



VICTOR HUGO.

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A Sketch of his Life and Work

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BY

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## INTRODUCTORY.

"I HAVE seen Heidelberg. I seemed to see the works of Victor Hugo, when posterity has passed over them, when the words have grown rusty, when the superb frontage of the literary temple has clad itself with the solemnity of old ruins, when time, like hoary ivy, has spread itself over the beauty of the verse. Old, and with cracks in them, the hemistichs will keep the thunder-smitten majesty of these Sarmatian kings, struck by bullets full in the breast. And the vast palace of the master's poetry will remain, great and charming, like this giant of grace, mingling Albert Dürer and Michael Angelo, jumbling together Rabelais and Palladia, having Gargantua in its tun, and the Invicta Venus in its chapel."

It is in such terms that the *Journal de Goncourt* expresses the estimate formed by the two brothers as to Hugo's works and the future that awaits them. The simile is, in its details, a little forced, and, after its authors' manner, somewhat fantastically picturesque; it has the merit, however, of comparing great things with great, and of reposing on a possible foundation. If such comparisons be useful or admissible at all, it is open to us to see much in common between the literary temple left by Hugo and mediæval castles, and though Hugo's works are not yet centuries old,

still less in ruins, they are treated already, by the sprightly journalist, in England and in France alike, as altogether out of date ; they have, like the Sarmatian kings, had hurled at them, of late years especially, many a critical bullet, of greatly varying effectiveness and weight. Whether MM. de Goncourt's forecast of their fate be correct or not, time will decide ; in the meantime, France, most of all modern countries given to rapid and clamorous upheaval in things artistic, has seen, in the space that has elapsed since Hugo's death, at least one new literary movement form and establish itself. In art, as in politics, revolutionary leaders are not, as a rule, over-respectful towards the old order that gave them birth ; Hugo himself gave but grudging admiration to Racine ; the young French poets of to-day accord, in many instances, scant homage to Hugo, The poets of an elder generation are, on the contrary, with few exceptions, enthusiastic Hugolaters, and the recent publication of their idol's posthumous *Dieu* awoke in Parisian journals a chorus of acclamation which drowned the sneers of the younger reviewers. The two conflicting forces confront each other, and the moment is perhaps not inopportune for an attempt to resume the character and work of one who, whatever be the place ultimately adjudged him by posterity, has been, for his own country pre-eminently, and to some extent abroad, one of the chief intellectual influences of the nineteenth century.

# VICTOR HUGO.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HUGO THE WRITER IS HUGO THE MAN.

“EVERY one who writes, writes one book; this book is himself.” This is the opening sentence of Hugo’s preface to the *Edition Définitive* of his works. Written on the poet’s seventy-eighth birthday, when his life’s labours, all but over, could fitly, by the labourer himself as by others, be reviewed and appraised, the words are in one sense a truism, in another a phrase, characteristic in expression, which sums up its author’s genius. They are a truism in so far as it is evident that no man can give out more than is in him, that he cannot, to use a colloquial image, leap beyond his own shadow; if they be taken to mean that from the works of every writer we can create an exact portrait of the man, gather the ideas, the emotions, the preferences, personal to him, reconstruct the physiognomy of his soul, then these words can apply, in their fulness, to one only of the two great classes of writers, to that class of which Hugo himself is, in our century at least, the most imposing example.

The favourite modern method of psychological criticism could hardly, unaided by evidence for their

lives, refashion the artist from the works of Racine or Balzac. In spite of efforts of incomparable, and occasionally intelligent, industry to extract his personality from his plays, Shakespeare remains little more than a luminous name.

Where such writers have merely signed, Hugo has sealed. His own heart is caught throbbing where the heart of Racine or of Shakespeare would seem to beat only through the creatures of their brain. Apart from the fact that much of his work is professedly and frankly personal—the expression of his sentiments and opinions in regard to contemporary persons and events—his own figure is ever visible directing the figures who move in his romances or on his theatre, prompting their actions and inspiring their utterances.

Not that the characters of Hugo's stage are mere marionettes, mere dolls, richly dressed and lifeless, through which their artist speaks stately sentiment or sonorous phrase; on the contrary, they live with a life at times, in its intensity, even lurid. But it is not the life of many-voiced humanity. The poet who has attempted, and so often triumphantly, almost every kind of literary composition, has perhaps proved his title to "a soul of a thousand voices";<sup>1</sup> it is never difficult to trace back each of these voices to its source in his own soul. Be their garment modern plain cloth, mediæval armour, or the costumes, slashed with silk, of the Renaissance; their nationality French, German,

<sup>1</sup> "Mon âme aux mille voix, que le Dieu que j'adore  
Mit au centre de tout comme un écho sonore."

(*Les Feuilles d'Automnes*).

or Spanish; their station a lackey's or a king's; the children of Hugo's imagination have marked family resemblance, on all are stamped the features of their father. No matter in what environment or in what connection they speak, the tones of their voices are singularly alike; they are, notably in all crises of passion or action, the tones in which their creator, when speaking in his own person, expresses himself. Ruy Blas, in the play of that name, denouncing the un-patriotic selfishness of the Spanish grandees; M. de Saint-Vallier, in *Le Roi s'amuse*, apostrophising Francis I.; the Burgrave Job, in *Les Burgraves*, ordaining that honour shall be paid to the beggar who appears at the feast; all these give vent to their anger or their compassion in accents quite similar to the accents of Victor Hugo when he launches invectives against oppression or pleads for universal charity.

Hernani, set under the bann of the Empire by Don Carlos, replies:—

"As you will,  
All the world else rests mine to brave you still.  
Where your power looms not, there for me is room.  
—And when the world is mine?  
—Then mine the tomb."

Hugo, defying Louis Napoleon, declares for final word:—

"If a mere thousand cleave to right, well, I am of them! Then  
If but a hundred stay, this Sylla yet I bid beware;  
If ten alone are faithful, I shall be among the ten;  
If one man only stands untamed, I shall be that one there!"

The two voices here are obviously identical; read in



connection with any of his dramatic works, play or romance, any volume of the poet's verse will afford numerous parallels of the same order.

In his earlier days, Hugo's heroes, as *Hernani*, *Didier*, *Ruy Blas*, were made directly after his own image; they are ardent, tender, indomitably obstinate, somewhat magniloquently magnanimous. Later, they ceased to be himself, to become instead one of his favourite virtues, flung intact into human form, as *Jean Valjean* is charity, *Gilliat* self-sacrifice, draped in ideal colours and elevated above humanity. In the same way, Hugo has given us several charming feminine types, *Esmeralda*, *Dea*, *Déruchette*, *Doña Sol*, but these are rather the concrete expression of what their creator finds delightful in womankind than actual studies of woman in "her infinite variety," as she ranges with Shakespeare from *Cleopatra* to *Imogen*, with Racine from *Phèdre* to *Bérénice*, with Balzac from *Valerie Marneffe* to *Marguerite Claës*.

Nothing is less absolute than a critical generalisation. There are, scattered throughout Hugo's verse, many dramatic lyrics where the poet has, with much felicity, sung, so to say, in fancy dress; similarly, in bypaths of his dramas and romances, we come upon characters wholly outside of his personal orbit. *Don César de Bazan*, *Gringoire*, *Gavroche*, for instance, sceptical and irresponsible scantily-clad Bohemians, have, in their grace as in their frailties, little in common with their staid and stately creator; various historical persons also, as *Louis XI.* and *Louis XIII.*, are drawn as history supposes them to have been.

But these and others are secondary personages, lightly, though happily, sketched in; it remains true that Hugo's principal characters are moulded upon his own personality, or spun from his own soul. And this is true of his villains as of his heroes and heroines, of his marplots as of his martyrs of love or duty.

Fashioned out of air and unknown to humanity are such frantic figures—like Webster's Cornelia "in several forms of distraction"—as Lucrece Borgia, Claude Frollo, the duchess Josiane; in the author's maturity, however, his ordinary type of darkness is the hero of his maturity reversed. A peculiarly detested vice or form of ignorance takes human shape, is set in relief against a specially admired virtue, and we have Javert, the incorruptible pedant of the hard letter of the law; Torquemada, the inflexible bigot of one fanatical idea. These, and their like, are personified agencies of evil or error rather than reasonable human evil agents; they are, as are the enlightened and virtuous people opposed to them, the creation of a temperament whose moral vision saw all things in large masses, to the neglect of modifying shades. Hugo, a master and finally a slave of literary antitheses, beheld the world and men's souls under the immense and eternal antithesis of light and darkness, good and evil, rigorously defined, irreparably separated. On the one hand, Bishop Myriel and Dea, saints without spot; on the other, the Sieur Clubin and the couple Thénardier, mere moral monsters.

The monsters imagined by his genius were not always only in the moral order. Henri Heine, who

persistently disparaged Hugo, tells a story, according to which, in a conversation he had with Renduel, Hugo's publisher, shortly after the appearance of *Notre Dame de Paris*, M. Renduel informed him that, having one day surprised Hugo in déshabille, he had ascertained the fact that Quasimodo's creator was himself hunchbacked, or, more accurately, hunch-hipped. It is thus that the poet of the *Buch der Lieder* accounts for the fondness for describing deformities on the part of his brother bard.

The story, eminently characteristic of the malice-loving Heine, is probably of his invention; in any case, it is not necessary to penetrate the secrets of Hugo's dressing-room in order to discover the reason of his literary partiality for a class of beings indissolubly associated with his name, the class of physical monstrosities, to some extent redeemed, as Quasimodo and Gwynplaine, by beauty of soul, or accentuated, as Triboulet, by a soul that corresponds with the body.

It was not, as is sometimes alleged, to an ingrained strain of morbidity in their creator's nature that these twisted-backed and gaping-mouthed people owed their birth. Of the two rocks in wait for a writer, Hugo not infrequently strikes on the commonplace; he steers clear, in a measure rare in his century, of the morbid. He appreciated all the ordinary pleasures, he shared all the ordinary ambitions, he felt all the ordinary sorrows, of his kind; he preferred always the scent of a cornfield, even of a cabbage garden, to the odour of haschisch; in all essentials, no saner, healthier genius ever lived. His morbidity, such as it is, is of the sur-

face and the senses, not of the soul, and the physically abnormal beings who invade his novels and his plays are sufficiently accounted for by his own frequently abnormal physical vision, by the tendencies of his fancy when it touches external things; a vision and a fancy that produced, in his poems, so much strange metaphor and imagery.

When, for instance, he speaks of Truth as "the calm and supreme eye on God's brow which man one day pierced out,"<sup>1</sup> or again, makes the poet request the eagle to come into his forehead, since its diameter admits the great bird's girth,<sup>2</sup> it is only natural that a lyrical vision of this sort should, when it finds dramatic expression, have corresponding outcome in the creation of objects grotesque and distorted. And thus, to support Humanity acting Ulysses to the Deity's Polyphemus, to encourage the eagle spread or fluttering within the poet's brain, arises the horrid array of of persons halt and blind, "Borgnes, Bossus, Boiteux," from *Han d'Islande* to *L'Homme qui Rit*.

But is it necessary to advance further instances of the intimate connection between Hugo's personality and his work? Far from essaying to conceal or deny it, Hugo constantly admits, justifies, obtrudes this connection; more, the assertion of its existence in all genius of the highest order formed an essential part of his artistic profession of faith. Many of his plays and almost all his novels were written in avowed mainten-

<sup>1</sup> See the piece beginning "L'aurore s'allume," in *Les chants du Crépuscule*.

<sup>2</sup> See the piece entitled "Duo," in *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*.

ance of this relationship; their primary object, as their author in homilies attached to them declares, was not to represent nature, but to advocate and illustrate some ethical theory proper to himself. An appendix or introduction, explaining the purpose of the work, is wanting to few of his volumes, verse or prose. In the preface to *Les Rayons et Les Ombres* he lays down various instructions for the poet who would compose the representative modern poem. These instructions are naturally all on the lines of what he himself felt capable of doing or aspiring to do. "Finally," he declares, "he will put there that profound self-portraiture which is perhaps the largest, the most general, and the most universal work that a thinker can achieve."

After such a revealing phrase of self-portraiture, it cannot surprise us that Hugo's work, poetry or prose, lyrical, dramatic, reflective, even, as it sometimes nominally is, critical, should be, in varying degrees of directness, merely the expression of his exuberant personality; that he is, indubitably, to be classed with the creators who have constructed life and men after their own hearts rather than in accordance with the so-called facts of existence; that he ranks with the preachers of an ideal rather than with the painters of reality, that he was, in other words, essentially a lyricist.

With a temperament of this kind, when it results in a mass of writings which in quantity probably exceed those of any author who ever wrote with a like constant care for literary form, one literary sin, the deadliest, was occasionally inevitable. No man can

flood seventy volumes with himself and obtain always for this self the interest of others. Where so much exists there must be something tiresome. There are pages of Hugo which are tiresome to a degree rare among French writers of eminence; there are others which are a permanent glory for French literature; there are many more which, for mere interest, for their power to stir the pulse and stimulate the blood, are scarcely to be surpassed in the literature of any country or time.

It does not follow, in fine, that the theory and practice of his art above developed necessarily lowers Hugo's literary position. But it does hence follow that his work cannot be truly or intimately studied or understood apart from the workman, his personality, his environment, his age, the events in which he had share. For such adepts of the purely psychological method of criticism as the late M. Émile Hennequin, Hugo is an admirable subject. M. Hennequin<sup>1</sup> indeed, has, in regard to Hugo among others, strained this method almost to the point of absurdity. Yet, without wholly assenting to the analysis which seeks to explain an author's preference in metaphors by his preference in meats, and the colour of his imagination by the colour of his hair, one must admit that Hugo claims, for adequate comprehension, some measure of mental anatomy. He has left much that the mere æsthetic faculty finds complete and lovely in itself; but to gain real insight into what he has created it

<sup>1</sup> See his *Quelques Écrivains Français*.

must be viewed in connection with the creative intelligence of the man behind it, with the circumstances of his life, with the movements, in thought and action, in which he took so effective and passionate a part.

## CHAPTER II.

### HUGO'S CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YEARS.

VICTOR HUGO, who was not exempt from the occasional frailties which humanize genius, has, more than once, called attention to his ancient lineage, and the majority of his biographers, accepting his authority, have recognised in him the descendant of an old Lorraine family, in his own words, "noble since the year 1531."

In order to become a scion of this illustrious stock, it was necessary for the poet to suppress his grandfather who, as M. Biré has clearly proved, was lord, in Lorraine indeed, not of a castle but of a carpenter's shop. The truth is that Hugo, on his father's side as on his mother's, sprang from the people. His paternal grandfather, Joseph Hugo, the son of a husbandman, was a master carpenter at Nancy; his maternal grandfather, Trébuchet by name, was an armourer at Nantes. And if, in accordance with an inspiration, or favourite freak, of modern scientific criticism, we are to regard the poet's genius as already existing in parcels amidst the various minds and bodies of his progenitors, and in their temperaments and vocations to seek the causes of his own, the internal evidence from Hugo's character might alone suffice to stamp him as the offspring of the laborious and persevering working classes of France,



and not of her idly-indifferent and disdainful aristocracy.

For, Alfred de Vigny, shut "in his ivory tower" from the clamours around him, and launching thence, from time to time, his superb and scornful verses; Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, content, rather than compromise with commercial civilization, to starve upon his dreams: these are the real representatives, in letters, of a class which dwells apart, and still fights against the conditions created by the Revolution. But Hugo, ambitious on every side, indefatigably industrious, of much patience till stung by injustice into fiery rebellion, gifted with that keen sense for opportunity which caused Sainte-Beuve to reproach him with having been the first speculator in literature, Hugo was a child of the Revolution and of the masses which made it.

Joseph Leopold Sigisbert Hugo, the poet's father, born at Nancy in 1773, was one of a family of twelve, the issue of two marriages. A carpenter's son by birth, he died lieutenant-general and a Count of the Empire. His brilliant career was doubtless due, in part, to this soldier's share in the qualities—excellent brains and excellent energy in using them—afterwards, in a different sphere, rendered so effective by his son. Part of his advancement Count Hugo also owed to the chances of the shifting and turbulent time in which his youth was cast,—a time when so many sons of the people carved for themselves with their swords, before their beards were fully grown, a splendid name. He has left Memoirs of his career. Written after it

was closed, during the peace of the Restoration, they reveal in him a defective memory, or an over-vivid imagination, similar to that which betrays itself in the like compositions of his son.

In 1792-94, Leopold Hugo was serving as captain against the royalists of La Vendée. While engaged in hunting "the Whites," he made the acquaintance of Mlle. Sophie Trébuchet, who lived with her father at Nantes. Sophie, like her father, was a royalist, but this contrast of political creed did not prevent the growth of an attachment between the young people, an attachment sealed by a civil marriage at Paris in 1796.

The principle of contrast, indeed, would seem to have been potent towards effecting this union. Physically, the bridegroom was tall and largely made; his portrait shows a face big-featured and good-humoured, somewhat heavy perhaps, on a pair of very broad shoulders; the bride was small and spare, not pretty, but intelligent-looking. Their characters were so little alike that, in the sequel, they proved incompatible. He came from the eastern, she from the western, limits of France, and it is significant that Victor Hugo, so little representative of central French genius, should have had parents both born near the borders. We may, if we will, see in his appreciation of all large effects of Nature—the ocean, the wind, sky-spaces—an inheritance from the Breton blood of his mother, though she, personally, cared for none of these things; while the semi-Teutonic vein on the other side may have been responsible for that taste for

vague metaphysical declamation which has led some Frenchmen to regard him as an *esprit allemand*. One may note also, as a tribute to the doctrine of heredity, that Hugo, "ever a fighter," counted five soldiers on his father's side. Many of his mother's relatives were connected with the church, and the poet, however little of dogma he ultimately believed, tended more and more to become sacerdotal in the matter and manner of what he wrote.

Two years after marriage Madame Leopold Hugo gave birth to a son, who was named Abel; a second, called Eugène, followed two years later. Finally, on the 7th Ventôse, year X. of the Republic (26th February, 1802) Victor Marie Hugo was born at Besançon, where his father had been appointed *chef de bataillon*. He was christened Victor after his godfather, General Lahorie, and Marie after his godmother, Madame Delelée, the wife of an aide-de-camp of Moreau.

In the celebrated piece which opens *Les Feuilles d'Automne* the poet has recounted the circumstances of his birth. There he tells what a weakling he was when newly-born, how all despaired of him except his mother, and to her, in verses full of emotion, he pours forth his gratitude for the love and care which preserved the life she had given and made him twice her child.

The little Victor's earliest unhappiness was a short separation from his mother, ever adored. The family were together at Marseilles when Madame Hugo found it necessary to pay a visit to Paris on business connected with her husband's promotion. The father

writes to her,—“Your Abel, your Eugène, and your Victor speak of you daily. . . . Victor is constantly calling for his mamma, but his poor mamma is not able to hear.” Bonbons only partially consoled him. “He goes away gloomily, sucking them as he goes.” Victor, who was then hardly two years old, remembered nothing, in later life, of this period of his existence; he remembered nothing either of the subsequent wanderings of the family between Corsica and Elba, to which islands his father's battalion had been ordered, and where he learned to lisp in Italian.

In the autumn of 1805, Leopold Hugo, who had been promoted to the rank of “gros-major,” received orders to join the Army of Italy. Though Victor's health was better than his babyhood had threatened, it was still far from showing promise of the robustness it afterwards attained, and the father, fearing for him as for the rest of the family a continuance of this wandering life, sent the children with their mother to Paris, where they took rooms in what was then No. 24, Rue de Clichy. The site of this house, now demolished, was on the present Place de la Trinité. From here dated Victor Hugo's earliest recollections, for the most part, and characteristically, connected, not with sentiments or emotions, but with objects that appealed to his eyes. He remembered the courtyard of the house, with its well and cattle trough, where a goat drank; he remembered also the school in the Rue du Mont-Blanc (now the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin), whither he was sent, and the schoolmaster's daughter, Mademoiselle Rose, putting on her stockings in the

morning, while he, the youngest of the school-children, watched her, seated on her bed.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime Italy had been, as the phrase was, pacified. Lieutenant-Colonel Hugo had captured the patriot brigand Fra Diavolo (for whom the sprightly music of Auber has ensured a long posthumous celebrity), and Joseph Bonaparte, in gratitude for the service thus rendered by his French officer, had appointed him colonel of the Royal Corsican regiment, and Governor of Avellino. Secure at last of a fixed position, the new governor wrote for his wife and children to come and join him. In October, 1807, they accordingly left Paris, and after a quiet, though then necessarily cumbrous, journey, of which Victor remembered various details, reached their resting-place. Avellino, like the rest of Calabria, is subject to earthquakes, and the family lived for six months there in a crazy old marble palace. In the course of their stay here Colonel Hugo inscribed his youngest son's name on the roll of his regiment, and Victor thus became entitled to boast,—

“I who a soldier was while yet a child.”

In June, 1808, Joseph Bonaparte, at his brother's imperial and imperious behest, changed the throne of

<sup>1</sup> A reminiscence of this incident may have inspired a quatrain of the song chanted by the insurgents on the barricade in *Les Misérables*.

“O place Maubert, O place Dauphine !  
Quand, dans le taudis frais et printannier,  
Tu tirais ton bas sur ta jambe fine,  
Je voyais un astre au fond du grenier ! ”

Naples for the throne of Spain. Colonel Hugo, who owed him so much, felt bound to accede to his request to accompany him to his new kingdom; this fresh voyage brought with it a fresh separation. The children delighted in the free, sunny, lazy life of Avellino, but it was too free, too sunny, to fit them for encountering the conditions of modern civilization. In the interests of their education they had to return to Paris. Their mother had preceded them thither, and the father, after speaking in affectionate terms of the two elder sons, writes to her:—"Victor, the youngest, exhibits a great inclination for study. He is as steady as his eldest brother, and very thoughtful. He speaks little, and always to the purpose. His remarks have often struck me. He has a very sweet face."

Victor was now growing quite a big boy, and with this second sojourn in Paris commenced for him a period fragrant in ever-cherished memories.

Madame Hugo was indifferent to Nature in her large aspects. During the Italian wanderings she had been interested chiefly in two things: the uncertainty of finding food and lodging, and the certainty that, wheresoever these were found, various small inhabitants of the country would feed and lodge on her children and herself. But though unmoved by mountains or seas, she had a passion for gardens. The house she ultimately decided for on her return to Paris was chosen because its garden was a spacious wilderness full of flowers and trees. To this garden, and to the memories that clustered among its branches, Victor

Hugo loved to revert. He has lavished on it, in verse and prose alike, many lines of affection and regret.<sup>1</sup> With the house attached to it, it formed part of what, before the Revolution, had been the convent of the Feuillantines; the sympathetic description of a convent and conventual life, which Hugo long afterwards inserted in *Les Misérables*, was no doubt largely the fruit of his having passed these early days in an atmosphere where, "breathless with adoration," nuns had for ages knelt.

His education at this time was, for the rest, to some extent clerical. With his brother Eugène, he was sent to a day-school kept by an ex-priest named Larivière, who, when the Revolution broke out, choosing to risk matrimony rather than to risk his head, had secularized himself, and espoused his housekeeper. The two together now instructed small children in reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the intervals of acquiring these accomplishments, of which he seems to have rapidly made himself master, Victor passed his time playing with his brothers in the garden, it being, as he tells us, with the old priest and his mother, one of the three preceptors of his childhood.

In these sports another and an older playmate not unfrequently took part. This was Victor's godfather, General Lahorie. Implicated in Moreau's conspiracy against the Emperor, and with the police on his track, he had, after many perils, found welcome and a safe refuge in the Feuillantines. During eighteen months

<sup>1</sup> See especially the poem entitled *Ce qui se passait aux Feuillantines vers 1813*. (*Les Rayons et les Ombres*.)

he delighted the children with the stories he told, and delighted them less with the Latin he taught them. He was beginning to read Tacitus with Victor when he was betrayed, arrested, and after some months' imprisonment put to death for participation in another conspiracy, that of General Mallet.

But before Lahorie was shot on the plain of Grenelle his godson had travelled far and had returned again to Paris.

" With victor camps that o'er cowed Europe ran,  
I wandered world-wide ere my life began,"

says Hugo in the ode entitled *Mon enfance*.

French prospects in Spain appeared bright just then. The national resistance was for the moment overcome; the Anglo-Portuguese army had retreated. King Joseph was anxious to consolidate his court, and for this purpose wished his French officers to establish themselves permanently in Spain. To the most distinguished among them he gave money wherewith to purchase Spanish estates on which to settle with their families; Victor Hugo's father was of the number of those thus favoured.

One day accordingly, Colonel Louis Hugo, the poet's uncle, appeared at the Feuillantines. His visit had for object to persuade his sister-in-law to come with the children to Spain, where her husband, now a general and Count of Cisuentes, had been appointed governor of three provinces. The visit, of which Victor always retained lively and pleasurable reminiscences, was successful in its aim; the children Spain



immediately set to learn Spanish; soon, "precious toys disputed the trunks with more indispensable articles, and in the spring of 1811 the family started for the South.

At Bayonne, where they joined the military convoy that was carrying into Spain funds for the French Government, Victor fell in boyish love with the daughter of their landlady. She was a year older than himself, and was, he afterwards said, the first person of the sex who had made him feel awkward and embarrassed. Thirty-three years later he revisited Bayonne, and looked vainly in his old lodgings for the little girl who had been his earliest passion, and whose name, Pepita, is enshrined in some of his daintiest love-verses.

Many travellers wished to take advantage of the military escort to protect their voyage into Spain; and, a long row of carriages guarded by soldiers and cannon before and behind, the convoy wound over the Pyrenees, "like an immense serpent that could bite with its head and sting with its tail."

The first halt was at the village of Ernani, a name that rang, to some result, in the ears of one of the voyagers. Thence, not without various guerilla alarms and much discomfort on the road, the procession moved onwards to Madrid. Arrived there, the Hugo household lodged in the vast Masserano palace, whose long gallery of family portraits, where Victor was wont to sit dreaming, suggested to the future dramatist one of most celebrated scenes (Hernani, Act iii., Scene *no.*

But at Madrid, no more than at the Fenillantines, was it all play for the boys. Abel was already page to the king, preparatory to entering the army, and, to fit them for the same career, Eugène and Victor were sent to the College of the Nobles, semi-school, semi-monastery, where they found themselves the only two Frenchmen among a troop of young Spaniards.

Naturally, they were made to feel the resentment of a proud and oppressed people towards its invader, and the fact that, being much further advanced than their schoolfellows, they had to be placed in a form among the oldest boys, did not lessen the disfavour with which they were regarded. Referring to the boyish battles that resulted, Victor said afterwards: "The Spaniards were in the right. They were fighting for their independence. But children cannot understand these things." They can remember, however, the knocks they have received in any cause, good or bad, and Victor, always inclined to be vindictive, revenged himself in later years on his old schoolfellow, the Count of Belverano, who, in the course of a heated political discussion, had wounded Eugène in the face with a pair of scissors. Gubetta, Count of Belverano, is, it will be remembered, the name he bestowed on Lucrece Borgia's chief instrument of evil. One of the four Fools in *Cromwell*, Elespura, was christened after another schoolfellow of whom the poet's memories were displeasing, while Quasimodo was to some extent modelled on the hunchback servant of the college who every morning woke the boys from dreams to work.

By the beginning of 1812, French prospects in Spain

had become so gloomy that General Hugo decided to send his wife and his two younger children home again. Their residence in Spain had thus lasted little longer than their residence in Italy, but for Victor it had been of much more moment. He was too young at the time to be greatly influenced by the Avellino days; his character bore ever after traces of his stay in Madrid. There was a Spanish strain in his genius, in his grandiloquence and lofty professions of honour; among his dramas not the least successful are those which deal with Spanish subjects; Señor Castelar has called him, half in pleasantry, "the greatest Spanish poet of the French language." Further, the boy brought back from across the Pyrenees a dignity and gravity of deportment which never left him, and contrasted with the ordinary bearing of literary persons. He was always remarkable for his exquisite formal politeness, especially towards women; in an age when such outward ceremonies and tokens of good breeding are less and less cultivated, his manners afforded to the end an example of "the constant fashion of the antique world."

With the boys' return to the Feuillantines, games in the garden recommenced, their chief playmate for a season being Edouard Delon, who afterwards died in Greece while serving with Lord Byron. In regard to lessons, M. Larivière now came regularly, but neither Eugène nor Victor could gain much more from the learning of the worthy ex-priest. During the next few years, their literary education was, in all essentials, of their own choosing. Madame Hugo, a royalist

in politics, and something of a despot in household affairs, professed in religion the creed of Voltaire, and had little faith in the efficacy of coercive education. She had refused to allow her sons to serve at mass at their college in Madrid, declaring, when the priests pressed it as a rule for all catholic pupils, that her children were protestants; again in Paris, she allowed them to read absolutely what they pleased. Herself an assiduous reader, she subscribed to a neighbouring library, and before beginning any book, required her sons' opinion of it. Some of these volumes, the librarians objected, were hardly fit for the perusal of young persons, but bah! answered the mother, books never yet did any one harm, and thus the boys became acquainted with Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire, as well as with the lighter literature of the eighteenth century. The stories of the younger Crébillon and the adventures of the Chevalier de Faublas are not, as a rule, put into the hands of children of eleven and thirteen, but Victor, who up to his marriage had lived in frugal ignorance of any form of dissipation, and whose early years are even not without a suspicion of priggishness, certainly justified, as far as he was concerned, his mother's contempt for the dangers of promiscuous reading.

Towards the close of 1813, municipal extension destroyed the beloved garden of the Feuillantines, and the Hugo family went to live in the Rue du Cherche-Midi. Here they were shortly joined by the father and eldest brother. The French were now expelled from Spain; France herself was about to be invaded.

Soon Victor saw, not, alas! for the last time, foreign soldiers in the streets of Paris, where their presence, as denoting the return of the Bourbons, was welcome in these years to the poet and his mother. General Hugo, on the contrary, was faithful to the Emperor; their differences of political feeling, in these times of excited change, aggravated the bitterness already existing between his wife and himself. Between the first and the second invasion of France, they separated by mutual consent, and the father, asserting his authority over his boys, whom he intended for the army, sent them, shortly before the Hundred Days, to a school kept by a M. Cordier, who, like Larivière, had formerly been a priest. Victor here developed a remarkable aptitude for mathematics; but the three years he passed in this school are chiefly memorable for having seen the budding of his poetical genius. His childhood's travels, the suns of Italy and Spain; his dreams amid the flowers and branches of the Feuillantines; Napoleon, once seen amid the roar of a people's applause, now fallen from emperor to exile; all these emotions and experiences were rich for his memory, and had ripened betimes his imagination. For the rest, he was early ambitious, and at the age of fourteen wrote in one of his innumerable manuscript books: "I mean to be Chateaubriand or nothing." From the first energetic to excess, he composed, while yet at school, thousands of verses in every style, from tragedies to comic operas, from elegies to acrostics, and when only fifteen, competed for the prize in poetry annually offered by the French Academy. In spite of

the subject, *The Advantages procured by Study in every Situation of Life*, and in spite of his youth, Victor's piece obtained an honourable mention. This success served to bring him into flattering relations with several meritorious mediocrities, then members of the Academy; it gained for him also the interest and acquaintance of Chateaubriand, the god of his boyish idolatry, whose catholic royalism converted him from the free-thinking royalism of his mother.

But with his mother Victor's relations were soon again of the closest. In 1818, he left the Pension Cordier, and let his father know that, in his case, arms must give place to the gown, or rather that, while refusing to enter the army, and nominally inscribing himself as a student of law, he meant really to devote himself to literature. General Hugo, who knew little of his son, not unnaturally regarded this as a disastrous announcement, and responded by cutting off supplies, and Victor, with Eugène who was in the same predicament, went to live with his mother in the Rue des Vieux-Augustins. Madame Hugo loved literature too well to object to her son's choice of it as a profession; she was, besides, prescient of the future greatness of her youngest boy; but the family had little to live upon, and it was essential that Victor should work steadily, and as far as possible with lucrative result. Accordingly, in order to win the esteem of the public, he continued to solicit the patronage of academies, and, in 1819, gained two prizes at the Floral Games of Toulouse with poems which he afterwards inserted in his *Odes et Ballades*. In regard to

the second of these pieces, that on the Statue of Henri IV., an incident occurred which is a tribute to the tender affection that united mother and son. Madame Hugo was ill, and Victor, anxiously watching by her bedside, let much of the night pass without beginning the ode which required to be sent off next morning. He would not leave her while awake, but as soon as, regretting that her son had lost his chance of the prize, she went to sleep, Victor sat down to write, and in the morning the mother found the poem completed and lying on her pillow. To the verses, composed under such pious auspices, was unanimously awarded "the golden lily," though among Victor's rivals in the competition was a poet ten years his senior though as yet inedited and unknown, Lamartine, who about this time made the acquaintance of the Hugo household, and has left a pleasant picture of its grave and studious interior.

In 1819, more successes at Toulouse constituted Victor, at the age of seventeen, Master of the Floral Games. In this year also, his eldest brother, Abel, started the *Conservateur Littéraire*, an organ of which Victor was the mainstay during the year and a half of its existence. He published in it the first draft of his story, *Bug-Jargal*, many verses and many articles, all conservative in tendency, whether dealing with politics or with literature. Though he had not yet attained to absolute originality in regard to either thought or expression, these contributions prove that his precocity as a writer of prose was hardly less remarkable than his precocity as a writer of verse.

The *Conservateur Littéraire* had been partly designed as a pendant to the *Conservateur*, of which Chateaubriand was editor. This journal, in a friendly notice of the new venture, drew attention to the fact that it was conducted by three brothers, the eldest of whom was twenty-one, and the youngest seventeen, who wished, if possible, to pay with its proceeds the debt they owed to their mother for sustenance and education. But before the review had ceased to appear, this mother was beyond the power of profiting by any addition of comfort its publication may have brought.

In the spring of 1821 the family had removed to a house in the Rue Mezières, where there was a garden. In the course of settling there, Madame Hugo caught inflammation of the lungs, but as summer approached, she seemed to grow better. On the 27th of June, Eugène and Victor were in her room.

"Look how well mamma is," said Eugène; "she has slept soundly since midnight."

"Yes," said Victor, "she will soon be all right," and he stooped to kiss her forehead. It was icy cold, and the heart had ceased to beat.

Three weeks later General Hugo married again. Victor's life was desolate for a season. The generality of Frenchmen entertain and profess for their mothers a devotion rarer on this side of the Channel, and such as most Englishmen would be ashamed openly at any rate to avow. And in the case of the Hugo children, circumstances had exalted this devotion to its utmost. Their mother had, in direct opposition to the wishes



of their father, countenanced their choice of a literary career, and she repaid this increase of responsibility by an increase of solicitude for their happiness. In matters of art and of the intelligence, Victor differed from her in his admiration of natural scenery and of mediæval architecture, as well as in his opinion of the relative value of the writings of Chateaubriand and Voltaire; but, in all essentials, he had allowed his mind to be coloured by her own. Emotionally, he appreciated to the full the preciousness of the one love which entirely casts out distrust; he was, as he himself says, "tied to his mother's apron strings," and obeyed her like a child. But though stricken, his heart was not slain; his affection had found in life another passion and interest which, in the irreparable loss of this one, stimulated his energies and sustained his existence.

About the same time as his parents were married, a friend of his father's, a registrar named Foucher, had married also. Major Hugo, as he then was, invited to his wedding dinner, proposed a toast to the future. "May you have a daughter. I will have a son, and they shall marry each other. I drink to the prosperity of their household." Strange to say, this pledge was fulfilled. So Victor Hugo records, but biographers with a zeal for accuracy have denied that such a pledge was ever plighted, as they have denied the authenticity of various other effective anecdotes relating to the poet's early years. In any case, M. Foucher did have a daughter, and, the friendship between the families continuing, the little girl used

to play with the little Hugos in the garden of the Feuillantines. Later the two households lived close to each other in the Rue du Cherche-Midi. When Victor left the Pension Cordier, he accompanied his mother on her frequent evening visits to these old friends, visits which did not seem calculated to amuse a young man. M. Foucher, elderly and valetudinarian, sat by the fire with his book and his snuff-box, and disliked the noise of conversation; the women, meanwhile, stitched in silence. And yet Victor showed an unimpeachable cheerfulness in assenting, and even in proposing, to pay his respects at the hotel Toulouse. Madame Hugo and Madame Foucher began to ask themselves the reason why, and it was discovered that the young poet objected neither to the silence nor to the eyes of the elders being bent over their work or their books, because these conditions permitted him to gaze, undisturbed and unregarded, upon the dark hair and soft dark eyes of Mlle. Adèle. It was discovered also that Mlle. Adèle did not find his gaze disagreeable.

Victor had not a penny. Mlle. Foucher was equally unfortunate. Both were still minors. The visits came to an end, and the families ceased to see each other. It was merely a fancy, the parents thought, natural but passing, on the part of two children who had known each other since almost babyhood, and who had enjoyed little opportunity as yet of seeing other boys and girls in the world from which their parents lived recluse. Deeper emotion would come to them with wider experience. What they at present took

for a permanent affection was merely the remembrance, touched with sentiment, of the days when they sat together on the swing and ran together in the garden,—

“ And how should Love,  
Whom the cross-lightnings of four chance-met eyes  
Flash into fiery life from nothing, follow  
Such dear familiarities of dawn?  
Seldom, but when he does, master of all.”

For Victor Hugo and Adèle Foucher love had followed and was master. Tenacious in everything he resolved, and stirred by a real passion, the poet had determined to marry Adèle, and to this determination kept ever in view, is to be ascribed much of the ceaseless and varied energy he showed during the years that next elapsed.

On the day following Madame Hugo's funeral, the lovers met and betrothed themselves amid tears. For another twelvemonth Victor, after refusing an allowance offered by his father on condition that he would take up a regular profession, lived, working strenuously, on thirty pounds and his hopes. His material existence at this time he has described in *Les Misérables*, in that of Marius expelled from his grandfather's house. The journal of Marius, enamoured of Cosette, and beginning, “Love is the salutation of the angels to the stars,” was written at this time, and expresses the actual feelings of the poet in the days when he was wooing Adèle.

This constancy and patience at last touched the parents of his bride-elect, and they consented to the

wedding as soon as Victor should be in a position to marry. This came sooner than was expected. The publication of his earliest volume of verse, *Odes et Poésies Diverses*, in June, 1822, brought him not only thirty pounds, which he expended entirely on a cashmere shawl, his wedding gift to Adèle, but also a pension of forty pounds yearly from the king, who had been pleased with the royalist tone throughout the poems. On this sum Victor married Adèle, with the approval of his father, as of her parents, in the church of Saint Sulpice, October 12th, 1822.

The day which crowned the poet's youthful struggles was saddened by the suddenly declared insanity of his brother, Eugène. He had always been inclined to constitutional melancholy, and it is hinted that his feelings at this wedding may have resembled those of Dante at the wedding of Beatrice. This event cast a premonitory shadow over the early days of a married life whose course was not entirely shadowless. Eugène never recovered, and after many years of confinement, died in the asylum of Charenton, at the age of thirty-seven. In *Les Voix Intérieures*, his brother has inscribed to him a touching poem reminiscent of the green Feuillantines and their boyhood passed together.

It has seemed necessary to dwell at some length upon the poet's early years because, apart from the interest that attaches always to the childhood and up-bringing of one who became great, these years of his adolescence afford us the explanation of the fact that Hugo, to a degree rare among men of genius, reaped

from his talents the full harvest they were capable of yielding. They show us the artist practical as a man of business, regular and industrious as an ideal husbandman, frugal, at need, as a miser. There are no traces in these early years of his of the indolence or perversity that so often defrauds the world of much that a genial temperament might have given it. There is every proof in them that Hugo possessed, in addition to his extraordinary gifts, all the ordinary ambitions and affections necessary to render such gifts effective. Like any ordinary mortal, he had fallen in love with and married the first amiable girl chance threw in his way. Like any ordinary mortal having nothing to start with, he had set himself to make money and a happy home for her. Thus splendidly equipped, intellectually and practically alike, and with health henceforth of iron, Hugo's years of manhood began. His biography for many years to come is essentially the record of his untiring literary activity, and of the movements, memorable in French letters, which this activity enabled him to lead.

## CHAPTER III.

### HUGO AND ROMANTICISM.

BEFORE touching on the chief personal events and literary landmarks of the years during which Hugo, undisturbed as yet, to all appearance, by political ambition, was known and renowned solely as a conqueror in letters, a word may be said as to the sequel of his love-idyll.

Hugo's temperament carried with it the temptations of its energies. An affectionate father to his children, to his children's children an adoring grandfather, he was not, in the sense which either the constancy of King Arthur or the correctness of Mrs. Grundy would attach to the phrase, "a model husband." Passionately in love with his wife when he married, almost every volume of verse he published during over ten years of their married life bore witness to the continued vivacity and tenderness of his feelings towards her. The general sombreness of one of his earlier stories, *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, is brightened by an episode, "like a lily amid the rain," reminiscent of the days of his boyish wooing. And till her death, seventeen years before his own, he never ceased to regard his wife with affection and respect. But along with his aspirations towards the sublimities of the

ideal, Hugo experienced imperious instincts in the direction of the cruder realities of life.

“Love's not Time's Fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come,”

affirms Shakespeare, but this theoretic constancy did not prevent him leaving to his wife his second-best bed only, presumably because Time's sickle had reaped from the lips and cheeks of Anne Shakespeare much of the colour that blossomed upon those of Anne Hathaway. In like manner, when Adèle Foucher had been for some time Adèle Hugo, the poet, whose youthful inspiration and effort owed so much to his stimulating love for her, found a new and younger muse in the person of Madame Drouet (Mlle. Juliette Gauvain was her real name), the Princess Negroni of his *Lucrece Borgia*. And his muse this actress, a poor actress but a beautiful woman, remained till her death, two years before his own. Sainte-Beuve severely calls her Hugo's Delilah. In the light of this biblical analogy, the following avowal on Saint-Beuve's own part has a somewhat strange effect: “I have never,” he says, “suffered my will and my judgment to be degraded, save for an instant in Hugo's world, and under the most potent and sweetest of charms, that which kept Rinaldo a prisoner in Armida's garden.”

During the early manhood of both, Hugo and Sainte-Beuve were extremely friendly, seeing each other often twice a day; Sainte-Beuve extolling Hugo in enthusiastic verses and enthusiastic critical articles, Hugo responding by poems in which he compared the

shrewd, but essentially mundane, essayist, to an eagle and a star. But, as the years wore on, complications which had nothing to do with literature and are of a nature too intimate to be dwelt upon,<sup>1</sup> combined with Hugo's increasing impatience of criticisms not merely eulogistic, brought about a tension of relations, and finally open enmity, between the two writers. And thus perished what had once promised to be, between the great poet and the great critic, "such a friendship as had mastered time."

But *Lucrèce Borgia* and Mme. Drouet date only from 1833. For ten years, at any rate, the Hugo household was happily united in its prosperity, the wife glorying in her husband's swift series of literary triumphs, the husband devoted to his wife and to the children she bore him, and advancing, by leaps and bounds, to an ever-widening celebrity. Four children were the fruit of the marriage. The eldest, a daughter, named, after the poet's father, Léopoldine, was followed by two sons, Charles and François-Victor. To the youngest girl, Adèle, born in the height of the Hugos' intimacy with him, Sainte-Beuve stood godfather.

Throughout these years of quiet, uneventful, resolute literary labour in the bosom of his family, Hugo's biography, as already stated, resolves itself into the record of the achievements which constituted him the protagonist of the French romantic movement.

<sup>1</sup> Those interested in this delicate subject may consult *Sainte-Beuve et ses Inconnues*, by M. A. T. Pons, notably the extracts given there from Sainte-Beuve's extremely rare volume of verse, entitled *Libre d'Amour*.



A complete examination of the causes which, at the beginning of our century, necessitated a revolution, alike as to form and spirit, in French literature, if this literature were to continue to live, would involve a review of French literary history, from, at any rate, the seventeenth century. It must suffice here to recall that the poetic forms which had, in their day, been adequate to express the sonorous nobility of Corneille, and the tenderness of Racine, had become thinned away into a barren preciseness which threatened to kill real poetry in France, and that the manner of writing, and the sentiments and subjects treated of in, such prose as that of Voltaire, quite adequate also in its season, had become over-narrow when the revolutionary epoch opened new horizons to man's soul, and made new claims on his powers of expression.

The spiritual father of the French literature of the first half of our century, if such paternity can be accorded to any one man, was undoubtedly Jean Jacques Rousseau. The note that was above all to distinguish the new literature was the dominance in it of intimate personal emotion, alike in its healthy and in its morbid states. It was in the works of Rousseau that this note was first struck. Nor was this all that the literary renaissance owed to him. The cult of wild natural scenery, and the revolt against the artificial atmosphere of the *salon*,—these, after its "subjectivity," were the most marked features of the "romantic" movement. Both are to be found in Rousseau.

Bernardin de Sainte-Pierre also, in his famous *Paul*

*et Virginie*, gave an impulse to the blind stirrings of his time in favour of a return to nature and the portrayal of simple passions and emotions.

But Rousseau, like Bernardin de Sainte-Pierre, came too early to see the new dawn rise. It was by Chateaubriand, who lived to see completed, by a younger generation, the work he began, that the literary revolution was definitely and puissantly proclaimed. Of Chateaubriand it has been said, somewhat loudly, by a compatriot, that he conceived and brought into the world the nineteenth century. All the leading tendencies of the new era are already contained in his work. His Bréton blood and his youthful wanderings in the New World inspired him with a passionate love of Nature, evinced throughout his writings. His *René* was the first of French romances to deal with the intimate spiritual emotions of a soul. His *Martyrs*, the earliest notable attempt to reconstruct an historical epoch, was the precursor at once of Michelet's *Histoire de France*, and of Flaubert's *Salammbô*. His *Génie du Christianisme* was the primary and most powerful influence in determining the resuscitation of mediævalism, and the renaissance of Catholic feeling and inspiration which, as sentiments at least, lingered with French romanticism till its close. It was Chateaubriand who first clearly proved that the wit and logic of Voltaire were not the final expression of the French spirit. And his importance as an innovator did not cease here. At the same time as he breathed new life into the soul of French prose, he reformed its outward texture. For his periods, strangely neglected in our

time, restored to French prose-writing a fulness and majesty it had not known since the days of Bossuet. With Chateaubriand the French language became again the possible vehicle of a passionate and lyrical emotion, which the admirable authors of the eighteenth century had deliberately rejected.

Chateaubriand inaugurated, for nineteenth-century France, poetic prose; poetic poetry was inaugurated for it by Lamartine, whose first volume of *Méditations*, published in 1820, has a place and significance in French literature analogous to the place and significance in the literature of England of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. Both volumes represented, for their respective countries, the return to the well-springs of poetic inspiration after the long reign of reason, in verse. And making due allowance for differences of race and religion, there is a considerable measure of likeness between Lamartine and Wordsworth. Each was so essentially of his own nation that Wordsworth can never be appreciated in France, nor Lamartine in England; each, for his compatriots, remains the poet who has given best expression to what is most intimate and profound in French as in British human nature; both, save in moments of inspiration, were weak on the formal side of verse. It was precisely on this formal side that the way was open, and the merit as remodeller belongs to Victor Hugo.

The rules of diction and of prosody, initiated for French verse by Malherbe, formulated and made precise by Boileau, had governed poetry draconically since the middle of the seventeenth century. For a century

and a half they passed undisputed and unchallenged. A young writer, guillotined during the Terror, was the first who, by his manner of moulding the standard French measure, the Alexandrine, dared to assail the laws established by Boileau, "the legislator of Parnassus." But André Chenier ventured only on a tentative reform. He did, indeed, introduce the mobile cæsura, instead of the regular break exactly in the middle of the verse; he initiated also the *enjambement*—he allowed, that is to say, a line, when completed, to run on uninterruptedly into the line that followed—a practice proscribed by Boileau. Despite the important step thus achieved towards the deliverance of the Alexandrine from its adamantine regularity, Chenier's verses, in structure as in phraseology, still bore the impress of the eighteenth century. So also, though in a lesser degree, did the volume of poems published by Alfred de Vigny, in 1822.

It was reserved for Hugo to achieve the complete liberation of French rhythm, and to accomplish at the same time a reform of equal moment, which his predecessors had barely, if at all, had the audacity to suggest.

Anticipated by Lamartine in the revivifying of French poetry by a subject-matter drawn from the soul, and in the re-discovery of "the lyrical cry," indebted, in some measure, to André Chenier for the rhythmical innovations brought to perfection in *La Légende des Siècles*, Hugo has the sole honour of having expanded and revolutionized the French vocabulary.

"Je mis un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire,"—

"I put a red cap on the old dictionary," he says himself in a defiant metrical apology<sup>1</sup> for his literary radicalism. Words, he here says, were before his time divided into noble and non-noble by a line of demarcation as strict as that which, under the old *régime*, separated the French aristocracy from the mass of the French people; a literary revolution was as necessary as a political revolution had been: words, like men, must be proclaimed free and equal.

There are still Frenchmen who exclaim against this literary revolution, as there are still Frenchmen who regard as a disaster the triumph of the ideas of 1789; and, in neither case, can the lovers of the old order be dismissed as wholly irrational. But French poetic diction had become rarefied and refined into a lifeless mandarin-like uniformity, and a rush of new blood was essential to it if it were ever again to possess the charm it had had in the hands of the poets of the Pleiade, if it were ever again to be the trumpet-like instrument it had been in the hands of Corneille. In Victor Hugo, France had the fortune to find one who, while vulgarising her literary vocabulary, was at the same time an incomparable artist; one who was, so to say, on the æsthetic side, at once the Cowper and the Tennyson of her poetic renovation.

Hugo's literary audacities were not simultaneous with his appearance as a poet. In the various volumes of *Odes et Ballades* he published from 1822 to 1828, there was ample evidence of a poet with a note of his own. From the first Hugo could, to use a well-worn

<sup>1</sup> *Réponse à un Acte d'Accusation.* (*Les Contemplations.*)

image, handle the lyre in a manner peculiar to himself, but he had as yet added no new string to the instrument in use among his contemporaries, and the music he educed from it was, for the most part, merely personal variations on the motives already discovered by Lamartine. We find, naturally, in these poems of the first period, touches of emphasis and of colour which foreshadow the mature Hugo. In the piece *A la Colonne de la Place Vendôme*, for example, one may trace the beginnings of the brilliant rhetoric that attained its full proportions in the ode *A l'Arc de Triomphe*; in three poems, depicting the public amusements in three different epochs of civilization—the Greek, the Roman, the Mediæval,—entitled respectively, *Le Chant de l'Arène*, *Le Chant du Cirque*, *Le Chant du Tournoi*, one may see the dawn of that unparalleled pictorial imagination, which reached ripeness in the marvellous visions of *La Légende des Siècles*. Some of the later *Ballades* of this period also, such as *La Chasse du Burgrave* and *Le Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean*, written when Hugo, under the guidance of Sainte-Beuve, had become acquainted with the rhythms of the sixteenth century, reveal in embryo the future master of all metrical effects.

But it was with the appearance of *Les Orientales* in 1829, that the poet really found himself. Technically, this book is the work of the mature Hugo; for the rest of his career he merely drew deeper and more varied music from an instrument now perfect to his hands. In the preface to this volume he laid down the æsthetic principles which governed the second phase of the

romantic movement, that phase which dates decisively from 1830. Poets, he here affirms, are not to be questioned as to their choice of subject, there is no geography of the intellectual world which fixes and forbids. "Is the work good or bad? That is all the domain of criticism. For the rest, neither praise nor blame for the colours employed, but only for the manner in which they are employed." The title, *Les Orientales*, was chosen as appropriate at a season when men's thoughts, stirred eastward by the war of Greek Independence and its consequences, were much occupied with the Orient, and the greater part of the poetry in this volume is concerned with oriental subjects. The Orient, equally with the middle ages, offers sumptuous pasture for the colour sense, and was eminently adapted to Hugo's genius. He made magnificent use of his opportunity. His power as an imaginative painter, was never more superbly manifested, on its sombre side, than in the poem which opens the volume, *Le Feu du Ciel*, where he recounts how the livid cloud, charged with heaven's thunder, travelled over ocean, mountain, and plain, forbidden by the voice of God to rest, till it burst, destroying, upon Sodom and Gomorrha. In richly decorative fancy he never surpassed *Sara la Baigneuse*, nor in metrical dexterity *Les Djinns*. Four verses of concentrated cursing, entitled *Malédiction*, and invoking, characteristically, all *physical* torments on the accursed one, are worthy of a place among the anathemas of *Les Châtiments*, while the pieces inspired by Philhellenic sympathy are a sonorous anticipation of the ringing

patriotism of the many verses addressed, in after days, to France.

In *Les Orientales*, Hugo attained maturity as an artist in words. Indeed nearly thirty years elapsed before, in the first series of *La Légende des Siècles*, he showed again a mastery over verbal music and colour, equal to that displayed in this glowing volume. But though his instrument was perfected, he had not yet touched all its strings. There is in *Les Orientales* little or no intimate personal emotion, little or none of the meditation, to which Hugo afterwards became so partial, "On man, on nature, and on human life." In *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, published in 1831, these strings were first fully sounded. In *Les Orientales* one clearly sees the foreshadowing of *La Légende des Siècles*, and more vaguely, the promise of *Les Châtiments*; in *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, various poems, reminiscent of events in his past life, or reflecting on circumstances and problems of his present, anticipate *Les Contemplations*; the verses on children, which begin here, are the germ of *L'Art d'Être Grandpère*, while several pieces, of philosophically religious character, are the first words of the many tomes of metrical writing on systems of metaphysic and faith, printed during the poet's declining years and after his death. Exception made for *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*, one may almost assert that Hugo's subsequent poetical productions were merely variants—variants often superb and welcome, occasionally superfluous—on motives already handled in his volumes of 1829 and 1831.

The books of poetry he had published up to this time



had been each one more successful than its predecessors, but the indefatigable energy, as well as the insatiable ambition, of Victor Hugo would not let him rest content with triumphs in one branch only of the literary art. Why it is that almost all French writers of eminence during our century, have been strongly attracted by the stage, while English authors, their contemporaries, are oftenest either indifferent to or repelled by it, is a vexed question into which this is not the place to enquire; Victor Hugo, like so many of his compatriots, felt early and ardently, the fascination of the footlights.

In the year 1827, he composed a drama, *Cromwell*. It contains some fine things, but, considered from the scenic point of view, it belongs to the class of plays which the author of *Obiter Dicta* has characterized as "dropsical." Impossible for the stage, it was never acted, and, as all the world knows, *Hernani*, produced in the year of literary tumult, 1830, was the first of Hugo's dramas to seek the suffrages of the theatre-going public.

The French stage was at this time undergoing a new birth, accompanied by all the struggles and torments which, in literature as in life, wait upon such an occurrence, and Hugo's share in the dramatic reformation was a parallel to his share in the reformation of lyrical verse. He was no more the first in this field than he was the first to lead the revolt against the eighteenth-century standard in lyrical poetry. In both cases, the new school had actually arisen, and was fighting when he threw himself into the combat;

in both cases, he sounded decisive victory for the reformers by the ardour of his onslaught and the imposing splendour of his style. Some months previous to the publication of *Cromwell*, Shakespeare had been successfully acclimatised in France, thanks largely to the acting of Miss Smithson, with whom, it may be remembered, Berlioz, who afterwards married her, was at this time madly in love. Shakespeare's installation on French soil was, like Wagner's, and for similar reasons, attended with difficulties. Quite recently, on the occasion of the presentation in Paris of the German musician's legend of the Knight of the Swan, a patriotic member of the Parisian populace, manifesting on the Place de l'Opéra, was heard to express the wish to get inside the Opera House, "in order to break the head of a dirty Prussian, called Lohengrin, who was within;" in the same way, an English company which had essayed to give a representation of *Othello*, while the memories of Waterloo were still fresh, was received with shouts from the gallery of "Down with Shakespeare! he is an aide-de-camp of Wellington." But by 1827, Frenchmen had discovered that Shakespeare had claims on their sympathies such as "Monsieur de Vilainton" could never possess; *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, had been played, amid much enthusiasm, at the Odéon, and Stendhal, following Madame de Staël, had, in his pamphlet *Racine et Shakespeare*, announced his preference for the methods of the English dramatist.

Various tentatives, also, had already been made to introduce "romanticism" on the theatre, but none of

them carried enough authority to strike the "classicists" home. Dumas' *Henri III. et sa Cour*, for instance, which preceded *Hernani* by a year, had scarcely sufficient literary merit to serve as a rallying cry for the champions of the romantic drama. Hugo's play, alike by its novelty of versification and by its effect on dramatic development, was the *Tamburlaine* of the French stage. It had this further likeness with Marlowe's first tragedy, that it shone more by its poetical than by its dramatic merits. This, for that matter, holds good of all Hugo's dramas, from *Cromwell* to *Torquemada*.

Both parties felt instinctively, on the eve of the representation of *Hernani*, that the real day of battle between them had come. The "classics" understood that the drama was to be, so to say, a gauntlet thrown in their face, and prepared themselves to protest noisily against its anticipated literary audacities. The "romantics" on their part organized bands of young men, mostly authors and painters, enthusiastic for the new artistic development, and to these were distributed tickets of entry with *Hierro*, the Spanish word for iron, stamped on them, symbolising the firmness they were expected to show in proclaiming, in the teeth of all opposition, their admiration for *Hernani* and their zeal for the "romantic" cause. On Thursday, February 25th, the pit-entrance of the Théâtre-Français was, from an early hour in the day, besieged by a multitude of strangely-attired unconventional-looking youths, eager to applaud the new tragedy, and to terrify, if possible, its opponents among

the audience.\* Conspicuous among those fervents of the faith was Théophile Gautier,—eighteen years old only, but already an author, and an *Hugolâtre intrinséant*, with his long hair streaming over a doublet of rose-coloured satin.<sup>1</sup> The young men entered early, taking possession of the galleries and pit, and beguiling their time of waiting by singing songs of the hour and by pleasantries in use at the artists' studios. When the higher-priced places began to fill, and each well-known upholder of the old order was saluted with sarcasms and jeers, it became evident that the evening was going to be stormy. Hardly had the curtain risen on the traditional three knocks, than the "classics" of the balcony and boxes found their worst anticipations realized. It was apparent that the plot and action of the piece were quite away from the traditional lines, and that its style was not *le style noble*, to which French audiences had hitherto been accustomed when they went to hear metrical tragedy. The boxes began to murmur and hiss, and were met from the pit with cries of "Silence!" and frantic indiscriminating applause. Early in the second act, Don Carlos asks of one of his attendants "Is it midnight?" and receives for reply "Just upon midnight." This dialogue appeared very vulgar to the elders among the audience, and they gave loud vent to their disapprobation. To please

<sup>1</sup> "Un pourpoint de satin rose," not a *gilet*, a waistcoat, as the legend generally has it. See Gautier's *Histoire du Romantisme*, for a vivid account of this evening, as well as for interesting details in regard to various leading personalities among the "romantics."

these people, as Gantier says, Don Carlos ought to have been answered something in this style:—

“From the castle’s high tower,  
My lord, the clock at last calls up the night’s twelfth hour.”

A ludicrous incident occurred later on. In the third act, *Hernani*, addressing Ruy Gomez, who has allowed Don Carlos to carry off Doña Sol as his hostage, apostrophises him, “Vieillard stupide! il l’aime. Stupid old man! he loves her.” A bald-headed, and, apparently, slightly-deaf gentleman in the boxes, misinterpreted this into “Vieil as de pique! il l’aime.”—“Old ace of spades! he loves her,” and, not unjustifiably, began to bellow his exasperation;—“No, it is too much! *Vieil as de pique. Le cochon!*” Nothing daunted, one of the poet’s partisans, determined to approve at any price, retorted loudly:—“*Vieil as de pique*, it’s capital! There is local colour. Bravo, Hugo!”

In spite of interruptions and the constant clamour of fight, on this evening, and many subsequent to it, *Hernani* was a success. It ran through a goodly number of representations, it made the sensation it was intended to make: Sainte-Beuve wrote to a friend after its seventh performance: “The cause of romanticism has, by the mere fact of *Hernani*, been advanced a hundred miles.” At this day, it may be noted, it is the one of Hugo’s dramas which best keeps its place on the Parisian stage.

In the following year, 1831, *Marion de Lorme* achieved, again at the Théâtre-Français a less con-

tested, and no less emphatic success,<sup>1</sup> lending naturally an additional lustre to the literary glory of Hugo. In this year also his reputation was further promoted by the publication of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, which proved that Hugo the prose-writer was worthy of Hugo the poet. Here his conception of "the grotesque," as witnessed in the creation of Quasimodo, corresponds with his "romantic" innovations as playwright and as lyricist. Quasimodo had been foreshadowed in the dwarf Habibrah of *Bug-Jargal*, and in Han d'Islande, but these were merely sketches; Quasimodo is an immortal and perfected picture.

In 1822, after the publication of *Odes et Poésies Diverses*, Hugo was already regarded as in the front rank among the young literary generation in France; in 1832, after the publication of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, his fame was already European. Goethe spoke of this, Hugo's first great romance, to criticise it severely,—he disliked the "grotesque" element—but seriously: Heine wrote of it, sneeringly, after his manner, but seriously also. And between these two dates Hugo had given to the world, in lyric poetry, *Les Orientales* and *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, in drama, *Hernani* and *Marion de Lorme*. Before he was thirty he was the recognised "Maître" or sovereign of a band of

<sup>1</sup> *Marion de Lorme* was written before *Hernani*, and had been accepted by the Comédie Française, when a royal interdiction forbade its representation, on the ground that Louis XIII. was treated in it with too scant respect. After the Revolution of July, 1830, this interdiction had, as a matter of course, no longer any value.

young writers and painters, linked together as reformers in matters of art and the imagination—a band whose leaders, like Napoleon's generals, had gifts almost equalling his own, among them being Balzac, Alfred de Vigny, Sainte-Beuve, not as yet estranged, Musset, Gautier, Dumas, the painter Delacroix, the sculptor David. By these he was hailed and revered as the master-spirit of a memorable movement, which was on the way to revolutionise French literary forms and ideas, and whose influence, under the guidance and genius of Berlioz and Delacroix, extended also to the sister arts of music and painting. Had Hugo died in 1832, he would still have been remembered by posterity, not only as a poet and novelist of brilliant promise, but also as one of those who have most powerfully contributed to influence the artistic manifestations of their century and race.

## CHAPTER IV.

HUGO'S HOME IN THE PLACE ROYALE.—THE VILLEQUIER  
CATASTROPHE.—THE POET BECOMES A POLITICIAN.—  
THE COUP D'ETAT.

IN 1832, the Hugo household which, since the poet's marriage, had several times changed its habitation, took up its abode in No. 6, Place Royale, its home henceforward for nineteen years. Hugo's literary labours had by this time made him comparatively rich, and he was able to give to the interior and furnishings of his new house the *cachet* of his personal taste and caprice in arrangement and decoration. The *salon* soon became celebrated as a rendezvous of literary and artistic Paris. In addition to the before mentioned artists and authors of his own generation, Hugo's evening receptions were frequented by such younger men, "les vaillants de mil huit cent trente," as Petrus Borel "the Lycanthrope," author, among other eccentricities, of *Champavert*, *Contes Immoraux*, the frontispiece of which book represents a husband showing to his wife the corpses of her lovers shut up in a cupboard; the painter brothers Devéria; Célestin Nanteuil, fanatic for everything mediæval; Arsène Houssaye, who still lives an octogenarian littérateur; Bouchardy, whose sensation dramas are still popular



on the outer Parisian Boulevards; Augustus Mackeat and Philothée O'Neddy. The two latter gentleman had been officially baptised under such ordinary names as Auguste Maquet and Théophile Dondey, but, in their youthful fervour, they rejected these in favour of the above given appellations, which had about them an extraneous "romantic" ring, and were calculated to inspire irritation in the breasts of the *bourgeoisie*. The kind of worship he received from these young devotees was fuel for Hugo's weaknesses; and when, on summer evenings, he stepped encircled by a band of worshippers, on the balcony of his house, dressed, as always, simply, in grey trousers, a black frock-coat, and a turned-down collar, he could not fail to observe that the Place Royale was generally sprinkled with strangers, Parisians or provincials, with occasionally among them an Anglo-Saxon tourist, come on the chance of a glimpse of his pale close-shaven face with its fine eyes and magnificent forehead.

All this adulation was not likely to modify the reverse of modest opinions which Hugo, naturally enough, already entertained in regard to himself and his work. His increasing self-absorption, in a lesser man one would call it self-conceit, had, as already stated, disastrous effects on his relations with Sainte-Beuve. Henri Heine, whose personal remarks should always, however, be taken with a kindly grain of salt, wrote, about this time, of Hugo: "Almost all his old friends have left him, and, to tell the truth, it is his own fault; they were wounded by his egotism."

An ardent admirer of this epoch puts it: "M. Hugo is becoming hard and harsh to touch. Perhaps it is my doing. One has always to speak to him of himself." More significant still is the evidence, cited by M. Biré, of one who, during the years of their adolescence, had been strongly drawn towards Hugo, not so much by reverence for his genius as by affection for him as a human being: M. Adolphe de Saint-Valry writes, in 1836:—"One of the earliest, I understood all the strength, the power, and promise contained in this young head of twenty; I underwent its seduction, fascinated by so much purity, grace and imagination, allied with such a frank and vigorous genius, admiration developed in me a sentiment of friendship and enthusiasm, almost as lively and passionate as love itself. . . . Yet now and again, even at the height of my illusion, a fatal thought flashed across my spirit like sinister lightning; I found, at times, that the affection of my friend, too reserved and too self-contained, gave poor responses to my ardent sympathy;" then, after some severe words for the self-seeking adulators of the poet, M. de Saint-Valry adds:—"after a thousand violent efforts, a thousand doubts, a thousand horrible tortures, to reject this heart-rending truth, I was compelled to acknowledge at last that men whose life is thought are without heart; that he of whom I speak, in spite of my deep devotion for him, had never cared for me, and that the *parvenus* of glory, however brilliant they may be, are no better than the *parvenus* of riches."

There is a note of pettishness in the words just

quoted, and it is quite possible that Hugo, as his interests and spheres of activity widened, found M. de Saint-Valry a bore. It is certain at any rate, that the great author was not, after his first youth, given to cultivating intimate spiritual relations with either man or woman. Almost all his earlier volumes of poetry contain at least one piece dedicated to Mlle. Louise Bertin, the daughter of the then editor of the *Journal des Débats*. But his friendship with this young lady, who supplied the music for the libretto of his *Esmeralda*, produced in 1836, was obviously less emotional than intellectual. It was, indeed, difficult for Hugo to make, still more to keep, close friends. Though he was carelessly lavish of praise to all those who showed, or sent, him their literary work; though, during his exile, he acknowledged the receipt of Leconte de Lisle's first volume of poems with the words "Jungamus dextras;" he preferred always to be personally approached in a spirit of more or less open deference. Most great "men of genius," it should be remembered have been no more amiable, some of them much less amiable, than was Hugo in this respect. After all, to be effective, genius must, especially when indefatigably industrious as in Hugo's case, be necessarily self-centred; the heart must essentially be dominated by the head. Whether, "in our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live," genius be worth its possession at this price is a question which need not here be discussed.

However much or little of his heart Hugo may have accorded to the outside world, his family affections

were always tender and profound. He cherished his children as he had cherished his mother, with a constant caressing solicitude, worthy of a woman. In February, 1843, his eldest daughter, Léopoldine, married M. Charles Vacquerie, brother of Auguste Vacquerie, the well-known poet and editor of *Le Rappel*. The young couple went to live in the house of the bridegroom's mother, at Villequier on the banks of the Seine. One cloudless summer's day in September of this year, the husband took his wife, accompanied by his uncle and his uncle's son, a boy of ten, for a sail upon the river. As they turned a corner between two hills, a sudden gust of wind capsized the little boat. The uncle and little cousin sank immediately. Léopoldine who, one laughing evening of re-union at the Place Royale, had heard that, in any accident of the kind, safety was to be found in keeping at all hazards to the boat, clung frantically with her hands to the sinking skiff, and not all the efforts of her husband, the only swimmer of the party, could detach her terrified clutch from it. Charles Vacquerie heroically chose to sink with the wife he could not save; their bodies were found next day, held tight in each other's arms.

A few days later, Victor Hugo returning from a voyage in the Pyrenees, entered a little café in a village near Rochefort. While waiting for the refreshment he had ordered, he asked to see a paper. "It is thus," he writes next day to Madame Louise Bertin, "that I have learned that the half of my life and of my heart is dead." David the sculptor writes a fortnight later: "The house in the Place Royale is sad and silent.

At night however one may hear the cries which grief wrings from the poor mother, who has continually in her hands her drowned daughter's hair; in the daytime Hugo holds embraced his children seated upon his knees." Just a year before, David had taken, in marble, a bust of Hugo, crowned, in the classical manner, with a laurel wreath, symbolic of his victories as a poet.

" God, couldst Thou think, above in heaven,  
That I preferred, beneath the skies,  
The dread rays of Thy glory given,  
To the soft light within her eyes."

These lines are from the fourth book of *Les Contemplations*, where Hugo mourns the loss of his daughter. Considered as the spontaneous, unlaboured, and yet perfect, expression of a mighty sorrow, these poems have hardly their equal in literature.<sup>1</sup> They are, from this point of view, decidedly superior to the elaborate exquisiteness of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Few poets accused of heartlessness and egotism have supplied to the absolute truth of this charge such an absolute refutation as that which is contained in the series of poems entitled *Pauca Meæ*.

Work was, for Hugo, always a refuge from sorrows and annoyances of any sort. But the direction of his

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Roden Noel's *A Little Child's Monument*, is perhaps the nearest analogy to *Pauca Meæ* we have in English. In both instances, a poet and father laments the loss of a child. The simplicity and emotional sincerity of the English poet's verses render them hardly less touching and beautiful than are the similar verses of Hugo.

activity was, about this time, beginning to undergo a change. In the years which elapsed between his settlement in the Place Royale and the catastrophe at Villequier, his literary production had been incessant. In addition to various volumes of stories and criticism, he had produced four new plays. But his third drama in verse, *Le Roi s'amuse*, had only been saved from disaster on the stage by the royal interdiction put upon it, on the plea of its immorality, after one stormy representation. Of his dramas in prose, *Lucrèce Borgia*, *Marie Tudor*, *Angelo*, the first alone had proved a complete scenic success. The volumes of verse he published in rapid succession, *Les Chants du Crépuscule*, *Les Voix Intérieures*, *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, were, in spite of beautiful things contained in each, declared by authoritative critics to have added no essentially new note to those already struck in *Les Feuilles d'Automne*. Finally, in 1843, *Les Burgraves*, from the literary point of view, the greatest of Hugo's plays, was a complete failure on the stage of the Français, the public deserting this theatre to applaud on the other side of the river, at the Odéon, the revival of classicism in Ponsard's *Lucrèce*, a mediocre play, in which the rôle of the heroine was interpreted by Rachel. The romantic movement had been too vehemently trumpeted not to produce a reaction. Profoundly chagrined by this check, Hugo abandoned the theatre from this time forward. In the esteem of competent judges, his reputation had suffered little or not at all. His renown as leader of the younger generation of French men of letters never was more brilliant than at the moment

of the defeat of *Les Burgraves*; it had, shortly before, received official sanction, in his election, on the fourth occasion, on which he presented himself, to the Académie Française.

But the poet, the business side of whose character affirmed itself ever more strongly with advancing years, had heed, in his successes, of something besides the praise of his literary compeers. His enemies assert that he ruined nine publishers and several theatrical managers: it is at any rate patent that he did not ruin himself. He died, as every one knows, in the possession of one of the largest fortunes ever amassed by a writer. And, in those days as now, the theatre was, for French men of letters, the shortest road to riches. Nor was it only the prospect of the closing of an avenue of gain that mortified Hugo when *Les Burgraves* failed. In the heart of his genius dwelt, like a cancer, an insatiable craving for notoriety. Even more than the approbation of his literary colleagues he appreciated the breath of popular applause. This he had tasted during the first flush of the romantic movement, and henceforth he could not forego it. Tokens of respect from the intellectual aristocracy did not console him now that he seemed in danger of being forgotten by the waiters in the Parisian cafés, who no longer read his name on the programmes of their theatres, and by the commercial travellers, their most assiduous clients. How, he asked himself, could he set his name flying again among the mouths of the million, how could he become once more an actuality of the day, discussed at the hour of absinthe, when the boulevards were thronged?

The way was evident, too evident. The poet flung himself into politics.

His temperament, with its tireless energy, its robust exuberance, had never been the temperament of the pure artist; it was at once stronger and less fine; it demanded, for its full exercise, outlets other than those merely artistic. He had at one time serious thoughts of undertaking the management of a theatre. In one of his earliest odes he says of himself; "J'aurais été soldat si je n'étais poète,"—"I should have been a soldier, were I not a poet." But politics, with the constant opportunities they afford for keeping one's name boisterously before the great public, were the natural outlet for energies that could not entirely content themselves in the region of intellect and art. In 1845, Hugo obtained from Louis Philippe the title of Peer of France. In 1848, after the revolution which overturned the monarchy and the Chamber of Peers with it, he secured election as a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Republic, and his mandate was renewed the following year by his election to the Legislative Assembly.

For politics Hugo had always shown a theoretic partiality. In the ode which, in the *Edition Définitive* of his works, opens his first volume of poems, he declares that the poet's business is not to dream merely, nor to love and suffer for himself, but to participate also in the public actions and passions of his time and to set these to music. From this his youthful conception of the poet's mission, Hugo never swerved. He was, some may think, only too faithful to it. The romantic



movement had had, in its early stages, a political, fervently Legitimate, side, and, throughout Hugo's Royalist and Catholic boyhood, this had not been the least among its attractions for him. Up to the time of his taking an active share in public affairs he had published scarcely a volume of verse in which the passions and passing events of the hour did not find an echo, or in which he failed to discuss these, sometimes in the spirit of a partisan, more frequently in the pose of a philosopher. These metrical comments, ardently reactionary during the Restoration, became gradually more democratic in tone as the tide of democracy mounted. This eager interest in what went on around him is not, in Hugo's case, wholly to be regretted, even from the most rigidly artistic point of view, for it inspired much of his finest and most impassioned verse. And further, as an abstract political thinker, he has occasionally shown capacity. The conclusion to *Le Rhin*, a volume of travels published in 1842, is a masterly historical comparison between the state of Europe in the first half of the seventeenth and in the first half of the nineteenth century. The object of this comparison was to prove that as in the seventeenth century Europe was menaced by two colossal powers, Turkey and Spain, it is likewise menaced in the nineteenth by two corresponding colossi, Russia which has devoured Turkey, England which has devoured Spain. "Germany and France are essentially Europe. Germany is the heart, France is the head. Germany and France are essentially civilisation. Germany feels, France thinks." Let France and Germany, by a rational adjustment of the

Rhine frontier, league themselves together and maintain the balance of things. It has been asserted that such a dream was once entertained by the man who has done so much to retard its realization, Prince Bismark. There are to-day many political thinkers in France and Germany to whom the ideas expressed by Hugo fifty years ago are familiar, who believe that such an alliance as he then anticipated must, sooner or later, in the interest of European civilisation, inevitably be brought about.

But less even than Lamartine, who, in 1848, was the popular idol of an hour, was Hugo one of those rare men of letters who are fitted to play a brilliant or influential part in the battle of practical politics. He was no orator. The speeches he delivered in the Assemblies of 1848-51 were all carefully prepared beforehand; he was incapable of repartee, and interruption or denial in the course of a speech seldom failed to produce a disastrous effect on its studiously arranged delivery.<sup>1</sup> With that, an almost total want of the born politician's insight into the permanent or momentary worth of the men and measures he dealt with, and, at this epoch at least, a seeming instability of opinion which lessened his political influence in

<sup>1</sup> These statements may seem to accord ill with the speeches as they stand in the volumes of *Actes et Paroles*. But they are all proved by M. Biré in his *Victor Hugo après 1830*. Hugo's speeches, many of which make magnificent reading as they appear in the collected edition of his works, would seem to have been revised and edited up to date, in the same way as, according to M. Biré, were revised and edited many of his youthful fragments published in *Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées*.

these days of swift change, when fervent even desperate conviction had alone a chance of coming to the front.

His apparent instability of opinion had already appeared in the fact that, up to this time, he had been a supporter of every successive form of government that France had known since the Restoration. An ardent Legitimist under Charles X., he became a staunch Orleanist with the advent of Louis Philippe, and remained so till "the Citizen King" was in his turn dethroned, when his sympathies veered round to the Provisional Republic. As to his lack of political insight, what further evidence of this is required than the enthusiastic support and apparently sincere confidence that, till within a few months of the massacre of the 2nd December, he accorded to the weak, if not wicked, mystic who was chosen to be the second French Republic's first President? Hugo's enemies assert, indeed, that had Louis Napoleon offered him the post he was supposed to covet, that of the Ministry of Public Instruction, and thus constituted him a member of his government, the poet would gladly have spared himself his eighteen years of sea-girt exile. Wounded vanity, they say, was the sole cause of his change of front.

This is probably a libel; it is obviously an unfair exaggeration. Victor Hugo had for long been turning in the direction of that creed of democratic republicanism to which, when once finally adopted, he remained consistently faithful. He had for long, also, been chanting the glories of "the soldier of democracy,"

Napoleon I., and, his poet's imagination aiding, the name of Napoleon borne by the great Emperor's nephew had, so to say, fascinated and drugged his reason. And even if, for the sake of argument, we regard him as a self-seeking adventurer in politics, though his ambition would doubtless have been gratified by a seat in the Cabinet, it so happened that at the time such a position could have been offered to him, it was, to all appearance, in the interests of his political future to enter the ranks of the opposition,—to act, that is to say, just as he did.

Hugo's decisive conversion to the party and principles of the "extreme Left," dates from the autumn of 1849. In June of this year, he had voted with "the Right" on such test questions as that of the declaration of a state of siege for Paris in consequence of a recent rising in the streets, and that of the expedition against the Roman Republic in support of the Pope. A few months later, however, his political evolution was completed; his votes and speeches proved him to have become, what he ever afterwards remained, an advanced republican and democrat.

At the outset what, in English parlance, is called a High Tory, the poet had now passed from that, through moderate Conservatism and mild Whiggery, to almost anarchical radicalism, rounding upon the opinions of his youth in a manner which recalls the somewhat similar political proteanism of the most eminent living British statesman. Hugo's opponents, like Mr. Gladstone's, accuse him of having merely been guided, in his appreciations on public affairs, by "the march

of mind," in its vulgarest sense and in its most patent manifestations; the admirers of the public career of the French poet, like the admirers of the English politician, may maintain that this restlessness of soul requires no further defence than that advanced by Descartes in apology for his own analogous wanderings in the mazes of metaphysics:—"I should have thought that I was committing a great sin against good sense, if, because I once approved of something, I had forced myself to consider it still good at a later date, when it had perhaps ceased to be so, or I had ceased to consider it as such."

One may note another trait of similarity between the foremost Frenchman and the foremost Englishman who, educated as Tories, have found salvation in Democracy. Though Mr. Gladstone is, and Hugo was not, a born orator, in the tenour of their oratory both strive to convey the impression of the absolute impersonal purity of their professions by constant appeals, in large capital letters, to Providence, Justice, Principle, Integrity of Conscience, and other entities of the kind. This tendency to over protestation does not always carry conviction to the sceptics, who are apt, on the contrary, to discover in "*un chaos si pompeux d'inutiles paroles*," "such a pompous chaos of superfluous words," a reason against according credence to its utter sincerity.

Hugo's active political career was, in the meantime, and for the present, drawing to a close. In July, 1851, the Assembly refused to carry by a sufficient majority a project for the revision of the Constitution,

which would have enabled Louis Napoleon to offer himself for re-election when his term of office expired in the following May. Had things taken their legal course, Hugo would now have stood a fair chance of being nominated to the Presidency when the next election should take place. But, as every one knows, on the night of the 2nd December, Louis Napoleon revised the constitution by a process which involved the military massacre, in the streets of Paris, of several hundred men, women, and children. This abnormally brusque exercise of a policy of coercion has been described, with much detail, in *L'Histoire d'un Crime*. In these volumes Hugo's indignation has produced burning and graphic pictures of the night of the Coup d'État, and the events of the ten days subsequent to it. There is a certain amount of poetry mingled with the truth of this brilliantly written book; its author is liable to lapses of memory which, as M. Biré has taken a malicious pleasure in pointing out, always redound to the greater glory of Hugo. From the pages of *L'Histoire d'un Crime*, one would naturally gather that the narrator was the soul of the attempts to organize resistance to government by slaughter. He tells us, for instance, how, on one occasion, finding himself, with others, in an omnibus that was stopped on its way by the passage of a cavalry regiment, he put down the window, looked out, and cried to the soldiers:—"Down with Louis Bonaparte! Those who serve traitors are traitors themselves!" The incident occurred, but the relentless Biré asserts that it was not Hugo but a republican deputy accompanying him who raised this

cry. This variation has the authority of the deputy, M. Arnand (de l'Ariège), himself, who adds, "While this went on, Victor Hugo, seated beside me, kept pulling me by the flap of my frock-coat and repeating, 'But keep quiet then! keep quiet! you are going to get us all massacred!'" Hugo and his friends affirm that, during these days a price of £1,000 was set upon his head; the then prefect of the police, M. de Maupas, has formally denied this, declaring, "Morny gave me the order to arrest him. I refused to do it. Victor Hugo was in nowise dangerous. Arrested, he would have been an embarrassment." In fine, while on the one side it is asserted that the part played by Hugo at this time touched on the tragic, on the other side it is hinted that it bordered on the burlesque. The truth probably lies, as usual, between the two opposite versions. It is obvious that the new government had little reason to add to the already sufficient irritation it had evoked by taking violent proceedings against the greatest living Frenchman of letters; it is obvious, also, that Hugo, far the most eminent personality in the republican camp, must have been a formidable factor among the opponents of the Coup d'État. That his liberty, if not his life, was considered in danger, is proved by the fact that, urged by his friends, on the 11th December he left Paris secretly, in a blouse, and with the papers of identity, belonging to a workman. A month afterwards, an official decree expelled from French territory sixty-six members of the late Assembly—Victor Hugo's name was on the list of those thus proscribed.

## CHAPTER V.

HUGO IN EXILE.—MARINE TERRACE AND HAUTEVILLE HOUSE.

—LOOKING AT THE OCEAN.—HUGO'S OLD AGE IN  
PARIS AFTER 1870.—HOW TO BE A GRANDFATHER.—  
THE POET'S DEATH AND BURIAL.

IN the exquisite lyric, entitled, *La chanson de ceux qui s'en vont sur la mer*, *The Song of those who wend their way upon the sea*, Hugo has concentrated the bitter regret of the feelings with which he entered upon exile. Intellectually, a rebel against the French classical traditions, and with much in his manner of thought, as of expression, that was wholly un-French, he had ever been, whether Legitimist, Bonapartist, or Republican, passionately patriotic, passionately devoted to France. For him, as for so many who have experienced its fascination, Paris was always "the mother-city," "the city of light." "Vienna, Berlin, Saint Petersburg, London," he writes, "are only towns; Paris is a brain."

Entertaining such sentiments towards his country and its capital, one might naturally have expected that Hugo would embrace the first opportunity of returning to France. And, while the Empire lasted, he had many such opportunities of making his peace with it,



of feeling again the swift pulse of Paris play round him, in exchange for the grey break of the waves on the shores of his Channel solitude. The Imperial Government would have been only too glad to receive into its fold so brilliant a penitent, and Hugo, coming back to Paris, would have found, in the rising *Parassien* school of poets, disciples as full of ardent reverence as were the romantics of 1830; he could again have made of his *salon* the reception room of a literary king. But he refused, from first to last, all offers of amnesty and reconciliation; he declared that he was willing to accept "bitter exile, without date or term," rather than return to France as long as the Government of the 2nd December throned there. And these were the days when the Empire appeared to be irresistibly powerful and surely based; when the Czar of Russia, and the Queen of England vied with each other in expressions and acts of goodwill towards the French Emperor; when, to quote Hugo's own words, "Windsor, the Kremlin, Schönbrunn, and Potsdam arranged rendezvous at the Tuileries."

Here again, the poet's enemies assert that, however great his desire to participate in the pleasures of Paris, however intoxicating the incense of literary adulation he might have received there, Hugo's position in exile, as chief of the recalcitrant republicans, was, in the circumstances, an ideal one for purposes of self-advertisement and far-reaching notoriety, and that he knew it. It afforded him, they say, an unparalleled occasion for an heroic pose. With his infinite dexterity in the intricacies of the art

of *réclame*, he contrived (it is alleged) while a prisoner among the Channel rocks, to appear to the world in the likeness of the poet-god Apollo banished by the barbarians, of the Apostle St. John proclaiming from Patmos the splendours of a retributive Apocalypse.

It is always difficult to decide what part the egotistical impulse may have had in what are apparently the most "altruistic" actions, and so-called great men, especially such as have been great as artistic creators, have, often not less than ordinary men, been influenced in their conduct by personal considerations. That Hugo had some innate, sincere, and intense convictions, untouched by circumstances and independent of success, is proved by his consistent and passionate advocacy, from youth upwards, of the total abolition of the death penalty. It should also be remembered that he suffered, through his exile and the consequent confiscation of his property in France, an immense material loss. For one so practically-minded, and father of a family who all went into exile with him, such a loss would scarcely have seemed sufficiently compensated by the mere aureole of a martyr, had he not been persuaded that duty, to his country and to his ideals of political justice, compelled him to relinquish his rights as a citizen rather than to accept the Empire.

In any case, lovers of literature have little reason to regret these eighteen years of exile. Lovers of Hugo's literature, above all, might almost be bidden to remember in their prayers the name of Louis Napoleon. At the date of the Coup d'État, it was twelve years since the poet had published a volume of verse, eight

since he had produced a play, seventeen since he had given to the world any work of imagination in prose. Had French politics followed the course he desired, it is possible that he might have completely abandoned himself to a career, in which men who could not have written one line of his lyrics, nor conceived one character of his dramas or romances, were at least as well fitted to figure and to lead as he. In addition to various volumes of eloquent denunciation, in prose and verse, of the Imperial Government, his years of exile brought forth the earliest and finest series of *La Légende des Siècles*, where Hugo's mastery of the formal side of poetry attained its apogee, and where his magnificent pictorial imagination is at its highest; the thought and tenderness of *Les Contemplations*; *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*, little masterpieces of dainty grace; and three great prose romances, *Les Misérables*, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, and *L'Homme qui Rit*.

Marine Terrace, in Jersey, where the Hugo household, embarking from Belgium, had sought refuge, was not an ideal residence for a poet and his family. Hugo describes the house as being "rectilinear, correct, square, newly-whitewashed; Methodism in building." But, in after days, he looked back with a kindly feeling on the years spent in Jersey. "The places where one has suffered and been proved, end by having a sort of bitter sweetness which, afterwards, causes regret for them." He adds, characteristically, "They have a severe hospitality which is pleasing to the conscience." Jersey was a contrast to Paris, and Hugo had plenty of time on his hands in his foreign environment. How

he planned to dispose of his time will be best related in his own words :—

“ One morning at the end of November (1852), two of the inhabitants of this place, the father and the younger son, were seated in the dining-room. They kept silence, like shipwrecked people who reflect. Without it rained, the wind blew, the house was as if benumbed by this angry noise outside. Both the two were plunged in thought, absorbed perhaps by this coincidence of a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile. Suddenly the son raised his voice, and asked the father, ‘What do you think of this exile?’ ‘I think that it will be long.’ ‘How do you mean to occupy it?’ The father answered, ‘I shall look at the ocean.’ There was a silence. The father broke it; ‘And you?’ ‘I,’ said the son, ‘will translate Shakespeare.’ ”

François Victor Hugo fulfilled his intention, and made an admirable prose translation of the English dramatist; the father also fulfilled his, and looked at the ocean.

It was what his genius required. The air of great cities, electric, vivifying, necessary indeed, as it is, for the ripening of all rich, and completely human natures, such as Hugo's, may become, for such natures especially, unwholesomely and witheringly intoxicating, if uninterruptedly breathed. Until his exile, Hugo had lived incessantly in the atmosphere of the most feverish of great cities; he had lived also, latterly, in the atmosphere so often venomous of active political partisanship. The tonic, sanifying roll of the waves as they

passed, white and green, beneath the exile's eyrie, re-taught him the true use of his genius; they even added to it a range and a depth unknown before.

Comparing the poems written previously to, with the poems written during Hugo's exile, it is impossible not to feel as if, so to say, the wind, and even the sea itself, had somehow entered into the later verses, giving a surge and murmur, almost unique in French poetry, to their imperial sweep. And from the monster ocean, as he gazed at it, arose for the novelist, shapes and conceptions monstrously beautiful; Gilliat, alone save for the sea-birds, refashioning the fragments of the *Durande*, surrounded by the cloud-wrack and the storm; the child *Gwynplaine*, cast mutilated and friendless on the bleak sea-shore, travelling tremblingly amid the old, eternal forces of Nature; the cannon, in *Quatre Vingt Treize*, burst loose, and become an animated agent of evil on the ship's deck.

It was at Guernsey, not at Jersey, that these visions were perfected. Marine Terrace was the centre of a colony of political exiles, some of whom were more honest than polished. They had founded a journal, *L'Homme*, in the columns of which they printed violent attacks on the French Emperor, his Government, and the Governments which acknowledged him. They did not spare the English Government, at this time closely allied with that of France, in consequence of the Crimean War. In October, 1855, the Queen of England visited Paris, and conferred upon Marshal Canrobert the Order of the Bath. "She has put Canrobert into his bath," wrote Felix Pyat in *L'Homme*. The silliness

of the *calendbur* did not prevent its arousing manly indignation in the loyal breasts of the inhabitants of Jersey, whose chief citizens convened by proclamation a mass meeting to protest against the outrage, inviting to it "all who respect the sex to which you owe your birth, and of which Queen Victoria is the ornament." Upon this, Lord Palmerston, generally respectful of the powers that be, gave the proscripts of Jersey notice to quit. They disbanded in various directions; the Hugo household passed over to the neighbouring island of Guernsey.

Hauteville House, their residence here, is on the edge of the sea. The room the poet chose for his study, at the top of the house, has a large window looking seawards, through which the sun blazes. Close to the window, Hugo, who always wrote standing, established his standing desk, and in this room he appeared, as ever and everywhere when writing, in the early hours of the morning. He worked regularly till the lunch hour, achieving on an average, a hundred verses or twenty prose pages of his large handwriting. The remainder of the day he spent in talk, exercise, or dreams. "A little work is a bore to one," he said, "plenty of work an amusement."

A life so arranged left considerable time for amusements, and in some ways the Hugo family missed Paris sadly. The sons were young; the father appeared to have taken a fresh lease of youth, and the diversions in use at Guernsey were not such as they had been accustomed to. "To make and receive visits, to frequent entertainments 'under distinguished patron-

age,' to hear three times a week the 'God save in the Queen's Assembly Rooms, to show oneself regularly at chapel, and to side with the Wesleyans or the Methodists, this is not an existence."

This obviously Parisian appreciation of English manners and English religion is from the pen of M. Alfred Asseline, a cousin of Madame Hugo's, one of the many friends and sympathisers who came to see the family in their exile. There was a constant and not wholly groundless fear of treachery and espionage among the proscripts, a fear which at times took almost comic forms. M. Asseline relates how, on one occasion, when an unusually pretty *bonne* had taken service with the Hugos, one of their intimates among the exiles seriously believed, and tried to persuade the family, that Lord Palmerston had sent her to spy upon them. "Palmerston should have sent two such spies," said François Victor. The anxious friend would seem, however, to have succeeded in communicating his suspicions to Madame Hugo, for the good-looking *bonne* soon left Hauteville House; her stay there is commemorated in various poems of *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*.

Surrounded by the mysterious forces and problems of Nature, Hugo, and it was characteristic of him, was led to meditate more deeply on the mysterious forces and problems of Humanity. In 1862, after a silence as a novelist of exactly thirty years, he produced his second great romance, *Les Misérables*. This, the most widely read of all Hugo's works, is the most complete expression of his mature judgment of society as at pre-

sent constituted. Regarded from the "sociological" point of view, *Les Misérables* is a long indictment of the existing social order, especially of the actual administration of the law. For Hugo in this book, as for Saint Paul, "the strength of sin is the law." To establish his point, he has naturally taken, or rather imagined, extreme, almost impossible, cases of unmerited suffering induced by the working of the contemporary legal machinery. His Christlike convict, Jean Valjean, is condemned by a succession of carefully arranged disasters, to the maximum of penalty for the minimum of crime; his antitype, Javert, is a scarcely human example of the official martinet. The book is not a study from life; it is a tract, whose developments are studiously manipulated in order to prove its leading thesis. Yet, thanks to its marvellous literary merits, *Les Misérables* remains the one supreme piece of imaginative writing on the side of those whose aspirations tend towards a complete reconstruction of nineteenth-century civilisation, its instruments and ideals.<sup>1</sup>

In regard to one social problem, Hugo had, as already stated, never varied. He always looked with

<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, Hugo is not as a rule popular with such of his compatriots as belong to the party of social revolution. Since his day, this party has generally grown grimmer as it has grown more powerful; for many members of it, any form of imaginative writing is aristocratic and anathema. It is sometimes maintained also, that Hugo's sympathy with the disinherited of the earth was rather theoretic than real, more in word than in deed. The most practical manifestation of this sympathy would seem to have been the gift of £2,000 he bequeathed by testament to the poor of Paris.



horror upon capital punishment. Long before this time, he had written two stories, the object of which was to bear witness to the frequent errors of justice attendant upon the penalty of death; he denounced it in several poems with all his might of emphasis. Whatever the crime of which a man had been proved guilty, it was, Hugo considered, a crime as grave as any, to deliberately rob him of his life; he would not have wished to have seen slain by judicial execution, even Louis Napoleon, or, in later days, even Bazaine.

Both at Jersey and at Guernsey, he made vigorous efforts to secure the commutation of the death sentence in the cases of several persons who seem to have been, from the ordinary standpoint, terrible scoundrels. A worthier object of interest was the American guerilla abolitionist, John Brown, to save whom from the hangman Hugo exerted himself to the utmost. When, in 1869, he petitioned the Queen on behalf of the authors of the Clerkenwell explosion, he touched on a still burning question of British politics.

This was the poet's last notable public action during his exile. In July, 1870, Napoleon III. incited equally by M. de Bismarck and by the Empress Eugénie, announced his intention of "carrying civilisation on to the right bank of the Rhine," with results which we all remember. After Sedan and the fall of the Empire, Hugo had no further reason for refusing to return to French soil. Indeed, as he himself set forth in the superb verses prefixed to the first edition of *Les Châtiments* authorised in his own country, he had now every reason for returning to it. As he declares

in this, the most noble and perfect of his political poems, when the Empire had made Gomorrha of Lutetia, he had fled, sorrowfully, to hide himself amid the great sorrow that is upon the sea; but when his native land saw Attila with his grim hordes invade it, he came back, to dedicate his brain and at need his blood, to the service of his beloved mother country, shattered for the moment, and friendless among the nations. After his return, in September, 1870, to Paris, where the warmth of his reception could scarcely have been exceeded had he crushed the Prussians *en route*, his first publication, dedicated "A Paris, Capitale des Peuples," was *L'Année Terrible*, a sort of versified journal of the events of the dire year that saw the world's capital in the hands of a stranger enemy, a sorrowing tribute of piety to the soft land that had given him birth, and to the brilliant city that had acclaimed his literary triumphs.

His trials and sorrows were not yet at an end. Elected to the National Assembly, then seated at Bordeaux, he resigned his seat there when it, largely composed of Royalists, refused to listen to his praise of Garibaldi, who had drawn his veteran republican sword in aid of the French Republic. Two years previous to his return from exile, Madame Hugo had died at Brussels; in March, 1871, the eldest son, Charles Hugo, followed her. A few weeks later, Victor Hugo went to Brussels on business, connected with the death of his son. The Parisian Commune had just been suppressed; cruel reprisals had been exercised against those who took part in it; the

Belgian Government, among others, had refused asylum to the fugitives from the rifles of the party of order. For these fugitives, Hugo, who half sympathised with the ideals they had attempted to realise, proclaimed publicly that his door was open, and that once within his walls, no one should touch them without commencing by himself. Some worthy citizens of the Belgian capital, among whom was the son of the Minister of the Interior, determined to attest their respectability by taking violent proceedings against one who had dared to declare that the Communists should be treated like human beings. A night attack was made on the house where Hugo lodged with his son's widow and her two little children; for two hours to the cries of "Hang him!" "A la lanterne!" "Death to the brigand!" a furious shower of stones broke the windows, and made havoc with the furniture of the house; a beam had been procured to batter in the door when, the dawn appearing, the night birds slunk away. The ringleaders in this riot escaped unpunished, and Hugo was told he must leave Belgium.

He knew not as yet, any more than another, whether fate had in store for his country yet deeper darkness or a new morning.<sup>1</sup> But hope grew and doubt decreased as time wore on. Immortal France, with her quenchless vitality, her ready recuperative power, her dexterous lightness of spirit after disaster,

<sup>1</sup> "Qu'est-ce qui va sortir de ta main qui se voile  
O destin ?  
Sera-ce l'ombre infâme et sinistre, ou l'étoile  
Du matin ?"

bound up her wounds and laughed. It soon appeared that the war had scarcely touched her supremacy, as the yet undethroned mistress of modern nations, in regard to all matters of art and the imagination. And she now delighted to do all sorts of honour to one who had, as an imaginative creator, brought so much honour upon her. It was during these years that the poet's fame reached its highest in France, and spread to its widest abroad. To this admiration for the man of letters was added the adulation of the people of Paris, in the first fervour of their recovered Republic, for the Republican, who, during eighteen years of exile, had never ceased to denounce the now detested Empire. Hugo's home in the Avenue d'Eylau (now the Avenue Victor Hugo) became at once the quasi-sacred centre of literary Paris, and a shrine to which curious strangers from all corners of the earth made pilgrimage. Here, carefully tended and guarded by his daughter-in-law, Madame Lockroy, and her husband, and enjoying the society of his old friend, Madame Drouet, who had been near him throughout his exile, he received the homage, as supreme pontiff of letters, of almost all the living writers of his country. Here, also, on his days of reception, came Jews, Turks, Peruvians and Chinamen, to each of whom in turn, after shaking hands with his wonted elaborate courtesy, he said a welcoming word. It was characteristic of the man and his genius that he should have suffered himself to be brought into competition, as one of the sights of Paris, with the new Opera House and the Jardin des Plantes, no more than these to be missed

visiting by the intelligent foreigner, and both in theory and in practice this form of celebrity had its comic side. Many worthier tributes were offered to him, the most memorable of these tokens of respect being that which he received on his eightieth birthday, when a large fraction of the people of Paris assembled beneath the balcony where stood the poet between his two grandchildren, Georges and Jeanne.

Georges and Jeanne were now all of his blood left him. His second son, François Victor, died two years after his brother; his remaining daughter, Adèle, was in an asylum. Hugo had always written exquisitely of children and children's ways. The apparition of a child, like a flower on a frowning ruin, brightens some of the most sombre episodes of *La Légende des Siècles*; in a poem of *Les Voix Intérieures* he had asked his children's pardon for having, in a moment of irritation, driven them from the study where they had been amusing themselves by tearing up his manuscripts. In the chapter of *Quatre Vingt Treize* which describes the children in the old tower, he has rendered "the divine chiaroscuro of infantine speech" in a manner worthy of Mrs. Molesworth; what reader of *Les Misérables* can forget the childhood of Cosette?

But, under the constant inspiration of the presence of his little grandchildren, Hugo, when in his old age, he produced *L'Art d'être Grand-Père*, surpassed all he had yet achieved in dealing with this lovely subject. As he drew nearer the gate by which one goes out on to the Infinite, the tiny forms that filled the gate by which one enters upon Life became, for him, more and

more interesting and attractive. In *L'Art d'être Grand-Père*, he at once studies childhood from without, and, as it were, understands it from within. He can talk of children like a grown-up person who lovingly meditates their mystery; he can talk with children like a mother, or still better, like one of themselves. For him, as for Mr. Swinburne, a child is the greatest of miracles, to be approached with wonder and awe:—

“Take heed of this small child of earth  
He is great, he hath in him God most high;  
Children before their fleshly birth  
Are lights alive in the blue sky.”<sup>1</sup>

He appreciates also, with Miss Rossetti, the quite unmetaphysical, but no less absorbing, marvels of

“Such an elbow furrowed with dimples!  
Such a wrist where creases sink!

and, in various pieces of *L'Art d'être Grand-Père*,—in that one, for instance which retails what the public, meaning the children, say at the Jardin des Plantes, the Parisian “Zoo,”—he has shown that he can himself absolutely become a child. He defined Paradise as a place where “the children are always little, and the parents always young.” If to some persons the definition should appear inadequate, Hugo has, in a manner, forestalled their objections by writing of himself as “I whom a little child makes perfectly stupid.”

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Mr. Swinburne, from Hugo, in the second series of *Poems and Ballads*.

Many of the poems of *L'Art d'être Grand-Père* deal directly with incidents of daily life in the children's nursery, with the "rixæ, pax, et oscula" attendant on such an interior. In these incidents the grandfather always appears as the beneficent genius of the grandchildren, educating them, that is to say, on a system of unlimited "spoiling," and also, "seeing that Georges is two years old and Jeanne is ten months," as their entirely humble servant. The grandchildren, for their part, regarded him as a storehouse of *bonbons* and toys, and sometimes as their preserver when punishment seemed imminent; in either capacity to be climbed about and bullied at their royal pleasure. The late Emperor of Brazil happening to call at the Avenue d'Eylan during these years, and Hugo saying to him, "Sire, I have the honour of presenting my grandson, Georges, to your Majesty," Dom Pedro answered, stroking the child's head; "My child, there is only one Majesty here, and this," turning towards Hugo, "is he." The little boy was probably considerably puzzled; for him and for his sister alike, Victor Hugo was not the most many-sided man of letters the century had produced; he was merely their "little papa."

The poet's old age was not, however, wholly occupied in caressing, and writing about, his grandchildren. His literary productiveness showed no decline with declining years. If among the many volumes, whose count is not yet told, published after his return from exile and after his death, some might seem to be largely composed of the rinsings of his genius, rejected

when his powers were at their height, this is by no means universally the case. The metrical systems of philosophy and religion he now poured forth make often tedious reading, but some of his later lyrics rank quite among his best work in this line.<sup>1</sup> *Torquemada*, in which he put a term to the silence that, as dramatist, he had preserved ever since the failure of *Les Burgraves*, was fully worthy of its predecessor. All Hugo's later dramatic writing, in fact, less theatrical, less adapted for representation on the stage than were the dramas of his youth, has a richness of human feeling, or else a wealth of fancy, that makes it, in some respects, superior to his earlier and better known plays. The dramatic poem, it can scarcely be called a drama, in *Les Quatre Vents de L'Esprit* which tells how the millionaire Duke Gallus, weary of facile conquests and the easy satisfaction of his loveless caprice, went out to look for love, saw it, but could not win it, then found, failed to recognise, and consequently lost it, has a note of genuine emotion and experience, rarer with Hugo than with Musset. The lawlessly constructed plays of the posthumous *Théâtre en Liberté*, where wonderful things come about in forests where flowers talk, and in which the strong people of the world are put to shame by the weak dwellers in the woodlands, appeal rather perhaps to Germanic than to Gallic taste. On the whole, it may possibly be claimed for Hugo

<sup>1</sup> In *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, for instance, the song commencing "Jamais elle ne raille" comes near to being his lyrical masterpiece. It has been lately set to very appropriate music by a rising young French musician, M. Xavier Perrean.



that he had the distinction, not common among literary creators, of having written nothing that materially assisted to lower his reputation, by persisting in working until the night arrived. The night, which came so late for him, came almost by an accident.

The poet's private life in his old age was of extreme simplicity. It contrasted with the blare of public notoriety around his name and with the sort of pose he at times assumed, in the same manner as the sweetness and spontaneity of his poems on children contrast with the theatrical effects of much of his political and social writing. He had always lived and worked most regularly in regard to hours; he eat plainly, drank little, and smoking was his abhorrence. Till the end he refused to make use of cabs, and, when not walking, rode on the outside of omnibuses. It was from a ride on one of these without his great coat that he caught the chill from the effects of which he died, May 22nd, 1885.

Hugo's funeral exhibited the same contrast of the sublime and the almost grotesque which appears in his work, character, and fashion of appealing to the public. In many ways the most imposing burial ceremony that had ever fallen to the lot of an artistic creator, there were mingled with its grandeur elements of the ridiculous. He had himself left instructions that he was to be borne to the tomb on a pauper's hearse, and thus he was taken from the Arc de Triomphe to the Pantheon, amid a convoy of a hundred and fifty thousand persons; preceded by innumerable carriages laden with wreaths that had

been sent from all corners of the earth; with all Paris standing at gaze to watch him, for the last time, pass along her streets. A pauper's hearse, in whose honour the world of flowers had been ransacked, in whose honour military music beat as it rolled along, in whose honour tens of thousands came as an escort to the sepulchre, Hugo, who so loved antitheses, has found none more strange! Not less contrasted was the aspect of the crowd that accompanied the coffin. For Hugo's multifarious activity had created for him claims on the respect of all kinds and classes of men; it was not only the poet but also the democrat, not only the great literary artist but also the eccentric humanitarian, who was mourned by this composite multitude. Senators moved alongside of conspirators, academicians, crowned with success, walked in the same path with half-starved Bohemians from Montmartre, the national colours fluttered in the same wind with the banners of anti-vivisectionists, anti-vaccinationists, societies for the prevention of necessary or superfluous "abuses," companies of free-masons and free-thinkers. No religious emblem found place amid all this; and the burial was accomplished unaided by the offices of the Church. For Hugo died, as he had lived throughout the greater part of his existence, a Deist, and in his public testament he had expressly refused the prayers of all churches, while ending it with the words: "I believe in God."

The most sumptuous obsequies that Paris had seen since, forty-five years previously, the ashes of Napoleon were translated from Saint Helena, were, in their gran-

deur bordered with burlesque, a symbol of the career of the man, whose genius, brilliant in all outward workmanship, gorgeously imaginative, and often passionately genuine, had mixed with it an alloy of tinsel and unreality.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF HUGO'S LITERARY GENIUS.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, whose academic temperament was frequently a blind guide to him in matters of art, and whose ear was always dull to the beauties of French versification, saw in Victor Hugo's personality and its literary outcome only "l'homme moyen sensuel," "the average sensual man, shouting and impassioned." There was undoubtedly in Hugo's character, and, therefore, in his work, much of the average middle-class citizen of the nineteenth century, of the man, that is, who, as largely from natural bent of mind as from policy, accepts and profits by the sentiments prevailing in his environment, and the opinions most puissant in his time. To share in and represent the passions, the tendencies, even the foibles, of his age and surroundings—to be, as Hugo himself says of himself, the "sonorous echo" of these—is, for the artist, in some respects a source of strength, supplying him at any rate with a constant motive and impulse to produce. And if Victor Hugo possessed this susceptibility to his environment to a point where it verged on weakness, he possessed also, in abundant measure,

the qualities which, in strong souls, are almost always twinborn with such a susceptibility. Untiring energy and the desire to appear to the world as doing work of the first order, and a great deal of it, these are not in themselves artistic qualities, but they constitute the substructure upon which most of the artistic work that endures has been done. They are the tribute which the highest genius pays to ordinary human nature, and to those forces in it which make the world go round. Paradoxical persons might maintain that the most finely-touched artistic natures are not those which have given us the most robust and enduring artistic work; the dreamer who cannot resign or rouse himself to action, the intellectual reactionary who cuts himself adrift from his time, the eccentric who disdains to crown himself with the laurels of success, may, for the psychologist, be more interesting studies than the strenuous artistic creator, recognised as great, with his share in what is essential and common to humanity. It remains true, however, that a large element of "the average sensual man," with his pleasures and ambitions, has existed in the composition of the vast proportion of those to whom the judgment of centuries has assigned the loftiest rank as intellectual princes, and that the great artist has, for basis of his nature, vulgar energies and passions quite similar to those of the industrious artisan. But the sum of qualities which complete the artisan are, though essential, only secondary in the artist, and to dismiss Victor Hugo as merely "the average sensual man, shouting and impassioned," is to perpetrate

what Matthew Arnold himself calls a "jugement saugrenu."<sup>1</sup>

What was there, then, in Hugo's work, that lifted him from the crowd of excellent and energetic persons, with a considerable opinion of their own merits, and of the value and effect of their voices—that made of him the most powerful agent in a great literary movement, and placed him, in the intellectual order, in the front rank of the world's creative forces?

In commenting on Hugo's connection with the French romantic movement, we have already referred to the literary qualities which first made him famous, and marked him out as the leader of a literary revolution, imperatively required. Equally with Keats in England, equally with Heine in Germany, he was, though in a widely different way from either, a master of all the secrets of his native language. Colour, the technical medium of the painter, is not everything in painting; words, the technical medium of the poet, are not everything in poetry; but a poet's command over words has precisely as much value as a painter's command over colours, and of Victor Hugo's power over words it is impossible to say anything in excess. Without using any violence towards the natural genius of the French language, he transformed it as the vehicle of expression in verse. He discovered in it possibilities of rhythmical harmonies unguessed at till

<sup>1</sup> "'Saugrenu' is a rather vulgar French word, but, like many other vulgar words, very impressive; used as an epithet for a judgment, it means something like 'impudently absurd.'" M. Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*.

he struck them. French verse had always been adequate as an instrument for the pure intelligence, as for the sentiments and common human emotions; but before Hugo's appearance it had for long suffered from a certain stiffness and thinness, which denied to it various artistic effects to be found in the verse of other nations. Malherbe, who "d'un mot mis à sa place enseigna le pouvoir," "taught the power of a word well in its place," was indeed an artist in words after his manner, but he regarded words solely from the logical and grammatical standpoint. For him, as for Boileau, as for Pope in England, a word was in its place when it went towards rendering, as accurately, concisely, and pointedly as possible, the clear expression of a definite sentiment or idea. And the Malherbe-Boileau school had been so long omnipotent in France, that men, forgetting such old singers as Charles d'Orleans and Ronsard, were beginning to treat it as a thing of course that French poetry was, in its nature, incapable of that indefinable beauty which, in other countries, was entering so largely into the nascent poetry of the nineteenth century; a beauty whose charm, escaping exact logical analysis, is greatly dependent on the mere arrangement, the cadence and sequence, of artfully chosen words.

Hugo changed all that. Hence it is that, refusing any homage to a school under whose auspices *Le Cid*, *Andromaque*, *Le Misanthrope*, were composed, some critics, fanatics of the purely æsthetic side of verse, have asserted that French poetry began with Hugo. He renewed, at any rate, its outward texture. In his

hands it was proved that its metrical forms could contain colours as opulent as the colours of Keats, could rival in music the *Kubla Khan* of Coleridge. In *Les Orientales* he attained maturity as an artist in words, and this volume was the law and the prophets for the later romantic school in verse. Never since the sixteenth century had French poetry known such variety of metrical effect, such richness of verbal colour. The publication of *Les Orientales* made an epoch in French literary history, and, with its appearance, its author's influence on the new æsthetics was already essentially complete.

But had Hugo contented himself with restoring to words their æsthetic, as distinct from their logical, value, he would merely have been superior to many poets of his country and century,—to such a skilled musician and colourist as Théodore de Banville for example,—from the fact of having preceded and paved the way for them. He was, he did, much more than that. Below this craftsman's empire over words, giving body to it, and in some sort its origin, lay an imagination such as, in its kind, few writers have ever possessed to the same degree of intensity. It was not the inward penetrative imagination of Lamartine and Wordsworth, which brooded over and gave voice to the shy secrets of Nature, and the subtle phenomena of the soul; it was not the psychologically creative imagination of Shakespeare and Racine, which bared the human heart and made men and women live for us, feeling and acting as we see them feel and act in the world around. Victor Hugo's imagination, like



his power over words, was almost entirely plastic and pictorial, and in this direction his gifts were supreme.

*La Légende des Siècles*, for example, despite its high-sounding title, would be but a poor and partial handbook to read the world's history from; as a series of impressive and sumptuous tableaux, drawn in a disjointed and arbitrary manner from all times and climes, it has not its like in literature.

It is characteristic of Hugo's imagination that, in *La Légende des Siècles*, where he professes to paint all epochs of history, he lingers relatively little over the Greek world, with its clear and bounded horizons, and, on the other hand, devotes the majority of these poems to subjects connected with Biblical and Eastern legend, or with the heroic amorphous chronicles of the Middle Ages. Always, as he says himself, "incliné du côté du mystère," "leaning towards the side of mystery," he loved the vague, the dim, as he loved to reconstruct ages long past, and to prophesy harmoniously over eras in the future. That his fancy was as delicately graceful as his imagination was mighty, *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois* suffice to prove. In this volume the poet, resting from his labours in granite, has become a mosaic-worker, in whose hands "the morsel that Cellini carves rivals the boulder on which Michael Angelo works," "la miette de Cellini vaut le bloc de Michel Ange." And many a glowing episode of *La Légende des Siècles* shows that he could deal with subjects where the action and environment were definite and circumscribed.

But, on its formal side, his verse is at its best when, so to say, the wind seems to have got into it, and to blow through its lyrical lilt; in the same way, his imagination is at its greatest when it tends most towards the infinite, where the wind has its home. He is unique among poets when his subject permits him to depict immense material spaces, filled with Titan-forms, painted after history or fashioned out of his own grandiose dream-world. Pictures such as that which opens *L'Expiation*, the retreat from Moscow of the army of giants, traversing limitless white deserts, filled with the mysterious terror of the steppes; conceptions like that of *Le Satyre*, the wood-creature, flung down on Olympus as a scoff and amusement for the assembled gods, singing to them "of the dædal earth," and its wonders, until, the sap of nature swelling within him, he grows glorious in strength and stature, out-towering all the puny Olympians, and reveals himself as Pan,—“Jupiter on your knees!”—the one universal and eternal God: visions as that which saw, in the world beyond ours, Pope Pius IX. brought to judgment and condemned as ultimately the sole responsible cause of the blood shed in war and massacre during his Pontificate, a vision in which the poet has contrived to convey in a manner perhaps unmatched in literature the sense of immeasurable distances, and the sound of the tramp of innumerable multitudes of men: it is in describing scenes and dreams like those that Hugo's imagination exults and triumphs. *Pleine Mer, Plein Ciel, Ce que dit la Bouche d'Ombre, Tout le Passé et Tout l'Avenir* are titles, in this

respect significant, that he has chosen for four of his poems.

This tendency, growing on him as he grew older, to measure himself with the immeasurable, to take all space and all time for his province, coupled as it was with an inclination towards vaporous speculation, would have meant for most writers a final floundering and collapse into bleak metaphysic. From this fate Hugo was saved by his plastic sense, by his firm and abiding hold on the concrete world of material vision and image. Even when, as in the volumes published in his old age, and in his posthumous works, he has indulged his genius for general disquisition to a disquieting extent, his vivid illustrations and metaphor preserve the result from ever being merely a philosophical or theosophical tract. More often indeed the opposite is the case. Hugo had a stock of philosophical ideas as plentiful as befits a poet, but it has frequently, and with some justice, been reproached to him that he concealed the essential aridity or commonplace of his thought by clothing it in a glittering robe of imagery, that he was apt to dress out a skeleton in imperial satins and gems. Hugo's poverty of thought is, however, often exaggerated; his very luxuriance of metaphor and simile has here been against him with certain critics, who have neither his pictorial spirit nor his fluent sense of analogy, and who would appear to be influenced by the notion that nothing worth saying can possibly be beautifully said.

It is at any rate certain that there has rarely existed a writer in whose mind the concrete and the

abstract, the physical and the spiritual worlds, have been so intimately welded together. Innumerable are the instances in his works of comparisons, drawn from the material world, serving to give substance and colours to conceptions in the world of emotion or idea; an emotion, an idea, rarely rose within him unclothed in material imagery, often splendidly appropriate. It may be doubted whether he cared much about Nature and the external world, save as a treasury of metaphor and simile, as a background for human interest, and a field for reflective musings on the destiny of our planet and its inhabitants. He was little given to delicate, deliberate word-painting of Nature in her smaller phases, in the manner perfected in England by Tennyson. He could, on occasion, sing of flowers and brooklets, for little escaped his keen eye for outward things; but it was more natural to Hugo to treat of Nature in her large and majestic aspects, and these in their relation to humanity. He was little disturbed by "a sudden whirr of pheasant's wings;" "laburnums, dropping wells of fire," left him cold; he turned from these to listen where, while wives and mothers watched hungrily upon the shore, "le vent de la mer souffle dans sa trompe," "the wind of the sea blows within its trumpet," or to hear, while Swiss freeman sold their birthright to Austrian tyrants for pay, the Alps proclaim, in the thunder of their avalanches, their inviolable allegiance to the spirit of Liberty.

Many of those who visited Hugo's home in the Place Royale, or Hauteville House in Guernsey, the exile's eyrie, have recorded their impressions of the strange-

ness of the furnishings and decorations which the poet chose to surround him. Scant regularity, tastes and epochs confused together, the Orient and the Middle Age dominating, dark rich ornamentation, quaint old chairs and tables, the whole contemplated from the walls by skulls and texts, recalling the transitory glory of things; these were the prevailing notes of the material atmosphere in which Hugo dwelt when within his own walls. Similarly, in his most characteristic poetry, the qualities, generally considered as conspicuously French, of arrangement and ordered composition, are subordinated to startling detail; colour floods form, a sombre background not infrequently gives emphasis to a surface luxuriance, and to the brilliancy of the workmanship. We have a superb instance of the last mentioned peculiarity in the poem entitled *Zim-Zizimi*, where an eastern sultan, seated alone in his gorgeous banqueting hall, hears the twelve sculptured sphinxes that support it speak to him, each in turn, of grandeur closing in death. In this poem, also, the parable put into the mouth of the ninth sphinx, affords an example of one of Hugo's favourite effects, so common with him that it becomes a mannerism. In verses that are the summit of splendid vibrating colour, he describes the glory and the loveliness of Cleopatra when alive, and closes the description with a line, grisly in its realistic audacity, showing the pride of her life grown loathsome in the tomb. Such an antithesis is an illustration of Hugo's conception of the *grotesque*, which enters largely into his poems and permeates his dramas.

The preface to *Cromwell*, his earliest drama, contains an elaborate theory of the rôle of the grotesque, according to Hugo the obverse side of the sublime, found always along with that in Nature, and therefore properly to be placed along with it in Art, whose mission is to imitate Nature. The "classical" playwrights of France had separated the two, constituting tragedy as the sphere of the sublime alone, and confining the grotesque to comedy. Both must be combined for the modern world, which demands neither pure tragedy nor pure comedy, but drama, where tragedy and comedy meet, and Hugo announces himself, by implication, as the initiator of the drama in France. This conception of the "grotesque" Hugo had gathered from Shakespeare, whose "sweet and bitter" Fools he transferred to the French stage.

On the causes which prevented the poet from being a great dramatist we have already commented. Incapable of "looking at happiness" or at sorrow "through another man's eyes," he lacked the very quality essential for supreme dramatic creation. It is the style, the superb versification, to be found in them that saves, and will long continue to save, *Hernani* and its successors from oblivion. It is a remarkable proof of this, that while *Hernani* and *Ruy Blas* alone among Hugo's dramas still occupy the stage, his finest plays, from the literary point of view, are just those which are the least capable of scenic interpretation. *Les Burgraves* is often magnificent reading but it failed utterly, and inevitably, on the stage. *Torquemada*, which contains the sublime tirade

where the Grand Inquisitor addresses those whose bodies he is burning to save their souls, "*Ah! sans moi vous étiez perdus, mes bien aimés!*" "Without me, you were lost, beloved ones;" is equally unfitted for the scene. And, on the other hand, it is precisely the qualities which make Hugo's plays effective, as far as they are effective, on the stage, that offend the taste and judgment of a cultivated reader. Hugo had an undoubted sense for theatrical, as distinct from genuinely and deeply dramatic, situation, and this enabled him to procure for his auditors in the theatre many a footlight thrill. But, read in the closet, these same situations seem tawdry and unreal; we smell the lime-light and see the blue fire in whose artificial atmosphere they appear to have been conceived. This applies especially to his prose dramas, where the lordly rhythm of his verse is wanting to compel admiration and cast its rich glamour over defects. Read, *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Marie Tudor* excite laughter where they do not excite disgust; one can easily imagine them very effective on the stage,—the stage, say, of the Parisian Théâtre des Batignolles, or of the Surrey Theatre in London.

The young gentlemen, authors, and *rapins* (art-students), who, according to the legend, after the first representation of *Hernani*, danced round the bust of Racine in the Théâtre Français, to the cry of "*Enfoncé, Racine!*" had allowed Hugo's lime-light effects and sonorous alexandrines to run away with their reason. Hugo, as dramatist, throwing Racine into the shade! One might as truthfully proclaim the superiority of Madame Tussaud's waxworks, including, in this case,

the entire collection of the Chamber of Horrors, over the sculpture galleries of the Louvre. Hugo's best dramas are, indeed, masterpieces in the art of creating, within the walls of a theatre, a momentary and fevered excitement; but, to attain this end, he required the aid of daggers, poison-cups, spectacular effects, improbable situations, heroic and unnatural personages. Racine, without any of these "romantic" accessories, remains, for his country, the master of dramatic romance. In his play of *Bérénice*, which has for sole intrigue the separation, compelled by political exigencies, of a man and woman who love each other, he has achieved the unique and apparently impossible feat of interesting us passionately through five acts in this bare thread of a theme. Hugo's plays will some day perhaps be chiefly remembered from their significance in literary history, as illustrating a mood in the artistic development of France. The tragedies of Racine, written in a language inappreciable in the entirety of its purity and grace for all save Frenchmen, must remain for ever as the most morally subtle, and artistically delicate, expression that France has known of the essential passions and emotions of mankind.

But, when all is said, Hugo's dramas leave on one the impression of having looked on a gorgeous and various-coloured pageant, sweeping past to the sound of a mighty and changeful music. This is undoubtedly not at all the impression one receives from the work of a born dramatist; but Hugo, we repeat, was, at bottom, totally and solely a great lyrical poet. The



magnificent *Châtiments* even, which would pass for satires, are in reality an outburst of red-hot lyrical wrath. Indignation certainly made these verses, but a personal indignation against a definite event, person, and period, not the abiding indignation of the satirist against human follies and vices, everywhere and always. Besides, the true satirist mocks; Hugo rages. The true satirist renders ridiculous; Hugo sometimes essays ridicule, but a curse closes his gibes. There exists, however, perhaps no volume of so-called satirical writing which, in point of poetry, approaches *Les Châtiments*. Its one grave defect is its frequent rhetorical appeal to the gallery. It contains many passages by the side of which we look to see "*Vifs applaudissements à Gauche; Clameurs et dénégations à Droits; mouvements divers sur plusieurs bancs.*"—"Loud applause upon the Left; clamorous denials on the Right; various movements on several benches"—comments on oratory frequent in the French Chamber with which Hugo interlards the speeches in his *Actes et Paroles*.

Of all Hugo's works, his romances are most popular out of France. Foreigners can appreciate an exciting story where the delicacies of versification are necessarily lost upon them, and Hugo's romances are triumphs of the sensational in situation, character, and event. They have the advantage over similar productions by Dumas père and Mr. Rider Haggard of being composed in a prose style, unique as that of Carlyle or Michelet, and, in general, admirably adapted to its subject-matter; they are, for the rest, something more

than mere sensation novels. They are not more than the dramas are representative of real human life. One does not in real life come across convicts with Christ-like natures, like Jean Valjean; prostitutes with the soul of an angel, like Fantine; hideous physical deformities with hearts of gold, like Gwynplaine; ladies so fantastically monstrous, in the moral sense, as the Duchess Josiane. But, in these days of realism and exact psychology, pure imagination is occasionally welcome in professedly imaginative work; and, granted the essentially unrealistic basis of Hugo's conceptions, his painting, in details, is always vivid and precise; granted the essentially superhuman nature of his psychology, its developments are generally natural and planned with regard to probability. He excels in the description of souls in the tension of some crisis of passion or action, and this genius for high-wrought situation is, in some sense, a form of his pre-eminent pictorial faculty. A tumultuous moment in the career of one of his characters seems to blaze upon the brain of this artist in words in the same way as a subject for a picture flashes before an artist in colour; in both cases, the primary inspiration is from the plastic sense. As with his plays, the literary value of Hugo's romances increases in many ways in proportion as they become impossible and unreal. The greatest of them on the whole is the unequal and unwieldy *Les Misérables*; the most perfect artistically is *Notre-Dame de Paris*; but the highest flights of genius are perhaps to be found amid the extravagance and absurdity of *L'Homme qui Rit*. It is another proof that Hugo's

essentially lyrical nature had freest scope and was most interesting in result when most abandoned to its own lyricism, when least trammelled by the attempt to realise life and outward things as they are, or as they appear to others.

In volumes on contemporary history, such as *L'Histoire d'un Crime*, his imagination burns up his judgment. No man was ever by nature less of a critic, but his study of Mirabeau, for example, and the book entitled *William Shakespeare*, are full of ideas and images which make them merit to be read, even though, from the exact critical standpoint, they may be little more than pieces of "excellent good fooling."

With advancing years the poet concerned himself more and more with the final questions of metaphysics, and constructed theories of the universe which, like all similar theories, are ultimately only of value as revelations of the temperament of their constructor. It was natural that Hugo's sanguine and exuberant temperament, on which so much of success had shone, should find expression in a robust optimism. Less cryptical in expression, his philosophy had, in substance, much in common with the philosophy of Browning. The optimism of both may be briefly summarised in the well-known words of the English poet:—

" God's in His Heaven,  
All's right with the world! "

Hugo has elaborated this text through many pages of prose and verse. Whether, as in his earlier days, expressed in the tender formulæ of the Catholic reli-

gion, or, as later, simply Deistic, his faith was constant in the ultimate manifestation of an Omnipotent Beneficence, healing the sorest wounds of the oppressed, and extending pardon to the oppressor. For, in Hugo's scheme of things, all-embracing Charity was lovelier and mightier than even all-equable Justice, the Virgin Mother pleading and prevailing with God.

"The heart," says Landor, "is the creator of the poetical world; only the atmosphere is from the brain." This is one view of poetry, a view which, it may be said in passing, should, in strict logic, deny the existence of "the poetical world" to writers of the type of Milton. Landor's own nature was too rich to be rigidly consistent; he has said elsewhere, "Without the sublime there can be no poet of the first order; but the pathetic may exist in the secondary; for tears are more easily drawn forth than souls are raised." This is another view of poetry, the corrective of that first quoted. Neither alone is absolute; taken together it may be said that the great poets of the world are those who, being at the same time technically masters of their craft, have fulfilled the requirements involved in the one as in the other point of view.

Judged from any ordinary standard of the sublime, Hugo frequently attains sublimity; considered as a master of his craft, he bears the test still more triumphantly. But many critics have maintained that, throughout his poetry, the head constantly usurps the place of the heart; that his emotion is deliberately excited, cunningly arranged in stately or delicate metre, and such critics, regarding poetry as primarily an

affair of emotion genuinely felt, have refused Hugo rank among the first order of poets. It is true that, in a large proportion of his verses, the poet gives one the impression of a man writing with his heart placidly at ease, his reason cool, or purposely worked up to fever heat, and the remainder of his intellectual and imaginative capacities in an intense and permanent condition of ardent and exalted activity. But it is by no means always so. Such patriotic pieces as *A L'Obéissance Passive* in *Les Châtiments*, carry, on the torrent of their eloquence, the convincing accents of a passionate sincerity, and if, as may be urged and admitted, all poetry of this kind is, by its very nature, largely of cerebral origin, no such intellectual or semi-intellectual impulse could have produced that book of *Les Contemplations* where the poet and father mourns his daughter. And in a kind of writing where any suspicion of affectation is as fatal as it is easy to detect, he is without an equal in literature: of all poets Hugo has written best about children.

The love of children and a pious affection for his kin, these qualities Hugo has certainly given indubitable proof of in his poetry. If it still be urged that, with these exceptions, significant exceptions surely, he wrote little that came directly from the heart, it must be conceded that it is not to the verses of Hugo that a Frenchman usually turns when afflicted by an inclination for a person of the opposite sex. There is, especially among his earlier volumes where it was most to be expected, relatively little of what is specifically known as love poetry among the many tomes of metri-

cal writing Hugo has left. Scattered throughout his work there is, indeed, to be found a fair proportion of verses dealing with love, some of them, as the *Gastibelza* of *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, the stanzas entitled *A la Belle Impérieuse* of *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*, the death-bed song of Fantine in *Les Misérables*, being marvels of artistic workmanship unsurpassed in literature. They are, however, for the most part, rather exercises of fancy or imagination on the love-theme than the cry of personal experience. But among those who are commonly regarded as the master-poets of the world, there is none with the exception of Dante in the *Vita Nuova*, and, perhaps, Shakespeare in his sonnets, who has given full voice to this cry. The German seeks it in Heine, not in Goethe; the Briton in Burns or Shelley, not in Milton. They are probably wise who shun the intimate experience, and refuse themselves the expression of personal passion. Hugo, as we have seen in the sketch of his life, was worldly-wise as well. Great in intellect, stupendously imaginative, of rarely robust physique, with all his senses splendidly alert, the very sanity of his mind and body precluded him from uttering those poignant notes of song which escape from a poet when a wayward emotion floods the springs of his being, and throws into disarray his senses and his brain. And his worldly wisdom seconded his natural temperament. He would always have preferred to the experience of a passion vibrating, for joy or sorrow, through his soul, and leaving him no richer in the world's esteem, the publication of a successful volume of verses, a theatrical

triumph, a political ovation. His love poetry has been somewhat brutally characterised as "*le chant du coq après la victoire*," "the cock-crow after victory." Neither in his life nor in his literature did he ever suffer himself to be the slave of love for any length of time. Hence it is natural that a Frenchman, when amorous, should go, not to Hugo, but, according to his temperament, to the spiritual emotion of Lamartine, or to the frank passion of Musset, for record of his sufferings and his joys.

But, after all, whether he write of love as constantly as Rossetti, or as seldom as Milton; whether he appeal to the personal emotions as much as Musset, or as relatively little as Hugo; a poet is—his very title proves it—primarily an intellectual being, and to allege against an intellectual being that the intellectual faculties preponderate in him, is at best a dubious sort of censure. What Hugo has done as an intellectual creator all the world knows and reverences; in the range of French Literature there are some names as great as his, there are many more beloved; it would be difficult to find one more significant or more imposing.

The total impression with which one rises from reading him may be rendered in figurative language. It is as if one had stood in some wind-driven, mountainous region of the South, with voices and colour and perfume floating down, through palaces and along dark ravines, amid the laden richness of a Castilian night. But from time to time forked lightning flashes, and there sounds a peal of thunder.

## CHAPTER VII.

### HUGO JUDGED BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND SUCCESSORS. HIS INFLUENCE ON THE CENTURY.

“ONE day Théo flung at Taine, who put, in his performances, Musset above Hugo: ‘Taine, you seem to me to be going in for vulgar platitude. To require from poetry sentimentalism—that is all wrong. Sun-bright words, words of light, with their rhythm and their music—that is what poetry is. Look at the commencement of *Ratbert*; there is no poetry in the world like that. It is the summit of the Himalayas. All emblazoned Italy is there—there, through the mere might of words.’” So records M. Emile Bergerat of his father-in-law, Théophile Gautier, Hugo’s most brilliant literary disciple, and one of his most enthusiastic and unflinching admirers. These words of eulogy, while they are representative of the idolatry with which Hugo was regarded by the majority of the generation of authors immediately following on his own, illustrate at the same time, the point of view which this generation had adopted towards poetry, and the standard by which it measured poetic performance.

The romantic movement in French literature was, as we have seen, at its outset a protest of the new spirit against the narrow ideals of the classical age in its



decadence. This first phase found voice in Chateaubriand and Lamartine. By the time Hugo decisively appeared and became significant, this spiritual protest against the worn ideals had done its work and exhausted itself. It passed with Hugo into a literary protest against the worn-out forms of the eighteenth century.

In its earlier stages the romantic movement had meant, at bottom, the revival, contemporaneous with the Restoration, of Catholic Christianity in France; it gave utterance to the inevitable emotional reaction against the reasoned Deism of Voltaire and the reasoned Materialism of Helvetius.

Important historical events create, in most cases, important literary landmarks. By the revolution of 1830, France showed that she was tired of the clerical domination re-accepted with the return of the Bourbons. At the same time Romanticism entered on its later phase. The shell of Catholicism and Mediævalism was preserved, but the spirit had fled from it. The young authors who now began to make themselves heard, described lovingly, and in much detail, the exterior, the architecture, of churches, but they rarely entered them, unless it were to make literary use of their interiors in novel or poem, as the scene of rendezvous not strictly clerical. They drew largely on mediæval decoration, on barbizon, portcullis and hauberk, as environment for their flights of fancy; but they would have been strangely uncomfortable had they been actually transported back into the Middle Age, with its real mediæval sentiments and ideas.

The mediævalism of 1830-40 was entirely picturesque; the troubadours, chevaliers, and châtelaines who flourished in the writings of this period were merely the symbols of a literary movement that, largely influenced by the sister art of painting, was bringing into French style a wealth of colour unknown to it before, and a tendency to substitute images for ideas.

Of such a movement Hugo was naturally the high priest. Inferior in emotional depth as in historical insight to Chateaubriand, far less instinctively Catholic than Lamartine, he could not have replaced either at the period of the origins of Romanticism. But coming as he did, when the spiritual ardour that initiated the new era had resolved itself into an ardour wholly artistic, he was well in his place as leader of this literary romanticism. For he was incomparably the greatest artist in words who had yet appeared in his country and century; his style, full of imagery and colour, was in accord with the prevalent literary tendencies; and though his soul was, in reality, modern, and adapted to the exigencies, intellectual and practical, of the nineteenth century, his imagination turned readily towards "le moyen âge énorme et délicat," where it found pasture at once for its extravagance and its grace, and for its marvellous power of pictorial vision. Hence the adulation of Hugo on the part of the long-haired, quaint-garmented poets and painters rising at this time into celebrity, and nothing if not superficially *moyenageux*.

But mediævalism, even on its artistic side, what in the eighteenth century was known as the "Gothic"

feeling, could not long flourish in France. The French artistic spirit is in reality profoundly, essentially "classical." The qualities naturally inherent to its literary expression are clearness, precision, logical development, ordered formal outline; and, completing all these, a sense of measure and a sentiment of proportion unique among European peoples. Racine is still the type of the French literary creator; Boileau, the most characteristic example of the French critic. Set beside any of the books produced in France during the high tide of Romanticism one of Rossetti's earlier poems, or William Morris' unique first volume *The Defence of Guinevere*, and one feels at once the difference—a difference in essence, not in degree—between the work of a race of Latin culture, work artificially directed into channels abhorrent to its genius, and the work of a race in which the "Gothic" spirit is indigenous.

Romanticism, if we use the word as meaning, in regard to the subject matter of literature, a preference for mediæval theme and sentiment, the predominance of accidental and individual over essential and general characteristics in the creation of dramatic situations and the portrayal of human nature; if we use it as meaning, in regard to literary expression, colours flooding form, clearness and proportion subordinated to startling impressiveness and wayward effect; Romanticism was doomed to rapid decay when it flowered on French soil. And so it happened. If we take the year 1820 as the date when it definitely took root, and 1843, the year of the failure of *Les Bur-*

*graves*, as the date when it finally withered, the romantic movement lived, through its various phases, barely a quarter of a century. It has been of inestimable service to French literature in enlarging its points of view and in enriching its vocabulary, but at the present day its importance is solely historical.

The foremost living critic of France, M. Ferdinand Brunetière, and the leading French magazine, *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, still accept Boileau as legislator, and Racine as example, of fixed canons of art; no one, even among those whose views are most opposed to the views of M. Brunetière and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, ever dreams of claiming a similar authority for the theories of 1830, or for the dramas of Victor Hugo.

But though Hugo witnessed the decay of the school whose leader, during his earlier manhood, he had been, many years passed before his authority began to decline with the withering of Romanticism. In the movement called romantic there were two currents—the revival of mediæval sentiment and subject, and the enriching and widening of the manner of literary expression. Originated together at the beginning of the century, found together in the writings of Chateaubriand, they became dissociated after 1830. While the former stream grew feeble and ran dry, the latter continued to flow and, in directions largely eccentric, is flowing still. The new manner of expression, resolving itself into an exclusive care for expression, gave birth, in poetry, to the *Parnassien* school—Romanticism's son and heir. "Au père avare, fils prodigue," and *vice*

*versé*, says the proverb, and, in many ways, nothing could be more unlike the rich luxuriance and frequent formal laxity which accompanied Romanticism, than was the studiously deliberate culture of the formal side of verse which marked the *Parnassien* era of French poetry—an era concentrated in the exquisite, occasionally empty, Théodore de Banville, and the impeccable, occasionally uninspired, Leconte de Lisle. It was a difference analagous to that which existed between the spirit and methods of Byron and the spirit and methods of Tennyson. The *Parnassien* school was, however, merely the natural continuation of Romanticism on its purely literary side. Mediævalism, even as an artistic plaything, was generally discarded, but the enriched vocabulary, the technical verse reforms, the abundant imagery which marked the romantic school—all these were adopted, developed and chastened into finished literary form by the *Parnassiens* who reigned over French poetry throughout the Second Empire.

These literary reforms were owing pre-eminently to one man—Victor Hugo; they had become indissolubly associated with his name. He was held in reverence by the *Parnassiens* as much as by the Romantics, but where the older generation had crowned him as the champion of Romanticism, the younger generation acclaimed him as the supreme master of versification. In the *Parnassien* temple there were many altars, each tended by its special worshippers, but the high altar remained dedicated to Victor Hugo. The words above quoted, of Gautier, express, in a

somewhat exalted fashion, the feeling with which he was regarded by all the members of this school.

Sainte-Beuve, writing in 1852, declares that "M. de Musset is the great reigning influence of the moment," but at this date Hugo had just made himself especially obnoxious to the Government of the day, and the Government exercised censorship over the Press. By this date, also, Sainte-Beuve and Hugo were enemies for ever, and the critic's authority should be tempered by the remembrance that "Hate, born of Love, is blind as he." Musset has always been extremely popular with the average French middle class, especially with its young men, for whom, in the adolescence of their emotions, during "Trois ans, les trois plus beaux de la belle jeunesse," "three years, the fairest of the fair season of youth," his verses are a quickening fountain of pleasure, the mirror of youthful existence. But with specially literary persons, with poets themselves, he is not, as a rule, in favour. Least of all was he in favour with the *Parnassiens*. He is strong where Hugo is weak; his work bears always the passionate impress of an emotional sincerity. But he is weak where Hugo is strong; his verse is, on the technical side, frequently faulty and careless, and just such defects were anathema to the *Parnassiens*, who estimated poetry in great measure in accordance with the amount of labour that had gone to its making, who cherished in it visible tokens of the chisel, and who had, in addition, sworn hatred of sentimentalism, "la haine du sentimentalisme." Sentimentalism, of the Parisian type, pervades all the verse

of Musset; it is present, to an extent distasteful to many of this school even in the work of their master Hugo.

These were the days when the collapse of all but purely artistic enthusiasms had bred in poetry a contempt for everything except perfection of form.

“L'art ne veut point de pleurs et ne transige pas  
Voilà ma poétique en deux mots.”

“Art has no need of tears and does not come to terms. There, in two words, is my theory of poetry.” So wrote Paul Verlaine, in his youth a fervent *Parnassien*. There was a side of Hugo's genius, his plastic and pictorial side, exemplified in *Les Orientales* and *La Légende des Siècles*, which appealed strongly to the adepts and believers in such a theory of poetry. Banville, the most complete example of this school has written: “In regard to verse, intelligent reading of Hugo will teach you everything.”

It was not in verse only that this indifference of the French mid-century to ideals was manifest. It affected also, prose in all its forms. Here, as elsewhere, the literary development was largely influenced by the condition of the political world. When France accepted the Second Empire, she made, to put it as gently as possible, large concessions to the spirit of compromise and material comfort; she implicitly renounced all those passionate enthusiasms, those aerial ardours, for Humanity, Fraternity, the reign of Justice upon earth—ideals, inherited from the great Revolution—which she had vainly attempted to realize during the two years subsequent to the Revolution of 1848. And this poli-

tical renunciation had its counterpart in the world of thought and art. In poetry, the *Parnassien* school superseded the romantic; in historical writing, the talented Taine, with his scientific curiosity, his care for accuracy of detail, his clear firm style, took the place of Michelet, with his genius, his exuberant lyricism, his romancing extravagance; in the novel, George Sand, full of wild emotional ardour, of slipshod sublimity, made way for Balzac, the omniscient analyst, and for Flaubert, the faultless student of eccentric character and morbid conditions of the soul, careless of all else save the fall of his phrases. Flaubert was the author of the saying, "De la forme nâit l'idée," an axiom accepted, almost without reserve, during a considerable number of years, by all the leading writers, poets and novelists alike, of his generation.

"Les filles d'opéra manquaient de princes russes," "the opera girls were in need of Russian princes," says Hugo, in sarcastic apology for the *coup d'état*; and the "filles d'opéra," who were, indeed, to some extent the social goddesses of the Second Empire, when their leisure allowed them to be literary required, for mental pabulum, a manner of writing adapted to their taste and imaginative capacity. To meet these arose the pseudo-realistic novels of the Second Empire, having little in common either with the imaginative psychology of Balzac and Stendhal, or with the later realism of Zola, which is, whatever else one may choose to think of it, a sincere and strenuous artistic effort. Among these novels the cleverest were the work of Ernest Feydeau; his brilliant



literary faculty was chiefly consecrated to stimulating and amusing the servants of a Venus whose locks had long forgotten the tonic freshness of the sea.

The distance seems far to travel between the hot-house talent of such a writer as Feydeau and such a writer as Hugo, whose strength, as Michelet in figurative language expressed it, is that of one "always walking in the wind and bathing twice daily." But even by Feydeau and his contemporaries Hugo's influence was indirectly felt, his supremacy implicitly acknowledged. The idols of the novelists of this period were, above all, Gautier and Flaubert. Gautier's admiration of Hugo knew no bounds; Flaubert was scarcely behind him in enthusiastic appreciation. The half barbaric impetuosity and glow of his temperament and literary work rendered natural, on Flaubert's part, a keen sympathy for the similar qualities manifested, on a far greater scale, in the temperament and work of the author of *Notre Dame de Paris*. "Hugo in this century" he writes, "will throw every one else into the shade, although he is full of poor things, but what inspiration! what inspiration!" And again: "How forgotten they will be all, the great men of the day, when this man will still be great and far shining!" There were, of course, even in these years, exceptions to this general attitude of respect. Mérimée, for instance, a master in his own line of exquisite and cynical prose, recoiled instinctively from the exuberant shouts of Hugo's enthusiastic optimism as from the luxuriant prodigalities of his style; littérateurs of

the academic type, such as Désiré Nisard, remained always outspokenly hostile to the protagonist of romanticism.

But, roughly speaking, one may say that up till 1880 there seemed every prospect that the nineteenth century would be known in French literature as, what many still maintain it will be, "le siècle de Victor Hugo." Even the realistic school, which by this date had got well into prominence, did not wholly disown Hugo. The larger part of its allegiance went naturally to Balzac, but among its leaders, Mm. de Goncourt's tribute of reserved but still fervent admiration has been already cited; M. Daudet's youth was fed upon Hugo's verses, and the recent marriage of his son with the Jeanne of *L'Art d'être Grandpère* is aptly symbolic of his enduring reverence for Hugo's name. M. Zola himself, coming to curse the romantics, as the fighting member of a professedly unromantic school, has in regard to Hugo played, on the whole, the part of Balaam. Among the later dramatists, Emile Augier died an avowed Hugolater; M. Sardou's stage tricks are borrowed from all sources, but most of all, perhaps, from the creator of *Hernani*; if Dumas *fils* has been comparatively grudging in his acknowledgment of Hugo's genius, this is largely owing to his pious sentiment, that Hugo's part in the dramatic movement of 1830 has been unduly exaggerated to the detriment of the honours due therein to Dumas *père*.

The realistic school, on the stage or in romance, was too largely indebted to Hugo to be able, without too patent ingratitude, to turn and rend him. The author

and his followers. And, here again differing from Hugo and the realists, dissection of interior thought and sentiment occupies with contemporary French novelists much of the place the older novelists had accorded to external description; the analytical tends to expel the plastic spirit. *Adolphe* contains not a single description of scenery or of the outward aspects of persons; there is little of such description in the writings of Stendhal. M. Bourget himself becomes pictorial with an obvious effort. This meagre colouring is, in part, a reaction against the perpetual pictorialism of Gautier, Flaubert, even Zola; it is also, in some sort, a return to the classical French tradition, and it marks the final downfall of the romantic ideals. Between the psychologists and the master of the "romantics" there could be little affinity; they have scant regard for his powers as a painter, powers in which they have little share; they find his drawing of character puerile; their ethical indifference is the antithesis of the didactic intention with which Hugo loaded his romances. Writers of the psychological school look first for tokens of wide and keen intelligence of humanity and its ways, for evidence of a soul, alert in itself, and studiously sharpened by culture. These things they rate higher than what is known as inspiration, than mere natural genius, in any one direction. "Your pure imagination men," to quote again a phrase of Landor's, are little to their taste. Their masters are those whose work has been essentially "a criticism of life"; their admiration turns less to great instinctive creators than to men of penetrative understanding, of clear-sighted vision in

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regard to existence and its problems. Goethe, for instance, who, for all that concerns the intellect and imagination, was in every respect at the opposite pole from Hugo, is held in great reverence by this school; M. Bourget has spoken of "the divine Goethe."

But it is on the development of French poetry that the influence of one, who was above all a lyrical poet, should naturally be expected to make itself most felt. We have seen how the *Parnassien* school was, in many ways, but a refined continuation of the technical side of Hugo's genius, how his artistic mastery of words, his command of colour, were followed up and brought to perfection by the leaders of this school, and how its leaders revered him. The *Parnassien* epoch in French poetry endured throughout, and even after the fall of the Second Empire. Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, the three men who have most powerfully contributed to overthrow it, were all, at one time, among its prophets. Baudelaire, indeed, whose solitary volume of verse, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is dedicated to one of the pontiffs of *Parnassienisme*, to the "parfait magicien ès lettres françaises," Théophile Gautier, made his appearance in the noonday of the *Parnassien* movement, and died without realizing that he had founded a school destined to supersede it. But so it proved. Though its author professed all the theories of the school to which he nominally belonged, though he attributed a predominant importance to the formal side of verse, the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* marked the advent of a new era in French poetry. Baudelaire's practice was not in entire accordance with

his principles. Technically, he ~~is not~~ <sup>is not</sup> ~~at all~~ <sup>at all</sup> ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> ~~much~~ <sup>much</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> perfection of mere workmanship ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> ~~Chénier,~~ <sup>Chénier,</sup> ~~Banville, Leconte de Lisle, and many a~~ <sup>Banville, Leconte de Lisle, and many a</sup> ~~poet of the century.~~ <sup>poet of the century.</sup> He could sacrifice, on the other hand, a rich rhyme for a subtle idea, he could relax his rhythm in order to give strength and suggestiveness to his emotion. *Les Fleurs du Mal* has been charged with immorality, unhealthiness, affectation, but, in a manner, wayward and morbid if you will, this volume was a return to the poetics of Lamartine, to a mode of writing where the lyrical emotion of the soul overrides the claims of the purely æsthetic side of poetry.

As a typical instance, take Baudelaire's treatment of love. With the exception of Lamartine, all French poets of this century had, in their treatment of this eternal theme, adopted and developed, each according to his taste and temperament, the eighteenth century ideal of love, that sane, natural, semi-pagan ideal which must always be that of the great majority of mankind. Hugo expresses this blithely or elegiacally, Masset with passion and tears. In such a poem as *Une Charmante*, Baudelaire opened the way for a more intimate, less instinctive conception of love, analogous to that which we find in several sonnets of Rossetti's *House of Life*. The way once opened, the direction indicated, troops rushed to occupy and exploit the newly discovered land.

"Most can raise the flowers now,  
Far all have got the seed."

Most recent French poetry, and much recent English,

is but the variously coloured blossom of the pungent seed first sown in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

The traditions of the *Parnassien* school are to this day continued in the daintily-turned, delicate-thoughted verses of M. Sully-Prudhomme, and in the work of M. François Coppée, whose chief strength lies in the touching portrayal of domestic trials and felicity. Both writers are popular. Both are Academicians. But the real leaders of the actual generation of French poets are Paul Verlaine, the enfranchised master of all chords of latter-day emotion; and Stéphane Mallarmé, the exquisite and enigmatic prince of the tribe of *symbolistes*, who are occupied rather with intellectual subtleties than with shades of feeling. It is shadowy suggestiveness, vague musical vibrations, that are sought for by the young poets of France in preference to clear, firm colour, moulded, plastic outline,—the ideals of the *Parnassiens*.

“ Car nous voulons la nuance encor,  
 Pas de couleur, rien que la nuance;  
 O ! la nuance seule fiancée  
 Le rêve au rêve et la fûte au cor ! ”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “ For we would have shades ever,—No colour, nothing but shades;—O ! it is shade alone that plights—The dream to the dream and the flute to the horn ! ” But this exquisitely melodious verse, whose charm depends so much on the use of the word *nuance*, can only be mangled in translation. *Nuance*, approximately *tint*, *shade*, has no exact English equivalent. Applied to literature, it expresses qualities of delicate suggestion and intellectual dexterity, such as are consummately shown in the writings of Renan. We have little need of the word in English literature as a rule.

says Verlaine in a poem which is the law and the prophets for his disciples, and his disciples are the most active and, apparently, the most gifted among the contemporary generation of French writers in verse.

It may be doubted whether, even in our cosmopolitan days, a school so opposed to the literary traditions of France be destined to enduring influence; it is remarkable that many of the *symbolistes* and *décadents* bear names of dubiously French origin. For the present, at any rate, a breath from the North seems to have swept over French poetry, bringing with it a northern dreaminess, a northern pathos, a northern indifference to precision of contour. Among the various causes of these contemporary tendencies in France, one may ascribe a leading importance to the actual influence on poetry of the musical art, an influence which has taken the place of that exerted during the romantic and *Parnassien* periods by the art of painting. Hugo has shown that he could appreciate music. A poem of *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, containing a description of an orchestra in motion, would seem itself to have streamed and clashed sonorously from out the purple-like clamour of such an orchestra as Bacon desired to have ever beside him when engaged in moulding his imperial periods. But, both by nature and by environment, Hugo was more susceptible to painting than to music. He has left drawings, in various media, that are individual and impressive; he has said of his own literary style that "if he admits sometimes, in certain cases, the vague and the twilight



in thought, he admits them more rarely in expression. Without doing injustice to the great poetry of the North, represented even in France by admirable poets, he has always appreciated keenly the precise forms of the South." He has shown himself, more than once, a master of indefinite suggestion by means of indefinite witchery of words. Such a piece as that beginning "Gastibelza, l'homme à la carabine," which Paul Verlaine has characteristically declared to be the only true poem Hugo ever wrote, is touched throughout as with the vague melancholy of the evening wind, blowing from an infinite, far-away, formless world. But in general so highly did he prize absolute clearness and precision in rendering what he felt, that there is a certain want of the dream horizon in his work. For the northern races, at least, this horizon is of the essence of poetry. It throbs through the verse of Heine, as of Verlaine and of Poe; it is frequently felt in Tennyson, occasionally even in Musset. Hugo had too passionately energetic and practical a nature to receive passively the mystic impressions of these sunset lands,—“Ah! land of fancies, bridged about with sighs,”—which fade as soon as the poet's thought fixes itself on exact conception or execution, on a definite love affair, or on definite interests of life.

“ Nous nous promenions parmi les décombres  
À Rozel-Tower ;  
Et nous écoutions les paroles sombres  
Que disait la mer.”

“ We wandered among the ruins at Rozel-Tower,  
and we listened to the sombre words said by the sea,”

writes Hugo in one of the most musical poems of the *Châtiments*. But the sea-wind did not bear to him, as to most poets, golden, but useless, reverie; it counselled the proscribers of Guernsey to keep high their courage, to battle with misfortune, as the rocks of the island battled with the storm and the foam. The song of the sea, as it sounded in Hugo's ears, was of more human value, it was nobler, than it would have been, sounding in the ears of a less masculine poet, but it was without the enchantment wafted from "faery lands forlorn."

Again, the present tendency of French writers is to express in prose all that can be expressed in prose,—all description, all meditation, all that comes from the mere intelligence,—reserving for verse, and verse in a loosened, almost lawless, form, only such inevitably metrical outbursts of the heart or imagination as flow from a lyrical movement of the soul. Such a theory must logically regard a large proportion of Hugo's poetry as the outcome of a bastard art. And Hugo's exuberant vitality, his joy and interest in mere living, his quenchless hope in the future, his indomitable trust in human nature,—all these qualities of his vigorous and sunny genius are lost on a sad generation which has more in common, if sceptical and perverse, with the sombre sorrow of Baudelaire, if pensively and resignedly religious, with the far from buoyant piety of Lamartine. Lamartine's phrase—"Mon cœur, lassé de tout, même de l'espérance." "My heart, wearied of everything, even of hope,"—sums up the emotional attitude of a large number of persons in our century's end.

At the conclusion of *Choses Vues* Hugo declares that, as the result of all he has seen and experienced in life, "there is only one thing before which one should bow—genius; and one thing before which one should kneel—kindness of heart (*la bonté*)." Such a profession of faith is old-fashioned. Most writers of the present day would revise this antiquated creed, and declare, as the result of their experience, that there is only one thing before which one should bow—cleverness (*esprit*); and one thing before which one should kneel—success.

Because of the changes he wrought in the old rules of French versification, Hugo was considered a revolutionary and a vandal by those who adhered to the strict classical traditions in technical matters. But he was always respectful of the genius of his language; his reforms never touched its essential characteristics. He would have been dismayed by the innovations, in structure of syntax and metrical law alike, introduced by the *symbolistes* and *décadents*. One may urge on behalf of these innovations, that the rigidity of French metrical rules has hitherto prevented poets from obtaining certain wayward effects of metre and imagination common to the poetry of other nations. But, to balance this, there has been up till now a sureness of touch about French poetic art, and this sureness of touch the tendencies actually prevalent threaten to undermine. This is another cause of the appearance of eclipse which Hugo's reputation is, in his own country, at present undergoing.

Hugo's influence, in countries other than his own,

has hardly as yet been commensurate with the European celebrity of his name. In Spain and in Italy, it is true, he has been much translated and talked about; among his ardent admirers, in the latter country, he counts the veteran poet Giosu  Carducci. But in Germany he is little read. What may be called the Teutonic strain in his genius,—his feeling for medi valism, his metaphysical aspiration,—natives of the Fatherland prefer to admire in poets indigenous to their soil, and apart from this there is nothing in Hugo's work likely to make him popular in Germany. In England his novels, and his novels only, have found their way to the great public. Among poets and men of letters, Tennyson has, in a laudatory sonnet, acclaimed him as "Victor in drama, Victor in romance." This sonnet, though most courteous, and even reverential, in tone, does not in itself prove that its writer was intimately acquainted with the works of one whom he salutes as "French of the French." Hugo was indeed, like the late Laureate himself, delightfully patriotic, but in all other respects,—in cast of thought, in manner of expression, in his outlook on men and existence,—in every way in which Tennyson was English of the English, Hugo was not peculiarly or specifically French. Mr. Swinburne, however, has, with ample knowledge and insight, hailed and hymned Hugo, whom he regards as incomparably the master-poet of the nineteenth century. Mr. Swinburne's influence on English verse has been great for now over a quarter of a century, and great was Hugo's influence on Mr. Swinburne. So that, in an indirect way, one may say

that Hugo has exercised considerable influence on recent English verse.

We have referred to the causes which, at the present time, tend to obscure Hugo in the eyes of the dominant, or, at any rate, the loudest section of contemporary French writers. But these writers are often narrowly literary, and their estimate of his work is not the estimate of the public at large. Booksellers' statistics tell us that Hugo is far the most popular of French poets. It is for his poetry that the small *bourgeoisie* and the working men of Paris ask at the public libraries, when they ask for poetry at all. Democracy, the god of his ultimate faith, has given him its sanction.

Hugo's fame may, for superior persons, vary with the variations of literary modes; he seems secure of permanent popular glory. He appeals to a public much larger than that of most poets. He has a part in the movement of thought, in the political movements, of his time which should ensure him, in the story of nineteenth-century France, a place analogous to that occupied by Voltaire in the story of France in the eighteenth century. He represents his age as no other contemporary writer—subtler and less faulty than he though many of them are—can claim to have done. When we add to this appeal to a wide humanity, the part borne by Hugo in the purely literary evolution of his time, it appears obvious that his must remain the most important, though not necessarily the most admired or the best-loved name, in the French literature of our century. Balzac alone, in the estimate of

future ages, may possibly dispute with him this supremacy.

There are many Frenchmen for whom Hugo is as much the centre of their intellectual and imaginative world as Notre Dame is the centre of the architecture of their capital. On the mental horizon of others he looms as the Eiffel Tower of literature. But whether worshipped as is the great cathedral of Paris, or supported of necessity, if with aversion, as is the eccentric monster of engineering ingenuity; whether acclaimed as by the "Romantics" and *Parnassiens* who held that, in poetry, "Tout dérive du Père," or regarded as a mighty and noxious intellectual force, as by the "Classics" of 1830, and by some of the later schools, Hugo has left an ineffaceable impression on the literature of his century. And, when all is said, on one side and the other, such an achievement is for the wide, rough, permanent judgment of the world, the proof of an author's greatness, as it is, in nearly all instances, the summit of an author's ambition.

## APPENDIX.

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### LIST OF HUGO'S WORKS.

It may perhaps be of interest for students of Hugo to offer them, in chronological order, a classified list of his various volumes, with a few words descriptive of the general contents and character of each.

#### I. POETRY.

##### Odes et Ballades. 1822-1828.

These, Hugo's earliest collected poetical pieces, originally appeared in four volumes, published with an interval of two years between each. They are interesting as showing the progressive development of Hugo's talent and the gradual emancipation of his style. They are interesting also, in the light of Hugo's subsequent opinions and career, in that their tone throughout is ardently Catholic and Royalist. A large proportion of these verses deal with contemporary public events. Considered as the production of a young man, singularly few of them treat of love. From the literary point of view, some of the *Ballades* rank among the poet's daintiest work.

**Les Orientales.** 1829.

As its title shows, the inspiration for this volume was drawn from the East. Composed during the war of Greek Independence, a certain number of the poems deal directly with that. But, even at the epoch of its publication, it was chiefly memorable as the revelation of Hugo's rarely equalled gifts as an imaginative painter in words. At the present day, when its temporary interest of subject is long over, it remains in the front rank among his poetical masterpieces.

**Les Feuilles d'Automne.** 1831.

The poems which make up this volume are, for the most part, personal meditations of a sentimental kind. The poet's youth was beginning to go from him, and a pensive melancholy, full of regret and vague desire, is the general characteristic of the book; hence its title, *Autumn Leaves*. It contains some of Hugo's most exquisite intimate writing in verse.

**Les Chants du Crépuscule.** 1835.

These *Songs of the Twilight* were written when the poet's mind, as the minds of many around him, was, so to say, in a twilight state in regard to religious and political beliefs. He has not yet wholly abandoned Catholicism, as one very beautiful poem, inspired by seeing a woman praying in a church, proves. He is in many ways still conservative, though he now sings of Napoleon instead of the Bourbons. But one feels that he may end, as he actually did, by becoming a



pure Deist and a thorough-going democrat. In this volume are to be found also some of Hugo's most popular love verses, such as the "O! ma charmante," which, in various settings, is well known to English pianists.

#### Les Voix Intérieures. 1837.

The *Inner Voices* heard here tell us little we had not heard already in the two preceding volumes. But, though there is a considerable amount of repetition in it, one cannot but be grateful for a book which gave us such poems as that addressed *To birds who have flown away*, and the *Ode to the Arc de Triomphe*.

#### Les Rayons et les Ombres. 1841.

To these *Sunbeams and Shadows*, the same remark applies as to the *Inner Voices*, and with similar reservations. A lovely piece of autobiography, shaped from memories of childhood, and various lyrics, perfect in form, redeem frequent redundancies and moralising prolixity.

#### Les Châtiments. 1853.

Since the poet had last published a volume of verses, the iron had entered into his soul, and into his lyre also. He was now an exile, and this book was intended to be *The Punishment of Louis Napoleon*, the author of his exile, who had, as he conceived it, betrayed his country. From the literary point of view, there is little but praise to give to Hugo's form of vengeance. From other points of view, objection has

been frequently taken to the indiscriminate rancour with which the poet pursues and scourges all who were in any way concerned in the *coup d'état*. The book bristles with ferocious personal allusions that cut like a whip across the face.

### Les Contemplations. 1856.

On page 55 reference has been made to the origin of the chief glory of this book,—the poet's memorial verses on his daughter. In other respects, it was the outcome of his thought, during his earlier years of exile, on all matters not directly political. Readers who do not primarily care for the artistic side of verse generally rank these volumes very high among Hugo's poetical work. They contain much of his deepest and tenderest philosophy. But, especially when writing of speculative subjects, he was growing less and less able to realize when he had said enough.

### La Légende des Siècles. 1859, 1877, 1883.

Three series of the *Legend of the Centuries* were published. Of these the earliest was the finest, but even the least good, the latest, could only have been written by a poet of superb powers. Hugo's idea in this work was to give in verse a history of the world, showing man's progress from ages of cruelty and egotism towards ages, still in the future, of mutual love and forbearance. He has given us a series of episodes, reaching from the earliest annals of the race down to our own day. The centre of the entire work is to be found in his pictures of mediæval society and

manners. They are sombre, too sombre for truth, but Hugo is here at his highest as a poet. The general consensus of literary opinion regards *La Légende des Siècles* as his masterpiece.

**Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois. 1865.**

These *Songs of the Streets and Woods* were the fruit of Hugo's lighter hours during exile. They sing of loves that never become too passionate, of moods that never become too intense. A blending of the natural felicity of language in the songs of the Elizabethan dramatists combined with a touch of the conscious licence of wit in Charles II.'s days might have given English literature something similar to *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*.

**L'Année Terrible. 1872.**

This is a chronicle of the events of the *Terrible Year*, 1870-71. Hugo, in Paris at the time, gives now a description of some street scene, now protests, in the name of civilisation, against the martyrdom of Paris, its authors and abettors.

**L'Art d'être Grandpère. 1877.**

*Vide* p. 80 for a brief account of *How to be a Grandfather*.

**Le Pape. 1878.**

Hugo's evolution from Catholicism to vehement anti-clericalism had for many years been definitely

achieved. In this book the Pope dreams that he is going about the world, relieving man's estate. At the end he wakes and exclaims, "What a horrible dream I have had!"

**La Pitié Suprême. 1879.**

Inspired by excellent humanitarian sentiments; this is, in other respects, one of Hugo's poorest books.

**Religions et Religion. L'Anc. 1880.**

These two volumes, published in the same year, continue the poet's somewhat verbose series of metrical tracts on philosophy and faith. In the former book, the various religions of the world are contrasted, to their disadvantage, with the one true religion, naturally implanted in man's mind; in the latter, *The Ass*, an intelligent quadruped proves to the philosopher Kant, that he is himself, essentially, what the said quadruped is called. None of the four last-mentioned poems can be considered fully worthy of Hugo's powers, but they each contain many striking lines.

**Les Quatre Vents de L'Esprit. 1881.**

The *Four Winds of the Spirit* speak, each in a separate division of this book, which is divided into four parts. One of these is dedicated to satire, another to drama, a third to lyric, and the last to epic poetry. The second and the third divisions, at least, hold matter that is worthy of the poet at his best.

**La Fin de Satan.** 1886.

Published posthumously, this volume is a continuation of the series of metaphysical disquisitions. *Satan's End*, according to Hugo, is his repentance and pardon.

**Toute la Lyre.** 1888.

*All the Lyre*, like the *Four Winds of the Spirit*, strikes notes of a very varied compass. Some of the lyrics here make the book of distinct value, even though it came after so much of the same kind from the same author.

**Dieu.** 1891.

This book recently caused a revival of Hugo enthusiasm in Parisian journals. It is a mystical account of a soul permitted, while yet alive on earth, to wander forth to seek for Truth and God. Its ascension from the lower to the higher spheres of the Infinite and Unknown is described with a great deal of rather confusing symbolism, and with great wealth of versification and imagery. On the whole this volume is decidedly the most powerful of Hugo's lengthier attempts to express in verse the philosophical faith of his mature and declining years.

## II. DRAMA.

**Cromwell.** 1827.

This play was too long for the stage. Its interest, even at the time of its publication, centred largely in its Preface, which was regarded as the manifesto of the new school. Hugo seems to have looked upon Cromwell as essentially devoured by ambition. The play ends with his words, "When then shall I be king?" In one scene Milton reproaches him with entertaining designs upon the Crown, and exhorts him to remain true to the Republic.

**Hernani.** 1830.

The first acted of Hugo's dramas remains, in many ways, the most characteristic specimen of his dramatic genius. The scene is laid in Spain and in Germany, just before and just after the election of the Emperor Charles V. (1519).

**Marion de Lorme.** 1831.

In some respects the most pathetic and interesting of Hugo's plays, *Marion de Lorme*, in sentiment and subject, is probably the least adapted to please average British taste. The period of its action is during the reign of Louis XIII. (1613).

**Le Roi s'Amuse.** 1832.

Dealing with the court and loves of Francis I. (1521), this is, in its *dénoûment*, the most harrowing of Hugo's

verse tragedies. It has not been found well suited for the stage.

**Lucrèce Borgia. Marie Tudor. 1833.**

The titles of these plays, written in prose, and produced in the same year, are sufficiently explanatory of where their story lies. *Lucrezia Borgia* is known all over the world through the music of Donizetti. *Mary Tudor*, which treats, in a purely imaginative manner, a stormy period of English history, gives an original view of the character of the English Catholic Queen.

**Angelo, Tyran de Padoue. 1835.**

A sombre story, like the preceding in prose, of love and passion in mediæval Venice. The three dramas last mentioned are still occasionally played at the theatres on the outer Boulevards of Paris.

**La Esmeralda. 1836.**

This is the story of the heroine of *Notre Dame de Paris*, arranged as a libretto for the music of the author's friend, Mlle. Louise Bertin. In the dramatic version of the story, things end happily. Esmeralda, instead of being burned, as in the original, is rescued by her lover, Captain Phœbus.

**Ruy Blas. 1838.**

The story passes at the Spanish Court, in 1699. It tells of the unhappy passion of the lackey, Ruy Blas, for the Queen of Spain. This drama is still frequently played at the Théâtre Français.

**Les Burgraves. 1843.**

The scene of *The Burgraves* is laid in a fortress of mediæval Germany. It is generally considered, from the literary point of view, as the greatest of Hugo's dramas. But its length and other reasons render it unsuited for the stage. It has not been revived there since it failed fifty years ago.

**Torquemada. 1832.**

Hardly inferior to *The Burgraves* as a piece of writing, this also is "a closet play." Hugo's version of the character of the Grand Inquisitor presents him as passionately convinced that purification by fire on earth saves souls from hell-fire hereafter. From wholly benevolent motives he burns two young lovers who had saved his life, because in doing so they had made use of a crucifix to raise the stone beneath which he had been buried alive. This, Torquemada regards as an act of sacrilege and a mortal sin, to be punished, unless shriven by fire on earth, by eternity of fire after death.

**Theâtre en Liberté. 1886.**

These are various plays of pure fantasy whose action passes in a half fairy-like forest. Though a posthumous work it should not be neglected. There is much in the volume that ought to make it acceptable in England, more, perhaps, than in France. It is an effort in the order of fancy of which *As you Like It* is the consummate type.



**Amy Robsart. Les Jumeaux. 1889.**

*Amy Robsart* was produced, in 1838, as the work of Paul Foucher, Hugo's brother-in-law. But it is now known that its real author was Hugo himself. The story is founded on Scott's *Kenilworth*. *The Twins* is merely a fragment of an unfinished drama, on the subject of "the Man with the Iron Mask."

## III. NOVELS.

**Han d'Islande. 1823.**

The story of the monster *Hans of Iceland* is interwoven with a love story, which is of interest as having been written when the novelist was himself in love with the girl who afterwards became his wife.

**Bug-Jargal. 1826.**

The subject of this story is drawn from the history of the negro rebellion in Hayti, early in the present century, against European rule. Both this book and the preceding one prove Hugo's innate taste for the portrayal of physical deformities.

**Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné. 1829.**

This is an attempt to depict, in a grimly realistic manner, the possible thoughts and sensations experienced by the victim during *The Last Day of One Condemned to Die*. It is a piece of special pleading against the penalty of death.

**Notre Dame de Paris. 1831.**

Hugo's first great romance is also, from the artistic point of view, his most perfect. Mr. Swinburne says that it "combines a Grecian perfection of form with a Gothic intensity of pathos." One may, however, object that even in *Notre Dame de Paris* there is a redundancy of mere description and a prolixity of detail. As a resuscitation of mediæval Paris it equals the best of Scott's historical novels, and its human interest is far more impassioned than any that Scott was capable of giving us. The book contains one of Hugo's most fascinating creations in feminine character, *La Esmeralda*.

**Claude Gueux. 1834.**

Another brief against capital punishment. *Claude the Beggar*, imprisoned for a trivial offence, has, in a moment of passionate irritation, killed the director of the prison, who treated him with brutality. Claude has, in reality, a noble nature, but circumstances have driven him to commit a crime which the law punishes by death. It is characteristic of Hugo that though this story was, to some extent, founded on fact, the Claude Gueux of real life was an ignoble ruffian.

**Les Misérables. 1862.**

Every one acquainted with Hugo at all knows the story of the man of sorrows, Jean Valjean, whose noble life was wrecked because he once stole a morsel of bread. In the original French edition the book was over-long; in English translations it is over-shortened.

**Les Travailleurs de la Mer. 1866.**

Conceived among the Guernsey rocks, this book, describing the existence of *The Toilers of the Sea*, is full of the might and the mystery of ocean. It is a little overloaded with technical detail.

**L'Homme qui Rit. 1869.**

As a picture of English life during the reign of Queen Anne, *The Laughing Man* is distinctly comic. As the story of the love of two high-souled creatures, each physically stricken,—for Gwynplaine has been mutilated and Dea is blind,—it is the tenderest and most sublime of Hugo's romances.

**Quatrevingt-Treize. 1872.**

Though published after his return from exile, *Ninety-Three*, in form and sentiment, finds its natural place among the novels inspired by Guernsey and the sea. Its interest centres itself in the scene where the royalist marquis, in the old tower, surrounded by republican soldiers, sacrifices his liberty in order to save the children who are threatened with destruction by fire.

**IV. MISCELLANEOUS.****Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées. 1834.**

This volume of *Mingled Literature and Philosophy* is a collection of the various critical and general articles written by Hugo during his earlier years. They do not always appear, in their collected form, exactly as

they were first printed. Their original conservatism, literary and political alike, is at times considerably softened. The most interesting feature of the book is a study of Mirabeau, full of striking thought and striking phrase.

**Le Rhin. 1842.**

This graphic record of a tour on the banks of the Rhine is not merely descriptive. It contains also reflections on society, suggested by what Hugo saw in his travels, and some remarkable words on international politics. But the jewel of the book is a delightful fairy story, *The Legend of Handsome Pécopin and of the Beautiful Bauldour*.

**Napoléon le Petit. 1852.**

An indictment of Napoleon the Little, the degenerate descendant of Napoleon the Great. The prose commentary of *Les Châtiments*.

**William Shakespeare. 1864.**

A volume of fine rhapsodical writing on things in general.

**Paris. 1867.**

Hugo's contribution to a work descriptive of Paris, its history, arts and place in the world, prepared for the Exhibition of 1867.

**Actes et Paroles. 1841-1876.**

These volumes of *Words and Deeds* contain Hugo's speeches and a record of his political career. They are

divided into three parts: *Before Exile, During Exile,* and *After Exile*. His speeches, as here printed, are remarkable oratorical efforts. But it should be remembered that it was Hugo's practice to reserve to himself the right of correcting for the press his original utterances in the Chamber.

**Mes Fils.** 1875.

A tribute to the memory of his sons. It was originally printed as an introduction to Charles Hugo's book, *Les Hommes de l'Exil*.

**Histoire d'un Crime.** 1877.

A detailed account of the exciting days of the *coup d'état*. Many of the statements in these volumes have been challenged by Hugo's opponents; he has, at any rate, constructed out of the events they record a narrative more thrilling than any novel.

**Choses Vues.** 1887.

A record of various *Things Seen* during the author's lifetime. The description of persons and places is often brilliantly life-like.

**En Voyage (Alpes et Pyrénées).** 1890.

As its title shows, the narrative of a voyage among the Alps and Pyrenees. It was on his way home from the Pyrenees that the poet received the news of the death of his daughter.

**Voyage en France et Belgique. 1892.**

The nature and contents of this book are again explained by its title. The volume, as the preceding one, affords ample evidence of Hugo's keen powers of observation, and of his unsurpassed gift for description of what he saw.

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There is no complete and authoritative Life of Hugo. *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, published in 1863, was written by Madame Hugo, under the superintendence of the poet himself; but it only brings the narrative down to 1862. There is besides a certain amount of poetry mingled with its truth. M. Barbou's *Victor Hugo et son temps* is the nearest existing approach to an official biography. Books such as those of M. Alfred Asseline, of M. Gustave Rivet, of M. Richard Lesclide, are mostly anecdotal, giving us various interesting glimpses of the poet's personal habits and domestic life. All students of Hugo's life must acknowledge their obligations to M. Edmond Biré's volumes, which constitute a detailed biography of the poet from his birth to his exile. But M. Biré's learned biography is to some extent vitiated by the ill-will he bears towards the poet for having changed his political faith and forsaken the religion of his childhood. His book is, so to say, informed throughout by the obvious intention to bring out as prominently as possible the spots upon the sun. French magazine and journalistic

criticism of Hugo is, naturally, very voluminous and of varying merit.

In England, the Hugo literature is not as yet large. Shortly after the poet's death, critical biographies of him appeared from the pens of Mr. Barnett Smith and of Mr. James Cappon. The latter book especially, *Victor Hugo, a Record and a Study*, contains much interesting matter. Mr. Frank Marzials has since produced a very readable life of the poet. Many Englishmen know Hugo chiefly through the panegyrics of Mr. Swinburne. "One must admire everything, like a brute," wrote Hugo of Shakespeare; and Mr. Swinburne might almost seem to have adopted this for his motto in regard to Hugo himself. But Mr. Swinburne's criticism is always stimulating. His always wonderful prose raises interest in all that he writes of, especially perhaps when, as in writing of Hugo, he offers us the spectacle, not diurnal in literary annals, of one great poet swinging incense before another, born in the same century with himself.

THE END.