as strong as that) in the same class with the letter which contained this proof of my friendship, I hereby declare you unworthy of that friendship. Stolberg shall not come, if he listens to me, or rather if he listens to his own conscience."

The breach thus made was never repaired. Stolberg did not come to Weimar; and Klopstock wrote no more.

To return: whatever basis there may have been for the reports which Gossip magnified, certain it is that the duke did not forget the cares of state in these wild orgies. Both he and his friend were very active, and very serious. If Weimar, according to the historian of Germany,[1] stands as an illustrious exception among the German courts, it was because Karl August, upheld by his friend, knew how to carry into earnest practice the axiom of Frederick the Great: "A king is but the first of subjects." Goethe's beneficent activity is seen less in such anecdotes as those often cited of his opening a subscription for Bürger to enable him to complete his translation of *Homer*, and of his relieving Jung Stilling from distress, than in the constant and *democratic* sympathy with which he directed the duke's endeavours.

That he had not the grave deportment of a councillor is very evident. Imagine him as in this anecdote related by Gleim: "Soon after Goethe had written *Werther* I came to Weimar, and wished to know him. I had brought with me the last *Musen Almanack*, a literary novelty, and read here and there a poem to the company in which I passed the evening. While I was reading, a young man, booted and spurred, in a short green shooting-jacket thrown open, came in and mingled with the audience. I had scarcely remarked his entrance. He sat down opposite to me and listened attentively. I scarcely knew what there was about him that particularly struck me, except a pair of brilliant black Italian eyes. But it was decreed that I should know more of him.

"During a short pause, in which some gentlemen and ladies were discussing the merits of the pieces I had read, lauding some and censuring others, the gallant young sportsman (for such I took him to be) arose from his chair, and bowing with a most courteous and ingratiating air to me, offered to relieve me from time to time in reading, lest I should be tired. I could do no less than accept so polite an offer, and immediately handed him the book. But oh! Apollo and all ye

[1] MENZEL, ccxli.

Muses—not forgetting the Graces—what was I then to hear? At first, indeed, things went on smoothly enough:

Die Zephyr'n lauschten,
Die Bäche rauschten,
Die Sonne
Verbreitet ihr Licht mit Wonne—

the somewhat more solid, substantial fare of Voss, Stolberg, and Bürger was delivered in such a manner that no one had any reason to complain.

"All at once, however, it was as if some wild and wanton devil had taken possession of the young reader, and I thought I saw the Wild Huntsman bodily before me. He read poems that had no existence in the *Almanach;* broke out into all possible modes and dialects. Hexameters, Iambics, doggerel verses one after another, or blended in strange confusion, came tumbling out in torrents. What wild and humorous fancies did he not combine that evening! Amidst them came such noble, magnificent thoughts, thrown in detached and flitting, that the authors to whom he ascribed them must have thanked God on their knees if they had fallen upon their desks.

"As soon as the joke was discovered, universal merriment spread through the room. He put everybody present out of countenance in one way or the other. Even my Mæcenasship, which I had always regarded it as a sort of duty to exercise towards young authors, poets, and artists, had its turn. Though he praised it highly on the one side, he did not forget to insinuate on the other that I claimed a sort of property in the individuals to whom I afforded support and countenance. In a little fable composed extempore in doggerel verses, he likened me wittily enough to a worthy and most enduring turkey hen, that sits on a great heap of eggs of her own and other people's, and hatches them with infinite patience; but to whom it sometimes happens to have a chalk egg put under her instead of a real one: a trick at which she takes no offence.

"'That is either Goethe or the Devil!" cried I to Wieland, who sat opposite me. 'Both,' he replied."

It is worth bearing in mind *what* the young Goethe was, that we may the better understand the reason of what he became. No sooner had he commenced his career as politician, than he began to tone down the extravagance of his demeanour;

without foregoing any enjoyments, he tried to accord more with those in whom a staid demeanour was necessitated by their more flagging pulses of lethargic life. One month after his appointment Wieland writes of him: "Goethe did in truth, during the first months of his visit here, scandalise most people (never me); but from the moment that he decided on becoming a man of business, he has conducted himself with blameless σωφροσυνη and all worldly prudence." Elsewhere he says: "Goethe, with all his real and apparent *sauvagerie*, has, in his little finger, more *conduite* and *savoir faire* than all the court parasites, Boniface sneaks, and political cobweb-spinners have in their whole bodies and souls. So long as Karl August lives no power can remove him."

As we familiarise ourselves with the details of this episode, there appears less and less plausibility in the often iterated declamation against Goethe on the charge of his having "sacrificed his genius to the court." It becomes indeed a singularly foolish display of rhetoric. Let us for a moment consider the charge. He had to choose a career. That of poet was then, as it is still, terribly delusive; verse could create fame, but no money: *fama* and *fames* were then, as now, in terrible contiguity. No sooner is the necessity for a career admitted than much objection falls to the ground; for those who reproach him with having wasted his time on court festivities, and the duties of government which others could have done as well, must ask whether he would have *saved* that time had he followed the career of jurisprudence and jostled lawyers through the courts at Frankfurt? or would they prefer seeing him reduced to the condition of poor Schiller, wasting so much of his precious life in literary "hackwork," translating French books for a miserable pittance? *Time*, in any case, would have been claimed; in return for that given to Karl August, he received, as he confesses in the poem addressed to the duke, "what the great seldom bestow—affection, leisure, confidence, garden and house. No one have I had to thank but him; and much have I wanted, who, as a poet, ill-understood the arts of gain. If Europe praised me, what has Europe done for me? Nothing. Even my works have been an expense to me."

In 1801, writing to his mother on the complaints uttered against him by those who judged falsely of his condition, he says they only saw what he gave up, not what he gained—they

could not comprehend how he grew daily richer, though he daily gave up so much. He confesses that the narrow circle of a burgher life would have ill-accorded with his ardent and wide-sweeping spirit. Had he remained at Frankfurt, he would have been ignorant of the world. But here the panorama of life was unrolled before him, and his experience was every-way enlarged. Did not Leonardo da Vinci spend much of his time charming the court of Milan with his poetry and lute-playing? did he not also spend time in mechanical and hydro-statical labours for the state? No reproach is lifted against his august name; no one cries out against *his* being false to his genius; no one rebukes him for having painted so little at one period. The "Last Supper" speaks for him. Will not *Tasso*, *Iphigenia*, *Hermann und Dorothea*, *Faust*, *Meister*, and the long list of Goethe's works, speak for *him?*

I have dwelt mainly on the dissipation of his *time*, because the notion that a court life affected his genius by "corrupting his mind" is preposterous. No reader of this biography, it is to be hoped, will fail to see the true relations in which he stood to the duke; how free they were from anything like servility, or suppression of genuine impulse. Indeed one of the complaints against him, according to the unexceptionable authority of Riemer, was that made by the subalterns, "of his not being sufficiently attentive to court etiquette." To say, as Niebuhr says, that the "court was a Dalilah to which he sacrificed his locks," is profoundly to misunderstand his genius, profoundly to misread his life. Had his genius been of that stormy kind which produces great Reformers and great Martyrs,—had it been his mission to agitate mankind by words which, reverberating to their inmost recesses, called them to lay down their lives in the service of an Idea,—had it been his tendency to meditate upon the far-off destinies of man, and sway men by the coercion of grand representative abstractions —then, indeed, we might say his place was aloof from the motley throng, and not in sailing down the swiftly-flowing stream to sounds of mirth and music on the banks. But he was not a Reformer, not a Martyr. He was a Poet, whose religion was Beauty, whose worship was of Nature, whose aim was Culture. His mission was to paint Life, and for that it was requisite he should see it. Happier circumstances might indeed have surrounded him, and given him a greater sphere. It would have been very different, as he often felt, if there had been a Nation to appeal to, instead of a heterogeneous mass of

small peoples, willing enough to talk of Fatherland, but in nowise prepared to *become* a Nation. There are many other *ifs* in which much virtue could be found; but inasmuch as he could not create circumstances, we must follow his example, and be content with what the gods provided. I do not, I confess, see what other sphere was open to him in which his genius could have been more sacred; but I do see that he built out of circumstances a noble Temple in which the altar-flame burnt with a steady light. To hypothetical biographers be left the task of settling what Goethe *might have been;* enough for us to catch some glimpse of what he was.

"Poetry," says Carlyle, "is the attempt which man makes to render his existence harmonious." It is the flower into which a life expands; but it is not the life itself, with all daily needs, daily struggles, daily prosaisms. The true poet manfully accepts the condition in which destiny has placed him, and therein tries to make his existence harmonious; the sham poet, like a weak workman, fretful over his tools, is loud in his assurances of what he *might* be, were it his lot to live in other circumstances. Goethe was led by the current of events to a little court, where he was arrested by friendship, love, leisure, and opportunities of a freer, nobler life than Frankfurt Law Courts offered him. After much deliberation he chose his career: these pages will show how in it he contrived to be *true* to his genius.

It is scarcely worth while to notice trash about his servility and court slavery. He was not required to be servile; and his nature was as proud as any prince's. "They call me a prince's servant," he said to Eckermann, "and a prince's slave; as if there were any meaning in such words! Whom do I serve? A tyrant—a despot? Do I serve one who lives for his own pleasures at the people's cost? Such princes and such times are, thank God! far enough from us. For more than half a century I have been connected in the closest relations with the grand-duke, and for half a century have striven and toiled with him; but I should not be speaking truth were I to say that I could name a single day on which the duke had not his thoughts busied with something to be devised and effected for the good of the country; something calculated to better the condition of each individual in it. As for himself, personally, what has his princely state given him but a burden and a task? Is his dwelling, or his dress, or his table more sumptuously provided than that of any private man in easy

circumstances? Go into our maritime cities, and you will find the larder and cellar of every considerable merchant better filled than his. If, then, I am a prince's slave, it is at least my consolation that I am but the slave of one who is himself a slave of the general good."

And to close this subject, read the following passage from Merck's letter to Nicolai—(the Merck who is said by Falk to have spoken so bitterly of the waste of Goethe's life at Weimar): "I have lately paid Goethe a visit at the Wartburg, and we have lived together for ten days like children. I am delighted to have seen with my own eyes what his situation is. The duke is the best of all, and has a character firm as iron: *I would do, for love of him, just what Goethe does.* . . . I tell you sincerely that the duke is most worthy of respect, and one of the cleverest men that I have ever seen,—and consider that he is a prince, and only twenty years of age!" The long and friendly correspondence Merck kept up with the duke is the best pledge that the foregoing estimate was sincere.

CHAPTER IV

THE FRAU VON STEIN

From out the many flirtations that amused him, there rises one which grew into predominant importance, swallowing up all the others, and leaping from lambent flame into eager and passionate fire. It was no transitory flash, but a fire which burnt for ten years; and thereby is distinguished from all previous attachments. It is a silver thread woven among the many-coloured threads which formed the tapestry of his life. I will here detach it, to consider it by itself.

The Baroness von Stein, "Hofdame," and wife of the Master of the Horse, was, both by family and position, a considerable person. To us she is interesting, as having sprung from a Scotch family, named Irving, and as being the sister-in-law to that Baron Imhoff who sold his first wife to Warren Hastings. She was the mother of seven children, and had reached that age which, in fascinating women, is of perilous fascination—the age of three-and-thirty. We can understand something of her power if we look at her portrait, and imagine those delicate, coquettish features animated with the lures of

sensibility, gaiety, and experience of the world. She sang well, played well, sketched well, talked well, appreciated poetry, and handled sentiment with the delicate tact of a woman of the world. Her pretty fingers had turned over many a serious book; and she knew how to gather honey from weeds. With moral deficiencies, which this history will betray, she was to all acquaintances a perfectly *charming* woman; and retained her charm even in old age, as many living witnesses testify. Some years after her first acquaintance with Goethe, Schiller thus writes of her to his friend Körner: "She is really a genuine, interesting person, and I quite understand what has attached Goethe to her. Beautiful she can never have been; but her countenance has a soft earnestness, and a quite peculiar openness. A healthy understanding, truth, and feeling, lie in her nature. She has more than a thousand letters from Goethe; and from Italy he writes to her every week. They say the connection is perfectly pure and blameless."

It was at Pyrmont that Goethe first saw the Frau von Stein's portrait, and was three nights sleepless in consequence of Zimmermann's description of her. In sending her that flattering detail, Zimmermann added, "he will assuredly come to Weimar to see you." Under her portrait Goethe wrote, "What a glorious poem it would be to see how the world mirrors itself in this soul! She sees the world as it is, and yet withal sees it through the medium of love; hence sweetness is the dominant expression." In her reply to Zimmermann she begs to hear more about Goethe, and intimates her desire to see him. This calls forth a reply that she "has no idea of the danger of his magical presence." Such dangers pretty women gladly run into, especially when, like Charlotte von Stein, they are perfect mistresses of themselves.

With his heart still trembling from the agitations of victory over its desires, after he had torn himself away from Lili, he saw this charming woman. The earth continues warm long after the sun has glided below the horizon; and the heart continues warm some time after the departure of its sun. Goethe was therefore prepared to fall desperately in love with one who "viewed all things through the medium of love." And there is considerable interest in noting the *kind* of idol now selected. Hitherto he has been captivated only by very young girls, whose youth, beauty, and girlishness were the charms to his wandering fancy; but now he is fascinated by a *woman*, a woman of rank and elegance, a woman of culture

and experience, a woman who, instead of abandoning herself to the charm of his affection, knew how, without descending from her pedestal, to keep the flame alive. The others loved him,—showed him their love,—and were forgotten. She contrived to keep him in the pleasant fever of hope; made herself necessary to him; made her love an aim, and kept him in the excitement of one

"Who never is, but always to be blest."

Considering the state of society and opinion at that period, and considering moreover that, according to her son's narrative, her husband was scarcely seen in his own home more than once a week, and that no pretence of affection existed between them, we could understand how Goethe's notorious passion for her excited sympathy in Weimar. Not a word of blame escaped any one on this subject. They saw a lover whose mistress gave him just enough encouragement to keep him eager in pursuit, and who knew how to check him when that eagerness would press on too far. In his early letters to her there are sudden outbreaks and reserves; sometimes the affectionate *thou* escapes, and the next day, perhaps even in the next sentence, the prescribed *you* returns. The letters follow almost daily. So early as January 1776 this significant phrase escapes: "Adieu, angel! I shall never become more prudent; and have to thank God for it. Adieu! and yet it grieves me that I love thee so—and precisely thee!"

Here is an answer, apparently, to something she has written (for unhappily we have none of *her* letters: she had taken the precaution to demand her letters back from him, and burnt them, carefully preserving his):

"Wherefore must I plague thee! dearest creature! Wherefore deceive myself and plague thee! We can be nothing to each other, and yet are too much to each other. Believe me thou art in all things one with me—but because I see things as they are it makes me mad! Good night, angel, and good morning. I will see thee no more . . . Only . . . Thou knowest all . . . My heart is . . . All I can say is mere folly. In future I shall see thee as men see the stars." A few days after, he writes, "Adieu, dear sister, since it must be so."

I select the following as indicating the tone: "1*st May*. To-day I shall not see you. Your presence yesterday made so wonderful an impression on me, that I know not as yet

whether I am well or ill from it. Adieu, dearest lady." "1*st May. Evening.* Thou art right to make me a saint, that is to say, to remove me from thy heart. Holy as thou art, I cannot make *thee* a saint. To-morrow, therefore . . . Well, I will not see thee. Good night!" On the 24th of May, a passionate letter reveals that she had written or spoken to him in a decided tone about "appearances" and "the world": "So the purest, most beautiful, truest relation I ever had to a woman, except to my sister, *that* also must be disturbed! I was prepared for it; but I suffered infinitely on account of the past and the future, and of the poor child thus consecrated in sorrow. I will not see you; your presence would make me sad. If I am not to live with you, your love will help me no more than the love of those absent, in which I am so rich. *Presence*, in the moment of need, discerns, alleviates, and strengthens. The absent comes with the hose when the fire is extinguished—and all for the sake of the world! The world, which can be nothing to me, will not let thee be anything to me. You know not what you do . . . The hand of one in solitude who hears not the voice of love, presses hard where it rests. Adieu, best of women!" "25*th May.* You are always the same, always infinite love and goodness. Forgive me if I make you suffer. I will learn to bear my suffering alone." "2*nd June.* Adieu. Love me as ever, I will come seldomer and write seldomer." "4*th June.* Here, dear lady, is a tribute. I will see if I can keep my resolution not to come. You are not quite safe with me. Yesterday there were again some moments in which I truly felt how I love you." "6*th June.* So you could do me the unkindness of remaining away yesterday. Truly what you do must be right in my eyes!! But it made me sad." "7*th June.* You are a darling to have told me all! When one loves one should tell everything. Dearest angel, and I have again three words which will set you at rest, but only words from me to thee! I shall come to-day."

She was forced to quit Weimar for a while. "Dearest lady," he writes, "I dare not think you are going away on Tuesday, and that you will be away from me six months. For what avails all else? It is *presence* alone which influences, consoles, and edifies! even though it sometimes torments—torment is the sunshower of love."

Here is a curious passage: "Last night as I lay in bed half asleep, Philip brought me a letter; half stupefied, I read—

that Lili is betrothed !! I turn round and fall asleep. How I pray that fate may act so by me in the right moment. Dear angel, good night." One more extract. "Oh! you have a way of giving pain which is like that of destiny, which admits of no complaint, however it may grieve."

In a little while the tone grows more subdued. Just as the tone of his behaviour in Weimar, after the first wild weeks, became softened to a lower key, so in these letters we see, after a while, fewer passionate outbreaks, fewer interjections, and no more *thou's*. But love warms them still. The letters are incessant, and show an incessant preoccupation. Certain sentimental readers will be shocked, perhaps, to find so many details about eating and drinking; but when they remember Charlotte cutting bread and butter, they may understand the author of *Werther* eloquently begging his beloved to send him a sausage.

The visitor may still read the inscription, at once homage and souvenir, by which Goethe connected the happy hours of love with the happy hours of active solitude passed in his Garden-house in the Park. Fitly is the place dedicated to the Frau von Stein. The whole spot speaks of her. Here are the flower-beds from which almost every morning flowers, with the dew still on them, accompanied letters, not less fresh and beautiful, to greet the beloved. Here are the beds from which came the asparagus he was so proud to send her. Here is the orchard in which grew the fruit he so often sent. Here is the room in which he dreamt of her; here the room in which he worked, while her image hovered round him. The house stands within twenty minutes' walk from the house where she lived, separated by clusters of noble trees.

If the reader turns back to the description of the Park, he will ascertain the position of this Gartenhaus. Originally it belonged to Bertuch. One day, when the duke was earnestly pressing Goethe to take up his residence at Weimar, the poet (who then lived in the Jägerhaus in the Belvidere Allée), undecided as to whether he should go or remain, let fall, among other excuses, the want of a quiet bit of land, where his taste for gardening could be indulged. "Bertuch, for example, is very comfortable; if I had but such a piece of ground as that!" Hereupon the duke, very characteristically, goes to Bertuch, and without periphrasis, says, "I must have your garden." Bertuch starts: "But, your highness—" "But me no buts," replies the young prince; "I can't help you.

Goethe wants it, and unless we give it to him we shall never keep him here; it is the only way to secure him." This reason would probably not have been so cogent with Bertuch, had not the duke excused the despotism of his act by giving in exchange more than the value of the garden. It was at first only lent to Goethe; but in 1780 it was made a formal gift.

It is charmingly situated, and, although of modest pretensions, is one of the most enviable houses in Weimar. The Ilm runs through the meadows which front it. The town, although so near, is completely shut out from view by the thick-growing trees. The solitude is absolute, broken only by the occasional sound of the church clock, the music from the barracks, and the screaming of the peacocks spreading their superb beauty in the park. So fond was Goethe of this house, that winter and summer he lived there for seven years; and when, in 1782, the duke made him a present of the house in the *Frauenplan*, he could not prevail upon himself to sell the Gartenhaus, but continued to make it a favourite retreat. Often when he chose to be alone and undisturbed, he locked all the gates of the bridges which led from the town to his house, so that, as Wieland complained, no one could get at him except by aid of picklock and crowbar.

It was here, in this little garden, he studied the development of plants, and made many of those experiments and observations which have given him a high rank among the discoverers in Science. It was here the poet escaped from courts. It was here the lover was happy in his love. How modest this Garden-house really is; how far removed from anything like one's preconceptions of it! It is true, that the position is one which many a rich townsman in England would be glad of, as the site for a handsome villa: a pretty orchard and garden on a gentle slope; in front, a good carriage road, running beside a fine meadow, encircled by the stately trees of the park. But the house, a half-pay captain with us would consider a miserable cottage; yet it sufficed for the court favourite and minister. Here the duke was constantly with him; sitting up, till deep in the night, in earnest discussion; often sleeping on the sofa instead of going home. Here both duke and duchess would come and dine with him, in the most simple, unpretending way; the whole banquet in one instance consisting, as we learn from a casual phrase in the Stein correspondence, of "a beer soup and a little cold meat."[1]

[1] Compare also the *Briefwechsel zwischen Karl August und Goethe*, i. 27.

There is something very pleasant in noticing these traits of the simplicity which was then practised. The duke's own hut—the *Borkenhaus*—has already been described (page 200). The hut, for it was nothing else, in which Goethe lived in the Ilmenau mountains, and the more than bourgeois simplicity of the Garden-house, make us aware of one thing among others, namely, that if he sacrificed his genius to a court, it assuredly was not for loaves and fishes, not for luxury and material splendour of any kind. Indeed, such things had no temptation to a man of his simple tastes. "Rich in money," he writes to his beloved, "I shall never become; but, therefore, all the richer in Confidence, Good Name, and Influence over the minds of men."

It was his love of Nature which made him so indifferent to luxury. That love gave him simplicity and hardihood. In many things he was unlike his nation: notably in his voluntary exposure to two bright, wholesome things, which to his contemporaries were little less than bugbears—I mean, fresh air and cold water. The nation which consented to live in the atmosphere of iron stoves, tobacco, and bad breath, and which deemed a pint of water all that man could desire for his ablutions, must have been greatly perplexed at seeing Goethe indulge in fresh air and cold water as enjoyingly as if they were vices.

Two anecdotes will bring this contrast into relief. So great was the German reluctance to even a necessary exposure to the inclemencies of open-air exercise, that historians inform us "a great proportion, especially among the learned classes, employed a miserable substitute for exercise in the shape of a machine, by means of which they comfortably took their dose of movement without leaving their rooms."[1] And Jacobs, in his *Personalien*, records a fact which, while explaining how the above-named absurdity could have gained ground, paints a sad picture of the life of German youth in those days. Describing his boyish days at Gotha, he says: "Our winter pleasures were confined to a not very spacious courtyard, exchanged in summer for a little garden within the walls, which my father hired. *We took no walks. Only once a year, when the harvest was ripe, our parents took us out to spend an evening in the fields.*"[2] So little had Goethe of this prejudice against fresh

[1] BIEDERMANN: *Deutschland's Politische Materielle und Sociale Zustände*, i. p. 343.

[2] Quoted by Mrs. AUSTIN: *Germany from* 1760 *to* 1814, p. 85.

air, that when he began the rebuilding of his Gartenhaus, instead of sleeping at an hotel or at the house of a friend, he lived there through all the building period; and we find him writing, "At last I have a window once more, and can make a fire." On the 3rd of May he writes: "Good morning: here is asparagus. How were you yesterday? Philip baked me a cake; and thereupon, wrapped up in my blue cloak, I laid myself on a dry corner of the terrace and slept amid thunder, lightning, and rain, so gloriously that my bed was afterwards quite disagreeable." On the 19th he writes: "Thanks for the breakfast. I send you something in return. Last night I slept on the terrace, wrapped in my blue cloak, awoke three times, at 12, 2, and 4, and *each time there was a new splendour in the heavens.*" There are other traces of this tendency to bivouac, but these will suffice. He bathed, not only in the morning sunlight, but also in the Ilm, when the moonlight shimmered on it. Always in the free air seeking vigour—

"Tauche mich in die Sonne früh
Bad' ab im Monde des Tages Müh'."

The duke shared this love of bathing, which December's cold could not arrest. It was here Goethe learned to swim by the aid of "corks" (which so often served him as an illustration), and no inclemency of the weather could keep him out of the water. The fascination of water luring into its treacherous depths, is wonderfully expressed by him in that ballad, which every one knows, and almost every one tries to translate. I have tried my hand in this version:

THE FISHERMAN.

The water rushed, the water swelled:
A fisherman sat by,
And gazed upon his dancing float
With tranquil-dreaming eye.
And as he sits, and as he looks,
The gurgling waves arise:
A maid, all bright with water-drops,
Stands straight before his eyes.

She sang to him, she spake to him:
"My fish why dost thou snare
With human wit and human guile
Into the killing air?
Couldst see how happy fishes live
Under the stream so clear,
Thyself would plunge into the stream,
And live for ever there.

"Bathe not the lovely sun and moon
Within the cool deep sea,
And with wave-breathing faces rise
In two-fold witchery?
Lure not the misty heaven-deeps
So beautiful and blue?
Lures not thine image, mirrored in
The fresh eternal dew?"

The water rushed, the water swelled,
It clasped his feet, I wis;
A thrill went through his yearning heart
As when two lovers kiss!
She spake to him, she sang to him:
Resistless was her strain;
Half drew him in, half lured him in;
He ne'er was seen again.

One night, while the moon was calmly shining on our poetical bather, a peasant, returning home, was in the act of climbing over the bars of the floating bridge; Goethe espied him, and moved by that spirit of devilry which so often startled Weimar, he gave utterance to wild sepulchral tones, raised himself half out of the water, ducked under, and reappeared howling, to the horror of the aghast peasant, who, hearing such sounds issue from a figure with long floating hair, fled as if a legion of devils were at hand. To this day there remains an ineradicable belief in the existence of the water-sprite who howls among the waters of the Ilm.

CHAPTER V

PRIVATE THEATRICALS

"Let my present life," writes Goethe to Lavater, January 1777, "continue as long as it will, at any rate I have heartily enjoyed a genuine experience of the variegated throng and press of the world—Sorrow, Hope, Love, Work, Wants, Adventure, Ennui, Impatience, Folly, Joy, the Expected and the Unknown, the Superficial and the Profound—just as the dice threw—with fêtes, dances, sledgings—adorned in silk and spangles—a marvellous *ménage!* And withal, dear brother, God be praised, in myself and in my real aims in life I am quite happy."

"Goethe plays indeed a high game at Weimar," writes Merck, "but lives at court after his own fashion. The duke

is an excellent man, let them say what they will, and in Goethe's company will become still more so. What you hear is court scandal and lies. It is true the intimacy between master and servant is very great, but what harm is there in that? *Were Goethe a nobleman it would be thought quite right.* He is the soul and direction of everything, and all are contented with him, because he serves many and injures no one. Who can withstand the disinterestedness of this man?"

He had begun to make his presence felt in the serious department of affairs; not only in educating the duke who had chosen him as his friend, but also in practical ameliorations. He had induced the duke to call Herder to Weimar, as *Hof Prediger* (court chaplain) and *General-superintendent;* whereat Weimar grumbled, and gossiped, setting afloat stories of Herder having mounted the pulpit in boots and spurs. Not content with these efforts in a higher circle, Goethe sought to improve the condition of the people; and among his plans we note one for the opening of the Ilmenau mines, which for many years had been left untouched.

Amusement went hand in hand with business. Among the varied amusements, one, which greatly occupied his time and fancy, deserves a more special notice, because it will give us a glimpse of the court, and will also show us how the poet turned sport into profit. I allude to the private theatricals which were started shortly after his arrival. It should be premised that the theatre was still in ashes from the fire of 1774.[1] Seyler had carried his troupe of players elsewhere; and Weimar was without its stage. Just at this period private theatricals were even more "the rage" than they are in England at present. In Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt, Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Fulda, were celebrated amateur troupes. In Würtzburg, for a long while, a *noble* company put on sock and buskin; in Eisenach, prince and court joined in the sport. Even the Universities, which in earlier times had, from religious scruples, denounced the drama, now forgot their antagonism, and in Vienna, Halle, Göttingen, and Jena, allowed the students to have private stages.

The Weimar theatre surpassed them all. It had its poets, its composers, its scene painters, its costumiers. Whoever showed any talent for recitation, singing, or dancing, was pressed into service, and had to work as hard as if his bread

[1] On the state of the theatre before Goethe's arrival and subsequently, see PASQUÉ: *Goethe's Theaterleitung in Weimar*, 1863.

depended on it. The almost daily rehearsals of drama, opera, or ballet, occupied and delighted men and women glad to have something to do. The troupe was distinguished: the Duchess Amalia, Karl August, Prince Constantine, Bode, Knebel, Einsiedel, Musæus, Seckendorf, Bertuch, and Goethe; with Corona Schröter, Kotzebue's sister Amalia, and Fräulein Göchhausen. These formed a curious strolling company, wandering from Weimar to all the palaces in the neighbourhood—Ettersburg, Tiefurt, Belvedere, even to Jena, Dornburg, and Ilmenau. Often did Bertuch, as Falk tells us, receive orders to have the sumpter waggon, or travelling kitchen, ready for the early dawn, when the court would start with its wandering troupe. If only a short expedition was intended, three sumpter asses were sufficient. If it was more distant, over hill and dale, far into the distant country, then indeed the night before was a busy one, and all the ducal pots and pans were in requisition. Such boiling and stewing and roasting! such slaughter of capons, pigeons, and fowls! The ponds of the Ilm were dragged for fish: the woods were robbed of their partridges; the cellars were lightened of their wines. With early dawn rode forth the merry party, full of anticipation, wild with animal spirits. On they went through solitudes, the grand old trees of which were wont only to see the soaring hawk poised above their tops, or the wild-eyed deer bounding past the hut of the charcoal burner. On they went: youth, beauty, gladness, and hope, a goodly train, like that which animated the forest of Ardennes, when "under the shade of melancholy boughs" the pensive duke and his followers forgot awhile their cares and "painted pomps."

Their stage was soon arranged. At Ettersburg the traces are still visible of this forest stage, where, when weather permitted, the performances took place. A wing of the chateau was also made into a theatre. But the open-air performances were most relished. To rehearsals and performances in Ettersburg the actors, sometimes as many as twenty, were brought in the duke's equipages; and in the evening, after a joyous supper often enlivened with songs, they were conducted home by the duke's body-guard of hussars bearing torches. It was here they performed Einsiedel's opera, *The Gypsies*, with wonderful illusion. Several scenes of *Götz von Berlichingen* were woven into it. The illuminated trees, the crowd of gypsies in the wood, the dances and songs under the blue starlit heavens, while the sylvan bugle sounded from afar, made up a picture,

the magic of which was never forgotten. On the Ilm also, at Tiefurt, just where the river makes a beautiful bend round the shore, a regular theatre was constructed. Trees, and other poetical objects, such as fishermen, nixies, water-spirits, moons, and stars,—all were introduced with effect.

The performances were of the same varied nature as the theatres. Sometimes French comedies, sometimes serious works of art, often broad extravaganzas. Occasionally they played charades, in which the plan was pre-arranged, but the dialogue left to the improvisation of the actors. Once when an actor grew wordy and wandering, they rushed on the stage, carried him off by force, and informed the audience (as if it were part of the piece) that he was suddenly taken ill. The records of that time have preserved for us the outline of a magical piece, got up in honour of Goethe's birthday—*Minerva's Birth, Life, and Deeds.* It was a magnificent magic-lantern piece, with music by Seckendorf. The characters were not represented by puppets, but by gentlemen and ladies, in the so-called *Petit Colisée* at Tiefurt. On the site of this new temple of the Muses stood formerly a solitary wood hut. In the representation every appliance was sought after which external effect demanded. It took place behind a large white curtain, *en silhoutte.* In the *Histoire universelle des Théâtres* there is only one example of a theatrical representation of this kind, namely, the drama which Chiron presented to his pupil, Achilles, and which had the same object and significance as the Tiefurt drama. In antiquity such representations were called *umbræ palpitantes*, by moderns, *ombres chinoises.* They were introduced at the Weimar court about this time, by the Duke George of Saxe-Meiningen, and were very much in favour there.

The subject of this Tiefurt piece is remarkable: Jupiter (in the person of the painter Kraus, on whose shoulders was placed a colossal paste-board head), in order to frustrate the prophecy that on the *accouchement* of his wife Metis, he would be thrust from the throne, has devoured Metis. Thereupon he suffers terrible pains in the head; Ganymede, hovering behind him on a great eagle, offers him the cup of nectar: the pains of the Thunderer increase visibly, and Ganymede soars into the air to fetch Æsculapius and Vulcan. Æsculapius seeks in vain to cure his master. A Cyclops, who is summoned, bleeds him at the nose, without effect. Then comes the powerful Vulcan (represented by the young Duke

Karl August), who, holding in one hand his hammer, in the other a great iron bar, and encircled by an apron, approaches his suffering father, and with one good stroke of the hammer splits his divine skull, out of which proceeds Minerva, the goddess of wisdom (represented by Corona Schröter), at first quite a small figure, but by means of appropriate machinery becoming larger and larger every moment, till at last the whole of her tall slim form is revealed, enveloped in light gauze. She is received by Father Zeus in the most friendly manner; and rich gifts are presented to her by all the gods. She is furnished with a helmet, an ægis, and a lance; Ganymede places Jupiter's owl at her feet, and amidst music and choral singing the curtain falls.

In the third and last act, the poet departed from the materials of the myth. He made the new-born goddess read in the Book of Fate, and find there the *28th of August*[1] marked as one of the most fortunate days. She says that "on that day three-and-thirty years ago a man was given to the world, who will be honoured as one of the best and wisest." Then appears a winged genius in the clouds, bearing Goethe's name. Minerva crowns this name, and at the same time dedicates to it the divine gifts which have been immemorially the tokens of her favour; for example, the golden lyre of Apollo, and the flowery wreath of the Muses. The whip of Momus alone, on the thong of which stood the word "Aves," is laid aside and rejected by the goddess; while the names Iphigenia and Faust appear in the clouds in fire transparencies. At the close, Momus advances unabashed, and brings the reputed symbol of his art as a present to Goethe.

Such was the opening and dedication of the new Weimar-Tiefurt Court Theatre. It is obvious that the piece was intended purely to celebrate the birthday of Goethe, the director of this social theatre; and gives us not a bad idea of the ingenuity and pains bestowed upon these amusements. The reader will not fail to notice that if Goethe prepared fêtes for the birthday of his duchess, Weimar also prepared fêtes for the birthday of its poet.

Another favourite magic-lantern piece was *King Midas*, which is mentioned in Amalia's letters to Knebel in the year 1781. But the best known of the Tiefurt dramas is Goethe's Operetta *Die Fischerin*, performed in the summer of 1782. The

[1] Goethe's birthday.

charming text, beginning with the famous Erl-König, is preserved in Goethe's works. The piece was represented in the Tiefurt Park, partly on the bank of the Ilm near the bridge, partly on the Ilm itself, which was illuminated with numerous torches and lamps. Under lofty alders against the river were placed scattered huts of fishermen; nets, boats, and fishing implements stood around. On Dorten's (Corona Schröter) hearth fire was burning. At the moment in which the fishermen, who had been called together, lighted their strips of wood and torches, and spread themselves with their brilliant lights in boats and on the banks of the river, to search for the lost maiden, the light flashed suddenly up from the necks of land which stretched forward into the Ilm, illuminating the nearest objects, and showing their reflection in the water, while the more distant groups of trees and hills lay in deep night. The spectators had assembled in great numbers, and as they crowded on the wooden bridge, the better to catch the magical effect of the illumination on the water, their weight crushed the bridge in, and the eager gazers fell into the river. No one, however, was injured. The involuntary bathers were heartily laughed at, and the accident was regarded as an amusing interlude.

I find further that when a travesty of the *Birds* of Aristophanes was performed at Ettersburg, the actors were all dressed in real feathers, their heads completely covered, though free to move. Their wings flapped, their eyes rolled, and ornithology was absurdly parodied. It is right to add, that besides these extravagances and *ombres chinoises*, there were very serious dramatic efforts: among them we find Goethe's second dramatic attempt, *Die Mitschuldigen*, which was thus cast:—

Alceste	Goethe.
Söller	Bertuch.
Der Wirth	Musäus.
Sophie	Corona Schröter.

Another play was the *Geschwister*, written in three evenings, it is said, but without evidence, out of love for the sweet eyes of Amalia Kotzebue, sister of the dramatist, then a youth. Kotzebue thus touches the point in his *Memoirs*: "Goethe had at that time just written his charming piece, *Die Geschwister*. It was performed at a private theatre at Weimar, he himself playing William and my sister Marianne—while to me, yes to me—was allotted the important part of postilion! My

readers may imagine with what exultation I trod the stage for the first time before the mighty public itself." Another piece was Cumberland's *West Indian*, in which the duke played *Major O'Flaherty*, Eckhoff (the great actor) the Father, and Goethe *Belcour*, dressed in a white coat with silver lace, blue silk vest, and blue silk knee-breeches, in which they say he looked superb.

While mentioning these I must not pass over the *Iphigenia* (then in prose), which was thus cast:—

Orestes	Goethe.
Pylades	Prince Constantine.
Thoas	Knebel.
Arkas	Seidler.
Iphigenia	Corona Schröter.

"Never shall I forget," exclaims Dr. Hufeland, "the impression Goethe made as Orestes, in his Grecian costume; one might have fancied him Apollo. Never before had there been seen such union of physical and intellectual beauty in one man!" His acting, as far as I can learn, had the ordinary defects of amateur acting; it was impetuous and yet stiff, exaggerated and yet cold; and his fine sonorous voice displayed itself without nice reference to shades of meaning. In comic parts, on the other hand, he seems to have been excellent; the broader the fun, the more at home he felt; and one can imagine the rollicking animal spirits with which he animated the Marktschreier in the *Plundersweilern;* one can picture him in the extravagance of the *Geflichte Braut*,[1] giving vent to his sarcasm on the "sentimental" tone of the age, ridiculing his own *Werther*, and merciless to *Waldemar*.[2]

I have thus brought together, irrespective of dates, the scattered indications of these theatrical amusements. How much enjoyment was produced by them! what social pleasure! and what endless episodes, to which memory recurred in after times, when they were seated round the dinner table! Nor were these amusements profitless. *Wilhelm Meister* was designed and partly written about this period; and the reader, who knows Goethe's tendency to make all his works biographical, will not be surprised at the amount of theatrical experience which is mirrored in that work; nor at the earnestness which

1 Published, under a very mitigated form, as the *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*. See the next chapter for further notice of this piece.

2 Jacobi and Wieland were both seriously offended with his parodies of their writings; but both soon became reconciled to him.

is there made to lurk beneath amusement, so that what to the crowd seems no more than a flattery of their tastes, is to the man himself a process of the highest culture.

Boar-hunting in the light of early dawn, sitting in the middle of the day in grave diplomacy and active council, rehearsing during the afternoon, and enlivening the evening with grotesque serenades or torchlight sledgings—thus passed many of his days; not to mention flirtations, balls, masquerades, concerts, and verse-writing. The muse was, however, somewhat silent, though *Hans Sachs' poetische Sendung*, *Lila*, some charming lyrics, and the dramas and operas written for the occasion, forbid the accusation of idleness. He was storing up materials. *Faust*, *Egmont*, *Tasso*, *Iphigenia*, and *Meister* were germinating.

The muse was silent, but was the soul inactive? As these strange and variegated scenes passed before his eyes, was he a *mere* actor, and not also a spectator? Let his works answer. To some indeed it has seemed as if in thus lowering great faculties to the composition of slight operas and festive pieces, Goethe was faithless to his mission, false to his own genius. This is but a repetition of Merck's exclamation against *Clavigo*, and may be answered as that was answered. Herder thought that the Chosen One should devote himself to great works. This is the objection of a man of letters who can conceive no other aim than the writing of books. But Goethe needed to *live* as well as to write. Life is multiplied and rendered infinite by Feeling and Knowledge. He sought both to feel and to know. The great works he has written—works high in conception, austerely grand in execution, the fruits of earnest toil and lonely self-seclusion—ought to shield him *now* from any charge of wasting his time on frivolities, though to Herder and Merck such a point of view was denied.

It was his real artistic nature, and genuine poetic mobility, that made him scatter with a prodigal hand the trifles which distressed his friends. Poetry was the melodious voice breathing from his entire manhood, not a profession, not an act of duty. It was an impulse: the sounding chords of his poetic nature vibrated to every touch, grave and stately, sweet and impassioned, delicate and humorous. He wrote not for Fame. He wrote not for Pence. He wrote poetry because he had *lived* it; and sang as the bird sings on its bough. Open to every impression, touched to ravishment by beauty, he sang whatever at the moment filled him with delight—now trilling

a careless snatch of melody, now a simple ballad, now a majestic hymn ascending from the depths of his soul on incense-bearing rhythms, and now a grave quiet chaunt, slow with its rich burden of meanings. Men in whom the productive activity is great, cannot be restrained from throwing off trifles, as the plant throws off buds beside the expanded flowers. Michael Angelo carved the Moses, and painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, but did he not also lend his master-hand to the cutting of graceful cameos?

CHAPTER VI

MANY-COLOURED THREADS

HITHERTO our narrative of this Weimar period has moved mainly among generalities, for only by such means could a picture of this episode be painted. Now, as we advance further, it is necessary to separate the threads of his career from those of others with which it was interwoven.

It has already been noted, that he began to tire of the follies and extravagancies of the first months. In this year, 1777, he was quiet in his Garden-house, occupied with drawing, poetry, botany, and the one constant occupation of his heart—love for the Frau von Stein. Love and ambition were the guides which led him through the labyrinth of the court. Amid those motley scenes, amid those swiftly-succeeding pleasures, Voices, sorrowing Voices of the Past, made themselves audible above the din, and recalled the vast hopes which once had given energy to his aims; and these reverberations of an ambition once so cherished, arrested and rebuked him, like the deep murmurs of some solemn bass moving slowly through the showering caprices of a sportive melody. No soul can endure uninterrupted gaiety and excitement. Weary intervals will occur: the vulgar soul fills these intervals with the long lassitude of its ennui; the noble soul with reproaches at the previous waste of irrevocable hours.

The quiet influence exercised by the Frau von Stein is visible in every page of his letters. As far as I can divine the state of things in the absence of her letters, I fancy she coquetted with him; when he showed any disposition to

throw off her yoke, when his manner seemed to imply less warmth, she lured him back with tenderness; and vexed him with unexpected coldness when she had drawn him once more to her feet. "You reproach me," he writes, "with alternations in my love. It is not true; but it is well that I do not every day feel how utterly I love you." Again: "I cannot conceive why the main ingredients of your feeling have lately been Doubt and want of Belief. But it is certainly true that one who did not hold firm his affection might have that affection doubted away, just as a man may be persuaded that he is pale and ill." That she tormented him with these coquettish doubts is but too evident; and yet when he is away from her she writes to tell him he is become dearer! "Yes, my treasure!" he replies, "I believe you when you say your love increases for me during absence. When away, you love the idea you have formed of me; but when present, that idea is often disturbed by my folly and madness. . . . I love you better when present than when absent: hence I conclude my love is truer than yours." At times he seems himself to have doubted whether he really loved her, or only loved the delight of her presence.

With these doubts mingles another element, his ambition to do something which will make him worthy of her. In spite of his popularity, in spite of his genius, he has not subdued her heart, but only agitated it. He endeavours, by *devotion*, to succeed. Thus love and ambition play into each other's hands, and keep him in a seclusion which astonishes and pains several of those who could never have enough of his company.

In the June of this year his solitude was visited by one of the agitations he could least withstand—the death of his only sister, Cornelia. *Sorrows and dreams*, is the significant entry of the following day in his journal.

It was about this time that he undertook the care of Peter Imbaumgarten, a Swiss peasant boy, the protégé of his friend Baron Lindau. The death of the Baron left Peter once more without protection. Goethe, whose heart was open to all, especially to children, gladly undertook to continue the Baron's care; and as we have seen him sending home an Italian image-boy to his mother at Frankfurt, and *Wilhelm Meister* undertaking the care of *Mignon* and *Felix*, so does this "cold" Goethe add love to charity, and become a father to the fatherless.

The autumn tints were beginning to mingle their red and yellow with the dark and solemn firs of the Ilmenau mountains; Goethe and the duke could not long keep away from the loved spot, where poetical and practical schemes occupied the day, and many a wild prank startled the night. There they danced with peasant girls till early dawn; one result of which was a swelled face, forcing Goethe to lay up.

On his return to Weimar he was distressed by the receipt of one of the many letters which *Werther* drew upon him. He had made sentimentality poetical; it soon became a fashion. Many were the melancholy youths who poured forth their sorrows to him, demanding sympathy and consolation. Nothing could be more antipathetic to his clear and healthy nature. It made him ashamed of his *Werther*. It made him merciless to all Wertherism. To relieve himself of the annoyance, he commenced the satirical extravaganza of the *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*. Very significant, however, of the unalterable kindliness of his disposition is the fact, that although these sentimentalities had to him only a painful or a ludicrous aspect, he did not suffer his repugnance to the malady to destroy his sympathy for the patient. There is a proof of this in the episode he narrates of his Harz journey, made in November and December of this year,[1] known to most readers through his poem, *Die Harzreise in Winter*. The object of that journey was two-fold; to visit the Ilmenau mines, and to visit an unhappy misanthrope whose Wertherism had distressed him. He set out with the duke, who had arranged a hunting party to destroy "a great thing of a boar" then ravaging the country round Eisenach; but, although setting out with them, he left them, *en route*, for purposes of his own.

Through hail, frost, and mud, lonely, yet companioned by great thoughts, he rode along the mountainous solitudes, and reached at last the *Brocken*. A bright sun shone on its eternal snows as he mounted, and looked down upon the cloud-covered Germany beneath him. Here he felt the air of freedom swell his breast. The world with its conventions lay beneath him; the court with its distractions was afar; and the poet stood amidst these snowy solitudes communing with that majestic spirit of beauty which animates Nature. There,

> . . . "high above the misty air
> And turbulence of murmuring cities vast,"[2]

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[1] And *not* in 1776, as he says; that date is disproved by his letters to the Frau von Stein.

[2] Wordsworth.

he was lost in reveries of his future life:

Dem Geier gleich
Der auf schweren Morgenwolken,
Mit sanftem Fittig ruhend,
Nach Beute schaut,
Schwebe mein Lied.

This image of the hawk poised above the heavy morning clouds looking for his prey, is (I adopt his own explanation) that of the poet on the snowy heights looking down on the winter landscape, and with his mind's eye seeking amidst the perplexities of social life for some object worthy of his muse.

Writing to his beloved, he speaks of the good effect this journeying amid simple people (to whom he is only known as Herr Weber, a landscape painter) has upon his imagination. It is like a cold bath, he says. And *à propos* of his disguise, he remarks how very *easy* it is to be a rogue, and what advantages it gives one over simple honest men to assume a character that is not your own.

But now let us turn to the *second* object of his journey. The letter of the misanthrope just alluded to was signed Plessing, and dated from Wernigerode. There was something remarkable in the excess of its morbidity, accompanied by indications of real talent. Goethe did not answer it, having already hampered himself in various ways by responding to such extraneous demands upon his sympathy; another and more passionate letter came imploring an answer, which was still silently avoided. But now the idea of personally ascertaining what manner of man his correspondent was, made him swerve from his path; and under his assumed name he called on Plessing.

On hearing that his visitor came from Gotha, Plessing eagerly inquired whether he had not visited Weimar, and whether he knew the celebrated men who lived there. With perfect simplicity Goethe replied that he did, and began talking of Kraus, Bertuch, Musäus, Jagemann, &c., when he was impatiently interrupted with "But why don't you mention Goethe?" He answered that Goethe also had he seen; upon this he was called upon to give a description of that great poet, which he did in a quiet way, sufficient to have betrayed his incognito to more sagacious eyes.

Plessing then with great agitation informed him that Goethe had not answered a most pressing and passionate letter in which he, Plessing, had described the state of his mind, and

had implored direction and assistance. Goethe excused himself as he best could; but Plessing insisted on reading him the letters, that he might judge whether they deserved such treatment.

He listened, and tried by temperate sympathetic counsel to wean Plessing from his morbid thoughts by fixing them on external objects, especially by some active employment. These were impatiently rejected, and he left him, feeling that the case was almost beyond help.

He was subsequently able to assist Plessing, who, on visiting him at Weimar, discovered his old acquaintance, the landscape painter.[1] But the characteristic part of this anecdote—and that which makes me cite it here—is, the practical illustration it gives of his fundamental realism, which looked to nature and earnest activity as the sole cure for megrims, sentimentalisms, and self-torturings. Turn your mind to realities, and the self-made phantoms which darken your soul will disappear like night at the approach of dawn.

In the January of the following year (1778) Goethe was twice brought face to face with Death. The first was during a boar-hunt: his spear snapped in the onslaught, and he was in imminent peril, but fortunately escaped. On the following day, while he and the duke were skating (perhaps talking over yesterday's escape), there came a crowd over the ice, bearing the corpse of the unhappy Fräulein von Lassberg, who, in the despair of unrequited love, had drowned herself in the Ilm, close by the very spot where Goethe was wont to take his evening walk. At all times this would have been a shock to him, but the shock was greatly intensified by the fact that in the pocket of the unfortunate girl was found a copy of *Werther!*[2] It is true we never reproach an author in such cases. No reflecting man ever reproached Plato with the suicide of Cleombrotus, or Schiller with the brigandage of highwaymen. Yet when fatal consequences occur, the author,

[1] In 1788, Plessing was appointed professor of philosophy in the university of Duisburg, where Goethe visited him on his return home from the campaign in France, 1792. The reader may be interested to know, that Plessing entirely outlived his morbid melancholy, and gained a respectable name in German letters. His principal works are *Osiris und Socrates*, 1783; *Historische und Philosophische Untersuchungen über die Denkart Theologie und Philosophie der ältesten Völker*, 1785; and *Memnonium, oder Versuche zur Enthüllung der Geheimnisse des Alterthums*, 1787. He died 1806.

[2] Riemer, who will never admit anything that may seem to tell against his idol, endeavours to throw a doubt on this fact, saying it was reported only out of malice. But he gives no reasons.

whom we absolve, cannot so lightly absolve himself. It is in vain to argue that the work does not, rightly considered, lead to suicide; if it does so, *wrongly* considered, it is the proximate cause; and the author cannot easily shake off that weight of blame. Goethe, standing upon logic, might have said: "If Plato instigated the suicide of Cleombrotus, certainly he averted that of Olympiodorus; if I have been one of the many causes which moved this girl towards that fatal act, I have also certainly been the cause of saving others, notably that young Frenchman who wrote to thank me." He might have argued thus; but Conscience is tenderer than Logic; and if in firing at a wild beast I kill a brother hunter, my conscience will not leave me altogether in peace.

The body was borne to the house of the Frau von Stein, which stood nearest the spot, and there he remained with it the whole day, exerting himself to console the wretched parents. He himself had need of some consolation. The incident affected him deeply, and led him to speculate on all cognate subjects, especially on melancholy. "This inviting sadness," he beautifully says, "has a dangerous fascination, *like water itself, and we are charmed by the reflex of the stars of heaven which shines through both.*"

He was soon, however, "*forced* into theatrical levity" by the various rehearsals necessary for the piece to be performed on the birthday of the duchess. This was the *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit.* The adventure with Plessing, and finally the tragedy of the Fräulein von Lassberg had given increased force to his antagonism against Wertherism and Sentimentality, which he now lashed with unsparing ridicule. The hero of his extravaganza is a Prince, whose soul is only fit for moonlight ecstasies and sentimental rhapsodies. He adores Nature; not the rude, rough, imperfect Nature whose gigantic energy would alarm the sentimental mind; but the beautiful rose-pink Nature of books. He likes Nature as one sees it at the Opera. Rocks are picturesque, it is true; but they are often crowned with tiaras of snow, sparkling, but apt to make one "chilly"; turbulent winds howl through their clefts and crannies, alarming to delicate nerves. The Prince is not fond of the winds. Sunrise and early morn are lovely—but damp; and the Prince is liable to rheumatism.

To obviate all such inconveniences he has had a mechanical imitation of Nature executed for his use; and this accompanies him on his travels; so that at a moment's notice, in secure

defiance of rheumatism, he can enjoy a moonlight scene, a sunny landscape, or a sombre grove.

He is in love; but his mistress is as factitious as his landscapes. Woman is charming but capricious, fond but exacting; and therefore the Prince has a doll dressed in the same style as the woman he once loved. By the side of this doll he passes hours of rapture; for it he sighs; for it he rhapsodises.

The *real* woman appears—the original of that much treasured image. Is he enraptured? Not in the least. His heart does not palpitate in her presence; he does not recognise her; but throws himself once more into the arms of his doll, and thus sensibility triumphs.

There are five acts of this "exquisite fooling." Originally it was much coarser, and more personal than we now see it. Böttiger says that there remains scarcely a shadow of its flashing humour and satiric caprice. The whip of Aristophanes was applied with powerful wrist to every fashionable folly, in dress, literature, or morals, and the spectators saw themselves as in a mirror of sarcasm. At the conclusion, the doll was ripped open, and out fell a multitude of books, such as were then the rage, upon which severe and ludicrous judgments were passed—and the severest upon *Werther*. The whole piece was interspersed with ballets, music, and comical changes of scene; so that what now appears a tiresome farce, was then an irresistible extravaganza.

This extravaganza has the foolery of Aristophanes, and the physical fun of that riotous wit, whom Goethe was then studying. But when critics are in ecstasies with its wit and irony, I confess myself at a loss to conceive clearly what they mean. National wit, however, is perhaps scarcely amenable to criticism. What the German thinks exquisitely ludicrous, is to a Frenchman, or an Englishman, generally of mediocre mirthfulness. Wit requires delicate handling; the Germans generally touch it with gloved hands. Sarcasm is with them too often a sabre not a rapier, hacking the victim where a thrust would suffice. It is a noticeable fact that amid all the riches of their Literature they have little that is comic of a high order. They have produced no Comedy. To them may be applied the couplet wherein the great original of Grotesque Seriousness set forth its verdict:

> Κωμῳδοδιδασκαλίαν εἶναι χαλεπώτατον ἔργον ἁπάντων.
> Πολλῶν γὰρ δὴ πειρασάντων αὐτὴν ὀλίγοις χαρίσασθαι.[1]

[1] ARISTOPHANES: *Equites*, v. 516.

which I will venture to turn thus:

Miss Comedy is a sad flirt,—you may guess
From the number who court her, the few she doth bless.

CHAPTER VII

THE REAL PHILANTHROPIST

A STRANGE phantasmagoria is the life he leads at this epoch. His employments are manifold, yet his studies, his drawing, etching, and rehearsing are carried on as if they alone were the occupation of the day. His immense activity, and power of varied employment, scatter the energies which might be consecrated to some great work; but, in return, they give him the varied store of material of which he stood so much in need. At this time he is writing *Wilhelm Meister*, and *Egmont*; *Iphigenia* is also taking shape in his mind. His office gives him much to do; and Gervinus, who must have known how great were the calls upon his time, should have paused ere he threw out the insinuation of "diplomatic rudeness" when Goethe answered one of his brother-in-law's letters through his secretary. Surely with a brother-in-law one may take such latitude?[1]

This man, whose diplomatic coldness and aristocratic haughtiness have formed the theme of so many long tirades, was of all Germans the most sincerely democratic, until the Reign of Terror in France frightened him, as it did others, into more modified opinions. Not only was he always delighted to be with the people, and to share their homely ways, which were consonant with his own simple tastes, but we find him in the confidence of intimacy expressing his sympathy with the people in the heartiest terms. When among the miners he writes to his beloved, "how strong my love has returned upon me for these lower classes! which one calls the lower, but which in God's eyes are assuredly the highest! Here you meet all the virtues combined: Contentedness,

[1] Since the text was written, the correspondence with the Frau v. Stein has appeared; and from it we learn that in Switzerland he even dictated some letters to *her!* It could not have been "diplomatic rudeness," inasmuch as he usually wrote to the duke himself through his amanuensis.

Moderation, Truth, Straightforwardness, Joy in the slightest good, Harmlessness, Patience—Patience—Constancy in—— in . . . I will not lose myself in panegyric!" Again, he is writing *Iphigenia*, but the news of the misery and famine among the stocking-weavers of Apolda paralyses him. "The drama will not advance a step: it is cursed; the King of Tauris must speak as if no stocking-weaver in Apolda felt the pangs of hunger!"

In striking contrast stands the expression of his contempt for what was called the great world, as he watched it in his visits to the neighbouring courts. If affection bound him to Karl August, whom he was forming, and to Luise, for whom he had a chivalrous regard, his eyes were not blind to the nullity of other princes and their followers. "Good society have I seen," runs one of his epigrams, "they call it the 'good' whenever there is not in it the material for the smallest of poems."

Gute Gesellschaft hab' ich gesehen; man nennt sie die gute
Wenn sie zum kleinsten Gedicht keine Gelegenheit giebt.

Notably was this the case in his journey with the duke to Berlin, May 1778. He only remained a few days there; *saw* much, and not without contempt. "I have got quite close to old Fritz, having seen his way of life, his gold, his silver, his statues, his apes, his parrots, and heard his own curs twaddle about the great man." Potzdam and Berlin were noisy with preparations for war. The great king was absent; but Prince Henry received the poet in a friendly manner, and invited him and Karl August to dinner. At table there were several generals; but Goethe, who kept his eyes open, sternly kept his mouth closed. He seems to have felt no little contempt for the Prussian court, and its great men, who appeared very small men in his eyes. "I have spoken no word in the Prussian dominions which might not be made public. Therefore I am called haughty and so forth." Varnhagen intimates that the ill-will he excited by not visiting the literati, and by his reserve, was so great as to make him averse from hearing of his visit in after years.[1] What, indeed, as Varnhagen asks, had Goethe in common with Nicolai, Ramler, Engel, Zellner, and the rest? He did visit the poetess Karschin and the artist Chodowiecki; but from the rest he kept aloof. Berlin

[1] *Vermischte Schriften*, iii. p. 62.

was not a city in which he could feel himself at home; and he doubtless was fully aware of the small account in which he was held by Frederick, whose admiration lay in quite other directions. What culture the king had was French, and his opinion of German literature had been very explicitly pronounced in a work published this year, in which *Goetz von Berlichingen* was cited as a sample of the reigning bad taste. The passage is too curious to be omitted. "Vous y verrez représenter les abominables pièces de Shakspear traduites en notre langue, et tout l'auditoire se pâmer d'aise en entendant ces farces ridicules, et dignes *des sauvages de Canada*." That certainly was afflicting to "le bon goût"; but *that* was not the worst. Shakspeare might be pardoned for *his* faults, "car la naissance des arts n'est jamais le point de leur maturité. Mais voilà encore un Goetz de Berlichingen qui parait sur la scène, imitation détestable de ces mauvaises pièces anglaises, et le parterre applaudit et demande avec enthousiasme la répétition de *ces dégoûtantes platitudes!*"[1]

Thus the two German Emperors, Fritz and Wolfgang, held no spiritual congress; perhaps no good result *could* have been elicited by their meeting. Yet they were, each in his own sphere, the two most potent men then reigning. Fritz did not directly assist the literature of his country, but his *indirect* influence has been indicated by Griepenkerl.[2] He awoke the Germans from their sleep by the rolling of drums; those who least liked the clang of arms or the "divisions of a battlefield," were nevertheless awakened to the fact that something important was going on in life, and they rubbed their sleepy eyes, and tried to *see* a little into that. The roll of drums has this merit, at all events, that it draws men from their library table to the window, and so makes them look out upon the moving, living world of action, wherein the erudite may see a considerable sensation made even by men unable to conjugate a Greek verb in "$\mu\iota$."[3]

On returning to Weimar, Goethe occupied himself with various architectural studies, *à propos* of the rebuilding of the

[1] *De la Littérature Allemande*, p. 46. His opinion of the newly discovered Niebelungen Lied was no less characteristically contemptuous: he declared he would not give such rubbish house-room.

[2] *Der Kunstgenius der Deutschen Literatur des letzten Jahrhunderts*, i. p. 52.

[3] Dr. George has become famous (or *did* become so—for, alas! what is fame?) by his shrewd suspicion that Frederick with all his victories could not accomplish *that* feat of intellectual vigour. Many men still measure greatness by verbs in $\mu\iota$.

palace; and commenced those alterations in the Park, which resulted in the beautiful distribution formerly described. But I pass over many details of his activity to narrate an episode which must win the heart of every reader. In these pages it has been evident, I hope, that no compromise with the truth has led me to gloss over faults, or to conceal shortcomings. All that testimony warrants I have reproduced: good and evil, as in the mingled yarn of life. Faults and deficiencies, even grievous errors, do not estrange a friend from our hearts; why should they lower a hero? Why should the biographer fear to trust the tolerance of human sympathy? Why labour to prove a hero faultless? The reader is no *valet de chambre* incapable of crediting greatness in a *robe de chambre*. Never should we forget the profound saying of Hegel in answer to the vulgar aphorism ("No man is a hero to his valet de chambre"); namely, "This is not because the Hero is no Hero, but because the Valet is a Valet."[1] Having trusted to the effect which the true man would produce, in spite of all drawbacks,—and certain that the true man was *lovable* as well as admirable, I have made no direct appeal to the reader's sympathy, nor tried to make out a case in favour of extraordinary virtue.

But the tribute of affectionate applause is claimed now we have arrived at a passage in his life so *characteristic* of the delicacy, generosity, and nobility of his nature, that it is scarcely possible for any one not to love him, after reading it. Of generosity, in the more ordinary sense, there are abundant examples in his history. Riemer has instanced several,[2] but these are acts of kindness, thoughtfulness, and courtesy, such as one expects to find in a prosperous poet. That he was kind, gave freely, sympathised freely, acted disinterestedly, and that his kindness showed itself in trifles quite as much as in important actions (a most significant trait),[3] is known to all persons moderately acquainted with

[1] "Nicht aber darum weil dieser kein Held ist, sondern weil jener der Kammerdiener ist."—*Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 40. Goethe repeated this as an epigram; and Carlyle has wrought it into the minds of hundreds; but Hegel is the originator.

[2] *Mittheilungen*, vol. i. pp. 102–5.

[3] There is lamentable confusion in our estimate of character on this point of generosity. We often mistake a spasm of sensibility for the strength of lovingness—making an *occasional* act of kindness the sign of a kind nature. Benj. Constant says of himself: "*Je puis faire de bonnes et fortes actions; je ne puis avoir de bons procédés.*" There are hundreds like him. On the other hand, there are hundreds who willingly perform many little acts of kindness and courtesy, but who never rise to the dignity of generosity; these are *poor* natures, ignorant of the grander throbbings.

German literature. But the disposition exhibited in the story I am about to tell is such as few persons would have imagined to be lying beneath the stately prudence and calm self-mastery of the man so often styled "heartless."

This is the story: A man (his name still remains a secret) of a strange, morbid, suspicious disposition, had fallen into destitution, partly from unfortunate circumstances, partly from his own fault. He applied to Goethe for assistance, as so many others did; and he painted his condition with all the eloquence of despair.

"According to the idea I form of you from your letters," writes Goethe, "I fancy I am not deceived, and this to me is very painful, in believing that I cannot give help or hope to one who needs so much. But I am not the man to say, 'Arise, and go further.' Accept the little that I can give, as a plank thrown towards you for momentary succour. If you remain longer where you are, I will gladly see that in future you receive some slight assistance. In acknowledging the receipt of this money, pray inform me how far you can make it go. If you are in want of a dress, greatcoat, boots, or warm stockings, tell me so; I have some that I can spare.

"Accept this drop of balsam from the compendious medicine chest of the Samaritan, in the same spirit as it is offered."

This was on the 2nd of November 1778. On the 11th he writes again, and from the letter we see that he had resolved to do *more* than throw out a momentary plank to the shipwrecked man—in fact he had undertaken to support him.

"In this parcel you will receive a greatcoat, boots, stockings, and some money. My plan for you this winter is this:

"In Jena living is cheap. I will arrange for board and lodging, &c., on the strictest economy, and will say it is for some one who, with a small pension, desires to live in retirement. When that is secured I will write to you; you can then go there, establish yourself in your quarters, and I will send you cloth and lining, with the necessary money, for a coat, which you can get made, and I will inform the rector that you were recommended to me, and that you wish to live in retirement at the University.

"You must then invent some plausible story, have your name entered on the books of the University, and no soul will ever inquire more about you, neither Burgomaster nor

Amtmann. *I have not sent you one of my coats, because it might be recognised in Jena.* Write to me and let me know what you think of this plan, and at all events in what character you propose to present yourself."

The passage in italics indicates great thoughtfulness. Indeed the whole of this correspondence shows the most tender consideration for the feelings of his protégé. In the postscript he says: "And now step boldly forth again upon the path of life! We live but once. . . . Yes, I know perfectly what it is to take the fate of another upon one's own shoulders, but you shall not perish!" On the 23rd he writes:

"I received to-day your two letters of the 17th and 18th, and have so far anticipated their contents as to have caused inquiry to be made in Jena for the fullest details, as for one who wished to live there under the quiet protection of the University. Till the answer arrives keep you quiet at Gera, and the day after to-morrow I will send you a parcel and say more.

"Believe me you are not a burden on me; on the contrary, it teaches me economy; *I fritter away much of my income which I might spare for those in want.* And do you think that your tears and blessings go for nothing? *He who has, must give, not bless; and if the Great and the Rich have divided between them the goods of this world, Fate has counterbalanced these by giving to the wretched the powers of blessing, powers to which the fortunate know not how to aspire.*"

Noble words! In the mouth of a pharisaical philanthropist *declaiming* instead of *giving*, there would be something revolting in such language; but when we know that the hand which wrote these words was "open as day to melting charity," when we know that (in spite of all other claims) he gave up for some years the sixth part of his very moderate income to rescue this stranger from want, when we know by the irrefragable arguments of deeds, that this language was no hollow phrase, but the deep and solemn utterance of a thoroughly human heart, then, I say, those words awaken reverberations within our hearts, calling up feelings of loving reverence for him who uttered them.

How wise and kind is this also: "Perhaps there will soon turn up occasions for you to be useful to me where you are, for it is not the Project-maker and Promiser, but he who in trifles affords real service, that is welcome to one who would so willingly do something good and enduring.

"Hate not the poor philanthropists with their precautions and conditions, for one need pray diligently to retain, amid such bitter experience, the goodwill, courage, and levity of youth, which are the main ingredients of benevolence. And it is more than a benefit which God bestows when he calls us, who can so seldom do anything to lighten the burden of one truly wretched."

The next letter, dated December 11th, explains itself:—

"Your letter of the 7th I received early this morning. And first, to calm your mind: you shall be forced to nothing; the hundred dollars you shall have, live where you may; but now listen to me.

"I know that to a man his ideas are realities; and although the image you have of Jena is false, still I know that nothing is less easily reasoned away than such hypochondriacal anxieties. I think Jena the best place for your residence, and for many reasons. The University has long lost its ancient wildness and aristocratic prejudices; the students are not worse than in other places, and among them there are some charming people. In Jena, they are so accustomed to the flux and reflux of men that no individual is remarked. And there are too many living in excessively straitened means, for poverty to be either a stigma or a noticeable peculiarity. Moreover it is a city where you can more easily procure all necessities. In the country during the winter, ill, and without medical advice, would not that be miserable?

"Further, the people to whom I referred you are good domestic peopie, who, on my account, would treat you well. Whatever might occur to you, I should be in a condition, one way or another, to assist you. I could aid you in establishing yourself; need only for the present guarantee your board and lodging, and pay for it later on. I could give you a little on New Year's Day, and procure what was necessary on credit. You would be nearer to me. Every market day I could send you something—wine, victuals, utensils that would cost me little, and would make your existence more tolerable; and I could thus make you more a part of my household expenses. The objection to Gera is, that communication with it is so difficult; things do not arrive at proper times, and cost money which benefits no one. You would probably remain six months in Jena before any one remarked your presence. This is the reason why I preferred Jena to every other place, and you would do the same if you could but see things with un-

troubled vision. How, if you were to make a trial? However, I know a fly can distract a man with sensitive nerves, and that, in such cases, reasoning is powerless.

"Consider it: it will make all things easier. I promise you, you will be confortable in Jena. But if you cannot overcome your objections, then remain in Gera. At New Year you shall have twenty-five dollars, and the same regularly every quarter. I cannot arrange it otherwise. I must look to my own household demands; that which I have given you already, because I was quite unprepared for it, has made a hole, which I must stop up as I can. If you were in Jena, I could give you some little commissions to execute for me, and perhaps some occupation; I could also make your personal acquaintance, and so on. But act just as your feelings dictate; if my reasons do not convince you, remain in your present solitude. Commence the writing of your life, as you talk of doing, and send it me piecemeal, and be persuaded that I am only anxious for your quiet and comfort, and choose Jena simply because I could there do more for you."

The hypochondriacal fancies of the poor man were invincible; and instead of going to Jena he went to Ilmenau, where Goethe secured him a home, and sent him books and money. Having thus seen to his material comforts, he besought him to occupy his mind by writing out the experience of his life, and what he had observed on his travels. In the following letter he refers to his other protégé, Peter Imbaumgarten:

"I am very glad the contract is settled. Your maintenance thus demands a hundred dollars yearly, and I will guarantee the twenty-five dollars quarterly, and contrive also that by the end of this month you shall receive a regular allowance for pocket money. I will also send what I can *in natura*, such as paper, pens, sealing-wax, &c. Meanwhile here are some books.

"Thanks for your news; continue them. The wish to do good is a bold, proud wish; we must be thankful when we can secure even a little bit. I have now a proposition to make. When you are in your new quarters I wish you would pay some attention to a boy, whose education I have undertaken, and who learns the huntsman's craft in Ilmenau. He has begun French; could you not assist him in it? He draws nicely; could you not keep him to it? I would fix the hours when he should come to you. You would lighten my anxiety about him if you could by friendly intercourse ascertain the

condition of his mind, and inform me of it; and if you could keep an eye upon his progress. But of course this depends on your feeling disposed to undertake such a task. Judging from myself—*intercourse with children always makes me feel young and happy.* On hearing your answer, I will write more particulars. *You will do me a real service, and I shall be able to add monthly the trifle which I have set aside for the boy's education.* I trust I shall still be able to lighten your sad condition, so that you may recover your cheerfulness."

Let me call attention to the delicacy with which he here intimates that he does not mean to occupy Kraft's [1] time without remunerating it. If that passage be thoroughly considered, it will speak as much for the exquisite kindness of Goethe's nature as any greater act of liberality. Few persons would have considered themselves unentitled to *ask* such a service from one whose existence they had secured. To pay for it would scarcely have entered their thoughts. But Goethe felt that to demand a service, which might be irksome, would, in a certain way, be selling benevolence; if he employed Kraft's time, it was right that he should pay what he would have paid another master. On the other hand, he instinctively shrunk from the indelicacy of making a decided *bargain.* It was necessary to intimate that the lessons would be paid for; but with that intimation he also conveyed the idea that in undertaking such a task Kraft would be conferring an *obligation* upon him; so that Kraft might show his gratitude, might benefit his benefactor, and nevertheless be benefited. After reading such a sentence, I could, to use Wieland's expression, "have eaten Goethe for love!"

Kraft accepted the charge; and Goethe having sent him some linen for shirts, some cloth for a coat, and begged him to write without the least misgiving, now sends this letter:

"Many thanks for your care of Peter; the boy greatly interests me, for he is a legacy of the unfortunate *Lindau.* Do him all the good you can quietly. How you may advance him! I care not whether he reads, draws, or learns French, so that he does occupy his time, and I hear your opinion of him. For the present, let him consider his first object is to acquire the huntsman's craft, and try to learn from him how he likes it, and how he gets on with it. For, believe me, man must have a trade which will support him. The artist is never

[1] Herr Kraft was the *assumed* name of this still anonymous protégé.

paid; it is the artisan. Chodowiecki, the artist whom we admire, would eat but scanty mouthfuls; but Chodowiecki, the artisan, who with his woodcuts illumines the most miserable daubs, he is paid."

In a subsequent letter he says: "Many thanks. By your attention to these things, and your care of Peter, you have performed true service for me, and richly repaid all that I may have been able to do for you. Be under no anxiety about the future, there will certainly occur opportunities wherein you can be useful to me; meanwhile, continue as heretofore." This was written on the *very day* of his return to Weimar from the Swiss journey! If this tells us of his attention to his protégé, the next letter tells us of his anticipating even the casualty of death, for he had put Kraft on the list of those whom he left as legacies of benevolence to his friends. It should be remarked that Goethe seems to have preserved profound secrecy with respect to the good he was then doing; not even in his confidential letters to Frau von Stein is there one hint of Kraft's existence. In short, *nothing* is wanting to complete the circle of genuine benevolence.

The year 1781 began with an increase of Kraft's pension; or rather, instead of paying a hundred dollars for his board and lodging, and allowing him pocket money, he made the sum two hundred dollars. "I can spare as much as that; and you need not be anxious about every trifle, but can lay out your money as you please. Adieu; and let me soon hear that all your sorrows have left you." This advance seems to have elicited a demand for *more* money, which produced the following characteristic answer:

"You have done well to disclose the whole condition of your mind to me; I can make all allowances, little as I may be able to completely calm you. My own affairs will not permit me to promise you a farthing more than the two hundred dollars, unless I were to get into debt, which in my place would be very unseemly. This sum you shall receive regularly. Try to make it do.

"I certainly do not suppose that you will change your place of residence without my knowledge and consent. Every man has his duty, make a duty of your love to me and you will find it light.

"It would be very disagreeable to me if you were to *borrow* from any one. It is precisely this miserable unrest now troubling you which has been the misfortune of your whole

life, and you have never been more contented with a thousand dollars than you now are with two hundred; because you always still desired something which you had not, and have never accustomed your soul to accept the limits of necessity. I do not reproach you with it; I know, unhappily too well, how it pertains to you, and feel how painful must be the contrast between your present and your past. But enough! One word for a thousand: at the end of every quarter you shall receive fifty dollars; for the present an advance shall be made. Limit your wants: the *Must* is hard, and yet solely by this *Must* can we show how it is with us in our inner man. To live according to caprice requires no peculiar powers."[1]

The following explains itself:

"If you once more read over my last letter you will see plainly that you have misinterpreted it. You are neither *fallen in my esteem*, nor have I a *bad opinion* of you, neither have I suffered my *good opinion* to be led astray, nor has your mode of thinking become *damaged* in my eyes: all these are exaggerated expressions, such as a rational man should not permit himself. Because I also speak out my thoughts with *freedom*, because I wish certain traits in your conduct and views somewhat different, does that mean that I look on you as a *bad man*, and that I wish to discontinue our relations?

"It is these hypochondriacal, weak and exaggerated notions, such as your last letter contains, which I blame and regret. Is it proper that you should say to me: *I am to prescribe the tone in which all your future letters must be written?* Does one command an honourable, rational man such things as that? Is it ingenuous in you on such an occasion to *underline* the words that you eat *my bread?* Is it becoming in a moral being, when one gently blames him, or names something in him as a malady, to fly out as if one had pulled the house about his ears? Do not misconstrue me, therefore, if I wish to see you contented and satisfied with the little I can do for you. So, if you will, things shall remain just as they were; at all events I shall not change my behaviour towards you."

The unhappy man seems to have been brought to a sense of his injustice by this, for although there is but one more letter, bearing the date 1783, that is, two years subsequent to the one just given, the connection lasted for seven years.

[1] I will give the original of this fine saying, as I have rendered it but clumsily: Das *Muss* ist hart, aber beim *Muss* kann der Mensch allein zeigen wie's inwendig mit ihm steht. Willkürlich leben kann jeder.

When Goethe undertook to write the life of Duke Bernhard he employed Kraft to make extracts for him from the Archives; which extracts, Luden, when he came to look over them with a biographical purpose, found utterly worthless.[1] The last words we find of Goethe's addressed to Kraft are, "You have already been of service to me, and other opportunities will offer. I have no grace to dispense, and my favour is not so fickle. Farewell, and enjoy your little in peace." It was terminated only by the death of the poor creature in 1785. Goethe buried him at his own expense, but even to the Jena officials he did not disclose Kraft's real name.[2]

To my apprehension these letters reveal a nature so exquisite in far-thoughted tenderness, so true and human in its sympathies with suffering, and so ready to alleviate suffering by sacrifices rarely made to friends, much less to strangers, that, after reading them, the epithets of "cold" and "heartless," often applied to Goethe, sound like blasphemies against the noblest feelings of humanity. Observe, this Kraft was no romantic object appealing to the sensibility; he had no thrilling story to stimulate sympathy; there was no subscription list opened for him; there were no coteries weeping over his misfortunes. Unknown, unfriended, ill at ease with himself and with the world, he revealed his wretchedness in secret to the great poet, and in secret that poet pressed his hand, dried his eyes, and ministered to his wants. And he did this not as *one* act, not as one passing impulse, but as the sustained sympathy of seven years.

Pitiful and pathetic is the thought that such a man can, for so many years, both in his own country and in ours, have been reproached, nay, even vituperated as cold and heartless! A certain reserve and stiffness of manner, a certain soberness of old age, a want of political enthusiasm, and some sentences wrenched from their true meaning, are the evidences whereon men build the strange hypothesis that he was an Olympian Jove sitting *above* Humanity, *seeing* life but not *feeling* it, his heart dead to all noble impulses, his career a calculated egotism. How it was that one so heartless became the greatest poet of modern times—how it was that he whose works contained the widest compass of human life, should himself be a bloodless pulseless diplomatist—no one thought

[1] See LUDEN'S *Rückblicke in Mein Leben.*

[2] I learn this from a letter to the Judge at Jena, which was exhibited at the *Goethe Austellung* in Berlin, 1861.

of explaining, till Menzel arose, and with unparalleled effrontery maintained that Goethe had no genius, but only talent, and that the miracle of his works lies in their style—a certain adroitness in representation. Menzel is a man so completely rejected by England—the translation of his work met with such hopeless want of encouragement, that I am perhaps wrong to waste a line upon it; but the bold style in which his trenchant accusations are made, and the assumption of a certain manliness as the momentum to his sarcasms, have given his attacks on Goethe a circulation independent of his book. To me he appears radically incompetent to appreciate a poet. I should as soon think of asking the first stalwart Kentish farmer for his opinion on the Parthenon. The farmer would doubtless utter some energetic sentences expressing his sense of its triviality; but the coarse energy of his language would not supply the place of knowledge, feeling, and taste; nor does the coarse energy of Menzel's style supply those deficiencies of nature and education which incapacitate him for the perception of Art.

The paradox still remains, then, in spite of Menzel: a great poet destitute of the feelings which poetry incarnates—a man destitute of soul giving expression to all the emotions he has not—a man who wrote *Werther*, *Egmont*, *Faust*, *Herman und Dorothea*, and *Meister*, yet knew not the joys and sorrows of his kind; will any one defend that paradox?[1] Not only that paradox, but this still more inexplicable one, that all who knew Goethe, whether they were his peers or his servants, loved him only as lovable natures can be loved. Children, women, clerks, professors, poets, princes—all loved him. Even Herder, bitter against every one, spoke of him with a reverence which astonished Schiller, who writes: "He is by many besides Herder named with a species of devotion, and *still more loved as a man* than admired as an author. Herder says he has a clear, universal mind, the truest and deepest feeling, and the greatest purity of heart."[2] Men might learn so much from his works, had not the notion of his coldness and indifference disturbed their judgment. "In no line," says Carlyle, "does he speak with asperity of any man, scarcely of anything. He

[1] I remember once, as we were walking along Piccadilly, talking about the infamous *Büchlein von Goethe*, Carlyle stopped suddenly, and with his peculiar look and emphasis, said, "Yes, it is the wild cry of amazement on the part of all spooneys that the Titan was not a spooney too! Here is a god-like intellect, and yet you see he is not an idiot! Not in the least a spooney!"

[2] *Briefw. mit Körner*, i. p. 136.

knows the good and loves it; he knows the bad and hateful and rejects it; but in neither case with violence. His love is calm and active; his rejection implied rather than pronounced."

And Schiller, when he came to appreciate by daily intercourse the qualities of his great friend, thus wrote of him: "It is not the greatness of his intellect which binds me to him. If he were not as a man more admirable than any I have ever known, I should only marvel at his genius from the distance. But I can truly say that in the six years I have lived with him, I have never for one moment been deceived in his character. He has a high truth and integrity, and is thoroughly in earnest for the Right and the Good; hence all hypocrites and phrase-makers are uncomfortable in his presence." And the man of whom Schiller could think thus is believed by many to have been a selfish egotist, "wanting in the higher moral feelings"!

But so it is in life: a rumour, originating perhaps in thoughtless ignorance, and circulated by malice, gains credence in the face of probability, and then no amount of evidence suffices to dissipate it. There is an atmosphere round certain names, a halo of glory or a halo of infamy, and men perceive this halo without seeking to ascertain its origin. Every public man is in some respects mythical; and the fables are believed in spite of all the contradictions of evidence. It is useless to hope that men will pause to inquire into the truth of what they hear said of another, before accepting and repeating it; but with respect to Goethe, who has now been more than a quarter of a century in his grave, one may hope that evidence so strong as these pages furnish may be held more worthy of credence than anything which gossip or ignorance, misconception or partisanship has put forth without proof.

BOOK THE FIFTH

1779 TO 1793

"Wenn sich der Most auch ganz absurd gebärdet,
Es giebt zuletzt doch noch 'nen Wein."

"Von jener Macht, die alle Wesen bindet
Befreit der Mensch sich der sich überwindet."

"Postquam me experientia docuit, omnia, quæ in communi vita frequenter occurrunt, vana et futilia esse; quum viderem omnia, a quibus et quæ timebam, nihil neque boni neque mali in se habere, nisi quatenus ab iis animus movebatur: constitui tandem inquirere, an aliquid daretur quod verum bonum et sui communicabile esset, et a quo solo rejectis ceteris omnibus animus afficeretur; imo an aliquid daretur, quo invento et acquisito continua ac summa in æternum fruerer lætitia."—SPINOSA.

CHAPTER I

NEW BIRTH

THE changes slowly determining the evolution of character, when from the lawlessness of Youth it passes into the clear stability of Manhood, resemble the evolution of harmony in the tuning of an orchestra, when from stormy discords wandering in pursuit of concord, all the instruments gradually subside into the true key: round a small centre the hurrying sounds revolve, one by one falling into that centre, and increasing its circle, at first slowly, and afterwards with ever-accelerated velocity, till victorious concord emerges from the tumult. Or they may be likened to the gathering splendour of the dawn, as at first slowly, and afterwards with silent velocity, it drives the sullen darkness to the rear, and with a tidal sweep of light takes tranquil possession of the sky. Images such as these represent the dawn of a new epoch in Goethe's life; an epoch when the wanderings of an excitable nature are gradually falling more and more within the circle of law; when aims, before vague, now become clear; when in the recesses of his mind much that was fluent becomes crystallised by the earnestness which gives a definite purpose to his life. All men of genius go through this process of crystallisation. Their youths are disturbed by the turbulence of errors and of passions; if they

outlive these errors they convert them into advantages. Just as the sides of great mountain ridges are rent by fissures filled with molten rock, which fissures, when the lava cools, act like vast supporting ribs strengthening the mountain mass, so, in men of genius, passions first rend, and afterwards buttress life. The diamond, it is said, can only be polished by its own dust; is not this symbolical of the truth that only by its own fallings-off can genius properly be taught? And is not our very walk, as Goethe says, a series of falls?

He was now (1779) entering his thirtieth year. Life slowly emerged from the visionary mists through which hitherto it had been seen; the solemn earnestness of manhood took the place of the vanishing thoughtlessness of youth, and gave a more commanding unity to his existence. He had "resolved to deal with Life no longer by halves, but to work it out in its totality, beauty, and goodness—*vom Halben zu entwöhnen, und im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen, resolut zu leben.*" It is usually said that the residence in Italy was the cause of this change; but the development of his genius was the real cause. The slightest acquaintance with the period we are now considering suffices to prove that long before he went to Italy the change had taken place. An entry in his Diary at this date is very significant. "Put my things in order, looked through my papers, and burnt all the old chips. Other times, other cares! Calm retrospect of Life, and the extravagances, impulses, and eager desires of youth; how they seek satisfaction in all directions. How I have found delight, especially in mysteries, in dark imaginative connections; how I only half seized hold of Science, and then let it slip; how a sort of modest self-complacency runs through all I wrote; how short-sighted I was in divine and human things; how many days wasted in sentiments and shadowy passions; how little good I have drawn from them, and now the half of life is over, I find myself advanced no step on my way, but stand here as one who, escaped from the waves, begins to dry himself in the sun. The period in which I have mingled with the world since October 1775, I dare not yet trust myself to look at. God help me further, and give me light, that I may not so much stand in my own way, but see to do from morning till evening the work which lies before me, and obtain a clear conception of the order of things; that I be not as those are who spend the day in complaining of headache, and the night in drinking the wine which gives the headache!"

There is something quite solemn in those words. The same thought is expressed in a letter to Lavater: "The desire to raise the pyramid of my existence, the basis of which is already laid, as high as practicable in the air, absorbs every other desire, and scarcely ever quits me. I dare not longer delay; I am already advanced in life, and perhaps Death will break in at the middle of my work, and leave the Babylonic tower incomplete. At least men shall say it was boldly schemed, and if I live, my powers shall, with God's aid, reach the completion." And in a recently published letter to the duke, he says: "I let people say what they will, and then I retire into my old fortress of Poetry and work at my *Iphigenia*. By this I am made sensible that I have been treating this heavenly gift somewhat too cavalierly, and there is still time and need for me to become more economical if ever I am to bring forth anything."[1]

No better index of the change can be named than his *Iphigenia auf Tauris*, written at this period. The reader will learn with some surprise that this wonderful poem was originally written in prose. It was the fashion of the day. *Götz*, *Egmont*, *Tasso*, and *Iphigenia*, no less than Schiller's *Robbers*, *Fiesco*, *Kabale und Liebe*, were written in prose; and when *Iphigenia* assumed a poetic form, the Weimar friends were disappointed—they *preferred* the prose.

This was part of the mania for returning to Nature. Verse was pronounced unnatural; although, in truth, verse is not more unnatural than song. Song is to speech what poetry is to prose; it expresses a different mental condition. Impassioned prose *approaches* poetry in the rhythmic impulse of its movements; as impassioned speech in its varied cadences also approaches the intonations of music. Under great emotional excitement, the Arabs give their language a recognisable metre, and almost talk poetry. But prose never *is* poetry, or is so only for a moment; nor is speech song. Schiller learned to see this, and we find him writing to Goethe, "I have never before been so palpably convinced as in my present occupation how closely in poetry Substance and Form are connected. Since I have began to transform my prosaic language into a poetic rhythmical one, I find myself *under a totally different jurisdiction*; even many motives which in the prosaic execution seemed to me to be perfectly in place, I can no longer use:

[1] *Briefwechsel zwischen Karl August und Goethe*, i. 11.

they were merely *good for the common domestic understanding, whose organ prose seems to be;* but verse absolutely demands reference to the imagination, and thus I was obliged to become poetical in many of my motives."

That Goethe should have fallen into the sophism which asserted prose to be more natural than verse is surprising. His mind was full of song. To the last he retained the faculty of singing melodiously, when his prose had degenerated into comparative feebleness. And this prose *Iphigenia* is saturated with verses; which is also the case with *Egmont.* He *meant* to write prose, but his thoughts instinctively expressed themselves in verse. The critical reader will do well to compare the prose with the poetic version.[1] He will not only see how frequent the verses are, but how few were the alterations necessary to be made to transform the prose drama into a poem. They are just the sort of touches which elevate poetry above prose. Thus, to give an example, in the prose he says: *unnütz seyn, ist todt seyn* (to be useless is to be dead), which thus grows into a verse—

Ein unnütz Leben ist ein früher Tod.[1]

Again in the speech of Orestes (Act ii. sc. 1), there is a fine and terrible allusion to Clytemnestra, "Better die here before the altar than in an obscure nook where the nets of murderous near *relatives* are placed." In the prose this allusion is not clear—Orestes simply says, the "nets of assassins."[3]

The alterations do not touch the substance of this drama; we must therefore consider it a product of the period now under review; and as such we may examine it at once.

CHAPTER II

IPHIGENIA

It was very characteristic in Schlegel to call *Iphigenia* "an echo of Greek song"; he delighted in such rhetorical prettinesses; but that German scholars should have so often re-

[1] See vol. xxxiv. of the edition of 1840.
[2] A life not useful is an early death.
[3] Neither Taylor nor Miss Swanwick appears to have seized the allusion. One translates it, "by the *knives of avenging kindred*"; the other, "where *near hands* have spread *assassination's wily net.*"

peated the phrase, and should have so often without misgiving declared *Iphigenia* to be the finest modern specimen of Greek tragedy, is truly surprising, until we reflect on the mass of flagrant traditional errors afloat respecting the Greek drama. For a long while the Three Unities were held to be inseparable from that drama; in spite of the fact that in several plays Unity of Time is obviously disregarded, and in two or three the Unity of Place is equally so. Again there was the notion that Comedy and Tragedy were not suffered to mingle in the same play; in spite of the palpable fact of Æschylus and Euripides having mingled them. It was also believed that Destiny formed the tragic-pivot; in spite of the fact, that in the *majority* of these plays Destiny has *no* place, beyond what the religious conceptions of the poets must of necessity have given to it, just as Christianity must of necessity underlie the tragic conceptions of Christian poets.

The very phrase with which critics characterise *Iphigenia* is sufficient to condemn them. They tell us it has "all the repose of Greek tragedy." Consider it for a moment: *Repose* in a tragedy! that is to say, calmness in the terrific upheaving of volcanic passions. Tragedy, we are told by Aristotle, acts through Terror and Pity, awakening in our bosoms sympathy with suffering; and to suppose *this* effect can be accomplished by the "meditative repose which breathes from every verse," is tantamount to supposing a battle-song will most vigorously stir the blood of combatants if it borrow the accents of a lullaby.

Insensibly our notions of Greek art are formed from sculpture; and hence, perhaps, this notion of repose. But acquaintance with the drama ought to have prevented such an error, and taught men not to confound calmness of *evolution* with calmness of *life*. The unagitated simplicity of Greek scenic representation lay in the nature of the scenic necessities; but we do not call the volcano cold, because the snow rests on its top. Had the Greek drama been exhibited on stages like those of modern Europe, and performed by actors without cothurnus and mask, its deep agitations of passion would have welled up to the surface, communicating responsive agitations to the form. But there were reasons why this could not be. In the Grecian drama, everything was on a scale of vastness commensurate with the needs of an audience of many thousands; and consequently everything was disposed in masses rather than in details; it thus necessarily assumed

something of the sculpturesque form, threw itself into magnificent groupings, and, with a view to its effect, adapted a peculiar eurhythmic construction. It thus assumed slowness of movement, because it could not be rapid without distortion. If the critic doubts this, let him mount on stilts and, bawling through a speaking-trumpet, try what he can make of Shakspeare; he will then have an approximative idea of the restraints laid upon the Grecian actor, who, clothed so as to aggrandise his person, and speaking through a resonant mask, which had a *fixed* expression, could not *act*, in our modern sense of the word, but could only declaim; he had no means of representing the *fluctuations* of passion, and the poet therefore was forced to make him represent passion in broad, fixed masses. Hence the movement of the Greek drama was necessarily large, slow, and simple.

But if we pierce beneath scenic necessities and attend solely to the dramatic life which pulses through the Grecian tragedies, what sort of calmness meets us there? Calmness is a relative word. Polyphemus hurling rocks as school-boys throw cherry-stones, would doubtless smile at our riots, as we smile at buzzing flies; and Moloch howling through the unfathomable wilderness in passionate repentance of his fall, would envy us the wildest of our despair, and call it calmness. But measured by human standards I know not whose sorrow "can bear such emphasis" as to pronounce those pulses calm which throb in the *Œdipus*, the *Agamemnon*, or the *Ajax*. The Labdacidan Tale is one of the sombrest threads woven by the Parcæ.

The subject selected by the Greek dramatists are almost uniformly such as to call into play the darkest passions: madness, adultery, and murder in *Agamemnon;* revenge, murder, and matricide in the *Choëphoræ;* incest in *Œdipus;* jealousy and infanticide in *Medea;* incestuous adultery in *Hippolytus;* madness in *Ajax;* and so on throughout the series. The currents of these passions are for ever kept in agitation, and the alternations of pity and terror close only with the closing of the scene. In other words, in spite of the slowness of its scenic presentation this drama is distinguished by the very absence of the repose which is pronounced its characteristic.

Here we meet with the first profound difference separating Goethe from the Greek dramatist. The repose which was forced upon the Greek, which formed one of his restraints, as the hardness of the marble restrains the sculptor, Goethe has adopted under conditions which did *not* force him; while the

repose, which the Greek kept only at the surface, Goethe has allowed to settle down to the core. In what was accidental, temporal, he has imitated Greek Art; in the one essential characteristic he has not imitated it. Racine, so unjustly treated by Schlegel, *has* given us the passionate life of the Greek Drama, in spite of his *Madame* Hermione and *Monsieur* Oreste; in imitating the slow scenic movement he has also imitated the dramatic agitation of the under-current.

Goethe's *Iphigenia*, then, we must cease to regard according to the Grecian standard. It is a German play. It substitutes profound moral struggles, for the passionate struggles of the old legend. It is not Greek in ideas nor in sentiment. It is German, and transports Germany of the eighteenth century into Scythia during the mythic age, quite as absolutely as Racine places the court of Versailles in the camp of Aulis; and with the same ample justification.[1] The points in which Goethe's work resembles the Greek, are, first, the slowness of its scenic movement and simplicity of its action, which produce a corresponding calmness in the dialogue; and secondly, a saturation of mythic lore. All the rest is German. And this Schiller, as a dramatist, clearly saw. "I am astonished," he says, "to find this piece no longer makes the same favourable impression on me that it did formerly; though I still recognise it as a work full of soul. *It is, however, so astonishingly modern and un-Greek that I cannot understand how it was ever thought to resemble a Greek play.* It is purely moral, but the *sensuous power, the life, the agitation, and everything which specifically belongs to a dramatic work is wanting.* Goethe has himself spoken slightingly of it, but I took that as a mere caprice or coquetry; now I understand him."

Schiller adds, however, that apart from the dramatic form, *Iphigenia* is a marvellous production, which must for ever remain the delight and wonderment of mankind. This is striking the right chord. A drama it is not; it is a marvellous dramatic poem. The grand and solemn movement of its evolution responds to the large and simple ideas which it unfolds. It has the calmness of majesty. In the limpid clearness of its language, the involved mental processes of the

[1] This error of local colouring, which critics more erudite than acute have ridiculed in Racine, is not only an error commanded by the very conditions of Art, but is the very error committed by the Greeks themselves. In this play of *Iphigenia*, Euripides has committed anachronisms as gross as any chargeable to Racine; and justly: he wrote for the audience of his day, he did not write for antiquity.

characters are as transparent as the operations of bees within a crystal hive; while a constant strain of high and lofty music makes the reader feel as if in a holy temple. And above all witcheries of detail there is the one capital witchery, belonging to Greek statues more than to any other works of human cunning—the perfect unity of impression produced by the whole, so that nothing in it seems *made*, but all to *grow*, nothing is superfluous, but all is in organic dependence, nothing is there for detached effect, but the whole is effect. The poem fills the mind; beautiful as the separate passages are, admirers seldom think of passages, they think of the wondrous whole.

I cannot in language less than hyperbolical express my admiration for this work considered in itself; as a drama, I think an instructive parallel might be drawn between it and the *Iphigeneia* of Euripides. The enormous superiority of Goethe in intellectual stature, even aided by the immeasurable advantage he has of writing in a language which is in some sort our own, would not cover his inferiority as a dramatist.

In Euripides we have this groundwork: Iphigenia, about to be sacrificed at Aulis, was snatched away in a cloud by Diana, and a hind substituted in her place; she is now priestess of Diana in Tauris, where she presides over the bloody sacrifice of every stranger thrown on the inhospitable shores. Orestes and Pylades, in obedience to the oracle, come to Tauris intent on bearing away the Image of Diana: that accomplished, Orestes is to be released from the Furies who pursue him. The two are seized, and brought to Iphigenia for sacrifice. A recognition takes place; and she aids them in their original design of carrying away the goddess. They are pursued by the Scythians, but Minerva appears, to cut the knot and calm the rage of Thoas.

This story Goethe has modernised. The characters are essentially different, the moral elements are different, and the effect is different. His Iphigenia, every way superior to the Greek priestess, has the high, noble, tender, delicate soul of a Christian maiden. Forced to fulfil the duties of a Priestess, she subdues by her mild influence the fierce prejudice of Thoas, and makes him discontinue the barbarous practice of human sacrifices. She, who herself had been anointed as a sacrifice, could she preside over the sacrifice of another? This sympathy is modern. No Greek would have suffered her own personal feelings thus to rise up in rebellion against a

religious rite. The key note is struck here, and this tone sounds through the whole piece.

Iphigenia is melancholy, and pines for her native shores, in spite of the honour which attends, and the good she effects by her influence on Thoas. The fate of her family perturbs her. Thoas has conceived a passion for her.

> Thou sharedst my sorrow when a hostile sword
> Tore from my side my last, my dearest son;
> *Long as fierce vengeance occupied my heart,*
> *I did not feel my dwellings' dreary void;*
> But now, returning home, my rage appeased,
> My foes defeated and my son avenged,
> I find there's nothing left to comfort me.[1]

And he expresses a hope to "bear her to his dwelling as a bride," which she gently evades; he then taxes her with the mystery in which she has shrouded herself. She answers—

> If I concealed, O king, my name and race,
> 'Twas fear which prompted me, and not mistrust;
> For didst thou know who stands before thee now,
> And what accursed head thy arm protects,
> A shuddering horror would possess thy heart;
> And, far from wishing me to share thy throne,
> Wouldst banish me perchance.

Thoas replies, with generosity, that nothing shall make him cease his protection.

> In my hands
> The goddess placed thee; thou hast been to me
> As sacred as to her, and her behest
> Shall for the future also be my law.
> If thou canst hope in safety to return
> Back to thy kindred, I renounce my claims.

This promise becomes an important agent in the dénouement, and is skilfully contrived. Iphigenia, urged by him to speak out, utters this tremendous line:

> Know: I issue from the race of Tantalus![2]

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[1] In all extracts from this work I avail myself of the translation by Miss SWANWICK (*Selections from Goethe and Schiller*), which is many degrees superior to that of the late WILLIAM TAYLOR (*Survey of German Poetry*, vol. iii.). Feeling, as I profoundly feel, the insuperable difficulties of translating Goethe into English, it would ill become me to criticise Miss Swanwick's version; but it would also be very unjust not to add, that all versions miss the exquisite beauty of the original, and resemble it no more than a rough wood-cut resembles a Titian.

[2] *Vernimm: ich bin aus Tantalus Geschlecht.*

Miss Swanwick, from metrical necessity, has weakened this into:—

"Attend: I issue from the Titan's race."

It was indispensable to preserve the name of Tantalus, so pregnant with terrible suggestion.

Thoas is staggered; but after she has narrated the story of her race, he repeats his offer of marriage, which she will not accept. Irritated by her refusal, he exclaims:

> Be priestess still
> Of the great goddess who selected thee;
> And may she pardon me that I from her
> Unjustly, and with secret self-reproach,
> Her ancient sacrifice so long withheld.
> From olden times no stranger near'd our shore
> But fell a victim at her sacred shrine;
> But thou with kind affection didst enthral me
> That I forgot my duty. Thou didst rock
> My senses in a dream: I did not hear
> My people's murmurs: now they cry aloud,
> Ascribing my poor son's untimely death
> To this my guilt. No longer for thy sake
> Will I oppose the wishes of the crowd
> Who urgently demand the sacrifice.
> . . . . . .
> Two strangers, whom in caverns of the shore
> We found concealed, and whose arrival here
> Bodes to my realm no good, are in my power:
> With them thy goddess may once more resume
> Her ancient, pious, long-suspended rites.

Thus ends the first act.

In the conception of Thoas a great dramatic collision is rendered impossible: so high and generous a nature cannot resist an appeal to his generosity; and thus the spectator foresees there will be no struggle. In Euripides, on the contrary, the fierce Scythian looms from the dark background, terrible as fate; and he is artfully withheld from appearing on the scene until the very last. *How* he is to be appeased no spectator foresees. To be sure he is appeased by a *Deus ex machina*, and not by a dramatic unravelling of the entangled threads; but this inferiority is, dramatically speaking, more than compensated by the effect of the collision, and the agitation kept up to the last. Thoas, in Goethe, is a *moral*, not a *dramatic* figure.[1]

The carelessness to all dramatic effect which weakens this play is seen in the very avoidance of a path Euripides had

[1] The notion of making Thoas in love is not new. LAGRANGE-CHANCEL, In his *Oreste et Pylade* (a real treat to any one with a perception of the ludicrous) has thrown as much "galanterie" into this play as one may find in an opera. Thoas loves Iphigénie, who loves Pylade; but while the tyrant sighs in vain, the truculent Scythian is sighed for by Thomyris, *princesse du sang royal des Scythes*. As a specimen of *couleur locale*, I may mention that Thoas in this play has a *capitaine des gardes* and two *ministres d'état*, with an *ambassadeur Sarmate* resident at his court.

opened, viz., the certainty in the mind of the audience that Orestes and Pylades are the two captives to be slaughtered. In Euripides, Orestes and his companion appear on the scene before they are made prisoners; in Goethe, not till after their capture has been announced. The effect of the announcement in Euripides is powerful, in Goethe it is null.[1]

In the second act Orestes and Pylades appear. The scene between them is very undramatic, but beautiful as a poetic exposition of their mental conditions. Orestes feels—

> It is the path of death that now we tread,
> At every step my soul grows more serene.

But Pylades clings to life, and to his purpose. "Am I not," he says—

> As ever full of courage and of joy?
> And love and courage are the spirit's wings
> Wafting to noble actions.
>
> *Orestes.* Noble actions?
> Time was when fancy painted such before us!
> When oft, the game pursuing, on we roam'd
> O'er hill and valley: hoping that ere long,
> With club and weapon arm'd, we so might chase
> The track of robber or of monster huge.
> And then at twilight, by the glassy sea,
> We peaceful sat reclined against each other;
> The waves came dancing to our very feet,
> And all before us lay the wide, wide world.
> Then on a sudden one would seize his sword,
> And future deeds shone round us like the stars
> Which gemm'd in countless throngs the vaults of night.
> *Pylades.* Endless, my friend, the projects which the soul
> Burns to accomplish. We would every deed
> Perform at once as grandly as it shows
> After long ages, when from land to land
> The poet's swelling song hath rolled it on.
> It sounds so lovely what our fathers did,
> When in the silent evening shade reclined,
> We drink it in with music's melting tones.
> And what we do, is as it was to them
> Toilsome and incomplete.

[1] Compare EURIP. v. 264, *sq.* There is one touch in the peasant's narrative which is very significant of that period when gods walked the earth so familiarly with man that every stranger might be taken for a god:

> ἐνταῦθα δισσοὺς εἶδε τις νεανίας
> βουφορβὸς ἡμῶν καπεχώρησεν πάλιν
> ἄκροισι δακτύλοισι πορθμεύων ἴχνος,
> ἔλεξε δ' οὐχ ὁρᾶτε· δαίμονές τινες
> θάσσουσίν οἵδε.

"There one of our cowboys espied the two youths, and stepping backwards on the points of his toes, retraced his steps, saying, 'Do you not see them? they are gods seated there.'"

Pylades fails to inspire him, however, with the resolution which he feels, and with belief in the probability of their escape from the shameful death, which Orestes accepts so calmly. Pylades has heard from the guards the character of Iphigenia; and congratulates himself on the fact that it is a woman who holds their fates in her hands, for even the best of men

> With horror may familiarise his mind;
> Through custom so transform his character,
> That he at length shall make himself a law
> Of what his very soul at first abhorred.

On some not very intelligible pretext he makes Orestes withdraw, that he may have an interview with Iphigenia; and as she approaches, unbinds his chains, and speaks, he adroitly bursts forth into these words:

> Delicious music! dearly welcome tones
> Of our own language in a foreign land!
> With joy my captive eye once more beholds
> The azure mountains of my native coast.[1]

He then tells her a story something like the real one, but disguising names: the *purpose* of which I do not detect. She inquires after her family, and hears the story of her mother's guilt. Noting her agitation, he asks if she be connected with that family by friendship. She sternly replies:

> Say on: and tell me how the deed was done.

He tells her. All she says is a few brief words, which are terribly significant: when he concludes, she veils herself, and withdraws, saying:

> Enough. Thou soon wilt see me once again.

and the act ends in this very *evasive* manner. The third act opens with the visit of Iphigenia to Orestes, in which she requests him to finish the story that Pylades had already half told; and he does so at some length. Disdaining the

1 M. PATIN has, I think, mistaken the import of this speech: comparing it with the simple exclamation of Philocletes, he says, "Philoclète n'en savait pas tant, il n'était pas si habile à se rendre compte de ses secrets mouvements: tout ce qu'il pouvait était de s'écrier, 'O douce parole!'" *Etudes sur les Tragiques Grecs*, iii. p. 323. But Pylades is not expressing *his* sentiments. His ear is not unfamiliar with the accents of his own language—he has just before heard them from Orestes; but by picturing Greece to *her*, he adroitly excites her sympathy for *himself*, a Greek.

guile which had prompted Pylades to conceal their names, he boldly says :

I am Orestes !

Here is a proper *ἀναγνωρισις*,—and naturally, no less than dramatically, it demands a cry from the heart of Iphigenia, who should at once fling herself into her brother's arms, and confess their relationship. Instead of this, she suffers him to continue talking, and to withdraw ; she only reveals herself in the next scene ! This is more like the dramatic treatment we find in juvenile writers, than what is expected from a great poet. Orestes has a return of his madness. He recovers from it, to feel himself purified by his sister's purity ; and Pylades now suggests that they shall bear away the image, and depart together.

It is evident that the tragic situation in this story is the slaughter of a brother by a sister ignorant of a relationship perfectly known to the audience. So far from having developed the tragedy of such a situation, Goethe has scarcely touched upon it, and never once awakened our fears : from first to last we are in no suspense, our emotions are untouched, our curiosity alone is excited to watch the process by which the terrible fate will be escaped. In Euripides, on the contrary, everything conspires to increase the terror of the situation. Iphigenia, formerly so mild that she wept with her victims, now rages like a lioness bereaved of her cubs. She has dreamed that Orestes is dead, and in her desolate condition resolves to wreak her woe on others. Her brother and her friend are brought before her. She questions them as to their names. Orestes refuses to tell her. In a rapid interchange of questions and answers she learns the story of her family ; and then offers to save *one* of their lives, on condition that the pardoned carry for her a letter to Argos. Here a contest of generosity ensues, as to who shall accept his life. Pylades is at length prevailed upon. The discovery is thus managed : Pylades, bound by his oath to deliver the letter, suggests this difficulty, viz., that should the boat be upset, or should the letter be lost, how then can he fulfil his promise ? Hereupon, to anticipate such an accident, Iphigenia tells him the contents of the letter ; and in telling him reveals her name. This produces the natural cry from Orestes, who avows himself, and clasps her in his arms. The dramatic movement of this scene is admirable. From this point the

interest slackens in Euripides, in Goethe it deepens. In the Greek play it is the culmination of passionate interest; for although the stratagem by which Iphigenia contrives to bear away the sacred image would flatter the propensities of the cunning Athenian audience,[1] it must have been, even to them, a delight altogether of a lower kind, addressing lower faculties, than those addressed by the tragic processional grandeur of the earlier portions; whereas in the German play, the hitherto feeble passionate interest now rises in an ascending scale of high *moral* interest, so that the tragedy evolved addresses the conscience rather than the emotions, being less the conflict of passions, than the high conflict with duty.

In the fourth act Iphigenia has to save more than her brother's life; she has to save him from the Furies; this is only to be done by deceit, inasmuch as force is impossible under the circumstances. To a Greek mind nothing could be more satisfactory. The Greek *preferred* deceit to force; but the Christianised conscience revolts from deceit as cowardly and deeply immoral. Accordingly Iphigenia shudders at the falsehood which is forced upon her, and only requires to be reminded by the king's messenger of the constant kindness and considerateness with which Thoas has treated her, to make her pause. When, therefore, Pylades arrives, urging her to flight, she communicates to him her scruples.

Pylades. Him thou dost fly who would have slain thy brother.
Iphig. To me at least he hath been ever kind.
Pylades. What fate commands is not ingratitude.
Iphig. Alas! it still remains ingratitude,—
Necessity alone can justify it.
Pylades. Thee before gods and men it justifies.
Iphig. *But my own heart is still unsatisfied.*
Pylades. Scruples too rigid are a cloak for pride.
Iphig. *I cannot argue, I can only feel.*

How modern all this is! Pylades, with more worldly views, says:

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[1] Comp. EURIPIDES, v. 1157, *sq.* Iphigenia pretends that as the image of the goddess has been stained by the impure hands of the two captives, it must be purified, and for this purpose she intends to cleanse it in the sea, but that must be done in solitude. She then bids Thoas command that every citizen shall remain within doors, carefully avoiding a sight of that which may pollute them—*μυσαρὰ γὰρ τὰ τοιάδ' ἐστι*:—nay more, with an ingenuity which is almost farcical, she bids Thoas himself remain within the Temple, throwing a veil over his eyes as the captives issue forth, and he is not to consider it at all singular if she is a long while absent. In this way she contrives to escape with the image, having made fools of Thoas and his guards.

Life teaches us
To be less strict with others than ourselves;
Thou'lt learn the lesson too. So wonderful
Is human nature, and its varied ties
Are so involved and complicate, that none
May hope to keep his inmost spirit pure,
And walk without perplexity thro' life.

Here, then, lies the tragedy. Will this soul belie its own high instincts, even for the sake of saving her brother? The alternative is horrible; and after portraying the temptation in all its force, and human frailty in all its tenderness, the poet shows us human grandeur in this fine burst from the unhappy priestess:

Attend, O king!
A secret plot is laid; 'tis vain to ask
Touching the captives; they are gone, and seek
Their comrades, who await them on the shore.
The eldest—he whom madness lately seized,
And who is now recovered—is Orestes,
My brother! and the other, Pylades,
His early friend and faithful confidant.
From Delphi, Phœbus sent them to this shore,
With a divine command to steal away
The image of Diana, and to him
Bear back the sister, promising for this
Redemption to the blood-stained matricide.
I have delivered now into thy hands
The remnants of the house of Tantalus:
Destroy us—if thou darest!

For anything like this we seek in vain throughout the Greek *Iphigenia;* and the mere grandeur of the conception would produce an overpowering effect on the stage, if delivered with adequate depth and dignity.

Had Thoas been represented as a fierce Scythian, or even had he not been hitherto allowed to convince us of his generosity, the "collision" would have been stronger; as it is, we have little faith in his ferocity. He has nearly relented when Orestes rushes in with drawn sword to hasten Iphigenia away, because their design has been discovered. A scene ensues in which Thoas is resolved not to suffer the image of Diana to be borne away; and as to carry it away is the object of Orestes, it must be decided by force of arms. But now a light suddenly breaks in upon Orestes, who reads the oracle in another way. Apollo said—

"Back to Greece the sister bring,
Who in the sanctuary on Tauris' shore
Unwillingly abides; so ends the curse."
To Phœbus' sister we applied the words,
And he referred to *thee.*

It was Iphigenia who was to purify him, and to bear *her* away is to fulfil Apollo's orders. This interpretation loosens the knot. Iphigenia recalls to Thoas his promise that she should depart if ever she could return in safety to her kindred, and he reluctantly says, "Then go!" to which she answers—

> Not so, my king; I cannot part
> Without thy blessing, or in anger from thee.
> Banish us not! the sacred right of guests
> Still let us claim: so not eternally
> Shall we be severed. Honour'd and belov'd,
> As my own father was, art thou by me:
> Farewell! Oh! do not turn away, but give
> One kindly word of parting in return.
> So shall the wind more gently swell our sails,
> And from our eyes with softened anguish flow
> The tears of separation. Fare thee well!
> And graciously extend to me thy hand
> In pledge of ancient friendship.
>
> *Thoas* (*extending his hand*). Fare thee well.

This is a very touching, noble close, and is in exquisite harmony with the whole.

The remarks on this masterpiece have already occupied so much space that I could not, were I disposed, pause to examine the various collateral points of criticism which have been raised in Germany. I will merely allude to the characteristic difference between Ancient and Modern Art exhibited in the treatment of the Furies, which in Euripides are terrible Apparitions, real beings personated by actors; in Goethe they are Phantasms moving across the stage of an unhappy soul, but visible only to the inward eye; in like manner the Greek dénouement is the work of the actual interference of the Goddess in person, whereas the German dénouement is a loosening of the knot by deeper insight into the meaning of the oracle.

CHAPTER III

PROGRESS

In the beginning of 1779 we find Goethe very active in his new official duties. He has accepted the direction of the War Department, which suddenly assumes new importance, owing to the preparations for a war. He is constantly riding about the country, and doing his utmost to alleviate the