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## THE CORRESPONDENCE AND CONVERSATIONS OF GOETHE

SOME fifteen thousand letters, which in certain editions fill nearly fifty goodly volumes, thousands of conversations piously and often lengthily recorded by a faithful and diligent admirer, such is the respectable bulk which Goethe offers to the reader of his *Correspondence* and *Conversations*. Goethe's letters alone cover a period of sixty-four years in a long life whose external events may briefly be told, but whose intellectual activity is almost unique.

By virtue of the varied and finished form in which the *Correspondence* and *Conversations* of Goethe have come down to us, they are of themselves a distinct contribution to literature, and at the same time they give us invaluable aid in the study of the different aspects of the genius of Goethe. Whether we deal with his life or study him as a philosopher, a poet, an artist, a literary critic, or a scientist, in every case we have to turn to the correspondence. The only drawback in the presence of such a correspondence available for so many various uses, is that when it has already been often handled to good effect, it has lost some of its freshness by the time it is approached for its own sake.

And yet, stripped of the richest part of their substance as they have been or will eventually be, the *Correspondence* and *Conversations* of Goethe are not devoid of interest, in one respect at least. More than any other parts of his works, including *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, they give us a close insight into the personality of Goethe.

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Many pictures of Goethe have been given. One of the most popular during his lifetime was the image of the youthful author of *Werther*. To some of his contemporaries, chiefly in Germany, we owe the unflattering portrait of the man of the world shining at a Lilliputian court, living in an atmosphere of flattery and without any sympathy or enthusiasm for anything but his own attractive personality. Others among his readers have preferred to remember him in a truer, though incomplete light, as a patriarch enjoying peacefully among art treasures and a few devoted friends and admirers the evening of a long and tranquil life.

Goethe himself entertained no illusion as to the faithfulness of the pictures which were given of him by his contemporaries. In a letter written to one of his friends he said: "If, my dear one, you can picture to yourself a Goethe who, in a laced coat, and otherwise clad from head to foot with finery in tolerable keeping, in the idle glare of sconces and lustres, amid a motley throng of people, is held a prisoner at a card-table by a pair of beautiful eyes; who in alternating distraction is driven from company to concert and from concert to ball, and with all the interest of frivolity pays his court to a pretty blonde, you have the present Carnival-Goethe . . ." And he promptly added, "But there is another Goethe," another Goethe which he has partly presented in his *Autobiography*; but this was written when he was already sixty, and who at sixty will revive the follies and dreams of his youth?

The impression which a casual observer might derive from the *Correspondence* and *Conversations* of Goethe is that a man who has written fifteen thousand letters and allowed thousands of conversations to be recorded must needs be loquacious and take himself very seriously. The truth is that Goethe, amiable and approachable as he was, by no

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means wore his heart on his sleeve for intruders to peer at. In a letter written to Schiller in 1796 he confessed that the fault which his friend had criticized in one of his books, and which he willingly admitted, was due to his temperament: "It is like a physical short-coming which makes me try to keep my life, my actions and my writings from the eyes of the public. That is why I always like to travel incognito and prefer to dress informally rather than elaborately. In a conversation with anyone with whom I am not well acquainted I will rather choose an insignificant topic or I will at least express myself in the most matter-of-fact manner, making myself appear more frivolous than I am, and trying to place myself between my real and my apparent self."

This is not the only apparent contradiction which we shall meet while retracing some of the stages in the development of the personality of Goethe as it is reflected in his *Correspondence* and *Conversations*. This reluctance to give out his intimate thoughts to the public renders the first letters of Goethe all the more invaluable to us. They give us a glimpse into the mind of a marvelously gifted youth of fifteen, wide-awake, proud, sensitive, highly strung and yet already endowed with an inward earnestness not understood at the time. Although one should not attach undue importance to youthful confessions, it is interesting to see young Goethe representing himself in his application for membership in a select club of young men of Frankfurt as "somewhat impetuous," adding, "On the other hand no one forgets an injury more readily than I." Goethe admits also that he is "very much given to laying down the law" but "ready to place himself under any discipline" if it is applied with discernment. "Another detail," he adds, "I am impatient and do not like to remain long in uncertainty." The impatience, one might almost say, the imperious rest-

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lessness, of Goethe when he set about a task appears from the number of notes and letters which followed his application.

Goethe now writes that in the autumn of 1765 he betook himself to Leipzig, having left his native town Frankfurt "with a sentiment of complete indifference as if he were never to enter it again." The letters which, as a student at Leipzig, he sends to his sister and his friends at home show young Goethe free at last from the somewhat gloomy and oppressive influence of his home. Having broken the bars of his cage, we find him enjoying life, looking around and with amazing promptitude becoming thoroughly at home in the atmosphere of the university town which was also the "kleine Paris" of the North, a town in which elegance and gallantry reigned supreme. Goethe brought to Leipzig no unusual enthusiasm for learning. His was the attitude of the amateur student who will condescend to bring his body to the lecture room, while keeping full control of his imagination and wits, occasionally exerting both at the expense of the professor. At the very beginning of his university life, on October 13, 1765, he writes to his sister: "You can hardly imagine what a beautiful thing a Professor is. I have seen these Gentlemen in all their glory and I remain awe-struck." Gottsched, although his star was already waning, was then one of the greatest names in the University, but not so in the eyes of young Goethe who writes to one of his friends in Frankfurt: "I have not yet seen Gottsched. He has married again. A lieutenant-colonel's daughter—she is nineteen and he is sixty-five. She four feet high, and he seven. She is as thin as a herring and he as bloated as a feather-bag."

Enjoying the freedom, "revelling in joy, living like a bird on a green bough," spending most of his time at parties,

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concerts, theatres, dinners, suppers, drives, Goethe has only one complaint to make, which is that his "purse is beginning to suffer." No sooner has Goethe made himself thoroughly at home in the best circles in Leipzig, than we find him raising himself to a slightly philosophical and superior plane from which he can point to the empty frivolity of the young society women of Leipzig and the lack of culture and of judgment on the part of its citizens. The short sketches which he gives his sister of social gatherings at Leipzig, often written in French, are as merciless as witty.

Just when worldly attractions seem to have won young Wolfgang over and entirely absorbed his mind, we find another aspect of Goethe coming to the surface. In May, 1766, he writes to his sister: "I have become so quiet, so quiet; you will not believe me—I often have fits of melancholy without knowing why. Then I look at the world with the eyes of a scared owl. I seek the depths of the woods, the beauty of the rivers, watching daisies, the violets . . ." Another letter to his friend Moors tells us that his sentimental needs, which had found no satisfaction in the society of Leipzig, were coming into their own. Knowing his poetical imagination which would adorn the humblest realities, his love of simplicity and sincerity, we can understand that, even after his unfortunate experience with Gretchen at Frankfurt, Goethe should have fallen in love with the daughter of an innkeeper and that, giving up more aristocratic lodgings, he should have settled down at the Golden Apple.

A letter of October, 1768, when he had already left Leipzig, gives this vivid picture of the small circle in which he spent almost two and a half years of his university life :

Your servant, Herr Schönkopf,—how are you, madam?—good evening, miss,—Peterchen, good evening.

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N. B.—You must imagine that I enter at the little door. You, Herr Schönkopf, are on the sofa by the warm stove, Madame in her corner at the writing-table, Peter close in front of the stove; and if Kätchen is sitting in my place, by the window, she may just get up, and make way for the stranger.

Although he then deprecated social distinctions, Goethe, even in the first enthusiasm of his love for Kätchen, was never ready to disregard them altogether. His attitude in this connection is fairly accurately represented in his letter of October 1, 1766, to his friend Moors:

What is social position? A mere color-wash that men have invented to daub over people who do not deserve it. And money is just as miserable an advantage in the eyes of a person who thinks. I am in love with a girl without position and without means, and at this moment I feel for the very first time the happiness that a true affection affords. . . . Were you only to know this excellent girl, dearest Moors, you would forgive me this folly which I am committing in loving her. Yes, she is worthy of the happiness which I wish her without being able ever to hope that I shall contribute anything to it.

There seems also to be something of a cynical touch and of a practical enthusiasm in his love for Kätchen, as far as we can judge from his letter to his sister Cornelia:

Among my acquaintances who are alive, the little Schönkopf deserves not to be forgotten. She is a very good girl, with an uprightness of heart joined to an agreeable naïveté,—she looks after my linen and other things when necessary, for she knows all about these matters, and is pleased to give me the benefit of her knowledge, and I like her well for that. Am I not a bit of scamp, seeing I am in love with all these girls? Who could resist them when they are good; as for beauty, that leaves me indifferent, and indeed all my acquaintances are more good than beautiful.

It was about the same time that Goethe came under the influence of a man eleven years older than himself, a certain Behrisch, cynical, intelligent, and witty; and who, while acting as a tutor to the young Prince of Lindenau, served as a sort of Mephistopheles to young Goethe, introducing him not only to the famous tavern of Auerbach but also to certain more or less commendable aspects of life. The cynical and amoral attitude of Behrisch is strongly reflected in some

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of the amazing letters of his young friend and admirer. But almost as soon as Behrisch, who left Leipzig in October, 1767, has disappeared from his horizon, Goethe appears to us in a new light. The playful and often cynical humor of the indifferent onlooker makes room for the intense earnestness of an ardent lover, and soon we see him going through all the tortures of a sincere passion crossed by jealousy.

Other changes were soon to occur in Frankfurt where Goethe returned in the summer of 1768, "sick" in body and in mind, "out of harmony with himself and with the world around him." The letters written in the autumn and the winter of 1768 reveal a Goethe very different from the one which is presented in his *Autobiography*. In the depressing atmosphere of Frankfurt which at that time he considered an entirely provincial and unattractive place, we find him restless, tired of inactivity, resenting as a torture the invalid's life to which he is condemned. At times, the boyish and sprightly moods of the student days at Leipzig reappear: "I get along tolerably well," he writes to one of his Leipzig friends, "I have half a dozen angels of girls whom I often see, though I have lost my heart to none of them. They are pleasant creatures and make my life uncommonly agreeable. He who does not know Leipzig might be very well off here."

Spending most of his time "in the company of the Muses," as he writes to Oeser, "and in a correspondence which will bring pleasure into a sickly solitary life which for a youth of twenty years would otherwise be something of a martyrdom," Goethe was also able to indulge in other mental activities. It was, as is well known, during this "exile" in Frankfurt that he became interested in alchemy and came for a while under the influence of Frau von Klettenberg, who

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opened to him new horizons which eventually reflected themselves in the first part of *Faust*.

In those days of disillusionment and humiliation to the pride which Goethe was still unwilling to surrender, we suddenly come across a group of letters which in their earnestness strangely contrast with some of the preceding ones: "Most esteemed Herr Professor," does he write to Oeser,

How I am indebted to you, dearest Herr Professor, for having pointed out to me the path to the true and beautiful, and for having made my heart susceptible of their charms. I owe you more than I can thank you for. . . . Instruction does much, but encouragement everything. Who amongst all my teachers has considered me worthy of encouragement, but yourself. They either altogether blamed, or altogether praised, and nothing can be so injurious to progress. Encouragement after blame is sunshine after rain—fruitful increase. Indeed, Herr Professor, had you not given my love for the Muses a helping hand, I should have really despaired. What I was when I came to you, you know, as well as what I was when I left you; the difference is your work. I well know that that happened to me which happened to Prince Biribincker, after his bath of flames: I saw altogether differently, I saw more than before; and, what is beyond all, I saw what I still have before me to do, if I will be anything. . . . You have taught me to be modest without losing confidence, and to be proud without presumption.

The tone of his very letters to Käthchen Schönkopf is no longer the same. On December 12, he writes to her:

A dream reminded me last night that I owe you a reply. Not as if I had so completely forgotten it; not as if I never thought of you; no, my friend, every day says something to me of you and of what I owe you. Yet it is strange, and a sensation which you too perhaps will know, the memory of absent friends becomes dimmed, although not effaced by time. The distractions of our life, acquaintance with fresh objects, in short every change in our condition, works upon our hearts as dust and smoke on a painting, making the finely-drawn lines quite imperceptible, whilst one does not know how it happens. A thousand circumstances bring you before my mind, a thousand times do I see your image, but as faintly, and with as little feeling as if I thought of some stranger. It often occurs to me that I owe you a reply, without my experiencing the slightest desire to write to you. When I now read your kind letter, already some months old, and see your friendship and care for one so unworthy, I am shocked at myself; and then only feel what a sad change must have come over my heart, when I suffer that to pass by without gladness, which formerly would have raised me to the heavens. Pardon me for this. Can one blame a miserable being because he cannot rejoice?



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There is a sort of autumnal sadness and a complete renunciation of the past in these parting words, written in January, 1770, "I cannot tell you more of myself than that I am living quietly, that I am hearty, healthy and busy . . . You are still a lovable girl and will also be a lovable wife and I, I shall remain Goethe."

It was about the same time that Goethe went through a mystical crisis the depth of which had never been thoroughly understood and might not be understood even today were it not for some letters to Langer,<sup>1</sup> which were discovered but recently, and which shed a new light on the extremely rich possibilities constantly offered by Goethe's personality. He was then, as he tells us, "a young and ardent being sick at heart and in body and aspiring to an unknown salvation." His attitude towards religion in his student days had been one of indifference and distrust. Then suddenly at the very time when he appears to be engaged in the company of the Muses and absorbed in alchemy we find him writing letters remarkable in their candid fervor and almost unique in their Biblical poetry and simplicity: "I owe you a great deal," he writes to Langer in November, 1768, "all the pastors in the world would have been incapable of touching a soul like mine—your affection, your sincerity alone could accomplish this prodigy." Goethe remains conscious of what he calls "the spark of an evil pride which is still burning in my soul, too powerful in me and which," he tells Langer, "will—I am afraid—continue to be so in the future." But two months later we find him writing to the same Langer: "Yes, I have wandered far, very far. I have suffered and now I am free. My soul had to be scorched and if there is, as I am told, a real hope of seeing my physical health improve, this terrible crisis will have been the most fortunate event

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by d'Harcourt in his *L'Education sentimentale de Goethe, 1749-1770*, Paris, 1931.

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in my life . . . There is in my soul, Langer, more silence than in yours, and I am ten years younger. But how long will this silence last. God alone knows! I am young and some day no doubt I will come out of the present labyrinth. But who can tell if the light which floods me now will always lighten my path and if I will go astray on the roads . . . Now and then I feel within me a great, great peace, a deep silence . . . We will wander yet, perhaps a long time, but in the end all will be well." And again, in the spring of 1770, he writes from Strasburg: "We invalids have over people in good health the superiority of being delicate and fragile and in a certain way more happy. When things go wrong with the body, oh how well the soul knows how to remain quiet at home, and wait and watch."

As seen through Goethe's correspondence, the years from 1765, when he entered the University of Leipzig, to the spring of 1770, when at the age of twenty-one he left for Strasburg, may be considered as a period of initiation to life and of artistic and sentimental development, followed by a moral crisis which matured his thought, enlarged his horizon and allowed him to turn even the unfortunate experiences of a somewhat irregular youth to benefit.

The period which follows is, on the contrary, less one of artistic and sentimental, than of intellectual, development. Having recovered his health, his buoyancy of mind and the world opening before him as an ever new and ever attractive stage, Goethe finds an entirely new atmosphere in Strasburg, the meeting point of two civilizations, French then, but still steeped in German culture. Before he reached Strasburg, Goethe, although he had already read very extensively, chiefly in the way of poetry, had somewhat wasted or at least scattered the rich resources of his mind in worldly and sentimental pursuits. His stay at Strasburg on the

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contrary deepened and intensified the earnest side in his nature, while giving a new impulse to his imagination. New intellectual vistas were opened to him. Those were the days of Herder, the Bible, Homer, Shakespeare, and McPherson. It is a most interesting period in the life of Goethe, marked in particular by the developing in his personality of such traits as the rapidity with which he adapts himself to new circumstances, the utter confiding frankness of his letters, chiefly to Salzman, the persistence of his youthful enthusiasms, and the promptitude with which the disciple and the admirer, in Goethe, comes up to the level of his guides and inspirers and offers to meet them and discuss with them on an equal footing.

Till that period art had been more of a vocation for Goethe than literature. On his return from Strasburg in 1771, we find him again, as in 1768, gathering and sifting the experiences of the past months. These were soon to find their expression, not in a moral or mystical crisis, but in a full-fledged masterpiece, his *Götz von Berlichingen* which amply testifies to the fact that, without giving up his leanings towards art, Goethe had finally been won over to the side of literature. In November, 1771, he sends to his friend and admirer Salzman a letter infinitely valuable to us for the glimpse it allows us into his state of mind and his methods of composition.

I am dramatizing the history of one of the noblest of Germans, rescuing the memory of an honest man; and the great labor which it costs me affords a genuine means of employing my time, which here I feel so necessary, for it is sad to have to live in a place where all our activity must simmer within ourselves. I am not satisfied with it, and still converse with myself both in the fields and on paper. It is true, that, when thrown back on itself, my soul soars to flights which collapsed in the distracted life of Strasburg. Yet even that would form but poor company, if I did not turn all the power which I feel within me towards one object, and try to seize and carry it on as far as I can.

Through these lines we can feel the play of an imagina-

tion unique in its freshness and its power of constantly renewing itself, and also of a sensibility almost fully developed. We see imagination and sensibility alike reaping the benefit of a rich literary training, and Goethe finally resorting to words rather than to plastic arts to express his sentimental moods and the visions of his mind. Here we have him in the characteristic attitude of the romantic poet who must give vent to his pent up feelings either "on paper" or "in conversations with himself" in the presence of Nature.

At the same time we find him trying to concentrate within himself all the resources of his imagination and his intellect. Such concentration can hardly be reconciled with scattered confidences and that is why the correspondence of Goethe in the very fruitful years from 1772 to 1776 is far less valuable for the study of his personality than his other more finished literary creations. Going deeper into his sentiments and moods, and fully able to express them, Goethe develops these into chapters of his masterpieces instead of spreading them through his letters. In fact his correspondence during the two years which precede the composition of *Werther* is strangely misleading. Although we have frequent references to the sorrow which he experienced after leaving his friend Kestner and Charlotte (the future heroine of *Werther*), nothing whatever betrays the preparation of a masterpiece so closely connected with a sentimental episode in the life of the author. One might even say that not only does Goethe not allow his correspondence to interfere with his literary pursuits, but that literature modifies to a certain extent the character of this correspondence. As an artist and a highly imaginative writer he likes to picture himself in certain attitudes: "still on the billows in my little boat," he writes to Herder in July, 1772, "and when the stars hide themselves, I float along in the hand of Fate, and courage

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and hope, fear and peace, alternate within my breast." As a romantic poet he is fond of dwelling on certain tragic and sentimental situations. When we read between the lines of his parting notes to Kestner and to Charlotte, we cannot help feeling that he is unquestionably sincere, but also that he enjoys picturing himself in the attitude of the forlorn and departing lover. There is something highly and deliberately romantic under the apparently artless simplicity of his words to Kestner, September 10, 1772:

He is gone, Kestner; when you get this letter, he will be gone. Give Lottchen the enclosed note. I was very composed, but your conversation has torn me to pieces. At present I can say nothing to you but farewell. Had I remained with you a moment longer, I could not have restrained myself. Now I am alone, and tomorrow I go. Oh, my poor head!

to Charlotte:

I hope, indeed, to come back again, but God knows when. Lotte, what did my heart feel whilst you were talking, for I knew that it was the last time that I should see you. Not the last time, and yet tomorrow I go away. He is gone. . . . I am now alone, and may weep. I leave you happy, and shall remain in your hearts. I shall see you again, but not to see you tomorrow is never to see you again. Tell the boys he is gone. I can say no more.

Highly romantic as was the disposition of Goethe at the time, there was in him too much of an artist and of a classicist not to feel that a thought or a sentiment remained incomplete till fully and harmoniously expressed. Having for months carefully nurtured his emotions, instead of trying to curb them, having developed them through his imagination, and completed them with the experiences of others (the suicide in Jerusalem of a young attaché to the Brunswick Embassy), Goethe once more expressed them through a literary channel and promptly forgot them.

There is no greater joy for the true poet than a great sorrow when faithfully and poetically rendered, and no sooner had *Werther* been published than we find Goethe in a state of joy and exaltation, which strongly reflects itself in

his answer to Kestner who had complained of thus being brought into a novel:

Thanks, dear friend, you are always good! Oh, that I could fall on your neck, throw myself at Lotte's feet one, one minute, and all, all should be blotted out, explained, which I could never make clear through books and paper! . . . Oh, ye unbelievers! would I cry, ye of little faith! Could you feel the thousandth part of what *Werther* is to a thousand hearts, you would not reckon the cost which it has been to you. . . . Dear brother Kestner, if you will wait you will be helped. I would not for my own life's sake recall *Werther*, *Werther* must—must be!

Goethe's emotional temperament and strong imagination were such that he could not remain long without a passion. If we omit a short-lived but profound attachment for Lili Schönemann, which caused him to become reluctantly but officially engaged and brought him to the verge of marriage, which he dreaded and fortunately escaped, the next stage in the development of his personality, as seen through his correspondence, is the period which goes from 1776 to 1789. During these thirteen years Goethe came under the spell of Charlotte von Stein, a very distinguished woman who lived at the court of Weimar and to whom in the course of a long attachment he wrote some eighteen hundred letters. In this correspondence with Charlotte von Stein, Goethe reveals the same inflammable heart, the same ardent imagination, the same impatient and imperious disposition, which he eventually had to curb. From 1776 to 1788, when he left for Italy, "immersed" as he was "in court and political affairs," Charlotte von Stein was a sort of social guide and intellectual companion to him. He gained a great deal in refinement and self-control from this intelligent and brilliant noblewoman whose influence on him he considered as important as that of Shakespeare. But it was not in his nature to remain long without breaking away from intellectual or sentimental bonds which interfered with the full development of his personality. On his return from Italy

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we find a Goethe who, having widened his horizon and partly quenched his thirst for art, feels ill at ease within the bars of his golden cage at Weimar. While reluctant to see the end of a friendship from which he had greatly benefited, he arranges his life in such a way that Charlotte von Stein brings their correspondence abruptly to a close. On this occasion one can note the firmness with which Goethe refuses to modify the status of his relations with his new companion, Christiane Vulpius, and the amazing frankness with which, although conscious of his debt towards Charlotte, he reasserts his personality and shows his resentment of any domination. "And you alone," he writes to her in one of his last letters, June, 1789, "would withdraw your affection, the best, the most intimate that I possess?"

But I confess to you that I can no longer bear the way in which you have treated me up to the present. When I wanted to talk to you, when I was in a communicative mood, you closed my mouth and accused me of indifference; while I was laboring for my friends, you said I was cold and negligent. You have criticized my every expression, my every gesture, and my whole manner of being, you have constantly tormented me.

I could add many other things if I did not fear I would hurt your feelings rather than regain your affection.

The ending of the correspondence with Charlotte von Stein brings to a close the period of sentimental "storm and stress" in Goethe's career.

Goethe, who was not a moralist and never claimed to be one, ordered his life very much as an artist does his studio, with a view to keeping his full freedom for the development of his personality. But the arrangement which he chose did not allow of any further prolonged intellectual or sentimental friendship with other women. The only other correspondence which he carried on with a woman, for any length of time, is his correspondence with the sister of the poet Brentano, Bettina Von Arnin, known as "A Child"; a highly impulsive and romantic child, almost an *enfant*

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*terrible* in her desire to protrude her infatuation, first into the life of Goethe and then upon the eyes of the public. Unfortunately the correspondence with "A Child," interesting as it is, blends reality so inextricably with romance, fiction, and a burning desire for notoriety that it can hardly be depended upon in a study of Goethe's personality.

It is not unusual in the career of Goethe that a period of sentimental or artistic activity is followed by one of intellectual development. And so it was from 1792 to 1805, a period of thirteen years, portrayed chiefly in his correspondence with Schiller. The first unfavorable impressions, the prejudices which seemed to preclude all further relations between the two writers, are well known. These were none the less followed by a friendship which may be considered as unique in literature if we recall the temperaments of the men, their ways of living, and above all their "modes of conceiving things." Of this correspondence with Schiller, we content ourselves with remarking that it comes at a critical period in the literary career of Goethe, at a time when, uneasy and conscious of flagging inspiration, he feels that he must again renew himself. These letters reveal him as eager to understand, taking pains to make himself clearly understood, and constantly seeking thoroughly to master the subjects under discussion. They show him to be a high-strung, nervous, slightly impatient writer who makes constant, though often belated, efforts to control himself and to render justice to his rivals. The poet also reappears, but no longer in his concentrative mood. Still under the powerful impulse of his visit to Italy we see him carried along, almost buffeted, by strong currents, scarcely able to seize the various ideas and dreams or passing visions which cross through his mind. To him the death of Schiller came as a severe blow. Other friendships had passed and left



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him resigned and serene but he could never replace Schiller's. The year 1805 marks the end of these periods which enriched his thought and strengthened or renewed his inspiration.

After 1805 the intellectual as well as the sentimental life of Goethe runs a smooth and uneventful course. His time he spent enjoying art treasures, receiving friends and visitors, taking interest in artistic, literary, and scientific achievements not only in Germany, but abroad. His celebrity as a writer had extended the list of his correspondents. While his friend Zelter was keeping him in touch with all the activities of musical and theatrical circles in Berlin, other correspondents helped him to follow the literary and scientific movements in other countries. More and more Weimar, through Goethe, was becoming a rallying point for young writers eager for some word of praise or encouragement from the patriarch of letters in Europe. His courtesy and his interest in the fate of his literary creations were such that no recognition of his merit, no allusion to his works ever remained unacknowledged. In spite of the abundance of his correspondence and of his close friendship with many of his correspondents, we might know a great deal less of Goethe had there not appeared upon the scene a young admirer to emulate "the devout follower" who "bored a hole into the cell of a saint of old in order to have an opportunity of watching him at every hour of the day and night." On the tenth of June, 1823, a young and unknown writer for whom Goethe had been "an infallible polar star" was admitted to his Olympian presence. He had come seeking advice about a booklet which he hoped to publish; he left carrying two volumes of the *Literary Annals of Frankfurt*, containing several articles of Goethe's on which Goethe himself had asked for an expression of opin-

ion. With his usual promptitude in judging men and events Goethe had decided that the collaboration of such an earnest, young and intelligent admirer might be of some use to him in his old age, and he obtained such collaboration. So for nine years Eckermann was the patient, attentive and faithful recorder of Goethe's gestures and sayings. Nor was Goethe himself adverse to this mode of transmitting his views on art, literature, science, men and events. And the fruits of this very uneven collaboration were published in 1836 under the title *Conversations with Goethe*. The book was well received as "a pleasant, gossiping, good-natured book" in which Goethe revealed himself as "a true man and not a piece of sculpture." Eckermann, particularly in England, was hailed as a new Boswell with "the same unbounded and unquestioning admiration of his subject, and with fully as much natural simplicity, but with greater intellectual culture."

The *Conversations with Goethe* may be considered as a book summing up the wisdom of Goethe and the experiences of his long life. It may also be examined as a document giving us new and closer insight into his personality when viewed not as a sage but simply as a man. In the Goethe which appears through the *Conversations* as in the Goethe of Strasburg and of other days, we find a mind which needs the company of great men, which feels thoroughly at ease among them and is always ready to carry on a conversation with them or about them. Whenever Eckermann wants to humor him or to put him in a talkative mood he merely has to mention Napoleon, Shakespeare, Byron, and his idol never refuses to answer. Goethe, to the last, remained an intellectual aristocrat. He was also, it must be admitted, an aristocrat in a social and political sense, disliking not the people, as he occasionally pointed out to Eckermann, but

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disorder and anything that would disturb the equanimity of his soul and the stability of government and peace.

At home among great men of all nations and all times, his mind does not suffer from such limitations as he encountered on earlier occasions in his career. His intellectual and artistic outlook has become so wide that though he may occasionally commit errors in judgment of men and books, he can never stoop to wholesale, collective condemnation. His admiration of foreign nations is neither systematic nor blind; in the French he appreciates a literary culture which he had shared, in the British, a proud independence of character, the courage which the British show, "to be what nature made them." Indifferent or even hostile to the efforts of those who could see nothing but national traditions or national literatures, he did not hesitate to proclaim that the words "National Literature" had no meaning, literature representing to him a field beyond and above provincial and national restrictions. It needed more than ordinary courage and human serenity to uphold this attitude, on some occasions, in the days of Goethe.

Throughout the *Conversations* we find traces of the same unbiassed attitude in his search for truth, the same vivid interest in all the activities of the human mind. Occasionally we come upon an expression of regret at having wasted many good hours on idle tasks. The poet also reappears once more, the victim of his inflammable heart and his irrepressible imagination, secretive for a while, then bringing out in great mystery and with untold joy the *Elegy* in which he has expressed his latest mood. The restlessness of youth alone has disappeared and made way for a patience and a serenity which crown a life "entirely given up to intellectual pursuits," as Goethe wrote in his last letter, March 17, 1832, and which had been "one of toil and trouble," never

"free from care, for one single month," as he confessed to Eckermann.

One lays down the *Correspondence* and the *Conversations* of Goethe with the feeling that in its steadiness of purpose and its continuous and harmonious development the life of Goethe was like a river, rising in distant sources, following an unusually rich and varied course. Through the glimpses these human documents afford, we may see the young torrent coming down from its hills, bubbling along eager to go, now proceeding full of enthusiasm, now tarrying along in contemplative mood, sometimes clashing against the rocks, sometimes coming to muddy corners, but in every case finding its way, and getting the benefit of all its experiences and tributaries, till it develops into a huge stream whose deep yet limpid waters spread out unruffled by storm, illuminated by peaceful rays of a beautiful and prolonged evening, enjoying life to the last, and reflecting rich memories and landscapes as it goes.

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