

IN THE CLOISTERS, WINCHESTER COLLEGE,

[Suggested by the sight of a boy's gravestone.]

How broad the gulf which delving Time hath made
Between those happy living and these dead.

Two things are ever with us, youth and death—
The Faun that pipes, and Pluto unbeguiled;
From age to age still plays the eternal child,
Nor heeds the eternal doom that followeth.
Ah, precious days of unreflecting breath!
There lay (so might we fancy) one who smiled
Through all life's paradox unreconciled,
Enjoying years the grown man squandereth.
And if his latest hour was touched with pain,
And some dim trouble crossed his childish brain,
He knew no fear,—in death more blest than we.
And now from God's clear light he smiles again,
Not ill-content his mortal part to see
In such a spot, amid such company.

E. C. LEFROY.—*Sonnets*.

GOETHE'S "FAUST."*

In the First Part, Mephistopheles appears among the hosts of Heaven to criticise the creation they so greatly applaud. His attention is particularly attracted to man, the most questionable, it must be confessed, of all the productions of the creative power. To Mephistopheles it does not seem questionable at all, but only laughable. Man—we quote from Sir Theodore Martin's translation of the evil spirit's speech—

had been better off hadst thou not some
Faint gleam of heavenly light into him put;
Reason he calls it, and doth yet become
More brutish through it than the veriest brute.

This gleam of heavenly light, which leads Faust to scorn all that is within his reach, and to strive for ever for an unattainable good, is at once the distinguishing characteristic of all that is best in humanity, and the butt at which the sharpest arrows of the scoffing fiend are aimed. The Lord names him as a representative of mankind; Mephistopheles accepts and ridicules him as such. To him the Lord replies:—

Though now he serve me stumblingly, the hour
Is nigh when I shall lead him into light.
When the tree buds the gardener knows that flower
And fruit will make the coming seasons bright.

Mephistopheles. What will you wager? If you only let
Me lead him without hindrance my own way,
I'll answer for it you shall lose him yet!

The Lord. So long as on this earth he lives, you may
Your snares for him and fascinations set;
Man, while the struggle lasts, is prone to stray.

The rendering of the last line is correct enough, but inadequate, and as this is one of the turning-points of the poem, we should hardly have been ready to forgive the translator but for other passages in which he has surpassed our expectations. The "while his struggle lasts," suggests the idea of a Christian "state of probation," which was entirely absent from the poet's mind when he wrote the Prologue in Heaven; nay, which he in many cases carefully avoids every reference to, in this, the First Part of "Faust." The words that Goethe puts into the mouth of the Lord are, baldly translated, "Man errs as long as he actively aspires." The only refuge from error therefore would be quiescence, that is, according to the teaching of the poem, spiritual death. The doctrine may be true or false; in either case it is the central idea of the drama. Carlyle perceived this. He adopted and restated the teachings of the poet, though in a strange way, and with modifications that Goethe would hardly have accepted. "Man's unhappiness," he says, "as I construe, comes of his greatness; it is because there is an infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the finite," and this, it may be remarked in passing, is the very conviction that Schopenhauer has stated in a more scientific way.

But to return to the poem. It is clear from the Prologue in Heaven that the hero's soul cannot finally be lost; for, if it were, the evil spirit would triumph not only over his human prey but over the Lord himself; and so Faust does not sell his soul, as in the old legend Dr. Faustus did, but the wager in heaven is balanced by a wager on earth. From the very first the hero shows a contempt of his tempter, and it is in scorn that he makes his offer:—

Faust. If e'er in peace on sluggard's couch I lie,
Then may my life upon the instant cease!
Cheat thou me ever by thy glozing wile,

So that I cease to scorn myself, or e'er
My senses with a perfect joy beguile,
Then be that day my last! I offer fair,
How say'st thou?

Mephistopheles. Done!

Faust.

My hand upon it! There!
If to the passing moment e'er I say,
"Oh linger yet! thou art so fair!"
Then cast me into chains you may,
Then will I die without a care!
Then may the death-bell sound its call,
Then art thou from thy service free,
The clock may stand, the index fall,
And time and tide may cease for me.

In the original the character of the pact is even more distinctly marked. The words "*Die Wette biet' ich*," here translated, "I offer fair," literally mean "This wager I offer."

This then is the condition imposed by Faust on the devil, to which Goethe referred in his conversation with Sulpiz Boisserée;* and it will at once be seen that to win his two wagers Mephistopheles must not only lead his victim away from the source of his being, and make him eat dust like the snake, but he must also render him contented with the condition to which he has been reduced. It is the old question that is here reproduced in a new form: Can all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them satisfy the hunger of a single human soul?

The Second Part contains the answer, which, however, we must turn to the end of it to find. When Care alone of the four Gray Sisters can enter the rich man's abode, the aged hero repels her with the statement of what his life has really been—

I've galloped merely through the world, I own.
Each pleasure by the hair I'd seize,
Cast off whatever failed to please,
What 'scaped me let unheeded go.
First craving, then achieving, then
Longing for something new again;
And stoutly on through life went storming so,
Grandly at first, and foremost in the race,
But sagely now, and at a sober pace.
Of man and earth I know enough; what lies
Beyond is barricaded 'gainst our eyes.
Fool, who with blinking gaze out yonder peers,
And dreams of kindred souls in upper spheres.
Let him stand firm and look around him here.
Not dumb this world to him that bears a brain:
Why through eternity should he career?
What things he knows will in his grasp remain.
So let him roam on through his earthly day;
Though spirits gibber, calmly hold his way;
And longing still, and still unsatisfied,
Accept his fate, let joy or grief betide.

The grand ring of the old hero's defiance is somewhat lost in the rendering, but it is clear enough, even from the English translation, that Mephistopheles has not yet won his wager with Faust. The eager mind does not yet repose on the sluggard's couch; it has not ceased, in the best and highest way, to scorn itself. Faust's senses have not yet been beguiled by a perfect joy. It is true that in the next scene he does say to the passing moment—"Oh linger yet, thou art so fair." But it is only in anticipation of a success that seems at hand, not in its actual possession. Mephistopheles and his chorus of Lemurs of course seize upon the words, and declare that the clock stands still and the index falls, but no fair umpire would decide that the evil spirit had won the match.

The moral of "Faust" is, therefore, that the dissatisfaction of the human soul with all that is, or can be, given it, is a sign of its higher origin; its discontent is its passport to larger spheres. All through the poem weight is laid on the effort rather than the result, the aspiration rather than the achievement. It is because Sir Theodore Martin has not clearly grasped this fact that it becomes necessary to insist upon it so strongly. Goethe was no utilitarian. In his opinion, as in that of the earlier Christians, man was not placed in this world merely to perform acts of beneficence, but to work out his own salvation. If any authority for this explanation of the plan of the poem be demanded, we have the highest, the poet's own. In recording a conversation that took place on the 6th of June, 1831, Eckermann writes:—

We spoke about the conclusion of "Faust," and Goethe called my attention to the passage, "The noble member of the spirit world is delivered from evil; the power is given us to save him who constantly and actively aspires, and if love from above, too, has sympathised with him, the hosts of the blessed meet him with a hearty welcome." "These verses," he said, "contain the key to Faust's salvation. In Faust himself, an

* I inquired about the conclusion. Goethe. "That I will not—I must not tell, but it, too, is finished; I have succeeded in it well, even greatly; it belongs to my best period." "I fancy the devil will lose in the end." Goethe. "Faust from the first makes a condition with the devil, out of which the rest follows."

* "Faust," a dramatic poem by Goethe. Part II. Translated by Sir Theodore Martin.