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VICTOR HUGO

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY

G. BARNETT SMITH,

AUTHOR OF

'SHELLEY: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY,' 'POETS AND NOVELISTS,'
ETC.

WITH A PORTRAIT OF VICTOR HUGO.

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I INSCRIBE THIS VOLUME
TO
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE,
REJOICING THUS TO CONNECT
THE
GREAT BARD AND PROPHET OF FRANCE
WITH THE ENGLISH
SINGER OF A YOUNGER DAY,
WHO HAS DRUNK DEEPLY
OF
THE MASTER'S SPIRIT.

G. B. S.

247698

PRELIMINARY NOTE.

I BEGAN this study of Victor Hugo in December last, and arrangements were made for its early publication. The great poet has now passed away, and this melancholy event gives the biographical portion of the present volume a completeness not originally anticipated. Notwithstanding the multitude of criticisms which have appeared in our own and other languages upon Hugo's works, this is the only book which relates the full story of his life, and now traces to its close his literary career. More than twenty years have elapsed since the publication of Madame Hugo's memorials of the earlier portion of the poet's history, and since that time M. Barbon's work (excellently translated by Miss Frewer) is the only narrative of a biographical character which has appeared. The writings of various French and English critics, the two works I have named, and those valuable chroniclers, the journals of London and Paris, have been of considerable service to me in the preparation of the biography now offered to the public.

The writings of Victor Hugo are so varied and multifarious, and many of them are so well known to English

readers, that I have not deemed it necessary to subject them to a detailed analysis. At the same time, the reader unfamiliar with these powerful works will, I trust, be able to gather something of their purport and scope from the ensuing pages. As they have impressed all minds, moreover, by their striking originality, I thought that it would not be without its value if, while venturing to record my own impressions, I gave at the same time a representation of critical contemporary opinion upon them. Finally, it has been my object to present to the reader, within reasonable compass, a complete survey of the life and work of the most celebrated Frenchman of the nineteenth century.

G. BARNETT SMITH.

HIGHGATE, LONDON, N.

June 3rd, 1885.

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HIS LIFE AND WORK.



CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS.

THE glory of France touched its zenith at the period when our narrative opens. Europe virtually lay at the feet of Napoleon, who had risen to a height of authority and power which might well have satisfied the most vaulting ambition. Nations whose records extended back into the ages of antiquity trembled before him; and only one people, that of this sea-girt isle of Britain, declined to bend the knee to the all-conquering First Consul. Yet the philosophic mind, reflecting that the stability of a nation or a throne must be measured by its growth, must surely have distrusted the permanence of a grandeur and a greatness thus rapidly achieved. And speedily would such prevision have been

justified, for in little more than one brief decade the sun of Napoleon set as suddenly as it arose.

(But while as yet the fame and the splendour of the conqueror were in their noonday, there was born at Besançon another child of genius, whose triumphs were to be won in a different and a nobler sphere. He was destined to touch, as with Ithuriel's spear, the sleeping spirit of French poesy, and to animate it with new life, vigour, and enthusiasm; he was to recall the divine muse from the drear region of classicism, and, by revivifying almost every branch of imaginative literature, he was himself to gain the triple crown of poet, romancist, and dramatist. And not alone for this was the child Victor Hugo to grow into manhood and venerable age. He was to become a great apostle of liberty, and as his life opened with the triumphs of the first Napoleon, so before its close he was destined to behold the last of that name pass away in the whirlwind, and France recover much of her prosperity and her power under the ægis of the Republic, of which the poet sang and for which he laboured.

The ancestry of Victor Hugo were not undis-

tinguished. Documents concerning them before the fifteenth century were lost in the pillage of Nancy, but since that time a clear genealogy is claimed. There was one Hugo, a soldier, who obtained in 1535 letters patent of nobility for himself and his descendants from Cardinal Jean de Lorraine, Archbishop of Rheims, which letters were subsequently confirmed by the Cardinal's brother, Antoine, Duke of Lorraine. The fifth descendant from this warrior-noble, Charles Hyacinthe Hugo, obtained new letters patent; and his grandson, Joseph Leopold Sigisbert, was the father of the poet. In the seventeenth century, a member of the Hugo family was known both in the Church and in literature, and became Abbé of Estival and Bishop of Ptolemais. Another who lived in the eighteenth century, Louis Antoine Hugo, was a member of the Convention, and was executed for moderatism. Thus in career, as in character, there was much variety in the Hugo family.

Sigisbert Hugo, who entered the army as a cadet in 1788, ultimately attained the rank of General under the First Empire. Although the hereditary title of Count was the appanage of this rank, he never took it up. While brave

and fearless in war, he is represented as being devotion and goodness personified, and humane to a fault. 'He set his children a fine example of duty, being ever their instructor in the paths of honour.' During a period of military service at Nantes, he became acquainted with Sophie Trébuchet, the daughter of a wealthy shipowner. An attachment soon sprang up between them, and they were married in Paris, Hugo having been summoned thither as reporter to the first council of war on the Seine.

Though the grandfather of Victor Hugo on the maternal side was engaged in commerce, he belonged to an old family, and one famous in La Vendée for its devotion to the Royalist cause. A cousin of Madame Hugo was the Count de Chassebœuf, better known as Volney, the author of *Les Ruines*; and another cousin was Count Cornet, who was very prominent in political matters both before and during the First Empire. Two sons were born to Major Hugo and his wife, and then they looked forward with hope to the birth of a daughter, whom it was decided to name Victorine. Another son, however, came instead, and one so weakly and diminutive that the accoucheur declared strongly

against his chances of life. The babe was taken to the mairie at Besançon, and registered as having been born on the 26th of February, 1802. He received the names of Victor Marie Hugo, and his godfather was Major Hugo's intimate friend, General Lahorie, chief of the staff to General Moreau. It has been pointed out that the word Hugo in old German was the equivalent of the Latin word *spiritus*, and this fact, combined with the Christian name of Victor, caused Dumas the elder to say that 'the name of Victor Hugo stands forth as the conquering spirit, the triumphant soul, the breath of victory.'

But for some time there could be little pre-sage of triumph or victory in connection with Victor Hugo. Languid and ailing in body, he became unusually sad for a child of such tender years, and 'was sometimes discovered in a corner, weeping silently without any reason.' He afterwards described his untoward childhood in the opening lines of the *Feuilles d'Automne*. For some time the Hugo family accompanied its head in his military journeyings; but when Major Hugo was ultimately ordered to join the army of Italy, he settled his wife and their three young children in Paris, in the Rue de

Clichy. That the youngest scion of the house could not really have been as feeble and frail as he looked, and that he must have had the basis of a good, sound constitution, is proved by his long life; but we must not forget also in this regard the great care and assiduous attention lavished upon him by his mother. His career furnishes another illustration of the truth that while the most glorious promise sometimes sets in gloom and premature death, on the other hand genius also not infrequently advances from the wavering spark to a noble flame, and out of weakness is made strength.

Major (afterwards General) Hugo rendered conspicuous service in Italy by the capture of the notorious bandit chief, Fra Diavolo, and the pacification of Naples. For these acts he was made Colonel of Royal Corsica and Governor of Avellino. When not quite five years old Victor was taken by his mother, with his brothers, Abel and Eugène, to Avellino, and the journey to Italy is associated with his first observations of natural scenery. Though so young, his imagination was fired by all he saw, and the impressions he formed were very distinct—so much so that in after life he would discuss

with Alexandre Dumas the aspects of the country through which he had travelled in his childhood.

In 1808 Colonel Hugo was sent to Madrid in the train of Joseph Bonaparte; but, as Spain was disturbed by war, he would not hazard the presence of his wife and children in that country. Madame Hugo accordingly went to Paris, and established herself at the house No. 12, in the Impasse des Feuillantines, where she now devoted herself to the education of her children. Late in life, Victor Hugo described the household in the Feuillantines. Near by there was an aged priest, who acted as tutor to the boys, teaching them a good deal of Latin, a smattering of Greek, and the barest outlines of history. In the gardens, and amid the ruins of an old convent in the grounds, the Hugo boys passed many happy days. 'Together in their work and in their play, rough-hewing their lives regardless of destiny, they passed their time as children of the spring, mindful only of their books, of the trees, and of the clouds, listening to the tumultuous chorus of the birds, but watched over incessantly by one sweet and loving smile.' 'Blessings on thee, O my

mother !' was the invocation of the poet in his later years.

Once the family received an accession in the person of General Lahorie, who had been connected with Moreau's conspiracy, and was condemned to death for contumacy. Madame Hugo, in her secluded dwelling, and in a little chapel buried amongst the foliage, gave him a secure shelter for eighteen months. Young Victor did not then know that the stranger in whom he took so deep an interest, and in whom he begat an equal interest, was his godfather. Lahorie took kindly to the boy, and frequently conversed with him, saying to him on one occasion with great impressiveness, 'Child, everything must yield to liberty !' The precautions of Lahorie and his friends were in the end of no avail. In 1811 he was arrested at the Feuillantines, tried and condemned by court-martial, and shot on the plain of Grenelle. Napoleon was implacable in his revenge ; his wrath might sleep, but it was never allowed to die.

. Another visitor to the Feuillantines was General Louis Hugo, uncle to the youths. With that strong poetic imagery which characterized



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Madrid, though irksome to Madame Hugo, was not so to her youngest son. He delighted in observing the features of the scenery and the towns through which they passed. With Ernani he was especially pleased, and subsequently gave to one of his dramas the name of this town. After a number of adventures, some of them of a trying character, the convoy entered Madrid, and Madame Hugo and her family were accommodated at the palace of Prince Masserano. Their rooms and all the appointments were very sumptuous, and there was a great display of Bohemian and Venetian glass and magnificent China vases. Concerning the latter, Victor Hugo said that he had 'never since met with any so remarkable.' Victor's eldest brother, Abel, was made a page to King Joseph, and it was intended that Victor himself should follow his example. Meanwhile Eugène and Victor were placed in the Seminary of Nobles, a proceeding which affected them deeply, and made them inexpressibly miserable after the happiness they had found in the Masserano Palace.

But great and dire events were impending in Napoleonic history. By the beginning of the year 1812 the position of French affairs generally

became so threatening that General Hugo decided to send his wife and the two younger children back to Paris. Not many months elapsed before his prescience was justified. Bonaparte's army was decimated by the inclement snows of Russia after the burning of Moscow, and the kings he had set up in the European capitals began to tremble for the stability of their thrones.

Madame Hugo and her two sons safely reached Paris after a tedious journey, and once more established themselves in the Feuillantines. The biographical work written by the poet's wife shows that Madame Hugo had liberal ideas on the subject of education: that where religion was in question she was averse to forcing any particular persuasion on her sons, or to interfere with their natural tendencies; neither did she wish to tax their intelligence any more than their consciences. In the matter of reading she was equally liberal: the boys were allowed the greatest freedom, and read Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and other authors; but the works of such writers paled in comparison with Captain Cook's travels, which had a great fascination for the young students. Madame Hugo judged that

any errors her sons were likely to imbibe in their wide and catholic reading would be rendered innocuous by the influence of a good example and the purity of the home life. She restrained them by her authority, and, while attending to their mental and moral development, she did not neglect the physical. She desired them to grow up healthy and complete in mind and body alike.

The troubles in Spain thickened apace, and King Joseph left Madrid, being followed by General Hugo. The victory of the Allies at Vittoria practically settled the fate of Joseph Bonaparte and the Spanish crown. The King dismissed his retinue of officers and retired into private life, and General Hugo returned to Paris with his son Abel. Madame Hugo and the other children had moved into the Rue du Cherche-Midi. Having herself been an invader, it was now the turn of France to be invaded. General Hugo was no favourite with the Emperor (who had not forgotten the Moreau conspiracy), but when his country was in danger he could not remain inactive. So he volunteered, and went into the provinces, where he rendered conspicuous service. He long held Thionville, keeping the

Allies at bay, and refused to open the town until he received official despatches from his General-in-Chief announcing the cessation of hostilities. The restoration of the Bourbons followed, and, although this was hailed with great joy by Madame Hugo, it led to General Hugo being deprived of his command and removed from active employment, together with all the officers who had shared in the defence of Thionville.

Eugène and Victor Hugo now lost the liberty they had for some time enjoyed, and were sent to school, being placed in the Collège Cordier et Decotte, in the Rue Ste. Marguerite. At first the removal was especially bitter to Victor, as it separated him from Adèle Foucher, a young girl who had completely won his youthful heart. This love continued to grow from its inception in the Rue du Cherche-Midi till the time when Adèle became his devoted wife, and returned Victor Hugo's affection with an ardour equal to his own.

The Hugo boys were naturally the subject of a cross-fire in regard to politics. Their father was devoted to the Empire, and their mother was equally devoted to the Royalists. But as the influence of a mother always has priority in

regard to time, Victor Hugo was for a season enthusiastic about royalty. He could not, with his warm temperament and lively imagination, be half-hearted about anything. Nor need it surprise us that he yielded first to the influence of his mother as regarded the Bourbons, and then to that of his father as regarded the Bonapartes. In youth it is the imagination which is developed ; the judgment is formed by slow stages. It would have surprised us more if Victor Hugo had not shown himself amenable to the potent influences of his home training. His father and mother were of no ordinary type ; they had both great latent force of nature and character, which deeply impressed itself upon their children. In estimating the career of Victor Hugo, then, with its later changes of opinion, the circumstances which surrounded his early years, and greatly assisted in moulding his character, must not be forgotten.

Early in 1815 Paris was electrified by the news that Napoleon had returned from Elba. For a brief period the magic of his name once more exercised a profound influence ; and under this revival of Bonapartist prospects General Hugo was again despatched to take the command

of Thionville. He exhibited the same capacity and spirit as before, but all was of no avail. The crowning disaster of Waterloo extinguished the hopes of the Bonapartists, and Napoleon fell, 'like Lucifer, never to rise again.'

It is matter for regret that the differences between General and Madame Hugo on the subject of politics and dynasties led to a separation between them, though one that was mutually desired. Each felt too strongly on these subjects to give way, and thereby stultify his or her convictions. But political disagreements did not affect the deep interest of both parents in their children. The boys made great progress at school, and also attended courses of lectures in physics, philosophy, and mathematics at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Their proficiency was especially marked in mathematics, and it obtained for both honourable mention in the examinations.

Poetry, however, even thus early, was the real mistress of Victor Hugo. His tentative efforts in this direction were as varied as they were numerous, and he has left an amusing record of his first wooings of the Muse. He alternated fights at the college (he and Eugène

were the kings of the school) with flights of the imagination. Nothing came amiss to him, whether ode, satire, epistle, lyric, tragedy, elegy, etc.; and he imitated Ossian and translated from Virgil, Horace, and Lucan at an age when others only just begin to acquire an appreciation and understanding of those authors. Nor were such writers as Martial and Ausonius unknown to him. Then from poetry he would turn to romances, fables, stories, epigrams, madrigals, logographs, acrostics, charades, enigmas, and impromptus; and he even wrote a comic opera.

In one of these youthful pieces he deprecated the exercise of the reader's satirical rage over the effusion; and certainly the chief impression which these initial attempts at composition leave upon the reader is not a critical one founded upon their manifest crudity and inconsequences of thought, but one of surprise at the exuberance of fancy and command of expression so soon and so singularly displayed. There was more than sufficient in them to the observant eye to foreshadow the genius which their author afterwards developed. Each of these poems was an effort of the imagination after strength of wing. But of all those who perused those early



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CHAPTER II.

DAWNINGS OF GENIUS.

VICTOR HUGO was not quite thirteen when he wrote his first poetical essay, which had for its subject *Roland and Chivalry*. This was followed in the same year, 1815, by an intensely Royalist poem, and one breathing indignation against the Emperor, after the disaster of Waterloo. The poet had been thrown constantly into the midst of Royalist influences and surroundings; not only his mother, but General Lahorie and M. Foucher, her most intimate friends, were enemies of the Empire, and the youth consequently imbibed at the same time hatred of the Empire and love of the Bourbons.

His first tragedy, *Irtamène*, was written in honour of Louis XVIII., and though professedly dealing with Egyptian themes, it was really a defence of the French King. There is a usurper

in it, who meets with condign chastisement, and the play ends with the coronation of the legitimate monarch. 'Those who hate tyrants should love kings,' said the writer, to whom at that time the restoration of the Bourbons meant liberty. But these things must not be made too much of. The poet was at that nebulous stage when the fact of writing poetry was more to him than the subject-matter of his exercises. He read voluminously, but he had not as yet begun to separate, to weigh, and to discriminate.

A course of the *Théâtre de Voltaire* led him to begin a new tragedy, *Athéli; or, the Scandinavians*, all in dramatic order, with its five acts, and its due regard to narrative, scenery, etc. Before he had completed it, however, he turned to a comic opera, *A Quelque Chose Hasard est Bon*. Then he reverted to the drama, and wrote a play in three acts, with two interludes, entitled *Inez de Castro*. From the point of view of literary art, little is to be said of these things; but there are many scattered passages in them which reveal remarkable insight on the part of one so young. In the year 1817 he first sought publicity for his compositions, competing for

the poetical prize annually offered by the French Academy. The subject chosen was, *The Advantages of Study in every situation of Life*, and amongst the competitors were Lebrun, Delavigne, Saintine, and Loyson, who all on this occasion made their poetical debut. The first prize was divided between Saintine and Lebrun, and Hugo received honourable mention; but when the poems came to be declaimed in public, the warmest applause followed that by Victor Hugo. The Academy judges were considerably puzzled by Master Hugo's exercise. In one place he wrote as though he had arrived at years of discretion and comparative maturity, and then demolished this idea by the lines—

‘I, who have ever fled from courts and cities,
Scarce three short lustres have accomplished yet.’

The judges came to the conclusion that the young poet was playing with them, and in their report accordingly threw doubt upon his statement that he was only fifteen years old. The production of his birth certificate set this question at rest, and Victor's name now became prominent in the newspapers. M. Raynouard, the cultured Secretary of the Academy, finding

that the 'most potent, grave, and reverend signors' had not been deceived, expressed the great pleasure he had in making the youthful competitor's acquaintance. Other distinguished men followed suit, and Hugo was described as 'the sublime child,' either by Chateaubriand or Soumet. The evidence points to the latter having first made use of this phrase, but its origin matters little, for Chateaubriand fully adopted it, remarking that anyone might naturally have used the words, they expressed so decided a truth. Hugo was taken by a friend to see the author of *Atala*, and the impression made upon his mind by this man of genius found utterance in the exclamation, 'I would be Chateaubriand or nothing.'

In 1818 Victor's brother Eugène was awarded a prize at the floral games of Toulouse. The younger brother's ambition was touched, and in the following year he secured two prizes from the same Academy for his poems on *The Statue of Henry IV.*, and *The Virgins of Verdun*. The former poem gained the golden lily, and the latter the golden amaranth. It seems that just as the writer was about to set to work on the first-named poem, Madame Hugo was seized

with inflammation of the chest. She lamented that her son would be unable to complete his poem in time; but he set to work, wrote it in a single night, and it was despatched next morning in time to compete for the prize. The President of the Toulouse Academy admitted that it was an enigma for one so young to exhibit such remarkable talents in literature.

A poem, *Moses on the Nile*, gained him a third prize at Toulouse, and this constituted him Master of the Floral Games, so that at the age of eighteen he became a provincial academician. He was still Royalist in his opinions, and on the few occasions when he was in the company of his father, the latter did not attempt to change his views, feeling that it would be useless to attempt to set the arguments of a few hours against a daily and hourly influence. But he had a true apprehension of his son's character, and on one occasion, when Victor had expressed himself warmly in favour of the Vendéans, General Hugo turned to General Lucotte, and said: 'Let us leave all to time. The child shares his mother's views; the man will have the opinions of his father.'

Victor Hugo was now the subject of con-

flicting claims. There was the law, which he had chosen as a profession, with its demands upon him, and there was literature, which he loved too much to surrender; while at the same time love and politics also claimed their share in him. He determined to throw himself ardently into literature. Separated from the object of his youthful affections, he wrote his *Hern d'Islande*, in which, while there are many crimes and horrors, there are also passages of tenderness, wherein he sought to embalm and reveal his feelings of love. His courage sustained him through many trials, but at last he was called upon to bear one that made a profound impression upon his heart. Madame Hugo, who was now living in the Rue Mézières, was seized with serious illness after working in her garden, which was her favourite occupation. For some time she struggled successfully with the disease, but it had obtained too firm a hold upon her, and she died suddenly on the 27th of June, 1821. On the evening of the funeral, Adèle Foucher, unconscious of what had occurred, was dancing at a party given in celebration of her birthday. Next morning Victor called upon her, and the lovers, mingling

their tears together, mutually renewed their old vows of attachment. Victor, to whom life had seemed without an object on the death of his mother, speedily found another after his betrothal to Adèle. Her parents no longer actively opposed the union, but stipulated for its postponement until Victor could provide a home.

In conjunction with several friends, Hugo had already founded the *Conservateur Littéraire*, to which he contributed articles on Sir Walter Scott, Byron, Moore, etc., and a number of political satires. He had a sum of seven hundred francs, upon which he subsisted for a year, and the method by which he did it will be found related in the experiences of Marius in *Les Misérables*. Translations from Lucan and Virgil, which appeared under the name of D'Auverney, and the Epistles from Aristides to Brutus on *Thou and You*, emanated from his pen. He also wrote a very noticeable article on Lamartine's *Méditations Poétiques*, which had just appeared. Then came the first instalment of his own *Odes et Ballades*, a work in which his genius began to attain a fuller freedom and a richer expression. The volume was received with very wide favour, and though, as M. Barbou has observed, it



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The *Odes* not only brought the author friends like Emile Deschamps and Alfred de Vigny, but they were pecuniarily successful. The first edition yielded him a profit of seven hundred francs, and a second quickly followed. The attention of the King was called to the poems, and the interest his Majesty took in them, together with a romantic incident in connection with the Saumur plot, led to a pension of 1,000 francs being conferred upon the poet from the King's privy purse. He now thought he was entitled to press the question of his marriage. His father, who had married again, offered no opposition; the Fouchers also gave way, and bestowed the hand of their daughter Adèle upon the young and now successful poet. Victor Hugo had shortly before this made the acquaintance of the celebrated priest Lamennais, and it was from his hands that he received the certificate of confession required before he could get married. 'I trust with all my heart,' wrote the priest, 'that God will bless this happy union, which He appears Himself to have prepared by implanting in you a long and unchanged affection, and a mutual love as pure as it is sweet.'

The Saumur plot, to which I have referred,

took place in 1822, and amongst those implicated in it was a young man named Delon, who had been an intimate friend of Victor Hugo in his childhood. On hearing of Delon's danger, Hugo wrote to the conspirator's mother, offering an asylum for her son in his own house, and remarking that as the writer was well known for his devotion to the Bourbons, he would never be sought in such a retreat. This letter fell into the hands of the King, but instead of its prejudicing him against Victor Hugo, he generously said, 'That young man has a good heart as well as great genius; he is an honourable fellow; I shall take care he has the next pension that falls vacant.' This was the origin of the poet's pension, which was in nowise due to an expressed wish or desire on his own part.

Hans of Iceland, the first published romance of Victor Hugo, appeared anonymously in 1823. The work at once attracted attention by reason of its graphic power and the startling nature of its contrasts. It combines horror with tenderness, the deepest gloom with flashes of the purest light. The author himself had a great affection for it, on the personal ground already mentioned. But its chief features are of a

different order. In this northern romance, as one critic has observed, the youthful novelist has turned to great account the savage wilds, gloomy lakes, stormy seas, pathless caves, and ruined fortresses of Scandinavia. 'A being savage as the scenery around him—human in his birth, but more akin to the brute in his nature; diminutive, but with a giant's strength; whose pastime is assassination, who lives literally as well as metaphorically on blood—is the hero; and round this monster are grouped some of the strangest, ghastliest, and yet not wholly unnatural beings which it is possible for the imagination to conceive—Spiagudry, the keeper of the dead-house, or *morgue*, of Drontheim, and Orugex, the State executioner—while gentler forms, the noble and persecuted Schumacker, and the devoted and innocent Ethel, relieve the monotony of crime and horror.' M. Charles Nodier, one of the ablest of French contemporary critics, in a review of the work in the *Quotidienne*, remarked upon the fact that there were men of a certain organization, to whom glory and distinction were temptations, just as happiness and pleasure tempted other men. 'Precocious intellects and deep sensibility do not take the future

into consideration—they devour their future. The passions of a young and powerful mind know no to-morrow; they look to satiate their ambition and their hopes with the reputation and excitement of the present moment. *Han d'Islande* has been the result of this kind of combination, if indeed one can describe as a combination that which is only the thoughtless instinct of an original genius, who obeys, without being aware of it, an impulse at variance with his true interests, but whose fine and wide career may not improbably justify this promise of excellence, and may hereafter redeem all the anxiety he has caused by the excusable error he committed when he first launched himself upon the world.' M. Nodier then discussed with much freedom, and yet with almost as much fairness, the peculiar features of the romance, its close and painful search into the morbidities of life, its pictures of the scaffold and the *morgue*, etc., as well as its strong local colouring, its historical truth, its learning, its wit, and its vigorous and picturesque style.

The author and his critic became personally acquainted. The latter called upon Victor Hugo, who, after other changes of abode, had now

established himself in the Rue de Vaugirard. A second pension of 2,000 francs had been awarded him by the King ; hence his migration into comparatively sumptuous quarters. Other literary friendships besides that with M. Nodier were formed as the result of Victor Hugo's first romance.

At this period he wrote an ode on the *Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile*, and there were many indications that his early Royalist opinions were in process of abandonment. He visited his father at Blois, and the General was not slow to observe the changes taking place in his son's views. While he could not admire Napoleon personally, he began to do justice to those who had planted the French standard in all the capitals of Europe. But it seemed as though the King was resolved to retain him by favours, for there was now conferred upon him the coveted badge of the Legion of Honour. He attended the coronation of Charles X. at Rheims, and from thence went to pay a visit to Lamartine. A project was formed and a treaty signed with a publisher, by which M. Lamartine, Victor Hugo, M. Charles Nodier, and M. Taylor engaged to prepare a work detailing a poetical and picturesque trip to

Mont Blanc and the Valley of Chamouni. For four meditations Lamartine was to receive 2,000 francs, Hugo 2,000 for four odes, Taylor 2,000 for eight drawings, and Nodier 2,250 for all the text. The travellers set out, Hugo being accompanied by his wife and child. On reaching Geneva—after a temporary arrest of Hugo, some time before, on account of the delay of his passport in its journey from Paris—the visitors found the police regulations very annoying. Each hotel possessed a register, in which every traveller was bound to write his name, his age, his profession, the place from whence he came, and his object in travelling. M. Nodier was so exasperated that in reply to the last query he wrote, ‘Come to upset your Government.’ For a few moments the hotel-keeper was not unnaturally electrified. The travellers got their jaunt, but owing to the insolvency of the publisher with whom they had arranged, the literary scheme was never carried out.

In ascending the Alps to the Mer de Glace, Victor Hugo had a narrow escape. His guide, who was new to the business, took the wrong path, and landed the visitor upon a dangerous tongue of ice. From this he was rescued with

great difficulty, and for several moments, which seemed like hours, he was suspended over a terrible abyss. Victor Hugo wrote a description of the journey from Sallenches to Chamouni, which was translated by Madame Hugo, and published in her sketch of the poet.

Bug Jargal, the second romance by Victor Hugo, but the earliest in point of time, was published in 1826. It had been originally written for the *Conservateur Littéraire*; but after its appearance there, it was almost entirely remodelled and rewritten. It is a tale of the insurrection in St. Domingo. The essential improbability of such a character as Bug Jargal (by what means did the author get such an uncouth name?), a negro of the noblest moral and intellectual character, passionately in love with a white woman, has been unfavourably commented upon. The hero is represented as not only tempering the wildest passion with the deepest respect, but he even sacrifices life itself at last in behalf of the woman of his love, and of her husband. It was objected that this was too violent a call upon the imagination, but knowledge of the negro character would tend to prove that such a devotion as Bug Jargal's is by no



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efforts. *La Revue Française*, a periodical which unfortunately had but a brief existence, bore testimony to this, as well as his poetical miscellany entitled *La Muse Française*. He also wrote a criticism upon Voltaire, which was afterwards reprinted in his *Mélanges de Littérature*; but this estimate did not reveal the breadth of view which the writer manifested in later years, when he passed an eloquent eulogium upon the philosopher of Ferney.

For a new edition of the *Odes* issued in 1826, and now separated from the *Ballades*, the author wrote an introduction in which he distinctly unfolded his principles of liberty in the realm of literature. He expressed his belief that 'in a literary production the bolder the conception the more irreproachable should be the execution;' and he added that liberty need not result in disorder. It was the first occasion on which the claims of what was called, for want of a better word, romanticism were formally promulgated by a writer eminent in that school. We shall shortly see how Victor Hugo translated these ideas into a concrete form in his works. Meantime, in February, 1827, an incident occurred which led to a stirring poem by Hugo,

and one which made him friends in a new quarter, while it lost them in an old one.

It appears that at a ball given by the Austrian Ambassador in Paris, the distinguished French marshals who attended were deliberately shorn of their legitimate titles. Thus, the Duke of Taranto was announced as Marshal Macdonald; the Duke of Dalmatia as Marshal Soult; the Duke of Treviso as Marshal Mortier, and so on. The insult was studied and deliberate on the part of the Ambassador; 'Austria, humiliated by titles which recalled its defeats, publicly denied them. The marshals had been invited in order to show contempt for their victories, and the Empire was insulted in their persons. They immediately quitted the Embassy in a body.' Victor Hugo's blood was stirred by this incident, and, without counting the cost, he took his revenge. Throwing all the weight of his indignation into the *Ode à la Colonne*, he hurled that effusion at the enemies of France. He was now only anxious to show that he was a Frenchman first, and a Vendéan afterwards.

The Ode made a great sensation, but it had a wider effect than its author anticipated. The Opposition welcomed him as one of themselves,

for in celebrating the marshals had not the poet celebrated the Empire? The Royalists, on the other hand, seeing this bitter attack upon the Austrians, who were the most powerful friends of the Bourbons, naturally thought that Victor Hugo had abandoned the Royalist cause. Neither side could quite understand how such a burst of invective as that witnessed in the Ode might be due alone to the outraged feelings of a Frenchman, without being intended in the least to partake of the nature of a political manifesto. To these fierce partisans, party was everything; to Victor Hugo it was the nation that was everything. But his rupture with the Royalists is naturally enough traced to this period. He and they could never be the same again to each other. The poet passed now from his admiration of the Bourbons to an acknowledgment of the glory and prowess of the Empire, as at a later period he pressed still further forward, and hailed the fuller liberty of Republican France.

CHAPTER III.

VICTOR HUGO'S HUMANITARIANISM.

IN 1829 Victor Hugo published anonymously his *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* ('The Last Day of a Convict'). It thrilled the heart of Paris by its vivid recitals. While having no pretensions to the character of a regular tale, it was, as a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* remarked, one of the most perfect things the author had as yet produced. It was the representation of one peculiar state of mind—that of a criminal faced by the certainty of his approaching death under the guillotine. Like Sterne, Hugo had taken a single captive, shut him up in his dungeon, and 'then looked through the twilight of the grated door, to take his picture.' The work is a chronicle of thoughts, a register of sensations; and it is amazing to see what variety and dramatic movement may be imparted to a

monologue in which the scene shifts only from the Bicêtre to the Conciergerie, the Hôtel de Ville, and the Place de Grève.

Few descriptions could be found in literature to vie with that in which Victor Hugo places the criminal before us as he enters the court to receive his sentence on a lovely August morning. But all the incidents attending the trial, the condemnation, and the execution are depicted with graphic skill and powerful energy. No one knows better than Victor Hugo how to relieve unutterable gloom by some brilliant ray of human affection, and so upon this condemned prisoner he causes to break a temporary vision of youth and innocence. The intensity all through this piece is such as to give the reader a strange realization of the criminal, with his weight of guilt, and his terrible and conflicting emotions.

But the critic of the *Edinburgh* would have us believe that all this was merely due to a desire by Victor Hugo to exhibit his literary skill. He even calls it absurd to regard the sketch as a pleading against the punishment of death, and roundly denies that the author had any such esoteric purpose. Unfortunately for him, there is conclusive evidence to prove that Victor Hugo

had a deeper intent in this painful representation than a mere literary play upon the feelings. In a preface to the edition of 1832 he distinctly avows his purpose : ' It is the author's aim and design that posterity should recognise in his work *not* a mere special pleading for any one particular criminal, which is always easy and always transitory, but a general and permanent appeal in behalf of all the accused, alike of the present and of the future. Its great point is the right of humanity urged upon society.'

Moreover, there is another powerful argument X
to be considered. Ever since 1820 Victor Hugo had been deeply moved on the question of capital punishment, and resolved to labour for its abolition. It will be convenient here to review briefly his public utterances on the subject, both before and subsequent to the appearance of *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*. We shall thereby be enabled to keep the literary and personal thread of our narrative intact. In the year above named Victor Hugo had seen Louvel, the murderer of the Duke of Berry, on his way to the scaffold. The culprit was a being for whom he had not the slightest sympathy ; but his fate beget pity, and he began to reflect on the anomaly that

society should, in cold blood, commit the same act as that which it punished. From that time, observes Madame Hugo, he had an idea of writing a book against the guillotine. Two executions which he witnessed during the next few years strengthened his convictions, and led to the work we have already discussed. Subsequently he wrote *Claude Gueux*, founded upon the sad and miserable story of a man of that name. Gueux was condemned to death in 1832 for a crime to which the pangs of hunger had impelled him. The case was doubly painful from the fact that the father of Claude, a very old man, had been sentenced to a punishment in the prison of Clairvaux, and the son, in order to bring help to him, committed an act whose consequences brought him within the walls of the same prison. Strenuous exertions were made by Hugo and others to save Gueux, but the Council of Ministers rejected the appeal. The man was executed, and a noble protest which Victor Hugo afterwards issued greatly moved the public conscience, and rendered society still more familiar with the writer's views.

In May, 1839, one Barbès was condemned to death for his share in the insurrection in the



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dwelling should be inviolate ; we ask you now to acknowledge a principle much higher and more sacred still—the inviolability of human life. The nineteenth century will abolish the penalty of death. You will not do away with it, perhaps, at once ; but be assured, either you or your successors will abolish it. I vote for the abolition, pure, simple, and definitive, of the penalty of death.'

In March, 1849, Victor Hugo made an unsuccessful appeal in the case of Daix, condemned to death for the affair of Bréa ; and in the following year the poet himself appeared as an advocate in the Court of Assize. He defended his eldest son, Charles Hugo, who had been summoned for protesting in his journal, *L'Événement*, against the execution, which had been accompanied by revolting circumstances. In the course of his eloquent pleadings, Victor Hugo said ; ' The real culprit in this matter, if there is a culprit, is not my son. It is I myself. I, who, for a quarter of a century, have not ceased to battle against all forms of the irreparable penalty—I, who, during all this time, have never ceased to advocate the inviolability of human life. . . . Yes, I assert it, this remains

of barbarous penalties—this old and unintelligent law of retaliation—this law of blood for blood—I have battled against it all my life; and, so long as there remains one breath in my body, I will continue to battle against it with all my power as an author, and with all my acts and votes as a legislator. And I make this declaration'—(*the pleader here stretched out his arm towards the crucifix at the end of the hall above the tribunal*)—'before the Victim of the penalty of death, whose effigy is now before us, who is now looking down upon us, and who hears what I utter. I swear it, I say, before this sacred tree, on which, nearly two thousand years ago, and for the instruction of men to the latest generation, the laws, instituted by men, fastened with accursed nails the Divine Son of God!' In conclusion, the orator exclaimed, 'My son! thou wilt this day receive a great honour. Thou art judged worthy of fighting, perhaps of suffering, for the sacred cause of truth. From to-day thou enterest the just and true manly life of our time, the struggle for the true. Be proud, thou who art now admitted to the ranks of those who battle for the human and democratic idea! Thou art seated on the bench

where Béranger and Lamennais have sat.' Notwithstanding his father's defence, which powerfully moved the whole court, Charles Hugo was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

While living in exile in Jersey, in 1854, Victor Hugo made an appeal on behalf of a man who was to be hanged in Guernsey. One of his letters was addressed to the people of Guernsey, who petitioned, but in vain, for the life of the convict Tapner. Another was addressed to Lord Palmerston, who gave the usual orders for the execution; and probably no English Minister ever received, either before or since, a communication couched in such burning and passionate language. The writer was literally overwhelming in his indignant rhetoric.

For John Brown, of Harper's Ferry, the anti-slavery enthusiast, Victor Hugo put in a strong plea with the United States. He told that country that 'Brown's executioner would neither be the Attorney Hunter, nor the Judge Parker, nor the Governor Wyse, nor the State of Virginia; it would be, though one shudders to think it, and still more to say it, the great American Republic itself. . . . When we consider that this nation is the glory of the whole

earth; that, like France, England, and Germany, it is one of the organs of civilization, that it has even gone beyond Europe in certain sublime strokes of bold progress, that it is at the summit of the whole world, that it wears on its brow the star of liberty, we are tempted to affirm that John Brown will not die; for we shrink back horrified at the idea of so great a crime being committed by so great a nation! The writer predicted that 'the murder of Brown would make in the Union a rent, at first concealed, but which would end by splitting it asunder.' John Brown was executed, and Hugo's prediction was verified. The South did indeed discover that the spirit of Brown was 'marching on'; and the American Union was for a time convulsed to its centre, ostensibly on the ground of union, but practically on account of slavery. Brown, the martyr, was justified by the event, and slavery was abolished in the United States.

During the year 1861, a Belgian jury pronounced, on a single occasion only, nine sentences of death. Thereupon a writer, assuming the name of Victor Hugo, published some verses in the Belgian journals, imploring the King's pardon for the nine convicts. Hugo's attention

was drawn to the verses, when he replied that he was quite willing for his name to be used, or even abused, in so good a cause. As his *alter ego* had addressed the King, so he now addressed the nation. He called upon it to arrest this great sacrifice of life, and to abolish the scaffold. 'It would be a noble thing that a small people should give a lesson to the great, and by this fact alone should become greater than they. It would be a fine thing that, in the face of the abominable growth of darkness, in the presence of a growing barbarism, Belgium, taking the place of a great Power in civilization, should communicate to the human race by one act the full glare of light.' The sentence of seven of the condemned men was commuted, but the two remaining convicts were executed.

When the Republic of Geneva revised its constitution in 1862, the principal question remitted to the people was the abolition of the punishment of death. M. Bost, a Genevese author, appealed to Victor Hugo for his intervention in the discussion. The poet replied by a long and exhaustive communication, in which he reviewed the leading cases in various European countries where the scaffold had recently

...
been called into requisition, and he closed with this exordium : ' O people of Geneva, your city is situate on a lake in the Garden of Eden ! you live in a blessed place ! all that is most noble in creation surrounds you ! the habitual contemplation of the beautiful reveals the truth and imposes duties on you ! Your civilization ought to be in harmony with nature. Take counsel of all these merciful marvels. Believe in your sky so bright ; and as goodness descends from the sky, abolish the scaffold. Be not ungrateful. Let it not be said that in gratitude, and, as it were, in exchange for this admirable corner of the earth, where God has shown to man the sacred splendour of the Alps, the Arve and the Rhone, the blue lake, and Mont Blanc in the glory of sunlight, man has offered to the Deity the spectacle of the guillotine.' The question had already been decided by the retention of the scaffold when this letter reached Geneva, but Victor Hugo now addressed the people. His second letter had an immense effect, and secured the rejection of the constitution proposed by the Conservatives. It also brought over a great number of adherents to the cause of abolition, which ultimately triumphed.

On many subsequent occasions, and notably in connection with Italy and Portugal, Victor Hugo wrote and strove for the abolition of capital punishment. In France his pressing personal appeals more than once availed to procure a commutation of the death-punishment. To his *Last Day of a Convict* was due the introduction of extenuating circumstances in the criminal laws of France, and he projected a work to be entitled *Le Dossier de la Peine de Mort*.

It is not my intention here, nor, indeed, is it necessary, to discuss the arguments which may be advanced for or against capital punishment. It has been simply my object to present Victor Hugo in a light which, while it may divide men in their judgments, will unite them in their sympathies. The cases I have cited will be more than sufficient to demonstrate that noble enthusiasm of humanity which forms so conspicuous a feature in Victor Hugo's character.



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freedom from old superstitions in Germany, and Byron had done the same in England. It was now the turn of France to feel the new gush of life, and to gather strength and lustre in the revival. As M. Asselineau has observed of the French romanticists, 'to their sincerity, their detestation of tediousness, their sympathy with life and joy and freshness, as well as to their youthful audacity, that was not abashed either by ridicule or insult, belongs the honour of securing to the nineteenth century the triumph of liberty, invaluable for its preciousness in the world of art.' And in enumerating the leaders of the movement, he cites as the most prominent and influential, Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Madame de Staël, Lamartine, Dumas, Alfred de Vigny, Balzac, George Sand, Théophile Gautier, Mérimée, Philarette Chasles, Alfred de Musset, and Jules Janin. Certainly the influence that developed the talents of such a galaxy of genius, so far from being despised, should be acclaimed as a force worthy of all admiration. It was one, in fact, that practically saved French literature from expiring of inanition.

But the romantics were fiercely assailed; so fiercely that Victor Hugo said, if they had been

thieves, murderers, and monsters of crime, they could not have been exposed to severer condemnation. Duvergier de Hauranne treated romanticism as a brain disease, and recommended a careful diagnosis of those suffering from it, in order to recover for them gradually their lost senses. But pleasantries such as these were not likely to affect a man in severe earnest. The literary revolutionaries of the Cénacle Club, whose leading spirit was Victor Hugo, laughed at the denunciations hurled against them, knowing that their opportunity had come. There was only one writer who, having put his hand to the plough, turned backward. This was Sainte-Beuve. The temper of his mind was critical, and after the first burst of enthusiasm with which he hailed the new school, and under whose influence he for a time joined it, had spent itself, he threw off his allegiance to the movement, and vowed that he had never really belonged to the reforming band.

Victor Hugo soon gave a pledge, though not in some respects a successful one, of the sincerity of his own convictions. M. Taylor, Commissaire Royal at the Comédie Française, and afterwards widely known in the world of art, asked the poet

on one occasion why he never wrote for the theatre. Hugo replied that he was thinking of doing so, and had already commenced a drama on the subject of Cromwell. 'A Cromwell of your writing should only be acted by Talma,' said Taylor; and he forthwith arranged a meeting between the famous tragedian and the dramatist. Talma was at that time greatly depressed, taking gloomy views of the stage, and asserting that his own career had been a failure—had never fulfilled its ends. No one knew what he might have been, he confided to Hugo, but now he expected to die without having really acted once. Nevertheless, from the genius of Hugo he did look for something original, and he had always longed to act Cromwell. In response, the author explained his intentions with regard to the proposed play, and also his views upon the drama generally. These views he afterwards enlarged upon in the preface to the play. He asserted that there were three epochs in poetry, each corresponding to an era in society; and these were the ode, the epic, and the drama. 'Primitive ages are the lyric, ancient times the heroic, and modern times the dramatic. The ode sings of eternity, the epic records history, the drama de-

picts life. . . . The characters of the ode are colossal—Adam, Cain, Noah; those of the epic are gigantic—Achilles, Atreus, Orestes; those of the drama are human—Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth. The ode contemplates the ideal; the epic, the sublime; the drama, the real. And, to sum up the whole, this poetical triad emanates from three fountain-heads—the Bible, Homer, and Shakespeare.’

In *Cromwell*, urged Hugo, he intended to substitute a drama for a tragedy, a real man for an ideal personage, reality for conventionalism; the piece was to pass from the heroic to the positive; the style was to include all varieties, epic, lyric, satiric, grave, comic; and there were to be no verses for effect. The author repeated his first line, ‘*Demain, vingt-cinq juin, mil six cent cinquante-sept,*’ which was certainly ludicrously matter-of-fact. Talma was delighted with the whole idea, and begged the poet to complete his work at once. Unfortunately the actor died soon afterwards, and the dramatist now went leisurely on with his play. While engaged upon the preface he saw some Shakespearian dramas performed in English at the Odéon, and the representations affected him deeply, and tinged his

dramatic views. At the close of 1827 *Cromwell* was published, and great indeed was the controversy to which it gave rise. The period dealt with was not what would be considered one of the most dramatic in the career of the Protector. It was that 'when his ambition made him eager to realize the benefits of the King's death,' when, having attained what any other man would have reckoned the summit of fortune, being not only master of England, but by his army, his navy, and his diplomacy, master of Europe too, he was urged onwards to fulfil the visions of his youth, and to make himself a king. Cromwell's final relinquishment of the kingly idea, with the preliminary stages which led up to his resolution, were delineated with subtle power and psychological skill.

But it was not the play so much as its preface—which the author put forward as the manifesto of himself and his literary friends—that stirred the gall of the critics. A writer in the *Gazette de France*, referring to Hugo's avowed aim to break 'all those threads of spiders' web with which the army of Liliput have undertaken to chain the drama whilst slumbering,' reminded him that in this liliputian army there were

some dwarfs to be found not so despicable after all; and amongst others stood out those men who had written for the stage from *Le Cid* down to *Cromwell*. 'But what would these men be worth in the eyes of him who calls Shakespeare the god of the Theatre? It is necessary to possess some strength to venture to attack giants; and when one undertakes to dethrone writers whom whole generations have united in admiring, it would be advisable to fight them with weapons which, if not equal to theirs, are at least so constructed as to have some chance.' M. de Rémusat in *Le Globe* endeavoured to hold the scales of justice between the contending parties, while the famous Preface acted as a rallying-cry for the supporters of the new principles. M. Soumet, Hugo's old friend, wrote concerning the drama: 'It seems to me full of new and daring beauties; and although in your preface you spoke mercilessly of mosses and climbing ivy, I cannot do less than acknowledge your admirable talent, and I shall speak of your work—grand in the style of Michael Angelo—as I formerly spoke of your odes.'

About the time of the publication of *Cromwell*, Victor Hugo was severely visited in his domestic

relations. Madame Foucher, his wife's mother, and a woman of many and great virtues, passed away; and on the 28th of January, 1828, the poet's father died suddenly of apoplexy. The General and his second wife had been quite reconciled to Victor and his brothers, and the Government had once more recognised the title of the old soldier as General of Division. He was happy in the affection of his sons, his daughter-in-law, and Victor Hugo's two children—Léopoldine and Charles. On the evening of his death he had spent several happy hours with the poet, but in the night the apoplexy struck him with the rapidity of a shot, and he immediately expired. The incident, as may be imagined, profoundly affected the sensitive and impressionable spirit of Victor Hugo.

Some years before these events, Victor Hugo had, in conjunction with M. Soumet, written a play entitled *Amy Robsart*, founded upon Scott's *Kenilworth*. Not being able to agree as to the value of each other's contributions, the two authors separated, each bearing away his own dramatic goods. Hugo afterwards handed over his play to his brother-in-law, Paul Foucher, who produced the piece in his own name at the



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was inundated with pâtés, game, fruit, and wine.

Another great stride in romanticism was made by the publication of Victor Hugo's *Orientales*, which appeared in 1828. These lyrical poems were full of energy and inspiration, and it was clear that the very antithesis of the classical style had now been reached. They enhanced the reputation of the writer, while they charmed all readers by their freshness, simplicity, and vigour.

In July, 1829, a brilliant company assembled at Hugo's house to listen to the reading of a new play by the poet, the famous *Marion de Lorme*, originally called *A Duel under Richelieu*. The writer, it was soon seen, had avoided the faults which marked the construction of *Cromwell*, and had produced a real drama, and one well adapted for stage representation. The company present at the reading included Balzac, Delacroix, Alfred de Musset, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny, Dumas, Deschamps, and Taylor. Dumas, with the generous frankness which always characterized him, afterwards wrote respecting the play: 'I listened with admiration the most intense, but yet an admiration that was tinged with sad-

ness, for I felt that I could never attain to such a powerful style. I congratulated Hugo very heartily, telling him that I, deficient in style as I was, had been quite overwhelmed by the magnificence of his.' But there was one point upon which Dumas, supported by Sainte-Beuve and Mérimée, pleaded, and pleaded successfully. Not feeling satisfied that Didier should meet his death without forgiving Marion, Hugo yielded to the pressure put upon him, and altered the drama accordingly. The news of a new play by Victor Hugo brought forward the managers at once, but it had already been promised to M. Taylor for the Théâtre Français. However, there was the ordeal of the censors yet to pass through, and fears were entertained as to the fourth act, in which Louis XIII. was described as a hunter, and represented as governed by a priest—points in which everybody would see a resemblance to Charles X. Permission to perform the play was refused. Victor Hugo appealed to the King, who removed from office the Minister of the Interior (M. de Martignac), the dramatist's chief enemy, and promised to read the offending act himself. Having done so, his Majesty declined to give his sanction to the

representation of the drama, but by way of a solatium granted the poet a fresh pension of 4,000 francs. Hugo was indignant, and at once wrote declining the pension, upon which the *Constitutionnel* remarked, 'Youth is less easily corrupted than the Ministers think.' With regard to the drama itself, it has been well remarked that 'had Marion, in spite of her heroism and her repentance, been adequately chastised for her lapse from virtue, probably much of the sentimentality would have been avoided, which, although now exploded, at the time caused a great depravity of taste, and invested the "Dames aux Camellias" and the "Mimis" of Bohemian life with an interest that they did not deserve.'

Undismayed by what had occurred, Victor Hugo now devoted himself to the composition of another drama, and his *Hernani* was shortly in the hands of M. Taylor for production. The censors again interfered, and in the course of a very impertinent report, observed that the play was 'a tissue of extravagances, generally trivial, and often coarse, to which the author has failed to give anything of an elevated character. Yet while we animadvert upon its flagrant faults, we

are of opinion that not only is there no harm in sanctioning the representation of the piece, but that it would be inadvisable to curtail it by a single word. It will be for the benefit of the public to see to what extremes the human mind will go, when freed from all restraint.' These literary censors did, however, require the alteration or removal of certain passages in which the kingly state and dignity were handled with too much freedom; and they forbade the name of Jesus to be used throughout the piece.

The supporters of the classical drama strenuously exerted themselves to prevent the play from being produced, but in vain. Of course, this creation of a new style meant the decline of the old one. The play went into rehearsal, and the author had a passage of arms with Mademoiselle Mars, who took the part of Doña Sol. This lady, whose power had made her imperious, found her master in Hugo, and when threatened with the loss of her part, she consented to deliver a disputed phrase as written. The time for production came, and when the author was asked to name his systematic applauders, according to custom, he declined to do so, stating that there would be no systematic applause. The play

excited the liveliest curiosity. Benjamin Constant was amongst those who earnestly begged for seats, and M. Thiers wrote personally to the author for a box. The literary friends of Victor Hugo attended in great numbers, including Gautier, Borel, and Balzac. The theatre was crowded, and the feeling of all parties intense. As the play progressed from act to act, nevertheless, it gained in its hold upon the audience. When the fourth act closed, M. Mame, a publisher, sought out Victor Hugo, and offered him 6,000 francs for the play, but the matter, he said, must be decided at once. The author protested, remarking that the success of the piece might be less complete at the end. 'Ah, that's true, but it may be much greater,' replied the publisher. 'At the second act I thought of offering 2,000 francs; at the third act I got up to 4,000; I now at the fourth act offer 6,000; and after the fifth I am afraid I should have to offer 10,000.' Hugo laughingly concluded the bargain for 6,000 francs, and went with the eager publisher into a tobacco shop to sign a roughly improvised agreement. The play concluded brilliantly, Mademoiselle Mars securing a great triumph in the last act. The whole house

applauded vociferously, and the triumph of romanticism was complete.

The literary war which ensued was very fierce. In the provinces, as in Paris, it divided the public into hostile camps, and so deep were the feelings which it excited that in Toulouse a duel was fought over the play, and one of the antagonists was killed. Armand Carrel was especially bitter in his assaults upon *Hernani*, but Hugo was more than consoled for this and other attacks by the following letter from Chateaubriand: 'I was present, sir, at the first representation of *Hernani*. You know how much I admire you. My vanity attaches itself to your lyre, and you know the reason. I am going—you are coming. I commend myself to the remembrance of your muse. A pious glory ought to pray for the dead.' As an amusing pendant to this, it may be mentioned in connection with the poet and *Hernani*, that a provincial Frenchman (in making his will) ordered the following inscription to be placed on his tombstone: 'Here lies one who believed in Victor Hugo.'

In spite of the attacks in the press, also of personal threats and of the deliberate and almost

unparalleled attempts to stifle the play in the theatre itself, *Hernani* held its own, and continued to be played with great pecuniary success until the enforced absence of Mademoiselle Mars, when it was withdrawn from the stage, and not acted again for some years. But the play had practically established the new drama. It was the herald of the renaissance, and for this reason must continue to occupy a conspicuous position whenever an attempt is made to estimate the dramatic work and influence of Victor Hugo.



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himself in the poet's study. All his prepared eloquence, we are told, at once vanished away; the long apostrophe of praise which he had spent whole evenings in composing came to nothing. He felt like Heine, who, when he was going to have an interview with Goethe, prepared an elaborate speech beforehand, but at the crucial moment could find nothing better to say to the author of *Faust* than that the plum-trees on the road between Jena and Weimar bore plums that were very nice when one was thirsty. But the Jupiter of German poetry was probably more flattered by his visitor's bewilderment than he would have been by the most glowing eulogium. Passing over Gautier's panegyrics, here is what he wrote concerning the person of Hugo: 'He was then twenty-eight years of age, and nothing about him was more striking than his forehead, that like a marble monument rose above his calm and earnest countenance: the beauty of that forehead was well-nigh superhuman; the deepest of thoughts might be written within, but it was capable of bearing the coronet of gold or the chaplet of laurel with all the dignity of a divinity or a Cæsar. This splendid brow was set in a frame of rich chestnut hair that was allowed to

grow to considerable length behind. His face was closely shaven, its peculiar paleness being relieved by the lustre of a pair of hazel eyes, keen as an eagle's. The curved lips betokened a firm determination, and when half opened in a smile, displayed a set of teeth of charming whiteness. His attire was neat and faultless, consisting of black frock-coat, grey trousers, and a small lay-down collar. Nothing in his appearance could ever have led anyone to suspect that this perfect gentleman was the leader of the rough-bearded, dishevelled set that was the terror of the smooth-faced *bourgeoisie*. Such was Victor Hugo. His image, as we saw it in that first interview, has never faded from our memory. It is a portrait that we cherish tenderly; its smiles, beaming with talent, continue with us, ever diffusing a clear and phosphorescent glory!

In the year 1831 Victor Hugo published a work which, if he had written nothing else, would have given him a place amongst the immortal writers of France. This was his *Notre-Dame de Paris*, undertaken and produced under extraordinary circumstances. It was received with mixed favour by the critics, but at once made its way to the heart of the people. Any

number of hostile reviews would have been insufficient to check the progress of so singular and powerful a work. The author had made an engagement to write this book for a publisher named Gosselin, and the latter now claimed the execution of the contract. The work was originally to have been ready by the close of 1829, but in July, 1830, it was not yet begun, and a new contract was prepared, under which it was to be completed by the ensuing December. Political events greatly disturbed the progress of the romance, and a further difficulty was created by the loss of manuscript notes which had taken two months to collect. In the removal of Hugo's books and manuscripts from the house in the Rue Jean Goujon to the Rue du Cherche-Midi, these valuable notes went astray. They were not recovered till some years afterwards, when they were incorporated in a later edition of the novel. A still further delay was granted by the publisher, in accordance with which the author was to complete the story by February, 1831, having just five months in which to accomplish the task.

Hugo set to work with marvellous energy, and some amusing details are given of the way

in which he laboured with his romance. 'He bought a bottle of ink, and a thick piece of grey worsted knitting which enveloped him from the neck to the heels ; he locked up his clothes, in order not to be tempted to go out, and worked at his novel as if in a prison. He was very melancholy.' It appears that he never left the writing-table except to eat and to sleep, and occasionally to read over some chapters to his friends. The book was finished on the 14th of January, and as the writer concluded his last line and his last drop of ink at the same moment, he thought of changing the title of the novel, and calling it 'The Contents of a Bottle of Ink.' This title, which was not thus used, however, was subsequently adopted by Alphonse Karr.

On being asked by his publisher for some descriptive notes upon the work, which might be useful in advertising it, Victor Hugo wrote : 'It is a representation of Paris in the fifteenth century, and of the fifteenth century in its relations to Paris. Louis XI. appears in one chapter, and the King is associated with, or practically decides, the *dénouement*. The book has no historical pretensions, unless they be those of painting with some care and accuracy — but

entirely by sketches, and incidentally—the state of morals, creeds, laws, arts, and even civilization, in the fifteenth century. This is, however, not the most important part of the work. If it has a merit, it is in its being purely a work of imagination, caprice, and fancy.’ Nevertheless, the author has underrated in certain respects the value of his own work. Powerful as it is from the imaginative point of view, it is no less remarkable for the way in which the writer has brought together a mass of historical and antiquarian lore. Its thoroughness and careful construction in regard to such details may be recommended to less accurate writers in the field of historical romance. Paris, with its myriad interests, is vividly represented by one to whom it had given up its past as well as its present. Whether we see life beneath the shadow of Notre-Dame, in the Cour des Miracles, the Place de Grève, the Palais de Justice, the Bastille or the Louvre, it is all the same—the master-hand has given life and vitality to all it has touched.

The gipsy girl Esmeralda, a fascinating creation, has been compared with the Fenella of Scott, the La Gitanilla of Cervantes, and the Mignon of Goethe. But she has a character of

her own distinct from all of these. In her history the power of love is once more exemplified, and if round her centres the finest pathos of the work, so also is she its noblest gleam of light and grace and beauty. It has been said that love makes the learned archdeacon forget his studies, his clerical character, his reputation for sanctity, to court the favours of a volatile Bohemian. 'Love for this same Parisian Fenella softens the human savage Quasimodo, the dumb one-eyed bell-ringer of Notre-Dame, and transforms him into a delicate monster, a devoted humble worshipper of the Bohemian. While she, who is the cynosure of neighbouring eyes, the object of adoration to these singular lovers, is herself hopelessly attached in turn to a giddy-pated captain of the guard, who can afford to love no one but himself.' In his grand and startling effects, the writer has been compared with the painter Martin. There is an almost unparalleled breadth, which gives the work a Rembrandtish effect in all the chief scenes. The siege of the cathedral by the banded beggars and vagabonds of Paris in the night is one not readily effaced from the memory; and this is equally true of the terrible interview between the

infatuated monk and his victim in the filthy dungeons of the Palais de Justice; of the weird scene of the Fête de Fous in the Hall of the Palace; of the Alsatian picture of the examination and projected hanging of Gringoire among the thieves in the Cour des Miracles; of the execution of Esmeralda; and of the fearful fate of the impassioned monk.

The strange fatality attending upon mere passion is insisted on all through; it binds together in one miserable chain the priest who is prepared to sacrifice all that is sacred in duty for love, the heartless soldier, and the trusting maiden. As to the *dramatis personæ*, the *Athenæum* observed, 'No character can be more intimately identified with the genius of Victor Hugo than the interesting, generous, and high-minded gipsy girl Esmeralda. The character of Phœbus de Chateaupers, the bold, reckless, gay, gallant, good-tempered, light-hearted, and faithless captain of gendarmerie, is also original, and wrought out with great skill. The Archdeacon Claude Frollo is a striking specimen of those churchmen of the fifteenth century who united the grossest superstition to the most consummate hypocrisy, and applied the influences



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cravings of the she-wolf mother, and in the surging passion, almost reaching to delirium, that rages in a man's brain, there is the moulding and wielding of everything just at the author's will.' Alfred de Musset, while unable to take in the scope of the work, acknowledged that it was colossal. Jules Janin remarked that 'of all the works of the author it is pre-eminently that in which his fire of genius, his inflexible calmness, and his indomitable will are most conspicuous. What accumulation of misfortunes is piled up in these mournful pages! What a gathering together there is of ruinous passion and bewildering incident! All the foulness as well as all the faith of the Middle Ages are kneaded together with a trowel of gold and of iron. At the sound of the poet's voice all that was in ruins has risen to its fullest height, reanimated by his breath. . . . Victor Hugo has followed his vocation as poet and architect, as writer of history and romance; his pen has been guided alike by ancient chronicle and by his own personal genius; he has made all the bells of the great city to clang out their notes; and he has made every heart of the population, except that of Louis XI., to beat with life!

Such is the book; it is a brilliant page of our history, which cannot fail to be a crowning glory in the career of its author.' Finally, Eugène Sue wrote: 'If the useless admiration of a barbarian like myself had the power to express and interpret itself in a manner worthy of the book which has inspired it, I should tell you, sir, that you are a great spendthrift; that your critics resemble those poor people on the fifth story, who, whilst gazing on the prodigalities of the great nobleman, would say to each other, with anger in their hearts, "I could live during my whole life on the money spent in a single day."' "

The publisher had some doubts of the pecuniary success of the novel, but these speedily disappeared, as edition after edition was called for. In the course of a year only, eight large editions had been disposed of, and the number of editions which have been issued since that time may be described as legion. From thinking, as he did originally, that he had made a bad bargain, M. Gosselin soon had reason to arrive at the conclusion that he had made a remarkably good one. Together with other publishers, he now pestered the author continually for more novels. Hugo

protested that he had none to give them; but wearied at length by their importunities he furnished the titles of two stories he proposed to write, which were to be called the *Fils de la Bossue* and *La Quinquengrogne*. The latter name was the popular designation of one of the towers of Bourbon l'Aschembault, and in the novel the author intended to complete the account of his views concerning the art of the Middle Ages. Notre-Dame was the cathedral, La Quinquengrogne was to be the dungeon.

Victor Hugo wrote at this time his admirable descriptive work *Le Rhin*—a work full of learning, vivacity, and humour—but he never proceeded with the two projected novels. *Notre-Dame* remained for many years the only romance in which the author revealed his marvellous power of moulding human sympathies, of throwing into imaginative conceptions the very form and substance of being, and of realizing a dead-past age as though it were that of the actual and the living.

CHAPTER VI.

'MARION DE LORME' AND OTHER DRAMAS.

THAT despotic monarch, Charles X., having been driven from his throne by the Revolution of July, 1830, there naturally followed the removal of the interdict from the theatres. Victor Hugo was at once applied to by the Comédie Française for his drama of *Marion de Lorme*, which had been in enforced abeyance. But when the political reaction was an absolute certainty, the sensitive mind of Hugo shrank from a demonstrative triumph. It is true that he was now in the full tide of masculine judgment, and that his ideas of progress and liberty were crystallized and matured; but he could not forget his early opinions. Though crudely formed, and based upon sentiment and not upon reason, they had been genuine and disinterested, and his chief feeling at this later period was not one of hatred

of the King, but rather of rejoicing with the people.

However, after a year had elapsed from Charles's fall, there was no reason why a drama should be lost to the stage simply because it contained an historical presentment of Louis XIII. After declining many offers, the author resolved to give the play to M. Crosnier, for the theatre of the Porte St. Martin; and he also entered into an agreement to write yearly two works of importance for this theatre. Dumas's *Antony* was being performed at the Porte St. Martin, but on the conclusion of its run *Marion de Lorme* was produced, with Madame Dorval in the part of Marion, and M. Bocage in that of Didier. Difficulties as usual were thrown in the way of the new play, but it eventually triumphed over them. The journals, nevertheless, were hostile, the *Moniteur* especially so, affirming that the author had never yet conceived anything more meagre and commonplace, and more full of eccentricities, than this piece. One critic asserted that the character of Didier was taken from that of Antony, although Hugo's play had been written first. Those friends who formerly applauded Hugo and Dumas conjointly, now divided them-

selves into two parties, one of which persistently assailed the writer of *Marion de Lorme*. From a variety of causes the play was only performed four nights on its first production, but the performances were afterwards resumed. It may be added that the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, whose judgment was better worth having than that of most of its contemporaries, remarked that Victor Hugo had never so truly shown himself a poet, nor attained to so high a range of vision, nor so wide a field of judgment, as in this piece.

A tragic incident which occurred not long after the representation of this play affected the poet deeply. Amongst the warmest of his band of admirers was M. Ernest de Saxe-Coburg, whose race and origin are indicated by his name. He and his mother lived in Paris, on a pension granted them by the Duke. Ernest was taken seriously ill, and the distracted parent rushed to the house of Victor Hugo, exclaiming, 'You alone can save him! Come at once!' But the unfortunate young man was already dead; and a painful scene took place in the chamber of death on the arrival of Victor Hugo and the mother. 'The unhappy woman, who had but this only child in the world to love, would not believe

that he was dead. He was but cold, she said ; and she threw herself on his bed, encircling him in her arms in order to impart warmth to the corpse. She frantically kissed his marble face, which was already cold. Suddenly she felt within herself that it was all over ; she raised herself, and haggard and wild as she was, though still beautiful, she exclaimed, " He is dead ! " M. Victor Hugo spent the night by the side of the mother and the corpse.' It was the lot of Hugo to awaken by his genius many personal attachments and enthusiasms such as that felt for him by this ill-fated youth ; and these attachments were invariably strengthened and deepened by subsequent friendship.

In 1832 the poet wrote his *Le Roi s'Amuse*. It has been charged against this play that it presents an unredeemed picture of vice and licentiousness. It has 'overstepped all bounds,' wrote one critic ; 'history, reason, morality, artistic dignity, and refinement, are all trampled under foot. The whole piece is monstrous ; history is set at nought, and the most noble characters are slandered and vilified. The play is entirely void of interest, and the horrible, the mean, and the immoral are all jumbled together



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answered haughtily, ' Sir, I have a rather higher opinion of my play now it is a failure.'

Next day the play was suspended, the reason given being that it was an offence against public morality. It appears that a number of devotees of the classical school had persuaded the Minister that a drama which had for its subject the assassination of a king was not to be tolerated on the very day after the existing monarch had himself escaped assassination; that the play was an apology for regicides, etc. Victor Hugo was not the man to be thus crushed without an effort to save his drama. In the first place he issued a manifesto to the public, briefly summarizing the plot of the piece, and denying that it was immoral. Then he entered a civil suit before the Board of Trade to compel the Théâtre Français to perform *Le Roi s'Amuse*, and likewise to compel the Government to sanction the performance. The trial opened in a densely crowded court, many celebrities being amongst the audience. They had been attracted by the announcement that the author would plead his own case. Hugo's speech was applauded by a band of very sympathetic listeners, and on its conclusion M. de Montalembert assured him that

he was as great an orator as he was a writer, and that if the doors of the theatre were closed against him, the tribune was still available. Judgment was given against the poet, and for the Minister. M. Paul Foucher, describing the scene on the night of the first performance of *Le Roi s'Amuse*, observed that while the whole theatre was in an uproar, and Hugo's name was drowned in the sea of roaring voices, 'the author's face exhibited no sign of despondency at the failure any more than it had shown passion or excitement during the struggle. His Olympian brow had withstood the tempest with the firmness of a rock, and after the curtain fell, he went to offer his thanks and encouragements to the actors and actresses, saying, "You are a little discomposed to-night; but you will find it different the day after to-morrow!" In spite of the hissing, he was sanguine about his play; nevertheless, it was not destined to be repeated.'

The poet's enemies now caused him considerable annoyance on the subject of his pension. He had ceased to receive the 1,000 francs granted him by Louis XVIII. out of his privy purse, but still received the 2,000 francs allowed him by the Home Minister. In reply

to the recriminations of the Ministerial journals, he wrote a letter to M. d'Argout, showing that this pension was clearly granted to him on literary grounds, quite apart from political opinions. But he had decided to accept it no longer, and thus stated his reasons: 'Now that the Government appears to regard what are called literary pensions as proceeding from itself, and not from the country, and as this kind of grant takes from an author's independence; now that this strange pretension of the Government serves as the basis to the somewhat shameful attacks of certain journals, the management of which is, unfortunately, though no doubt incorrectly, imagined to be in your hands; as it is also of importance to me to maintain my relations with the Government in a higher region than that in which this kind of warfare goes on—without discussing whether your pretensions relating to this indemnity have the smallest foundation, I hasten to inform you that I entirely relinquish it.' The Minister replied, taking the poet's view, that the pension was a debt due from the country, and stating that it should still be reserved for him; but Victor Hugo never took it up from this time forward.

For a brief period managers held aloof from the dramatist, and when he wrote *Le Souper à Ferrare*, which title was afterwards changed to that of *Lucrece Borgia*, no one was eager for it. But this attitude changed after his speech at the tribunal, and M. Harel, director of the Porte St. Martin, sought for and obtained the play. Admirable representatives were found for the chief parts, Frédérick Lemaître taking that of Gennaro, Delafosse that of Don Alphonse d'Este, Mademoiselle Georges that of Lucretia, and Mademoiselle Juliette that of the Princess Negroni. Meyerbeer and Berlioz composed the music for the song which was sung at the supper given by the Princess Negroni. Only one person was allowed to be present at the final rehearsal, and that was Sainte-Beuve. The critic was playing a double part towards the dramatist, with whom he had been out of sympathy for some time past, and it is recorded that at the close of the rehearsal of *Lucrece Borgia* he warmly congratulated the author upon his drama, and went away circulating reports everywhere that the piece was an utter absurdity! 'It was solely due to his treachery and infamous gossip that on the morning of the day on which the piece was to

be performed in the evening, several newspapers announced that they were in possession of the plot, and that the whole production was in the highest degree obscene, depicting orgies terrible and indecent beyond conception.'

Great interest, notwithstanding, was manifested in the play, and amongst those who implored the author for first-night seats was General Lafayette. The representation was a triumphant success, and for awhile nothing was talked about in Paris but the new play. The monetary success was equal to the literary and dramatic. The receipts for the first three performances amounted to 84,769 francs—a sum which no other work had equalled or approached during M. Harel's management. Referring to two of his most widely known dramas, Victor Hugo predicted that *Le Roi s'Amuse* would one day prove to be the principal political era, and *Lucrece Borgia* the principal literary era of his life. He had purposely presented deformities in both, but he believed that by uniting monsters to humanity, one could not fail to excite interest and perhaps sympathy. 'Physical deformity, sanctified by paternal love, this is what you have in *Le Roi s'Amuse*; moral deformity,

purified by maternal love, this is what you find in *Lucrece Borgia*.''

Hugo was fated to be the victim of misunderstanding with regard to almost all his dramas; and he found no exception in *Lucrece Borgia*. From an attitude of delight and complacency; M. Harel, the director of the theatre, passed to one of studious neglect and insolence. He took off the play, and then demanded a new one; which he averred the poet had agreed to write for him. A quarrel ensued, and the manager challenged the dramatist to a duel. It would have taken place, but M. Harel thought better of the affair, and apologized, whereupon Hugo agreed to give him his next piece. M. Harel remarked upon the whole incident, 'You are probably the first author to whom a manager has said, "Your play or your life!"'

Marie Tudor, produced in November, 1833, was the next play by Victor Hugo. It was concerned with a queen, a favourite, and an executioner, a trio as common in history as upon the mimic stage. The dramatist had now two difficulties to contend with. In the first place, the partisans of Dumas sowed dissension between the two authors, and spread lying reports

respecting Hugo and his attitude towards Dumas ; and in the second place, the writer's own friends grew alarmed at various reports which gained currency. ' I hear on all sides,' wrote one of them, ' that your play is more than ever a tissue of horrors—that your Mary is a bloodthirsty creature, that the executioner is perpetually on the stage, and several other reproaches all equally well founded.' Hugo remained calm and unmoved, though he was warned that the presence of the executioner on the stage had been given as the watchword to those who intended to hiss the play. The piece was produced in due course, and Mademoiselle Georges looked superbly and acted well. But the author's enemies kept up a persistent hissing, and there was a strong contest between those who formed a genuine judgment upon the play and greatly admired it, and those who were resolved upon its ruin. The first night left the result dubious, but the piece continued to be played beyond the time generally regarded as constituting an average success. On its withdrawal, all the relations between the author and the Porte St. Martin naturally ceased, and the treaty with



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he has shown the temptations resisted by the virtue of the one, and the tears shed over her guilt by the other; he has cast blame where blame is due, upon man in his strength and upon society in its absurdity; in contrariety to the two women, he has delineated two men—the husband and the lover, one a sovereign and one an outlaw, and, by various subordinate methods, has given a sort of summary of the relations, regular and irregular, in which a man can stand with a woman on the one hand, and with society in general on the other.' There is nothing more characteristic of the author's dramas than this exhibition of striking contrasts; and, indeed, in all his poetic work is to be traced this juxtaposition of the strongest lights and shades of which human life and human emotion are capable.

The two leading stars in *Angelo* were Mademoiselle Mars and Madame Dorval. Unfortunately, a serious feud arose in consequence of the former discovering that the part she had chosen was not the most forcible and picturesque; and it required all the strong will of Victor Hugo to bring the actress to reason. The two ladies had their partisans in the theatre when

the play came to be acted, but the representation passed over without mishap, and it was conceded that a fair success had been achieved.

Whatever might be Victor Hugo's defects as a dramatist, and however he might divide in opinion the theatre-going public of Paris upon the general claims of his plays, he had certainly infused life into the dramatic literature of the time. He had attained a commanding position, and although his genius was marred by some eccentricities, it was also as unquestionably distinguished for its grand conceptions, its dramatic felicities, and its splendours of diction.

CHAPTER VII.

LAST DRAMATIC WRITINGS.

IN some respects, no man of equal genius was ever so unfortunate as Victor Hugo in his relations with the stage. I refer, of course, to the earlier part of his career, for there came a time when the appreciation of him as a dramatist was as high and universal as was the admiration of his literary excellence. But during the long struggle between the old and the new drama there were always enemies ready to denounce and hiss whatsoever he produced ; and had he given them a *Romeo and Juliet* or a *Hamlet*, the result would have been precisely the same.

We have seen the alternations of failure and success which attended the plays already passed in review ; and the same mixed reception was awarded to those final efforts in connection with the drama which led him to adopt the resolution



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some time before his death he had been insane, and towards the end his one favourite relative, Victor, even could not visit him, as the sight of his brother conjured up illusions which made him dangerously violent. Though of strong constitution naturally, when the sufferer's mind gave way his physical health began to fail also, and he gradually wasted away until death released him in February, 1837. This was the brother who had been Victor Hugo's constant companion in early life, and the news of his death deeply agitated the survivor, keenly awakening the slumbering recollections of childhood.

Louis Philippe gave a grand fête at Versailles in the summer of 1837, on the occasion of the marriage of the Duke of Orleans. Victor Hugo, Dumas, Balzac, and other men of letters were invited, and were obliged to appear in fancy dress, the result being ludicrous in some cases, as in that of Balzac, who had on the dress of a marquis, which, it was jokingly said, fitted him as badly as the title itself would. Hugo was an object of special distinction by the Royal family. The King conversed with him, and the Duchess of Orleans paid him marked attention. There

were two people, she said, with whom she wished to become acquainted—M. Cousin and himself. She had often spoken of him to Monsieur de Goethe; she had read all his works, and knew his poems by heart. Her favourite book was the *Chants du Crépuscule*; and she added, ‘I have visited *your* Notre-Dame.’ Hugo was promoted to the rank of Officer of the Legion of Honour, and he received from the Duchess a painting by M. Saint-Evre representing Inez de Castro. It was a valuable work, and on the gilding of the frame was inscribed, ‘*Le Duc et la Duchesse d’Orléans à M. Victor Hugo, 27 Juin, 1837.*’

At this juncture the poet brought a second action before the Board of Trade, to compel the Comédie Française to fulfil its agreement with him by producing his plays. He also claimed compensation for past neglect. Hugo’s advocate, M. Paillard de Villeneuve, in an effective speech, demonstrated the injustice of a theatre supported by the State becoming the monopoly of a clique; showed how the existing state of things pressed heavily upon such men of genius as his client; and asserted that not only had no pieces ever realized greater profits, but that actually at that moment, while they were prohibited in France,

they were drawing large and appreciative audiences in London, Vienna, Madrid, Moscow, and other important cities. Victor Hugo himself also spoke, complaining that the manager of the French theatre had deceived him, and that he wore two masks—one of which was intended to deceive authors, and the other to elude justice. The Board gave judgment in the poet's favour, sentencing the Comédie Française to pay 6,000 francs damages, and to perform *Hernani*, *Marion de Lorme*, and *Angelo* without delay. An appeal was entered against this judgment, and when it came on for hearing Hugo pleaded his cause in person, asserting that there was an organized effort to close the stage against the new and rising school of literature. The appeal was dismissed, and justice was at length done to the dramatist. In conformity with the judgment, *Hernani* was first produced, and the play was brilliantly successful.

I must refer in this place to some of Victor Hugo's lyrical efforts. Not without reason has the volume entitled *Feuilles d'Automne* held a high place in the regard of his admirers. It is the poetry of the emotions expressed in such graceful lyric verse as has rarely been penned.



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returns to a bright assurance of a grand development of the human race.' The volume has tones of gentleness and also tones of lofty scorn. To the suffering and the unfortunate the poet was ever tender and pitiful; but to the mean, the base, and the vicious he was as a whip and a scourge. He always endeavoured to separate the worthy from the unworthy, and wherever the latter were to be found, whether in the ranks of friends or foes, they were never suffered to escape the lash of his indignation.

Another volume of poems, *Les Voix Intérieures*, was published in 1837. 'The poet in this production,' says one of his biographers, 'regards life under its threefold aspect, at home, abroad, and at work; he maintains that it is the mission of the poet not to suffer the past to become an illusion to blind him in the present, but to survey all things calmly, to be ever staunch yet kind, to be impartial, and equally free from petty wrath and petty vanity; in everything to be sincere and disinterested. Such was his ideal, and in accordance with it Victor Hugo spared no effort to improve the minds and morals of men in general, and by his poetry, as well as by his romances and his plays, he desired to con-

stitute himself the champion of amelioration.' This same desire for the elevation of the race ran through all his efforts—social, literary, and political. He may have been mistaken in his means sometimes, never in the honesty and purity of his intent.

Returning to the stage, Victor Hugo had become so impressed with the idea that the French nation had a right to have a theatre in which the higher drama should be performed, that he was brought to consent to several interviews on the subject with M. Guizot. The latter admitted that there never was a more legitimate request; he agreed with the poet that a new style of art required a new style of theatre; that the Comédie Française, which was the seat of Tradition and Conservatism, was not the proper arena for original literature of the day; and that the Government would only be doing its duty in creating a theatre for those who had created a department of art. A scheme was perfected for a new theatre, and M. Anténor Joly was named as manager. No building but a very old one was to be had, however, and this—which was in a bad situation—was transformed into the Théâtre de la Renaissance. For this theatre

Hugo wrote his *Ruy Blas*, a drama which, as is well known, deals with the love of a queen for a valet who subsequently becomes a minister. The play was in five acts, and the leading character was sustained by Lemaître. The actor strongly approved the first three acts, but was more than dubious about the fourth and fifth. During the final rehearsals of this piece Victor Hugo had a marvellous escape of his life. Two of the actors happening to station themselves awkwardly, he got up in order to indicate their right positions. Scarcely had he left his chair when a great bar of iron fell upon it from an arch above, smashing it to atoms. The author would undoubtedly have been killed on the spot but for this momentary rising to correct the mistake of the actors.

The body of the theatre being incomplete when the play came to be produced, difficulties beset the representation. It was winter, and many of the audience were chilled by violent draughts. But the play soon warmed them into enthusiasm. In the fifth act, we are told by one who was present, Lemaître rivalled the greatest comedians, and success was more decided than ever. 'The way in which he tore off his livery,



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the poet on his part agreed to add two unpublished volumes.

Victor Hugo produced no drama after this for several years ; but in 1840 he issued his work *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, consisting of poems which had previously been read to his friends Lamartine, Deschamps, De Lacretelle, and others. Here again he sought expression for his ever-widening aspirations after human perfectibility. Once more in this work 'he claims the right of expressing his goodwill for all who labour, his aversion to all who oppress ; his love for all who serve the good cause, and his pity for all who suffer in its behalf ; he declares himself free to bow down to every misery, and to pay homage to all self-sacrifice.' In the poetical alternations and contrasts in this volume will be discovered a profound love and appreciation of Nature, as well as an undercurrent of affection for the human. The poet himself, looking back upon what he had accomplished, and forward towards what he hoped to do, at the transition period before he went into exile, asserted his thesis that 'a poet ought to have in him the worship of conscience, the worship of thought, and the worship of Nature ; he should be like Juvenal,

who felt that day and night were perpetual witnesses within him ; he should be like Dante, who defined the lost to be those who could no longer think ; he should be like St. Augustine, who, heedless of any accusation of Pantheism, declared the sky to be an intelligent creation.' And it is under such inspiration that ' he has attempted to write the poem of humanity. He loves brightness and sunshine. The Bible has been his Book ; Virgil and Dante have been his masters ; he has laboured to reconcile truth and poetry, knowing that knowledge must precede thought, and thought must precede imagination, while knowledge, thought, and imagination combined are the secret of power.' It would be impossible for a poet with any vigour of imagination, and any perception of the soul of beauty in all things, to fail with these sublime ideals before him.

I now come to the last of Victor Hugo's writings for the stage, and in *Les Burgraves* we have in some respects the best of his dramatic works. It was written towards the close of 1842, and produced (like its predecessors) in the midst of difficulties in March, 1843, at the Comédie Française. At the time of its pro-

duction, the author's political opinions had arrived at a stage of compromise. Though he was a Republican in theory, he had no strong objection to such a monarchy as that of Louis Philippe, which was liberty itself compared with that which it overthrew. For a sovereign who refrained from tyranny, and was not inimical to progress, he had some sympathy, and he was willing to wait until the time became ripe for the advent of the Republic. Writing to M. Thiers, indeed, to beg for some amelioration in the lot of an imprisoned editor, he said of himself, 'I do not at the present time take any definite political part. I regard all parties as acting with impartiality, full of affection for France, and anxious for progress. I applaud sometimes those in power, sometimes the opposition, according as those in power or in opposition seem to me to act best for the country.'

The catholic spirit in which he looked upon public affairs was manifested in his study upon Mirabeau. Defining the position of the wise politician, he remarked that 'he must give credit to the moderate party for the way in which they smooth over transitions; to the extreme parties for the activity with which they advance the



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Carrel, were prepared to go with Victor Hugo in politics, but rejected his new literary ideas. They clung to the old form of the drama, and found a new star in Ponsard, the author of *Lucrece*, a tragedy which had for its subject the expulsion of the Tarquins and the establishment of a Republic in Rome. So the Parisians were beguiled by the name of Ponsard, who found a great and useful ally in Rachel; and Hugo was contemned, in spite of such strictures as those of Thierry in *Le Messager*, who drew a comparison between the ostracism with which his countrymen visited such brilliant writers as Hugo, and that of the Athenians, who punished people whose renown lasted too long.

It was at this juncture that *Les Burgraves* was produced, and even the genius of the writer himself added to the difficulties by which he was beset. He had conceived three stupendous characters, Job, Otbert, and Barbarossa; and although the actors who sustained these characters, MM. Beauvallet, Geffroy, and Ligier, were undoubtedly men of dramatic instinct and ability, neither they nor any other living tragedians could adequately set forth these epic creations. In the matter of this magnificent trilogy, the author

has been not inaptly compared with Æschylus. 'The first of Greek tragedians, Æschylus, after he had long stirred the emotions of the Athenians, was finally deserted by them; they preferred Sophocles to him, and full of dejection he went into exile, saying, 'I dedicate my works to Time;' and Time at last did him ample justice, though he did not live to enjoy his triumph. But in this, Hugo differed from the glorious Greek, for he lived to witness the repentance of the people.

Les Burgraves was ill received on the first night, but this was nothing compared with the opposition subsequently manifested. At every representation, sneers and hissing interrupted the progress of the piece; but the manager and the actors struggled on and played the drama for thirty nights. Some of the most influential journals joined themselves to the enemy, and the time was marked by the defection of Lamartine to the side of Ponsard. Théophile Gautier was one of the small band who boldly applauded Hugo's drama in the press. 'In our day,' he asserted, 'there is no one except M. Hugo who is capable of giving the epic tone to three great acts, or of maintaining their lyric swing. Every

moment seems to produce a magnificent verse that resounds like the stroke of an eagle's wing, and exalts us to the supremest height of lyric poetry. The play is diversified in tone, and displays a singular flexibility of rhythm, making its transitions from the tender to the terrible, from the smile to the tear, with a happy facility that no other author has attained.'

With the production of this play dates Victor Hugo's final abandonment of the stage. Strange fate this for a writer for whom Charles Nodier claimed the honour of being, after Rabelais and Molière, one of the most original geniuses that French literature ever saw. But the dramatist was disgusted with the literary hostility, the political insincerity, and the personal antipathy which abounded, and although he had a play, *Les Jumeaux*, which had never been produced, he resolved to give no more of his writings to the stage. He was repeatedly pressed in after years to depart from this resolution, but in vain. 'My decision is final,' he said on one occasion. 'Under no pretext shall any more of my plays appear on the stage during my life.'

The poet wrote several plays not for publication after this time, and one of them, *Torquemada*,



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CHAPTER VIII.

THE FRENCH ACADEMY.

A SEAT amongst the 'forty Immortals' is the high and honourable aim of every distinguished Frenchman. But the chequered history of the Academy since its formation by Richelieu two centuries and a half ago, furnishes another evidence of the truth that merit does not always secure its just reward. Again and again have men illustrious in letters been passed over, whilst those who had no claim upon the nation's regard have snatched fortuitous honours by unworthy means. Amongst those who knocked on more than one occasion at the doors of the French Academy in vain, was Victor Hugo. That such a man must be ultimately successful was beyond a doubt ; but it says little for the Academy that it failed to recognise his claims

until its hostile attitude had become a scandal to literature.

As a kind of apology for, or defence of his career, in 1834 Hugo published his *Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées*. For those who could see nothing but tergiversation in the development of his views, as regarded from the Royalist standpoint of 1819 and the Revolutionary standpoint of 1834, these collected papers presented a series of progressive arguments well worthy of study. Nor was it merely from the personal point of view that the author issued this work ; he believed that the gradual changes of thought which they revealed, all tending towards a fuller liberty in art, politics, and literature, were but typical of the states of mind through which a very large moiety of the young thinkers of his generation had passed. That he did not spare the crudities and defects which marked his own period of literary adolescence will be apparent from this passage, in which he frankly discusses his early compositions : ‘ There were historical sketches and miscellaneous essays, there were criticism and poetry ; but the criticism was weak, the poetry weaker still ; the verses were some of them light and frivolous, some of them

tragically grand ; the declamations against regicides were as furious as they were honest ; the men of 1793 were lampooned with epigrams of 1754, a species of satire now obsolete, but very fashionable at the date at which they were published ; next came visions of regeneration for the stage, and vows of loyalty to the State ; every variety of style is represented ; every branch of classical knowledge made subordinate to literary reform ; finally, there are schemes of government and studies of tragedies, all conceived in college or at school.'

The time had now come in which he demanded a larger scope. His ideas had expanded, and while not abandoning the life contemplative, he desired to become in some way the man of action, and to mingle in the literary and political conflicts going forward around him. Taxed with forsaking the study of Nature, the poet replied that he still loved that holy mother, but in this century of adventure a man must be the servant of all. Reviewing his political position, he felt that he had more than paid his debt to the fallen monarchy, while he could at the same time conscientiously acknowledge Louis Philippe. The recollection of a pension was balanced by the



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and amongst these was Casimir Delavigne, who had considerable weight amongst the Forty. M. Barbou states that 'the poet of the imperial era was sickly and asthmatic, and he detested Victor Hugo simply for his robustness and power.' When Dumas canvassed Delavigne in the interest of his friend, the author of *Notre-Dame*, Delavigne replied with warmth that he would vote for Dumas with all his heart, but for Hugo never. The Academicians elected M. Dupaty, probably on the principle that his fame was of such a restricted character that it could not in the least detract from their own lustre. Commenting upon his defeat, Hugo said, 'I always thought the way to the Académie was across the Pont des Arts; I find that it is across the Pont Neuf.'

Three years later there was another vacancy, and Hugo canvassed the Academicians in turn. But the whole nature of his work was opposed in spirit to the exclusives of the Academy, and it is not to be wondered at, from this standpoint, that he failed to meet with a favourable appreciation. However brilliant a candidate might be, most of the members were unable to take a large and liberal view. Alexandre Duval

was especially bitter against Hugo, and when the poet was asked what he had done to offend him, he replied, 'I had written *Hernani*.' Though in a dying condition, Duval insisted upon being taken from his bed to vote against Hugo. M. Molé was elected. In 1840 a third vacancy occurred, and although Hugo was again a candidate, the Academicians elected M. Flourens.

At length, in 1841, on the occasion of his fourth candidature, Victor Hugo was successful. Amongst the distinguished men who voted for him were Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Villemain, Mignet, Cousin, and Thiers. In the list of those who opposed him were the names of only two men of real note, Delavigne and Scribe. One, M. Viennet, voted for Hugo, though the amusing anecdote is told concerning him that when the poet was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, he said he should like to claim 'the cross of a chevalier for everyone who had the courage to read right through any work of a romantic, and the cross of an officer for everyone who had the wit to understand it!' Amidst much that is paltry in the jealousies of literary men, it deserves to be stated to the honour of

Balzac that this eminent writer declined to become a candidate against Victor Hugo.

The new Academician, who was by no means universally congratulated upon his success, was received on the 3rd of June, 1841. According to custom he was called on to pronounce a eulogium upon his predecessor, M. Népomucène Lemercier. His oration began with a description of the splendour and power of Napoleon. Before his greatness, said the speaker, the whole universe bowed down, with the exception of six contemplative poets. 'Those poets were Ducis, Delille, Madame de Staël, Benjamin Constant, Chateaubriand, and Lemercier. But what did their resistance mean? Europe was dazzled, and lay, as it were, vanquished and absorbed in the glory of France. What did these six resentful spirits represent? Why, they represented for Europe the only thing in which Europe had failed—they represented independence; and they represented for France the only thing in which France was wanting—they represented liberty.' Alluding still more directly to M. Lemercier, Hugo related that he was on brotherly terms with Bonaparte the consul, but that when the consul became an emperor he was no longer his



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fessed his entire ignorance of Victor Hugo's name, and the following conversation took place:

'I am the author of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Bug Jargal*, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, *Marion Delorme*, etc.'

'I never heard of any of them.'

'Will you do me the honour of accepting a copy of my works?'

'I never read new books.'

The later relations of Hugo with the Academy are of considerable interest. A generous forgetfulness of offence characterized him. When Casimir Delavigne died, and it fell upon Hugo to deliver the funeral oration over one who had been his enemy, he testified to the fine talents of Delavigne, and magnanimously exclaimed: 'Let all the petty jealousies that follow high renown, let all disputes of the conflicting schools, let all the turmoil of party feeling and literary rivalry be forgotten. Let them pass into the silence into which the departed poet has gone to take his long repose!' In January, 1845, Hugo had to reply to the speech of M. Saint Marc Girardin, and shortly afterwards—which was a much more difficult and delicate matter—to the opening

address of M. Sainte-Beuve. In the early stage of the poet's career, Sainte-Beuve, as we have seen, warmly hailed his advent, but he afterwards became his enemy, turning his back upon all his old literary beliefs. By way of covering his retreat, he advocated in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* a union between the classics and romanticists ; and while he did justice to every other writer whom he named, he arrested his praise when he came to the name of Victor Hugo. He remarked that all signs of magnificent promise were forgotten, 'as soon as we think of his numerous stubborn relapses, or consider the way in which he holds to theories which public opinion has already condemned. Sentiments of humanizing art, which might easily enough be praised, are utterly ignored, and M. Hugo clings with a steadfast persistence to his own peculiar style.' The public were naturally curious to know how Hugo would speak of one who had acted treacherously towards him, but with his usual high-minded courtesy, the speaker uttered not one word of a personal character against the man who had been so unjust towards himself.

The Academy had few members who were so

regular in attendance, or were so useful to that august body, as Victor Hugo. He brought into all his relations with it the same energy and conscientiousness which marked his course in connection with literature and the drama. His association with the Academy was virtually the first stage of a new departure in his career.



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its points close to his ear; his beard was in a state of four days' high vegetation. As to Victor Hugo, he wore a grey hat of a rather doubtful shade; a faded blue coat with gilt buttons, and a frayed black cravat, the whole set off by green spectacles of a shape and form to rejoice a rural bailiff.' During breakfast, in speaking of literature and the drama, Hugo incidentally mentioned his large profits as a dramatist. 'Balzac listened with the air of a martyr listening to an angel, while he heard Hugo recount the enormous sums which had accrued to him from his magnificent dramas. This *coup de soleil* was likely to excite Balzac's brain for a long time to come.' At that period the author of the *Comédie Humaine* was a personal authority on the bitterness of poverty. The talk proceeded to royalty, to the patronage of talent, and such like matters. Balzac spoke eloquently upon the lustre which men of genius have shed upon their own times. 'The pen alone,' he said, 'can save kings and their reigns from oblivion. Without Virgil, Horace, Livy, Ovid, who would recognise Augustus in the midst of so many of his name? . . . Without Shakespeare the reign of Elizabeth would gradually disappear from the history of

England. Without Boileau, without Racine, without Corneille, without Pascal, without La Bruyère, without Molière, Louis XIV., reduced to his mistresses and his wigs, is but a crowned goat, like the sign of an inn. Without the pen, Philippe le Roi would leave behind him a name less known than that of Philippe the eating-house keeper of the Rue Montorgueil, or of Philippe the famous pilferer and juggler. Some day it will be said (at least, I hope so, for his Majesty's sake), "Once upon a time there lived a king called Louis Philippe, who, by the grace of Victor Hugo, Lamartine, etc." French rulers were emphatically destined to live in the pages of Victor Hugo, but in the case of at least one sovereign it was to be by the immortality of contempt.

At the residence of Hugo in the Place Royale, whither he had moved on leaving the Rue Jean Goujon, there was a frequent visitor in the person of one Auguste Vacquerie. This young poetic enthusiast was born at Villequier, in La Seine Inférieure, in the year 1820. He was educated first at Rouen, but having an unconquerable longing to see and be near Victor Hugo, he went to complete his studies at the

Pension Favart, Paris, within a few doors of Hugo's house. In one of his poems he confessed that though he ardently sighed for Paris, that city meant to him Hugo and nothing beside—it was the shrine of the poet's fame. Like his friend Paul Meurice, he lived in the inspiration of Victor Hugo's name, and the two youths became constant and intimate visitors at the house in the Place Royale. Vacquerie fell seriously ill, and he was nursed with all the devotion of a mother by Madame Hugo. After his recovery, and in acknowledgment of the care bestowed on his son, M. Vacquerie, senior, invited Madame Hugo to occupy his château at Villequier during the summer vacation. The offer was gladly accepted, and Madame Hugo and her four children left Paris for Normandy on this pleasurable excursion. In the course of this visit, Auguste Vacquerie's brother Charles was introduced to Léopoldine Hugo, and these impressionable natures at once fell in love. An engagement of no long duration followed, for the young couple were married in the following spring of 1843. The wedded life of the poet's daughter was unfortunately as brief as it was happy and joyous. After a period of five



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shore, but finding it was impossible to save her, he determined not to survive her, and, taking her into his embrace, sank with her in the stream. The two bodies were recovered a few hours afterwards.'

One can well understand the accession of melancholy which would come over the poet and his wife in consequence of such a disaster as this. Gloom fell upon the house in the Place Royale, but Victor Hugo found consolation in the affection of the partner of his youth, whose devotion had seemed thus far to increase with the lapse of years. Again and again she animated his lyre, and gave his verse much of its sweetest and noblest inspiration. She entered fully into his high aspirations, and received with grace and *bonhomie* visitors like Lamartine and Madame de Girardin, who came to exchange the courtesies of friendship and genius.

Victor Hugo was given to silent wanderings by night in the Champs Élysées and the vicinity, and he has stated that many of his finest thoughts occurred to him during these midnight walks. On one occasion this habit nearly proved of serious import to him, for as he was passing along near the Rue des Tournelles, wrapped in

meditation, he was attacked and knocked down by a band of pickpockets, and would in all probability have suffered severe injury had not some passers-by caused his assailants to take precipitate flight. The incident caused no modification in the poet's custom, for of physical or moral fear he had scant knowledge.

Notwithstanding his advanced political views in later life, Victor Hugo, as I have already had occasion to observe, moved forward towards a republic by gradual stages. He had no faith in the stability of a government which was merely the result of revolt, and in 1832, when there appeared considerable danger of insurrectionary bloodshed, he wrote: 'Some day we shall have a republic, and it will be a good one. But we must not gather in May the fruit which will only be ripe in August. We must learn to be patient, and the republic proclaimed by France will be the crown of our hoary heads.' His political honesty impressed his contemporaries. Louis Blanc saw a noble unity in his political progressiveness; and another critic, M. Spuller, in eulogizing the three great French poets of the nineteenth century, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Hugo, observed that although they were all

born outside the pale of the Revolution, they proved to be the very men to help forward and to glorify the democracy, Hugo especially being a noble exponent of the new social truths.

There naturally came a time, therefore, when Hugo desired actual contact with political life. At first, as I have remarked, he formed the design of getting returned for the Chamber of Deputies, but this idea had to be abandoned. Then he was sent for by Louis Philippe. This monarch, though generally immovable on social and literary questions, and caring little for the conciliation of the democracy, was much impressed by the power he recognised in Victor Hugo. Stories are told of interviews, prolonged into the night, between the King and the poet. The result was that on the 13th of April, 1845, Hugo was created a peer—an event which was warmly applauded by the bulk of the people. In taking his seat in the Upper Chamber the new peer was by profession an independent Conservative, but there was in him already a large Republican leaven. His maiden speech was delivered in defence of artists and their copyright, and this was followed in March, 1846, by a vigorous address on Poland. As was the case



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any pretender must be harmless in the midst of a nation where there was freedom of work and of thought ; and that by mercifulness the Chamber would consolidate its power with the people. Louis Philippe was so impressed by these views that he allowed the Bonapartes to return.

That momentous revolutionary year, 1848, did not come upon Victor Hugo altogether as a surprise. That which astonished him was not the character, but the strength of the new movement. He had long before seen that the stability of any French Government would depend upon its attitude towards the people and the pressing social and political questions of the time. If a Government ignored, or attempted to crush the forces which were at work in society, then it was inevitably doomed to fall before them. He had indulged some hope that the Government of Louis Philippe would inaugurate an enlightened policy ; but it failed to do this, while it perpetuated abuses which had long been obnoxious. That which the far-seeing predicted actually occurred ; the monarchy was swept away. Hugo thought for a moment that a compromise might be effected by constituting the Duchess of Orleans regent ; but he speedily saw

that the popular movement was against all Royalty and its forms, and he gave in his adhesion to the Republic. The Provisional Government having fixed the elections for the 23rd of April, Hugo was nominated as a candidate for Paris ; but he was unsuccessful. Shortly afterwards, however, he was returned to the National Assembly, on the occasion of the supplementary elections rendered necessary in Paris. He took an independent part in the debates in the Assembly, voting now with the Right and now with the Left. His socialistic views found expression during the discussion upon the national factories, which had borne such lamentable results. ' Admitting the necessity which might seem to justify their establishment, he insisted that practically they had had a most disastrous influence upon business, and pointed out the serious danger which they threatened, not alone to the finances, but to the population of Paris. As a socialist, he addressed himself to socialists, and invoked them to labour in behalf of the perishing, but to labour without causing alarm to the world at large ; he implored them to bestow upon the disendowed classes, as they were called, all the benefits of civilization,

to provide them with education, with the means of cheap living; and, in short, to put them in the way of accumulating wealth instead of multiplying misery.' From the point of view of the social reformer, his utterances were wise and conciliatory. During the sanguinary days of June he went from place to place, striving to avert bloodshed; and after the outbreak he was instrumental in saving the lives of several of the insurgents. He advocated mercy, and in the Assembly proposed that an entire amnesty should be proclaimed. A deputy rose and embraced him, and with this deputy, who was none other than Victor Schœlcher, a close friendship was formed. Hugo would have no part in the proceedings against Louis Blanc, and he declined to assent to the vote that Cavaignac deserved the gratitude of his country. He opposed the project of having but one Chamber, and it has been pointed out that the existence of a second Chamber would in all probability have saved France from the *Coup d'État*. From his place in the Assembly he spoke strongly in favour of the liberty of the press and of the abolition of capital punishment. In April, 1848, he started the journal *L'Événement*, which had



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but they must have been superficial students of his career. The poet had long been drifting towards this end. With the advance in his political views there seems to have come an expansion in his eloquence; and the tribune witnessed many impassioned speeches from the deputy—speeches which moved his auditors to the utmost depths of emotion. When he defended Italy at the time the French entered Rome—and in doing so strongly attacked the abuses attendant upon ecclesiastical domination—he incurred the anger of his former friend Montalembert. Replying to the Comte he said: ‘There was a time when he employed his noble talents better. He defended Poland as now I defend Italy. I was with him then; he is against me now. The explanation is not far to seek. He has gone over to the side of the oppressors: I have remained on the side of the oppressed.’

Presiding at the Peace Congress of Paris, held on the 21st of August, 1849, and addressing Richard Cobden and his fellow-delegates from various parts of the world, Hugo gave expression to his sanguine humanitarian sentiments. ‘You have come,’ he observed to these representatives of peace, ‘to turn over, if it may be, the last and

most august page of the Gospel, the page that ordains peace amongst the children of the one Creator; and here in this city, which has rejoiced to proclaim fraternity to its own citizens, you have assembled to proclaim fraternity to all men.' The orator expressed his conviction that universal peace was attainable, and at the closing sitting of the Congress, held on the 24th, the anniversary of St. Bartholomew, he spoke in this impassioned strain: 'On this very day, 277 years ago, this city of Paris was aroused in terror amidst the darkness of the night. The bell, known as the silver bell, chimed from the Palais de Justice, and a bloody deed, unprecedented in the annals of crime, was perpetrated; and now, on that self-same date, in that self-same city, God has brought together into one general concourse the representatives of that old antagonism, and has bidden them transform their sentiments into sentiments of love. The sad significance of this mournful anniversary is removed; each drop of blood is replaced by a ray of light. Well-nigh beneath the shadow of that tower whence tolled the fatal vespers of St. Bartholomew, not only Englishmen and Frenchmen, Germans and Italians, Europeans and Americans, but actually

Papists and Huguenots have been content to meet, happy, nay proud, to unite themselves together in an embrace alike honourable and indissoluble.' These words excited a strange fervour and enthusiasm in the audience, and amidst the waving of hats and handkerchiefs, and other demonstrations of applause, a Roman Catholic abbé and a Protestant pastor might have been seen embracing, overcome by the power of the orator's language.

During the debate on the new Education Bill, introduced by M. de Falloux in January, 1850, Victor Hugo adversely criticized the measure as placing too much power in the hands of the clergy. He announced that he should oppose any scheme which entrusted the education of youth to the clerical party, who were always seeking to fetter the human mind. Church and State must pursue independent courses. 'Your law,' he exclaimed, directly addressing the Minister, 'is a law with a mask. It says one thing, it does another. It may bear the aspect of liberty, but it means thralldom. It is practically confiscation under the name of a deed of gift. But it is all one with your usual policy. Every time that you forge a new chain you cry,



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follow the steps of Napoleon. As for me, I am honest; and I shall follow in the way of Washington.' It never struck the poet that his visitor protested too much. Upright and sincere himself, he liked to believe in the integrity of others, and he little dreamt that Louis Napoleon, who had sworn fidelity to the Constitution, and again and again declared himself bound by his oath, would in a short time strangle the Republic with his own hands.

But, alas! it was not long before the poet and his friends were disillusioned, for, as Proudhon remarked, 'Citizen Bonaparte, who but yesterday was a mere speck in the fiery heavens, has become an ominous cloud, bearing storm and tempest in its bosom.' Hugo, seeing what was advancing, bore himself courageously, and from his place in the tribune never ceased to advocate the cause of freedom, while he bade the people repose securely in their own strength. The reactionary policy began with the curtailment of the liberty of the press, and culminated in the *Coup d'État* of the 2nd December, 1851. On that date the Legislative Assembly was dissolved; universal suffrage was established, and Paris was declared to be in a state of siege. Thiers,

Cavaignac, and others were arrested and sent to the Castle of Vincennes. About 180 members of the Assembly, with M. Berryer at their head, on endeavouring to meet, were also arrested, and Paris was occupied by troops. Sanguinary conflicts ensued between the people and the soldiery, but the troops were victorious. Napoleon put a pistol at the head of Paris, and ultimately, by means which will be condemned in history to all ages, the Empire was established.

Victor Hugo did all in his power for the maintenance of the rights of the people, but in vain. In the tribune he indignantly inveighed against the tyranny of Napoleon, and was in consequence placed at the head of the list of the proscribed. He supported the Committee of Resistance in their efforts to depose the Prince; but the people were paralyzed by the display of power, and he was obliged to fly from Paris. A sum of 25,000 francs was offered to anyone who would either kill or arrest him, and so great was the terror of the populace that no one could be found who would give the friend of freedom an asylum. At length he secured temporary shelter beneath the roof of a relation, remaining here until the 12th of December,

when he left Paris, completely disguised, by the Northern Railway Station. The expatriated poet reached Brussels in safety, but his sons and the rest of the staff of *L'Évènement* had been cast into prison. It was a momentous time for the friends of Victor Hugo, who were naturally anxious for his safety when so many of the friends of the Republic had been seized and incarcerated.

In his retreat the great patriot found himself confronted by a new task. He resolved to compile a history of the infamous events which had driven him into exile. 'His lashes should reach to the faces of Napoleon and his acolytes at the Tuileries; he became at once the Tacitus and Juvenal of his time, only his accents were mightier than theirs, because his indignation was greater and his wrath more just.' Napoleon had triumphed, but the scourge was soon to descend which should leave him exposed to the derision and contempt of the world to the end of time. The sword is powerful; but the pen, which is the stronger weapon, has always overtaken it, and adjusted the historical balance in the interests of humanity.



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published until 1877, and I shall make some references to it in a later chapter. Amongst other exiles in Brussels were the ill-assorted couple Émile de Girardin and General Lamoricière. But Belgium also sheltered in this hour of peril Ledru Rollin, the sculptor David, Barbès, Louis Blanc, Edgar Quinet, and Eugène Sue. Indeed, many of the finest and choicest spirits of France had been driven from their native soil.

The sons of Victor Hugo joined their father in January, 1852, and the poet determined to remain in Brussels so long as Napoleon III. reigned at the Tuileries. Fate, nevertheless, decreed otherwise. The Belgian Government, though favourable to Hugo, was still more anxious to maintain friendly relations with the new French Empire. Victor Hugo soon made it impossible, however, for the Belgian rulers to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. The publication of his *Napoléon le Petit* fell like a thunderbolt over both Paris and Brussels. That scathing work made the Dictator writhe amid the splendours of his palace. It was charged with wit, pathos, sarcasm, and invective. Amongst the many personal passages denunciatory of Louis Napoleon was the follow-

ing: 'He will never be other than the nocturnal strangler of liberty; he will never be other than the man who has intoxicated his soldiers, not with glory, like the first Napoleon, but with wine; he will never be other than the pigmy tyrant of a great people. Grandeur, even in infamy, is utterly inconsistent with the character and calibre of the man. As Dictator, he is a buffoon; let him make himself Emperor, he would be grotesque. That would at once put an end to him. His destiny is to make mankind shrug their shoulders. Will he be less severely punished for that reason? Not at all: contempt does not in his case mitigate anger. He will be hideous, and he will remain ridiculous. That's all. History laughs, and crushes. What would you have the historian do with this fellow? He can only lead him to posterity by the ear. The man once stripped of success, the pedestal removed, the dust fallen, the lace and spangles and the great sabre taken away, the poor little skeleton laid bare and shivering—can anyone imagine anything meaner and more miserable?' This powerful satire closed with a vision of vengeance: 'You do not perceive that the 2nd of December is nothing but an immense illusion,

a pause, a stop, a sort of working curtain, behind which the Deity, that marvellous machinist, is preparing and constructing the last act, the final and triumphant scene of the French Revolution ! You look stupefied upon the curtain, upon the things painted upon the coarse canvas, this one's nose, that one's epaulettes, the great sabre of a third, those embroidered vendors of *eau-de-Cologne* whom you call generals, those *poussahs* that you call magistrates, those worthy men that you call senators, this mixture of caricatures and spectres—and you take them all for realities. You do not hear yonder in the shade that hollow sound ! You do not hear some one going backwards and forwards ! You do not see that curtain shaken by the breath of Him who is behind !'

The excitement caused by this work proved too much for the Belgian Government, and, desirous of keeping well with Napoleon III., it reluctantly decided that the author must be expelled. As there was no law bearing upon Hugo's case, the Belgian Chamber passed one to meet it, and Hugo was cast out from what he deemed to be a secure asylum. He embarked for England, but only on his way to Jersey,



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consequence of his rank, observes one writer, 'he enjoyed certain privileges, one of which was that he was exempt from the obligation of sweeping his doorstep and clearing away the grass from the front of his house!' But he was obliged to supply the suzerain of the Duchy of Normandy with two fowls every year, a tax that was religiously exacted from 'his lordship.'

Yet even in the little island home of their adoption the exiles were not permitted to rest in peace. Spies were sent amongst them, who endeavoured to gather evidence of sedition, and although Jersey had its own laws, as Napoleon was now the ally of England the situation was not without its dangers. One Imperial spy, named Hubert, was discovered; and when the exiles determined that he should die for his treachery, Hugo, with his usual large-hearted magnanimity, came forward and saved his life.

Another terrible denunciation of Napoleon and his satellites was penned by Hugo during his stay in Jersey. *Les Châtiments*, this new satire, was even more powerful and telling than *Napoléon le Petit*. Its verse burned with indignation. The poet spared no one who was in any degree responsible for the crime of the 2nd December.

‘Sometimes he is full of pity for the victims of the dastardly aggression, pouring out his sympathy for those whom the convict-ships were conveying to the deadly climates of Cayenne and Lambessa, to receive for political offences the fate of the worst of felons; sometimes he sounds forth their virtues in brilliant strophes; and sometimes he rises into grandeur as he scourges the great men of the Second Empire, whilst at others he uses the lash of satire, and depicts them all as circus grooms and mountebanks. Page after page seems to bind his victim to an eternal pillory.’ The work showed, in its various divisions, how society was ‘saved,’ order re-established, the dynasty restored, religion glorified, authority consecrated, stability assured, and the deliverers themselves delivered. It was first published in Brussels, but only in a mutilated form, the Belgian Government dreading the effects of some of its bitter attacks upon the ruler of France. In vain the poet protested against this infringement of liberty. A complete edition of the work, however, soon appeared at St. Helier, and it speedily got into circulation in all the European capitals, ingeniously defying every effort to suppress it. ‘The more it was

hunted down the more thoroughly it penetrated France. It had as many disguises as an outlaw. Sometimes it was enclosed in a sardine-box, or rolled up in a hank of wool; sometimes it crossed the frontier entire, sometimes in fragments; concealed occasionally in plaster busts or clocks, laid in the folds of ladies' dresses, or even sewn in between the double soles of men's boots.'

Matters were thus rendered righteously unpleasant for Napoleon, who dreaded these attacks upon his person and power. A man of genius fighting for liberty is sometimes stronger than a throne; and it was possible that this might be the issue between the poet and the Dictator. The work brought no profit to its author, but he had the far higher reward of seeing it carry terror into the midst of the Tuileries, while it at the same time stirred the slumbering conscience of the French nation. For two or three years the Jersey exiles remained unmolested, but Napoleon, feeling insecure, determined that they should 'move on.' Victor Hugo on several occasions delivered funeral orations over departed patriots. He never spared the French rulers, and invariably expressed sympathy with 'the heartrending cry of humanity which made



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or later he will have to expiate the crime of the 2nd of December. What is said is true: there is a personal quarrel between him and me; there is the old quarrel of the judge upon the bench and the prisoner at the bar.*

The tension became too great when Félix Pyat published in *L'Homme* a 'Letter to Queen Victoria,' commenting in sarcastic but foolish terms upon her Majesty's visit to the Emperor and Empress of the French. Some of the personal portions of the pamphlet affecting the Queen were perfectly unjustifiable, and the result was a serious agitation in Jersey for the expulsion of the exiles. At one moment their lives were in danger. Hugo confessed that he did not care for this, but he should greatly regret the destruction of his manuscripts. His compositions, which represented thirty years' labour, and included *Les Contemplations*, *La Légende des Siècles*, and the first portion of *Les Misérables*, were accordingly secured in a strong iron-bound chest. Madame Hugo, though warned of her danger, resolutely remained by the side of her husband.

The conductors of *L'Homme* were at once expelled from Jersey, whereupon Victor Hugo

drew up a protest on behalf of the exiles. 'The *Coup d'État*,' said this document, 'has penetrated into English liberty. England has reached this point that she now banishes exiles.' It then went on to inveigh against the crimes of 'treason, perjury, spoliation, and murder,' committed by Napoleon III., for which he had been legally condemned by the French Court of Assize, and morally by the bulk of the English press. The protest received thirty-seven signatures, amongst them being those of Louis Blanc and Victor Schœlcher. After a period of uncertainty, the English Government consented to the expulsion of the refugees.

On the 27th of October, 1855, the news was communicated to Victor Hugo that he must quit the island by the 2nd of November. The poet said to the constable of St. Clément, the bearer of the tidings, 'I do not await the expiration of the respite that is given me. I hasten to quit a land where honour has no place, and which burns my feet.' After paying a farewell visit to the graves of their dead comrades, the exiles dispersed, leaving Jersey for various destinations; and on the 31st of October, Hugo and his family embarked for Guernsey,

CHAPTER XI.

IN GUERNSEY.—‘LES MISÉRABLES.’

THOUGH harassed in mind and in person, Victor Hugo had reserved to himself, during his troubled stay in Jersey, leisure 'in which to devote himself to the Muses pure and simple. As the result of these periods of meditation, there appeared in Paris in 1856 *Les Contemplations*. This work, which speedily went through several editions, was the lyrical record of twenty-five years. According to the author himself, it holds, more than any other of the numerous collections of his poetry, 'as in a rocky chalice, the gathered waters of his life.' And, again, he observed that 'the author has allowed this book to form itself, so to speak, within him. Life, filtering drop by drop, through events and sufferings, has deposited it in his heart.'

Divided into two parts, the earlier division of



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appeared in 1859, I shall speak in greater detail when referring to its completion.

Expelled from Jersey, the poet found a home in Guernsey; for although the islands are geographically near, the sentiments of the islanders differed greatly on the subject of political refugees. At Hauteville House, which, as its name implies, occupied a commanding elevation, Victor Hugo found a home which is now peculiarly linked with his name. The re-arrangement of the place was a work of time. Writing to Jules Janin, Hugo announced his getting into new quarters: 'England has hardly been a better guardian of my fireside than France. My poor fireside! France broke it up, Belgium broke it up, Jersey broke it up; and now I am beginning, with all the patience of an ant, to build it up anew. If ever I am driven away again I shall turn to England, and see whether that worthy prude Albion can help me to find myself *at home*. . . . I have taken a house in Guernsey. It has three stories, a flat roof, a fine flight of steps, a courtyard, a crypt, and a look-out; but it is all being paid for by the proceeds of *Les Contemplations*.'

Innumerable are the pilgrimages which have

been made to Hauteville House, with consequent descriptions of the residence. A brief sketch of the leading features of the poet's home, for which I am indebted to an account written by one of such visitors, will not be unacceptable. Hauteville House, which overlooks the city and fort beneath, and commands a vast expanse of sea, is likewise famed for its interior treasures. The visitor finds carvings of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, and porcelain, enamels, and glass, the work of Venetian and Florentine masters. Entering the house by a vestibule, there is first perceived on the upper lintel a *basso-relievo* representing the chief subject in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. On the right and left, in carved oak, are two medallions, by David, of Victor Hugo and his second daughter. A fine Renaissance column supports the whole. Passing on, the monumental door of the dining-room is reached. Upon one of the panels is written 'Love and Believe;' and over one of the doors, and below a statuette of the Virgin, is the word of welcome to the visitor, 'Ave.' In the billiard-saloon are hung the poet's designs, framed in varnished fir. To his other evidences of ability Hugo adds that of a graphic artist. Many of his sketches have a breadth and

power which strongly recall the pencil of Rembrandt, though in the matter of drawing and some other points they will not, of course, sustain comparison with the work of that wonderful master.

The tapestry-parlour is an apartment of special interest, the mantelpiece particularly fixing the attention. Imagine a cathedral of carved oak, which, rising vigorously from the floor, springs up to the ceiling, where its upper carving touches the tapestry. The doorway corresponds to the fireplace; the rosace is a convex mirror, placed above the mantelpiece; the central gable is a firm entablature covered with fantastic foliage, and decorated by arches of exquisite taste, in which the Byzantine mingles with the rococo; the two towers are two counterforts, which repeat all the ornamentation of the entire mass. The coping, very imposing in its effect, recalls the fronts of the houses in Antwerp and Bruges. A face appears amid the woodwork, vigorously thrown out. It is that of a bishop, whose crosier alone is gilded. On each side of it is a shield, with the witty motto :

‘Crosier of wood, bishop of gold :
Crosier of gold, bishop of wood.’



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the inscription, 'The absent are here.' The galleries and rooms of the first story are likewise rich in Renaissance work, and in Chinese and Japanese treasures. The Oak Gallery, which is a kind of guest-chamber, has six windows looking out upon Fort St. George, which distribute the light through a perfect forest of carved oak. The mantelpiece — a marvellous piece of work, represents the sacrifice of Isaac. A state bed and a massive candelabrum in oak, surmounted by a figure carved by Victor Hugo, are also noticeable objects; but they are almost eclipsed by the splendid door of entrance, which, as seen from the interior, is as brilliant as a church window. Two spiral columns sustain a pediment of oak with Renaissance grotesques, surrounded by arabesques and monsters; it advances with two folds, which are resplendent with paintings, among which are eight large figures of the martyrs, attired in gold and purple, the principal being St. Peter. There is inscribed on the lintel, '*Surge, perge,*' and close by the words of Lucan, 'The conquerors have the gods, with the conquered Cato remains.' There are also numerous maxims, poetic and otherwise.

Hugo's own room was the look-out—a little belvedere open in all directions, but very small in extent. It contains the poet's writing-table and an iron bed. Whether regarded from the point of view of its noble situation, or from that of the artistic treasures which find a lodgment in its interior, Hauteville House is a place to inspire a poet of a far less expansive imagination than Victor Hugo.

While the author of *Notre-Dame* pursued his studies and compositions in the belvedere, the other inmates of Hauteville House were generally engaged in a variety of pursuits beneath. The elder son, Charles, devoted himself to the writing of dramas and romances, while the second son, Victor François, undertook with much spirit and success a translation of Shakespeare. Adèle, the one daughter now remaining, composed music; Auguste Vacquerie plunged into a series of curious literary studies, which resulted in the production of *Les Mielles de l'Histoire* and *Profils et Grimaces*; and Madame Victor Hugo busied herself in collecting notes for her husband's *Life*. Unfortunately, owing to her death, her task was never completed, a portion only of her labour of love seeing the light in

1863. The whole family ever cordially welcomed any Frenchmen who sought a refuge at Hauteville House, and Gérard de Nerval, Balzac, and many others occupied in turns a room specially set apart for the use of such visitors.

Two or three years after Hugo established himself in Guernsey, an amnesty was announced by the Emperor of the French. The proclamation was dated the 15th of August, 1859. The poet refused to avail himself of the act of grace, and in conjunction with Louis Blanc, Edgar Quinet, and others, replied to the Imperial pardon by a counter manifesto. He was blamed by some for this step, it being urged that it was his duty to return to France during the days of the Second Empire, and to use every effort to procure that amelioration of the condition of the people, and the fruition of their hopes, which he and other patriots desired. But Victor Hugo was very depressed at this time, and saw little prospect of the realization of his own aspirations and of those who felt and acted with him. But an idea of the vast personal influence attributed to the poet may be gathered from such language as the following which was used concerning him at this time:



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15,000 copies, the first Brussels edition to 12,000, and the first Leipzig edition to 3,000. No fewer than 150,000 copies were sold in one year, and altogether, in various forms and editions, more than three times this immense number of copies were disposed of. The book was found everywhere, from the Steppes of Russia to the battlefields of the United States, where it solaced many a soldier during the Civil War.

This stupendous work is divided into five parts, entitled respectively 'Fantine,' 'Cosette,' 'Marius,' 'L'Idylle Rue Plumet et l'Épopée Rue St. Denis,' and 'Jean Valjean.' Each of these parts consists of eight or more books, which are again divided into chapters. It was complained that the book was partly the offspring of a poet, and partly the offspring of a social philosopher, and that while the poetry was noble the philosophy was detestable. At the same time it was admitted that the writer had stamped upon every page the hall-mark of genius, and the loving patience and conscientious labour of a true artist. The romance opens with a finely-sketched portrait of a worthy bishop, called by the people Monseigneur Bienvenu, a

noble creation, which surprised those who looked upon Hugo merely as a curser of the Church and all its works. A scene of strong dramatic power occurs in Chapter X., which deals with an interview between the bishop and a dying conventionnel, who had all but voted for the death of the King. Victor Hugo's unequalled command of language and his terse and vigorous emphasis come here into full play. 'All French writers of mark,' says a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, 'are divisible into two schools; the one is characterized by the polish and smoothness to which the romance element is carried in a Racine, or, in more modern times, a Lamartine; the other is full of a *viel esprit Gaulois*," a Molière or a La Fontaine. For this rugged force of speech, all knots, the bark still on, M. Hugo is very remarkable. The terseness with which he throws into a word the compressed power which a feebler but more elegant writer would draw out into a whole sentence, indicates an amount of genius which belongs only to the kinglier spirits of an age, and which in French literature has only been matched by Rabelais, in Italian by Dante.'

The real hero of the story is Jean Valjean,

the son of a woodcutter of Faverolles. Losing his father and mother when a child, he grew up to carry on the former's craft, supporting thereby an elder sister (left a widow) and her seven children. One night, in that terrible year of famine, 1795, Jean Valjean broke into a baker's shop to steal a loaf for the starving children at home. He was arrested for the theft, and condemned to five years at the galleys. Frequent attempts to escape added fourteen years more to his punishment. At length, after nineteen years, he was liberated; but, while now free, his lot was as hard as though he were still in confinement. No one will recognise or aid this pariah of civilization, and he enters the episcopal town of D—— in despair. The good bishop alone will receive the outcast, and he entertains him, and has a bed provided for him. In the middle of the night Valjean is overcome by wild impulses. He steals the spoons from the cupboard over the bed of the sleeping bishop, and escapes through the garden. In the morning he is caught and brought back, but the bishop only heaps coals of fire upon his head in return for his perfidy. Valjean is allowed to go out into the world, but there is a terrible struggle



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graphically told, and having for their central and cardinal motive the trials of Valjean and the revolt against society. In the last volume we have the marriage of Cosette, daughter of Fantine, with one Marius, both of whom owed their lives to Valjean. Marius and Cosette shrink from Valjean when they hear his confession that he is a liberated convict. But when Marius learns further that Valjean had saved his life and conveyed him from the barricades to his grandfather's house, and that he had also secured for him his wife's dowry of 600,000 francs, remorse overcomes him for his ingratitude. He and Cosette seek out Valjean at his lodgings, but only arrive in time to witness the death of the suffering, sinning, struggling convict, and to receive his last blessing.

This romance contains passages which, for grandeur of conception and skill in execution, have never been equalled by any other French writer. At the same time the work is not without its defects, chief of which is the frequent recurrence of prolix digressions. For example, at a very critical point in the story, when Jean Valjean has effected his escape with Marius in his arms from the pursuit of the soldiery, the

reader is treated to some hundred pages of speculation on the valuable uses to which the sewage of large towns may be put. Other eccentricities might be pointed out, but high and above them all burns the light of the original genius of the author, which transforms the book for us into a veritable wizard's spell. Hugo, even with his perversities and his literary contradictions, can move us as no other man can. Writing to Lamartine, who had been considerably exercised by the social views promulgated in this book, the author said: 'A society that admits misery, a humanity that admits war, seem to me an inferior society and a debased humanity; it is a higher society, and a more elevated humanity at which I am aiming—a society without kings, a humanity without barriers. I want to universalize property, not to abolish it; I would suppress parasitism; I want to see every man a proprietor, and no man a master. This is my idea of true social economy. The goal may be far distant, but is that a reason for not striving to advance towards it? Yes, as much as a man can long for anything I long to destroy human fatality. I condemn slavery; I chase away

misery; I instruct ignorance; I illumine darkness; I discard malice. Hence it is that I have written *Les Misérables*.' So much for one side of the work; but if its social and political philosophy be condemned to the exclusion of its manifold excellences and beauties, then I can only pity the mole-like blindness of those who, in their haste to be critical, have lost that key-note of human sympathy which alone can unlock the treasures of *Les Misérables*.



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well received almost everywhere; as an institution of fraternity it is accepted with a cordial welcome—accepted by Christians as being in conformity with the Gospel, and by democrats as being agreeable to the principles of the Revolution.' He also advocated the education of children, as well in the principles of justice and real happiness as in the various branches of knowledge; for by elevating the child they would elevate the people of the future.

The good work thus initiated in Guernsey was imitated by humanitarians in London, who provided acceptable meals for the poor in the Ragged Schools, and for the neglected and the outcast. Hugo's example was therefore not barren of results, though systematic care for the poor was still a dream of the future.

A strangely interesting scene took place at Brussels, when Victor Hugo's publishers in that city, Messrs. Lacroix and Verboeckhoven, gave a grand banquet to the author in celebration of the success of *Les Misérables*. Distinguished representatives of the English, French, Italian, Spanish and Belgian press attended, and amongst the chief guests were the Burgomaster of Brussels, the President of the Chamber of Representatives,

MM. Eugène Pelletan, De Banville, Champfleury, and Louis Blanc. The illustrious exile was much moved as he listened to speeches breathing sympathy and affection for himself as a man, and admiration for him as a writer. 'Eleven years ago, my friends,' he said in reply, 'you saw me departing from among you comparatively young. You see me now grown old. But though my hair has changed, my heart remains the same. I thank you for coming here to-day, and beg you to accept my best and warmest acknowledgments. In the midst of you I seem to be breathing my native air again; every Frenchman seems to bring me a fragment of France; and while thus I find myself in contact with your spirits, a beautiful glamour appears to encircle my soul, and to charm me like the smile of my mother-country.' The Empire had made this gathering impossible in Paris, the city where it should naturally have been held.

A pleasant act of reparation for past injustice was performed when, on the 18th of May, 1860, the inhabitants of Jersey once more welcomed Hugo to their island. He went over upon the requisition of five hundred sympathizers with liberty, who invited him to speak on behalf of

the subscription which was being raised to assist Garibaldi in the liberation of Italy. The occasion was pre-eminently one to unseal the fount of eloquence in the exile and the poet. His own deep love for France led him to feel profoundly with the noble patriot who was struggling for a united Italy. Hugo spoke with great energy, first depicting Italy in her bondage, then pleading for her freedom and independence, and prophesying the near approach of the time when, with the sword of Garibaldi, aided by the support of France and England, Italy would rise victorious in the struggle for liberty.

A few years later, and we have some glimpses of the domestic relations of the poet. His son Charles was married in 1866, at Brussels, to the ward of M. Jules Simon. In April, 1867, Victor Hugo became a grandfather, and amongst the many evidences of his affection for children this little letter, written upon his grandson's birth, is well worthy of preservation: 'Georges,—Be born to duty, grow up for liberty, live for progress, die in light! Bear in thy veins the gentleness of thy mother, the nobleness of thy father. Be good, be brave, be just, be honourable! With thy grandmother's kiss, receive thy father's



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Shortly before making this tour Hugo had issued *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*. In these songs of the streets and the woods will be discovered the amusing recreations of a great spirit and the representations of its lighter moods. Applying to the volume a standpoint quite out of keeping with its scope and motive, some of the reviewers saw in it a decadence of genius. They had no ear for its music or for its more delicate undertones. It was so different from the work they expected from such a writer that it must be bad. Charles Monselet thought there were some passages in this book which, in pure musical quality, were worthy of Rossini or Hérold.

But those who complained of the poems had no reason to complain of the work which followed it in 1866, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. This was another of the great romances by which the name of Victor Hugo will live. In announcing the completion of the work the author wrote, 'In these volumes I have desired to glorify work, will, devotion, and whatever makes man great. I have made it a point to demonstrate how the most insatiable abyss is the human heart, and that what escapes the sea,

does not escape a woman.' In the work itself was the inscription, 'I dedicate this book to the rock of hospitality and liberty, to that portion of old Norman ground inhabited by the noble little people of the sea: to the island of Guernsey, severe yet kind, my present refuge, and probably my grave.' This powerful story dealt with the last of three great forces which Victor Hugo had now illumined by his genius—religion, society, and Nature. In these forces were to be seen the three struggles of man. They constitute at the same time, said the writer, his three needs. Man has need of a faith; hence the temple. He must create; hence the city. He must live; hence the plough and the ship. But these three solutions comprise three perpetual conflicts. The mysterious difficulty of life results from all three. Man strives with obstacles under the form of superstition, under the form of prejudice, and under the form of the elements. He is weighed down by a triple kind of fatality or necessity. First, there is the fatality of dogmas, then the oppression of human laws, and finally the inexorability of nature. The author had denounced the first of these fatalities in *Notre-Dame de Paris*; the second was fully exemplified

in *Les Misérables*; and the third was indicated in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. But with all these fatalities there also mingled that inward fatality, the supreme agonizing power, the human heart.

This book on the toilers of the sea has been compared with the *Prometheus* of Æschylus. The story or plot is very subordinate, the author having devoted himself to the great contest between his hero and the powers of Nature. In the whole range of literature there is probably nothing more graphic than the account of Gilliatt's battle with the devil-fish. 'This is St. George and the Dragon over again,' remarked a critic in the *British Quarterly Review*; 'and you might as well blame Ariosto or Dante, or great mediæval painters and sculptors, for their innumerable elaborate creations of such monstrous objects, as blame the modern who has, by his study of modern science, seen and restored much that our ancestors conceived. The Pieuvre, moreover, is an ugly symbol of the evil spiritual powers with which man contends. For the rest, Hugo may revel in his strength of creation in this region, as Ariosto and Dante revelled before him, as the builders, too, of our great Gothic cathedrals revelled in



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has been borne with, there is still much invested with that peculiar interest which only the author can weave round his creations. The movement of life plays a subordinate part in the story, and the real purpose of the work is seen to be a description of the battle waged in the individual breast, first with Fate, and then with those ancient enemies of man, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Criticizing this book, Mr. Swinburne remarked : ' Has it not been steeped in the tears and the fire of live emotion ? If the style be overcharged and overshining with bright sharp strokes and points, these are no fireworks of any mechanic's fashion ; these are the phosphoric flashes of the sea-fire moving in the depths of the limitless and living sea. Enough that the book is great and heroic, tender and strong, full from end to end of divine and passionate love, of holy and ardent pity for men that suffer wrong at the hands of men ; full, not less, of lyric loveliness and lyric force ; and I, for one, am content to be simply glad and grateful : content in that simplicity of spirit to accept it as one more benefit at the hands of the Supreme singer now living among us the beautiful and lofty life of one loving the race of men he serves, and of them in

all time to be beloved.' Yet, notwithstanding its evidences of power, *L'Homme qui Rit* failed to obtain that deep hold upon the public mind which was secured by its predecessors.

A writer in the *Cornhill* pointed out that it was Hugo's object in this romance to denounce the aristocratic principle as it is exhibited in England. Satire plays a conspicuous part, but the constructive ingenuity exhibited throughout is almost morbid. 'Nothing could be more happily imagined, as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the aristocratic principle, than the adventures of Gwynplaine, the itinerant mountebank, snatched suddenly out of his little way of life, and installed without preparation as one of the hereditary legislators of a great country. It is with a very bitter irony that the paper, on which all this depends, is left to float for years at the will of wind and tide.' There are also other striking contrasts. 'What can be finer in conception than that voice from the people heard suddenly in the House of Lords, in solemn arraignment of the pleasures and privileges of its splendid occupants? The horrible laughter, stamped for ever "by order of the King" upon the face of this strange spokesman of Democracy, adds yet

another feature of justice to the scene ; in all time, travesty has been the argument of oppression ; and, in all time, the oppressed might have made this answer : " If I am vile, is it not your system that has made me so ? " This ghastly laughter gives occasion, moreover, for the one strain of tenderness running through the web of this unpleasant story : the love of the blind girl Dea for the monster. It is a most benignant providence that thus harmoniously brings together these two misfortunes ; it is one of these compensations, one of these after-thoughts of a relenting destiny, that reconcile us from time to time to the evil that is in the world ; the atmosphere of the book is purified by the presence of this pathetic love ; it seems to be above the story somehow, and not of it, as the full moon over the night of some foul and feverish city.' This last sentence exhibits a misapprehension of Victor Hugo's method. It is part of his plan to discover that which would be accounted as the most vile, the most contemptible, the most loathsome in human nature, and to show that it has some point of contact with the most educated, the most refined, the most beautiful. Critics may complain that he sacrifices art sometimes in



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piece was received with a favour that was practically unanimous; and although M. Francisque Sarcey (who was not then numbered amongst Hugo's admirers) hinted that the applause was not precisely genuine, his insinuations were soon rudely scattered to the winds. On the next night, and for eighty succeeding nights, this remarkable play drew forth the most genuine and vociferous applause.

A number of young authors, including François Coppée, Armand Silvestre, and Sully Prudhomme, were so delighted with the success of *Hernani* that they addressed the following letter to the poet: 'Master most dear and most illustrious, we hail with enthusiastic delight the reproduction of *Hernani*. The fresh triumph of the greatest of French poets fills us with transports. The night of the 20th of June is an era in our existence. Yet sorrow mingles with our joy. Your absence was felt by your associates of 1830; still more was it bewailed by us younger men, who never yet have shaken hands with the author of *La Légende des Siècles*. At least they cannot resist sending you this tribute of their regard and unbounded admiration.' Writing from Brussels, Hugo thus replied: 'Dear poets,

the literary revolution of 1830 was the corollary of the Revolution of 1789 ; it is the speciality of our century. I am the humble soldier of the advance. I fight for revolution in every form, literary as well as social. Liberty is my principle, progress my law, the ideal my type. I ask you, my young brethren, to accept my acknowledgments. At my time of life, the end, that is to say the infinite, seems very near. The approaching hour of departure from this world leaves little time for other than serious meditations ; but while I am thus preparing to depart, your eloquent letter is very precious to me ; it makes me dream of being among you, and the illusion bears to the reality the sweet resemblance of the sunset to the sunrise. You bid me welcome whilst I am making ready for a long farewell. Thanks ; I am absent because it is my duty ; my resolution is not to be shaken ; but my heart is with you. I am proud to have my name encircled by yours, which are to me a crown of stars.' The writer who thus contemplated an early departure from the stage of human life was to accomplish much more before that event, and to witness many startling changes in his beloved France.

The third Napoleon seems to have been inspired by a bitter jealousy of the genius of Victor Hugo, whose great influence he dreaded ; and the poet answered this by an unconquerable distrust of the Emperor. After the representations to which I have drawn attention, Hugo declined to allow his play to be acted, and it was only at the close of Napoleon's reign that he could be prevailed upon to allow the production of *Lucrece Borgia* at the Porte St. Martin. George Sand was present on this occasion, and thus wrote to the dramatist: 'I was present thirty-seven years ago at the first representation of *Lucrece*, and I shed tears of grief; with a heart full of joy I leave the performance of this day. I still hear the acclamations of the crowd as they shout, "Vive Victor Hugo!" as though you were really coming to hear them.'

Hugo's sympathy with Garibaldi—for whom he had a profound admiration—found vent in 1867, in a poem entitled *La Voix de Guernesey*. It severely condemned the Mentana Expedition, and encouraged Garibaldi under the check he had sustained at the hands of the Pope and Napoleon III. Garibaldi replied with some verses styled 'Mentana,' and this interchange of



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CHAPTER XIII.

PARIS AND THE SIEGE.

HAVING vowed never again to visit the land that was 'the resting-place of his ancestors and the birthplace of his love' until she had been restored to liberty, it is not surprising that Victor Hugo rejected the renewed amnesty offered him by Napoleon in 1869. The past ten years had wrought in him no signs of relenting, and when he was urged by his friend M. Félix Pyat to accept this new offer of a truce, he replied, '*S'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là*' ('If there remain only one, I will be that one'). When the Republican journal *Le Rappel* was started, with Charles and François Hugo, Auguste Vacquerie, and Paul Meurice as its principal contributors (joined subsequently by M. Rochefort), he wrote for the opening number a congratulatory manifesto addressed to the editors. By every means

in his power, indeed, he endeavoured to advance Republican principles.

Early in 1870 Napoleon was so impressed by the spread of Republican feeling that he resolved to test the stability of his power and the magic of his name by a *plébiscite*. This step was condemned by Hugo, who asked why the people should be invited to participate in another electoral crime. He thus gave vent to his burning indignation at the proposal: ‘While the author of the *Coup d’État* wants to put a question to the people, we would ask him to put this question to himself, “Ought I, Napoleon, to quit the Tuileries for the Conciergerie, and to put myself at the disposal of justice?” “Yes!”’ This bold and stinging retort led to the prosecution of the journal and the writer for inciting to hatred and contempt of the Imperial Government. But the poet went on his course unmoved, now engaged in writing his study of *Shakespeare*, and now in responding to the appeals made to him from various quarters, including those from the insurgents of Cuba, the Irish Fenians who had just been convicted, and the friends of peace at the Lausanne Congress. He had suffered another domestic grief in 1868 by the death of his wife,

his unfailing sympathizer and consoler in his early struggles, and other sorrows were impending.

The war with Prussia in 1870 led to the disaster of Sedan, and the collapse of the Empire. Hugo at once hastened to France, where he was welcomed with heartfelt enthusiasm by his friends of the Revolutionary Government formed on the 4th of September. M. Jules Claretie, who accompanied the poet on the journey from Brussels to Paris, has written a graphic account of his return to the beloved city. At Landrecies Hugo saw evidences of the rout and the ruin which had overtaken France. 'In the presence of the great disaster, whereby the whole French army seemed vanquished and dispersed, tears rolled down his cheeks, and his whole frame quivered with sobs. He bought up all the bread that could be secured, and distributed it among the famished troops.' The scene in Paris on Hugo's arrival was a memorable one. 'Through the midst of the vast populace,' continues the narrator, 'I followed him with my gaze. I looked with admiration on that man, now advancing in years, but faithful still in vindicating right, and never now do I behold him greeted with the salutations of a grateful people without



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all ill-will ; check all resentment. Be united, and you shall be invincible. Rally round the Republic. Hold fast, brother to brother. Victory is in our keeping. Fraternity is the saviour of liberty !' Addressing also the crowd assembled in the Avenue Frochot, the place of his destination, the poet assured them that that single hour had compensated him for all his nineteen years of exile.

Installed at the house of his friend Paul Meurice, Hugo remained in Paris all through the siege. The Empire having fallen, the cause of strife had ceased, and Hugo addressed a manifesto to the Germans, in which he said : ' This war does not proceed from us. It was the Empire that willed the war ; it was the Empire that prosecuted it. But now the Empire is dead, and an excellent thing too. We have nothing to do with its corpse ; it is all the past, we are the future. The Empire was hatred, we are sympathy ; that was treason, we are loyalty. The Empire was Capna, nay, it was Gomorrha ; we are France. Our motto is " Liberty, Equality, Fraternity ; " on our banner we inscribe, " The United States of Europe. " Whence, then, this onslaught ? Pause a while

before you present to the world the spectacle of Germans becoming Vandals, and of barbarism decapitating civilization.' But the victorious Germans did not share the peaceful sentiments of the writer, and it would have gone ill with him if, like his manifesto, he had fallen into the hands of the Prussian Generals.

The siege went on, and the poet laid the funds from his works at the feet of the Republic. Readings were given of *Les Châtiments*, and other poems, and the proceeds expended in ammunition. It was a brave struggle on the part of the Parisians. Gambetta called on Hugo to thank him for his services to the country, when the latter replied: 'Make use of me in any way you can for the public good. Distribute me as you would dispense water. My books are even as myself; they are all the property of France. With them, with me, do just as you think best.' The poet kept up a brave heart during the privations of hunger, and cheered many of the younger spirits at his table by his pleasantry and wit, which relieved the gloom that pressed so heavily over all. When the great and terrible time of peril and suffering was past, he left it on record: 'Never did city exhibit such fortitude.

Not a soul gave way to despair, and courage increased in proportion as misery grew deeper. Not a crime was committed. Paris earned the admiration of the world. Her struggle was noble, and she would not give in. Her women were as brave as her men. Surrendered and betrayed she was; but she was not conquered.' One can scarcely wonder that men who loved Paris as a woman loves her child can never forget the humiliation she was called upon to pass through.

In the list of the Committee of Public Safety, which was responsible for the insurrectionary movement of the 31st of October, the name of Victor Hugo appeared; but he disavowed its use, and on the ensuing 5th of November he declined to become a candidate at the general election of the mayors of Paris. Nevertheless, 4,029 suffrages were accorded him in the 15th arrondissement. In the elections of February, 1871, he was returned second on the list with 214,000 votes, Louis Blanc coming first with 216,000, and Garibaldi third with 200,000 votes. Speaking on the 1st of March in the National Assembly — which met at Bordeaux — Hugo strongly denounced the preliminaries of peace.



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sorrow to a cup that seemed already over-full ; and he grieved that a voice so powerful should be hushed just at an emergency when the country should be showing its gratitude to all its benefactors. Garibaldi thus wrote to Hugo : ' It needs no writing to show that we are of one accord ; we understand each other ; the deeds that you have done, and the affection that I have borne for you make a bond of union between us. What you have testified for me at Bordeaux is a pledge of a life devoted to humanity.'

It was at this juncture that the poet was called upon to mourn the loss of his son Charles, who died suddenly from congestion of the brain. There had been an unusually close bond between the two, and the shock came with great force upon the father. The body of the deceased was brought to Paris for interment, Hugo following the hearse on foot to the family vault at Père la Chaise. Funeral orations were delivered by Auguste Vacquerie and Louis Mie.

From Brussels, whither he had gone after his son's death, the poet protested against the horrors of the Commune. He also vainly tried to preserve the column in the Place Vendôme

from destruction. He wrote his poem, *Les deux Trophées*, referring to the column and the Arc de Triomphe, with the object of staying the hands of the destroyers, but the mad work went forward. Nevertheless, it was characteristic of him that after the insurrection was at an end, he pleaded for mercy towards the offenders. In his house at Brussels many fugitives found shelter, until the Belgian Government banished them from the country. In reply to this edict Hugo published an article in *L'Indépendance*. He declared that although Belgium by law might refuse an asylum to the refugees, his own conscience could not approve that law. The Church of the Middle Ages had offered sanctuary even to parricides, and such sanctuary the fugitives should find at his home; it was his privilege to open his door if he would to his foe, and it ought to be Belgium's glory to be a place of refuge. England did not surrender the refugees, and why should Belgium be behindhand in magnanimity? But these arguments were of no avail with the exasperated Belgians. A few of the more ruffianly spirits of Brussels actually made an attack upon the poet's house, which they assaulted with stones, to the great danger

of Madame Charles Hugo and her children. Defeated in their attempts to break in the door or to scale the house, the assailants at length made off. So far at first from any redress being granted to Hugo for this outrageous assault, or any punishment being meted out to the offenders, the poet himself was ordered to quit the kingdom immediately, and forbidden to return under penalties of the law of 1865. A debate took place in the Chamber, and as the result of this debate and various protests, the Government did not order the indiscriminate expulsion of all exiles, as they had contemplated. They also made some show of satisfaction to Hugo by ordering a judicial inquiry into the attack upon his residence. In the end a son of the Minister of the Interior was fined a nominal sum of 100 francs for being concerned in the outrage.

Hugo now made a tour through Luxemburg, and afterwards visited London, returning to Paris at the close of the year 1871. After the trial of the Communists he pleaded earnestly, but in vain, for the lives of Rossel, Lullier, Ferré, Crémieux, and Maroteau. In the elections of January, 1872, he got into a difficulty with the Radicals of Paris in consequence of his



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During the siege of Paris, Hugo kept a diary of this lurid history, and upon this he constructed his poem *L'Année Terrible*—the events celebrated extending from August, 1870, to July, 1871. Speaking of this work, a writer whom I have already quoted remarked that 'the poems of the siege at once demand and defy commentary; they should be studied in their order as parts of one tragic symphony. From the overture, which tells of the old glory of Germany before turning to France with a cry of inarticulate love, to the sad majestic epilogue which seals up the sorrowful record of the days of capitulation, the various and continuous harmony flows forward through light and shadow, with bursts of thunder and tempest, and interludes of sunshine and sweet air.' The variety of note in these tragic poems has also been well insisted upon. 'There is an echo of all emotions in turn that the great spirit of a patriot and a poet could suffer and express by translation of suffering into song; the bitter cry of invective and satire, the clear trumpet-call to defence, the triumphal wail for those who fell for France, the passionate sob of a son on the stricken bosom of a mother, the deep note of thought that slowly opens into flower of speech;

and through all and after all, the sweet unspeakable music of natural and simple love. After the voice which reproaches the priest-like soldier, we hear the voice which rebukes the militant priest; and a fire, as the fire of Juvenal, is outshone by a light as the light of Lucretius.' Mr. Dowden sees in these poems the work of a Frenchman throughout, not a man of the Commune, nor a man of Versailles. 'The most precious poems of the book are those which keep close to facts rather than concern themselves with ideas. The sunset seen from the ramparts; the floating bodies of the Prussians borne onward by the Seine, caressed and kissed and still swayed on by the eddying water; the bomb which fell near the old man's feet while he sat where had been the Convent of the Feuillantines, and where he had walked in under the trees in Aprils long ago, holding his mother's hand; the petroleuse, dragged like a chained beast through the scorching streets of Paris; the gallant boy who came to confront death by the side of his friends—memories of these it is which haunt us when we have closed the book—of these, and of the little limbs and transparent fingers, and baby-smile, and murmur like the murmur of

bees, and the face changed from rosy health to a pathetic paleness of the one-year-old grandchild, too soon to become an orphan.' But other critics, while acknowledging the force of the writing and the noble aspirations of the author, place the work on a considerably lower level as a whole. Yet no one who knows the work can surely deny that the poet has thrown a halo of glory round the concrete facts of a disastrous and momentous period.

While the language of despair was held by many of his friends at this dark crisis in French history, Victor Hugo never once wavered in his hopes for the future of his country. So far from being annihilated, he predicted that France would rise to enjoy a greater height of prosperity, and a more durable peace, than she had ever enjoyed under the Empire.



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with the capacity of taking delight in nobility and beauty of imaginative work will find themselves in possession of a new treasure, the lover of historic truth, who hates to see abstractions passed off for actualities, and legend erected in the place of fact, escapes with his praiseworthy sensibilities unwounded.'

The work is on a colossal scale, exhibiting great breadth of touch, while the style has now the power of the lightning, and now the calm and the depth of the measureless sea. 'With La Vendée for background, and some savage incidents of the bloody Vendean war for external machinery, Victor Hugo has realized his conception of '93 in three types of character—Lantenac, the Royalist marquis; Cimourdain, the Puritan turned Jacobin; and Gauvain, for whom one can as yet find no short name, he belonging to the Millenarian times.' It was said that there is nothing more magnificent in literature than the last volume of this work, and while its author had no rival in the sombre, mysterious heights of imaginative effect, he was equally a master in strokes of tenderness and the most delicate human sympathy. Rapidity and profusion, are the pre-eminent

characteristics of this work—'a profusion as of starry worlds, a style resembling waves of the sea, sometimes indeed weltering dark and massive, but ever and anon flashing with the foamy lightning of genius. The finish and rich accurate perfection of our own great living poet Tennyson are absent. Hugo is far more akin to Byron; but his range is vaster than Byron's. He has Byron's fierce satire, and more than Byron's humour, though it is the fashion to generalize and say that the French have none. He is both a lyrical and epic poet. He is a greater dramatist than Byron; and whether in the dramas or prose romances, he shows that vast sympathy with, and knowledge of, human nature which neither Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, nor Wordsworth had. Scott could be his only rival. In France they had lived dramatic lives for the last ninety years; we have lived much more quietly in England, and in France there is a real living drama.'

As this book, full-hearted in its passion, and deeply-veined with human emotion, is the last of Victor Hugo's prose romances, some brief general allusions to him as a novelist will be appropriate. Taking the five books (which

have been referred to in the order of their publication) alone, viz., *Notre-Dame*, *Les Misérables*, *Les Travailleurs*, *L'Homme qui Rit*, and *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*—they would have made the fame of any writer; and yet, it has been justly remarked, they are but one façade of the splendid monument that Victor Hugo has erected to his own genius. I am not one of those who would contend that Hugo's style is everywhere immaculate. On the contrary, he sometimes sins greatly; but these occasions are rare compared with his mighty triumphs. Still, justice must not be extinguished in admiration. My own view of Hugo's literary gifts, as expressed more especially in his romances, has been so fairly put by another writer that I shall transfer, and at the same time in the main adopt, his language: 'Everywhere we find somewhat the same greatness, somewhat the same infirmities. In his poems and plays there are the same unaccountable protervities that have already astonished us in the romances; there, too, is the same feverish strength, welding the fiery iron of his idea under forge-hammer repetitions; an emphasis that is somehow akin to weakness; a strength that is a little epileptic. He stands so far above all his



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relax sometimes from its highest strain, and if Victor Hugo failed at times to scale his loftiest note of thought or expression, it may be remembered also that even Shakespeare was not always in the mood for producing *Hamlets*.

There appeared, in 1874, Hugo's pathetic sketch 'Mes Fils,' containing a tribute of affection to his own dead children; and in 1875-6 was published his *Actes et Paroles*. This justificatory work was in three parts, which dealt respectively with the period before exile, the period of exile, and the period since exile. 'The trilogy is not mine,' said the author, 'but the Emperor Napoleon's; he it is who has divided my life; to him the honour of it is due. That which is Bonaparte's we must render to Cæsar.' Although he first strongly countenanced resistance, the writer concluded with an exhortation to clemency, holding that resistance to tyrants should not be deemed inconsistent with mercy to the vanquished. We have here a complete collection of Hugo's addresses, orations, and confessions of faith, etc., during the preceding thirty years. *Pour un Soldat*, a little brochure written in favour of an obscure soldier, appeared in 1875. Its publication not only resulted in

saving the life of the soldier, who had been condemned for a venial crime, but the sufferers in Alsace and Lorraine reaped the pecuniary fruits of its popularity. The second part of *La Légende des Siècles* was published in 1877. At this time the poet was living in the Rue de Clichy, No. 21, sharing part of the house with Madame Charles Hugo, who, after a widowhood of some years, married M. Charles Lockroy, deputy for the Seine, and also known as a man of letters. Madame Drouet, who had befriended the poet when he was proscribed in 1851, placed her salon in this house at the poet's disposal for the reception of his friends. M. Barbou, who saw much of Hugo in this residence, thus describes the man and his habits: ‘The hand, no doubt, is too slow for the gigantic work that the poet conceives. And yet no moment is ever lost. Generally up with the sun, he writes until mid-day, and often until two o'clock. Then, after a light luncheon, he goes to the Senate, where, during intervals of debate, he despatches all his correspondence. He finds his recreation generally by taking a walk, although not unfrequently he will mount to the top of an omnibus just for the sake of finding himself in the society of the

people, with whom he has shown his boundless sympathy. At eight o'clock he dines, making it his habit to invite not only his nearest friends, but such as he thinks stand in need of encouragement, to join him and his grandchildren at their social meal. At table Victor Hugo relaxes entirely from his seriousness. The powerful orator, the earnest pleader, becomes the charming and attractive host, full of anecdote, censuring whatever is vile, but ever ready to make merry over what is grotesque. . . . Hale and vigorous in his appearance, precise and elegant in his attire, with unbowed head, and with thick, white hair crowning his unfurrowed brow, he commands involuntary admiration. Round his face is a close white beard, which he has worn since the later period of his sojourn in Guernsey as a safeguard against sore throat; but he shows no token of infirmity. His countenance may be said to have in it something both of the lion and the eagle, yet his voice is grave, and his manner singularly gentle.'

The same writer devotes a chapter to Hugo's love of children, à propos of his *L'Art d'être Grand-père*. It is perfectly true that women, and children also, stirred in the poet an element



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Towards the close of his eighth decade, the poet seemed to have almost abandoned political life, but he had not forgotten his friends and the electors of Paris. Innumerable letters published in the public press proved this, as well as his presence as chairman at a number of Democratic conventions, and the delivery of a number of public discourses, such as those pronounced at the obsequies of M. Edgar Quinet and Madame Louis Blanc. Preparatory to the first Senatorial elections, M. Clémenceau, President of the Municipal Council of Paris, waited upon the poet, and in the name of the majority of his colleagues offered him the function of delegate. Hugo accepted, and at once issued his manifesto, entitled 'The Delegate of Paris to the Delegates of the 36,000 Communes of France,' in which he reiterated, with redoubled energy, his old idea of the abolition of monarchy by the federation of the peoples. On the 30th of January, 1876, he was elected Senator of Paris, but only after a keen struggle. He was fourth out of five, and was not returned until after a second scrutiny, when it was found that he had secured 114 votes out of a total of 216.

Soon after his election, Hugo introduced a

proposal in the Senate for granting an amnesty to all those condemned for the events of March, 1871, and to all those then undergoing punishment for political crimes or offences in Paris, including the assassins of the hostages.' On the 22nd of May he delivered an eloquent oration in support of his motion. Towards the close of his address, he described the state of the prisoners in New Caledonia. Having painted their agony, and deplored the continuation of the prosecutions and the last transport of convicts, he said: 'That is how the 18th of March has been atoned for. As for the 2nd of December, it has been glorified, it has been adored and venerated, it has become a legal crime. The priests have prayed for it, the judges have judged by it, and the representatives of the people, at whom the blows were dealt by this crime, not only received them, but accepted and submitted to them, acting with all rigour against the people and all baseness before the Emperor. It is time to put a stop to the astonishment of the human conscience; it is time to renounce that double shame of two weights and two measures. I ask a full amnesty for the events of the 18th of March.' The motion was rejected, only about

seven hands being held up for the amnesty. The poet-orator again pleaded the same cause in January, 1879, but his proposal was coldly received. Nevertheless, in the following month an Amnesty Bill was passed by the Chamber of Deputies.

Early in 1877 appeared the second part of the *Légende des Siècles*; and it is pleasant to recall an interchange of courtesies which took place in this year between Victor Hugo and our own greatly-honoured poet, Lord Tennyson. In the month of June, 1877, there appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* the following sonnet, addressed to Hugo by the Poet Laureate:

‘Victor in Poesy, Victor in Romance,
 . Cloud-weaver of phantasmal hopes and fears,
 . French of the French, and lord of human tears;
 Child-lover; Bard whose fame-lit laurels glance,
 Darkening the wreaths of all that would advance,
 Beyond our strait, their claim to be thy peers;
 Weird Titan, by the winter-weight of years
 As yet unbroken, stormy voice of France;
 Who dost not love our England—so they say;
 I know not—England, France, all man to be
 Will make one people ere man’s race be run:
 And I, desiring that diviner day,
 Yield thee full thanks for thy full courtesy
 To younger England in the boy, my son.’



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at Brussels, during the first months of exile. It was begun on the 14th of December, 1851, and on the day succeeding the author's arrival in Belgium, and was finished on the 5th of May, 1852, as though chance had willed that the anniversary of the death of the first Bonaparte should be countersigned by the condemnation of the third. It is also chance which, through a combination of work, of cares, and of bereavements, has delayed the publication of this history until this extraordinary year, 1877. In causing the recital of events of the past to coincide with the events of to-day, has chance had any purpose? We hope not. As we have just said, the story of the *Coup d'État* was written by a hand still hot from the combat against the *Coup d'État*. The exile immediately became an historian. He carried away this crime in his angered memory, and he was resolved to lose nothing of it: hence this book. The manuscript of 1851 has been very little revised. It remains what it was, abounding in details, and living, it might be said bleeding, with real facts. The author constituted himself an interrogating judge; all his companions of the struggle and of exile came to give evidence

before him. He has added his testimony to theirs. Now history is in possession of it; it will judge. If God wills, the publication of this book will shortly be terminated. The continuation and conclusion will appear on the 2nd of December. An appropriate date.'

When the second part of the work was issued at the beginning of 1878, France had fortunately passed through a time of great political excitement without those fearful consequences which have frequently followed such periods in her history. The continuation of Victor Hugo's work did not consequently create such popular fervour as it might otherwise have done. But the author was as scathing as ever in his invectives, and no one knew such strong depths of bitterness and indignation as he. The satellites of Louis Napoleon were sketched with the pen of a Swift, and in the delineation of their master we find such touches as this: 'Louis Napoleon laid claim to a knowledge of men, and his claim was justified. He prided himself on it, and from one point of view he was right. Others possess discrimination; he had a nose. 'Twas bestial, but infallible.' As for the members of his court, 'they lived for pleasure. They lived by the

public death. They breathed an atmosphere of shame, and threw on what kills honest people.' There are many interesting episodes in a momentous period dealt with throughout this work, which, like everything else by its author, is instinct with his strong personality.



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to themselves. For half a century I have been outpouring my volumes of thought in prose and in verse, in history, philosophy, drama, romance, ode, and ballad, yet I appear to myself not to have said a thousandth part of what is within me; and when I am laid in the tomb I shall not reckon that my life is finished; the grave is not a *cul-de-sac*, it is an avenue; death is the sublime prolongation of life, not its dreary finish; it closes in the twilight, it opens in the dawn. My work is only begun; I yearn for it to become brighter and nobler; and this craving for the infinite demonstrates that there is an infinity.' He denied that there were any occult forces responsible for the creation of man and nature; there was a luminous force, and that was God. Continuing the thought as to his own future existence, he added, 'I am nothing, a passing echo, an evanescent cloud; but let me only live on through my future existences, let me continue the work I have begun, let me surmount the perils, the passions, the agonies, that age after age may be before me, and who shall tell whether I may not rise to have a place in the council-chamber of the Ruler that controls all, and whom we own as God?'

If his creed had not many doctrines, it was at least very clear upon those which he did hold. He set against the God of the Papists, as he conceived him, another being whom he regarded as the personification of the true, the just, and the beautiful, who made his influence everywhere felt, but nowhere more deeply or more permanently than in the human conscience. In April, 1878, Hugo gave a concrete form to some of his religious ideas in his poem entitled *Le Pape*. It represented the Pope—though not the existing or any particular Pontiff—as having a long dream. He finds himself treading in the steps of Christ, mixing with and succouring the poor and the afflicted, eschewing all pomp, interposing between two hostile armies and preventing bloodshed, saving the malefactor from the scaffold, and finally leaving Rome for Jerusalem. All this, of course, is a fearful mistake; his Holiness wakes up, declares that he has had a frightful dream, and clings to the Syllabus and worldly state more firmly than ever. The contrast was very sharply drawn between the good, ideal pastor, and the worldly and sensual father too often met with. Hugo's evolvment of his own ideas led to much controversy, and his book was

severely attacked. By way of reply he issued *La Pitié Suprême*. For those who sinned through ignorance and defective education, he inculcated pity and forgiveness; and the work generally furnished but another illustration to many which had gone before of the liberality of his mind, and his support of the doctrine of universal toleration. At a still later date, in his *L'Âne*, he once more denounced false teachers. Desiring, like Rabelais, to lash his kind, the poet put his denunciations into the mouth of an ass, which animal was taken to be the type of unsophisticated man. In the pages of this satire, observed Louis Ulbach, 'the poet at the climax of his life, dazzled though he is by the nearness of the dawn beyond, glances back at those whom he has left behind, addresses them with railery keen enough to stimulate them, but not stern enough to discourage them, and from the standpoint of his severity, puts a fool's cap upon all false science, false wisdom, and false piety.' Nevertheless, the work was regarded as a failure, in spite of its scintillations of genius, the satiric power of Victor Hugo being one rather of fierce denunciation than that which consists in the perception of the incongruous in humanity.



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at war with the other—the system of Dante and the system of Milton. Without Hell, Dante would never have been able to write a line of the *Inferno*; and without the Devil, Milton would have been in a condition equally forlorn. Yet M. Hugo's book is an attack upon both these venerable beliefs, and also upon the positivists who are trying to undermine them.' Hugo, in short, gave his support to the unconscious humourist who complained of *Paradise Lost* that it proved nothing.

As a polemic in verse, the poet was not very successful; but no one would turn to the poems of Victor Hugo in order to find the successful controversial theologian. No doubt he made the mistake of believing that he was eminently fitted for grappling with abstruse religious theories, and he was not the first literary genius who has done so. But if he failed in polemics in the work at which I have just glanced, there still remained, in all his energy and fulness, Hugo the poet and the philanthropist.

CHAPTER XVI.

PUBLIC ADDRESSES, ETC.

VICTOR HUGO was unquestionably a great orator, or rather I ought perhaps to say he exhibited the powers of a great orator on special occasions. If eloquence is to be measured by the effect which it has upon the audience, he had the electrical force of the orator in no small degree; for in connection with certain persons and topics he was successful in enkindling an enthusiasm in his hearers which was almost unparalleled. But his oratory was not of that even kind which, if it never passes beyond a given elevation, never sinks on the other hand into bathos or commonplace. Hugo had a wonderful gift of language, and he was an orator when his heart was thrown into his subject, and he pressed into its service all the wealth of rhetoric he had at command. Nevertheless, some of his public utterances were

far from being successful—a result due in some instances to extravagance of language and quixotism of idea, and in others to the absence of that ‘sweet reasonableness’ which dispassionately weighs and considers the opinions of others, and judges righteous judgment.

At the celebration of the Voltaire centenary in Paris in May, 1878, Hugo was the chief speaker. The great meeting was held in the Gaité Theatre, which was crowded to suffocation. One who was present stated that while all the speakers at the demonstration were warmly applauded, it was only when Victor Hugo arose that the full tempest of acclamation burst forth. ‘Can a grander, a more striking, a more exaggerated scene be conceived than this association of Victor Hugo and Voltaire, of the most eloquent and the most touching of French orators exhausting his mines of highly coloured epithets and colossal antitheses on the ironical head of Voltaire? A report of his speech does not suffice; the white head and apostle’s beard, the inspired eye, the solemn voice, rolling as if it would sound in the ears of posterity; the involuntarily haughty attitude in vain striving to seem modest; the imperturbable seriousness



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us ask counsel of other mighty thinkers and auxiliaries of this glorious Voltaire—of Jean Jacques, Diderot, Montesquieu. Let us stop the shedding of human blood. Enough, despots. Barbarism still exists. Let philosophy protest. Let the eighteenth century succour the nineteenth. The philosophers, our predecessors, are the apostles of truth. Let us invoke these illustrious phantoms that, face to face with monarchies thinking of war, they may proclaim the right of man to life, the right of conscience to liberty, the sovereignty of reason, the sacredness of labour, the blessedness of peace. And as night issues from thrones, let light emanate from the tombs.’ There are probably no two great French writers who present more marked points of contrast than Voltaire and Victor Hugo; yet the latter, not only in praising his predecessor, but on many other occasions, gloried in being grandly inconsistent if he could thereby, as he believed, advance the interests of humanity.

Victor Hugo presided at the International Literary Congress held in Paris in June, 1878. His speech on that occasion, though by no means confined to business details, was accepted by the

Congress as forming the basis of its decisions. The speaker urged that a book once published becomes in part the property of society, and that after its author's death his family have no right to prevent its reissue. He held that a publisher should be required to declare the cost and the selling price of any book he intended to bring out; that the author's heirs should be entitled to 5 or 10 per cent. of the profit, and that in default of heirs the profit should revert to the State, to be applied to the encouragement of young writers.

Passing to more general questions, and dwelling on the memorableness of the year 1878, Hugo defined the Exhibition as the alliance of industry, the Voltaire Centenary as the alliance of philosophy, and the Congress then sitting as the alliance of literature. 'Industry seeks the useful, philosophy seeks the true, literature seeks the beautiful—the triple aim of all human forces.' He welcomed the foreign delegates as the ambassadors of the human mind, citizens of a universal city, the constituent assembly of literature. Peoples, he remarked, were estimated by their literature; Greece, small in territory, thereby earning greatness, the name of England suggest-

ing that of Shakespeare, and France being at a certain period personified in Voltaire. He next showed that copyright was in the interest of the public, by securing the independence of the writer; and, glancing at the former dependent position of men of letters, he remarked that paternal government resulted in this—the people without bread and Corneille without a sou. Deriding the alleged dangerousness of books, and urging the real dangers of ignorance, he described schools as the luminous points of civilization. He ridiculed as harmless archæological curiosities those who wished mankind to be kept in perpetual leading-strings, and who anathematized 1789, liberty of conscience, free speech, and a free tribune. He exhorted men of letters to recognise as their mission conciliation for ideas and reconciliation for men. They should war against war. ‘Love one another’ signified universal disarmament, the restoration to health of the human race, the true redemption of mankind. An enemy was better disarmed by offering him your hand than by shaking your fist. In lieu of *Delenda est Carthago*, he proposed the destruction of hatred, which was best effected by pardon. After showing her industry



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to this meeting, the English Working-men's Peace Association waited upon Victor Hugo in Paris, and presented him with an address, magnificently illuminated and framed, as a token of admiration for the services he had rendered to the cause of humanity and peace. In reply, Hugo said: 'As long as I live I shall oppose war, and defend the cause which is dear and common to us all—the cause of labour and peace.'

As honorary president of a secular education congress in 1879, Victor Hugo thus addressed that body: 'Youth is the future. You teach youth, you prepare the future. This preparation is useful, this teaching is necessary to make the man of to-morrow. The man of to-morrow is the universal Republic. The Republic is unity, harmony, light, industry, creating comfort; it is the abolition of conflicts between man and man, nation and nation, the abolition of the law of death, and establishment of the law of life. The time of sanguinary and terrible revolutionary necessities is past. For what remains to be done the unconquerable law of progress suffices. Great battles we have still to fight—battles the evident necessity of which does not disturb the

serenity of thinkers; battles in which revolutionary energy will equal monarchical obstinacy; battles in which force joined with right will overthrow violence allied with usurpation—superb, glorious, enthusiastic, decisive battles, the issue of which is not doubtful, and which will be the Hastings and the Austerlitz of humanity. Citizens, the time of the dissolution of the old world has arrived. The old despotisms are condemned by the Providential law. Every day which passes buries them still deeper in annihilation. *The Republic is the future.*'

Another address, in which Hugo expounded his views of the future of humanity, of labour and progress, etc., was delivered at Château d'Eau, on behalf of the Workmen's Congress at Marseilles. Differentiating the achievements of the centuries, he remarked that 'for four hundred years the human race has not made a step but what has left its plain vestige behind. We enter now upon great centuries. The sixteenth century will be known as the age of painters; the seventeenth will be termed the age of writers; the eighteenth, the age of philosophers; the nineteenth, the age of apostles and prophets. To satisfy the nineteenth century it is necessary to

be the painter of the sixteenth, the writer of the seventeenth, the philosopher of the eighteenth; and it is also necessary, like Louis Blanc, to have the innate and holy love of humanity which constitutes an apostolate, and opens up a prophetic vista into the future. In the twentieth century war will be dead, the scaffold will be dead, animosity will be dead, royalty will be dead, and dogmas will be dead; but man will live. For all there will be but one country—that country the whole earth; for all there will be but one hope—that hope the whole heaven.'

It will be seen that there was a sweeping breadth and magnificence about Victor Hugo's prophecies for the twentieth century. But that epoch is so near that we may well doubt whether the seer's extensive programme will so speedily be realized. Still, the prophecy is lofty, generous, noble, and I will not attempt to destroy the horoscope. Passing on to the great question of the day, that of labour, the orator observed: 'The political question is solved. The Republic is made, and nothing can unmake it. The social question remains; terrible as it is, it is quite simple; it is a question between those who have, and those who have not. The latter of these



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years ago M. Thiers declared that the railway would be a mere toy between Paris and St. Germain; another distinguished man, M. Pouillet, confidently predicted that the apparatus of the electric telegraph would be consigned to a cabinet of curiosities. And yet these two playthings have changed the course of the world. Have faith, then; and let us realize our equality as citizens, our fraternity as men, our liberty in intellectual power. Let us love not only those who love us, but those who love us not. Let us learn to wish to benefit all men. Then everything will be changed; truth will reveal itself; the beautiful will arise; the supreme law will be fulfilled, and the world shall enter upon a perpetual fête-day. I say, therefore, have faith! Look down at your feet, and you see the insect moving in the grass; look upwards, and you will see the star resplendent in the firmament: yet what are they doing? They are both at their work; the insect is doing its work upon the ground, and the star is doing its work in the sky. It is an infinite distance that separates them, and yet while it separates, unites. They follow their law. And why should not their law be ours? Man, too, has to submit to uni-

versal force, and inasmuch as he submits in body and in soul, he submits doubly. His hand grasps the earth, but his soul embraces heaven; like the insect he is a thing of dust, but like the star he partakes of the empyrean. He labours and he thinks. Labour is life, and thought is light!

Some idea of Victor Hugo's social and humanitarian ideas may be gained from these addresses. In the course of a conversation with M. Barbou, however, he supplemented these views and theories by explicit statements upon various questions. France, he said, was in possession of a *bourgeoise* Republic, which was not an ideal one, but which would undergo a slow and gradual transformation. He regarded himself and his contemporaries as having been pioneers and monitors, whose advice was worth obtaining, because they had gained their knowledge by experience, having lived through the struggles of the past; but whose theories could not be put into practice by themselves. The future solution of the social question belonged to younger men, and to the twentieth century. That solution, he maintained, would be found in nothing less than the universal spread of instruc-

tion ; it would follow the formation of schools where salutary knowledge should be imparted. By educating the child they would endow the man, and when that had been accomplished, society might proceed to exercise severe repression upon anyone who resisted what was right, because he would have been already so trained that he could not plead ignorance in his own behalf.

But Hugo was careful to add that he did not expect a Utopia to follow this universal dissemination of knowledge. When man had proceeded well on the path of advancement, he would require land to cultivate. He would go out and colonize, and the whole interior of Africa was destined, he believed, before long to be conquered by civilization. Frontiers would disappear, for the idea of fraternity was making its way throughout the world. As the whole earth belonged to man, men must go forth and reclaim it. For the whole race he saw a brighter future, and his watchwords in this respect would seem to have been—Labour, progress, peace, happiness, and enlightenment.



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Hugo took up the legendary side of the question in this Legend of the Ages. It was intended to be followed by two other sections under the respective titles of 'The End of Satan' and 'God.' The first part of this great trilogy was far more striking than any of its author's previous poems. Its brilliancy and energy, its literary skill and its powerful conceptions, enchained the attention. The poet divided his work into sixteen cycles, extending from the Creation to the Trump of Judgment. A full and on the whole discriminating criticism of this remarkable poem has been given by the Bishop of Derry, who also, with some success, has translated passages from it. But Victor Hugo's French is too peculiar and impassioned to be brought within the trammels of English verse. Nevertheless, I will quote from the Bishop the last three stanzas of that beautiful poem, *Boaz Endormi*, one of the first set of poems, all of which are devoted to Scriptural subjects. The rich man Boaz sleeps, quite unconscious of the Moabitess Ruth, who lies expectant at his feet:

'Asphodel scents did Gilgal's breezes bring—
 Through nuptial shadows, questionless, full fast
 The angels sped, for momentarily there pass'd
 A something blue which seem'd to be a wing.

'Silent was ail in Jezreel and in Ur—

The stars were glittering in the heaven's dusk meadows,
Far west among those flowers of the shadows,
The thin clear crescent, lustrous over her,

'Made Ruth raise question, looking through the bars

Of Heaven, with eyes half-oped, what God, what comer
Unto the harvest of the eternal summer,
Had flung his golden hook down on the field of stars.'

The second section deals with the Decadence of Rome, and here the poet's imagination has full sway. The well-known story of Androcles and the Lion is the subject of a beautiful poem. The third section is Islam, and then come the Heroic Christian Cycle, the Day of Kings, etc. But perhaps the most important composition in the work is Ewiradnus, a poem in praise of the true and gentle knight. 'The Thrones of the East, Ratbert, Sultan Mourad, the Twentieth Century, and some other sections, all bear evidence of intense poetic realism, and show the mastery of the author over pictorial and dramatic effects.

The Bishop of Derry raises a question upon which a good deal might be said, when he propounds a theory to the effect that Victor Hugo possesses fancy rather than imagination. It may not be possible to produce passages from Hugo

which, for sustained grandeur and breadth of conception, would be equal to isolated passages that could be cited from Dante and Milton; yet there are as unquestionably scores of other passages in the works of Victor Hugo in describing which it would be wholly inadequate to use the term fancy. They are either grandly and powerfully imaginative, or they are nothing. This writer no doubt too frequently distorts his conceptions, while his treatment sometimes falls from sublimity into caricature; but it is incontestable, I think, that in spite of all *bizarrie*, and every other exception or qualification, he possesses a mobile and an impressive imagination.

In 1877 appeared the second part of *La Légende des Siècles*. Although it scarcely rose to the level of the first part, it was not without those exalted passages which gave supremacy to the poet. 'Once again the seer surveys the cycle of humanity from the days of Paradise to the future which he anticipates; he takes his themes alike from the legends of the heroic age of Greece, and from the domains of actual history, and after singing of the achievements of the great, he dedicates his lay to the little ones,



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dazzled Europe when the first part of the poem appeared. But neither was there any growth of those highest poetic characteristics 'in which Hugo's magnificent poetry was always weak—such as self-dominance, serenity, and that wise sweetness of a balancing judgment, equitable alike to the slave in the field and to the king on his throne, which belongs to the mind we call dramatic, whether the dramatist be the writer of *Œdipus* or the writer of *Hamlet*.'

The *Légende des Siècles* offers a bewildering maze of things, sweet, beautiful, and sublime. It scintillates with the brilliant lights of genius as the vault of heaven is fretted with the glittering stars. Yet what is perhaps nobler still, as Mr. Swinburne has said, 'Over and within this book faith shines as a kindling torch, hope breathes as a quickening wind, love burns as a changing fire. It is tragic, not with the hopeless tragedy of Dante, or the all but hopeless tragedy of Shakespeare. Whether we can or cannot share the infinite hope and inviolable faith to which the whole active and suffering life of the poet has borne such unbroken and imperishable witness, we cannot in any case but recognise the greatness and heroism of his love

for mankind. As in the case of Æschylus, it is the hunger and thirst after righteousness, the deep desire for perfect justice in heaven as on earth, which would seem to assure the prophet's inmost heart of its final triumph by the prevalence of wisdom and of light over all claims and all pleas established or asserted by the children of darkness, so in the case of Victor Hugo is it the hunger and thirst after reconciliation, the love of loving-kindness, the master-passion of mercy, which persists in hope and insists on faith, even in face of the hardest and darkest experience through which a nation or a man can pass. Hugo's poetic masterpiece, to translate his own language concerning it, had its rise in the past, in the tomb, in the darkness and the night of the ages; but permeating all is the regenerating light of a mighty hope.

The poet published in 1881 *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*. The work which bore this fanciful title of the four winds of the Spirit was divided into four distinct sections—the Book Satiric, the Book Dramatic, the Book Lyric, and the Book Epic. The wind of Victor Hugo, however, is chiefly of the lyric kind. It 'is like a fine sou'wester, warm and bright, but deeply charged

with tears. Over the bitter and eager wind of satire, for instance, he has no real command, and none over that bracing north wind of masculine thought and intellectual strength which is necessary to vitalize epic and drama.' So it was complained, and not without force or reason, that while it would be impossible to praise the lyrical portions of his work too highly, the satirical lacked subtlety and delicacy to make it effective; the epic wanted a larger freedom of natural growth; while situations intended to be dramatic rarely rose above the merely theatrical. The play in which these situations occur is concerned with the absolute equality of all men in regard to the great human passions. Cynicism or conventionality may for a long period encrust a man, but there comes a time when the heart will have its way. Hugo's latest illustrator of this truth, Duc Gallus, rescues a peasant girl from a proposed marriage with a brutal fellow whom she loathes, but rescues her with the deliberate intention of making her his mistress. Though surrounded with splendour, the girl soon pines and breaks her heart through sheer loneliness, and at last in despair she kills herself by means of a poisoned ring. The



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pure love of their souls—that is, fastens their bodies to the stake for the purpose of saving from the everlasting fires of hell both their souls and their bodies. The poet shows how the idea gradually mastered him until it became irresistible as fate. The chief point in the plot well illustrates this. Torquemada having been condemned as a fanatic by the Bishop of Urgel, is ordered to be bricked up alive in a vault. He is rescued from his living tomb by two lovers, Don Sanche and Donna Rosa. Torquemada swears to be their eternal friend, and subsequently saves them from the wrath of the King. Sanche and Rosa are just being freed when the former relates the manner of the deliverance of Torquemada from his tomb. Sanche had used as a lever on that occasion an iron cross which hung upon the tottering wall. ‘O ciel! ils sont damnés!’ exclaims Torquemada, when he hears this. In his view the lovers are now condemned to eternal perdition, but in order to save their souls he sends their bodies to the stake. It need scarcely be said that the author, in ascribing honesty and other characteristics to the bloodthirsty Inquisitor, gives a more exalted view of him than is taken by impartial history. But the

play must be read for its poetry and its scenic effects, which are magnificent.

A prose work by Hugo, to which considerable interest attaches, was published in 1883, under the title of *L'Archipel de la Manche*. As its title implies, it deals with the Channel Islands, in one of which the author found for so long a time his home. From the literary aspect, the work suffers when compared with its author's verse, which alone can be grandly descriptive—at least since the production of his earlier romances. But for its glimpses of the inhabitants of Guernsey, and its occasional touches of rich local colour, this work may be turned to with pleasure and advantage.

CHAPTER XVIII

HONOURS TO VICTOR HUGO.

UNLIKE many other great men, Victor Hugo was not compelled to wait for a posthumous recognition of his powers. His genius was incontestable; he towered far above all his contemporaries; and the universal acknowledgment of his talents left no room for jealousy. Hence writers and artists of all classes, and of varying eminence, combined with their less distinguished fellow-countrymen in paying homage to one who has shed undying lustre upon the French name.

The chief ovations accorded to the poet I must briefly pass in review. Several revivals of his best-known dramas have taken place of recent years, but the most striking of these celebrations was undoubtedly that at the Théâtre Français, on the 25th of February, 1880. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the original representation



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Hugo's poems and romances, the speaker said: 'Time, O glorious master, takes no hold upon you; you know nothing of decline; you pass through every stage of life without diminishing your virility; for more than half a century your genius has covered the world with the unceasing flow of its tide. The resistance of the first period, the rebellion of the second, have melted away into universal admiration, and the last refractory spirits have yielded to your power. . . . When La Bruyère before the Academy hailed Bossuet as father of the Church, he was speaking the language of posterity, and it is posterity itself, noble master, that surrounds you here, and hails you as our father.'

At the word 'father' the whole audience rose, and took up the salutation. When quiet was restored M. Delaunay suggested that the poet should be solicited for a new dramatic work. The enthusiasm was renewed at this suggestion, and it may well be imagined that the acclamations reached their culminating point when Sarah Bernhardt rose and embraced the aged author of *Hernani*. On this occasion Victor Hugo read his address of thanks, which was brief and pregnant in its allusions. 'Before me

I see the press of France,' said Hugo. 'The worthies who represent it here have endeavoured to prove its sovereign concord, and to demonstrate its indestructible unity. You have assembled to grasp the hand of an old campaigner, who began life with the century, and lives with it still. I am deeply touched. I tender you all my thanks. All the noble words that we have just been hearing only add to my emotion. There are dates that seem to be periodically repeated with marked significance. The 26th of February, 1802, was my birthday; in 1830 it was the time of the first appearance of *Hernani*; and this again is the 26th of February, 1880. Fifty years ago, I, who am now here speaking to you, was hated, hooted, slandered, cursed. To-day, to-day—but the date is enough. Gentlemen, the French press is one of the mistresses of the human intellect; it has its daily task, and that task is gigantic. In every minute of every hour it has its influence upon every portion of the civilized world; its struggles, its disputes, its wrath resolve themselves into progress, harmony, and peace. In its premeditations it aims at truth; from its polemics it flashes forth light. I propose as my toast the prosperity of the

French press, the institution that fosters such noble designs, and renders such noble services.'

On the 27th of December, 1880, there was a grand festival at Besançon in honour of the poet, its most illustrious son. The chief inhabitants of the town, and the visitors from Paris, assembled at the Mairie, and proceeded thence to the Place St. Quentin. The Mayor was accompanied by M. Rambaud, chief secretary to the Minister of Public Instruction, and General Wolff, commander of the *Corps d'Armée*. There were also present deputations from the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, officers, university professors, a representative of the President of the Republic, the Rector of the Academy, the Prefect, the Municipal Councillors, and a large body of members of the press. The poet was represented by M. Paul Meurice. The whole of Besançon was *en fête*. In a street facing the Place St. Quentin a large platform had been erected, and here the proceedings took place. A beautiful medallion affixed to a house near the platform was uncovered by the Mayor. This medallion represented a five-stringed lyre with two laurel branches of gold, and there was an inscription which, by the poet's express de-



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himself: 'It is with deep emotion that I tender my thanks to my compatriots. I am a stone on the road that is trodden by humanity; but that road is a good one. Man is master neither of his life nor of his death. He can but offer to his fellow-citizens his efforts to diminish human suffering; he can but offer to God his indomitable faith in the growth of liberty.' The marble bust of the poet was crowned with a wreath of golden laurel, and while the whole audience stood, a band of one hundred and fifty musicians performed the *Marseillaise*. Cries of '*Vive Victor Hugo! Vive la République!*' were heard as the audience left the theatre.

An ovation such as few sovereigns have ever received was accorded to Victor Hugo by the City of Paris on the 27th of February, 1881. The day before, the poet had completed his seventy-ninth year, and by the French people this is regarded as entitling to octogenarian honours. A celebration took place which was compared with the reception of Voltaire in 1788. The Avenue d'Eylau, where Victor Hugo resided, was densely thronged, and the poet, being recognised with his children and grandchildren at an upper window of his house, was cheered

by a vast multitude, estimated by unsympathetic observers at 100,000. The Municipality had erected at the entrance to the Avenue lofty flag-staffs decorated with shields bearing the titles of his works, and supporting a large drapery inscribed '1802, Victor Hugo, 1881.' Early in the morning the Avenue was thronged with processions consisting of collegians, trades unions, musical and benefit societies, deputations from the districts of Paris and from the provinces, etc. A deputation of children, bearing a blue and red banner with the inscription, '*L'Art d'être Grand-père,*' and headed by a little girl in white, arrived at the house, and was received by Victor Hugo in the drawing-room. The little maiden, who recited some lines by M. Mendès, was blessed by the venerable poet. Among other incidents of the day, the Paris Municipality drew up in front of the house, and Victor Hugo read to them the following speech: 'I greet Paris, I greet the city. I greet it not in my name, for I am naught, but in the name of all that lives, reasons, thinks, loves, and hopes on earth. Cities are blessed places; they are the workshops of Divine labour. Divine labour is human labour. It remains human so long as

it is individual ; as soon as it is collective, as its object is greater than its worker, it becomes Divine. The labour of the fields is human ; the labour of the towns is Divine. From time to time history places a sign upon a city. That sign is unique. History in 4,000 years has thus marked three cities, which sum up the whole effort of civilization. What Athens did for Greek antiquity, what Rome did for Roman antiquity, Paris is doing to-day for Europe, for America, for the civilized universe. It is the city of the world. Who addresses Paris addresses the whole world, *ubi et orbi*. I, a humble passer-by, who have but my share in your rights, in the name of all cities, of the cities of Europe, of America, of the civilized world, from Athens to New York, from London to Moscow ; in thy name, Rome ; in thine, Berlin —I praise, with love I hail, the hallowed city, Paris.'

A stream of processions then filed past the house, many of them bearing imposing bouquets, which were deposited in front of Hugo's residence. The musical societies alone exceeded 100 ; strains of the *Marseillaise* were now and again audible, and the entire Avenue, nearly a



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idea of union was inseparable from a grand festival. 'There were enough days in the year given to what separated men. It was well to give a few hours to what brought them together, and there could be no better opportunity than the festival of an unrivalled poet, an eloquent apostle of human brotherhood, whose use of his genius was greater than his genius itself, the oneness of his life consisting in the constant ascent of his spirit towards the light.' In the evening of the day there was a Victor Hugo concert at the Conservatoire, and at many of the theatres verses were recited in his honour. On the night of the 25th a special performance was given at the Gaité of *Lucrece Borgia*, which had not been produced for ten years. The house was filled, all the notabilities of Paris being present, while the poet himself also appeared for a short time. The celebration generally was one triumphant success.

In honour of Hugo's eightieth birthday, on the 26th of February, 1882, the French Government ordered a free performance of *Hernani* at the Théâtre Français. Crowds stood outside for hours waiting for admission, and 2,300 persons managed to squeeze themselves into

seats intended to accommodate only 1,500. The poet and his grandchildren were present during the last act, and were loudly applauded. Hugo's bust was placed on the stage at the close of the piece, and verses in his honour by M. Coppée were recited. On the preceding evening 5,000 persons had attended his reception, when the committee of the previous year's grand celebration presented him with a bronze miniature of Michael Angelo's 'Moses.' In acknowledging the gift, the poet said, 'I accept your present, and I await a still better one, the greatest a man can receive: I mean death—death, that recompense for the good done on earth. I shall live in my descendants, my grandchildren, Jeanne and Georges. If, indeed, I have a narrow-minded thought it is for them. I wish to ensure their future, and I confide them to the protection of all the loyal and devoted hearts here present.'

Yet one more celebration I must notice. On the 22nd of November, 1882, the Théâtre Français gave a brilliant performance of Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'Amuse*. It has already been seen that this piece was first produced on the 22nd of November, 1832, amid such a scene of

disorder and tumult that the Government forbade its further representation. From that time forward it had never been produced until this fiftieth anniversary in 1882. It was the subject of preliminary conversation for weeks in Paris, and great anxiety was manifested on the subject of seats. It was stated that if the house, which had only provision for 1,500 persons, could have been made to accommodate 10,000, there would still have been an insufficiency of places to satisfy all the supplications with which the Théâtre Français was besieged. The intrinsic value of the work, however, was not the first thought of those who engaged in the feverish quest for seats, which for a full month possessed all fashionable, artistic, literary, political, diplomatic, and financial Paris. It was chiefly the desire to do honour to the veteran poet. With regard to the representation itself, the splendour of the mounting, the beauty of the accessories, and the historical fidelity of the costumes, transcended all expectation. Never was a piece placed on the stage with greater, or indeed probably equal, art.



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with these details warmly contradicted the statement that Victor Hugo was an infidel; on the contrary, he was a firm believer in God and in a future state; and this, as we have seen, the poet himself confirmed. Even when in his octogenarian period it was the poet's habit to rise with the day, summer and winter, and to work until nine. He then allowed himself an hour's rest for breakfast and his morning constitutional, after which he again sat at his desk, mostly pursuing his intellectual labours, till five in the afternoon. Work being concluded, he dined at half-past six, and invariably retired to rest at ten. On one occasion, speaking of his future works, the poet said, 'I shall have more to do than I have already done. One would think that with age the mind weakens; with me it appears, on the contrary, to grow stronger. The horizon gets larger, and I shall pass away without having finished my task.'

On one occasion, a poor old woman was so delighted with the poetry of her grandson, aged eighteen, that in the fulness of her heart she sent his verses to Victor Hugo. The poet thus spoke of this incident to a friend—'In spite of myself, I must hurt this worthy woman's feel-

ings by not replying to her letter ; the verses of her grandson are simply mine, taken from *Les Contemplations*. I can't anyhow write to say I find my own verses beautiful—I can't encourage plagiarism ; and I won't tell the grandmother that her grandson is a liar.'

Much has been written concerning Hugo's skill as a draughtsman. It appears that this own discovery of his powers in this direction was made in a little village near Meulan, where he stopped to change horses, when travelling with a lady in a diligence. He went inside the village church, and was so struck by the graceful beauty of the apse that he made an attempt to copy some of the details, using his hat as an easel. He obtained a fair *souvenir* of the place, and for the first time realized how beneficially copying from nature might be combined with his literary pursuits. After that he always delighted in sketching architectural peculiarities of fabrics which remained in the original design, and had not been 'improved' by modern handling.

He never took artistic lessons, but by constant practice he acquired considerable facility in representing a certain class of subjects, ruined castles with deep shadows, gloomy landscapes,

stormy skies, etc. M. Ph. Burty and several writers and artists of the first class have expressed their admiration of his artistic work, and its striking effects. His drawings were chiefly illustrative of his own thoughts. They were employed either to develop his poems, or to serve as pictorial commentaries upon his own literary creations. Théophile Gautier wrote: 'M. Hugo is not only a poet, he is a painter, and a painter whom Louis Boulanger, C. Roqueplan, or Paul Huet would not refuse to own as a brother in art. Whenever he travels he makes sketches of everything that strikes the eye. The outline of the hill, a break in the horizon, an old belfry—any of these will suffice for the subject of a rough drawing, which the same evening will see worked up well-nigh to the finish of an engraving, and the object of unbounded surprise even to the most accomplished artists.' M. Castel collected many of Hugo's early drawings into an album, and published them with the object of furthering the poet's work among poor children. Théophile Gautier supplied an introduction to the album, and it had an excellent sale. A number of land and sea pieces, bearing Hugo's signature, passed into the possession of



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brought the whole of the family practically under the same roof. The house is three stories high, and the poet's study was on the first floor, where he lived in a kind of bower, looking out upon one side in the direction of the Avenue, and on the other towards a pleasant garden, with a lawn surrounded by flowers and shaded by noble trees. The daily post to Hugo's house was an important matter, for he had a stream of communications from all parts of the world. If a poetaster in America or Australia thought he possessed immortal genius he could not rest content until he had received, or at least attempted to obtain, Victor Hugo's imprimatur. There were many things the kindly veteran would smooth over in order not to wound sensitive minds bitten with the *cacoëthes scribendi*. The poet was also very accessible to personal callers, so much so that it was said you had only to put on a black coat, pull at his bell, and there you were. Sometimes his good-nature was imposed upon, as will happen with all men, little or great. An amusing story is told of a cabman who, after driving the poet one day, refused to take the fare, on the ground that the honour of having Victor Hugo in his vehicle was a sufficient reward. The

author of *Notre-Dame* asked his admiring Jehu to dinner; but when the meal was over, and Hugo might naturally have thought they could cry quits, the guest drew a manuscript from his pocket with the ominous words, 'I also am a poet!' Greatness is thus not without its penalties.

A good deal of interest attaches to Victor Hugo's manuscripts. Madame Drouet was the poet's literary secretary for thirty years, and during all that period she copied with her own hand the manuscripts of his various works as he wrote them. This was done to guard against the danger of the originals being lost, or mangled by printers. A writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* has furnished some interesting details respecting the manuscripts, which will be valuable as showing how the poet worked. What he effaced, he says, was so covered with ink, applied in a horizontal direction, that nobody will ever be able to make it out. When he wanted to get a subject well into his mind's eye he drew it sometimes with great finish of detail on the margin. There is something in several of the manuscripts reminding one of Doré's illustrations of the *Contes Drôlatiques*; while others bring to mind

Albert Dürer's orfèvrerie. All Victor Hugo's important manuscripts have been bequeathed to the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The writer to whom I have just referred further adds these personal details respecting the poet and his habits: 'Victor Hugo occupied the room looking on the garden in which he died. The window of his chamber is framed with ivy, and opens on an ivy-clad balcony. A vast old-fashioned four-post bed, with a flat, short drapery of antique brocade round the roof, stands in an alcove. The poet's body lay on it after death. A dressing-room is at the head, and a small closet used as a wardrobe at the foot. The desk is massive, and made with shelves, on which precious books are placed. One of them is the volume of the *Contemplations*, paid for by public subscription when Victor Hugo was in exile, and presented to Madame Victor Hugo. The vignettes and other illustrated portion of the work were done by the artists who had known, admired, and loved her husband. Between every second page there was a blank sheet, upon which a literary celebrity wrote a thought, good wish, or sentiment. Michelet led off; Louis Blanc, Jules Janin, Théophile Gautier, Dumas père,



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was equally fond of walking about Paris, revisiting old sites associated with personal or historic events.

It will have been seen in the course of this volume that Victor Hugo was much tried by domestic affliction. Both his sons died young, Charles leaving the two children, Georges and Jeanne, of whom their grandfather was so fond. Madame Charles Hugo, the mother of these children, married afterwards, as already stated, M. Lockroy, the Extremist Deputy and journalist. The poet's second daughter, Adèle Hugo, fifty years of age, is in an asylum in the neighbourhood of Paris; and from the Paris correspondent of the *Times*, and other sources, I glean the following information concerning her: Thirty years ago she married an officer of the English Navy, while her father was living at Guernsey. The marriage was contrary to the wishes of Victor Hugo, who refused to have further intercourse with his daughter. She went to India with her husband. Some years afterwards she came back to Europe insane, under the care of a negro woman, who had become attached to her. Her father secured her admission to an asylum, and visited her there every week. On these journeys

to St. Mandé to see his daughter, he would take the Muette-Belville omnibus, with a correspondence to Vincennes, and every Christmas he sent 500 francs to the conductors of these lines. His pockets were stuffed with bonbons and little articles of finery which it gave Adèle pleasure to receive. It is stated that her madness takes the gentle and childish form. She would always know Victor Hugo, but did not understand why he did not take her to live with him. He placed her under the guardianship of his and her old friend Vacquerie, and made no attempt to evade the law, in virtue of which she comes, as alleged, into a fortune of £120,000, and half the income which may be derived from the copyright of Victor Hugo's works. The poet is said to have regretted during his later years his harshness in connection with his daughter's marriage, and her melancholy history cast over him one of the few sorrowful shadows that visited his life.

Hugo possessed one valuable piece of landed property, a plot of ground bought by him for 337,365 francs in the Avenue which bears his name. It is covered with trees, which surround a bright patch of lawn, and throw deep shadows over the ground, grateful to the eyes of those

accustomed to the dusty streets of Paris. It says not a little for his vigour and apparent hold upon life, that after he had passed his eighty-second year he intended to superintend the erection of his new house, which was to be built entirely from his own designs. A large portion of Hugo's fortune—which was estimated altogether at about four million francs—was invested in Belgian National Bank shares, English Consols, and French Rentes.

For several years before his death Victor Hugo had renounced public speaking, his latest efforts in this direction having brought on an indisposition which obliged him to go to Guernsey for rest and quiet. He had also ceased to issue political appeals and manifestoes, though agitators of all shades of opinion (including the Irish Nationalists) endeavoured to enlist his sympathies. Occasionally he would give the weight of his name to a movement with whose ramifications he was not very familiar; but it was only for a time that he yielded to such blandishments. He attended the Senate periodically until the very last, although his deafness prevented him from following the course of the discussions.



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CHAPTER XX.

THE POET'S DEATH AND BURIAL.

WHEN the news that Victor Hugo had been seized with a serious illness was made known on the 17th of May, it excited a painful sensation not only in Paris and throughout France, but also in London, Vienna, and other European capitals. The great age of the sufferer caused the gravest apprehensions, notwithstanding his well-known vigour and robustness of constitution.

The last public act of the poet was to stand sponsor to M. de Lesseps at the Academy reception, held towards the close of April, 1885. In accordance with his customary practice he was thinly clad, although the weather was inclement, and the rain fell while he stood for a considerable time in the quadrangle. His friends dreaded the result of this exposure. It seems

that the spectators, as if with the presentiment that they would not see him again, gave him a prolonged cheer, 'which he acknowledged with the seriousness of a man already looking back, as from a distance, on the world's transient satisfactions. He then sat down, apparently absorbed in listening to what he called the inner voices, scarcely raising his head to respond to the plaudits evoked by the passage in his honour.' A fortnight after this incident, Hugo received his friend Lesseps and his family to dinner, according to his weekly custom. It was noticed by the poet's relatives, though it escaped the attention of his godson of the Academy, that the host was far from being in his usual health. Nevertheless, he exerted himself with his wonted courtesy, and remained with his guests until they departed at a late hour. He was already suffering from a cold, caught, it is said, on the 13th of May, when he took one of those omnibus rides to which, as we have seen, he was very partial. Overtaxed by his exertions in entertaining his friends, and unable to shake off the effects of the cold, serious symptoms began to develop themselves. In addition to an affection of the heart, congestion of the lungs

set in. Although for some time he battled heroically with the disease, he at length looked for and anticipated death.

A correspondent of the *Daily News*, reporting a conversation with an intimate friend of the Hugo family upon the poet's last illness, said: 'He tells me that he never heard of a more terrible struggle between organic vitality and the morbid causes that are at work. Victor Hugo would like to die, so that it cannot be said it is his strength of will that enables him to resist the disease from which he is suffering. Contrary to what some of the journals have said, he is a very bad patient. Last night, when after straining his whole body to breathe, he had fallen into a prostrate state, a strong blister was prescribed, and the three doctors agreed to stay and watch its effects. As one of them was going to apply it, Victor Hugo jumped up and not only pushed him away but the others also, with a muscular force that astounded them. He rushed to and fro, convulsively throwing up his arms, and clutching the furniture. In the intervals between the crises, the poet likes to have his granddaughter near him. He feels that death has come to summon him, and that



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succour and consolation so much needed in these cruel ordeals.' M. Lockroy at once replied as follows: 'Madame Lockroy, who cannot leave the bedside of her father-in-law, begs me to thank you for the sentiments which you have expressed with so much eloquence and kindness. As regards M. Victor Hugo, he has again said, within the last few days, that he had no wish during his illness to be attended by a priest of any persuasion. We should be wanting in our duty if we did not respect his resolution.' As the correspondent of the *Times* observed, the Archbishop could scarcely have expected an acceptance of his offer, for Victor Hugo was not the man to play the revolting death-bed farce of Talleyrand; and to have died a Catholic would not even have been a reversion to the creed of his childhood, for, strictly speaking, he was not brought up a Catholic. His mother, though a Vendéan Royalist, was a Voltairian; and when she entered her sons at the monastic college of Madrid, she declared them Protestants in order to exempt them from the confessional. But all through life Hugo was a Theist, and ran the gauntlet of much criticism from sceptical friends in consequence of his firm belief in the Deity.

There seemed at one time a possibility of the poet's recovery, though he did not himself share this view. 'I only wish that death may come quickly,' he exclaimed the day before his death; and again, in passing through a severe spasmodic fit, he said: 'It is the struggle between day and night.' The patient's sufferings were very great, and those about him could desire nothing but his release. For several days he was kept alive only by injections of morphia. On the evening of the 21st he rallied sufficiently from his lethargy to embrace his two grandchildren, both in their 'teens, and to utter a few words. His breathing was temporarily easier, though the action of the heart continued to be very feeble. At five o'clock on the following morning the last agony commenced. Almost his last words, addressed to his granddaughter, were, 'Adieu, Jeanne, adieu!' His final movement of consciousness was to grasp his grandson's hand. The pulse gradually grew weaker and weaker, and at half-past one o'clock he raised his head, made a gesture as if bowing, and fell back lifeless.

In the afternoon M. Nadar attended, to photograph the death-bed. M. Bonnat, whose striking

portrait of Hugo was one of the features of the Salon a few years ago, took a sketch, and M. Dalou, the sculptor, made a cast of the head. M. and Madame Jules Simon were the first amongst a long list of notabilities to pay a visit of condolence to the family. Early on the morning of the poet's death a crowd had assembled in the Avenue Victor Hugo, and the painful news of his decease rapidly spread through their midst, and was soon known throughout Paris.

When the Senate met, shortly after the melancholy event, the President, M. Le Royer (a Protestant), said: 'Victor Hugo is dead. He who for more than sixty years has excited the admiration of the world and the legitimate pride of France has entered into immortality. I will not sketch his life; everyone knows it. His glory is the property of no party or opinion; it is the appanage and inheritance of all. I have only to express the deep and painful emotion of the Senate, and the unanimity of its regret. In sign of mourning, I have the honour to ask the Senate to adjourn.' M. Brisson then said: 'The Government joins in the noble words of the President of the Senate. To-morrow the



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ing religious beliefs in France was set at rest by the publication of the following unsealed memorandum handed by the poet to M. Vacquerie on the 2nd of August, 1883 :—‘ I give 50,000 francs to the poor. I wish to be carried to the cemetery in their hearse. I refuse the prayers (*oraisons*) of all churches : I ask for a prayer (*prière*) from all souls. I believe in God.—VICTOR HUGO.’ Though rejecting creeds, it was seen that the illustrious departed had not rejected belief. On one point M. Renan expressed the universal feeling when he wrote as follows :—‘ M. Victor Hugo was one of the evidences of the unity of our French conscience. The admiration which enveloped his last years has shown that there are still points upon which we are agreed. Without distinction of class, party, sect, or literary opinion, the public, for some days past, has hung upon the heartrending narratives of his agony ; and now there is nobody who does not perceive a great void in the heart of the country. He was an essential member of the church in whose communion we dwell—one might say that the spire of that old cathedral has crumbled into dust with the noble existence which has carried the banner of the ideal highest in our century.’

At the opening of the French Chamber on the 23rd, M. Floquet pronounced an eloquent eulogium upon Victor Hugo. He spoke of France as having lost one of her best citizens, who had enriched the treasure of national glory, had restored courage in adversity, and after having suffered everything for the Republic had inculcated concord and tolerance. He described him as a hero of humanity, who for sixty years had been the champion of the poor, the weak, the humble, the woman, and the child, and as the advocate of inviolable respect for life, and of mercy to those who had gone astray. His name ought to be proclaimed, not only in the academies of artists, poets, and philosophers, but in all legislative assemblies, on which he had sought to impress the inspirations of his all-powerful and benevolent genius.

In proposing a vote of 20,000 francs for a national funeral, M. Henri Brisson said:—'Victor Hugo is no more. While living he became immortal. Death itself, which often adds to the reputation of men, could not add to his glory. His genius dominates our century. Through him France irradiated the world. It is not letters alone that mourn, but our country and

humanity—every reading and thinking man in the whole world. As regards us Frenchmen, for the last sixty-five years his voice has entered into our inner moral life and our national existence, bringing into them all that is sweetest and brightest, most touching and most elevated, in the private and public history of that long series of generations which he has charmed, consoled, kindled with pity or indignation, enlightened, and warmed with his own fire. What man of our time is not indebted to him? Our democracy laments his loss. He has sung all its grandeurs; he has wept over all its miseries. The weak and lowly cherished and venerated his name. They knew that this great man had their cause in his heart. It is a whole people that will follow him to the grave.'

Loud acclamations followed this speech, and the proposal was adopted by 415 votes to 3.

The news of the poet's death excited as much emotion in the French provinces as in the capital. The Municipal Councils of Lyons, Marseilles, and Toulon closed their sittings as a mark of grief, after having appointed delegates to represent them at the funeral. The Municipal Council of Besançon sent the following address to the



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A desire having been expressed that Victor Hugo should be buried in the Panthéon, the feeling spread rapidly through almost all classes. In pursuance of this wish, M. Anatole de la Forge moved in the Chamber of Deputies that the Panthéon, known as the Church of St. Geneviève, should be secularized, in order that Victor Hugo's remains might be buried there. Urgency was voted for the motion by 229 against 114 votes, but the Minister of the Interior requested the House to postpone the vote upon it until the next sitting.

It may be here stated that the Panthéon was commenced in 1764 as a church, completed in 1790 as a Walhalla, was a church from 1822 to 1830, and again from 1851 until 1885. The interments in it of Mirabeau, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Marat are matters of history, as are also the expulsions which followed. Mirabeau's body was publicly expelled by the Terrorists; Marat's by the Anti-Terrorists; and Voltaire's and Rousseau's clandestinely by the Legitimists. In 1881 the last French Chamber passed a Bill secularizing it; but this did not pass through the Senate.

Two days after the discussion upon M. de la

Forge's motion, the *Journal Officiel* published a series of documents which summarily disposed of the matter. Ministers having advised President Grévy that an opportune moment had arrived for accomplishing the wish expressed by the Chamber in 1881, and for restoring the building to its original destination as a burial-place for illustrious Frenchmen, two Presidential Decrees were made, one declaring the Panthéon to be henceforth a mausoleum for great men who should have merited the gratitude of the nation, and the other directing that the body of Victor Hugo should be laid there. In the Chamber an order of the day was proposed by the Comte de Mun, condemning the Presidential Decree as a provocation to Catholics and as an act of feebleness; but this was rejected by 388 to 83. Another motion expressing the Chamber's entire approval of the letter and spirit of the Decree was then submitted, and carried by 338 to 90. Hugo's family consented to the body being taken to the Panthéon, but insisted on its being carried in a pauper's hearse from the Arc de Triomphe, where it was to lie in state, to the national mausoleum.

At six o'clock on the morning of the 31st of

May the remains of the poet were transferred to the Arc de Triomphe, where waggon-loads of flowers and memorial wreaths had been constantly arriving. All the shops, cafés, and restaurants in the Avenue Victor Hugo, and near the Triumphal Arch, had remained open all night. 'There was nothing disorderly,' wrote a correspondent, 'and the impression everything gave was one of sadness, though all day the aspect of the Place de l'Étoile had been really festive. The cenotaph was visible from the Tuileries. The coffin was covered with a silver-spangled pall, which rose from a base covered with black and violet cloth, violet being regal mourning, and Victor Hugo having attained an intellectual and moral sovereignty over France.' Early in the day the crowds of human beings in all the avenues leading to the Place de l'Étoile were very dense. As evening drew on the aspect was like that of some great fair. Medals bearing *Les Châtiments*, *Napoléon le Petit*, and other legends, were offered for sale, as well as medallions and numberless other memorials of the dead. The display of flowers was wholly unparalleled. At night a flood of electric light poured upon the Place de l'Étoile, revealing the



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live in the memory of all who witnessed it. What distinguished the procession in honour of Victor Hugo from the only one comparable with it, that of Gambetta, observed the correspondent of the *Times*, was not only its vast size, which was without precedent, but also the distinct sentiment which dominated both its members and the crowd. It was at once the triumph of the democracy and an illustration of its power. In the case of Gambetta, France beheld a statesman cut off in his prime, with all the dreams of hope and ambition before him. In the case of Victor Hugo, it was a veteran in letters entering into his rest. 'At the tidings of his death, all France, all parties, seemed to claim him; and it was the loss of the poet, the thinker, the humanitarian, which was first deplored. Then, by degrees, party claims were put forth. The poet and thinker disappeared, and this made his funeral less sublime. The crowd paid homage to the political weaknesses of his latter years, to the democratic philanthropist, to the Extremist Senator, to a Hugo, in fact, whom posterity will ignore, while honouring him with a place among great literary geniuses.' The struggle over his remains ended by other parties giving way, and

the people for whom he had laboured claiming him as their especial champion and prophet. But certainly, whether for king, priest, statesman, or man of letters, Paris and the provinces never before turned out in such vast multitudes.

The wreaths arriving from all parts were placed on twelve cars, drawn by four or six horses each, and they formed a brilliant spectacle. Before six o'clock in the morning there were already four rows of spectators assembled on each side of the Champs Élysées. The authorities, with considerable skill and foresight, had directed most of the societies likely to bear what might be qualified as seditious banners to meet in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Here accordingly, at a little before nine o'clock, were massed various free-thought societies, nearly all of them bearing red flags or banners, from Boulogne, Asnières, Argenteuil, Suresne, Bicêtre, Sèvres, Puteaux, and other places. Some of the banners were ornamented with Phrygian caps. Close by, in the Avenue de la Grande Armée, the proscripts of 1851-52 had also a red banner. By ten o'clock there were fifteen red flags close to the Arc de Triomphe. At the corner of the Rue

Brunel M. Lissagaray, M. Martin, and some thirty well-known anarchists had responded to the call of the Revolutionary Committee. They seemed, however, lost in the crowd. Twice this little group of anarchists tried to unfurl a red flag, but being so closely watched, they had not time to hoist the colour in the air before flag-bearer and flag were both captured. By half-past ten the anarchists, having already lost two flags, abandoned the Rue Brunel. A little before eleven o'clock a Commissioner of Police, in plain clothes, accompanied by half-a-dozen policemen and a company of Republican Guards, marched down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and, accosting the bearer of every red flag that seemed at all objectionable, lifted his hat, and demanded that the emblem should be covered over. Although disturbances had been feared none occurred. The Red Republicans and anarchists (whom Victor Hugo had more than once condemned) were but as a drop in the bucket, compared with the myriads of other citizens assembled to do honour to the dead. Although some arrests were made, the greatness of the whole occasion dwarfed their significance, and the most imposing spectacle within living memory



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delivered from a tribune erected on the left of the catafalque. The first speaker, M. Le Royer, President of the Senate, described Victor Hugo as the most illustrious senator, whose Olympian forehead, bowed on his breast in an anticipated posture of immortality, always attracted respectful homage from all his colleagues. He never mounted the tribune but to support a cause always dear to him—the Amnesty. Amidst apparent hesitations, he had all his life consistently pursued a high ideal of justice and humanity, and his moral action on France was immense. He unmasked the sophisms of crowned crime, comforted weak hearts, and restored to honest men right notions of moral law, which had been momentarily obscured.

The speech of the day, however, was delivered by M. Floquet, President of the Chamber of Deputies. In tones which could be distinctly heard throughout the vast arena, and with much eloquence of gesture, the orator said: ‘What can equal the grandeur of the spectacle before us, which history will record! Under this arch, constellated with the legendary names of so many heroes, who have made France free, and wished to render her glorious, we see to-day the

mortal remains, or rather, I should say, the still serene image, of the great man who so long sang the glory of our country and struggled for her liberty. We see here around us the most eminent men in arts and sciences, the representatives of the French people, the delegates of our departments and communes, voluntary and spontaneous ambassadors, and missionaries from the civilized universe, piously bending the knee before him who was a sovereign of thought, an exile for crushed right and a betrayed Republic, a persevering protector of all the weak and oppressed, and the chosen defender of humanity in our century. In the name of the nation we salute him, not in the humble attitude of mourning, but with all the pride of glorification. This is not a funeral, but an apotheosis. We weep for the man who is gone, but we acclaim the imperishable apostle whose word remains with us, and, surviving from age to age, will conduct the world to the definite conquest of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This immortal giant would have been ill at ease in the solitude and obscurity of subterranean crypts. We have elevated him there, exposed to the judgment of men and Nature, under the grand sun which illuminated

his august conscience. Whole peoples realize the poetical dream of this sweet genius. May this coffin, covered with the flowers of the grateful inhabitants of Paris, which Victor Hugo loved to call the *Cité Mère*, and of which he was the respectful son and faithful servant, teach the admiring multitude duty, concord, and peace.'

M. Floquet concluded by reciting the verses beginning '*Je hais l'oppression d'une haine profonde*' ('I hate oppression with a profound hatred'). This address, which elicited enthusiastic approval, was followed by one from M. Goblet, Minister of Public Instruction. The Minister said that Victor Hugo, while living, figured in the glorious pleiad of great poets—with Corneille, Molière, Racine, and Voltaire. He would always remain the highest personification of the nineteenth century, the history of which, with its contradictions, its doubts, its ideas, and aspirations, had been best reflected in his works. The speaker laid stress upon the profoundly human character of Victor Hugo, who represented in France the spirit of toleration and peace. M. Émile Augier, who appeared in the uniform of the Academy, said: 'The great poet that France has lost vouchsafed me a place in



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clapping of hands. Chopin's *Marche Funèbre* was the music played at the opening of the ceremonial. After this came in slow movement the strains of the *Marseillaise*, which were soon followed by the *Chant du Départ*, and then by the Girondins' celebrated chant, *Mourir pour la Patrie*. Faithful to the stipulation of his will, Victor Hugo's body was conveyed to its last resting-place in the poor man's hearse—that is to say, the cheapest hearse which the *Pompes Funèbres* provide. As the corpse was being removed from the cenotaph every head was uncovered. The artillery of the Invalides and of Mont Valérien boomed out a farewell salute. 'The procession,' wrote a correspondent of the *Daily News*, 'had for vanguard a squadron of mounted gendarmes, followed by General Sausier, the Governor of Paris, and the Cuirassiers, with band playing; twelve crown-laden cars, the band of the Republican Guard, the delegates of Besançon carrying a white crown, the French and foreign journalists, the Society of Dramatic Authors, and the delegates of the National and other theatres. The cars were surrounded by the children of the school battalion. There was no crown on the pauper's hearse. The friends

of the deceased held the cords of the pall, and Georges Hugo walked alone, behind. He was in evening dress, and looked a young man. His face is handsome, and his air distinguished. His mother, sister, and different ladies and other friends of the family walked at a short distance behind him. The crowd of people was astounding round the Arch of Triumph, and in the Champs Élysées' side-ways the windows, balconies, house-roofs, and even the chimney-tops were crowded.'

The very trees seemed to bud with human beings; and the crowd of spectators in the streets was so deep and serried that it was impossible for any wearied senator, savant, or other venerable person to get out if once imprisoned. All along the route of the procession heads were religiously uncovered as the hearse passed. The school battalion guarded it, and then came many companies of boyish militia. Gymnastic societies in white, blue, and red flannel shirts, with white trousers, gaiters, and caps; delegations of the learned societies, political clubs, printers, publishers, newspapers, foreign Radicals, literati, philanthropical societies, fire brigades, humane societies, trades unions,

came in processional order. Each group was distinctly separated from the other. Down the broad Champs Élysées the procession moved with great facility, as all carriages had been cleared away before eight o'clock in the morning. All the available standing-room of the broad causeway was filled with an eager throng; but the most sublime sight was presented at the Place de la Concorde. The corner from the Champs Élysées to the bridge was walled off by the troops, so that an innumerable multitude was able to collect at this point. Not content with this, the banks of the Seine, down to the water's edge, on both sides of the bridge, were thickly studded with people, and every floating barge or boat was dangerously loaded with spectators. Far up the broad stretch of the Avenue the procession, with its thousand crowns and banners, could be seen slowly descending. Many groups had not yet left the Arc de Triomphe when the head of the procession reached the Panthéon. A dense mass of spectators had gathered in and around the Place de la Concorde; but perhaps no portion of the route was so crowded as the Rue Soufflot, which leads from the Boulevard St. Michel to the



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past. Dragoons, Republican Guard, and Line were in their turn acclaimed by the multitude, pleased by their martial appearance and their light tread after the fatigues of the day. Then came the blare of the Artillery trumpets, followed by those of the Dragoons, and at precisely a quarter to seven the last soldier made the last salute to the remains of Victor Hugo. A statue of Hugo in his famous posture of reverie fronted the Panthéon. This papier-mâché statue represented Victor Hugo watching the long procession that did him honour. It was a trifle; but there was a touch of tender thoughtfulness in this reminder to the surging multitude that they must not forget the man who was being borne to the grave.'

Thus ended a funeral pageant worthy, on the whole, of the poet and the nation—a pageant in which were to be found representatives of all classes of the French community. Victor Hugo, whose genius recalled the elder glory of French literature, now sleeps in the Panthéon. While he differed from the illustrious men of the past, having neither the wit of Rabelais nor Molière, the classic dignity of Corneille, nor the philosophic depth of Voltaire, he had a greatness, though of

a different kind, equal to their own. He therefore joins them as an equal. He has given to French literature a new departure ; for every book he has written, while wet with human tears, is yet stamped with the terrible earnestness which possessed his spirit, and made immutable by the Herculean strength of his genius.

CHAPTER XXI.

GENIUS AND CHARACTERISTICS.

VICTOR HUGO, though simple in nature, was many-sided in intellect. As I approach the conclusion of my task, I feel how truly great the sum of this man's work was, notwithstanding the flaws which disfigured it. And in proportion to its greatness is the difficulty of appraising, or even of approximately appraising, its value. This task belongs to a writer or writers yet unborn; for neither in his own nor even in the next generation does such a man of genius as Hugo—an author *sui generis*, one utterly unlike all others—assume his distinctive niche in the Walhalla of literature. But there are some suggestions of a general character which may be offered respecting his work, and these will naturally fall under four headings—political, social, moral or religious, and literary.



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of the German and the logical hardheadedness of the Briton. He is hypersensitive and emotional, not argumentative and judicial. He only knows that he has ideas, and that every man who opposes those ideas is an enemy of the human species, and must be put out of the way. This was proved again and again in that terrible year of Revolution, 1793, when the friends of Reason sent each other to the block as they successively gained the upper hand. One would think that this was a sufficient baptism of blood; but it was not so; the tale has been renewed at intervals, and the communistic horrors of 1871 added another fearful page to the grim catalogue. French politics are a succession of storms; the lightning breaks, the thunder rolls, and the deluge follows; then, for a time, the sky clears and the sun shines brilliantly; but the clouds return after the rain; the barometer becomes demoralized; and electrical disturbance is once more the order of the day.

But in the intervals of sanity in the French political world—I use the word ‘sanity’ in its larger sense—great and noble work is done, work worthy of the world’s admiration. When the French mind conceives projects of ameliora-

tion, it conceives them with boldness and generosity. In this lies the safety-valve of the people, and also the best hope for the future of the race. Men like Hugo are the men to suggest and to push forward these great conceptions for the national welfare. They may have few political principles as such, but the political sympathies of such a man as Victor Hugo have more force and weight than the most orthodox and irreproachable doctrines of a hundred smaller men. While politicians may be struggling for unimportant details, men of great sympathies are mighty to the moving of mountains. As a practical politician, then, let it be frankly admitted that Hugo was a failure ; that in his speeches he was frequently rhapsodical ; and that he could take no initiative in practical legislation. All these are matters in which lesser intellects might, could, should, would, and do succeed. But in that higher region where the eternal principles of justice come into play, where sublime benevolence holds her seat, where by a quick and living sympathy universal humanity is made to feel a universal brotherhood, then Victor Hugo had a political illumination to which none other of his contemporaries could lay claim.

From the political to the social is but a step, and that a natural one. It cannot be said of Hugo that he was liberal in his social theories and aristocratic in his practice. He had a courteousness of nature that made him equally esteemed, and had in reverence, by such an one as a king or an emperor, and the meanest of his compatriots who called upon him for advice or aid. If he endeavoured to teach the higher social life to others, he at least led the way by setting before himself only such aims as were noble and humane. He was the very soul of truth in all his relations, and if he were not the equal of Rousseau as a great social teacher, he far transcended the author of the *Contrat Social* in his irreproachable life and his deep personal sympathies. One writer has said that 'Victor Hugo's own strongest influence is but a breath of the influence of Rousseau.' This is a deliverance as unhappy as it is dogmatic. There is neither necessity nor appositeness in placing the two writers in such juxtaposition. France before Rousseau was not the France of Victor Hugo; the former had work of an originative character to do in the social sphere, as Victor Hugo had in that of literature. But while Hugo



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of publicity, he believed he was doing a great social work, and helping on that golden age of happiness for which he laboured. In his earnestness and enthusiasm, he might commit, and doubtless did commit, errors of judgment ; but then without these very qualities of earnestness and enthusiasm all the great things associated with his name could have had no birth. Where we gain much, we can easily forgive a little. Victor Hugo had a conscience, and as a man amongst men, pleading for men, he threw it all into his social work. In Jean Valjean he will never cease to plead, though he himself is dead. He has given to the sufferings of humanity a voice which will continue to speak in tones of pathos and of sadness until the last of those sufferings and social wrongs shall have passed away. Of many devastating spirits has the world been called upon to say that they made a solitude and called it peace ; but of Victor Hugo we may say that he found humanity a bleak and cheerless wilderness, and endeavoured to make it blossom as the rose.

Yet loving the world and humanity as he did, and feeling that the earth was ' bound by gold chains about the feet of God,' Hugo, as I

have before said, has been claimed by some as an unbeliever. As though any great poet who had come to years of discretion could be a materialist or an infidel. So far from seeing no God in the universe, the poet as a rule is God-intoxicated. I shall be reminded, perhaps, of Lucretius and Shelley, but even these, as the exceptions, would only serve to prove the rule. The Roman, however, was philosopher first, and poet afterwards ; while as for the atheism of Shelley, it was a spasmodic experience due to a revolt against authority—not a deep-settled conviction—and an experience out of which he was rapidly growing at the time of his death. No poet of the first order has ever been an atheist, and Victor Hugo was no exception to the rule. While discarding religious systems, he was, in fact, profoundly religious. He never swerved in this matter from the position he held in 1850, and which he thus explained at the close of a speech on public instruction, ‘God will be found at the end of all. Let us not forget Him ; and let us teach Him to all. There would otherwise be no dignity in living, and it would be better to die entirely. What soothes suffering, what sanctifies labour, what makes

man good, strong, wise, patient, benevolent, just, and at the same time humble and great, worthy of liberty, is to have before him the perpetual vision of a better world throwing its rays through the darkness of this life. As regards myself, I believe profoundly in this better world, and I declare it in this place to be the supreme certainty of my soul. I wish, then, sincerely, or, to speak more strongly, I wish ardently for religious instruction.' There is surely nothing vague or nebulous about this. No man could express himself more clearly or emphatically if directly questioned upon the great and momentous topics of God and immortality. As a religious teacher, then, Hugo may be justly claimed ; for the whole weight of his name and influence was thrown upon the side of those profound religious convictions which have been the consolation of the human race, and which have knit man in indissoluble bonds to the Divine.

What shall I say of Victor Hugo from the literary point of view? His true glory is that he revived French literature—created it afresh, as it were—and was himself the best representative of its new excellences. But this subject is



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Mr. Swinburne, and from his numerous tributes I may select one passage that is a kind of triumphant summary of the rest. It is the last stanza from his New-Year Ode to Hugo, in the *Midsummer Holiday, and other Poems* :

‘Life, everlasting while the worlds endure,
 Death, self-abased before a power more high,
 Shall bear one witness, and their word stand sure,
 That not till time be dead shall this man die.
 Love, like a bird, comes loyal to his lure ;
 Fame flies before him, wingless else to fly.
 A child’s heart toward his kind is not more pure,
 An eagle’s toward the sun no lordlier eye.
 Awe sweet as love and proud
 As fame, though hushed and bowed,
 Yearns toward him silent as his face goes by ;
 All crowns before his crown
 Triumphantly bow down,
 For pride that one more great than all draws nigh :
 All souls applaud, all hearts acclaim,
 One heart benign, one soul supreme, one conquering name.’

Making allowance for the fervour which a peculiarly fervid singer throws into his admiration, there is much truth in this metrical tribute to the literary and personal worth of the great poet. Substantially the same high view of Hugo is held by Lord Tennyson and other literary men in this country. But, with regard to criticism

in particular, the writer from whom I have just quoted was even happier still in his prose comparisons. He remarked in his essay on *La Légende des Siècles* that 'Hugo, for all his dramatic and narrative mastery of effect, will always probably remind men rather of such poets as Dante or Isaiah than of such poets as Sophocles or Shakspeare. We cannot, of course, imagine the Florentine or the Hebrew endowed with his infinite variety of sympathies, of interests, and of powers ; but as little can we imagine in the Athenian such height and depth of passion, in the Englishman such unquenchable and sleepless fire of moral and prophetic faith. And hardly in any one of these, though Shakspeare perhaps may be excepted, can we recognise the same buoyant and childlike exultation in such things as are the delight of a high-hearted child—in free glory of adventure and ideal daring, in the triumph and rapture of reinless imagination, which gives now and then some excess of godlike empire and superhuman kinship to their hands whom his hands have created, and the lips whose life is breathed into them from his own.' And again, 'In his love of light and freedom, reason and justice, he

not of Jerusalem, but of Athens; but in the bent of his imagination, in the form and colour of his dreams, in the scope and sweep of his wide-winged spiritual flight, he is nearer akin to the great insurgent prophets of deliverance and restoration than to any poet of Athens, except only their kinsman Æschylus.' Even the most superficial reading of Hugo must leave an impression of magnificent powers, of powers which in given circumstances might have produced many and different forms of greatness. He had that exaltation of the intellect and imagination, that lofty range of mental force, which moulds centuries and moves the world.

But there are special literary qualities in Hugo which should be noticed. First among them is his extreme conscientiousness. His natural eloquence has sometimes been regarded as a snare to him, and yet in all the details of his work he was rigidly exact, so far as the most minute search could enable him to be. This was apparent in *Notre-Dame*, and especially so in *Les Misérables*, where he devoted a volume to a description of the battle of Waterloo, or Mont St. Jean, as the French designate it. Before writing on this, he lived for some time in the



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none of whom has more than 1,500 words at his disposal. Théophile Gautier, a studious man and a dilettante, used to boast to his friends of possessing 3,000. "But," he used to add, "I might toil to the last day of my life without attaining to the vocabulary of Hugo." Genius apart, merely by his knowledge and use of his mother-tongue, Hugo is the Rabelais of modern days. This is the minor side of his glory, I allow; but critics ought not to neglect it, or they will lead people to form false ideas.'

As to Hugo's human passion, it agonizes in almost every page of his writings. He is nothing if not intensely human. And his weird and powerful effects are heightened by that undertone, that minor chord of music which he touches more often than the more jubilant major notes. 'The still sad music of humanity' is for ever beating in his ear, and he translates its moving pathos into words. A mind of this stamp feels that it can rarely turn to the humorous, and accordingly it is objected that he has no sense of humour. The charge is true in the main, for the grim humour of some of his situations may be better expressed by the epithet of grotesque. He lacked just this saving

sense of humour to place him on a level with the greatest writers—or rather with those writers who are greatest in the delineation of human nature and its passions; for we have great writers, such as Dante and Milton, who are equal strangers with Hugo to the humour which plays about the pages of Shakspeare.

But Hugo is pre-eminent in other qualities. He is firmly and uncompromisingly veracious. No special correspondent who ever described a battlefield could be more vivid and telling in his reminiscences. There is the stamp of reality and truthfulness upon all that he has written. With a gloomy magnificence of imagery he has described scenes and events that are now immortal in literature. There is a grand spontaneity in his utterances—an eloquence that springs from the heart as much as from the head; while over all his poems and romances a noble halo has been thrown which is the reflex of the innate nobility of the man.

M. Émile Montégut has observed that Hugo is master of all that is colossal and fearful. His imagination prefers sublime and terrible spectacles: war, shipwreck, death, and primitive civilizations, with their babels and convulsions—

these attract him. How well, also, can he imitate the plaintive cries of the ocean under the tempest which torments it! Let him but paint a feudal ruin and you will be made to feel all its imposing horrors; or a palace of Babylon, and you will realize its massive splendours. He knows the secrets of the Sphinx, and of the monstrous idols; he is familiar with the burning deserts of Africa, and the horrors of hyperborean countries. In the domain of the weird he is sovereign king, and no one will dispute with him. In other fields he may have rivals, but in the region where the fantastic mingles with the superhuman he has no equal.

But there is yet another side to Hugo which English critics have been just to note—it is that concerned with his human creations. While he may revel in the scenes which M. Montégut depicts, his heart is mostly in his human creations. And with regard to his treatment of these, it has been observed that the spectator is put outside the scene, and can do nothing but look on breathless, while amid mist and cloud, with illuminations fiery or genial, as the case may be, the great picture rises before him, each actor detached and separate, some in boldest



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The workmanship is often wonderful ; but it is not the workmanship which strikes us most—it is the abundant, often wild, sometimes unguided and undisciplined touch of genius which inspires and expands and exaggerates and dilates the words it is constrained to make use of—almost forcing a new meaning upon them by way of fiery compulsion, to blazon its own meaning upon brain and sense, whether they will or not. We know no literary work of the age—we had almost said no intellectual work of any kind—so possessed and quivering with this indescribable but extraordinary power.'

Hugo's works are undoubtedly in parts eccentric, and all too frequently extravagant ; but this is the nodding of Homer. His conceptions are gigantic, and his figures truly dramatic ; and these are the chief things with which we have to do. In his superb excellences he stands alone—he is unique. His table is weighted with intellectual sustenance ; so great is his abundance that a myriad writers could be fed from the crumbs which fall from his table. From the literary point of view we must not forget his chief distinction—that he effected the most brilliant and complete revolution that has been wit-

nessed in the history of French literature. He changed the whole face of art in French poetry, and destroyed for ever the poetry of conventionality. He has endowed his native language with new nerve and sensibility; he has given it a fresh and vital force, and the effects of his influence upon the nation and literature of which he was the brightest ornament must be radical and abiding.

One quality only, or so it seems to me, Hugo lacked to place him on a level with the few great master spirits of the world. He wanted the universality of Homer and Shakspeare. Whenever the *Iliad* is read, the power of that mighty story is felt, and methinks that had I been born of any other than that English nationality of which I can boast, there is still something in Shakspeare which would have moved me as no other writer does. It is that secret power which draws all hearts to him—‘that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin,’ and unites all men in admiration of his singular genius. Hugo is great also, but he has not that Shakspearean greatness which compels the tribute of all other peoples, as it receives the willing homage of his own. His noble poems and romances, with their sonorous

eloquence, their rapid changes, their varied effects, remind me of Nature on an autumn day. The gloomy cloud gathers in the heavens, the lurid lightning darts from its bosom, the thunder rolls and reverberates in the mountains; but anon the tempest passes, the heavens open, and the glorious and beneficent sun once more smiles upon the world. So Hugo is a mixture of thunder and sunshine; of smiles and tears. No man had ever a greater heart—Shakspeare, and few others only, a more expansive intellect. He lacks the grand impartiality and the majestic calm of the author of *Hamlet*; but his soul is filled with the same love of his species, and it is large enough to embrace all the sons of humanity. His is a name which any nation might well hold in everlasting honour. Though his life be ended, the splendour of his fame has but just begun; for the works infused and moulded by his genius, and into which he threw so much of passionate energy, of a noble idealism, of radiant hope, of moral fervour, and of human sympathy, will assuredly confer upon him glory and immortality.