

extremes forms of materialism and scepticism with their virulent attacks, their uncontrolled animosity towards traditional beliefs, for which Germany has gained an unfortunate reputation in the course of the nineteenth century, did not then exist in the best literature of the country. It was, so far as it was imported through French literature, distinctly distasteful<sup>1</sup> to the humanistic spirit of such leaders of popular thought in Germany as Lessing, Mendelssohn, Herder, and Goethe.

Thus, looking at European thought as a whole, in so far as it occupied itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century with ethical questions, or with the problem of the Good, we find that the three countries contributed independent aspects: the conception of an existing moral order in this country, the overthrow of all existing order in France, and the spirit of free and unfettered inquiry in Germany. There followed from these different aspects a hasty reconstruction in France disregarding the fundamental questions altogether, an extreme love

<sup>1</sup> On this point also see what Goethe says in the eleventh book of 'Dichtung und Wahrheit,' writing then of his Strassburg days and under the influence of Herder, who had introduced him to Goldsmith, and was then already occupied with his studies in folk-lore and folk-song. Criticising French literature, in particular the flippancy and bad faith of Voltaire, but recognising a cognate spirit in Diderot—of whom he, *inter alia*, says that he was "in all that the French blame in him, a true German"—he turns, with a contemptuous estimate of the 'Système de la Nature' as a "quintessence of senility," away from French literature in the following words: "Thus, living on

the confines of France we at once got free and clear of all French ways. We found their manner of life too precise and too elegant, their poetry frigid, their criticism destructive, their philosophy abstruse and yet insufficient, so that we were on the point of abandoning ourselves, at least tentatively, to crude nature, were it not that another influence had for some time already prepared us for higher and freer views and enjoyments equally true and poetical; secretly at first and moderately, it dominated us ever more distinctly and powerfully. I need hardly say that I mean Shakespeare, and, after having said this, a further explanation is not necessary" (*loc. cit.*, vol. 28, p. 70).