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Transcribed Letter, 23 Sep. 1860, from James Reeve Stuart (in Karlsruhe, Germany) to Mrs. Mary Barnwell Stuart (in Port Royal, S.C.)

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Author

Stuart, James Reeve.

Background

Art student from South Carolina, who in 1860 at the time he wrote this letter, was marking almost two years of residence in Germany while enrolled in the Royal Academy of Art in Munich and the Karlsruhe Art School.

Summary

Travel letter, 23 September 1860, of James Reeve Stuart is written from Karlsruhe, Germany, and addressed to his mother, Mary Barnwell Stuart, who lived in Port Royal, S.C. The letter discusses James' travels through Germany and the sights he had recently seen while studying at the Royal Academy of Art in Munich and the Karlsruhe Art School; places discussed include buildings, art work, and landscapes in or near Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig and elsewhere.

Stuart and his mother enjoyed close ties to the family of Senator Robert Woodward Barnwell (the friend named "Rob" frequently cited in the letter being Robert Hayne Barnwell, the senator's son). Other family members are mentioned briefly: George Cuthbert, William Elliott, John Elliott, and most of James Stuart's siblings are named.

James calls Karlsruhe “the place where I commenced to be a German,” but since his traveling partner Rob left Germany to return home, Karlsruhe seems to have lost some of its luster for James: “The last I saw of [Rob] he was standing on the platform of the station at Leipsig which he was to leave at seven. I left at five. To prevent my feeling lonely I determined to do a little sight seeing by myself...”

The rest of Stuart’s letter describes places he visited to stave off his solitude: the Wartburg in Eisenach, where “Luther was shut up for ten months and commenced the translation of the Bible.” There James saw “the spot on the wall where the inkstand struck when [Luther] threw it at Satan one night.” Also chronicled are trips to Dresden, Rönigstein castle, Berlin, Charlottenburg, and finally to Leipzig, about which he remarked to his mother, “The great fair was in progress in Leipsig and the City crammed. There are people from all quarters of the globe there and generally of a rather disreputable appearance especially the Jews, the meanest dirtiest greasiest set you can imagine, wearing cylinder hats and black tight fitting coats to the ankles.” This anti-Semitic attitude is fascinating historically, considering events that would occur in Germany nearly eighty years after James’ commencing “to be a German.”

23 Sep. 1860
[Karlsruhe],
Germany

My dear mother—

I am in the old place again. I arrived at seven in the evening from Cassel [Kassel (Hessen, Germany)] which I left at nine in the morning. I felt somewhat as if coming home while on the cars from Heidelberg. First, this is the place where I commenced to be a German but now the chief fixture is wanting in Rob for it has been his home since we arrived almost two years ago.

The last I saw of him he was standing on the platform of the station at Leipsig [Leipzig] which he was to leave at seven. I left at five. To prevent my feeling

lonely I determined to do a little sight seeing by myself and so stopped at Eisenach at ten o'clock and walked up to the "Wartburg." This is the Castle in which Luther was shut up for ten months and commenced the translation of the Bible. I saw the Armour which was put upon him at the time of his capture on the road. It hung in the room which he occupied which still remains as he left it with his furniture, his beer-mug, (a big one.) and the spot on the wall where the inkstand struck when he threw it at Satan one night. It is a singular instance of the superstitions of those days, for he believed it himself.

The Wartburg [Castle] is celebrated too, in earlier German history for and contest which took place here between the various bards or "Minnesingers" [known as the "Singers War" contest of 1206] in the great Hall which has been renovated and the walls painted in fresco, one side being covered by a large picture representing this contest. The whole castle is being thoroughly restored to its former condition. It is a very fine specimen of the castles of the 12th Century built in what the Germans call the Romanesque style, I think very much like the Norman Gothic of England.

The Armoury was very striking. The room was dimly lighted and as we entered one wall was filled with weapons and around the other three sides stood a double row of dark figures, the complete suits of armour all arrange[d] standing with their visors closed, while in the centre was one of those heavy center columns from which the vaulted ceiling sprung. There were suits also mounted on fully arm[ored] horses. Two such were also in the grand Hall. The armour was not so very interesting however as I had just seen [at] the exhibition in Dresden in the Rustkammer.

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I did not enjoy the visit to Dresden very much, not being at all well, with a styne on my eye and two boils on the back of my neck which made me feel great sympathy for Job, although I don't think I was quite so patient. The Gallery which I expected to enjoy so much I took hardly any interest in. We made quite a pleasant days party up the river into the "Sachsen

Schweiz," [Saxon Schweiz] some of the strangest scenery I have ever seen. Huge pillars of rock rising along the banks of the [Elbe] river and all over the country solid masses rising perpendicular by some hundreds of feet and perfectly level on the top.

"Rönigstein" one of these has been for centuries the main fortress and refuge for the Saxon kings, and has never been taken. It is impossible to storm it and there is no elevation sufficiently near for a cannonball to reach it.

We did not see George Cuthbert and W[illia]m Elliott again. They were doing the country in Style. I believe that in the only letter I wrote while traveling I said very little of Berlin. The city pleased me more than any other which I have yet seen. There is such an appearance of healthy activity and everything appears to be done with such a liberal hand. We did not visit the palace, the Gallery is a very good one and the whole arrangement of the Antiquities, where temples and tombs are made in imitation of those from which the objects were taken and these are a remarkably fine collection, Mummies and Sarcophagi, altars and some of those huge, black stone figures, seated and standing with that strange quiet expression which I have so often read of. There were some casts too from the Nenevite [Ninevites, i.e. residents of Nineveh in Assyria] sculptures.

There was a room for German antiquities of the Barbarous ages, a room for Chinese curiosities, for American, African, and South Sea Island weapons, utensils and such like curiosities. Among the Egyptian mummies were those of every variety of bird beast and fish. Bats, cats, rats, and some young crocodiles, carefully wrapped all of them and preserving their forms very completely.

The finest portion of what is called the New [Neues] Museum is the "Treppen Haus" [Treppenhaus] or Hall of the stairway. An immense room devoted entirely to arrangement to these broad flights of steps at the foot of which along the wall are some Antique fragments and cast from the Horse tamers figures some fifteen or twenty feet high. On either wall above are pictures

and friezes by [Wilhelm von Kaulbach (1805-1874)] only five are as yet completed the space for the sixth still bare wall. They are painted in stereochromic a substitute

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for frescoes and much stronger and brighter in tone than the latter. The subjects are "Babel", "Homer", [Destruction of] Jerusalem, [Hunnenschlacht (Battle of the Huns)] and [the Crusades] the last I believe will be from the Reformation. These are the pictures I think to which Rob Barnwell alludes and advises my learning the style. But Kaulbach was perhaps forty years old when the first of these was commenced and he had commenced to draw when a mere boy. The laying on the colour is but play when compared with the drawing which makes the great master and which is Kaulbach's forte, as I remember your mentioning some American traveler who was much most pleased with the Castors in the [Raczynski] gallery as I was myself. Rob is bringing Home a beautiful engraving of it. We passed one afternoon at Potsdam went through old Fritz's Palace, saw his atlas, his handwriting and his little caricature of Voltaire. The Windmill, too or rather a reconstruction of it. [Stuart visited Sanssouci, a home of Frederick II (1712 – 1786) of Prussia, AKA Frederick the Great, nicknamed "Old Fritz."]

The most beautiful thing I saw there (in Berlin) was the Mausoleum in the palace grounds at [Charlottenburg]. It is a rotunda of dark stone, the light entering from above through blue glass which gives the interior a subdued and solemn appearance; on the floor are two slabs of marble, beneath which lie the late King and Queen Louise. Beneath the dome the two lie side by side upon simple sarcophagi. They are both by the sculptor [Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857)] lately dead and that of Queen Louise [1776-1810] is the most beautiful and touching work of the kind I saw.

She had taken up Rauch while [a] poor boy as a protégé and when she died at only 22 or 4 he requested to be allowed to carve this monument and to be granted unlimited time. I believe he kept it on

hand for fifteen years, but there has not been a [strone?] thrown away. She is lying in a perfectly simple and easy position with the hands folded over the breast; it is this very simplicity which is so striking. The king lies in uniform wrapped in his cloak. He has a very firm face, and I believe was a remarkably fine man. The same who was driven out by Napoleon.

At Dresden we visited Moreau's monument on the spot where he fell. It was a wonderfully good shot which Napoleon's gunner made to hit the group at such a distance. Leipsig which we went to from Dresden has now grown all over the battlefield. The Elster [River] in which [Jozef] Poniatowski [1763-1813] was drowned is not more than ten or fifteen steps broad but at that time must have been filled with struggling men and horses, and floating corpses.

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The great fair was in progress in Leipsig and the City crammed. There are people from all quarters of the globe there and generally of a rather disreputable appearance especially the Jews, the meanest dirtiest greasiest set you can imagine, wearing cylinder hats and black tight fitting coats to the ankles.

I find everything quite the same in Carlsruhe. The Lieutenant was quite glad to see me again, he had been dining all alone since we left. There was a little bit of shamfighting this morning on the parade, cavalry, artillery and infantry, going through all of the manoeuvres and burning plenty of powder.

Connor brought to visit me today two new Americans who have also come to study art, after having been in Dusseldorf, Antwerp and a short time in Munich. So we will have quite a Colony soon.

The Academy is being put to rights so I will not be at work immediately. We have had now three splendid days and I suppose you are having the same. W[illia]m Richard tells me he has sent on ten letters to Rob: where did they come from? I found three waiting for me, one from Sarah two from you, and as you say that it is difficult to write on such thin paper, I will tell you that they cost exactly the same as Sarah's did

which is written on ordinary paper, so don't trouble yourself about it, write as if you were writing to Bluffton [S.C.]. I am very glad to hear that Middleton has got a nice House there and I hope to hang his and Emma's portraits there in two years. Sarah appears to have settled into a genuine old housefrau. Her letter is quite old Aug. 1.

Henry is now about going back to Columbia [S.C.], I suppose, and Allan breaking in Corn. He will find a great crony, I think, in Rob who is full of planting and a little assistant machinery. I found here on my arrival a note from Cousin Catherine and a box containing Uncle James' seal, left here by John Elliott who must have come immediately after our departure. Please send her the note within.

My love to my Aunts and Grandmama. This is my second in six weeks but I will write oftener now. Rob leaves Hamburg on Monday so I hope this may precede him. He bids fair to have fine weather on the voyage. Sailing vessels are too slow for us when we turn our face homeward. I am at the end of my paper now.

Ever your affectionate son,
J.R. Stuart