



Snarls & Northern Smiles & Smoke-room Stories

formed at the Théâtre Français. The growing recognition of the world was evidenced in his appointment as director of the Normal Singing School of Paris, the primary school of the Conservatoire. In 1854 a five act opera, with a libretto from the legend of the "Bleeding Nun," was completed and produced, and Gounod was further gratified to see that musical authorities were willing to grant him a distinct place in the ranks of art, though as yet not a very high one.

Thoughts of 'Faust'—
For years Gounod's serious and elevated mind had been pondering on Goethe's great poem as the subject of an opera, and there is reason to conjecture that parts of it were composed and arranged, if not fully elaborated, long prior to its final crystallisation. But he was not yet quite ready to enter seriously on the composition of the masterpiece. He must still try his hand on lesser themes. Occasional pieces for the orchestra or choruses strengthened his hold on these important elements of lyric composition, and in 1853 he produced "Le Médecin malgré lui," based on Molière's comedy, afterwards performed as an English opera under the title of "The Mock Doctor." Gounod's genius seems to have had no affinity for the graceful and sparkling measures of comic music, and his attempt to rival Kowalew and Anber in the field where they were pre-eminent was decidedly unsuccessful, though the opera contained much fine music.

'Faust' the First Time in London.
"You may not know," broke in the Professor, "that the success of "Faust" in London was "dodged," if I may use such a word. Of course, the opera would eventually have won success, but the first success was undoubtedly due to management. Poor old Mapleson, best of impresarios, finest of raconteurs, used to tell the story inimitably. I will repeat it from his memoirs here. It loses much of its delightful piquancy, but is still amusing, and as strange as true. Says Mapleson:—"About this time (1863), I was told of an opera well worthy of my attention which was being performed at the Theatre Lyrique of Paris. I started to see it, and at once decided that Gounod's "Faust"—the work in question—possessed all the qualities necessary for a success in this country. On inquiry I found that Mr Thomas Chappell, the well-known music publisher, had acquired the opera for England. The late Mr Frank Chappell, on the part of his brother, but acting in some measure on his own responsibility, had bought the "Faust" music for reproduction in England from M. Choudens of Paris; and I have heard not only that he acquired this privilege for the small sum of £40 (1,000 francs), but moreover that he was remunerated with on his return home for making so poor a purchase.

"Nothing in 'Faust'!"
"The music of an opera is worth nothing until the opera itself has become known, and Messrs Chappell opened negotiations with Mr Frederik Gye for the production of 'Faust' at the Royal Italian Opera. The work, however, had not made much impression at the Theatre Lyrique, and Mr Gye, after going to Paris specially to hear it, assured his stage manager, the late Mr Augustus Harris, who had formed a better opinion of Gounod's music than was entertained by his chief, that there was nothing in it except the 'Chorus of Soldiers.' After due consideration Mr Gye refused to have anything to do with 'Faust,' and the prospect of this opera's being performed in London was not improved by the fact that, in the Italian version, it had failed at Milan. Meanwhile I had heard 'Faust' at the Theatre Lyrique, and, much struck by the beauty of the music, felt convinced that the work had only to be fitly presented to achieve forthwith an immense success in London. Mr Chappell was ready to give £200 towards the cost of its production, and he further agreed to pay me £200 more after four representations, besides a further payment after ten representations. Certain that I had secured a treasure, I went to Paris and bought from M. Choudens a copy of the score, the orchestral parts, and the right for myself personally of performing the work whenever I might think fit in England. I then visited Gounod, who for £100 agreed to come over and superintend the production of what he justly declared to be his masterpiece. I was at that time (as indeed I always was when anything important had to be done)

my own stage manager. My orchestral conductor was Ardti; Titiens undertook the part of 'Margherita'; Giuglini that of 'Faust'; Trebelli was 'Siebel'; Gasier, 'Mephistopheles'; and Santley, 'Valentine.' Far from carrying out his agreement as to superintending the production of the work, Gounod did not arrive in London until nearly seven o'clock on the night of production; and all I heard from him was that he wanted a good pit box in the centre of the house. With this, for reasons which I will at once explain, I had no difficulty whatever in providing him.

A Dismal Failure Imminent.
"One afternoon, a few days before the day fixed for the production of the opera, I looked in upon Mr Nugent at the box-office and asked how the sale of places was going on. 'Very badly, indeed,' he replied. Only thirty pounds' worth of seats had been taken. This passage! a dismal failure, and I had set my mind on a brilliant success. I told Mr Nugent in the first place that I had decided to announce 'Faust' for four nights in succession. He thought I must be mad, and assured me that one night's performance would be more than enough, and that to persist in offering to the public a work in which it took no interest was surely a deplorable mistake. I told him that not only should the opera be played for four nights in succession, but that for the first three out of these four not one place was to be sold beyond those already disposed of. That there might be no mistake about the matter, I had all the remaining tickets for the three nights in question collected and put away in several carpet bags, which I took home with me that I might distribute them far and wide throughout the metropolis and metropolitan suburbs. At last, after a prodigious outlay in envelopes, and above all postage stamps, nearly the whole mass of tickets for the three nights had been carefully given away.

The Dodge.
"I at the same time advertised in the Times that in consequence of a death in the family, two stalls secured for the first representation of "Faust"—the opera which was exciting so much interest that all places for the first three representations had been bought up—could be had at twenty-five shillings each, being but a small advance on the box office prices. The stalls thus liberally offered were on sale at the shop of Mrs Phillips, the jeweller, in Cockspur street, and I told Mr Phillips that if he succeeded in selling them I would present him with three for the use of his own family. Mr Phillips sold them three times over, and a like success was achieved by Mr Baxter, the stationer, also in Cockspur Street. Meanwhile demands had been made at the box-office for places, and when the would be purchasers were told that 'everything had gone,' they went away and repeated it to their friends, who, in their turn, came to see whether it was quite impossible to obtain seats for the first performance of an opera which was now beginning to be seriously talked about. As the day of production approached the inquiries became more and more numerous. 'If not for the first night, there must surely be places somewhere for the second,' was the cry. Mr Nugent and his assistants had, however, but one answer, 'Everything had been sold, not only for the first night, but also for the two following ones.' The first representation took place on June 11th, and the work was received with applause, if not with enthusiasm. I had arranged for Gounod to be recalled; and he appeared several times on the stage, much, I think, to the annoyance of Ardti, to whom the credit of a good ensemble and a fine performance generally was justly due. The opinions expressed by several distinguished amateurs as to the merits of Gounod's admirable work were rather amusing. The late Lord Dudley said that the only striking pieces in the opera were the 'Old Men's Chorus' and the 'Soldiers' March' which was going a step beyond Mr Gye, who had seen nothing in the work but the 'Soldiers' Chorus.' Another noble lord, when I asked him what he thought of 'Faust,' replied: 'This demand is most premature. How am I to answer you until I have talked to my friends and read the criticisms in the morning papers?' The paucity of measured tunes in the opera—which is melodious from beginning to end—caused many persons to say that it was wanting in melody. The second night 'Faust' was received more warmly than on the first, and at each succeeding representation it gained additional favour, until after the third performance the paying public, burning with desire to see a work from which they had hitherto been debarred, filled the theatre night after night. No further device was necessary for stimulating its curiosity; and the work was now to please and delight successive audiences by its own incontestable merit. It was given for ten nights in succession, and was constantly repeated until the termination of the season. So successful was 'Faust' at Her Majesty's Theatre that Mr Gye resolved to produce it at once; and he succeeded in getting it out by July 2nd. The following was the cast of the work at the Royal Italian Opera:—Margherita, Miolan Carvalho (the creator of the part at the Theatre Lyrique); Siebel, Nantier Oides; Mephistopheles, Faure; Valentine, Graziani; Faust, Tamberlik."

Gounod's Death.
'Gounod is dead. I know not if the world mean much to the rest of you,' said the doctor, sadly, 'but for me one of the lights of my life has gone out and the world is darker when I think that the greatest composer of my time is gone; that the soul that has thrilled me so many thousands of times will never more pour itself into one of those melodies which have surely done more to purify and ennoble mankind than all the sermons ever preached by even the most eloquent preachers, for music has a power over natures deaf to every other voice. The Roman Catholic Church is the only religious body that has recognised the full importance of this fact, though every year the prejudices of other denominations are being dispelled, and music is being recognised as far the most powerful missionary placed at the disposition of religion. I have called Gounod the greatest composer of my time, not because he is my own favourite, but because I really believe he was possessed of a far higher musical genius than either Wagner or Verdi, who is still left to us, and who still works. In melody he is the peer of Mozart. If we may compare him to any of his great forerunners, I think it should be to Schubert. Like most other French composers he was largely influenced by Gluck in the foundation of his work, and as has been truly said, no modern composer has been so brilliant and effective a disciple in carrying out the formulas of the great master. More free, flexible, and melodious than Spontini and Haëvy, measuring his work by a conception of art more lofty and ideal than that of Meyerbeer, and in creative power far their superior, Gounod's genius as shown in the one opera of "Faust" alone suffices to stamp his great mastership.

'Faust's' First Production.
'Imagine if you can that night in the young musician's life when "Faust" was first produced on the 19th of March, 1859. In the morning a half-known minor musical composer, by midnight the idol of Paris, one of the foremost musicians of the age. Imagine after all the weary years of work and waiting—for they were many and unexpressibly disappointing—that sudden and overwhelming avalanche of praise. Not merely the vulgar *triumph* of the people, but of Auber's tears of joy, and Rossini's splendid tribute. Imagine him as he was there that night in the Theatre Lyrique. A noticeable-looking man of blonde complexion, a great Saxony beard, clear cut features, and large bright eyes, with the shadows of many disappointments—a man who despised the social world and lived for his art and that alone. As his opera, the work of years, progresses, the play of his features attracts attention from those about him. Most eloquently do the rapid changes which pass over the troubled eyes and mobile face reflect the emotions of the composer, not enjoying and approving now, scowling hideously as something goes awry to his critical understanding. One imagines that when he found himself famous, the scorn of the world, which he never took much trouble to conceal, must have leapt out in some biting words. He must have thought of those early days when we are told score after score was rejected by the managers. No one cared to hazard the risk of producing an opera by this unknown composer. His first essay was a pastoral opera, "Philemon and Baucis," and it did not escape from the manuscripts for many a long year, though it has in more recent times been received by critical German audiences with great applause. A catalogue of Gounod's failures would have no significance except as showing that his industry and energy were not relaxed by public neglect. His first decided encouragement came in 1851, when "Sappho" was produced at the French Opera through the influence of Madame Pauline Viardot, the sister of Malibran, who had a generous belief in the composer's future, and such a position in the musical world of Paris as to make her requests almost mandatory. This opera, based on the fine poem of Alfre Angier, was well received, and cheered Gounod's heart to make fresh efforts. In 1852 he composed the choruses for Ponsard's classical tragedy of "Ulysse," per-