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## The Influence of Metaphysical Speculation.

In a previous article, we very briefly illustrated the destructive forces, which were couched in metaphysical speculation, involving morality, religion and society in one common ruin. After destruction comes reconstruction; and historically considered, it will be found that this will be attempted on the basis of some political speculation, some theory of human rights or of the constitution of human nature; and thus the speculative principles of philosophers will be transfused into life and manners, and into the form of the government.

This was notably true at the beginning of the present century in France. By changing the abstract speculation of the philosopher to the concrete sanction of statute law, the philosopher became the lawgiver of the state. To illustrate the case in hand let us consider the philosophical influence of Rousseau, who was the great prototype of those whom Carlyle has styled the authors of the "Literature of Desperation."

Of the destructive power of the philosophy of this brilliant sentimentalist there is ample proof. Said Napoleon, "Without Rousseau the French Revolution would not have occurred." Carlyle in his "Heroes" observes, that "this man was the Evangelist of the French Revolution, that his semi-delirious speculations on the miseries of civilized life, and the preferability of the savage to the civilized helped well to produce a whole delirium in France generally." Hume writes from Paris respecting his popularity: "It is impossible to express or imagine the enthusiasm of this nation in his favor."

This man, so potent in revolution, sought also to lay down the principles on which reconstruction could be effected. He attempted the impossible task of organizing anarchy. All were governors; there were no subjects. Obedience was slavery, and duty an obsolete notion.

From what philosophical principles did this constructive effort proceed? And what effect did they have on the reorganization of society in France?

This brilliant writer had argued and plausibly maintained two theses, to which more than to any other causes were due the sufferings of this nation, in her throes for a birth into a new political order of things. The first was, that "no individual, nor yet the whole multitude constituting the state has the right to compel a man to do anything of which it cannot be demonstrated, that his own reason must join in prescribing it;" the second, if possible still more anarchical, was, "that no one is bound to obey a law to which he has not given consent." To a people panting for liberty, these principles or doctrines have a peculiar fascination, and it is not strange under the circumstances they should have been eagerly accepted.

As a destructive force, nothing could be more admirably planned; and their inher-

ent weakness and inefficiency becomes apparent only when it was sought to build on these shifting sands the fabric of a stable government. His maxim of "the law of to-day does not bind me to-morrow" is the very essence of political nonsense and absurdity. Political doctrines like these, one would think, must be rejected almost instinctively by the mind; and yet in a nation acute in intelligence, and zealous for progress, they found millions of admirers and advocates.

It needs but very rudimentary reasoning to point out the enormous error of this political philosophy, and why it was subversive of all government.

It proclaimed to a y subject, if indeed there were any subjects, "that the only legitimate authority over a man is his individual will," that this will cannot be delegated, and consequently, strictly speaking, there can be no representative government. If any attempt is made to enforce a law, to which the people individually have not consented, it is right to resist. Besides if a contract is made to-day, because it is my will, to-morrow my will may change, and the contract is no longer binding. Now as it is impossible to forecast what the men of the future desire, thus all legislation, which respects the future, is made impossible, and the foundations of every kind of political organization, as well as of commercial honor, are swept away by a plausible philosophy of individualism. In his scheme of political organization, every individual has a right to object to everything, and to resist every measure; and there must arise from the nature of the case endless irritations and fierce oppositions.

What was presumptively true to the wise thinkers, as the result of such indoctrination, the history of France at this period completely verified. Disorder, anarchy, and dissolution followed each other in rapid succession, until the reins of absolute power were seized by the hands of a master, who raised himself to this eminence without consulting the popular will, and who crowned his work by imposing on a people struggling for this impossible liberty, the principles of imperial, hereditary despotism.

In striking contrast to these dreams of a frenzied philosophy, that overthrew the ancient regime in France, but was utterly unable to construct a new system, we present the calm wisdom, the sound philosophy, and the political insight embodied in the Declaration of Independence. This is not a string of "glittering generalities" as one has stigmatized it, but it contains the substance of political wisdom, on which has been reared a political organization of colossal proportions, and we trust of enduring existence. These abstract principles led the nation through a protracted war to their permanent liberty and peace, under the reign of law.

The man of thought must precede, in the order of nature, the man of action; and those speculative principles, which seem to lie remote from human uses, and

seem to be only the amusement of the curious mind, often prove to be the pivotal points on which individual and national prosperity depends. A. R. B.

## Goethe's Wilhelm Meister.

(continued.)

Wilhelm's entire adventures at the castle are the means Goethe used to lift his hero to a different plane of thought, by the glimpse of better associations. But he seemed never able to learn that he was too superior to be forever confined to the company of actors and actresses. Up to this time, the mind of a reader of modern novels, is continually on the alert to find in all these wanderings and comminglings, a plot upon which to lay the tensions of the imagination. But there is none. Mignon is a mystery; so is the old harper; but we can see nothing in them more than might any day be observed by one traveling as did Wilhelm. Boys often, in their inexperience, ally themselves to a person having a talent, but neglect the character of the new friend, and are led into much confusion, and sometimes disgrace, by their adherence to bombast, and not to the quietness of a silver morality. He could never understand the Countess. He could have loved her, but for her station. Philina, in her imitations of nobility, had greater charms for him than Philina as Philina. Her reception of him in the Countess' chambers, was a surprise he could not comprehend. "His experience of the world was too limited to perceive that the most frivolous and good-for-nothing persons most frequently accuse themselves in bitter terms, acknowledging and lamenting their faults with candour, even when they are wholly destitute of resolution to turn from the evil courses which their irresistible nature has compelled them to pursue." Her lightness of manner, and generosity of disposition, were charms to him that the stolidness of the Countess had not rendered altogether void of enchantment. Culture is stately. Vulgarity calls it pride. The culture of our colder climates cannot brook the physical grimaces of the tropical Italian. It is too much like the coarseness of the northern illiterates. Wilhelm had not yet, however, attained the insight of character which enables one to see that fineness of structure is sensitive about confiding its own secrets to another. That

"Aye keep somethin' to yourself,  
You will not tell to others,"

was born in him. But that others should do the same he never considered a necessity. Melira's murmurings against fortune he bore patiently, and that with no possible prospect of bettering himself. The whole weight of the company's welfare he shouldered as his own responsibility. Only once does he become impatient, and that, when they so wrongfully accuse him as the cause of all their misfortunes, after the robbing catastrophe. He then perceives, though not distinctly, that they have bound themselves to his fortune, not to himself. The satisfaction his faculty of

approbation finds, in being the leader of a company of such worthy actors, becomes a minimum beside the maximum of trouble and anxiety their grumblings give him. The sentiments that the fair amazon aroused in his breast, lead us to desire immediately to follow the maid. Mariana has lost all interest to us, as she did to him, after a sight at the amazon; and that without a word having passed from the latter's lips.

But we cannot take him from the castle without speaking of his introduction by Jarno, to the heaven mind, the world-music of Shakspeare. Jarno is another enigma to him. But both Wilhelm and the reader fall to liking him for this one deed—for his love for the "myriad-minded." What enthusiasm! It is not of the literary kind, either. But the bubblings up from a fountain of purity; that needed not the panegyrics of a Coleridge to expand, nor the criticisms of a Johnson to concentrate. Speaking of the plays, he says:

"They appear to be the productions of a heavenly genius who has descended to the abodes of men, to render them, by the gentlest lessons, acquainted with themselves. They are not mere poems. One might think during their perusal that he stood before the opened, solemn books of destiny, through which the whirlwind of impassioned life is breathing, whilst the leaves are agitated to and fro."

In these days of Napoleonism, when Fate and Destiny are puppets for the novelist to bandy back and forth in the machinery of his bookwork, this extract may not seem of more than ordinary strength; but when we consider that this was before German literature had swollen to the ocean it now is, we cannot but see in it some of Coleridge's sentiments. And then, from this, we can turn immediately to the conversations with Serlo, and perceive how much more Goethe saw was to come out of Shakspeare than any of his contemporaries dreamed of. In these talks with the celebrated manager, the theme gradually merged into the play of Hamlet; and Goethe takes advantage of his hero's youthful enthusiasm to express his own prophetic hopes as to Shakspeare: "He (Wilhelm) assured Serlo that he looked forward with the fondest hopes to the epoch which would arise in Germany from his (S's) incomparable productions." Goethe's conception of the beauty in philosophy, and of strength in beauty, could not have found a more boundless theme for congratulation, than in the possession of Hamlet for the foundation of philosophy in the German character—a character capable of such infinite digestion. It is said that the English have gluttons, the French gourmands, but that the Germans can assimilate more, and of a greater variety, than either. Hence it is, their philosophies are so extensive. They swim in Plato's ocean, make love to his mermaids, and deck them with pearls drawn from the deep seas of Shakspeare. Their powers of mastication are elephantine. Coleridge is a palm leaf; Bacon a fair meal; and the genius of Aristotle must undergo sharp