THE SELF AND PERSONALITY.

TWO PHILOSOPHICAL POEMS BY GOTTFRIED HERDER, TRANSLATED BY CHARLES ALVA LANE, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR.

GOTTFRIED Herder, one of the great classical poets of Germany and a personal friend of Goethe, has left us two poems which belong to the class of philosophical literature in which he treats the problem of man and the significance of life. Like all philosophical poetry they have not found a large circle of readers and, so far as we know, have never been translated into English or any other language. Yet they deserve to be known and ought to become accessible in a worthy and readable version to the English speaking world. It is for this reason that Mr. Charles Alva Lane has rendered these two poems into English blank verse which is the meter of the original.

Herder was a theologian and, not without the influence of Goethe, had been appointed general superintendent of the Protestant churches of the allied Thuringian duchies. He was liberal in his theology, and it speaks well of the times that a man of his breadth could hold so prominent a place in the church.

In one of his best known books¹ Herder outlined the theory of evolution and applied it especially to history in showing that the development of mankind is subject to law, and that progress is noticeable in a higher and ever higher actualization of the human race.

¹ *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit.*

In the two philosophical poems before us Herder insists that there are two aspects in man's destiny. In one sense man is eternal and even divine. He is like unto God himself, who in man has become incarnate, he the Creator, in one of his creatures. But on the other hand man's life is transient and he himself is like the worm that is trodden under foot. While man ought to be conscious of the dignity of his divine nature, he ought at the same time to repudiate that portion of his being which is accidental, temporary and unworthy of preservation.

In dealing with a problem of this kind it is of great importance to use the proper words for that which is divine in man in distinction to man's lower nature, and we believe that in dealing with this subject Herder has been unfortunate in the choice of his terms. In one poem he speaks of "self" as that which is eternal, which represents man's high and noble being and which ought to be regarded with reverence and respect; in the other poem he denounces that which is perishable and transient as man's "personality." So Herder comes to the conclusion that man ought to relinquish all interest in his personality and cling to self as being the spark of his divinity. The self is to him the deity that shapes man's being; it is the factor which produces all that is good and noble and worthy of preservation in the continued life of mankind, while his personality should be abandoned to death.

Now it seems to us that what makes man a rational being in contrast to the brutes is exactly his personality. Man becomes a person by dint of his reason, for by personality we understand an individuality endowed with the superior qualities of manhood. Animals, nay even plants and other objects of nature, are called individuals in so far as they are particular things which possess an existence of their own. But the particular thing, the individual, changes into a person as soon as it becomes a rational

being which can be held responsible for its actions. Personality accordingly is the expression of man's divinity. It denotes that quality in him which makes him divine, which liberates him from the bondage of natural law and endows him with the highest perfection in the range of creation, making him master of his own destiny. He can choose and direct, he can foresee events, and can modify the course of nature according to his needs. He traces law in the phenomena of his experience, and can recognize single happenings as instances of universal laws. This recognition of law is an echo of the divine destiny that governs the world, and in this sense every rational creature, every living being whom we signify by the word "person" bears the stamp of divinity. Accordingly we would prefer to call that which represents the divine in man, his personality. Those features which make him a person characterize him as being made in the image of God. They prove his superiority over brute nature and are the factors of his life which are cherished even after death and are preserved in memory from generation to generation. They are what Herder thus defines in his poem:

"What lives of us in other hearts again
Our truest and our deepest being is."

The term "self" is different. By it we understand a particular existence which insists on its individuality and such insistence is called selfish. It is exactly this selfishness which man must overcome in order to bring out the noble and lasting character of his personality. So far as a personality is merely an individual existence it has no worth, it is a self of material concreteness; while personality, that feature of the individual which changes it into a person, is exactly what makes the individual understand the significance of law. It is that which causes him to

see the universal in the particular and the everlasting type in single instances. This faculty, in one word called reason, not only endows man with intellectuality but in addition enables him to follow his conscience, that divine guide pointing out a higher course of conduct, in common parlance called moral or religious, and herein we find a realization of the divine in nature. It would therefore have been preferable if Herder had reversed his terms and had spoken of "the self" as the thing to be abandoned, and of "personality" as that which man ought to develop and cherish.

Herder's choice of terms appears at first sight accidental and we may understand by "self" what we would have denoted as personality and *vice versa*. But on close inspection we notice that this difference in terms indicates a difference in the philosophical explanation of man's nature. We must remember that Herder was still a theologian and though he was liberal, though his God was no longer the God of the Middle Ages but a philosophical conception of the divinity of the universe, he yet applies to God the human attributes of consciousness, and his argument is that the world would be a chaos, a play of blind forces, unless, like man, it were directed and governed by an all-consciousness.

Here, in our opinion, Herder's philosophical conception fails, and here the argument of his poems is therefore disappointing. He does not see that the underlying truth remains the same if he only grants that man's personality is the echo of the divinity of the universe. In man the law-ordained character of the universe reveals itself and accordingly the world is not a congeries of matter and a play of blind forces but a law-ordained whole, a cosmos. In a way we concede that the world is a congeries of matter and a play of blind forces, but a most significant feature of this stupendous mass of matter and energy consists in

its being subject to law. This law which governs the world exhibits a definite character, causing all its commotion to be possessed of a definite direction tending toward an unequivocal aim; and this aim, we may fairly well assume, must be the same everywhere as we find it to be here on earth. It is the self-realization of reason, of moral aspirations, a tendency to eradicate evil and let good will prevail. Life everywhere is a struggle, but the dignity of the struggle consists in the fact that there are ideals, the ideals of goodness, of truth, and of beauty, and that there is also the endeavor to realize them without regard to selfish ends.

It is true enough that man is an incarnation of the divinity of the universe, but that the universe should be a self like man, that the universe should be an ego, possessed of an ego-consciousness, is an assumption which has no warrant before the tribunal of scientific thought. If Herder assumes an all-consciousness, we can simply point out that his logical deduction is a mistake, a *non sequitur*. The underlying truth of his two poems, however, that man though transient reflects the eternal, remains untouched

It is true enough that the large masses of mankind are not philosophical and personify their conception of God. They can not think of him as a potent factor in the world and in the life of man except under the figure of a human personality, a powerful king or a kind-hearted father, and this conception is as legitimate as any poetical representation of abstract ideas. The truth therefore which Herder's poems bring out need not be discountenanced on account of his anthropomorphic God-conception. It remains true that the power that sways the universe is not blind force but a cosmic norm which gives a definite character to all that is.

We take a great interest in Herder's poems on the self and on personality, because he touches upon the deepest

problem of man's existence and in a certain sense solves it correctly. If the old theological God-conception still clings to him it does not spoil the beauty of the poems, and though he employs the terms "self" and "personality" where we would have preferred him to reverse them, his use may be tolerated if we consider the meaning which he bears in mind.

Mr. Charles Alva Lane has translated the poems so as to render a faithful version of the original. He has not attempted to change the meaning or even the words of the poet, and we leave it to our readers to judge of the beauty of these verses, together with their shortcomings. May they enjoy the presentation of these religio-philosophical thoughts in the way the German poet presented them, not as we might wish that he had done. Even with what we deem to be shortcomings, they are beautiful enough and worthy of careful study.

* * *

We will add a few words in comment on the meter, which is classical but is commonly called blank verse. In our present neglect of classical traditions the nature of blank verse is commonly misunderstood. Some text-books on the rules of versification go so far as to call them iambic pentameters, their authors being ignorant of the fact that iambic pentameters would consist of lines twice as long as these. The truth is they are iambic trimeters, but being catalectic consist of only five iambi.

Classical prosody is by its very nature of a musical character. It does not know of rhyme, and the beauty of the verse is due to the rhythm of long and short syllables. The term meter corresponds to what in music is called a bar, and a foot is the ultimate unit of rhythm. In dactylic and anapestic meters a foot happens to be a meter, but in the iambic rhythm two feet constitute one meter, and so iambic pentameters would consist of twice five iambi. Be

ing accustomed to the fact that dactylic hexameters consist of six dactylic feet, our authors of metrical text-books have made the wrong conclusion that five iambic feet ought to be called iambic pentameters, and they are at the same time ignorant of the general principles in the classical system of metrics.

Another point of importance is the fact frequently overlooked that verses are separated by a musical pause or rest, enabling the reader to let the metrical form stand out boldly so that the ear may easily catch the musical sound of the verse. For this reason the dactylic hexameter is stunted at the end by having the last meter mutilated, as the final syllable is cut off, or rather replaced, by what in music is called a rest, equivalent to a short syllable.

In the iambic trimeter the last foot is omitted and in the terminology of classical prosody such a line is called catalectic. An iambic trimeter accordingly takes the time of three iambic meters equal to six iambs, of which, however, the last one is either mutilated or entirely omitted, which means that it is replaced by a musical rest equivalent to either a full iambus or one long syllable. A schedule of the verse accordingly would be

υ — υ — | υ — υ — | υ — ∘ O

We mark the rest for a long syllable by a large zero, and for a short syllable by a small zero, and we will say that the last long syllable is always replaced by a rest, and the last short syllable may be replaced by a rest or it may be preserved. In English, which abounds in monosyllables, it is easier to end a verse in an accented syllable, and so it has become habitual to avoid unaccented syllables at the end. This habit has produced the impression that to have blank verse consist of five iambs plus an unaccented syllable is a poetic license, but the truth is, as may be seen from our explanation, that this unaccented syllable is perfectly legit-

imate, as is also evinced by the fact that it does not disturb the euphony of the verse.

PERSONALITY.¹

Would'st thou, O Friend, to halcyon peace attain?
Flee then thy haunting Personality!
With traitor-dreams it woos and slays the hope;
The heart and soul it narrows, and with cares
Discomforteth. With poison-fires it burns
The blood, and e'en the toiling breath it steals,
Till all the ways of life are choked and vain.

Declare, what is this Personality?—
When in the Mother-womb of parents twain
An alien Life came and was thee, plant-like,
On strange soil nourished, thoughtless didst thou hang,
And grow through inchoate life to human child.
Beholding not the world, it recked of thee,
And all its light burned round, thee to inform.
Her breath and kisses drinking, thou wert yet,
For helpless seasons of thy mother part,
And on her ministrant and cradling breast
Thou learnedst how the tools of Sense to ply.
But slowly from the mother-functions loosed,
The world's wierd pageantry upon thee wrought,
And in its own unresting image made
A Soul of thee—a thing of myriad moods
And ever-changing imagery of thought.

How grows the child? The foot and hand aspire;
The ear and eye, change-hungry, ever mould

¹ An effort has been made throughout this translation to follow with fidelity the thought and even the verbal forms of our author; but in several instances valid considerations have prompted slight variances from the text.

There is in German a certain directness of expression that would subject a literal rendering to a charge of verbal severity. German words have a wider range of mental connotations than have those of our more copious English tongue. Some latitude of expression is therefore essential to a faithful

Their melting forms of sight and sound. And so
Through boyhood, youth and manhood's stern estate
Thou passest on to gray senility.
In youth what lingers of the weanling's mood?
In boyhood's bounding pulse what token hints
The feebleness of age? Change creeps on change;
The body ever moulds itself anew,
And thou art even with thyself deceived
Until the mirror's message yields the truth.

In youth dost hunger for thy mother's breast?
When love upon thy burning heart hath seized,
Do bride and sister seem alike to thee?
And when the dream of honor drives thee forth
Desirest thou again the swaddling clothes?
Tastes now the sugar-plum as when, a child,
Thy palate welcomed its sweet ravishment?
Doth now the inner world, emotion-swept,
The airy phantasies that flit and charm,
The wide world's fronting problems seem the same
As erstwhile to thy childhood's prisms eyes?

Be thou a man! Life is a restless stream
Of ever-changing forms: Wave driveth wave
In serried tides that rise and sink and rise,
One stream, but not the same beyond the span
A melting moment fills, and not the same
At any place, nor in its mingling drops
From fountain to the welcome of the sea.

Shall such an unsubstantial phantasy
Foundation serve for duty and for hope,
And all the weal and woe that make thy life?
Upon a shadow wilt thou be established?

transcription of the thought; but the tendency to this indulgence has here been restrained even to the sacrifice, at times, of poetic effects.

Unto a frenzied image shall thy thoughts,
Thy glorious energies, and all the wealth
Of life's wide purposes devoted be?

Be thou a man! Nay, thou art not thine own:
Unto the great good All belondest thou.
From this thou hast received and borrowest yet.
Not only must thou unto it release
The things that individualize thy life,
But e'en thyself, thyself. For lo, a child,
A child eternal on the mother-breast,
Lulled by the beatings of her heart, thou liest.
Wert thou dissevered from all living things,
And from the life of generations flown,
Whence thou thy being and thy mould receivedst—
What then wert thou? No ego,² but a thing
Insentient, lost, ungathered from the surge
Of toiling elements. Each drop of life's
Fine essence; every corpuscle within
The blood; the flashing thoughts of heart and soul;
The deeds, resolves, the customs, and the play
Of life's ineffable activities,
Whose weird machinery thou knowest not;
Each utterance of lip, each subtle change
That giveth speech to features of the face,
Is but an alien token loaned to thee
By generous pasts for life's swift uses now.
So ever changed and ever changing wends
The bearer of unowned possessions through
The world. Discarding customs as a garb,
Anon he changeth speech, opinions, modes,
By restless marching of the years constrained,
Or by the mighty Mother's promptings moved.

*The original here reads simply *Kein Ich*.

What thought of thy ten thousand is thine own?
The kingdom of the genii, though one
And indivisible, an Ocean-world,
In stream and drop is flowing into thee,
Thine inmost being's character to form.
What of thy myriad feelings is thine own?
Necessity and love, and custom's sway,
And deeds of others echoed in thine acts,
And time and space, the bitterness of grief,
The burden of thy loneliness—lo, these
Have fashioned it, delivering to thee,
That so thy spirit's moulding-glue may catch
And model it anew to something great,
Yea, e'en into the good, the better All.
Thither is urging each desire, and thither
Doth every impulse of the soul constrain;
Each wish and yearning hath it for a goal;
The living fountains of activity,
The spirit's prying quests and haunting dreams,
The bridal-passion and the mother-love
Well ever thitherward. Thus from the germ
The bud unfoldeth to the fragrant bloom,
And, still a-yearn, strives upward into wealth
Of myriad fruits. And ever, evermore
The wide Becoming of the eternal All
Supplieth air and sun, and night and day:
The ego dies that so the whole may be.

And what is that which thou with thy poor I
Would'st to the future leave? Thy name, forsooth?
Ah, though thou Raphael wert, in Raphael's work,
I fain forget the man, and raptured cry
With Art's glad voice: "An angel painted it."

Thine ego? Thinkest thou, Posterity
Will long hold memory of thee? Thy name?

With ever-lessening voice, a few brief years
 May echo it with that of Mavius
 And Bavus, Stax and Nero-Herostrat.³

Nay, only in the Open of thy life,
 When all unmindful of the narrow self,
 Thy soul can find its immortality;
 For then thou livest in a thousand souls,
 And in a myriad hearts thy heart doth beat.
 Eternal then, Omnipotent thou art,
 A god, and like a god, invisible,
 Sunk in the potency of nameless life.⁴

Yea, what it toucheth Personality
 Doth blight, obliterating from thy work
 The virtue of the eternal Genius
 And benison of immortality.

So let us then in working and in willing
 The potent promptings of the ego hush,
 That so the better Thou and He and We
 And Ye and They may moderate its sway,
 And from its thralldom manumission win.
 Of all things be our chiefest duty this:
 Forgetfulness of self. So prospereth
 Our work, and sweet each deed will be

³ Mavius and Bavus were characters probably first introduced in some Roman comedy. The names became synonyms of the Poetaster. Virgil so uses them in his third Eclogue, and they are mentioned by Pope in the Prologue to his Satires. Gifford used the title "Baviad" for his Lampoon on the Della Crustan School of Literature.

After the destruction of the Temple of Ephesus by Herostratus laws were enacted prohibiting the mention of his name, the avowed object of his vandalism having been that of securing notoriety. The name Nero brands him as incendiary owing to the tradition that Nero set fire to Rome so that he might see how Troy would look in flames.

⁴ *Unsichtbar-namenlos*: a free rendering is here presented. Perhaps the author had reference to the custom which obtained among Oriental religionists of coining the name of the Deity into unpronounceable forms, as in the Hebraic tetragrammaton JHVH, that so they might "let sacred silence meditate the theme."

To dull the glamour of unworthy pride,
 And free, omnipotent, eternal make us.
 Amid the spirit's aspirations lost,
 Where living gulfs are throbbing with the joy
 Of cosmic Choral Song, oh, be our soul
 A dulcet note to swell the harmony!
 Our heart a living wheel in nature's work!

When life at last shall lower its flickering torch,
 And I the world with hungry questionings probe
 And keen desires, the self shall not concern.
 What gift will then my guardian genius grant?
 Childhood? Or youth? Or even snowy age?
 Their bloom hath faded, and I gladly drink
 The Lethean cup. Then my Elysium
 Shall no dead vision of misfortune mar,
 Nor memory disturb of service vain.
 Unto the gods I dedicate myself,
 As Decius did, with gratitude profound
 And confidence that knows no plummet's touch;
 For lo, how richly doth the bounteous All reward—
 The teeming and rejuvenating All!
 Verily nothing less should I return
 Than that which nature dowered me withal—
 My poor, unworthy Personality.

THE SELF.

Forget thine ego, but thy self lose never.
 From out the treasury of Godhood's heart
 No gift more precious than thy self can come.

What thou receivest from the Mother-breast,
 The throbbing bosom of the Universe—
 The restless elements aflow in thee,
 Air, aliment, the urging energy,

Form, thought and phantasy, are not thy self.
 Thy self is what from these thou didst create,
 What thou did'st fashion, hast been and now art.
 Thou art thine own creator, thine own work.

Not what thou seest (animals observe);
 Not what thou hearest (brutes can likewise hear);
 Not what thou learnest, (ravens also learn),
 But what, perceiving, thou dost understand;
 The power that in thee works, the inner seer
 Who from the past divineth what shall be;
 The organizer, who from chaos spins
 The pattern of the raveling universe
 Into the tapestries of mind and sense.
 This art thou, even as 'tis likewise God.

"The Godhood?" Verily! for fancy thou¹
 The chaos of the Universe sans soul
 And purposeless; wherein no being bides
 Who to himself and all things else is Law!
 Conceive the ineffable insanity
 That then would guide the reeling worlds! Adown
 This barren chaos that itself knows not
 Cast thou thyself! Would'st thou be then a self?

Back into thyself? Within the luminous
 Seclusion of awareness there abides
 A potent proof of an All-Consciousness.
 Lapse backward: be an animal; the sense
 Of human selfhood lose, and wonderest thou,
 O fool, that thus thou lovest Godhood too?

"The harmony of being!"—An empty word
 To him who heareth not aright! Give ear

¹ This passage recalls that wonderful dream of Jean Paul Richter which constitutes the first *Blumenstück* of his *Siebenkäs*.

Unto the deep recesses of the soul,
And lo, from out the Silences thy heart
Will utter forth the word, choiring with all
The world of Him, the highest Self, the mind,
The soul, the essence of all beings, God!

So let it be! Within thine inmost soul
Build thou a temple to divinity,
And thence shall issue life's rich benisons:
Yea, thence shall whisper evermore that voice
Whose truth is Nature's self. Avouch thou then
The message, and henceforth become its priest.
At holiest altar serve it, that so be
Thou honorest thyself, attaining thus
Unto thy being's apotheosis.

The hateful image which thou, shuddering,
Beholdest in the mirror of thy life,
The Fury that to envy prompteth thee
And hatred and vain pride; who dispossessed
Thy soul of treasures dearest unto it;
Who locked thee as with iron from the sway
Of every tender impulse of the heart—
Lo, she is not thyself! Nay, unto thee
She serveth as the subtlest enemy
To rob thee of thy very self! Behold,
Hath she not barred thee from thy greatest joy,
Thy work? Opposed she not thy vanity
With vainer pride, which, overwhelming thee,
Embittered, so that all life's precious fruit
With poison reeked instead of odors sweet?
Yea, from thyself she parted thee, and graved
An image false to woo thee from without.
And seeking this, and loving it alone,
O foolish soul, thou, thou hast lost thyself!

Deceived Narcissus, art thou then but that
At which thou smilest in the fountain's depth?
The thing thou seest in the mirror's flash,
And e'en cajolest in thine echoed voice?
Alas, is then thy shadow more than thou?

And wonderest thou, who on the poison fumes
Dost live of thine own breath when other mouths
Return it unto thee—dost wonder then
That thou a shadow hast become, a spring
Dried up, a sepulcher of what thou wast,
A puppet, playing vainly with thyself?

Losing thy self what dost remain to thee?
What lives of us in other hearts again,
Our truest and our deepest being is.
That which doth make us kin to all the world,
That bringeth peace amid the storm and stress,
Wooing forgetfulness of evil things,
And toward the foolish pleading charity—
This is the Over-soul, the greater Self.

Deep in the heart, unprompted from without,
A power there is whose urge is heavenward.
It spreadeth out our wings upon the storm
As peacefully as on the brooding-nest.
Yea, reveling in this power which, at rest,
Yet acheth with the will to dare and do,
We mount forever upward, glad and free,
Rejoicing that our vision doth anon
The goal descry where ends the pilgrimage.
Who is it? A supreme and sovereign Self.

Who beareth thousands in his loving breast,
And pitieth their infirmities; who turneth

To light their darkness, bearing in himself
The rule that measureth all blessedness:
“What thou would’st not have hap to thee, that do
Thou not to others; what thou would’st, do first.”—
Who is this human god, the motive and
The power that doth within thee nobly will
And do? A Self omnipotently good.

Talent is not the man. The spider weaves;
The wasp and bee can build, for e’en in these
Is Art’s fine instinct bred. The singer’s heart
May not be throbbing in the tender song,
Nor what the player plays be inly felt.

The coward slinks, a shadow, through the world;
The fool his substance wastes; the sycophant
Seeks empty paths his flattery opes to him;
The weakling trembles, dying many deaths.
But who’s immortal? T’is a deathless Self.

Ambrosia, fruit of immortality,
And fadeless wreaths of amaranthine blooms,
Lo, these are token and reward of Man’s
Divine endeavor, plied in termless toil,
By Good-will prompted and th’impelling Voice
That will not to the clay-world say, “Thou art
My sire”; nor to the worms, nor to decay,
“Ye are my brothers, sisters, mother!” Nay, but calm
Before the abyss that yawns, the heaven that spreads,
It saith: “What in me dies, is not my Self!
What in me lives—the quick within the soul,
The eternal—knoweth not the touch of death.

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