

*The*  
OPEN COURT

Devoted to the Science of Religion,  
the Religion of Science, and the Extension  
of the Religious Parliament Idea

FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

AUGUST, 1931

←————→  
VOLUME XLV      NUMBER 903

*Price 20 Cents*

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Wieboldt Hall, 339 East Chicago Avenue  
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EDITED BY

FRANK THILLY

and G. WATTS CUNNINGHAM

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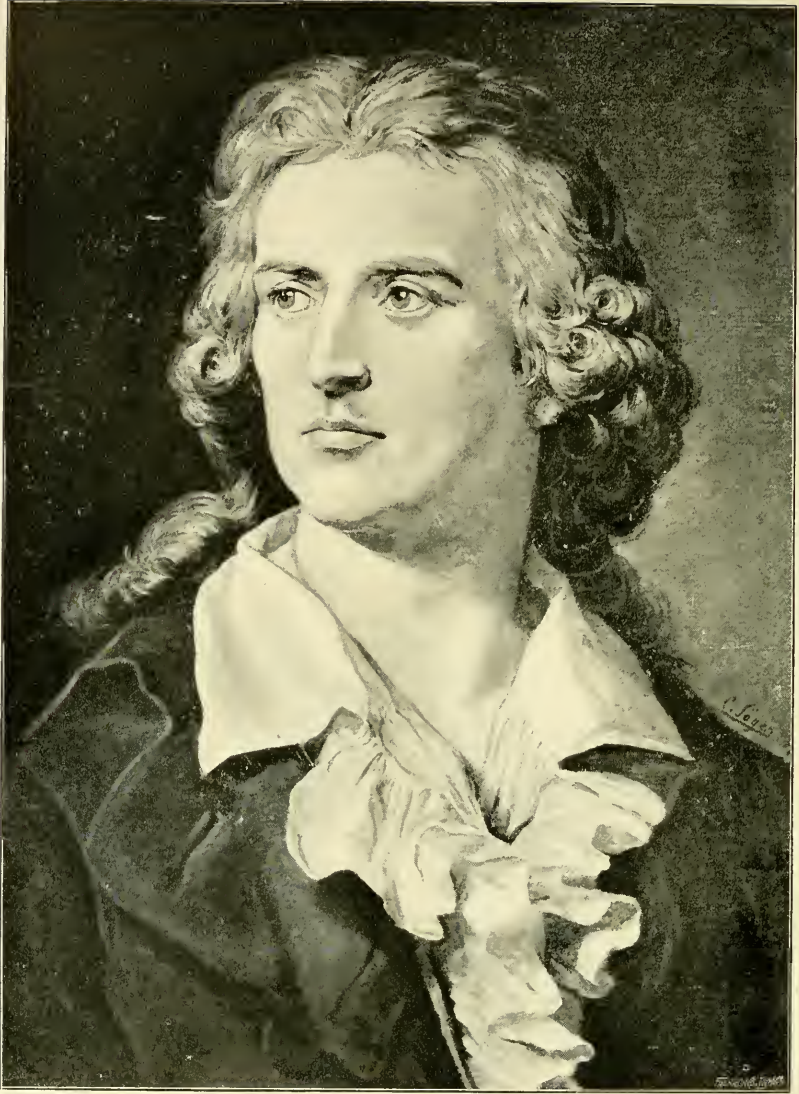
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## A GREAT ETHICAL POEM: SCHILLER'S "IDEAL UND DAS LEBEN"

BY WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHERIE

THERE has been of late much discussion of Keats' paradox, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." No more irritating granite boulder was ever found in the honey-jar of supposedly innocent "art for art's sake" poetry. J. Middleton Murry has delicately solved the problem it raises, in his "Keats and Shakespeare," and his "Studies in Keats," recently published by the Oxford Press.

Perhaps, indeed, our philosophers in England are addressing themselves over-seriously to the dissection of Keats. To think of our beloved enchanter as a constructive metaphysician, seems almost amusing. And yet how could it be otherwise than that a serious, ambitious, highly gifted youth should ponder in his own fresh amateur way the perennial problems of the universe? Whoever thinks he can be excused from systematic thought, because he is an artist, or a practical scientist, is merely depriving himself of the aids to reflection that have been created by an age-long succession of great thinkers. There is no escape for the poet, whose art uses language, from ethical and philosophical inferences. His words themselves bear independent witness to the spiritual travail of their users. I suppose that not even a nonsense rhymer could escape meaning, and meaning again suggests further meaning, if the words themselves be worthy to hold attention. From meaning to meaning, we will pass on, then, until we glimpse the horizon, or look up awe-struck to the zenith. Always the destiny of man, individual, social, racial, will sooner or later force itself upon the most unwilling mind. A butterfly, a briar-rose, a cat-bird, the wind in the spring trees, a glimpse of the sea—any topic, however remote, and the problem of eternity is sprung. It is impossible to

be an "art for art's sake" artist seriously, or with fine deliberate flippancy, producing things of beauty, and not surprise or appall the reader with long, long thoughts of love, of death, of shame and glory.

No one probably likes "didactic verse" less than the present writer. There was a time, to be sure, when it had its excellent *raison d'être*. Verse itself was no doubt primarily mnemonic. It was to recall to mind that words were ordered rhythmically; that the jingle of initial or final rhyme marked the beat; that phrases were balanced in the deadly parallel, life-giving to the proverbial commonplace.

But man soon found that he wanted to remember other things besides saws, gnomic judgments and oracles. There were ancestral heroes to celebrate; so the epic muse began her creative work. She perpetuated ideals. She created, by fame and infamy, a system of rewards and punishments. It was an awful thing to fall into disfavor with the blind Homer. Now to this very day do not Achilles and Hector, Helen and Nausicaa live, with a life so much more significant than that of the list of our Presidential worthies, for instance, or Chief Justices? A few more centuries, and we will have to dig up Hoover, but we will have to take no such trouble with Odysseus, his fair spouse, or his island enchantress!

Thus poetry was to men the first giver of immortality. And yet, even so, busy with men and women, it dealt far more profoundly, because half-consciously at best, with the meaning of life. What in man was worthy of worship? So it was that the poets fashioned the gods, and the gods in turn created, and solemnized institutions.

However modern we may be and impatient of control outside our own consciousness, the wisdom that comes winsomely finds a ready welcome. The prophet must be the poet, or his own children shall not remember his doctrine. And even blunders can be of service, when an interpolated whale can keep Jonah to the forefront of discussion, and a fictitious turkey make the meanest moron acquainted with Job!

What the poets, then, may think on the great themes, cannot but be contagious. True, it is not their gift as poets warrants their philosophy, but their genius may somehow sift the current evidence for them, and give them insight, where other men are blind,

overwhelmed with too much learning or fear of displaying their lack thereof. And facts, among men of genius, are verbally articulate. So the supreme poets, in quest of beauty, may be ravished by wisdom on the way,—and ravish us in turn.

In these times, we are most suspicious of the stoic appeal. We do not want to hear of principles. We suspect discipline. We forget the athletic origin of ascetic theory. Yet if we read German, how can we escape the splendor of Schiller's finest work,—escape its subtle magic of rhythm and phrase? His fury and fervor of enthusiasm for noble ends? His rapture in the mere memory of genius? Those of us who were subjected to the spell in our boyhood cannot willingly forget all that it meant to us then. A poet who was popular in the best sense, appealing to youth, and at the same time sober, priestly, prophetic, historically and philosophically serious, but above all things endowed with that irresistible magic for which there is no formula, and from which there is as yet no rational protection, cannot but hold his own. Unluckily for English readers, Bowring, and even Arnold-Forster, have not succeeded in transferring to our language Schiller's "Cranes of Ibycus," with all the somber terror of the original. We have not shuddered as we should, watching the tramp and stamp of the Æschylean chorus of the Eumenides. "The Gods of Greece" have not moved us to pathetic yearning for the blessed days gone by, as they should. "The Diver," "The Ring of Polycrates," "The Fight with the Dragon"—none of these leap from the English page with dominant power over our pulses, and guide our passions unawares by ways of security to peace. The somber awe and anguish (as of a play of Ford and one of Webster fused, with something of the hammer of Kipling beating time for cataracts of Swinburnian euphony) in the choruses of that tale of chaste incest, "The Bride of Messina," have permanently taken possession of our deepest selves as Poe with his more ghastly and obvious shudders never could.

They, then, who have not in a German-reading boyhood known Schiller, walked with him in the "Walk," danced with him in his "Dance," and bowed with him to "Genius," defying "Fortune," cannot be expected perhaps to share altogether with us the reverence we feel for "Life and the Ideal." But maybe they will not object to have one more effort made, honestly, on their behalf, to transfer something of its enthusiasm, conveyed through lines of

English words, ordered as faithfully as may be to the verse form of the original.

This supreme ethical poem of Schiller concludes with a noble picture of Herakles, so that for thirteen stanzas we are merely climbing step by step to reach a height whence we may see the heaven of Zeus open to us, and the Queen of Heaven, blue-eyed Hera, bow down to greet him whom she has persecuted, only that he might mount the nobler from his self-lit pyre, and be wedded to Hebe in the Olympian presence, where all the gods do honor to what in man is mightiest, most resolute, most aspiring,—tho' never, in false asceticism, resigned to forego beauty and joy at the end.

Like Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the doctrine of the poem appeals only to the valiant. It is explicit, however, and hence perhaps the modern reader will not respond to it altogether so mystically. May be he would rather have his moral sanctions Hugoesquely delivered in one great gesture of the creative finger, or uttered in one shrill shriek of "Fiat Lux!" Perhaps the modern prefers to read once again Rudyard Kipling's outmoded "If," and have his duty set forth to him with Anglo-Saxon balance. Yet even so, if he is for achievement's sake prepared for abstinences, and inured by sheer sportsmanship to disciplines, and resolved, if need be, to self-immolation for the sake of that high irrational lure of derring-do, he may undertake to become imaginatively a companion in deed and truth of Herakles, so as to pass at the last with him from sacrificial labors into the heaven of triumphant thought, upborne by the very flames kindled of the world's consuming fire. For that pyre of Herakles is only in small the cosmic Ragnarock that prepares for the new green world of golden-haired, apple-cheeked Baldur, and Nanda, his beloved, who followed him in death and now rises hand in hand with him to fairer life. That pyre is symbolically identical with Elijah's chariot of the snorting steeds, and also with the transfiguring bolt of Zeus, that upbore the blind, Lear-like King, in Sophocles' "Œdipus Coloneus," above the too great woes of outcast age.

Here, then, is our best result of many years of labor, often dropped, only to be resumed; not the poem itself, alas, the stanzas interrupted by a prose analysis—but the shadow it has cast over a life progressively devoted to keeping fresh the tradition of truth and beauty as at their worthiest only when one with each other, crowning virtue with worship.



## LIFE AND THE IDEAL

## I.

Because of the limitations of our body and person, we are forced to the cruel choice between sense enjoyment and soul contentment.

Ever crystal-fair and zephyr-soft  
 Life glideth calmly by, where throne aloft  
     The blessèd Gods on heights Olympian;  
 Moons wax and wane,—folk-kindreds come and go—  
 But still the roses of their youth will blow  
     Changeless 'mid wreck of worlds. Ah me, and man  
 Confronts the Choice (doubtful at best, and sad)  
     Between a thrill of sense—and peace of soul!  
 The brows of the high Gods alone are glad  
     Of these twain, wedded to one joyous whole.

## II.

Let us not then bind ourselves over as slaves to sense.

O sons of men, even here and now would ye  
 Be like the Gods in Death's dominion—free?  
     Then pluck none of his garden's luring fruit.  
 On the fair show of things delight your eye:  
 Possession yieldeth joys that straightway die,  
     And slayeth sweet desire in swift pursuit.  
 Yea, Styx, Demeter's child with black folds nine  
     Of fathomless stagnant water, could not hold:  
 For that she took death's apple, must she pine,  
     Chained to the grisly law of Orcus cold.

## III.

Yet even now we may elect to establish our residence in the heavenly city.

Howbeit the powers, that weave our darkling fate,  
 Beyond this body cannot wreak their hate:  
     Unbound by tyrannies of time and space,  
 Playmate of happy sprites o'er fields of day,  
 Familiar of the Gods, divine as they,  
     Form moveth, haloed of immortal grace.  
 Would ye soar thither, wafted of her wings,  
 Ev'n now? Forthwith, earth's fears beneath you hurled,  
 Breaking the clutch of narrow dismal things,  
     From life take flight into the Ideal world!

## IV.

There may we commune with the Ideal of man and by faith anticipate the victory of our holy causes.

Young yonder abideth ever, without flaw  
 Or earthly blemish—in radiance and awe  
     Of perfect bloom—the human Form divine:  
 As fared the shades by Stygian marges dumb  
 In calm sheen through a fabled Elysium:  
     Rather, as stood—the azure for his shrine—  
 The eternal Soul ere to the fleshly tomb  
     She made descent out of her glorious place,  
 When the scales of battle in life tremble with doom,  
     There victory greets thee, smiling, face to face.

## V.

Yet our citizenship in the Kingdom of the Spirit must not relax our efforts on earth, but only increase or renew our strength and courage.

Not craven limbs to rescue from the strife,  
 But to refresh the living with new life,  
     See, Victory waves her fragrant garland thus!  
 Implacable, howe'er ye yearn for rest,  
 Life hurtleth you on her steep-billowy breast  
     While swift time swirleth 'round uproarious.  
 But should your courage waver—her quivering wings  
     Adroop for the dread sense of limits dire—  
 Look up to yonder heights, where Beauty brings  
 Unto their goal your spirit, that dared aspire!

## VI.

This world below is so ordered that for sport or work alike none can succeed save at cost of strength, skill and courage, else would weakness, incompetency and cowardice prevail.

When war is wag'd for lordship or defence—  
 Champion eyes champion, grappling might immense  
     With defter might—at fortune's call or fame's—  
 Bare-handed Valor ill copeth with armed force;  
 Likewise where chariots o'er the dust-chok'd course  
     Shatter each other in th' heroic games,  
 Courage alone can wrest him prize and praise  
     That beckon from far goals attain'd; alone  
 The Strong may master fate, while all his days  
     The dastard weakling shall his fall bemoan.

## VII.

Yet it is the capable brave who most often require to rest, and to realize the stillness and sweetness that mark the larger life.

Yet see, the River of life,—tho' hurling fierce  
 Torrents of foam where crags close-hem and pierce  
 His stream,—floweth smooth, gentle, sinuous  
 Thro' visionary calm of Beauty's vale,  
 Mirroring on his silver edges pale  
 Aurora blithe, or twinkling Hesperus!  
 Dissolv'd in gracious mutual love, and bound  
 Together freely in bands of comeliness,  
 Here impulse hath, and passion, respite found.  
 And foes ban ire, sweet fellowship to bless.

## VIII.

No fashioner of beauty can presume on his easier access to the world of imagination. If he would glorify the Ideal he beholds, he must endure hardship.

When fashioning Genius would a soul create  
 In what ere then was lifeless—fain to mate  
 Pure Form with Substance at his urgent will—  
 Bid manful diligence strain every nerve,  
 Bid courage vanquish matter, till it serve,  
 And the whole purpose of the Thought fulfill:  
 Only stern toil, and stubborn quest shall hear  
 The murmur'd runes from deep-hid wells of truth;  
 Only the chisel's valiant stroke lays bare  
 What lurks within the marble block uncouth.

## IX

If, however, he should lose vision and confidence, he may behold his work already perfect in ideal pre-existence—the pattern on the Mount—and so be enabled to toil the better for its partial realization here.

But if to Beauty's realm thou penetrate,  
 Below Sloth tarrieth with leaden weight  
 Amid the dust, in the heavy clod it sways.  
 Wrung with no aching toil from the crude mass  
 Behold, there,—sprung from nothing, come to pass  
 Even of herself—thy Vision beyond praise!  
 Quell'd be thy struggle, all thy doubt allayed  
 In a serene content at mastery won;  
 For now, no trace is left of what betrayed  
 A human frailty in the work begun!

## X.

All are in the truest sense artists, fashioners of their own character, and awful indeed is the discovery of the inevitable discrepancy between principle and performance.

Whenso in man's poor nakedness ye face  
 The majesty of law, your pride abase ;  
     Even to the *Holy One* guilt draweth nigh.  
 Well may stout virtue quail before the rays  
 Of steadfast truth, and with averted gaze  
     Your deeds avoid the Perfect's penetrant eye.  
 For never mortal but his aim must miss.  
     No boat may ferry, and no bridge may bear  
 Athwart yon frightful sundering abyss ;  
     Nor soundeth anchor its swallowing despair.

## XI.

But even now our mystic faith can afford comfort and consolation, for by union with Divinity man may within himself adore his God, and share in some degree his bliss.

Up, and take sanctuary from imprisoning sense  
 In the far freedom of high thought,—for thence  
     Hath every fear-begotten phantom flown ;  
 The gap 'twixt purpose and achievement fills.  
 Draw then the God into your inmost wills,  
     And he forsakes for you his cosmic throne.  
 None but the slave's mind balks at fettering sway,  
 Who of the law hath scorn'd the chastening rod ;  
 For lo, with man's resistance pass away  
     Likewise the threatful sovereignties of God.

## XII.

Nevertheless, we are not God, save in aspiration, and must feel as our own the woes and iniquities of our fellows, so that at times we are driven to rebel, until our very desire for communion with God will fail.

When the vast anguish of the human race  
 Harroweth, and Laocoön's tortured face  
     Of dumb woe, throttled by the monster snake,  
 Ye front : 'tis right your manhood should rebel,  
 And unto heaven proclaim the griefs of hell  
     Until your heart for rueful sorrow break.  
 'Tis well that Nature's voice of dread prevail,  
     And pallid youth grieve with tear-blinded eyes ;  
 That death-pangs should your deathless Self assail,  
     When ye for fellow-feeling agonize.

## XIII.

Yet in due time we learn that all human evil may be made to bear fruit in higher good, and the sufferer be transfigured to a thing divine.

Yet nevermore in yon sun-happy realm,  
 Where the pure Forms abide, shall overwhelm  
 The mind such turbid wash of human woe.  
 There may not pain thro' the soul's armor pierce,  
 Nor blighting tears be shed. Earth's fury fierce  
 Lives only in the spirit's battle-glow—  
 Lovely, as hover shimmering rainbow hues  
 Over the thunderous rack with sprightly glee;  
 So thro' cloud-veils of moody gloom transfuse  
 Bright skies of cheer, and fair felicity!

## XIV.

So at least the old Hellenic myth teaches: The Divinely Begotten was persecuted only to challenge and bring to fuller manifestation the hidden God in him.

Such lore the antique myth to men made plain:—  
 How Zeus of yore did Herakles constrain  
 To serve the coward, and bear his rule unjust;  
 Humbl'd he track'd life's footsore ways, and fought  
 Unceasing: lion and hydra slaying, wrought  
 With his own hands huge labors; yea, and thrust  
 His body alive in Charon's doleful bark  
 Dear friends to loose. Dire plagues and burdens great  
 Hera devis'd, and grievous care and cark—  
 Yet ever his fortitude outsped her hate:

## XV.

Wherefore, when he had fully established his divine sonship, he reconciled mankind to his inevitable passion and their own.

Until his course was run; until in fire  
 Stripping the earthly raiment, on the pyre  
 The hero, freed, breath'd Empyréan airs;  
 Blithe-hearted at his new-got power of flight,  
 Upward he soared from joyful height to height,  
 While down as an ill dream sank earth's dull cares.  
 Olympian harmonies the Man unfold,  
 Transfigur'd in the shining hall of Zeus.  
 With smile and blush, the Goddess, see, doth hold  
 To his lips at length her cup of heavenly bliss!