"In the spring there came here a certain Goethe, by trade[1] a *Doctor Juris*, twenty-three years old, only son of a very rich father; in order—this was his father's intention—that he might get some experience in *praxi*, but according to his own intention, that he might study Homer, Pindar, &c., and whatever else his genius, his manner of thinking, and his heart might suggest to him.

"At the very first the *beaux esprits* here announced him to the public as a colleague, and as a collaborator in the new Frankfurt *Gelehrte Zeitung*, parenthetically also as a philosopher, and gave themselves trouble to become intimate with him. As I do not belong to this class of people, or rather am not so much in general society, I did not know Goethe until later, and quite by accident. One of the most distinguished of our *beaux esprits*, the Secretary of Legation Gotter, persuaded me one day to go with him to the village of Garbenheim—a common walk. There I found him on the grass, under a tree, lying on his back, while he talked to some persons standing round him—an epicurean philosopher (von Goué, a great genius), a stoic philosopher (von Kielmansegge), and a hybrid between the two (Dr. König)—and thoroughly enjoyed himself. He was afterwards glad that I had made his acquaintance under such circumstances. Many things were talked of—some of them very interesting. This time, however, I formed no other judgment concerning him than that he was no ordinary man. You know that I do not judge hastily. I found at once that he had genius, and a lively imagination; but this was not enough to make me estimate him highly.

"Before I proceed further, I must attempt a description of him, as I have since learned to know him better. He has a great deal of talent, is a true genius and a man of character; possesses an extraordinarily vivid imagination, and hence generally expresses himself in images and similes. He often says, himself, that he always speaks figuratively, and can never express himself literally; but that when he is older he hopes to think and say the thought itself as it really is. He is ardent in all his affections, and yet has often great power over himself. His manner of thinking is noble: he is so free from prejudices that he acts as it seems good to him, without troubling himself whether it will please others, whether it is the fashion,

[1] *Seiner Handthierung nach.* The word is old German, and now fallen out of use, although the verb *handthieren* is still occasionally used.

whether conventionalism allows it. All constraint is odious to him.

"He is fond of children, and can occupy himself with them very much. He is *bizarre*, and there are several things in his manners and outward bearing which might make him disagreeable. But with children, women, and many others, he is nevertheless a favourite. He has a great respect for the female sex. In *principiis* he is not yet fixed, and is still striving after a sure system. To say something of this, he has a high opinion of Rousseau, but is not a blind worshipper of him. He is not what is called orthodox. Still this is not out of pride or caprice, or for the sake of making himself a *rôle*. On certain important subjects he opens himself to few, and does not willingly disturb the contentment of others in their own ideas. It is true he hates scepticism, strives after truth and after conviction on certain main points, and even believes that he is already convinced as to the weightiest; but as far as I have observed, he is not yet so. He does not go to church or to the sacrament, and prays seldom. For, says he, I am not hypocrite enough for that. Sometimes he seems in repose with regard to certain subjects, sometimes just the contrary. He venerates the Christian religion, but not in the form in which it is presented by our theologians. He believes in a future life, in a better state of existence. He strives after truth, yet values the feeling of truth more than the demonstration. He has already done much, and has many acquirements, much reading; but he has thought and reasoned still more. He has occupied himself chiefly with the *belles lettres* and the fine arts, or rather with all sorts of knowledge, except that which wins bread."

On the margin of this rough draught, Kestner adds: "I wished to describe him, but it would be too long a business, for there is much to be said about him. In one word, *he is a very remarkable man*."

Further on: "I should never have done, if I attempted to describe him fully."

The Gotter referred to at the opening of this letter was a young man of considerable culture, with whom Goethe became intimate over renewed discussions on art and criticism. "The opinions of the ancients," he says, "on these important topics I had studied by fits and starts for some years. Aristotle, Cicero, Quinctilian, Longinus—none were neglected, but they did not help me, for they presupposed an experience which I

needed. They introduced me to a world infinitely rich in works of art; they unfolded the merits of great poets and orators, and convinced me that *a vast abundance of objects must lie before us ere we can think upon them*—that we must accomplish something, nay fail in something, before we can learn our own capacities and those of others. My knowledge of much that was good in ancient literature was merely that of a schoolboy, and by no means vivid. The most splendid orators, it was apparent, had *formed themselves in life*, and we could never speak of them as artists without at the same time mentioning their personal peculiarities. With the poets this was perhaps less the case: but everywhere nature and art came in contact only through life. And thus the result of all my investigations was my old resolution to study Nature, and to allow her to guide me in loving imitation."

Properly to appreciate this passage we must recall the almost universal tendency of the Germans to construct poems in conformity with definite rules, making the poet but a development of the critic. Lessing nobly avowed that he owed all his success to his critical sagacity; Schiller, it is notorious, hampered his genius by fixing on his Pegasus the leaden wings of Kant's philosophy; and Klopstock himself erred in too much criticism. Goethe was the last man to disdain the rich experience of centuries, the last man to imagine that ignorance was an advantageous basis for a poet to stand upon, but he was too thoroughly an artist not to perceive the insufficiency of abstract theories in the production of a work of art which should be the expression of real experience.

In conjunction with Gotter he translated Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, though he speaks slightingly of his share in it. Through Gotter's representations he was also persuaded to publish some little poems in Boie's *Annual*. "I thus[1] came into contact with those," he says, "who, united by youth and talent, afterwards effected so much in various ways. Bürger, Voss, Hölty, the two Counts Stolberg, and several others grouped round Kolpstock; and in this poetical circle, which extended itself more and more, there was developed a tendency which I know not exactly how to name. One might call it that need of independence which always arises in times of peace—that is to say precisely when, properly speaking, one is not

[1] Düntzer in his *Studien* has thrown doubts on this connection with the Göttingen School having originated in Wetzlar. But the point is of no importance, and Goethe's own version is left undisturbed in the text.

dependent. In war we bear restraints of force as well as we can; we are physically, but not morally wounded; the restraint disgraces no one; it is no shame to serve the time; we grow accustomed to suffering both from foes and friends; we have wishes rather than definite views. On the contrary, in times of peace our love of freedom becomes more and more prominent, and the greater our freedom, the more we wish for it; we will tolerate nothing above us; we will not be restrained; no one shall be restrained! This tender, sometimes morbid feeling, assumes in noble souls the form of justice: such a spirit then manifested itself everywhere; and because but few were oppressed, it was wished to free these from occasional oppression. And thus arose a certain moral contest between individuals and the government, which, however laudable its origin, led to unhappy results. Voltaire, reverenced for his conduct in the affair of Calais, had excited great attention; and in Germany Lavater's proceedings against the *Landvogt* (sheriff of the province), had perhaps been even more striking. The time was approaching when dramatists and novelists sought their villains among ministers and official persons; hence arose a world, half real, half imaginary, of action and reaction, in which the most violent accusations and instigations were made by writers of periodical journals, under the garb of justice, who produced the more powerful effect because they made the public imagine that it was itself the tribunal—*a foolish notion, as no public has an executive power;* and in Germany, dismembered as it was, public opinion neither benefited nor injured any one."

It was a period of deep unrest in Europe: the travail of the French revolution. In Germany the spirit of the revolution issued from the study and the lecture hall; it was a literary and philosophic insurrection, with Lessing, Klopstock, Kant, Herder, and Goethe, for leaders. Authority was everywhere attacked, because everywhere it had shown itself feeble, or tyrannous. The majestic peruke of Louis XIV. was lifted by an audacious hand, which thus revealed the baldness so long concealed. No one *now* believed in that Grand Monarque; least of all Goethe, who had *Götz von Berlichingen* in his portfolio, and to whom Homer and Shakspeare were idols. "Send me no more books," writes Werther, "I will no longer be led, incited, spurred by them. There is storm enough in this breast. I want a cradle-melody, and that I have in all its fulness in Homer. How often do I lull with it my raging blood to rest!"

The Kestner Correspondence proves, what before was known, that *Werther* is full of biography, and that Goethe was then troubled with fits of depression following upon days of the wildest animal spirits. He was fond of solitude; and the lonely hours passed in reading, or making sketches of the landscape in his rough imperfect style.

"A marvellous serenity has descended on my spirit," writes Werther, "to be compared only to the sweet mornings of spring which so charm my heart. I am alone, and here life seems delicious in this spot formed for natures like mine. I am so happy, so filled with the calm feeling of existence, that my art suffers. I cannot sketch, yet never was I a greater painter than at this moment! When the dear valley clothes itself in vapour, and the sun shines on the top of my impenetrable forest and only a few gleams steal into its sanctuary, while I lie stretched in the tall grass by the cascade, curiously examine the many grasses and weeds, and contemplate the little world of insects with their innumerable forms and colours, and feel within me the presence of the Almighty who formed us after his own image, the breath of the All-loving who sustains us in endless bliss,—my friend, when my eyes are fixed on all these objects, and the world images itself in my soul like the form of a beloved, then I yearn and say: Ah! couldst thou but express that which lives within thee, that it should be the mirror of thy soul, as thy soul is the mirror of the Infinite God!"

The image of Frederika pursued him. It could only be banished by the presence of another. "When I was a boy," he prettily says in a letter to Salzmann, "I planted a cherry-tree, and watched its growth with delight. Spring frost killed the blossoms, and I had to wait another year before the cherries were ripe—then the birds ate them; another year the caterpillars—then a greedy neighbour—then the blight. Nevertheless, when I have a garden again, I shall again plant a cherry-tree!" He did so:

> "And from Beauty passed to Beauty,
> Constant to a constant change."[1]

The image which was to supplant that of Frederika was none other than that of the Charlotte Buff before mentioned. Two years before his arrival, her mother had died. The care of the house and children devolved upon her; she was only

[1] Monckton Milnes.

sixteen, yet good sense, housewifely aptitude, and patient courage carried her successfully through this task. She had for two years been betrothed to Kestner, secretary to the Hanoverian Legation, then aged four-and-twenty: a quiet, orderly, formal, rational, cultivated man, possessing great magnanimity, as the correspondence proves, and a dignity which is in nowise represented in the Albert of *Werther*, from whom we must be careful to distinguish him, in spite of the obvious identity of position. How Goethe came to know Kestner has already been seen; how he came to know Lotte may now be told.[1] The reader with *Werther* in hand may compare the narrative there given with this extract from Kestner's letter to a friend. "It happened that Goethe was at a ball in the country where my maiden and I also were. I could only come late, and was forced to ride after them. My maiden, therefore, drove there in other society. In the carriage was Dr. Goethe, who here first saw Lottchen. He has great knowledge, and has made Nature in her physical and moral aspects his principal study, and has sought the true beauty of both. No woman here had pleased him. Lottchen at once fixed his attention. She is young, and although not regularly beautiful, has a very attractive face. Her glance is as bright as a spring morning, and especially it was so that day, for she loves dancing. She was gay, and in quite a simple dress. He noticed her feeling for the beauty of Nature, and her unforced wit,—rather humour than wit. He did not know she was betrothed. I came a few hours later; and it is not our custom in public to testify anything beyond friendship to each other. He was excessively gay (this he often is, though at other times melancholy); Lottchen quite fascinated him, the more so because she took no trouble about it, but gave herself wholly to the pleasure of the moment. The next day, of course, Goethe called to inquire after her. He had seen her as a lively girl, fond of dancing and pleasure; he now saw her under another and a better aspect,—in her domestic quality."

To judge from her portrait, Lotte must, in her way, have been a charming creature: not intellectually cultivated, not poetical,—above all, not the sentimental girl described by *Werther;* but a serene, calm, joyous, open-hearted German maiden, an excellent housewife, and a priceless manager. Goethe at once fell in love with her. An extract from Kest-

[1] Lotte and Lottchen, it is perhaps not altogether superfluous to add, are the favourite diminutives of Charlotte.

ner's account will tell us more. After describing his engagement to Lotte, he adds,—"She is not strictly a brilliant beauty, according to the common opinion; to me she is one: she is, notwithstanding, the fascinating maiden who might have hosts of admirers, old and young, grave and gay, clever and stupid, &c. But she knows how to convince them quickly that their only safety must be sought in flight or in friendship. One of these, as the most remarkable, I will mention, because he retains an influence over us. A youth in years (twenty-three), but in knowledge, and in the development of his mental powers and character, already a man, an extraordinary genius, and a man of character, was here,—as his family believed, for the sake of studying the law, but in fact to track the footsteps of Nature and Truth, and to study Homer and Pindar. He had no need to study for the sake of a maintenance. Quite by chance, after he had been here some time, he became acquainted with Lottchen, and saw in her his ideal: he saw her in her joyous aspect, but was soon aware that this was not her best side; he learned to know her also in her domestic position, and, in a word, became her adorer. It could not long remain unknown to him that she could give him nothing but friendship; and her conduct towards him was admirable. Our coincidence of taste, and a closer acquaintance with each other, formed between him and me the closest bond of friendship. Meanwhile, although he was forced to renounce all hope in relation to Lottchen, and *did* renounce it, yet he could not, with all his philosophy and natural pride, so far master himself as completely to repress his inclination. And he has qualities which might make him dangerous to a woman, especially to one of susceptibility and taste. But Lottchen knew how to treat him so as not to encourage vain hope, and yet make him admire her manner towards him. His peace of mind suffered: there were many remarkable scenes, in which Lottchen's behaviour heightened my regard for her; and he also became more precious to me as a friend; but I was often inwardly astonished that love can make such strange creatures even of the strongest and otherwise the most self-sustained men. I pitied him, and had many inward struggles; for, on the one hand, I thought that I might not be in a position to make Lottchen so happy as he would make her; but, on the other hand, I could not endure the thought of losing her. The latter feeling conquered, and in Lottchen I have never once been able to perceive a shadow of the same conflict."

Another extract will place this conflict in its true light:—"I am under no further engagement to Lottchen than that under which an honourable man stands when he gives a young woman the preference above all others, makes known that he desires the like feeling from her, and when she gives it, receives from her not only this, but a complete acquiescence. This I consider quite enough to bind an honourable man, especially when such a relation lasts several years. But in my case there is this in addition, that Lottchen and I have expressly declared ourselves, and still do so with pleasure, without any oaths and asseverations." This absence of any *legal* tie between them must have made Kestner's position far more trying. It gives a higher idea both of his generous forbearance and of the fascination exercised by Goethe: for what a position! and how much nobility on all sides was necessary to prevent petty jealousies ending in a violent rupture! Certain it is that the greatest intimacy and the most affectionate feelings were kept up *without* disturbance. Confident in the honour of his friend and the truth of his mistress, Kestner never spoiled the relation by a hint of jealousy. Goethe was constantly in Lotte's house, where his arrival was a jubilee to the children, who seized hold of him, as children always take loving possession of those who are indulgent to them, and forced him to tell them stories. It is a pleasant sight to see Goethe with children; he always shows such hearty fondness for them; and these brothers and sisters of Lotte were doubly endeared to him because they belonged to her.

One other figure in this Wetzlar set arrests our attention: it is that of a handsome blonde youth, with soft blue eyes and a settled melancholy expression. His name is Jerusalem, and he is the son of the venerable Abbot of Riddagshausen.[1] He is here attached as secretary to the Brunswick Legation, a colleague, therefore, of von Goué. He is deeply read in English literature, and has had the honour of Lessing's friendship; a friendship subsequently expressed in the following terms, when Lessing, acting as his editor, wrote the preface to his Philosophical Essays: "When he came to Wolfenbüttel he gave me his friendship. I did not enjoy it long, but I cannot easily name one who in so short a space of time excited in me more affection. It is true I only learned to know one side of his nature, but it was the side which explains all the rest. It was

[1] No Catholic, as this title might seem to imply, but a Protestant; his abbey, secularised two centuries before, yielded him only a title and revenues.

the desire for clear knowledge; the talent to follow truth to its last consequences; the spirit of cold observation; but an ardent spirit not to be intimidated by truth. . . . How sensitive, how warm, how active this young inquirer was, how true a man among men, is better known to more intimate friends." The Essays which these words introduce are five in number; the titles are given below.[1]

The melancholy of his disposition led him to think much of suicide, which he defended on speculative grounds. And this melancholy, and these meditations, were deepened by an unhappy passion for the wife of one of his friends. The issue of that passion we shall have to narrate in a future chapter. For the present it is enough to indicate the presence of this youth among the circle of Goethe's acquaintances. They saw but little of each other, owing to the retiring sensitiveness of Jerusalem; probably the same cause had kept them asunder years before in Leipsic, where they were fellow-students; but their acquaintance furnished Goethe with material which he was afterwards to use in his novel.

Jerusalem's unhappy passion and Goethe's unhappy passion, one would think, must have been a bond of union between them; but in truth Goethe's passion can scarcely have been called "unhappy"—it was rather a delicious uneasiness. Love, in the profound, absorbing sense, it was not. It was an *imaginative passion*, in which the poet was more implicated than the man. Lotte excited his imagination; her beauty, her serene gaiety, her affectionate manners, charmed him; the romance of his position heightened the charm, by giving an *unconscious security* to his feelings. I am persuaded that if Lotte had been free, he would have fled from her as he fled from Frederika. In saying this, however, I do not mean that the impossibility of obtaining her gave him any comfort. He was restless, impatient, and, in a certain sense, unhappy. He believed himself to be desperately in love with her, when in truth he was only in love with the indulgence of the emotions she excited; a paradox which will be no mystery to those acquainted with the poetic temperament.

Thus passed the summer. In August he made a little

[1] I. Dass die Sprache dem ersten Menschen durch Wunder nicht mitgetheilt sein kann. II. Ueber die Natur und den Ursprung der allgemeinen und abstrakten Begriffe. III. Ueber die Freiheit. IV. Ueber die Mendelssohnsche Theorie vom sinnlichen Vergnügen. V. Ueber die vermischten Empfindungen.

excursion to Giessen, to see Professor Höpfner, one of the active writers in the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen.* Characteristically he calls on the professor incognito, presenting himself as a shy awkward student; which, as Höpfner only knows him through correspondence, is facile enough. The comic scene ends by his jumping into the professor's arms, exclaiming, "I am Goethe!" In Giessen, he found Merck. He persuaded him to return to Wetzlar, to be introduced to Lotte. Merck came; but so far from undervaluing her, as the very inaccurate account in the *Autobiography* would have us understand, Merck wrote to a friend: "J'ai trouvé aussi l'amie de Goethe, cette fille dont il parle avec tant d'enthousiasme dans toutes ses lettres. Elle mérite réellement tout ce qu'il pourra dire du bien sur son compte."[1] He exasperated Goethe by preferring the "Juno form" of one of her friends, and pointing her out as the more worthy of attention, because she was disengaged. That Goethe should have been offended, was in the order of things; but in the retrospective glance which he gave to this period in his old age, he ought to have detected the really friendly spirit animating Merck; he ought not to have likened him to Mephistopheles; the more so as Merck's representations were really effectual, and hastened the dénouement. Every day made Goethe's position less tenable. At last he consented to tear himself away, and accompany Merck in a trip down the Rhine. It was time. Whatever factitious element there may have been in his romance, the situation was full of danger; indulgence in such emotions would have created at last a real and desperate passion; there was safety but in flight.

Merck left Wetzlar, having arranged that Goethe should join him at Coblentz. The following extracts from Kestner's *Diary* will remind the reader of Goethe's departure from Leipsic without saying adieu to Käthchen. His dislike of "scenes" made him shrink from those emotions of leave-taking usually so eagerly sought by lovers.

"*Sept.* 10*th*, 1772. To-day Dr. Goethe dined with me in the garden; I did not know that it was the last time. In the evening Dr. Goethe came to the *teutsche Haus.* He, Lottchen, and I, had a remarkable conversation about the future state; about going away and returning, &c., which was not begun by him, but by Lottchen. We agreed that the one who died first

[1] *Briefe aus dem Freundeskreise von Goethe, Herder, Merck*, p. 59.

should, if he could, give information to the living, about the conditions of the other life. Goethe was quite cast down, for he knew that the next morning he was to go."

"*Sept.* 11*th*, 1772. This morning at seven o'clock Goethe set off without taking leave. He sent me a note with some books. He had long said that about this time he would make a journey to Coblentz, where the pay-master of the forces, Merck, awaited him, and that he would say no good-byes, but set off suddenly. So I had expected it. But that I was, notwithstanding, unprepared for it, I have felt—felt deep in my soul. In the morning I came home. 'Herr Dr. Goethe sent this at ten o'clock.' I saw the books and the note, and thought what this said to me—'He is gone!'—and was quite dejected. Soon after, Hans [1] came to ask me if he were really gone? The *Geheime Räthin* Langen had sent to say by a maid-servant: 'It was very ill-mannered of Dr. Goethe to set off in this way, without taking leave.' Lottchen sent word in reply: 'Why had she not taught her nephew better?' Lottchen, in order to be certain, sent a box which she had of Goethe's, to his house. He was no longer there. In the middle of the day the *Geheime Räthin* Langen sent word again: 'She would, however, let Dr. Goethe's mother know how he had conducted himself.' Every one of the children in the *teutsche Haus* was saying: '*Doctor Goethe is gone!*' In the middle of the day I talked with Herr von Born, who had accompanied him, on horseback, as far as Brunnfells. Goethe had told him of our evening's conversation. Goethe had set out in very low spirits. In the afternoon I took Goethe's note to Lottchen. She was sorry about his departure; the tears came into her eyes while reading. Yet it was a satisfaction to her that he was gone, since she could not give him the affection he desired. We spoke only of him; indeed, I could think of nothing else, and defended the manner of his leaving, which was blamed by a silly person; I did it with much warmth. Afterwards I wrote him word what had happened since his departure."

How graphically do these simple touches set the whole situation before us: the sorrow of the two lovers at the departure of their friend, and the consternation of the children on hearing that Dr. Goethe is gone! One needs such a picture to reassure us that the episode, with all its strange romance, and with all its danger, was not really a fit of morbid

[1] One of Lotte's brothers.

sentimentalism. Indeed, had Goethe been the sentimental Werther he has represented, he would never have had the strength of will to tear himself from such a position. He would have blown his brains out, as Werther did. On the other hand, note what a worthy figure is this of Kestner, compared with the cold Albert of the novel. A less generous nature would have rejoiced in the absence of a rival, and forgotten, in its joy, the loss of a friend. But Kestner, who knew that his friend was his rival,—and such a rival, that doubts crossed him whether this magnificent youth were not really more capable of rendering Lotte happy than he himself was,—grieved for the absence of his friend!

Here is Goethe's letter, referred to in the passage just quoted from the Diary:

"He is gone, Kestner; when you get this note, he is gone! Give Lottchen the enclosed. I was quite composed, but your conversation has torn me to pieces. At this moment I can say nothing to you but farewell. If I had remained a moment longer with you I could not have restrained myself. Now I am alone, and to-morrow I go. O my poor head!"

This was the enclosure, addressed to Lotte:

"I certainly hope to come again, but God knows when! Lotte, what did my heart feel while you were talking, knowing, as I did, that it was the last time I should see you? Not the last time, and yet to-morrow I go away. He is gone! What spirit led you to that conversation? When I was expected to say all I felt, alas! what I cared about was here below, was your hand, which I kissed for the last time. The room, which I shall not enter again, and the dear father who saw me to the door for the last time. I am now alone, and may weep; I leave you happy, and shall remain in your heart. And shall see you again; *but not to-morrow is never!* Tell my boys, He is gone. I can say no more."

CHAPTER IV

PREPARATIONS FOR WERTHER

HAVING sent his luggage to the house of Frau von Laroche, where he was to meet Merck, he made the journey down the Lahn, on foot. A delicious sadness subdued his thoughts as

he wandered dreamily along the river banks; and the lovely scenes which met his eye solicited his pencil, awakening once more the ineffectual desire (which from time to time haunted him) of becoming a painter. He had really no faculty in this direction, yet the desire often suppressed now rose up in such a serious shape, that he resolved to settle for ever whether he should devote himself to the art or not. The test was curious. The river glided beneath, now flashing in the sunlight, now partially concealed by willows. Taking a knife from his pocket he flung it with his left hand into the river, having previously resolved that if he saw it fall he was to become an artist; but if the sinking knife were concealed by the willows he was to abandon the idea. No ancient oracle was ever more ambiguous than the answer now given him. The willows concealed the sinking knife, but the water splashed up like a fountain, and was distinctly visible. So indefinite an answer left him in doubt.[1]

He wandered pleasantly on the banks till he reached Ems, and then journeyed down the river in a boat. The old Rhine opened upon him; and he mentions with peculiar delight the magnificent situation of Oberlahnstein, and, above all, the majesty of the castle of Ehrenbreitstein. On arriving at the house of Geheimrath von La Roche, where he had been announced by Merck, he was most kindly received by this excellent family. His literary tendencies bound him to the mother; his joyousness and strong sense, to the father; his youth and poetry, to the daughters. The Frau von Laroche, Wieland's earliest love, had written a novel in the Richardson style, *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim;* and Schäfer remarks that she probably gathered Merck, Goethe, and others into her house with a view to favourable criticisms of this novel. If this were her design, she succeeded with Goethe, who reviewed her book in the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen.* Whether this compliance was extorted by herself, or by the charms of her daughter Maximiliane, history saith not; certain

1 This mode of interrogating fate recalls that strange passage in ROUSSEAU'S *Confessions* (Livre vi.), where he throws a stone at a tree: if he hits, it is a sign of salvation; if he misses, of damnation! Fortunately he hits: "Ce qui, véritablement. n'étais pas difficile, car j'avais eu le soin de le choisir fort gros et fort près; depuis lors je n'ai plus douté de mon salut." Had Goethe read this passage? The *Confessions* appeared in 1768, that is, four years before this journey down the Lahn. Yet from a passage in one of his letters to the Frau von Stein, it seems as if he then, 1782, first read the *Confessions.*

it is that the dark eyes of the daughter made an impression on the heart of the young reviewer. She is the Mlle. B. introduced in *Werther;* but she is even still more interesting to us as the future mother of Bettina. They seem to have looked into each other's eyes, flirted and sentimentalised, as if no Lotte had been left in Wetzlar. Nor will this surprise those who have considered the mobile nature of our poet. He is miserable at moments, but the fulness of abounding life, the strength of victorious will, and the sensibility to new impressions, keep his ever-active nature from the despondency which killed Werther. He is not always drooping because Charlotte is another's. He is open to every new impression, serious or gay. Thus, among other indications, we find him throwing off *Pater Brey* and *Satyros*, sarcasm and humour which are curious as products of the Werther period, although of no absolute worth; and we follow him up the Rhine, in company with Merck and his family, leisurely enjoying Rheinfels, St. Goar, Bacharach, Bingen, Elfeld, and Biberich,—

> "The blending of all beauties; streams and dells,
> Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine,
> And chiefless castles, breathing stern farewells
> From gray but leafy walls where Ruin greenly dwells"—

sketching as if life were a leisure summer day.

He returned to Frankfurt, and busied himself with law, literature, and painting. Wandering Italians, then rare, brought casts of antique statues to Frankfurt; and with delighted eagerness he purchased a complete set, thus to revive as much as possible the grand impression he received at Mannheim. Among his art-studies must be noted the attention bestowed on the Dutch painters. He began to copy some still-life pictures; one of these he mentions with pride, and what, think you, this one was?—a copy of a tortoiseshell knife-handle inlaid with silver! He has *Götz von Berlichingen* in his portfolio, and delights in copying a knife-handle!

To law he devoted himself with greater assiduity than ever. His father, delighted at going through the papers with him, was peculiarly gratified at this honourable diligence, and in his delight was willing to overlook the other occupations of "this singular creature," as he rightly named him. Goethe's literary plans were numerous, and the *Frankfurt Journal* gave him constant opportunities for expressing himself on poetry, theology, and even politics. Very significant is the following

passage from one of these articles, in reply to the complaint that the Germans had no Fatherland, no Patriotism. "When we have a place in the world where we can repose with our property, a field to nourish us, and a house to cover us, have we not there our Fatherland? and have not thousands upon thousands in every city got this? and do they not live happy in their limited sphere? Wherefore, then, this vain striving for a sentiment we neither have nor can have, a sentiment which only in certain nations, and in certain periods, is the result of many concurrent circumstances? Roman patriotism! God defend us from it, as from a giant! we could not find the stool upon which to sit, nor the bed on which to lie in such patriotism!" He was also rewriting *Götz von Berlichingen.* He found, on re-reading the manuscript, that, besides the unities of time and place, he had sinned against the higher unity of composition. He says,—

"In abandoning myself to my imagination, I had not deviated much in the beginning, and the first acts were pretty much as had been intended. In the following acts, however, and especially towards the end, I was unconsciously led away by a singular passion. In making Aldelheid so lovable, I had fallen in love with her myself,—my pen was unconsciously devoted to her alone,—the interest in her fate gained the preponderance; and as, moreover, Götz, towards the end, has little to do, and afterwards only returns to an unhappy participation in the Peasant War, nothing was more natural than that a charming woman should supplant him in the mind of the author, who, casting off the fetters of art, thought to open a new field. I was soon sensible of this defect, or rather this culpable superfluity, since my poetical nature always impelled me to unity. Instead of the biography of Götz and German antiquities, I now confined my attention to my own work, to give it more and more historical and national substance, and to cancel that which was fabulous or passionate. In this I indeed sacrificed much, as the inclination of the man had to yield to the conviction of the artist. Thus, for instance, I had placed Aldelheid in a terrific nocturnal gipsy scene, where she produced a great effect by her beautiful presence. A nearer examination banished her; and the love affair between Franz and his gracious lady, which was very circumstantially carried on in the fourth and fifth acts, was much condensed, and only the chief points indicated.

"Without altering the manuscript, which I still possess

in its original shape, I determined to rewrite the whole, and did this with such activity, that in a few weeks I produced an entirely new version. It had never been my intention to have the second poem printed, as I looked upon this likewise as no more than a preparatory exercise, the foundation of a new work, to be accomplished with greater industry and deliberation.

"When I suggested my plans to Merck, he laughed at me, and asked what was the meaning of this perpetual writing and rewriting? The work, he said, by this means, only becomes different, and seldom better; you must see what effect one thing produces, and then try something new. 'Be in time at the hedge, if you would dry your linen,' he exclaimed, in the words of the proverb: hesitation and delay only make uncertain men. On the other hand, I pointed out how unpleasant it would be to offer a bookseller a work on which I had bestowed so much affection, and perhaps have it refused; for how would they judge of so young, nameless, and audacious an author? As my dread of the press gradually vanished, I wished to see printed my comedy *Die Mitschuldigen*, upon which I set some value, but I found no publisher inclined to undertake it.

"Here the mercantile taste of my friend was at once excited. He proposed that we should publish at our own expense this singular and striking work, from which we should derive large profit. Like many others, he used often to reckon up the bookseller's profit, which with many works was certainly great, especially if what was lost by other writings and commercial affairs was left out of the calculation. We settled that I should procure the paper, and that he should answer for the printing. To work we went, and I was pleased to see my wild dramatic sketch in clean proof sheets; it looked really better than I myself expected. We completed the work, and it was sent off in several parcels. It was not long before the attention it excited became universal. But as, with our limited means, the copies could not be forwarded, a pirated edition suddenly made its appearance. As, moreover, there could be no immediate return, especially in ready money, for the copies sent out, and as my treasury was not very flourishing at the time when much attention and applause was bestowed upon me, I was extremely perplexed how to pay for the paper by means of which I had made the world acquainted with my talent. On the other hand, Merck, who knew better how to

help himself, was certain that all would soon come right again; but I never perceived that to be the case."

There is some inaccuracy in the foregoing, which a comparison of the first and second versions of the work will rectify. The changes he effected were very slight, and mainly consist in the striking out of the two scenes in which Adelheid plays so conspicuous a part.

A greater inaccuracy, amounting to injustice, is contained in the passage about Herder, as we now learn from the *Posthumous Papers* of the latter, from which it is clear that he *did* greatly admire *Götz*, and wrote warmly of it to his betrothed, saying, "you will have some heavenly hours of delight when you read it, for there is in it uncommon German strength, depth, and truth, although here and there it is rather schemed than artistically wrought (*nur gedacht*)." Probably in writing to Goethe he was more critical, and, as usual with him, somewhat pedagogic; but it is also probable that he was loud in praise, since the poet replies, "Your letter was a consolation. I already rank the work much lower than you do. Your sentence that Shakspeare has quite spoiled me, I admit to the full. The work must be fused anew, freed from its dross, and with newer, better metal cast again. Then it shall appear before you." He seems to have been nettled (not unnaturally) at the sentence, "all is rather schemed than artistically wrought," which, he says, is true of *Emilia Galotti*, and prevents his altogether liking it, although a masterpiece. Judging from a tolerably extensive acquaintance with authors in relation to criticism, I should think it highly probable that the longer Goethe pondered on Herder's letter the fainter became his pleasure in the praise, and the stronger his irritation at the blame. I have known a feeling of positive gratitude for a criticism, slowly change into an uneasy and almost indignant impression of injustice having been done. That Goethe did not, on reflection, so entirely concur with the objections he was at first ready to admit, appears from the fact that he did not recast his work.

When *Götz* appeared the effect on the public was instantaneous, startling. Its bold expression of the spirit of Freedom, its defiance of French criticism, and the originality no less than the power of the writing, carried it triumphant over Germany. It was pronounced a masterpiece in all the *salons* and in all the beer-houses of that uneasy time. Imitations followed

with amazing rapidity; the stage was noisy with the clang of chivalry, and the book shelves creaked beneath the weight of resuscitated Feudal Times.

An amusing example of "the trade" is mentioned by Goethe. A bookseller paid him a visit, and with the air of a man well-satisfied with his proposal, offered to give an *order* for a dozen plays in the style of *Götz*, for which a handsome *honorarium* should be paid. His offer was the more generous, because such was the state of literature at this period, that, in spite of the success *Götz* achieved, it brought no money to its author—pirated editions circulating everywhere, and robbing him of his reward. Moreover, what the bookseller proposed was what the public expected. When once a writer has achieved success in any direction, he must continue in that direction, or peril his reputation. An opinion has been formed of him; he has been *classed;* and the public will not have its classification disturbed. Nevertheless, if he repeat himself, this unreasoning public declaims against his "poverty." No man ever repeated himself less than Goethe. He did not model a statue, and then amuse himself with taking casts of it in different materials. He lived, thought, and suffered; and because he had lived, thought, and suffered, he wrote. When he had once expressed his experience in a work, he never recurred to it. The true artist, like the snake, casts his skin, but never resumes it. He works according to the impulse from within, not according to the demand from without. And Goethe was a genuine artist, never exhausting a lucky discovery, never working an impoverished vein. Every poem came fresh from life, coined from the mint of his experience

Götz is the greatest product of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. As we before hinted, this period is not simply one of vague wild hopes and retrospections of old German life, it is also one of unhealthy sentimentalism. Goethe, the great representative poet of his day—the secretary of his age—gives us masterpieces which characterise both these tendencies. Beside the insurgent Götz, stands the dreamy Werther. And yet, accurately as these two works represent two active tendencies of that time, they are both far removed above the perishing extravagances of that time; they are both *ideal* expressions of the age, and as free from the disease which corrupted it, as Goethe himself was free from the weakness of his contemporaries. Wilkes used to say that he had never been a Wilkite. Goethe was never a Werther. To appreciate

the distance which separated him and his works from his sentimental contemporaries and their works, we must study the characters of such men as Jacobi, Klinger, Wagner, and Lenz, or we must read such works as *Woldemar*. It will then be plain why Goethe turned with aversion from such works, his own included, when a few years had cleared his insight and settled his aims. Then also will be seen the difference between genius which idealises the spirit of the age, and talent which panders to it.[1]

It was, indeed, a strange epoch; the unrest was the unrest of disease, and its extravagances were morbid symptoms. In the letters, memoirs, and novels, which still remain to testify to the follies of the age, may be read a self-questioning and sentimental introspection, enough to create in healthy minds a distaste both for sentiment and self-questioning. A factitious air is carried even by the most respectable sentiments; and many *not* respectable array themselves in rose-pink. Nature is seldom spoken of but in hysterical enthusiasm. Tears and caresses are prodigally scattered, and upon the slightest provocations. In Coburg an *Order of Mercy and Expiation* is instituted by sensitive noodles. Leuchsenring, whom Goethe satirised in *Pater Brey* as a professional sentimentalist, gets up a secret society, and calls it the *Order of Sentiment*, to which tender souls think it a privilege to belong. Friendship is fantastically deified; brotherly love draws trembling souls together, not on the solid grounds of affection and mutual service, but on entirely imaginary grounds of "spiritual communion"; whence arose, as Jean Paul wittily says, "an universal love for all men and beasts—except reviewers." It was a sceptical epoch, in which everything established came into question. Marriage, of course, came badly off among a set of men who made the first commandment of genius to consist in loving your neighbour *and* your neighbour's wife.

These were symptoms of disease; the social organisation was out of order; a crisis, evidently imminent, was heralded by extravagances in literature, as elsewhere. The cause of the disease was want of faith. In religion, in philosophy, in politics, in morals, this eighteenth century was ostentatious of its disquiet and disbelief. The old faith, which for so long had made European life an organic unity, and which in its

1 As Karl Grün epigrammatically says of Goethe and his contemporaries, "he was at once patient and physician, they were patients and nothing else."

tottering weakness had received a mortal blow from Luther, was no longer universal, living, active, dominant; its place of universal directing power was vacant; a new faith had not arisen. The French Revolution was another crisis of that organic disturbance which had previously shown itself in another order of ideas,—in the Reformation. Beside this awful crisis, other minor crises are noticeable. Everywhere the same Protestant spirit breaks through traditions in morals, in literature, and in education. Whatever is established, whatever rests on tradition, is questioned. The classics are no longer believed in; men begin to maintain the doctrine of progress, and proclaim the superiority of the moderns. Art is pronounced to be in its nature progressive. Education is no longer permitted to pursue its broad traditional path; the methods which were excellent for the past, no longer suffice for the present; everywhere new methods rise up to ameliorate the old. The divine right of institutions ceases to gain credence. The individual claimed and proclaimed his freedom: freedom of thought and freedom of act. Freedom is the watchword of the eighteenth century.

Enough has been said to indicate the temper of those times, and to show why *Werther* was the expression of that temper. Turning to the novel itself, we find it so bound up with the life of its author, that the history of his life at this epoch is the record of the materials from which it was created; we must, therefore, retrace our steps again to the point where Goethe left Wetzlar, and, by the aid of his letters to Kestner, follow the development of this strange romance.

Götz was published in the summer of 1773. It was in the autumn of 1772 that Goethe left Wetzlar, and returned home. His letters to Kestner and Charlotte are full of passionate avowals and tender reminiscences. The capricious orthography and grammar to be noticed in them, belong to a period when it was thought unworthy of a genius to conform to details so fastidious as correct spelling and good grammar; but the affectionate nature which warms these letters, the abundant love the writer felt and inspired, these belong to him, and not to his age. If a proof were wanted of Goethe's loving disposition, we might refer to these letters, especially those addressed to the young brother of Charlotte. The reader of this biography, however, will need no such proof, and we may therefore confine ourselves to the relation of Goethe to the Kestners. "God bless you, dear Kestner,"

runs one of the early letters, "and tell Lotte that I often believe I can forget her; but then I have a relapse, and it is worse with me than ever." He longs once more to be sitting at her feet, letting the children clamber over him. He writes in a strain of melancholy, which is as much poetry as sorrow: when a thought of suicide arises, it is only one among the many thoughts which hurry through his mind. There is a very significant passage in the *Autobiography*, which aptly describes his real state of mind: "I had a large collection of weapons, and among them a very handsome dagger. This I placed by my bedside every night, and before extinguishing my candle I made various attempts to pierce the sharp point a couple of inches into my breast; but not being able to do it I laughed myself out of the notion, threw aside all hypochondriacal fancies, and resolved to live." He played with suicidal thoughts, because he was restless, and suicide was a fashionable speculation of the day; but whoever supposes these thoughts of suicide were serious, has greatly misunderstood him. He had them not, even at this period; and when he wrote *Werther* he had long thrown off even the faint temptation of poetic longings for death. In October 1772 the report reaches him that his Wetzlar friend, Goué, has shot himself: "Write to me at once about Goué," he says to Kestner; "*I honour such an act, and pity mankind*, and let all the Philisters make their tobacco-smoke comments on it and say: There, you see! Nevertheless, I hope never to make my friends unhappy by such an act, myself." He was too full of life to do more than coquette with the idea of death. Here is a confession: "I went to Homburg, and there gained new love of life, seeing how much pleasure the appearance of a miserable thing like me can give such excellent people." On the 7th of November he suddenly appeared in Wetzlar with Schlosser, and stayed there till the 10th, in a feverish, but delicious, enthusiasm. He writes to Kestner on reaching home: "It was assuredly high time for me to go. Yesterday evening I had thoroughly criminal thoughts as on the sofa. . . . And when I think how above all my hopes your greeting of me was, I am very calm. I confess I came with some anxiety. I came with a pure, warm, full heart, dear Kestner, and it is a hell-pain when one is not received in the same spirit as one brings. But so—God give you a whole life such as those two days were to me!"

The report of Goué's suicide, before alluded to, turned out

to be false; but the suicide of Jerusalem was a melancholy fact. Goethe immediately writes to Kestner:

"Unhappy Jerusalem! The news was shocking, and unexpected; it was horrible to have this news as an accompaniment to the pleasantest gift of love. The unfortunate man! But the devil, that is, the infamous men who enjoy nothing but the chaff of vanity, and have the lust of idolatry in their hearts, and preach idolatry, and cramp healthy nature, and overstrain and ruin the faculties, are guilty of this misery, of our misery. If the cursed parson is not guilty, God forgive me that I wish he may break his neck like Eli. The poor young man! When I came back from a walk, and he met me in the moonlight, I said to myself, he is in love. Lotte must still remember that I laughed about it. God knows, loneliness undermined his heart, and for seven years[1] his form has been familiar to me. I have talked little with him. When I came away, I brought with me a book of his; I will keep that and the remembrance of him as long as I live."

Among the many inaccuracies of the *Autobiography*, there is one of consequence on the subject of *Werther*, namely, the assertion that it was the news of Jerusalem's suicide which suddenly set him to work. The news reached him in October 1772, and in November Kestner sent him the narrative of Jerusalem's last days. Not until the middle and end of 1773 did he write *Werther*. In fact, the state of his mind at this period is by no means such as the *Autobiography* describes. Read this letter written in December: "That is wonderful! I was about to ask if Lenchen[2] had arrived, and you write to tell me she is. If I were only there I would nullify your discourse, and astonish all the tailors; I think I should be fonder of her than of Lotte. From the portrait she must be an amiable girl, much better than Lotte, if not precisely the . . . *And I am free and thirsting for love.* I must try and come; yet that would not help me. Here am I once more in Frankfurt, and carry plans and fancies about with me, which I should not do if I had but a maiden." In January he seems to have found a maiden, for he writes: "Tell Lotte there is a certain maiden here whom I love heartily, and whom I would choose before all others if I had any thought of marriage, and she also was born on the 11th January.[3] It would be pretty: such a pair! Who knows what God's will is?" I agree with Viehoff

[1] This "seven years" refers to the first sight of Jerusalem at Leipsic.
[2] A sister of Charlotte's.
[3] Lotte's birthday.

against Düntzer, that this alludes to Anna Antoinette Gerock, a relation of Schlosser's, who is known to have loved him passionately, and to have furnished some traits for Mignon. Clear it is that he is not very melancholy. "Yesterday I skated from sunrise to sunset. And I have other sources of joy which I can't relate. Be comforted that I am almost as happy as people who love, like you two, that I am as full of hope, and that I have lately *felt* some poems. My sister greets you, my maiden also greets you, my gods greet you." Thus we see, that, although Lotte's picture hangs by his bedside, although her image hovers constantly before him, and the *Teutsche Haus* is the centre of many yearning thoughts, he is not pining despondently for Charlotte. He has rewritten *Götz*, and allowed Merck to carry it to the printer's. He is living in a very merry circle, one figure in which is Antoinette Gerock, as we gather from a letter written in February 1773, a month after that in which he refers to his "maiden." Here is the passage: "At Easter I will send you a quite adventurous novelty.[1] My maiden greets Lotte. In character she has much of Lenchen, and my sister says resembles her portrait. If we were but as much in love as you two—meanwhile I will call her my 'dear little wife,' for recently she fell to me in a lottery as my wife." She was then only fifteen, and their relation to each other will be described in chap. vi.

And now the day approaches when Lotte is to be married and leave Wetzlar. He writes to her brother Hans, begging him, when Lotte departs, to write at least once a week, that the connection with the *Teutsche Haus* may not be broken, although its jewel is carried away. He writes to Kestner to be allowed to get the wedding ring. "I am wholly yours, but from henceforth care not to see you nor Lotte. Her portrait too shall away from my bedroom the day of her marriage, and shall not be restored till I hear she is a mother; and from that moment a new epoch begins, in which I shall not love her but her children, a little indeed on her account, but that's nothing to do with it; and if you ask me to be godfather, my spirit shall rest upon the boy, and he shall make a fool of himself for a maiden like his mother." Enclosed was this note to Lotte: "May my memory with this ring for ever remain with you in your happiness. Dear Lotte, some time hence we shall see each other again, you with this ring on your

[1] *Götz.*

finger, and I as always thine. I know no name or bye-name to sign this with. You know me." When the marriage takes place he writes to Kestner: "God bless you; you have surprised me. I had meant to make a holy sepulchre on Good Friday, and bury Lotte's portrait. But it hangs still by my bed, and shall remain there till I die. Be happy. Greet for me your angel, and Lenchen; she shall be the second Lotte, and it shall be as well with her. I wander in the desert where no water is, my hair is my shade, and my blood my spring." The bridesmaid brings him the bridal bouquet, a flower of which he sticks in his hat, as he walks to Darmstadt, in a melancholy mood; but to show that his passion for Charlotte was after all only a poetic passion, here is a passage in the letter he sent to Kestner immediately after the marriage: "O Kestner, when have I envied you Lotte in the human sense? for not to envy you her in the spiritual sense I must be an angel without lungs and liver. Nevertheless I must disclose a secret to you. That you may know and behold. When I attached myself to Lotte, and you know that I was attached to her from my heart, Born talked to me about it, *as people are wont to talk*. 'If I were K. I should not like it. How can it end? You quite cut him out!' and the like. Then I said to him in these very words, in his room, it was in the morning: 'The fact is, I am fool enough to think the girl something remarkable; if she deceived me, and turned out to be as girls usually are, and used K. as capital in order to make the most of her charms, the first moment which discovered that to me, the first moment which brought her nearer to me, would be the last of our acquaintance,' and this I protested and swore. And between ourselves, without boasting, I understand the maiden somewhat, and you know how I have felt for her and for everything she has seen and touched, and wherever she has been, and shall continue to feel to the end of the world. And now see how far I am envious, and must be so. For either I am a fool, which it is difficult to believe, or she is the subtlest deceiver, or then—Lotte, the very Lotte of whom we are speaking." A few days afterwards he writes: "My poor existence is petrified to barren rock. This summer I lose all. Merck goes. My sister too. And I am alone."

The marriage of Cornelia, his much-loved sister, was to him a very serious matter, and her loss was not easily supplied. It came, too, at a time when other losses pained him. Lotte was married, Merck was away, and a dear friend had just died.

Nevertheless, he seems to have been active in plans. Among them was most probably that of a drama on *Mahomet*, which he erroneously places at a later period, after the journeys with Lavater and Basedow, but which Schäfer, very properly, restores to the year 1773, as Boie's *Annual* for 1774 contains the *Mahomet's Song*. Goethe has narrated in full the conception of this piece, which is very grand; he tells us the idea arose within him of illustrating the sad fact, noticeable in the biographies of genius, that every man who attempts to realise a great idea comes in contact with the lower world, and must place himself on its level in order to influence it, and thus compromises his higher aims, and finally forfeits them. He chose Mahomet as the illustration, never having regarded him as an impostor. He had carefully studied the Koran and Mahomet's life, in preparation. "The piece," he says, "opened with a hymn sung by Mahomet alone under the open sky. He first adores the innumerable stars as so many gods; but as the star god (Jupiter) rises, he offers to him, as the king of the stars, exclusive adoration. Soon after, the moon ascends the horizon, and claims the eye and heart of the worshipper, who, refreshed and strengthened by the dawning sun, is afterwards stimulated to new praises. But these changes, however delightful, are still unsatisfactory, and the mind feels that it must rise still higher, and mounts therefore to God, the One Eternal, Infinite, to whom all these splendid but finite creatures owe their existence. I composed this hymn with great delight; it is now lost, but might easily be restored as a cantata, and is adapted for music by the variety of its expression. It would, however, be necessary to imagine it sung according to the original plan, by the leader of a caravan with his family and tribe; and thus the alternation of the voices and the strength of the chorus would be secured.

"Mahomet converted, imparts these feelings and sentiments to his friends; his wife and Ali become unconditional disciples. In the second act, he attempts to propagate this faith in the tribe; Ali still more zealously. Assent and opposition display themselves according to the variety of character. The contest begins, the strife becomes violent, and Mahomet flies. In the third act, he defeats his enemies, makes his religion the public one, and purifies the Kaaba from idols; but this being impracticable by force, he is obliged to resort to cunning. *What in his character is earthly increases and develops itself; the divine retires and is obscured.* In the fourth act, Mahomet

pursues his conquests, his doctrine becomes a *means* rather than an *end*, all kinds of practices are employed, nor are horrors wanting. A woman, whose husband has been condemned by Mahomet, poisons him. In the fifth act he feels that he is poisoned. His great calmness, the return to himself and to his better nature, make him worthy of admiration. He purifies his doctrine, establishes his kingdom, and dies.

"This sketch long occupied my mind; for, according to my custom, I was obliged to let the conception perfect itself before I commenced the execution. All that genius, through character and intellect, can exercise over mankind, was therein to be represented, and what it gains and loses in the process. Several of the songs to be introduced in the drama, were rapidly composed; the only one remaining of them, however, is the *Mahomet's Gesang*. This was to be sung by Ali, in honour of his master, at the apex of his success, just before the change resulting from the poison." Of all his unrealised schemes, this causes me the greatest regret. In grandeur, depth, and in the opportunities for subtle psychological unravelment of the mysteries of our nature, it was a scheme peculiarly suited to his genius. How many *Clavigos* and *Stellas* would one not have given for such a poem?

Maximiliane Laroche had recently married Brentano, a Frankfurt merchant, a widower, many years her senior, with five children. Goethe became intimate at their house; and, as Merck writes, "il joue avec les enfans et accompagne le clavecin de madame avec la basse. M. Brentano, quoique assez jaloux pour un Italien, l'aime et veut absolument qu'il fréquente la maison." The husband wanted his presence, often as an umpire in the disputes with his wife; and the wife, also, chose him umpire in her disputes with her husband; nay, Merck hints, "il a la petite Madame Brentano à consoler sur l'odeur de l'huile, du fromage, et des manières de son mari." So passed autumn and winter, in a tender relation, such as in those days was thought blameless enough, but such as modern writers cannot believe to have been so blameless. For my part I cannot disbelieve his own word on this matter, when he says: "My former relation to the young wife, which was, properly speaking, only that of a brother to a sister, was resumed after marriage. Being of her own age, I was the only one in whom she heard an echo of those voices to which she had been accustomed in her youth. We lived in childish confidence; and, *although there was nothing passionate in our*

intercourse, it was painful, because she was unable to reconcile herself to her new condition." If not passionate, the relation was certainly sentimental and dangerous. Hear how he writes to Frau Jacobi: "It goes well with me, dear lady, and thanks for your double, triple letter. The last three weeks there has been nothing but excitement, and now we are as contented and happy as possible. I say *we*, for since the 15th of January not a branch of my existence has been solitary. And Fate, which I have so often vituperated, is now courteously entitled beautiful, wise Fate, for since my sister left me, this is the first gift that can be called an equivalent. The Max is still the same angel whose simple and darling qualities draw all hearts towards her, and the feeling I have for her—wherein her husband would find cause for jealousy—now makes the joy of my existence. Brentano is a worthy fellow, with a frank, strong character, and not without sense. The children are lively and good." An anecdote, related by his mother to Bettina, gives us an amusing picture of him parading before Max. The morning was bright and frosty. "Wolfgang burst into the room where his mother was seated with some friends: 'Mother, you have never seen me skate, and the weather is so beautiful to-day.' I put on my crimson fur cloak, which had a long train, and was closed in front by golden clasps, and we drove out. There skated my son, like an arrow among the groups. The wind had reddened his cheeks, and blown the powder out of his brown hair. When he saw my crimson cloak he came towards our carriage and smiled coaxingly at me. 'Well,' said I, 'what do you want?' 'Come, mother, you can't be cold in the carriage, give me your cloak.' 'You won't put it on, will you?' 'Certainly.' I took it off, he put it on, threw the train over his arm, and away he went over the ice like a son of the gods. Oh, Bettina, if you could have seen him! Anything so beautiful is not to be seen now! I clapped my hands for joy. Never shall I forget him, as he darted out from under one arch of the bridge and in again under the other, the wind carrying the train behind him as he flew! Your mother, Bettina, was on the ice, and all this was to please her."

No thought of suicide in *that* breast!

Quite in keeping with this anecdote is the spirit of the satirical farce *Götter, Helden, und Wieland*, which is alluded to in this passage of a letter to Kestner, May 1774, and must therefore have been written some time before: "My rough

joke against Wieland makes more noise than I thought. He behaves very well in the matter, as I hear, so that I am in the wrong." The origin of this farce was a strong feeling in the circle of Goethe's friends, that Wieland had modernised, misrepresented, and traduced the Grecian gods and heroes. One Sunday afternoon "the rage for dramatising everything" seized him, and with a bottle of Burgundy by his side he wrote off the piece just as it stands. The friends were in raptures with it. He sent it to Lenz, then at Strasburg, who insisted on its at once being printed. After some demurring, consent was given, and at Strasburg the work saw the light. In reading it, the public, unacquainted with the circumstances and the mood to which it owed its origin, unacquainted also with the fact of its never having been designed for publication, felt somewhat scandalised at its fierceness of sarcasm. But in truth there was no malice in it. Flushed with the insolence and pride of wit, he attacked a poet whom, on the whole, he greatly loved; and Wieland took no offence at it, but reviewed it in the *Teutsche Mercur*, recommending it to all lovers of pasquinade, *persiflage*, and sarcastic wit. This reminds one of Socrates standing up in the theatre, when he was lampooned by Aristophanes, that the spectators might behold the original of the sophist they were hooting on the stage. *Götter, Helden, und Wieland* is really amusing, and under the mask of its buffoonery contains some sound and acute criticism.[1] The peculiarity of it, however, consists in its attacking Wieland for treating heroes unheroically, at a time when, from various parts of Germany, loud voices were raised against Wieland, as an immoral, an unchristian, nay, even an atheistical writer. Lavater called upon Christians to pray for this sinner; theologians forbade their followers to read his works; pulpits were loud against him. In 1773 the whole Klopstock school rose against him[2] in moral indignation, and burned his works on Klopstock's birthday. Very different was Goethe's ire. He saw that the gods and heroes were represented in perruques and satin breeches, that their cheeks were rouged, their thews and sinews shrunk to those of a *petit-maître*; and against such a conception of the old Pagan life he raised his voice.

"I cannot blame you," he writes to Kestner, "for living in the world and making acquaintances amongst men of rank

1 It called forth a retort, *Thiere, Menschen, und Goethe;* which has not fallen in my way. Critics speak of it as personal, but worthless.

2 *Gervinus*, iv. p. 285.

and influence. Intercourse with the great is always advantageous to him who knows properly how to use it. I honour gunpowder, if only for its power of bringing me a bird down out of the air. . . . So in God's name continue, and don't trouble yourself about the opinions of others, shut your heart to antagonists as to flatterers. . . . O Kestner, I am in excellent spirits, and if I have not you by my side, yet all the dear ones are ever before me. The circle of noble natures is the highest happiness I have yet achieved. And now, my dear *Götz*, I trust in his strong nature, he will endure. He is a human offspring with many sins, and nevertheless one of the best. Many will object to his clothing and rough angles; yet I have so much applause that it astonishes me. I don't think I shall soon write anything which will again find its public. Meanwhile I work on, in the hope that something striking in the whirl of things may be laid hold of."

On Christmas Day 1773, in answer to Kestner's wish that he should come to Hanover and play a part there, he writes this noticeable sentence: "My father would not object to my entering foreign service, and no hope or desire of an office detains me here—but, dear Kestner, *the talents and powers which I have, I need too much for my own aims; I am accustomed to act according to my instinct, and therewith can no prince be served.*" In less than two years he was to accept service under a prince; but we shall see that he did so with full consciousness of what was required, and of what he could afford to give.

The mention of that prince leads me to make an important correction in the date of the first acquaintance with him, erroneously placed in the December of 1774 by Goethe. It is useless to inquire how Goethe's memory could so have deceived him as to bring this important event in conjunction with his first acquaintance with Lili; the dates of the Knebel correspondence are beyond question. On the 11th February Knebel paid him a visit, and informed him that the two princes, Karl August and Constantine, were desirous of seeing him. He went, and was received with flattering kindness, especially by Karl August, who had just read *Götz*. He dined with his royal hosts in a quiet way, and left them, having received and produced an agreeable impression. They were going to Mainz, whither he promised to follow them. His father, like a sturdy old burgher who held aloof from princes, shook his sceptical head at the idea of this visit. To

Mainz, however, the poet went a day or two afterwards, and spent several days with the young princes, as their guest. This was his first contact with men of high rank.

In the following May he hears with joy that Lotte is a mother, and that her boy is to be called Wolfgang, after him; and on the 16th of June he writes to Lotte: "I will soon send you a friend who has much resemblance to me, and hope you will receive him well; he is named Werther, and is and was—but that he must himself explain."

Whoever has followed the history thus far, moving on the secure ground of contemporary document, will see how vague and inaccurate is the account of the composition of *Werther* given by its author, in his retrospective narrative. It was not originated by growing despair at the loss of Charlotte. It was not originated by tormenting thoughts of self-destruction. It was not to free himself from suicide that he wrote this story of suicide. All these several threads were woven into its woof; but the rigour of dates forces us to the conviction that *Werther*, although taken from his experience, was not written while that experience was being undergone. Indeed, the true philosophy of art would, *a priori*, lead us to the conviction that, although he cleared his "bosom of the perilous stuff" by moulding this perilous stuff into a work of art, he must have essentially outlived the storm before he painted it,—conquered his passion, and subdued the rebellious thoughts, before he made them plastic to his purpose. The poet cannot see to write when his eyes are full of tears; cannot sing when his breast is swollen with sighs, and sobs choke utterance. He must rise superior to his grief before he can sublimate his grief in song. The artist is a master, not a slave; he *wields* his passion, he is not hurried along by it; he possesses, and is not possessed. Art enshrines the great sadness of the world, but is itself not sad. The storm of passion weeps itself away, and the heavy clouds roll off in quiet masses, to make room for the sun, which, in shining through, touches them to beauty with its rays. While pain is in its newness, it is pain, and nothing else; it is not Art, but Feeling. Goethe could not write *Werther* before he had outlived Wertherism. It may have been, as he says, a "general confession," and a confession which brought him certain relief; but we do not confess until we have repented, and we do not repent until we have outlived the error.

Werther was written rapidly. "I completely isolated myself," he says; "nay, prohibited the visits of my friends,

and put aside everything that did not immediately belong to the subject. Under such circumstances, and under so many preparations in secret, I wrote it in four weeks, without any scheme of the whole, or treatment of any part being previously put on paper." It is of this seclusion Merck writes: "Le grand succès que son drame a eu lui tourne un peu la tête. Il se détache de tous ses amis, et n'existe que dans les compositions qu'il prépare pour le public."

It is a matter of some interest to ascertain the exact truth respecting the date of the composition of Werther. As before stated, his own account is manifestly inaccurate; and the only thing which renders it difficult to assign the dates with tolerable precision, is his statement that it was written in four weeks, without any scheme of the whole or treatment of any part having been previously put on paper. If we consent to believe that his memory in this case deceived him, the correspondence of the period furnishes hints from which we may conclude that in 1772, on the arrival of the news about Jerusalem's suicide, he made a general sketch, either in his mind or on paper; and that during the following year he worked at it from time to time. In June 1773, he writes to Kestner: "And thus I dream and ramble through life, writing plays and *novels*, and the like." In July he writes: "I am working my own situation into art for the consolation of gods and men. I know what Lotte will say when she sees it, and I know what I shall answer her." The word in the original is *Schauspiel*—play, drama; Viehoff suggests that he does not mean drama, but a work which will bring his situation *zur Schaw*—before the public eye. In September of the same year, he writes: "You are always by me when I write. At present, I am working at a novel, but it gets on slowly." In November Frau Jacobi writes to him, acknowledging the receipt of a novel, in manuscript, no doubt, which delights her. In February 1774, Merck writes of him: "Je prévois qu'un roman, qui paraîtra de lui à pâques, sera aussi bien reçu que son drame." As we have nowhere a hint of any other novel, besides Werther, at this epoch, it is difficult to resist the evidence of these dates; and we must, therefore, conclude that the assertion in the *Autobiography* is wholly inexact.

In September 1774 he wrote to Lotte, sending her a copy of *Werther:* "Lotte, how dear this little book is to me thou wilt feel in reading it, and this copy is as dear to me as if it were the only one in the world. Thou must have it, Lotte; I have

kissed it a hundred times; have kept it locked up that no one might touch it. O, Lotte! And I beg thee let no one except Meyers see it yet; it will be published at the Leipsic fair. I wish each to read it alone,—thou alone,—Kestner alone,—and each to write me a little word about it. Lotte, adieu Lotte!"

Let us now take a glance at this work, which startled Europe, and which for a long while was all that Europe knew of Goethe.[1]

CHAPTER V

WERTHER

Aujourdhui l'homme désire immensément, mais il veut faiblement: In these words Guizot has written an epigraph for *Werther;* a book composed out of a double history, the history of its author's experience, and the history of one of his friends.

The story of Jerusalem, whom he met in the Wetzlar circle, furnished Goethe with the machinery by which to introduce his own experience. He took many of the details from Kestner's long letter, sent shortly after the catastrophe: the letter may therefore be here abridged, as an introduction to the novel. Jerusalem, melancholy by temperament, was unhappy during the whole of his Wetzlar residence. He had been denied admittance into the high diplomatic society to which his position gave him claims; he had been in unpleasant relations with his ambassador, whose secretary he was; and he had fallen in love with the wife of his friend. Thus oppressed, he shunned company, was fond of long moonlight walks, and once lost himself in the wood, wandering about the whole night. But he was solitary, even in his grief, told none of his friends the causes of his melancholy, and solaced himself with novels—the wretched novels of that day. To these he added all the tragedies he could get hold of; English writers, especially the gloomy writers; and various philosophical works. He wrote also essays, one on suicide, a subject which greatly occupied him. Mendelssohn's *Phædon* was his favourite work.[2] When the rumour reached

[1] SCOTT, in prefacing his translation of *Götz*, says: "It was written by the *elegant* author of the *Sorrows of Werther.*"

[2] Goethe, it will be remembered, in Strasburg, made an analysis of this work, contrasting it with Plato's.

Wetzlar of Goué's suicide he said that Goué was not a fit man for such a deed, but defended the act. A few days before his own unhappy end he was talking with Schleimitz about suicide, and said, "It would be a bad look out, however, if the shot were not to take effect!" The rest of the narrative must be told in Kestner's own words, the simple circumstantial style best fitting such a history.

"Last Tuesday he comes with a discontented look to Kielmansegge, who was ill. The latter asks how he is? 'Better than I like to be.' He also that day talked a good deal about love, which he had never done before; and then about the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which had for some time pleased him more than usual. In the afternoon (Tuesday) he goes to Secretary H.'s. Until eight o'clock in the evening they play tarock together. Annchen Brandt was also there; Jerusalem accompanied her home. As they walk, Jerusalem often strikes his forehead, gloomily and repeatedly says: 'If one were but dead—if one were but in heaven!' Annchen joked him about it; he bargains for a place by her side in heaven, and at parting he says: 'It is agreed, then, that I shall have a place by you in heaven.'

"On Wednesday, as there were great doings at the Crown Prince, and everybody invited everybody, he went there to dinner, though he generally dined at home, and he brought Secretary H. with him. He did not behave there otherwise than usual; if anything, he was more cheerful. After dinner, Secretary H. takes him home with him to see his wife. They take coffee; Jerusalem says to Mrs. H.: 'Dear Mrs. H., this is the last coffee I shall drink with you.' She thinks it a joke, and answers in that tone. The same afternoon (Wednesday) Jerusalem was alone at H.'s: what took place there is unknown; perhaps herein lies the cause of what followed. In the evening, just as it was dark, Jerusalem comes to Garbenheim, into the usual inn, asks whether anyone is in the room above? On the answer, No, he goes up, soon comes down again, goes out into the yard, towards the left, comes back after a little while, goes into the garden; it becomes quite dark, he remains there a long time, the hostess makes her remarks upon this, he comes out of the garden, goes past her with hasty steps, all without saying a word, into the yard, hurrying straight away from it.

"In the meantime, or still later, something passed between H. and his wife, concerning which H. confides to a female

friend that they quarrelled a little about Jerusalem; and his wife at last desired that he would forbid him the house, whereupon he did so the following day, in a note.

"[It is said[1] that Secretary H. has given secret information that on the Wednesday before Jerusalem's death, when he was with H. and his wife taking coffee, the husband was obliged to go to the ambassador. When he returns, he observes an extraordinary seriousness in his wife, and a silence in Jerusalem, which appear strange to him, especially as he finds them so much changed after his return. Jerusalem goes away. Secretary H. makes his observations on the above-mentioned circumstances: he contracts suspicion that something injurious to him may have happened in his absence; for he is very suspicious and jealous. Nevertheless, he puts on a composed and cheerful air, and determines to put his wife to the test. He says: Jerusalem has often invited him to dinner; what does she think of their asking Jerusalem for once to dine with them? She, the wife, answers: No; and she must entirely break off intercourse with Jerusalem; he begins to behave in such a way that she must altogether avoid his society. And she held herself bound to tell him, her husband, what had passed in his absence. Jerusalem had thrown himself at her feet, and had wanted to make a formal declaration of love to her. She was naturally indignant at this, and had uttered many reproaches to him, &c. She now desired that her husband would forbid him, Jerusalem, the house, for she could and would neither see nor hear anything more of him.

"Hereupon, it is said, H. the next morning wrote the note to Jerusalem, &c.]

"In the night of Wednesday-Thursday he got up at two o'clock, awakened the servant, said he could not sleep, he was not well, has a fire lighted, tea made, yet is afterwards, to all appearance, very well.

"Thursday morning, Secretary H. sends Jerusalem a note. The maid will not wait for an answer, and goes away. Jerusalem has just been shaved. At eleven o'clock Jerusalem sends a note to Secretary H., who does not take it from the servant, and says he requires no answer, he cannot enter into any correspondence, and besides they saw each other every day at the office. When the servant brings back the note unopened, Jerusalem throws it on the table and says: Very

[1] The passage in brackets occurs in a subsequent letter; it is inserted here to give the story continuity.

good. (Perhaps to make the servant believe that it related to some indifferent matter.)

"In the middle of the day he dines at home, but takes little —some soup. At one o'clock he sends a note to me, and at the same time one to his ambassador, in which he begs the latter to send him his money for this (or the following) month. The servant comes to me. I am not at home, nor is my servant. Jerusalem in the meantime is gone out, comes home about a quarter-past three, the servant gives him the note again. Jerusalem asks him why he did not leave it at my house with some maid-servant? He replies, because it was open and unsealed. Jerusalem: That was of no consequence, every one might read it; he must take it again. The servant thinks himself hereby warranted to read it also, reads it, and then sends it by a boy who waits in the house. I, in the meantime, had come home; it might be half-past three when I received the following note: 'Might I beg of you to lend me your pistols for a journey which I am about to take?—J.'[1] As I knew nothing of all this that I have told you, or of his principles, having never had any particular intercourse with him, I had not the least hesitation in sending him the pistols.

"The servant had read in the note that his master intended to make a journey, and indeed the latter had himself told him so, also had ordered everything for his journey the next morning at six o'clock, even the *friseur*, without his (the servant's) knowing whither, or with whom, or in what way. But as Jerusalem always kept his engagements secret from him, this did not arouse his suspicion. Nevertheless he thought to himself: 'Is master perhaps going secretly to Brunswick, leaving me here alone?' &c. He had to take the pistols to a gunmaker's to get them loaded.

"The whole afternoon Jerusalem was busy alone; rummaged among his papers, wrote, walked, as the people below in the house heard, rapidly up and down the room. He also went out several times, and paid his small debts; he had taken a pair of ruffles, he said to the servant; they did not satisfy him, he must return them to the tradesman; if he did not like to take them again, there was the money for them, which in fact the tradesman preferred.

"About seven o'clock the Italian master came to him. He

[1] "*Dürfe ich Ew. Wohlgeb. wohl zu einer vorhabenden Reise um ihre Pistolen gehorsamst ersuchen?*" The German epistolary forms of civility are not translatable.

found him restless and out of humour. He complained that he had his hypochondriasis again strongly, and about various things; said also, that the best he could do would be to take himself out of the world. The Italian urged upon him very seriously that such passions must be repressed by philosophy, &c. Jerusalem: That is not so easily done; he would rather be alone to-day, he might leave him, &c. The Italian: He must go into society, amuse himself, &c. Jerusalem: Well, he was going out again. The Italian, seeing the pistols on the table, is anxious about the result, goes away at eight o'clock and to Kielmansegge, to whom he talks of nothing but Jerusalem, his restlessness and discontent, without however mentioning his anxiety, because he believed that he might be laughed at for it.

"The servant went to Jerusalem to take off his boots. But he said, he was going out again; as he really did, before the Silberthor on the Starke Weide and elsewhere in the streets, where, with his hat pressed over his eyes, he rushed by several persons, with rapid steps, without seeing any one. He was also seen about this time standing a long time by the river, in a position as if he meant to throw himself in (so they say).

"Before nine o'clock he comes home, says to the servant that there must be more fuel put in the stove, because he shall not go to bed yet, also tells him to get everything ready for six o'clock in the morning, and has a pint of wine brought to him. The servant, that he may be ready very early, because his master was always very punctual, goes to bed in his clothes.

"As soon as Jerusalem was alone, he seems to have prepared everything for the dreadful deed. He tore up his correspondence and threw it under the table, as I have myself seen. He wrote two letters, one to his relations, the other to H.; it is thought also that he wrote one to the ambassador Höffler, which the latter perhaps suppresses. They lay on the writing-table. The first, which the medical man saw the next morning, contained in substance only what follows, as Dr. Held, who read it, related to me:

"'Dear father, dear mother, dear sisters and brother-in-law, forgive your unhappy son and brother; God, God bless you!'

"In the second, he entreated H. for forgiveness that he had disturbed the peace and happiness of his married life, and created dissension between this dear couple, &c. At first his inclination for H.'s wife had been only virtuous, &c. It is said to have been three sheets long, and to have ended

thus:—'One o'clock. In the other life we shall see each other again.' (In all probability he shot himself immediately on finishing this letter.)"

The sensation produced in Wetzlar by this suicide was immense. People who had scarcely seen Jerusalem were unable to quiet their agitation; many could not sleep; the women especially felt the deepest interest in the fate of this unhappy youth; and *Werther* found a public ready for it.

With these materials in hand, let us take up the novel to see how Goethe employs them. Werther is a man who, not having yet learned self-mastery, imagines that his immense desires are proofs of immense superiority: one of those of whom it has been wittily said that they fancy themselves great painters because they paint with a big brush. He laughs at all rules, whether they be rules of Art, or rules which Convention builds like walls around our daily life. He hates order—in speech, in writing, in costume, in office. In a word, he hates all control. Gervinus remarks that he turns from men to children because they do not pain him, and from them to Nature because she does not contradict him; from truth to poetry, and in poetry from the clear world of Homer to the formless world of Ossian. Very characteristic of the epoch is the boundless enthusiasm inspired by Ossian, whose rhetorical trash the Germans hailed as the finest expression of *Nature's* poetry. Old Samuel Johnson's stern, clear sense saw into the very heart of this subject when he said, "Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever if he would but *abandon* his mind to it." It is abandonment of the mind, throwing the reins on the horse's neck, which makes such writing possible; and it was precisely this abandonment to impulse, this disregard of the grave remonstrances of reason and good sense, which distinguished the Werther epoch.

Werther is not Goethe. Werther perishes because he is wretched, and is wretched because he is so weak. Goethe was "king over himself." He saw the danger, and evaded it; tore himself away from the woman he loved, instead of continuing in a dangerous position. Yet although Werther is not Goethe, there is one part of Goethe living in Werther. This is visible in the incidents and language as well as in the character. It is the part we see reappearing under the various masks of Weislingen, Clavigo, Faust, Fernando, Edward, Meister, and Tasso, which no critic will call the same lay figure variously draped, but which every critic must see belong

to one and the same genus: men of strong desires and weak volitions, wavering impressionable natures unable to attain self-mastery. Goethe was one of those who are wavering because impressionable, but whose wavering is not weakness; they oscillate, but they return into the direct path which their wills have prescribed. He was tender as well as impressionable. He could not be stern, but he could be resolute. He had only therefore, in imagination, to keep in abeyance the native force of resolution which gave him mastery, and in that abeyance a weak wavering character stood before him, the original of which was himself.

When a man delineates himself, he always shrinks from a complete confession. Our moral nature has its modesty. Strong as the impulse may be to drag into light that which lies hidden in the recesses of the soul, pleased as we may be to create images of ourselves, we involuntarily keep back something, and refuse to identify ourselves with the creation. There are few things more irritating than the pretension of another to completely understand us. Hence authors never thoroughly portray themselves. Byron, utterly without self-command, is fond of heroes proud and self-containing. Goethe, the strongest of men, makes heroes the footballs of circumstance. But he also draws from his other half the calm, self-sustaining characters. Thus we have the antithesis of Götz and Weislingen—Albert and Werther—Carlos and Clavigo—Jarno and Meister—Antonio and Tasso—the Captain and Edward; and deepened in colouring, Mephistopheles and Faust.

Werther is not much read nowadays, especially in England, where it labours under the double disadvantage of a bad name and an execrable translation. Yet it is well worth reading in the original, where it will be found very unlike the notion of it current among us. I remember many years ago reading it in the execrable English version with astonishment and contempt; this contempt remained, until accidentally falling in with a Spanish translation, the exquisite beauty of the pictures changed my feeling into admiration, and Goethe's own wonderful prose afterwards fixed that admiration for ever. It is a masterpiece of style; we may look through German literature in vain for such clear sunny pictures, fulness of life, and delicately managed simplicity. Its style is one continuous strain of music, which, restrained within the limits of prose, fulfils all the conditions of poetry; dulcet as the sound of falling waters, and as full of sweet melancholy as an autumnal eve.

Nothing can be simpler than the structure of this book, wherein, as M. Marmier well remarks,[1] every detail is so arranged as to lay bare the sufferings of a diseased spirit. Werther arrives at his chosen retreat, believing himself cured, and anticipating perfect happiness. He is painter and poet. The fresh spring mornings, the sweet cool evenings, soothe and strengthen him. He selects a place under the limes to read and dream away the hours. There he brings his pencil and his Homer. Everything interests him—the old woman who brings his coffee, the children who play around him, the story of a poor family. In this serene convalescence he meets with Charlotte, and a new passion agitates his soul. His simple uniform existence becomes changed. He endeavours by bodily activity to charm away his desires. The days no longer resemble each other: now ecstatic with hope, now crushed with despair. Winter comes: cold, sad, gloomy. He must away. He departs, and mingles with the world, but the world disgusts him. The monotony and emptiness of official life are intolerable to his pretensions; the parchment pride of the noblesse is insulting to his sense of superiority. He returns to the peaceful scene of his former contentment, and finds indeed Charlotte, the children, his favourite woods and walks, but not the calmness which he seeks. The hopelessness of his position overwhelms him. Disgusted with the world—unsatisfied in his cravings—he dies by his own hand.

Rosenkrantz—in the true spirit of that criticism which seeks everywhere for meanings more recondite than the author dreamt of—thinks that Goethe exhibits great art in making Werther a diplomatist, because a diplomatist is a man of *shams* (*scheinthuer*); but the truth is, Goethe made him precisely what he found him. His art is truth. He is so great an artist that the simplest realities have to him significance. Charlotte cutting bread and butter for the children—the scene of the ball—the children clinging round Werther for sugar, and pictures of that kind, betray so little inventive power, that they have excited the ridicule of some English critics to whom poetry is a thing of pomp, not the beautiful vesture of reality. The beauty and art of *Werther* is not in the incidents (a Dumas would shrug despairing shoulders over such invention), but in the representation. What *is* Art but Representation?[2]

[1] *Etudes sur Goethe*, p. 11.

[2] "*L'art n'est qu'une forme*," says George Sand, with a truth few critics

The effect of *Werther* was prodigious. "That nameless unrest," says Carlyle, "the blind struggle of a soul in bondage, that high, sad, longing discontent which was agitating every bosom, had driven Goethe almost to despair. All felt it; he alone could give it voice. And here lies the secret of his popularity; in his deep, susceptive heart he felt a thousand times more keenly what every one was feeling; with the creative gift which belonged to him as a poet, he bodied it forth into visible shape, gave it a local habitation and a name; and so made himself the spokesman of his generation. *Werther* is but the cry of that dim, rooted pain under which all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing: it paints the misery, it passionately utters the complaint; and heart and voice all over Europe loudly and at once respond to it. True it prescribes no remedy; for that was a far different, far harder enterprise, to which other years and a higher culture were required; but even this utterance of pain, even this little, for the present is grasped at, and with eager sympathy appropriated in every bosom. If Byron's life weariness, his moody melancholy, and mad, stormful indignation, borne on the tones of a wild, and quite artless melody, could pierce so deep into many a British heart, now that the whole matter is no longer new—is indeed old and trite—we may judge with what vehement acceptance this *Werther* must have been welcomed, coming, as it did, like a voice from the unknown regions; the first thrilling peal of that impassioned dirge which, in country after country, men's ears have listened to till they were deaf to all else. For *Werther*, infusing itself into the core and whole spirit of literature, gave birth to a race of sentimentalists who have raged and wailed in every part of the world, till the better light dawned on them, or, at worst, exhausted nature laid herself to sleep, and it was discovered that lamenting was unproductive labour. These funereal choristers, in Germany, a loud, haggard, tumultuous, as well as tearful class, were named the *Kraftmänner*, or Powermen; but have long since, like sick children, cried themselves to rest."[1]

Perhaps there never was a fiction which so startled and enraptured the world. Men of all kinds and classes were moved by it. It was the companion of Napoleon, when in

have penetrated; let me add Goethe's own opinion—surely of weight in such matters: "None will comprehend the simple truth that the highest, the only operation of art is representation" (*Gestaltung*).

[1] *Miscellanies*, vol. i. p. 272.

Egypt; it penetrated into China. To convey in a sentence its wondrous popularity, we may state that in Germany it became a people's book, hawked about the streets, printed on miserable paper, like an ancient ballad; and in the Chinese empire, Charlotte and Werther were modelled in porcelain.[1]

Objectors of course there were. Lessing, for example, who neither suffered from the disease of the epoch, nor tolerated any approach to sentimentality, thought so fiery a production ought to have a cold epilogue to counteract it. "Do you believe," he wrote, "that any Roman or Grecian youth would *thus* and *therefore* have committed suicide? Certainly not. They knew how to guard themselves from the extravagancies of love, and in the days of Socrates such an ἔξ ἔρωτος κατοχὴ whom τι τολμᾷν παρὰ φύσιν impelled, would scarcely be pardoned even by a girl. Such little-great questionable originals only suit our Christian culture, which knows so well how to transform a corporeal necessity into a spiritual perfection. So, worthy Goethe, let us have a concluding chapter; and the more cynical the better."[2] This is a misstatement of the

[1] While in Italy, he received a letter from a young Frenchman, who said: "Oui, Monsieur, je vous dois la meilleure action de ma vie, par conséquent, la racine de plusieurs autres, et pour moi votre livre est bon. Si j'avais le bonheur d'habiter le même pays que vous, j'irais vous embrasser, et vous dire mon secret; mais malheureusement j'en habite un où personne ne croirait au motif qui vient de me déterminer à cette démarche. Soyez satisfait, Monsieur, d'avoir pu à trois cents lieues de votre demeure ramener le cœur d'un jeune homme à l'honnêteté et à la vertu, toute une famille va être tranquille, et mon cœur jouit d'une bonne action."

Let me not forget the visit of his English admirer, who accosted him on the stairs with "You must be the author of *Werther!*" adding that he could not wait a moment longer, all he wanted to say was this: "I will not repeat what you must have heard from thousands, for indeed your work has not affected me so much as it has others; but when I think what it required to write such a book, I am lost in astonishment." Having eased his mind of this weight, he wished Goethe a hearty farewell, and ran down stairs.

A similar story is told by Schiller in a letter to Körner. "A shrivelled figure entered my room, and asked me if I was not Councillor Schiller. I replied in the affirmative. 'I heard that you were here, and could not restrain myself from seeing the author of *Don Carlos.*' '*Gehorsamer Diener!* your most obedient servant,' said I; 'whom have I the honour of addressing?' 'I have not the happiness of being known to you. My name is Vulpius.' 'I am indebted to you for your politeness; unluckily, I have an engagement.' 'Oh, sir, I beg you won't mention it. I am quite satisfied with having seen you.'"—*Briefwechsel*, i. p. 105.

At the risk of swelling this note to unreasonable dimensions, I must quote a passage from *Pliny's Letters*, which records a similar anecdote: "Nunquamne legisti Gaditanum quemdam Titi Livii nomine gloriaque commotum ad visendum eum ab ultimo terrarum orbe venisse, statimque ut viderat abiisse?"—*Lib.* II. *Ep.* iii.

[2] LESSING: *Werke*, x. p. 225, Letter to Eschenberg.

It is surmised that Lessing's objections to *Werther* were sharpened by his

whole question. It is not the extravagance of love which causes Werther's suicide: it is his own diseased moral nature which makes life insupportable, and which makes unhappy love the spark that fires the train. Moreover, one reads with surprise this reference to Greek and Roman life, coming from so admirable a scholar as Lessing. He forgot that Sophocles, in the *Antigone*, makes an unhappy lover commit suicide because his mistress is lost to him. He forgot, also, that the Stoics introduced the "fashion" of suicide into Rome; and in Alexandria the Epicureans established a "society for the suppression of life"—the *συναποθανουμενοι* — where, having exhausted every pleasure, the members assembled at a feast, the wine-cup went freely round, and in the midst of this orgie they quietly put an end to their contemptible existences:—a new variation of the conversazione, at which, instead of music and æsthetic tea, the guests were invited to supper and suicide.

The Berlin Aristarchus—Nicolai—an upright, but narrow-minded man, and a great enemy of all *schwärmerei*, wrote by way of criticism a parody called the *Joys of Young Werther*, in which sentimentalism is ridiculed:—Werther shoots himself with chicken's blood only, and marries Charlotte "and lives happy all the rest of his life."

Goethe's answer to this was "a burlesque poem called *Nicolai at Werther's Grave*, which, however, cannot be communicated." This poem has been recovered and printed by Boas.[1] It is exceedingly coarse, and not very humorous. The admirers of Werther, of course, are greatly incensed against Nicolai; but they forget that Nicolai never denied the talent of the work, he only echoed Lessing's objection to its tendency. His criticism, moreover, was but a feather in the scale against the praise which poured in from all sides.

While the public was reading the tragic story of *Werther* through fast-flowing tears, a painful sense of indignation rose in the breasts of Kestner and Charlotte at seeing themselves thus dragged into publicity, their story falsified. The narrative was in many respects too close to reality not to be very offensive in its *deviations* from reality. The figures were unmistakable; and yet they were not the real figures. The

dislike at recognising his young friend, Jerusalem, thus brought into a fiction. A letter from Weisse to Garve, quoted by APPELL, *Werther und seine Zeit*, p. 50, confirms this.

[1] *Nachträge zu Goethe's Werke*: Lief. i. p. 12.

eager public soon found out who were the principal personages, and that a real history was at the bottom of the romance; but as the whole truth could not be known, the Kestners found themselves in a very false light. They were hurt by this indiscretion of their friend; more hurt perhaps than they chose to confess; and we may read, in the following fragment of the sketch of the letter sent by Kestner on receipt of the book, the accents of an offended friend whose pride restrains the full expression of his anger:

"Your *Werther* might have given me great pleasure, since it could have reminded me of many interesting scenes and incidents. But as it is, it has in certain respects given me little edification. You know I like to speak my mind.

"It is true, you have woven something new into each person, or have fused several persons into one. So far good. But if in this interweaving and fusing you had taken counsel of your heart, you would not have so prostituted the real persons whose features you borrow. You wished to draw from nature, that your picture might be truthful; and yet you have combined so much that is contradictory, that you have missed the very mark at which you aimed. The distinguished author will revolt against this judgment, but I appeal to reality and truth itself when I pronounce that the artist has failed. The real Lotte would, in many instances, be grieved if she were like the Lotte you have there painted. I know well that it is said to be a character compounded of two, but the Mrs. H. whom you have partly inwoven was also incapable of what you attribute to your heroine. But this expenditure of fiction was not at all necessary to your end, to nature and truth, for it was without any such behaviour on the part of a woman—a behaviour which must ever be dishonourable even to a more than ordinary woman—that Jerusalem shot himself.

"The real Lotte, whose friend you nevertheless wish to be, is in your picture, which contains too much of her not to suggest her strongly: is, I say—but no, I will not say it, it pains me already too much only to think it. And Lotte's husband—you called him your friend, and God knows that he was so—is with her.

"The miserable creature of an Albert! In spite of its being an alleged fancy picture and not a portrait, it also has such traits of an original (only external traits, it is true, thank God, only external), that it is easy to guess the real person.

And if you wanted to have him act so, need you have made him such a blockhead? that forthwith you might step forward and say, see what a fine fellow I am!"

Kestner here touches on a point of morality in literature worth consideration. While emphatically declaring that the artist must take his materials from reality, must employ his own experience, and draw the characters he has really known, we must as emphatically declare that he is bound to represent his experience in forms sufficiently different from the reality to prevent the public reading actual histories beneath his invention, and recognising the persons he has employed as lay figures, whenever those persons are assigned parts which they would reject. There is, of course, great difficulty in keeping to truth while avoiding the betrayal of actual occurrences; but it is a difficulty which is commanded by morality.

Goethe was evidently astounded at the effect his book had produced on his friends: "I must at once write to you, my dear and angry friends, and free my heart. The thing is done; the book is out; forgive me if you can. I will hear nothing till the event has proved how exaggerated your anxiety is, and till you have more truly felt, in the book itself, the innocent mingling of fiction and truth. Thou hast, dear Kestner, exhausted everything, cut away all the ground of my excuse, and left me nothing to say; yet I know not, my heart has still more to say, although I cannot express it. I am silent, but the sweet presentiment I must still retain, and I hope eternal Fate has that in store for me which will bind us yet closer one to the other. Yes, dear ones, I who am so bound to you by love, must still remain debtor to you and your children for the uncomfortable hours which my—name it as you will—has given you. . . . And now, my dear ones, when anger rises within you, think, oh think only that your old Goethe, ever and ever, and now more than ever, is your own."

Their anger fell. They saw that he had committed an indiscretion, but had done no more. They wrote forgiveness, as we gather from this letter Goethe sent on the 21st of November:

"Here I have thy letter, Kestner! On a strange desk, in a painter's studio, for yesterday I began to paint in oil, I have thy letter, and must give thee my thanks! Thanks, dear friend! Thou art ever the same good soul! O that I could spring on thy neck, throw myself at Lotte's feet, one, one

minute, and all, all that should be done away with, explained, which I could not make clear with quires of paper! O ye unbelieving ones! I could exclaim. Ye of little faith! Could you feel the thousandth part of what Werther is to a thousand hearts, you would not reckon the sacrifice you have made towards it! Here is a letter, read it, and send me word quickly what thou thinkest of it, what impression it makes on thee. Thou sendest me Hennings' letter; he does not condemn me; he excuses me. Dear brother Kestner! if you will wait, you shall be contented. I would not, to save my own life, call back Werther, and believe me, believe in me, thy anxieties, thy *gravamina* will vanish like phantoms of the night if thou hast patience; and then, between this and a year, I promise you in the most affectionate, peculiar, fervent manner, to disperse, as if it were a mere north-wind fog and mist, whatever may remain of suspicion, misinterpretation, &c., in the gossiping public, though it is a herd of swine. Werther must—must be! You do not feel *him*, you only feel *me* and *yourselves;* and that which you call *stuck on*, and in spite of you, and others, is *interwoven.* If I live, it is thee I have to thank for it; thus thou art not Albert. And thus—

"Give Lotte a warm greeting for me, and say to her: 'To know that your name is uttered by a thousand hallowed lips with reverence, is surely an equivalent for anxieties which would scarcely, apart from anything else, vex a person long in common life, where one is at the mercy of every tattler.'

"If you are generous and do not worry me, I will send you letters, cries, sighs after Werther, and if you have faith, believe that all will be well, and gossip is nothing, and weigh well your philosopher's letter, which I have kissed.

"O then!—hast not felt how the man embraces thee, consoles thee, and in thy—in Lotte's worth, finds consolation enough under the wretchedness which has terrified you even in the fiction. Lotte, farewell,—Kestner, love me, and do not worry me."

The pride of the author in his darling breaks out in this letter, now his friends have forgiven him. We must admit that Kestner had reason to be annoyed; the more so as his friends, identifying him with the story, wrote sympathetically about it. He had to reply to Hennings on the subject, and in telling him the true story, begged him to correct the false reports. He says: "In the first part of *Werther*, Werther is Goethe himself. In Lotte and Albert he has borrowed

traits from us, my wife and myself. Many of the scenes are quite true, and yet partly altered; others are, at least in our history, unreal. For the sake of the second part, and in order to prepare for the death of Werther, he has introduced various things into the first part which do not at all belong to us. For example, Lotte has never either with Goethe or with any one else stood in the intimate relation which is there described; in this we have certainly great reason to be offended with him, for several accessory circumstances are too true and too well known for people not to point to us. He regrets it now, but of what use is that to us? It is true he has a great regard for my wife; but he ought to have depicted her more faithfully in this point, that she was too wise and delicate ever to let him go so far as is represented in the first part. She behaved to him in such way as to make her far dearer to me than before, if this had been possible. Moreover, our engagement was never made public, though not, it is true, kept a secret: still she was too bashful ever to confess it to any one. And there was no engagement between us but that of hearts. It was not till shortly before my departure (when Goethe had already been a year away from Wetzlar at Frankfurt, and the disguised Werther had been dead half a year) that we were married. After the lapse of a year, since our residence here, we have become father and mother. The dear boy lives still, and gives us, thank God, much joy. For the rest, there is in Werther much of Goethe's character and manner of thinking. Lotte's portrait is completely that of my wife. Albert might have been made a little more ardent. The second part of *Werther* has nothing whatever to do with us. . . . When Goethe had printed his book, he sent us an early copy, and thought we should fall into raptures with what he had done. But we at once saw what would be the effect, and your letter confirms our fears. I wrote very angrily to him. He then for the first time saw what he had done; but the book was printed, and he hoped our fears were idle." In another letter to the same, Kestner says: "You have no idea what a man he is. But when his great fire has somewhat burnt itself out, then we shall all have the greatest joy in him."

We have thus brought to a close the history of *Werther*, its composition and effect: a history so important in the biography of its author, that we might have been excused for having devoted so much space to it, even if the letters, which have furnished the evidence, did not throw so strong a light

upon a period very inadequately represented in the *Wahrheit und Dichtung*.

On the 28th August 1849, the hundredth anniversary of the great poet's birth, when all Germany joined in a jubilee, a small marble monument was erected in the well-known *Wertherplatz* without the Wetzlar gates, where Goethe was wont to sit and muse; three lime trees are planted round it, bearing this inscription:—

RUHEPLATZ DES DICHTERS

GOETHE

ZU SEINEM ANDENKEN FRISCH BEPFLANZT

BEI DER JUBELFEIER AM 28 AUG. 1849.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITERARY LION

GOETHE was now at the perilous juncture in an author's career, when having just achieved a splendid success, he is in danger either of again snatching at laurels in presumptuous haste, or of suffering himself to repose upon the laurels he has won, talking of greatness, instead of learning to be great. Both perils he avoided. He neither traded on his renown, nor conceived that his education was complete. Wisely refraining from completing fresh important works, he kept up the practice of his art by trifles, and the education of his genius by serious studies.

Among these trifles are *Clavigo*, the *Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilen*, and the *Prolog zu Bahrdt's Neuesten Offenbarungen*. For the composition of *Clavigo* we must retrace our steps a little, and once more see him in the Frankfurt circle during the summer of 1774, that is, before the *publication* of *Werther*, which was delayed till October. In his sister's pleasant circle we have already noticed Antoinette Gerock, who was fascinating enough to fix his attentions. They were accustomed to meet once a week, in picnics and pleasure parties; at one of these it was agreed to institute a marriage

lottery. He thus speaks of it:—"Every week lots were drawn to determine the couples who should be symbolically wedded; for it was supposed that every one knew well enough how lovers should conduct themselves, but few had any proper conceptions of the requisite demeanour between man and wife. General rules were laid down to the effect that these wedded couples should preserve a polite indifference, not sitting near each other, nor speaking to each other too often, much less indulging in anything like caresses. At the same time, side by side with this polite indifference, this well-bred calm, anything like discord or suspicion was to be sedulously avoided; and whoever succeeded in gaining the affections of his wife without using the importunities of a lover, was supposed to have achieved their ideal. Much sportive confusion and agreeable pleasantry of course arose from this scheme." Strangely enough, to him it fell thrice to have the same girl appointed by hazard to fill the place of his wife. When fate had brought them together for the third time, it was resolved unanimously that they should be no longer separated, that heaven had spoken, and that hereafter they were to consider themselves as man and wife, and not to draw lots as the others did. At these réunions something new was generally read aloud by one of the party. One evening Goethe brought with him as a novelty the *Mémoire* of Beaumarchais. During the conversation which ensued, Goethe's partner said to him: "If I were thy liege lady, and not thy wife, I would command thee to change this memoir into a play, to which it seems well suited." He answered: "That thou mayst see, my love, that liege lady and wife are one, I here undertake that this day week I will read a play on this very matter." So bold a promise excited astonishment, but he resolved on fulfilling it. "What, in such cases," he says, "is termed invention, was with me spontaneous. While escorting my titulary wife home I was silent; and on her inquiring the cause, I told her that I was thinking out the play, and had already got into the middle of it—intending to show her how gladly I would do anything to please her. Upon which she pressed my hand, and I snatched a kiss. 'Thou must not step out of thy character,' she exclaimed; 'they say it is not proper for married folks to be loving.' 'Let them say what they please,' I replied, 'we will have it our own way.'"

He confesses that before reading the memoir aloud, the subject had appeared to him eminently dramatic; though,

without such a stimulus as he had received, this piece, like so many others, would have remained among the number of *possible* creations. The only novelty in it was his mode of treating the villains. He was weary of those characters so frequently represented, who, from revenge, or from hate, or from trivial motives, ruin a noble nature; and he wished in Carlos to show the working of clear good sense, against passion and inclination. Justified by the precedent of Shakspeare, he translated, word for word, such portions of the memoir as were dramatic; borrowing the dénouement from an English ballad.[1] He was ready before the week expired, and read the piece to a delighted audience.

A few words on this memoir may be useful. Beaumarchais had two sisters living in Madrid, one married to an architect, the other, Marie, engaged to Clavijo, a young author without fortune. No sooner had Clavijo obtained the office he had long solicited, than he refused to fulfil his promise. Beaumarchais hurried to Madrid; his object was twofold: to save the reputation of his sister, and to put a little speculation of his own on foot. He sought Clavijo, and by his sangfroid and courage extorted from him a written avowal of his contemptible conduct. No sooner is this settled, than Clavijo, alarmed at the consequences, solicits a reconciliation with Marie, offering to marry her. Beaumarchais consents, but just as the marriage is about to take place he learns that Clavijo is secretly conspiring against him, accusing him of having extorted the marriage by force, in consequence of which he has procured an order from the government to expel Beaumarchais from Madrid. Irritated at such villainy, Beaumarchais goes to the ministers, reaches the king, and avenges himself by getting Clavijo dismissed from his post. This is, in brief, the substance of the *Mémoire*, which appeared in February 1774. The adventure occurred in 1764, so that Clavijo, who subsequently became a distinguished writer, might have seen himself not only held up to odium in the sparkling pages of Beaumarchais, but represented on the stage of every German theatre. He died in 1806, vice-president of the Natural History Society in Madrid, having previously translated Buffon, and edited the *Mercurio historico y politico de Madrid*. We must suppose that Goethe knew nothing of the existence of Clavijo when he wrote the drama.

[1] So he says: but his memory deceived him. The ballad was an old German ballad, *Das Lied vom Herren und der Magd*. See *Herder's Nachlass*, i. 159.

With Beaumarchais in our hands it is curious to read *Clavigo*, which is as close a reproduction as the dramatic form admits; and is an evidence that Goethe did wisely in not at once proceeding to complete *Faust* (fragments of which were written) or *Cæsar*. He would infallibly have repeated himself. He has repeated himself in *Clavigo*: the external circumstances are changed, but the experience is the same. Clavigo is another Weislingen, and was meant to be so: "I have written a tragedy," Goethe writes to Schönborn, "*Clavigo*, a modern anecdote, dramatised with the greatest simplicity and heartfelt truth. My hero is an irresolute, half-great, half-little man, the pendant to Weislingen, or rather Weislingen himself as the chief person." He has well portrayed the weak ambitious nature of one who hopes to rise still higher in the world, but feels his career obstructed by a passion which made him happy in the obscure days of penniless youth. The popular author and court favourite aspires to some woman of rank; an aspiration in which he is encouraged by his friend Carlos, who mockingly strips off the garlands with which the poet's imagination had decked his mistress.

Marie is a weak, sensitive creature, without much individuality, and is perhaps the poorest sketch Goethe has given of a woman. There is, however, one little touch which shows the poet; it is a sentence which escapes Marie, when Clavigo returns repentant to her feet, appealing to her affection: she throws herself on his neck, exclaiming, "Ah, sister, whence knows he that I love him so—*woher weiss er dass ich ihn so liebe!*"

Marie is overjoyed at Clavigo's return, but her joy is brief. The demon of ambition, aided by the cold sarcasms of Carlos (in whom we see the germ of Mephistopheles), once more troubles Clavigo, and turns him from a marriage so ill suited to his hopes. Carlos bitterly, but truly, says to him, "There is nothing in the world so pitiable as an undecided man, who wavers between two feelings, hoping to reconcile them." He suggests that Beaumarchais should be assassinated. "He who orders the assassination of the brother, pantomimically intimates that he will have nothing to do with the sister," adds Carlos, quite in the Mephistophelic tone. They determine on a contemptible plan. Beaumarchais is to be imprisoned for having insulted and threatened Clavigo under his own roof to him. The order for arrest arrives, and Marie dies broken-hearted at the treachery of her lover.

Sophie Lavaters.

Up to this point—short at least of the death of Marie—Beaumarchais' *Mémoire* has been faithfully followed; a fifth act is added, with a dénouement to fit it for the stage.

Powerful as this scene is in theatrical effect, one cannot but admit that æsthetically it is poor and almost commonplace. The clumsiness by which the meeting is contrived has been noticed by Rosenkranz.[1] Clavigo is seeking Carlos; he orders the servant who lights the way, *not* to pass through the street where the Beaumarchais family resides, yet the servant actually leads him there because it is the shorter route. The whole tone of this fifth act is not in harmony with what precedes. The act is *grafted on*—it does not *grow out of*—the subject.

As a stage play the interest is great: the situations are effective; the dramatic collision perfect; the plot is clearly and rapidly evolved; the language vigorous, passionate, and pointed. But it must not be tried by any high standard. Merck, anxious about his friend's reputation, would not consent to judge the play according to the theatre-standard, but exclaimed, "Such trash as this you must not write again; others can do that!" Goethe says, that in this Merck was wrong, and for the first time did him an injury. "We should not in all things transcend the notions which men have already formed; it is right that much should be done in accordance with the common way of thinking. Had I written a dozen such pieces (and it would have been easy to do so with a little stimulus), three or four of them would perhaps have kept their place upon the stage."

This can scarcely be accepted as conclusive reasoning. Merck might have replied, "Perhaps so; but you have genius fit for higher things than stage plays." Nevertheless, as before hinted, I think Goethe was right in his course, although the reasons he alleges are unsatisfactory. *Clavigo*, like the other trifles he composed at this period, must be regarded as the sketches with which an artist fills his portfolio, not the works which are to brighten galleries. The impulse to create was imperious; if trifles were demanded, he created trifles. His immense activity was forced to expend itself on minor works, because he dimly felt himself unripe for greater works.

He was beginning to feel himself a man of consequence; the notable men of the day eagerly sought his acquaintance. Among these men we must note Klopstock, Lavater, Basedow,

[1] So he says: but ... ballad, *Das Lied vom Herren und d... Seine Werke*, p. 185.