CHARLES GOUNOD

A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

By JULIEN TIERSOT

ONE HUNDRED YEARS have passed since Charles Gounod was born—June 17, 1818—at Paris. It was scarcely fifteen years ago that musical France celebrated the centenary of another of her glorious children, Hector Berlioz; while the coming quarter-century will furnish numerous occasions for analogous commemorations, by which the glories of the French School, hitherto too lightly considered, shall be set forth, and its lofty flight during the nineteenth century shall be made manifest. Despite other claims on our attention at this period, it is proper that we should call to mind a time which, in the annals of French art and genius, shines with an unquenchable lustre. The subject is sufficiently remote for us to examine, in its ensemble, the life-work and career of a master who died twenty-five years ago (October 17, 1893), and who, variously appraised while living, nevertheless occupied a conspicuous position in the musical speculations of the entire world. Let us attempt to make a rapid survey of these topics and, from a distant and commanding point of view, to scan simultaneously the life of the man, the career of the artist, and the productions of the musician.

I.

The first characteristic trait revealed by this examination is that Gounod was, first and foremost, an artist. To certain minds this statement may seem supererogatory. And, none the less, this trait is not always the most prominent one when certain masters are under consideration. The one may rather seem a thinker; a second, an impassioned soul; a third, a man of action or pious belief. Gounod is essentially a musician. It was not unfit that he had himself portrayed as holding in his arms, with loving devotion, the score of *Don Giovanni;* he was in very truth of Mozart's lineage; in him it is the musical instinct which predominates. The circumstances attending his entry into life, like those of his last hours, agree in their attestation of the essential character of his artist-nature.

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Art was his by inheritance. Among his ancestors, one—his grandfather, "Armourer to the King" and, in this capacity, lodged in the Louvre—was one of those artisans whose trade well-nigh attains the dignity of an art; and his father was a painter of talent. He himself manifested an aptitude for painting; when he had won the Prix de Rome as a musician, Ingres, the director of the Académie de France at the Villa Medici, having seen some sketches which he had made on his walks among the antiquities of Rome, said to him, "If you wish, I will send you home with the first prize in painting." But he could not have led a divided life, and music claimed him.

Indeed, he had imbibed its primal principle with his mother's milk. "She never nursed me without singing," he narrates; "she assuredly made me swallow as much music as milk—and I can say that I took my first lessons quite unwittingly." His mother, Madame Gounod, who bore the auspicious cognomen of Victoire, was herself a musician; for several years she had been a piano-teacher, and so became the natural initiatrix of her son, the future author of *Faust*.

Furthermore, it is an advantage of Paris, the "grand' ville," that it is a cultural soil favorable to the development of every talent; each flourishes in the atmosphere suitable to it, and finds an environment for which it is adapted from its very inception. In his "Mémoires d'un Artiste," Gounod relates how he, as a mere child, once happened to have his capacities tested by an old musician, Jadin, formerly a *page de musique* under Louis XVI and one of the first professors in the Conservatoire. At the age of eight he was a pupil in a boarding-school, where the professor of solfeggio was a young man destined to become an illustrious singer—Duprez. When he entered the Lycée Saint-Louis, the *maître de chapelle* in that institute was Hippolyte Monpou, a composer of note in the romantic period. The chaplain himself, Abbé Dumarsais, encouraged his promising talent; he it was who, on his appointment as curate, later reserved for Gounod the position as *maître de chapelle* through which he made his entry into the career of a professional musician.

He did not neglect his classical studies, and in due course became a bachelor of arts.

But, while still on his bench at the Lycée Saint-Louis, he was so haunted by a prepossession for art that, not daring to speak about it, he wrote a long letter to his mother declaring his wish to become a musician; carefully modulating his epistolary style to conform to the harangues of the *Conciones*, he asserted that

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"in this career there is found a real and constant happiness, a spiritual consolation"; that one may rightfully "prefer the glory of the arts to a position which money alone renders eminent"; that music is so sweet a companion "that it would deprive him of a great happiness to prevent him from following it." And as those who directed him and loved him opposed his desire with the anticipated objection, "To be a musician is not to have a vocation," he replied vehemently, "What! If one is named Mozart, has one no vocation?"

So, of necessity, he went his way, which led him definitively into the artist world, his chosen sphere. At the same time that he was studying rhetoric, he was taking lessons in harmony of Reicha, the best teacher then living; then he entered the Conservatoire, where he was a pupil of Lesueur. Thus it happened that Gounod and Berlioz, though differing in age by fifteen years, both studied under the same masters.

We hardly need add that for a long time he had heard music in the theatres and concerts. At seven he had been taken to the Odéon, where *Der Freischütz* was being sung; soon thereafter, to the Théatre Italien, where he listened to *Otello* and *Don Giovanni;* finally, the newly established Concerts of the Conservatoire had initiated him into the beauties of the Beethoven symphony. Even in the Lycée, he had arleady begun to devote himself ardently to musical composition. He was a pupil of the Conservatoire for only three years, attending, besides the classes of Lesueur, those of Berton, Halévy, and Paër, and winning the Prix de Rome in 1839.

He had already tried his hand at compositions of a wider scope than those which sufficed to satisfy his earlier ambitions. In 1838 (when he reached the age of twenty) the pupils of Lesueur composed, for the anniversary service of their master's death, a collective mass, of which each wrote a portion. The Agnus Dei fell to his lot, and was so well received that his first public début was saluted by Berlioz in these terms: "The Agnus, for three solo voices with chorus, by M. Gounod, the youngest of Lesueur's pupils, is beautiful—very beautiful. Everything in it is novel and distinguished—melody, modulation, harmony. In this piece M. Gounod has given proof that we may expect the very best ('tout') of him."

Pursuing this same path, he composed an entire mass, which was produced at the church of St.-Eustache on St. Cecila's day (November, 1839), and which he dedicated to the memory of his teacher. The homage thereby rendered to the initiator of his genius was deserved. Gounod, in his Memoirs, pays a fitting

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tribute to Lesueur—"serious-minded, devoted, ardent, of an inspiration at times biblical, strongly inclined toward sacred subjects; tall, with a face pale as wax, the air of an ancient patriarch. Lesueur (he continues) received me with a paternal kindness and tenderness; he was loving, he had a warm heart. His instruction, which, unhappily for me, continued for only nine or ten months, was of great benefit, and from him I received advice whose illuminating and elevating effect assures it a lasting place in my memory and my affectionate gratitude." It was in such terms that the pupils of Lesueur spoke of their master. I know another who, fifty years later, left a like memory in the minds of his pupils—César Franck. Such schooling was a fine and salutary experience for Gounod.

He took his departure for Rome toward the end of 1839, at the age of twenty-one. As far as his productivity at that time was concerned, his sojourn there was not especially fruitful; none the less it exercised a considerable influence on the development of his mind. On the one hand, by removing him from the artificial atmosphere of Parisian society, it impregnated him with that Latin genius of which several of his works (and some of the best) exhibit the evident influence; on the other, it promoted in him a religious evolution whose consequences, for his life and lifework, were momentous. Further on we shall return to this dual tendency, whose full effect was not felt until much later. At Rome, Gounod was wholly engaged in preparations, composing a mass and some sacred pieces, taking notes which he utilized to the full at the proper time; for instance, in the notebooks of his journey, we find the themes of certain songs which are among his best, such as the poem by Théophile Gautier, "Ma belle amie est morte," "Le Vallon," and "Le Soir," which became "Stances de Sapho." Two of his most expressive melodies, settings of poems by Lamartine, were written prior to his arrival in Rome, and this in itself indicates a rare musical aptitude, together with a supreme disdain for the trivial forms then in fashion—"the romance *Loïse Puget*, the musical-album style"—to which Gounod ascribes a "brutalizing influence." The poet-soul which lived in him refused to submit itself to such influences.

He found his greatest enjoyment in the most purely artistic circles. He avoided Italian opera, just then fallen very low (he tells of a representation of *Norma*, at the Apollo Theatre, summing up the impression he received in these words: "One felt as if one were at Guignol's").[1] But, to make up for it, he assiduously

[1] A puppet-show.

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attended the ceremonies at the Sixtine Chapel; the wealth of detail with which he describes them in his Memoirs attests the importance, from the standpoint of his art, that he ascribes to them. He impregnated himself with the atmosphere of the Roman Campagna, with the aspect of the ancient ruins, with the countryside of Capri, Siena, and the lake of Nemi. He made the acquaintance and was a familiar guest of two ladies of fine mind and superior talent—Mme. Viardot (Pauline Garcia), destined to be the admirable interpreter of his dramatic firstling *Sapho,* and Fanny Hensel, Mendelssohn's sister, who revealed to him the beauties of Bach and Beethoven, and inspired him to transports of admiration. For he was essentially a vibrant soul, and music affected him with a rare intensity. Mme. Hensel, whose memoirs are so vividly interesting, scarcely exaggerates when she declares that "German music distresses him and makes him almost mad"; that the playing of this music "produces on him the effect of a bomb falling into a house; possibly it causes great internal revulsions within him." To tell the truth, this influence was in no way disastrous; it simply contributed to keep Gounod in the channels of high art, and absorbed nothing whatever of his individuality, which, on the contrary, it only fructified. It was probably not long after one of these intimate recitals, in whose course Fanny Hensel introduced Gounod to Bach, that the former composed, on the harmonious weft of the first prelude in The Well-tempered Clavichord, the fine melody of the Méditation, which helped to establish his juvenile renown. This Méditation has been made into an Ave Maria, and people have gone into ecstasies over his religious feeling. This is a total misconception; this melody has been successively adapted to very different sets of words, and it was conceived quite independently of any preconception other than musical; it is a "counter-subject" naturally emanating from Bach's prelude, in whose harmonies it was integrally contained. To disengage it, artistic insight was needed; Gounod executed this contrapuntal operation in masterly fashion; but he did it simply as an artist. What purer genius could, by its contact, have promoted the unfolding of his own?

Gounod returned to France after the required three years' term in Italy and Germany. At this juncture a diversion occurred which nearly turned him aside from his chosen path; having become a *maître de chapelle* in Paris, he seemed destined to cultivate sacred music exclusively; he even dreamed of abandoning the career so brilliantly begun, that he might enter the Church. But he thought better of it, and returned into the world. He

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wrote for the theatre; the first poems that he set to music were on Greek subjects—*Sapho*, *Ulysse*. Success was tardy in coming. At the time when these works appeared, French taste was at its lowest ebb; it demanded nothing better than vulgar Italian operas or silly comedy-operas. Nevertheless, some few isolated and neglected masters fretted under restraint, although powerless in view of such indifference. Berlioz, discouraged, laid his pen aside, and the younger generation of artists had need of proudest self-reliance to enter upon so difficult a career. Gounod was among the first to experience the effects of this general want of appreciation. But, at the same time, those who sought to appreciate were well able to distinguish the lofty qualities manifested in these first works, and his fame gradually spread. It became universal when, in 1859, the Théâtre-Lyrique produced *Faust*, which, after its production at the Opéra ten years later, has become one of the most dependable supports of the repertory in all the musical theatres of the world. *Philémon et Baucis*, *Mireille*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Polyeucte*, and certain other operas now known only by name, mark the successive steps in the career of the dramatic composer.

Toward the close of his life he returned, with renewed predilection, to religious music, which, indeed, he had never ceased to cultivate. He had written masses, motets, canticles; he now wrote more; the best works of his declining years are two oratorios, *Rédemption* and *Mors et Vita*, imbued with pure and elevated lyricism. And, as a man, he had reached the height of his boldest ambitions. The name of Gounod was mentioned throughout the entire world as that of one of the leading musicians of the century. "To be a musician is not to have a vocation," was the objection raised by the good teacher who, shaken by his pupil's youthful conviction when he retorted by citing the name of Mozart, was unable to refrain from murmuring, "Well, if that is the way you take it . . ." That certainly was the way that he took it, and he convincingly proved that it was "a vocation" to be called Gounod. He had grown to be greater than an artist, he had risen to the rank of master—"cher maître." He who, in his infantile declaration, had pompously written: "Achilles preferred glory to a long life passed without winning a famous name," was ableto enjoy the double delight of a glorious name and length of days. In his old age, surrounded by honors and deferential attentions, he did not fear to play the pontiff (*pontifier*) more or less; this term, generally employed with a certain irony, may be applied to him without malevolence, for it assists in defining the quasi

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ecclesiastical bearing which finally gave the tone to his entire personality. Those who knew him during his last years remember him thus, in the intimacy of his homelife in the handsome house which he had arranged to suit his taste, where an organ lent to the home the air of a sacred place; clad in a flowing robe from which his fine monastic head emerged like that of a Father of the Church, inspired rather than austere, his very gesture seemed to bless the fervent disciples, the fair admirers, who busied themselves about him and came to pay him their respects.

Had he only so willed it, he might have reposed on his laurels; but how find repose when the brain is never at rest, and swarming with new ideas? Music was his obsession, attracting him imperiously and ceaselessly. There were times when the effort of creation was so intense as to cause him great mental fatigue; but when the paroxysm was past, he would again grasp the pen for further labors. From the age of seventy onward he himself felt that the source of inspiration was running dry within him, or, at least, that it had lost its freshness; but that did not matter—he went on writing. The complete list of his works shows a considerable number of miscellaneous pieces for piano, voice, etc., which he produced as though from natural necessity, because it was his function. And he died with his head prone on a score on which he was engaged, and which he was about to finish at the moment when, standing before his work, he was stricken down.

II.

However, Gounod did not play the pontiff all his life. He had his hours of doubt, of hesitation, of weakness. Revealing himself thus as a man, he interests us more than by his most carefully calculated acts. In his youth he underwent a religious crisis which almost ravished him from his art, and left a profound impression on his mind. There is no exaggeration whatever in asserting that this was the most momentous event of his lifetime. It would be a serious mistake to attempt to ignore this fact—to pretend that the works of the musician and his public career are all that we need know, and that the rest does not concern us. What! is there no intimate relation between the conscience of the individual and the production of the artist? As a matter of fact, the one is an emanation from the other. We must needs sound the depths of this conscience; by so doing, we shall learn to distinguish that which is profoundest in the man; and it is only after we have

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penetrated the deeps of his soul that the true meaning of his works shall be revealed to us in the fullest light.

Gounod did not draw his faith from his course of education. Brought up in the Catholic religion, the first impressions derived from it were merely superficial, his case resembling that of other children of the French bourgeoisie at that time, when the influence of Voltaire had by no means lost its hold. In contrast with the majority of families, his mother had no hand in his religious fervor; occupied in rearing her children and in gaining a livelihood through her art, she had no spare time to devote to religious exercises; like Martha, the sister of Mary, she was careful and troubled about many things, and left to others "that good part"; and if there came a day when she longed to acquire, for herself, somewhat of that "good part," she owed it to her son, for it was he who brought about her belated conversion and induced her to resume the long-neglected religious exercises.

That an influence of such a nature was brought to bear on him in his youth, was owing, in turn, to music. At this period, when symphonic art was practised to a very limited extent in France, the sole music worthy of the name existed (properly speaking) in only two species, the opera and ecclesiastical song; and this latter, ranking very high in popular estimation, represented the superior form of the art. Now, we have seen that the youthful Gounod, who had only an occasional opportunity of hearing Mozart, Weber and Rossini at the Théâtre Italien, lived in an almost absolute intimacy with the fellowship of the chapels. The provisor of the Lycée where he began his studies was an Abbé, and in the chapel there was a raised platform occupied by a small choir, which he joined immediately upon his entrance. When he underwent the first examination proposed for testing his musical aptitude, he was given the biblical words of the romance of *Joseph* to set to music. Possibly his first attempts at composition in the Conservatoire were trivial cantatas and pieces constructed according to the scholastic formula; none of these compositions were ever accorded the honor of a public hearing, whereas the first work which he had publicly performed was that Agnus Dei which earned the encomium of Berlioz; and no sooner had he carried off the Prix de Rome with the obligatory competitive cantata *Fernand*, than he set about the composition and public production of an entire Mass. We should also bear in mind those traits in the character of his old teacher Lesueur, which made the deepest impression on him—"serious-minded, devoted, ardent, of an inspiration at times biblical, strongly inclined toward

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sacred subjects; .... with the air of an ancient patriarch." Hence, his musical education was a foremost means of leading him into the path of religion.

But it was at Rome, and from the very outset of his sojourn in the papal city, that the definitive evolution was accomplished. And there, again, his previous musical habitudes were not foreign to the influences to which he was exposed.

In the Lycée Saint-Louis one of Gounod's schoolmates was a young man somewhat older than himself, with whom music formed a common bond of sympathy from the beginning—they sang together in the choir. This young man's name was Charles Gay. Let us remember the name; for he was the man who set in motion this entire evolution which we are now to record. Having lost sight of each other on leaving the school, they met again in a decidedly secular resort, the Opéra, at a representation of *La Juive*. They renewed their old acquaintance and learned that they had entered into a new comradeship, for Gay, likewise possessed by the demon of music, had taken up the same course of study as Gounod, and under the same teacher, Reicha. They became intimate; Gounod was received into Gay's family; a sister of the latter was a good pianist; they played Mozart and Beethoven together, and the young masters of the future tried their own compositions in the privacy of home.

One day Charles Gay announced to Gounod that he was going to study for the priesthood. He kept his word, and from now onward we shall call him Monseigneur Gay, for he became a bishop.

Gounod was extremely astonished to learn the resolution of his friend. Was it really possible to sacrifice such an enticing career for one so little enviable? To become a curate when one might be an artist?!

He continued his studies in the Conservatoire and won the prize, which obliged him to dwell two years, or more, in Rome.

During this period Charles Gay had also set out for Italy, having a desire to pursue his theological studies in the capital of Christendom. He was already there in the autumn of 1839, when Gounod, while preparing to depart, was taking farewell of Paris with the production of his first Mass at Saint-Eustache; a letter written at Siena on Oct. 19 reveals the interest which he took in this production. Another, dated at Rome, Dec. 7, says, "I am happy that Charles Gounod is coming." Equal impatience was manifested on Jan. 17, 1840. And ten days later, when the new laureates of the Institute arrived in the Eternal City after

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the interminable and fatiguing journey per vetturino, the sole familiar face that met Gounod's eye was that of Charles Gay.

It is a time-honored custom, usually religiously observed by winners of the Prix de Rome, to state that their sojourn in Italy was the happiest time of their lives. Berlioz was almost the only one to depart from it, and to complain of the boredom he suffered during his "exile." Gounod, who in later years was obliged, as a leading member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, to enforce the observance of this obligation, did not care to protest too strongly against it; nevertheless, he could not refrain from avowing, in his "Mémoires d'un Artiste," that on his arrival in Rome his impression was one of profound sadness: "I felt thoroughly disillusioned (he writes), and it would not have taken much to make me renounce my stipend, repack my trunk, and return post-haste to Paris." As for Charles Gay, four weeks after their reunion, Gounod penned this pregnant phrase: "Poor Charles is sad for what he left behind, and sad at what he found at the Academy."

Gounod's mind, so readily susceptible to impressions, was therefore well prepared just then to receive any consolations which might be offered him. Those of religion were the first brought to bear, and it was Charles Gay who provided them.

And in how short a time, too! As we have seen, Gounod tells us that he was on the point of giving up his stipend and returning to Paris, "there to rejoin what he loved." The former member of this assertion is correct; but the latter is contestable. The truth is, that the future author of *Faust*, at the age of twenty-one and one-half years, was on the brink of renouncing art and embracing the priesthood. No public act of his tells us so, for nothing irreparable was consummated; but we are very well informed by certain letters, although those written by the principal actor in this little drama of the conscience have not come to light. But we do know the answers to them from his mother and his elder brother, and we perceive, from the loving anxiety which they express, what he himself must have confessed.

"Your letters are more like a homily, like a flesh-and-blood sermon, than anything else (so writes Urbain Gounod). You appear to be wholly absorbed and controlled by the influence of your friend Gay.... It is not for you to assume the mission of converting others—our mother, for example—to observances to which she is no longer accustomed, and the neglect of which has in no way prevented her from doing those things which, in my opinion, are the very essence of true piety."

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So we see that the new proselyte had already begun to try to convert his mother! She, with infinite delicacy, wrote in turn:

"I feel well assured of the goodness of your heart and the purity of your intentions, of your loftiness of soul, of your desire to speak only of useful matters and to conform your actions to win the approval of the Master of all things; and, nevertheless, in spite of all this, my dear child, while reading your last letter my heart was sorely troubled by a sort of vague anxiety which it inspired. . . . Be constantly on your guard, and assert yourself with all frankness as an artist of religious tendency, but not as a man of religion (with its multifarious observances) who proposes to reserve himself for the career of an artist."—The influence of which his mother was more especially in dread was that of Father Lacordaire, whose eminent talent was known to her; she went so far as to express a fear that Charles intended to become a Dominican, "which I consider wholly out of harmony with your passionate temperament," she wrote.

Mme. Gounod was not mistaken. Father Lacordaire, still young, and a recent acquisition of the Church, was at that time in Rome, where, in the Minerva monastery, he had just assumed the habit of a Dominican. He was gifted with most persuasive eloquence, and young men came in throngs to hear him speak. Gounod, taken thither by his friend Gay, went to hear him, and was won over then and there. In his combative proselytism the priest had in no wise neglected to follow up his words by actions; in the name of St. John the Baptist he grouped together in a brotherhood (*confrérie*) a certain number of young people, French artists, or Romans of noble family. Gounod was one of the first twelve members of this *confrérie;* and it was not in the Villa Medicis, but in the monastery during a period of seclusion, that he penned the score of the only one of his works which was heard in public during his stay in Rome—a Mass produced at Saint-Louis des Français in 1841.

Meanwhile he went on multiplying his religious observances. A letter from Charles Gay tells, in a tone of fervent mysticism, of a ceremony in which they took part on the Day of the Annunciation, when Gounod partook of the communion "for the first time since his childhood." He sought to induce some comrades to join him; at this same ceremony his comrade, Georges Bousquet, winner of the Prix de Rome the year before, accompanied him, and it was he who, "for the first time in his life," approached the sacred table. Was the effect of this belated first communion as lasting as his friend hoped? Judging by the later career of

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Bousquet, who died young, after having been through all the vicissitudes of the musician's trade, such was by no means the case. And Bousquet himself took Mme. Hensel very frankly into his confidence with regard to Gounod: he informed her that Father Lacordaire had sought them out during the winter; that Gounod, "with his weak character, very visionary and open to every influence," had "let himself be caught in the noose of religion," and that at no distant time "he would exchange music for the frock."

Now, all this took place within a period of four months. Gounod arrived in Rome on the 27th of January, 1840, and Gay's letters, from which we have just borrowed some extracts, were dated the 25th of February and 11th of March (he himself left Rome the 27th of April). The festival of the Annunciation, which is spoken of as an anniversary in a letter of the following year, fell ou March the 25th; the letters from Gounod's mother and brother were written on April the 27th; it was on May the 16th, 1840, that Lacordaire convoked his first disciples at the monastery of Saint-Sabine; and Fanny Hensel left Rome about the beginning of June.

After this period Gounod's faith, while suffering no relapse, became at first more calm in its manifestations; he held fast to his belief, but for the time being gave up the idea of entering the priesthood; and although he devoted himself almost exclusively for nearly ten years to the composition of sacred music, he none the less maintained most amicable relations with his comrades in that monastery of artists (Berlioz dubbed it "the academic barracks") known as the Villa Medicis.

At Rome he composed a Mass with orchestra which was executed at Saint-Louis des Français for the king's birthday festival; a Te Deum in Palestrina style (his *envoi de Rome*), harshly criticized by Spontini; two other Masses, a Requiem from one of them being sung at Vienna during his obligatory sojourn in that city in the winter of 1842–1843; finally, a letter written in Rome during the last year of his stay there announced his intention (which was not realized) to write a "symphony with choruses, in four Parts, on Christ, His persecution, His death, a prophecy against Jerusalem, and the Resurrection."

He returned to Paris in May, 1843, and the first friend whom he saw on descending from the diligence from Germany was the same who greeted his arrival at Rome in the *vetturino*—Charles Gay. So close was their intimacy that they dwelt in the same house; his mother had so arranged it; and in the near neighborhood still

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lived the former chaplain of the Lycée Saint-Louis, Abbé Dumarsais, now a curate of the parish "des Missions." The previous year, Mme. Gounod had written her son in her joy: "I do not know precisely where you want to live when you come back; shall it be near the *Missions*, or near the Opéra?" Fate had already decided—it was not to be near the Opéra, at least, not just then. Mme. Gounod, having (thanks to her son) resumed the observances of religion, now, as we see, selected a domicile in the vicinity of her new spiritual advisers. Abbé Dumarsais had long before promised that, if he should become curate, he would appoint him his *maître de chapelle;* he was taken at his word, and the youthful stipendiary became the incumbent of a position of which he, in very truth, proposed to make a sacred office; for he stipulated that he should be known in the parish as the "curate of the music."

He found the task less pleasing than he may possibly have expected. Musical taste, in that nineteenth-century environment, was as bad in the churches as in the theatres, which is saying a good deal. Gounod, fresh from Rome, desired to introduce the traditions of the Sixtine Chapel into the little parish; but he had to do with the faithful from the district of the rue de Sèvres, and they had a preference for Adolphe Adam's *Laudate.* His mother, foreseeing the difficulty, had already warned him. The year before, doubtless to give his congregation a foretaste, the curate had had a Mass by Palestrina brought out, and the artistic world of Paris was invited to assist at the production; the effect was deplorable, and Mme. Gounod thought it well to inform her son of it: "It is cold as ice (she wrote him); it gives me the impression of an interminable aberration"; and in continuation she did not hesitate to launch rather vivacious criticisms at the head of "M. Palestrina." The curate, despite his good intentions, would have liked to conciliate everybody; he advised his new *maître de chapelle* to "modify his style," to "make concessions"; but Gounod rebelled, offered to resign, and only their fast friendship rendered an amicable arrangement possible.

In very truth, it was a highly ambitious scheme, this attempted reformation of sacred music with the limited means at Gounod's disposal in the parish of the Missions. There was a mediocre organ; four singers—two basses, a tenor, and a choirboy; over and above all these, the *maître de chapelle* in his composite function of conductor, organist, singer and composer. Grand resources for producing the responsive choruses of Allegri, Palestrina and Carissimi! Indeed, Gounod did not even try to

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do so. He confined himself to composing motets and masses in that style, with simplifications to suit the means at hand for their execution. All the works which he wrote at this period are conceived in this skeletonized form; of these, we shall take the liberty of mentioning only such as were published: a Short Mass and Salutation, for four men's voices (Op. 1); the Offices of Holy Week (Op. 2); a Salve Regina, canticles, motets, etc.

The above-mentioned works bearing the publication-numbers Op. 1 and Op. 2, also bear the author's name and style as follows: "Musique de l'Abbé Ch. Gounod."

In fact, the artist, returning to the project abandoned in Rome, had again made up his mind to enter the priesthood. In February, 1846, the newspapers announced that Gounod, winner of the Prix de Rome, had taken holy orders. This was going rather fast; not only was he never ordained, but it was not until later that he could assume the simple title of seminarian. But it is quite true that then and theretofore his life and his art were exclusively devoted to religion. "He does not wish to do anything for the theatre, and declares his intention to occupy himself solely with sacred music," writes his brother to Hector Lefuel, Dec. 7, 1844. He had again submitted himself to the guidance of Father Lacordaire. At this time he frequented one of those tables d'hôte in the Latin Quarter whose youthful *habitués* are sometimes destined to become men of renown, and where ingenious and ofttimes fruitful ideas are bandied about—the cabaret of père Fricaud in the rue Guénégaud; here he met Courbet, Gérard de Nerval, Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire, Henri Murger, Gustave Doré; breakfast was served for twelve sous; Gounod continued his proselyting campaign, and even succeeded in attracting to the meetings at Notre-Dame the popular chansonnier, Pierre Dupont. His letters at this time were written on pape bearing the letterhead of the Foreign Missions, and he signed them "Ab. Ch. Gounod," with a cross at the top of the page; an interesting collection of them has been published, addressed to the painter Richomme. Lastly, we have a letter to one of his old comrades in Rome, Besozzi, dated at Carmes, Nov. 7, 1847; in it Gounod excuses himself for not assisting at his wedding, announcing that he was going "without doubt to spend, in that place, the three years of study and seclusion required to prepare him for the priesthood."

And on the 6th of October, 1847, the *maître de chapelle* at the Missions church actually received from the archbishop of Paris a letter authorizing him "to live at les Carmes and to attend,

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as an extern, the course at Saint-Sulpice." He then had to don the religious garb.

But, once again, it was not for long. Not five months had elapsed when he left the seminary and renounced the churchly career.

What had happened? Gounod merely states, in his Memoirs (where he touches very discreetly on this episode in his life), that he "had mistaken his true vocation; that it had become impossible for him to live without his art."

Was this really all? were there no other reasons for making so serious a determination? The secret behind his avowal eludes us, and we must not force its revelation.

So let us be content to know that Gounod reëntered the world at the beginning of March, 1848. Art had gained the upperhand of faith! He even relinquished his position of *maître de chapelle*, although it would have been quite permissible for him, as a layman, to retain it; and it seems to us that this circumstance confirms the impression that his return into secular life was, in a sort, a flight, an escape. For that matter, it was not the only time in Gounod's life that he sought freedom. This time he did so without commotion or unpleasant publicity; neither did he fall from an excess of devotion into unbelief.[1] He even continued to compose masses, this time with full orchestra, and with no hesitation at letting women sing in the temple. But he also wrote *Sapho, Faust, Roméo et Juliette*. He married, allying himself with a family whose head was a well-known professor in the Conservatoire, so that he was again smoothly launched on the stream of secular artistry. Being no longer a *maître de chapelle*, he accepted the post of director of the municipal Orphéon; as such, he still wrote choruses for men's voices, and opportunity was not lacking for controversy on one or the other hand. Then came success, and with it honors and wealth; he became a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and, had he so willed, might have been appointed Director of the Conservatoire. Toward the close of his life (as we have already intimated) he resumed the observances of religion with greater ostentation than ever. Not that his bearing showed aught of austerity; he was not one of those who take delight in flagellations and haircloth shirts. His devotional attitude, in common with the works evolved therefrom, is fairly well characterized by Pascal's somewhat caustic epithet—"easy devotion."

[1]After the birth of one of Gounod's children in September, 1863, Abbé Gay spoke of "the restitution of himself which he had made to God, at the beginning of this year, by becoming altogether a Christian."—It follows from this remark that between 1848 and 1863—fifteen years—the ex-Abbé Gounod might at least have been charged with lukewarmness.

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We may go a step further, and call it "comfortable." But, as he did not care to be accused of cherishing a "faith without works," he did not fail to assert his belief however and whenever circumstances permitted. His letters, even such as were of a wholly private nature, show that he was possessed of a decidedly combative spirit, and one which did not even hold aloof from the polemics of the day. M. Camille Bellaigue has published several characteristic specimens. Besides, we should not forget that, while his last thought was for his art, it was also for his faith. As we mentioned before, he died holding in his hands the last score that he composed; and this score was that of a sacred work, a Requiem.

As for his musical productivity, it could not fail to owe a great part of its value to religious inspiration. The ample list of Gounod's works discovers a majority of religious compositions, and certain critics have placed them in the front rank. It was in this sense that M. Saint-Saëns wrote: "When, in the far-distant future, the operas of Gounod shall have been received into the dusty sanctuary of the libraries, the Mass of St. Cecilia, the *Rédemption*, and *Mors et Vita*, will still endure. . . ." Without affirming or denying this proposition, we may at least confirm the fact that the author of *Faust* directed his chief activities toward the production of sacred music. We have mentioned several works written during his youth, first in Paris, then in Italy, in Austria, and finally after his return to Paris, while acting as *maître de chapelle*. Thereafter, although dividing his time, he multiplied the Masses, of which he published a vast number under various titles—Messes de Sainte-Cécile (1855), des Anges Gardiens (1872), du Sacré-Cœur (1876), de Pâques (1882), de Jeanne d'Arc (1887), de Clovis (1890), de Saint-Jean (?), masses for the Orphéonistes (1853), for the Seminaries (1872), for the religious communities (1882), a Choral Mass (1883), for the Cathedrals (1890), and several Masses for the Dead. Without taking note of the innumerable secular songs, we still have to record the *Sept Paroles du Christ* (1855), "*Près du fleuve étranger*" (1861), a Stabat Mater (1867), *Gallia*, a lamentation according to Jeremiah (1871), and, finally, his two great oratorios *Rédemption* (begun at Rome in 1869 and produced for the first time at London in 1882) and *Mors et Vita* (1885).

In the setting of these works Gounod took the lead in a style quite unfamiliar to the art of sacred music—a style at times not wanting in breadth, but whose expression is founded, beyond all else, on charm. Though an admirer of Palestrina, he did not follow his example with regard either to form or to accent. In

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summing up the impression which the music of the Sixtine Chapel had made upon him, he testifies to "an intensity of contemplation rising at times to ecstasy," an "absence of visible procedures, of pecular artifices"; and he praises, in Palestrina as in Michelangelo, the "disdain for seductiveness." That is finely said, but how little does it apply to himself! Disdain for seductiveness! None ever had less of it than Gounod. He well knew how to limn a sweeping outline, a fluid and transparent harmony, and he used these wholly extrinsic effects without scruple for his religious purposes. In only one case do we see him attempt to reproduce the forms of polyphony *à la* Palestrina; this is in the *Sept Paroles du Christ*, a work written in strict *a cappella* style and dating from the commencement of his mature period (1855), but which we suspect of having been conceived some time before—a composition deserving to be better known to-day. But all the rest is music with full orchestra; in style it is pure and elevated. Gounod inaugurated the employment of a certain "basilican" style whose imposing beauty reaches such heights, in some passages, as to give an impression of grandeur. This is admirably exemplified in *Mors et Vita*, where the solemn and sonorous *Judex* develops a broad phrase, the fine flower of many analogous themes strewn by Gounod throughout his works, but which finds, in this number, its fullest realization. Just here it might almost be called powerful. But, at bottom, it is grace that predominates. Now, this word "grace" is susceptible of two interpretations; the one wholly secular, when applied to external charms, the other sacred, when it designates virtue and talent inspired by the divine will. In our characterization of Gounod's works these two significations are blended; no other term could better set forth and describe the sum total of what his art comprehends and expresses.

III.

No artist is altogether complete until he has learned how to attune every chord of his lyre and cause it to vibrate when and where he will. Gounod would not have played the rôle which, as we have seen, he assumed in his period, had he remained simply and solely the religious musician whose course we have followed till now. But his very nature, blended of sensuousness and mysticism, rendered him at least equally predisposed to a display of profane inspiration; it is to this latter that his works owe the greater share of the popularity which they have enjoyed throughout the world.

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He himself, even in his religious transports, was quite well aware of this spiritual duality. At Rome, when his choice of a vocation was pending, he declared "that it is possible to write beautiful sacred music in a strict style, and, side by side with it, to paint from another palette the uncontrolled tempest of human passion." He dreamed (according to the testimony of M. Camille Bellaigue) of composing a Requiem "characterized by, or expressive of, love rather than terror." Such was his ideal at a time when his mind was entirely occupied with sacred matters. It was far worse when he had resolved to follow a secular career, which took, on the whole, a sufficiently worldly course. In the very first works produced under this second influence, he discovers himself, from an artistic viewpoint, in a wholly different light;—he is a pagan.

At the outset, the subjects he treated lent themselves admirably to this evolution. His first opera was *Sapho*, and in this work, which brings illustrious characters of Greek art on the scene, he set forth a genuinely new and charming aspect of antique poetry, here and there in a lofty vein. How shall we define so individual a style? Such a musical evocation could not be founded on imitation, for which music offers no authentic model in this case; it was realized through equivalents, through suggestions coming from poetry or other arts—a Pompeian fresco, a Tanagra statuette. We have been permitted to see an André Chénier doing Greek verse in French; even in music, Gluck occasionally gave men of the eighteenth century hellenistic thrills; passing over the hymns in the grand style in *Alceste* and *Iphigénie*, let us recall the choral dance in *Alceste:* "Parez vos fronts de fleurs nouvelles," composed originally for another work in which the character presents the eternal type of beauty, Helen. We may admire the same delicate relief, fortified by a more modern treatment, in the song of the Shepherd: "Broutez le thym, broutez mes chèvres," wherein both accent and form carry one back—one could hardly say wherefore—to the idyls of Theocritus.

As for the stanzas of Sapho: "Ô ma lyre immortelle," they possess the amplitude of a beautiful Grecian garment, and leave an impression of the purest classic beauty.

But (one might object) this last song was not written expressly for *Sapho*. True enough, Gounod had written it before as a setting of Théophile Gautier's poem, "Ma belle amie est morte," and merely adapted his melody to the dénouement of the tragedy. But what is more Latin—let us say, more Mediterranean—than these verses of Gautier's?—and what happier

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thought could have crossed the musician's mind, as he set himself to bring his inspiration into harmony with the personality of the antique character? It redounds to Gounod's credit that he was able to revive these pure and lovely forms, whether in large or in little, and the pages that he wrote in this style are perhaps those which will endure as the best witnesses to his originality.

After this début, opportunities were not wanting for him to draw inspiration from the same source. The second work that he gave to the theatre is the score of the choruses of *Ulysse*, abounding in songs graceful in outline and frisky of rhythm, suggestive of the Homeric world. And again in *Philémon et Baucis*, which came a little later, the finest passages are those which he conceived along the same line of thought, for example, the chorus of Bacchantes, "Filles d'Athor," which crosses the stage like an animate and harmonious fresco.

Further on we shall speak of *Polyeucte*, a somewhat more recent work, and one calling for numerous observations. But there is another which, although it has nothing to do with antiquity or Greece, none the less gathers together in an even more complete homogeneity the above-described characteristics of Gounod, namely, *Mireille*. We must pause a moment to examine it.

Mireio, the celebrated Provençal poem by Frédéric Mistral, is a thoroughly modern piece of work, in all its freshness when Gounod conceived the plan of making it the subject of a musico-dramatic composition. But this work, which has remained unique of its kind, is Latin in the full sense of that which antiquity has enshrined for enduring fame. It is, therefore, significant that the author of *Sapho*, of *Philémon et Baucis*, and the choruses of *Ulysse*, who had already produced *Faust*, and thereafter had made a failure with a grand opera lacking both consistency and vitality, *La Reine de Saba*, should have ventured to possess himself of an episode of folk-life emanating from one of the most poetic districts of France, Provence—"province romaine," an ancient colony of the Phocæans, sonorous of speech and animated by radiant sunshine.

A new development of his mind, impressions renewed and deepened, just then predisposed him to plunge into this novel atmosphere of national life and poetry. On his first journey to Rome he had experienced (as he himself said later) only superficial emotions, mere tourist impressions without lasting effect on his artist-nature. But as early as 1862, by way of relaxation from the exertion incidental to the composition of his operas, he again went to Italy, and the journey, this time completed without

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preoccupations or obligations, had not only reawakened old memories, but also aroused new and fruitful ideas.

He was thus in a most receptive mood for the charm of a poem like *Mireio*, and on the first reading he was so vividly impressed by its Latin character that he resolved to compose the music for it in Italy.

Destiny willed otherwise; a series of fortuitous happenings conspired to confirm an idea to which he would have paid no attention whatever at the outset—namely, to seek Provençal inspiration in the land of Provence itself.

Towards the beginning of March, 1863, he had gone to Lyons to conduct a concert of his own works. It was his intention to proceed only as far as the Mediterranean coast, in order to inspect the church of the "Saintes-Maries de la mer," this being the spot where the closing scene of the poem is laid; thence he again started for Rome.

But he had already entered into correspondence with Mistral, who had offered to point out the sources from which he could draw the melodic types suitable for lending the proper color to his music, and who had invited him to come and see, with his own eyes, "Mireille herself coming out after Vespers of a Sunday at Arles, or Avignon, or Saint-Rémy." Being already on the way, Gounod accepted the poet's invitation. He first went to Marseilles, intending to take ship there; he desired to return to the Italian mountains, to install himself on the shore of the lake of Nemi, there to seclude himself for work. But he returned on his steps and passed on to Maillane to pay a visit to Mistral, with whom he expected to stay two or three days.

He stayed there two or three months. The mirage of Italy was soon dissipated when he had seen Provence. On his first walk he was astonished at the beauty of the countryside, "the superb mountains," "the Roman antiquities" whose stones blend with the rock of the adjacent quarries, "these rocks that are as one with the ruins of the middle ages," the vast plain that one surveys from the summit of the mountain "des Baux,"—"a panorama yet vaster than that of the Roman Campagna, and terrible in its austerity." This Parisian had discovered Provence! And he rejoiced in it. Mistral himself appeared to him like "the poet in the shepherd of old, in the man of Nature, in the man of the fields and skies." He would have been glad to abide with him, to dwell in his *mâs* in company with his aged mother, and compose his musical work in such idyllic companionship! Circumstances being unfavorable to the prolongation of this intimacy,

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he took up lodgings in the village of Saint-Rémy, hard by the place where the poet laid the scene of *Mireio*.

He installed himself in the village inn, where he was well taken care of. For sole companion in his solitude he had the local organist, the director of the Orphéon "l'Écho des Alpilles," a worthy Alsatian musician by the name of Iltis, with whom he dwelt in good Provençal intimacy, and who made a point of handing down to us his recollections of his transient relations with a master. Every morning the latter went his way along the paths and through the groves in pursuit of the melodies which the inspiration of nature was to reveal to him; the countryfolk watched him, as he passed, with a curiosity at once sympathetic and respectful; the young girls, sisters of Mireille, smiled at him as they wished him good-day. In the evening, after a day devoted to work, Iltis and he went to stroll "on the promenade," where, while smoking their pipes, they discoursed on the most diverse subjects—occasionally the most serious; and so it came about on Shrove-Thursday that Gounod, having been to communion that morning, touched on the problem of our final end and the incertitudes of the future life, and concluded his remarks with a phrase which, while expressing his spiritual travail, permits us to view his belief from a somewhat different angle from that indicated in his conversations with Abbé Gay or Father Lacordaire:—"It is stupefying!"—Then they would seek a table at the café, where there was always a deal of ceremony as to who should "pay the scot," for Gounod had yielded to Southern custom even in such prosaic dealings. He was delighted to ascertain that one could live "for nothing" in hospitable Provence. In fine weather he sometimes went out with Iltis to spend the day in the country scrambling over the rocks, scaling the Alpilles, hurtling downward to the valley; the master always had his notebook at hand, ready to jot down fugitive thoughts, while the leader of the Orphéons took charge of matters needful for the recuperation of the physical man. When Spring came, Gounod received the news that his wife and son proposed to join him; in order to receive them with every honor, the two musicians traversed the thickets to despoil the white-thorn of its early-flowering branches, which they brought home by armfuls to decorate the house. In the midst of these innocent and tranquil pleasures the score was taking shape; its outline was well-nigh completed when, on May 26, after a stay of more than two months, the inhabitants of Saint-Rémy tendered their transient guest a farewell banquet, at whose termination Mistral brought out a toast (a *brinde*, in the Provençal tongue)

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in which he offered the good wishes of all to the "mestr musicaire, que tan liuen fai dinda li murmur prouvençau."

Yes; but in the very midst of his seclusion Gounod had found it necessary (here we have the reverse of the medal!) to repair to the railway station at Tarascon that he might pay his respects to Madame Carvalho, then on her way to sing at Marseilles, who was the prospective interpreter of *Mireille* at the Théâtre Lyrique, of which her husband was the director; from her he received the injunction, "It must be brilliant, brilliant, brilliant!"—False brilliants, of a truth! Despite his obliging humor, to which he yielded only too often, the author could not refrain from protesting: "I answered, that it would be as brilliant as I am." But by this exchange of views in the railway station the author was rudely awakened from his ideal dream, and brought back into the world of realities—and what a world!—that of the stage! The voice of Provence had called him, and dictated his songs; now another voice intervened, that of the cancatrice, of the directress, who wished to be served as best suited her, and who cared for nothing beyond her personal effect. A marvellous voice—an incomparable cancatrice—for Mme. Carvalho left with those who heard her an abiding memory of supreme perfection in the art of song; why was it that a woman so generously endowed could not consent to remain simply in her rôle as an interpreter? why did she presume to dictate to a master who alone should have been the judge of the realization of his work? Gounod saw himself obliged to insert a waltz in the middle of a first act penned in an eminently poetic, homogeneous and sustained style! A waltz in a scene impregnated through and through with rustic poesy, whose songs have all the purity and perfume of nature! Thus the work so lovingly conceived was given to the public only after manifold patching and mutilation.

And this is why *Mireille* does not yet realize, in all its plenitude, the musical ideal that one might form of it, any more than its perfect accord with the poem. On undertaking its composition, Gounod, in spite of all efforts, had been unable to disengage himself sufficiently from exterior constraints, and to overcome parasitical influences, so as to hark back to the perfect purity of primitive art.

Besides, it must be admitted that in a three-months' sojourn he could hardly have possessed himself of a Provençal soul. The musician is not like the painter, who has only to gaze upon a landscape in order to reproduce its features and colors; he requires a longer intimacy for the assimilation of characteristics differing in nature from those whose product he himself is.

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So Gounod succeeded merely in striking a distinctive note of quite exterior effect, without actually attaining to the sources of Provençal tradition. Yet this effort, however incomplete, sufficed to imbue the score of *Mireille* with a character which noticeably differentiates it from other operas of the period; and certain exquisite "turns," wherein one hears as it were an echo of the idyllic inspiration of antique poesy, render it one of the most significant works that he composed.

There is a work in which Gounod combined, for the sake of contrast, the two inspirations which form the dual foundation of his genius. We have already mentioned it—it is *Polyeucte*.

By producing on the stage of the Opéra the tragedy of Corneille, with its presentation of the sublime sacrifice of a martyr, it is evident that the author of *Faust* wrought the work as an offering of faith. Unfortunately, nothing is less in keeping with Corneille than Gounod's gift. As we remarked before, despite all his piety, martyrdom was in no wise his vocation. Hence, he found himself impotent to infuse his harmonies with the exalted mood of an iconoclast. Néarque's zeal for making converts brought forth under his pen music that is merely an operatic duo. The lines which Corneille puts into Polyeucte's mouth, so admirable in their fervor and sublime love:

> Seigneur, de vos bontés il faut que je l'obtienne;
> Elle a trop de vertus pour n'être pas chrétienne,

inspired nothing more in his imagination than the colorless chant of a chorale constructed according to the formula; and when the fanatic spouse, tearing himself loose from all human attachments, proclaims that he is marching on "to glory," the music expresses his outcry by a mere commonplace vocal effect of the tenor, although Corneille's words were fitted to render this farewell so touching. Even where, thinking to interest the audience, he sets in action certain episodes relegated in the classic tragedy to the rank of simple narrative—for example, the tableau of the baptism of Polyeucte—his effort is vain; the masterpiece of Christian art which had been expected was not achieved, and the expectations of those who had previously admired *Faust* and *Mireille* were not realized.

But in *Polyeucte* the action flows in two parallel currents, the one depicting the Christian world, the other in the pagan sphere. Note the resultant paradox—it was in this latter that the author of *Mors et Vita* found his finest inspirations! Pauline, before her conversion, sings a "Hymn to Vesta" which, in its imposing beauty,

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reminds one of the loveliest songs that Gounod gave his mythological heroines, Alceste or Iphigénie. In the "Pagan Ballet" occurs a dance of the god Pan, in the rhythmical figures and fine sonority of which Gounod has fairly outdone the charms peculiar to the choruses of *Ulysse* and *Philémon et Baucis*, those happy inspirations of his secular youth. At the première of *Polyeucte*, the number which most powerfully attracted the attention of an audience assembled with the expectation of experiencing thrills of a different order, was a barcarolle sung, to the accompaniment of murmurous flutes, by a voluptuous group of richly apparelled Roman youths and courtesans crowned with flowers. M. Saint-Saëns relates that one day, when Gounod gave him a foretaste of his still unfinished work, it was precisely with this number that he commenced. "But (said Saint-Saëns), if you portray paganism so seductively, what sort of figure will Christianity cut beside it?" "For all that (replied Gounod), I can't deprive it of its weapons." It is only too true that the artist did not succeed in adequately arming the cause for which, after all, his sympathies were engaged, and so ensuring its triumph—at least in his musical work.

IV

Moreover, *Polyeucte* dates from a period which we should be glad to omit from Gounod's biography, and whose weaknesses are excusable solely on the plea of extenuating circumstances.

When the war of 1870 broke out, the author of *Faust*, being fifty years old, was no longer of an age to take up arms in his country's service; he went over to England, shedding distant tears for the unhappy plight of France. Had this absence been only for the time being, no reproach would attach to him therefor; but at the moment when, on the conclusion of peace, he was about to return, he made the acquaintance of a woman, no doubt an enchantress of a sort—she was a talented singer, and is said to have been beautiful—who, like Calypso, for a long time held this new Ulysses captive afar from home. But in this case Ulysses was wanting in craftiness; it was unfortunate for Gounod that, diseased both in mind and in body, he allowed this influence so to gain upon him that for nearly four years he could not summon up energy to throw it off. As for Mrs. Georgina Weldon (whose name received such wide publicity that we may be permitted to mention it here), she appears to have defined her own rôle in this adventure sufficiently well by declaring that, in her opinion, "music is merchandise pure and simple." It was purely and simply a stroke of "business" on

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her part to abuse the transient weakness of a master whom she exploited, at first, so long as he remained under her direct influence; and, after he came to himself, she clearly revealed the nature of her claim by having Gounod sentenced, eleven years subsequent to their separation, to pay her 250,000 francs—an unjust lawsuit against which the Queen of England herself protested by her attitude, and which, toward the close of his life, deprived Gounod of the capacity to take part in the grand musical festivals with which his works were bound up. This adventure irrefutably confirms the fact that Gounod's character was weak, and that he was too readily influenced—a fact already revealed to some extent by previous episodes in his career.

However, it was at London, and for one of those grand artistic celebrations which go greatly redound to the honor of the land that once extended its hospitality to Handel, that Gounod, shortly after his arrival, composed and brought out for the first time a work still considered to be one of his loftiest conceptions. In the Spring of 1871, just before the opening of an international exhibition, he was requested to write for it a new work representative of French art, to be brought out at the Albert Hall before an audience of ten thousand. In the midst of the agonies through which he, like all Frenchmen, was passing, his song could seek no inspiration beyond them. He wrote a "Lamentation," for which he could easily find a lyric text, eternally applicable to such woes, in the Book of Jeremiah; and, desiring to make his intention clearly manifest, he bestowed on his setting of these biblical sentences the significant title of *Gallia*. It is not a lengthy work, as it includes only four numbers, slow and severe; but in style it is peculiarly fine, and Gounod rarely attained to such a height. A memory of the funeral choruses in *Alceste* and *Orphée* may have exercised a certain influence on the conception of the first chorus and the despairful prelude preceding it; but are there finer models, or any which he might more legitimately follow, than the sublime harmonies of Gluck? Solemn strains, expressive and sustained throughout, alternate between the solo voice and the anguished chords of the chorus; the orchestra falls in, growing in sonority and power; and suddenly the music becomes softer; suave chords announce a more serene conclusion, and, in a beautiful cantilena whose major modality contrasts vividly with the sombre mood foregoing, and which gradually swells, and rises, and soars upward, carried away by the sweep of an impassioned ardor, the voice, with swift response from the chorus supported by the unfettered orchestra, proclaims in ringing tones the message of hope and faith:

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"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! turn again unto thy God!" This is, of a surety, one of the most sublimely moving pages that the art of that period conceived. Could it be otherwise, when the musician who penned it treated sincerely, with all his art and all his soul, a subject which fired his zeal from that double source of inspiration —his faith and his native land?

V

And, taking everything into consideration, it is just in his most celebrated work that Gounod's real nature comes to fullest fruition; in that point we need not dissent from public opinion, which has given it worldwide sanction.

Faust is an opera full of music. But (some one will object) it is an "opera"; and time was when the mere title would have brought about the condemnation of a work. Is it not time that these disputes were ended, and is not our present viewpoint sufficiently remote for us to see that every author is free to write in the style of his period? So let us not find fault with Gounod for musically illustrating Goethe and Shakespeare, and making operas out of "Romeo and Juliet" and "Faust." It was better for him to do this than to waste his strength on poems pieced together by ordinary verse-smiths, like *La Reine de Saba*, *Le Tribut de Zamora*, *La Nonne sanglante*, etc.

With regard to the charge that he was not a faithful interpreter of the poets, we must not shut our eyes to the fact that it is justified. It might have been applied to *Roméo et Juliette* as well as to *Faust;* but how does it happen that the charge is always formulated apropos of this latter work? Berlioz, in his day, met with a similar mishap, for the German critics gave his *Damnation de Faust* an unfavorable reception, motivated by the stricture that he had failed to respect Goethe; to which the French master responded by expressing his astonishment at not having heard the same objection apropos of his Romeo and Juliet symphony, wherein he had treated the subject with at least equal freedom. "It is doubtless because (so he opines) Shakespeare was not a German!" There is a certain narrowness, in certain ways of thinking. . . . Without passing on the full validity of such arguments, let us advance the simple proposition that it is permissible to admit that Goethe is no more inviolable than Euripides, Racine, or Shakespeare, from whom the composers of operas have borrowed freely; and that the stricture above cited would necessarily apply to an important group of operas which we have been accustomed to regard as masterpieces; and that would (we think) be a pity.

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Restoring the operas of Gounod to their historical environment, we shall, therefore, accept them for what they are—namely, adaptations of literary works whose original development is reduced to the proportions of a canvas destined for the reception of such embroideries as the musician's fancy shall dictate. And we shall add, that such procedure is in no way forbidden.

Though we have mentioned *Roméo et Juliette*, we shall not enlarge on that topic, although that work has emulated to a certain extent the brilliant career of *Faust*; but it belongs in second place, and while it contains several numbers written in good style, we are quite unable to award it a value rising appreciably above the level at which an opera may be estimated as a genuine work of art. It is better to confine ourselves to works of the first rank, which will endure as typical.

As said before, the score of *Faust* is full of music. At times this music soars to lofty heights of lyricism. It is delicious, full-flowing, diversified. In it all the traits of Gounod's individuality are gathered together.

This episode of the loves of Gretchen and Faust, thus segregated from the vast poem, is without a doubt a most worldly subject; yet the Christian artist again found a possibility of asserting himself in an authoritative fashion. The scene in the church, with its organ-prelude in sustained style and the lines of the funereal chant that form a setting for Gretchen's agonized lament, is assuredly an episode in grander style than any analogous numbers to be found in foregoing works of the operatic repertory. It is said that the composer introduced fragments of a Requiem (unpublished) which he began while in Rome and brought out in Vienna (1842); if true, this would afford yet stronger proof of the sincerity of its religious emotion.

Furthermore, scenes of this description have always lent peculiar value to Gounod's operas; consider the wedding-tableau in *Roméo et Juliette*, to which the song of Père Laurent imparts a loftiness of style not invariably in evidence throughout the work.

Certain traits make it manifest that the indissoluble blending of sacred and profane inspiration in Gounod is a perfectly concrete reality; of this, one of the most justly celebrated songs in *Faust* shall now be cited as a sufficiently piquant example. The theme of the duet, "O nuit d'amour, ciel radieux," seemingly expresses an ecstasy of most worldly sort; now, this song, prior to its incorporation in the opera, was an "O salutaris"—as may be proved by substituting the words of the hymn for those which

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Marguerite sings; and either set of words perfectly fits the graceful lines of the cantilena.

The veritably Latin—that is, pagan—element which we have noted as constituting an important part of Gounod's genius, might appear to be too foreign to a German work for suitable utilization in "Faust." And for all that, even at the beginning of the opera, in the springtide songs of the young maidens awaking with the dawn, we find the same fresh pastoral inspiration that pulsates in works like *Philémon et Baucis* and *Mireille*.

In fact, it never entered Gounod's head to compose a Germanic work when writing *Faust*. The first impressions which he received from Goethe's masterpiece were blended with influences emanating from a wholly different sphere. It was at Rome, after his arrival in 1840, that he read "Faust" for the first time—"nota bene, in French," as he particularizes. Some months thereafter, on a trip to the isle of Capri, he conceived, while surveying the fantastic landscape there outspread, "the first idea for the Walpurgis Night. The book (so he adds, recalling his memories of Italy) never left me; I carried it with me everywhere, and jotted down in scattered notes the various ideas which I thought would be of use whenever I might try to write an opera on the subject." Therefore, it was neither in the forests of the Harz, nor yet in the picturesque labyrinth of the ancient streets of Frankfort, but surrounded by the Roman countryside and with Mediterranean views before him, that Gounod received his first impulsion from "Faust." How could the work of his maturity escape such influences?

This work is, all in all, a work of the period; better, assuredly, than the other works of that time; and what it owes to that period is not that which rendered it better. Even making every allowance, it is difficult to conceal the shock one feels on seeing the soldiers defile in their German costumes of the middle ages, preceded by a band of Sax instruments, and singing a chorus which was soon made populår by the Orphéons. However, this chorus is excellent in its own way; the march, brilliant and not lacking in warmth, would have had a fine effect in that same year when *Faust* was represented for the first time, if used to regulate the victorious steps of the French army returning from Solferino and Magenta. Hence, not its intrinsic worth, but solely its adaptation to such an environment, should be called in question. And no analogous censure will hold against the spirited scene of the Kermesse, where the sextuple chorus meanders on its rejoicing way with the most natural dash and go.

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All this does not touch the depths of the work. But its arrangement is so happy that in the midst of so many brilliant accessories the principal figures stand out with a surpassing intensity of effect. Marguerite dominates this entire ensemble; and while—let us repeat for the last time—she is not the Gretchen of Goethe, she has therefor perhaps even greater poetic charm, a more ideal grace. In the love-songs that she and her partner lavish throughout the work, the musician's nature—seductive, feminine and sensual—finds freer course than ever before. There are love-duets in *Roméo et Juliette*—they are found in almost every act; but these duets are merely opera-numbers. In *Faust* it is souls that sing. The culminating point is reached in the quatuor in the garden, an excellent musical-comedy scene in free form, which mounts on and on to the height of a veritable love-poem, finding full and final development in a strain where the multitudinous voices of the orchestra unite in sonorous evocation of the voices of Nature herself—as is specified in the poem.

VI

M. Camille Saint-Saëns, ever Gounod's disciple and faithful friend, and who became his worthiest successor, summed up in a few well-chosen, pithy words, written on the very day of the Master's death, the chief features of his career:

"At the beginning he was misunderstood, followed only by a faithful few; and, without ever deviating from the line which he had marked out for himself, he gradually attained success, fame, and popularity. Nevertheless, he had to contend against an incessant hostility. In the first place, he came in conflict with the 'light horse' of comedy-opera; next, with the Italian coterie; finally, with the German clique."

Now, resisting all these influences, the artist maintained his individuality. More particularly, he never consented to go over to those forces from abroad which, for a quarter of a century or more, have carried musical art along with an irresistible momentum in unfamiliar directions—forces which, during the last years of his life, had begun to win the upperhand. For French musicians, the victims of this invasion, the choice was left of only two ways—either to join the following of the victor with good grace, thus imitating the ironical resignation of Ernest Reyer, who declared himself ready to "succumb gracefully," like the gladiator, or not to acknowledge themselves conquered, and to resist with their own weapons, even though inferior. We of to-day are not in a

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position to find fault with a master who, in any event, had a good right to stand on his own feet, for having ranged himself with the latter and making head against the invader.

Our memory of the conflict in which he found himself opposed by nearly the entire younger generation, ought not to render us unjust at the present time. No one had a better right than he to bear his standard high.

The combat was undoubtedly unequal. We recall a coincidence which fairly well defines the respective situations. In 1882 Gounod brought out as a novelty, at the Conservatoire and in other symphonic concerts, a canticle which he had written to a poem by Racine, "D'un cœur qui t'aime"—an excerpt from the choruses of *Athalie*. It was a charming piece, breathing the quintessence of the author's tender mysticism of mind, chaste in contour, wholly in Racine's spirit. But, in that same year, *Parsifal* made its appearance at Bayreuth. How could one avoid comparing them?

Still, the superiority of one work is no reason why another should be done to death. In the atmosphere there are different levels, at each of which it is possible to breathe. Homer, Dante and Shakespeare have not deprived Horace, Petrarch and Lamartine of a right to exist.

And so it is wrong to censure Gounod for having been an opponent of what was called, in his time, the music of the future, and for having posed as the champion of a waning art. The truth is, that he opposed, purely and simply, the encroachments of a different race. He himself, save for some few superficial traits, is by no means a man of the past. While he implicitly takes his stand on an earlier tradition, it is one to which it is always an artist's right, if not his duty, to attach himself—the national tradition. Gounod, a French musician, naturally made French music. A reading of *Mireille*, that efflorescence of Provençal poetry, of *Philémon et Baucis*, inspired by La Fontaine, of *Le Médecin malgré lui*, an illustration of Molière, even of *Faust*, which owes nothing to Goethe but its title, brings the conviction that Gounod belongs to the lineage of Grétry, of Boieldieu, of Rameau. He modified their forms without sensibly changing their spirit. Any musical fragment of *Mireille* might find an equivalent in *Lucile* or *Zémire*. The pastorales of the shepherd Andreloun, or of the shepherd in Sapho, sound like those in *Hippolite et Aricie* or *La Guirlande;* the love-songs, in fine, whereby the tender soul of the author of *Faust* most charmfully expresses itself, spring from an emotionality which, however diverse from that of the eighteenth century,

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has its source in the same niche of the French soul as that of Monsigny or Dalayrac.

It was through these qualities that Gounod's music found an instant echo in the souls of his immediate successors, at least, if not in those of his contemporaries. Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, are at hand to declare, in their works, what they owe to him; and there was a time when, before worshipping at Wagner's shrine, our young musicians devoted themselves to Gounod *ad nauseam*. Those of to-day would be ingrates, however divergent the paths they have followed, did they refuse such a worthy predecessor the homage which they owe him; and the world that he delighted will assuredly unite with them in paying honor, at this centennial celebration, to one of those who have contributed to its most lasting, and not seldom its purest and most exquisite, artistic enjoyment.

(*Translated by Theodore Baker*)

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