

Goethe's Faust: A Kantian Analysis

Three Wise Men ...

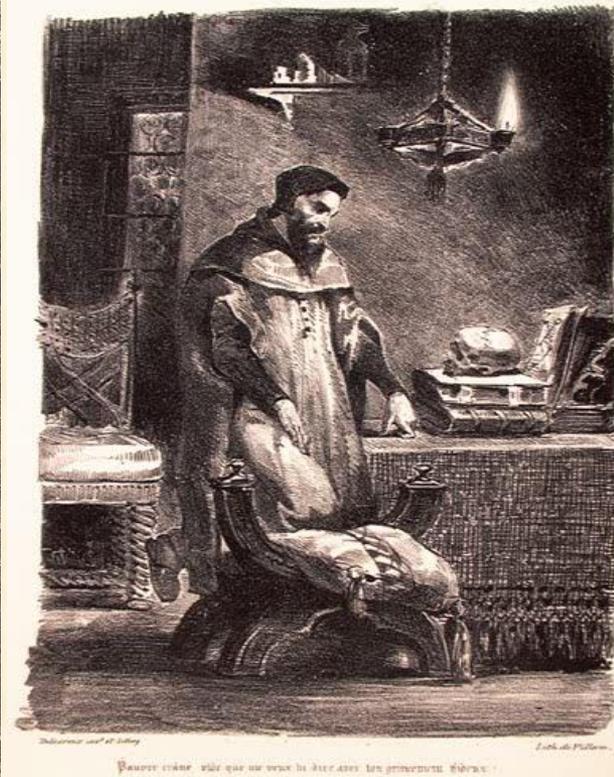
Kant



Goethe



Faust



Peu de crâne, vite que se vante la tête avec les principes d'Érasme.

Three Wise Men ...

Kant

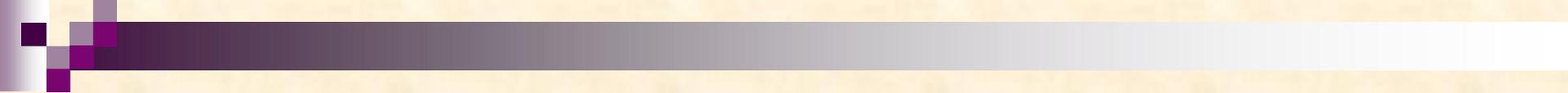
- 22 April 1724: Born – Königsberg (baptised Emanuel)
- 1740-46: Studies theology, philosophy, science, and physics at Königsberg
- 1746-1755: Employed as a private tutor but continues scholarly research
- 1755: Appointed to lecturer's post at Königsberg – teaches “logic, metaphysics, mathematics, physics, and physical geography, as well as moral philosophy, mechanical science fortification, and possibly pyrotechnics”
- 1770: Refuses offer of chair at Erlangen
- 2 May 1770: Professor of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg
- 12 February 1804: Dies

Goethe

- 28 August 1749: Born – Frankfurt
- 1765-68: Studies law at Leipzig, but more interested in poetry
- 1770-71: Studies law Strasbourg
- 1771-74: Practices law in Frankfurt; then Wetzlar
- 1774: Publishes first novel - *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*
- 1775: Joins Duke Karl August in Weimar
- 1786-88: Travels to Italy
- 1791-1817: Director of Weimar Court Theatre
- 1808: Publishes *Faust Part I*
- 1810: Publishes *Theory of Colours*
- 22 March 1832: Dies – Weimar
- 1832: *Faust Part II* published posthumously

Faust

- Believed to around 50 years in Study (1)
- German academic
- “Alas, I’ve studied Philosophy, The Law and Physic and also, More’s the pity, Divinity ... True, I know more than all the dimwits, The doctors, masters, clerks, and prelates. ... Have given myself to necromancy To hear the mouths of ghosts disclose In power some of their mysteries ...”
- Keen to do whatever is required to expand his horizons – “Escape! Into a wider land!”



“Kant ist der Philosophen vorzüglichste, ohne allen Zweifel. Er ist auch derjenige, dessen Lehre sich fortwirkend erwiesen hat und die in unsere deutsche Cultur am tiefsten eingedrungen ist”

“Kant is the most excellent philosopher without doubt. He is also the one whose teachings have continued to be of influence and have had the most profound effect on our German culture.”

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 11 April 1827.

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOETHE

IN THE LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE,

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

OF

Johann Peter

^ ECKERMANN.

BY S. M. FULLER.

Margaret Fuller, in Boston 1833

BOSTON:

HILLIARD, GRAY, AND COMPANY.

M.DCCC.XXXIX.

own powers of thought, and make our own powers productive."

"Yes," said Goethe; "Lessing himself said, that if God would give him truth, he would decline the gift, and prefer the labor of seeking it for himself."

"That philosophic system of the Mohammedans is a good measure, which we can apply to ourselves and others, to ascertain the degree of spiritual progress which we have attained."

"Lessing, from his polemical nature, loved best the region of doubt and contradiction. Analysis is his province, as there his fine understanding could most aid him."

"You will find me wholly the reverse. I have always avoided contradiction, striven to dispel doubt by inward efforts, and uttered only the results of my mental processes."

I asked Goethe which of the new philosophers he admired most.

"Kant," said he, "stands undoubtedly highest; his doctrines still continue to work, and have penetrated most deeply into our German education. He has done his work on you, although you have never read him; now you need him no longer, for you already possess what he could give you; but if you wish, by and by, to read something of his, I recommend to you his 'Critique on the Power of Judgment,' in which he has written admirably upon rhetoric, tolerably upon poetry, but unsatisfactorily on the plastic arts."

"Has your Excellency ever had any personal connection with Kant?"

"No," he replied; "Kant has never taken notice of me; while my nature led me a way not unlike his. I wrote my 'Metamorphoses of Plants,' before I knew any thing about Kant; and yet is it wholly in his spirit. The separation of subject from object, the faith that each creature exists for its own sake, and that cork-trees do not grow, merely that we may have stoppers for our bottles, — this I share with Kant, and I rejoice to meet him on such ground. Afterwards I wrote *Lehre von Versuch*, which is to be regarded as criticism upon subject and object, and medium for both.

"Schiller was wont to advise me against the study of Kant's philosophy. He said Kant could give me nothing; but he himself studied Kant with great zeal; and I, also, studied him, and not without profit."

While talking thus, we had been walking up and down the garden; the clouds had been darkening; it began to rain; and we were obliged to return to the house, where we continued our conversation for some time.

Wednesday, 20th June.

The family table was covered for five; the room was vacant and cool, which was very pleasant in this extreme heat. I went into the spacious room next the dining-hall, where are the worked carpet, and the colossal bust of Juno.

Goethe soon came in, and greeted me in his affectionate and cordial manner: he took a chair, and sat down by the window. "Do you also take a

Tuesday, 24th March.

"The nobler a man is," said Goethe, "so much the more is he under the influence of demons, and he must take heed and not let his guiding will counsel him to a wrong path.

"There was something of demonology in my connection with Schiller; it might have happened earlier or later without so much significance; but that it should occur just at this time, when I had my Italian journey behind me, and Schiller began to be weary of his philosophical speculations, led to very important consequences for both."

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

An Exposition

OF THE

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF JURISPRUDENCE

AS

THE SCIENCE OF RIGHT.

BY

IMMANUEL KANT.

Translated from the German

BY

W. HASTIE, B.D.

EDINBURGH:

T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET.

1887.

“Law” is other-regarding

- While “Law” condemns all immoral action, it does not provide a sanction where such actions affect only the individual actor.:[\[1\]](#)

“My duty towards myself cannot be treated juridically; the law touches only on our relations with other men; I have no legal obligations towards myself; and whatever I do to myself I do to a consenting party ...”

[\[1\]](#) Immanuel Kant “Duties to Oneself” in *Lectures on Ethics* (1780-81) quoted in J M Finnis “Legal Enforcement of ‘Duties to Oneself’: Kant v Neo-Kantians” (1987) 87 *Colum L Rev* 433, 433.

- If the Choir of the Angels heralding Easter had not interrupted Faust before he consumed “This drink, this last, ...” his suicide (“self-murder”), Faust would have breached the Right he owed to himself, but he would not have broken any Law.

Free choice and practical reason

- Free will – two aspects:
 - Free choice (*freie Willkür*)
 - Practical reason (*Wille*)
- Negative and positive counterparts
- One defines the other

“Law” and “Right”

- External law (public Right)
 - Universal law maxim: *Legal* obligation
- Internal law (private Right)
 - Principle of *ethical* obligation
- Perjury breaching Law and Right
 - After handing his witness statement (“note”) to Mephisto, Faust says:
“It’s easy being in the right
If all you hear is your own voice.”

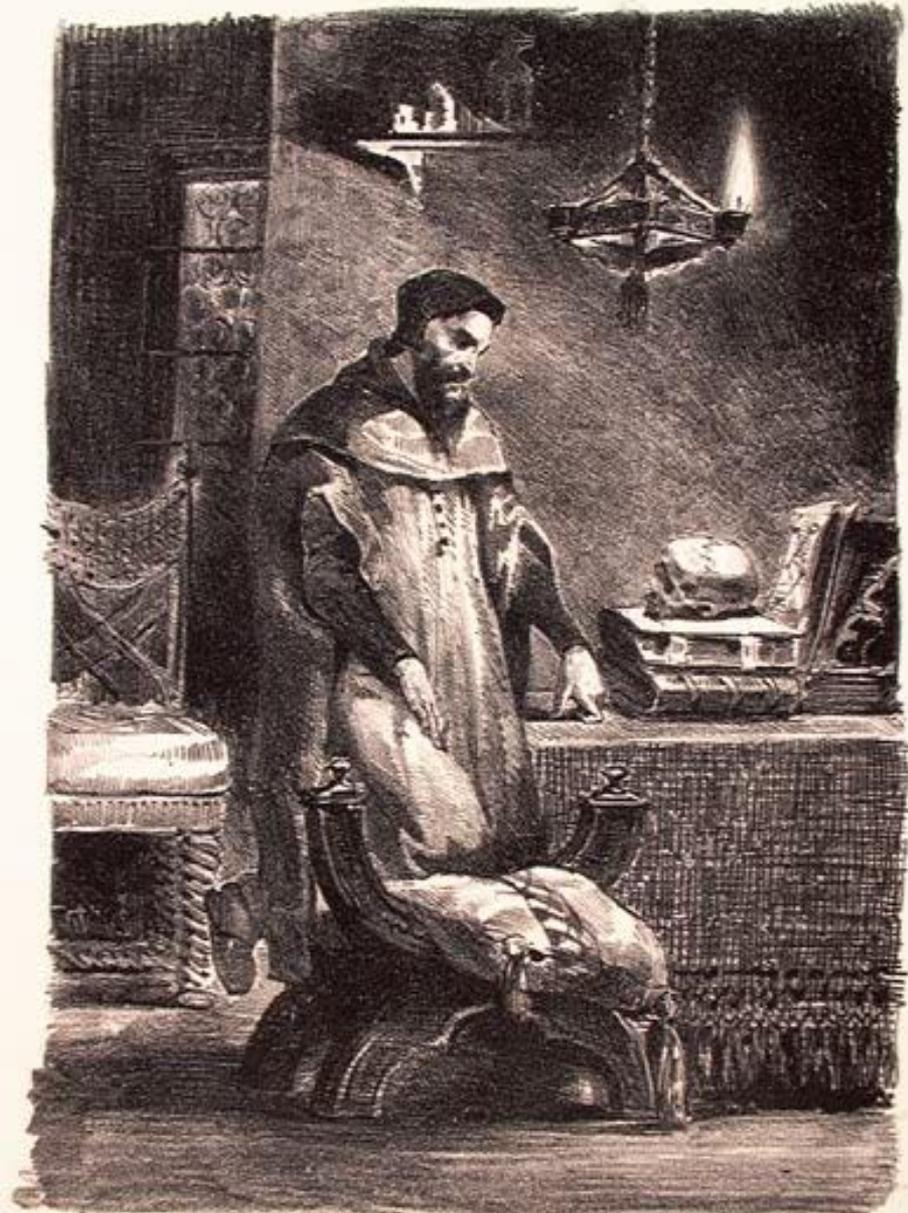




“Right” and the morality of “Law”



De temps en temps j'aime à voir le vieux Père,
Et y me garde bien de lui rompre en Quatre.



Peu de crâne, vite que on veine li dire avec les pronoms du Féru.



Delaware sur l'Esbay

Lith. de Silvano

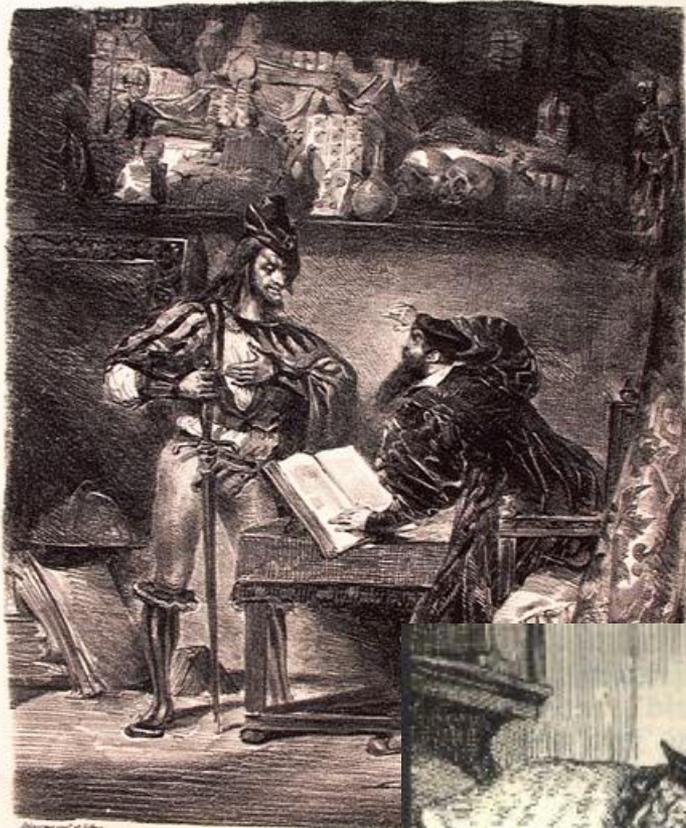
Saint... Seigneurs qui peut conserver l'espérance de naviger sur cet océan d'erreurs :
 ... l'esprit a beau déployer ses ailes, le corps, hélas ! n'en a point à y ajouter.



Delaware sur l'Esbay

Lith. de Silvano

Il grogne et n'ose vous aborder : Il se couche sur le ventre :
 il remue la queue

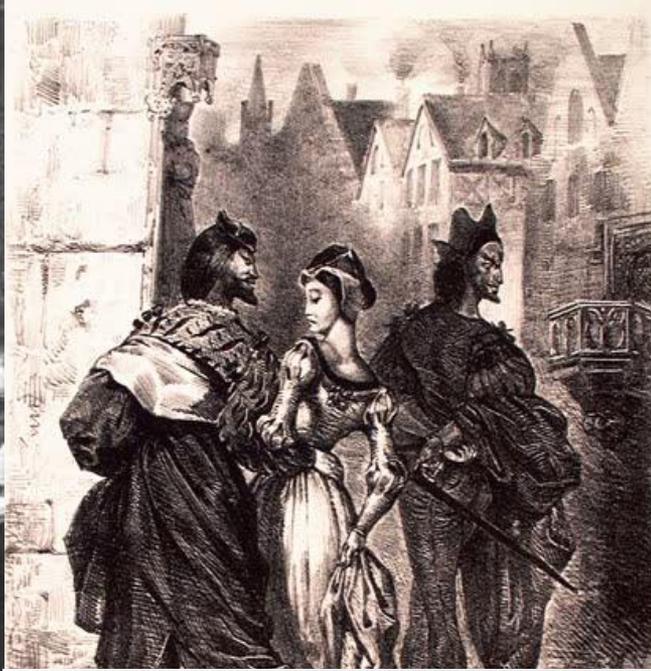


Mirza: Pourquoy tout ce vacarme? qui demande M. le...



— Au feu, le laide, l'enfer, e allume
Marsellon l'only nous sur lui... son affaire ne sera pas tenir

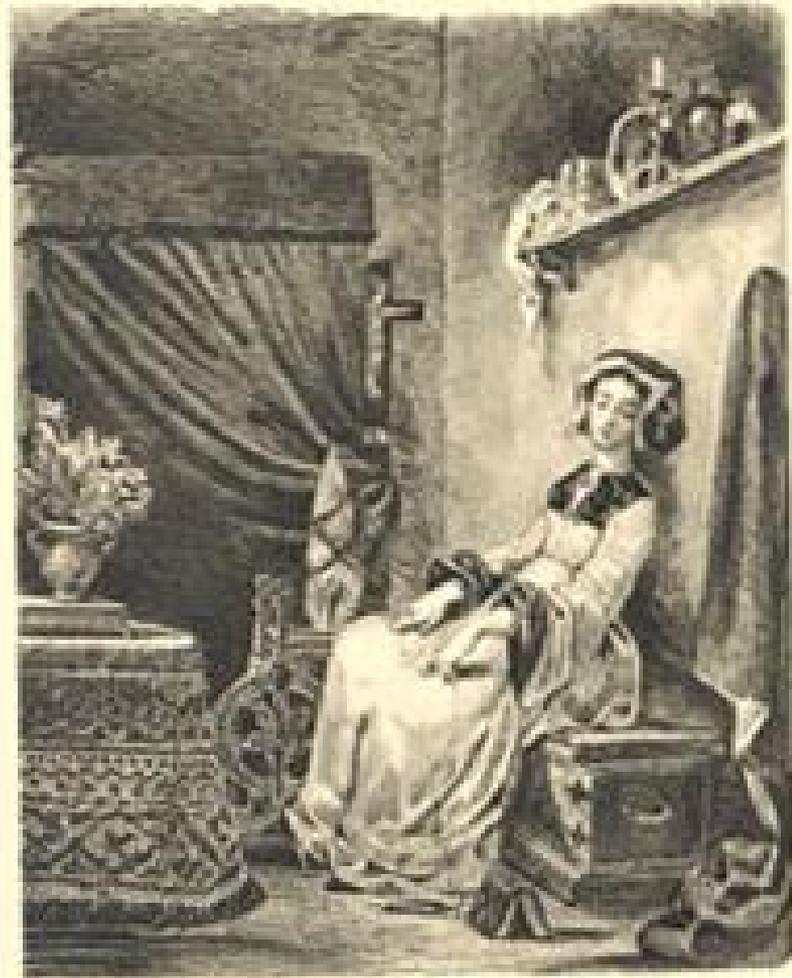




Dirty Dick



- *“Hans Liederlich”*
- Reinforces Goethe’s portrayal of Faust’s descent into immorality



Gretchen – Law and Right

■ Well (*Brunnen*)

□ Bärbelchen: “In her shift she’ll rue the day.”

■ *Sünderhemdchen*

□ The *Brunnensäule*

■ Goethe – abolition of public expiation: 10 May 1786

■ Cathedral (*Dom*)

□ Pregnancy signalled: “– And under your heart / Is there not already a quickening, a welling up”

□ Deserted by Faust



Brother ...



Mother ...



Delors - 1848

La Mère Supérieure - Paris

*Alors... Malheureuse ! ah ! et je pressais ses genoux qui se succédaient en tremblant dans une sueur et à l'écart contre moi.
Ce pauvre Olympe... Ce malheur de Dieu ! sur toi ! la vengeance est vaine... Malheur à toi !*

*Alors...
Malheur à toi !
Quel quel quel quel quel
Malheur à toi !*

Son.



Prison – “Right” or right?

- Crime (*Verbrechen*) (Line 4408)

- Not son’s drowning, but the ultimate cause

- Faust’s declarations of love

- Yielding to own, natural, “good” impulses

- Belief that this must be “right”

- “Now sin and I are face to face.
But – everything that drove me to it,
Heavens, it was good, oh it was sweet.”

- (Lines 3584–86)

Kant on infanticide

- “There are, however, two crimes deserving of death, with regard to which it still remains doubtful whether *legislation* is also authorised to impose the death penalty. The feeling of honour leads to both, in one case [*infanticidium maternale*] the honour of one’s sex. Legislation cannot remove the disgrace of an illegitimate birth ... So [the mother finds herself] in the state of nature, and [this act] of *killing (homicidium)* ... would ... not be called murder (*homicidium dolosum*), [is] certainly punishable but cannot be punished with death by the supreme power ... and no decree can remove the mother’s shame when it becomes known she gave birth without being married.”

Immanuel Kant *The Metaphysics of Morals* (translated by Mary J Gregor) (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991) 144–45, 336 (emphasis in the original).

- Now for the but ...

me no more pleasure. Indeed, having represented the world so clearly before I knew it, when I did know it, my representation might well take a tinge of persiflage." "There is in every character," said he, another time; "a certain necessity, a sequence, which obliges secondary features to be formed from leading features. Observation teaches you how to draw your inferences when once you have ascertained certain premises; but some persons possess this knowledge untaught. Whether with me experience and this innate faculty are united, I will not say; but this I know, if I have talked with any man a quarter of an hour, I can make him talk two hours."

Goethe had said of Lord Byron, that the world to him was transparent, and that he could paint by the light of his presentiments; I doubted whether Byron would succeed in painting, for instance, a subordinate animal nature, for his individuality seemed to me to be so dear to him, that he could not give himself up to such a subject. Goethe agreed, and said that even genius had not instinctive knowledge on subjects uncongenial with its nature.

"And if your excellency," said I, "maintain that the world is inborn with the poet, you mean only the world of soul, as it manifests itself in human relations, and not the empiric world of shows and conventions; the latter, surely, even the poet must learn from observation."

"Certainly," replied Goethe; "the poet knows by instinct how to represent the region of love, hate, hope, despair, or by whatever other names you may call the moods and passions of the soul. But he knows not by

instinct how courts are held, or how a coronation is managed, and, if he meddle with such subjects, must depend either on experience or tradition. Thus, in 'Faust,' I might by presentiment have known how to describe my hero's weariness of life, and the emotions which love excites in the heart of Margaret; but the lines,

*Wie traurig steigt die unvollkommne Scheibe
Des späten Monds mit feuchter Glut heran!*

'How gloomily does the imperfect orb
Of the late moon arise in humid glow!'

Faust
3851-2

require that the writer should have observed nature."

"Yet," said I, "every line of 'Faust' bears marks, not to be mistaken, of most careful study of life and the world. The reader would suppose it the fruit of the amplest experience."

"Perhaps so," replied Goethe; "yet, had I not the world in my soul from the beginning, I must ever have remained blind with my seeing eyes, and all experience and observation would have been dead and unproductive. The light is there, and the colors surround us; but, if we bore nothing corresponding in our own eyes, the outward apparition would not avail us."

Monday, 10th January, 1825.

Goethe is much interested always in the English, and has desired me to introduce to him the young Englishmen who are here at present. He appointed five o'clock this afternoon for the reception of Mr. H., the English engineer officer, of whom I had previously been able to say much good to him. We were conducted to the pleasant, well-warmed apartment, where Goethe usually passes his afternoons and evenings. Three lights were burning on the table, but he was not there; we heard him talking in the adjoining saloon.

"It is remarkable," said Goethe, "how the power of understanding gets the start of that of expressing; so that a man may comprehend all he hears, when, as yet, he can express but a very small part of it."

"I experience daily," said Mr. H., "the truth of that remark. I understand very well whatever I hear or read; I feel it when a bad expression is made use of in German. But, when I speak, nothing will flow, and I cannot express myself as I wish. In light conversation at Court, jests with the ladies, chat at balls, and the like, I already succeed pretty well. But, if I try to express opinions on any important topic, to say any thing characteristic or of much thought, I fail utterly; the proper words will not come."

"Be not discouraged by that," said Goethe, "since fit expression of such is hard enough in one's mother tongue."

He asked what books Mr. H. had read in German. "I have read 'Egmont,'" he replied, "and found so much pleasure in the perusal, that I have repeated it three times. 'Torquato Tasso,' too, has afforded me

high enjoyment. Now, I am reading 'Faust,' which I find somewhat difficult."

Goethe laughed at these last words. "Really," said he, "I would not have advised you to undertake 'Faust.' It is mad stuff, and quite beyond the customary range of feeling. But, since you have begun without asking my advice, we shall see how you will get through. Faust is so peculiar an individual, that few men can sympathize with the situation of his mind. And the character of Mephistophiles is, on account of the irony and extensive acquaintance with the world which it displays, not easily to be comprehended. But you will see what lights open upon you. 'Tasso' lies far nearer the common feelings of men, and all there is told with a minuteness and detail very favorable to an easy comprehension of it."

advantage, obliged to encounter; thence nothing poetical of importance produced during those ten years; saddened by love affairs; the father always impatient of his court life.

The advantage—that he did not change his place of abode, and was not obliged twice to go through the same experience.

He fled to Italy in order to revive his poetic power. Superstitious fancy, that he should not succeed, if any one knew about it; therefore observes profound secrecy. Writes to the Grand Duke from Rome. Returns from Italy with great requisitions upon himself.

Duchess Amelia—a perfect Princess, with perfectly natural, human sense and enjoyment of life. She was very fond of Goethe's mother, and would fain have had her at Weimar, but he opposed it.

About "Faust."—" 'Faust' sprang up at the same time with 'Werther.' I brought it with me, written out on letter-paper, and not an erasure in the manuscript, for I took care not to write down a line that was not worthy to remain."

"Here," said he, "we have a subject of the highest sort—the nourishing principle which upholds the world, and pervades all nature, is brought before our eyes by this beautiful symbol. This, and others of a like nature, I esteem the true symbols of the omnipresence of God."

Monday, 6th June.

Goethe showed me the till now wanting beginning of the fifth act of "Faust." I read to the place where the cottage of Philemon and Baucis is burnt, and Faust, standing by night on the balcony of his palace, perceives the smoke, which is borne to him by a light breeze.

"These names of Philemon and Baucis," said I, "transport me to the Phrygian coast, recalling the famous couple of antiquity. But this scene belongs to modern days, and a Christian land."

"My Philemon and Baucis," said Goethe, "have nothing to do with the ancient characters and their story. I gave this couple the names merely to mark their characters. The persons and relations being similar, the use of the names has a good effect."

We then spoke of Faust, whom his hereditary portion of discontent has not left in his old age, and whom, amid all the treasures of the world, and in a new dominion of his own making, a couple of lindens, a cottage, and a bell, which are not his, have power to annoy. He is therein not unlike Ahab, King of Israel, who fancied he possessed nothing, unless he could also make the vineyard of Naboth his own.

"Faust," said Goethe, "should, according to my

design, appear just a hundred years old in the fifth act; and perhaps it would be well, in some passage, expressly to say so."

We then spoke of the conclusion, and Goethe directed my attention to the passage—

"Delivered is the noble spirit
From the control of evil powers;
Who ceaselessly doth strive must merit
That we should save and make him ours:
Celestial Love did never cease
To watch him from its upper sphere;
The children of eternal peace
Bear him to cordial welcome there."

"These lines," said he, "contain the key to Faust's salvation. In himself, an activity becoming constantly higher and purer, eternal love coming from heaven to his aid. This harmonizes perfectly with our religious view, that we cannot obtain heavenly bliss through our own strength, unassisted by divine grace.

"You will confess that the conclusion, where the redeemed soul is carried up, was difficult to manage; and that I, amid these supersensual matters, about which we scarce have even an intimation, might easily have lost myself in the vague, if I had not, by means of sharply-drawn figures and images from the Christian church, given my poetical design the desirable form and compactness."

In the following weeks, Goethe finished the fourth act; so that, in August, the second part was entirely finished and sewed together. Goethe was extremely

happy in having attained this object towards which he had been striving so long.

"My remaining days," said he, "I may now consider a free gift; and it is truly of little consequence what I now do, or whether I do any thing."

The morning after Goethe's death, a deep longing seized me to look yet once again upon his earthly

garment. His faithful servant, Frederic, opened for me the chamber in which he was laid out. Stretched upon his back, he reposed as if in sleep; profound peace and security reigned in the features of his noble, dignified countenance. The mighty brow seemed yet the dwelling-place of thought. I wished for a lock of his hair; but reverence prevented me from cutting it off. The body lay naked, only wrapped in a white sheet; large pieces of ice had been placed around, to keep it fresh as long as possible. Frederic drew aside the sheet, and I was astonished at the divine magnificence of the form. The breast was so powerful, broad, and arched; the limbs full, and softly muscular; the feet elegant, and of the most perfect shape; nowhere, on the whole body, a trace either of fat or of leanness and decay. A perfect man lay in great beauty before me; and the rapture which the sight caused, made me forget, for a moment, that the immortal spirit had left such an abode. I laid my hand on his heart — there was a deep silence — and I turned away to give free vent to my tears.