

Paul and Virginia

[Romantic opera, in three acts and seven tableaux; text by Carré and Barbier. First produced at the Opéra National Lyrique, Paris, November 15, 1876; in London, June 1, 1878; in New York, March 28, 1883.]

PERSONAGES.

Paul. St. Croix, slave-master. Domingo, mulatto slave. M. de la Bourdonnais, governor of the island. Negro Slave. Virginia. Meala, mulatto slave. MME. de la Tour, mother of Virginia. Margaret, mother of Paul. Overseer. Old Lady, grand-aunt of Virginia.

[Inhabitants of the island, sailors, slaves, etc.]

The scene is laid upon an island on the African coast; time, the eighteenth century.

The story of "Paul and Virginia," Massé's masterpiece, follows the lines of Bernardin St. Pierre's beautiful romance of the same name. The first act opens with the recital of the history of Madame de la Tour, mother of Virginia, and Margaret, the mother of Paul, and reveals the love of the two children for each other. While they are discussing the advisability of sending Paul to India for a time, against which his slave Domingo piteously protests, islanders come rushing towards the cabin announcing the arrival of a vessel from France. In hopes that she will have a letter announcing that she has been forgiven by the relatives who have renounced her, Madame de la Tour goes to the port. A love scene between the children follows, which is interrupted by the hurried entrance of the slave Meala, who is flying from punishment by her master, St. Croix. The two offer to go back with her and to intercede for her forgiveness, in which they are successful. St. Croix, who has designs upon Virginia, begs them to

remain until night; but Meala warns them of their danger in a song, and they leave while St. Croix wreaks his revenge upon Meala.

The second act opens in the home of Madame de la Tour. She has had a letter from her aunt forgiving her, making Virginia her heiress if she will come to France, and sending money for the journey. After a long struggle between duty to her mother and love for Paul, she declines to go. Meala makes them another hurried call, again flying from St. Croix, who this time is pursuing her with a twofold purpose, first, of punishing Meala and, second, of carrying out his base designs against Virginia. He soon appears at the house and demands his slave, but Paul refuses to give her up. At last St. Croix offers to sell her to Paul, and Virginia furnishes the money. The faithful Meala that night informs them of St. Croix's plot to seize Virginia when she goes to the vessel; but he is foiled, as she does not leave. The act closes with a call from the governor of the island, who bears express orders from Virginia's relatives, signed by the King, that she must go to France.

The last act is brief, and relates the tragedy. It opens at a grotto on the seashore, where the melancholy Paul has waited and watched week by week for the vessel which will bring Virginia back to him. At last it is sighted, but a storm comes up and soon develops into a hurricane, and when it subsides the vessel is a wreck, and Virginia is found dead upon the beach.

The opera is replete with beautiful melodies. There are, in the first act, a characteristic minor song for Domingo, "Ah! do not send my Dear Young Master," which the composer evidently intended to be in the Ethiopian manner; a chanson of the genuine French style, "Ah! Hapless Black," though sung by a negro boy; a lonely and expressive melody sung by Virginia, as she pleads with St. Croix, "What I would say my Tongue forgetteth"; the weird Bamboula chorus, sung by the slaves; and a very dramatic aria for Meala, "Neath the Vines Entwining," in which she warns the children of their danger. The principal numbers in the second act are Virginia's romance, "As Last

Night thro' the Woods"; a beautiful chanson for Domingo, "The Bird flies yonder"; Paul's couplets, "Ah! crush not my Courage"; the passionate duet for Paul and Virginia, "Ah! since thou wilt go," closing in unison; and Virginia's florid aria, "Ah, what Entrancing Calm," the cadenza of which is exceedingly brilliant. The best numbers in the short last act are Meala's song, "In vain on this Distant Shore"; Paul's letter song, "Dearest Mother"; and the vision and storm music at the close.