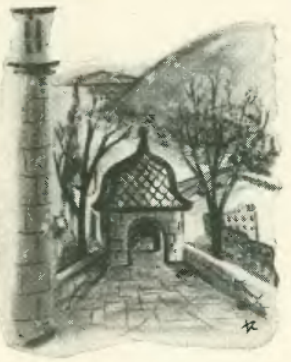
LETTER FROM BONN

I CAME to Bonn from Berlin, driving along the Autobahn that passes through the Ruhr—an instructive way, I found, to approach the capital of the German Federal Republic. While I was crossing the Soviet Zone, I had the four-lane highway practically to myself, but after I entered the British Zone, at Helmstedt, traffic increased, and by the time I reached the Ruhr, I was in an endless file of vehicles, moving at a crawl—mostly trucks and trailer trucks, interspersed with small Volkswagen and now and then a glossy, chauffeur-driven Mercedes limousine. Unlike most comparable roads in the United States, which neatly circumnavigate industrial areas, the Autobahn runs straight through the heart of the Ruhr, flanked by blast furnaces and rolling mills, with their slag heaps, coalpits, and dump cars, and I had to drive through what seemed like the suburbs of a dozen Pittsburghs. The last time I had been in this area—three years after the war—I had seen smokeless chimneys rising above the twisted girders of silent factories. Now the air was full of sulphurous smoke and the hissing and pounding of machinery as red streams of molten iron rolled out of the furnaces, and dump cars and narrow-gauge trains clanged back and forth. Later, I came upon miles and miles of new one-family and two-family houses, built by the government, by the steel companies, or by private investors with government help. The Ruhr workers, who had practically no houses at the end of the war, are now the best-housed workers in Europe, and their rents are among the lowest; a worker pays thirty-nine marks (nine dollars) a month—roughly ten per cent of his income—for a two-room apartment with a bathroom and a kitchen. Production in the Ruhr is now greater than it was in 1936, the last so-called normal prewar year. All this makes a dramatic picture of recovery, which elates some Autobahn travellers and terrifies others. During a brief stop at Cologne, I talked with two Frenchmen who had driven across the Ruhr the night before and were still dazed by the stupendous red glow of the blast furnaces against the dark skies. "We know we're supposed to forget our old fears and prejudices," one of them said. "But look what these Boches have achieved in half a dozen years. How can you ever trust them?" As the world recently learned, a good many Frenchmen feel the same way without ever having seen the blast furnaces.



IN the years before the First World War, Bonn was a pleasant university town and a haven for retired Army officers and wealthy aristocrats (at one time it had a hundred and fifty gold-mark millionaires), and it took pride in the fact that it was the birthplace of Ludwig van Beethoven and the garrison of the Königshusaren, one of Germany's most exclusive guards regiments. The sons of the Kaiser, like many other highborn young men, went to Bonn to avail themselves of the privilege of studying at the Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelm University and putting in their Army service at the same time. The university had a high academic reputation; among its teachers or alumni were Carl Schurz, Friedrich Nietzsche, the historians Jakob Burckhardt and Heinrich von Treitschke, and the poet Hoffmann von Fallersleben, who wrote "Deutschland über Alles." (More recently, Joseph Goebbels attended classes there.) In the old days, the students' corps, or clubs, each representing a definite social stratum, provided Bonn with a certain amount of liveliness. The fanciest corps of all, the Borussen, was restricted to royalty and the nobility. Then there were, in descending order, the Rhenanen, for the sons of rich landowners; the Palaten, for the sons of industrialists; the Hanseaten, for the sons of merchant princes; and the Saxonen, for the sons of lawyers and judges. The corps students were monarchists—their slogan was "For Kaiser and Fatherland, Honor and Freedom"—and they duelled enthusiastically all over town. They paraded, wearing their colors, on a promenade called the Couleur Corso, and they went in for *Kneipen*, or all-night drinking bouts, at the Weinhaus Streng, which still keeps its barrels in cellars under the university. During the Second World War, the university's main building, which was once an archbishop's palace, was bombed and several wings were burned out, but the gold-plated statue of

the Virgin Mary, known as "Regina Pacis," that tops the southern façade was spared by the flames, and the people of Bonn considered this a good omen. Bonn University, as it is now commonly and unceremoniously called, has become the second-largest university in Western Germany, with more than seven thousand students, but student life, by some lights, is far drabber than it used to be. Duelling is frowned upon, and only a small group of nationalistic diehards practice it. Most of the students nowadays regard the venerable Teutonic rituals as a waste of time. They are more interested in money and jobs.

The house, at 20 Bonngasse, in which Beethoven was born, on December 16, 1770, still stands. It narrowly escaped being torn down sixty-odd years ago, though, when it was being operated as a tavern and neighbors complained that the goings on there were disorderly. The building was saved by twelve citizens of Bonn, who put up the cash to buy it and then organized the Beethovenhaus Society, among whose charter members were Johannes Brahms, Max Bruch, Giuseppe Verdi, Joseph Joachim, Anton Rubinstein, Clara Schumann, Prince Otto von Bismarck, and Field Marshal Count Helmuth von Moltke. The back part of the building was restored to look as it had at the time of Beethoven's birth, and the front was converted into a museum. This now contains such things as the keyboard of the organ, from the old Church of the Friars Minor in Bonn, on which the eleven-year-old Ludwig made his first attempts at preluding; the viola Beethoven used as a member of the court orchestra; a Nicolò Amati violin and an Andrea Guarnieri cello; Beethoven's monocle, on a black cord; and the ear trumpets that were made for him by the Vienna mechanic Johann Nepomuk Maelzel. There are forbidding busts of the composer everywhere one turns—in the small, low, dim attic room where he was born, and even in the generally charming vine-enclosed garden behind the house. As I looked around, I couldn't help thinking of a visit I once paid to Chopin's birthplace, a white frame house in a village near Warsaw. It was cheerful and airy, and its rooms were decorated with white wild roses and peonies, picked every morning in the garden. By contrast, the Beethoven house seemed like a mausoleum.

After the collapse of the Hohenzollerns in 1918, Bonn retained its cultural eminence but lost a good deal of its dash. The guards regiment was, of course,

disbanded, and the student corps became considerably more subdued. The burghers of Bonn, monarchists almost to a man, paid as little attention as possible to the Weimar Republic. Hitler came to Bonn in 1932, during his unsuccessful campaign for the German Presidency, and the owner of the Königshof, then the town's leading hotel, indicated that his presence as a guest would not be desirable. He went, instead, to Bad Godesberg, a town four miles away, where he was cordially received at the Rhein-Hotel Dreesen. The Bonners were delighted to see him leave, and Hitler never forgave them. From that time on, when he visited the Rhineland he invariably kept clear of Bonn. In 1938, he made history at the Dreesen when he and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met there for an informal talk, which led to the Munich Conference. The Königshof was badly bombed during the war, and is still a ruin; the Dreesen, after serving as the headquarters of the French High Commissioner for several years, was returned to its owner, who rebuilt it magnificently and reopened it in the fall of 1952. The former *Führer-Suite*, consisting of two bedrooms, a drawing room, a conference room, and a bathroom, is available at forty marks, or less than ten dollars, a day—a real bargain.

ON November 3, 1949, to the dismay of the people of Bonn, the Bundestag voted, by a narrow margin, to make their city the capital of Western Germany. Most Bonners had favored Frankfurt, the runner-up. But Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was against Frankfurt, because its population was predominantly Socialist and it was run by a political machine. He felt that a small, aloof city of indeterminate views, like Bonn, would keep the political temperature of the Bundestag relatively low, and would also emphasize the provisional character of the government, for at the time there was genuine hope that Germany would be unified and Berlin would again be the capital. Most Bonners still wish Frankfurt had been chosen. They complain that Bonn has become noisy and overcrowded, and it is true that in four years the population has increased from ninety thousand to a hundred and forty thousand. Many of the newcomers are refugees from the Soviet Zone of Germany, who come to the capital in search of jobs or assistance. The Bonners talk about these people as if they were immigrants, and not fellow-Germans. "Those refugees will do practically anything to make

money," one well-to-do citizen said to me the other day. "They start out as building workers, and their wives get jobs as charwomen. In no time, they're running their own enterprises. Our schools are jammed with their children. And their young people are already marrying our sons and daughters. In a few years, the pure Catholic character of our region, the whole cultural and religious structure of our beautiful Rhineland, will be destroyed by those Protestants from the East. You run into them everywhere. Even the police force is full of them. They get the best jobs, because they work so hard. Here we like a graceful way of life—a walk through the Siebengebirge, a glass of Rhine wine. Now it's work, work all the time, and the competition is terrific. In ten years, these new people will own everything, and Bonn will be as vulgar as Berlin."

The impact on Bonn of the vast governmental machine that was suddenly thrust upon it has been tremendous. It is as if Princeton, New Jersey, say, were called upon to accommodate all the agencies of the federal government in Washington. Elsewhere in Germany, Bonn is referred to with a mixture of amusement, condescension, and affection as "*das Bundesdorf*"—"the capital village"—and, indeed, it has remained a small town at heart. The other morning, I saw a herd of sheep grazing on a plot near the Bundeshaus, in which the Parliament convenes. During the day, automobiles are not allowed to park on the south side of the charming old Marktplatz, because they would block the way to the stalls of flowers, vegetables, and fruit that have been set up there every morning for generations. Fast through trains still stop at the local railroad station for only a minute, just as they did in the days before Bonn became the capital of the most populous country in Western Europe. "Old" Bonners will have nothing to do with the new Bonn. They wouldn't think of being seen in the Café Kranzler or the Café Vaterland—two restaurants that were once famous in Berlin and have now moved here.

Nevertheless, the struggle to keep the old Bonn alive is a losing one. On the road between here and Bad Godesberg, I saw four new buildings in the space of one block—the headquarters of the British High Commission, the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party, a Coca-Cola bottling plant, and a huge white garage. The streets swarm with automobiles bearing license plates that are prefixed with "O" (official German cars), "4C" (American Ar-

my), "4H" (American civilian), "BZ" and "CCG" (British), and "DO" and "FZ" (French). The new Bonn is being established not in the historic center of the town, but at its eastern edge, on the left bank of the Rhine. This is where the Chancellery and the Bundeshaus are, and a number of former millionaires who used to live in the section and who lost their money in Germany's various inflations and currency devaluations have rented or sold their villas to the government for temporary use as office buildings and Ministries. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Post and Communications have been installed in brand-new boxlike buildings, and the other Ministries soon will be. In a few years, Bonn will be a spick-and-span, made-to-order capital. There is nothing provisional about the new buildings; they are made of steel and reinforced concrete, and they seem to have been designed with the idea that there is to be a Western Germany for a good long time and that Bonn is to remain its capital. Even the most optimistic government officials have given up hope of moving back to Berlin. Like soldiers in the trenches, they are now simply trying to make themselves as comfortable as they can while wishing they were elsewhere.

Since there still aren't nearly enough apartments to go around, a civil servant arriving in Bonn must plan to spend at least a year in a rented room, without his family, if he has one. During this time, a married man receives eight marks (two dollars) a day as so-called separation money, and he is supposed to live on this, while his salary goes home to his family. Every three months, he gets a free round-trip ticket, third class, on the federal railroads for a visit home. And when he is at last assigned an apartment, his wife quickly discovers that she has set up housekeeping in one of the most expensive cities in Western Germany.

All things considered, the Berliners who have had to move here are no more enthusiastic about Bonn than Bonn is about them. "Bonn is not a capital but a form of capital punishment," a civil servant who arrived three years ago told me. "What with the fog from the Rhine, the dampness, and the hothouse climate, people feel logy and tired all the time. Some of my friends have constant headaches. We miss the invigorating air of Berlin—and not only the air. We're all suffering from claustrophobia. At night, I meet the same people I see all day long at the office. In my three years here, I've never once

been asked to the house of a native Bonn family. What I miss most is people who don't talk shop every night. In Berlin, my wife and I knew artists and musicians and publishers. We had fun. Here, about all my wife can do is join in a weekly *Kaffeekränzchen* with the wives of two other German officials and with a French and an American lady. They take turns speaking German, French, and English, and it's really more educational than social. Of course, we see a lot of Allied officials at the monster cocktail parties, and we used to go to their homes, too, but then after a few times we felt we couldn't accept any more of their invitations, because we're in no position to ask them to our place. Two dinner guests at a time are about all we can manage in a two-room apartment, and I can't serve decent wines. The walls are as thin as paper, and the neighbors can hear every word we say. I like to play chamber music, and so do some of my colleagues, but how can we play in the evening when there is a baby asleep in the apartment next door? Some American friends of mine sometimes drive up to Düsseldorf for a concert or an opera, but I can't afford a trip like that. On Sundays, I do some bird watching—I got started on it when I was in England for a while before the war—but that's about my only recreation. Not a very interesting life, is it? We all pretend that someday we'll get out of Bonn, but, of course, we really know that we're stuck here for good."

Of all the recent arrivals here, the eleven hundred Americans undoubtedly have the most lavish accommodations. All of them, except Dr. James B. Conant, the High Commissioner, who has a house in Bad Godesberg, live just outside that town, in a specially built modern village, in the southern-California style, and complete with a shopping center, a church, a school, a cinema, a clubhouse, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, a central heating plant, a printing plant, a warehouse, and a gas station. The Americans call the development the Compound, and the Germans call it the Golden Ghetto. "A self-imposed one, mind you," a Bonner told me, with a smile. Less elegant housing developments, for the German employees of the Office of the United States High Commissioner for Germany, or HICOG, have been built in nearby Muffendorf and Tannenbusch. And in Mehlem, ten minutes from Bonn by car, is the new HICOG headquarters—a modernistic structure consisting of six wings, one of them seven

stories tall, that stands on stilts near the bank of the Rhine. Now, with German sovereignty in the offing, HICOG is shrinking steadily, and the surplus offices are being turned over to the German government; when HICOG is dissolved, the Americans will keep only enough real estate for a normal embassy and dispose of the rest. Altogether, the American projects are said to have cost around twenty million dollars. Everything was ready by November, 1951, and that month five hundred Americans, with their families, household goods, and office equipment, moved here from Frankfurt. The big move took five months to plan and eighteen days to carry out.

Compared to HICOG's Little Rockefeller Center, the British and the French headquarters are rather modest. The British adhered to the local German style in designing their rather austere building, in Bonn. The French headquarters, in Bad Godesberg, has a fine club and a good restaurant, and it reminds me of crossings on the Liberté and the Ile-de-France.

THE Bundeshaus, a square modern structure, dating from 1930, that was originally a teachers' seminary, overlooks the Rhine, that most powerful of all German national symbols. From the stone-paved terrace of its restaurant, which is open to the public, brooding Germans not only can keep their mystical watch on the Rhine as they drink their coffee with whipped cream and eat their *Kuchen* but can look up at the Drachenfels, the mountain on which Siegfried slew the dragon, and at the Petersberg, with its luxurious Kurhotel, which was built in the early years of this century by Peter Mülhens, the manufacturer of 4711 cologne. In May, 1945, American troops who were engaged in mopping-up operations discovered a subterranean armament factory in the Petersberg where a thousand Russian and Polish slave laborers were making airplane parts. Four years later, the Kurhotel became the headquarters of the three Allied High Commissioners. Once in a while, Adenauer would be invited to come there for a conference. Today, when the High Commissioners want to talk to Adenauer, they call on *him*. The Kurhotel is now in private hands again, and has been converted, at a reported cost of seven hundred thousand dollars, into a deluxe hideout for Ruhr millionaires. Instead of the three Allied flags, the black, red, and gold German flag is again flying on its roof—another pleasing sight

for the people on the terrace of the Bundeshaus.

In the restaurant, grave-faced men discuss business and politics—the two are inseparable in Bonn—over large plates of sauerkraut. The political parties are assigned their own tables, and the members are always careful to sit at them; it would cause much comment if a Social Democrat sat down to lunch with a Christian Democrat. Each political party also has its own hotel and winehouse in town. Party discipline is very strict. The leaders lay down the law at caucuses, and when a vote is taken in the Bundestag, each floor leader keeps an eye on his deputies, like a teacher in front of a class, to make sure that they vote as they have been told to. There are few roll-call votes, because no one likes them. A deputy who is obliged to go along with his party on what may turn out to be an unpopular measure can always tell the voters that he was against it, and without a roll call no one can prove he wasn't. Three out of every four laws that are passed by the Bundestag are introduced by the Cabinet. One deputy, explaining the Bundestag's lack of initiative, said, "Only the Ministries have staffs of legal experts competent to prepare new legislation." Since the deputies are so languid about lawmaking, lobbyists don't bother much with them, concentrating instead on officials in the Ministries.

All this, of course, serves to enhance the eminence of Chancellor Adenauer, up in his chancellery—the Palais Schaumburg, an eighteenth-century baroque building that once belonged to the Francophile Prince Schaumburg-Lippe. "Bonn *is* Adenauer," an American who has been here from the start told me. "He can sometimes be utterly ruthless in order to reach his objective, but his objective is always the good of Germany, as he sees it. He has the patience of a wise old man. He never arrives at his decisions in a hurry, and he isn't afraid to change them when he feels he has made a mistake." Among the Germans, Adenauer's authority appears to be unchallenged. At press conferences, he acts like a pleasant but stern professor. Every time he leaves Bonn, his colleagues work up ambitious projects of their own, but these are usually scuttled as soon as he returns.

One of the big questions in Bonn, naturally, is what will happen when the seventy-eight-year-old Chancellor is no longer around. Unlike Churchill, Adenauer has not encouraged the emergence of a political heir. Quite the contrary. Last year, when Dr. Heinrich

von Brentano, the Christian Democratic floor leader, was mentioned as the next Chancellor, Adenauer began to bear down on him in caucus meetings, and today no one talks of Brentano. A while ago, Adenauer fell sick, and several of his political friends reminded him that someone would have to take his place someday. Adenauer looked at them in surprise, and then said yes, there was always the chance that he might be run over by a car. "He seems to rule out the possibility of natural death," one of them said later.

QUITE early the other morning, I drove over to Rhöndorf, the sleepy little town on the other side of the Rhine where Adenauer lives. After having breakfast in the Drachenfels Hotel there, I set out to find the Chancellor's house, following some rather vague directions the waitress had given me. I headed for the foothills of the Drachenfels, which looms up behind the town, and soon I saw a large black Mercedes limousine with the license number O-002 (Dr. Theodor Heuss, the President of the Republic, has O-001) parked in front of a garage, which was being painted by two men in coveralls. A lane at right angles to the street ran past the garage and then, flanked by lilac and magnolia bushes, up a slope, ending in a flight of perhaps fifty steps, at the top of which was the comfortable white frame house, overlooking the Rhine, in which Adenauer lives, with his bachelor son. In front of the house was an exotic tree—transplanted, I've been told, from the Crimea—and on the doorstep were some empty milk bottles; in the rear, I knew, were his famous rosebushes. I asked the painters if the Chancellor was at home. They said that he was, and that he'd probably be coming out at any minute. "And when he comes, he'll come fast," one of them added. "He always walks fast, even going up those steps after a long day."

Just then, a man wearing a long leather coat came out of a small white building at one corner of the property, where, the painters told me, the Secret Service had set up shop. He walked over, joined us, and began chatting about his duties. The Chancellor was an easy job, he said. The immediate neighbors—a doctor, a businessman, and a clerk—were all old friends of Dr. Adenauer's, and they took better care of him than any Secret Service could.

A fast Porsche, with the word "POLIZEI" on its side, and a Mercedes, smaller than the parked one, drove up,

and half a dozen more men in leather coats got out. The Secret Service man looked at his watch and said the Chancellor would be coming down the lane at any moment. "Punctual as a clock," he went on. "Leaves here at nine-fifty, which gets him to his office at ten. Hates to have us use the sirens, though, even when the traffic is heavy.... Good morning, Frau Schmitz."

A fat, middle-aged woman in a faded house dress was walking down the road toward us, leading a small boy by the hand. She started to reply to the Secret Service man's greeting, but at that moment he and the other men snapped smartly to attention. A tall, erect old man wearing a black homburg and carrying an umbrella was striding briskly down the lane. As he passed us, he took off his hat, nodded this way and that, and said, "*Morn zusamm*' [Good morning, everybody]," in the Rhenish dialect. Then he got into his limousine, and was driven off, preceded by the Porsche and followed by the smaller Mercedes. One of the painters took a cigarette out of his breast pocket and rolled it between his fingers as he stared after the three cars.

"In two years he'll be eighty," he said, and shook his head incredulously.

"He's all right," said Frau Schmitz, her eyes shining with admiration. "He'll go on forever."—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

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Abstract art has always existed, but until this century it never knew of its existence.—*First sentence of the book "Abstract Painting," by Thomas B. Hess.*

Picasso was right, as usual, when he said: "There is no abstract art."—*Last sentence of the same book.*

Pity you didn't find out sooner.

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TAKEN BY MISTAKE: Will the party who picked up my purse at the Robinson Drug Store Saturday, please return the small beaded coin purse and money as it holds a sentimental value for me. Rita Schauer, Garrison, N. Dak.—*Adv. in the McLean County (N. D.) Independent.*

Great-great-grandmother in love with Alexander Hamilton?

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MOST FASCINATING NEWS STORY OF THE WEEK

[*The following item, reprinted in its entirety, is from the New Orleans Times-Picayune*]

BBISBANE, AUSTRALIA (AP)—Mrs. E.B.A. Fowles of Annerley, Brisbane, had a bad sneezing turn on the way home one night.

She didn't go to a doctor about it. She went to the police.