

**POEMS AND
BALLADS
OF GOETHE**

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Poems and ballads of Goethe by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

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POEMS AND BALLADS

OF

G O E T H E

TRANSLATED BY

W. EDMONDSTOUNE AYTOUN, D.C.L.

AND

THEODORE MARTIN

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18.4.41

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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P R E F A C E.

SEVERAL years have elapsed since a considerable portion of the following translations appeared in the columns of "Blackwood's Magazine." It was then the ambition and desire of the translators to have laid before the public, through that widely-circulated medium, such a selection from the minor poems and ballads of the great German author, as might tend to convey to an English reader something like an adequate impression of his varied genius. At that time very few of these poems had appeared in an English dress; at any rate, no attempt towards a copious version had been made. Goethe was well known in England by the fame of his longer works; in particular, his "Faust" was generally read, and had been frequently trans-

lated ; but, comparatively speaking, few persons were acquainted with his lesser poems, upon the composition of which he bestowed the utmost amount of care and elaboration. His accomplished biographer, Mr Lewes, has said of these, with equal truth and felicity of expression—
“ They are instinct with life and beauty, against which no prejudice can stand. They give musical form to feelings the most various, and to feelings that are true. They are gay, coquettish, playful, tender, passionate, mournful, reflective, and picturesque ; now simple as the ‘tune which beats time to nothing in your head,’ now laden with weighty thought ; at one moment reflecting with ethereal grace the whim and fancy of caprice, at another sobbing forth the sorrows which press a cry from the heart.” Mr Lewes is here alluding rather to the lyrics than the ballads, of which latter some may be ranked as among the most perfect and powerful of modern poetical compositions.

After having proceeded some way with their task, the translators were prevented by other avocations from completing it. It was, however, never lost sight of as a work to be carried through,

should circumstances permit. Under the deep conviction that these masterpieces of literary skill ought to be approached with no reckless hand, the translators have in the interval endeavoured to overcome the difficulties of their self-imposed task, and they have spared no pains to make their transcripts faithful in form as well as spirit to the originals.

They believe that the system of co-operation which they have pursued has been attended with advantage. Each translator has selected the poems to which he thought he could best do justice, and in this way he has worked with a freshness of impulse which otherwise could not have been obtained. In many cases the poems have undergone the careful revision of both the translators, and each has honestly given and accepted the criticism and correction of the other. The initial of each translator attached to the poems indicates those which are either wholly or substantially his separate work. In some instances, however, the translations are, in the strictest sense, joint productions, and to these the joint initials have been appended. The translators may perhaps be allowed to add, that

they have already had some experience of the advantages of literary co-operation; for a volume of humorous poems and *jeux d'esprit* issued by them, several years ago, under the title of "Bon Gaultier's Ballads," has been fortunate enough to obtain a wide circulation.

The translators need hardly say that they have not attempted a version of all, or even of the majority of Goethe's minor poems. The vast number of these would, of itself, have been sufficient to deter them from any such attempt; but, besides this, many of them are really of slight intrinsic value. Every voluminous author has been unequal in his efforts. Goethe, who was the most industrious and indefatigable literary man of the age, was no exception to this rule. His wheat, though of the finest quality, has not been so well winnowed that the chaff has entirely disappeared. Further, some of the minor poems are valuable solely, or nearly so, for the neatness of their workmanship, and the charm of these is not to be transferred to another language. Others are either of exclusively biographical interest, or cast in forms alien to the genius of the English language. The former do not fall within the

scope of a work like the present; the latter would have been so much altered by the process of recasting, as to assume the appearance of original rather than of translated poems. The admirable series of compositions in hexameter and pentameter verse, including "The Roman Elegies," "Alexis and Dora," and others, which in themselves are among the most finished of Goethe's poetical works, the translators do not believe can be rendered, by any amount of labour and skill, into corresponding English measures with any assurance of success. At the same time, it was with no small reluctance that they abandoned the classical measures in the case of the series of poems "In the Manner of the Antique." But believing the idea of these exquisite pieces to be more important than the form, and to be separable from the form without serious detriment, they decided on adopting the metres which in their opinion would best commend them to the taste of English readers. For, after all, it is for them, and not for German scholars, that this volume has been written. Wherever, as in the case of the poems in irregular unrhymed metres, it seemed possible to pre-