

WILHELM MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAVELS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOETHE

BY

THOMAS CARLYLE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I. — II

APPRENTICESHIP. Books I.—IV.



LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL,
LIMITED.
1891.

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TO THE READER.

[London, 1839.]



THESE two Translations, *Meister's Apprenticeship* and *Meister's Travels*, have long been out of print, but never altogether out of demand; nay, it would seem, the originally somewhat moderate demand has gone on increasing, and continues to increase. They are therefore here republished; and the one being in some sort a sequel to the other, though in rather unexpected sort, they are now printed together. The English version of *Meister's Travels* has been extracted, or extricated, from a Compilation of very various quality named *German Romance*; and placed by the side of the *Apprenticeship*, its forerunner, which, in the translated as in the original state, appeared hitherto as a separate work.

In the *Apprenticeship*, the first of these Translations, which was executed some fifteen years ago, under questionable auspices, I have made many little changes; but could not, unfortunately, change it into a right translation: it hung, in many places, stiff and laboured, too like some unfortunate buckram cloak round the light harmonious movement of the original; and, alas, still hangs so, here and there; and may now hang. In the second Translation, *Meister's Travels*, two years later in date, I have changed little or nothing: I might have added much; for the original, since that time, was as it were taken to pieces by the Author himself in his last years, and constructed anew; and in the Final Edition of his Works appears with multifarious intercalations, giving a great expansion both of size and of scope. Not Pedagogy only, and Husbandry and Art and Religion and Human Conduct in the Nineteenth Century, but Geology, Astronomy, Cotton-spinning, Metallurgy, Anatomical Lecturing, and much else, are typically shadowed forth in this second form of the *Travels*; which, however, continues a Fragment like the first, significantly pointing on all hands towards infinitude; not more complete than the first was, or indeed perhaps less so. It will well reward the trustful student of Goethe to read this new form of the *Travels*; and see how in that great mind, beaming in mildest mellow splendour, beaming if also trembling, like a great sun on the verge of the horizon, near now to its long farewell, all these things were illuminated and illustrated: but for the mere English reader there are probably in our prior edition of the *Travels* already novelties enough; for us, at all events, it seemed unadvisable to meddle with it farther at present.

Goethe's position towards the English Public is greatly altered since these Translations first made their appearance. Criticisms, near the mark, or farther from the mark, or even altogether far and away from any mark; of these there has been enough. These pass on their road; the man and his works remain what they are and were; more and more recognisable for what they are. Few English readers can require now to be apprised

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that these two Books, named Novels, come not under the Minerva-Press category, nor the Ballantyne-Press category, nor any such category ; that the Author is one whose secret, by no means worn upon his sleeve, will never, by any ingenuity, be got at in that way.

For a Translator, in the present case, it is enough to reflect that he who imports into his own country any true delineation, a rationally-spoken word on any subject, has done well. Ours is a wide world, peaceably admitting many different modes of speech. In our wide world there is but one altogether fatal personage—the dunce ; he that speaks *irrationally*, that sees not, and yet thinks he sees. A genuine seer and speaker, under what conditions soever, shall be welcome to us : has not he *seen* somewhat, of great Nature our common Mother's bringing-forth ; seen it, loved it, laid his heart open to it and to the Mother of it, so that he can now rationally speak it for us ? He is our brother, and a good not a bad man ; his words are like gold, precious, whether stamped in our mint, or in what mint soever stamped.

T. CARLYLE.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION OF MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP.

[*Edinburgh, 1824.*]

WHETHER it be that the quantity of genius among ourselves and the French, and the number of works more lasting than brass produced by it, have of late been so considerable as to make us independent of additional supplies ; or that, in our ancient aristocracy of intellect, we disdain to be assisted by the Germans, whom, by a species of second-sight, we have discovered, before knowing any thing about them, to be a tumid, dreaming, extravagant, insane race of mortals ; certain it is, that hitherto our literary intercourse with that nation has been very slight and precarious. After a brief period of not too judicious cordiality, the acquaintance on our part was altogether dropped : nor, in the few years since we partially resumed it, have our feelings of affection or esteem been materially increased. Our translators are unfortunate in their selection or execution, or the public is tasteless and absurd in its demands ; for, with scarcely more than one or two exceptions, the best works of Germany have lain neglected, or worse than neglected, and the Germans are yet utterly unknown to us. Kotzebue still lives in our minds as the representative of a nation that despises him ; Schiller is chiefly known to us by the monstrous production of his boyhood ; and Klopstock by a hacked and mangled image of his *Messias*, in which a beautiful poem is distorted into a theosophic rhapsody, and the brother of Virgil and Racine ranks little higher than the author of *Meditations* among the Tombs.

But of all these people there is none that has been more unjustly dealt with than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. For half a century the admiration, we might almost say the idol of his countrymen, to us he is still a stranger.

His name, long echoed and reëchoed through reviews and magazines, has become familiar to our ears : but it is a sound and nothing more ; it excites no definite idea in almost any mind. To such as know him by the faint and garbled version of his *Werter*, Goethe figures as a sort of poetic Heraclitus ; some woe-begone hypochondriac, whose eyes are overflowing with perpetual tears, whose long life has been spent in melting into ecstasy at the sight of waterfalls, and clouds, and the moral sublime, or dissolving into hysterical wailings over hapless love-stories and the miseries of human life. They are not aware that Goethe smiles at this performance of his youth ; or that the German Werter, with all his faults, is a very different person from his English namesake ; that his Sorrows are in the original recorded in a tone of strength and sarcastic emphasis, of which the other offers no vestige, and intermingled with touches of powerful thought, glimpses of a philosophy deep as it is bitter, which our sagacious translator has seen proper wholly to omit. Others again, who have fallen in with Retzsch's *Outlines* and the extracts from *Faust*, consider Goethe as a wild mystic, a dealer in demonology and osteology, who draws attention by the aid of skeletons and evil spirits, whose excellence it is to be extravagant, whose chief aim it is to do what no one but himself has tried. The tyro in German may tell us that the charm of *Faust* is altogether unconnected with its preternatural import ; that the work delineates the fate of human enthusiasm struggling against doubts and errors from within, against scepticism, contempt and selfishness from without ; and that the witchcraft and magic, intended merely as a shadowy frame for so complex and mysterious a picture of the moral world and the human soul, are introduced for the purpose not so much of being trembled at as laughed at. The voice of the tyro is not listened to ; our indolence takes part with our ignorance ; *Faust* continues to be called a monster ; and Goethe is regarded as a man of "some genius," which he has perverted to produce all manner of misfashioned prodigies ; things false, abortive, formless, Gorgons and Hydras and Chimæras dire.

Now, it must no doubt be granted, that so long as our invaluable constitution is preserved in its pristine purity, the British nation may exist in a state of comparative prosperity with very inadequate ideas of Goethe : but, at the same time, the present arrangement is an evil in its kind ; slight, it is true, and easy to be borne, yet still more easy to be remedied, and which therefore ought to have been remedied ere now. Minds like Goethe's are the common property of all nations ; and, for many reasons, all should have correct impressions of them.

It is partly with the view of doing something to supply this want, that *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is now presented to the English public. Written in its Author's forty-fifth year, embracing hints or disquisitions on almost every leading point in life and literature, it affords us a more distinct view of his matured genius, his manner of thought and favourite subjects, than any of his other works. Nor is it Goethe alone whom it portrays ; the prevailing taste of Germany is likewise indicated by it. Since the year 1795, when it first appeared at Berlin, numerous editions of *Meister* have been printed : critics of all ranks, and some of them dissenting widely from its doctrines, have loaded it with encomiums ; its songs and poems are familiar to every German ear ; the people read it, and speak of it, with an admiration approaching in many cases to enthusiasm.

That it will be equally successful in England, I am far indeed from anticipating. Apart from the above considerations, from the curiosity, intelligent or idle, which it may awaken, the number of admiring, or even approving judges it will find can scarcely fail of being very limited. To