

**GOETHE: HIS LIFE  
AND  
WORKS. AN ESSAY**

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Goethe: his life and works. An essay by George H. Calvert

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HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

AN ESSAY.

BY

GEORGE H. CALVERT.

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# GOETHE.



## I.

### WEIMAR AND ITALY.

To the English-speaking public Goethe is the great German Poet who wrote *Werther* and *Faust*, — a large, nebulous, remote figure. A smaller circle can call over the catalogue of his principal creative works, prose-fictions as well as poems, and knows that he has a name in Science ; and that, surviving to be over fourscore, he lived his latter days in high state at Weimar, the acknowledged primate of all German literary dioceses, a sage as well as poet. But few know that behind the poet, beneath the writer and thinker, lying as solid foundation to the splendid superstructure of sixty printed volumes, is a practical man of business, a vigorous, rigorous, methodical administrator, who, as such, did better work and more of it than was ever done, except by a few of the pre-



dominant lawgivers and wisest, long-lived rulers of populous nations.

For more than fifty years the chosen, trusted, appreciated friend of Carl August, Duke, afterwards Grand-Duke, of Weimar, Goethe was for the first ten years of his long abode in Weimar, from his twenty-sixth to his thirty-sixth year, the chief minister of the wise young Duke, and the virtual administrator of the ducal government, reorganizing during that first decade some of the most important of its departments, and creating new ones.

No detracton is it from the breadth of the principles he applied as political worker, that Goethe's field was limited ; but fortunate for the world that it was limited. The reorganizing of a Prussia or an Austria might have swallowed up the whole man, or have absorbed so much of his vitality for more years as to have maimed the poet ; whereas, his ministerial functions in Weimar, — performed too as they were through personal love for and enlightened sympathy with the glorious young Duke, — were but a phasis in his unfolding, early lessons that were an initiatory discipline for the poet and thinker, strenuous exercises which developed, fortified, and mellowed the faculties whose predestined field was literature. What-

ever Goethe did, saw, read, whatever he experienced in any shape, he made subservient to his culture. In pains and pleasures, in the most plodding labor and the most fantastic amusement, in all the passages of his daily life, he kept his growth and improvement ever before him. From everything and everybody he came in contact with he drew some food. Like Prospero, he was —

“ All dedicate  
To closeness and the bettering of his mind ; ”

but he did not need, like Prospero, “ to neglect worldly ends ; ” all such he made serve his primary end of self-culture, moral, æsthetical, intellectual self-culture.

In his twenty-eighth year, January 1777, little more than a twelvemonth from his arrival in Weimar, Goethe writes to Lavater : “ Let my present life continue so long as it will, at any rate I have heartily enjoyed a genuine experience of the variegated throng and press of the world, — sorrow, hope, love, work, wants, adventure, ennui, impatience, folly, joy, the expected and the unknown, the superficial and the profound, just as the dice threw, with fêtes, dances, sleighings, — adorned in silk and spangles, — a marvelous *ménage* ! And withal, dear brother, God be praised, in myself and in

my real aims in life I am quite happy." About the same time, in a letter from Weimar to a friend, Merck says: "Goethe is the soul and direction of everything, and all are contented with him because he serves many and injures no one. Who can withstand the disinterestedness of this man?" Too earnest a man was Goethe, too true and large a soul, to be flattered by the privileges of high worldly position. He took the chief place under the Duke, to be useful to him and his people. He could be uniquely useful, because he did not covet the place, did not climb up to it from below, but descended upon it a winged benefactor, who folded for a time his wings, or rather made of them magic arms with which all other arms must willingly co-work.

Looking at the wide book-shelf, filled by Goethe's printed works, and knowing their range and achievement, it is at first hard to figure to one's self that, in the first years of his residence in Weimar, the writer of these scores of teeming volumes would, for two or three weeks, scour the whole ducal domain on horseback to supervise the drawing of the men for the war-contingent; that at another time he would accompany the master of the ducal forests and farms over his wide field of duty;