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THESIS.

A STUDY OF

GOETHE'S "HERMANN AND DOROTHEA"

COMPARED WITH LONGFELLOW'S "EVANGELINE,"

.. BY ..

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The simple story of Hermann and Dorothea is one of Goethe's most delightful productions. It never ceased to give pleasure to its author even in his old age and he always considered it one of his happiest inspirations. It can never cease to be an enjoyment to cultured, beauty-loving readers, who will always esteem it one of the choicest gems of poetic thought. This simple idyl of middle-class life in Germany has touched a vibrant chord in every true heart, and no one can fail to feel a lively sympathy with the admirable people Goethe has so faithfully portrayed.

The poem was written during the period of Goethe's friendship with Schiller. After completing his *Torquato Tasso* and the *Roman Elegies* Goethe has been occupied with ministerial business and the study of science, so had produced nothing worthy to rank with his best work. He almost thought he had lost the impulse for writing poetry but his power was only slumbering and was awakened by his intercourse with Schiller, whose enthusiasm, as Goethe himself said, called forth "a second youth," "a new spring." It was Schiller's intense interest that induced him to complete his *Wilhelm Meister* which he had begun before his visit to Italy. However, he did not enter fully into the spirit of the work and hurried the conclusion to get the book off his hands in order to write *Hermann and Dorothea*. It was a fortunate

inspiration which caused him to turn to the life of his own time and take up the subject which had been in his brain six or seven years. This new burden was much easier to bear because it gave him opportunity to express certain views, feelings, and ideas of the times. His interest was so great that he wrote with amazing ease and rapidity, finishing the first five cantos in nine days, during a visit at Jena.

For the material for this poem Goethe drew from two important historical events, the Reformation in Germany and the French Revolution.

By the peace of Westphalia in 1648 all the citizens of Germany, whether Catholic or Protestant, were granted freedom of religion, provided, however, that every ruler should have the right to make his own religion that of his state, and his subjects who refused to conform should have three years to leave the country. In the Archbishopric of Salzburg especially there were many Protestants. They formed the most trustworthy class of the inhabitants, and were a simple, hardy and industrious people; many were miners living in the mountains which were almost inaccessible in winter; others were artisans; but the greater number were farmers in comfortable circumstances whose wealth consisted principally in herds and land. These people contributed in a great degree to the wealth of the country and the Archiepiscopal Court. Many of the Archbishops, however, were intolerant and bigoted and a fanatic crusade was looked for at almost any

time.

Finally, in 1865, Archbishop Gandolf ordered the Protestants to leave his domain. In the depth of winter over a thousand were forced to go, leaving their children behind them or having them taken away from them on the border. Gandolf was succeeded by Baron Firmian who was determined to free his land of heretics. He organized a band of preachers and inquisitors who by espionage, fines and imprisonment were to restore the simple peasants to the Catholic faith. But representatives of the different communities met and made a solemn vow to remain true to their own faith. The Emperor then sent troops to force them to subjection. The people, suffering cruelly at the hands of the soldiers who were quartered on them, sent petitions to the Protestant princes throughout the empire but their protests remained unheeded.

Suddenly, in October 1731, Archbishop Firmian issued his notorious proclamation, ordering all heretics, above the age of twelve, not possessing property, to leave the country in eight days; others who possessed goods or land were allowed more time, according to the nature of the property, in which to dispose of it. All miners and mechanics in the employ of the state were discharged and forced to begin their journey at once, being allowed to take with them only what they could carry on their backs. The soldiers broke into the houses and forced the people out in the night. Many families became scattered in the darkness, some never

becoming reunited, others only after long wandering in distant cities. The leaders were imprisoned in the dungeons of Salzburg castle and the women were forced to carry their children and aged parents who were not able to walk. There were long processions of these sufferers streaming through every pass to a land of liberty.

In the mean time the Protestant princes, impatient at the contempt with which their remonstrances were received, took more decided action. In February 1732 Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia issued an invitation to the people to settle in his kingdom; he also sent word to the archbishop that the passes must be kept open, that families were not to be broken up and must be allowed to come by the shortest routes. England and Denmark both sent eloquent remonstrances to the emperor, but they were not heeded. Finally the King of Denmark granted his Catholic subjects in Holstein till April in which to prepare to leave. Then Friedrich Wilhelm announced that he should regard the Salzburgers as his subjects; and the Catholic clergy of Magdeburg were informed that unless the Salzburg Protestants were better treated, they would be banished within a given time. Then, as the archbishop did not yield, the Protestant powers joined in declaring they would use force to bring him to terms. Finally the Emperor induced him to submit. The Salzburgers who emigrated first suffered most as they had to leave their property behind or sell it for less than its value.

Companies of exiles continued for a year or more to leave their homes and cross the border into other countries where they were received by the Protestants as if they were an army returning victorious. People were appointed to provide for their wants and went out in processions to meet them, from each city they approached. About 20,000 are said to have settled in Prussia 1,200 miles from their former home. The pathetic story of the suffering and heroism of these exiles touched all hearts and there are numerous records of their reception in various cities. In fact several collections of documents relating to their wanderings, with maps of their journeys, have been published. In the 'Comprehensive History of the Emigrants or exiled Lutherans from the Archbishopric of Salzburg,' 1732 the story of Hermann and Dorothea is published under the heading "Wonderful Marriage." In Göcking's 'Complete History of the Emigration' the story is contained in the chapter on 'Works of Divine Providence.' It is also contained in a 'Flugschrift' of 1732. It was one of these narratives which interested Goethe and suggested the poem. With one exception he altered the original story but little, only making the subject more connected and complete. In the original it turns out at the last that Dorothea, who is supposed to be so poor, has a considerable portion to offer with herself, but Goethe thought this an ignoble element in the story and omits it in his poem.

The scene, however, is changed. He transferred the

incident to present times and in place of the exiles of centuries before, for religious faith, he introduced German emigrants from the left bank of the Rhine who had been driven from their homes by the French soldiers. By changing the religious into a political hostility he appealed to a principle of lasting and universal interest. The popularity of the poem was greatly heightened by the fact that the people of Germany had just passed through the scenes described.

Goethe himself was in the army six weeks, with the Prussian forces, under the command of the Duke of Brunswick, when they advanced toward Paris. After capturing Longwy and Verdun they were stopped before the heights of Valmy and the undertaking was abandoned. The Prussians retreated with a loss of 30,000 men. Goethe soon after left the army but went into camp with the Duke of Weimar and remained through the sieges of Speier, Worms and Mainz. After witnessing their surrender he returned to his home and studies in Weimar. He used many of the scenes of these two experiences in his poem.

Goethe was very hostile to this great movement which was everywhere asserting itself and it was of the greatest interest to himself and Schiller to uphold the national literature and to retain public sympathy for it in spite of the revolutionary influences. His letters to Schiller show how great was his apprehension. The bombardment of Frankfort, his native city, and his mother's flight

to Offenbach brought the campaign very near to him and it is quite evident that the scenes of these times were vividly before him as he wrote.

Although the scene of the poem was laid in this time and its distinctly patriotic spirit kindled enthusiasm in all loyal hearts, his main purpose was to describe permanent conditions of existence and to contrast these conditions with the disturbing changes in public and private life. As he himself says in a letter to his friend Meyer, December 6, 1796.

"I have sought to separate in the epic crucible, the purely human element in the existence of a small German city, from its slag, and to reflect at the same time as from a little mirror the great movements and changes in the theatre of the world." He had given expression to his views in several minor works but they had gained only slight popularity. So with his mind filled with the events of the Revolution he began, in August 1796, the poem which was to become of national interest, but he did not complete it till the following June.

The time of the action of the poem is August and the scene is in the vicinity of the Rhine in the Bavarian Palatinate, as is indicated approximately by references in the poem itself to Strassburg, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Landau and other cities. Local references, however, were scarcely needed to give it the necessary coloring of life and reality.

A sweeter story with a simpler plot than that of 'Hermann and Dorothea' can scarcely be imagined. In the very first scene we are introduced to the little German village with its honest, kindly burghers, and its charming air of prosperity and contentment. Hermann's father and mother are sitting at their inn-door talking together of the sad fate of the exiles who have just passed in weary procession along a road a short distance from the town, and to whom the good housewife has just sent Hermann with clothing and provisions. The pastor and the village apothecary come along the street and stop to talk with the innkeeper and his wife.

While they are there Hermann returns and from his beaming countenance and excited manner the wise pastor knows that something unusual has happened. Hermann gives an animated account of his mission, telling how he has failed to overtake the entire procession, but has met with a young girl driving a team of oxen before a wagon in which is a sick woman and a little child. Hermann is moved with pity at their destitute condition and gives all the food and clothing to the girl to make the two sufferers comfortable. His listeners approve of his action but the cynical apothecary takes this occasion to warn Hermann never to marry, since afflictions bear so much heavier on a married man than on one who has only himself to care for. Hermann excitedly rebukes such selfishness and the conversation turns upon marriage. The innkeeper has selected a wife for his son, the daughter of a

wealthy neighbor, who, however, does not suit the young man. The father suspects that his son has become enamored of the beautiful exile, and declares warmly that he will never permit him to marry a common peasant girl. Hermann is stung by his harshness and leaves the room. His mother follows him and after a time finds him alone in great despondency under his favorite pear-tree. He finally confesses to her that he does love the girl and wishes to marry her. The mother comforts and encourages him and then skillfully overcomes his father's resistance.

It is arranged, that the pastor and druggist go with Hermann, to find the girl and learn whether she is worthy to become his wife. Hermann promises to accept their decision as final. They find the emigrants in the next village, where the two older men are captivated by Dorothea's grace and beauty and learn from an old judge that Dorothea is a high-minded, noble-hearted and altogether admirable girl. Of course they give their hearty consent to Hermann's marriage but he experiences a natural hesitation about proposing when he sees an engagement ring already on Dorothea's finger. So he simply asks her to go home with him to aid his mother in household duties. She accepts this position of servant and so is surprised when, on reaching the inn, Hermann's father greets them with jocular speeches, compliments Hermann on his good taste, and wounds the girl's pride and sensibility so that she begs to return to her own people. Hermann begs

the pastor to clear matters up, but the latter takes the father's side in order to further test Dorothea. He learns that she really loves Hermann and finally explanations are made to everybody. Hermann learns that the engagement ring she wears was given to her by a former lover who is now dead; Dorothea finds that she is to be a bride, not a servant; the pastor explains his seeming inconsistency; both parents embrace their future daughter; and a happy betrothal takes place.

The characters, like the story itself, are simple and harmonious, strongly and artistically drawn; typical rather than individual and remarkably true to nature.

Dorothea is the strongest character in the poem and combines admirably womanly self reliance and tenderness. She is frank and generous and her actions are dominated by true nobility of spirit, and unselfish motives. She is a woman of fine sensibility and intelligence and she has plenty of spirit too. She can be indignant; even angry, as well as tender, and her hard discipline of suffering has brought out very strongly the firmness and decision which characterize her without in any way diminishing her sweetness and grace.

Hermann is less independent but he is by no means a weak man. It is simply because there has been nothing in his life to call forth the stronger traits, that he seems a less admirable character than Dorothea. He has never been fully appreciated or understood by the majority of people, and his

mother is the only one who has the key to his really true and noble heart. He is quiet and retiring, modest and even diffident before women, but he is a serious minded, thoughtful man, trustworthy in everything, and ardently and sincerely devoted in his love.

The father, a sturdy citizen, is rather selfish, hates all care and trouble and thinks too much of the good things of life. He is very fond of show, anxious to rise higher in the social scale, and, as an aid to this, wishes Hermann to marry a rich bride. Although rough, worldly and irascible, he is not essentially unkind, as is shown by his final consent to the betrothal of Hermann and Dorothea.

In the mother, who is probably the most beautiful character in the poem, we find numerous traits of Goethe's mother. She has a bright, sunny spirit and is an excellent wife and affectionate mother. She is gentle, trusting and sympathetic, but intelligent and loyal to her convictions, one who wisely waits for the right season and skillfully attains her object.

Both the pastor and the apothecary are genuine village characters who bring out one another's peculiarities by the difference of their thought and feeling. The former is an educated man of wide, practical views and deep insight into the character of others. By his good humor, intelligence and kindness he wins the confidence and admiration of all, while the apothecary is a gossiping, self-important and

somewhat whimsical bachelor who believes in the good old times and takes a cynical view of the present.

Though all these characters are so diverse in their dispositions and ideas, they all blend in one harmonious whole, presenting an interesting and attractive study of simple, true hearted men and women.

If it is true that the highest art is faithfulness to nature, 'Hermann and Dorothea' certainly deserves the eulogy which Schiller pronounced upon it in calling it not only the culmination of Goethe's art but of all modern literature. The simple story is presented in a setting so harmonious, so clear, and so artistic, that in reading we are conscious only of the sensation of beauty and harmony, and it is impossible to think of the style as distinct from the poem itself.

The work is divided into nine canto's each bearing the name of one of the Muses which hints at the Greek flavor we may expect to find in the poem. The subject matter of each canto is in appropriate relation to the muse who introduces it, and we are thus brought into contact with all the various forms of poetry.

Goethe put a great deal of thought and painstaking effort on the perfection and revision of the meter in this poem, for he wished it to be not only artistically faultless, but a sort of manifesto or practical expression of his views regarding the controversy about meter which was raging in

Germany at the time. The experiment, however, of writing a German epic in Greek hexameters was a decided success and accomplished much for the literary cause in Germany.

The poem consists of two thousand hexameters in imitation of Homeric meter, but with many important changes. The German language did not permit the use of syllables long by nature or position as in the Greek, and so the quantity is necessarily subordinate to the accent. In his hexameter Goethe allows himself great variety, using not only iambs, dactyls, and anapests, but trochees and spondees as well, - all, however, blending in fluent musical verse. He uses the caesura so skillfully that it also gives variety to the verse. It often coincides with a grammatical or rhetorical pause or division in the verse, and it always, whenever the poet uses it, appeals to the sense with a pleasing rhythmical effect, smooth but far from monotonous. With very few exceptions the form and meter is so natural and pleasing that there is no hint of anything unusual or foreign. Platen, that unexcelled authority on classic meters, who was himself the master of poetic finish, says that "the hexameter (in Hermann and Dorothea) is rugged indeed" but he adds immediately "yet the poem will ever remain the pride of Germany, the pearl of art."

The style is easy and graceful, yet broad in its universal interest, and deep in its spiritual insight. There is nothing grand or sublime about it unless it be its simplicity, and that is truly Wordsworthian. The great apostle

of the English peasantry could have found no one more truly after his own heart than this aristocratic German, who wrote one of the most exquisite productions of any literature, wholly in the plain simple language of the burgher class and invested it all with the highest practical atmosphere.

There is in this poem the calm of the greek poets and also a breadth and vastness from the great world movement which forms the historical and ever present back-ground. Schlegel hailed it in its "structural simplicity, its broad rhythmic movement and its noble directness and purity of phrase" as "the most complete union of the Germanic spirit with the Greek classical form, and the most perfect production of Goethe's cultured realism."

Critics have united in praising "Hermann and Dorothea", both for the subject matter and the artistic form in which this has been presented, and no adverse opinion seems possible upon a work of so much skill and delicacy. One of its chief charms lies in the atmosphere with which the author has surrounded it, and this is too intangible for analysis.

Goethe's treatment of his characters is artistic and true to life. He did not attempt to make them represent his ideas or impressions, they are simply themselves, and never do or say anything which is not entirely in harmony with their circumstances and their level of culture. The only unfavorable comment which can be made is that Hermann

appears at the first glance almost too weak and self-distrustful to claim our admiration, but we soon learn his many good qualities and come to respect him for them.

The simple pastoral atmosphere of "Hermann and Dorothea" reminds one strongly of Longfellow's "Evangeline" and in many respects the poems are strikingly similar. Neither of the authors are subjective but there is a strong contrast between Goethe's poem, which is so intensely German, and Longfellow's, which is essentially American. The scene of "Hermann and Dorothea", laid in a quiet German valley, situated in an old country, a land of culture, which has the gathered wisdom and strength of past ages, is in no respect like the home of Evangeline in the forest primeval, a wild, partially cultivated land with no military strength or historical importance. The primitive simplicity of Arcadia is quite different from the rural simplicity of the German village. Both, however, attain an added dignity from their historical background and the story in both is the result of a great war and the consequent exile of the conquered.

In "Evangeline" our interest is with the exiles alone, for both the hero and heroine are among the unfortunates. The tragic element in the poem is the sorrow of the lovers in their long separation and search for each other, and the final meeting, just as Gabriel is dying, reserves to the last the climax of the tragedy. "Hermann and Dorothea" is a simple, pleasing comedy, with just enough of sadness

in Dorothea's experience to bring out the contrast between fixed and wandering life, and make the conclusion and her future still brighter.

The characters in both poems are simple, honest and kindly, moving easily and gracefully in their lowly sphere and shedding about them, in the German story, a genial atmosphere of hospitable comfort and good cheer, and in the Arcadian romance, the gentle light of pious goodness and brotherly kindness. The men are stalwart and brave, strong to do or patient to suffer as circumstances demand. The women are good and true, noble-minded and sympathetic, and they too can be strong and patient. Longfellow makes us feel the presence of his characters though he says very little about them and permits them to say very little for themselves. Gabriel stands before us as a strong muscular young man, of energy and earnestness and devoted in his love. He, like Hermann, loves too deeply to be reconciled when he feels that his loved one is lost to him, and the uncertainty and sorrow make him moody and restless. His father's description of him to Evangeline and the priest reminds us strongly of Hermann in his despondent grief under the pear-tree.

The two women, however, bear their grief in a different way. They, too, suffer acutely, ^Evangeline from the death of her father, her own exile, and the loss of her lover, Dorothea from the death of her first lover, her exile, and her final humiliation and sorrow when Hermann's father

rallies her, as she thinks, insultingly, and she fears that Hermann does not care for her. Her first love affair, however, makes us feel that her affection is not as deep and strong as Evangeline's. The American poet has here struck a truer note than the German. Both women in their exile are unselfish and helpful to their fellow-sufferers, and it is no detriment to Evangeline's unselfish devotion that she is ever seeking for her loved Gabriel.

Longfellow, like Goethe, has used, with delightful effect, the epic stanza to portray the simplicity of humble life and the true nobility of lowly characters. "Evangeline" is a beautiful romance of love and disappointment; "Hermann and Dorothea" is the happy tale of love, which, beginning under unauspicious skies, comes at last to a joyous conclusion, and makes the little story one of ever abiding interest and pleasure.