

**LETTERS FROM
ITALY AND VIENNA**

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Letters from Italy and Vienna by William Rind

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WILLIAM RIND

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LETTER I.

Vienna, Feb. 1851.

DEAR S—,

Though a straight line is the shortest between its extreme points, yet, if the extremities be Calais and Vienna, the shortest line that can be *generated* between them in time is a grand spiral, that fetches a far compass by Hanover, Berlin, and Breslaw,^{*} and comes wheeling up to the Danube with its train of huge and clattering caravans, smoking through every open window as vigorously as from its funnel. If fuel should fail by the way, the "Herr Conducteur" need only require of every German that he should throw his little bundle of cigars into the tender, and billets enough would be forthcoming for the full day's journey. With thirty-eight fellow-travellers in the same carriage, two of them

* Already modified by the opening of the Prague line.

ladies, and thirty-five diligent fumists, we carried with us a condensation of smoke that made a rush at the first aperture, and waved through the frosty air in long blue streamers; and when all the sashes were let down upon nearing the final station, the whole train steamed from tender to truck like a steed relaxing to the goal.

It was not for the first time that I renewed acquaintance with the light-hearted and light-heeled Viennese. *Nous sommes légers, voilà tout!* was Madame de Staël's concession and defence in behalf of her fellow-citizens, and a hundred times I have made to myself the same apology (though in a somewhat different sense) for this happy race: whom it is impossible not to felicitate on their cheerful temperament, their frank and genial sociability, their natural courtesy and kindness; nor, on the other hand, to take to task for their immoderate love of pleasure. Viennese existence may be defined, at least through the season, to be "life drawn out into a recurring series of dances." In other lands the dance is the bye-play of life, and subordinate to its more earnest purposes: but in a Viennese winter it is one of the prime

necessaries of being; it is better than meat and drink; and *sleep* every one would resign at the first touch of Strauss's fiddle. If that son of his father,—I know not how better to designate the man of hereditary minstrelsy,—could be set on the apex of St. Stephen's spire, and quaver forth his Orphean notes to the city that clustered at his feet and to the broad belt of suburbs beyond the encircling Glacis, I suppose that in every far and near chamber of the imperial metropolis every fair "locataire" would start upon her feet and dance *perforce* till he ceased.

Not having a turn for dancing—any more than Dr. South,*—I was reduced, when nothing better was to be done, to button my English reserve about me, and to wait for the interludes of conversation. One unfailling resource was usually at hand. The votaries of Terpsichore and Thalia had been startled by a louder voice in 1848, and Politics yet contended

* One can sympathise with this learned and austere Divine in his embarrassment at a Polish *réunion*. "In this exercise (of dancing) every body joined, and even I myself, *who have no manner of relish for such unedifying vagaries*, had a Madonna put into my hand by the Bishop of Plosko."

for the mastery with Pleasure. This had especially been the case in the winter of '49, when the very saloons of the Carnival had resounded with political discussions. I was congratulated by some non-Austrian Germans upon witnessing the improved and more earnest tone of conversation pervading the cafés since the revolution. Metternich's government had been too literally paternal; or, if you will—without meaning to impeach the great abilities of that autocratic statesman—maternal. He had treated the people as children, who were to do as they were bidden without asking questions, and then they should have *bouffons* in abundance. The two great instruments of Government were amusement and bugbears. If any unhappy citizen gave signs that he had outgrown the nursery, and was capable of thinking for himself, the next great political move was to draw a cordon round him; to deprive him of pens and ink, and by all means to prevent the infection of reason. "The people must be amused" was the bureaucratic cry. I am sorry to add, that some gentlemen whom I talked with, and who claimed intimate connexion with Metternich's friends, frankly professed the maxim, "The

people must be deceived!" They blamed both Metternich and Guizot for their mismanagement in not having yielded to the people in words and promised them every thing which they clamoured for. They would have had, they said, ample opportunities afterwards of gradually recovering all they had lost. The people however, at one burst, broke asunder all restraints, and eased themselves of their superiors. They acted as was to be expected:—the lewder sort like madmen, the better like schoolboys broke loose. They were slowly subdued and brought under the master's scule; but they were no longer the children they had been before. Their talk was more serious, their aspirations more manly, their determination deep in the consciousness of growing strength. Development and progress would now seem inevitable, if they be not beguiled by the old bait of immoderate amusement. It is not force and martial law that can permanently replace the old state of things; but it will glide in easily and imperceptibly amid a heart-and-soul abandonment to frivolity. The difference is already striking between this year and last. Then there were many 'Herr Barons'