

GOETHE: 1749-1949

JOHANNA RICHTER*

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE was born in Frankfurt am Main, 28 August, 1749. In this bicentenary year of his birth, many are considering his works again, to find whether or not the "last universal man" can give us leadership in our troubled age. Others are frankly skeptical, since his world was so different from ours. He travelled by horse and carriage to Italy; he knew nothing of aeroplanes or motor cars. The machine did not yet dominate mankind, and so the social problems of the day were very different from ours. His time knew neither rocket bombs nor atomic energy, nor had it experienced the modern man, so familiar to us — the broken man, conscious of all his instincts, despairing of himself. How, then, can Goethe possibly give us guidance? Let us look, not to poets and star-gazers of the past, but to great men in politics and economics, to those who have given bread and hope to the poor.

The error in such thinking is not hard to discover. Poetry, because it is an art, requires a certain distance from real life; the poet, in his work, must not give a mere reflection of his world. He lifts from everflowing life some events to which he wishes to give special significance and duration. Through the power of his imagination these fragments of reality are transformed into poetry. They are artistic creations and, therefore, forms that Goethe, like the greatest of masters, used as symbols or means to communicate his thought to us. To follow a poet into the world behind his poetry requires a mature reader. We can hardly expect that Goethe will disclose himself if we are unprepared. A detailed knowledge of his works is necessary and helpful, but the poet Goethe we will find only if we listen to him silently for a long time. Then he may begin to converse with us. Finally we will discover the core of the master's mind, which in modified forms appears in all his works. Thus Goethe, like any other great artist, could say: "I have been able to write only what I am thinking, how I mean it; and thus I am dividing myself, dear friends, but I am always remaining the same."

Immer hab' ich nur geschrieben,
Was ich denke, wie ich's meine
Und so spalte ich mich, Ihr Lieben,
Und bin immerfort der Eine.

*Lecturer in German, Dalhousie University.

Since Wilhelm Dilthey, more than 40 years ago, made the first attempt to write a psychology of poetry in his book *Das Erlebnis Und Die Dichtung (Experience and Poetry)*, we have learned to pay greater attention to the inherent structure of a poet's imagination and the general development of his personality. That is not always an easy task, for little is usually known about the growth of a writer's inner life, since we meet him only in maturity. For instance, we know hardly anything about Shakespeare's personal development. His works give us a better insight into all kinds of human existence, yet he reveals little or nothing about himself, seeming to disappear completely behind his creations.

How different is the picture we receive from Goethe. It seems as if Dilthey had created the title of his book solely for him. A greater connection between personal, inner experience and poetry can hardly be imagined. His works are the results of continuous transformation of real life into poetry. Spranger describes this creative process by means of a picture: rays of the universe enter the poet's soul and are radiated from this organism back into the objective world. Goethe himself refers to this act as "inhaling and exhaling" (*einatmen und ausatmen*). The emphasis of our definition lies in the word *organism*, for, while it is true that personal experience in our changeable world, be it large or small, is the stimulus for poetic creation, the reception is decided by the poet's original inner disposition: only impressions from the outer world congenial to the individual form of the poet's inner nature can be assimilated, to become part of his organism, to be amalgamated, and to grow with his inner development. Subjects like *FAUST* have grown with their creator. We have several versions of Goethe's masterpiece, published at different periods of the poet's life. The final manuscript was finished only shortly before he died in his 82nd year. Therefore, Goethe's works are not merely descriptions of human existence, but they are, as he puts it, "fragments of one long confession". All his writings are milestones of a long journey through life. The dynamics of his emotion, however, were so immense that he needed more outlets to save his mind from destruction. Besides his works, we have his diaries, an autobiography, and about 12,000 letters; in these priceless documents the development of this master mind lies before us. Goethe, indeed, called his poetry "Gelegenheitsgedichte" (occasional poems), pointing to the events in his outer life that stimulated his creative ener-

gies. To gain a comprehensive picture of this gigantic mind, one has to study not only "the long confession" but also the background that it reveals,

I

While Goethe was blessed by nature with unusual gifts, his development took place in a special era. When the poet was born, Europe had enjoyed ten years of peace. Even Germany, which still suffered from the aftermath of the Thirty Years War, was showing the beginning of economic improvement and, with it, increasing security in civil life. Moreover, a development that had begun during the Renaissance was becoming clearer: the individual, who for centuries had been closely circumscribed by the old traditions of the family life, fixed structure of society, and the religious ties of the older Protestant, was gaining personal freedom and finding his own independent way of expressing his emotions. Influenced by French and English writers, who were one or even two centuries ahead in literary development, German poetry was showing increased interest in the life of man: human qualities—love, friendship, humanity, love of homeland and nature—were now themes of poetry. In music Germans were leading: Bach was still alive when Goethe was born, and so was Handel; during the poet's life, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert composed their masterpieces, and Mendelssohn was 23 when Goethe died. Great development was beginning in German philosophy. In 1755 Kant returned to Königsberg as a professor, and although he had not yet startled the world with his *Critiques* it was already his belief that the autonomy of man's reason was the fundamental principle of philosophy. If we include other contemporaries like Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose longing was to develop the Self to great perfection, and Schleiermacher, who proclaimed religion a province of man's mind, and Schiller, whose greatest interest was the education of man through art to dignity, we cannot help realizing the new outlook on life. The age stressed the development of man to his highest possibilities. It was this new, spring-like atmosphere, the dawn of a great period in history, that surrounded Goethe from childhood.

The poet's inner development and the circumstances under which it took place can only be sketched here. From his Franconian ancestors Goethe had inherited not only a strong individual nature, of which he was happily aware, but also the talent to extract the most from an enjoyable day or hour.

He grew up in Frankfurt, then a free town of 33,000 souls, not restricted by monarch or ruling duke. Membership in a respected and prosperous family gave him security and self-confidence, and the liberty to move through dark and narrow streets lined with houses of mediaeval beauty; it also gave him opportunities to take part in colorful pageantry. Frankfurt, which connected all four corners of Germany, was a centre of trade. The pretty Main ran under bridges, through little villages to the fertile Rhineland. Here, among cheerful villagers celebrating their festivals, Goethe enjoyed his youth. His birthplace could satisfy his longing to experience life, his greatest desire. During the French occupation a new world opened to him: the opportunity to observe French character and to see French comedies and operettas.

When Goethe was a child his mother, who had a great talent for story telling, nourished his vivid imagination. Later his ambitious father took charge of his and his only sister's education. This training, although it allowed the boy freedom to develop his talents, lacked the discipline gained from contact with others and strengthened the boy's tendency to do always as he pleased. Yet his greatest teacher was life itself. He could fit into most phases of life and grasp their true value. While idealizing the objects of his impressions, he was widening and deepening his own nature. His emotional susceptibility, which was immense, enabled him not only to experience the greatest happiness but also endless suffering: he became seriously ill because his imagination created terrifying pictures of young Gretchen's sufferings. At 16 he went to Leipzig to study law, but he was not an industrious student and frittered his time away. Once when he was confined to bed with fever he rushed to the theatre, where he knew that the girl he loved was with another. Yet a few days later he wrote to a close friend: "If I tell you what I feel, what I have to puzzle about, and when I am at the end, I beg God not to give her to me." Here is already one of the fundamental traits of Goethe's character: in his longing to experience life in its fulness he could not bind himself to one event. Whenever there came, through his fault, a crisis in his relations with others and separation and a sense of guilt followed, he suffered deeply in his imagination the pain that he was causing others. This tragic fate was part of his nature; he could not escape it. In his youth he suffered under his "so-being" until he learned to understand himself. In his well known "Original Words"

("Urworte") he speaks about the daimonic power in his life. "Daimon" he wrote over the first stanza; he called the second "Tyche", Providence, the inner power that saved so often his better Self. His friends suffered from this attitude: in their lives he left marks that did not heal, and he knew it. Often he felt as if under a curse. Not until he was able to recognize the universal value ("das allgemein Menschliche") of such personal experience and its result upon him, and in his poetry had "confessed" this gain was he consoled.

Naturally such a person will find much of life unsatisfactory. Home and birthplace became intolerable to Goethe. Soon he disliked Leipzig society with its fixed rules of behavior. Back in Frankfurt after three years of student freedom, he suffered greatly under personal restrictions, made necessary by a severe illness that he brought on himself. On his recovery he left Frankfurt with relief, ready for new experiences; yet during the next five years, his "travel years", Frankfurt remained the centre to which he always returned. In Strassbourg, whither he went to finish his law course, he enjoyed a rich period of development. Here Herder introduced him to Shakespeare and to the treasures of German folklore and architecture. He fell in love with Friederike Brion, the charming daughter of the minister of Sesenheim, who represented for him the natural, warm and cheerful type of German womanhood that Goethe always loved. The idyll ended in renunciation on her part, and Goethe left Strassbourg conscious of guilt—and we enjoy a handful of beautiful poems.

Back in Frankfurt Goethe practised law unsuccessfully, for he was more concerned with the problems of life. He considered as possible subjects Faust, Caesar, Mohammed, Prometheus, and wrote many unfinished sketches. Finally he wrote *Goetz von Berlichingen* which was a great success though it shows little of the poet's later style. The spirit of the French Revolution was already in the air, and the younger generation saw in the play the song of songs of freedom. Older people discussed its historical events, and young literary men rejoiced over Goethe's utter disregard of the "unities". The goal of his next trip to study law was Wetzlar, the beautiful town in the Lahn valley. The great event was his acquaintance with Kestner, the court secretary, and his young bride Lotte Buff. She, too, was blue-eyed, golden haired, and cheerful, and after the death of her mother had charge of eleven brothers and sisters. Meeting her in such domestic scenes Goethe fell passion-

ately in love. They danced together and wandered through fields for four beautiful months. Lotte remained faithful to Kestner, and Goethe left one morning, leaving only a brief note behind. One more of his many escapes.

Back in Frankfurt, he again tried and failed at law, for his thoughts were still in Wetzlar and letters of passionate love went to his friends. Then about a year later a young lawyer with whom he was intimate committed suicide. That event seemingly crystalized an idea that Goethe had nourished for some time: in four weeks he dashed off *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Not only does the book reveal his grief over a disappointing love affair, but it also expresses Goethe's despair about the infinite longing of man in a finite world—the FAUST problem! Though the chief characters are not true images of Goethe, Lotte, and Albert, yet they were well enough sketched to let the world know the intimate story behind the novel. His friends in Wetzlar objected strongly, and the friendship suffered. THE SORROWS made Goethe a famous writer, known in many lands. While the discussion was still raging whether one should mock or weep over Werther's fate, the author himself felt greatly relieved after this "confession". He was in the best of spirits and journeyed round Frankfurt and down the Rhine to visit friends. Here he came into touch with Spinoza's philosophy. His own views of life still unformed, Goethe was fascinated by Spinoza's idea of Nature as an expression of Divinity, for if it was true that the Universe, which includes men, animals, plants, and the inorganic world, was part of the Divine then his secret Self was also included in this bond. The Divinity in Nature was using him as an instrument. He reflected on this structure of his inner nature, and when he found that this creative power never left him he decided to take it as the basis of his whole being. During this month he also produced many of his finest ballads and lyrics, and, most important of all, his first sketch of FAUST, which was to remain unfinished for many years.

That winter saw young Goethe for the first time among the youth of Frankfurt society, which he had always avoided. Deeply in love with Lily Schoenemann, the daughter of a wealthy banker, he became engaged. Again we have a few lovely songs, composed before he escaped once again. With the two young Counts of Stolberg he went to Switzerland, where he enjoyed the beauties of nature and his freedom. Back

in Frankfurt, he returned to Lily, yet not for long. He became more and more silent and one day he came no more.

II

To the young Goethe, waiting impatiently in Heidelberg for the royal coach to take him to Weimar, the invitation of the Duke Carl August had come as a godsend. Longer residence in Frankfurt was impossible. He was taking with him the fame of a writer. He had discovered his poetic genius, and with the help of Spinoza he had interpreted his inner genius. He was surrendering himself to the changing winds that God sends." To August von Stolberg he wrote: "I wonder what fate has in mind for me that it makes me pass through so many experiences; it probably intends to lead me where general pain of mankind will trouble me no more," "Blessed peace, come, O come into my heart!" With such passive, subjective expectation Goethe arrived as guest of the 18-year old Duke of Weimar.

Situated in hilly country, Weimar was a city of about 6,000 souls. Nearby were picturesque villages, a few towns with ruined castles, Jena with its university, Eisenach with its Wartburg and famous for Luther and Bach, the little weaving town of Apolda, and Ilmenau with its mines; but there was little else to attract a young mind of Goethe's calibre, accustomed to the wide valleys of the Main and the Rhine with their busy, progressive life. Yet from now on, Weimar was the scene of the poet's activities.

What, then, made him like this place? Did court society attract him? Some of his friends had expressed disapproval of his association with aristocrats. Nor had he any liking for such a life. True, he was eager to leave the law, paternal disappointment, and Lily behind in Frankfurt, but also in Weimar he found what only life at a court could give him: the noble, unrestricted freedom his nature needed for development. Goethe disliked "the poisonous atmosphere of cities" and was passionately fond of the outdoor life in which this young nobility lived. He was an excellent rider, swimmer, skater and hunter. He still liked camping—so did the young Duke—and dancing with young girls under the linden trees. No wonder that this visit developed into an intimate friendship. To bind Goethe more closely to Weimar, he was presented with a small cottage in a large park. It was here that he began seriously to study nature. Yet the poet brought to Weimar

his imaginative, artistic mind, which had suffered so greatly under the study of law. He could repay his benefactor with his whole personality. How richly did he respond! He soon filled the empty court with a new spirit. A man keenly interested in people, a master of conversation, yet also a fine listener, he awoke new energies in young and old. His ability to write plays and farces soon drew every one into joyful enterprises. On outdoor stages that he had constructed performances took place at the Duke's summer residences of Tiefurt and Belvedere. Boredom gave way to cultural pleasures. Naturally Goethe became the Duke's most influential adviser in state affairs. He finally rose to be a Privy Councillor.

Was Goethe prepared for such an office? Could he relate such duties to his poetic ambitions? Goethe did not publish any major work during the next ten years, that is, as long as he was in charge of the internal and external affairs of the state. In *TASSO* he says: "The poet who lives self-contented in his inner world, in the inspirations of his free imagination, should not sit in the senate of princes . . . What should be noted here should produce an effect and should be of effective service." So the world began to forget the young poet; yet these administrative years were of the greatest importance to his poetry. (We might compare Milton's years in government service.) Of the first question, while it is true that he had had no training for such governmental tasks, except his disliked, superficial legal training, we should remember that his poetry was based on personal experience. If this decade in Weimar was of advantage to his personal development, his future poetic writings should show these fruits.

It is always dangerous to dogmatize on what would have happened if something else had not happened, especially if opinions vary greatly. We refer to Goethe's friendship with Frau von Stein, whom he met shortly after his arrival and with whom he fell deeply in love. She was the wife of Oberstallmeister von Stein, (a state official in charge of the royal stables) and the mother of seven children, of whom three boys were living. For more than 10 years this friendship continued. Seemingly she understood perfectly his troubled soul, and for the first time love of woman brought peace to Goethe. To keep this relationship as a friendship she drew his attention to his inner development. Yet if he, too, had not desired improvement of his inner Self, she could never have succeeded. They met every day, exchanged little notes and tokens, which

her youngest son and Goethe's favourite usually delivered, and discussed together the events of the day. To Lavater Goethe wrote: "She has gradually succeeded my mother, sister and loves, and a bond has developed between us like ties of nature." He speaks of love and confidence "without limitation" developing into an "indispensable custom." How much this intimate exchange of ideas meant to him he expressed in a letter to her: "Now the hour has come in which I am accustomed to see you daily, to relax, and to recover through the free exchange of our points of view; and "As long as you remain mine I will enjoy my leisure hours telling you just how I feel in freeing myself from all the worries of my troubled mind." What was troubling him, we might ask, that he needed such a sympathetic friend and confessor?

In becoming a Minister of State Goethe had entered a new field of duties. A scholar, he could not rule from his desk without detailed knowledge. As he had been born a man "thinking through his eyes," as he once put it, the many state affairs gave his inquisitive mind the right stimulus: he had to go to the root of a matter as he searched for the hidden law. Thus he discovered that to become a leader one had to master one's subject, to become a master one had to be an apprentice first, and to be a master means to be able to renounce personal desires. The discovery of this wisdom he described later in *VILHELM MEISTER'S APPRENTICE AND TRAVEL YEARS*.

The range of Goethe's official duties was wide. Herder called him the factotum, the general handiman of the State. He was Minister of War, and Minister of Highways. As Minister of Mines he studied geology. Yet he had also to balance the budget and curb the Duke's extravagance. For the theatre and actors he was responsible as Minister of Arts. Miscellaneous duties were his: to appoint professors at Jena, and to settle technical and welfare problems for farmers and weavers. At the beginning of his stay at Weimar he wrote Kestner: "I am accustomed to follow my instincts:" and to Kraft: "Accustomed to do every day what circumstances demand, what my insight, talents, and abilities permit, I do not care how long it takes me to remember the wise man who declared as sufficient three well used hours." Over his office door he wrote the motto: *hic est aut nusquam quod quaerimus* ("Here and nowhere else is what I desire.") Once the glorification of his emotions filled his mind and the lawyer's duties were an unwanted

disturbance; now the day belonged to his official duties; and only his rare leisure hours were reserved for poetry. Thus his poetic genius became subordinate to life. How much self-control did that require! The picture of this great change would be incomplete if we did not mention his attitude as a member of society. Before coming to Weimar he had rejected all formal rules of behavior, being governed by his momentary moods: "Nature has forbidden me to behave artificially." At court he discovered that the world is a firmly established order that the individual cannot disregard without danger to its very existence. In this Frau von Stein was his teacher; he wrote her: "I am trying out everything that we have discussed about conduct, style of life, behavior, manners, and I am able to take it leisurely, and yet I am conscious of myself." That is, he had accepted voluntarily the underlying principles of social behavior. Thus had come true the promise he had made to himself after reaching the summit of the Brocken after climbing through snow and ice in the middle of December soon after his arrival in Weimar. He took his success as a symbol of will power, which would enable him to reach the peak of his inner nature: to become master of himself.

After he had achieved this aim his interest in the court and state affairs diminished. Finally he was interested only in the results such actions had on his inner Self. From letters to Frau von Stein we know that it became increasingly difficult for him to repress his poetic genius. There came the day when he had to drop his burden. His well known escape from Karlsbad, where he was staying with the Duke, to Italy followed. Not even Frau von Stein had known of his intention; she never forgave him. To the Duke he wrote from his journey, asking for a long leave. He remained in Italy for two years, studying the masterpieces of art but most of all seeking to gain perspective of his inner Self. More and more he knew that his duty in life was not to administer a state, but to be a poet. He wrote the Duke: "I have found my better Self in this one and a half years of loneliness, but as what? As an artist." Another time we read: "Every day it becomes clearer to me that I am really born to be a poet." The Duke gave him his release, and Goethe's apprenticeship was ended. Yet this period of renunciation of his mission as a poet had been necessary for him to gain his better Self. He had needed ten years of state service and the loving understanding of Charlotte von Stein.

Goethe's moral development found expression, as Metz pointed out, in a changed style of writing. His early works were subjective. Prometheus, the creative artist; Mohammed, the religious genius; Faust, with his unlimited longing for knowledge, power and enjoyment; Werther, showing the greatest strength of emotion in despairing of the finite world—all these represent young Goethe. Yet with the inner progress in subordinating his subjective desires to objective challenge, his individual wishes to the general demand, we find in his writings a growing tendency towards the presentation of typical characters and their problems. In *Iphigenia*, *Faust*, *Herman and Dorothea*, the heroes not only mirror Goethe's inner life, but they also act according to their own psychological laws. In his last and maturest works—*The Elective Affinities*, *Wilhelm Meister's Travel Years*, *Faust II*—his characters have lost all non-essential characteristics and appear as symbols of human values or as personalities who in their moral lives have as object in view "universal human value" (das allgemein Menschliche). Shakespeare gives us men as they are; Goethe, as they ought to be.

Not much remains to tell of the poet's life. The struggle was over. He returned from Italy to Weimar and felt like a stranger, more lonely than before. The close relationship to Frau von Stein was dropped; instead, he took into his house a young simple minded, warm hearted girl, whom he later married. After he had found himself he, too, longed to sit by the fireside. Weimar society never accepted Christine Valpuis. One son of this marriage survived. Goethe's friendship with Schiller was of great importance. It took a long time for these two poets to understand the difference between their inner natures, but later they respected and influenced each other just because of the difference. Twice in later years Goethe experienced the inspiring power of love for women. In Marianne Willemer he found a beautiful and most congenial soul. The mysterious poems he wrote to her are known under the title *Der Westoestliche Divan*. To Ulricke von Lewetzow he dedicated the elegy known as "The Marienbad."

In his farewell to life Goethe could say:

Ihr gluecklichen Augen,
Was je ihr gesehen,
Es sei, wie es wolle,
Es war doch so schoen!

You happy eyes,
Whatever you viewed,
Whether good or bad,
It was so wonderful!

III

The picture we have drawn of Goethe's inner development and the outer circumstances under which it took place has revealed his growth from his youthful "Storm and Stress" to maturity. We have drawn attention to the centre of the poet's inner nature: his eager longing to find his better Self, and his infinite desire to connect his being to the eternal powers. Now we must give the essence of Goethe's philosophy, his interpretation of man's mission in this world, which finally brought him peace of mind.

We know before hand that we are not to expect abstract ideas, for Goethe was no theoretical thinker; nor shall we find a philosophical system, for Goethe was a poet speaking through symbols. Yet, if we collect his confessions on this matter we can trace his philosophical thought back to the ideas of the Neoplatonists of the 16th and 17th centuries. In Giordano Bruno, Shaftesbury, and Leibniz we find the same ideas that had fascinated the young Goethe in Spinoza's general view of nature. Goethe continued, therefore, in his philosophical thought in the line of the German mystic philosophy of nature. In religion, too, he remained a neoplatonic mystic.

For this philosophy, nature is a creation of God, a world of rising terraces in which the stone world, or the earth, is the lowest region; then come the kingdoms of plants and animals, and finally the realm of the highest developed creature: Man. It is the picture of a pyramid, crowned by God, or shall we better say, by Divinity. Between man and God Goethe placed a "daimonic" power (*das Daimonische*). This picture of the world is, of course, very old; one is astonished at Goethe's strict adherence to it. Yet from the great variety of appearances in the empirical world Goethe is interested only in the original phenomena, which are the basic laws of nature, pure and uncomplicated. Accessible to our observation, they are of great significance, being expressions of the Divinity in nature. Here the infinite spirit penetrates into the finite world to become symbols of the Divine: "All transitory things are but symbols of eternal truth," Such original phenomena Goethe found in all regions of the universe: in the organic world, the kingdoms of plants and of animals, as underlying laws of the daimonic power—that is, in his own mind—and in the realm of man. Nature is God's world, and the original phenomena have for

Goethe, the scholar, creator and mystic rooted in this earth, the value of revelation.

We can see now why Goethe ardently loved to study natural science: to read the whole book of nature meant to study Divinity in all its manifoldness. Goethe's interest in nature goes far back into his childhood, but in Weimar he began the serious study of geology, physics, botany, anatomy, and psychology. How seriously he took these studies we can gather from a remark to Eckermann: "I do not attach importance to my work as a poet, but I claim to be alone in my time in apprehending the true nature of color." During the pillage of Weimar his greatest fear was for his scientific work in manuscript. The loss of it, he thought, would be irreparable. Yet little of his scientific studies is recognized to-day.

Did Goethe undertake scientific research as our time understands it? As always we can find the answer in his "long confessions." In *Wilhelm Meister's Travel Years*, Montanus studies the earth seriously as a scholar. Yet Montanus is really Goethe, the last universal man looking at nature. He cannot help connecting the results of his scientific research with the meaning of life, the parts of his discoveries to a meaningful universe as a whole. Nature becomes a realm of values. "I do not fear," says Montanus-Goethe, "to be blamed for the paradox that I have been led from examining the heart (man's soul), the youngest, the most manifold, most changeable, most upstart part of creation to examine the oldest, hardest, deepest, most unshakable son of nature (the earth), for one will gladly admit that all natural things are coherent." Looking from the summit of a mountain, he noticed that it was close to the heavenly powers, yet subject to the magnetism of the earth. He proceeds to compare this bare summit to the lonely feelings of a man devoting himself to the deepest thoughts. To win ground on this earth, we must remember, is Faust's last longing:

... this globe
Has room for great deeds;
Something to be astonished at will happen.

As a student of botany Goethe became dissatisfied with the fixed species implied by the Linnean system of classification. He suspected a continuous change in plant-form and believed that he had found the original plant, one of the "original laws" in nature. He gives his conclusions in *The Metamorphosis of the Plant*. Everything is individual; yet everything is connected

by unnoticeable transitions to everything else. Goethe combined with the assumption of an identical organic original form the law of continuous form-change. It was Dilthey who pointed to the psychological side of this conclusion; for him this law originated in the poet's own mind. The unceasing development Goethe had experienced in his own inner organism he applied to nature. We must, according to Goethe, keep ourselves flexible if we wish to receive a vivid perception of nature and the way she would lead us.

This law of metamorphosis holds also in the animal kingdom. Goethe made some notable discoveries, such as the development of the human skull from vertebrae, and the presence of the intermaxillary bone in the human, as well as in animal, skulls. Again, however, his chief interest lay in the discovery of a leading principle of research. He found that everywhere in the universe the relation of the parts to the whole is retained and that it can be seen how the parts are affected by the whole. "I stuck to the thought of investigating the meaning of each part separately and then determining its relation to the whole." "Rejoice, highest creation of nature! You are able to follow the highest thoughts to which it, creating, rose."

This law holds not merely in the different realms of this poem of a neoplatonic universe but also in this gigantic picture of nature. Each higher form includes some parts of the lower forms, until finally man embraces everything that is inferior to him. Though he is bound by this law to the lower kingdoms, yet he is qualified for creative work. Form and continual transformation:

All forms are similar, but none is equal to the other,
And so the chorus points to a secret law.

In this world picture Goethe gives special significance to light. God's world could not exist without it. Light becomes a visible symbol; it is the emanation of God's spirit into the dark world:

Light and spirit—the one dominating in the physical and the
other in the moral world—

Are the most imaginable, indivisible energies we can imagine.

Goethe, who undertook a great number of color experiments, believed that he had surpassed Newton's theory of light.

Man, the highest creation in the universe, can rise to great heights, even though he is bound to nature. In his own life Goethe had fulfilled this task. But what is man's task in this world? Goethe gives his answer in *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*. As a youth he had hoped through magic to reach nature's inner centre; now a long life has convinced him that the meaning of the universe and of mankind can be found only through a fully experienced life. In the every day struggles of life and in observation of matter, man has his answer to the question. Thus will he find *himself*. His first task is to become his better Self. *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister* accompanied Goethe for more than half a century. They show man's metamorphosis and could be finished only after the poet had reached full maturity. Both works presuppose man's longing for self perfection and for a meaningful life. Goethe knew, of course, that many are "incomplete" men and that even the noblest fails in his striving for the infinite in this finite world. In Goethe there was this vital desire for inner perfection; it included his inner purification and a longing for redemption. He followed the two ways to reach his goal: wide contact with life, and concentration on his inner Self. He speaks of this expansion and contraction as a basic law of nature. *Faust*, with his unlimited longing for life, represents the utmost expansion; *Wilhelm Meister*, as well as all the other Goethean characters who have learned to renounce, represents successful concentration. Even so Goethe read his own life: "An intuitive desire for self perfection that works within and without me is the core and centre of my existence." Even the aesthetic man, the poet, must take an active part in life's struggle before devoting himself to his aesthetic mission. The motto of *The Paedagogical Province* is, therefore, "Vom Nuetzlichen, durchs Wahre zum Schoenen." ("From Reality, through Truth to Beauty."). Goethe paid so much attention to the active life that he believed that the unceasingly active monad, to use a term from Leibniz, will not be destroyed; Nature will have to permit it a new existence when the earthly body has been dissolved.

Goethe's attitude towards the great political event of his day, The French Revolution, is well known. Though he had spent more years in active affairs than do most poets, yet his real battlefield was in man's soul, not international politics. Moreover, the coming era seems to have given him a sense of insecurity. In order to protect his mind he stood aside from the titanic struggle. Yet Goethe was not a pure individualist:

he had aristocratic feelings, as all outstanding men have, but, as *Wilhelm Meister's Travel Years* shows, he was aware of the importance of co-operation of men for the sake of the whole.

In man's task of finding and perfecting the Self is included an ethical demand. Yet is man free to undertake such a task? In the *Ur-worte*, we read: "So you have to be; you cannot escape yourself" and "All our intention is just a longing, because we have to follow. We just seem to be free." Man is tied to his entelechy, and he also must conform to his "Daimon," as Goethe calls this inner individual power, if he is to live in inner harmony. In *The Elective Affinities*, Ottilie broke the law: "I have stepped out of my path; I have broken my own law; I have even lost the right feelings for it." Man's soul, however, does not merely turn on itself, for it is interwoven with the objective world. Yet this contact, too, is determined by his individuality. Everywhere are walls! Yet on two sides man's limitations are broken. Eros, who acts as the inspiring flame, lifts man out of this lonely tower. How often had Goethe experienced this himself! (It must be said here that in loving, only a very few grasp the idea of love.) The other escape is through conscience. "The heavenly stars proclaim God's honor . . . The moral law in man's heart determines the gravitation of his inner moral world." This leads us to the ultimate truth: "Could you even dare to think yourself in the centre of this infinite order if you could not manifest an equally wonderful force that revolves about a pure heart?" (Darfst du dich in der Mitte dieser ewig lebendigen Ordnung auch nur denken, sobald sich nicht gleichfalls in dir ein herrliches Bewegtes zu einen reinen Mittelpunkt kreisend hervortut?) Therefore, we are, after all, free to perfect our personalities.

To prepare ourselves for this last state of mind requires much self-restraint. "Stirb und Werde," Goethe cries out to us, by which he means that we must overcome the obstacles within ourselves in order to arise anew, for only then shall we be able to make the law of our individual nature conform to the universal law. We have reached the transcendental sphere. Can man fulfill his mission unattended? His part is to strive for the better Self. In *Faust* Goethe has shown that for man the fulfilment rests in the unceasing longing for perfection. He has to acquiesce in the movement toward the goal. Yet the eternal powers are in accordance with his intentions. They

contribute their part: Mercy and Loving Forgiveness welcome him.

<p>Wer immer strebend sich bemueht, Den koennen wir erloesen, Und hat an ihm die Liebe gar Von oben teilgenommen, Begegnet ihm die selige Schar Mit herzlichem Willkommen.</p>	<p>Who strenuously strives onward, Him we have power to redeem Even the Divine Love Has shown its sympathy And the eternal chorus will Receive him with kindest welcome.</p>
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The Divine is redeeming man! What did divinity, or God, mean to Goethe? God is invisible. He cannot be expressed in man's terms. He cannot be found in one form; He must be sought in a thousand ways. The most beautiful appearances, the deepest thoughts we may call God. For the world is an image of God, but an image only. God is much more. We can approach Him only in paying awe to Him. Goethe's religion is one of deepest awe. We express our reverence to God in three ways: in view of what is superior to us, inferior to us, and equal to us. As we look upon the wonder of our existence, our sufferings, and our inner victories, a sense of awe arises within us.

Goethe's life was "Storm and Stress," losing and finding, to the very end. "There is no end!" There is only one power that "keeps the world together in its deepest centre." It is the greatest of the "original laws" of our spiritual-moral world: Love, infinite Love, emanating from God and also Divine in itself. Goethe could subscribe to the words of the greatest of the Apostles: "But the greatest of these is Love."¹

1. This article is based on ideas and methods of philosophy known in English as "The School of Understanding" founded by Wilhelm Dilthey. The writer wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to Prof. E. Spranger, now of Tuebingen, Germany, who in directing her earliest studies introduced her to this approach to life.