

Graduating Thesis.

The Influence of German Literature upon
English Literature, since the time of Chaucer.

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Outline:

Introduction

Condition of English Literature previous to
the effects of German Literature.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

His Principal Work.

His Influence.

Condition of his Time.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

His Works.

His Influence.

Thomas Carlyle.

Condition of his Time.

Works

His Influence.

Bayard Taylor.

His Principal Work.

His Influence.

Effect of German Literature on Wordsworth's Poetry.

Johann Friedrich Schiller.

His Works.

His connection with Goethe.

Reasons for advancement of German Literature.

Conclusion.

The literature of a nation varies with the character of that nation. It shows the effects that have been imparted by different nations, governments and climates. It is one of the best utterances of the minds of the people. The literature of every age is in a great part an imitation of the immediately preceding age; while in other cases the literature of one nation has been acted upon by the literature of another nation. This is what has happened to the English literature; for it has been especially influenced by the German literature.

Heiland, Heider, Goethe and Schiller are German authors who have exerted immense influence upon English writers, and their influence can be easily traced in our literature. Evident, also, that German literature has taken a deep hold upon the interest of the English speaking world, since the time of Coleridge, from the fact that a great many more English people

read German literature now than were wont to read it a few generations ago.

The study of German literature has already taken such firm root among the English and is spreading so rapidly that English writers are constantly referring to it as a guide. German literature is overflowing with good ideas; it is eminently suggestive; in short it contains everything we may expect from good reading matter. Today we give it the foremost place among all literature.

The conditions of the English language before German was introduced were constantly changing. As early as 658 and 680 was struck the first note of an English literature. Passing on through the succeeding centuries, great changes have taken place, but they have effected so gradual that it is difficult to lay down fixed dates of demarkation between the successive stages. But the greatest effect has been produced through the influence of German literature.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was born in England, was the first to show the influence of German literature on England. There can be no doubt that his style in a great measure was borrowed from the German writers. He also received many expressions from German which otherwise probably we should never have had. In 1798 Coleridge left England for Germany where he remained for about two years, receiving a powerful stimulus from the new intellectual and literary life on which that nation had just entered. Immediately after his return from his visit he translated Schiller's "Wallenstein" which was favorably and enthusiastically received. He was the first to introduce to the English readers some of the valuable points in German Philosophy. Before his time only vague traditions of that philosophy had arrived; and mere caricatures of it had been published. He has truthfully been called the "Creator of the higher criticism of England," which has accomplished so

much in the hands of Lessing and Goethe. Coleridge grew up in a time when the British public were just awakening to the fact of the existence of German literature.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe although a German who is said to have created the German language and literature nevertheless had that in his work which the English found when they had translated it, very beautiful expressions. He had such an influence upon English literature that he almost converted many English into German writers. His works have made the English aspire and endeavor to be not fragments of manhood but to be men indeed. His greatest work the "Faust" which is included in two parts is the work of his whole life. It shows a confession of his life. Numerous expressions which are now so natural would never have been at our command had it not been for the German literature. Goethe was not only a citizen of his country but one of his time.

Whatever he thought would interest man he also found interest in it.

Another great work which he gave to the world was "Wilhelm Meister". The book was translated into English; to some it was a stone of stumbling; to others foolishness; and to most an object of wonder. One thing certainly Goethe has done for English literature; he has put into the minds of the people a purer and more earnest purpose in its study. No English writer has ever reached Goethe in the magic of his representation.

Thomas Carlyle another great English writer has given to the English many of the writings of the Germans. While he was yet young he studied German. This study brought him in contact with a literature which seemed to reveal to him "a new heaven and a new earth." He became very enthusiastic over the work of Goethe. There was at this time a demand for German literature and the literary results of Carlyle thus fortunately

211

6

happened to fall in with the popular demand. In 1824 his translation of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister," was published. Previous to this he wrote a Life of Schiller. The contact of Carlyle with Goethe's writings inclined to give him the German effect. In his translation of "Wilhelm Meister" he wished to turn the great English readers to the great writings of Germany. After the translation of a "Life of Schiller" Carlyle became a correspondent of Goethe; and the poet regarded him as the first English man who had found his way to the heart of the German literature. He would oftentimes write to Goethe for his opinions in literary lines.

In 1858 and 1865 Carlyle published two volumes at a time, the six volumes of his History of Frederick the Great, a work in which he allied himself with German Thoughts. He laid before the English people a production which made them more conscious of their unworthiness.

We may now pass to Bayard Taylor, a man whose career began amid humble circumstances, yet ended in splendor. When he was only seven years old he was grieved over the death of Goethe. He inherited two strains of blood, German and English. His literary triumphs were not made in English literature alone, for his inclinations were toward German life and letters. Goethe was his chief literary passion; like him he yearned after the unshackled range of all experience. He was very successful as a traveller. He wrote a history of Germany and essays and brought them before the English people. He studied German and English literature. One of the greatest influences that was wrought by him was his translation of Goethe's "Faust". For seven years he worked upon his translation, completing it in 1870. He undertook to render the poem in its original metres and in this respect succeeded beyond all previous translators.

Her and his works were widely known both in England and Germany, and many of his works have been translated into German. He rendered genuine service to literature by his translation of some of the great works into the English tongue.

It has often been said that the German inspiration operated most directly and produced the most marked effect in the poetry of Wordsworth. It gave to him a wider scope and deeper insight to his perception and mode of judgment of the poetical in all its forms and manifestations. This it has done to all the English within the last sixty years. It has furnished to the English readers some of the most appreciated examples.

Another great man to whom English literature is indebted is Johann Friedrich Schiller who is the author of the most popular drama, "Wilhelm Tell," which has been known in England, one loved by all who

read it. It is a drama of liberty and national union. It showed the combined work and friendship of Goethe and Schiller unparalleled in the annals of literary history and interrupted only by death. Carlyle has said of Schiller "He is a high ministering servant at truth's altar and bore him worthily in the office he held."

The reasons for such an advancement of the German literature is because they study a foreign nation in a spirit which deserves to be oftener imitated. It is their honest endeavor to understand each with its own peculiarities, in its own special manner of existence; not that they may praise it or censure it; or attempt to alter it; but to participate in whatever worth or beauty it has brought into being. For these reasons the Germans have the most and best translations.

It is from the German source that some of the great English writers received their ideas; for surely no

literature has ever produced as great a mass of new ideas, as so valuable as the Germans.

In the field of literature England is yet not able to compete with Germany, although she is constantly receiving knowledge from that source. England is fast building up a literature of her own and she may some day stand on an equal basis with that of Germany.

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