

GOETHE EXPLODED.

It is enough to sicken the soul and turn one's hair grey to see the frantic efforts of our time, not so much to "investigate" as to "find out." We have no objection to the exegete and the scholiast of the period. He is a worthy and useful member of society. His remarks may not be very brilliant, his mind may be none of the largest, but he plods away over his author, young or old, good or bad, and produces in due time his honestly begotten tome. But what we do abominate is that morbid hankering to startle the world with some revelation or other about the productions of some of the proudest and greatest of its men, to "show up," to "explode" them, to prove that their noblest efforts, the things for which we honour their memories, belong in fact to the genius of some obscure, deluded woman. Poor thing! Our great man not only robbed her of her affections, but of her work, her glory, her wages. And she knows it; and though he be long dead she is silent—like a woman. But justice slumbers not. Mrs. A., in time, makes the acquaintance of a young and aspiring writer, and one day they walk in the garden; the clouds are gathering in the west; if they are Germans they say "Du" to each other (though she may be as old as his great-grandmother); and he quotes poetry, and she listens strangely. And of a sudden he looks at her fixedly, and, seized with a sudden prophetic inspiration, says, "*Thou art the poet: this song, supposed to be (say) Goethe's, it is thine! it is thine!*" And she, blushing, looks as if there were a struggle in her breast; she looks as if she wanted to say something, and at last she does say something. "Yes, I did write this little song, but pray don't tell anybody. I wrote many another thing too which *he* afterwards called his. But *pray* don't tell anybody." Proof she has none. Yes, she has a handkerchief of that larcenous poet's, and certain letters, and an embossed wax picture, and, oh! many more relics. And the young littérateur forthwith sits down and indites a "sensational," or, rather, a "sentimental," and sends it to press. And while he is busy with the proof sheet his friends speak in little paragraphs of the tremendous Goethe discovery that has been made by Herr Hermann Grimm.

We have blurted out the story. Yes, Hermann Grimm, under the modest signature of H. G., has given a Goethe revelation to the world, and he has come by it pretty much in the way above described. It is to be found in full in a recent number of the "Preussische Jahrbücher." Goethe, according to him, has misappropriated a woman's poems in the "Westöstlichen Divan." We confess we would fain have silenced this affair to death—*stillgeschwiegen*, as the Germans have most wisely attempted—if to do so were in our power. What to us is most painful about it is the fact that a writer of Grimm's standing should so far have yielded to an impulse of righteousness, let us call it, as to overlook the absurd position he was preparing for himself. The worst part, however, is this; that, being without the faintest trace of proof for the assertion he brings forward, he actually dares to hint that Goethe must have stolen a great deal more than Hermann Grimm has heard of.

But let us proceed to this tale of "Goethe and Suleika," as H. G.'s paper is entitled. The lady in question is Marianne von Willemer, of whom we have all heard in connection with Goethe. He became acquainted with her in his sixty-fifth year, and from that time till his death they were friends, and kept up a correspondence. She had been educated for the stage in Frankfort, but had only appeared there a few times when Geheimrath von Willemer fell in love with her and married her. From all accounts she was very charming and very intellectual, and Goethe liked her and the salon she had formed. When Grimm made her acquaintance not many years ago she was widowed, old, garrulous, living in the far golden past when she had been pretty—a past she tried to keep alive, chiefly by a certain pocket-handkerchief which Goethe once had given her. Grimm, with sentimental complacency, describes how he found her surrounded by relics of the great man—on one table all his letters to her, loosely heaped up under a glass case, on another a poem gorgeously mounted and framed, and so forth. After enlarging upon his intense admiration for Marianne, and his exceeding great intimacy with her, he proceeds to describe, in a manner too characteristic not to be given in his own words, how during one summer she spent some weeks with him in the country in the neighbourhood of Frankfort.