Review

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et partout le charme insaisissable d'une mélodie qui attire et qui retient.

Les deux livres ornés de reproductions de gravures bien choisies, sont dignes par l'impression¹ et la reliure, des bibliothèques les plus exclusives. Le second contient devant chaque article (sauf pour Buffon²) une bibliographie sommaire.

E. FANNIÈRE.

OXFORD.

Goethes Gespräche. Begründet von WOLDEMAR VON BIEDERMANN. Neu herausgegeben von FLODOARD VON BIEDERMANN. 5 vols. Leipzig: F. W. von Biedermann. 1909-1911. 8vo. xii + 555; 669; 520; 495; xviii + 507 pp.

The publication of the conversations of great men has not infrequently been denounced as an act of impiety. Quintilian blames the compilers of Cicero's *Dicta* for their want of prudence in selecting their collection, and there are still many well-meaning, if narrow, minds, to whom the editor of Luther's *Table Talk* appears guilty of deplorable indiscretion. No such accusation could possibly be raised against the editor of Goethe's *Gespräche*; for, although everything authentic is included in a collection like the present, there are very few conversations in which the poet does not appear great and amiable.

When the first edition of this valuable compilation appeared, it was warmly applauded as bringing together much inaccessible matter. In the present edition the number of conversations has been doubled, although it must be confessed the new items are not always of the first importance. Amongst the most interesting additions are Soret's diaries, reproduced here for the first time in their original French, from the manuscript copy preserved in the Weimar Archiv. In this, as well as in the collections of the Kanzler von Müller, Falk, Eckermann and others we are inclined to question the wisdom of dividing them up to suit the chronological arrangement of the present work. The exact chronological order of these conversations is not a matter on which much weight should be laid, and surely the personality of the interlocutor, which is lost sight of here, counts for something. This is particularly evident in the case of Eckermann whose *Gespräche* must always occupy the first place in such a collection. Eckermann has received his full share of praise and censure. Herr von Biedermann joins the chorus of his detractors; he accuses him of negligence in his dates, and considers him generally untrustworthy. Eckermann never, however, aimed at complete accuracy, and never intended to furnish a stenographically correct report of his daily conversations with Goethe. No one has vindicated his method more successfully than Dr Houben in his recent

¹ Les erreurs typographiques sont nombreuses dans les citations françaises des deux livres.

² Pourquoi? Mme Duclaux ne s'est elle pas servie des études de Faguet, de Quatrefages et de Nadault de Buffon?

edition of the *Gespräche*; and it is to be regretted that Herr von Biedermann did not take the opportunity of discussing that editor's arguments in his introduction. Dr Houben shows plainly that Eckermann worked as a productive artist, distributing and arranging his material in order to produce a lifelike picture of his beloved master.

We feel inclined to go a step further than Dr Houben and to look into the origin of Eckermann's motives and principles of composition. He arrived at Weimar when Goethe had entered the last stage of his career as a writer, and was engaged on his life-story, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; he became Goethe's assistant, and out of the autobiographical atmosphere pervading the master's study the plan of the *Gespräche* was no doubt born. In his record of Goethe's conversations he proceeded on the lines that are implied in Goethe's use, in the title of his autobiography, of 'Dichtung,' the word meaning there, not the deliberate perversion of the truth, but the artistic selection, composition and arrangement of the facts. Thus Eckermann avoids glaring effects, passes over unpleasant events, such as family and other quarrels, and he makes effective use of contrast and preparatory exposition; he often chooses the place of a conversation in order to supply it with a suitable background¹.

Eckermann, it is true, was too little of the artist to attain a high measure of success with his method, but it is a mistake to deal with his work as if it were a mere chronicle of daily events. He seems himself to have anticipated the dangers to which his book would be exposed at the hands of future editors; for his son, probably acting in accordance with his father's wishes, stipulated with Brockhaus the publisher that the work should be preserved in its original form, lest its accuracy be impaired and its character destroyed, 'das Werk in seiner Ursprünglichkeit zu erhalten und es durch keinerlei Umarbeitung in seiner Wahrheit abzuschwächen' (Houben, p. 658). Contemporaries able to form a competent judgment are practically unanimous in the opinion that Eckermann succeeded in the task he attempted, namely to depict Goethe, the man as he lived, and worked, and suffered. The words of Kanzler von Müller to this effect have been repeatedly quoted. We add a few utterances of members of Goethe's family which have been preserved by Mrs Anna Jameson, the intimate friend of Ottilie von Goethe. Speaking of the first part of Eckermann's *Gespräche*, which had then just appeared, she says: 'When I left Weimar, it was not yet published. There my attention was strongly directed to this book, not so much by the interest as by the *kind* of interest it had excited around me. I remember one of Goethe's grandsons turning over the

¹ Goethe's words uttered in respect of his visit to Bodmer are of considerable interest in this connexion: 'Überhaupt zwar finde ich nicht ganz schicklich, dass Reisende einen bedeutenden Mann, den sie besuchen, gleichsam signalisieren, als wenn sie Stoff zu einem Steckbrief geben wollten. Niemand bedenkt, dass es eigentlich nur ein Augenblick ist, wo er, vorgetreten, neugierig beobachtet und doch nur auf seine eigene Weise; und so kann der Besuchte bald wirklich, bald scheinbar als stolz oder demütig, als schweigsam oder gesprächig, als heiter oder verdriesslich scheinen.' (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Buch 18.)

leaves as it lay on my table, and exclaiming with animation—"Es ist der Grosspapa selbst! da lebt er!—da spricht er!" Another, habitually intimate with the domestic life of Goethe [von Müller?], said with emotion—"Es ist das buch von liebe und wahrheit." "Whatever may be in that book," said a dear friend of mine [Otilie], when she placed it in my hands, "I would pledge myself beforehand for its truth. The mind of Eckermann, at once unsullied and unruffled by all contact with the world, is so constituted, that he could not perceive or speak other than the truth, any more than a perfectly clear and smooth mirror could reflect a false or a distorted image¹."

"Eckermann's book" said she [Otilie, probably in a letter], "is the purest altar that has yet been erected to the fame of Goethe. In times like these, when the feeling of reverence (Pietat) [*sic*] seems to be fast departing, when a young author of talent takes the pen, as a sort of critical dissecting-knife, mangling and prying where once he trembled and adored; when his first endeavour is to fling down that heaviest burthen upon the soul of an egotist—the burthen of admiration for the merits of another, is it not pleasant to meet with such a book as this? And when everything one reads is so artificial, *so gemacht*, so impertinent, is it not delightful to open a book where in every page we feel the pulse-throb of a warm, true heart? I do not know if I am right, but it seems to me that those who cannot admire, can have nothing in themselves to be admired; then how worthy of admiration must that man be, who thus throws down his whole heart and soul in admiration before the feet of another! the simplicity of this entire abnegation of self lends to it a certain dignity. There is nothing here but truth and love—for Goethe loved Eckermann, and O! how Eckermann loved Goethe!

"I can have no critical judgment here, and ought not to have; I can only bear witness to the general truth of the whole—nothing could be truer. I cannot be, like you, struck and charmed by particular passages. I was too long a sort of Lady High Treasurer to be dazzled or astonished now that the caskets are opened. I greet the gems as old acquaintance"" (*l.c.*, pp. 231, 2).

In his introduction, Herr von Biedermann quotes with approval a remark of Gustav von Loeper to the effect that this collection of conversations is the most beautiful biography of Goethe imaginable. Such a statement seems somewhat to exaggerate the importance of the volumes before us, as it would require more than the genius of a Boswell to work these disconnected fragments into anything like a complete and satisfactory life. In the first place, they are far too unevenly distributed over the poet's lifetime. All the large collections were, for obvious reasons, compiled during the second half of Goethe's career; and on turning to the volumes of the present edition, we find that the first contains all known conversations down to 1808, these consisting, during the first forty years, largely of brief and occasional

¹ *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, by Mrs Jameson. 3 vols. London, 1838; vol. i, pp. 173, 4.

notices only. From 1805 onwards, however, the bulk of the conversations increases rapidly. The second volume covers fifteen years, the period from 1808 to 1823, the third comprises the next five years, and the fourth the remaining four years. Thus, the young Goethe is very inadequately represented. We realise from the fragmentary entries taken from Lavater's diaries how much we have missed, and we feel a keen disappointment when we find Jacobi referring to the Düsseldorf visit with the tantalising remark, 'seine Tafelreden hätte ich aufzeichnen gewünscht' (No. 71).

Only in later years do the conversations become really valuable for biographical purposes. For here, speaking in the presence of mostly sympathetic and admiring interlocutors, Goethe puts aside much of the reserve characteristic of his later letters and diaries. As the years advanced, the number and variety of people seeking an interview with the celebrated poet increase. Almost all classes, professions and nationalities are represented, and it is surprising to see how wide is the scope of his interests, and how he always contrives to find a topic of conversation suited to the station and profession of his visitor.

There is another aspect in which the collection is seriously deficient: those who were most closely associated with Goethe observe an almost complete silence with regard to their conversations with him. Not merely the companions of his youth have nothing to tell us; but poets and thinkers like Herder, Wieland and Schiller are equally silent; so, too, are Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Schlegels, Schopenhauer. Intimate friends, the Duke, Frau von Stein, and the two men in whom Goethe placed unreserved confidence, Meyer and Zelter, maintain the same reticence. The few records of their intercourse with him that have been garnered by subsequent editors are mere chance fragments. And our regret grows the more intense when we are told by these very friends how overpowering the impressions were that his speech made upon them. Herder, in 1786, remarks, 'Er ist in seiner Naturforschung der freieste, gründlichste, reinste Geist, den ich als Beobachter kennen gelernt habe, ein wahres *exemplar humanae naturae* in diesem Fache, dessen Umgang mein Trost ist, und dessen Gespräche jedesmal meine Seele erweitern' (No. 261).

Varnhagen von Ense expresses himself in a similar strain: '[Das Gespräch] war wie ein Stück Leben, in tausend Wellen fließend, ein Gefühl im ganzen wirkend, ohne die einzelnen Bezüge gesondert festhalten zu lassen; jedes Wort eine Blüte am Zweige des Baums, aus der tiefen dunkeln Wurzel her, aber selber doch nur als luftig heitres Gebild des Augenblickes erschlossen....Schwer würde ich einige besondere Sprüche aus dem lebensreichen Ganzen aussondern; die festesten, kräftigsten Ausserungen, die feinsten, erfreulichsten Wendungen, voll Gestalt im Hervorkommen, zerflossen mir unter den Händen, wie ich sie dem Gedächtnisse zum Behalten und Überliefern einprägen wollte' (No. 1817).

This latter quotation also provides one reason, at least, why Goethe's most intimate friends did not record what they had listened to: his

speech made too deep an impression. And the following words by Johanna Frommann (No. 1820) no doubt accounted for the silence of many: 'Du wärest zufrieden gewesen mit dem, was er sagte, aber nachsagen kann man's besser mal mündlich, als schriftlich, nicht weil's verfänglich wäre, sondern weil einem kaum gefällt, was man ihm nachsagt, viel weniger nachschreibt.'

Another, and perhaps the most powerful reason of all for reticence was the feeling that words spoken in friendship were purely personal property, and should not be profaned by being made public. If this was the sentiment of friends and comrades, how much more sacred must Goethe's conversation have been to his relatives. Mrs Jameson, in the book we have already quoted, tells us that Ottilie, 'was pressed by arguments and splendid offers of emolument to give to the world the domestic life of the poet, or at least to contribute some notes with regard to his private conversations and opinions. She refused at once and decidedly. "I had," said she, "several reasons for this. In the first place, I have not a good memory, and I have a very lively imagination: I could not always trust myself. What I should say would be something very near the truth, and very like the truth, but would it be *the truth*? How could I send into the world a book, of the exact truth of which I could not in my own conscience, and to my own conviction, be assured? A second reason was, that Goethe did not die young; I could not do him any justice he was unable to do himself, by telling the world what he *would* have done, what he *could* have done, or what he intended to do, if time had been given. He lived long enough to accomplish his own fame. He told the world all he chose the world to know; and if not, is it for me—for *me!*—to fill up the vacancy, by telling what, perhaps, he never meant to be told?—what I owed to his boundless love and confidence?—*that* were too horrible!"' (p. 179 f.).

We have several times taken occasion to praise the compiler of this 'Gesamtausgabe' for his diligence in collecting material; but the same cannot, unfortunately, be said of his editing. There are far too many misprints, especially in the French and English passages which would have been all the better for a revision by competent proof-readers. Not all the mistakes are as entertaining as the mutilated quotation from Horace, which reads: 'Sic te *dira* potens Cypri...' (II. 552). Copious indices are added to the fifth volume, and neither are these without serious defects. Although we have made no systematic examination of their accuracy, we have found many omissions and mis-statements. A few instances are given:

Vol. v. p. 378^a Koethe II. 359, omitted; p. 418^b Kabale und Liebe I. 386 (the drama is not mentioned on the page indicated); p. 450^b, line 2, read 288 for 208; p. 457^a Geschichte, add II. 585; p. 472^a Tabak, add II. 488, 600; p. 480^b Stolz, read II. 421 for II. 420; p. 481^b add references to 'Balladen,' IV. 228, 230; p. 482^a 'Der Edelknabe und die Müllerin,' omit IV. 398, which refers to 'Der Junggeselle und der Mühlbach,' and should be entered in its proper place; p. 484^a Der Fischer, add II. 385;

p. 484^b Der Gott und die Bajadere, II. 500(?); p. 486^b Der untreue Knabe, III. 248(?).

In the text itself we do not see the necessity of the note of exclamation added by the editor to 'Den Morgen war ich zum Tee bei die (!) Stein eingeladen' (No. 330). There is nothing remarkable in this construction. The accusative after 'bei,' expressing direction, is found in Central German sources, in Luther's language, in Klopstock and Goethe, and may be heard in the colloquial speech of educated speakers at the present day. The editor further places a query after 'ägyptisch-babylonische Grillen' (No. 413); but is it not clear that the expression refers to the stories contained in Genesis and other historical writings of the Old Testament?

We will not, however, close with a note of discord. In spite of faults—often inevitable in a compendious work of this nature—the collection can be heartily recommended to all lovers and students of Goethe. It is a highly valuable, nay indispensable, complement to the Weimar edition. We confidently expect that a new edition will soon be called for; and it is chiefly in the hope of this that attention is drawn to blemishes that may easily be removed.

HEINRICH MUTSCHMANN.

NOTTINGHAM.

Dantis Alagherii Operum Latinorum Concordantiae. Ediderunt E. K. RAND et E. H. WILKINS. Oxonii, e Prelo Clarendoniano. MDCCCXII. Roy. 8vo. viii + 577 pp.

Concordanza delle Rime di Francesco Petrarca. Compilata da K. McKENZIE. Oxford, della Stamperia dell' Università. 1912. Roy. 8vo. xvi + 519 pp.

The Cambridge (U.S.A.) Dante Society is to be congratulated on the completion of their series of Concordances to the works of Dante. It is now just on a quarter of a century since the first volume, Dr Fay's valuable *Concordance to the Divina Commedia* (Boston, U.S.A., 1888), was published. This was followed, seventeen years later, by the *Concordanza delle Opere Italiane in Prosa e del Canzoniere di Dante* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1905), edited by E. S. Sheldon and A. White, which was noticed in this *Review* at the time of publication. The present volume, which, like its immediate predecessor, is issued from the Clarendon Press, comprises the whole of the Latin works of Dante. The text followed is that of the *Oxford Dante*, but a certain number of variants from critical editions of several of the separate works (e.g. from Rajna's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Albini's *Eclogae*, Barbi's *Vita Nuova*, and Shadwell's *Quaestio de Aqua et Terra*) have been included, with cross-references to the Oxford text. Further, by the courtesy of Dr Moore, editor of the *Oxford Dante*, a few emendations which have been decided upon since the publication of the last edition of that work have been embodied in the Concordance.