

THACKERAY IN WEIMAR.

WITH UNPUBLISHED DRAWINGS BY THACKERAY.¹



WEIMAR, the old residence town of the grand dukes of Saxony, yearly attracts a large number of strangers. They are not drawn thither by any extraordinary natural beauties or mineral springs, nor by old art treasures, or the fashionable life of modern summer-resorts. What attracts so large a multitude of travelers is the desire to visit the place where German thought blossomed and ripened into a classic beauty never before known. Well has the small town on the Ilm been called «Ilm-Athens,» and the ruling house been compared with the Medicis. For it was not a mere coincidence, but the cautious choice of the intellectual and benevolent Grand Duchess Anna Amalia, that brought together in Weimar the greatest German poets and thinkers as teachers and companions for her son Carl August, who in his turn knew how to appreciate them, to increase their numbers, and to retain them in Weimar.

Among the visitors to Weimar are representatives of all the civilized nations of the world; but particularly numerous since the beginning of this century have been travelers from England, and recently from the United States. Goethe's biographer, Lewes, was received there in the most kindly and cordial manner; there Bayard Taylor pursued his studies for his beautiful «Faust» translation, and gave lectures on American literature. It was through him that many of the inhabitants of Weimar first became acquainted with Edgar Allan Poe's «Raven.» In like manner, Professor Thomas of Ann Arbor, one of America's best Goethe students, who has now been called to take the place of the late H.H. Boyesen at Columbia University, studied there in the Goethe-Schiller Archives and the Goethe National Museum.

The existence of the Goethe-Schiller Archives and the Goethe National Museum is due to the generous bequest of Goethe's last grandchild, who died in 1885; and they have lately become objects of great interest to admirers of art and literature.

But many of those who come to Weimar

unattracted by the classic peace of the past find the social and intellectual atmosphere of the place most agreeable. The worthy descendants of Anna Amalia and Carl August, mindful of the noble traditions of their house, are continually striving to keep fresh the artistic and literary atmosphere. The Weimar Court Theater was one of the first to produce the great works of Wagner; Liszt made the cosy little cottage near the park, given him by the Grand Duke Carl Alexander, his permanent home, and hundreds of his pupils carried with them from Weimar into the world the art taught them by this great master. The Art School and the Conservatory of Weimar boast of a well-earned reputation.

The opening of the Goethe National Museum offered the layman an opportunity to glance into the workshop of this universal genius; and the manuscripts and correspondences of the «Poet-Archives» put in new light the commanding position held by Goethe in the literary and artistic life of his time. Contributions to his art and natural-history collections were sent him from all sides, and his opinion was asked on all questions of literature, art, and the natural sciences. Artists and scholars of all nations came to Weimar in the first decades of this century in ever-increasing numbers to form a personal acquaintance with Goethe, and to rejoice in his kindly appreciation of their works and interests.

They received at the same time stimulus and encouragement in the intellectual and friendly intercourse which was carried on both at court and in private houses. In this respect the salons of Frau Johanna Schopenhauer, and of the witty, fantastical daughter-in-law of Goethe, Ottilie (née Von Pogwisch), particularly distinguished themselves. Ottilie, with her husband August von Goethe, and their children, Walther, Wolfgang, and Alma, occupied the top floor of Goethe's house on the Frauenplan. She stood at the head of Goethe's household, cared for her father-in-law with the greatest assiduity and self-sacrifice, and entertained her guests in the most agreeable and graceful manner imaginable.

The rooms on the first floor were used only

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for large parties, while Goethe's study and bedroom, which looked out upon the spacious garden in the rear, remained undisturbed in the midst of the liveliness and gaiety often going on in other parts of the house.

With advancing age, Goethe had retired more and more from the whirl of society; and often again, as in the beginning of his stay

In the course of a second visit they talked much of Byron, and of the similarity of Burns's «Vision» and Goethe's «Zueignung.» Afterward the conversation turned more in detail to Byron's life and works.

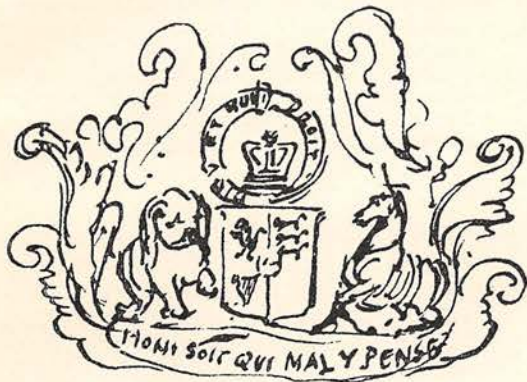
It was a satisfaction to me to find that Goethe preferred to all other serious poems of Byron the «Heaven and Earth.» He added: «Byron should have lived to execute his vocation, to dramatize the Old Testament. What a subject under his hands the tower of Babel would have been!» In this way I spent five evenings with Goethe. I saw much of his daughter-in-law; he is said to have called her «ein verrückter Engel» (a crazy angel), and the epithet is felicitous.

At Otilie's Robinson often met Samuel Naylor, the clever translator of «Reineke Fuchs» into English, and the son of his friend Thomas Naylor. Samuel Naylor, it seemed, was a favorite of Frau von Goethe. In fact, during those years a considerable number of young Englishmen were shown particular favor by the ladies of Weimar.

A member of the English colony at Weimar in 1830 was Mr. W. G. Lettsom, who was then the English minister's attaché at Weimar, and later became her Majesty's chargé d'affaires in Uruguay. While a student in Cambridge he had been a friend of William Makepeace Thackeray, and seems to have given him most enticing descriptions of the charms and attractions of the society life at Weimar. For when Thackeray, then but nineteen years of age, had, without the permission or knowledge of his pastor and masters, undertaken a trip to Paris during his vacation in the summer of 1830, and had over-

come his first scruples about this escapade, he extended his journey to Weimar, and remained there the entire winter, captivated by the pleasant and stimulating life.

Through his friend he was soon introduced into the best social circles, and above all, of course, into Goethe's house. Wherever he went, he met with a friendly and hearty welcome, as did every well-recommended Englishman. But Otilie von Goethe particularly rejoiced at this splendid addition to her English retinue. She had expressed her affection for the sons of England before this, call-



To his Britannic
Majesty's
Consul in Weimar.
These drawings
of his Britannic Majesty's
subjects
are dedicated
by
An Individual.
Thackeray

in Weimar, he lived in the idyllic little cottage in the park, and there received his visitors in quiet and friendly intercourse.

Henry Crabb Robinson, the friend of Charles Lamb and William Wordsworth, who until the middle of this century traveled extensively through the Continent and became acquainted with all persons of intellectual or artistic renown, describes a visit to Goethe's cottage in the year 1829. He writes in his «Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence»:

He [Goethe] generally eats and drinks alone, and when he invites a stranger it is to a tête-à-tête. This is a wise sparing of his strength.

ing herself in jest «the British consul at Weimar.» As such she extended her protection to young Thackeray, who, though unknown at the time, soon became through his talents a general favorite.

We gain further knowledge of Thackeray's visit to Weimar from his own hand. He writes in a letter dated Wednesday, the 20th of October:

I saw for the first time old Goethe to-day. He was very kind, and received me in rather a more distinguished manner than he had used to other Englishmen here. The old man gives occasionally a tea-party, to which the English and some special favourites in the town are invited; he sent me a summons this morning to come to him at twelve. I sat with him for half an hour, and took my leave on the arrival of —. And Madame de Goethe was very kind. When I went to call on her I found her with three Byrons, a Moore, and a Shelley on her table.

At about the same time Thackeray ordered from a bookseller in Charterhouse Square «a liberal supply of the Bath post paper, on which he wrote his verses and drew his countless sketches. On certain sheets of this paper, after his interview with Goethe,



A COACHMAN.

we find the young artist trying to trace from recollection the features of the remarkable face which had deeply impressed his fancy.»

There is to be found in «Thackerayana,» a collection of notes, anecdotes, and drawings which have been put together from the works left by Thackeray, rather an unsuccessful portrait sketch. This, it seems, partly served as a model for the illustration by Daniel Maclise (under the pseudonym of Alfred Croquis) which appeared in the March number

of «Fraser's Magazine» in 1832, almost simultaneously with Goethe's death.

Goethe received from Thackeray the first numbers of this magazine, founded in February, 1830; and Thackeray writes to Lewes:

Any of us who had books or magazines from England sent them to him, and he examined them eagerly. «Fraser's Magazine» had lately come out, and I remember he was interested in those admirable outline portraits which appeared for a while in its pages. But there was one, a very ghastly caricature of Mr. R——, which, as Madame de Goethe told me, he shut up and put away from him angrily. «They would make me look like that,» he said; though, in truth, I can fancy nothing more serene, majestic, and healthy-looking than the grand old Goethe.

Goethe's unfavorable judgment unfortunately did not deceive him, for the portrait by Maclise unintentionally became in the reproduction a very striking caricature, like that of Mr. R——. The original drawing, however, which is now in the South Kensington Museum, in spite of its sharp characterization and painfully realistic treatment, makes a striking and noble impression, and thus realizes far better the enthusiastic description which Carlyle gave it in «Fraser's Magazine» of March, 1832:

Reader, thou here beholdest the Eidolon of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. So looks and lives, now in his eighty-third year, afar in the bright little friendly circle of Weimar, «the clearest, most universal man of his time.»

Maclise, who had never seen Goethe, undoubtedly used Thackeray's sketch for the profile drawing, which explains its awkward and bent figure. For the full face he made use of an engraving, widely known in England, after the admirable Goethe portrait by Stieler in Munich. Later Carlyle himself says, in a note to the Fraser portrait:

The copy in «Fraser's Magazine» proved a total failure and involuntary caricature, resembling, as was said at the time, a wretched old clothes-man carrying behind his back a hat which he seemed to have stolen. (Carlyle's «Miscellanies,» vol. iii, p. 93.)

On November 17, 1830, Thackeray writes, still from Weimar:

I have read «Faust,» with which, of course, I am delighted, but not to that degree I expected.

It is natural, of course, that, owing to his youthfulness, the pathos and dramatic power of Schiller appealed to him in a greater degree, as one can see from his letter of February 25, 1831:

Talking of Schiller, I am in possession of his handwriting and of his veritable court sword, and I do believe him to be, after Shakspeare, «The Poet.» . . . I have been reading Shakspeare in German. If I could ever do the same for Schiller in English, I should be proud of having conferred a benefit on my country.

The best description of Thackeray's subsequent life in Weimar is found in the above-mentioned letter to Lewes, of April 28, 1855:

Five and twenty years ago at least a score of English lads used to live at Weimar for study or sport or society, all of which were to be had in the friendly little Saxon capital. The Grand Duke and Duchess received us with the kindest hospitality. The court was splendid, but yet most pleasant and homely. We were invited in our turns to dinners, balls, and assemblies there. Such young men as had a right appeared in uniform, diplomatic and military. Some, I remember, invented gorgeous clothing—the kind old Hof-Marschall of those days, M. de Spiegel (who had two of the loveliest daughters eyes ever looked on), being in no wise difficult as to the admission of these young Englishers. Of the winter nights we used to charter sedan-chairs, in which we were carried through the snow to those pleasant court entertainments. I, for my part, had the good luck to purchase Schiller's sword, which formed a part of my court costume, and still hangs in my study, and puts me in mind of days of youth most kindly and delightful.

We knew the whole society of the little city, and but that the young ladies, one and all, spoke admirable English, we surely might have learned the very best German. The society met constantly. The ladies of the court had their evenings. The theatre was open twice or thrice in the week, where we assembled, a large family party. Goethe had retired from the direction, but the great traditions remained still. The theatre was admirably conducted. . . .

In 1831, though he had retired from the world, Goethe would nevertheless kindly receive strangers. His daughter-in-law's tea-table was always spread for us. We passed hours after hours there, and night after night, with the pleasant



est talk and music. We read over endless poems and novels in French, English, and German. My delight in those days was to make caricatures for children. I was touched to find that they were remembered, and some even kept until the present time; and very proud to be told, as a lad, that the great Goethe had looked at some of them.

A small collection of sketches of this kind he had, at this time, dedicated to Frau von Goethe, under the joking title, already mentioned, of «British consul in Weimar.» The loose leaves are carefully pasted together, and on each one Ottilie von Goethe has testified in her own hand to Thackeray's authorship; and the name Thackeray which stands below the dedication given on page 921, and which serves more or less as iden-

tification of «An Individual» immediately above it, is written by Otilie.

These drawings were handed down with the greatest care by inheritance to Goethe's grandchildren, and so on down to the author, who takes pleasure in presenting them to the public as valuable aid for the appreciation of Thackeray's artistic talent, and as a remembrance of one of the happiest episodes in the life of the great novelist.

Most readers know Thackeray as an artist only from the drawings he has made for his novels; but in these, as well as in the Goethe sketch, he shows himself by no means to the best advantage; for, on the one hand, the sketch suffered, as did that of Maclise, in course of reproduction; and on the other hand, the great knack of his artistic talent lay in his very sketchy though highly characteristic treatment of lively and preferably humorous scenes or funny types and personages.

Frau von Gustedt, who as Jenny von Papenheim was a friend of Otilie von Goethe,

tells in her memoirs how Thackeray used to caricature himself:

As we sat about the tea-table and conversed he drew the most humorous sketches. He always drew himself by beginning at the feet and completing the picture without taking his pen from the paper. He used to draw a little street boy next to him, making fun of him because of his queerly shaped nose, which had once been broken while boxing. Otherwise he was of good appearance—tall, with fine eyes, and thick curly hair. He belonged to the most popular set of Englishmen who made Weimar their temporary home, and of these there were a great many.

Pictorial puns can be found in Thackeray's Charterhouse school-books, in which there is a drawing called «In a State of Suspense.» Still more numerous are his similarly humorous treatments, while a student, of legal definitions, such as «Fee Simple,» «On Freeholds,» «A General Clause,» «A Rejoinder,» «An Ejectment,» etc.

Further details concerning his visit to Goethe, and his impressions of court and of Weimar society, Thackeray describes from memory:

Of course I remember very well the perturbation of spirit with which, as a lad of nineteen, I received the long-expected invitation that the «Herr Geheimerath» would see me. This notable audience took place in a little antechamber of his private apartments, covered all round with antique casts and bas-reliefs. He was habited in a long greydrabredingote, with a white neck-cloth, and a red ribbon in his buttonhole. He kept his hands behind his back, just as in Rauch's statuette. His complexion was very bright, clear, and rosy, his eyes extraordinarily dark, piercing, and brilliant. . . . I fancied Goethe must have been still more handsome as an old man than even at the days of his youth. His voice was very rich and sweet. He asked me questions about myself,



which I answered as best I could. . . . *Vidi tantum*: I saw him but three times—once walking in the garden of his house in the Frauenplan, once going to step into his chariot on a sunshiny day, wearing a cap and a cloak with a red collar. He was caressing at the time a beautiful little golden-haired granddaughter, over whose sweet fair face the earth has long since closed to. [Alma von Goethe died at the age of seventeen years, while on a visit in Vienna in 1844.]

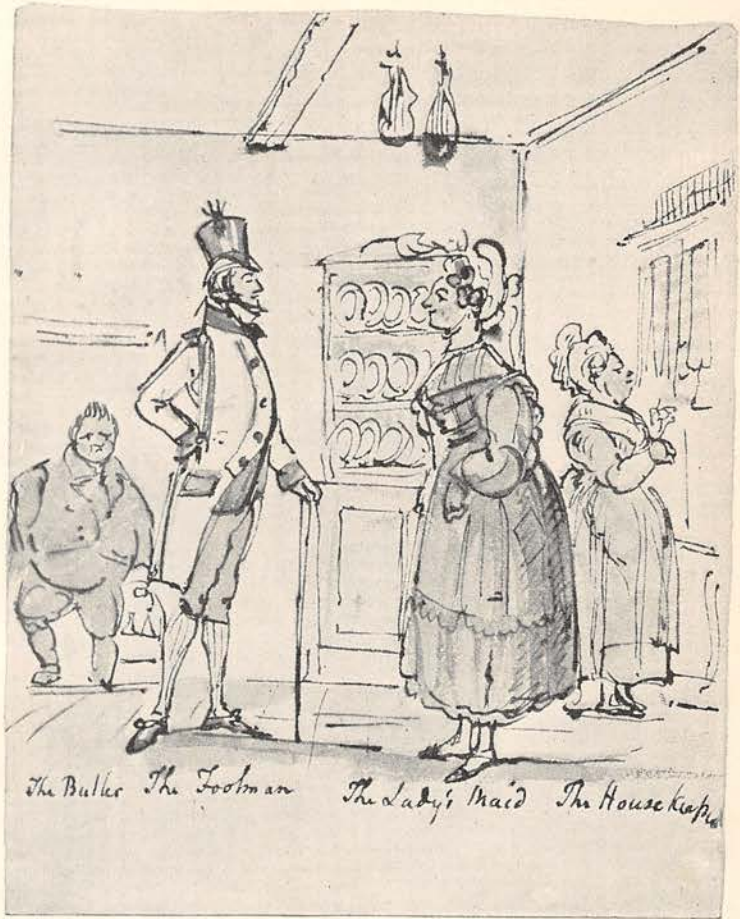
Though his sun was setting, the sky round about was calm and bright, and that little Weimar illumined by it. In every one of those kind salons the talk was still of art and letters. . . . At the court the conversation was exceedingly friendly, simple, and polished. The Grand Duchess, a lady of very remarkable endowments, would kindly borrow our books from us, and graciously talk to us young men about our literary tastes and pursuits. In the respect paid by this court to the patriarch of letters there was something ennobling, I think, alike to the subject and sovereign.

The most interesting document of the international literary pursuits cultivated by the social circle grouped about Ottilie von Goethe is «Das Chaos» («The Chaos»), a publication printed for this same small company. J. D. Gries, the talented translator of Tasso and Ariosto, had described the confusion of languages then spoken in Weimar in a stanza which, freely translated, would read:

Often time full many a thing can show,
Which once we thought was but a fable;
Weimar as «German Athens» we did know,
But now they call it «German Babel.»

And the origination of «The Chaos» points, if only in a trivial way, to the polyglottism which later reigned throughout its pages.

In the year 1829, when the French sculptor David visited Weimar for the purpose



of making his famous bust of Goethe, and Mickiewicz, the Polish Byron, was also there, a small circle of intimate friends of Ottilie met together in her living-room one rainy afternoon. Among the gentlemen were Councilor Soret of Geneva, the instructor of the present Grand Duke Carl Alexander; Mr. Patrick Parry, a popular Englishman who had settled down in Weimar; and Eckerman, Goethe's secretary. The conversation had come to a standstill, something which very rarely happened, when Eckerman remarked with a sigh, «Es regnet»; «It rains,» said Parry; and «Il pleut,» laughed Soret.

«Go home if you don't know anything better to talk about,» said Ottilie, moodily; «it seems to me, anyway, that our company is falling asleep. It is the highest time to shake them up with something of particular interest.»

The proposition met with general applause, and after diverse expressions of opinion it was finally decided to found a *Musen-Verein*, (Society of the Muses), with an Apollo at

its head. The club was to meet once a week to furnish contributions for a journal to appear only in manuscript form. Otilie succeeded in interesting Goethe in the undertaking, but could not persuade him to act as Apollo. The nine Muses soon met, and were compelled to take a tenth into the club. «The old gods will gladly suffer this from us good people of Weimar,» Otilie explained. In a few days the manuscript journal appeared. The contributions were not

and excited in trying to guess the authors of the different articles, and in the hope of being guessed themselves, and of having replies. On Goethe's birthday, August 28, 1829, the first printed number appeared.

It opened with a German prologue, by Holtei, explaining the appearance of «The Chaos,» and «invoking the good graces of the great master.» In the «Letter-Box,» which begins in the next number and is continued in the succeeding ones, one «Elvira» replies in French

*Best ever so humble
There's no place like home.*



signed; Otilie alone knew their authors, and took good care to keep their names in secrecy.

The Society of the Muses was heard from as such but once, and forthwith disbanded. «The Chaos» took its place, as the contents of the future printed pages were to be chaotic. According to the rules, only such persons were admitted to «The Chaos» as had lived in Weimar at least three days, had contributed at least one original but still unpublished article, and had promised to keep it secret from all non-members. Otilie, as editor, was assisted by Parry and Soret. These three carried out the original undertaking with much tact and discretion; and by and by the greater portion of society also took part. Young and old were interested

to an Englishman who writes for news from Weimar. One «Henry Davantry» writes from London warning a friend against visiting Weimar, against the German «malaria» sentimentality, the tobacco, the moonlight, and the dancing-craze of the women. The writer of the «Elvira» letter was Mr. Plunkett, son of Lord Dausany, and Otilie was the author of the letter signed «Davantry.»

The second number opened with an English prologue by Mr. Charles Knox, the twelfth son of the Bishop of Derry; while a prologue in French, written by Soret under the pseudonym of «Plainpalais,» served as introduction to the third. The same number contained an answer, also by Soret, to a letter by «Elvira.»

After the appearance of a fourth prologue in Italian, a correspondence in French by

the Russian Larazin, and English poems by Charles des Voeux, the translator of Goethe's «Tasso,» Gries, under the pseudonym of «Alikuïn,» again complained of the predominance of the foreign element in verses a free translation of which is:

British, Gallic, and Italian
Seem to be in fullest sway;
If I knew some Kamchadalean,
Satisfied I 'd go my way.
With happiness supreme I 'd smile
If Turkish I could murder; oh,
But German now is out of style,
And only German 's all I know.

Goethe, too, contributed several poems, which were marked with a star, and by his graceful verses «To Her» evoked a contest of skilful retorts «To Him,» written by four ladies, among them Ottilie, each one of whom claimed for herself the compliments of his verses.

It was generally taken for granted that Thackeray, too, had contributed to «The Chaos» during his stay at Weimar; for Ottilie von Goethe could not permit such a talent, although only later fully developed, to escape her undertaking. But nothing has ever been discovered which might lead to the identification of any pseudonym which he may have used. Two contributions, however, have been found among the manuscripts which are carefully kept in the «Poet-Archives» in Weimar, which doubtless were written by the same hand as the above dedication and the titles of the other illustrations. They were surely, therefore, written by Thackeray.

The first is a merry drinking-song, without title or signature:

I pray not for riches, I ask not for fame;
Let madmen and soldiers go seek her;
But honesty needeth no Sir to his name,
And a little 's enough for good liquor.
I state him an ass who, despising his glass,
For place or preferment will quarrel;
My creed I do hold with the lyric of old,
For he stuck all his life to his barrel!

When goblins and ghosts 'mong the children of men
Were permitted by Satan to riot,
Our priests laid them deep in the Red Sea, and then

The poor exorcised devils were quiet!
Now all dæmons are rare, save the one that 's
called care;

But we 've need of no priest to dismay him.
Right simple 's the spell the dull spirit to quell—
In the red sea of wine you should lay him.

St. Peter in heaven hath charge of the keys,
If his brother St. John 's a truth-teller.

When an angel in heaven, how gladly I 'd ease
The old boy of the keys of the cellar!
Or if banished elsewhere as a sinner who ne'er
Has listened to prayer or to preacher,
Then may I be cursed with perpetual thirst,
And to quench it an emptiless pitcher!

Numerous translations from Goethe's works appeared in «The Chaos.» Count Alessandro Poerio in Florence translated «Die Braut von Corinth» into Italian, and Count Casa Valencia «Die Spinnerinn» into Spanish. Lord Leweson contributed to «The Chaos» parts of his «Faust» translation, which, however, did not please Goethe very much. But all the more satisfactory were the translations of «Meine Ruh' ist hin» from «Faust,» and «Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt» («Mignon»), by Samuel Naylor, and of other selections by Mr. Lawrence under the pseudonym of «St. Ives.»

To this category belongs Thackeray's second contribution, entitled «Translated from Faust,» and signed «Rosa»:

Once on a time there lived a king,
And he did keep a flea.
Now he did love this little thing
As though his sire was he.

The tailor was called by the king's desire,
And he bid the man of stitches
To make a coat for the young squire
And an elegant pair of breeches.

Silks and velvets rich and rare
Did this flea each day now put on;
Ribbons, too, on his coat he did wear,
And a gold cross at his button.

A minister next was this little flea,
And wore a star which made his
Brothers and sisters at court to be
Great gentlemen and great ladies.

They bit the court, and they bit the queen
And the wretched maids of honor;
But not one of them all might scratch, I ween,
Though a dozen were upon her!

Now ladies and lords are more at ease,
For nothing does prohibit 'em,
When bitten by nasty little fleas,
To kill them all ad libitum.

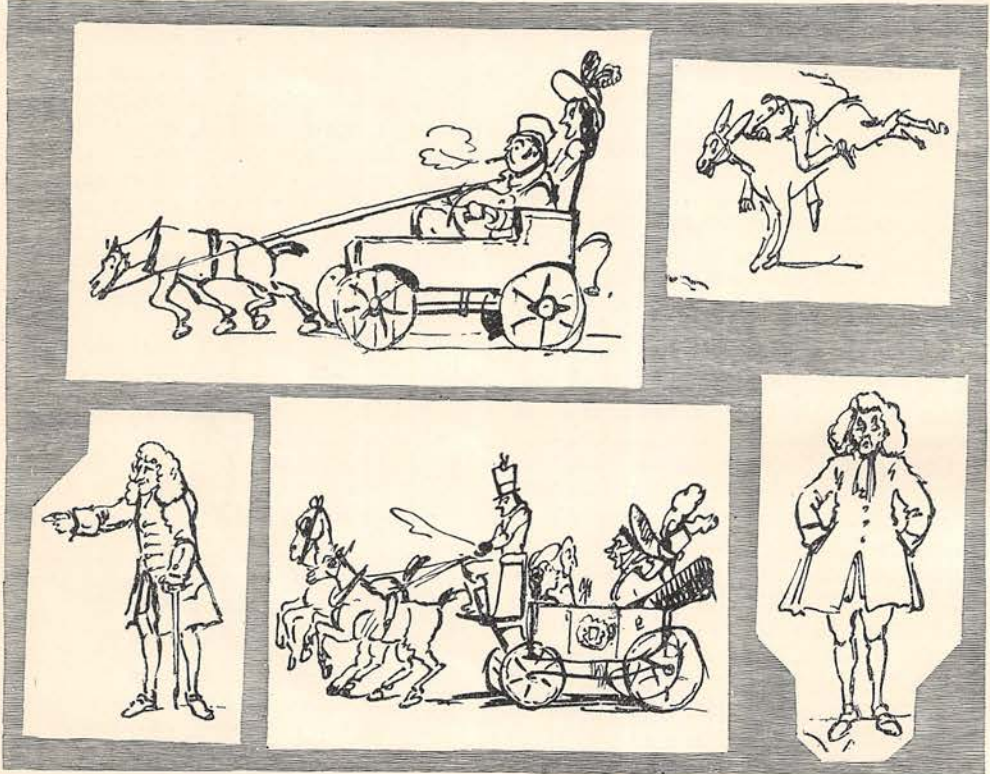
In a letter also published in «The Chaos» Ottilie von Goethe characterized the general tone of Weimar society which then reigned, and which to some degree still reigns:

We speak to each other frankly and openly about every feeling and sensation. Even if Weimar were a place in which few strangers were seen, or where these were widely scattered, we would, ac-

according to custom, fight our way up the entire ladder which has to be climbed with a stranger, beginning with the first question, «Is this your first visit to Weimar?» and ending with remarks on the weather and the theatre. But as so many different countries sent us their inhabitants, we all silently resolved to throw off the awful chain of monotony which in consequence would surely weigh upon us

loved town where he had spent so happy and so instructive a period of his youth.

I passed a couple of summer days in the well-remembered place, and was fortunate enough to find some of the friends of my youth. Madame de Goethe was there, and received me and my daughter with the kindness of old days. We drank tea



every hour of the day; and then, after the first phrase had been uttered as payment on account, quietly to continue in our customary way, as if no stranger were present. . . . Wherein consists the great difference in feeling one's self out of place or at home? Surely only therein, that one approaches one's old acquaintances with confidence and without all ceremony. So one acts and talks as if one could not be misunderstood, whereas one treats strangers in their places in a way which really is nothing but politely expressed distrust.

It was no wonder, then, that the charm of such an unceremonious and cordial intercourse, and the cultivated amiability of the members of society, induced Thackeray to interrupt his university work for a considerable time. With joyous gratitude he in later years remembered his sojourn in Weimar and the friends he had won there. After twenty-three years he returned thither for a short visit with his daughter, to show her the dearly

loved town where he had spent so happy and so instructive a period of his youth.

Thackeray closes his letter to Lewes with the words:

After a five and twenty years' experience since those happy days of which I write, and an acquaintance with an immense variety of human kind, I think I have never seen a society more simple, more charitable, courteous, gentlemanlike, than that of the dear little Saxon city where the good Schiller and the great Goethe lived and lie buried.

And Lewes adds from personal experience:

Thackeray's testimony is not only borne out by all that I learn elsewhere, but is indeed applicable to Weimar in the present day, where the English visitor is received by the reigning Grand Duke and Duchess with the same exquisite grace of courtesy, and where he still feels that the traditions of the Goethe period are living.

Walter Vulpius.
(Translated by Herbert Schurz.)