

## IX.

“German, strive for Roman strength, for Grecian beauty! Both have sped thee; but never yet the Gallic spring!”

Thus Schiller invokes the German genius.

But how if the bear must dance like the monkey, to earn his daily bread?—A revolting sight, ridiculous at once and mournful!—

The German tempo is the walk (*der Gang*), the “Andante”; which therefore also has been so richly and expressively developed in German music, that music-friends have rightly called it the typical German style, and have declared its maintenance and studious cultivation to be a question of vital moment in German æsthetics. With this deliberate walk the German reaches everywhere in time, and manfully can make the farthest-lying thing his own. Germans have learnt and taught the plastic arts in Italy; in German poets the great Spaniards lived on, when driven from their country's stage by power of French influence; and while Englishmen had turned the performances of their Shakespeare into circus-evolutions, the German spelled for himself the mysteries of human nature from this their miracle. With this walk Goethe, setting out from Götz, reached Egmont, that type of German nobility and true distinction by whose side the overreaching Spanish don seems an automaton oiled with venom: for this transformation of the rugged, rough-hewn Götz into the graceful, freely-moving Netherlander, it needed but a stripping of the bear-hide, thrown round us for protection from the rawness of the age and climate, to let the supple, sinewy body—whose natural tendency to beauty even Winckelmann, so enthusiastically engrossed in all things Southern, acknowledged with delight—attest its inner warmth. The calm patrician gait, wherewith this Egmont trod the scaffold, led the favoured poet through the wonder-land of myrtle and laurel, from hearts a-droop with tenderest soul-griefs in marble palaces, to knowledge

and proclamation of the sublime mystery of the Ever-womanly, of the likeness that passeth not away; and should Religion ever vanish from the earth, 'tis this would keep the sense of its divinest beauty sempiternally alive, so long as Goethe's "Faust" itself had not been lost.

How strange that, whenever German literary-æsthetes begin to talk of idealism and realism, Goethe is straight-way called a representant of the latter, and Schiller an idealist! Though sayings of Goethe's own have given rise to this, yet the whole character of his productivity, and especially his conduct toward the Theatre, shews how little such a designation hits the mark. Plainly, in regard of his truly great creations, his bearing toward the Theatre was far more that of an idealist than Schiller's: for scarcely had the ground of an agreement with this Theatre been trodden, than Goethe ruthlessly transgressed the bounds mapped-out by the scanty predevelopment of German histrionic art for the poet's commerce with it. Nor was it the "Gallic spring" that tempted him; but the swing of German genius drove him far, far hence, and left the German actor staring after him with much the indifference of Mephistopheles when Helena's magic-mantle floats away in clouds. For Goethe lived longer than Schiller, and came to despair of German history: Schiller lived merely long enough to cherish a doubt—which doubt he took such noble pains to conquer. Never has a friend of man done for a neglected people what Schiller did for the German Theatre. If the whole ideal life of the German spirit is illustrated in the course of his poetic evolution, so in the sequence of his dramas we may read the history of the German Theatre, and of its attempted raising to a popularly-ideal art. It might indeed be hard to draw a parallel between the "Robbers" and "Fiesco," instinct already with full poetic greatness, and the raw spirit of the German Theatre's beginnings in so-called English-comedianism: in every comparison of the creations of our great masters with what faced them from the wasted Folk-life, however, we shall always stumble on this sad, this indomit-

able disproportion. Better will the harmony appear, from the point where we find in Schiller himself the result of his observation of the character and capabilities of the Theatre. This is past mistaking in "*Kabale und Liebe*": perhaps that piece is the strongest proof, supplied as yet, of what could be done in Germany by a full accord between Theatre and Poet.—The excellent, the veritably German-breathing players of the happy epoch of the German Theatre's rebirth, as well, had brought matters as far as a naturalistic imitation of the surrounding burgher-world: for this they shewed no less a talent than any other nation, and did no little honour to that German nature for which Lessing had fought his energetic battles. Though the ideal of all Art remained unknown to them, yet they copied with realistic truth a sterling, unaffected nature, from whose simplicity, whose goodness of heart and warmth of feeling, one well might await in course of time an outlook on the beautiful. What first discredited and made the German burgher-play repulsive,—what Goethe and Schiller lamented in despair, was not that honest beginning, but its caricature, the Sensational-piece inflicted on us by the reaction against the ideal trend of our great poets.

For the present let us follow Schiller in his strong-winged progress from that burgher sphere to the realms of the Idea. "*Don Carlos*" was to decide whether the poet should finally turn his back upon the theatre, like Goethe, or draw it by his loving hand into those higher regions with him. What the German spirit here achieved, will ever be astounding. In what language of the world, among Spaniards, Italians or French, shall we find beings from the highest spheres of life, monarchs and Spanish grandees, queens and princes, expressing themselves in the most passionate and the tenderest emotions with such distinguished, such humanly - noble naturalness, at once so polished, so witty and full of deeper meaning, so unforcedly highbred, and withal so visibly sublime, so drastically uncommon? How conventional and stilted must even Calderon's royal figures, how utterly laughable the courtly-

theatrical marionettes of a Racine, appear beside them! Shakespeare himself, who yet could give his kings and yokels equally appropriate truths to speak, was here no all-sufficient pattern; for that sphere of the Sublime which the poet of "Don Carlos" trod, had not opened out before the gaze of the great Briton. And it is intentionally that we here confine ourselves to the speech, the gestures of the characters in "Don Carlos," because we have to ask ourselves at once: how was it possible for German players, who had previously no other model but the human nature of everyday, to adopt this speech, these gestures? What did not forthwith and wholly prosper, at least succeeded to a hopeful pitch: for here was shewn, as in poet so in players, the German's aptitude for the ideal. His starting-point was a naturalistic imitation of his own familiar burgher-life, itself in correspondence with the natural German manner—the "Andante": what remained to win, was the loftier swing, the tenderer passion of the more sublime "Allegro"; and attainable they were, for Schiller's figures wore no made, conventional, unnatural gentility, but the true, the nature-noble, the purely-human eminence of heart. These actors were so conscientious in their self-appraisal, that they feared to fall into un-nature and affectation through an unaccustomed recitation of the un-burgherlike iambics; to keep faith with themselves on the new path, they elected to have these iambics written out in prose for their preliminary study, and thus to not attempt the rhythmic pathos until the natural accent of the words had been ensured—much as it would be sensible in Opera, however trivial the text, to teach the singers to first pronounce it properly, before they begin to practise singing it. The only danger in this phase of evolution, by no means unlovable in itself, was lest the German actor's fundamental sense of naturalness should degenerate into grotesque over-emphasis and downright ranting, in the more emotional parts.\* Goethe and Schiller, intelligently taking stand by

\* "Die an sich wahrlich nicht unliebenswürdige Gefahr lag bei dem Fortschreiten in dieser Entwicklungsphase der deutschen Schauspieler nur darin, dass der gründliche Natürlichkeitssinn beim Affekt nicht in groteske Heftigkeit und allzu wahre Sinnfälligkeit ausarte."—

Goethe's side, adopted the selfsame expedient for checking this natural impetuosity, as the lawgivers of the French Theatre had long employed to banish Nature out-and-out. In this regard it is very instructive to note how Benj. Constant expresses himself in his "*Réflexions sur le théâtre Allemand*": the naturalism of the German Theatre he highly admires, seeing that it is applied with so much chasteness, loyalty, and tender conscience; but he believes that it should stay forbidden to the French, since on the one hand they have aimed at nothing but the opportune, i.e. theatrical Effect, whilst on the other hand the true-to-Nature affords so strong an engine of effect that, were it once conceded to them, they would deal in none but such effects, and their exaggerations would soon destroy all truth, good taste, nay, even any possibility of the truly natural. And in the further evolution of the French Theatre the consequence of giving up its rules has fully borne out this foreboding: to our deep disgrace we presently shall have to see how hence again, under sway of the reaction against the German spirit, the final ruin of the German Theatre, nay, of German Art in general, was brought about. With wise precaution our great poets let the players practise a few orthodox French pieces, to learn to feel the artistic benefits of Culture too, and thus, like stout Ulysses shunning Scylla as Charybdis, to steer the ship of the German Theatre, freighted with the last and highest glory of the long-suffering nation, into the haven of its new, its ideal home.

Henceforth the glorious couple worked and wrought together in newly-kindled hope: for very joy at Schiller's work, Goethe forgot his own poetic gifts, and helped the dear one all the better. Thus, in direct formative interaction with the Theatre, arose those splendid dramas; each of them, from "Wallenstein" to "Tell," the landmark of a conquest on the unknown realm of the Ideal, and standing now as pillars of the German spirit's only veritable hall-of-Fame. And this was compassed *with* the Theatre. Without seeing any startling geniuses appear within its ranks,

the whole body of actors was inspired with the breath of the Ideal : with result that a potent sympathy seized every cultured person of that age, seized youth, the Folk itself, for the Theatre ; for upon these had dawned the spirit of their great poets, wellnigh clad in flesh, and made them through this Theatre the partners in their poets' great ideas for man's ennobling.—

But the worm was already gnawing at this blossom : to have come to actual fruit-bearing, the tree must have been able to strike strong roots into the depth and breadth of the people's life, moulding and fashioning its every particle of soil. We have seen how the people opened wide its breast to take the boon : we have viewed its deeds—but we have also learnt what was its wage.—It is highly significant, and peculiar to the unexampled character of German history, that the worm which gnawed at the blossom of German Art was the selfsame fiend that wrought the ruin of the German nation's political revival,—a fact not recognisable until viewed from a distance, the distance of our days.

If the Czar had not succeeded in making a ballet-dancer from a Russian privy-councillor, yet he found it possible to create a Russian privy-councillor from a German zany. At the hearth and home of their gigantic labours, the tranquil, tiny Weimar, *August von Kotzebue* was preparing for Schiller and Goethe their first annoyances and troubles of disturbance and confusion. A strange, a certainly not ungifted, a flippant, vain and evil-hearted mortal, whom the glory of the Gods annoyed. All their doings were so new and dauntless : could not one derange them ? He made stage-pieces of every style that seemed at all likely to suit ; chivalry-pieces, farces, and finally—to strike the nail right home—sensational-pieces. Whatever ill leanings, whatever bad habits and evil passions existed among the public or the players, he stirred them up and set them going. Benj. Constant's prophecy was beginning to be fulfilled in Paris : the monster of Melodrama was born ; to Germany must it be brought with all one's might, were it only,

through the "Dog of Aubry," to make Goethe lay down the reins of Weimar management. But one meant to introduce the actual sovereignty of the Abject (*des Niederträchtigen*). A particularly novel blend was just the thing for that. The blunt had been the first foundation of German naturalness, at the theatre too: no cleanly soul had taken umbrage at "Götz," the "Robbers,"—at Shakespeare, ay, at Calderon, who could play his hand of bluntness with the rest; only to the French had it been prohibited, and for the same good reason as the true-to-Nature, because with them the blunt is but another name for the obscene. Nature, suppressed, avenged herself: what was not suffered as obscenity, assumed the garment of frivolity. Kotzebue adapted the "suggestive" [*das "Schlüpfrige"*—lit. the "slippery"], i.e. the absolutely fatuous, which betrays its nothingness so signally that one seeks beneath its every fold for Something, until at last awakened curiosity is shewn the well-disguised obscene—but so gingerly that the police can have nothing to say against it. Behold! the archetype was won, for a new theatrical development in Germany. Kotzebue wrote his privy-councillor reports to Petersburg, upon the charming turn of things in Germany, and was in the best of spirits. Then on March 23rd, 1819, a stripling in the old-german gown found entrance to his chamber, and stabbed the privy-councillor to death. An unheard, a deed of fateful presage. It all was instinct: the Russian Czar had dealt from instinct, when he got his privy-councillor to write him those really nothing worse than flippant reports; and so did *Sand*, who could make no other answer to the plain proofs of Kotzebue's political harmlessness, than—that this man was the corrupter of German Youth, the betrayer of the German Folk. The judges racked their brains: there *must* be some terrible conspiracy afoot; the murder of the privy-councillor was surely nothing but a prelude; the masters of the State, the State itself, would follow next for certain. Nothing was to be extorted from the youthful murderer, but that he hugged his deed, would gladly do it over again, thanked God who had en-

lightened him and now was leading him towards a righteous death of expiation in peace and surety of salvation. And he abode by this without a moment's blenching, through fourteen-months' imprisonment, devoured by festering wounds, racked on the sordid plank of suffering.—It was a clever Jew, Börne by name, who first made merry at this deed ; nor did Heine, if our memory serves us, allow it to escape his wit. What the nation felt, is not quite clear ; the only certainty is, that the German Theatre belonged to Kotzebue's spiritual heirs. At this theatre we still will look a little closer, and that in earnest.

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## X.

The line now struck by the German Theatre, in force of the reaction already described by us, could hardly be kept to its full corruptive tendence without a direct and definite influence from the sphere of political power. The new, seductive social station, now allotted to the Theatre, became the weightiest engine of that influence. Entirely alienated from the spirit of their people, the Princes hitherto had entertained their courts with nothing but Italian and French opera-, ballet-, and comedian-companies : the German play and *Singspiel* had been set before the genuine public in wretched show-booths, by ill-nourished, mostly strolling players, conducted and hawked around on strictly industrial principles. They alone comprised the real stage-handicraft, in its good and evil sense. But now that everything was taking a nobler, more human form of energy through the rebirth of the German art-spirit, the municipal and royal authorities, led by men of good will and artistic feeling (among whom the German nobles, then mindful of their rank and freedom, shewed out to marked advantage), bethought them of extending to these strolling troops, which they were surprised to find displaying certain sterling talents, a social patronage conducive to the weal of Art itself. A shining