

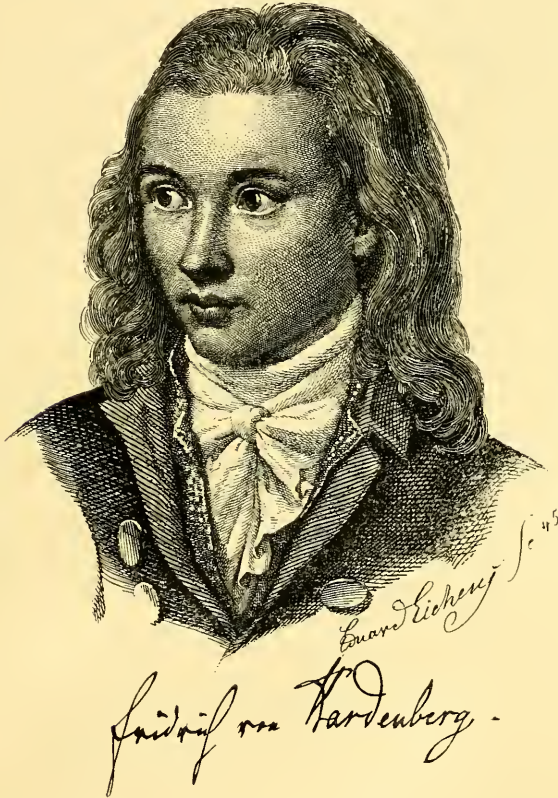
## NOVALIS.

BY BERNHARD PICK.

FRIEDRICH von Hardenberg, better known by the name of Novalis, was born at Wiederstedt in Mansfeld territory, near Eisleben, May 2, 1772. His father, who had been a soldier in his youth, and still retained a liking for that profession, was at this time director of the Saxon Saltworks at Weissenfels. Tieck says, "He was a vigorous, unweariedly active man, of open, resolute character, a true German. His religious feelings made him a member of the Herrnhut Communion, yet his disposition continued gay, frank, rugged and uncompromising." The mother also was distinguished for her worth; "a model of noble piety and Christian mildness," virtues which her subsequent life gave ample opportunity for exercising. Friedrich, her second child and first son, was very delicate in childhood; he was of a dreamy disposition and betrayed little spirit, and only the enthusiastic affection with which he loved his mother, distinguished him beyond his apparently more gifted brothers and sisters. In consequence of a violent bilious disease which befell him in his ninth year, his faculties seemed to awaken into proper life, and he became the readiest and most eager learner in all branches of his studies. In his eighteenth year, after a few months of preparation in the gymnasium at Eisleben, he repaired to Jena in 1790. Here he continued for three years, after which he spent one season in the Leipsic University, and another at Wittenberg. At Jena he studied philosophy under Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling, who exerted a lasting influence upon his mind. At Leipsic he became intimately connected with Friedrich Schlegel, one of the main leaders of the so-called Romantic school, while at Wittenberg, influenced by Friedrich von Schiller, who showed him the ideal side of practical activity, he studied chemistry, mathematics, history and jurisprudence, but especially Church history.

But the time had now arrived when study must become sub-

ordinate to action, and what is called a profession had to be determined upon. At the breaking out of the French Revolution, Novalis had been seized with a strong and altogether unexpected taste for military life; however, the entreaties of his relatives ultimately prevailed, and it was settled that he should follow his father's line of occupation. In 1794 he gave up his studies at Wittenberg, and went to Tennstedt in Thuringia "to train himself in practical affairs under the Kreisamtmann Just."



Soon after his arrival at Tennstedt Novalis met Sophie von Kuehn in a country mansion of the neighborhood. She was then thirteen years of age, but the first glimpse of her fair and wonderfully lovely form was decisive for his whole life.

Tieck speaks of her in the following manner:

"All persons that have known this wondrous loved one of our friend, agree in testifying that no description can express in what

grace and celestial harmony this fair being moved, what beauty shone in her, what gentleness and majesty encircled her."

The same author says:

"The spring and summer of 1795 were the blooming time of Hardenberg's life; every hour that he could spare from business he spent in Grüningen; and in the fall of that same year he obtained the desired consent of Sophie's parents."

Unhappily, however, these halcyon days were of too short continuance. Sophie fell dangerously sick, and the 19th of March, 1797, two days after her fifteenth birthday, she passed away. The death of his beloved became to Novalis the turning-point of his inner life. It reminded him that he also was no longer a citizen of this world, but of the other. To this period belong his *Hymnen an die Nacht*, or "Hymns to the Night," consisting of five prose poems interspersed with verse, and a sixth entirely in verse. In these he wrote "of the vague longings or aspirations of the soul as higher and truer than all science and philosophy."

With reference to the "Hymns" Carlyle says of Novalis: "Naturally a deep, religious, contemplative spirit, purified also, as we have seen, by harsh affliction, and familiar in the 'sanctuary of sorrow,' he comes before us as the most ideal of all idealists."

Sophie von Hardenberg, the accomplished authoress of *Friedrich von Hardenberg, genannt Novalis, eine Nachlese aus den Quellen des Familienarchivs* (2d ed., Gotha, 1883), says: "Why do the 'Hymns to the Night' so peculiarly lay hold of the soul of the reader? It is because they show the transformation of the poet into a Christian. In these Hymns his deepest sorrow appears transfigured by a more than earthly splendor." And Haym, who has given an outline of the Life of Novalis in his important work on the Romantic School, says: "The 'Hymns to Night,' those profoundly sorrowful strains of rapturous lamentation and of fervent pain, can be compared with nothing that our classical poetry has produced."

These "Hymns to the Night" were written soon after the death of his sweetheart, in that period of deep sorrow, or rather of holy deliverance from sorrow, and Novalis himself regarded them as his most finished productions. They are of a strange, veiled, almost enigmatical character; nevertheless, on closer examination, they appear to be in no wise lacking true poetic worth. There is a vastness, an immensity of idea; a still solemnity reigns in them, a solitude almost as of extinct worlds. Here and there too some ray of light visits us in the deep void; and we cast a glance, clear and wondrous, into the secrets of that mysterious soul. A full com-

mentary on the "Hymns to the Night" would be an exposition of Novalis's whole theological and moral creed; for it lies recorded there, though symbolically, and in lyric, not in didactic language.

"Once when I was shedding bitter tears," these are the words of the third hymn, "when dissolved in pain my hope had melted quite away, and I stood solitary by the sun-parched mound that in its dark and narrow space concealed the form of my life; solitary as none other had ever been; pursued by unutterable anguish; powerless; with but one thought, and that of misery; when looking around for help, forward I could not go, nor backward, but clung to a transient extinguished life with unutterable longing;—lo, from the azure distance, down from the heights of my former blessedness, came a chill breath of dusk, and suddenly the bond of birth, the fetter of life was snapped asunder. Vanished the glory of earth and with it my lamenting; my infinite sadness melted into a new unfathomable world; thou Inspiration of Night, Heaven's own Slumber, camest over me; the scene rose gently aloft; above it hovered my enfranchized new-born spirit. Into a cloud of dust had changed that grave; through the cloud I beheld the transfigured features of my beloved one. In her eyes lay eternity; I clasped her hand, and my tears flowed in a glittering stream. Millenniums passed into the distance, like thunder-clouds. On her neck I wept tears of rapture for this new life.—It was my first, mine only dream, and only since that time have I felt an everlasting changeless faith in the heaven of night, and in its sun, my beloved."

The sixth hymn, entitled *Sehnsucht nach dem Tode* (i. e., "Longing for Death"), begins:

*"Hinunter in der Erde Schooss."*

It has been translated by Helen Lowe in her *Prophecy of Balaam* (1841) and reproduced in the *Lyra Mystica* (1864). With some alterations it reads thus:

"Into earth's bosom let me go,  
Far from light's realms descending!  
These stinging pains and this wild woe  
Portend a blissful ending.  
The narrow bark shall waft us o'er,  
Full soon to land on Heaven's calm shore.

"Praised be that everlasting night;  
Praised, never-broken slumber;  
Day with its toils hath worn us quite,  
And cares too long encumber;  
Now vain desires and roamings cease,  
We seek our Father's House in peace.

“What should we do in this cold world  
 With Love and Truth so tender?  
 Old things are in oblivion hurled,  
 The new no gladness render:  
 O sorrowful his heart and lone  
 Who reverent loves the past and gone!

“Those ages past, whose purer race,  
 High thoughts with ardor fired,  
 When man beheld our Father’s Face,  
 And knew His Hand desired;  
 While many a simple mind sincere  
 Resembled still His image clear.

“Those days of old, when spreading wide  
 Ancestral trees were growing;  
 When even children joyful died  
 Their deep devotion showing;  
 While though life laughed and pleasure spake,  
 Yet many a heart for strong Love brake.

“Those times of yore when God revealed  
 Himself in young life glowing;  
 With early death His Passion sealed,  
 His precious Blood bestowing;  
 Nor turned aside the stings of pain  
 Us nearer to Himself to gain.

“Through deepening mists how vainly gaze  
 Our fond thoughts, backward turning;  
 Nought in this dreary age allays  
 The thirst within us burning:  
 We must arrive our home within  
 That ancient Holiness to win.

“What still delays our wished return?  
 The Loved have long been sleeping;  
 Their graves our earthly journey’s bourne—  
 Enough of fear and weeping!  
 With fruitless striving long annoyed  
 The heart is weary, the world a void.

“Strange rapture ever new, unknown,  
 Through the faint frame is thrilling:  
 Hark! the soft echo of our moan  
 The hollow distance filling;  
 Whence our loved ones toward us bend,  
 Their breathings of desire ascend.

“Down to the lovèd bride we go,  
 To Jesus, gone before us;

Be of good comfort, mourners ; lo !  
 Grey twilight deepens o'er us ;  
 A dream dissolves our chains unblest,  
 Our Father, take us to His Rest."

A few months after writing his "Hymns to the Night," Novalis was cured of his morbid desire for death, and in the autumn of 1797 he went to Freiberg to enter the academy of mining, which flourished under the famous Werner, whom Novalis describes in his *Lehrlinge zu Sais* ("Pupils of Sais"), an unfinished philosophical romance. To this Freiberg period belong also his "Fragments," known as *Blüthenstaub* (i. e., Pollen of Flowers"); *Glauben und Liebe* ("Faith and Love"), together with some minor poetical pieces, which he called *Blumen* (i. e., "Flowers"); all of which were published in Schlegel's *Athenaeum* of 1798 and 1800, under the pseudonym "Novalis" then assumed by him.

About a year after the death of his first love, Novalis formed an acquaintance with Julie von Charpentier and became engaged to marry her, although his Sophie continued to be the center of his thoughts ; nay, as one departed, like Dante's Beatrice, she stood in higher reverence with him than when visible and near. Soon after this Novalis formed an acquaintance with the elder Schlegel, who, together with Tieck whom he first met in Jena, seems to have occasioned frequent interruptions in the young student's work. From Artern at the foot of the Kyffhäuser Mountain, Novalis went very often to Jena to see his friends, and on one such occasion in the autumn of 1799, he read to them certain of his "Spiritual Songs," which were to form part of a Christian hymnbook, which he meant to accompany with a collection of sermons. About this time he composed the first volume of his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, a sort of art-romance, intended as he himself said, to be an "Apotheosis of Poetry."

In 1800, Novalis, who for years had had a tendency to consumption, was taken with the disease in its most acute form ; and in the days of his sickness he enjoyed communion with the writings of Lavater, Zinzendorf, and other mystical writers, as well as with the Biblical treasures. He died March 25, 1801, in the house of his parents, gently and to the music of the piano which he had asked his brother to play. "The expression of his face," says Tieck, "was very much like that of John the Evangelist, shown in Albert Dürer's glorious engraving. . . . His friendliness, his geniality, made him universally beloved. . . . He could be as happy as a child ; he jested with cheerfulness, and permitted himself to become the object of

jests for the company. Free from all vanity and pride of learning, a stranger to all affectation and hypocrisy, he was a genuine true man, the purest and most lovely embodiment of a noble immortal spirit."

In the second edition of his *Reden über Religion* ("Discourses on Religion"), Schleiermacher speaks thus of Novalis: "I shall point you to a glorious example, which you all ought to know: to that divine youth who too early fell asleep, to whom all that his spirit touched became art, and whose whole perception of the world became immediately a great poem; and whom although he has hardly done more in fact than utter his first strains,—you must associate with the richest poets, those few who are as profound as they are vital and clear. In him behold the power of the inspiration and reflectiveness of a pious soul; and confess that when philosophers will be religious and seek God, like Spinoza, and artists will be pious and love Christ, like Novalis, then will the great resurrection be celebrated for both their worlds."

Novalis is best known in Protestant Germany by his "Spiritual Songs," which will always remain his lasting monument, since they are the key-note of his love for his Saviour; and though they do not bear the stamp of church hymns, still they are adapted for singing in quiet solitude, even within the heart. Schlegel pronounced Novalis's songs "the divinest" things he ever wrote, and through the influence of Schleiermacher some have been included in the *Berliner Gesangbuch*. Schleiermacher quoted these hymns in the pulpit with deep emotion. Rothe, the greatest theologian since Schleiermacher, has written a sympathetic and appreciative essay on our poet in which he says: "Novalis is the type of a modern religious poet, and even of a Christian life that only in the future will attain its full realization." Pfleiderer—no friend of the Romantic School of pietism—says: "Nowhere is there any sweeter or more powerful expression of that warm and hearty inwardness of Protestant mysticism which manifested itself in pietism, and exercised so precious and salutary an influence on the German people, then stiff and frozen from the hands of supernaturalists and rationalists alike, than in the "Spiritual Songs" of Novalis. They are the true Song of Songs of pious love for the Saviour, and express the whole gamut of its feelings from the deepest sorrow to the highest blessedness and joy. He who gave the Protestant Church these hymns, which belong to the most precious jewels of the religious poetry of all ages, he surely—Romanticism notwithstanding—was a good Evangelical Christian." (*Philosophy of Religion*, I, 274.)

Beyschlag, who has edited his "Spiritual Songs," dwells with deep admiration on "the charm of inward truth" and the spiritual elevation of these remarkable Christian hymns.

The publication of Carlyle's memorable essay on Novalis in 1829, contributed not a little to make "the chords of many an English heart thrill under the fascination and mysteriousness of his poetic thought," and as early as in 1841 we meet with an English translation of some of the poetical pieces of Novalis. "As a poet," says Carlyle, "Novalis is no less idealistic than as a philosopher. His poems are breathings of a high, devout soul; feeling always that here he has no home, but looking, as in clear vision to a 'city that hath foundations.' He loves external nature with a singular depth, nay, we might say, he reverences her, and holds unspeakable communings with her; for Nature is no longer dead, hostile matter, but the veil and mysterious garment of the Unseen; as it were, the Voice with which the Deity proclaims to man. These two qualities,—his pure religious temper, and heartfelt love of nature,—bring him into true poetic relation both with the spiritual and the material world, and perhaps constitute his chief work as a poet."

It is to be regretted that the English essayist had so little to say of Novalis's "Spiritual Songs" which Schlegel and Tieck regarded as his most important poetical productions. "They are Christian hymns of great merit and deep fervent sincerity. They display the genius of the Romantic School in its purest and highest application, and are appropriately ranked with Schleiermacher's 'Discourses on Religion,' as regards their spiritual feeling and enduring worth."