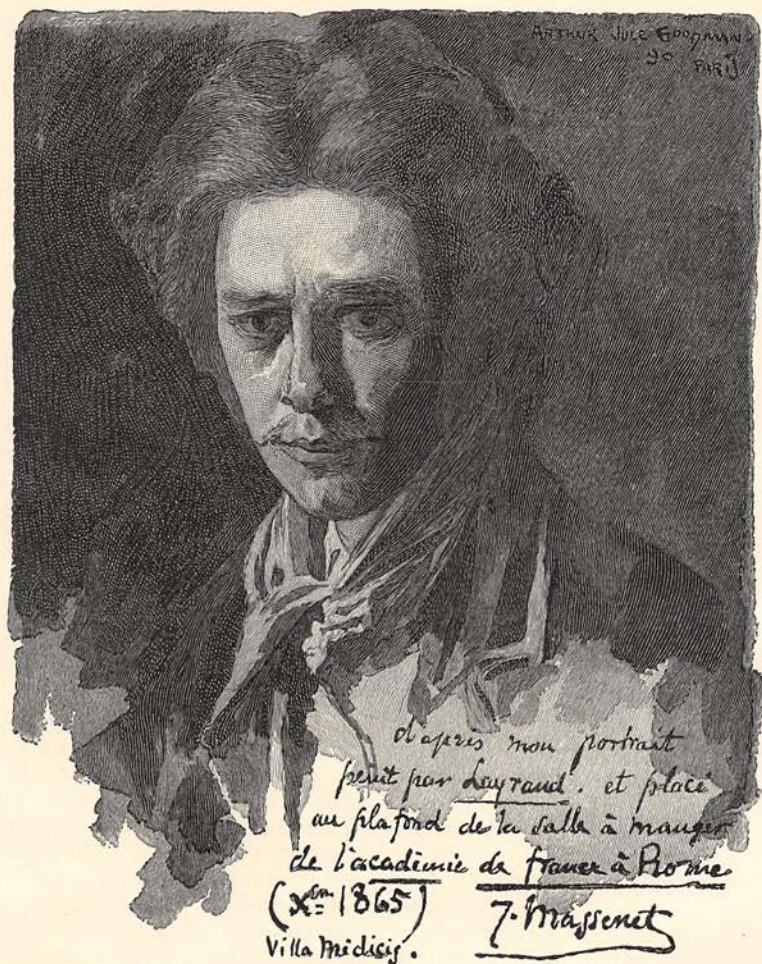


AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES BY THE COMPOSER
MASSENET.



JULES ÉMILE FRÉDÉRIC MASSENET. (1865.)

ENGRAVED BY CHARLES STATE.

YOU are so kind as to write to know what was the beginning of my musical career, and you ask me, "How did I become a musician?" This seems a very natural question, but nevertheless I find it a very awkward one to answer. Should I tell you that, like many of my brothers in art, I had followed my vocation, I might seem slightly conceited; and should I confess it caused me many a struggle to devote myself entirely to music, then you might have the right to say, "Why, then, did you become a musician?"

My father was a superior officer under the First Empire. When the Bourbons were re-

stored he sent in his resignation. As he had been a distinguished pupil of the Polytechnic School, he devoted himself to manufactures, and started important iron-works near St. Etienne (Loire). He thus became an iron-master, and was the inventor of those huge hammers which, crushing steel with extraordinary power by a single blow, change bars of metal into sickles and scythes. So it was that, to the sound of heavy hammers of brass, as the ancient poet says, I was born.

My first steps in my future career were no more melodious. Six years later, my family then living in Paris, one day I found myself in front

of an old piano, and either to amuse me, or to try my talent, my mother gave me my first music-lesson. It was the 24th of February, 1848, a strangely chosen moment, for our lesson was interrupted by the noise of street-firing that lasted for several hours. The revolution had burst forth, and people were killing one another in the streets.

Three years later I had become—or my parents affectionately thought I had become—a clever enough little pianist. I was presented for admission to the piano classes at the Imperial Conservatory of Music, and was admitted. To my mother I now was “an artist,” and even though my education took up six hours of my day, she found time to make me work at my piano to such good effect that within a year I became “lauréat” of the Conservatory. At this period my father’s ill health forced us to leave Paris, and so put a stop to my music for several years. I took advantage of this period to finish my literary studies. But the pain of separation from the Conservatory gave me courage enough to beg my parents (whom my wish distressed) to give me permission to return, and I did not again leave Paris until the day when, having obtained the “first grand prize” of musical composition (1863), I left for Rome with a scholarship from the Académie de France.

Did the progress made in these years of work really prove my vocation? Certainly I had won the “prix de Rome,” and had also taken prizes for piano, counterpoint, fugue, and so on. No doubt I was what is called a good pupil, but I was not an artist in the true sense.

To be an artist is to be a poet; to be touched by all the revelations of art and nature; to love, to suffer,—in one word, to live! To produce a work of art does not make an artist. First of all, an artist must be touched by all the manifestations of beauty, must be interpenetrated by them, and know how to enjoy them. How many great painters, how many illustrious musicians, never were *artists* in the deepest meaning of the word!

Oh, those two lovely years in Rome at the dear Villa Medici, the official abiding-place of holders of Institute Scholarships—unmatched years, the recollection of which still vibrates in my memory, and even now helps me to stem the flood of discouraging influences!

It was at Rome that I began to live; there it was that, during my happy walks with my comrades, painters or sculptors, and in our talks under the oaks of the Villa Borghese, or under the pines of the Villa Pamphili, I felt my first stirrings of admiration for nature and for art. What charming hours we spent in wandering through the museums of Naples and Florence! What tender, thoughtful emotions we felt in the dusky churches of Siena and Assisi! How thor-

oughly forgotten was Paris with her theaters and her rushing crowds! Now I had ceased to be merely “a musician”; now I was much more than a musician. This ardor, this healthful fever still sustains me; for we musicians, like poets, must be the interpreters of true emotion. To feel, to make others feel—therein lies the whole secret!

My time was nearly up at the Villa Medici, and but a few days separated me from the hour in which I had to say good-by to my happy life—a life full of work, full of sweet tranquillity of mind, a life such as I never have lived again.

It was on December 17, 1865, that I had to prepare for my departure; nevertheless, I could not persuade myself to bid adieu to Rome. It was Rome that bade me adieu, and this is how she did it. It was six o’clock in the afternoon. I was alone in my room, standing before the window, looking through the glass at the great city outlined in gray against the light still remaining from a lovely clear sunset. This view is forever imprinted on my memory, and at the time I could not detach myself from it. Alas! little by little a shadow crept over one corner of the sky, spreading and spreading until finally Rome had disappeared altogether. I have never forgotten those moments, and it is in remembering them that I evoke my youth.

I NOTICE that I am saying but little of music, and that I seem to care more for what strikes the eye than for what charms the ear. Let us open together some of my orchestral scores. Thereon I am in the habit of writing the day and the hour, and sometimes an account of events of my life. Some of these have afforded me suggestions for my work. The first part of “Mary Magdalene” begins “At the gates of Magdala, evening.” It was in truth of Magdala that I was then thinking; my imagination journeyed to far Judea, but what really moved me was the remembrance of the Roman Campagna, and this remembrance it was that I obeyed. I followed the landscape I had really known; therein was its accent, its exact impression. Afterward, in writing the “Erinnyes,” the love that I felt for an exquisite Tanagra terra-cotta dictated to me the dances for the first act of Leconte de Lisle’s admirable drama. Later, while I was arranging the score of the “Roi de Lahore,” near me was a little Indian box whose dark blue enamel spotted with bright gold continually drew my eyes to it. All my delight, all my ardor came from gazing at this casket, wherein I saw the whole of India!

Mournful recollections also take up a great part of the life of the musician whose modest beginnings were saluted by firing in the



MASSENET IN HIS STUDY. (1890.)

streets. In 1870—a dismal date for my poor dear country—the Prussian cannons, answering those of Mont Valérien, often lugubriously punctuated the fragments that I tried to write during the short moments of rest that guard duty, marching around Paris, and military exercises on the ramparts, left us. There the musician, in the physical weariness of this novel life, vainly trying to find a few moments of forgetfulness, did not altogether abdicate his rights. In the leaves of a finished score, but one which

will never be brought before the public, “Méduse,” I find annotated the patriotic cries of the people, and the echoes of the “Marseillaise” sung by the regiments as they passed my little house at Fontainebleau on their way to battle. And so in other fragments I can read the bitter thoughts that moved me when, having returned to Paris before it was invested, I was inspired by the woeful times that were upon us during the long winter of that terrible year.

Oh, the unforgettable pain and sorrow of

those dismal days when our hearts plunged so quickly from comforting enthusiasm to the darkest despair!—when weeks of uncertainty and of waiting were scarcely brightened by rare letters, received one knew not how or whence, and bringing us news of ancient date concerning the far-off families and the dear friends we no longer hoped to see again! Then came the last effort, the last struggle at Buzenval; the death of my poor friend, the painter Henri Regnault; then the most terrible trial of all, whose shameful reality made us forget cold, hunger, all that we had endured—the armistice, which in our wearied but far from resigned hearts rang the knell of our last and righteous anger! Yes, truly, during those dark days of the siege of Paris, it was indeed the image of my dying country that lay bleeding in me, feeble instrument that I was, when, shivering with cold, my eyes blinded with tears, I composed the bars of the “*Poème du Souvenir*” for the inspired stanzas written by my friend the great poet Armand Silvestre, “*Arise, beloved, now entombed!*” Yes, both as son and musician, I felt the image of my poor country imprint itself on my bruised heart in the sweet and touching shape of a wounded muse, and when with the poet I sang, “*Tear off thy winding sheet of flowers,*” I well knew that, though buried, she would come forth from her shroud, with blanched cheeks, indeed, but lovelier and more adorable than ever!

I have already said how dear to me is, and how faithfully true remains, the recollection of my Roman years; and I would like to be able to convince others how useful it is for young musicians to leave Paris, and to live, were it but for a year, in the Villa Medici, among a set of intelligent comrades. Yes, I am thoroughly in favor of this exile,—as it is called by the discontented. I believe in residing there, for such a residence may give birth to poets and artists, and may awaken sentiments that otherwise might remain unknown to those in whom they lie dormant.

But, you answer, genius cannot be given to any one, and if these young men be merely good students, already masters of their trade, it is not possible to give them the sacred fire they need.

Yes! I believe that being forced to live far away from their Parisian habits is a positive advantage. The long hours of solitude in the Roman Campagna, and those spent in the admirable museums of Florence and Venice, amply compensate for the absence of musical meetings, of orchestral concerts, of theatrical representations,—in short, of music. How few of these young men, before leaving France, ever knew the useful and penetrating charm of living alone in close communion with nature or art. And the day in which art and nature speak to

you makes you an artist, an adept; and on that day, with what you have already learned, and with what you should already know, you can create in strong and healthy fashion. How many garnered impressions and emotions will live again in works as yet unwritten!

In order to give more weight to my personal opinions, let me have the pleasure of quoting a fragment of the speech made at one of the last prize-day distributions of the Académie des Beaux-Arts by my whilom comrade at Rome, now my colleague at the Institute of France, the celebrated engraver Chaplain:

During their stay at the Villa Medici, these young artists are far from spending all the treasure of thoughts and impressions which they there amass. What delight, and often what rare good luck, later to find a sketch made from some lovely scene, or an air noted down while traveling through the mountains! On the road from Tivoli to Subiaco, one summer day, a little band of students were on a walking excursion through the beautiful mountains, which, like an amphitheater, surround and rise up around Rome. We had halted in order to contemplate at our leisure the wonderful panorama of the Roman Campagna unrolling itself before us. Suddenly, at the foot of the path we had just climbed, a shepherd began to play a sweet, slow air on his pipe, the notes of which faded away, one by one, in the silence of the evening. While listening, I glanced at a musician who made one of the party, curious to read his impressions in his face; he was putting down the shepherd's air in his note-book. Several years later a new work by a young composer was performed at Paris. The air of the shepherd of Subiaco had become the beautiful introduction to “*Mary Magdalen.*”

I have quoted the whole, even the friendly praise given me by my dear comrade of Rome; but I have spoken so much of myself here that I thought I need not refuse myself these compliments coming from another in justification of my enthusiasm for those blessed years to which, it seems to me, I owe all the good qualities wherewith people are kind enough to credit me.

Do not, however, think me too exclusive in my ideas. If I speak to you of Rome, it is because the Villa Medici is unique as a retreat,—is a dream realized. I have certainly been enthusiastic over other countries, and I think that scholars should travel. When I was a scholar, I left Rome during many months. Two or three friends would join forces and start off together. We would go to Venice or down the Adriatic; running over perhaps to Greece; and, on our return, stopping at Tunis, Messina, and Naples. Finally, with swelling hearts, we would see the walls of Rome; for there, in the Academy of France, was our home. And then, how delightful to go to work in the healthful quiet, in which we could create without anything to preoccupy

us — with no worries, no sorrows. After a wandering life, after the hotel with its commonplace rooms and table, what joy to return to "our villa" and to meditate under its evergreen oaks!

The ordinary traveler never can know this repose, because it is to us alone, we scholars of the Institute, that France gives such a shelter. The remembrances of my youth have almost

always been my consolation for the years of struggle that have made up my life. But I do not thank France alone for being so good to us. I wish to bring also to your country my tribute of gratitude. It is to a woman of your great country, to an American, to Miss Sibyl Sanderson, the incomparable interpreter of "Esclarmonde," that I owe the impulse to write that lyric drama.

J. Massenet.

DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN SCIENTIFIC ERRORS?



THE question may be treated mainly as a philosophical question, in its bearings upon science as well as upon religion. Unhappily, it has become mixed with several side issues, which should be detached

from it, and thrown out of the discussion. As it is to be presented here, it will have nothing to do with the current disputes in different churches, or with the definition of any type of orthodoxy, or even with the formal vindication of Christianity itself. These are important issues in their own time and place. But there is a larger, if not higher, view of the main issue which they involve, and which they may even hide from our sight. All schools of philosophy, as well as all churches and denominations, have a common interest in inquiring whether the Bible can yield us any real knowledge within the domain of the various sciences. Indeed, all men everywhere will become practically concerned in that inquiry, if the oldest and most highly prized book in the world is now to be set aside as a mixture of truth and error, obsolete in science, if not also in morals and religion, and of little further use in the progress of civilization.

The way to the question should be cleared by several distinctions and admissions. Let us first distinguish mere literary imperfections from scientific errors, and frankly admit the existence of the former in the inspired authors. They were not trained rhetoricians, nor even practised writers. They show the greatest variety of culture and of style. The rugged simplicity of the Prophet is in contrast with the refined parallelism of the Psalmist. The Evangelists did not write pure Greek. It has been said, it would be difficult to parse some of the sentences of St. Paul. Many of the Old Testament metaphors seem gross to modern taste, and there are

certain didactic portions of Leviticus which are too natural to be read in public worship. Nevertheless, to reject the teaching of inspired writers on such esthetic grounds would be like denying the mathematics of the "Principia" because Newton wrote bad Latin, or repudiating some medical classic as unfit for the drawing-room. The literary blemishes of Holy Scripture, as seen by fastidious critics, do not touch its revealed content or divine purport, but may even heighten it by the force of contrast.

We may also distinguish and admit certain historiographical defects in the inspired authors. The prophets and evangelists were not versed in the art of historiography, and did not write history philosophically, nor even always chronologically. Their narratives have many little seeming discrepancies as to dates, places, names, and figures. The line of the patriarchs is yet to be traced, amid conflicting chronologies, with historical accuracy. Persons and events do not always appear to synchronize; as when it is stated in the "Book of the Kings" that Ahaziah was forty years old on coming to the throne, and in the "Chronicles" that he was twenty-two years old. The Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of the crucifixion of Christ with differing motives and details, which have not yet been fully harmonized. Such things are simply unavoidable in all historical composition. At the present date of antiquarian research, neither the dynasties of the Pharaohs, nor of the Cæsars, nor even of the Popes, have been clearly ascertained. No one can read Bossuet's "Universal History," or even Bancroft's "History of the United States," without losing himself in chronological puzzles. The English historians Clarendon, Neal, and Burnet narrate the execution of Charles I. with substantial agreement, but from the most varied dogmatic points of view. There are obvious misprints in some editions of Hallam's