



# WEST-EASTERN DIVAN

JOHANN WOLFGANG  
VON GOETHE

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In Twelve Books

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GOETHE

*Translated by Edward Dowden*

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## FOREWORD

GOETHE'S last important body of lyrical poetry, the West-Eastern Divan, is known to very few English readers. Many persons who are familiar with Faust and Iphigenie and the ballads have never opened this collection of verse. Even in Germany the Divan, as a whole, is much less known than it deserves to be. There are excuses to be pleaded for such neglect. The Divan is the product of Goethe's Indian summer of art-life, the rejuvenescence that came to him when he was sixty-five; and Indian summer has not the mighty ravishment of spring. In this the marks of old age are evident in thought and feeling, in style and diction. Few of its poems are quite equal individually to the most enchanting of Goethe's earlier lyrics; some are obscure even to German commentators; some require for their comprehension an acquaintance with Goethe's scientific ideas; the play of sexagenarian love-making in the book of Zuleika may be easily misunderstood.

Yet the Divan has had, as a whole, worthy lovers and diligent students. Hegel placed it in the forefront of modern poetry; Heine learnt from it some of his lyrical manner, and wondered how such ethereal lightness as that of certain of its poems was possible in the German language. It was the subject of Düntzer's laborious scholarship - it was carefully edited by Loeper. No one has done so much to further a true appreciation of it as Conrad Burdach, and it was the subject of his Festvortrag at the General Meeting of the German Goethe Society in June 1896.

My husband, whose words I have here in part reproduced, says in continuation, in his Essay on "Goethe's West-Eastern Divan" (published in Essays Modern and

Elizabethan, J. M. Dent & Sons): "I follow the guidance of that excellent scholar and would aspire to come with a long interval after Conrad Burdach. Having previously known the poems well, I took with me last summer (1907) Loeper's edition to Cornwall, and found that the game of translating Goethe's poetry into what aimed at being English verse could be played on the wind-blown cliffs of the Lizard, or in the shadow of some fantastic cave of Serpentine, to the accompaniment of the Western waves. Even to fail in such a game was to enter into the joy of *l'amour de l'impossible*.

" By slow degrees the whole of Goethe's silver arabesque work was transmuted into Cornish or British tin. But the foiled translator had at least to scrutinize every line of the original and encounter every difficulty. And there were some things so wise, so humane, so large in their serene benignity, that they could not be wholly spoilt even by a *traduttore*, who at least, as regards the sense of each poem, strove not to be a *traditore*."

Lay readers who happen to have at hand that volume of Edward Dowden's Essays will do well to set aside this Foreword and seek their information about the Divan in that Essay as a whole. (I may mention here that it has been translated into German and published in the " Erdgeist " by Herr Paul Tausig of Vienna, translator of other writings of E. Dowden.)

For readers who cannot immediately refer to that Essay for information, if they need such, I give here for guidance some of the facts noted herein.

Goethe, from his early years, had been attracted to the poetry of the East. In the period of his youthful Titanism he had chosen Mohammed as the central figure of a dramatic poem, and had prepared himself for the task - never to be accomplished - by a study of the Koran.

In 1774 he informed his friend Merck that he had translated Solomon's "Song of Songs," the most glorious collection of love-songs ever fashioned by God." At Weimar

he had translated one of the pre-Islamic poems of the Mu'allakat. He had been charmed by the Indian drama *Sakuntala*. Roses from Saadi's Garden and Jami's Loves of Laila and Majnun had introduced him to Persian poetry.

But it was not until after the publication of Joseph von Hammer's celebrated translation of the Divan of Hafiz in 1812 that the great German poet became, as it pleased him to imagine himself, a wandering merchant in the East, trucking his wares for those of Persian singers. He speaks of himself in this character in the dissertation which follows the verse of the West-Eastern Divan.

Is Goethe here only assuming an Eastern garb? No he interprets in his own way a tendency of the time. The dominating classical influences, Greek and Italian, had waned and the new romantic literature was turning to the East. But the East of Goethe's imagination was not the East of the English poets who had looked Eastward: Southey, Shelley or Byron. From Byron's East, indeed, it was as remote as possible.

If he became a Romantic poet again it was in his own original and incomparable fashion. He felt profoundly hostile to the neo-Catholic party in the Romantic School, and in the Divan some shrewd thrusts are delivered against them by the old Pagan - the old Pagan who was in spirit more religious than they who had found, like Hafiz, the secret of being "selig" without being "fromm," which fact they never could admit nor understand.

Goethe turned to the East as to a refuge from the strife of tongues, as well as from the public strife of European swords. There the heavens were boundless, and God - the one God - seemed to preside over the sand- waste. There Islam - submission to God's will- seemed to be the very rule of life.

Before all else the merchandise which Goethe sought to purchase in the East was wisdom and piety and peace. These the Persian Hafiz had somehow found. Hafiz - gay

but also wise - possessed of inward piety, did not pursue with zeal the outward practices of religion. The special quality, as Goethe perceived, of the Persian poet was his spontaneity; he was a true poetic fount: " wave welling after wave", like Goethe's own lyrical impulses in his earlier days, when song seemed to possess him rather than to be held in possession. There was another circumstance in common with them. Hafiz - a contemporary of our own Chaucer - had seen Timur, that scourge of God, sweep over Persia with his hordes and spread his conquests from Delhi to Damascus. Another Timur had arisen in Europe in the nineteenth century whose name was Napoleon.

Hafiz could not stay the conqueror's career; but at least he could give the world the joy of his Ghazels - so likewise Goethe.

With a strange and happy return upon him of the creative impulse of youth, urging him to swift and spontaneous jets of song, Goethe, in the early morning of 25th July 1814, started in his carriage from Weimar for the Rhine, Frankfurt and Wiesbaden. It was seventeen years since he had visited the scenes of his childhood and youth. Something of enchantment was added by this revival of the past to the Indian summer of Goethe's sixty-fifth year. (With an arrangement of certain pieces of the West-Eastern Divan, as indicated by Burdach, we can make out a kind of diary of the days of travel.)

The central motive of the poems is, in truth, love. First there is benignant charity extended to man as man; secondly, there is the charming relation of the old sage, poet and toper of wine to the boy-cupbearer, blooming in beauty, eager, as a boy may be, for wisdom, a relation which is lightly touched with humour; and last, there is the passionate love of man and woman exhibited in that ideal pair, Hatem and Zuleika.

During his visit to Frankfurt in the autumn of 1814 Goethe had the pleasure of personal intercourse with his



friend, the Banker Willemer - a man of generous heart and cultured intelligence. Marianne, his third wife - a woman of thirty - had bright social gifts and graceful cultivation, besides good humour and good sense. She became model for the Zuleika of the West-Eastern Divan, accepted her part as Zuleika with pride and pleasure, and played up to it with spirit, not without a sense of humour. The poems are poems of passionate love, but in the relation of Goethe and the good Marianne - a relation absolutely honest - the passion was born for the imagination merely, from a friendship which was of the happiest kind and which endured without interruption up to Goethe's last days, though after 1815 they never met again.

A few beautiful poems in the collection are Marianne's, e.g., the song to the East Wind and the lovelier song to the West Wind (which every German singer knows in a beautiful musical setting).

The secret of Marianne's contribution to the Divan was well kept. She disclosed the facts not long before her tranquil death at the age of seventy-six.

Loeper, in his very elucidating Foreword to the Divan, notes that we find in it only the expression of the active, living side of the Orient; it shows forth the submission to God, but not the Fatalism of the East. The urge in it is all towards joy, towards life, towards love, out of the depths of a serene and composed spirit.

From out the narrow room and narrow local surroundings of his home the poet takes his Hegira into the open world, into the freedom of Nature, as well as also into the freedom of human intercourse, in foreign towns, in the market-places, the taverns.

When the book came to light in 1819, in the epoch of the Byron Welt-Schmerz, it must have seemed as though it were a protest against all enmity towards the world and humanity - inasmuch as it is wholly free from all trace of self-torturings or of immersion in subjectivity. Goethe's

world herein knows no such melancholy, for the pain and sorrow and the longing that it may contain have tangible objects and are never otherwise than sound and sane.

The calm Indian-summer radiance illumines it all.

E. D. D.

December 1913.

## I. MOGANNI NAMEH. BOOK OF THE SINGER

*Twenty years I let go past,  
Joying in what life provides;  
A train, each lovely as the last,  
Years' fair as 'neath the Barmecides.*

### *I. HEJIRA*

NORTH and West and South up-breaking!  
Thrones are shattering, Empires quaking;  
Fly thou to the untroubled East,  
There the patriarchs' air to taste!  
What with love and wine and song  
Chiser's fount will make thee young.

There, 'mid things pure and just and true,  
The race of man I would pursue  
Back to the well-head primitive,  
Where still from God did they receive  
Heavenly lore in earthly speech,  
Nor beat the brain to pass their reach.

Where ancestors were held in awe,  
Each alien worship banned by law;  
In nonage-bounds I am gladly caught –  
Broad faith be mine and narrow thought;  
As when the word held sway, and stirred  
Because it was a spoken word.

Where shepherds haunt would I be seen,  
And rest me in oases green;  
When with the caravan I fare,  
Shawl, coffee, musk, my chapman's ware,  
No pathway would I leave untraced  
To the city from the waste.

And up and down the rough rock ways  
My comfort, Hafiz, be thy lays,  
When the guide enchantingly,  
From his mule-back seat on high,  
Sings, to rouse the stars, or scare  
The lurking robber in his lair.

In bath or inn my thought would be,  
Holy Hafiz, still of thee;  
Or when the veil a sweetheart lifts  
From amber locks in odorous drifts;  
Ay, whispered loves of poet fire  
Even the Houris to desire!

Would you envy him for this,  
Or bring despite upon his bliss,  
Know that words of poets rise  
To the gate of Paradise,  
Hover round, knock light, implore  
Heavenly life for evermore.

## *II. PLEDGES OF BLESSING*

FROM a cornelian Talisman  
Glad prosperous days the faithful gain;  
If on an onyx ground it rest  
To lips devout let it be pressed!  
All that is ill away 'twill chase,  
It shields you and it shields the place;

If the engraven word proclaim  
With pure intention Allah's name,  
To love and deed it will inflame;  
And women, more than others can,  
Will vantage by the Talisman.

Like symbols, but on paper set  
By pen-craft, form the Amulet;  
No narrow limit here will hem  
The scribe as with the graven gem,  
And pious souls may thus rejoice  
In longer verses of their choice;  
Such papers round the neck men wear  
Devoutly as a scapular.

Behind the Inscription no hid meanings lie;  
It is itself - the sentence tells you all;  
And this once read will straightway make you call  
With glad assent - " 'Tis I that say it, I."

*Abraxas* I will seldom bring!  
Here chiefly the distorted thought  
Some gloomy madness has begot  
Would pass for the divinest thing.  
If things absurd I speak, believe  
'Tis an *Abraxas* that I give.

A Signet-ring's design craves studious care;  
The highest sense in narrowest room must fit;  
Yet if you plant a true idea there,  
Graven stands the word and scarce you think of it.

### *III. FREEDOM OF SPIRIT*

MINE be the saddle still, to ride  
While you in hut or tent abide!

And gay I gallop through wilds afar,  
Nought o'er my bonnet save the star.

The stars were appointed by His voice,  
Your guides over land and sea,  
That the heart within you may rejoice  
And your glance still heavenward be.

#### *IV. TALISMANS*

GOD'S very own the Orient!  
God's very own the Occident!  
The North land and the Southern land  
Rest in the quiet of His hand.

Justice apportioned to each one  
Wills He Who is the Just alone.  
Name all His hundred names, and then  
Be this name lauded high! Amen.

Error would hold me tangled, yet  
Thou knowest to free me from the net.  
Whether I act or meditate  
Grant me a way that shall be straight.

If earthly things possess my mind  
Through these some higher gain I find;  
Not blown abroad like dust, but driven  
Inward, the spirit mounts toward heaven.  
In every breath we breathe two graces share -  
The indraught and the outflow of the air;  
That is a toil, but this refreshment brings;  
So marvellous are our life's comminglings.  
Thank God when thou dost feel His hand constrain,  
And thank when He releases Thee again.

## *V. FOUR GRACES*

THAT glad of heart the Arab should  
Roam his wild spaces o'er,  
Hath Allah for the general good  
Granted him graces four.

The turban first, a braver gear  
Than crowns of Emperors old;  
And, for his dwelling everywhere,  
A tent to raise or fold.

A sword that surelier can defend  
Than crag or turret-height,  
A little song, which maids attend  
For wisdom or delight.

If from her shawl my singing spell  
Draw flowers that fall my way,  
What is her own she knows right well,  
And still is kind and gay.

With flowers and fruits the sense to please,  
I deck the board for you,  
And would you add moralities,  
I give them gathered now.

## *VI. CONFESSIO*

WHAT is hard to cover? Fire!  
Flame, the monster, will betray  
By night its presence, smoke by day.  
Hard to hide is love's desire;  
However hushed and close it lies,  
Love will leap forth from the eyes.  
Hardest is a song to hide;