

## GOETHE AND RELIGION.

BY THE EDITOR.

GOETHE'S faith in God received a severe shock while he was a small child by the news of the earthquake at Lisbon. From his religious instruction the boy had learned to look upon God as all-good, all-wise and all-powerful, and such a dreadful accident seemed to be incompatible with this conception of deity. In his autobiography the poet describes his own state of mind as follows:\*

“An extraordinary event deeply disturbed the boy's peace of mind for the first time. On the 1st of November, 1755, the earthquake at Lisbon took place, and spread a prodigious alarm over the world, long accustomed to peace and quiet. A great and magnificent capital which was at the same time a trading and mercantile city, was smitten without warning by a terrible calamity. The earth trembled and tottered; the sea foamed; ships dashed against one another; houses fell down, and churches and towers on top of them; the royal palace was partly swallowed by the waters; the bursting land seemed to vomit flames; everywhere among the ruins were seen smoke and fire. Sixty thousand persons a moment before in ease and comfort, perished together; and he was most fortunate who was no longer capable of a thought or feeling about the disaster. The flames raged on; and with them raged a troop of desperadoes, before concealed, or set at large by the event. The wretched survivors were exposed to pillage, massacre and every outrage; and thus on all sides Nature asserted her boundless caprice.

“Intimations of this event had spread over wide regions more quickly than the authentic reports: slight shocks had been felt in many places; in many springs, particularly those of a mineral nature, an unusual receding of the waters had been remarked; and such phenomena added to the effect of the accounts themselves, which were

\*The quotations from Goethe's *Autobiography* in this article follow mainly the translations of Oxenford.

rapidly circulated, at first in general terms, but finally with dreadful definiteness. Hereupon the religiously inclined were not wanting in reflections, neither were the philosophical in grounds for consolation, nor the clergy in warnings. So complicated an event arrested the attention of the world for a long time; and, as additional and more detailed accounts of the extensive effects of this explosion came from every quarter, those who had already been aroused by the misfortunes of strangers now began to be more and more anxious for themselves and their friends. Perhaps the demon of terror had never so speedily and powerfully diffused his terrors over the earth.

"The boy, who was compelled to endure frequent repetitions of the whole story, was not a little staggered. God, the Creator and Preserver of heaven and earth, whom the explanation of the first article of the creed declared so wise and benignant, having abandoned both the just and the unjust to the same destruction, had not manifested himself by any means in a fatherly character. In vain the young mind strove to resist these impressions. This was the more impossible since the wise and scripture-learned could not themselves agree as to the light in which such a phenomenon should be regarded.

"The next summer gave a closer opportunity of knowing directly that angry God, of whom the Old Testament records so much. A sudden hail-storm, accompanied by thunder and lightning, violently broke the new panes at the back of our house, which looked towards the west, damaged the new furniture, destroyed some treasured books and other valuable things, and was the more terrible to the children, as the whole household, quite beside themselves, dragged us little folks with them into a dark passage, where, on their knees, with frightful groans and cries, they thought to conciliate the wrathful Deity. Meanwhile, my father, who was the only one self-possessed, forced open and unhinged the window-frames, by which we saved much glass, but made a broader inlet for the rain which followed the hail; so that, after we were finally quieted, we found ourselves completely surrounded by floods and streams of water, in the halls and on the stairs."

The poetic inclination of Goethe appeared also in his religious yearnings, and it is interesting to see how even as a boy he presents an exact parallel to the religion of ancient Persia whose God was worshiped under the symbol of light, and where the sun was greeted as His visible representative in the world. We let Goethe show the condition of his mind in his own words:

"It may be taken for granted, that among our other lessons, we children had a continued and progressive instruction in religion. But the ecclesiastical Protestantism imparted to us was, properly speaking, nothing but a kind of dry morality. Ingenious exposition was not thought of, and the doctrine appealed neither to the understanding nor to the heart. For that reason, there were various secessions from the Established Church. Separatists, Pietist, Moravians (*Herrnhuter*), the Quiet-in-the-Land, and others differently named and characterized, sprang up, all of whom were animated by the same purpose of approaching the Deity, especially through Christ, more closely than seemed to them possible under the forms of the established religion.

"The boy heard these opinions and sentiments constantly spoken of, for the clergy as well as the laity divided themselves into *pro* and *con*. Those who dissented more or less widely formed the minority; but their modes of thinking proved enticing on account of their originality, heartiness, perseverance, and independence. All sorts of stories were told of their virtues, and of the way in which these were manifested. The reply of a pious tinker was once circulated, who when one of his craft attempted to shame him by asking, 'Who then is your confessor?' answered with great cheerfulness and confidence in the goodness of his cause, 'I have a very famous one,—no less than the confessor of King David.'

"Things of this sort naturally made an impression on the boy, and led him into similar states of mind. In fact, he came to the conclusion that he might approach directly the great God of nature, the Creator and Preserver of heaven and earth, whose earlier manifestations of wrath had been long forgotten in the beauty of the world, and the manifold blessings in which we participate while upon it. The way he took to accomplish this was very curious.

"The boy had chiefly kept to the first article of belief. The God who stands in immediate connection with nature, and owns and loves it as his work, seemed to him the proper God, who might be brought into closer relationship with man, as with everything else, and who would take care of him, as of the motion of the stars, the days and the seasons, and animals and plants. There were texts of the Gospels which explicitly stated this. The boy would ascribe no form to this Being: he therefore sought him in his works, and would fain build him an altar in the good Old-Testament fashion. Natural productions were set out to represent the world, and over these a flame was to burn, signifying the aspirations of man's heart towards his Maker. He brought the best ores and other specimens

out of his natural history collection which had been increased as chance directed. But the next difficulty was how to arrange and build them up. His father possessed a beautiful red-lacquered music-stand, ornamented with gilt flowers, in the form of a four-sided pyramid, with different elevations, which had been found convenient for quartets, but lately was not much in use. The boy took possession of this, and set up his natural specimens one above the other in steps; so that it all looked quite pretty and at the same time sufficiently significant.

"On an early sunrise his first worship of God was to be celebrated, but the young priest had not yet settled on how to produce a flame which should at the same time emit an agreeable odor. At last it occurred to him to combine the two, as he possessed a few fumigating pastils, which diffused a pleasant fragrance with a glimmer, if not with a flame. Nay, this soft burning and exhalation seemed a better representation of what passes in the heart, than an open flame. The sun had risen long before, but the neighboring houses concealed the east. At last it appeared above the roofs. The boy at once took up a burning-glass and applied it to the pastils, which stood on the summit in a fine porcelain saucer. Everything succeeded as desired, and the service of devotion was complete. The altar remained as a peculiar ornament of the room which had been assigned him in the new house. Every one regarded it only as a well-arranged collection of natural curiosities. The boy knew better but concealed his knowledge. He longed for a repetition of the solemnity. But unfortunately, just when the most opportune sun arose, the porcelain cup was not at hand: he placed the pastils on the upper surface of the stand with no protection; they were kindled; and so great was the devotion of the priest, that he did not observe, until it was too late, the mischief his sacrifice was doing. The pastils had burned mercilessly into the red lacquer and beautiful gold flowers, and had vanished just as if some evil spirits had left their black, ineffaceable footprints. This threw the young priest into the most extreme perplexity. The mischief could be covered up to be sure with the largest of his specimens; but the spirit for new offerings was gone, and the accident might almost be considered a hint and warning of the danger there always is in wishing to approach the Deity in such a way."

Goethe's polytheistic tendencies\* reappear in an elaboration of the Christian doctrines into a religious system which was similar

\* Cf. the author's article on "Goethe's Polytheism." *Open Court*, July, 1907.

to the old gnosticism with the details of which, however, Goethe was probably unfamiliar. His elaboration will therefore remain a curious parallel in the eyes of any one who compares the laws of mental evolution both in the individual and in the history of mankind. We ought to remember though that the following statement must not be taken too seriously. We must bear in mind that here it is Goethe the poet who speaks, and he recapitulates merely a phase of his development, not the final result of his views. He says:

"I diligently studied the different opinions; and as I had often enough heard it said that ultimately every man has his own religion, so nothing seemed more natural to me than that I should form mine too; and this I did with much satisfaction. Neo-Platonism lay at the foundation: the hermetical, the mystical, the cabalistic, also contributed their share; and thus I built for myself a world that looked strange enough.

"I could easily represent to myself a Godhead which has gone on producing itself from all eternity; but, as production can not be conceived without multiplicity, so of necessity it must have immediately appeared to itself as a Second, which we recognize under the name of Son; now, these two must continue producing, and again manifested themselves in a Third, who was just as substantial, living, and eternal as the Whole. With these three, however, the circle of the Godhead was complete; and it would not have been possible for them to produce another perfectly equal to them.

"But, since the creative impulse always proceeded, they created a fourth, which from the beginning was self-contradictory, inasmuch as it was, like them, unlimited, and yet at the same time was to be contained in them and bounded by them. Now, this was Lucifer, to whom the whole power of creation was committed from this time forth, and from whom all other beings were to proceed. He immediately displayed his infinite activity by creating the whole concourse of angels,—all, again, after his own likeness, unlimited, but contained in him and bounded by him. Surrounded by such a glory, he forgot his higher origin, and believed that he could find it within himself; and from this first ingratitude sprang all that does not seem to us in accordance with the will and purposes of the Godhead.

"Now, the more Lucifer concentrated himself within himself, the more painful must his condition have become to him, as well as to all the spirits whose sweet uprising to their origin he had prevented. And so there took place what is known to us as the Fall of the Angels. One part of them joined Lucifer, the others turned to their origin.

"From this concentration of the whole creation—for it had proceeded out of Lucifer, and was bound to follow him—sprang all that we perceive under the form of matter, which we figure to ourselves as heavy, solid, and dark, but which, since it is descended, if even not immediately, yet by filiation, from the Divine Being, is just as unlimited, powerful, and eternal as its sire and grandsire.

"Now since the whole mischief, if we may call it so, arose merely through the one-sided direction of Lucifer, the better part was indeed wanting to this creation; for it possessed all that is gained by concentration, while it lacked all that can be effected by expansion alone: and so the entire creation might have been destroyed by everlasting concentration, have become annihilated with its father Lucifer, and have lost all its claims to an equal eternity with the Godhead. This condition the Elohim contemplated for a time: and they had their choice, either to wait for those cons in which the field would again have become clear, and space would be left them for a new creation: or, if they would, to seize upon that which already existed, and supply the want according to their own eternity. Now they chose the latter, and merely by their will supplied in an instant the whole want which the consequence of Lucifer's undertaking involved. They gave to the Eternal Being the faculty of expansion, of moving towards them: the peculiar pulse of life was again restored, and Lucifer himself could not avoid its effects. This is the epoch when that appeared which we know as light, and when that began which we are accustomed to designate by the word creation.

"However much this multiplied itself by progressive degrees, through the continually working vital power of the Elohim, still a being was wanting who might be able to restore the original connection with the Godhead: and so man was created, who in all things was to be similar, yea, equal to the Godhead, but thereby, in effect, found himself once more in the situation of Lucifer, that of being at once unlimited and limited. And since this contradiction was to manifest itself in him through all the categories of existence, and a perfect consciousness, as well as a decided will, was to accompany his various conditions, it was to be foreseen that he must be at the same time the most perfect and the most imperfect, the most happy and the most unhappy, creature. It was not long before he, too, completely acted the part of Lucifer. True ingratitude is the separation from the benefactor; and thus that fall was manifest for the second time, although the whole creation is noth-

ing and was nothing but a falling from and returning to the original.

“One easily sees how the Redemption has here not only been decreed from eternity, but is considered as eternally necessary,—nay, that it must ever renew itself through the whole time of becoming and being (*Werden und Wesen*). In this view of the subject, nothing is more natural than for Divinity itself to take on the form of man, which had already prepared itself as a veil, and to share his fate for a short time, in order, by this assimilation, to enhance his joys and alleviate his sorrows. The history of all religions and philosophies teaches us, that this great truth, indispensable to man, has been handed down by different nations, in different times, in various ways, and even in strange fables and images, in accordance with their limited knowledge. Enough, if it only be acknowledged that we find ourselves in a condition, which, even if it seems to drag us down and oppress us, yet gives us opportunity, nay, even makes it our duty, to uplift ourselves, and thereby to fulfil the purposes of the Godhead, so that, while we are compelled on the one hand to actualize our own selves (*uns zu verselbsten*), we, on the other hand, do not fail to unself ourselves (*uns zu entselbstigen*) in regular pulsation.”

Goethe can scarcely be called a believer in Christian dogmas, but he always took a deep and sympathetic interest in genuinely pious people. His friendship for Fräulein von Klettenberg, as well as his intimacy with Jung Stilling are well known. He went so far as to help the latter in the publication of his books which appeared under the titles *Heinrich Stillings Jugend* and *Stillings Jünglingsjahre*. At first sight Goethe might be thought to hold at the same time views that seem irreconcilable, and yet there need be no inconsistency in his several utterances. We will here enumerate some of these apparent contradictions.

Goethe's poetic nature made him appreciate Roman Catholic ceremonies and rituals. Protestantism was too prosaic and did not appeal to his emotional nature. His views are worth considering. He writes:

“The Protestant service has too little fulness and consistency to be able to hold the congregation together; hence it easily happens that members secede from it, and either form little congregations of their own, or, without ecclesiastical connection, quietly carry on their civic existence side by side. Thus for a considerable time complaints were made that church-going diminished from year to year, and also attendance at the Lord's Supper. With respect to

both, but especially the latter, the cause lies close at hand; but who dares to speak it out? We will make the attempt.

"In moral and religious, as well as in physical and civic, matters, man does not like to do anything on the spur of the moment; he needs a sequence from which habit results. What he is to love and to perform, he cannot represent to himself as single or isolated; and, if he is to repeat anything willingly, it must not have become strange to him. If the Protestant worship lacks fulness in general, so let it be investigated in detail, and it will be found that the Protestant has too few sacraments,—nay, indeed, he has only one in which he is himself an actor,—the Lord's Supper; for baptism he sees only when it is performed on others, and is not greatly edified by it. The sacraments are the highest part of religion, the symbols to our senses of an extraordinary divine favor and grace. In the Lord's Supper earthly lips are to receive a divine Being embodied, and partake of a heavenly nourishment under the form of an earthly one. This import is the same in all kinds of Christian churches. Whether the sacrament is taken with more or less submission to the mystery, with more or less accommodation as to that which is intelligible, it always remains a great, holy thing, which in reality takes the place of the possible or the impossible, the place of that which man can neither attain nor do without. But such a sacrament should not stand alone. No Christian can partake of it with the true joy for which it is given, if the symbolical or sacramental sense is not fostered within him. He must be accustomed to regard the inner religion of the heart and that of the external Church as perfectly one, as the great universal sacrament, which again divides itself into so many others, and communicates to these parts its holiness, and eternity.

"Here a youthful pair join hands, not for a passing salutation or for a dance; the priest pronounces his blessing upon them, and the bond is indissoluble. It is not long before this wedded pair bring their own likeness to the threshold of the altar. The infant is purified with holy water, and so incorporated into the Church that it cannot forfeit this benefit but through the most monstrous apostasy. In the course of life the child goes on growing in worldly things of his own accord, but in heavenly things he must be instructed. If on examination it proves that this has been fully done, he is received into the bosom of the Church as an actual citizen, as a true and voluntary professed Christian, not without outward tokens of the significance of this act. Now, only, is he truly a Christian; now for the first time does he know his privileges and also his



duties. But, in the meantime, a great deal that is strange has happened to him as a man. Through instruction and affliction he has come to know how critical appears the state of his inner self, and there questions of doctrines and of transgressions will constantly occur; but punishment shall no longer take place. For here, in the infinite confusion in which he must entangle himself, amid the conflict of natural and religious claims, an admirable expedient is given him, in confiding his deeds and misdeeds, his infirmities and doubts, to a worthy man, appointed expressly for that purpose, who knows how to calm, to warn, to strengthen him, to chasten him likewise by symbolical punishments, and at last, by complete washing away of his guilt, to render him happy, and to give him back, pure and cleansed, the tablet of his manhood. Thus prepared, and set entirely at rest by several sacramental acts, which on closer examination branch out again into minuter sacramental features, he kneels down to receive the Host; and, that the mystery of this high act may be still enhanced, he sees the chalice only in the distance. It is no common eating and drinking that satisfies,—it is a heavenly feast, which makes him thirst after heavenly drink.

“Yet let not the youth believe that is all he has to do: let not even the man believe it. In earthly relations we finally become accustomed to depend on ourselves; and, even there, knowledge, understanding, and character will not always suffice; while on the other hand in heavenly things we never finish learning. The higher feeling within us, which often finds itself not quite at home, is, besides, oppressed by so much from without, that our own power hardly administers all that is necessary for counsel, consolation, and help. But, to this end, that remedy is instituted for our whole life, and an intelligent, pious man is continually waiting to show the right way to the wanderers, and to relieve the distressed.

“And what has been so well tried through the entire life, is now to show forth all its healing power with tenfold strength at the gate of Death. According to a familiar custom, inculcated from youth upwards, the dying man receives with fervor those symbolical, significant assurances, and where every earthly warranty fails, he is assured, by a heavenly one, of a blessed existence for all eternity. He feels perfectly convinced that neither a hostile element nor a malignant spirit can hinder him from clothing himself with a transfigured body, so that, in direct relation with the God-head, he may partake of the boundless bliss which flows forth from God.

“Then, in conclusion, that the whole man may be made holy,

the feet are anointed and blessed. They are to feel, even in the event of possible recovery, a repugnance to touching this earthly, hard, impenetrable soil. A wonderful elasticity is to be imparted to them, by which they spurn from under them the clod of earth which hitherto attracted them. And so, through a brilliant cycle of equally holy acts, the beauty of which we have only briefly hinted at, the cradle and the grave, however far asunder they may chance to be, are joined in one continuous circle.

“But all these spiritual wonders spring not, like other fruits, from the natural soil, where they can neither be sown nor planted nor cherished. We must supplicate for them another region,—a thing which cannot be done by all persons nor at all times. Here we meet the highest of these symbols, derived from pious tradition. We are told that one man may be more favored, blessed, and sanctified from above than another. But, that this may not appear as a natural gift, this great boon, bound up with a heavy duty, must be communicated to others by one authorized person to another; and the greatest good that a man can gain, without having to acquire it by his own wrestling or grasping, must be preserved and perpetuated on earth by spiritual inheritance. In the very ordination of the priest is comprehended all that is necessary for the effectual solemnizing of those holy acts by which the multitude receive grace, without any other activity being needful on their part than that of faith and implicit confidence. And thus the priest joins the line of his predecessors and successors, in the circle of those anointed with him, representing the highest source of blessings, so much the more gloriously as it is not he, the priest, whom we reverence, but his office; it is not his nod to which we bow the knee, but the blessing which he imparts, and which seems the more holy, and to come the more immediately from heaven, because the earthly instrument cannot at all weaken or invalidate it by its own sinful, nay, wicked, nature.

“How shattered to pieces is this truly spiritual connection in Protestantism, which declares part of the above-mentioned symbols apocryphal, and only a few canonical!—and how, by their indifference to some of these, will they prepare us for the high dignity of the others?

“In my time I had been confided to the religious instruction of a good old infirm clergyman, who had been confessor of the family for many years. The “Catechism,” a “Paraphrase” of it, and the “Scheme of Salvation,” I had at my fingers’ ends: I lacked not one of the strong and convincing Biblical texts, but from all this

I reaped no fruit; for, as they assured me that the honest old man arranged his chief examination according to an ancient set formula, I lost all pleasure and inclination for the affair, spent the last week in all sorts of diversions, laid in my hat the loose leaves borrowed from an older friend who had gotten them from the clergyman, and unfeelingly and without understanding read aloud all that I might have uttered with feeling and conviction.

"My good intention and my aspirations in this important matter were still more paralyzed by a dry, spiritless routine, when I was about to approach the confessional. I was indeed conscious of having many failings but no great faults; and that very consciousness diminished them, since it directed me to the moral strength which lay within me, and which, with resolution and perseverance, was at last to become master over the old Adam. We were taught that we were much better than the Catholics for the very reason that we were not obliged to confess anything in particular in the confessional,—nay, that this would not be at all proper, even if we wished to do it. I did not like this at all; for I had the strangest religious doubts, which I would gladly have had cleared up on such an occasion. Now, as this was not to be done, I composed a confession for myself, which, while it well expressed my state of mind, was to confess to an intelligent man, in general terms, that which I was forbidden to tell him in detail. But when I entered the old choir of the ancient church of the Barefoot Friars [the church used by the Protestants of Frankfort], when I approached the strange latticed closets in which the reverend gentlemen used to be found for that purpose, when the sexton opened the door for me, when I now saw myself shut up in the narrow place face to face with my spiritual grandsire and he bade me welcome with his weak, nasal voice, all the light of my mind and heart was extinguished at once, the well-conned confession-speech would not cross my lips. In my embarrassment I opened the book I had in my hand, and read from it the first short form I saw, which was so general, that anybody might have spoken it with quite a safe conscience. I received absolution, withdrew neither warm nor cold, went the next day with my parents to the Table of the Lord, and, for a few days, behaved myself as was becoming after so holy an act."

While Goethe praises the beauty of the Roman Catholic ceremonies and blames Protestants for the prosaic tenor of their religion, he recognizes the significance of the Reformation and offers thanks to Luther. In the very last year of his life in his talks with Eckermann he said:

"We are not at all aware of all for which we have to thank Luther and the Reformation in general. We have been made free from the fetters of spiritual narrowness; as a result of our advancing culture we have become able to go back to the source and grasp Christianity in its purity. We have once more the courage to stand on God's earth with firm feet and to recognize ourselves in our God-given human nature. May the spiritual culture continue to advance, may the natural sciences grow in ever broader expansion and greater depth, and may the human soul extend, as it will, over the sublimity and moral culture of Christendom as it gleams and shines in the Gospels."

Goethe was broader than either Roman Catholics or Protestants, and in the face of an attempt made by Countess Bernstein to convert him, he maintained his position in these words (October, 1809): "I have tried my life long to be candid with myself and with others, and in all earthly affairs have always looked at the highest things; you and yours have done the same. Let us therefore continue so as long as it is day for us; a sun will shine for others also. They will make their way to it and incidentally illumine us with a brighter light. May all be again united in the arms of the all-loving Father!"

Goethe was a good observer and he noticed that pious Christians in spite of their agreement in belief held very different religious tenets. The words in which they expressed themselves were to some extent the same, but the sentiments, attitudes and conceptions of each varied according to their needs. So, for instance, he noted when Lavater met Fräulein von Klettenberg in Frankfort, that, although they were apparently and in all externalities one in their religious faith, yet they conceived of their Saviour, in a very different manner. Goethe says in his *Autobiography*, Book XIV: "It has been repeatedly claimed in times of toleration that every man has his own religion, his own way of serving God. Although I did not maintain this directly I could notice in the present case that men and women stand in need of a different Saviour. Fräulein von Klettenberg's attitude to Him was a woman's attitude toward a lover to whom she surrenders unconditionally. All joy and all hope is placed in his person and she entrusts to him, and without doubt or hesitancy, the fate of her life. Lavater, however, regarded his Saviour as a friend whom a man would jealously strive to imitate without envy and lovingly, whose merit he recognizes, praises and for that reason endeavors to become like Him."

Goethe was not an anti-Christian but an anti-dogmatist. He

disliked the literal belief in dogma and the narrow interpretation of the sacraments. He refused to attend the baptism of Schiller's second son because the ceremony would jar on him, but he was not opposed to Christianity. Accordingly he had his own son instructed in the Christian doctrine by his friend Herder who at that time was superintendent-general of the Weimar State Church. Herder consented to undertake this task in a liberal spirit and Goethe thanked him in these words: "You will have the kindness, my old and honored friend, to introduce my son to the Christian fellowship in a more liberal manner than custom prescribes. For this I thank you most heartily."

Goethe loved and cherished the Bible; he says: "As for myself, I loved and valued it; for almost to it alone did I owe my moral culture. The events, the doctrines, the symbols, the similes, had all impressed themselves deeply upon me and had influenced me in one way or another. These unjust, scoffing, and perverted attacks, therefore, disgusted me; but people had already gone so far as very willingly to admit, partly for the sake of defending many passages, that God had accommodated himself to the modes of thought and power of comprehension in men; that even those moved by the spirit had not on that account been able to renounce their character, their individuality, and that Amos, a cow-herd, did not use the language of Isaiah, who is said to have been a prince."

An incident recorded by Falk under the date of November 10, 1810, seems to stand in flat contradiction to Goethe's praise of the Bible. In a conversation which he carried on with a bigoted Roman Catholic doctor in 1810 in the presence of the high-minded and pious Louis Bonaparte, ex-king of Holland, he branded the Bible as a dangerous book. We let Goethe tell this incident in his own words as related by Falk:

"But once when he [this bigoted man] started again an almost Capuchinian tirade on the dangerousness of books and the book-trade I could not help answering him with the opinion that the most dangerous of all books, so far as the history of the world is concerned, is indubitably the Bible, because no other book has brought so much good and so much evil to the human race. When I had finished this speech I was somewhat frightened at what I had said, for I thought the powder-mine would now explode into the air in all directions. Fortunately, however, it happened otherwise. To be sure I saw the doctor first grow pale and then red again from terror and wrath at these words, but the king composed himself with his usual gentleness and friendliness and said almost jokingly:

*'Cela perce quelquefois que Monsieur de Goethe est hérétique';*  
"Sometimes the heretic comes out in Monsieur de Goethe."

In *Wilhelm Meister*, Book VI, we read the following passage, which we can not doubt relates an incident of Goethe's own experience, although it may seem inconsistent with the understanding of his views which we have received from other expressions of his. He says: "Once I prayed out of the depth of my heart 'Now Almighty give me faith.' I was then in the condition in which one must be, but seldom is, when one's prayers are acceptable to God. Who could describe what in those moments I felt? A powerful impulse drew my soul to the cross on which Jesus had perished. My soul was near to Him who had become Man and died on the cross, and then I knew what faith meant. 'This is faith indeed,' I cried, and started up overawed by the idea. For such emotions as these all words fail us."

Goethe was too broad to be either a Christian or an anti-Christian. He was both, and the Christians in his time, too narrow to understand his position, called him a pagan. Goethe was sufficiently clear-sighted to see that they were Christians in name only, and that in spite of his unbelief he himself was a better Christian than they. He said: "Who to-day is such a Christian as Christ would have him? Perhaps I am the only one, although you consider me a heathen."