

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GERMAN LITERATURE AND ART.

TAKING a comparative glance at the leading families of the human species, it is interesting to notice the many different aspects under which some dominant quality, peculiar to each race, is shadowed forth. In its language and literature, its architecture and fine arts, in the daily routine of peaceful life and the exceptional condition of war, the careful observer will find the characteristics of a race displayed.

Who can be more individualised by his peculiarities than the Celt? Seek him where we will—whether in the Basque provinces of Spain, or amidst the bogs of Ireland; whether in the Scotch highlands, or the mountain tracts of Wales—in temperament he is the same, and this temperament is reflected in every phase of his existence. His mental organisation, delicately attuned, is responsive to every external impression. His impulses are generous, his soul is poetic; but the balance of his mental faculties is unstable. He originates ideas without combining them. His mental creations want body, weight, and form. Like spirits, they are invoked; like spirits, they flit away.

Then what a speaking commentary on the Celtic temperament—what an epitome of its fervour, its poesy, its instability, are the small remaining fragments of that people's literature. Fragments we say, for surely one is not called on to acknowledge a few Welsh ballads, and the apocryphal version of Ossian, as the full literary representative of Celtic genius. Not that we undervalue the poems of Ossian, by the way, or deem them altogether spurious. That the materials of these poems existed orally, traditionally, we entertain no doubt.

Scarcely less expressive of the Celt's temperament than his literature is the phase under which we view him in war. Choleric of disposition, quick to take offence, the Celt has from all time been prone to appeal to the sword's arbitrament. None more daring in the field than he—none more personally brave—more dashing and impetuous; yet for want of prolonged concentration of energy to one object—a want so characteristic of his race—he has never yet excelled in the larger strategy of war. He is a creature of raids, forays, and skirmishes—brilliant onslaughts and fierce attacks. But he is no general—he cannot *handle* large bodies of men. The battle-field is no chess-board for him; he must rush to the fray.

We might easily extend the number of our instances, and demonstrate the outshining of Celtic genius under many other phases, though still essentially the same; time and space, however, admonish us to pass on and scrutinise another dominant race, which more particularly concerns us now; that race the Celt's antipodes—we mean the *Teutonic*, of course. And here one preliminary word; it is this: we beg to eschew all that delicate ethnological investigation which affects to settle relationship between Teuton and Goth. By Teutonic we mean the German race, and by the German race we mean all those who speak the German tongue. The demarcation suffices; nay, it is even more correct than it seems. None but a mind of true Teutonic mould can think with fluency in the German language.

Who can doubt the expressiveness of that language and its literature? Nay, who can misinterpret the expression of the German alphabet itself? Why, it is the very epitome of the Gothic style of architecture, and both are the representatives of the German mind—massive, yet detailed; fanciful, yet rigid—ponderous, sombre, and deeply toned. What more simple than the first idea of a Gothic architectural structure? What more elaborately made out than the ornamentation of its details? Starting with the one simple idea of an arch, the builder at length overlays his structure with the most florid accessories. So wayward, so fanciful, so ramified are these; that the mind of an observer is for a time lost in following them through their maze. Yet when the labyrinth has been threaded—when the fret-work has been seen in its minutiae—all is found to bear the impress of proportion and form defined. Fanciful and wayward though the architect has been, he has never once lost sight of the leading Teutonic idea

—of uniting the ideal to the material, fixing it, rendering it visible and tangible, by endowing it with form. Even a German ghost is more bodily than any other ghost; half endowed with substance and proportions. Once caught, the spectre comes from the German's hands half a thing of earth.

There is a charm about German literature and painting which, if we mistake not, is explicable on the principles announced as constituting the peculiarity of the Teutonic mind—that is to say, is attributable to a contrast between the simplicity of a first idea and the elaborate form-wrought accessories wherewith it is subsequently invested. This we believe to be a peculiarity of the Teutonic genius—a peculiarity manifested under thousands of phases, and not least of all in the literature of Germany. So essentially Teutonic, so Germanesque is this literary exponent of a principle, that it admits of no good translation. An integral portion of that language, it can be wedded to no other; and as some tender plants assume rank growths and ungainly mien when taken from their native soil and planted elsewhere—so it is with many exquisite scions of German poetry and prose. Integral parts of their own language, they flourish in no other. They may not die, but their elegance departs. Thousands of little tales and poems, which breathe the most exquisite sentiment in German, become, when rendered in a foreign tongue, only little better than a sort of nursery literature of the higher class. The wood-cut (p. 256) to which our remarks apply illustrates, and was suggested by, a stanza of this kind.

The mother, fondly caressing her little child, is asked by the latter where her brother has gone. The mother tells the little child her brother has died. But the little child knows not of death. "The angels have taken him away," continues the mother, "because he was always so good to me, and never gave me trouble." The little child then says, "Pray teach me how I may *not* be good, and how I may torment you, lest the angels also take me." This is the sentiment—this the inspiring theme of some exquisite stanzas by Johann Ludwig Uhland, a celebrated living poet of Germany, and whose beautiful lyrics are not half so well known as they deserve to be. Uhland may be characterised as a German Beranger, purified from all that levity of things sacred which too often sullies the French bard's effusions. Every thought, every aspiration of Uhland, is suggestive of that better existence to which the minds of rational beings should be directed. No poet has realised a more exalted conception of the nobleness of his mission than Uhland. Few authors of poetry worth reading have written so sparingly; nor is this to be wondered at, seeing the peculiar circumstances under which he has been placed—the troublous mould in which his destinies have been cast.

Born in 1787, at Tübingen, the son of the university secretary, Uhland early manifested his love for literary pursuits, although he trained himself for the law. Blessed with a competent fortune, our author would have devoted himself entirely to literature and the muses. But fate willed it otherwise. The great French Revolution broke forth, and involved Wurtemberg in its ramifications. The organic laws and constitution of this little country were totally remodelled at the will of Napoleon. Uhland did not behold these changes quietly or complacently. They aroused his spirit, and inspired some of his happiest effusions. Nevertheless, the poems of Uhland are well esteemed in France: not so much in consequence of their poetic merit, it may be (for our Gallic friends are often unjust to the Teutonic muse), as from the circumstance of their author having lived several years in Paris, where he devoted himself with the zeal of a true enthusiast to the study of mediæval literature, in which department the libraries of Paris are peculiarly rich.

Much of Uhland's poetry could never be adequately rendered into English. The task has been essayed by an Englishman whom we forbear to name, and the result is not felicitous. Yet we do not censure the translator; he had to deal with a

poet who availed himself to the fullest extent of the power existing in the German language of endowing common subjects with a poetic garb. What shall we say for example of the poet who was so recklessly daring, that he wrote some stanzas—beautiful stanzas, too, on—what does the reader think?—*Pork soup!* Yet so it is.

are thoroughly Germanesque. Not a leaf is left undefined out of deference to that quality of Teutonic genius which insists on extreme regard to form. Nor need we marvel that the genius of a people who invest spirits with bodies half mortal, causing them to marry and to be given in marriage, to become almost like ourselves, will insist on making fig-



THE MOTHER AND CHILD.—ILLUSTRATION OF A POEM BY UHLAND.

We congratulate the French artist, whose painting we illustrate, on having so thoroughly caught the inspiration of Teutonic art. The figures are well composed—their modelling is round—the expression of the mother and child tells the sentiment of the poem. The leaves in the background, too,

leaves more distinct of outline than nature herself makes them under the conditions of position and distance, as represented in our wood-cut. The painting is thoroughly Germanesque, an expression of ours, which we intend as a compliment to the French artist.