

BOOKS ABROAD. Norman, Oklahoma U.S.A., Summer 1959:

Momme Mommsen, Katharina Mommsen.
Die Entstehung von Goethes Werken in Dokumenten.
2 vols. Berlin. Akademie-Verlag. 1958

The German Academy, which is giving us the magnificent new Goethe edition, is also the publisher of a work of extraordinary value and exceptionally low price. Around the turn of the century, Gräf undertook a similar work, but he limited his tabulations to the poetic works of Goethe and was not even in a position to use the available sources, since they were then still in process of publication. As Mommsen points out, Goethe the entire man and all of his works have now become important, and we want to be informed about their genesis as well.

To indicate the scope of this work, it suffices to say that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* covers 181 pages. It is gratifying to have completeness and to have all of Goethe's own references assembled. German Goethe students of influence were generally university professor who were either too lazy or too busy to use all the sources or too disinterested in Goethe as he was because they wanted to express their own views, and being in authority and independent of criticism they established a poor tradition of biographical scholarship. It is therefore praiseworthy to find that the Berlin Academy produces a work infinitely superior to anything done by most professors during the last generation or two. For in addition to Goethe's own utterances, the writings of others who knew about Goethe's work at the time are cited and extracted. Only the poems are excluded, as Gräf suffices for them even today.

It would have been easy to introduce interpretation, but the Mommsens limit themselves to the work in question and not to its evaluation or discreditation. They have made use of unpublished sources and of letters to Goethe when necessary.

With all the projects going at present, there remain few desiderata for the Goethe scholar. An index of published letters and of letters held or known to be held in autograph collections would make Goethe biography far easier than it now is, and a publication of letters to Goethe would in many cases make Goethe's meaning clearer and his personality more fully understood. To undertake this work or work such as the Mommsens undertook requires objectivity and persistence. But they will have the reward of posterity. Scholars who prepare works that remain useful to later generations far outlive those who merely appeal to their contemporaries. The names of Momme and Katharina Mommsen will thus live on for many years, like the name of DuCange, Liddell, and Scott or Böhlingk. For I do not see how any Goethe scholar will want, or be able, to do without this magnificent work.

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