

dists had overspread a great part of continental Europe, infecting Germany most of all, a great revolution began—a revolution almost as spirit-stirring as the one inaugurated by Luther. The nature of this revolution was still Protestant, as it had been in the 16th century. It was a protest against the predominance of French taste in literature, and against the letter of scripture in religion. The successor of Martin Luther in this struggle of the 18th century was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who may be said to have created a German prose, such as no writer on the whole has surpassed. With terrible wit and logic, Lessing attacked the ruling French taste in literature, and with more moderation, the letter of scripture in religion. For the next half century the course of German literature was wild and erratic. A studious and learned people, familiar with the poets of other nations, were, in the first simplicity of nature and feeling, too often tempted to pursue the singular, the excessive, and the monstrous. A metaphysical passion arose, stronger than had been known in Europe since the days of the scholastic philosophy. System succeeded system with the rapidity of fashions in dress. Metaphysical publications were as numerous as the political tracts which flooded France on the eve of the great revolution. Allusions to the most subtle speculations were common in the most trivial popular writings, and bold metaphors derived from their peculiar philosophy were familiar in common conversations, and in observations on literature and manners. The theology and philosophy of the Germans became associated in the minds of men with all that was lawless, absurd, and impious. But at length the metaphysical rage greatly subsided. The small circle of dispute respecting first principles must be always rapidly described, and the speculator who sets out with the idea that his course is infinite, soon finds himself at the point from which he began, or like the doomed host in pandemonium, reasoning high on fate, fine knowledge and absolute decree, finds no end in “wandering mazes lost.” German literature, by this means, however,

worked itself into originality; and religion emerged purified and sublimed. It is true that some of the more distinctive dogmas of evangelical belief, have been sacrificed. Neander, for instance, glories in the thought that the theology of Germany has abandoned what he calls the old mechanical view of inspiration, but we must not forget that Neander has given us one of the loftiest and purest conceptions of the Divine man that we have in the whole range of Christology, if I may be allowed the use of such a germanism. The *Leben Jesu* of Neander has long since supplanted the *Leben Jesu* of Strauss in the best minds of Germany.

It was at the commencement of this second epoch in the religious and literary history of Germany, that her greatest poet and thinker, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, was born. Carlyle, Emerson, *et hoc genus omne*, claim for the German Goethe, that, next to our own Shakspeare, he is the first of modern poets. In our precise English way of speaking, we would never think of calling Goethe a didactic writer; and yet his great Scotch disciple and commentator just named, has ventured the assertion that the teachings of Goethe, embody the germ of a new dispensation for the world. Carlyle, deeply imbued with the German philosophy, may have acquired unconsciously some of the German extravagance of expression, and employed it in this instance, as unguardedly as when he gave his estimate of poor Quashee. To the amazement of Carlyle, however, Quashee is now a free man, and struggling hard in his simple way, to render himself worthy of freedom, and it is not at all improbable that the negro shall have attained a high degree of development before the German Goethe shall have fully vindicated his messiahship. An Englishman can never think of Goethe, but in connection with his ardent admirer and apologist, Thomas Carlyle, yet the more he knows of the characters of these great men, the more he will wonder that a connection could ever have existed between them. We partly acquiesce in Carlyle's hero-worship of Cromwell, Mirabeau, and Napoleon, but most people wonder at the homage which is demanded for the courtly, artistic, epicurean German, whose