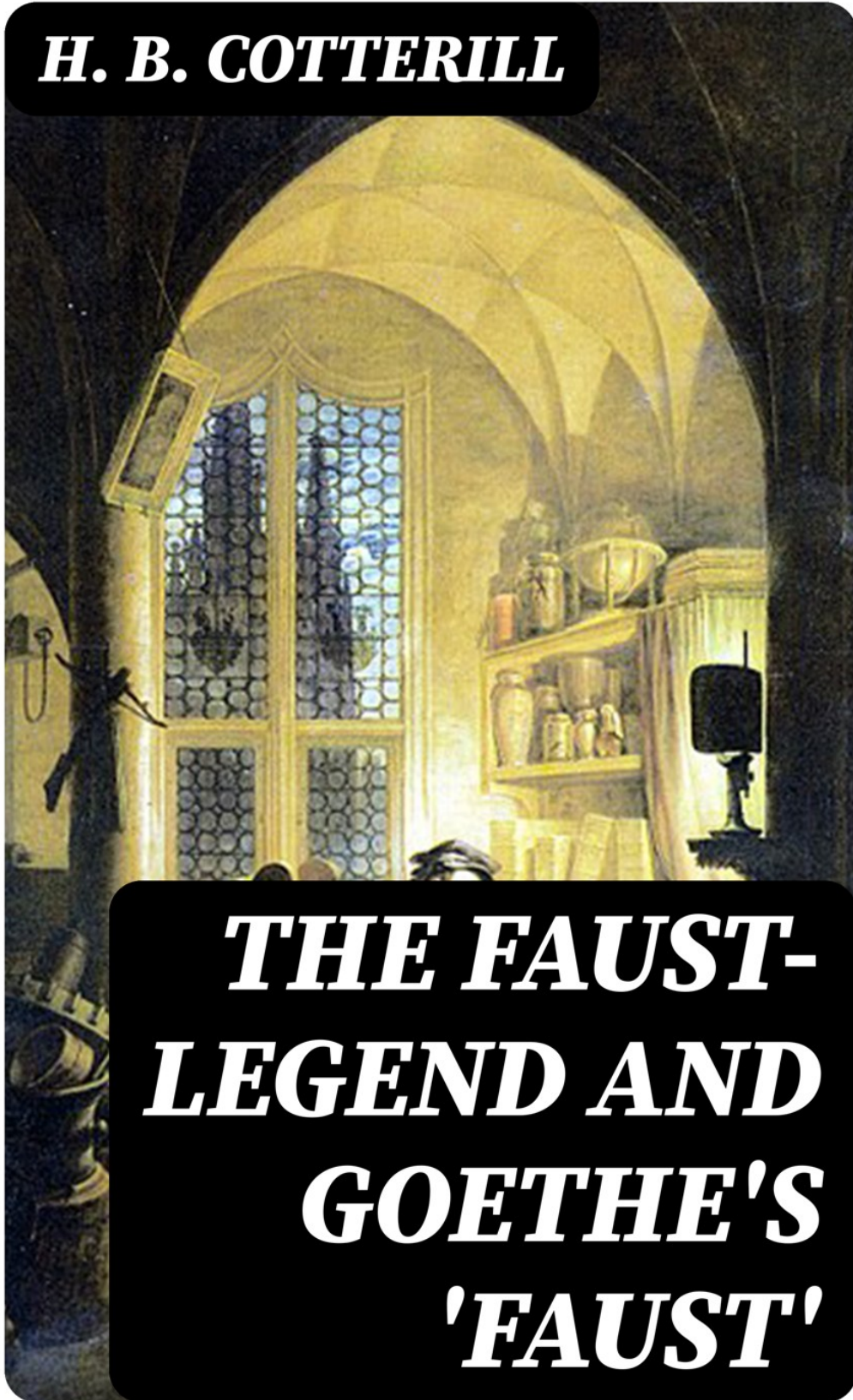


***H. B. COTTERILL***



***THE FAUST-  
LEGEND AND  
GOETHE'S  
'FAUST'***

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# **The Faust-Legend and Goethe's 'Faust'**

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GOETHE'S 'FAUST'

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# PREFACE

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These lectures have been given perhaps half a dozen times, in England, in Switzerland and in Germany. On allowing them to appear in print I should perhaps apologize to my readers for the somewhat free and familiar style in which parts of them are written; but even if I had the time to recast them into a more serious form I should be unwilling to do so, for there is surely enough ponderous literature on the subject, and although some may resent in a book what often helps to make a lecture attractive, I think I can rely on the fact that many people agree with the dictum of Horace:

*Ridiculum aeri  
Fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res,*

or, as Milton has it:

*Joking decides great things  
Stronger and better oft than earnest can.*

Almost the only change that I have made in my MS. has been the substitution or addition of an English translation in numerous places where I had formerly quoted the German original. On some occasions, when first writing the lectures, I very probably used the English version of *Faust* by Bayard Taylor, but I have not the book at present at hand and cannot feel quite certain whether any of the verse translations are not my own. The little book makes of course no pretence to be a contribution to critical or biographical

literature. It is meant especially for those who wish to know something more about the story of Faust and about Goethe's play, and who, because their knowledge of German does not suffice or for other reasons, are unable to study the subject in any more satisfactory way.

H. B. C.

FREIBURG IM BREISGAU  
*August 1912*

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## I

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# **THE OLD FAUST-LEGEND**

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All of us have probably experienced the fact that it is possible to have been familiar for a long time with some great work of imagination—some poem or picture—to have learnt to love it almost as if it were a living person, to imagine that we understand it and appreciate it fully, even to fancy that it has a special message, a deeper meaning, for us than for almost any one else, and then to come across somebody—some commentator perhaps—who informs us that our uncritical appreciation is quite worthless, mere shallow sentiment, and that until we can accurately analyze and formulate the Idea which the artist endeavoured to incorporate in his work, and classify the diverse manifestations of this Idea as subjective, objective,

symbolical, allegorical, dramatical-psychological or psychological-dramatical, we are not entitled to hold, far less to express, any opinion on the subject.

When I realised that I had undertaken to lecture on *Faust*, I thought it my duty to study Goethe's German commentators—some of them at least; for to study all would consume a lifetime. A few of the works of these commentators I already possessed—some, I am sorry to say, with their pages yet uncut. Others I procured, following the advice of German friends well versed in the matter. I set to work on what was presumably the best of these commentaries. As I laboured onwards, page after page, I found myself from time to time turning back to the title of the book. Sure enough, it was *Ueber Goethe's Faust*. I laboured on—the suspicion deepening at every turn of the page that perhaps the binder might have bound up the wrong text under the title *Ueber Goethe's Faust*. At the fifty-third page I came to a dead stop. Except quite incidentally neither Goethe nor Faust had as yet been mentioned. These fifty-three pages had been entirely devoted to what seemed to my rather unmetaphysical mind a not very luminous or edifying dissertation on the difference between *Ansicht* and *Einsicht*—between mere Opinion and true critical Insight; and, as far as I could discover, the only conclusion as yet arrived at was that the writer possessed an exclusive monopoly in the last-mentioned article.

But I will not inflict upon you any further description of my tusslings with Teutonic interpreters of *Faust*—with their *egos* and *non-egos*, their moral-æsthetic symbolisms and so on. Let us leave them to the tender mercies of Goethe

himself, who was not sparing of his ridicule in regard to his commentators, nor, alas, at times in regard to his countrymen. 'Of all nations,' he says, 'the Germans understand me least.... Such people make life a burden by their abstruse thoughts and their *Ideas*, which they hunt up in all directions and insist on discovering in everything.... They come and ask *me* what "Ideas" *I* have incorporated in my *Faust*. Just as if I myself knew!—or could describe it, even if I did know!' Of course Goethe's great poem contains an Idea, if by that word we mean in a poem what we mean by *life* in anything living; but it is not by dissection and analysis that we shall discover it. 'He who wishes,' says Goethe in *Faust*, 'to examine and describe anything living first does his best to expel the life. Then he has got the dead parts in his hand; but what is wanting is just the spiritual bond.' It is my purpose—a purpose not easy of fulfilment—to avoid this method of dissection and to place before you living realities, not anatomical specimens.

But before we plunge *in medias res* and grapple our present subject, namely the old Faust-legend, I should like to say just a few words in order to show from what standpoint I think we should regard Goethe as a poet and a thinker—for that he is great both as a poet and as a thinker cannot be denied.

Goethe describes his own philosophy as the philosophy of action. He believed in impulse, in inspiration, in action, rather than in reflexion, analysis and logic. 'Reflect not!' he makes Iphigenie exclaim—'Reflect not! Grant freely, as thou feel'st!' And in one of his Epigrams he says:



*Yes, that's the right way,  
When we cannot say  
How we think. True thought  
Comes as a gift, unsought.*

Such theory of inspiration is thoroughly Greek, reminding one of Plato's 'muse-inspired madman' and of what Sophocles is related to have said to Aeschylus; 'Thou, Aeschylus, always dost the right thing—but unconsciously (ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰδώς γε).' Thus it was also with Goethe. All intellectual hobbies and shibboleths, all this endless wearisome discussion and dissection and analysis and criticism and bandying about of *opinion*, which is the very life-breath of modern intellectual existence and modern journalistic literature, Goethe rejected, as Plato had done in his *Phaedrus*, where he makes Socrates call such things 'rotten soul-fodder.'

'The whole! The whole!' was Goethe's frequent exclamation—'life! action! being!—the living whole, not the dead parts!' He was for ever decrying mere thought, mere intellect, mere cleverness. And yet of all moderns what greater intellect, what greater thinker, can we name than Goethe himself? Seldom, perhaps never, has there existed a mortal so many-sided. 'In such manifold directions'—he wrote to his friend Jacobi—'does my nature move, that I cannot be satisfied with *one* single mode of thought. As poet and artist I am polytheist; as a student of Nature I am pantheist. When I need a God for my personal nature, as a moral and spiritual human being, He also exists for me. Heaven and earth are such an immense realm that it can only be grasped by the collective intelligence of all

intelligent beings.' Such 'collective intelligence' Goethe perhaps more nearly possessed than any other human being has done. The lordly pleasure-house which he built for his soul was such as Tennyson describes (and his words refer of course to Goethe):

*Full of great rooms and small the palace stood,  
All various, each a perfect whole  
From living Nature, fit for every mood  
And change of my still soul.*

And wonderfully true are those other lines of Tennyson—but rather bitter, as perhaps was to be expected of Tennyson when he was describing a great character with which he had so little sympathy:

*I take possession of man's mind and deed.  
I care not what the sects may brawl.  
I sit as God holding no form of creed,  
But contemplating all.*

To Goethe all things, both in Nature and in Art were but transitory reflexions of the real and eternal. 'Alles vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis'—all things transitory are but a parable, an allegory of truth and reality—such are some of the last words of his great Poem; and thus too he regarded his own poetry. 'I have,' he said, 'always regarded all that I have produced as merely symbolic, and I did not much care whether what I made were pots or dishes.' Even that life-poem of his, *Faust*, which he planned and began as a young man of about twenty-five, and the last lines of which he wrote a few months before his death, aged eighty-

two, only represents (as indeed do all great works of art) *one* aspect of belief—or perhaps I should rather say a certain number of truth's innumerable aspects, none of them claiming to afford a full vision, and not a few of them apparently contradictory; for, as both Plato and Shakespeare tell us, truth cannot be directly stated: it lies, as it were, in equipoise between contradictory statements:

*For no thought is contented. The better sort,  
As thoughts of things divine ... do set the word  
Against the word.*

*Faust* does not claim to be a universal Gospel, nor to offer a final solution of the riddle of existence. It makes no attempt to pile up Pelions on Ossa—to scale heaven with the Babel-towers of the human reason. It merely holds up a mirror in which we see reflected certain views of truth, such as presented themselves to Goethe from some of his intellectual heights. To regard it and judge it otherwise—to analyse its Idea—to insist on discovering its Moral—to compare it with some little self-contained system of theory or dogma which we ourselves may have finally accepted—and to condemn Goethe as a prophet of lies because, viewing truth from such diverse standpoints (many of them perhaps quite inaccessible for us) he may seem at times to ignore some of our pet formulæ—this, I think, would convict us of a lamentable lack of wisdom and humility. And if at times we feel pained by what may seem irreverent, let us remember that Goethe wrote also these words: 'With many people who have God constantly on their tongues He becomes a phrase, a mere name uttered without any