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Oh, the ease and wildness, and the coquetry of the playing—notes of liquid fire pure and dance languorously, exquisitely, ecstatically, rhythms graceful as a seagull or a swallow—gossamer dreams woven of moonfire, passion and sleeping snow on a "night of frost in May."

It thrills our jaded selves with a breath of the primeval, and more especially the Oriental, the supple, the savage, the immortal.

However civilised you are it makes your soul rise as a wave to the west wind, as the hooded cobra to the pipe of the charmer.

Some time ago, while conversing with an eminent man, whose name, for his own sake and safety I shall not disclose, gave vent to the remark that "from the serpent to the woman was not a far cry."

And —— they are nearly all women at Paderewski's recitals. His power, perhaps, is a purely hypnotic one—at all events it partakes of the nature of wizardry; but there is no doubt that the playing with (or shall I say to?) cobras is rather dangerous, and the latter end of the charmer is not hard to predict; it is too intimately connected with the former end of the cobra.

He has been bitten by the wily fang, since these notes were written, and I believe now lies a victim in her coils.

However this may be, there is undoubtedly a subtle violence about Paderewski that is quite irresistible, a something untamable—it reminds me of a great wind passing over the sea; it stirs up the languid waves of quiet people to a froth, and a foam of excitement, and a thunder of applause.

How pale the audience becomes in its frenzy of exultation. I think of Krishna and the milkmaids:—

"Like white lotus flowers, whose root is wounded under the water,
The moonlight of their downcast faces shines with pallid splendor."

We cannot exhaustively appreciate many things at a time, unless we are gifted with that catholicity of preference which renders preference worthless.

Personally, I am never quite sure if a recital partakes of the nature of a succession of courses of cold veal—or not! In the case of Paderewski the question of cold veal does not arise, for he is something more than a mere piano player—his art is far too personal, unique, and subtle ever to be classed or stereotyped.

This the critic doesn't grasp. The critic, as an essentially modern product, has the lamentable modern tendency to put the cart before the horse. Given—Paderewski and the piano in juxtaposition, the critic immediately starts at the ultimate end, music, and thus he gets hold of the wrong end of the stick. He should, of course, begin with Paderewski and the piano, from which many delicious concerts and conceits may be evolved. But then I think all sane people (and I trust I am one of such) look upon the critic as the deaf adder.

Many sneer at a pianoforte recital as a monotony. It appeals to me—for I love monotony, and subjective art is of necessity monotonous.

Every strong personality is hopelessly monotonous, and art without personality would be as cold as philanthropy.

I fear that the great charm of monotony is commonly undervalued. Of course, Wagner and all his colleagues have done their best to correct the vulgar error that variety is the salt of life—at any rate, they have taught us that limitation is the salt of love; but still we find intelligent persons depreciating monotony, and applauding the meretricious beauty of change, depreciating personality, and crying for versatility.

Besides its ravishing monotony, the piano recital's limitations charm the discriminating soul. The music is limited to one instrument and one interpreter—a kind of limited edition de luxe of tone-language.

When one listens to Paderewski one can not help feeling that he has restricted his tone-diction somewhat — rejecting all the every-day colloquialisms of piano playing, and confined himself to a rarefied essence of tone-speech, whereof each syllable is vitally expressive, each note a pearl wrought by no earthly, no maritime oyster.

He has the ubiquitous faculty attached to us finer souls—that of feeling our art to the core, and being at the same time keenly alive to the impression it is making on others.

His marvellously sensitive touch seems to win secrets from the vibrating strings as a father-confessor cajoles the fluttering hearts and tongues of emotional sweet sinners; indeed, often his notes have a double vibration, a double entente—the echo infinitely subtle.

This double entente is especially audible in his interpretation of Chopin. He brings out so well that Tartar ferocity overlaid with Parisian polish that delicate rose-jacynth cruelty faintly flushing those mystical white dreams—in short, that mixture of tiger's blood and honey, wherein lies the true mordente affettuoso.

Moreover, his Chopin nocturnes have that exquisite little touch of languor which puts the last seduction on passion.

I have found many analogies to Paderewski, but, in truth, his personality is a quick-change artist. During a recital it will successively and successfully impersonate Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Schumann, homogeneising these divers persons with the informing essence of its own delightful self—it has a certain delicate naturalness which is very palpably and indelibly art. Paderewski is essentially the genius of the piano; since the unique charm of the piano is his, and his are the limitations of the piano. Viewed among other pianists, he is like a chrysanthemum in a bed of asters—the petulant, fantastic flower of Japan and the stolid blooms of China.

As I streamed pensively out of the hall that afternoon, these words throbbed in my brain:—

"His gentle spirit rolls
In the melody of souls,"

and I could not help thinking with Adelaide Proctor that "the artist soul" had roused "in him the flame of genius," which "like the light of heaven came upon his brow" and "touched his heart and lit his spirit, too."

RHAPSODIES.

(By Bryceson Treharne.)

IV.

"THE REDEMPTION"—AN AFTERTHOUGHT.

They scratch with their pens in the mould of their graves,
And the ink and the anguish start,
For the devil mutters behind the leaves—
It's pretty, but is it Art?
—Rudyard Kipling.

The art of Gounod is a matter upon which we are capable of forming a complete and disinterested judgment, since at the artist's death there was no development, only continuance, to expect from any further work which he might be persuaded to create. Therefore over such a death-bed one does but extend the sorry sympathies that follow the close of a career which is worthy of regrets, and which has been touched by its mortal fate.

I have said that it should not be impossible to pass judgment on Gounod's art, yet it would be easy to be both unjust and too enthusiastic towards it, presenting, as it does, many points which can by no means justify our approval, and many, on the other hand, to which we are willing to yield large sympathy and admiration.

Gounod's music has, in the first place, a complete and unified character of its own —it is absolutely personal. If I do not reckon it as great, I assuredly reckon it as unique. It has a brilliance of its own, a fancy of its own, a weakness of its own, and, when it happens to be cheap, a cheapness that belongs to itself.

But its first quality, its essential quality—and the applicability of the word will be easily understood—is its feminine sweetness. There is a masculine, a virile sweetness of music, which is notable in the work of every great musician, except in that of Gounod. His sweetness is not exactly weak, although it is by no means strong; it is not foolish, although it is not dictatorial; it is soft, eloquent, fanciful, tender, smooth, fluent. Lacking strenuousness, it has a graceful litheness; wanting in power, it has a subtle fragrance of triumphant skill which is extremely persuasive.

Now, this quality of feminine sweetness which frequently instils into Gounod's music a pervasive spirit that can only be described as angelic, is responsible also for the many limitations of that music. That it has a weary monotony of feeling none would be found to deny; that its thinness is often only disguised by its style; that it often expresses far less than its expression implies; that its body is often wire-drawn in order to compare a certain long straight line of accomplishment; that, though its fancy is a very Ariel in its gaiety of resource and variety of attitude, its imagination is poor and inflated; that, in a word, Gounod was a very singular and unique specimen of an artist who cannot be called great in the [hig]hest sense of the word—these are all [fa]cts which may not be gainsaid.

I am driven to the conclusion that Gounod's sacred drama, "The Redemption," has found its way to the public heart by reason of its appeal to the religious instinct of a religious people. He has treated the sublime drama (the touching tale told simply by the Evangelists) in his own fashion, concerning which musical connoisseurs will always, perhaps, disagree. But there are things of high import hidden from the wise and prudent, though revealed unto babes, and the public who are not connoisseurs will ever listen with sympathetic ears to the French master's cunning harmonies, throwing, as they do, a life and [co]lor around familiar scenes. To me "The [Re]demption" is nought but a stagey imitation of Bach's sublime Passion Musik from [a] Roman Catholic point of view.

The composer himself disarms us by saying that we are not to glance at it from an old-fashioned oratorio standard. He describes it as a "Trilogy." It is even more than a triangular arrangement, having a [pro]logue, and starts with that misty foundation of matter "Chaos," which is tor[tu]ously begotten of ascending and descend[ing] chromatic gamuts played together, mak[ing] us all regret the archaic picture at the [co]mmencement of the "Creation" by that [de]parted master, Haydn.

[G]ounod is his own laureate, and tells us [he] wrote the words when lodged in Rome [at] the Academy of France, situate on that [fav]ourite promenade of the modern Romans, [the] Pincian Hill. What the text may be [like] in the original cannot be hazarded; [th]at it is through the medium of an un[cou]th and unmusical translation we cer[tai]nly do know; such doggerel has rarely [me]t the eye in works of a sacred character. [T]he entire concoction bears remarkable [like]ness to the Biblical "dramas" in which [the] younger members of our Sunday-schools [tak]e a demure delight. With a proviso. [We]ll-known hymns of the Latin Church are [see]mingly interlarded and sung to the [hoa]ry strains of the Roman Plain-chant, [as] the "Vexilla Regis" and "Stabat [Ma]ter," the latter with a noteworthy read[ing] which may be commended to Anglican [cler]gymen who contemplate improving [thei]r congregations by a performance of the [wor]k. Gounod's attempts at choral writing [are] of the most humble description, re[sem]bling brief "part songs," and without [the] slightest address in the march of the [inne]r parts; but of a series of more than [twe]nty short choruses, almost all are in [sim]ple counterpoint, note against note, [sylla]ble to syllable, as in operatic music; [and] on such ignoble pabulum as this our [trai]ned bodies of singers are invited to [fea]st.

[A]re, then, the wonderful pages of Bach's [Pass]ions Musick mere sound and fury, [sign]ifying nothing? It may be that the [com]poser devoutly wishes to contribute in [brin]ging this century back to the "Roman [Obe]dience" by his pious hymns, sung to [cares]sing organ accompaniment. They have [...] it is true, the cloying fervor of the [...]n tunes of Dykes among our native [...]ers, but it is doubtful whether M. [Gou]nod will bring many lambs into the [Rom]an fold from the ranks of our choris[ters] who insist on being well cared-for [...] making up their minds for a scien[tific] shout in any large, sacred work, and [are h]ardly to be appeased by copious doses [of or]dinary psalmody.

It would be unfair to dismiss the clerical translator without a sample of his wares. The Disciples here reply to the holy women:—

"Though we fain would have believed you,
Some form, surely, has deceived you.
Some phantom seen in the night.
From trusting what you have told us,
Lack of witness must withold us.
We rely on hearing and sight."

It can hardly be said that these words fall grandly on the ear, and they are average specimens of the prevailing bathos. Another quotation has a strong flavor of H.M.S. Pinafore—the allusion is to our common projenitor, the primeval Adam.

And he, placed in a land of abundance and beauty,
Loved a pure, happy life, under guidance of duty.

Surely such a subject demands grave and noble diction. In the art of marrying words to music, a new revelation is made as to the word "possession," usually accented on the second syllable; but in the first short chorus the translator regales himself by placing the accent, with hideous musical effect, on the last, and that a note on the strongest musical accent known, viz., the first note in any time bar.

This offence against the quantities is carefully repeated a little further on; subsequently the same word is set as we always hope to find it. Therefore, both ways cannot be correct, even from a "precenting" point of view. To return to the music.

The impression, after listening to Gounod's ouvrage de ma vie, must be faithfully chronicled—it is one of dull monotony —the air-form of composition has been almost entirely tabooed, while extreme and irritating weariness is caused by the endless sing-song of those bores, the narrators, who cling with dreadful pertinacity to the two or three notes doled out to them by the composer, who frequently surrounds their utterances with humorous figures on accompanying violins, when not busy with his sour and diminished discords. The faults are almost too obvious to need pointing out.

It is much to be regretted that at the very outset the Saviour is introduced as one of the dramatis personæ, having many solo entrances assigned throughout. As a matter of notoriety Beethoven's "Mount of Olives," and Spohr's "Calvary" were remodelled in this respect before a performance in England was permitted. A want of elevation of style is apparent everywhere; for instance, the passage given to the mocking Jewish priests, "Can He not save Himself," is dangerously similar to the profane Habanera in "Carmen." Again, the composer can hardly expect us to accept the theatrical and tawdry strains of his march to "Calvary" as typical of the dead march of the ancient Romans—it is more fitted for a regiment of the French Guards marching on parade than for Roman legions. The portentous darkness during the crucifixion affords excuse for a very sinuous orchestral movement, which may fairly be described as a study in dissonances and must have cost the composer a deal of midnight oil; in comparison with this "study" contrast the sublime effect of a few master strokes in "He sent a thick darkness," from Handel's "Israel in Egypt!"

The separation of groups of trumpet-players at opposite wings of the orchestra, when it is full, first practised by Berlioz, and continued by Verdi with splendid effect in his "Requiem," has been followed by Gounod in his chorus "Saviour of Men," where the only two notes played easily lend themselves to changing harmonies.

The opening passages of this movement for the horns are very suggestive of Weber's overture to "Der Freischütz," where the cadence for the instruments are much alike. In the symphony to the solo, with chorus, "Ye mountains, ye perpetual hills," Gounod takes without compunction Mendelssohn's melodious theme from "St. Paul," "Be thou faithful unto death," for tenor, with 'cello obbligato, but hesitates to give the audacious crib to the singer. So it is relegated to the violins before the vocal entry.

Then, turn to the earthquake music—it is hard to say whether M. Gounod was in the body or out of the body when he perpetrated this. Imagine an earthquake represented by the rapid chromatic scales of flutes and violins in unison, while the brass sustains the harmonies, and the grosse caisse and tam-tam enforce the rhythm—this is realism, perhaps unprecedented in sacred music.

What is music coming to? Is it in its decline and fall? Fast going to the dogs in senile insanity, whose normal features are gross materialism and material grossness! The violins, we are informed (literally by Gounod himself), represent "Jesus est étendu sur la croix," and the meaning of another characteristic passage is indicated by the legend, "On enfonce les clous dans les pieds, et dans les mains de Jésu."

Only think! attempting to paint an earthquake—and such an earthquake—per flutes and fiddles!

Goethe witnessed the ruins of Messina: and the Italian scientist dispatched to report on the ravages in Calabria said the sight almost bereft him of his senses. To term it indescribable is weak. Nay, experience itself cannot realise the horror and image of it, the gigantic devastation and despair. Tremendous nature, as it were in throe at the birth of hell before us — and this to be represented, painted, imitated, suggested—what you will—per flutes and fiddles. There are things equally impartable by flutes and fiddles as by bristles; they belong solely to poetry, or even solely to themselves.

But, perhaps, I have mistaken the oracle; perhaps it is meant to be, à la Mephistopheles, ironical.

How does Thackeray describe George the Fourth?:—"Silk stockings, padding, stays, a coat with frogs and a fur collar, a star and blue ribbon, under-waistcoats, more under-waistcoats, and then—nothing."

So would I analyse the "Redemption."