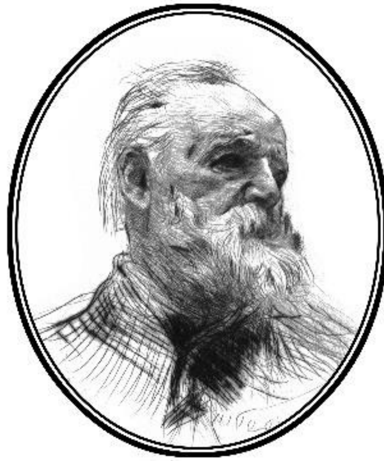
The Rhine

Le Rhin, 1838, 1839, 1840



Victor Hugo

A translation into English by

A. S. Kline

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'Scene on the Rhine'
James Baker Pyne (1800–1870)
Artvee

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Part I: Letters I-IV

'Le Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris'
Eugène Galien-Laloue (French, 1854-1941)
Artvee

Translator's Introduction

'Victor Hugo' (1839)
Louis Candide Boulanger (French, 1806-1867)
Artvee

Victor-Marie Hugo (1802 – 1885) novelist, poet, essayist, playwright, artist, and politician, became a leading light of the French Romantic literary movement, witnessed by the turbulent opening night of his play *Hernani* in 1830, which portrayed the Romantic hero as a figure in conflict with society, dedicated to love and driven by fate; and supported by the lengthy preface to his play *Cromwell*, which championed freer forms closer to Shakespearean drama, interweaving tragic, comic, and grotesque elements, rather than the rigid rules of previous French theatre. He later achieved wider fame with his poetry, and the novels *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Les Misérables*.

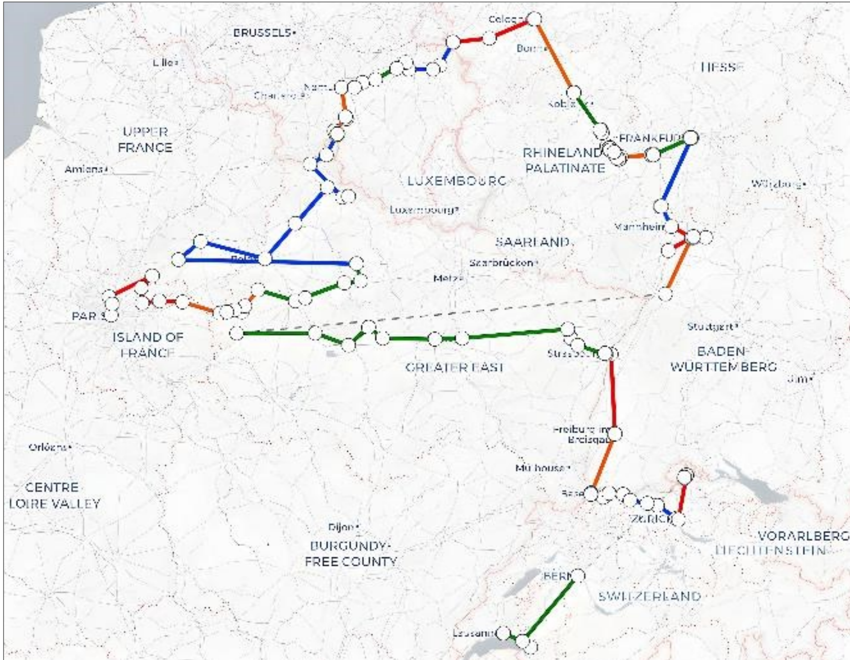
With the Revolution of 1848, Hugo was elected a deputy for Paris in the Constituent Assembly and later in the Legislative Assembly, where he adopted a position increasingly critical of the ruling powers. When in December 1851 a coup d'état inaugurated the Second Empire under Napoleon III, Hugo, opposed to political absolutism and authoritarianism, left France for Brussels. A twenty-year exile, mostly spent in the Channel Islands, ensued; initially enforced then voluntary. The French defeat in the Franco-German War, and the proclamation of the Third Republic in 1871, brought Hugo back to Paris, where he was received as a living symbol of republicanism and a national hero.

Hugo made three trips to the Rhineland with Juliette Drouet in 1838, 1839, and 1840, and the notes, letters and recollections of these excursions, plus added research, formed the basis of a collection of mainly fictitious letters, written so as to describe a single tour, published as '*Le Rhin*' in 1842. The preface and conclusion to Hugo's account were written to address the political issue of the left bank of the Rhine, ceded to Prussia, at France's expense, in 1815, which was a topic of much debate in the late 1830's. He sought a utopian compromise that would satisfy both countries, and yet maintain the rights of France, in a spirit of friendship between the nations.

This translation omits both preface and conclusion, though they reveal facets of Hugo's character as well as his political thought, to allow the reader to enjoy his travel writing without major distraction. His portrait of Champagne, Belgium, and the Rhineland, well before the Franco-Prussian War and the two World Wars, is of great historical interest, as well as providing a charming and fascinating picture of those regions.

In this new, enhanced translation the proper names of people and places, and the titles given to works of art, have been fully researched, modernised, and expanded; comments in parentheses have been added here and there to provide a reference, or clarify meaning; and minor typographic or factual errors, for example incorrect attributions and dates, in the original text, have been eliminated.

The Locations of Victor Hugo's 'The Rhine'



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LETTER I: FROM PARIS TO LA-FERTÉ-SOUS-JOUARRE

La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, July 1838

As I wrote to you, my friend, it was the day before yesterday, at around eleven in the morning, that I quit Paris[1]. I departed via the road to Meaux, leaving behind, to the west and north, Saint-Denis[2], and Montmorency[3], and at the very end of the hills the slopes of 'S-P'. I thought of you all at that moment in a good and tender way, and I kept my gaze fixed on that small dark bump at the end of the plain, until the moment when a bend in the road suddenly hid it from me.

You know my taste for making long journeys in brief stages, to avoid fatigue, without luggage, in a cabriolet (*a two-wheeled carriage drawn by a single horse*), and alone, except for my old childhood friends, Virgil and Tacitus. So, you know from that how I am equipped.

I took the road to Châlons, because I know the road to Soissons all too well from having followed it a few years ago; the latter thanks to the demolition-men, is of little interest today. Nanteuil-le-Haudouin[4] has lost its castle built under François I. Villers-Cotterêts has turned the magnificent manor-house of the Duke of Valois into a workhouse, and there, as almost everywhere, sculptures, paintings, all the spirit of the Renaissance, all the grace of the sixteenth century, has disappeared shamefully beneath the scraper and whitewash. Dammartin-en-Goële[5]'s enormous tower has been razed, from the top of which Montmartre could be distinctly seen, a full twenty-seven miles away, and whose large vertical crack gave rise to that

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[1] Letter I — Paris: 48°51'23.8"N, 2°21'07.9"E

[2] Letter I — Saint-Denis: 48°56'10.3"N, 2°21'26.6"E

[3] Letter I — Montmorency: 48°59'13.9"N, 2°19'26.8"E

[4] Letter I — Nanteuil-le-Haudouin: 49°08'22.9"N, 2°48'19.1"E

[5] Letter I — Dammartin-en-Goële: 49°03'19.1"N, 2°40'54.1"E

saying whose meaning I have never fully grasped: *It's like the castle of Dammartin, dying of laughter*. Today, widowed of its old fortress, in which the Bishop of Meaux, when he was in dispute with the Count of Champagne, had the right to take refuge with seven of his entourage, Dammartin no longer generates proverbs but merely gives rise to literary notes of this kind, which I copied verbatim, during the time I spent there, from I no longer know which little local guide-book spread out on the inn table:

'Dammartin (Seine-et-Marne): small town on a hill. Lace is made there. Hotel: *Sainte-Anne*. Things of interest: the parish church, the market hall, sixteen hundred inhabitants.'

The short time allowed for dinner by that tyrant of the stagecoaches called 'the conductor' did not allow me to verify to what extent the sixteen hundred inhabitants of Dammartin were all truly of interest.

So, I took the road to Meaux. Between Claye-Souilly[6] and Meaux, in the most beautiful weather and on the finest road in the world, a wheel of my cabriolet broke. You know that I am one of those men who *press on with their journey*; the cabriolet forsook me, I forsook the cabriolet. Just then a small stagecoach was passing, the diligence of Touchard and Company. There was only one seat free, I took it; and ten minutes after the accident, I 'pressed on with my journey' perched on the imperial (*the roof, carrying people and luggage)* between a hunchback and a gendarme.

I am, at present, here in La Ferté-sous-Jouarre[7], a pretty little town that I am very happy to see again for the fourth time, with its three bridges, its charming islands, its old mill in the middle of the river which is connected to the land by five arches, and its beautiful pavilion from the time of Louis XIII which belonged, it is said, to the Duke of Saint-Simon, and which today is changing shape in the hands of a grocer.

If indeed Monsieur de Saint-Simon owned the old dwelling, I doubt that his native manor of La Ferté-Vidame had a more proud and lordly air, or was better suited to framing the haughty figure of that duke and peer, than the charming and severe châtelet of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre.

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[6] Letter I — Claye-Souilly: 48°56'44.6"N, 2°41'12.5"E

[7] Letter I — La Ferté-sous-Jouarre: 48°57'00.0"N, 3°07'59.9"E

It is a perfect time for travel. The countryside is full of workers. The harvest is being completed. Here and there, large haystacks are being constructed, which, when half-finished, resemble those disembowelled pyramids found in Syria. The cut wheat is stacked on the ground, on the hillsides, in a way that mimics the patterns on zebras' backs.

You know, my friend, it is not events I seek in travelling, but ideas and sensations; and for that, novelty suffices. Besides, I am content with little. Provided I have trees, grass, air, the road in front, and the road behind, everything suits. If the country is flat, well, I like broad horizons. If the country is hilly, I like unexpected views, and there is one at the top of every hill. Just now I passed a charming valley. To right and left are capricious vagaries of terrain; sizeable hills transected by farmland, and a multitude of escarpments amusing to see; here and there, groups of lowly cottages whose roofs seem to touch the ground. At the bottom of the valley, is a stream marked by a long line of greenery, and crossed by a little old bridge of stained and worm-eaten stone where the two stretches of high-road meet. At the moment we arrived, a wagon was crossing the bridge, an enormous German wagon, swollen, strapped, and tied, looking like Gargantua's belly, mounted on four wheels and drawn by eight horses. In front of me, following the undulation of the opposite hill, bright with sunlight, rose the road on which the shadows of rows of tree drew in black the shape of large combs with several teeth missing.

Well, these trees, these shadow-combs, which you may smile at, this wagon, this white road, this old bridge, these low stubble fields, all this heartens me and makes me smile too. Such a valley, with the sky above, satisfies me. I alone in the carriage was gazing at it and enjoying it. The other passengers were yawning dreadfully.

When we change relays, I find everything entertaining. We halt at the door of the inn. The horses arrive with a clattering sound. There is a white hen on the main road, a black hen in the bushes, a harrow or an old broken wheel in a corner, children smeared with dust playing on a sand-heap; above my head Charles V, Joseph II, or Napoleon hang from an old iron gallows, to act as an inn-sign, mighty emperors who are now only good for proclaiming a tavern. The house is full of voices shouting commands; on the doorstep, the stable-boys and kitchen-maids flirt with one another, dung and dishwater mingle; and I, I take advantage of my lofty position — on the

imperial — to listen to the hunchback and the gendarme in conversation, or admire the pretty little colonies of dwarf poppies that form oases on an old roof nearby.

Besides, my gendarme and my hunchback are philosophers, 'not at all proud,' and converse in a friendly manner with each other, the gendarme without disdaining the hunchback, the hunchback without despising the gendarme. The hunchback pays six hundred francs in taxes to Jouarre, the former *Jovis ara* (*altar of Jupiter*), as he was kind enough to explain to the gendarme. He also has a father who pays nine hundred livres in Paris, and he waxes indignant with the government every time he has to pay the toll, of one sou, to cross the bridge over the Marne between Meaux and La Ferté. The gendarme pays no taxes, and simply recounts his history. In 1814, at Montmirail (*where Napoleon was victorious*), he fought like a lion; he was a conscript. In 1830, during the Three Glorious Days (*the July Revolution that overthrew Charles X, and installed Louis-Philippe as king*), he was afraid and ran away; he was a gendarme at the time. It was a surprise to him, but not to me. As a conscript, a mere twenty years old, he was brave. As a gendarme, having a wife and children, and, he added, his own horse, he was a coward. The same man, but not, however, the same life. Life is a dish that is only rendered pleasant by its sauce. Nothing is more intrepid than a convict. In this world, it is not to one's skin that one clings, but one's clothes. He who is completely naked clings to nothing.

Also, you will agree, the two eras were very different. Whatever is in the air acts on a soldier as on every other man. The ideas that blow about him freeze him or warm him, too. In 1830, the wind of revolution was blowing. He bowed to, and was overcome by, the force of the idea which is like the soul of the power within events. And then, what could be sadder and more enervating, than to fight for a strange cause, for shadows that have passed through a troubled brain, for an insane dream, brother against brother, soldier against worker, Frenchman against Parisian! In 1814, on the contrary, the conscript was battling the foreigner, the enemy, for a clear and simple reason, for himself, for everyone, for his father, mother, sisters, for the plough he had just left, for the thatched roof that was burning over there; for the earth beneath the nails of his shoes, for his living, blood-stained homeland. In 1830, the soldier knew not why he was fighting. In 1814, he more than knew it, he understood it; he more than understood it, he felt it; he more than felt it, he saw it plain.

Three things interested me in Meaux[8]: a delightful little Renaissance portal attached to an old dilapidated church, on the right, as you enter the town; then the cathedral; then, behind the cathedral, a fine old stone dwelling, half-fortified, flanked by large engaged turrets (*the old Cathedral Chapter*). There was a courtyard. I bravely entered the courtyard, although I had noted an old woman knitting there. But the good lady let me pass. I wanted to study a very beautiful exterior staircase, paved with stone and framed in wood, supported by two lowered arches and covered with a canopy roof with basket-handle arcades, which lead up to the old house. I lacked the time to sketch it. I regret that; it is the first staircase of this kind that I have seen. It seemed to me to date from the fifteenth century (*that of the Chapter is 13th century*).

The cathedral (*Saint-Etienne*) is a noble church, begun in the twelfth century and completed in the sixteenth. It has just been restored in an odious manner. The restoration is not even finished. Of the work on the two towers planned by the architect, the restoration of only one has been completed. The other, the restoration of which has only been sketched out, hides its stump beneath a covering of slate. The central door, and that on the right are from the fourteenth century; the one on the left is from the fifteenth. All three are very beautiful, although made of a stone that the wind and rain have eroded.

I wanted to decipher the bas-reliefs. The tympanum of the left door represents the story of Saint John the Baptist; but the sun, which fell directly onto the facade, prevented me from deciphering anything further. The interior of the church is of a superb composition. There are large openwork tri-lobed ribs on the choir, of the most beautiful effect. In the apse, there remains only a magnificent stained-glass window, which causes one to regret the others. At the moment, at the entrance to the choir, two altars in ravishing fifteenth-century woodwork are being restored; but they are being daubed with wood-coloured oil-paint. Such is the taste of the natives of the area. To the left of the choir, near a charming low door with a transom, I saw a beautiful kneeling marble statue of a sixteenth-century warrior, without coat of arms or inscription. I was unable to divine the name associated with the statue. You, who know everything, would have done so. On the other side is another statue; this one bears an inscription, and it's a good thing too: for

[8] Letter I — Meaux: 48°57'36.0"N, 2°52'59.9"E

you yourself would not have recognised in its hard, dull marble the severe figure of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (*Bishop of Meaux, tutor to the Dauphin, and renowned theologian, 1627-1704*). As regards Bossuet, I am much afraid that the destruction of the stained-glass windows was his doing. I saw his episcopal throne, with rather beautiful woodwork in the Louis XIV style, and a figured canopy. I lacked the time to visit his famous study at the episcopal palace (*now the Musée Bossuet*).

A strange fact is that Meaux possessed a theatre before Paris did, a true performance hall, built in 1547 — according to a manuscript from the local library — reminiscent of the ancient circus in that it was covered with a velarium (*retractable awning*), and also of the modern theatre in that '*there were set all around it boxes that could be locked, which were rented to the inhabitants of Meaux*'. Mystery plays were performed there. A man named Pascalus played the Devil and retained the nickname ('*le diable verd*'). In 1562 he delivered the city to the Huguenots, and the following year the Catholics hanged him, partly because he had delivered the city, and partly because of his nickname. —Today Paris has twenty theatres, while this city of ancient Champagne no longer has a single one. It is claimed that Meaux boasts of the fact; as if it were proud of not being Paris.

This country is full of reminders of Louis XIV's century. Here, the Duke of Saint-Simon; at Meaux, Bossuet; at La Ferté-Milon, Racine; at Château-Thierry, La Fontaine (*the latter two were born in those respective towns*) All within a radius of forty miles or so. The great lord is a neighbour of the great bishop, while tragedy rubs shoulders with fable.

Leaving the cathedral, I found the sun veiled and was able to examine the façade. The large tympanum of the central portal is most curious. The lower compartment represents Joan (*Joan I of Navarre*), wife of Philip the Fair (*Philip IV of France*), with whose funds the church was built after his death. The Queen of France, her cathedral in hand, presents herself at the gates of paradise. Saint Peter opens them for her. Behind the queen stands the handsome King Philip with an air of embarrassed poverty. The queen, sculpted in a spirited manner, turning, indicates the poor devil of a king with a sideways glance, and a shrug of the shoulder, seemingly saying to Saint Peter: '*Bah! Admit him too, into the bargain!*'

Letter II: Montmirail Montmort Épernay

Épernay, July 21st

At La Ferté-sous-Jouarre I hired the first cart I came across, asking only one thing: does it know the way, and are the wheels sound? And off I went to Montmirail[9]. There was nothing in that little town but a pleasantly green meadow at the entrance to two beautiful tree-lined avenues. The rest, except for the castle, is a jumble of hovels.

On Monday, around five in the evening, I left Montmirail, heading towards the road from Sézanne to Épernay. An hour later I was at Vauchamps[10], and crossed the famous battlefield (*the Battle of Vauchamps in 1814 was a Napoleonic victory*). A few moments before arriving there, I encountered an oddly-loaded cart on the road, drawn by a donkey and a horse. On the cart were pots and pans, old chests, chairs with straw seats, and a pile of other furniture; in the front, in a kind of basket, were three small, semi-naked children; in the back, in another basket, were a number of chickens. It was led by a man in a smock, on foot, carrying a child on his back. A few steps away, was a woman, also walking, and carrying a child, though still in her womb. All this equipage was hastening towards Montmirail, as if that great battle of 1814 were about to recommence. 'Yes,' I said to myself, 'one would have encountered carts like these here twenty-five years ago.' I made inquiries, they were not relocating, it was an expatriation. They were on their way not to Montmirail, but to America. It was not a battle, but poverty they were fleeing. In short, my dear friend, it was a family of poor Alsatian peasants who were emigrating having been promised land in Ohio, and who were leaving their country without suspecting that Virgil had written the most beautiful verses in the world about

[9] Letter II — Montmirail: 48°52'12.0"N, 3°32'17.9"E

[10] Letter II — Vauchamps: 48°52'55.2"N, 3°36'59.4"E

them two thousand years ago (*see Virgil's 'Aeneid', the end of Book II, 'the departure from Troy'*).

As for the rest, these good people were departing with an air of perfect indifference. The man was mending a strand of his whip, the woman was singing to herself tunelessly, the children were playing. Only the furniture had something unhappy, painful, and out of place about it. The chickens also seemed to me to be aware of their misfortune. This indifference surprised me. I really thought the homeland was more deeply engraved on people's hearts. Did it not matter to these folk that they will no longer see the same trees and fields? I followed them for a while with my eyes. Where was this little group heading, jolting and stumbling along? Where was I heading myself? The road turned, they disappeared from view. I heard, now and then, the sound of the man's whip and the woman's song, then all sign of them vanished.

A few minutes later I was amidst the glorious plain that had known the emperor (*Napoleon*). The sun was setting. The trees cast long shadows. The furrows, already marked here and there, were a blond colour. A blue mist rose from the depths of the ravines. The countryside was deserted. In the distance, one could see only a few forgotten ploughs, looking like large grasshoppers. To my left, there was a quarry, producing millstones; large, ready-carved, and rounded millstones, some pale and new, others old and black, lay on the ground pell-mell, upright, prone, or in heaps, like the pieces of an enormous, overturned chequerboard. Indeed, giants had played many a game there.

I wished to see the Château de Montmort[11], so twelve miles or so from Montmirail, beyond Fromentières[12] at Champaubert[13], I turned sharply left and took the road north to Épernay. There were sixteen of the most delightful giant elm-trees in the world, leaning over the road with sullen profiles and dishevelled wigs. Elm-trees are one of my joys when traveling. Each elm is worth viewing separately. All other trees are stupid and look alike; only elms possess imagination, and make fun of their neighbours, falling over

[11] Letter II — Château de Montmort: 48°55'24.1"N, 3°48'41.3"E

[12] Letter II — Fromentières: 47°51'49.2"N, 0°39'55.4"W

[13] Letter II — Champaubert: 48°52'44.0"N, 3°46'32.9"E

where the latter lean, thin where they are bushy, and making all sorts of grimacing faces at passers-by, in the evening. Young elms have foliage that shoots out in all directions, like a firework bursting. From La Ferté to the place where these sixteen elms are found, the road is lined only with poplars, aspens or here and there walnut trees, which lightened my mood.

The country is flat, the plain stretches away as far as the eye can see. Suddenly, emerging from a clump of trees, one sees on the right, as if half buried in a fold of the ground, a delightful riot of turrets, weather-vanes, gables, dormers, and chimneys. This is the Château de Montmort.

My cabriolet turned the corner, and I dismounted in front of the castle gate. It is an exquisite sixteenth-century fortress, built of brick, with slate roofs and ornate weathervanes, with its double enclosure, its double moat, its triple-arched bridge leading to the drawbridge, the village at its feet, and an admirable landscape all around, for twenty miles or more. Except for the windows, which have almost all been refurbished, the building is well preserved. The entrance tower contains, wound one upon the other, a spiral staircase for the men and a ramp for the horses. At the foot there is still an old portcullis, and as I climbed up, within the embrasures of the tower, I counted four small fifteenth-century pulleys. The garrison of the fortress consisted at the time of an old servant, Mademoiselle Jeannette, who received me very graciously. All that remains of the old apartments inside are the kitchen, a beautiful vaulted room with a large fireplace; the old drawing room, which has been converted into a billiard room; and a charming little study with gilded woodwork, the ceiling of which has a very ingeniously twisted figure as a rosette. The old drawing room is magnificent. The ceiling with painted, gilded and carved beams is still intact. The fireplace, surmounted by two very noble statues, is in the finest style of the time of Henri III. The walls were once covered with vast tapestry panels, containing family portraits. During the Revolution, some spirited folk from the neighbouring village tore down these tapestries and burned them, dealing a mortal blow to feudalism. The current owner has replaced these panels with old engravings, representing views of Rome, and the battles of the great Condé (*Louis II de Bourbon, Prince of Condé, 1621–1686*), pasted on the bare wall. Having viewed all this, I gave thirty sous to Mademoiselle Jeannette, who seemed dazed by my generosity. Then I looked at the ducks and the chickens in the castle moat, and went away.

Leaving Montmort — which one arrives at by the most dreadful road in the world, by the way — I came across the mail-coach which must have brought you my previous letter. I entrusted it, my friend, with all sorts of fine thoughts for you.

The road plunged into a wood, just as night was falling, and I saw nothing till Épernay but charcoal-burners' huts, emitting smoke, amidst the branches. The red visage of a distant forge appeared to me at times, the wind stirred the vivid silhouettes of trees along the roadside, and above my head, in the sky, the splendid Wain made its journey among the stars, while my poor two-wheeler made its own among the stones.

Épernay[14] is the city of Champagne wine. No more, no less. Three churches have succeeded one another in Épernay. The first, a Romanesque church, built in 1037 by Thibaut I, Count of Champagne (*1010-1089*), son of Eudes II. The second, a Renaissance church, built in 1540 by Piero Strozzi (*1510-1558*), Marshal of France, Lord of Épernay, killed at the siege of Thionville in 1558. The third, the current church, appears to me to have been built according to the designs of Monsieur Poterlet-Galichet, a brave merchant whose shop bearing his name is next to the church. The three churches seem to me to be admirably characterised and summed-up by these three names: Thibaut I, Count of Champagne; Pierre Strozzi, Marshal of France; Poterlet-Galichet, grocer.

Which is enough for you to divine that the last, the current church, is a hideous plastered building, dull, white and heavy, with triglyphs supporting the archivolts. Nothing remains of the first church. All that remains of the second are some beautiful stained-glass windows, and an exquisite portal. One of the windows tells the whole story of Noah in the naivest manner. The stained-glass windows and portal are, of course, enclosed and imprisoned in the frightful plaster of the new church. It was as though I was seeing the comic actor Jacques-Charles Odry, with his over-short white trousers, blue stockings and large shirt collar, wearing the helmet and breastplate of Francis I.

I was urged to visit the region's main curiosity, a large cellar containing one and a half million bottles. On the way, I encountered a field of rapeseed

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[14] Letter II — Épernay: 49°02'24.0"N, 3°57'36.0"E

in bloom, complete with poppies, butterflies and a beautiful shaft of sunlight. I remained there. The grand cellar will have to do without my visit.

The ointment which aids hair-growth, named 'Pilogène' in La Ferté, is in Épernay named, 'Phyothrix', and '*imported from Greece*'.

By the way, in Montmirail, the Hôtel de la Poste charged me forty sous for four fresh eggs, which seemed a bit excessive to me.

I forgot to tell you that Thibaut I was buried in his church, and Strozzi in his. I demand a tomb for Monsieur Poterlet-Galichet in the current one.

This Strozzi was a fine fellow. Brisquet, Henry II's fool, amused himself one day by larding, with bacon fat, from behind, in the middle of the courtyard, a very fine new coat that the marshal had donned that very day. It seems this caused a deal of laughter, since Strozzi later took cruel revenge. For myself, I would not have laughed, nor taken revenge. Larding a velvet coat with bacon! I was never impressed by such Renaissance jests.

Letter III: Châlons-en-Champagne Sainte-Menehould Varennes-en-Argonne

Varennes-en-Argonne, July 25th

Yesterday, at nightfall, my cabriolet was on the road, beyond Sainte-Menehould; I had just reread those admirable and eternal lines:

'…speluncae vivique lacus, at frigida tempe
mugitusque boum mollesque sub arbore somni'

'…caves, and natural lakes, and cool valleys,
the cattle lowing, and sweet sleep under the trees'

(*Virgil: 'Georgics' Book II:469-70*)

I had remained leaning on the old half-open book, the pages of which were crumpling under my elbow. My soul was full of all those vague, sweet, sad ideas which often fill my mind at sunset, when the sound of wheels on paving stones woke me. We were entering a town — 'What town is this?' — My coachman answered: 'It's Varennes[15].' Then the carriage turned into a street which slopes down, between two rows of houses which have a grave and pensive air to them. The doors and shutters were closed; there was grass growing in the courtyards. Suddenly, after passing through an old carriage-entrance from the time of Louis XIII, made of dark stone, flanked by a large well covered with a lid of planking, the carriage emerged into a small triangular open space surrounded by single-storey, whitewashed houses, and with two stunted trees guarding a door in one corner. The long side of this trigonal intersection was adorned with an ugly belfry of flaking slate. It was in this square that Louis XVI was arrested as he fled, on June 21st, 1791. He was arrested by Drouet, the postmaster of Sainte-Menehould (there was no post office in Varennes at the time), in front of a yellow house that forms the corner of the square after passing the belfry. The king's carriage followed the hypotenuse of the triangle. Ours travelled the same path. I descended from the cabriolet and gazed at this little square for a long time. How quickly it widened out, thereafter! In a few months it grew to become monstrous, it became the Place de la Révolution (*in Paris*, *renamed the Place de la Concorde, for a second time, after the July Revolution of 1830*).

This is what is said in the region. The king protested vigorously that he was not the king (which Charles I would not have done, incidentally). They were about to release him, not having confirmed his identity, when a certain Monsieur Ethé arrived, who had some reason, I know what, to hate the monarchy. This Monsieur Ethé (I know not if that is the correct spelling of the name, but the name of traitor is always sufficiently plain), this man approached the king, in the manner of Judas, saying: 'Good day, sire.' That was enough. The king was detained. There were five royal personages in the carriage; the wretch, with that phrase, condemned all five of them. That '*good day, sire*', meant, for Louis XVI, for Marie-Antoinette and for Madame Élisabeth (*Louis' granddaughter*), the guillotine; for the Dauphin (*Louis' younger son, Louix XVII, though he never reigned*), the agony of the Temple prison; for Madame Royale (*Louis' eldest daughter*), the extinction of her line, and exile.

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[15] Letter III — Varennes-en-Argonne: 49°13'35.5"N, 5°02'11.6"E

To those who are not reflecting on that event, the little triangle in Varennes has a gloomy appearance; to those who are, it has a sinister aspect.

I believe I have already pointed out to you, on more than one occasion, that material Nature sometimes offers up remarkably symbolic events. Louis XVI at that time was descending a very steep and even dangerous slope, where the lead horse of my carriage almost fell. Five days previously, I had come across a sort of gigantic chequerboard on the battlefield of Montmirail. Today I crossed that fatal little triangle in Varennes, which has the shape of the guillotine's knife.

The man who assisted Drouet, and who seized Louis XVI there was called Billaud —why not Billot (*meaning* '*the block*')?

Varennes is sixty miles from Reims. The 'Place du 21 Janvier' (*an imagined name for the Place de la Révolution; 21st of January 1793 was the date of Louis XVI's execution*) is but a stone's throw from the Tuileries. How these juxtapositions must have tormented the poor king! Between Reims and Varennes, between his coronation and dethronement, was a journey of only sixty miles for my coachman; for the mind, it represented an abyss we name 'the Revolution'.

I asked for lodging at a very old inn whose name is: *Au Grand Monarque (on the site of the modern Hôtel de Grand Monarque, 1 Place de l'Église*), and whose sign displays a portrait of Louis-Philippe. Probably, over the last hundred years, the faces of Louis XV, Bonaparte, and Charles X have appeared there, in their turn. Forty-five years ago, on the day when this town denied passage to the royal carriage, what hung over this door on its old curved iron arm, still sealed to the wall today, was undoubtedly a portrait of Louis XVI.

Louis XVI may have stopped at the *Grand Monarque*, and seen himself there painted in ensign, himself merely a 'painted' king — Poor 'Grand Monarque!'

This morning, I walked round the town, which is very gracefully situated indeed, on both banks of a pretty river (*the Aire*). The old houses of the upper town form a most picturesque amphitheatre on the right bank. The church, which is in the lower town, is insignificant. It is opposite my inn. I can see it from the table where I am writing. The bell tower bears this date: 1776. It was two years older than Madame Royale.

This gloomy event has left its trace here, a rare thing in France. People still talk of it. The innkeeper told me that '*a gentleman from the town has composed*

a play about it. —That reminded me, that on the night of the attempted escape, the little Dauphin was disguised as a girl, and had asked Madame Royale *if it was for a play*. It was indeed, for the play that the 'gentleman from the town' *composed.*

I owe the church (*the Église Notre-Dame, destroyed in 1914, and rebuilt to the same plan*) some amends; I have just viewed it again. It has a charming little tri-lobed portal on the right-hand side.

If all this architecture is not too tedious, I may tell you that Châlons[16] failed to quite live up to my idea of it, the cathedral, at least. And by the way, without dwelling on the fact, I will add that the road from Épernay to Châlons was not what I expected either. You only get a glimpse of the Marne, on the banks of which I noted, however, in the villages, two or three Romanesque churches with not particularly pointed bell-towers, akin to the bell-tower of Fécamp. The whole countryside is nothing but flat plains; always flat plains, it's too beautiful. As for the rest of the landscape, there are many sheep and many Champenois (*the people of Champagne*).

The nave of the cathedral (*Saint-Étienne*) is noble, and of a beautiful design; some rich stained-glass windows remain, a rose window among others, and I saw in the church a charming Renaissance chapel with the 'F' and the salamander emblem of Francis I. Outside the church, there is a very severe, pure Romanesque tower, and a precious fourteenth-century portal. All this is hideously dilapidated; and the church is very dirty; and the sculptures of Francis I are colour-washed in yellow; and all the ribs of the vaults are painted; and the facade is a poor copy of our facade of Saint-Gervais; and the spires! — I had been promised openwork spires. I was counting on the spires. And I found two types of towers with pointed caps, openwork indeed, and of an appearance, all things considered, original enough, but heavily hollowed out, and with volutes mingled with ogives! I left quite discontented.

On the other hand, if I did not find what I expected, I found what I did not expect, that is to say, a very beautiful Notre-Dame in Châlons. What were the antiquarians thinking of? They talk of Saint-Étienne, the cathedral, and breathe not a word about Notre-Dame (*La Collégiale Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de*

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[16] Letter III — Châlons-en-Champagne: 48°57'23.0"N, 4°21'52.9"E

Châlons). The Notre-Dame of Châlons is a Romanesque church with squat vaults and robust round arches, very august and very complete, with a superb remaining spire of lead-covered timber, which dates from the fourteenth century. This spire, on which the lead sheets form lozenges and scales, like those on a snake's skin, is lightened in the middle by a charming lantern crowned with small lead gables, to which I climbed. The city, the Marne, and the hills are beautiful to see from there.

The traveller can also admire some beautiful stained-glass windows in Notre-Dame, and a rich thirteenth-century portal. But, in 1793, the locals smashed the stained-glass windows, and shattered the statues on the portal. They scraped the opulent archivolts (*ornamental mouldings*) as one scrapes a carrot. They treated the side portal of the cathedral, and all the sculptures they encountered in the city, in the same way. Notre-Dame had four spires, two tall and two lower; they demolished three of them (*a second, twin to the one described above, has since been restored*). It was an act of enraged stupidity that was nowhere as marked as here. The French Revolution was terrible; the Revolution in Champagne was stupid.

Within the lantern, into which I had climbed, I found this inscription engraved in lead, by hand and in sixteenth-century style: '*On August 28, 1580, peace was published at Châl...*'

This inscription, half-erased, lost in the shadows, which no one seeks and no one reads, is all that remains today of that great political act, that great event, that great achievement, that peace (*the Edict of Beaulieu-lès-Loches, 1576*) concluded between Henry III and the Huguenots, through the intermediation of the Duke of Anjou, formerly Duke of Alençon. The Duke of Anjou, who was the king's brother, had designs on the Netherlands and claims to the hand of Elizabeth of England. The internal religious war hampered his plans. Hence this peace, this famous affair *published at Châlons on August 28, 1580*, and forgotten throughout the world this day of July 22, 1838.

The fellow who helped me climb, from ladder to ladder, to this lantern is the city watchman, *le guettier*, as he is called. This man spends his life in the watch-tower, a small stone cage with four skylights facing the four winds. This cage and its ladder are his universe. He is no longer a mere mortal, he is the eye of the city, which is always open, always awake. To make sure he stays awake, he is forced to call the hour each time it strikes, leaving a silence

between the penultimate stroke, and the last. This perpetual insomnia would be impossible to sustain if his wife did not help him. Each night at midnight, she ascends, and he sleeps; then he rises at noon, and she descends. Their two existences rotate one around the other, without touching except for a minute at noon and one at midnight. A small gnome with an odd face, which they call their child, is the result of their occasional tangent.

Châlons has three other churches: Saint-Alpin, Saint-Jean, and Saint-Loup. Saint-Alpin has beautiful stained-glass windows. As for the town hall, its only remarkable feature is the four enormous stone guard-dogs crouching, formidably, in front of the facade. I was delighted with these Champenois lions.

Five miles or so from Châlons, on the road to Sainte-Menehould, in a place where there are only flat fields of stubble as far as the eye can see, except for the dusty trees along the road, a magnificent object suddenly appears before you. It is the abbey of Notre-Dame-de-l'Épine[17]. There is a true fifteenth-century spire there, worked like lace and admirable to see, though flanked by a telegraph-station, which 'she' gazes at, it is true, disdainfully like the great lady that she is. It is a strange surprise to see this splendid flower of Gothic architecture blooming superbly among fields which barely support a few withered poppies. I spent two hours in this church; I prowled all around it buffeted by a dreadful wind that made the pinnacles sway distinctly. I held my hat in both hands, and I admired it with whirlwinds of dust in my eyes. From time to time a piece of stone-work would break from the spire, and fall into the cemetery next to me (*the second spire which was razed so as to install the telegraph in 1798 was rebuilt in 1868*). There were a thousand details, there, worth sketching. The gargoyles are particularly complex and curious. They are generally composed of two monstrous shapes, one of which bears the other on its shoulders. Those on the apse seemed to me to represent the seven deadly sins. 'Lust', a pretty country girl with her hair pulled back too far, must have really set the poor monks dreaming.

There are at most three or four hovels nearby, and it would be difficult to explain the presence of this cathedral without a town, village, or even a hamlet to speak of, if there was not, in a chapel, closed by a latch, a small,

[17] Letter III — Notre-Dame-de-l'Épine: 48°58'38.1"N, 4°28'15.3"E

but very deep, well, which is a miraculous one, though very humble, very simple and much like an ordinary village well, as befits a miraculous object. The marvellous edifice grew from it. The well produced the church as a bulb produces a tulip.

I continued on my way. Three miles further on we passed through a village whose feast day was being celebrated, with the most jarring music. As I left the village, I noticed on the top of a hill, a meagre white hovel, on the roof of which a kind of large black insect was gesticulating. It was the telegraph chatting amicably with that of Our Lady of the Thorn.

Evening was approaching, the sun was setting, the sky was magnificent. I gazed at the hills at the far end of the plain, half-covered by an immense cloak of purple heather like a bishop's cape. I saw a road-mender suddenly straighten his hurdle lying on the ground, and arrange it as if to shelter himself beneath it. Then the carriage passed a flock of geese gossiping happily. 'It's about to rain,' said the coachman. Indeed, I turned my head and half the sky behind us had been invaded by a large black cloud, the wind was violent, the hemlocks in bloom were bending to the ground, the trees seemed to be calling to each other in terror, small dried thistle-heads scurried along the road faster than the carriage, and great clouds flew above us. A moment later one of the most beautiful storms I have ever seen broke forth. The rain was pouring down, but the whole sky was not clouded as yet. A huge arc of light remained of the sunset. Large black shafts of rain falling from the clouds crossed the golden rays streaming from the sun. There was no longer a single living being visible in the landscape, not a person on the road, not a bird in the sky; it thundered loudly, and at times, over the fields, large flashes of lightning struck the ground. The leaves twisted about in a hundred ways. The storm lasted a quarter of an hour, then a gust of wind drove the rain away, the cloud settled as a diffuse mist on the eastern hill-slopes, and the sky became pure and calm again. In the interval, twilight had fallen. The sun seemed to have dissolved in the west, to form three or four large bars of red-hot iron, which night was slowly extinguishing on the horizon. The stars were shining when I arrived at Sainte-Menehould.

Sainte-Menehould[18] is quite a picturesque little town, spreading pleasantly over the slopes of a very green hill, topped with large trees. I saw a fine thing there: the kitchen of the *Hôtel de Metz*.

It was a real kitchen. An immense room. One wall is occupied by copperware, the other by earthenware. In the middle, opposite the windows, is the fireplace, an enormous cavern, which contained a splendid fire. On the ceiling, was a blackened network of magnificently smoke-stained beams, from which hung all sorts of joyous things, baskets, lamps, a meat-safe, and in the centre a large openwork basket in which vast trapezoids of bacon were displayed. Beneath the mantlepiece, besides the spit, the rack, and the cauldron, a dazzling set of a dozen shovels and tongs, of all shapes and sizes, gleamed and sparkled. The blazing hearth sent rays of light into every corner, cast great shadows on the ceiling, gave a fresh pink tint to the blue earthenware, and made a fantastic edifice of saucepans glow like a wall of embers. If I were a Homer or a Rabelais, I might have said: 'This kitchen is a world, to which this fireplace is the sun.'

It was a world indeed. A world in which a whole republic of men, women, and animals moved. Boys, maids, kitchen-lads, carters seated at tables, stoves on stoves, pots clucking, fried food squeaking, pipes, cards, children playing, cats, and dogs, and the master who watches over all. *Mens agitat molem* (*mind moves matter: see Virgil's 'Aeneid' Book VI,727*). In one corner, a large clock with a box and weights gravely tells the time to all these busy people.

Among the countless things hanging from the ceiling, I admired one especially, on the evening of my arrival. It was a small cage in which a little bird was sleeping. This bird seemed to me to be the most admirable emblem of trust. That den, that forge for indigestion, that terrifying kitchen, was full of noise day and night, yet the bird slept. No matter how people raged around it, men swore, women quarrelled, children screamed, dogs barked and cats meowed, the clock struck, the cleaver clanged, the dripping-pan squawked, the turnspit creaked, the sink wept, the bottles sobbed, the windows shuddered, and the coaches passed under the arch like thunder; that little ball of feathers never moved. — God is delightful. He inspires faith even in little birds.

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[18] Letter III — Sainte-Menehould: 49°05'30.1"N, 4°54'00.0"E

And, in this connection, I must declare that too much is complained of as regards inns in general, and I myself, first and foremost, have sometimes spoken too harshly of them. An inn, all things considered, is a good thing, and one is very happy to meet with one. And then, I have noticed that in almost every inn there is a fine woman. She is the hostess. I leave the host to the bad-tempered travellers, but grant me the hostess. The host is a rather gloomy being. The hostess is amiable. Poor woman! Sometimes old, sometimes ill, often overweight, she goes, she comes, plans everything, carries everything, arranges everything, nudges the servants, blows the children's noses, chases the dogs, compliments the travellers, rouses the chef, smiles at one, scolds another, watches over a stove, carries a traveller's bags, welcomes this one, sees that one away, and shines in every direction, as does the soul. She is the soul, in fact, of that great body that we call the inn. The host is only fit for drinking with carters in a corner.

In short, thanks to the hostess, the welcome an inn provides loses something of the ugliness of paid-for hospitality. The hostess supplies those fine feminine attentions that veil all venality. It is all a little banal, but it is pleasant.

The hostess of the *Hôtel de Metz* at Sainte-Menehould (*at 33 Rue Chanzy from1821, it ceased trading around 1930*) is a young girl of fifteen or sixteen who is everywhere, and who runs this giant machine wonderfully-well, while occasionally playing the piano. The host, her father — is this an exception? — is a fine fellow. All in all, it's an excellent inn.

Yesterday, as I wrote to you at the beginning of this letter, I departed Sainte-Menehould. From Sainte-Menehould to Clermont-en-Argonne[19], the road is delightful. A continuous orchard. On both sides of the road, a riot of fruit trees whose beautiful green leaves revel in the sun, and which spread their shade, in formal shapes, over the path. The villages have something of a Swiss or German air about them. White stone houses, half-clad in planks, with large hollow-tile roofs that extend two or three feet beyond the wall. Almost, they are chalets. One senses the proximity of the mountains. Indeed, the Ardennes, to the north, are not far away.

[19] Letter III — Clermont-en-Argonne: 49°06'19.6"N, 5°04'19.9"E

Before arriving at the large town of Clermont-en-Argonne, we traversed a wonderful valley in which the Marne and the Meuse flow together as one (*La Biesme*). The descent into this valley is magical. The road plunges between two hills, and at first you see only a chasm full of foliage below you. Then the road bends, and the whole valley appears. A vast circuit of hills, and in the middle a beautiful village, almost Italian so flat are the roofs; to the right and left several other villages on wooded hilltops; bell-towers in the mist that reveal other hamlets hidden in the folds of the valley as if on a green velvet dress, immense meadows where large herds of cattle graze, and, through all this, the pretty, lively river that flows joyfully. It took me an hour to cross this valley. During that time, a telegraph-station at the end of it was displaying the following three signs:

While the machinery was doing this, the trees rustled, the water ran, the flocks mooed and bleated, the sun shone brightly, and I compared the works of Man to those of God.

Clermont is a beautiful village that sits above a sea of greenery, with its church on its head, like Le Tréport above an ocean of waves.

In the centre of Clermont, we turned left and, passing through a beautiful landscape of plains, hillsides, and running water, we arrived in Varennes in two hours. Louis XVI followed this graceful route.

My friend, in rereading this letter, I realise that I have two or three times used the word *Champenois*, since it came to my mind involuntarily, ironically nuanced by a popular saying. However, do not misunderstand the true meaning that I attach to it. The saying (*that Champagne is a land of beasts*), perhaps more familiar than appropriate, speaks of the region as Madame de la Sablière spoke of La Fontaine (*Marguerite de la Sablière, held an intellectual salon, and was patron to Jean de La Fontaine, whose fables are populated by beasts/animals*) who was a man of 'beastly' genius, as befits a genius from Champagne. This does not prevent La Fontaine from being, between Régnier and Molière, an admirable poet, and Champagne from being, between the Rhine and the Seine, a noble and illustrious region. Virgil might have said of Champagne, in the manner in which he did speak of Italy: *Alma parens frugum, alma virum ('Kind mother of crops, kind mother of men'. Compare Virgil's 'Georgics II', 173*).

Champagne produced Jacques Amyot, another *fine fellow* who spent his efforts on Plutarch, as La Fontaine spent his on Aesop; Thibaut IV, the poet (*'the Troubadour', Count of Champagne and King of Navarre, who was rumoured to have sought an affair with Blanche of Castile, Louis VIII's widow*) who, next to being king, would have asked nothing better than to be the father of Saint Louis (*Louis IX*); Robert de Sorbon, who was the founder of the College of the Sorbonne; Jean Charlier de Gerson, who was chancellor of the University of Paris; Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, who almost won Algiers for France in the sixteenth century; Amadis Jamyn (*poet and disciple of Ronsard*), Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and Denis Diderot; two painters, Simon Mathurin Lantara and Le Valentin (*Valentin de Boulogne*); two sculptors, François Girardon and Edmé Bouchardon; two historians, Flodoard of Reims and Jean Mabillon; two cardinals of genius, Charles de Lorraine and Jean-François-Paul de Gondi; two popes full of virtue, Martin IV (*Simon de Brion*) and Urban IV (*Jacques Pantaléon*); and a king full of glory, Philippe Auguste (*Philip II of France*).

People who invoke popular lore, and derive the name of the town of Sézanne from *sexdecim asini* (*sixteen donkeys*), as others, thirty years ago, derived that of Fontanes from *faciunt asinos* (*they breed donkeys*); such people wax triumphant over the fact that Champagne engendered César-Pierre Richelet, publisher of the *Dictionnaire des Rimes* (*claimed as his*, *but actually a revision of Nicolas Frémont d'Ablancourt's work*), and the playwright Antoine-Alexandre-Henri Poinsinet, the most 'mystified' man of that century in which Voltaire mystified the world. Well, you who love harmony and correspondences, who want the character, work and spirit of a man to resemble the natural products of his homeland, and who find it admirable that Bonaparte was a Corsican, Mazarin an Italian, and Henri IV a Gascon, know this: Mirabeau (*born at Le Bignon, near Nemours*) too was, almost, from Champagne, and Danton (*born in Arcis-sur-Aube*) completely so. So there. My God! Why shouldn't Danton have been from Champagne? Claude Favre de Vaugelas, the grammarian, was definitely from Savoy!

The great Abraham de Fabert, Marquis d'Esternay, Marshal of France, was also, almost, from Champagne, that son of a printer, who never wished to rise too high nor fall too low; a pure and serious spirit, who always kept himself free from the extremes, and who, successively tested by fate, first with regard to his nobility, then his modesty, was ever the same with regard to the actions whether base or lofty proposed to him, neither rejecting the

base out of pride, nor the lofty out of humility, but repudiating both due to his chaste character, refusing to spy for Mazarin, or accept the Order of the Holy Spirit, from Louis XIV. To Louis XIV he said: '*I am a soldier, not a gentleman'*. To Mazarin: '*I am an arm, and not an eye'*.

Champagne was a powerful and robust province. The Count of Champagne was the lord of the Viscounty of Brie, which Brie itself was, strictly speaking, only a lesser Champagne, as Belgium is a lesser France. The Count of Champagne was a peer of France, and carried the fleur-de-lis banner at coronations. He himself reigned over counties held by the seven Counts, termed the *Peers of Champagne*, who were the Counts of Joigny, Rethel, Braine, Roucy, Brienne, Grandpré and Bar-sur-Seine.

Each city and town, in Champagne, is unique. The larger towns are intertwined with our history; the smaller ones all tell of some event. Reims, which possesses the cathedral among cathedrals, Reims baptised Clovis I after the Battle of Tolbiac (*c.496*). Troyes was saved from Attila, by Bishop Lupus, and saw, in 878, what Paris saw only in 1804, a pope consecrating an emperor in France, namely John VIII crowning Louis the Stammerer. It was at Attigny that Pepin the Short, 'Mayor of the Palace' (*a historical title in the Frankish kingdoms, under the Merovingian kings*), held his plenary court from which he made Waiofar, Duke of Aquitaine (*the last independent Duke*) tremble. It was at Andelot (*Andelot-Blancheville*) that the pact between Gontran, King of Burgundy, and his nephew Childebert II, King of Austrasia, was established (*in 587*), in the presence of the *leudes* (*the Frankish vassals*). Hincmar (*Archbishop of Reims*) took refuge in Épernay; Peter Abelard, in Provins; Héloïse, in the Abbey of the Paraclete. A Council of Bishops was held at Fismes (*in 881*). Langres saw the triumph of the two Gordians in the late empire (*Gordian I was Roman emperor for 22 days with his son Gordian II, in 238, the Year of the Six Emperors*), while, in the Middle Ages, its bourgeoisie destroyed the seven formidable castles around them, those of Changey, Saint-Broing, Heuilly-Coton, Coubon, Bourg, Humes (*Humes-Jorquenay*) and Le Pailly. The Treaty of Joinville was concluded with the Catholic League in 1584. Châlons sided with Henri IV in 1591. Saint-Dizier saw the death of the Prince of Orange (*René de Châlon, who was killed during the siege of 1544*). Doulevant (*Doulevant-le-Château*) sheltered the Comte de Moret (*Antoine de Bourbon*). Bourmont was the ancient fortified town of the Lingones (*a Gallic tribe of the Iron Age and Roman periods*). Sézanne is the ancient parade ground of

the Dukes of Burgundy. Signy-l'Abbaye was founded by Saint Bernard, in the domain of the Lord of Châtillon, to whom the saint promised, by authentic act, '*as many acres in heaven as the lord would grant him on earth'*. Mouzon was the fief of the Abbot of Saint-Hubert, who sent every year to the King of France 'six hounds and six birds of prey for hawking'. Chaumont is the naive city where one hopes '*to play the devil on Saint John's Day and pay one's debts' (whoever acted the part of the Devil, in the celebrations on the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, 24th June, was granted the freedom of the region for 8 days*). Château-Porcien is the town which the Constable of Châtillon (*Jean II*) sold to Louis I Duke of Orléans. Bar-sur-Aube is the town '*that the king could neither sell nor give away'*. Clairvaux had its tun (*a giant wine vat*) like Heidelberg. Villenauxe (*Villenauxe-la-Grande*) had its statue of Queen Pedauque (*a mythical queen, said to have originated in Visigothic Toulouse, characterised by her crow's feet wrinkles*). Arconville still has the pile of stones from the Huguenot massacre, to which each peasant adds a pebble as he passes. The signal fires of Mont-Aigu answered those of Mont-Aimé sixty miles away. Wassy was burned twice, by the Romans in 211, and in 1544 by the Imperial troops (*of Charles V*), as Langres was by the Huns in 351, and the Vandals in 407, and as Vitry (*Vitry-le-François*) was by Louis VII in the twelfth century and Charles V in the sixteenth. Sainte-Menehould is the noble capital of the Argonne, which, sold by a traitor to Charles II, Duke of Lorraine, refused to surrender. Carignan is the ancient 'Yvois'. Attila is said to have raised an altar at Pont-le-Roi (*Pont-sur-Seine, in 451*). Voltaire was entombed near Romilly-sur-Seine (*Voltaire's tomb was in the Abbey of Sellières, prior to his remains being transferred to the Pantheon in Paris, in 1791*).

As you can see, the local history of these Champenois towns is the history of France, fragmentary it is true, but great in scope.

Champagne retains the imprint of our ancient kings. It was in Reims that they were crowned. It was in Attigny that Charles the Simple (*Charles III*) decreed that the estate of Bourbon (*Bourbon-l'Archambault*) be ruled by a Sire de Bourbon. Both Saint Louis (*Louis IX*) and Louis XIV, the holy monarch, and the great monarch of the Capetian lineage first bloodied their swords in Champagne: the former, in 1228, at Troyes, where he raised the siege; the latter, in 1652, at Sainte-Menehould, where he entered through the breach in the walls. Remarkably, both kings were fourteen years old.

Champagne bears the mark of Napoleon. He filled (*in 1814*) the last pages of his prodigious epic with Champenois names: Arcis-sur-Aube, Châlons, Reims, Champaubert, Sézanne, Vertus, Méry-sur-Seine, Fère-Champenois, Montmirail. So many battles, so many triumphs. Fismes, Vitry-le-François, and Doulevant each held the honour of being his headquarters once, Piney twice, Troyes three times. Nogent-sur-Seine saw five victories for the emperor in five days, manoeuvring on the Marne, accompanied by his handful of heroes. Saint-Dizier had already seen two in two days. At Brienne-le-Château, where he had been schooled by the Benedictines, he was almost killed by the Cossacks.

The ancient annals of this Belgian Gaul, which became Champagne, are no less poetic than the modern ones. All these fields are full of memories; Merovech and the Franks, Flavius Aetius and the Romans, Theodoric and the Visigoths; Mount Julius (*Mont-Jules*, *Neuville-lès-This*), and the tomb of Flavius Jovinus (*at Reims, Durocortorum*); Attila's camp near La Cheppe (*prior to the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, 451*); the military roads of Châlons, Gruyères and Warcq; Viridomarus, Caracalla; Julius Sabinus (*of the Lingones*) and Eponina (*his wife*); the Arch of the Two Gordians (*Gordian I and Gordian II his son*) at Langres, the Gate of Mars at Reims; all this antiquity, clothed in shadows, speaks, lives, still palpitates, cries out from the depths of darkness to every passer-by: *Sta, viator!* (*Halt, Traveller!*). Celtic antiquity itself stammers, in an intelligible murmur, from the dark ages of history. Osiris was worshipped at Troyes; the god Borvo Tomona left his name to Bourbonne-les-Bains, while near Wassy, beneath the fearful branches of the Fôret de Dér, where the Haute-Borne menhir still stands (*between Aviz and Oiry*), like the ghost of a druid, over the mysterious ruins of Noviomagus Vadicassium, Champagne has its Palenque (*the Mayan city ruins in Mexico*).

From the Romans to our times, invested in turn by the Alans, the Suevi, the Vandals, the Burgundians and the Germans, these Champenois towns, built on the plains, allowed themselves to be burned rather than surrender to the enemy. The Champenois towns built on the hills have taken as their motto: *Donec moveantur* ('*until these move*'). It is the blood of ancient *Gallia Comata*, the blood of the Catti, the Lingones, the Tricasses, the Catalauni, who defeated the Vandals, the Nervii who defeated Syagrius, which flows today in the heroic veins of the Champenois peasant. It was a Champenois native, Louis Florentin Bertèche, a captain, who at Jemmapes (*in 1792*) killed

seven Austrian dragoons with his own hand. In 451, the plains of Champagne devoured the Huns; if God had willed, in 1814, they would have devoured the Russians.

Let us never speak, therefore, except with respect, of this admirable province which, during the invasion, sacrificed half of its sons for France. The population of the department of Marne alone, in 1813, was three hundred and eleven thousand inhabitants; by 1830, it was still only three hundred and nine thousand. Fifteen years of peace had not been enough to restore it.

So, returning to the explanation I needed to give: when applied to Champagne, the word *beast* carries another meaning. It signifies naive, simple, rough, primitive, sometimes formidable. The beast could very well be an eagle or a lion. As Champagne proved in 1814.

Letter IV: From Villers-Cotterêts to the Border

Givet, July 29

This, after a long stage of my journey. Dear friend, I write to you today from Givet, an ancient little town which had the honour of providing the dying Louis XVIII with the last password he issued, and his last pun (*his response to being asked for the day's watchword and password was 'Saint-Denis, Givet': Saint Denis being the burial place of the French Kings, and Givet a homophone for 'j'y vais', 'I'm on my way there'*), and at which I have just arrived at four in the morning, crushed by the jolting of a dreadful 'cart' that they call, here, a diligence. I have slept for two hours, fully clothed, on the bed, day has come and I am writing to you. I have opened my window to enjoy the view from my room, which consists of the corner of a whitewashed roof, an ancient wooden gutter full of moss, and a cabriolet wheel leaning against a wall. As for my room itself, it is a large hall furnished with four large beds, with an immense woodwork fireplace, adorned on the outside by a tiny mirror, and on the inside by a tiny bundle of sticks. On the bundle of sticks, delicately placed next to a broom, is an enormous and antediluvian boot-jack,

carved with a billhook by some carpenter in a rage. The fantastic opening of this boot jack imitates the windings of the Meuse; and it is almost impossible to pull one's foot out, if one is imprudent enough to place it within. One runs the risk of wandering, as I just did, throughout the inn, boot-jack on foot, crying for help. To be fair, I owe the place a slight amendment. Just now, I heard chickens cackling. I leant over to view the courtyard, and saw beneath my window a charming little common mallow in full bloom, looking much like a hollyhock, on a board propped up by two old pots.

Since my last letter, an incident, that is scarcely worth telling you of, caused me to suddenly retreat from Varennes-en-Argonne to Villers-Cotterêts[20], and the day before yesterday, after having dismissed my carriage from La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, I took the stagecoach for Soissons in order to make up for lost time: it was completely empty, which, between you and me, did not displease me. I was able to spread out the sheets of my Cassini map, at my ease, on the coupé's bench seat.

As I approached Soissons, evening was falling. Night was already opening her smoke-filled hand over this ravishing valley into which the road plunges after the hamlet of La Folie, and was slowly spreading her immense shadow over the cathedral tower, and the double spire of the Abbey of Saint-Jean-des-Vignes (*in decay after the Revolution*). However, through the heavy mist that crept slowly over the countryside, one could still distinguish the cluster of walls, roofs, and buildings that is Soissons[21], half-contained by the steely crescent of the River Aisne, like a sheaf that the sickle is about to cut. I halted for a moment at the top of the descent to enjoy this beautiful spectacle. A cricket was singing in a neighbouring field, the trees along the path were murmuring softly, quivering in the last evening breeze before falling asleep; I watched attentively, as a great and profound peace clothed the dark plain which, in my mind's eye, saw Caesar conquer, Clovis reign, and Napoleon falter. Men, even a Caesar, a Clovis, a Napoleon, are only shadows that pass, and war only a shadow which passes with them, while God, and Nature which comes from God, and peace, which comes from Nature, are eternal things.

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[20] Letter IV — Villers-Cotterêts: 49°15'13.0"N, 3°05'24.0"E

[21] Letter IV — Soissons: 49°22'54.1"N, 3°19'25.0"E

Planning to collect the trunk from Sedan, which would not arrive in Soissons till midnight, I had time on my hands, and had foregone my seat in the stagecoach. The distance separating me from Soissons was no more than a charming stroll, which I completed on foot. Some distance from the town, I sat down near a pretty little house, softly lit by the glow from a blacksmith's forge on the opposite side of the road. There I looked, reverently, at the sky, which was superb and serene. The only three planets visible at that hour were all shining, in the same half of the heavens, as I gazed to the southwest. Jupiter — our beautiful Jupiter, you know it, my friend — which was retrograde three months ago, lay on a perfectly straight geometric line between the two stars which currently frame it (*Regulus in Leo, and Spica in Virgo*). Further, and to the north-west, Mars, red as fire or blood, imitated the stellar scintillations in its fierce blaze; and, to the south-east, that monster-planet, that frightening and mysterious world that we call Saturn, shone softly, with the appearance of a pale and peaceful star. Opposite, in the same arc of sky as Mars, in the depths of the landscape, I thought I saw a magnificent lighthouse with revolving rays, blue, scarlet and white, illuminating with dazzling rutilation the dark hillsides that separate Noyon from Soisson. As I was wondering what a lighthouse could be doing on open ground, in the immense plain, I saw it leave the heights of the hills, cross the violet mist of the horizon, and sink from sight. This 'lighthouse' was Aldebaran, the tricolour sun, the enormous star of purple, silver, and turquoise, sinking majestically through the vague and sinister pallor of twilight.

O my friend! What secret lies in these stars which all poets since there have been poets, all thinkers since there have been thinkers, all dreamers since there have been dreamers, have in turn contemplated, studied, and adored: some, like Zoroaster, with confident wonder; others, like Pythagoras, with inexpressible terror! Seth named the stars as Adam named the animals. The Chaldeans and the Genethliacs (*astrologers*), Ezra and Zerubbabel, Orpheus, Homer and Hesiod, Cadmus, Pherecydes, Xenophon, Hecataeus, Herodotus and Thucydides, all those earth-bound eyes, for so long extinguished now and shuttered, devoted themselves to watching, from century to century, and with anguish, those eyes of heaven which are always open, always alight, always alive. The same planets, the same stars that we look at today, were observed by all these men. Job (*see 'Job' 9:9 and 38:31*) speaks of Orion and the Hyades; Plato listened and distinctly heard the vague music of the spheres

(*see his 'Timaeus'*); Pliny believed the sun to be a god (*see his 'Natural History' Book 2:12*) and attributed the spots of the moon to the fumes of the earth (*Book 2: 46*). The Tartar poets called the pole *senesticol*, which meant '*the iron nail*', Some dreamers, seized by a kind of vertigo, have dared to mock the constellations. '*The lion* (*Leo*),' says Jean-Baptiste de Rocoles, '*could just as easily be called an ape*'. Marcus Pacuvius, however, barely reassured, tried to stupefy himself, and disbelieved in the astrologers, on the pretext that they would be equal to Jupiter:

'Nam si qui, quæ ventura sunt, prævideant,

Aequiparent Jovi'

'For if any foresaw the things that are to come,

They would be equal to Jupiter himself'

Favorinus of Arles asked himself this formidable question: *What if the causes of everything are not in the stars?* '*Si vitae mortisque hominum rerumque humanarum omnium tempus et ratio et causa in caelo et apud stellas foret?*' He believed that the sidereal influence extended to flies and worms, '*muscis aut vermiculis*', and, he adds, to hedgehogs, '*aut echinis*'. Aulus Gellius, sailing from Aegina to Piraeus, over a '*calm sea*', sat, by night, at the stern and considered the stars: '*Nox fuit, et clemens mare, et anni aestas, caelumque liquid serenum; sedebamus ergo in puppi simul universi, et lucentia sidera considerabamus:* it was night, the sea was calm, the time summer, and the sky bright and clear. So, we all sat together, at the stern, and watched the brilliant stars' (*see Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights; 2:21*). Horace himself, that practical philosopher, that Voltaire of the age of Augustus, though a greater poet, it is true, than the Voltaire of Louis XV, Horace himself shuddered as he looked at the stars, a strange anxiety filled his heart, and he wrote these lines sufficient to inspire dread:

'Hunc solem, and stellas, et decedentia certis

Tempora momentis, sunt qui formidine nulla

Imbuti spectator!'

'The sun up there, the stars, the seasons, going past

In unerring flow, some can watch unmoved by awe'

(*Horace 'Epistles' Book I:VI*)

As for myself, I do not fear the stars, I love them — yet I have never reflected without a certain pang in my heart that the normal state of the heavens is darkness. What we call day exists for us only because we are close to a star.

One cannot always gaze at immensity; infinity crushes; ecstasy is as devout a state as prayer, but prayer soothes while ecstasy exhausts. From the constellations, my eyes fell to the humble rustic wall against which I was leaning. Here again there was subject for meditation and thought. Into this wall, the peasant who had built it had sealed a stone, a venerable stone, on which the reverberations of the chisel allowed me to recognise the almost entirely erased traces of an ancient inscription; I could only distinguish two intact letters, IC; the rest was eroded. What was this inscription? Roman, or Romanesque? It spoke of Rome, without a doubt, but of which Rome? Of pagan Rome, or of Christian Rome? Of the city of power, or the city of faith? I remained, awhile, with my eyes fixed on this stone, my mind lost in endless hypotheses. I know not if the contemplation of the stars had predisposed me to reverie, but I reached a point at which I saw in those two mysterious letters — IC — those letters which, the first time they appeared to men, governed the world, and, the second time, transformed it, revive and shine in some manner before my gaze. Iulius (*Julius*) Caesar, and Iesus (*Jesus*) Christ!

It was doubtless under the inspiration of an idea similar to the one which absorbed me, at that moment, that Dante placed together in the pit of the Inferno, being devoured forever by the fetid jaws of Satan, both the great traitor and the great assassin, Judas and Brutus.

Three cities succeeded Soissons, the *Noviodunum* of the Gauls, the *Augusta Suessonium* of the Romans, and the ancient Soissons of Clovis, Charles the Simple, and the Duke of Mayenne (*Charles II of Lorraine, who died at Soissons in 1611*). Nothing remains of *Noviodunum* which Caesar's speedy advance compromised. The Suessones, according to Caesar's 'Commentaries' ('*De*

Bello Gallico', Book II, 12) '*celeritate Romanorum permoti, legatos ad Cæsarem de deditione mittunt: troubled by the speed of the Romans, sent ambassadors to Caesar with regards to their surrender*'.

All that remains of *Augusta Suessonium* are a few damaged remnants, amongst others those of an ancient temple which in the Middle Ages became the church of Saint-Pierre-au-Parvis. Ancient Soissons is richer. It possesses the Abbey of Saint-Jean-des-Vignes, and its ancient castle. In the Church of Saint Gervais and Saint Protais which preceded the existing Gothic cathedral, Pepin the Short was crowned in 752. I have not been able to verify what remains of the fortifications of the Duke of Mayenne, and whether it was those fortifications which led the Emperor Napoleon to say, in 1814, on noticing some fossil shells, gryphaea or belemnites, embedded in the walls, that those of Soissons were built of the same stone as those of Saint-Jean-d'Acre. An intriguing observation when one considers where it was made, by whom, and on what date.

The night was too dark when I entered Soissons to be able to search for Noviodunum or Suessonium. I was content to have supper while waiting for the stagecoach to appear, and to wander around the gigantic silhouette of Saint-Jean-des-Vignes, rising boldly against the sky, with the appearance of a stage set. As I walked, the stars appeared in, and disappeared from, the crevices of the darkened building, as if it were full of fearful people, ascending, descending, running everywhere with lights in their hands.

As I was returning to the inn, midnight struck. The whole town was as black as an oven. Suddenly a tempestuous noise was heard at the end of a narrow street, perfectly peaceful until that moment, and in itself apparently incapable of such nocturnal disturbances. The mail coach was arriving. It halted a few steps from my inn. There was precisely one empty space, which was all to the good. These new coaches are truly most elegant and comfortable; you sit in them as if in an armchair, your legs at ease, with headrests on the right and left if you choose to close your eyes, and a large window in front of you if you keep them open. Just as I was about to settle, very voluptuously, such a strange uproar, mingled with shouts, the noise of wheels, and the stamping of horses, rose from

another small dark street that, despite the courier, who granted me a scant five minutes, I hastened there. On entering the narrow street, this is what I saw: — At the foot of a vast wall, which displayed the odious and icy

appearance peculiar to prisons, a low, arched door, armed with enormous bolts, stood open. A few steps from this door, between two mounted gendarmes, a sort of lugubrious cart had halted, half-visible in the darkness. Between the cart and the doorway, a group of four or five men were struggling, dragging a woman, who was uttering terrifying screams, towards the cart. A dark-lantern, carried by a man lost in the shadows it cast, cast a gloomy light on the scene. The woman, a robust country-woman of about thirty, put up a desperate resistance, screaming, hitting, scratching, and biting, and at times a shaft of light from the lantern fell on her dishevelled and sinister-looking head, like to that of a statue of Despair. She had seized hold of one of the iron bars of the door-grille and was clinging to it. As I approached, the men made a violent effort, tore her from the grille, and carried her in a single bound to the carriage. This carriage, which was now brightly-lit by the lantern, had no other opening than small round holes bored in the two sides, and a door at the back, closed on the outside by large bolts. The man with the lantern drew the bolts, the door opened, and the inside of the cart was suddenly visible. It was a kind of box, closed to daylight, and almost airless, divided transversely into two oblong compartments by a solid partition. The single door was arranged in such a way that once locked it met the wood of the partition, sealing both compartments, at the same time. No communication was possible between the two cells, furnished, by way of seating, with a board pierced with a hole. The left-hand side was empty; but the right was occupied. There, in the corner, half-crouched like a wild beast, lying across the bench since he lacked space for his knees, was a man — if he could still be called a man — a sort of ghost with a squarish face, a flat skull, broad temples, grizzled hair, and short, hairy, and stocky limbs, dressed in old trousers of torn canvas, and a rag that had once been a smock. The wretch's legs were tightly bound by a doubly knotted rope that reached almost to the hocks. His right foot was concealed in a wooden clog; his bare left foot was wrapped in a bloody cloth that left a set of horribly bruised and diseased toes visible. This hideous being was peacefully eating a lump of black bread. He seemed to pay no attention to what was happening around him. He did not even stop eating to view the unfortunate companion who was being brought to him. She, however, with her head thrown back, still resisting the guards who were trying to push her into the empty compartment, continued to cry: 'I won't! Never! Never! Kill me instead!' She had not yet seen the other. Suddenly, in one of her convulsions, her eyes fell on the

interior of the carriage, and saw the dreadful prisoner in the shadows. Then her cries suddenly ceased, her knees buckled, she turned away trembling in every limb, with barely the strength to say in a subdued voice, but with an expression of anguish that I will never forget: 'Oh! That man!'

At that instant, he looked up at her with a fierce and stupid air, like the tiger of a peasant he was. I confess that here I could not resist intervening. It was clear that she was a thief, perhaps even something worse, whom the gendarmerie was transferring from one place to another, in one of those odious vehicles that the Parisian urchins call, metaphorically, *salad-baskets*; but after all, she was a woman. I thought I should involve myself, and called out to the guards. They did not even turn their heads; only, a worthy gendarme, who would surely have asked even Don Quixote for his papers, took advantage of the opportunity to demand that I show my passport. I had just given the said document to the courier, at the mail-coach. While I was explaining myself to the gendarme, the doormen made a final effort, plunged the half-dead woman into the cart, closed the door, and slid home the bolts, so that, at the moment when I turned towards them again, there was no trace of the carriage in the street but the sound of its wheels and the hooves of the escort, plunging, together with a loud clatter, into the darkness.

A short while later I myself was being borne, at the gallop, along the road to Reims, seated in an excellent coach, drawn by four excellent horses. I thought of that unfortunate woman, and with a heart-felt pang compared my journey to hers. It was in the midst of these thoughts that I fell asleep.

When I awoke, dawn was beginning to revive the trees, the meadows, the hills, the bushes along the road, all those peaceful things whose sleep our coaches and mail coaches so brutally invade. We were in a charming valley, probably that of Braine-sur-Vesle. A faint, fragrant breath of air rose from the as yet still darkened hillsides. Towards the east, at the southerly end of the dawn glow, very close to the horizon, in a limpid, blue, dark, dazzling medium, an ineffable mixture of shadowy pearl and sapphire, Venus shone resplendent, and her magnificent radiance clothed the fields and woods, dimly glimpsed, with an inexpressible serenity, grace, and melancholy. It was like a celestial eye opened, lovingly, upon that beautiful sleeping landscape.

The mail coach gallops through Reims[22], with no respect for the cathedral (*Notre-Dame de Reims*). As it passes, one can barely see, above the gables in a narrow street, two or three lancet windows of the apse, the coat of arms of Charles VII, and the beautiful spire of the Suppliciés, above the apse.

From Reims to Rethel, nothing — an impoverished Champagne, whose golden hair July has trimmed; vast, bare, yellow plains, immense, smooth waves of land on top of which quiver a few miserable patches of brushwood, like vegetative foam; now and then, in the depths of the landscape, a mill, turning slowly as if overwhelmed by the midday sun, or, at the roadside, a potter drying a few dozen rough flower pots, on planks at the threshold of his cottage.

Rethel[23] spreads gracefully from the top of a hill down to the Aisne, whose branches intersect the town in two or three places. Otherwise, there is nothing to proclaim it the former princely residence of one of the seven Counts of Champagne who were Peers of France. The streets are those of a large village rather than city streets. The church is in a mediocre style.

From Rethel to Mézières (*Charleville-Mézières*[24]), the road climbs those vast steps with which the Argonne plateau connects to the higher plateau of Rocroi. The large slate roofs, the facades, the whitewashed wooden cladding, protecting the north side of the houses from the rain, grants the villages a distinctive appearance. Now and then, the first ridges of the Faucilles heights (*Col de la Faucille*) appear on the horizon to the southeast. For the rest, there are few or no forests. Here and there, in the distance, one can see a few tufted hills. Deforestation, that bastard offspring of civilisation, has sadly devastated the old lair of the Boar of the Ardennes (*William de la Marck*).

Upon arriving at Mézières, I looked for the old, half-ruined towers of the Saxon castle of Hellebarde; I found there only the cold, hard zigzags of a citadel by Sébastien Vauban. On the other hand, inspecting the ditches, I saw, in various places, a few rather beautiful, though dismantled, remnants of the

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[22] Letter IV — Reims: 49°15'30.1"N, 4°01'54.5"E

[23] Letter IV — Rethel: 49°30'42.1"N, 4°22'00.1"E

[24] Letter IV — Charleville-Mézières: 49°46'10.9"N, 4°43'07.0"E

moated wall attacked by Charles V (*in 1521*) and defended by Bayard (*Pierre Terrail, the Chevalier de Bayard*). The church of Mézières (*Notre-Dame-d'Espérance, since rebuilt after war-damage*) had a reputation for its stained-glass windows. I took advantage of the half-hour the mail coach allows travellers for lunch to visit it. The stained-glass windows must have been beautiful indeed; some fragments sadly lost amidst large windows of plain glass remain, in the apse. But what is remarkable is the church itself, which is sixteenth century, and of charming form, with flamboyant mullioned bays, and a charming porch backing onto the southern portal. Two bas-reliefs from the time of Charles VIII, on pillars, to the right and left of the choir, have been sealed, sadly daubed with whitewash, and mutilated. The whole church is colour-washed, in a yellow hue, with ribs and keystones of various colours. Which renders it very stupid and ugly. While walking along the north aisle of the apse, I noticed on the wall an inscription which recalls that Mézières was cruelly attacked and bombarded by the Prussians in 1815. Below the inscription, these two ridiculous lines have been added in Latin: '*Lector, leva oculos ad fornicem et vide quasi quoddam divinæ manus indicium*: *Reader, raise your eyes to the vault, and see, as it were, a sign of the divine hand*'.

I raised my eyes *ad fornicem* (*to the vault*), and saw a large rent in the ceiling above my head. In this rent a large bomb, which I could distinguish perfectly, was, and is, suspended from projecting stones by its metal ear. It is a Prussian bomb which, having pierced the roof of the church, the framework, and the mass of masonry, halted thus, as if by a miracle, at the moment of falling to the paving below. For twenty-five years, it has remained there as God suspended it. Around the bomb, there is a jumble of broken bricks, rubble, and plaster, the entrails of the vaulting. This bomb, and the gaping wound created above the heads of passers-by produces a strange effect, rendered even more singular by the historical echo that springs to mind, when one recalls that it was precisely Mézières that received the first bombs ever employed in warfare, in 1521. On the other side of the church, another inscription states that the wedding of Charles IX with Elizabeth of Austria was 'happily celebrated,' *feliciter celebrata fuere*, in the church of Mézières, on November 17, 1570 — two years before the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacres.

The main portal is from this same period, and consequently in fine and noble taste. Unfortunately, it is one of those late facades of the sixteenth

century, the form of which was not fully realised till the seventeenth. The bell-tower was not completed till 1626. It would be impossible to find anything heavier or more awkward, except for those of the various new churches of Paris being constructed at this moment.

For the rest, Mézières has large trees on its ramparts, clean, sad streets, doubtless brightened with difficulty on Sundays and holidays, while nothing in the town recalls Hellebarde and Garinus (*his son*) who founded it (*in 899*), nor Count Balthazar of Rethel who sacked it (*in 940*), nor Count Hugues III of Rethel who granted it the status of a city (*in 1233*), nor the archbishops of Reims who besieged it, Foulques and Adalbero. The god Macer, who gave his name to Mézières, became the *Saint Masert* of the church chapels.

There are no monuments, no architectural edifices, in Sedan[25], at which I arrived around noon. Pretty women, handsome carabinieri, trees and meadows along the Meuse, cannons, drawbridges and bastions, such is Sedan. It is one of those places where the severe air of citadel towns mingles strangely with the joyful air of garrison towns. I would have liked to have found vestiges of Turenne (*Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, vicomte de Turenne*) in Sedan; there are none. The pavilion where he was born has been demolished, and replaced by a piece of grey stone with this inscription in gold letters: 'Turenne Nacqit ici (*Turenne was born here*), 11th September 1611'.

This date, which sparkled on the grey stone, struck me. I brought to mind everything it recalled. In 1611, Sully (*Maximilien de Béthune Sully, 1st Prince of Sully*) retired to private life. Henri IV had been assassinated the previous year. Louis XIII, who was to die on May 14th, like his father (*in 1610 and 1643 respectively*), was ten years old. Anne of Austria, his wife, was the same age, five days younger than him (*born on the 22nd and 27th of September respectively*). Richelieu (*Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu from 1622*) was in his twenty-sixth year. Some fine bourgeois parents in Rouen were raising their *little one*, *Pierre*; he whom the universe later named the *great Corneille*; he was five years old. Shakespeare and Cervantes were still alive. Brantôme (*Pierre de Bourdeille, soldier and memoirist*), and Pierre Mathieu, the playwright, were also alive. Elizabeth I of England had been dead eight years, and, seven years previously, Clement VIII, the *peaceful pope and good Frenchman*, as Pierre de

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[25] Letter IV — Sedan: 49°42'06.8"N, 4°56'26.9"E

l'Estoile, the diarist, termed him. In 1611, 'Papirius' Masson (*Jean Papire Masson, the historian*) and Jean Busée (*Joannes Busaeus, the theologian*) died; Emperor Rudolph II was declining (*he died in 1612*); Gustavus Adolphus would succeed Charles IX of Sweden, the visionary king; Philip III was driving the Moors from Spain, against the advice of the Duke of Osuna (*Pedro Téllez-Girón, 3rd Duke of Osuna*); and in 1611, the Dutch astronomer John Fabricius was noting the existence of sunspots. This is what was happening in the world when Turenne was born.

Sedan has not proved a pious guardian of his memory. The pavilion where Monsieur de Turenne was born has been demolished, as I have said, and his castle razed to the ground.

I lacked the courage to visit Bazeilles, to see whether some landowner or other had not had the avenue of trees he planted torn up. Instead, the main square in Sedan offers the visitor a rather mediocre bronze statue of Turenne, which consoled me not at all. This statue is nothing but a glorification. The room where he was born, the castle where he lived, the trees he planted, those held memories of the man.

Nor are there even any memories of William I de La Marck, that terrifying predecessor of Turenne in the annals of Sedan. A remarkable thing, and one that must be mentioned in passing: over time, and due to no more than the natural progress of things and ideas, the city of that 'Wild Boar of the Ardennes' altered to such an extent that it produced Turenne.

After a very good lunch, at an excellent place called the *Hôtel de la Croix-d'Or* (*at 1 Place Turenne, not extant*), there was nothing to keep me in Sedan; I decided to return to Mézières and take the coach for Givet. It is about fifteen miles, but fifteen very picturesque ones. I traversed them on foot, followed by a young, dark-skinned, barefoot fellow who cheerfully carried my overnight bag. The road, halfway up the hillside, mostly follows the Meuse valley. About three miles from Sedan, is Donchery[26], with its old wooden bridge and its beautiful trees; then there are smiling villages, pretty castles with pepper-pot turrets buried in clumps of greenery, wide meadows where herds of cattle graze in the sun, and the Meuse which one loses sight of and then finds once more. The weather was the finest in the world, it was

[26] Letter IV — Donchery: 49°41'42.1"N, 4°52'27.7"E

charming. Halfway there, I felt very hot and thirsty; I looked everywhere for a house where I might obtain a drink. Finally, I saw one. I hastened there, hoping it was a tavern, and read this sign above the door: Bernier-Hannas, *oat merchant, and pork butcher*. On a bench, next to the door, there was a person afflicted with a goitre. Goitres abound in the region. I nevertheless entered, bravely, the butcher's shop selling oats, and drank with great pleasure a glass of the water which had doubtless caused the goitre.

At six in the evening, I arrived at Mézières; at seven, I left for Givet, gloomily wedged into a low, narrow, and dark carriage, between a fat gentleman and a fat lady, husband and wife, who spoke across me, to each other, tenderly. The lady called her husband *my poor chiat*. I know if her intention was to call him *my poor dog (chien)* or *my poor cat* (*chat*). While traversing Charleville, which is only a cannon-shot from Mézières, I noted the central square, which was built in 1605, in a very grand style, by Charles I Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers and Mantua, and which is the true sister of our Place Royale in Paris. There are the same houses with arcades, brick facades, and tall roofs. Then, as night was descending, and having nothing better to do, I slept; but a violent sleep, a troubled and dreadful sleep, between the snores of the fat man, and the groans of the fat woman. I was awakened, from time to time, when we changed horses, by lanterns suddenly visible in the window, and by dialogues such as: 'Hey! Hey! What nag is that? I don't want her. She's the fidgeter' — 'and Monsieur Simon? Where is Monsieur Simon?' —'Monsieur Simon? Well! He's working. He's always working. He works *like a madman, only worse*.' On another occasion, when the carriage halted at a relay-station, I opened my eyes, to find the wind blowing strongly, the sky dark, and an immense mill, its sails turning sinisterly overhead, which seemed to be gazing at us from its two lit skylights as if with burning eyes. On yet another occasion, as soldiers surrounded the stagecoach, and a gendarme asked for our passports, I could hear the chains of a drawbridge rattling, and a street lamp illuminated piles of cannonballs at the foot of a high black wall; the carriage was almost touching the muzzle of a cannon; we were at Rocroi[27]. The name awakened me completely. Although it cannot be called '*seeing Rocroi*', I took a certain pleasure in thinking that I had visited, in the same day and only a few hours apart, those two heroic places, Rocroi and Sedan.

[27] Letter IV — Rocroi: 49°55'36.1"N, 4°31'23.9"E

Turenne was born in Sedan; one could say that the great Condé was born in Rocroi (*his first major battle, in 1643, which launched his military career*).

Meanwhile, the two fat people, my neighbours, were talking between themselves, and telling each other, as if in some scene of a badly-written play, things that they were well aware of: — that they *had not been to Rocroi since 1818. Twenty-two years ago!* — that *Monsieur Crochard, the secretary of the sub-prefecture, was their close friend* — that*, as it was midnight, he must be in bed, good Monsieur Crochard*, etc. The lady seasoned these fascinating revelations with bizarre phrases familiar to her; thus, she said: '*Selfish as an old hare*' and '*a poor man's luck*' instead of *pot-luck*. That monstrous fellow, her husband, for his part, uttered puns, like this one: *They say it's a commonplace* ('*comme un', 'like one'*), *I say it's a place 'comme trois'* (*'like three'*), or twisted proverbs, like this one: *Sell-your-wife-and-stop-your-ears*. Then he laughed in a good-natured way.

The carriage departed, my two neighbours were still talking. I was making a great effort to listen not to their conversation but to the horses' bells, the noise of the wheels on the paving stones, the axle-hubs, the creaking of nuts and screws, the sonorous rustling of the window-blinds, when suddenly a delightful chiming sound came to my rescue, a series of fine, light, crystalline, fantastic, ethereal chimes, which rang out suddenly from the darkness, announcing our arrival in Belgium, a country of tinkling sounds, endlessly pouring forth their mocking, ironic, witty banter, as if reproaching my two ponderous neighbours for their foolish chatter.

This chiming, which would have woken me, sent them to sleep. I assume we must have been at Fumay[28], but the night was too dark to distinguish anything. I was obliged to pass by the magnificent ruins of the castle of Hierges, and those beautiful sheer-sided rocks called the *Ladies of the Meuse* (*Les Dames de Meuse*), without seeing a thing. From time to time, at the foot of a precipice clothed in vapour, I saw, as if through a hole in the smoke, something whitish: it was the Meuse.

Finally, as the first glimmers of dawn appeared, a drawbridge was lowered, a gate was opened, and the coach entered, at a brisk trot, a sort of long defile formed on the left by a black sheer-sided cliff, and on the right by a long, low, interminable, and most strange building, apparently uninhabited,

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[28] Letter IV — Fumay: 49°59'39.8"N, 4°42'22.2"E

pierced from one end to the other by a multitude of doors and windows which seemed to be open, and lacking shutters, frames or glass, allowing patches of light, or rather of the twilight already tinting the edge of the sky on the far side of the Meuse, to be seen through the dark, fantastic interior of the house. At the far end of this singular dwelling, there was a single closed and dimly-lit window. Then the carriage passed, briefly, in front of a large tower with a striking profile, entered a narrow street, and turned into a courtyard. Inn-maids appeared with candles, and stable-boys with lanterns; I was at Givet[29].

The End of Part I of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

[29] Letter IV — Givet: 50°08'19.0"N, 4°49'27.8"E

Part II: Letters V-VIII

'View of Dinant'
Geo Poggenbeek (Dutch, 1853-1903)
Artvee

Letter V: Givet

On the road, at an inn, August 1st

Givet[30] is a pretty town, clean, gracious, and hospitable, situated on both banks of the Meuse, which divides it into Grand and Petit Givet, at the foot of a high, and beautiful wall of rock, whose summit is somewhat spoiled by the geometric lines of the Fort de Charlemont[31]. The inn, which is called the Hôtel du Mont-d'Or (*not extant*), is very good, although it is the only one, and could therefore accommodate passers-by in any way it chose, and serve them anything it wished for dinner.

The bell-tower of Petit Givet is a simple slate needle; as for the bell-tower (*of Saint-Hilaire Church*) in Grand Givet, it exhibits a more complex and erudite architectural style. Here, it seems, is how the architect designed it. The bold fellow took a square priest's or lawyer's cap. On this square cap he placed an inverted salad bowl; on the platform provided by the upturned base of this salad bowl, he placed a sugar bowl; on the sugar bowl, a bottle; on the bottle, a sun-orb fixed into the neck by means of its lower vertical ray; and finally, on the sun-orb, a rooster skewered by the upper vertical ray. Assuming that it took him a day to engender these six ideas, on the seventh day he rested. The architect must have been Flemish.

For about two centuries, Flemish architects imagined that nothing was more beautiful than pieces of crockery or kitchen utensils raised to gigantic, nay titanic proportions. So, when they were given to building bell-towers, they seized the opportunity, valiantly, and set about crowning their cities with a host of colossal pitchers.

The views in Givet are no less charming, especially if you stand towards evening, as I did, in the centre of the bridge, and look south. Night, which is

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[30] Letter V — Givet: 50°08'19.0"N, 4°49'27.8"E

[31] Letter V — Fort de Charlemont: 50°08'07.4"N, 4°48'32.8"E

the best means of hiding our follies, was beginning to veil the ridiculous outline of the bell tower. Smoke oozed from all the roofs. To my left, I heard the infinitely gentle rustling of some tall elms, above which the evening glow vividly highlighted a large eleventh-century tower, dominating Petit Givet halfway up the hill. To my right, another old tower, half stone and half brick, with a conical cap, was entirely reflected in the Meuse, a dazzling, metallic mirror crossing the darkened landscape. Further away, at the foot of the formidable Charlemont rock, I could make out, like a whitish line, the long building that I had seen the day before when I entered, which was simply an empty barracks. Above the city, above the towers, above the bell-tower, a huge wall of rock rose up sheer, extending as far as the eye could see to the mountains on the horizon, and enclosing the view as if in a stadium. In the distance, in a clear green sky, the crescent moon was slowly descending, so fine, so pure and so delicate, that one would have said that God was letting us glimpse half of his gold ring.

During the day, I wished to visit the venerable tower which once held Petit Givet in check. The path is rough and engages the hands as well as the feet; it is necessary to climb the rock a little, which is composed of a very beautiful and very hard granite. Arriving, not without some difficulty, at the foot of the tower which is falling to ruin and whose Romanesque bays have been shattered, I found it barricaded by a door adorned with a large padlock. I called out, I knocked, no one answered. I had to descend the way I had climbed. However, my ascent was not entirely wasted. While circling the old building, whose facing has almost completely peeled away, I noticed, among the rubble which every day crumbles further to dust in the ravine, a large stone on which one could still distinguish the remains of an inscription. I examined it carefully; there remained of the inscription only a few decipherable letters — here is the order in which they were arranged:

LOQVE ... SA.L.OMBRE

PARAS .... MODI.SL.

ACAV.P ..... SOTROS.

The letters, carved deeply into the stone, seemed to have been traced with a nail; and a little below, the same nail had engraved this signature which remained intact: — IOSE GVTIEREZ, 1643. I have always had a taste for inscriptions. I confess that this one occupied my thoughts a great deal. What did it mean? In what language was it? At first glance, making some concessions to the spelling, one might believe it to be in French, and read these absurd words: Loque sale (*Dirty rag*) — Ombre (*Shadow*) — Parasol (Parasol) — Modis (*Accursed*, *maudis*) — La cave (*The cavern*) — Sot (*Fool*) — Ros (*Pink*). But one could only form these words by ignoring the spaces where letters had been erased, and besides it seemed to me that the grave Castilian signature, *Jose Gutierez*, was there as a protest against such poverty of thinking. By comparing the signature with the sequence *paras* and the sequence *otros*, which are Spanish, I concluded that the inscription must be in Castilian, and, after thinking about it, here is how I believe it might be read:

LO QUE EMPESA EL HOMBRE

PARA SIMISMO DIOS LE

ACAVA PARA LOS OTROS

‘*What Man commences for himself, God achieves through others*’

Which seems to me, in truth, a very fine sentence, very Catholic, very sad, very Castilian. Now, who was this Gutierez? The stone was evidently torn from the inside of the tower. 1643 is the date of the Battle of Rocroi. Was Jose Gutierez one of the vanquished in that battle? Had he been captured? Had they imprisoned him there? Had he been granted the leisure, in his dungeon, to write that melancholy summary of his life, and of all human life? My suppositions are all the more probable since to engrave such a long sentence in the granite with a nail, it would have taken all the patience that only prisoners possess, which is so greatly composed of ennui. Then, who had mutilated the inscription in this way? Was it simply due to time and chance? Was it the work of some malicious fool? I leant towards the latter hypothesis. Some boor, a wicked wigmaker turned rebellious soldier, will have been locked up as a disciplinary measure in this tower, and thought he

was being witty by creating a ridiculous meaning from the hidalgo's grave lament. He turned a serious expression into a grimace. — Today the gentleman and the boor, lament and farce, tragedy and parody, mingle together haphazardly, at the feet of the passer-by, in the same thicket, in the same ravine, in the same state of oblivion!

Next day, at five in the morning, very comfortable, this time, and all alone on the bench-seat of the Van Gend and Company stagecoach, I left France by the Namur road, and climbed the first ridge of the only chain of high hills that exists in Belgium; due to the Meuse, which persists in flowing in the opposite direction to the slope of the Ardennes plateau, having succeeded in carving a deep valley through the immense plain that we call Flanders; a plain on which Man has built many a fortress, Nature having denied him mountains.

After a quarter of an hour's climb, the horses, already out of breath, and the Belgian driver, already thirsty, stopped by common accord, with touching unanimity, in front of a tavern, in a poor but picturesque village, spreading on both sides of a wide gorge that cuts through the hills. This gorge, which is at once the bed of a torrent and the main street of the village, is naturally paved with the exposed blue granite of the hillside. As we passed through it, six horses, harnessed to chains, were moving, or rather climbing, along this strange, dreadfully steep street, dragging behind them a large, empty, four-wheeled cart. If the cart had been loaded, it would have required twenty horses, or rather twenty mules. I failed to see what use the cart could be in this ravine, if not to create an improbable subject for the sketches produced by the poor young Dutch painters that one encounters here and there on the road, knapsack on back, and stave in hand.

What could one occupy oneself with on the bench of a stagecoach except gazing? — I was admirably situated for that. I had, before my eyes, a large section of the Meuse valley; to the south, Petit and Grand Givet, gracefully linked by their bridge; to the west, the great ruined tower of the Château d'Agimont[32], blending with the hillside and casting an immense pyramidal shadow behind; to the north, the dark trench into which the Meuse plunges and from which rose a luminous blue mist. In the foreground, two strides

[32] Letter V — Château d'Agimont: 50°09'49.6"N, 4°47'19.1"E

from my bench, in the attic of the inn, a pretty country girl, seated on her bed in her chemise, was dressing near her wide-open window, which let in both the rays of the rising sun, and the glances of random travellers perched on top of their stagecoaches. Above this attic, in the distance, like a crowning glory, on the borders of France, stood the formidable batteries of Charlemont, stretching out in an immense line.

While I was contemplating this landscape, the country girl looked up, saw me, smiled, gave me a gracious nod, did not close her window, and slowly continued her toilette.

Letter VI: The Banks of the Meuse   Dinant   Namur

Liège, August 3rd

I have just arrived in Liège, via a delightful road that follows the entire course of the Meuse from Givet. The banks of the Meuse are beautiful and charming. It is strange that they are so little mentioned. Here is a summary.

After the village, the inn, and the country girl who was dressing herself for the benefit of the rising sun, we negotiated an ascent that reminded me of Val-Suzon near Dijon, since the road, constantly turning back on itself, twisted and turned, for the next three-quarters of an hour, amidst a forest, over deep ravines dug by the torrents. We reached a plateau, where we were speeding quickly over the vast flat countryside, which stretched around us as far as the eye could see, and where one might have thought oneself in the midst of Beauce, when, suddenly, the ground fell away horribly a few paces to the left. From the road, the eye plunged to the bottom of a fearful vertical cliff, on which only vegetation can climb. It is a sudden and dreadful precipice, two or three hundred feet deep. At the bottom of this precipice, in the shadows, through the gaps in the brushwood on the bank, I saw the Meuse and a boat thereon travelling peacefully along towed by horses, and at the edge of the river a pretty Rococo gatehouse which looked like a mannered pastry-shop, or a clock-tower from the time of Louis XV, with a Lilliputian

pool and a Pompadour garden whose volutes, fancies, and grimaces one could take in at a glance. Nothing is more singular than this little piece of Chinoiserie amidst the vastness of nature. It looked like a garish human protest, in bad taste, against the sublime poetry of God.

Then we moved away from the abyss, and the plain began again, since the Meuse slices through this plateau, in its steep sharply-cut valley, like a furrow in a field.

A quarter of a league further on, we slowed; the road sloped down steeply to join the river. This time the abyss was charming. A riot of flowers, and beautiful trees lit by the radiant morning sky. Orchards surrounded by hedges rose and fell pell-mell on both sides of the road. The Meuse, narrow and green, flowed to the left, deeply entrenched in a double escarpment. A bridge appeared; another river, smaller and even more delightful, flowed into the Meuse: it was the Lesse. Nine miles away, in the gorge which opens on the right, are the famous caves of Han-sur-Lesse[33]. The coach passed beyond, and drew away. The sound of the watermills along the Lesse is lost in the hills. The left bank of the Meuse slopes down gracefully, bordered by an uninterrupted line of farms and villages; the right bank swells and rises. A wall of rocks invaded and narrowed the road; the brambles on the bank shivered in the wind and sun two hundred feet above our heads. Suddenly a large pyramidal rock, sharp and bold as a cathedral spire, appeared at a bend in the road. 'There's the *Bayard Rock*[34],' the driver informed me. The road passes between the hillside and this colossal marker, then turns again, and, at the foot of an enormous block of granite crowned with a citadel, the eye plunges into a long street of old houses, connected to the left bank by a fine bridge and dominated at its end by the pointed ridges, and large flamboyant mullioned windows, of a fifteenth-century church. Here was Dinant[35].

We halted in Dinant for fifteen minutes, just enough time to note a small garden in the coach-yard, which alone would have been enough to tell me that I was in Flanders. The flowers were very beautiful, and in the midst of these flowers there were three painted terracotta statues. One of these statues

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[33] Letter VI — Han-sur-Lesse: 50°07'31.7"N, 5°11'15.1"E

[34] Letter VI — Rocher Bayard: 50°14'40.9"N, 4°55'16.8"E

[35] Letter VI — Dinant: 50°15'40.0"N, 4°54'43.9"E

was that of a woman. She was more of a mannequin than a statue, being clad in a calico dress, and wearing an old silk hat. After a few moments, from a small sound I could hear, and a singular splashing from beneath her skirts, I realised that the statue was a fountain.

The bell tower of Dinant's church (*the Collegiate Church of Notre Dame*) is like a huge water-barrel. However, seen from the bridge, the church's facade has retained much of its character, and the entire town is beautifully laid out.

At Dinant, we left the right bank of the Meuse. The suburb on the left bank, which we crossed, curves upwards admirably round an old crumbling moat belonging to the ancient city wall. At the foot of this curve, through a block of houses, I glimpsed, as I passed, an exquisite fifteenth-century castle with its scrolled facade, its casements of stone, its brick turret, and its extravagant weather vanes.

After Dinant the valley opens up, the Meuse widens; on two distant ridges on the right bank two ruined castles can be seen; then the valley widens again, the cliffs appear only here and there, beneath a rich caparison of vegetation; a green velvet cover, embroidered with flowers, covers the entire landscape. On all sides hop-fields, orchards, the trees with more fruit than leaves, purple plum-trees, and red apple-trees overflow, and at every moment the scarlet clustered berries of the rowan-trees, like a vegetative coral, appear in enormous clumps. Ducks and chickens quack and squawk on the road; one hears the boatmen singing on the river; young girls, their arms bared to their shoulders, pass by, baskets laden with herbs on their heads, and from time to time a village cemetery rubs melancholic shoulders with the road full of joy, light and life.

In one of these cemeteries, whose tall grass and sloping wall lean over the path, I read this inscription:

— 'O pie, defunctis miseris succurre, viator!' —

— 'O, pious traveller, aid the wretched dead!' —

No *memento*, in my opinion, conveys so profound an effect. Usually the

dead warn; here they implore. Further on, as you pass by a hill where the rocks on the right bank, eroded and sculpted by the rain, imitate the worn and wavy stones of our old fountain in the Luxemburg Gardens, now so deplorably renovated, by the way (*the Medici fountain, renovated in 1811*), you feel that you are approaching Namur[36]. Country-houses begin to mingle with labourers' dwellings, villas with villages, statues with rocks, English parkland with hop fields, and, it must be said, all without too much conflict and disagreement.

The stagecoach stopped in one of these composite villages. On the one side was a magnificent garden interspersed with colonnades, and Ionic temples, on the other a tavern, adorned on the left with a group of drinkers, and on the right with a splendid clump of hollyhocks. Behind the gilded gates of the villa, on a pedestal of white marble veined black by the shadows of the branches, a Venus de Medici was half-hidden in the leaves, as if ashamed and indignant at being seen stark naked by Flemish peasants seated around pots of beer. A few steps further on, a trio of tall, beautiful girls were ravaging a lofty plum tree, and one of them was perched on a thick arm of the tree in a graceful attitude, the passers-by so completely forgotten that she gave the passengers of the imperial I know not what vague desire to descend.

An hour later I was in Namur. The two valleys of the Sambre and the Meuse meet and merge at Namur, which sits on the confluence of the two rivers. The women of Namur seemed to me pretty and pleasant; the men have a sensible, serious, and hospitable physiognomy. As for the city itself, except for glimpses of the Meuse and Sambre bridges, it reveals little of note. It is a city whose past is no longer written on its present face. Lacking in architecture, monuments, buildings, and old houses, furnished with four or five mediocre Rococo churches, and a few Louis XV fountains in poor, dull, and sad taste, Namur has only ever inspired two poems, an ode by Boileau (*see his 'Odes', I, 'Ode Sur la Prise de Namur', 1693*) and a song by an unknown poet in which there is talk of an old woman and the Prince of Orange; in truth, Namur deserves no other poetry.

The citadel crowns the city, coldly and sadly. Yet I will say that I regard with a certain respect those severe fortifications, which one day had the

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[36] Letter VI — Namur: 50°28'00.8"N, 4°52'03.0"E

honour of being besieged by Vauban, and defended by Menno van Coehoorn (*in 1692*).

Where there is lack of churches, I look at the shop-signs. For anyone who knows how to approach a city, shop signs hold great meaning. Apart from the dominant professions, and local industries, that are first revealed there, particular phrases abound, and the names of the bourgeoisie, almost as important to study as the names of the nobility, appear there in their most naive form, and also in their most enlightened aspect.

Here are three names taken almost at random from the shop fronts in Namur; all three have a meaning. Firstly, L'*épouse Debarsy, négociante* (*The Wife of Debarsy, merchant*). One feels, reading this, that one is in a country which was French yesterday, foreign today, French, the next; one in which the language is altering and denaturing itself imperceptibly, crumbling at the edges, and taking, within the form of French expressions, awkward German turns. The three words are French; the phrase is already no longer so. Next, *Crucifix-Piret, haberdasher.* This is indeed a name from Catholic Flanders. As a surname, first name or nickname, *Crucifix* would be unknown to all of Voltairean France. Lastly, *Menandez-Wodon, watchmaker.* A Castilian name, and a Flemish name, united by a hyphen. Is not that the whole century and a half of Spanish rule over the Netherlands written, attested to, and recounted in a single surname? So, there before us are three names, each of which expresses, and summarises one of the major aspects of the country; one highlights the language, the second the religion, the last its history.

Let me also observe, immediately, that among the shop-signs in Dinant, Namur, and Liège, the name *Demeuse* is very frequently observed. Around Paris and Rouen, we have *Desenne* and *Deseine.*

And to end on a note of pure fantasy, I also noticed in a suburb of Namur a certain *Janus, baker*, which reminded me that I had previously noted in Paris, at the entrance to the Faubourg Saint-Denis, *Nero, confectioner*, and in Arles, on the very pediment of a ruined Roman temple, *Marius, hairdresser.*

Letter VII: The Banks of the Meuse Huy Liège

Liège, August 4th

The road to Liège from Namur leads through an avenue of magnificent trees. The immense foliage does its best to hide from the traveller the gloomy bell-towers of the city, which, from a distance, dotted with cup-and-ball shapes, seem like some gigantic nine-pin bowling game. The moment one emerges from the shade of these beautiful trees, a fresh breeze from the Meuse reaches your face, and the road begins to skirt the river, joyfully. The Meuse, now swollen by the Sambre, has widened its course; but the double wall of cliffs reappears, presenting at every moment cyclopean fortresses, great ruined keeps, groups of titanic towers. These rocky heights of the Meuse contain a lot of iron; fused with the landscape, they are of an admirable colour; the rain, air, and sunlight darken them splendidly; but torn from the earth, exploited, and cut, they are metamorphosed into the odious grey-blue granite with which all of Belgium is infested. What makes magnificent mountains then produces only hideous houses. God made the rock; Man made the rubble.

We passed through Sanson (*Thon-Sanson*[37]), at pace; a village above which the remains of a fortified castle, built it is said under Clodion (*Chlodio*, *a 5th century Frankish king*) are crumbling away in the brambles. The rock there represents a human face, bearded and severe, which the driver does not fail to point out to his passengers. Then we reached Andenne[38], where I noted, an inestimable rarity for antiquarians to savour, a little rustic church from the twelfth century still intact (*L'Église Saint-Pierre d'Andenelle*). In another village, Sclayn[39], I believe, one reads this inscription in large letters above the main

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[37] Letter VII — Thon-Sanson: 50°27'49.1"N, 5°00'47.2"E

[38] Letter VII — Andenne: 50°29'47.8"N, 5°05'43.3"E

[39] Letter VII — Sclayn: 50°29'22.6"N, 5°01'39.6"E

door of the church (*L'Église Saint-Maurice de Sclayn*): '*No dogs in God's house*'. If I were the worthy priest of Sclayn, I would deem it more pressing to advise people to enter than warn the dogs to keep out.

After Andenne, the mountains recede, the valley becomes a plain, and the Meuse turns away from the road and through the meadows. The landscape is still beautiful, but factory chimneys appear a little too often, those sad obelisks of our industrial civilisation.

Then the hills draw closer, and the river and the road meet. One sees the vast bastions of a fortress, seated like an eagle's nest on the brow of a rock; a beautiful fourteenth-century church (*La Collégiale Notre-Dame*) flanked by a high square tower; a city gate flanked by a ruined moat; and a wealth of charming houses, designed by the complex whimsical, and spirited genius of the Flemish Renaissance to entertain the eyes, reflected in the Meuse, with terraces in bloom on both sides of an old bridge (*Li Pontia*). We were in Huy[40].

Huy and Dinant are the two prettiest towns on the Meuse. Huy is halfway between Namur and Liège, as is Dinant between Namur and Givet. Huy, which is still a formidable citadel, was once a warlike commune and withstood sieges conducted by the forces of Liège, as Dinant did those of Namur, in that heroic time when towns declared war on each other as kingdoms do today, a time in which Jean Froissart said:

'La grand'ville de Bar-sur-Saigne

A fait trembler Troye en Champaigne'

'The noble town of Bar-sur-Seine,

Made Troyes tremble in Champagne'

After Huy, the delightful scenic contrasts that enliven the entire landscape along the Meuse recommence. Nothing is more severe than the cliffs, nothing more cheerful than the meadows. There are a few hill-slopes,

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[40] Letter VII — Huy: 50°31'12.6"N, 5°14'16.9"E

bristling with staked vines, which produce a mediocre wine. They constitute, I believe, the only vineyards in Belgium.

From time to time one encounters, at the edge of the river, in some ravine or other over which the road passes, a zinc-processing factory of dilapidated appearance with cracked roofs, from which smoke escapes through all the tiles, simulating a fire that is kindling or going out; or a zinc mine with its vast mounds of reddish earth; or again, behind a hop field, next to a field of large beans, amidst the scents of a small garden overflowing with flowers, surrounded by a hedge patched here and there with a worm-eaten trellis, and amidst the deafening cackle of a population of hens, geese and ducks, one sees a brick house, solemn, clean, sweet, and brightened by a climbing vine, with slate turrets, stone windows, leaded windows, doves on its roof, birdcages at its windows, and a little child and a ray of sunshine on its threshold, and one dreams of the paintings of David Teniers the Younger and Frans van Mieris the Elder.

However, evening arrives, the wind dies, the meadows, the bushes, and the trees fall silent, and only the sound of water can be heard. The interiors of the houses are dimly lit; objects fade as if in clouds of mist; the travellers in the carriage, yawn as best they can, saying: 'We will be in Liège in an hour.' It is at this moment that the landscape suddenly takes on an extraordinary aspect. There, in the high forests, at the foot of the brown and rugged hills in the west, two round orbs of fire burst forth, gleaming like the eyes of a tiger. Here, at the edge of the road, there is a frightening candlestick-shape, only eighty feet high, which blazes amidst the landscape and casts sinister patches of light on the cliffs, forests and ravines. Further on, at the entrance to this valley buried in shadow, a mouth filled with embers opens and closes, suddenly, from which a tongue of flame emerges at times with dreadful hiccupping sounds. These are factories that illuminate all around them.

When one has passed the place called *Petite-Flemalle*[41], the scene is rendered inexpressible and truly magnificent. The whole valley seems pierced by erupting craters. Some of them disgorge, from behind the copses, swirls of scarlet vapour starred with sparks; others highlight, lugubriously, against a red background the black silhouette of a village; elsewhere flames are visible

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[41] Letter VII — Petite-Flemalle: 50°35'52.1"N, 5°28'06.2"E

in the gaps between buildings. One might think an enemy army had recently traversed the countryside, and twenty sacked towns were offering you, simultaneously, in the nocturnal darkness, all the various aspects and phases of the flames consuming them, some kindling, others giving off smoke, and others blazing.

This warlike spectacle is produced in a time of peace; this dreadful vision of devastation is created by industry. You have there, before your eyes, John Cockerill's blast furnaces.

A fierce and violent din surrounds this productive chaos. I was interested enough to descend, and approach one of these dens. There, I could admire the industrial process. It is a beautiful and prodigious spectacle, which, at night, seems to borrow something supernatural from the solemn sadness of the hour. The wheels, saws, boilers, rolling-mills, cylinders, balances, all those monsters of copper, sheet-metal, and bronze we call machines and which steam endows with a frightening and terrible life, roar, whistle, squeak, rattle, snort, bark, and yelp, tearing the bronze, twisting the iron, chewing granite, and, at times, in the midst of the smoke-blackened workers who harass them, howling with pain amidst the burning atmosphere of the factory, like hydras or dragons tormented by demons in Hell.

Liège[42] is one of those old towns that are in the process of becoming new ones — a deplorable, but fatal transformation! It is one of those towns where everywhere the ancient carved and painted shop fronts, flaking and peeling, are giving way instead to white facades adorned with plaster statues; where the good old large slate roofs laden with dormer windows, carillons, pinnacles, and weather-vanes, are sadly collapsing, gazed at in horror by some dazed bourgeois reading the *Constitutionnel* (*the French newspaper, founded in 1815 by Joseph Fouché*) on a flat zinc-paved terrace; where the toll-house, a Greek temple equipped with a Customs officer, has replaced the gate flanked by towers, and bristling with partizans; and where the long red chimneys of the blast furnaces have replaced the resounding bell-towers of the churches. The old towns produced noise, the modern towns give off smoke.

Liège no longer has the enormous cathedral (*Saint Lambert's*) of the prince-bishops, built by the illustrious Bishop Notger in the year 1000 and

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[42] Letter VII — Liège: 50°38'26.1"N, 5°34'04.7"E

demolished in 1795 (*after the Liège Revolution*) by no one knows who; but it does possess Cockerill's factory.

Nor does Liège any longer possess its Dominican convent, a sombre cloister of high renown, a noble edifice of proud architecture; but it does have, on precisely the same site, a theatre (*Théâtre Royal de Liège*) embellished with columns with cast-iron capitals, where comic opera is performed, and of which Mademoiselle Mars (*the actress Anne Françoise Boutet*) laid the first stone.

Liège is still, in the nineteenth century as in the sixteenth, a city of gunsmiths. It competed with France for weapons of war, and with Versailles in particular for decorative weapons. But the old city of Saint-Hubert, formerly a combination of church and fortress, an ecclesiastical and military commune, no longer prays or fights; it buys and sells. Today it is a large industrial hive. Liège has transformed itself into a wealthy commercial centre. The Meuse valley has one arm in France, and the other in Holland, and, thanks to its two great arms, constantly takes with the one and receives payment with the other.

Everything is vanishing in this city, even as regards etymology. The ancient *Legia* stream is now called the *Ri-de-Coq-Fontaine*.

However, it must be said that Liège, gracefully scattered along the green ridge of the Sainte-Walburge hill, divided by the Meuse, crossed by thirteen bridges, some of which have an architectural presence, into upper and lower towns, and surrounded, as far as the eye, can see by trees, hills and meadows, still has enough turrets, enough facades with scrolled or carved gables, enough Romanesque bell-towers, enough gates like Porte Saint-Martin and Porte d'Amercoeur, to amaze even the most irritated of poets and antiquarians faced with its factories, workshops, and machinery.

As it was pouring with rain, I was only able to visit four churches: — Saint-Paul's, the present cathedral, a fine nave from the fifteenth century, flanked by a Gothic cloister and a charming Renaissance portal that has been foolishly whitewashed, and surmounted by a bell tower which must have been very beautiful, but the angles of which some inept contemporary architect has debased, a shameful operation which the old roofs of our Hôtel de Ville in Paris are undergoing at this very moment. — The Collegiate Church of St. John the Evangelist, a grave façade from the tenth century, composed of a large square tower with a slate spire against both sides of

which are crowded two other low bell-towers, also square. Against this façade leans, insolently, the octagonal dome, or rather the hump, of an abominable Rococo church one door of which opens onto an ogival cloister disfigured, scraped, whitewashed, sad, and full of tall grasses. — Saint-Denis, a curious tenth-century church whose large tower is from the ninth. This tower bears obvious traces of fire and devastation on its lower part. It was probably burned during the great Viking invasion, in 882, I believe. The Romanesque architects naively repaired and continued the brick tower, as the fire had left it, placing the new walls on the old, eroded stone, so that the outline of its ruined state was perfectly preserved in the bell-tower as it is today. This large red section which envelops the bell tower, ragged at the edge, produces a singular effect. — Lastly, Saint-Hubert's (*not extant*), whose Romanesque apse bordered by low, semicircular galleries is of a magnificent order.

As I was walking from Saint-Denis, to Saint-Hubert, through a labyrinth of old, low, narrow streets, adorned here and there with Madonnas above which arc concentric hoops, like large strips of tin, bearing devout inscriptions, I was suddenly confronted by a vast, dark stone wall pierced with large basket-handle bays, and enriched by the luxurious ribbing that announces the rear facade of a medieval palace. I came to a dark door, I entered, and after a few steps, found myself in a vast courtyard. This courtyard, which no one speaks of and which should be more famous, is the inner courtyard of the palace of the ecclesiastical princes of Liège. Nowhere have I seen a stranger, gloomier, or more superb architectural ensemble. Four granite facades topped by four prodigious slate roofs, supported by four low galleries of ribbed arches, which seemed to sag and widen under the weight, enclosed the view on all sides. Two of these facades perfectly intact, offer the beautiful arrangement of ribs and low arches which characterises the end of the fifteenth century, and the beginning of the sixteenth. The windows of this clerical palace have mullions like church windows. Unfortunately, the other two facades, destroyed by the great fire of 1734, were rebuilt in the mediocre style of that period, and somewhat spoil the general effect. However, their dry character is not in absolute contradiction to the austerity of the old palace. The bishop who reigned one hundred and four years ago (*Georges-Louis de Berghes*) wisely refused rocailles and chicory-leaves, and was presented with two poor and gloomy facades; for such was the rule in the architecture of the eighteenth century, there was no middle ground: it was either superficiality or bareness; vulgarity or wretchedness.

The four-sided gallery that encloses the courtyard is admirably preserved. I walked round it. Nothing is more interesting than the pillars on which the projections of these large, low ribs rest. The pillars are made of grey granite, like the whole palace. Half the length of the shaft of each pillar vanishes, above or below depending on which of the four arcades one examines, beneath a bulge enriched with arabesques. In one whole row of pillars, the western row, the bulge is repeated and the shaft entirely concealed. This is nothing more than a Flemish whim of the sixteenth century. But what perplexes the investigator of ancient architecture is that the arabesques carved on these bulges, and the capitals of the pillars, which are naively and crudely sculpted, and loaded to the abacus (*the flat, slab-like component at the top of a capital*), with chimerical figures, impossible foliage, apocalyptic animals, and winged dragons, in an almost Egyptian and hieroglyphic manner, seem to belong to the art of the eleventh century; but in order to avoid claiming these short, squat, swollen pillars as Byzantine architecture, it must be remembered that the princely-episcopal palace of Liège was begun only in 1526, by Prince Érard de La Marck, who reigned for thirty-two years (*1506-1538*).

This grave building is now the courthouse. Bookshops, and stalls selling trinkets, have been set up beneath all the arcades. A vegetable market is held in the courtyard. One sees the black robes of busy lawyers passing between large baskets full of red and purple cabbages. Groups of happy or angry Flemish merchants chat or quarrel in front of each pillar; the sounds of fractious pleas issue from all the windows; and in this dark courtyard, once collected and silent as a cloister, whose form it possesses, the inexhaustible words of both the lawyers and the gossipers, their chattering and babbling, now perpetually intersect and mingle.

Above the great roofs of the palace appears a tall and massive square brick tower. This tower, which was once the prince-bishop's belfry, is now the prison for prostitutes; a sad and cold antithesis that the Voltairean bourgeois of thirty years ago would have remarked on wittily, while the utilitarian and positive bourgeois of today does so stupidly.

Leaving the palace through the main gate, I was able to contemplate its current facade, a glacial and declamatory work by the disastrous architect (*Jan Andries Anneessens*) of the 1734 rebuilding. One might almost think one was viewing a tragedy by the playwright François Lagrange-Chancel (*who failed to*

match his predecessor Racine), only in marble and stone. There was a fine fellow in the square, in front of this facade, who longed for me to admire it. I turned my back on him, mercilessly, though he told me that Liège is called *Luik in Dutch, Lüttich* in German and *Leodicum* in Latin.

The room which I occupied in Liège was decorated with muslin curtains on which were embroidered, not bouquets, but melons. I also admired the room's triumphal engravings, depicting, in honour of the allies, our French disasters of 1814, and cruelly humiliating us in our own language. Here is the text of the *caption* printed at the bottom of one of these images: 'Battle of Arcis-sur-Aube, March 21, 1814. Most of the garrison of this place, composed of the ancient guard (doubtless meaning the *Old Guard*), were taken prisoner, and the allies entered Paris, victoriously, on April 2nd (*in fact on the 31st March; on the 2nd of April the Senate declared Napoleon's deposition*).'

Letter VIII: The Banks of the Vesdre   Verviers

Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen), August 4th

Yesterday, at nine in the morning, as the stagecoach from Liège to Aix-la-Chapelle was about to leave, a brave Walloon bourgeois roused the passers-by, through refusing to mount on top of the coach, reminding me by the energy of his resistance of that Auvergne countryman *who had paid to be in the 'box' and not in 'the opera'*. I offered to take the place of this worthy traveller; I took my place in the 'opera'; everyone calmed down, and the stagecoach left.

I was right to do so. The road is cheerful and charming. The river is no longer the Meuse, but the Vesdre (*the Dutch 'Wesder', the German 'Weser'*). The Meuse flows through Maastricht and Roermond to Rotterdam and the sea.

The Vesdre is a torrent that descends from Kornelimünster, between Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen)[43] (*Aachen*) and Duren, and flows via Verviers and

[43] Letter VIII — Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen): 50°46'36.1"N, 6°05'01.0"E

Chaudfontaine[44] to Liége, through the most ravishing valley in the world. At this time of year, on a fine day, with a blue sky, it is sometimes a ravine, often a garden, and always a paradise. The road does not leave the river for a moment. Sometimes they cross, together, a fortunate village huddled beneath the trees with a rustic bridge outside every gate; sometimes, in a solitary fold of the valley, they skirt an old alderman's castle with its square towers, high pointed roofs, and large facade pierced by a few rare windows, proud and modest at the same time as befits a building whose place is somewhere between the countryman's cottage and the lord's keep. Then the landscape, suddenly, takes on a noisy, joyful voice, and at the turn of a hill the eye glimpses, beneath a clump of lime-trees and alders through which the sunlight passes, the low house and large black wheel flooded with gems of light which we call a water-mill.

Between Chaudfontaine and Verviers the valley appeared to me to be of a Virgilian sweetness. The weather was wonderfully fine, delightful little children played on the thresholds of the gardens, the breeze from the aspens and poplars blew over the roadway, beautiful heifers, grouped in threes and fours, rested in the shade, lying about, gracefully in the green meadows. Elsewhere, far from any house, and alone in the middle of a large meadow enclosed by hedges, an admirable heifer, worthy of being guarded by Argus, grazed majestically. I imagine the sound of a flute among the hills.

'Mercurius septem mulcet arundinibus'

'Mercury lulls to sleep, with the seven-reed pipe'

(*This non-classical Latin quotation can be found as part of the inscription at the foot of an 18th century copy by Hendrik Voogd, engraved by Giovanni Volpato, of a Nicolas Poussin design showing Mercury lulling Argus to sleep by playing his reed pipe, a scene from the Greek myth of Io. A public domain digital image of the engraving is in the Collections de Montpellier Méditerannée Métropole*)

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[44] Letter VIII — Chaudfontaine: 50°35'34.2"N, 5°36'20.1"E

From time to time a factory chimney, or a length of cloth drying in the sun beside the road, interrupted this eclogue.

The railway that crosses the whole of Belgium from Antwerp to Liège, and which is to be extended as far as Verviers, will pierce these hills, and cut through the valleys.

The stretch of track, a colossal undertaking, will thread the mountains up to fifteen times. Everywhere one encounters earthworks, embankments, the beginnings of bridges and viaducts; or one sees, at the bottom of an immense wall of living rock, a swarm of little black ants busily digging a small hole. These ants are doing the work of giants.

At times, in places where the holes are already deep and wide, a gasp of air, and a hoarse sound are suddenly emitted. It is as if the mountain, violated, were crying aloud through an open mouth. It is the mine playing to the gallery. Then, the stagecoach stops abruptly, the workers who were digging, on a nearby earthwork, flee in all directions, a crack of thunder is heard, repeated by the echo from the hill, and pieces of rock leap from a corner of the landscape, to splatter the plain on all sides. It is the mine playing to the heavens above. During our halt, we travellers heard that yesterday a man was killed, and a tree smashed in two by one of these blocks, weighing twenty tons, and the day before yesterday a workman's wife who was bringing *coffee* (not soup) to her husband was struck by lightning in the same way —This also disturbed the idyll somewhat.

Verviers[45], an insignificant town, is divided into three districts (*from south-west to north-east along the Vesdre*) called *Chic-Chac* (*south of the river, around and south of Parc de l'Harmoni*), *Dardanelles* (*north of the river, around Rue des Dardanelles*), and *Basse-Grotte* (*north of the river around Rue de Renoupré*). I noticed, there, a little boy of six smoking his pipe masterfully, seated on the threshold of his house. When the little smoker saw me pass by, he burst out laughing. I concluded that I seemed very ridiculous to him.

After Verviers, the road continues north-east, beside the Vesdre, to Limbourg[46]. Limbourg, that county town, that *pie* whose *crust was found so hard*

[45] Letter VIII — Verviers: 50°35'22.9"N, 5°51'52.9"E

[46] Letter VIII — Limbourg: 50°36'44.2"N, 5°56'22.7"E

by Louis XIV (*it put up a stiff resistance in 1673 during the Dutch War*), is today nothing more than a dismantled fortress, picturesquely crowning a hill.

Seemingly a moment later, the terrain flattens, a plain appears, a large double door opens: it is the Customs barrier; a sentry-box, decorated in black and white from top to bottom, appears; we are on the threshold of the King of Prussia's house.

The End of Part II of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part III: Letters IX-XI

'View of Cologne's old town'
Carl Rüdell (German, 1855-1939)
Artvee

Letter IX: Aix-la-Chapelle

(*Aachen*) Charlemagne's Tomb

Aix-la-Chapelle, August 6th

To invalids, Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen)[47] represents a cluster of mineral springs (*the Aachener Thermalquellen*), hot, cold, ferruginous, and sulphurous; to the tourist, a place of military redoubts, and concerts (*the Lower Rhenish Music Festival; the Niederrheinische Musikfeste*); to the pilgrim, a shrine of revered relics, which are on view only once every seven years: the robe of the Virgin, the blood of the infant Jesus, and the cloth on which Saint John the Baptist was beheaded; to the antiquarian and the chronicler, a noble convent for girls with an abbess who is the direct heiress of the monastery built by that Saint Gregory who was the son of Nicephorus II Phokas, Emperor of the East; to the hunting enthusiast, an ancient valley of wild boars, *Porcetum,* which gave its name to the *Borcette* (*Burtscheid*) district of the city; to the manufacturer, it is a source of water suitable for cleansing wool; to the merchant, it is a set of factories for the production of cloth including sundry casimirs (*serge fabrics*), as well as needles and pins; to those who are neither merchants, nor manufacturers, nor hunters, nor antiquarians, nor pilgrims, nor tourists, nor invalids, it is the city of Charlemagne.

Charlemagne was indeed born in Aix-la-Chapelle (*c. 748*), and he died there (*814*). He was born in the old half-Roman palace of the Frankish kings, of which only the Granus Tower remains, since incorporated in the Town Hall. He was buried in the Palatine chapel (*of the present Cathedral, the Aachener Dom*) which he had founded in 796, two years after the death of his wife Fastrada; the chapel which Pope Leo III blessed in 805, and at the consecration of which, or so tradition says, two bishops of Tongres (*Tongeren-*

[47] Letter VIII — Aix-la-Chapelle: 50°46'36.1"N, 6°05'01.0"E

Borgloon), who had died and were buried at Maastricht, rose from their tombs, so as to complete the total of three hundred and sixty-five archbishops and bishops, representing the days of the year, involved in the ceremony.

This historic and fabulous church, which gave its name to the city, has undergone many transformations over the past thousand years. As soon as I arrived in Aix, I visited the chapel.

If one approaches the church facade, this is its appearance: a Louis XV-era portal in grey-blue granite with eighth-century bronze doors, backed by a Carolingian wall surmounted by a tier of Romanesque semicircular arches. Above these archivolts a beautiful, richly carved Gothic tier which displays the severe ogive of the fourteenth century; and as a crowning glory, vile brick masonry with a slate roof, dating back about twenty years. To the right of the portal, a large pine cone, in tenth-century bronze is set on a granite pillar, and on the other side, on a second pillar, there is a bronze she-wolf also ancient, probably Roman, which half turns towards the passer-by, its mouth half-open and its teeth bared.

(Pardon me, my friend, but allow me to open a parenthesis here. The pine cone has a meaning, and this she-wolf too, or this wolf, for I was not able to clearly recognize the sex of the bronze beast. Here is what the old wives of the country say of it.

— A long time ago, the people of Aix-la-Chapelle wished to build a church. They all contributed, and the work was begun. Foundations were dug, the walls were raised, the framework was roughed out, and for six months there was a deafening din of hammers, saws, and axes. At the end of six months, the funds were exhausted. Pilgrims were encouraged to give alms, and a tin basin was placed at the door of the church; but only a few *targes* and *liards* to pay for the cross were placed therein. What was to be done? The senate assembled, enquired, talked, considered, consulted. The workmen refused to work, while grass, brambles, ivy, all the insolent plants that clothe ruins began to conquer the fresh stonework of the abandoned building. Was the church to be left in that state? The burgomasters of the noble senate were dismayed. As they deliberated, an unknown stranger, a tall and handsome man, entered.

— 'Greetings, gentlemen. What is all this? You seem dismayed. Is not your church dear to your heart? Have you not the means to complete it? Is it money you lack, as people say?'

— 'Stranger,' came the reply, 'to the Devil with you! We would need a million in gold.'

— 'Then, here it is,' said the unknown; and, opening a window, he showed the burgomasters a large cart in the square, which had halted at the door of the Town Hall. The cart was drawn by ten pairs of oxen, and guarded by twenty black Africans armed to the teeth.

One of the mayors descended with the man, and grasped one of the bags with which the cart was loaded, at random, then both ascended, the stranger and the burgomaster. The bag was emptied before the senate: it was indeed full of gold.

The senators, stupefied and wide-eyed asked:

— 'Who are you, my lord?'

— 'My dear citizens, I am a fellow with money. What more do you wish to know? I live in the Black Forest, near Lake Wildsee, not far from the ruins of Heidenstadt, city of the pagans. I own gold and silver mines, and at night heaps of garnets pour through my fingers. But my tastes are simple, I feel ennui, I am a melancholy being, I spend my days watching the water-beetles play on the surface of the transparent waters of the lake, the newts playing below, and the smartweed (*Polygonum amphibium*) growing among the rocks. But, enough questions and distractions. I have thrown off my shackles; so, come profit from it. Here's your million in gold. Do you wish to take it'

— 'By the Lord, yes!' cried the senators. 'We'll complete our church.'

— 'Well, take it; but on one condition.'

— 'Which is, my lord?'

— 'Finish your church, burgomasters; take all this wealth; but promise me, in exchange, the first soul that crosses the threshold of your church, on the day of its consecration, when the bells ring out.'

— 'Are you the Devil, then?' cried the senators.

— 'What fools you are!' Master Urian (*a medieval name and epithet for the Devil*) replied.

The burgomasters began to leap about in fear, making the sign of the cross. But since Urian was a benign devil, and laughed until his ribs burst while jingling his brand-new coins, they felt reassured, and negotiations began. The Devil has his wits about him. That's why he's the very devil. 'After all,' he said, 'in this bargain it's I who lose. You'll have your million, and your church. I'll have only a single soul. And whose soul, if you please? The first that comes along. A random soul. Some false, hypocritical fellow whose devotion is a sham and who, to show zeal, seeks to be first to enter. Burgomasters, the plans for your church are fine. I like the design. The building will be beautiful, I think. I see, with pleasure, that your architect prefers the Montpellier-squinch (*trompe de Montpellier*) to the corner-squinch (*trompe-sous-le-coin*). I don't utterly hate this pendentive vault, with a rectangular face and curved sides; but I would have preferred a groin vault with sloping and rectangular tops to the piers. I approve of the fact that he shows a door there in the round tower, but I doubt he's allowed long enough tie-stones for the walls. What's your architect's name, citizens? —Tell him from me that, to construct the arch of a portal in his hollow tower, it is necessary that there be four layers: two of voussoirs (*ring-stones*), with a layer of mortar between; the fourth, the webbing, forms the outer curve of the arch. But it's all the same to me. Here's a barrel-vaulted stairway, with squinches, leading down to a crypt, all in a very fine style and perfectly planned. It would be a shame to leave things as they are — we must complete the church. Come, my friends, a million for you, a soul for me. Is it settled?' Thus spoke Master Urian.

— 'After all,' thought the burghers, 'we are most fortunate that he is content with only one soul. He might well, if he looked a little more closely, seize on everyone in this city.'

The deal was struck, the million was accepted. Urian disappeared through a trapdoor from which a small blue flame emerged, as was fitting, and two years later the church was built.

It goes without saying that the senators all swore not to disclose the details to anyone, and it goes without saying that each of them, that very evening, told his wife all about it. It's a law of nature. A law the senators had not made, but that all observe. So much so that, since the whole city, thanks to the senators' wives, knew the secret, when the church was finished, no one wished to be first to enter.

A new embarrassment, as great as was the previous. The building was finished, but no one wished to set foot in it; the church was complete, but empty. Now, what good is an empty church? — The Senate gathered. They could think of no solution. — They called upon the Bishop of Tongres (*Tongeren-Borgloon*). He offered no ideas. — They called upon the canons of the chapter. They could conceive of nothing. — They called upon the monks in their monastery. — 'By heavens', said a monk, 'it must be admitted, my lords, that you are committed to very little. You owe Urian the first soul that enters the church doorway. But he failed to stipulate what kind of soul it should be. Urian is naught but a fool, I tell you. My lords, after a lengthy chase, a wolf was caught alive this morning in the valley of Borcette. Bring this wolf to the church. Urian will have to be content with that. It's only a wolf's soul, but it's *still a soul of sorts*.'

— 'Bravo!', cried the senators. 'Here's a monk with his wits about him.'

The next day, at dawn, the bells rang. 'Well,' said the townspeople, 'today is the consecration! But who will dare to enter first?' 'Not I.' — 'Nor I.' — 'Nor I. – 'Nor I.' They hastened there in a crowd. The senate and the chapter stood before the gate. The wolf was brought in a cage, and at a given signal, the doors of the cage and the doors of the church were suddenly opened. The wolf, frightened by the crowd, saw the church was deserted and plunged inside. Urian was waiting, mouth open, eyes closed voluptuously. Judge of his rage when he found it was a wolf he was swallowing. He let out a terrifying roar, and flew about for some time beneath the high arches of the church, with a thunderous sound. Then he finally flew out, consumed with anger, kicking the great bronze doors (*the Wolfstür*) so furiously, as he left, that they split from top to bottom — the split is still shown today.

That is why, the old women add, the bronze statue of the wolf was placed to the left of the church doorway, and to the right a pine cone to represent its wretched soul, devoured by Urian who had been made to look so foolish.

Leaving the legend, and returning to the church, I must tell you, however, that I sought the famous split made by the Devil's heel, and failed to find it. Here, I close the parenthesis.)

Now, when one approaches the chapel through the great portal, the Roman, Romanesque, Gothic, and Rococo styles, and the modern style, blend and overlap on the facade, but without true affinity, without the force of necessity, without order, and, consequently, without grandeur.

If you approach via the eastern end of the church, the effect is quite different. The high fourteenth-century apse appears to you in all its audacity and beauty, with the cleverly-conceived pitch of its roof, the rich workmanship of its balustrades, the variety of its gargoyles, the dark colour of its stone, and the glassy translucency of the immense lancets at its base, due to which the two-storey houses hidden between the buttresses seem imperceptible.

However, from this point on, the appearance of the church, imposing as it may be, is hybrid and discordant. Between the apse and the portal, in a sort of hole into which all the lines of the building collapse, the Byzantine dome with triangular pediments that Otto III had built in the tenth century above the tomb of Charlemagne is concealed, barely connected to the facade by a pretty sculpted bridge from the fourteenth century.

A flattened façade, a buried dome, a detached apse, such is the chapel of Aix. The architect of 1355 wanted his prodigious chapel to absorb Charlemagne's church, devastated in 881 by the Normans, and the dome of Otto III, destroyed by fire in 1236. A system of low chapels, attached to the base of the large central chapel, was to envelop in its embrace the entire building, except for the portal. Two of these chapels, which still exist, and which are admirable, were already built when the fire of 1366 occurred. Execution of this powerful, vegetative architectural design was halted. Strangely enough, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries added nothing to the church. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have spoiled it.

However, it must be said that, taken as a whole, as it stands the chapel of Aix has both mass and grandeur. After a period of contemplation on the part of the visitor, a singular majesty is evident in this extraordinary building, which remained unfinished, like the life's work of Charlemagne himself, and is composed of architecture in a host of styles, as his empire was composed of nations that spoke a host of languages.

All in all, to the thoughtful person who gazes at it externally, there is a strange and profound harmony between the great man and the great tomb. I couldn't wait to enter.

After passing through the arch of the portico, and leaving the ancient bronze doors behind me, each adorned in the centre with a lion's head, and partitioned in rectangular panels with moulded architraves, what first struck

my eye was a white rotunda on two floors, lit from above, in which all the coquettish fancies of rocaille and chicory-leaf decoration flourish on all sides. Then, lowering my eyes to the ground, I saw in the centre of the pavement of this rotunda, beneath the pale light that falls through the plain-glass panes, a large slab of black marble, worn by the feet of passers-by, with this inscription in copper letters: CAROLO MAGNO.

Nothing could be more shocking or brazen than this Rococo chapel, displaying its courtesan's graces above the great Carolingian name. Angels resembling cupids, palms resembling plumes, garlands of flowers, and ribbons with bows, that is what the Pompadour style has placed beneath the dome of Otto III, and above the tomb of Charlemagne.

The only thing in this indecent chapel worthy of the man, and the place, is an immense circular chandelier with forty-eight candles, which is about twelve feet in diameter, a gift in the twelfth century offered by Frederick Barbarossa to Charlemagne. This chandelier, made of copper and gilded silver, has the shape of an imperial crown; it is suspended from the vault, above the black marble slab, by a thick iron chain ninety feet long.

The black slab is about nine feet long by seven feet wide. It is obvious, moreover, that there was once another monument to Charlemagne in the very same place. Nothing indicates that the black slab, framed by a thin copper strip and surrounded by a border of white marble, is ancient. As for the letters CAROLO MAGNO, they are no more than a hundred years old.

Charlemagne no longer lies beneath this stone. In 1165, Frederick Barbarossa, whose sacrilege the chandelier-crown, magnificent as it may be, fails to redeem, had the great emperor unearthed. The church took the imperial skeleton and dismembered it like that of a saint, rendering each bone a relic. In the neighbouring sacristy, a vicar shows the relics to passers-by, and I saw, for the fixed price of three francs seventy-five centimes, the arm of Charlemagne, that arm which held the orb of the world, a venerable bone which bears on its dried integuments this inscription written, for a few *liards*, by a twelfth century scribe: *Brachium sancti Caroli Magni.* After the arm, I viewed the skull, that skull the brain within which moulded a whole new Europe, and which a verger taps with his fingernail.

These things are in a cupboard. A wooden cabinet painted grey with gold decorations, adorned at its top with some of those *angels resembling cupids* of

which I spoke just now, this, today, is the tomb of that Charles whose name shines still, for us, across ten centuries and who left this world only after having adorned his name, thus rendered doubly immortal, with the two words, *sanctus*, *magnus*, saintly and great, the two most august epithets with which heaven and earth can crown a human head!

One thing that is astonishing is the material grandeur of this skull and this arm, *grandia ossa*. Charlemagne was indeed one of those rare great men who are also of great stature. The son of Pepin the Short was a colossus in body as well as in mind. He was said to be seven times taller than his foot was long, the latter distance becoming a measure of length (*though reputedly he was 6 feet five inches tall, while the Parisian foot measure, 'pied du roi', was slightly longer than the English one*). It is this king's foot, Charlemagne's foot, that we have just replaced by a fraction of a *meter*, thus sacrificing, I know not why, in one fell swoop, history, poetry, and language to an invention that the human race has done without for six thousand years, which we call the *decimal system*.

Moreover, on opening, this cupboard produces a sort of dazzlement, so resplendent is it with gold. The doors are covered inside with paintings on a golden background, among which I noticed eight admirable panels which are said to be by Albrecht Durer. Besides the skull and the arm, the cabinet contains: the 'Horn of Charlemagne', an enormous elephant's tusk hollowed out, and curiously sculpted towards the wider end (*of Saracen origin, and of the 11th century*); the 'Cross of Charlemagne', a jewel in which is set a piece of the true cross and which was around the emperor's neck in the tomb ('*Charlemagne's Talisman', now in Reims Cathedral*); a charming Renaissance monstrance given by Charles V and marred in the last century by the addition of an excess of tasteless ornamentation; the fourteen gold plaques, covered with Byzantine sculptures, which adorned the marble armchair of the great emperor; a monstrance given by Philip II, which reproduces the profile of the dome of Milan; the rope with which Jesus Christ was tied during the flagellation; a piece of the sponge soaked in gall with which his thirst was quenched on the cross; finally, the knitted belt of the Holy Virgin, and the leather belt of Jesus Christ. This small twisted and rolled strap, like the whips used on schoolboys, attracted the attention of three emperors; after Constantine, who affixed his *sigillum* (*seal*) to it, which is still attached, and which I saw, it fell to Harun-al-Rashid (*fifth Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate*), who gave it to Charlemagne.

All these venerable objects are enclosed in glittering Gothic and Byzantine reliquaries, which are like microscopic cathedrals, chapels, and spires, made of solid gold, with sapphires, emeralds and diamonds serving as stained glass windows.

Amidst these innumerable jewels piled up on the two shelves of the cabinet, there rise, like two mountains of gold and precious stones, two large reliquaries of immense value and wondrous beauty. The first and oldest, which is Byzantine, encircled with niches in which sixteen crowned emperors are seated, contains the remains of Charlemagne's bones and is never opened. The second, which is from the twelfth century, and which Frederick Barbarossa gave to the church, contains the famous relics of which I spoke to you at the beginning of this letter and is opened only every seven years. A single showing of this reliquary, in 1496, attracted one hundred and forty-two thousand pilgrims, and brought in eighty thousand gold florins, in fifteen days.

This shrine has only one key. The key is separated into two pieces, one of which is kept by the chapter, the other by the city magistrate. The shrine is sometimes opened in particular circumstances, but only for crowned heads. The current King of Prussia, when still only a royal prince, requested that it be opened. The request was refused.

In a small cupboard, next to the large one, I saw an exact copy, in gilded silver, of the Germanic crown of Charlemagne. The Carolingian Germanic crown, surmounted by a cross, loaded with precious stones and cameos, is formed of a fleur-de-lis circle which surrounds the head, and a semicircle welded from the forehead to the nape of the neck with a slight inflection which imitates the profile of the horned ducal cap (*corno ducale*) of the Venetian doges. Of the three crowns which Charlemagne wore ten centuries ago, as Emperor of Germany, as King of France, and as King of the Lombards, the first, the Imperial Crown of the Holy Roman Empire, is in Vienna (*at the Hofburg*); the second, the Crown of France was in Reims Cathedral (*the crown was destroyed during the Revolution*); the third, the Iron Crown, is in Milan (*'The Iron Crown of Lombardy', in the Cathedral of Monza*). As I left the sacristy, the verger entrusted me to a Swiss who began to progress through the church in front of me, occasionally opening gloomy panels, from which magnificence suddenly burst forth.

Thus, the ambo (*Heinrichskanzel*), which has all the appearance of a village pulpit, sheds its hideous chrysalis of reddish wood and suddenly appears as a splendid tower of silver gilt. A prodigy of eleventh-century chiselling, and goldsmith's work, it was donated to the chapel by the Emperor Henry II. Deeply-incised Byzantine ivories, a rock-crystal cup with its saucer, and a monstrous onyx nine inches long, are inlaid in this gold 'breastplate' which encases the priest speaking in the name of God, and whose front panel represents Charlemagne carrying the chapel of Aix on his arm.

This pulpit is placed at the corner of the choir, which occupies the marvellous apse of 1353. All the coloured stained-glass windows have vanished. The lancets are plain-glass from top to bottom. The rich tomb of Otto III, founder of the dome, destroyed in 1794, was replaced by a flat stone marking its location at the entrance to the choir. An organ given by the Empress Josephine, near the admirable fourteenth-century vault, is in the mediocre style of 1804. Vault, pillars, capitals, small columns, statues, the entire choir is whitewashed.

In the midst of this degraded apse, the bronze eagle of Otto III, with open beak, angry eye, and wings half-spread, transformed into a lectern, is fearful and shivering, indignant at bearing the book of plaint-chant, he who has the globe of the world beneath his feet.

Yet the eagle should be shown more respect. When Napoleon visited the Chapel, the lightning-bolts that I saw today attached to both sides of that imperial globe carried in its talons by Otto's eagle, were added. The Swiss unscrews the lightning-bolts at the request of the curious.

On the back of this eagle, as if by a sad and ironic foreboding, the tenth-century sculptor extended a bronze bat with a human face, which is as if nailed there, and on which the lectern's book now rests.

To the right of the altar is enshrined the heart of Marc-Antoine Berdolet, the first and last bishop of Aix-la-Chapelle. For this church has never had but the one bishop, whom Bonaparte appointed (*in 1802*). His epitaph describes him as *primus Aquisgranensis episcopus*. Now, as in the past, the chapel is administered by a chapter presided over by a dean with the title of provost.

In a darkened room of the chapel, the Swiss opened another cupboard for me. Therein is the sarcophagus of Charlemagne. It is a magnificent Roman coffin of white marble, on the front of which is sculpted, with the

most masterful chisel, the abduction of Proserpina. I contemplated, this bas-relief which is two thousand years old, for a long time. At the end of the composition, four frenzied horses, at once infernal and divine, led by Mercury, are dragging a chariot, in which Proserpina, having been seized by Pluto, is screaming, struggling, and writhing in despair, towards a half-open chasm in the plinth. The strong hand of the god presses the half-naked throat of the young girl, who leans back, and whose dishevelled head meets the straight and impassive gaze of the helmeted Minerva. Pluto carries off Proserpina, in whose ear Minerva the counsellor whispers. Smiling, Cupid is seated on the chariot between Pluto's colossal legs. Behind Proserpine, struggle a group of nymphs and furies, portrayed with the proudest of sculptural lines. Proserpine's companions strive to stop a second chariot drawn by two fire-eating winged dragons, which follows in succession. One of the young goddesses, who has boldly seized a dragon by the wings, causes it to cry out in pain. This bas-relief is a poem. It is a violent, vigorous, exorbitant, superb, somewhat emphatic piece of sculpture, which pagan Rome created, and which Rubens might have done. This sarcophagus, before acting as a coffin for Charlemagne, was, it is said, that of Augustus.

Finally, via another narrow and dark staircase, which many kings, emperors, and illustrious tourists have climbed for six centuries, my guide led me to the gallery which forms the first floor of the rotunda, and which is called the Hochmunster (*High Minster*).

There, beneath a wooden box that was half-open, and which is never opened entirely except for crowned visitors, I saw Charlemagne's stone armchair. This armchair, low and wide, with a back semi-circular at the top, is formed of four slabs of white marble, bare and without sculptures, joined by bronze brackets. It has an oak board covered with a red velvet cushion for a seat, and is raised on six steps, two of which are of granite and four of white marble.

On this chair, clad in the fourteen Byzantine plaques I spoke to you about earlier, at the top of the stone platform to which these four white marble steps lead, with the crown on his head, the globe in one hand and the sceptre in the other, his Germanic sword at his side, the mantle of the Empire on his shoulders, the cross of Jesus Christ around his neck, and his feet plunged in the sarcophagus of Augustus, the Emperor Charlemagne was seated in the tomb. He remained in shadow, on this throne, and in this attitude, for three hundred and fifty-two years, from 814 to 1166.

It was in 1165 that Frederick Barbarossa, seeking to legitimise his reign, entered the tomb, the monumental form of which no tradition has preserved, and to which belonged the two sacred bronze doors adapted for use in the portal. Barbarossa was himself an illustrious prince and a valiant knight. It must have been a strange and formidable moment when this crowned king (*he was crowned King of the Romans in 1152, and Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 1155*) found himself face to face with the crowned corpse; one emperor, clad in all the majesty of the empire; the other, in all the majesty of death. The soldier vanquished the shade; the living dispossessed the dead. The chapel retained the skeleton, Barbarossa took the marble seat; and, of this chair where the dead Charlemagne had sat, he made the throne on which the emperors came to sit in grandeur for four centuries.

In fact, thirty-one emperors, not including Barbarossa, have been anointed and crowned on this chair in the Hochmunster of Aix-la-Chapelle. Ferdinand I was the last; Charles V the penultimate. Since then, the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperors has taken place in Frankfurt.

I could not tear myself away from this armchair, so simple and so grand. I contemplated the four marble steps scratched by the heels of those thirty-one illustrious 'Caesars' who had seen their radiance kindled there, and who had been extinguished in their turn. Countless ideas and memories came to my mind. I remembered that the violator of this sepulchre, Frederick Barbarossa, having grown old, wishing to crusade for a second time (*he participated in the Second Crusade, and led the Third Crusade*), travelled to the East. There, one day, he came to a beautiful river. The river was the Calycadnus (*the Saleph, now named the Göksu*). He was over-heated, and fancied bathing therein. The man who had profaned Charlemagne's tomb, had forgotten about Alexander the Great. He entered the river, whose icy water seized him. Alexander, a young man, had almost died in the River Cydnus (*the Tarsus Stream, the modern Berdan*) not far distant from the Calycadnus — Barbarossa, an old man, did.

One day, I have no doubt, a pious and holy thought will come to some king or emperor. Charlemagne will be removed from the cupboard where the sacristans have put him, and be replaced in his tomb. All that remains of his great skeleton will be religiously gathered together. He will be returned to his Byzantine vault, with its bronze doors, his Roman sarcophagus, his marble armchair raised on the stone platform and adorned with the fourteen gold

plaques. The Carolingian diadem will be placed on his skull, the orb of empire in his hand, the mantle of cloth-of-gold about his bones. The bronze eagle will proudly resume its place at the feet of that master of the world. All the gold and diamond reliquaries will be arranged around the platform, like the furniture and chests of a last royal chamber; and then — since the Church prefers its saints to be contemplated in the form that death gave them — through some narrow skylight, cut into the thickness of the wall and adorned with iron bars, by the light of a lamp suspended from the vault of the sepulchre, the kneeling traveller will be able to view, at the top of those four white steps no human foot will ever touch again, on that marble chair flecked with gold, crown on forehead, globe in hand, shining vaguely in the darkness, the imperial ghost that will once have been Charlemagne.

It will be a profound sight to see, for anyone who dares to venture a glance into that vault, and each will take away from that tomb a profound thought. People will travel there from the ends of the earth, and all kinds of thinkers will visit. Charles, son of Pepin, was indeed one of those complete beings whom humanity can consider from four different angles. Historically, he is a great man like Augustus or Sesostris (*the legendary Twelfth Dynasty pharaoh based on Senusret I, Senusret III and others*); as regards fable, he is a paladin like Roland, a magician like Merlin; the Church views him as a saint like Jerome or Peter; while to the philosopher, he is civilisation itself personified, which, achieving a giant's stature every thousand years strides across some deep abyss, amidst civil war, barbarism, revolution, calling itself sometimes Caesar, sometimes Charlemagne, sometimes Napoleon.

Shortly before Bonaparte was crowned in Notre-Dame, as Napoleon I (*December 2nd 1804*), he visited Aix-la-Chapelle (*October 2nd 1804*). Josephine, who accompanied him, wished, on whim, to sit in the marble armchair. The emperor, who, out of respect, had put on his full-dress uniform, allowed this woman of Creole heritage to do so, while he remained motionless, standing, silent, and bare-headed before Charlemagne's chair.

Remarkably, a fact, which comes to mind here, in passing, is that Charlemagne died in January 814. A thousand years later, in June 1814, Napoleon was exiled.

In that same fateful year, the allied sovereigns made a visit to the shade of the great Charles (*in January 1814*). Emperor Alexander I of Russia, like Napoleon, had donned his full-dress uniform; Frederick William III, King of

Prussia, wore his undress greatcoat and cap; Francis I of Austria (*also known as Francis II, the last Holy Roman Emperor*) was in a frock coat and round hat. The King of Prussia mounted two of the marble steps and asked the provost of the chapter to explain the details of the coronation of German emperors. The two emperors remained silent. Today, in 1838, Napoleon, Josephine, Alexander, Frederick William and Francis are all dead.

My guide, who gave me these details, is a former French soldier who fought at Austerlitz and Jena, has since settled in Aix-la-Chapelle, and has become Prussian by the grace of the Congress of 1815. Now he wears the baldric and the halberd before the chapter, during ceremonies. I admired that Providence which shines forth in the smallest of things. The mind of this man, who speaks to travellers of Charlemagne, is full of Napoleon. Due to that, without his knowledge, I found I know not what grandeur in his words. Tears came to his eyes when he told me of his old battles, his old comrades, his old colonel. It was in the same tones that he spoke to me of Marshal Soult, Colonel Graindorge (*Jean-Francois, Baron Graindorge, mortally wounded in the Peninsula War*), and, without knowing how much the name would interest me, of General Hugo (*Victor Hugo's father, Joseph Léopold Sigisbert Hugo*). He had recognised in me a Frenchman, and I will never forget with what simple and profound solemnity he said to me as he left: '*You will be able to say, sir, that you saw, in Aix-la-Chapelle, a sapper of the thirty-sixth Swiss Cathedral regiment.*'

On another occasion he had said to me: '*You see in me, sir, a citizen of three nations: I am Prussian by chance, Swiss by profession, French at heart.* However, I must admit that his military-man's ignorance of ecclesiastical matters made me smile more than once during the course of my visit, notably in the choir, when he showed me the stalls and said gravely: *Here are the places for the* '*chamoines*' (*chanoines, canons*). Do you not think it should be pronounced *chats-moines* (*cat-monks*)?

As I left the chapel, I was so absorbed by a single thought that I barely looked at a façade, a few steps from the church and very beautiful, of the fourteenth century, which was adorned with seven statues of proud emperors, and today grants access to some kind of cesspool. And then at that moment a distraction occurred. Two visitors had, like myself, emerged from the chapel, into which my old soldier-guide had probably just piloted them for a few minutes. Since they were laughing out loud, I turned round. I recognised two travellers, the eldest of whom had written his name, that very

morning, in front of me, in the register of the *Hotel de L'Empereur* (*not extant*), namely Monsieur le Comte d'A — one of the oldest and noblest names in Artois. They were now speaking loudly.

— 'Such names!' they said. 'It took the Revolution to produce them. Captain Lasoupe! Colonel Graindorge! Wherever did they hail from?' — They were the names of the captain and colonel of my poor old Swiss, who had apparently spoken of them to these travellers as he had to me.' I could not help replying: 'Where did they hail from? I will tell you, gentlemen. Colonel Graindorge was a great-grandcousin of Marshal de Lorges, father-in-law of the Duke of Saint-Simon; and as for Captain Lasoupe, I suppose he was some relation to the Duke of Bouillon, uncle of the Elector Palatine.' A few moments later I was in the square containing the Town Hall, which I was eager to visit.

The Town Hall of Aix is, like the chapel, a building composed of five or six others (*the Town Hall has been extensively restored and remodelled since this description of 1838*). On both sides of a dark facade with long, narrow, closely spaced windows, which dates from the time of Charles V, rise two belfries, one low, round, wide, and flattened; the other high, slender, and quadrangular. The second belfry is a beautiful fourteenth-century construction. The first is the famous Granus Tower, which is difficult to recognise under the strange, convoluted bell-tower with which it is crowned. This bell-tower, which is repeated in a smaller version on the other tower, is like a pyramid of gigantic turbans of all shapes and sizes, placed one on top of the other, and decreasing in size sharply at each stage. At the foot of the facade is a vast staircase, whose layout is similar to that of the staircase of the Cour du Cheval-Blanc at Fontainebleau. Opposite, in the centre of the square, a marble Renaissance fountain, somewhat altered and retouched in the eighteenth century, supports, above a large bronze cup, a bronze statue of Charlemagne, armed and crowned. To the right and left two other smaller fountains bear at their summit two fearful and dreadful black eagles, half-turned towards the grave and tranquil emperor.

It was there, on this site, in the Roman Granus tower perhaps, that Charlemagne was born. The fountain, the facade, the belfries, the whole ensemble, is regal, melancholic, and severe. Charlemagne is still wholly present. A presence which grants a powerful unity to the disparities of the edifice. The tower of Granus recalls Rome, his imperial predecessor; the

facade and the fountains recall Charles V, the greatest of his successors. Even the oriental figure of the belfry makes one think, vaguely, of the magnificent Caliph Harun-al-Rashid, his friend.

Evening was approaching. Having spent all day in the presence of these great and austere memories, it seemed to me that I was coated in the dust of ten centuries; I felt the need to leave the city, to breathe, to see the fields, trees, and birds. This led me out of Aix-la-Chapelle, into the fresh green lanes, which I wandered until nightfall, beside the old walls. Aix-la-Chapelle still has its ring of towers. Vauban failed to pay it a visit. But, the underground passages, which ran from the lower rooms of the Town Hall and the Chapel vaults as far as Burtscheid Abbey, and even as far as Limburg, are now filled in and lost.

As night fell, I sat down on a grassy slope. Aix-la-Chapelle was spread before me, set in its valley as if in a graceful basin. Little by little the evening mist, reaching the jagged roofs of the old streets, erased the outline of the two belfries, which, mingled, in perspective, with the steeples of the city, vaguely recall the Muscovite and Asiatic profile of the Kremlin. Only two distinct masses stood out from the whole city, the Town Hall and the Cathedral. Then all the day's emotions, thoughts, and sights, came flooding back to me. The city itself, the illustrious and symbolic city, was as if transfigured in my mind, and before my gaze. The former of those two black masses that I could still distinguish, and that alone I could distinguish, was for me nothing more than a child's crib; the latter only the tomb of a dead man; and at times, in the depths of my contemplation, in which I was as if buried, it seemed to me that I saw the shadow of that giant whom we call Charlemagne rising slowly, on the pale nocturnal horizon, in all his grandeur, between the cradle, and the tomb.

LETTER X: COLOGNE

The Banks of the Rhine. Andernach, August 11th

Dear friend, I am annoyed with myself. I sped through Cologne[48] like a barbarian. I barely spent forty-eight hours there. I intended to stay for two weeks or more; but, after almost a whole week of fog and rain, such a beautiful shaft of sunlight lit the Rhine, that I wished to take advantage of it, in order to view the riverine landscape in all its richness and joy. So, I left Cologne this morning by the steam-boat, *Cockerill*. I left the city of Agrippina behind me (*Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium was the Roman colony from which the city developed, Agrippinians being the new name granted the Ubian tribe, as a tribute to Agrippina Minor, wife to the Emperor Claudius*), and I saw neither the old paintings in the Church of Saint Mary's in the Capitol, nor the mosaic-paved crypt of the Basilica of Saint Gereon, nor the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, painted by Rubens for the old half-Roman church of Saint Peter where he was baptised, nor the bones of the eleven thousand virgins in the Ursuline cloister, nor the incorruptible corpse of the martyr Albinus, nor the silver sarcophagus of Saint Cunibert, nor the tomb of Duns Scotus in the Church of the Minorites; nor the sepulchre of Empress Theophania, wife of Otto II, in the Church of Saint Pantaleon; nor the Maternus-Gruft (*the Maternus crypt*) in the Church of Saint Maria in Lyskirchen (*according to legend, the church was founded in the 4th century by Bishop Maternus*), nor the two Golden Chambers, that of the Basilica of Saint Ursula, and that of the Cathedral; nor the Hall of the Imperial Diets (*the Gürzenich*), today a warehouse; nor the old Arsenal (*the Zeughaus*), today a wheat store. I saw nothing of it all. It's absurd, but that's how it is.

So, what did I see in Cologne? The Cathedral and the Town Hall; nothing more. You have to be in a wonderful city like Cologne for that to be a small thing. For they are two rare and wonderful buildings.

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[48] Letter X — Cologne: 50°56'13.9"N, 6°57'49.7"E

I arrived in Cologne after sunset. I headed straight for the Cathedral, after having placed my overnight bag in the hands of one of those worthy messengers, in blue uniforms with orange collars, who work in this country for the King of Prussia (excellent and lucrative work, I assure you; the traveller is heavily taxed, and the messenger shares the proceeds with the king). Here is a useful detail: before quitting this good man (the messenger), I asked him, to his great surprise, to take my baggage, not to a hotel in Cologne, but to a hotel in Deutz, which is a small town on the other side of the Rhine, linked to Cologne by a pontoon bridge. Here is the reason: I like to select, as far as possible, the view of the landscape and horizon from my window, whenever I stay for several days at the same inn. Now the windows in Cologne look across the river to Deutz, and the windows of Deutz look out on Cologne; which led me to select an inn in Deutz, following an incontestable principle of mine. It is better to dwell in Deutz and view Cologne than to live in Cologne and view Deutz.

Once alone, I began to walk, seeking the Cathedral and expecting it at every street corner. But that inextricable city was unknown to me, and the evening shadows had darkened the narrow streets; I dislike asking for directions, and wandered around at random for quite a while.

Finally, after venturing through a sort of carriage entrance into a sort of courtyard, ending on the left in a sort of corridor, I emerged, suddenly, onto a quite large, and perfectly dark and deserted square (*the Domplatz*).

There I came upon a magnificent spectacle. Before me, beneath the unreal light of a twilight sky, in the midst of a crowd of low houses with capricious gables, an enormous black mass, laden with needles and pinnacles, rose and then broadened; a stone's throw away, stood, another isolated black mass, narrower and taller, a sort of large square fortress, flanked at its four corners by four tall engaged towers, at the top of which was highlighted a strangely inclined framework shaped like a gigantic feather and placed as if on a helmet on the brow of the old keep. The dark mass was an apse; the keep was the lower section of a bell-tower; the apse and the section of a bell-tower comprised the Cathedral of Cologne[49].

[49] Letter X — Cologne Cathedral: 50°56'28.7"N, 6°57'29.5"E

What had seemed to me to be a black feather leaning above the crest of the sombre monument was an immense and symbolic crane, clad and armoured with lead plating, that I saw again the next day, which, from the summit of its tower, declares to all who pass that this unfinished basilica will be continued, that this section of bell-tower and this section of church, separated at this moment by a vast space, will one day fuse together and live a common life; and that Archbishop Engelbert von Berg's dream, which became a building (*begun in 1248*) under Archbishop Conrad von Hochsteden, will, in a century or two, be the greatest Cathedral in the world, and that modern Homers still place their hopes in this incomplete Iliad.

The church was shut. I approached the bell-tower; its dimensions are enormous. What I had taken for towers at the four corners were simply the bulging outlines of the buttresses. Only the ground floor and the first floor, composed of a colossal ogive, of each are yet built, but already their construction is almost the height of the towers of Notre-Dame de Paris. If the projected spires are ever raised above these monstrous blocks of stone, Strasbourg Cathedral will be nothing compared to it. I doubt that the bell-tower of Mechelen itself, also unfinished, can match it as regards stature and magnitude.

As I have said elsewhere, nothing resembles a ruin like a rough sketch. Already brambles, saxifrages and wall-pellitories, all the herbs that like to gnaw at the mortar and sink their nails into the joints of the stones, have attacked the venerable portal. Man has not finished building before Nature is busy destroying.

The square was silent. No one passed by. I had approached as close to the gate as the rich fifteenth-century iron-grille that protects it allowed me, and I could hear the peaceful murmur of the countless little host of plants that grow and thrive on the projections of old buildings whispering peacefully in the night wind. A light, that appeared at a nearby window, illuminated for a moment, beneath the arches, a crowd of exquisite seated statuettes, angels and saints, reading from large books open on their knees, or speaking and preaching, their fingers raised. Thus, some study, others teach. An admirable prologue for a church, which is nothing other than the Word rendered in marble, bronze, and stone! The gentler architecture of swallows' nests blends with the stone on all sides, as a charming corrective to the severe architecture of the building.

Then the light was extinguished, and I saw nothing but the vast, eighty-foot wide, open arch, without a frame and without a windbreak, gutting the tower from top to bottom and allowing my gaze to penetrate into its darkened bowels. In this window was framed, diminished by perspective, the opposite window, also broad and open, whose rose-window and mullions, as if drawn in ink, stood out with inexpressible purity against the clear, metallic twilit sky. Nothing could be more melancholic, or more singular, than that elegant little white ogive within the large black ogive. Such was my first encounter with Cologne Cathedral.

I have failed to tell you anything of the road from Aix-la-Chapelle to Cologne. There is little to say. A pure and simple landscape akin to that of Picardy or Touraine, a green and blond plain with from time to time a twisted elm or a pale curtain of poplars in the background. I don't dislike that peaceful sort of landscape, but I enjoy it without cries of enthusiasm. In the villages, old peasant women passed like ghosts, wrapped in long grey or soft pink calico mantles whose hoods are drawn down over their eyes; the young women, in short petticoats, wearing a little headband covered with spangles and glass beads that barely hides their magnificent hair, tied above the nape of the neck with a large silver arrow, were cheerfully cleaning the doorways of their houses, and, bending, showed their hamstrings to passers-by as in the paintings of the old Dutch masters. As for the men, they are dressed in a blue smock and a blunderbuss hat, as if they were countrymen in a country with a constitution.

As for the road, it had rained; it was very wet. I failed to meet anyone, except, at times, some young blond musician, thin and pale, on his way to Aix-la-Chapelle or Spa (*in Belgium*), knapsack at his side, his double-bass covered with a green cloth on his back, his baton in one hand, his cornet in the other; dressed in a blue coat, a flowered waistcoat, a white tie, and half-tights rolled up above his boots because of the mud; a poor devil clad from head to waist for a ballroom, and waist down for travel. I also saw, in a field near the path, a local hunter whose appearance was as follows: a round apple-green hat with a large lilac cockade in faded satin, a grey blouse, a large nose, and a rifle.

In a pretty little squarish town, flanked by brick walls and ruined towers, which is halfway there and whose name I know not (*Düren*[50]), I admired four magnificent travellers seated, the shutters being open wide, on the ground floor of an inn, before a gargantuan table piled high with meat, fish, wine, pâtés and fruit; drinking, cutting, biting, twisting, skinning, devouring; one red, another crimson, the third purple, the fourth violet, like four living personifications of voracity and gluttony. It seemed to me that I saw the gods of Gluttony, namely Goulu, Glouton, Goinfre and Guliaf, seated around a mountain of food.

That said, the inns are excellent in this country, except, however, the one in which I stayed in Aix-la-Chapelle which is only passable (the *Hôtel de l'Empereur*), and in which my room provided, to keep my feet warm, a superb dyed carpet on the floor, a magnificence which probably explains the exorbitant cost of the said *gasthof*.

To complete my comments regarding Aix-la-Chapelle, I will tell you that the counterfeit book trade flourishes there as in Belgium. In a large street which terminates at the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, I found my pirated works displayed in a shop window, side by side with those of Lamartine, therefore in valued and illustrious company. The *counterfeit* portrait of myself in this Prussian reprint was a little less ugly than all those horrible caricatures that the traders in portraits, and the booksellers, including my publishers in Paris, purvey to the credulous and terrified public as being my exact likeness; an abominable slander, against which I solemnly protest. *Cælum hoc et conscia sidera testor: as heaven and the stars above are my witness.*

I live like a true German. When I dine my napkins are as large as kerchiefs, I sleep in sheets as large as napkins. I eat leg of lamb with cherries, and hare with prunes, and drink excellent Rhine wine, and excellent Moselle wine which an ingenious Frenchman, dining yesterday a few steps from me, called '*vin de demoiselle*' ('*young ladies' wine*'). This same Frenchman, after tasting the liquid in his carafe, formulated this axiom: '*Rhine water is no match for Rhine wine*'.

In the inns, the host, hostess, valets and maids speak only German; but there is always a waiter who speaks French, a French, in truth, somewhat

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[50] Letter X — Düren: 50°48'10.8"N, 6°28'52.0"E

coloured by the Germanic milieu in which he is immersed; but this variety is not without charm. Yesterday I heard this same traveller, my companion, ask the waiter, while showing him the dish that had just been served to him: 'What is this?' The waiter replied with dignity: '*It is bichons*.' It was indeed pigeons.

Besides, a Frenchman who, like me, knows no German, is wasting his time if he asks this 'head waiter,' as he is called here, questions other than those provided for, and printed in, the *Travellers' Guide*. The waiter bears only a surface varnish of French; if you choose to dig a little further, you will find German, pure German, incomprehensible German.

I come to my second visit to Cologne Cathedral. I returned in the morning — one approaches this masterpiece by a shabby courtyard. There, poverty-stricken women besiege you. While distributing some local currency to them, I remembered that prior to the French occupation there were twelve thousand beggars in Cologne, who had the privilege of passing on to their children the fixed and special sites where each of them stood. This institution has disappeared. Aristocracies are crumbling. Our century has no more respect for hereditary beggar-ship than for the hereditary peerage. Now the barefoot have nothing to bequeath to their families. Once past the poor, one enters the church.

A forest of pillars and columns, large and small, their bases entangled with wooden palisades and lost at their summits in a tangle of low vaults made of rafters and battens, varying in curvature and unequal in height; there is scant daylight in the church; all the vaults are low and prevent one seeing beyond about forty feet; on the left four or five dazzling stained-glass windows, descending from the wooden ceiling to the stone paving in wide sheets of topaz, emerald and ruby; on the right a jumble of ladders, pulleys, ropes, sheaves, winches and tackles; in the background, plain-chant, the deep voices of the cantors and prebendaries, the beautiful Latin of the psalms travelling the ceiling fragmentedly, amidst puffs of incense, and the sound of an admirable organ weeping with ineffable sweetness; in the foreground the grinding of saws, the groaning of pulleys and cranes, the deafening banging of hammers on planking: that is how the interior of Cologne Cathedral appeared to me.

This Gothic Cathedral wed to a carpenter's workshop, this noble canoness brutally married to a mason, this great lady obliged to patiently

combine her quiet habits, her august and discreet life, songs, prayers, and meditation, with these tools, this uproar, this coarse dialogue, this low company, all this *misalliance*, produces at first a strange impression, due to the fact that one no longer sees Gothic churches being built, which dissipates after a moment when one reflects that, after all, nothing is more natural. The crane on the bell-tower carries a meaning: that the work interrupted in 1473 has been resumed. All this tumult involving carpenters and stonemasons is necessary. The Cathedral of Cologne is being continued, and, if it pleases God, will be completed. Nothing could be finer, if the skill exists to complete it. These pillars supporting the wooden vaulting sketch out a nave, which will one day join the apse to the bell-tower.

I examined the stained-glass windows, which date from the time of Maximilian I, the Holy Roman Emperor, and are painted in the robust and magnificently exaggerated style of the German Renaissance. There is an abundance of kings and knights with stern faces, superb figures, monstrous plumes, fierce lambrequins, exorbitant morions, and enormous swords, armed like executioners, bent like archers, and coiffed like warhorses. Near them are their wives, or, to put it better, their formidable females, kneeling in the corners of the stained-glass windows with the profiles of lionesses and wolves. The sunlight passes through these figures, adds fire to their eyes, and brings them to life.

One of these windows presents a beautiful motif that I have already encountered many times, the genealogy of the Virgin (*the 'Tree of Jesse' window, of 1509*). At the bottom of the painting, a giant Adam, dressed as an emperor, is lying on his back. From his belly emerges a large tree that fills the entire window, and on the branches of which appear all the crowned ancestors of Mary; David playing the harp; Solomon pensive; while at the top of the tree, in a large blue compartment, the last flower opens and reveals the Virgin carrying the Child.

A few steps further on I read on a large pillar this sad and resigned epitaph:

INCLITVS ANTE FVI, COMES EMVNDVS

VOCITATVS, HIC NECE PROSTRATVS, SUB

TEGOR VT VOLUI. FRISHEIM, SANCTE,

MEVM FERO, PETRE, TIBI COMITATVM,

ET MIHI REDDE STATVM, TE PRECOR,

ÆTHEREVM. HÆC LAPIDVM MASSA

COMITIS COMPLECTITVR OSSA.

‘I was once famous, Count Edmund my name,

Now I lie here prostrate in death,

Beneath the pavement I sought. Holy

Peter, now I bring you my county

Of Frisheim, grant me the heavenly city,

I pray you. This mass of stone

Covers a Count, every bone.’

I transcribe this epitaph as it is laid out on a vertical stone tablet, like prose, without any indication of the somewhat barbaric hexameters and pentameters that form couplets. The pair of rhyming lines with their caesura that end the inscription contain a quantitative error, *massa*, which surprised me, because the Middle Ages knew how to write Latin verse.

The left arm of the transept is as yet merely indicated, and ends in a large oratory, cold, ugly, dull, and poorly- furnished, except for a few confessionals. I hastened to enter the church, and, as I left the oratory, three things struck me almost at once: to my left, a charming little sixteenth-century pulpit, very spiritedly done and delicately carved in black oak; a little further on, the choir grille, a rare and complete example of exquisite fifteenth-century ironwork; and opposite me, a very beautiful gallery with squat pilasters and low arches, in the style of our late Renaissance, which I suppose was created for that sad refugee, Queen Marie de Medici (*the second wife of Henri IV; banished by her son Louis XIII, she eventually took refuge in Cologne, in a house loaned to her by Rubens, the artist*).

At the entrance to the choir, in an elegant rococo armoire, a true Italian Madonna sparkles and shines laden with sequins and tinsel, along with her bambino. Below this opulent Madonna, with her bracelets and pearl necklaces, has been placed, as an apparent antithesis, a massive poor-box, fashioned in the twelfth century, garlanded with chains and iron padlocks and half-sunk into a roughly carved block of granite. It looks like a log sealed in a paving stone.

As I looked up, I saw, hanging from the ogee above my head, some gilded rods attached at one end to a transverse rod. Beside these is the inscription: — '*Quot pendere vides baculos, tot episcopus annos huic Agrippinæ præfuit ecclesiæ*: *the bishop has presided over this Church of Agrippina for as many years as you see rods suspended.*' — I like this strict way of counting the years, and of making perpetually visible to the archbishop the time he has already employed or wasted. Three rods are hanging from the vault at this moment (*Clemens August Droste zu Vischering was Archbishop of Cologne from 1835 to 1845*).

The choir constitutes the interior of this famous apse which is still, so to speak, the entire cathedral of Cologne, since the bell-tower lacks its spire, the nave its vault, and the church its transept. In this choir riches abound. There are sacristies full of delicate woodwork, chapels full of severe sculptures; paintings from all periods, tombs of all shapes; bishops of granite couched in a fortress, bishops of jasper couched on a bier borne by a procession of weeping figurines, bishops of marble couched beneath an iron trellis, bronze bishops couched on the ground, wooden bishops kneeling before altars; lieutenant-generals from the days of Louis XIV leaning on their sepulchres, knights from the time of the Crusades lying facing upwards with their dogs resting lovingly against their steel feet; statues of apostles dressed in golden robes: oak confessionals with twisted columns; noble canonical stalls; Gothic baptismal fonts in the form of coffins; altarpieces laden with statuettes; beautiful fragments of stained glass; fifteenth-century Annunciations on a background of gold, displaying the rich wings, multi-coloured above, white below, of the Angel who gazes at, and well-nigh covets, the Virgin; tapestries woven from designs by Rubens; iron-grilles that one would think were by Quentin Matsys, painted and gilded shuttered wardrobes that one would think were by Frans Floris the Elder.

All this, it should be said, is shamefully dilapidated. Whoever is building Cologne Cathedral externally, someone is demolishing it internally. Not a

tomb whose figurines are not marred or truncated; not a grille that is not rusty where once it was gilded. Dust, ashes, and filth lie everywhere. Flies dishonour the venerable face of Archbishop Philip von Heinsberg. The man of bronze lying on a slab, whose name was Konrad von Hochstaden, and who laid the cornerstone of this Cathedral (*in 1248*), cannot today crush the spiders that bind him to the ground like Gulliver with their innumerable threads. Alas! Arms of bronze are no match for living ones.

I believe that a bearded statue of a reclining old man, which I saw in a dark corner, broken and mutilated, is by Michelangelo. This reminds me that I saw at Aix-la-Chapelle, lying in a corner of the old cloister-cemetery, like tree trunks awaiting the butcher, those famous antique marble columns (*imported from Rome and Ravenna to construct Charlemagne's Palatine Chapel*) seized by Napoleon and recovered by Blücher. Napoleon had seized them for the Louvre, Blücher recovered them for the charnel house. One of the phrases I most often utter is, 'To what end?'

In all this degradation, I only saw two somewhat-respected and occasionally-cleaned tombs, the cenotaphs of two Counts of Holstein-Schauenburg (*Adolf III and Anton*). These two Counts of Schauenburg form one of those pairs who seem to have been foreseen by Virgil. They were brothers, both archbishops of Cologne, both buried in the choir, both having very beautiful seventeenth-century tombs facing each other. Adolf gazes across at Anton.

I have purposely omitted until now, in order to tell you of it in some detail, the most venerated sepulchre in the Cathedral of Cologne, the famous Shrine of the Three Kings. There is a rather large chamber (*since removed*) of multi-coloured marble enclosed by thick copper grilles; a hybrid and bizarre design in which the architectural styles of Louis XIII and Louis XV blend coquetry with heaviness. This is located behind the high altar in the culminating chapel of the apse. Three turbans amidst the design of the main grille strike the eye first. One raises one's eyes, to view a bas-relief representing the *Adoration of the Magi*; one lowers them, to read this mediocre couplet:

'Corpora sanctorum recubant hic terna magorum.

Ex his sublatum nihil est alibive locatum'

'The sacred bodies of the three magi lie here.

Nothing of them has been removed, or placed elsewhere'

Here an idea, at the same time both humorous and serious, stirs one's thoughts. It is in this place, then, that those three poetic Kings of the Orient lie who came, led by the star, *ab Oriente venerunt*, and who worshipped a child in a stable, *et procidentes adoraverunt*. I too worshipped in my turn. I confess that nothing in the world charms me more than that *Thousand-and-One-Nights'* tale enshrined in the Gospel. I approached the tomb, and behind the jealously closed grating, through a darkened window, I saw, amidst the shadows, a large and marvellous Mosan Art reliquary in solid gold, sparkling with arabesques, pearls and diamonds, exactly as one glimpses, through the darkness of nineteen centuries and more, behind the dark and austere grille of Church tradition, the oriental and dazzling history of the Three Kings.

On both sides of the venerated grille, two gilded copper hands emerge from the marble, each half-opening a bag to receive alms, below which the chapter has engraved this subtle exhortation: — '*And opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts'* (*see Matthew 2:11*).

Opposite the tomb three copper lamps burn, one of which bears the name: *Gaspar*, the second *Melchior*, the third *Balthazar*. It was an ingenious idea to display, illuminated as it were, in front of the sepulchre, the names of the three Magi.

As I was about to retreat, something pointed pierced the sole of my boot; I looked down; it was the head of a copper nail driven into the large slab of black marble over which I was walking. I remembered, while examining this stone, that Marie de Medici had wanted her heart to be placed under the pavement of Cologne Cathedral in front of the Shrine of the Three Kings. This slab that I was trampling underfoot doubtless covered her heart. There was once on this slab, where one can still distinguish the imprint, a copper or gilded bronze panel bearing, in the German manner, the coat of arms and epitaph of the dead woman, for the affixing of which the nail that tore my boot had served. When the French occupied Cologne, Revolutionary ideas, probably aided by a speculative coppersmith, uprooted this panel decorated with a fleur-de-lis, like the others which once surrounded it, because a number of copper nails coming loose from the neighbouring slabs attest to

and proclaim many similar efforts. Thus, the poor queen saw herself first erased from the heart of Louis XIII, her son, then the memory of Richelieu, his creature; and now it is erased from the very earth!

And what strange whims destiny pursues! This queen, Marie de Medici, this widow of Henry IV, exiled, abandoned, destitute as her daughter Henriette, widow of Charles I, was to prove a few years later, came to die in Cologne, in 1642, in the Ibach house, No. 10 Sterngasse, the very house where sixty-five years earlier, in 1577, Rubens, her artist, was born.

The Cathedral of Cologne, seen again in broad daylight, stripped of the unreal magnification that evening lends to objects, and which I call *twilight grandeur*, seemed to me, I must say, to have lost a little of its sublimity. The outline is still beautiful, but its lines possess a certain dryness. This is perhaps due to the relentlessness with which the current architect (*Ernst Friedrich Zwirner*) is mortaring and sealing this venerable apse. Old churches should not be over-renovated. In such an operation, which diminishes the architectural form while trying to rectify it, the mysterious vagueness of its outline vanishes. At the moment, I prefer the sketchy mass of the bell-tower to a perfect apse. In any case, and with all due respect to various people of refinement who would wish to make of Cologne Cathedral the Parthenon of Christian architecture, I see, for my part, no reason to prefer this Cathedral apse to our old, complete Notre-Dames of Amiens, Reims, Chartres, and Paris. I even admit that Beauvais Cathedral, which has also remained a mere apse, barely known and very little praised, seems to me in no way inferior, either in mass or in detail, to Cologne Cathedral.

Cologne Town Hall[51], situated quite close to the Cathedral, is one of those delightful harlequin-style buildings made of elements from all periods, and in all styles, that one encounters in the old municipalities which have created their laws, morals, and customs, in much the same way. The mode of formation of both buildings and customs is an interesting study. There was agglomeration rather than construction, successive growth, capricious enlargement, encroachment on neighbouring edifices; nothing was done according to a regular or pre-determined plan; everything happened as and when, according to the needs arising.

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[51] Letter X — Cologne Town Hall: 50°56'18.2"N, 6°57'33.5"E

Thus the Town Hall of Cologne, whose foundations probably contain some Roman cellar, was, around the year 1250, only a grave, severe ribbed dwelling like our Maison-aux-Piliers (*the House of Pillars, in Paris, on Place de Grève, was a precursor to the current Hôtel de Ville*); then it was felt that a belfry was needed to house the tocsin bell as a call to arms, and the night watchmen, and a beautiful fifteenth-century tower (*the Ratsturm*), both bourgeois and feudal, was built; then, under Maximilian I, as the joyful breath of the Renaissance began to blow above the dark stone foliage of the cathedrals, and a taste for elegance and ornamentation spread everywhere, the aldermen of Cologne began to feel the need to improve their town house. They, perhaps, summoned from Italy, as architect, a pupil of old Michelangelo, or from France some sculptor, a friend of young Jean Goujon, and added a triumphant and magnificent loggia (*the Rathauslaube, designed by Wilhelm Vernukken*) to the black fourteenth-century facade. A few years later, they needed a promenade next to their registry, and they built a charming courtyard with arcaded galleries, sumptuously enlivened with coats of arms and bas-reliefs, which I saw, and which in two or three years no one will see, because it is being allowed to fall into ruin. Finally, they recognized that a large hall was necessary for meetings, auctions, and assemblies, and (*between 1608 and 1615*) they commissioned, opposite their belfry and loggia, a splendid building in stone and brick (*the Spanischer Bau*) in the finest taste, and of the noblest design. — Today, the fourteenth-century ribbed building, the fifteenth-century belfry, the Renaissance loggia, and courtyard, and the early seventeenth-century hall, mutually aged by time, laden by events with tradition and memories, fused and grouped together by chance in the most original and picturesque way, form the Town Hall of Cologne.

May I say in passing, my friend, that, as both a product of art and as an expression of history, this Town Hall is worth somewhat more than the cold and pale building, bastardised by its triple frontage cluttered with archivolts, bastardised by the economical and petty monotony of its ornamentation where everything is repeated and nothing stands out, and bastardised by its truncated roofs without crests or chimneys, in which a handful of mediocre masons, in the very face of our good city of Paris, are today drowning the ravishing masterpiece created by 'Boccador' (*the architect Domenico da Cortona*). We are a strange people; we allow the Hôtel de la Trémouille to be demolished and we build this thing! We allow gentlemen who believe and call themselves architects to lower, slyly, by two or three feet, that is to say,

completely disfigure Boccador's charming pointed roof, so as to enhance it, alas, with the horrible flattened attics they invented. Will we forever be the same people that admires Corneille and yet sees him retouched, pruned and corrected by François Andrieux? — Well, let us return to Cologne.

I climbed the Town Hall belfry, and from there, beneath a grey and gloomy sky, which was, to a degree, in harmony with the buildings and my thoughts, I had at my feet all that admirable city.

Cologne on the Rhine, like Rouen on the Seine, and Antwerp on the Scheldt, like all cities bordering on a watercourse too wide to be easily crossed, has the shape of a taut bow to which the river is the bowstring.

The roofs are of slate, tightly packed together, angled like maps folded in two; the streets are narrow, the gables are carved. A reddish curve of moated brick wall, which appears and reappears everywhere above the roofs, ties the city like a buckled belt to the river itself, meeting it downstream by the Thürmchen turret (*at the eastern end of modern Thürmchenswall, not extant,*), upstream by the superb Bayenturm tower (*restored in the 1990's*), amidst the crenellations of which stands a marble bishop blessing the Rhine. From the Thürmchen to the Bayenturm the city extends along the river, over two miles of windows and facades. Towards the middle of this long line a large pontoon bridge, gracefully pressing against the current, crosses the river, very wide at this point, and connects Deutz, a small block of white houses on the other bank, to the vast cluster of black buildings, which is Cologne.

Seen from the Town Hall belfry, amidst the mass of Cologne, among the roofs, turrets and attics full of flowers, rise the varied and prominent peaks of twenty-seven churches among which, without counting the Cathedral, are four majestic Romanesque churches, all differing in design, worthy by their grandeur and beauty of being cathedrals themselves, Great Saint Martin to the east, Saint Gereon to the west, the Holy Apostles (*Saint Aposteln*) to the south-west, and Saint Mary's of the Capitol to the south, surrounded by enormous clusters of apses, towers and bell towers.

If one examines the city in detail, all is alive and throbbing; the bridge is laden with passers-by and carriages, the river is covered with sails, the shore is lined with masts. All the streets teem, all the windows seem to speak, all the roofs to sing. Here and there, green clumps of trees gently caress these black houses, and amidst the monotony of slate roofs and brick frontages,

the old stone mansions of the fifteenth century display their long friezes of flowers, fruits and sculpted foliage, on which pigeons come to perch with joy.

Around this large city, commercial in aspect by virtue of its industry, militaristic by virtue of its location, and maritime by virtue of its river, a vast and fertile plain spreads and widens in all directions, sinking down in folds in the direction of Holland, which the Rhine traverses from one side to the other, and to the northeast crowned by its seven historic ridges, that marvellous nest of traditions and legends which we call the Seven Mountains (*the Siebengebirge*).

Thus, Holland and its commerce, Germany and its poetry, present two great aspects of the human spirit, the material and the ideal, on Cologne's horizon, itself a city of commerce and reverie.

Descending from the belfry, I halted in the courtyard in front of the charming Renaissance porch. I called it a moment ago the *triumphant* loggia, but I should have said the *triumphal* loggia; for the second floor of this exquisite composition is formed of a series of small triumphal arches joined together to form arcades and dedicated, in inscriptions of the period, firstly to Julius Caesar, secondly Augustus, thirdly Agrippina, who gave her name to the site of Cologne (*Colonia Agrippinensum*); fourthly Constantine, the Christian emperor; fifthly Justinian, the law-giving emperor; and lastly to Maximilian, at that time a recent emperor. On the facade the sculptor-poet chiselled three bas-reliefs representing the three lion tamers, Milo of Croton, Pepin the Short, and Daniel. At the two extremities he placed Milo of Croton, who overcame the lions by the power of his body, and Daniel, who subdued them by the power of his mind; between Daniel and Milo, linking both in a natural manner, he placed Pepin the Short, who attacked wild beasts with that mixture of physical and moral vigour that marks the soldier. Between pure strength and pure thought, stands courage. Between the athlete and the prophet, the hero.

Pepin has his sword in hand, while his left arm wrapped in his cloak is plunged into the lion's mouth; the lion, claws and jaws opened, is raised on its hind feet in the formidable attitude which heraldry terms 'rampant'. Pepin faces him valiantly, in a fighting stance. Daniel stands motionless, his arms hanging down, his eyes raised to heaven while the friendly lions roll at his feet; the spirit does not struggle, it triumphs. As for Milo of Croton, his arms trapped in the tree-trunk, he struggles, as the lion devours him; his is the

agony of the unintelligent man, blind with presumption, believing in his muscles and his fists; yet pure force is vanquished — these three bas-reliefs are of great significance. The last produces a terrifying effect. I know not what fearful and fatal idea emerges, perhaps without the sculptor himself being aware, from this dark poem. It is Nature taking revenge on Man, vegetation and animals making common cause, the oak tree aiding the lion.

Unfortunately, archivolts, bas-reliefs, entablatures, imposts, cornices and columns, all that beautiful porch, has been restored, scraped, repointed and whitewashed, to a state of the most deplorable cleanliness.

As I was about to leave the Town Hall, a man, aged rather than old, debased rather than bent, of wretched appearance but proud bearing, was crossing the courtyard. The concierge who had led me to the belfry pointed him out to me. The man is a poet, who lives on his income from recitals and who writes epics. His name, however, is completely unknown to all. My guide, who greatly admired him, told me he had written epics against Napoleon, against the Revolution of 1830, against the Romantics, against the French, and another fine epic to invite the current architect of Cologne to complete the church in the style of the Pantheon in Paris. Epics they might be. But the man is covered in filth. I have never seen a less presentable fellow in all my life. I doubt we have anyone in France comparable to that epic poet.

On the other hand, a few moments later, just as I was traversing a dark and narrow street, a little old man with a sharp-eyed look emerged suddenly from a barber's shop and ran up to me, shouting: *Monsieur! Monsieur! The crazy French! Oh! The French! Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat! Fight the lot! Hurrah! Hurrah! Is Napoleon not the fellow! Fight all Europe! Oh! The French! Cry Hurrah! Monsieur! A bayonet for every Prussian! Good riddance, like at Jena! Hurrah, the French! Rat-a-tat!*

I confess that I enjoyed his speech. France looms great in the memories, and hopes, of these noble people. This whole bank of the Rhine loves us — I almost said awaits us.

In the evening, as the stars were appearing, I walked along the other side of the river, on the shore opposite Cologne. I had before me the whole city, whose countless gables and black steeples stood out in all their detail against the pale sunset sky. To my left rose, like the giantess of Cologne, the tall spire of Great Saint Martin with its pierced turrets. Almost opposite me, the dark apse of the Cathedral, raised its thousand sharp pinnacles, like some

monstrous hedgehog, crouched at the water's edge, the crane on the steeple seeming to form its tail, and to which two lighted street lamps towards the foot of that dark mass added flaming eyes. I heard, amidst the shadows, only the caressingly discreet tremors of the water at my feet, the dull sound of a horse's hooves on the planks of the pontoon bridge, and in the distance, from a forge I had glimpsed, the ringing, glittering sound of hammer on anvil. No other noise from the city crossed the Rhine. A few panes of glass glittered vaguely, while from beneath the forge, a blazing furnace, a long luminous trail, no mere gleam, flowed, and dispersed in the river, as if this pocketful of fire were emptying itself into the water.

This beautiful and sombre ensemble, stirred a melancholy reverie in my mind. I said to myself: — 'The Germanic city has disappeared, the city dedicated to Agrippina has disappeared, the city of Saint Engelbert (*Count Engelbert II, Archbishop of Cologne from 1216 to 1225*) still stands. But for how long? The temple (*fourth century*) housing the shrine (*of the Three Magi*) endowed by Saint Helena vanished a thousand years ago; the church built by Archbishop Anno (*Arno II, Archbishop from 1056 to1075*) will fall. The city is worn away by its river. Every day some old stone, some old memory, some old custom is detached from it due to the friction produced by a score of steamboats. A city on the great artery of Europe cannot exist with impunity. Cologne (*founded in 50AD*), though less ancient than Trier (*in Germany, founded in 16BC*) or Solothurn (*in Switzerland, founded in 15AD*), two of the very oldest Roman towns in Europe, has already been altered and transformed thrice, by the rapid and violent tide of events and ideas which traversed it, constantly pulsing from the cities of William the Silent (*William of Orange*) to the mountains of William Tell, the tributaries of Germany flowing to Cologne from Mainz, the tributaries of France from Strasbourg. Now a fourth climacteric epoch of Cologne appears to be proclaiming itself. The spirit of *positivism* and *utilitarianism*, as the barbarians of today have it, is penetrating and invading it; new styles affect it, entering the labyrinth of its ancient architecture on all sides; new streets drive wide gaps through the Gothic mass; 'modern good taste' applies, building Rue de Rivoli type facades, which enjoy the admiration of foolish shopkeepers. Drunken rhymesters advise the city of Konrad von Hochstaden to imitate the architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot's Pantheon. The archbishops' tombs are falling into disrepair in a Cathedral being raised today by vanity, not faith. The splendid country-women dressed in scarlet, and wearing gold and silver head-dresses, have

disappeared; Parisian grisettes stroll on the quaysides; I saw today a few last desiccated bricks fall from the Romanesque cloister of Saint Martin; a Café Tortoni (*like that in Paris, on the Boulevard des Italiens, in Paris, founded around 1800*) is about to open there. Long rows of white-coloured houses give the feudal and Catholic suburb of the Martyrs-of-Thebes (*around Saint Gereon's church, the site according to legend of the martyrdom of the Theban Legion*) an air, falsely, of Batignolles in Paris. An omnibus crosses the old pontoon bridge, and one can travel for six sous from Agrippinensium to Tuitium (*Deutz, the Roman Castrum Divitia, known as Tuitium from the tenth century onwards*) — alas, the ancient towns are vanishing!

Letter XI: Concerning the Ibach House

Andernach[52]

My friend! My friend! What other things do, perhaps they know; but, as has been said before, men know not what they do. Often, when comparing history with Nature, amidst those eternal comparisons which my mind cannot help but draw between events, in which God hides himself, and the Creation in which he shows himself, I have shuddered, suddenly, with a secret anguish, and have imagined that the forests, lakes, mountains, the thunder amidst the clouds, the flower that nods its head when we pass, the star that twinkles on the misty horizon, the ocean that mutters or roars, forever seeming to issue a warning, are manifest and dreadful things, full of light and knowledge, that gaze with pity at Man, the creature of pride whose arms are tied by impotence, the thing of vanity whose eyes are blinded by ignorance, as he gropes among them all in that darkness peculiar to himself. Nothing in me finds this thought repugnant, that a tree might be conscious of its fruit; but, of a certainty Man has no consciousness of his own destiny.

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[52] Letter XI — Andernach: 50°25'36.8"N, 7°24'32.0"E

The life and intellect of Mankind are at the mercy of some obscure yet divine machine, called by some Providence, by others Chance, which mingles, combines and decomposes everything, which hides its workings in the darkness, to display the result in broad daylight. We believe we are doing one thing, and do another. '*Urceus exit*' (*see Horace: 'Ars Poetica: lines 21-22. 'Amphora coepit institui; currente rota cur urceus exit? An amphora's begun, the potter's wheel turns, why does a mere jug emerge?*). History is full of examples. When the husband (*Henri II*) of Catherine de Medici, and lover of Diane de Poitiers, yields to the mysterious attractions of Filippa Duci, the beautiful Piedmontese girl, he not only engenders Diane de France who will wed Orazio Farnese, but thereby the de facto alliance between his fourth son who will become Henri III, with his cousin who will become Henri IV (*Henri III's ninth cousin once removed*). When the Duke of Nemours (*Jacques de Savoie*) gallops down the steps of the Sainte-Chapelle on his chestnut horse, *Réal*, it is not only a mad and dangerous folly he is rendering fashionable, it is the death of the King of France he is preparing. On July 10, 1559, in the lists on the rue Saint-Antoine, when Montgomery (*Gabriel de Lorges, Count of Montgomery*), dripping with sweat beneath his vast red plume, lowers his lance, and charges the handsome fleur-de-lis adorned cavalier applauded by all the ladies, he has no suspicion of the prodigious consequences arising from what he holds in his hand. Never has a fairy wand worked so wondrously as that lance. In a single blow Montgomery fatally injures Henri II, demolishes the Hôtel des Tournelles (*in which Henri II died from his wound*) and builds the Place Royale (*initiated by Henri IV, it was later renamed the Place des Vosges*), that is to say, he upsets the workings of the play, eliminates the hero, and alters the decor.

When Charles II of England, after the Battle of Worcester, hid in the hollow oak-tree (*the Boscobel Oak, in 1651*), he thought he was doing no more than that; not at all, he gave his name to a royal constellation (*Robur Carolinum, Charles' Oak, so named by Edmund Halley the Astronomer Royal in 1679*), and gave Halley an opportunity to outdo the famous Tycho Brahe. Madame de Maintenon's second husband (*Louis XIV*), by revoking the Edict of Nantes, and the Parliament of 1688, by expelling James II, did nothing other than make possible the curious Battle of Almansa (*1707*) where face to face, on the same field, were to be seen a French army commanded by an Englishman, Marshal Berwick (*James FitzJames, 1st Duke of Berwick*), and an English army commanded by a Frenchman, the Marquis de Ruvigny and Earl of Galway (*Henri de Massue*). If Louis XIII had not died on May the 14th, 1643, the idea

would not have occurred to the aged Comtefontaine (*Paul-Bernard de Fontaines*) to attack Rocroi within five days; and a heroic prince, at twenty-one years of age, would not have been presented with that magnificent opportunity on May 19th (*the Battle of Rocroi*), which turned the Duke of Enghien into the great Condé. And amidst all this tumult of facts which clutter the histories, what singular echoes, what extraordinary parallels, what formidable counter-blows! In 1664, after the insult offered to the Comte de Créqui (*Charles III de Blanchefort de Créquy later made a duke; the incident was known as the Corsican Guard Affair*), his ambassador, Louis XIV had the Corsicans banished from Rome; one hundred and forty years later, in 1804, Napoleon Buonaparte saw the Bourbon dynasty exiled from France.

What shadows! And what lightning-flashes in the shadows! Around 1612, when the young Henri de Montmorency (*the 4th Duke in 1614, and Viceroy of New France in North America in 1620, who supported Gaston Duke of Orleans, was defeated at the Battle of Castelnaudary in 1632, and was subsequently executed*), then aged seventeen, saw, among the gentlemen-servants going to and fro in his father's house, in the humble attitude appropriate to service, bearing and offering an ewer for the guests to wash their hands, a pale and puny page, the little Charles de Laubespine de Châteauneuf, what could have told him that this page, bowing so respectfully before him, would become a sub-deacon, that this sub-deacon would become Keeper of the Seals, that this Keeper of the Seals would preside by commission over the parliament of Toulouse, and that, twenty years later, this page, sub-deacon, and president would slyly seek a dispensation from the Pope, so that the rascal could have his master, he himself, Henri, Duke of Montmorency, Marshal of France by election of the sword, peer of the kingdom by the grace of God, decapitated! When President de Thou (*Jacques Auguste de Thou*), in his history of France, polished, sharpened, and carefully refurbished the edict of Louis XI of December 22, 1477, what could have told this father that one day that same edict would be the axe, with Jean-Martin Laubardemont as its handle, with which Richelieu would cut off his son's head! (*The son was François-Auguste de Thou, executed for conspiracy against Louis XIII*)

Amidst this chaos there is still law. Chaos is only the appearance; there is order at its heart. After long periods of time, the same fearful happenings that once made our fathers raise their eyes to the heavens, return, like comets, out of the darkest depths of history. Ever the same entanglements, the same

falls from grace, the same betrayals, ever the same shipwrecks on the same reefs; names change, things persist. A few days before the fatal Easter of 1814, the emperor might well have said to his thirteen marshals: *Amen dico vobis quia unus vestrûm me traditurus est Truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me* (*see the Vulgate Matthew 26:21*). Caesar forever adopts Brutus; Charles I forever prevents Cromwell from leaving for Jamaica; Louis XVI forever prevents Mirabeau from embarking for the Indies; always and everywhere cruel queens are punished by cruel sons; always and everywhere ungrateful queens are punished by ungrateful sons. Every Agrippina gives birth to the Nero who will slay her; every Marie de Medici gives birth to the Louis XIII who will banish her.

And as regards myself, do you not notice in what strange way my thoughts pass from idea to idea, and so, almost without my knowledge, to those two women, those two Italians, those two ghosts, Agrippina the Younger and Marie de Medici, the two spectres of Cologne! Cologne is the city of unhappy queen-mothers. Some sixteen hundred years apart, the names and memory of the daughter of Germanicus, mother of Nero, and the wife of Henry IV, mother of Louis XIII, were attached to Cologne. Of these two widows — parentless when widowed — the first rendered so by poison (*the rumoured fate of her husband Claudius*), the second by the dagger (*the assassination of her husband Henri IV*), Marie de Medici, died there; the other, Agrippina, was born there.

I visited the house in Cologne where Marie de France died — the Ibach House according to some, the Jabach House according to others — and, instead of telling you what I saw there, I shall say what I thought of it. Forgive me, my friend, for not describing for you, on this occasion, all the little local details that I like and which, in my opinion, paint the picture of a person, whose appearance explains that person, and leads the mind from external facts to internal ones. This time I will refrain from doing so. I am afraid of wearying you with my *festoons* and my *astragals* (*excessive detail: see Nicolas Boileau, 'L'Art Poétique', Chant I, 1674*).

The melancholy queen, Marie, died there on July 3, 1642. She was sixty-eight years old. She had been exiled from France for eleven years. She had wandered everywhere, to Flanders, to England, a great burden to every country. In London, Charles the First treated her with dignity; during the three years she spent there, he gave her one hundred pounds sterling a day.

Later, I regret to say, Paris failed to show the Queen of England the same hospitality that London had shown the Queen of France. Henrietta, the daughter of Henri IV, and the widow of Charles the First was housed in the Louvre, in some garret or other, where she remained in her bed for lack of a bundle of firewood in the winter, awaiting the few coins the coadjutor loaned her. Her mother, the widow of Henri IV, found a last refuge in Cologne in much the same state — in the deepest poverty. At the request of Cardinal Richelieu, Charles the First had ejected her from England. I am sorry for Charles, the melancholic author of the *Eikon Basilike* (*Charles' spiritual autobiography, probably ghost-written by Bishop John Gauden*) yet I fail to understand how the man who knew how to display kingship as regards Cromwell failed to do so as regards Richelieu.

However, I insist on noting one detail full of deep significance: Marie de Medici's death was closely followed by that of Richelieu, in the same year, and by Louis XIII, who died the year following. What was the point of all that unnatural hatred between three human creatures, what was the point of those intrigues, that persecution, the many quarrels, the perfidy, when all three die almost at the same hour? — God knows His own purpose.

There is an unfortunate element of doubt where Marie de Medici is concerned. The shadow cast by François Ravaillac (*who assassinated Henri IV*) has always seemed to me to haunt the trailing folds of her dress. I have always been appalled by the dreadful sentence that President Hénault (*the historian Charles-Jean-François Hénault, who was President of the Parliament*), without malicious intent perhaps, wrote about that queen: '*She was not sufficiently surprised by the death of Henri IV.*'

I confess that all of that renders the clear, loyal, if pompous era of Louis XIV more admirable to me. The shadows and obscurities that mar the beginning of that era highlight the splendours of its end. Louis XIV represents power as did Richelieu, but with the addition of majesty; he represents grandeur, like Cromwell, plus serenity. Louis XIV's genius resided not within himself, but in the geniuses around him, which renders the king a lesser being perhaps, but his reign a greater one. As for me, who love, as you know, things which are *successful* and complete, without disputing all the qualifications that must be admitted, I have always had a profound sympathy for that grave and magnificent prince so nobly born, so well suited to his role, so ably surrounded, a king from the cradle and a king in death; a true monarch

in the highest sense of the word, a central sovereign of our civilisation, a pivot of Europe, who was able to employ, so to speak, among those whom he saw *appear, shine forth, and disappear* around his throne in turn, *during his reign*: seven popes; four Ottoman sultans; two Holy Roman emperors; two kings of Spain (*excluding Archduke Charles, a disputed claimant*); two kings of Portugal; four kings and two queens (*Mary II who ruled jointly with William III, and Anne*) of England; three kings of Denmark; two kings of Sweden; four kings of Poland; and four Tsars of Russia; that pole star of a whole century who, for seventy-two years, saw all the constellations revolve, majestically, around him!

The End of Part III of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part IV: Letters XII-XVII

'Maus Castle and the Loreley'
Johannes Jakob Diezler (1789–1855)
Wikimedia Commons

Letter XII: Apropos the Wallraf Museum

Andernach[53]

Besides the Cathedral of Cologne[54], the Town Hall and the Ibach house, I also visited, at Schleis Kotten (*Klettenberg?),* near the city, the remains of the underground aqueduct (*the Eifel Aqueduct*) which, in Roman times, according to legend, ran from Cologne to Trier, and traces of which can still be found today in thirty-three villages. In Cologne itself, I saw the Wallraf Museum (*housing a collection donated by Ferdinand Franz Wallraf to the city in 1824, and at the time of Hugo's visit provisionally located in the former quarters of the Cologne archbishops in Trankgasse, the Wallrafianum*). I would be tempted to give you an inventory of it here, but I will spare you. Let it suffice for you to know that, although, thanks to the depredations of Baron Hupsch (*the notorious collector and charlatan Johann Wilhelm von Honvlez-Ardenn Hüpsch Lontzen*) I failed to find the war-chariot of the ancient Germans there, nor the famous Egyptian mummy, nor the large culverin, four ells long, cast in Cologne in 1400; on the other hand, I saw a very beautiful Roman sarcophagus, and the armour of Bishop Bernhard von Galen (*Christoph Bernhard Freiherr von Galen, prince-bishop of Münster*). I was also shown an enormous cuirass which is said to have belonged to an Imperial general, Jan von Werth (*Johann von Werth, a cavalry general in the Thirty Years' War*); but I searched in vain for his great sword eight and a half feet long, his large pike akin to Polyphemus' pine-tree (*see Virgil's 'Aeneid' III, 659*), and his large Homeric helmet which two men, it is said, had difficulty lifting.

The pleasure of seeing all these beautiful or curious things, museums, churches, town halls, is tempered, it must be said, by the endless persistent demands for a tip. On the banks of the Rhine, as elsewhere in all much-visited

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[53] Letter XI — Andernach: 50°25'36.8"N, 7°24'32.0"E

[54] Letter XI — Cologne Cathedral: 50°56'28.7"N, 6°57'29.5"E

countries, the need to tip is like a very unwelcome mosquito, which returns, at every instant and every opportunity, to bite, not your skin, but your purse. Now the traveller's purse, that precious purse, contains all he has, since sacred hospitality is no longer there to receive him at the threshold with its sweet smile and august cordiality. Here is the degree of importance to which the intelligent natives of this country have raised the tip, and I am stating the facts, I am not exaggerating. You enter any town or city; at the gate, a steward enquires for the name of the hotel in which you intend to stay, asks for your passport, takes it and keeps it. The carriage stops in the courtyard of the post office, the driver, who has not looked at you the whole journey, approaches, opens the door for you and offers you his hand with a beatific expression. Tip. A moment later, the postilion approaches in turn, though it's forbidden by police regulations, and addresses you in a gibberish harangue which means: tip. You unpack, a large fellow commands the carriage, and sets your trunk, and overnight bag on the ground. Tip. Another fellow places the luggage on a wheelbarrow, asks you which hotel you are going to, and starts racing ahead of you pushing his wheelbarrow. When you arrive at the hotel, the host appears, and commence a little dialogue that should be written in every language on the door of every inn: — '*Good morning, monsieur,*'— '*Monsieur, I would like a room.*' — '*Very good, Monsieur.*' To the attendants: '*Show monsieur to number four.*' '*Monsieur, I would like dinner.*' — '*Right away, monsieur,*' etc., etc. You reach number four. Your luggage is already there. A man appears; it is the one with the wheelbarrow who carried it to the hotel. Tip. A second arrives; what does he want? It is the fellow who brought your things to the room. You tell him: 'All right, I'll give it you when I leave, like the other servants.' 'Monsieur,' the man replies, 'I don't belong to the hotel.' Tip. You go out. Here's a church, a beautiful church. You wish to go in. You turn around, you look, you search. The doors are closed. Jesus said: '*Compelle intrare*' (*'Urge them to enter', Vulgate, Luke 14:21-23*). Priests should keep the doors open, but the vergers close them to earn thirty sous. However, an old woman has seen your embarrassment, she comes to you and points to a bell next to a small wicket-gate. You understand, you ring, the wicket opens, the verger appears; you ask to see the church, the verger takes a bunch of keys and approaches the gate. Just as you are about to enter the church, you feel a tug on your sleeve; it is the obliging old woman whom you, ungratefully, forgot and who followed you. Tip. There you are in the church; you contemplate, you admire, you exclaim. 'Why is there a green curtain covering

this painting?' 'Because it is the most beautiful painting in the church,' says the verger. Hang on. Here one hides beautiful paintings, when elsewhere one would display them. 'Who painted it?' 'Rubens.' 'I would like to see it.' The verger leaves you and returns a few minutes later with a very grave and sad-looking individual. It is the custodian. This good man presses a spring, the curtain opens, you view the painting. Once the painting has been viewed, the curtain closes, and the custodian gives you a meaningful bow. Tip. Continuing your walk through the church, still towed behind the verger, you arrive at the choir gate, which is firmly locked, and before which stands a magnificent figure splendidly accoutred, it is the Swiss, who has been warned of your passage and who is waiting for you. The choir is behind the Swiss. You tour it. As you leave, your plumed and braided guide greets you majestically. Tip. The Swiss returns you to the verger. You pass in front of the sacristy. O miracle! It is open. You enter. Here is a sacristan. The verger leaves with dignity, since it is right to leave the sacristan to his prey. The sacristan takes hold of you, shows you the ciboria, the chasubles, the stained-glass windows that you could see very well without him, the bishop's mitres, and, beneath a pane of glass, in a box lined with faded white satin, the skeleton of some saint dressed like a troubadour. The sacristy has been viewed, the sacristan remains. Tip. The verger leads the way back. Here is the staircase to the towers. The view from the top of the great bell-tower must be beautiful, you wish to ascend. The verger pushes the door open, silently; you climb about thirty steps of the Vis-de-Saint-Gilles (*a reference to the twelfth century winding staircase at the former Abbey of Saint Gilles, Gard*). Then the passage is suddenly barred to you. There's a closed door. You turn round. You are alone. The verger is no longer there. You knock. A face appears at a peephole. It is the bellringer. He opens it and says to you: 'Come up, Monsieur'. Tip. You go up, the bellringer fails to follow; so much the better, you think; you breathe, you enjoy being alone, you thus happily reach the summit-platform of the tower. There, you look around, you walk to and fro, the sky is blue, the landscape is superb, the horizon is immense. Suddenly, you realise that for some moments an unwelcome being has been following you and elbowing you and muttering obscure phrases in your ears. This is the sworn and privileged 'explainer', charged with commenting to strangers on the magnificence of the bell-tower, the church and the landscape. This fellow is usually a stutterer. Sometimes he stutters and is also deaf. You choose not to listen to him, you let him babble at leisure, and forget him while

contemplating the enormous croup of the church, from which the flying buttresses emerge like dissected ribs, the thousand details of the stone spire, the roofs, the streets, the gables, the roads that run in all directions like the spokes of a wheel whose rim is the horizon and whose hub is the city, the plain, the trees, the rivers, the hills. When you have seen everything, you think about descending, you head towards the turret of the staircase. The man stands before you. Tip. 'That's fine, sir,' he says, pocketing your offering; 'now would you give me a little for myself?' 'What! What have I just given you?' 'That's for the church, Monsieur, to which I owe two francs per person; but now, Monsieur understands, I need a little something for myself.' Tip. You descend. Suddenly, a trapdoor opens next to you. It's the bell-cage. You must see the bells in this beautiful bell-tower. A young fellow shows them to you and names them. Tip. At the bottom of the bell-tower you find the verger, who has waited for you, patiently, and who escorts you, respectfully, to the threshold of the church. Tip. You return to your hotel, and you are careful not to ask for directions from any passer-by, because they would seize the opportunity to extract a tip. You have hardly set foot in the inn, when you see someone coming towards you with a friendly air, a figure who is completely unknown to you. It is the steward who returns your passport. Tip. You dine, the time of departure arrives, the servant brings you the bill. Tip. A stable-lad carries your luggage to the stagecoach, or the *schnellpost* (*express mail coach*). Tip. An attendant hoists it onto the luggage rack. Tip. You enter the carriage, you leave, night falls; all will commence again tomorrow.

Let us recap: tip to the driver, tip to the postilion, tip to the luggage-retriever, tip to the wheelbarrow-pusher, tip to the man *who is not from the hotel*, tip to the old woman, tip for Rubens, tip to the Swiss, tip to the sacristan, tip to the bellringer, tip to the mutterer, tip to the church, tip to the sub-bellringer, tip to the verger, tip to the steward, tip to the servants, tip to the stable-lad, tip to the attendant: that's eighteen tips in a day. Subtract those regarding the church, which proved very expensive, and nine remain. Now calculate all these tips based on a minimum of fifty centimes and a maximum of two francs, which is sometimes obligatory, and you have a worrying large sum. Don't forget that every tip has to involve a silver coin. Copper coins and sous are shavings and sweepings which the lowest fellow contemplates with inexpressible disdain.

For these ingenious people, the traveller is nothing but a purse to be deflated as quickly as possible. Everyone is at it, individually. The government itself sometimes gets involved; it takes your trunk and portmanteau, loads them on its shoulders, and offers you a hand. In the bigger cities, the baggage porters owe the royal treasury twelve sous and two liards per traveller. I had not been in Aix-la-Chapelle for a quarter of an hour before I had already bought the King of Prussia a drink.

Letter XIII: Andernach

Andernach

I am writing to you again from Andernach, on the banks of the Rhine, at which I disembarked three days ago. Andernach is a former Roman municipality (*Antunnacum*) replaced by a Gothic township that still exists. The landscape from my window is delightful. I have before me, at the foot of a high hill that barely allows me to see a thin slice of sky, a beautiful thirteenth-century tower, from the top of which rises, a charming feature that I have seen only here, another smaller octagonal tower with eight pediments, crowned with a conical roof; to my right the Rhine and the pretty white village of Leutesdorf, glimpsed among the trees; to my left the four Romanesque bell-towers of a magnificent eleventh-century church (*Saint Mary's Cathedral, the Mariendom*), two above the portal, two above the apse. The two large bell-towers of the portal are of an incised design, tall and unusual; they are square towers surmounted by four sharp, triangular gables, bearing in the interspaces four slate lozenges which meet at their summits in a point. Beneath my window, chickens, children, and ducks, quack, chatter and cluck in perfect harmony. In the background, further off, country folk are tending the vines — however, it seems this picture felt inadequate to the man of taste who decorated the room I occupy; next to my window he nailed another one, as a pendant no doubt: it is an image representing two large candlesticks placed on the ground with this inscription: *View of Paris*. By dint of racking my brains, I realised that it was, in fact, a view of the Barrière du Trône (*the twin monumental columns of the Vincennes Gate*) — it bears a likeness.

The day I arrived, I visited the church, beautiful inside, but hideously whitewashed. The Emperor Valentinian and a child of Frederick Barbarossa are said to have been interred there. No vestiges remain. A beautiful 'Christ in the Tomb' in the round; a life-size figure, from the fifteenth century; a knight from the sixteenth century in half-relief, leaning against the wall; and in an attic, a pile of coloured figurines, in grey alabaster, the debris from a commonplace but admirable mausoleum of the Renaissance: this is all that the hunchbacked, smiling bell-ringer was able to show me for the sacrifice of a small coin of silver-plated copper which here represents thirty sous.

Now I must tell you something real, an encounter rather than an adventure, which left in my mind the veiled and dark impression of a dream.

Leaving the church, which opens almost onto the countryside, I walked around the town. The sun had just set behind the high, cultivated and wooded hill, a heap of lava in prehistoric times and today a quarry extracting basalt millstones, which dominated *Antunnacum* two thousand years ago and today dominates Andernach, and which has seen the successive disappearance of the citadel of a Roman prefect, the palace of the kings of Austrasia, from whose windows those naïve princes of earlier times fished for carp in the Rhine, the supposed imperial tomb of Valentinian, the Abbey of the Noble Daughters of Saint-Thomas *('Our Lady Outside the Walls' which housed a hundred women in its convent*), and which now sees the old walls of this feudal city of the electors of Trier crumbling stone by stone.

I followed the ditch that runs alongside these walls, where labourers' hovels lean against each other familiarly today, and which serve merely to shelter cabbage and lettuce patches from the north winds. The part-dismantled but noble city still has its fourteen round or square towers, but converted into poor gardeners' lodgings; half-naked children sit and play on the fallen stones, and young girls sit at the window and chat about their lovers in the embrasures intended for catapults. The formidable castle (*the Electoral Castle*) that defended Andernach from attacks from the east is now nothing more than a vast ruin, the bays of its broken windows melancholically open to the rays of sun or moon, while the parade ground of the fortress is now a beautiful green lawn, where the women of the city bleach the linen in summer that they spun in winter.

After leaving behind me the large arched gate of Andernach, riddled with bullet-holes blackened by time, I found myself on the banks of the Rhine.

The fine sand between small turf lawns looked inviting, and I began to ascend the river, slowly, towards the distant hills about Sayn. The evening was charmingly mild; Nature was growing calm on the threshold of sleep. Wagtails came to drink in the river, and fled into the osier beds; above the tobacco-fields I saw carts pulled by oxen passing-by on narrow paths, carts laden with the basalt tufa with which Holland builds its dikes. Near me was moored a decked boat from Leutesdorf, bearing on its prow the austere and sweet word: *Pius*. On the other side of the Rhine, at the foot of a long, dark hill, thirteen horses were slowly towing another boat, which was assisted by two large triangular sails billowing in the evening breeze. The measured pace of the team, the sound of bells, and the cracking of whips reached me. A pale city was lost in the distance in the mist; and far away, toward the east, at the very edge of the horizon, the full moon, red and round like a Cyclops' eye, appeared between two eyelids of cloud on the brow of the sky.

How long did I walk like this, absorbed in the reverie of all Nature? I know not. But night had fallen, the countryside was completely deserted, and the bright moon was almost at its zenith when I awoke, so to speak, at the foot of an eminence crowned at its summit by a dark cube, around which were black silhouettes, some imitating gallows; others, masts with transverse yards. I climbed to the summit, stepping over sheaves of large, freshly-cut bean plants. The block, set on a circular mass of masonry, was a tomb wrapped in scaffolding.

Who was it for? Why the scaffolding? Set in the masonry was a low, arched door roughly closed by a few planks. I knocked on it with the tip of my cane; the sleeping occupant gave no answer. Then, by means of a gentle ramp carpeted with thick grass, and sown with blue flowers which the full moon seemingly had caused to open, I climbed onto the circular mass, and inspected the tomb.

A large truncated obelisk, set on an enormous block representing a Roman sarcophagus, the whole, both obelisk and block, of bluish granite; around the monument and as high as its summit, a slender framework traversed by a long ladder; the four faces of the cube pierced and open as if four bas-reliefs had been torn loose; and here and there, at my feet, on the circular platform, broken blades of blue granite, and fragments of cornices, the debris from an entablature, this is what the moon showed me.

I walked around the tomb (*in Weissenthurm, erected in 1797*), looking for the dead person's name. On the first three facades there was nothing; on the fourth I saw this dedication in glittering copper letters: *The Army of Sambre-et-Meuse to its Commander-in-Chief*; and, below these two lines, the moonlight allowed me to read this name, indicated rather than written:

HOCHE

The lettering had been torn away, but had left a vague imprint on the granite. That name, in that place, at that hour, and seen in that light, made a deep and inexpressible impression on me. I have always loved Hoche. Louis Lazare Hoche was, like General Marceau (*François Séverin Marceau-Desgraviers*), one of those great men, young, barely delineated, in whom Providence, wishing the Revolution to conquer and France to be dominant, anticipated Bonaparte; half-successful attempts, incomplete trials whom Fate shattered as soon as it had drawn, from out of the shadows, their finished, severe and definitive profile.

'So,' I thought, 'this is where Hoche died! — And the heroic date of April 18, 1797 (*the Battle of Neuwied*), came to mind.

I was unsure where I was. I looked around. To the north, was a vast plain; to the south, within rifle range, the Rhine; and at my feet, at the bottom of the mound that was like the base of a tomb, a village at the entrance to which stood an old square tower.

At that moment a man was crossing a field a few steps from the monument; I asked him in French the name of the village. The man — an old soldier perhaps, for war, as much as civilisation, has taught our language to the nations of the world —shouted: 'Weissenthurm,' then disappeared behind a hedge.

The name, *Weissenthurm*, means the *White Tower*; I recalled the *Turris Alba* of the Romans. Hoche died in an illustrious place. It was here, near this very spot, that almost nineteen hundred years ago (*55BC*) Caesar crossed the Rhine for the first time.

What is the purpose of the scaffolding around the monument? Are they restoring it? Or destroying it? I know not. I climbed the base, and, holding

onto the timbers, I looked into the tomb through one of the four openings made in the block. It was a small quadrangular chamber, bare, sinister, and cold. A ray of moonlight entering through one of the crevices highlighted a white form, in the shadows, standing upright against the wall.

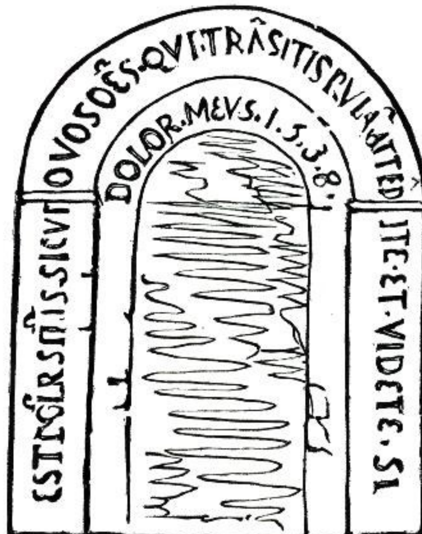
I entered the chamber via the narrow loophole, bowing my head, and hauling myself through on my knees. There, I saw in the centre of the pavement a round, gaping hole, full of darkness. It was through this hole, no doubt, that the coffin had once been lowered into the vault beneath. A rope hung down, and was lost in the night. I approached. I risked a glance into this hole, this shadow, this vault; I looked for the coffin; I saw nothing. I could barely make out the vague outline of a sort of funereal alcove, cut into the vault, which stood out in the gloom. I remained there, for a long while, my eyes and thoughts immersed, in vain, in the double mystery of death and night. A sort of icy breath issued from the hole in the vault as from an open mouth.

I can scarcely say what was happening within me. The tomb, encountered so suddenly, that great name, recognised unexpectedly, the gloomy room, the inhabited or perhaps empty vault, the scaffolding that I glimpsed through the breach in the monument, the solitude and the moonlight enveloping the sepulchre, all these ideas presented themselves at once to my thoughts, and cloaked them in shadow. A profound feeling of pity wrung my heart. This is what becomes of the illustrious dead, exiled or forgotten abroad! This funeral trophy raised by an entire army is at the mercy of the passer-by. The French general sleeps far from his country amidst a field of beans, and Prussian masons do what they please to his tomb. It seemed to me that I heard a voice coming from that pile of stones saying: *France must retake the Rhine*. Half an hour later, I was on the road back to Andernach, only two and a half miles distant.

I don't understand 'tourists.' Andernach is an admirable place. I travelled here through superb country. From the top of the hills the view embraces a circus of giants, from the Siebengebirge to the ridges of Ehrenbreistein. Here, there is not a stone in the buildings that is not a memory, not a detail of the landscape that is not a blessing. The inhabitants have those affectionate and kind faces that delight the stranger. The inn (*the Hôtel-de-l'Empereur*) is excellent, among the best in Germany. Andernach is a charming town; well, Andernach is a deserted town, no one comes here — they go where the hustle

and bustle is, to Koblenz, to Baden, to Mannheim; no one comes to a place of history, Nature, poetry; no one comes to Andernach.

I returned to the church a second time. The Romanesque ornamentation of the bell towers is of a rare richness and a taste both unusual and exquisite. The southern portal has strange capitals, and a large, deeply-carved archivolt. The obtuse-angled tympanum bears a Romanesque painting of the Crucifixion, still perfectly visible and distinct. On the façade, next to the ribbed doorway, a painted bas-relief, which is from the Renaissance, represents Christ kneeling, his arms outstretched, in an attitude of terror. Around him swirl and mingle, as in a dreadful dream, all the dread things of which his Passion will be composed: the paltry cloak, the reed sceptre, the crown with thorny florets, the rods, the pincers, the hammer, the nails, the ladder, the lance, the sponge of gall, the sinister profile of the bad thief, the livid mask of Judas with the purse around his neck; finally, before the eyes of the divine master, the cross, and between the arms of the cross, like a supreme torment, a most poignant pain of pains, a small column at the top of which stands a crowing rooster, that is to say, the ingratitude of, and abandonment by, a friend. This last detail is admirably beautiful. Therein lies the whole great theory of moral suffering, far worse than physical suffering. The gigantic shadow of the two tall bell-towers spreads over this sombre elegy. Around the bas-relief, the sculptor engraved a legend that I copied (sic):



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

‘O all you that pass this way, take note and see if there is any suffering like to my suffering.’

(*Vulgate, Lamentations1:12*)

In front of this severe facade, a few steps from this double lamentation, that of both Job and Jesus, charming little children, joyful and rosy, were frolicking on a green lawn and, with loud cries, were feeding grass to a poor rabbit, tame and frightened. No one else chose to *pass this way*.

There is a second beautiful church in Andernach (*the Christuskirche*). This one is Gothic. It is a fourteenth-century nave, now converted into a barracks’ stable, and guarded by Prussian cavalrymen, sabres in hand. Through the half-open door, a long line of horses’ rumps can be seen, disappearing in the shadows of the chapels. Above, on the portal, one reads: *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis.* Now, it is left to the horses, who are unable to read, to repeat the plea.

I would have liked to climb the curious tower, which I can see from my window, and which is, to all appearances, the ancient town sentinel; but the staircase is broken, and the vaults have collapsed. I was forced to abandon the idea. Yet, the magnificent ruin has so many flowers, such charming flowers, flowers arranged with such taste and maintained with such care at all the windows, that one would think it inhabited. It is inhabited in fact, inhabited, at one the same time, by the most coquettish and the fiercest of inhabitants, by that sweet invisible faery who lodges in all ruins, who appropriates them for herself, and for herself alone, who destroys all the floors, the ceilings, the staircases, so that human footsteps will not disturb the birds’ nests, and who places at all the windows and in front of all the doors flower-holders that she alone knows how to make, being the faery she is, out of some old stone hollowed out by the rain, or carved by time.

Letter XIV: The Rhine

Sankt-Goar, August 17th

You know, for I have often told you, how I love rivers. Rivers bear ideas as well as goods. Everything has its magnificent role in Creation. Rivers, like immense trumpets, sound forth to the ocean the beauty of the earth, the cultivation of the fields, the splendour of cities, and the glory of humankind.

And, as I have also told you, of all rivers, I love the Rhine. The first time I saw the Rhine was a year ago, at at Kehl[55], crossing the pontoon bridge. Night was falling, the carriage was moving slowly. I remember I felt a certain respect as I crossed the old river. I had wished to see it for a long time. It is never without emotion that I enter into communication, I almost said communion, with these great natural entities which are also great historical entities. Add to this, that the most disparate objects often seem to me to present, I know not why, strange affinities and harmonies. Do you remember, my friend, the Rhône at Valserhône? — We saw it together in 1825, on that sweet journey to Switzerland which is one of the luminous memories of my life. We were then in our twenties! Do you remember with what a cry of rage, with what a ferocious roar the Rhône rushed into the abyss, while the frail wooden bridge trembled beneath our feet? Well, since that time, the idea of the Rhône in my mind is that of a tiger, while the Rhine roused in me that of a lion.

This evening, at Kehl, at my first sight of the Rhine, the idea failed to trouble me. I contemplated, for a long time, that proud and noble river, violent, but lacking in fury, wild, yet majestic. It was swollen and magnificent at the moment when I crossed it. It wiped its tawny mane, its *muddy beard*, as Nicolas Boileau says *(see his 'Épîtres: Au Roi (I), Le passage du Rhin'*) on the boat-

[55] Letter IX — Kehl: 48°34'22.4"N, 7°48'39.6"E

bridge. Its two banks were lost in the twilight. Its noise was a powerful yet peaceful roar. I found something of the ocean therein.

Yes, my friend, it is a noble river, feudal, republican, imperial, worthy of being both French and German. There is a whole history of Europe, contained in its two great aspects, this river of warriors and thinkers, in its superb flood which makes France leap forth, in its deep murmur which makes Germany dream.

The Rhine unites everything. The Rhine is as swift as the Rhône, as wide as the Loire, as deep as the Meuse, as winding as the Seine, as clear and green as the Somme, as full of history as the Tiber, as regal as the Danube, as mysterious as the Nile, as glittering with gold as an American river, as full of fables and ghosts as a river of Asia.

Before history was written, before human beings existed perhaps, a double chain of volcanoes smoked and blazed where the Rhine flows today, volcanoes which died, leaving on the surface two lines of lava and basalt arranged parallel to each other like two long walls. At the same time, the gigantic crystallisations which form primitive mountains concluded, the enormous layers of alluvium which form secondary mountains dried, the fearful mass we now call the Alps slowly cooled, the snow accumulating there; two great flows from this accumulated snow spread over the land: one, the flow from the northern slopes, crossed the plains, encountered the double trench of extinct volcanoes, and fled from there to the Ocean; the other, the flow from the western slopes, descended the heights, skirted the second block of expired volcanoes that we call the Ardèche, and was lost in the Mediterranean. The first of these flows formed the Rhine; the second the Rhône. The first tribes that history witnesses on the banks of the Rhine were members of that great family of half-savage peoples who called themselves *Celts*, and whom the Romans called *Gauls*: *qui ipsorum lingua* CELTAE, *nostra vero* GALLI *vocantur*, writes Julius Caesar (*see 'De Bello Gallico' Book I, I*).

The Rauraci established themselves near the source, the Argentorati and the Moguntians nearer the mouth. Then, in time, Rome appeared: Caesar crossed the Rhine; Nero Claudius Drusus built his fifty citadels; the consul Munatius Plancus had already begun a city on the northern ridge of the Jura (*Augusta Raurica, now Augst*); Drusus built a fort at the mouth of the River Main (*a major tributary of the Rhine*), then he established a colony opposite Tuitium (*Deutz*): a senator, Antonius, founded a municipality under Nero

near the Batavian waters; and the whole of the Rhine was under the control of Rome. When one of the legions which had encamped under the very olive trees where Jesus Christ had lain, returned from the siege of Jerusalem, Titus sent it to the Rhine. The Roman legions continued the work of Drusus; a city seemed necessary to the conquerors to link the Melibokus hills to the Taunus mountains; and Moguntiacum (*Mainz*), sketched out by Drusus, was built by the legion, then enlarged by Trajan and embellished by Hadrian — A striking thing, and one which must be noted in passing! — This legion had, according to legend, brought with it one Crescentius, who was the first to carry the word of Christ to the Rhine and introduce the new religion. God wanted these same blind men who had overturned the last stones of the Temple near the Jordan, to lay the first stone on the Rhine — After Trajan and Hadrian, came Julian, who consolidated a fortress (*later Koblenz*), built by Drusus at the confluence of the Rhine and the Moselle; after Julian, Valentinian, who erected castles on the two extinct volcanoes which we call the Lowemberg and the Stromberg; and thus were founded, linked together and consolidated in a few centuries, like a chain riveted to the river, that long and robust line of Roman colonies, Vinicella (*Winkle*), Altavilla, Lorica, Trajani Castrum (*Trechtingshausen*), Versalia, Mola Romanorum, Turris Alba (*Weissenthurm*), Victoria (*Neuwied*), Rodobriga, Antoniacum, Sentiacum, Rigodulum, Rigomagus (*Remagen*), Tulpetum, Broilum, which started from the Cornu Romanorum at Lake Constance, descended the Rhine past Basilia, which is Basel; Argentoratum, which is Strasbourg; Moguntiacum, which is Mainz; Confluentes, which is Koblenz; Colonia Agrippinensium, which is Cologne; and, nearer the Ocean, reached Traiectum-ad-Mosam, which is Maestricht, and Traiectum-ad-Rhenum, which is Utrecht.

From then on, the Rhine was Roman. It was nothing more than the river watering the later Helvetic province, the first and second Germania, the first Belgium and the Batavian province. The hairy Gaul of the North, whom the toga-clad Gaul of Milan and the breeched Gaul of Lyon came to visit, out of curiosity, in the third century, the hairy Gaul was tamed. The Roman castles on the left bank kept the right bank in check, and the legionary dressed in cloth from Trier, armed with a halberd from Tongeren, had only to watch from the top of the rocks the old war chariot of the Germans, a massive rolling tower, with wheels armed with scythes, a pole bristling with pikes, drawn by oxen, and crenellated for ten archers, which sometimes ventured to the other side of the Rhine and even beneath the ballistae of the fortresses of Drusus.

That dread passage of men from the north to the regions of the south, which inevitably renews itself at certain climacteric periods in the life of nations and which is called the Invasion of the Barbarians, came to submerge Rome at the moment when Rome was destined to transform itself. The granite military barrier of the citadels of the Rhine was crushed by this outpouring, and there was a moment around the sixth century when the hills of the Rhine were crowned with Roman ruins as they are today with feudal ones.

Charlemagne restored the ruins, rebuilt the fortresses, and opposed the old Germanic hordes reborn under other names, the Boemans, the Abotrites, the Welebates, the Sarabes; he built, at Mainz, where his wife Fastrada was buried (*in Saint Alban's Abbey in Mainz, the tomb later transferred to Mainz Cathedral*) a bridge with stone piers, the ruins of which, it is said, can still be seen beneath the water; raised the aqueduct at Bonn; repaired the Roman roads of Victoria, now Neuwied; of Baccarachus, now Bacharach; of Vinicella, now Winkel; and of Thronus-Bacchi, now Trarbach; and built for himself, from the debris of a bath of Julian, a palace, the Saal, at Nieder-Ingelheim. But, despite all his genius and willpower, Charlemagne only galvanised dry bones. Old Rome was dead. The physiognomy of the Rhine had changed.

Already, as I have indicated above, under Roman domination a germ of life had been deposited, unnoticed, in the Rheingau. Christianity, the divine eagle which began to spread its wings, had laid its eggs among these rocks which contained a world. Following the example of Saint Crescentius, who, from 70AD, evangelised the Taunus, Saint Apollinaris had visited Rigomagus (*Remagen*); Saint Goar had preached at Baccarachus; Saint Martin, bishop of Tours, had catechised Confluentes (*Koblenz*); Saint Materne, before Tongeren, had lived in Cologne; Saint Eucharius had built a hermitage in the woods near Trier, and, in the same forests, Saint Gezelin (*of Schlebusch*), it is said, while standing for three years on a column, fought hand to hand with a statue of Diana which he finally brought down by merely gazing at it. At Trier itself, many obscure Christians had died the death of martyrs in the courtyard of the palace of the prefects of Gaul, and their ashes had been cast to the wind; yet those ashes were a seed.

The seed was in the furrow; but, as long as the Barbarians were active, nothing grew. On the contrary, there was a profound collapse in which

civilisation seemed to fail; the chain of fixed traditions was broken; history seemed to fade; the men and events of that dark era crossed the Rhine like shadows, barely casting a fanciful reflection on the river, vanished as soon as seen. Then, for the Rhine, after a historical lacuna, a wondrous age commenced.

The imagination of man, no more than Nature herself, accepts emptiness. When Mankind is silent, Nature fills the birds' nests with cries, makes the leaves whisper, and the thousand voices of solitude murmur. Where historical certainty is lacking, imagination brings shadows, dreams, and appearances to life. Fables vegetate, grow, intermingle, and flower in the gaps of truncated history, like hawthorns and gentians in the crevices of a ruined palace.

Civilisation is like the world itself, it has its nights and its days, its fullness and its eclipses; it vanishes and reappears. As soon as the dawn of civilisation reborn began to break above the Taunus, on the banks of the Rhine there was a delightful murmur of legend and fable; in all the regions illuminated by that distant ray, a thousand supernatural and charming figures shone forth, while in the darker places hideous forms and frightening phantoms were stirring. Then, while the Saxon and Gothic castles, now dismantled, were being built in fine new basalt, beside the Roman ruins now almost erased, a whole population of imaginary beings, in direct communication with its lovely girls and handsome knights, spread throughout the Rheingau: the *oreads*, who claimed the mountains; the *undines*, who claimed the waters; the *gnomes*, who claimed the interior of the earth; the Spirit of the Rocks; the Striker; the Black Hunter, crossing the thickets mounted on a large stag with sixteen antlers; the Maiden of the Black Marsh; the Six Maidens of the Red Marsh; Wotan, the god with ten hands; the Twelve Black Men; the starling who proposed riddles; the crow who croaked his song; the magpie who told the story of his grandmother; the dwarfs of Zeitelmoos forest; Everard the Bearded, who advised princes lost in the hunt; Sigefried the Horned, who stunned dragons in their caves. The Devil placed his stone at Teufelstein and his ladder at Teufelsleiter; he even dared to go and preach publicly at Gernsbach near the Black Forest; but happily, God erected, on the other side of the river, opposite the Devil's Pulpit, the Angel's Pulpit. While the Seven Mountains, that vast extinct crater, were filling with monsters, hydras and gigantic spectres, at the other end of the chain, at the entrance to the

Rheingau, the harsh wind off the River Wisper brought, as far as Bingen, clouds of little faeries as small as grasshoppers. Mythology grafted itself in these valleys onto the legends of the saints and produced strange results, bizarre flowers of the human imagination. The Drachenfels had, under other names, its Tarasque and its Sainte-Marthe (*Martha of Bethany, according to Tarascon legend, subdued the monstrous Tarasque*); the double fable of Echo and Hylas attached itself to the formidable Rock of Lurley (*the Lorelei Rock*); the serpent-maiden crawled in the underground passages of Augst; Hatto (*Hatto II, Archbishop of Mainz*), the wicked bishop, was eaten in his tower by his subjects, who had been changed into mice; the seven mocking sisters of Schönburg Castle were transformed into rocks, and the Rhine had its *maidens* as the Meuse had its *ladies*. The demon Urian crossed the Rhine at Dusseldorf, having on his back, folded in two like a miller's sack, the large dune that he had taken from the shore at Leiden to swallow up Aix-la-Chapelle, and which, exhausted with fatigue and deceived by an old woman, he dropped, foolishly, at the gates of the imperial city where the dune the Looseberg lies today. From that time, plunged in darkness, wherein magical lights sparkle here and there, in the woods, rocks, and valleys, only apparitions appear, visions, prodigious encounters, diabolical hunts, infernal castles, sounds of harps in the thickets, melodious songs sung by invisible singers, frightful bursts of laughter uttered by mysterious passers-by. Human heroes, almost as fantastic as the supernatural characters, Cunon of Sayn, Sibo de Lorch *Strong Sword*; Griso the pagan; Adalrich, Duke of Alsace; Tassilo III, Duke of Bavaria; Anthyses, Duke of the Franks; Samo, King of the Wends; wander terrified in these vertiginous forests, seeking, and weeping for, their beautiful, tall, slender white princesses crowned with charming names, Gela, Garlinda, Liba, Williswinda, Schonetta. These knights and adventurers, half-immersed in the impossible, and barely gripping real life by the heel, pass to and fro in the legends, lost towards evening in the inextricable forests, breaking through brambles and thorns beneath the hooves of their heavy steeds, as in Albrecht Durer's etching *Knight Death and the Devil*, followed by a scrawny greyhound, watched by imps among the branches, and sometimes accosting, in the shadows, a blackened charcoal-burner seated near a fire, who is Satan disguised, casting the souls of the dead into a cauldron; sometimes naked nymphs who offer them caskets full of precious stones; sometimes little old men, who return a sister, a daughter, a fiancée to them, whom they have found on a mountain asleep amidst a bed of moss, in the depths of a beautiful

pavilion covered with corals, shells and crystals; sometimes some powerful dwarf *whose word*, say the old poems, *is as good as a giant's*.

From time to time, among these chimerical heroes, figures of flesh and blood appear: first and foremost Charlemagne and Roland; Charlemagne at every age, as a child, a young man, an old man; Charlemagne, whom legend has being born at a miller's in the Black Forest; Roland, whom legend has being killed, not at Roncevaux by the blows of an entire army, but of love on the Rhine, in front of the convent of Nonnenwerth (*the island in the Rhine at Remagen*); later, the Emperor Otto the First, Frederick Barbarossa, and Adolph Count of Nassau, King of the Germans (*from 1292*). These historical figures, mingle in the tales with marvellous characters out of legend; there is a factual tradition that persists beneath the clutter of dreams and imaginings, a history that vaguely emerges through the fables, a ruin that reappears here and there beneath the flowers.

However, the shadows dissipate, the tales fade, day breaks, civilisation forms again and, with that, history takes shape once more. Here are four men from four different directions who meet, from time to time, near a stone on the left bank of the Rhine, a few steps from an avenue of trees, between Rhens and Kapellen (*Stolzenfels*). These four men sit on this stone, and there they make and unmake the emperors of Germany. These men are the four electors of the Rhine; this stone is the royal seat, the Königsthül.

The place they choose, roughly in the middle of the Rhens valley, which belongs to the Elector of Cologne, looks both to the north-west, on the left bank, to Kapellen (*Stolzenfels*), which belongs to the Elector of Trier; and to the south-east, on the right bank, to Oberlahnstein, which belongs to the Elector of Mainz, and Braubach, which belongs to the Elector Palatine. In an hour each Elector can reach Rhens from his home.

For their part, every year, on the second day of Pentecost, the notables of Koblenz and Rhens meet in the same place under the pretext of a festival, and confer among themselves regarding certain obscure matters; the beginnings of a town, and of a bourgeoisie, quietly making their den in the foundations of the formidable Germanic edifice already fully-constructed; a lively and eternal conspiracy of the little against the great, germinating audaciously near the Königsthül, in the very shadow of this stony throne of feudalism.

Almost in the same place, in the electoral castle of Stolzenfels, which dominates the small town of Kapellen, and is today a magnificent ruin, Werner, Archbishop of Trier (*Werner von Falkenstein*), lodged, and maintained, from 1388 to 1418, alchemists who failed to make gold, but who found on their way to the philosopher's stone several of the basic laws of chemistry. Thus, in a relatively short space of time, the same point on the Rhine, a place barely noticed today, which faces the mouth of the Lahn, saw the birth of empire, democracy, and science in Germany.

Thenceforth, the Rhine took on both a military and religious aspect. Abbeys and convents multiplied; churches halfway up the slope linked the riverside villages to mountain keeps, a striking example, renewed at every bend of the Rhine, of the way in which the priest should be situated in human society. The ecclesiastical princes multiplied the number of buildings in the Rheingau, as the prefects of Rome had done a thousand years before. Archbishop Baldwin of Trier (*Baldwin of Luxembourg*) builds the church at Oberwesel, and the bridge at Koblenz (*the Balduinbrücke*) over the Moselle; Archbishop Walram of Jülich (*Archbishop of Cologne*) sanctifies with a magnificently carved stone cross the Roman ruins and the volcanic peak of Godersberg (*at Bad Godersberg*), ruins and a hill suspected, to a degree, of magical powers. Spiritual power and temporal power are inherent in these princes as in the Pope. From that, stems their dual jurisdiction which oversees the soul and the body, as in purely secular states, without seeking the benefit of clergy. John of Bornich, chaplain of Sankt Goar, poisons his lady, the Countess of Katzenelnbogen, the poison being added to the communion wine; the Elector of Cologne, as his bishop, excommunicates him, and, as his prince, has him burned alive.

For his part, the Elector Palatine felt the need to protest perpetually against the possible encroachments of the three archbishops of Cologne, Trier and Mainz; and the Palatine Countesses as a sign of sovereignty, went to give birth in the Pfalz, a tower built in front of Kaub, on a rock, in the very centre of the Rhine.

At the same time, amidst the simultaneous or successive efforts to develop the prince-electors' authority, the orders of chivalry established positions on the Rhine. The Teutonic Order settled in Mainz, within sight of the Taunus, while, near Trier, within sight of the Seven Mountains, the Knights of Rhodes established themselves at Martinshof. From Mainz the

Teutonic Order branched out as far as Koblenz, where one of its commanderies gained a foothold. The Templars, already masters of Courgenay and Porrentruy in the bishopric of Basel, had Boppard and Sankt Goar on the banks of the Rhine, and Trarbach between the Rhine and the Moselle. It was this same Trarbach, the land of exquisite wines, the Thronus-Bacchi of the Romans, which later belonged to that Pierre Flotte (*Chancellor of France under Philip V*) whom Pope Boniface called *one-eyed in body* and *blind in mind*.

While princes, bishops, and knights were laying the foundations of their power, commerce was also establishing its colonies. A host of small merchant towns sprouted, in imitation of Koblenz on the Moselle and Mainz near the River Main, at the confluences of all the rivers and torrents which flow into the Rhine from the innumerable valleys of the Hündsruck, the Hohenruck, the Hammerstein ridges, and the Seven Mountains. Bingen was founded on the Nahe; Niederlahnstein on the Lahn; Engers, beside the Sayn; Irrlich, on the Wied; Linz, beside the Aar; Rheindorf on the Mahrbachs; and Berghein, on the Sieg.

However, in the gaps which separated the ecclesiastical princes and the feudal princes, the commanderies of the knight-monks, and the bailiwicks of the communes, the spirit of the times and the nature of place had given rise to a singular race of lords. From Lake Constance to the Seven Mountains, each hill-crest of the Rhine had its burg and its burgrave. These formidable Rhine barons, robust products of a harsh and fierce landscape, nestled amidst the basalts and heaths, in their crenellated dens, served like the emperor by officers on their knees, men of prey possessed of the conjoined characters of the eagle and the owl, powerful only in their neighbourhood, but all-powerful there, these barons, commanding their ravines and their valleys, raised soldiers, made the roads, imposed tolls, ransomed the merchants, whether they came from Saint Gallen or Dusseldorf, blocked the Rhine with their chains, and sent challenges, proudly, to the neighbouring towns when they ventured to affront them. Thus, it was that the burgrave of Ockenfels provoked the larger commune of Linz am Rein, and the knight Hausner of Hegau, the imperial city of Kaufbeuern. Sometimes, amidst these strange duels, the cities, feeling they lacked strength, were fearful and asked the emperor for help; then the burgrave would burst out laughing, and at the next patronal festival, would attend the town tournament mounted, insolently, on

his miller's donkey. During the terrible wars of Adolph, Count of Nassau, and Dietrich the First of Isenburg, several of these knights who had their fortresses in the Taunus, pushed their audacity to the point of pillaging a suburb of Mainz under the very eyes of the two pretenders who were disputing possession of the town. This was their way of displaying their neutrality. The burgrave was neither for Isenburg nor for Nassau; he was for the burgrave. It was only under Maximilian the First, when that great captain of the Holy Roman Empire, George von Frundsberg, had destroyed the last of the burgs, Hohenkrähen, that this formidable species of gentlemen savages, who began in the tenth century as hero-burgraves and ended in the sixteenth as brigand-burgraves, became extinct.

But one of those hidden movements whose results are only evident after many years was also being accomplished on the Rhine. At the same time as the spread of commerce, and in the same vessels, so to speak, the spirit of heresy, enquiry, and liberty ascended and descended this great river, along which, it seems, all the ideas of humanity were destined to pass. One could say that the soul of Tanquelin (*the itinerant preacher Tanchelm*), who in the twelfth century preached against the Pope before the cathedral in Antwerp, escorted by three thousand armed sectarians, with the pomp and equipage of a king, ascended the Rhine after his death and thereby inspired Jan Hus in his house in Constance, then descended again, from the Alps to the Rhône, and brought forth Doucin (*a second Fra Dolcino, leader of the Dulcinian reformist movement, executed in 1307 for heresy?*) in the county of Avignon. Jan Hus was burned, Doucin was quartered. Martin Luther's hour had not yet struck. In the ways of Providence, there are men destined to eat green fruit and others ripe fruit.

However, the sixteenth century was dawning. The Rhine, in the fourteenth century, had seen, not far from its course, the birth of artillery, in Nuremberg; and in the fifteenth, on its very bank, in Strasbourg, of printing (*Johannes Gutenberg's movable-type printing press*). In 1400, Cologne had cast a famous culverin fourteen feet long. In 1471, Wendelin von Speyer printed his Bible (*in Venice, in Italian*). A new world was about to emerge, and, remarkably and a fact worthy of emphasis, it was on the banks of the Rhine that those two mysterious tools with which God works ceaselessly for the civilisation of man, the cannon and the printed book, war and ideas, had been re-invented and taken on a new form.

The Rhine, as regards the destiny of Europe, has a kind of providential significance. It is the great transverse ditch that separates the South from the North. Providence has made it the river that acts as a border; fortresses have made it the river that acts as a wall. The Rhine has seen the faces, and reflected the forms, of almost all the great men of warfare who, for thirty centuries, have ploughed the old continent with that ploughshare called the sword. Caesar crossed the Rhine, ascending from the south; Attila crossed the Rhine descending from the north. Clovis won the Battle of Tolbiac there. Charlemagne and Bonaparte reigned there. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, Emperor Rudolf the First of Hapsburg, and the Elector Palatine, Frederick the First, displayed their greatness, and were victorious, and formidable there. Gustavus Adolphus (*King of Sweden*) commanded his armies there from the top of the sentry-box at Kaub. Louis XIV saw the Rhine. *The Duke of Enghien (in 1804) and the great Condé* (*in 1672*) *crossed it.* Alas, Turenne too (*killed at Sasbach, in 1675*)! Drusus has his stone in Mainz (*the Drususstein*), as François Marceau does in Koblenz (*the pyramid-tomb designed by Jean-Baptiste Kléber, though his remains are in the Panthéon*), and Lazare Hoche at Andernach (*reburied there in 1919, having been first interred beside Marceau at Fort Petersberg in Koblenz*). To the eye of the thinker who views history as a living thing, two great eagles perpetually soar over the Rhine, the eagle of the Roman legions and the eagle of the regiments of France.

This noble Rhine, which the Romans called *Rhenus superbus*, sometimes carried the lines of boats bristling with lances, spears or bayonets which bore to Germany the armies of Italy, Spain and France, or bore to the old Roman world, always geographically adjacent, the barbarian hordes, forever the same; sometimes peacefully transported the fir-trees of the Murg and Saint Gallen, the porphyries and serpentines of Basel, the potash of Bingen, the salt of Karlshall, the leathers of Stromberg, the quicksilver of Lansberg, the wines of Johannisberg and Bacharach, the slates of Kaub, the salmon of Oberwesel, the cherries of Bad Salzig, the charcoal of Boppard, the tinware of Koblenz, the glassware of the Moselle, the wrought iron of Bendorf, the tuffs and millstones of Andernach, the sheets of Neuwied, the mineral water of Antoniustein, the cloths and pottery of Vallendar, the red wines of the Aar, the copper and lead of Linz, the cut stone of Königswinter, the wools and silks of Cologne; and it majestically fulfilled, in its passage through Europe, in accord with the will of God, its double function of river of war and river of peace, displaying, uninterruptedly, on the dual line of hills which encloses

the most notable part of its course, on the one side oak-trees, on the other vineyards, that is to say on the one side the north, on the other the south; on the one side strength, on the other joy.

The Rhine did not exist for Homer. It was one of the likely, though unknown, rivers of that dark land of the Cimmerians, on which it rained incessantly and which never saw the sun. For Virgil, it was not an unknown river, but the icy river, *Frigora Rheni* (*see Virgil 'Eclogues' X, 47*). For Shakespeare it was a source of 'Rhenish' wine (*'Hamlet' Act V Scene 1*). For us until the day when the Rhine becomes Europe's burning question, it is an opportunity for a fashionable and picturesque excursion, the promenade-ground of the idlers of Ems, Baden, and Spa. Petrarch visited Aix-la-Chapelle, but failed I think to mention the Rhine.

Geography grants, through the inflexible stubbornness of hills, basins and slopes, which all the Congresses of the world cannot thwart for long, geography grants the left bank of the Rhine to France. Divine Providence thrice granted it both banks. Under Pepin the Short, under Charlemagne, and under Napoleon.

Pepin the Short's empire straddled the Rhine. It included France proper, less Aquitaine and Gascony, and Germany proper, up to and including the state of Bavaria.

Charlemagne's empire was twice as large as Napoleon's. It is true, and a considerable fact, that Napoleon possessed three empires, or, to put it better, was emperor in three ways: immediately and directly, of the French empire; mediately and through his brothers, of Spain, Italy, Westphalia and Holland, kingdoms which he had made the buttresses of his central empire; morally and by right of supremacy, of Europe, which was no more than the base, more deeply invaded day by day, of his prodigious imperial edifice. Understood in this way, Napoleon's empire was at least as large as Charlemagne's.

Charlemagne, whose empire had the same central point, and the same extended axes as Napoleon's, seized, and agglomerated, about Pepin the Short's heritage: Saxony as far as the Elbe, Germany as far as the Saal, Slavonia as far as the Danube, Dalmatia as far as Cattaro (*Kotor, Montenegro, on the Škurda River*), Italy as far as Gaeta, Spain as far as the Ebro. In Italy he halted only at the borders of Campania, and the Greek colonies, and in Spain only at the borders with the Moors.

When this immense conglomeration dissolved for the first time, in 843, Louis the Pious having died (*in 840*) and the Moors having recovered that whole slice of Spain between the rivers Ebro and El Llobregat, from the three pieces into which the remaining empire divided there was enough to make one emperor, Lothair I, who reigned in Italy and a large triangular fragment of Gaul, and two kings, Louis the German, in Germany, and Charles II, the Bald, in France. Then, in 855, when the first of these three fragments was divided in turn, from the pieces of that fraction of Charlemagne's empire it was still possible to make one emperor, Louis II (*the eldest son of Lothair I and nephew of Louis the German*), reigning in Italy; a king, Charles of Provence (*youngest son of Lothair I*), holding Provence and Burgundy; and another king, Lothair II (*the second eldest son of Lothair I*), with Austrasia, which was thereafter called Lotharingia, and then Lorraine. When the time came for the second fragment, the kingdom of Louis the German, to be torn apart, the largest section formed the German Empire, and the smaller an anthill of innumerable counties, duchies, principalities and free cities, protected by the margraviates, guardians of the borders. Finally, when the third fragment, the state of Charles the Bald, bent and broke under the burden of the years and its princes, the last remnants were enough to support a king, the King of France; five sovereign dukes, of Burgundy, Normandy, Brittany, Aquitaine and Gascony; and three count-princes, the Count of Champagne, the Count of Toulouse and the Count of Flanders.

These emperors were Titans. They held the universe in their hands for a moment, then death drew their fingers apart, and everything fell to ruin.

One might say that the right bank of the Rhine belonged to Napoleon as it had to Charlemagne. Bonaparte dreamed not of a mere duchy of the Rhine, as some mediocre politicians had done during the long struggle of the House of France against the House of Austria. He knew that a longitudinal kingdom that is not insular cannot last; it folds and splits in two at the first violent shock. One principality must not affect the basic order; profound order is necessary for States to maintain themselves and resist disintegration. With some mutilation and agglomeration, the emperor accepted the Confederation of the Rhine as geography and history had wrought it, and was content to systematise it. The Confederation of the Rhine needed to stand up to, and obstruct, both North and South. It was aligned against France, the emperor turned it about. His strategy was steered by a hand that placed and moved

empires, with the strength of a giant and the sagacity of a chess player. By elevating the princes of the Rhine, the emperor understood that he was augmenting the crown of France and diminishing the crown of Germany. Indeed, these electors who became kings, these margraves and landgraves who became grand dukes, gained in escarpments on the borders of Austria and Russia what they lost on the border with France, enhanced in front, belittled behind, kings to the emperors of the North, prefects to Napoleon.

Thus, the Rhine has seen four quite distinct phases, displaying four clear physiognomies. The first phase was the antediluvian and perhaps pre-Adamite era, of the volcanoes; the second phase: the ancient historical era, the struggles of Germany against Rome, in which the Caesars shine; the third phase: the marvellous era in which Charlemagne emerges; and the fourth phase: the modern historical era, the struggles of Germany and France, dominated by Napoleon. For, whatever the writer does to avoid the monotony of glory, when one scans European history from one end to the other, Caesar, Charlemagne, and Napoleon are the three enormous militaristic, or rather millennial, milestones one always finds on the way.

And now, to end with a final observation, the Rhine, a river blessed by providence, also seems to be a symbolic river. In its flow, in its course, in the environments it crosses, it is, so to speak, the image of civilisation, which it has already served greatly, and will, in future, serve even more. It descends from Constance to Rotterdam, from the land of eagles to the city of herrings, from the city of popes, councils, and emperors to a trading post of merchants and the bourgeoisie, from the Alps to the Ocean, as humanity itself has descended from lofty, immutable, inaccessible, serene, resplendent ideas, to broadly mobile, stormy, dark, utilitarian, navigable, dangerous, and unfathomable ideas, which command everything, bear everything, fertilise everything, and engulf everything; descended, that is, from theocracy to democracy, from one great system to another.

Letter XV: Mouse Castle (*Burg Maus*)

Sankt Goar, August

Last Saturday it rained all morning. I had taken passage to Andernach on the steamship *Stadt Manheim*. We had ascended the Rhine for a few hours when suddenly, the westerly wind, the Favonius of Virgil and Horace, the same that, under the name Foehn, brings such terrible storms to Lake Constance, pierced, on whim, as it is usually from that direction the clouds come, with a stroke of its wing the great vault of cloud that we had above our heads and began to disperse the wreckage to all the corners of the sky with childish joy. In a few minutes the true and eternal blue dome reappeared resting on the four corners of the horizon, and a warm midday ray brought all the passengers back on deck.

At that moment, still *between the vines and the oaks*, we were passing in front of a picturesque old village on the right bank, Wellmich[56] (*part of Sankt Goarshausen*), whose Romanesque bell-tower, today stupidly castrated and restored, was adorned a few years ago by four pointed turrets like the military tower of a burgrave. Above Wellmich rose, almost vertically, one of those enormous lava banks along the Rhine whose cross-section resembles, in disproportionate proportion, that of a tree trunk sliced in half by the woodcutter's axe. On this volcanic ridge, stood a superb though ruined feudal fortress, of the same stone and the same colour, as if it were a natural outgrowth of the mountain. On the very edge of the Rhine a group of young washerwomen, were chattering away, while gaily beating their linen in the sun.

This cliff tempted me; I disembarked there. I knew the ruined castle[57] (*now restored*) of Wellmich as one of the most infamous and least visited on

[56] Letter XI — Wellmich (part of Sankt Goarshausen): 50°10'17.0"N, 7°41'34.1"E

[57] Letter XI — Mouse Castle (Burg Maus): 50°10'18.8"N, 7°41'46.0"E

the Rhine. To travellers, it is a site difficult of approach and even, it is said, dangerous. To the countryfolk, it is full of spectres and a source of fearful stories. It is inhabited by living flames which vanish into inaccessible underground passages during the day, and only become visible at night at the top of the great round tower. This great tower itself is simply the above-ground extension of an immense well, now in-filled, which once pierced the entire mountain, and descended below the level of the Rhine. Into this well, a lord of Wellmich, a Falkenstein, that fatal name in legends, who lived in the fourteenth century, had whoever he saw fit among passers-by, or among his vassals, thrown, without confession. It is all these troubled souls who, it is said, now inhabit the castle. At that time, there was in the bell tower of Wellmich a silver bell given and blessed by Winfried, Bishop of Mainz, in 740AD, a memorable time when Constantine V was Emperor of Rome in Constantinople, when the pagan king Marsilius, according to legend, had four kingdoms in Spain, and when King Clothaire IV (*Chlothar IV*) is said to have reigned over the Franks, he who was later excommunicated, with triple excommunication, by Saint Zachary, the fifty-first pope. This silver bell was only rung for the forty-hours of prayer when a lord of Wellmich was seriously ill and in danger of death. Now, Falkenstein, who did not believe in God, nor even the devil, and who lacked funds, coveted this beautiful bell. He had it torn from the bell-tower and brought to his keep. The prior of Wellmich was moved to approach this lord, in chasuble and stole, preceded by two altar boys carrying the cross, to ask for his bell back. Falkenstein began to laugh and shouted at him: '*You desire your bell? Well, you shall have it, nor will it ever leave you*'. Having said this, he had the priest thrown into the well with the silver bell tied around his neck. Then, on the lord's orders, sixty ells (*seventy-five yards*) of the well were filled with large stones, above the priest and the bell. A few days later, Falkenstein suddenly fell ill. When night came, the astrologer and the physician who were keeping watch over their lord, heard with terror the tolling of the silver bell sounding from the depths of the earth. The next day Falkenstein was dead. Since that time, every year, on the night of January 18, the anniversary of Falkenstein's death, and the day of commemoration of Saint Peter's first sermon in Rome, the silver bell can be distinctly heard ringing beneath the mountain — such is one of the local legends — in addition, the neighbouring mountain, which encloses the Wellmich torrent on the other side, is itself claimed to be the tomb of an ancient giant; for the human imagination, which has rightly seen volcanoes as Nature's great

forges, has placed Cyclopes everywhere it has found mountains emitting smoke, and every Etna has its Polyphemus.

Thus, I began to climb towards the ruin, accompanied by the memory of Falkenstein and that of the giant. I should tell you that some children of the village had first shown me the best path, for which service I let them take from my purse whatever they wanted; for the silver and copper coins of foreign peoples, thalers, groschen, pfennigs, are strange and unintelligible things to their world and, indeed, for my part, I understand nothing of the barbaric currencies imposed by the Borussians (*Prussians*) on the land of the Ubians (*the Ubii, who populated Cologne*).

The path is indeed rough; but not dangerous, except for people prone to vertigo, or perhaps after heavy rain, when the earth and rocks are slippery. Besides, this accursed and much-dreaded ruin has the advantage over the other ruins of the Rhine of not being exploited. No official follows you on the ascent, no guardian of the spectres asks you for a tip, no locked and padlocked door blocks your way halfway up. One climbs, one scales the old basalt staircase of the burgraves which still reappears in places, clings to the brushwood and tufts of grass, and no one helps you and no one hinders. After twenty minutes, I was at the summit of the mountain, on the threshold of the ruin. There I turned and paused for a moment before entering. Behind me, below a postern gate transformed to a shapeless hole, rose a steep staircase transformed to a grassy ramp. Before me unfolded an immense landscape, geometrically, yet not coldly, composed of concentric views; at my feet, the village was grouped about its bell-tower, a bend in the Rhine about the village, and a dark crescent of mountains about the Rhine, crowned in the distance here and there with dungeons and old castles and then, around and above the mountains, the arch of the blue sky.

After catching my breath, I entered by the postern gate, and began to climb the narrow slope of turf. At that moment, the ruined fortress appeared to me in so dilapidated an aspect, in such a formidable and wild form, that I confess I would not have been in the least surprised to see some supernatural form emerge from beneath its ivy curtain carrying bizarre flowers in its apron: Gela, beloved of Barbarossa, or Hildegard, the wife of Charlemagne, that sweet empress who knew the occult virtues of herbs and minerals and who went botanising in the mountains. I glanced for a moment towards the northern wall, possessed by a vague desire to see rise up, suddenly, between

the stones those goblins *who are everywhere in the north*, as the gnome said to Cuno of Sayn, or the three little old women singing the sinister song of the folktales:

‘On the giant’s grave

I picked three nettle shoots;

I turned them into thread:

Take this gift, my sister.’

But I had to resign myself to seeing and hearing nothing, only the mocking note of a rock thrush perched somewhere about.

Now, friend, if you wish for a complete idea of the interior of this famous yet unknown ruin, I can do no better than to transcribe here what I wrote in my notebook as I walked there. It is a castle seen in a disorderly manner, minutely, but taken as I went, and in consequence a mere resemblance.

‘I am among the ruins. The round tower, though eroded at the top, is still of a prodigious height. Two-thirds of the way up are the vertical notches of a drawbridge whose bay is blocked. On all sides, immense walls with distorted windows still delineating rooms without doors or ceilings. Floors without stairs — stairs without rooms. Uneven, hilly ground, formed of collapsed vaults, covered with grass. An inextricable jumble. I have often admired with what jealousy, akin to that of a miserly owner, solitude guards, encloses, and defends what man has abandoned. It carefully arranges on the threshold the fiercest most bristly brushwood, the most vicious and best-armed plants, holly, nettles, thistles, hawthorn, heath, that is to say, more nails and claws than there are in a menagerie of tigers. Through those savage and snarling bushes, the brambles, those serpents of vegetation, stretch and slither and bite your feet. Here, however, as Nature never forgets ornamentation, this jumble is also charming. It is a sort of vast wild bouquet where plants of all shapes and species abound, some with flowers, others with their fruits, those over there with their rich autumn foliage: mallow, bindweed, bell-flower, anise, burnet, white mullein, yellow gentian, strawberry, thyme, deep-purple blackthorn, hawthorn which in August we ought to call red-thorn with its scarlet berries, the brambles’ long runners

laden with blackberries already the colour of blood. An elderberry. Two pretty acacias. An unexpected corner where some Voltairean countryman, taking advantage of others' superstition, has cultivated for himself a small patch of beet. Enough to make a lump of sugar. To my left the tower without door, window, or visible means of entrance. To my right, an underground passage its vaulting shattered. Changed into a chasm. A superb noise created by the wind, an admirable display of blue sky in the crevices of this immense ruin. I climb a grassy staircase into a kind of high room. I am there. Nothing but two magical views of the Rhine, the hills and the villages. I lean into the embrasure, at the foot of which is the underground chasm. Above my head two chimneys carved in blue granite, fifteenth century. Remains of soot and smoke in the hearth. Faded paintings in the window arches. Up above, a pretty turret without roof or stairs, full of flowering plants leaning down to look at me. I hear the washerwomen of the Rhine laughing. I go back down into a lower room. Nothing. Traces of excavations through the pavement. Some treasure buried by the gnomes that the villagers have sought. Another low room. A square hole in the centre leading to a vault. Two names on the wall: *Phaedovius, Kutorga.* I write mine beside it with a pointed sliver of basalt. Another vault. Nothing. From here I can see the chasm again. It is inaccessible. A ray of sunlight penetrates it. This underground passage is at the bottom of the large square keep that occupied the corner opposite the round tower. This must have been the burg's prison. A large compartment facing the Rhine. Three chimneys, one with small columns severed at various heights hanging there. Three shattered floors under my feet. At the rear, two vaulted arches. Over one, dead branches; over the other, two pretty swathes of ivy, balanced there, gracefully. I approach them. Vaults built on the raw basalt of the mountain which outcrops again here Traces of smoke. In the other large compartment which I entered first, and which must have been the courtyard, near the round tower, white plaster on the wall with a remnant of paint and two numbers traced in red: 23 — 18 — (*sic*)

I circle the outside of the castle along the moat. Rather a difficult scramble. The grass is slippery. You have to crawl from bush to bush above a deep precipice. Still no entrance or trace of a walled-up door at the bottom of the large tower. Remains of paintings on the machicolations. The wind turns the pages of my notebook, and makes it difficult for me to write. I am going to re-enter the ruin. I am there. I write on a small green velvet panel that the old wall lends me.'

I forgot to tell you that this enormous ruin is called *the Mouse* (die Maus). Here is why. In the twelfth century, there was only a small burg there, always watched and very often harassed by the lord of a large fortified castle located half a league further away, which was called *the Cat* (die Katz), an abbreviation of the name of its lord, Katzenelnbogen. Kuno von Falkenstein, to whom the puny burg of Wellmich fell as an inheritance, had the original burg razed, and built, on the same site, his castle, much larger than the neighbouring Katz castle, declaring that '*from now on it would be the Mouse who would eat the Cat*'.

He was right. *Die Maus*, in fact, although ruined today, is still a sinister and formidable creature, once armed and alive, with hips of lava and basalt, from the very bowels of this extinct volcano which, it seems, bears her with pride. I doubt that any have been tempted to mock the mountain which gave birth to this mouse (*a reference to Horace, 'Ars Poetica':* '*parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus: the mountains are in labour, a ridiculous mouse is born'*).

I stayed amongst the ruins until sunset, which is the hour of spectres and ghosts. My friend, it seemed to me that I had become a happy schoolboy again; I wandered and climbed everywhere, I turned over large stones, I ate raw blackberries, I tried to irritate the supernatural inhabitants, to tease them from the shadows; and, as I crushed thickets of grass, while walking at random, I felt the acrid odor, vaguely rising to my nostrils, of plants amidst ruins, which I loved so much in my childhood.

It is certainly the fact, after all is said and done, that with its evil reputation as a well as its host of souls and skeletons, this impenetrable tower lacking doors or windows has a lugubrious and singular appearance.

Meanwhile the sun had sunk behind the mountain, and I was about to do likewise, when something strange stirred, suddenly, near me. I bent down. A large lizard of extraordinary shape, about nine inches long, with a large belly, a short tail, a flat, triangular head like a viper, black as ink, and traversed

from head to tail by two golden-yellow stripes, was placing its four black feet, on legs like arms with prominent elbows, on the damp grass, and creeping slowly towards a low crevice in the old wall. It was the mysterious, solitary inhabitant of the ruin, its animal-spirit, a creature at once real and fabulous — a salamander — gazing at me, calmly, as it returned to its crevice.

Letter XVI: Over the Fields

Sankt Goar, August

I could barely tear myself away from the ruins. Several times I started to descend, then returned. Nature, like a smiling mother, lends herself to all our dreams and all our whims. As I was finally about to leave the Burg Maus, the idea came to me, and I confess I carried it out, of placing my ear against the base of the large tower in order to be able to tell myself, in all conscience, that if I had not entered, I had at least listened at the wall. I hoped for some noise, without flattering myself, however, that Winfried's bell would deign to ring for me. At that moment, oh wonder, I heard, with my own ears, honestly heard, a vague metallic quivering, the faint and barely distinct sound of a bell, which rose up towards me through the twilight, and seemed in fact to sound from beneath the tower. I confess that at that strange noise the lines Hamlet speaks to Horatio were suddenly brought to mind *('Look, my Lord, it comes' etc: Hamlet, Act I Scene IV)*, as if written there in luminous characters; I even believed that, for a moment, they had illuminated my mind. But I swiftly returned to the real world. It was the Angelus of some village lost far away among the folds of the valleys, that the wind obligingly brought me. No matter. I choose to believe, and relate, that I heard the mysterious silver bell of Wellmich ringing and chiming beneath the mountain.

As I was emerging from the northern ditch, which has become an extremely thorny ravine, the neighbouring mountain, the tomb of the giant, was suddenly visible. From the point where I was, the rock at the base of that mountain, very close to the Rhine, displayed the colossal profile of a head rearing backwards, its mouth gaping. It seemed as if the giant who, according

to legend, lies there prone, crushed and suffocated by the mountain's weight, had managed to raise the frightful mass a little, and that his head was already emerging from between the rocks, but that at that very moment Apollo or Saint Michael had set his foot on the mountain, so that the flattened monster had expired in that same posture with a great cry. The cry was lost amidst the darkness of forty centuries, the mouth remained open.

Nonetheless, I must declare that neither the giant, nor the silver bell, nor the ghost of Falkenstein, prevent the staked vines climbing from terrace to terrace close to the Maus. Too bad for ghosts who haunt a countryside of vineyards! Wine-making is at their door, and the tendrils of the vine will cling gaily to their ruins. Unless, of course, the hillside of Wellmich is cultivated by the spirits themselves, and it is necessary to apply to its strange winemakers the sentence that I read yesterday in some Teutonic guide to the banks of the Rhine: 'Behind the mountain of Johannisberg, is the village of the same name with nearly seven hundred *souls* who produce a very fine wine.'

However, even the thirstiest passer-by must beware of touching the grapes, bewitched or not. In Wellmich, we are in the Duchy of Nassau, and the laws of Nassau are ferocious with regard to rural offences. Any offender seized is required to pay a fine equal to the sum of the damage caused by all previous offences where the guilty parties escaped. Recently, an English tourist picked, and ate, a plum in a field, for which he was fined fifty florins.

I sought lodgings in Sankt Goar, which is on the left bank, three miles or so upstream from Wellmich. A boatman from the village took me across the Rhine, and dropped me politely at the King of Prussia's property, for the left bank belongs to the King. Then, as he left me, this good man gave me, in a mongrel language, half-German, half-Gaulish, further information about the route which I probably misunderstood, because, instead of following the road which runs along the river, I took to the mountain-side, thinking I was taking a short cut, and found myself somewhat lost.

However, as I was crossing the high reddish plateaus where strong winds blow in the evening, and trampling the freshly-cut stubble, a ravine suddenly appeared on my left. I entered it, and after a few moments of very steep descent, along a path that at times seemed like a staircase made of large slates, I saw the Rhine again. There I sat down; I was tired.

The daylight had not yet completely vanished. It was pitch-black in the ravine where I was, as in the valleys on the left bank, backed by large ebony-

hued hills; but an inexpressible pink glow, a reflection of the purple sunset, floated over the mountains on the far side of the Rhine and the vague silhouetted ruins that appeared to me on all sides. Before my eyes, in an abyss, the Rhine, whose murmur reached me, was hidden beneath a broad layer of whitish mist from which, at my feet, emerged the tall needle of a Gothic bell-tower half submerged in the fog. There was doubtless a town there, hidden by that sheet of vapour. I saw to my right, a few yards below me, the grass-covered roof of a large grey tower, dilapidated yet still standing, proudly, on the slope of the mountain, devoid of battlements, machicolations or staircase. On this roof, set in a section of wall that remained standing, there was a doorway, wide open since there was no longer a door, through which no human foot could pass. Above my head I heard some unknown passers-by talking as they walked the mountain-slope, and whose shadows I saw moving by in the darkness. The pink glow had vanished.

I rested there for a long time, seated on a stone, my mind quiet, watching, in silence, the passage of that dark hour when crepe-like smoke and vapour slowly hide the landscape, and the outlines of objects take on fantastic and lugubrious forms. A few stars seemed to catch, and nail to the zenith, the black shroud of night spread over half the sky, and the white shroud of twilight spread, sinisterly, over the other.

Little by little the sound of footsteps and voices ceased in the ravine, the wind died, and with it that gentle tremor amidst the grasses that maintains a conversation with the weary passer-by and keeps him company. No sound came from the invisible town; the Rhine itself seemed to have fallen asleep; a pale and livid cloud invaded the immense spaces, from west to east; the stars veiled themselves one by one, and above me I had nothing but one of those leaden skies where visible to the poet, hovers that great bat which bears written on its belly, the word *Melancholia*.

Suddenly a breeze arose, the mist parted, and cleared the church, and a dark block of houses, studded with a thousand lighted window-panes, appeared at the foot of the precipice, through the gap that had opened in the fog. It was Sankt Goar[58].

[58] Letter XVI — Sankt Goar: 50°08'60.0"N, 7°43'00.1"E

Letter XVII: Sankt Goar

Sankt Goar, August

One can pass a very well-spent week at Sankt Goar. One should take care that, from the very comfortable *gasthaus* Zur Lilie, one's windows allow a view of the Rhine. There, one is between the Cat and the Mouse. To the left, is the Burg Maus, in the distance, half-veiled by the Rhine mists; to the right, in front of one, the Burg Katz, a robust keep surrounded by turrets, which, at the top of the slope, occupies the tip of a triangle the other two corners of which the picturesque village of Sankt Goarshausen, on the banks of the Rhine and forming the base, marks with two old towers, one square, the other round. — The two hostile burgs watch each other, seeming to dart withering glances across the landscape; for, though a keep may be in ruins, its shattered windows still gaze outwards, with the hideous look of a gouged-out eye-socket. Opposite them, on the left bank, as if ready to call a halt to the machinations of the two adversaries, the colossal spectre of the castle-palace of the Landgraves of Hesse, the Rheinfels, stands and gazes.

At Sankt Goar, the Rhine is no longer a river; it is a lake, a real lake as in the Jura Mountains, seemingly closed on all sides, with sombre recesses, shimmering depths, and immense echoes.

If you keep to your room, you can enjoy the activity on the Rhine all day long: the rafts, the long sailing vessels, the little arrow-shaped boats, and the ten or so steam omnibuses that go to and fro, ascending and descending the river, passing by every moment, splashing like a large dog swimming, emitting smoke, and decked out with flags. In the distance, on the opposite bank, beneath beautiful walnut trees shading a lawn, you can watch the soldiers of the Duke of Nassau manoeuvring in their green jackets and white trousers, and listen to their boisterous drumming on behalf of a minor sovereign. Close by, under your window, you can watch the women of Sankt Goar go by in their sky-blue bonnets, like tiaras altered by a blow from a fist, and hear a

host of little children laughing and chattering as they come out to play in the Rhine. Why not? The children of Tréport and Étretat play in the sea. Besides, the children of the Rhine are charming. None of them have the harsh, severe look of English children, for example. The German children have an indulgent air about them like that of aged priests.

If you choose to go out, you can cross the Rhine for six sous, the price of a Parisian omnibus ride, and climb to the Burg Katz. It was in this manor of the Barons of Katzenelnbogen that the lugubrious adventure of the chaplain, John of Bornich, took place, in 1471. Today, *Die Katz* is a beautiful ruin, the usufruct of which is rented by the Duke of Nassau to a Prussian major for four or five florins a year. Three or four visitors effectively pay the rent. I leafed through the book in which foreigners are registered; and in the last thirty pages — about a year's worth — I saw not a single French name. Many German ones, a few English, and two or three Italian comprised the whole register. Moreover, the interior of the Burg Katz is completely dilapidated. The lower room of the tower in which the chaplain prepared the poison he employed on the countess is now used as a cellar. A few meagre vines twist about their stakes on the very spot where the portrait gallery used to be. In a small room, the only one with a door and a window, an engraving of Bohdan Khmelnytsky (*who created, between 1648 and 1654, an independent Cossack state in the Ukraine*) has been nailed to the wall, and at the foot of it one reads: *Belli servilis autor* (sic) *rebelliumque Cosaccorum et plebis Ukraynen*: *the instigator of the Ruthenian war, and the uprisings of the Cossacks and the Ukrainian people*. That formidable leader of the Zaporozhian Host (*responsible for the massacre of tens of thousands of Poles and Jews*) dressed in a costume that is somewhere between Muscovite and Turkish, seems to be looking askance, perhaps through the fault of the engraver, at a few portraits of currently reigning princes ranged around him.

From the top of the Burg Katz, the eye plunges into the famous narrows of the Rhine called the *Bank*. Between a sandbank and the square tower of Sankt Goarshausen there is only a narrow passage. On one side the narrows, on the other the sandbank. The Rhine has everything, even its own Scylla and Charybdis. In order to cross these much-feared narrows, a tree trunk called the *hund* is tied to the downstream side of the boats with a fairly long rope, and as they pass between the sandbank and the tower, they throw the tree trunk into the narrows. The narrows in their anger seize the tree trunk, so

that the raft is held downstream of the tower. When the danger is over, the rope is cut, and the narrows take the *hund*, as an offering to this Cerberus.

On the platform of the Burg Katz, one may consult the guide: *Where is the Bank?* It indicates a small fold in the Rhine at your feet. This fold is the dreaded narrows. One should not judge chasms by their appearance.

A little further upstream from the Bank, in a wild bend, the fabled Lorelei rock, with its thousand granite layers which give it the appearance of a collapsed staircase, plunges precipitously into the Rhine. There is a famous echo there which repeats, it is said, seven times everything that is said or sung to it.

If I were not fearful of appearing to diminish the reputation of this echo, I would confess that for me the echo has never achieved more than five repetitions. It is likely that the *oread* (*mountain nymph*) of the Lorelei, once courted by so many mythological princes and counts, is beginning to grow hoarse and bored. The poor nymph now has only one worshipper, who has dug two small rooms in the rocks opposite her, on the other bank of the Rhine, and spends his day playing his hunting horn, and firing gunshots at her. This man, whose task is to conjure up the echo, and who makes a living doing so, is a courageous old French hussar.

In truth, the effect of the Lorelei's echo on an unsuspecting passer-by, is extraordinary. The boat equipped with two small oars which crosses the Rhine at this point, makes a tremendous sound. If you close your eyes, you would think you were listening to a Maltese galley passing with its fifty large oars, each oar moved by four chained convicts.

Descending from the Burg Katz, before leaving Sankt Goarshausen, one should visit, in an old street parallel to the Rhine, a charming house from the German Renaissance, much disdained, of course, by its inhabitants. Then one turns right, crosses a torrent bridge, and plunges, to the sound of water-mills, into the 'Swiss Valley,' a superb, almost alpine ravine formed by the high hill of Patersberg and one of the rear ridges of the Lorelei rock.

The 'Swiss Valley' is a delightful walk. One can wander, visit the villages above, or plunge into narrow gorges so dark and deserted that in one of them I saw the freshly-turned earth and trampled grass created by the tusks and hooves of a wild boar. Or one can follow the bottom of the ravine, between rocks that look like cyclopean walls, beneath the willows and alders. There,

alone, deeply engulfed in an abyss of leaves and flowers, one can wander and dream all day and listen, like a friend admitted as a third party to a tête-à-tête, to the mysterious conversation of the torrent and the trail. Then, if one approaches the farms and the mills, by rutted lanes, everything encountered seems arranged and grouped in advance to furnish the corner of a Poussin landscape. There is a half-naked shepherd, alone with his flock in a tawny field, blowing strange melodies into a kind of ancient *lituus* (*Etruscan curved trumpet*). Here is a cart drawn by oxen, like the ones I saw in the vignettes from Virgil, printed by Louis-Etienne Herhan, that I used to pore over in my childhood. Between the yoke and each oxen's forehead there is a small leather pad embroidered with red flowers and dazzling arabesques. Young girls pass by, barefoot, their hair dressed like statues from the late Empire. I saw one who was charming. She was seated near a fruit-drying oven that was smoking gently; she raised her large, sad blue eyes, shaped like two almonds in a face browned by the sun, to the sky; her neck was laden with glass beads and necklaces artistically arranged to hide a nascent goitre. With that deformity and her beauty, one might have thought her an Indian idol crouching beside her altar.

One crosses a meadow, the mouth of the ravine widens suddenly, and one sees at the top of a wooded hill an admirable ruin. This schloss (*castle*) is the Reichenberg. It was here that, during the wars of the Middle Ages over feudal rights, one of the most formidable of these bandit knights who called themselves *scourges of the country* (*landschaden*) lived. The neighbouring town lamented in vain, the emperor could cite the emblazoned brigand at the Imperial Diet in vain, the iron-willed fellow shut himself in his granite home, boldly continued his orgy of omnipotence and plunder, and lived, excommunicated by the Church, condemned by the Diet, hunted by the emperor, until his white beard was down to his belly. I entered the Reichenberg. There is nothing left in that cave of Homeric thieves but wild scabious, the shadows of ruined windows wandering over the rubble, two or three cows grazing the grass among the ruins, a remnant of a coat of arms, mutilated by hammer blows, above the great door, and here and there, under the traveller's feet, stones pushed aside by the passage of reptiles.

I also visited, behind the Reichenberg hill, some hovels, barely visible today, of a lost village which is called the *Village of Barbers*. Here is the tale of this village:

The Devil, who had a grudge against Frederick Barbarossa because of his presence on two Crusades, had the idea one day of cutting off his beard. A truly magisterial trick, very fitting for a Devil to play on an emperor. He therefore arranged, with a local Delilah, an unanticipated act of betrayal whereby the Emperor Barbarossa, passing through Bacharach, was to be lulled to sleep, then shaved by one of the many barbers of the city. Now, Barbarossa, when still only the Duke of Swabia, at the time of his love affair with the beautiful Gela, had obliged an old faery who dwelt by the River Wisper, who now resolved to thwart the Devil. The little fairy, the size of a grasshopper, sought out a very stupid giant friend of hers, and asked him to lend her his bag. The giant consented and even graciously offered to accompany the faery, an offer which she accepted. The little faery probably made herself a little taller, then went to Bacharach on the very night that was to precede Barbarossa's visit there, and one by one took up all the barbers of the town while they were fast asleep, and placed them in the giant's sack. After which she told the giant to load this sack on his shoulders and take it somewhere far off. The giant, who, because of the darkness and his stupidity, had seen nothing of what the old woman had done, obeyed her and strode away through the sleeping countryside with the sack on his back. Meanwhile the barbers of Bacharach, knocking against each other randomly, began to wake, and struggle about inside the sack. The giant was fearful and redoubled his pace. As he was passing over the Reichenberg he raised his leg a little because of the tall castle tower, and one of the barbers, who had his razor in his pocket, and had pulled it free, cut a large hole in the bag, through which all the barbers escaped, though somewhat buffeted and bruised through landing in the undergrowth, while uttering terrifying cries. The giant thought he had a nest of demons on his back, and sped away as fast as he was able. The next day, when the emperor passed through Bacharach, there was no longer a barber to be found there; and, as Beelzebub arrived, a crow perched on the city gate said, mockingly to the Devil: 'My friend, you've been thwarted, someone's thumbed their nose at you.' Since that time, Bacharach has lacked even a single barber. It's impossible to this day to find even a shop to shave in. As for the barbers who were spirited away by the faery, they settled on the very spot where they had escaped from the sack, and built a village there which was called the *Village of Barbers*. And that is how Emperor Frederick I, kept his beard, and his nickname (*Barbarossa, Red-Beard*).

Besides the Burg Maus, the Burg Katz, the Lorelie Rock, the Swiss Valley, and the Reichenberg, near Sankt Goar there is also, the Rheinfels, which I mentioned to you a moment ago.

A whole mountain, hollowed out inside, with ruins on its summit ridge; two or more floors of chambers and underground corridors that appear to have been dug by colossal moles; immense piles of rubble, vast rooms each with an ogive fifty feet wide; seven dungeons, their oubliettes full of stagnant water that echoes, with a flat, dead sound, at the splash of a stone; the noise of watermills in the little valley behind the castle; and, through the crevices in the façade, the Rhine and a steamboat which, seen from this height, seems like a large green fish with yellow eyes that has been trained to carry men and carriages on its back, moving over the water; a feudal palace of the Landgraves of Hesse transformed to an enormous ruin; embrasures for cannons and catapults, resembling those stalls for wild beasts beneath the old Roman Circus, and on which grass grows; in various places, half-embedded in the ancient gutted wall, a ruined and choked spiral staircase, whose crude helix looks like some monstrous antediluvian shell; uncut slates and basalts which give the archivolts the profiles of saws or open jaws; large bulging timbers fallen in a heap, or, to put it better perhaps, lying on their sides as if they were tired of standing upright; such is the Rheinfels. One can view it for two sous.

It seems that the earth trembled beneath this ruin. It was no earthquake; it was the French Revolutionary Army passing through. In 1797 they slighted the Rheinfels.

A strange thing! Everything has collapsed, but not the four walls of the chapel. One cannot traverse this place of peace, alone preserved in the midst of this fearful citadel in ruins, without a certain melancholy emotion. In the window embrasures one reads these grave inscriptions, two per window: — *Sanctus Franciscus de Paula vixit 1500* — *Sanctus Franciscus vixit 1526.* — *Sanctus Dominicus vixit...* (half-erased) — *Sanctus Albertus vixit 1292.* — *Sanctus Norbertus, 1150* — *Sanctus Bernardus, 1139.* —*Sanctus Bruno, 1115* — *Sanctus Benedictus, 1140.* —There is still another name, half-erased; then, after having gone back, thus, through the Christian centuries, from halo to halo, one arrives at these three majestic lines: — *Sanctus Basilius magnus, episc. Cæsareæ Cappadoci, magister monachorum orientalium, vixit anno 372:* Saint Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, teacher of Eastern monks, lived in the

year 372. — Next to Basil the Great, below the very door of the chapel, these two names are inscribed: *Sanctus Antonius magnus. Sanctus Paulus eremita*... — That is all that the bombs and the mines have respected.

This formidable castle, in a state of ruin under Napoleon, had trembled before Louis XIV. The old *Gazette de France*, which was printed at the Bureau de l'Adresse, on the mezzanine floors of the Louvre, announced, on January 23rd, 1693, that 'the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel takes possession of the town of Sankt Goar and the Rheinfels, ceded to him by Landgrave Frederick of Hesse, who has decided to end his days in Cologne.' In its next issue, on February 5th, it announced that 'five hundred labourers are working alongside the soldiers on the fortifications of the Rheinfels.' A fortnight later, it proclaimed that 'the Count of Thüngen is having chains stretched across, and redoubts built on, the Rhine.' Why did this Landgrave flee? Why did these five hundred labourers work alongside the soldiers? Why these redoubts and chains hastily stretched across the Rhine? Louis the Great (*Louis XIV*) had frowned. The German war was about to recommence.

Today the Rheinfels, at the gate of which the ducal crown of the Landgraves, carved in red sandstone, is still embedded in the wall, houses the outbuildings of a farm. A few vines grow there, and a few goats graze. In the evening, the whole ruin, silhouetted against the sky with its openwork windows, is magnificent in its massiveness.

Ascending the Rhine a mile from Sankt Goar (the Prussian mile, like the Spanish *legua*, like the Turkish 'hour's march', is worth two French leagues, or five or so English miles), one suddenly sees, in the gap between two mountains, a beautiful feudal town spreading halfway up the slope from the banks of the Rhine, with ancient streets such as in Paris we only see depicted on the scenery at the Opéra, fourteen crenellated towers more or less draped in ivy, and two large churches of the purest Gothic period. This is Oberwesel, one of the towns on the Rhine which has seen the most warfare. The old walls of Oberwesel are riddled with cannon-shot and bullet-holes. One can decipher there, like a palimpsest, the large iron cannonballs of the archbishops of Trier, Louis XIV's Biscayans (*clustered small-calibre cannonballs*), and the canister rounds delivered by our Revolutionaries. Today, Oberwesel is an old soldier who has become a winemaker. His red wine is excellent.

Like almost all the towns on the Rhine, Oberwesel has a ruined castle, above it on the mountainside, the Schönberg, one of the most admirable

ruined fortresses in Europe (*now restored*). In Burg Schönberg, in the tenth century, there lived seven cruel, mocking *damsels* who can be seen today, through the breaches of their castle, transformed into seven rocks in the middle of the river.

The excursion from Sankt Goar to Oberwesel is most attractive. The road runs alongside the Rhine, which suddenly narrows there, confined between the high slopes. Ther are no houses, almost no passers-by. The area is deserted, silent, wild. Large banks of half-eroded slate emerge from the river and cover the bank like gigantic scaly integuments. From time to time, half-hidden beneath the thorns and osiers and as if lying in ambush on the banks of the Rhine, one glimpses a kind of immense spider, formed of two long, flexible, curved poles, crossed transversely and joined at their middle, with, at the highest point, a large knot attached to a lever, plunging its four points into the water.

It is indeed a spider. At times, amidst the solitude and silence, the mysterious lever is worked, and one sees the hideous insect slowly rise, gripping its web in its feet, in the midst of which a beautiful silver salmon leaps and writhes.

In the evening, after having previously consumed one of those magnificent dinners which fills the deep cavern of the stomach to the caecum, one returns to Sankt Goar, and encounters at the end of a long table, adorned at intervals with silent smokers, one of these excellent and honest German suppers the partridges of which are bigger than chickens. There, one sates one's remaining appetite wonderfully, especially if one knows how to adapt like the wanderer Ulysses to the national customs, and if one has the good sense not to demur at certain bizarre combinations served on the same dish, for example, roast duck with apple compote, or a boar's head with jam. Towards the end of the supper, a fanfare accompanied by musket-fire suddenly bursts forth, outside. People hurry to the window. The French hussar is raising echoes at Sankt Goar. The echo of Sankt Goar is no less marvellous than the echo of Lorelei. The thing makes an admirable sound. Each pistol-shot becomes a cannon-shot repeated by the mountain. Each flourish of the fanfare echoes with prodigious clarity from the dark depths of the valleys, in delightful, exquisite, veiled, but weaker and slightly ironic notes that seem to mock you, but caressingly. As it is impossible to believe that this vast, black and heavy mountain can be so minded, after a very few moments

the sincerest positivist is led by the illusion, into thinking, and being ready to swear, that there is over there, in the shadows, within some fantastic grove, a supernatural and solitary being, a faery of some kind, a Titania who amuses herself by parodying, in a delightful manner, our human music, and making half a mountain tumble and resound every time she hears a gunshot. It is at once fearful and charming. The effect would be even more profound if one could forget for a moment that one is dining at an inn, and that this extraordinary sensation is served you as if it were one more dessert dish. But everything happens in as natural a manner as possible; the operation completed, a servant, holding in his hand a pewter plate which he presents as a receptacle for offerings, makes a tour of the room for the hussar, who stands in a corner to preserve his dignity, and everything is over. All retire having paid their dues.

The End of Part IV of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part V: Letters XVIII-XX

'The Steeger Gate in Bacharach on the Rhine'
Nicolai Astudin (1847–1925)
Wikimedia Commons

Letter XVIII: Bacharach

Lorch, August 23rd

I am currently surrounded by the most beautiful, honest, yet unknown old towns in the world. I lodge in Rembrandt interiors, with cagefuls of birds at the windows, strange lanterns hanging from the ceiling, and, in the corner of the rooms, spiral steps that a ray of sunlight slowly climbs. An old woman and a spinning wheel with twisted legs grumble together in the shadows, trying to outdo one another.

I spent three days in Bacharach[59], a sort of Court of Miracles (*an area of beggars and thieves in Paris*) on a stretch of the Rhine, forgotten, due to Voltaire's good taste, by the French Revolution, by the battles of Louis XIV, by the cannonades of 1797 and 1805, and by the elegant and wise architects who build houses in the shape of chests of drawers and secretaries. Bacharach is truly the most ancient heap of human dwellings I have ever seen in my life. Next to Bacharach, the streets of Oberwesel, Saint-Goar and Andernach are, by comparison, akin to the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue de Bergère in Paris.

Bacharach is the ancient *Bacchi Ara* (*Altar to Bacchus*). It is as if a giant, who was also a dealer in bric-a-brac, wishing to open a shop on the Rhine, took a mountain as his set of shelves, and arranged on it, from top to bottom, with a giant's taste, a pile of enormous curiosities, commencing with a shelf beneath the Rhine itself. There, at water level, there is a lump of volcanic rock according to some; a Celtic menhir according to others; a Roman altar according to the rest, which is the *Ara Bacchi* itself. Then, on the bank of the river, two or three old worm-eaten ship's hulls are visible, sliced in two and planted upright in the ground, which serve as huts for fishermen. Then again, behind the huts, is a formerly-crenellated enclosure, buttressed by four square towers, the most chipped, the most machine-gunned, the most dilapidated

[59] Letter XVIII — Bacharach: 50°03'32.0"N, 7°46'14.2"E

ever seen. Then, set against the walls themselves, houses with pierced windows and galleries; and beyond them, at the foot of the mountain, an indescribable jumble of intriguing buildings, jewel-like hovels, with fantastic turrets; humped facades; impossible gables whose double staircase bears a bell-tower emerging like an asparagus stem on each step; frontages on which heavy beams trace delicate arabesques; volute-shaped attics; openwork-balconies; chimneys representing tiaras and crowns, smoking philosophically; and extravagant weather-vanes, which are no longer weather-vanes but capital letters from old manuscripts cut from a sheet of metal with a punch, and which creak in the wind (I had, among others, above my head an 'R' which spent all night naming itself: — rrrr.) Amidst this delightful jumble lies a square — a tortuous square, surrounded by blocks of houses fallen from the sky at random, and possessing more bays, islets, reefs, and promontories than a Norwegian fjord. On one side of this square two polyhedrons composed of Gothic constructions, overhanging, leaning, grimacing, while standing upright, and brazenly defying all geometry and all sense of balance. On the other side, is a beautiful and rare Romanesque church (*Saint Peter's*), pierced by a lozenge-shaped portal; surmounted by a tall militaristic bell-tower; joined to the apse by a gallery of small archivolts with black marble columns; and everywhere inlaid with Renaissance tombs like a jewelled shrine. Above the church, higher up the slope, are the ruins of another church (*the Wernerkapelle*), completed in the fifteenth century in red sandstone, now without doors, roof, or stained glass, a magnificent skeleton, standing proudly against the sky. Finally, as a crowning glory, at the top of the mountain, are the rubble, and ivy-covered remnants, of a *schloss*, the Castle of Stahleck, residence of the Counts Palatine in the twelfth century. Such is Bacharach.

This old town out of a faery tale, teeming with stories and legends, is inhabited by a picturesque population, all of whom, old and young, children and grandfathers, the ugly women with goitre and the pretty girls too, have in their eyes, in their profile, and in their bearing, an air of the thirteenth century. Which does not prevent the pretty girls there from being very pretty; on the contrary.

From the top of the schloss one has an immense view, and one discovers in the embrasures of the mountains five other ruined castles; on the left bank, Fürstenberg (*at Oberdiebach*), Sooneck (*at Niederheimbach*) and Heimburg (*Burg Hohneck, Niederheimbach*); on the other side of the river, to the west, one

glimpses the vast Gutenfels (*at Kaub, overlooking Pfalzgrafenstein, the toll castle on Falkenau island*), full of the memory of Gustavus Adolphus (*King of Sweden, who died at the Battle of Lützen, in 1632, during the Thirty Years' War);* and towards the east, above a valley which is the Wisperthal of fable, at the top of a hill, on a small eminence which serves as its base, a ruined black tower (*Nollig*), resembling the old Bastille of Paris, which is the inhospitable manor whose door, according to the legend, Sibo von Lorch refused to open to the gnomes on stormy nights.

Bacharach is sited amidst a wild landscape. Clouds, forever clinging to its high ruins, steep rocks, and turbulent water, fittingly envelop this austere old town, which is Roman, Romanesque, Gothic, and which steadfastly refuses to become modern. Remarkably, a belt of sandbanks bordering it upstream and downstream prevents steamboats from berthing, and keeps civilisation at a distance.

No discordant touch, no white facade with green shutters disturbs the austere harmony of the scene. Everything contributes to it, even the name, *Bacharach*, which seems like an ancient cry of the Bacchantes (*the wild female followers of Dionysus*) adapted to the Sabbath. I must say, however, as a faithful historian, that I only saw a milliner there, installed, with her pink ribbons and white bonnets, below a terrifying black ogive from the twelfth century.

The Rhine roars magnificently around Bacharach. It seems to love and guard the ancient town, proudly. One is tempted to shout: '*Well roared, lion!*' (*see Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Act V, scene I*). Within arquebus range of the town, it races along, and whirls about in a funnel of rocks, imitating the foam and noise of the Ocean. This fearsome passage is called the *Wildes Gefäert*. It is much more fearsome, yet much less dangerous than the 'Bank' at Saint-Goar — One should not judge chasms, etc.

When the sun pierces the clouds, and smiles through the windows, nothing is more delightful than Bacharach. All those decrepit and shabby facades brighten and blossom. The shadows of the turrets and weathervanes sketch out a thousand bizarre, angular shapes. Flowers — there are flowers everywhere — appear at the windows along with the women, and on every threshold, in joyous and peaceful groups, children and old people, everywhere warming themselves in the midday rays — the old people with that pallid smile that says: *No more!* the children with that sweet look that says: *Not yet!*

In the midst of these good people, a Prussian sergeant in uniform wanders about, looking like something between a dog and a wolf. And yet, whether it be the spirit of the country, whether it be envy of Prussia, I have not yet seen, in the picture frames hanging on the walls of the inns, any other portraits of great men than those of that conqueror with a somewhat rococo profile, a sort of Napoleon combined with Louis XV, a true hero, a true thinker, and a true prince moreover, Frederick II.

In Bacharach, a passer-by is a phenomenon. One is not only a stranger, one appears strange. The traveller is gazed at and followed with anxious eyes. No doubt because, no one deigns to visit this ancient, repudiated capital of the Counts Palatine, a dreadful hole which the *dampfschiffs* (*steamboats*) avoid, and which all the Rhine guidebooks describe as a *sad town*, except, that is, for a few poor painters wandering past with their knapsacks on their backs.

Nonetheless, I must also confess that in a study next to my room there was a lithograph representing Europe, that is to say two beautiful ladies with low-cut necklines, and a handsome gentleman with a moustache, singing around a piano, accompanied by this playful quatrain hardly worthy of Bacharach:

L'EUROPE

L'Europe enchanteresse où la France en jouant

Donne partout les lois de sa mode éphémère.

Les plaisirs, les beaux-arts et le sexe charmant

Sont les cultes chéris de cette heureuse terre.

Enchanting Europe, in which France, at leisure,

Shares, with all, the laws of ephemeral fashion.

The charming sex, the fine arts, and pleasure,

Are the cherished cults of that happy nation.

With the milliner and her pink ribbons, the lithograph, and that quatrain of the Empire, the dawn of the nineteenth century is beginning to break in Bacharach.

I had beneath my window a whole little world, happy and charming. It was a sort of backyard adjoining the Romanesque church, from which one can climb a steep lava staircase to the ruins of the Gothic church. There, all day long, with the tall grass up to their chins, three little boys and two little girls, who happily beat the three little boys, played. The sum of their ages could not have been much more than fifteen years old in total. The grass, slightly undulating in places, was so thick the ground was invisible. Amidst this grass, two green arbours laden with magnificent grapes stood joyfully, and amidst the vines, two scarecrow-mannequins, dressed like Lubins (*the title character in the 1762 French comic-opera 'Annette et Lubin' by Marie-Justine-Benoîte Favart*) from comic opera, with wigs and hideous three-cornered hats, were trying to scare the little birds, which did not prevent greenfinches, pipits, and wagtails from flocking to these bunches of fruit. In every corner of the little garden, starry sprays of sunflowers, hollyhocks, and daisies burst forth like showers of light in a firework display. Around these clusters, fluttered a living snow of white butterflies, mingled with feathers that had escaped from a neighbouring dovecote. Each flower and cluster had, moreover, its cloud of flies of all colours shining resplendently in the sun. The flies buzzed, the children chattered, and the birds sang; and the buzzing of the flies, the chatter of the children, and the song of the birds rose amidst a continuous cooing of pigeons and turtledoves.

On the evening of my arrival, after admiring this delightful garden till nightfall, the lava staircase attracted me and I took it into my head to climb, in beautiful starlight, to the ruins of the Gothic church, which was dedicated to Saint Werner who, it was claimed, was martyred at Oberwesel (*despite uncertainty about the manner of his death the claim led to pogroms against the Jews, along the middle and lower Rhine and the Moselle*). After climbing the sixty or eighty steps without banisters or guardrails, I arrived at the grass-covered platform, in which the beautiful dismantled nave is deeply rooted. There, while the city slept in deep shadow beneath my feet, I contemplated the sky, and the misshapen ruins of the Palatine Castle, through the black fenestration of mullions and rose windows. A gentle night wind barely bent the stalks of the withered wild oats. Suddenly I felt the earth cave, and sink beneath me. I

lowered my eyes, and by the light of the constellations, I recognized that I was walking on a freshly dug grave. I looked around me; black crosses with white death's heads were vaguely emerging from all sides. I then remembered the soft undulations of the ground lower down. I confess that at that moment I could not resist that kind of frisson that the unexpected grants. My charming little garden full of children's chatter, birds, doves, butterflies, light, life, and joy, was a cemetery.

Letter XIX: Fire! Fire!

Lorch, August

At Bacharach, when midnight comes, one goes to bed, one closes one's eyes, one lets go of the thoughts one has been carrying around all day. One arrives at that moment when within one there is both something awake and something asleep, when the tired body is already resting, but the stubborn mind is still at work, when it seems that sleep feels like life, and life like sleep. Suddenly a noise pierces the darkness and reaches your ears, a singular, inexpressible, dreadful noise, a kind of wild growling, at once threatening and plaintive, which mingles with the night wind and which seems to come from that high cemetery situated above the town where you saw that very morning the eleven stone gargoyles of the ruined church of Saint Werner open their mouths as if they were preparing to scream. You wake with a start, you sit up, you listen: 'What was that?' It was the night crier blowing his horn, and warning the town that all is well, so that it can sleep peacefully. So be it; but I scarcely think it possible to reassure people in a more troubling manner.

In Lorch[60] you can be woken up in an even more dramatic way. But first, my friend, let me tell you about the place. Lorch is a large town of about eighteen hundred inhabitants, situated on the right bank of the Rhine and

[60] Letters XVIII–XX — Lorch am Rhein: 50°02'38.8"N, 7°48'09.4"E

extending at right angles along the Wisper, whose mouth it marks. The Wisper valley is a valley of stories and fables; it is the country of those little grasshopper-like faeries. Lorch is located at the foot of the Devil's Ladder, a high, almost sheer, rock that the valiant Gilgen climbed on horseback to seek his fiancée, Gerlinde, hidden by the gnomes on the summit of the mountain. It was in Lorch that the faery Ave invented, according to legend, the art of weaving cloth to clothe her lover, the chilly Roman knight Heppius — who gave his name to Heppenheim. It is remarkable, incidentally, that, among all peoples and in all mythologies, the art of weaving fabrics was invented by a woman: in ancient Egypt, it was Isis; in Lydia, Arachne; in Greece, Athene; in Peru, Mama Ocllo, sister-wife of Manco Capac; in the villages of the Rhine, it was the faery Ave. The Chinese alone, it is said, attribute the invention to a man, the emperor Yao; though to the Chinese the emperor is not a man, he is a being of fantasy whose reality vanishes behind the bizarre titles with which they endow him. They know not his nature, for they call him the *Dragon*; they know not his age, for they call him *Ten-Thousand-Years*; they know not his sex, for they call him also *The Mother*. But what have we to do with China, here? I shall return to Lorch. Forgive me the diversion.

The first red wine from the Rhine was made in Lorch (*in Roman times, according to legend*). Lorch existed before Charlemagne, and left traces in charters from 732. Heinrich III von Virneburg, Archbishop of Mainz, enjoyed himself there, and resided there, in 1348. Today there are no more Roman knights, faeries, or archbishops in Lorch; but the little town is happy, the landscape is magnificent, the inhabitants are hospitable. The beautiful Renaissance house (*the Hilchenhaus, 1546*) on the banks of the Rhine has a facade as original and as rich in that genre as that of our Château de Meillant. Old Sibo's fabled fortress protects the town, which is threatened from the other bank of the river by the historic castle of Fürstenberg[61] with its large tower, round on the outside, hexagonal, it is said, on the inside. And nothing is more charming than to see this small, lively colony of country folk prospering happily between the two fearsome skeletons which were once two citadels.

[61] Letter XX — Burg Fürstenberg, Rheindiebach: 50°02'31.2"N, 7°47'16.1"E

Now, here is how one of my nights at Lorch was disturbed. Last week, at perhaps one in the morning, while the town was asleep, I was writing in my room, when I suddenly noticed that my paper had reddened under my pen. I looked up; it was no longer lit by my lamp, but by my windows. Both had become two large pink opal rectangles through which a strange reverberation reached my ears. I opened the windows and looked out. A wide arch of flame and smoke was curving a few yards above my head with a frightening noise. Quite simply, the Hôtel P…. the gasthaus next to mine, had caught fire and was burning.

In an instant the inn awoke, the people of the township were afoot, the cry of *Feuer! Feuer!* filled the quay and the streets, the tocsin rang out. I closed my windows and opened the door. Another spectacle. The great wooden staircase of my gasthaus, almost touching the burning building, and lit by large windows, seemed itself to be on fire; and on this staircase, from top to bottom, a crowd of burdened shadows with bizarre silhouettes jostled, pressed, and trampled. The whole crowd of guests were in motion, some in their underpants, others in their chemises, the travellers dragging their trunks, the servants the furniture. All these fugitives were still half-asleep. No one shouted or spoke. The turmoil was that of an antheap. The dreadful blaze filled the view behind their heads. As for myself, since everyone thinks of themselves at such times, I had very little luggage, I was staying on the first floor, and I ran no risk other than being forced to leave the inn by way of the window.

Meanwhile a storm had risen, it was pouring with rain. As always occurs when one is in a hurry, the hotel emptied only slowly, and there were moments of terrible confusion. Some wanted to enter, others to exit; the heavier furniture was being lowered from the windows, attached to ropes; mattresses, sleeping bags and bundles of linen were dropped from the rooftop onto the pavement; the women were terrified, the children cried; the country folk, awakened by the tocsin, came running from the mountain slope, their large hats brimful of water, and leather buckets in their hands. The fire had already reached the attic floor of the house, and it was said that it had been set deliberately at the P… inn; a circumstance which always adds a darker interest and a sort of dramatic background to a fire.

Soon the pumps arrived, chains of workers formed, and I ascended to the attic, an enormous tangle, several stories high, of picturesque timbers, like those supporting all the tall slate roofs on the banks of the Rhine. The entire

timber frame of the neighbouring building was clothed in a single sheet of flame. This immense pyramid of burning wood, topped by a vast red plume shaken by the storm-wind, giving off dull sounds, arched over our roof, already alight here and there and crackling. The issue was serious; if our roof caught fire, ten houses certainly, and perhaps, given the strong wind, a third of the town would burn. The labour was difficult. It was necessary, beneath the whirlwind of flame and sparks, to peel the slates from part of the roof, and cut through the weathervane gables of the dormers. The pumps were admirably served. From the attic windows my gaze plunged into the furnace and I was, so to speak, inside the fire itself. It is a terrible and admirable thing, a fire in one's face. I had never seen a like spectacle — but since I was there, I accepted its reality.

At first, when one sees oneself as if enveloped in a monstrous cave of fire where everything blazes, shines, sparkles, shrieks, suffers, bursts and collapses, one cannot avoid a feeling of anxiety; it seems that all is lost and that nothing will be able to combat the fire's dreadful force; but as soon as the pumps arrive one regains one's courage.

Conceive with what rage the water attacked its enemy. Scarcely had the pump's hose, that long serpent that one heard panting below in the darkness, passed its slender neck above the dark wall and set its fine sparkling copper head amidst the flames than it spat a furious jet of liquid steel onto that fearful chimera with a thousand heads. The burning pyre, attacked unexpectedly, howled, rose, leapt frightfully, opened dreadful jaws full of rubies, and licked all the doors and windows at once with its innumerable tongues. Steam mixed with the smoke; white whirlwinds and black whirlwinds spiralled away at every breath of wind, twisting and clasping one another in the shadows beneath the clouds. The water's hiss answered the fire's roar. Nothing is greater or more terrible than that ancient and eternal combat between the hydra and the dragon.

The force of the column of water thrown up by the pump was prodigious. The slates and bricks it touched shattered and scattered like scales. When the roof structure finally collapsed, a magnificent moment, when the scarlet plume of the fire was replaced, amidst a terrible noise, by an immense and tall plume of sparks, a single chimney of the inn remained standing like a sort of small stone tower. A jet of water from the pump hurled it into the abyss.

The Rhine, the township, the mountains, the ruins, the whole crimsoned spectral landscape re-emerging in this light, were wreathed with the smoke and flame, amidst the continual tolling of the tocsin, the crashes of sections of wall falling in one piece like drawbridges, the dull blows of the axe, the tumult of the storm, and the noise of the townsfolk. It was hideous, yet, in truth, it was also beautiful.

Observing the details of the fire, nothing was more singular. In the gap between a whirlwind of flame and a whirlwind of smoke, men's heads emerged at the end of a ladder. One saw these men flooding, at point-blank range as it were, the fierce flame that struggled and fluttered, and persisted, beneath the solid jet of water. In the midst of this dreadful chaos, there were well-nigh noiseless areas where small, silent fires crackled gently in corners as in a widow's meagre hearth. The windows of the rooms, now inaccessible, swayed to and fro in the wind. Pretty blue flames quivered at the tips of beams. Heavy timbers, detached from the edge of the roof, remained suspended from a nail, swinging above the street in the hurricane, enveloped in a long sheet of flame. Others fell into the narrow space between the houses and established bridges of glowing embers there. Inside the apartments, Parisian wallpaper with pretentious borders disappeared and reappeared amidst puffs of red ash. On the third floor, there was a mediocre Louis XV wall painting, by 'Gentil' Bernard (*Pierre-Joseph Bernard*), with rocks, trees and shepherds which struggled to survive for a long time. I gazed at it with admiration. I had never seen an eclogue put on such a brave face. Finally, a great flame entered the room, seizing the unfortunate celadon-green landscape, and the villager embracing the villager's wife, and Thyrsis cajoling Glycera went up in smoke. As if in tandem, a poor little garden, horribly drenched in hot coals, was burning away at the foot of the house. A young acacia, leaning against a blazing trellis, stubbornly refused to catch fire and remained untouched for four hours, the green and pretty crown nodding amidst showers of sparks.

Add to all this a few pale, blonde English girls half-dressed in the downpour, beside their luggage, a few steps from the inn, and all the local children laughing out loud and clapping their hands every time a jet of water came towards them, and you will have a fairly complete idea of the fire at the Hôtel P… at Lorch. A burning building is simply a burning building; but the truly sad part of it was that a poor fellow died there.

Around four in the morning, we were what is called *masters of the fire*; the gasthaus P… its roofs, ceilings, stairs. and floors collapsed, was still ablaze within its four walls, and we had succeeded in saving our inn. Then, and almost without intermission, water succeeded fire. A swarm of maids, brushing, rubbing, sponging, wiping, invaded the rooms, and in less than an hour the house had been cleaned from top to bottom.

Remarkably, nothing was stolen. All these belongings, moved in haste, in the rain, in the middle of the night, were religiously brought back by the far-from-wealthy folk of Lorch. Such accidents are hardly rare on the banks of the Rhine. Every wooden house has a hearth, and here wooden houses abound. In Saint-Goar alone, there are at this moment, in different places in the town, four or five ruins created due to fires.

The next morning, I noted, with some surprise, two or three closed ground floor rooms of the inn, which were perfectly intact, and about which the blaze had raged without disturbing anything. There is a little tale about this that is told in the country. I do not vouch for it. — A few years ago, an Englishman arrived quite late at an inn in Braubach, had supper and went to bed. In the middle of the night, the inn caught fire. They rushed to the Englishman's room. He was asleep. They woke him. They explained the situation, and that the house was on fire, and that he had to leave at once. — 'What the Devil!' cried the Englishman, 'You've woken me for that! Leave me alone. I'm tired, I've no intention of rising. You're all quite mad if you think I'm going to start running around the fields in my shirt at midnight! I intend to enjoy my nine hours sleep, comfortably. Put out the fire if you like, I shan't stop you. As for me, I'm happy in bed, I'll stay here. Good night, my friends, I'll see you tomorrow.' That said, he retired to bed once more. There was no way to make him see reason, and, as the fire spread, the people ran away, after closing the door on the Englishman, who was asleep again, and snoring. The fire was terrible, and it was extinguished with great difficulty. The next morning, the men who were clearing the rubble arrived at the Englishman's room, opened the door and found the traveller half-awake and rubbing his eyes in his bed, who yawned and called to them as soon as he saw them: 'Can you tell me if there's a bootjack in this place?' He rose, had a very hearty breakfast, and left admirably rested and refreshed, much to the displeasure of the local boys, who were counting on utilising the Englishman's mummified body as what is called in the Rhine valley a *dry*

burgomaster, that is to say, a perfectly smoked and preserved corpse, which is shown to foreigners for a few farthings.

LETTER XX: FROM LORCH TO BINGEN

Bingen, August 27th

From Lorch to Bingen is two German miles, in other words, four French leagues, or nearly sixteen *kilometres*, in the horrible language that the law wishes us to use, as if it were up to the law to create the language. Quite the contrary, my friend, in a host of cases it is up to the language to create the law.

You know my preference. Whenever I can travel a portion of my route on foot, that is to say, converting the journey into a walk, I never fail to do so.

Nothing is as charming, in my opinion, as travelling – on foot! One belongs to oneself, one is free, one is joyful; one is entirely and, un-dividedly, absorbed in the incidents of the road, in the farm where one has lunch, in the tree where one shelters, in the church where one meditates. One departs, one stops; one departs again – nothing hinders, nothing holds one back. One journeys and dreams alone. Walking lulls one's reveries; one's reveries veil fatigue. The beauty of the landscape hides the distance involved. One does not travel, one wanders. With each step one takes, an idea is born. It seems as if one feels swarms of them hatching and buzzing in one's brain. Many a time, seated in the shade at the edge of a highway, beside a small, lively spring from which flowed joy, life, and freshness accompanying its progress, beneath an elm tree full of birds, near a field full of haymakers, rested, serene, happy, gently occupied with a thousand dreams, I have watched with compassion the post-chaise pass before me, like a whirlwind amidst which lightning flickers, a swift, sparkling thing which contains I know not what slow, heavy, bored, and drowsy travellers; a flash of lightning that bears away a heap of tortoises. Oh! How quickly those poor people, who are, after all, often people of heart and spirit, would throw themselves from their loving

prison, in which the harmony of the landscape is turned to noise, the sun to mere heat and the road to dust, if only they knew of all the flowers to be found in the undergrowth, all the pearls to be gathered among the pebbles, all the *houris* to be discovered among the country girls, by the winged, opulent and joyful imagination of he who is walking! *Musaque pedestri* (*'and the Muse too afoot', see Horace's 'Satires' II.6, line 17*).

And then everything comes to the man who walks. It is not only that ideas arise in him; adventures befall him, and, for my part, I greatly love every adventure that happens to myself. If it is pleasant for others to invent adventures, it is even pleasanter to experience them oneself.

I remember a visit I made seven or eight years ago to Claye (*Claye-Souilly*[62]*),* a few miles from Paris. Why? I no longer remember. I happened to find these few lines in my notebook. I am transcribing them for you because they are, so to speak, a part of the random things I wish to tell of:

— 'A canal on the ground floor, a cemetery on the first floor, a few houses on the second, that's Claye. The cemetery occupies a terrace, with a balcony overlooking the canal, from which the ears of the country folk of Claye can hear the passing serenades, if there are any, rising from the mail-boat from Paris to Meaux, which travels ten miles an hour. In that country, you are not merely interred, you are buried deep. It's a fate, like any other.'

I remember I was returning to Paris on foot; I had left quite early in the morning, and, around midday, the beautiful trees of the forest of Bondy[63] inviting me to rest at a place where the path bends sharply, I sat down on a grassy bank, leaning against an oak, my feet dangling in a ditch, and began to scribble in my green notebook the comments you have just read.

As I was finishing the fourth line — which I see today in the manuscript separated from the fifth by a fairly large gap — I raised my eyes, vaguely, and saw, on the other side of the ditch, at the edge of the road, in front of me, a few steps away, a bear staring at me. In broad daylight one is spared nightmares; one cannot be fooled by a shape, an apparition, a misshapen rock, or an absurd tree trunk. '*Lo que puede un sastre*' (*'What a tailor can do!' The*

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[62] Letter XX — Claye-Souilly (remembered): 48°56'44.6"N, 2°41'12.5"E

[63] Letter XX — Forest of Bondy (remembered): 48°54'48.2"N, 2°33'54.4"E

title of Goya's etching, no.52, from his 'Los Caprichos' showing a forked tree covered by clothing, turned thereby into a fearsome scarecrow figure) may be formidable at night; but at midday, under a May sun, one is free of hallucinations. It was indeed a bear, a real bear, a live bear, and perfectly hideous. He was sitting gravely, showing me the dusty underside of his hind legs and paws, of which I could distinguish all the claws, his front paws lazily crossed on his belly. His mouth was half-open; one of his ears, torn and bleeding, was half hanging down; his lower lip, half torn off, revealed bare fangs; one of his eyes was gouged out, and with the other he was gazing at me with a serious air.

There was no sign of a woodcutter in the forest, and what little I could see of the path at that point was absolutely deserted. I felt a degree of emotion. One sometimes avoids trouble from a stray dog by calling it by a canine name *Fox*, *Soliman*, or *Azor*; but what can one say to a bear? Where had it come from? What was this bear doing in the forest of Bondy, on the main road from Paris to Claye? What was the meaning of this new sort of vagabond? It was all very strange, ridiculous, unreasonable, and, when all was said and done, very unfortunate. I was, I confess, most perplexed. I sat still, however; I must say that the bear, for its part, did the same; it even seemed to me, up to a certain point, benevolent. It looked at me as tenderly as a one-eyed bear can look. All things considered, though it opened its jaws it opened them as a mouth usually opens. It was not a grin; it was a yawn; it was in no way ferocious; it was almost literary. This bear had something honest, beatific, resigned and somnolent about it; and I have since noted the same facial expression in old theatre-goers listening to some tragedy or other. In short, his countenance was so tame that I also resolved to put on a good face. I accepted the bear as a spectator, and continued what I had begun. I therefore began to sketch in my book the fifth line of the note above, which fifth line, as I told you just now, is in my manuscript distant from the fourth; because, as I began to write it, my eyes were fixed on the bear's eyes.

While I was writing, a large fly came and landed on the bloodied ear of the spectator. He slowly raised his right paw and flicked it over his ear with a catlike movement. The fly flew off. He looked for it; then, once it had disappeared, seized his two hind legs with his forelegs, and, as if satisfied with this classic attitude, resumed his contemplation of me. I declare I followed these various movements with interest.

I was beginning to grow accustomed to this tête-à-tête, and was writing the sixth line of my note, when an incident occurred: a sound of hurried footsteps was heard in the main road, and suddenly I saw another bear emerge from around the bend, a large black bear; the first being a tawny one. This black bear arrived at a brisk trot, and, seeing the tawny bear, came and rolled gracefully on the ground beside it. The tawny bear did not deign to look at the black bear, nor did the black bear deign to pay any attention to me.

I confess that, at this second apparition, which raised my perplexity to the second power, my hand trembled. I was writing the phrase: '.... can hear the passing serenades.' On the manuscript, I find today a rather large gap between the words: *hear the passing*, and the word: *serenades*. The gap indicates: — *Another bear!*

Two bears! It was all too much. What was the reason? By what chance? Judging by the direction from which the black bear had emerged, both had come from Paris, a place where there are few animals — especially wild ones.

I remained as if petrified. The first bear had ended up taking part in the other's games, and, from rolling in the dust, both had turned grey. However, I had managed to rise, and was wondering if I should try and retrieve my cane which had rolled into the ditch at my feet, when a third bear appeared, a reddish bear, small, deformed, even more torn and bleeding than the first; then a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, the last two padding along together. These last four bears crossed the road like extras crossing backstage, seeing nothing and looking at nothing, almost running, and as if they were being pursued. The strange scene prompted one to seek an explanation. Then I heard barking and shouts; a dozen bulldogs, and eight men or so armed with iron-tipped sticks and carrying muzzles in their hands, burst onto the road, chasing the fleeing bears. One of these men stopped, and while the others brought back the now-muzzled beasts, he provided the answer to the riddle. The manager of the circus at the Barrière du Combat (*the Paris toll-gate on the road to Meaux, not extant*) was taking advantage of the Easter holiday to send his bears and mastiffs to perform at Meaux. The entire menagerie was travelling on foot. At the last stop they had unmuzzled them to feed them; and while their keepers were seated at the neighbouring tavern, the bears had taken advantage of their moment of freedom to stroll at leisure, happy and alone, for a part of the way. They were actors on leave. Such was one of my adventures as a traveller afoot.

Dante begins his Divine Comedy by telling us that one day he met a leopard in a wood, then after the leopard a lion, then after the lion a she-wolf. If the traditional tale is true, in their travels in Egypt, Phoenicia, Chaldea and India, the seven wise men of Greece all had like adventures. They each encountered a different beast, as befits wise men who all have different wisdom. Thales of Miletus was followed for a long time by a winged griffin; Bias of Priene walked side by side with a lynx; Periander of Corinth made a leopard back down by staring at it; Solon of Athens walked boldly towards a furious bull; Pittacus of Mitylene encountered a bullfrog; Cleobulus of Rhodes was accosted by a lion, and Chilon of Lacedaemon by a lioness. All these marvellous events, if examined closely, could likely be explained by the equivalent of my menagerie on leave, Easter holiday, and Barrière du Combat. If I had recounted my adventure with the bears, in proper style, I might perhaps in two thousand years' time have acquired something of the air of an Orpheus. *Dictus ob hoc lenire tigres ('he is said to have tamed tigers' see Horace, 'Ars Poetica', line 393*). You see, my friend, my poor acrobatic bears hold the key to many wonders. With all due respect to the ancient poets and Greek philosophers, I hardly believe in the virtue of a stanza when faced with a leopard or the power of a syllogism as regards a hyena; but long ago, I think, Mankind, equipped with an intellect that can transform instinct at will, discovered the secret of taming lions and tigers, subduing animals, and brutalising beasts. Mankind, always and everywhere, believes it has made a great step forward when it has substituted, through intelligent training, stupidity for ferocity. All things considered, it may indeed be such, since without that step, I might have been eaten — and the seven wise men of Greece with me.

Since I am reminiscing, let me tell you one little story more. You know G…, that old poet-scholar who proves that a poet can be patient, that a scholar can be charming and that an old man can retain his youth. He walks as if he were a mere twenty years old. In April 183... we were together on some excursion in the Gâtinais (*around the Loing valley*). We were walking side by side on a fresh morning warmed by a pleasant sun. I, whom truth charms, and paradox amuses, know no more agreeable company than G.... He knows all the proven truths, and invents every possible paradox.

I remember that his fancy at that moment was to maintain that the basilisk exists. Pliny speaks of it (*in his 'Naturalis Historia' VIII, 32*), and

describes it, so G… said. The basilisk is born in the neighbourhood of Cyrenaica in Africa. It is about twelve fingers long; it has a white spot on its head like a coronet; and when it hisses, the snakes flee. The Bible (*Isaiah 14:29*, *in some versions*) says that it has wings. What is known is that in the time of Saint Leo (*Pope Leo the First*) there was in Rome, in the church of Santa Lucia, a basilisk which infected the whole city with its breath. The Pope dared to approach the damp, dark vault which was the monster 's lair, and the humanist Julius Caesar Scaliger says, (*in his 'Exercitationes', 1557*), in a rather beautiful phrase, that he *extinguished it with his prayers*.

G… added, noting my incredulity regarding the basilisk, that certain places have a particular effect on certain animals: that at Seriphus, in the Archipelago, the frogs never croak; that at Reggio, in Calabria, the cicadas never sing; that wild boars are mute in Macedonia; that the serpents of the Euphrates never bite the natives, even when the latter are asleep, but only foreigners; while the scorpions of Mount Latmos, harmless to foreigners, mortally sting the inhabitants of that place. He asked me, or rather he asked himself, a host of questions, and I let him continue. Why are there a multitude of rabbits in Majorca, but why is there not a single one in Ibiza? Why do hares die in Ithaca? Why is it that one cannot find a wolf on Mount Olympus, nor an owl on the island of Crete, nor an eagle on the island of Rhodes?

Seeing me smile, he would interrupt himself: 'All very well, my dear fellow! But such was the opinion of Aristotle!' To which I would simply reply: 'My friend, it's dead science; and dead science is no longer science, it is merely erudition.' And G… would reply with his gentle look full of gravity and enthusiasm: 'You are right. Science dies. Only art is immortal. One great scholar arrives, and another is forgotten; while as for the great poets of the past, those of the present and future can only try to match them. Aristotle has been surpassed, Homer has not.' Having said this, he would become thoughtful, and then he would start looking for a buprestid (*jewel beetle*) in the grass, or a rhyme in the clouds.

We were approaching Milly-la-Forêt[64], thus, amidst that plain where one can still see the remains of a hovel that become famous in the witch trials of the seventeenth century. Here is the occasion. A lynx was ravaging the

[64] Letter XX — Milly-la-Forêt (remembered): 48°24'11.9"N, 2°28'06.2"E

countryside. Gentlemen of the king's hunting party chased it down, accompanied by a force of servants and country folk. The wolf, pursued across the plain, reached the hovel and threw itself inside. The hunters surrounded the hovel, then entered abruptly. They found an old woman there. A hideous old woman, at whose feet lay the wolf's skin that Satan had not had time to spirit away through a trapdoor. It goes without saying that the old woman was burned on a bundle of green wood; this was done in front of the beautiful portal of the Cathedral of Sens. I admire the fact that men, with a sort of inept sense of display, have always sought out such calm, serene, and wondrous creations of human intelligence, before which to enact their greatest stupidities. This occurred, they say, in 1636, the year in which Corneille staged *Le Cid*.

As I was telling this story to G… he said 'Listen.' I could indeed hear a fanfare produced by some charlatan or other, that emerged from a small group of houses on our left, hidden in the trees. G… has always had a taste for that kind of grotesque, triumphant noise. 'The world,' he said to me that day, 'is full of a great and serious uproar of which this is a parody. While lawyers declaim on the political stage, while rhetoricians hold forth on the scholastic, I visit the meadows, I catalogue midges, and collate blades of grass, I am impressed with the greatness of God, and always charmed to encounter, at some place or other, this noisy emblem of the pettiness of men, this charlatan thumping on his bass drum, this Bobino (*a nineteenth-century Italian clown who performed in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris*), this Bobèche (*Antoine Mandelot, a clown in the French theatre*), this figure of irony! The charlatan mingles in my mind with my studies and completes them; I pin his form to my cardboard like a beetle or butterfly, and classify the human insect among the others.'

G… therefore led me towards the group of houses from which the noise was coming — a little hamlet which is called, I believe, Petit-Sou, which made me think of the village of Asculum, on the road from Trivicum to Brundisium (*Brindisi*), which made Horace (*see 'Satires' Book I.5, lines 87-88*) devise a rebus:

…quod versus dicere non est,

Signis perfacile est………………

…what can't be said in verse,

is quite easy to signal…………………

Asculum, cannot, indeed, be accommodated in dactylic hexameter verse, nor Petit-Sou in an alexandrine. It was the village festival. The square, the church, and the town hall were all adorned. The sky itself, coquettishly decorated with a crowd of pretty white and pink clouds, had something rustic, joyful and Sunday-like about it. Circles of little children and young girls, contemplated fondly by old men, occupied one end of the square which was clothed with grass; at the other end, paved with sharp pebbles, the crowd surrounded a kind of trestle leaning against a sort of hut. The trestle comprised two planks and a ladder; the hut was covered with that classic blue and white checkered canvas used for mattresses, and which, when a smock is made from it, when needed, has given the nickname of *paillasses* (*straw-mattresses*) to the servants of every charlatan. Beside the trestle, was the door of the hut, a simple slit in the canvas; and above this door, on a white sign, decorated with this word in large black capital letters, MICROSCOPE, teemed, more frightening animals, more chimerical monsters, more impossible beings, crudely drawn in a thousand fantastic attitudes, than Saint Anthony saw or the artist Jacques Callot ever dreamed.

Two men occupied this stage. One, as dirty as Job, as tanned as Ptah, coiffed like Osiris, and making a moaning sound like Memnon's statue, with something oriental, foolish, fabulous and Egyptian about him, was beating a large drum while blowing randomly into a flute. The other was watching him. He was a kind of Sbrigani (*a schemer in Molière's play 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac', 1669*), pot-bellied, bearded, hairy of head and body, with a ferocious air, and dressed as a melodramatic Hungarian.

Around this hut, this trestle and these two men, stood many an impassioned countryman, many a fascinated countrywoman, many of the most horrified admirers in the world their silly mouths agape and stupid eyes open wide. Behind the platform, some children were making holes, artistically, in the aged blue and white canvas, which offered little resistance, allowing them to see the inside of the hut. As we arrived, the Egyptian finished his fanfare the Sbrigani began to speak, and G… began to listen.

Except for the usual invitation: '*Enter and you will behold*, etc., I declare that what this clown said was perfectly unintelligible to me, to the country-folk and to the Egyptian, who had assumed the posture of a bas-relief, and listened with as much dignity as if he was attending the dedication of the great columns of the hypostyle hall of Karnak by Merenptah Seti I, the father of Ramesses II.

However, at the first words the charlatan spoke, G… shuddered. After a few minutes, he leaned towards me and said in a low voice: 'Being young, with good eyesight and a pencil, do me the favour of writing down what this man says.' I wanted to ask G… for an explanation of this strange request, but his attention had already returned to the trestle too energetically for him to hear me. I decided to comply, and as the charlatan spoke slowly and solemnly, here is what I wrote down from his dictation:

'The family of *mites* is divided into two groups: the first has no eyes; the second has up to five, including the genus *cunaxa* with two, and the genus *bdella* with four.'

Here G…, who was listening with ever-deepening interest, took off his hat, and, addressing the charlatan in his most gracious and gentle voice said: 'Pardon, Monsieur, but you tell us nothing about the genus *gamasus*?

— 'Whom do we have here?' said the man, glancing around at the audience, but without surprise or hesitation. 'This old gentleman? Well, old gentleman, in the genus *gamasus* I have only found one species, it is *dermanyssus*, a parasite of the pipistrelle bat.'

— 'I thought, G… continued timidly, that it was a *glycyphagus* cursor?

— 'A mistake, my good man,' replied the Sbrigani. 'There is a gulf between the *glycyphagus* and the *dermanyssus*. Since you are concerned with these great questions, study Nature. Consult Charles De Geer, Constantine Hering and Johann Hermann. Observe (I was still writing as yet) the *sarcoptes ovis*, which has at least one of the two pairs of hind legs complete and wattled; the *sarcoptes rupicaprae*, whose hind legs are rudimentary and setigerous, without vesicle, and without tarsus; the *sarcoptes hippopodos*, which is perhaps one of the *glycyphagidae*.'

— 'You are not sure?' G… interrupted, almost respectfully.

— 'I am not sure,' the charlatan replied majestically. 'Yes, I must confess,

holding truth to be sacred, that I am not sure. What I am sure of is that I collected one of the *glycyphagidae* from the feathers of the eagle-owl. What I am sure of is that, while visiting galleries of comparative anatomy, I found *glycyphagidae* in the cavities, between the cartilages and under the epiphyses of skeletons.'

— 'That is amazing!' murmured G….

— 'But,' continued the man, 'this is taking me too far from my subject. I will speak to you another time, gentlemen, of the *glycyphagidae* and the *psoroptes*. The extraordinary and formidable animal that I am going to show you today is the *sarcoptes*. A frightening and marvellous thing: the camel mite, which does not resemble that of the horse, resembles that of man! Hence a possible confusion, the consequences of which would be disastrous (I was still writing away). Let us study them, gentlemen; let us study these monsters. The form of each is almost the same; but the dromedary *sarcoptes* is a little more elongated than the human *sarcoptes*; the intermediate pair of posterior hairs, instead of being the smallest, is the largest. The ventral surface also has its peculiarities. The collar is more clearly separated in *sarcoptes hominis* (*sarcoptes scabiei var. hominis*), and it sends down below an aciculiform point which does not exist in *sarcoptes dromadarii*. The latter is larger than the other. There is also an enormous difference in the spines at the base of the hind legs; they are simple in the first species, and unequally bifid in the second...'

At this point, tired of writing all these dark and imposing things, I could not help but nudge G…'s elbow and ask him in a low voice: 'But what the devil is the man talking about?'

G... half turned to me and said gravely: 'The mites that cause scabies.'

I burst into such a fit of laughter that the notebook fell from my hands. G... picked it up, snatched the pencil from me, and without deigning to reply to my gaiety, even with a gesture of contempt, while more attentive than ever to the charlatan's words, he continued to write in my place, in the calm, collected, and Raphaelesque attitude of a disciple of the school of Athens.

I must say that the country folk, more and more dazzled, shared, to a supreme degree, the admiration and beatitude of G…. Extreme science, and extreme ignorance, meet each other in extreme naivety. The obscure and formidable dialogue of the charlatan had perfectly succeeded with the villagers of the honest neighbourhood of Petit-Sou. These people are like

children: they marvel at what they do not understand. They love the unintelligible, the bristling, the declamatory and marvellous amphigouri (*nonsensical rigmarole*). The more ignorant the man, the more the obscure charms him; the more barbaric the man, the more complexity pleases him. Nothing is less simple than a savage. The idioms of the Huron, the Botocudo (*of Eastern Brazil*) and the Chesapeake peoples are forests of consonants through which, half-swallowed in the mud of poorly-rendered ideas, crawl immense and hideous words, like antediluvian monsters beneath the inextricable vegetation of the primeval world. The Algonquins translate the name France, short, simple and sweet as it is, by *Mittigouchiouekendalakiank*.

So, when the hut opened, the crowd, impatient to contemplate the promised wonders, poured in. A charlatan's *Mittigouchiouekendalakiank* always results in a shower of liards or doubloons in their purse, depending on whether they have addressed themselves to the people below them or to the people above.

An hour later we resumed our walk and were following the edge of a small wood. G... had not yet spoken a word to me. I was making a thousand futile efforts to regain his favour. Suddenly, seeming to emerge from a deep reverie and as if answering himself, he said: 'And he speaks very well concerning it!'

— 'Of scabies?' I said very timidly.

— 'Yes, of course, scabies,' G... replied firmly.

He added after a brief silence: 'This man has made magnificent microscopic observations. Real discoveries.'

I ventured another word. 'Doubtless, he will have studied the subject with this Egyptian pharaoh whom he has made his lackey and musician.'

But G... was no longer listening. 'What a prodigious thing!' he cried, 'and what a subject for melancholy meditation! Illness pursues Mankind after death. Skeletons suffer from scabies!'

There was another silence, then he continued: 'This man should be in the third class at the Institute. There are many academics who are charlatans; here is a charlatan who ought to be an academic.'

Now, my friend, I can see you laughing in turn, and exclaiming: 'Is that all? Oh, what pleasant adventures, what engaging stories, and what a traveller

on foot you are! To meet bears, or to hear a sabre-swallower, bare-armed and red-belted, confront, in the open air, the human mite with the camel mite, and deliver a philosophical course in comparative mange to country folk! Truly one should hasten to leap from one's post-chaise, for these are wondrous delights.'

If you wish. As for me, I know not if it's dawn, spring, or youth that enlivens these memories, now ancient, alas, but they glow in my mind. I find a charm in them I cannot express. Laugh as much as you like at the *traveller afoot*, I am always ready to start out again, and if some similar adventure happened to me today, *I would take extreme pleasure in it.* (*See Jean de La Fontaine, Fables, VIII, 4 'Le Pouvoir des fables'.*)

But such good fortune is rare, and when I undertake an excursion on foot, provided the sky has a joyful look, the villages have an air of happiness, the dew trembles on the tips of the grass, mankind labours, the sun shines and the bird sings, I thank the good Lord, and ask him for no other adventure. The other day, then, at five thirty in the morning, having given the necessary orders to have my luggage transported to Bingen, I left Lorch, as dawn broke, and a boat transported me to the opposite bank. If you ever follow this route, do the same. The Roman, Romanesque, and Gothic ruins of the left bank are of much greater interest to the pedestrian than the slate layers of the right bank. At six, I was seated, after a rather steep climb through the vines and scrubland, on the ridge of a hill of extinct lava which overlooks the castle of Furstenberg and the valley of Diebach, and there I noticed an error of the antiquarians. They say, and I followed them when I wrote my previous letter to you, that the large tower of Furstenberg, round on the outside, is hexagonal on the inside. Now, from the high point where I had placed myself, my gaze plunged deep into the tower, and I can assure you, if it is of interest, that it is round inside as well as outside. What is remarkable is its height which is prodigious, and its shape which is singular. As it has enormous battlements without machicolations, and as it widens from the top to the base, without bays, without windows, pierced only by a few tall loopholes, it resembles in the strangest way the mysterious and massive dungeons of Samarkand, Calicut (*Kozhikode, India*) or Granganor (*Koci, India*); and one might have expected to see the Maharaja of Lahore or the Zamorin of Malabar appear, at the top of this large, almost Hindu, tower, rather than Louis V of Bavaria or Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. Yet this citadel, more

oriental than Gothic, played a great role in the struggles of Europe. At the moment in which I was recalling the host of ladders successively applied to the sides of this stone giant, the siege of the Bavarians in 1321, the Swedes in 1632, and the French in 1689, a tree-creeper was gaily climbing it.

What caused the antiquarians' error, is a turret which defends the citadel from the mountain side, and which, round on the inside, is armed at its summit with a crowning of machicolations carved with six sides. They took the turret for the tower, and the exterior for the interior. However, at that early hour, thanks to the vapours still settling and resting on the ground, I could only distinguish the summit of the keep, the top of the walls, and on the horizon, all around me, the high crests of the hills. At my feet, the depths of the landscape were hidden by a thick white mist whose edges were gilded by the sun. It was as if a cloud had plunged into the valley.

As seven o'clock struck, from the clouded bell tower of Rheindiebach which is the hamlet below Furstenberg, the treecreeper flew away, and I rose. As I descended, the fog rose too, and as I reached the village, the rays of the sun were also reaching it. A few minutes later, I had left the village behind, without seeking, I confess, to test the famous echo from its ravine; I walked happily along the Rhine, and exchanged a friendly 'hello' with three young artists who were heading towards Bacharach, their knapsacks and umbrellas on their backs. Meeting a trio of young people travelling on foot and lightly burdened, cheerful in all respects, and with radiant eyes as if their pupils reflected future enchantment, I could not help hoping for the realisation of their dreams, and thinking of those three brothers, Honoré d'Albert, Seigneur de Cadenet; Charles d'Albert Duc de Luynes; and Léon, Seigneur de Brantes, who, two hundred years ago, set out one fine morning, on foot, for the court of King Henry IV, having between them only a cloak worn by each in turn, and who, fifteen years later, under Louis XIII, were, the first, Duke of Chaulnes; the second, Constable of France; and the third, Duke of Luxembourg — dream then, youngsters, and stride on!

This complement of three when journeying seems to be fashionable on the banks of the Rhine; for I had not travelled half a league, and barely reached Niederheimbach[65], when I met three more young men walking in

[65] Letter XX — Niederheimbach: 50°01'54.1"N, 7°48'10.4"E

company. They were evidently students of one of those noble universities that fertilise old Teutonia by civilising young Germany. The wore the classic cap and belted tight frock-coat, and bore a stick in one hand, a coloured earthenware pipe in their mouth, and, like the trio of artists, knapsack on their backs. On the pipe sported by the youngest of the three a coat of arms was painted, probably his own. They seemed to be involved in a heated discussion and were heading, like the painters, towards Bacharach. As they passed by, one of them called out to me, saluting me with his cap: '*Dic nobis, domine, in qua parte corporis animam veteres locant philosophi?*' (*'Master, tell us in which part of the body the ancients located the spirit?'*). I returned the salute and replied: '*In corde, Plato; in sanguine Empedocles; inter duo supercilia Lucretius.*' (*'In the heart, Plato; in the blood Empedocles; and between the eyebrows, Lucretius.'*) The three young men smiled and the eldest called out: '*Vivat Gallia regina!*' *('Long live Queen Gallia!'*) I replied: '*Vivat Germania mater!*' (*'Long live Mother Germania!'*)We waved to each other again, and I walked on. I approve of that way of travelling, as a company of three. A pair of lovers, a trio of friends.

Above Niederheimbach, the hills of the dark forest of Sann, or Sonn, are layered and overlapping, and there, among the oaks, stand two crumbling fortresses: Heimburg in Niederheimbach, the Roman castle, and Sooneck[66], the brigands' castle. King Rudolf the First destroyed Sooneck in 1282; time itself has demolished Heimburg. An even more melancholy ruin is hidden deep in the folds of these mountains: Falkenburg.

I had, as I told you, left the village behind me. The sun was burning hot, the fresh breeze from the Rhine was growing cooler, the road was becoming cloaked with dust; to my right a charming ravine, full of shade, opened narrowly between two rocks; a host of little birds chattered there to their heart's content and indulged in dreadful gossip about each other in the depths of the trees; a stream of running water swollen by the rains, falling from stone to stone, taking on the air of a torrent, devastated the daisies, frightened the midges, and made noisy little cascades in the pebbles; I distinguished, vaguely, along this stream, in the gentle shade shed by the foliage, a path on which a thousand wild flowers, bindweed, amaranth, helichrysum (*strawflower*), the gladiolus with grooved lanceolata, the iris with nine bluish-grey petals, hidden

[66] Letter XX — Burg Sooneck: 50°01'10.6"N, 7°49'32.2"E

from the layman spread a carpet for the poet. You know there are moments when I almost believe in the intelligence of things; it seemed to me that a crowd of voices murmured amidst this ravine, saying: 'Where are you going? You seek the places where there are few human footprints, and many divine traces; you wish to set your soul in harmony with the soul of solitude; you want shade yet light, motion yet peace, both transformation and serenity; you seek the place where the Word flourishes in silence, where one sees life as the surface of everything, while feeling that eternity is in the depths; you love the wilderness yet feel no hatred for Mankind; you seek grass and moss, damp leaves, branches swollen with sap, birds that sing, streams that run, perfumes that spread. Well then! Enter. This is your path.' I did not wait to be asked twice, I entered the ravine.

To tell you what I did there, or rather what solitude did to me there; of how the wasps buzzed around the purple bellflowers; of how the coppery necrophores (*burying beetles*) and the blue feronias (*ground beetles*) took refuge in the small microscopic caves that the rain excavates for them under the roots of the heather; of how wings rustled the leaves; of who it was that scuttled dimly amongst the mosses, or chattered in its nest; of the soft and indistinct noise of the vegetation, of mysterious mineralisation and fertilisation; the richness of beetles, the activity of bees, the gaiety of dragonflies, the patience of spiders; of the aromas, the reflections, the blossoming, the plaints; the distant cries; of the struggles of insect against insect, the catastrophes of anthills, the minor dramas of the grass; the breezes that exhaled from out the rocks like sighs, the rays that fell from the sky through the trees like glances, the drops of water that fell from the flowers like tears; the half-revelations that came from everything; the calm, harmonious, slow and continuous work of all these beings, and all these things that appear to live closer to God than Man; to tell you of all this, my friend, would be to express the ineffable, to show you the invisible, to paint the infinite for you. What was I doing there? I no longer knew. As in the ravines of Sankt Goarshausen, I wandered, I dreamed, I worshipped, I prayed. What was I thinking of? Don't ask. There are moments, you know, when thought floats along as if drowned, amidst a thousand confused ideas.

Everything in these mountains mingled with my meditations, and combined with my reveries: the greenery, the ruins, the ghosts, the landscape, the memories, the human beings who passed through these solitudes, the

history that once blazed there, the sun that still shines there. Julius Caesar, I said to myself, walking like me, may have crossed this stream, followed by the soldier who carried his sword. Almost all the great voices that have shaken human intelligence have disturbed the echoes of the Rheingau and the Taunus. These mountains are the same ones that were moved when Thomas Aquinas, long nicknamed *Bos mutus ('the dumb ox', so named by his fellow university students*), finally uttered as doctrine a roar that made the world tremble. '*Dedit in doctrina mugitum, quod in toto mundo sonavit.*' It was amidst these mountains that Jan Hus, paving the way for Martin Luther, as if the curtain that was torn aside at the last allowed the future to be seen clearly, is said to have uttered, from the height of his pyre in Constance, the prophetic cry: '*You are burning a goose, but in a hundred years you will hear a swan sing*' (*'Hus' means 'goose' in the Czech language*). Finally, it was amidst these rocks that Luther, a hundred years later, emerging at the appointed hour, opened his wings, and issued his formidable clamour: *let the bishops and princes, the monasteries and cloisters, the churches and palaces die, rather than a single soul!* And it seemed to me that, from the midst of the branches and brambles, the ruins answered on all sides: 'O Luther, the bishops and princes, the monasteries and cloisters, the churches and palaces are dead indeed!'

Plunged, thus, among inexhaustible and perennial things, which exist, persist, flower, become green, and clothe history in their eternal vegetation; is history weighty or slight? Decide the question if you can. To me, it seems that contact with Nature, which is next to God, sometimes diminishes Mankind, sometimes magnifies. It is a weighty thought that Humanity is a creature with intelligence, with its own laws, which exercises its powers, and fulfils a role amidst the immense reality of Creation. But, in the presence of a great oak, redolent with antiquity, yet full of life, swollen with sap, laden with foliage, inhabited by a thousand birds, how much does the phantom which was Luther, the spectre which was Jan Hus, the shade which was Caesar weigh?

Yet, I confess to you, there was a moment during my walk when all such considerations disappeared, when Mankind vanished, when I had naught in my soul but God alone. I had arrived, I could no longer say by what path, at the summit of a very high hill covered with bushy heather, bearing some analogy to the kermes-oak scrub of Provençe, and had before my eyes a wasteland, but a joyful and superb wasteland, a divine wasteland. I have seen

nothing more beautiful in all my excursions along the Rhine. I knew not what the place was called. Around me, as far as the eye could see, were only mountains, meadows, running water, vague greenery, soft mist, damp gleams that shimmered like half-open eyes, vivid reflections of gold drowned in the blue of distance, magical forests like tufts of green feathers, a horizon shimmering with shadow and light. It was one of those places where it seems you see before you that magnificent peacock, we call Nature, displaying its tail.

Behind the hill where I was sitting, at the top of a mound covered with firs, chestnut-trees, and maple, I saw a dark ruin, a colossal heap of brown basalt. It looked like a pile of lava kneaded by a giant into the shape of a fortress. What was this castle? I could not say, I knew not where I was. It is my habit to question a building near to, as you know. In a quarter of an hour, I was among its remains.

An antiquarian who paints the portrait of a ruin, much like a lover who paints a portrait of his mistress, charms himself, but risks boring others. To an indifferent person listening to one who is enamoured, all beauties are alike, and all ruins too. I am not saying, my friend, that I will henceforth abstain from all descriptions of buildings where you are concerned. I know that history and art fascinate you; I know that you are part of the intelligent public, and not the indifferent public. This time, however, I will refer you to the detailed portrait I gave you of the Burg Maus. Imagine a deal of undergrowth, a host of collapsed ceilings, many a broken window, and above all those four, or was it five, tall devilish towers, black, gutted and formidable.

I went to and fro among these ruins, searching, rummaging, questioning; I was turning over the broken stones in the hope of finding some inscription that would highlight a fact, or a sculpture that would reveal an era, when a bay, which had once been a door, provided passage for me beneath a vault, through which a brilliant ray of sunlight penetrated via a crevice. I entered and found myself in a sort of low room lit by loopholes, the shape and embrasure of which indicated that they had been used for the play of onagers (*catapults*), falconets (*light cannons*) and scorpions (*large mounted crossbows*). I leant from one of these loopholes, after pushing aside the clump of flowers that blocked it. The view from the window was not cheerful: a dark and narrow valley, or rather a tear in the mountain, once crossed by a bridge of which only the supporting arch now remains. On one side was a landslide of earth and rocks, on the other a torrent, with a black basalt floor, racing down, to

break in foam along the ravine. Sick and unhealthy trees shaded small meadows carpeted with thick grass like that of a cemetery. I know not if it was an illusion or the play of wind and shadow, but I thought I saw, in places, large circles traced in the tall soft grasses, as if mysterious nocturnal round-dances had compressed the earth, here and there. That ravine is not only solitary, it is gloomy. One feels that at certain moments it witnesses hideous spectacles, that it sees supernatural and evil things happening in the darkness, and that it retains, even in broad daylight, even in full sunlight, a degree of sadness mixed with horror. In that valley, more than in any other place, one distinctly feels that the nocturnal hours are dark and chill; it seems that they imbue the scent of the grasses, the colour of the soil, the shape of the rocks, with all they bear of what is vague, sinister and desolate.

As I was about to leave the lower room, the crest of a tombstone half-buried in the rubble struck my eyes. I bent down quickly. Judge of my eagerness; perhaps I would find there the explanation I was seeking, the answer I demanded of this mysterious ruin, the name of that ruined castle? With my hands and feet, I pushed aside the rubble, and in a few moments had exposed a very beautiful sepulchral slab of the fourteenth century, quarried from the red sandstone of Heilbronn. On this slab, sculpted almost in the round, lay a knight fully-armed, but lacking his head. Under the feet of this stone figure was engraved in Roman capitals a crude couplet, still legible and easy to decipher:

VOX TACUIT. PERIIT LUX, NOX RVIT ET RVIT VMBRA.

VIR CARET IN TUMBA QUO CARET EFFIGIES.

THE VOICE IS SILENT. LIGHT PERISHES, NIGHT FALLS AND THE SHADOWS FALL.

THE MAN IN THE GRAVE LACKS WHAT THE EFFIGY LACKS.

I was little more advanced than before. The castle was an enigma; I had sought an answer, and had found one. The answer to the enigma was an inscription without a date, an epitaph without a name, a man without a head. That, you will agree, is a sombre answer and a gloomy explanation.

What personage was this couplet, gloomy in substance, barbaric in form, referring to? If one were to believe the second line engraved on this sepulchral stone, the skeleton beneath was headless like the effigy above. What did those three, capital letter Xs signify, detached, so to speak, from the rest of the inscription through their size? On looking more carefully, and cleaning the slab with a handful of leaves from the plants around, I found strange engravings on the effigy. Three Roman numerals were traced in three different places; this on the right XXX, this on the left XXX, and this last instead of the head:

Now these three figures are only variations of the one monogram. Each of the three is composed of the three letter Xs that the engraver of the epitaph highlighted in the inscription. If the tomb had been in Brittany, the three Xs could have alluded to the Combat of the Thirty (*1351, an episode in the Breton War of Succession*); if it had dated from the seventeenth century, the three Xs could have indicated the Thirty Years' War; but in Germany and in the fourteenth century, what meaning could they have borne? And then, was it chance which, to add to the obscurity, had used in the formation of this funereal figure no other element than the letter X, which denies access to the answer, and designates the *Unknown*? I confess I have been unable to dispel the darkness.

However, I recall that this way of concealing, while indicating, the tomb and the memory of a decapitated individual is common to all eras and all peoples. In Venice, in the Chamber of the Grand Council (*Sala del Maggior Consiglio*) in the Doge's Palace, there is a black frame where the portrait of the fifty-seventh Doge should hang, and below it the gloomy Republic has written this sinister memento:

LOCUS MARINI FALIERI DECAPITATI.

THE PLACE FOR MARINA FALIERI, DECAPITATED.

In Egypt, when the weary traveller arrives at Biban-el-Molouk (*The Valley of the Kings, near Luxor*), he finds amidst the sand, amongst the ruined palaces and temples, a mysterious sepulchre which is that of Ramesses V (*and VI*), and on that sepulchre he sees the legend:

And this hieroglyph, which tells a tale in the desert, means: *he who is headless*. But in Egypt as in Venice, at the Doge's Palace as in Biban-el-Molouk, one knows where one is, one knows one is dealing with Marino Faliero or with Ramesses V. Here I knew neither the name of the place nor of the man. My curiosity was aroused to the highest degree. I confess that this ruin, so utterly silent, intrigued me and almost angered me. I fail to accept that a ruin, even a tomb, has the right to maintain such a silence.

I was about to leave the lower chamber, charmed to have found so curious a monument, but disappointed not to learn more, when a sound of clear, sonorous, and cheerful voices reached me. I heard a lively and rapid dialogue in progress, in which I could distinguish, amidst laughter and joyful cries, only these few words: *Fallen rocks... subterranean passage... very ugly foot-path.* A moment later, as I rose from the tomb where I was seated, three slender young girls, dressed in white, three blonde and rosy heads, with fresh smiles and blue eyes, suddenly appeared beneath the arch, and, on seeing me, stopped short in the shaft of sunlight which illuminated the threshold. Nothing could be more magical and more charming for a dreamer seated on a sepulchre in a ruin, than that apparition and in that light. A poet would have been right to see angels and halos there. I confess that I only saw a trio of Englishwomen.

I confess also, to my shame, that at once the rather dull and prosaic idea came to me of taking advantage of these angels to discover the name of the castle. This was my rapid sequence of thoughts: 'These Englishwomen — for they are obviously English, they speak English, and are blonde — these Englishwomen, are to all appearances visitors who come from some nearby pleasure resort, from Bingen or Rudesheim. It is clear that they have made this ruin an object of their expedition, and must necessarily know the name of the place they have chosen as the goal of their walk.' — Once this was settled in my mind, it only remained to begin a conversation, and I confess again that I had recourse to the most awkward of all the array of means employed in such situation. I opened my notebook to give myself an excuse, called to my aid the little English I think to command, and began gazing through the loophole into the ravine, murmuring, as if speaking to myself, I know not what awed and ridiculous epiphonemas (*exclamations*): *Beautiful view!* — *Very fine, very pretty waterfall!* etc., etc. — The young girls, at first intimidated and surprised by encountering me, began to whisper in low voices, stifling a little discreet laughter. They did so charmingly, but were evidently making fun of me. I then made a mighty decision, I resolved to go straight to the point; and, although I pronounce English like an Irishman, although the *th* in particular is a formidable obstacle for me, I took a step towards the still motionless group, and addressing myself, with the most graceful air I could muster, to the tallest of the three: '*Miss*,' I said, amending the laconic nature of my question by my exaggerated manner, '*what is, if you please, the name of this castle?*' The lovely child smiled; since I doubtless deserved a burst of laughter and had expected one, I was touched by this act of clemency; then she looked at her two companions and answered me, blushing slightly, and in the best French in the world: — 'Monsieur, it seems that this castle is called Falkenburg. At least that is what a goatherd, who is French and who is talking with our father in the great tower, said. If you wish to go that way, you will find them.' The Englishwomen were Frenchwomen. Her words, so clearly spoken and without the slightest accent, were enough to demonstrate the fact; but the lovely child took the trouble to add: 'We have no need to speak English, Monsieur, we are French. and you are French.'

— 'But, Mademoiselle,' I continued, 'how did you know that I was French?'

— 'By your English,' said the younger one.

Her older sister looked at her almost sternly, if ever beauty, grace, adolescence, innocence, and joy can look stern. I began to laugh.

— 'But, Mesdemoiselles, you yourselves were speaking English just now.'

— 'To amuse ourselves,' said the youngest.

— 'For practice,' continued the eldest.

This imposing and almost maternal correction seemed lost on the younger, who ran gaily to the tomb, lifting her dress because of the stones, and revealing the prettiest little foot in the world. 'Oh!' she cried, 'Come and see! A statue on the ground! Look! It has no head. It's a man.'

'It is a knight,' said the eldest, who had approached. There was still a shadow of reproach in the word, and the tone of voice with which it was pronounced implied: '*My sister, a young person should not say* it's a man, *but she can say* it is a knight.'

Such is somewhat the story of women in general. It says everything about them. They are repulsed by things, but dress those things in words, and they are acceptable. Choose the words carefully, however. They are indignant at crude ones, frightened by honest ones, tolerate more delicate ones, welcome elegant ones, and smile at the periphrasis (*circumlocution*). They only realise later — often too late — how much reality there was in the approximation. Most women slip, and many tumble, down the dangerous slope of a mollifying translation.

For the rest, that simple nuance, *it is a man — it is a knight*, revealed the state of those two young hearts. One was still sound asleep; the other was awake. The elder of the two sisters was already a woman, the youngest was still a child. Yet there was barely two years between them. The middle sister was simply a young girl. Since their entry into the vault, she had blushed a lot, smiled a little, and not said a word.

Meanwhile, all three of them had bent over the tomb, and enchanted rays of sunlight outlined their graceful profiles on the spectral slab of granite. A moment ago, I had been wondering about the name of the spectre, now I was wondering about the names of these young girls, and I cannot say what I felt on finding these two mysteries commingled, one so full of terror, the other full of charm.

By listening to their subdued whispers, I caught one of their three names, the name of the youngest. She was the prettiest. A true fairy-tale princess. Her long blonde eyelashes hid blue eyes whose pure light nevertheless penetrated them. Between the younger sister and the older sister, she was like modesty poised between naivety and grace, and softly tinted by vague reflections of both. She looked at me twice, but did not speak to me. She was the only one of the three whose voice I had not heard, but she was also the only one whose name I knew. There was a moment when her younger sister said to her very quietly: '*Look, Stella!*' I have never gained a better comprehension than I did in that moment of all that is limpid, luminous and charming in that starry name.

The youngest was thinking aloud — 'Poor man (*the elder sister's lesson had been lost on her*)! They cut off his head. What an age that was when men's heads were cut off!' — Suddenly she broke off: — 'Ah! Here's the epitaph! It's in Latin — *Vox— tacuit — periit — lux...* — It's difficult to read. I'd like to know what it means.'

— 'Mesdemoiselles,' said the eldest, 'let's go and find father, he will explain it to us.'

And they rushed out of the crypt like three deer.

They had not even thought of addressing me; I was a little humiliated that my English had given them such a poor idea of my Latin.

At some point, a kind of plasterwork had been added to the tomb, leaving a patch smoothed out with a trowel next to the epitaph. I took a pencil, and on that blank page wrote my translation of the couplet:

The girls had been gone scarcely two minutes, when I heard their voices cry: '*This way, father! This way!*' They were returning. I wrote the last line in haste, and before they reappeared, slipped away. Did they find the translation I had left them? Who knows? I exited among the twists and turns of the ruined walls, and never saw them again.

Nor did I learn anything of the mysterious decapitated knight. Sad destiny! What crime had this wretch committed? Men had inflicted death, Providence had added oblivion. Darkness on darkness. His head was severed from the statue, his name from legend, his story from human memory. His tombstone itself will doubtless soon vanish. Some winegrower from Sooneck, or even Ruppertsberg, will commandeer it one fine day, scatter with

his foot the mutilated skeleton that it perhaps still covers, slice the tombstone in half, and make of it the frame for a tavern door. And the men will sit, and the old women spin, and the children laugh, beside the nameless effigy, decapitated long ago by the executioner and now sawn apart by a mason.

For, these days, in Germany as in France, ruins are put to use. New houses are made from old palaces. Alas! Old laws and societies undergo much the same transformation. Let us watch, study, meditate, and not complain. God knows what he is doing. Only sometimes I wonder: 'Why does the *valet-at-arms*, not content merely to be *still standing*, always seem to be seeking vengeance on *the buried emperor*?

But, my friend, I have strayed far from Falkenburg (*a former name for Burg Reichenstein; now restored*). Let me return there. — It meant a great deal for me to know that I was amidst a nest of legends, and be able to speak directly to those old towers that still stand so proud and straight, though dying, their entrails flowing into the grass. So, there I was in that manor famous in story, whose tales I may tell you of, if you know them not. Guntram and Liba especially comes to mind. It was on this bridge that Guntram met the two men carrying a coffin. It was on that staircase that Liba threw herself into his arms and said to him, laughing: 'A coffin? No, it is our marriage bed you must have seen'. It was near that fireplace, still sealed to the wall in a room without floor or ceiling, that the bedstead was located, which had just been brought and which she showed him. It was in that courtyard, today full of flowering hemlocks, that Guntram, leading his fiancée to the altar, saw a knight dressed in black and a veiled woman walking before him, visible to him alone. It was in this crumbling Romanesque chapel, where live lizards scuttle over sculpted lizards, that at the moment of placing the sacred ring on the pretty pink finger of his fiancée, he suddenly felt a cold hand in his — that of the maiden of the Castle in the Forest, who combed her hair at night while singing beside an open, empty tomb. — It was in this low room that he expired, and that Liba died, on seeing him die. Ruins bring tales to life, and tales render them living.

I spent several hours amongst the rubble, seated below impenetrable thickets, allowing whatever ideas came to me to linger, *Spiritus loci* (*the spirit of the place*). Perhaps my next letter will bear them to you. However, hunger also came, and around three o'clock, thanks to the French goatherd, whom the lovely visitors had told me about and whom I happily encountered, I reached

a village on the banks of the Rhine, Trechtingshausen[67], I believe, the ancient Trajani Castrum.

There was no inn there, but a beer-tavern, and no dinner but a very tough leg of lamb, from which a student, smoking his pipe at the door, tried to dissuade me, by saying that a starving Englishman, who had arrived an hour before me, had been unable to embark upon it, and had been disheartened by it. I declined to answer, proudly, as Marshal Créquy (*Charles I de Blanchefort, Marquis de Créquy*) did, in 1625, before the Genoese fortress of Gavi (*in Piedmont*): '*What Barbarossa could not take, Barbegrise* (*Greybeard*) *will*'; but I ate the leg of lamb.

I started walking again as the sun was setting. The landscape was severe but delightful. I had left behind me the Gothic chapel of Saint Clement. To my left, was the right bank of the Rhine formed of slate and clothed in vines. In the distance, the last rays of sunlight reddened the famed slopes of Assmannshausen, at the foot of which, clothed in vapour, smoke perhaps, lay Aulhausen[68], the village of earthenware potters. To my right, above the road I was following, upstream of Reichenstein (*Falkenberg, demolished by King Rudolph of Habsburg and rebuilt by the Count Palatine*), was Burg Reichenstein[69] (*also called the Vautsberg, Vogtsburg or Feitsburg*), inhabited in 1348 by Kuno II von Falkenstein, Archbishop of Mainz, and restored in our day by Prince Frederick William Louis of Prussia. Rheinstein played a great role in the wars over feudal rights. The Archbishop of Mainz once rented it to the Emperor of Germany for forty thousand livres tournois. Which reminds me that Thibaut, Count of Champagne, not knowing how to repay a debt to the Queen of Cyprus, sold to *his dearest lord Louis, King of France,* the County of Chartres, the County of Blois, the County of Sancerre, and the Viscounty of Châteaudun, also for the sum of forty thousand livres. Today, forty thousand livres is the price a retired bailiff pays for a country house in Bagatelle or Pantin (*suburbs of Paris*).

Yet I paid scant attention to the landscape and its history. Since the day was declining, I had only one thought. I knew that before arriving in Bingen,

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[67] Letter XX — Trechtingshausen: 50°00'42.5"N, 7°50'50.6"E

[68] Letter XX — Aulhausen (referenced): 49°59'46.7"N, 7°53'48.5"E

[69] Letter XX — Falkenburg (Burg Reichenstein): 49°59'38.0"N, 7°51'28.8"E

at the confluence with the Nahe, I would see a strange building, a gloomy ruin (*rebuilt in 1855 as a Prussian signal tower, extant*) standing in the reeds in the middle of the river between two high mountains. This ruin is the Maüsethurm[70].

In my childhood, over my bed was a small painting in a black frame that some German maid had hung on the wall. It represented an old, isolated tower, mouldy and dilapidated, surrounded by deep, black water that covered it with vapour, and mountains that clothed it in shadow. The sky above this tower was gloomy and full of horrible clouds. In the evening, after praying to God, and before going to sleep, I always looked at this painting. At night I saw it again in my dreams, and saw it with dread. The tower grew taller, the water seethed, lightning fell from the clouds, the wind whistled in the mountains, and seemed at times to emit cries. One day I asked the maid what this tower was called. She answered me, while making the sign of the cross: the Maüsethurm.

And then she told me a story. That once upon a time in Mainz, in her country, there had been a wicked archbishop named Hatto (*Hatto II, Archbishop of Mainz from 968 to 970*), who was also Abbot of Fulda, a miserly priest, she said, *raising his hand to bless rather than to give*. That, in a year of poor harvest, he bought all the wheat to resell it at a high price to the people, because the priest wanted to be rich. That the famine became so great that the peasants were dying of hunger in all the villages along the Rhine. That the people gathered around the burg of Mainz, weeping and asking for bread, and that the archbishop refused. Here the story became horrible. The starving people refused to disperse and surrounded the archbishop's palace, muttering. Hatto, annoyed, had these poor people surrounded by his archers, who seized the men and women, the old men and the children, and locked them all in a barn which was set on fire. 'It was,' added the old woman, '*a spectacle to make stones weep*'. Hatto only laughed; and as the wretched people, expiring in the flames, uttered piteous cries, he remarked: '*Do you hear the mice squeaking*' The next day the barn was in ashes; Mainz was empty of people; the city seemed dead and deserted, when suddenly a multitude of rats and mice, swarming from the remnants of the barn like the worms from Job's

[70] Letter XX — Maüsethurm (Mouse Tower): 49°58'19.6"N, 7°52'50.2"E

ulcerous flesh (*see Job 7:5*), rising from underground, emerging from between the paving stones, forcing their way through the cracks in the walls, reborn under the feet that sought to crush them, multiplying among the stones and beneath the bushes, flooded the streets, the citadel, the palace, the cellars, the rooms, and the alcoves; a disease, a plague, a hideous seething. Hatto, distraught, quit Mainz and fled across the plain, the rats and mice following; he ran to shut himself up in Bingen, which had high walls, the rodents crossed the walls and entered Bingen. Then the archbishop fled to a tower built in the middle of the Rhine, and took refuge there, after crossing in a boat with ten archers beating the surface of the water; the rats and mice swam in pursuit, crossed the Rhine, climbed the tower, gnawed the doors, the roof, the windows, the floors, and the ceilings, and, finally reaching the deep cellar where the miserable archbishop had hidden himself, devoured him alive. And now the curse of heaven and the horror of men are upon this tower, which is called the Maüsethurm. It is deserted; it has fallen to ruin in the middle of the river; and sometimes at night a strange reddish vapour is seen issuing from it, which resembles the smoke from a furnace: it is the soul of Hatto returning.

Have you noticed how history is often immoral, but the tales are always honest, moral, and virtuous? In history, the strongest prosper, tyrants succeed, executioners are happy, monsters grow fat, men like Sulla (*the Roman dictator*) are transformed into fine bourgeoisie, Louis XI, and Cromwell die in their beds. In tales, Hell is always visible; not a fault but finds its punishment, sometimes even an exaggerated one; no crime but bring its torment, often hideous; no villain but turns into an unfortunate, sometimes pitiable, wretch. That is because history moves in the infinite, and the tale in the finite. Whoever creates a tale feels they lack the right to simply state facts and hint at consequences; they grope in the shadows, certain of nothing, needing to reduce everything to a moral, a morsel of advice, a lesson; and would never dare to describe events without reaching an immediate conclusion. God, who determines the course of history, reveals what he wishes, and hides his knowledge of all that will follow.

Maüsethurm is a convenient word. One finds in it what one wishes to find. There are those who believe themselves to be realists but are merely arid; who squeeze the poetry from everything, always ready to say, like that other realist on hearing the song of the nightingale: '*Be silent, you noisy creature!*' Such

folk affirm that Maüsethurm comes from *maus* or *mauth*, which means a *toll*. They declare that in the tenth century, before the river's course was widened, this stretch of the Rhine was only clear on the left hand side, and that the city of Bingen established, by means of this tower, its right to deny vessels passage. They base their argument on the fact that there are still two similar towers near Strasbourg dedicated to the collection of taxes on passers-by, which are also called Maüsethurm. For these serious thinkers immune to fables, the cursed tower is a toll-house, and Hatto was a customs officer.

To the old wives, whom I eagerly support, Maüsethurm comes from *maüse*, which comes from *mus* and which means *mouse* or *rat*. This supposed toll-house is the Mouse Tower, and the customs officer is a phantom. Yet, after all, the two opinions can be reconciled. It is not absolutely impossible that, around the sixteenth or seventeenth century, after Luther, after Erasmus, strong-minded burgomasters *used* the Hatto tower, and temporarily installed a tax and toll office in this ill-haunted ruin. Why not? The Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, in Rome, is depicted as a Customs House, Rome's *Dogana*, by artists. What Rome did historically, Bingen could well have done in legend. *Mauth* would then be correct, though *Maüse* would not be incorrect.

However, ever since that old servant told me the tale of Hatto, the Maüsethurm has always been a familiar image in mind. You know, there are none without their ghosts, just as there are none without their illusions. At night we belong to dreams; sometimes it is a ray of light that crosses them, sometimes a tongue of flame; and, according to its colour, the dream may be of celestial glory, or be a vision of Hell, an effect like that of Bengal fire (*coloured flares*) that occurs in the imagination.

I must admit that the Mouse Tower, in the midst of its river, never appeared to me to be anything other than horrible. So, I confess, when chance, which leads me somewhat at whim, brought me to the banks of the Rhine, my first thought was not that I would now see the dome of Mainz, or Cologne Cathedral, or the Rheinpfalz, but that I might visit the Mouse Tower.

Judge then what I felt, poor believer of a poet, though unbelieving, and poor passionate antiquarian that I am. Twilight slowly followed day, the hills turned brown, the trees turned black, a few stars twinkled, the Rhine murmured in the shadows, no one passed on the vague whitish road, which

shrank to my gaze as the darkness deepened, and was lost in mist, so to speak, a few steps in front of me. I walked slowly, my eyes straining in the darkness; I felt that I was approaching the Maüsethurm and that in a few moments this formidable ruin, which had been for me until that day only an image, would become a reality.

There is a Chinese proverb that says: 'Over-stretch the bow, and the arrow goes astray'. The same thing happens to one's thoughts. Little by little that mist called reverie entered my mind. The vague rustling of foliage barely sounded from the mountain; a clear, faint, pleasant tapping from a distant, unseen forge reached me; imperceptibly, I forgot about the Maüsethurm, the rats and mice, and the archbishop; I began to listen, as I walked, to that noise from an anvil, which is, among all the voices of evening, one that awakens in me the most inexpressible ideas; it ceased while I was listening, and at the end of a quarter of an hour I had composed, I know not how, almost without wishing to, the following commonplace lines:

Cupid was at his forge. At the anvil's sound,
All the birds, disturbed, opened their eyes;
It was the evening hour, when mists abound,
And Venus, a bright celestial gem, is found,
High above the mountains, a fire in the skies.

The nesting thrush, the quail in its barley field,
Wondered, crying: 'What does he fashion there?
What does he forge so late?' A robin revealed
The answer: 'Oh, I know what's there concealed;
He's shaping a starry glance snatched from the air.'

Then all the birds, mocking the young master,
Cried out: 'Cupid, what is it you seek to do

With a glance, in which ill can never linger?
It's far too pure to serve your aim, O traitor!
Too gentle, villain, to serve such as one as you!'

But Cupid, midst the sparks, said: 'Seek your rest;
Sleep, little birds of the woods, as the stars arise;
Fold your wings, and warm the eggs in your nest.
Each pure glance, a deadly dart, is fatally blessed,
And my quiver is filled from the sweetest of eyes.'

As I was finishing this composition, I came to a bend in the road, and halted abruptly. This is what lay before me. At my feet, through the undergrowth I saw the Rhine racing past me, downstream, with a hoarse and furious murmur, as if it were escaping some evil; to left and right, mountains, or rather immense darkened masses their summits lost in the cloudy night sky, dotted here and there with a few stars; in the background, an immense curtain of shadow; in the centre of the river, in the distance, standing in flat, oily, almost dead water, a tall black tower, of horrendous shape, from the top of which, strangely agitated and seeming to sway, issued a reddish nebulosity. This brightness, which resembled the light shed from some burning air-hole, or the steam from a furnace, cast its pale, wan radiance over the mountain slopes and, highlighting a gloomy ruin halfway between myself and the right bank, a monstrous silhouette, was reflected in the fantastic shimmering of the water.

Imagine, if you can, that sinister landscape vaguely filled with light and darkness. And, not a human noise in that solitude, not a single bird-call; an icy, gloomy silence, troubled only by the irritated and monotonous complaint of the Rhine. The Maüsethurm was before my eyes.

It was no less frightening than when I had conjured it in imagination. Everything was there: the night, the clouds, the mountains, the shivering reeds, the sound of the river full of secret horrors, as if one could hear the hissing of hydras hidden beneath the water, the sad and feeble breaths of

wind, the shadows, the abandoned appearance of the tower, the isolation, and even the *steam from the forge* wreathing the tower, like the very soul of Archbishop Hatto! Here then was the scene from my dreams, was it to remain a dream?

Thus, the idea came to me, the simplest in the world, but which at that moment had a vertiginous effect on me: I desired, instantly, at that hour, without waiting for the dawn, for the morrow, to visit the ruin. The apparition was before my eyes, the darkness was profound, the pale ghost of the archbishop hovered above the Rhine; it was the moment to visit the Mouse Tower.

But how? Where to find a boat? At such a time? In such a place? To swim across the Rhine would have been to take a taste for encountering ghosts a little too far. Besides, had I been a strong enough swimmer, and a big enough fool at that, there is precisely at that spot, a few yards from the Maüsethurm, a most formidable chasm, the Bingerloch, which formerly swallowed cargo boats as a shark swallows herrings, and to which, a swimmer would in consequence, scarcely amount to a gudgeon. I was in difficulties.

As I approached the ruin, I remembered that the tremor of the silver bell, and the ghosts, of the Wellmich dungeon had not prevented the staked vines rooting in their hillside, and climbing the ruins, and I concluded that, the proximity of a chasm necessarily rendering the river a good fishing ground, I would probably encounter at the water's edge, near the tower, some salmon fisherman's hut. If winegrowers dared to brave Archbishop Kuno von Falkenstein's Burg Maus, fishermen might easily confront Archbishop Hatto and his Maüsethurm.

I was not mistaken, though I walked for a long time without encountering anyone. I reached the point of the bank nearest to the ruin, I passed it, I advanced almost as far as the confluence with the Nahe, and I was beginning to lose hope of finding a boatman, when, descending to the osiers on the bank, I saw one of those large spider-nets of which I spoke previously. A few steps from the net a boat was moored, in which a man wrapped in a blanket was sleeping. I clambered aboard, I woke the man, I showed him one of those large Saxon crowns which are worth two florins forty-two kreutzers, that is to say six francs; he understood me, and a few minutes later, without having said a word, as if we had been two ghosts ourselves, we floated towards the Maüsethurm.

Once in the centre of the river, it seemed to me that the tower we were approaching, instead of growing in size, was diminishing; it was the vastness of the Rhine that created the effect, which soon faded. As I had boarded the boat at a point on the shore higher than the Maüsethurm, we descended the Rhine, advancing rapidly.

I had my eyes fixed on the tower, at the top of which that faint light still appeared, and which I now saw distinctly enlarging, with each stroke of the oar, in a way which, I do not know why, seemed terrifying. Suddenly, I felt the boat sink beneath me as if the water was receding beneath it, and the jolt made my stick roll about my feet; I looked at my companion; he looked at me with a smile which, lit in sinister manner by the supernatural light from the Maüsethurm, had something fearful about it, and said to me: '*Bingerloch*' We were above the abyss.

The boat veered; the man rose; gripped a hook in one hand, and a rope in the other; plunged the hook into the waves, leaning on it with all his weight, and began to walk along the deck planks. As he walked, the underside of the boat made a harsh scraping noise against the tops of the rocks hidden beneath the water. This delicate manoeuvre was done simply, with marvellous skill and admirable composure, and without him uttering a word.

Suddenly, he pulled his hook out of the water, and held it horizontally, throwing one end of the rope out of the boat. The boat came to a sudden halt. We were approaching shore. I looked up. Half a pistol-shot away, on a small island that cannot be seen from the river bank, stood the Maüsethurm, huge, dark, formidable, jagged at the summit, widely and deeply gnawed at the base, as if the dreadful rats of legend had even eaten away at the stones.

The light was no longer a light; it was a fierce, dazzling blaze that cast its rays far into the mountains, issuing from the crevices and misshapen bays of the tower as if through the holes of a gigantic, dark-lantern. It seemed to me that I heard in the fateful building a singular and continuous sort of shrill noise, like that of a grindstone.

I disembarked, signalled to the boatman to wait for me, and strode towards the building.

At last, I had reached it! — Here, in reality, was Hatto's tower; this was indeed the rats' tower, the Maüsethurm! It was before my eyes, a few steps away from me, and I was about to enter in! To penetrate a nightmare, walk

around within the atmosphere of a nightmare, touch the stones of a nightmare, tread the grass of a nightmare, wet my feet in the waters of a nightmare, was, beyond doubt, an extraordinary sensation.

The facade towards which I was walking was pierced by a small dormer window and four other unequal windows, all lit, two on the first floor, one on the second, and one on the third. At eye level, below the two lower windows, a broad, low doorway, wide open, could be reached from the ground by means of a solid wooden ladder with three rungs. This doorway, from which issued even more light than the windows, was closed by a roughly- finished oak panel, that the wind from the river caused to creak gently on its hinges. As I walked towards this door, rather slowly because of the sharp rocks in the undergrowth, a round, black mass sped quickly by me, almost between my feet, and I thought I saw a large rat fleeing into the reeds. I could still hear the creaking. I continued to advance and, in a few strides, I stood in front of the door.

This doorway, which the wicked archbishop's architect had built only a few feet above the ground, probably in order to render the climb an obstacle to rats, had once been the entrance to the lower chamber of the tower; now the ruin no longer possessed lower or upper rooms. All the floors having tumbled on top of each other, the ceilings having collapsed, successively, Maüsethurm was a chamber enclosed by four high walls, with rubble for a floor and the clouds above for a ceiling.

However, I ventured to look into the interior of this room, from which came the strange creaking and extraordinary radiance. Here is what I saw:

In a corner facing the door were two men, with their backs to me. They were leaning forward, one squatting, the other bent over a kind of iron vice that with a little imagination one could easily have taken for an instrument of torture. They were barefoot, bare-armed, dressed in rags, with leather aprons over their knees, and large hooded jackets on their backs. One was old; I could see his grey hair; the other young; I could see his blond hair, which was reddened, thanks to the purplish light from a large furnace, illuminated, in the opposite corner of the ruin. The old man had his hood tilted to the right like the Guelphs, the young man wore it tilted to the left like the Ghibellines. However, they were neither Ghibelline nor Guelph; nor were they two executioners, two demons, nor even two ghosts; they were merely two blacksmiths. This furnace, in which a long bar of iron glowed, was equipped

with a chimney. The glow, which so strangely represented, amidst that melancholy landscape, the soul of Hatto changed hellishly into a living flame, was the fire and smoke from this chimney. The creaking was the sound of a file being employed. Near the door, beside a tub full of water, two long-handled hammers rested on an anvil; it was the noise of this anvil I had heard an hour or so before and which led me to compose the verses you have read.

So today the Maüsethurm is a forge. Why then might it not have been a Customs House in the past? You see, my friend, that derivation from *Mauth* is not, definitively, in error...

Nothing is more dilapidated and decrepit than the interior of the tower. Those walls, to which were attached the splendid episcopal tapestries from which the rats and mice, say the legends, *gnawed Hatto's name everywhere*, those walls are now bare, wrinkled, hollowed by the rains, greened externally by the river mist, blackened on the inside by the smoke of the forge.

Yet the two blacksmiths were the best people in the world. I had climbed the ladder and entered the chamber. They showed me, next to their chimney, the narrow, cracked door of a windowless turret, now inaccessible, where, they said, the archbishop first took refuge. Then they lent me a lantern, and I was able to visit the whole of the little island. It is a long, narrow strip of land where, amidst a belt of rushes and reeds, *euphorbia officinalis* (*spurge*) grows everywhere. At every stride, while crossing the island, one's foot knocks against mounds, or sinks into underground tunnels. Moles have replaced the rats there. The Rhine has stripped and exposed the eastern tip of the islet, which battles like a boat's prow against the current. There is neither soil nor vegetation at the tip, but a pink marble outcrop which, in the light of my lantern, seemed to me to be veined with blood. It is on this marble that the tower is built.

The Maüsethurm is square. The turret above, whose interior the blacksmiths had shown me, forms a picturesque bulge on the side facing Bingen. The pentagonal cross-section of this long, slender turret, and the sham machicolations, on which it rests suggests a tenth-century construction (*the tower itself was originally Roman, Hatto II restored it in 968*). Below this turret the rats seem to have gnawed deeply at the base of the tower. The bays have so lost all form that it seems impossible to deduce any date from them. The cladding is scratched here and there, as if a hideous form of leprosy is attacking the exterior walls. Shapeless stones, at the top of the building, which

were once battlements or machicolations, look like sperm-whale teeth, or mastodon bones, sealed in the wall. Above the turret, at the end of a long mast, a sad black and white rag flaps and flutters in the wind.

At first, I felt a kind of harmony between the ruin in mourning, and that funereal rag. But it was simply the Prussian flag. I remembered that the Grand Duke of Hesse's domain actually ends at Bingen. Rhenish Prussia begins there. Please refrain from taking my comments about the Prussian flag in a bad light. I am speaking of the effect it produces; nothing more. All flags are glorious. He who loves Napoleon's flag could never insult Frederick's.

After viewing everything and picking a sprig of spurge, I quit the Maüsethurm. My boatman had fallen asleep again. As he was taking up his oar again, and prodding the boat away from the island, the two blacksmiths returned to their anvil, and I heard the red-hot iron bar they had plunged into the tub of water hissing.

Now what more I can tell you? That half an hour later I was in Bingen[71], that I was extremely hungry, and that after my supper, though I was tired, though it was very late, and though the good citizens were asleep, I climbed, for a thaler offered appropriately, to Klopp Castle, an old ruin (*Burg Klopp*[72], *rebuilt 1875-79*) which dominates Bingen. There I met with a spectacle worthy of closing a day in which I had seen so many things, and rubbed shoulders with so many ideas.

The night was at its deepest, and drowsiest. Below me lay a cluster of black houses, a pool of darkness. There were now only seven windows still lit in the whole town. By an odd chance, those seven windows, like seven red stars, reproduced with perfect exactitude the Great Bear, which was sparkling, at that very moment, pure and white in the far reaches of the sky; so exactly, in fact, that the constellation, in all its majesty, billions of miles above my head, seemed as if reflected at my feet in an inky mirror.

The End of Part V of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

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[71] Letter XX — Bingen am Rhein: 49°58'00.1"N, 7°53'44.9"E

[72] Letter XX — Burg Klopp, Bingen: 49°57'56.9"N, 7°53'51.0"E

Part VI: Letter XXI

'The knight of the lily'
Ludovico Marchetti (Italian, 1853 - 1909)
Artvee

Letter XXI: The Legend of Handsome Pécopin and Beautiful Bauldour

Bingen, August

I promised you one of the famous legends of the Falkenburg, perhaps even the finest, the dark adventure of Guntram and Liba. But I've been thinking. What is the point of telling you tales you can read in the first collection you come across, told more skilfully than I can manage? But since you absolutely desire a story to amuse your grandchildren with, here is one, my friend. At least it's a legend you'll not find in any legendarium. I am sending it to you, just as I wrote it, under the very walls of the collapsed manor, with the enchanted Forest of Sooneck before my eyes, and, or so it seemed to me, under the direction of the trees, the birds, and the wind amongst the ruins. I had just been talking with that old French soldier who had become a goatherd in these mountains, and well-nigh a savage and a sorcerer; a singular end for a drummer-master of the 37th Light Infantry (*which served in the West Indies and Gibraltar, and participated in the late stages of the Peninsular War in 1814*). This brave man, a former child-soldier in the Voltairean army of the Republic, appears to believe in faeries and gnomes as he once believed in the emperor. Solitude always acts thus on the intelligence; it develops the poetic side of a man; every shepherd is a dreamer.

So I wrote this 'legendary' tale in that very place, hidden in the moated ravine, sitting on a block that was once a rock, and then part of a tower in the twelfth century, and now a rock again, picking a wild flower from time to time, to imbibe its soul, one of those bindweeds that are so fragrant, and die so quickly, and looking alternately at the green grass and the radiant sky, while great golden clouds swam past the dark ruins of Falkenburg. That said, here is the tale:

I

A Legend

The handsome Pécopin loved the beautiful Bauldour, and the beautiful Bauldour loved the handsome Pécopin. Pécopin was the son of the burgrave of Sooneck, and Bauldour was the daughter of the lord of Falkenburg. One held the forest, the other the mountain. Now what could be simpler than wedding the mountain to the forest? The two fathers came to an agreement, and Bauldour was betrothed to Pécopin.

That day, it was an April day, the elderberries and hawthorns, in bloom in the forest, were opening to the sun, a thousand delightful little waterfalls, the snow and rain transformed into streams, the horrors of winter become the graces of spring, leapt harmoniously down the mountain, and love, the April of Mankind, sang, shone and blossomed in the hearts of the two affianced young people.

Pécopin's father, an old and valiant knight, the honour of the County of Nahegau, died not long after the betrothal, blessing his son, and recommending Bauldour to him. Pécopin wept, then little by little, from the tomb where his father had disappeared, his eyes returned to the sweet and radiant face of his fiancée, and he was consoled. When the moon rises, who thinks of the setting sun?

Pécopin possessed the finest qualities of a youth, an honest man, and a gentleman. Bauldour was a queen in the manor-house, a holy virgin in church, a nymph in the woods, a faery at her tasks.

Pécopin was a great hunter, and Bauldour was a beautiful spinner of thread. Now, there is no hatred between the spindle and the game-bag. The spinner spins while the hunter hunts. He is absent, the distaff consoles and relieves ennui. The pack barks, the spinning-wheel sings. The distant barking of the hounds, mingled with the barely-heard notes of the hunting-horn, lost deep amidst thickets, murmurs quietly, amidst its vague sounds of the chase: 'Think of your lover'. The spinning-wheel, which obliges the beautiful dreamer to lower her gaze, whispers aloud and constantly in its small, sweet, and severe voice: 'Think of your fiancé'. And, when the husband and the lover are one, all is well. So, wed the spinner to the hunter, and fear nothing.

However, I must say, Pécopin loved hunting a little too much. When he was on his horse, when he had the falcon on his fist, or followed it with his eyes, when he heard the ferocious yapping of his bloodhounds stretching their muscular legs, he launched himself, he flew, through the air, forgetting everything. Now, 'Nothing in excess'. Happiness is achieved by moderation. Keep your tastes in balance, and your appetites in check. Whoever loves horses and dogs too much angers the women; whoever loves women too much angers God.

When Bauldour, and this happened often, when Bauldour saw Pécopin ready to set off on his horse, which was already neighing with joy and prouder than if it were bearing Alexander the Great in his imperial robes; when she saw Pécopin caress him, pass his hand over his neck, and, curbing the spur, present the palfrey with a bouquet of grass to refresh him, Bauldour was jealous of the horse. When Bauldour, that proud and noble young lady, that bright star of love, youth and beauty, saw Pécopin caressing his mastiff, and raising that snub-nosed head, those large nostrils, those wide ears, and that black face, to his charming and manly one, in a friendly manner, Bauldour was jealous of the dog.

She would retreat to her private chamber, saddened and angry, and she would weep. Then she would scold her maids, and after her maids she would scold her dwarf. For anger in women is like rain in the forest; it falls twice. *Bis pluit.*

In the evening, Pécopin would arrive dusty and tired. Bauldour would sulk and murmur a little, with a tear in the corners of each of her blue eyes. But Pécopin would kiss her hand, and she would remain silent; Pécopin would kiss her beautiful forehead, and she would smile. Bauldour's brow was white, pure, and admirable like King Charlemagne's tusk of ivory.

Then she would retire to her turret and Pécopin to his. She never allowed this knight to undo her belt. One evening he lightly pressed her elbow, and she blushed very deeply. She was engaged and not married. Modesty is to a woman what chivalry is to a man.

II

The Phoenix and the Planet Venus

They liked to arouse envy. Pécopin had, in his armoury at Sooneck, a large painting in a gilded frame representing the sky and the seven heavens, each planet with its own colour, and its name written in vermilion beside it; Saturn was leaden white; Jupiter, a clear yellow; Mars inflamed and a little sanguine; Venus, the Oriental goddess, blazing bright; Mercury, sparkling; the Moon icy silver; the Sun, all radiant fire. Pécopin erased the name of Venus, and wrote *Bauldour* in its place.

Bauldour had in her perfumery a high-warp tapestry on which was depicted a bird the size of an eagle, with a golden neck, a purple body, a blue tail mixed with crimson feathers, and a crest on its head surmounted by a tuft of feathers. Below this marvellous bird the workman had written this Greek word: *Phoenix*. Bauldour erased this word, and embroidered in its place the name: *Pécopin*.

Meanwhile the day appointed for the wedding was approaching. Pécopin was joyful and Bauldour was happy.

There was, in the forest of Sooneck, a huntsman, a very clever fellow, free of speech and malicious in his comments, who was called Erilangus. This man, who was a very fine archer, had been sought in marriage by several rich countrywomen in the neighbourhood of Lorch; but he had rejected the brides and had become a slave to the pack. One day when Pécopin asked him the reason, Erilangus replied: '*My lord, dogs suffer from several strains of rabies, women a thousand.*' On another day, learning of his master's upcoming wedding, he addressed him boldly saying: *Sire, why are you marrying?* Pécopin chased the fellow away.

This should have troubled the knight, since Erilangus possessed a subtle mind and a long memory. But the man went off to the court of the Marquis of Lusatia (*the Markgrafschaft Lausitz, was a lord of the Bohemian marches*), where he became master of the hunt, and Pécopin heard no more of him.

A week before the wedding, Bauldour was spinning in a window

embrasure. Her dwarf came to warn her that Pécopin was ascending the stairs. She wished to run to meet her fiancé, but as she rose from her chair, which had a straight, carved back, her foot entangled itself in the thread of her distaff. She fell. Poor Bauldour rose. She was without injury, but she remembered that a similar accident had once happened to that lady of the manor, Liba, and her heart sank. Pécopin entered, smiling, spoke to her about their marriage, and future happiness, and the cloud in her soul flew away.

III

In Which the Difference in Hearing Between a Young Man and an Old Man is Explained

The next day, Bauldour was spinning thread in her room, while Pécopin was hunting in the woods. He was alone and had only a single hound with him. During the course of the hunt, he arrived at a farmhouse at the entrance to the Sooneck forest, marking the boundary between the Sooneck and Falkenburg estates. This farmhouse was shaded on the east by four large trees, an ash, an elm, a fir, and an oak, which were called in the country the *Four Evangelists*. It seems that they were enchanted trees. As Pécopin passed beneath their shade, a bird was perched on each of these four trees: a jay on the ash, a blackbird on the elm, a magpie on the fir, and a crow on the oak. The four calls of these four feathered creatures mingled in a strange way, and seemed at times to question and answer one another. He could also hear a pigeon, which he could not see because it was in the woods, and a hen, which he could not see because it was in the farmyard. A few steps further on, a bowed old man was arranging tree stumps along a wall for the winter fire. Seeing Pécopin approach, he turned round and straightened. — 'Sir Knight,' he cried, 'do you hear what the birds are saying?' — 'Good fellow', replied Pécopin, 'what does it matter to me!' — 'Sire,' the old man continued, 'as far as a young man is concerned, the blackbird merely whistles, the jay is garrulous, the magpie squawks, the crow croaks, the pigeon coos, the hen clucks; to an old man, the birds speak.' — The knight burst out laughing. — 'Pardieu! That's but a fantasy.'— The old man replied, gravely:

You are wrong, master Pécopin.' 'You have never met me,' cried the young man, 'how do you know my name?' — 'The birds named you,' replied the old man. — 'You are an old fool, my good fellow,' cried Pécopin, and rode on.

About an hour later, as he was crossing a clearing, he heard a horn blowing, and saw a fine troop of horsemen traversing the woods; it was the Count Palatine out hunting. The Count Palatine was accompanied by the burgraves, who are the counts of the castles, the wildgraves, who are the counts of the forests, the landgraves, who are the counts of the land, the Rhinegraves, who are the counts of the Rhine, and the raugraves, who are counts by right of force. A gentleman horseman belonging to the Pfalzgraf (*the Count Palatine*), named Gaïfreroi, saw Pécopin, and called out to him: 'Halloo, there good huntsman! Will you ride with us?' 'Where are you going?' said Pécopin. 'Good huntsman,' replied Gaïfreroi, 'we are off to hunt down a kite, which is destroying our pheasants at Heimburg (*Heimberg in Niederheimbach, otherwise Burg Hohneck*); we are off to hunt a black vulture which is at Vautsberg (*Rheinstein*), and is exterminating our falcons; we are off to hunt an eagle at Reichenstein that is killing our merlins. Come with us.' — 'When will you return?' asked Pécopin. — 'Tomorrow', said Gaïfreroi. — 'I'll follow you', said Pécopin. The hunt lasted three days. On the first day Pécopin killed the kite, on the second day Pécopin killed the vulture, on the third day Pécopin killed the eagle. The Count Palatine marvelled at such excellent archery. — 'Knight of Sooneck,' he said to him, 'I grant you the fiefdom of Rhinestein (*Vautsberg*), upstream from my castle of Gutenfels. You will follow me to Stahlech (*a ruined castle, overlooking Bacharach*) to receive the investiture and take the oath of allegiance, in public and in the presence of the aldermen, *in mallo publico et coram scabinis*, as the charters of the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne say.' It was necessary to obey. Pécopin sent Bauldour a message in which he sadly announced to her that the gracious will of the Pfalzgraf obliged him to go, immediately, to Stahleck, concerning a very great and important matter. — 'Be calm, my dear lady, he added in closing, I will return next month.' — The messenger having left, Pécopin followed the Palatine and went to lodge with the knights of the prince's suite in the lower courtyard of the castle at Bacharach. That night he had a dream. He saw again the entrance to the Forest of Sooneck, the farm, the four trees and the four birds; the birds neither called, nor whistled, nor sang; they spoke. Their voices, with which the voices of the hen and the pigeon mingled,

consisted of this strange dialogue, which Pécopin, while asleep, heard distinctly:

The Jay

'The pigeon's in the woods.'

The Blackbird

'The hen, in the yard, says: Pécopin.'

The Jay

'The pigeon says: Bauldour.'

The Raven

'The lord is on his way.'

The Magpie

'The lady is in the tower.'

The Jay

Will he come from Aleppo?

The Blackbird

From Fez?

The Raven

From Damanhur?

The Magpie

The hen has bet against it, the pigeon for.

The Hen

Pécopin! Pécopin!

The Pigeon

Bauldour! Bauldour! Bauldour!

Pécopin awoke, he was in a cold sweat; at first he recalled the old man, and was terrified, without knowing why, by the dream and this dialogue; then he tried to understand, then he failed to understand; then he fell asleep again, and the next day, when day broke, when he saw the beautiful sunlight once more, which chases away ghosts, dissipates dreams, and gilds the mists, he no longer thought of the four trees, nor of the four birds.

IV

In Which the Various Qualities Specific to the Various Embassies are discussed

Pécopin was a gentleman of renown, breeding, wit, and excellent looks. Once introduced to the Court of the Pfalzgraf and installed in his new fiefdom, he pleased the Palatine to such an extent that the worthy prince said to him one day: 'My friend, I am sending an embassy to my cousin in Burgundy, and I have chosen you as ambassador because of your fine reputation.' Pécopin was obliged to do as his prince wished. Arriving at Dijon, he distinguished himself so well by his eloquent speeches that the duke said to him one evening, after having emptied three large glasses of Bacharach wine: 'Sir Pécopin, you are our friend; I have something of a quarrel with my lord the king of France, and the Count Palatine has allowed me to send you to address the king; I have chosen you as my ambassador because of your noble race.' Pécopin left for Paris. The king took a great liking to him, and taking him aside one morning said to him: 'Pardieu, Sir Pécopin; since the Palatine lent you to the Burgundian to serve Burgundy, the Burgundian will lend you to the king of France to serve Christianity. I require a noble lord to make certain remonstrances on my behalf to the Miramolin (*The Amir al-Mu'minin*, *or Supreme Leader*) of the Moors in Spain, and I have chosen you, as my ambassador, because of your fine wit. — One could refuse the emperor one's support; one might refuse the Pope one's wife; but one could refuse the King of France nothing. Pécopin set off for Spain. In Granada the Miramolin welcomed him in style, and invited him to the *zambras* (*festivities*) of the Alhambra. Every day was nothing but feasts, contests with javelins and lances, and falcon hunts, and Pécopin took part in them as the great jouster and hunter that he was. In his capacity as a Moorish leader, the Miramolin kept fine peregrines, excellent saker falcons, and admirable merlins, and at these hunts there were the finest flights of falcons imaginable. However, Pécopin did not forget to attend to the King of France's affairs. When the negotiation was over, the knight presented himself

to the Sultan to take his leave. — 'I accept your request, Christian sire', said the Miramolin, 'as you are indeed leaving immediately, for Baghdad'. — 'For Baghdad!' cried Pécopin. — Yes, sir knight,' replied the Moorish prince; for I cannot sign the treaty with the king in Paris without the consent of the Caliph of Baghdad, who is Commander of the Faithful; I must send someone of consequence to the Caliph, and I have chosen you as ambassador because of your good looks.' When one is among the Moors, one goes where the Moors desire, though they are dogs and infidels. Pécopin departed for Baghdad. There he met with an adventure. One day, as he was passing under the walls of the Seraglio, the favourite Sultana saw him, and as he was handsome, proud, and sad, she fell in love with him. She sent a black female slave to him, who spoke to the knight in the garden next to a tall microphylla (*small-leaved*) linden tree (*Tillia Europaea, Microphylla*) that can still be seen there, and who gave him a talisman, saying: 'This is from a princess who loves you, and whom you will never see. Keep this talisman. As long as you carry it with you, you will retain your youth. When you are at risk of dying, touch it, and it will save you.' —Pécopin accepted the talisman, just in case, which was a very beautiful turquoise stone inlaid with characters unknown to him. He attached it to his neck chain. 'Yet, my lord,' added the slave as she left him, 'beware of this: As long as you have this turquoise about your neck, you will not age a day; but if you lose it, you will be aged, in a minute, by all the years you have previously lived. Farewell, handsome giaour (*infidel*).' With that, the slave-girl departed. Meanwhile, the Caliph had seen the Sultana's slave accost the Christian knight. This Caliph was a very jealous individual, and something of a magician. He invited Pécopin to a feast, and when night came, he led the knight to a high tower. Pécopin, without noticing, had advanced quite close to the parapet, which was very low, when the Caliph spoke to him thus: 'Sir knight, the Count Palatine sent you to the Duke of Burgundy because of your fine reputation, the Duke of Burgundy sent you to the King of France because of your nobility, the King of France sent you to the Miramolin of Granada because of your fine mind, the Miramolin of Granada has sent you to the Caliph of Baghdad because of your good looks; I, because of your fine reputation, your nobility, your fine mind and your good looks, I send you to the Devil.' As he uttered the final word, the Caliph pushed Pécopin violently, such that the latter lost his balance, and fell from the top of the tower.

V

The Excellent Effect of an Excellent Thought

When a man falls into the abyss, a dreadful flash of lightning strikes his eyelids at that instant, and shows him at once the life from which he is about to emerge, and the death into which he is about to enter. In that supreme moment, Pécopin, distraught, sent a last thought to Bauldour, and placed his hand to his heart; which caused him, without thinking, to touch the talisman. Hardly had he touched the magic turquoise stone with his fingers than he felt himself carried away as if on wings. He was no longer falling, he was gliding. He flew in that manner all night. When day broke, the invisible hand that supported him placed him on a solitary beach, at the edge of the sea.

VI

In Which We See that the Devil Himself is Wrong to be Greedy

Now, at that very time, the Devil had met with a disagreeable and singular adventure. The Devil is accustomed to carry off his souls in a basket, as can be seen on the portal of the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Fribourg, in Switzerland, where he is depicted with a pig's head on his shoulders, a hook in his hand, and a rag-picker's basket on his back; for the Devil finds and gathers the souls of the wicked from the detritus that the human race deposits at the threshold of all the great earthly or divine truths. The Devil was not in the habit of closing his basket, which is why many souls escaped, thanks to the celestial interference of the angels. The Devil noticed this and fitted a strong lid to his basket equipped with a fine padlock. But the souls, being very subtle, ignored the lid; and, aided by the little pink fingers of many a Cherubim, still found a way to escape through holes in the basket. Seeing this, the Devil, very vexed, killed a dromedary, and

from the skin of its hump made a bag like a wineskin, which he knew how to seal marvellously well, with the assistance of a demon, Hermes, and which rendered him more joyful, once it was filled with souls, than a purse filled with gold sequins would a schoolboy. It is ordinarily in Upper Egypt, on the shore of the Red Sea, that the Devil, after having made his rounds of the lands of the pagans and unbelievers, completes the filling of his bag. The place is deserted; it is a sandy beach near a small palm grove which is situated between Coma (*Qiman al-Arus, Egypt*), where Saint Anthony was born and Clysma, where Saint Sisoës the Great died.

So, one day when the Devil's soul-gathering had gone better than usual, he was happily topping up his bag when turning around by chance, he saw an angel a few paces from him gazing at him smilingly. The Devil shrugged his shoulders, and continued to pile the souls into his bag, with little prior preparation, I confess, since allof them were fit for his cauldron. When he had finished, he grasped the bag with one hand ready to load it onto his shoulders; but he found it impossible to lift from the ground, so many souls were inside, and so heavy and burdensome were the iniquities with which they were laden. He seized the infernal bag with both arms; but his second attempt was as ineffective as the first, he could no more lift the bag than if it had been the tip of a rock protruding from the earth. 'Oh! Leaden souls!' said the Devil, and began to swear. Turning round, he saw the beautiful angel gazing at him and laughing. 'What are you doing here?' cried the Devil. 'As you see,' said the angel, 'I was smiling before, and now I'm laughing.' 'O, Celestial Fowl! Great Innocent, depart!' replied Asmodeus. But the angel with a stern expression, spoke to him thus: 'Dragon, these are the words I speak to you on behalf of the Lord above: you will fail to drag this bag of souls to Gehenna until a saint from Paradise, or a Christian fallen from the heavens, has helped you raise it from the earth, and placed it on your shoulders.' With this, the angel spread his aquiline wings and flew away.

The Devil was puzzled, indeed. 'What can the fool mean?' he muttered between his teeth. 'A saint from Paradise or a Christian fallen from the heavens? I'll be stuck here a long while if I have to wait till such help arrives! Why on earth did I fill this bag so outrageously full? Yet that fool, neither man nor bird, was screeching it! Come, now! I'm obliged to wait for this saint who will come from Paradise or the Christian who will fall from the heavens!' What a stupid tale, they must be short of entertainment up there!' While he

was talking to himself, the inhabitants of Coma and Clysma thought they heard thunder rumbling dully on the horizon. It was the Devil grumbling.

For a carter stuck in a bog, swearing is fine, but getting free of the rut he is in is even better. The poor Devil racked his brains, and thought hard. He is a very clever fellow, the one who seduced Eve. He enters everywhere, when he wants. Just as he can corrupt love, he can slither into Paradise. He maintains relations with Saint Cyprian the Magician, and he knows how to ingratiate himself with the other saints when occasion arises, sometimes by performing small mysterious services for them, sometimes by addressing them charmingly. This great scholar knows what conversation pleases each person. He attacks them all by way of their weakness. He brings Saint Robert of Knaresborough (*who lived on herbs, roots and water*) little oat-rolls with butter. He talks about goldsmith's work with Saint Eligius (*who was a goldsmith*) and cuisine with Saint Euphrosynus the Cook. He speaks to the holy bishop Germanus of Paris about King Childebert I, to the holy abbot Wandrille about King Dagobert I, and to the holy eunuch Usthazade about King Shapur II. He speaks to Saint Paul the Simple, of Egypt, about Saint Anthony (*of whom he was a disciple*), and he speaks to Saint Anthony about his pig. He speaks to Saint Lupus of Troyes about his wife Pimeniole (*whom he was forced to leave*), and is careful not to speak to Saint Gomer (*Saint Gummerus of Lier*) about his wife Guinmarie (*who was a difficult woman*). — For the Devil is a great flatterer. A heart of gall, a mouth of honey.

Now, four saints, who were known for their close friendship, Saint Nilus the Solitary, Saint Austremonius, Saint John the Dwarf, and Saint Medard, were out walking that very day, on the shore of the Red Sea. As they neared the palm grove, deep in conversation, the Devil saw them approaching before himself being seen. He instantly assumed the form of a poor, broken-down old man, and began uttering piteous cries. The saints drew close. 'What on earth is the matter?' asked Saint Nilus. 'Alas, alas, my good lords,' cried the Devil, 'aid me, I beg you. I am but a poor slave. My master, who is very wicked, is a merchant from Fez. Now you know all who dwell there, the Moors, the Numidians, the Garamantes, and all the inhabitants of Barbary, Nubia and Egypt, are evil, perverse, obsessed with women and illicit relationships; reckless ravishers, they are vicious and pitiless due to the influence of the planet Mars. Moreover, my master is a man tormented by black bile, yellow bile and Cicero's phlegm (*see Marcus Tullius Cicero's 'Tusculan*

Disputations', Book IV, X); and hence a cold, dry melancholy which makes him timid, of little courage, with a great inclination nevertheless for evil. Which renders his poor slaves oppressed, including myself a poor and aged fellow.' — 'Where is all this leading, my friend?' said Saint Austremonius, intrigued. — 'Well, my good lord,' replied the Devil. My master is a great traveller. He has a strange obsession. In every country he visits, this wicked man heaps up, in his garden, a vast pile of sand collected from the seashore nearby. In Zeeland he gathered a mountain of muddy, black sand; in Friesland a pile of coarse sand, mixed with those reddish shells, in which the Tiger Cone is found (*the sea snail, Conus canonicus*); and in the Cimbrian Chersonese, which is today called Jutland, a heap of fine sand mixed with those pale banded shells among which it is not unusual to find the Sunrise Tellin (*the bivalve mollusc Tellina radiata*)…' — 'May the Devil take you! interrupted Saint Nilus, who was impatient by nature. 'Come to the point. You've wasted our time for a quarter of an hour listening to your nonsense. I've counted the minutes.' The Devil bowed humbly: 'You count the minutes, my lord? A noble pursuit. You must be from the South; for those from the South are ingenious, and given to mathematics, being closer than other men to the circuit of the planets.' Then, suddenly, bursting into tears and beating his chest with his fist, he cried: 'Alas, alas, my good princes, I have a very cruel master. To build his mountain, he forces me, an old man, to come here every day, so as to fill this bag with sand from the shore. I have to bear it away on my shoulders. When I have done so, and completed the trip, I must begin again; it occupies me from dawn till sunset. If I want to rest, if I wish to sleep, if I succumb to fatigue, if the bag is not quite full, he has me whipped. Alas! I am very miserable, and sore, and overwhelmed with infirmities. Yesterday, I made six such trips in the one day; when evening came, I was so weary I could barely lift this bag I had filled to my back; and I spent the whole night here, weeping beside my burden, terrified to face my master. My lords, my good lords, of mercy, for pity's sake, help me to set this burden on my shoulders, so I can return to my master, for, if I delay, he will kill me. Oh! Oh!'

Listening to this pathetic harangue, Saint Nilus, Saint Austremonius, and Saint John the Dwarf were moved, and Saint Medard began to weep, which caused rain to fall on the earth for forty days.

But Saint Nilus said to the Devil: 'I cannot help you, my friend, and I regret it; for I would have to put my hand to this bag made of skin, which is

a dead thing, and a verse from the most Holy Scripture forbids our touching dead things under penalty of remaining impure.'

Saint Austremonius said to the Devil: 'I cannot help you, my friend, and I regret it; for I consider it would be a good action, and good actions have this disadvantage, that they lead the one who does them to exhibit vanity, so I abstain from doing them in order to retain my humility.'

Saint John the Dwarf said to the Devil: 'I cannot help you, my friend, and I regret it; but, as you see, I am so small in height I could not reach your belt. How could I set the burden on your shoulders?'

Saint Medard, in tears, said to the Devil: 'I cannot help you, my friend, and I regret it; but I am truly so moved that my arms are too weak.'

And they continued on their way. The Devil was furious. 'These creatures!' he cried, as he watched the saints depart. 'The old pedants! How absurd they are with their long beards! On my word, they are even more stupid than that angel!'

When we get angry, we can at least swear, and send to the Devil whoever has irritated us. The Devil lacks this recourse. Also, his anger possesses a sharpness that pierces and exasperates himself also.

As he grumbled, fixing his eyes, full of flame and fury, on his enemy the heavens, behold, he saw in the clouds a black dot. This dot grew larger, it approached; the Devil gazed at it; it was a man — an armed and helmeted knight, a Christian with a red cross marked on his chest — falling from the clouds.

'Praise be to whoever!' cried the Devil, leaping for joy. 'I'm saved. Here comes my Christian! I had no joy of those four saints, but it would be the very Devil if I couldn't defeat one man.' At that instant, Pécopin, gently deposited on the shore, landed beside him.

Seeing the old man, resting like a slave by his burden, he walked towards him, and asked: 'Who are you, friend, and where am I?'

The Devil began to moan piteously: 'You are on the shore of the Red Sea, my lord, and I am the most miserable of wretches.' Then, he sang to the knight the same antiphon as to the saints, begging him, in conclusion, to help him load the bag made of skin on his back.

Pécopin nodded: 'My good man, that's a most unlikely tale. 'My fair lord, who fell from the sky,' replied the Devil, 'yours is even less so, and yet it's true.'

— 'Indeed', said Pécopin.

— 'And then,' continued the Devil, 'what can I do about it? If my complaint appears inadequate, is it my fault? I lack wealth and wit; I know not how to invent; my lamentations simply tell of what has happened to me, and I can only speak the truth. Such is my meat; such my soup.'

— 'Indeed,' said Pécopin.

— 'And then, finally,' continued the Devil, 'what harm can it do you, my young and valiant fellow, to help a poor, infirm old man set this bag on his shoulders?'

This seemed conclusive to Pécopin. He bent down, lifted the bag from the ground, without difficulty, and, supporting it in his arms, prepared to place it on the back of the old man who was bending his back before him. A moment more, and it would be done.

Now, the Devil has vices; that is what ruins him. He is greedy. The idea came to him that very moment of adding Pécopin's soul to the other souls he was going to carry away; but to do so he had to kill Pécopin first. So, he began to summon, in a low voice, an invisible spirit of whom he then demanded something in obscure words.

Everyone knows that when the Devil converses and talks with other devils, he speaks a jargon that is half Italian, half Spanish. He also employs a few Latin words, here and there. This has been proven and clearly established in several encounters, and in particular at the trial of Doctor Eugenio Torralba, (*the Castilian 'magician'*) which began in Valladolid on January 10, 1528 and duly ended on May 6, 1531. (*Torralba had been an advisor to many at Court and in the Curia. He was sentenced to imprisonment and the wearing of the penitential garment, the sambenito. Deemed a madman, he was released by the inquisitor in 1535.*)

Pécopin was knowledgeable. He was, as I told you, an intelligent knight, a man who could endure an evening vigil bravely. He was well-read. He knew the Devil's language.

At the very moment when he was about to set the bag on the old man's

shoulder, he heard him, bent over as he was, murmur in a low voice: '*Bamos, non cierra occhi, verbera frappa, y echa la piedra*' ('*Now, look sharp, strike the blow, and let the stone fall'; a mixture of all three languages*). It was like a flash of lightning in Pécopin's mind. It instantly aroused his suspicions. He looked upwards, and saw at a great height above him an enormous stone that some invisible giant held suspended over his head.

Throwing himself backwards, and touching the talisman with his left hand, while grasping his dagger with his right, Pécopin pierced the bag with the tremendous force and speed of a whirlwind which, in the same instant, passes above, whirls about in flight, lightens, thunders and strikes.

The Devil let out a loud cry. The freed souls fled through the exit that Pécopin's dagger had opened for them, leaving behind in the bag their nastiness, their crimes, and their darkest thoughts, a hideous heap, an abominable wart, which was instantly attracted to the Devil himself, became embedded in him, and, covered by the hairy skin of the bag, remained fixed forever between his shoulders. Since that day Asmodeus has been hunchbacked.

Moreover, just as Pecopin threw himself backwards, the invisible giant dropped his stone, which fell on the Devil's foot and crushed it. Since that day, Asmodeus has been lame.

The Devil, like God, commands the thunder; a hideous, but inferior, thunder that rises from the ground and uproots trees. Pécopin felt the shore tremble beneath him, and something terrible envelop him; black smoke blinded him, a frightful noise deafened him; it seemed to him that he had fallen, and was rolling rapidly, skimming the ground, as if he were a dead leaf driven by the wind. He fainted.

VII

A Friendly Proposal from an Old Scholar in a Hut Roofed with Leaves

When he regained consciousness, he heard a soft voice saying: '*Hu fi 'al sama*', which in Arabic means: 'He is in heaven'. He felt a hand placed on his chest, and he heard another deep, slow voice replying: '*La, la, lam yamut*', which means: 'No, no, he is not dead'. He opened his eyes and saw an old man and a young girl kneeling beside him. The old man was as black as night, he had a long white beard braided into small plaits in the fashion of the ancient magi, and he was dressed in a large, smooth green silk robe. The young girl was the colour of red copper, with large eyes like porcelain and lips like coral. She had gold rings in her nose and ears. She was charming.

Pécopin was no longer on the shore. The breath from Hell, driving him on, at random, had blown him into a valley filled with rocks, and strangely-shaped trees. He rose. The old man and the young girl gazed at him gently. He approached one of the trees; the leaves shrank; the branches withdrew; the flowers, which had been pale white, turned red; and the whole tree seemed to recoil in some way before him. Pécopin recognising the Tree of Shame concluded that he had left Arabia and was in the famous land of Pudiferan (*Punt*).

Then, the old man beckoned to him. Pécopin followed and, a few moments later, the old man, the young girl and Pécopin were seated, all three, on a mat in the hut roofed with palm leaves, the interior of which, full of precious stones of all kinds, sparkled like a burning brazier.

The old man turned to Pécopin and said to him in German: 'My son, I am he who knows everything, the great Ethiopian lapidary, the Taleb (*seeker of knowledge*) of the Arabs. My name is Zin-Eddin to men and Evil-Merodach (*for the derivation of the name see the Bible: 2 Kings 25:27*) to the genies. I am the first man to have penetrated this valley; you are the second. I have spent my

life extracting from Nature the science of all things, and pouring into all things the science of the soul. Thanks to my knowledge, thanks to the light infused for a hundred years from my eyes, the stones of this valley live, the plants think, and the creatures possess understanding. It is I who have taught them the true art of healing, which Mankind lacks. I taught the pelican to wound itself to cure its young bitten by vipers, the blindworm to eat fennel to regain its sight, the bear suffering from cataracts to annoy the bees so they stung his eyes. I brought to the eagles, when confined, the Oolite (*Oolitic limestone, the name from the Greek word òoion, an egg*) which helps them lay eggs easily. If the jay purges itself with a bay leaf, the tortoise with hemlock, the deer with dittany, the wolf with mandrake, the wild boar with ivy, the turtledove with the herb helxine (*Soleirolia*); if horses, bothered by a swelling, open a vein in their rear thigh themselves; if the stellion (*a stellate lizard*), when moulting, devours its skin to cure itself of epilepsy; if the swallow cures ophthalmia in its young by means of the Chelidonius stone (*'Swallow stone', an agate, fossil, or calcareous secretion*) which it searches for beyond the seas; if the weasel equips itself with rue when it chooses to fight the snake — it is I, my son, who taught them. Until now I have only had creatures for disciples. I was awaiting a man. You are here. Be my son. I am old. I will leave you my hut, my gems, my valley, and my knowledge. You will marry my daughter, who is called Aïssa, and who is beautiful. I will teach you to distinguish the sandastre ruby (*marked with gold spots in the shape of stars*) from the chrysolampis (*described by Pliny the Elder as having a fiery lustre*), to cleanse mother of pearl in a pot of salt, and relight the fire of dulled rubies by soaking them in vinegar. Each day's worth of vinegar grants them a year of beauty. We will spend our lives quietly gathering diamonds, and eating roots. Be my son.'

— 'Thank you, venerable lord,' said Pécopin. 'I accept with joy.' When night came, he fled.

VIII

The Wandering Christian

He wandered for a long time through many countries. To recount the journeys that he made would require one to describe the whole world. He walked barefoot, and in sandals: he rode all kinds of mounts: donkeys, horses, mules, camels, zebras, onagers and even elephants. He sailed in every kind of vessel, on every course; the rounded ocean-going vessel, and the longship of the Mediterranean, the *oneraria* and *remigia* (*Roman cargo boats un-oared and oared*), the galley and galleon, frigate and frigatoon (*a Venetian ship with a lateen sail*), felucca, polacca (*a three-masted vessel*) and tartane, barque, barquette, and barcarolle. He ventured to travel aboard the wooden caracores *(the Malayan kurakura*) of the natives of Banten (*in Indonesia*) and the leather boats (*Armenian kuphars or guffas*) of the Euphrates of which Herodotus spoke (*'The Histories', Book I, 194*). He was buffeted by all the winds, the Levante/Sirocco and the Sirocco/Mezzogiorno, the Tramontane and the Galerna. He crossed Persia, Bago (*Myanmar*), and those places under the rule of Bago: Brama, Tazatay, Transiana, Sagistan, and Cassubi. He saw Monomotapa (*the ancient Kingdom of Mutapa, occupying parts of Zimbabwe/Mozambique*) as did Vincent Leblanc (*of Marseilles, in the 17th century*); Sofala (*Mozambique*) as did Pedro Ordoñez (*Pedro Ordóñez de Ceballos*; Hormuz (*the eastern shores of the Persian Gulf*) as did the Sieur de Fines; savages, as did Acosta (*José de Acosta*); and giants as did Pierre-Olivier Malherbe of Vitré. He lost four toes in the desert, as had Jerome Costilla (*in Chile*). He was sold seventeen times like Fernão Mendez-Pinto, was a convict like Texeus, and was spared being rendered a eunuch like Parisol. He suffered from the sickness called the *pyans* (*possibly malaria*), from which the black-skinned peoples perish, scurvy, which terrified Avicenna, and seasickness, to which Cicero preferred death. Pécopin climbed mountains so high that, on reaching the summit, he vomited blood, phlegm, and bile. He landed on that island one sometimes encounters without seeking it, and that one can never find while doing so, and verified that the inhabitants of the place are good

Christians. In Midelpalie, which is to the north, he noted a castle in a place where there is none, but the prestige of the north is so great that one should not be surprised by this. He stayed for several months with the king of Mogor Ekebas, well-regarded and cherished by that prince, of whose Court he later recounted everything that the English, the Dutch, and even the Jesuit fathers have since written down. He became a learned individual, for he had been taught by the two masters of all doctrine: travel and misfortune. He studied the fauna and flora of every clime. He observed the winds, through the migrations of birds, and the currents, through the migrations of cephalopods. He noted Ommastrephes sagittatus (*the European flying squid, now classified as Todarodes sagittatus*) passing through the underwater regions on its way to the North Pole, and Ommastrephes giganteus (*the jumbo squid, now classified as Dosidicus gigas*) on its way to the South Pole. He saw men and monsters as well as the ancient Greek, Ulysses. He knew all the marvellous beasts, the rosmar (*or rostunger, the walrus*), the black rail (*the bird Laterallus jamaicensis*), the solen goose (*the northern gannet, Morus bassanus*), garagians which are similar to sea-eagles, pintails (*the bird, Anas acuta*), of the Comoro Islands (*in the Mozambique channel*), the capercaillies of Scotland, the antenales which flock together, the alcatrazes (*pit vipers, lanceheads*) as big as geese, the moraxos bigger than a shark, the peymones of the Maldives islands which eat men, the manare fish (*the manta ray*) which has a head like an ox, the claki bird which is born from certain kinds of rotten wood, the little saru which talks better than a parrot, and finally the boranet, the animal-plant of the Tartar countries, which has a root in the ground and which grazes the grass around it. He killed, while out sea-fishing, a Triton snail of the yapiara species, and, while fishing in a pond, inspired love in a Great Crested newt of the baëpapinus species. One day, on the island of Mannar (*off Sri Lanka*), which is many a mile from Goa Island (*off Mozambique*), he was hailed by some fishermen, who showed him seven mermen and nine mermaids that they had caught in their nets. He heard the nocturnal noise of the marine blacksmith, and he ate one hundred and fifty-three kinds of fish that live in the sea, and all that were found in the net of the apostles when they went fishing at the Lord's command. In Scythia, he pierced with his arrows a griffin against which the Arimaspi (*a legendary tribe of one-eyed people, see Herodotus 4.13.1*) were making war to obtain the gold that the creature guarded. They wished to make him their king, but he escaped. He was almost shipwrecked in many encounters, and notably near Cape Gardafui (*a Somalian headland*), which the ancients called Aromata

Promontorium; and amidst all his many adventures and wanderings, his fatigue, feats of prowess, efforts and miseries, that brave and faithful knight Pécopin had only one aim, to reach Germany; only one hope, to return to Falkenburg; only one thought, to see Bauldour again.

Thanks to the Sultana's talisman that he always carried with him, he could, as we remember, neither age nor die. Yet he counted the years, sadly. By the time he finally reached the north of France, five years had passed since he had last seen Bauldour. Sometimes he thought about her in the evening, after walking since dawn, and he would sit on a stone by the side of the road and weep. Then his spirits would revive, and he would take courage: 'Five years,' he would murmur to himself; 'yes, but at last I shall see her again. She was fifteen, now, she will be twenty!' His clothes were in tatters, his shoes were worn, and his feet were bleeding, but his strength and joy had returned, and he was soon on his way again. In that state, he reached the Vosges Mountains.

IX

In Which We See What Fun a Dwarf Can Have in a Forest

One evening, after having journeyed all day among the heights, seeking a passage by which to descend to the Rhine, he arrived at the entrance to a grove of firs, ash-trees, and maples. He entered without hesitation. After walking for more than an hour, the path he was following suddenly emerged in a clearing dotted with holly, juniper, and wild raspberry bushes. Beside the clearing lay a marsh. Exhausted by his efforts and dying of hunger and thirst, he looked from side to side, seeking a cottage, a charcoal kiln, or a shepherd's fire, when suddenly a flock of shelducks passed close to him, flapping their wings and calling. Pécopin shuddered when he recognized these strange birds that make their nests underground in rabbit burrows, such that the country folk in the Vosges call them duck-rabbits. He pushed aside the clumps of holly, and found stonecrop, angelica, hellebore and great yellow gentian, growing and flourishing everywhere in the grass. As he bent down to inspect them, a mussel-shell that had fallen on the

lawn caught his eye. He picked it up. It was one of those freshwater mussels from the Vologne river (*a right tributary of the Moselle*) that can contain pearls as big as peas. He looked up; an eagle owl was hovering above his head.

Pécopin was beginning to worry. With good reason, it must be confessed. The hollies and raspberry bushes, the shelducks, the magic herbs, the mussel, the eagle-owl, none of this was very reassuring. He was quite alarmed, and anxiously wondering where in truth he was, when a distant song reached him. He listened. The voice producing it was hoarse, broken, sad, annoying, dull and shrill at the same time, and this is what it sang:

'My little lake engenders, in the shade that veils it darkly,

Laughing Amphitrite, and jet-black Neptunus;

My humble depths nourish, midst mountains that are nameless,

The Emperor Neptunus, and Queen Amphitrite.

I am the dwarf, the giants' grandfather,

Two seas are born from my drop of water.

I pour, from out my rocks, that no wing touches ever,

For her a blue river, a green river just for him.

I pour out from my cave, free of fire, dark and dim,

A green river for him, and for her a blue river.

I am the dwarf, the giants' grandfather,

Two seas are born from my drop of water.

A fine emerald's concealed amidst my sand and stone;

A pure sapphire within my moist casket, rich and fine.

My emerald melts, and becomes the flowing Rhine;
My sapphire dissolves and, behold, creates the Rhône.

I am the dwarf, the giants' grandfather,
Two seas are born from my drop of water.'

Pécopin could no longer doubt it. A poor weary traveller, he was already deep in the fatal *Bois des Pas-Perdus* (*'The Wood of Lost Footsteps'*). This wood is a vast forest full of labyrinths, enigmatic trails, and mazes in which the dwarf Roulon wanders. Roulon dwells in a lake in the Vosges, at the top of a mountain; and because he sends from there a stream that descends to the Rhône (*via the Saône*), and another to the Rhine (*via the Moselle*), this boastful dwarf calls himself the father of the Mediterranean and the North Sea. His pleasure is to wander in the forest and mislead passers-by. The traveller who enters the *Bois des Pas-Perdus* never leaves.

The voice and the song were that wicked dwarf Roulon's song and voice. Pécopin, distraught, threw himself face down on the ground. 'Alas!' he cried, 'All is over. I shall never see Bauldour again.' 'Quite so,' said a voice nearby.

X

Equis Canibusque (*Horses and Hounds*)

He sat up; an old nobleman, dressed in a magnificent hunting outfit, was standing a few paces before him. This gentleman was fully equipped for the chase. A cutlass with a hilt of chased gold was at his hip, and from his belt hung a hunting-horn, inlaid with tin and carved from the horn of a buffalo. There was something strange, and vaguely luminous, about his pale smiling face, lit by the last glimmer of twilight. This old huntsman, appearing, suddenly, in such a place, at such an hour, would certainly have seemed singular to you as well as I; but in the *Bois des Pas-Perdus*

one thinks only of Roulon; the old man was not the dwarf, and that was enough for Pécopin.

The good fellow, moreover, had a gracious, courteous, and pleasing appearance. And then, although definitely dressed for the chase, he was so old, so worn, so bent, so broken, his hands were so wrinkled and weak, his eyebrows so white, and his legs so emaciated, that it would have been pitiful to fear him. His smile, on closer examination, was the banal, shallow smile of an imbecilic king.

— 'What do you want of me?' asked Pécopin.

— 'To go join Bauldour', said the old hunter, still smiling.

— 'When shall I go?'

— 'Spend but a night hunting beside me.'

— 'Which night?'

— 'This one.'

— 'And then I will see Bauldour again?'

— 'When our night of hunting is over, at sunrise, I will leave you at the gates of Falkenburg.'

— 'Hunting at night?'

— 'Why not?'

— 'Yet it's strange, indeed.'

— 'Well?'

— 'Is it not very tiring?'

— 'No.'

— 'But you are quite old.'

— 'Don't worry about me.'

— 'Well, I'm tired, I've walked all day, and I'm dying of hunger and thirst,' said Pécopin. 'I'll scarcely be able to ride a horse.' The old lord took a silver damascened gourd from his belt, and presented it to him.

—' Drink this,' he said.

Pécopin raised the flask, eagerly, to his lips. He had barely swallowed a

few mouthfuls when he felt revived. He was young, strong, alert, powerful. He had slept, he had eaten, he had drunk. At times, he even thought he had drunk too much.

— 'Come, then;' he said, 'let us walk, ride, and hunt all night, I'm happy to do so; but will I see Bauldour again?'

— 'After the night has passed, at sunrise.'

— 'And what guarantee do you give me?'

— 'My very presence. The aid I bring you. I could well have left you to die here of hunger, weariness, and misery, abandoning you to the errant dwarf of Lake Roulon; but I took pity on you.'

— 'I'm with you, then' said Pécopin. 'You've promised. At sunrise, I shall be in Falkenburg.'

— 'Hello! You, others! On with you! On with the hunt!' cried the old lord, straining his aged voice.

As he shouted towards the thicket, he turned around, and Pécopin saw that he was hunchbacked. Then he took a few steps, and Pécopin saw that he was lame.

At the call of the old lord, a troop of horsemen dressed like princes and mounted like kings, came out of the dense woodland. They gathered in profound silence around the old man, who appeared to be their master. All were armed with knives or spears; the master alone bore a horn. Night had fallen, and around the gentlemen stood two hundred servants carrying two hundred torches.

— '*Ebbene*,' said the master, '*ubi sunt los perros?*' (*'Well, where are the hounds?'*)

The mixture of Italian, Latin and Spanish jarred with Pécopin. But the old man continued impatiently: 'The dogs! The dogs!' He had barely finished speaking, when a terrible barking filled the clearing. A pack had just appeared there. An admirable pack, a true emperor's pack. Servants in yellow jackets and red stockings, kennel attendants with fierce faces, and naked black Africans, held the hounds tightly on the leash.

Never was a pack of dogs more complete. Every possible breed of hunting dog was there, coupled and divided in separate groups, according to breed and instinct. The first group consisted of a hundred English mastiffs

and a hundred greyhounds, with twelve pairs of tiger-hounds (*Kai Ken*) and twelve pairs of deer-hounds. The second group was made up entirely of Barbary *greffiers* (*Italian pointers*) with red and white markings, brave dogs that are not startled by loud noises, are good for three years, inclined to run after cattle, and are used for hunting large prey. The third group was a legion of Norwegian Elkhounds: tawny dogs, with lively reddish hair, with white patches on the forehead or neck, possessing a fine sense of smell and a big heart, which take particular delight in chasing elk and deer; grey dogs, with leopard-like flecking on the back, and legs displaying the same kind of fur as a hare's paws or grooved with red and black. The choice was excellent. There was not a single mongrel among them. Pécopin, who knew what he was talking about, could not see a single one among the fawn-coloured hounds that was yellowish or marked with grey, nor among the greys a single one that was silvery or had tawny paws. All were true and authentic.

The fourth group was formidable; it was a dense, deep, tightly-packed crowd of those powerful black-backed hounds from Saint-Hubert Abbey (*now officially the Abbey of St Peter in the Ardennes; Saint Hubert is the patron saint of hunting, and the bloodhound breed is said to have descended from hounds bred there*), which have short legs and cannot run fast, but are formidable bloodhounds that chase wild-boars, foxes, and strong-scented beasts, furiously. Like those of Norway, all were noble dogs and of true breed, and had evidently been suckled close to the heart. They had an average-size head, arched rather than flattened, a mouth black not red, long ears, curving loins, a muscular saddle, wide legs, broad and muscular thighs, straight harp-shaped hocks, a tail thick near the loins with the rest thinner, rough hair beneath the belly, strong claws, and straight feet shaped like those of a fox. The fifth group were Orientals. They must have cost immense sums; for the only dogs in the group were those from Palibothra (*Patna, India*) that will attack bulls; those that attack lions, which were from Cintiqui (*Cuiju*, *Guizhou in southwest China? See Marco Polo's 'Travels', chapter LIX for such dogs*), and those from Monomotapa (*Mutapa, Zimbabwe/Mozambique*), all of which had formed part of the guard of the Emperor of India. The whole pack, whether from England, Barbary, Norway, the Ardennes or India, howled abominably. Parliament could not have done better.

Pécopin was dazzled by this pack, and his hunting appetite was roused. However, it had to have come from somewhere, and he could not help telling

himself that it was strange that, given the loud barking, no one had heard it before seeing it.

The servant who was master of the hunt, and leading the chase, was a few steps away from Pécopin, his back to him. Pécopin went to him to question him, and put his hand on his shoulder; the servant turned around. He was masked.

This rendered Pécopin speechless. He was even beginning to wonder very seriously whether he should indeed follow the hunt, when the old man accosted him. 'Well, sir knight, what do you say to our dogs?'

— 'I say, my fair lord, that to follow such magnificent dogs, one would need magnificent horses.'

The old man, without answering, raised to his mouth a silver whistle, which was tied to the little finger of his left hand, a precaution taken by a discerning individual accustomed to meeting with upsets, then he whistled.

At the sound of the whistle, there was a noise amidst the trees, the participants lined up, and four grooms in scarlet livery appeared, leading two noble steeds. One was a fine Spanish genet, of magisterial appearance, with smooth, blackish, long, rounded, and well-formed hooves and coronets; short, straight, moon-shaped pasterns; bare, sinewy cannons; and lean, well-set knees. He had the hocks, gaskins, and forearms of a fine stag, a broad, open chest, and a firm, well-padded, and quivering back. The other was a Tartar racer with an enormous rump, a long body, well-proportioned flanks, and a bay-coloured coat. His neck, of medium curvature, but not too arched, was covered with a vast, flowing, curling mane; his thick tail hung to the ground. He had a seamed brow, above large, sparkling eyes; a wide mouth; restless ears, and broad nostrils; a star on his forehead; and two 'stockings' on his legs: a brave and mature seven-year-old. The former had a chamfron to protect his head, a breastplate with a coat of arms, and a war-saddle. The latter was less proudly, but more splendidly, harnessed; he had a silver bit, gilded studs, a gold-embroidered bridle, a regal saddle, a brocaded carapace with hanging trimmings, and a waving plume. The first stamped his feet, curveted, snorted, bit at his bridle, and scattered the pebbles under his feet, as if eager for battle. The other looked here and there, sought applause, neighed joyfully, played the part of a king, and pawed the ground marvellously, sweeping at it with the tips of his hooves Both were as black as

ebony. Pécopin, his eyes full of admiration, contemplated these two wondrous beasts.

— 'Well,' said the lord, hobbling about, coughing, and still smiling, 'which one shall you take?'

Pécopin no longer hesitated, and leapt onto the genet.

— 'Are you well-set?' the old man called out to him.

— 'Indeed,' said Pécopin.

Then the old man laughed aloud, tore away the harness, plume, saddle and caparison of the Tartar horse with one hand, seized it by the mane with the other, leapt like a tiger, and mounted the superb beast, which was trembling in every limb, bareback; then, snatching his hunting horn from his belt, he began to sound such a formidable fanfare that Pécopin, deafened, thought the frightening old man must have a chest filled with thunder.

XI

What one exposes oneself to when riding an unfamiliar horse

At the sound of the hunting- horn, the depths of the forest were illumined by a thousand extraordinary lights, shadows passed amongst the trees, distant voices cried: 'On with the chase!' The pack barked, the horses snorted, and the trees shuddered as if in a high wind.

At that moment a cracked bell, which seemed to bleat like a goat in the darkness, struck midnight. At the twelfth stroke the old lord blew his ivory horn a second time, the servants unleashed the pack, the dogs leapt forward like a handful of stones thrown from a ballista, the cries and howls redoubled, and the huntsmen, whippers-in, the mounted field, and the old man and Pécopin, galloped away.

There followed a wild, violent, rapid, radiant, dizzying, supernatural gallop, which gripped Pécopin, dragged him along, carried him away, such that every step his steed took resonated in his brain as if his skull were the

road beneath him, dazzled him like lightning, intoxicated him like an orgy, and roused him like warfare; a gallop which at times became a whirlwind, a whirlwind which now and then became a hurricane.

The forest was immense, the hunters innumerable, clearing followed clearing, the wind wailed, and whistled through the undergrowth, the hounds barked, the colossal black silhouette of an enormous stag, a monarch of sixteen tines, appeared at times through the branches, and fled amidst the light and shadow, Pécopin's horse panted terribly, the trees leaned forward as if to watch the hunt pass by, and fell back after doing so, fearful peals from the hunting-horns burst forth at intervals, then the horns suddenly fell silent, and in the distance, the single hunting-horn of the old huntsman was heard.

Pécopin had no idea where he was. Galloping past a ruin shaded by fir trees, amidst which a waterfall poured from the top of a great wall of porphyry, he thought he had glimpsed the Château of Nideck (*at Oberhaslach, in the Bas-Rhine, France*). Then he passed a line of mountains to his left, which appeared to him to be the Basses-Vosges; he recognized successively, by the shape of their four summits, Le Ban de la Roche, Champ du Feu, Le Climont and Ungersberg. A moment later he was in the Hautes-Vosges. In less than a quarter of an hour his horse crossed the Giromagny, the Rotabac, the Soultz, the Baerenkopf, the Gresson, the Bressoir, the Haut-de-Honce, the Montagne de Lure, the Tête-de-l'Ours, the Grand Donon and the Grand Ventron. These vast peaks seemed jumbled together in the darkness, without order or connection; it was as if a giant had overturned the great chain of peaks of Alsace. At times, he thought he could distinguish below him the lakes the Vosges display near their summits, as the mountains seemingly passed beneath the belly of his horse. Thus, he saw his shadow reflected in the Bain-des-Païens (*Cascade du Heidenbad*), in the lakes of Saut-des-Cuves, and in Le Lac Blanc and Le Lac Noir of the Val d'Orbey. But he saw it as swallows see their shadows, in skimming a pond's mirror, disappearing no sooner than they have appeared. However, so strange and so frantic was the chase, that he had to reassure himself by touching his hand to his talisman, and recalling that after all he was not far from the Rhine.

Suddenly a thick mist enveloped him, the trees faded into the mist, then vanished within it; the noise of the hunt redoubled amidst the shadows, and his Spanish genet began to gallop with renewed fury. Soon the fog was so dense that Pécopin could barely distinguish his horse's pricked-up ears in

front of him. In such terrible moments, it must require a great effort, and is certainly an act of great merit, to trust one's soul to God and one's heart to one's mistress. Which is what the brave knight achieved, most devoutly. He was thinking only of God and Bauldour, perhaps even more of Bauldour than of God, when it seemed to him that the lamentation of the wind became like a voice and distinctly pronounced the name: *Heimburg*; At that moment a large torch carried by a huntsman pierced the fog, and by the light of this torch, Pécopin saw a kite pass over his head, pierced by an arrow, yet still in flight. He tried to follow the bird with his eyes, but his horse leapt, the kite flapped its wings, the torch plunged amidst the woods, and Pécopin fell back into the night. A few moments later the wind spoke again, saying: *Vautsberg*; a new glimmer of light illuminated the fog, and Pécopin saw in the shadows a black vulture, its wing pierced by a javelin and yet still flying. He opened his eyes to follow it, he opened his mouth to call out; but before he could fix his gaze, before he had uttered his cry, the glimmer of light, the vulture, and the javelin, had disappeared. His horse had not slowed for a moment, and was running headlong at all these phantoms, as if it were the blind horse of the demon Paphos, or the deaf horse of King Sisymordachus. The wind screeched a third time, and Pécopin heard that mournful voice in the air say the name: *Rheinstein*; a third flash of light crimsoned the misty trees, and a third bird passed. It was an eagle its belly pierced by a sapling, yet it still flew. Then Pécopin remembered the Pfalzgraf's hunt, in which he had been involved, and shuddered. But the genet was galloping so strongly, the trees and the vague objects of the nocturnal landscape fled by so swiftly, the speed of Pécopin's passage was so prodigious, that, nothing outside, nor even within him, found rest. Visions and apparitions succeeded one another so confusedly in his mind, that he was even unable to fix his thoughts on his own sad memories. Ideas blew through his brain like the wind. The noise of the hunt could still be heard in the distance, and now and then the monstrous nocturnal stag roared amidst the thickets.

Little by little the fog lifted. The air suddenly became warm, the trees altered in shape; cork-oaks, pistachio trees, and Aleppo pines appeared among the rocks; a large white moon, surrounded by an immense halo, lit the gloomy heather. Yet there ought to have been no moon that night.

Riding along a sunken path, Pécopin bent down, and tugged a handful of herbs from the bank. By moonlight he examined the plants and

recognised, with anguish, the Anthyllis vulneraria (*woundwort*) of the Cévennes, Veronica filiformis (*slender speedwell*) and Ferula communis *(giant fennel*) whose hideous wispy leaves end in claws. Half an hour later the wind was even warmer; strange oceanic mirages filled the spaces of the high forest at times; he bent down once more to the bank and again grasped the first plants his hand came across. This time they were the silver broom (*Argyrolobium zanonii*) of Sète, the broad-leaved anemone (*Anemone Stellata*) of Nice, the tree mallow (*Lavatera maritima*) of Toulon, the bloody-cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*) of the Basses-Pyrénées, recognisable by its five-lobed leaf, and the great masterwort (*Astrantia major*) each of whose flower-heads, a cluster of tiny whitish-green florets, shines brightly amidst a circle of petal-like bracteoles, like the planet Saturn gleaming amidst its set of rings. Pécopin knew he was moving away from the Rhine, at frightening speed; he had travelled more than two hundred and fifty miles between his plucking the two handfuls. He had crossed the Vosges, the Cévennes, and was now crossing the Pyrenees. — 'Death rather than this', he thought, and sought to throw himself from his horse. As he moved to plunge from the saddle, he felt his feet gripped as if by two iron hands. He looked down. His stirrups had seized and were holding him fast. They were alive.

The distant cries, the neighing and barking raged on; the old hunter's horn, preceding the hunt at a fearful distance, sounded its sinister melodies; and through large bluish branches that the wind shook, Pécopin saw the hounds swimming across ponds full of magical reflections.

The wretched knight resigned himself, shut his eyes, and allowed himself to be borne along. When he opened them again; the heat, like that of a furnace, of a tropical night struck his face; a vague roaring of tigers, and the wailing howls of jackals, reached him: he glimpsed ruined pagodas on the tops of which vultures, philosophers, and storks, perched gravely, arranged in long lines; trees of bizarre shape displayed a thousand strange attitudes in the valleys; he recognized banyans and baobabs; the *pitta* (*Pitta brachyura*) whistled, the *thun-thuni* (*the purple sunbird, Cinnyris asiaticus*) whirred, the little *sholakili* (*the blue robin, Sholicola albiventris*) sang. Pécopin was in a forest in India.

He closed his eyes. Then he opened them again. In a quarter of an hour the equatorial gusts had been replaced by an icy wind. The cold was dreadful. His horse's hooves made the frost creak. Reindeer, elks, and satyrs moved like shadows through the mist. The harshness of the woods and the

mountains was severe. There were only a few cliffs of immense height on the horizon, around which gulls and skuas (*stercoraria*) flew, while through horrible black vegetation, one could glimpse tall white waves, at which the sky hurled snowflakes, and which in turn hurled flakes of foam at the sky. Pécopin was traversing the larch forests of Biarmia (*Bjarmland, mentioned in the Viking Sagas*), which are at the North Cape.

A moment later the darkness deepened. Pécopin saw nothing more, but he did hear a dreadful sound and recognised that he was passing close to the Maelstrom whirlpool (*Moskstraumen, off the Lofoten Islands*) which is the Tartarus of the ancients, and the navel of the sea.

What was the nature of this terrible belt of trees that circled the earth? The sixteen-tined stag reappeared at intervals, ever fleeing and ever pursued. Shadows and murmurs flew pell-mell on its trail, and the old hunter's horn dominated all, even the sound of the Maelstrom.

Suddenly, the genet stopped short. The barking ceased, everything around fell silent. The wretched knight, who had ridden with closed eyes for more than an hour, opened them again. He found himself in front of the facade of an enormous dark building, whose lit windows seemed to gaze at him. The facade was as black as a mask, and as alive as a face.

XII

An Ill Place to Lodge in Described

What the building was, he found it difficult to guess. It was a manor house as well fortified as a citadel, a citadel as magnificent as a palace, a palace as menacing as a cavern, a cavern as silent as the tomb. Not a voice could be heard, not a shade could be seen.

Around this castle, whose immensity had something supernatural about it, the forest stretched as far as the eye could see. There was no longer a moon above the horizon. Only a few stars could be seen in a sky red as blood.

His horse had stopped at the foot of a flight of stairs that led to a large closed door. Pécopin looked to right and left, and thought he could distinguish other flights of stairs, all along the façade, at the feet of which other motionless riders stood, waiting like himself, seemingly in silence.

Pécopin drew his dagger, and was about to strike the pommel against the marble balustrade of the steps, when the old hunter's horn suddenly sounded from the castle, from behind the façade perhaps, vastly powerful and sonorous, as deafening as the storm-filled bugle into which the dark angel blows. That horn, the sound from which bent the trees visibly, sang a terrible death-knell in the darkness.

The horn fell silent. No sooner had it done so, than the castle gates swung open, as if the wind had violently and instantly thrust them aside. A flood of light issued forth. The genet climbed the steps of the porch, and Pécopin entered a vast, splendidly-illuminated hall.

The walls of this chamber were covered with tapestries depicting subjects taken from Roman history. The spaces between the panelling were clad in cypress-wood and ivory. Above, there was a gallery full of flowers and shrubs, and in one corner, beneath a rotunda, was an area set aside for the women, paved with agate. The area of the pavement was a mosaic depicting the Trojan War.

Other than himself, no one was present; the room was deserted. There was nothing more sinister than this bright hall, and intense solitude.

The horse, which was advancing of its own accord and whose steps sounded loudly on the pavement, slowly crossed this first hall, and entered a second chamber, which was likewise immense, illuminated, and deserted. Large panels of carved cedar extended around the walls of the chamber, and within the panels a mysterious artist had framed marvellous paintings, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold. There were battles, hunts, festivities in castles lit by fireworks, which were besieged and stormed by fauns and savages, jousts, and naval engagements with all kinds of vessels moving over an ocean of turquoise, emeralds and sapphires, which admirably imitated the briny, swollen waves, and tumescence of the sea.

Below these paintings a frieze, carved by the finest and most masterful of chisels, showed, in all the innumerable aspects and relationships between them, the three species of terrestrial creatures that possess fully-developed

intellects: giants, humans, and dwarves; and everywhere, in this work, the giants and dwarves humiliated the humans, who were shown as smaller than the giants, and more foolish than the dwarves.

The ceiling, however, seemed to pay a partial homage to human genius. It was entirely composed of medallions placed side by side in which shone, lit by obscure fire, and crowned with Plutonic crowns (*of cypress*), the portraits of all the men to whom the world owes discoveries that have been deemed useful, and who, for this reason, are called the *benefactors of humanity*. Each was there because of the area to which his inventiveness had been applied: Arabos, son of Hermes, medicine; Daedalus, labyrinths; Pisistratus books; Aristotle, libraries; Tubal Cain, anvils; Archytas of Tarentum, war-engines; Noah, navigation; Abraham, geometry; Moses, the trumpet; Amphictyon, the divination of dreams; Frederick Barbarossa, falconry; and Jean Bachou from Lyon, the squaring of the circle (*the mathematician and alchemist, Jean Bachou, published his 'Demonstration du Divin Theoreme de la Quadrature du Cercle: 'Demonstration of the Divine Theorem of the Quadrature of the Circle', in 1671*). In the angles of the vault, and in the pendentives, many illustrious faces were grouped, constellations of masters in this sky filled with human stars: Flavius Amalfitanus (*Flavio Gioia*), who invented the magnetic compass; Christopher Columbus, who discovered America; Botargus (*Carolus Battus, Carel Baten, a sixteenth century Dutch physician author of the cookery book 'Eenen Seer Excellenten Gheexperimenteerden Nieuwen Cocboeckin' in 1593*) who invented culinary sauces; Mars, who invented war; Faustus, who invented printing; the monk Berthold Schwartz (*a fourteenth century alchemist*), who invented gunpowder; and Pope Pontian (*Bishop of Rome in 235AD*), who invented cardinals. Several of these famous characters were unknown to Pécopin, for the simple reason that they had not yet been born at the time when this story takes place.

The knight entered, thus, a long series of magnificent rooms, his horse leading him. In one of them he noticed on the eastern wall this inscription in gold letters: 'The *caoua* of the Arabs, otherwise known as *kawa* (*coffee*), is derived from a plant that grows in abundance in the Turkish empire, and which is called in India the miraculous plant, being prepared as follows: take half an ounce of the leaves, grind them to powder, and infuse them in a pint of fresh water for three or four hours; then boil it so that one third makes a kind of consommé. Sip it little by little, almost as if inhaling it. People of status sweeten it with sugar and flavour it with ambergris.'

Opposite, on the western wall, shone another inscription: 'Greek fire is made from willow-charcoal, salt, brandy, sulphur, pitch, incense and camphor, and burns on the surface of water without any other mixture, consuming all matter.'

In another room, the only ornament was a portrait, the very likeness, of Trimalchio, who at his feast (*see the 'Satyricon' by Petronius Arbiter*), sang in a vile voice about the 'sauce' to which Asafoetida had been added.

Everywhere torches, chandeliers, candles and candelabras, reflected in immense copper and steel mirrors, glittered amidst these immense and opulent rooms in which Pécopin encountered not a single living being, and through which he advanced, his eyes haggard, his mind troubled, alone, anxious, and fearful, full of those inexpressible, confused ideas which haunt dreamers in the darkness of the forest.

Finally, he arrived in front of a door of reddish metal above which, amidst a cluster of precious stones, was set a large golden apple and, on this apple, he read this two-line inscription:

ADAM INVENTED THE MEAL,

EVE INVENTED THE DESSERT

XIII

As the Inn, so the Menu

As he sought to explore the lugubriously ironic meaning of the inscription, the door slowly opened, the horse entered, and Pécopin was like a man who suddenly passes from the full noon sun to a cellar. The door closed behind him, and the place he had entered was so dark that, at first, he thought he had been blinded. He could only see a large pale glow some distance away. Little by little his eyes, dazzled by the supernatural light of the antechambers he had previously passed through, became accustomed to the darkness, and he began to distinguish, as if through a mist,

the thousand monstrous pillars of a prodigious Babylonian style hall. The light at the centre of this room took on visible contours, forms took shape there, and after a few moments the knight saw, in the shadow, in the midst of a forest of twisted columns, a large table emerge, lividly lit by a seven-branched candlestick, at the candle-tips of which trembled and flickered seven blue flames.

At the top of this table, on a throne of pure gold, sat a living bronze giant. This giant was Nimrod. To his right and left sat a crowd of pale, silent guests on iron chairs, some wearing Moorish caps, others covered more completely in pearls than the King of Visnagar (*in Gujarat, India*).

Pécopin recognised all the famous hunters there, who have left their mark on history: King Mithrobuzanes (*the Orontid King of Sophene, between Armenia and Syria, second century BC, see Polybius, 'Histories' Book XXXI*) the tyrant Machanidas (*of Sparta third century BC*), the Roman consul Lucius Aemilius Barbula (*consul in 281BC*); Rollo, king of the sea (*Viking ruler of Normandy in the tenth century*); Zwentibold, the illegitimate son of the great Arnulf, King of Lorraine (*Lotharingia, late tenth century*); Haganon, favourite of Charles III (*Charles the Simple, tenth century*) of France; Herbert II, Count of Vermandois (*said to have been executed by Louis IV during a hunt*); William III of Aquitaine Tête-d'Etoupe (*Towhead*), count of Poitiers, founder of the illustrious House of Rechignevoisin; Pope Vitalian (*seventh century*); Fardulfus, Abbot of Saint-Denis (*ninth century*); Athelstan, king of England (*tenth century*), and Harald, King of Denmark. Beside Nimrod stood the great Cyrus, who founded the Persian Empire more than five hundred years before Jesus Christ, and who wore on his chest his coat of arms, which was, as we know, sinople (*green*) with a lion argent (*silver*) rampant, crowned with gold laurel, with a crenellated border of or (*gold*) and gules (*red*) charged with eight tierce-leaves (*clover-leaf shapes*) with tails, argent.

The table was laid according to imperial etiquette, and at the four corners there were four distinguished and illustrious huntresses: Queen Emma (*wife of Aethelred the Unready*), Queen Ogive (*Eadgifu of Wessex, Queen of West Francia, wife of Charles the Simple*) mother of Louis IV d'Outremer, Queen Gerberga (*of Saxony, wife of Louis IV*), and Diana, who, as a goddess, had her canopy and casket (*of eating utensils*) like the three queens.

None of the guests ate, spoke, or looked at each other. A large empty space in the middle of the tablecloth seemed to be awaiting the meal, while

there were flasks on the table in which sparkled liquids from many a varied country: palm-wine from India, rice-wine from Bengal, distilled-water from Sumatra, *sake* from Japan, grapefruit juice from China, and *pekmez* from Turkey. Here and there, in vast jugs of richly enamelled earthenware, foamed that beverage the Norwegians called *øl*, the Goths *buska*, the Carinthians *vo*, the Sclavonians *oll*, the Dalmatians *bieu*, the Hungarians *ser*, the Bohemians *pio*, the Poles *piwo*, and which we call beer.

Black Africans who looked like demons, or demons who looked like black Africans, surrounded the table, standing there silently, napkins on their arms, ewers in their hands. Each guest had, as was fitting, their dwarf beside them. Diana had her greyhound.

Looking attentively into the misty depths of this extraordinary place, Pécopin saw that in the apparently endless immensity of the hall, beneath the forest of columns, there was a multitude of spectators; all on horseback like himself, all in hunting attire: shadows in the darkness, statues in the stillness, spectres in the silence. Among those closest to him, he thought he recognized the horsemen who had accompanied the old hunter in the *Bois des Pas-Perdus*. As I have just said, guests, servants, assistants, maintained a dreadful silence, and one would have been more likely to have heard whispers from a stone tomb, than the sound of a breath even from that crowd.

It was cold indeed in the darkness. Pécopin was frozen to the bone; nonetheless he felt sweat trickling down all his limbs.

Suddenly, a loud barking sounded, at first distant, but soon wild, violent, joyful; then the hunting-horn of the old huntsman joined it, and began to execute, with triumphal splendour, an admirable, perfectly strange, and new hallali, which, reinvented several centuries later by Roland de Lattre (*Orlando di Lasso, the Late-Renaissance composer*) as a result of a nocturnal inspiration, earned that great musician, on April 7th, 1574, the honour of being created by Pope Gregory XIII a knight of Saint Peter, and awarded the Order of the Golden Spur *de numero participantium* (*participating in their number*).

At the sound, Nimrod raised his head, Abbot Fardulfus half turned away, and Cyrus, who was leaning on his right elbow, shifted his weight to his left.

XIV

A New Way of Falling from a Horse

The barking and horn blasts drew nearer; the twin leafs of a large door, opposite that through which Pécopin had entered, opened, and the knight beheld the two hundred torchbearers entering from a long, dark corridor, supporting on their shoulders an immense pure-gold dish in which lay, in the middle of a vast pool of sauce, the venison from the stag of sixteen tines, roasted, blackened, and smoking hot.

In front of the servants, whose two hundred torches were as red as glowing embers, rode the old huntsman his buffalo-horn in hand, astride the Tartar racer, bathed in foam. He was no longer blowing his horn; but smiled courteously, ignoring the howling pack, still led by the masked huntsman escorting the stag.

As this procession emerged from the corridor, and entered the hall, the servants' torches turned a bluish colour, and the dogs suddenly fell silent. These fearful mastiffs, with the jaws of lions and the roar of tigers, advanced towards the table, behind their master, at a slow pace, heads bowed, tails tucked between their legs, loins trembling, in profound terror, eyes raised in supplication. There the mysterious guests sat, pale as ever, impassive and gloomy, their faces like those of marble statues.

Nearing the table, the old man gazed at the faces of the gloomy diners, and burst out laughing: 'Hombres y mujeres, or çà, vosotros, belle signore, domini et dominæ, amigos mios *('Well then, ladies and gentlemen, my fine cavaliers, lords and ladies, my friends' in a mixture of Spanish, French, Italian, and Latin*) how are matters progressing'

— 'You're very late,' said the man of bronze.

— 'That is because of a friend here, to whom I wished to show our hunting skills,' replied the old man.

— 'Indeed,' replied Nimrod, 'but, behold.'

And extending the thumb of his right hand over his bronze shoulder, he pointed behind him to the rear of the room. Pécopin's eye mechanically

followed the giant's gesture, and in the distance saw whitish lines outlined on the black walls, as if there had been windows there struck dimly by the first glimmer of dawn.

— 'Well, then!' the huntsman continued, 'We must hurry.'

At his signal, the two hundred torchbearers, helped by the black Africans, prepared to place the roasted venison on the table, at the foot of the seven-branched candlestick.

Suddenly, Pécopin drove his spurs into the flanks of the genet, which obeyed him strangely enough, perhaps because of the approach of daylight, which weakened the enchantment; he urged his horse between the servants and the table, stood upright in the stirrups, drew his sword, looked fixedly in turn at the sinister faces round the great table and at the old huntsman, and cried out in a thunderous voice: 'Pardieu! Whoever you are, spectres, monstrous visions, apparitions of emperors or devils, I forbid you to take a step, or, by Death itself, God help me, I will teach you all, even you, man of bronze, what the iron-clad foot of a living knight weighs when it lands on the head of a phantom! I am in a ghostly den, but I intend to do real and terrible things here, in whatever manner I choose! Interfere not, my masters! And you who lied to me, you old wretch, draw your sword with your young man's strength, since you blow your hunting-horn with the ferocity of a raging bull. On guard or, by the Mass, I will slice your loins and belly, even though you be King Pluto himself!'

— 'Ah! It's you, my friend!' said the old man. 'Well! You shall dine with us.'

The smile that accompanied this gracious invitation exasperated Pécopin: 'On guard, you old rascal! Ah! You made me a promise, and have deceived me!

— 'Hijo, (*my son*) all is not ever yet! What can you know of the matter?'

— 'On guard, I tell you!'

— 'Come! My good friend, you're taking things the wrong way.'

— 'Return me to Bauldour, as you promised!

— 'Who says I will not? But what will you do with her when you do see her again?'

— 'She is my fiancée, you know that well, you wretch, and I shall marry her,' said Pécopin.

— 'And make one more sad and unhappy couple before long, no doubt,' replied the old huntsman, shaking his head. 'Well, after all! What does it matter to me? Things are ever this way. A bad example is still set to all the males and females down here by the male and female up there, the sun and moon, who form a detestable household and are never in the sky together.'

— 'What! End your mockery,' cried the knight, 'or I'll exterminate you, and these demons and their demonesses, and purge this cavern of them.'

The old man replied with a dismissive smile: 'Purge yourself, my friend! Here's the formula for you: senna, rhubarb, and Epsom salt. Senna clears the stomach, rhubarb cleanses the duodenum, Epsom salt purges the intestines.'

Pécopin, furious, rushed at him, with raised sword; but scarcely had his horse taken a step or two when he felt it trembling and collapsing. He looked around. A cold, white ray of daylight had penetrated the cave and was gliding over the bluish flagstones. Except for the old huntsman, still smiling and motionless, all the bystanders were starting to vanish. The flames of the candles and torches were dying; the light in the eyes of the ghosts, which Pécopin's sudden outburst had momentarily revived, had died; and through the enormous brazen torso of the giant Nimrod, as through a statue of glass, Pécopin could clearly distinguish the pillars at the rear of the hall.

His horse was becoming unsolid, and slowly melting beneath him. Pécopin's feet were now almost touching the ground. Suddenly a rooster crowed. There was something terrible in that clear, metallic, vibrant song, which cut through Pécopin's ear like a steel blade. At the same moment a fresh breeze blew, his horse vanished beneath him, and he staggered and almost fell. When he rose once more, all had disappeared.

He found himself alone, standing on solid ground, sword in hand, in a ravine choked with heather, a few steps from a torrent of water foaming over the rocks, at the gate of an old castle. Day was breaking. He looked up and gave a cry of joy. The castle before him was that of Falkenburg.

XV

In Which We Learn of the Rhetorical Device the Good Lord Employs Most Willingly

The rooster crowed a second time. The sound came from the castle's farmyard. This rooster, whose voice had just brought the dizzying palace of the nocturnal huntsmen down around Pécopin, had perhaps that very night pecked at the crumbs that fell every evening from Bauldour's blessed hands.

Oh, the power of love! The generous strength of the heart! The warm and beautiful radiance of youth and passion! Scarcely had Pécopin seen those beloved turrets again than the fresh and dazzling image of his fiancée appeared to him, filling him with light, and he felt the miseries of the past, the embassies, kings, and journeys, the spectres, the frightening visions from amidst whose depths he was emerging, all dissolve within like smoke.

Certainly, it was not thus, with head held high and eyes of flame, that the crowned priest (*the Pope*), of whom the *Speculum Historiale* (*Vincent of Beauvais' thirteenth century work, 'The Mirror of History'*) speaks, emerged from amidst the ghosts after visiting the dark and splendid interior of the bronze dragon. And since just such a fearsome figure had appeared to the one who tells this tale, it is fitting to cast a curse upon him, and impose a stigma here also on that false sage who had two faces, one turned towards the light, the other the darkness, and who appeared as Pope Sylvester II before God, and the magician Gerbert (*of Aurillac*) before the Devil.

Hatred is a duty towards traitors and double-dealers. Every Parisian owes a stone to Perrinet Leclerc (*who betrayed Paris to the Burgundians in 1418*), every Spaniard to Count Julian (*of Ceuta, who aided the Moors in their conquest of Spain*), every Christian to Judas, and every human being to Satan.

Moreover, let us not forget that God invariably sets day against night, good against evil, the Angels against the Devil. The austere teaching of Providence results from that sublime and eternal antithesis. It seems that

God is constantly saying: 'Choose!' In the eleventh century, in opposition to the Cabalist priest Gerbert, he placed the chaste and learned Emuldus. The magician was Pope, the holy doctor a physician, so all could see beneath the same sky, amidst the same events, at the same moment, white science in a black robe and black science in a white robe.

Pécopin had put his sword back in its scabbard and was striding toward the manor, whose windows, already brightened by a ray of sunlight, seemed to reflect the dawn's smile. As he approached the bridge, of which only an arch remains today, he heard a voice behind him saying: 'Well, Knight of Sooneck, have I kept my promise?'

XVI

In Which the Question of Whether One Can Recognise Someone One Does Not Know Is Addressed

He turned around. Two figures stood there in the heather. One was the masked huntsman, and Pécopin shuddered when he saw him. He carried a large red wallet under his arm. The other was a small, hunchbacked old man, lame and very ugly. It was he who had spoken to Pécopin, and Pécopin tried to remember where he had seen that face before.

— 'My good sir,' said the hunchback, 'do you not recognise me, then?'

— 'Indeed, I do,' Pécopin replied.

— 'Splendid!'

— 'You are the slave I met on the shore of the Red Sea.'

— 'I am the hunter of the Bois des Pas-Perdus,' replied the little old man. It was the Devil.

— 'Upon my word,' replied Pécopin, 'be whoever you please to be; but, since, to be brief, you have kept your word to me, and I am here at Falkenburg, and since I am about to see Bauldour again, I am yours to command, sir, and in all loyalty, I thank you.'

— 'Last night you accused me of breaking my promise. What did I say?'

— 'You told me: all is not over yet.'

— 'Well, now you should thank me; and I say to you, again: all is not over yet! Perhaps you were in too much of a hurry in accusing me, and perhaps you are in too much of a hurry now, in thanking me.'

As he spoke, the little hunchback displayed an inscrutable expression. Irony is the very face of the Devil. Pécopin shuddered:

— 'Why, what do you mean?' The Devil pointed to the masked huntsman:

— 'Do you recognise this fellow.'

— 'Yes.'

— 'Do you know who he is?'

— 'Why, no.' The huntsman unmasked himself: it was his valet Erilangus. Pécopin felt himself tremble. The Devil continued:

— 'Pécopin,' you were my creditor. It is to you I owed two things: my hump, and my clubfoot. Now I am an honest debtor. I sought your old valet Erilangus, to inquire about your tastes. He told me that you liked hunting. So, I thought: 'It would be a shame not to have this handsome hunter involve himself in the Black Hunt. As the sun was setting, I met you in the clearing. You were in the Bois des Pas-Perdus. I arrived just in time; the dwarf Roulon was going to capture you for himself, but I took you for myself. There, you have it.'

Pécopin shuddered involuntarily. The Devil added:

— 'If you had not had your talisman with you, I would have kept hold of you. But I like things as they are. Revenge must be seasoned with various sauces.'

— 'But what do you want with me, you demon?' Pécopin said with an effort.

The Devil continued:

— 'To reward Erilangus for the information, I made him my bearer. He has profited well from it.'

— 'You vile wretch, will you tell me, at last, what this means?' repeated Pécopin.

— 'What did I promise you?'

— 'That after the night spent hunting, you would bring me to the Falkenburg at sunrise'

— 'And here you are.'

— 'Tell me, you demon, is Bauldour dead?'

— 'No.'

— 'Is she married?'

— 'No.'

— 'Did she take the veil?'

— 'No.'

— 'Is she still at Falkenburg?'

— 'She is.'

— 'Does she love me still?'

— 'Forever.'

— 'In that case, and if you are speaking the truth,' cried Pécopin, breathing freely, as if a mountain had been lifted from his shoulders, 'whoever you are, and whatever happens, I thank you.'

— 'Carry on then!' said the Devil. 'You're happy and so am I.'

Having said this, he seized Erilangus in his arms, though he himself was small and Erilangus tall; then, twisting his deformed leg around the other, and standing on tiptoe, he did a pirouette, and Pécopin saw him sink into the ground like a drill-bit. A second later he disappeared.

The ground, closing on the Devil, and emitted a charming little violet glow, strewn with green sparks, which flew gaily, with many a gambol and caper, towards the forest, where it remained at rest for some time, hanging amidst the trees, and colouring them with a thousand luminous shades, like a rainbow in front of their leaves.

XVII

The Small Matter of an Oak-Tree

Pécopin shrugged his shoulders. — 'Bauldour is alive, Bauldour is free to wed,' he thought, 'and Bauldour loves me! What is there to fear? It was five years ago yestereve exactly, before meeting the Devil, that I quit her side. So, it will be five years and a day! I shall see her again, and she will be more beautiful than ever. Woman is the fair sex; and twenty is the golden age.' In those times of steadfast loyalty, a separation of five years was not unusual.

While performing a monologue in this manner, he approached the castle and recognised, with pleasure, every boss on the doors, every tooth of the portcullis, and every nail in the drawbridge. It felt happy and welcoming. The threshold of a house that saw us as children smiles at us as adults, like a mother satisfied with what she sees.

As he crossed the bridge, he noticed, near the third arch, a very fine oak-tree whose crown rose high above the parapet. 'That's strange!' he said to himself, 'I don't recall a tree there.' Then he remembered that, two or three weeks before the day on which he had encountered the Palatine's hunt, he had played a game of acorns and knucklebones, with Bauldour, while leaning on the parapet of the bridge, and that, at that very spot he had dropped an acorn in the moat. — 'Bless me,' he thought, 'that acorn has grown into an oak-tree in a mere five years. This ground is fertile indeed!'

Four birds, perched in the tree, were chattering away; a jay, a blackbird, a magpie, and a crow. Pécopin scarcely paid any attention to them, nor to the pigeon cooing in its cote, nor the hen clucking, in the farmyard. He thought only of Bauldour and hurried on.

The sun being on the horizon, the porter's servants had recently lowered the drawbridge. At the moment when Pécopin entered beneath the portal, he heard a burst of laughter behind him, which seemingly came from far away, though perfectly distinct, and prolonged. He looked everywhere, but saw no one. It was the Devil laughing in his underground cavern.

There was a trough of water under the arch, of which the light and shadow made a mirror. The knight leant down to it. After the fatigue of his long journey, which had left him with barely a rag on his body, especially after the tumult of his night of supernatural hunting, he expected to be shocked by his appearance. Not at all. Was it by virtue of the talisman the Sultana had given him, or was it the effect of the elixir the Devil had made him drink? He looked more charming, fresher, younger, and more rested than ever. What astonished him most was to see himself suddenly clad in brand new, and extremely magnificent, clothes. His mind was so confused he had no memory at all of when during the night he had acquired them. He appeared very handsome, so dressed. He possessed the attire of a prince, and the air of a genie.

As he was gazing at himself, a little surprised, but wholly satisfied, finding all to his liking, he heard a second burst of laughter, even more joyous than the first. He turned around but saw no one. It was the Devil laughing in his cavern.

He crossed the main courtyard. The men-at-arms leant over the battlements of the walls; none of them recognised him, and he, in return, recognized none of them. The maids in short petticoats who were beating the linen at the edge of the wash-houses turned around; none recognised him, and he recognised none of them. But he had such a handsome face that they let him pass. A fair face implies a great name.

He knew his way and headed towards the little turret-staircase which led to Bauldour's room. As he crossed the courtyard, it seemed to him that the walls of the castle were a little darker and more scarred, that the ivy on the northern walls had grown excessively thick, and the vines on the southern walls had grown remarkably large. But does a loving heart marvel at a few dark stones, or a few leaves more or less?

When he reached the turret, he barely recognised the door. The vaulting of this staircase was a quarter-spiral suspended in a round tower, and at the time when Pécopin had left the country, Bauldour's father had just finished having the entrance rebuilt from scratch, using beautiful white sandstone from Heidelberg. Now this entrance, which, according to Pécopin's calculations, had been standing for barely five years, was now brown and split, and, eaten away by creeping plants, it sheltered three or four swallows' nests beneath its arch. But is a loving heart surprised by a few swallows' nests?

If lightning-flashes were accustomed to climbing stairs, I would compare Pécopin to them. In the blink of an eye he was on the fifth floor, in front of the door of Bauldour's retreat. This door at least was neither blackened nor changed; it was clean, cheerful, neat and spotless as ever, its ironwork gleaming like silver, the knots of its wood as clear as the pupils of a lovely girl's eyes, and he saw that it was indeed the same virginal door that the young lady of the castle had never failed to have cleaned by her women every morning. The key was in the lock, as if Bauldour had been waiting for him.

All Pécopin had to do was set his hand to the key and enter. He halted. He was panting with joy, tenderness, and happiness, and from having climbed five floors. Great pink flames passed before his eyes, and it seemed to him that they were cooling his forehead which was even hotter. A buzzing noise filled his head, and the blood pounded beneath his temples.

When this first tremor had calmed, and silence fell within him, he listened. How can I describe what was stirring in his poor soul, intoxicated with love? He heard through the door the sound of a spinning-wheel in the room.

XVIII

In Which Sober Minds Will Learn the Rudest of Metaphors

Strictly speaking, it might not be Bauldour's spinning wheel; perhaps it was only the spinning wheel of one of her women: for near her room Bauldour had her oratory, where she often spent her days. If she spun a lot, she prayed even more. Pécopin said all this to himself; but he nevertheless listened to the spinning-wheel with rapture. Such are the foolish things a man in love does, especially when he has a great mind and heart.

Moments like the one in which Pécopin found himself are composed of ecstasy that seeks to prolong the moment, and impatience that longs to enter; the balancing act lasts a few minutes, then the moment arrives when impatience wins. Pécopin, trembling, finally set his hand to the key, it turned in the lock; the bolt gave way, the door opened; he entered.

— 'Ah!' he thought, 'I was mistaken, it wasn't Bauldour at the spinning-wheel.'

Indeed, there was someone spinning in the room, but she was an old woman. 'An old woman' is an understatement; it was an old faery, for only faeries reach so fabulous an age, and such aged decrepitude. Now this old crone appeared to be, and indeed had to be, more than a hundred years old. Imagine, if you can, a poor little human, or superhuman being bent, folded, creaking, tanned, rusted, scuffed, flaking, sullen, shrivelled and sulky; white in eyebrows and hair, black in teeth and lips, yellow in the rest, thin, bald, hairless, creased, trembling and hideous. And if you want to acquire some idea of this face, in which a thousand wrinkles ended at its mouth, like the spokes of a wheel at its hub, imagine that you are witnessing a living incarnation of that rude metaphor of the Romans – *anus* (*which also means, when the 'a' is taken as short, not long, 'an old woman'*). This venerable, and revolting being was seated or squatting near the window, her eyes lowered to her spinning-wheel, and the spindle in her hand, like one of the Fates.

The good lady was probably very deaf; for at the noise made by the door opening and Pécopin entering she made no movement.

However, the knight took off his infula (*headband*) and his bycoket, (*the medieval cap with a wide brim pointed at the front, turned up at the rear*) as is fitting when encountering someone of such great age, and said, taking a step forward: — 'Madame, where is Bauldour?'

The lady centenarian raised her eyes, dropped her thread, trembled in all her limbs, gave a little cry, half-raised herself on her chair, stretched out her long skeletal hands towards Pécopin, fixed her ghastly eyes on him, and said in a weak, brittle voice that seemed to issue from a sepulchre: — 'O heavens above! Sir Pécopin, what do you want of me? Do you wish me to say a mass for you? Oh, Dear God! Sir Pécopin, are you dead indeed, and your shade returned to haunt us?'

— 'Pardieu! My good lady,' — replied Pécopin, bursting into laughter, and speaking very loudly so that Bauldour could hear him if she were in her oratory, a little surprised, however, that this crone knew his name. — 'I am not dead. Nor is it my shade that appears here; it is I who have returned, if you please, I, Pécopin, a kindly ghost of flesh and blood. And I need no masses said, I wish only a kiss from my fiancée, from Bauldour, whom I love

more than ever. Do you hear, my good lady!'

As he finished these words, the old woman threw herself on his neck. It was Bauldour. Alas, the Devil's hunt of a single night had lasted a hundred years. Bauldour was not dead, thanks to God or the Devil; but, at the moment when Pécopin, as young as, and perhaps even more handsome than, before, reached her, and saw her again, the poor girl of twenty he remembered was now a hundred and twenty years old and a day.

XIX

The Beautiful and Wise Words of Four Philosophers Whose Legs Are Adorned with Feathers

Pécopin fled, distraught. He rushed to the foot of the stairs, crossed the courtyard, threw open the doors, crossed the bridge, climbed the escarpment, traversed the ravine, jumped the torrent, broke through the undergrowth, climbed the mountain, and took refuge in the Forest of Sooneck. He ran about there all day, frightened, terrified, desperate, maddened. He still loved Bauldour, but he was horrified by that spectral form. He no longer knew his mind, his memory, nor his heart. When evening came, seeing that he was approaching the towers of his native castle, he tore off his rich clothes, gifted to him, ironically, by the Devil, and cast them into the deep torrent of Sooneck. Then he tore at his head, and realised, suddenly, that he was holding a handful of white hair. Then his knees trembled, and his loins gave way; he was forced to lean against a tree, his hands were horribly wrinkled. In the confusion of his grief, while no longer aware of what he was doing, he had seized the talisman hanging from his neck, broken the chain, and hurled it into the torrent along with his clothes.

At that moment the words of the Sultana's slave were instantly fulfilled. He had aged a hundred years in a minute. In the morning, he had lost his love, come the evening he had lost his youth. At that moment, for the third time on that fateful day, someone burst out laughing, somewhere behind him. He turned around and saw no one. The Devil was laughing in his cavern.

What to do after this final disappointment? He picked up a stick from the ground, left behind by some wood-cutter; and, leaning on this, he walked painfully towards his castle, which fortunately was very close. As he arrived, he saw in the last rays of twilight a jay, a magpie, a blackbird, and a crow, perched on the roof of the gatehouse between the weather vanes, who seemed to be waiting for him. He heard a hen he could not see clucking: *Pécopin! Pécopin!* He heard a pigeon he could not see cooing: *Bauldour! Bauldour! Bauldour!* Then he remembered his dream in Bacharach, and the words that had been addressed to him long ago — alas, it was a hundred and five years ago — by the old man arranging tree-stumps along the wall: 'Sire, as far as a young man is concerned, the blackbird merely whistles, the jay is garrulous, the magpie squawks, the crow croaks, the pigeon coos, the hen clucks; to an old man, the birds speak.' So, he listened, and this is the dialogue he heard:

THE BLACKBIRD

My handsome hunter, you're here once more!

THE JAY

For a day, young men leave; for years, tis sure.

THE RAVEN

Kite, eagle, and vulture, you hunted before.

THE MAGPIE

Far better to hunt the sweet bird, Amour!

THE HEN

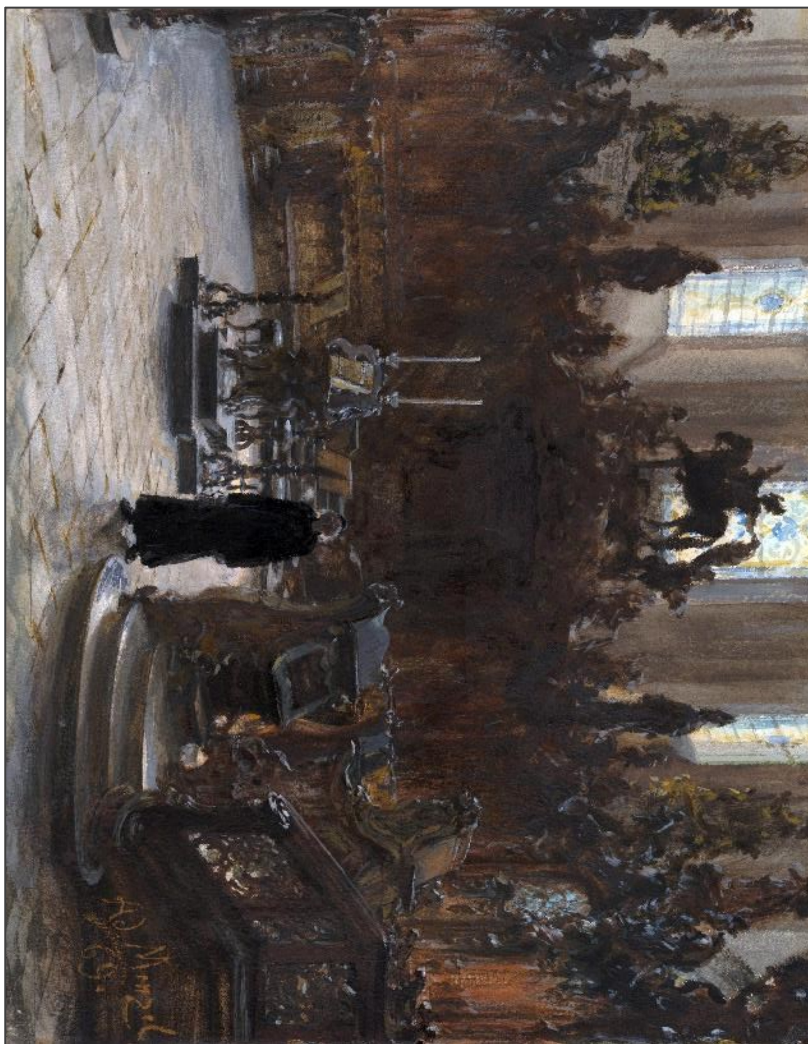
Pecopin! Pecopin!

THE PIGEON

Bauldour! Bauldour! Bauldour!

The End of Part VI of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part VII: Letter XXII-XXIV



'The Choirstalls in the Mainz Cathedral'
Adolph von Menzel (German, 1815 - 1905)
Artvee

Letter XXII: Bingen am Rhein

Mainz, September 15th

You scold me in your last letter, my friend, and you are partly wrong and partly right. You are wrong about the church at Épernay, because I did not really write what you thought I had. And yet at the same time you are right, because it seems that I was unclear. You write to me that you have made inquiries about the church at Épernay, that I was mistaken in attributing it to Monsieur Poterlet-Galichet; that Monsieur Poterlet-Galichet, a brave, worthy and honourable bourgeois of Epernay, had nothing to with the construction of the church; and that in addition there are in that town two very distinguished men by the name of Poterlet: an engineer of rare merit, and a young painter full of promise. I subscribe to all this; and I myself knew, ten years ago, a young and charming painter called *Poterlet* (*Hippolyte Poterlet, 1803-1835, not to be confused with his first cousin Pierre Saint-Ange Poterlet, also an artist*), who, if death had not snatched him away at the age of thirty-two, would today be regarded as a great talent by the public, as he was, in 1828, by his friends. But I did not say what you thought I said. Reread my letter, the second one, I believe; I do not attribute the church at Épernay to Monsieur Galichet in the least. I simply wrote: 'The current church *appears to me* to have been built,' etc. A comment, in jest, that only applied to the church.

That minor matter settled, I return from Épernay to Bingen[73]. The transition is abrupt and the distance long; but you are one of those intelligent and kindly readers, aware of Necessity, as well as of the laws of Nature, who both grant poets and dreamers their enjambments.

Bingen is a charming and beautiful city, both dark and light in aspect, serious like an ancient city, yet cheerful like a new one, a city which, from Drusus the Younger (*14BC-23AD*) to the Emperor Charlemagne (*c747-814*),

[73] Letter XXII — Bingen am Rhein: 49°58'00.1"N, 7°53'44.9"E

from the Emperor Charlemagne to Archbishop Willigis of Mainz (*940-1011*), from Archbishop Willigis to the merchant Montemagno (*Richard of Montemagno, a Lombard, was granted permission to remain in the city in 1373*), from the merchant Montemagno to the visionary Bartholomew Holzhauser (*1613-1658*), from the visionary Bartholomew Holzhauser, to the lawyer Hermann Gottfried Joseph Faber (*1767-1851*), currently reigning in the castle (*Burg Klopp, rebuilt 1875-9*), on the site where Drusus established a fortress, has gradually agglomerated, house by house, in the Y formed by the Rhine and the Nahe, like dew gathering drop by drop in the calyx of a lily. Excuse me this comparison, which has the defect of being flowery, but which has the merit of being true, and which faithfully represents, and covers all possible examples of, the mode of formation of a city at a confluence.

Everything contributes to making Bingen an antithesis, built in the midst of a landscape that is itself a living antithesis. The town, constrained to the west by the Nahe, and to the north by the Rhine, developed in the shape of a triangle around a Gothic church backed by a Roman fort. In the fort, which dates from the first century and which long served as a hideout for rogue knights, there is a priest's garden; in the church (*Basilica Sankt Martin*), which is from the fifteenth century, there is the tomb of that quasi-sorcerer doctor, Bartholomew Holzhauser, whom the Archbishop Elector of Mainz (*Johann Philipp von Schönborn*) would probably have burned as a soothsayer, if he had not paid him to act as his astrologer. On the side towards Mainz, the east, the famous paradise-plain that opens onto the Rheingau shines, sparkles, and is green with vegetation. On the Koblenz side, the north, the dark mountains of Leyen frown. Here Nature smiles like a fair nymph stretched out naked on the grass; there she threatens like a recumbent giant.

A thousand memories, evoked here by a forest, there by a rock, and elsewhere by some building, mingle and collide in this corner of the Rheingau. Over there, on the right bank of the Rhine, that green hillside is the smiling Johannisberg; at the foot of the Johannisberg, that formidable square keep, which flanks the corner of the strong town of Rudesheim, served as a bridgehead for the Romans. On the summit of the Niederwald, which faces Bingen, at the edge of a marvellous forest, on that mountain which now encroaches on the Rhine, and which in pre-historic times barred its entrance, a small temple (*built 1790, destroyed 1944, rebuilt 2006*) with white columns, like a Parisian café rotunda, rises above the gloomy and superb

Ehrenfels Castle[74], built in the twelfth century by Archbishop Siegfried II of Mainz, a set of gloomy towers that were once a formidable citadel, and are now a magnificent ruin. The folly dominates, and humbles, the fortress. On the left side of the Rhine, on the Ruppertsberg, which looks out over the Niederwald, and amidst the ruins of the Disibodenberg convent (*between the rivers Glan and Nahe*), the blessed well dug by Saint Hildegard borders the infamous tower built by Hatto II. Vineyards surround the convent; chasms surround the tower. Blacksmiths have set up shop in the tower, the Prussian Customs Office has moved into the convent. Hatto's ghost hears the anvil ringing, and Hildegard's shade watches parcels being sealed.

By a bizarre contrast, the rebellion of Julius Civilis (*69AD*) which destroyed the bridge of Drusus the Younger; the legions of Julius Tutor (*during the Civilis Rebellion*); the Normans in 890; the burghers of Bad Kreuznach in 1279; Baldwin of Luxembourg, Archbishop of Trier in 1334; the plague in 1349; the flood in 1458; the quarrels of the Gaugraves, Adolph II of Nassau-Wiesbaden-Idstein and Diether von Isenburg (*c1459*); the Palatine Bailiff of Kreuznach, Albrecht V Göler von Ravensberg, in 1496; Landgrave William II of Hesse in 1504; the War of the Palatinate Succession (*1688-1697*) which destroyed the bridge of Archbishop Willigis (*in 1689*); the Thirty Years' War; the armies of the French Revolution and the Empire; all the forces of devastation, successively crossed this happy and serene plain, while the most appealing figures of the liturgy and legend, Gela of Gelnhausen; Jutta von Sponheim (*Abbess of Disibodenberg*); Lioba von Tauberbischofsheim; Guda (*the twelfth century nun and illuminator*); Gisela, the sweet daughter of Hans Brömser von Rüdesheim; Hildegard, the friend of Saint Bernard; Saint Hiltrude of Liessies, the penitent of Pope Eugene, all inhabited these sinister rocks in turn. The smell of blood still haunts the plain, the perfume of saintliness and beautiful lives still veils the mountains.

The more you examine this lovely place, the more the antithesis intensifies before your eyes and in your mind. It exists in a thousand forms. The instant the waters of the Nahe flow beneath the arches of the stone bridge, on the parapet of which the lion of Hesse turns his back to the eagle of Prussia, which leads the Hessians to say that he disdains to recognise them,

[74] Letter XXII — Burg Ehrenfels: 49°58'32.5"N, 7°52'49.4"E

and the Prussians to say that he is afraid; at that instant, I say, when the waters of the Nahe, flowing calmly and slowly, from Mont Tonerre (*the Donnersberg*), emerge from beneath the bridge which forms a boundary, the bronze-green arm of the Rhine suddenly seizes the blonde and indolent river, and plunges it into the Bingerloch. What is wrought in the abyss is the gods' affair. But it is certain that Jupiter never delivered a sleepier naiad to a more violent river.

The church of Bingen is washed in grey, both inside and out. Which is absurd. Yet I declare that the abominable restorations now being carried out in France will eventually reconcile me to whitewashing. In passing, I know of nothing in this line more deplorable than the restoration of the Abbey of Saint-Denis, now completed, alas, or the restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris, which is being sketched out at this moment. I will return one day, you may be sure, to those two barbaric operations. I cannot help feeling a sense of personal shame when I think that the first was carried out on my doorstep, and the second is taking place in the very heart of Paris. We are all guilty of this dual architectural crime, by our silence, tolerance, and inertia, and it is upon us and our contemporaries that posterity will one day rightly lay the blame, and against us that it will express its indignation, when, in the presence of two disfigured, debased, parodied, mutilated, disguised, dishonoured, and unrecognisable buildings, it will ask us to account for those two admirable basilicas, beautiful among beautiful churches everywhere, illustrious among illustrious monuments everywhere, one which was the metropolis of royalty, the other which is the metropolis of France. Let us bow our heads in advance. Such restorations are tantamount to demolition.

Whitewashing, on the other hand, is content to be merely stupid. It does not in itself commit devastation. It dirties, glues, soils, flours, tattoos, it ridicules, it uglifies; but does not destroy. It accommodates the thoughts of the architect Cesare Cesariano (*who wrote a commentary on Vitruvius and worked on the Duomo in Milan*), or Erwyn von Steinbach (*the thirteenth century architect of Strasbourg Cathedral*) as it does the face of Gautier-Garguille (*the stage name of Hugues Guéru, the seventeenth century comic actor*); it places a plaster mask thereon. Nothing more. Cleanse the long-suffering facade, plastered with white, yellow, pink, or grey, and you will find the venerable face of the church alive and well.

To seat oneself at the summit of Burg Klopp[75], around sunset, and from there look down on the city at its foot, and around at the immense horizon; to see the mountains darken, the chimneys emit smoke, the shadows lengthen, and the landscape evoke Virgil's lines; to breathe, in the same breath, the breeze from the trees, the breath of the river, the mountain air, and the town's exhalations, when the weather is warm, the season mild, and the evening fine, is an intimate sensation, exquisite, inexpressible, full of little secret pleasures concealed by the grandeur of the spectacle, and the depth of one's contemplation. At the attic windows, young girls sing, their eyes lowered on their work; the birds trill gaily in the ruin's ivy, the streets teem with people, and the sound of those people is one of work and happiness; boats pass on the Rhine, oars can be heard cutting the waves, and sails shiver; doves fly around the church; the river shimmers, the sky pales; and a horizontal shaft of sunlight crimsons the distant dust clouds on the ducal road from Rüdesheim to Biberach, and makes the express carriages sparkle, and seemingly flee in a golden cloud, borne along by four stars. The washerwomen of the Rhine spread their sheets over the bushes; the washerwomen of the Nahe beat their laundry, and go to and fro, bare-legged and with wet feet, on the rafts made of fir-tree trunks moored at the water's edge, and laugh at some tourist sketching the Ehrenfels. The Maüseturm[76], standing in the midst of this joy, steams in the shadow of the mountains.

The sun sets, evening comes, night falls, the roofs of the town become one roof, the mountains gather themselves into a single mass of darkness into which the pale clear waters of the Rhine sink and are lost. Crepe-like mists rise slowly from the horizon to the zenith; the little steamboat (*dampfschiff*) from Mainz to Bingen arrives to take up its nocturnal station alongside the quay, opposite the Hotel Victoria; the washerwomen, their bundles on their heads, return home along the sunken lanes; the sounds die away, the voices fall silent; a last pink glow, which resembles the reflection of the other world in the pale face of a dying man, colours, for a little while longer, Burg Ehrenfels, pale, decrepit, and gaunt, on the top of its rocky outcrop, Then it too fades — and Hatto's tower, almost unnoticed a couple of hours before, suddenly seems to grow taller, and take possession of the landscape. Amidst

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[75] Letter XXII — Burg Klopp, Bingen: 49°57'56.9"N, 7°53'51.0"E

[76] Letter XXII — Maüseturm (Mouse Tower): 49°58'19.6"N, 7°52'50.2"E

the reverberations of the forge, its cloud of smoke, which was dark in daylight, now reddens little by little, and, like the soul of a villain plotting revenge, grows luminous as the sky grows blacker.

I was, a few days ago, on the platform of Burg Klopp, and, while all this dreamy reverie was taking place around me, had allowed my thoughts to drift I know not where, when a little window suddenly opened in a house below my feet, a candle shone, a young girl leant on the window, and I heard a fresh, clear, pure voice — the voice of that young girl — singing this verse to a slow, sad, plaintive tune:

'Plas mi cavalier frances,

E la dona catalana,

E l'onraz del ginoes,

E la court de castelana,

Lou contaz provencales,

E la danza trevizana,

E lou corps aragones,

E la perla Julliana,

La mans a kara d'angles,

E lou donzel de Toscana.'

'I'm pleased by a French cavalier,

And a Catalonian lady;

Hold Genoese courtesy dear,

And Castilians, so courtly;

Provençal songs, I love to hear,

Treviso's dances, delight me.

And how the Aragonese appear,

And the pearl, Giuliana, truly,

An English hand and face, so clear,

And a squire from Tuscany, highly.'

I recognised those joyful lines penned by Frederick Barbarossa, and I cannot tell you what effect it had on me, that emperor's poem transformed to a popular air, that knight's chant to a young girl's song, those Roman rhymes in a German mouth, the gaiety of times past changed to melancholy, the bright light of the Crusades piercing the shadow of the present and, suddenly, shedding its light on me, a poor, terrified dreamer, in a Roman ruin transformed to a lawyer's candlelit villa, amidst the darkness, four hundred yards or so from the Mäuseturm transformed to a locksmith's workshop, four paces from the Victoria Hotel, ten from a steamboat jetty.

And, since I am speaking of the music I happened to hear on the banks of the Rhine, why not say that at Braubach, as our steamboat was mooring at the quayside to allow the passengers to disembark, a group of students, seated on a fir-tree log, lost from some raft belonging to the River Murg, sang in chorus, in German, Quasimodo's admirable aria, one of the most lively and original adornments of Mademoiselle Louise Bertin's opera (*'La Esmerelda', 1836, based on his novel 'Notre-Dame de Paris', 1831*). The future, I have no doubt, my friend, will restore that severe and remarkable work, savaged at its first appearance with such violence, and proscribed with such injustice, to its rightful place. The public, too often abused by the hateful uproar arising round all great works, will finally revise that passionate burst of criticism, unanimously fulminated by political parties, musical rivalry, and literary cliques, and will one day be able to admire its sweet and profound music, so full of pathos and strength, so graceful in places, so painfully moving at times; a creation in which are mingled, in each musical phrase, so to speak, what is most tender and what is most serious, the heart of a woman, and the mind of a thinker. Germany already does it justice, France will soon do so.

As I am a little wary of exploitative local curiosities, I confess I chose not to go and see the miraculous ox- horn, nor the nuptial bed, nor the iron chain borne by old Hans Brömser von Rüdesheim. On the other hand, I visited the

square keep of Rüdesheim (*Brömserburg*[77]), inhabited at the present time by an intelligent owner (*the Count of Ingelheim*) who was aware that this ruin had to retain its ruined state, so as to retain the air of a palace. Buildings are like the gentry, the older they are the nobler. What an admirable manor-house that square keep represents! Roman cellars, Roman walls, a Knights' Hall, whose table is lit by a candelabra like the one above Charlemagne's tomb (*the Barbarossa candelabra*), Renaissance stained-glass windows, nigh-on Homeric mastiffs barking in the courtyard, thirteenth-century iron lanterns on the walls, narrow spiral staircases, dungeons whose depths are fearful, sepulchral urns arranged in a kind of ossuary, a whole collection of dark and terrible things, at the summit of which blossoms an enormous tuft of flowers and greenery. These are the thousand plants covering the ruins that this current owner, a man of true taste, maintains, thickens, and cultivates. They form a fragrant and bushy terrace, from which one may contemplate the magnificence of the Rhine. There are paths allowing one to walk through this monstrous bouquet. From a distance it forms a coronet, from close-to a garden.

The hills of Johannisberg shelter this venerable keep, and protect it from the north-winds, while warm southerlies enter through the windows opening onto the Rhine. I know of no breeze more charming, no wind more literary than a southerly. It makes happy, profound, serious, and noble ideas germinate in one's head. By warming the body, it seems to also enlighten the mind. The Athenians, who knew what they were doing, expressed this thought in one of their most ingenious sculptures. In the bas-reliefs of the Tower of the Winds (*in the Roman agora in Athens*), the ice-cold winds are hideous and hirsute, with a stupid air, and are dressed like barbarians; the gentle, warm winds are dressed as Greek philosophers.

At Bingen, I sometimes saw, at the far end of the room in which I dined two very differently set tables. At one a fat Bavarian major sat, all alone, who spoke a little French, and every day watched a real and complete five-course German dinner pass before him, close enough to touch. At the other table, a poor wretch was leaning, in melancholy fashion, over a dish of sauerkraut, and who, after eating his meagre meal, finished by devouring with his eyes

[77] Letter XXII — Brömserburg, Rüdesheim am Rhein: 49°58'39.7"N, 7°55'03.0"E

his neighbour's gargantuan feast. I have never witnessed a better example of the vivid parable provided by those words of Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt: '*Providence cheerfully creates wealth on one side, and appetite on the other*.'

The poor wretch was a young scholar, pale, serious, and bearded, very fond of entomology and a little in love with a maid at the inn, which is a scholarly taste. However, a scholar in love always presents me with a problem. How does passion exist, with its turmoil, anger, jealousy and time-wasting, amidst a calm sequence of precise studies, cold experiments, and meticulous observations which composes the life of the scholar? Can you imagine passion, for example, in the mind of John Huxham, the doctor, who in his beautiful treatise *Aere et Morbis epidemicis* recorded, month by month, from 1728 to 1738, the amount of rain that fell in Plymouth, and the occurrence of epidemics, for ten consecutive years?

Can you imagine Romeo, with his eye to a microscope, counting the four thousand facets of a fly's eye; or Don Juan, in a serge apron, analysing antimony paratartrate (*tartar emetic*) or potassium bitartrate (*cream of tartar*); or Othello, bent over a high-power lens, looking for species of Galionella (*bacteria*) or Diatomophyceae (*algae*) in fossilised flour from China?

However, despite all theories to the contrary, my entomologist was in love. He conversed sometimes, spoke better French than the major, and had a noble system for describing the world about him, but was penniless. I like systems, though I don't much believe in them. René Descartes dreams, Christiaan Huyghens amends Descartes' dreams, Edme Mariotte amends Huyghens' amendments. Where Descartes sees starry objects, Huyghens investigates microscopic globules, and Mariotte observes pinprick-sized points in the retina. What is proven in all this? Nothing but the limitations of Mankind and the greatness of God. That is something of note. But, all things considered, I like systems. Systems are the ladders by which we ascend to truth.

Sometimes my young scholar would drink a bottle of beer at the table d'hôte; I took a newspaper, sat down in the embrasure of a window and watched him. The table d'hôte at the Hotel Victoria was very mixed and very unharmonious, like every juxtaposition created by chance. At the top of the table sat an oldish English lady with three pretty children. A duenna rather than a nurse; an aunt rather than a mother. I felt very sorry for the poor little ones. The good lady's hand was a basket full of slaps. The major sometimes

dined next to the lady to whet his appetite. He was talking with a Parisian lawyer on holiday, who was going to Baden-Baden *because*, he said, *one must go there, everyone goes there*. Near the lawyer, sat a noble and worthy gentleman with white hair, more than eighty years old, who had the gentle air that comes from having one foot in the grave, and readily quoted verses from Horace. As he had no teeth, the word *mors* (*death*) in his pronunciation changed to *mox* (*soon*): which in this old man's mouth had, thus, a melancholy meaning.

Opposite the old man sat a gentleman who wrote poetry in French, and who one day read to his neighbours, after a few drinks, a dithyramb in free verse about Holland, in which he spoke pompously of the 'harangues' that come out of the sea. 'Harangues' from the sea! I confess that, for my part, I have scarcely ever seen anything but herrings emerge.

The whole was completed by two large merchants from Alsace, enriched by smuggling weasel-skins, who are electors and jurors these days, and who smoked their pipes while telling each other the same stories over and over. When they had finished them, they began the whole series again. As they had invariably forgotten the names of the people they were talking about, one said *Monsieur Thing*, and the other *Monsieur Machine*. They understood each other perfectly.

The writer of verse —the poet, if you will — was a classical, philosophical, constitutional, ironic, Voltairean fellow, who took pleasure in *undermining*, so he said, *prejudice*, that is to say, in insulting, while repeating commonplace objections regarding them, past things, many of them serious, mysterious, and holy that other folk respect. He liked to *strike*, it was his expression, *great lance-blows against human error*; and, though he never chanced to attack the real windmills of this century, he gaily called himself *Don Quichotte* (*Don Quixote*). I called him *Don Quichoque* (*Don Qui-Shock, i.e. one who gives offence*).

Sometimes the poet and the lawyer, though born to get along, quarrelled. The poet, to complete my portrait of him, was an unintelligible author, troubled in mind about everything, one of those people with an impediment of sorts, who stammer when speaking, and scribble when writing. The lawyer crushed him with his show of superiority. Sometimes the poet was transported, and angered the other. Then the irritated lawyer would talk for two hours, with a clear, limpid, flowing, transparent, inexhaustible eloquence, as my fountain's tap speaks when the cap is on askew. When this occurred,

the entomologist, a man of wit, amused himself, in turn, by crushing the lawyer. He spoke extremely well, was admired by the rest, and from time to time glanced sideways to see if the pretty maid was listening to him.

One day he had very pertinently held forth on the subject of virtue, resignation, and renunciation; having not eaten. Now, philosophy is a meagre supper when one has no sauce with which to dress it. I invited him to dinner, and, although he could hardly have guessed, from the two or three words I had spoken, what country I was from, he willingly accepted. We conversed. He took a liking to me, and we made a few excursions together to the Maüseturm and to the right bank of the Rhine. I paid the boatman's fee.

One evening, as we were returning from Hatto's tower, I asked him to have supper with me. The major was at the table. My learned companion had found a beautiful scarab-beetle on the island with an azure breastplate, and, while showing it to me, he said: 'Nothing is as fine as the *sagres bleus* (*blue Sagra beetles*). At this, the major, who was listening, could not help interrupting him: – 'By Jove, sir!' he said, *sacrebleus* (*swearwords*) are useful sometimes for making soldiers march and horses gallop, but I don't see what's so fine about them.'

That is the sum total of my adventures in Bingen. As for the rest, though the town is not large, it is one of those where the flood of tips I described elsewhere, is to be distributed widely, from the doorman to the boatman, the boatman to the guide, the guide to the maid, the maid to the innkeeper, at the end of which the unfortunate traveller's purse is wholly plundered, flattened, and empty.

By the way, since Bacharach, I am done with thalers, silbergrossen, and pfennigs, and have progressed to florins and kreutzers. The mystifications are redoubled. This, if one ventures into a shop, is an example of one's conversation with the tradesman: 'How much is this?' The merchant replies: 'Sir, one florin fifty-three kreutzers.' — 'Please explain more clearly.' — 'Monsieur, that makes one thaler, and two gros, and eighteen Prussian pfennigs.' — 'I beg your pardon, I still don't understand. And in French money?'— 'Monsieur, one florin is worth two francs three sous, and one centime; one Prussian thaler is worth three francs and three quarters; one silbergrossen is worth two and a half sous; one kreutzer is worth three-quarters of a sou; one pfennig is worth three-quarters of a liard.' So, I reply like Don Caesar (*Don César de Bazan, a character in Hugo's play Ruy Blas*) whom you know of: '*That's perfectly clear*', and open my purse at random, trusting in

the ancient god of honesty, at whose altar the Ubians perhaps worshipped, the altar which Tacitus speaks of. *Ara Ubiorum.*

Mystification is rendered still more complete by the effects of pronunciation. *Kreutzer* is pronounced *creusse* among the Hessians, *criche* among the Badeners, and *cruche* in Switzerland.

Letter XXIII: Mainz (*Mayence*)

Mainz, September

Mainz[78] and Frankfurt, like Versailles and Paris, are now one and the same city. In the Middle Ages there were twenty-six miles between the respective cities, that is to say, two days travel; today an hour and a quarter separate them, or rather join them together. Between the Imperial city and the Electoral city, our civilisation has laid that link that we call a railway. A charming railway, which borders the River Main at times, crosses a rich, and vast, green plain, without viaducts, tunnels, cuttings or embankments, with simple wooden sleepers under the rails; a railway that the apple trees shade paternally as if it were a village path; which is exposed, lacking ditches or gates, and being all on the one level, to the saturnine good nature of German children, and along which an invisible hand seemingly presents the orchards, gardens and cultivated fields, one after another, and then hastily removes them, pushing them pell-mell into the depths of the landscape, like pieces of fabric disdained by the buyer.

Frankfurt and Mainz are, like Liège, admirable cities ruined by good taste. I know not what corrosive attraction pallid architecture, plaster colonnades, churches like theatres, and palaces like dance-halls have; but it is a fact that all the ancient cities are melting and dissolving rapidly into these dreadful piles of white houses. In Mainz, I had hoped to see the Martinsburg, the feudal residence of the Archbishop Electors until the seventeenth century;

[78] Letter XXIII — Mainz: 49°59'33.4"N, 8°14'56.4"E

we French had turned it into a hospital, the Hessians razed it (in 1806/7) to enlarge the free port. As for the Merchants' Hotel, built by the famous league of a hundred cities (*the Rhine League out of which the Hanseatic League developed*), splendidly decorated with stone statues of the seven Electors bearing their coats of arms, below which two colossal figures supported the shield of the empire, it was demolished to create space. I was planning to stay opposite, in the Three Crowns Inn (*Zu den Drei Kronen*), opened in 1360 by the Cleemann family, and undoubtedly the oldest inn in Europe; I was expecting one of those inns as described by the Chevalier de Gramont (*Michel de Gramont, the privateer*), with a vast dining room with pillars and joists, an immense fireplace the front wall of which is nothing but a leaded window, and outside a mounting-block for mule-riders. I chose not to enter. The old Cleemann inn is now a kind of fake Hôtel Le Meurice (*on the Rue de Rivoli, opened in 1835 by Charles-Augustin Meurice, and designed to appeal to English travellers*), with imitation-stone cardboard rosettes on the ceilings, and at the windows that luxury of draperies and poverty of curtains which characterise German inns.

Someday, Mainz will do to the house of *Buona Monte* (*Guten Berg in German! Gutenburg Court, Hof zum Gutenberg, the fourteenth century house where Johannes Gutenberg was probably born, was located at the corner of what is now Schusterstrasse and Christophsstrasse. Destroyed in 1636 during the Thirty Year's War, it was rebuilt in 1661, and destroyed by fire in 1894*) and to the house *Zum Jungen* (*at Mailandgasse 3, built after 1250, destroyed in 1945, demolished in 1948*), what Paris has done to the venerable buildings of Les Piliers des Halles (*arcade shops on the Rue de la Tonnellerie dating back to the thirteenth century of which the last pillars disappeared when the Rue du Pont Neuf was built in 1866*). The paternal roof of Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg, gentleman of the Elector Adolphe of Nassau's court (*Johannes was made a 'Hofman', in 1465*) whom posterity knows simply by the name *Gutenberg*, just as it knows Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, valet of the chamber of King Louis XIV by the name *Molière*, will be destroyed, and replaced by some wretched facade adorned with a wretched bust. However, the old churches still defend what surrounds them; and it is around its cathedral that one must seek to discover Mainz, just as it is around its collegiate church that one must seek to discover Frankfurt.

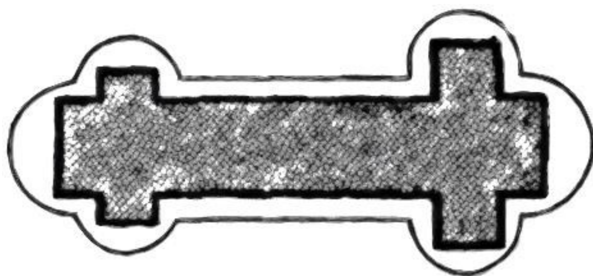
Cologne is a Gothic city still lingering in the Romanesque period; Frankfurt and Mainz are Gothic cities already immersed in the Renaissance, and even, in many ways, the Rococo and Chinese style. Hence, as regards

Mainz and Frankfurt, an air of the Flemish cities distinguishes them, almost uniquely, among the cities of the Rhine.

In Cologne, one senses that the breath of the austere builders of the Cathedral, Master Gerhard, Master Arnold, and Master Johann, has long filled the entire city. Those three mighty shades have seemingly watched over Cologne for four centuries, protecting the Church of Plectrude (*Sankt Maria im Kapitol; Plectrude was the wife of Pepin of Herstal*), the church of Saint Anno (*the Apolstelkirche*), the sarcophagus of Theophanu (*of the Holy Roman Empress Theophanu, wife of Otto II, in Sankt Pantaleon*), and the golden chamber of the eleven thousand virgins, preventing the exercise of false taste, barely tolerating the almost classical imaginings of the Renaissance, preserving the purity of the ogives and archivolts, weeding out the chicory-leaf (*acanthus-leaf*) ornamentations of Louis XV wherever they ventured to appear, maintaining the lines of the carved gables, and the severe mansions, of the fourteenth century in all their vivacity; and only withdrew, like the lion before the ass, in the presence of the stupid and abominable ideas of the Parisian architects of the Empire and Restoration. In Mainz and Frankfurt, the Rubens-inspired architecture, the swollen and powerful lines, the rich Flemish capriciousness, the dense and inextricable flourishes of those iron grilles laden with flowers and animals, the inexhaustible variety of the corners and turrets; the phenomenal colours of the stonework; the plump, pot-bellied, opulent outlines, possessing more health than beauty; the masks, the tritons, the naiads, the dripping dolphins, all that ample and robust pagan sculpture; the enormous, hyperbolic and exorbitant ornamentation; that whole magnificent display of bad taste, invaded the city at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and has since plumed and garlanded, in accord with its whimsical poetry, the old and grave German masonry. While, everywhere there are historiated, decorated shop-fronts, with braided and interlaced ornamentation, complex pediments, fire-vases, pomegranates, pine-cones, cippi and rocailles, offering crayfish-pyramid profiles, and voluted gables possessing three rows of hammer-curls like the ceremonial wig of Louis XIV.

From a bird's eye view, Mainz and Frankfurt, the one on the Rhine, the other on the Main, having a similar position to Cologne, necessarily have similar layouts. The pontoon bridge at Mainz engendered Kastel on the opposite bank, as the stone bridge at Frankfurt engendered Sachsenhausen, and as the Cologne bridge, engendered Deutz.

Mainz Cathedral[79] (*Saint Martin's*), like those of Worms and Trier, lacks a façade, and terminates at each end in a choir. These two Romanesque apses, each with its own transept, face each other and are joined by a large nave. It is as if two churches were welded to one another to form the one. The layout is that of two crosses touching and blending at the base. This geometric arrangement generates in elevation six campaniles, that is to say on each apse a large bell-tower between two turrets, like the priest between the deacon and the subdeacon, symbolism which is displayed, as I have said elsewhere, in the large rose windows of our cathedrals between their two side ribs.



The two apses which unite to form the cathedral of Mainz are from two different periods, and, although almost identical in geometric design, except for dimensions, present, as buildings, a complete and striking contrast. The first, and smaller, western one dates from the tenth century. Begun 975/6, it was inaugurated, and damaged by fire, in 1009. The second, eastern chancel, whose large bell tower is two hundred feet high, was begun soon after, but was burned down in 1081; following the rebuilding, each century has added its stone. A hundred years ago, the reigning architectural style invaded the dome; the flora of Pompadour architecture inserted its jets of stone, its frills, and its foliage alongside the Byzantine dentils, Lombard lozenges, and Saxon round arches, and today this odd, grimacing 'vegetation' clothes the old apse. The large main bell-tower, a wide, squat cylinder, ample at its base, superbly laden with three rich fleur-de-lis diadems whose diameters decrease from its base to its summit, carved everywhere with roses and facets, seems rather built with precious stones than common ones. On the other large tower, grave, simple, Romanesque and Gothic, which faces it, modern masons

[79] Letter XXIII — Mainz Cathedral (Dom St Martin): 49°59'56.0"N, 8°16'27.1"E

erected, probably for economy, a similarly conical dome, supported at its base on a circle of pointed gables resembling the iron crown of the Lombard kings, a zinc cupola, perfectly bare, without gilding and without ornament, with a slightly swollen profile, which recalls the ancient pontifical headdress of primitive times. The appearance of the pair of bell-towers is akin to that of the severe tiara of Gregory VII facing the splendid double-circlet tiara of Boniface VIII. Nobly devised, ordered, built, and sculpted there by Time and Chance, those two great architects (*note that a neo-Romanesque tower was erected in place of the eastern cross-tower in 1875*).

This entire venerable ensemble is painted pink; everything, from top to bottom, the two apses, the great nave and the six bell-towers. The thing was done with care and taste. Pale pink was awarded to the Romanesque bell tower, and bright pink to the Pompadour bell tower.

Like the chapel at Aix, the bronze doors of Mainz cathedral are decorated with lions' heads; those at Aix-la-Chapelle are Roman. When I visited Aix and viewed those doors, I searched in vain, as you will remember, for the split in them that the Devil's kick had made, so it is said, when he departed in a rage at having swallowed the soul of a wolf instead of the soul of a bourgeois shop-keeper. No such story is associated with the doors of the Mainzer Dom. They are from the early eleventh century, and originally donated by Archbishop Willigis to the now-demolished (*1803-7*) church of Our Lady (*Sankt Mariengraden*), from which they were taken, and then set in the majestic Romanesque portal of the cathedral. On the two upper doors are written, in Roman characters, the privileges granted to the city in 1135 by Archbishop Adalbert (*Adalbert I von Saarbrücken*), second elector of Cologne. Below is engraved on a single line this older legend:

WILLIGISVS ARCHIEPS EX METALLI
SPECIE VALVAS EFFECERAT PRIMVS

(*'Archbishop Willigis was first to effect doors made of metallic substance, i.e. bronze'*)

If the centre of Mainz recalls Flemish cities, the interior of its cathedral recalls Belgian churches. The nave, the chapels, the two transepts, and the two apses lack stained glass and mystery, being whitewashed from the pavement to the vault, though sumptuously furnished. On all sides loom frescoes, paintings, woodwork, and twisted and gilded columns; but the true jewels of this immense edifice are the tombs of the Archbishop Electors. The church is paved with them, the altars are made of them, the pillars are supported with them, the walls are covered with them; they are magnificent slabs of marble and stone, sometimes more precious in their sculpture and workmanship than the golden slabs of Solomon's temple. I found, both in the church and in the chapter house and cloister, one tomb from the eighth century, two from the thirteenth, six from the fourteenth, six from the fifteenth, eleven from the sixteenth, eight from the seventeenth, and nine from the eighteenth; in all forty-three sepulchres. Among this number I count neither the altar-tombs, difficult to approach and explore, nor the pavement-tombs, a dark and confused funereal mosaic, abraded more and more, day by day, beneath the feet of visitors. I also omit four or five insignificant tombs from the nineteenth century.

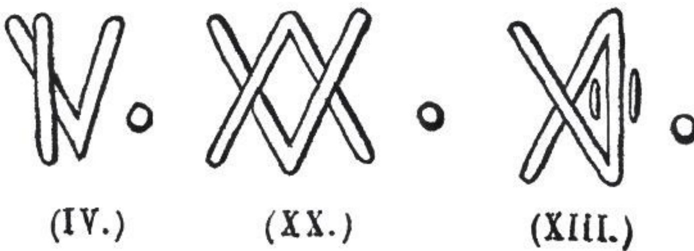
All these tombs, except five, are the graves of archbishops. Of these thirty-eight cenotaphs, distributed without chronological order, as if at random, among a forest of Byzantine columns with enigmatic capitals, the art of six centuries develops, vegetates, and inextricably intertwines its branches, from which, like dual fruit, falls the history of thought, at the same time as the history of events. There, Liebenstein, Homburg, Gemmingen, Heufenstein, Brandenburg, Steinburg, Ingelheim, Dalberg, Eltz-Kempenich, Stadion, Weinsberg, Ostein, Leyen-Hohengeroldseck, Hennenberg-Römhild, Thurn-und-Taxis, almost all the great names of Rhineland Germany, appear within the sombre radiance these tombs spread in the darkness of the church. All the fantasies of the period, of the artist and of the dying, mingle with the epitaphs. The mausoleums of the eighteenth century, half-open, have allowed their skeletons to escape, bearing in long, fleshless fingers archbishops' mitres and electors' hats. Archbishops who were contemporaries of Richelieu and Louis XIV dream as they recline, at the foot of their sarcophagi, leaning on their elbows. The arabesques of the Renaissance display their hanging tendrils and perched monsters amidst the delicate foliage of the fifteenth century, and reveal, amidst a thousand charming decorations, statuettes, Latin couplets, and coloured coats of arms.

Severe names, *Mathias Burhecg*, *Conradus Rheingraf* (Conrad, Count of the Rhine), are inscribed, between a tonsured monk who represents the clergy and a morioned man-at-arms who represents the nobility, beneath a pure equilateral triangle of an ogive of the fourteenth century; while on a painted and gilded slab of the thirteenth century, gigantic archbishops, with apocalyptic monsters beneath their feet, crown, with both hands, kings and emperors less than themselves. It is in this haughty attitude that Archbishops Siegfried III von Eppstein, who crowned two emperors, Henry of Thuringia and William II of Holland; and Peter von Aspelt, who crowned two emperors and a king, Louis of Bavaria, Henry VII, and John of Bohemia, stare at you with the eyes of an Egyptian mummy. An abundance of coats of arms, heraldic mantles, mitres, crowns, electoral hats, cardinal's hats, sceptres, swords, crosiers, are piled higher and higher on these monuments, and strive to recreate, for the eyes of passers-by, that great and formidable figure, who presided over the nine Electors of the German Empire, and was called the Archbishop of Mainz. A chaos, half-submerged in the shadows, of august or illustrious objects, of venerable or formidable emblems, from which these powerful princes wished to conjure the idea of grandeur and which merely conjure thoughts of nothingness.

A remarkable thing, which proves to what extent the French Revolution was an act of providence, the necessary and, so to speak, algebraic, result of the whole ancient European effort, is that everything it destroyed was destroyed forever. It arrived at the appointed hour, like a woodcutter in haste to finish his work, and felled swiftly and pell-mell all the ancient trees mysteriously marked by the Lord. One feels, as I believe I have already indicated somewhere, that it had within it the *quid divinum* (*divine inspiration*). Nothing that it razed rose again, nothing that it condemned survived, nothing that it undid was restored. And let us observe here that the life of states is not suspended by the same thread as that of individuals; it is not enough to strike at an empire to kill it; one can only kill cities and kingdoms when they are about to die. The French Revolution touched Venice, and Venice fell; it touched the German Empire, and the German Empire fell; it touched the Electors, and the Electors vanished. In the same year, the great abyssal year of 1793, the King of France, a man well-nigh treated as a god, and the Archbishop of Mainz, a priest well-nigh treated as a king, were swallowed up.

The Revolution neither extirpated nor destroyed Rome, because Rome has no foundations, but roots; roots which are constantly growing, in the shadows beneath Rome and beneath all nations; which traverse and penetrate the entire globe from one end to the other; and which we see reappearing at this very moment in China and Japan, on the far side of the earth.

The Jean de Troyes (*author of The Memoirs of Philip De Commines*) of Cologne, namely Gottfried Hagen, clerk of the city in 1270, recounts, it is said, in the manuscript of his 'little' chronicle (*'Reimchronik der Stadt Köln aus Dem Dreizehnten Jahrhundert'*), unfortunately torn apart during the French occupation and of which only a few mismatched pages remain in Darmstadt, that during the reign of that same Archbishop of Mainz Siegfried II, whose tomb is such a formidable presence in the cathedral, an old astrologer named Mabusius was condemned to the gallows as a sorcerer and soothsayer, and led to die on the stone gallows of Lorchhausen, which marked the boundary of the Archbishop of Mainz, facing another gallows which marked the boundary of the Count Palatine. On arriving there, since the astrologer refused the crucifix and persisted in calling himself a prophet, the monk who accompanied him mockingly asked him in what year the line of Archbishops of Mainz would end. The old man asked that his right hand be untied, which was done; then he picked up a gallows nail that had fallen to the ground, and, after reflecting for a moment, engraved with this nail, on the face of the gallows that looked towards Mainz, this singular polygram:



After which he delivered himself up to the executioner, while the bystanders laughed at his madness and the enigma. Today, by combining the three mysterious numbers written by the old man, one can unlock the meaning of that formidable figure: *ninety-three* (*'quatre-vingt-treize', four times twenty, plus thirteen*).

It is to be noted that the menacing gallows which, since the thirteenth century, had borne on its sinister plinth the date of the fall of empires, bore at the same time a condemnation of itself, and the date of its own collapse. The gallows were emblems of the old power. The French Revolution no more respected the permanence of gallows than the permanence of dynasties. Just as nothing is made of marble any longer, nothing is made even of stone. In the nineteenth century, the scaffold too lost its majesty and grandeur; it is now made of fir-wood, like the throne.

Like Aix-la-Chapelle, Mainz had a bishop (*Joseph Ludwig Colmar*), one only, who was appointed by Napoleon, and a worthy and respectable pastor, it is said, who sat from 1802 to 1818, and who is buried, like the others, in what was his cathedral. However, it must be admitted that in the presence of the majestic nothingness of the archiepiscopal electors of Mainz, the nothingness of Monsieur Louis Colmar, bishop of the department of Mont-Tonnerre, in his ogival tomb in the 'troubadour' style, which would be an admirable model of a Gothic clock for the rich bourgeois of the rue Saint-Denis, if a dial had been set there instead of a bishop, seems diminished and impoverished. Moreover, as I said just now, this puny bishop, whose only greatness was that of being a Revolutionary instrument, ended the line of sovereign archbishops. Since Monsieur Louis Colmar, there has only been the one bishop in Mainz, today the capital of Rhenish Hesse.

I also found there, in the cathedral, an Arcadian pair of brother archbishops, buried opposite each other, after having reigned over the same people, and governed the same souls, one dying in 1390, and the other in 1420. Johann II and Adolph I von Nassau gaze at each other in the nave of Mainz as do Adolph II and Anton von Schauenburg in the choir at Cologne.

I said that one of the forty-three tombs was from the eighth century. This monument, which is not that of an archbishop, is the one I sought first and which detained me the longest, because it was coupled in my mind with the great sepulchre of Aix-la-Chapelle. It is the tomb of Fastrada, wife of Charlemagne. Fastrada's tomb is a simple slab of white marble now set in the wall. I deciphered the epitaph, written in Roman letters with Byzantine abbreviations:

FASTRADANA PIA CAROLI CONIVNX VOCITATA
CHRISTO DILECTA IACET HOC SVB MARMORE TECTA
ANNO SEPTENGENTESIMO NONAGESIMO QVARTO

Then come these three mysterious verses:

QVEM NVMERVM METRO CLAVDERE MVSA NEGAT
REX PIE QVEM GESSIT VIRGO LICET HIC CINERESCIT
SPIRITVS HÆRES SIT PATRIE QVÆ TRISTIA NESCIT

'The pious wife of Charles, named Fastrada,
Beloved of Christ, lies here beneath the marble lid,
In the year seven hundred and ninety-four,
Which number the Muse refuses to enshrine in metre.
Pious king, whom these ashes bore, grant that
Her spirit be heir to a land free of tribulation'

And below, the year in Arabic numerals:

It was in 794, in fact, that Fastrada, buried first at Saint Alban's Abbey, slept the sleep of death beneath the slab. After the destruction of the Abbey in 1552, her tombstone was transferred to Mainz Cathedral, A thousand years later, in 1794, for history sometimes repeats great things, with fearful, almost geometric, precision, the companion of Charlemagne awoke. Her old town of Mainz was under siege; her church of Saint Alban was bathed in flames;

her tomb lay open. It is not known what became of her bones. Today a poor old Swiss in an aventurine wig, dressed in a sort of invalid's uniform, recounts all this to passers-by.

In addition to the tombs, the statuettes on plinths, the triptych paintings with gold backgrounds, and the altar bas-reliefs, each of the two apses has its own special furnishings. The old apse from 975/6, adorned with two charming Romanesque staircases, curves around a magnificent bronze baptismal urn from the fourteenth century. On the exterior of this vast basin are sculpted the twelve apostles and Saint Martin, patron saint of the church. The cover was broken during the siege. During the Empire, a period of taste, the Gothic basin was topped with a sort of large saucepan lid.

The western apse, the largest and least ancient, is occupied, cluttered so to speak, by a large choir panelled in black oak, in which the tormented and furious style of the eighteenth century is deployed, which defies the straight line with such violence, that it almost attains beauty. Never has a more delicate chisel, a more powerful fantasy, a more varied invention been placed at the service of bad taste. Four statues, those of Crescens, the legendary first bishop of Mainz c. 80AD; of Saint Boniface, the first archbishop in 755; of Willigis, first Elector in 1011, and Bardo, founder of the Dom in 1050, stand gravely on the perimeter of the choir, dominated, above the archbishop's Asiatic canopy, by the equestrian group of Saint Martin and the Beggar (*erected 1769*). At the entrance to the choir, displaying all the mysterious pomp of the Hebrew High Priests, stand Aaron, who represents the bishop within, and Melchizedek, who represents the bishop without. The archbishop of Mainz, like the Bishop Princes of Worms and Liège, the Archbishops of Cologne and Trier, and the Pope himself, unites in one person the dual pontiff. He is both Aaron and Melchizedek.

The chapter house, which adjoins the choir, and which, with its splendid Pompadour joinery-work, echoes the contrast between the two large bell-towers, is a dark and superb Romanesque Hall. There is nothing but a large bare wall; a dusty pavement dented by the reliefs of tombs; a remnant of stained glass in the lower window; a coloured tympanum depicting Saint Martin, not as a Roman horseman but as the Bishop of Tours; three large sculptures from the sixteenth century, representing the Crucifixion, the Exit from the Tomb, and the Ascension; a stone bench lining the walls for the canons; and at the back, for the presiding archbishop, a large stool also in

stone, which recalls the severe marble chair of the first popes that is displayed at Notre-Dame des Doms in Avignon. Leaving this hall, one enters the fourteenth-century cloister, which has always been an austere place and is today a gloomy one. The result of the bombardment of 1794 is evident everywhere. Tall, damp grasses, among which stones silvered by the saliva of reptiles are mouldering; ribbed arcades with broken windows; tombs cracked by incendiary shells like panes of glass; stone knights fully armed, blasted head on by bomb fragments and retaining nothing but a scar for a face; old women's rags hung to dry on a line; plank partitions patching granite walls here and there; a gloomy solitude, a profound despondency broken only by the intermittent croaking of crows; this is today the archiepiscopal cloister of Mainz. The foundations of one buttress, struck by a cannonball, slipped entirely under the shock, but the buttress failed to fall, and still hangs there today like a harpsichord key on which an invisible finger seeks to rest. Two or three sad and wretched statues, standing in a corner, exposed to the wind and rain, gaze silently at this desolation.

Here, beneath the galleries of the cloister, is an obscure monument, a fourteenth-century bas-relief, the enigma presented by which I have sought in vain to divine. On one side are men chained in attitudes of despair; on the other, an emperor accompanied by a bishop and surrounded by a crowd of triumphant personages. Is this Barbarossa? Is it Louis of Bavaria? Is it the revolt of 1160? Is it to do with the conflict between Mainz and Frankfurt in 1332? Is it none of these things? — I know not. I passed on.

As I was about to leave the galleries, I distinguished in the shadows a stone head emerging halfway from the wall and encircled by a crown with three carved fleurons of wild celery (*apium*) like the kings of the eleventh century. I looked. It was a gentle and severe figure at the same time, one of those faces imbued with the august beauty that the habit of deep thought gives to a man's face. Below, the hand of a passerby had charcoaled this name: Frauenlob. I was reminded of that 'Tasso' of Mainz, so slandered during his life, so venerated after his death. When Heinrich Frauenlob (*a noted Minnesinger*) died, in 1318, I believe, the women of Mainz, who had mocked and insulted him, sought to carry his coffin. The women, and his coffin laden with coronets and flowers, are chiselled into the slab set a little lower than the head. I looked again at that noble face. The sculptor had carved the eyes as open. In this church full of sepulchres, amidst this crowd of reclining

princes and bishops, in this cloister sleeping the sleep of death, a lone poet remains, standing there, and watching on.

The Market Square (*Marktplatz*[80]), which borders the cathedral on two sides, is a copious, flowery and intriguing ensemble. In the middle stands a pretty trigonal fountain of the German Renaissance; a delightful little poem of a fountain which, from a heap of coats of arms, mitres, river-gods, naiads, bishop's crosiers, cornucopias, angels, dolphins, and mermaids, makes a pedestal for the Virgin Mary. On one of the faces, I read this pentameter:

Albertus princeps, civibus ipse suis (*Prince Albert himself, to his fellow citizens*), which recalls, the friendlier dedication inscribed on the fountain erected by the last Elector of Trier, near to his palace, in the improved city of Koblenz: *Clemens Vinceslaus, elector, vicinis suis* (*Clemens Wenceslaus, Elector, to his neighbours*). '*To his fellow citizens*' is constitutional. '*To his neighbours*' is charming.

The fountain of Mainz was built by Albrecht von Brandenburg, who reigned as Archbishop of Mainz from 1514 to 1545, and whose epitaph I had just read in the cathedral: *Albert, Cardinal-Priest of Saint Peter in Chains, Archchancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, Marquis of Brandenburg, Duke of Stettin and Pomerania, Elector*. He erected or rather rebuilt the fountain, in memory of the success of Charles V (*at the Battle of Pavia in 1525*), and his capture there of Francis I, as this inscription in recently revived gold letters states:

DIVO KAROLO V CÆSARE SEMP. AVG. POST VICTORIA
GALLICAM REGE IPSO AD TICINV SVPERATO AC CAPTO
TRIVPHANTE FATALIQ. RVSTICORVPER GERMANIA COSPI
RATIONE PROSTRATA ALBER. CARD. ET ARCHIEP. MOG.
FONTE HVNC VETVSTATE DILAPSV AD CIVIV SUORUM
POSTERITATISQVE VSVM RESTITVI CVRAVIT.

Seen from the summit of the citadel[81], Mainz presents sixteen towers towards which the cannons of the Germanic Confederation gracefully turn:

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[80] Letter XXIII — Mainz Market Square (Marktplatz): 49°59'57.5"N, 8°16'26.8"E

[81] Letter XXIII — Mainz Citadel (Zitadelle): 49°59'34.8"N, 8°16'28.2"E

the six bell-towers of the cathedral, two fine military belfries, a twelfth-century spire, four Flemish pinnacles, plus the dome of the Carmelites of the Rue Cassette in Paris (*Saint-Joseph-des-Carmes*) thrice repeated, which is sufficient. On the slope of the hill crowned by the fortress, one of these ignoble domes crowns a sad old Saxon church, the saddest and most humble in the world, flanked by a charming Gothic cloister adorned with flamboyant mullions where the Kaiserlichs (*Imperial troops*) water their horses from Romanesque sarcophagi.

The beauty of the Rhenish women of Mainz is undeniable; only the women there are full of curiosity in the manner of both Flanders and Alsace. Mainz unites the spy's-mirror of Antwerp and the spy's-turret of Strasbourg.

The city, however whitewashed it may be, has retained, in many places, the honourable appearance of a merchant city of the Rhineland Hanseatic League. One can still read on the doors PRO CELERI MERCATVRÆ EXPEDITIONE (*The swift expediting of goods*). In two or three years one will read *Roulage accéléré* (*the French equivalent*).

Moreover, a profound flow of life, from the Rhine, animates this city. It is no less bristling with masts, no less cluttered with bales, no less full of noise than Cologne. People walk, talk, push, drag, arrive, depart, they buy, sell, shout, sing, in short, they live life, in all the districts, houses, and streets. At night, this immense buzz falls silent; and one hears in Mainz nothing but the murmur of the Rhine, and the eternal noise of the seventeen mill-ships moored to the submerged piles of the Charlemagne Bridge (*a wooden bridge linking Mainz to Kastel, built at Charlemagne's command between 803 and 813, on the stone foundations of the former Roman bridge, but burned down in 813*).

Whatever the Congresses have done, or rather have not done as regards Mainz, the vacuum left by the triple domination of the Romans, the Archbishops, and the French has not been filled. No one is home. The Grand Duke of Hesse reigns there only in name. On his fortress in Cassel, he can read: CURA CONFOEDERATIONIS CONDITUM (*'built to guard the 'German' Confederation, 1832'*); and in front of his fortress at Mainz he can see a white-coated soldier and a blue-coated soldier, that is to say Austria and Prussia, patrolling night and day, weapons in hand. Neither Prussia nor Austria are at home there either; they obstruct each other, and jostle each other. Obviously, this is only a temporary state of affairs. There is in the very wall of the citadel a ruin, half-engaged in the new rampart — a kind of

truncated pedestal which is still called the *Eagle Stone*, the Adlerstein. It is the tomb of Drusus. An eagle indeed, an imperial eagle, a formidable and all-powerful eagle, perched there for sixteen hundred years and then vanished (*at the time of the Thirty Year's War*). In 1804, it reappeared; in 1814, it flew away again — today, at this very hour, Mainz can see, on the horizon towards France, a black dot growing larger and approaching. It is the eagle returning.

Letter XXIV: Frankfurt am Main

Mainz, September

I was in Frankfurt[82] on a Saturday. I had been walking around, at random, for some time, searching for my old Frankfurt amidst a labyrinth of very ugly new houses, and very beautiful gardens, when I suddenly arrived at the entrance to a singular street. Two long parallel rows of tall, black, sombre, and sinister houses, almost alike, but with those slight differences between like features which characterise periods of fine architecture; and between these houses, all contiguous and compact, as if pressed with terror against each other, this narrow, dark roadway, drawn with a ruler; nothing but large doorways surmounted by strangely confused iron latticework; all the doors closed; on the ground floors nothing but windows fitted with solid iron shutters; all these shutters closed; on the upper floors, wooden frontages, almost everywhere armed with iron bars; a gloomy silence, no singing, no voices, no breathing, only at intervals the muffled sound of footsteps inside the houses; beside each door, a grilled peephole half-open revealing a dark alley; everywhere dust, ashes, cobwebs, rot and decay, a poverty perhaps more affected than real; an air of anxiety and fear imbuing the facades of the buildings; one or two passers-by in the street gazing at me with suspicion and mistrust: at the windows of the first floors, beautiful young well-dressed girls, brown-skinned, with semitic profiles, appearing, furtively, or the faces of old women with like profiles, their hair dressed in

[82] Letter XXIV — Frankfurt am Main: 50°06'45.7"N, 8°40'25.3"E

exorbitant fashion, motionless and pale behind the clouded glass; in the alleys on the ground-floor, piles of bales, and other merchandise; fortresses rather than houses, caverns rather than fortresses, spectres rather than passers-by — I was in the street the Jews inhabit, and I was there on their Sabbath.

In Frankfurt there are still Jews and Christians; true Christians, that is, who despise the Jews, true Jews who, in turn, loathe the Christians. On both sides, they hate and shun one another. Our civilisation, which seeks to maintain a balance of ideas and to quell anger everywhere, no longer understands these looks full of abomination that strangers cast at each other. The Jews of Frankfurt live in their gloomy houses, and withdraw to their rear courtyards to avoid the breath of the Christians. Twelve years ago, this street, rebuilt and slightly widened in 1662, still had iron gates at both ends, fitted with bars and reinforcements on the outside and inside. When night fell, the Jews returned and the two gates were closed. They were barred from the outside, like plague victims, and barricaded themselves inside like those under siege. Judenstrasse[83] (*or Judengasse*) is not a street, it is a city within a city. Exiting Judenstrasse, I found myself in the old city. I had just entered Frankfurt.

Frankfurt is a city of caryatids. Nowhere have I seen so many colossal supports as in Frankfurt. It is impossible to make marble, stone, bronze, and wood-work groan and howl with richer invention and more varied cruelty. Whichever way you turn, there are wretched figures of every period, style, age, sex, and imagining, writhing and groaning miserably beneath enormous weighty masses. Horned satyrs, nymphs with Flemish busts, dwarves, giants, sphinxes, dragons, angels, devils, a whole unfortunate population of supernatural beings, captured by some magician who has shamelessly trawled all mythologies simultaneously, and enclosed by him in petrified forms, are chained there beneath the entablatures, imposts and architraves, and are sealed up to their waists in the walls. Some bear balconies; others, turrets; the most oppressed, bear houses. Others again raise on their shoulders some insolent bronze black African dressed in a robe of gilded tin, or an immense Roman emperor of stone in all the pompous costume of Louis XIV, with his large wig, ample cloak, and armchair, his platform and credence table on

[83] Letter XXIV — Judengasse, Frankfurt: 50°06'45.0"N, 8°41'23.3"E

which his crown is placed, and his canopy with carved panels and vast draperies; a colossal construction which represents an engraving by Gérard Audran completely reproduced, in the round, in a monolith twenty feet high. These prodigious monuments project like inn signs. Beneath their titanic burdens, the caryatids bend in every posture of rage, pain and fatigue. Some bow their heads, others half-turn; some place their two clenched hands on their hips, or fill their swollen chests ready to burst; there are disdainful Hercules who support six-story houses with a single shoulder, and shake their fists at folk; there are sad, hunchbacked Vulcans who support themselves on their knees, or unfortunate sirens whose scaly tails are crushed horribly between stone partitions; there are exasperated Chimeras who bite each other furiously; others that weep, or laugh bitterly, or make frightful grimaces at passers-by. I have noticed that many an overhanging cabaret-hall, resounding to the clink of glasses, is supported on the heads of caryatids. It seems that it is the taste of the old free bourgeoisie of Frankfurt to have their feasts borne by suffering statues.

The most dreadful nightmare one could experience, in Frankfurt is neither the invasion of the Russians, nor the irruption of the French, nor a European war devastating the country, nor a civil war, as in the past, ravaging the city's fourteen districts again, nor typhus, nor cholera; it would be the awakening, the unleashing of the revenge of the caryatids.

One of the curiosities of Frankfurt, which will soon vanish, I fear, is the butchers' quarter, occupying two old streets. It would be impossible to find older or blacker houses leaning over a more splendid heap of fresh meat. An indescribable air of gluttonous joviality is imprinted on the bizarrely slated and sculpted facades, whose ground floors seems to devour, like deep, wide-open maws, innumerable quarters of beef and mutton. The blood-stained and rosy butchers converse gracefully beneath garlands of legs of lamb. A red stream, whose colour is barely diluted by two gushing fountains, flows and steams down the middle of the street. As I passed by, the place was full of terrifying cries. Inexorable murderous lads, with Herodian faces, were carrying out a massacre of suckling pigs. The maids, baskets on their arms, laughed amidst the din. There are futile and ridiculous emotions one must contain; yet I confess that, if I had known what to do with the poor little suckling pig that a butcher was bearing away, by its two hind feet, in front of me and gave not a cry, ignorant of what would be done to it, and

understanding nothing of the matter, I would have purchased it, and saved it. A pretty little girl of four, who, like me, was looking at it with compassion, seemed to encourage me with her gaze. I failed to do as those charming eyes told me, I disobeyed that sweet look, and I reproach myself for it. — A superb and grandiose golden ensign, supported by a gallows grille, the most beautiful and richest in the world, composed of all the emblems of the butchers' corps and surmounted by the imperial crown, dominates and completes this magnificent slaughterhouse worthy of Paris in the Middle Ages, faced with which, Caltagirone (*Bonaventure Caltagirone, General of the Franciscan Order, who helped negotiate the Peace of Vervins in 1598, and described his visit to the Parisian equivalent*) or Rabelais, in the sixteenth century, would doubtless have been astonished.

From the slaughterhouse one emerges into a square of moderate grandeur (*Römerberg*[84]), worthy of Flanders and which deserves to be celebrated and admired, even compared with the Old Market of Brussels. It is one of those trapezoidal squares where all the styles and whims of the bourgeois architecture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance are represented by model houses whose ornamentation has been employed, according to the period and taste, with prodigious appropriateness, slate as well as stone, lead as well as wood. Each shop-front is of individual worth, and contributes to the present-day composition and general harmony of the square. In Frankfurt, as in Brussels, two or three new houses, of the most stupid appearance, seeming like imbeciles amidst a gathering of intelligent people, spoil the whole, yet enhance the beauty of the older buildings which are their neighbours. A marvellous fifteenth-century building (*Old Saint Nicholas Church*), composed, I know not for what purpose, of a church nave and a town-hall belfry, fills one side of the trapezoid with its superb and elegant silhouette. Towards the middle of the square, randomly, without evidently any desire for symmetry, two fountains have sprouted, like perennial bushes, one from the Renaissance, the other from the eighteenth century. On these two fountains, by a singular chance, each standing at the top of her column, Minerva and Judith, the Homeric virago and the Biblical virago, the former grasping the head of Medusa, the latter no longer grasping the head of Holofernes, meet and confront each other.

[84] Letter XXIV — Römerberg and the Römer, Frankfurt: 50°06'37.1"N, 8°40'55.9"E

Judith, beautiful, haughty and charming, surrounded by four celebrated Sirens blowing trumpets at her feet, is a heroic girl of the Renaissance. She no longer has the head of Holofernes, which she once raised in her left hand, but still holds the sword in her right, while her dress, blown by the wind, and with the proudest fold one could see, rises above her marble knee, to reveal her thin, firm leg.

Some expositors claim that this statue represents Justice, and that she held in her hand, not the head of Holofernes, but a pair of scales. I give that little credence. Justice holding the scales in her left hand, and the sword in her right would represent Injustice. Besides, Justice has no right to be either so pretty or so elegantly posed.

Opposite this figure and displaying a black dial and five grave windows of unequal height, rise the three juxtaposed gables of the Römer (*restored 1945-75*). It was in the Römer that the emperors were elected; it was in this place that they were proclaimed; it was also in this square that the two famous Frankfurt Fairs were held and still are held: the September Fair, established in 1240 by letter of permit of Frederick II; and the Easter Fair, established in 1330 by Ludwig of Bavaria. The fairs have survived the emperors and the empire.

I entered the Römer. After wandering, without meeting anyone, through a large, low, crooked room, vaulted and cluttered with booths from the fair, then up a wide staircase with a Louis XIII banister, lined with mediocre, unframed paintings, then along a host of dark corridors and stairs, I finally found a servant, by dint of knocking on all the doors, who, at the word: *Kaisersaal*, took a key from a nail in her kitchen and led me to the Hall of the Emperors.

The smiling and kindly girl first took me through the Hall of the Electors, which today, I believe, is used for the sessions of the High Senate of the city of Frankfurt. It was there that the electors or their delegates declared the emperor King of the Romans among themselves. On an armchair between the two windows, the Archbishop of Mainz presided. Then seated in order around an immense table covered in tawny leather, each below his coat of arms painted on the ceiling, were, to the right of the Archbishop of Mainz, Trier, Bohemia and Saxony; to his left, Cologne, the Palatinate, and Brandenburg; and opposite him, Brunswick and Bavaria. The passer-by experiences the impression produced by simple things that express great

things, when he sees and touches the red and dusty leather of this table at which the Emperors of Germany were elected. Apart from the table, which has been transported to a neighbouring room, the Hall of the Electors is today in the state it was in during the seventeenth century. The nine coats of arms on the ceiling framing a mediocre fresco, a red damask hanging, silver-plated copper sconces acting as candelabras depicting Fame, a large mirror with curved rods opposite which, in the last century, a full-length portrait of Joseph II was placed as a counterpart; a space above the door with a portrait of the last of Charlemagne's grandsons (*Louis, the last East Frankish ruler of the Carolingian dynasty*) who died in 911, ending his reign, and whom the Germans call the *Child*. Nothing more. — The whole is austere, serious, and tranquil, and makes one think rather than merely look.

After the Electors' Hall, I viewed the Emperors' Hall (*Kaisersaal*). In the fourteenth century, the Lombard merchants who gave their name to the Römer, and who had shops there, had the idea of surrounding the great hall with niches, in order to display their goods. An architect, whose name has been lost, measured the perimeter of the hall and built forty-five niches. In 1564, Maximilian II was elected in Frankfurt, and shown to the people from the balcony of this hall which, from Maximilian II onwards, was called the Kaisersaal, and was used for the proclamation of emperors. They decided to decorate it, and the first thought that came to mind was to install, in the niches created around the imperial hall, the portraits of all the German Caesars elected and crowned since the extinction of the line of Charlemagne, reserving the vacant niches for future Caesars. However, from Conrad I in 911, to Ferdinand I in 1556, thirty-six kings and emperors had already been crowned at Aix-la-Chapelle. Adding to this the new King of the Romans, there remained only eight empty niches for the future. This was very few. The thing was nevertheless done, with a promise to enlarge the hall when necessary. The niches were furnished little by little, at roughly four emperors per century. In 1765, when Joseph II ascended the sacred imperial Caesarean throne, there remained only one empty place. Serious consideration was once again given to extending the Kaisersaal and adding new compartments to those created five centuries earlier by the architect of the Lombard merchants. In 1794, Francis II, the forty-fifth king of the Romans, arrived to occupy the forty-fifth compartment. It was the last niche; he was the last emperor. The spaces were filled, the Germanic empire collapsed. The unknown architect was destiny; the mysterious room with its forty-five niches

the very history of Germany, which, once the line of Charlemagne was extinguished, was fated to reveal only forty-five emperors.

There, in fact, in this oblong, vast, cold, almost dark room, cluttered at one of its corners with discarded furniture, among which I saw the Electors' leather-covered table, and barely lit at its eastern end by the five narrow unequal windows which mount in pyramid fashion towards the exterior gable, between four high walls covered with faded frescoes, under a wooden vault with formerly gilded ribs, alone, in a kind of half-light which resembled the beginning of oblivion, each crudely pictured, and depicted therein as bronze busts whose pedestals bear the two dates that open and close their respective reigns, some wearing laurel crowns like Roman Caesars, others adorned with the Germanic diadem, silently looking at each other, each in his sombre ogive, are the three Conrads, the seven Henrys, the four Ottos, the one Lothair, the four Fredericks, the one Philip, the two Rudolfs, the one Adolphus, the two Alberts, the one Louis, the four Charles, the one Wenceslas, the one Robert, the one Sigismund, the two Maximilians, the three Ferdinands, the one Mathias, the two Leopolds, the two Josephs, the two named Francis, the forty-five phantoms who, for nine centuries, from 911 to 1806, helped to determine the course of history, with the sword of Saint Peter in one hand and Charlemagne's orb in the other. At the end opposite the five windows, near the ceiling, a mediocre painting depicting the Judgment of Solomon is blackening and peeling.

When the Electors had finally designated an Emperor, the Frankfurt Senate met in this hall; the burghers, arranged in fourteen groups, corresponding to the fourteen districts of the city, assembled outside in the square. Then the five windows of the Kaisersaal were opened, facing the people. The large window, the middle one, was surmounted by a canopy and remained empty. At the first window on the right, adorned with a black iron balcony from which I could see the road to Mainz, the Emperor appeared, alone, in full costume, the crown on his head. To his right, in the small window, were gathered the three Archbishop-Electors of Mainz, Trier and Cologne. At the other two windows, to the left of the large empty window, in the first stood Bohemia, Bavaria and the Palatinate of the Rhine; in the smaller one, Saxony, Brunswick and Brandenburg. In the square, in front of the facade of the Römer, in the middle of the vast empty square surrounded by guards, there was a large sack for oats, an urn full of gold and silver coins,

a table bearing a silver basin and a silver-gilt jar, and another table burdened with a whole roast ox. At the moment when the emperor appeared, the trumpets and cymbals burst forth, and the Arch-Marshal (*Erzmarschall*) of the Holy Roman Empire, the Arch-Chancellor (*Erzkanzler*), the Arch-Cupbearer (*Erzmundschenk*), the Arch-Treasurer (*Erzschatzmeister*) and the Grand Carver (*Grossmundschenk*) entered the square in procession. Amidst cheers and fanfares, the Arch-Marshal on horseback, lifted the sack for oats to his saddle, and filled it with a measure of silver; the Arch-Chancellor took the basin from the table; the Arch-Cupbearer filled the silver-gilt jar with wine and water; The Arch-Treasurer drew coins from the urn and threw them to the people by the handful; the Grand Carver sliced a portion from the roast ox. At that moment, the Archbishop of Mainz appeared, proclaimed aloud the new Caesar, and read the formula of the oath. When he had finished, the Senate in the hall and the bourgeois in the square answered gravely: *Yes*. During the taking of the oath, the new emperor, already formidable in power, removed the crown but held the sword.

From 1564 to 1794, the now-neglected square, and now-deserted hall, witnessed this majestic ceremony nine times. The great offices of the empire, being hereditarily acquired by the Electors, were filled by their delegates. In the Middle Ages, the secondary monarchies held it as a signal honour and good policy to occupy the great offices of the two empires which had replaced the Roman Empire. Each prince gravitated towards the imperial centre nearest to him. The King of Bohemia was Arch-Cupbearer of the German empire; the Doge of Venice was Protospatharios (*the highest dignitary*) of the Eastern empire.

After the proclamation at the Römer came the coronation at the collegiate church. I followed the order of ceremony. After leaving the Kaisersaal, I visited the church (*the Kaiserdom*[85]).

The collegiate church of Frankfurt, dedicated to Saint Bartholomew, consists of a double cross-nave from the fourteenth century, surmounted by a beautiful fifteenth-century tower, unfortunately unfinished. The church and the tower are made of beautiful red sandstone, blackened and rusted by the

[85] Letter XXIV — Kaiserdom (St Bartholomew's Cathedral), Frankfurt: 50°06'38.9"N, 8°41'08.9"E

years. Only the interior is whitewashed. (*The Kaiserdom was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1867, burned out in 1944 and reconstructed again in the 1950s*)

Here again, is a Belgian church. White walls; no stained-glass windows; a rich furnishing of sculpted altars, coloured tombs, paintings, and bas-reliefs. In the naves, severe marble knights, mustachioed bishops from the time of Gustavus Adolphus who have the faces of *landsknechts* (*mercenaries*), admirable stone bell-towers hollowed out and carved by faeries, magnificent copper light fixtures reminiscent of the lamp of the alchemist-painter Gerrit Dou, a 'Christ in the Tomb' painted in the fourteenth century, a 'Virgin on her Deathbed', sculpted in the fifteenth. In the choir, curious frescoes, horribly adorned with Saint Bartholomew, charmingly with the Magdalen; rough and savage woodwork carved around 1400; woodwork and frescoes donated by the Knight of Ingelheim, who had himself painted kneeling in a corner, wearing gold with gules chevrons. On the walls, a complete collection of those fantastic morions with frightening crests proper to Germanic chivalry, hung on nails like the pots and pans in a kitchen. Near the door, one of those enormous clocks which are akin to a two-story house, a three-volume book, a poem in twenty cantos, a whole world. Above, on a large Flemish pediment, the hours of the day tick by; below, in the depths of a kind of cave where things are in motion pell-mell in the darkness, a crowd of thick rods that one might take for the antennae of monstrous insects, mysteriously articulate the time of year. The hours turn above, the seasons march below. The sun, with its glorious golden rays, the full and dark moon, the stars on a blue background, operate complicated evolutions, which reveal at the lower end of the clock a series of small pictures in which schoolchildren skate, old people warm themselves, country folk harvest the wheat, or shepherdesses pick flowers. Maxims and phrases somewhat faded shine in the sky by the light of the equally faded stars. Each time the hand reaches a numeral, doors open and close on the pediment of the clock, and Jacquemarts armed with hammers, emerging then retreating, strike the hour on the bell, executing bizarre sounds to the rhythm of a Pyrrhic dance. All this, throbs and rumbles, as if the very walls of the church were alive, with the sound of a sperm whale imprisoned in the great Heidelberg Tun (*the huge barrel in Heidelberg Castle*).

This collegiate church has an admirable Crucifixion by Van Dyck. Albrecht Durer and Rubens each have a painting there, of 'Christ on the Virgin's Knees'. The subject is the same; the two paintings differ significantly.

Rubens placed a child Jesus on the knees of the Divine Mother; Albrecht Durer placed a crucified Christ there. Nothing equals the grace of the first painting, except the anguish of the second. Each of the two painters followed his genius. Rubens chose life, Durer chose death.

Another painting, in which anguish and grace are mixed, is a precious one on leather, from the sixteenth century, which represents the interior of the tomb of Saint Cecilia. The various frames are composed of all the principal moments of the saint's life. In the middle, in a dark crypt, the saint is lying full length on her face, in her golden robe, with the mark of the axe on her neck, a pink and delicate wound that resembles a charming mouth one would like to kiss on one's knees. It seems as if one is about to hear the voice of the holy musician rise and sing *por la boca de su herida* (*through the mouth of her wound).* Below the open coffin, is written in gold letters: *En tibi sanctissimae virginis Ceciliae in sepulchro jacentis imaginem, prorsus eodem corporis situ expressam*: *here is an image of the most holy virgin Cecilia lying in her tomb, depicted in the exact same position as her body.*

Indeed, in the sixteenth century, a pope, Leo X, I am told, had the actual tomb of Saint Cecilia (*in the Basilica of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome*) opened (*it was opened during restoration work in 1599, under Clement VIII*), and this ravishing painting is, it is said, an exact portrait of the miraculous corpse.

Since Maximilian II, it is in the centre of the collegiate church, at the entrance to the choir, at the intersection of the transept and the nave, that the emperors have been crowned. I saw in a corner of the transept, wrapped in a grey paper sack granted the shape of a child's padded headdress, the immense imperial crown in a gold-plated frame that was suspended above their heads during the ceremony, and remembered that a year ago I had seen the fleur-de-lis carpet from the coronation of Charles X, rolled up, roped, and forgotten on a wheelbarrow in the attic of Reims Cathedral. To the right of the choir door, exactly adjoining the place where the emperor was crowned, the Gothic woodwork complacently displays two contrasting figures sculpted in oak: Saint Bartholomew flayed, carrying his skin on his arm, looking disdainfully to his left at the Devil perched on a magnificent pyramid of mitres, diadems, crests, tiaras, sceptres, swords and crowns. A little further on, the new Caesar could, under the tapestries from which it was doubtless hidden, glimpse at times standing in shadow and against the wall, like some sinister apparition, the stone spectre of that unfortunate pseudo-

emperor Günther XXI von Schwarzburg, fatality and hatred in his look, holding with one hand and arm his shield with the rampant lion, and with the other his imperial helm; a proud and fearsome statue tomb, which for two hundred and thirty years witnessed the enthronement of emperors, and whose granite sadness survived all those festivals of painted cardboard and gilded wood.

I wanted to climb the bell tower. The *glockner* (*bell-ringer*) who had guided me into the church, and who knew not a word of French, abandoned me at the first steps of the spiral stair, and I ascended alone. Arriving at the summit, I found the staircase blocked by a barrier with iron spikes; I called out, no one answered; whereupon I decided to climb the barrier. Once the obstacle was overcome, I was on the platform of the Pfarthurm (*cathedral tower*). From there, I had a charming view. Above my head a glorious sun, at my feet the whole city; to my left Römer Square, to my right the Judenstrasse, like a long, inflexible, black ridge among the white houses; here and there a few only-partially ruined apses of ancient churches, two or three high belfries flanked by turrets, sculpted with the eagle of Frankfurt and repeated, like echoes, in the depths of the view, by the three or four old watchtowers which once marked the limits of the little free State; behind me the Main, a silver sheet striped with gold by the wakes of the boats; the old bridge with the roofs of Sachsenhausen, and the reddish walls of the old Teutonic house; around the town, a thick belt of trees; beyond the trees, a great tableland of plains and ploughed fields, ending in the blue ridges of the Taunus range. While lost in I know not what reverie, I leant against the section of the truncated bell tower from 1509, clouds began to roll across the sky, driven by the wind, hiding and revealing wide azure rents at every moment, and causing great patches of shadow and light to form everywhere on the ground below. The city and the horizon presented an admirable picture. The landscape is never more beautiful than when it dons its tiger's hide. — I thought I was alone on the tower, and would have stayed there all day. Suddenly, I heard a slight noise beside me; I turned my head: it was a young girl of about fourteen, leaning half out of a skylight, who was looking at me with a smile. I risked a few steps, I traversed a corner of the Pfarthurm which I had not yet crossed, and found myself amidst the inhabitants of the bell-tower. There was a whole little world there, a sweet and happy one. The young girl, who was knitting; an old woman, her mother no doubt, who was at her spinning-wheel; doves perched on the gargoyles of the bell-tower, cooing; a hospitable monkey who

held out his hand from the depths of his little hutch; the weights of the big clock which rise and fall with a dull noise and amuse themselves by working the figures in the church where emperors have been crowned; add to this the profound peace one feels in high places, composed of the murmur of the wind, the rays of the sun, and the beauty of the landscape — does that not make a pure and charming whole? — Of the cage of ancient bells, the girl had made herself a room; she had her bed there in the shade, and sang as the bells sang, but in a sweeter voice, for herself and God alone. Of one of the unfinished pinnacles, the mother had made a chimney for the meagre widow's fire above which her cooking pot hangs. Such is the summit of the bell-tower of Frankfurt Cathedral. How and why was that little colony there; to what purpose? I knew not; but I admired it all the same. This proud imperial city, which has endured so many wars, which has been bombarded with so many cannonballs, which has enthroned so many Caesars, whose walls were once like a suit of armour, and whose eagle held in its two talons the diadems the Austrian eagle bore on its twin heads, is today dominated and crowned by the humble hearth of an old woman, from which a little wisp of smoke rises.

The End of Part VII of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part VIII: Letter XXV-XXVI

'The Rhine at Constance'
Edward Thomas Daniell (1804–1842)
Yale Center for British Art

Letter XXV: The Rhine

Mainz, October 1st

A stream flows from Lake Toma (*Tomasee, Lai da Tuma*), on the north-eastern slopes of the Saint Gotthard Pass; it joins a second stream, that flows from a second lake at the foot of Mount Lukmanierberg (*Lai da Songta Maria, in the Lukmanier Pass, to form the Vorderrhein*); a third (*the Hinterrein*) oozes from a glacier and descends amidst the rocks, from a height of more than five thousand feet above sea-level. Fifty miles from their respective sources, the waters meet in the same ravine near Reichenau (*Reichenau Tamins*). There, they mingle. Do you not admire, my friend, the powerful and simple way in which Providence produces greatness? Three shepherds meet, there is a people; three streams meet, there is a river.

A people emerged then, on November 17, 1307 (*at the start of the 'William Tell' Rebellion*), at night, on the edge of a lake, where three shepherds had embraced; the people rose up, they attested to the great God who makes commoners and Caesars alike, then they took up their scourges and pitchforks. A rustic giant took on a giant sovereign, the Emperor of Germany, hand to hand. At Küssnacht, they defeated the bailiff Albrecht Gessler, who made people bow down before his hat; at Sarnen, the bailiff Landenberg, who gouged out the eyes of old men; at Thalwil, the bailiff Wolfenschiessen, who killed women with axes; at Morgarten (*1315*), Duke Leopold I of Austria. They buried the three thousand Englishmen of Enguerrand de Coucy below the hill of Buttisholz (*1375*). They held in check four formidable enemies who came from the four cardinal points of the compass; they defeated the Duke of Austria at Sempach (*1386*); Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy at Morat (*Murten, 1476*), and again at Grandson (*1486*); the Duke of Milan at Novara (*1513*); and the Duke of Savoy at Chillon (*1536*); and let me note in passing that at Novara, in 1513, the Duke of Milan was a duke by right of the sword, and was called Louis XII, King of France. The people hung, on nails in their arsenals, above their commoners clothes

and next to the iron collars intended for them, the splendid ducal armour of these vanquished princes; they possessed great citizens, William Tell first, then the three liberators (*Walter Fürst, Werner Stauffacher, and Arnold von Melchtal*), then Petermann of Gundoldingen (*slain at Sempach*), who left his blood on the banner of the city, and Konrad Baumgarten, and Niklaus von Scharnachthal (*leader at Morat/Murten*), and Arnold Winkelried who sacrificed himself at Sempach, as Marcus Curtius had in that chasm in Rome (*in 362 BC*); the people fought at Bellinzona (*the Battle of Giornico, 1478*) for the inviolability of the land, and at Kappel for the inviolability of conscience; they lost Huldrych Zwingli, slain at Kappel, in 1531, but freed François Bonnivard (*the prisoner of Chillon*) in 1536; and since then have stood firm. The Swiss fulfilled their destiny between the four colossi of the continent, as a strong, solid, impenetrable, centre of civilisation, an asylum for science, a refuge for thought, an obstacle to unjust invasions, a point of support for legitimate resistance. For six hundred years, in the heart of Europe, in the midst of hostile Nature, under the eye of a benevolent providence, these great mountaineers, worthy sons of the great mountains themselves, grave, cold, and serene like them, subject only to necessity, jealous of their independence, in the presence of absolute monarchies, idle aristocracies, and envious democracies, have lived a strong communal life, exercising at the same time the most fundamental of rights, liberty, and the most sacred of duties, work.

The Rhine is born between granite walls; it takes a step, and encounters at Andeer, a Roman village (*Lapidaria*), the memory of Charlemagne; at Chur, the ancient Curia Raetorum, the memory of Drusus; in Feldkirch, a memory of André Masséna (*his failed second battle of 1799*); then, as if consecrated for the destiny that awaits it by this triple Germanic, Roman, and French baptism, leaving the mind undecided between its Greek etymology Ρἑειν, and its German etymology *Rinnen*, which both mean *to flow*, it takes its flowing course, traverses forests and mountains, reaches Lake Constance, leaps the falls at Schaffhausen, skirts the rear ridges of the Jura and the Vosges, pierces the chain of dead volcanoes of the Taunus, crosses the plains of Friesland, floods and drowns the lowlands of Holland, and after having dug, through the rocks, earth, lava, sand, and reeds, a tortuous valley of seven hundred and sixty five miles, after having sounded, in traversing the great European anthill, the perpetual murmur of its waves, which one might say is composed of the eternal quarrel between the north and the south, after having received twelve thousand tributaries, watered a hundred and fourteen cities, separated, or, to

put it better, divided eleven nations, bearing in its foam, and mingling with its noise, the history of thirty centuries and thirty peoples, is lost in the sea. A Protean River; the border of empires, the frontier of ambition, a brake to conquerors; the serpent of the enormous caduceus that the god of Commerce extends over Europe; a grace and adornment of the globe; a long green lock of Alpine hair, that trails down to the Ocean. Thus, from three shepherds and a triple-stream, Switzerland and the Rhine were born, in similar manner in the same mountains.

The Rhine has many aspects. It is sometimes wide, sometimes joyful. Murky or translucent, it is always swift, and joyful with that great joy proper to all that is powerful. It is a torrent at Schaffhausen, a chasm full of rapids at Laufen, a river at Sickingen, a stream at Mainz, a lake at Sankt Goar, a marsh at Leiden. It is said that it calms and slows towards evening as if falling asleep; a phenomenon, more apparent than real, visible as regards all large rivers.

I have said elsewhere: unity in variety is the principle of all complete art. In this respect, Nature is the greatest artist of all. She never abandons a form without having made it rehearse all its qualities. Nothing resembles each other less in appearance than a tree and a river; yet, at bottom, the tree and the river have the same general outline. Examine, in winter, a tree stripped of its leaves, lay it flat on the ground in your mind, and you will have the structure of a river seen by a giant, in bird's eye view. The trunk of the tree is the river itself; the large branches the tributaries, the twigs and small branches the torrents, streams, and springs; the spread of its roots the mouth. All rivers, seen on a geographical map, are trees which bear cities, sometimes at the end of their branches like fruit, sometimes in between their branches like nests; and their confluences and the innumerable tributaries imitate, according to the inclination of the slopes and the nature of the terrain, the varied branches of the different plant species, which all, as we know, launch shoots, more or less well-separated, from the stem, according to the particular pressure of their sap and the density of their wood. It is remarkable that, if one considers the Rhine in this way, the regal idea which seems to attach itself to that robust river is evident. The Ys of almost all the tributaries of the Rhine, the Murg, the Neckar, the Main, the Nahe, the Lahn, the Moselle and the Aare contain an angle of about ninety degrees. Bingen, Niederlahnstein, and Koblenz are within such right angles. If one, in thought, were to lay out the immense

geometric pattern of the river, and stand the result upright on the ground, the Rhine, gathering all its tributaries in its outstretched arms, would take the form of an oak-tree. The countless streams into which it divides at its mouth, before reaching the North Sea, would represent the roots laid bare.

The most famous and most admired part of the river, the richest for the geologist, the most interesting to the historian, the most important for the politician, and the most beautiful to the poet, is this section of the central Rhine which, from Bingen to Königswinter (*near Bonn*), traverses from east to west the black chaos of volcanic and metamorphic hills that the Romans called the Alps of the Chatti.

This is the famous stretch of the river from Mainz to Cologne, that almost all *tourists* travel in fourteen hours during the long summer days. In this way, you gain a dazzling sight of the Rhine, and nothing more. When a river flows fast, to see it properly, you must ascend, not descend it. As regards myself, the journey from Cologne to Mainz, took me a month, as you know.

From Mainz to Bingen, as from Königswinter to Cologne, there are twenty miles of rich, green and smiling terrain, with beautiful and cheerful villages at the water's edge. But, as I told you just now, the great embankment of the Rhine begins at Bingen beside the Rupertsberg and the Niederwald, two mountains of schist and slate, and ends at Königswinter, at the feet of the Seven Mountains.

Here everything is beautiful. The dark escarpments of both banks are reflected in the wide stretches of water. The steepness of the slopes means that vines are cultivated on the Rhine in the same manner as olive trees on the coast of Provençe. Wherever the southern sunlight falls, if the rocks project at all, the country folk carry sacks and baskets of earth there by hand, and, in this earth, in Provençe they plant an olive tree, and on the Rhine a vine. Then they buttress their earthwork with a dry-stone wall which holds back the soil, and lets rainwater drain away. Here, as an added precaution, so that the rains do not destroy everything, the winegrower covers the ground, as one does a roof, with pieces of slate from the mountain. In this way, on the top of the steepest rocks, the Rhenish vine, like the Mediterranean olive-tree, grows on a kind of platform set above the head of passers-by like a flowerpot in an attic window. All the gentle slopes bristle with vines.

It is a thankless job, when all is said and done. For ten years, the Rhine has not seen a good harvest. In several places, especially in Sankt Goarshausen, in the Nassau region, I saw abandoned vineyards. From below, all these shoulders of dry stone which follow the thousand undulations of the slope, and to which the layers of rock necessarily almost always give the shape of a crescent, surmounted by their green fringe of vines, attached to, as if hanging from, the projections of the mountain at their two ends where they are thinner, represent innumerable garlands suspended from the austere walls of the Rhine. In winter, when the vines and the soil are black, these dirty grey earthworks resemble those large cobwebs, stacked in layers in the corners of abandoned ruins, a kind of hideous hammock in which dust has heaped itself.

At every bend in the river, a cluster of houses gathered, to become a town or a city. Above each group of houses stands a ruined keep. The towns and villages, bristling with gables, turrets, and bell-towers, look from a distance like barbed arrows set down on the lower slopes of the mountains.

Often the hamlets stretch out, at the edge of the bank, in the shape of a *pigtail*, enlivened by singing washerwomen, and children playing. Here and there a goat grazes the young shoots of the osier beds. The houses along the Rhine resemble large slate-coloured helmets placed on the river bank. The exquisite interlocking beams painted red and blue, against the white plaster, form the ornamentation of the facades. Several of these villages, like those of Mülheim and Mondorf near Cologne, are inhabited by salmon fishermen and basket-weavers. On beautiful summer days, this makes for a charming sight; the basket-maker weaves his basket on the threshold of his house, the fisherman mends his nets in his boat; above their heads the sun ripens the vines on the hill. All do what God grants them to do, the sun as well as Mankind.

The towns are of a more complex and tumultuous nature. They abound on the Rhine. Such as Bingen, Oberwesel, Sankt Goar, Neuwied, Andernach. There is Linz am Rhein, a large town with square towers, which suffered from the plague in 1476, and which stand opposite Sinzig (*Sentiacum*), on the other side of the Rhine, built by Sentius to guard the mouth of the Aar. There is Boppard, the ancient Vicus Baudobriga, a fort built by Drusus, a royal estate of Frankish kings, an imperial town proclaimed at the same time as Oberwesel, a bailiwick of Trier, and a charming old town in which a pagan statue is preserved in the church, above which church the two Romanesque bell-towers coupled by bridgework resemble two large oxen beneath a yoke.

I noticed there near the town gate a lovely ruined apse upstream. There is Kaub, a town of the Palatinate. There is Braubach, named in a charter of 933, a fiefdom of the Counts of Arnstein von Lahngau, an imperial town under Rudolph in 1270, a domain of the Counts of Katzenelnbogen in 1283, which accrued to Hesse in 1473, to Darmstadt in 1632, and in 1802 to Nassau.

Braubach, which communicates with the Baths of Taunus (*thermal spas*), is admirably situated at the foot of the tall rock which bears the Marksburg at its summit. This old castle of Saint Mark is today a state prison. Every marquis seems to collect squires; it seems to me that Monsieur de Nassau wishes to collect state prisoners. It is a strange luxury.

Twelve thousand six hundred inhabitants in eleven hundred houses; a bridge (*destroyed in 1945*), formed of thirty-six boats built in 1819 on the Rhine; a bridge (*the Balduinbrücke*) of fourteen arches over the Moselle built of lava-stone on the very foundations of the bridge built around 1311 by Archbishop Baudoin, through a large expenditure of indulgences; the famous fort Ehrenbreitstein, surrendered to the French on January 27, 1799 after a blockade during which the besieged had paid three francs for a cat, and thirty sous for a pound of horsemeat; a well five hundred and eighty feet deep, dug by Margrave John II of Baden; the arsenal square, which once saw the famous culverin named the Griffon, which fired shot weighing a hundred and sixty pounds, and itself weighed twenty thousand; a fine old Franciscan convent (*the Kapuzinerkloster*) converted into a hospital in 1804; a Romanesque Church of Our Lady (*the Liebfrauenkirche, destroyed in 1944, and since restored*), redone in the Pompadour style and painted pink; a church of Saint Florin (*the Florinskirche*), converted into an artillery magazine by the French, and today an evangelical church, which is far worse from an artistic point of view, also painted pink; a collegiate Basilica of Saint Castor enriched with a portal from 1805 and painted pink; no library: such is Koblenz, which the French write as *Coblentz*, out of politeness to the Germans, and which the Germans write as *Koblence* out of consideration for the French. First a Roman castrum in the area of the Altstadt, then a royal court under the Franks, an imperial residence until the reign of Louis IV the Bavarian, a city patronised by the Counts of Arnstein until 1250, and then, from Arnould II of Isenberg, by the archbishops of Trier, besieged in vain in 1688 by Vauban and by Louis XIV himself, Koblenz was taken by the French in 1794 and given to the Prussians in 1815 (*after the Congress of Vienna*). As for myself, I chose not to enter it. So great a number of pink churches frightened me.

As a military centre, Koblenz is an important site. Its three fortresses face each other from three sides. Fort Grossfürst Konstantin dominates the road to Mainz, the Kaiser Franz fortress on the Petersberg guards the road to Trier and Cologne, and Ehrenbreistein watches over the Rhine and the road to Nassau.

As a site, Koblenz is perhaps over-praised, especially when compared with other Rhine towns that no one visits and no one talks about. Ehrenbreistein, once a beautiful and colossal ruin (*in 1801, a new fortress was built by the Prussian 1817-28*), is now a cold and gloomy citadel *crowning*, in a dull manner, a magnificent rock. The true crowns of the mountains were the line of ancient fortresses. Each tower was a jewel.

Some of these cities have inestimable riches of art and archaeology. The oldest masters, and the greatest painters, populate their museums. Domenichino, the Carracci, Guercino, Jacob Jordaens, Frans Snyders, Lorenzo di Credi, are in Mainz. Augustin Braun, William of Cologne, Rubens, Albrecht Dürer, Guillermo Mesquida, are in Cologne. Hans Holbein the Younger, Lucas van der Leyden, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Jan van Scorel, Raphael, and a copy of Titian's 'Sleeping Venus', are in Darmstadt. Koblenz has engravings of the works of Albrecht Dürer, complete except for four leaves. Mainz has the Psalter of 1457 (*Fust and Schöffer's edition, the second book printed with movable type*). Cologne had the famous missal of the castle of Drachenfels, coloured in the twelfth century; it lost it (*extant, now at Saint Remigius, Königswinter*); but it has preserved and still preserves the precious letters of Gottfried Leibnitz to the Jesuit, Barthélemy Des Bosses.

These beautiful towns and charming villages are set amidst wildest Nature. Mists creep through the ravines; clouds cling to the hills, seeming to hesitate then riding the winds; dark druidic forests sink between mountain peaks in the violet distance; large birds of prey soar beneath a marvellous sky that partakes of those of two lands distant from the Rhine, sometimes full of dazzling light like an Italian sky, sometimes cloaked in reddish vapour like a Greenland one. The slopes are rough, the lavas blue, the basalts black; everywhere mica and quartz dust; everywhere violent fractures; the rocks have the profiles of snub-nosed giants. Ridges of flaky slate, shiny as silk, gleam in the sunlight, which resemble the backs of enormous wild boars. The views along the entire river are extraordinary.

It is evident that, before forming the Rhine, Nature had premeditated a desert; mankind made of it a street. In Roman and barbarian times, it was a military street. In the Middle Ages, as the river was almost entirely bordered by ecclesiastical states and held in some manner, from its source to its mouth, by the Abbot of Saint Gall, the Prince-Bishop of Constance, the Prince-Bishop of Basel, the Prince-Bishop of Strasbourg, the Prince-Bishop of Speyer, the Prince-Bishop of Worms, the Archbishop-Elector of Mainz, the Archbishop-Elector of Trier, and the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne, the Rhine was called *the Priests' Street* (*Priestergasser*). Today it is the Merchants' Street.

The traveller who ascends the river, sees the world flowing towards him, so to speak, and, on this account, the spectacle is more beautiful. At every moment one encounters something passing by: sometimes a narrow arrow-shaped boat, fearful to see in motion so laden with people is it, especially if it is a Sunday, the day when these brave Catholic river-dwellers, ruled by Huguenots, often travel far to hear the Mass; sometimes a steamboat decked with flags; sometimes a long-boat with two lateen sails descending the Rhine, with its cargo humped beneath the mainmast, its attentive and serious pilot, and its busy sailors, a woman seated at the door of the cabin, and amidst the bales the sailors' store-chest coloured with red, green and blue rosettes. Or one sees long teams of horses attached to heavily-loaded vessels slowly ascending; or a brave little horse towing a large, decked boat like a lone ant dragging a dead beetle. Suddenly the river bends, and, at the turn which presents itself, a large raft from Namedy (*in Andernach*) majestically emerges. Three hundred sailors manoeuvre the monstrous object, immense oars beating the water rhythmically at bow and stern; a whole ox, cut-open and bleeding, hangs attached to the sheers (*crane*), another live ox turns about the post to which it is tied and bellows at the sight of heifers grazing on the bank; the skipper strides up and down the double staircase to his platform, the tricolour flag, unfurled, flutters horizontally in the wind; the cook stirs his fire beneath the large cooking pot; smoke emerges from three or four huts to and from which the sailors pass: a whole floating village lives aboard this prodigious fir-wood platform.

Yet these gigantic rafts when compared to the huge old rafts of the Rhine are like a rowboat to a three-decker. The rafts of old, composed, as today, of oak-trees, with fir-wood masts, wooden planks, and smaller items, trimmed

at their ends with spars called *bundsparren*, fastened together with osier ties, and iron crampons, carried up to twenty huts, a dozen boats loaded with anchors, plumblines, and spare ropes, and a thousand oarsmen; their draft was some eight feet, they were seventy feet wide, and about nine hundred feet long, that is to say the length of ten mature fir trees of the river Murg, tied end to end. Around the central raft, and moored to its edge by means of a tree-trunk which served both as bridge and cable, floated, so as to maintain its course, and lessen the dangers of grounding, up to a dozen trains of smaller rafts about eighty feet long, some called *kniee*, others *anhänge*. On the main raft an alleyway between the huts terminated at one end at a vast tent, on the other at the captain's hut, a sort of wooden palace. The kitchen emitted smoke constantly. A large copper cauldron bubbled away day and night. Each morning and evening the pilot shouted a word of command, and raised above the raft a basket suspended from a pole; it was the signal for mealtime, and the host of labourers rushed to the tent with their wooden bowls. The men on these rafts consumed, in a single trip, eight barrels of wine, six hundred hogsheads of beer, forty sacks of dried vegetables, twelve thousand pounds of cheese, fifteen hundred pounds of butter, ten thousand pounds of smoked meat, twenty thousand pounds of fresh meat and fifty thousand pounds of bread. They carried a herd of cows, and their own butchers. Each of these rafts represented seven or eight hundred thousand florins worth of timber, that is to say about two million francs.

It is difficult to imagine such a vast wooden island winding its way from Namedy to Dordrecht, dragging its archipelagos of islets through the tortuous bends, narrows, falls, whirlpools, and serpentine currents of the Rhine. Shipwrecks were frequent. It was also said, proverbially, and still is repeated, that the raft operator needed three sets of funds: the first floating on the Rhine, the second locked away on shore, and the third the coins in his pocket. The art of steering these frightening assemblages past the many reefs was usually exercised by one pilot per generation. At the end of the last century, the secret of it belonged to a master from Rudesheim called Old Jung. When Jung died, the great rafts disappeared.

At the present time, twenty-five steamboats are in the process of ascending and descending the Rhine each day. The nineteen Cologne Company's vessels, recognisable by their black and white funnels, run from Strasbourg to Düsseldorf; the six ships of the Düsseldorf company, with

tricolour funnels, run from Mainz to Rotterdam. This immense operation extends to Switzerland by means of the steamboat from Strasbourg to Basel, and to England by means of the steamships running from Rotterdam to London.

The old means of navigating the Rhine, represented by the sail-boats, contrasts with the new represented by the steamboats. The steamboats, cheerful, coquettish, elegant, comfortable, fast, decorated and flagged with various colours, including those of England, Prussia, Nassau, Hesse, Baden, and the Dutch tricolour, invoke the names of rulers or cities: *Ludwig II*, *Gross Herzog von Hessen*, *Königin Victoria*, *Herzog von Nassau*, *Prinzessinn Mariann*, *Gross Herzog von Baden*, *Stadt Manheim, Stadt Coblentz* ; the sail-boats pass by slowly, bearing on their prows grave, sweet names: *Pius*, *Columbus*, *Amor*, *Sancta Maria*, *Gratia Dei*. The steamships are varnished and gilded, the sail-boats tarred. The steamboats represent speculation; the sail-boats the old, true austere, reverent means of navigation. Some sail while advertising themselves, others while saying a prayer. Some rely on men, others on God. This lively and striking contrast of dissimilar vessels is accentuated by endless encounters and clashes on the Rhine.

Through this contrast, and with the singular force of reality, breathes the dual spirit of our era, which is the daughter of a religious past, and believes itself the mother of an industrial future.

Forty-nine islands, covered with thick vegetation, hiding houses with smoking chimneys, adorned with tufts of flowers, and sheltering boats in their charming harbours, are scattered along the Rhine from Cologne to Mainz. All recall some memory: there is Grafenwerth, where the Dutch built a fort which they called *The Priest's Hat, Pfaffenmüth*, a fort which the scandalised Spaniards captured and re-named *Isabella*. There is Graswerth, the *island of grass*, where Johann Philipp Von Reiffenberg wrote his *Antiquitates Saynenses*. There is Niederwerth, once rich with the endowments of the Margrave John II of Baden, Archbishop of Trier. There is Urmitzer Werth, which saw Caesar pas by; there is Nonnenswerth (*Rolandswerth*), which saw Roland.

The memories recalled by the river banks seem to correspond to those recalled by the islands. Allow me to touch on a few of them here; I will return in more detail to this interesting subject later. Every shade that rises on one bank of the river causes another to rise on the opposite bank. The coffin of

the Blessed Rizza, granddaughter of Louis the Pious, is in Koblenz; the tomb of Ida, niece to Otto III, is in Cologne (*in Sankt Maria im Kapitol, of which she was the Abbess*). Saint Hildegard is said to have left in Eibingen a ring that Saint Bernard gave her, with the motto: *I love to suffer*. Sigebert I was the last king of Austrasia to live in Andernach. Saint Genevieve lived in Frauenkirch, in the woods, near a mineral spring that today adjoins a memorial chapel; her husband resided in Simmern. Schinderhannes (*Johannes Bückler, the outlaw*) devastated the Nahe valley. It was there that one day he amused himself, pistol in hand, by forcing a group of Jews to remove their shoes; then forced them to don shoes again, after mixing them up, and hobble away, which was a source of laughter to him. Before Schinderhannes, this gentle valley had known Louis I of Zweibrücken known as the Black (*'der Schwarze'*).

When a traveller who is ascending the river has passed Koblenz and left behind him the graceful island of Oberwerth, where a white building has replaced the old ruined abbey of the noble ladies of Sainte Madeleine auf der Insel, the mouth of the Lahn appears to him. The view is admirable. At the water's edge, behind a clutter of moored boats, rise the two crumbling bell-towers of the Johanniskirche (*Larnstein*), vaguely reminiscent of Jumiéges Abbey. On the left bank, above the village of Cappellen, on a ridge of rocks, stands Stolzenfels (*rebuilt 1823-1842*), the vast and magnificent archiepiscopal fortress where Elector Werner von Falkenstein studied the Almuchabala (*Al-Muchabala refers to the process of balancing an equation, i.e. performing the same operation on both sides, a concept introduced by the mathematician al-Khwarizmi in his work Kitab al-Jabr w'al-Muqabala*); and on the right bank, on the Lahn, at the far end of the horizon, the clouds and the sun mingle with the dark ruins of Burg Lahneck, full of enigmas for the historian, and obscurities for the antiquarian. On both sides of the Lahn, two pretty towns, Niederlahnstein and Oberlahnstein, linked to each other by an avenue of trees, gaze at each other and seem to smile. A few stone-throws from the eastern gate of Oberlahnstein, which still retains its dark ring of moats and machicolations, the trees of an orchard reveal, and at the same time conceal, a small chapel (*Marien Kapelle*) from the fourteenth century, plastered and re-plastered, surmounted by a puny bell tower. This chapel saw the deposition of Emperor Wenceslas IV, King of Bohemia and Germany.

For it was in this village church that, in the year of Christ 1400, the four Electors of the Rhine, Johan II von Nassau-Wiesbaden-Idstein, Archbishop

of Mainz; Friedrich III von Saarwerden, Archbishop of Cologne; Werner von Falkenstein, Archbishop of Trier; and Rupert III, Count Palatine, solemnly proclaimed from the top of the portal the deposition of this Wenzel, Emperor of Germany. Wenceslas was a sluggish and wicked individual, a drunkard and ferocious when drunk. He had priests drowned who refused to reveal the secrets of the confessional. While doubtful of his wife's fidelity, he had confidence in her intellect and was influenced by her ideas. Now, this caused concern in Rome. Wenceslas' second wife was Sophie of Bavaria, whose confessor was Jan Hus. Jan Hus, propagating Wycliffe's doctrines, was seen to be undermining the Papal See; the Pope struck at the emperor. It was at the instigation of the Holy See that the three archbishops summoned the Count Palatine. The Rhine from then on dominated Germany. The four of them deposed the emperor, and appointed in his place the one among them who was not a clergyman, Count Rupert. Rupert, to whom this reward had undoubtedly been secretly promised, was, moreover, a worthy and noble Emperor. One can see from this, that in its overall guardianship of kingdoms and kingships, the actions of Rome, sometimes public, sometimes hidden, were on occasions beneficial. The judgment rendered against Wenceslas was on six counts, the four principal grievances being: first, the squandering of his domain; second, the schism caused to the Church; third, the civil wars of the Empire; and fourth, having allowed his hounds to sleep in his room.

Jan Hus continued his preaching, and so did Rome. — Jan Hus is claimed to have said '*I would rather be thrown into the sea with a millstone around my neck than recant*'. He took up the *sword of the spirit* and fought hand to hand against Rome. Then, when the Council summoned him, he attended boldly *without safe conduct. Venimus sine salvo conductu.* You know the result, accomplished on July 6, 1415 (*the date of Hus' execution*). The years, which gnaw away at all that is flesh and merely superficial, also grant facts a death-like status, and lay bare the fibres of history. Today, to any who choose to consider, thanks to the insights caused by this abrasion, the providential series of events of that dark era, the deposition of Wenceslas is the prologue to a tragedy of which the pyre at Constance is the catastrophic denouement.

Opposite this chapel, on the opposite bank, at the edge of the river, one could still see not half a century ago the royal seat, the ancient Königsstühl, of Rhens, of which I have already spoken (*destroyed in 1795,* demolished in 1806, *reconstructed in 1842, then relocated in 1929 to the Rheinhöhe*). The

Königsstühl, taken as a whole, was seventeen German feet (*slightly shorter than the French pied du roi*, *both being slightly longer than the English equivalent*) high, and twenty-four in diameter. This was its form: seven stone pillars supported a large octagonal stone platform, also supported at its centre by an eighth pillar larger than the others, representing the emperor in the middle of the seven electors. Seven stone chairs, corresponding to the seven pillars above which each of them was placed, arranged in a circle and facing each other, occupied, seven of the sides of the platform. The eighth side, which faced south, was filled by the staircase, a massive stone step composed of fourteen steps, two steps per elector. Every feature of this grave and venerable edifice possessed a meaning. Behind each chair, on the face of each side of the octagonal platform, were sculpted and painted the coats of arms of the seven electors: the twin-tailed lion of Bohemia; the crossed swords of Brandenburg; Saxony, which bore black with gold stripes; the Palatinate, a gold lion on a black field; Trier, argent with a red cross; Cologne, argent with a black cross; and Mainz, which bore gules with a silver wheel. These coats of arms, whose enamelling, colours, and gilding rusted in the sun and rain, were the only ornament of this old granite throne.

It was there that, in the open air, beneath the sunlight and breeze from the sky, seated in those rigid stone armchairs over which the trees shed their leaves, and across which the shadows of the clouds ran, as rough, simple, naïve, and august as the kings in Homer's epics, the ancient electors of Germany chose the emperor among themselves. Later, these grand ideas faded, a less epic civilisation invited the seven princes, raised to nine, towards the end of the seventeenth century, by the accession of Bavaria and Brunswick to the electorate, to meet around that leather-covered table in Frankfurt.

The seven princes who sat on those stone seats in the Middle Ages were men of considerable power. The electors occupied the highest positions of the Holy Empire. They preceded, in the imperial marching line, the four dukes, the four arch-marshals, the four landgraves, the four burgraves, the four counts who were warlords, the four abbots, the four boroughs, the four knights, the four towns, the four villages, the four rustics, the four marquises, the four ordinary counts, the four lords, the four mountains, the four barons, the four possessions, the four huntsmen, the four offices of Swabians, and the four servants. Each of them had his own marshal to bear before him a

sword with a gilded scabbard. They called the other princes *the crowned heads*, and called themselves *the crowning hands*. The Golden Bull (*a founding document of the Holy Roman Empire, issued by Emperor Charles IV, taking its name from the gold seal it bore*) compared them to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, to the seven hills of Rome, to the seven branches of Solomon's candlestick. Among them, electoral powers took precedence over royal powers; The Archbishop of Mainz walked on the emperor's right, and the King of Bohemia on the archbishop's right. They were of such high status, the impact of their actions was so visible across Europe, and they so dominated the nations from on high, that the folk of Weesen, in Switzerland, called, and still call, the seven peaks above their lake, Walensee, the *Sieben Churfirsten*, the Seven Electors.

The Königsstühl is gone, and so are the electors. Four stones now mark the site of the Königsstühl; nothing at present marks the seats of the electors.

In the sixteenth century, when it became the fashion to proclaim the emperor in Frankfurt, sometimes in the hall of the Römer, sometimes in the conclave-chapel of Saint Bartholomew's Cathedral, the election became a complicated ceremony. Spanish etiquette was reflected in it. The form was meticulous; the apparatus strict, guarded, sometimes awe-inspiring. From the morning of the day fixed for the election, the gates of the city were closed, the bourgeoisie took up arms, the military drums sounded, the alarm bell rang; the Electors, dressed in cloth of gold, and wearing red robes lined with ermine, the secular Electors wearing the electoral cap on their heads, the archbishops their scarlet mitres, solemnly received the oath of the magistrate of the city who undertook to guarantee them against any *attack of one on another*; this done, they themselves swore an oath to each other before the Archbishop of Mainz; then Mass was said for them; they sat on black velvet chairs, the Marshal of the Holy Roman Empire *closed the doors* and they proceeded with the election. However well sealed the doors were, the chancellors and the notaries passed to and fro. Finally, the *most reverends* declared agreement with the *most illustrious*; the king of the Romans was named, the princes rose from their chairs, and while the presentation to the people took place at the windows of the Römer, one of the suffragans of Mainz sang Saint Bartholomew a *Te Deum* to a triple chorus of *Deum* on the church organs, on the Electors' trumpets, and on those of the emperor. All this, to the sound *of the great bells ringing from the towers, and the great cannons, firing joyfully*, says the anonymous narrator regarding the election of Mathias II (*in 1612*) in his curious manuscript.

At the Königsstühl, things were done more simply and grandly, in my opinion. The Electors ascended the platform in procession, via the fourteen steps each a foot high, and took their places in their stone armchairs. The people of Rhens, held back by soldiers with arquebuses (*early firearms*), surrounded the royal seat. The Archbishop of Mainz, standing, said: '*Most generous princes, the Holy Empire is vacant*'. Then he intoned the antiphon *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, and the Archbishops of Cologne and Trier sang the other collects dependant thereon. The chant finished, all seven took the oath, the seculars with their hands on the Gospel, the ecclesiastics with their hands on their hearts. A beautiful and touching distinction, which means that the heart of every priest should be a copy of the Gospel. After the oath, they sat in a circle talking to each other in low voices; suddenly, the Archbishop of Mainz rose, stretched out his hands towards the sky, and cried out to the people, scattered far and wide among meadows adorned with hedges and bushes, the name of the new temporal head of Christianity. Then the marshal of the empire planted the imperial banner on the banks of the Rhine, and the people shouted: '*Vivat rex!*'

Before Lothair III, who was elected on September 13, 1125, (*at Aachen*) the same eagle, the golden eagle, adorned the banner of the Eastern Empire and that of the Western Empire; but the crimson sky of dawn was reflected in one, and the cold northern sky in the other. The Eastern banner was red; the Western banner was blue. Lothair substituted for these colours the colours of his house, gold and sable. The golden eagle in a blue sky was replaced on the imperial banner by the black eagle in a gold sky. As long as there were two empires, there were two eagles, and these two eagles each had only one head. But at the end of the fifteenth century, when the Greek empire had collapsed, the Germanic eagle, remaining alone, seeking to represent the two empires, looked both to the West and to the East, and acquired two heads.

This is not, moreover, the first appearance of the double-headed eagle. It can be seen sculpted on the shield of one of the soldiers on Trajan's Column, and, if we are to believe the monk Hermann of Attaich (*Henricus Sterv*) and the writings collated by Urstisius (*Christian Wurstisen*), Rudolf I of Habsburg wore it embroidered on his chest on August 26, 1278, at the Battle on the Marchfeld.

When the banner was planted on the banks of the Rhine in honour of the new emperor, the wind would stir its folds, and from the manner in which it fluttered the people derived omens. In 1346, when the electors, urged on by Pope Clement VI, proclaimed Charles, Margrave of Moravia, King of the Romans from the top of the Königsstühl, with a cry of *vivat rex,* although Duke Louis V, heir to Louis IV, was still alive, the imperial banner toppled into the Rhine and was lost. Fifty-four years later, in 1400, the fatal omen was fulfilled: Wenceslas, son of Charles, was deposed.

And this fallen banner indicated the fall of the House of Luxembourg, which, after Charles IV and Wenceslas, produced only one emperor, Sigismund, and was forever eclipsed by the House of Austria.

After leaving the place where the Königsstühl once stood, cast down, as a symbol of feudalism, by the French Revolution, one ascends the river towards Braubach, passing Boppard, Wellmich, Saint Goar, and Oberwesel, and suddenly to the left, on the right bank, appears a large shelf of slate like the roof of a giant's house, surmounted by an enormous tower which seems to disgorge the cold vapour of the clouds like some colossal chimney. At the foot of this rock, along the shore, a pretty town, grouped around a Romanesque church with a spire, extends its facades to the south. In the centre of the Rhine, in front of the town, often half-veiled by the mists of the river, on a rock at water level, stands an oblong, narrow, high-sided building, whose front and rear part the water like the prow and stern of a vessel, whose wide, low windows imitate hatches and gun ports, and on the lower wall of which a thousand iron crampons possess the vague outlines of anchors and grappling hooks. Capricious bossages, and small outbuildings hang, like boats and rowboats, from the sides of this strange construction which yields itself to the wind, like the banners on its masts, and the hundred weather vanes on its pointed bell-towers. The enormous tower is Burg Gutenfels; the town is Kaub; and the stone ship, eternally afloat on the Rhine and eternally at anchor before the Palatine city, is the palace, the Pfalzgrafenstein.

I have already spoken to you of the Pfalz. One could only enter this symbolic residence, built on a marble platform called *The Rock of the Counts Palatine*, by means of a ladder, which led to a drawbridge that can still be seen. There were dungeons there for state prisoners, and a small room where the Countesses Palatine were forced to await the hour of their delivery, with no other distraction than to visit, in the cellars of the palace, a well dug in the

rock below the bed of the Rhine, and full of water that was not Rhine water. Today the Pfalz has changed masters. Monsieur de Nassau owns the Palatine 'Louvre'; the palace is deserted, no princely cradle rocks to and fro on its flagstones, no wailing sovereign disturbs those black vaults. There is nothing left but the mysterious well that is always full. Alas, a well replenished by drops of water filtering through rock endures longer than a royal lineage.

Beside the course of this mighty river, the Pfalz stood near to the Königsstühl. The Rhine saw, almost at the same place, a woman give birth to the Count Palatine, and the Empire give birth to its Emperor.

From the Taunus to the Seven Mountains, on both sides of the magnificent escarpment which encloses the river, there are fourteen great castles on the right bank: Ehrenfels, Fürsteneck, Gutenfels (*Kaub*), Rheineck, Burg Katz, Burg Maus, Liebenstein and Sternberg, which are called the 'Brothers', then Marksburg, Philipsburg, Lahneck, Sayn, Hammerstein and Okenfels; and twelve on the left bank: Vogtsburg (*Rheinstein*), Reichenstein (*Falkenburg*), Sooneck, Heimburg (*Hohneck*), Fürstenberg, Stahleck, Schönberg, Rheinfels, Rheinberg, Stolzenfels, Rheineck and Rolandseck, in all, twenty-six half-ruined fortresses, superimposing the history of the Rhinegraves on the history of the ancient volcanoes, the traces of war on the traces of lava, and completing in a formidable way the severe outline of the hills.

One of these castles Hammerstein was built in the tenth century by the Conradines. Three were built or restored in the twelfth century: Stahleck by the Archbishops of Cologne; Sayn by Frederick, first Count of Sayn, conqueror of the Moors of Spain; and Rolandseck by Archbishop Frederick I of Cologne. Four were built or restored in the thirteenth century: Ehrenfels by Archbishop Siegfried II in 1212; Fürstenberg by the Archbishop of Cologne, Engelbert I in 1219; Gutenfels by the Falkensteins in 1220; and Rheinfels, in 1245, by Dieter V, Count of Katzenelnbogen. Four castles were built in the fourteenth century: Fürsteneck, possibly in 1309, by Archbishop Heinrich III von Virnenburg of Mainz; Vogtsberg (*Rheinstein*), in 1316, by a Falkenstein; Burg Maus, in 1356, by Bohemund II Archbishop of Trier, and Burg Katz, in 1371, by Count William II of Katzenelnbogen. Only one dates from the sixteenth century: Philipsburg, constructed, from 1568 to 1571, by the Landgrave Philipp II of Hesse-Rheinfels. Four of these citadels, on the left bank, Reichenstein, Rheinstein, Falkenburg, and Sooneck, were captured

in 1282 by Emperor Rudolph I of Habsburg, Sooneck was destroyed (*rebuilt in 1346, and later restored*); one, Rolandseck, was destroyed by Emperor Heinrich V; five were destroyed by Louis XIV, in 1689, Fursteneck, Stahleck, Schönberg, Stolzenfels and Hammerstein; one, Rheinfels, by Napoleon; one by a fire, Rheineck; and one by the Black Band (*La Bande Noire, a group of post-Revolutionary speculators*), Gutenfels. I am not exactly sure who built Reichenstein, Rheinstein, Stolzenfels, Rheineck, or Marksburg restored in 1644 by George II, Landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt. Nor who demolished Reichenstein former residence of a lord devoted to serving, as the name indicates, Ehrenfels, Fursteneck, Sayn, Burg Katz and Burg Maus. An even deeper obscurity covers six of these manors: Heimburg, Rheinberg, Liebenstein, Sternberg, Lahneck, and Okenfels. They emerged from the shadows, and returned to them. I neither know who built them or who destroyed them.

Nothing is stranger, as regards the passage of history than this dense darkness in which one can dimly perceive, around 1400, the tumultuous activity of the Rhineland Hanseatic League, waging war against the lords, and in which one can distinguish, even further back, in the deeper darkness of the twelfth century, the formidable ghost of Barbarossa exterminating the burgraves. Several of these ancient fortresses, whose history is now lost, were half Roman and half Carolingian. More clearly-lit figures appear with regard to the other ruins. We can find their chronicles scattered here and there in the old charterhouses. Stahleck, which dominates Bacharach, and is said to have been founded by the Huns, saw the death of Hermann von Stahleck in the twelfth century (*1156*); the Hohenstaufen, the Guelphs and the Wittelsbachs inhabited it, and it was besieged and taken eight times (*during the Thirty Years' War*) between 1620 and 1644. Schönberg, from which sprang the Belmont family (*Belmont is French for Schönberg*) and the legend of the Seven Sisters (*who were turned to seven rocks in the Rhine*), saw the birth of that great general Frederick of Schönberg, whose singular destiny was to strengthen the House of Braganza and precipitate the fall of the House of Stuart (*in the Glorious Revolution of 1688; he was killed at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690*). Rheinfels resisted the cities of the Rhine in the thirteenth century, and Marshal Tallard in 1692, but surrendered to the French Republic in 1794. Stolzenfels was the residence of the archbishops of Trier. Rheineck saw the death of the last Count of Rheineck, who died in 1544 as canon custodian of Trier Cathedral. Hammerstein suffered the quarrel between the Counts of

Engersgau and the Archbishops of Mainz, the attack by Emperor Henry II in 1017, the flight of Emperor Henry IV in 1125, the Thirty Years' War, the passage of the Swedes and the Spanish, and the devastation created by the French in 1689. Rheinstein experienced the shame of being sold for a hundred crowns in 1823. Gutenfels (*Kaub*), the proud sentry-box of Gustavus Adolphus, the sweet asylum of the beautiful Countess Guda and the amorous Emperor Richard, four times besieged, in 1504 and in 1631 by Metz, in 1620 and in 1642 by the Imperial troops, once sold in 1289 by Garnier of Münzenberg to Ludwig IV of Bavaria, son of Ludwig II, the Severe, for two thousand one hundred marks of silver, was partially demolished in 1807, the stone being sold, for a profit of six hundred francs.

This long, dual line of buildings, at once poetic and military, whose facades bear witness to every era of the Rhine, and evoke all the legends, commences in front of Bingen, with the castle of Ehrenfels on the right bank, and Burg Ratz on the left, and ends at Königswinter, with the Rolandseck on the left bank and Drachenfels on the right. A striking example of symbolism and worthy of being noted along the way, is that of the immense ivy-covered arches of Rolandseck facing the cave of that dragon Siegfried the Horny-Skinned stunned, while Burg Maus faces the Ehrenfels; here fable and history are linked to one other.

I have only recorded the castles that were built on the Rhine, which every traveller views in passing. But if one penetrates the valleys and mountains, one encounters a ruin at every step. In the valley of the Wisper alone, on the right bank, in a walk of a few leagues I noted seven: Rheinberg, castle of the Counts of the Rhingau, hereditary squires of the Holy Roman Empire, extinct in the seventeenth century; a formidable fortress that once worried the large commune of Lorch, in the scrubland, Burgruine Waldeck; at the crest of a schist rock, near a mineral spring that provides water to a few puny huts, Sauerburg, built in 1355 by Ruprecht I, Count Palatine, and sold for a thousand florins during the Bavarian War, by the Elector Philip to Philip of Kronberg, his marshal; Heppeneff, destroyed no one knows when; Kammerberg, Mainz state property; Nollig, an ancient castrum of which one tower remains; and Sareck, which stands in the forest opposite the Winsbach convent, like the knight opposite the priest in ancient society. Today the castle and the convent, the nobleman and the priest, are both ruins. Only the forest and the society, renewed each year, have survived.

If one explores the Seven Mountains, one finds there, in the form of fragments buried under ivy, an abbey, Schomberg, and six castles: Drachenfels, ruined by Heinrich V; the Wolkenburg hidden in the clouds, as its name says, ruined by Heinrich V; Löwenberg, in which the Protestant reformers Martin Bucer and Philipp Melanchthon took refuge, and to which Agnes of Mansfeld (*Agnes von Mansfeld-Eisleben*) and Archbishop Gebhard (*Gebhard Truchsess von Waldburg, the Prince-Elector of Cologne*) fled, after the marriage which glorified their heresy; Nonnenstromberg and Ölberg, built by Valentinian in 368; and Hemmerich, manor of those bold knights of Heinsberg who waged war on the electors of Cologne.

In the plain, towards Mainz, there is Frauenstein, which dates from the twelfth century; Scharfenstein, an archiepiscopal fief; Greifenklau, built in 1350. Towards Cologne, there is the admirable Godesberg. Where does this name, Godesberg, come from? Is it from the cantonal court, *Goding*, which was held there in the Middle Ages? Is it from *Wotan*, the ten-handed monster, whom the Ubians worshipped there? No etymological antiquarian has decided the question for me. However, that may be, Nature, before historical times, made Godesberg, a volcanic hill; the Emperor Julian, in 362, had made it a camp; Archbishop Dietric I von Hengebach, Archbishop of Cologne, in 1210, a castle; Elector Frederick II, in 1375, a fortress; the Elector of Bavaria, in 1583, a ruin. The last Elector of Cologne, Maximilian Francis, turned it into a vineyard.

These ancient castles on the banks of the Rhine, colossal landmarks placed by feudalism along its course, fill the landscape with their reverie. Silent witnesses to vanished times, they assisted the events, framed the scenes, heard the words that were uttered. They are there like ever-present wings to the stage on which a dark drama has been played out along the Rhine for a thousand years. They have seen, the most ancient of them at least, all the actors, proud, strange, or formidable, enter and leave amidst the providential twists and turns of history: Pepin, who gave cities to the Pope; Charlemagne dressed in a wool shirt and an otterskin jacket, leaning on the old deacon, Peter of Pisa, and caressing with his strong hand the elephant Abul-Abbas; Otto IV, the Lion, shaking his blond mane; the Margrave of Italy, Azzo, carrying the banner adorned with angels, victorious at the Battle of Merseburg (*the Battle of Riad in 933*); Heinrich II, the Lame; Conrad of Thuringia, the Older, and Conrad I, the Younger; Henry IX, Duke of Bavaria,

the Black, who imposed four German popes on Rome; Rudolph of Saxony, bearing inscribed on his crown the papal hexameter: *Petra dedit Petro, Petrus diadema Rudolpho* (*meaning 'Saint Peter, the Rock on which the Church was founded, grants the Pope authority, and the Pope, 'Gregory VII', confers the crown on you'*); Godfrey of Bouillon, who drove the pike of the imperial flag into the belly of the enemies of the empire; and Heinrich V, who climbed on horseback the marble steps of St. Peter's in Rome.

There is not a single great figure of German history whose shadow is not cast on these venerable stones; the old Duke Welf I of Bavaria; Albrecht the Bear, Margrave of Brandenburg; Saint Bernard; Barbarossa, who held the Pope's stirrup with the wrong hand; Rainald of Dassel, Archbishop of Cologne, who tore off the fringes of the *carrocio* (*standard-bearing cart*) of Milan; Richard the Lionheart; William II, Count of Holland; Frederick II, the gentle emperor with the Greek face, the friend of poets as was the Emperor Augustus, the friend of Caliphs as was Charlemagne, studying in his tent, furnished with a clock on which a golden sun and a silver moon marked the seasons and the hours. These fortresses beheld, as they appeared: the monk Christian preaching the Gospel to the peasants of Prussia; Hermann von Salza, fourth grand master of the Teutonic Order, great builder of cities; Ottokar I and Ottokar II, kings of Bohemia; Frederick I, Margrave of Baden, and Conradin (*Conrad III*) Duke of Swabia, beheaded at sixteen; Louis IV, Landgrave of Thuringia and husband of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary; Frederick I, Margrave of Meissen, called 'the Bitten', who bore on his cheek the mark of his mother's despair (*at parting from her husband Albert II*); and Rudolf I of Habsburg, who mended his grey doublet himself.

Those walls resounded to the motto of Eberhard I, Count of Württemberg: *Glory to God! War to the rest!* They lodged Sigismund, that emperor whose justice was well-weighed, and badly-executed; Louis IV, the last emperor to be excommunicated; Frederick III, the last emperor to be crowned in Rome. They listened to Petrarch scolding Charles IV for having remained in Rome for only a day and shouting at him: '*What would your ancestors, the Caesars, say if they met you at this hour in the Alps, head bowed and back turned to Italy?*' They saw, 'the German Achilles', Albrecht III of Brandenburg, furious and humiliated, after his defeat at Nuremberg (*1450*), and 'the Burgundian Achilles', Charles the Bold, after his fifty-six assaults on Neuss (*1474/5*). They saw, the Western bishops, haughty and proud, on their mules

and in their litters, skirting the Rhine in long lines, journeying, in 1415, to the Council of Constance to judge Jan Hus; in 1431, to the Council of Basel to depose Pope Eugene IV; and in 1519 to the Diet of Worms to question Luther. They saw the white and dripping corpse of Saint Werner, a sad little child supposedly martyred by Jews, and thrown into the Rhine in 1287, floating, in sinister fashion, upriver from Oberwesel to Bacharach, his blond hair mingling with the flow. They saw Mary of Burgundy, mortally hurt by a fall from her horse while hunting heron, borne from Wijnendale to Bruges, in a velvet-lined coffin, beneath a golden pall.

The hideous Magyar hordes, and the tumult of the Mongols arrested by Henry II, the Pious, in the thirteenth century; the cry of the Hussites who wanted to reduce all the cities of the earth to five; the threat of Procopius the Great and Procopius the Small (*military commanders of the Hussites, both slain at the Battle of Lipany in 1434 which ended the Hussite Wars*); the tumultuous noise of the Turks ascending the Danube after their capture of Constantinople (*in 1453*); the iron cage in which the vengeance of kings paraded John of Leiden (*the Dutch Anabaptist insurrectionist, in 1536*), chained between his chancellor Bernhard Krechting and his former executioner Bernhard Knipperdolling; the young Charles V, the word *Nondum* (*of his motto, 'Nondum in auge: not yet at the zenith'*) sparkling in diamond stars on his shield; Albrecht von Wallenstein (*Bohemian military leader on the Catholic side in the Thirty Years' War of 1618-1648*) served by sixty gentlemen squires; Tilly (*Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly, commander of the Catholic League in that war*), in a green satin coat on his little grey horse; Gustavus Adolphus (*King of Sweden*) crossing the Thuringian forest (*in the 1630s*); the anger of Louis XIV; the anger of Frederick II; the anger of Napoleon; all those terrible things which shook or terrified Europe in turn, struck the old walls like lightning. Those glorious fortresses received the blows of the Swiss, who destroyed the ancient Hapsburg cavalry at Sempach (*in 1386*), and of the Grand Condé who destroyed the ancient infantry at Rocroi (*in 1643*). They heard the ladders crack, the boiling pitch hissing, the cannons roaring. The lansquenets (*mercenaries*), servants of the lance, their lines of 'hedgehog' pikes so fatal to the squadrons; the sudden assaults of Franz von Sickingen, 'the last knight' in the sixteenth century; the learned assaults of Burtenbach (*Sebastian Schertlin von Burtenbach Hapsburg military leader in the Italian Wars, who fought at Pavia in 1525*), that great captain; these fortresses saw all, braved all, suffered all. Melancholy now, when the moon at night covers their spectral forms with a white shroud, even more

melancholy in full sunlight; replete once with glory and renown, reduced now to a tedious nothingness, eroded by time, undermined by men, casting shadows that diminish year by year on the sloping vineyards, they watch the past fall stone by stone into the Rhine, day by day into oblivion.

O noble towers! O saddened, ancient, paralysed giants! O combatant knights! A steamboat, full of merchants and bourgeoisie, blows its smoke in your face as it passes!

Letter XXVI: Worms   Mannheim

Banks of the Neckar, October

Night was falling. The indescribable feeling of ennui that seizes the soul as daylight vanishes seemed as if spreading over the entire horizon around us. Whence the sadness at such times? Is it in Nature? Is it only in ourselves? A white crepe-like mist rose from the depths of this immense valley of the Vosges, the reeds of the river rustling lugubriously, the steamboat beating at the water like a large, tired dog; all the travellers, feeling heavy or dozing, had descended to the cabin, which was cluttered with packages, overnight bags, disordered tables, and sleeping people; the deck was deserted; three German students alone remained there, motionless, silent, smoking their decorated earthenware pipes, without making a gesture or saying a word; three statues; I made a fourth, gazing vaguely into the wide expanse. I said to myself: 'I see nothing on the horizon. We won't be in Worms before dark. It's strange.' I had not thought Worms so far from Mainz. Suddenly the steamboat stopped. 'There,' I said to myself, 'the water is low along this stretch, the bed of the Rhine is blocked by sandbanks; we're stuck fast.'

The skipper of the boat emerged from his hutch. 'Well now! Captain,' I said, since these days, as you know, everyone has acquired a sonorous name: an actor is called an 'artiste', a singer a 'virtuoso'; a skipper is therefore a 'captain'. — 'Well now! Captain, here's something of a setback. We'll not arrive before midnight, then.' The skipper gazed at me with the wide blue

eyes of a stunned Teuton, and replied: 'You *have* arrived!' I looked at him in turn, no less stunned than he was. At that moment, we must have represented, in an admirable manner, French astonishment and German astonishment.

— 'Arrived, Captain?'

— 'Yes, arrived.'

— 'Where?'

— 'At Worms, of course!'

I exclaimed, and cast my eyes around me. At Worms[86]! Was I daydreaming? Was I the toy of some twilight vision? Was the navigator mocking the traveller? Was the Rhinelander playing a trick on the Parisian? Was the German mocking the Gaul? At Worms! But where was that tall and magnificent stretch of wall flanked by square towers which bordered the river, proudly employing the Rhine as a moat? I saw only a vast plain whose depths were hidden from me by dense mists, pale curtains of poplars, the bank of the river barely distinguishable, so mingled was it with reeds, and on that very bank, quite close to us, a fine green lawn where some women were hanging out their linen to whiten it in the dew.

Meanwhile the skipper, his arm stretched out towards the front of the boat, pointed to a sort of house, newly built, square, plastered, with green shutters, and very ugly, a kind of large whitish paving stone that I had not noted at first.

— 'Monsieur, this is Worms.'

— 'Worms!' I replied; 'Worms, this! That white house! But at most it's an inn!'

— 'An inn, indeed. You'll be fine there.'

— 'But, the city?'

— 'Oh! the city! Is it the city you want?'

— 'Certainly.'

— 'Very well. You'll find it over there, in the plain; but you have to walk!

[86] Letter XXVI — Worms: 49°38'02.4"N, 8°21'04.0"E

It's a long way. Ah! Monsieur, is here to visit the town? It's generally very rare for people to stop here; gentlemen travellers are content with my inn. It's very comfortable. Ah! Monsieur, is keen to see the town? That's different. For myself, I always pass by quite late in the evening, or very early in the morning, and I've never seen it.'

Were you once an imperial city? Did you possess gaugraves, sovereign archbishops, bishop-princes, a pfalz (*palace*), four fortresses, three bridges over the Rhine, three convents with bell-towers, fourteen churches, and thirty thousand inhabitants! Were you once one of the four main cities in the formidable Hanseatic League of a hundred cities! To those who are enamored of fanciful traditions, as to those who study and criticise real facts, as strange, poetic, and famous a place as any other city in Europe! Did you possess, in your marvellous past, all that the past can contain of fable and history, those two trees, more similar than one thinks, whose roots and branches are sometimes so inextricably intertwined in the memory of men! Are you the city that saw Caesar conquer, Attila pass by, Brunhilda (*wife of Sigebert I, and thrice ruler of Austrasia*) dream, and Charlemagne marry! Are you the city that saw the combat in the 'Rose Garden' between Siegfried the Horn-Skinned and the dragon; and that disputation, before the facade of its cathedral, of Kriemhild's (*Siegfried's wife*), from which arose an epic (*the Nibelungenlied*); and that disputation of Martin Luther's, on the benches of the Diet, from which arose a religious sect! Are you that *Borbetomagus* of Drusus the Younger, the *Vormatia* of the Vangiones, the Wonnegau of the poets, the chief town of the heroes of the *Nibelungenlied*, the capital of the Frankish kings, the judicial court of the emperors! Worms, in a word, so diminished that an oaf, intoxicated with tobacco, who no longer even knows whether he descended from the Vangiones or the Nemetes says, in speaking of you: '*Oh! Worms! The city! It's over there! I've never seen it!*'

Yes, my friend, Worms is all of those things. An illustrious city, as you know. An Imperial and royal residence, with thirty thousand inhabitants, and fourteen churches, whose names are now completely forgotten. Which is why I record them here:

The Cathedral of Saint Peter.

Sancta Caecilia.

Saint Savin's.

Saint Andrew's.

Saint Mang's.

Saint John's.

The Church of Our Lady.

Saint Paul's.

Saint Rupert's.

The Church of the Dominicans

Saint Lamprecht's.

Saint Sixtus'.

Saint Martin's.

Saint Amand's.

Nonetheless, I disembarked, to the great surprise of my fellow passengers, who seemed unable to comprehend my strange whim. The steamboat had resumed its route towards Mannheim, leaving me alone with my luggage in a narrow craft which was being violently shaken by the eddies of the river, and agitated by the wheels of the steamboat. I had approached the landing stage without really noticing the two men who were standing there as the boat approached, and the steamer moved away. One of the two, a sort of chubby Hercules with rolled-up sleeves, and the most insolent air ever, was leaning, while smoking his pipe, on a rather large handcart. The other, thin and puny, stood, without a like pipe or show of insolence, beside a small wheelbarrow, the humblest and most pitiful in the world. He possessed one of those pallid, withered faces which are indicative of no particular age, and which leave the mind hesitant as to whether they reveal precocious old age or late adolescence.

After I had landed, and while I was still gazing at the poor devil with the wheelbarrow, I failed to notice that my sleeping-bag, left on the grass at my feet by the boatman, had suddenly disappeared. However, the sound of wheels in motion made me turn my head: there was my sleeping-bag moving

off aboard the handcart, gallantly pulled by the fellow with the pipe. The other looked at me sadly, without taking a step forward, without risking a gesture, without saying a word, with the air of an oppressed man resigning himself to something beyond my understanding. I ran after my sleeping bag.

'Ahoy, friend!' I shouted to the man, 'Where are you off to?'

The noise his cart made, the smoke from his pipe, and perhaps also his self-importance, prevented him from hearing me. I reached his side, breathless, and repeated my question.

— 'Where am I going?' he said in French, without stopping.

— 'Yes,' I replied.

— 'Pardieu,' he said, 'why there!'

And he nodded towards the white house, which was now only a stone's throw away.

— 'Well! What is that place?' I said to him.

— 'Well! It's the inn.'

— 'That's not where I'm going.'

He stopped short. He looked at me, like the skipper of the steamboat, with the most astonished air imaginable; then, after a moment's silence, he added with that fatuity peculiar to innkeepers who being the only one, in a deserted place, allow themselves the luxury of being insolent, because they believe themselves to be indispensable:

— 'Does Monsieur wish to sleep in a field?'

I felt I should avoid becoming angry.

— 'No,' I told him, 'I'm heading for town.'

— 'Which town?'

— 'For Worms.'

— 'What, for Worms?'

— 'For Worms!'

— 'For Worms?'

— 'For Worms!'

— 'Ah!' the man continued.

How many things can be implied by an *ah!* That one, I will never forget. There was, therein, surprise, anger, contempt, indignation, mockery, irony, pity, a deep and legitimate regret for my thalers and my silbergrossen, and, in short, a certain air of disgust. This *ah!* meant: 'Who is this man? What kind of trouble have I landed in? He's going to Worms! What will he do in Worms? Some schemer! A bankrupt in hiding! Why go to the effort of building an inn on the banks of the Rhine for such travellers as this one! This fellow irritates me. Going off to Worms is stupid! He would have happily spent ten French francs with me; he owes me them! He's a thief. What makes him think he's the right to go elsewhere? It's abominable! And to think that I went so far as to carry his luggage! A meagre overnight bag! There's a fine traveller, who has only an overnight bag! What rags does he keep in there? Does he even possess a shirt? In fact, though it seems this Frenchman is scarcely penniless, he'd probably have left without paying. What things one meets with, though! What we are exposed to! Perhaps I should offer him up to the officers. Well, well! One must take pity on him. Let him go wherever he wants, to Worms, to Hell, with him! I might as well leave him here, in the middle of the road, with his bag!'

My friend, have you noticed that there are great speeches that are mere empty words, while there are monosyllables that are full of meaning?

All this he uttered in that single *ah!* He picked up my 'bag' and threw it on the ground.

Then he set off majestically, with his cart. I thought I should remonstrate with him, a little.

— 'Well!' I said to him, 'are you going away like this? Simply leaving me here with my overnight bag? What the Devil! At least take the trouble to put it back where you found it.'

He continued to move away.

— 'Hey there, you oaf!' I shouted at him.

But he no longer understood French, and continued on his way, whistling.

I was forced to accept the situation. I could have run after him, fuelled my anger, and lost my temper; but what can one do with an oaf, except knock

him down? And, to tell the truth, comparing myself to that fellow, I doubt that of the pair of us, he would have been the one toppled. Nature, which seems to disdain equality, had not intended it to exist between that Teuton and myself. Obviously, at dusk there, in the open air, on the highway, I was the inferior, and he the superior. O sovereign law of the fist, which rules all passers-by with perfect inequity! *Dura lex, sed lex!* (*The law is harsh, but it is the law*!). Thus, I resigned myself.

I picked up my overnight bag, and tucked it under my arm; then I re-oriented myself. Night had fallen, the horizon was black, I could see nothing around me but the whitish, indistinct mass of the inn on which I had chosen to turn my back. All I could hear was the vague, soft sound of the Rhine in the reeds.

— '*You'll find Worms over there*', the captain of the steamboat had said, indicating the depths of the plain. *Over there!* Nothing more. How to reach *there*? Was it a mere stone's throw away? Was it five miles away? Worms, the city of legends, which I had come so far to seek, was beginning to seem like one of those towns in fairytale which recede as the traveller advances towards them.

And those terrible and ironic words of the man with the cart came back to me: '*Does Monsieur wish to sleep in a field*?' I seemed to hear the familiar spirits of the Rhine, the goblins and gnomes, repeating them in my ear with mocking laughter. It was precisely the hour when they emerge, mingling with the sylphs, the masked figures, the sorceresses, and the ghosts of the excommunicated, and attend those mysterious dances which leave great circular traces on the trampled lawns, traces which the cows, the next morning, gaze at dreamily.

The moon was about to rise. What to do? Join their dance? That would be strange. But sleeping in the fields is hard. Retrace my steps? Ask for hospitality at the inn I had disdained? Face another *ah!* from the boor with the cart? Who knows? Perhaps find the door closed in my face, and hear behind me, around me, in the reeds, in the mist, in the agitated foliage of the aspens, redoubled bursts of laughter from the gnomes with eyes like garnets, and the goblins with green faces? To be humiliated thus before the faeries! To see Titania's sweet and luminous face light with a smile of mocking pity! Never! Better, to sleep under the stars! Better to walk all night!

After consulting with myself awhile, I decided to return to the landing-stage. There I would probably find some track that would lead me to Worms. The moon was rising. I addressed a mental invocation to her, in which I conjured up an abominable mixture of all the poets who have spoken of the moon, from Virgil to Antoine-Marin Lemierre. I called her the *pale courier* and the *queen of the night*, and I begged her to enlighten me a little, declaring to her brazenly that I acknowledge *Diana as the sister of Apollo*, and, having thus sought her favour, according to the classical rite, I set off, bravely, once more, my satchel under my arm, in the direction of the Rhine.

I had barely taken a few steps, immersed in a deep reverie, when a slight noise disturbed me. I raised my head. It is right to invoke the goddess. The moonlight enabled me to see. Thanks to the horizontal rays which were beginning to silver the tips of the wild oats, I distinguished perfectly, in front of me, only a few steps away, beside an old willow-tree whose wrinkled trunk grimaced horribly, I distinguished, I say, a pale and livid figure, a spectre which looked at me with a frightened air. This ghost was pushing a wheelbarrow.

— 'Ah!' I said, 'Here's an apparition.'

Then, my eyes fell on the wheelbarrow, and a second thought followed the first:

— 'Behold!' I said, 'It's a porter.'

It was neither a ghost nor a porter; I recognised the second witness to my landing on this hitherto inhospitable shore, the man with the pale face.

He himself, on seeing me, had taken a step backwards, and seemed only slightly reassured. I thought it appropriate to speak:

— 'My friend,' I said to him, 'our meeting has obviously been destined from all eternity. I have an overnight bag that I find much too heavy at the moment, while you have a completely empty wheelbarrow; may I place my bag in your wheelbarrow? Eh? What do you say?'

On this left bank of the Rhine, everyone speaks and understands French, including the ghosts. The apparition answered me:

— 'Where is Monsieur going?'

— 'I am going to Worms.'

— 'To Worms?'

— 'To Worms.'

— 'Would Monsieur like to try the *Pheasant*?'

— 'Why not?'

— 'Then, Monsieur is going to Worms?'

— 'To Worms.'

— 'Ah!' said the man with the wheelbarrow.

I would like to have avoided here that parallelism which has all the appearance of a symmetrical construct; but I am simply a historian, and cannot refuse to note that this *ah!* was precisely the counterpart and the opposite of the *ah!* of the man with the cart.

This *ah!* expressed astonishment mingled with joy, satisfied pride, ecstasy, tenderness, love, legitimate admiration for my person, and sincere enthusiasm for my pfennings and my kreutzers.

This *ah!* meant: 'Ah! what an admirable traveller and a magnificent passer-by! This gentleman is going to Worms! He will stay at the *Pheasant*! How one recognises the Frenchman in that! This gentleman will spend at least three thalers at my inn! He will give me a good tip. He is a generous lord, and certainly an intelligent individual. He is going to Worms! He has the wit to choose Worms, this one! Good! Why are passers-by of this sort so rare? Alas! It is an elegiac and interesting situation to be an innkeeper in this city of Worms, where there are three inns open every day to the traveller who arrives every three years! Welcome, illustrious foreigner, wise Frenchman, amiable gentleman! What! He is here to visit Worms! He comes here nobly, simply, his cap on his head, his night-bag under his arm, without pomp, without fuss, without seeking to make an impression, much like one who is at home here! That's fine! What a great nation the French nation is! Long live the Emperor Napoleon!'

After this beautiful monologue expressed by the one syllable, he took my satchel and placed it in his wheelbarrow, looking at me with a kind air and an ineffable smile that meant to say: 'A night-bag! Nothing but a night-bag! How noble and elegant it is to have only a night-bag! One sees that this worthy lord feels sufficiently grand in himself, that he finds himself, rightly, quite dazzling as he is, and disdains to try and efface the poor innkeeper with a

semblance of opulence, a display of luggage, the encumbrance of suitcases, coat-racks, hat-boxes and umbrella-cases, with those deceptively large trunks, which are left behind at inns to cover the expense, and which most often contain nothing but wood-shavings and paving stones, bundles of hay and old copies of the *Constitutionnel*! Nothing but a night-bag! He is a prince, indeed.'

After this harangue and a smile, he joyfully lifted the arms of his wheelbarrow, finally loaded, and set off, saying to me in a soft and caressing voice: 'Monsieur, this way!'

Along the path he spoke to me; happiness had made him talkative. The poor devil came every day to the landing stage to wait for travellers. Most of the time, the boat passed without stopping. There was scarcely even a person travelling steerage, gazing at the melancholy silhouette of the four bell-towers, and wondering what the two innkeepers of Worms, were about before the splendid sunset horizon. Sometimes, however, the vessel stopped, the signal was given, the boatman from the landing-stage detached himself, ran to the steamboat, and returned with one, two, or even three travellers. He had seen up to six at one time! Oh! The admirable windfall! The new arrivals disembark with that open, astonished, and foolish air which is the joy of every innkeeper; but, alas, the innkeeper of the inn at the water's edge snatches and swallows them instantly. Who, ever, wishes to go to Worms? Who suspects that Worms even exists? So that my poor fellow would see the big cart from the riverside hotel sink into the trees, jolting and creaking beneath a weight of trunks and suitcases, while he, a pensive philosopher, returned by the light of the stars with his empty wheelbarrow. Such emotions had rendered him lean; but he came there nevertheless every day, with the consciousness of duty accomplished, to this ironic-landing stage, to this derisory jetty, to watch the waters of the Rhine flow, the travellers pass by and the neighbouring inn fill with guests. He disdains to struggle, or become irritated, he starts no war, utters no words; he resigns himself, pushes his wheelbarrow there, and protests, as much as a small wheelbarrow can protest, against the presence of a large cart. He has within him, and he bears on his face, become impassive by dint of humiliation undergone and disappointment suffered, that feeling of strength and grandeur which resignation joined to perseverance gives to the weak and small. Next to the superb, bloated, and triumphant innkeeper by the water's edge, who scarcely

deigns to notice his existence, he, the stubborn, patient, tenacious and oppressed individual, maintains the serious and inexpressible attitude shown by the eunuch before the pasha, the angler in the presence of the fisherman casting his net.

To continue; we crossed plains, meadows, fields of lucerne; we crossed, with the aid of I know not what shapeless assemblage of old beams and piles adorned with a trembling deck of openwork planks, the little arm of the Rhine where one can still see, two centuries later, the beautiful covered wooden bridge leading to the large and proud square tower adorned with projecting turrets, built by Maximilian I. The moon had borne away all the mists which rose to the zenith in whitish clouds; the background to the landscape had cleared, and the magnificent profile of the cathedral of Worms[87] (*Saint Peter's*), with its twin towers and its bell-towers, its gables, naves and counter-naves, appeared on the horizon, an immense mass of shadow standing proud, lugubriously, against a sky full of constellations, like a great nocturnal ship, at anchor among the stars.

Having passed the small arm of the Rhine, we still had to cross the larger arm. We turned to the left, and I concluded that the beautiful stone bridge that once led to the fortress gate near the Carmelite monastery no longer existed. After a few minutes' walk, through charming greenery, we arrived at an old, dilapidated bridge, probably built on the site of the old wooden bridge at the Saint Mang gate. Once I crossed this bridge, I glimpsed a length of the superb wall of Worms, which once possessed eighteen square towers on the side of the city that faced the Rhine. Alas! What remained? A few sections of decrepit wall pierced with windows, a few old fragments of towers collapsed beneath ivy or transformed into bourgeois dwellings, with white-curtained windows, green shutters and trellised arbours, instead of battlements and machicolations. A shapeless remnant of a round tower which stood out at the eastern end of the wall seemed to me to be the Nideck tower; but in vain I looked, I could not find except for this ruined Nideck tower either the sharp spire of the Cathedral, or the pretty low bell-tower of Sainte Cecilia. As for the Frauwenthurm, the square tower nearest to the Nideck tower, it has been replaced, it seemed to me, by a market garden. Moreover, ancient Worms was

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[87] Letter XXVI — Worms Cathedral (Dom St Peter): 49°37'48.4"N, 8°21'37.1"E

already asleep; all was profoundly silent there; silence everywhere, not a light in the windows. Close to the path we were following, through the fields of beets and tobacco that surround the town, an old woman, bent over in the undergrowth, was searching for herbs in the moonlight.

We entered the city: no chains creaked, no drawbridge fell, no portcullis rose; we entered the old feudal and military city of the gaugraves and bishop-princes through a gap that had been a fortress gate and was now only a breach. Two poplars on the right, a dunghill on the left. There are farms installed in old castles that have such entrances.

Then we turned to the right, my companion whistling as he pushed his wheelbarrow cheerfully, and I mused. We followed the old wall on the inside for a while, then entered a maze of deserted alleys. The appearance of the town was still the same. A tomb rather than a town. Not a candle in the windows, not a passerby in the streets. It was about eight in the evening.

However, we entered a fairly wide square, which led to what, in the moonlight, seemed to me to be a large street. One side of this square was occupied by the ruin, or rather the ghost, of an old church.

— 'What church is this?' I asked my guide, who had stopped to catch his breath.

He answered me with that expressive shrug of the shoulders, which means: '*I've no idea.*'

The church, unlike the town, was neither deserted nor silent; a noise escaped from it, a light escaped through the door. I approached the door. And what a door! Imagine a few boards roughly attached to each other by shapeless crosspieces studded with large nails, leaving wide, unequal spaces between them at the bottom, and chipped at the top, barricading, with the insolent air of a servant who is master in his lord's house, a magnificent and royal portal of the fourteenth century.

I looked through the skylights and had a vague glimpse of the interior of the church. The severe archivolts of the time of Charles IV stood out painfully in the darkness amidst an inexpressible clutter of tuns, hooped barrels, and empty casks. At the back, by the light of a tallow candle placed on a stone projection that must have been the high altar, a cooper, with rolled-up sleeves and a leather apron, was pegging a large barrel. The staves echoed under the mallet with that hollow wooden sound which sounds so

mournful to anyone who has heard the gravedigger's hammer resonate on a coffin.

What church was this? Above the portal, rose a powerful square tower which must once have borne a tall spire. A little behind us, on the left, were the four bell-towers of the cathedral. I saw some distance ahead, towards the southwest, an apse which must have been the Church of the Dominicans; it is true that I failed to locate on the left the bell-tower of Saint Paul's engaged between its two low towers; but we were not far enough into the city nor close enough to the Saint Martin gate for it to be Saint Lamprecht's; moreover I could not see the small spire of Saint Sixtus, which should have been on the right, nor the taller tower of Saint Martin's, which should have been on the left. I concluded that this tower must be Saint Ruprecht's.

Once these conjectures were settled, and this discovery made, I returned to inspect the wretched interior of this venerable edifice, the candle gleaming amidst the shadows which had once been starred by the imperial lamps during coronations, the leather apron spread out where purple robes once floated, the cooper awake alone in the nocturnal sleeping city, hammering away at his cask on the high altar, and all the past of that illustrious church appeared before me. Recollections flooded my mind. Alas! This same nave of Saint Ruprecht had seen the approach and solemn entry, in great pomp, from the main street of Worms, popes and emperors, sometimes both together under the same canopy, the pope on the right on his white mule, the emperor on the left on his jet-black horse, bugles and flutes at the head, eagles and gonfalons fluttering in the breeze, and all the princes and all the cardinals on horseback preceding the pope and the emperor, the Marquis of Montferrat holding the sword, the Duke of Urbino holding the sceptre, the Count Palatine carrying the orb, the Duke of Savoy carrying the crown! Alas! How everything transient vanishes!

A quarter of an hour later, I was installed in the inn, the *Pheasant* (which was perhaps the *Swan*, unless it was the *Peacock*. Reader, beware of the author on this point), but which, I must say, had the finest appearance in the world. I ate an excellent supper in a room furnished with a long table, adorned with two men busy with their two pipes. Unfortunately, the dining room was dark, which saddened me. On entering it, one saw only a candle in a fog. Those two men emitted more smoke than ten heroes.

As I began to eat supper, a third guest entered. This one was not smoking; he spoke. He spoke French with a polyglot's accent; one could not distinguish, listening to him, whether he was German, Italian, or English or even from Auvergne; he was perhaps all of those at once. Add to that, great self-confidence combined with little intellect, and, it seemed to me, some pretensions of being a handsome fellow; too much tie, too much shirt-collar; and too much winking at the maids; he was a man of perhaps fifty-eight years of age, but poorly preserved.

He started a conversation on his own, and maintained it; no one replied. The two Germans were smoking, I was eating.

— 'Monsieur, you come from France! Beautiful country! Noble country! The classical soil! The land of taste! Homeland of Racine! But, my, my, I don't like your Bonaparte! For me, the emperor has spoilt the general. I am a Republican, sir. I say it out loud, your Napoleon is a false example of a great man: I shall return to him. But how beautiful the tragedies of Racine are! (He pronounced *beautiful*, as *peautiful*) There is the true glory of France. Racine is not appreciated in Germany; a barbaric land; Napoleon is loved there almost as much as in France. Those good Germans are well named. It's pitiful; do you not think so, Monsieur?'

As I finished consuming my partridge coincidentally with the end of his sentence, I replied, turning to the boy: '*The next course*.' This answer seemed sufficient for him to start a conversation, and he continued.

— 'Monsieur is right to visit Worms. It is wrong to disdain Worms. Do you know, sir, that Worms is the fourth city of the Grand Duchy of Hesse? That Worms is the capital of a canton? That Worms has a permanent garrison, sir, and a gymnasium, sir? Tobacco, sugar, and white lead are produced here; wine, wheat, and oil are produced here. There is a beautiful fresco by Johann Conrad Seekatz in the Lutheran church, a work of the good old days; from 1701 or 1712. Behold, Monsieur, Worms has beautiful, well-made roads, the new road, the Gaustrasse, which runs to Mainz via Hessloch (*Dittelsheim-Hessloch*); and the road to Mont-Tonnerre, via the Zell valley (*the Zellertal*). The old Roman road which runs alongside the Rhine is now nothing more than a curiosity. And for myself, sir — Are you the same? — I dislike curiosities. Antiquities? Nonsense. Since I've been in Worms, I have avoided visiting the famous Rosengarten (*the fictional garden in the epic poem*), the rose-garden where their Siegfried, they say, killed their dragon. Mere folly! Utter

nonsense! Who believes in such old wives' tales since Voltaire? An invention of the priesthood. Oh! Sad humanity! How long you have let yourself be dictated to by nonsense? Did Siegfried exist? Did the dragon exist? Have you ever seen a dragon in your life, my dear Monsieur? Did Cuvier, the learned Georges Cuvier, see dragons? Besides, is it possible? Can a creature, come let us be serious, can a creature emit fire from its nose and mouth? Fire consumes everything; it would begin by reducing the unfortunate animal to ashes, Monsieur. Do you not think so? These are gross errors. The mind is not moved by what it cannot credit. That is Boileau. Note it. Boileau! (He pronounced the name *poilu*) It's like their Luther oak (*in Wittenberg, beneath which Luther burned the Papal Bull etc. in 1520, which was replaced in 1830*)! I've no more respect for their Luther oak, which one sees on the way to Alzey beside the Pfalzerstrasse, the old Palatine Road. Luther! What has Luther to do with me? A Voltairean pities a Lutheran. And as for their Church of Our Lady, which is outside the Mainz gate, with its portal of the five wise virgins, and the five foolish virgins (*see Matthew 25:1-13*), I only esteem it because of its vineyard, which produces the wine Liebfraumilch. Drink some, sir, there are some excellent bottles in this inn! Ah! You French! You are *bons vivants*, all of you! And do taste also, trust me, the Katterloch wine and Luginsland wine. My goodness, I'd seek out Worms just for a glass of each of those three wines.'

He paused to breathe, and one of the smokers took advantage of the pause to say to his neighbour: 'My dear sir, I never close my year-end with less than a seven-figure inventory.' This was doubtless in response to a question that the other smoker had asked him before my arrival; but two smokers, and two German smokers, never bother to force the pace of their conversation; their pipes absorb them: the dialogue staggers along, as best it can, amidst the smoke.

This smoke served me well; my supper was finished, and, thanks to the fog from the two pipes, I was able to disappear without being seen, leaving the orator to grapple with the smokers, and the dialogue to continue between puffs of verbiage and puffs of tobacco.

I was installed in a rather pretty German room, washed clean, and cold; white curtains at the windows, white towels on the bed. I say towels, you know why; what we call a pair of sheets does not exist on the banks of the Rhine. Having said that, the beds are very large. The result is the most bizarre

in the world; those who made the mattress planned it for Patagonians, those who cut the sheets planned them for Lapps. An opportunity for philosophy. The average weary traveller accepts the weather as God deals it to him, and the bed as the maid makes it for him.

My room was furnished somewhat haphazardly, as inn rooms generally are. Some travellers take things when they leave, and others forget something; this creates an ebb and flow that is apparent in the furniture of hotel rooms. Thus, between the two windows, a sofa was replaced by two cushions placed on a large wooden trunk evidently left there by a guest. On one side of the fireplace, on a nail, hung a small portable bronze barometer; on the other side only the nail remained, which must once have supported the natural *counterpart*, some convenient portable thermometer, probably taken by an unscrupulous traveller. Over this same fireplace, between two bouquets of artificial flowers under glass domes, such as are made on the Rue Saint-Denis, stood a genuine antique vase, made of coarse earthenware, doubtless found in some excavation in the surrounding area, a sort of Roman ewer with a wide belly such as are unearthed in Sologne, on the banks of the Sauldre; a rather precious vase, moreover, though it had neither the ornamentation of the vases of Nola, nor the shape exhibited by the vases of Bari.

At the head of the bed, in a black wooden frame, hung one of those 'troubadour' engravings, in the Empire style, with which our Rue Saint-Jacques flooded all of Europe forty years ago. At the bottom of the image was engraved this inscription, of which I even preserve the spelling and grammar: 'BIANCA AND HER LOVER FLEEING TOWARDS FLORENCE ACROSS THE APENINS. Feer of pursute made them choose a little-used path, where they lost their way for several days. Young Bianca, her feet torn by brambles and stones, made a shoe for herself out of plants.' (*The original oil painting was created by Jean-Louis Ducis, in 1824. Bianca Cappello a Venetian noblewoman loved Pietro Bonaventuri, a young Florentine employee of the Salviati banking family, and in 1563, she eloped with him to Florence, where they married*). The next day I took a walk around the city.

You Parisians are so accustomed to the spectacle of a city in perpetual change that you have ended up paying no attention to it. Around you there is a continual explosion of timber and stone. The city grows like a forest. It is as if the foundations of your homes are not simply foundations, but roots, living roots through which sap flows. The small house becomes a large house

as naturally, it seems, as the young oak becomes a mature tree. Almost night and day, you hear the sound of hammers and saws, cranes being erected, ladders being moved, of scaffolding being placed in position, pulleys, winches, and cables creaking, stones being raised, the noise of streets being paved, the noise of buildings being erected. Every week, there's some new experiment; cut-sandstone, Volvic lava, tar macadam, bitumen paving, wooden paving. You're away for two months and, on your return, you find everything changed. In front of your door there was a garden; now there is a street; a brand-new street, yet already complete, with eight-story houses, shops on the ground floor, inhabited from top to bottom, women on the balconies, traffic congestion in the roadway, crowds on the pavements. You don't rub your eyes, you don't cry out at the miracle, you don't think you're daydreaming. No, you find it quite simple. Well, what's this? A new street, that's all. Only one thing surprises you: the tenant of the garden had it on a lease, so how was all this managed? A neighbour explains it to you. The tenant paid fifteen hundred francs rent; he was given a hundred thousand francs to leave, he left. It all becomes quite simple again. Where will this expansion of Paris end? Who can say? Paris has already overflowed five fortified defensive walls, there is talk of building a sixth; before half a century it will have filled the space, then it will flow beyond. Every year, every day, every hour, by a sort of slow, irresistible process of infiltration, the city spreads into the suburbs, the suburbs become townships, then the townships become part of the city. And, I will repeat, this does not amaze you in the least, you Parisians. Goodness me! The population's increasing; the city must grow; what does it matter to you! You go about your business. And what a business, all these worldly affairs. The day before yesterday a revolution, yesterday a riot, today the great and holy work of civilisation, peace, and thought. What does the moving of stones in your suburb matter to you, Parisians, who move the minds of Europe and the whole world! The bees don't look to the hive, they look to the flowers; you do not look to your city, you look to ideas.

And you barely reflect on the fact that, amidst this formidable and lively city of Paris, which was already a great city, and which is becoming a gigantic city, that elsewhere there are cities which are declining, and dying. Worms is one of them. Alas! Rome was once supreme; Rome which resembles you, Rome which preceded you, Rome which was the Paris of the pagan world. A dying city! A sad and solemn thing! The streets are deteriorating. Where there was a row of houses, there is now only a wall; where there was a wall, there

is nothing. Grass replaces the pavements. Life retreats toward the centre, toward the heart, like blood in the veins of a dying man. It is the extremities that die first, the limbs in humans, the suburbs in cities. Abandoned places lose their houses, inhabited places lose their upper floors. Churches collapse, are ruined, and turn to dust, not for lack of belief as in our industrial anthills, but for lack of believers. Entire neighbourhoods fall into disuse. They are almost strange to traverse; a kind of savage tribe settles therein. Here the city no longer spreads into the countryside, it is the countryside that re-enters the city. The streets are cleared, the crossroads are cultivated, the thresholds of the houses are ploughed; the deep rut of the manure carts digs and overturns the old paving stones; the rain makes puddles in front of the doors; discordant cackling farmyard sounds replace the murmurs of the crowd. A square reserved for Imperial ceremonies is turned into a lettuce patch. The church becomes a barn, the palace becomes a farm, the tower becomes a dovecote, the house becomes a shack, the shop becomes a stall, the lake becomes a pond, the city dweller becomes a farm-labourer; and the city is dead. Everywhere solitude, tedium, dust, ruin, oblivion. Everywhere: on the deserted squares; on the shrouded and gloomy passers-by, on their sad faces; on crumbling lengths of wall; on the low, silent and sparse houses, the eyes of the mind see the long, melancholy shadows of a setting sun projected.

Despite all this, perhaps because of all this, Worms, framed by the dual heights of the Vosges and the Taunus, bathed by its beautiful river, seated amidst the innumerable islands of the Rhine, surrounded by its decrepit lengths of wall, and its fresh belt of greenery, Worms is a beautiful, and intriguing city full of interest. I have searched in vain for that part of the city built outside the line of walls and square towers, which, from the gate of Saint Martin, met the Rhine at right angles. The suburb no longer exists. I found no vestige of the Neuturm (*destroyed by the French in 1689*), which terminated the north-eastern end, with its pointed spire and its four turrets. Not a single stone remains of that magnificent Mainz Gate (*the Golden Gate*), adjoining the Neuturm, which, with its two high bell-towers, seen from the Rhine amidst the others, resembled a church, seen from the plain among the towers, resembled a fortress. The small nave of Saint Amandus has disappeared; and, as for the Church of Our Lady, once so tightly enclosed by houses and roofs, it is today lost amidst the fields. Before the portal of the wise virgins and the foolish virgins, young girls who were as beautiful as the wise and as cheerful as the foolish, spread out their linen washed in the Rhine on the meadow.

Between the outer buttresses of the nave, old men seated on the ruins warmed themselves in the sun. *Aprici…senes* (*aprici for apricantes: 'old men basking'*) says Persius (*Satire V:179*); *solibus aptum* (*'suited to the sun'*), says Horace (*Epistles Book I: XX, 24*).

As I was wandering through the streets, a gentleman local to the place, passing a few steps from me, suddenly dazzled me. This brave young man wore, heroically, a small, low, long-haired blunderbuss hat and wide trousers, without foot-straps, which only reached down to the ankle. At the other end of him, the collar of his shirt, straight and starched, reached to the middle of his ears; and the collar of his coat, ample, heavy and lined with buckram, reached to his occiput. If I am to judge from this example, such is the state of elegance in Worms. A true freemason in his Sunday best, minus the bright, and satisfied air, minus the perfect, naive joy. I remembered that this was the attire of elegant fellows under the Restoration. You know that I disdain no detail, and that for me everything that touches the man reveals the man. I examine clothing as I study buildings. Costume is a man's first garment; his house is the second. This elegant fellow, in Worms, a living anachronism, recalled to my eyes the progress that costume has made in France, and consequently in Europe, over the last twenty years, thanks to womankind, artists, and poets. Women's clothing, so laughably ugly under the Empire, has become quite charming. Men's clothing has improved. Hats have taken on a taller shape and wider brims. Coats have acquired long tails and low collars, which benefit well-made men by developing the hips and freeing the shoulders, and ill-made men by concealing the thinness and slenderness of their limbs. The waistcoat has been opened and lowered; the shirt-collar is now turned down; the trousers, a hideous garment, have been given some shape by means of the sash. All this is good and could be even better. In terms of grace and inventiveness in clothing, though, we are far from the exquisite elegance of Francis I, Louis XIII, and even Louis XV. We still have many more steps to take towards true beauty and art, of which costume is a part; and that is all the more fortunate, since fashion, which is mere mental fantasy, marches indifferently, forward or back. All it would take to spoil everything is a rich, young fool, freshly arrived from London. Nothing says that we will not soon see the reappearance of little hairy hats, large straight collars, leg-of-mutton sleeves, fish-tails, high cravats, short waistcoats, and ankle trousers, and that my elegant grotesque from Worms will not turn into an elegant one from Paris. *Di! talem avertite* vestem! *('Gods, prevent such a garment', vestem substituted for casem' see Virgil 'Aeneid' Book III; 265*).

Worms Cathedral, like those of Bonn, Mainz, and Speyer, belongs to the Romanesque family of double-apse cathedrals, the magnificent flowers of early medieval architecture, which are rare throughout Europe and seem to flourish by preference on the banks of the Rhine. This double apse necessarily creates four bell-towers and eliminates the portals of the facade, requiring only side portals. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins, already sculpted at Worms on one of the tympanums of the Church of Our Lady, is reproduced on the southern portal of the Dom. A charming and profound subject, often chosen by those sculptors of the naive era, who were all poets.

When you visit the interior of the cathedral, the impression given is both varied and powerful. The Byzantine frescoes, the Flemish paintings, the thirteenth-century bas-reliefs, the exquisite chapels in the florid Gothic style, the neo-pagan tombs of the Renaissance, the delicate consoles carved at the ends of the double-arches, the coloured and gilded coats of arms, the intercolumnar spaces populated by statuettes and figurines, compose one of those extraordinary ensembles where all styles, all periods, all fantasies, all fashions, all arts, appear before you simultaneously. The exaggerated and violent rocailles of the last bishops-princes, who were at the same time archbishops of Mainz, provide gigantic yet coquettish features in the corners. Here and there large sections of wall, formerly painted and decorated, today bare, sadden the eye. These bare walls are deemed an indication of progress. The style is one of simplicity, sobriety, or who knows what? Oh, the bad taste revealed by 'tastefulness'! Fortunately, the forest of arabesques and ornaments which filled the cathedral of Worms was far too dense for 'tastefulness' to destroy it entirely. One finds magnificent remains of it at every step. In a large low chapel, which serves, I believe, as a sacristy, I admired several marvels of the fifteenth century: a baptismal font, an immense urn on the rim of which is depicted Jesus surrounded by the apostles, the apostles as small as children, Jesus as large as a giant; several sculptural pages taken from the two Testaments, vast poems in stone composed more like paintings than bas-reliefs; and lastly a 'Christ on the Cross' almost life-size, a work which makes one cry out, and dream, so well does the curious and perfect delicacy of the details combine with a sublime pride of expression, without disturbing it.

In a narrow, rather dark and very ugly square, a few steps from the cathedral of Worms, next to this marvellous edifice which possesses height,

depth, mystery, colour and form, which clothes an imperishable and eternal thought with all the prodigious luxury of granite images and metaphors; just next to it, I say — like criticism beside poetry —a poor little Lutheran church, topped with a puny Roman dome, decked out with a nasty Greek pediment, white, square, angular, bare, cold, sad, morose, boring, low, envious — registers its protest.

I have reread the lines I have just written, and am almost tempted to erase them. Do not misunderstand me, my friend, and find in them what I did not seek to place there. They are an artist's opinion on two works of art, nothing more. Beware of seeing in them an attempt to judge between two religions. Every religion is venerable to me. Catholicism is necessary to society; Protestantism is useful to civilisation. And then, to insult Luther at Worms would be a double profanation. It was at Worms above all that the great man showed greatness. No, irony will ever pass my lips in the presence of those thinkers and sages who suffered for what they believed to be good and true, and who generously spent their genius to augment, some divine faith, others human reason. Their work is holy as regards the world, and sacred to me. Happy and blessed are those who love and believe, whether like the Catholics, they make a religion of every philosophy, or whether like the Protestants, they make a philosophy of every religion.

Mannheim[88] is only fifteen miles from Worms, on the other bank of the Rhine. Mannheim has, in my eyes, little merit other than having been founded in the same year as Pierre Corneille was born, in 1606. Two hundred years of age, for a city, is mere adolescence. So, Mannheim is brand-new. The good bourgeoisie, who take the regular for the beautiful, and the monotonous for the harmonious, and who admire, with all their hearts, French tragedy and the stone facings of the Rue de Rivoli, would greatly admire Mannheim. It is tiresome: there are thirty streets, and yet there is only one street; there are a thousand houses, and yet there is only one house. All the facades are identical; all the streets intersect at right angles. Beyond that, cleanliness, simplicity, whiteness, straight lines: it is the beauty of the chessboard that I have spoken about somewhere.

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[88] Letter XXVI — Mannheim: 49°29'15.0"N, 8°27'57.6"E

You know that the good Lord is, for me the great creator of antitheses. He perpetrated one, and one of the most complete, by setting Mannheim down next to Worms. Here, a city that is dying; there, a city that is being born; here, the Middle Ages with its unity which is so harmonious and so profound; there, classical taste with all its tedium. Mannheim arrives, and Worms leaves; the past is Worms, the future is Mannheim. (Here I open a parenthesis: do not conclude from that, however, that the future will be classical in taste.) Worms contains the remains of a Roman road; Mannheim lies between a pontoon bridge and a railway. Now it is pointless for me to tell you where my preference lies, you are not unaware of it. Indeed, as regards cities, I like the ancient ones.

I admire the rich plain no less, however, on which Mannheim sits, and which is twenty-six miles wide between the mountains of Neckar, and the hills of the Isenach. The first twelve miles or so, from Heidelberg to Mannheim, are covered by rail; and the other fourteen from Mannheim to Dürkheim (*Bad Dürkheim since 1904*) by carriage (*the link to Mannheim by rail was completed in 1913*). Here again, the past and the future join hands.

Otherwise, in Mannheim itself, I noted only the magnificent trees in the castle park, an excellent hotel, the *Palatinat*, a fine Rococo bronze fountain in the square, and this inscription in gold letters on the window of a hairdresser's: 'SALON WHERE ONE CUTS HAIR LIKE MONSIEUR CHIRARD, OF PARIS'.

The End of Part VIII of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part IX: Letter XXVII-XXVIII

'View of Heidelberg castle in the light of evening'
Felix Possart (German, 1837-1928)
Artvee

Letter XXVII: Speyer

Banks of the Nectar, October

What shall I tell you of Spire, or *Speyer*[89] as the Germans call it, or *Spira*, as the Franks named it? *Noviomagus*, says the legend. *Civitas Nemetum*, says history. It is an illustrious city. Julius Caesar may have camped there; Drusus fortified it; Tacitus spoke of the Nemetes tribe there (*see 'Germania' XXVIII*); the Huns burned it; Constantine rebuilt it; Julian enlarged it; Bishop Dagobert I converted a temple of Mercury there into the church of Saint Germain (*in the seventh century*); Otto I gave Christianity its first tournament there, Conrad I of the Salian dynasty made it the capital of the empire, Conrad II made it the sepulchre of the emperors. The Templars, who left a beautiful ruin there, fulfilled their function as sentinels of the Frontiers. All those torrents of men that devastated and fertilised Europe traversed Speyer: during the first few centuries, the Vandals and the Allemani (*'all men', men of all tribes, is the etymology, according to Gaius Asinius Quadratus, the third century Greek historian*); during the latter, the French. During the Middle Ages, from 1125 to 1422, during three hundred years, Speyer suffered eleven sieges. As a consequence the old Carolingian city was deeply affected. Its privileges were revoked; its blood, and its population, flowed everywhere. It hosted the Imperial Supreme Court which the city of Wetzlar inherited, and the Imperial Diets (*assemblies*) a shadow of which remains in Frankfurt. It had thirty thousand inhabitants; and now only eight.

Who today remembers the holy bishop Rudiger Hüzmann? Where does the Spira stream flow? Where is the village of Spira? What has been done with the lofty church of Saint John? In what state is that chapel of Olivet the old registers call the *incomparable*? What has become of the admirable square tower with angular turrets that dominated the gate of the road to Speyerbach? What vestiges remain of Saint Vildnberg? Where was the Imperial Court

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[89] Letter XXVII — Speyer: 49°19'07.7"N, 8°26'19.7"E

housed? Where is the hotel of the advocate-assessors, *who*, says an old charter, *establish and administer justice in the name of his Imperial Majesty, the Electors, and other princes of the Empire, in the public consistory of the whole Empire established by Charles the Fifth*? Of this high jurisdiction, to which all the others were *devolved and ultimately subject,* what remains? Nothing, not even the four-pillared stone gallows in the meadow beside the Rhine. Only the sun continues to treat Speyer with as much magnificence as if it were still the queen of imperial cities. The proverbial Speyer wheat is still as beautiful and golden as in the time of Charles V, and the excellent red 'goosefoot' wine is still worthy of being drunk by bishop-princes in scarlet stockings, and electors in ermine hats.

The cathedral, begun by Conrad I, continued by Conrad II and Heinrich III, and completed by Heinrich IV in 1097, is one of the most superb buildings of the eleventh century. The first Conrad dedicated it, the charters say, to the 'Blessed Virgin Mary.' It is still today of incomparable majesty. It has resisted time, men, wars, assaults, fires, riots, revolutions, and even the embellishments of the bishop-princes of Speyer and Bruchsal. I visited it; I will not, however, describe it to you in detail. Here, as in the Ibach house, I cannot say that I saw the church, so absorbed was I by the thoughts that filled me. No, I failed to see the building, I saw only my thoughts. Let me tell you of them. I know nothing of the rest; everything passed before my eyes like a shadow. Search, if you wish, among the itineraries and monographs, for a description of the cathedral of Speyer; you will not read one from me. Something even higher and more magnificent seized me in the midst of my contemplation of that dark architecture. Before now I have often had, and will often have again, the opportunity to show you churches; this time let me show you God.

Between 1024 and 1308, for three centuries, Conrad II's plan was carried out. Of the nine emperors, and various kings of the Romans, who reigned during this period, four emperors (*Conrad II, Heinrich III, IV and V*) and four kings (*Philp of Swabia, Rudolph I, Adolph of Nassau, and Albrecht I*) were buried in the crypt beneath Speyer Cathedral. As for the other five emperors, Lothair III, Frederick I Barbarossa, Henry VI, Otto IV, and Frederick II, and the other dozen or so kings, destiny did not grant them that august burial. The wind that blows over men at the hour of their death bore them elsewhere.

Of this latter group of emperors and kings, two only, who were not Germans, were interred in tombs in their native country: Richard of Cornwall in England, Alfonso of Castile in Spain. The others were cast to the four cardinal points: Lothair III was interred at the monastery of Königslutter, Otto IV at Brunswick, William of Holland at Middelburg, Henry VII at Pisa, Frederick II and Conrad IV at Palermo, and Barbarossa near the River Cydnus (*according to one account, his heart and internal organs were interred in Saint Paul's Church Tarsus, Turkey; his flesh in the Church of Saint Peter, Antioch, now Antakya, Turkey; and his bones in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, destroyed in 1291, in Tyre, Lebanon*),

Barbarossa in particular, the great Barbarossa, where is he? In the River Cydnus, says history; in Antioch, says the chronicler; in the Kyffhäuser cave, says the Württemberg legend; in the Kaiserslautern cave, says the legend of the Rhine.

The four Caesars lying beneath the slabs of the apse of Speyer were almost all glorious emperors. It was the founder of the cathedral, that contemporary of Canute the Great, Conrad II, who divided old Teutonia into six classes, called Military Shields, *Clypei Militares*, a hierarchy that was overturned by the Golden Bull, but which Poland adopted and imitated: so much so that, even in these last centuries, the republican constitution of Poland, reproducing the old feudal constitution of Germany, has acted like a mirror that has retained the image long after the object it reflects has disappeared. It was Heinrich III, who proclaimed and maintained universal peace for three years, preferring to a war of people against people, the duel of king against king that he offered Henri I of France (*in 1056*); Heinrich IV, conquered the Saxons (*in 1069 and 1071*) and was excommunicated then absolved by Gregory VII; Heinrich V was the ally of Venice. Of the kings, Conrad III, the friend of the Diets, called himself *Emperor of the Romans*; Philip of Swabia, was the formidable adversary of Pope Innocent III. The king who triumphed over Ottokar II of Bohemia, the exterminator of burgraves, the founder of dynasties, and the father of emperors, was Rudolf of Habsburg. Adolph of Nassau, was the valiant monarch killed by an axe blow on the battlefield (*at the Battle of Göllheim in 1298*). Finally, it was Adolph's enemy, his rival, his murderer, Albrecht I of Austria, who, with the crown on his head, had the King of Bohemia (*Wenceslaus III*) serve him at table, Albrecht who abolished tolls, and tamed, iron caltrop in hand, the four formidable electors

of the Rhine; a prince immeasurable in everything, in his ambition as in his power, to whom Boniface VIII one morning offered the kingdom of France: faced with such a gift, one does not know whom to admire most, the pope who had the audacity to offer it, or the emperor who had the audacity to accept.

Alas! What could be more like dreams than these grandeurs? And how similar those princes often were in the wretchedness of their demise! Albrecht of Austria, at Göllheim, near Mainz, had killed with his own hand his cousin and his emperor, Adolph of Nassau; ten years later, in 1308, John of Habsburg killed, at Windisch on the River Reuss (*in Switzerland*), his uncle and emperor, Albrecht of Austria. Albrecht, who was one-eyed and ugly, and who was advised, said Boniface VIII, by a woman with viper blood, *sanguine viperali*, had been nicknamed the *Regicide*; John was nicknamed the *Parricide*.

However, it may be, eight princes, good, bad or mediocre, were buried, side by side, though varied, so to speak, in the diversity of their destinies, with the glory of arms proper to a few, and the splendour of the empire common to all, in the vault of Speyer, enveloped in the mysterious majesty of death. For all of Germany, a sort of national superstition surrounded these sleeping emperors and kings. The people, who possess the quarrelsome and mutinous instincts of children, willingly hate the present and living powers that be, simply because they possess power, because they *are* present, because they *are* alive. '*Those of Flanders'*, says Philip of Commines, '*always love the son of their prince; never the prince himself*'. The Bishop of Olmütz wrote to Pope Gregory X: '*Volunt imperatorem, sed potentiam abhorrent: they desire an emperor, but abhor power*.'

Yet, as soon as power meets its demise, we love it; as soon as it is vanquished, we admire it; once it is dead, we respect it. Nothing was therefore greater, more august and more sacred in Germany and Europe than those four imperial and those four royal tombs covered, as if by a triple veil, by silence, darkness, and veneration. Who broke the silence? Who disturbed the darkness? Who profaned that veneration? Listen:

In 1693, Louis XIV suddenly despatched an army to the Palatinate, commanded by men whose names can still be read in the records of the Gazette de France: 'ARMY OF GERMANY, April 11th — Maréchal de Boufflers, Maréchal Duc de Lorges, Maréchal de Choiseul — *Lieutenant Generals*: Marquis de Chamilly, Marquis de la Feuillée, Marquis d'Uxelles,

Milord Mountcassel, Marquis de Revel, Sieur de la Bretesche, Marquis de Villars, Sieur de Mélac. — *Sergeant-Major Generals*: Duc de la Ferté, Sieur de Barbezières, Comte de Bourg, Marquis d'Alègre, Marquis de Vaubecourt, Comte de Saint-Fremont.'

Civilisation was then beginning to coat barbarism everywhere; but the coating was not very thick as yet. At the slightest shock, with the next war, it broke, and barbarism, finding a passage, spread everywhere. That is what happened in the Palatinate War. The Great Monarch's army entered Speyer. Everything was shut fast: the houses, the cathedral, the tombs. The soldiers opened the doors of the houses, opened the doors of the cathedral, and broke the stone of the tombs. They violated families, they violated religion, they violated death itself.

The first two crimes were almost commonplace crimes. War, in those times which we sometimes admire too much, accustomed men to such things. The last was a monstrous affront. Death was violated, and with death, a thing not seen before, royal majesty, and with royal majesty the whole history of a great people, the whole past of a great empire. The soldiers searched the coffins, tore off the shrouds, and from the skeletons, those sleeping majesties, stole their golden sceptres, their jewelled crowns, their rings that had sealed the declarations of peace and war, and their banners of investiture, *hastas vexilliferas*. They sold to the Jews what Popes had blessed. They sold the ragged purple robes, and the objects buried in ashes. They sorted the gold, the diamonds, and the pearls; and, when there was nothing precious left in those sepulchres, when nothing remained but dust, they swept the bones that had been emperors and kings, pell-mell, into a hole in the ground. Drunken corporals rolled the skulls of four Caesars and four monarchs, into a common grave, with their feet. That is what Louis XIV initiated in 1693. Just one hundred years later, in 1793, this is what God initiated:

There was in France a royal ossuary just as there was an imperial one in Germany. One day, one fatal day when all the barbarity of ten centuries reappeared from beneath the surface of civilisation and submerged it, the dreadful and hideous armed hordes, who waged war, no longer against one king, but against all kings, no longer against a mere cathedral, but against all religion, no longer against a city or an entire state, but against the entire history of the human race: fearful hordes, I say, blood-stained, ragged, and

ferocious, rushed upon the ancient sepulchre of the kings of France. These folk, whom nothing could stop in their formidable work, also came to break tombs, tear apart shrouds and desecrate bones. Strange and mysterious labourers, they came to turn dust into dust. Listen to this: — the first spectre they awoke, the first king they brutally tore from his coffin, as one shakes a servant who has slept too long, the first skeleton in a purple robe that they seized, so as to cast him into the charnel house, was Louis XIV.

O vengeful Fates! 1693; 1793! Two sides of a sinister equation! Admire its formidable exactitude! After a century for Mankind, a mere instant for the Eternal One, what Louis XIV had caused to happen at Speyer to the emperors of Germany, God returned upon him at Saint-Denis.

One last thing that should be noted is that the founder of Speyer Cathedral, the oldest of those old Germanic princes, Conrad II, before he became Emperor of Germany, had been the Duke of Rhenish France. A Duke of France was outraged by a King of France. Retribution! Retribution!

If Louis XIV, during his campaigns in Germany, had passed through Otterberg (*near Kaiserslautern*), which I visited not long ago, he would have seen there, an admirable Abbey church[90] (*thirteenth century Romanesque*, *formerly part of the Cistercian monastery*) akin to the cathedral in Speyer. The church is said, like the cathedral, to have been built by Conrad II, and on the main portal of that sombre church he might have read a severe and melancholy warning, which might not have proved unhelpful to that great monarch, a warning which one can still see there today:

MEMENTO CONRADI: REMEMBER CONRAD

[90] Letter XXVII — Otterberg Abbey Church: 49°30'11.5"N, 7°46'27.5"E

Letter XXVIII: Heidelberg

Heidelberg, October

Dear Louis (*the artist, Louis Candide Boulanger*), take care, I am in the mood to write you an interminable letter. You ask me for four pages; '*I would give you a hundred*', as Orosmane says (*in Voltaire's play 'Zaïre' Act I, Scene IV*). Well, hard luck! Escape me if you can; old friends are talkative.

I arrived in this city ten days ago, dear friend, and I cannot tear myself away. During your excursion to Germany twelve years ago, did you visit Heidelberg? Above all, did you stop here? For one must not merely pass through Heidelberg[91], one must stay here, one must live here. I certainly will have more to tell you regarding it than I did regarding that sort of mock Versailles of Baden, called Mannheim, that insipid city whose right-angled streets seem to be cut from a block of plaster, and whose bell-towers, like those of Namur, are not bell-towers, but the result of *successfully completed* cup-and-ball games. Landing from the Rhine steamboat, I stayed in Mannheim long enough to have a carriage hitched, and then fled in haste to Heidelberg. Do the same if you ever find yourself there.

Heidelberg, situated at the entrance to the Neckar valley, as if taking refuge amidst the trees, between two wooded ridges prouder than hills but less severe than mountains, has admirable ruins, two fifteenth-century churches, a charming house from 1595, with a red facade and gilded statues, called the House of the Knight Saint George (*Haus zum Ritter Sankt Georg, on Hauptstrasse*), old towers over the water, its bridge, and above all its river, its limpid, tranquil and untamed river, where trout abound, legends abound, rocks bristle, and where the water's flow, complicated by reefs, is no less than an inextricable network of whirlpools and currents; a delightful torrent of a river in which, one can be sure, no steamboat will ever seek to entangle itself.

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[91] Letter XXVIII — Heidelberg: 49°24'33.8"N, 8°41'39.1"E

I lam leading a busy life here, a little haphazardly so, it is true, but I waste not a moment, I assure you; I haunt the forest and the library, that other forest; and in the evening, in my inn room, like your friend Benvenuto Cellini, I write on sheets of paper, which will end I know not where, my adventures of the day. '*Questa mia vita travagliata io scrivo: I write about this troubled life of mine.*' (*see Cellini's autobiography*)

Except that Benvenuto's adventures involved sword or stiletto blows, escapes from the Castel Sant'Angelo, fighting with sharpened blades on behalf of Rosso Fiorentino against the disciples of Raphael, fortified towns, colossi undertaken, insolent attempts against the Pope or the Duchesse d'Étampes (*mistress of Francis I*), Bohemian travels, with his two pupils Paul and Ascanius, an assault on the Hôtel de Nesle, the furniture and people hurled from the windows; and then, here and there, a masterpiece, *qualchè bell' opera*, as he himself says, a Juno, a Leda, a silver Jupiter as tall as Francis I, or a gold ewer for which the King of France gave the Cardinal of Ferrara an abbey and with it an income of seven thousand crowns.

My own adventures, and works, those of a laborious idler with whom you are well acquainted, dear Louis, you know by heart, you have shared them long enough; a solitary walk on an abandoned path, the contemplation of a ray of sunlight on a bed of moss, a visit to a cathedral or a village church, an old book, leafed through in the shade of an ancient tree, a countryman whom I question, a beautiful burying-beetle armoured in purple and gold, unfortunately fallen on its back and struggling, that I right in passing with the tip of my foot; some verse amidst it all; and then, reveries of several hours duration, in front of Rochemaure Castle on the Rhône, Château-Gaillard on the Seine, or Rolandseck on the Rhine, in front of a ruin beside a river, in front of what has fallen and beside what flows, or, a spectacle no less touching in my opinion, in front of what blossoms and beside what sings, in front of a forget-me-not's cluster of blue flowers and beside a stream of running water. That is what I am involved in, or, to put it better, that is what I *am*: because, for me, *doing* inevitably and immediately flows from *being*. As one is, so one does.

Here in Heidelberg, in this city, in this valley, among these ruins, the life of a thoughtful man is charmed. I feel I would never leave this country if you were here, dear Louis, if I had all my family here, and if summer would last a little longer. In the morning, I depart, but first, I pass (forgive me a

shamelessly bold expression, but which captures my thoughts), to *nourish my spirit*, before the House of the Knight Saint George. It is truly a delightful building. Imagine a ground floor then three stories with narrow windows supporting a triangular windowed pediment with large curled openwork volutes at the sides; from top to bottom of those three stories, two columns of windows with fanciful surrounds, projecting onto the street; finally, the whole facade built of red sandstone, sculpted, chiselled, carved, sometimes boldly and mockingly, sometimes merely severely, covered from top to bottom with arabesques, medallions, and gilded busts. When the poet who built this house had finished it, he wrote in gold letters, in the middle of the frontage, the dutiful religious verse: *Si Jehova non ædificet domum, frustra laborant ædificantes eam*. (*A Latin variant of Vulgate, Psalm 126: Nisi Dominus ædificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui ædificant eam: Except the Lord build the house, the builders labour in vain*.').

That was in 1592. Twenty-eight years later, in 1620, the Thirty Years' War began with the Battle of White Mountain near Prague, and continued until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. During this long Iliad, of which Gustavus Adolphus was the Achilles, Heidelberg, four times besieged, taken and retaken, twice bombarded, was burned down in 1635. Only one house escaped the fire, this one of 1592. All the others, which had been built without the Lord's help, burned from top to bottom.

After peace was declared (*the Peace of Westphalia, 1648*), the Elector Palatine, Charles I Louis, who has been nicknamed the 'Solomon of Germany', returned from England (*in 1649*) and rebuilt his city. 'Solomon' was succeeded by 'Elagabalus' (*referring to the Roman emperor whose reign was notorious for religious controversy and alleged sexual debauchery*), Count Charles Louis by his son Charles II, then by the Palatine branch of Wittelsbach-Simmern, by the Palatine branch of Pfalz-Neuburg, and finally the Thirty Years' War was succeeded by the Palatine War. In 1689, a man whose name is employed today, in Heidelberg, to frighten small children, Mélac, (*Ezéchiel du Mas, Comte de Mélac*), lieutenant-general of the armies of the King of France sacked the Palatine city and reduced it to a pile of rubble. Only one house survived, this one of 1592.

Heidelberg was quickly rebuilt. Four years later, in 1693, the French returned; the soldiers of Louis XIV violated the Imperial tombs in Speyer, and the Palatine tombs in Heidelberg. Marshal de Lorges (*Guy Aldonce de*

Durfort, 1st Duke of Lorges) set fire to the four corners of the electoral residence, the conflagration was terrible, all of Heidelberg burned. When the whirlwind of flame and smoke that enveloped the city dissipated, a house, just one, was seen standing in the heap of ashes. It was still, as ever, this house of 1592.

Today, the charming vermilion façade, damascened with gold, still virgin, intact and proud, and alone worthy of being attached to the castle amidst the insignificant pile of white houses which now composes Heidelberg, rises superbly over the city, its triumphant inscription sparkling in the sun, wherein I read every morning in passing that the Lord was the builder and saviour.

It is true, and must be said, for the religious devotions of the Renaissance were seasoned with pagan fantasies, that the effect of this grave psalm is somewhat tempered by the more profane line that the architect engraved above it: *Persta invicta Venus* (*'Beauty' always unconquered*), which itself must feel a little embarrassed by a third legend with which the pediment is crowned: *Soli. Deo. Gloria.* (*To the Sun, to God: Glory*). Having greeted the miraculous house, I cross the bridge and head off into the mountains.

There, I immerse myself, lose myself, walk, take the path that presents itself; I gaze at the trees, at those pillars, capital on capital, of the vast mysterious cathedral; and, immersed in the reading of Nature, like the Puritans of old in their meditation of the Bible, I seek God.

To each his own book, you see, my friend, and in the Gospel as in the landscape, the same hand has written the same things. As for myself, I think that all the faces of Jehovah require, and must be awarded, our contemplation, and this idea has governed and filled all my reveries for twenty years; you are aware of this, Louis, you who love me and whom I love. I also think that the study of Nature in no way harms the practice of life, while the spirit which knows how to be free and winged among the birds, fragrant among the flowers, mobile and vibrant among the waves and the trees, high, serene, and peaceful among the mountains, also knows, when the time comes, and perhaps better than anyone, how to be intelligent and eloquent among others. I am nothing, I know, but I compose my nothingness of little fragments of everything.

I walk, thus, all day without really knowing where I am, my eyes most often fixed on the ground, my head bent towards the path, my arms behind

my back, letting the hours pass, and gathering thoughts where I find them. I sit in those excellent armchairs covered with moss, that is to say, with green velvet, which ancient Pales (*a Roman deity; the patron of shepherds and their flocks*) hollows out at the foot of all the old oak-trees for the weary traveller; Like a good-natured sovereign, I set free, in reward for my welcome there, all the flies and butterflies that I find caught in nets of which I am the author; a small and obscure amnesty, which, like all amnesties, only angers spiders. And then, in the vale below my throne, I watch some admirable stream flowing, strewn with pointed rocks where the silver tunics of the naiads gather in a thousand folds; or else, if the mountain has no torrent, if the wind, the leaves and the grass are silent, if the place is calm, deserted, far from any town, far from any house, even a mere hut, I silence within myself all the murmurs that arise incessantly within us, and open my ears to the song of some young mountaineer lost amidst the trees, with his flock of goats, far off, over there, above or below me. Nothing is as melancholy and sweet as a wild Tyrolean air, sung in the shade, by a poor little goatherd, invisible to the solitude that listens. Sometimes, over a whole great mountain-side, there is only that child-like voice. The mountaineers of these forests near the Black Forest have a kind of 'chiaroscuro' song which is charming.

Since I walk every day, I have become known and accepted, to some extent, in the villages. Children playing at being soldiers go out of their way to let me pass; the carter from the Neckar valley smiles at me from under his felt hat adorned with silver braid, with pendant fringes, and artificial roses; the peasants greet me gravely in their large Henri IV hats; young girls and old women consider me a familiar passer-by, and greet me with: 'Guten tag' I wonder, by the way, and here more than anywhere, each time I cross the street in some town or hamlet, how such pretty young girls turn into such ugly old women. — I sketch, here and there, the huts that possess some sort of style. In this country devastated by feudal wars, monarchical wars and revolutionary wars, cabins are built from castle ruins; which produces strange buildings. The other day I came across a labourer's hovel composed as follows: four mud walls, whitewashed, a door and a window at the front; to the right of the door, the crowned lion of Bavaria, carrying the orb and the sceptre, sculpted, almost in the round, on a large slab of red sandstone. To the left of the window, another slab of red sandstone, a large bas-relief representing a fist clenched on a block and half severed by an axe. Above the axe, this erased date, 16… and below the block, another date, 1731; between

the two dates, this word RENOVATUM (*made anew*). Nothing could be more mysterious or sinister than this bas-relief. We are not shown the man, whose fist is represented; we are not shown the executioner, whose axe is visible. This horrible thing seems to have dropped from the clouds. The two bas-reliefs are embedded in the wall, a little below some old roof slats. The Palatine lion turns as if irritated and furious towards this half-severed fist. Now, who set this lion there? What does this hideous bas-relief signify? What crime is signified that led to such punishment? What singular chance led to this idea of adorning a cottage with a roaring lion and a bloody hand? A vine, laden with grapes, climbs joyously across this dark enigma.

By dint of looking, I found some characters engraved on the summit of this bas-relief with the severed fist; and, by disturbing the leaves and bunches of grapes, I deciphered the name *Burg Freiheit*.

That same day, towards evening, I had left the city at noon by the so-called Philosophers' Walk[92], which path leads I know not where, as befits a philosophers' path, and found myself in some valley or other. I began to climb the escarpment of a tall hill by one of those ancient tracks that one often finds in this country, stepped paths, paved with large rough stones, giving the appearance of a Cyclopean wall laid flat on the ground, attributed by the ignorant to the Giants, and by the learned to the Romans, which is as much as to say, to the giants by all.

The light was fading, behind me, over the shores of the Rhine. It was one of those sinister sunsets where the sun seems to sink endlessly into shadow, crushed beneath granite clouds, shapeless, and swimming in an immense pool of blood. I climbed slowly towards the sunset. Little by little it paled, then faded away. When I was halfway up the hill I turned around.

I had before my eyes alone one of those vast twilit landscapes in which the mountains drag themselves across the horizon like enormous snails, of which the rivers and streams, pale and vague beneath the mist, seem to be the silvery traces.

The mountain slope steepened sharply, the rocky staircase stretched on indefinitely; but the heather and the young dwarf-chestnut trees sighed

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[92] Letter XXVIII — Philosophers' Walk (Philosophenweg): 49°25'02.3"N, 8°42'28.1"E

around me, with that friendly and hospitable murmur which invites the traveller to continue. So, I resumed my ascent.

As I reached the summit of the mountain-slope, the moon, that full moon, round and brilliant, which rises with a coppery hue in the plains, a golden hue over the mountains, suddenly appeared before me; and, itself climbing the neighbouring hill, began to glide over the ground amidst the black undergrowth like a splendid disc pushed by invisible genies. The whole chain of peaks and valleys, seen in that light, from the stairs on this pathway of the Giants, took on I know not what supernatural form.

I was on the point of seeking help. The moon lit my path, which suited me perfectly. At the same time, my shadow began to walk beside me as if to keep me company. Ten minutes later, I was at the top of the mountain. From below, I had not thought it so high. Incidentally, that is the story of all great things seen from below. Hence the diminishing and narrow judgment of small men regarding great men.

There was nothing in the sky but the moon. Not a cloud, not a star. It was that sort of bright night that only exists once a month if at all. At the summit of the mountain, a vast ridge covered with heather and scoured by the wind, I had before my eyes not a landscape, but a large geographical map, almost circular, blurred by distance and mist, like that which Jesus Christ would have seen when Satan transported him to the mountain to offer him the kingdoms of the earth. Incidentally, to make such a proposition to one who knows himself to be God and whom one knows to be God, to offer the kingdoms of the earth to one who already possesses the kingdom of heaven, is a mark of stupidity, that I have, between ourselves, difficulty in understanding as regards that sort of antediluvian Voltaire whom we call the Devil.

Towards the north, the heath led to a forest. Not a cottage, not a woodcutter's hut. A profound solitude. As I was walking along the ridge, I saw, a few steps from the barely distinct path, beneath some bristling bushes (regarding bushes, an equivalent to the Latin word *horridus* is lacking in our language: a word which means less than *horrible* and more than *bristling*), I saw, I say, a sort of hole towards which I headed.

It was a fairly large square pit, ten or twelve feet deep, eight or nine feet wide, into which reddish bramble arms sagged, and into which the moonlight

entered through the crevices of the undergrowth. I could vaguely distinguish in its depths a pavement of large flagstones undermined by the rain, and four walls of solid masonry, enormous stones, now shapeless and hideous beneath weeds and moss. I thought I could detect some crude sculptures mixed with rubble on the pavement, and among this rubble a large rounded block, roughly flared, pierced in its middle with a small square hole, which seemed as if it might be a Celtic altar, or the capitol of a pillar from the sixth century. There were no stairs, however, by which to descend into the excavation.

It may have been just a cistern, but I assure you that the time, the place, the moon, the brambles and the confusion of objects glimpsed in the deep, gave this mysterious room without stairs, sunk into the earth, with the sky for a ceiling, something of a wild and formidable air. What was this singular pit? You know me: I persisted, I searched, I wanted to know more about this cave than the moon and the heath told me; I pushed aside the brambles with my cane, I clung to the branches, grasped by the handful, and bent over the shadowy space.

At that moment I heard a deep, broken voice behind me pronounce, distinctly, the word: '*Heidenloch*'. Despite my little German I knew the word. It means: *Pit of the Pagans*. I turned around. No one in the heather; the wind blowing, the moon shining. Nothing more. Only it seemed to me that there, towards the forest, about thirty paces away, between myself and the moon, there was a mass of shadow, a tall bush that I had not as yet noticed.

I thought I was mistaken, and that, like all those who walk in solitude, I was seeing visions, and I started to explore the edge of the pit again. Here the voice rose a second time, and I heard again behind me the three strange syllables: *Heidenloch*. Instantly, I turned around at this, and in turn said, out loud: '*Who's there?*'

At that point, I believe I noticed, and not without an involuntary shudder, I confess, that the tall bush had moved a few steps closer. I said again: '*Who's there?*' and, just as I was about to walk resolutely towards it, I saw it approaching me, and heard for the third time, a faint voice saying: '*Heidenloch*'.

In such deserted places, at a strange hour of the night, one is prone to superstition, and I declare that I was starting to recall all the legends of the Rhine and the Neckar, which rose to my brain like smoke, when the

supernatural bush turned round. Then, what had lurked in the shadows now faced the moon, and I saw a little old woman her chin almost resting on a stick bulging with large knots, her body almost buried beneath a great pile of branches overflowing on all sides, sweeping the earth behind her, and swaying above her head in the most fantastic manner. Her grey eyes looked at me, as she repeated the word: '*Heidenloch! Heidenloch!*' She looked like an old dryad who had been chased away by the woodcutters, bearing her tree on her back.

She was simply a poor old woman, returning from cutting brushwood in the forest, who had seen a stranger and granted him some information, and who was now off to her cottage, dragging her bundle of sticks along the Giants' path, in the moonlight. I thanked her with a few kreutzers, while looking at her with admiration. I have never in my life seen a smaller old woman beneath a more enormous bundle of wood.

She addressed me, with a grateful grunt, a fearful, but gracious grimace, which fifty years before would have been a fresh and charming smile. Then she turned her back on me, that is to say, on the undergrowth; and, after a few minutes, having reached the slope of the mountain, sank into the earth and vanished like an apparition. Her explanation, however, had explained nothing. It was simply a lugubrious word now added to a lugubrious thing. That was all.

I confess to you that I remained a long time in this place, looking at the *Pit of the Pagans*, which is perhaps the open and empty tomb of a Giant, perhaps a Druidic chamber, perhaps the cesspool of a Roman camp, or the rainwater reservoir of some vanished Romanesque monastery, or the hideous sepulchral cellar beneath a demolished gallows, whose silent walls may have been watered with human blood, or piled high with skeletons, or deafened by Sabbath dancers circling about the ossuary; a pit full of darkness, into which the moon today casts a livid ray, and an old woman a sinister word. As I descended the mountain, I saw in the trees, on a neighbouring summit, a ruined tower which is undoubtedly connected to the excavation whose significance is lost today (*the ruins of Saint Stephen's Monastery stood nearby*).

Now, the Pagans, that is to say the Sicambri, according to some, and the Romans, according to others, have left deep traces of their passing in the popular legends which are everywhere mixed with history and encumber it. At Lorch, at the entrance to the Wisperthal, there is another *Pit of the Pagans*

also called the Heidenloch. At Winkel, on the Rhine, the old *Winkela*, there is a *Street of the Pagans*, the Heidengass; and at Wiesbaden, the old *Aquae Mattiacorum*, there is a *Wall of the Pagans*, the Heidenmauer.

I exclude from these pagan remains a kind of arch whose section, covered with ivy, crumbles away on the mountain behind Kaub, about a league from Gutenfels, and which the peasants call the *Pagan Bridge*, the Heidenbrukke, because it seems obvious to me that it is the ruin of a bridge built there by the Swedes during the Thirty Years' War. Though, tradition is never greatly in error. Gustavus Adolphus was almost a Scipio; and what he waged on the Rhine in the seventeenth century was a great classical war, a Roman war. The same strategies that Polybius described as being employed during the Punic War, the military strategist Jean-Charles Folard (*Le Chevalier Folard*) recognised and observed during the Thirty Years' War.

These, dear Louis, are the adventures I meet with on my walks, and I am not at all surprised that tales and legends have sprouted everywhere in a country where bushes walk about at night and speak to passers-by.

The other evening, at dusk, I had before me a high, black, bare hilltop, filling the entire horizon and surmounted at its summit by a large ruined tower, isolated like the Maximilian towers of Linz (*thirty-two small circular forts named after Archduke Maximilian Joseph of Austria-Este and built by him, from 1831-33, to defend that city*). Four large sections of the battlements, their dentils worn, chipped, and transformed to triangular shapes by time, completed the dark silhouette of the tower, and gave it a crown of pointed fleurons. Country folk, the current inhabitants of this ruin, had lit an immense fire of faggots inside, the light from the blaze seen externally through the only three openings of the tower, an arched door at the bottom, and two windows at the top. Illuminated thus, it was no longer a tower, it was the black and monstrous head of the terrifying god Pluto, opening his fiery mouth and gazing over the hill with eyes like burning embers.

At such times, when the sun has set, when the moon has not yet risen, one encounters valleys which seem cluttered with strange collapsed shapes; times when the rocks resemble ruins, and the ruins resemble rocks. Sometimes the poet in me triumphs over the antiquarian, and I am content with such imaginings. Sometimes I return next day, at daybreak; I explore the ruins step by step, and try to determine their age from the outward projection of the machicolations, the shape of the dentils, or the spacing of the ribs.

There is a ruin of this kind, two miles from Heidelberg, in a ravishing valley, an archaeologist's valley and a dreamer's valley. Four old castles (*Vorderburg, Mittelburg, Hinterburg, and Schwalbennest*), on four rocky outcrops, like four vultures face each other; between these four keeps an ancient dilapidated town seems to have taken refuge, in terror, at the summit of a conical mountain, against whose slopes it clings, and from which it has observed for six hundred years the formidable presence of the castles. The Neckar seems to have taken up the cause of the town, and it surrounds the mountain of the burghers with its steel arm. Old forests, at this hour, bedecked with the gilded leaves of autumn, lean over this valley on all sides, as if awaiting battle. There, among the oak and chestnut groves, are tall pine trees, inhabited by owls and squirrels. At certain times the whole scene is not merely a landscape, it is a stage, and one awaits the hour when the actors, the city and the castles, that anthill of dwarves and those four petrified giants, will come to life and commence the drama. This admirable place is called Neckarsteinach[93].

One of these four keeps was converted into a farmhouse, and a second into a summer residence. The third and fourth, which are completely ruined, devastated, and deserted, particularly interested me and made me return several times. The fourth was called, in the twelfth century and is still so called today, *Schwalbennest* (*Schadeck, formerly Shadheck*), which means the *Swallow's Nest*. It was in fact built, with its projecting masonry, as if by some gigantic swallow, on a platform of rock in a bay of the enormous red, sandstone mountain.

In the days of Rudolf I of Habsburg, it was the manor of a dreadful gentleman-bandit called Bligger I, 'the Scourge' (*The 'four castles' of Neckarsteinach were built in the thirteenth century, by the noble family known as the Edelfrein von Steinach whose main forename was Bligger. Bligger II von Steinach, a Minnesinger, has been claimed as the author of the Nibelungenlied epic*). The whole valley, from Heilbronn to Heidelberg, was prey to this human-faced bird of prey. Like all his peers, the Diet summoned him. Bligger refused to attend. The emperor ostracised him from the empire. Bligger only laughed. The League of a Hundred Cities sent its best troops and its finest captain to

[93] Letter XXVIII — Neckarsteinach: 49°24'29.5"N, 8°50'20.0"E

besiege the Swallow's Nest. In three sorties the Scourge exterminated the besiegers. This Bligger was a fighter of colossal stature whose arm struck with the power of that of a blacksmith. Finally, the Pope excommunicated him and all his adherents. When Bligger heard the sentence of excommunication read at the foot of his wall by one of the bannerets of the Holy Empire, he merely shrugged his shoulders.

The next day, when he awoke, he found his castle deserted, and the gate and postern walled up. All his men-at-arms had left the accursed citadel during the night and had blocked the exits. Then one of them, who had hidden himself on the mountain, on a cliff from which he could view the interior of the castle, saw Bligger the Scourge lower his head, and slowly circle his courtyard. He shunned the keep, and walked alone, thus, until evening, the flagstones ringing under his steel sabatons.

As the sun set behind the hills of Neckargemünd, the formidable burgrave fell flat on his face on the pavement.

He was dead. His son Bligger II, was only able to free his family from excommunication by going on crusade (*the Third Crusade, 1189-92*) and bringing back from the Holy Land the head of the Sultan, which still appears today on the shield of the stone knight named Ulrich Landschad (*Ulrich V, died 1369*), a descendant of Bligger II, who sleeps stretched out on his tomb in the Evangelical Church at Neckarsteinach. The family is now extinct.

Isn't this a beautiful story, Louis, and just as worth the telling as the great battles and marriages of kings? Yet it must be retrieved from the popular memory. Historians disdain these details. They say they are trivial; I declare them great. They are old wives' tales, they add; but do you know anything more magnificent and more terrible than old wives' tales? To me, Homer seems so sublime that I rank the *Iliad* among the old wives' tales.

On this subject, George Buchanan (*author of Rerum Scoticarum Historia, 1582*), whom I was leafing through recently in the Heidelberg library, makes a naive admission. This is what he writes about 'Macbeth': '*Multa hic fabulose affingunt; sed, quia theatris aut fabulis milesiis sunt aptiora quam historiae, ea omitto: some of our people here fabricate many a thing in a fabulous manner; but because they are more suitable for theatres or Milesian fables than history, I omit them.*' What Buchanan thus places in parentheses is Shakespeare.

The people, moreover, are not wrong. They love great personages, and they love stories. They even willingly exaggerate aspects of the characters in their legends, and place them, by an august magnification of detail, at the level of the great men of history. Chroniclers are no shyer than historians of overturning the order of Nature when it is a question of solemnising one of their heroes. When the Scottish laird Donwald assassinated King Duff (*Dubh mac Maíl Chaluim, in 967*) in the castle of Forres, there were wonders, and the sun was veiled as at the death of Caesar (*note the solar eclipse of July 967*).

As long as the narrators of these happenings are called Hector Boece (*Scottish philosopher and historian*) or Hailes (*David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, 3rd Baronet of Hailes, advocate, judge, and historian*), such happenings are not deemed history, but mere tales. The moment those narrators are called Homer, Virgil or Shakespeare, those same events are more than mere history, they are deemed epic.

Schwalbennest Castle still has a proud and sombre appearance today. It is a square keep whose two remaining corners facing the valley are hidden and absorbed by round turrets with machicolations; a double circumvallation covered with ivy envelops the keep, and the whole ruin clings, as I said, to the side of the mountain almost overhanging the Neckar.

I climbed the path, once so formidable, where boiling oil, burning pitch, and molten lead once flowed from the machicolations. I entered through that postern gate and door that were once walled up, now wide crevices that allow passage to the first comer, and I carved with a nail these words on a stone of the doorframe: '*Where the door of the tomb has closed on a family to open no more, the door of the house opens to close no more.*'

The interior of the burg has a gloomy appearance. Tree roots, here and there, have lifted the old twelfth-century paving stones, on which Bligger's colossal armour resonated when that same burgrave fell down dead. Water, from the mountain which is penetrated by springs, continues to ooze drop by drop into the half-filled cistern. Strawberry plants in bloom flourish between the flagstones. The stones of the walls, lashed by the rain and gnawed by the moonlight, are pockmarked with a thousand holes where the larvae of ghostly butterflies spin their cocoons in the shadows. No human footsteps can be heard in this dwelling. At the inaccessible windows of the keep the wild chatelaines of this ruin appear: ferns, waving their fans, and hemlocks, lowering their parasols. The great hall, whose roof and ceilings

have collapsed, is still decorated regally with thirteen wide-open windows overlooking the valley. When I was there, the setting sun framed a magnificent Claude Lorrain landscape in one of them.

The other keep has, so to speak, no name, no history, no date, almost no shape, and was much more formidable than the Swallow's Nest. If we forget for a moment the square tower that still dominates it, it is no longer a keep, no longer a dwelling, no longer a ruin, no longer a building with human form (for mankind gives form to buildings); it is a block, a cavernous mass, a rock pierced like a lung with bronchi and alveoli; it is an enormous madrepore (*mass of stony coral*) that penetrates and inextricably fills, with all its antennae, all its feet, fingers, necks, spirals, beaks, trunks, and with all its hair-like entangling vegetation, that frightening mass of polyps. I entered with great difficulty, making a noise in the undergrowth like a wild beast.

This castle (*Hinterburg*) is a century older than the Schwalbennest. The square tower has only one entrance, a twelfth-century portal, below which the two diamond-edged consoles that supported the drawbridge still protrude from the walls, at a height of about forty feet. The shadowy archivolt of this inaccessible doorway is as pure as if the stone were cut yesterday.

The only thing, apart from the square tower, that still has a shape is a large round tower, three-quarters razed, which flanked one of the corners of the wall, and which I saw during my ascent. Once I had entered the labyrinthine caverns of the collapsed castle, I had some difficulty finding it again. Finally, I noticed between two clumps of brambles the narrow mouth of a corridor. I slipped through it, and thus arrived at a small, unusual crossroads: there were four vaulted, low oblong cells, radiating towards four different points of the valley, each ending in a loophole, and all four starting from the end of the corridor where I had entered. Imagine the inside of a mould where the bronze to form the foot of a colossal eagle was cooling. These four cells were embrasures for onagers (*catapults*) or falcons (*mangonels*). From the point where I was, the burgrave could see from the same place, through the first loophole, on his right, the side of the mountain; through the second, opposite him, the Schwalbennest; through the third, the town clustered on the hill-slopes; and, through the fourth, on his left, the other two castles (*Mittleburg and Vorderberg)* in the valley. This eagle's claw, the nails of which were four war-machines, was the interior of the round tower.

Between the four embrasures, everything was massive, cemented, granite masonry. I sketched the Schwalbennest as seen through the loophole. In spring, the ruin, transformed to a bouquet of flowers, must be quite charming. Beyond this, no one here knows anything about the burg. It lacks a legend or even a ghost. The generations who inhabited it have seemingly entered, one after another, into a bottomless cavern, and not a single shadow has emerged.

As I had arrived at sunset, night fell while I was still there. It was then that this ruin in the scrubland gradually filled with strange noises. Dear Louis, if anyone ever speaks to you of the silence of ruins at night, make an exception, I beg you, of Hinterburg castle, above Neckarsteinach. I have never in my life heard such a din. You know that delightful tumult that bursts forth in a forest, in April, at sunrise; a note springs from every branch, a melody from every tree; the warbler chirps, the wood-pigeon coos, the goldfinch trills and buzzes, the sparrow, a merry fife, whistles gaily amidst the tutti. The wood is an orchestra. All those winged voices sing at once, spreading the mysterious symphony of the great invisible musician over the hills and meadows. In the Hinterburg, at dusk, it is the same, but transformed to a thing of horror. All the monsters in the shadows wake and swarm. The bat beats its wings, the spider taps the wall with a hammer, the toad whirls its hideous rattle. Who knows what poisonous and funereal life crawls between the stones, in the grass, among the branches. And then, dull rumblings, strange knocking, yelping, crackling sounds beneath the leaves, faint sighs, that one hears close to oneself, the weird moans of deformed beings exhaling lugubrious noises: what one has never heard before, howled or murmured, by what one never sees. At times dreadful cries rise suddenly from the ruined and deserted rooms; uttered by the owls who moan like dying people. At other moments, one thinks one hears something treading through the thicket a few steps away; it is the noise of drooping branches moving of their own accord. Two burning coals, fallen from who knows what furnace, shine in the shadows among the brambles; an owl there is gazing at you.

I hurried away, feeling rather ill at ease, unable to see where to set my hands in the darkness, prodding the stones with the tip of my cane. I assure you that I felt a vast surge of joy when, as I emerged from the dark and impenetrable canopy of vegetation that encloses and envelops the ruins, the blue sky, vague, starry and splendid, appeared to me like an immense basin

of lapis lazuli flecked with gold, seen through a gap in the mountains. It seemed to me that I had emerged from the grave, to embrace life once more.

In the evening, after such expeditions, I return to the city. On the way I meet groups of students from the renowned University of Heidelberg; noble, serious young men with thoughtful expressions. The road runs beside the Neckar. The bell of Neuburg Abbey rings at intervals, in the distance. The hills cast their long shadows on the river; the water sparkles in the moonlight, glittering with the shimmer of silver; long dark boats ride the rapids like arrows, or free of boats and passers-by, beyond the houses, the valley is silent, the river deserted, and the rocks emerging haphazardly amidst the currents take on the shapes of crocodiles and giant frogs, surfacing so as to breathe the evening air above.

Since I am speaking of sunsets, twilight, and moonlight, I must tell you about the evening two days ago. To me, as you know, these great events are never 'the same', nor do I consider myself spared from gazing at the heavens today merely because I saw them yesterday. So, allow me to continue. As the day was declining, I climbed, amidst a fine chestnut grove overlooking the Castle of Heidelberg (*on the Jettenbühl*), to a high hill called the Kleiner Gaisberg. There was a fortress there in the twelfth century, built by Conrad of Hohenstauffen, Count Palatine of the Holy Roman Empire, and half-brother to the Emperor Barbarossa. From the remains of this fortress, burned in 1278 at the same time as the city of Heidelberg, the Swedes made a dry-stone entrenchment in 1633; at present, a farmer has made Gustavus Adolphus' entrenchment the boundary to his potato field.

The Rhine plain, seen from the Kleiner Gaisberg, is like the ocean seen from the Bois-Rosé cliff (*La Falaise d'Amont, the cliff at Fécamp, which the Chevalier de Bois-Rosé, companion of Henri de Navarre, the future Henri IV, climbed at night, with fifty men, to take the fort of Bourg-Baudouin*). The horizon is immense. Mannheim, Philippsburg, the high bell-towers of Speyer, a host of villages, forests, endless plains, the Rhine, the Neckar, countless islands, and in the background the Vosges.

To the right, on the Heiligenberg, a wooded area which fifteen hundred years ago was called *Mons Piri*, and a thousand years ago *Aberinesberg*, the ruins tell the same story as those of Conrad's keep on the Gaisberg. The Romans had erected a temple to Jupiter and a temple to Mercury, there; from the debris of these two temples, Clovis, after the Battle of Tolbiac in 496, built a

palace that the Frankish kings inhabited. Four hundred years or so later, under Louis the German, Thiotroch, Abbot of Lorsch, built a church from the remains of Clovis' palace. In 1622, the Imperial army, commanded by the Count of Tilly (*Johann Tserclaes*) seized Heiligenberg, tore down the Romanesque abbey of Thiotroch, and built batteries and breastworks on the mountain ridge from the rubble. Today, of these stones that were a temple to Jupiter, a palace of the Frankish kings, a Catholic church, and an Imperial battery, the folk of the neighbouring villages make dwellings.

I sat at the top of the Gaisberg, next to a wild honeysuckle still in bloom, on a stone placed there during the Thirty Years' War. The sun had disappeared. I contemplated the magnificent landscape. A few clouds fled towards the east. The sunset laid its long bands painted with the colours of the solar spectrum over the violet-tinted Vosges. A star shone in the clearest part of the sky.

It seemed to me that all those men, those ghosts, those shadows who had passed through these mountains for two thousand years, Attila, Clovis, Conrad of Hohenstauffen, Barbarossa, Frederick I the Victorious, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne (*Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, vicomte de Turenne*), and Custine (*Adam Philippe, Comte de Custine*), still stood there behind me and gazed like me at that splendid view. I had, below my feet the ruined Hohenstauffen, to my right the Roman ruins; below me, hanging over the precipice, the Palatinate ruins; in the background, in the mist, a humble church built by the Catholics in the fifteenth century, despoiled by the Protestants in the sixteenth, and today divided by a partition between the Protestants and the Catholics, that is to say, in the eyes of Rome, half paradise and half hell, profaned, and destroyed; around this church, a little town four times burned, three times bombarded, sacked, rebuilt, devastated and rebuilt, yesterday a princely residence, today a university factory, school, and workshop city, a city of bachelors and working people, that is to say, an anthill of children studying the obscure, and adults inhabiting nothingness; in the space before me, I had the river with its eternal gleam of mother-of-pearl, the sky's eternal sapphire, the clouds ever purple, the ever diamantine stars; beside me the flowers forever fragrant, the wind ever joyful, the trees always trembling and youthful. At that moment, I felt amidst all that immensity the smallness of man and the greatness of God, and there came to me one of those dazzling sensations that Nature delivers, akin to what must be felt by

those eagles one sees motionless, in the evening, at the summit of the Alps or the Atlas Mountains, absorbed in profound contemplation.

You know, Louis, in high places, in solemn moments, there is a flowing tide of ideas that gradually invades the mind and almost floods the intellect. To tell you everything that passed and repassed in my mind during those two or three hours of reverie on the Gaisberg would be impossible.

Four thousand years ago, this vast countryside, which can be seen from its summit, wide as a sea, was indeed a lake, an immense lake whose waves beat against this great circle of mountains, Mont Tonerre, the Taunus, the Melibokus, Mons Piri, and the Vosges. The Rhine, like the Niagara, descended thence, from lake to lake, to the Ocean. An ancient legend tells that a necromancer, captured by a king, dried up this lake to obtain his freedom. This imprisoned magician was, in truth, the captive Rhine, which gnawed at the western barrier of the lake in order to plunge more deeply between the double chain of extinct volcanoes that begins with the Taunus and ends at the Seven Mountains. Since then, the lake has become a plain, mankind has succeeded the waves, and keeps have occupied the reefs.

I have mentioned some of the great ghosts from history who have crossed this plain over the past twenty centuries. Caesar was the first, Bonaparte the last. There are cities around which, periodically, through a sort of local fatality ambient in the air, through a combination of their geographical situation and their political value, knots of events form, at certain times, as knots of clouds form over high mountains. Heidelberg is one of those cities.

To speak only of its castle (for I must return now to speaking of it, and indeed should have started here), what adventures has it not experienced! For five hundred years it has been the victim of everything that has shaken Europe, and has ended in ruins. This is due to the fact that, in truth, the Castle of Heidelberg, residence of the Count Palatine, who bowed only to kings, emperors, and popes, and was too grand to remain bowed at their feet, could only raise its own head by conflicting with them; this is due, I say, to the fact that the Castle of Heidelberg has always adopted an attitude of opposition to the powers that be. From 1300, the time of its foundation, that conflict began with a Thebaid; it had, in Count Palatine Rudolph I and the Emperor Louis IV the Bavarian, its Eteocles and its Polynices, those two unnatural brothers. Then the role of the Elector expanded. In 1400, the

Palatine Rupert II, assisted by the three electors of the Rhine, deposed Emperor Wenceslaus and took his place; one hundred and twenty years later, in 1519, the Palatine Frederick II made the young King Charles I of Spain Emperor, as Charles V. In 1415, Duke Louis VII, the Bearded, had declared himself protector of the Council of Constance, and imprisoned in his Heidelberg castle a Pope, John XXIII (*the Pisan antipope*), whom he calls, in a letter to the emperor, *your simoniac Baldassarre Cossa.* A century later, Luther took refuge in Mannheim, near this same Heidelberg, under the wing of the Palatine Frederick V. I deliberately omit here, in order to tell you more about him in a moment, Frederick I the Victorious, the great Titan of Heidelberg. In 1619, Frederick V, a young man of twenty-three, seized the royal crown of Bohemia in spite of the emperor, and in 1685 the Palatine Philip William of Neuberg, an old man of seventy-nine, took the Elector's hat in spite of the King of France. After that, Heidelberg experienced endless struggles, upheavals, and commotions; the Thirty Years' War, which enhanced Gustavus Adolphus' glory; and the Palatinate War, which was a stain on that of Turenne. Every formidable event struck this castle. Three emperors, Louis of Bavaria, Adolf of Nassau and Leopold of Austria, besieged it; Pius II launched excommunications from here; Louis XIV launched thunderbolts.

One could even say that heaven intervened. On June 23, 1764, the day before Charles Theodore, Count Palatine of the Rhine, was due to arrive at the castle and establish his residence there (which, incidentally, would have been a great misfortune; for, if Charles Theodore had spent his thirties there, the severe ruin we admire today would, without a doubt, be encrusted with hideous Pompadour damascening); on the eve of that day, therefore, when the prince's furniture was already loaded at the door of the Church of the Holy Spirit, a lightning-bolt from the heavens struck the octagonal tower, set fire to the roof, and completed the destruction of the centuries-old castle in a few hours. Already two hundred years earlier, in 1537, the old palace built by Conrad on the Gaisberg and converted by Frederick II into a powder magazine had been struck by lightning and destroyed. Remarkably, the same phenomenon struck those two castles of Heidelberg, the keep of the Hohenstauffen, and the manor of the Palatines. They both ended like a tragic dream, *with a thunderclap.*

That dull, veiled, jealous conflict, of which I spoke to you just now, between the elector and the emperor, the sovereign count and the Caesar, is

visibly translated to, and bursts forth on the facades of the castle. On the palace of Elector Palatine Otto-Henry, the artist, full of the spirit of that prince, has set medallions of Roman emperors. Among these Caesars he has displayed Nero, and, surreptitiously, added Brutus. He has subordinated the composition of his three storied building to four statues proudly placed on the ground floor. These four statues are symbols; they are demigods and demi-kings. Here are Joshua, Samson, Hercules, and David. As regards David he has chosen to show not the king, but the shepherd. Each statue has an inscription below, which seeks to explain the Elector Palatine's proud thought. Beneath Joshua's feet one reads:

DUKE JOSHUA (HERZOG JOSHUA)

WITH GOD'S AID

CAUSED

THIRTY-ONE KINGS TO PERISH

Samson, in his legend, almost becomes an elector palatine:

SAMSON THE STRONG

WAS GOD'S LIEUTENANT

AND GOVERNED ISRAEL

FOR TWENTY YEARS

Hercules is Frederick II, who said, after having saved Germany twice, and beaten the Turks at the head of the army of the German Confederation:

I AM HERCULES

SON OF JUPITER

KNOWN BY MY NOBLE WORKS

AND WIDELY KNOWN

Finally, David, the shepherd David, who holds his sling in one hand and Goliath's head in the other, is the usurper legitimised by glory, Frederick the Victorious, who seemingly addresses the Emperor Adolph:

DAVID WAS A YOUNG BOY

COURAGEOUS AND CAUTIOUS;

FROM INSOLENT GOLIATH

HE SEVERED THE HEAD

Goliath should have been warned. The Elector Palatine was, indeed, a great and formidable prince. He held the same rank among the Ducal Electors as the Archbishop of Mainz among the Bishop-Electors. He carried the orb of the Holy Roman Empire at Germanic solemnities. Since the time of Charles V, it was added to his coat of arms.

The Counts Palatine freely displayed their literacy, the ornament and coquetry of true princes. In the fourteenth century (in *1386*) Rupert I, the Elder founded the University of Heidelberg; in the seventeenth, the Palatine Charles I Louis was a doctor of the University of Oxford. Otto Heinrich the Magnanimous, Elector Palatine (*who rebuilt Heidelberg Castle*) drew and sculpted. It is true that Otto Heinrich belongs to that admirable sixteenth century, which commonly combined the prince and the artist on its dazzling summits. Charles V picked up Titian's brush. Francis I, like Charles IX later, wrote verses, painted and drew. '*Molte volte*', says Gian Paulo Lamozzo (*author of 'Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura' 1584, and 'Idea del tempio della pittura', 1590*) '*si dilettava di prendere lo stilo in mano e esercitarsi nel disegnare e dipingere*: *he often enjoyed taking the stylus in his hand and practicing drawing and painting.*'

Frederick the Victorious was a learned prince too, thanks to his old chaplain the astronomer and humanist Mathias von Kemnat (*Matthias Widmann*), who was the twin so to speak at the time, in the fifteenth century, of Charles Martin the Bold, the valiant Duke of Burgundy, and one whose friendship the latter preferred to the title of king. History has no prouder a figure. He commenced with usurpation, because his country needed a man and not a child (*He was regent for his nephew Philip, but arrogated the Elector's title*

in 1451). He defended the Palatinate against the emperor (*Frederick III*), and the Archbishop of Mainz (*Diether von Isenburg*) against Pope Pius II; he was thrice excommunicated; he defeated the League of Thirteen Princes; he lent support to the Rhine Hanseatic League; he stood against all of Germany; he won the Battle of Pfeddersheim (*1460*), and that of Seckenheim (*1462*) after which he gave his prisoners, Margrave Charles I of Baden; George of Baden, Bishop of Metz; Count Ulrich V of Württemberg, and their one hundred and twenty-three knights, a famous *meal without bread*; he declared war on the burgrave-bandits and purged the Neckar of them, as Barbarossa and Rudolph of Habsburg had purged the Rhine; finally, after a life in military camp, he died in a cloister. A life similar to that of Frederick II the Great, later in history, a death similar to that of Charles V. A hero with a dual aspect, in whom Providence sketched those two great leaders in advance.

Seen in bird's eye view, Heidelberg Castle[94] looks roughly like an F, as if chance had decided to make this magnificent manor house into a gigantic initial, that of the victorious Frederick, its most illustrious inhabitant.

The long jamb of the F is parallel to the Neckar, and faces north towards the town, which the castle, halfway up the slope, dominates. The larger arm, which runs at right angles to the upper end of the jamb, extends above a valley which separates it from the mountains to the east. The smaller arm in the middle, shortened by the ruins which terminate it, closes off the castle to the west, towards the Rhine plain, and turns its towers, which it still seems to hold, despite its broken wrist, towards Mount Gaisberg.

The Heidelberg manor possesses every feature. It is one of those buildings in which beauties scattered elsewhere accumulate and mingle. There are notched towers as at Château de Pierrefonds; jewel-like facades as at Château d'Anet; halves of moats that have fallen in one piece into the ditch as at Rheinfels Castle; large, sad, crumbling, mossy pools, as at the Villa Pamphili; regal fireplaces full of brambles as at the Château de Meung-sur-Loire; grandeur as at Tancarville Castle; grace as at Chambord; a sense of dread as at Chillon.

The traces of war and assault are everywhere. One cannot conceive with what fury the French in particular must have ravaged this castle from 1689

[94] Letter XXVIII — Heidelberg Castle (Schloss): 49°24'37.4"N, 8°42'55.4"E

to 1693 (*during the Nine Year's War*). They returned thrice or more. They exploded mines beneath the terraces, and in the bowels of the main towers; they set fire to the roofs; they sent bombs flying amidst the Dianas and Venuses of the most delicate facades. I saw traces of cannonball fragments embedded in the doorframes of those ravishing windows on the ground floor and in the Knights' Hall, windows through which the Palatine had leapt in an attempt to *become a man*. This same Palatine (*Philipp Wilhelm von Neuberg*), so witty, so wicked, and so desperate to be a girl, was later the cause of the war. Strangely enough, there are cities that have been lost by women who were marvels of beauty; this miracle of ugliness lost Heidelberg.

Yet, whatever the devastation, when one climbs to the castle via the ramps, arches, and terraces which lead there, one regrets that the longer side facing the town, although admirably composed, at its western end, of a gutted tower which was the great tower; at its eastern end, of a beautiful octagonal tower which was the bell-tower; and, at its centre, of a hôtel with two gables, in the style of 1600, which was the palace of Frederick IV; one regrets, I say, that this whole large side is rather monotonous. I confess I would prefer one or two breaches there. If I had gained the honour of accompanying Marshal de Lorges (*Guy Aldonce de Durfort*) in his savage action of 1693, I would have advised him to fire a few cannon volleys, which might have enlivened the tedious lines of the great facade. When one creates a ruin, one should do so thoroughly.

You recall the admirable Château de Blois, so *stupidly* employed as a barracks, the inner courtyard of which has four facades, each telling a tale of great architecture. Well, when one enters the inner courtyard of the Palatines, the impression is no less profound or less complex. One is dazzled. One is tempted to close one's eyes, as one is tempted to plug one's ears in front of Paolo Veronese' 'Marriage at Cana'. In this courtyard there is an immense radiance which seems to shine from all sides at once. Everything solicits one, and calls out to one. Facing the palace of Frederick IV, one has before one's eyes the two high triangular pediments of the dense and dark facade, with widely projecting entablatures, where between four rows of windows, and carved with the proudest of chisels, stand nine Palatines, two kings and five emperors. To its right, is Otto Henry's exquisite Italian frontage with its divinities, chimeras, and nymphs, velveted with soft powdery shadows, who seem to live and breathe; with its Roman Caesars, its Greek demigods, its

Hebrew heroes, and its porch with sculptures from Ariosto (*the author of 'Orlando Furioso'*). To its left, one glimpses the Gothic frontispiece of the palace of Louis VII the Bearded, furiously pierced and cracked as if by blows from the horns of a gigantic bull. Behind it, under the ogives of a porch sheltering a half-filled well, are the four grey granite columns given by Pope Leo III to the great Emperor of Aix-la-Chapelle (*Charlemagne*), brought from Ravenna to the banks of the Rhine in the eighth century, and in the fifteenth from the banks of the Rhine to the banks of the Neckar, and which, after having seen the fall of Charlemagne's palace at Ingelheim, saw the Palatine castle crumble at Heidelberg. The entire pavement of the courtyard, in fact, is blocked by crumbling steps, dried-up fountains, and chipped basins. Everywhere the stone is cracking and nettles are emerging.

The two Renaissance facades that give such splendor to this courtyard are of red sandstone, while the statues that adorn them are of white sandstone, an admirable combination that proves that those great sculptors were also great colourists. Over time, the red sandstone has rusted and the white sandstone has become gilded. Of these two facades, the one, that of Frederick IV, is entirely severe; the other, that of Otto Henry, is entirely charming. The first is historical, the second is out of myth and legend. Charlemagne dominates one, Jupiter dominates the other.

The more one contemplates those two juxtaposed palaces, and the more one penetrates their marvellous details, the more one is overcome by sadness. A strange destiny has overtaken these masterpieces of marble and stone; a stupid passer-by as disfigured them, or an absurd cannonball annihilated them; and it is not the artists, it is the rulers, whose names are attached to them. No one today knows who the divinely-inspired artists who built and sculpted the walls of Heidelberg were. The glory of ten great artists floats above this illustrious ruin without our being able to settle on their names. Some unknown 'Boccador' (*Domenico da Cortona*) designed the palace of Frederick IV, some unknown 'Primaticcio' (*Francesco Primaticcio*) composed the façade of Otto-Heinrich; a 'Cesare Cesariano', his name lost amidst shadows, created the pure equilaterally-triangular ogives of Louis V's manor. Here are arabesques by some vanished 'Raphael', figurines by an unknown 'Benvenuto Cellini'. Darkness shrouds them all. Soon these marble poems will die, their poets being dead already. Do you not think. Louis, that the bitterest denial of justice is the denial of glory, and mere oblivion.

For whom did they work, these admirable men? Alas, for the wind that blows, for the grass that grows, for the ivy that seeks to compare its foliage to theirs, for the swallow that passes by, for the rain that falls, for the night that descends.

It is a singular thing that the three or more bombardments which ploughed through these two facades chose not to ravage them in the same manner. On Otto Heinrich's facade, they shattered scarcely anything but cornices or architraves. The immortal Olympians who populate it barely suffered. Neither Hercules, nor Minerva, nor Hebe, were touched. The cannonballs and the fire-bombs whirred around these invulnerable statues without marring them. Contrariwise, the sixteen crowned knights who have lion-headed knee-guards and display so valiant a presence on that of Frederick IV were treated like men of war by the bombs. Almost all were wounded. The emperor Otto I, was scarred across the face; Otto III, the King of Hungary, had his left leg shattered; Otto Heinrich, the Elector Palatine, had his hand blown off. A bullet disfigured Frederick III the Pious. A bomb fragment cut Frederick II in two, and broke the back of John Casimir (*a younger son of Frederick III*). In these assaults, the one who begins this royal series of statues, at the top, near the sky, Charlemagne, lost his orb, and the one at the bottom, Frederick IV, lost his sceptre.

Nonetheless, nothing is more superb than that legion of princes, all mutilated, yet all still standing. The anger of Leopold I and Louis XIV, the celestial anger's thunder and lightning, the French Revolution, the anger of the people, assailed them in vain; each is there still, defending the facade, hip forward, leg outstretched, heel firmly planted, head held high. The lion of Bavaria grimaces proudly beneath their feet. On the second floor, beneath a leafy branch that has pierced the architrave and that toys gracefully with the stony plumes of his helmet, Frederick I the Victorious half-draws his sword. The sculptor has imbued his face with an air of Ajax offering combat to Jupiter, or Nimrod shooting his arrow at Jehovah.

It must have been a wondrous spectacle, those two palaces of Otto Heinrich and Frederick IV, seen by the light of that bombardment on the fatal night of May 21, 1693. Marshal de Lorges had placed a battery on the plain, in front of the village of Neuenheim, another on the Heiligenberg, a third on the road to Wolfsbrunnen, a fourth on the Kleine Gaisberg. From these encircling points, the mortars, surrounding Heidelberg like a ring of

dreadful hydra-heads, plunged long necks of flame into the courtyard of the castle, relentlessly, and simultaneously from all sides; the shells scored the paving with their iron skulls; rifled cannonballs and red-hot cannonballs flew amidst trails of fire, and by their light, tumultuous and terrible, the colossi of the Electors Palatine and the Emperors, armoured like scarabs, sword in hand, were outlined in combat posture, on Frederick IV's facade; while beside them, on the other facade, naked, serene and tranquil, vaguely lit by the reflections from the grenades, the radiant gods and blushing goddesses smiled beneath a rain of bombs.

Among these royal figures, who seem to be more like petrified souls than statues, two only seemed to me to have lost a degree of pride; Louis V and Frederick V. Indeed they are not part of the dazzling constellation of princes scattered over the palace of Frederick IV. They are leaning in the shadows against the ruin which was once the Great Tower.

Frederick V is overwhelmed; it seems that he is thinking deeply about the error that determined his destiny. The crown of Bohemia, seized by the Bohemians from the brow of Ferdinand II of Austria had been offered by them to the Elector of Saxony, who refused it; then to Charles Emmanuel II, Duke of Savoy, who refused it; then to Christian IV, King of Denmark, who refused it; they finally offered it to the Palatine Frederick V, who, advised by his wife, took this crown with both hands He had himself crowned in Prague in 1619; then war broke out, and he went away to die, a wandering exile, banished by the events he himself had caused, far from his country. His wife was Elizabeth Stuart of England (*the 'Winter Queen'*), granddaughter of Mary Queen of Scots. She had brought her husband, as a dowry, her family's ill destiny. It was not so much that Elizabeth wed a king, as that Frederick V wed exile.

Frederick V, in that dark niche where the bushes almost completely hide him, still has on his head the Bohemian crown, which initiated the Thirty Years' War; but he lacks the hands that once grasped it. Strangely enough, it was a Swedish bomb that severed them.

Louis V, next to him, is no less gloomy. He seems aware that there are no longer guards on the parade ground, that the *'never-empty'* tower is empty, that there are no longer priests in the chapel, nor lions in the Giant's Tower, nor Electors in Germany, nor Palatines in Heidelberg, and that the Great Tower he built which, after the keep of Bourges (*the main tower of the Castle of*

Charles VII at Mehun-sur-Yèvre), was the highest tower in Europe, leans partially-collapsed behind him. He looks sadly at the ivy which is gradually creeping across his face.

This large tower had a counterpart at the other end of this palace-fortress, the *Tower of Frederick the Victorious*. Around 1455, Frederick I, wishing to make his castle impregnable, had a mighty tower built above the small valley that separates it from the mountains to the east. This tower was eighty feet high, built of granite and closed with iron gates. The side of its wall that faced the enemy was twenty feet thick. Frederick had three formidable batteries erected inside, one above the other, and, for the purpose of manoeuvering his war-engines, sealed enormous iron rings in the vaulting that still hang there. In 1610, his great-grandnephew Frederick IV raised this immense tower by a large octagonal storey. When the prodigious construction was finished and complete, the thumb of an angry King of France rested upon it and cracked it like a nut. Today the *Tower of Frederick the Victorious* is referred to as the *Split Tower.* Half of that colossal cylinder of masonry lies in the ditch. Other broken sections have parted from the whole, and would have collapsed long ago, but monstrous trees have seized them in their powerful claws and hold them suspended above the abyss.

A few steps from this terrifying ruin, chance has created a delightful one; the interior of the palace of Otto Heinrich, of which until now, dear Louis, I have only described the facade. There, standing wide-open, delivered to the first comer, beneath the sun and rain, the snow and wind, without ceiling, panelling, or roof, amidst the dilapidated walls pierced as if at random, are twelve Renaissance doors, twelve jewels akin to goldsmith's work, twelve masterpieces, twelve idylls of stone, amidst which are mingled, as if emerging from the same roots, an admirable and charming host of wild flowers worthy of the Palatines, *consule dignae* (*'worthy of a consul', Virgil: 'Eclogue IV', line 3*). There is something inexpressible in this mixture of art and reality; there is at the same time conflict and harmony; Nature, which rivals Beethoven, also rivals the sculptor, Jean Goujon. Arabesques render brushwood, brushwood forms arabesques. One knows not which to choose and admire the most, the living leaf or the sculpted one.

For myself, it seemed to me that the ruin is full of divine order; that this palace, built by the faeries of the Renaissance, is now in its natural state. All those marvellous fantasies of free and intense art must have been ill at ease

in rooms where peace or war were signed, where shadowy princes dreamed, where queens were married, where German emperors were designated. Could these Vertumni, Pomonas and Ganymedes understand aught of the ideas emerging from the mind of Frederick IV or Frederick V, by the grace of God, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Vicar of the Holy Roman Empire, Elector, Duke of Upper and Lower Bavaria? A great lord slept in this room with a king's daughter under a ducal canopy; now there is neither lord, nor king's daughter, nor canopy, nor even a ceiling; bindweed thrives in it, and wild mint perfumes it. Which is fine. Far better. These charming sculptures were made to be kissed by flowers, and gazed at by the stars. Nature, just and holy, celebrates the work, though the workmen are forgotten.

Besides an innumerable quantity of basins, grottoes and fountains, pavilions and triumphal arches, besides the chapel dedicated to Saint Ulrich of Augsburg, and erected by Julius III as the foremost chapel in Germany; besides the large Military Square, the two arsenals, the Handball Court of Elector Charles, the Lion Menagerie, the Aviary, the Bird House, the Great Chancellery, and the Mint flanked by four turrets, Heidelberg Castle contained and united, in its magnificent whole, eight palaces of eight princes, from eight different eras. One from the fourteenth century, the palace of Pfalzgraf Rudolf III; one from the fifteenth century, the palace of Emperor Rupert III; three from the sixteenth: the palaces of Louis V, Frederick II, and Otto Heinrich; three from the seventeenth: those of Frederick IV, Frederick V, and Elizabeth the White Queen. Its ruin today consists of all those ruins.

Besides the turrets, the arbours and the lantern-stairs of the interior, there were nine exterior towers: the Charles Tower, the Rondelle, the Great Tower, the Tower of Frederick the Victorious, the Never-Empty Tower, the Communication Tower, the Giant's Tower, the Octagonal Tower, and the Library tower, which contained the *Palatine Library* of the Vatican, and whose Greek manuscripts and Byzantine missals served as bedding, for lack of straw, for the horses of the Imperial army in 1622.

Five of these towers still exist: the Library Tower, the Octagonal Tower, the Great Tower, the Split Tower (*the Tower of Frederick the Victorious*), and the Giant's Tower, the only one that is square.

A strange destiny! This prodigious palace, once the scene of festivals and wars, the residence of the Counts of the Rhine and the Dukes of Bavaria, the Kings of Bohemia and the Emperors of Germany, is today nothing more than the tangled remains of an empty barrel.

Beneath the Church of St. Philibert in Tournus is a crypt, beneath Saint-Denis a sepulchre, beneath Heidelberg Castle a cellar. When you have traversed this grandiose remnant, this epic of collapsed ruins, the demolished halls of arms, the palaces full of moss, brambles, shade and oblivion, the towers that tottered like drunken men and fell like dead men, the vast courtyards where, barely two hundred years ago, a landsknecht stood on the steps, pike raised high, all this great edifice, all this great witness to history, a man arrives with a lantern, opens a low door, shows you a dark staircase, and beckons you down. You descend, the vault is dark, the crypt is a meditative place, the basement windows cast a religious half-light, you expect the tombs of the Electors Palatine, you find a large tun, a Pantagruelian fantasy, a throne for a colossal Jean Ramponneau (*a famed eighteenth-century Parisian wine-merchant*). On seeing this strange object, one thinks one hears, amidst the darkness of the ruins, an immense burst of Gargantuan laughter.

The Heidelberg Tun is Rabelais lodged with Homer. The Great Tun, lying on its side in the vast cellar that shelters it, presents the appearance of a ship in dry-dock. It is twenty-four feet in diameter and thirty-three feet long. It bears on its front face a rocaille shield on which is sculpted the cipher of the Elector Karl Theodore. Two double-flighted staircases wind around it, and rise to a platform set on its back. It can hold two hundred and thirty-six casks worth of wine, each cask containing twelve hundred double-sized bottles; from which it follows that the Great Tun of Heidelberg can hold five hundred and sixty-six thousand four hundred ordinary-sized bottles. It was filled through a hole pierced in the vault above the bung, and emptied with a pump that is still hanging there on the wall. This monster cask was filled three times with Rhine wine. The wine matured and improved there. The first time it was filled, the Elector and the members of his court danced on the platform above it. It has stood empty since 1770.

However, this barrel is not the old Great Tun of Heidelberg, covered with curious sculptures and constructed in 1595 by Elector John Casimir, to solemnise some kind of reconciliation between the Lutherans and Calvinists. Karl Theodore had it broken up around 1750, and constructed this one, larger, but less ornate.

Besides the large barrel, the deep vaults of the Palatine Castle, which extend on all sides like a network of caves, contained what were termed the small barrels. These small barrels were barely as high as a first storey. There

were ten or twelve of them. Only one remains, which I was shown in its stall, a few steps from the Great Tun. Its capacity was only a fifth of the latter's. It is a splendid assembly of oak staves, constructed in the time of Louis XIII, decorated, by the Electors Palatine, with the coat of arms of Bavaria and three lion-heads on each of its faces, and by the French soldiers with sundry blows of their axes. That was in 1799. The barrel was thought to be full of Rhine wine, our soldiers wanted to break in. The barrel held firm. They had shattered the walls of the citadel; they failed to breach the barrel. This small barrel has stood empty since 1800.

Walking amidst the shadows cast by the large barrel, one suddenly sees, behind the props that support it, a singular wooden statue on which a basement window casts its pallid ray. It is a statue of a jovial little old man, grotesquely attired, beside whom hangs a crude clock attached to a nail. A string hangs from beneath this clock; you pull it, the clock opens suddenly, and out leaps a fox's tail that strikes you in the face. The little old man is a court jester; the clock an example of his buffoonery.

This is the only thing that still stirs and moves in Heidelberg Castle, this royal jester's prank. Up above on the ruins, Charlemagne lacks a sceptre, Frederick the Victorious his tower, the King of Bohemia an arm, Frederick II a head; Frederick V's royal orb was shattered in his hand by a cannonball, a different kind of royal orb; everything has collapsed, ended, died away, except for this jester. He is still there, standing, almost breathing and calling out: 'Here I am!' He wears a blue coat, an extravagant waistcoat, and the half-green, half-red wig of a court fool; he looks at you, he detains you, pulls you by the sleeve, he plays his stupid prank, and laughs in your face. In my opinion, the gloomiest, and saddest thing in this ruin of Heidelberg is not those dead princes and kings, but this living buffoon.

He was the Court fool of the Palatine Charles III Philip. His nickname was Perkeo (*supposedly from his cry of 'Perché no?' 'Why not?' in Italian, when offered a drink. His birth name was possibly Clemens Pankert or Giovanni Clementi*). He was three feet six inches tall, like his statue, below which his name is engraved. He drank fifteen double-bottles (*seven English gallons*) of Rhine wine a day. Such was the talent for which he was famous. One day, in perhaps 1710, he made the Elector Palatine of Bavaria, and the Emperor of Germany, those shades passing by at that time, laugh uproariously, when several foreign princes were guests at the Palatine Castle. Perkeo was measured against one

of those great grenadiers of Frederick I, King of Prussia, who, with their high-heeled boots and huge bearskin hats, were obliged to descend the palace stairs backwards. The jester was barely taller than the grenadier's boot. *This caused great laughter*, says a narrator of the time. Sad princes of a degenerate age, occupying themselves with dwarves and giants, and neglecting the people!

If Perkeo failed to drink his fifteen bottles, he was whipped. Deep down, beneath the wretched fellow's grimacing gaiety, there was of necessity a vast well of sarcasm and disdain. The princes, in the whirlwind of greater affairs, failed to notice. The splendid radiance of the Palatine court concealed the glimmers of hatred which occasionally lit the jester's face; but today, in the shadow of its ruin, they reappear; they render the secret thoughts of the jester distinctly visible. The shadow of Death, which passed over that grinning countenance, stole his facetiousness and left only irony. Perkeo's statue mocks that of Charlemagne.

You should avoid returning to see Perkeo again. On first viewing he saddens, the second time he scares. Nothing is more sinister than frozen laughter. In that deserted palace, near that empty barrel, one thinks of this poor fellow beaten by his masters because he was not yet drunk, and his hideously joyous mask becomes a thing of dread. It is no longer the laughter of a jester who mocks, it is the sneer of a demon wreaking his vengeance. In this ruin full of ghosts, Perkeo too is a spectre.

Forgive me, dear Louis, if I entertain a diversion; but, speaking of phantoms, I can tell you about the ghosts. Many, they say, haunt the castle of Heidelberg. They walk about there on moonlit, stormy nights. Sometimes it is Jutta, the wife of Anchises, Duke of the Franks (*according to late medieval legend, Count Palatine of the Rhine and Duke of Brabant, who founded the town of Handschuhsheim, later part of Heidelberg, around the year 510*), who sits, pale and crowned, beneath the small ogives of the gazebo of Louis the Bearded. Sometimes it is two Frankish judges, two black knights who are seen walking along by the statue of Jupiter, on the inaccessible frieze of the palace of Otto Heinrich. Sometimes hunchbacked musicians, familiar demons who whistle satanic melodies in the attic of the chapel. Sometimes it is the White Lady who passes beneath the vaults, and who sometimes speaks. It is this White Lady who, it is said, appeared in 1655, in Otto Heinrich's Rittersaal (*Knight's Hall*) to Count Frederick of Zweibrücken, the son of John II, and predicted the fall of the Palatinate. During the time of the Electors Palatine, she

appeared each time one of the country's sovereigns was about to die. She failed to return to announce the deaths of the Grand Dukes of Baden. It seems that she chose not to recognise the Treaty of Lunéville (*in 1801 between the French Republic and Emperor Francis II*).

These, dear Louis, are the apparitions that tourists seek in that old palace. For myself, I must admit, I only saw a different kind of apparition, a pair of tourists, one day, around noon, two immense chimney-sweeps from the Black Forest, who had come to visit as artists and connoisseurs the huge chimney-tower of the Palatinate, and were in ecstasies regarding it, and who, all in black, with white teeth, each waving with both arms a vast cloak they wore like a shawl, had the air of two large bats, from the Odéon performance of 'Robin des Bois' (*François Castil-Blaze's translation and arrangement, in 1824, of Carl Maria von Weber's 'Der Freischütz', of 1821*) amidst the ruins of Heidelberg Schloss.

Every kind of devastation has afflicted this castle. So far, I have spoken to you of Jacques de Tilly, of the Count of Birkenfeld, of Marshal de Lorges, of the Emperor of Germany and of the King of France, the great demolishers. I have told you nothing of the lesser ones. When one is searching for the spoor of lions, one ignores the footprints of rats. Heidelberg Schloss, however, had its rats. The least of ravagers, official architects, rushed upon this monument as if it were in France, indeed as if it were in Paris. Invalid soldiers who had been housed there mutilated the old edifice in hatred, ruin by ruin. They completely demolished two pediments out of four in Otto Heinrich's bedroom. The English struck the caryatid pilasters, in the dining room, with hammer blows, so as to carry them away. An architect, commissioned to build a water conduit from Heidelberg to Mannheim, brought down the ceiling of the Knights' Hall, in order to make cement from the bricks, for his aqueducts. You will recall how our gate in the Place Royale (the *Place des Vosges, where Hugo resided at No. 6 from 1832 to 1848*), a rare and still complete monument of seventeenth-century ironwork, that good old gate of which Madame de Sévigné speaks (*Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, born at No. 1bis*); a gate which had witnessed the '*Birds of the Tournelles*' (*a society of Parisian gallants linked to the famous courtesan Ninon de l'Enclos who lived on rue des Tournelles*) flit by; a gate which Corneille had elbowed, on his way to the courtesan Marion Delorme's lodgings, and Molière on his way to those of Ninon de Lenclos, was sold this year, before my very door, for *five sous per pound in weight*.

Well, dear Louis, the simpletons who perpetrated that foolish thing hardly invented it. The simpletons who hatched the idea were from Heidelberg; the former are mere plagiarists. Around Otto Heinrich's steps there stood an admirable iron railing from the Renaissance. The city architects sold it *by weight for less than six liards a pound.* I quote the text from the chronicle of the market itself. What say you? Those six liards (*in total less than two sous in value*) are a poor match for our five sous.

You have doubtless forgotten the hill of the little Gaissberg, where I was situated when I began to speak to you of the Castle of Heidelberg; and where I so forgot myself that I was seized by profound reverie. Night had fallen, clouds had spread across the sky, the moon had risen almost to its zenith, while I, still seated on the same stone, gazed into the darkness around me, and the shadows within me. Suddenly the town bell-tower far beneath my feet struck the hour, it was midnight: I rose and descended. The road which leads to Heidelberg passes in front of the ruins. At the moment I arrived at this stretch, the moon, veiled by diffuse clouds and surrounded by an immense halo, shed a lugubrious light on that magnificent mass of ruins. Beyond the ditch, thirty paces from me, in the middle of a vast thicket, the Split Tower, whose interior I could see, appeared to me like an enormous Death's Head. I could distinguish the nasal cavities, the vault of the palate, the double brow-ridge, the deep and terrible sockets of the extinguished eyes. The large central pillar with its capital was the root of the nose. Torn sections formed the cartilages. Below, on the slope of the ravine, the collapsed remnants of wall horribly represented the projecting jaw. I have never in my life seen anything more melancholic than that great skull set amidst that great nothingness which is called the Palatine Castle.

The ruin, always open, is deserted at that hour. The idea of entering struck me. The two stone giants guarding the Square Tower let me pass. I crossed the black porch above which the old iron portcullis still hangs, and entered the courtyard. The moon had almost vanished behind the clouds. Only a pale light issued from the sky.

Louis, nothing is greater than what has fallen. This ruin, lit in this way, seen at this hour, had an inexpressible sadness, sweetness, and majesty. I thought I felt in the barely distinguishable trembling of the trees and brambles something grave and respectful. I heard no footsteps, no voices, not a breath. There were neither shadows nor lights in the courtyard; a sort

of dreamy half-light tempered everything, illuminated everything, and veiled everything. The tangle of breaches and crevices allowed faint rays of moonlight to reach even the darkest corners; and in the black depths, beneath inaccessible vaults and corridors, I saw a patch of whiteness moving slowly.

It was the hour when the facades of old abandoned buildings are no longer facades, but faces. I advanced over the uneven and hilly pavement without daring to make a noise, and felt, within the four walls of the enclosure, that strange discomfort, that indefinable feeling the ancients called the *horror of the sacred woods*. There is a sort of insurmountable terror in the sinister mingled with the sublime.

However, I climbed the damp, greening steps of the old porch lacking balustrades, and entered the old roofless palace of Otto Heinrich. You may laugh; but I assure you that walking at night through rooms which have been inhabited by people, whose doors are adorned with, whose chambers still reveal, their unique identities; to say to oneself: 'This was the dining room, this was the bedroom, this was an alcove, this was the fireplace,' and yet feel the grass under one's feet, and see the sky above one's head, is terrifying. A room which still has the appearance of a room, and whose ceiling has been removed by an invisible hand like the lid of a box, is a gloomy and nameless thing, no longer a place of residence, yet no tomb either. In a tomb one feels the soul of Mankind; in this one feels only the shadow of that same.

Just as I was about to pass from the vestibule into the Knights' Hall, I halted. There was a singular noise there, all the more distinct because the rest of the ruin was filled by a sepulchral silence. It was a sort of low, strident, continuous rattling sound, interspersed at times with a short, sharp, rapid hammering, which sometimes seemed to come from the depths of the darkness, from a distant point among the trees, or the ruins; sometimes seeming to rise from beneath my feet, from between the cracks in the pavement. Whence did this noise come? What nocturnal being caused the rattling and hammering? I know not, but it resembled the creaking of a loom, and I could not help thinking, as I listened to it, of the hideous spinner of the legends who spun rope for the gallows amidst ruins.

However, nothing appeared, no creature, no living person. The room was as deserted as the rest of the palace. I struck the pavement with my cane, the noise stopped, then started again a moment later. I struck it again, it stopped, then started again. Yet, I saw nothing but a large, frightened bat,

which the shock of my cane on the flagstone had caused to emerge from one of the sculpted consoles of the wall, and which was now circling above my head in that funereal flight that seems made for the interior of collapsed towers.

Shall I tell all? Why not? Are you not one who understands all the dream states of the mind? It seemed to me that I was bothering someone in this ruin. Whom? I know not. But it is certain that I was disturbing some mysterious entity. Night reigned alone; I had disturbed it. All the supernatural inhabitants of these royal ruins fixed their vague frightened eyes on me simultaneously. The tritons, the satyrs, the double-tailed sirens, the winged Cupid who has been toying for three centuries with a garland on the threshold of the Knights' Hall, the two naked Victories whom the invalid-soldiers had mutilated, the caryatids hidden by purple shrubs, the chimeras holding stone rings in their mouths, the naiads who seem to be listening to the stony flow of water falling from their urns, had something troubled and sad about them; the grimaces of the stone masks took on a strange expression; a light made the sombre Isis of the vestibule stand out lugubriously in the shadows, to whom the rains that abrade and erode it have granted the indefinable smile of the artist Piere-Paul Prud'hon's figures; two helmeted sphinxes, each with a woman's breasts and a faun's ears, seemed to whisper in low voices, while gazing at me, *transversa tuentes* (*guardians of the way*); and I thought I could hear the lions by the hearth breathing in the undergrowth where they have been crouching since the foot of the pensive Elector Palatine ceased to rest against either of their marble manes. Something motionless and terrible palpitated around me within the walls of this enclosure, and each time I approached a dark door or a misty corner, I thought I saw a mysterious gaze fixed on me. Are you a visionary like me? Have you experienced this? Statues that sleep during the day, but at night they wake and become ghosts?

I left Otto's palace and entered the courtyard, still pursued by that strange little noise made by some 'watchman' in the Knights' Hall. As I reached the foot of the stairway, the moon suddenly appeared, clear and brilliant, through a wide rent in the clouds; the double-pedimented palace of Frederick IV was suddenly visible to my eyes, magnificent, lit as in broad daylight, with those sixteen pale and formidable giants; while to my right Otto's façade, rising black against the luminous sky, allowed dazzling rays of moonlight to escape through its twenty-four windows simultaneously.

I wrote *lit as in broad daylight*; I was wrong, it was both more and less. The moon shining on ruins does more than shed light, it brings harmony. It hides no detail, but exaggerates no scar; it casts a veil over shattered things and adds I know not what misty halo to the majesty of old buildings. It is far better to view a crumbling palace or cloister by night than by day. The harsh clarity of sunlight seems to render the ruins more tired-looking and trouble the melancholy mood of the statues.

The shades of the emperors and the Electors Palatine looked at me in turn; those *simulacra*. Strangely enough, it had felt, a moment before, as if the sirens, nymphs and chimeras were looking at me in anger; it seemed to me now that all those formidable old princes were fixing on me, an insignificant passer-by, a kind and hospitable eye. Some of them seemed even taller, lit by the enchanted radiance of the moon. One of them, who had been struck and half-toppled by a bomb, Jean Casimir, leaning against the wall, with pallid face, aquiline nose and long beard, had the air of an exhumed Henry IV.

I left the palace via the garden and, on the way down, stopped for a moment on one of the lower terraces. Behind me, the ruins, hiding the moon, formed a broad patch of shadow, halfway up the slope, from which sprang long stony lines in all directions, both darkened and luminous, streaking the vague, vaporous landscape in the background. Below me Heidelberg lay asleep, stretched along the mountain-slopes in the depths below, all lights extinguished, every door closed tight; beyond Heidelberg I could heard the Neckar flowing, seeming to murmur in a low voice to the hills and the plain; and the thoughts which had filled me all evening, of the nothingness of Mankind's past; of the fragility of Mankind's present; and of God's eternity and Nature's grandeur, all came to mind at the same moment, as I descended slowly into the darkness, as if represented by the triple aspect of that ever-wakeful living river, the sleeping city, and the dead palace.

POSTSCRIPT

Carlsrühe[95], November

Dear Louis, my endless letter is over at last. Praise be to God, and forgive me. Do not read this 'folio' I send you, rather visit and view Heidelberg.

I have just made a magnificent tour of the Bergstrasse (*the road from Darmstadt in southern Hesse via Heidelberg to Wiesloch, eight miles south of that city, in northern Baden-Württemberg*). I encountered mud and snow, but you know I am a bit of a mountaineer. I suffered greatly, not from the cold but from the stoves. Imagine! Since I have been in Germany, I have not yet been able to warm myself at a hearth, a lit ember, a burning bundle of sticks. Here there are only horrid stoves whose pipes twist about the room like snakes. They give out a nasty, treacherous heat that boils your head and freezes your feet. One is no warmer, one merely suffocates.

Apart from this small inconvenience — of asphyxiation evening and morning — the country is truly admirable. There are downpours of rain all night; I hear it beating against my windows; I anticipate dreadful wet days; yet, I know not how, in the morning the cloud parts, the mists disperse, and I see the loveliest things in the world.

'Nocte pluit tota, redeunt spectacula mane'

'It rains all night, at dawn it's fine for the Games'

(*Aelius Donatus/Suetonius: 'Vita Vergili'*)

[95] Letter XXVIII (Postscript) — Carlsrühe: 49°00'24.8"N, 8°24'13.3"E

Farewell, dear friend. I will see you soon. In a few weeks I will shake your generous hand. Love me.

The End of Part IX of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part X: Letter XXIX-XXXIII

'Strasbourg with a view of the cathedral'
Karl Weysser (German, 1833-1904)
Artvee

Letter XXIX: The Road to Strasbourg

1839 (*Second Journey*)

Strasbourg, August

Here I am, in Strasbourg, my friend. My window opens onto the Place d'Armes (*Place Kléber*). To my right I have a clump of trees, to my left the Strasburger Münster (*Cathedral of Our Lady of Strasbourg*), whose bells are in full cry at this moment; in front of me, at the end of the square, is a sixteenth-century house, very beautiful, though washed in yellow, and with green shutters; behind this house, the high gables of an old nave, where the town's library stands; in the middle of the square, a wooden hut out of which, it is said, a monument to Kléber (*Jean-Baptiste Kléber, French army officer, and architect*) will emerge; all around me, a string of old, rather picturesque roofs; a few steps from my window, a lantern-gallows, at the foot of which a few blond, pot-bellied German kids are chattering. From time to time, an elegant English post-chaise, a carriage or a landau, stops in front of the door of the *Maison-Rouge* — where I lodge — with its Baden postilion. The Baden postilion is charming; he has a bright yellow jacket, a black varnished hat with wide silver-braid, and carries, across the middle of his back, and slung over his shoulder, a small hunting-horn with an enormous tuft of red tassels. Our French postilions are hideous; the postillion of Longjumeau is a myth (*a character from the comic-opera of that name by Adolphe Adam, 1836*); a dirty old blouse with a hideous cotton cap, that's the French postilion for you. Now, add to the Baden postilion the post chaise, the German children, the old houses, trees, huts and a bell-tower, a pretty sky of blue with white clouds, and you'll possess an idea of the scene.

I have had very few adventures; however I spent two nights in a mail coach, which left me with a lofty idea of the solidity of our human machinery. A night in a mail coach is a horrible thing. At the moment of departure, all is well, the postilion cracks his whip, the horses' bells tinkle joyfully, one feels

in a strange and sweet state, the movement of the carriage adds gaiety to one's spirits, the twilight adds melancholy. Little by little night falls, the conversation of one's neighbours languishes, one feels one's eyelids grow heavy, the mail's lanterns are lit, the horses are changed, then it departs again like the wind; the sky is completely dark, one falls asleep, and it is precisely at this moment that the road chooses to deteriorate; the bumps and quagmires enhance each other; the coach begins to dance. It is no longer a road, it is a chain of mountains with tarns and peaks, which must provide magnificent view-points for ants. Then two opposing motions seize the car and shake it furiously, like two enormous hands that seek to clutch it in passing: a movement from front to back and back to front, and a movement from left to right and right to left — both a pitching and a yawing motion. It results from the happy complication that every jolt is multiplied at the height of the axles, and is raised to the third power in the interior of the car; so much so that a stone as big as your fist causes one to hit one's head on the same spot eight times in succession, as if hammering a nail into it. It is charming. From that moment on, one is no longer in a carriage but a whirlwind. It feels as if the thing is possessed by a frenzy. The comfortable mail-coach introduced by Antoine Conte (*Directeur Général des Postes, 1832-47*) is transformed into an abominable *patache* (*a badly sprung two-wheeler),* one's Voltaire (*padded armchair*) is nothing more than an infamous *tape-cul* (*see-saw*). One leaps, dances, bounces, lurches against one's neighbour — all while asleep. For that's the beauty of it all, you sleep. Sleep grips you on the one hand, the infernal carriage on the other. Out of this arises a nightmare like no other.

Nothing can be compared to one's dreams in a sleep punctuated by jolting. One sleeps and at the same time fails to do so, one is at once immersed in both reality and the dreamworld. It is an amphibious sort of nightmare. From time to time, you half-open an eyelid. Everything has a deformed appearance, especially if it is raining, as it was the other night. The sky is black, or rather there is no sky, it seems as if you are fleeing madly across an abyss; the lanterns of the carriage cast a pale glow which makes the horses' rumps look monstrous; At intervals, fierce mops of elm trees suddenly appear in the light, and vanish; puddles of water sparkle and quiver in the rain like drops in a frying pan; bushes take on a crouched and hostile air; piles of stones adopt the forms of recumbent corpses; one looks around vaguely; the trees in the plain are no longer trees, they are hideous giants one thinks one sees advancing slowly towards the roadside; every old wall

resembles an enormous toothless jaw. Suddenly a spectre passes by, stretching out its arms. By day, it would simply be a signpost, and would honestly proclaim the road from Coulommiers to Sézanne. By night, it is a dreadful phantom that seems to cast a curse on the traveller. And then, I know not why, one's mind is full of images of snakes; it's as if snakes were crawling in one's brain; the brambles hisses on the edge of the embankments like handfuls of asps; the postilion's whip is a winged viper that follows the carriage and tries to bite you through the window; in the distance, in the mist, the line of hills undulates like the belly of a boa constrictor digesting its meal and, magnified by sleep, takes the shape of a prodigious dragon seeking to encircle the horizon. The wind moans like a weary Cyclops, and makes you dream of some terrifying workman labouring painfully in the darkness. — Everything is alive, with the dreadful life that a stormy night grants to things.

The towns one passes through also begin to dance, the streets rise and fall perpendicularly, the houses lean wildly over the car, and some gaze into it with burning eyes. Those are the ones whose windows are still lit. Around five in the morning, one thinks oneself done for; but the sun rises, and you forget it all. That is what a night in a mail coach is like, and I am talking to you here about the new mail-coaches, which are, moreover, excellent vehicles during daylight, when the road is good — which is rare in France.

You can imagine, dear friend, how difficult it is for me to give you an idea of the countryside traversed in this way. I passed through Sézanne[96], and this is what remains of it in my mind: a long, dilapidated street, low houses, a square with a fountain, an open-fronted shop where a man lit by a candle was planing a plank. I traversed Phalsbourg, and what I have retained of it is the sound of chains and drawbridges, soldiers on watch with lanterns, and black fortified gateways beneath which the carriage plunged.

From Vitry-le François to Nancy, I travelled by day. I saw nothing of particular note. It is true that the mail-coach hardly reveals anything.

Vitry-le François[97] is a Rococo military fortress. Saint-Dizier[98] is a long,

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[96] Letter XXIX — Sézanne: 48°43'31.1"N, 3°43'26.0"E

[97] Letter XXIX — Vitry-le-François: 48°43'32.9"N, 4°35'01.0"E

[98] Letter XXIX — Saint-Dizier: 48°38'21.1"N, 4°56'55.0"E

wide street lined here and there with beautiful Louis XV houses built of cut stone. Bar-le-Duc is quite picturesque; a pretty river runs through it. I take it be the Ornain; but I am saying nothing about the river, since I happened to rouse all of Brittany by confusing the Vilaine with the Couesnon. Naiads are touchy, and I do not care to grapple with green-haired river-gods. So, pretend I have said not a word.

By the way, I have made this whole journey in company with a good provincial notary who has his office in some small town in the South, and who is going to spend his holidays in Baden, '*because*', he says, '*everyone goes to Baden-Baden*'. No conversation was possible, of course. The worthy notary smells of stamped-paper as a rabbit in its hutch smells of cabbage-leaves.

However, as travel makes one talkative, I tried to broach a variety of subjects in a hundred ways, to see if I might find him *edible*, as Diderot said. I chipped away at him on all sides, but failed to obtain anything more than lumps of stupidity. There are many people like him. I was like those children who long to bite an imitation sweet at all costs; they seek sugar, they find plaster.

The town of Bar-le-Duc[99] is dominated by an immense sloping vineyard which is bright green in August and which, as I was passing by, was framed against a wholly blue sky. There was nothing crude about the blueness or the greenness, warmly clothed by a shaft of sunlight. In the countryside around Bar-le-Duc, the fashion is for houses with any pretensions to possess, instead of a half-timbered door, a small porch made of cut stone, with a square ceiling, raised on a flight of steps. These are quite pretty. You know I like to note local architectural quirks, as I have said a hundred times, whenever the architecture is natural, and not adulterated by the efforts of architects. The local climate is written in the architecture. A pointed roof indicates rain; a flat one indicates sun; one laden with stones indicates wind.

However, I met with nothing of note in Bar-le-Duc, except that the postal officer ordered four hundred jars of jam for his annual sale, and that just as I was leaving the town, an old, crippled horse was entering, probably on its way to the slaughterhouse. Do you recall the famous *Saval* made by our sweet child, our dear little D..., which remained for so long exposed to all the

[99] Letter XXIX — Bar-le-Duc: 48°46'25.0"N, 5°09'38.9"E

storms, melting away in the rain, in a corner of the balcony of the Place-Royale, with a grey paper nose, neither ears nor tail, and nothing left but three wheels? Such was my poor horse of Bar-le-Duc.

From Vitry-le François to Saint-Dizier, the landscape is mediocre. There were large, reddish-brown ridges of mown wheat, which look gloomy at this time of year. No more ploughmen, no more harvesters, no more gleaners walking barefoot, heads bowed, with a meagre sheaf under their arm. Everything was deserted. From time to time a huntsman and a pointer, motionless at the top of a hill, silhouetted against the clear sky. The villages are not visible; they are nestled between the hills, in small green valleys at the bottom of which a small stream almost always flows. At times you can see the tip of a bell-tower.

On one occasion, this summit of a bell-tower presented a singular aspect. The hill was green; it was covered with grass. Above this hill one could see absolutely nothing but the tin hat of a church tower which seemed to be sited exactly on top of the hill. This hat was of Flemish form. (In Flanders, in village churches, the bell-tower has the shape of a bell.) One can see it from here: it looks like a vast green carpet on which Gargantua seems to have left his giant bell.

After Saint-Dizier, the road is charming. A fresh mantle of trees is spread on all sides, the valleys deepen, the hills thin out, and at times take on the illusory air of mountains. What helps the illusion is that sometimes, despite their charming appearance, the soil is shallow, and the tops of the hills are scarred, and peeling. One feels that the grasses lack strength enough to drive their sap to such a height. This makes the hills larger only in appearance, but it does at least render them larger.

Ligny-en-Barrois[100] is a pretty town. Three or four hills meet in a star-shaped valley. The houses of Ligny-en-Barrois are all heaped up at the bottom of this valley, as if they have slid downwards from the top of the hills. It makes for a delightful little town; and then there is a pretty river and two beautiful ruined towers. The hills are charming; they were kind enough to oblige the mail coach to ascend them at a walking pace, so that I was able to descend, follow the coach on foot, and see the town.

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[100] Letter XXIX — Ligny-en-Barrois: 48°41'17.9"N, 5°19'13.1"E

I have doubts about Toul Cathedral. I suspect it has some affinity with Orléans Cathedral, that odious church which from afar makes so many promises, and near-to keeps none of them. However, I hold a rather better opinion of Toul Church; though it is true that I have not seen it up close. Toul[101] is in a valley, the mail-coach descended at a gallop, the sun was setting, and cast an admirable horizontal shaft of light on the facade of the cathedral; the building has a singularly dilapidated appearance, it has solidity, and is very beautiful. As I approached, I saw that the dilapidation was at least as much due to decay as old age, that the towers were octagonal, which displeased me, and that they were surmounted by a balustrade similar to the summits of the towers of Orléans Cathedral, which shocked me. However, I will not condemn Toul Cathedral. Seen from the apse, it is quite beautiful. As we crossed the bridge at Toul, my travelling companion asked me if the House of Lorraine was not the same as the House of Medici (*the House of Lorraine succeeded the House of Medici as the Grand Dukes of Tuscany in 1737 after the extinction of the Medici male line, ruling until Tuscany's annexation into the Kingdom of Italy in 1860*).

Nancy[102], like Toul, is in a valley, but a beautiful, wide, and opulent valley. The town has an insignificant appearance; the steeples of the cathedral are Pompadour pepper-pots. However, I have become reconciled to Nancy, firstly because I dined there, and was very hungry; secondly because the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville (*Place Stanislas*) is one of the prettiest, most cheerful, and most complete Rococo squares I have seen. It is a very well-designed and splendidly laid out area, with all sorts of adornments that go well together, and aid each other in achieving a fine effect: rocaille fountains; groves of clipped and shaped trees; thick, gilded, and ornate iron railings; a statue of King Stanislas; a triumphal arch (*the Arc Héré*) in an ornate and entertaining style; and noble, and elegant facades, well linked and arranged at thoughtful angles. The pavement itself, made of sharp pebbles, is compartmented like a mosaic. It is a marquetry square.

I truly regretted that I lacked the time to view that city, entirely in the style of Louis XV, in detail and at leisure. The architecture of the eighteenth

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[101] Letter XXIX — Toul: 48°40'49.1"N, 5°53'26.9"E

[102] Letter XXIX — Nancy: 48°41'31.6"N, 6°11'03.8"E

century, when it is thoroughly applied, ends up redeeming its bad taste. Its vegetative fantasies grow and blossom at the top of buildings in clusters of flowers so extravagant and so bushy, that all one's irritation disappears, and one becomes accustomed to them. In hot climates, in Lisbon for example, which is also a Rococo city, it seems as if the sun acts on this stone vegetation as on other vegetation. It is as if sap has circulated in the granite; the vegetation has emerged, expanded, and extended prodigious branches on all sides, in arabesques that rise, swollen, towards the sky. On monasteries, on palaces, on churches, ornamentation has been added everywhere, at every opportunity, on one pretext or another. There is not a single pediment in Lisbon whose line is unbroken.

What is remarkable, and what completes this comparison of eighteenth-century architecture to vegetation, a thing I observed in Nancy while passing the cathedral, is that, just as the trunks of trees are dark and melancholy, the lower levels of Pompadour buildings are bare, morose, heavy and lugubrious. Rococo has ugly feet. I arrived in Nancy on Sunday at seven in the evening; at eight the mail-coach departed again. This stage at night was more settled than the first. Was I wearier? Was the road better? The fact is that I clung on to the carriage straps, and slept. That's how I came to see Phalsbourg.

Around four in the morning, I woke. A cool wind was striking my face, the coach, driven at full speed, was leaning forward, we were descending the famous Saverne pass[103] (*Col de Saverne*). I received one of the most beautiful impressions of my life. The rain had stopped, the mists were dispersing to the four winds, the crescent moon was traversing the clouds swiftly and, at times, sailing freely within a quadrilateral patch of azure, like a boat on a small lake. A breeze, rising from the Rhine, made the trees at the edge of the road quiver. From time to time, they parted and allowed me to see a vague and dazzling abyss: in the foreground, a copse, behind which the mountain was hidden; below, immense plains with watery meanders gleaming like lightning; in the background a dark, confused and dense line — the Black Forest — a whole magical panorama glimpsed in the moonlight. Such incomplete sketches have perhaps even more value than finished ones. They are dreams that one can gaze at, and almost touch. I knew that before my eyes lay France,

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[103] Letter XXIX — Saverne Pass (Col de Saverne): 48°45'19.1"N, 7°20'09.2"E

Germany, and Switzerland; Strasbourg with its spire, the Black Forest with its mountains, the Rhine with its twists and turns; I was looking at everything, divining everything, yet seeing nothing. I have never experienced a more extraordinary sensation. Add to that the hour, our speed, the horses plunging downwards, the violent noise of the wheels, the rustling of the lowered windows, the trees in frequent passage, or rather their shadows, the sighs that issue from the mountains in the early hours, a kind of murmur rising from the plain, the beauty of the sky, and you will understand something of what I felt. By day, this valley amazes; by night, it fascinates.

The descent takes a quarter of an hour and its length is a little more than three miles. — Half an hour later, it was twilight; dawn to my left was whitening the edge of the horizon, a group of pale houses covered with black tiles was visible at the top of a hill, the true azure of day would soon overflow the horizon, a few country folk were already passing on their way to their vineyards, a clear, cold, violet light was struggling with the ashen glow of the moon, the constellations were fading, two stars of the Pleiades had disappeared, the Charioteer Auriga's triple team were plunging rapidly towards their stable with its blue doors, it was cold, I was frozen, I had to raise the windows. A moment later the sun rose, and the first thing it revealed was a village notary shaving at his window, next to a red calico curtain, his nose reflected in a broken mirror.

A couple of miles further on, the country-folk were now of picturesque appearance, the wagons magnificent; I counted thirteen mules attached to one of them, harnessed with widely spaced chains. One could feel the approach of Strasbourg, the old German city.

As we galloped, we traversed Marmoutier[104], and Wasselonne[105] a long, narrow passage between houses, squeezed into the last gorge of the Vosges near Strasbourg. Of Marmoutier, I glimpsed only the unusual church façade, topped by a juxtaposition of two capped octagonal bell-towers and a square one, which the movement of the coach suddenly presented in front of my window, the image of the building jolting like a stage flat, and then immediately bore away.

[104] Letter XXIX — Marmoutier: 48°41'22.9"N, 7°22'25.0"E

[105] Letter XXIX — Wasselonne: 48°38'16.1"N, 7°26'44.2"E

Suddenly, at a bend in the road, the mist lifted, and I saw Strasbourg Minster. It was six in the morning. The enormous cathedral, the tallest construction built by the hand of man after the Great Pyramid (*till 1874, when it was surpassed by Saint Nikolai's Church, Hamburg*), was highlighted clearly against a background of dark mountains of magnificent form, sunlight, here and there, bathing the wide valleys between them. The labour of God on Mankind's behalf, the labour of Mankind on God's behalf, the mountains and the cathedral, competed in grandeur. I have never seen anything more imposing.

LETTER XXX: STRASBOURG

September

Yesterday I visited the Cathedral (*Liebfrauenmünster zu Strassburg*[106], *Our Lady of Strasbourg*). The Minster is truly a marvel. The portals of the church are beautiful, particularly the Romanesque portal; there are some superb figures on horseback on the facade, the rose window is noble and well executed. The whole face of the church is a skillfully composed poem. But the true triumph of this cathedral is the spire. It is a true stone tiara with its crown and its cross. It is a prodigy of the gigantic and the delicate. I had seen Chartres, I had seen Antwerp, I was obliged to visit Strasbourg[107].

The church was never completed. The apse, miserably truncated, was arranged according to the taste of Cardinal de Rohan, that imbecile, he of that affair of the Queen's necklace. The apse is hideous. The stained-glass window that was adapted to it displays a common carpet design. It is ignoble. The other stained-glass windows are beautiful, except for a few that have

[106] Letter XXX — Strasbourg Cathedral (Liebfrauenmünster): 48°34'54.5"N, 7°45'02.5"E

[107] Letter XXIX — Strasbourg: 48°34'24.2"N, 7°45'07.6"E

been renewed, notably the great rose window. The entire church is shamefully plastered; some of the sculptures have been restored with a degree of taste. The cathedral has been added to in every style. The pulpit is a small fifteenth-century construction, florid Gothic, and of a delightful design and manner. Unfortunately, it has been gilded in a stupid way. The baptismal font is from the same period and superbly restored. It is a vase surrounded by an intricate stone mesh of the most marvellous sculpting in the world. Beside it, in a dark chapel, there are two tombs. One, that of a bishop of the time of Emperor Louis IV, presents the fearsome concept that Gothic art expressed in every form: a bed beneath which is a tomb, sleep superimposed on death, the man above the corpse, death above eternity. The sepulchre is on two levels. The bishop (*Konrad von Lichtenberg*), in his pontifical robes, his mitre on his head, is lying on his bed, under a canopy; he is sleeping. Below, in the shadows, beneath the feet of the bed, we glimpse an enormous stone in which two enormous iron rings are sealed; it is the lid of the tomb. We see no more. The architects of the sixteenth century showed the corpse (you will recall the tombs at Brou), those of the fourteenth hid it; which is even more frightening. Nothing could be more sinister than those two iron rings.

In the depths of my reverie, I was distracted by an Englishman, who was asking questions about the affair of the Queen's necklace, and about Jeanne de La Motte, in the belief that he was looking at the tomb of Cardinal de Rohan. In any other place I could not have stopped myself from laughing. Yet, after all, it would have been wrong of me. Who does not possess areas of gross ignorance? I know, and you also know, a learned doctor who says *Dentrifice Powder* (*a tautology*) which proves that he knows how to use neither Latin nor French. A lawyer, I forget whom, an opponent of literary property in the Chamber of Deputies, says: *Monsieur Réaumur*, *Monsieur Fahrenheit*, *Monsieur Centigrade*. An infallible philosopher, our contemporary, invented the previously non-existent past tense *recollexit*. Bernhard Roillet, a very learned rector of the University of Paris in the fifteenth century, was indignant that schoolchildren wrote: *mater tuus, pater tua* (*the adjectives are of incorrect gender*) yet himself said: *Marmouseti* (*for Marmouset*). A barbarism moralising over a solecism.

I return to my cathedral. The tomb I just told you about is in the north semi-transept. In the south semi-transept, there is a chapel that scaffolding prevented me from seeing. Beside this chapel, in the choir, runs a fifteenth-

century balustrade fixed to the wall. A painted and sculpted figure leans on this balustrade, seemingly admiring a pillar (*the Pillar of Angels*) surrounded by superimposed statues, opposite him, and which is of marvellous effect. Tradition has it that this figure represents the first architect of the Minster, Erwin von Steinbach.

Statues tell me a lot, so, I have a habit of questioning them, and when I meet one that I like, I keep it company awhile. Thus, I was alone with the great Erwin, and deep in thought for more than an hour, when a scoundrel came to disturb me. It was the Swiss guard of the church, who, to earn thirty sous, offered to explain the cathedral to me. Imagine a dreadful Swiss, half German and half Alsatian, offering me his *explanations*: — *Monsir, fous afre pas fu lé champelle?* — I dismissed this trader in gibberish somewhat harshly.

I was unable to see the astronomical clock in the nave, which is a charming little sixteenth-century construction. It is being restored and is covered with a wooden casing.

Having seen the church, I climbed the bell-tower. You know my taste for perpendicular excursions. I was careful not to miss the tallest spire in the world. Strasbourg Minster is more than four hundred and sixty feet high. It is one of that family of bell-towers which are flanked by open staircases. It is an admirable thing to move about in, this monstrous mass of stone, completely filled with air and light, hollowed out like a toy from Dieppe, a lantern as well as a pyramid, which vibrates and throbs at every breath of wind. I climbed to the top of the vertical ladders. On the way up, I met a visitor who was coming down, quite pale and trembling, half-carried by his guide. Yet there is no danger. Only at the point where I stopped, at the base of the spire itself, was there the possibility. Four open spiral staircases, corresponding to the four vertical turrets, delicate winding spirals of thinned, worked stone, rest on the spire, whose angles they follow, and clamber up to what is called the crown, about thirty feet from the lantern, surmounted by a cross which forms the summit of the bell-tower. The steps of these staircases are very tall and narrow, and become narrower as one ascends. So much so that at the top they barely protrude far enough to rest one's heels on them. It is necessary to climb thus about a hundred feet, and one is four hundred feet from the ground. There are no guardrails, or so few that it is not worth mentioning them. The entrance to the staircase was closed by an iron gate. The gate is only opened with special permission from the mayor of

Strasbourg, and one can only climb accompanied by two roofers, who tie a rope round your body, the end of which they attach at intervals, as you climb, to the iron bars that connect the mullions. Eight days ago, three women, three Germans, a mother and her two daughters, made the ascent. However, no one, except the roofers who maintain the bell-tower, ascend to the lantern, where there is no longer a staircase, but simply iron bars arranged in steps.

From where I stood, the view is admirable. Strasbourg is beneath one's feet, an ancient town with jagged gables and large roofs laden with dormer windows, interspersed with towers and churches as picturesque as any town in Flanders. Two pretty rivers, the Ill and the Rhône, brighten this dark mass of buildings with their clear, green stretches of water. All around the walls, as far as the eye can see, stretches an immense landscape full of trees and dotted with villages. The Rhine, which passes within a league of the town, flows through this countryside, twisting and turning about itself. Moving around the bell tower, one can view three mountain ranges: the ridges of the Black Forest to the north, the Vosges to the west, and the Alps to the south.

One is so high that the landscape is no longer a landscape; it is, akin to what I saw from the mountain above Heidelberg, a geographical map, but a living map, with mist, smoke, shadows, gleaming and tremulous waters and leaves, clouds, rain, and rays of sunlight.

The sun cheerfully celebrates those who are on high peaks. While I was at the top of the Minster, it suddenly dispelled the clouds that had covered the sky all day long, and set fire to all the city vapour, all the mists of the plain, while pouring golden rain on Saverne, whose magnificent slopes I saw again thirty miles away on the edge of the horizon, through a resplendent gauze. Behind me a large cloud showered rain on the Rhine; at my feet the city murmured softly, and its syllables reached me through gusts of wind; the bells of a hundred villages rang out; red and white insects, which were really a herd of oxen, lowed in a meadow on the right; other blue and red insects, who were gunners, were involved in firing practice, in the quadrant on the left; a black beetle, which was really a stagecoach, was pursuing the road to Metz; and to the north, on the ridge of a hill, the Castle of the Margraves of Baden-Baden (*Hohenbaden*, *Altes Schloss*) shone in a pool of light, like a precious gem. I went from one turret to another, gazing in turn at France, Switzerland and Germany, in a single shaft of sunlight. Each turret faces a different nation.

During my descent, I halted for a few moments at one of the upper doors of the turret's staircase. On the two sides of this door are the stone figures of the two architects of the Cathedral. These two great poets are represented squatting, their backs and faces tilted back, as if marvelling at the height of their work. I began to do as they did, and remained as statuesque as they themselves were for several minutes. On the platform, they had me write my name in a visitor's book; after which I left. The bells and the clock are of no interest.

From the Cathedral I walked to the Church of Saint Thomas[108], which is the oldest in the city, and in which is to be found the tomb of Marshal Maurice de Saxe. This tomb is to Strasbourg what Charles Antoine Bridan's 'Assumption' is to Chartres Cathedral, a very famous thing, much vaunted, but quite mediocre. It is a large marble operatic group, in the inadequate style of Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, whereon Louis XV boasts in lapidary style of being himself the author and guide — *auctor* and *dux* — of the victories of Marshal de Saxe. A cupboard is revealed with a bewigged plaster head therein; it is the bust of Pigalle. — Fortunately, there are other things to see in Saint Thomas: first the church itself, which is Romanesque, and whose squat dark bell-towers possess great character; then the stained-glass windows, which are beautiful, though their lower part has been stupidly plastered over; then the tombs and sarcophagi, which abound in this church. One of these tombs is from the fourteenth century; it is a stone slab set in the wall, on which is sculpted a German knight of the most superb figure. The knight's heart, in a silver-gilt box, had once been placed in a small square hole dug in the figure's belly. In 1793, some local Brutus, out of hatred for knights and love of silver-gilt boxes, tore the heart out of the statue. All that remains is the empty perfectly-square hole. On another stone slab is carved a Polish colonel, helmet and plume on his head, in that beautiful armour that soldiers still wore in the seventeenth century. It is thought to be a knight; no, it is a colonel. There are also two marvellous stone sarcophagi; one, which is gigantic and laden with coats of arms in the opulent style of the sixteenth century, is the coffin of a Danish gentleman who was laid to rest, I know not why, in this church; the other, even more curious, if not more beautiful, is hidden in a cupboard, like the bust of Pigalle. A general rule: sacristans hide everything

108 Letter XXX — Church of Saint Thomas, Strasbourg: 48°34'46.9"N, 7°44'42.7"E

they can, because they are paid to show them. In this way, they sweat fifty-centime coins from poor granite sarcophagi that can't avoid it. This one is from the ninth century; a great rarity. It is the coffin of a bishop who could not have been more than four feet high, judging by his coffin; a magnificent sarcophagus, moreover, covered with Byzantine sculptures, figures and flowers, and supported by three stone lions, one under the head, two beneath the feet. As it is in a cupboard against the wall, one can only see one side. This is unfortunate as regards the artistry; it would be better if the coffin were in the open air in a chapel. The church, the sarcophagus and the traveller would benefit; but what would become of the sacristan? Sacristans first and foremost; that is the rule in such churches.

It goes without saying that the Romanesque nave of Saint Thomas is painted bright yellow. I was about to leave when the Protestant sacristan, a fat, chubby Swiss of about thirty, caught me by the arm: 'Would you like to see a few mummies?' 'I would.' Another hiding place, another key. I enter a vault. These mummies have nothing Egyptian about them. They are of a Count of Nassau and his daughter, who were found embalmed while searching the church cellars, and who were placed in this corner under glass. The two poor dead people sleep there in broad daylight, lying in their coffins, from which the lids have been removed. The Count of Nassau's coffin is adorned with painted coats of arms. The old prince is dressed in a simple costume tailored in the style of Henry IV. He has large, yellow leather gloves, black shoes with high heels, a guipure collar, and a linen cap edged with lace. His face is a dark brown colour. The eyes are closed. A few hairs of his moustache are still visible. His daughter is wearing a splendid costume like that of Elizabeth the 'Winter Queen'. The head has lost its human form; it is a death's-head; it has hair no more; only a bouquet of pink ribbons remains on the bare skull. The dead woman has a necklace around her neck, rings on her hands, mules on her feet, a cluster of ribbons, jewels and lace on the sleeves, and a small, richly-enamelled canoness's cross on the chest. Her small, grey, gaunt hands are folded and she sleeps on a bed of linen akin to that which children make for their dolls. I saw in it the hideous doll, called Death. It is recommended that one not touch the coffin. If one were to do so what was once the Princess of Nassau would crumble to dust.

Turning around to see the Count, I was struck by a sort of shiny, buttery coating to his face. The sacristan —ever the sacristan — explained to me that

eight years ago, when the mummy was discovered, it had been thought necessary to varnish it. What do you think of that? What good was it to have been Count of Nassau only to be varnished by Frenchmen, two hundred years after one's death? The Bible promises the human corpse every metamorphosis, every humiliation, every fate, except this one. It says: 'The living will scatter you like dust, trample you underfoot like mud, burn you like dung' (*see 2nd Samuel 22:43, in the French 'Martin' Bible of 1744*) but it does not say: '*They will end up polishing you like a pair of boots!*'

Letter XXXI: Freiburg im Breisgau

September 6th

Here is an account of my entry to Freiburg im Breisgau[109]: — it was nearly four in the morning; I had been travelling all night aboard the coupé of the Baden mail, emblazoned in gold with a red line, and driven by those fine yellow-coated postilions I told you about, while traversing a cluster of clean, healthy, pretty, and happy villages, dotted with blossoming gardens round the houses, watered by small, lively rivers whose bridges are adorned with rustic statues I glimpsed in the light of our lanterns. I had been talking until eleven in the evening with my companion in the coupé; a very modest and intelligent young man, an architect from the city of Haguenau; then, as the road is good, as the mail-coaches of Leopold I, Grand Duke of Baden, travel very slowly, I fell asleep. Thus, around four in the morning, the cheerful, but cold breath of dawn entered via the lowered window, and struck me in the face; I half awoke, with a confused impression of real objects, still retaining enough of the dreams of sleep to follow with my eyes a fantastic dwarf as tall as my thumb, dressed in a golden cope, and wearing a red wig, who was dancing merrily behind the postilion, on the rump of the carrier horse, with many a bizarre contortion, gambolling like a mountebank, parodying the posture of the postilion, and dodging the whip

[109] Letter XXXI — Freiburg im Breisgau: 47°59'56.4"N, 7°50'31.6"E

with comical leaps when by chance it passed near him. From time to time this dwarf turned towards me, and it seemed to me that he greeted me, ironically, with great bursts of laughter. There was in the front part of the carriage a badly-greased nut that sang a song which the wicked little rascal seemed to be enjoying greatly. At times, his mischievousness and insolence almost made me angry, and I was tempted to warn the postilion. When there was more daylight in the sky, and less sleep in my head, I recognised that this dwarf jumping about in his gold cope was a small copper button with a scarlet tuft attached to the horse's crupper. The horse's movements were communicated to the crupper in an exaggerated fashion, such that the copper button assumed a thousand mad attitudes — I woke fully — it had rained all night, but the wind had dispersed the clouds; patches of diffuse, woolly mist blotted out the sky, here and there, like shreds of black fur; to my right stretched a vast brown plain, barely touched by the light; to my left, behind a dark hill, on the summit of which vivid silhouettes of trees were outlined, the eastern reaches were turning a vague blue. Amidst this blue, above the trees, and below the clouds, Venus shone — you know how I love the planet Venus — I was gazing at it, unable to take my eyes away, when suddenly, at a bend in the road, an immense black arrow silhouetted in the clear air, rose from the centre of the horizon. We had reached Freiburg.

A few moments later, the carriage stopped on a broad, new, white street, and deposited its sundry contents, packages, suitcases, and travellers, under a large carriage entrance lit by a flickering lantern. My French companion bid me adieu, and left me. I was not sorry to arrive; I was quite tired. I was about to enter the house boldly, when a fellow took my arm and barred my way with some sharp words in German, which were completely unintelligible to me. I cried aloud in good French, addressing the people around me; but there were no longer any but Prussian, Austrian, or Baden travellers there, some carrying their trunks, others their portmanteaus, all very German and very sleepy. My complaints nevertheless woke them a little, and they answered me. But not a word of French from them, not a word of German from me. We jabbered back and forth, each trying to find the right words. I finally understood, however, that this carriage entrance was not a hotel: it was the post office, and nothing more.

What to do? Where to go? Here they no longer understood me. I would have liked to follow them; but most of them were Freiburgers returning

home, and dwelt in different directions. I had the disappointment of seeing them depart, one after another, until the last, and at the end of five minutes I was alone beneath the carriage entrance. The carriage had gone. At this point, I noticed that my overnight bag, which contained not only my clothes, but also my money, had disappeared. The scene was acquiring an air of tragedy; I assumed it to be an act of Providence; and finding myself suddenly without clothes, money, or shelter, lost among the Scythians what is more, I turned to the right, and began to walk straight ahead. I felt rather dreamy. Meanwhile the sun, which waits for no one, had continued on its way. It was early morning; I gazed at all the houses one after the other, like a fellow who would greatly like to enter one; but they were all daubed in yellow and grey and shut tight. As a consolation, in my much-perplexed explorations, I came across an exquisite fifteenth-century fountain, which poured its water joyously into a large stone basin via four shiny copper taps. There was enough daylight for me to distinguish the three tiers of statuettes grouped around the central column, and I made out with some difficulty that the statue, in Heilbronn sandstone, which had been destined to crown this charming little building, had been replaced by a wicked weather-vane of painted tin, depicting Fame. After walking all around the fountain to view the figurines, I set off again.

Two or three houses beyond the fountain, a lighted lantern shone above an open door. Well, I went in. No one under the carriage entrance. I called, no one answered. In front of me, a staircase; to my left, a half-open door. I pushed on a door opposite at random; it opened. I entered, I found myself in a dark room, with the vague shape of a window to my left. I called out: 'Anyone there?' No answer. I felt along the wall, I found a door; I pushed on it, it opened. Here was another dark room, with light glowing at the rear, and a half-open door. I approached the door and looked inside. Here comes the frightening part. In an oblong room, vast and supported in the centre by two pillars, curious figures were seated, around a long table, dimly lit by candles placed at intervals,

They were pale, serious, sleepy beings. At the end of the table, closest to me, sat a tall, pale woman wearing a cap topped with an enormous black plume. Beside her was a young man of seventeen, livid and with a serious air, wrapped in an immense floral dressing gown, with a black silk cap over his eyes. Beside the young man, was an old man with a greenish face whose wore

three tiers of head-dress on his head: the first tier, a cotton cap; the second a scarf; the third, a hat. And, chair by chair, a handful of living Nuremberg nutcrackers, grotesquely dressed and engulfed in immense felt hats, with dark faces, and enamel eyes, were spread on either side of the table. The rest of the long table was deserted, and the tablecloth, white and bare as a shroud, was lost in the shadows at the back of the room. Each of these unusual guests had in front of them a white cup, and some unusually-shaped vessels on a small tray. None of them said a word. From time to time, and in the deepest silence, they raised their white cup in which a black liquor was steaming, to their lips and drank gravely. I realised that these ghosts were drinking coffee. Having considered the matter, and judging that the moment had come to produce an effect, I pushed open the half-open door and entered the room boldly.

A pause; no effect. The tall woman, dressed like a herald, alone turned her head, glanced at me fixedly showing the whites of her eyes, and returned to drinking her potion. Otherwise, not a word, nothing. The other ghosts failed even to look at me. A little disconcerted, cap in hand, I took three steps towards the table, and said, while very much afraid of showing disrespect in this castle of Udolpho: — 'Gentlemen, is this not an inn?' Here the old man with the triple coiffure produced a sort of inarticulate grunt which vanished heavily into his cravat. The others remained immobile.

I confess that then I lost patience, and was heard shouting, at the top of my lungs: — 'Hello! Ahoy! Innkeeper! Taverner! By all the devils! Hotelier Waiter! Anyone! *Kellner!*' I had acquired this word, *Kellner*, in my comings and goings along the Rhine, without really knowing its meaning, and had carefully tucked it away in a corner of my mind, with a vague idea that it might someday be useful to me. Indeed, at the magical cry of: '*Kellner!*' a door opened in the darkest part of the cavern. *Open Sesame!* could have not proved more successful. The door closed, after yielding to an apparition which advanced straight towards me. It was a young girl, pretty, pale, with swollen eyes, dressed in black, wearing a strange headdress on her head, which looked like an enormous black butterfly lying flat on its forehead, its wings open. She also had a large piece of black silk wrapped around her neck, as if this graceful spectre was obliged to hide the red, circular line Mary Stuart and Marie Antoinette were fated to wear. — 'Kellner? she asked me. 'Kellner!' I answered fearlessly.

She took a torch and signalled me to follow her. We returned to the rooms I had traversed, and in the middle of the first room I had entered, she showed me with a smile a man sleeping the deep sleep of the righteous, on a wooden bench, his head on my travelling-bag. Greatly surprised by this last prodigy, I shook the man; he woke; the young girl and he exchanged a few words, in a low voice, and two minutes later we found ourselves, my sleeping bag and I, very comfortably installed in an excellent room, with snow-white curtains.

There I was, in the *Hotel of the Court of Zähringen*. And here is the explanation of this tale à la Ann Radcliffe:

At the Customs office in Kehl[110], the driver of the Baden mail-coach, having heard me conversing in Latin (not without a few barbarisms) with a worthy pastor who was returning to Zurich, and in Spanish with a certain Colonel Duarte, who was off, via Savoy, to join Don Carlos (*Carlos María Isidro de Borbón*), had concluded that I knew German, and had not therefore been otherwise concerned as to my fate. At Freiburg, the *kellner*, that is to say the factotum of the Hotel Zähringen, was waiting for the mail-coach on its arrival, and the courier, upon disembarking, had pointed me out to him without my knowledge, saying: '*Here's one for you*'; and had handed him my night bag while I was struggling amidst the Germans. The Kellner, believing me to be forewarned, had gone on ahead with my bag and waited for me at the hotel, where he slept in the lower room. You can guess the rest. Yet, as regards my adventure, it was a fine act of providence that when I left the post office I turned right, and not left. God is great.

The impassive spectres drinking coffee were simply the passengers on the stagecoach from Frankfurt to Geneva, taking advantage of the hour's respite the carrier grants one at dawn; good people, dressed somewhat in the German style, who seemed strange to me, and to whom I must have seemed absurd. The young girl was a pretty servant from the Hotel de Zähringen. The large black butterfly is the headdress of the country. A graceful headdress. Broad, black silk ribbons fitted like a cockade on the forehead, sewn to a cap that is also black, though sometimes embroidered with gold at its top, the hair hanging down behind the back, in two long braids. The two

110 Letter XXXI — Kehl (Rhine crossing): 48°34'25.0"N, 7°48'34.9"E

ends of the thick black necktie, which is also a local fashion, also hang down behind the back.

I had left Strasbourg at seven in the evening the day before. Night was falling when I crossed the Rhine at Kehl over the pontoon bridge. On reaching the other bank, the coach stopped, and the Baden Customs officers commenced their inspection. I handed over my keys, and went off to view the Rhine at dusk. This period of contemplation allowed me to fill the time waiting at Customs, and spared me the displeasure of seeing all that my companion the architect related to me afterwards concerning a poor actress going to Karlsruhe; a rather pretty gypsy, whom the Customs officers amused themselves by tormenting, obliging her to pay seventeen sous for an unhemmed calico *bustle*, and dragging all her tinsel and wigs out of her suitcase, to the poor girl's great confusion.

The Freiburg Minster[111], except for its lower height, is equal to the Strasbourg one. It possesses, though in a different style, the same elegance, the same boldness of line, the same verve, the same solidity of rusted, dark stone, dotted here and there with light-filled holes of all shapes and sizes. The architect of the new cast iron bell-tower of Rouen Cathedral had, it is said, the bell-tower of Freiburg Cathedral in mind. Alas!

Freiburg Minster possesses two other bell-towers. They are Romanesque, small, low, severe, with round arches and Romanesque dentils, and are placed, not, as usual, at the ends of the transept, but in the angles formed by the intersection of the lesser nave with the greater. The Minster is also, in a way, independent of the church, though it adjoins it. It is built at the entrance to the great nave, above an almost Romanesque porch, full of painted and gilded statues, of the greatest interest. On the square outside the church, there is a pretty fountain from the sixteenth century, and in front of the porch, three columns from the same period, which bear a statue of the Virgin between the figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. At the foot of these columns the pavement is laid out as a labyrinth.

To the right, the shadow of the church shelters, in the same square, a sixteenth-century house (*the Merchant's Hall, the Kaufhaus*), with an immense roof of coloured tiles, with stepped gables, flanked by two pointed turrets,

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[111] Letter XXXI — Freiburg Minster: 47°59'43.1"N, 7°51'09.7"E

supported by four arches, pierced by charming bays, and adorned with coloured coats of arms, and an ornate balcony on the first floor, and, between the cross-windows of this balcony, four painted and gilded statues, representing Emperor Maximilian I; Philip I, King of Castile; Emperor Charles V; and Emperor Ferdinand I. This admirable building serves I know not what dull municipal and bourgeois purpose, but it has been colour-washed in red. On this side of the Rhine, they colour-wash in red. They decorate their churches as the savages of the South Seas decorate their faces.

The Minster, fortunately, is not so plastered. The church is coated with a layer of grey, which is almost tolerable when you consider that it could have been beetroot-coloured. The stained-glass windows, almost all of which have been preserved, are of marvellous beauty. As the spire occupies the place of the large rose window on the facade, the side aisles end in two medium-sized rose windows inscribed in triangular arches to the most mysterious and charming effect. The flamboyant Gothic pulpit is superb, the canopy added above is wretched. These sorts of pulpit had no canopy. That is what churchwardens should learn before fiddling with these beautiful buildings, at random. The entire lower part of the church is Romanesque, as are the two side portals, one of which, the one on the right, is hidden by a Renaissance porch. Nothing is more interesting, in my opinion, than these conjunctions of the Romanesque and the Renaissance styles; the Byzantine archivolt, so austere, the neo-Roman archivolt, so elegant, meet together and combine, and, as they are both fanciful, this common basis renders them harmonious and allows them to align without clashing.

A string of engaged Romanesque arches runs along the base of the great nave on both sides. Each of the capitals might have been designed separately. The Romanesque style is richer in capitals than the Gothic style. At the foot of one of these arcades lies Duke Berthold V, who died in 1218, without posterity, and is buried beneath his statue: *sub haec statua*, says the epitaph. *Haec statua* is a stone giant with a long garment, leaning against the wall, feet on the pavement, sculpted in the sinister manner of the thirteenth century, who gazes at the passers-by with a formidable air. He would be a terrifying Commander (*a reference to the Commander in Mozart's opera 'Don Giovanni'*). I would not care to hear him ascending my stairs one evening. This great nave, darkened by the stained-glass windows, is entirely paved with mossy-green tombstones; the carved coats of arms and stern faces of the knights of

Breisgau are worn away by the passage of feet, the faces of proud gentlemen who formerly would not have suffered a prince to touch their faces must now suffer the passage of cowherds.

Before entering the choir, you should admire two exquisite Renaissance porticoes, located, one on the right, the other on the left, in the arms of the transept; then, in a chapel (*the Suter Chapel*) fronted by a grille, at the end of a small golden cavern, you can glimpse a hideous skeleton dressed in gold brocade and pearls, that of Saint Alexander, martyr; then two gloomy chapels, also with grilles, which face each other, arrest your passage: one is full of statues, a 'Last Supper' with Jesus, all the apostles, and the traitor Judas; the other contains only the one figure of Christ in the tomb; two funereal scenes, one of which completes the other, the verso and recto, as it were, of that marvellous poem called the Passion. Sleeping soldiers are sculpted on the sarcophagus of Christ.

The sacristan has reserved the choir and the chapels of the apse for himself. One may enter, but must pay. However, one does not regret the cost. This apse, like those in Flanders, is a museum, and a varied one. It contains Romanesque goldwork, flamboyant carpentry, Venetian fabrics, Persian tapestries, paintings by Holbein (*The Oberried Altarpiece's two surviving panels*), jewelled locksmith's work that could be by Biscornet (*the legendary thirteenth century iron-worker who is said to have created the intricate side doors of Notre Dame de Paris*). The tombs of the Dukes of Zähringen, in the choir, are very beautiful, nobly-sculpted slabs; the two Romanesque doors of the small bell-towers, one of which has dentils, are very interesting; but what I admired above all was, in a chapel at the rear, a Byzantine Christ, about five feet high, brought back from Palestine by a bishop of Freiburg. The figure of Christ, and the cross, are made of gilded copper enhanced with brilliant stones. The Christ, fashioned in a barbaric but powerful style, is dressed in a richly-worked tunic. A large uncut ruby adorns the side. The stone statue of a bishop, leaning against the neighbouring wall, contemplates him with adoration. The bishop is standing; he has a proud, bearded face, a mitre on his head, a crozier in his fist, a cuirass on his stomach, a sword at his side, his shield at his elbow, iron boots on his legs, and his foot resting on a lion. It is all very beautiful.

I shirked climbing the bell-tower. Freiburg is dominated by a large hill, almost a mountain, higher than the bell-tower. I preferred to climb the hill. I was rewarded for my trouble with a delightful view. In the centre, at my feet,

the dark cathedral with its three-hundred and eighty foot high spire; all around it the city's carved cables, and weather-vaned roofs adorned with arabesques of coloured tiles; here and there, among the houses, a few old square towers belonging to the old city wall; beyond the city an immense velvet-green plain fringed with hedges, in which the sun makes the cottage windows shine like gold sequins; trees, vineyards, roads that flee; to the left, a wooded height whose shape recalls the Ducal horned hat (*corno ducale*) of the Doge of Venice; along the horizon, thirty five miles of mountains. It had rained all day, but as I reached the summit of the hill, the sky cleared, and an immense arch of cloud curved above the dark spire, penetrated everywhere by the sun's rays.

Just as I was about to descend, I saw a path that wound between two walls of sheer rock. I followed this path, and after a few steps suddenly found myself, as if at a window, overlooking another valley quite different from that of Freiburg. One would think one was hundreds of miles away. It was a dark, narrow, gloomy valley, with only a few houses among the trees, and was hemmed in on all sides between high hills. A heavy ceiling of cloud rested on the separated ridges of the mountains like a roof over a series of battlements; and, through the gaps in the hills, like the skylights of an enormous tower, I saw the blue sky.

By the way, I ate some trout from the Upper Rhine, in Freiburg, which are excellent little fish — and very pretty, blue, spotted with red.

Letter XXXII: The Road to Basel

Basel, September 7th

Yesterday, dear friend, at five in the morning, I left Freiburg. At noon I entered Basel[112]. The route I am following is more picturesque every day. I saw the sunrise. Around six its powerful light pierced

[112] Letter XXXII — Basel: 47°33'34.6"N, 7°35'19.0"E

the clouds, and the horizontal rays stretched out into the distance, revealing the monstrous humps of the Jura on the horizon. They are already formidable. One feels that they are the last undulations of those enormous waves of granite called the Alps.

The Baden mail coupé was fully booked. The interior was composed thus: a German librarian, sad at having forgotten his blouse in an inn on Mount Rigi; a little old man dressed as in the days of Louis XV, mocking another old man in the costume of a dandy, who looked to me like a travelling version of the opera singer Jean Elleviou, by asking him *if he had visited the land of the Grisons*; finally a tall tradesman's agent, a peddler of fabrics who declared with a loud laugh that, as he had been unable to place his samples he was traveling *in wines* (in vain); moreover, he had whiskers on his cheeks as clipped poodles do elsewhere. — Seeing this, I climbed onto the imperial. It was quite cold; I was up there alone.

The young girls at this southern end of the Haut-Rhin wear an exquisite local costume: the cockade-headdress I told you about, a brown petticoat with large, rather short pleats, and a man's jacket of black cloth with pieces of red silk, imitating cuts and slashes, sewn to the waist and sleeves. Some, instead of a cockade, have a red handkerchief tied like a fichu (*a small triangular shawl*) under their chin. They look charming dressed like that. It doesn't stop them from blowing their noses with their fingers, however.

Around eight in the morning, in a wilderness conducive to reverie, I saw a gentleman of venerable age, dressed in a yellow waistcoat, grey trousers and a grey frock coat, with a large round hat on his head, an umbrella under his left arm, and a book in his right hand. He was reading attentively. What intrigued me was that he had a whip in his left hand. Moreover, I heard a strange grunting noise from behind bushes bordering the road. Suddenly the bushes parted, and I realised that this philosopher was tending a herd of pigs.

The road from Freiburg to Basel runs along a chain of magnificent hills high enough to block the clouds. From time to time, one meets on the road a cart drawn by oxen, and driven by a peasant in a large hat, whose mode of dress recalls Lower Brittany; or a wagon drawn by eight mules; or a long wooden beam that was once a fir tree, being transported to Basel on two pairs of wheels which it links together like a hyphen; or an old woman kneeling before an ancient carved cross. Two hours before arriving in Basel, the road cuts a corner of the forest: deep thickets, pines, firs, larches; at times

a clearing, in which a large oak stands alone like a seven-branched candlestick; then ravines where one hears torrents murmuring. It is the Black Forest.

I will tell you about Basel in detail in my next letter. I lodge at *The Stork*, and from the window where I am writing, I can see, in a small square, two pretty fountains side by side, one from the fifteenth, the other from the sixteenth century. The larger one, that of the fifteenth, flows into a stone basin full of beautiful green shimmering water, which the rays of the sun seem to fill, as they penetrate, with a crowd of golden eels.

These fountains are remarkable things, by the way. I counted eight in Freiburg; in Basel there are fountains on every street corner. They abound in Lucerne, Zurich, Bern, and Solothurn. They are a typical feature of mountainous areas. Mountains generate torrents, torrents beget streams, streams produce fountains; from which it follows that all those charming Gothic fountains in Swiss towns must be classified among the flowers of the Alps.

I saw some beautiful things in Basel Minster[113], and some curious ones, among others the tomb of Erasmus. It is a simple marble coffee-coloured slab, standing upright, with a very long epitaph in Latin. Above the epitaph is a roundel containing a face in profile which resembles, to some extent, the portrait of Erasmus by Holbein, beneath which is written the mysterious word: *Terminus*. There is also the sarcophagus of the Empress Anna (*Gertrude of Hohenberg*) wife of Rudolf I von Habsburg, with her sleeping child (*Charles, who died in infancy*) beside her; and, in one arm of the window, another fourteenth-century tomb, on which lies a sombre stone Marquise, the Lady of Hochburg. — But, not wishing to encroach, I will tell you about Basel in my next letter.

Tomorrow at five in the morning I leave for Zurich, where a fracas has erupted that they term, here, a revolution. Grant me a storm on the lake, and the spectacle will be complete.

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[113] Letters XXXII–XXXIII — Basel Minster: 47°33'23.0"N, 7°35'31.9"E

Letter XXXIII: Basel

Frick, September 8th

Dear friend, I have a wretched quill pen, and am waiting for a penknife to sharpen it. That doesn't stop me from writing to you, as you see. The town where I am lodging is called Frick[114], offering nothing remarkable except a rather pretty landscape, and an excellent lunch which I have just devoured. I was very hungry. — Ah! I have been brought a penknife, and some ink. I had begun this letter with my carafe for a writing desk. Since the ink is fine, I shall tell you about Basel, as I promised.

At first sight, Basel Minster is shocking and disgraceful. Firstly, it no longer has stained-glass windows; secondly, it is plastered in deep red, not only inside, which is right, but outside, which is infamous; and this, from the paving of the square to the tips of the bell-towers: so much so that the two spires, which the fifteenth-century architect had made charming, now look like two carrots with openwork ornamental carving. — However, once one's first irritation has passed, one looks at the church as a whole, and finds it pleasing; it is well preserved. The roof, with coloured tiles, has originality and grace (the interior construction is of little interest). The spires, flanked by lantern staircases, are pretty. On the main facade there are four interesting female statues: two holy women dreaming and reading; two mad women, barely dressed, showing their beautiful, firm, plump Swiss shoulders, mocking and insulting each other, and laughing broadly, on both sides of the Gothic portal. A way of representing the Devil that is new and witty. Two equestrian saints, Saint George and Saint Martin, depicted on horseback and larger than life, complete the decorations of the facade. Saint Martin shares half of his cloak with a poor man, which was perhaps only a meagre woollen blanket in reality, but later, transfigured by alms-giving, was carved of marble, granite, jasper, porphyry, velvet, satin, purple, silver cloth, and gold brocade,

[114] Letter XXXIII — Frick: 47°30'29.9"N, 8°01'09.8"E

embroidered with diamonds and pearls, cast by Benvenuto Cellini, sculpted by Jean Goujon, and painted by Raphael. — Saint George, on whose head two angels are placing a Germanic helm, thrusts his lance deep into the mouth of the dragon which is writhing on a plinth composed of hideous plants.

The northern portal, that of Saint Gallus is a beautiful Romanesque poem. At the sides beneath the archivolt, are the four evangelists; to the right and left, all their works of charity depicted in small niches one above the other, framed by two pillars and surmounted by an architrave. This forms two pilasters, at the top of which a glorifying angel blows a trumpet. The poem ends with an ode. Above, a Byzantine rose window completes the portal; and, in beautiful sunshine, it makes a charming picture in a superb frame.

The southern portal is less curious, but it communicates with a noble fifteenth-century cloister, paved, panelled, and ceilinged with sepulchral stones, and somewhat analogous to the admirable cloister of Saint Wandrille Abbey (*Fontenelle Abbey, Caudebec-en-Caux, Normandy*), so stupidly ruined by an inept restorer. The tombs here hang suspended on all sides, rising high under the ogives with their flamboyant mullions; they are worked slabs, some in stone, others in marble, some in bronze; they are falling into ruin; moss eats the granite, the bronze oxidises. However, the mingling of all the styles of the last five hundred years, reveals the history of architecture. All the dead forms of that great art are there, pell-mell, juxtaposed in collision, at all angles, superseded one by another, and as if buried in their tombs: the ogive and the semicircular arch, the lowered arch of Charles V, the notched pediment of Henry III, the twisted column of Louis XIII, the chicory leaves of Louis XV. All these successive manifestations of human thought, hanging on the wall like paintings in a living room, frame epitaphs. A single idea is at the centre of these creations executed with dazzling artistry — Death. The varied, living vegetation of architecture flourished around this one idea.

In the centre of the cloister there is a small square courtyard full of that beautiful dense grass that grows over the dead. Inside the church, besides the tombs I mentioned in my last letter, I found fifteenth, and sixteenth century woodworked stalls. These little carved wooden constructions are, for me, very amusing little books to read; each stall is a chapter. The carved wooden stalls of Amiens Cathedral represent the Iliad of such epics.

The pulpit, which is fifteenth century, rises from the pavement like a large stone tulip entangled by a network of inextricable ribs. This beautiful flower has been endowed with an absurd canopy, as in Freiburg. — In general, Calvinism, without ill intention, has mistreated this poor church; it has plastered it, it has whitewashed the windows, it has masked, with a balustrade with swollen calves, the beautiful Romanesque order of the tall bays of the nave, and has engendered beneath the beautiful Catholic vault a Puritan atmosphere which is merely tedious. The old cathedral of the Bishop Prince of Basel, who wore argent with a sable crozier, is now nothing more than a Protestant Hall.

Yet Methodism has respected the Romanesque capitals of the choir, which are mysterious and remarkable; it has respected the crypt under the altar, where there are twelfth-century pillars and thirteenth-century paintings. Some Romanesque monsters, of chimerical deformity, torn from some ancient church that has disappeared, lie there, on the dark pavement of this crypt, like sleeping mastiffs. They are so frightening that one passes by in the shadows for fear of waking them.

The old woman who was guiding me offered to show me the cathedral archives, and I accepted. Here is a description: an immense carved wooden chest from the fifteenth century, magnificent, but empty — as one enters the archive room, one hears a dreadful yawn; it is this great chest opening — I continue. A vast cupboard from the same period, with a thousand drawers. I opened some of these drawers; they were empty. In one or two I found small engravings representing Zurich, Berne, or Mount Rigi; in the largest there was an image of some men squatting around a fire; at the foot of this image, which is in the most Swiss of tastes, I read this inscription: *Bivoic des Bohémiens*. Add to this a few old iron cannonballs placed on a window sill, a mace, two Swiss clubs that country folk may have used to hammer Charles the Bold, with four rows of nails arranged like shark jaws, some mediocre wax reproductions of Johann Baptiste Klauber's 'Danse Macabre', destroyed in 1805 along with the Dominican cemetery; a table laden with fossils from the Black Forest; two rather curious sixteenth-century earthenware bricks; a Liège almanac for 1837, and there you have the archives of Basel Cathedral. These archives are reached through a beautiful black gate, extravagant, curled, and skilfully worked, which is four hundred years old. Birds and chimeras are perched, here and there, in its dark iron foliage.

From the top of the bell towers the view is admirable. I had beneath my feet, three hundred and fifty feet below, the wide, green Rhine; beyond the river outer Basel, in front of me inner Basel: for the Rhine cuts the city in two; and, as in all cities traversed by a river, one bank has developed at the expense of the other. In Paris it is the right bank, in Basel the left bank. The two Basels are connected by a long wooden bridge (*Mittlere Brücke*) often attacked by the Rhine, which has stone piers on only one side of the river, and in the centre of which stands a pretty fifteenth-century sentry-box turret. The two parts of the town offer a delightful embroidery of carved gables, Gothic facades, roofs with weathervanes, turrets and towers, along the Rhine on both sides. These rows of old houses are mirrored in the Rhine. The bridge and its reflection have the odd look of a large ladder laid from one bank to the other. Clumps of trees, and a host of gardens, their vegetation hanging from the house fronts mingles with the zigzags of ancient architecture. The naves of the churches, and towers of the fortified enclosures, appear as large dark knots, to which the capricious lines which run tumultuously from the bell towers to the gables, from the gables to the dormers, are attached here and there. All of this laughs, sings, speaks, chatters, springs, crawls, flows, walks, dances, and shines in the midst of a line of high mountains on the horizon, which only part to let the Rhine pass through.

I descended to the city, which abounds in exquisite fancies, well-conceived doors, extravagant ironwork, and curious constructions from all periods. Among other things, there is a large building that today serves as a shed for a train of carts, and whose bays wickets, doors, and windows, offer everywhere, Gordian knots of ribs, often cut short by the architect, which are the most bizarre in the world. I have not encountered anything like it anywhere. The stone is twisted and woven like a wicker basket. You can find basket-handles like them in Normandy; but to see a whole basket done in this manner, you must come to Basel. Near this waggon-depot, I visited the old gunsmiths' house, a beautiful sixteenth-century building, with paintings on the frontage, in which Venus and the Virgin are charmingly mingled.

The town hall (*the Roothuus*[115]) dates from the same period. The facade, surmounted by a plumed man-at-arms, who bears the shield of the city, would be beautiful if it were not plastered (always in red!) and, what is more, adorned with hideous painted figures leaning on a figurative balcony which is in the Gothic revival style of 1810. The inner courtyard has undergone the same form of decoration. The grand staircase possesses two statues: one, at its foot, is a handsome Renaissance warrior claiming to represent the Roman consul Munatius Plancus; the other, which is at the top, at the corner of the impost of a lowered door, is a city official who holds a letter in his hand; he is painted, dressed half in black and half in white, which are the colours of the coat of arms of the city, while the letter, tightly folded, has a red seal. This Gothic official has survived all the European revolutions. I encountered him that very morning near the Hôtel des Trois-Rois, going through the town, in good health and very much alive, preceded by his man-at-arms carrying a sword; which made some merchants, who were reading the *Constitutionnel* at the door of a tavern, burst out laughing.

To continue; a young woman suddenly emerged from the lowered doorway; she addressed a few words to me in German, and, since I failed to understand her, I followed her. I was right to do so. The girl kindly showed me into a room where there is a most exquisite spiral staircase, then into a room entirely of polished oak, with beautiful stained-glass windows in the casements, and a superb Renaissance door in the place where we usually have a fireplace: here, as in Alsace, as in Germany, there are no fireplaces, only stoves. Seeing all these marvels, I gave the gracious girl a fine French silver coin which made her smile. Beside the town hall staircase there is a curious fresco of the Last Judgment, which is from the sixteenth century.

I could not leave Basel without visiting the library[116]. I knew that Basel is as regards Hans Holbein the Younger, what Frankfurt is as regards Albrecht Durer. In the library, in fact, there is a nest, a heap, an encumbrance of Holbeins; whichever way you turn, all is Holbein. There is Luther, there is Erasmus, there is Melanchthon, there is Katherina von Bora (*the wife of Martin Luther*), there is Holbein himself; there is Holbein's wife (*Elsbeth Binzenstock*)

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[115] Letter XXXIII — Basel Town Hall (Roothuus): 47°33'29.5"N, 7°35'17.9"E

[116] Letter XXXIII — Kunstmuseum Basel: 47°33'14.8"N, 7°35'39.1"E

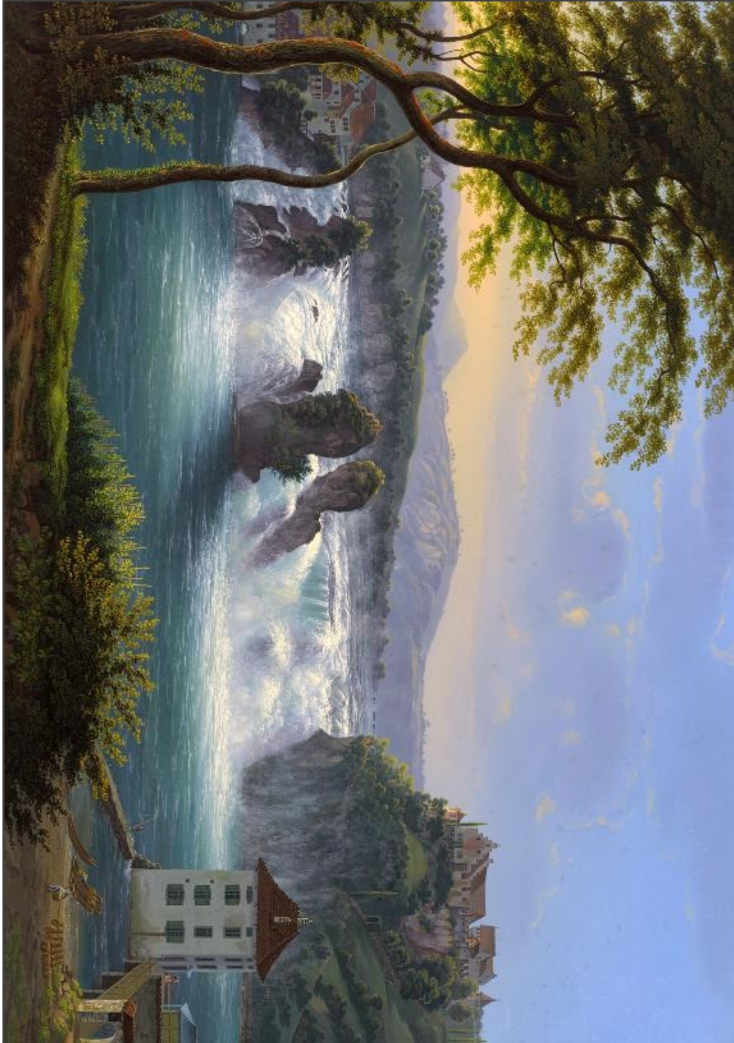
a fine woman of about forty, still charming, who has wept, and who dreams between her two pensive children, who looks like a woman who has suffered, and yet who makes you want to kiss her strong neck. There is also a drawing of Thomas More with all his family, his father, his children, even his monkey (*at the right-hand edge of the drawing*), for the grave chancellor loved monkeys. And then there are two Passions, one painted, the other drawn with a pen; two dead Christs, admirable corpses that make you shudder. All this is by Holbein; all this is divine in its reality, poetry and invention. I have always loved Holbein; I find in his painting the two things that touch me most, sadness and sweetness.

Besides the paintings, the library has furniture; many Roman bronzes found at Augst, a Chinese chest, a Venetian tapestry-door, a prodigious sixteenth-century wardrobe (for which *twelve thousand francs have already been offered*, my guide told me), and finally the table of the Diet of the Thirteen Cantons. It is a magnificent sixteenth-century table, adorned with wyverns, lions, and satyrs that support the coat of arms of Basel, carved with the arms of the cantons, inlaid with tin, mother-of-pearl, and ivory; a table around which meditated these *avoyers* (*magistrates*) and *landammans* (*council chairmen*) feared by the emperors; a table where these governors of men could see the solemn inscription: *Supra naturam præsto est Deus* (*Above Nature there is God*). — It is, however, in poor condition. The library of Basel is rather poorly maintained; the objects are heaped there like oyster shells. I saw on a sideboard a small painting by Rubens standing upright against a pile of books, and it must have already fallen a few times since the frame was all broken. — You can see that there was something of everything in this library, paintings, furniture, rare fabrics; there were even some books.

My friend, I end this letter here, scribbled, as you can see, on some Egyptian papyrus, more porous and absorbent than a sponge. That is one torture I now record among those I'd never wish on my worst enemy: writing with a pen that spits, on paper that drinks the ink.

The End of Part X of Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

Part XI: Letter XXXIV-XXXIX



'The Rhine Falls near Schaffhausen'
Johann Heinrich Bleuler the Younger (Swiss, 1787-1857)
Artvee

Letter XXXIV: The Road to Zurich

September 9th

I am in Zurich. Four o'clock in the morning has just sounded from the city belfry, accompanied by trumpets. It sounded like reveille, so I opened my window. It is pitch black, and no one is asleep. The city of Zurich is buzzing like an irritated hive. The wooden bridges tremble under the measured steps of battalions passing confusedly in the shadows. The noise of drums can be heard among the hills. Alpine Marseillaises are being sung in front of the lit taverns on street corners. Zurich *bisets* (*National Guards in plain clothes*) are practicing in a small square near the Hôtel de l'Epée (*at Weinplatz 10, now the Hotel zum Schwert, first mentioned in 1408, renovated in 1991*), where I lodge, and I hear the commands in French: *Shoulder arms! Carry arms!* From the room next to mine, a young girl answers with a tender, heroic, and monotonous song, whose tune explains the words. There is a lit skylight in the belfry, and another amongst the tall spires of the cathedral. The glow of my candle vaguely illuminates a large diagonal bicolour flag in white and blue, which is hanging above the quay (*the Zurich cantonal flag*). Peals of laughter can be heard, loud shouts, the sound of doors closing, strange clicks. Shadows pass and repass everywhere. A joyful rumour of war keeps this little nation awake. However, the lake with its reflections of the stars, murmurs majestically, at my window, those words of tranquility, comfort, and peace that Nature voices to Humanity. I watch the dark nocturnal ripples decompose and recompose themselves on its surface. A rooster crows, and up there, to my left, above the cathedral, between the two black bell-towers, Venus gleams like the tip of a spear between two turrets on a stretch of battlements. There is revolution in Zurich. Small towns wish to act like great ones. Every marquis desires a squire. Zurich has just slain its mayor, and changed its government.

Since they have woken me, I am taking advantage of this to write to you, my friend. A benefit accruing to you from this little revolution.

It was dawn yesterday morning when I left Basel. The road to Zurich runs for half a mile or more alongside the old towers of the city. I have not told you about the towers of Basel; yet they are remarkable, all of different shapes and heights, separated from each other by a crenellated wall above a formidable moat in which the city of Basel successfully cultivates potatoes. In the days of bows and arrows, the encircling wall defended a mighty fortress; now it is no more than a flimsy pretence.

The entrances to the city are still adorned with those beautiful fourteenth-century portcullises, whose hooked teeth adorn the tops of the gateways, so that as you leave you think you are emerging from a monster's mouth. By the way, the day before yesterday, at the top of the spire of Basel Minster, a gargoyle seemed to stare at me; I leaned over, put my hand in its mouth, resolutely, and all was fine. You can tell the story to those people who marvel at Isaac van Amburgh (*the noted American lion-tamer, of Dutch extraction*).

Almost all the entrances to greater Basel are fortress gates of noble character, especially the one leading to the polygon (*military training ground*), a proud keep with a pointed roof (*the Spalentor*), flanked by two turrets, adorned with statues like the Porte de Vincennes and the ancient gate of the old Louvre. It goes without saying that it has been scraped, planed, mortared, and colour-washed (in red). Two archers carved into the battlements are curious. They lean their *poulaine* (*long, pointed, medieval*) shoes against the wall and seem to be supporting their weapons with enormous effort, so heavy are they to carry. At this moment a platoon of about two hundred men is passing beneath the gate, returning from the polygon with a cannon. I believe this to be the army of Basel.

Near this gate is a delightful Renaissance fountain, heaped with cannons, mortars, and piles of sculpted cannonballs around its basin, from which the water spurts with the twittering sounds of a bird. This poor fountain is shamefully mutilated and degraded; the central column was laden with exquisite figures, of which only the torsos remain, and here and there an arm or a leg. Poor masterpiece, violated by all the soldiers of the arsenal! — But I am now on the road from Basel to Zurich.

For four hours, until Rheinfelden, it skirts the Rhine, following a ravishing valley in which all the damp glimmers of morning showered on us from the clouds. We left Grenzach on the left, whose high tower (*Saint Leodegar*), marked with a clockface, can be seen from the bell-towers of Basel;

then we traversed Augst[117]. Augst, is a barbaric name. Yet, the name is short for Augusta, since Augst was a Roman township, the capital of the Rauraci, the ancient Augusta Raurica founded by the consul Munatius Plancus, to whom the people of Basel erected a statue in their town hall, with an epitaph written by a bold pedant named Beatus Rhenanus (*Beatus Bild, the sixteenth century humanist scholar*). A glorious history, I would say, for a very small town. Indeed, Augusta Raurica is now nothing more than the adorable setting for a Swiss vaudeville. A group of picturesque cabins, perched on a rock, connected by two old fortress gates; two mildewed bridges, beneath which races a pretty torrent, the Ergolz, which descends from the mountain, thrusting aside the tree-branches; the sound of mill-wheels; wooden balconies brightened by vines, an old cemetery in which I noted, in passing, a strange tomb from the fourth century that seems to be collapsing into the Rhine, which it adjoins; such is Augst, Raurica, Augusta. The ground is marked by excavations. A pile of small bronze statuettes is being extracted, with which the Basel library is mounting a display of curiosities.

Half an hour further on, a pretty ribbon of old wooden houses transected by a waterfall, on the right bank of the Rhine, is Warmbach. And then, after a mile or so of trees, ravines and meadows, the Rhine broadens; in the middle of the water a large rock (*Inseli Burgstell*[118]) crouches, covered with ruins and connected to the two banks by a covered bridge, built of wood, of a singular appearance. A small Gothic town, bristling with towers, battlements and bell-towers, descends in disorder towards this bridge: it is Rheinfelden[119], a military and religious citadel, one of the four forest towns (*with Säckingen, Laufenburg, and Waldshut, forming the Old League of Upper Germany*) a famous and charming place. The ruin in the middle of the Rhine is the old castle, which is called the Stone of Rheinfelden (*Castle Stein on Inseli Burgstell island*). Under the wooden bridge which has only one arch, beyond the rock, on the side opposite the city, the Rhine is no longer a river, it is an abyss. Many boats are lost there every day. — I halted for a good quarter of an hour at Rheinfelden. The inn signs, the most entertaining in the world, hang from enormous

[117] Letter XXXIV — Augst (Augusta Raurica): 47°32'02.8"N, 7°43'18.1"E

[118] Letter XXXIV — Inseli Burgstell: 47°33'17.3"N, 7°47'22.6"E

[119] Letter XXXIV — Rheinfelden: 47°33'40.0"N, 7°47'08.2"E

flowery iron arms. The main street is enlivened by a beautiful fountain (*the Albrechtsbrunnen, of 1542 but later named after Archduke Albrecht VI; now a copy, the original is in the Fricktal museum*) whose column bears a noble man-at-arms, who himself bears the arms of the city, with his own arm raised proudly above his head.

From Rheinfelden to Albbruck, the landscape remains charming, but there is nothing for the antiquarian, unless, like myself, they are driven more by curiosity than archaeology, and are more of a wanderer on the highway than a traveller. I am a diligent observer of all things, nothing more; but I believe I am right to be so; everything elicits a thought; I try to extract the thought from the thing. It is an exercise in chemistry like any other.

Letter XXXV: Zurich

September

When one travels in the plains, the journey's interest is provided by the sides of the road; when one travels through a mountainous country, by the horizon. But, even with the admirable line of the Jura before my eyes, I wished to see everything, and gazed at the roadside as much as at the skyline. The countryside bordering the road is admirable at this season, amidst such a landscape. The meadows are dotted with yellow, blue, white, and violet flowers, as in spring; magnificent brambles scratched the body of the carriage as we passed; here and there steep banks imitated the shapes of the mountains, and streams of water as thick as my thumb parodied their torrents; everywhere, the autumn spiders have stretched their hammocks on the thousandfold tips of the bushes: the dew sits there in large pearls.

And then there are the domestic scenes in which local peculiarities are revealed. Near Rheinfelden, three men were shoeing an ox that looked very stupid, tethered, and restrained for the purpose. At Augst, a poor deformed tree, leaning on a forked prop, served as a horse for the little boys of the village, children with Rome for an ancestor. Near the Basel gate, a man was

beating his wife, something common to labourers and kings. Did not the Duke of Buckingham (*George Villiers*) tell Madame de Chevreuse (*Marie Aimée de Rohan, Duchesse de Chevreuse*) *that he had loved three queens, and been obliged to discipline all three*? A hundred yards from Frick, I saw a hive placed on a board above the door of a hut. The ploughmen went in and out through the door of the hut, the bees entered and departed through the door of the hive; men and insects did the work of the good Lord.

All this amused and delighted me. In Freiburg, I neglected for a long while the immense landscape I had before my eyes, while concentrating on the patch of grass on which I was sitting. It was situated on a small overgrown hump of the hill. Therein too was a world. Beetles crawled ponderously through the deeply-rooted stems of vegetation; parasol-shaped hemlock flowers imitated the pine-trees of Italy; a long leaf, like a half-open bean pod, revealed beautiful drops of rain, like a diamond necklace in a case of green satin; a poor wet bumblebee, in its yellow and black velvet, climbed painfully along a thorny branch; thick clouds of midges hid the light from it; a bluebell trembled in the breeze, and a whole nation of aphids sheltered under its enormous tent. Near a puddle of water that would not have filled a basin, I saw emerging from the mud, and writhing towards the sky to absorb the air, an earthworm similar to an antediluvian python, fated perhaps to find, in that microscopic universe too, the Hercules that would slay it, and the Cuvier who would describe it. In short, I found that little universe as great as the other. I supposed myself to be Micromégas (*a visitor from another planet, in Voltaire's early science fiction tale of that name, 1752*); my scarabs were examples of *megatherium giganteum* (*first specimen discovered 1787, named by Cuvier in 1796*) my bumblebee was a winged elephant, my midges were eagles, my puddle of water a lake, and three tufts of tall grass a virgin forest. — You recognise me in this picture, don't you, my friend? — At Rheinfelden, the exuberant inn signs engrossed me as completely as any cathedral does; and my mind is so constructed that at certain moments a village pond, clear as a steel mirror, surrounded by thatched cottages, and crossed by a flotilla of ducks, delights me quite as much as Lake Geneva.

At Rheinfelden we left the Rhine and only saw it again for a moment at Bad Säckingen[120]: an ugly church, a covered wooden bridge, an insignificant town at the bottom of a delightful valley. Then the road ran through cheerful villages across a wide, high plateau around which one sees a monstrous herd of mountains gambolling in the distance. Suddenly, you come across a clump of trees near an inn, you hear the sound of a brake applied, and the road drops away into the dazzling Aare valley.

The eye plunges at first into the depths of the sky and finds there, on the far horizon, a series of jagged, steep and rugged ridges, which I believe to be the Graue Hôrner; then it plunges to the depths of the valley to find Brugg[121], a beautiful little town bound tightly by a picturesque ligature of walls and battlements, with a bridge over the Aare; and then it climbs again along a dark wooded swell and halts at a tall ruin. This ruin is the Castle of Habsburg the cradle of the House of Austria. I gazed for a long time at that tower, from which the two-headed eagle flew.

The Aare, blocked by boulders, has torn the valley floor into capes and promontories. This beautiful landscape is one of the great places in history. Rome fought there, Vitellius' destiny crushed that of Galba; Austria was born there. From this crumbling keep, built in the eleventh century by Count Radbot of Klettgau (*Swabia*), flowed an immense river of archdukes and emperors covering the entire history of modern Europe.

To the north of Brugg, the valley is lost in mist. There is the confluence of the Aare, the Reuss, and the Limmat. The Limmat flows from Lake Zurich bringing the water from the springs on Mount Todi; the Aare flows from Lake Thun (*Thunersee*) and Lake Brienz (*Brienzersee*), and brings the water from the Grimsell waterfalls; the Reuss flows from Lake Lucerne, and brings the torrents of Mount Rigi, the Windgällen, and Mount Pilatus. The Rhine bears all this to the ocean.

All I have just written to you, the three rivers, the ruin, and the magnificent shape of the rocks eaten away by the Aare, filled my reverie as the carriage galloped down to Brugg. Suddenly, I was awakened from my thoughts by the charming composition offered by the approach to the town.

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[120] Letter XXXV — Bad Säckingen: 47°33'22.7"N, 7°56'29.8"E

[121] Letter XXXV — Brugg: 47°29'12.1"N, 8°12'40.3"E

It is one of the most delightful clusters of roofs, towers, and steeples I have yet seen. I had always promised myself, if ever I visited Brugg, to pay great attention to an ancient bas-relief inlaid in the wall near the bridge, which, it is said, represents a Hun's head. As it was Sunday, the bridge was decked with a crowd of pretty, smiling girls, full of curiosity and in their finest attire, so much so that I forgot the Hun's head. By the time I remembered, the town was a good two miles behind me.

With their cockades of ribbons on their foreheads, less exaggerated than in Freiburg, their black velvet bodices adorned with silver chains, and rows of buttons, their velvet cravats with gold-embroidered corners worn tight around their necks like the iron gorgets of knights, their brown skirts with thick pleats, and their alert faces, the women of Brugg all appeared pretty; many are. The men were dressed like our masons in their Sunday best, and looked hideous. I understand there are male lovers in Brugg; I can't conceive of too many female ones.

The town, clean, sanitary, and happy in appearance, made up of pretty houses, almost all of them ornate, is no less delightful inside than outside. A singular thing is that both sexes, in their Sunday gatherings, play out the tale of Alpheus and Arethusa (*separated by the sea, the river god Alpheus in Greece nonetheless pursued the nymph Arethusa to Syracuse, Sicily*), for as I crossed the city, I saw all the women at the Bridge gate, and all the men at the other end of the main street (*Haupstrasse*), at the Zurich gate. Nor do the sexes mingle further in the fields; we met a group of men, then a group of women; this custom, in which the children themselves participate, is specific to the whole canton and extends as far as Zurich. It is a strange thing, and, like many strange things, a wise thing. In this land of vigour and beauty, of exuberant nature and exquisite costumes, Nature tends to make the men enterprising, while the costume makes the women coquettish; custom intervenes, separates the sexes, and forms an obstacle.

The valley, indeed, is not only a confluence of rivers, it is a confluence of costumes too. One crosses the Reuss and the black velvet bodice becomes a corselet of flowered damask, to the middle of which is sewn a wide gold braid. One crosses the Limmat and the brown skirt becomes a red skirt with an embroidered muslin apron. All hairstyles mingle equally; ten minutes later one encounters beautiful girls with large exorbitant combs as in Lima, with high-shaped black straw hats as in Florence, and lace as in Madrid. All wear a bouquet of natural flowers at the side. A refinement.

The variety of hairstyles was such that I anticipated every possibility. After the Reuss bridge, there is a small hill. I was climbing it on foot. I saw an old woman coming towards me wearing a sort of vast Spanish sombrero in black leather, to adorn which, as a crowning glory, were added a pair of boots and an umbrella. I was about to record this strange headdress, when I noticed that the good woman was simply carrying on her head a traveller's suitcase. The traveller himself was following a few steps behind; a fine man, who doubtless prided himself on speaking French, and who accosted me to tell me about the revolution in Zurich. All I could understand, amidst a lot of gibberish, was that there had been a proclamation from the mayor, and that the proclamation began thus: *Brave Iroquois!* — I presume that the worthy man meant: *Brave Zuriquois*.

The Aare valley network bears two charming adornments: Brugg where the Aare valley widens, Baden where the Limmat narrows. For half an hour we had been following the banks of the Limmat, which raises a dreadful outcry at the bottom of a charming ravine whose sloping landslides are planted with vines. Suddenly a gate with four turrets blocks the road; below this gate, wooden houses whose attics seem to hunch together rush pell-mell into the ravine; above, among the trees, stands an old ruined castle (*Ruine Stein*) whose battlements form a cockerel's crest on the mountain. At the far end, under a covered bridge, the Limmat rushes swiftly over a bed of rocks, which roughen the water violently. And then a bell-tower with coloured tiles, seemingly clad in a snakeskin, is seen. It is Baden[122].

There is everything in Baden: Gothic ruins, Roman ruins, thermal waters, a statue of Isis, excavations where many gambling dice have been found, a town hall where Prince Eugène of Savoy and Marshal de Villars (*Claude Louis Hector, 1st Duke of Villars*) exchanged signatures (*the Treaty of Baden, 1714, formally ended the War of the Spanish Succession*). As I wished to arrive in Zurich before nightfall, I contented myself with viewing, in the square while they were changing horses, a charming Renaissance fountain surmounted, like the one in Rheinfelden, by the haughty and severe figure of a soldier. The water gushes from the mouth of a frightening bronze serpent that roils its tail amidst the ironwork of the fountain. Two familiar pigeons had perched on this serpent, and one of them drank by dipping its beak in the arched stream

[122] Letter XXXV — Baden: 47°28'25.0"N, 8°18'42.8"E

of water, fine as a silver hair, that fell from the tap into the basin below.

The Romans called the thermal waters of Baden *the talkative waters*, 'aquae verbigenae'— As I write to you, my friend, it seems to me I must have drunk of them.

The sun was setting, the mountains were steepening, the horses were galloping on an excellent road in the opposite direction to the Limmat's flow; we were traversing a completely wild region; beneath our feet there was a white monastery with a red steeple, like a child's toy; before our eyes, a mountain shaped like a hill, but so high that a forest there seemed like a heath; in the severe garden of the monastery, a white-robed monk was walking, talking with a black-robed monk; above the mountain, an old tower half-showed its face, reddened by the horizontal rays of sunlight. What was this place? I do not know. Konrad of Tegerfelden, one of the murderers of the Emperor Albert (*Albrecht I*) held a castle in this solitude. — Were these the ruins? — I was only a passer-by, and knew nothing, I have left to these sinister places their secrets; but I could not help thinking vaguely of that nocturnal assassination in 1308, and the revenge, according to legend, executed by Agnes (*Albert's daughter, and Queen of Hungary*) while this savage tower, hidden, little by little, by the folds of the ground, slowly returned to the mountain.

We came to a bend in the road; an unexpected crevasse let pass an immense shaft of sunset light; the villages, the smoke, the herds, and people reappeared, and the beautiful valley of the Limmat began to smile again.

The villages are truly remarkable in this canton of Zurich[123]. They are composed of magnificent thatched cottages comprising three sections. At one end the dwelling-house, of wood and masonry, with its three stories, with low cross-shaped window frames, and small round stained-glass panes; the other end, houses the animals, in stables and stalls made of planks; in the centre are the quarters for the wagons and utensils, fitted with a large carriage door. In the roof, which is enormous, are the haybarn and attic. Three houses under one roof. Three heads under one hat. That is the Zurich cottage. As you can see, it is a palace.

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[123] Letters XXXV–XXXVI — Zurich: 47°22'27.1"N, 8°31'48.0"E

Night had fallen, and I had fallen asleep in the carriage, when a noise of planks sounding beneath the trampling of the horses woke me. I opened my eyes. I was in a sort of timber cavern of the most singular appearance. Above me large beams curved into low arches and, inextricably buttressed, supported a dark vault; to the right and left, low arches made of squat joists allowed me to glimpse two dark, narrow galleries, pierced here and there with square holes through which the night breeze and the sound of a river reached me. At the very end of this strange crypt, I could see bayonets gleaming vaguely. The carriage rolled slowly over a floor from the cracks in which issued a deafening roar. A distant torch, quivering in the wind, cast gleams and shadows on these massive wooden arches. I was on the covered bridge of Zurich. Patrols were bivouacking round it. No description could give a true idea of the bridge, seen like that, and at that hour. Imagine the beams of a cathedral roof, laid across a river, shaking under the wheels of a stagecoach.

As I am writing all this, day is breaking. I am a little disappointed. Zurich loses something in the daylight; I miss the vague profiles of the night. The cathedral steeples are ignoble pepper-pots. Almost all the facades are plastered and whitewashed. On my left I have a kind of Hôtel Guénégaud (*the only complete Hôtel designed by François Mansart still standing in Paris; constructed 1651-55*). But the lake is beautiful; and, over there, the barrier of the Alps is admirable. It corrects perhaps the overly-cheerful, or so it seems to me, view of the lake, bordered by white houses and green crops. The mountains always give the impression of immense tombs; the lower ones have a black shroud of larch-trees; the upper ones a white shroud of snow.

Four in the afternoon

I have just taken a ride on the lake, in a sort of little gondola, like a hackney carriage, for thirty sous an hour. I generously contributed three francs worth (*two hours fee*) to Lake Zurich; I regret them a little. It is beautiful, but very nice. They have a brand-new church (*the Neumünster*) which they show you with pride, the interior of which resembles the church at Pantin (*Saint-Germain de Pantin*). The Zurich senators live in whitewashed villas, which have the false air of the *guinguettes* (*café dance-halls*) of Vaugirard

in Paris. I saw an omnibus go by, God forgive me, as at Passy. I am no longer surprised that these fellows make revolutions.

Fortunately, the blue water of the lake is transparent. I could see, in the glassy depths, mountains on the bed of the lake, and forests on these mountains. The rocks and weed were quite a good representation, I thought, of the lands drowned by the Flood, and, leaning over the edge of my two-oared boat, I felt Noah's emotions as he stood at the window of the Ark. From time to time, I saw large fish, striped with black like tigers, swim by. I rescued, with the tip of my stick, two or three drowning flies.

Zurich must be very popular with those who adore the façade of the Saint-Sulpice seminary. Superb buildings are currently being built here, the architecture of which recalls the Madeleine, or the guardhouse on the Boulevard du Temple. As for me, apart from the Romanesque portal of the cathedral[124], a few old houses lost as if drowned amidst the new ones, two church spires, and three or four surrounding towers, of which an enormous one resembles the Pantagruelian belly of a burgomaster, I am not one to admire Zurich. I searched in vain for the famous Wellenberg tower which was in the middle of the Limmat, and which had served as a prison for the Count of Habsburg (*Johann II of Habsburg-Laufenburg, in 1350*) and the Mayor, Hans Waldman beheaded in 1489. Has it been demolished? (*It stood between today's Münster Bridge and the Quaibrücke, and had indeed been demolished, in 1837*)

While I am in full flow, *pardieu*, let me speak about the inn! At the *Hôtel de l'Epée*, the traveller is not flayed; rather he is skillfully dissected. The innkeeper provides you with a view of the lake, at the rate of eight francs per window, per day. The high prices at the *Hôtel de l'Epée* reminded me of a verse by Ronsard, who, it seems, dined badly:

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[124] Letters XXXV–XXXVI — Zurich Cathedral (Grossmünster): 47°22'12.4"N, 8°32'38.4"E

'Life is harnessed

To two wretched horses, drinking and eating'

(*Ronsard, Sonnet LXXI: Au Sieur Galandius*)

Nowhere are those two horses more wretched than at the *Hotel de l'Epée*. By the way, I neglected to tell you that Zurich was once called *Turicum*. The Limmat divides it into two cities, Greater Zurich and Lesser Zurich, which are connected by three beautiful bridges, '*over which the bourgeoisie often stroll*', says George Braun of Cologne (*publisher of Civitates Orbis Terrarum from 1572 to 1617, covering many cities of the world*). The vineyard is well exposed to the sun. There is Zurich wine, and Zurich wheat.

I embrace you, though I am thirteen hundred and thirty-eight feet above you (*the height of Zurich above sea lev*el).

Letter XXXVI: Zurich Continued

September

I have quit the Hôtel de l'Epée. I decided to stay in the city, no matter whereabouts. My inn is no longer a bad one, though I no longer have sight of the lake. There are times when I miss those wretched dinners in losing the magnificent view.

The day before yesterday was one of those times. It was raining. I was confined to the room I lodge in — a small, sad, cold room, decorated with a bed painted grey with white curtains, chairs with lyre-shaped backs, and bluish wallpaper mottled with those tasteless and styleless designs that are employed indiscriminately on the garments of badly-dressed women, and on the walls of poorly-furnished rooms. I opened the window, which is one of those hideous windows from fifty years ago that are called 'guillotine' windows, and I watched in melancholy mood, the rain falling. The street was

deserted; all the windows of the house opposite were closed; not a single profile behind the panes, not a passerby on the pavement made of small, rounded, black pebbles that the rain caused to shine like ripe chestnuts. The only thing that enlivened the landscape was the gutter on the neighbouring roof, a sort of tin gargoyle representing a donkey's head with an open mouth, from which the rain poured in torrents; a dirty yellow rain, which had washed the tiles, and was about to wash the pavement. It is sad that something should take the trouble to fall from the heavens with no other result than to turn dust to mud.

I was confined to my lodgings; the lodgings were not very pleasant. What to do? La Fontaine wrote his tales for just such an occasion. So, I was thinking. Unfortunately, I was in one of those states of mind that you are doubtless familiar with, in which one has no reason to be sad and no motive to be cheerful; where one is equally incapable of deciding whether to burst out laughing or to burst out crying; where life seems perfectly logical, uniform, flat, boring, and sad; where everything is grey and pallid inside and out. The weather was the same within me as it was in the street, and, if you will allow me the metaphor, I would say it was raining in my mind. You know, I am somewhat of the nature of a lake; I simply reflect the azure heavens or the cloud. The thoughts that I have in my soul resemble the sky that is over my head.

Turning one's eyes inward — if you will excuse the expression — one finds a landscape within oneself. Now, at that moment, the landscape that I could see within myself was scarcely much better than the one before my eyes.

There were a few wardrobes in the room. I opened them mechanically, as if I might be lucky enough to discover a treasure trove. Now, inn-cupboards are always empty; a full cupboard indicates a permanent dwelling. The passer-by has no nest here. So, I found nothing in the cupboards.

Yet, just as I was closing the last one, I saw on the top shelf something that seemed of interest. I put my hand on it. First dust, and then a book. A small, square book like the Liège almanacs (*annual compendiums popular from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries*), bound in grey paper, covered in dust, forgotten for years. What good luck! I brushed off the dust, I opened it at random. It was in French. I looked at the title: — *The Secret Loves and Shameful Adventures of Napoleon Buonaparte*, with engravings — I looked at the

engravings — a man with a large belly and the profile of a Punchinello, wearing a frock coat and a little hat, mingled there amongst all sorts of naked women. I looked at the date: — 1814 (*compare the 'Mémoires secretes sur Napoléon Buonaparte' by Charles Doris, published that year*).

I was curious to read on. Oh, my friend, what can I tell you about it? How to give you an idea of this book, printed in Paris by some pamphleteer and left behind in Zurich by some Austrian? Napoleon Buonaparte was ugly; his small, sunken eyes, his wolfish profile, and his bare ears made him look atrocious. He spoke badly; he had no wit and no presence of mind; he walked awkwardly; he carried himself without grace, and took lessons from Talma (*the actor François Joseph Talma*) every time he had to 'sit in state' Besides, his military fame was greatly exaggerated; he wasted men's lives; he only won victories by dint of his battalions. (To blame conquerors for deploying battalions! The author is doubtless one of those people who blame poets for employing metaphors!) He lost more battles than he won. It was not he who won the battle of Marengo; it was Louis Desaix; It was not he who won the Battle of Austerlitz; it was Jean-de-Dieu Soult; it was not he who won the battle of Borodino, but Michel Ney. — He was only a second-rate captain, far inferior to the generals of the great century, Turenne, Condé, the Duke of Luxembourg (*François-Henri de Montmorency*), or Vendôme (*Louis Joseph de Bourbon, Duke of Vendôme*); and even in our day, his 'military talent' was nothing, compared to the 'warrior genius' of the Duke of Wellington. His character was that of a coward. He was afraid of cannon-fire. He hid during the cannonade at Brienne. At Brienne! (*in 1814 where Napoleon was nearly captured by Cossacks after the battle but rescued by General Gaspard Gourgaud*) — He suffered from vice upon vice — he lied like a lackey — he was miserly to the point of giving only ten francs a day to a woman he kept in a small, solitary street in the Faubourg Saint Marceau (the author says: *I saw* the street, the house, and the woman). He was jealous to the point of locking up this woman, who scarcely ever went out, and lived separated from the whole world, without a human creature to serve her, a prey to terror and despair. That is what Napoleon Buonaparté's *love-life* was like! — he had, moreover — for this fierce jealous man was a shameless libertine, the character of an Othello mixed with that of Don Juan — he had, moreover, in all the districts of Paris, little rooms, cellars, attics, dungeons, rented under assumed names, to which he attracted poor young girls under various pretexts, etc., etc., etc. From this, arose flocks of children, little new Napoleonic dynasties, relegated

today to attics, or picking up scraps and tatters by boundary stones, bowed down by a rag-picker's basket. That is what Napoleon Buonaparté's *love-life* was like! — What say you? The first tale is somewhat reminiscent of Geneviève de Brabant in the depths of her wood; the second is stolen from that of the Minotaur. I glimpsed many others and worse, but have not had the courage to read further. I never have encounters of any length with books that ennui opens and disgust closes.

Are you laughing? I confess I am not. There is always something in slander directed against great men, while they are still alive, that grips my heart. I say to myself: so, this is how contemporary recognition treated those geniuses whom posterity surrounds with respect, some because they rendered their nation greater, others because they improved humanity! If you are Molière, you will be accused of having bedded your daughter; Napoleon, you will be accused of the like with your sisters. — Hatred and envy are never inventive, you say; they always repeat more or less the same nonsense, which is rendered harmless by dint of being repeated. What is slander worth if it is simply plagiarism? — Doubtless that is so, if the public are aware of it; but does the public know that what is said of some great man of our day is precisely what was said yesterday about another? I agree with you. But the crowd knows nothing. Great men disdain such things, you will say again; no doubt; but how do you know the suffering it caused did not equal the disdain? Who knows all the poignant pain that lurks in disdain's silent depths? What is more repulsive than injustice, or more bitter than receiving a vicious insult when one deserves a glittering crown? How do you know that this odious little book, at which you laugh today, was not sent unofficially, in 1815, to the prisoner of Saint Helena, and did not, stupid as it seems to you and indeed is, cause the man who slept so soundly on the eve of Marengo, and that of Austerlitz, a troubled night? Are there not times when hatred, with its brazen and furious affronts, can torment even a genius who is aware of his strength, and his destiny, by penning a caricature for posterity, when all the world has sought to leave his private life deep among shadows! No, my friend, I cannot laugh at this infamous little libel. When I explore the past in depth, when I visit the ruined cellars of an ancient prison, I take every single thing seriously, the old calumnies that I pluck from oblivion, the hideous rusty instruments of torture I find in the dust.

May they wither in ignominy these miserable effectors of base works, whose only function is to torment while alive those whom posterity will glorify when dead!

If the nameless author of this ignoble book still exists today, in some obscure corner of Paris, what a punishment it must be for that filthy old man, whose white hair is but a crown of opprobrium and shame, to witness, each time he has the misfortune to pass through the Place Vendôme, that same Napoleon, become a man of bronze, standing erect, in eternal glory, on his eternal column, greeted now, at all hours, beneath clouds and in sunlight, by the crowd!

After I closed that volume, everything darkened; the rain had become more violent outside, and the sadness deeper within me. My window remained open, and my gaze mechanically fixed itself on that grotesque tin gutter which furiously disgorged its yellowish, muddy flood. The sight calmed me. I said to myself that for the most part those who work evil are not fully aware of it, that the ignorance and ineptitude within them exceeds even their wickedness; and I remained there, motionless, silent, absorbing the mysterious teaching that things deliver to us through the harmony that exists between them, my elbows resting on that stupid pamphlet out of which so much hatred and slander had poured, my eyes fixed on that tin donkey's mouth vomiting dirty water.

Letter XXXVII: Schaffhausen

September

I have been in Schaffhausen[125] a few hours. Write *Schaffhausen*, and pronounce it as you please. Imagine a Swiss 'Anxur', a German 'Terracina', a fifteenth-century town, whose houses are a cross between the chalets of Unterseen and the sculpted dwellings of old Rouen; perched in

[125] Letter XXXVII — Schaffhausen: 47°41'39.8"N, 8°38'03.8"E

the mountains; traversed by the Rhine which twists in its stony bed with a great clamour; dominated by ruined towers; full of steep, zigzag streets, and given over to the deafening din of the nymphs, or the waters — *nymphis, lymphis,* transcribe Horace as you wish — and to the uproar of the washerwomen. After passing the city gate, which is a thirteenth-century fortress, I turned around and saw above the ogive this inscription: SALVS EXEVNTIBVS (*GOOD HEALTH ON LEAVING*). I concluded that on the other side it probably read: PAX INTRANTIBVS (*PEACE ON ENTERING*). I like a hospitable manner of greeting.

I told you to write *Schaffhausen* and pronounce it however you like. You can write it however you like too. Nothing compares, for stubbornness and diversity of opinion, to the herd of antiquaries, except the herd of grammarians. Bartolomeo Platina (*Bartolomeo Sacchi*) writes *Schaphuse*, Johann Stumpf writes *Schapfuse*, Georg Braun writes *Shaphusia*, and Oswald Myconius writes *Probatopolis*. Make what you will of that. After the name, the etymology. Another matter entirely. *Schaffhausen* means the city of sheep, says Heinrich Glarean — 'Not at all' exclaims Strumpf! Schaffhausen mean a *port for vessels*, from *schafa*, a ship, and *hause*, a dwelling. — 'City of sheep!' Glarean insists; the coat of arms of the city are gold with a sable ram. — 'Port for vessels!' cries Strumpf; Here is where the boat stops, unable to progress any further. — Ma foi! Let the etymology be as it may. I leave Strumpf and Glarean to fight it out.

Doubtless they would fight over the old Munot Fortress[126] (*Festung Munot*), which is near Schaffhausen, on the Emmersberg, and which has the etymology *Munitio*, say the antiquarians, because of a Roman citadel once sited there. Today there are only a few ruins, a large tower, and an immense casemated vault which can shelter several hundred men.

Two centuries ago, Schaffhausen was even more picturesque. The town hall, and All Saints Abbey Monastery (*Kloster Allerheiligen*), and the church of Saint Johann were then in all their beauty; the towers and walls completely enclosing the town were intact. There were thirteen towers, not counting the castle and not counting the two tall towers on which rested that strange and magnificent suspension bridge over the Rhine which Nicolas Oudinot

[126] Letter XXXVII — Munot Fortress, Schaffhausen: 47°41'48.8"N, 8°38'23.6"E

destroyed on April 13, 1799, with that ignorance and carelessness of masterpieces which is pardonable only in heroes. Finally, outside the city, beyond the gate which leads to the Black Forest, in the mountains, on an eminence, beside a chapel, one could then have distinguished in the distance, on the misty horizon, a hideous little edifice of timber and stone — the gallows. In the Middle Ages, and even no more than a hundred years ago, in any sovereign commune, a suitably-furnished gallows was an elegant and masterly thing. The city adorned with its gallows; the gallows adorned with its hanged man. That meant a *free city*.

I was very hungry, it was late; I commenced dining. They brought me a French meal, served by a French waiter, with a menu in French. Some originalities, doubtless involuntary, were mingled, not without grace, in the spelling of this menu. As my eyes wandered among the rich fantasies of its local compiler, seeking to complete my repast, below these three lines:

Haumelette au chantpinnions,

Biffeteque au craison,

Hépole d'agnot au laidgume,

(*Omelette with mushrooms, Steak with cranberries, Shoulder of lamb with vegetables, all misspelt*)

I came across this. *Calaïsche à la choute* – 10 francs. 'Pardieu!' I said to myself, 'here is a local dish: *calaïsche à la choute*. I must try it. Ten francs! It must be some refinement unique to Schaffhausen cuisine.' I called the waiter. 'Monsieur, the *calaïsche à la choute*.' The conversation began in French. I told you that the waiter spoke French. (*The following conversation is in heavily accented Swiss French on the part of the waiter, not reproduced in English here*)

— 'Very good sir. Tomorrow morning.'

— 'No,' I said, 'right away.'

— 'But, sir, it's quite late.'

— 'What does that matter?'

— 'But it will be dark in an hour.'

— 'Well?'

— 'But Monsieur will not be able to see.'

— 'See! See what? I don't need to see.'

— 'I don't understand, Monsieur'.

— 'Ah! So, it's truly beautiful to contemplate, your *calaïsche à la choute*?'

— 'Very fine, sir, admirable, magnificent!'

— 'Well, you can light four candles all round me.'

— 'Four candles! Monsieur jests. I don't understand.'

— 'Pardieu!' I continued with some impatience, 'I understand perfectly, I am hungry. I wish to eat.'

— 'Eat what?

— 'Eat your *calaïsche*.'

— 'Our *calaïsche*?'

— 'Your *choute*.'

— 'Our *choute*! Eat our *choute*! Monsieur, jests. Eat the Rhine *choute*!'

Here I burst out laughing. The poor devil of a boy no longer understood, while I had, suddenly. I had been toyed with by the hallucination in my brain created by the innkeeper's wondrous spelling. *Calaïsche à la choute* meant *a carriage to the waterfall*. In other words, after offering you dinner, the menu kindly offered you a carriage to visit the Rhine Falls at Schloss Laufen, for ten francs.

Seeing me laugh, the boy took me for a madman, and went away muttering: — 'Eat the falls! Light the Rhine Falls with four candles! Monsieur jests.'

I have reserved a *calaïsche à la choute* for tomorrow morning.

Letter XXXVIII: The Rhine Falls

Schloss Laufen, September

My friend, what can I say? I am viewing an incredible thing. I am only a few steps away. I hear its noise. I am writing to you without knowing my own thoughts. Ideas and images pile up, pell-mell, pour into my mind, collide, break, and vanish in smoke, foam, sound and mist. Within me, is an immense bubbling of some kind. It seems to me as though I have the Rhine Falls in my brain.

I write at random, as thoughts arrive. You will understand, if that is possible. We arrived at Schloss Laufen[127], a thirteenth-century castle, of good size, built in a fine style. There are two golden wyverns on the door, their mouths are open. They are barking. It seemed as if they were the ones making the mysterious noise one heard. We entered. We were in the castle courtyard. It is no longer a castle; it is a farm. Chickens, geese, turkeys, manure, a cart in a corner; a lime vat. A door opened. The waterfall appeared.

A wonderful display! A dreadful tumult! That's one's first thought. Then one looks more closely. The cataract carves gulfs filled with large white scales. As in the heart of a fire, there are little peaceful patches in the midst of this thing full of terror; bushes are mingled with the foam; charming streams thread the mosses; fountains for Poussin's Arcadian shepherds, are shaded by small, gently waving branches. — And then these details vanish, and the impression of the whole returns to you. An eternal storm. Living, raging snow.

The water is strangely transparent. Black rocks form sinister faces underwater. They seem to touch the surface, yet are ten feet deep. Below the two main vomitories of the waterfall, two great jets of foam bloom on the river and disperse in green mist. On the other side of the Rhine, I could see a group of calm little houses, where housewives were going to and fro.

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[127] Letter XXXVIII — Schloss Laufen (Rhine Falls): 47°40'36.1"N, 8°36'54.0"E

While I watched, my guide spoke: — 'Lake Constance froze over in the winter of 1829-1830. It hadn't frozen so for a hundred and four years. People drove across it. The poor folk froze to death in Schaffhausen.' — I descended a little further, towards the abyss. The sky was grey and overcast. The waterfall roars like a tiger. The noise is frightful, its speed terrifying. A dense mist on the water, like smoke and rain combined. Through this mist one sees the cataract in full flow. Five large rocks split it into five streams of different appearances and sizes. It is as if one were seeing five gnawed piers of a titanic bridge. In winter, the ice makes blue arches on these black abutments.

The closest of these rocks is of a strange shape; it seems as if the dread, impassive head of a Hindu idol with an elephant's trunk is emerging from the raging water. Trees and bushes which intertwine at its summit give the effect of horrid spiky hair. At the most fearful point of the falls, a great rock appears and disappears beneath the foam like the skull of a submerged giant, thrashed hard, for six thousand years, by the dreadful onslaught.

The guide continued his monologue. — 'The Rhine Falls are two miles from Schaffhausen as the crow flies. The entire mass of the river falls here from a height of seventy-five feet.' —

The steep path that descends from Laufen Castle to the abyss crosses a garden. As I passed by, deafened by the formidable waterfall, a child, accustomed to living with this wonder of the world, was playing among the flowers and singing, sticking its little fingers into the pink snapdragons.

This path has various stations, at which you pay a little from time to time. The poor cataract can't work for nothing. Look at the effort it exerts. It is essential that along with all the foam it hurls at the trees, rocks, riverbanks and clouds, it also hurls a few pennies into someone's pocket. It's the least it can do.

Walking along the path, I came to a kind of shaky balcony almost at the base of the falls, above the abyss and almost in the abyss.

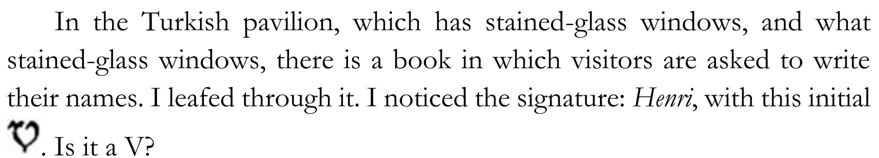
There, everything stirs in you at once. You are dazed, stunned, overwhelmed, terrified, but charmed. You lean against a trembling wooden barrier. Yellowed trees — it is autumn — and red-berried rowan trees surround a small pavilion in the style of the Café Turc (*the 'Café et Jardin Turc' in Paris, on Boulevard du Temple*) from where one may observe all the horrors of the scene. Women cover themselves with an oilcloth mantle (a franc per person). One is enveloped in a frightful thundering downpour.

Pretty little yellow snails crawl, voluptuously, amidst the dew on the edge of the balcony. The rock that overhangs it weeps drop after drop into the falls. On a rock in the middle of the cataract a painted wooden troubadour knight stands, leaning on a red shield with a white cross. Some fellow must have risked his life to plant that ambiguous figure amidst Jehovah's great and eternal poetry.

Two giants who raise their heads, I mean the two largest rocks, seem to be speaking to each other. The thunderous sound is that of their voices. Above a fearful ridge of foam, one sees a peaceful little house with a small orchard. One might say the dreadful hydra is condemned to carry that sweet and happy cabin on its back forever.

I moved to the end of the balcony; I leant against the rock. The view was even more terrifying. It is a scene of fearful collapse. The hideous but splendid abyss furiously hurls a rain of pearls in the faces of those who dare to gaze at it so closely. It is admirable. The four great swollen plumes of the cataract constantly fall, rise and descend again. It as if one was viewing the four flashing wheels of a storm chariot turning before one.

The wooden bridge was flooded. The planks were slippery. Dead leaves rustled beneath my feet. In a crevice in the rock, I noticed a small tuft of withered grass, bone dry beneath the Schaffhausen cataract! In all that deluge, it lacked a little water. There are hearts that resemble that tuft of grass. In the midst of a whirlwind of human well-being, they are parched. Alas! It's because they lack that drop of water, which comes not from the earth but the heavens, and is called 'love'!

In the Turkish pavilion, which has stained-glass windows, and what stained-glass windows, there is a book in which visitors are asked to write their names. I leafed through it. I noticed the signature: *Henri*, with this initial . Is it a V?

How long I remained there, lost in this great spectacle, I could not say! During my contemplation of the falls, hours could pass in the mind, like waves in the abyss, without leaving a trace in the memory.

However, someone arrived to warn me that the daylight was fading. I ascended to the castle, and from there went down to the shore where one crosses the Rhine to reach the right bank. This strand is at the foot of the waterfall, and one crosses the river a few fathoms from the cataract. One

makes this venturesome journey in a charming little boat, light, exquisite, fitted out like a savage's canoe, built of a wood as supple as sharkskin, solid, elastic, fibrous, which despite touching the rocks at every moment is barely scratched, and is manoeuvred, like all the canoes of the Rhine and the Meuse, with a hook and a shovel-shaped oar. Nothing is stranger than to feel, seated in this shell, the profound and stormy shock of the water.

As the boat moved away from the jetty, I looked overhead at the tiled battlements and carved gables of the castle overlooking the precipice. Fishing-nets were drying on the pebbles by the river. So, people fish in this whirlpool? Yes, indeed. Since the fish struggle to leap the cataract, they catch a lot of salmon there. Besides, into what whirlpool does humankind not cast its line?

Now let me summarise all these vivid, almost poignant sensations. On first impression, one does not know what to think, one is overwhelmed, as by all great epics. Then the whole thing sorts itself in the mind. Beauties emerge from the clouds. All in all, it is vast, dark, terrible, hideous, magnificent, inexpressible.

On the far side of the Rhine, it turns the mills. On one bank, is the castle; on the other, the village, which is called Neuhausen am Rheinfall[128]. While I yielded to the rocking of the boat, I admired the superb colour of the water. It was like swimming in liquid serpentine. Remarkably, each of the two great rivers of the Alps, as it leaves the mountains, has the colour of the sea to which it flows. The Rhône, as it emerges from Lake Geneva, is blue like the Mediterranean; the Rhine, as it flows from Lake Constance, is green like the ocean.

Unfortunately, the sky was overcast. I cannot say therefore that I saw the Laufen Falls in all their splendour. Nothing is as rich and marvellous as that shower of pearls of which I have already spoken, and which the cataract casts far and wide. Yet it must be even more admirable when the sun changes those pearls into diamonds, and the rainbow's emerald neck curves into the dazzling foam like a divine bird come to drink from the abyss.

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[128] Letter XXXVIII — Neuhausen am Rheinfall: 47°40'27.8"N, 8°36'49.0"E

From the far side of the Rhine, where I am writing to you at this moment, the cataract can be seen in its entirety, split into five distinct parts, each with its own distinctive physiognomy, forming together a kind of crescendo. The first is a mill overflow; the second, composed almost symmetrically due to the passage of the river and time, is like a Versailles fountain; the third is a cascade; the fourth is an avalanche; the fifth is pure chaos.

One last word, and I will close this letter. A few steps from the waterfall, the limestone cliffs, which are very beautiful, are being mined. From the middle of one of the quarries there, a galley slave, striped in grey and black, pickaxe in hand, a double chain attached to one foot, was gazing at the cataract. Chance sometimes seems to delight in confronting us with such antitheses, sometimes melancholy, sometimes frightening, the work of Nature and the work of society.

LETTER XXXIX: VÉVEY   CHILLON   LAUSANNE

Vévey, September 24th

To Louis Boulanger

I am writing this letter to you, dear Louis, almost at random, not knowing where, or even if, it will find you. Where are you at this moment? What are you doing? Are you in Paris? Are you in Normandy? Are you gazing at the canvases that your thoughts illuminate? Or are you, like me, visiting God’s art gallery? I don't know what you are doing; but I am thinking of you, I am writing to you, and I love you.

I am journeying at this moment like a swallow. I race ahead seeking good weather. Whenever I see a patch of blue sky, I speed towards it. The clouds, the rain, the north wind, the winter, follow like enemies in pursuit, enveloping the poor countries I leave behind. It is now pouring in Strasbourg, which I

visited a fortnight ago; Zurich, where I was last week; Bern[129], where I spent yesterday. I am in Vévey[130], a pretty little town, white, clean, English-looking, and very comfortable, heated by the southern slopes of Mount Chardonne as if by a giant stove and sheltered by the Alps as if by a screen. I have above me a summer sky, the sunlight, hillsides covered with ripe vines, and the magnificent emerald expanse of Lake Geneva (*Lac Léman, through which the Rhône flows*) set amidst snowy mountains as if in a silver bracelet. — I miss you.

Vévey has only three things to offer; but those three things are charming: its cleanliness, its climate, and its church. I will confine myself to talking about its tower, since the church itself no longer owns to anything worth remarking on. It has undergone the kind of careful, methodical, and varnished devastation that Protestantism inflicts on Gothic churches. Everything is scraped, planed, cleaned, disfigured, whitewashed, polished, and rubbed. It is a stupid and pretentious mixture of barbarism and cleanliness. No more ornate altars, no more chapels, no more reliquaries, no more painted or sculpted figures; a table and wooden stalls that clutter the nave, that is the church of Vévey (*Saint-Martin's*).

I was walking about there, rather gloomily, escorted by that old woman, ever the same, who acts as the verger in Calvinist churches, while striking my knees against the pews assigned to the prefect, the justice of the peace, the pastors, etc., etc., when I noticed, next to a condemned chapel to which I had been attracted by some beautiful old consoles from the fourteenth century, left there and forgotten by the Puritan architect, in a dark hollow, a large slab of black marble attached to the wall. It is the tomb of Edmond Ludlow, one of the judges of Charles I, who died an exile in Vévey in 1698. I had thought his tomb was in Lausanne. As I bent down to pick up my pencil which had fallen to the ground, the word *depositorium*, engraved on the slab, struck my eyes. I was treading on another tomb, that of another regicide, another outlaw, Andrew Broughton. Andrew Broughton was Ludlow's friend. As his friend had done, he had signed Charles I's death-warrant; he had loved Cromwell; and then hated Cromwell, and now sleeps in the cold church of

[129] Letter XXXIX — Bern (passed through): 46°56'51.4"N, 7°26'53.9"E

[130] Letter XXXIX — Vévey: 46°27'33.8"N, 6°50'43.1"E

Vévey, near his friend. — In 1816, the artist Jacques-Louis David, in exile, like Ludlow and Broughton, passed through Vévey. Did he visit the church? I know not; but the judges of Charles I had many things to say to that judge of Louis XVI. They had this to tell him: that everything collapses, even fortunes built on the back of a scaffold; that revolutions are like waves, in which one must seek to be neither the foam nor the mire left behind; that every revolutionary idea is a two edged sword, one edge cuts others, the second cuts oneself; that the exiles who have created exiles, the proscribed who have proscribed others, drag behind them a dark shadow, of self-pity mixed with anger; its source the reflection of the miseries of others shining like the angel's blazing sword on their own misfortune. They could also tell this great painter — could they, not Louis? —that for a thinker, from a single day's quiet contemplation, there emerge, from the serenity of the sky or the deep azure of Lake Geneva, more noble and benevolent ideas, more ideas useful to humanity, than will emerge in ten centuries from twenty revolutions like those which did away with Charles I, and Louis XVI; and that above the agitations of politics, above the climatic storms which forever afflict nations, storms whose muddy flow brings new Jean-Paul Marats and new Comtes de Mirabeau, there exists, for great souls, Art, which contains the intelligence of man, and that of Nature, which contains, indeed, the intelligence of God!

While I was giving myself over to these daydreams, a ray of the setting sun, entered through a sort of skylight and, seemingly stunned by the bareness and gloom, came to rest on those two tombs like the light of a torch, allowing me to read the epitaphs. They are long, grave protestations in which the spirits of the two old regicides, upright, pure, and noble men, seem to breathe. Both set forth the facts of their lives, and the fact of their deaths without anger, but without any concessions. They employ rigid and haughty sentences, worthy indeed of being uttered by marble. One feels how both missed their homeland. One's native country is always beautiful, even London seen from Lake Geneva. But what struck me was that each of the two old men adopted a different attitude in the tomb. Edmond Ludlow flew joyfully to the eternal dwelling, *sedes aeternas laetus advolavit*, says the epitaph on the slab attached to the wall. Andrew Broughton, weary of the labours of life, fell asleep in the Lord, *in Domino obdormivit*, says the epitaph on the slab laid on the ground. Thus, one was joyful, the other weary. One found wings in the sepulchre; the other found a pillow there on which to rest. One had slain a king and longed for paradise; the other had done the same and sought rest.

Does it not seem to you, as it does to me, that in those two short sentences lies the key to these two men and the nuance that shades their similar political convictions? Ludlow was a thinker; he had already forgotten the dead king, and saw only an emancipated people. Broughton was a doer; he no longer thought of the people, but had ever had in mind that difficult task of overthrowing a king. Ludlow had never seen anything but the end in view, Broughton only the means. Ludlow looked forward, Broughton looked back. One died dazzled by the reality, the other exhausted by it.

As I quit those two tombs, a third epitaph attracted me, a long and solemn apostrophe to the passer-by engraved in gold on black marble, like that of Ludlow. My poor Louis, all great things attract parody. Near the two regicides lies an apothecary. He was a respectable practitioner, called Laurent Matte, a very honest and very charitable man, who, since he happened to make his fortune in Libourne (*in France*) and retired from commerce in Vévey, absolutely desires the reader to stop and reflect: '*Morare parumper, qui hac transis, et respice rerum humanarum inconstantiam et ludibrium: Stay a while, passer-by, and consider the instability and absurdity of human affairs*.' If ever an emphatic inscription proved, by contrast, ridiculous, it is surely this, which elbows aside those two severe slabs beneath which Ludlow and Broughton lie with bloodied hands.

In the evening — it was yesterday — I walked along the lakeshore. I thought of you, Louis, a great deal, and of our pleasant walks, in 1828, when you and I were twenty-two and twenty-six respectively, when you had recently created your '*Supplice de Mazeppa*', and I was creating '*Les Orientales*', and when we were pleased with a horizontal shaft of sunset light spread above Vaugirard. The moon as I walked was almost full. The high cliffs of Meillerie (*on the shore of Lake Geneva*), black at the summit and vague in their shape halfway, filled the horizon. In the background, to my left, below the moon, the Dent d'Oche was highlighted by a charming pearl-grey cloud, while mountains of all shapes and sizes fled tumultuously in the mist. The admirable clarity of the moon tempered the violent aspects of the landscape. I walked along the very edge of the shore. It was the night of the equinox (*the twenty-third of September, in 1839*). The lake had that feverish agitation which, at high tide, seizes the mass of water and makes it shudder. At times, little waves invaded the pebbled path along which I walked, wetting the soles of my boots. To the west, in the direction of Geneva, the lake, lost in the mists, had

the appearance of an enormous piece of slate. The sounds of voices reached me from the town, and I saw a boat leaving Vévey to fish the lake. These fishing-boats of Lake Geneva have a shape determined by the airflow over the water. They are equipped with two lateen sails facing in opposite directions, attached to separate masts, so as to catch the two main winds that pour into Lake Geneva from its two ends, one, via Geneva, which rises from the plains, the other, via Villeneuve, which descends from the mountains. By day, in sunlight, the lake is blue, and the sails are white, giving the boats the appearance of mayflies running over the water with wings raised. By night, the water is grey and the insect is black. So, I watched this seemingly gigantic mayfly, progressing slowly towards Meillerie, silhouetted against the moonlight with its pair of membranous, translucent wings. The lake murmured at my feet. There was an immense peace amidst the immensity of Nature. It was vast, yet it was gentle. A quarter of an hour later the boat had disappeared, the fever of the lake had calmed, the city had fallen asleep. I was alone, but I felt all creation living and dreaming around me.

I thought of my two regicides, who also had their share of this sleep, this rest of all things in this beautiful place. I lost myself in contemplation of a place that God had filled with his peace, and that men have afflicted with their wars. It is a sad privilege of the most charming places to attract invasion and avalanche. Men are like snow; they melt, and race through the valleys lit by the sun. All the delightful low shores of Lake Geneva have been devasted, for three thousand years, constantly, by armed adventurers who came, strangely enough, from the south as well as from the north. The Romans found traces of the Greeks here; the Germans found traces of the Arabs. The Chateau de Glérolles was built by the Romans to ward off the Huns. Nine hundred years later the Tour de Gourze was built by the Waldensians to ward off the Hungarians. One guards Vévey; the other protects Lausanne. While leafing through, in the library of Basel, the other day, a rather interesting copy of Caesar's *Commentaries*, I came across a passage where Caesar says that tablets written in Greek characters were found in the Helvetians' camp, and I noted the phrase: *tabulae repertae sunt litteris graecis confectae ('tablets were found written in Greek letters': see 'De Bello Gallico I, xxix')*.

The Romans' legacy to this delightful country comprised two or three military towers; various tombs, among others that sombre and touching one bearing the epitaph of Julia Alpinula (*a forged Renaissance epitaph of 1588 which*

led to the invention of her as a Swiss heroine; it reads: 'Julia Alpinula: Hic jaceo. Infelicis patris, infelix proles. Deae Aventiae Sacerdos; exorare patris necem non potui male mori in fatis ille erat, Vixi annos XXIII: Julia Alpinula: I lie here. Unhappy offspring of an unhappy father. Priestess of the goddess Aventia, I was unable to pray for my dead father, the victim of an evil fate. I lived twenty-three years'); weapons; milestones; and the great military road which scars these admirable valleys from Valais to Avenches via Vévey and Attalens, and of which one still discovers traces here and there. The Greek legacy is one of pantomime processions, which recall the naturalistic theories of drama, in which young girls crowned with ivy are borne along in chariots. They also left behind the *koraule*, notably the Grand Koraule of the Count of Gruyère, that dance explained by its name, χοϱος (*dance*) and *αυλη* (*court*). Thus, fortresses, sepulchres, an epitaph which is an elegy, and a strategic road, bear the imprint of Rome; processions that seem ordered by Thespis, and *a dance to the sound of the flute*, a remembrance of Greece.

This morning, I visited Chillon[131] in beautiful sunshine. The road runs between vineyards, along the lake. The wind made of Lake Geneva an immense blue moiré; the white sails sparkled. At the bottom of the road, seagulls gracefully landed on rocks at water level. Towards Geneva, the horizon mimicked the ocean.

Chillon is a mass of towers perched on a rocky outcrop. The entire castle dates from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the exception of some woodwork, doors, tables, ceilings, etc., which are from the sixteenth. Today, it serves as an arsenal and powder magazine for the Canton of Vaud. The muzzles of the cannons touch the embrasures intended for catapults. A French woman, displaying much grace and intelligence, guides visitors on a tour of the castle.

The crypt, which is at the level of the lake, is divided into three main underground passages. The first, which is like an antechamber to the other two, was the guard room. It is a vast nave formed of two juxtaposed ribbed vaults, the arches of which rest, in the middle of the room, on a transverse row of pillars. The second underground passage, which is smaller, is divided into two very dark rooms. The first was a dungeon, the second is a most

[131] Letter XXXIX — Chillon Castle: 46°24'51.1"N, 6°55'39.0"E

sinister place. In the first, one glimpses a large stone bed dug into the living rock; in the second, between two enormous square pillars, one of which is part of the wall itself, one can vaguely distinguish, after standing for a few minutes in this cellar, a beam fixed transversely at both ends into the rough granite, the upper edge of which presents a row of notches, as if it had been worn and scored deeply, in various places, by a rope or chain which had been tied there. In the middle of this crosspiece there is a square hole which lets in the daylight, if one can call the pale and earthy light, which clings here and there to the angles of the vault, daylight. This vague and horrible apparatus is a set of gallows. The notches were in fact made by gallows chains. The hole admitted the hangman's rope. The two ladders for the victim and the executioner, which leant on the two opposing pillars, have disappeared. Opposite the gallows there was a hole in the wall through which the corpse was thrown into the lake. This hole has been walled up, and is now a low dark niche like a black stain at the foot of the wall. A few steps from this niche a spiral staircase ends, a staircase which led to the chamber of justice with its massive, barely squared oak door.

The third room resembles the first; only it is even darker. The loopholes have been filled in and transformed into air vents. In each intercolumn there was a cell. The partitions have been torn down, and the compartments that saw so much diverse misery for three centuries eliminated. It is the fifth of these compartments that François Bonivard (*'The Prisoner of Chillon'*) famously occupied. All that remains of his dungeon is the pillar, of the chain that shackled his feet only an iron ring sealed in that same pillar, of the chain that circled his neck only a hole in the stone. The ring that held the neck-chain has been torn out. I remained for a long time as if riveted to this pillar, around which that free-thinker circled for six years like a wild animal. He could lie down — on the stone floor — only with great difficulty and without being able to stretch his limbs fully. He had, in fact, confined there, no other distraction than those of a wild creature. He wore the base of the pillar with his heels. I put my hand into the furrow he had made. And he marked, in a similar manner with his foot, the granite projection which his chain allowed him to reach. For a prospect he had only a hideous wall of solid rock, that opposite the wall which plunges into the lake. — Such are the cages in which thinkers were imprisoned in 1530.

The first of the five compartments interested me no less than the fifth. In Bonivard's cell dwelt intelligence, in this cell devotion. A young man from Geneva, named Michel Cotié, had an attachment, mixed with admiration, for the prior of Saint-Victor. When he discovered that Bonivard was in Chillon, he wished to rescue him. He knew the castle of Chillon from having served there; he entered it again, and obtained some kind of domestic work. Imprudence betrayed him: he was caught trying to communicate with Bonivard. He was treated as a spy and shut in a dungeon (the first on the right as you enter). He would have been hanged, but the Duke of Savoy desired a confession that would compromise Bonivard. Cotié resisted torture valiantly. One night he sought to escape: he sawed through his chain, pierced the wall, climbed one of the air vents, and pulled out an iron bar. He thought himself safe. The night was intensely dark; he threw himself into the lake; he had only known the castle before in summer, and had noted that the water in the lake rose to a few feet below the air vents: but it was winter; in winter, there is no snow melt, the water level in the lake drops, and leaves the rocks in which Chillon is rooted exposed; he failed to realise the fact, and was shattered in his fall. — Such is the story of Cotié.

He left nothing but a few charcoal drawings on the wall. They are half life-size figures not lacking in a certain style: an almost erased Christ on the cross, a kneeling saint with her legend around her head in Gothic characters, a Saint Christopher (which I copied; you know my mania), and a Saint Joseph. Cotié's fate contradicts, to my great regret, the ancient tradition of *Christofori faciem etc.* (*'Christofori faciem die quacumque tueris, Illa nempe die non morte mala morieris: on whatever day you see the likeness of St Christopher, on that same day you will escape death's evil blow'. See for example the woodcut from a manuscript dated 1417 from Bohemia, the 'Laus Virginis', generally regarded as the earliest dated woodcut in Europe*). His Saint Christopher did not save him from violent death.

The air-vent, through which Michel Cotié climbed faces the third pillar. It was on this pillar that Byron, in 1816, appears to have written his own name, with an old ivory-handled awl, which, it is said, was found in 1536 in the Duke of Savoy's bedroom by the Bernese who freed Bonivard. The name, *Byron*, (*the signature's authenticity is doubtful*) engraved on the granite column, in large, slightly inclined letters, cast a strange glow over the dungeon.

It was noon, I was still in the crypt, I was drawing Saint Christopher; — I looked up by chance, and the vault was blue. — The phenomenon of the

Grotta Azzurra (*in Capri*) was accomplished in the Chillon dungeon, and Lake Geneva created as fine an effect as the Mediterranean. You see, Louis, Nature forgets no one; thus, it did not forget Bonivard in his cell. At midday it transformed that cell into a palace; it covered the entire vault with that splendid blue moiré of which I spoke to you just now, and Lake Geneva ceilinged his dungeon.

And Nature even sent kingfishers to the prisoner, which came to perch on his air vent. The Dukes of Savoy have disappeared from the castle of Chillon, the kingfishers still frequent the lake-shore. The dreadful crypt does not frighten them; one might think they believe the place built for them; they enter boldly through the loopholes, and perch there for shelter, sometimes from the heat, sometimes from storms.

There are seven columns in the crypt, there were seven dungeons. The people of Bern, in 1536, found six prisoners there, among them Bonivard; and freed them all, except a murderer named Albrignan, whom they hanged from the crosspiece of that dark room. This was the last time the gallows were used.

Every tower of Chillon could tell of dark events. In one, I was shown three cells, one above the other; the upper one was entered through a door, the other two through holes covered with slabs that were lifted and allowed to fall behind the prisoner. The lower dungeon received a little light through a skylight; the middle dungeon had neither a vent nor daylight. Fifteen months ago, someone descended on a rope, and found a bed of coarse straw on the paving stones on which the place of a body was still marked, and here and there human bones. The upper dungeon is decorated with those gloomy paintings that prisoners are wont to draw in blood. There are arabesques, flowers, coats of arms, a palace with a broken pediment in the Renaissance style. — Through the skylight its occupant could see leaves and grass in the moat.

In a separate tower, after a few steps over a worm-eaten floor that threatened to collapse, and across which it is forbidden to walk, I saw, through a square hole, a deep abyss sunk in the very heart of the tower: this too was a dungeon. The floor lay at a depth of ninety-one feet, and was bristling with knives. There they found a dislocated skeleton, and an old goat-hair blanket striped with grey and black, which had been thrown into a corner, and on which I was standing while I looked into the abyss.

In another tower there was a cellar that had been filled-in. Lord Byron, in 1816, had asked permission to excavate it. He was refused on some pretext or other. Since then, the vault has been cleared. I descended. This was the temporary burial-place of Count Peter II of Savoy, who was one of the great men of his time, and who was nicknamed *Little Charlemagne* (an ill-matched pair of words). In 1268, Count Peter's corpse was lowered into this vault with great pomp. Today, both the tomb and the corpse have vanished. I saw the old rotten door of the vault, without hinges or lock, leaning against the wall under the shed in a neighbouring courtyard; and nothing remains of Count Peter except the square imprint of the head of his sarcophagus, torn from the wall by the Bernese. (*Peter II of Savoy had renovated Chillon. He had died in France, and was ultimately interred at Hautecombe Abbey in Saint-Pierre-de Curtille in Savoy*)

The neighbouring courtyard was itself a cemetery where several great Savoyard lords had tombs. Now there is only a little grass, and an old dead ivy tangled around an old, dilapidated beam.

I was unable to visit the chapel, which is replete with gargoyles. The chamber of the dukes is above the burial vault. The Bernese mutilated the panelling and made a guardroom of it. The smoke from their pipes has blackened the wooden ceiling, its fleur-de-lis coffers, and its ribs strewn with silver crosses. The bear of Bern is painted on the fireplace. The coat of arms of Savoy is scarred. A hole in the wall is shown, where, it is said, treasure was once stored, and from which the people of Bern extracted, with great cries of joy, beautiful gold objects belonging to the Duke of Savoy. All those marvellous vases of Benvenuto Cellini and François Colomb must have made an admirable effect pouring out pell-mell into the guardroom. Once can imagine the picture it made. If you painted the subject, Louis, it would be delightful. — The room was decorated with a beautiful frescoed reliquary, in which one can still see some legs and arms. The window is a fifteenth-century casement rather finely carved on the outside.

The door to this ducal chamber was torn off after the assault of 1536. I was shown this door in a large adjoining room, where there are, incidentally, some curious tables and a beautiful fireplace. It is of solid oak fortified with iron plates flattened on an anvil. Towards the bottom of the door is a round, bevelled opening through which a falcon's beak has passed (*a polearm with a long spike at front and rear, known as a Lucerne Hammer*). A Bernese bullet had

pierced the iron frame deeply, and lodged in the oak. If one puts one's finger in the hole, one can feel the bullet.

The Hall of Justice is next to the Ducal Chamber. Imagine a magnificent nave, with a coffered ceiling, heated by an immense fireplace, brightened by ten or twelve trefoiled ogival windows from the thirteenth century, and furnished today with cannons, which however fails to spoil the effect. All the neighbouring rooms are full of cannonballs, bombs, howitzers and cannons, some of which possess the beautiful monstrous forms of previous centuries. Through the half-open doors one can glimpse those formidable copper mouths gleaming in the shadows.

At the end of the Hall of Justice is the torture chamber. A few feet below the ceiling, a large beam crosses it from side to side. I saw in this beam the three holes through which the rope of the strappado passed. This beam rests on a wooden pillar crowned with a charming fourteenth-century capital, which has been painted and gilded. The base of the pillar, to which the victim was tied, is marked by deep, black scars. The instruments of torture, as they moved over the victim's body, encountered the wood from time to time. Hence the hideous scars. The room is lit by a beautiful ogival window offering a dazzling view.

A remarkable thing is that the castle of Chillon, though surrounded by water, is free of the lake's humidity, such that the windows are left open winter and summer. In spring, small birds come to make their nests in the mouths of the howitzers.

After a three-hour visit, I left Chillon and, having returned to Vévey, visited Ludlow again in his church. It is greatly fitting, in my opinion, that Providence sited Ludlow's tomb close to Bonivard's dungeon. A mysterious thread, which runs through the events of two centuries, links these two men. Bonivard and Ludlow had the same idea: emancipation of the mind and of the people. Luther's reforms, in which Bonivard assisted, prompted, after a hundred and thirty years, Cromwell's revolution, in which Ludlow was involved. What Bonivard desired for Geneva, Ludlow desired for London. Only, Bonivard was the persecuted thinker; Ludlow the persecuting thinker; what the Duke of Savoy did to Bonivard, Ludlow returned with interest on Charles I. The history of human thought is full of these surprising echoes. Therefore, and this is the culmination of Providence's magnificent logic, Ludlow's tomb needed to be sited near Bonivard's prison.

Lausanne, September 25th, ten o'clock in the evening

It is in Lausanne[132], dear Louis, that I seek to end this interminable letter. An icy wind blows through my window; but I leave it open for love of the lake, which I can see, almost in its entirety, from here. Strangely enough, Vévey is the warmest city in Switzerland, Lausanne is the coldest. Only eleven miles or so separate Lausanne from Vévey; Provençe adjoins Siberia.

Paris receives, on average, a hundred and fifty-one days of rain a year; Vévey, fifty-six. Take that as you will, and unfold your umbrella.

Lausanne has not a single monument that mediocre Puritan taste has not spoiled. All the delightful fountains of the fifteenth century have been replaced by hideous granite cippi (*low, square or rounded Roman-style posts*), stupid and ugly as cippi always are. The town hall has its belfry, its roof, and its gargoyles of decorative, cut and painted iron; but the windows and doors have been poorly retouched. The old bailiffs' castle (*Château Saint-Maire*) a cube of stone enhanced by brick machicolations, with four turrets at the four corners, is of fine size; but all the bays have been redone; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's green shutters are stupidly cramponed to the venerable cross-windows of Guillaume de Challant, Bishop of Lausanne. The cathedral[133] is a noble edifice of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; but almost all the figures have been carefully amputated; not a painting remains; not a stained-glass window; and it is daubed in sugar-paper grey; and they have but poorly restored the spire of the bell-tower over the transept, and they have placed on the bell-tower over the portal the pointed hat of the magician *Rothomago* (*a character in Dominique Séraphin's shadow-puppet play of that name, staged at the end of the eighteenth century*). However, there are still superb statues beneath the southern portal, and, apart from a few figurines, the beautiful flamboyant doors of Sébastien de Montfaucon, the last bishop of Lausanne have been left intact. Inside, I was in error, there still remains one stained-glass window,

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[132] Letter XXXIX — Lausanne: 46°31'18.8"N, 6°38'07.1"E

[133] Letter XXXIX — Lausanne Cathedral: 46°31'21.4"N, 6°38'07.1"E

the rose window. They have also preserved a charming bench of transitional workmanship, mixed with flowery Gothic and Renaissance, a gift from this same Sébastien de Montfaucon; a large number of Romanesque capitals, of exquisite complexity; and some admirable tombs, among others that of the knight Otto I de Granson, who is lying on his tomb, his hands severed, having been defeated in a duel. Below the knight, dressed in his coat of armour, I noticed the mortuary stone of Samuel Constant, Marquis de Rebecque, the grandfather of Benjamin Constant.

As I left the church, night was falling, and I thought of you again, my sublime artist. Lausanne is a mass of picturesque houses, spread over two or three hills, starting from the same central point, and topped with the cathedral like a tiara. I was on the esplanade of the church in front of its portal, the head of the city, so to speak. I saw the lake above the roofs, the mountains above the lake, the clouds above the mountains, and the stars above the clouds. It was like a staircase which my thoughts ascended from step to step, expanding at each degree. You will have noticed, as I, that in the evening, the clouds, in cooling, lengthen, flatten, and can take on the shape of crocodiles. One of these large black crocodiles swam slowly in the air, towards the west; its tail blocked a luminous arch built by the clouds at sunset; rain fell on Geneva, buried in the mist, from the creature's belly; two or three glittering stars emerged from its mouth like sparks. Below it, the lake, dark and metallic, spread inland like a pool of molten lead. A few plumes of smoke crept over the roofs of the city. To the south, the horizon was fearsome. One caught only a glimpse of the broad bases of the mountains buried beneath a monstrous explosion of mist and cloud. There will be a storm tonight.

I am about to return home, and am writing to you, though I would much rather shake you by the hand, and speak to you. I have tried to make my letter a sort of window through which you are able to see what I can see.

Farewell Louis, and I shall be with you soon. You know how much I am yours; be mine, for your part. You are creating beautiful things, I am sure; I think good thoughts, and they are for you; for you are in the first rank of those I love. You know that truly, do you not?

I shall be in Paris in ten days' time.

The End of Part XI, and of Victor Hugo's '*Le Rhin*'

About the Author

Victor-Marie Hugo (1802 –1885) novelist, poet, essayist, playwright, artist, and politician, became a leading light of the French Romantic literary movement, witnessed by the turbulent opening night of his play Hernani in 1830, which portrayed the Romantic hero as a figure in conflict with society, dedicated to love and driven by fate; and supported by the lengthy preface to his play Cromwell, which championed freer forms closer to Shakespearean drama, interweaving tragic, comic, and grotesque elements, rather than the rigid rules of previous French theatre. He later achieved wider fame with his poetry, and the novels Notre-Dame de Paris and Les Misérables.

With the Revolution of 1848, Hugo was elected a deputy for Paris in the Constituent Assembly and later in the Legislative Assembly, where he adopted a position increasingly critical of the ruling powers. When in December 1851 a coup d'état inaugurated the Second Empire under Napoleon III, Hugo, opposed to political absolutism and authoritarianism, left France for Brussels. A twenty-year exile, mostly spent in the Channel Islands, ensued; initially enforced then voluntary. The French defeat in the Franco-German War, and the proclamation of the Third Republic in 1871, brought Hugo back to Paris, where he was received as a living symbol of republicanism and a national hero.

His poetry ranges over personal, philosophical, political and social themes. The personal aspects were deepened by the premature loss of his recently-married daughter in 1843 and his internal religious and philosophical struggles; the political and social aspects by his republican sympathies and the turbulent events of French nineteenth-century politics. In this selection the personal dominates, rather than the political or religious, revealing the calmer more introspective aspect of the poet invoked in Les Misèrables, particularly in the figure of Jean Valjean with whom he identified spiritually, rather than the polemical and rhetorical aspects which guaranteed his fame.

About the Translator

Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's Metamorphoses and Dante's Divine Comedy.