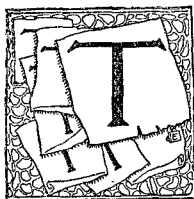


PICTORIAL SUCCESSES OF MR. IRVING'S "FAUST."



THE critics of Mr. Irving's "Faust," as given at the Lyceum Theater in London, have concerned themselves, as a rule, entirely with its intellectual and dramatic characteristics. When all the critical points had been discussed but little space remained to give to such secondary considerations as beauty of scenery and perfection of detail. Yet to this perfection and beauty was due the greater part of the success of the play.

The "Faust" pictures are fine not only in themselves but in their harmonious relations to the play. Though Mr. Irving believes that the first duty of one who mounts a piece is to produce a beautiful and pleasing effect, he shows that he thinks it equally necessary to make his audience feel the reality of the scenes before them. Beautiful as are his streets, full of color and richness; his quiet gardens, in the light of the setting sun or the soft afterglow; his wild storm-lit mountain-top, rugged and riven,—not one is given for the sake of its beauty alone. All are realizations either of Goethe's suggestions and descriptions, or of the life of the place and time in which the scenes are laid.

The only scenes to which Goethe gave definite locality are those in Auerbach's cellar in Leipzig and those on the Harz Mountains. Mr. Irving was therefore in a measure free to choose the place for the principal action of his play, and his choice fell upon Nuremberg. As for time, "Faust" is a legend of the Middle Ages, and so long as the medieval character was preserved there was no necessity for exact dates. The brocades and armor worn by the citizens of Nuremberg, if not copied from, are suggested by, old pictures; but for his own dress Mr. Irving conscientiously wears the scarlet coat, the tall cock's feather, and the long, sharp sword which Goethe borrowed from the Mephistopheles of the puppet play. The pointed mustache and short, forked beard of the operatic demon, not being authorized by Goethe, he has discarded,—unwisely we think, since he looks much more like a fallen Dante, as Mr. Hatton says, than like a mocking Mephistopheles. By respecting the traditional dress and disregarding the traditional face, he has given us neither the old Mephistopheles nor a new one.

The chief merit of Mr. Irving's pictures is not in his materials, those being at the disposal of all managers, but in the artistic way in which he uses them. The finest scenes from the

pictorial standpoint are naturally the streets, the gardens, and the Brocken. Here Mr. Irving had the best chance to exercise his powers, and they are all excellent examples of his thoroughness and sincerity. *Faust's* study, though shown in semi-darkness, is as perfect in its details as if meant to be examined by electric light. The "drear accursed masonry" of the poem, the "vaulted ceiling," the "painted panes," the books in "toppling heap," are all here. The moonlight does not come in through the window in a great square splotch so that you know an electric moon is at work, but falls softly across the floor and touches with pale silver light the table near which *Faust* sits. The dim Gothic chamber, with its uncanny shapes hovering in corners and from the ceiling, is but a background for the red *Mephistopheles* who is ever the highest light and the center of interest, and for the somber *Faust* who is in such strong contrast to him. For Mr. Irving sees himself and Mr. Alexander not only as the chief characters in the tragedy, but as the principal figures in a picture rich in color, vigorous in composition. Their every pose is a subject for a painter, and the result of long and careful study. No consciousness is apparent in their movements, and probably the average English theater-goer, who understands difficulty only when he sees it, would think there was no art.

A more wonderful combination of beautiful pictures than is found in each of the two street scenes has probably never been put on any stage. The first of these is the place which Goethe names for *Faust's* meeting with *Margaret*. Mr. Irving shows a street strictly medieval in architecture and character, and fills it with all the rich and many-sided life of the time. *Margaret* is just coming from confession in a near cathedral when *Faust* sees her; therefore the most appropriate part of Nuremberg is the St. Lorenz Platz. Whether or no Mr. Irving's square is an exact copy of the real Platz makes little difference. A more important point is that, with the cathedral portal, the wine-shop, the bush hanging by wrought-iron-work scroll above the door, the men within drinking, the gabled, steep-roofed houses, and the crowd of citizens, it is perfect as a series of pictures and in true medieval feeling. There is perhaps no better proof of this than the fact that scarcely an artist has seen it without wanting to draw bits from it. Every one can see that the doorway, with its many statues, is a careful study from some old church or cathedral. In the

crowd there are great ladies in shining brocades, and peasant women in bodices and gay-colored aprons; knights in velvet and plush, swaggering soldiers in armor, and peasants in plain hose and jerkin; little girls in stiff brocades and broad-brimmed hats, and little girls in dark woolen gowns like the child in Rembrandt's picture of "Christ Blessing the Little Ones"; pages in silk attire, and a beggar in picturesque rags with pipes under his arm; brown-cowled monks in solemn procession, and white-veiled nuns who linger to talk to the women and children just beneath the shrine at the church door, where there is a blue Madonna with flowers at her feet. You wish they would stay long enough for you really to see them; but almost at once they have passed into the cathedral, to return only for another minute as short.

Throughout these pictures the color scheme as well as the grouping is beautifully carried out, for Mr. Irving is nothing if not a colorist. Just at the end, before the curtain falls and *Mephistopheles* is alone on the stage, the red of the sweeping roofs seems to reach its highest value in his more brilliant vermilion, as, doubled up and shrinking, he crouches against the tree near the wine-shop, his fingers in his ears to shut out the music of the cathedral chimes which it is agony for him to hear. You might, indeed, call the whole play an arrangement in red, for in all the scenes the color is toned so that it may lead up to his demon dress.

The second street scene, that of *Valentine's* death or duel, occurring much later in the play, in the third act, is no less realistic and beautiful. When the curtain goes up, there is still a faint color in the sky at the end of the long, twisting street to the left, but it quickly fades. The church rises, a great dark mass away above the stage, and you only see the heavy buttresses and one large window. The rest is in shadow, save in one corner where a lamp burns before a shrine. From out the gathering gloom and to the sound of distant drumming come the soldiers home from the wars,—wives, children, and sweethearts hanging to their arms, the halberds wreathed with green, and torches and cressets borne aloft. Each separate group is a study in itself. But the finest picture comes after *Mephistopheles* has sung his demon-song and flung away his mandolin, and *Valentine* is wounded, and all the townspeople hurry back through the long street and from every side, and *Margaret* and *Martha* come out from the house opposite the church. In the soldiers marching home there was the feeling of Rembrandt's "Night Watch." In this last group the feeling is not of a single picture, but of all the greatest pictures of this kind that have ever been painted. Mr. Irving himself has said that in its composition he had

many of them constantly in his mind; and when you analyze his picture, you find that it is masterly. All the light from the torch held by the man who supports him is concentrated on the face of *Valentine*: the mass of faces behind peer out from a mysterious half-light, while *Margaret*, her crime typified by the dense black shadow falling on her, cowers in the foreground. Of course the effect is heightened by the electric light, but so skillfully that you are not made aware of it. One etching that suggests itself to us just now, Rembrandt's "Raising of Lazarus," is somewhat like this scene in the arrangement of light and shade. But Mr. Irving's picture is in no sense a copy: it is rather the work of a great master of composition.

If you compare these street scenes with those the opera has taught you to expect, you are not likely to underrate their merits. It is the same with the gardens, which are the perfection of realism. Even Nilsson's voice might seem sweeter if she, like Miss Terry, could have for background a pretty green space shut in with high brick wall, with near and distant gables and spires and towers showing above it, instead of the conventional scene, with its characterless house, and single tree and flowers from the nearest florist's. In just such gabled cottages, with latticed windows and projecting upper stories, would people of *Martha's* and *Margaret's* rank have lived; with just such flowers would their gardens have been filled. In *Martha's*, there is one low tree, and roses border the garden paths. Both are seen in the warm evening light. When *Faust* and *Margaret* first come out between *Martha's* tall rose-trees the cathedral spires are dark against a glowing sky, but before they part twilight has fallen upon the place. If you watch closely, the change from the colors of sunset to the dusk of twilight may seem too violent. If you see only its effect upon the garden, it is natural enough. Gradually the flowers stand out from the green leaves with that artificial look peculiar to real roses in the hour before night, when the west is still aflame; gradually the scene is filled with the strange mystery of evening, "when the earth is all rest, and the air is all love." Of the many pictures of *Faust* and *Margaret* that have been painted, not one has equaled this of the Lyceum, when, in the tender light, *Margaret*, the daisies in her hand, tells *Faust* the simple story of her life. In her garden the scene is fairer, as indeed it should be, as here love grows sweeter and passion more intense. In broad daylight one wonders would *Margaret's* heart be so heavy without her lover? O heart of lead! and her little Nuremberg world still so fair about her! The red fades, and the luminous green, that never comes but in the evening,

covers the sky beyond the spires, and *Faust* returns. Students pass in a neighboring street singing, and three girls come running in the gate, to stand still and watch, and then shut it softly, only to open it a second time and watch again. Some one within the little house lights the evening lamp. It is all as real and beautiful as life itself. In just such a garden many a trusting maiden has been wooed and won by twilight in Nuremberg.

On the Brocken Mr. Irving could not be realistic, as he could in the streets or gardens of Nuremberg. But in another sense realism was possible. Goethe, by the words of *Mephistopheles* and the witches, describes very vividly the scenes of the wild Walpurgis night, and many are the medieval legends on the subject. To reproduce his picture and to show the Blocksberg under the conditions peculiar to May-night revels, was therefore Mr. Irving's task.

When the curtain first rises it is dark along the labyrinth of vales and rocky ramparts. Great crags are to the right; to the left is an abyss overshadowed by rude fir-trees. As *Faust* and *Mephistopheles* appear and climb toilsomely upward from the cavern to the crag, the moon with its belated glow breaks through the clouds. Weird, uncanny creatures fly through the air. The tempest raves, the forest grinds and cracks; but above the whistling and surging of the storm voices ring high, singing now near, now far, until along the mountain-side the infuriate glamouring song sweeps as the witches, young and old, horrible and beautiful, in strange unearthly draperies, comes slowly winding up from the depths below. They crowd and push and roar and clatter. *Faust* and *Mephistopheles* stand apart on the high cliff, and away above all loom up their shadows on the sky beyond, great specters of the Brocken. One dance ends only that another may begin, but at last *Mephistopheles* leaves the apes he has been caressing and bids the revelers begone. There is nothing more powerful than this single scene,—one minute a wild shrieking, singing crowd of misty shapes, moving hither and thither, clambering over the rocks and up the trees, dancing and turning; the next, after one last shriek, wilder, shriller than the rest, a silent, storm-beaten mountain-top deserted but for one flaming form. Then, sum-

moning them once more, he himself plunges into the midst of the reveling. Now the dreary light, that has been strangely glimmering, here glows through film and haze, there sweeps in rolling vapor; now creeps like a thread, now leaps and plays, lighting up the great mountain and all the rugged slopes, and finally gushes forth, a shower of fiery rain, over the wild and howling crowd of witches, while the rocky ramparts on all their heights are set ablaze. Thus is the ideal Brocken of the poem realized on the stage, and, hardened play-goer that you are, you cannot but shudder as the curtain falls.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since the above was written, Mr. Irving has kept the promise he made on the evening of the first performance of "Faust," and has added the Witches' Kitchen to the other scenes. We do not, however, think this an improvement. The gradual transformation of *Faust*, it is true, is excellent. Instead of the sudden change to which the opera has accustomed us, we see, as in the Chippewa legend, old age by slow degrees disappear upon the advance of youth. There is one second when *Faust* stands with the fresh, beautiful face of a young man, while around his brow cling the snowy locks of age; then he throws off all the weight of years with his cloak. The effect is so much finer than the usual traditional transformation, that operatic managers would do well in this particular to imitate Mr. Irving. But from a pictorial standpoint the new scene has but little merit.

In the scene that immediately follows on the St. Lorenz Platz, the little wine-shop with its wrought-iron-work scroll and bush has gone, and the foreground is bare and uninteresting. It is only right to add that, on the other hand, the great buttress springing from the cathedral to the opposite house in the middle distance, and the hilly street beyond, are more effective than the back-ground which they have replaced. But all the lovely grouping, the meeting of the burghers, the lingering crowd at the cathedral door, the idle gossiping, which were by far the most beautiful of the Lyceum "Faust" pictures, have been sacrificed for a novelty unworthy of them.

Joseph and Elizabeth R. Pennell.

THE ACTING IN MR. IRVING'S "FAUST."

AS an assistance to making clear to ourselves some of the questions suggested by the wonderful modern art of "staging" a piece, and in particular the effect that traps and panoramas, processions and colored lights, may have in their exuberance, their obtrusiveness upon the personal interpretation, the man-

ner in which, at the Lyceum, Mr. Henry Irving has produced a version of Goethe's "Faust" (for which he has been indebted to the fruitful pen of Mr. Wills) is greatly to be welcomed. Nothing lights up a subject like a good example, and Mr. Irving's examples are always excellent. His production of "Faust"

has been largely acclaimed and still more largely witnessed; it has had one of the longest of long runs, which, at the moment these words are written, shows no signs of abating. To the richness and ingenuity of the spectacle innumerable pens will have testified. The critic gives his impression, and that impression has been abundantly uttered. There is another one which also naturally has its turn. The *mise-en-scène* in the light of the acting, and the acting in the light of the *mise-en-scène*, are the respective halves of the interesting question. It is with the second half only that we ourselves are concerned.

In this connection the first thing that strikes us is a certain perversity in the manner in which Mr. Irving has approached and regarded his task, a perversity most singular on the part of a manager to whom the interests of the dramatic art have long appeared to be so dear. Saying to himself that he would give great attention to the machinery of the piece, he omitted to indulge at the same time in this indispensable reflection,—that to prevent the impression of triviality which might easily arise from an abuse of pantomimic effects, he should take care to put at the service of the great story a consummate interpretation; to see that *Faust* and *Margaret* and *Martha*, as well as *Mephistopheles*, were embodied in such a manner as to enable them to hold up their heads and strike their respective notes in the midst of the wilderness of canvas and paint. To the canvas and paint—since he feels Goethe's poem, or indeed simply the wondrous legend, in that way; or even, as we may say, since he feels in that way the manner in which Mr. Wills feels Goethe and the legend—he was perfectly welcome; but surely he ought to have perceived that, given the grandly poetic, ironic, but at the same time very scantily dramatic nature of his drama; given the delicacy and subtlety of a work of genius of the complexion of "Faust," special precautions should be taken against the accessories seeming a more important part of the business than the action. Evidently, however, Mr. Irving argued indirectly the opposite way. It is as if he had said that he would pile the accessories so high that the rest of the affair would n't matter, it would be regarded so little.

It would n't matter, in the first place, that Mr. Wills should have turned him out an arrangement of Goethe so meager, so common, so trivial (one really must multiply epithets to express its inadequacy), that the responsibility of the impresario to the poet increased tenfold, rather than diminished, with his accepting it, there being so much more, as it were, to make up for. It would n't matter that from the beginning to the end of the play,

thanks to Mr. Wills's ingenious dissimulation of the fact, it might never occur to the auditor that he was listening to one of the greatest productions of the human mind. It would n't matter that Mr. Irving should have conceived and should execute his own part in the spirit of somewhat refined extravaganza; a manner which should differ only in degree from that of the star of a Christmas burlesque,—without breadth, without depth, with little tittering effects of low comedy. It would n't matter that *Faust* should be represented by a young actor, whose general weakness should prevent him, in spite of zealous effort, from giving stature and relief to his conception of the character, and whose unformed delivery should interfere in the same degree with his imparting variety of accent to his different speeches. It would n't matter that, with Mr. Wills's version and such an interpretation, the exquisite episode of the wooing of *Margaret* should hold no place in the play—should literally pass unperceived. It would n't matter that Miss Ellen Terry, as picturesque and pleasing a figure as usual, should give perhaps a stranger exhibition than she has ever given before of her want of art and style, and should play the divine, still, concentrated part of *Margaret* without apparently a suspicion of what it consists. If it would n't matter that Mr. Irving himself should be thin, that Mr. Alexander should be insignificant, that Miss Terry should be rough, and that Mr. Wills should be all three, of course it would matter still less that the two extremely mature actresses who were successively to attempt *Martha* should give the English public (so far at least as represented at the Lyceum) a really rare opportunity to respond to bad taste with bad taste, to greet with artless and irrepressible glee the strange gruntings and snortings with which the performers in question have seen fit to enrich the character. All these things, to our sense, *should* have mattered; it was far better that the overtopping scenery should have been sacrificed than that a concession should have been made in regard to the personal rendering of the piece. It was far better that the "points" should remain the points that Goethe made, even if the background had to be bare for it; that the immortal group of the scholar with his passions rekindled, the girl who trusts and suffers, and the mocking, spell-weaving fiend should hold itself well together, detach itself, and stamp itself strongly, even if the imagination had to do the work of putting in the gardens and spires of the German city, the mists and goblins of the Brocken, and the blue fire that plays about *Mephistopheles*. Of course if Mr. Irving could both have mounted the play and caused the acting of it to be an equal feature, that would have

been best of all ; but since the personal representation of a work at once so pregnant poetically and so faulty as a dramatic composition was the problem to challenge by its very difficulties an artist of his high reputation,—an artist universally acclaimed as leading the public taste, not as waiting behind its chair,—he would have consulted best the interests of that reputation by "going in" for a dramatic as distinguished from a spectacular success.

We may as well confess frankly that we attach the most limited importance to the little mechanical artifices with which Mr. Irving has sought to enliven "Faust." We care nothing for the spurting flames which play so large a part, nor for the importunate lime-light which is perpetually projected upon somebody or something. It is not for these things that we go to see the great Goethe, or even (for we must, after all, allow for inevitable dilutions) the less celebrated Mr. Wills. We even protest against the abuse of the said lime-light effect: it is always descending on some one or other, apropos of everything and of nothing; it is disturbing and vulgarizing, and has nothing to do with the author's meaning. That blue vapors should attend on the steps of *Mephistopheles* is a very poor substitute for his giving us a moral shudder. That deep note is entirely absent from Mr. Irving's rendering of him, though the actor, of course, at moments presents to the eye a remarkably sinister figure. He strikes us, however, as superficial—a terrible fault for an archfiend—and his grotesqueness strikes us as cheap. We attach also but the slenderest importance to the scene of the Witches' Sabbath, which has been reduced to a mere bald hubbub of capering, screeching, and banging, irradiated by the irrepressible blue fire, and without the smallest articulation of Goethe's text. The scenic effect is the ugliest we have ever contemplated, and its ugliness is not paid for by its having a meaning for our ears. It is a horror cheaply conceived, and executed with more zeal than discretion.

It seems almost ungracious to say of an actress usually so pleasing as Miss Terry that she falls below her occasion, but it is impossible for us to consider her *Margaret* as a finished creation. Besides having a strange amateurishness of form (for the work of an actress who has had Miss Terry's years of practice), it is, to our sense, wanting in fineness of conception, wanting in sweetness and quietness, wanting in taste. It is much too rough-and-ready. We prefer Miss Terry's pathos, however, to her comedy, and cannot but feel that the whole scene with the jewels in her room is a mistake. It is obstreperous, and not in the least in the poetic tone. If the passages in the garden fail of their effect, the respon-

sibility for this is not, however, more than very partially with the *Margaret*. It is explained in the first place by the fact that the actor who represents *Faust* is, as we have hinted, not "in it" at all, and in the second by the fact that the conversation between *Mephistopheles* and *Margaret* is terribly overaccented—pushed quite out of the frame. *Martha's* flirtation, especially as Mrs. Stirling plays it, becomes the whole story, and *Faust* and *Margaret* are superseded. What can have beguiled Mr. Irving into the extraordinary error of intrusting the part of *Martha* first to one and then to another actress of (on this occasion at least) signally little temperance and taste? The fault has been aggravated by being repeated; the opportunity of retrieving it might have been seized when Mrs. Stirling laid down her task. But Mrs. Chippendale has even a heavier hand. We should be sorry to fail of respect to the former actress, who, to-day full of years and honors, has always shown an eminent acquaintance with her art and has been remarkable for a certain old-fashioned richness of humor. As such matters go, on the English stage, she is supposed to have the "tradition." It is to be hoped, however, for the tradition's sake, that she violates it to-day by her tendency to spread, to "drag," as the phrase is, to take too much elbow-room. This defect was sufficiently marked when a year or two ago she played the *Nurse* of *Juliet*; whom she put sadly out of focus. It is manifested in an even greater degree by her *Martha*, and it must be said that if she renders the part in the spirit of the tradition, the tradition will on this occasion have been strangely coarse. Yet Mrs. Stirling is distinction itself compared with the displeasing loudness to which her successor treats us; and of this latter lady's acting, it is enough to say that it compelled us to indulge in a melancholy "return" on an audience moved by such means to such mirth. The scene between *Mephistopheles* and *Martha* is the most successful of the play, judged by the visible appreciation of the public—a fact which should surely minister to deep reflection on the part of those who, as artists, work for the public. All the same, Mr. Irving would have been well advised, from the artistic point of view, in causing *Martha*, by contact and example, to be represented in a higher style of comedy. We shall not attempt to point out still other instances in which, as it seems to us, he would have been well advised; we have said enough to substantiate our contention that it is not for the interest of the actor's art that it should be too precipitately, or too superficially, assumed that the great elaboration of a play as a spectacle is a complete expression of it—a complete solution of the problem. * * *

THE TONIC SOL-FA SYSTEM.

OPINIONS OF A TEACHER.



THE musical world is surprised, and the professional portion of it not a little disturbed, by the appearance of a new method of writing and teaching music called the Tonic Sol-fa system. The first impulse of the musician is to condemn and reject the innovation. He issues a bull of excommunication against it, expecting it thereafter to disappear and take its place with the exploded theories and forgotten devices of the past. But presently he finds that his edict has failed to accomplish its purpose. The movement continues to live and shows signs of a boundless vitality. If he is disposed to be fair-minded and just, he then resolves to investigate the system in order to take an intelligent stand for or against it.

From that moment he finds himself the subject of a series of novel sensations, of which the prominent element is surprise. In the first place he is surprised to learn that the system has revolutionized popular music in Great Britain. If he visits that country, he sees its results on every side. He finds it in virtual possession of the Board (public) schools of the kingdom; he finds that all the church and Sunday-school hymnals have editions printed in the peculiar-looking tonic sol-fa notation; in many of the churches he hears sung by the congregations music of a high classical character such as only a few of the best-trained choirs in America attempt.

Being led by the visible results to a closer inspection of the cause, his sensations become even more positive than before. He sees that the educational influences of the system work with equal efficiency downward or upward. It furnishes such easy and natural steps for the elementary study of music as to bring it within reach of the children of the kindergarten, and at the same time supplies a key to the intricacies of higher art which enables the average singer, with but limited time for musical study, to master what the professional musician alone is able to acquire by the staff system. The observer finds vast gatherings of children singing Handel's Messiah and performing marvelous feats in sight-reading, hundreds of amateur societies rendering the most difficult works of the modern composers, unnumbered singers and players pursuing the study of har-

mony for the mere pleasure of it; he finds that hereafter music is no more to be limited to the specially musical than the enjoyment of literature to the few who are able to produce it.

Music has two distinct sides—the instrumental and the vocal. The instrumental side is exceedingly complex. The complications are represented by the keyboard of a piano or an organ. Twelve scales are to be played, a separate manipulation being required for each. The form of the scale or the order of its intervals is preserved by the use of sharps and flats—the black keys. The staff notation grew into use gradually as an embodiment of all the possible complications of instrumental music.

The vocal side of the art is, on the contrary, of the utmost simplicity. In fact it is, in its earlier stages, rather a language than an art. Little children will often use this language, *i. e.*, sing tunes correctly, before they can articulate. To the voice there is practically but one scale instead of twelve. It is, in effect, a musical alphabet of eight tones, produced in its different positions with no change of mental impression and no consciousness of sharps or flats. To illustrate: the singer is conscious of no difference between the key of B and the key of C, while the player uses five sharps in playing the former and none at all in playing the latter. The tonic sol-fa notation is a natural outgrowth of the vocal side of music. The following is a brief account of its origin and growth:

In the year 1844 a young nonconformist clergyman named John Curwen became pastor of a Congregational church at Plaistow, in the eastern suburbs of London. He had an unusual love for children, and great faith in music as a means of interesting and improving them. But he was, himself, musically deficient. His deficiency was so marked that a wager was made among his fellow-students at college that he could not be taught to sing the scale correctly within a given time, Mr. Curwen agreeing to receive a certain amount of drilling each day. The story goes that he accomplished the feat, but with nothing to spare. In after years he pursued the study very earnestly, and endeavored to impart to the children of his parish whatever he succeeded in gaining for himself. But the results were far from satisfactory. Hearing of a new method employed by a philanthropic lady at Norwich (Miss