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Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

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To Peter Bagster, Esq.

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TO PETER BAGSTER, ESQ.

MY DEAR PETER,—To prevent more funeral condolences and mistakes, as you may have heard some rumour of my illness, this is to say, I am alive and well. But I have had a very serious attack ; so bad indeed, that I begin to think that my constitution cannot be so sapped and weak as I supposed ; or how could it have held out, not only against the disorder itself, but the German doctoring of it, which to my mind, was the most trying and dangerous of the two ? But I shall save all the medicals for Truby when I get home to Kent. At any rate, to be candid, as an honest man ought to be, even at my own expense, the notion of my going off in a moment is quite settled, for if anything could bring on sudden death, eight and forty hours of pain and fever were quite sufficient for a warning. Whereby you may gather that I have changed my opinion about my case ; so let the doctor crack his fingers and cry out that it was all through him and his advice, to go up the river Rhine.

While I am on the subject, I ought to say that poor Kate has derived benefit as well as myself ; and is a young girl for spirits compared to what she was ; though mayhap she would not own to it herself, being at present in a terrible taking at what she calls a domestic misfortune, which has quite driven poor George out of

her head. The same being the sudden conversion of her maid, Martha, into a papist, and such a zealous one, that she crosses her mistress as well as herself a hundred times in a day.

For my part, Peter, setting aside servants and the like, and considering only the poor and destitute orders, instead of blaming their ignorance and superstition for their being Roman Catholics, I almost wonder how they can be anything else. Having had the opportunity of studying the subject abroad by going into foreign churches and cathedrals, as well as the wretched dwellings of the lower people, it's my firm belief that their religion may be laid more to their poverty than to their ignorance. Suppose a poor old German, in a dark dirty cold room, without fire, without candle, and without even the chirp of a cricket, by way of company. She puts on her ragged cloak, totters fifty yards, and there she is in a comfortable cheerful church, well warmed and lighted-up like a general illumination. She sees priests in magnificent brocaded robes, great gold and silver candlesticks, and shrines and chapels shining with jewels, mock or real is all one, rubies, amethysts, topazes, emeralds, sapphires, and so forth, things which even some of her betters are apt to connect with the treasures of Heaven and the glories of the New Jerusalem. She hears a fine organ, finely played, and chosen singers, with voices like angels, chanting hymns in an unknown tongue. I mean no disrespect to the religion in saying it's as good to her as the Italian Opera in London. Then she enjoys the smell of frankincense,

and the sight of grand pictures, and statues, and carvings, and above all, there is the Virgin Mary in royal robes, with a crown and pearls, and velvet, and ermine, like a Queen of this world, and the poor old woman in her tatters has as free access to her and as long audience as the greatest court lady in the land. Is it any wonder if such a poor creature goes by choice to a church which along with the bodily comfort she wants at home, lets her share for a while in those pleasures of sight and hearing and so forth, for which she had senses given to her by the Almighty, as well as the rich and noble of the earth?

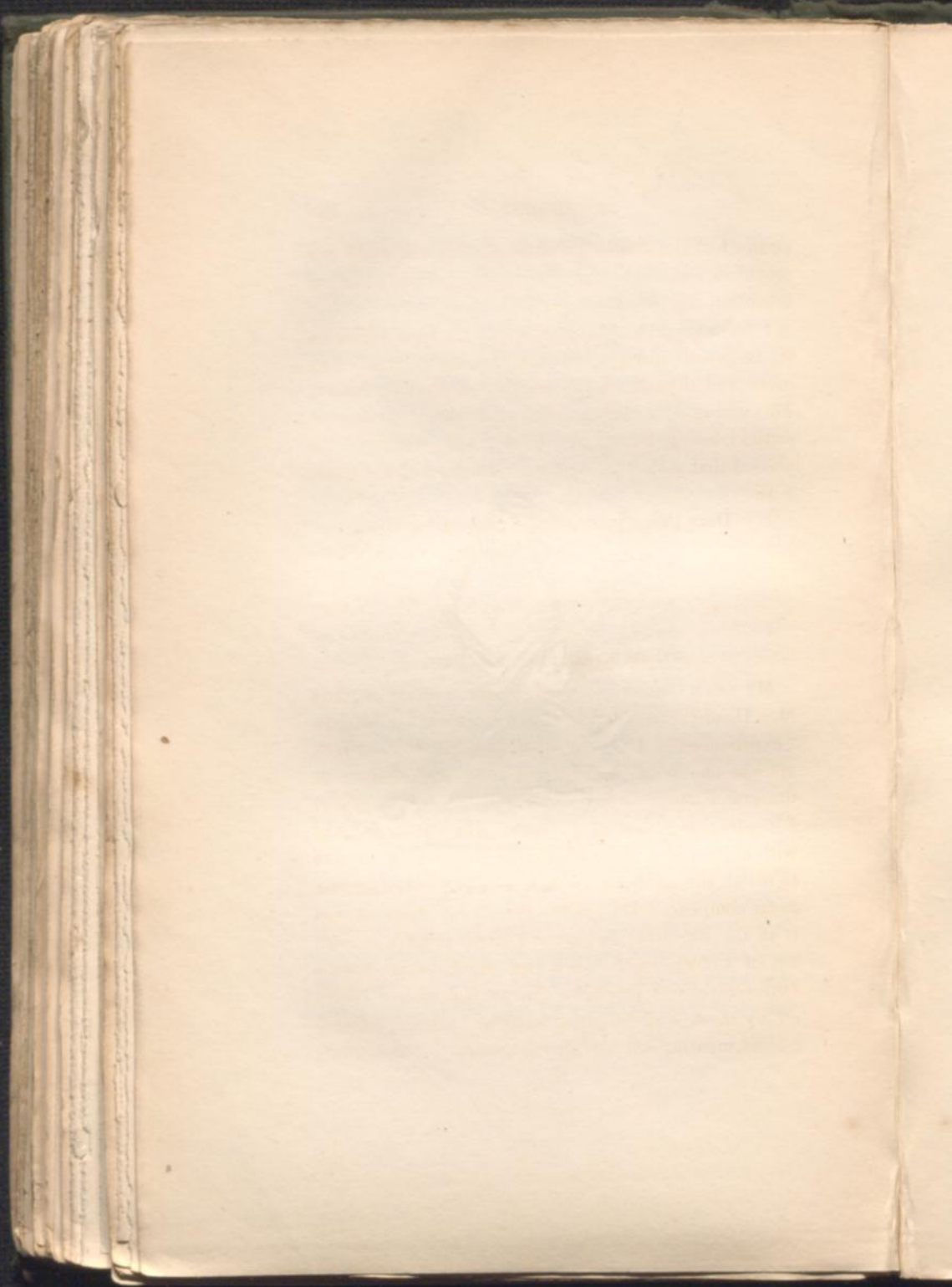
Now in England, old friend, we make the church as unattractive, to such a poor ancient body, as we can. We stick her in a cold aisle, on a hard bench, and take no more pains to please her other senses. We bid her, forsooth, admire the plain unadorned simplicity of the Protestant religion. But the lady in the hat and feathers has been to the Theatre, the Opera, Concerts, Exhibitions, and Balls, or Routs, six days of the week, and instead of any denial, may feel it a relief on the seventh to sit in a quiet church, and listen to its simple service. Not that I wish our temples to be turned into oratorios, or picture galleries, or stages for showy spectacles—all I want is fair play for the lower classes. If such gratifications as the Catholic churches afford to them, are out of character with our own Protestant places of worship, the poor people ought, in justice, to be allowed to enjoy them elsewhere. But instead of

that, what do we do? We shut up our tombs and monuments; set a price on St. Paul's and the Abbey; our saints shake their heads at anything like a public Ball or Concert in humble life; and our magistrates put down the cheap Theatres, as if Tom and Jerry at a penny a head, was twelve times more immoral than Tom and Jerry at a shilling. To my notion, such a system is more likely to produce Catholics than Protestants; and what is likelier still, to make the lower classes of no religion at all. It's just like Learning, which no boy in the world would take to if you sent him to a school without a play-ground.

Frank, who has made acquaintance with a captain in the Prussian service, went off this morning by diligence to join the regiment on its march to Berlin. He ought to have left Coblenz in company, but was taken ill. He nearly lost his start by the coach, for when the time came, the German maid who ought to have waked him and prepared his breakfast, was snoring comfortably in her bed. But the Germans, both men and women, in such cases, are wonderfully phlegmatic. I have been told of a pig driver who brought a porker across the Rhine, during a hard frost; the moment the porker got out of the boat, he laid himself quietly down in the snow, and instead of rousing him, the fellow coolly lugged out his flint and steel, lighted his pipe, and patiently smoked over the pig till he chose to rise of his own accord. Kätchen had no pipe; but she had some other source of philosophy, for when told that her young



"I HIDE MY TIME."



master had almost lost his place, she only shrugged her shoulders, and when informed that he had quite lost his breakfast, she only shrugged them again.

I have some thoughts of going up the river Rhine as far as Schaffhausen, to see the famous waterfall; but much will depend on the weather at Frank's return. This is singing rather a different tune to my former ditties; but I know, old friend, you will be well pleased that such warnings were fancies and not facts, with

Dear Peter, your old and faithful friend,

RICHARD ORCHARD.

TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ.

MY DEAR GERARD,—Now for some account of what Mrs. Headwigs would doubtless have called her military "experiences." The most eligible horse I could pick up was one which had carried an engineer officer at the grand manœuvres; which I purchased for about 15*l.*—trappings and all. A Prussian military cloak, with a quiet blue collar instead of a red one, happened to match the saddle-cloth, as regulation, and made me so far complete. But, as the French say, the first step is all the difficulty; and when I ought to have stepped out of Coblenz with my friend the Captain and his 10th company, I was lying in my bed with a blister on my chest, whilst my nag went without me, like the "chief mourner" at a dragoon's funeral. The Captain