

for betterment, and not for expiation, when we finally admonish to a genuinely redeeming, inner union of the German Princes with their Folks, their imbuelement with the veritable German Spirit.

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### III.

If one takes for granted that it needs times of great political upsoaring, to force the mental qualities of a people to high florescence, one is faced with the question: how comes it, on the contrary, that the German War of Liberation was plainly followed by a terribly rapid falling-off from the previous steady rise? Two issues are included in the answer, one shewing us the dependence, the other the independence, of a nation's artistic genius on the actual stage of its political life. No doubt, the birth of even a great art-genius must stand in some connexion with the spirit of his time and nation; but if we don't propose to seek at random for the secret bonds of that connexion, we certainly shall not do wrongly to leave to Nature her own mystery, and confess that great geniuses are born by laws we cannot fathom. That no genius, such as those the middle of last century brought forth in rich variety, was born in the beginning of the present century, has certainly nothing strictly to do with the political life of the nation; on the other hand, that the high stage of mental receptivity whereto the artistic genius of the German Rebirth had lifted us, so quickly settled down again, that the Folk allowed its ample heritage to be reft from it wellnigh untasted—this, at any rate, may be explained by the spirit of reaction from the fervour of the war of freedom. That the womb of German mothers at that time conceived for us no greater poets than Houwald, Müllner and their compeers, may belong to the inscrutable secret of Nature; but, that these minor talents should have abandoned the free highways of their great German fathers, to wander with quite childish insipidity in a

mournful imitation of misunderstood Romanic models, and that these wanderings should have met with actual consideration, allows us to argue with much certainty to a mournful spirit, a mood of great depression, in the nation's life. Nevertheless in this mutual mood of mourning there lingered still a trace of spiritual freedom: one might say, the exhausted German spirit was helping itself as best it could. The true misery begins when it was to be helped along in another fashion.

Indisputably the most decisive effect of the spirit of German Rebirth upon the nation itself had finally been exerted from the Theatre, through dramatic poetry. Whoever pretends (as impotent literati are so fond of doing nowadays) to deny to the Theatre a most preponderant share in the art-spirit's influence upon the ethical spirit of a nation, or even to belittle it, simply proves that he himself stands quite outside this genuine interaction, and deserves notice neither in literature nor in art. For the Theatre, had Lessing begun the war against French tyranny, and for the Theatre great Schiller brought that war to fairest victory. The whole aim of our [two] great poets was to give their poems their first, their true, convincing life through the Theatre; and all their intervening literature, in its truest sense, was merely an expression of that aim. Without finding in the existing Theatre a technical development even somewhat preparatory for the high tendency of German Rebirth, our great poets were driven regardless onward in advance of such development, and their legacy was bequeathed to us on express condition that we first made it truly ours. If, then, no genius such as Goethe and Schiller was born to us any more, it now was the very task of the reborn German spirit to rightly tend their works and thus make ready for a long florescence, which Nature necessarily would have followed with the bringing forth of new creative geniuses: Italy and Spain once lived to see this reciprocity. Nothing more would have been needed, than to set the Theatre in train to duly celebrate

the deeds of Lessing's fight and Schiller's victory.—But as the youthful idealism of the Burschenschaft was parried by the vicious tendence of the old Landsmannschaften, so, with an instinct only owned by those whose subjects are profoundly helpless, the rulers took possession of this Theatre, to withdraw the wondrous platform of the German spirit's noblest deeds of freedom from just the influence of that spirit's self. How does a skilful general prepare the enemy's defeat? By cutting off its communications, its commissariat. Napoleon the Great "*dépaysait*" the German spirit. From the heirs of Goethe and Schiller one took the Theatre. Here Opera, there Ballet: Rossini, Spontini, the Dioscuri of Vienna and Berlin, who behind them dragged the Pleiades of German Restoration. Yet here, too, the German spirit was to try to break itself a path; if verse was dumb, yet tune rang out. The fresh, sweet breath of the youthful German breast, still heaving with noble aspiration, breathed out of glorious Weber's melodies; a new life of wonders was won for German feeling (*Gemüth*); with cheers the German Folk received its Freischütz, and now seemed minded to throng anew the French-restored magnificence of the Intendant-ruled court-theatres — there, too, to conquer and to vivify. We know the long-drawn torments which the nobly popular German master suffered for his crime of the Lützow-chasseurs' melody,\* and whereof at last he pined away and died.

The most calculating wickedness could not have gone to work more cleverly, than here was done, to demoralise and slay the German art-spirit; but no less horrible is the supposition that perchance sheer stupidity and trivial love of pleasure, on the potentates' part, achieved this havoc. After the lapse of half a century the result is palpable enough, in the general state of spiritual life among the

\* In August 1820, Weber was serenaded by the Göttingen students with his song "*Lützow's wilder Jagd*," the words by Körner. Lützow had been allowed in 1813 to form a "free corps," which soon won celebrity for its dash and spirit in the War of Liberation; it was joined by Körner, Jahn, Friesen, etc., etc.—TR.

German people : 'twere a lengthy task, to follow it through all its strangely complex phases. We propose to offer later our contribution to that task, from several points of view. For our present purpose let it suffice to indicate the fresh-won power, over the German spirit, of a civilisation which since has taken so fearfully demoralising a turn in its own country that noble minds beyond the Rhine are casting glances, longing for redemption, across to us. From what they then behold, to their amazement, we best may gather how matters really stand with ourselves.

The Frenchman, disgusted with his own civilisation has read the book of Mdme. Stael on Germany, let us say, or B. Constant's report on the German Theatre; he studies Goethe and Schiller, hears Beethoven's music, and believes he cannot possibly be mistaken if he seeks in close and accurate acquaintance with German life both consolation and a hope for his own people's future also. "The Germans are a nation of high-souled dreamers and deep-brained thinkers." Madame de Stael found stamped on Schiller's genius, upon the whole evolution of German science, the influence of Kant's philosophy: what is there for the Frenchman of to-day to find with us? He will merely discover the remarkable consequences of a philosophic system once nursed in Berlin,\* and now brought into thorough world-renown under cover of the famous name of German Philosophy; a system which has succeeded in so incapacitating German heads for even grasping the problem of Philosophy, that it since has ranked as the correct philosophy to have no philosophy at all. Through such an influence he will find the spirit of all the sciences so altered that, in regions where the German's earnestness had made itself proverbial, superficiality, running after effect, and positive dishonesty—no longer in the discussion of any problems, but in personal bickerings

\* That of Hegel; whereof Feuerbach's was an offshoot. Cf. Vol. I., 25, concerning Feuerbach's "bidding farewell to Philosophy," to which the end of the present sentence appears to refer.—TR.

mixed with calumnies and intrigues of every species—almost alone supply the food-stuff for our book-mart, which itself has become a simple monetary speculation of the booksellers. Luckily he will find, however, that the real German public, just like the French, reads no more books at all, but gains its information almost solely from the journals. In these latter he will find with sorrow that, even in an evil sense, the process is no longer German—as at least is the case with the wranglings of the university-professors; for he will here observe the final consummation of a jargon that has more and more departed from resemblance to the German language. In all these manifestations of publicity he will also note the obvious trend toward forsaking any connexion with the nation's history, so highly honourable to the German, and “operating” (“*anbahnen*”) a certain European dead-level of the vulgarest interests of everyday, whereon the ignorance and fatuity of the journalist may frankly make its comfortable confession, so fondly flattering to the Folk, of the uselessness of thorough culture.—To the Frenchman, amid such circumstances, the remains of the German people's love for reading and writing won't rank of special value; rather will he deem the people's mother-wit and native common-sense thereby endangered. For if he has been revolted in France by the nation's practical materialism, he will scarcely comprehend why this evil should be theoretically instilled into the German Folk through a journalistic propaganda based on the most unspiritual conclusions of an arrogantly shallow Nature-science; seeing that, upon this path, even the presumable results of naïve practice are made unfruitful.

Our guest next turns to German Art, remarking in the first place that the German knows nothing by that name but Painting and Sculpture, with Architecture perhaps thrown in. From those days of the German rebirth he recalls the fair, the noble beginnings of a development of the German art-spirit on this side too: yet he perceives that what was meant in grand and genuine earnest by the noble P. Cornelius, for instance, has now become a flippant

pretext which flings its heels for mere Effect, just the same as Science and Philosophy; but as far as Effect is concerned, our Frenchman knows that none can beat his friends at home.—Onward to poetic Literature. He believes he is reading the journals again. Yet no! Are these not books, and books of nine internally consecutive volumes? \* Here must be the German spirit; even if most of these books are mere translations, yet here at last must come to light what the German really is, apart from A. Dumas and E. Sue? He undoubtedly is something else, to boot: a trader on the name and fame of German greatness (*Herrlichkeit*)! Everything bristles with patriotic assurances, and “German,” “German,” so tolls the bell above the cosmopolitan synagogue of the “now-time.” † ’Tis so easy, this “German”! It comes quite of itself, and no wicked Academy looks us up and down; nor is one exposed to the constant chicane of the French author, who, for one solitary linguistic solecism, is dismissed forthwith by all his colleagues with the cry that he can’t write French.—But now to the Theatre! There, in the daily, direct communion of the public with the intellectual leaders of its nation, must assuredly come out the spirit of the thoughtful German people, so self-conscious in the practice of its morals; the people of whom a certain B. Constant had assured the Frenchman that it did not need French rules, since the Seemly was a thing inherent in the inwardness and pureness of its nature. It is to be hoped our visitor won’t make his first acquaintance with our Schiller and Goethe at the theatre, as in that case he could never comprehend why we had lately been erecting statues to the former in the squares of all our cities; or he would be led to suppose that it was in order to have done with the excellent, worthy man and his undeniable services, in some right handsome way, for good and all. In particular, in his encounter with our great poets on the stage, he would

\* See note to Vol. II., 148—Gutzkow’s “*Ritter vom Geiste*.”—TR.

† “Der ‘Jetztzeit’”, in place of “Gegenwart”; our slang expression, “up to date”, would be a fair equivalent.—TR.

be astounded at the extraordinarily dragging tempo in the recitation of their verses, for which he would feel bound to seek a stylistic ground until he became aware that this drawling arises merely from the actor's difficulty in following the prompter; for this mimetic artist has plainly not the time to commit his verses properly to memory. And the reason soon grows obvious enough; for one and the same actor, in course of the year, has to offer nearly all the products of the theatric literature of every age and every people, of every genre and every style—about the most remarkable collection one can anywhere find—to the subscribing public of the German theatre. With this unheard extension of the duties of the German mime, it naturally is never taken into consideration *how* he shall fulfil his task: both critics and public have got far beyond that. The actor is therefore compelled to found his popularity upon another quarter of his doings: the “now-time” is always bringing him something to set him in his congenial, his “self-intelligible” element; and here again, as in the case of Literature, is found the help of the peculiar modern traffic of the newest German spirit with French civilisation. As A. Dumas was Germaned there, so here the Parisian stage-caricature is “localised”; and in measure as its new “locale” compares with Paris, does this main support of the German Theatre's repertory cut a presentable figure on our stage. A surprising awkwardness of the German's adds its quota to all this, producing complications which must awake in our French visitor the thought that the German far outstrips the Parisian in frivolity: what goes-on in Paris really quite beyond the pale of good society, in the smaller hole-and-corner theatres, he will see reproduced in our most stylish of Court-theatres, with vulgar loutishness to boot, and set before the exclusive circles of society without a scruple, naked and unashamed, as the newest piece of drollery; and this is found quite as it should be. Recently we lived to see Mdlle. Rigolboche—a person only explicable by means of Paris, and advertised in monster type as the Parisian “Cancan-dancer”—summoned to perform at

a Berlin theatre the dances which she there had executed, by special agreement with the well-known ballet-caterers, for enlivening the most disreputable rendezvous of the travelling world;\* moreover a gentleman of high position in the Prussian aristocracy, and in the habit of patronising the world of Art, paid her the honour of fetching her away in his carriage. This time we had our knuckles rapped for it in the Parisian press: for the French felt rightly shocked to see how French civilisation looked without the French *decorum*. Indeed, we may conclude that it is a simple feeling of decency on the part of those peoples who were erewhile influenced by the German spirit, that now has turned them quite away from us and thrown them wholly into the arms of French civilisation: the Swedes, Danes, Dutch, our blood-related neighbours, who once had stood in innermost spiritual communion with us, now draw their requirements in the way of art and intellect direct from Paris, as they very properly prefer at least the genuine articles to the counterfeits.

But what will our French visitor feel, when he has feasted upon this spectacle of German civilisation? To be sure, a desperate home-sickness for at least the French *decorum*; and in that feeling, pondered well, there is won a new and most effectual engine of French supremacy, against which we may find it very hard to shield ourselves. If nevertheless we mean to make the attempt, let us proceed to test with care, and without a shred of idle overweening, the resources haply still remaining to us.

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#### IV.

To the intelligent Frenchman, whom we have just seen reviewing the present physiognomy of intellectual life in Germany, we yet might speak a final word of comfort—namely, that his eye had merely skimmed the outer atmosphere of true German spiritual life. That was the

\* 1867 was the year of the French International Exhibition.—Tr.