

mental and spiritual culture. He is a youth in the middle rank of life, of splendid ability, but of an undecided turn of mind, susceptible of love, but not to say fond of adventure merely for its own sake. He desires to study mankind, not that it will be useful to him, but because it will enlighten him. He joins himself to a company of strolling players, and for a while, seeks in the cultivation and representation of dramatic art, the means of acquiring the culture which he appears to consider the *summum bonum* of his existence. In a considerable part of the story, the other actors with whom he is associated, are prominent *dramatis personae*, and never fail to keep alive the objective interest of the tale. A wonderful group, too, they are, Philina, Laertes, Mignon, the old Harper, Aurelia and her brother—painted with Shakspearian distinctness. The apprentice, after much varied experience of life, which is chiefly interesting to the reader from a subjective point of view, accomplishes the end of his term, marked by his marriage with *Natalie*. He now commences his *Wanderjahre*, or travels, which are to perfect his culture. From this moment, however, our interest in the hero flags. His individuality sinks out of view, and we have to put up with generalities, including a large amount of allegory, which is not at all captivating. To the majority of readers, Meister, especially the second part, would be a dull book. It is an attempt to delineate life without its conventionalities. As if a Greek had written it, there is a complete absence of all moral verdict on the part of the author; no one seems to praise the good or anathematize the bad; and this has given rise to the criticism which, however much the admirers of Goethe may resent, is no less the fact, that he looked on life only as an artist.

Meister is an interesting book; in this sense, it furnishes a key to the author's conception of the higher truths of religion,—it embodies indirectly that *sui generis* creed, of which Carlyle, evidently one of its adherents, augurs, in the future, a world wide acceptance; but alas for the worlds when men have nothing else to look to for comfort and salvation. Who,

think you is to be the high priest of this church of the ages to come? We are told that it is the poet. "Look at men," says Meister, "how they struggle after happiness and satisfaction!" After that which the poet has received from nature—the right enjoyment of the world—the feeling of himself in others—the harmonious conjunction of many things that will seldom go together. Who, but the poet, first formed gods for us, exalted us to them, and brought them down to us? Well understood, the whole secret of Goethe's creed is contained in this last sentence. The religion founded upon this strange confession of faith is elsewhere expounded. Cleared of the alegorical stuff with which it is surrounded, we find it to consist of a threefold reverence, explained by an alegorical personage in conversation with Meister, thus:—"The religion which depends on reverence for what is above us, we denominate the Ethnic; it is the religion of the nations, and the first happy deliverance from a degrading fear; all heathen religions, as we call them, are of this sort, whatsoever names they may bear. The second religion which finds itself on reverence for what is around us, we denominate the philosophical, for the philosopher stands in the middle, and must draw down to him all that is higher, and up to him all that is lower; and only in this medium condition does he merit the title of wise. But now we have to speak of the third religion, grounded on reverence for what is under us; this we name the Christian; as, in the Christian religion, such a temper is the most distinctly manifested, it is a last step to which mankind were fitted and destined to attain. But what a task was it, not only to be patient with the earth, and let it lie beneath us, we appealing to a higher birth-place; but also to recognise humility and poverty, mockery and despite, disgrace and wretchedness, suffering and death; to recognize these things as divine, nay, even on sin and crime to look not as hinderances, but to honour and love them as furtherances of what is holy. Of this, indeed, we find some traces in all ages, but the trace is not the goal, and this being now attained, the human