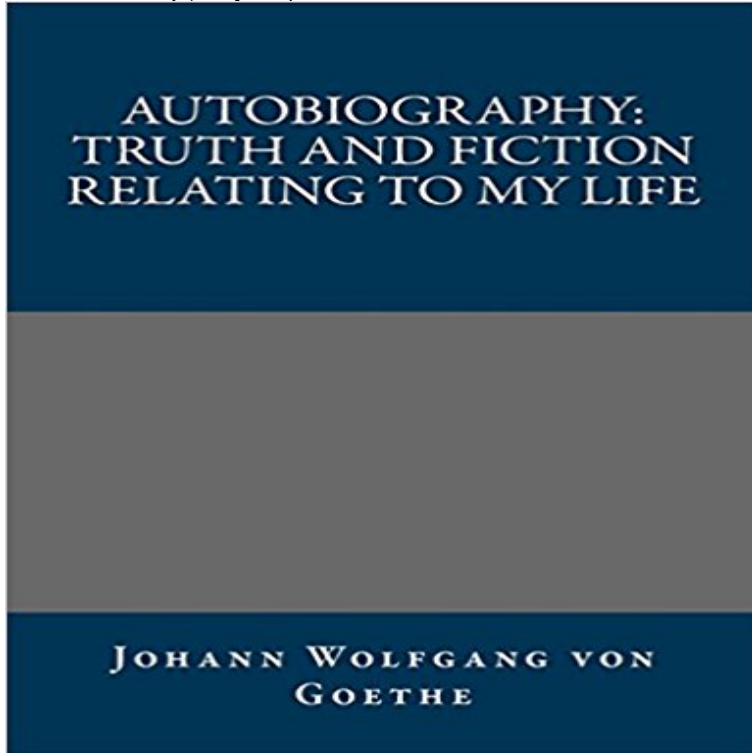


## Autobiography: Truth and Fiction Relating to My Life



It would appear that for inquirers into Foreign Literature, for all men anxious to see and understand the European world as it lies around them, a great problem is presented in this Goethe; a singular, highly significant phenomenon, and now also means more or less complete for ascertaining its significance. A man of wonderful, nay, unexampled reputation and intellectual influence among forty millions of reflective, serious and cultivated men, invites us to study him; and to determine for ourselves, whether and how far such influence has been salutary, such reputation merited. That this call will one day be answered, that Goethe will be seen and judged of in his real character among us, appears certain enough. His name, long familiar everywhere, has now awakened the attention of critics in all European countries to his works: he is studied wherever true study exists: eagerly studied even in France; nay, some considerable knowledge of his nature and spiritual importance seems already to prevail there. [Footnote: Witness /Le Tasse, Drame par Duval,/ and the Criticisms on it. See also the Essays in the /Globe,/ Nos. 55, 64 (1826).] For ourselves, meanwhile, in giving all due weight to so curious an exhibition of opinion, it is doubtless our part, at the same time, to beware that we do not give it too much. This universal sentiment of admiration is wonderful, is interesting enough; but it must not lead us astray. We English stand as yet without the sphere of it; neither will we plunge blindly in, but enter considerately, or, if we see good, keep aloof from it altogether. Fame, we may understand, is no sure test of merit, but only a probability of such; it is an accident, not a property, of a man; like light, it can give little or nothing, but at most may show what is given; often it is but a false glare, dazzling the eyes of the vulgar, lending by casual extrinsic splendour the brightness and manifold

glance of the diamond to pebbles of no value. A man is in all cases simply the man, of the same intrinsic worth and weakness, whether his worth and weakness lie hidden in the depths of his own consciousness, or be betrumpered and beshouted from end to end of the habitable globe. These are plain truths, which no one should lose sight of; though, whether in love or in anger, for praise or for condemnation, most of us are too apt to forget them. But least of all can it become the critic to follow a multitude to do evil even when that evil is excess of admiration; on the contrary, it will behoove him to lift up his voice, how feeble soever, how unheeded soever, against the common delusion; from which, if he can save, or help to save any mortal, his endeavours will have been repaid.

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