



**The Auto-Biography of Goethe: Truth and Poetry;
From My Own Life, Translated from the German
By John Oxenford (Classic Reprint)**

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

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As a preface to the present work, which, perhaps, more than another requires one, I adduce the letter of a friend, by which so serious an undertaking was occasioned. We have now, my dear friend, collected the twelve parts of your poetical works, and on reading them through, find much that is known, much that is unknown; while much that had been forgotten is revived by this collection. These twelve volumes, standing before us, in uniform appearance, we cannot refrain from regarding as a whole; and one would like to sketch therefrom some image of the author and his talents. But it cannot be denied, considering the vigour with which he began his literary career, and the length of time which has since elapsed, that a dozen small volumes must appear incommensurate. Nor can one forget that, with respect to the detached pieces, they have mostly been called forth by special occasions, and reflect particular external objects, as well as distinct grades of inward culture; while it is equally clear, that temporary moral and aesthetic maxims and convictions prevail in them. As a whole, however, these productions remain without connexion; nay, it is often difficult to believe that they emanate from one and the same writer. Your friends, in the meantime, have not relinquished the inquiry, and try, as they become more closely acquainted with your mode of life and thought, to guess many a riddle, to solve many a problem; indeed, with the assistance of an old liking, and a connexion of many years standing, they find a charm even in the difficulties which present themselves. Yet a little assistance here and there would not be unacceptable, and you cannot well refuse this to our friendly entreaties.

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