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FAUST

A DRAMATIC SKETCH

By ADALBERT VON CHAMISSE
(1803)

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

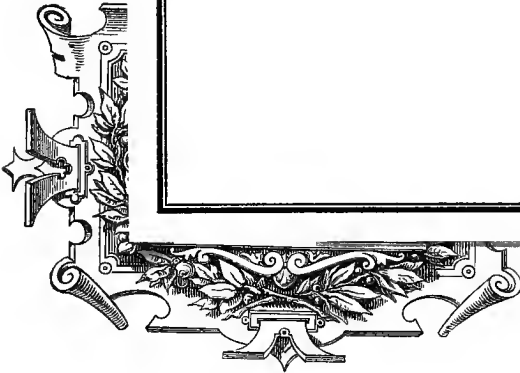
By HENRY PHILLIPS JR

PHILADELPHIA

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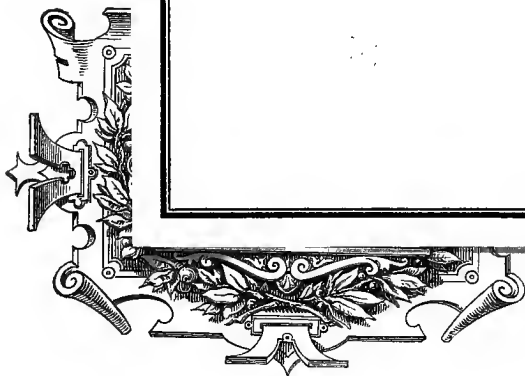
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With the compliments of

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FAUST

A DRAMATIC SKETCH

By ADALBERT VON CHAMISSO

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No.

NOTE.

THE present poem is one of the twenty-nine Fausts, by various authors, which appeared in Germany, during the sixty-one years in which Goethe was employed upon his masterpiece.

Adalbert Von Chamisso, unfortunately best known by his least important work (Peter Schlemihl), has sunk into unmerited oblivion; and under the impression that this poem has never before appeared in our language, I have ventured to translate it, although merely a sketch, not entirely free from obscurities.

Chamisso was a ripe scholar, a naturalist of high rank, and has been characterized as "a hale, hearty, sinewy poet."

HENRY PHILLIPS, JR.

PHILADELPHIA, January, 1881.

FAUST.

SCENE.—A STUDY ROOM LIGHTED BY A DIM CRESSET.

FAUST.

The fleeting years of youth are long gone by,
Thy manhood's prime days can ne'er return :
The sunset of thy life approacheth fast.
What was that life? A stranger in the world,
In visions passed the niggard-measured hours,
Striving for truth, with but a pigmy force
To war a giant's strife. Oh, fool! fool! fool!

Thou hast thy youth in wild excess abused,
Forgetful of all future, of thyself,
Forgetful of the world that 'round thee rolled ;
Enjoy thou wouldst, and learn still to enjoy.
Oh favored minion of fair fortune's gifts,
I hold thee wise, since thou so prosperous art.
Wisdom and folly—words that mean but naught ;
Sickness, I understand ; *fool*, I cannot.

A spark burns low within my bosom's cell,
Lit by a stranger hand ; high shall it flame,
And thirst eternal, never quenched, consume.
On him who wrought all things I place the blame ;
Our wills are bound ; we must and ever must.
Have we no freedom then, or are we but
As stones that fall from an almighty hand,
Sink down and deep to the abyss below,
And feel, *he* willed it so?

What art thou then, O man? A greedy grasper,
A wooer bold of all created space,
Who, blind in night, condemned in double gloom
To wander for all time, to nothing know,
A riddle never to be solved by thee,
Creator of thy sphere, from its own self create
By laws whose acts run from primeval thought,
What art thou, potent, powerless worm of earth?
A god in fetters, or a flake of dust?
What is the world of soul, the world of thought?
Time, matter, space, the all-pervading whole,
And their creations, means through which they live?
Beyond their scope what is it never ends?
What is the Godhead, that most mighty chain,
The first, but never to be mind-beholden, link
Which in itself unborne doth all things bear?
My brain swims with delusions, misty, vain.
The inner light that burns within my breast
Throws on the darkness of the outer night
Its baseless pictures, shadowy simulacra

Of mine own self as it within me lives ;
 Of such is made the world that I have known.
 Perhaps, the game of chance has so ordained,
 He, the great Architect, whom we Almighty call,
 Is acting in his grander sphere the same.
 But how if it should prove that Soul and Mind
 And God, not empty thoughts but beings are?
 I cannot grasp the theme—my thought's in vain—
 Forever firm betwixt such dreams and me
 Stand lying senses and sound reason's laws.

Eternal riddles!—vipers of savage mien
 Who feed and live and breed forevermore,
 Who in your gruesome sport consume my heart,
 Where nestle new and swift-recurring broods.
 I cannot banish nor suppress the race ;
 In never resting, fierce, resistless might
 Ye seize possession of my 'frighted soul.
 Alas for him whom ye to combat lure !
 The thinker's brow shall deadly fear itself,
 While as the trophy of the hard-fought fight
 A *lasting doubt* shall victory's prize remain !

No longer shall the serpent's-tooth of doubt
 Upon my sickening heart its banquet gnaw,
 Nor poisoned wounds by their own pangs entice !
 In the clear beam of Truth *it is my will*
 From doubts and scruples dim to cleanse my soul ;
 My will shall reach that power beyond the stars
 Where idly struggling I could ne'er attain.

(He seeks and opens a roll of incantations, and while resting his hand upon the spell, he speaks :)

No dreams are these traced on this mouldy scroll ;
 I'll follow, Seer, upon thy giant track
 Along thy path, nor tremble nor recoil.
 List to my potent spell, ye Spirits all
 Who guard the threshold of night's misty realm,
It is my will ye show me bright and clear
 The spirit world, and teach me how to rule
 The weighty elements of thought and doubt.

(Conjuration of spirits.)

Awake, ye beings dread, who 'neath the dark
 And fearsome veil of ignorance lie hid ;
 My soul speaks forth, hearken, ye spirit world,
 The summons of a strong and steadfast will.

EVIL SPIRIT *(heard on the left).*

The summons of the strong and steadfast will
 We heed. Thou son of dust, whose rashness vast
 And mighty will have made thee like to us,
 Give utterance to thy wish.

GOOD SPIRIT *(heard on the right).*

Faust ! Faust ! Faust !

FAUST.

And thou ? I called not thee ! Avaunt ! Begone !
 No longer will I brook thy tyrant yoke.
 Begone ! It is not thou, most feeble one,

Who canst the burning thirst for wisdom quench,
 Or smooth to stilly calm the storm-beat' soul.
 Thou lam'st my flight,—take hence thy weight.
 Avaunt!

It is my will on high to speed my way
 As should a *man*, freed from all doubt or fear.
 I turn away from thee—I follow yon;—
 Grant me instruction, knowledge,—give me TRUTH.

EVIL SPIRIT.

Thou speakest words of high and noble sense,
 Far, far beyond the power of mortal thought.
 Thy stéadfast will hath brought me to thy side;
 Give me the guerdon due—*give me thy soul*.
 The vasty treasures of the deep-sought Truth
 Before thy gaze shall freely opened lie,
 And all that dust-born mortal may conceive
 Thy mind shall grasp.

GOOD SPIRIT.

Faust! Faust!
 The once happy man
 Our Father did grant
 Of Eden's sweet fruits
 To pluck as he chose;
 'Twas but one alone
 He kept for his own.
 With artful flattery raised the snake its head,
 "Omniscient ye shall be, and like the gods,
 Should ye but dare to taste that tree forbid

By Him ye Father call: an envious soul,
A tyrant he; no true and loving sire."

Faust! Faust!

For innocent hearts
All pleasures of life
Are budding forever.
They tarry where blooming
Fresh roses are blowing,
Where fruits ever ripening
Beckoning call
The fleet flying footsteps
O'er barriers to hasten.
As comrades eternal
The Father hath sent him
Firm Faith and strong Hoping,
Mates steadfast in fortune.

Faust! Faust!

To feel all that which end can never know,
Thy kindly maker, parent, gave thee soul;
His praise with love to chaunt he gave thee heart.
And wrangling with thy father thou hast dared,
Still guarded 'round by his mild beaming love,
To ask of him that fruit, the fruit of death.
Despise, contemn life's empty haps and crowns,
And strive but for the Godhead's distant goal.
The 'Venger's vengeance smites the guilty head.

FAUST.

Then was I for a preordainèd pang
Created by a God of bitter hate?

Brought into being by a heartless fiend
Whose pleasure dwells in viewing others' pains?

GOOD SPIRIT.

Fortune has smiled upon thy life-long path.

FAUST.

Wisdom alone to me is Fortune's smile.

GOOD SPIRIT.

Hope springs eternal in the breast of him
Who all things can support: learn to endure.

FAUST.

Hope withers in the sorely wearied breast.

GOOD SPIRIT.

The crown of virtues bright may bloom for thee.

FAUST.

My doubts have long since rent this crown away.

GOOD SPIRIT.

Thou wield'st thy will, and all thy pleasures fade.

FAUST.

Then must I choose, in fetters, my own woe.

GOOD SPIRIT.

Be of good faith; act free as conscience calls.

FAUST.

Nay, nay, there is no freedom for my will,
I am not free ; in bondage aye shall be.

GOOD SPIRIT.

Beware !—The scorner's heavy doom awaits.

FAUST.

The scorner's heavy doom I throw on him
Who high endowed, then deep oppressed my soul,
And who hath raised as bitterest enemy
Against myself, my ever-working brain.

GOOD SPIRIT.

And gave thee, it to fetter, thy strong will.
The 'Venger's vengeance smites the culprit brow.

FAUST.

Shadow of earlier wrath, more fearful yet,
That fierce revenges sins not yet begun,
Nor even thought in heart's deep-anguished moan ;
Hell's grimmest frights ye hurl at me in vain—
Ye cannot bind a *man's* firm, earnest will.
I say thou liest ! No, I am *not* free !
A doom hangs o'er me strong as triple bronze,
Rolls 'round my path, and with force unrestrained
It tears me forth. And, then,—the bolt is sped,
The lot is drawn, and cruelty bears sway.

EVIL SPIRIT (*half aloud*).

Fate false e'en now is lying through thy sprite.

FAUST.

'Tis thou who liest, good spirit! Avaunt! Begone!
I turn away from thee, I follow yon;—
Give me instruction, knowledge, purest Truth.

EVIL SPIRIT.

Then be it so—but swear me my reward,
And I will open up before thy gaze
The storehouse vast, of treasure-guarded Truth,
Where all that man can know thou shalt attain.
First break the staff of doom o'er thine own soul.

*(The staff of Judgment is conjured into Faust's
hand; he starts back in affright, then collects
himself and speaks :)*

FAUST.

Let quick the will, the speedy son of Thought,
Bring forth the deed of earn'st!

GOOD SPIRIT.

The deed of earn'st
Which in the lap of Time, late working moves,
Escaped from thee, o'erpowered by foreign might,
Be ever 'counted of necessity!
Still yet, oh Faust, thy heart's will is thine own.

EVIL SPIRIT (*half aloud and very slowly*).

And I will open thee all wisdom's stores,
And all that man avails shall be disclosed.

FAUST.

My will is mine? Thought, willed and done.

GOOD SPIRIT.

And canst thou dare with earth-born, blinded gaze
To face that greatest thought, that fearful word,
Eternity?

FAUST.

Yes, I do dare. 'Tis but a hairbreadth's time
Belongs to man—that space in which he lives.
So shall he buy, e'en at the Future's risk,
The fleetfoot, burning pleasure of the hour,
For, like enough, his future 's but a dream.

GOOD SPIRIT.

How if the dream portend a truth untold?

FAUST.

Then let the dream-born terrors selves reveal!
Thou dost but whet the sharpened fang of doubt,
Whose biting edge doth gnaw my cankered soul.
My heart can ne'er by striving reach pure Truth,
'That Truth, which to attain alone she beats.
Beyond endurance are the tortures fanned
That now I suffer, and an end must come.

Cased in a corselet wove' of rugged steel
 From off my heart each shaft of angry pain
 Falls powerless, and can no wound inflict
 Save those alone winged by the arm of doubt.
 I'll bear the brunt of the Eternal's wrath
 As doth become a man ; unflinching eye
 I'll look into that never-ending face.
 My curse upon thee and thy god of hate.
 With steadfast hand and free from doubt or dread
 I'll break the staff myself o'er mine own doom.

GOOD SPIRIT.

Woe and wail, earth-born, earth-nurtured !
 Woe and wail ! the crown he breaks !
 See ! he falls where dim re-echo
 Steep, grim-frowning, rugged chasms.
 Rent in thousand million atoms
 In their arms the deeps receive him.

In valleys soft-blooming
 The man of earth nourished
 Gazes and wanders
 On flowery meadows.
 Never presumptuous
 Dare his rash thoughts stray
 Where far above him
 Rolls the bright sun.
 In garments of loving
 The all-feeding earth
 Reflects the soft beam

Of a mild, tempered light ;
Let this suffice him,
The prismatic radiance,
Blandishing ray.
With heart unpolluted
Restrain his rash longing
The sun's beam to grasp.
When climbed the tall mountains
With ice-covered summits
To reach the steep path
Of the death-dealing orb ;
No nearer the far one
Than in the deep valley,
The fierce glare appals him,
His footsteps faint totter,
He falters, he stumbles—
Then down, down the steep giddy height,
He falls to the bottomless chasm ;
The echoing abyss receives him
In fragments ten million or more.

Woe and wail ! earth-born, earth-nurtured !
Woe ! his crown is torn away !
Escaped from the arms
Of his loving protector
To frenzied destruction
He rushes—and falls !
He stumbles, and falls in the measureless chasm ;
With echoing crash the abyss receives him,
Dashed into fragments ten millions or more.

FAUST (*breaking the staff*).

The staff is broken.

GOOD SPIRIT.

'Tis broken !

EVIL SPIRIT.

'Tis broken !

A long silence.

FAUST.

And now ?

EVIL SPIRIT.

I mock at thee, thou giddy, simple toy
Of towering pride, of avaricious brain ;
I mock at thee, thou fool whom I despise,
And guerdon thee such prize as thou hast won.

Doubt stands eternal bound to mortal ken,
Which naught save superstition can transcend.
I doom thee, without anchor, without sail,
To wander on a hostile, gloomy sea,
Where plummet ne'er can sound, nor brink appear
To meet thy hopeless, storm-beat, erring way ;
While ever 'fore thy gaze, as night comes on,
The doors are ope'd, of death long preordained,
And terrors fresh-renewed thy heart shall grasp.
Thy whole eternity belongs to me.
I guerdon thee the prize which thou hast won.

Faith's simple flower bloomed innocent for thee—
 Thy pride did spurn it—dared to ask for Truth.
 Then be it so! Truth's fearsome mien thou 'lt know.
 From the strong opposition of thy soul
 There gleamed on thee a premonition true;
 Doubt stands eternal bound to mortal ken.
 The dust-encircled creature can naught else receive.
 How can the blind from birth conceive of light?

Like as a language and the sound of words
 To thought is but a mean, a symbol, help;
 So is the Soul's emotion, thought itself,
 E'en speech is void, a naked, empty sign
 Of Truth's reality forever hid.

Thou thinkest but through aid of noisy speech,
 But through the eyes of mind can Nature see,
 Only through Reason's laws can of her judge.
 And haddest thou one thousandfold thy brain,
 Thou scant-endowed! and could'st thou raise more
 free

Thy mind so cramped to the all-sided whole,
 The all-bethought,—yet wouldst thou ever be
 By thine own nature's bounds apart, divorced;
 Thou couldst but shadows see and nothing know.

Let man strive hard and battle with himself!
 Such is his lot. Naught but the spirit pure
 Freed from all fleshly bonds can ever *know*.
 There bind it not the walls, the living walls

That stand eternal 'twixt thy gaze and Truth,
That sever thee and Truth for evermore.
The walls are razed by Death. The Vengeance sure
Waits gruesomely for thee in that dread land
Where no more strivings, doubts, or longings are,
Where at the last is found the meed of life.

Thy empty sounds I echoing must repeat,
Re-mirror all the shadows of thy brain,
Mock pictures born from lying wisdom's dream,
That I, a spirit, may approach a man,
To comprehend thoughts, words, and fancies vain ;
In all a vision false as false can be
Of that deep knowledge ever veiled in night.
Yet Truth is thy reward, so shalt thou know
All that to mortal man of thought is given.

Doubt stands eternal bound to human ken—

A savage 'venger, serpent of thy life.

Despair, thou grovelling earth-worm, whom yet
deeper

Down in his low-born dust I crush and tread !

Thou darest not raise yon gloomy, dusky veil.

No more for thee shall Time bring forth her flowers,

Thy whole Eternity belongs to me.

In vengeance I disclose thee Wisdom's stores,

I guerdon thee the prize that thou hast won.

FAUST (*in the act of throwing himself on his knees towards the spot where the voice of the Good Spirit was heard, checks himself suddenly, and rising speaks*).

Nay, I'll not bend 'fore thee, thou prophet dark
Of that dread curse yet seven times fulfilled
That flames around my giddy, whirling brain.
Destruction is the God whose shrine I seek!
Thou hast no power that from the past can wrest
Its heritage so easy, lightly won.

Could I but frame on thee a savage curse!
Could I but see thee prey to human pangs,
In torture racked by ne'er resolving doubts,
And then in scorn despise and flout and jeer!
I curse myself that I so feeble am,
And naught can do save murmur with the lips,
Whose weakly quavering dies in the thin air.

Long-sought-for scorner of my ardent wish,
Oh Truth! I see thy outline, misty, dark,
Pursued at distance ever infinite,
Forever lengthening, limitless and dim,
With every gleam of hope to reach thee lost.
Now am I stranded on the rocky crags,
Around me roar the dense and gloomy floods,
Deep o'er my head the thunder pregnant waves.
The shore I ne'er can reach,—I ne'er can reach,
That goal for which I've paid so dear a price.

EVIL SPIRIT.

The walls are razed by death. The Vengeance waits,
 With savage mien, thy coming in yon land
 Where never enter longing, strife, or doubt,
 Where at the end is found the meed of life.

FAUST.

The walls are razed by death — The Vengeance
 waits
 In yonder land — Thou viper of my life !
 Where'er I turn my gaze, with fearsome front
 Thou coldly starest. Eternity ! Damnation !
 Let not your tortures be eternal doubt !

Fall walls, be razed, and let all be fulfilled !
 Ye mystic 'Venger, be my rescue now !
It is my will to follow in thy track
 E'en to yon night veiled, hidden land of gloom.

*(He turns to the Evil Spirit to ask death from it ;
 a dagger is conjured into his hand, whose point
 he places against his bosom and slowly thrusts it
 into his heart.)*

Dannation evermore—but in thy bosom—
 Perchance annihilation—or wisdom deep—
 But Certainty at last !

*(He falls. The cresset flickers and goes out. The
 curtain descends slowly as the scene darkens.)*

FINIS.

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