round me, in which nothing can enter, save Love and Friendship, Science and Art. I will not complain of the past, for I have learnt much that was valuable." Experience is the only schoolmaster; although, as Jean Paul says, "the school-fees are somewhat heavy." Goethe was always willing to pay the fees, if he could but get the instruction.

BOOK THE SIXTH

1794 TO 1805

"Für mich war es ein neuer Frühling, in welchem alles froh neben einander keimte, und aus aufgeschlossenen Samen und Zweigen hervorging."

Denn Er war unser! Mag das stolze Wort
Den lauten Schmerz gewaltig übertönen.
Er mochte sich bei uns, im sichern Port
Nach wildem Sturm zum Dauernden gewöhnen.
Indessen schritt sein Geist gewaltig fort
Ins Ewige des Wahren, Guten, Schönen,
Und hinter ihm, im wesenlosen Scheine
Lag, was uns Alle bändigt, das Gemeine!

GOETHE, OF SCHILLER.

CHAPTER I

GOETHE AND SCHILLER

THERE are few nobler spectacles than the friendship of two great men; and the History of Literature presents nothing comparable to the friendship of Goethe and Schiller. The friendship of Montaigne and Etienne de la Boëtie was, perhaps, more passionate and entire; but it was the union of two kindred natures, which from the first moment discovered their affinity, not the union of two rivals incessantly contrasted by partisans, and originally disposed to hold aloof from each other. Rivals Goethe and Schiller were, and are; natures in many respects directly antagonistic; chiefs of opposing camps, and brought into brotherly union only by what was highest in their natures and their aims.

To look on these great rivals was to see at once their profound dissimilarity. Goethe's beautiful head had the calm victorious grandeur of the Greek ideal; Schiller's the earnest beauty of a Christian looking towards the Future. The massive brow, and large-pupilled eyes,—like those given by Raphael to the infant Christ, in the matchless Madonna di San Sisto,—the strong and well-proportioned features, lined indeed by thought and suffering, yet showing that thought and suffering have troubled, but not vanquished, the strong man, —a certain healthy vigour in the brown skin, and an inde-

scribable something which shines out from the face, make Goethe a striking contrast to Schiller, with his eager eyes, narrow brow,—tense and intense,—his irregular features lined by thought and suffering, and weakened by sickness. The one *looks*, the other *looks out*. Both are majestic; but one has the majesty of repose, the other of conflict. Goethe's frame is massive, imposing; he seems much taller than he is. Schiller's frame is disproportioned, he seems less than he is. Goethe holds himself stiffly erect; the long-necked Schiller "walks like a camel."[1] Goethe's chest is like the torso of the Theseus; Schiller's is bent, and has lost a lung.

A similar difference is traceable in details. "An air that was beneficial to Schiller acted on me like poison," Goethe said to Eckermann. "I called on him one day, and as I did not find him at home, I seated myself at his writing-table to note down various matters. I had not been seated long, before I felt a strange indisposition steal over me, which gradually increased, until at last I nearly fainted. At first I did not know to what cause I should ascribe this wretched and to me unusual state, until I discovered that a dreadful odour issued from a drawer near me. When I opened it, I found to my astonishment that it was full of rotten apples. I immediately went to the window and inhaled the fresh air, by which I was instantly restored. Meanwhile his wife came in, and told me that the drawer was always filled with rotten apples, because the scent was beneficial to Schiller, and he could not live or work without it."

As another and not unimportant detail, characterising the healthy and unhealthy practice of literature, it may be added that Goethe wrote in the freshness of morning, entirely free from stimulus; Schiller worked in the feverish hours of night, stimulating his languid brain with coffee and champagne.

In comparing one to a Greek ideal, the other to a Christian ideal, it has already been implied that one was the representative of Realism, the other of Idealism. Goethe has himself indicated the capital distinction between them: Schiller was animated with the idea of Freedom; Goethe, on the contrary, was animated with the idea of Nature. This distinction runs

[1] This picturesque phrase was uttered by Tieck, the sculptor, to Rauch, from whom I heard it. Let me add that Schiller's brow is called in the text, "narrow," in defiance of Dannecker's bust, with which I compared Schiller's skull, and found that the sculptor, as usual, had grossly departed from truth in his desire to idealise. Artists always believe they know better than Nature.

through their works: Schiller always pining for something greater than Nature, wishing to make men Demigods; Goethe always striving to let Nature have free development, and produce the highest forms of Humanity. The Fall of Man was to Schiller the happiest of all events, because thereby men fell away from pure *instinct* into conscious *freedom;* with this sense of freedom came the possibility of Morality. To Goethe this seemed paying a price for Morality which was higher than Morality was worth; he preferred the ideal of a condition wherein Morality was unnecessary. Much as he might prize a good police, he prized still more a society in which a police would never be needed.

But while the contrast between these two is the contrast of real and ideal, of *objective* and *subjective* tendencies, apparent when we consider the men in their totality, this is only true of them relatively to each other. To speak of Goethe as a Realist, pure and simple, is erroneous; and to speak of Schiller as an Idealist, pure and simple, is not less so. Gervinus strikingly remarks that, compared with Nicolai or Lichtenberg, Goethe appears as an Idealist; compared with Kant and his followers, Schiller appears as a Realist. If Schiller, in comparison with Goethe, must be called a self-conscious poet, in comparison with the Romanticists, he is *naïve* and instinctive. Indeed, all such classifications are necessarily imperfect, and must only be used as artifices of language, by which certain general and predominant characteristics may be briefly indicated. Goethe and Schiller were certainly different natures; but had they been so fundamentally opposed, as it is the fashion to consider them, they could never have become so intimately united. They were opposite and allied, with somewhat of the same differences and resemblances as are traceable in the Greek and Roman Mars. In the Greek Mythology the God of War had not the prominent place he attained in Rome; and the Greek sculptors, when they represented him, represented him as the victor returning, after conflict, to repose: holding in his hand the olive branch, while at his feet sate Eros. The Roman sculptors, or those who worked for Rome, represented Mars as the God of War in all his terrors, in the very act of leading on to victory. But, different as these two conceptions were, they were both conceptions of the God of War; Goethe may be likened to the one, and Schiller to the other: both were kindred spirits united by a common purpose.

Having touched upon the points of contrast, it will now be

needful to say a word on those points of resemblance which served as the basis of their union. It will be unnecessary to instance the obvious points which two such poets must have had in common; the mention of some less obvious will suffice for our present purpose. They were both profoundly convinced that Art was no luxury of leisure, no mere amusement to charm the idle, or relax the careworn; but a mighty influence, serious in its aims although pleasurable in its means; a sister of Religion, by whose aid the great world-scheme was wrought into reality. This was with them no mere sonorous phrase. They were thoroughly in earnest. They believed that Culture would raise Humanity to its full powers; and they, as artists, knew no Culture equal to that of Art. It was probably a perception of this belief that made Karl Grün say, "Goethe was the most ideal Idealist the earth hath ever borne; an *æsthetic* Idealist." And hence the origin of the wide-spread error that Goethe "only looked at life as an artist," *i.e.* cared only for human nature inasmuch as it afforded him materials for Art; a point which will be more fully examined hereafter. (*Book* vii. *ch.* 4.) The phases of their development had been very similar, and had brought them to a similar standing-point. They both began rebelliously; they both emerged from titanic lawlessness in emerging from youth to manhood. In Italy the sight of ancient masterpieces completed Goethe's metamorphosis. Schiller had to work through his in the gloomy north, and under the constant pressure of anxieties. He, too, pined for Italy, and thought the climate of Greece would make him a poet. But his intense and historical mind found neither stimulus nor enjoyment in plastic Art. Noble men and noble deeds were the food which nourished his great soul. "His poetic purification came from moral ideals; whereas in Goethe the moral ideal came from the artistic."[1] Plutarch was his Bible. The ancient masterpieces of poetry came to him in this period of his development, to lead him gently by the hand onwards to the very point where Goethe stood. He read the Greek tragedians in wretched French translations, and with such aid laboriously translated the *Iphigenia* of Euripides. Homer, in Voss's faithful version, became to him what Homer long was to Goethe. And how thoroughly he threw himself into the ancient world may be seen in his poem, *The Gods of Greece*.

[1] *Gervinus*, v. p. 152.

Like Goethe, he had found his religious opinions gradually separating him more and more from the orthodox Christians; and, like Goethe, he had woven for himself a system out of Spinoza, Kant, and the Grecian sages.

At this time, then, that these two men seemed most opposed to each other, and *were* opposed in feeling, they were gradually drawing closer and closer in the very lines of their development, and a firm basis was prepared for solid and enduring union. Goethe was five-and-forty, Schiller five-and-thirty. Goethe had much to give, which Schiller gratefully accepted; and if he could not in return influence the developed mind of his great friend, or add to the vast stores of its knowledge and experience, he could give him that which was even more valuable, *sympathy* and *impulse*. He excited Goethe to work. He withdrew him from the engrossing pursuit of science, and restored him once more to poetry. He urged him to finish what was already commenced, and not to leave his works all fragments. They worked together with the same purpose and with the same earnestness, and their union is the most glorious episode in the lives of both, and remains as an eternal exemplar of a noble friendship.

Of all the tributes to Schiller's greatness which an enthusiastic people has pronounced, there is perhaps nothing which carries a greater weight of tenderness and authority than Goethe's noble praise. It is a very curious fact that in the history of Shakspeare, that he is not known to have written a single line in praise of any contemporary poet. The fashion of those days was for each poet to write verses in eulogy of his friends; and the eulogies written by Shakspeare's friends are such as to satisfy even the idolatry of admirers in our day; but there exists no eulogy, no single verse, from him whose eulogy was more worth having than that of all the rest put together.[1] Had literary gossip, pregnant with literary malice, produced the absurd impression that Shakspeare was cold, selfish, and self-idolatrous, this curious fact would have been made a damning proof. I have so often in these pages used Shakspeare as a contrast to Goethe, that it would be wrong not to contrast him also on this point. Of all the failings

[1] There is, indeed, a couplet in the *Passionate Pilgrim* which names Spenser with high praise; but it is doubtful whether the *Passionate Pilgrim* is anything but the attempt of a bookseller to palm off on the public a work which Shakspeare never wrote; and it is certain that Shakspeare is *not* the author of the sonnet in which Spenser is mentioned, that sonnet having been previously published by a Richard Barnfield.

usually attributed to literary men, Goethe had the least of what could be called jealousy; of all the qualities which sit gracefully on greatness, he had the most of magnanimity. The stream of time will carry down to after ages the memory of several whose names will live only in his praise; and the future students of Literary History will have no fact to note of Goethe similar to that noted of Shakspeare: they will see how enthusiastic was his admiration of his rivals, Schiller, Voss, and Herder, and how quick he was to perceive the genius of Scott, Byron, Béranger, and Manzoni.

But I must quit this attempt to characterise the two rivals, and proceed to narrate their active co-operation in the common work.

While the great world was agitated to its depths by the rapid march of the Revolution, the little world of Weimar pursued the even tenor of its way, very much as if nothing concerning the destinies of mankind were then in action. Because Goethe is the greatest figure in Germany, the eyes of all Germans are turned towards him, anxious to see how he bore himself in those days. They see him—not moving with the current of ideas, not actively sympathising with events; and they find no better explanation of what they see than the brief formula that "he was an Egoist." If they look, however, at his companions and rivals, they will find a similar indifference. Wieland, the avowed enemy of all despotism, was frightened by the Reign of Terror into demanding a dictatorship. Nor—strange as it may appear—was Schiller, the poet of Freedom, the creator of Posa, more favourable to the French than Goethe himself. The Republic had honoured him in a singular way. It had forwarded him the diploma of citizenship; a dignity, conferred at the same time on Washington, Franklin, Tom Paine, Pestalozzi, Campe, and Anacharsis Clootz! The diploma signed by Danton and Roland, dated 6th September 1792, is now preserved in the Library at Weimar, where visitors will notice the characteristic accuracy of the French in the spelling of Schiller's name—*à Monsieur Gille, publiciste allemand.* This honour Schiller owed to his *Robbers*, or as his admirers called it, *Robert, chef de Brigands.* From the very first he had looked with no favourable eye on the Revolution, and the trial of Louis XVI. produced so deep an impression on him, that he commenced an address to the National Convention, which was however outrun by rapid events. Like Wieland, he saw no hope but in a dictatorship.

Such being the position of the leading minds, we are not to wonder if we find them pursuing their avocations just as if nothing were going on in France or elsewhere. Weimar could play no part in European politics. The men of Weimar had their part to play in Literature, through which they saw a possible regeneration. Believing in the potent efficacy of culture, they devoted themselves with patriotism to that. A glance at the condition of German Literature will show how patriotism had noble work to do in such a cause.

The Leipsic Fair was a rival to our Minerva Press: Chivalry romances, Robber-stories and Spectre-romances, old German superstitions, Augustus Lafontaine's sentimental family-pictures, and Plays of the *Sturm und Drang* style, swarmed into the sacred places of Art, like another invasion of the Goths. On the stage Kotzebue was king. The *Stranger* was filling every theatre, and moving the sensibilities of a too readily-moved pit. Klopstock was becoming more and more oracular, less and less poetical. Jean Paul indeed gave signs of power and originality; but except Goethe and Schiller, Voss, who had written his *Luise* and translated *Homer*, alone seemed likely to form the chief of a school of which the nation might be proud.

It was in this state of things that Schiller conceived the plan of a periodical—*Die Horen*,—memorable in many ways to all students of German Literature. Goethe, Herder, Kant, Fichte, the Humboldts, Klopstock, Jacobi, Engel, Meyer, Garve, Matthisson, and others, were to form a phalanx whose irresistible might should speedily give them possession of the land. "The more the narrow interests of the present," says Schiller, in the announcement of this work, "keep the minds of men on the stretch, and subjugate while they narrow, the more imperious is the need to free them through the higher universal interest in that which is purely *human* and removed beyond the influences of time, and thus once more to re-unite the divided political world under the banner of Truth and Beauty."

Such was the undertaking which formed the first link in the friendship of Goethe and Schiller. How they stood towards each other has been seen in the seventh chapter of the preceding Book. One day, in May 1794, they met, coming from a lecture given by Batsch at the Natural History Society in Jena; in talking over the matter, Goethe, with pleased surprise, heard Schiller criticise the fragmentary Method which

teachers of Science uniformly adopted. When they arrived at Schiller's house, Goethe went in with him, expounding the Theory of Metamorphoses with great warmth. Taking up a pen, he made a rapid sketch of the typical plant. Schiller listened with great attention, seizing each point clearly and rapidly, but shaking his head at last, and saying: "This is not an observation, it is an Idea." Goethe adds: "My surprise was painful, for these words clearly indicated the point which separated us. The opinions he had expressed in his essay on *Anmuth und Würde* recurred to me, and my old repulsion was nearly revived. But I mastered myself, and answered that I was delighted to find I had Ideas without knowing it, and to be able to contemplate them with my own eyes." There can be no question of Schiller having been in the right, though perhaps both he and Goethe assigned an exclusively subjective meaning to the phrase. The typical plant, Goethe knew very well, was not to be found in nature; but he thought it was *revealed* in plants.[1] Because he arrived at the belief in a type through direct observation and comparison, and not through *a priori* deduction; he maintained that this type was a perception (*Anschauung*), not an idea. Probably Schiller was more impressed with the metaphysical nature of the conception than with the physical evidence on which it had been formed. The chasm between them was indeed both broad and deep; and Goethe truly says: "It was in a conflict between the Object and the Subject, the greatest and most interminable of all conflicts, that began our friendship, which was eternal." A beginning had been made. Schiller's wife, for whom Goethe had a strong regard, managed to bring them together; and the proposed journal, *Die Horen*, brought their activities and sympathies into friendly union. Rapid was the growth of this friendship, and on both sides beneficial. Schiller paid a fortnight's visit at Weimar; Goethe was frequently in Jena. They found that they agreed not only on subjects, but also on the mode of looking at them. "It will cost me a long time to unravel all the ideas you have awakened in me," writes Schiller, "but I hope none will be lost."

Regretting that he could not give the novel *Wilhelm Meister* for the *Horen*, having already promised it to a publisher, Goethe nevertheless sends Schiller the manuscript from the

[1] Goethe, speaking of his labours in another department, says, "I endeavoured to find the Primitive Animal (Urthier), in other words, the Conception, the Idea of an Animal." *Werke*, xxxvi. p. 14.

third book onwards, and gratefully profits by the friendly criticism with which he reads it. He gave him, however, the two *Epistles*, the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, the *Roman Elegies*, and the essay on *Literary Sansculottism*.

The mention of *Wilhelm Meister* leads us to retrace our steps a few months, when the active interest he took in the direction of the Weimar Theatre, revived his interest in this novel, over which he had dawdled so many years. He finished it; but he finished it in quite a different spirit from that in which it was commenced, and I do not at all feel that Schiller's criticisms really were of advantage to it. But of this anon.

Towards the end of July he went to Dessau, and from thence to Dresden, where he strove with Meyer to forget the troubles of the time in contemplation of the treasures of Art. "All Germany," he writes to Fritz von Stein, "is divided into anxious, croaking, or indifferent men. For myself I find nothing better than to play the part of Diogenes, and roll my tub." He returned, and daily grew more and more intimate with Schiller. They began the friendly interchange of letters, which have since been published in six volumes, known to every student. In Goethe's letters to other friends at this time, 1795, is noticed an inward contentment, which he rightly attributes to this new influence. "It was a new spring to me," he says, "in which all seeds shot up, and gaily blossomed in my nature." Contact with Schiller's earnest mind and eager ambition, gave him the stimulus he so long had wanted. The ordinary spurs to an author's activity—the need of money or the need of fame—pricked him not. He had no need of money; of fame he had enough; and there was no nation to be appealed to. But Schiller's restless striving, and the emulation it excited, acted like magic upon him; and the years of their friendship were for both the most productive. In an unpublished letter from Frau von Stein to Charlotte von Lengefeld, dated 1795, there is this noticeable sentence: "I also feel that Goethe is drawing nearer to Schiller, for he has appeared to be now a little more aware of my existence. He seems to me like one who has been shipwrecked for some years on one of the South Sea Islands, and is now beginning to think of returning home." By the shipwreck is of course meant Christiane Vulpius; and by home, the salon of the Frau von Stein. It is possible, however, to reverse these positions.

On the 1st of November another son is born to Goethe. He bids Schiller to bring his contribution in the shape of a daughter, that the poetic family may be united and increased by a marriage. But this child only lives a few days. On the 20th, Schiller writes: "We have deeply grieved for your loss. You can console yourself with the thought that it has come so early, and thus more affects your *hopes* than your love." Goethe replies: "One knows not whether in such cases it is better to let sorrow take its natural course, or to repress it by the various aids which culture offers us. If one decides upon the latter method, *as I always do*, one is only strengthened for a moment; and I have observed that nature always asserts her right through some other crisis."

No other crisis seems to have come in this case. He was active in all directions. Göttling, in Jena, had just come forward with the discovery that phosphorus burns in nitrogen; and this drew Goethe's thoughts to Chemistry, which for a time was his recreation. Anatomy never lost its attraction: and through the snow on bitter mornings he was seen trudging to Loder's lectures, with a diligence young students might have envied. The Humboldts, especially Alexander, with whom he was in active correspondence, kept alive his scientific ardour; and it is to their energetic advice that we owe the essays on Comparative Anatomy. He was constantly talking to them on these subjects, eloquently expounding his ideas, which would probably never have been put to paper had they not urged him to it. True it is that he did not finish the essays; and only in 1820 did he print what he had written.[1] These conversations with the Humboldts embraced a wide field. "It is not perhaps presumptuous to suppose," he says, "that many ideas have thence, through *tradition*, become the common property of science, and have blossomed successfully, although the gardener who scattered the seeds is never named."

Poetical plans were numerous; some of them were carried into execution. A tragedy on the subject of "Prometheus Unbound" was begun, but never continued. The Hymn to Apollo was translated. *Alexis und Dora*, the *Vier Jahres Zeiten*, and several of the smaller poems, were written and

[1] This detail is important, as indeed every question of date must be in science. When the Essays were published, the principal ideas had already been brought before the world; when the Essays were written, the ideas were extraordinary novelties.

given to Schiller for the *Horen* or the *Musen Almanach;* not to mention translations from Madame de Stael, and the "Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini." But the product of this time which made the greatest sensation was the *Xenien.*

It has already been indicated that the state of German Literature was anything but brilliant, and that public taste was very low. The *Horen* was started to raise that degraded taste by an illustrious union of "All the Talents." It came—was seen—and made *no* conquest. Mediocrity in arms assailed it in numerous journals. Stupidity, against which, as Schiller says, "the gods themselves are powerless," was not in the least moved. The *Horen* was a double failure, for it failed to pay its expenses, and it failed to excite any great admiration in the few who purchased it. Articles by the poorest writers were attributed to the greatest. Even Frederick Schlegel attributed a story by Caroline von Wolzogen to Goethe. The public was puzzled—and somewhat *bored.* "All the Talents" have never yet succeeded in producing a successful periodical, and there are some good reasons for supposing that they never will. The *Horen* met with the fate of *The Liberal,* in which Byron, Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Moore, Hazlitt and Peacock were engaged. But the two great poets who had taken the greatest interest in it were not to be ignored with impunity. They resolved on a literary vengeance, and their vengeance was the *Xenien.*

A small library might be collected of the works called forth by these epigrams; but for the English reader the topic necessarily has but slender interest. He is not likely to exclaim with Boas: "On the 31st of October 1517, was commenced the Reformation of the Church in Germany; in October 1796, commenced the Reformation of Literature. As Luther published his Theses in Wittenberg, so Goethe and Schiller published their *Xenien.* No one before had the courage so to confront sacred Dulness, so to lash all Hypocrisy." One sees that some such castigation was needed, by the loud howling which was set up from all quarters; but that any important purification of Literature was thereby effected is not so clear.

The idea was Goethe's. It occurred to him while reading the *Xenia* of Martial; and having thrown off a dozen epigrams, he sent them to Schiller for the *Musen Almanach.* Schiller was delighted, but said there must be a hundred of them, chiefly directed against the journals which had attacked

the *Horen;* the hundred was soon thought too small a number, and it was resolved to have a thousand. They were written in the most thorough spirit of collaboration, the idea being sometimes given by one, and the form by another; one writing the first verse, and leaving the second to the other. There is no accurate separation of their epigrams, giving each to each, although critics have made an approximative selection; and Maltzahn has recently aided this by collation of the original manuscripts.

The sensation was tremendous. All the bad writers in the kingdom, and they were an army, felt themselves personally aggrieved. The pietists and sentimentalists were ridiculed; the pedants and pedagogues were lashed. So many persons and so many opinions were scarified, that no wonder if the public ear was startled at the shrieks of pain. Counterblasts were soon heard, and the *Xenien-Sturm* will remain as a curious episode of the war of the "many foolish heads against the two wise ones." "It is amusing," writes Goethe to Schiller, "to see what has really irritated these fellows, what they believe will irritate us, how empty and low is their conception of others, how they aim their arrows merely at the outworks, and how little they dream of the inaccessible citadel inhabited by men who are in earnest." The sensation produced by the *Dunciad* and by the *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was mild compared with the sensation produced by the *Xenien;* although the wit and sarcasm of the *Xenien* is as milk and water compared with the vitriol of the *Dunciad* and the *English Bards*.

Read by no stronger light than that which the appreciation of wit *as* wit throws on these epigrams, and not by the strong light of personal indignity, or personal malice, the *Xenien* will appear very weak productions, and the sensation they excited must appear somewhat absurd. But a similar disappointment meets the modern reader of the *Anti-Jacobin*. We know that its pages were the terror of enemies, the malicious joy of friends. We know that it was long held as a repertory of English wit, and the "Days of the *Anti-Jacobin*" are mentioned by Englishmen as the days of the *Xenien* are by Germans. Yet now that the *personal* spice is removed, we read both of them with a feeling of wonder at their enormous influence. In the *Xenien* there are a few epigrams which still titillate the palate, for they have the salt of wit in their lines. There are many also which have no pretension to wit, but are

admirable expressions of critical canons and philosophic ideas. If good taste could not be created by attacks on bad taste, there was at any rate some hope that such a castigation would make certain places sore; and in this sense the *Xenien* did good service.

The publication of *Wilhelm Meister* falls within this period, and we may now proceed to examine it as a work of art.

CHAPTER II

WILHELM MEISTER

A FRENCHMAN, an Englishman, and a German were commissioned, it is said, to give the world the benefit of their views on that interesting animal the Camel. Away went the Frenchman to the *Jardin des Plantes*, spent an hour there in rapid investigation, returned, and wrote a *feuilleton*, in which there was no phrase the Academy could blame, but also no phrase which added to the general knowledge. He was perfectly satisfied, however, and said, *Le voilà, le chameau!* The Englishman packed up his tea-caddy and a magazine of comforts; pitched his tent in the East; remained there two years studying the Camel in its habits; and returned with a thick volume of facts, arranged without order, expounded without philosophy, but serving as valuable materials for all who came after him. The German, despising the frivolity of the Frenchman, and the unphilosophic matter-of-factness of the Englishman, retired to his study, there *to construct the Idea of a Camel from out of the depths of his Moral Consciousness*. And he is still at it.

With this myth the reader is introduced into the very heart of that species of criticism which, flourishing in Germany, is also admired in some English circles, under the guise of Philosophical Criticism, and which has been exercised upon *Wilhelm Meister* almost as mercilessly as upon *Faust*.

My readers, it is hoped, will not generalise this remark so as to include within it all German critics and men of culture; such an extension of the remark would be almost as unfair in Germany as in England. There are many excellent critics in Germany, and excellent judges who are not critics; it would be too bad if our laughter at pedants and pretenders were to

extend to these. But no one acquainted with Germany and German literature can fail to recognise the wide-spread and pernicious influence of a mistaken application of Philosophy to Art: an application which becomes a tyranny on the part of real thinkers, and a hideous absurdity on the part of those who merely echo the jargon of the schools. It is this criticism which has stifled Art in Germany, and ruined many a young artist who showed promise. It is a fundamental mistake to translate Art into the formulas of Philosophy, and then christen the translation the Philosophy of Art. The critic is never easy until he has shifted his ground. He is not content with the work as it presents itself. He endeavours to get *behind* it, beneath it, into the depths of the soul which produced it. He is not satisfied with what the artist has *given*, he wants to know what he *meant*. He guesses at the meaning; the more remote the meaning lies on the wandering tracks of thought, the better pleased is he with the discovery; and he sturdily rejects every simple explanation in favour of this exegetical Idea. Thus the phantom of Philosophy hovers mistily before Art, concealing Art from our eyes. It is true the Idea said to underlie the work was never conceived by any one before, least of all by the Artist; but *that* is the glory of the critic: he is proud of having plunged into the depths. Of all horrors to the German of this school there is no horror like that of the surface—it is more terrible to him than cold water.

Wilhelm Meister has been the occasion of so many ideas constructed out of the depths of moral consciousness, it has been made to *mean* such wondrous (and contradictory) things, that its author must have been astonished at his unsuspecting depth. There is some obvious symbolism in the latter part, which I have little doubt was introduced to flatter the German tendency; as I have no sort of doubt that its introduction has spoiled a masterpiece. The obvious want of unity in the work has given free play to the interpreting imagination of critics. Hildebrand boldly says that the "Idea of *Wilhelm Meister* is precisely this—that it has no Idea,"—which does not greatly further our comprehension.

Instead of trying to discover the Idea, let us stand fast by historical criticism, and see what light may be derived from a consideration of the origin and progress of the work, which, from first to last, occupied him during twenty years. The first six books—beyond all comparison the best and most im-

portant—were written before the journey to Italy: they were written during the active theatrical period when Goethe was manager, poet, and actor. The contents of these books point very clearly to his intention of representing in them the whole nature, aims, and art of the comedian; and in a letter to Merck he expressly states that it is his intention to portray the actor's life. Whether at the same time he meant the actor's life to be symbolical, cannot be positively determined. That may, or may not, have been a *secondary* intention. The primary intention is very clear. Nor had he, at this time, yielded to the seduction of attempting the symbolical in Art. He sang as the bird sings; his delight was in healthy objective fact; he had not yet donned the robes of an Egyptian priest, or learned to speak in hieroglyphs. He was seriously interested in acting, and the actor's art. He thought the life of a player a good framework for certain pictures, and he chose it. Afterwards, the idea of making these pictures symbolical certainly did occur to him, and he concluded the romance upon this after-thought.

Gervinus emphatically records his disbelief of the opinion that Goethe originally intended to make Wilhelm *unfit* for success as an actor; and I think a careful perusal of the novel, even in its present state, will convince the reader that Gervinus is right. Instead of Wilhelm's career being represented as the development of a false tendency—the obstinate cultivation of an imperfect talent, such as was displayed in Goethe's own case with respect to plastic Art—one sees, in spite of some subsequent additions thrown in to modify the work according to an after-thought, that Wilhelm has a true inborn tendency, a talent which ripens through practice. With the performance of *Hamlet* the apogee is reached; and here ends the first plan. Having written so far, Goethe went to Italy. We have seen the changes which came over his views. After a lapse of ten years he resumes the novel; and having in that period lived through the experience of a false tendency—having seen the vanity of cultivating an imperfect talent—he *alters* the plan of his novel, makes it symbolical of the erroneous striving of youth towards culture; invents the cumbrous machinery of a Mysterious Family, whose watchful love has guided all his steps, and who have encouraged him in error that they might lead him through error unto truth. This is what in his old age he declared—in the *Tag und Jahres Hefte*, and in his letters to Schiller—to have been the plan upon

which it was composed. "It sprang," he says, "from a dim feeling of the great truth that Man often seeks that which Nature has rendered impossible to him. All dilettantism and false tendency is of this kind. Yet it is possible that every false step should lead to an inestimable good, and some intimation of this is given in *Meister*." To Eckermann he said: "The work is one of the most incalculable productions; I *myself can scarcely be said to have the key to it.* People seek a central point, and that is difficult to find; nor is it even right. I should think a *rich manifold life brought close to our eyes would be enough in itself without any express tendency*, which, after all, is only for the intellect." This is piercing to the very kernel. The origin of the symbolical matter, however, lies in the demands of the German intellect for such food. "But," he continues, "if anything of the kind is insisted upon, it will, perhaps, be found in the words which Frederic at the end addresses to the hero, when he says: 'Thou seem'st to me like Saul, the son of Kish, who went out to seek his father's asses, and found a kingdom.' Keep only to this; for, in fact, the whole work seems to say nothing more than that man, despite all his follies and errors, being led by a higher hand, reaches some happy goal at last."

Schiller, who knew only the *second* plan, objected, and with justice, to the disproportionate space allotted to the players. "It looks occasionally," he wrote, "as if you were writing *for* players, whereas your purpose is only to write *of* them. The care you bestow on certain little details of this subject and individual excellencies of the art, which although important to the player and manager, are not so to the public, give to your representation the false appearance of a particular design; and even one who does not infer such a design, might accuse you of being too much under the influence of a private preference for these subjects." If we accept the later plan, we must point out the inartistic composition, which allows five books of Introduction, one of disconnected Episode, and only two of Development. This is against all proportion. Yet Frederick Schlegel expressly says that the two last books are properly speaking the whole work; the others are but preparations.[1]

The purpose, or rather purposes, of *Wilhelm Meister* seem first, the rehabilitation of Dramatic Art; and secondly, the

[1] *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, p. 168. Schlegel's review is well worth reading as an example of ingenious criticism, and praise artfully presented under the guise of analysis.

theory of Education. The last two books are full of Education. Very wise and profound thoughts are expressed, and these thoughts redeem the triviality of the machinery. But otherwise these books are lamentably inferior to the first six books in style, in character, in interest. On the whole, *Wilhelm Meister* is, indeed, "an incalculable work." Several readings have intensified my admiration (which at first was tepid), and intensified also my sense of its defects. The beauties are ever new, ever wonderful; the faults press themselves upon notice more sharply than they did at first.

The story opens with great dramatic vivacity. Mariana and old Barbara stand before us, sketched with Shakspearian sharpness of outline and truth of detail. The whole episode is admirable, if we except the lengthy narrative in which Wilhelm details his early passion for the Marionnettes, which has probably made some readers as drowsy as it made Mariana. There is something painfully trivial in his long narrative; apart from its artistic error as a digression. The contrast between Wilhelm and the prosaic Werner is felicitously touched. But the happiest traits are those which show Wilhelm's want of decision, and incapacity of finishing the work he has begun; traits which indicate his peculiar temperament. Indeed throughout the novel Wilhelm is not the hero, but a creature of the incidents. He is a mere nose-of-wax. And this is artfully designed. Egmont and Goetz are heroes: living in stormy times, they remain altogether uninfluenced by the times. The poet represents noble characters, and he represents them in their strong, clear individuality, superior to circumstance. With Wilhelm, he shows how some characters change, obedient to every external influence. The metamorphoses of Wilhelm would have been impossible with a character such as Egmont. This seems so obvious, that one is surprised to find critics objecting to the vacillating character of Wilhelm, as if it were a fault in art. It would be as reasonable to object to the vacillations of Hamlet. Wilhelm is not only led with ease from one thing to another, but is always oscillating in his views of himself. Even his emotions are not persistent. He passes from love of the passionate Mariana to an inclination for the coquettish Philina; from Philina to the Countess, whom he immediately forgets for the Amazon; he is about to marry Theresa, but relinquishes her as soon as he is accepted, and offers himself to Natalie.

There is in this novel, evidence of sufficient humour to have

made a decidedly humorous writer, had that faculty not been kept in abeyance by other faculties. Wilhelm's unconscious pedantry, and his predominant desire to see the drama illustrated in ordinary life, and to arrange life into a theatre;[1] the Count and his eccentricities; the adventures of the players in the castle where they arrive, and find all the urgent necessaries wanting; the costume in which Wilhelm decks himself; the whole character of Philina and that of Frederic—are instances of this humorous power.

To tell the story of this novel would be too great an injustice to it; the reader has, therefore, it must be presupposed, already some acquaintance with it; in default thereof, let him at once make its acquaintance.[2] The narrative being presupposed as known, my task is easy. I have only to refer to the marvellous art with which the characters unfold themselves. We see them, and see through them. They are never described, they exhibit themselves. Philina, for example, one of the most bewitching and original creations in fiction, whom we know as well as if she had flirted with us and jilted us, is never once described. Even her person is made present to us through the impression it makes on others, not by any direct information. We are not told that she was a strange mixture of carelessness, generosity, caprice, wilfulness, affectionateness, and gaiety; a lively girl, of French disposition, with the smallest possible regard for decorum, but with a true decorum of her own; snapping her fingers at the world, disliking conventions, tediousness and pedantry; without any ideal aspirations, yet also without any affectations; coquetting with all the men, disliked by all the women, turning every one round her finger, yet ready to oblige and befriend even those who had injured her: we are not told this; but as such she lives before us. She is so genuine, and so charming a sinner, that we forgive all her trespasses. On the whole, she is the most original and most difficult creation in the book. Mignon, the great poetical creation, was perhaps less difficult to draw, when once conceived. All the other characters serve as contrasts to Philina. She moves among them and throws them into relief, as they do her. The sentimental sickly Aurelia, and the sentimental Madame Melina, have an earnestness Philina does not comprehend; but they have the faults of their qualities, and

[1] See especially Book I., cap. 15, for his idea of the private life of players, as if they carried *off* the stage something of their parts *on* the stage.

[2] It has been translated by Carlyle.

she has neither. She has no more sense of earnestness than a bird. With bird-like gaiety and bird-like enjoyment of existence, she chirrups through sunshine and rain. One never thinks of demanding morality from her. Morality? she knows it not, nay, has not even a bowing acquaintance with it. Nor can she be called immoral. Contrasting her with Mignon, we see her in contrast with Innocence, Earnestness, Devotion, and vague yearnings for a distant home; for Philina was never innocent, she is as quick and clever as a kitten; she cannot be serious: if she does not laugh she must yawn or cry; devoted she cannot be, although affectionate; and for a distant home, how can that trouble one who knows how to nestle everywhere? It is possible to say very hard words of Philina; but, like many a naughty child, she disarms severity by her grace.

Of Mignon, and her songs, I need say nothing. Painters have tried to give an image of that strange creation which lures the imagination and the heart of every reader; but she defies the power of the pencil. The old Harper is a wild weird figure, bearing a mystery about with him, which his story at the close finely clears up. He not only adds to the variety of the figures in the novel, but by his unforgettable songs gives a depth of passion and suffering to the work which would otherwise move too exclusively in familiar regions. These two poetic figures, rising from the prosaic background, suggest an outlying world of beauty; they have the effect of a rainbow in the London streets. Serlo, Laertes, the selfish Melina, and his sentimental wife, are less devoloped characters, yet drawn with a masterly skill.

But when we quit their company—that is, when we quit the parts which were written before the journey to Italy, and before the plan was altered—we arrive at characters such as Lothario, the Abbé, the Doctor, Teresa, and Natalie, and feel that a totally new style is present. We have quitted the fresh air of Nature, and entered the philosopher's study; life is displaced by abstractions. Not only does the interest of the story seriously fall off, but the handling of the characters is entirely changed. The characters are described; they do not live. The incidents are crowded, have little vraisemblance and less interest. The diction has become weak—sometimes positively bad. As the men and women are without passion, so is the style without colour. Schiller, writing of the first book, says: "The bold poetic passages, which flash up from

the calm current of the whole, have an excellent effect; they elevate and fill the soul." But the style of the last two Books, with the exception of the exquisite Harper's story, is such that in England the novel is almost universally pronounced tedious, in spite of the wonderful truth and variety of character, and the beauty of so many parts. In these later Books the narrative is slow, and carries incidents trivial and improbable. The Mysterious Family in the Tower is an absurd mystification; without the redeeming interest which Mrs. Radcliffe would have thrown into it. With respect to the style, it is enough to open at random, and you are tolerably certain to alight upon a passage which it is difficult to conceive how an artist could have allowed it to pass. The iteration of certain set forms of phrase, and the abstractness of the diction, are very noticeable. Here is a sentence! "Sie können aber hieraus die unglaubliche Toleranz jener Männer sehen, dass sie eben auch mich auf meinem *Wege* gerade *deswegen*, weil es mein *Weg* ist, keines*wegs* stören."

One great peculiarity in this work is that which probably made Novalis call it "artistic Atheism."[1] Such a phrase is easily uttered, sounds well, is open to many interpretations, and is therefore sure to find echoes. I take it to mean that in *Wilhelm Meister* there is a complete absence of all *moral verdict* on the part of the author. Characters tread the stage, events pass before our eyes, things are done and thoughts are expressed; but no word comes from the author respecting the moral bearing of these things. Life forgets in activity all moral verdict. The good is beneficent, but no one praises it; the bad works evil, but no one anathematises it. It is a world in which we see no trace of the preacher, not a glimpse even of his surplice. To many readers this absence is like the absence of salt at dinner. They feel towards such simple objective delineation something of the repugnance felt in Evangelical circles to Miss Edgeworth's Tales. It puts them out. Robert Hall confessed that reading Miss Edgeworth hindered him for a week in his clerical functions; he was completely disturbed by her pictures of a world of happy active people *without* any visible interference of religion—a sensible,

[1] "Das Buch handelt bloss von gewöhnlichen Dingen, die Natur und der Mysticismus sind ganz vergessen. Es ist eine poetisirte bürgerliche und häusliche Geschichte; das Wunderbare darin wird ausdrüklich als Poesie und Schwärmerei behandelt. Künstlerischer Atheismus ist der Geist des Buchs." *Schriften*, ii. p. 367.

and on the whole, healthy world, yet without warnings, without exhortations, without any apparent terrors concerning the state of souls.

Much has been said about the immorality of *Wilhelm Meister*, which need not be repeated here. Schiller hits the mark in his reply to what Jacobi said on this point: "The criticism of Jacobi has not at all surprised me; for it is as inevitable that an individual like him should be offended by the unsparing truth of your pictures, as it is that a mind like yours should give him cause to be so. Jacobi is one of those who seek only their own ideas in the representation of poets, and prize more what *should be* than *what is*; the contest therefore begins in first principles. So soon as a man lets me see that there is anything in poetical representations that interests him more than internal necessity and truth, I give him up. If he could show you that the immorality of your pictures does not proceed from the nature of the subject but from the manner in which you treat it, then indeed would you be accountable, not because you had sinned against moral laws, but against critical laws."

Wilhelm Meister is not a moral story, that is to say not a story written with the express purpose of illustrating some obvious maxim. The consequence is that it is frequently pronounced immoral; which I conceive to be an absurd judgment; for if it have no express moral purpose, guiding and animating all the scenes, neither has it an immoral purpose. It may not be written for the edification of virtue; assuredly it is not written for the propagation of vice. If its author is nowhere a preacher, he cannot by his sternest critics be called a pander. All that can be said is that the Artist has been content to paint scenes of life, *without comment;* and that some of these scenes belong to an extensive class of subjects, familiar indeed to the experience of all but children, yet by general consent not much talked of in society. If any reader can be morally injured by reading such scenes in this novel rather than in the newspaper, his moral constitution is so alarmingly delicate, and so susceptible of injury, that he is truly pitiable. Let us hope the world is peopled with robuster natures; a robuster nature need not be alarmed.

But while asserting *Wilhelm Meister* to be in no respect a Moral Tale, I am bound to declare that deep and healthy moral meaning lies in it, pulses through it, speaking in many tones to him who hath ears to hear it. As Wordsworth says

of *Tam O'Shanter*, "I pity him who cannot perceive that in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect." What each reader will see in it, will depend on his insight and experience. Sometimes this meaning results from the whole course of the narrative; such for example as the influence of life upon Wilhelm in moulding and modifying his character, raising it from mere impulse to the subordination of reason, from dreaming self-indulgence to practical duty, from self-culture to sympathy; but the way this lesson is taught is the artist's not the preacher's way, and therefore may be missed by those who wait for the moral to be pointed before they are awake to its significance.

The "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," which occupy the Sixth Book, have, in some circles, embalmed what was pronounced the corruption of the other books. Stolberg burned all the rest of the work, and kept these chapters as a treasure. Curious indeed is the picture presented of a quiet mystic, who is at the same time an original and strongly marked character; and the effect of religious convictions on life is subtly delineated in the gradual encroachment and final predominance of mysticism on the mind of one who seemed every way so well fitted for the world. Nevertheless, while duly appreciating the picture, I regret that it was not published separately, for it interrupts the story in a most inartistic manner, and has really nothing to do with the rest of the work.

The criticism on *Hamlet*, which Wilhelm makes, still remains the best criticism we have on that wonderful play. Very artfully is *Hamlet* made as it were a part of the novel; and Rosenkrantz praises its introduction not only because it illustrates the affinity between Hamlet and Wilhelm, both of whom are reflective, vacillating characters, but because Hamlet is further allied to Wilhelm in making the Play a touchstone, whereby to detect the truth, and determine his own actions.

Were space at disposal, the whole of Schiller's criticism on this work might fitly be given here from his enthusiastic letters; but I must content myself with one extract, which is quite delightful to read: "I account it the most fortunate incident in my existence, that I have lived to see the completion of this work; that it has taken place while my faculties are still capable of improvement; that I can yet draw from this pure spring; and the beautiful relation there is between us makes it a kind of religion with me to feel towards what is yours as if it were my own, and so to purify and elevate my

nature that my mind may be a clear mirror, and that I may thus deserve, in a higher sense, the name of your friend. How strongly have I felt on this occasion that the Excellent is a power; that by selfish natures it can be felt only as a power; and that only where there is disinterested love can it be enjoyed. I cannot describe to you how deeply the truth, the beautiful vitality, the simple fulness of this work has affected me. The excitement into which it has thrown my mind will subside when I shall have perfectly mastered it, and that will be an important crisis in my being. This excitement is the effect of the beautiful, and only the beautiful, and proceeds from the fact that my intellect is not yet entirely in accordance with my feelings. I understand now perfectly what you mean when you say that it is strictly the beautiful, the true, that can move you even to tears. Tranquil and deep, clear, and yet, like Nature, unintelligible, is this work; and all, even the most trivial collateral incident, shows the clearness, the equanimity of the mind whence it flowed."

CHAPTER III

THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL

"After the mad challenge of the *Xenien*," writes Goethe to Schiller, "we must busy ourselves only with great and worthy works of Art, and shame our opponents by the manifestation of our poetical natures in forms of the Good and Noble." This trumpet-sound found Schiller alert. The two earnest men went earnestly to work, and produced their matchless ballads, and their great poems, *Hermann und Dorothea* and *Wallenstein*. The influence of these men on each other was very peculiar. It made Goethe, in contradiction to his native tendency, speculative and theoretical. It made Schiller, in contradiction to his native tendency, realistic. Had it not urged Goethe to rapid production, we might have called the influence wholly noxious; but seeing what was produced, we pause ere we condemn. "You have created a new youth for me," writes Goethe, "and once more restored me to Poetry, which I had almost entirely given up." They were both much troubled with Philosophy at this epoch. Kant and Spinoza occupied Schiller; Kant and scientific theories occupied

Goethe. They were both, moreover, becoming more and more imbued with the spirit of ancient Art, and were bent on restoring its principles. They were men of genius, and therefore these two false tendencies—the tendency to Reflection, and the tendency to Imitation—were less hurtful to *their* works than to the national culture. Their genius saved them, in spite of their errors; but their errors misled the nation. It is remarked by Gervinus, that "Philosophy was restored in the year 1781, and profoundly affected all Germany. Let any one draw up a statistical table of our literary productions, and he will be amazed at the decadence of Poetry during the last fifty years in which Philosophy has been supreme." Philosophy has distorted Poetry, and been the curse of Criticism. It has vitiated German Literature; and it produced, in combination with the tendency to Imitation, that brilliant error known as the Romantic School.

A few words on this much talked-of school may not be unacceptable. Like its offspring, *L'École Romantique* in France, it had a critical purpose which was good, and a retrograde purpose which was bad. Both were insurgent against narrow critical canons; both proclaimed the superiority of Mediæval Art; both sought, in Catholicism and in national Legends, meanings profounder than those current in the literature of the day. The desire to get deeper than Life itself led to a disdain of reality and the present. Hence the selection of the Middle Ages and the East as regions for the ideal: they were not present, and they were not classical; the classical had already been tried, and against it the young Romantic School was everywhere in arms. In other respects the German and French schools greatly differed. The Schlegels, Tieck, Novalis, and Werner, had no enemy to combat in the shape of a severe National Taste, such as opposed the tentatives of Victor Hugo, Dumas, and Alfred de Vigny. On the contrary, they were supported by a large body of the nation, for their theories only carried further certain tendencies which had become general. Thus in as far as these theories were critical, they were little more than jubilations over the victorious campaigns won by Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and Schiller. The Schlegels stood upon the battlefield, now silent, and sang a hymn of victory over the bodies of the slain. Frederick Schlegel, by many degrees the most considerable critic of this school, began his career with an Anthology from Lessing's works: *Lessing's Geist: eine Blumenlese seiner Ansichten;* he ended

it with admiration for Philip the Second and the cruel Alva, and with the proclamation that Calderon was a greater poet than Shakspeare. Frederick Schlegel thus represents the whole Romantic School from its origin to its close.

Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Solger are the philosophers of this school; from the two former came the most famous, now almost forgotten, principle of "Irony," which Hegel [1] not only disposed of as a principle, but showed that the critics themselves made no use of it. No one, not even Tieck, attempted to exhibit the "irony" of Shakspeare, the god of their idolatry. Among the services rendered by Tieck and A. W. Schlegel, the translation of Shakspeare must never be forgotten, for although that translation is by no means so accurate as is generally believed, being often singularly weak, and sometimes grossly mistaken in its interpretation of the meaning, it is nevertheless a translation which, on the whole, has, perhaps, no rival in literature, and has served to make Shakspeare as familiar to the Germans as to us.

In their crusade against the French, in their naturalisation of Shakspeare, and their furtherance of Herder's efforts towards the restoration of a Ballad Literature and the taste for Gothic Architecture, these Romanticists were with the stream. They also flattered the national tendencies when they proclaimed "Mythology and Poetry, symbolical Legend and Art to be one and indivisible," [2] whereby it became clear that a new Religion, or at any rate a new Mythology, was needed, for "the deepest want and deficiency of all modern Art lies in the fact that the artists have no Mythology." [3]

While Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher were tormented with the desire to create a new philosophy and a new religion, it soon became evident that a Mythology was not to be created by programme; and as a Mythology was indispensable, the Romanticists betook themselves to Catholicism, with its saintly Legends and saintly Heroes; some of them, as Tieck and A. W. Schlegel, out of nothing more than poetic enthusiasm and dilettantism; others, as F. Schlegel and Werner, with thorough conviction, accepting Catholicism and all its consequences.

Solger had called Irony the daughter of Mysticism; and how highly these Romanticists prized Mysticism is known to all readers of Novalis. To be mystical was to be poetical as

[1] *Æsthetik*, i. pp. 84–90.
[2] F. SCHLEGEL: *Gespräche über Poesie*, p. 263. [3] *Ibid.* p. 274.

well as profound; and critics glorified mediæval monstrosities because of the deep spiritualism which stood in contrast with the pagan materialism of Goethe and Schiller. Once commenced, this movement carried what was true in it rapidly onwards to the confines of nonsense. Art became the handmaid of religion. The canon was laid down that only in the service of Religion had Art ever flourished,—only in that service *could* it flourish: a truth from which strange conclusions were drawn. Art became a propaganda. Fra Angelico and Calderon suddenly became idols. Werner was proclaimed a Colossus, by Wackenroder, who wrote his *Herzensergiessungen eines Kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, with Tieck's aid, to prove, said Goethe, that because some monks were artists, all artists should turn monks. Then it was that men looked to Faith for miracles in Art. Devout study of the Bible was thought to be the readiest means of rivalling Fra Angelico and Van Eyck; inspiration was sought in a hair-shirt. Catholicism had a Mythology, and painters went over in crowds to the Roman Church. Cornelius and Overbeck lent real genius to the attempt to revive the dead forms of early Christian Art, as Goethe and Schiller did to revive the dead forms of Grecian Art. Overbeck, who painted in a cloister, was so thoroughly penetrated by the ascetic spirit, that he refused to draw from the living model, lest it should make his works too *naturalistic;* for to be true to Nature was tantamount to being false to the higher tendencies of Spiritualism. Some had too much of the artistic instinct to carry their principles into these exaggerations; but others less gifted, and more bigoted, carried the principles into every excess. A band of these reformers established themselves in Rome, and astonished the Catholics quite as much as the Protestants. Cesar Masini in his work *Dei Puristi in Piltura* thus describes them: "Several young men came to Rome from Northern Germany in 1809. They abjured Protestantism, adopted the costume of the Middle Ages, and began to preach the doctrine that painting had died out with Giotto, and to revive it, a recurrence to the old style was necessary. Under such a mask of piety they concealed their nullity. Servile admirers of the rudest periods in Art, they declared the pigmies were giants, and wanted to bring us back to the dry hard style and barbarous imperfection of a Buffalmacco, Calandrino, Paolo Uccello, when we had a Raphael, a Titian, and a Correggio." In spite of their exaggerated admiration of the Trecentisti, in spite of a doctrine

which was fundamentally vicious, the Romanticists made a decided revolution, not only in Literature but in Painting, and above all in our general estimate of painters. If we now learn to look at the exquisite works of Fra Angelico, Ghirlandajo, and Massaccio with intense pleasure; and can even so far divest ourselves of the small prejudices of criticism, as to be deeply interested in Giotto, Gozzoli, or Guido da Arezzo, feeling in them the divine artistic faculty which had not yet mastered artistic expression; it is to the preaching of the Romanticists that we owe this source of noble enjoyment. In poetry the Romanticists were failures, but in painting they achieved marked success. Whatever may be thought of the German School, it must be confessed that before Overbeck, Cornelius, Schadow, Hess, Lessing, Hübner, Sohn, and Kaulbach, the Germans had no painters at all; and they have in these men painters of very remarkable power.

To return to Goethe. He was led by Schiller into endless theoretical discussions. They philosophised on the limits of epic and dramatic poetry; read and discussed Aristotle's Poetics; discussions which resulted in Goethe's essay, *Ueber epische und dramatische Poesie;* and, as we gather from their correspondence, scarcely ventured to take a step until they had seen how Theory justified it. Goethe read with enthusiasm Wolf's *Prolegomena* to Homer, and at once espoused its principles.[1] The train of thought thus excited, led him from the origin of epic songs to the origin of the Hebrew songs, and Eichhorn's *Introduction to the Old Testament* led him to attempt a new explanation of the wanderings of the people of Israel, which he subsequently inserted in the notes to the *Westöstliche Divan.*

Nor was he only busy with epical theories; he also gave himself to the production of epics. *Hermann und Dorothea,* the most perfect of his poems, was written at this time. *Achilleis* was planned and partly executed; *Die Jagd* was also planned, but left unwritten, and subsequently became the prose tale known as *die Novelle.* This year of 1797 is moreover memorable as the year of ballads, in which he and Schiller, in friendly rivalry, gave Germany lyrical masterpieces. His share may be estimated, when we learn that in this year

[1] Later on in life he returned to the old conviction of the unity of Homer. It is to be regretted that in England Wolf's masterly work is seldom read, the critics contenting themselves with second-hand statements of his views, which fail to do them justice.

were written the *Bride of Corinth*, the *Zauberlehrling*, *der Gott und die Bajadere*, and the *Schatzgräber*. In an unpublished letter to Körner, he writes, "You will have learned from Schiller that we are now making attempts in the ballad line. His are, as you know already, very felicitous. I wish that mine may be in some sort worthy to stand beside them; he is, in every sense, more competent to this species of poetry than I am."

In the same year *Faust* was once more taken up. The *Dedication*, the *Prologue in Heaven* and the Intermezzo of *Oberon and Titania's Marriage* were written. But while he was in this mood, Hirt came to Weimar, and in the lively reminiscences of Italy, and the eager discussions of Art which his arrival awakened, all the northern phantoms were exorcised by southern magic. He gave up *Faust*, and wrote an essay on the *Laokoon*. He began once more to pine for Italy. This is characteristic of his insatiable hunger for knowledge; he never seemed to have mastered *material* enough. Whereas Schiller, so much poorer in material, and so much more inclined to production, thought this Italian journey would only embarrass him with fresh objects; and urged Meyer to dissuade him from it. He did not go; and I think Schiller's opinion was correct: at the point now reached he had nothing to do but to give a form to the materials he had accumulated.

In the July of this year he, for the third time, made a journey into Switzerland. In Frankfurt he introduced Christiane and her boy to his Mother, who received them very heartily, and made the few days' stay there very agreeable. It is unnecessary for us to follow him on his journey, which is biographically interesting only in respect to the plan of an epic on *William Tell* which he conceived, and for which he studied the localities. The plan was never executed. He handed it over to Schiller for his drama on that subject, giving him at the same time the idea of the character of Tell, and the studies of localities, which Schiller managed to employ with a mastery quite astonishing to his friend. The same brotherly co-operation is seen in the composition of *Wallenstein*. It is not true, as was currently supposed in Germany, that Goethe wrote any portions of that work. He has told us himself he only wrote two unimportant lines. But his counsel aided Schiller through every scene; and the bringing it on the stage was to him like a triumph of his own.

In the spring of 1798 Schelling's Philosophy of Nature, and

his own plans for a History of the Theory of Colours, lured him from poetry; but Schiller again brought him back to it. *Faust* was resumed, and the last tragic scenes of the First Part were written. In the summer he was much at Jena with Schiller, consequently with poetry. Achilles and Tell, the ancient and the modern world, as Schäfer remarks, struggled for priority, but neither obtained it, because he was still perplexed in his epic theories. The studies of the *Iliad* had "hunted him through the circle of enthusiasm, hope, insight and despair." No sooner did he leave Jena than, as he confessed, he was drawn by another polarity. Accordingly, we see him busy with an art-journal, the *Propyläen*. He was also busy with the alteration of the Theatre, the boards of which, on the 12th of October, 1798, were made for ever memorable by the production of *Wallenstein's Camp* and *Prologue*. On the 30th January, 1799, the birthday of the Duchess Louise, the *Piccolomini* was produced; and, on the 20th of April, *Wallenstein's Tod*.

It was in this year that a young advocate, in Edinburgh, put forth a translation of *Götz von Berlichingen*, and preluded to a fame as great as Goethe's own; and it was in the December of this year that Karl August's generosity enabled Schiller to quit Jena, and come to Weimar for the rest of his life, there in uninterrupted intercourse with Goethe to pursue the plans so dear to both, especially in the formation of a national stage. I will take advantage of this change to insert a chapter on *Hermann und Dorothea*, which was published in 1796–97; and I will afterwards group together the scattered details of the theatrical management, so as to place them before the reader in a continuous narrative.

CHAPTER IV

HERMANN UND DOROTHEA

The pleasure every one finds in making acquaintance with the original stories from which Shakspeare created his marvellous plays, is the pleasure of detecting how genius can improve upon the merest hint, and how with its own vital forces it converts lifeless material into immortal life. This pleasure also carries the conviction that there is no lack of subjects for an artist, if he have but the eye to see them. It shows us

that great poets are not accustomed to cast about for subjects worthy of treatment; on the contrary, the merest hint is enough to form the nucleus of a splendid work; a random phrase will kindle a magnificent conception.

Very like the material offered by Bandello to Shakspeare is the material offered to Goethe by the old narrative[1] from which he created one of the most faultless of modern poems. Herein we learn how a rich and important citizen of Altmühl has in vain tried to persuade his son to marry. The Saltzburg emigrants pass through the town, and among them the son finds "a maiden who pleases him right well;" he inquires after her family and bringing up, and as all he hears is satisfactory, away he hies to his father, declaring that unless this Saltzburg maiden be given him, he will remain unmarried all his life. The father, aided by the pastor, tries to persuade him from such a resolution. But their efforts being vain, the pastor advises the father to give his consent, which is done. Away goes the son to the maiden, and asks her if she is willing to enter his father's domestic service. She accepts, and is presented to the father. But he, ignorant of his son's *ruse*, and believing he sees before him the betrothed, asks her whether she is fond of his son. The maiden thinks they are laughing at her, but on learning that they are serious in wishing her to belong to the family, declares herself quite ready, and draws from her bosom a purse containing 200 ducats, which she hands to her bridegroom as her dowry.

This is the story out of which grew *Hermann und Dorothea*. An ordinary story, in which the poet alone could see a poem; *what* he has seen, every reader of German literature well knows; and those to whom the poem is unknown must be content with the following analysis.

The epoch is changed to that of the French Revolution. The emigrants are driven from home by political events. The scene is on the right side of the Rhine. The streets of a quiet little village are noisy with unaccustomed movement; every one is crowding to see the sad procession of emigrants passing through, in the heat and dust of a summer afternoon. Mine Host of the Golden Lion, sitting at his doorway, marvels at such curiosity, but applauds the active benevolence of his

[1] *Das Liebthätige Gera gegen die Salzburgischen Emigranten. Das ist: kurze und wahrhaftige Erzählung wie dieselben in der Gräflich Reuss Plauischen Residenz Stadt angekommen, aufgenommen, und versorget, auch was an und von vielen derselben Gutes gesehen und gehöret worden.* Leipsic: 1732.

wife, who has sent their son with linen, food and drink, to bestow upon the sufferers, "for to give is the duty of those who have."

And now are seen returning some of the curious. See how dusty their shoes, and how their faces are burning! They come back wiping the perspiration from their glowing faces; the old couple rejoice at having sat quiet at home, contenting themselves with what will be told them of the sight. Sure enough, here comes the pastor, and with him the apothecary; seating themselves on the wooden bench, they shake the dust off their shoes, and fan their hot faces with their handkerchiefs. They narrate what they have seen; and mine host, sighing, hopes his son will overtake the emigrants, and give them what has been sent. But the heat suggests to him that they should retire into the cool back parlour, and, out of the way of the flies, refresh themselves with a bottle of Rhine wine. There, over the wine, mine host expresses his wish to see his son married. This is the whole of the first canto; and yet, slight as the material is, the wonderful objective treatment gives it substance. The fresh air of the country breathes from the verse.

In the second canto Hermann appears before his father and friends. The pastor's quick eye detects that he is returned an altered man. Hermann narrates how he accomplished his mission. Overtaking the emigrants, he fell in with a cart drawn by oxen, wherein lay a poor woman beside the infant to which she had just given birth. Leading the oxen was a maiden, who came towards him with the calm confidence of a generous soul, and begged his aid for the poor woman whom she had just assisted in her travail. Touched with pity, and feeling at once that this maiden was the best person to distribute justly the aid he had brought, Hermann gave it all into her hands. They parted, she gratefully pursuing her sad journey, he thoughtfully returning home. Love has leaped into his heart, and, by the light of his smile, the pastor sees he is an altered man.

On hearing his tale, the apothecary hugs himself with the consolation of not having wife and children to make him anxious in these anxious times; "the single man escapes the easiest." But Hermann reproves him, asking, "Is it well that a man should feel himself alone in joy and sorrow, not understanding how to share these joys and sorrows? I never was so willing to marry as to-day; for many a good maiden needs

the protection of a husband, and many a man needs the bright consolation of a wife, in the shadow of misfortune." Hereupon the father, smiling, exclaims, "I hear you with pleasure; such a sensible word you have seldom uttered." And his mother also applauds him, referring to her marriage as an example. Memory travels back complacently to the day of her betrothal. It was in the midst of misfortune—a fire had destroyed all their property—but in that hour of misfortune their union was decided. The father here breaks in, and says the story is true, but evidently wishes to warn his son from any imitation of his own venture. With admirable art and humour his fatherly anxiety is depicted. He married a girl who had nothing when he himself had nothing; but now, when he is old and well to do in the world, this idea of beginning life upon no solid foundation of fortune is alarming to him. He paints the difficulties of keeping house, the advantages of fortune, and concludes with a decisive intimation to Hermann that he expects a rich daughter-in-law to be brought into the house. He indicates the daughters of a rich neighbour, and wishes Hermann to select one. But Hermann has not only a new love in his heart, he has an old repugnance to these rich neighbours, who mocked his simplicity, and ridiculed him because he was not as familiar with the personages of an opera as they were. This enrages his father, who upbraids him for being a mere peasant without culture, and who angrily declares he will have no peasant-girl brought into the house as his daughter-in-law, but a girl who can play the piano, and who can draw around her the finest people of the town. Hermann, in silence, quits the room; and thus closes the second canto.

The third canto carries on the story. Mine host continues his angry eloquence. It is his opinion that the son should always rise higher in the social scale than the father: for what would become of the house, or the nation, without this constant progress? "You are always unjust to your son," replies the mother, "and thus frustrate your own wishes. We must not hope to form children after our notions. As God has given them us, so must we have them and love them, bring them up as best we can, and let them have their own disposition. For some have this and others that gift. One is happy in one way, another in another. I won't have my Hermann abused. He is an excellent creature. But with daily snubbing and blame you crush

his spirit." And away she goes to seek her son. "A wonderful race the women," says the host, smiling, as his wife departs, "just like children. They all want to live after their own fashion, and yet be praised and caressed!" The old apothecary, carrying out the host's argument respecting the continual improvement of one's station, happily displays his character by a speech of quiet humour, describing his own anxiety to improve the appearance of his house, and how he has always been hindered by the fear of the expense. The contrast of characters in this poem is of the finest and sharpest: mother and father, pastor and apothecary, all stand before us in distinctive, yet unobtrusive, individuality, such as only the perfection of art achieves.

In the fourth canto, the mother seeks her son. The description of this search is a striking specimen of Goethe's descriptive poetry, being a series of pictures without a metaphor, without an image, without any of the picturesque aids which most poets employ; and yet it is vivid and picturesque in the highest degree. I wish I dared quote it. But the reader of German can seek it in the original; and translation is more than ever unjust to a poet, where style is in question.

In the stable she seeks him, expecting to find him with his favourite stallion; then she goes into the garden (not omitting to set up the tree-props and brush the caterpillars from the cabbages, like a careful housewife as she is!) then through the vineyard until she finds him seated under the pear-tree, in tears. A charming scene takes place between them. Hermann declares his intention of setting off in defence of fatherland; he is eloquent on the duties of citizens to give their blood for their country. But the mother knows very well it is no political enthusiasm thus suddenly moving him to quit his home; she has divined his love for Dorothea, the maiden whom he met among the emigrants; she questions him, and receives his confidence. Yes, it is because he loves Dorothea, and because his father has forbidden him to think of any but a rich bride, that he is about to depart. His father has always been unjust to him. Here interposes the mother; persuades Hermann to make the first advances to his father, certain that the paternal anger is mere hasty words, and that the dearest wish of Hermann's heart will not be disregarded. She brings him back with these hopes.

In the fifth canto the friends are still sipping from green glasses the cool Rhine wine, and arguing the old question.

To them enter mother and son. She reminds her husband how often they have looked forward to the day when Hermann should make choice of a bride. That day has arrived. He has chosen the Emigrant maiden. Mine host hears this in ominous stillness. The Pastor rises, and heartily backs Hermann in his prayer. He looks upon this choice as an inspiration from above, and knows Hermann well enough to trust him in such a choice. The father is still silent. The Apothecary, cautious ever, suggests a middle course. He does not trust implicitly in these inspirations from above. He proposes to inquire into the character of the maiden, and as he is not easily to be deceived, he undertakes to bring back a true report. I need scarcely point out the superiority of this treatment of the old story, wherein the lover first inquires into the character of the maiden, and then makes up his mind to have her. Hermann needs no inquiry—but neither does he shirk it. He urges the Apothecary to set off, and take the Pastor with him, two such experienced men being certain to detect the truth. For himself he is sure of the result. Mine host, finding wife and friends against him, consents, on a worthy report being brought by Pastor and Apothecary, to call Dorothea his daughter. The two commissioners seat themselves in the cart, and Hermann, mounting the box, drives them swiftly to the village. Arriving there, they get out. Hermann describes Dorothea, that they may recognise her; and awaits their return. Very graphic is the picture of this village, where the wanderers are crowded in barns and gardens, the streets blocked up with carts, men noisily attending to the lowing cows and horses, women busily washing and drying on every hedge, while the children dabble in the stream. Through this crowd the two friends wander, and witness a quarrel, which is silenced by an old magistrate, who afterwards gives them satisfactory details about Dorothea. This episode is full of happy touches and thoughtful poetry. The friends return joyful to Hermann, and tell him he may take Dorothea home. But while they have been inquiring about her, he, here on the threshold of his fate, has been torturing himself with doubts as to whether Dorothea will accept him. She may love another; what is more probable? She may refuse to come with them into a strange house. He begs them to drive home without him. He will alone ask Dorothea, and return on foot with her if she consent. The Pastor takes the reins, but the cautious

Apothecary, willing enough to entrust the Pastor with the care of his soul, has misgivings about his power of saving his body. The Pastor reassures him, and they disappear in a cloud of dust, leaving Hermann to gaze after them motionless, fixed in thought.

The next two cantos are exquisitely poetical. As Hermann stands by the spring, he sees Dorothea coming with a water jug in each hand. He approaches her, and she smiles a friendly smile at his approach. He asks why she comes so far from the village to fetch water. She answers that her trouble is well repaid if only because it enables her to see and thank him for the kindness he has shown to the sufferers; but also adds that the improvident men have allowed oxen and horses to walk into the streams, and so disturb all the water of the village. They then pass to the well, and sit upon the wall which protects it. She stoops, and dips a jug in the water; he takes the other jug and dips it also, and they see the image of themselves mirrored in the wavering blue of the reflected heavens, and they nod and greet each other in the friendly mirror. "Let me drink," says the joyous youth. And she holds the jug for him. Then they rest leaning upon the jugs in sweet confidence.[1]

She then asks him what has brought him here. He looks into her eyes, and feels happy, but dares not trust himself with the avowal. He endeavours to make her understand it in an indirect recital of the need there is at home for a young and active woman to look after the house and his parents. She thinks he means to ask her to come as servant in his house, and, being alone in the world, gladly consents. When he perceives her mistake he is afraid to undeceive her, and thinks it better to take her home and gain her affection there. "But let us go," she exclaims, "girls are always blamed who stay long at the fountain in gossip." They stand up, and once more look back into the well to see their images meeting in its water, and "sweet desires possess them."

[1] I cannot resist quoting the original of this charming picture:

Also sprach sie, und war die breiten Stufen hinunter
Mit dem Begleiter gelangt; und auf das Mäuerchen setzten
Beide sich nieder des Quells. Sie beugte sich über, zu schöpfen;
Und er fasste den anderen Krug, und beugte sich über.
Und sie sahen gespiegelt ihr Bild in der Bläue des Himmels
Schwanken, und nickten sich zu, und grüssten sie freundlich im Spiegel.
Lass mich trinken, sagte darauf der heitere Jüngling;
Und sie reicht' ihm den Krug. Dann ruhten sie Beide vertraulich
Auf die Gefässe gelehnt.

He accompanies her to the village, and witnesses, in the affection all bear to Dorothea, the best sign that his heart has judged aright. She takes leave of them all, and sets forth with Hermann, followed by the blessings and handkerchief-wavings of the emigrants. In silence they walk towards the setting sun, which tinges the storm-clouds threatening in the distance. On the way she asks him to describe the characters of those she is going to serve. He sketches father and mother. "And how am I to treat you, you the only son to my future master?" she asks. By this time they have reached the pear-tree, and the moon is shining overhead. He takes her hand, answering, "Ask your heart, and follow all it tells you." But he can go no farther in his declaration, fearing to draw upon himself a refusal. In silence they sit awhile and look upon the moon. She sees a window—it is Hermann's, who hopes it will soon be hers. They rise to continue their course, her foot slips, she falls into his arms; breast against breast, cheek against cheek, they remain a moment, he not daring to press her to him, merely supporting her. In a few minutes more they enter the house.

The charm of these cantos, as indeed of the whole poem, cannot of course be divined from the analysis I am making; the perfume of a violet is not to be found in the description of the violet. But with all drawbacks, the analysis enables a reader of imagination to form a better conception of the poem than he would form from an æsthetical discussion such as philosophical criticism indulges in. With this caveat let our analysis proceed. The mother is uneasy at this long absence of Hermann; comes in and out, noting the appearances of the storm, and is rather sharp in her blame of the two friends for leaving him without securing the maiden. The Apothecary narrates how he was taught patience in youth; and, the door opening, presents the young couple to their glad eyes. Hermann introduces her, but tells the Pastor aside that as yet there has been no talk of marriage; she only supposes her place to be that of servant. The host, wishing to be gallant, goes at once to the point, treats her as his daughter, and compliments her on her taste in having chosen his son. She blushes, is pained, and replies with some reproach that for such a greeting she was unprepared. With tears in her eyes she paints her forlorn condition, and the secret escapes her, that, touched by Hermann's generosity and noble bearing, she really has begun to feel the love for him they twit her with; but having made that confession, of course she can no longer

stay; and she is departing with grief in her heart when the mistake is cleared up; she is accepted, dowerless, by them all, and Hermann, in pressing her to his heart, feels prepared for the noble struggle of life.

Such is the story of *Hermann und Dorothea*, which is written in Homeric hexameters, with Homeric simplicity. In the ordinary course of things, I should be called upon to give some verdict on the much-vexed question as to whether, properly speaking, this poem is an Epic or an Idyll, or, by way of compromise, an Idyllic Epic. The critics are copious in distinctions and classifications. They tell us in what consists the Epos proper, which they distinguish from the Romantic Epos, and from the Bourgeois Epos; and then these heavy batteries are brought to bear on *Hermann und Dorothea*. Well! if these discussions gratify the mind, and further any of the purposes of Literature, let those, whose bent lies that way, occupy themselves therewith. To me it seems idle to trouble oneself whether *Hermann und Dorothea* is or is not an Epic, or what kind of Epic it should be called. It is a poem. One cannot say more for it. If it be unlike all other poems, there is no harm in that; if it resemble some other poems, the resemblance does not enhance its charm. Let us accept it for what it is, a poem full of life, character, and beauty; simple in its materials, astonishingly simple in its handling; written in obvious imitation of Homer, and yet preserving throughout the most modern colour and sentiment. Of all Idylls, it is the most truly idyllic. Of all poems describing country life and country people, it is the most truthful; and on comparing it with Theocritus or Virgil, with Guarini or Tasso, with Florian or Delille, with Gesner or Thomson, the critic will note with interest its absence of poetic ornamentation, its freedom from all "idealisation." Its peasants are not such as have been fashioned in Dresden China, or have solicited the palette of Lancret and Watteau; but are as true as poetry can represent them. The characters are wonderfully drawn, with a few decisive unobtrusive touches. Shakspeare himself is not more dramatic in the presentation of character. The Host, his wife, the Pastor, the old cautious Apothecary, stand before us in all their humours. Hermann, the stalwart peasant, frank, simple, and shy, and Dorothea the healthy, affectionate, robust, simple peasant girl, are ideal characters in the best sense, viz., in the purity of nature. Those "ideal peasants" with Grecian features and

irreproachable linen, so loved of bad painters and poor poets, were not at all the figures Goethe cared to draw; he had faith in nature, which would not allow him to idealise.

Very noteworthy is it that he, like Walter Scott, could find a real pleasure in talking with the common people, such as astonished his daughter-in-law (from whom, among others, I learned the fact), who could not comprehend what pleasure this great intellect found in conversation with an old woman baking her bread, or an old carpenter planing a fir-plank. He would talk with his coachman, pointing out to him the peculiarities of the scenery, and delighting in his remarks. Stately and silent as he often was to travelling bores, and to literary men with no ideas beyond the circle of books, he was loquacious and interested whenever one of the people came in his way; and the secret of this was his abiding interest in every individuality. A carpenter, who was a carpenter, interested him; but the carpenter in Sunday clothes, aping the bourgeois, would have found him as silent and stately as every other pretender found him. What Scott gathered from his intercourse with the people, every one knows who has noticed the rich soil of humour on which Scott's antiquarian fancies are planted; what Goethe gathered from the same source may be read in most of his works, especially in *Hermann und Dorothea*, *Faust*, and *Wilhelm Meister*.

The same objective truth is noticeable in his delineation of the scenes. They are not rhetorically or metaphorically described, they are presented directly to us. Instead of saying what they are like, he says what they *are*. Hence it is that while this poem is essentially *popular* (and on its first appearance produced a deep impression on the people, was reprinted on the coarsest paper, at the lowest prices, such as only occurs with the people's literature), it is also one of the greatest favourites with highly cultured readers. Between these two classes there is a third class, cultivated indeed, but not sufficiently cultivated, which finds the simplicity of this poem undistinguishable from baldness. Such readers desire imagery, and cannot see the art which dispenses with it; they want more stirring incidents, and characters stalking upon stilts.

As I do not enter upon the discussion of whether the poem is or is not an Epic, I may leave undisturbed all the derivative questions respecting the absence of *similes*, *episodes*, and *supernatural machinery* — which the critics assure us are indispensable to the Epic—as also the other subsidiary matters of

action, time, and space. By so doing the bulk of this chapter is materially diminished, and the reader not materially impoverished. Two points only require notice, and those shall be briefly touched.

First of the subject-matter. Taken from the sad experience of the hour, moving amid scenes made desolate by the French Revolution, it was natural that something of political significance should be sought in this story. Schiller would undoubtedly have made it the vehicle of splendid eloquence on Freedom, such as would have made the pulses beat. But that was nowise Goethe's tendency. He told Meyer that he had endeavoured "in an epic crucible to free from its dross the pure human existence of a small German town, and at the same time mirror in a small glass the great movements and changes of the world's stage."[1] While leaving to others the political problem, he confined himself as usual to the purely human and individual interest. Instead of declamations on Freedom, he tried to teach men to be free; and by Freedom he meant the complete healthy development of their own natures, not a change of political institutions. In one of the *Xenien* he says:

> Zur Nation euch zu bilden, ihr hoffet es, Deutsche, vergebens.
> Bildet, ihr könnt es, dafür freier zu Menschen euch aus.[2]

And in this sense *Hermann und Dorothea* may be accepted as a Hymn to the Family, a solemn vindication of the eternal claims which, as a first necessity, should occupy men.

With regard to the second point, that namely of style, Schiller's cordial praise, in a letter to Meyer, may here find place. "Nor have we in the meantime been inactive, as you know, and least of all our friend, who in the last few years has really surpassed himself. His epic poem you have read; you will admit that it is the pinnacle of his and all our modern art. I have seen it grow up, and have wondered almost as much at the manner of its growth as at the completed work. Whilst the rest of us are obliged painfully to collect and to prune, in order slowly to bring forth anything passable, he has only gently to shake the tree, in order to have fall to him the most beautiful fruit, ripe and heavy. It is incredible with what ease he now reaps for himself the fruits of a well-bestowed life and

[1] *Briefe an und von Goethe.*

[2] "Germans, you hope in vain to develop yourselves into a nation; strive, therefore, to develop yourselves all the more freely into men."

a persistent culture; how significant and sure all his steps now are; how the clearness as to himself and as to objects, preserves him from every idle effort and beating about. But you have him now yourself, and can satisfy yourself of all this with your own eyes. But you will agree with me in this, that on the summit where he now stands, he ought to think more of bringing the beautiful form he has given himself to outward exhibition, than to go out in search of new material; in short, that he now ought to live entirely for poetic execution."

The Homeric form is admirably adapted to this kind of narrative; and Voss had already made it popular by his *Luise*. Respecting the style of this poem, I would further beg the reader to compare it with that of the last books of *Wilhelm Meister*, composed about the same period, and he will then see Goethe's immense superiority on quitting prose for poetry. None of the faults of his prose are traceable here. The language is as clear as crystal, and as simple; the details are all, without exception, significant; not a line could be lopped away without injury. One feels that the invigorating breezes of Ilmenau have roused the poet out of the flaccid moods of prose, and given him all his quiet strength.

Before finally dismissing the poem, it may amuse the reader to have a specimen of that ingenious criticism which delights in interpreting the most obvious facts into profound meanings. Hegel, in his *Æsthetik*, and after him Rosenkrantz, in his excellent book *Goethe und seine Werke*, call attention to the fact that Goethe is far truer in his *German* colouring than Voss, whose *Luise* gave the impulse to this poem. Not having read the *Luise* I am unable to judge of this superiority; but the example cited by these critics is assuredly amusing. Voss, they tell us, makes his people drink copiously of coffee; but, however wide-spread the custom of coffee-drinking, we must remember that coffee, and the sugar which sweetens it, are not *German*, they come from Arabia and the West Indies; the very cups in which the coffee is drunk are of Chinese origin, not German. We are miles away from Germany. How different is Goethe! His host of the Golden Lion refreshes guests with a glass of wine; and what wine? Rhine wine; the German wine, *par excellence;* the wine growing on the hill behind his own house! And this Rhine wine, is it not drunk out of green glasses, the genuine German glasses? And upon what do these glasses stand? Upon a tin tray: that is also genuine German!

It would be the merest prosaism to suggest that in *Luise* the pastor drinks coffee, because coffee is habitually drunk in the parsonage; while in *Hermann und Dorothea* the characters drink wine, because they are in the *Golden Lion*, and Rhine wine, because they are in the Rhine country; yet to such prosaisms is the British critic reduced in answering the subtleties of German æsthetics.

CHAPTER V

THE THEATRICAL MANAGER

It will be briefer, and help to convey a more accurate notion of Goethe's efforts in the direction of the Theatre, if, instead of scattering through this biography a number of isolated details, recording small events in chronological order, I endeavour to present some general view of his managerial efforts.

We have already seen how, on his arrival at Weimar, the court was given to theatrical entertainments, and how eagerly he entered into them. The Theatre was in ruin from the fire of the previous year. Theatres were improvised in the Ettersburg woods, and Tiefurt valley, whereon the gay courtiers "strutted their brief hour" by torchlight, to the accompaniment of horns. Actors were improvised from the court circle. Plays were improvised, and sometimes written with elaborate care. The public was the public of private theatricals. All this has been narrated in Book IV. What we have here to do with it is to call attention to the contrast thus presented by the Weimar stage with other German stages, and, above all, with the essential conditions of a stage which is to be anything more than the amusement of a dilettante circle. The drama is essentially a national outgrowth. In Weimar, instead of growing out of a popular tendency, and appealing to the people, it grew out of the idleness of a court, and appealed to dilettantism. The actors, instead of being recruited from runaway clerks, ambitious apprentices, romantic barbers, and scapegrace students, were princes, noblemen, poets, musicians. Instead of playing to a Public,—that heterogeneous, but in dramatic matters indispensable, jury, whose verdicts are in the main always right—they played to courtiers, whose judg-

ment, even when unfettered, would not have had much value; and it never was unfettered. The consequence may be foreseen. As a court amusement, the theatre was a pleasant and not profitless recreation; as an influence, it was pernicious. The starting point was false. Not so can dramatic art flourish; not so are Molières and Shakspeares allowed to manifest their strength. The national co-operation is indispensable. Academies may compile Dictionaries, they cannot create Literature; and Courts may patronise Theatres, they cannot create a Drama. The reason lies deep in the nature of things. Germany has never had a Drama, because she has never had a Stage which could be, or would be, national. Lessing knew what was needed, but he had not the power to create it. Schiller early mistook the path, and all his noble strivings were frustrated.

Goethe and Schiller, profoundly in earnest, and profoundly convinced of the great influences to be exercised by the stage, endeavoured to create a German Drama which should stand high above the miserable productions then vitiating public taste. They aspired to create an Ideal Drama, in which the loftiest forms of Art should be presented. But they made a false step at the outset. Disgusted with the rude productions of the day, and distrusting the instincts of the public, they appealed to the cultivated few. Culture was set above Passion and Humour, Literature above Emotion. The stage was to be literary; which is saying, in other words, that it was not to be popular. Nor did experience enlighten them. During the whole period of their reform, the principal performances were of the old style. At first a wandering troupe, with a wandering repertory, performed opera, drama, and farce, as best it could, with more real success than High Art could boast. Even when Schiller had ennobled the stage with his masterpieces, the ever pressing necessity of *amusing* the public forced the manager to give the vulgar appetite its vulgar food.[1] The dramatic problem is: How to unite the demands of an audience insisting on amusement, with the demands of Art, looking beyond amusement? There are many writers who can amuse, but who reach no higher aim; and there are writers who have lofty aims, but cannot amuse. In the drama the first class is nearer the mark than the second; but the true dramatist is he who can unite the two. Shakspeare and

[1] Goethe confesses so much. See *Eckermann*, vol. i. p. 305; Oxenford's translation.

Molière—to take the greatest examples—are as amusing as they are profound; and they live only because they continue to amuse. *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Tartuffe*, *L'école des Femmes*, and the *Malade Imaginaire*, may be enjoyed by the pit, and by the most cultivated critic. Goethe and Schiller fell into the error which in England, a few years ago, was preached as a gospel by a band of clever writers, who gloried in the title of "Unacted Dramatists"; the error of supposing a magnificent dome could be erected without a basis on our common earth; the error of supposing that a Drama could be more successful as Literature, than as the reflection of national life.

It was in 1790 that the Weimar Theatre was rebuilt and reopened. Goethe undertook the direction with powers more absolute than any other director ever had; for he was independent even of success. The court paid all expenses; the stage was left free for him to make experiments upon. He made them, and they all failed. He superintended rehearsals with great care. Shakspeare's *King John* and *Henry IV.*, his own *Gross-Kophta*, *Bürgergeneral*, *Clavigo*, *Die Geschwister*, were produced, but without any great effect; for the actors were mediocre and ill paid, and there was no audience to stimulate actors by enthusiasm and criticism. The audience was chilled by the presence of the court, and could rarely be emboldened into rapture, which is the life, the pulse, the stimulus of acting. The pit was cowed by the court, and the court was cowed by Goethe. His contempt of public opinion was undisguised. "The direction," he wrote to his second in command, "acts according to its own views, and not in the least according to the demands of the public. Once for all, understand that the public must be controlled—*will determinirt seyn.*" To Schiller, who was quite of this opinion, he said: "No one can serve two masters, and of all masters the last that I would select is the public which sits in a German theatre." It is all very well for a poet or a philosopher to scorn the fleeting fashions of the day, and to rely on the verdict of posterity; but the Drama appeals to the public of the day, and while the manager keeps his eye on posterity, the theatre is empty.

Wer machte denn der Mitwelt Spass?

"Who is to amuse the present?" asks the sensible Merry Andrew, in the Theatre-Prologue to *Faust*. A dramatist appealing to posterity, is like an orator hoping to convince the

descendants of his audience instead of persuading the listening crowd.

The Weimar audiences might be treated despotically, but they could not be forced into enthusiasm for that which wearied them. They submitted in silence. The riotous gallery and dogged pit of France and England only tolerate the absurdities which delight *them;* they admit no arbiter but their own amusement. An infusion of this rebellious element would have aided Goethe and Schiller in their efforts, by warning them from many a mistake. The Jena students might have supplied this element, had they been more constant visitors, and less controlled. The student is by nature and profession a rebel; and the Jena student had this tendency cultivated into a system. To be a roaring swashbuckler, with profound contempt for all *Philistines*, and a vast capacity for beer, was not, indeed, enough to constitute a pure judge of art; but to be young, full of life and impulse, and above all to be independent, were primary qualities in a dramatic audience; and the students brought such qualities into the pit. "Without them," says the worthy Klebe in his description of Weimar, "the house would often be empty. They generally come in the afternoon, and ride or drive back after the play." If they enlivened the Theatre, they scandalised the town. Imagination pictures them arriving covered with dust, in garbs of varied and eccentric device, ambitious of appearing as different from "humdrum" citizens as might be: adorned with tower-shaped caps, with motley ornaments of tassel, lace, &c., from under which escape flowing locks quite innocent of comb, which mingle with beard and moustache. Their short jackets are lined with stuffs of different colour. Their legs are cased in riding trousers, the inner sides of which are of leather. In their hands is the famous long whip, which they crack as they pour from the Webicht over the bridge into the town, startling its provincial dulness with an uproar by them called "singing"—a musical entertainment which they vary by insulting the not imposing soldiers, whom they christen "tree-frogs," on account of the green and yellow uniform. They push to the utmost the license and pride of the "Renomist," namely, to be ill-mannered.

When these students poured into the theatre, they carried there something like enthusiasm; but they were controlled by one who had a very mediocre admiration of their wild ways—the Geheimrath Goethe, who was not only *Geheim-*

rath and Manager, but their idol.[1] Of him Edward Devrient, in his excellent history of the German stage,[2] says: "He sat in the centre of the pit; his powerful glance governed and directed the circle around him, and bridled the dissatisfied or neutral. On one occasion, when the Jena students, whose arbitrary judgment was very unseasonable to him, expressed their opinion too tumultuously, he rose, commanded silence, and threatened to have the disturbers turned out by the hussars on guard. A similar scene took place in 1802 on the representation of Fr. Schlegel's *Alarcos*, which appeared to the public too daring an attempt, and the approbation given by the loyal party provoked a loud laugh of opposition. Goethe rose and called out with a voice of thunder: 'Let no one laugh!' At last he went so far as for some time to forbid any audible expression on the part of the public, whether of approval or disapproval. He would suffer no kind of disturbance in what he held to be suitable. Over criticism he kept a tight rein; hearing that Bötticher was writing an essay on his direction of the theatre, he declared that if it appeared he would resign his post; and Bötticher left the article unprinted."

Holding this despotic position towards the public, it may be imagined that he was imperious enough with the actors. Both he and Schiller were of opinion that nothing short of the "brief imperative" was of any use with actors—*denn durch Vernunft und Gefälligkeit ist nichts auszurichten*, said Schiller. Goethe as director would hear of no opposition, would listen to none of the egotistical claims which usually torment managers; he insisted on each doing what was allotted to him. Resistance was at once followed by punishment; he sent the men to the guard-house, and had sentinels placed before the doors of the women, confining them to their rooms. With the leading actors he employed other means: once when Becker refused to play a small part in *Wallenstein's Lager*, Goethe informed him that if he did not undertake the part, he, Goethe, would play it himself—a threat which at once vanquished Becker, who knew it would be fulfilled.

Nevertheless with all this despotism he was still the great, high-minded, lovable Goethe, and was reverenced by the

[1] See HEINRICH SCHMIDT: *Erinnerungen eines Weimarischen Veteranen*, p. 46, describing the enthusiasm with which he and DE WETTE and their friends read Goethe's poems, and wrote poems in his praise.

[2] *Geschichte der deutschen Schauspiel-Kunst.*

actors who were under him. Chancellor von Müller says that "Nowhere did he more freely exercise the spell of his imposing presence; rigorous and earnest in his demands, unalterable in his determinations, prompt and delighted to acknowledge every successful attempt, attentive to the smallest as to the greatest, and calling forth in every one his most hidden powers—in a narrow circle, and often with slender means, he accomplished what appeared incredible; his encouraging glance was a rich reward; his kind word an invaluable gift. Every one felt himself greater and more powerful in the place which he had assigned to him, and the stamp of his approbation seemed to be a sort of consecration for life. No one who has not seen and heard with what pious fidelity the veterans of that time of Goethe's and Schiller's cheerful spirited co-operation, treasured every recollection of these their heroes; with what transport they dwelt on every detail of their proceedings; and how the mere mention of their names called forth the flash of youthful pleasure from their eyes; can have an idea of the affectionate attachment and enthusiastic veneration those great men inspired."

It appears from Edward Devrient's account that the actors were miserably paid. Even Caroline Jagemann—the duke's mistress—who was prima donna, as well as leading actress, received only six hundred thalers a year, with a retiring pension of three hundred; and six hundred thalers is about one hundred pounds sterling. Moreover, the actors were not allowed a *congé*, as at other theatres; so that no money could be made by them beyond their salaries.[1] Except to confessed mediocrity, Weimar could scarcely have offered a temptation; nevertheless, the magic names of Goethe and Schiller did attract a few good actors.

The shifts to which the management was forced to have recourse, with so small and insufficient a troupe, may be gathered from this anecdote. The opera of *Die Zauberflöte* was performed, but the Queen of Night was so far advanced in pregnancy, that it was impossible to let her appear in that condition. Another singer was not to be had. In this dilemma Goethe actually made her sing the music behind the scenes, while an actress on the stage pantomimically represented the character.

When the connection between Schiller and Goethe grew

[1] On the various salaries paid to actors at Weimar, see PASQUE: *Goethe's Theaterleitung in Weimar*, i.

closer, the Theatre began to assume a really earnest aspect. With his natural tendency to interest himself in whatever deeply interested his friends, Goethe caught some of Schiller's dramatic enthusiasm, and began to treat the stage as a means of artistic education for the nation. *Don Carlos* was performed; somewhat later *Egmont* was adapted to the stage by Schiller (in a melodramatic style which revealed his love of material effects), and the greatest undertaking of all was achieved, namely, the performance of *Wallenstein*. The effect was prodigious, and the Weimar stage seemed really to have achieved something like the establishment of a new and grandiose style of dramatic representation. It was, however, but a flash. The strivings of the two poets were misdirected, as the event soon proved. No drama could so be founded. The dramatic age had passed, and could not be restored—not at least in such forms.

"The Weimar School," says Devrient,[1] who is here speaking *ex professo*, and is worth attending to, "although it demanded of the artist 'to produce something resembling nature,'[2] nevertheless set up a new standard of nobleness and beauty, by which every phenomenon in the region of Art was to be tested. The tendency hitherto dominant had by no means neglected the beautiful, but it had sought only a *beautiful reality*,—now, with subtle distinction, *beautiful truth* was demanded from it. Hitherto *living nature* had served as the standard, now an *enlightened taste* was to be the rule. The actors were to disaccustom themselves to the native German manner, and find a freer, a more universal conception; they were to raise themselves out of the narrow limits of the special, of the individual, to the contemplation of the general, of the Ideal.

"These were astoundingly new and hard demands on the actor. Hitherto a plain understanding, with vivid and sensitive feelings, had tolerably well sufficed to make this natural talent tell; for the problems lay within the actor's circle of vision. Now, appeal was principally made to his taste; he was required to have a refined instinct, and ennobled sentiments, which, to a certain degree, presupposed scientific and antiquarian culture; for instead of *nature*, as hitherto, the antique was now the model of speech and feature. The actual culture of the histrionic class was not in the remotest degree adequate to these demands; what then was to be done? The Weimar

[1] *Geschichte der deutschen Schauspiel-Kunst*, p. 255.
[2] *Goethe's Vorrede zu den Propyläen.*

School must content itself with *training:* it must seek to supply by external drilling what ought properly to have proceeded from a higher intellectual life, from an intrinsically ennobled nature. Nothing else remained to it. The spirit of our literature was pressing forward with unexampled power to that summit on which it could from thenceforth measure itself with that of all other nations; it carried along with it theatrical art, such as it was. If the attempt had been made to advance the culture of actors as far as was necessary in order to bring it even with the victorious march of our literature, the moment would have been lost in which the stage could render immeasurable service to the national culture.

"Goethe and Schiller had essentially this mission: to elevate poetry; to carry the intellectual life of the nation into higher ideal regions; literature was their *immediate* object, the stage only a secondary one; nay, it was with them only a means to an end. To work with entire devotion to dramatic art, solely for it and through it, as Molière and Shakspeare did, never occurred to them; nor would they imitate Lessing, who attached himself closely to art, to what it achieved, and could achieve. They placed themselves and their poems on the stand-point of the independent *literary* drama. The old schism between the *genres* again presented itself; the scholarly in opposition to the popular drama; and poetic art again won the supremacy over dramatic. *Don Carlos* and *Wallenstein* were not conceived for the actual stage, and could only be adapted to it with great labour and sacrifice; in writing *Faust*, *Tasso*, and the *Natürliche Tochter*, Goethe did not contemplate their representation, which must be considered purely as a theatrical experiment. It was a natural consequence that, since the two great poets adapted their works to the theatre just as it was, and were by no means excessively fastidious in their mode of doing it, they, with the same sort of violence, pushed forward the art of representation, and here also had to content themselves with what could be achieved by merely external discipline. Dramatic art had not reached that point of culture which could prepare it perfectly to comprehend and master their poems, and reproduce them independently. . . . Now if this new school was to make its authority in taste acknowledged, that authority must necessarily be exercised with a certain despotism. With despotism towards the actors and the public, since both were deeply imbued with naturalism. Like the unfortunate Neuber, like Schroeder in his eightieth

year, Schiller and Goethe placed themselves in decided opposition to the taste of the majority. They maintained a thoroughly aristocratic position with respect to the public, and defended the ideal principle with all the power of their pre-eminent genius; nay, they did not scorn to attack the prevalent taste with the sharpest weapons of satire. Their correspondence exhibits their contempt for the masses, and for the champions of the popular taste, in all that rudeness which seems inseparable from the enthusiasm of great souls for a more exalted humanity. Nowhere did they sue for the approbation of the multitude; nowhere did they accommodate themselves to the ruling taste, or even flatter it.

"The despotic energy with which Goethe carried out the ideal principle, in spite of all difficulties, necessarily made itself felt in his direction of the theatre. He had to urge forward dramatic art, and to wring from the public a formal respect for the experiments of his school; a double task, which obliged him to surpass even Schroeder in the peremptoriness of his commands."

Not only were there difficulties of rhythm, but also of pronunciation, to be overcome. The German language, harsh as it is at the best, becomes hideous in the careless licenses of pronunciation which various cities and classes adopt—as people who are too ugly to hope for any admiration, come at last entirely to neglect their appearance. The Suabians, Austrians, and especially the Weimarians, plagued Goethe terribly with their peculiarities of speech. "One would scarcely believe that *b*, *p*, *d*, and *t*, are generally considered to be *four* different letters," said the poet to Eckermann, "for they only speak of a hard and a soft *b*, and of a hard and a soft *d*, and thus seem tacitly to intimate that *p* and *t* do not exist.[1] With such people *Pein* (pain) is like *Bein* (leg), *Pass* (pass) like *Bass* (bass), and *Teckel* (a terrier) like *Deckel* (cover)." Thus an actor, in an impassioned moment bidding his mistress cease her reproaches, exclaimed *O ente* (Oh, duck!) meaning *O ende* (Oh, cease!)

The success of *Wallenstein*, which was a theatrical no less than an artistic success, seemed to have decided the battle in favour of the Ideal school; seemed, but did not. Art was henceforth to be everything. So far did Goethe carry out his

[1] LUDECUS in his book, *Aus Goethe's Leben: Wahrheit und keine Dichtung*, tells a story of GRAF, Schiller's favourite actor, who on seeing the great TALMA exclaimed, "*Dalma ist ein Gott!*"

principle of placing Art foremost,[1] that he would not suffer the actors to "forget the audience"; his maxim was, that in a scene between two actors, the presence of the spectator should constantly be felt. Consequently the actors were not allowed to stand in profile, or to turn their backs upon the audience, or to speak at the back of the stage, under any pretext. They were to *recite*, not to *be* the characters represented. Heinrich Schmidt narrates how Goethe in giving him lessons in acting, entered into the minutest details. In the celebrated monologue of Hamlet, "To be or not to be," he allowed Schmidt to place his right hand upon his chin, while the left hand supported the right elbow; but would not permit this left hand to be closed like a fist, insisting that the two middle fingers should be held together, the thumb and the other two fingers kept apart.[2] In acting, he reversed his old artistic maxim, and insisted on Beauty first, Truth afterwards: *erst schön dann wahr*.[3]

It will surprise no one that this tendency, this preoccupation with the Ideal, should result in the rehabilitation of the most perfect form of drama which that tendency has produced—I mean the French Tragedy, so pitilessly ridiculed by Lessing. Nay, Goethe himself translated Voltaire's *Mahomet*, which was played in 1800, and afterwards *Tancred*. The *Adelphi* of Terence, translated by Einsiedel; the *Ion* of Schlegel; the *Phêdre* of Racine; translated by Schiller; and finally Schiller's own *Braut von Messina*, sufficiently show the wide departure from anything like a modern national drama into which the Weimar school had wandered. Nay, even Shakspeare had to suffer the indignity of being elevated by this classical mania. Schiller translated his *Macbeth*—how he travestied it may be seen by the curious reader; enough to mention here that he changes the Witches into Fates; and we learn from Heinrich Voss that these terrible sisters were represented by young girls beautifully dressed! We need not, therefore, be surprised on hearing that Terence's comedy was actually represented by actors in Roman Masks,—thus entirely getting rid of Expression, which forms the basis of modern acting. So deplorable a mistake needs only to be mentioned to be appreciated. One

[1] See his *Rules for Actors* in *Werke*, xxxv. pp. 435–459.
[2] *Erinnerungen*, p. 110
[3] Remnants of the old Weimar school still talk of these days, and of the drilling which it was necessary to give the actors. From one, to whom Goethe was very kind, I heard full confirmation of what is said in the text.

step alone remained for dilettantism; and that step was to give the actors the cothurnus, and make them spout Latin and Greek.

During these antique restorations, experiments were made with Shakspeare, Calderon, Gozzi—with everything but the life of the people—and Weimar was proclaimed a great school of Art, in which the *literary* public religiously believed. But the other public? Goethe himself shall answer. "Here in Weimar they have done me the honour to perform my *Iphigenia* and my *Tasso*," he said to Eckermann in his old age. "But how often? Scarcely once in three or four years. The public finds them tedious. Very probably. . . . I really had the notion once that it was possible to found a German Drama; but there was no emotion or excitement—all remained as it was before."

To found a German Drama by means of poetic works, and antique restorations, was the delusion of one who was essentially *not* a dramatist. I have more than once denied to Goethe the peculiar genius which makes the dramatist; and my denial is not only supported by the evidence of his own works, it is, I think, conclusively established by his critical reflections on Shakspeare, and his theatrical treatment of Shakspeare's works. Profoundly as he appreciated the poet, he seems to me wholly to have misunderstood the dramatist. He actually asserts that *Hamlet's* Ghost, and the Witches in *Macbeth*, are examples of Shakspeare's "representing what would better be imagined"; that in the reading, these figures are acceptable, but in the acting they disturb, nay repel, our emotion. So radical a misconception need not be dwelt on. The reader, who does not at once perceive it, may rest assured that he is wholly unacquainted with the secrets of dramatic art. As an example of Goethe's entire misunderstanding of Shakspeare's art, I will cite the version he made of *Romeo and Juliet*, of which he was not a little proud. The subject is of sufficient literary interest—considering the two names implicated—to warrant a digression.

It was in 1811 that he undertook to recast *Romeo and Juliet* for the stage; and as this version has recently been recovered, and printed by Boas,[1] we can examine it at leisure. There is scarcely any Shakspearian play which a great poet and dramatist might so reasonably undertake to recast as *Romeo*

[1] *Nachträge zu Goethe's Werken.*

and Juliet; for while it is instinct with life, character, and dramatic movement, it is in some respects among the worst of Shakspeare's fine plays. Juvenility of style is apparent in almost every scene. The frequence of rhyme, the forced rhetoric and conceits, the lame expression, and the deficiency in that passionate and profound poetry which illuminates the great plays, prove it to be an early work. In most of the great situations we find long tirades of rhetorical *concetti* in place of the nervous language, strongly coloured by passion, which Shakspeare afterwards knew so well how to employ. Thus when Juliet is in agony of suspense as to whether Romeo is dead, she says:

> This torture should be roared in dismal hell.
> Hath Romeo slain himself? Say thou but *I*,
> And that bare vowel, *I*, shall poison more
> Than the death-darting *eye* of cockatrice;
> I am not I, if there be such an *I*.

There are critics who will defend this (what will they not defend in Shakspeare?) and find plausible arguments to show that it is true passion; but I do not advise any modern poet to write thus, if he would win the admiration of these critics.

It will not be supposed, however, that I am dead to the beauty of this work, which, because of its pre-eminent qualities, is an universal favourite. It is the work of Shakspeare *young*, but indisputably Shakspeare. He has not only presented the story with wonderful vividness and variety, but he has crowded it with *characters*, and animated those characters with true dramatic motives. Think of old Capulet, Tybalt, the Nurse, Peter, Gregory and Sampson, and the Apothecary,—all episodical figures, yet each having his well-marked individuality. By touches brief yet free and masterly the figures stand out from the canvas.

One would imagine that a dramatist who undertook to remedy the defects of this work, would throw all his labour into those parts where the work is weakest, and thus free the rich harvest of dramatic thought from all the chaff and stubble; one would certainly never expect him to remove any of those vivid touches which give life to the characters, or any of those dramatic presentations of the subject which animate the scene. Yet this, and this only, has Goethe done.[1]

Shakspeare opens with one of his life-like expositions,

[1] *Nachträge zu Goethe's Werken.*

pregnant with purpose, and arresting attention at the outset. The Capulet servants are swaggering in the streets of Verona, and no sooner do they meet the servants of the Montagues than at once they come to blows. Tybalt and Benvolio quickly join the fray: old Capulet and old Montague are not long behind. The whole feud of the two houses—that which forms the *nodus* of the piece—lives before us. The entrance of the Prince, threatening death to the man who next disturbs the peace of Verona, introduces another tragic motive. The whole exposition is a masterly specimen of dramatic art. But Goethe had so little sense of what was dramatic, that he strikes out this exposition, and opens his version like a comic opera, with a chorus of servants who are arranging lamps and garlands before Capulet's house:

Zündet die Lampen an
Windet auch Kränze dran
Hell sey das Haus!
&c. &c.

Maskers pass into the house. Romeo and Benvolio enter and *talk*. They *tell* us of that family feud, which Shakspeare made us *see*. Rosalind is alluded to by Romeo, but all the fantastic hyperbole of desire which Shakspeare's Romeo expresses (in direct contrast with the expression of his *passion* for Juliet), is struck out. The two enter Capulet's house, where Benvolio promises to show him a lovelier face than Rosalind's. Before they enter, however, Mercutio arrives; and at this point the student of Shakspeare will uplift his eyebrows when he sees how Goethe has contrived to destroy this poetic creation. Not only is the celebrated Mab speech omitted, but Mercutio declares he will keep out of the ball-room, lest he should be discovered—by his handsome figure! The whole of this must be translated, or my readers may withhold their credence.[1]

Romeo. Come with us.
Get you a mantle, get a stranger's mask.
Mercutio. In vain I don the mask, it helps me not.
I'm known by every child, and must be known.
I am a distinguished man; there is a character in my figure and voice, in my walk, in my every movement.

[1] In a letter to Frau von Wolzogen, he speaks of his recently completed version thus: "The maxim which I followed, was to concentrate all that was most interesting, and bring it into harmony; for Shakspeare, following the bent of his genius, his time, and his public, was forced to bring together much that was not harmonious, to flatter the reigning taste." *Literarischer Nachlass der Frau von Wolzogen*, vol. i. p. 437.

Benvolio. Truly! thy paunch has a charming look.

Mercutio. It is easy for you to talk—toothpicks, beanstalks as you are! You hang rag after rag upon you: who will unpack you? But I with the heaviest mantle, with the most outrageous nose, I have only to appear, and some one directly whispers behind, "There goes Mercutio! By my faith, it is Mercutio!" That indeed would be immensely vexatious were it no glory. And since I am Mercutio, let me be Mercutio, and always Mercutio! Now, good-bye to you. Do your business as well as you can, I seek my adventures on my pillow. An airy dream shall delight me, while you run after your dreams, and can no more catch them than I can.

I shall be brisk when o'er you weeps the dawn,
While you for weariness, or love, will yawn. *Exit.*

Into *this* has Mercutio been metamorphosed! The ball scene follows. The Nurse, indeed, is introduced, but all her individuality is destroyed; every one of the characteristic touches is washed out by an unsparing sponge. In his essay on Shakspeare he gives us the clue to these omissions; for he says "that the Nurse and Mercutio almost entirely destroy the tragic meaning of the story, and are to be regarded as farcical additions, which the modern stage repudiates."[1] The alterations in this scene are not important, and are chiefly the presence of the Prince, who comes to the ball with Mercutio, his object being to mix in the society of Capulet and Montague, and so bring about amity between the houses. The old feud is again *talked* of: as if talking could take the place of doing! The rest of the piece follows the original pretty closely; there are only two alterations which call for notice; one an improvement, and one an extraordinary and inexplicable blunder.

To begin with the blunder: The reader knows with what sharpness Shakspeare has contrasted the calm respectable Paris, who woos Juliet through her parents, and the fervid Romeo, who goes direct to Juliet herself; one seeks the father's consent, without troubling himself about the maid; the other seeks the maid's consent, and braves the enmity of the father. What will the reader think of Goethe's dramatic ideas, on hearing that this contrast is entirely effaced: Paris makes love to Juliet; has long adored her in silence, before he ventured to ask her parent's consent!

The second alteration is a dramatic improvement; although it will certainly make the Shakspeare bigots cry out. It is the closing of the piece with Juliet's death, the Friar in a short soliloquy pointing the moral. Nothing can be more undramatic or more tiresome than the long recapitulation of

[1] *Werke*, xxxv. 379.