

CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC LITERATURE.

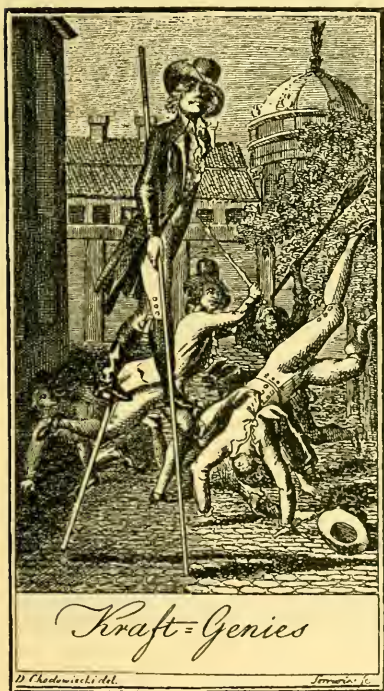
COMMENTS ON GOETHE'S POEM, "NATURE AND ART."

BY THE EDITOR.

BY classical we understand everything in art and literature that has become accepted as a model of perfection, or at least that complies with, and conforms to, the rules of the recognized standard. In contrast to the classical, stand all those, be they artists or authors, who repudiate rule, or standard, or authority and proclaim the liberty of genius. These opponents of classical taste go under different names. They were prominent before as well as after the appearance of Goethe's most classical literature, and it seems as if epochs of classicism were constantly alternating with anti-classical tendencies.

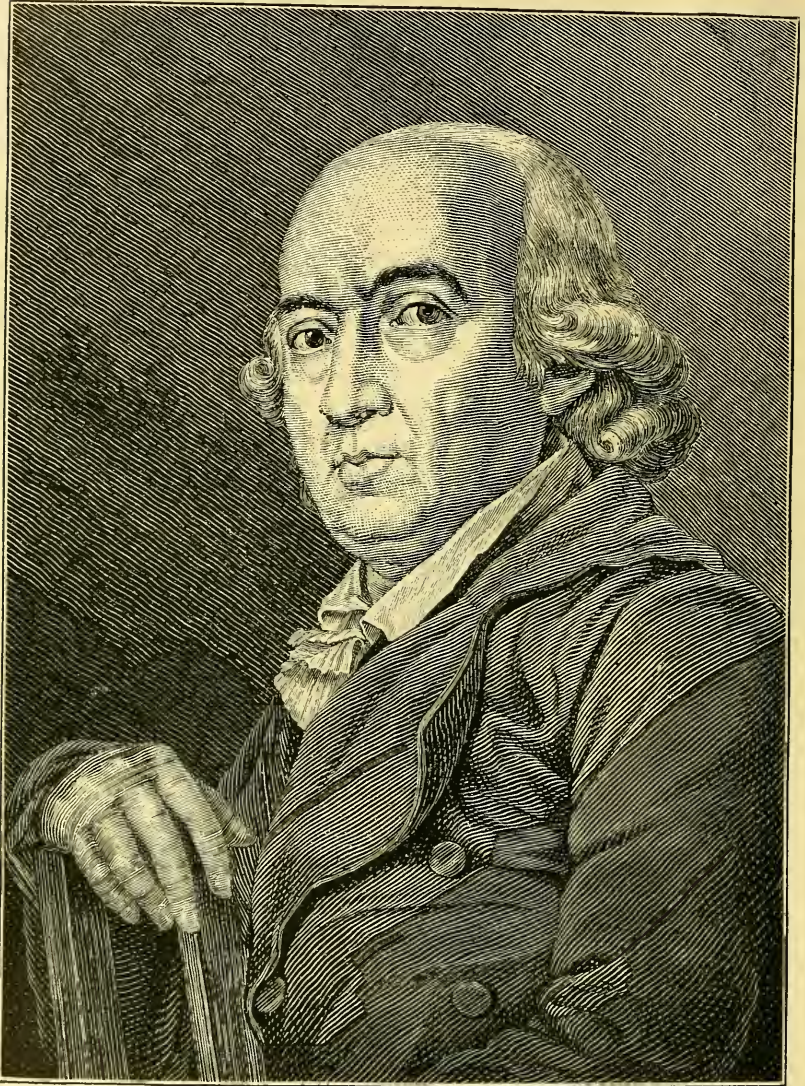
The poets of the time of Goethe's youth reveled in the thought that genius should be untrammelled by conventionalities, traditions or considerations of any kind. No standards, not even those of common morality, must be tolerated, while full play should be given to sentiment, to

a most vigorous self-realization, to an unimpeded actualization of anexuberant joy of life, of *Lebenslust* and of passion, which was



A CONTEMPORARY CARICATURE.

justified by the plea that passion represented the promptings of nature. Nature was the ideal of this period, and "Back to nature"



JOHANN GOTTFRIED VON HERDER.

After a crayon drawing from life by Bury. Original in possession of Herder's grandson, Councillor Stichling of Weimar.

was the slogan, whose note had first been sounded by Jean Jacques Rousseau.

The leading spirits of this epoch, viz., the time preceding the efflorescence of classical literature in Germany, named this movement the period of genius, and one of the most prominent among them, Klinger, characterized its aspirations in a drama which in its days was much admired, but is now generally known only for its title, *Sturm und Drang*, i. e., "Storm and Stress," a title which after-



FRIEDRICH MAXIMILIAN KLINGER.¹

After a drawing by Goethe, 1775.



MALER MÜLLER.²

After an engraving by Ludwig E. Grimm, 1816.

wards furnished the name by which this period of German literature became known.

The main poets of the classical period, Goethe, Schiller, Herder and even Lessing, took an active part in this movement of Storm and Stress, or as it was then thought to be, of untrammelled genius. Herder wrote in 1777 "The Fragments," from which the beginning of the epoch is dated, Goethe wrote "Werther" and "Goetz," and

¹ Klinger was born February 17, 1752; he came in contact with Goethe at Weimar in 1776; he served first in the Austrian and then in the Russian army, rising in the latter to the rank of lieutenant-general; in Russia he was knighted. He died February 25, 1831, at St. Petersburg.

² Friedrich Müller, born January 13, 1749 at Kreuznach, became a convert to Roman Catholicism and died at Rome April 23, 1825. He combined with his poetic talent other artistic gifts, and is generally known as "Painter Müller" (*Maler Müller*) to distinguish him from the many other Müllers.

Schiller, "The Robbers." Even the sober Lessing was for some time not a little under its influence, but while Klinger and Maler Müller never outgrew the crudities of this naturalism all the others here



FRIEDRICH SCHILLER.
After a drawing by Jagemann.

mentioned matured when they developed to the fulness of their manhood and sobered down to a recognition of the need, or perhaps the helpfulness and indispensableness of rules, and they adopted the

standards of former classical periods, especially those established in Greek antiquity. Through the observance of rule they succeeded in rising above nature and building there with nature's own materials a realm of a higher and purer nobility, the realm of art.

The triumph of these greater men ended the period of storm and stress and rendered impossible a further recognition of these



THE YOUNG GOETHE.

After a crayon drawing by Johann Hieronymus Lips in 1791. The original is preserved in the *Freie deutsche Hochstift*, Frankfort on the Main.

wild geniuses. The epoch of the men of nature, or raw genius, of the spirit of rebellion, ends with the appearance of Schiller's "Don Carlos" in 1787, and posterity judges of this movement merely as a time of preparation for genuine art and the higher classical literature which developed out of it. It was the age of the immaturity

of genius, and so it is well characterized as a period of storm and stress.

Goethe and Schiller as well as the other classical writers, among whom Herder, Wieland and Lessing deserve special mention, did



AUGUST WILHELM VON SCHLEGEL.

Painted by Hoheneck.

their best work when they allowed their poetical effusions to be guided by rule. To be sure we find nature in their works, yet its impulsive impetuosity is moderated by the dignity of art.

Both the young Goethe and the the young Schiller were for

some time in search for an expression of the highest and best, and in their younger years they passed through a period of wildest irregularities which, however, they gradually outgrew without losing the genius and vigor of their early aspirations. In his best years Goethe was apt to antagonize those who would take nature as the only



LUDWIG TIECK.
Painted by Joseph Stieler.

guide, and for a long time he was prejudiced against Schiller because he disliked his drama "The Robbers." In his later years, however, Goethe broadened and without losing his preference for the classical, he saw more and more the significant part which these

wild promptings play in the development of man. In the history of literature the pendulum naturally swings back from classic regularity to a recognition of sentiment, and in his old age, Goethe may at the same time have felt that nature, even in her irregularities, is dominated by a law which will gradually assert itself, even in those who scorn the rule of art.

Under these impressions Goethe wrote a sonnet for which the preceding remarks will serve as a commentary. In this Goethe returns to a recognition of the rights of nature, and he concedes that nature with her immediate promptings will help to warm our hearts, but after all, he remains faithful to the classical ideal by saying:

"Who wants great things must practice self-control;
In limitation shows himself the master,
And liberty needs law for wise direction."

In the year following the classical period, a reaction set in against the rigidity of classical taste, and thus we find again a number of men who, scorning a definite standard, prefer to follow sentimental impulses. They were not as wild and reckless as the geniuses of the period of storm and stress, but they yielded the more to the vagueness of mysticism and reveled in religious as well as patriotic sentimentality. They fled from the present and sought their ideals in the past, especially the Middle Ages with their knights errant, crusades and adventures, mostly recorded by authors of the Romance nations. Hence they are called by the collective name of romantic school.

It seems as if mankind can not cling to a definite ideal for any length of time. Whenever men attain the classical, they long for a change, and so history repeats itself. Even in our days we witness again the upheaval of a sentimental revolution which would discard all norm even in science and philosophy. It appears that people have become tired of definiteness in their conception of truth, and wish to replace it by something quite original, the result being aberrations and vagaries. And yet these periods are natural and in many respects even justified and helpful, for they teach mankind to dig for the truth again and again; for the truth is not true if it is not true to me, and nothing is really true to me unless I have searched for and found the truth myself. Therefore we—every one of us—must discover the same old truths.

Says Faust in the first act of Goethe's great drama:

"Yea, the inheritance which parents left thee
Earn it anew to really possess it."

Goethe's sonnet to which we refer here has never as yet been translated and we have attempted to put it into English verse, thus:³

"Nature and art each other seem to flee,
 Yet unexpectedly again they meet.
 All my objections now are obsolete
 For both apparently with me agree.
 Honest endeavor here will needed be,
 And when in hours with thoughtfulness replete
 We give ourselves to art with zeal complete,
 May nature warm our hearts and make them free.

"Thus only culture can attain its goal.
 In vain wild spirits will, with methods faster
 And broader, seek the heights of pure perfection.
 Who wants great things must practice self-control;
 In limitation shows himself the master,
 And liberty needs laws for wise direction."

The meaning of the terms Nature and Art will be understood by those who have followed our expositions. Nature is the ideal of the men of storm and stress, of impressionists, of the Romantic school, of sentimentalists. Goethe had been opposed to genius that was sowing its wild oats, but now he grants it the right of existence, but prophesies that it will not reach the perfection of Art. He wants liberty, not license, even in poetry, and declares that great things can be accomplished only by self-control and self-limitation.

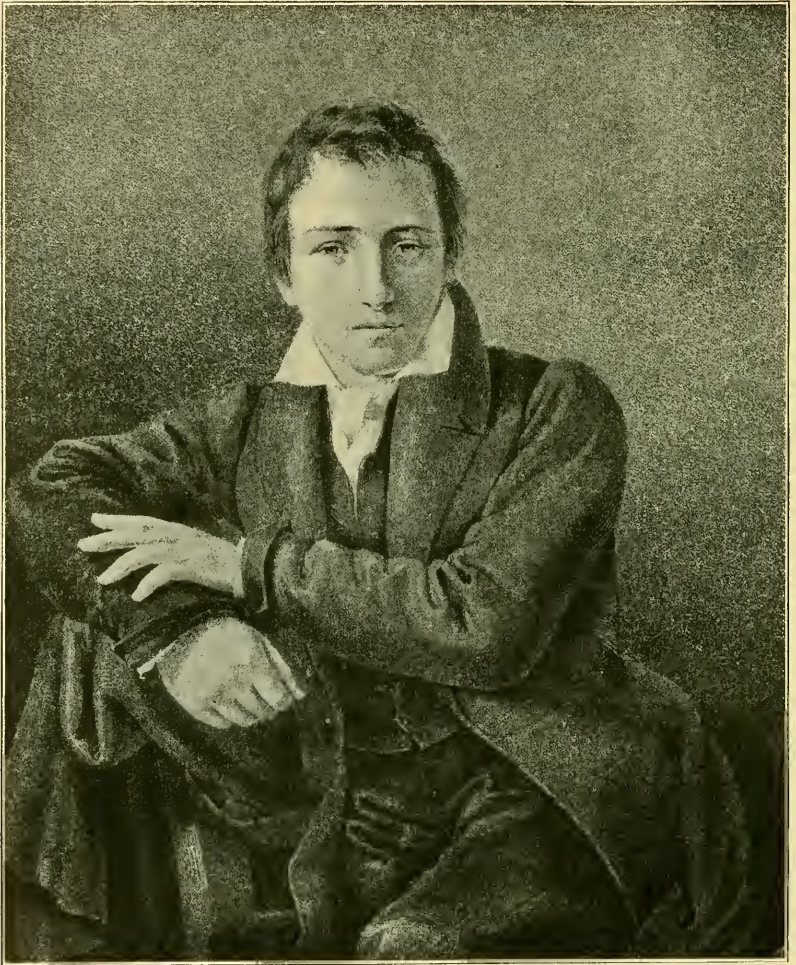
Mankind, however, tires easily of self-control, of rule, of limitation and also of the classical. The pendulum swings to and fro and after the classical period Germany experienced a vigorous re-

³ On reading this sonnet before the *Verein aller deutscher Studenten*, I learned from Prof. J. T. Hatfield, of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, that he also has translated the same poem, and with his permission I take pleasure in reprinting it here from his series of "Poems from the German," published in No. 10 of William S. Lord's little leaflet entitled *Noon*:

"Nature and Art seem oftentimes to be foes,
 But, ere we know it, join in making peace;
 My own repugnance, too, has come to cease,
 And each an equal power attractive shows.
 Let us but make an end to dull repose:
 When Art we serve in toil without release,
 Through stated hours, absolved from vain caprice,
 Nature once more within us freely glows.

"All culture, as I hold, must take this course;
 Unbridled spirits ever strive in vain
 Perfection's radiant summit to attain.
 Who seeks great ends must straitly curb his force;
 In narrow bounds the Master's skill shall show,
 And only Law true Freedom can bestow."

vival of Romanticism. Its leading spirits were the Schlegel brothers (of whom August Wilhelm is the more important), Tieck, and a great number of minor poets of whom we will mention Hardenberg



HEINRICH HEINE.

Born, December 13, 1797 or 1799, at Düsseldorf; died February, 17, 1856 at Paris. (After a painting by Moritz Oppenheim.)

who under the pseudonym Novalis has written some very touching religious lyrics, some of which will remain for all ages a most noble expression of Christian piety. We may also classify Heine with

them, although he was least tinged with the reactionary spirit and a hankering after the poetry of the Middle Ages.

Romanticism has produced many beautiful works of literature, but after all, the classical productions of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing



NOVALIS.

and Herder have proved more enduring. Romantic poetry is almost forgotten while we return again and again to the great masters of classic art.