

SCHILLER AS A PROPHET.

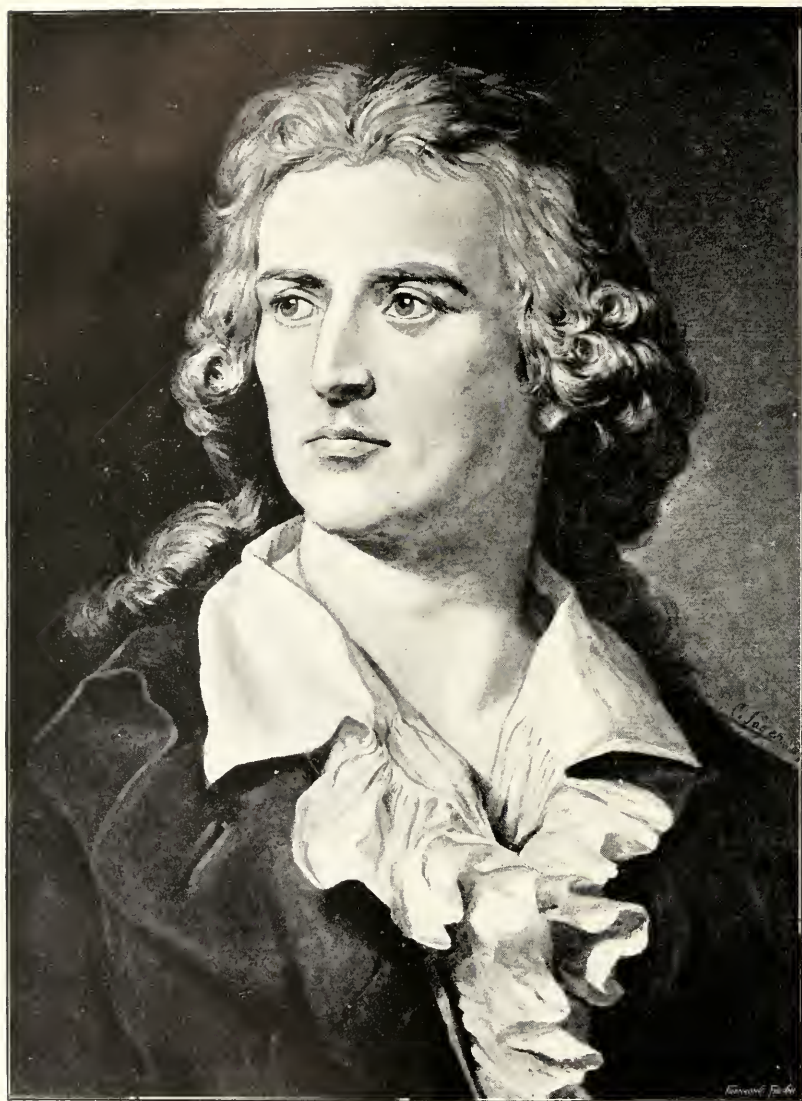
BY THE EDITOR.

ALL TRUE POETS are prophets both in the original sense of the word and in its commonly accepted significance. A prophet (or *προφήτης*) is a preacher, one who propounds the law of the higher life, of the ideal. A prophet is, as the Hebrew call him, "a *nâbî*," a revealer of truth, a messenger who speaks in behalf of the moral world-order, expounding the duties which it involves. Prophets are confronted with the same reality as their fellow creatures, but while other mortals see merely what is, prophets have the vision of what ought to be; and by comprehending the law of being, they actually can foresee the future.

When Amos, the shepherd of Tekoah, witnessed the tyranny of the powerful, the oppressiveness of the rich, and the debaucheries in which the whole people indulged at their national festivals, he saw at once the doom which this lack of discipline foreboded; and he raised a cry of alarm among the revellers at Bethel, prophesying the desolation that would follow in the wake of their feasts. He whose mind's eye is undimmed by passion can always see the curse that accompanies sin and self-indulgence.

Schiller was the prophet of the ideal, the revealer of the ought; and at the same time his sensitive nature made him understand the signs of the time, so as to render his poetry predictions of the nearest future. The barometer does not better predict the weather than did Schiller's dramas the great historical events of the age; and what is most remarkable is the exactness with which the German poet anticipated every change in the fate of the world in regular succession. Thus Schiller wrote *Die Räuber* (the robbers) in 1780-1781, and the French revolution ensued, an outburst of the same spirit which pervaded this drama. In 1783 Schiller dramatised the story of the bold adventurer Fiesco, who took possession of the





SCHILLER

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throne of Genoa, and Napoleon soon afterwards seized the government of France and placed the imperial crown upon his head. In 1791 Schiller wrote his famous trilogy *Wallenstein*, and the succeeding years became a period of warfare which were paralleled in the history of Europe only in the campaigns of the great Duke of Friedland. Further on, in 1801 Schiller wrote the *Jungfrau von Orleans*, describing a foreign invasion and the heroic struggle for liberty, foreshadowing Napoleon's conquests and the national rebirth of Germany which ended in the final expulsion of the Corsican invader. *Wilhelm Tell*, Schiller's last work, written in 1804, is a noble prophecy of the eventual union of the German tribes which took place in much the same way as the Swiss formed their confederacy; for united Germany also was the result of a self-defence against the external danger of a common foe.

Schiller's anticipations of coming events must be startling to those who do not understand that the poet's nature by his very vision of the ideal will necessarily and naturally presage the future. And there was no one among all the prophets of the world who had a clearer and more philosophical grasp of the significance of the ideal in its relation to the real than Schiller; and thus Schiller has become a religious prophet announcing a deeper conception of God as based upon the matured thought of the philosophy of his time.

Plato was the inventor of the conception of the ideal from which Philo (20 B. C.—40 A. D.) developed the doctrine of Words or λόγοι which manifest themselves as virtues in the spiritual leaders of the world.¹ Philo's logos doctrine contains the Christian view as expressed in the Fourth Gospel. It is a Platonic view that the logos is, as Philo says, "the archetypal model, the idea of ideas," but it is already a genuine Christian thought, when he speaks of "the word of the Supreme Being" as "the second Deity," and as "the image (εικών) of God, by whom all the world has been framed." The Greek conception of the ideal found another expression in the philosophical writings of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, who distinguishes two things, the material (ὕλικόν) and the formal (αἰτιῶδες), the latter being that which is the determinant in causation, meaning literally "the cause-like" or simply "the causal."

While the conception of the ideal is represented by Plato with a tinge of corporeality as if the ideas were beings or things who

¹ Thus Abraham is the educational virtue διδασκαλική ἀρετή; Isaac the ingrained or natural virtue, φυσική ἀρετή; Jacob the practice-virtue, ἀσκητική ἀρετή; Joseph, political virtue, as leading a life of political usefulness (βίος πολιτικός), and Moses is the pattern of all virtues, he is the model and a unique manifestation of the word (ὁ λόγος), as the totality of all the words (λόγοι).

existed somewhere in an unspatial space and an untemporal time, and while to Philo the logoi are forces performing work as we might think of light and electricity, or tools employed by the great architect of the world in his work of creation, Schiller conceives of the ideal realm as forms with the same scientific clearness that is possessed only by the trained mathematician. The realm of the ideal is not anything material, nor is it dynamical; it is purely formal. Yet the formal is the most essential part of this material reality which is the world in which we live and move and have our being. The purely formal is not an idle illusion; it is the recognition of the eternal, the immutable, the absolute, the laws of which pervade the whole universe and determine the destiny of stars as well as molecules, of nations and of every single individual not less than of mankind as a whole. Thus James Sime, compiler of the meagre sketch of Schiller's life in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, is right in his terse characterisation of the poet when he says:

“Schiller had a passionate faith in an eternal ideal world to which the human mind has access; and the contrast between ideals and what is called reality, he presents in many different forms.”

This side of Schiller's poetry is little known among the English-speaking nations. Goethe's philosophy has become accessible through the excellent translations of several ingenious translators, men like Bayard Taylor and others. It appears that it is even more difficult to translate Schiller than Goethe. Schiller's verses sound like music; yet is their language simple, and a native German needs no effort to understand their meaning at once. It seems almost impossible to reproduce their elegant diction adequately. The best translations of Schiller's poems are not entirely free from the grossest blunders, which prove that the translators were unable even to parse the original sentences, let alone to grasp their significance.

The most important poem that sets forth Schiller's confession of faith in its philosophical foundation is his anthem on “the Ideal and Life,” the most significant verses of which are as follows¹:

“Smooth, and ever clear, and crystal-bright,
Flows existence zephyr-light,
In Olympus where the blest recline.
Moons revolve and ages pass away
Changelessly, 'mid ever-rife decay,
Bloom the roses of their youth divine.

¹Edgar Bowring's translation is the best that could be had. The first verse, which is very good, remains here unaltered. The other verses are more or less changed for reasons which comparison with the original will explain.

Man has but a sad choice left him now,
Sensual joy and soul-repose between ;
But upon the great Celestial's brow,
Wedded is their splendor seen.

" Wouldst thou here be like a deity,
In the realm of death be free,
Never seek to pluck its gardens fruit
On its beauty thou may'st feed thine eye ;
Soon the impulse of desire will fly
And enjoyment's transient bliss polute.
E'en the Styx that nine times flows around
Ceres' child's return could not delay ;
But she grasped the apple—and was bound
Evermore by Orcus' sway.

" Yonder power whose tyranny we bemoan,
On our bodies has a claim alone.
Form is never bound by time's design.
She the gods' companion,¹ blessed and bright
Liveth in eternal realms of light
'Mongst the deities, herself divine.
Wouldst thou on her pinions soar on high,
Throw away the earthly and its woe !
To the ideal realm for refuge fly
From this narrow life below.

This same idea of the ideal realm of pure forms is further emphasised in the thirteenth verse, beginning with the lines :

" In den heiteren Regionen,
Wo die reinen Formen wohnen."

Which may be translated as follows :

" In yon region of pure forms,
Sunny land e'er free from storms,
Misery and sorrow cease to rave,
There our sufferings no more pierce the soul,
Tears of anguish there no longer roll.
Nought remains but mind's resistance brave.
Beauteous as the rainbow's colored hue,
Painted on the canvas of the cloud,
E'en on melancholy's mournful shroud
Rest reigns in empyrean blue."

Schiller, utilising to some extent Greek mythology, contrasts pure form with reality. Peace of soul exists alone in the realm of pure form ; there no suffering exists ;² for what is painful struggle

¹ *Die Gespielin seeliger Naturen*, means the companion of the blessed ones, i. e., the gods, and not (as Mr. Bowring has it) "blissful Nature's playmate."

² Schiller's description of the region of pure forms reminds us of St. John's revelation, where we read : "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death,

in real life, appears in the domain of the ideal merely as beautiful contrast. Pure form is divine, while its bodily realisation is mingled with that element that is of the earth earthy. Therefore the poet exhorts us, in the second stanza, not to lust after the fruit of sensuality; once bound by its spell, we are caught in the maelstrom of desire, leading to disgust, and the desire itself will leave us, which reminds one of Schopenhauer who declares that life is an oscillation between wants and *ennui*. But that is not all. Schiller adds that enjoyment involves us in the doom of death,—an idea in which Greek views are strangely mixed with the resignation of the Buddhist. So long as we are able to discard all earthly sorrow, and seek refuge in the realm of the ideal, we need not fear death. Death is the fate of Eve who tasted the forbidden fruit of sensual desire, but death has no power over Proserpine, Ceres's daughter, the goddess of spring, whose return to life from the domain of OrCUS, Styx cannot prevent.

And what is the ethics to which Schiller's philosophy of pure form leads? Schiller says :

“ Man before the law feels base,
 Humbled and in deep disgrace.
 Guilt e'en to the holy ones draws nigh.
 Virtue pales before the rays of truth.
 From the ideal every deed, forsooth,
 Must in shame and in confusion fly.
 None created e'er surmounted this,
 Neither a bridge's span can bear,
 Nor a boat o'er that abyss,
 And no anchor catches there.

“ But by flying from the sense-confined
 To the freedom of the mind,
 Every dream of fear thou'lt find thence flown,
 And the endless depth itself will fill.
 If thou tak'st the Godhead in thy will,
 It no longer sits upon its throne.¹
 Servile minds alone will feel its sway
 When of the law they scorn the rod,
 For with man's resistance dies away
 E'en the sovereignty of God.”

neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.”

¹ Schiller's expressions that “ God descends from his throne ” and “ abdicates his sovereignty,” have been misunderstood by Mr. Bowring. He translates :

(The Godhead)

“ Will soar upwards from its earthly throne.”

This is an ethics both of modesty and of moral endeavor. Since the ideal can never be attained in its purity, even the holy man is not free from guilt, and absolute perfection can never be realised. Nevertheless, the ideal is not a beyond; it is an immanent presence which can find its incarnation in man. And the ideal ceases to appear as an implacable condemnation of our shortcomings as soon as it dominates our entire being. He whose will is determined by the ideal, can say of God, "I and the Father are one." God is no longer above, but within him. Says Schiller:

" Nehmt die Gottheit auf in euren Willen,
Und sie steigt von ihrem Weltenthron."

This looks like outspoken atheism, but it is the same atheism for which Socrates drank the hemlock. It is the same blasphemy for which Christ was crucified. It is an expression of that moral endeavor which renders man divine and gives rise to the ideal of the God-man.

In the same sense that permeates these lines of his poem "The Ideals and Life," Schiller expresses himself in his "Words of Faith," which contain Schiller's poetical formulation of Kant's postulates of Freedom, Virtue, and God. Schiller says:

" These words I proclaim, important and rare,
Let from mouth to mouth them fly ever.
The heart to their truth will witness bear,
Through the senses you'll prove them never.¹
Man will no longer his worth retain,
Unless these words of faith remain.

" For LIBERTY man is created; he's free,
Though fetters around him be clinking.
Let the cry of the mob never terrify thee,
Nor the scorn of the dullard unthinking!
Beware of the slave when he breaks from his chain,²
But fear not the free who their freedom maintain.

" And VIRTUE is more than an empty sound,
It can in life be made real.
Man often may stumble, before it be found,
Still, he can obtain this ideal.
And that which the learned in their learning ne'er knew,
Can be done by the mind that is childlike and true.

¹ Schiller has here in mind the contrast made by Kant between sensation rising from the outside and thought, having its roots in the pure forms of our mind. Schiller means to say that the three ideas, "freedom (i. e., moral responsibility) virtue, and God," are not sense-given.

² While Schiller says, "the slave must be feared when he frees himself, not the free man," Bowring translates, "Fear not the bold slave, nor the free man."

“ And a God, too, there is, a purpose sublime,
 Though frail may be human endeavor.
 High over the regions of space and of time
 One idea supreme rules forever.
 While all things are shifting and tempest pressed,
 Yet the spirit pervading the change is at rest.

“ Preserve these three words, important and rare,
 Let from mouth to mouth them fly ever,
 The heart to their truth will witness bear,
 Through the senses you'll prove them never,
 Man will forever his worth retain,
 While these three words of faith remain.”

When Schiller speaks of God as “a purpose sublime”; literally, “a holy will,” “*ein heiliger Wille*,” and as “the idea supreme,” “*der höchste Gedanke*,” and when he contrasts God with the restlessness of the world, stating that “a spirit of rest pervades all change,” *Es beharret im Wechsel ein ruhiger Geist*, we do not believe that these expressions were framed under strain of versification. They must, in our opinion, be regarded as carefully worded definitions which are the matured product of the poet's thought, and considering their deep significance, we make bold to claim Schiller (not less than Goethe)¹ as one of the most clear-sighted prophets of the Religion of Science.

Schiller's religion was not limited to any sect, and indeed he avoided giving allegiance to any particular creed, because his religious faith, although very definite, was broader and more deeply rooted than any one of those confessions of faith which the Christian dogmatism of his time could offer him. He took the religious problem too seriously to accept any set of formulas without making them his own and transforming them into a religion that was tenable before the tribunal of both his philosophy and his conscience. This apparent lack of religion was an evidence of his extraordinary religious seriousness, which he expressed in the famous distich :

“ What my religion? I'll tell you! There is none among all you may mention
 Which I embrace.—And the cause? Truly, religion it is!

¹ Goethe says :

“ Und alles Drängen, alles Ringen
 Ist ewige Ruh' in Gott dem Herrn.”