

FAUST - PART I

by

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

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Introductory Note

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, the greatest of German men of letters, was born at Frank fort-on-the-Main, August 28, 1749. His father was a man of means and position, and he personally supervised the early education of his son. The young Goethe studied at the universities of Leipsic and Strasburg, and in 1772 entered upon the practise of law at Wetzlar. At the invitation of Karl August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar, he went in 1775 to live in Weimar, where he held a succession of political offices, becoming the Duke's chief adviser. From 1786 to 1788 he traveled in Italy, and from 1791 to 1817 directed the ducal theater at Weimar. He took part in the wars against France, 1792-3, and in the following year began his friendship with Schiller, which lasted till the latter's death in 1805. In 1806 he married Christiane Vulpius. From about 1794 he devoted himself chiefly to literature, and after a life of extraordinary productiveness died at Weimar, March 22, 1832. The most important of Goethe's works produced before he went to Weimar were his tragedy "Gotz von Berlichingen" (1773), which first brought him fame, and "The Sorrows of Young Werther," a novel which obtained enormous popularity during the so-called "Sturm und Drang" period. During the years at Weimar before he knew Schiller he began "Wilhelm Meister," wrote the dramas, "Iphigenie," "Egmont," and "Torquato Tasso," and his "Reinecke Fuchs." To the period of his friendship with Schiller belong the continuation of "Wilhelm Meister," the beautiful idyl of "Hermann and Dorothea," and the "Roman Elegies." In the last period, between Schiller's death in 1805 and his own, appeared "Faust," "Elective Affinities," his autobiographical "Dichtung und Wahrheit" ("Poetry and Truth"), his "Italian Journey," much scientific work, and a series of treatises on German Art.

Though the foregoing enumeration contains but a selection from the titles of Goethe's best known writings, it suffices to show the extraordinary fertility and versatility of his genius. Rarely has a man of letters had so full and varied a life, or been capable of so many-sided a development. His political and scientific activities, though dwarfed in the eyes of our generation by his artistic production, yet showed the adaptability of his talent in the most diverse directions, and helped to give him that balance of temper and breadth of vision in which he has been surpassed by no genius of the ancient or modern world.

The greatest and most representative expression of Goethe's powers is without doubt to be found in his drama of "Faust"; but before dealing with Goethe's masterpiece, it is worth while to say something of the history of the story on which it is founded--the most famous instance of the old and widespread legend of the man who sold his soul to the devil. The historical Dr. Faust seems to have been a self-called philosopher who traveled about Germany in the first half of the sixteenth century, making money by the practise of magic, fortune-telling, and pretended cures. He died mysteriously about 1540, and a legend soon sprang up that the devil, by whose aid he wrought his wonders, had finally carried him off. In 1587 a life of him appeared, in which are attributed to him many marvelous exploits and in which he is held up as an awful warning against the excessive desire for secular learning and admiration for antique beauty which characterized the humanist movement of the time. In this aspect the Faust legend is an expression of early popular Protestantism, and of its antagonism to the scientific and classical tendencies of the Renaissance.

While a succession of Faust books were appearing in Germany, the original life was translated into English and dramatized by Marlowe. English players brought Marlowe's work back to Germany, where it was copied by German actors, degenerated into spectacular farce, and finally into a puppet show. Through this puppet show Goethe made acquaintance with the legend.

By the time that Goethe was twenty, the Faust legend had fascinated his imagination; for three years before he went to Weimar he had been working on scattered scenes and bits of dialogue; and though he suspended actual composition on it during three distinct periods, it was always to resume, and he closed his labors upon it only with his life. Thus the period of time between his first experiments and the final touches is more than sixty years. During this period the plans for the structure and the signification of the work inevitably underwent profound modifications, and these have naturally affected the unity of the result; but, on the other hand, this long companionship and persistent recurrence to the task from youth to old age have made it in a unique way the record of Goethe's personality in all its richness and diversity.

The drama was given to the public first as a fragment in 1790; then the completed First Part appeared in 1808; and finally the Second Part was published in 1833, the year after the author's death. Writing in "Dichtung und Wahrheit" of the period about 1770, when he was in Strasburg with Herder, Goethe says, "The significant puppet-play legend . . . echoed and buzzed in many tones within me. I too had drifted about in all knowledge, and early enough had been brought to feel the vanity of it. I too had made all sorts of experiments in life, and had always come back more unsatisfied and more tormented. I was now carrying these things, like many others, about with me and delighting myself with them in lonely hours, but without writing anything down." Without going into the details of the experience which underlies these words, we can see the beginning of that sympathy with the hero of the old story that was the basis of its

fascination and that accounted for Goethe's departure from the traditional catastrophe of Faust's damnation.

Of the elements in the finished Faust that are derived from the legend a rough idea may be obtained from the "Doctor Faustus" of Marlowe, printed in the present volume. As early as 1674 a life of Faust had contained the incident of the philosopher's falling in love with a servant-girl; but the developed story of Gretchen is Goethe's own. The other elements added to the plot can be noted by a comparison with Marlowe.

It need hardly be said that Goethe's "Faust" does not derive its greatness from its conformity to the traditional standards of what a tragedy should be. He himself was accustomed to refer to it cynically as a monstrosity, and yet he put himself into it as intensely as Dante put himself into "The Divine Comedy." A partial explanation of this apparent contradiction in the author's attitude is to be found in what has been said of its manner of composition. Goethe began it in his romantic youth, and availed himself recklessly of the supernatural elements in the legend, with the disregard of reason and plausibility characteristic of the romantic mood. When he returned to it in the beginning of the new century his artistic standards had changed, and the supernaturalism could now be tolerated only by being made symbolic. Thus he makes the career of Faust as a whole emblematic of the triumph of the persistent striving for the ideal over the temptation to find complete satisfaction in the sense, and prepares the reader for this interpretation by prefixing the "Prologue in Heaven." The elaboration of this symbolic element is responsible for such scenes as the Walpurgis Night and the Intermezzo, scenes full of power and infinitely suggestive, but destructive of the unity of the play as a tragedy of human life. Yet there remains in this First Part even in its final form much that is realistic in the best sense, the carousal in Auerbach's cellar, the portrait of Martha, the Easter-morning walk, the character and fate of Margaret. It is such elements as these that have appealed to the larger reading public and that have naturally been emphasized by performance on the stage, and by virtue of these alone "Faust" may rank as a great drama; but it is the result of Goethe's broodings on the mystery of human life, shadowed forth in the symbolic parts and elaborated with still greater complexity and still more far-reaching suggestiveness--and, it must be added, with deepening obscurity--in the Second Part, that have given the work its place with "Job," with the "Prometheus Bound," with "The Divine Comedy," and with "Hamlet."

Dedication

YE wavering shapes, again ye do enfold me,
As erst upon my troubled sight ye stole;
Shall I this time attempt to clasp, to hold ye?
Still for the fond illusion yearns my soul?
Ye press around! Come then, your captive hold me,
As upward from the vapoury mist ye roll;
Within my breast youth's throbbing pulse is bounding,
Fann'd by the magic breath your march surrounding.

Shades fondly loved appear, your train attending,
And visions fair of many a blissful day;
First-love and friendship their fond accents blending,
Like to some ancient, half-expiring lay;
Sorrow revives, her wail of anguish sending
Back o'er life's devious labyrinthine way,
And names the dear ones, they whom Fate bereaving
Of life's fair hours, left me behind them grieving.

They hear me not my later cadence singing,
The souls to whom my earlier lays I sang;
Dispersed the throng, their severed flight now winging;
Mute are the voices that responsive rang.
For stranger crowds the Orphean lyre now stringing,
E'en their applause is to my heart a pang;
Of old who listened to my song, glad hearted,
If yet they live, now wander widely parted.

A yearning long unfelt, each impulse swaying,
To yon calm spirit-realm uplifts my soul;
In faltering cadence, as when Zephyr playing,
Fans the Aeolian harp, my numbers roll;
Tear follows tear, my steadfast heart obeying
The tender impulse, loses its control;

What I possess as from afar I see;
Those I have lost become realities to me.

Prologue For The Theatre

MANAGER. DRAMATIC POET. MERRYMAN.

MANAGER

YE twain, in trouble and distress
True friends whom I so oft have found,
Say, for our scheme on German ground,
What prospect have we of success?
Fain would I please the public, win their thanks;
They live and let live, hence it is but meet.
The posts are now erected, and the planks,
And all look forward to a festal treat.
Their places taken, they, with eyebrows rais'd,
Sit patiently, and fain would be amaz'd.
I know the art to hit the public taste,
Yet ne'er of failure felt so keen a dread;
True, they are not accustomed to the best,
But then appalling the amount they've read..
How make our entertainment striking, new,
And yet significant and pleasing too?
For to be plain, I love to see the throng,
As to our booth the living tide progresses;
As wave on wave successive rolls along,
And through heaven's narrow portal forceful presses;
Still in broad daylight, ere the clock strikes four,
With blows their way towards the box they take;
And, as for bread in famine, at the baker's door,
For tickets are content their necks to break.
Such various minds the bard alone can sway,
My friend, oh work this miracle to-day!

POET

Oh of the motley throng speak not before me,
At whose aspect the Spirit wings its flight!

Conceal the surging concourse, I implore thee,
Whose vortex draws us with resistless might.
No, to some peaceful heavenly nook restore me,
Where only for the bard blooms pure delight,
Where love and friendship yield their choicest blessing,
Our heart's true bliss, with god-like hand caressing.

What in the spirit's depths was there created,
What shyly there the lip shaped forth in sound;
A failure now, with words now fitly mated,
In the wild tumult of the hour is drown'd;
Full oft the poet's thought for years bath waited
Until at length with perfect form 'tis crowned;
What dazzles, for the moment born, must perish;
What genuine is posterity will cherish.

MERRYMAN

This cant about posterity I hate;
About posterity were I to prate,
Who then the living would amuse? For they
Will have diversion, ay, and 'tis their due.
A sprightly fellow's presence at your play,
Methinks should also count for something too;
Whose genial wit the audience still inspires,
Knows from their changeful mood no angry feeling;
A wider circle he desires,
To their heart's depths more surely thus appealing.
To work, then! Give a master-piece, my friend;
Bring Fancy with her choral trains before us,
Sense, reason, feeling, passion, but attend!
Let folly also swell the tragic chorus.

MANAGER

In chief, of incident enough prepare!
A show they want, they come to gape and stare.
Spin for their eyes abundant occupation,
SO that the multitude may wondering gaze,
You by sheer bulk have won your reputation,

By mass alone can you subdue the masses,
Each then selects in time what suits his bent.

Bring much, you something bring for various classes,
And from the house goes every one content.
You give a piece, abroad in pieces send it!
'Tis a ragout--success most needs attend it;
'Tis easy to serve up, as easy to invent.
A finish'd whole what boots it to present!
Full soon the public will in pieces rend it.

POET

How mean such handicraft as this you cannot feel!
How it revolts the genuine artist's mind!
The sorry trash in which these coxcombs deal,
Is here approved on principle, I find.

MANAGER

Such a reproof disturbs me not a whit!
Who on efficient work is bent,
Must choose the fittest instrument.
Consider! 'tis soft wood you have to split;
Think too for whom you write, I pray!
One comes to while an hour away;
One from the festive board, a sated guest;
Others, more dreaded than the rest,
From journal-reading hurry to the play.
As to a masquerade, with absent minds, they press,
Sheer curiosity their footsteps winging;
Ladies display their persons and their dress,
Actors unpaid their service bringing.
What dreams beguile you on your poet's height?
What puts a full house in a merry mood?
More closely view your patrons of the night!
The half are cold, the half are rude.
One, the play over, craves a game of cards;
Another a wild night in wanton joy would spend.
Poor fools the muses' fair regards.
Why court for such a paltry end?
I tell you, give them more, still more, 'tis all I ask,
Thus you will ne'er stray widely from the goal;
Your audience seek to mystify, cajole;--
To satisfy them--that's a harder task.
What ails thee? art enraptured or distressed?

POET

Depart! elsewhere another servant choose
What! shall the bard his godlike power abuse?
Man's loftiest right, kind nature's high bequest,
For your mean purpose basely sport away?
Whence comes his mastery o'er the human breast,
Whence o'er the elements his sway,
But from the harmony that, gushing from his soul,
Draws back into his heart the wondrous whole?
With careless hand when round her spindle, Nature
Winds the interminable thread of life;
When 'mid the clash of Being every creature
Mingles in harsh inextricable strife;
Who deals their course unvaried till it falleth,
In rhythmic flow to music's measur'd tone?
Each solitary note whose genius calleth,
To swell the mighty choir in unison?
Who in the raging storm sees passion low'ring?
Or flush of earnest thought in evening's glow?
Who every blossom in sweet spring-time flowering
Along the loved one's path would strow?
Who, Nature's green familiar leaves entwining,
Wreathes her glory's garland, won on every field?
Makes sure Olympus, heavenly powers combining?
Man's mighty spirit, in the bard reveal'd!

MERRYMAN

Come then, employ your lofty inspiration,
And carry on the poet's avocation,
Just as we carry on a love affair.
Two meet by chance, are pleased, they linger there,
Insensibly are link'd, they scarce know how;
Fortune seems now propitious, adverse now,
Then come alternate rapture and despair;
And 'tis a true romance ere one's aware.
Just such a drama let us now compose.
Plunge boldly into life--its depths disclose!
Each lives it, not to many is it known,
'Twill interest wheresoever seiz'd and shown;
Bright pictures, but obscure their meaning:
A ray of truth through error gleaming,
Thus you the best elixir brew,
To charm mankind, and edify them too.
Then youth's fair blossoms crowd to view your play,

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