

WILHELM MEISTER'S
APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAVELS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOETHE

BY

THOMAS CARLYLE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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WILHELM MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP.



BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

THUS Wilhelm, to his pair of former wounds, which were yet scarcely healed, had now got the accession of a third, which was fresh and not a little disagreeable. Aurelia would not suffer him to call a surgeon; she dressed the hand with all manner of strange speeches, saws and ceremonies; and so placed him in a very painful situation. Yet not he alone, but all persons who came near her, suffered by her restlessness and singularity: and no one more than little Felix. This stirring child was exceedingly impatient under such oppression, and showed himself still naughtier, the more she censured and instructed him.

He delighted in some practices which commonly are thought bad habits, and in which she would not by any means indulge him. He would drink, for example, rather from the bottle than the glass; and his food seemed visibly to have a better relish when eaten from the bowl than from the plate. Such ill-breeding was not overlooked: if he left the door standing open, or slammed it to; if when bid do anything, he stood stock-still, or ran off violently, he was sure to have a long lecture inflicted on him for the fault. Yet he showed no symptoms of improvement from this training: on the other hand, his affection for Aurelia seemed daily to diminish; there was nothing tender in his tone when he called her Mother; whereas

he passionately clung to the old nurse, who let him have his will in everything.

But she likewise had of late become so sick, that they had at last been obliged to take her from the house into a quiet lodging; and Felix would have been entirely alone, if Mignon had not, like a kindly guardian-spirit, come to help him. The two children talked together, and amused each other in the prettiest style. She taught him little songs; and he, having an excellent memory, frequently recited them, to the surprise of those about him. She attempted also to explain her maps to him. With these she was still very busy, though she did not seem to take the fittest method. For, in studying countries, she appeared to care little about any other point than whether they were cold or warm. Of the north and south Poles, of the horrid ice which reigns there, and of the increasing heat the farther one retires from them, she could give a very clear account. When any one was travelling, she merely asked whether he was going northward or southward; and strove to find his route in her little charts. Especially when Wilhelm spoke of travelling, she was all attention, and seemed vexed when anything occurred to change the subject. Though she could not be prevailed upon to undertake a part, or even to enter the theatre when any play was acting, yet she willingly and zealously committed many odes and songs to memory; and by unexpectedly, and as it were on the spur of the moment, reciting some such poem, generally of the earnest and solemn kind, she would often cause astonishment in every one.

Serlo, accustomed to regard with favour every trace of opening talent, encouraged her in such performances: but what pleased him most in Mignon was her sprightly, various and often even mirthful singing. By means of a similar gift, the Harper likewise had acquired his favour.

Without himself possessing genius for music, or playing on any instrument, Serlo could rightly prize the value of the art; he failed not, as often as he could, to enjoy this pleasure, which cannot be compared with any other. He held a concert once a-week; and now, with Mignon, the Harper and Laertes, who was not unskilful on the violin, he had formed a very curious domestic band.

He was wont to say: "Men are so inclined to content themselves with what is commonest; the spirit and the senses

so easily grow dead to the impressions of the beautiful and perfect, that every one should study, by all methods, to nourish in his mind the faculty of feeling these things. For no man can bear to be entirely deprived of such enjoyments: it is only because they are not used to taste of what is excellent, that the generality of people take delight in silly and insipid things, provided they be new. For this reason," he would add, "one ought every day at least to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words." With such a turn of thought in Serlo, which in some degree was natural to him, the persons who frequented his society could scarcely be in want of pleasant conversation.

It was in the midst of these instructive entertainments, that Wilhelm one day received a letter sealed in black. Werner's hand betokened mournful news; and our friend was not a little shocked when, opening the sheet, he found it to contain the tidings of his father's death, conveyed in a very few words. After a short and sudden illness he had parted from the world, leaving his domestic affairs in the best possible order.

This unlooked-for intelligence struck Wilhelm to the heart. He deeply felt how careless and negligent we often are of friends and relations while they inhabit with us this terrestrial sojourn; and how we first repent of our insensibility when the fair union, at least for this side of time, is finally cut asunder. His grief for the early death of this honest parent was mitigated only by the feeling, that he had loved but little in the world, and the conviction that he had enjoyed but little.

Wilhelm's thoughts soon turned to his own predicament; and he felt himself extremely discomposed. A person can scarcely be put into a more dangerous position, than when external circumstances have produced some striking change in his condition, without his manner of feeling and of thinking having undergone any preparation for it. There is then an epoch without epoch; and the contradiction which arises is the greater, the less the person feels that he is not trained for this new manner of existence.

Wilhelm saw himself in freedom, at a moment when he could not yet be at one with himself. His thoughts were noble, his motives pure, his purposes were not to be despised. All this he could with some degree of confidence acknowledge to himself: but he had of late been frequently enough compelled