THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOETHE'S FAUST.

BY THE EDITOR.

GOETHE described characteristic attitudes of himself in all his heroes. He possessed a streak of Werther's pessimism, of Goetz's romanticism, of Tasso's impatience, of Egmont's gaiety and overconfidence, of Wilhelm Meister's eagerness for self-development, etc., but in Faust the poet revealed the most intimate aspirations of his own being and of the destiny he felt to be his own. Therefore it may truly be said that Goethe's main work is his Faust, which he had begun in his early youth and finished at an advanced age.

Like Prometheus, Faust is of a Titanic cast of mind. He does not bow to God nor does he fear the Evil One. He cares not for his fate in this world nor in the next. He possesses unusual strength of mind. Him the thought of heaven does not allure, nor hell terrify. His inborn desire, even when he seems to surrender it, at bottom remains to

"...detect the inmost force
Which binds the world, and guides its course."

Faust is anxious to dare and to do. He does not shrink from danger, or shipwreck. He will share the fate common to all mankind, will enjoy life's pleasures but also willingly endure its pain. When Faust sees the symbol of the Earth-Spirit he exclaims:

"How otherwise upon me works this sign!
Thou, Spirit of the Earth, art nearer:
Even now my powers are loftier, clearer;
I glow, as drunk with new-made wine:
New strength and heart I feel to do and dare,
The pain of life and all its joys to share,
And though the shock of storms may smite me,
No crash of shipwreck shall have power to fright me!"

This endeavor to be a man with men is expressed again when Faust has concluded his contract with Mephistopheles:
"My bosom, of its thirst for knowledge sated,
Shall not, henceforth, from any pang be wrested,
Whatever then to all mankind be fated
Shall be within mine immost being tested:
The highest, lowest forms I mean to borrow,
And heap upon myself their bliss and sorrow,
And thus my own soul to all else expanded,
With all the others shall at last be stranded!"

Faust is the representative of the spirit of the Reformation, with all that it implies, the dawn of natural science and the re-awakening of the humanities. He studies in Wittenberg, the university of Luther, and his very name identifies him with Faustus the companion of Gensfleisch-Gutenberg, the inventor of the black art of printing. Further he represents the Renaissance, the revival of a study of the classics together with Greek art and its noble ideals, pagan though they were. This is symbolized in the figure of Helen, the type of beauty whom Faust makes visible to the eyes of his audience. Incidentally Faust also shows his sympathy with the ancient Teutonic paganism by participating in the witches' festival that is celebrated in the Walpurgis night on the Brocken. But this is not all. Faust is an inquirer into the secrets of nature. In this he bears a resemblance to Roger Bacon who in a lecture before the students of Paris imitated the rainbow by letting a ray of light pass through a prism, the result being that his audience rose in a general uproar shouting that he practised magic and was in alliance with the Evil One. In compliance with the popular belief of the age, Goethe actually represents Faust as a past master in the art of magic. The Faust of the folk-legend visits foreign countries by magic means, and performs most wonderful feats; so we may say that he incorporates also the spirit of the bold explorers and navigators who in scorn of danger crossed the unknown seas, opened new regions to commerce and brought back to their home the wealth of distant countries.

Faust typifies aspiring mankind and has his predecessors in all those characters of history, literature and legend, who find no satisfaction in their surroundings but dare destiny to yield to them pleasanter, better, nobler conditions with a richer and deeper life. Thus Faust embodies all those features which Goethe endeavored to acquire and which he himself possessed in a high degree.

It is true Faust despairs of the possibility of knowledge and the usefulness of science. He says:

"I've studied now Philosophy
And Jurisprudence, Medicine.—"
And even, alas! Theology,—
From end to end, with labor keen;
And here, poor fool! with all my lore

FAUST IN HIS STUDY.
By A. von Kreling.

I stand, no wiser than before:
I'm Magister—yea, Doctor—hight,
And straight or cross-wise, wrong or right,
These ten years long, with many woes,
I've led my scholars by the nose,—
And see that nothing can be known!
Forsooth, that cuts me to the bone.”

In his conversation with Wagner he exclaims (Scene II):

“O happy he, who still renewes
The hope, from Error's deeps to rise forever!
That which one does not know, one needs to use;
And what one knows, one uses never.”

Faust's despondency recalls an actual fact in the life of Agrippa von Nettesheim, one of his prototypes who, having written a large work *De occulta scientia*, wrote a book at the end of his career, which bore the title *De vanitate scientiarum*.

If science fails, if knowledge is impossible, and if reason can not be relied upon, mankind is left without a guide. Hence Faust's despair is well supplemented by the cynical advice which Mephistopheles gives to the student. These comments are full of satire, criticising the actual conditions of the sciences as practised by mediocre and self-seeking men.

Overcome by his despondency Faust is disgusted with the search for knowledge and simply wishes to be a man among men, expecting thereby to quench the thirst of his soul with the inane vanities of life with which common people are satisfied. In this frame of mind he concludes his pact with Mephistopheles which is important for the comprehension of Goethe's plan, and we should notice the very words of the condition under which Faust accepts the service of Mephistopheles and forfeits his soul in the next world. Since the scene is of such significance we quote its most important passage as follows:

**Mephistopheles.**

"Wilt thou to me entrust
Thy steps through life, I'll guide thee,—
Will willingly walk beside thee,—
Will serve thee at once and forever
With best endeavor,
And, if thou art satisfied,
Will as servant, slave, with thee abide.

**Faust.**

"And what shall be my counter-service therefor?

**Mephistopheles.**

"The time is long: thou need'st not now insist."
"No—no! The Devil is an egotist,
And is not apt, without a why or wherefore,
'For God's sake,' others to assist.
Speak thy conditions plain and clear!
With such a servant danger comes, I fear.

Mephistopheles Knocking.
By A. Liezen-Mayer.

Mephistopheles.
"Here, an unwearied slave, I'll wear thy tether,
And to thine every nod obedient be:
When *There* again we come together,
Then shalt thou do the same for me.

**FAUST.**

"The *There* my scruples naught increases.
When thou hast dashed this world to pieces,
The other, then, its place may fill.
Here, on this earth, my pleasures have their sources;
Yon sun beholds my sorrows in his courses;
And when from these my life itself divorces,
Let happen all that can or will!

---

**SIGNING THE CONTRACT.**

By Franz Simm.

I'll hear no more; 't is vain to ponder
If there we cherish love or hate,
Or, in the spheres we dream of yonder,
A High and Low our souls await.

**MEPHISTOPHELES.**

"In this sense, even, canst thou venture.
Come, bind thyself by prompt indenture,
And thou mine arts with joy shalt see:
What no man ever saw, I'll give to thee."
THE OPEN COURT.

FAUST.
"Canst thou, poor Devil, give me whatsoever?
When was a human soul, in its supreme endeavor,
E'er understood by such as thou?
Yet, hast thou food which never satiates, now,—
The restless, ruddy gold hast thou,
That runs, quicksilver-like, one's fingers through,—
A game whose winnings no man ever knew,—
A maid, that, even from my breast,
Beckons my neighbor with her wanton glances,
And Honor's godlike zest,
The meteor that a moment dances,—
Show me the fruits that, ere they're gathered, rot,
And trees that daily with new leafage clothe them!

MEPHISTOPHELES.
"Such a demand alarms me not:
Such treasures have I, and can show them.
But still the time may reach us, good my friend,
When peace we crave and more luxurious diet.

FAUST.
"When on an idler's bed I stretch myself in quiet,
There let, at once, my record end!
Canst thou with lying flattery rule me,
Until, self-pleased, myself I see,—
Canst thou with rich enjoyment fool me,
Let that day be the last for me!
The bet I offer.

MEPHISTOPHELES.
"Done!

FAUST.
"And heartily!

When thus I hail the Moment flying:
'Ah, still delay—thou art so fair!'
Then bind me in thy bonds undying,
My final ruin then declare!
Then let the death-bell chime the token,
Then art thou from thy service free!
The clock may stop, the hand be broken,
Then Time be finished unto me!"

At the time when the Faust legend took shape anything extraordinary could be done only with the help of the Evil One, and the punishment for such reckless and wicked men was the doom of eternal damnation. According to the original plan of the Faust legend, Faust was indeed lost, for the old folk-lore story is written from the standpoint of orthodox Catholicism. It makes Faust conclude his pact with the Devil without any alternative and when the
time is up, his soul is forfeited and the Devil carries him away to hell.

It is strange, however, that Protestant writers took a greater interest in the story than Catholics, perhaps because they felt that the problem of the man who risked even the salvation of his soul for the sake of expanding his knowledge of and control over the powers of nature touched their own fate.

The first and most extensive treatment of the Faust legend is that of the *Volksbuch* which was dramatized by Marlowe, Shakespeare’s famous contemporary. We here reproduce a rare print published as a title vignette in the first edition of Marlowe’s drama representing Faust conjuring the Devil.

During the period of Storm and Stress almost every German poet treated the legend of Faust, and the best known of these versions is the drama by Klinger, a powerful play, but not without the faults of the vigorous but immature spirits of this time. Lessing wrote a Faust which by an unfortunate accident was lost in the mails. A

*For details of the Faust legend as treated by Marlowe and in the *Volksbuch* see the author’s *History of the Devil*, pp. 422-429.*
synopsis of his plan is contained in his Collected Works. Lenau's Faust is not very remarkable but it is still known and read.

The motive of Faust's relation to Mephistopheles is taken from the old legend of Theophilus who in his ambition to excel all others...
in fame and ecclesiastical dignity makes a contract with the Devil, but repents, does penance and is finally saved by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who compels the Devil to surrender his claim to the soul of Theophilus. The lesson of this legend on the one hand is to warn good Christians to beware of the Devil who is on the *qui vive* to catch the souls even of the saints, and on the other hand to declare the unlimited power of the Church to rescue from distress and to save the pious from the very clutch of Satan.

The Theophilus legend has been a favorite story with pious Christians throughout the Middle Ages, and we have a thirteenth century manuscript illuminated by Monk Conrad of the Scheiern monastery which is now preserved in the Library of Munich. The picture reproduced from this medieval book shows first how Theophilus is prompted by the Devil of vanity to give alms. Repenting the contract he had made, he is shown in the second picture praying to the Virgin Mary. In the third picture he does penance and an angel delivers to him the handwriting of the contract. In the fourth picture he confesses to the bishop and delivers into his hands the document restored to him by the grace of Mary.

But while there is hope for a man like Theophilus who confesses his sin, repents, seeks the assistance of the Church, submits to discipline and does penance, there is no salvation for Faust, the representative of Protestantism. He has cut himself loose from the Church that alone can save, and so he foregoes the advantage of the Church's means of grace. Marlowe and all the many other poets who before Goethe have dramatized the Faust legend adopt the principle of the old folk-lore story in this point that Faust is lost and can not be saved. Even Goethe's original intention had been the same. In the prison scene Faust comes to the rescue of Gretchen but finds her in a dreadful state of insanity. He urges her to leave, but she answers:

"If the grave is there,  
Death lying in wait, then come!  
From here to eternal rest:  
No further step—no, no!"

Faust tries first persuasion and then force; she does not yield but stays. In the meantime day dawns and Mephistopheles calls Faust, "Hither to me!" and he goes leaving Gretchen to her doom. This conclusion of the first part was intended to indicate that while Gretchen's soul is purified Faust remains under the influence of Mephistopheles.

Yet Goethe had made Faust too human, too ideally human, not
MARGARET IN PRISON.
By Franz Simm.
to have that redeeming feature which would make his eternal per-
dition impossible. It is true, he goes astray and is implicated in
crimes. He becomes guilty of the death of Valentine although he
slays him merely in self-defense. He is accessory to the death of
Gretchen, the mother, as well as of her baby. Faust is not a crim-
inal, but his wretched behavior implicates him in guilt; and yet not
otherwise than is indicated in the stanza of the harper in Wilhelm
Meister, the venerable protector of Mignon, who sings:

"Who never eat with tears his bread,
   Who never through night's heavy hours
Sat weeping on his lonely bed,—
   He knows you not, ye heavenly powers!

"Through you the paths of life we gain,
   Ye let poor mortals go astray,
And then abandon them to pain,—
   Since man the penalty must pay."

Protestantism is a protest against the narrowness of the me-
dieval Church. It is a negation of the old, and Faust likewise is
a destructive spirit. He boldly curses everything which beguiles
him with false illusions. He exclaims:

"Cursed be the vine's transcendent nectar,—
   The highest favor Love lets fall!
Cursed, also, Hope!—cursed Faith, the spectre!
   And cursed be Patience most of all!"

Faust destroys his old ideals, but he feels in himself the power
to build them up again, and this is expressed by the chorus of spirits
who sing:

"Woe! woe!
   Thou hast it destroyed,
The beautiful world,
With powerful fist:
In ruin 't is hurled,
   By the blow of a demigod shattered!
The scattered
   Fragments into the Void we carry,
Deploring
   The beauty perished beyond restoring.
Mightier
   For the children of men,
Brightlier
   Build it again,
In thine own bosom build it anew!
Bid the new career
Commence,
With clearer sense,
And the new songs of cheer
Be sung thereto!"

Goethe felt that the bold progressiveness of science and the insatiate aspiration of the spirit of invention to make the powers of nature subservient to the needs of man, could be no sin. The courage of a man who truly says to himself, "Nor hell nor Devil can longer affright me," is evidence of his strength, his manliness, his independence and even the good Lord must cherish respect for him. Therefore in spite of all the errors into which he might fall, Faust can not be lost. To err is human. Says the good Lord in the prologue:

"While man's desires and aspirations stir,
He cannot choose but err."
But error is the inheritance of the human race. Adds the Lord:

“A good man through obscurest aspiration
Has still an instinct of the one true way.”

In this sense Goethe completed his Faust and justified the final salvation of Faust’s soul in the Prologue, the main passage of which also deserves to be quoted in full.

The scene opens with a doxology of the archangels who praise the creation, the sun, the earth, the magnificence of nature and especially the still small voice which most of all reveals the glory of God. As Satan appeared before God to accuse Job, so Mephistopheles comes to the celestial assemblage. The scene reads as follows:

**Mephistopheles.**

“Since Thou, O Lord, deign’st to approach again
And ask us how we do, in manner kindest,
And heretofore to meet myself wert fain,
Among Thy menials, now, my face Thou findest.
Pardon, this troop I cannot follow after
With lofty speech, though by them scorned and spurned:
My pathos certainly would move Thy laughter,
If Thou hadst not all merriment unlearned.
Of suns and worlds I’ve nothing to be quoted;
How men torment themselves, is all I’ve noted.
The little god o’ the world sticks to the same old way,
And is as whimsical as on Creation’s day.
Life somewhat better might content him,
But for the gleam of heavenly light which Thou hast lent him:
He calls it Reason—thence his power’s increased,
To be far beastlier than any beast.
Saving Thy Gracious Presence, he to me
A long-legged grasshopper appears to be,
That springing flies, and flying springs,
And in the grass the same old ditty sings.
Would he still lay among the grass he grows in!
Each bit of dung he seeks, to stick his nose in.

**The Lord.**

“Hast thou, then, nothing more to mention?
Com’st ever, thus, with ill intention?
Find’st nothing right on earth, eternally?”

**Mephistopheles.**

“No, Lord! I find things, there, still bad as they can be.
Man’s misery even to pity moves my nature;
I’ve scarce the heart to plague the wretched creature.

**The Lord.**

“Know’st Faust?”
THE OPEN COURT.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

"The Doctor Faust?"

THE LORD. "My servant, he!

MEPHISTOPHELES.

"Forsooth! He serves you after strange devices: No earthly meat or drink the fool suffices: His spirit's ferment far aspireth: Half conscious of his frenzied, crazed unrest, The fairest stars from Heaven he requireth, From Earth the highest raptures and the best, And all the Near and Far that he desireth Fails to subdue the tumult of his breast.

THE LORD.

"Though still confused his service unto Me, I soon shall lead him to a clearer morning. Sees not the gardener, even while buds his tree, Both flower and fruit the future years adorning?"

MEPHISTOPHELES.

"What will you bet? There's still a chance to gain him, If unto me full leave you give, Gently upon my road to train him!"

THE LORD.

"As long as he on earth shall live, So long I make no prohibition. While Man's desires and aspirations stir, He cannot choose but err.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

"My thanks!* I find the dead no acquisition, And never cared to have them in my keeping. I much prefer the cheeks where ruddy blood is leaping, And when a corpse approaches, close my house: In life is sport. Thus treats the cat a mouse.

THE LORD.

"Enough! What thou hast asked is granted. Turn off this spirit from his fountain-head; To trap him, let thy snares be planted, Let him, with thee, be downward led; Then stand abashed, when thou art forced to say: A good man, through obscurest aspiration, Has still an instinct of the one true way."

But Mephistopheles has underrated the difficulty of his task. Faust concludes his pact without fear, because he is fully conscious

*Mephistopheles thanks for the permission of testing Faust while he still lives.
of the Devil's inability to fulfil his promise. As has been quoted above, Faust says:

"Canst thou, poor Devil, give me whatsoever? When was a human soul in its sublime endeavor, E'er understood by such as thou?"

Faust promises to surrender himself body and soul when he would ever be satisfied with mere enjoyment, with empty pleasures, with vanity, with lazy indolence. We here repeat the passage for it is important. Faust says:

"When on an idler's bed I stretch myself in quiet, There let, at once, my record end! Canst thou with lying flattery rule me, Until, self-pleased, myself I see,— Canst thou with rich enjoyment fool me, Let that day be the last for me! The bet I offer."

Mephistopheles imagines that Faust will finally succumb to man's inborn vanity, egotism, and hankering after pleasure. When Faust in his temporary despair of the efficacy of science as well as of finding satisfaction in great deeds, has concluded his pact, Mephistopheles feels sure of a final triumph. He expresses his wrong estimation of Faust in these words:

"Reason and Knowledge only thou despise, The highest strength in man that lies! Let but the Lying Spirit bind thee With magic works and shows that blind thee, And I shall have thee fast and sure!— Fate such a bold, untrammeled spirit gave him, As forwards, onwards, ever must endure; Whose over-hasty impulse drave him Past earthly joys he might secure. Dragged through the wildest life, will I enslave him, Through flat and stale indifference; With struggling, chilling, checking, so deprave him That, to his hot, insatiate sense, The dream of drink shall mock, but never lave him: Refreshment shall his lips in vain implore— Had he not made himself the Devil's, naught could save him, Still were he lost forevermore!"

Faust, however, is proof against the allurements which the Devil offers. It is characteristic of him that in Auerbach's cellar among the drunken students he takes no part whatever in their jokes or the buffoonerries of Mephistopheles. Apparently he is bored,
for the only utterance he makes in this scene, besides a word of greeting when he enters, is the sentence addressed to Mephistopheles.

"I now desire to leave this place."

Mephistopheles expected to amuse Faust. He says:

"Before all else, I bring thee hither
Where boon companions meet together,
To let thee see how smooth life runs away.
Here, for the folk, each day's a holiday:
With little wit, and ease to suit them,
They whirl in narrow, circling trails,
Like kittens playing with their tails;
And if no headache persecute them,
So long the host may credit give,
They merrily and careless live."

But Mephistopheles has misjudged Faust's taste. When the students become aggressive in their intoxication, Mephistopheles bewilders them by hallucinations and then leaves the wineshop with his companion. The drunkards recover from their confusion and one of them swears:

"I saw him with these eyes upon a wine cask riding
Out of the cellar door just now."

Mephistopheles continues to misjudge the wants of Faust. In the second part he addresses him with the question:

"So thou wilt glory earn?"
but Faust answers:

"The deed is everything, the glory naught."

And what Faust thinks of pleasure appears from his estimate of the young emperor who thinks only of enjoyment when he should attend to the duties of government.

Says Mephistopheles:

"Thou knowest him. The while we twain, beside him,
With wealth illusive bounteously supplied him,
Then all the world was to be had for pay;
For as a youth he held imperial sway,
And he was pleased to try it, whether,
Both interests would not smoothly pair.
Since 't were desirable and fair
To govern and enjoy, together."

Faust answers:

"A mighty error! He who would command
Must in commanding find his highest blessing:
Then, let his breast with force of will expand,
But what he wills, be past another's guessing!
What to his faithful he hath whispered, that
Is turned to act, and men amaze thereat:
Thus will he ever be the highest-placed
And worthiest!—Enjoyment makes debased."

There is a radical difference between Faust's conception of the world and that of Mephistopheles. To Faust ideas, ideals, thoughts,
aspirations, and the endeavor to accomplish something, are all important and the material realities are merely means to an end. Mephistopheles regards only the concrete material things as realities and has a contempt for Faust's spiritual treasures as if they were mere phantoms and bubbles of a feverish imagination. Thus when Faust searches for Helen, the Greek ideal of beauty, Mephis-

WAGNER PREPARING HIS HOMUNCULUS.
By Franz Simm.

tophcles hands him a key and instructs him how with its help he can find his way to the realm of the mysterious mothers—the prototypes of all existent forms.

Mephistopheles sends Faust into the void. The place of eternal ideas is to him nothing. It has no bodily reality, it is nothing tangible, not concrete material. It is a region for which Mephis-
Topheles expresses a very strong dislike. But Faust feels at home and at once understands the situation. He says:

“In this thy Naught I hope to find the All.”

What is real to Mephistopheles is merely a transient symbol to Faust, and what is Faust’s All, is Naught to Mephistopheles, an empty void, something non-existent.

Here in a mystical allegory Goethe symbolizes the existence of an ideal realm which to the materialist is a mere phantom, but the poet does not fail to criticize also the fantastic aberrations of science which are commonly pursued with noisy pretensions by immature naturalists and pseudo-scientists. Faust does not attempt the artificial procreation of a human organism. It is Wagner, his former famulus, and now his successor at the university who is bent on producing an homunculus. Mephistopheles surprises him in his laboratory and Wagner with hushed voice urges him not to disturb the work.

In contrast to the extravagances of natural science, Goethe pillories the faults of the philosophy of his age in the baccalaureus, a young scholar who in the exuberance of his youth thinks that in him the climax of the world’s evolution is reached; with his appearance on earth the day dawns, before him there was chaos and night. He says to Mephistopheles:

“This is Youth’s noblest calling and most fit!
The world was not, ere I created it;
The sun I drew from out the orient sea;
The moon began her changeful course with me;
The Day put on his shining robes, to greet me;
The Earth grew green, and burst in flower to meet me,
And when I beckoned, from the primal night
The stars unveiled their splendors to my sight.
Who, save myself, to you deliverance brought
From commonplaces of restricted thought?
I, proud and free, even as dictates my mind,
Follow with joy the inward light I find,
And speed along, in mine own ecstasy,
Darkness behind, and Glory leading me!"

Mephistopheles is dumbfounded at the conceit of this immature youth; but the Devil has seen other generations which had behaved no better, and says to himself:

"Yet even from him we're not in special peril;
He will, ere long, to other thoughts incline:
The must may foam absurdly in the barrel,
Nathless it turns at last to wine."

Faust is absolutely fearless and beyond the temptations of vanity and self-indulgence; he lives in his ideals only and finds delight in work. His highest ambition is to create new opportunities for his fellow men. He recovers a kingdom from the sea, not to rule there as a sovereign, but to be a leader who would teach a free people to work out their own salvation, and a man of this stamp can not be lost. As the Dutch have wrested great districts of new land from the ocean by damming the floods with dykes, so Faust succeeds in retrieving a large tract of swamps by drainage. This is true happiness which he procures for himself and others, yet even this happiness is no indulgence; it is a constant struggle and must be bought by unceasing exertion. Faust himself grows old and the constant worry for the success of his plans deprives him of his sight. Care, in the shape of a haggard witch appears in his home; she breathes upon his eyes and an eternal night sinks upon him. Still more urgently does he follow his spiritual vision and pushes the work so as to have it done. But while he imagines that the laborers are throwing up dykes and laying the drains, the Lemures, the ugly spirits of decay, are digging his grave. Faust feels elated at the thought of his plan's completion; he says:

"To many millions let me furnish soil,
Though not secure, yet free to active toil;
Green, fertile fields, where men and herds go forth
At once, with comfort, on the newest Earth,
And swiftly settled on the hill's firm base,
Created by the bold, industrious race.
A land like Paradise here, round about:
Up to the brink the tide may roar without,
And though it gnaw, to burst with force the limit,
By common impulse all unite to hem it.
Yes! to this thought I hold with firm persistence;
The last result of wisdom stamps it true:
He only earns his freedom and existence,
Who daily conquers them anew.
Thus here, by dangers girt, shall glide away
Of childhood, manhood, age, the vigorous day:
And such a throug I fain would see,—
Stand on free soil among a people free!
Then dared I hail the Moment fleeing:
'Ah, still delay—thou art so fair!'”
The traces cannot, of mine earthly being,
In æons perish,—they are there!—
In proud fore-feeling of such lofty bliss,
I now enjoy the highest Moment.—this!”

Now for the first time Faust feels true enjoyment and would
hold on to that moment of satisfaction. But this is not a joy which
the Devil can give: it is the purest joy of ideal aspiration and indeed
to Mephistopheles it appears poor and empty. This joy is not of
the earth; it is no indulgence in what Mephistopheles calls the
realities of life; it is purely ideal, not material, and ideals to the
worldly minded are mere phantoms, “shifting shapes.”

Mephistopheles adds this comment:

“No joy could sate him, and suffice no bliss!
To catch but shifting shapes was his endeavor:
The latest, poorest, emptiest Moment—this,—
He wished to hold it fast forever.”

Now follows the scene in which Mephistopheles loses his prize,
and here it seems to me Goethe has failed to bring out the meaning
of Faust's salvation. Instead of rescuing Faust by the intrinsic
worth of his character and the nobility of his endeavor, Goethe
makes Mephistopheles lose his forfeit by mere negligence on account
of a sudden sentiment of lust that is aroused in him by the sight of
angels.

The Lemures are at work to dig the grave and Mephistopheles
calls all the devils of hell to his aid. He exclaims with some frantic
whirling gestures of conjuration:

“Come on! Strike up the double quick, anew,
With straight or crooked horns, ye gentlemen infernal,
Of the old Devil-grit and kernel,
And bring at once the Jaws of Hell with you!"

At the same time angels appear scattering roses before which the devils retire. Mephistopheles only remains, but the sight of the angelic figures turns his head and he falls in love with them. He says:

"The sight of them once made my hatred worse.
Hath then an alien force transpierced my nature?
What now restrains me, that I dare not curse?—
And if I take their cozening bait so,
Who else, henceforth, the veriest fool will be?
The stunning fellows, whom I hate so,
How very charming they appear to me!—
Tell me, sweet children, ere I miss you,
Are ye not of the race of Lucifer!
You are so fair, forsooth, I'd like to kiss you;
It seems to me as if ye welcome were.
I feel as comfortable and as trustful,
As though a thousand times ere this we'd met!
So surreptitiously catlike—lustful:
With every glance ye're fairer, fairer yet.
O, nearer come.—O, grant me one sweet look!

ANGELS.
"We come! Why shrink? Canst not our presence brook?
Now we approach: so, if thou canst, remain!"

{The Angels, coming forward, occupy the whole space.)

Mephistopheles
(who is crowded into the proscenium).
"Us, Spirits damned, you brand with censure,
Yet you are wizards by indenture;
For man and woman, luring, you enchain."

Thus Mephistopheles is defrauded and he has only himself to blame. It is no merit of Faust's that saves Faust's soul. The scene concludes thus:

(The angles rise, bearing away the Immortal* of Faust.)

Mephistopheles (looking around him).
"But why they suddenly away are hieing?
These pretty children take me by surprise!
They with their booty heavenwards are flying;
Thence from this grave they take with them their prize.
My rare, great treasure they have speculated:
The lofty soul, to me hypothecated,
They 've rapt away from me in cunning wise.

* The original manuscript reads here "Faust's entelechy," which to Goethe meant the same as "Faust's Immortal."
But unto whom shall I appeal for justice? Who would secure to me my well-earned right? Tricked so in one's old days, a great disgust is; And I deserve it, this infernal spite. I've managed in a most disgraceful fashion; A great investment has been thrown away: By lowest lust seduced, and senseless passion, The old, case-hardened Devil went astray. And if, from all this childish-silly stuff His shrewd experience could not wrest him, So is, forsooth, the folly quite enough, Which, in conclusion, liath possessed him."

This conclusion may be criticised for two reasons. First, according to Goethe's own plan, Faust must be saved not through a fault of Mephistopheles, but through his own merit; and secondly, the fault which Goethe here imputes to Mephistopheles is not in keeping with his character. Mephistopheles is not the Devil of lust. He is the malevolent intriguier and, with all his devilish features, would never be silly enough to be so easily duped. So we say that the passage under consideration is out of harmony with the whole. The Devil should have what is the Devil's and God what belongs to God.

We would propose to change the scene thus: As soon as Faust is dead Mephistopheles summons his army (as Goethe has it) to make good his claims; the devils claw the body of Faust without any interference on the part of angels, and while the devils try to snatch it away, the remains fall to pieces. We see the body crumble to dust, the skull and the bones fall down and the vestments turn to rags. The Lemures would sweep the remains into the grave and now would be the time for Mephistopheles to philosophize on the vanity of life. This then is the fruit of all his labors, and here he holds his prize to the attainment of which he has devoted so many years. What is Faust now? A heap of bones and ashes, and his life is past as if it never had been. The Lemures shout in chorus: "It is past." So also thinks Mephistopheles, and Goethe rightly puts these words into his mouth:

"—Past! a stupid word.
If past, then why?
Past and pure Naught, complete monotony!
What good for us, this endlessly creating?—
What is created then annihilating?
'And now it's past!' Why read a page so twisted?
'T is just the same as if it ne'er existed,
Yet goes in circles round as if it had, however:
I 'd rather choose, instead, the Void forever."
While Mephistopheles in his realism clings to the bodily remains of Faust the angels appear and in the place where his body had fallen to pieces there rises the transfigured effigy of Faust, the Faust idea, that spiritual self of him which survives death. It is his life’s work and the blessings which he leaves to posterity, symbolized by his personality. Mephistopheles has taken the mortal remains, they are his share which shall not be taken from him; he overlooks the immortal part of Faust’s being, for he is spiritually blind and does not value it. Thus Mephistopheles has only helped to free the immortal soul from the dross of all its mortal ingredients, and now the angels hail the transfigured Faust and lift him up to his home, whither the ideal of womanhood, das ewig Weibliche, has ever since been leading him, there to be united with all that is beautiful, good, and true,—with God.

This is the meaning of the Chorus Mysticus:*

"Things unremainable
But as symbols are meant:
The unattainable
Here grows to event:
Ineffable though be the good,
Here it is done:
Eternal womanhood
Leads upward and on!"

That eternal home which to Mephistopheles is a nonentity is after all the only true existence worthy of the name; all so-called realities are merely transient symbols of the eternal in which everything finds its final fulfilment and completion, and to find this goal is salvation.

*While in all other quotations we have used Bayard Taylor’s version with very slight deviations, we prefer here to replace his lines by our own Cf. The Open Court, “Goethe's View of Immortality,” June, 1906.