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CHAPTER X. THE POET IN EXILE.

In Brussels Victor Hugo came upon friends, amongst them being the novelist, Alexandre Dumas. The latter was living in this city because he was the better able to pursue his literary work there, undistracted by the myriad claims which such a centre as Paris presents. He had never mixed ardently in politics, but he was so chagrined at the banishment of Hugo that he chivalrously resolved never to visit Louis Napoleon or the Tuileries again; and he resolutely adhered to this decision. Victor Schœlcher followed Hugo to Brussels, having escaped from his pursuers in the disguise of a priest. Towards the close of December, 1851, the poet began to write his stirring narrative, *L'Histoire d'un Crime*, and the work was completed by the following May. It was not [Pg 142] published until 1877, and I shall make some references to it in a later chapter. Amongst other exiles in Brussels were the ill-assorted couple Émile de Girardin and General Lamoricière. But Belgium also sheltered in this hour of peril Ledru Rollin, the sculptor David, Barbès, Louis Blanc, Edgar Quinet, and Eugène Sue. Indeed, many of the finest and choicest spirits of France had been driven from their native soil.

The sons of Victor Hugo joined their father in January, 1852, and the poet determined to remain in Brussels so long as Napoleon III. reigned at the Tuileries. Fate, nevertheless, decreed otherwise. The Belgian Government, though favourable to Hugo, was still more anxious to maintain friendly relations with the new French Empire. Victor Hugo soon made it impossible, however, for the Belgian rulers to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. The publication of his *Napoléon le Petit* fell like a thunderbolt over both Paris and Brussels. That scathing work made the Dictator writhe amid the splendours of his palace. It was charged with wit, pathos, sarcasm, and invective. Amongst the many personal passages denunciatory of Louis Napoleon was the [Pg 143] following: 'He will never be other than the nocturnal strangler of liberty; he will never be other than the man who has intoxicated his soldiers, not with glory, like the first Napoleon, but with wine; he will never be other than the pigmy tyrant of a great people. Grandeur, even in infamy, is utterly inconsistent with the character and calibre of the man. As Dictator, he is a buffoon; let him make himself Emperor, he would be grotesque. That would at once put an end to him. His destiny is to make mankind shrug their shoulders. Will he be less severely punished for that reason? Not at all: contempt does not in his case mitigate anger. He will be hideous, and he will remain ridiculous. That's all. History laughs, and crushes. What would you have the historian do with this fellow? He can only lead him to posterity by the ear. The man once stripped of success, the pedestal removed, the dust fallen, the lace and

spangles and the great sabre taken away, the poor little skeleton laid bare and shivering—can anyone imagine anything meaner and more miserable?' This powerful satire closed with a vision of vengeance: 'You do not perceive that the 2nd of December is nothing but an immense illusion,[Pg 144] a pause, a stop, a sort of working curtain, behind which the Deity, that marvellous machinist, is preparing and constructing the last act, the final and triumphant scene of the French Revolution! You look stupefied upon the curtain, upon the things painted upon the coarse canvas, this one's nose, that one's epaulettes, the great sabre of a third, those embroidered vendors of *eau-de-Cologne* whom you call generals, those *poussahs* that you call magistrates, those worthy men that you call senators, this mixture of caricatures and spectres—and you take them all for realities. You do not hear yonder in the shade that hollow sound! You do not hear some one going backwards and forwards! You do not see that curtain shaken by the breath of Him who is behind!'

The excitement caused by this work proved too much for the Belgian Government, and, desirous of keeping well with Napoleon III., it reluctantly decided that the author must be expelled. As there was no law bearing upon Hugo's case, the Belgian Chamber passed one to meet it, and Hugo was cast out from what he deemed to be a secure asylum. He embarked for England, but only on his way to Jersey,[Pg 145] which he had decided upon as his next place of habitation. He landed at St. Helier on the 5th of August, 1852, and was received by a body of French compatriots and exiles.

Hugo was now somewhat straitened in means, as he derived nothing from his dramas and his various works. From his very ability and genius, he was singled out as a special object of disapprobation on the part of the French rulers. The poet first settled down in a small house on the Marine Terrace, and the money he received from the sale of his effects in Paris was a very welcome addition to his small store. But he had passed through too many periods of hardship and vicissitude to repine over these altered circumstances—he rather rejoiced to suffer for conscience' sake. He now gave himself up to intellectual labour, and found much happiness in his leisure hours in the bosom of his family, every member of which was deeply attached to him; and in the interchange of affectionate confidences with his intimate friends, Vacquerie, Paul Meurice, and others. He was treated with great distinction by the islanders, not (as he himself said) because he was Victor Hugo the poet, but because he was a peer of France. In[Pg 146] consequence of his rank, observes one writer, 'he enjoyed certain privileges, one of which was that he was exempt from the obligation of sweeping his doorstep and clearing away the grass from the front of his house!' But he was obliged to supply the suzerain of the Duchy of Normandy with two fowls every year, a tax that was religiously exacted from 'his lordship.'

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

Another terrible denunciation of Napoleon and his satellites was penned by Hugo during his stay in Jersey. *Les Châtiments*, this new satire, was even more powerful and telling than *Napoléon le Petit*. Its verse burned with indignation. The poet spared no one who was in any degree responsible for the crime of the 2nd December.[Pg 147] 'Sometimes he is full of pity for the victims of the dastardly aggression, pouring out his sympathy for those whom the convict-ships were conveying to the deadly climates of Cayenne and Lambessa, to receive for political offences the fate of the worst of felons; sometimes he sounds forth their virtues in brilliant strophes; and sometimes he rises into grandeur as he scourges the great men of the Second Empire, whilst at others he uses the lash of satire, and depicts them all as circus grooms and mountebanks. Page after page seems to bind his victim to an eternal pillory.' The work showed, in its various divisions, how society was 'saved,' order re-established, the dynasty restored, religion glorified, authority consecrated, stability assured, and the deliverers themselves delivered. It was first published in Brussels, but only in a mutilated form, the Belgian Government dreading the effects of some of its bitter attacks upon the ruler of France. In vain the poet protested against this infringement of liberty. A complete edition of the work, however, soon appeared at St. Helier, and it speedily got into circulation in all the European capitals, ingeniously defying every effort to suppress it. 'The more it was[Pg 148] hunted down the more thoroughly it penetrated France. It had as many disguises as an outlaw. Sometimes it was enclosed in a sardine-box, or rolled up in a hank of wool; sometimes it crossed the frontier entire, sometimes in fragments; concealed occasionally in plaster busts or clocks, laid in the folds of ladies' dresses, or even sewn in between the double soles of men's boots.'

Matters were thus rendered righteously unpleasant for Napoleon, who dreaded these attacks upon his person and power. A man of genius fighting for liberty is sometimes stronger than a throne; and it was possible that this might be the issue between the poet and the Dictator. The work brought no profit to its author, but he had the far higher reward of seeing it carry terror into the midst of the Tuileries, while it at the same time stirred the slumbering conscience of the French nation. For two or three years the Jersey exiles remained unmolested, but Napoleon, feeling insecure,

determined that they should 'move on.' Victor Hugo on several occasions delivered funeral orations over departed patriots. He never spared the French rulers, and invariably expressed sympathy with 'the heartrending cry of humanity which made [Pg 149] the crowned criminal turn pale upon his throne.'

At the obsequies of one Félix Bony, who had been a victim of Imperial tyranny, the poet referred to the British alliance with the Emperor of the French as a degradation to England. Upon this, Sir Robert Peel intimated in the House of Commons that he should feel it his duty to put an end to this kind of language on the part of French refugees as soon as possible. Ribeyrolles, the editor of *L'Homme*, the French newspaper in Jersey, retorted that England was England no longer, and Victor Hugo returned the following answer: 'M. Bonaparte has driven me from France because I have acted on my rights as a citizen, and as a representative of the people; he has driven me from Belgium because I have written *Napoléon le Petit*, and he will probably drive me from England because of the protests that I have made and shall continue to make. Be it so. That concerns England more than it concerns me. America is open to me, and America is sufficiently after my heart. But I warn him, that whether it be from France, from Belgium, from England, or from America, my voice shall never cease to declare that sooner [Pg 150] or later he will have to expiate the crime of the 2nd of December. What is said is true: there *is* a personal quarrel between him and me; there is the old quarrel of the judge upon the bench and the prisoner at the bar.'

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

The conductors of *L'Homme* were at once expelled from Jersey, whereupon Victor Hugo [Pg 151] drew up a protest on behalf of the exiles. 'The *Coup d'État*,' said this document, 'has penetrated into English liberty. England has reached this point that she now banishes exiles.' It then went onto inveigh against the crimes of 'treason, perjury, spoliation, and murder,' committed by Napoleon III., for which he had been legally condemned by the French Court of Assize, and morally by the bulk of the

English press. The protest received thirty-seven signatures, amongst them being those of Louis Blanc and Victor Schœlcher. After a period of uncertainty, the English Government consented to the expulsion of the refugees.

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

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CHAPTER XI. IN GUERNSEY.—'LES MISÉRABLES.'

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

Divided into two parts, the earlier division of [Pg 153] the work dealt with other times, the second with 'to-day.' From the trials and the joys through which the poet had passed he endeavoured to extract the philosophy of life. Everything is tinged with deep feeling, for it would be superfluous to say that Hugo was ever the subject of profound emotions. He felt more deeply and strongly than other men, and this gives that intense personal realism to his work which distinguished it from the first recorded utterance to the last. Virulently attacked in some quarters, this series of poems was as warmly welcomed in others. With the public it found ready favour, and speedily ran through numerous editions. It may safely be affirmed that criticism which is merely captious has never yet permanently injured any work. Wherever there is genius, it will force its way through such obstacles, and find an honest public appreciation. If Hugo had not himself had faith in the poetic seed in such works as *Les Contemplations*, he must have despaired; but with that egotism of talent which is never offensive, he left

his work confidently to the judgment of minds which could think and souls which could feel. Of that gigantic work, *La Légende des Siècles*, the first part of which [Pg 154] appeared in 1859, I shall speak in greater detail when referring to its completion.

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

Innumerable are the pilgrimages which have [Pg 155] been made to Hauteville House, with consequent descriptions of the residence. A brief sketch of the leading features of the poet's home, for which I am indebted to an account written by one of such visitors, will not be unacceptable. Hauteville House, which overlooks the city and fort beneath, and commands a vast expanse of sea, is likewise famed for its interior treasures. The visitor finds carvings of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, and porcelain, enamels, and glass, the work of Venetian and Florentine masters. Entering the house by a vestibule, there is first perceived on the upper lintel a *basso-relievo* representing the chief subject in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. On the right and left, in carved oak, are two medallions, by David, of Victor Hugo and his second daughter. A fine Renaissance column supports the whole. Passing on, the monumental door of the dining-room is reached. Upon one of the panels is written 'Love and Believe;' and over one of the doors, and below a statuette of the Virgin, is the word of welcome to the visitor, 'Ave.' In the billiard-saloon are hung the poet's designs, framed in varnished fir. To his other evidences of ability Hugo adds that of a graphic artist. Many of his sketches have a breadth and [Pg 156] power which strongly recall the pencil of Rembrandt, though in the matter of drawing and some other points they will not, of course, sustain comparison with the work of that wonderful master.

The tapestry-parlour is an apartment of special interest, the mantelpiece particularly fixing the attention. Imagine a cathedral of carved oak, which, rising vigorously from the floor, springs up to the ceiling, where its upper carving touches the tapestry. The

doorway corresponds to the fireplace; the rosace is a convex mirror, placed above the mantelpiece; the central gable is a firm entablature covered with fantastic foliage, and decorated by arches of exquisite taste, in which the Byzantine mingles with the rococo; the two towers are two counterforts, which repeat all the ornamentation of the entire mass. The coping, very imposing in its effect, recalls the fronts of the houses in Antwerp and Bruges. A face appears amid the woodwork, vigorously thrown out. It is that of a bishop, whose crosier alone is gilded. On each side of it is a shield, with the witty motto:

'Crosier of wood, bishop of gold:

Crosier of gold, bishop of wood.'

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On two scrolls, representing rolled parchment, are inscribed the names of those whom Victor Hugo looks upon as the principal poets of humanity—Job, Isaiah, Homer, Æschylus, Lucretius, Dante, Shakespeare, Molière. On the opposite side are the names of Moses, Socrates, Christ, Columbus, Luther, Washington. Two oaken statues lean from the double entablature of the chimney-piece. One represents St. Paul reading, with an inscription on the pedestal—'The Book;' the other shows a monk in ecstasy, with his eyes uplifted, and on the pedestal is written 'Heaven.' The working-room contains another fine monumental piece of work, bearing a motto taken from the fourth act of *Hernani*, '*Ad augusta per angusta.*' The dining-room walls are covered with splendid Dutch delf of the seventeenth century, and the room has also a magnificent mirror and a piece of Gobelin tapestry representing the riches of Summer. Vases and statuettes are to be met with everywhere; and on panels are carved various legends—'Man,' 'God,' 'My country,' 'Life is exile.' An armchair of carved oak, which was regarded by the poet as the ancestral seat at his table, is closed by a chain, and bears[Pg 158] the inscription, 'The absent are here.' The galleries and rooms of the first story are likewise rich in Renaissance work, and in Chinese and Japanese treasures. The Oak Gallery, which is a kind of guest-chamber, has six windows looking out upon Fort St. George, which distribute the light through a perfect forest of carved oak. The mantelpiece—a marvellous piece of work, represents the sacrifice of Isaac. A state bed and a massive candelabrum in oak, surmounted by a figure carved by Victor Hugo, are also noticeable objects; but they are almost eclipsed by the splendid door of entrance, which, as seen from the interior, is as brilliant as a church window. Two spiral columns sustain a pediment of oak with Renaissance grotesques, surrounded by arabesques and monsters; it advances with two folds, which are resplendent with paintings, among which are eight large figures of the martyrs, attired in gold and

purple, the principal being St. Peter. There is inscribed on the lintel, '*Surge, perge,*' and close by the words of Lucan, 'The conquerors have the gods, with the conquered Cato remains.' There are also numerous maxims, poetic and otherwise.[Pg 159] Hugo's own room was the look-out—a little belvedere open in all directions, but very small in extent. It contains the poet's writing-table and an iron bed. Whether regarded from the point of view of its noble situation, or from that of the artistic treasures which find a lodgment in its interior, Hauteville House is a place to inspire a poet of a far less expansive imagination than Victor Hugo.

While the author of *Notre-Dame* pursued his studies and compositions in the belvedere, the other inmates of Hauteville House were generally engaged in a variety of pursuits beneath. The elder son, Charles, devoted himself to the writing of dramas and romances, while the second son, Victor François, undertook with much spirit and success a translation of Shakespeare. Adèle, the one daughter now remaining, composed music; Auguste Vacquerie plunged into a series of curious literary studies, which resulted in the production of *Les Mielles de l'Histoire* and *Profils et Grimaces*; and Madame Victor Hugo busied herself in collecting notes for her husband's *Life*. Unfortunately, owing to her death, her task was never completed, a portion only of her labour of love seeing the light in [Pg 160] 1863. The whole family ever cordially welcomed any Frenchmen who sought a refuge at Hauteville House, and Gérard de Nerval, Balzac, and many others occupied in turns a room specially set apart for the use of such visitors.

Two or three years after Hugo established himself in Guernsey, an amnesty was announced by the Emperor of the French. The proclamation was dated the 15th of August, 1859. The poet refused to avail himself of the act of grace, and in conjunction with Louis Blanc, Edgar Quinet, and others, replied to the Imperial pardon by a counter-manifesto. He was blamed by some for this step, it being urged that it was his duty to return to France during the days of the Second Empire, and to use every effort to procure that amelioration of the condition of the people, and the fruition of their hopes, which he and other patriots desired. But Victor Hugo was very depressed at this time, and saw little prospect of the realization of his own aspirations and of those who felt and acted with him. But an idea of the vast personal influence attributed to the poet may be gathered from such language as the following which was used concerning him at this time: [Pg 161] 'Had Victor Hugo stood forward, as he was morally bound to do, the fatal day of Sadowa might never have happened, the disastrous Ministry of M. Émile Ollivier would have been impossible, and France could have been spared the overwhelming ruin which fell upon her when absolutely abandoned to the counsels and government of the feeblest mediocrity.' It is

impossible, of course, to say that these sanguine expectations would have been justified; but they will at least serve to show the high esteem in which the poet was held, and the weight attached to his individual will and example.

Another epoch in the literary career of Victor Hugo was reached in 1862 by the publication of the celebrated romance, *Les Misérables*. This work had been begun many years before, and was to have been published in 1848. Its original conception was vastly extended in course of time, until what was at first meant to occupy only two octavo volumes ultimately spread over ten. The work appeared simultaneously in Paris, London, Brussels, New York, Madrid, Berlin, Turin, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Milan, Rotterdam, Warsaw, Pesth, and Rio de Janeiro. The first Paris edition amounted to [Pg 162] 15,000 copies, the first Brussels edition to 12,000, and the first Leipzig edition to 3,000. No fewer than 150,000 copies were sold in one year, and altogether, in various forms and editions, more than three times this immense number of copies were disposed of. The book was found everywhere, from the Steppes of Russia to the battlefields of the United States, where it solaced many a soldier during the Civil War.

This stupendous work is divided into five parts, entitled respectively 'Fantine,' 'Cosette,' 'Marius,' 'L'Idylle Rue Plumet et l'Épopée Rue St. Denis,' and 'Jean Valjean.' Each of these parts consists of eight or more books, which are again divided into chapters. It was complained that the book was partly the offspring of a poet, and partly the offspring of a social philosopher, and that while the poetry was noble the philosophy was detestable. At the same time it was admitted that the writer had stamped upon every page the hall-mark of genius, and the loving patience and conscientious labour of a true artist. The romance opens with a finely-sketched portrait of a worthy bishop, called by the people Monseigneur Bienvenu, a [Pg 163] noble creation, which surprised those who looked upon Hugo merely as a curser of the Church and all its works. A scene of strong dramatic power occurs in Chapter X., which deals with an interview between the bishop and a dying conventionnel, who had all but voted for the death of the King. Victor Hugo's unequalled command of language and his terse and vigorous emphasis come here into full play. 'All French writers of mark,' says a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, 'are divisible into two schools; the one is characterized by the polish and smoothness to which the romance element is carried in a Racine, or, in more modern times, a Lamartine; the other is full of a *viel esprit Gaulois*, a Molière or a La Fontaine. For this rugged force of speech, all knots, the bark still on, M. Hugo is very remarkable. The terseness with which he throws into a word the compressed power which a feebler but more elegant writer would draw out into a whole sentence, indicates an amount of genius which belongs only to the

kinglier spirits of an age, and which in French literature has only been matched by Rabelais, in Italian by Dante.'

The real hero of the story is Jean Valjean,[Pg 164] the son of a woodcutter of Faverolles. Losing his father and mother when a child, he grew up to carry on the former's craft, supporting thereby an elder sister (left a widow) and her seven children. One night, in that terrible year of famine, 1795, Jean Valjean broke into a baker's shop to steal a loaf for the starving children at home. He was arrested for the theft, and condemned to five years at the galleys. Frequent attempts to escape added fourteen years more to his punishment. At length, after nineteen years, he was liberated; but, while now free, his lot was as hard as though he were still in confinement. No one will recognise or aid this pariah of civilization, and he enters the episcopal town of D—— in despair. The good bishop alone will receive the outcast, and he entertains him, and has a bed provided for him. In the middle of the night Valjean is overcome by wild impulses. He steals the spoons from the cupboard over the bed of the sleeping bishop, and escapes through the garden. In the morning he is caught and brought back, but the bishop only heaps coals of fire upon his head in return for his perfidy. Valjean is allowed to go out into the world, but there is a terrible struggle[Pg 165] between the good and the evil nature within him. The psychological power of this part of the novel is marvellous. The conflict between right and wrong is renewed periodically in Valjean's breast all through the romance, and it is the influence of the Christian bishop which prevents the miserable man from becoming dead to all his better instincts. The third book of the first part is devoted to the episode of Fantine, an unhappy being who is more sinned against than sinning, and whose sorrows are vividly and painfully described, with some few delicate lights thrown in upon child-life. A striking portrait of Javert, a severe French *agent de police*, testifies once more to Victor Hugo's power of human analysis; but the most thrilling scenes still centre round Valjean. The ex-convict becomes a respectable provincial mayor under an assumed name, and when a man is arrested in his old name of Valjean, after a tremendous struggle, in which he sees the dead bishop calling upon him to be true to his conscience, he resolves to deliver himself up and save the innocent man. I cannot follow all the ramifications of this extraordinary work, which absolutely teems with exciting incidents, all[Pg 166] graphically told, and having for their central and cardinal motive the trials of Valjean and the revolt against society. In the last volume we have the marriage of Cosette, daughter of Fantine, with one Marius, both of whom owed their lives to Valjean. Marius and Cosette shrink from Valjean when they hear his confession that he is a liberated convict. But when Marius learns further that Valjean had saved his life and conveyed him from the barricades to his grandfather's house,

and that he had also secured for him his wife's dowry of 600,000 francs, remorse overcomes him for his ingratitude. He and Cosette seek out Valjean at his lodgings, but only arrive in time to witness the death of the suffering, sinning, struggling convict, and to receive his last blessing.

This romance contains passages which, for grandeur of conception and skill in execution, have never been equalled by any other French writer. At the same time the work is not without its defects, chief of which is the frequent recurrence of prolix digressions. For example, at a very critical point in the story, when Jean Valjean has effected his escape with Marius in his arms from the pursuit of the soldiery, the [Pg 167] reader is treated to some hundred pages of speculation on the valuable uses to which the sewage of large towns may be put. Other eccentricities might be pointed out, but high and above them all burns the light of the original genius of the author, which transforms the book for us into a veritable wizard's spell. Hugo, even with his perversities and his literary contradictions, can move us as no other man can. Writing to Lamartine, who had been considerably exercised by the social views promulgated in this book, the author said: 'A society that admits misery, a humanity that admits war, seem to me an inferior society and a debased humanity; it is a higher society, and a more elevated humanity at which I am aiming—a society without kings, a humanity without barriers. I want to universalize property, not to abolish it; I would suppress parasitism; I want to see every man a proprietor, and no man a master. This is my idea of true social economy. The goal may be far distant, but is that a reason for not striving to advance towards it? Yes, as much as a man can long for anything I long to destroy human fatality. I condemn slavery; I chase away [Pg 168] misery; I instruct ignorance; I illumine darkness; I discard malice. Hence it is that I have written *Les Misérables*.' So much for one side of the work; but if its social and political philosophy be condemned to the exclusion of its manifold excellences and beauties, then I can only pity the mole-like blindness of those who, in their haste to be critical, have lost that key-note of human sympathy which alone can unlock the treasures of *Les Misérables*.

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CHAPTER XII. LITERARY AND DRAMATIC.

Utopian as some of Victor Hugo's social theories might be, his aspirations after the perfection of the race were unquestionably noble. What is more, he furnished practical evidence of the sincerity of his desire to bridge over the gulf which separates humanity into classes. At his house in Guernsey he entertained periodically the children of the poor, frequently to the number of forty, at his own table. They would be

accompanied by their mothers, and would sit down to an excellent repast, the hospitable board being presided over by the poet himself. In this fraternal spirit he endeavoured to carry out his democratic ideas. At one of his Christmas feasts at Hauteville House, Hugo remarked: 'My idea of providing a substantial dinner for the destitute has been[Pg 170] well received almost everywhere; as an institution of fraternity it is accepted with a cordial welcome—accepted by Christians as being in conformity with the Gospel, and by democrats as being agreeable to the principles of the Revolution.' He also advocated the education of children, as well in the principles of justice and real happiness as in the various branches of knowledge; for by elevating the child they would elevate the people of the future.

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

A strangely interesting scene took place at Brussels, when Victor Hugo's publishers in that city, Messrs. Lacroix and Verboeckhoven, gave a grand banquet to the author in celebration of the success of *Les Misérables*. Distinguished representatives of the English, French, Italian, Spanish and Belgian press attended, and amongst the chief guests were the Burgomaster of Brussels, the President of the Chamber of Representatives,[Pg 171] MM. Eugène Pelletan, De Banville, Champfleury, and Louis Blanc. The illustrious exile was much moved as he listened to speeches breathing sympathy and affection for himself as a man, and admiration for him as a writer. 'Eleven years ago, my friends,' he said in reply, 'you saw me departing from among you comparatively young. You see me now grown old. But though my hair has changed, my heart remains the same. I thank you for coming here to-day, and beg you to accept my best and warmest acknowledgments. In the midst of you I seem to be breathing my native air again; every Frenchman seems to bring me a fragment of France; and while thus I find myself in contact with your spirits, a beautiful glamour appears to encircle my soul, and to charm me like the smile of my mother-country.' The Empire had made this gathering impossible in Paris, the city where it should naturally have been held.

A pleasant act of reparation for past injustice was performed when, on the 18th of May, 1860, the inhabitants of Jersey once more welcomed Hugo to their island. He went over upon the requisition of five hundred sympathizers with liberty, who invited him to speak on behalf of[Pg 172] the subscription which was being raised to assist Garibaldi in the liberation of Italy. The occasion was pre-eminently one to unseal the fount of eloquence in the exile and the poet. His own deep love for France led him to feel profoundly with the noble patriot who was struggling for a united Italy. Hugo spoke

with great energy, first depicting Italy in her bondage, then pleading for her freedom and independence, and prophesying the near approach of the time when, with the sword of Garibaldi, aided by the support of France and England, Italy would rise victorious in the struggle for liberty.

A few years later, and we have some glimpses of the domestic relations of the poet. His son Charles was married in 1866, at Brussels, to the ward of M. Jules Simon. In April, 1867, Victor Hugo became a grandfather, and amongst the many evidences of his affection for children this little letter, written upon his grandson's birth, is well worthy of preservation: 'Georges,—Be born to duty, grow up for liberty, live for progress, die in light! Bear in thy veins the gentleness of thy mother, the nobleness of thy father. Be good, be brave, be just, be honourable! With thy grandmother's kiss, receive thy father's [Pg 173] blessing.' The child had scarcely come, however, to gladden the household before he was taken away again. He lived a twelvemonth only; but in his place there soon came another Georges, and he was followed by a sister Jeanne—offshoots of humanity which twined themselves round the heart of the grandfather, and on more than one occasion inspired his pen.

In the summer of 1866, the poet and his two sons, with a party of friends, went upon a tour of pleasure through Zealand. But the journey, which was intended to be pursued strictly incognito, became in reality a kind of progress. The principal traveller was recognised at Antwerp, and Charles Hugo, who afterwards published a work entitled *Victor Hugo en Zélande*, remarked that though his father had come to discover Zealand, Zealand had discovered him instead. Many pleasant incidents marked the journey, not the least gratifying being a reception at Ziericsee, when, in addition to being welcomed by the municipal authorities, two little girls, dressed in white, came forward and presented Hugo with magnificent bouquets. On leaving Dordrecht, the farewell was one that might have been tendered to a sovereign.

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

But those who complained of the poems had no reason to complain of the work which followed it in 1866, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. This was another of the great romances by which the name of Victor Hugo will live. In announcing the completion of the work the author wrote, 'In these volumes I have desired to glorify work, will, devotion, and whatever makes man great. I have made it a point to demonstrate how the most insatiable abyss is the human heart, and that what escapes the sea,[Pg 175] does not escape a woman.' In the work itself was the inscription, 'I dedicate this book to the rock of hospitality and liberty, to that portion of old Norman ground inhabited by the noble little people of the sea: to the island of Guernsey, severe yet kind, my present refuge, and probably my grave.' This powerful story dealt with the last of three great forces which Victor Hugo had now illumined by his genius—religion, society, and Nature. In these forces were to be seen the three struggles of man. They constitute at the same time, said the writer, his three needs. Man has need of a faith; hence the temple. He must create; hence the city. He must live; hence the plough and the ship. But these three solutions comprise three perpetual conflicts. The mysterious difficulty of life results from all three. Man strives with obstacles under the form of superstition, under the form of prejudice, and under the form of the elements. He is weighed down by a triple kind of fatality or necessity. First, there is the fatality of dogmas, then the oppression of human laws, and finally the inexorability of nature. The author had denounced the first of these fatalities in *Notre-Dame de Paris*; the second was fully exemplified[Pg 176] in *Les Misérables*; and the third was indicated in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. But with all these fatalities there also mingled that inward fatality, the supreme agonizing power, the human heart.

This book on the toilers of the sea has been compared with the *Prometheus* of Æschylus. The story or plot is very subordinate, the author having devoted himself to the great contest between his hero and the powers of Nature. In the whole range of literature there is probably nothing more graphic than the account of Gilliatt's battle with the devil-fish. 'This is St. George and the Dragon over again,' remarked a critic in the *British Quarterly Review*; 'and you might as well blame Ariosto or Dante, or great mediæval painters and sculptors, for their innumerable elaborate creations of such monstrous objects, as blame the modern who has, by his study of modern science, seen and restored much that our ancestors conceived. The Pieuvre, moreover, is an ugly symbol of the evil spiritual powers with which man contends. For the rest, Hugo may revel in his strength of creation in this region, as Ariosto and Dante revelled before him, as the builders, too, of our great Gothic cathedrals revelled in[Pg 177] their gargoyles and hobgoblins. But before we quit this romance, observe the perfect unity of it as a work of art.'

The career of Gilliatt, the hero of this romance, is important from certain social and philosophical aspects, as well as from the individual point of view. The work is a dissertation upon the dignity, duty, and power of labour, the French writer thus endorsing the dictum of Carlyle on this great question. Gilliatt, hand to hand with the elements, grapples with the last form of external force that is brought against him. It has been well observed that the artistic and moral lesson are worked out together, and are, indeed, one. Gilliatt, alone upon the reef at his herculean task, offers a type of human industry in the midst of the vague 'diffusion of forces into the illimitable' and the visionary development of 'wasted labour' in the sea, and the winds, and the clouds. It is man harassed and disappointed, and yet unconquered.

In 1869 appeared a fourth important romance by Victor Hugo, the strange and grotesque *L'Homme qui Rit*. In this book there is a good deal to make the reader restive, for in some parts it is unquestionably repulsive. But when this [Pg 178] has been borne with, there is still much invested with that peculiar interest which only the author can weave round his creations. The movement of life plays a subordinate part in the story, and the real purpose of the work is seen to be a description of the battle waged in the individual breast, first with Fate, and then with those ancient enemies of man, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Criticizing this book, Mr. Swinburne remarked: 'Has it not been steeped in the tears and the fire of live emotion? If the style be overcharged and overshining with bright sharp strokes and points, these are no fireworks of any mechanic's fashion; these are the phosphoric flashes of the sea-fire moving in the depths of the limitless and living sea. Enough that the book is great and heroic, tender and strong, full from end to end of divine and passionate love, of holy and ardent pity for men that suffer wrong at the hands of men; full, not less, of lyric loveliness and lyric force; and I, for one, am content to be simply glad and grateful: content in that simplicity of spirit to accept it as one more benefit at the hands of the Supreme singer now living among us the beautiful and lofty life of one loving the race of men he serves, and of them in [Pg 179] all time to be beloved.' Yet, notwithstanding its evidences of power, *L'Homme qui Rit* failed to obtain that deep hold upon the public mind which was secured by its predecessors.

A writer in the *Cornhill* pointed out that it was Hugo's object in this romance to denounce the aristocratic principle as it is exhibited in England. Satire plays a conspicuous part, but the constructive ingenuity exhibited throughout is almost morbid. 'Nothing could be more happily imagined, as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the aristocratic principle, than the adventures of Gwynplaine, the itinerant mountebank, snatched suddenly out of his little way of life, and installed without preparation as one of the hereditary legislators of a great country. It is with a very bitter irony that the

paper, on which all this depends, is left to float for years at the will of wind and tide.' There are also other striking contrasts. 'What can be finer in conception than that voice from the people heard suddenly in the House of Lords, in solemn arraignment of the pleasures and privileges of its splendid occupants? The horrible laughter, stamped for ever "by order of the King" upon the face of this strange spokesman of Democracy, adds yet[Pg 180] another feature of justice to the scene; in all time, travesty has been the argument of oppression; and, in all time, the oppressed might have made this answer: "If I am vile, is it not your system that has made me so?" This ghastly laughter gives occasion, moreover, for the one strain of tenderness running through the web of this unpleasant story: the love of the blind girl Dea for the monster. It is a most benignant providence that thus harmoniously brings together these two misfortunes; it is one of these compensations, one of these after-thoughts of a relenting destiny, that reconcile us from time to time to the evil that is in the world; the atmosphere of the book is purified by the presence of this pathetic love; it seems to be above the story somehow, and not of it, as the full moon over the night of some foul and feverish city.' This last sentence exhibits a misapprehension of Victor Hugo's method. It is part of his plan to discover that which would be accounted as the most vile, the most contemptible, the most loathsome in human nature, and to show that it has some point of contact with the most educated, the most refined, the most beautiful. Critics may complain that he sacrifices art sometimes in[Pg 181] doing so, but his reply would be that there can be no sacrifice of art where truth is concerned. Falsehood alone is destructive of art.

I must pause here to note some interesting dramatic reproductions which took place in Paris in connection with the Exhibition of 1867. Existing dramatic literature was at a very low ebb, when the Emperor felt that this important international occasion ought to be further distinguished by the production of some new dramas. The managers were nonplussed, for they had nothing worth producing, and the Minister of Fine Arts ventured to hint as much to his Majesty. Ultimately the name of Victor Hugo was brought forward, and it was decided to bring out *Hernani* at the Théâtre Français, and *Ruy Blas* at the Odéon. On the 20th of June, accordingly, *Hernani* was produced, and performed by a brilliant company, including Delaunay, Bressant, and Mademoiselle Favart. Twenty thousand applications had been made for tickets for the first performance. The audience was a very mixed one, and as it was feared that political disturbances might occur, the most rigid precautions were taken by the authorities. But there was no need for this—the[Pg 182] piece was received with a favour that was practically unanimous; and although M. Francisque Sarcey (who was not then numbered amongst Hugo's admirers) hinted that the applause was not

precisely genuine, his insinuations were soon rudely scattered to the winds. On the next night, and for eighty succeeding nights, this remarkable play drew forth the most genuine and vociferous applause.

A number of young authors, including François Coppée, Armand Silvestre, and Sully Prudhomme, were so delighted with the success of *Hernani* that they addressed the following letter to the poet: 'Master most dear and most illustrious, we hail with enthusiastic delight the reproduction of *Hernani*. The fresh triumph of the greatest of French poets fills us with transports. The night of the 20th of June is an era in our existence. Yet sorrow mingles with our joy. Your absence was felt by your associates of 1830; still more was it bewailed by us younger men, who never yet have shaken hands with the author of *La Légende des Siècles*. At least they cannot resist sending you this tribute of their regard and unbounded admiration.' Writing from Brussels, Hugo thus replied: 'Dear poets,[Pg 183] the literary revolution of 1830 was the corollary of the Revolution of 1789; it is the speciality of our century. I am the humble soldier of the advance. I fight for revolution in every form, literary as well as social. Liberty is my principle, progress my law, the ideal my type. I ask you, my young brethren, to accept my acknowledgments. At my time of life, the end, that is to say the infinite, seems very near. The approaching hour of departure from this world leaves little time for other than serious meditations; but while I am thus preparing to depart, your eloquent letter is very precious to me; it makes me dream of being among you, and the illusion bears to the reality the sweet resemblance of the sunset to the sunrise. You bid me welcome whilst I am making ready for a long farewell. Thanks; I am absent because it is my duty; my resolution is not to be shaken; but my heart is with you. I am proud to have my name encircled by yours, which are to me a crown of stars.' The writer who thus contemplated an early departure from the stage of human life was to accomplish much more before that event, and to witness many startling changes in his beloved France.

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

performance of this day. I still hear the acclamations of the crowd as they shout, "Vive Victor Hugo!" as though you were really coming to hear them.'

Hugo's sympathy with Garibaldi—for whom he had a profound admiration—found vent in 1867, in a poem entitled *La Voix de Guernesey*. It severely condemned the Mentana Expedition, and encouraged Garibaldi under the check he had sustained at the hands of the Pope and Napoleon III. Garibaldi replied with some verses styled 'Mentana,' and this interchange of [Pg 185] friendship and goodwill between the two patriots stirred the worst blood of the French clerical party. The poems were circulated by some means throughout France in considerable numbers, the result being an Imperial order to stop the representations of *Hernani*, while the following letter was also despatched to the poet in Guernsey: 'The manager of the Imperial Théâtre de l'Odéon has the honour to inform M. Victor Hugo that the reproduction of *Ruy Blas* is forbidden.—Chilly.' From Guernsey came this pithy reply, addressed to the Tuileries: 'To M. Louis Bonaparte.—Sir, it is you that I hold responsible for the letter which I have just received signed Chilly.—Victor Hugo.'

The Emperor would doubtless have given much could he have quenched the genius and subdued the patriotism of the exile. But though the former affected security in his power, and the latter looked for the triumph of the people, neither could anticipate the dawning of that day of humiliation and blood which in the course of a few years was to break over unhappy France.

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CHAPTER XIII. PARIS AND THE SIEGE.

Having vowed never again to visit the land that was 'the resting-place of his ancestors and the birthplace of his love' until she had been restored to liberty, it is not surprising that Victor Hugo rejected the renewed amnesty offered him by Napoleon in 1869. The past ten years had wrought in him no signs of relenting, and when he was urged by his friend M. Félix Pyat to accept this new offer of a truce, he replied, '*S'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là*' ('If there remain only one, I will be that one'). When the Republican journal *Le Rappel* was started, with Charles and François Hugo, Auguste Vacquerie, and Paul Meurice as its principal contributors (joined subsequently by M. Rochefort), he wrote for the opening number a congratulatory manifesto addressed to the editors. By every means [Pg 187] in his power, indeed, he endeavoured to advance Republican principles.

Early in 1870 Napoleon was so impressed by the spread of Republican feeling that he resolved to test the stability of his power and the magic of his name by a *plébiscite*. This step was condemned by Hugo, who asked why the people should be invited to participate in another electoral crime. He thus gave vent to his burning indignation at the proposal: 'While the author of the *Coup d'État* wants to put a question to the people, we would ask him to put this question to himself, "Ought I, Napoleon, to quit the Tuileries for the Conciergerie, and to put myself at the disposal of justice?" "Yes!"' This bold and stinging retort led to the prosecution of the journal and the writer for inciting to hatred and contempt of the Imperial Government. But the poet went on his course unmoved, now engaged in writing his study of *Shakespeare*, and now in responding to the appeals made to him from various quarters, including those from the insurgents of Cuba, the Irish Fenians who had just been convicted, and the friends of peace at the Lausanne Congress. He had suffered another domestic grief in 1868 by the death of his wife,[Pg 188] his unfailing sympathizer and consoler in his early struggles, and other sorrows were impending.

The war with Prussia in 1870 led to the disaster of Sedan, and the collapse of the Empire. Hugo at once hastened to France, where he was welcomed with heartfelt enthusiasm by his friends of the Revolutionary Government formed on the 4th of September. M. Jules Claretie, who accompanied the poet on the journey from Brussels to Paris, has written a graphic account of his return to the beloved city. At Landrecies Hugo saw evidences of the rout and the ruin which had overtaken France. 'In the presence of the great disaster, whereby the whole French army seemed vanquished and dispersed, tears rolled down his cheeks, and his whole frame quivered with sobs. He bought up all the bread that could be secured, and distributed it among the famished troops.' The scene in Paris on Hugo's arrival was a memorable one. 'Through the midst of the vast populace,' continues the narrator, 'I followed him with my gaze. I looked with admiration on that man, now advancing in years, but faithful still in vindicating right, and never now do I behold him greeted with the salutations of a grateful people without[Pg 189] recalling the scene of that momentous night, when with weeping eyes he returned to see his country as she lay soiled and dishonoured and well-nigh dead.' Concerning this scene, M. Alphonse Daudet also wrote: 'He arrived just as the circle of investment was closing in around the city; he came by the last train, bringing with him the last breath of the air of freedom. He had come to be a guardian of Paris; and what an ovation was that which he received outside the station from those tumultuous throngs already revolutionized, who were prepared to do great things, and infinitely more rejoiced at the liberty they had regained than terrified by the cannon that were thundering against their ramparts!

Never can we forget the spectacle as the carriage passed along the Rue Lafayette, Victor Hugo standing up, and being literally borne along by the teeming multitudes.' At one point, in acknowledging his enthusiastic reception, Hugo said: 'I thank you for your acclamations. But I attribute them all to your sense of the anguish that is rending all hearts, and to the peril that is threatening our land. I have but one thing to demand of you. I invite you to union. By union you will conquer. Subdue[Pg 190] all ill-will; check all resentment. Be united, and you shall be invincible. Rally round the Republic. Hold fast, brother to brother. Victory is in our keeping. Fraternity is the saviour of liberty!' Addressing also the crowd assembled in the Avenue Frochot, the place of his destination, the poet assured them that that single hour had compensated him for all his nineteen years of exile.

Installed at the house of his friend Paul Meurice, Hugo remained in Paris all through the siege. The Empire having fallen, the cause of strife had ceased, and Hugo addressed a manifesto to the Germans, in which he said: 'This war does not proceed from us. It was the Empire that willed the war; it was the Empire that prosecuted it. But now the Empire is dead, and an excellent thing too. We have nothing to do with its corpse; it is all the past, we are the future. The Empire was hatred, we are sympathy; that was treason, we are loyalty. The Empire was Capua, nay, it was Gomorrha; we are France. Our motto is "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity;" on our banner we inscribe, "The United States of Europe." Whence, then, this onslaught? Pause a while[Pg 191] before you present to the world the spectacle of Germans becoming Vandals, and of barbarism decapitating civilization.' But the victorious Germans did not share the peaceful sentiments of the writer, and it would have gone ill with him if, like his manifesto, he had fallen into the hands of the Prussian Generals.

The siege went on, and the poet laid the funds from his works at the feet of the Republic. Readings were given of *Les Châtiments*, and other poems, and the proceeds expended in ammunition. It was a brave struggle on the part of the Parisians. Gambetta called on Hugo to thank him for his services to the country, when the latter replied: 'Make use of me in any way you can for the public good. Distribute me as you would dispense water. My books are even as myself; they are all the property of France. With them, with me, do just as you think best.' The poet kept up a brave heart during the privations of hunger, and cheered many of the younger spirits at his table by his pleasantry and wit, which relieved the gloom that pressed so heavily over all. When the great and terrible time of peril and suffering was past, he left it on record: 'Never did city exhibit such fortitude.[Pg 192] Not a soul gave way to despair, and courage increased in proportion as misery grew deeper. Not a crime was committed. Paris earned the admiration of the world. Her struggle was noble, and she would not

give in. Her women were as brave as her men. Surrendered and betrayed she was; but she was not conquered.' One can scarcely wonder that men who loved Paris as a woman loves her child can never forget the humiliation she was called upon to pass through.

In the list of the Committee of Public Safety, which was responsible for the insurrectionary movement of the 31st of October, the name of Victor Hugo appeared; but he disavowed its use, and on the ensuing 5th of November he declined to become a candidate at the general election of the mayors of Paris. Nevertheless, 4,029 suffrages were accorded him in the 15th arrondissement. In the elections of February, 1871, he was returned second on the list with 214,000 votes, Louis Blanc coming first with 216,000, and Garibaldi third with 200,000 votes. Speaking on the 1st of March in the National Assembly—which met at Bordeaux—Hugo strongly denounced the preliminaries of peace.[Pg 193] The treaty, however, was ratified. Interposing in the debate which subsequently took place on the election of Garibaldi, he said: 'France has met with nothing but cowardice from Europe. Not a Power, not a single King rose to assist us. One man alone intervened in our favour; that man had an idea and a sword. With his idea he delivered one people; with his sword he delivered another. Of all the Generals who fought for France, Garibaldi is the only one who was not beaten.' A strange scene of tumult arose upon this speech, many members of the Right gesticulating and threatening violently. Rising in the midst of an uproar that was indescribable, Hugo announced that he should send in his resignation. This he accordingly did, and remained firm, notwithstanding the earnest entreaties to withdraw it on the part of the President, M. Grévy. Next day, in consequence, there was nothing for the President to do but to announce the resignation, which was couched in these terms: 'Three weeks ago the Assembly refused to hear Garibaldi; now it refuses to hear me. I resign my seat.' Louis Blanc expressed his profound grief at the resignation; it was, he said, adding another drop of [Pg 194] sorrow to a cup that seemed already over-full; and he grieved that a voice so powerful should be hushed just at an emergency when the country should be showing its gratitude to all its benefactors. Garibaldi thus wrote to Hugo: 'It needs no writing to show that we are of one accord; we understand each other; the deeds that you have done, and the affection that I have borne for you make a bond of union between us. What you have testified for me at Bordeaux is a pledge of a life devoted to humanity.'

It was at this juncture that the poet was called upon to mourn the loss of his son Charles, who died suddenly from congestion of the brain. There had been an unusually close bond between the two, and the shock came with great force upon the father. The body of the deceased was brought to Paris for interment, Hugo following

the hearse on foot to the family vault at Père la Chaise. Funeral orations were delivered by Auguste Vacquerie and Louis Mie.

From Brussels, whither he had gone after his son's death, the poet protested against the horrors of the Commune. He also vainly tried to preserve the column in the Place Vendôme[Pg 195] from destruction. He wrote his poem, *Les deux Trophées*, referring to the column and the Arc de Triomphe, with the object of staying the hands of the destroyers, but the mad work went forward. Nevertheless, it was characteristic of him that after the insurrection was at an end, he pleaded for mercy towards the offenders. In his house at Brussels many fugitives found shelter, until the Belgian Government banished them from the country. In reply to this edict Hugo published an article in *L'Indépendance*. He declared that although Belgium by law might refuse an asylum to the refugees, his own conscience could not approve that law. The Church of the Middle Ages had offered sanctuary even to parricides, and such sanctuary the fugitives should find at his home; it was his privilege to open his door if he would to his foe, and it ought to be Belgium's glory to be a place of refuge. England did not surrender the refugees, and why should Belgium be behindhand in magnanimity? But these arguments were of no avail with the exasperated Belgians. A few of the more ruffianly spirits of Brussels actually made an attack upon the poet's house, which they assaulted with stones, to the great danger[Pg 196] of Madame Charles Hugo and her children. Defeated in their attempts to break in the door or to scale the house, the assailants at length made off. So far at first from any redress being granted to Hugo for this outrageous assault, or any punishment being meted out to the offenders, the poet himself was ordered to quit the kingdom immediately, and forbidden to return under penalties of the law of 1865. A debate took place in the Chamber, and as the result of this debate and various protests, the Government did not order the indiscriminate expulsion of all exiles, as they had contemplated. They also made some show of satisfaction to Hugo by ordering a judicial inquiry into the attack upon his residence. In the end a son of the Minister of the Interior was fined a nominal sum of 100 francs for being concerned in the outrage.

Hugo now made a tour through Luxemburg, and afterwards visited London, returning to Paris at the close of the year 1871. After the trial of the Communists he pleaded earnestly, but in vain, for the lives of Rossel, Lullier, Ferré, Crémieux, and Maroteau. In the elections of January, 1872, he got into a difficulty with the Radicals of Paris in consequence of his[Pg 197] refusal to accept the *mandat impératif*. This, he explained, was contrary to his principles, for conscience might not take orders. He was willing to accept a *mandat contractuel*, by which there could be a more open discussion between the elector and the elected. Hugo was defeated, receiving only

95,900 votes, as against 122,435 given to his opponent, M. Vautrain, a result partly accounted for by Hugo's amnesty proposals. The poet published, in September, 1873, *La Libération du Territoire*, a poem which was sold for the benefit of the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine. In it the writer strongly condemned the adulation poured upon the Shah of Persia, then on a visit to France, and respecting whose cruelty and barbarism many anecdotes were current.

On the morning following Christmas Day, 1873, the poet was again called upon to bear a great loss by the death of his only remaining son, François Victor. At the funeral Louis Blanc delivered a short address, in which he extolled the literary ability, the integrity, and the virtues of the deceased. To the shouts of '*Vive Victor Hugo! Vive la République!*' the weeping poet was led away from the grave-side.

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During the siege of Paris, Hugo kept a diary of this lurid history, and upon this he constructed his poem *L'Année Terrible*—the events celebrated extending from August, 1870, to July, 1871. Speaking of this work, a writer whom I have already quoted remarked that 'the poems of the siege at once demand and defy commentary; they should be studied in their order as parts of one tragic symphony. From the overture, which tells of the old glory of Germany before turning to France with a cry of inarticulate love, to the sad majestic epilogue which seals up the sorrowful record of the days of capitulation, the various and continuous harmony flows forward through light and shadow, with bursts of thunder and tempest, and interludes of sunshine and sweet air.' The variety of note in these tragic poems has also been well insisted upon. 'There is an echo of all emotions in turn that the great spirit of a patriot and a poet could suffer and express by translation of suffering into song; the bitter cry of invective and satire, the clear trumpet-call to defence, the triumphal wail for those who fell for France, the passionate sob of a son on the stricken bosom of a mother, the deep note of thought that slowly opens into flower of speech; [Pg 199] and through all and after all, the sweet unspeakable music of natural and simple love. After the voice which reproaches the priest-like soldier, we hear the voice which rebukes the militant priest; and a fire, as the fire of Juvenal, is outshone by a light as the light of Lucretius.' Mr. Dowden sees in these poems the work of a Frenchman throughout, not a man of the Commune, nor a man of Versailles. 'The most precious poems of the book are those which keep close to facts rather than concern themselves with ideas. The sunset seen from the ramparts; the floating bodies of the Prussians borne onward by the Seine, caressed and kissed and still swayed on by the eddying water; the bomb which fell near the old man's feet while he sat where had been the Convent of the Feuillantines, and where he had walked in under the trees in Aprils long ago, holding his mother's

hand; the petroleuse, dragged like a chained beast through the scorching streets of Paris; the gallant boy who came to confront death by the side of his friends— memories of these it is which haunt us when we have closed the book—of these, and of the little limbs and transparent fingers, and baby-smile, and murmur like the murmur of[Pg 200] bees, and the face changed from rosy health to a pathetic paleness of the one-year-old grandchild, too soon to become an orphan.' But other critics, while acknowledging the force of the writing and the noble aspirations of the author, place the work on a considerably lower level as a whole. Yet no one who knows the work can surely deny that the poet has thrown a halo of glory round the concrete facts of a disastrous and momentous period.

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

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CHAPTER XIV: QUATRE-VINGT-TREIZE.—POLITICS, ETC.

In 1874 appeared the last of Victor Hugo's great romances, *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*. It was published on the same day in ten languages. This grand historical and political novel was a fitting close to a series of works unexampled in scope and breadth of conception. A great prose epic upon that terrible year in French history, 1793, it excited the liveliest interest throughout Europe, and critics of all shades of opinion hastened to do justice to its extraordinary merits. Even those warm admirers of the author's superb imaginative genius, who had looked forward with misgiving to this daring excursion into the historic field, admitted that his complete success had justified the effort. They extolled the work as 'a monument of its author's finest gifts; and while those who are, happily, endowed[Pg 202] with the capacity of taking delight in nobility and beauty of imaginative work will find themselves in possession of a new treasure, the lover of historic truth, who hates to see abstractions passed off for actualities, and legend erected in the place of fact, escapes with his praiseworthy sensibilities unwounded.'

The work is on a colossal scale, exhibiting great breadth of touch, while the style has now the power of the lightning, and now the calm and the depth of the measureless sea. 'With La Vendée for background, and some savage incidents of the bloody

Vendean war for external machinery, Victor Hugo has realized his conception of '93 in three types of character—Lantenac, the Royalist marquis; Cimourdain, the Puritan turned Jacobin; and Gauvain, for whom one can as yet find no short name, he belonging to the Millenarian times.' It was said that there is nothing more magnificent in literature than the last volume of this work, and while its author had no rival in the sombre, mysterious heights of imaginative effect, he was equally a master in strokes of tenderness and the most delicate human sympathy. Rapidity and profusion are the pre-eminent[Pg 203] characteristics of this work—'a profusion as of starry worlds, a style resembling waves of the sea, sometimes indeed weltering dark and massive, but ever and anon flashing with the foamy lightning of genius. The finish and rich accurate perfection of our own great living poet Tennyson are absent. Hugo is far more akin to Byron; but his range is vaster than Byron's. He has Byron's fierce satire, and more than Byron's humour, though it is the fashion to generalize and say that the French have none. He is both a lyrical and epic poet. He is a greater dramatist than Byron; and whether in the dramas or prose romances, he shows that vast sympathy with, and knowledge of, human nature which neither Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, nor Wordsworth had. Scott could be his only rival. In France they had lived dramatic lives for the last ninety years; we have lived much more quietly in England, and in France there is a real living drama.'

As this book, full-hearted in its passion, and deeply-veined with human emotion, is the last of Victor Hugo's prose romances, some brief general allusions to him as a novelist will be appropriate. Taking the five books (which[Pg 204] have been referred to in the order of their publication) alone, viz., *Notre-Dame*, *Les Misérables*, *Les Travailleurs*, *L'Homme qui Rit*, and *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*—they would have made the fame of any writer; and yet, it has been justly remarked, they are but one façade of the splendid monument that Victor Hugo has erected to his own genius. I am not one of those who would contend that Hugo's style is everywhere immaculate. On the contrary, he sometimes sins greatly; but these occasions are rare compared with his mighty triumphs. Still, justice must not be extinguished in admiration. My own view of Hugo's literary gifts, as expressed more especially in his romances, has been so fairly put by another writer that I shall transfer, and at the same time in the main adopt, his language: 'Everywhere we find somewhat the same greatness, somewhat the same infirmities. In his poems and plays there are the same unaccountable protervities that have already astonished us in the romances; there, too, is the same feverish strength, welding the fiery iron of his idea under forge-hammer repetitions; an emphasis that is somehow akin to weakness; a strength that is a little epileptic. He stands so far above all his[Pg 205] contemporaries, and so incomparably excels them in richness,

breadth, variety, and moral earnestness, that we almost feel as if he had a sort of right to fall oftener and more heavily than others; but this does not reconcile us to seeing him profit by the privilege so freely. We like to have in our great men something that is above question; we like to place an implicit faith in them, and see them always on the platform of their greatness: and this, unhappily, cannot be with Hugo. As Heine said long ago, his is a genius somewhat deformed; but, deformed as it is, we accept it gladly; we shall have the wisdom to see where his foot slips, but we shall have the justice also to recognise in him the greatest artist of our generation, and, in many ways, one of the greatest artists of all time. If we look back, yet once, upon these five romances, we see blemishes such as we can lay to the charge of no other man in the number of the famous; but to what other man can we attribute such sweeping innovations, such a new and significant view of life and man, such an amount, if we think of the amount merely, of equally consummate performance? It is in the nature of the human intellect, finite as it is, to [Pg 206] relax sometimes from its highest strain, and if Victor Hugo failed at times to scale his loftiest note of thought or expression, it may be remembered also that even Shakespeare was not always in the mood for producing *Hamlets*.

There appeared, in 1874, Hugo's pathetic sketch 'Mes Fils,' containing a tribute of affection to his own dead children; and in 1875-6 was published his *Actes et Paroles*. This justificatory work was in three parts, which dealt respectively with the period before exile, the period of exile, and the period since exile. 'The trilogy is not mine,' said the author, 'but the Emperor Napoleon's; he it is who has divided my life; to him the honour of it is due. That which is Bonaparte's we must render to Cæsar.' Although he first strongly countenanced resistance, the writer concluded with an exhortation to clemency, holding that resistance to tyrants should not be deemed inconsistent with mercy to the vanquished. We have here a complete collection of Hugo's addresses, orations, and confessions of faith, etc., during the preceding thirty years. *Pour un Soldat*, a little brochure written in favour of an obscure soldier, appeared in 1875. Its publication not only resulted in [Pg 207] saving the life of the soldier, who had been condemned for a venial crime, but the sufferers in Alsace and Lorraine reaped the pecuniary fruits of its popularity. The second part of *La Légende des Siècles* was published in 1877. At this time the poet was living in the Rue de Clichy, No. 21, sharing part of the house with Madame Charles Hugo, who, after a widowhood of some years, married M. Charles Lockroy, deputy for the Seine, and also known as a man of letters. Madame Drouet, who had befriended the poet when he was proscribed in 1851, placed her salon in this house at the poet's disposal for the reception of his friends. M. Barbou, who saw much of Hugo in this residence, thus describes the man and his

habits: 'The hand, no doubt, is too slow for the gigantic work that the poet conceives. And yet no moment is ever lost. Generally up with the sun, he writes until mid-day, and often until two o'clock. Then, after a light luncheon, he goes to the Senate, where, during intervals of debate, he despatches all his correspondence. He finds his recreation generally by taking a walk, although not unfrequently he will mount to the top of an omnibus just for the sake of finding himself in the society of the[Pg 208] people, with whom he has shown his boundless sympathy. At eight o'clock he dines, making it his habit to invite not only his nearest friends, but such as he thinks stand in need of encouragement, to join him and his grandchildren at their social meal. At table Victor Hugo relaxes entirely from his seriousness. The powerful orator, the earnest pleader, becomes the charming and attractive host, full of anecdote, censuring whatever is vile, but ever ready to make merry over what is grotesque.... Hale and vigorous in his appearance, precise and elegant in his attire, with unbowed head, and with thick, white hair crowning his unfurrowed brow, he commands involuntary admiration. Round his face is a close white beard, which he has worn since the later period of his sojourn in Guernsey as a safeguard against sore throat; but he shows no token of infirmity. His countenance may be said to have in it something both of the lion and the eagle, yet his voice is grave, and his manner singularly gentle.'

The same writer devotes a chapter to Hugo's love of children, *à propos* of his *L'Art d'être Grand-père*. It is perfectly true that women, and children also, stirred in the poet an element[Pg 209] of chivalrous devotion. He also strove to exalt woman as something far beyond the mere passion and plaything of man; while as to children, 'he is pathetic over an infant's cradle, he is delighted at childhood's prattle, and to him the fair-haired head of innocence is as full of interest as the glory of a man.' Nor was there anything derogatory to his genius in this, or in his making Georges and Jeanne, his two grandchildren, the hero and heroine of the work above named. When the wisdom of his indulgence was questioned, he replied that he agreed with M. Gaucher, who held that 'a father's duties are by no means light; he has to instruct, to correct, to chastise; but with the grandfather it is different, he is privileged to love and to spoil.' But he taught the oneness of humanity even to his grandchildren; and once, when they were about to enjoy the good and pleasant things of this life, he bade the children fetch in some houseless orphans who were crouching under the window, in order to share their appetizing dishes. Unconquered by his opponents, Hugo confessed himself a captive to the children, and he defined Paradise as 'a place where children are always little, and parents are always young.'

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

Soon after his election, Hugo introduced a [Pg 211] proposal in the Senate for granting an amnesty to all those condemned for the events of March, 1871, and to all those then undergoing punishment for political crimes or offences in Paris, including the assassins of the hostages. On the 22nd of May he delivered an eloquent oration in support of his motion. Towards the close of his address, he described the state of the prisoners in New Caledonia. Having painted their agony, and deplored the continuation of the prosecutions and the last transport of convicts, he said: 'That is how the 18th of March has been atoned for. As for the 2nd of December, it has been glorified, it has been adored and venerated, it has become a legal crime. The priests have prayed for it, the judges have judged by it, and the representatives of the people, at whom the blows were dealt by this crime, not only received them, but accepted and submitted to them, acting with all rigour against the people and all baseness before the Emperor. It is time to put a stop to the astonishment of the human conscience; it is time to renounce that double shame of two weights and two measures. I ask a full amnesty for the events of the 18th of March.' The motion was rejected, only about [Pg 212] seven hands being held up for the amnesty. The poet-orator again pleaded the same cause in January, 1879, but his proposal was coldly received. Nevertheless, in the following month an Amnesty Bill was passed by the Chamber of Deputies.

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

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

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To this sonnet the French poet returned a reply which I may translate as follows: 'My dear and eminent *confrère*, I read with emotion your superb lines. It is a reflection of your own glory that you send me. How shall I not love that England which produces such men as you! The England of Wilberforce, the England of Milton and of Newton! The England of Shakespeare! France and England are for me one people only, as Truth and Liberty are one light only. I believe in the unity of humanity, as I believe in the Divine unity. I love all peoples and all men. I admire your noble verses. Receive the cordial grasp of my hand. It made me happy to know your charming son, for it seemed to me that while clasping his hand I was pressing yours.'

In 1877-78 appeared Hugo's *L'Histoire d'un Crime*. It possessed special interest from its autobiographical character, and, like many of its predecessors, it was instinct with energy and passion. By way of preface to this history, the author remarked, 'This work is more than opportune; it is imperative. I publish it.' Then came the following explanatory note: 'This work was written twenty-six years ago [Pg 214] at Brussels, during the first months of exile. It was begun on the 14th of December, 1851, and on

the day succeeding the author's arrival in Belgium, and was finished on the 5th of May, 1852, as though chance had willed that the anniversary of the death of the first Bonaparte should be countersigned by the condemnation of the third. It is also chance which, through a combination of work, of cares, and of bereavements, has delayed the publication of this history until this extraordinary year, 1877. In causing the recital of events of the past to coincide with the events of to-day, has chance had any purpose? We hope not. As we have just said, the story of the *Coup d'État* was written by a hand still hot from the combat against the *Coup d'État*. The exile immediately became an historian. He carried away this crime in his angered memory, and he was resolved to lose nothing of it: hence this book. The manuscript of 1851 has been very little revised. It remains what it was, abounding in details, and living, it might be said bleeding, with real facts. The author constituted himself an interrogating judge; all his companions of the struggle and of exile came to give evidence[Pg 215] before him. He has added his testimony to theirs. Now history is in possession of it; it will judge. If God wills, the publication of this book will shortly be terminated. The continuation and conclusion will appear on the 2nd of December. An appropriate date.'

When the second part of the work was issued at the beginning of 1878, France had fortunately passed through a time of great political excitement without those fearful consequences which have frequently followed such periods in her history. The continuation of Victor Hugo's work did not consequently create such popular fervour as it might otherwise have done. But the author was as scathing as ever in his invectives, and no one knew such strong depths of bitterness and indignation as he. The satellites of Louis Napoleon were sketched with the pen of a Swift, and in the delineation of their master we find such touches as this: 'Louis Napoleon laid claim to a knowledge of men, and his claim was justified. He prided himself on it, and from one point of view he was right. Others possess discrimination; he had a nose. 'Twas bestial, but infallible.' As for the members of his court, 'they lived for pleasure. They lived by the[Pg 216] public death. They breathed an atmosphere of shame, and threw on what kills honest people.' There are many interesting episodes in a momentous period dealt with throughout this work, which, like everything else by its author, is instinct with his strong personality.

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CHAPTER XV. POEMS ON RELIGION.

Victor Hugo's attitude on religion was the subject of frequent comment. It is now known that so far from being a sceptic, as was frequently declared, he had a firm belief in God and immortality. When a rationalist on one occasion said to him that though he himself had a dim belief in immortality, he doubted whether the outcasts of society could have any belief in their own immortality, the poet replied, 'Perhaps they believe in it more than you do.'

Arsène Houssaye has left an interesting sketch of certain religious confidences with which Hugo favoured him some years before his last illness. 'I am conscious within myself of the certainty of a future life,' the poet expressly said. 'The nearer I approach my end the clearer do I hear the immortal symphonies of worlds that call me [Pg 218] to themselves. For half a century I have been outpouring my volumes of thought in prose and in verse, in history, philosophy, drama, romance, ode, and ballad, yet I appear to myself not to have said a thousandth part of what is within me; and when I am laid in the tomb I shall not reckon that my life is finished; the grave is not a *cul-de-sac*, it is an avenue; death is the sublime prolongation of life, not its dreary finish; it closes in the twilight, it opens in the dawn. My work is only begun; I yearn for it to become brighter and nobler; and this craving for the infinite demonstrates that there is an infinity.' He denied that there were any occult forces responsible for the creation of man and nature; there was a luminous force, and that was God. Continuing the thought as to his own future existence, he added, 'I am nothing, a passing echo, an evanescent cloud; but let me only live on through my future existences, let me continue the work I have begun, let me surmount the perils, the passions, the agonies, that age after age may be before me, and who shall tell whether I may not rise to have a place in the council-chamber of the Ruler that controls all, and whom we own as God?'

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

dream, and clings to the Syllabus and worldly state more firmly than ever. The contrast was very sharply drawn between the good, ideal pastor, and the worldly and sensual father too often met with. Hugo's evolvment of his own ideas led to much controversy, and his book was [Pg 220] severely attacked. By way of reply he issued *La Pitié Suprême*. For those who sinned through ignorance and defective education, he inculcated pity and forgiveness; and the work generally furnished but another illustration to many which had gone before of the liberality of his mind, and his support of the doctrine of universal toleration. At a still later date, in his *L'Âne*, he once more denounced false teachers. Desiring, like Rabelais, to lash his kind, the poet put his denunciations into the mouth of an ass, which animal was taken to be the type of unsophisticated man. In the pages of this satire, observed Louis Ulbach, 'the poet at the climax of his life, dazzled though he is by the nearness of the dawn beyond, glances back at those whom he has left behind, addresses them with raillery keen enough to stimulate them, but not stern enough to discourage them, and from the standpoint of his severity, puts a fool's cap upon all false science, false wisdom, and false piety.' Nevertheless, the work was regarded as a failure, in spite of its scintillations of genius, the satiric power of Victor Hugo being one rather of fierce denunciation than that which consists in the perception of the incongruous in humanity.

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Another work in which Hugo endeavoured to place the false and the true in religion side by side, was his *Religions et Religion*, issued in 1880. 'This book,' said the author in a prefatory note, 'was commenced in 1870, and completed in 1880. The year 1870 gave infallibility to the Papacy, and Sedan to the Empire. What is the year 1880 to bring forth?' *Religions et Religion* was an attack not only upon various systems of religion, but also upon those who attack all religion. The writer made an assault upon the system of Milton, and established a system of religion of his own, which in its catholicity should embrace all spirits who love the good. The work was regarded as part of the great epic *Le Fin de Satan*, which had been foreshadowed many years before. But, as one of his critics remarked, if Hugo had fallen into the mistake of thinking that this book was not only a poem full of the loveliest sayings and the noblest aspirations, but a valuable treatise on theology and philosophy, it was but a mistake which he had been making ever since he began to write. Hugo's new poem 'is an emphatic, not to say a violent, answer to two different systems of poetic religion, each of which is itself [Pg 222] at war with the other—the system of Dante and the system of Milton. Without Hell, Dante would never have been able to write a line of the *Inferno*; and without the Devil, Milton would have been in a condition equally forlorn.

Yet M. Hugo's book is an attack upon both these venerable beliefs, and also upon the positivists who are trying to undermine them.' Hugo, in short, gave his support to the unconscious humourist who complained of *Paradise Lost* that it proved nothing.

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

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CHAPTER XVI. PUBLIC ADDRESSES, ETC.

Victor Hugo was unquestionably a great orator, or rather I ought perhaps to say he exhibited the powers of a great orator on special occasions. If eloquence is to be measured by the effect which it has upon the audience, he had the electrical force of the orator in no small degree; for in connection with certain persons and topics he was successful in enkindling an enthusiasm in his hearers which was almost unparalleled. But his oratory was not of that even kind which, if it never passes beyond a given elevation, never sinks on the other hand into bathos or commonplace. Hugo had a wonderful gift of language, and he was an orator when his heart was thrown into his subject, and he pressed into its service all the wealth of rhetoric he had at command. Nevertheless, some of his public utterances were [Pg 224] far from being successful—a result due in some instances to extravagance of language and quixotism of idea, and in others to the absence of that 'sweet reasonableness' which dispassionately weighs and considers the opinions of others, and judges righteous judgment.

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

eye, the solemn voice, rolling as if it would sound in the ears of posterity; the involuntarily haughty attitude in vain striving to seem modest; the imperturbable seriousness[Pg 225] with which he piles antithesis upon antithesis—all this must be realized.' Hugo was enthusiastically cheered on taking the chair. Waving his arm he exclaimed, '*Vive la République!*'—a cry which was then taken up with equal fervour by every person in the audience. After the other speakers had been heard, the distinguished chairman delivered his oration. He rapidly sketched the work accomplished by Voltaire, and concluded thus: 'Alas! the present moment, worthy as it is of admiration and respect, has still its dark side. There are still clouds on the horizon; the tragedy of peoples is not played out; war still raises its head over this august festival of peace; princes for two years have persisted in a fatal misunderstanding; their discord is an obstacle to our concord, and they are ill-inspired in condemning us to witness the contrast. This contrast brings us back to Voltaire. Amid these threatening events let us be more peaceful than ever. Let us bow before this great dead, this great living spirit. Let us bend before the venerated sepulchre. Let us ask counsel of him whose life, useful to men, expired a hundred years ago, but whose work is immortal. Let[Pg 226] us ask counsel of other mighty thinkers and auxiliaries of this glorious Voltaire—of Jean Jacques, Diderot, Montesquieu. Let us stop the shedding of human blood. Enough, despots. Barbarism still exists. Let philosophy protest. Let the eighteenth century succour the nineteenth. The philosophers, our predecessors, are the apostles of truth. Let us invoke these illustrious phantoms that, face to face with monarchies thinking of war, they may proclaim the right of man to life, the right of conscience to liberty, the sovereignty of reason, the sacredness of labour, the blessedness of peace. And as night issues from thrones, let light emanate from the tombs.' There are probably no two great French writers who present more marked points of contrast than Voltaire and Victor Hugo; yet the latter, not only in praising his predecessor, but on many other occasions, gloried in being grandly inconsistent if he could thereby, as he believed, advance the interests of humanity.

Victor Hugo presided at the International Literary Congress held in Paris in June, 1878. His speech on that occasion, though by no means confined to business details, was accepted by the[Pg 227] Congress as forming the basis of its decisions. The speaker urged that a book once published becomes in part the property of society, and that after its author's death his family have no right to prevent its reissue. He held that a publisher should be required to declare the cost and the selling price of any book he intended to bring out; that the author's heirs should be entitled to 5 or 10 per cent. of

the profit, and that in default of heirs the profit should revert to the State, to be applied to the encouragement of young writers.

Passing to more general questions, and dwelling on the memorableness of the year 1878, Hugo defined the Exhibition as the alliance of industry, the Voltaire Centenary as the alliance of philosophy, and the Congress then sitting as the alliance of literature. 'Industry seeks the useful, philosophy seeks the true, literature seeks the beautiful—the triple aim of all human forces.' He welcomed the foreign delegates as the ambassadors of the human mind, citizens of a universal city, the constituent assembly of literature. Peoples, he remarked, were estimated by their literature; Greece, small in territory, thereby earning greatness, the name of England [Pg 228] suggesting that of Shakespeare, and France being at a certain period personified in Voltaire. He next showed that copyright was in the interest of the public, by securing the independence of the writer; and, glancing at the former dependent position of men of letters, he remarked that paternal government resulted in this—the people without bread and Corneille without a sou. Deriding the alleged dangerousness of books, and urging the real dangers of ignorance, he described schools as the luminous points of civilization. He ridiculed as harmless archæological curiosities those who wished mankind to be kept in perpetual leading-strings, and who anathematized 1789, liberty of conscience, free speech, and a free tribune. He exhorted men of letters to recognise as their mission conciliation for ideas and reconciliation for men. They should war against war. 'Love one another' signified universal disarmament, the restoration to health of the human race, the true redemption of mankind. An enemy was better disarmed by offering him your hand than by shaking your fist. In lieu of *Delenda est Carthago*, he proposed the destruction of hatred, which was best effected by pardon. After showing her industry [Pg 229] and hospitality, France should show her clemency, for a festival should be fraternal, and a festival which did not forgive somebody was not a real festival. The symbol of public joy was the Amnesty, and let this be the crowning of the Paris Exhibition.

In the August following this Congress, a great working-men's conference was held in the French capital in favour of International Arbitration. Victor Hugo being unable to attend and preside at the gathering, as originally announced, sent a communication expressing his approbation of the objects of the meeting. 'I demand what you demand,' he wrote. 'I want what you want. Our alliance is the commencement of unity. Let us be calm; without us, Governments attempt something, but nothing of what they try to do will succeed against your decision, against your liberty, against your sovereignty. Look on at what they do without uneasiness, always with serenity, sometimes with a smile. The supreme future is with you. All that is done, even against

you, will serve you. Continue to march, labour, and think. You are a single people; Europe and you want a single thing—peace.' Two or three months subsequent [Pg 230] to this meeting, the English Working-men's Peace Association waited upon Victor Hugo in Paris, and presented him with an address, magnificently illuminated and framed, as a token of admiration for the services he had rendered to the cause of humanity and peace. In reply, Hugo said: 'As long as I live I shall oppose war, and defend the cause which is dear and common to us all—the cause of labour and peace.'

As honorary president of a secular education congress in 1879, Victor Hugo thus addressed that body: 'Youth is the future. You teach youth, you prepare the future. This preparation is useful, this teaching is necessary to make the man of to-morrow. The man of to-morrow is the universal Republic. The Republic is unity, harmony, light, industry, creating comfort; it is the abolition of conflicts between man and man, nation and nation, the abolition of the law of death, and establishment of the law of life. The time of sanguinary and terrible revolutionary necessities is past. For what remains to be done the unconquerable law of progress suffices. Great battles we have still to fight—battles the evident necessity of which does not disturb the [Pg 231] serenity of thinkers; battles in which revolutionary energy will equal monarchical obstinacy; battles in which force joined with right will overthrow violence allied with usurpation—superb, glorious, enthusiastic, decisive battles, the issue of which is not doubtful, and which will be the Hastings and the Austerlitz of humanity. Citizens, the time of the dissolution of the old world has arrived. The old despotisms are condemned by the Providential law. Every day which passes buries them still deeper in annihilation. The Republic is the future.'

Another address, in which Hugo expounded his views of the future of humanity, of labour and progress, etc., was delivered at Château d'Eau, on behalf of the Workmen's Congress at Marseilles. Differentiating the achievements of the centuries, he remarked that 'for four hundred years the human race has not made a step but what has left its plain vestige behind. We enter now upon great centuries. The sixteenth century will be known as the age of painters; the seventeenth will be termed the age of writers; the eighteenth, the age of philosophers; the nineteenth, the age of apostles and prophets. To satisfy the nineteenth century it is necessary to [Pg 232] be the painter of the sixteenth, the writer of the seventeenth, the philosopher of the eighteenth; and it is also necessary, like Louis Blanc, to have the innate and holy love of humanity which constitutes an apostolate, and opens up a prophetic vista into the future. In the twentieth century war will be dead, the scaffold will be dead, animosity will be dead, royalty will be dead, and dogmas will be dead; but man will live. For all

there will be but one country—that country the whole earth; for all there will be but one hope—that hope the whole heaven.'

It will be seen that there was a sweeping breadth and magnificence about Victor Hugo's prophecies for the twentieth century. But that epoch is so near that we may well doubt whether the seer's extensive programme will so speedily be realized. Still, the prophecy is lofty, generous, noble, and I will not attempt to destroy the horoscope. Passing on to the great question of the day, that of labour, the orator observed: 'The political question is solved. The Republic is made, and nothing can unmake it. The social question remains; terrible as it is, it is quite simple; it is a question between those who have, and those who have not. The latter of these[Pg 233] two classes must disappear, and for this there is work enough. Think a moment! Man is beginning to be master of the earth. If you want to cut through an isthmus, you have Lesseps; if you want to create a sea, you have Roudaire. Look you; there is a people and there is a world; and yet the people have no inheritance, and the world is a desert. Give them to each other, and you make them happy at once. Astonish the universe by heroic deeds that are better than wars. Does the world want conquering? No, it is yours already; it is the property of civilization; it is already waiting for you; no one disputes your title. Go on, then, and colonize.'

This is no doubt grand, but it is vague. However, the men of highest aspiration have frequently proved themselves ill-fitted for the practical development of their own theories. It is the penalty which the brain has to pay for being stronger than the hand that it must often call in the services and co-operation of the latter. Hugo was exceedingly happy in dealing with cavillers at material progress. He showed that those who make the worst mistakes are those who ought to be the least mistaken. 'Forty-five[Pg 234] years ago M. Thiers declared that the railway would be a mere toy between Paris and St. Germain; another distinguished man, M. Pouillet, confidently predicted that the apparatus of the electric telegraph would be consigned to a cabinet of curiosities. And yet these two playthings have changed the course of the world. Have faith, then; and let us realize our equality as citizens, our fraternity as men, our liberty in intellectual power. Let us love not only those who love us, but those who love us not. Let us learn to wish to benefit all men. Then everything will be changed; truth will reveal itself; the beautiful will arise; the supreme law will be fulfilled, and the world shall enter upon a perpetual fête-day. I say, therefore, have faith! Look down at your feet, and you see the insect moving in the grass; look upwards, and you will see the star resplendent in the firmament: yet what are they doing? They are both at their work; the insect is doing its work upon the ground, and the star is doing its work in the sky. It is an infinite distance that separates them, and yet while it separates, unites.

They follow their law. And why should not their law be ours? Man, too, has to submit to [Pg 235]universal force, and inasmuch as he submits in body and in soul, he submits doubly. His hand grasps the earth, but his soul embraces heaven; like the insect he is a thing of dust, but like the star he partakes of the empyrean. He labours and he thinks. Labour is life, and thought is light!

Some idea of Victor Hugo's social and humanitarian ideas may be gained from these addresses. In the course of a conversation with M. Barbou, however, he supplemented these views and theories by explicit statements upon various questions. France, he said, was in possession of a *bourgeoise* Republic, which was not an ideal one, but which would undergo a slow and gradual transformation. He regarded himself and his contemporaries as having been pioneers and monitors, whose advice was worth obtaining, because they had gained their knowledge by experience, having lived through the struggles of the past; but whose theories could not be put into practice by themselves. The future solution of the social question belonged to younger men, and to the twentieth century. That solution, he maintained, would be found in nothing less than the universal spread of [Pg 236]instruction; it would follow the formation of schools where salutary knowledge should be imparted. By educating the child they would endow the man, and when that had been accomplished, society might proceed to exercise severe repression upon anyone who resisted what was right, because he would have been already so trained that he could not plead ignorance in his own behalf.

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

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CHAPTER XVII. 'LA LÉGENDE DES SIÈCLES,' ETC.

I have reserved this poem for somewhat fuller mention than I have been able to accord to Victor Hugo's other works. This is called for by reason of the inherent

grandeur of the work, and because upon this noble achievement the greatness of the poet's fame must ultimately rest. Mr. Swinburne holds it to be the greatest work of the century, and many critics who have not his *perfervidum ingenium* incline to the same view. When the first part of the *Légende* appeared, in 1859, it excited so much interest that every poet of any note in France wrote warm letters of congratulation to the author. To one of these, penned by Baudelaire, and typical of the rest, Hugo characteristically replied.

Regarding humanity in two aspects—the historical and the legendary, and maintaining that the latter was in one sense as true as the former,[Pg 238] Hugo took up the legendary side of the question in this Legend of the Ages. It was intended to be followed by two other sections under the respective titles of 'The End of Satan' and 'God.' The first part of this great trilogy was far more striking than any of its author's previous poems. Its brilliancy and energy, its literary skill and its powerful conceptions, enchained the attention. The poet divided his work into sixteen cycles, extending from the Creation to the Trump of Judgment. A full and on the whole discriminating criticism of this remarkable poem has been given by the Bishop of Derry, who also, with some success, has translated passages from it. But Victor Hugo's French is too peculiar and impassioned to be brought within the trammels of English verse. Nevertheless, I will quote from the Bishop the last three stanzas of that beautiful poem, *Booz Endormi*, one of the first set of poems, all of which are devoted to Scriptural subjects. The rich man Boaz sleeps, quite unconscious of the Moabitess Ruth, who lies expectant at his feet:

'Asphodel scents did Gilgal's breezes bring—

Through nuptial shadows, questionless, full fast

The angels sped, for momentarily there pass'd

A something blue which seem'd to be a wing.

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'Silent was all in Jezreel and in Ur—

The stars were glittering in the heaven's dusk meadows.

Far west among those flowers of the shadows,

The thin clear crescent, lustrous over her,

'Made Ruth raise question, looking through the bars

Of Heaven, with eyes half-oped, what God, what comer

Unto the harvest of the eternal summer,

Had flung his golden hook down on the field of stars.'

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

The Bishop of Derry raises a question upon which a good deal might be said, when he propounds a theory to the effect that Victor Hugo possesses fancy rather than imagination. It may not be possible to produce passages from Hugo [Pg 240] which, for sustained grandeur and breadth of conception, would be equal to isolated passages that could be cited from Dante and Milton; yet there are as unquestionably scores of other passages in the works of Victor Hugo in describing which it would be wholly inadequate to use the term fancy. They are either grandly and powerfully imaginative, or they are nothing. This writer no doubt too frequently distorts his conceptions, while his treatment sometimes falls from sublimity into caricature; but it is incontestable, I think, that in spite of all *bizarre*, and every other exception or qualification, he possesses a mobile and an impressive imagination.

In 1877 appeared the second part of *La Légende des Siècles*. Although it scarcely rose to the level of the first part, it was not without those exalted passages which gave supremacy to the poet. 'Once again the seer surveys the cycle of humanity from the days of Paradise to the future which he anticipates; he takes his themes alike from the legends of the heroic age of Greece, and from the domains of actual history, and after singing of the achievements of the great, he dedicates his lay to the little ones, [Pg 241] and in a charming poem entitled *Petit Paul* he depicts with fascinating pathos all the tenderness and all the sorrows of childhood.'

The third and final part of the work was published in 1883. Discussing the unity of tone which entitles this strange work, with its multitude of separate characters and incidents, to be called a poem, a writer in the *Athenæum* observed: 'It is an apprehension, at once profound and tender, of the pathos of man's mysterious life on the earth; a pity such as has never before been expressed by any poet; a beautiful faith

in God such as, in these days, can only find an echo in rare and noble souls; and an aspiration for justice and the final emancipation of man such as seems an anachronism, indeed, in a time which has given birth to Gautier and to Baudelaire on the one hand, and to Zola and his followers on the other.' Yet, notwithstanding its unity, it is not a little curious that the Legend was as finished a work at the end of the first instalment as it was at the end of the whole. As to the poetic qualities of the closing part of the work, there was no decadence of true poetic impulse, nor any subsidence of that marvellous brilliance which [Pg 242] dazzled Europe when the first part of the poem appeared. But neither was there any growth of those highest poetic characteristics 'in which Hugo's magnificent poetry was always weak—such as self-dominance, serenity, and that wise sweetness of a balancing judgment, equitable alike to the slave in the field and to the king on his throne, which belongs to the mind we call dramatic, whether the dramatist be the writer of *Œdipus* or the writer of *Hamlet*.'

The *Légende des Siècles* offers a bewildering maze of things, sweet, beautiful, and sublime. It scintillates with the brilliant lights of genius as the vault of heaven is fretted with the glittering stars. Yet what is perhaps nobler still, as Mr. Swinburne has said, 'Over and within this book faith shines as a kindling torch, hope breathes as a quickening wind, love burns as a changing fire. It is tragic, not with the hopeless tragedy of Dante, or the all but hopeless tragedy of Shakespeare. Whether we can or cannot share the infinite hope and inviolable faith to which the whole active and suffering life of the poet has borne such unbroken and imperishable witness, we cannot in any case but recognise the greatness and heroism of his love [Pg 243] for mankind. As in the case of Æschylus, it is the hunger and thirst after righteousness, the deep desire for perfect justice in heaven as on earth, which would seem to assure the prophet's inmost heart of its final triumph by the prevalence of wisdom and of light over all claims and all pleas established or asserted by the children of darkness, so in the case of Victor Hugo is it the hunger and thirst after reconciliation, the love of loving-kindness, the master-passion of mercy, which persists in hope and insists on faith, even in face of the hardest and darkest experience through which a nation or a man can pass. Hugo's poetic masterpiece, to translate his own language concerning it, had its rise in the past, in the tomb, in the darkness and the night of the ages; but permeating all is the regenerating light of a mighty hope.'

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

but deeply charged[Pg 244] with tears. Over the bitter and eager wind of satire, for instance, he has no real command, and none over that bracing north wind of masculine thought and intellectual strength which is necessary to vitalize epic and drama.' So it was complained, and not without force or reason, that while it would be impossible to praise the lyrical portions of his work too highly, the satirical lacked subtlety and delicacy to make it effective; the epic wanted a larger freedom of natural growth; while situations intended to be dramatic rarely rose above the merely theatrical. The play in which these situations occur is concerned with the absolute equality of all men in regard to the great human passions. Cynicism or conventionality may for a long period encrust a man, but there comes a time when the heart will have its way. Hugo's latest illustration of this truth, Duc Gallus, rescues a peasant girl from a proposed marriage with a brutal fellow whom she loathes, but rescues her with the deliberate intention of making her his mistress. Though surrounded with splendour, the girl soon pines and breaks her heart through sheer loneliness, and at last in despair she kills herself by means of a poisoned ring. The[Pg 245] Nemesis of remorse now overtakes the Duc. Beneath this pretended cynicism there has been all the while smouldering a real passion, which, now that it is too late, breaks out into a fierce and inextinguishable flame; it was in depicting these heights and depths of emotion that Hugo found his keenest delight.

The Book Epic deals with the great French Revolution, but it is in the Book Lyric that the poet achieves his finest triumph. In considering the substance and variety of Hugo's lyrical efforts, every reader will agree with the judgment that amongst poets of energy, as distinguished from the poets of art and culture, Shelley's is the only name in nineteenth-century literature which can stand beside that of Victor Hugo.

In 1882 was published *Torquemada*, a drama written chiefly during Victor Hugo's exile in Guernsey. The poet himself regarded it as one of his best efforts, and it certainly exhibits his glowing imagination and his power of depicting human misery at their highest. The great Inquisitor is drawn as a single-minded enthusiast who, following relentlessly to their conclusion the doctrines upon which he has been nourished from childhood, burns and tortures people out of[Pg 246] pure love of their souls—that is, fastens their bodies to the stake for the purpose of saving from the everlasting fires of hell both their souls and their bodies. The poet shows how the idea gradually mastered him until it became irresistible as fate. The chief point in the plot well illustrates this. Torquemada having been condemned as a fanatic by the Bishop of Urgel, is ordered to be bricked up alive in a vault. He is rescued from his living tomb by two lovers, Don Sanche and Donna Rosa. Torquemada swears to be their eternal friend, and subsequently saves them from the wrath of the King. Sanche and Rosa are

just being freed when the former relates the manner of the deliverance of Torquemada from his tomb. Sanche had used as a lever on that occasion an iron cross which hung upon the tottering wall. 'O ciel! ils sont damnés!' exclaims Torquemada, when he hears this. In his view the lovers are now condemned to eternal perdition, but in order to save their souls he sends their bodies to the stake. It need scarcely be said that the author, in ascribing honesty and other characteristics to the bloodthirsty Inquisitor, gives a more exalted view of him than is taken by impartial history. But the [Pg 247] play must be read for its poetry and its scenic effects, which are magnificent.

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

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CHAPTER XVIII. HONOURS TO VICTOR HUGO.

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

The chief ovations accorded to the poet I must briefly pass in review. Several revivals of his best-known dramas have taken place of recent years, but the most striking of these celebrations was undoubtedly that at the Théâtre Français, on the 25th of February, 1880. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the original representation [Pg 249] of *Hernani*, and that play was again produced to mark 'the golden wedding of Hugo's genius and his glory.' After the termination of the play the curtain was lifted, when a bust of the dramatist was seen elevated on a pedestal profusely decorated with wreaths and palm-leaves. The stage was filled with actors dressed to represent the leading characters in Hugo's various plays. Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt came forward in the character of Doña Sol, and recited with much feeling and energy some laudatory verses by M. François Coppée, which roused anew the enthusiasm of the

audience. In response to the call of M. Francisque Sarcey, the vast assembly rose, and filled the air with their congratulatory vociferations. '*Ad multos annos!* long live Victor Hugo!' Such were the cries from all parts of the house, which so affected the venerable poet that he was compelled to retire.

A few days subsequent to this performance the members of the Parisian press gave a grand banquet to Victor Hugo at the Hôtel Continental. The speech of welcome and honour to the poet was delivered by M. Émile Augier, himself a writer of considerable reputation. After referring to the marvellous vitality of Victor[Pg 250] Hugo's poems and romances, the speaker said: 'Time, O glorious master, takes no hold upon you; you know nothing of decline; you pass through every stage of life without diminishing your virility; for more than half a century your genius has covered the world with the unceasing flow of its tide. The resistance of the first period, the rebellion of the second, have melted away into universal admiration, and the last refractory spirits have yielded to your power.... When La Bruyère before the Academy hailed Bossuet as father of the Church, he was speaking the language of posterity, and it is posterity itself, noble master, that surrounds you here, and hails you as our father.'

At the word 'father' the whole audience rose, and took up the salutation. When quiet was restored M. Delaunay suggested that the poet should be solicited for a new dramatic work. The enthusiasm was renewed at this suggestion, and it may well be imagined that the acclamations reached their culminating point when Sarah Bernhardt rose and embraced the aged author of *Hernani*. On this occasion Victor Hugo read his address of thanks, which was brief and pregnant in its allusions. 'Before me[Pg 251] I see the press of France,' said Hugo. 'The worthies who represent it here have endeavoured to prove its sovereign concord, and to demonstrate its indestructible unity. You have assembled to grasp the hand of an old campaigner, who began life with the century, and lives with it still. I am deeply touched. I tender you all my thanks. All the noble words that we have just been hearing only add to my emotion. There are dates that seem to be periodically repeated with marked significance. The 26th of February, 1802, was my birthday; in 1830 it was the time of the first appearance of *Hernani*; and this again is the 26th of February, 1880. Fifty years ago, I, who am now here speaking to you, was hated, hooted, slandered, cursed. Today, to-day—but the date is enough. Gentlemen, the French press is one of the mistresses of the human intellect; it has its daily task, and that task is gigantic. In every minute of every hour it has its influence upon every portion of the civilized world; its struggles, its disputes, its wrath resolve themselves into progress, harmony, and peace. In its premeditations it aims at truth; from its polemics it flashes forth light. I

propose as my toast the prosperity of the [Pg 252] French press, the institution that fosters such noble designs, and renders such noble services.'

On the 27th of December, 1880, there was a grand festival at Besançon in honour of the poet, its most illustrious son. The chief inhabitants of the town, and the visitors from Paris, assembled at the Mairie, and proceeded thence to the Place St. Quentin. The Mayor was accompanied by M. Rambaud, chief secretary to the Minister of Public Instruction, and General Wolff, commander of the *Corps d'Armée*. There were also present deputations from the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, officers, university professors, a representative of the President of the Republic, the Rector of the Academy, the Prefect, the Municipal Councillors, and a large body of members of the press. The poet was represented by M. Paul Meurice. The whole of Besançon was *en fête*. In a street facing the Place St. Quentin a large platform had been erected, and here the proceedings took place. A beautiful medallion affixed to a house near the platform was uncovered by the Mayor. This medallion represented a five-stringed lyre with two laurel branches of gold, and there was an inscription which, by the poet's express [Pg 253] desire, consisted simply of his name and the date of his birth—'Victor Hugo: 26th of February, 1802.' The lyre was surmounted by a head typical of the Republic, encircled by rays. The procession adjourned from the Place St. Quentin to the stage at the Besançon Theatre, in the centre of which had been placed David's bust of Victor Hugo. At the request of the Mayor, M. Rambaud delivered an address upon the poet's character and genius. He recited the history of his struggles and of his literary conflicts, and of the gradual attainment of victory over thought and intellect; descanted upon his ever-increasing influence, his development as a politician, his internal conflicts, and his final triumph; described his prolonged duel with the Empire, and his ultimate success; reviewed the leading characteristics of his lyrical, dramatic, and historical writings; and finally demonstrated how, after a life fraught with conflicts, trials, and sorrows, he found his reward in the revival of France, in the progress of democracy; and last, though not least, in the peaceful joys of domestic life and the society of his grandchildren.

To this address M. Paul Meurice responded, and read the following letter from Victor Hugo [Pg 254] himself: 'It is with deep emotion that I tender my thanks to my compatriots. I am a stone on the road that is trodden by humanity; but that road is a good one. Man is master neither of his life nor of his death. He can but offer to his fellow-citizens his efforts to diminish human suffering; he can but offer to God his indomitable faith in the growth of liberty.' The marble bust of the poet was crowned with a wreath of golden laurel, and while the whole audience stood, a band of one

hundred and fifty musicians performed the *Marseillaise*. Cries of '*Vive Victor Hugo! Vive la République!*' were heard as the audience left the theatre.

An ovation such as few sovereigns have ever received was accorded to Victor Hugo by the City of Paris on the 27th of February, 1881. The day before, the poet had completed his seventy-ninth year, and by the French people this is regarded as entitling to octogenarian honours. A celebration took place which was compared with the reception of Voltaire in 1788. The Avenue d'Eylau, where Victor Hugo resided, was densely thronged, and the poet, being recognised with his children and grandchildren at an upper window of his house, was cheered [Pg 255] by a vast multitude, estimated by unsympathetic observers at 100,000. The Municipality had erected at the entrance to the Avenue lofty flagstaffs decorated with shields bearing the titles of his works, and supporting a large drapery inscribed '1802, Victor Hugo, 1881.' Early in the morning the Avenue was thronged with processions consisting of collegians, trades unions, musical and benefit societies, deputations from the districts of Paris and from the provinces, etc. A deputation of children, bearing a blue and red banner with the inscription, '*L'Art d'être Grand-père,*' and headed by a little girl in white, arrived at the house, and was received by Victor Hugo in the drawing-room. The little maiden, who recited some lines by M. Mendès, was blessed by the venerable poet. Among other incidents of the day, the Paris Municipality drew up in front of the house, and Victor Hugo read to them the following speech: 'I greet Paris, I greet the city. I greet it not in my name, for I am naught, but in the name of all that lives, reasons, thinks, loves, and hopes on earth. Cities are blessed places; they are the workshops of Divine labour. Divine labour is human labour. It remains human so long as [Pg 256] it is individual; as soon as it is collective, as its object is greater than its worker, it becomes Divine. The labour of the fields is human; the labour of the towns is Divine. From time to time history places a sign upon a city. That sign is unique. History in 4,000 years has thus marked three cities, which sum up the whole effort of civilization. What Athens did for Greek antiquity, what Rome did for Roman antiquity, Paris is doing to-day for Europe, for America, for the civilized universe. It is the city of the world. Who addresses Paris addresses the whole world, *urbi et orbi*. I, a humble passer-by, who have but my share in your rights, in the name of all cities, of the cities of Europe, of America, of the civilized world, from Athens to New York, from London to Moscow; in thy name, Rome; in thine, Berlin—I praise, with love I hail, the hallowed city, Paris.'

A stream of processions then filed past the house, many of them bearing imposing bouquets, which were deposited in front of Hugo's residence. The musical societies alone exceeded 100; strains of the *Marseillaise* were now and again audible, and the entire Avenue, nearly a [Pg 257] mile long, was thickly lined with spectators, while that

part of it commanding a view of the poet's house was densely packed, except for a passage-way for the processions. Medals and photographs of the hero of the day were to be seen everywhere, and the behaviour of the enormous assemblage was most exemplary. Victor Hugo, whose love of the fresh air always made him careless of exposure, remained at the open window for several hours bareheaded, acknowledging the greetings of the successive deputations and of the multitude. At the Trocadéro a musical and literary festival was held, when selections from Victor Hugo's works were sung or recited by some of the leading Paris *artistes*, and the *Marseillaise* was performed by a military band. M. Louis Blanc, who presided, said that few great men had entered in their lifetime into their immortality. Voltaire and Victor Hugo had both deserved this, one for stigmatizing religious intolerance, the other for having, with incomparable lustre, served humanity. He commended the committee for inviting the co-operation of men of different opinions, for genius united in a common admiration men otherwise at discord, and the [Pg 258] idea of union was inseparable from a grand festival. 'There were enough days in the year given to what separated men. It was well to give a few hours to what brought them together, and there could be no better opportunity than the festival of an unrivalled poet, an eloquent apostle of human brotherhood, whose use of his genius was greater than his genius itself, the oneness of his life consisting in the constant ascent of his spirit towards the light.' In the evening of the day there was a Victor Hugo concert at the Conservatoire, and at many of the theatres verses were recited in his honour. On the night of the 25th a special performance was given at the Gaîté of *Lucrece Borgia*, which had not been produced for ten years. The house was filled, all the notabilities of Paris being present, while the poet himself also appeared for a short time. The celebration generally was one triumphant success.

In honour of Hugo's eightieth birthday, on the 26th of February, 1882, the French Government ordered a free performance of *Hernani* at the Théâtre Français. Crowds stood outside for hours waiting for admission, and 2,300 persons managed to squeeze themselves into [Pg 259] seats intended to accommodate only 1,500. The poet and his grandchildren were present during the last act, and were loudly applauded. Hugo's bust was placed on the stage at the close of the piece, and verses in his honour by M. Coppée were recited. On the preceding evening 5,000 persons had attended his reception, when the committee of the previous year's grand celebration presented him with a bronze miniature of Michael Angelo's 'Moses.' In acknowledging the gift, the poet said, 'I accept your present, and I await a still better one, the greatest a man can receive: I mean death—death, that recompense for the good done on earth. I shall live in my descendants, my grandchildren, Jeanne and Georges. If,

indeed, I have a narrow-minded thought it is for them. I wish to ensure their future, and I confide them to the protection of all the loyal and devoted hearts here present.'

Yet one more celebration I must notice. On the 22nd of November, 1882, the Théâtre Français gave a brilliant performance of Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'Amuse*. It has already been seen that this piece was first produced on the 22nd of November, 1832, amid such a scene of [Pg 260] disorder and tumult that the Government forbade its further representation. From that time forward it had never been produced until this fiftieth anniversary in 1882. It was the subject of preliminary conversation for weeks in Paris, and great anxiety was manifested on the subject of seats. It was stated that if the house, which had only provision for 1,500 persons, could have been made to accommodate 10,000, there would still have been an insufficiency of places to satisfy all the supplications with which the Théâtre Français was besieged. The intrinsic value of the work, however, was not the first thought of those who engaged in the feverish quest for seats, which for a full month possessed all fashionable, artistic, literary, political, diplomatic, and financial Paris. It was chiefly the desire to do honour to the veteran poet. With regard to the representation itself, the splendour of the mounting, the beauty of the accessories, and the historical fidelity of the costumes, transcended all expectation. Never was a piece placed on the stage with greater, or indeed probably equal, art.

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CHAPTER XIX. PERSONAL AND MISCELLANEOUS.

In private life and character, it is well known that Victor Hugo was one of the noblest and most unselfish of men. Numberless are the anecdotes related of his generosity and kindness of disposition. His children's repasts at Hauteville House, Guernsey, and his hospitality to the suffering and distressed in Paris, I have already alluded to. He had a special talent for organizing Christmas parties, and was never happier than when surrounded by his grandchildren. He mingled in all their games, and even shared their troubles and their punishments. When his favourite little grandchild was put on dry bread for bad conduct, the grandfather was so unhappy that he would take no dessert. His pleasures were as simple as his mind was great. The writer who furnishes me [Pg 262] with these details warmly contradicted the statement that Victor Hugo was an infidel; on the contrary, he was a firm believer in God and in a future state; and this, as we have seen, the poet himself confirmed. Even when in his octogenarian period it was the poet's habit to rise with the day, summer and winter, and to work until nine. He then allowed himself an hour's rest for breakfast and his

morning constitutional, after which he again sat at his desk, mostly pursuing his intellectual labours, till five in the afternoon. Work being concluded, he dined at half-past six, and invariably retired to rest at ten. On one occasion, speaking of his future works, the poet said, 'I shall have more to do than I have already done. One would think that with age the mind weakens; with me it appears, on the contrary, to grow stronger. The horizon gets larger, and I shall pass away without having finished my task.'

On one occasion, a poor old woman was so delighted with the poetry of her grandson, aged eighteen, that in the fulness of her heart she sent his verses to Victor Hugo. The poet thus spoke of this incident to a friend—'In spite of myself, I must hurt this worthy woman's [Pg 263]feelings by not replying to her letter; the verses of her grandson are simply mine, taken from *Les Contemplations*. I can't anyhow write to say I find my own verses beautiful—I can't encourage plagiarism; and I won't tell the grandmother that her grandson is a liar.'

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

He never took artistic lessons, but by constant practice he acquired considerable facility in representing a certain class of subjects, ruined castles with deep shadows, gloomy landscapes,[Pg 264] stormy skies, etc. M. Ph. Burty and several writers and artists of the first class have expressed their admiration of his artistic work, and its striking effects. His drawings were chiefly illustrative of his own thoughts. They were employed either to develop his poems, or to serve as pictorial commentaries upon his own literary creations. Théophile Gautier wrote: 'M. Hugo is not only a poet, he is a painter, and a painter whom Louis Boulanger, C. Roqueplan, or Paul Huet would not refuse to own as a brother in art. Whenever he travels he makes sketches of everything that strikes the eye. The outline of the hill, a break in the horizon, an old belfry—any of these will suffice for the subject of a rough drawing, which the same evening will see worked up well-nigh to the finish of an engraving, and the object of unbounded surprise even to the most accomplished artists.' M. Castel collected many of Hugo's early drawings into an album, and published them with the object of

furthering the poet's work among poor children. Théophile Gautier supplied an introduction to the album, and it had an excellent sale. A number of land and sea pieces, bearing Hugo's signature, passed into the possession of [Pg 265] M. Auguste Vacquerie. The poet prepared a set of illustrations for his *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, and a second album, consisting of miscellaneous illustrations by Hugo, has also been prepared. Many of his sketches were left in Hauteville House, and M. Paul Meurice, Madame Lockroy, and Madame Drouet came into possession of others. Victor Hugo himself sat for a great number of portraits between his twenty-fifth and his seventy-seventh year, and he was likewise the subject of numerous caricatures. These portraits and caricatures were edited and published by M. Bouvenne. A very sumptuous volume is M. Blémont's *Livre d'Or* of Victor Hugo, containing beautiful illustrations by eminent artists, suggested by his poems and romances.

During the latter years of his life Victor Hugo resided in the quarter already mentioned, the Avenue d'Eylau (near the Bois de Boulogne), whose name, out of compliment to the poet, has been changed by the Municipality of Paris into the Avenue Victor Hugo. The house is semi-detached, and adjoins that occupied by M. and Madame Lockroy and Georges and Jeanne. A communication between the two residences, however, [Pg 266] brought the whole of the family practically under the same roof. The house is three stories high, and the poet's study was on the first floor, where he lived in a kind of bower, looking out upon one side in the direction of the Avenue, and on the other towards a pleasant garden, with a lawn surrounded by flowers and shaded by noble trees. The daily post to Hugo's house was an important matter, for he had a stream of communications from all parts of the world. If a poetaster in America or Australia thought he possessed immortal genius he could not rest content until he had received, or at least attempted to obtain, Victor Hugo's imprimatur. There were many things the kindly veteran would smooth over in order not to wound sensitive minds bitten with the *cacoëthes scribendi*. The poet was also very accessible to personal callers, so much so that it was said you had only to put on a black coat, pull at his bell, and there you were. Sometimes his good-nature was imposed upon, as will happen with all men, little or great. An amusing story is told of a cabman who, after driving the poet one day, refused to take the fare, on the ground that the honour of having Victor Hugo in his vehicle was a sufficient reward. The [Pg 267] author of *Notre-Dame* asked his admiring Jehu to dinner; but when the meal was over, and Hugo might naturally have thought they could cry quits, the guest drew a manuscript from his pocket with the ominous words, 'I also am a poet!' Greatness is thus not without its penalties.

A good deal of interest attaches to Victor Hugo's manuscripts. Madame Drouet was the poet's literary secretary for thirty years, and during all that period she copied with

her own hand the manuscripts of his various works as he wrote them. This was done to guard against the danger of the originals being lost, or mangled by printers. A writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* has furnished some interesting details respecting the manuscripts, which will be valuable as showing how the poet worked. What he effaced, he says, was so covered with ink, applied in a horizontal direction, that nobody will ever be able to make it out. When he wanted to get a subject well into his mind's eye he drew it sometimes with great finish of detail on the margin. There is something in several of the manuscripts reminding one of Doré's illustrations of the *Contes Drôlatiques*; while others bring to mind [Pg 268] Albert Dürer's orfèvrerie. All Victor Hugo's important manuscripts have been bequeathed to the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The writer to whom I have just referred further adds these personal details respecting the poet and his habits: 'Victor Hugo occupied the room looking on the garden in which he died. The window of his chamber is framed with ivy, and opens on an ivy-clad balcony. A vast old-fashioned four-post bed, with a flat, short drapery of antique brocade round the roof, stands in an alcove. The poet's body lay on it after death. A dressing-room is at the head, and a small closet used as a wardrobe at the foot. The desk is massive, and made with shelves, on which precious books are placed. One of them is the volume of the *Contemplations*, paid for by public subscription when Victor Hugo was in exile, and presented to Madame Victor Hugo. The vignettes and other illustrated portion of the work were done by the artists who had known, admired, and loved her husband. Between every second page there was a blank sheet, upon which a literary celebrity wrote a thought, good wish, or sentiment. Michelet led off; Louis Blanc, Jules Janin, Théophile Gautier, Dumas père, [Pg 269] and other celebrities of the time filled blank pages. Lamartine shines by his absence. He was always jealous of Victor Hugo, and querulously attacked *Les Misérables* soon after that strange *chef d'œuvre* was published. There is also a tall desk in Victor Hugo's bedroom. It was the one that he most used. He was up every morning at six, when he washed in cold water, and then took a cup of black coffee and a raw egg. This refectory kept up strength and did not draw blood from the brain, as must a less easily digested one. If ideas did not come rapidly he went to the window, which was all day open, winter and summer, sought inspiration by gazing thence, returned to the desk, sketched, and then wrote. If his "go" slackened, he walked about, and again looked out and drew. At eleven he breakfasted. His Pegasus, he used to say, was the knifeboard (impérial) of an omnibus, and he generally mounted it early in the afternoon. If he had nothing particular to do he did not get down till he had been to the terminus and back again. The objective faculties were not more active in these rides than the subjective. He

used to observe, reflect, and dream simultaneously.' When not riding, Hugo[Pg 270] was equally fond of walking about Paris, revisiting old sites associated with personal or historic events.

It will have been seen in the course of this volume that Victor Hugo was much tried by domestic affliction. Both his sons died young, Charles leaving the two children, Georges and Jeanne, of whom their grandfather was so fond. Madame Charles Hugo, the mother of these children, married afterwards, as already stated, M. Lockroy, the Extremist Deputy and journalist. The poet's second daughter, Adèle Hugo, fifty years of age, is in an asylum in the neighbourhood of Paris; and from the Paris correspondent of the *Times*, and other sources, I glean the following information concerning her: Thirty years ago she married an officer of the English Navy, while her father was living at Guernsey. The marriage was contrary to the wishes of Victor Hugo, who refused to have further intercourse with his daughter. She went to India with her husband. Some years afterwards she came back to Europe insane, under the care of a negro woman, who had become attached to her. Her father secured her admission to an asylum, and visited her there every week. On these journeys[Pg 271] to St. Mandé to see his daughter, he would take the Muette-Belville omnibus, with a correspondence to Vincennes, and every Christmas he sent 500 francs to the conductors of these lines. His pockets were stuffed with bonbons and little articles of finery which it gave Adèle pleasure to receive. It is stated that her madness takes the gentle and childish form. She would always know Victor Hugo, but did not understand why he did not take her to live with him. He placed her under the guardianship of his and her old friend Vacquerie, and made no attempt to evade the law, in virtue of which she comes, as alleged, into a fortune of £120,000, and half the income which may be derived from the copyright of Victor Hugo's works. The poet is said to have regretted during his later years his harshness in connection with his daughter's marriage, and her melancholy history cast over him one of the few sorrowful shadows that visited his life.

Hugo possessed one valuable piece of landed property, a plot of ground bought by him for 337,365 francs in the Avenue which bears his name. It is covered with trees, which surround a bright patch of lawn, and throw deep shadows over the ground, grateful to the eyes of those[Pg 272] accustomed to the dusty streets of Paris. It says not a little for his vigour and apparent hold upon life, that after he had passed his eighty-second year he intended to superintend the erection of his new house, which was to be built entirely from his own designs. A large portion of Hugo's fortune—which was estimated altogether at about four million francs—was invested in Belgian National Bank shares, English Consols, and French Rentes.

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

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The relation of the poet's life begun by Madame Hugo, has been completed by M. Paul Meurice, who includes in his work reprints of early poems and criticisms by Hugo, which are useful as strengthening the view taken in the earlier part of this narrative of his youthful political opinions. The poet is stated to have bequeathed his theatrical copyrights to M. Meurice, and the copyrights of his other works to M. Vacquerie. A magnificent national edition of the whole of Victor Hugo's works is now being issued in Paris. When completed, the work will contain etchings executed from original designs by fifty-seven of the chief French painters of the day, including Bonnat, Boulanger, Baudry, Cabanel, Constant, Comerre, Cormon, Gérôme, Harpignies, Henner, Moreau, and Rochegrosse. There will also be no fewer than 2,500 ordinary illustrations. The edition, which will extend to forty volumes, will contain unpublished, as well as all the published, works of the poet, and it will be completed by the opening day of the Universal Exhibition of 1889. No other monument could more fitly, or more worthily, commemorate this distinguished writer.

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CHAPTER XX. THE POET'S DEATH AND BURIAL.

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

The last public act of the poet was to stand sponsor to M. de Lesseps at the Academy reception, held towards the close of April, 1885. In accordance with his customary practice he was thinly clad, although the weather was inclement, and the rain fell

while he stood for a considerable time in the quadrangle. His friends dreaded the result of this exposure. It seems[Pg 275] that the spectators, as if with the presentiment that they would not see him again, gave him a prolonged cheer, 'which he acknowledged with the seriousness of a man already looking back, as from a distance, on the world's transient satisfactions. He then sat down, apparently absorbed in listening to what he called the inner voices, scarcely raising his head to respond to the plaudits evoked by the passage in his honour.' A fortnight after this incident, Hugo received his friend Lesseps and his family to dinner, according to his weekly custom. It was noticed by the poet's relatives, though it escaped the attention of his godson of the Academy, that the host was far from being in his usual health. Nevertheless, he exerted himself with his wonted courtesy, and remained with his guests until they departed at a late hour. He was already suffering from a cold, caught, it is said, on the 13th of May, when he took one of those omnibus rides to which, as we have seen, he was very partial. Overtaxed by his exertions in entertaining his friends, and unable to shake off the effects of the cold, serious symptoms began to develop themselves. In addition to an affection of the heart, congestion of the lungs[Pg 276] set in. Although for some time he battled heroically with the disease, he at length looked for and anticipated death.

A correspondent of the *Daily News*, reporting a conversation with an intimate friend of the Hugo family upon the poet's last illness, said: 'He tells me that he never heard of a more terrible struggle between organic vitality and the morbid causes that are at work. Victor Hugo would like to die, so that it cannot be said it is his strength of will that enables him to resist the disease from which he is suffering. Contrary to what some of the journals have said, he is a very bad patient. Last night, when after straining his whole body to breathe, he had fallen into a prostrate state, a strong blister was prescribed, and the three doctors agreed to stay and watch its effects. As one of them was going to apply it, Victor Hugo jumped up and not only pushed him away but the others also, with a muscular force that astounded them. He rushed to and fro, convulsively throwing up his arms, and clutching the furniture. In the intervals between the crises, the poet likes to have his granddaughter near him. He feels that death has come to summon him, and that[Pg 277] medical help is impotent to save him. He chafes at having to lie in bed. His voice is very weak, but remains audible to those near him. He was greatly affected on hearing that numbers of working people come in the evening to stand mutely and respectfully at a short distance from his house, so as to hear from those who call, as they are walking away, how he is. With his characteristic politeness, he has ordered that a direct notification is to be made to the humble watchers in the street of his decease, and wishes it to be known that his last

thoughts have been about his friends the poor of Paris, with whom he has long been in brotherhood by feeling.'

On hearing of Victor Hugo's alarming illness, Cardinal Guibert, the Archbishop of Paris, wrote to Madame Lockroy: 'I have the deepest sympathy with the sufferings of M. Victor Hugo and with the anxieties of his family. I have prayed much at the Holy Sacrifice of Mass for the illustrious patient. Should he desire to see a minister of our holy religion, although I am myself still weak, and in a state of convalescence from a disease much resembling his, I should make it my very pleasing duty to bring him the[Pg 278] succour and consolation so much needed in these cruel ordeals.' M. Lockroy at once replied as follows: 'Madame Lockroy, who cannot leave the bedside of her father-in-law, begs me to thank you for the sentiments which you have expressed with so much eloquence and kindness. As regards M. Victor Hugo, he has again said, within the last few days, that he had no wish during his illness to be attended by a priest of any persuasion. We should be wanting in our duty if we did not respect his resolution.' As the correspondent of the *Times* observed, the Archbishop could scarcely have expected an acceptance of his offer, for Victor Hugo was not the man to play the revolting death-bed farce of Talleyrand; and to have died a Catholic would not even have been a reversion to the creed of his childhood, for, strictly speaking, he was not brought up a Catholic. His mother, though a Vendéan Royalist, was a Voltairian; and when she entered her sons at the monastic college of Madrid, she declared them Protestants in order to exempt them from the confessional. But all through life Hugo was a Theist, and ran the gauntlet of much criticism from sceptical friends in consequence of his firm belief in the Deity.

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

In the afternoon M. Nadar attended, to photograph the death-bed. M. Bonnat, whose striking [Pg 280] portrait of Hugo was one of the features of the Salon a few years ago, took a sketch, and M. Dalou, the sculptor, made a cast of the head. M. and Madame Jules Simon were the first amongst a long list of notabilities to pay a visit of condolence to the family. Early on the morning of the poet's death a crowd had assembled in the Avenue Victor Hugo, and the painful news of his decease rapidly spread through their midst, and was soon known throughout Paris.

When the Senate met, shortly after the melancholy event, the President, M. Le Royer (a Protestant), said: 'Victor Hugo is dead. He who for more than sixty years has excited the admiration of the world and the legitimate pride of France has entered into immortality. I will not sketch his life; everyone knows it. His glory is the property of no party or opinion; it is the appanage and inheritance of all. I have only to express the deep and painful emotion of the Senate, and the unanimity of its regret. In sign of mourning, I have the honour to ask the Senate to adjourn.' M. Brisson then said: 'The Government joins in the noble words of the President of the Senate. To-morrow the [Pg 281] Government will have the honour of submitting to the Chamber a Bill for a national funeral to Victor Hugo.' The Senate then rose. The Municipal Council paid similar homage to the man whose name was imperishably associated with that of Paris. The Council also resolved upon attending the funeral in a body.

For some days the poet's death was the only subject of conversation in Paris. Foreign visitors delayed their departure in order to be able to say that they had witnessed his funeral. The Mayor of the 46th arrondissement declared the house where he died to be sacred, and the property of the city of Paris, and it was decided to give his name to new streets in the capital. For the first time, it was said, since Lafayette's death—and even this comparison proved to be inadequate—France was to celebrate a truly national funeral. The funerals of Thiers and Gambetta, though the most striking in France for at least a generation, aroused sympathy in one section of the people, and drew forth protests from the rest; but all France felt that it could bow the head with unanimous respect and veneration before the remains of Victor Hugo.

A doubt which had troubled all persons [Pg 282] holding religious beliefs in France was set at rest by the publication of the following unsealed memorandum handed by the poet to M. Vacquerie on the 2nd of August, 1883:—'I give 50,000 francs to the poor. I wish to be carried to the cemetery in their hearse. I refuse the prayers (*oraisons*) of all churches: I ask for a prayer (*prière*) from all souls. I believe in God.—Victor Hugo.' Though rejecting creeds, it was seen that the illustrious departed had not rejected belief. On one point M. Renan expressed the universal feeling when he wrote as follows:—'M. Victor Hugo was one of the evidences of the unity of our French

conscience. The admiration which enveloped his last years has shown that there are still points upon which we are agreed. Without distinction of class, party, sect, or literary opinion, the public, for some days past, has hung upon the heartrending narratives of his agony; and now there is nobody who does not perceive a great void in the heart of the country. He was an essential member of the church in whose communion we dwell—one might say that the spire of that old cathedral has crumbled into dust with the noble existence which has carried the banner of the ideal highest in our century.'

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

In proposing a vote of 20,000 francs for a national funeral, M. Henri Brisson said:— 'Victor Hugo is no more. While living he became immortal. Death itself, which often adds to the reputation of men, could not add to his glory. His genius dominates our century. Through him France irradiated the world. It is not letters alone that mourn, but our country and [Pg 284] humanity—every reading and thinking man in the whole world. As regards us Frenchmen, for the last sixty-five years his voice has entered into our inner moral life and our national existence, bringing into them all that is sweetest and brightest, most touching and most elevated, in the private and public history of that long series of generations which he has charmed, consoled, kindled with pity or indignation, enlightened, and warmed with his own fire. What man of our time is not indebted to him? Our democracy laments his loss. He has sung all its grandeurs; he has wept over all its miseries. The weak and lowly cherished and venerated his name. They knew that this great man had their cause in his heart. It is a whole people that will follow him to the grave.'

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

The news of the poet's death excited as much emotion in the French provinces as in the capital. The Municipal Councils of Lyons, Marseilles, and Toulon closed their sittings as a mark of grief, after having appointed delegates to represent them at the funeral. The Municipal Council of Besançon sent the following address to the [Pg 285] Hugo family:—'The native town of Victor Hugo, through the Council, places at the feet of the departed its sentiments of profound grief. The glory of the greatest of her children will for ever irradiate her and the whole world. By his genius he was foremost among men of letters and poets. By his love of his country and of liberty he was the enemy of usurpers and despots, and the power of his heart and his zeal for the welfare of humanity place him at the head of the protectors of the oppressed, the humble, and the weak.' The Mayor of Nancy addressed the following letter to M. Lockroy:—'The town of Nancy has always felt proud of having been the birthplace of General Hugo, the father of the man of genius for whom France mourns. She claimed as a glory for the blood of Lorraine, which ran in his veins, the renown of the great poet. I am an inadequate but sincere interpreter of the general grief.' At Algiers the Municipal Council closed its sittings, and from London, Vienna, and St. Petersburg messages of sympathy were despatched. On the day following the poet's death it was computed that at least ten thousand letters and messages of condolence reached the Avenue Victor Hugo.

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

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

Two days after the discussion upon M. de la [Pg 287] Forge's motion, the *Journal Officiel* published a series of documents which summarily disposed of the matter.

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

At six o'clock on the morning of the 31st of [Pg 288] May the remains of the poet were transferred to the Arc de Triomphe, where waggon-loads of flowers and memorial wreaths had been constantly arriving. All the shops, cafés, and restaurants in the Avenue Victor Hugo, and near the Triumphal Arch, had remained open all night. 'There was nothing disorderly,' wrote a correspondent, 'and the impression everything gave was one of sadness, though all day the aspect of the Place de l'Étoile had been really festive. The cenotaph was visible from the Tuileries. The coffin was covered with a silver-spangled pall, which rose from a base covered with black and violet cloth, violet being regal mourning, and Victor Hugo having attained an intellectual and moral sovereignty over France.' Early in the day the crowds of human beings in all the avenues leading to the Place de l'Étoile were very dense. As evening drew on the aspect was like that of some great fair. Medals bearing *Les Châtiments*, *Napoléon le Petit*, and other legends, were offered for sale, as well as medallions and numberless other memorials of the dead. The display of flowers was wholly unparalleled. At night a flood of electric light poured upon the Place de l'Étoile, revealing the [Pg 289] coffin with Dalou's powerfully modelled bust at the foot, and bringing out the flowers and the names of Victor Hugo's works on shields. The effect of the Horse Guards with torches and veiled lamps was very striking. Twelve schoolboys, relieved every hour, formed a picket in front of the cenotaph, round which there was an outer circle of juvenile guards, and an inner one of Hugo's intimate friends. English literature and the fine arts were worthily represented in the votive offerings laid at the feet of the great poet. Wreaths, flowers, and memorial cards were sent in great abundance. Lord Tennyson wrote under his name the word 'Homage,' and at the top of his card, '*In Memoriam celeberrimi Poetæ*.' Mr. Browning also was represented, as well as Sir Frederick

Leighton, the President of the Royal Academy. Archdeacon Farrar sent the message, 'In honour of one who honoured man as man.' Sir F. Burton, director of the National Gallery, wrote, 'Honour to the memory of the great master;' and similar tributes were paid by many men of letters, poets, Royal Academicians, and others.

The funeral ceremony took place on the 1st of June, and it was of such a character as to [Pg 290] live in the memory of all who witnessed it. What distinguished the procession in honour of Victor Hugo from the only one comparable with it, that of Gambetta, observed the correspondent of the *Times*, was not only its vast size, which was without precedent, but also the distinct sentiment which dominated both its members and the crowd. It was at once the triumph of the democracy and an illustration of its power. In the case of Gambetta, France beheld a statesman cut off in his prime, with all the dreams of hope and ambition before him. In the case of Victor Hugo, it was a veteran in letters entering into his rest. 'At the tidings of his death, all France, all parties, seemed to claim him; and it was the loss of the poet, the thinker, the humanitarian, which was first deplored. Then, by degrees, party claims were put forth. The poet and thinker disappeared, and this made his funeral less sublime. The crowd paid homage to the political weaknesses of his latter years, to the democratic philanthropist, to the Extremist Senator, to a Hugo, in fact, whom posterity will ignore, while honouring him with a place among great literary geniuses.' The struggle over his remains ended by other parties giving way, and [Pg 291] the people for whom he had laboured claiming him as their especial champion and prophet. But certainly, whether for king, priest, statesman, or man of letters, Paris and the provinces never before turned out in such vast multitudes.

The wreaths arriving from all parts were placed on twelve cars, drawn by four or six horses each, and they formed a brilliant spectacle. Before six o'clock in the morning there were already four rows of spectators assembled on each side of the Champs Élysées. 'The authorities, with considerable skill and foresight, had directed most of the societies likely to bear what might be qualified as seditious banners to meet in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Here accordingly, at a little before nine o'clock, were massed various free-thought societies, nearly all of them bearing red flags or banners, from Boulogne, Asnières, Argenteuil, Suresne, Bicêtre, Sèvres, Puteaux, and other places. Some of the banners were ornamented with Phrygian caps. Close by, in the Avenue de la Grande Armée, the proscribed of 1851-52 had also a red banner. By ten o'clock there were fifteen red flags close to the Arc de Triomphe. At the corner of the Rue [Pg 292] Brunel M. Lissagaray, M. Martin, and some thirty well-known anarchists had responded to the call of the Revolutionary Committee. They seemed, however, lost in the crowd. Twice this little group of anarchists tried to unfurl a red flag, but

being so closely watched, they had not time to hoist the colour in the air before flag-bearer and flag were both captured. By half-past ten the anarchists, having already lost two flags, abandoned the Rue Brunel. A little before eleven o'clock a Commissioner of Police, in plain clothes, accompanied by half-a-dozen policemen and a company of Republican Guards, marched down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and, accosting the bearer of every red flag that seemed at all objectionable, lifted his hat, and demanded that the emblem should be covered over.' Although disturbances had been feared none occurred. The Red Republicans and anarchists (whom Victor Hugo had more than once condemned) were but as a drop in the bucket, compared with the myriads of other citizens assembled to do honour to the dead. Although some arrests were made, the greatness of the whole occasion dwarfed their significance, and the most imposing spectacle within living memory [Pg 293] became a veritable popular triumph, and one reflecting credit upon the French nation.

Vivid descriptions were penned of the ceremony. According to one of these, by eleven o'clock the sight at the foot of the Arc de Triomphe became more and more impressive. The dull, grey sky, the roll of the muffled drums, the mournful strains of Chopin's *Funeral March*, combined with the hushed tones of conversation, helped to impress the numerous audience gathered round. The bright red robes of the judges and the sombre gowns of the barristers made a picturesque contrast with the very plain, unpretending dress of the members of the Government and of the Foreign Diplomatic Corps, who sat in the most favoured places at the foot of the Arc. In the background the glitter of cuirassier armour and the gold braiding of the representatives of the army gave tone and vivacity to the scene. Much interest was manifested at the presence of the French Cabinet, of both Houses, and of the English Ambassador, sitting side by side with M. de Mohrenheim, the Russian Ambassador.

When the mourning family had taken their places, Ministers went to pay them their condolences. The funeral addresses were then [Pg 294] delivered from a tribune erected on the left of the catafalque. The first speaker, M. Le Royer, President of the Senate, described Victor Hugo as the most illustrious senator, whose Olympian forehead, bowed on his breast in an anticipated posture of immortality, always attracted respectful homage from all his colleagues. He never mounted the tribune but to support a cause always dear to him—the Amnesty. Amidst apparent hesitations, he had all his life consistently pursued a high ideal of justice and humanity, and his moral action on France was immense. He unmasked the sophisms of crowned crime, comforted weak hearts, and restored to honest men right notions of moral law, which had been momentarily obscured.

The speech of the day, however, was delivered by M. Floquet, President of the Chamber of Deputies. In tones which could be distinctly heard throughout the vast arena, and with much eloquence of gesture, the orator said: 'What can equal the grandeur of the spectacle before us, which history will record! Under this arch, constellated with the legendary names of so many heroes, who have made France free, and wished to render her glorious, we see to-day the [Pg 295] mortal remains, or rather, I should say, the still serene image, of the great man who so long sang the glory of our country and struggled for her liberty. We see here around us the most eminent men in arts and sciences, the representatives of the French people, the delegates of our departments and communes, voluntary and spontaneous ambassadors, and missionaries from the civilized universe, piously bending the knee before him who was a sovereign of thought, an exile for crushed right and a betrayed Republic, a persevering protector of all the weak and oppressed, and the chosen defender of humanity in our century. In the name of the nation we salute him, not in the humble attitude of mourning, but with all the pride of glorification. This is not a funeral, but an apotheosis. We weep for the man who is gone, but we acclaim the imperishable apostle whose word remains with us, and, surviving from age to age, will conduct the world to the definite conquest of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This immortal giant would have been ill at ease in the solitude and obscurity of subterranean crypts. We have elevated him there, exposed to the judgment of men and Nature, under the grand sun which illuminated [Pg 296] his august conscience. Whole peoples realize the poetical dream of this sweet genius. May this coffin, covered with the flowers of the grateful inhabitants of Paris, which Victor Hugo loved to call the *Cité Mère*, and of which he was the respectful son and faithful servant, teach the admiring multitude duty, concord, and peace.'

M. Floquet concluded by reciting the verses beginning '*Je hais l'oppression d'une haine profonde*' ('I hate oppression with a profound hatred'). This address, which elicited enthusiastic approval, was followed by one from M. Goblet, Minister of Public Instruction. The Minister said that Victor Hugo, while living, figured in the glorious pleiad of great poets—with Corneille, Molière, Racine, and Voltaire. He would always remain the highest personification of the nineteenth century, the history of which, with its contradictions, its doubts, its ideas, and aspirations, had been best reflected in his works. The speaker laid stress upon the profoundly human character of Victor Hugo, who represented in France the spirit of toleration and peace. M. Émile Augier, who appeared in the uniform of the Academy, said: 'The great poet that France has lost vouchsafed me a place in [Pg 297] his friendship. Hence the honour I have to be chosen by the Academy to express our grief, which is as nothing to that of the whole

nation. To the sovereign poet France renders sovereign honours. She is not prodigal of the surname Great. Hitherto it has been almost the exclusive appanage of conquerors; but one preceding poet was universally called the Great Corneille, and henceforth we shall say the Great Victor Hugo. His long-acquired renown is now called glory, and posterity commences. We are not celebrating a funeral, but a coronation.' M. Michelin, President of the Municipal Council of Paris, delivered the last speech of the day.

On the conclusion of the addresses, the drums beat the salute, and then the band of the Republican Guard struck up the *Marseillaise*. Just as they had reached the chorus of the stirring French national anthem, the coffin was brought out from the catafalque, and at that precise moment the sun, bursting through the grey clouds, threw a ray of brilliant light on the mountain of flowers whence the remains of Victor Hugo had emerged. Now the march commenced, the school battalions and the representatives of the Press taking the lead, amid [Pg 298] clapping of hands. Chopin's *Marche Funèbre* was the music played at the opening of the ceremonial. After this came in slow movement the strains of the *Marseillaise*, which were soon followed by the *Chant du Départ*, and then by the Girondins' celebrated chant, *Mourir pour la Patrie*. Faithful to the stipulation of his will, Victor Hugo's body was conveyed to its last resting-place in the poor man's hearse—that is to say, the cheapest hearse which the Pompes Funèbres provide. As the corpse was being removed from the cenotaph every head was uncovered. The artillery of the Invalides and of Mont Valérien boomed out a farewell salute. 'The procession,' wrote a correspondent of the *Daily News*, 'had for vanguard a squadron of mounted gendarmes, followed by General Saussier, the Governor of Paris, and the Cuirassiers, with band playing; twelve crown-laden cars, the band of the Republican Guard, the delegates of Besançon carrying a white crown, the French and foreign journalists, the Society of Dramatic Authors, and the delegates of the National and other theatres. The cars were surrounded by the children of the school battalion. There was no crown on the pauper's hearse. The friends [Pg 299] of the deceased held the cords of the pall, and Georges Hugo walked alone, behind. He was in evening dress, and looked a young man. His face is handsome, and his air distinguished. His mother, sister, and different ladies and other friends of the family walked at a short distance behind him. The crowd of people was astounding round the Arch of Triumph, and in the Champs Élysées' side-ways the windows, balconies, house-roofs, and even the chimney-tops were crowded.'

The very trees seemed to bud with human beings; and the crowd of spectators in the streets was so deep and serried that it was impossible for any wearied senator, savant, or other venerable person to get out if once imprisoned. All along the route of

the procession heads were religiously uncovered as the hearse passed. The school battalion guarded it, and then came many companies of boyish militia. Gymnastic societies in white, blue, and red flannel shirts, with white trousers, gaiters, and caps; delegations of the learned societies, political clubs, printers, publishers, newspapers, foreign Radicals, literati, philanthropical societies, fire brigades, humane societies, trades unions,[Pg 300] came in processional order. Each group was distinctly separated from the other. Down the broad Champs Élysées the procession moved with great facility, as all carriages had been cleared away before eight o'clock in the morning. All the available standing-room of the broad causeway was filled with an eager throng; but the most sublime sight was presented at the Place de la Concorde. The corner from the Champs Élysées to the bridge was walled off by the troops, so that an innumerable multitude was able to collect at this point. Not content with this, the banks of the Seine, down to the water's edge, on both sides of the bridge, were thickly studded with people, and every floating barge or boat was dangerously loaded with spectators. Far up the broad stretch of the Avenue the procession, with its thousand crowns and banners, could be seen slowly descending. Many groups had not yet left the Arc de Triomphe when the head of the procession reached the Panthéon. A dense mass of spectators had gathered in and around the Place de la Concorde; but perhaps no portion of the route was so crowded as the Rue Soufflot, which leads from the Boulevard St. Michel to the[Pg 301] Panthéon. Windows, ladders, roofs, and chimneys were all utilized by those eager to witness the passing of the procession. Shortly after half-past one the head of the procession reached the steps of the Panthéon, and at two o'clock the coffin was brought up the front steps, and placed on the catafalque. The representatives of the family, of Government, and the various authorities took their places on either side of the main entrance. Once more a grand spectacle was offered by the artistic grouping of crowns, flowers, uniforms, and colours under the majestic pillars of the Panthéon. Speeches were again delivered, and these continued while the procession, with, bands and banners, filed past. The working-class corporations followed in their various order, and these were succeeded by the Secular Technical School for Girls, the Republican Socialist Alliance, the Comedians of Paris, the Montmartre Choral Society, the Women's Suffrage Society, the Radical Socialist Club, and many other bodies. 'A few minutes after six o'clock,' remarked the *Times* correspondent, 'the last crowns and banners passed by, and after a short interval the troops representing the Army of Paris commenced their [Pg 302]march-past. Dragoons, Republican Guard, and Line were in their turn acclaimed by the multitude, pleased by their martial appearance and their light tread after the fatigues of the day. Then came the blare of the Artillery trumpets, followed by those of the Dragoons, and at precisely a quarter to seven the last soldier

made the last salute to the remains of Victor Hugo. A statue of Hugo in his famous posture of reverie fronted the Panthéon. This papier-mâché statue represented Victor Hugo watching the long procession that did him honour. It was a trifle; but there was a touch of tender thoughtfulness in this reminder to the surging multitude that they must not forget the man who was being borne to the grave.'

Thus ended a funeral pageant worthy, on the whole, of the poet and the nation—a pageant in which were to be found representatives of all classes of the French community. Victor Hugo, whose genius recalled the elder glory of French literature, now sleeps in the Panthéon. While he differed from the illustrious men of the past, having neither the wit of Rabelais nor Molière, the classic dignity of Corneille, nor the philosophic depth of Voltaire, he had a greatness, though of [Pg 303] a different kind, equal to their own. He therefore joins them as an equal. He has given to French literature a new departure; for every book he has written, while wet with human tears, is yet stamped with the terrible earnestness which possessed his spirit, and made immutable by the Herculean strength of his genius.

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CHAPTER XXI. GENIUS AND CHARACTERISTICS.

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

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It has been said that Hugo failed in politics; but as he never posed for being a practical politician, the charge does not possess the significance that would have attached to it had he come forward as a political saviour—of whom France has had so many. For the sinuosities and compromises of party politics, however wise and necessary at times, he had no aptitude. He had no political creed; or, if he had, it might be summed up in one article. He individualized humanity, and declared it to be miserable. The whole of

his creed, therefore, consisted in the destruction of monopolies and abuses, and the uplifting of the masses. But he was certainly unfitted for the debates of such a body as the French Chamber, and it was probably one of the best things he ever did in his life when he shook the dust from under his feet, and bade the Assembly an indignant farewell. Yet he was more successful than scores of other politicians who have set up a claim to superior political wisdom. The French Chamber has been too frequently suggestive of a *maison d'aliénés*. The modern Gallic politician is about the most impulsive creature of which we have any knowledge. He lacks the phlegmatic nature [Pg 306] of the German and the logical hardheadedness of the Briton. He is hypersensitive and emotional, not argumentative and judicial. He only knows that he has ideas, and that every man who opposes those ideas is an enemy of the human species, and must be put out of the way. This was proved again and again in that terrible year of Revolution, 1793, when the friends of Reason sent each other to the block as they successively gained the upper hand. One would think that this was a sufficient baptism of blood; but it was not so; the tale has been renewed at intervals, and the communistic horrors of 1871 added another fearful page to the grim catalogue. French politics are a succession of storms; the lightning breaks, the thunder rolls, and the deluge follows; then, for a time, the sky clears and the sun shines brilliantly: but the clouds return after the rain; the barometer becomes demoralized; and electrical disturbance is once more the order of the day.

But in the intervals of sanity in the French political world—I use the word 'sanity' in its larger sense—great and noble work is done, work worthy of the world's admiration. When the French mind conceives projects of [Pg 307]amelioration, it conceives them with boldness and generosity. In this lies the safety-valve of the people, and also the best hope for the future of the race. Men like Hugo are the men to suggest and to push forward these great conceptions for the national welfare. They may have few political principles as such, but the political sympathies of such a man as Victor Hugo have more force and weight than the most orthodox and irreproachable doctrines of a hundred smaller men. While politicians may be struggling for unimportant details, men of great sympathies are mighty to the moving of mountains. As a practical politician, then, let it be frankly admitted that Hugo was a failure; that in his speeches he was frequently rhapsodical; and that he could take no initiative in practical legislation. All these are matters in which lesser intellects might, could, should, would, and do succeed. But in that higher region where the eternal principles of justice come into play, where sublime benevolence holds her seat, where by a quick and living sympathy universal humanity is made to feel a universal brotherhood, then

Victor Hugo had a political illumination to which none other of his contemporaries could lay claim.

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From the political to the social is but a step, and that a natural one. It cannot be said of Hugo that he was liberal in his social theories and aristocratic in his practice. He had a courteousness of nature that made him equally esteemed, and had in reverence, by such an one as a king or an emperor, and the meanest of his compatriots who called upon him for advice or aid. If he endeavoured to teach the higher social life to others, he at least led the way by setting before himself only such aims as were noble and humane. He was the very soul of truth in all his relations, and if he were not the equal of Rousseau as a great social teacher, he far transcended the author of the *Contrat Social* in his irreproachable life and his deep personal sympathies. One writer has said that 'Victor Hugo's own strongest influence is but a breath of the influence of Rousseau.' This is a deliverance as unhappy as it is dogmatic. There is neither necessity nor appositeness in placing the two writers in such juxtaposition. France before Rousseau was not the France of Victor Hugo; the former had work of an originaive character to do in the social sphere, as Victor Hugo had in that of literature. But while Hugo[Pg 309] was not the creator of a new social system, one of the primary causes of his influence was of a social character. His intense and genuine sympathy with the humble and the poor and the suffering gave him a place in the affection of thousands who knew little of social theories. The key, indeed, to Hugo's personal character and influence, as distinguished from the literary, was that human sympathy which led to his untiring efforts to protect the weak against the strong. He would have no parleying with oppression and violence, and notwithstanding his passionateness he really exercised a salutary and calming influence in the main, and one which told for goodness. To him the orphan's rags, the shame of woman, and the anguish of the toiler never appealed in vain. I can imagine him doing what sturdy old Samuel Johnson did when he rescued the outcast woman in the Strand, and himself bore her away to a place of safety. Hugo had a clear enough insight into those social reforms which are still a necessity even in this enlightened age. He did not believe in the perfection of the poor, though he did believe in the absolute imperfection of kings and priests. By setting the latter in the full blaze[Pg 310] of publicity, he believed he was doing a great social work, and helping on that golden age of happiness for which he laboured. In his earnestness and enthusiasm, he might commit, and doubtless did commit, errors of judgment; but then without these very qualities of earnestness and enthusiasm all the great things associated with his name could have had no birth. Where we gain much, we can easily forgive a

little. Victor Hugo had a conscience, and as a man amongst men, pleading for men, he threw it all into his social work. In Jean Valjean he will never cease to plead, though he himself is dead. He has given to the sufferings of humanity a voice which will continue to speak in tones of pathos and of sadness until the last of those sufferings and social wrongs shall have passed away. Of many devastating spirits has the world been called upon to say that they made a solitude and called it peace; but of Victor Hugo we may say that he found humanity a bleak and cheerless wilderness, and endeavoured to make it blossom as the rose.

Yet loving the world and humanity as he did, and feeling that the earth was 'bound by gold chains about the feet of God,' Hugo, as I [Pg 311] have before said, has been claimed by some as an unbeliever. As though any great poet who had come to years of discretion could be a materialist or an infidel. So far from seeing no God in the universe, the poet as a rule is God-intoxicated. I shall be reminded, perhaps, of Lucretius and Shelley, but even these, as the exceptions, would only serve to prove the rule. The Roman, however, was philosopher first, and poet afterwards; while as for the atheism of Shelley, it was a spasmodic experience due to a revolt against authority—not a deep-settled conviction—and an experience out of which he was rapidly growing at the time of his death. No poet of the first order has ever been an atheist, and Victor Hugo was no exception to the rule. While discarding religious systems, he was, in fact, profoundly religious. He never swerved in this matter from the position he held in 1850, and which he thus explained at the close of a speech on public instruction, 'God will be found at the end of all. Let us not forget Him; and let us teach Him to all. There would otherwise be no dignity in living, and it would be better to die entirely. What soothes suffering, what sanctifies labour, what makes [Pg 312] man good, strong, wise, patient, benevolent, just, and at the same time humble and great, worthy of liberty, is to have before him the perpetual vision of a better world throwing its rays through the darkness of this life. As regards myself, I believe profoundly in this better world, and I declare it in this place to be the supreme certainty of my soul. I wish, then, sincerely, or, to speak more strongly, I wish ardently for religious instruction.' There is surely nothing vague or nebulous about this. No man could express himself more clearly or emphatically if directly questioned upon the great and momentous topics of God and immortality. As a religious teacher, then, Hugo may be justly claimed; for the whole weight of his name and influence was thrown upon the side of those profound religious convictions which have been the consolation of the human race, and which have knit man in indissoluble bonds to the Divine.

What shall I say of Victor Hugo from the literary point of view? His true glory is that he revived French literature—created it afresh, as it were—and was himself the best representative of its new excellences. But this subject is [Pg 313] so great that I scarcely dare venture upon it. The poet carried out in his own person and work the advice he once gave to some younger spirits, 'Act so that your conscience will approve, and your works praise you; and, like those great unknown, you will leave the world better than you found it; while, in virtue of the justice which I believe to be the law of the universe, you will rise high elsewhere in the scale of creation. A man is splendidly praised when he is praised by his works.' Of course, he had his detractors—such men as Charles Maurice, who believed himself to be a greater writer than Victor Hugo, and who only perceived in *Hernani* the effects of 'an intolerable system of style destructive of all poesy.' The world has since regulated this matter adversely to Maurice. Then there were others not so unjust as this writer, but men who were so strongly impressed by the defects of Hugo that they scarcely gave him due credit for his manifest powers of literary expression. Heine and Amiel may be taken to represent this type. To set against these are the Hugolâtres, as Théophile Gautier called them. In England the most enthusiastic admirer of the poet is undoubtedly [Pg 314] Mr. Swinburne, and from his numerous tributes I may select one passage that is a kind of triumphant summary of the rest. It is the last stanza from his New-Year Ode to Hugo, in the *Midsummer Holiday, and other Poems*:

'Life, everlasting while the worlds endure,
Death, self-abased before a power more high,
Shall bear one witness, and their word stand sure,
That not till time be dead shall this man die.
Love, like a bird, comes loyal to his lure;
Fame flies before him, wingless else to fly.
A child's heart toward his kind is not more pure,
An eagle's toward the sun no lordlier eye.
Awe sweet as love and proud
As fame, though hushed and bowed,
Yearns toward him silent as his face goes by;
All crowns before his crown

Triumphantly bow down,

For pride that one more great than all draws nigh:

All souls applaud, all hearts acclaim,

One heart benign, one soul supreme, one conquering name.'

Making allowance for the fervour which a peculiarly fervid singer throws into his admiration, there is much truth in this metrical tribute to the literary and personal worth of the great poet. Substantially the same high view of Hugo is held by Lord Tennyson and other literary men in this country. But, with regard to criticism [Pg 315] in particular, the writer from whom I have just quoted was even happier still in his prose comparisons. He remarked in his essay on *La Légende des Siècles* that 'Hugo, for all his dramatic and narrative mastery of effect, will always probably remind men rather of such poets as Dante or Isaiah than of such poets as Sophocles or Shakspeare. We cannot, of course, imagine the Florentine or the Hebrew endowed with his infinite variety of sympathies, of interests, and of powers; but as little can we imagine in the Athenian such height and depth of passion, in the Englishman such unquenchable and sleepless fire of moral and prophetic faith. And hardly in any one of these, though Shakspeare perhaps may be excepted, can we recognise the same buoyant and childlike exultation in such things as are the delight of a high-hearted child—in free glory of adventure and ideal daring, in the triumph and rapture of reinless imagination, which gives now and then some excess of godlike empire and superhuman kinship to their hands whom his hands have created, and the lips whose life is breathed into them from his own.' And again, 'In his love of light and freedom, reason and justice, he [Pg 316] not of Jerusalem, but of Athens; but in the bent of his imagination, in the form and colour of his dreams, in the scope and sweep of his wide-winged spiritual flight, he is nearer akin to the great insurgent prophets of deliverance and restoration than to any poet of Athens, except only their kinsman Æschylus.' Even the most superficial reading of Hugo must leave an impression of magnificent powers, of powers which in given circumstances might have produced many and different forms of greatness. He had that exaltation of the intellect and imagination, that lofty range of mental force, which moulds centuries and moves the world.

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

Before writing on this, he lived for some time in the [Pg 317] vicinity of the scene, and closely noted every item in connection with the fight on that great battlefield. He wrote to a correspondent, 'I have studied Waterloo profoundly; I am the only historian who has passed two months on the field of battle.' This same feeling of conscientiousness he also carried into other matters.

Another point which must be borne in mind in endeavouring to get at the source of Victor Hugo's influence upon literature is the extent and flexibility of his vocabulary. 'No one,' wrote M. Edmond About, shortly after the appearance of *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, 'can fail to recognise the power of Hugo's invention, the wealth of his ideas, the grandeur of his oratorical flights, and that sublimity which is the mark of a man of genius; but it is not known in Europe, nor even in France, that Victor Hugo is the most learned of men of letters. He possesses an enormous vocabulary. Out of the 27,000 words which the dictionary of the Academy contains, and 6,000 of which have an individuality of their own, the language of common life employs at most about a thousand. I could mention illustrious publicists, popular dramatists, novelists, whose books are much read and much liked, [Pg 318] none of whom has more than 1,500 words at his disposal. Théophile Gautier, a studious man and a dilettante, used to boast to his friends of possessing 3,000. "But," he used to add, "I might toil to the last day of my life without attaining to the vocabulary of Hugo." Genius apart, merely by his knowledge and use of his mother-tongue, Hugo is the Rabelais of modern days. This is the minor side of his glory, I allow; but critics ought not to neglect it, or they will lead people to form false ideas.'

As to Hugo's human passion, it agonizes in almost every page of his writings. He is nothing if not intensely human. And his weird and powerful effects are heightened by that undertone, that minor chord of music which he touches more often than the more jubilant major notes. 'The still sad music of humanity' is for ever beating in his ear, and he translates its moving pathos into words. A mind of this stamp feels that it can rarely turn to the humorous, and accordingly it is objected that he has no sense of humour. The charge is true in the main, for the grim humour of some of his situations may be better expressed by the epithet of grotesque. He lacked just this saving [Pg 319] sense of humour to place him on a level with the greatest writers—or rather with those writers who are greatest in the delineation of human nature and its passions; for we have great writers, such as Dante and Milton, who are equal strangers with Hugo to the humour which plays about the pages of Shakspeare.

But Hugo is pre-eminent in other qualities. He is firmly and uncompromisingly veracious. No special correspondent who ever described a battlefield could be more vivid and telling in his reminiscences. There is the stamp of reality and truthfulness

upon all that he has written. With a gloomy magnificence of imagery he has described scenes and events that are now immortal in literature. There is a grand spontaneity in his utterances—an eloquence that springs from the heart as much as from the head; while over all his poems and romances a noble halo has been thrown which is the reflex of the innate nobility of the man.

M. Émile Montégut has observed that Hugo is master of all that is colossal and fearful. His imagination prefers sublime and terrible spectacles: war, shipwreck, death, and primitive civilizations, with their babels and convulsions[Pg 320]—these attract him. How well, also, can he imitate the plaintive cries of the ocean under the tempest which torments it! Let him but paint a feudal ruin and you will be made to feel all its imposing horrors; or a palace of Babylon, and you will realize its massive splendours. He knows the secrets of the Sphinx, and of the monstrous idols; he is familiar with the burning deserts of Africa, and the horrors of hyperborean countries. In the domain of the weird he is sovereign king, and no one will dispute with him. In other fields he may have rivals, but in the region where the fantastic mingles with the superhuman he has no equal.

But there is yet another side to Hugo which English critics have been just to note—it is that concerned with his human creations. While he may revel in the scenes which M. Montégut depicts, his heart is mostly in his human creations. And with regard to his treatment of these, it has been observed that the spectator is put outside the scene, and can do nothing but look on breathless, while amid mist and cloud, with illuminations fiery or genial, as the case may be, the great picture rises before him, each actor detached and separate, some in boldest[Pg 321] relief, with a force which is often tremendous, and always forcibly dramatic. The giant and the child are treated with equal care and conscientiousness. Though first in massive effects, in deep broad lines, Hugo is also first in the most delicate shades of tenderness. 'The babes are as distinct as the heroes, every pearly curve of them tender and sweet as rose-leaves, yet complete creatures, nowhere blurred or indefinite, even in the most delicious softness of execution.' I quote from a writer in *Blackwood*, who had the candour (not always displayed by critics) to acknowledge that neither in France nor upon our own side of the Channel is there a contemporary writer who can with any show of justice be placed by the side of Victor Hugo. 'His genius is too national, his workmanship too characteristic, to be contrasted with the calmer inspiration of any Englishman.... His subject, the character he is unfolding, possesses the writer: he throws himself upon it with a glow and fervour of knowledge, with a certainty of delineation which is not the mere exercise of practised powers, but with that something indescribable, something indefinable, added to it, swelling in every line, and transforming every paragraph.[Pg

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

Hugo's works are undoubtedly in parts eccentric, and all too frequently extravagant; but this is the nodding of Homer. His conceptions are gigantic, and his figures truly dramatic; and these are the chief things with which we have to do. In his superb excellences he stands alone—he is unique. His table is weighted with intellectual sustenance; so great is his abundance that a myriad writers could be fed from the crumbs which fall from his table. From the literary point of view we must not forget his chief distinction—that he effected the most brilliant and complete revolution that has been [Pg 323]witnessed in the history of French literature. He changed the whole face of art in French poetry, and destroyed for ever the poetry of conventionality. He has endowed his native language with new nerve and sensibility; he has given it a fresh and vital force, and the effects of his influence upon the nation and literature of which he was the brightest ornament must be radical and abiding.

One quality only, or so it seems to me, Hugo lacked to place him on a level with the few great master spirits of the world. He wanted the universality of Homer and Shakspeare. Whenever the *Iliad* is read, the power of that mighty story is felt, and methinks that had I been born of any other than that English nationality of which I can boast, there is still something in Shakspeare which would have moved me as no other writer does. It is that secret power which draws all hearts to him—'that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin,' and unites all men in admiration of his singular genius. Hugo is great also, but he has not that Shakspearean greatness which compels the tribute of all other peoples, as it receives the willing homage of his own. His noble poems and romances, with their sonorous[Pg 324] eloquence, their rapid changes, their varied effects, remind me of Nature on an autumn day. The gloomy cloud gathers in the heavens, the lurid lightning darts from its bosom, the thunder rolls and reverberates in the mountains; but anon the tempest passes, the heavens open, and the glorious and beneficent sun once more smiles upon the world. So Hugo is a mixture of thunder and sunshine; of smiles and tears. No man had ever a greater heart—Shakspeare, and few others only, a more expansive intellect. He lacks the grand impartiality and the majestic calm of the author of *Hamlet*; but his soul is filled

with the same love of his species, and it is large enough to embrace all the sons of humanity. His is a name which any nation, might well hold in everlasting honour. Though his life be ended, the splendour of his fame has but just begun; for the works infused and moulded by his genius, and into which he threw so much of passionate energy, of a noble idealism, of radiant hope, of moral fervour, and of human sympathy, will assuredly confer upon him glory and immortality.

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