LETTER XLV.

WITTENBERG.

MY DEAR:--

I am here in the station house at Wittenberg. I have been seeing and hearing to-day for you, and now sit down to put on paper the results of my morning. "What make you from Wittenberg?" Wittenberg! name of the dreamy past; dimly associated with Hamlet, Denmark, the moonlight terrace, and the Baltic Sea, by one line of Shakspeare; but made more living by those who have thought, loved, and died here; nay, by those who cannot die, and whose life has been life to all coming ages.

How naturally, on reaching a place long heard of and pondered, do we look round for something uncommon, quaint, and striking! Nothing of the kind was here; only the dead flat of this most level scenery, with its dreary prairie-like sameness. Certainly it was not this scenery that stirred up a soul in Luther, and made him nail up his theses on the Wittenberg church door.

"But, at any rate, let us go to Wittenberg," said I; "get a guide, a carriage, cannot you?" as I walked to one window of the station house and another, and looked out to see something wonderful. Nothing was in sight, however; and after the usual sputter of gutturals which precedes any arrangement in this country, we were mounted in a high,

awkward carriage, and rode to the town. Two ancient round tower and a wall first met my eye; then a drawbridge, arched passage, and portcullis. Under this passage we passed, and at our right hand was the church, where once was laid the worn form that had stood so many whirlwinds--where, in short, Luther was buried. But this we did not then know; so we drove by, and went to a hotel. Talked English and got German; talked French with no better success. At last, between W., G., and the dictionary, managed to make it understood that we wanted a guide to the Luther relics. A guide was after a time forthcoming, in the person of a little woman who spoke no English, whom, guide book in hand, we followed.

The church is ancient, and, externally, impressive enough; inside it is wide, cold, whitewashed, prosaic; whoever gets up feeling does it against wind and tide, so far as appearances are concerned. We advance to the spot in the floor where our guide raises a trap door, and shows us underneath the plate inscribed with the name of Luther, and by it the plate recording the resting-place of his well-beloved Philip Melanchthon; then to the grave of the Elector of Saxony, and John the Steadfast; on one side a full length of Luther, by Lucas Cranach; on the other, one of Melanchthon, by the same hand. Well, we have seen; this is all; "He is not here, he is risen." "Is this all?" "All," says our guide, and we go out. I look curiously at the old door where Luther nailed up his theses; but even this is not the identical door; that was destroyed by the French. Still, under that arched doorway he stood, hammer and nails in hand; he held up his paper, he fitted it

straight; rap, rap,--there, one nail--another--it is up, and he stands looking at it. These very stones were over that head that are now over mine, this very ground beneath his feet. As I turned away I gave an earnest look at the old church. Grass is growing on its buttresses; it has a desolate look, though strong and well kept. The party pass on, and I make haste to overtake them.

Down we go, doing penance over the round paving stones; and our next halt is momentary. In the market-place, before the town house, (a huge, three-gabled building, like a beast of three horns,) stands Luther's bronze monument; apple women and pear women, onion and beet women, are thickly congregated around, selling as best they may. There stands Luther, looking benignantly, holding and pointing to the open Bible; the women, meanwhile, thinking we want fruit, hold up their wares and talk German. But our conductress has a regular guide's trot, inexorable as fate; so on we go.

Wittenberg is now a mean little town; all looks poor and low; yet it seems like a place that has seen better days. Houses, now used as paltry shops, have, some of them, carved oaken doors, with antic freaks of architecture, which seem to signify that their former owners were able to make a figure in the world. In fact, the houses seem a sort of phantasmagoria of decayed gentlefolk, in the faded, tarnished, old-fashioned finery of the past. Our guide halts her trot suddenly before a house, which she announces as that of Louis Cranach; then on she goes. Louis is dead, and Magdalen, his wife, also; so there is no

one there to welcome us; on we go also. Once Louis was a man of more consequence.

Now we come to Luther's house--a part of the old convent. Wide yawns the stone doorway of the court; a grinning masque grotesquely looks down from its centre, and odd carvings from the sides. A colony of swallows have established their nests among the queer old carvings and gnome-like faces, and are twittering in and out, superintending their domestic arrangements. We enter a court surrounded with buildings; then ascend, through a strange doorway, a winding staircase, passing small, lozenge-shaped window. Up these stairs he oft trod, in all the moods of that manifold and wonderful nature--gay, joyous, jocose, fervent, defiant, imploring; and up these stairs have trod wondering visitors, thronging from all parts of the world, to see the man of the age. Up these stairs come Philip Melanchthon, Lucas Cranach, and their wives, to see how fares Luther after some short journey, or some new movement. Now, all past, all solitary; the stairs dirty, the windows dim.

And this is Luther's room. It was a fine one in its day, that is plain. The arched recesses of the windows; the roof, divided in squares, and, like the walls and cornice, painted in fresco; the windows, with their quaint, round panes,--all, though now so soiled and dim, speak plainly of a time when life was here, and all things wore a rich and joyous glow. In this room that great heart rejoiced in the blessedness of domestic life, and poured forth some of those

exulting strains, glorifying the family state, which yet remain. Here his little Magdalen, his little Jacky, and the rest made joyous uproar.

There stands his writing table, a heavy mass of wood; clumsy as the time and its absurdities, rougher now than ever, in its squalid old age, and partly chipped away by relic seekers. Here he sat; here lay his paper; over this table was bent that head whose brain power was the earthquake of Europe. Here he wrote books which he says were rained, hailed, and snowed from the press in every language and tongue. Kings and emperors could not bind the influence from this writing table; and yet here, doubtless, he wrestled, struggled, prayed, and such tears as only he could shed fell upon it. Nothing of all this says the table. It only stands a poor, ungainly relic of the past; the inspiring angel is gone upward.

Catharine's nicely-carved cabinet, with its huge bunches of oaken flowers hanging down between its glass panels, shows Luther's drinking cup. There is also his embroidered portrait, on which, doubtless, she expended much thought, as she evidently has much gold thread. I seem to see her conceiving the bold design--she will work the doctor's likeness. She asks Magdalen Cranach's opinion, and Magdalen asks Lucas's, and there is a deal of discussion, and Lucas makes wise suggestions. In the course of many fireside chats, the thing grows. Philip and his Kate, dropping in, are shown it. Little Jacky and Magdalen, looking shyly over their mother's shoulder, are wonderfully

impressed with the likeness, and think their mother a great woman. Luther takes it in hand, and passes some jests upon it, which make them laugh all round, and so at last it grows to be a veritable likeness. Poor, faded, tarnished thing! it looks like a ghost now.

In one corner is a work of art by Luther--no less than a stove planned after his own pattern. It is a high, black, iron pyramid, panelled, each panel presenting in relief some Scripture subject. Considering the remote times, this stove is quite an affair; the figures are, some of them, spirited and well conceived, though now its lustre, like all else here, is obscured by dust and dirt. Why do the Germans leave this place so dirty? The rooms of Shakspeare are kept clean and in repair; the Catholics enshrine in gold and silver the relics of their saints, but this Protestant Mecca is left literally to the moles and the bats.

I slipped aside a panel in the curious old windows, and looked down into the court surrounded by the university buildings. I fancied the old times when students, with their scholastic caps and books, were momently passing and repassing. I thought of the stir there was here when the pope's bull against Luther came out, and of the pattering of feet and commotion there were in this court, when Luther sallied out to burn the pope's bull under the oak, just beyond the city wall near by. The students thought it good fun; students are always progressive; they admired the old boy for his spirit; they threw up caps and shouted, and went out to see the ceremony with a will. Philip Melanchthon wondered if brother Martin was not going a little too

fast, but hoped it would be overruled, and that all would be for the best! So, coming out, I looked longingly beyond the city gate, and wanted to go to the place of the oak tree, where the ceremony was performed, but the party had gone on.

Coming back, I made a pause opposite the house on which is seen the inscription, "Here Melanchthon lived, labored, and died." A very good house it was, too, in its day; in architecture it was not unlike this. I went across the street to take a good look at it; then I came over, and as the great arched door stood open, I took the liberty of walking in. Like other continental houses, this had an arched passage running through to a back court and a side door. A stone stairway led up from this into the house, and a small square window, with little round panes, looked through into the passage. A young child was toddling about there, and I spoke to it; a man came out, and looked as if he rather wondered what I might be about; so I retreated. Then I threaded my way past queer peaked-roofed buildings to a paved court, where stood the old church--something like that in Halle, a great Gothic structure, with two high towers connected by a gallery. I entered. Like the other church it has been whitewashed, and has few architectural attractions. It is very large, with two galleries, one over the other, and might hold, I should think, five thousand people.

Here Luther preached. These walls, now so silent, rung to the rare melody of that voice, to which the Roman Catholic writers attributed some unearthly enchantment, so did it sway all who listened. Here,

clustering round these pillars, standing on these flags, were myriads of human beings; and what heart-beatings, what surgings of thought, what tempests of feeling, what aspirations, what strivings, what conflicts shook that multitude, and possessed them as he spoke! "I preach," he said, "not for professor this or that, nor for the elector or prince, but for poor Jack behind the door;" and so, striking only on the chords common to all hearts, he bowed all, for he who can inspire the illiterate and poor, callous with ignorance and toil, can move also the better informed. Here, also, that voice of his, which rose above the choir and organ, sang the alto in those chorals which he gave to the world. Monmouth, sung in this great church by five thousand voices, must needs have a magnificent sound.

The altar-piece is a Lord's Supper, by Louis Cranach, who appears in the foreground as a servant. On each side are the pictures of the Sacraments. In baptism, Melanchthon stands by a laver, holding a dripping baby, whom he has just immersed, one of Luther's children, I suppose, for he is standing by; a venerable personage in a long beard holds the towel to receive the little neophyte. From all I know of babies, I should think this form of baptism liable to inconvenient accessories and consequences. On the other side, Luther is preaching, and opposite, foremost of his audience are, Catharine and her little son. Every thing shows how strictly intimate were Luther, Melanchthon, and Cranach; good sociable times they had together. A slab elaborately carved, in the side of the church, marks the last rest of Lucas and Magdalen Cranach.

I passed out of the church, and walked slowly down to the hotel, purchasing by the way, at a mean little shop, some tolerable engravings of Luther's room, the church, &c. To show how immutable every thing has been in Wittenberg since Luther died, let me mention that on coming back through the market-place, we found spread out for sale upon a cloth about a dozen pairs of shoes of the precise pattern of those belonging to Luther, which we had seen in Frankfort--clumsy, rude, and heelless. I have heard that Swedenborg said, that in his visit to the invisible world, he encountered a class of spirits who had been there fifty years, and had not yet found out that they were dead. These Wittenbergers, I think, must be of the same conservative turn of mind.

Failing to get a carriage to the station, we started to walk. I paused a moment before the church, to make some little corrections and emendations in my engravings, and thought, as I was doing so, of that quite other scene years ago, when the body of Luther was borne through this gate by a concourse of weeping thousands. These stones, on which I was standing, then echoed all night to the tread of a closely-packed multitude--a muffled sound, like the patter of rain among leaves. There rose through the long, dark hours, alternately, the unrestrained sobbings of the throng, and the grand choral of Luther's psalms, words and music of his own. Never since the world began was so strange a scene as that. I felt a kind of shadow from it, as I walked homeward gazing on the flat, dreamy distance. A great windmill was creaking its

sombre, lazy vanes round and round,--strange, goblin things, these windmills,--and I thought of one of Luther's sayings. "The heart of a human creature is like the millstones: if corn be shaken thereon, it grindeth the corn, and maketh good meal; but if no corn be there, then it grindeth away itself." Luther tried the latter process all the first part of his life; but he got the corn at last, and a magnificent grist he made.

Arrived at the station, we found we must wait till half past five in the afternoon for the train. This would have been an intolerable doom in the disconsolate precincts of an English or American station, but not in a German one. As usual, this had a charming garden, laid out with exquisite taste, and all glowing and fragrant with plats of verbena, fuschias, heliotropes, mignonette, pansies, while rows of hothouse flowers, set under the shelter of neatly trimmed hedges, gave brightness to the scene. Among all these pretty grounds were seats and walks, and a gardener, with his dear pipe in his mouth, was moving about, watering his dear flowers, thus combining the two delights of a German, flowers and smoke. These Germans seem an odd race, a mixture of clay and spirit--what with their beer drinking and smoking, and their slow, stolid ways, you would think them perfectly earthly; but an ethereal fire is all the while working in them, and bursting out in most unexpected little jets of poetry and sentiment, like blossoms on a cactus.

The station room was an agreeable one, painted prettily in frescoes,

with two sofas. So we arranged ourselves in a party. S. and I betook ourselves to our embroidery, and C. read aloud to us, or tried the Amati, and when we were tired of reading and music we strolled in the garden, and I wrote to you.

I wonder why we Anglo-Saxons cannot imitate the liberality of the continent in the matter of railroad stations, and give the traveller something more agreeable than the grim, bare, forbidding places, which now obtain in England and America. This Wittenberg is but a paltry town; and yet how much care is spent to make the station house comfortable and comely! I may here say that nowhere in Europe is railway travelling so entirely convenient as in Germany, particularly in Prussia. All is systematic and orderly; no hurrying or shoving, or disagreeable fuss at stations. The second class cars are, in most points, as good as the first class in England; the conductors are dignified and gentlemanly; you roll on at a most agreeable pace from one handsome station house to another, finding yourself disposed to be pleased with every thing.

There is but one drawback to all this, and that is the smoking. Mythologically represented, these Germans might be considered as a race born of chimneys, with a necessity for smoking in their very nature. A German walking without his pipe is only a dormant volcano; it is in him to smoke all the while; you may be sure the crater will begin to fume before long. Smoking is such an acknowledged attribute of manhood, that the gentler sex seem to have given in to it as one of

the immutable things of nature; consequently all the public places where both sexes meet are redolent of tobacco! You see a gentleman doing the agreeable to a lady, cigar in mouth, treating her alternately to an observation and a whiff, both of which seem to her equally matters of course. In the cars some attempt at regulation subsists; there are cars marked "Nich rauchen" into which we were always very careful to get; but even in these it is not always possible to make a German suspend an operation which is to him about the same as breathing.

On our way from Frankfort to Halle, in a "nich rauchen" car, too, a jolly old gentleman, whose joyous and abundant German sounded to me like the clatter of a thousand of brick, wound up a kind of promiscuous avalanche of declamation by pulling a matchbox from his pocket, and proceeding deliberately to light his pipe. The tobacco was detestable. Now, if a man must smoke, I think he is under moral obligation to have decent tobacco. I began to turn ill, and C. attacked the offender in French; not a word did he understand, and puffed on tranquil and happy. The idea that any body did not like smoke was probably the last that could ever be made to enter his head, even in a language that he did understand. C. then enlisted the next neighbor, who understood French, and got him to interpret that smoke made the lady ill. The chimney-descended man now took his pipe out, and gazed at it and me alternately, with an air of wondering incredulity, and seemed trying to realize some vast conception, but failing in the effort, put his pipe back, and smoked as before! Some

old ladies now amiably offered to change places with me, evidently regarding me as the victim of some singular idiosyncrasy. As I changed, a light seemed to dawn on the old chimney's mind--a good-natured one he was; he looked hard at me, and his whiffs became fainter till at last they ceased, and he never smoked more till I was safe out of the cars.