

MARLOWE SOCIETY.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS.

One can imagine two English poets quickly making themselves at home at Bryanston. One is Kit Marlowe. The other is quite obviously Shelley, who in all that concerns education was born at least a hundred years too soon. How eagerly he would wander untrammelled and unclad beside our Dorset Stour.

Marlowe, honoured by a Society founded in his name, has already become in a very real sense acclimatised, and the Marlowe Society inaugurated its career by presenting DOCTOR FAUSTUS on December 15th and 16th of last year.

This theme has fascinated many writers who have one and all drawn inspiration from the old *Puppenspiel*. There are many Fausts, but there is only one Marlowe. And to a generation ignorant of Goethe and glutted with Covent-Garden Gounod, Marlowe's play comes with the impact of irresistible passion.

Why is this tragedy so tremendous ?

There are some minds which find it difficult to be interested in a play without a woman in it. The only woman Marlowe wanted had been dead some two thousand years. Helen of Troy was her name, and it was one to conjure with : a name to evoke a couplet that should echo down the ages. And having made his choice, Marlowe needed no *Gretchen am Spinnrade* for a box-office attraction.

But wherefore the tragedy ?

Perhaps it is that all Englishmen are Puritans at heart, and this history of a man fighting for his own soul and losing it reaches a culminating point of painful and tragic intensity.

"Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burnéd is Apollo's laurel bough."

The Marlowe Society is to be congratulated on the success of its first venture. It was a notable performance, chiefly memorable for the acting of M. P. Phillips in the title role.

There are lines in Marlowe's play which have all the sonorous rotundity of a French horn. Not a few are well-known, for like HAMLET and all good plays, FAUSTUS is 'full of quotations.'

Such verses are pitfalls to actors, and have to be negotiated with artful caution. In the delivery of them Phillips was perhaps less successful than in quieter passages ; but throughout the play he maintained an admirable consistency of character. He emphasised effectively the deepening gloom of the closing scenes : and in the final soliloquy raised emotion to a rare height, so that to more than one member of the audience, the keen, shrill scream of Faustus as he falls, "never to rise again," was almost unbearable.

The minor characters were mostly in the hands of junior members of the Society who acquitted themselves with credit.

Ample compensation for undertaking the least significant role in the play is afforded by the reflection that it is the minor characters who can make or mar any performance. If they are acting all the time, no play can fail to be some sort of a success. But they must not relax for a moment.

When one of the scholars stepped so bravely forward on that last desperate night with a ringing : "I will stay with Faustus," then in a moment we of the audience had full conviction of imminent peril and there was drama before us.

It is generally easy for the principal actor to throw himself into his part : it is always essential for the minor characters to immerse themselves in theirs.

And that supplies another reason for the success of the Marlowe Society.

It would be invidious to mention particular names where so many were good : but ungrateful not to comment on the good delivery of old-man, scholar Austin (who doubled two parts with distinction), and Maine, another Wurtemburger who united to an excellent voice a most pleasing ease of gesture.