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A HISTORY
OF
GERMAN LITERATURE

BY
JOHN G. ROBERTSON
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NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
1902

330.9

R65

Cop. 4

Printed by

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD & SONS, *Edinburgh, Scotland.*

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P R E F A C E.

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WHILE the general object and scope of the present History of German Literature are sufficiently obvious, some explanation is necessary with regard to the illustrative passages which form one of its features. Such passages are accompanied, in the case of older dialects, by a literal German version, which is to be considered as a glossary rather than as a translation. It is believed that by this means the reader will be able better to appreciate the meaning and poetic value of the extracts than if he were offered an English version or an actual translation into modern German. Medieval literature cannot be approached through the medium of translations, and, as F. Pfeiffer remarks in the introduction to his edition of Walther von der Vogelweide, "Mittelhochdeutsche Gedichte auch nur erträglich ins Neuhochdeutsche zu übersetzen, ist ein Ding der Unmöglichkeit." Old High German, Old Saxon and Middle High German extracts are based on standard texts; but, from the Early High German period onwards, titles of works and quotations are taken from original editions—that is to say, the

orthography is not modernised. The bibliographical notes are restricted to references which are likely to be of service to the English or American student. As a work which is to be found in every larger library, and consequently generally accessible, the collection of *Deutsche Nationallitteratur*, edited by J. Kürschner, is—irrespective of the unequal value of the individual volumes—referred to throughout.

For what I owe to other workers in the field, and for invaluable hints and suggestions from those who have helped me in reading the proofs—especially my friend Professor F. H. Wilkens of Union College, Schenectady—I have to express my hearty thanks. Above all, I am indebted to the Universitäts- und Landes-Bibliothek in Strassburg, which has enabled me, in almost all cases, to write from a first-hand acquaintance with the literature.

JOHN G. ROBERTSON.

STRASSBURG, *July 1, 1902.*

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INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH the criteria of poetic excellence in Germany have often differed widely from those acknowledged elsewhere, the historical development of German literature has naturally many features in common with that of other European literatures ; and, while its periods of flourishing and decay have rarely coincided with those in France, in England, or even in Scandinavia, they have, in general, been rooted in social and intellectual movements, the significance of which was more than national. In Germany, as in other lands, for example, a shadowy pre-Christian epoch was followed by an age of rigid monasticism ; the knight of the Crusades receded before the burgher of the rising towns, and Reformation was intimately associated with Renaissance. And in more recent centuries, Germany has responded even more quickly than her neighbours to the social and intellectual changes which, heedless of national or linguistic barriers, have, from time to time, swept across Europe. While no modern literature has grown up in entire independence, none is bound by closer ties or is more indebted to its fellows than that of Germany. Before entering on the study of this literature, it is consequently important to make clear, by means of a comparative survey, the position which it occupies in Europe and the relations in which it stands to other literatures ; to establish in how far divergences in the evolution of German

letters are to be ascribed to national temperament, in how far to accidents of social or political history.

Divisions
of German
literature.

Historically regarded, German literature¹ admits of a natural division into three epochs, each of which is distinguished by special linguistic characteristics: an Old High German period, in which the dialects of South Germany retained the wide range of vowel sounds to be found in all the older Germanic languages; a Middle High German epoch, beginning about 1050, in which that diversity of vowel sounds and grammatical forms had in great measure disappeared; and, lastly, a New High German or modern German period, which began about the middle of the fourteenth century. During the second of these periods, the High German dialects gained an ascendancy over those of the North and of Central Germany, while, in New High German times, German literature is practically restricted to High German.

Setting out from the fact that the "Blütezeit" of German poetry, at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was followed by a period of depression, which, ultimately, towards the end of the eighteenth century, made way for the crowning age of German classical poetry, Wilhelm Scherer attempted to establish for German literature a general law of evolution.² He regarded it as oscillating between "periods of flourishing," which recurred at regular intervals of six hundred years; according to his hypothesis, the epoch which touched its

¹ Cp. A. Koberstein, *Grundriss zur Geschichte der deutschen National-literatur* (1827), 5th ed., by K. Bartsch, 6 vols., Leipzig, 1872-74 (vol. i. of a sixth edition appeared in 1884); G. C. Gervinus, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (1835-36), 5th ed., by K. Bartsch, 5 vols., Leipzig, 1871-74; A. F. C. Vilmar, *Geschichte der deutschen Nationallitteratur* (1848), 24th ed., with a continuation by A. Stern, Marburg, 1894; W. Wackernagel, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur* (1848-53), 2nd ed., by E. Martin, Basle, 1879-94; K. Goedeke, *Grundriss zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (1857-81), 2nd ed., Dresden, 1884 ff. (seven volumes have appeared); W. Scherer, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur* (1883), 9th ed., Berlin, 1902; F. Vogt and M. Koch, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart*, Leipzig, 1897; K. Francke, *German Literature, as determined by Social Forces*, 4th ed., New York, 1901. Cp. also J. Kürschner, *Deutsche Nationallitteratur*, 222 vols., Stuttgart, 1882-98 (referred to in the present volume as D.N.L.)

² *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur*, 9th ed., 18 f.

zenith in 1200 was preceded by an earlier "Blütezeit" of unwritten literature, which reached its highest point about 600. Literary evolution, however, is too complicated a phenomenon to be explained by laws simple as those which Kepler applied to the planetary system; in any case, Scherer's first "period of flourishing" is only a hypothesis. Other Germanic races, such as the Goths, had, as early as the fourth century, acquired a certain facility of literary expression, and the Anglo-Saxon epic of *Beowulf* dates from the seventh or eighth century; but, considering only the West Germanic races of the continent—those which especially concern us here—we possess but one fragment of a heroic lay, the *Hildebrandslied*, and a couple of pre-Christian charms, as a testimony to the nation's imagination previous to the Carolingian epoch. The themes of the German national epic had originated, it is true, in the period of the Migrations; but whether the traditions had, in that age, taken a form which could be described as literary, is open to doubt.

The Old High German period of German literature¹ extended from about 750 to 1050; but, as the chief literary remains date only from the ninth century, this epoch may, roughly speaking, be said to lie between the age in which Anglo-Saxon poetry flourished and the age of Anglo-Saxon prose. It was essentially a period of monkish ascendancy, and—if we except the epic poetry of the Saxons—the Germanic imagination was held rigidly in check by Christianity. In the unequal battle between the World and the Church, the former succumbed, and the Latin Renaissance of the eleventh century finally crushed out the weak beginnings of a national literature. Meanwhile, however, the Romance literatures of

The Old
High
German
period.

¹ Cp. J. Kelle, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur*, 1 (to the middle of the eleventh century), Berlin, 1892; R. Koegel, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, 1 (in two parts), Strassburg, 1894-97; also R. Koegel and W. Bruckner, in Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, 2d ed., 2, 1, Strassburg, 1901, 29 ff.; W. Golther, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur von den ersten Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters* (D.N.L., 163, 1), Stuttgart [1892].

the South and West of Europe were developing more rapidly than those of the North. While, early in the twelfth century, Germany was still engaged in freeing herself from monastic asceticism, and England was being remodelled by the Normans, French singers were composing the first national *chansons*, the lyric of the troubadours was flourishing in Provence, and the *Poema del Cid* had taken shape in Spain.

Middle
High
German
literature.

The revival of German poetry—now known as Middle High German¹—was late in setting in, but when it did come, it advanced with all the more rapidity. In the course of the twelfth century, the iron rule of the Church began to yield, worldly themes took the place of religious legends as subjects for poetry, and wandering singers or “*Spielleute*” became a factor of importance. Had German literature been left wholly to itself, its history in the thirteenth century might possibly have been analogous to that of English literature of the same period; but, towards the close of the twelfth century, German poets came under the influence of their French contemporaries, and, within a few decades, Middle High German literature had far outstripped all its neighbours. The Arthurian epic became in Germany, what it already was in France, the chosen form of courtly romance, and the national sagas were remodelled under the stimulus of the new ideals: even the German lyric was indebted to Provençal singers. Thus, it might be said that the zenith of Middle High German poetry fell a little later than that of medieval literature in France, and a full century before French chivalric literature awakened an echo in England.

Middle High German poetry was exposed to the same causes of decay as those to which all pre-Renaissance litera-

¹ Cp. F. Kull, *Geschichte der altdutschen Dichtung*, Graz, 1886; F. Vogt in Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, 2nd ed., 2, 1, Strassburg, 1901, 161 ff. The beginning of the period is discussed by J. Kelle in his *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur*, 2, Berlin, 1896, and in W. Scherer, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert (Quellen und Forschungen)*, 12, Strassburg, 1875, and *Geistliche Poeten der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (same series, 1 and 7), Strassburg, 1874-75.

tures were subject ; in Germany, as elsewhere, the change which came over medieval society—the disappearance of knighthood and the rise of the middle classes—left deep traces on literature : verse yielded to prose, relative form to formlessness, and the naïve art of the courtly singers to didacticism and satire. But there was also another reason for the rapid decay of what was the richest, because the most concentrated, of all medieval literatures. The Middle High German period was, as will be seen, almost exclusively an epoch of poetry ; Germany had no prose writers, no Villehardouin or Joinville, no Duns Scotus or Roger Bacon ; she had only poets, neither thinkers nor historians, and before the thirteenth century had reached its close, her literature, like a plant without adequate roots, had withered away. And in the following century—the fourteenth—when Italy could point to Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, when, in France, the long age of medieval romance was followed by a period of satire and allegory, and English poetry was steadily advancing towards the poetic efflorescence associated with Chaucer, Germany fell back into comparative darkness ; her writers appealed only to the crass tastes of the people. Not, indeed, until after the early Italian Renaissance and the culture of the Humanists¹ had spread beyond the Alps, did the Germans begin to do what their neighbours had done before them, namely, to establish universities and thus lay a solid basis for a national literature. At a time when Froissart was writing French history, and Wyclif was fighting for reformation in England, mystics like Eckhart and Tauler were only beginning to lay the real foundations of German intellectual life.

Germany's recovery from this period of depression was, however, phenomenally rapid. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the German-speaking races had virtually no literature and little prospect of one ; but not a hundred years elapsed before Luther had inaugurated the Protestant

Reforma-
tion and
Renaissance.

¹ Cp. L. Geiger, *Renaissance und Humanismus in Italien und Deutschland*, 2nd ed., Berlin, 1899.

Reformation and placed his people in the van of European progress. The epoch between the decay of Middle High German as a distinct language, and the final crystallisation of modern German, it is usual to describe as Early New High German. The literature of these centuries is intimately associated with Reformation and Renaissance; but it is significant for the German national character that the effects of the Renaissance did not make themselves felt in Germany until after the Reformation. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Humanists, it is true, had endeavoured to awaken Germany to the importance of the classic revival, by bringing the treasures of Southern literature within the grasp of German poets, but their efforts met with little success. Until the way had been prepared for it by the Reformation, the Renaissance made no lasting impression on German literature. In its defiant individualism, Protestantism was thoroughly Germanic; under its influence, the literature of the people finally triumphed over the literature of knighthood; satire and fable flourished as never before, and the drama—hitherto restricted to liturgic representations in the churches—was on the way to becoming what it had long been in England and France, a national art. Thus, once more, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Germany did not lag very far behind the other nations of Europe; but her progress was due to the spirit of the Reformation, not to that of the Renaissance, and her poetry was Germanic, as it had never yet been—even at the zenith of the Middle High German period. Just, however, as German culture had reached a stage of its development when it might have benefited by the Latin Renaissance—in the seventeenth century—the nation was overwhelmed by the most appalling catastrophe in modern history, by the Thirty Years' War. The literature of the Reformation era, so full of promise, dwindled away in artificial imitation and formless satire; religious poetry alone was able to withstand the general decay. In the great era in European literature which opened with Shakespeare and

Bacon, with Tasso, Cervantes and Lope de Vega, and closed with Calderon, Milton and the master-dramatists of France, Corneille, Racine and Molière—the most brilliant literary era in the history of the world—Germany had no share. Crude imitations of Elizabethan dramas took the place of the abortive national drama; versions of Spanish picaresque novels and French heroic romances formed the chief reading of the cultured public: in place of a Shakespeare, a Gryphius; in place of a Cervantes, a Grimmelshausen; while the lessons which France learned from Boileau, Germany received from the subordinate genius of Opitz. It was the very end of the seventeenth century, before a thinker of the standing of Leibniz saved the honour of the German name and laid the foundations for a brighter future.¹

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, while England and France stood in the foreground of European intellectual life, Germany was again the outcast. And this time, the gulf that separated her from the neighbouring nations was even greater than in the Reformation era, the task before the nation correspondingly harder. German literature of the eighteenth century² falls into two natural divisions, the first of which was characterised by imitation of French and, more especially, of English models, while the second was a period of national originality. Under the influence of the English nature-poets, Klopstock created the modern German lyric; under that of Richardson and Fielding, Gellert and Wieland laid the basis of the novel; while, in the school of English thinkers and dramatists, Lessing became the master-critic of his time, and the pioneer

The
eighteenth
century.

¹ Cp. C. Lemcke, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung neuer Zeit*, 1 (*Von Opitz bis Klopstock*), 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1882; K. Borinski, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters* (D.N.L., 163, 2), Stuttgart [1894].

² Cp. J. Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur von Leibniz bis auf unsere Zeit*, 4 vols., Berlin, 1886-90; H. Hettner, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur im 18. Jahrhundert*, 4th ed. (edited by O. Harnack), 2 vols., Brunswick, 1893-95; J. W. Schaefer, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd ed. (edited by F. Muncker), Leipzig, 1881.

of the modern German drama. By the middle of the century, when Goethe was born, Germany had thus made a vast stride forwards. In drama, she could not compare with Italy, where Metastasio, Goldoni and Gozzi were still alive to uphold the Italian theatre, but, in all else, she was in advance of both Italy and Spain. Goethe's childhood was contemporary with the age of Goldsmith and the great English historians—that on which Dr Johnson set his stamp—while the fresh, vigorous beginnings of Ewald von Kleist and Klopstock belong, significantly enough, to the same period as the mature poetry of Gray. But France was the source of ideas no less vital to German development than were those that came from England, and Lessing and Winckelmann were overshadowed by their French contemporaries, Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau.

As the century drew to its close, the individual character of the German mind became more and more marked. The outburst of "Sturm und Drang" was, although inspired by Rousseau, almost an isolated phenomenon in the European literature of the time; the buoyant vigour of the German drama was without a parallel; the ballad-poetry of men like Bürger was only equalled by the *Percy Reliques* on which it was modelled; with the single exception of Burns, there was not a lyric poet in Europe who could be compared with the leading German singers of that eventful time; even master-thinkers like Hume and Condillac were of inferior importance to Herder and Kant. Germany's hour had come at last, and, at the end of the century, when the French Revolution was destroying the results of generations of Latin culture, German philosophy and German literature held the leading position in Europe. In the fugue of the nations, to quote Hettner's application of Goethe's suggestive metaphor, England had, during the eighteenth century, led with the first voice, France had carried on the second, and to Germany had fallen the last and most resonant of all.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, German

classical literature had reached its zenith. But this was not all: in half-conscious antagonism to the reigning classicism, the Romantic School inaugurated a new movement, which left traces on the development of literature almost to the close of the century. Germany, however, soon ceased to play the leading rôle in European literature; for before Goethe's death, France was, once again, exerting a decisive influence on the general current of thought and letters, and Byron was unquestionably more of a "world-poet" than any of his German contemporaries, Goethe excepted. The "Young German" epoch, that is to say, the epoch that lay between the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, was characterised by subservience to France; the poets of the French *école romantique* gave such ideas as they borrowed from Germany a cosmopolitan stamp, and Hugo, Musset and Béranger became, like Byron, forces in German literature. Between 1840 and 1848, the Germans, again docilely following France, learned to express their enthusiasm for freedom in political lyrics; and Balzac and George Sand—like Scott, a little earlier—gave Germany examples of a fiction which satisfied modern needs better than did the novels of the Romantic School. Except at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, Germany passed through no literary epoch which could be compared with that of French Romanticism or with the "Blütezeit" of English Victorian literature. In great measure this was due to political causes, to a want of national unity; for, throughout the century, there was no lack of writers of genius: a nation that could point to lyric poets like Eichendorff, Heine, Mörike and Storm, to dramatists such as Kleist, Grillparzer and Hebbel, to a novelist like Gottfried Keller, had no reason to take a subordinate rank. But, in the nineteenth century, eminent writers were no longer, as in the cosmopolitan age of German classicism, sufficient to make a great literary period; there was also necessary a certain political concentration, a national life held together

by common aims, and this was wanting in modern Germany. If for no other reason, the closing period of our history, in which Germany appears at last as one nation, has a peculiar interest for the student; for, once more, with the help of French, Russian and Scandinavian models, the German mind has asserted itself as an original force among the literatures of Europe.¹

It is not easy to express in a few words the peculiarities, the national characteristics, of this literature, whose position in relation to that of other Western nations we have attempted to define. In the first place, German literature is more composite than any other written in a single tongue.

Geographical distribution.

At the present day, it embraces the imaginative work of one-third of the population of the European continent; it is the literature, not only of the German Empire, but also of the eight millions who speak the German tongue in Austro-Hungary,² and the majority of the inhabitants of Switzerland.³ Moreover, within the German Empire itself there exists a diversity of peoples and national temperaments—one might almost say of races—which adds considerably to the difficulty of definition. The literature of the Baltic coasts, for example, is as different from that of the Bavarian Highlands and of Austria as is that of France from Italy; and centres like Berlin, Munich and Vienna display wider variations in their literary tastes than are to be found throughout the whole English-speaking world.

General characteristics.

In spite of these initial difficulties, however, certain broad and general features may be distinguished, which are to be traced throughout the entire evolution of German literature. The question is most conveniently approached comparatively,

¹ Cp. R. von Gottschall, *Die deutsche Nationallitteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 4 vols., 7th ed., Leipzig, 1900-02; R. M. Meyer, *Die deutsche Litteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd ed., Berlin, 1900, and the same author's *Grundriss der neuern deutschen Litteraturgeschichte*, Berlin, 1902.

² Cp. J. W. Nagl and J. Zeidler, *Deutsch-Österreichische Litteraturgeschichte*, 1, Vienna, 1899.

³ Cp. J. Baechtold, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur in der Schweiz*, Frauenfeld, 1887.

by contrasting German letters with French. The literatures of these two nations—which, by a freak of history, began their political development together under the sway of one king—form the most striking contrast that is to be found within the Aryan family. According to the testimony of literary history, there would seem to be stronger bonds of intellectual sympathy between Germany and Spain or Italy, than between France and Germany; while French art and literature have always been more warmly appreciated and more successfully imitated by the Scandinavian than by the German peoples. English literature, on the other hand, is the result of too complicated an evolution to form as sharp an antithesis to either French or German literature as do these two to each other, while the Slavonic literatures have, to a large extent, imitated their western neighbours. Thus, it may be said that, as far as Europe is concerned, the two poles of literary expression are represented by France and Germany; here are concentrated the fundamental characteristics which distinguish what Madame de Staël called “la littérature du nord” from “la littérature du midi.”¹ The poetic temperament of the Teuton, as compared with the Latin, is displayed in its naïvest, simplest form in the first of the two “cosmopolitan” epochs of European literature, in that of chivalry: the comparison is, moreover, simplified by the fact that both French and German poets treated the same themes, and had the same artistic ideals before them. The supreme qualities of the French romances of chivalry are those of style: even if a French epic is, as a whole, defective in proportion, its constituent parts are rarely without balance and proportion; practical and clear-minded, the French poet deals with facts and concrete ideas. The German poet of the same time proved, as we shall see, an apt pupil of his French masters, but the natural bent of his mind is none the less clearly to be seen beneath the veneer

¹ *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, Paris, 1800, 134.

of French imitation; however closely he may translate from the French, he is never reluctant to enlarge upon his original: not content to describe things as they appear to the outward eye, he reflects upon them, interprets them, and explains them. In spite of its rougher workmanship, the verse of Wolfram von Eschenbach or Gottfried von Strassburg consequently strikes an individual note which is not to be found in the French medieval writers. Thus, too, the Germans early displayed their supremacy in the lyric; deeply as they had been influenced by the Provençal poets, the Minnesingers put into their songs a subjectivity, a richness of sentimental feeling, which distinguishes them from the Troubadours.

As the centuries moved on, and the epic developed into the novel, the Minnesang into the modern lyric, and the feeling for nature awakened, national peculiarities became more emphasised. The relation, for instance, in which French prose fiction stands to German is only in a higher degree that in which Crestien de Troyes stood to Wolfram von Eschenbach. The German novelist of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries deals with feelings and thoughts rather than with actions and events; his aim, to which all else is sacrificed, is to follow out, in all its details, the growth of an individual; and his pen is at the service of subjective and personal ideas which he enforces with an insistence that often outsteps the bounds of æsthetic licence.

Or let us turn to the drama, and especially to comedy, which, in French literature, occupies a similar place to the lyric in German, or the novel in English literature. As a nation, the Germans are not deficient in the comic spirit; on the contrary, they are highly endowed with a deep and hearty humour; but their literature is, notwithstanding, deficient in good comedies of the highest order. This is due to the fact that comedy depends least of all on the expression of individual feelings and convictions; it is, in the first instance, a criticism of society. The representative German comedies—*Minna von Barnhelm* must be excluded, as being

modelled on the non-German comedy of the eighteenth century, such as Grillparzer's *Weh dem, der lügt*, or Wagner's *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*—are never, like the masterpieces of French or English comedy, purely objective; they express an individual standpoint which makes it impossible to bring them into the same line with the masterpieces of a Molière, Congreve or Goldoni.

The fundamental differences between French and German literature might be summed up by saying that the former is the supreme example of a social literature, while the latter is a literature of individualism. The unique position which Paris has always held in the intellectual life of the French nation has determined the character of French literature; the literary spirit, which attains its highest expression in the criticism of life, is essentially metropolitan. In Germany, on the other hand, the national life is divided over many capitals, and the nation's thought and literature centre in innumerable coteries. The German writer has never known a single tribunal of public opinion; he has thought as an individual and written for himself. Hence the literature he has produced is one in which the lyric, the most personal of all forms of literature, predominates, and where the epic or novel is employed to express purely personal feelings, ideas and desires. Even the drama, unless in a modified degree, in Austria, is not objective. At the same time, German dramatists are not exposed, like those of France, Spain or Italy, to the temptation of repeating themselves; and, consequently, a feature of the German drama is its varied character. Neither Goethe nor Schiller, Grillparzer nor Hebbel, has written two plays on exactly the same lines; the ability to make the same mould serve again and again, a talent possessed by all the masters of the Romance drama, is absent in German literature, or is, at least, restricted to subordinate talents such as Hans Sachs, Weisse or Kotzebue. Thus, in spite of its deficient bulk, the dramatic literature of the Germanic races is rich in initiative and originality.

Such being the outstanding characteristics of German literature, as they appear by contrast with the literatures of the Latin peoples, it is not difficult to infer what part the former has played in the evolution of European literature as a whole. The antithesis of Latin and Germanic, South and North, is, in art and poetry, expressed by the words "classic" and "romantic"; the Latin literatures, with their social background, are the representatives of rule and order, of classicism, while the Germanic spirit finds its most perfect expression in Romanticism. For the Latin nationalities, the great "Blütezeit" was the classical Renaissance, or a direct consequence of the Renaissance; in the north, the classical spirit—whether in the Germany of Opitz and Gottsched, in the Sweden of the eighteenth century, or, although naturally in a lesser degree, in England from the Restoration onwards—has invariably been a foreign growth which has harmonised but indifferently with the national temperament. And, in the same way, Romanticism has been equally strange on Latin soil; the word "romantique," it is true, is applied to the chief French movement of the nineteenth century, but it is open to question how far this movement represented an encroachment of the "littératures du nord," how far it was merely a revival of the spirit that animated the early Renaissance.

German literature in its highest national development has always been romantic—that is to say, individual, spiritual, lyrical: this is its importance and this explains its mission in the economy of European letters. And, just as the historian of French literature must keep constantly in view the social background, or as English literary history must take account of the national enterprise and independence of the Anglo-Saxon race, so German literature must be regarded pre-eminently as the literature of subjectivity and individualism.

ERRATA.

P.	L.	
12	12	<i>for Isidor read Isidore.</i>
53	13	<i>for has read have.</i>
72	3	<i>from foot, for 1883 read 2nd ed., 1901.</i>
244	9	<i>from foot, for Maler read Mahlern.</i>
248	18	<i>for Mahler read Mahlern.</i>
271	20	<i>for 1748 read 1740.</i>
335	11	<i>for F. read G.</i>
489	13	<i>from foot, for letze read letzte.</i>

CHAPTER VI.

HERDER; THE GÖTTINGEN BUND.

THE line that separates the age of Rationalism from the new movement which began in Germany as "Sturm und Drang," might be said to pass between Lessing's *Litteraturbriefe* and the *Fragments* of Herder. Lessing, as we have already seen, is the representative writer of the "Aufklärung." With Herder, on the other hand, the new epoch opens; he is the gatekeeper of the nineteenth century. As a maker of literature, a poet, he does not, it is true, take rank beside the masters of German poetry; but as a spiritual force and intellectual innovator, he is second to none. The whole fabric of German thought and literature at the close of the eighteenth century would have been lacking in stability without the broad and solid basis afforded by his work.

Johann Friedrich Herder,¹ an East Prussian, was born in the village of Morungen on August 25, 1744. His childhood was embittered by privations, his school-life was one long tyranny. He was able, however, to attend the university, where he began by studying medicine, but soon found theology more to his taste. It is significant that the first influence under which he fell was that of Immanuel Kant, who laid in the young student's mind the foundation of the method, by means of which he revolutionised at a later date the science of history. In Königsberg he also came into immediate personal relations with J. G. Hamann (1730-88),

newish period

Lessing and Herder.

J. F. Herder, 1744-1803.

J. G. Hamann, 1730-88.

¹ R. Haym, *Herder nach seinem Leben und seinen Werken*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1877-85; E. Kühnemann, *Herders Leben*, Munich, 1895. The standard edition of Herder's *Sämmtliche Werke* is that edited by B. Suphan, 32 vols., Berlin, 1877 ff. A selection (10 vols.) in D.N.L., 74-78 [1885-94], ed. by H. Meyer, H. Lambel, and E. Kühnemann.

the "Magus im Norden."¹ Hamann was a strange wayward genius, ~~who, after~~ an aimless, penurious youth, became suddenly aware of the true meaning of the Bible, while on a visit to London in 1758. Returning to Königsberg, his native town, he began to read and study with untiring zeal. His writings—the chief of which are *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* (1759), and *Kreuzzüge des Philologen* (1762)—are all fragmentary and full of strange, often startling, ideas in aphoristic form. His fervid enthusiasm, his championship of genius, his insistence on a man facing life and its tasks with his whole collective energy, and not acting by halves, made his sybilline utterances popular with the new generation of "Stürmer und Dränger." To Hamann, Herder owed his acquaintance with English literature, especially Ossian and Shakespeare, and with Hamann's aid he succeeded in obtaining a position in the "Domschule" in Riga. Here he spent five years (1764-69) of unrelenting work.

Herder's
Fragmente,
1767.

In 1767, the third year of his residence in Riga, the *Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Litteratur* were published anonymously as "Beilagen" or supplements to the *Litteraturbriefe*. Lessing's share in this latter publication had come to an end as early as 1760, but the journal continued to appear until the middle of 1765, owing mainly to the co-operation of a new writer, Thomas Abbt (1738-66), who is now only remembered as the author of two books, *Vom Tode fürs Vaterland* (1761) and *Vom Verdienste* (1765). Abbt may be regarded as the connecting-link between Lessing and Herder; it was his warm enthusiasm, rather than Lessing's cold, critical genius, that attracted Herder in the *Litteraturbriefe*. Abbt was a pioneer in the study of history on principles of organic development, a study which Herder and Justus Möser first illustrated practically. The standpoint of the *Fragmente* is not essentially different from that of the *Litteraturbriefe*, except perhaps with regard to Klopstock, whom Herder champions more warmly; but the two publications follow opposite methods. The *Litteraturbriefe* were in the first place critical; they had little to say of general theories or ideas. Herder's *Frag-*

T. Abbt,
1738-66.

¹ Cp. J. Claassen, *Hamanns Leben und Werke*, Gütersloh, 1885, and J. Minor, *J. G. Hamann in seiner Bedeutung für die Sturm- und Drangperiode*, Frankfurt, 1881.

mente, on the other hand, begin with the exposition of ideas, and only criticise by the way; they are leavened with a spirit of enthusiasm, and betray in every line the personality of their author. The germs of many of Herder's chief opinions are to be found in the *Fragmente*—his ideas on language, for instance, on the relation of his own to other literatures, on the "Volkslied." His next work, *Kritische Wälder* (1769)—the title being an imitation of Quintilian's "*sylvæ*"—is of a more polemical nature. In the first "Wäldchen," which discusses Lessing's *Laoköon*, Herder's instinctive antagonism to his predecessor is more marked than in the *Fragmente*, while the second and third volumes are occupied with the antiquarian Klotz, who raised Lessing's ire.

*Kritische
Wälder,*
1769.

In the summer of 1769, Herder was able to leave Riga, the provincialism of which had begun to weigh heavily upon him; he proceeded by sea to Nantes and spent nearly five months in France. The most interesting work of this period, and, in some respects, the most interesting of all that Herder wrote, is his *Journal meiner Reise im Jahre 1769*. It is a record of the most magnificent literary, æsthetic, and political dreams that ever haunted the brain of man, and through them all runs the fundamental idea of Herder's intellectual life, the conception of the human race and human culture as a product of historical evolution. Herder's writings can be described as at best only a collection of fragments, but a certain plan is behind them all; they are fragments of one great work on the evolution of mankind; to make this evolution of human history clear was the aim of Herder's life. At the end of his visit to France, he was appointed travelling-tutor to the son of the Prince-bishop of Lübeck; but this appointment came to an end hardly a year later in Strassburg, where Herder arrived with his pupil in September, 1770. Relieved of his duties, he took the opportunity of placing himself under the hands of an eye-specialist in Strassburg—he suffered from a growth in one of the lachrymal glands—before settling down as pastor in the little town of Bückeberg. The winter which he spent in Strassburg (1770-71) was of importance, for from it may be said to date the origin of the movement known as the "Sturm und Drang." During these months in Strassburg, Goethe sat at Herder's feet and learned the new

Herder's
journey to
France,
1769.

In Strass-
burg,
1770-71.

Von
deutscher
Art und
Kunst,
1773.

J. Möser,
1720-94.

Volkslied-
er, 1778-
79.

faith from his lips. Herder opened the young poet's eyes to the greatness of Shakespeare, revealed to him the treasures of national poetry in the songs of the people, and endowed the traceries of the Gothic cathedral above their heads with a new meaning and a new gospel. In this momentous period and the few years that immediately followed, Herder was a force of the first magnitude in German literature, a force that it is impossible to overestimate. Of his writings at this time the most important were a prize essay, *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), and his contributions to *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773).¹ The latter work, in which Goethe and Möser also had a share, may be regarded as the manifesto of the German "Sturm und Drang." Justus Möser (1720-94), a native of Westphalia, who spent a considerable part of his life in London, was another pioneer of the coming time; his *Osnabrückische Geschichte*, which began to appear in 1765, was the earliest historical work written from the modern standpoint of organic development. He stimulated even in a higher degree than Klopstock the interest of the German people in their own past; he realised what Abbt had not lived to complete. Möser's *Patriotische Phantasien* (1774)² were richer in ideas for the political well-being and progress of the nation than any other book of this eventful time.

In 1778 and 1779, Herder published a collection of popular songs and ballads of many nations, entitled *Volkslieder*.³ This work opened the eyes of the German people to the poetic worth of the Volkslied; and it was, at the same time, characteristic of the new standpoint which Herder held with regard to criticism. While a critic of the older generation, like Lessing, set, for instance, less value on a popular ballad than on an epigram, Herder gave the Volkslied its true place in literary history. In the songs which he took over from foreign literatures, he proved himself an admirable translator, but he lacked the creative faculty of the poet; his original poems, his lyric dramas, of which *Brutus* (1774) was written in these years, are reminiscent of Klopstock. Of the prose

¹ *Werke*, 5. A convenient reprint of *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, ed. H. Lambel, in the *Litteraturdenkmale*, 40, 41, Stuttgart, 1892.

² Ed. R. Zöllner, in the *Bibl. der deutschen Nationallitt.*, 32, 33, Leipzig, 1871.

³ *Werke*, 25; the title *Stimmen der Völker* was given to the collection by J. von Müller, the first editor of Herder's works.

writings of this period, the most noteworthy is a book which appeared in 1774, under the title *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*. A better example could hardly be found of the peculiarly germinating qualities of Herder's thought—and no thinker of the eighteenth century scattered so many suggestive ideas abroad as he—than this little book. Many of the ideas here set forth reappear in the literature and philosophy of the Romantic movement in the following generation. To 1774 belongs also the first part of the *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, a work, however, which is too immediately a product of the "Sturm und Drang" to have had permanent worth. Herder's theological writings, such as the *Provinzialblätter an Prediger* (1774) and the *Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend* (1780-81), carry into the field of religion the passionate battle which, in literature, he waged against the spirit of the "Aufklärung." In 1776, he accepted an invitation to Weimar as general superintendent or chief pastor. This welcome release from Bückeburg he owed to his old pupil Goethe. And in Weimar he wrote his most important book, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, which was published in four parts between 1784 and 1791.¹ This is, at least, an approach to the comprehensive treatise which Herder always dreamed of writing; it contains the fullest statement of his views on the subject of historical evolution. But the importance of the *Ideen* extends beyond the individual writer; the work forms, we might even say, an intellectual bridge between the two centuries. Herder's conception of the history of humanity was, on the one hand, like that of Lessing, of Rousseau, and of all the leading thinkers of the eighteenth century, a pedagogic one; he conceived the human race as undergoing a process of education towards an ideal humanism. But he went a step further; he regarded this educative process from the standpoint of historical evolution, and herein lies his claim to be regarded as one of the founders of modern historical science.

Call to
Weimar.

*Ideen zur
Philosophie der
Geschichte,
1784-91.*

Before the publication of the *Ideen*, perhaps even before he received the call to Weimar, Herder had ceased to be an active power in the world of letters; certainly from about

¹ *Werke*, 13, 14; a convenient edition by J. Schmidt in *Bibl. der deutschen Nationallitt.*, 23-25, Leipzig, 1869, and in D.N.L., 77 (3 vols.)

Antagon-
ism to
Kant.

Der Cid,
1805.

The "Göt-
tinger
Dichter-
bund."

H. C. Boie,
1744-1806,
F. W.
Gotter,
1746-97.

1780 on, he fell rapidly behind the intellectual movement. His later philosophical writings are filled with a petty spirit of antagonism towards his first teacher, Kant, for whose development he had neither understanding nor sympathy; even his relations with Goethe and Schiller were strained for a time. But in the last year or two of his life—he died in Weimar on the 18th of December, 1803—he asserted himself once more with a work of genuine poetry, a translation of the Spanish "Volkslieder" which centre in the Cid Campeador. *Der Cid: nach Spanischen Romanzen besungen* (1805)¹ is Herder's finest poetic achievement and one of the abiding treasures of German ballad literature.

Before passing on to consider the movement which is most immediately associated with Herder's work, the "Sturm und Drang," we must first turn to a group of writers who stood somewhat apart from the main stream, namely, the members of the "Göttinger Hain" or "Bund." The word "Hain" at once suggests an affinity with the "bards" who looked up to Klopstock as their master,² and it is, indeed, as a development of the school of Klopstock that the Göttingen poets are to be regarded.

The "Göttinger Hain" was founded in 1772, but the *Göttinger Musenalmanach*, which ultimately became the organ of the "Hain," had begun to appear nearly three years earlier. A French *Almanac des Muses*, which had been published annually since 1765, served as model for the first *Göttinger Musenalmanach für das Jahr 1770*,³ and its founders, H. C. Boie (1744-1806) and F. W. Gotter (1746-97),⁴ had undoubtedly something similar in view. Gotter, in particular, had pronounced Gallic tastes, and his dramas are, for the most part, adaptations from the French. His connection with the *Almanach* did not, however, last long; in 1775, Voss edited it, then, for three years, Göckingk, who in turn gave place to Bürger. (With this publication virtually begins a new

¹ Ed. J. Schmidt in *Bibl. der deutschen Nationallitt.*, 15, Leipzig, 1868; in D.N.L., 75.

² Cp. Klopstock's ode, *Der Hügel und der Hain* (*Werke*, ed. R. Hamel, 3, 140).

³ Reprints of the *Göttinger Almanach* from 1770 to 1772, edited by C. Redlich, will be found in the *Litteraturdenkmale*, No. 49 f., 52 f., 64 f., Stuttgart, 1894-97.

⁴ Cp. K. Weinhold, *H. C. Boie*, Halle, 1868, and R. Schlösser, *F. W. Gotter*, Hamburg, 1895.

chapter in the history of the German lyric ; the first *Göttinger Almanach* was the forerunner of many others, which, until well into the next century, formed the favourite receptacle for original poetry. The consecration of the "Göttinger Bund," which originated in the meetings of several gifted young students, to whom Boie acted as mentor, took place on the 12th of September, 1772. Voss, Hölty, the brothers Miller, and two others, had gone out in the evening to a village in the neighbourhood of Göttingen, probably Weende.

"Der Abend war ausserordentlich heiter," wrote Voss to a friend, "und der Mond voll. Wir überliessen uns ganz den Empfindungen der schönen Natur. Wir assen in einer Bauerhütte eine Milch, und begaben uns darauf ins freie Feld. Hier fanden wir einen kleinen Eichengrund, und sogleich fiel uns allen ein ; den Bund der Freundschaft unter diesen heiligen Bäumen zu schwören. Wir umkränzten die Hütte mit Eichenlaub, legten sie unter den Baum, fassten uns alle bei den Händen, tanzten so um den eingeschlossenen Stamm herum,—riefen den Mond und die Sterne zu Zeugen unseres Bundes an, und versprachen uns eine ewige Freundschaft."¹

Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826)² was not the most inspired of this little group, but he was the representative poet and the chief of the "Bund." After a youth of extreme privation—he was a native of Mecklenburg—he attracted Boie's attention by some verses sent to the *Almanach*, and the latter made it possible for him to study at the University of Göttingen. Here Voss devoted himself zealously to classical philology and to poetry. In 1776, he retired to Wandsbeck, where he lived a couple of years on the scanty income brought in by literary work. From 1782 to 1802, he was a schoolmaster in Eutin ; in 1802, we find him in Jena, and in 1805, he was appointed professor in Heidelberg, where he died in 1826. Voss's literary work does not cover a wide range, and the bulk of it rarely rises above a certain homely mediocrity. Voss had, in fact, too much common-sense to be a great poet ; he never lost touch with the prosaic realities of daily life. In later years, this essentially unpoetic side of his nature, combined with a boorishness of manner which he never lost, brought him into dis-

J. H. Voss,
1751-1826.

¹ *Briefe von J. H. Voss*, edited by A. Voss, Leipzig, 1840, I, 91 f.

² *Der Göttinger Dichterbund*, herausg. von A. Sauer, I (D.N.L., 49 [1887]). Cp. W. Herbst, *J. H. Voss*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1872-76.

agreeable conflict with the younger Heidelberg Romanticists. Apart from his leadership of the "Göttinger Dichterbund," Voss owes his place in German literature to his translations from the Greek and Latin, and to his *Idylls*—above all, to the finest of them, *Luise*, which served Goethe as a model for *Hermann und Dorothea*.

Voss's
Homer,
1781-93.

The version of *Homers Odyssee*, which Voss published in 1781,¹ is one of the masterpieces of German translation; although unequal, and occasionally disfigured by harsh and un-German constructions, it remains, in essentials, the most perfect rendering of Homer into a modern tongue. It is, indeed, surprising that this Mecklenburg peasant, with his homely ideas of poetry and life, should have been able to convey, not merely the meaning, but the spirit, the primitive harmony and almost the music, of the Homeric epic in his translation. In Voss's translation, Homer became almost as complete a possession of the German people as Shakespeare in that of Schlegel. The version of the *Iliad* did not appear for twelve years after that of the *Odyssey* (1793), and, owing to the translator's striving after philological accuracy, is deficient in the freshness that characterised the latter. The same fault disfigures more or less all Voss's later classic translations, as well as the second edition of the *Odyssey* (1793). His final work was a version of Shakespeare, in which he was assisted by his sons (9 vols., 1818-39).

His
Idyllen.

When we turn to Voss's *Idyllen*² (first collected edition in the *Gedichte*, 1785), it is difficult to realise that little over twenty years had elapsed since Gessner's last volume of *Neue Idyllen* found admiring readers. Between the sentimental and artificial shepherds and shepherdesses of Gessner and the intensely realistic figures of Voss, at least a century would seem to have intervened. In the idylls of the two poets, it is not the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which touch, but the seventeenth and nineteenth. In less than a generation, the word "Idyll" had undergone a complete change of meaning; a new spirit was abroad, a spirit that sought to base literature once more upon the realities of life, and, instead of the conventional figures of the Renaissance pastoral, Voss, whose

¹ Cp. the edition by M. Bernays, Stuttgart, 1881.

² Edited by K. Goedeke (*Bibl. der deutschen Nationallitt.*, 26), Leipzig, 1869.

model was the *Idylls* of Theocritus, gives us villagers, country schoolmasters, and pastors. The homely world of the German social novel is here embellished by a poetry that is hardly less homely. *Luise, ein ländliches Gedicht in drey Idyllen* (1784), Luise,
1784. is Voss's most popular work. The subject of the poem is the courtship and wedding of Luise and a young pastor, but this forms only the thread which holds the various scenes together. These scenes are painted with both truth and humour, and give a faithful picture of life in a country parsonage, at a time when rationalism was still a dominant force in religious thought. But one misses here, as in all Voss's writings, poetic tact; his striving after realistic simplicity and his love of detail often lead him into absurdities, and even his humour is not always in good taste. None the less, by associating the idyll with the Greek epic, he became the creator of a new *genre* in German poetry; as Schiller said,¹ he not only enriched the literature, but also widened it. His other idylls have been unduly overshadowed by *Luise*, but one, at least, *Der siebenzigste Geburtstag*, which appeared in the *Almanach* for 1781, is worthy of a place beside it.

The most gifted lyric poet of the Göttingen circle was undoubtedly Ludwig H. C. Hölty (1748-76),² whose unhappy life was cut short by consumption at the age of twenty-eight. L. H. C.
Hölty,
1748-76. In the simple elegiac songs and odes which Hölty wrote after his association with the Bund (*Gedichte*, first collected, 1782-83), there is lyric inspiration of the highest order. But it is poetry which suggests a comparison with Uz rather than with Goethe. In verses, such as the following, from the poem *Lebenspflichten* (1776):—

"Rosen auf den Weg gestreut,
Und des Harms vergessen!
Eine kleine Spanne Zeit
Ward uns zugemessen.

Heute hüpf't im Frühlingstanz
Noch der frohe Knabe;
Morgen weht der Todtenkranz
Schon auf seinem Grabe,"³

¹ *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (Werke, 10), 489.

² Cp. A. Sauer, *l.c.*, 2 (D.N.L., 50, 1 [1894]). Hölty's *Gedichte* have also been edited by K. Halm (*Bibl. der deutschen Nationallitt.*, 29), Leipzig, 1870.

³ A. Sauer's edition, 2, 112.

an unmistakable echo is to be heard of the classic Anacreontic. At the same time, Hölty obviously belonged to a generation which stood on a more intimate footing with nature than did the Halle school. His lyrics were not always as polished as Uz's, but the tragic melancholy that pervades them was, at least, sincere.

Only one other member of the little group of poets who danced round the oak-tree in September, 1772, has a claim upon our attention here—namely, the Swabian, J. M. Miller (1750-1814),¹ who had come to Göttingen to study theology. Many of the songs which Miller contributed to the Almanachs—his *Gedichte* did not appear in a collected edition until 1783—became veritable Volkslieder, but he is now best remembered as the author of *Siegwart*, a characteristic novel of the "Sturm und Drang," to which we shall return. In December, 1772, three months after the founding of the "Hain," two new members, the brothers Christian and Friedrich Leopold, Grafen zu Stolberg (1748-1821 and 1750-1819),² joined the circle, and infused new life into it by bringing it into closer relations with Klopstock. Neither had much genius, but, caught up and carried along by the revolutionary spirit of the time, they wrote rhetorical odes against tyrants, and sang pæons in honour of their fatherland. A volume of *Gedichte* by both brothers appeared in 1779. Their talents, however, show to most advantage in their translations from the Greek. Amongst other things, Christian made a German version of *Sofokles* (1787), while Friedrich, whose literary work is the more voluminous and important, translated the *Ilias* (1778), *Auserlesene Gespräche des Platon* (1796-97), and—as late as 1806—*Die Gedichte von Ossian*.

Besides these poets of the Göttingen "Hain," a few other writers have to be considered, who, although not actually members of the Bund, belonged to the same group; they are Claudius, Göckingk, and, most famous of all, Bürger. Matthias Claudius (1740-1815), a native of Holstein, was the oldest of the three; simple, unassuming, and pious, he is an excellent example of the literary man as produced by the homely provincialism of German life in the eighteenth century.

J. M.
Miller,
1750-1814.

C. zu Stol-
berg, 1748-
1821.
F. L. zu
Stolberg,
1750-1819.

M. Clau-
dius, 1740-
1815.

¹ Cp. A. Sauer, *l.c.*, 2 (D.N.L., 50, 1 [1894]), 117 ff.

² Cp. A. Sauer, *l.c.*, 3 (D.N.L., 50, 2 [1896]), 1 ff.

For more than four years, under the pseudonym "Asmus," Claudius edited *Der Wandsbecker Bothe* (1771-75), and, in the literary criticism which he contributed to it, revealed a good, if somewhat unimaginative, common-sense, tempered always by a genial humour; he was fond of posing as the champion of the people against both philosopher and scholar. The "Wandsbeck Messenger," as he called himself after his paper, is one of the lovable personalities of German literature. He was not an inspired poet, but he contributed to the store of German "Volkslieder" a number of hearty, popular songs, such as the *Rheinweinlied* ("Bekränzt mit Laub den lieben vollen Becher"), and the familiar *Abendlied*.—

"Der Mond ist aufgegangen,
Die goldnen Sternlein prangen
Am Himmel hell und klar;
Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget,
Und aus den Wiesen steigt
Der weisse Nebel wunderbar."¹

His writings—embracing, besides poems, a miscellaneous collection of sketches and anecdotes—were published under the fantastic title, *Asmus omnia sua secum portans, oder Sämmtliche Werke des Wandsbecker Bothen* (1775, 1790-1812).²

The intimate personal relation in which Leopold F. G. von Göckingk (1748-1828)³ stood to the Göttingen circle has made it difficult to measure his poetry by the proper standard. As a matter of fact, his verses ought rather to be compared with those of Wieland and the older Anacreontic rhymers, to whom he is in many respects akin, than with the poetry of his friends in Göttingen; on the other hand, he is in closer touch with life and reality than the generation which had not come under Klopstock's influence. Göckingk's reputation rests on his *Lieder zweier Liebenden* (1777) and his *Episteln* (first collected in the *Gedichte*, 1780-82). The passionate earnestness of the new literature is not to be found in these poems, but they show a remarkable command of verse and a clever satirical talent. It may at least be said of Göckingk that no other German writer has handled the "Epistle," as a literary form, so dexterously as he.

L. F. G.
von Göck-
ing, 1748-
1828.

¹ A. Sauer's edition, 284 f., 293 f.

² Edited by C. Redlich, 12th ed., Gotha, 1882. Cp. W. Herbst, *M. Claudius*, Gotha, 1878, and A. Sauer, *l.c.*, 3, 193 ff.

³ A selection of his poetry, edited by J. Minor, in D.N.L., 73 [1884], 115 ff.

Bürger's
Lenore,
1773.

The *Göttinger Musenalmanach* for 1774, which was published in the previous autumn, contained a poem which has exerted a more widespread influence than any other short poem in the literature of the world. This was the ballad of *Lenore* which had been suggested to G. A. Bürger by a Low German Volkslied, similar to the Scottish ballad of *Sweet William's Ghost* in Percy's *Reliques*. The background of the ballad is the Seven Years' War; Wilhelm, Lenore's lover, has fallen in the battle of Prague, and she, despairing of his return, rebels against God's Providence. In the night, a ghostly rider comes to her in the guise of her lover and bids her mount behind him.

“Und als sie sassen, hop ! hop ! hop !
Ging's fort im sausenden Galopp,
Dass Ross und Reiter schnoben,
Und Kies und Funken stoben. . . .

Wie flogen rechts, wie flogen links
Die Hügel, Bäum' und Hecken !
Wie flogen links, und rechts, und links,
Die Dörfer, Städt' und Flecken !
Graut Liebchen auch ?—Der Mond scheint hell !
Hurrah ! die Todten reiten schnell !—
Graut Liebchen auch vor Todten ?—
Ach ! lass sie ruhn, die Todten ?”¹—

When the goal of the wild ride is reached, Lenore's companion discloses himself as Death in person—a skeleton with hook and hour-glass. The spirits, dancing in the moonlight, point the moral :—

“Geduld ! Geduld ! Wenn's Herz auch bricht !
Mit Gott im Himmel hadre nicht !”

Like wildfire, this wonderful ballad swept across Europe, from Scotland to Poland and Russia, from Scandinavia to Italy. The eerie tramp of the ghostly horse which carries Lenore to her doom re-echoed in every literature, and to many a young sensitive soul was the poetic revelation of a new world. No production of the German “*Sturm und Drang*”—not even Goethe's *Werther*, which appeared a few months later—was more stimulating in its effects on other literatures than Bürger's *Lenore*; this ballad did more than

¹ A. Sauer's edition, 175 ff. ; the text of the lines quoted is, however, that of the *Almanach*, 221 ff.

any other single work towards calling the Romantic movement to life in Europe.¹

Gottfried August Bürger was born on the last night of the year 1747, at Molmerswende, near Halberstadt, and died at Göttingen in 1794. His biography describes one of those unbalanced, unhappy lives which, from this time on, become so frequent in German annals: his passionate temperament ill adapted him for the quiet regular life which circumstances demanded of him. His first serious mistake was his marriage, in 1774, to a lady with whose sister—the “Molly” of his songs—he was already passionately in love. For a time, indeed, he carried on a kind of double marriage with both sisters in the unrestrained manner of the “Geniezeit.” His wife died in 1784, and with an exultation which found expression four years later in *Das hohe Lied von der Einsigen*, he greeted the possibility of being able to marry Molly. But his happiness was short-lived; within a few months Molly, too, died. Some years later, he married again, but his third marriage was even a more miserable one than the first, and in two years ended in a divorce. Apart from these domestic miseries, Bürger was condemned to a life of poverty, first as an official in a small village, then as an unsalaried teacher in the University of Göttingen; and for a man of his nature, straitened circumstances were not compatible with happiness. Of his other ballads, *Die Weiber von Weinsberg* (1775), *Lenardo und Blandine* (1776), *Das Lied vom braven Mann* (1777), are good examples of his powers; after *Lenore*, however, *Der wilde Jäger* (1778) unquestionably takes first place. Herder had pointed out the rich spring of ballad poetry in Bishop Percy’s *Reliques*, and Bürger, by following in Herder’s footsteps, created the German Romantic ballad. His best poems are either direct translations from the English, or—like *Lenore* itself—imitations of the Percy Ballads. To this group belong, *Der Bruder Graurock und die Pilgerin* (1777), *Des Pfarrers Tochter von Taubenheim* (1781), and *Der Kaiser und der Abt* (1784). The love-songs to Molly and *Das Blümchen Wunderhold* reveal another side of Bürger’s poetic genius, while his sonnets

G. A. Bürger, 1747-94

Other ballads.

¹ Cp. E. Schmidt, *Charakteristiken*, Berlin, 1886, 199 ff.; editions of Bürger’s *Gedichte*, by A. Sauer (D.N.L., 78 [1884]) and E. Grisebach, 2 vols., Berlin, 1889. The most recent work on Bürger is by W. von Wurzbach, Leipzig, 1900.

and other experiments in the metrical forms of Romance literatures had a direct influence on the poetry of the Romantic School: A. W. Schlegel was proud to claim that, as a student in Göttingen, he had sat at Bürger's feet. Bürger, it may also be mentioned, translated from the English the *Wunderbaren Reisen zu Wasser und Lande des Freyherrn von Münchhausen* (1786), the famous "Volksbuch," which R. E. Raspe had published in England a year earlier.

There is perhaps more truth in the severe criticism of Bürger, which Schiller wrote in 1791,¹ than the critic's pointedly moral attitude towards the poet's weaknesses makes us willing to admit. The lack of balance, the defective moral principle in Bürger's life, sapped to a large extent the vitality of his poetry. Standing as he did, on the threshold of Romanticism, his career might have been a warning to his successors: he was an example of a principle, which was deeply engrained in all the Romantic writers, namely, that a man's poetry must be at one with his life, and that great poetry can only be the expression of a great life.

¹ *Sämmtliche Schriften*, ed. K. Goedeke, 6, 314 ff.

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