

SCHILLER

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Schiller by James Sime

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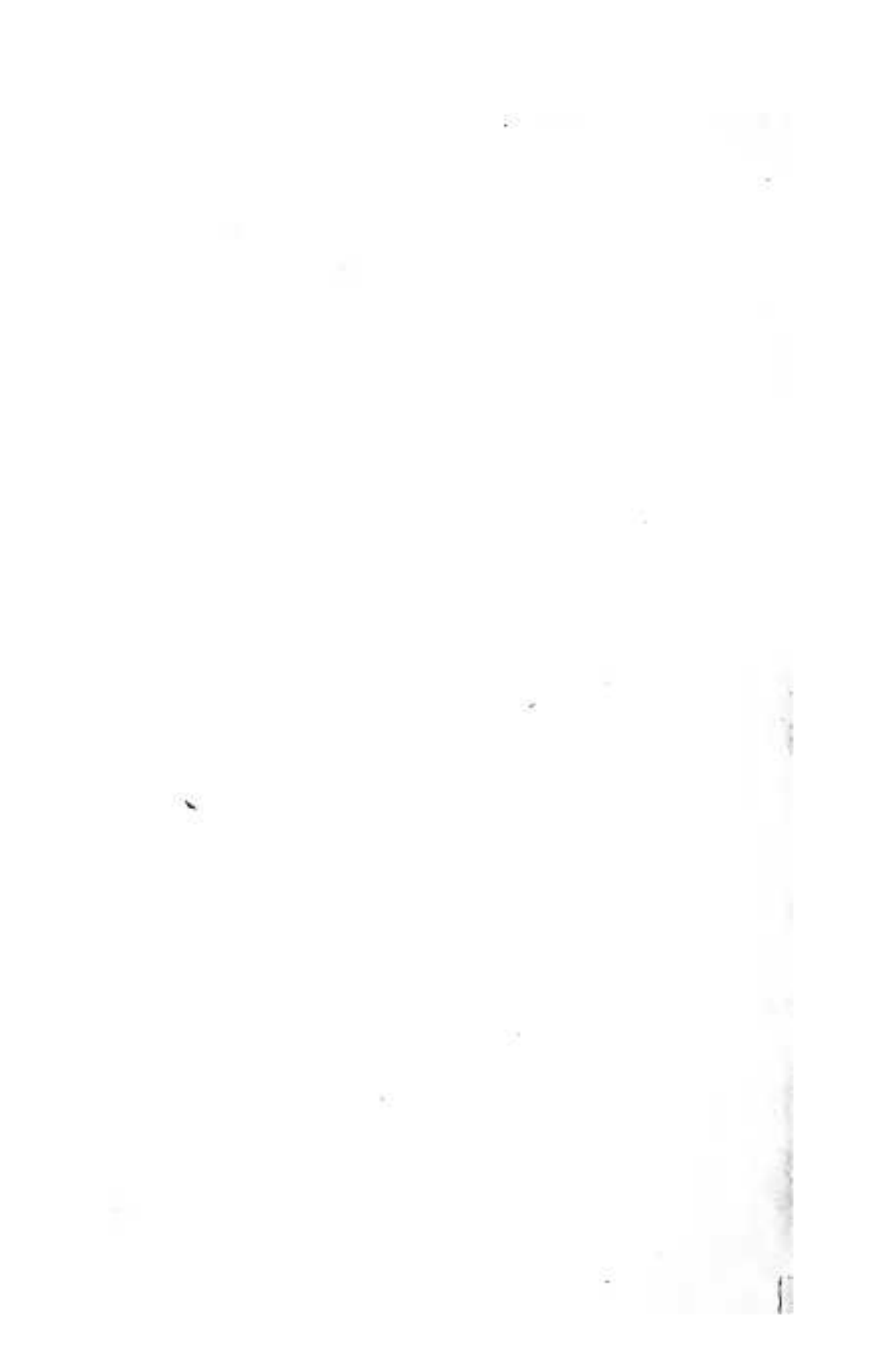
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SCHILLER.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

IN his splendid Epilogue to "The Song of the Bell," written soon after Schiller's death, Goethe says of his friend that, in his mature years, "that which fetters us all—the common—lay far behind him." It would be impossible to indicate more exactly the quality which must impress every student of Schiller's career. Even in his appearance there was an aspect of greatness as he walked through the streets with his firm military step, his tall form towering above the passers-by. "His carriage, his walk, every one of his movements," said Goethe to Eckermann, "was proud and grand; but his eyes were mild." No one could talk with him without perceiving the loftiness of his aims; and always he felt, even to his last hours, that, whatever task he had accomplished, still wider worlds remained for him to conquer. For many years his life was one of almost con-

stant suffering; but pain could not break his iron will, or turn him from the path on which he had elected to march. The meanest subjects he strove to see in the light of great ideas; and in his search for truth he never allowed his judgments to become hard doctrines, but submitted them willingly to new tests, holding that man rises to genuine dignity, not so much by what he believes as by the temper in which he believes it. Schiller's poetry is marked by the same grandeur of tone as that which characterised his thought and feeling. The passions which he prefers to represent are high, enduring, and strenuous—passions which, if gratified, create around them a new world; which, if baffled, rend human nature in its depths. With how many heroic forms has he not enriched modern literature!—forms which breathe the spirit of his own inmost life, and which possess an eternal freshness and vitality. Only the highest poets of all—and Schiller does not rank with them—have the capacity of appreciating equally the tragedy and the comedy of existence. To humour he was not inaccessible, but wit, in its most refined forms, was beyond his range; and it was more natural to him to grasp his materials boldly and firmly, than to handle them with a light and delicate touch. The peculiarities of his genius were not, however, incompatible with a fine feeling for the gentler aspects of life; and amid the “crashing splendours” of his heroic conflicts we often detect a note of exquisite tenderness and pathos.

It is commonly said of Schiller, that in all his writing he is the representative and the advocate of a particular set of ideas. “Schiller,” says Heine, “wrote for the great ideas of the Revolution; he destroyed the