

ALTHOUGH at the Birmingham festival the solemn dignity of Gounod's sacred trilogy might momentarily be overshadowed by the unexpected novelty of Dvorak's cantata, no musician can doubt that "Mors et Vita" will ultimately rank as one of our best oratorios. Gounod's early theological training seems to have particularly fitted him for the "work of his life," as he calls the "Redemption" and "Mors et Vita." They are both written in a spirit of devout earnestness that cannot fail to satisfy the listener, however much he may be inclined to carp at minor points.

An entirely correct opinion of "Mors et Vita" can hardly be formed until it is heard with full chorus and orchestra, but the score reveals many beauties which it may be interesting to consider. As the name implies, the work is in three parts. The first consists of the entire Requiem Mass, the second represents the Judgment, and the third is the Vision of St. John—the happiness and glory of the New Jerusalem. Important use is made of four leading motives for the foundation of the work. The "Death" motive, the most original and effective of the melodic forms, consists of four descending notes of the minor scale, beginning at the key-note C and ending on G flat, instead of G natural. The "Life" motive, expressive of sorrow and tears, consists of three ascending notes of the same scale, the fourth note skipping to B natural, a minor fourth below; and, by changing to B flat, the same motive is used to express consolation and joy. The "Happiness of the Blessed" motive is formed by four successive notes of the major scale, ascending from dominant or fifth note of scale to tonic, thence returning to third, closing on second. The fourth conspicuous form is the trumpet call, which announces the awakening of the dead, distinguished from an ordinary trumpet call by a chromatic interval. Beyond saying that Gounod's scholarship is well displayed by contrapuntal and fugal writing, we lay aside any particular consideration of the technical value of the work, and endeavor to view it from the ordinary standpoint of musical feeling.

The trilogy opens with a dramatic prologue, where the "Death" motive appears at once to the words "Horrendum est incidere in manus Dei viventis," and, in connection with effective harmonies, vividly describes the cold horror of an awe-stricken soul. It is thrice repeated, each time a semitone higher, and by its stern solemnity prepares the mind of the listener for the despair and sorrow to come. The gloom is broken by the voice of Jesus, saying "Ego sum Resurrectio et Vita," and the same words are then repeated by the full chorus. An adagio formed on a melancholy, chromatic phrase, used afterwards frequently throughout the work, and a contrapuntal andante prelude the "Requiem eternam," upon whose harmonies we are borne along as over the dark surface of a secluded lake—a lake whose glassy bosom is soon disturbed by hint of coming storms. At "Et lux perpetua luceat eis" the "Life" motive appears in the orchestra, and when the prayer for rest modulates into the "Kyrie Eleison," to which a more cheerful effect is given by the major key, we catch, as it were, the first pale gleam of that glory which is to gild with dazzling brightness the walls of the celestial city. To the beautiful words, "A custodia matutina usque ad noctem," we have a full double chorus in strict fugal style, which gives a somewhat cold impression of devotion in the abstract, not the devotion of warm religious feeling. However desirable such a movement may be as an exercise of skill, one is inclined to think if Gounod were asked why he wrote it, he would answer as Reicha answered Berlioz. "What do you think," asked Berlioz, "of the fugues composed on *A mens et Kyrie Eleisons* with which the masses and requiems of great composers are infested?" "Oh," said Reicha, "it is barbarous!" "Then, sir, why do you write them?" "Oh, because all the world does." We exclaim with Berlioz, "Miseria!"

The "Dies irae" is picturesquely treated. It is introduced by the "Death motive,"

and a monotonous repetition of the minor third gives an effect of plaintive sorrow to the words sung by the chorus. By the broken agitation of the accompaniment we are reminded of the restless fear that must underlie the horrors of that dread day when earth and heaven shall pass away. At the "Tuba mirum" loud trumpet blasts foretell the sounds that shall "ring through earth's dark sepulchres," and these blasts, combined with an ingenious expansion of the "Death" motive, strikingly mark the awakening of death and nature. The "Death" motive again, softly ascending in curious harmonies, follows the last words "Nil multum remanebit." In the quartet and chorus, "Quid sum miser," and the solo and chorus, "Felix culpa," we have two compositions which will doubtless prove among the most popular selections; the former having a memory-haunting melody and also a forcible phrase at "Rex tremendae majestati," and the latter, a dignified soprano solo which expresses the content of those grateful for the knowledge of a Redeemer.

Passing through the fugally developed "Quaerens me," which although perhaps suited to the complaining words is not specially interesting, we reach the "Ingenisco tanquam Reus," a fine and elaborate piece of writing where we are carried from expressions of contrition and shame to a surpassingly tender and pathetic plea for pardon at "Qui Mariam absolvisti." Borne upward on bold modulations we linger at the climax of hope in "Mihi quoque spem dedisti," and then, through equally rich chord combinations, come to the prayer to be saved from everlasting fire. Can any one, not unfeelingly stolid, fail to be affected by the notes of shuddering, self-pitying awe that softly close this magnificent inspiration?

After a pleasing tenor air, we move to a group of more dramatic scenes, where we are swayed in turn by the fury of the "Confutatis maledictis" with the death motive again fortissimo, by the contrition of the quartet soli, "Oro supplex," where the accompaniment brings up a vision of rain pattering on lonely graves or wind sighing through leafless branches, by the solemn anguish of the "Lacrymosa" and by the reverent supplication of the almost unaccompanied "Pie Jesu." A soprano air, "Sed signifer sanctus" in the double chorus, "Domine Jesu," and the tenor solo and chorus of the Sanctus are in Gounod's best vein—melodiously flowing, pure, and refined—and will doubtless prove as welcome both to the learned and unlearned as those songs "winged to a heavenly argument" through which he is so widely known. Noting in the "Pie Jesu" a chorus constructed on the phrase aptly described as meaning justice tempered with mercy, a phrase which forms the principal theme of the Judex, we pass to the "Agnus Dei"—that exquisite prayer for the peace and happiness of the loved ones passed beyond our ken. Here, at the words "Dona eis requiem," the "Happiness of the blessed" motive appears; and thenceforward, we move, on steadily massed harmonies, to an expression of confidence in the wisdom of Him who giveth life and who taketh it away. The closing orchestral passage symbolizes again Justice, Mercy and Peace. Gounod might indeed have closed the first part here; but he has chosen to add an orchestral epilogue wherein are skilfully interwoven the motives of Death and Life, and wherein one pleasing phrase forshadows the possibilities of future happiness.

The second part opens with a subtle tone-poem called "Mortuus Somnorum." As befits the rest of those who have done with earthly care, the harmonies are characterized by a measured vagueness, if such an expression may be used. Soon the monotony is disturbed by a faint call of the angelic trumpets; restlessness, hints of stirring, pervade the music—always adagio and pianissimo; and at length, chords singularly marking unconscious expectation leave us thrilled to our very finger-tips with the cold, weird calmness of the movement. But what words can represent this breathing of indefinite thought, this impassiveness of the waiting dead that hovers like a veil of thick white mist around these ungraspable chords! Only a tone-poet could have written this "Sleep of the Dead;" only a word-poet should attempt to describe it. Now the savage clamor of

grand fanfare of trumpets strikes with appalling effect upon the listening ear. At the stern call to judgement we seem to see the "squadron'd angels," drawn up in countless hosts throughout empyreal space, waiting with bowed heads to hear the doom of the awakening souls. And then we go on into the stirring, the dim anxiety, the hurrying fear, that tell the "Resurrectio Mortuorum," and draw a sigh of relief, when a baritone solo speaks the coming of the Son of God. A beautiful melody, formed on the "Justice and Mercy" motive, marks the appearance of the Judge, and notably expresses tenderness and inflexible purpose; it is also used with the "Happiness" motive in the orchestral accompaniment of the chorus. The "Judicium Electorum," including a delicately cheerful soprano air, "Beati lavant qui stolas," and a chorale in the primitive style of the early church, stands in strong contrast to the grave chords of the "Judicium Rejectionum." Behold, now, says the harmony, the inflexibility of a law from which there is no appeal! In despairing agitation the doomed say among themselves: "We have departed from the way of the righteous; our punishment is just;" and their awful resignation, which is but an agonized "recognition of the inevitable," closes this group of gloomy scenes.

The entire third part consists of smooth, melodious phrases and clear-flowing harmonies. A poetic description of the delight and wonder with which the new heaven and earth are surveyed, and a solo, picturing the "Jurusalem Coelestis," "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband," form the opening numbers. After a noble Sanctus with an accompaniment which indicates celestial harps and "flutterings of angelic wings," and a chorus expressing the soothing promises of God to be with his people, we have a quartet, "Lacrymae dolor, mors," one of the most important portions of the work. The easy flow of voices gives an impression of freedom and relief from care, and lifts us into a clearer atmosphere

Where the bright seraphim in burning row
Their loud, uplifted angel trumpets blow;
And the cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires.

We are now passing beyond the power of ill. The glories of eternal life and happiness dispel the shadows of death, and, accordingly, at the words "Quia prima abierunt" the "Death" motive finally disappears. Through the "Ecce Omnia Novata," the "Life" and "Happiness" motives are of course predominant, and all the resources of voice and orchestra are used to express the bliss of the redeemed. The grand "Hosanna," an allegro maestoso movement fugally developed, brings the third part to an end in a triumphant burst of exultant harmony.

In reviewing the work as a whole, it will be seen that the first part, following the line of thought of other composers who have written requiem masses, presents nothing strikingly original excepting in the use of the "Life" and "Death" motives which give it greater breadth and unity of design. The third part, in the present state of music, offers fewer difficulties to a composer, supposing him to possess genius and knowledge, than the second. It was to be expected that music of peace, joy, and rapture, would be given as satisfactorily as possible by Gounod, whose poetic temperament enables him to rise to those exalted moods in which the soul finds freest expression. But the second part, dealing with sublime and terrible emotions is to our mind the real success of the work. Considering the disadvantages under which a composer labors when he tries to express by the orchestra, fear, awe, horror and despair, in a sufficiently solemn manner to escape the charge of absurdity, one marvels at Gounod's achievement. The whole section embracing the scenes of the Judgment is characterized by dignity; while here and there are touches of deep significance, only revealed by the careful study which a work like this demands for a full comprehension of its power.

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The new work by the great French composer was performed at the recent festival at Birmingham, and was received with marked favor. An English musical critic gives this account of it:

"The work is divided into three parts, the first, entitled 'Mors,' contains a prologue, followed by an elaborate setting of the 'Requiem Mass.' The second part, entitled 'Judicium,' opens with an instrumental prelude intended to depict the sleep of the dead. This is followed by another instrumental movement, in which is heard the sound of the last trump. We then have the judgment first of the elect, and then of the rejected. In the third part, 'Vita' we pass from those solemn scenes to the bright vision of the heavenly Jerusalem.

"As in the 'Redemption,' so here, the composer has made use of representative themes. The principal one consists of four notes presenting a sequence of three major seconds. It is intended to express 'the terror inspired by the sense of the inflexibility of justice.' It is first heard in the opening chorus, 'Horrendum est incidere in manus Dei viventis,' given out by voices and instruments fortissimo, in unison and octaves. Afterward it is used with harmonies, and we hear it now in ascending, now in descending form, and also combined with other melodies. In the opening chorus it is repeated three times in succession, and each time a semitone higher, after the manner of Berlioz in his famous 'Judex crederis.' We meet with it for the last time in the quartet of the third part, after the words 'for the first things are passed away.' Another short melodic form, of which much skilful use is made, is supposed to express sorrow and tears, and, by a slight transformation, also consolation and joy. And then there is the 'call of the angelic trumpets.' Mozart was content with a simple diatonic phrase, but Berlioz racked his brain to produce a novel and startling effect. Gounod pursues a middle course; he adopts an ordinary trumpet call, but imparts character to it by means of his favorite device—a chromatic interval.

"From a purely musical point of view, 'Mors et Vita' is far more interesting than the 'Redemption.' In both works the composer has endeavored to bring out and intensify the meaning of the words, but in the latter one the technical workmanship is far more conspicuous. As in the 'Redemption' so here, there are movements of studied brevity and simplicity, but there are others of large dimensions and elaborate developments. The 'Redemption' was after the manner of a sacred drama; 'Mors et Vita' is more like an ordinary mass or oratorio. The earlier work stood, as it were, alone; whereas, the latter one, especially so far as its first and most important part is concerned, invites comparison with the Requiems of Mozart, Cherubini and Berlioz. If we are not very much mistaken, 'Mors et Vita' will rank among Gounod's highest efforts. Chromatic chords and chromatic passing notes are frequent, and at times betray weakness rather than strength, but they are less extravagant and harsh than those employed in the 'Redemption.' The instrumental movements in the first work were, to our thinking, the weakest portions, but it was not surprising that the composer should fail in attempting tone pictures of 'The Creation,' the 'Darkness at the Crucifixion,' or even the 'Apostles in Prayer.' So in the present work, we feel that the prelude, attempting to depict the sleep of the dead, the movements entitled 'Tuba ad ultimum judicium,' and 'Resurrectio Mortuorum' will prove more or less disappointing. Such subjects and scenes are almost beyond the reach of musical expression."