

poleon, who read it seven times. It penetrated into China, where Charlotte and Werther were modelled in porcelain. Its success seems to have sprung from the fact that it vividly expressed the discontent and pessimism of the age.

The name and fame acquired through this novel attracted the attention of Charles Augustus, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar, who, in 1775, invited the young poet to his court. Here Goethe resided for the most part during the remaining fifty-six years of his life. The little town of less than twenty thousand inhabitants, through his genius and that of Schiller, Herder and Wieland, became the Athens of Germany—the focus of its intellectual life.

Goethe was appointed Privy Councillor, but the chief function of his office seems to have been to direct the artistic pleasures of the court, which sought to imitate the manners and morals of Versailles.

Goethe swam with the tide, and joined the Grand Duke in his maddest carousals. He seems, however, to have revolted from the frivolities and dissipations of masking, drinking, dancing, and dicing, and to have found a nobler employment for his powers in literature. His most important work of this period is the "Wilhelm Meister," a human document, in which much of his experience and philosophy is set forth. A sojourn of two years in Italy gives us his admirable Torquato Tasso, founded upon the tragic story of the author of "Jerusalem Delivered." It embodies the very spirit of classic art; is almost "faultily faultless," like Pygmalion's statue before it was smitten into life.

The supreme work of the greatest poet of his time, the immortal Faust, appeared in 1805. The

ancient legend on which it is founded is one of the most weird superstitions of the Middle Ages. With a crude and coarse realism it was often carved in wood in the choir stalls of the churches, or painted on panels, or enacted in rude moralities. Even a celestial origin is attributed to the legend by a reference to the dispute between Michael the Archangel, with the Devil, about the body of Moses (Jude ix.), and the war in heaven between Michael and the dragon (Revelation xii. 7). Twenty-nine versions of the Faust legend, says Bayard Taylor, existed in Germany before the time of Goethe. The English Marlowe found in it the "motif" of his vigorous play. The obvious lesson was that he must have a long spoon who would sup with the Devil.

It was Goethe, however, who first grasped the marvellous power and deep meaning of the ancient legend. For thirty years it haunted his mind, and at length found expression in the greatest drama of modern times. The sombre tragedy describes the struggle of the human soul with the most subtle temptation. Goethe's Mephistopheles is not the vulgar devil of the Middle Ages, but a much more acute and insidious spirit. The play is, in large part, a transcript of the author's own soul wrestlings. "I am conscious," he wrote Lavater, "that God and Satan, heaven and hell, are striving for the mastery within me." It is a variation on the theme alike of the Christian apostle and the Roman moralist, "When I would do good, evil is present with me."

The intense vitality of the play grips the very soul. The pitifulness of the story of Marguerite touches every heart. The remorse and despair of Faust are recognized as a divine Nemesis.