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Hattie Tyng Griswold

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In an old, many-cornered, and gloomy house at Frankfort-on-the-Main, upon the 28th of August, 1749, was born the greatest German of his day, Wolfgang Goethe. The back of the house, from the second story, commanded a very pleasant prospect over an almost immeasurable extent of gardens stretching to the walls of the city, but the house itself was gloomy, being shut in by a high wall. Over these gardens beyond the walls and ramparts of the city, stretched a long plain, where the young Wolfgang, serious and thoughtful, was wont to wander and to learn his lessons. He had the sort of superstitious dread which is usually the inheritance of children with a poetic nature, and suffered greatly in childhood from fear. He was obliged by his father, who was a stern and somewhat opinionated old man, to sleep alone, as a means of overcoming this fear; and if he tried to steal from his own bed to that of his brothers, he was frightened back by his father, who watched for him and chased him in some fantastic disguise. That this did not tend to quiet his nerves may well be imagined, and it was only through time and much suffering that he overcame his childish terrors. His mother was a gay, cheerful woman, much younger than his father, and as she was only eighteen years old when Wolfgang was born, always said that they were young together. She had married with little affection for her elderly husband, and it was in her favorite son that she found all the romance and beauty of her life. She was a woman of strong character, and presents one of the pleasantest pictures in German literature. With a warm, genial nature, full of spirit and enthusiasm, she retained to the last days of her life an ardent interest in all the things which delighted her in youth.

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