

**THE GLADIATOR OF
RAVENNA. A
DRAMA, IN FIVE ACTS**

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BY
FRIEDRICH HALM.

Men can render their will great or small! When imprisoned within a contracted circle, the mind grows narrow and compressed; it expands and soars high when animated by a lofty object.—SCHILLER.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN, WITH A PREFACE,

BY
PROFESSOR DE VERICOUR.

~~Motone. J. 93.~~

LONDON:
JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1859.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

ONE of the pre-eminent characteristics of modern Germany is, the enthusiastic sympathy with which are hailed all the energetic advocates of progressive movement, and of social as well as political reforms. The whole realm of Germanic literature is impregnated with the political aspirations that animate the Teutonic nations, along with their hopes for loftier institutions. That hopeful spirit breathes even more vividly in the domain of poetry than in the grave and abundant pages of history. There are, no doubt, many poets still, beyond the Rhine, who remain within the loftier regions of poetry—whose muse is not inspired by liberty and the glories of the Forum—who, like Uhland, Justinus Kerner, the late Gustav Schwab and their followers—poets of the Swabian school, prove themselves faithfully to be the exquisite posterity of the Minnesingers. Other poets, like Geibel, or, like Schücking—the Westphalian so bent upon singing the charms of his native land—and a few others, whatever may be their political digressions, remain within the limits of political principles of an extreme moderation. On the whole, the great majority of the poets of modern Germany are inspired by the political views, the various hopes of reforms, that have never ceased to agitate Europe in our time. Poetry, with them, is more especially an instrument, a means to that end; and, whatever may be their genius, poetry, in the artistic point of view, is with them an object of secondary consideration. The old and venerable Arndt has, during forty years, sent forth his patriotic stanzas, burning with intense hatred for his Gallic neighbours, which, however legitimate before 1815, is now stripped of its interest and devoid of its object. Count Platen's muse has always been nobly inspired by the iniquitous sufferings of prostrate Poland. Count Auersperg, Stieglitz, the Pflzers, Dingelstedt, have all been faithful to the cause

of liberty, or adopted it, later, as a more dignified subject for their genius. Heim and Hoffmann have been obliged to leave their country in consequence of their bold allusions. Herwegh's poetical compositions are replete with every idea of socialism compatible with rhythmical effusions. Froelich, in his epic, Ulrich von Hutten, has skilfully introduced political allusions and expressions of his hopes, with a power and energy which, it is needless to add, gave great umbrage in high political quarters.

But the drama also, has been in Germany a field from which have been sent forth numberless popular yearnings. Gutzkow and Prutz have thrown into their dramas all the spirit of opposition and reform that was admissible in such compositions. Gutzkow has ever transformed the stage into an arena for theological disputes. His Uriel Acosta, performed at Dresden, in the midst of the ardent plaudits of the multitude, is a sort of dramatic discussion on the conflict of ecclesiastical statutes, and on religious liberty. We are not aware that the liberty of conscience has been menaced in Saxony; but if there had been a shadow of danger on the subject, it seems that the legislative assemblies, the bishops and consistories of Germany, would avert it without delay; claims of that nature do not appear dignified or graceful on the stage. A great number of the fantastic dramas of Gutzkow, however, are free from the excesses of political and religious allusions, and his genius may well have forcibly depicted in some of them the maddening persecutions of despotism, as he has himself cruelly suffered from them. Prutz goes farther; his object is to found a political drama as a regular mode of political opposition; in this novel forum he has occasionally transgressed the laws of moderation and good taste, despite the superiority of his intellect, and his skilful taste in other fields of literature. Of late, however, Germanic genius has evinced the salutary symptoms of a greater reserve. It has manifested the rational conviction that the cause of the people and of freedom, will be served far more effectually in avoiding struggles with the state police, and in only producing before the public plays and dramas which, however political and moral in their object, will remain within the limits of pure, admissible truth, engendering no convulsive passion — no frantic explosions — but a simple, dignified enthusiasm, which is Nature itself. In this respect, the dramatic authors of Germany possess, in Schiller's immortal Wilhelm Tell, the most perfect of all models.

The Germans attribute to the drama, and the stage generally, an importance not to be met with elsewhere. The theatre, with them, is not only an amusement indispensable to their taste and manners, but is also a serious school, a public tribune. They encourage, love, and esteem the dramatists. Among dramatic authors are to be found at this day, as well as in the days of Goethe and Schiller, many of the greatest names in the literature and society of Germany; and among them, those who are hailed with the greatest enthusiasm, are ever the authors whose genius has been kindled by some idea of liberty or humanity. As Germany contains several capital cities under governments that differ in the degree of toleration, there are dramatic compositions that are permitted in one metropolis, and sometimes repulsed in another, or the representation of which is the result of endless efforts or private influences. Some twenty-five years ago, Michael Beer—whose premature death has been an irreparable loss to the drama, brother of the illustrious composer of the *Prophet*—succeeded in having his *Struensee* performed at Munich, Dresden, and Berlin. Laube, on the contrary, who suffered nine months in the state prison of Berlin, beheld insuperable obstacles opposed to the appearance of his *Struensee* on the stage. In the varied dramatic movement of Germany, Vienna and Berlin, whose tastes differ extremely, form the two extreme points; Dresden and Munich, on the other hand, present a point of transition between the two points—a sort of dramatic eclecticism. In Munich, however, political subjects also occupy the stage, although with less freedom and boldness than in the North of Germany. At Munich, a drama, the heroine of which is a *woman of the people* (by Mallian), has excited a greater enthusiasm than any of the compositions of Goethe or Schiller. There also, a patriotic drama by Knorr, the hero of which is *Plinganser*, a student who, at the commencement of the 18th century, put himself at the head of the people against the Austrians, has had a marvellous success. It may be observed, however, that such a popularity, as well as that of the *Quistows* of Schneider, at Berlin, is more especially the result of the national vanity skilfully flattered, and not so much an enthusiasm created by the illustration of a general, universal principle, as in the other dramas mentioned above.

Of late years no drama in the whole of Germany has obtained such a popularity as the *Gladiator of Ravenna*. Its author, Mr. Munch de Bellinghausen (nephew of the

former president of the Germanic Diet), a lyric and dramatic poet of great eminence, has signed all his works with the pseudonym of Friedrich Halm. He sent his "Gladiator" to the director of the imperial theatre at Vienna, anonymously, without giving his pseudonym, already very celebrated in Germany. The drama was performed on the 18th of October, 1854, before empty benches, as there was no author's name assigned to it that might prove an attraction for the public; but after the first representation, its success was complete. The public flocked subsequently to hear it. It was soon represented in all the principal cities of Germany, Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Munich, Leipsic, &c., and in all it was hailed with the same enthusiastic admiration. The singular incognito of the author became a source of intense curiosity and conjecture throughout Germany. We have heard the authorship attributed to a prince of royal blood, well known for his distinguished literary labours. In the very midst of this triumph of the Gladiator, a Bavarian schoolmaster, who had written a play on the same subject, and sent it to Mr. Laube, director of the Vienna imperial theatre, wrote to Mr. Laube, complaining of his being the victim of a plagiarism. Friedrich Halm had in the meantime made himself known as the author of the drama that occupied so deeply the public mind. The schoolmaster gave publicity to his claims, and soon found partisans and sympathizers; but the great test had not yet been appealed to; he was called upon to publish his own "Gladiator," and as soon as it appeared, the public opinion unhesitatingly, unanimously, proclaimed the pre-eminent superiority and originality of Halm's drama, as to execution, object, and spirit; and its triumph was enhanced by the pretensions of its humbler rival. It is the custom in Germany not to send a dramatic composition to the press till it has passed through all the principal theatres of its agglomerated states, and exhausted, as it were, every source of succession the stage. This explains why the Gladiator of Ravenna, although performed in 1854, was only published the year before last. The original is in beautiful poetry, literally translated here in plain prose.

Hermann, or Armin, or Arminius, who vanquished Varus and his Roman legions, and his wife Thusnelda, are the two most antique and revered personifications of Germanic nationality. Friedrich Halm, in selecting them for the background, as it were, of his drama—in bringing them, as a source of contrast with corrupt and despotic Rome—in adopting them as a powerful, sublime agency in the

dramatic action—was naturally evoking remembrances and associations that could not fail to rouse the slumbering enthusiasm of the Germans for their traditions. It is therefore very probable, that the simple, pure, patriotic feelings of the descendants of Armin, contributed somewhat to the extraordinary success of the Gladiator of Ravenna; but that they did so to a very limited degree, and with a certain class only, we feel convinced, after careful researches and observations on the subject. It is the deeper object of the drama—the far more profound illustration it presents—that drew forth the unbounded admiration and sympathy of pensive Germany.

We believe that no truthful and enlightened member of a civilized community will deny that personal, political, and mental freedom are the elementary rights of our being. When freedom has been hunted through the world,—when it is exposed to insult and injury,—when it is crushed by conquest,—mind remains her last refuge,—her last asylum; but when it quails there, and, still more, when its very essence is poisoned there in the cradle, what does become of the worth of human nature? If air and water stagnate, instead of becoming elements of life and enjoyment, they become sources of disease, pestilence, and death; but, what are these types compared with the miseries—with the monstrosity—which result from a stagnation of Thought! It is true that no human power can control the secret working of the mind; still further, philosophers proclaim that no human power can chain down the internal movements of thought; but it is no less an irrefragable truth that criminal human power can check, blunt, annihilate the mind of its fellow-creature in its very germ; and transform it so, that it grows in a perpetual state of putrefaction; incapable of any intellectual or moral feeling; lost to every sentiment of its mental being. The creature, created in the image of God, then continues to live, but feeble, inert, undesirous of assistance, it ceases to be a man; it becomes a chattel. The laws of Divine Providence appear outraged beyond the general human conception; for, those whose faith in divine mercy is restricted within certain limits, may be understood to doubt whether Almighty God will consent to admit *chattels* into the realm of eternity.

Friedrich Halm's *GLADIATOR* is an admirable illustration of such a transformation of human mind. He is born with every noble germ that the Creator of all has awarded to man; but the human mind of the slave-gadiator has grown

in the most abject state—in a putrid atmosphere. He has lived in utter ignorance of his own divine right—he has lost all that is human : intelligence, virtue, the purer affections ; but still more—skilful corruption, and the system of terror that has made slaves of men among all races—have degraded him also, so far as to make him bless his servitude, adore his oppressors, pride himself in his disgrace, play cheerfully with his chains—nay, his grovelling spirit clings to them—he would even seek them. And the tender interest he inspires by those noble germs in him, irrevocably perverted and transformed, does not debar us from feeling that there is no hope of redemption for him—that he must die unredeemed in this world, to meet with his recompense and regeneration in the other, where the assassins of his soul will in their turn meet with divine justice.

We behold in the Gladiator of Ravenna the excesses and completeness of the mental thralldom which annihilates the whole spiritual being, and engenders a monstrous transformation. It does not behove us to enter into an analysis of the partial intellectual rights that are still fettered or impeded in our modern societies ; the whole of Europe is alive to them. We have great faith in the ultimate perfected state of the human mind. It seems a consoling and general belief in our time that the prospects of progress for individuals and the world at large, in our European societies, must be in accordance as the intellect can be cultivated in all classes, assert its own dignity, claim its rightful provinces of investigation, and pursue its career of development, both moral and spiritual.

But the *gladiator* exhibits also, in his individuality, the results of that odious, wholesale system of slavery, accepted as an institution by a great Christian country. A powerful party in that country has skilfully organised a system which will prove the destructive agency of its greatness, even of its very existence, if pursued ; namely, a system, the object of which is to make a portion of our fellow-creatures descend from the state of man to that of insensible brutish beings, lowered to the condition of cattle—studying the best mode of augmenting the abjectness of the slave, in order to ensure for ever his slavery—annihilating him, brutalising him, as much as possible, so that the slaveholder may *conscientiously* authorize himself, by such a state, to his rivetting the chains still more cruelly, and be justified in doing so in the face of the world. Slavery, that evil of all evils, that iniquity of all iniquities, renders such a system