

## Literature, &amp;c.

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From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

HEART AND IMAGINATION;  
OR, THE POET AND THE  
PEASANT.

A YOUNG man was rambling along the skirts of the forest which separates St. Marie aux Mines from Ribauville, and notwithstanding the approach of night, and the fog that was rapidly thickening around him, he strolled leisurely along without a thought of the lateness of the hour. His green jacket, doo-skin gaiters, and the gun which rested on his shoulder, would have pointed him out as a sportsman, had not the book which peeped from his game pouch, betrayed rather the literary dreamer, to whom the pleasures of the field were only a fair pretext for the indulgence of a solitary ramble. Even at this moment the meditative nonchalance with which he pursued his way, bespoke Arnold de Munster to be less eager in his quest of game, than intent in pursuing the phantasies of his own imagination. During the last few minutes his thoughts had wandered back to Paris, and to the home and friends whom he had left behind. He pictured to himself with regret the study, so tastefully decorated with statues and engravings, the German melodies which his sister used to sing to him, and the chosen society wont to assemble beneath their hospitable roof.

Why had he given up all these enjoyments, and exiled himself in a country-house in the distant province of Alsace? Was it needful thus to retrieve his fortune? Or would it not be far better to make any pecuniary sacrifice, rather than dwell among the coarse and vulgar beings by whom he was here surrounded? While thus lost in perplexing thought, Arnold had walked on without considering whither the path he was pursuing might lead him. At length his reverie was dispelled by the unpleasant consciousness that the fog had melted into rain, and was penetrating his shooting-jacket. He now thought of hastening homeward, but on looking around him, perceived that he had lost his way amidst the windings of the forest, and sought in vain to discover which was the direction he ought to take. Meanwhile the daylight was fading away, the rain became heavier, and he wandered on in uncertainty through unknown paths. His heart was beginning to fail him, when suddenly the welcome tinkling of bells met his ears, and a team, conducted by a tall man clad in a blouse, appeared in sight, coming up from a by-road towards the spot where he stood. Arnold awaited his approach, and asked whether it were far to Sersberg.

'Sersberg!' repeated the teamster; 'I hope you do not reckon upon sleeping there to-night.'

'Pardon me, but I do though,' replied the young man.

'At the Cheateau of Sersberg?' continued the peasant: 'then you must know of a railway leading to it. There are six good leagues to be traversed before you could reach the gate, and considering the weather and the roads, they might be reckoned as twelve.'

The young man made an exclamation of surprise. He had started early in the day from the chateau, and had no idea he had rambled so far from it. But the peasant, on hearing of the course he had pursued, explained to him that for some hours he had been going in the wrong direction; and that, while he thought himself on the road to Sersberg, he had, in reality, been turning his back upon it. It was now too late to repair his error—the nearest village was about a league distant, and Arnold did not know the way thither; so that he found himself compelled to accept the shelter which was cordially offered by his new companion, whose farm happily lay near at hand. He accordingly joined the countryman, and attempted to enter into conversation with him; but Moser was no talker, and appeared a perfect stranger to all those ideas which habitually filled the young man's mind.

On emerging from the forest, Arnold called his attention to the magnificent horizon which lay before them, and which the last rays of the setting sun, now tinged with a hue of the deepest purple. The farmer only shrugged his shoulders, and murmured in reply—'It will be a bad day to-morrow,' at the same time drawing more closely around him the *limousine* which served him for a cloak.

'I should think one can see the whole valley from this point of the road,' said Arnold, who sought to pierce through the darkness in which the base of the hill was already enveloped.

'Yes, yes,' replied Moser, shaking his head, 'this rascally hill is high enough for that. Now there is an invention which I don't see much use for.'

'What invention?'

'Why, the mountains to be sure.'

'You would like better to have nothing but plains?'

'What a question!' exclaimed the farmer, laughing aloud. 'You might as well ask me whether I would not break my horses' backs.'

'Ah, that is true,' replied Arnold in a tone of contemptuous irony: 'I forgot the horses! God ought certainly to have thought of them above all when he created the world.'

'I do not know,' Moser tranquilly replied, 'whether God should have thought of them or not; but certainly the engineers ought not to forget them when they construct a road. The horse, sir, is the labourer's best friend, without intending, however, any insult to the oxen, which have also their value.'

Arnold looked at the peasant in amazement.

'Then do you really see nothing in all which surrounds you,' asked he seriously, 'but the mere question of utility? The forest, the mountain, the clouds—do they never speak to your heart? Have you never stood still to contemplate the setting sun, or the forest lighted up by the stars, as it is at this moment?'

'Me!' exclaimed the farmer. 'Do you suppose, then, that I make almanacs? What good should I get from your star-light nights and setting suns? The important thing is to earn enough to pay for one's three daily meals, and something to keep the cold out of one's stomach. Would monsieur like a little drop of cherry brandy? It is good, and comes from the other side of the Rhine.'

He held out a small flask to Arnold, who rejected it disdainfully.

The coarseness of the peasant renewed his regrets for the polished society he had left behind. He could hardly believe that these unhappy beings, whose lives were devoted to labour, and whose minds never seemed to rise above what was most material in all that surrounded them, could be men endowed with the same nature as himself. Their animal existence was the same, but what an abyss between their spirits! Were there any inclinations common to each—any point of resemblance which might attest their original fraternity? Arnold felt each moment more inclined to doubt it. The longer he reflected, the more he became convinced that this immaterial flower of all things, to which we have given the name of poetry, was the privileged possession of a few choice spirits, while the rest of mankind vegetated in the dull limbo of a prosaic existence. Such thoughts as these communicated a sort of contemptuous nonchalance to his demeanour towards his guide, with whom he no longer attempted any conversation. Moser showed neither surprise nor annoyance at his conduct, and began to whistle a familiar air, interrupting it now and then to utter a word of encouragement to his horses.

Ere long they reached the farm, where the tinkling of the little bells had announced their approach. A young boy and middle aged woman appeared at the same moment upon the threshold.

'It is your father!' exclaimed the woman, turning hastily back into the house, whence there immediately issued forth the joyous voices of children, who came running to the door, and pressed eagerly round the peasant.

'Wait a minute there, *marmaille!*' he exclaimed with his rough voice, whilst at the same time he drew from the cart a covered basket. 'Let Fritz unharness the horses.'

But the children continued to besiege the farmer, all talking at the same time. He stooped down to kiss them all, one after another: then suddenly raising himself up, 'Where is Johnny?' he inquired with a hurried voice, which betrayed some feeling of anxiety.

'Here, papa—here I am,' answered a feeble little voice within the doorway. 'Mamma does not like me to come out in this rain.'

'Stay, then—stay a moment,' said Moser, while he threw the reins on the backs of the unharnessed horses: 'I am coming to you, my child. Go in all of you, children, not to let him be tempted to come out.'

The three children ran joyously back to the porch, where the little Johnny stood by his mother's side. He was a pale, sickly boy, so deformed, that it was impossible to guess his age. He rested upon crutches, and his whole frame was bent and emaciated. On his father's approach, he extended his diminutive arms towards him with an expression so full of joy and love, that his wrinkled face beamed with delight. Moser lifted him up with his own hands, uttering at the same time an exclamation of happiness not unmingled with emotion. 'Come, then, my little Puss!' said he; 'kiss papa, then; with both arms hug him close now. How has he been since yesterday?'

The mother shook her head. 'Always that cough,' she said in an under tone.

'Oh, papa, it is nothing,' said the little boy. 'Louis had drawn me rather too fast in my wheel chair; but I am quite well again. I feel as strong as a man.'

The peasant laid him carefully down, raised the fallen crutches, which he placed under his arms, and looked at him with an air of satisfaction. 'Don't you think he grows, wife?' said he in the tone of a man who wants to be encouraged in his own opinion. 'Walk a little way Johnny—walk, my boy! He walks quicker and more firmly. He will do well, wife; we must only have a little patience.'

The good woman said nothing, but her glance rested upon her infirm child with such an expression of utter despair that it made Arnold shudder. Happily for poor Moser that he saw it not.

'Come here now, all you young brood,' he continued, opening the basket which he had taken from the cart. 'There is something for everybody. Fall into rank, and hold out all hands.'

The good father had just produced three small white rolls, ornamented with gilding. Three exclamations of joy were uttered, and six little hands simultaneously started

forward to receive them; but in a moment all drew back as if by instinct: 'and Johnny!' inquired with one accord all the little voices.

'What matters about Johnny?' gaily replied Moser. 'Who knows but I have brought nothing for him this evening. He shall have his share another time.'

But the child smiled, and tried to stretch over and peep into the basket. The farmer stepped back, lifted the cover, and raising his hand with an air of mock solemnity, displayed before the eyes of all a gingerbread cake, decorated with white and pink sugar plums. There was a general exclamation of delight. Johnny himself could not suppress a feeble cry of admiration, a slight tinge of colour passed across his pale cheeks, and he stretched out his hand with an expression of joyous avidity.

'Ah, that takes your fancy my little Puss,' exclaimed the father, whose countenance brightened at the sight of his child's pleasure. 'Take it my old man, take it, it is only sugar and honey.'

He placed the cake in the hands of the little cripple, watched him as he slowly moved away, and then turning towards Arnold, said with some emotion, 'He is my first born sir: disease has somewhat deformed him, but he is as sharp as a needle, and it will be our own fault if he does not turn out a gentleman.' While speaking he crossed the outer room, and led the way into a sort of parlour, whose whitewashed walls were decorated with a few rude engravings. On entering, Arnold perceived Johnny seated on the ground, surrounded by his brothers, amongst whom he was sharing the cake given him by his father. But each was declaiming against the size of his share, and wanting it to be smaller; it needed all the eloquence of the little hunchback to make them accept the shares he had allotted to them.

The young huntsman looked at the scene for some moments with the deepest interest, and when the children had again left the room he expressed his admiration of it to the farmer's wife. 'Certainly,' she replied with a smile, while at the same time a sigh escaped her, 'there are times, when I think that the infirmities of our poor John are of use to our other children: amongst each other they are slow in yielding, but not one of them can ever refuse him anything—it is a continual exercise of kindness and devotion.'

'And a fine kind of virtue it is,' interrupted Moser, 'who could refuse anything to an innocent who has so much to suffer? It is a foolish thing for a man to say, but do you know sir, that child always makes me disposed to cry. Often when I am in the fields, I begin all of a sudden to think of him. I say to myself, "Perhaps Johnny is ill, perhaps he is dead!" and, then, no matter what hurry there may be for the work to be got through, I must find some pretext or other for coming home and seeing how things go on. You see he is so feeble, so suffering. If he were not loved more than others, he would be too unhappy.'

'Yes, yes,' gently replied his wife. 'The poor child is to us at once a cross and a blessing. My children sir, are all dear to me; but when I hear upon the floor the sound of Johnny's crutches, I always feel as if it were a thrill of joy pass through me; it is a notice to me that our gracious God has not yet withdrawn the beloved child from us. It often seems to me that Johnny brings happiness to the house, like the swallow's nest built beneath the roof. If I had not to watch over him, I should feel as if I had "nothing left to do."

Arnold listened to these naive expressions of tenderness with mingled interest and surprise. The good woman called a servant to assist her in laying the cloth; and the young man, at the invitation of Moser, drew near the brushwood fire, which was burning on the hearth. As he leaned against the mantelpiece, his eye rested on a small black frame wherein was enclosed a dried leaf; Moser perceived his glance.

'Ah you are looking at my relic, I perceive,' said he laughing. 'It is a leaf from the weeping willow which grows away yonder upon the tomb of the hero! It was given to me by a Strasburg merchant, who had also served in the old regiment. I would not give the thing for two hundred crowns.'

'You attach, then, some particular idea to it?' said the young man inquiringly.

'Idea? no!' replied the peasant, 'but I too have served a campaign in the 14th hussars—a valiant regiment sir—which was pretty well cut up at Montrivail. There were only eight men left in our squadron; so to be sure, when the *Little Corporal* passed in front of the line he saluted us—yes sir—he took off his hat and saluted us! *Tanquerre!* it was worth while being killed for him. Ah, he was the father of the soldier.'

Here the peasant began to fill his pipe, with his eyes fixed upon the frame of black wood and the dried leaf. There was evidently to him in this remembrancer of a wonderful destiny of a whole romance of youth and of emotion. He recalled the last struggles of the Empire, in which he had borne a part; the reviews held by the Emperor when his presence were still considered a pledge of victory; the brief success of the French campaign, which was so soon followed by the disaster of Waterloo; the departure of the fallen hero; and his long agony on the rock of St. Helena. All these images passed successively before the farmer's mind, and his brow became knitted—he pressed his thumb more energetically upon his pipe, and whistled in a low tone one of the marches of his old regiment.

Arnold respected the old soldier's meditations, and waited till he himself should more break the silence. The arrival of a new guest awoke him from his reverie—he drew a chair to the table for his guest, and took his place opposite.

'Come,' said he abruptly, 'let us set to with the soup. I have taken nothing to-morrow but a crust of bread and two mouthfuls of cherry brandy. I could swallow a cow whole this evening,' and to prove his assertion, he began rapidly despatch the large basin of soup which he held before him. For a few minutes nothing heard but the noise of spoons, soon followed by that of knives, employed in cutting up a quarter of smoked bacon, which the good peasant placed before them.

The long walk and keen air had even Arnold an appetite which made him get all his Parisian delicacies, the best seemed the best flavoured he had ever tasted, and the cheap *vin du pays*, which constituted the sole beverage of the farmer's table, appeared to him capital.

The supper went merrily on till the mer enquired, as if struck by a sudden thought, 'where is Farraut? I have not seen him since my return.'

His wife and children looked at each other and made no reply.

'Well then what's the matter?' said Moser, who perceived their embarrassment. 'What is the dog? What has happened! Do answer me, Dorothy.'

'Don't be vexed, dear papa,' interposed Johnny; 'we did not dare to tell you. Farraut is gone off, and has not come again.'

'Gone off! but you should have told me said the peasant, sipping the table with fist. 'And what road did he take?'

'The road to Gerennes.'

'When was it?'

'After breakfast we saw him go up the path.'

'Something must have happened to him said Moser, rising from his seat. 'The animal is almost blind, and there are snags all along the road. Get me my goat-skin and my lantern; I must find poor Farraut, dead or alive.'

Dorothy went out without making any observation on the lateness of the hour, the badness of the weather, and soon returned with the cloak and lantern.

'You value this dog much?' inquired Arnold, surprised at their anxiety.

'Not for my own sake,' replied Moser, he lighted his pipe; 'but he did a good service to Dorothy's father. One day as he returning from La Boutraye with the price of his bullocks, four men set on him, and have killed him to get his money, but he ranted drove them off, and so, when the man died two years ago, he called me to bed-side, and asked me to take care of the dog for one of his children. Those were very words. I promised it, and it would shame not to keep one's word with the dead. Ho, Fritz give me my stick! I would save the world that anything should happen to Farraut. The creature has been in the world for twenty years. He knows every corner of the place, and he recalls the grandfather to mind. Give the lantern quickly, Dorothy. Good night sir, and well till tomorrow.'

Moser wrapped himself in his goat-skin cloak. The sound of his iron-tipped staff made itself heard for a few moments, and then he was lost amidst the noise of the rain, which was raging without.

After a long silence, the hostess proposed to show the young man the room she had reserved for him; but Arnold begged to be allowed to await the arrival of the host. He felt interested in this man, whom he had first thought rude and vulgar-minded, and in this humble family, whose life had seemed him so devoid of interest.

The night passed on; but no sign of Moser. The children dropped asleep one after another, and John himself who, made the longest resistance, at length yielded to the weariness which stole over him.

Dorothy, uneasy and restless, went continually to the door to see if she could hear sound of footsteps. Arnold tried to reassure her; but this only excited her the more, accused Moser of never considering her health or safety; of being always ready to sacrifice himself for others; of never being satisfied to see either man or beast suffer without relieving them; and in proportion she multiplied her complaints, which were wonderfully like praises, her anxiety being greater, and she was filled with forebodings of ill. The night before the dog had never howled, an owl had perched on the roof, and besides it was Wednesday, always a fortunate day to them. At last she became miserable that the young huntsman proposed to go in search of her husband; and she went about to awaken Fritz to accompany him as guide, when the sound of footsteps was heard outside.

'It is he!—it is Moser!' exclaimed the good woman. 'Thank God! he is safe.'

'Hollo! open quick, wife,' cried the dog from without.

She ran to draw back the bolt, and appeared with the old blind dog in his mouth.

'Here he is,' cried he gaily. 'God bless me! I thought I should never find him. The poor animal had rolled to the bottom of a great quarry.'

'And did you go down there to get him?' inquired the terrified Dorothy.