GOETHE

Also by Albert Schweitzer

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF CIVILIZATION
I. THE DECAY AND THE RESTORATION OF CIVILIZATION
II. CIVILIZATION AND ETHICS
III. *In preparation*

THE QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

PAUL AND HIS INTERPRETERS

THE MYSTICISM OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

J. S. BACH

ON THE EDGE OF THE PRIMEVAL FOREST
and MORE FROM THE PRIMEVAL FOREST

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Adam and Charles Black

GOETHE

BY

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

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PREFACE

OF the three chapters of this book, the first two are addresses delivered by Dr. Schweitzer at Frankfort on Main and the third is an essay contributed by him to the French review *Europe*.

No one fortunate enough to have the least understanding familiarity with the works of Goethe, and also fortunate enough to know Albert Schweitzer, could fail to be impressed by the remarkable appropriateness of the choice made by the representatives of the City of Frankfort when they invited Schweitzer to become the first recipient of the annual Goethe Prize they had founded. But in 1927 he could not leave his Hospital in Africa, that year removed from Mission territory to land granted him by the Government. So he could only be the second to receive, on 28 August, 1928, the Prize bestowed on the anniversary of Goethe's birthday.[1]

When the hundredth anniversary of Goethe's death (22 March, 1832) was in view, Frankfort's choice did not deviate, and Dr. Schweitzer, after two more years at Lambaréné, was able to be present. The applications for tickets of admission to hear him speak were so numerous that the commemoration could not be held as intended in the famous Römer, where Goethe himself had witnessed

[1] His address on this occasion, Chapter I in this book, is translated by C. T. Campion and was first published in English in the *Hibbert Journal* (Allen & Unwin).

as a boy the coronation of the Emperor Joseph in April 1764. The great Opera House requisitioned instead was filled to capacity by an audience which listened spell-bound for sixty-five minutes to the ominous words of the, most happily, only speaker.[1] These were preceded by the Funeral March from the Eroica Symphony, and when the Doctor left the stage a passage from one of Bach's suites alone broke the silence. Never was any ceremony conducted with more decorum or marked by more moving and profound solemnity.

A special number of the French review *Europe* was issued on 15 April, 1932, to commemorate the centenary of Goethe's death. The twenty-three contributors included Romain Rolland, Thomas Mann, Benedetto Croce, Jean Prévost, Jules Romains, Pierre Abraham, Toshihiko Katayama, Lucien Price and Albert Schweitzer, who took as his subject " Goethe Penseur ". This article[2] has never before been published in English, and seems to have been largely forgotten. Though it repeats a few of the points raised in the Frankfort oration, it is of equal interest.

[1] Chapter II in this book, translated by Mrs. C. E. B. Russell.

[2] Translated by Mrs. C. E. B. Russell and included here, as Chapter III, by permission of the publishers of *Europe*, Editions Rieder, Paris.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Born at Frankfort on Main, 28 August, 1749
Died at Weimar, 22 March, 1832

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MADURAI

CONTENTS

MY DEBT TO GOETHE

An Address delivered at Frankfort on Main
on receiving the city's Goethe Prize
"for services to humanity"
28 August, 1928

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MADURAI

MY DEBT TO GOETHE

I WILL narrate shortly how I came into touch with Goethe, and how he reacted on my life.

It was in the field of philosophy that I had first to take up a position with regard to Goethe. When my revered Strassburg teachers, Wilhelm Windelband and Theodore Ziegler, had introduced me to the new philosophy, and I was glowing with enthusiasm for the great speculative systems, I could not but feel it almost incomprehensible that Goethe, who had lived through the powerful influence of a Kant, a Fichte, a Hegel, stood comparatively coldly on one side and let this influence pass by, while he remained within the circle of a nature-philosophy as he had learnt it from the Stoics and Spinoza, coming to believe in it with complete confidence and to attempt himself to develop it further. This astonishment at his remaining loyal to the apparently insignificant, and allowing something so powerful to pass by him, had a great effect on me. I can say that it was for me my first and longest-lasting incitement to come to an understanding with the new philosophy, and to develop my own thought. It thus became in the course of years clear to me that there are two philosophies which exist side by side. The object of all philosophy is to make us, as thinking beings, understand how we are to place ourselves in an intelligent and inward relation to the universe,

and how we are to be active under the impulses which come to us from it.

The first of these philosophies brings man and the universe together only by doing violence to nature and the world, and putting men into connection with a world which has been made to bend itself to their thought.

The other philosophy, the insignificant nature-philosophy, leaves the world and nature as they are and compels man to find his place in them, and to assert himself in them as a spirit triumphant over them and working upon them.

The first is a work of genius, the other is elemental. The first progresses by means of mighty eruptions of thought such as appear in the great speculative systems of German philosophy and compel our admiration. But it has its day, and then disappears. The other, the homely, simple nature-philosophy, remains current. In it there comes into its own an elemental philosophizing which first sought to realize itself in the Stoic doctrine, but then shared the latter's ruin because it could not find its way through to an affirmative view of the world and of life. This nature-philosophy has been handed down to us incomplete. In Spinoza and in the rationalism of the eighteenth century it tried again to think itself through to world- and life-affirmation, but when it proved unable to do this, force took the place of tentative effort. The great speculative philosophy produced its systems of compulsion. But at a time when everyone was blinded by the sight of a world that was bent to human thought there was one man who was not blinded, but held to the elemental, homely

nature-philosophy, recognizing that it had not yet indeed—that is, in the eighteenth century in which he lived—succeeded in thinking itself through to the end as affirmative, but knowing that it must somehow do so, and labouring on at that task in the plain and simple way which is the essence of his genius.

When I came to myself again and, returning to this nature-philosophy, recognized that what is demanded of us is to think it through to its goal of world- and life-affirmation in so simple a way that every thoughtful person in the world should have to take part in this thinking and thereby find himself at peace with the infinite, while at the same time obtaining an effective impulse to creative activity, then I saw in Goethe the man who had held out at the abandoned post where we were now mounting guard again, and resuming the interrupted work.

Meanwhile I had found contact with him in another way. At the end of my student days I re-read, almost by chance, the account of his Harzreise in the winter of 1777, and it made a wonderful impression on me that this man, whom we regarded as an Olympian, set out amid November rain and mist to visit a minister's son who was in great spiritual difficulties, and give him suitable help. A second time there was revealed to me behind the Olympian the deep but homely man. I was learning to love Goethe. And so whenever it happened in my own life that I had to take upon me some work or other in order to do for some fellow-man the human service that he needed, I would say to myself, " This is a Harzreise for you ".

I came once more on the real Goethe when it struck me in connection with his activities that he could not think of any intellectual employment without practical work side by side with it, and that the two were not held together by their character and object being similar, but were quite distinct and only united through his personality. It gripped me deeply that for this giant among the intellectuals there was no work which he held to be beneath his dignity, no practical employment of which he ever said that others on account of their natural gifts and of their profession could do it better than he, and that he was always ready to prove the unity of his personality by the union of practical work with intellectual activity.

I was already a minister when I first had to arrange my daily work, and when I sighed over the fact that through the much walking and the manifold duties entailed by my new office—which I had persisted in taking upon me to satisfy an inward need—I lost time which would have been available for intellectual labour, I comforted myself with Goethe, who, as we know, with mighty plans of intellectual activity in his head, would sit studying accounts and trying to set in order the finances of a small principality, examining plans so that streets and bridges should be constructed in the most practical way, and exerting himself year in, year out, to get disused mines at work again. And so this union of homely employment with intellectual activity comforted me concerning my own existence.

And when the life-course I had chosen led me to the point where I was compelled to embrace an activity which

lay far from the natural endowment in which I had hitherto proved myself—far, too, from the employment for which I had prepared myself—then Goethe was the comforter who provided the words which helped me through. When other people, and even those who knew me best, found fault with my decision and tormented me with reproaches for wanting to study medicine, a subject for which (they said) I was not suited, declaring it to be a quixotic adventure, then I was able to reflect that this quixotic proceeding would perhaps not have been for him, the great man, so entirely quixotic, seeing that he finally allows his Wilhelm Meister, little prepared as he seemed to be for it, to become a surgeon in order that he may be able to serve. And at this point it struck me what a meaning it has for us all that Goethe in his search for the final destiny of man allows those characters in which he has depicted himself, viz. Faust and Wilhelm Meister, to end their days in a quite insignificant activity that they may thereby become men in the fullest sense in which, according to his ideas, they can become so.

Then when I began preparing myself for this new activity I met Goethe again. For my medical course I had to busy myself with natural science, though as a learner, not, like hm, as an investigator. And how far removed, alas, lay natural science from what I hoped to complete in the way of intellectual production before I became immersed in practical work! But I was able to reflect that Goethe, too, had left intellectual work to return to the natural sciences. It had almost excited me that, at a time when he ought to

have been bringing to its final shape so much that was stirring within him, he lost himself in the natural sciences. And now I myself, who had hitherto been engaged only in intellectual work, was compelled to occupy myself with them. It deepened my nature, and it became clear to me why Goethe devoted himself to them and would not give them up. It was because it means for everyone who produces intellectually, enlightenment and enormous gain, if he who has hitherto created facts now has to face facts, which are something, not because one has imagined them, but because they exist. Every kind of thinking is helped, if at any particular moment it can no longer occupy itself with what is imagined, but has to find its way through reality. And when I found myself under this " On through reality! " compulsion, I could look back at the man who had done it all before us.

And when my laborious years of study had ended, and I left them behind as a qualified doctor, I once more met Goethe, seeming even to converse with him in the primeval forest. I had always supposed that I went out there as a doctor, and in the first years, whenever there was building or similar work to be done, I took care to put it on the shoulders of those who seemed to me to be specially adapted for it, or who had been engaged for it. But I had to acknowledge that this would not do. Either they did not turn up or they were so ill-suited for the work that no progress was made. So I accommodated myself to the work, far removed though it was from my duties as a doctor. But the worst came last. When at the end of 1925, owing to a

severe famine which endangered the existence of my hospital, I was compelled to get a plantation made for it, so that during any famine in the future we might be able to keep our heads above water to some extent through our own resources, I was obliged to superintend the clearing of the forest myself. The very miscellaneous body of workers, which the chance of the moment produced from among the willing ones of the friends of our patients, would bow to no authority but that of " the old Doctor ", as I was called. So I stood for weeks and months in the forest, worrying over refractory labourers, in order to wrest from it land that would produce food for us. Whenever I got reduced to despair I thought how Goethe had devised for the final activities of his Faust the task of winning from the sea land on which men could live and feed themselves. And thus Goethe stood at my side in the swampy forest as my smiling comforter, and the man who really understood.

There is one more point which I should like to mention of Goethe's influence on me, and it is this: that I found him everywhere haunted by anxiety about justice. When about the end of the last century the theory began to prevail that whatever is to be realized must be realized without regard to right, without regard to the fate of those who are hard hit by the change, and I myself did not know how these theories should be met, it was to me a real experience to find everywhere in Goethe the longing to avoid realizing any design at the cost of right. And I have again and again with real emotion turned over the final pages of *Faust*

(which both in Europe and in Africa I always re-read at Easter) where Goethe represents as the last experience of Faust, and that in which he is for the last time guilty of wrongdoing, his attempt to remove the hut which disturbs him in his possession—by a slight and well-intentioned act of violence—being, as he himself says, tired of righteousness. But in the execution of it this well-intentioned act of violence becomes a cruel act of violence in which more than one person loses his life, and the hut goes up in flames. That Goethe at the conclusion of his *Faust* should insert this episode which holds up the action of the poem gives us a deep insight into the way in which there worked within him anxiety about justice, and the strong desire to realize any plan that has to be carried out without causing any kind of injury.

My final lasting contact with Goethe arose out of my recognition of the living and vigorous way in which he shared the life of his age in its thought and in its activity. Its billows were ever surging within him. That is what impresses one, not only in the young and in the fully ripe Goethe, but in the aged Goethe also. When the mail-coach was still crawling along the high road, and we should have thought that the industrial age could be announcing its arrival merely by uncertain shadows cast in advance, it was for him already there. He was already concerning himself with the problem it put before the world: that the machine was now taking the place of the man. If in his *Wilhelm Meister* he is no longer master of his material, it is not because the old man no longer has the power to

shape it which he formerly had at his command, but because the material had grown till it could be neither measured nor moulded; it was because the old man was putting into it the whole of his experience and of his anxiety about the future; it was because this old man was so concerned about being among men of his age as one who understands the new age and has grown to be a part of it. That is what impresses one so deeply in the ageing Goethe.

Such were the contacts with Goethe through which I came nearer and nearer to him. He is not one who inspires. He puts forward in his works no theories which rouse to enthusiasm. Everything that he offers is what he himself has experienced in thought and in events, material which he has worked up into a higher reality. It is only through experience that we come nearer to him. Through experience which corresponds with his he becomes to us, instead of a stranger, a confidant with whom we feel ourselves united in reverential friendship. My own destiny has brought it about for me that I can experience with a vividness that goes to the very marrow of my soul the destinies of our time and anxiety about our manhood. That in an age when so many whom we need as free personalities get imprisoned in the work of a profession, I, as such a free personality, can feel all these things and, like Goethe, can through a happy combination of circumstances serve my age as a free man, is to me an act of grace which lightens my laborious life. Every task or piece of creative work that I am allowed to do is to me only a return of gratitude to destiny for that act of grace.

Similar anxiety about his age and similar work for it Goethe went through before us. Circumstances have become more chaotic than he, even with his clear vision, could foresee. Greater then than circumstances must our strength be, if in the midst of them we are to become men who understand our age and grow to be a part of it.

A spirit like Goethe's lays upon us three obligations. We have to wrestle with conditions so as to secure that men who are imprisoned in work and are being worn out by it may nevertheless preserve the possibility of a spiritual existence. We have to wrestle with men so that, in spite of being continually drawn aside to the external things which are provided so abundantly for our age, they may find the road to inwardness and keep in it. We have to wrestle with ourselves and with all and everything around us, so that in a time of confused ideals which ignore all the claims of humanity we may remain faithful to the great humane ideals of the eighteenth century, translating them into the thought of our own age, and attempting to realize them to-day. That is what we have to do, each of us in his life, each of us in his profession, in the spirit of the great Frankfort child whose birthday we are celebrating to-day in his birthplace. I myself think that this Frankfort child does not move further away from us with the course of time, but comes nearer to us. The further we travel forward the more certainly we recognize Goethe to be the man who, as our own duty is, amid the deep and widely varied experience of his age cared for his age and laboured for it; the man who would become a man who understood

his age and grew to be a part of it. He did this with the abounding talents which were laid in his cradle here by destiny. We have to do it as men who have received only one small pound, but who in our trading with that pound wish to be found faithful. So may it be!

GOETHE'S MESSAGE FOR OUR TIME

A Commemorative Address delivered at the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of his death in the city of his birth, Frankfort on Main on 22 March, 1932

GOETHE'S MESSAGE FOR OUR TIME

A HUNDRED years ago at nine o'clock in the morning, when Goethe, who believed himself convalescent, sat up in the armchair in which he had passed the night, he inquired what the date was. On hearing that it was 22 March, he said, "So spring has begun, and recovery will be all the easier".

He had forgotten that 22 March had for him always been a day heavy with destiny; he failed to remember that terrible twenty-second of March of the year 1825 when the Weimar Theatre, the place where Schiller and he together had developed so glorious an activity, had gone up in flames. He, the sun-worshipper, was entirely filled with joy because the sun of spring was in the heavens.

When his thoughts were already beginning to be somewhat confused, he regained full consciousness for a moment and begged that a shutter which had remained closed should be opened to admit more light. Before the spring sun had reached its zenith, he had entered the kingdom of eternal light.

The City of Frankfort is commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the death of her greatest son in the most splendid spring sunshine . . . and in the greatest distress which this City and Goethe's fellow-countrymen have ever known. Unemployment, hunger and despair are the lot of

so many inhabitants of the City and of the Reich. Who dares weigh the burden of anxiety about our future existence which has been brought into this Opera House by those of us who are gathered together for this commemoration!

Along with material existence, spiritual existence is threatened. So much which used to be done for civilization and culture can no longer be continued. The hundredth return of the anniversary of Goethe's death falls at the very time when the uniquely excellent educational system, which was the pride of his people and to whose furtherance he himself had contributed by constant effort, continued during more than half a century, is beginning to fall a prey to destruction.

We can scarcely give fitting expression to the joy we feel because Frankfort for the first time celebrates a Goethe festival in possession of the University to which, as Goethe's city, it has a right, of the University whose foundation has at last become possible through the spirit of sacrifice of its citizens. Sheer anxiety about its future throws a gloom over our joy. May there be vouchsafed to it the fate of sister universities which, starting in periods of deepest distress, were afterwards permitted to blossom forth in the most glorious fashion.

May a kindly destiny rule also over the venerable abodes of science in Frankfort and allow them to come safely through these difficult days.

And further, may it prove possible to preserve from ruin the house where Goethe was born. Its foundations are threatened, and owing to the lack of money it is doubtful

whether the most pressing of the work required can be carried out.

So great are the distress and anxiety amid which this day falls, that the question might be raised whether it would not be better to let it pass unobserved. The answer may be found in *Faust*. There the Emperor, still under the influence of the tumult of battle, gives permission for the festival solicited by the Lord High Chamberlain with the words:

> Indeed my mood is too serious for me to think of festivity
> Yet, let it be . . .

So, let it be!

But it is with a curious cleavage in our hearts that to-day we celebrate Goethe. Proudly we bring before our minds what we find in him and his works, which can never be lost and can never lose its value. But at the same time we cannot do otherwise than ask ourselves whether he has not become to us a stranger, since the period in which he lived and worked was not yet aware of the needs and problems of our own time. But does not the brightness which shines from him span the dark valley in which we find ourselves, to reach into coming eras which will again be on the same height as those he lived in?

However, for the present away with such questions. For this hour, let us suppress also the melancholy which overwhelms us when, confronting the uniquely happy circumstances in which his uniquely splendid endowments were allowed to develop, we think in deep sorrow of those who

could not give to the world the wealth which they bore within them because, before they fully reached manhood, they were snatched away by war. Let us think also of those to whom it is not granted to unearth the treasures of their inmost being because the exigencies of their existence deny them the opportunity.

So great is our misery that we have arrived at a capacity of escaping from ourselves and finding edification in the fact, that has become almost past realizing, that there *was* once a time when people could live their lives in circumstances which permitted the attainment of a perfect state of human existence. It is in such a spirit that to-day we approach Goethe, whose lot this was to a degree scarcely vouchsafed to any other.

Goethe himself takes account of how much he owes to the circumstances in which he passed his life. He often speaks of this, for the last time even only three weeks before his death in a conversation with the young native of Geneva, Soret, to whom we are indebted for such valuable notes on his ten last years.

He grew up exposed to the stimulation of the varied and rich impressions of a birthplace which was open to all the social, mental and spiritual life of the period. On one occasion he said himself that he could think of no other city in this way so suitable for his cradle. Later he found in Weimar rare conditions for the life of the spirit, such as could only be offered by the courts of princes. These conditions the German courts large and small of that age

provided in quite special fashion, for they had developed into places of the finest culture. He lived in a time in which men found stability in the spirit of progress which was working within them. In the ears of us men and women of to-day, how strangely ring the passages in his Autobiography in which he relates that in his youth he had the satisfaction of seeing how conditions were constantly improving and how the conception of humanity was coming to be the ruling idea among men! And then, when he experienced the mighty upheavals which followed the French Revolution and seemed to place the prosperous development of European mankind in jeopardy, he was allowed to live to the end of the Revolution and at last establish the fact that it was but a passing phenomenon.

He never knew material cares. He was spared the fight for a living, a struggle for which he was not by nature endowed.

In his position at Weimar he found an alternation of work and leisure, both of which were necessary for his development. He could serve, but never had to be servile; he could take part in government which was simply aimed at the realization of what was right and expedient without having to waste any of his powers in the concerns of party politics and party opinions.

Just at the right moment there stepped into his life the men he needed. Herder, Wieland, Lessing, Shakespeare, Spinoza and Jakobi gave him what they have to give.

At Weimar the Prince, as his friend, always tried in so far as he could to understand and comply with his wishes

in all things. It was not a mere hollow phrase when Goethe once wrote: "This Prince gave me an opportunity for self-development such as would not have been possible under any other conditions to be found in the Fatherland".

The friendship with Schiller began to flower in 1794 at the moment when he knew not how to escape from the loneliness he had chosen after his return from Italy, at the moment when, lacking any stimulus to creative work, he was beginning to despair of his poetical gift.

It may well be that of all those who furthered his development, whether as a great man or a small, everyone in the end received more than he gave. But he himself, embarrassed by the manifold uncertainty and irresolution which so curiously accompanied his power to will and to work, needed kindly responsiveness, needed to be understood and encouraged, needed indeed to be led. That he found all this from his youth up right into the loneliness of old age was the great piece of good fortune that conditioned his life. Scarcely any of his great works arrived at completion without an understanding friend fanning the flame of his joy in the writing and further keeping it burning. This his sister did for *Götz von Berlichingen*, his father for *Egmont*; and for *Faust* and many another work did Schiller.

Helped on in this way by circumstances and by men and women, Goethe developed into the great human and creative personality to whom we are looking up this day.

Far be it from us to desire to approach this human personality in uncritical admiration. There is much in Goethe's

life, in his thought, in his works, that we imagine for ourselves from what we know, and much which in imagination we should like to add.

Goethe is not a directly attractive and inspiring ideal figure. He is less and he is more.

The fundamental basis of his personality, which is unchanging, is sincerity combined with simplicity. He can and does confess about himself that lying, hypocrisy and intrigue are as far from him as vanity, jealousy and ingratitude.

Along with these two qualities which determine the bent of his nature, there are others which cannot be reconciled with each other, but proceed from the two opposite poles, spontaneity and non-spontaneity. Goethe had a charming way of giving himself out, and on the other hand was at the same time reserved. He had great natural kindliness, and yet could be very chilly. He experienced everything with extreme vitality and at the same time was anxiously concerned not to be thrown off his balance. He was impulsive and at the same time irresolute. In the letter he wrote to Schiller on 27 August, 1794, he called his new friend's attention to the fact that on closer acquaintance he will discover in him a sort of obscurity and hesitancy which he cannot master.

Goethe then, richly endowed with gifts as he was, had by nature neither a happy nor a harmonious nature, but had a considerable struggle with himself, a struggle rendered the more difficult by frequent periods of ill-health, owing to which, by his own testimony, " he lost some of

the best years of his life ". And for what a long time do depression and want of capacity for work continue when they result from such sickliness!

He recognized as the course he must follow with himself that he must not try to force anything alien upon his nature, but must try to bring to fruition whatever good lived and glimmered in him and to get rid of whatever was not good.

He devoted himself with deep seriousness to this self-discipline. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he speaks of the heart-felt seriousness with which he already regarded himself and the world when he was quite young. Everyone who with any understanding comes within the sphere of his influence is impressed by this seriousness.

By such efforts at self-development he arrived at a full humanity which, founded on sincerity and candour, was distinguished by absence of envy, by composure, by a pacific attitude and by kindliness.

Life gave him rich opportunities for the exercise of these qualities. For indeed he did not lead a successful and easy existence. After *Werther* not one of his creations found universal approval. The intimate art which appears in his later works of imagination alienated his readers. They expected something quite different from the author of *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werther*. What an outflow of idiotic criticism did Goethe have to endure about so perfect a work as *Hermann und Dorothea*, and that not only from the undiscriminating multitude, but from people who stood near to him!

The edition of his collected works prepared in Italy found

but a moderate sale. His dramatic creations were hardly played at all. His fame as a poet paled beside the rising star of Schiller. Because he was not a professional scientist nobody took any notice of his researches in Natural Science. He was opposed both by open and veiled enmity.

But he went on his way in silence and serenity. In a letter to Schelling he ventured the question whether amidst all the hostile feeling of which he was the object a single complaint had been heard from him!

No less marked than his peaceable disposition was his great kindliness. It is true that for people who stood far from him he had on occasion a stiffness which was felt as coldness and interpreted as arrogance, a stiffness which constantly went on increasing with the years, as the manner he had inherited from his father became ever more apparent in him. At bottom this stiffness, as Chancellor von Müller remarked to Grillparzer when he was considerably disappointed after his first visit to Goethe (29 September, 1826) was nothing but his own embarrassment whenever he was with people he did not know or knew but little. Two days later, at his second interview, Grillparzer was in fact able to assert, " that Goethe was as charming and responsive as he was stiff and cold the other day ".

In conformity with his innermost nature, from childhood to old age Goethe was cordial and sympathetic. As we know from many witnesses, he withdrew himself from none who really needed him. Because it was for him the most natural course, he especially tried to be actively helpful in all distress of spirit and soul that he came across. He once

confessed that "a dominating habit" (eine herrische Gewohnheit) compelled him to this. It was from such concern for the lonely and embittered that originated the poem "Aber abseits, wer ist's" (Who is this that walks apart?") which is one of the most moving of his writings.

Vogel, the doctor who was about him in the closing years of his life, tells us that Goethe placed means at his disposal in order that he might assist with more than the customary alms needy persons he might come across in his practice. But he was not to disclose who was the benefactor.

Thus Goethe made real a humanity which he has crystallized in the words "noble, helpful and good" (edel, hilfreich und gut), a humanity whose magic and greatness are one with its magnificent sincerity and naturalness. It was thus that his feeling of humanity made so strong an impression on those who saw it radiating from his wonderful eyes. It is thus that it impresses us as it shines forth from his life and his work.

How great must have been the impression of the personality of Goethe, if Wieland could describe him as "the greatest, best, most splendid human being ever created by God", and Schiller say of him that he had greater worth as a man than any other with whom he had been personally acquainted!

As what is profoundly natural determines his human personality, so also does it determine the creative side of his being. With Goethe a fragment of Nature enters into

Literature. In his imaginative work German poetry, indeed poetry in general, first becomes really natural, that is to say, liberated from every kind of unnaturalness and filled with nature itself.

It was no chance happening that in him a painter lived in union with the poet. And if this painter, remarkable as he was, was not destined to reach the height toward which in ever renewed onset he was striving, yet he joined in the task of fashioning the poems. With magic power Goethe knows how to transport us into the natural scene that lies before his own eyes and his own soul. In a unique degree he has been granted the gift of transforming what he has seen into actual experience.

How beautiful are his similes! He does not invent imagery to fit a thought, but the pictures of what he has seen and experienced, stored in his mind, wait within him ready for the thought which is destined to gain form from them.

Nature rules completely in Goethe's language. In the well-known epigram about the mastery in painting which was denied him, he consoles himself with the fact that he has approached mastery in the single talent of writing German. This mastery consists in the fact that the German language as he employs it develops full life in a completely natural and simple manner. In its original form, but at the same time ennobled, the language flows through his works of imagination. It preserves its perfect naturalness not only in diction but also in rhythm. It never becomes subordinate to the rhythm of the metres in which it is used,

but lives within them and soars above them in absolute freedom.

In correspondence with what is so profoundly natural in his whole being, Goethe lived his life in constant spiritual union with Nature. The young boy felt the need of worshipping God at sunrise in front of an altar on which he offered fruit. In the first sorrow that, through an unjust suspicion, fell upon the fourteen-year-old lad and involved the loss of Gretchen, he sought comfort in being alone with Nature. It was with Nature he took refuge when remorse for the injustice of his behaviour to Friederike would not leave him. It was in Nature he confided, and in Nature that he found himself again.

If the friendship in which men communicate to each other enthusiasm for what is good and support in misfortune remains so entirely in the background in Goethe's poetry, it is because with him intimacy with Nature means the great friendship beside which all other friendship pales. Even in the friendship with Schiller, which comes to him like a miracle, he keeps back something of himself for himself. To Nature alone can he give himself unreservedly.

Detachment from Nature is for him the great error into which man may fall. The tragic thought therefore which he enshrines in the Faust legend and symbolizes there is the thought of alienation from Nature. Faust, by recourse to magic, to which he has surrendered himself because in the hitherto attempted way he could not get near enough to Nature to satisfy his presumptuous claims, has deserted Nature and has thus condemned himself to an existence

which must of necessity be passed in error and guilt. After every chaotic experience he awakes to a new existence in Nature—these passages are among the most arresting in the whole drama of Faust!—yet still always returns to the spell of magic, until at last the yearning to reach once more at any price a natural relationship to Nature breaks through and conquers.

Thus the key to Goethe's Faust lies in the verses:

> Noch hab' ich mich ins Freie nicht gekämpft.
> Könnt' ich Magie von meinem Pfad entfernen,
> Die Zaubersprüche ganz und gar verlernen,
> Stünd' ich, Natur, vor dir, ein Mann allein,
> Da wär's der Mühe wert, ein Mensch zu sein.
> Das war ich sonst, eh' ich's im Düstern suchte . . .
>
> (I have not yet fought my way to freedom.
> Could I banish magic from my path,
> Entirely forget the words of enchantment,
> Could I stand before thee, Nature, just simple man,
> Then it would be worth while to be a human being.
> Once I was that, before in gloom I searched . . .)

Up to the most advanced age, Goethe lived in constant, ever-deepening communion with Nature. He spent the day before his last birthday, when he had just finished *Faust* and sealed it with ten seals, with his grandchildren in splendid late summer weather at Ilmenau, where Nature had so often spread its peace about him. For the last time he read on the wall of the little hunting-lodge his "Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" ("Over all the summits lies

peace") which he had written in pencil on the seventh of September, 1780. Chancellor von Müller relates that he returned strengthened in spirit as if the peace of the woods and the fresh air of the mountains had breathed new life into him, bringing a renewed zeal for work which was to endure right up to his death.

In most intimate union with Nature, Goethe was creative in a natural way. Therein lies the unique greatness of his work, therein too the limitation imposed on him. This is at once apparent in his method of production. He had the glorious experience that it was not he that imagined, but imagination that travailed in him. But only when the material summoned him could he work at it; when it no longer challenged him, he had to let it lie, and wait till it called once more. He trod this path of tribulation, and gazed without envy and full of admiration at Schiller, who could be creative unceasingly, dependent only on his own will.

That the natural-creative form of his genius implied greatness *and* limitation he learnt also by the fact that he could not express himself with similar freedom in every form of poetry. The power, the magic and the inimitable perfection of his lyrical, epic and narrative works are due to the deep foundations in Nature on which his life was based. But that he could not escape from Nature handicapped him as a dramatist. He could not persuade himself so to arrange Nature and action as they give the best effect on the stage, but insisted on trying to introduce them to

the spectators as they present themselves in the reality of Nature. Therefore all Goethe's plays have something about them untheatrical and super-theatrical, unless like *Tasso* and *Iphigenie* they are as if of themselves fitted for the stage by the simplicity of the action and the nature interwoven with it. On the one hand the most usual stage-effects are renounced, on the other they make demands on the stage which are far beyond its capacity. Only on the stage of our imagination, for which really they were written, not on the stage of boards, can they exercise their full effect, which, however, is not to say that they lack their complete right to a place on the latter.

In his drastic way, Goethe once said of stage arrangements which he found unsatisfactory the unjust words that so far as the theatre is concerned, one must leave Nature in its place and be contented with "what can be played on boards, between laths, pasteboard and canvas by dolls to an audience of children".

We must not try to come to the aid of the un-theatrical and the super-theatrical in Goethe by highly developed scenery such as was to him unimaginable. With this the unfilled chasm between stage and reality would only be the more apparent. Only the imagination of the spectator is able to raise what Goethe tries to present to him from the incompleteness and imperfection in which he sees it on the stage to completely-visioned reality.

As regards his subject-matter, it is perfectly clear in what measure Goethe's intimacy with Nature implies the greatness and the limitation of his work. Scarcely ever has a

prophecy been so entirely fulfilled as was the saying of Merck, his ruthlessly critical friend, to the young Goethe that " he could not turn aside from the direction he was taking of giving a poetical form to reality ".

And indeed it was not vouchsafed to Goethe to feel, or to write of, any material that lay outside his own nature and his own experience and give it convincing life and form. He only attained perfection—but what arresting and unique perfection!—when his work was somehow or other a revelation of himself. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he says himself that all his works are fragments of a great confession. This is not only true of those in which, as in *Werther*, in *Tasso*, in *Faust*, in *Wilhelm Meister*, there is a central figure in which there lives a portion of his soul. The other works also have the character of confessions because the whole life of each composition in the long run flows from his own experience. The more one becomes absorbed in the details of Goethe's works, the more does one become aware to what an extent they are in the deepest sense self-contemplation.

When he undertakes the poetical treatment of any subject without being under the compulsion of self-communication, there results something which in spite of this or that excellence only bears quite indistinctly the hall-mark of his mind and his genius.

After he had undertaken, in 1791, the management of the Court theatre at Weimar, he regarded it as a duty, as we know from one of his letters, to write every year a few pieces for the stage. Hence we have works not undeserving

of criticism, such as *Der Grosskophta*, *Der Bürgergeneral*, *Die Natürliche Tochter*. Later on he saw that he could not carry out what he had undertaken, and for half the length of an average human life directed the theatre without letting himself be stirred to further dramatic activity.

So the poet Goethe was not a man who could do everything. If youth—and so it was from the beginning—feels more drawn to Schiller than to Goethe, it is not only because the element of enthusiasm is wanting, but because his works fail to display the uniform perfection of those by Schiller. Where so great a genius is in question, youth finds it hard to contemplate half-successful and barely successful work alongside of what is most magnificent.

In reality, every creative spirit is subject to its own laws, which it cannot resist. Goethe in his masterpieces has fulfilled in so perfect a fashion his mission of revealing to us in closest union with Nature his very self as an expression of the most bountiful and noblest Nature, and has in this way bestowed on humanity such great riches, that it avails nothing to consider in how much this treasure might have been increased by works of another kind.

And the contents of this self-communication? There are three motives running parallel and interwoven with each other. The motive of becoming noble, the ennobling influence of woman, and the motive of the sense of guilt.

Self-ennoblement: because Goethe recognizes as the way he has to deal with his own personality that he must not

force upon himself what is alien to him, but must perfect his own nature, there are in his works no ready-made heroes with passionate ideals, but over and over again we see himself in various forms as one who is striving, as one who, with an incorruptible sense of reality, straying and erring, seeks the way that leads upward.

Fundamentally, all the characters he has drawn—think of those who pass before us in the pages of *Wilhelm Meister*—are in process of purification, but each preserves his or her original individuality.

Goethe lets this idea of self-ennoblement glow with a soft light in very simple sayings which will for ever illuminate the road of questing humankind. He who confessed that his great wish in life was that the idea of the Pure should become in him ever brighter belongs to the pathfinders[1] among men.

As guardian of and helper towards what is noble he consecrates Woman, because this was the mission she fulfilled in his life.

Even his first love, Gretchen at Frankfort, used the power she had over him to guard him from harmful follies and to urge him always to keep himself unsullied. Later, Frau von Stein was for more than ten years his guide on the path to purity and goodness. And next he was furthered in his spiritual and mental development by two princesses at the court of Weimar, and by sundry other women who are less conspicuous in the foreground of his life. These women pass from his life into his works of imagination, here hardly altered in bearing and form, there mingled together to

[1] Literally "signposts".

form new personalities, but whether of high or low degree all alike lofty in nature.

In this way he created sublime figures like that of the Princess in *Tasso* and that of Iphigenie. To what greatness does the antique Iphigenia-material rise with Goethe in the way in which Iphigenie restrains her brother and Pylades from taking the road of violence, falsehood and dissimulation which they regard as open to them in their effort to gain freedom; and also in that she herself refuses to pay the price of ingratitude to that end! Remember, that in the original Greek story, it is Iphigenia herself who shows the men the way of subterfuge.

There is hardly anything in world-literature which comes up to this work of Goethe's in ethical power, and hardly anything in which the ethical appears in such unpretending guise and yet with such compelling force.

No less deeply than the ennobling influence of Woman did Goethe experience the consciousness of guilt. How it quivers through the sentences of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in which he speaks of the culpability of his attitude to Friederike! And when in *Götz*, in *Clavigo*, in *Stella* and in any other work he shows us a man who has incurred guilt towards a woman because of inconstancy following on thoughtlessness, it is no poetical motive that he has found in his life and expressed in literature, but self-accusation that can find no rest.

The classical tragic guilt into which man falls, not by his own fault, but of inescapable necessity, is not to be found in Goethe's writings. He shows us only what he has

experienced, not what he has invented. There cannot be such a thing as absolute necessity for one who writes, " Our life, like the Whole in which we are contained, is in incomprehensible fashion made up of freedom and necessity ". In general, as he wrote to Zelter in 1830, he can take no interest in purely tragic happenings.

He was conscious that in all the thoughts which occupy us in connection with the subject of guilt and becoming guilty, we are touching on a great mystery which we can neither overlook nor fathom. But he believes he is justified in suspecting that the power over us given to guilt is not intended to destroy us, but must, in the end, contribute to our purification. Life has its rights over guilty men as over others. " But man wills to live " (" Aber der Mensch will leben ") he says at the end of the painful lines about culpability towards Friederike in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and there follows: " Therefore I sincerely sympathized with others. . . ." To have become guilty oneself signifies the possession of a dearly-bought deeper understanding of life.

That an earnest disposition may be acquired through guilt Goethe verifies in his own life. If the mature man cannot bring himself to expel from his life a woman who has entered it by his fault, but gives her a place beside him and takes upon himself all the outer and inner difficulties that arise for him out of this action, it is because the thought of that boyish culpability still lives in his heart and shows him the hard road he has to tread because of this much more serious lapse into guilt. This is a side of the Christiane-chapter of his life which is too often overlooked.

There was one man, as we know from one of his letters, who interpreted his behaviour in this way: Schiller.

How powerfully, unobtrusive as it is, does the thought of purification through guilt and remorse and restitution appear in the characters of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and *Wanderjahre*!

If the sense of guilt is at work on a human being, he is on the way to redemption through the unfathomable mystery of love, which penetrates the darkness of earth like a fragment of glowing eternity. "Who struggles ever striving, him we can redeem. . . ." ("Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen. . . .")

In what he thus betrays of himself as a poet, Goethe is revealed as a thinker. It is true that all his life long he resisted entering the ranks of the philosophers. In one sentence he proudly boasts that he only had so much success because he "never thought about thinking". He certainly tried to understand Kant, Hegel (for whom he had genuine affection) and Schelling, and endeavoured whenever possible to feel himself one with them. But he did not succeed. In the end he was repeatedly obliged to admit that they were travelling on a path that was not his. He did not understand the way in which the German spirit in these thinkers waged the battle for an ethical, idealistic Weltanschauung.

And once again, it is in his profound union with Nature that the greatness and the limitation of his thought as of his art are to be found. However much he tries, he ultimately

cannot join these thinkers because for them thought stands between Man and Nature. That is why for him Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is, as he says, a "prison fortress" which prevents us from moving within Nature in freedom of imagination and thought; therefore the systems of speculative philosophy are in his eyes a violation of Nature.

The intimate relationship in which he stood to Nature, combined with his sense of reality, did not allow him to treat her in this way. He approached her with reverence, hoping she might reveal to him something of her secrets and permit him to find the knowledge which bestows strength for life's journey. His efforts were aimed at an objective, ethical nature-philosophy.

If he writes in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, "For a light had arisen for the finest thinking and feeling minds to reveal to them that a direct, original view of Nature, accompanied by action based upon this, was the best that man could wish for himself, and moreover not difficult of attainment", he means that struggle for a world- and life-view to which he is himself devoted.

He will not allow his thought to circle in an imaginary Infinite. The doctrines of metaphysics as usually set forth are for him idle wordiness. Only the Infinite as disclosed when he is absorbed in Nature and self has for him any reality and significance.

Willst du ins Unendliche schreiten,
Geh nur im Endlichen nach allen Seiten

(Wouldst thou march into the Infinite,
Go into the Finite in every direction)

is one of his aphorisms.

And how splendid is this other one:

Was ist Unendlichkeit?
Wie kannst du dich so quälen?
Geh in dich selbst!
Entbehrst du drin Unendlichkeit in Sein und Sinn
So ist dir nicht zu helfen.

(What is Infinity?
How canst thou so torture thyself?
Look within!
If there thou lack'st infinity in being and mind,
No help for thee.)

And God he does not seek outside and alongside Nature, but only *in* Nature. With Spinoza, whom he reveres as his teacher in philosophy, he confesses that he believes in the identity of God and Nature. He lives in the conviction that God is in all things and all things are in God. That he has here found the truth, becomes certain to him through the wise Greek saying that we live and move and have our being in God, which the Apostle Paul, according to Acts, quotes in his speech on the Areopagus at Athens. This rings out from his faith in God:

Ihm ziemt's, die Welt im Innern zu bewegen,
Natur in sich, sich in Natur zu hegen,

So dass, was in ihm lebt und webt und ist,
Nie seine Kraft, nie seinen Geist vermisst

(It is meet that He moves within the Universe
And cherishes Nature in Himself and Himself in Nature
So that what lives and moves and is in Him,
Ne'er lacks His power nor spirit.)

Goethe sees the essence of piety in man making this natural being-in-God, which he has in common with all that lives, an act of the spirit. He expresses this in the stirring verses:

In unsers Busens Reine wogt ein Streben,
Sich einem Hohen, Reinen, Unbekannten
Aus Dankbarkeit freiwillig hinzugeben,
Enträtselnd sich dem ewig Ungenannten,
Wir heissen's: fromm sein.

(In the purity of our heart there surges a striving,
Voluntarily to surrender ourselves out of gratitude
To Something which is lofty and pure and unknown
Unriddling ourselves to the eternally Nameless,
We call this: being pious.)

Because he knows this one thing, that he is united to Nature and to God, Goethe has no need of a Weltanschauung artificially built up to the last detail, but can be content to rest in a world-view that is incomplete and can never be completed. He has no wish to be richer than it is possible for him to be by an absolutely honest acquisition of truths. On this wealth he is confident he can live.

He characterizes this attitude of his in the words: "Im Endlichen bis nach allen Seiten des Erforschlichen zu gehen, das Erforschliche bis zu den Urphänomenen zu begreifen, das Unerforschliche aber bescheiden zu verehren". (In the Finite to travel in all directions in which research can lead us, to understand what is capable of investigation by going right back to the original phenomena, but what is beyond research modestly to reverence.) He dares to stand by the decision that "die Natur Leben und Folge aus einem unbekannten Mittelpunkte zu einer nicht erkennbaren Grenze ist" ("Nature is life and succession from an unknown centre to an undiscernible circumference,") and to be at ease in the assurance that "in the life of nature nothing happens that is not in close connection with the whole" ("in der lebendigen Natur nichts geschieht, was nicht in enger Verbindung mit dem Ganzen stehe.")

In this renunciation of a complete Weltanschauung Goethe was alone in his era. His old age falls in the decades in which speculative philosophy, because it dared to answer ultimate questions, governed the minds of men and was regarded as the highest and final method of thought.

But how does Goethe introduce morality into the philosophy of Nature? The great problem for all such philosophy —for Goethe as for the Stoics, for Spinoza, for Lao-Tse, the Chinese thinker with whom he has so much in common —is indeed how Natural Philosophy proceeds from Nature to the Moral.

Goethe takes a quite simple course. He does not bother about all the origins and foundations of the Moral which people were testing in his day, but takes the ethical thoughts which had made their appearance among men to be a manifestation of Nature. For, he says, Divine Nature is revealed not only in physical, but also in the very earliest moral, phenomena. The ideas which develop among men are also manifestations of Nature in so far as the history of mankind forms part of the evolution of Nature. Therefore he is certain that, in some way we cannot explain, the original cause of the universe is at the same time the first cause of love and that this love proceeding from the Infinite is in sympathy with us and wills to be active in us. It is in this way that the air of love as it is wafted from the religion of the prophets of Israel and the religion of Jesus inspires the thought of Goethe. He who, earlier than Nietzsche, was troubled by the problem how the becoming-noble, that is to say self-realization, and the becoming good are related in a man—and it is here that lies his real significance in philosophy!—has found the simple solution that the true becoming-oneself consists in nothing else than in the true becoming-good. This idea of Goethe's that what is noble is at the same time the generally current conception of goodness will come to have power in the thought of man when Nietzsche's rebellion against the traditional human conception of goodness is only a memory of the nineteenth century.

And now—for Goethe, the ethical thinker, what is the ideal of perfected humanity? It is altogether simple.

Notice how humble is the end of the life of Faust as of Wilhelm Meister. Faust, who demanded from the World Spirit complete knowledge of the Universe, ends by winning from the sea land that will bear fruit for human consumption. Wilhelm Meister recognizes as his mission the devotion of his life to the service of emigrants as a surgeon.

What is the "man" of Goethe about whom people talk so much and with such an air of mystery? He is the man Goethe is striving to be throughout his life: a spiritualized man, who is at the same time a man of action and as such a strong personality, but in an unobtrusive way:

> Dir selbst sei treu und treu den andern . . .
> Und dein Streben sei's in Liebe,
> Und dein Leben sei die Tat.
>
> (Be true to thyself and true to others . . .
> And let thy striving be in love
> And thy life be an act.)

He alone understands Goethe who comes under the compulsion of this his profound and simple ideal of humanity, and is moved by the spirit of resignation from which that ideal derives—the spirit which fits a man to face life.

This poet and thinker stands before us as a universal personality because he is at the same time remarkably active in practical affairs and active also as an investigator of Nature.

In former days attention was so exclusively devoted to the author, that the attention he deserved was not turned to the man of action and the scientific observer. Only through what has been brought to light in these last decades by the study of his life and work have we accustomed ourselves to see him again as he appeared to those who were round about him in Weimar.

So far as concerns his official activities in the Principality of Weimar, the fact is not, as people like to imagine, that the poet held a position at court as a secondary concern with which he could occupy himself just as much or as little as he pleased. As a Civil Servant he was heart and soul in his job. What trouble he took from the very beginning to bring order into the finances of the country! His position made great claims upon him even after his return from Italy, when he had been relieved of a part of his work and only continued to be at the head of the branches of the administration concerned with Art, Science and Education. What an impression was that made on a visitor when in one of his latter years he discovered Goethe busied with the lists of school attendance throughout the whole territory of Sachs-Weimar and immediately found a pen pressed into his hand in order that he might join in calculating that school attendance had for the most part risen and was better in hill districts than on the plain!

Natural Science also was not for him dilettantism and a mere pastime, but a profession. He devoted more time to scientific than to literary work.

So we have the astonishing fact that the man of action and the scientist were just as much to the fore in him as the author.

Because he is in this way so universal, Goethe is generally honoured as the great man of the Renaissance, born unduly late. This does not tally in every respect. It is true that through the universality of his genius, through his relation to Nature, through his urge to truth, and the independence of his scientific research he approaches some of the great figures of the Renaissance. But at the same time, because he has not their enthusiasm, their instability, their revolutionary spirit, he is quite different from them, as well as in his whole spiritual nature and in the seriousness of his conception of life. He is far less a man of the Renaissance than, say, was Leibnitz.

And the way in which the universality of his genius finds expression is again quite different from what we find in the men of the Renaissance. In them it flames up of itself as though by spontaneous combustion, and enjoys and consumes itself with busy versatility. In Goethe, as we know from himself, it comes to activity through the reflections that arise in his mind and the demands that life makes upon him.

He takes account of the fact, as do others as well, that he has an eminently practical nature. In the year 1774, that is a year before he followed the call to Weimar, Lavater wrote: "Goethe would make a splendid acting deputy for a prince; that's where he belongs. He might be a king."

And now, having reached the summit of his first period of imaginative activity, and already encompassed by a bright aura of fame, he was confronted by the question how to occupy himself during the long intervals which, as he knew by experience, obtruded between his creative periods. So he reached the decision, as he says, " to dedicate himself to worldly affairs, so as to leave none of his powers unemployed ".

The many-sided official activity which occupied him from 1775 for more than ten years involved his being concerned with road-making, mining, the control of rivers, the improvement of agriculture and forestry. Through such work he was led to concern himself ever more and more with Nature, and this at a time when already in Leipzig and Strasbourg his interest in Science had been stimulated by association with medical men. As time went on, Nature, approached in this way, completely took possession of him. He was busied with everything that related to it—Botany, Mineralogy, Geology, Comparative Anatomy, Physics, Chemistry.

By his own methods of approach—because of his disposition he could not follow others—he arrived at results which contemporary Science reached by different paths. In many branches of knowledge he outstripped it, especially in the view, which later Natural Science confirmed, that in Nature all forms of being are interdependent and that by the laws of creation one has developed from the other.

He was also right in his opposition to the view then

universally held that mountains are all alike of volcanic origin. As we are no longer under the spell of the controversies of those days, we can estimate more justly than his contemporaries the value of what he accomplished in his writings on the Natural Sciences, and can say that they are indeed worthy of him.

Goethe was an exceptionally fine observer.

But: did the official and the research-worker suppress unduly the poet that lived in Goethe, and has not much which only Goethe the poet could have created for this reason remained uncreated? It is certain that, if it was only in the last years of his life, with a hand that already trembled, he pulled himself together to finish *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*, the reason was that the official and the scientist did not allow him to tackle this work any earlier. But will not the fact that we do not possess these works each poured into its mould in a single operation balance the other fact that they are two streams which reflect the experience and thoughts of Goethe from youth into old age?

Let it not be forgotten that at least one thing was gained by the poet from Natural Science. It was to this that he owed his friendship with Schiller. If Schiller had not encountered him at that memorable assembly of the Jena Natural Sciences Society, they would probably never have met at all, for Goethe wished to avoid Schiller because he seemed to him too revolutionary. And how many of the finest works of Goethe would have remained unborn within his soul but for this friendship through which, as he himself confesses, he once more became a poet!

So let us leave unanswered the question whether what the official accomplished and the much or the little by which Goethe advanced Natural Science balance what perhaps, owing to these activities, he failed to accomplish as a writer. The only thing that matters is that in this too he was true to himself and with profound earnestness went the way which by his nature he was compelled to go. That the great author by this service as an official and in his labours dedicated to Science stands before us as the man who knows neither Great nor Small, but does all that he does with conscientiousness and devotion is so arresting a life-become-poem that it could not be outweighed by any other poem he might have given us in its place. The most precious thing about any personality, however great may be his creative genius, is always in spite of all himself.

So the peculiar greatness of Goethe's universality consists in the fact that it comprises a whole man, an earnest man.

And finally: what is Goethe's message to us, to humanity, in the appalling predicament in which we find ourselves in these days? Has he any message for us at all?

He has indeed.

All thinking in which the thinker does not turn his attention to the social conditions of a particular era, but devotes himself to the study of Man as such and of Man as an individual—and Goethe does this as does scarcely any other—has in itself something sublime which lifts it above

time. Society changes with the times, but man is always man.

So the message of Goethe to the man of to-day is the same as to the man of his own time and the man of all times, namely: "Strive to be really man! And thou thyself, be as a man living an inner life, a man who, in a way that corresponds to his own nature, is a man of action."

But, the question arises, can we in the terrible circumstances of our time still achieve such personal human existence? Do we still possess the minimum of material and spiritual individual independence which is the requisite condition for success? The circumstances of the age in which we live are indeed such that the man of the present day hardly possesses any material independence at all, whilst his spiritual independence is also most seriously threatened. In every way our position, daily becoming more unnatural, is developing in a direction which involves that in every respect man more and more ceases to be a being who belongs to Nature and himself, and is ever more subjected to the social organization in which he lives.

There arises a question which even half a lifetime ago we should have regarded as impossible: Is there any longer any sense in holding on to the ideal of personal human individuality, when circumstances are developing in just the opposite direction, or is it not on the contrary our duty to adjust ourselves to a new ideal of human existence, in accordance with which man is destined to attain a

differently constituted perfection of his being in unreserved absorption into organized society?

But what else is this than that we, like Faust, going astray in an appalling fashion, should break away from Nature and surrender ourselves to a monstrous unnaturalness?

And indeed, what else is that which is going on in this frightful age than a gigantic repetition of the Faust-drama played on the world-stage? In thousands of flames the cottage of Philemon and Baucis is burning! In thousandfold acts of violence and thousandfold deeds of murder a mentality which has lost all human qualities wages its wanton sport! With a thousand grimaces Mephistopheles grins in our faces! In thousandfold ways man has let himself be led to renounce his natural relationship to reality and to seek his weal in the magic formulas of some economic or social system which only thrusts still further the possibility of escape from economic and social misery!

And the terrible significance of these magic formulas, to whatever school of economic and social witchcraft they may belong, is always that the individual has to surrender his material and spiritual personal existence, and may continue to live only as belonging body and soul to a plurality which controls him absolutely.

Goethe could not foresee that a time would come when economic circumstances would in this way make for the destruction of the material independence of the individual. But with the mysterious prescience by which he was conscious of the danger of the introduction of machinery, whose first beginnings he experienced, he foresaw that in

the future the spiritual independence of mankind would be menaced by the appearance of a mass-will. This foreboding was the cause of his inconquerable aversion for all that was revolutionary. In his eyes revolutionary activity was mass-will trying to subject individual wills to itself. As a witness of the first indications of mass-will in the French Revolution and in the movement of the wars of liberation, he had a clear consciousness that something had made its appearance whose consequences reached beyond the range of vision. Hence his hesitant attitude to the wars of liberation, an attitude that gave occasion to much misinterpretation. He certainly desired freedom for his fellow-countrymen, but the manifestation of a mass-will directed to this end had for him a sinister look, as we know from a conversation he had with the Professor of History at Jena, Luden by name, in 1813, when with deep emotion he gave vent to thoughts which he usually kept to himself.

He was the first to experience something like fear for the future of humanity. At a time when others were still unconcerned, it dawned upon him that the great problem with which approaching developments would be concerned must be how the individual would be able to maintain himself against the majority.

This foreboding anxiety, which haunted him and lay at the back of many an ominous remark, causing him to be reproached with being a reactionary and wanting in understanding of the signs of the time, included also anxiety for his own nation. He knew that no people so sins against its own nature when its members surrender their spiritual

independence as does his own people, the people that with so reserved a pride he loved. For he knew that the profound intimacy with Nature, the spirituality and the need for spiritual independence which made up his own character, were manifestations in him of the soul of his nation.

And now, a hundred years after his death, it has come about that through the force of events, and through the influence upon economic, social and spiritual conditions of a disastrous material development determined by those events, the material and spiritual independence of the individual, in so far as they were not already crushed, are on all sides threatened most seriously. We are commemorating the death of Goethe in the most stupendous hour of fate that has ever sounded for humanity. And in this hour of fate it is his mission, beyond that of every other writer or thinker, to speak to us. As most untimely of all men, he gazes into our era, because he has absolutely nothing in common with the spirit in which it lives. But as the most timely he tenders his advice, because what it needs to hear he has to say.

What is it he says to our era?

He tells it, that the frightful drama which is now being played through can only come to an end, if it removes from its path the economic and social magic to which it has surrendered itself, unlearns the incantations with which it has been befooled, and is determined, whatever the cost, to get back to a natural relationship with reality.

To individuals he says: Do not abandon the ideal of personal, individual manhood, even if it run contrary to

circumstances such as have developed. Do not believe this ideal is lost, even when it no longer seems tenable along with the opportunistic theories which endeavour simply to adjust the spiritual to the material. Remain human with your *own* souls! Do not become mere human things which allow to be stuffed into them souls which are adjusted to the mass-will and pulse in measure with it!

Not everything in History is destined, as it seems to a superficial method of observation, to be subjected to constant change. But it necessarily happens that ideals which carry within them their lasting truth come into conflict with changing circumstances and by the encounter are confirmed and deepened. Such an ideal is that of human personality. If it be surrendered, spiritual man is ruined, and that means the end of civilization, yes indeed, the end of humanity.

And therefore it is of great importance that at this time our eyes should be turned on Goethe, who proclaimed real and noble individual humanity, and that his thoughts should be spread among the people in every possible way. May the " Be thyself " which rings out from them, and in this hour of destiny for mankind has all the significance of a world-historic watchword, give us courage to resist the spirit of the age, and in the most difficult circumstances to preserve for ourselves and for others as much genuine humanity as we possibly can. And may we—here lies the decisive factor!—each in so far as the possibility is open to him, make the simple human feeling of " Edel sei der Mensch, hilfreich und gut " (" Let man be noble, helpful

and good ") be realized in action, that it may be among us not only a thought but a living force.

Before two decades have passed, Frankfort will celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of her greatest son. May he who at that fresh festival delivers the commemorative address be able to declare that the profound gloom in which we celebrate this day has begun to lift, and that a generation engrossed in reality, in a true spirit of reality, is beginning to master material and social distress and is united in the resolve to cling to the old, only true ideal of individual humanity.

And by then may the day have dawned when the life of man once more flows on in harmonious and natural lively movement, like the music of Bach, whose charm worked so strongly on Goethe because his own spirit there found its reflection.

But we ourselves are still menaced by the doom of the lines of *Hermann und Dorothea:*

Denn gelöst sind die Bande der Welt,
Wer knüpfet sie wieder,
Als allein nur die Not, die höchste,
Die uns bevorsteht.

(The bonds of the world are loosened,
Who shall tie them again,
Except the distress alone, the deepest,
That lies before us.)

But may other lines from the same poem dominate us and in us become truth:

Aber es siege der Mut
In dem gesunden Geschlecht!

(But may courage
In this healthy people win the day!)

GOETHE—THINKER

An essay contributed to the special number of the French review Europe *commemorating the centenary of Goethe's death*

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GOETHE—THINKER

I. GOETHE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HIS TIME

GOETHE was a thinker who, throughout the whole of his life, refused to be the adherent of any philosophic system. In one of his poems he boasts that he reached his results—and magnificent results they were—because he did not make the mistake of " thinking about thought ".

As he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, his aversion for philosophy dated back to the time when he was a student. The rationalist philosophy of the eighteenth century which he had encountered at Leipzig (1765–68) and at Strasbourg (1770–72) had nothing to offer him that he did not already know for himself, and annoyed him by its doctrinaire quality. He reproached it as tainted with scholasticism, especially in respect of its logic and its metaphysics. In *Faust* he gave free vent to the resentment he still bore it.

And, further, its pretension that it could explain all things filled him with repugnance. In his opinion it displayed in this way the fact that it had no real regard for the grandeur of the mysteries of nature. For example, the materialism professed by Baron Holbach in his *Système de la Nature*, which claimed to be the last word of rationalistic philosophy, seemed to Goethe, with his wish to give the simplest explanations of the physical and spiritual world,

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to be a dull and obsolete form of thought. The work appeared in 1770 while he was living in Strasbourg.

Voltaire, for whom, generally speaking, he had great respect, displeased him because, in order to struggle against the narrowness of the prevalent religion, he ridicules the Church, the guardian of religious tradition, while at the same time he is anxious to preserve certain fundamental religious truths. For Goethe the religious and ethical tradition preserved in the Bible was a sacred thing. Although he knew that its contents are not all of equal value, whether religious or moral, he did not approve of profane hands being laid upon it. He demanded the recognition that there are mysteries in religion as in nature, and these, he asserted, must be approached with reverence.

He tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that the position he adopted at Strasbourg with regard to the French and German philosophy of his time determined his attitude for life. Every time he made acquaintance with a new philosophy, he examined it from three principal angles: (1) Is it concerned with natural reality without preconceived theories, and does it bring man into direct relationship with nature? (2) Is its conception of ethics profound and enlightened? (3) When it has arrived at the final questions raised by research and reflection, has it the courage to admit that there remain unfathomable mysteries, or does it pretend to offer a system which explains everything? He recognized as plausible every philosophy which provided him with a satisfactory answer to these three fundamental demands.

When he felt that he was concerned with eminent

thinkers, he took pains to penetrate their ideas in so far as was possible, and he rather over- than underestimated the stimulus he received from them.

He made an effort too not to let himself be dominated by the mistrust which he instinctively felt for philosophers. In a letter to Jakobi dated 23 November, 1801, he formulates his position in happy terms: "I grant that every man who relies upon experience, if he arrives at conspicuous results, is, and always remains, an 'unconscious philosopher'. And I admit that he has a sort of apprehension in respect of philosophy, and especially that of our era; but that this apprehension does not at all degenerate into aversion, but develops rather into a prudent and calm bias in its favour".

Let us now examine one after the other the philosophical systems with which Goethe was in contact, and the way in which he reacted to each of them.

We must not imagine that he broke completely with the eighteenth-century philosophy of rationalism.

He saw clearly that the social, economic and intellectual progress realized before his eyes was due to the ethical-rational ideal proclaimed by this philosophy. But the conception of the world on which it claimed to base its ideal seemed to him inadequate.

In the main, Goethe set before himself the same objectives as did Kant: viz., to give a surer and deeper foundation to the moral and spiritual values contained in contemporary rationalist philosophy. Kant attempts to do this by elaborating a new theory of knowledge, Goethe by scrutinizing

more profoundly nature itself and man's relation to it. Kant makes a detour, Goethe makes straight for the goal.

As a young man, he had to thank Herder, whom he met for the first time in 1770 at Strasbourg, for much. He found in Herder what he had not yet encountered—a philosopher liberated from all doctrinairism and endeavouring to penetrate reality by the intensity of his feeling. Herder also gave him glimpses of the problems of the spiritual development of humanity of which Goethe had previously had no conception. Later on the two men followed different paths because their natures were too dissimilar, and Herder could not understand that Goethe was endeavouring to approach nature by work of a purely scientific character.

Rousseau delighted Goethe and his Strasbourg friends because he preached the return to nature which coincided with their own ideas. Even in 1791, in *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, Goethe respectfully evoked " the solitary pedestrian lover of plants " in whose footsteps he had followed in his study of botany.

The Encyclopedists, far from stimulating him to his advantage, rather confused him because of the great accumulation of materials they had gathered.

In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he expresses a curious opinion about Diderot: " In all with which the French reproach him, he is a true German."

On his return from Strasbourg to Frankfort he plunged for the first time (1774) into the study of Spinoza, and in him found the master who not only overawed him but

satisfied his inmost aspirations. In *The Metamorphosis of Plants* he declares that, along with Shakespeare and Linnæus, Spinoza is one of the three men who have exercised the strongest influence upon him.

Goethe was so powerfully attracted by Spinoza because in his work he found for the first time clearly formulated ideas of which in a confused and chaotic fashion he had long been convinced, that is to say that God is not outside nature but in nature and identical with nature: that the goal of ethics is to lead the creature to perfection, always with respect for his own nature: that happiness consists in the attainment of tranquillity of soul. By the contact with Spinoza his own conceptions were clarified, his soul purified. One may ask, what would have happened to the young Goethe, if at the decisive hour the *Ethics* of Spinoza had not subdued him to its severe discipline?

Nevertheless, along with the deferential and grateful remembrance he devotes to this work in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, he remains fully conscious of having preserved his independence in this connection as in other directions. This is how he expresses himself: "I am not able clearly to distinguish between the thoughts I drew from my reading of the *Ethics* and those I put into my reading." And further on: "Moreover, one must not fail to recognize that the closest relations are only established between opposites."

As a matter of fact, it was the Stoic ideas which he found in Spinoza which influenced Goethe. The attraction these ideas exercised on him was so strong that it could override the rigid geometrical logic in which they found expression.

In reality he was only a Spinozist in so far as he was a Stoic.

His admiration for Spinoza brought him into relationship with Frederick Henry Jakobi, who was one of the first to draw fresh attention to this at that time almost forgotten thinker. In 1774 Goethe went to visit Jakobi at Düsseldorf, and at once felt for him, and felt for the first time in his experience, what he calls "a friendship of the spirit". But later, when Jakobi turned away from Spinoza and published his book *On Divine Matters* (1811), in which he asserted a clear distinction between pantheism and theism and postulated the existence of a transcendent and personal God, the friendship between the two cooled off.

In 1784, at Weimar, Goethe re-read the *Ethics* with Madame de Stein. His enthusiasm for Spinoza kept him a little on one side of the philosophic movement of that epoch.

It is interesting to note the opinion which Schiller during a short stay at Weimar formed on Goethe—who was then in Italy—and his circle of faithful followers. "A lofty disdain for all speculation, a devotion to nature pushed to affectation, and a state of resignation in face of the fact that he is able to rely only on his five senses, in short, a certain childish simplicity in the use of reason characterizes Goethe and all the following he has here. They prefer to mess about with plants and dabble in mineralogy rather than risk going astray in vain speculative demonstrations." (Letter from Schiller to Körner, 12 August, 1787.) What a superb blend of admiration and mockery!

On his return from Italy in 1788, Goethe had to define his position with regard to Kant. Reinhold, an enthusiastic admirer of the philosopher of Königsberg, brought all Jena under the sway of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which had appeared in 1781. " For some time past ", wrote Wieland in a letter of 18 February, 1789, " Goethe has been studying Kant's work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, with great diligence ". Goethe's conversion to Kant was not yet however very far advanced when in 1794 he made acquaintance with Schiller, and formed a friendship with him in spite of the fact that he had long avoided him as being too revolutionary. Schiller, brim-full of Kant, did all he could to win Goethe for the gospel of Königsberg, and it was to please him that Goethe in good faith sought to rid himself of what in a certain passage he calls his " impenitent realism ". It was in vain; he always fell back. He could not agree to cease to maintain direct, simple relations with reality. The enormous doctrinaire edifice of *The Critique of Pure Reason* seemed to him, as he said in 1813 in an oration in memory of Wieland, " a dungeon which restrains our free and joyous expeditions into the field of experience ".

Although very reserved about Kant's discoveries in the field of the theory of knowledge, Goethe on the other hand recognized his " immortal merit " in having rejected in the matter of ethics all conceptions which based morality on utility, and in having demonstrated the independence and sovereignty of ethics.

He also commended Kant for having upheld in *The*

Critique of Judgment, which appeared in 1790, the truth that nature, like art, is not determined by final causes, and that it produces things for their own sakes. Kant laboured, as did Goethe himself, to demolish the narrow walls which shut in the conception of the universe elaborated by the rationalism of the eighteenth century, and sought to establish afresh nature in all its rights.

But Goethe could not forgive Kant for having, in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason*, supported the idea that in human nature there is something " fundamentally evil ". In this he saw an unworthy concession to the dogma of original sin.

That did not prevent him from singing Kant's praises to Victor Cousin when he received a visit from him on 20 October, 1817, nor from declaring to Eckermann on 11 April, 1827, that he regarded Kant as the most eminent of modern philosophers. In 1830 he went the length of saying to the Genevan, Soret, " For in spite of all, I too am a disciple of Kant ". But he hastened to add discreetly that he only subscribed to certain assertions of Kantian philosophy, and that on other points his opinion was entirely different.

With the representatives of post-Kantian philosophy he entered into relations as Curator of Jena University, at which the three most important of them—Fichte (1794–1799), Schelling (1798–1803) and Hegel (1801–1806)—were lecturers.

For Fichte with his passionate nature he had little fellow-feeling and therefore failed to appreciate him at his just

value. He even regretted that he had been called to Jena to succeed Reinhold. When Fichte sent him his great work *The Fundamental Principles of the Theory of Knowledge* he replied in very diplomatic fashion: " As for myself, I shall be very grateful to you, if you can reconcile me to the philosophers. I cannot do without them, but I can never throw in my lot with them." (24 June, 1794.)

Quite different were his relations with Schelling and Hegel. In both he found again his own fundamental mystical conception, that the universe is a manifestation of the Infinite Spirit, and that the world-soul wills to realize itself in the spirit of man. But this fundamental conception rests in their case on a quite different basis from his own. For them it results from logical speculation on the relations of nature and the infinite, for him from contemplative absorption in the mysteries of nature. They arbitrarily compel nature to conform to their system, and this is what digs between them and Goethe a ditch which no bridge can span. Yet in so far as was possible he strove to penetrate their thought.

He drew apart from Schelling when, as in more recent times Jakobi, he abandoned the absolute identity of God and nature, and gave higher place to the revelation of God given by " revealed religion " than to that given by nature.

Hegel was very sympathetic to him personally. He appreciated his scientific and historical attainments, while Hegel for his part defended Goethe's theories on light, and manifested great understanding for his researches in the natural sciences.

On 4 February, 1829, Goethe declared to Eckermann: "Hegel is certainly a man of eminence, and he says some excellent things, provided one translates them into one's own language".

At a tea-party given by Goethe (18 October, 1827) in honour of Hegel, then on a visit to Weimar, the guest praised dialectics as the infallible method for the discovery of truth. The host responded by remarking that dialectics also serve to make true what is false and false what is true. Then he went on to extol the study of nature, a study concerned with the truly infinite and eternal which no logical subtlety can change. (Noted by Eckermann, 18 October, 1827.)

Goethe always saw clearly that speculative philosophy, however important and interesting are its conceptions, cannot endure, but must some day give place to a philosophy of nature which scrutinizes reality objectively. He was right in this expectant attitude which among his contemporaries he was alone in maintaining.

In short, Goethe borrowed nothing from any of the philosophies with which he came in contact. But thanks to his conscientious study of the thought of others, he arrived at an ever clearer conception of ideas of his own.

II. GOETHE'S PHILOSOPHY

In none of his writings did Goethe ever give a complete account of his conception of the universe. But the ideas contained in them, or scattered in his letters or in inter-

views, take their place, as if automatically, in a simple and unified philosophy.

It is a nature-philosophy based on an elemental view of reality. The dominant idea is that the only true knowledge is that which adds nothing to nature either by thought or by imagination, that is to say, knowledge which only admits the validity of research which is free from prejudices and assumptions and inspired by a pure and firm resolve to discover truth. Further, it must be supported by meditation which plunges into the very depths of nature.

Goethe is convinced that the knowledge, whether it be little or much, of God, of the world and of man gained from this quest will suffice to give us a *raison d'être* for our existence.

If thinking be directed to nature in all simplicity and sincerity, it cannot be admitted that anything exists outside nature. Thought then must cease to imagine God as existing above thought and directing thought. It can only conceive God as existing in and active in nature. Recognition of the identity of God and nature is then, according to Goethe, the point of departure for all consistent thought.

It follows that all things are in God and God is in all things.

Goethe professes this pantheistic mysticism under various forms and it is constantly renewed in his poetical works. At bottom it is nothing but the fundamental and always identical conviction of European mysticism—whether the mysticism of antiquity, of the Middle Ages or of modern times—when, having passed the vague stage of sentiment, it endeavours to rise to thinking.

The mysticism of Goethe—and this is what distinguishes it from that of the Stoics, of the mystics of the Middle Ages and of Spinoza—has in common with that of Giordano Bruno the fact that it is united with a veneration of, and a lively contemplation of, nature. Its special characteristic is that, far from being ignorant of the natural sciences, or soaring beyond them in speculative flight, its aim is to owe its origin to these sciences. Hence its serious, even harsh, savour.

The spirit which animates the philosophy of Goethe is strikingly revealed in something he said in old age to Soret: " Nature is always true, always serious, always severe. It is invariably right; faults and errors are always the work of man. It disdains the incapable; it only confides itself to the being that is sincere, pure and capable." (13 February, 1829.)

Goethe made profession of this mysticism " of being one with God-Nature " in a period destitute of all sense of mysticism. In the eyes of the eighteenth-century rationalist the relations between God, man and the world were, in a nutshell: God governs in the best possible way a world which He has created the best possible world, and man, on the world-stage, practises obedience to God. This completely exoteric conception had its origin in Christianity. The Christian idea of God results from a historical process which raised the ethical divinity of the people of Israel—the God who dwells outside the world—to the position of a God who is master of the universe. And the great religious problem which confronts Christianity is to dis-

cover how to combine the esoteric conception of God, which originates in the contemplation of nature, with the exoteric conception, which originates in history, without ruining the latter.

Christianity, feeling itself menaced by every conception of God derived from the contemplation of nature, instinctively took up a defensive attitude in face of all mysticism and all pantheism. This is why it regards Stoicism, whose morality is nevertheless so near to its own, as its mortal enemy. So in teaching the identity of God and Nature, Goethe had to resign himself to being looked on by his contemporaries as a pagan.

Obviously he could appeal to the speech of the Apostle Paul to the Athenians. St. Paul, according to *The Acts of the Apostles*, quotes the verses of Aratus, a Greek poet influenced by Stoicism, "In Him we live and move and have our being; we are His children", and thus seems to give the mysticism "of being one with God-Nature" its right of citizenship in Christianity. Indeed, Goethe's admirable poems on God, the universe and man contain constant allusions to this expression of Stoic mysticism which is quoted in *Acts*. But this saying, in the thought of the New Testament and of Christianity, is but like an accidental obstruction in their path. It is even very problematic whether Paul really uttered it at Athens. In his Epistles one can find no trace of pantheistic mysticism.

Goethe's thought therefore opens a new phase in the endless struggle between the natural and the Christian conceptions of God.

And how does he introduce the ethical element into the philosophy of nature? The great problem in truth for all philosophy of nature is how to pass from nature to morality. Goethe proceeds far more simply than all other pantheists. These, for example the classic Stoics and Lao-Tse, affirm, without being able to prove, that life in harmony with nature has an automatically moral character. Or, like such Stoics as Epictetus and Confucius, they ascribe to nature an ethical character which it does not possess at all. Or again, like Spinoza, they establish ethics by considerations fundamentally foreign to their nature-philosophy, which they only join on to it at a later stage. Goethe simply asserts at the very outset that the ethical element is the gift of nature. The Divine is revealed in nature by " primordial phenomena " (Urphänomene) not only physical but ethical as well. (Goethe to Soret, 13 February, 1829.) The ideas formed in the course of the spiritual development of the human race are also manifestations of nature in proportion as the history of humanity is a part of the evolution of nature. The ethic of love as it appears in the thought of the prophets of Israel and of Jesus, and of human beings in general, is a primordial phenomenon of the moral order. By experience, in the most profound and widest sense of the word, Goethe believes we know that God, who is identical with Nature, by means of what for us is an unfathomable mystery, is not only creative force but also ethical will. But for this fact the moral element could not manifest itself in human thought.

Thus he is able to concede that we can find no ethical

element in nature outside ourselves, and nevertheless can admit that the ethical element is a natural phenomenon. The possibility of being noble, good and helpful distinguishes man from all other creatures. "For nature is unfeeling", he says in the poem entitled *The Divine*.[1] In so far as he is moral, man conforms to his own nature. To exist in God-Nature for Goethe means to exist in love.

This is how he solves what is the problem of problems for all systems of philosophy, viz. the problem of attaining a philosophy which, based on nature, by nature comprises the moral element. It is thus that he unites pantheism and Christianity.

The conception of the universe which he arrives at in this way comprehends, he believes, all that is indispensable for existence. In regard to all the other questions to which his thirst for knowledge would fain find answers, he is content to be satisfied with presentiments or to resign himself to the fact that they withhold from him their secrets.

From this point, his watchword will be: "In the realm of the finite to push research in all directions and lay hold on

[1] *Das Göttliche*

Edel sei der Mensch,
Hülfreich und gut!
Denn das allein
Unterscheidet ihn
Von allen Wesen
Die wir kennen.

. . . . . .

Denn unfühlend
Ist die Natur.

what is accessible even up to the primordial phenomena. As to the inaccessible, to reverence it with all due modesty". This is what he intended Eckermann to understand when he said, "Man is not come into the world to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins and, as a consequence, to keep within the bounds of the accessible." (15 October, 1825.)

Having discovered simply by direct contemplation of nature what was essential and indispensable in his conception of the world, he could forgo what is generally understood by metaphysics. The current teaching about the world that lies beyond the reach of the senses he characterized as mere words without foundation or meaning. "God has punished you by giving you metaphysics," he wrote to Jakobi on 5 May, 1786, "me he blessed by bestowing on me physics".

"If you want to approach the Infinite", he says in a beautiful aphorism, "be contented to explore the Finite". And again:

> What is Infinity?
> How canst thou so torture thyself?
> Look within:
> If there thou lack'st infinity in being and thought,
> No help for thee.[1]

[1] Was ist Unendlichkeit?
Wie kannst du dich so quälen?
Geh' in dich selbst.
Entbehrst du drin Unendlichkeit in Sein und Sinn
So ist dir nicht zu helfen.

All that we ought to know and are able to know about the supernatural is that all that is natural has a spiritual foundation, that nothing is solely spiritual nor solely material and that there is no spirit apart from matter nor matter apart from spirit. "The true metaphysic is what was, is and will be before, with and after physics." (*On the Sciences in General.*)

As for knowing how the God who is ethical will is one with the God who is creative force—that too is one of the problems which Goethe makes no claim to solve. It is enough for him to know that in some mysterious way which for ever baffles investigation they *are* One. The Lisbon earthquake (1 November, 1755) as he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, demolished, when he was a child of six, the notion he had had of God as a wise and kind ruler of the world. The more closely he scrutinized the history of the world, the more convinced he became that God is a mass of enigmas. But this did not shake his belief that in God-Nature there is love. In *Faust* he proclaims that love proceeding from the Infinite plays its part in human destiny.

But he has no desire that the natural element in God should be subordinated to the ethical element, nor that in any way whatever, under pretext of explaining all things, dualism should be reintroduced into the conception of the Divinity.

At bottom, all that piety needs to know about God is that we ought to surrender ourselves to Him. In striking lines Goethe has told us what he means by piety :

In the purity of our hearts, there surges an aspiration
Towards Something high and pure and unknown,
That we may devote to this, in gratitude and willingly
Our whole being, unriddling ourselves to the ever nameless
And that is what we call being pious.[1] (Being.

How moving too is his confession to Boisserée (1815): "There are things of which it is to God alone I can talk".

As for eternal life, Goethe thinks man has no need to know more than follows from the identity of God and Nature, namely to know that every ephemeral existence is but a manifestation of an eternal being. If he seeks in his own consciousness a more complete picture of what eternal life will be, he likes to imagine that in one way or another he will continue to be active. In this connection he said to Eckermann, "The thought of death leaves me perfectly calm, for I hold a firm belief that the soul is a being of absolutely indestructible nature and continues active to all eternity".

How he tried to imagine existence after the present life, we learn from a conversation he had on the day of Wieland's funeral with Falk, whom he held in high esteem because he had founded a home for abandoned children. Still greatly moved by the loss of his revered friend, he opened his heart more than was his custom. To imagine eternal life, he had recourse in this interview to the monadology of Leibnitz,

[1] In unsers Busen Reine wogt ein Streben
Sich einem Hohen, Reinen, Unbekannten
Aus Dankbarkeit freiwillig hinzugeben
Enträtzelnd sich dem ewig Ungenannten.
Wir heissen's: fromm sein.

whereas, strange to say, he never referred to the teaching of Leibnitz, although he was nearer to him than to Spinoza. Monads, he explained to Falk, to whatever element or whatever part of the universe they may belong, are indestructible. When a man dies, there takes place a disintegration in that the chief monad more or less releases from service the other monads which had been united with it during terrestrial existence and had combined to form the corporeal life. Thereupon these monads return to the elements to which they belong, and the principal monad becomes afresh the centre of a new complex of monads, that is to say, it becomes a creative force under a new form. In this sense Goethe is persuaded that he has already existed thousands of times and that he must return to the world thousands of times anew. But man, he thinks, will not necessarily live again in human form. Why, he asks himself in the course of this conversation, should I not admit that the indestructible element of Wieland may display fresh activity in the form of a brilliant star?

What would Leibnitz have said to this way of using his monadology?

Goethe conjectures then that " we are not all immortal in the same way " (to Eckermann, 1 September, 1829).

It will be noticed how different is Goethe's idea of the persistence of personality from the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation. On the other hand, it may be found in similar shape among certain Chinese thinkers. Nevertheless, Goethe is always plainly conscious that every method of imagining eternal life is tainted with contradictions. He

also refrains from raising the question, How? On one occasion he even went the length of declaring to Eckermann, " To meditate on our eternal life is a good occupation for people in high society and for idle women. But a sensible man leaves on one side the world to come and shows himself active and useful in this world. (25 February, 1824.)

His real thoughts in this connection he expressed to Chancellor von Müller on 29 April, 1818, viz. " Strongly as he is attracted by the earth and its thousands of varied phenomena, nevertheless man lifts his eyes in scrutiny and full of nostalgia to the heavens spread above him in infinite space. For he feels clearly and profoundly in his heart that he is a citizen of this spiritual kingdom in which we believe, without being able to prevent ourselves from believing, and without ceasing thus to believe."

Because of his nature-philosophy, Goethe is also exempted from all research aimed at explaining that the world has a meaning in relation to man and that the ethical activity of man has a meaning in relation to the world. This constitutes the fundamental difference between his thought and all the philosophy of his time. At bottom rationalist philosophy, no less than do Kant and speculative philosophy, sets no other goal before it than to attribute to the world a meaning by whose aid man can find significance in his own existence. This purpose compels them to construct complete philosophic systems which go far beyond the contents of our experience. Goethe on the contrary, can be satisfied to state " Nature has no system; it has, it *is*, life which

from an unknown centre trends with effort and continuous succession towards an indeterminable boundary". He never ceases asserting that in nature nothing is an end in relation to another end, but that "every creature is for itself its own end". According to him, the goal of nature, in so far as one can speak of a goal, is reached in measure as each being arrives at fully realizing its own existence. "In nature nothing is produced which is not in close relationship with the whole" (*Experience as Intermediary between Object and Subject*, 1792). Thus, to give meaning to his life and his ethical activity, man does not need to understand the meaning of the universe. It is by inner necessity, because it is part of his being, that man must be moral.

So that the ethics of Goethe, like those of Kant, rest on a categorical imperative. But ethical activity, by inner necessity, rests for him on far simpler foundations than it does for Kant.

According to Goethe, to become moral does not consist for man in the introduction of moral thoughts into his being, but in activating a continuous effort towards "becoming noble", by which effort he tends to free himself from the non-moral elements of his nature, and to allow all that is good in him to reach its full fruition.

This idea of "becoming noble" dominates all Goethe's ethics. It was he, not Nietzsche, who was the first to recognize that the great problem of ethics is to reconcile the ennoblement of man, that is to say, the realization of his own essential being, with his duty of becoming good. He

solves the question by declaring that one does not actually realize oneself except by becoming good. This idea of Goethe's that the " noble " and the good in the traditional sense of the word are interrelated will preserve all its life-giving power in human thought at a time when no one will take any more notice of the revolt of Nietzsche against the traditional conception of good, nor of his superman, about whom so much fuss has been made, except as an episode of the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century.

Goethe strives to realize this " becoming noble " in his own life. His greatest wish, he confesses, is to reach an ever closer ideal of purity. In all sincerity he strives to make the candour and nobleness bestowed on him by nature his ruling qualities. With truceless effort he forces himself to realize his motto " Live in peace with the world ". This love of the true, the pure and the peaceful gives to his character its grandeur and its serenity.

In a letter to Schelling, he feels he has a right to declare that he has never uttered the smallest complaint about all the hostility, open or secret, of which he has been the victim.

A reproach often levelled against his moral character is to the effect that he was wanting in enthusiasm. That is true: the fire of love seems in him singularly weak. And yet it is marvellously bright. What is wanting in ardour in his ethic of love is compensated by its depth.

Goethe was an impassioned opponent of his contemporary the English moralist Bentham. The latter, in his fanatical utilitarianism, demands of each individual that in all things

and in every place he shall concern himself with procuring by his activities the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number of people. By this postulate, according to Goethe, who in a bad temper called him " an old fool ", Bentham attacks the individual existence of the human being and flings disorder into the social life of the community. " Don't compel me ", says Goethe to Soret in 1830, " to take the greatest good of society as the determining measure for my profoundly personal existence ". The greatest good of the greatest number cannot be realized, he says, by the abolition of natural relations between the individual and the community. The maximum of love, and therefore of well-being, will only be attained if each individual develops in himself in the most perfect and most personal fashion the love which nature has implanted in his heart. In thus opposing the utilitarianism of which Bentham is one of the representatives who makes the strongest appeal, Goethe reminds us of Lao-Tse rejecting the utilitarian morality of Confucius.

The whole morality of Goethe lies in these words: " Be true to thyself and to others ".

This does not exclude love expressed in action; it implies it. " Let your aspirations be inspired by love, and let your life be action ", he says in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*.[1]

His life throughout supplies proofs of the active love he bore in his heart. He believed that his special mission was

[1] Und dein Streben, sei's in Liebe
Und dein Leben sei die Tat

to sympathize with and to relieve all the moral or spiritual distress he might come across, and he never denied his assistance to any who really needed it. He was constrained to this, as he once said, by a " dominating habit ". How beautiful was his remark to Jakobi, " We ought all to have pity for each other "! (1781).

On 10 December, 1781, he wrote to Madame von Stein, " I pray God to make me more thrifty every day, so that I may be able to be generous with all things—money or goods, life or death ". And already on 12 March of the same year he had written to her, " I pray the Graces will give and preserve goodness of heart to my Beloved ".

Vogel, the doctor who attended him in his old age, tells us that he was able to assist numerous patients with the money Goethe placed at his disposal " for people who needed something more than ordinary charity ". But the benefactor forbade him to betray his name.

The ethical thought of Goethe is contained in its entirety in the fact that Wilhelm Meister, the character in which he has most fully embodied his own personality, finds himself led by his inner experiences and the circumstances of his life to dedicate himself to his neighbour and accompany emigrants as their surgeon.

What then Goethe offers as an ethical ideal is the deepening of the inner life and its blossoming as moral action.

Further, true ethics, he teaches, quite naturally include resignation. In the thought that it is by inner necessity that he labours for the realization of good, man must find the joy and the courage to be active. He must not expect from

life happiness, nor expect to see the results of his activity. Nor must he give way to a state of helplessness when what is unreasonable gets the better of what is reasonable. " Whoever desires to be active must resemble that unreasonable sower in the parable who casts the seed without worrying as to how large the harvest will be nor where it will come up " (In a letter from Goethe to Schiller).

As for himself, here is what he wrote to Plessing in 1782: " All I can assure you is that even in the midst of happiness I live in a perpetual state of renunciation, and that each day, with all my troubles and my work, I see that it is not my will that is done, but the will of a higher Power whose thoughts are not my thoughts ".

He insists very strongly on the ethical character of his conception of the world and of civilization. The words he addressed to Eckermann on 11 March, 1832, eleven days before his death, are like an ethical last will and testament. " Whatever progress spiritual culture may make, whatever development and whatever deepening the sciences may achieve in ever-widening research, to whatever growth the human spirit may attain, never will be surpassed the greatness and ethical culture of Christianity as it glows and sparkles with splendour in the Gospel."

Such is Goethe's nature-philosophy. It is far from being unique in history; it is one expression of that simple philosophy of nature which reappears under ever diverse forms among European and Chinese thinkers, tending always anew towards the perfecting of their ethical ideas.

If he had unfolded it as a system, it would probably have

had some influence on the age he lived in, and might perhaps have contributed to prevent European thought, after the failure of speculative philosophy, from finding itself so helpless in face of the natural sciences.

But he confined its expression to his poetry, whence it blooms for generations to come in flowers of ever brighter radiance.

It is to his philosophy that one can most happily apply what he wrote to Zelter (1 November, 1829) about that which a man can bequeath to posterity of his experience and his thought. This is what he said: " If one wishes to leave to future generations something from which they can draw profit, it should be confessions. One must set oneself before the generations that are to come as a personality, with the thoughts one cherishes, the opinions one holds. And our descendants can, if they wish, search there for what suits them or for what is eternal truth ".

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