

THE GROTTA OF ANTIPAROS.

TRANSLATED AND SLIGHTLY ABRIDGED, FROM ENGEL'S "PHILOSOPH FÜR DIE WELT."

THE following translation may not be without its use, if it teach this lesson, that though Christianity, like all other truth, can bear the closest scrutiny, still some mental qualities are required in the examiner, which, if absent, will lead him not towards truth, but away from it, into the abyss of error and ruin.

Put the name of any ably written and profound Infidel work in the place of the "*Système de la Nature*," and the moral is the same.

HERR VON WILLWITZ was one of the most amiable young noblemen in Livonia. Devoting himself to his studies with as much industry as talent, he became, also, an exceedingly well educated man. Still he failed in getting employment in the civic service of the state, and, accordingly, in part from discouragement, and in part from desire to recommend himself to his superiors, he resolved to enter the Russian navy, and joined the fleet which was about to sail for the Archipelago.

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Illness and the advice of his physician, compelled him, however, soon to return to his estate in Livonia. Here he became acquainted with the Baron von B——, whose castle was only a few miles distant from his own. A mutual craving for society soon made the two country gentlemen much more intimate than they would ever have become had they lived in a city.

On a certain occasion, when Willwitz came in upon the Baron unexpectedly, the latter hastening to greet his friend, laid down a book which he had just been reading. "Anything new?" asked Willwitz.

"New or old as you may please to style it, To me, indeed, it is new; but to such a great reader as you, probably old." As Willwitz was about to take it, the Baron, with rather a comical look, snatched it away, and inquired with much self-complacency "what book he thought it was."

"O, some romance, Baron, I'll wager."

"You think so because I am the reader. But this time, Mr. Wiseman, you are at fault. Guess again."

"A book of travels, then." And again Willwitz made an eager movement to seize it, "or perhaps, indeed,—and yet, it cannot be; no one would expect to find it with you."

"Why not? what is it that no one would expect to find with me? You musn't think that you are the only thinking man in all Livonia."

"That would be singularly impudent. Am I not in your company?"

"You are quizzing me; I understand it. Still one may become what he is not now, and I have always thought I was in a fair way of becoming something. Philosophy! my friend, philosophy!"—(while with a triumphant air he held out the book)—"And that, too, not of the superficial order, but the very deepest metaphysics."

"What! I should be very sorry to find it so, Baron. I should be afraid that it would portend an early death." He took it up, and was not a little surprised when he found it to be the famous "*Système de la Nature*."

"Is it possible! *You* reading a work like this?"

"You are acquainted with it, then."

"I read it while coming from Leghorn. An Englishman lent it to me while I was ill."

"Well, you found it a really excellent work, didn't you?"

Excellent! A book resting on such principles as that, excellent?"

"I mean as respects style, execution?"

"Of what consequence is the execution, Baron? A poison, because it pleases the palate, is none the less poison—the greater the reason why people should be warned against it. How in the world did you come across this book?"

"Do you ask how? In a very natural way."

.... Fie! Willwitz, fie! You talk like a parson, and represent the whole matter like a parson. These good gentlemen take the first taste; and then, when we poor folks belonging to the laity want a taste too, then we are sent to hell. Why not read? Haven't you read it?"

"Good Baron, between you and I, there is some difference. If I had never read dry German metaphysics, I confess I should be a little afraid of these eloquent Frenchmen. Tell me how it came into your head—you, who have such a horror of all hard study, so little taste for deep thinking—you, who are so entirely lacking in the various knowledge that such a book presupposes in its readers; how did it come into your head?"