

To the Editor of the Era

Sir, -- I read with great interest your article on "The Psychology of 'Faust'" in the last issue of The Era, and should like to address a few remarks to you on this subject. As I have acted on both the German and the English stage, and have taken part in Faust productions (both parts) at **the Frankfurt Theatre** and, furthermore, have made a special study of the "Faust" subject. I venture to presume that these few words of mine will not be uninteresting to your readers.

Firstly, I must remind your reader-writer that the first and second parts of Goethe's "Faust" are a continuous story. Of course, Mephistopheles' last words, "Her zu mir" ("Here to me") are capable of misrepresentation, being accepted by the British public as meaning "You belong to me now" instead of merely "Come away, or we'll be caught by the prison officials."

Messrs. Phillips and Carr have evidently wished to correct the wrong notion of Faust's damnation, and have therefore made Faust refer to the bet, and say that the conditions of the same are not fulfilled; that he has not enjoyed a single moment of happiness. But they are still in error themselves, for Mephistopheles has no right to order Faust down to Hell, and there is no suggestion – in Goethe, at least – of his doing so. The conditions of the wager between Faust and Mephistopheles are that, if ever Faust should be induced to wish to recall a single moment of existence or, rather, that if he is so satisfied with any single moment that he could wish the clock to stand still, then he would belong to Mephistopheles body and soul.

"Werd 'ich zum Augenblicke sagen
Verwelle doch! du bist so schon
Dann magst du mich in Fesrein schlagen
Dann wil ich gern au Grunde gehen."

As he has never uttered such a wish up to the end of the first part, any suggestion of damnation by Mephistopheles would be a breach of contract, for, however happy Faust may have been with Margaret, he has not been happy enough to wish to bid the clock stand still.

Faust is certainly no student, regretting his lost youth, as your leader-writer would have us suppose, but a "world-tired philosopher." In the whole of the first act I can find no regrets for a lost youth, but on dissatisfaction with his present mode of life and a yearning for knowledge hitherto unattainable by man.

It is in the course of Mephistopheles' second visit that the devil, not Faust, proposes that a compact should be made, and Faust scornfully tells him that even his hellish powers will not avail to make Faust satisfied with the ordinary life on earth; in fact, he is willing to wager his should on the result. And so the bet is made. The devil is to be at Faust's beck and call day and night, ready to gratify any withs that may be uttered, and to have Faust's soul if he con get it; that is to say, if he can induce Faust to wish the clock to stand still. The philosopher, conscious of his own state of feeling and his higher desires, measures himself confidently against the devil. Now, if Goethe had wished to write a "sound acting drama," as your leader-writer puts it, he would have cut out all that first act, with its endless monologues describing the philosopher's yearning and strivings, and just let him summon the devil to his presence, as Gounod and Irving make him do.

It is noteworthy, too, that in Goethe Faust does not desire pure unalloyed pleasure, of that happiness which Messrs. Phillips and Carr impute as his desire. Rather does he demand from him to be allowed to experience from him every sort of feeling that man can experience. No sort of pain is to be allowed to be a stranger to him - hate, disappointment, jealousy, all these he is to know; and finally, as Goethe puts it, to take the sorrows of the whole world to himself and feel it within his bosom. Goethe's philosopher knows that unadulterated happiness would soon cloy, and rejects it without further discussion.

Now we come to the Margaret episode, for, considering the length of the play when both parts are put together, Margaret is a mere episode. There I grant your leader-writer to be correct; it's the seduction of an ordinary drama. Mephistopheles cannot take Faust, who is an old man travelling about the world as comfortably as he could a younger man, and so decides to make him young by magic means. The witches' draught has its effect, and Faust regains his lost youth and with it youthful desires. Mephistopheles' last words in this scene are –

"Tho'lt find, this drink thy blood compelling
Every woman fair as Helen."

And so it happens. Goethe has no vision of Faust rejecting the fairest in the world for the sake of a peasant maiden; but his Faust, being made young, behaves as a young man would and falls in love quite naturally with the first pretty girl he meets – a regular calf love; but with Mephistopheles at hand, ready to lend his magic aid, events take their course very

quickly, with terrible consequences for poor Margaret. Faust gets over this love-sickness, goes off to amuse himself on the Brocken, and only thinks of Gretchen again when he learns of her terrible fate. Then, being a good-hearted man, he is naturally alarmed, and does his best to rescue her. The first part of Goethe's play ends with his failure to achieve this. Of Faust's subsequent adventures at the court of the Emperor Maximilian, his conjuration of Helen of Troy, the classical Walpurgisnacht, Faust's marriage with Helen, and his subsequent good deeds, there is neither time nor place to speak of now. Sufficient to say that Helen, Faust's true mate, arouses every good feeling that is latent within him and that he decides to use his and Mephistopheles' powers for the benefit of the human race. Many years later, when he contemplates the good he has done, he utters the wish for the clock to stand still; his moment of satisfaction has arrived. – Yours faithfully,

Claud W. Sykes
Sept. 9, 1908

Schauspielhaus, the Municipal Theater of Frankfurt
Colored Postcard, Digitized by the Library of Congress.

