

THE TEST OF LOVE.

(Translated from Victor Hugo.)

Be what you may—young, old, or rich, or wise—
If you have never watched with eager eyes
An airy footfall on a summer's eve,
Or a white veil, perchance, that glimmers by,
And, like a meteor in a sombre sky,
Seems a bright furrow in your heart to leave;

If it be only from the amorous lay
Of some fond bard, who sigs his soul away,
You know the summit of all human bliss,
To feel one heart is yours, and yours alone,
And, for your sun and moon and stars, to own
Two loving eyes that close beneath your kiss;

If you have never waited, sunk in gloom,
Beneath the windows of a festal room,
When the gay guests were streaming from the ball,
To see your idol, brilliant as a star,
Blue-eyed and golden-haired, the fairest far,
Pass, decked with roses, from the lamp-lit hall;

If you have never felt a wild distress
When hands, n. t yours, your darling's fingers press,
And her heart throbs upon another's breast;
If you have never watched with jealous gaze
The wanton licence of the dance's maze,
And loathed to see her flattered and caressed;

Entranced with ecstasy before unknown
If you have never strayed—but not alone—
O'er silent hills, beneath the lime-trees' shade,
While countless stars were glowing in the sky,
And, save the birds, no living thing was nigh
To hear the vows you murmured to a maid;

If some soft hand your hand has never thrilled,
If the three words, "I love you," have not filled
Your heart with floods of rapture for a day;
If you have never compassionated king
Who deem the crowns and sceptres precious things,
While you have love that cannot pass away;

If you have never when daylight's hours are fled,
And dreams are floating round your dear one's head,
Wept like a child from feeling's fond excess,
And called so often on her cherished name,
That you would scarcely marvel if she came,
Like some kind angel, your despair to bless;

If you have never known a woman's glance
Stir your dull spirit from its soulless trance,
Till earth seemed changed to Paradise above;
If you have never felt 'twere sweet to die
For the fair child who mocks each pleading sigh,
You have not drunk the bitter wine of love!

Montreal.

GEO. MURRAY.

A POOR DEVIL.

I.

"No, I never played Romeo; Mercutio was my part. I was always at my best where a certain humour or mockery was required—a something sardonic, a knowledge of the world. I played the lover, too, in my day, and with some success—on the stage, on the stage, of course—ha, ha! not without success." Here the old gentleman pushed out his chest and inhaled the fragrance of his glass. Tom Bolivar winked as if he would call the attention of the company to the consummate art with which he had drawn out the old gentleman. To me it seemed that this task was as easy as to draw the cork of a soda-water bottle in the sun; and furthermore, that if any power had drawn the old gentleman out, it was whisky. He certainly paid more attention to the whisky than to the rest of the company. He was very sociable, and liked to have friends about him; but he always seemed to me to take us collectively, and barely to recognize individuals. I suspect that he was very shy in his youth. Even at this time he was very silent until the labours of the day were done and he had had a glass or two. When he did begin to speak, he was apt to speak a good deal; but he seemed to address himself to his tumbler, and we might listen if we chose. I always chose. I was a young man still, and a shy man—probably the shyest man in that festive club. Therefore I was glad when the old gentleman began to talk, for I could listen as well as anybody—probably better than any other member, for most of us were wits. Sometimes I fancied that the old gentleman looked at me out of the corner of his eye, that he came nearer to talking to me than to the others. I was almost sure that we understood each other a little—that there was an uneasy fluttering sympathy between us. I used to suspect that some day, or rather some night, he would ask me to lend him money. Luckily I had not got any. I had often given him cigars. He offered me a pinch of snuff once rather shakily. I did not take it, because I don't like snuff. He was not offended; indeed I am not sure that he meant to offer it to me; perhaps he was only pushing the box about; he had a trick of pushing things about on the table. If he was naturally shy he must have suffered much, for he was an actor all his life, and had been thrown with all sorts of people. He had had some good engagements, but, if Tom Bolivar were right, they were not due to his own merits. Tom always declared that he never could act. The old gentleman thought that he not only had been, but was still, an uncommonly good actor. I am no judge of acting.

"No," continued the old gentleman after a pause, "oddly enough I never did play Romeo and I dressey that I never shall." Here Tom laughed; and the old gentleman flushed a little as he said, "I have a good leg still."

"There's no deficiency at that end," remarked Tom to his neighbour, in that hoarse tone which he always means for a whisper. It was held in the club that the old gentleman was deaf; I hoped that he was. He was silent for a while; but when the waiter unbidden had brought a fresh tumbler, the stream began to flow again.

"Did you ever see my poor dear wife's

Juliet?" He appeared to ask the question of the whisky, and he certainly expected no answer, for he continued without a pause: "She was the best Juliet I ever saw;" "there was a romance, a something poetical if I may say so. One does not see such acting nowadays." Tom winked at us furiously, as if we did not all know as well as he that, when the old gentleman began to talk about his late wife, he was likely to talk about her at some length. I sometimes think that Tom was meant for a showman. Tom had often pointed out to us that it was strange in the old gentleman to be so fond of this subject of conversation, because the deceased lady had been very eccentric in her conduct, and more monotonous on the stage than off it. Now, when the old gentleman paused in his praises of this lady, Tom with a very sly look asked if he never played Romeo to her Juliet.

"Never," said the old gentleman, and after that he became silent. He went away early; and then somebody raised the question whether Tom had not hurt his feelings. Tom was vastly indignant, and maintained that it was impossible that the old gentleman could have understood his innuendo. Tom regards himself as a master of delicate innuendo, and thinks that there are few people of intellect fine enough to understand his allusions. On this occasion he got rather warm, and hinted that we were unworthy of subtle humour. He spoke most disrespectfully of the old gentleman, and declared that no hint was plain enough for his comprehension. "Hurt his feelings!" cried Tom, scornfully. "You might talk of him under his nose for an hour, and he would not find out that you were not talking of Herr von Bismarck. He went about singing his wife's praises like a bird with one note; and all the time everybody knew"—and Tom finished his sentence with a toss of the head and a contemptuous shrug of his big shoulders. "And since his wife died, is the tedious old man any better? Doesn't he come here night after night and tell us of the points she made as Juliet or Beatrice, or Julia in the 'Hunchback'? And if we are spared the mother for one night, we have a double dose of her daughter. The old dotard bleats over that girl, as if—" Tom did not finish the sentence save with a contemptuous cloud of smoke; and I thought I might ask a question.

"He did teach her to act, didn't he?" I said.

"He never learned to act himself," said Tom, and he laughed as if he had launched an epigram. We all laughed; we were very kind to each other's jokes.

"Perhaps you admire the old gent's acting," Tom said to me. "If so, now's your chance; he plays Mephistopheles next week. He fancies himself in the part. He has done it a great many times in the provinces. You had better go and see him. I daresay there will be room in the theatre."

We all laughed again, but I did not laugh well, for I did not like having the talk directed at me.

"You know that he is at his best where a certain humour or mockery is required, a something weird and sardonic." We all laughed at the imitation of the old gentleman's voice and manner. We always laughed at Tom's imitations, which were wonderfully clever; and yet I never could see the resemblance of the old gentleman to Tom's imitation of him.

"And the girl does Margaret," said Tom, when we had done laughing; "there will be lots of people to go and see her—always lots of shirt-fronts where she plays. We all know her great talents—a plump figure and an eye. She has the deuce of an eye." He looked very knowing, and so did most of us.

"I don't wish you to suppose for a moment," began Tom again, "that I would say anything against the old gent. Nobody is fonder of the old gent than I am; and, by George! his trust in women would be beautiful if it weren't so idiotic."

Then we all declared, or muttered, or asserted by a nod, that we were fond of the old gentleman.

II.

I have said that I was a young man ten years ago, when that festive club was in full swing, and the old gentleman came there every night after the theatre. I went very often to the play at that time; but I doubt if I should have gone to a revival of an old stage version of Goethe's "Faust," had I not been curious to see the old gentleman as Mephistopheles. I was young then, and was pleased by the knowledge that the actor playing before me was my personal friend. I felt that I enjoyed a certain superiority over the other young men, who did not know Mephistopheles at home. However, on the night on which I went to see the old gentleman act, there was at least one young man over whom I could claim no superiority. Unluckily he sat in the next stall, and made me feel uncomfortable. And yet there was nothing remarkable about him, except a self-possession almost insulting to sensitive people. Everything about him was exactly right. He made me feel as if my hair was rough and my dress-boots shapeless. Mephistopheles did not look powerful physically. When he stood still, he generally crossed his right foot over his left, placed his left hand on his hip, and turned his head over his right shoulder. There was something tremulous about the old gentleman in this attitude, which diminished the impression of supernatural power in repose. Something tremulous also about the

lips interfered with the clear-cut sardonic smile which they were meant to wear. Yet the old actor spoke firmly enough, and with good discretion; and the scene of his first meeting with Faust was well received. I fancied that he gave me a kindly glance out of the corner of his diabolical eye. Encouraged by this, and perhaps desiring to assert myself against my well-groomed neighbour in the stalls, I left my seat at the end of the first act, and went behind the scenes that I might pay my respects to Mephistopheles. His profession seemed to give him courage. Dressed in red and under his tall stiff plume he looked about him more freely. He shook me by the hand, and thanked me for my presence with a flourish of the arm, and a somewhat old-fashioned courtesy.

"I think you do not know my daughter," he said, with a slighter flourish of the other arm towards a young lady who stood a few yards off. I bowed simply; she nodded, glanced at me for a moment, and then turned her eyes away again as if she were looking for something or somebody. Her glance was peculiar; she did not favour me with a second; so, while her father talked to me of the part and the points, I was able to look at his daughter. Her body was beautifully proportioned, but the curves were a little too full, or seemed so to me. Her hair was plentiful and fair, but I fancied that even in the sunlight it would have but little warmth or brilliancy. The most striking features were the eyes, which were large, but very deeply set under dark brows and lashes. As I studied those eyes, and paid but slight attention to the critical remarks of the old gentleman, I became by degrees aware that the eyes from out of their strange shadow were looking at me. They were sulky, provoking, and amused. When I was sure that they were fixed upon me, and that my face betrayed my discovery, I expected that they would be turned aside. They continued to regard me with their half-sullen, half-humorous look, until I turned away rather sharply and interrupted the flow of the old gentleman's discourse. He stopped short, supposing that I had some luminous remark to make. I stammered out an apology, and was turning again to seek the front of the house, when I found myself face to face with my neighbour of the stalls. Though I had almost trodden on his shining boot, he regarded me with a face carefully divested of expression. Then he looked beyond me, and I saw that the girl greeted him with a curt nod.

"How d'ye do, my lord?" said the old gentleman, with his most nervous manner. He seemed to have lost his short-lived self-possession. "I hope you like the performance?" he added.

"Uncommon," said the young man briefly, but with more civility than I expected. "How are you?" he asked, as he stepped forward to the side of the girl.

She said nothing, but made a mocking face and rapped the hand which he was holding out to her, with her fan.

There was something strange in her laugh, something which made me glance at her father. He was fidgety. There was a flush under his eyes, a flush too rosy for Mephistopheles, and the actor pulled a powder-puff from his wallet.

"We are going to begin, my lord," he said quickly.

"Then I must clear out," said the other, and I followed him back to the stalls.

It seemed to me that a change came over the old gentleman's acting. He was at once more natural and less self-possessed. I thought that he was determined to lose himself in his part—to be for a short time the very devil. There was more life in the creature; and yet I felt the effort—the purposeful abandonment of himself. Anybody could see that he was more vigorous, that his favourite Mephistophelian attitude was less shaky; the pit became more attentive, the gallery more excited; there was some applause. At the sound of approval Mephistopheles pricked his ear like a war-horse. He was warmed by that unusual fire; he felt that he was acting with unwonted force. As he opened the jewel-case, and temptation's paste flashed brilliant in the stage gaslight, his mocking laughter rang with startling effect. Even my neighbour in the stalls gave a slight movement. What chance had the paper roses of a cotton-velvet Siebel against that magnificent display?

"Perchance," said Faustus, "she will choose the flowers?"

"Not if she be Eve's daughter," cried the old gentleman with almost hysterical passion.

There was a round of applause, and much laughter of jocular husbands and fathers in the gallery; but it struck me that the devil showed too much emotion. His mockery was surely too fierce. However, it is certain that the old gentleman had never before appeared so strong. He swept Faust into concealment behind a tree with an appearance of power, and he peered forth with terrible malignity to study the working of curiosity. Who could have brought those jewels? When Margaret entering had found the casket, she raised her eyes. I thought that she was looking at me. The shadows under the dark brows were turned in my direction; I felt rather than saw the half-closed eyes in the shadows. In a moment I knew that I was mistaken—that I had been thrilled in vain; and I laughed at my vanity. She was looking at my neighbour with a look both defiant and bored, which was quite out of keeping with the character which she played. When that sensible woman Martha found the girl with diamonds in her ears, and discerned the situation in an instant, Margaret betrayed but little astonishment.

"'Tis a present from a lover—perhaps from a rich lord who has fallen in love with you," cried the fat little housewife. "A lover! O heavens!" said the girl, and made a motion, which lacked impulse, as if she would take the jewels from her ears. Indeed this was a phlegmatic Gretchen. I turned my eyes from her to her father, who was sneaking from the stage. The old gentleman had some elaborate stage business here, which occupied much time. He moved from covert to covert, and paused in divers attitudes that he might watch the working of the charm. Now he seemed to be doing the business mechanically. His unusual force had deserted him. His elaborate progress was in slightly wavy lines. His expression was peculiar. Never before on the face of fiend was a look so pathetically human. I passed my hand over my eyes that I might trust my own impression. It was the face of a wan old ghost drawn backward by invisible forces into the shades—a ghost with dim longing eyes fixed on his dearest, who abode in the upper gaslight already forgetful of him. It seemed impossible that the whole house should not discover this unparalleled phenomenon—this impossible devil. I glanced at my next neighbour in the stalls: he was holding his opera-hat against his lips; it was harder than ever to read his expression. I was uncomfortable, as if I were at a double performance—as if two familiar dramas were interwoven in a night-mare. "Sure, 'tis the prince of Trebizond, who is travelling incognito," cried judicious Martha, and Margaret bit her under lip and frowned. She cared not a jot for the character nor the audience. At the end of the second act my neighbour again left his seat, but I did not follow him. I was at once listless and restless.

In the last act the old gentleman played splendidly. I could still detect in him unusual excitement; but I fancied that he was aware of his excitement, and was using it for artistic ends. It filled the lines of his conception with bounding life; instead of a meagre sketch here was a glowing picture; instead of a tremulous but careful player a vivid mocking devil. Within the vast cathedral, where Margaret tries to pray, stands the fiend in shadow, more and less than human, angelic and batlike. The old gentleman was positively appalling. "Close in upon her, spirits of darkness; take your own." Then the demons are heard lowly chanting through the heavenly music, and Margaret falls senseless. This swoon was admirably managed by the girl, who for the rest had played the part poorly enough. The remainder of the great story was disposed of with amazing speed. The butchery of Valentine, the madness of Margaret, rushed by to the throb of violins; and there was the old gentleman in the supreme moment. Baffled, he glared at his lost prey, but could still mock all things and himself. "'Tis enough to make the very devil swear to be robbed of such a dainty." There was such scorn and spite in his words that I turned cold and shuddered. Even the audience were moved; and as the curtain fell there was loud and general applause. The old gentleman stepped out snirking and jaunty, and turned up his weary eyes with the conventional respect for the gallery.

III.

For a long time I saw nothing of the old gentleman. His name vanished from the advertisements of the theatre, where "Faust" had been only a stop-gap. The winter season passed away, and spring was passing—the season in which the fancy of the young man turns so easily love-sick. But to what love? In those days I had little to do, save to observe the tricks and oddities of my neighbours. I was an amateur of unconsidered gestures, a delicate discriminator of the tendencies and twists of noses. I was quick in the recognition of people even in a crowd. For such a student, there is no field so delightful as the Park. To the Park at noon in early summer flock lazily the fashionable, the beautiful, the eccentric. Suddenly, after a month of east wind the folk of London awoke with amazement to the fact that the chimney-cowls had been turned completely round. They rubbed their dull eyes, but could not rub out the marvel. With what creaking and groaning must those monotonous and depressing monsters, which had stared all one way until mankind had forgotten that there were four quarters of the heavens—with what jerking and metallic wailing must they have accomplished that momentous revolution under the silent and astonished stars! Morning saw them turned towards the north-east; a soft air blew from the south-west, lipping of Africa, wafting swallows homeward, fragrant of violet banks; all colours were straightway deepened and softened; men forgot the sky's hard blue, infrequent amid hail-storms, and looked up gratefully at a soft, deep bright heaven, where little flocks were a-drying after storm. They saw, too, with newly-awakened eyes that the horse-chestnuts and thorn-bushes were lightly clad in fresh raiment, and that the olms were touched with green. There is nothing more beautiful under heaven than the first green on smoke-begrimed London trees when the west wind is blowing. It is like the singing of Ophelia amid murder and murderous thoughts, or the smile of Victor Hugo for a child. But these are of those wayward fancies, against which I am warned by more rational persons. They belong to that idle period of my life in which I was no better than a fanciful observer of human quaintness, and before I obtained that post of Inspector of Infant Samplers, which I