

**THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
GOETHE'S FAUST**

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The Philosophy of Goethe's Faust by Thomas Davidson & Charles M. Bakewell

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**THOMAS DAVIDSON & CHARLES M. BAKEWELL**

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BY

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Education of the Wage-Earners," etc.*

EDITED BY

CHARLES M. BAKEWELL

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## PREFACE

Throughout his life Mr. Davidson was an assiduous reader of Goethe's writings, and particularly of the *Faust*, most of which he knew by heart. In the six lectures that form this book, first delivered in the winter of 1896 at Cambridge, Massachusetts, he has told what that poem had come to mean for him, and has sought to lay bare its "philosophical or ethical skeleton."

These lectures are published partly in response to the request of those who heard them delivered and have expressed the desire to have them in permanent form, and partly in the belief that they will be welcome to a much larger circle of readers. Those who read poetry for its content cannot fail to be interested in the interpretation of Goethe's masterpiece by a scholar of Mr. Davidson's breadth and learning who had lived long and intimately with it.

"I hold," writes Mr. Davidson, "that true poetry may include all the content of philosophy and much of that of religion, — presenting it, however, in its own form, which is always individual and concrete. *Faust* is just such a form; but its content, I believe, is the entire spiritual movement toward individual emancipation, composed of the Teutonic Reformation and the Italian Renaissance in all their history, scope, and consequences."

These lectures were written for delivery, and were not prepared by their author with special view to publication. Under these circumstances they may very well contain some passages which he would himself have emended had he lived to see them put in print. Nevertheless, the editor has thought it best to leave the text in the form which Mr. Davidson gave it, and has only ventured to make the obvious minor corrections in proof.

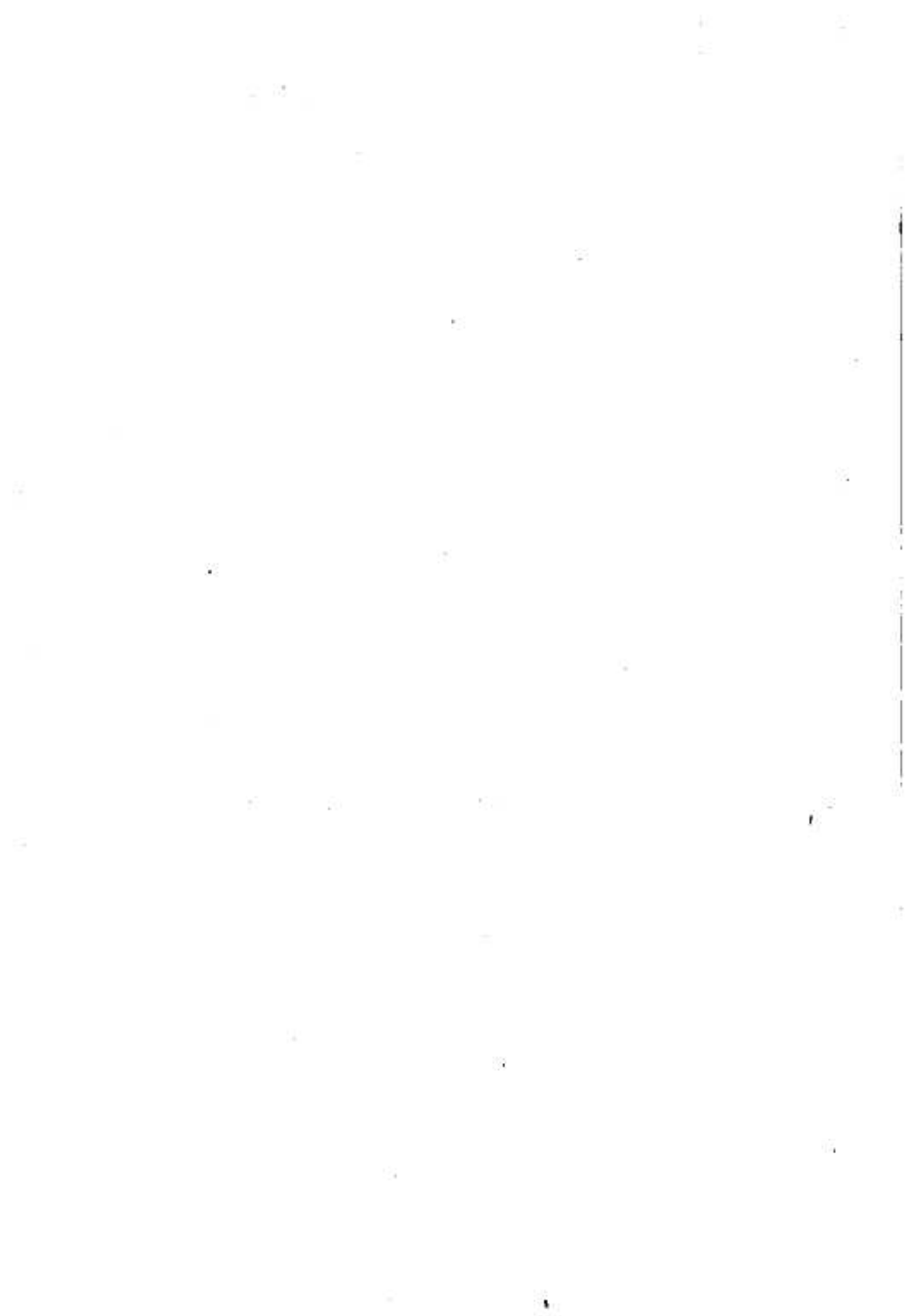
The editor has also supplied the missing chapter headings, and has added translations of the passages which in the manuscript were given in German, wherever the meaning is not apparent from the context. In almost all such cases the translations are taken from Miss Swanwick's version, and the translations so taken are inclosed in brackets.

THE EDITOR.

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# THE PHILOSOPHY OF GOETHE'S FAUST

## I

### THE FAUST MOTIVE

It is a weighty saying of Aristotle's that "Poetry is more serious and more philosophical than History." This was certainly true of the classical poetry of Greece, to which he specially refers, and it is true of all poetry which has any claim to be considered classical. History is the ordered record of facts. Poetry is the embodiment of the inner meaning of these facts in concrete form. In the language of a recent book, it is "Reality," as opposed to "Appearance." That this was Goethe's opinion is shown in the first prologue to the work with which we are about to deal. There the poet, protesting against the prostitution of his art to popular taste or sordid ends, exclaims: "Shall the poet, for thy sake, blasphemously fritter away the loftiest right, the human right, that Nature hath conferred upon him? Whereby doth he move all hearts? Whereby doth he vanquish every element? Is it not the harmony which penetrates forth from his bosom and draws the world back into his heart? When Nature, unconcernedly spinning, forces the thread's

everlasting length upon the spindle ; when the inharmonious crowd of all beings sounds tiresomely in confusion ; who is it that, with infusion of life, breaks up the eternal monotonous flow of the series, so that it stirs rhythmically ? Who calls the individual to the consecration of the universal, wherein it beats in glorious chords ? . . . Who guarantees Olympus, assembles gods ? It is the power of man *revealed* in the poet."

Poetry, then, according to Goethe, is the humanization of the world, the infusion into it of the human spirit, whereby alone it gains meaning for man.<sup>1</sup> No wonder that Aristotle should say that poetry is more serious and philosophical than history, since the latter presents the world as yet unhumanized.

I have made these remarks and citations because there is at the present day a current notion, more or less consciously formulated, that poetry, and indeed art generally, is a mere play of the creative imagination, charming indeed, and perhaps uplifting, but without any serious content, and therefore without any relation to the serious, practical affairs of life. It is sadly true, indeed, that most of our current literature and art corresponds to this notion ; but the same is not true of the great literature, the literature that forms part of the eternal possession of the race. It is not true of the *Book of Job*, of the *Oresteia*, of the *Divine Comedy*, of *Faust*, of *Julius Cæsar*, of *In Memoriam*, and surely it is not true of the greatest of all poems, the gospel, that "truth embodied in a tale," as Tennyson calls it. Some people

<sup>1</sup> We see here the influence of Kant's philosophy, though the thought occurs in Dante, *Parad.*, IV, 40 sqq.