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CONVERSATIONS OF GOETHE WITH ECKERMANN. TRANSLATED BY JOHN OXENFORD.

EDITED BY J. K. MOORHEAD, WITH AN
INTRODUCTION BY HAVELOCK ELLIS

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INTRODUCTION

"THE best German book there is"—that was the judgment of Nietzsche concerning Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. It is a saying that may well lead us to reflect. Here was one of the great figures of the world, who in the course of a long life produced works of which many are celebrated everywhere; and half a century after his death we are told by another figure of high rank, himself also a German, that not any of these famous works but another book, produced by a seemingly insignificant and uncultured man, is to be placed at the summit of all German literature.

Those who in literature devote themselves to the glory of others have usually been long in reaching their proper place in human esteem. Their very success causes this neglect; in the dazzling light they have turned on the figure they celebrate they are themselves scarcely seen. The authors of the Gospels of Jesus, which yet are the most revered of human productions, remain shadowy and uncertain figures. The most famous European philosopher is Socrates; and we seldom remember that, outside the pages of Plato, Socrates is a dim and obscure person.

More to the point, however, when we are dealing with Eckermann, is Boswell, with whom he was almost contemporary. Boswell's achievement was in some respects greater than Eckermann's; for Goethe would have been not less famous, though less intimately known, if Eckermann had never met him. But Johnson would have been little more than a name for those who were not students of English eighteenth-century literature if Boswell had never lived; it is sometimes disputed, but remains in a sense true, that the figure of Dr. Johnson we know is the artistic creation of Boswell. Yet until recent years Boswell has generally been regarded as rather a contemptible fellow, a weak, simple, foolish, dissipated Scotch laird, with only just the modicum of intelligence needed to set down what he knew of the great man in whose company he was privileged to live. That was, for instance, Macaulay's estimate of Boswell; needless to say it is not the estimate

which prevails to-day. His undeniable weaknesses no longer dim the figure of a great artist who bent all that was sensitive in his own temperament, and all that was laborious, to one single task which has made him the incomparable master of biography, and almost the patron saint of biographers.

Eckermann has not been treated with such contempt as Boswell; he has been looked upon as completely insignificant and almost ignored. It is not till to-day, nearly a century after his work was done, that it has seemed worth while to write his life, though now indeed that has been very thoroughly accomplished in two substantial volumes by Professor Houben, who has also produced the best edition of the *Conversations*. We may see clearly to-day that Eckermann, even though in his other activities he may be negligible, was by temperament and by training admirably equipped for the work which, within its narrow limits, is comparable to Boswell's.

Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* may be said to belong to the class of table-talk literature in which many figures of varying degree of eminence have been presented: Luther and Selden and Coleridge and Northcote, to name a few. Such books at the best are really of the nature of biography as Boswell understood it; but they form a class because their conscious aim is slighter, and because, chronologically, they seldom cover more than a small slice of life. But in proportion as they are adequate they are more than mere brilliant fragments of the subject's conversation; it is their function to represent the man's speech as the transparent veil which reveals his personality, so that we are conscious not of a mere succession of opinions on a flat surface but of a living complex person moving in his own three-dimensional space. We may realize the supremacy of Eckermann in this field if we compare his work with, for instance, that of a contemporary Englishman, H. N. Coleridge, who was at the same time noting down the sayings of his famous father-in-law and uncle, S. T. Coleridge, for a volume of *Table Talk*. It is a book to be cherished and consulted; it contains splendid chunks, sometimes of gold. But they are all shapeless and disconnected, fallen on the page at random; they are never articulated to any conversation and they have no background whatever, there is not one word of description, there are no interlocutors, and the recorder himself with misplaced modesty never appears. So that while we have here an anthology of thoughts that will always be precious, as a picture of Coleridge

it scarcely exists; a fine opportunity to bring us near to the personality of one of the great figures in English imaginative literature was for ever lost.

Eckermann, simple and modest and unaffected as he was, never suppresses his own presence, while yet never emphasizing it. We know him from the *Conversations*, and Dr. Houben has further enabled us to realize precisely the manner of man he was. Of humble birth—his father having failed with a little shop went about the countryside peddling stockings and such like—Johann Peter Eckermann had been born in 1792 at Winsen-on-the-Luhe, a little below Hamburg. He succeeded, but with much difficulty and many delays, in gaining a certain amount of school education—though he was for the greater part his own teacher—and even culture, so that late in life he acquired a doctorate. In the course of this he supported himself by occupying very minor and ill-paid official posts; which at last led him, at the age of twenty-three, to Hanover, where in a royal city and a centre of literature and science, he was for the first time surrounded by opportunities for self-development. But, a little before then, he had been in the army, as a volunteer in the war against Napoleon; and that brought him to Brussels, where the wealth of art was a revelation; he would stand entranced before the pictures of Rubens, and resolved to become a painter himself, for he had already developed a taste for drawing, though his chief impulse at this time was to verse and to criticism; all this with a talent which, while not despicable, would never have secured fame. We may trace his early development in his letters to his intimate friend, Lange. "The art of poetry," he wrote at the age of twenty-five, "naturally stands first in my eyes, but to exercise this in full degree a study of the arts in general is necessary." And again: "Everyone along his own line! My struggle is not for bread, but for culture. And, after all, do the so-called bread studies always come off successfully?" Once more: "Everyone in his own element! My element is art." We see the ardour of the youth, with the mild earnest eyes and the long hair. It was an ardour that he never really outgrew.

After a preliminary youthful stage of enthusiasm for Schiller, young Eckermann had been drawn to Goethe's works. The attraction increased as his knowledge increased. It became both an immense admiration and a passionate affection. "I read of nothing and thought of nothing but only

of him," he wrote later, "wherever I went, wherever I remained: in my walks and in my daily affairs, he was in my thoughts, even at night he entered into my dreams." It was one of the great events of his early life, when, after much trouble, he succeeded in obtaining a portrait of his idol.

In 1823, at the age of thirty-one, he succeeded in reaching Weimar, where Goethe seems to have become favourably predisposed almost at once. He had arrived at the right moment. Goethe was seventy-four years old, and still active, both in practical affairs and in literature; but with increasing years and diminishing energy the need to put his yet unfinished works into a finally ordered and completed shape was weighing on him. His swift insight enabled him to detect in Eckermann, despite his imperfect scholarly training, the man to assist him in this task. Eckermann had found his vocation and was content. Even though the immediate pecuniary reward was inconsiderable, he no longer sought any permanent post which might have brought in a more solid income and enabled him to marry. The girl to whom he had been engaged for ten years—their letters have been preserved—was naturally enough rather exasperated at this position of affairs and at the way her lover not only neglected to seek a definite post but even put aside offers that were made to him; she refers impatiently to "your great Goethe." Eckermann endeavoured to soothe poor Hanchen, and explained to her, gently and patiently, his own view of the situation. He was already realizing his mission in life, and it is clear that love was to play there a secondary part.

While Eckermann's temperament may not have been unduly sentimental, one feels that his attitude towards Goethe was really a transformation of the lover's attitude, and could have left over but a moderate adoration for his Johanna. It must be noted, however, that there was one moment when Eckermann was nearly carried off his feet by a quite human infatuation. To support himself at Weimar he took pupils, especially young Englishmen to whom he taught German out of Goethe's novels and plays; and in the summer of 1828 he had also a pupil in French, a young singer and actress, whom he had known since she was scarcely more than a child, Auguste Kladzig. Like himself, she was lonely; her father had just died, she lived unhappily with a stepmother, and sought consolation in her art and in mental work. Teacher and pupil were drawn to each other; sympathy soon

took on a warmer tone. Dante-Eckermann, as Houben puts it, had found his Beatrice; by far his best poems were addressed to Auguste. Meanwhile his letters to Hanchen languished, he even neglected Goethe's society, and his absorption was evident to all around. In the struggle he fled for a time from Weimar and grew melancholy and ill. In January 1829, however, he wrote to Auguste that, "after my too great interest in you," relations with Goethe had been resumed, and "I am as happy as ever." But the struggle lasted some time longer—though he had day-dreams of Hanchen and Auguste in sisterly communion—and culminated in the best poem he ever wrote, *Renunciation.* At last and after many postponements (which may not have been regretted by Eckermann; for, as he had once remarked to Hanchen, he "had never thought happily over the state of marriage," so that at one moment she offered to release him), on November 9, 1831, Peter Eckermann and Johanna Bertram were married, and three days later Auguste resigned her position at the Weimar theatre and left the town—subsequently, in her turn, also marrying. Hanchen arrived at Weimar eager to be greeted by her bridegroom's "great Goethe." But she was bitterly disappointed. Goethe seems only to have seen her casually at his daughter-in-law's, for Ottilie gave the newcomer a warm-hearted welcome. She was never invited to Goethe's house, and he only once mentions her name in his diaries; it seems to have been a painful subject. Eckermann received no word of congratulation, or he could not fail to have mentioned it. He resumed his almost daily service in the temple where he was high priest. Goethe was once more supreme in his mind and heart.

It seems to Eckermann's biographer that Goethe, perhaps deliberately, troubled himself little about the material situation of his collaborator, who was "a pure fool in business matters," in allowing him to earn a precarious living by fees from his English pupils. The relationship seems, however, to have been regarded on both sides as mainly one of friendship, and Eckermann's services were indeed such as no payment could have recompensed. In the spring of 1831, however, Goethe at last drew up a contract by which Eckermann became the editor of his works with the right to a small percentage on the profits, though the conditions of the contract were difficult and uncertain; as if conscious of this, shortly before his death, Goethe arranged for a slight further

benefit. Eckermann was content, and it seems to have been on the strength of this agreement that he finally married.

Eckermann was not, however, a blind worshipper—no one who is blind to defects can have a clear vision for qualities—and he could even be humorously critical at times, as when he narrates his discovery that the seeming omniscient Goethe was a child in some fields of knowledge and wanted to know if the sparrows in the hedge were larks. (That chanced to be a field where Eckermann had from childhood been at home; and at Weimar he had cheered his loneliness by setting up an aviary of forty birds, most of which had to be dispersed on his marriage.)

He is always sensitively alive to Goethe. Not only are the master's words uttered before us in a simple, spontaneous form of perfect shape—in which whatever there might be of Eckermann's art, it is an art which nature makes—but we are made aware at every moment of Goethe's presence; we see him and hear his voice, while every scene is led up to with natural art and becomes a picture of daily life, yet the daily life of one of the world's permanently great figures. It thus comes about that some of the most penetrating of Eckermann's pages are those that scarcely contain any "conversation" of serious interest; we recall the incomparable and unforgettable scene in which Eckermann teaches Goethe how to use his Belgian bow and arrows.[1] So that we have here a perfect setting for a long series of matured sayings on life and literature, on thought and art, on people and things; a distilled quintessence of wisdom, the like of which we shall scarcely find elsewhere; and beyond this we have the living and breathing figure of the aged Goethe himself.

Only a fine artist could have achieved this result, and an artist who was at the same time peculiarly fitted by nature for the end he achieved. In this respect we may liken Eckermann to Boswell, who accomplished with equal success an even more difficult task. Johnson was an intractable and unattractive figure to manipulate. "An extraordinary man," said a level-headed Scots lawyer who also had an insight into genius, Henry Mackenzie; but "his wisdom is dogmatical, and his wit unfeeling," so that "there is no winning quality about him." Yet by the biographer's art, and without distortion or even any apparent mitigation of the rugged

[1] In the present abridgment a mere summary of this conversation is given.

features, it has come about that viewing him in Boswell's mirror posterity regards Johnson almost with affection. Eckermann's task was less difficult in so far as he had less rough and clumsy material to mould; but more difficult in that it was incomparably more complex and profound, unlovable even by virtue of that depth and that complexity. Goethe has often seemed cold, remote, forbidding, as inhuman as Leonardo; and scarcely any of the world's supreme spirits have evoked more repulsion in some minds. It is only in the pages of Eckermann that, while even gaining in greatness and depth, he becomes a familiar human being, to be touched with tenderness and affection. Houben compares Eckermann's art to that of a great actor with an affinity for a particular part, into which he can enter with that intimate penetration which the Germans call *Einfühlung*, and play with such skill that meanings are brought out which even the creator of the part had not been able to express. It is doubtless true that Goethe, who knew what Eckermann was doing, never confided to him anything of an intimate nature, and even when referring to some personal experience left it vague. Thus the narrative of October 7, 1827, sounds mysterious, though it clearly refers to Frau von Stein. There are, it appears, errors in Eckermann's statements; but they are unimportant—his fidelity remains, and is indeed always apparent. He was not a secretary, which Goethe already had, but a "helper and collaborator"; and he liked to think himself (as was indeed inscribed on his grave) Goethe's "friend." But the fact that Goethe maintained with him on intimate personal matters his habitual reserve really helps Eckermann to preserve his native quality of childlike directness and simplicity.

We must always remember, however, that Eckermann was all the time an artist; and, while closely faithful to the essential truth, he omitted, rearranged, transposed, in order by art to come closer to the essential inner truth, as those who knew Goethe gladly testified. He so absorbed Goethe's style that his own literary manner in later life became that of Goethe, though not of Goethe at his best. His sensitive spirit, his peculiar sympathetic insight into Goethe's mind, had been revealed in essays written before he had ever seen Goethe, and they finally culminated in this incomparable book. Perhaps it is not surprising that the achievement of so insignificant a person was ignored, or dismissed, even by Heine, with a sneer. Apart from the decisive utterance (in *Human*

All too Human) which we owe to the genius of Nietzsche, it is only to-day, nearly a century after the *Conversations* were first published, that Eckermann takes his rightful place in the Walhalla of Fame.

Even to-day, indeed, Eckermann's achievement is scarcely appreciated at its real worth. There is still a latent note of protest in the declarations of those who vindicate his high claim. Almost as I write I come on a recent statement to an interviewer by the distinguished Spanish scholar, Eugenio d'Ors, who in chancing to refer to "that extraordinary book" the *Conversations with Goethe*, added: "Full justice has not even yet been done to Eckermann. He discovered a *terra incognita* in the philosophic order of formal expression. He was an inventor, just as Plato was in discovering the dialogue and Renan the philosophic drama." We may question here the special kind of eminence ascribed to Plato, or Eckermann's right to be placed beside him, but nothing could bring out more clearly the change of feeling that has taken place since Heine referred to Eckermann as a "parrot."

Eckermann's relations with Goethe lasted for some nine years, from his arrival in Weimar in 1823 to Goethe's death in 1832. During this period he was seeing Goethe sometimes almost daily, and we can check his own notes of the meetings by the entries in Goethe's diaries. It thus appears that only twenty per cent of their meetings find any record in the *Conversations*. In the first place the *Conversations* were prepared with Goethe's approval—even to some extent, it seems, his oversight; though he refused to give permission for their publication in his lifetime. Eckermann dealt freely, however, with the material he accumulated, even with dates, altering them when it suited his purpose, welding conversations together and manipulating them, always as an artist, yet an artist who remained true to the material he was moulding.

After Goethe's death, Eckermann stayed on in Weimar, where indeed was his life-work. He was occupied in the congenial task, entrusted to him by the master himself, of editing and publishing such of Goethe's work, suitable for the public, which remained unprinted. As it was not very remunerative work, Eckermann remained, as he had been for some years, the teacher in English and some other subjects of the young Prince Carl, of the ruling house, whose tutor was Frédéric Soret, a brilliant and versatile Swiss Huguenot—not only highly cultured, but also, unlike the simple Ecker-

mann, a man of the world. He was, however, a good friend to Eckermann; and, having arrived at Weimar earlier and there established his position, he was well able to be helpful. In the end he became in some degree a partner in the *Conversations*, in the sense that talks of his with Goethe were incorporated in the work.[1]

Yet Eckermann's life was troubled. His editorial work led to a number of worries and difficulties. There was always a lack of money. His health, never strong, grew worse, and the Thuringian climate never suited him. The good and faithful Hanchen, who had been bred in a better social environment, brought comfort into the life of her peasant-born husband, who by himself went out in shabby clothes and was content to live meagrely; and we know that their life together was happy. But she was not strong, and after a brief married life of three years she died at the birth of her first living child. Eckermann struggled on in grief and loneliness; it seemed to him in moments of depression that he had no friends, though he really had many. But his health was improved by visits to the tonic climate of his native Hamburg; where, too, he found the warm hospitality of his own people. At last, in 1836, with considerable aid and support from Soret—though Eckermann never allowed his own judgment to be deflected where Goethe was concerned—the first two volumes of the *Conversations*, after being in preparation for twelve years, were really completed and published by Brockhaus at Leipzig.

The book made no great stir on its appearance, either at home or abroad; so that Eckermann's intention, formed at an early stage of his work, for an English translation, was not carried out till 1850.[2] But it was received with full approval by those whose good opinion was best worth having, especially the near friends of Goethe best able to judge of its value when compared with the efforts of enthusiastic but less competent disciples. They realized that Eckermann's cult of Goethe was balanced by his sound judgment and scrupulous honesty, while his eager receptivity and his many-sided interests enabled him to view the various aspects of Goethe's complex nature better than those who approached him with specialized mental outfits. This, no doubt, was the fundamental aptitude

[1] Omitted in this abridgment.

[2] Sarah Margaret Fuller's translation appeared in 1839. Her version, however, was very incomplete.

demanded for the task; while a trifling incident significantly illustrates Eckermann's scrupulous care in carrying it out. In translating into German a conversation recorded by Soret (who wrote in French) immediately after the news of the death of the grand duchess, Goethe's friend and patroness, Soret wrote how he found Goethe at dinner, "finishing his bottle of wine, with the air of being *en pointe* and speaking with vivacity." Eckermann, who had been present at the dinner, paused and reflected: it suggested that the wine had gone to the master's head; and there would be scandal, for already there was chatter about the large wine-bills at Goethe's house. So he wrote in his next letter to Soret: "We had on that occasion only *one* bottle of wine. Of that Frau von Goethe had about a glass, Walter and Wolf the same, I three or four, Goethe the remainder. He was in a cheerful, rather exalted mood, but the cause was not the wine," and he proceeds to explain the real causes. Soret replied: "I see in this a fresh proof of your care to put everything in the right light, and this for many readers is not a proof to be undervalued. You yourself have often referred to the bottle of wine, though you do not allow it to have influenced the conversation, and I will follow your example." So he altered the criticized sentence to: "Goethe sat at the table with Eckermann and talked with vivacity." But that, also, was not satisfactory to Eckermann, who changed it to: "I found him sitting at table with a good friend and drinking a bottle of wine." That incident illustrates the spirit of Eckermann's work for Goethe. It may not bring out Eckermann's distinction as an artist, which no one then seems to have seen. He himself realized, and in an important letter written in 1844 for publication clearly expounded, what he had done. Some, he says, suppose that this book consists of machine-made impressions from memory. But, while quite satisfied with the state of his memory, he was not concerned to produce the indiscriminating effect of a photograph; he aimed at selection: "all is perfectly true, but everything is selected. I was careful to wait days and weeks before writing down my impressions, so that all that was small might be lost and only what was significant be left." And later he speaks of "a spiritual crystallization" which sometimes involved spending months over a single conversation. He adds that he made it his aim to conceal this art and to produce an impression that should seem simply natural. Eckermann's book

was thus a work of re-creation, if not of creation. It required the distance of half a century and more to see that it was to be, if not the most widely famous, the most intimately cherished of Goethe books, one of the great books of the world which can never grow stale.

After the first two volumes of the *Conversations* appeared in 1836, Eckermann had felt encouraged to prepare a third volume with the help of Soret's notes. This was possible only by a slow process of elaboration from the blended notes, enlarged from memory, moulded by Eckermann's insight into Goethe's spirit and Goethe's modes of expression. So it was that the third volume lingered for another twelve years, being published in 1848. Meanwhile Eckermann's life was still troubled by hardships, poverty, and ill-health, as well as a dispute with his publisher Brockhaus which he carried into the law courts and lost; and though eventually he became reconciled with Brockhaus the third volume was issued by another publisher.

The year 1848 was an unfortunate moment for such a book to appear. The world was full of social upheaval and political agitation, as far removed as possible from the lofty-Olympian atmosphere in which Eckermann's Goethe moved. Moreover, the literary generation then attaining maturity had grown up in revolt against Goethe and that world of serene art and cosmopolitan harmony which he represented. They were experiencing the reaction which every generation feels against the great men of the previous generation who had died in full fruition and the sunshine of popular fame. We have seen in England a similar reaction against the great figures of the Victorian period; and in France more recently we have seen how Anatole France, an immortal though among the lesser gods, was buried in solemn official pomp amid the silent and complete indifference of the literary generation that succeeded him. Such reactions, however unbalanced, are wholesome and necessary, if we are not to be unduly fettered to the past, for they are ultimately effaced by a more just balance of opinion. It was such a reaction of opinion that Eckermann had to encounter; although his third volume, notwithstanding the elaboration it had undergone, proved in its final shape to be not unworthy to rank with the two earlier volumes.

It attracted almost no attention. The press was occupied with other matters than conversations with Goethe, and

those critics who had welcomed the earlier volumes had either passed away or could find no occasion for discussing the new volume. Only a few hundred copies were sold in two years, and even by 1867 only fifteen hundred copies had gone.

Notwithstanding this check to his literary success, Eckermann continued for six years longer to talk of a fourth volume of *Conversations*, and wrote of the rich material still in his hands. His statements became indeed at this period so large, and with so slender a foundation, that Houben believes he was already falling into the state of senility which became more marked before his death. No publisher was now willing to listen to his proposals. He found consolation in his son, whose education he had entirely conducted, and who lived with him in Weimar and now showed some ability as a painter. Notwithstanding his poverty, his struggles, his ill-health, Eckermann retained the esteem of those who knew him; and sometimes attracted visitors from afar, desirous to see the man who had been Goethe's friend and collaborator. One of them says that his character was like that of La Fontaine, and another that he recalled the amiable figure of the Vicar of Wakefield, and showed similar contentment with his simple conditions. He was surrounded as in early life by birds of many sorts, though he had sold whatever articles of value he possessed, to keep hunger from the door, and all furniture that could be dispensed with was at the pawnbroker's; but on the sofa, where he sat to take his morning coffee flavoured with a little salt, he still cherished two cushions that Hanchen had embroidered.

He died on December 3, 1854, suddenly, from a stroke. He had been forgotten; even the people of Weimar learnt with surprise that a man who had been the friend of Goethe was so recently living among them.

Eckermann will not be forgotten again. His fame is growing; his book is translated into all the languages of civilization; he has moulded the portrait by which we all best know the greatest modern figure in the world of the spirit. And it is due to Eckermann that Goethe is commonly regarded as an "Olympian."

That is not to say that the portrait is false. Its truth was recognized by those who best knew Goethe, nor is there any other to put in its place. Before he died, Goethe's immense significance had become more or less generally recognized

throughout the civilized world; he was sought and courted by some of the most distinguished persons of his own and other lands. It is easy to gather together the notable tributes they offered to his fame. Yet the privilege of presenting to the world the final and immortal picture of Goethe was vouchsafed to none of the highly cultivated poets and scholars and historians who flocked to Weimar. It was reserved for the imperfectly and painfully educated son of the humble pedlar among the bleak northern marshes of Winsen-on-the-Luhe; who, not being considered strong enough to make a good hand-worker, had acquired a taste for writing and drawing, and, as we now realize, in his own way, possessed genius. So it came about that the simple man of the people was able through his sensitive receptivity to think himself into the richest and most complex mind of his time, and with a minimum of notes and facts to re-create him for the world as a living and moving person. In that process, it is true, he occasionally, as some people feel, idealized him; taming down some of the master's statements, omitting what might hurt anyone's susceptibilities, and whatever might seem to some too audacious, if not obscene—for the plebeian is sometimes more observant of conventional decorum than the aristocrat. Yet Eckermann had the skill to do this not only without injury to his art, but without offence to truth. His art, we see, was to make Goethe yet more essentially Goethe. So that to-day, a century after his death, when we wish to come into intimate contact with Goethe we neglect the younger and in many respects very different Goethe of whom no full portrait exists; too often we neglect his own work, even the *Faust* and the *Wilhelm Meister* which still to-day bear so closely on our lives. When we wish to come near to Goethe, it is the Goethe of the final stage we seek, and we go to Eckermann.

HAVELOCK ELLIS.

1930.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

In abridging Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, the principle observed has been to omit nothing of Goethe's except mere formalities. At the same time, everything of interest in the remarks of other members of the circle has been preserved. Nearly one-eighth of the original bulk—not reckoning the Soret conversations [1]—has been got rid of by chastening Eckermann's extreme verbosity and what he himself might have consented to call his subjectiveness. As being in nowise a conversation with Goethe, his travel-journal, with its not uninteresting chat of theatres and hotels, has been rigorously summarized—even to the omission of the miraculous waiter he met at Frankfort. His exposition of the way to edit Goethe's correspondence is left out for the same reason.

The basis of this edition is John Oxenford's translation, published in two volumes in 1850; Oxenford's, in turn, was partially based on Sarah Margaret Fuller's abridgment of 1838. Some errors and infelicities of his version are here corrected. Even Oxenford did not insert everything found in the German: catering for the contemporaries of Queen Victoria, he had to omit—especially in the Soret sections, with which we have nothing to do. The two passages he omitted from the Eckermann part are here restored: they occur respectively under the dates of July 9, 1827, and February 20, 1829.

The subordinate party to these Conversations introduced them, on their first publication, with an account of his own life until his meeting with Goethe; from which account the following biographical sketch is mainly derived.

Johann Peter Eckermann, the youngest child of his father's second marriage, was born on the 21st of September, 1792, in a hut at Winsen-on-the-Luhe, between Lüneburg and

[1] Soret's conversations with Goethe, with which Eckermann supplemented his own, are here omitted. They are relatively few, and generally of inferior interest: the most notable thing in them, perhaps, is Goethe's repeated reference to Jeremy Bentham as "that madman"—he wondered how so old a man could be a reformer.

Hamburg, in the Electorate of Hanover. His father owned a small piece of land and a cow, and travelled about the adjoining heathland, hawking ribbons, yarn, quills, and linen; and Johann Peter, in childhood, gleaned, minded cows, collected litter and fuel, and gathered and sold acorns. He first showed artistic ability by copying a picture of a horse that was on a packet of tobacco. Through the influence of the Oberamtmann and other highly-placed persons, he took lessons, along with better-class children, in French and Latin; and, for two years after his confirmation, was clerk to a local Justiz-beamter—until, in 1810, the French occupation abolished the office at Winsen. He was in the office of direct taxes at Lüneburg until the next year, and then in that of the under-prefect in Uelzen until 1812; when he became secretary of the mayoralty of Bevensen. In the spring of 1813 he left this post to become a volunteer in the Kielmansegge Jäger Corps, against the French. He made the 1813–14 campaign through Mecklenburg and Holstein and before Hamburg. Afterwards, on duty in Flanders and Brabant, he became acquainted with the great pictures of the Netherlands, and began copying at Tournay. But he was interrupted by marching orders; and, the corps being disbanded at Hamelin in the autumn of 1814, he went home. His father was dead, and he lodged with a married sister.

In the winter of 1815 he walked the forty leagues to Hanover, to study under the artist Ramberg. He lodged with a friend, and drew; but in May his health failed. He was obliged to renounce the artistic life, and obtained a post in the army clothing department, with a commission. His friend had some literary culture, and showed him Körner's *Lyre and Sword*; which stimulated Eckermann, in view of the expected return of the German troops from France, to compose and to distribute copies of a poem describing a soldier's hardships. He continued writing poetry, and became familiar with the work of Schiller and Klopstock, and finally of Goethe.

Growing aware of his need for education, he took private lessons in Latin and Greek; and then, when nearly twenty-five, became a student at the Gymnasium—spending there five hours a day, besides doing his office work, which occupied about the same length of time. The strain broke his health again, and he left the school in the spring of 1817. He wrote an unsuccessful play, to combat the current vein of Fate and Destiny in drama. He resigned his position in the Hanover

army, and in May of 1821 went to Göttingen to enter the university—taking jurisprudence as a "bread" (livelihood) study. In his second year he deserted jurisprudence for philology. He left the university in the autumn of 1822; and in country lodgings near Hanover he wrote a volume of essays entitled *Beyträge zur Poesie* (Contributions to—or rather, *on*—Poetry). In order to have this volume published by Cotta, he resolved to seek assistance from Goethe, to whom he had already sent a copy of his poems. At the end of May 1823, therefore, Eckermann travelled on foot "over Göttingen and the Werrathal," to Weimar.

This brings us to the beginning of his Conversations. Thenceforward Eckermann remains swallowed up in Goethe. In 1827 the Philosophic Faculty of Jena gave him the degree of Doctor. He became, as will be seen, tutor to the heir of the Grand Duke Charles-Frederick, young Charles-Alexander, born 1818; who, as Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach from 1853, lived to see the first year of the twentieth century.

On the 9th of November, 1831, Eckermann married Johanna Bertram. In 1838 he was made "grand-ducal counsellor" and librarian to the Grand Duchess. He edited Goethe's posthumous works. He died at Weimar on the 3rd of December, 1854.

Eckermann's own published works are:

Beyträge zur Poesie, mit besonderer Hinweisung auf Goethe. Stuttgart, 1824.

Gespräche mit Goethe. Vols. I and II, Leipzig, 1836.

Gedichte. Leipzig, 1838.

Einige Worte über den Rechtsstreit gegen Borckhaus in Betreff der Gespräche mit Goethe. Weimar, 1846.

Gespräche mit Goethe. Vol. III (Supplemental). Magdeburg, 1848.

Aus Goethes Lebenskreise: J. P. Eckermanns Nachlass. Edited by F. Tewes. Berlin, 1905.

On p. 319, line 33, "theatre-box" was inserted on the understanding that Blücher cultivated oratory by observing how actors spoke. This interpretation was made in ignorance of Blücher having been a Freemason. The primary meaning of the German word (Loge) is theatre-box, but it also means a Freemasons' Lodge.

EXTRACT FROM PREFACE TO OXENFORD'S TRANSLATION (1850)

GOETHE was born in August 1749, and died in March 1832, so that his age is seventy-three when the Conversations begin, and eighty-two when they terminate.

In 1836, . . . Eckermann . . . published, in two volumes, his *Conversations with Goethe*. In 1848 he published a third volume, containing additional Conversations, which he compiled from his own notes, and from those of another friend of Goethe's, M. Soret, of whom there is a short account in the Preface to the Third or Supplemental Volume.[1] Both these works are dedicated to Her Imperial Highness Maria Paulouna, Grand Duchess of Saxe-Weimar and Eisenach.

Had I followed the order of German publication, I should have placed the whole of the Supplementary volume after the contents of the first two; however, as the Conversations in that volume are not of a later date than the others (which, indeed, terminate with the death of Goethe), but merely supply gaps, I deemed it more conducive to the reader's convenience to rearrange in chronological order the whole of the Conversations, as if the Supplement had not been published separately.

Still, to preserve a distinction between the Conversations of the First Book and those of the Supplement, I have marked the latter with the abbreviation "Sup." . . .

I feel bound to state that, while translating the First Book, I have had before me the translation by Mrs. Fuller, published in America. The great merit of this version I willingly acknowledge, though the frequent omissions render it almost an abridgment. The contents of the Supplementary volume are now, I believe, published for the first time in the English language.

J. O.

[1] Soret's contributions are omitted. See Editor's Preface.

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SELECTIONS FROM THE AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL PREFACE

. . . .

I MENTION these things to excuse the frequent and important gaps the reader will find, if he is inclined to read the book in chronological order. To such gaps belong much that is good, but is now lost, especially many favourable words spoken by Goethe of his widely scattered friends as well as of the works of various living German authors, while other remarks of a similar kind have been noted down. . . . Books have their destinies even at the time of their origin. . . .

The representations of the person of Goethe by Rauch, Dawe, Stieler, and David, have all a high degree of truth, and yet each bears more or less the stamp of the individuality that produced it. If this can be said of bodily things, how much more does it apply to the fleeting intangible objects of the mind! However it may be in my case, I trust that all those who, from mental power or personal acquaintance with Goethe, are fitted to judge, will not misinterpret my exertions to attain the greatest possible fidelity.

Having given these explanations as to the manner of apprehending my subject, I have still something to add as to the import of the work.

What we call the True, even in relation to a single object, is not something small; rather is it, even if simple, at the same time comprehensive; which, like the various manifestations of a deep and widely reaching natural law, cannot easily be expressed. It cannot be disposed of by a sentence, or by sentence upon sentence, or by sentence opposed to sentence; but, through all these, one attains just an approximation, not the goal itself. So, to give a single instance, Goethe's detached remarks on poetry often appear one-sided, and indeed often contradictory. . . .

But these contradictions are single sides of the True, and taken together denote the essence of truth itself and lead to an approximation to it. I have therefore been careful, in these and similar cases, not to omit these seeming contradictions, as they were elicited by different occasions in the course of dissimilar years and hours. I rely on the insight and comprehension of the cultivated reader. . . .

WEIMAR, 31*st October*, 1835.

EXTRACTS FROM PREFACE TO THIRD OR SUPPLEMENTAL VOLUME

. . . .

WHEN I was so happy as to write my first two parts, I could sail with a fair wind; because the freshly-spoken words were then still ringing in my ears, and the living intercourse with that wonderful man sustained me in an element of inspiration, through which I felt borne as if on wings to my goal.

But now when that voice has been hushed for many years, and the happiness of those personal interviews lies so far behind me, I could attain the needful inspiration only in those hours in which it was granted me to enter into my own interior, and, in undisturbed reverie, to give a fresh colouring to the past, where it began to revive within me, and I saw great thoughts, and great characteristic traits before me, like mountains—distant indeed, yet plainly discernible, and illumined as by the sun of actual day. . . .

The living Goethe was again there: I again heard the peculiarly charming sound of his voice, to which no other can compare. I saw him again in the evening, with his black frock and star; jesting, laughing, and cheerfully conversing with the social circle in his well-lighted room. Another day, when the weather was fine, he was with me in the carriage, in his brown surtout and blue cloth cap, with his light grey cloak laid over his knees: there he was, with his countenance brown and healthy as the fresh air; his words flowing freely, and sounding above the noise of the wheels. Or I saw myself in the evening by the quiet taper-light again transported into his study, where he sat opposite me at his table, in his white flannel dressing-gown, mild as the impression of a well-spent day. We talked about things good and great: he set before me the noblest part of his own nature, and his mind kindled my own—the most perfect harmony existed between us. He extended his hand to me across the table, and I pressed it: I then took a full glass which stood by me, and which I drank to him without uttering a word, my glances being directed into his eyes across the wine. . . .

My relation to him was peculiar, and very intimate: it was that of the scholar to the master; of the son to the father; of

the poor in culture to the rich in culture. He drew me into his own circle, and let me participate in the mental and bodily enjoyments of a higher state of existence. Sometimes I saw him but once a week, when I visited him in the evening; sometimes every day, when I had the happiness to dine with him either alone or in company. . . .

Winter and summer, age and youth, seemed with him to be engaged in a perpetual strife and change; nevertheless, it was admirable in him, when from seventy to eighty years old, that youth always recovered the ascendancy; autumnal and wintry days were rare exceptions. . . .

He was often concise and circumspect, not only in many of his writings but also in his oral expressions. When, however, in happy moments, a more powerful dæmon was active within him, that self-control abandoned him, his discourse rolled forth with youthful impetuosity, like a mountain cataract. . . . Thus, Marmontel said of Diderot, that whoever knew him from his writings only knew him but half; but that as soon as he became animated in actual conversation he was incomparable, and irresistibly carried his hearers along. . . .

WEIMAR, 21st *December*, 1847.

[Eckermann, according to the new German edition edited by Houben, made some mistakes in his dates. The dates here given are as corrected by Houben.]

1823

Weimar, June 10, 1823.

I ARRIVED here a few days ago, but did not see Goethe till to-day. He received me with great cordiality, and made me feel this day as one of the happiest in my life.

Yesterday, when I called to inquire, he fixed to-day at twelve o'clock to see me. I went at that hour, and found a servant waiting to take me to him.

The interior of the house impressed me pleasantly: everything was extremely simple and noble; even the casts from antique statues, placed upon the stairs, indicated Goethe's partiality for plastic art, and for Grecian antiquity. I saw several ladies moving busily about in the lower part of the house, and one of Ottilia's beautiful boys,[1] who came familiarly up to me, and looked me fixedly in the face.

After I had cast a glance around, I ascended the stairs, with the very talkative servant, to the first floor. He opened a room, on the threshold of which the motto *Salve* was a good omen of a friendly welcome. He led me through this apartment, and opened another somewhat more spacious where he requested me to wait. The air here was most cool and refreshing; on the floor was spread a carpet: the room was furnished with a crimson sofa and chairs, which gave a cheerful aspect; on one side stood a piano; and the walls were adorned with many pictures and drawings. An open door opposite disclosed a farther room, also hung with pictures, through which the servant had gone to announce me.

It was not long before Goethe came in, in a blue frock-coat, and with shoes: an impressive figure. He soon dispelled uneasiness by the kindest words. We sat on the sofa. I felt in a happy perplexity, and could say little or nothing.

[1] Ottilia was Goethe's daughter-in-law, and the female head of the house—since his wife was dead. The boys were Walter and Wolfgang.

He began by speaking of my manuscript. "I have just come from *you*," said he; "I have been reading your writing all the morning; it needs no recommendation—it recommends itself." He praised the clearness of the style, the flow of the thought, and the peculiarity that all rested on a solid basis and had been thoroughly considered. "I will soon forward it," said he; "I shall write to Cotta by post to-day, and send him the parcel to-morrow."

We talked of my proposed excursion. I told him my design was to go into the Rhineland, where I intended to stay at a suitable place, and write something new. First, however, I would go to Jena, and there await Herr von Cotta's answer.

Goethe asked whether I had acquaintance in Jena. I replied that I hoped to come in contact with Herr von Knebel; on which he promised me a letter which would ensure me a favourable reception. "And, indeed," said he, "while you are in Jena, we shall be near neighbours, and can see or write to one another as often as we please."

We sat a long while together, in a tranquil affectionate mood. I forgot to speak for looking at him—I could not look enough. His face is powerful and brown—full of wrinkles, and each wrinkle full of expression! He spoke in a slow, composed manner, such as you would expect from an aged monarch who reposes upon himself, and is elevated above both praise and blame. I felt becalmed like one who, after many toils and tedious expectations, finally sees his dearest wishes gratified.

He then spoke of my letter, and remarked that a person able to treat *one* matter with clearness is fitted for many things besides.

"None can tell what turn this may take," said he; "I have many good friends in Berlin, and have lately thought of you in that quarter." Here he smiled pleasantly to himself. He then pointed out to me what I ought now to see in Weimar, and said he would desire secretary Kräuter to be my cicerone. Above all, I must not fail to visit the theatre. He asked me where I lodged, saying that he should like to see me once more, and would send for me at a suitable time.

We bade each other an affectionate farewell; I felt that he liked me.

Wednesday, June 11, 1823.

This morning, a card from Goethe, written by his own hand, desired me to come to him. I went and stayed an hour. He

seemed quite different from yesterday, and had the impetuous and decided manner of a youth.

He entered, bringing two thick books. "It is not well," said he, "that you should go from us so soon; let us become better acquainted. But, as the field of generalities is so wide, I have thought of something in particular, which may serve as a ground-work for intercourse. These two volumes contain the Frankfort Literary Notices of the years 1772 and 1773, among which are almost all my little critiques written at that time. These are not marked; but, as you are familiar with my style and tone of thought, you will easily distinguish them from the others. I would have you examine somewhat more closely these youthful productions, and tell me what you think of them. I wish to know whether they deserve a place in a future edition of my works. From my present self these things stand so far, that I have no judgment about them. But you younger people can tell whether they are to you of any value, and how far they suit our present point of view. I have already had copies taken, which you can have by and by to compare with the originals. Afterwards we might ascertain whether here and there some trifle might not be left out, or touched up without injuring the whole."

I replied, I would gladly make the attempt.

"You will find yourself perfectly competent," said he, "when you have once entered on the task; it will come quite naturally."

He then told me he intended to set off for Marienbad in a week; and he should be glad if I could remain at Weimar till then, that we might become better acquainted.

"I wish, too," said he, "you would not merely pass a few days or weeks in Jena, but live there all the summer, till I return from Marienbad towards the autumn. Already I have written about a lodging for you and other things necessary to make your stay pleasant.

"You will find there the most various resources and means for further studies, and a very cultivated circle; besides, the country has so many aspects, that you may take fifty walks, each different from the others, each pleasant, and almost all suited for undisturbed thought. You will find there plenty of leisure to write many new things for yourself, and also to accomplish my designs."

I could make no objection to such good proposals, and consented joyfully. When I departed, he was especially amiable, and fixed an hour the day after to-morrow for further converse.

Monday, June 16, 1823.

I have lately been frequently with Goethe. To-day, I declared my opinion of his Frankfort criticisms, calling them echoes of his academic years: an expression that seemed to please him.

He then gave me the first eleven numbers of *Kunst und Alterthum*,[1] to take with me to Jena, with the Frankfort critiques as a second task.

"I wish," said he, "you would study carefully these numbers, and not only make a general index of contents but also set down what subjects are not to be looked upon as concluded—that I may thus see at once what threads I have to take up again and spin longer. This will be a great assistance to me, and so far an advantage to you, that you will more keenly observe and apprehend the import of each treatise than if you read merely from inclination."

I said that I would willingly undertake this labour also.

Thursday, June 19, 1823.

I was to have gone to Jena to-day; but Goethe yesterday requested earnestly that I would stay till Sunday, and then go by the post. He gave me yesterday the letters of recommendation, and also one for the family of Frommann. "You will enjoy their circle," said he; "I have passed many delightful evenings there. Jean Paul, Tieck, the Schlegels, and all the other distinguished men of Germany, have visited there, and always with delight; and even now it is the union-point of many learned men, artists, and other persons of note. In a few weeks, write to me at Marienbad, that I may know how you are going on, and how you are pleased with Jena. I have requested my son to visit you there."

I felt grateful for so much care, and was very happy to see that Goethe regarded me as his own.

Saturday, June 21, I bade farewell to Goethe; and on the following day I went to Jena, where I established myself in a rural dwelling, with good respectable folk. In the families of von Knebel and Frommann, I found, on Goethe's recommendation, a cordial reception and cultured society. I made the best possible progress with the work I had taken with me, and had, besides, the pleasure of receiving a letter from Herr von Cotta, in which he not only declared himself ready to publish my manuscript which had been sent him, but promised me a

[1] *Art and Antiquity*.

handsome remuneration, adding that I myself should superintend the printing at Jena.

Thus my subsistence was secured for at least a year; and I felt the liveliest desire to produce something new at this time, and so to found my future prosperity as an author. I hoped that, in my *Beyträge zur Poesie*, I had already come to an end with theory and criticism; and I had plans for innumerable poems and dramas of various sorts.

But I was not long content in Jena; my life there was too quiet and uniform. I longed for a great city, where there was not only a good theatre, but where life was lived on a great scale. In such a town, too, I hoped to live quite unobserved, and to be free always to isolate myself for undisturbed production.

Meanwhile, I had sketched the index for Goethe's *Kunst und Alterthum*, and sent it to Marienbad with a letter, to which I received the following answer:

"The index arrived just at the right time, and corresponds precisely with my wishes and intentions. Let me, when I return, find the Frankfort criticisms arranged in like manner, and receive my best thanks—which I already silently pay beforehand, by carrying about with me your views, situation, wishes, aims, and plans; so that, on my return, I may be able to discuss your future more thoroughly. To-day I will say no more. My departure from Marienbad gives me much to think of and to do; while my stay, all too brief, with persons of interest, occasions painful feelings.

"May I find you in that state of tranquil activity, from which, after all, world-views and experiences are most surely and clearly evolved. Farewell. Rejoice with me in the anticipation of a prolonged and more intimate acquaintance.

"Goethe.

"Marienbad, August 14, 1823."

These lines of Goethe's determined me to take no step for myself, but to be wholly resigned to his will and counsel. Meanwhile, I wrote some little poems, finished arranging the Frankfort criticisms, and expressed my opinion of them in a short treatise intended for Goethe. I looked forward with eagerness to his return from Marienbad; for my *Beyträge zur Poesie* was almost through the press, and I wished at all events to refresh myself this autumn by going for a few weeks to the Rhine.

Jena, September 15, 1823.

Goethe is returned safe from Marienbad; but, as his country-house here is not so convenient as he requires, he will stay only a few days. He is well and active, so that he can take walks several miles long.

He began on my affairs:

"To speak out plainly, it is my wish that you should pass this winter with me in Weimar. With respect to poetry and criticism: you have a natural foundation for them. They are your profession, to which you must adhere, and which will soon bring you a good livelihood. But yet there is much, not strictly appertaining to this department, that you ought to know. However, you should get over it quickly this winter in Weimar: and you will wonder at the progress you have made by Easter; because you will have the best means, which are in my hands. Thus you will have laid a firm foundation for life. You will have attained comfort, and will be able to go forward with confidence."

I replied that I would regulate myself entirely by his wishes.

"With a home in my neighbourhood," continued Goethe, "I will provide you; you shall pass no unprofitable moment during the whole winter. Much that is good is brought together in Weimar; and you will find, in the higher circles, a society equal to the best in any great city. Besides, many eminent men are personally connected with me. With them you will make acquaintance, and you will find their conversation in the highest degree useful."

Goethe mentioned many distinguished men, indicating the peculiar merits of each.

"Where else," he continued, "would you find so much good in such a narrow space? We also possess an excellent library, and a theatre which yields to none in Germany. Therefore, I repeat, stay with us; and not only this winter, but make Weimar your home. Thence proceed highways to all quarters of the globe. In summer you can travel and see what you wish. I have lived there fifty years; and where have I not been? But I was always glad to return to Weimar."

Jena, Thursday, September 18, 1823.

Yesterday morning, before Goethe's return to Weimar, I had the happiness of another interview with him. What he said at that time was to me quite invaluable. All the young poets of Germany should know it.

He began by asking whether I had written any poems this summer. I said I had indeed written some, but on the whole I lacked the necessary ease. "Beware," said he, "of attempting a large work. *That* is what injures our best minds, even those finest in talent and most earnest in effort. I have suffered from this cause, and know how much it injured me. What have I not let fall into the well! If I had written all that I well might, a hundred volumes would not contain it.

"The Present will have its rights; the thoughts and feelings which daily press upon the poet will and should be expressed. But, if you have a great work in your head, nothing else thrives near it; all other thoughts are repelled, and the pleasure of life itself is for the time lost. What exertion and expenditure of mental force are required to arrange and round off a great whole! and then what powers, and what a tranquil situation, to express it with the proper fluency! If you have erred as to the whole, all your toil is lost; and further, if, treating so extensive a subject, you are not perfectly master of your material in the details, the whole will be defective, and censure will be incurred. Thus, for all his toil and sacrifice, the poet gets, instead of reward and pleasure, nothing but discomfort and a paralysis of his powers. But if he daily seizes the present, and always treats with a freshness of feeling what is offered him, he always makes sure of something good; and, if he sometimes does not succeed, has at least lost nothing.

"There is August Hagen, in Königsberg, a splendid talent: have you ever read his *Olfried und Lisena*? There you may find passages that could not be better; the situations on the Baltic, and the other particulars of that locality, are all masterly. But these are only fine passages; as a whole, it pleases nobody. And what labour and power he has lavished upon it! indeed, he has almost exhausted himself. Now, he has been writing a tragedy." Here Goethe smiled, and paused for a moment. I took up the discourse, and said that, if I was not mistaken, he had advised Hagen (in *Kunst und Alterthum*) to treat only small subjects. "I did so, indeed," he replied; "but do people conform to the instructions of us old ones? Each thinks he must know best about himself, and thus many are lost entirely, and many for a long time go astray. Past is the time for blundering about —*that* belonged to us old ones; and what was the use of all our seeking and blundering, if you young people choose to go the very same way over again? In this way we can never get on at all. Our errors were endured because we found no beaten

path; he that comes later must not be seeking and blundering, but should use the instructions of the old ones to proceed at once on the right path. It is not enough to take steps which may some day lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal.

"Carry these words about with you, and see how you can apply them. Not that I really feel uneasy about you, but perhaps by advice I help you quickly over a period not suitable to your present situation. If at present you treat only small subjects, freshly dashing off what every day offers you, you will generally produce something good, and each day will bring you pleasure. Give what you do to the pocket-volumes and periodicals, but never submit yourself to the requirements of others; always follow your own sense.

"The world is so great and rich, and life so full of variety, that you can never want occasions for poems. But they must all be *occasioned*; that is to say, reality must give both impulse and material. A particular event becomes universal and poetic by the very circumstance that it is treated by a poet. All my poems are occasioned poems, suggested by real life, and having therein a firm foundation. I attach no value to poems snatched out of the air.

"Let none say that reality wants poetical interest; for in this the poet proves his vocation, that he has the art to win from a common subject an interesting side. Reality must give the motive, the points to be expressed—the kernel; but to work out of it a beautiful animated whole, belongs to the poet. You know Fürnstein, called the Poet of Nature; he has written the prettiest poem possible, on the cultivation of hops. I have now proposed to him to make songs for the different crafts of working-men, particularly a weaver's song; and I am sure he will do it well, for he has lived among such people from his youth: he understands the subject thoroughly, and is therefore master of his material. That is exactly the advantage of small works; you need only choose those subjects of which you are master. With a great poem, this cannot be: no part can be evaded; all that belongs to the unification of the whole, and is interwoven into the plan, must be represented with precision. In youth, however, the knowledge of things is one-sided: a great work requires many-sidedness; so comes shipwreck."

I told Goethe I had contemplated writing a great poem upon the seasons, in which I might interweave the employments and amusements of all classes. "Here is the very case in point,"

replied Goethe; "you may succeed in many parts, but fail in others that refer to what you have not investigated. Perhaps you would do the fisherman well, and the huntsman ill; and if you fail anywhere, the whole is a failure—however good single parts may be—and you have not produced a perfect work. Give separately the single parts to which you are equal, and you make sure of something good.

"I especially warn you against great inventions of your own; for then you would try to give a view of things, and for that purpose youth is seldom ripe. Further, character and views detach themselves as sides from the poet's mind, and deprive him of the fulness requisite for future productions. And, finally, how much time is lost in invention, internal arrangement, and combination! for which nobody thanks us, even supposing our work happily accomplished.

"With a *given* material, on the other hand, all goes easier and better. Facts and characters being provided, the poet has only the task of animating the whole. He preserves his own fulness, for he needs to part with but little of himself; and there is much less loss of time and power, since he has only the trouble of execution. Indeed, I advise the choice of subjects that have been worked before. How many Iphigenias have been written! yet they are all different, each writer considers and arranges the subject after his own fashion.

"But, for the present, you had better lay aside all great undertakings. You have striven long enough; it is time that you should enter into the cheerful period of life; and for the attainment of this, the working out of small subjects is the best expedient."

We had been walking up and down the room. I could but assent, feeling the truth of each word. At each step I felt lighter and happier; for I must confess that grand schemes, of which I had not as yet been able to take a clear view, had been no little burden to me.

I feel years wiser through these words of Goethe's, and perceive the good fortune of meeting with a true master.

Weimar, Thursday, October 2, 1823.

I came here yesterday from Jena, favoured by agreeable weather. Immediately after my arrival, Goethe, by way of welcoming me to Weimar, sent me a season-ticket for the theatre. I passed yesterday in making my domestic arrangements—the rather, as they were very busy at Goethe's; for the

French Ambassador from Frankfort, Count Reinhard, and the Prussian State Counsellor, Schultz, from Berlin, had come to visit him.

This forenoon I was again at Goethe's. As I was about to take my leave, he said he would first make me acquainted with the State Counsellor, Schultz. In the next room we found that gentleman looking at the works of art. Goethe introduced me, and left us together.

[Some formal talk with Schultz.]

Tuesday, October 14, 1823.

This evening, I went for the first time to a large tea-party at Goethe's. I arrived first, and enjoyed the view of the brilliantly lighted apartments, which, through open doors, led one into the other. In one of the farthest, I found Goethe, dressed in black, and wearing his star—which became him so well. We were for a while alone, and went into the so-called "covered room" (*Deckenzimmer*), where the picture of the Aldobrandine Marriage, which was hung above a red couch, especially attracted my attention. On the green curtains being drawn aside, the picture was before my eyes in a broad light, and I was delighted to contemplate it quietly.

"Yes," said Goethe, "the ancients had not only great intentions, but they carried them into effect. We moderns have also great intentions, but are seldom able to bring them out with such power and freshness as we have thought them."

Now came Riemer, Meyer, Chancellor von Müller, and many other distinguished gentlemen and ladies of the court. Goethe's son and Frau von Goethe, with whom I was now for the first time made acquainted, also entered. The rooms filled gradually, and there was life and cheerfulness in them all. Some pretty youthful foreigners were present, with whom Goethe spoke French.

All, free and unconstrained, laughed and talked. I had a lively conversation with young Goethe [1] about Houwald's *Bild* (Picture),[2] which was given a few days since. I was greatly pleased to see this young man expound the points with so much animation and intelligence.

Goethe himself went about from one to another; he seemed to prefer listening, and hearing his guests talk, to talking much himself. Frau von Goethe would often come and lean upon him, and kiss him. I had lately said to him that I enjoyed the

[1] Goethe's only son, August. [2] A drama of some celebrity.—J. O.

theatre highly, and that I felt great pleasure in giving myself up to the impression of the piece, without reflecting much upon it. This to him seemed right, and suited to my present state.

He came to me with Frau von Goethe. "This is my daughter-in-law," said he; "do you know each other?"

We told him that we had just become acquainted.

"He is as much a child about the theatre as you, Ottilia!" said he; and we exchanged congratulations upon this taste which we had in common. "My daughter," continued he, "never misses an evening."

"That is all very well," said I, "as long as they give good lively pieces; but when the pieces are bad, they try the patience."

"But," said Goethe, "it is a good thing that you cannot leave, and must hear and see even what is bad. By this means you are penetrated with the hatred for the bad, and come to a clearer insight into the good. In reading, it is not so—you throw aside the book if it displeases you; but at the theatre you must endure."

We now separated, and joined the rest, who were loudly and merrily amusing themselves about us—now in this room, now in that. Goethe went to the ladies; and I joined Riemer and Meyer, who told us much about Italy.

Afterwards, Counsellor Schmidt seated himself at the piano, and played some of Beethoven's pieces, which seemed received with deep sympathy. An intelligent lady then related many interesting particulars respecting Beethoven. Ten o'clock came, and thus had passed an extremely pleasant evening.

Sunday, October 19, 1823.

To-day, I dined for the first time with Goethe. No others were present except Frau von Goethe, Fräulein Ulrica,[1] and little Walter; and thus we were all very comfortable. Goethe appeared now solely as father of a family, helping to all the dishes, carving the roast fowls with great dexterity, and not forgetting between whiles to fill the glasses. We had much lively chat about the theatre, young English people, and other topics of the day; Fräulein Ulrica was especially lively and entertaining. Goethe was generally silent, coming out only now and then with some pertinent remark. From time to time he glanced at the newspaper, reading us some passages, especially about the progress of the Greeks.

They then talked about the necessity of my learning English;

[1] Ottilia's sister.

and Goethe earnestly advised me to do so, particularly on account of Lord Byron—saying that a character of such eminence had never existed before, and probably would never come again. They discussed the merits of teachers here, but found none with thoroughly good pronunciation; on which account they deemed it better to go to some young Englishman.

After dinner, Goethe showed me some experiments relating to his theory of colours. The subject was, however, new to me; I understood neither the phenomena nor what he said about them. Nevertheless, I hoped that the future would afford me leisure to initiate myself into this science.

Tuesday, October 21, 1823.

I went to see Goethe this evening. We talked of his *Pandora*. I asked him whether this poem was to be regarded as a whole, or whether there was anything further. He said there was nothing further in existence, and that he had written no more because the first part was planned on so large a scale that he could not afterwards get through a second. Besides, what was done might be regarded as a whole, so he felt easy.

I said that I had penetrated the meaning of this difficult poem only by degrees, after I had read it so many times as almost to know it by heart. Goethe smiled, and said, "I can well believe that; for its parts are wedged one within another."

I added, that I could not be perfectly satisfied with what Schubarth said about this poem: that there was there united all that had been said separately in *Werther*, *Wilhelm Meister*, *Faust*, and the *Elective Affinities*—thus making the matter very incomprehensible and difficult. "Schubarth," said Goethe, "often goes a little deep; but he is very clever, and all his words are pregnant."

We spoke of Uhland; and Goethe said, "When I see great effects, I am apt to suppose great causes; and, with a popularity so extensive as that of Uhland, there must be something superior about him. However, I can scarcely form a judgment as to his poems. I took up his book with the best intentions, but fell immediately on so many weak and gloomy poems that I could not proceed. I then tried his ballads; where I really did find distinguished talent, and could plainly see that there was some foundation for his celebrity."

I then asked Goethe his opinion as to the kind of verse proper for German tragedy. "People in Germany," he replied, "will scarcely come to an agreement on that point. Everyone does

just as he likes, what he finds suitable to his subject. The Iambic trimeter would be the most dignified measure; but it is too long for us Germans, who, for want of epithets, generally find five feet quite enough. The English, on account of their many monosyllables, cannot even get on so far as we do."

Goethe then showed me some copperplates, and afterwards talked about old German architecture; adding that, by degrees, he would show me a great deal in this way.

"We see in the works of the old German architecture," he said, "the flower of an extraordinary state of things. Whoever comes immediately close to such a flower, will only stare at it with astonishment; but he who sees into the secret inner life of the plant, into the stirring of its powers, and observes how the flower gradually unfolds itself, sees the matter with quite different eyes—he knows what he sees.

"I will take care that in the course of this winter you attain more insight into this important subject, that when you visit the Rhine next summer, the sight of the Minster of Strasburg and the Cathedral of Cologne may do you some good."

Saturday, October 25, 1823.

At twilight, I passed half an hour at Goethe's. He sat in a wooden arm-chair before his table. I found him in a gentle mood, as one who is filled with celestial peace or is recalling a delicious happiness he has enjoyed. Stadelmann gave me a seat near him.

We talked of the theatre, which was one of the topics that chiefly interested me this winter. The *Night on Earth* of Raupach was the last piece I had seen. I gave my opinion that the piece was not brought before us as it existed in the mind of the poet; that the Idea was predominant over the Life; that it was rather lyric than dramatic; and that what was spun out through five acts would have been far better in two or three. Goethe added that the idea of the whole, which turned upon aristocracy and democracy, was by no means of universal interest.

I then praised those pieces of Kotzebue's which I had seen—namely, his *Affinities*, and his *Reconciliation*. I praised in them the quick eye for real life, the dexterity at seizing its interesting side, and the genuine and forcible representation of it. Goethe agreed with me. "What has kept its place for twenty years, and enjoys the favour of the people," said he, "must have something in it. When Kotzebue contented

himself with his own sphere, and did not go beyond his powers, he usually did well. It was the same with him as with Chodowiecky; who always succeeded perfectly with the scenes of common citizens' life, while if he attempted to paint Greek or Roman heroes it proved a failure."

He named several other good pieces of Kotzebue's, especially *The Two Klingsbergs*. "None can deny," said he, "that Kotzebue has looked about a great deal in life, and ever kept his eyes open.

"Intellect, and some poetry, cannot be denied to our modern tragic poets; but most of them are incapable of an easy, living representation—they strive after something beyond their powers; and for that reason I might call them *forced* talents."

"I doubt," said I, "whether such poets could write a piece in prose, and am of opinion that this would be the true touchstone of their talent." Goethe agreed with me; adding that versification enhanced, and even called forth, poetic feeling.

We then talked about his *Journey through Frankfort and Stuttgart to Switzerland*; which he has lying by him in three parts, in sheets, and which he will send me, that I may read the details and plan how they may be formed into a whole. "You will see," said he, "that it was written on the impulse of the moment; there was no thought of plan or artistical rounding: it was like pouring water from a bucket."

Monday, October 27, 1823.

This morning, I was invited to a tea-party and concert, which were to be given at Goethe's house this evening. The servant showed me the list of persons to be invited, from which I saw that the company would be very large and brilliant. He said a young Polish lady had arrived, who would play on the piano.

Afterwards the bill for the theatre was brought, and I saw that the *Chess-machine* was to be played. I knew nothing of this piece; but my landlady was so lavish in its praise, that I was seized with a great desire to see it. Besides, I had not been in my best mood all day, and the feeling grew upon me that I was more fit for a merry comedy than for such good society.

In the evening, an hour before the theatre opened, I went to Goethe. All was already in movement throughout the house. As I passed, I heard them tuning the piano in the great room, as preparation for the musical entertainment.

I found Goethe alone in his chamber; he was already dressed, and I seemed to him to have arrived at the right moment.

"You shall stay with me here," he said, "and we will entertain one another till the arrival of the others." I thought, "Now I shall not be able to get away: stop I must; and, though it is very pleasant to be with Goethe alone, yet, when a quantity of strange gentlemen and ladies come, I shall feel out of my element."

I walked up and down the room with Goethe. Soon the theatre became the subject of our discourse, and I had an opportunity of repeating that it was to me a source of new delight. "Indeed," added I, "I feel so much about it, that I have had a severe contest with myself, notwithstanding the great attractions of your evening party."

"Well," said Goethe, stopping short, and looking at me with kindness and dignity, "go then; do not constrain yourself; if the lively play this evening suits you best, is more suitable to your mood, go there. You have music here, and that you will often have again." "Then," said I, "I will go; it will, perhaps, do me good to laugh." "Stay with me, however," said Goethe, "till six o'clock: we shall have time to say a word or two."

Stadelmann brought in two wax lights, which he set on the table. Goethe desired me to sit down, and he would give me something to read. And what should this be but his newest, dearest poem, his *Elegy from Marienbad* !

I must here go back a little for a circumstance connected with this poem. Immediately after Goethe's return from Marienbad, the report had been spread that he had there made the acquaintance of a young lady equally charming in mind and person, and had been inspired with a passion for her. When her voice was heard in the Brunnen-Allee, he had always seized his hat, and hastened to join her. He had missed no opportunity of being in her society, and had passed happy days: the parting had been very painful, and he had, in this excited state, written a most beautiful poem; which, however, he looked upon as a consecrated thing, and kept hid from every eye.[1]

I believed this story, because it perfectly accorded not only with his bodily vigour, but also with the productive force of his mind and the freshness of his heart. I had, therefore, to congratulate myself on the fortunate moment which brought the poem before me.

[1] This queer note is confirmed by Soret; who remarks, under date November 17, 1823, that Goethe's illness of that time was a result of the passion above mentioned.

He had, with his own hand, written these verses in Roman characters on fine vellum paper, and fastened them with a silken cord into a red morocco case; so that, from the outside, it was obvious that he prized this manuscript above all the rest.

I read it with great delight, and found that every line confirmed the common report. The first verse, however, intimated that the acquaintance was not first made, but only renewed, at this time. The poem revolved constantly on its axis, and seemed always to return to the point where it began. The close, wonderfully broken off, made a singular impression.

When I had finished, Goethe came to me again. "Well," said he, "there I have shown you something good. But you shall tell me what you think a few days hence." I was glad he excused me from passing a judgment at the moment. Goethe promised to let me see it again in some tranquil hour.

The *Chess-machine* was, perhaps, a good piece, well acted; but I saw it not—my thoughts were with Goethe. When the play was over, I passed by his house; it was all lighted up; I heard music from within, and regretted that I had not stayed there.

The next day, I was told that the young Polish lady, Madame Szymanowska, in whose honour the party had been given, had played on the piano to the enchantment of the whole company. I learned also that Goethe became acquainted with her last summer at Marienbad.

At noon, Goethe sent me a little manuscript, *Studies by Zauper*. I sent him some poems I had written this summer at Jena.

Wednesday, October 29, 1823.

This evening I went to Goethe just as they were lighting the candles. I found him in a very animated state of mind: his eyes sparkled with the reflection of the candle-light; his whole expression was one of cheerfulness, youth, and power.

As he walked up and down with me, he began to speak of the poems I sent him yesterday.

"I understand now," said he, "why you talked to me, at Jena, of writing a poem on the seasons. I now advise you to do so; begin at once with Winter. You seem to have a special sense and feeling for natural objects.

"Only two words would I say about your poems. You stand now at that point where you must break through to the high and difficult part of art—apprehension of what is individual.

You must do some violence to yourself to get out of the *Idea*. You have talent, and have got so far; now you *must* do this. You have been lately at Tiefurt; that might now afford a subject for the attempt. You may perhaps go to Tiefurt and look at it three or four times before you win from it the characteristic side, and bring all your *motif* together; but spare not your toil; study it throughout, and then represent it; the subject is well worth this trouble. I should have used it long ago, but I could not; for I have lived through those important circumstances, and my being is so interwoven with them, that details press unduly upon me. But you come as a stranger; let the Castellan tell you the past, and you will see only what is present, prominent, and significant."

I promised to try, but could not deny that this subject seemed far out of my way, and very difficult.

"I know well," said he, "that it is difficult; but apprehension and representation of the individual is the very life of art. Besides, while you content yourself with generalities, everybody can imitate you; but, in the particular, none can—and why? because no others have experienced exactly the same thing.

"And you need not fear lest what is peculiar should not meet with sympathy. Each character, however peculiar it may be, and each object you can represent, from the stone up to man, has generality; for there is repetition everywhere, and there is nothing to be found only once in the world.

"At this step of representing what is individual," continued Goethe, "begins, at the same time, what we call composition."

This was not at once clear to me, though I refrained from questions. "Perhaps," thought I, "he means the blending of the Ideal with the Real—the union of that which is external with that which is innate. But perhaps he means something else." Goethe continued:

"And be sure you put to each poem the date at which you wrote it." I looked at him inquiringly, to know why this was so important. "Your poems will thus serve," he said, "as a diary of your progress. I have done it for many years, and can see its use."

It was now time for the theatre. "So you are going to Finland?" called he, jestingly, after me; for the piece was *John of Finland*, by Frau von Weissenthurn.

The piece did not lack effective situations; but it was so overloaded with pathos, and the design was so obvious in every part, that the whole did not impress me favourably. The

last act, however, pleased me much, and reconciled me to the rest.

[It caused him to reflect that, while poorly-drawn characters in plays gain in reality from being acted, well-drawn characters usually lose thereby.]

Monday, November 3, 1823.

I went to Goethe at five o'clock. I heard them, as I came upstairs, laughing very loud, and talking in the great room. The servant said that the Polish lady dined there to-day, and that the company had not yet left the table. I was going away; but he said he had orders to announce me, and that perhaps his master would be glad of my arrival, as it was now late. I waited a while, after which Goethe came out in a very cheerful mood, and took me to the opposite room. He had a bottle of wine brought, and filled for me, and occasionally for himself.

"Before I forget it," said he, looking about the table for something, "let me give you a concert-ticket. Madame Szymanowska gives, to-morrow evening, a public concert at the Stadthaus, and you must not fail to be there." I replied that I certainly should not repeat my late folly. "They say she plays very well," I added. "Admirably," said Goethe. "As well as Hummel?" asked I. "You must remember," said Goethe, "that she is not only a great performer, but a beautiful woman; and this lends a charm to all she does. Her execution is masterly—astonishing, indeed." "And has she also great power?" said I. "Yes," said he, "great power; and that is what we do not often find in ladies."

Secretary Kräuter came in to consult about the library. When he left us, Goethe praised his talent and integrity in business.

I then turned the conversation to the *Journey through Frankfort and Stuttgart into Switzerland, in* 1797, the manuscript of which he had lately given me, and which I had already diligently studied. I spoke of Goethe's and Meyer's reflections on the *subjects* of plastic art.

"Ay," said Goethe, "what can be more important than the subject, and what is all the science of art without it? All talent is wasted if the subject is unsuitable. It is because modern artists have no worthy subjects, that people are so hampered in all the art of modern times. From this cause we all suffer. I myself have not been able to renounce my modernness.

"Very few artists," he continued, "are clear on this point,

or know what will really be satisfactory. For instance, they take my *Fisherman* as the subject of a picture, and do not think that it cannot be painted. In this ballad, nothing is expressed but the charm in water which tempts us to bathe in summer; there is nothing else in it: and how can that be painted?"

I mentioned how pleased I was to see how, in that journey, he had taken an interest in everything: shape and situation of mountains, with their species of stone; soil, rivers, clouds, air, wind, and weather; then cities, with their origin and growth, architecture, painting, theatres, municipal regulations and police, trade, economy, laying out of streets, varieties of human race, manner of living, peculiarities; then again, politics, martial affairs, and a hundred things beside.

He answered, "But you find no word upon music, because that was not within my sphere. Each traveller should know what he has to see, and what properly belongs to him, on a journey."

The Chancellor[1] came in. He talked a little with Goethe; and then spoke to me, kindly and with much acuteness, about a little paper he had lately read. He soon returned to the ladies, among whom I heard the sound of a piano.

When he had left us, Goethe spoke highly of him, and said, "All these excellent men, with whom you are now placed in so pleasant a relation, make what I call a home, to which one is always willing to return."

I said I already began to perceive the beneficial effect of my present situation, and found myself gradually leaving my ideal and theoretic tendencies and more and more able to appreciate the value of the present moment.

"It would be a pity," said Goethe, "if it were not so. Only persist in this, and hold fast by the present. Every situation —nay, every moment—is of infinite worth; for it is the representative of a whole eternity."

After a short pause, I turned the conversation to Tiefurt. "The subject," said I, "is complex, and it will be difficult to give it proper form. It would be most convenient to me to treat it in prose."

"For that," said Goethe, "the subject is not sufficiently significant. The so-called didactic, descriptive form, would, on the whole, be eligible; but even that is not perfectly appropriate. The best method will be to treat the subject in ten

[1] Friedrich von Müller.

or twelve separate little poems—in rhyme; but in various measures and forms, such as the various sides and views demand, by which means light will be given to the whole." This advice I at once adopted as judicious. "Why, indeed," continued he, "should you not for once use dramatic means, and write a conversation or so with the gardener? By this fragmentary method you make your task easy, and can better bring out the characteristic sides of the subject. A great, comprehensive whole, on the other hand, is always difficult; and he who attempts it seldom produces anything complete."

Monday, November 10, 1823.

Goethe has not been very well for the last few days; it seems he cannot get rid of a very bad cold. He coughs a great deal, very loud, and with much force; the cough seems to be painful, for he generally has his hand on his left side.

I passed half an hour with him this evening before the theatre. He sat in an arm-chair, with his back sunk in a cushion, and seemed to speak with difficulty.

After we had talked a little, he wished me to read a poem with which he intended to open a new number of *Kunst und Alterthum.* He remained sitting, and showed me where it was kept. I took the light, and sat down at his writing-table to read it, at a little distance.

This poem was singular; and, though I did not fully understand it on the first reading, it affected me strangely. The glorification of the Paria was its subject, and it was treated as a Trilogy. The prevailing tone seemed that of another world, and the mode of representation was such that I found it very difficult to form a notion of the subject. The presence of Goethe was also unfavourable to thorough abstraction: now I heard him cough; now I heard him sigh; and thus I was, as it were, divided in two—one half read, and the other felt his presence. I was forced to read the poem again and again, to get near it. However, the more I penetrated into it, the more significant and the higher in art did it seem.

At last I spoke to Goethe, as to both subject and treatment; and he gave me new light.

"Indeed," said he, "the treatment is very terse, and you must go deep into it to seize upon its meaning. It seems, even to me, like a Damascene blade hammered out of steel wire. I have borne this subject about with me for forty years; so that it has had time to get clear of everything extraneous."

"It will produce an effect," said I, "when it comes before the public."

"Ah, the public!" sighed Goethe.

"Would it not be well," said I, "to add an explanation as we do to pictures, when we endeavour to give life to what is present, by describing the preceding circumstances?"

"I think not," said he. "With pictures it is another matter; but, as a poem is already expressed in words, one word only cancels another."

I thought Goethe was here very happy in pointing out the rock on which those who interpret poems are commonly wrecked. Still it may be questioned whether it be not possible to avoid this rock, and to affix some explanatory words to a poem without injuring the delicacy of its inner life.

When I went away, he asked me to take the sheets of *Kunst und Alterthum* home with me, that I might read the poem again, and also the *Roses from the East* of Rückert, a poet whom he seems to value highly, and to regard with great expectation.

Wednesday, November 12, 1823.

Towards evening, I went to see Goethe; but heard, before I went upstairs, that the Prussian minister, von Humboldt, was with him—at which I was pleased, being convinced that this visit of an old friend would cheer him up and do him good.

I then went to the theatre, where *The Sisters of Prague*, got up to perfection, was done admirably, so that it was impossible to leave off laughing throughout.

Thursday, November 13, 1823.

Some days ago, as I was walking one fine afternoon towards Erfurt, I was joined by an elderly man; whom I supposed, from his appearance, to be an opulent citizen. We had not talked together long, before I asked him whether he knew Goethe. "Know him?" said he, with delight; "I was his valet almost twenty years!" He then launched into the praises of his former master. I begged to hear something of Goethe's youth, and he gladly consented to gratify me.

"When I first lived with him," said he, "he might have been about twenty-seven years old; he was thin, nimble, and elegant in his person. I could easily have carried him in my arms."

I asked whether Goethe, in that early part of his life here, had not been very gay. "Certainly," replied he; "he was always gay with the gay, but never when they passed a certain limit;

in that case he usually became grave. Always working and seeking; his mind always bent on art and science; that was generally the way with my master. The duke often visited him in the evening, and then they often talked on learned topics till late at night, so that I got extremely tired, and wondered when the duke would go. Even then he was interested in natural science.

"One time he rang in the middle of the night; and when I entered his room I found he had rolled his iron bed to the window, and was lying there, looking out upon the heavens. 'Have you seen nothing in the sky?' asked he; and when I answered 'No,' he bade me run to the guard-house, and ask the man on duty if he had seen nothing. I went there; the guard said he had seen nothing, and I returned with this answer to my master, who was still in the same position, lying in his bed, and gazing upon the sky. 'Listen,' said he; 'this is an important moment; there is now an earthquake, or one is just going to take place'; then he made me sit down on the bed, and showed me by what signs he knew this."

I asked the good old man "what sort of weather it was."

"It was very cloudy," he replied; "very still and sultry."

I asked if he at once believed there was an earthquake on Goethe's word.

"Yes," said he, "I believed it, for things always happened as he said they would. Next day he related his observations at court, when a lady whispered to her neighbour, 'Only listen, Goethe is dreaming.' But the duke, and all the men present, believed Goethe, and the correctness of his observations was soon confirmed; for, in a few weeks, the news came that a part of Messina, on that night, had been destroyed by an earthquake."

Friday, November 14, 1823.

Towards evening, Goethe sent me an invitation to call upon him. Humboldt, he said, was at court, and therefore I should be all the more welcome. I found him, as I did some days ago, sitting in his arm-chair. The chancellor soon joined us. We sat near Goethe, and carried on a light conversation, that he might only have to listen. The physician, Counsellor Rehbein, soon came also. To use his own expression, he found Goethe's pulse quite lively and easy. At this we were highly pleased, and joked with Goethe on the subject. "If I could only get rid of the pain in my left side!" he said. Rehbein prescribed a plaster; we talked on the good effect of such a

remedy, and Goethe consented to it. Rehbein turned the conversation to Marienbad, and this appeared to awaken pleasant reminiscences in Goethe. Arrangements were made to go there again, it was said that the grand-duke would join the party, and these prospects put Goethe in the most cheerful mood. They also talked about Madame Szymanowska, and mentioned the time when she was here and all the men were solicitors for her favour.

When Rehbein was gone, the chancellor read the Indian poems, and Goethe meanwhile talked to me about the Marienbad Elegy.

At eight o'clock, the chancellor went; and I was going too, but Goethe bade me stop a little, and I sat down. The conversation turned on the stage, and the fact that *Wallenstein* was to be done to-morrow. This gave occasion to talk about Schiller.

"I have," said I, "a peculiar feeling towards Schiller. Some scenes of his great dramas I read with genuine love and admiration; but presently I meet with something that violates the truth of nature, and I can go no further. I feel this even in reading *Wallenstein.* I cannot but think that Schiller's turn for philosophy injured his poetry, because this led him to consider the idea far higher than all nature; indeed, thus to annihilate nature. What he could conceive must happen, whether it were in conformity with nature or not."

"It was sad," said Goethe, "to see how so highly gifted a man tormented himself with philosophical disquisitions which could in no way profit him. Humboldt has shown me letters Schiller wrote to him in those unblest days of speculation. There we see how he plagued himself with the design of perfectly separating sentimental from naïve poetry. For the former he could find no proper soil, and this brought him into unspeakable perplexity. As if," continued he, smiling, "sentimental poetry could exist at all without the naïve ground in which it has its root.

"It was not Schiller's plan," continued Goethe, "to go to work instinctively; he was forced to reflect on all he did. Hence he never could leave off talking about his poetical projects; and thus he discussed with me all his late pieces, scene after scene.

"On the other hand, it was contrary to my nature to talk over my poetic plans with anybody—even with Schiller. I carried everything about with me in silence, and usually nothing was known to anyone till the whole was completed. When

I showed Schiller my *Hermann and Dorothea* finished, he was astonished, for I had said not a syllable to him of any such plan.

"But I am curious to hear what you will say of *Wallenstein* to-morrow. You will see noble forms, and the piece will make an impression on you such as you probably do not dream of."

Saturday, November 15, 1823.

In the evening I was in the theatre, where I for the first time saw *Wallenstein*. Goethe had not said too much; the impression was great, and stirred my inmost soul. The actors, who had almost all belonged to the time when they were under the personal influence of Schiller and Goethe, gave an ensemble of significant personages, such as on a mere reading were not presented to my imagination. I could not get it out of my head the whole night.

Sunday, November 16, 1823.

In the evening at Goethe's; he was still sitting in his elbow-chair, and seemed rather weak. His first question was about *Wallenstein*. I gave him an account, which he heard with visible satisfaction.

M. Soret came in, led in by Frau von Goethe, and remained about an hour. He brought from the duke some gold medals, and by showing and talking about these seemed to entertain Goethe. Frau von Goethe and M. Soret went to court, and I was left alone with Goethe.

Remembering his promise to show me his Marienbad Elegy again, Goethe arose, put a light on the table, and gave me the poem. He quietly seated himself again, and left me to an undisturbed perusal.

After I had been reading a while, I turned to say something, but he seemed asleep. I therefore used the opportunity to read the poem again and again with rare delight. The most youthful glow of love, tempered by moral elevation of the mind, seemed to me its pervading characteristic. Then I thought that the feelings were more strongly expressed than we are accustomed to find in Goethe's other poems, and imputed this to the influence of Byron—which Goethe did not deny.

"You see the product of a highly impassioned mood," said he. "While I was in it I would not for the world have been without it, and now I would not for any consideration fall into it again.

"I wrote that poem immediately after leaving Marienbad, while the feeling of all I had experienced there was fresh. At

eight in the morning, when we stopped at the first stage, I wrote down the first strophe; and thus I went on composing in the carriage, and writing down at every stage what I had just composed in my head, so that by the evening the whole was on paper. Thence it has a certain directness, and is poured out at once, which may be an advantage to it as a whole."

"It is," said I, "quite peculiar in its kind, and recalls no other poem of yours."

"That," said he, "may be because I staked upon the present moment as a man stakes a considerable sum upon a card, and sought to enhance its value as much as I could without exaggeration."

These words struck me as throwing light on Goethe's method and exhibiting his many-sidedness.

It was now near nine o'clock; Goethe bade me call Stadelmann. He then let Stadelmann put the prescribed plaster on his left side. I turned to the window, but heard him lamenting that his illness was not lessening, but grew permanent. When the process was over, I sat down by him again for a little while. He now complained to me also that he had not slept for some nights, and had no appetite. "The winter," said he, "thus passes away; I can put nothing together; my mind has no force." I tried to soothe him, telling him not to think so much of his labours at present, and that he would soon be better. "Ah," said he, "I am not impatient; I have lived through too many such situations not to have learned to suffer and to endure." He was in his white flannel gown, and a woollen coverlet was laid on his knees and feet. "I shall not go to bed," he said, "but will pass the night thus in my chair, for I cannot properly sleep."

Meanwhile the time for my departure was come; he extended his dear hand to me, and I left.

When I went down into the servants' room, to fetch my cloak, I found Stadelmann much agitated. He said he was alarmed about his master, for if *he* complained, it was a bad sign indeed! His feet, too, which had lately been a little swollen, had suddenly become thin. He was "going to the physician early in the morning, to tell him these bad signs." I endeavoured to pacify him, but he would not be talked out of his fears.

Monday, November 17, 1823.

When I entered the theatre this evening, many persons pressed towards me, asking very anxiously how Goethe was.

News of his illness, perhaps exaggerated, must have spread rapidly over the town. Some said he had water on the chest. I felt depressed all the evening.

Wednesday, November 19, 1823.

Yesterday, I walked about in a state of great anxiety. Nobody besides his family was admitted to see him.

In the evening I went to his house, and he received me. I found him still in his arm-chair; his outward appearance was quite the same as when I left him on Sunday, but he was in good spirits.

We talked of Zauper, and the widely differing results which proceed from the study of ancient literature.

Friday, November 21, 1823.

Goethe sent for me. To my great joy I found him walking up and down in his chamber. He gave me a little book, the *Ghazels* of Count Platen. "I had intended," said he, "to say something of this in *Kunst und Alterthum*, for the poems deserve it; but my present condition will not allow me to do anything. Just see if you can fathom the poems and get anything out of them."

I promised to make the attempt.

"*Ghazels*," continued he, "have this peculiarity, that they demand great fulness of meaning. The constantly-recurring similar rhymes must find ready for them a store of similar thoughts. Therefore it is not everyone that succeeds in them; but these will please you." The physician came in, and I departed.

Monday, November 24, 1823.

Saturday and Sunday I studied the poems: this morning I wrote down my view of them, and sent it to Goethe; for I had heard that nobody had been admitted to him for some days, the physician having forbidden him to talk.

However, he sent for me this evening. When I entered, I found a chair already placed for me near him. He began immediately to speak of my little critique. "I was much pleased with it," said he; "you have a fine talent. I wish now to tell you something," he continued; "if literary proposals should be made to you from other quarters, refuse them, or at least consult me before deciding upon them."

I replied that I wished to belong to him alone, and had at present no reason to think of new connections.

We then talked of the *Ghazels*. Goethe expressed his delight at the completeness of these poems, and that our present literature produced so much that was good.

"I wish," said he, "to recommend the newest talent to your especial study and observation. I wish you to become acquainted with whatever our literature brings forth worthy of note, and to place before me whatever is meritorious, that we may discuss it in the numbers of *Kunst und Alterthum*, and mention what is good, sound, and elevated, with due acknowledgment. For, with the best intentions, I cannot, at my advanced age, and with my manifold duties, do this without aid from others."

He sent me the latest literary periodicals to assist in the proposed task. I did not go to him for several days, nor was I invited. I heard his friend Zelter had come to visit him.

Monday, December 1, 1823.

To-day, I was invited to dine with Goethe. I found Zelter sitting with him when I arrived. Both advanced to meet me, and gave me their hands. "Here," said Goethe, "we have my friend Zelter. In him you make a valuable acquaintance. I shall send you soon to Berlin; he will take excellent care of you." "Is Berlin a good place?" said I. "Yes," replied Zelter, laughing; "a great deal may be learned and unlearned there."

We sat down and talked on various subjects. I asked after Schubarth. "He visits me at least every week," said Zelter. "He is married now, but has no appointment, because he has offended the philologists in Berlin."

Zelter asked me then if I knew Immermann. I said I had often heard his name, but as yet knew nothing of his writings. "I made his acquaintance at Münster," said Zelter; "he is a very hopeful young man, and it is a pity that his appointment leaves him no more time for his art." Goethe also praised his talent. "But we must see," said he, "how he comes out; whether he will submit to purify his taste, and, with respect to form, adopt the acknowledged best models as his standard. His original striving has its merit, but leads astray too easily."

Little Walter now came jumping in, asking many questions, of both Zelter and his grandfather. "When thou comest, uneasy spirit," said Goethe, "all conversation is spoiled." However, he loves the boy, and was unwearied in satisfying his wishes.

Frau von Goethe and Fräulein Ulrica now came in, and with them young Goethe, in his uniform with sword, ready for court. We sat down to table. Fräulein Ulrica and Zelter were very gay, rallied each other during the whole of dinner. Zelter, a healthy, happy man, could give himself up wholly to the moment, and always had the word for the occasion—sometimes giving a hard hit. He imparted to others his own freedom of spirit, so that all narrowing views were soon dispelled by his presence. He went away soon after dinner, to visit the grand-duchess.

Thursday, December 4, 1823.

This morning, Secretary Kräuter brought me an invitation to dine with Goethe; at the same time, by Goethe's desire, giving me a hint to present Zelter with a copy of my *Beyträge zur Poesie*. I took the copy to him at his hotel. Zelter, in return, put Immermann's poems into my hands. "I would willingly make you a present of this copy," said he, "but, you see, the author has dedicated it to me, and I must therefore keep it as a valuable memorial."

Before dinner, I walked with Zelter through the park towards Upper Weimar.

"If I am to compose music for a poem," said he, "I first try to bring before me a living picture of the situation. I then read it aloud till I know it by heart; and thus, when I again recite it, the melody comes of its own accord."

About two, I returned to dinner, and found Goethe and Zelter looking at engravings of Italian scenery. Frau von Goethe came in, and we sat down to dinner. Fräulein Ulrica was absent; and so was young Goethe, who just came in to say Good-day, and then returned to court.

Many anecdotes were told by both Zelter and Goethe, illustrating the peculiarities of their common friend, Friedrich August Wolf, of Berlin. There was a great deal of talk about the *Nibelungen*, and then about Lord Byron and his hoped-for visit to Weimar, in which Frau von Goethe took especial interest. The Rochus festival at Bingen was also a very cheerful subject; and Zelter remembered two beautiful girls, the memory of whom seemed still to exhilarate him. Goethe's social song, *Kriegsglück* (Fortune of War), was then gaily talked over. Zelter was inexhaustible in his anecdotes of wounded soldiers and beautiful women, and they all tended to show the truthfulness of the poem. Goethe himself said that he had had no need to go far for such realities; he had seen them all at Weimar.

Frau von Goethe maintained a lively opposition, saying that she would not admit women were so bad as that "nasty" poem represented them.

When I was alone with Goethe, he asked me about Zelter. "Well," said he, "how do you like him? On a first acquaintance, he may appear blunt, even rough; but that is only external. I scarcely know any man who is really so tender as Zelter. Besides, we must not forget that he has passed more than half a century in Berlin; where there is such an audacious set that one cannot get on well with delicacy, but must have one's eyes wide open and be a little rough now and then, only to keep one's head above water."

(Sup). Wednesday, December 31, 1823.

Dined at Goethe's; conversing on various subjects. He showed me a portfolio containing sketches; amongst which the first attempts of Henry Füssli[1] were especially remarkable.

We then spoke upon religious subjects, and the abuse of the divine name. "People treat it," said Goethe, "as if that incomprehensible and most high Being, who is even beyond the reach of thought, were only their equal. Otherwise, they would not say the *Lord God*, the *dear God*,[2] the *good God*. This expression becomes to them, especially to the clergy, who have it daily in their mouths, a mere phrase, a barren name. If they were impressed by His greatness they would be dumb, and through veneration unwilling to name Him."

[1] That is, Fuseli, as we call him.—J. O.

[2] "The *dear* God" (der liebe Gott) is one of the commonest German expressions.—J. O.