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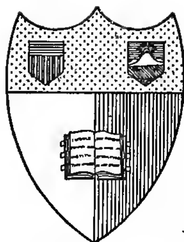

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VICTOR HUGO

VICTOR HUGO

A MEMOIR AND A STUDY

BY

JAMES CAPPON, M.A.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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TO EDWARD CAIRD, Esq.,

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW,

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE.

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INTRODUCTION.

VICTOR HUGO'S LAST DAYS.

SINCE the last pages of the following work were written, an event has occurred which has given to the subject a new and pathetic interest. The news of Victor Hugo's death has sounded throughout the civilised world, with the due accompaniment of funeral oratory; loud panegyric from some, doubtless a majority—censure or reserved praise from others. On one point only is opinion undivided—namely, that the man who has just passed through the dark portals was one of the greatest figures of the century, and will continue, by his writings and example, to exercise a wide and at present incalculable influence on the future of Europe. Now that death has given completeness to his work, the occasion seems to ask from us a few words more, by way, if not of final estimate, at least of farewell and tributary lamentation — one small note more in the world-wide dirge rising in

many tongues round that bier which lies[1] in solemn state, with its sumptuous funeral draperies, under the massive pillars of the *Arc de Triomphe.*

Yet perhaps the most poignant element of grief—the bitter feeling of irreparable loss that has followed many great men, snatched away untimely to their grave—has no place here. It is no half-told tale (in spite of some works which have not gone beyond the the title) that Hugo has left us, but one at the end of which *Finis,* in the fullest sense of the word, may be written. No broken pillar need stand with symbolic pathos over his grave, but one towering and elaborately complete to the last flourish on the last leaf of the sculptured capital. And not only has his life, which has exceeded the average even of those who live long, allowed him to utter to the final syllable his message to men, but its later years have united with singular felicity the repose welcome to old age, and the honours and public attention of one still in active career. "*Il est entré vivant dans l'immortalité.*" He has not had to wait for immortality, but has gone on living while his name became a legend.

From such an eminence and with such a career behind him, we might think Hugo had beyond most men the chance of surveying life comprehensively, and leaving us with some large and almost final judgment on its value. It is a curious fact, therefore, that, contrary to the general rule of great men, no utterance breathing the smallest degree of scepticism or dissat-

[1] 31st May 1885.

isfaction with life has ever escaped from him, unless we go back to some verses written in his thirtieth year,—those poems of 'Feuilles d'Automne,' which are little more than the wanton melancholy of a still youthful poet. Later poems, such as the "Epopée of the Worm," which might seem to contradict this statement, are merely the sceptical stage of a conception of life which, as a whole, has no scepticism in it. In reality there is never the least cry of *vanitas vanitatum*, nor any of that peculiar pathos, nor any of that peculiar humour, which comes from its presence in the spirit. The sad commonplace which has come profounder with the cry of every great man from Boethius to Carlyle, receives no support from him. So powerful is the optimism of a life spent in high and successful energy, and so true it is that all philosophy comes from the heart, the finest logic being only a bad translation of that voice.

But it deserves mention also, as having something to do with this ever-radiant optimism of Hugo, that even on the small human side of things he was a singularly fortunate man. Love, family affections, friendships to choose amongst the best, honours official and unofficial, all these were his in due season and degree. Even the disastrous wave of 1851 did not overwhelm what was substantial in any of these. His old age has been passed quietly and happily in the midst of all the comforts and attentions which loving hands, though not those of earlier years, could bestow. His own children, it is true, are dead, with the exception of the

youngest, Adèle, who, still more unfortunate, is the inhabitant of a madhouse. But the Lockroys,[1] who live in the house next him, and his old and true friends MM. Vacquerie and Meurice, have been, one may say, part of his household, and, since the death of Madame Drouet, have borne the chief share of social responsibilities and the management of his affairs; and more than all, his grandchildren—the Georges and Jeanne—whom he adored and has immortalised, have grown up in his house like fair young sprouts round the old and gnarled trunk. "*Adieu, Jeanne, adieu!*" were his last words,—the last of many farewells which the octogenarian had made in his long way through the world,—he who had known Chateaubriand and Charles X., Lamartine and Béranger, Thiers, Napoleon III., and Gambetta. This lingerer on the stage, this potent visionary, this antagonist of kings and popes, Death came up with him at length and rode away with him into the past — into silence and the haze without bounds, as he himself has sung, to the mystery that wrings its coils under the veil, to the serpent whose lick wastes the stars:—

> "Au mystère qui tord ses anneaux sous des voiles
> Au serpent inconnu qui lèche les étoiles
> Et qui baise les morts!"

Old age had left him, thanks to his sound constitution, most of the pleasures to which his simple habits

[1] Mme. Lockroy, widow of Charles Hugo, and mother of the Georges and Jeanne referred to, married M. Lockroy, an eminent Radical Deputy and journalist.

—curiously simple in such a man—had accustomed him. The morning hours, between six and eleven, were given to work amongst his manuscripts—to the last one of his keenest pleasures—generally in his bed-room, where his desk, somewhat high (for he liked not to stoop), stood at the window, his elegantly furnished study being less used; then after breakfast a saunter or a ride, mostly on the imperial of an omnibus, through the streets of Paris; sometimes to the dark old quarters —'the homes of the people'—sometimes, if a pastoral idyllic mood urged, to the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne. His tastes were more robust than fastidious, and the vicinity of the Opera-House, or the presence of elegant vehicles and Parisian dandies did not hinder him from hearing the 'flutes of Hœmus' or seeing Virgilian satyrs dance in the glades of the fashionable suburb. Then home by four o'clock for two hours' work before dinner, after which a few intimate friends were received; or if it were Thursday, a larger gathering of Parisian notabilities and illustrious visitors. At such times his conversation, always polite and sufficiently ready, easily grew eloquent, especially when he was taking his swing on some favourite subject. He was rather fond of epigrammatic finish in his judgments; but to our mind his sayings want the best French flavour, and betray that air of effort which mars much of his literary accomplishments. His characterisation of M. Thiers in 1871 as 'the man of the minute,' may stand as an example.

From the strife of the political arena, from the daily

parliamentary battle at least, Hugo had for long held aloof, and even exercised a judicious reserve of speech and attitude, recalling that of earlier years before the fierce battle with Imperialism began. His attendances in the Senate were rather those of a spectator than an actor; and the manifestoes and funeral orations which from time to time came from him, were no more than were required to show that the great champion of liberal thought in France had not deserted his post. Indeed, they were mostly the breathings of a pacific if ardent and hopeful spirit—often pleadings for mercy on behalf of some political unfortunate: his last act of that kind was, we believe, a petition on behalf of Guglielmo Oberdan, the Italian Irredentist of Trieste. But except for such performances—and even these, within the last few years, had ceased with the waning vigour of the poet—Hugo had wisely recognised that into this daily contest of the political parties he could not safely enter. A great liberal force he could not but be, silent or otherwise; but as an *homme politique* his immediate following had never been of the wisest or most reputable—never, perhaps, even considerable in mere point of numbers. He could not be at once a great poet and a party strategist. Amongst the many opposites he was able to reconcile in his life and character, this one alone, after repeated trials, he had found intractable.

Yet there is no doubt that in the unbounded enthusiasm which Hugo's work has called forth, as well as in the work itself, the political element counts for

much. The more than royal pomp of these magnificent obsequies prepared for him—that *cortége* in which statesmen, diplomatists, generals, with a whole army behind them figure, is no tribute to mere literary merit. To find any parallel to it, any so imposing national apotheosis, we must go to another of the Latin peoples, to Italy, and see the legend that they have made there of Garibaldi; and it is worthy of note that, in both these cases, the public opinion of each nation supports the other in a greater amount of hero-worship than the ordinary Englishman or German can easily understand. There is a radical difference here between the Teutonic and the Latin race, and Victor Hugo belongs emphatically to the latter. It is not only the clear sculpturesque forms of his thought, seizing things in large traits, regardless of small reservations—not only his ardour, his confidence, his love and appreciation of the Latin peoples, that prove this, but the whole fund of ideas in his life and work is the expression of the Latin consciousness as it heaves yet under the impulses of the great Revolution. For these meridional peoples, with their fervid and hopeful temperament, and their ancient Republican traditions, the Revolution has been something different than for the northern races. We accepted its effects reaching our shores later, and with less tempestuous movement. They have been formed, have taken new birth and character in the heat of the struggle. The great revolutionaries—Danton, Mazzini, Garibaldi, or Hugo, are their popular legends, and exalted beyond all comprehension of the Englishman or

German who weighs them in some severer balance. The standard used, indeed, is a different one. The northern races, impressed with the value of organisation, prize more highly a disciplined activity which does its work in recognised channels without too much disturbance of the ordinary economy. They rate somewhat less the superb sallies, the happy audacities, the *condottiere*-like achievements which the Latin peoples, suspicious of rulers, and restless under discipline, are apt to consider their highest traditions. The names we have mentioned have for the Latin peoples something of the value of a protest against the superior solidity or potency of organisation in the Teutonic races, against Teutonic morality and Teutonic ideals. Popular sentiment in France or Italy has now and then admired a Beaconsfield or a Moltke, and has on occasion called the Grand Chancellor of the German Empire by flattering names; but when a great day comes, and the secular ode is to be sung, they forget all about such men of order and rule, and would name the century from their heroes, Garibaldi or Hugo, the cavalier and the poet of humanity, as the organs of the popular party call them. It is in vain that a social and political stratum amongst them, which has learned to appreciate another form of merit, tries to stem the tide. It fights a losing fight against the strength of national tendencies and popular traditions. These figures of revolution, with their wild utterance and uncompromising attitude, are the only possible heroes of the Latin races whose heart, less wise, perhaps, than

generous, turns with something like indifference, or even suspicion, from merit that is too officially crowned.

But if for the Latin peoples generally Hugo is a typical hero, representing fully their sharp scorn of conventions, their distrust of governing classes, and their deep sense of universal right—for France he is all that and something more. In him all Frenchmen find the proof that France has been the support of liberal and humanitarian ideas in the century of their birth; to them he is the sign, as Renan puts it, that liberalism is the national work of France. With the Napoleons in her past, not to speak of Guizots and Veuillots, this might have been doubted; the reactions, it might have been said, have been as potent and as long-lived as the progressive impulses. But with Hugo there at the end of the century as Rousseau and the Revolution are near the beginning, there is no longer a doubt. He completes the ideal of modern France as Cæsar did that of Roman conquest, or Nelson that of England's supremacy on the seas. That is why Frenchmen of all ranks and opinions—even those, and they were many, who distrusted and dreaded his utterances while he lived—gratefully accord him unprecedented national honours now that he is dead.

That he could thus represent in his own life and work France's place amongst the nations, and in a manner consolidate that, is the better part of Hugo's greatness. The virtues he had—courage, fortitude,

candid speech, and uncompromising fidelity to a lofty ideal—all had their root here; and for the sake of these, France will overlook some weaknesses that were scarce less gigantic than his virtues.

Nor was this work of Hugo's any the easier that in his time there was little or nothing to add to the doctrines already enunciated by the thinkers who had preceded him. In this respect no great original creation was possible, nor for such semi-philosophic work had he any talent. But to refresh and renew the principles of the great revolutionary thinkers, as he has done, in a time when they were hackneyed and somewhat discredited, and to give them a setting in new and splendid forms of art and eloquence was a work of no less magnitude than to discover them. Since Rousseau, what word has been spoken for nature which will compare with the 'Songs of the Streets and Woods'! after Volney, what note so new in the revolutionary view of history as 'The Legend of the Centuries'! after Voltaire, what name but Hugo! His very death may be counted as a fresh triumph for his cause. This demogorgon of radicals, this inveterate enemy of priests and kings—the two pivots of the old world—dies not in obscurity, or disgrace, or defeat, but triumphant as a setting sun, awing even voices willingly hostile into silence.

BOOK I.

ORIGINS AND TENDENCIES — ROMANTICISM — THE NEW DRAMA—LYRICAL POEMS—FROM CONTEMPLATION TO ACTION.

VICTOR HUGO.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND EARLY SURROUNDINGS — A SOLDIER'S CAREER UNDER THE EMPIRE—LES FEUILLANTINES—EDUCATION—RESIDENCE IN SPAIN—LITERARY BEGINNINGS.

VICTOR HUGO was born at Besançon, in the third year of the present century, the tenth year of the Republic as the registers of that time dated. His father, who was then in command of the brigade stationed in the town, was of an old Lorrain family; his mother a Vendean, who, like Madame de la Rochejaquelin and other royalist ladies, had fled to the wilds in the times of the Revolutionary terror. The elder Hugo, whose qualities as a soldier had gained him the friendship of Moreau and Joseph Bonaparte, had unfortunately fallen into disfavour with the implacable First Consul. Having no hope of promotion, therefore, in France, Major Hugo was glad to accept a pressing invitation which Joseph Bonaparte, then newly in-

stalled in the conquered kingdom of Naples, gave him to enter the Neapolitan army. His chief service there was the command of an expedition against the patriotic banditti, who, from the cover of the impassable ravines and mountains of Calabria, still maintained an obstinate warfare against the invaders. In this difficult enterprise Hugo was completely successful, having at last hunted to earth and captured the chief of these bands, the famous Fra Diavolo. As the reward of his energy in this affair, he received a regiment, and was made Governor of the province of Avellino.

Hither, too, now that Colonel Hugo's position was established, came Madame Hugo, with her three sons, Abel, Eugène, and Victor, the last only five years old. The boys were delighted with the journey, with the sunshine and deep blue skies, and the picturesque cities of the new land where their home was to be. Victor's mind, in particular, preserved its impressions of the silvered Adriatic, the pontifical glory of Rome and Naples "glistening in the sunlight, and bounded by the azure sea." Not less were they pleased with their new home itself, the old marble palace at Avellino, grand and spacious, which Governor Hugo had selected as his residence; although to Madame Hugo, accustomed to the trim comforts of a Parisian residence, the old walls, whose crevices were the familiar haunt of lizards and the numerous tribes of Italy's insects, had doubtless a less inviting appearance.

Under the First Empire, however, a soldier's career was fast and full of changes, Western Europe being

little else than a huge camping-ground for Napoleon's armies, and the distribution of provinces as familiar to his generals as to a Roman of the later Republic. Some months after Madame Hugo's arrival, King Joseph, much against his will, was transferred to Spain by his imperious brother. Colonel Hugo having decided to follow the fortunes of his protector, the boys had, sorrowfully enough, to leave their home in the old palace, made glorious for them by all the military pomp and bustle of a Governor's residence, and the freedom of the fine woods and ravines of Avellino, for the confinement of city life in Paris. For to Paris it had been decided, on account of the still insecure state of the Spanish conquest, that Madame Hugo and the children should return. The abode, however, which the mother—a woman of much resource and management—selected for herself and her boys, was not without its attractions. It went by the name of "Les Feuillantines," so well known to readers of Hugo's earlier poems. It was an old convent taken from the nuns at the time of the Revolution, with large rooms and great windows, a fine garden (almost a park) full of foliage and the songs of birds, and making a delightful theatre for children's sports. Here were passed two pleasant years, some figures of importance in the annals of the Hugos mingling with the family group at the Feuillantines. One of these was General Lahorie, godfather of Victor, then proscribed by the relentless Emperor for his connection with Moreau's conspiracy, and for a time peace-

ably hidden at Les Feuillantines in the guise of a poor relation and preceptor for the children, a frank old veteran, *bon enfant*, who could play games with the young Hugos, tell good stories, and also help Victor with Tacitus and Virgil. Also an occasional playmate for the boys, Mdlle. Adèle Foucher, the daughter of an old friend of the family, not held of much account in these days by the young gentlemen in their sports, but well known afterwards as Madame Victor Hugo, and the object of much complimentary verse from the young poets of the romantic circle.

In later years Hugo often recurs to the joyful days at Les Feuillantines. In the last poem of the volume, 'Les Rayons et Ombres,' readers will find a pleasant description of his boyish sports and studies. Worthy of notice, too, is the hint there given of the firm, if gentle, maternal rule under which these three unusually vigorous and spirited boys were reared. Other testimony to the character of Hugo's mother is not wanting. Among the glimpses of the interior at Les Feuillantines which we find in a life of Victor Hugo, written by his wife, here is one sufficiently illustrative: "Madame Hugo had a good many little tyrannical ways. Thus, she would scold when her little corps returned from the wars (in the Feuillantines garden) with dirty shirts and torn trousers. She had taken great pains to dress her sons in good, stout, brown cloth in winter, and strong linen in summer; but no cloth or linen was ever made that could resist the fury of their games." The elder Madame Hugo,

indeed, in the unsettled state of Major Hugo's affairs, had to study points of economy and discipline somewhat more than was ever necessary to the wife of the successful poet and dramatist. Left much alone in the management of her children, Madame Hugo showed a self-reliant and original character. As far as books and lessons went, she allowed her boys to be educated after a somewhat freer fashion than the ordinary training of school and college; but, on the other hand, she insisted on a good deal of practical discipline even at a late age. We hear of the young Hugos being regularly set to do solid work in the large garden, and even made thoroughly efficient in the dyeing of clothes. In return, they had their own way in the library, wandered through *fabliaux* and romances without number, and even set their youthful speculation to work on the writings of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot, their mother being of opinion that "books had never yet done anybody any harm."

The result, although Madame Hugo barely lived to see it, has done something to justify her method, about which at times she had her apprehensions. To those most interested it gave in their later life abundant satisfaction. Victor Hugo himself has recorded in more than one fine poem his gratitude for the choice his mother made between the free mode of education at Les Feuillantines and the severer routine of college studies.[1] In other cases, it is true, the experiment might be more hazardous. The discipline of college

[1] Les Rayons et Ombres, poem 19; and Voix Intérieures, 29.

General, and, as Governor of the province of Guadalaxara, was maintaining with success a fierce warfare with one of the most renowned of the guerilla captains, El Empecinado. In 1811 the success of the French arms in Spain seemed so well established that Madame Hugo might again venture to join her husband; and the family left Les Feuillantines to take a somewhat prominent place in the short-lived pomp of the new Court at Madrid. While there, the Hugos inhabited the Masserano Palace, belonging to the Prince of that name, who seems to have vacated it for the General's family, on what terms we know not, but with some pardonable display of offended dignity. Thus for a second time was Victor, though too young to be a conspicuous figure, hung upon the fringes of high military and Court life, and the tone thus given to a mind of itself sufficiently disposed to fasten on the highly coloured side of the world, may be traced in the vein of Spanish romance which runs through many of his early works, 'Les Orientales,' 'Hernani,' 'Ruy Blas.' The great portrait-gallery, which, amongst all the amplitude and splendour of the Masserano apartments, most delighted him, is said to have given the suggestion for the famous gallery scene in 'Hernani.' For the younger sons, however, Eugène and Victor, all this magnificence was turned into ashes by the announcement that they were to be sent to a seminary. The seminary was a sort of private college for the sons of the nobility, and was managed by two monks, Don Basilio and Don Manuel, who appear to

have themselves constituted the whole teaching staff; a secluded, gloomy sort of establishment, modelled according to all accounts on high principles of Spanish pride and indolence.

Victor's experience of Spanish ways, however, was not destined to be of long duration. In the spring of 1812 French affairs were looking so ill in Spain, that General Hugo thought it prudent to send his family back to France; and after a rather difficult journey under an armed convoy, Madame Hugo and her children found themselves once more at Les Feuillantines. In due course came the invasion of France by the Allied armies, the abdication of Napoleon, the exile at Elba, and the events of the Hundred Days, terminating in Waterloo. The great figure, whose shadow had so long lain across the path of king and peasant alike, was at length removed from the scene. With the fall of the Emperor the fortunes of the Hugos, gilded for a while by some remote rays of the imperial grandeur, sank again into obscurity. General Hugo, who in the latter days of the Empire, had once more entered Napoleon's service, and had made himself obnoxious to the restored dynasty by a too prolonged adherence to the imperial cause, was removed from his command. He now came to Paris with the intention of preparing a career for his children. Victor and Eugène were accordingly once more sent to a school, the Pension Cordier, with the view of preparing them for the École Polytechnique. Here the somewhat irregular education which the boys had received was

supplemented by three years of steady drill in the usual subjects. At the end of this course, however, Victor refused the offers made by his father to start him in a profession, and announced his intention of making a literary career.

Young as he was, Victor had already made many attempts both in verse and prose. From all accounts the three years at the Cordier Pension must have been occupied fully as much with verse-making as with the prescribed studies—"every possible kind of verse," writes his wife, or the author of 'Hugo Raconté,' "odes, satires, epistles, tragedies, fables, epigrams, translations, &c., even a comic opera." So that the young Victor might be said to have already served a faithful if illicit apprenticeship to the muse. He now began to feel his way towards a public by presenting his pieces at the annual competitions of the French Academies of Letters. Three odes which he thus made public in the years 1818, 1819, and 1820 at the Académie des Jeux floraux at Toulouse, received the prize; and with these and various contributions to the 'Conservateur Littéraire,' a journal established by his brother Abel and some friends, Victor Hugo may be considered as having entered on his public career as a writer—a career which now holds the first place in the annals of contemporary literature, and which in general interest and significance for this century may rank with that of Goethe.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESTORATION—THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND THE REVOLUTION—CHATEAUBRIAND—ROMANTICISM AND LIBERALISM IN THE CHURCH—LAMENNAIS—A DEFENDER OF THE FAITH.

HUGO'S literary career thus commenced under what is called the Restoration. Few epochs have less right to their name. All that the sovereigns of Europe were able to restore to France was an old and somewhat wearied Bourbon, who, indeed, in character and ideas, belonged much more to the France of the past, to the eighteenth century, than most of those who, either as friends or enemies, surrounded him. Nowhere was the difference between the old and the new France more significant than in literature and in literary circles, and amongst these, perhaps nowhere so marked as in that literature which was conservative in its spirit and aims.

At Court the names of the old nobility were again heard of, and were alone in honour; but the Court had ceased to be a real centre of social or political life. In the provinces a fierce conflict was going on between the rich *bourgeoisie* and the ancient nobility struggling

to reinstate themselves in territorial power and influence; in the Chamber, M. de Villèle was endeavouring, amid increasing difficulties, to educate an aristocratic party in the modes of parliamentary conquest; but in the freer and more sensitively assorted world of literature, the rent that had been made in the continuity of the national life was undisguisable.

The eighteenth century had seen memorable conflicts, both literary and philosophical, but at bottom there was a fundamental agreement in ideas about life amongst those who fought over minor points of taste and logic. The spirit of the age, which found its fullest expression in Voltaire, was a cynical compromise between the new truths they were conscious of, and the old world, to the manners and usages of which they were attached. The Voltairean churchman, the Voltairean courtier, and the Voltairean philosopher, might have little faith in the divinity either of Church or king, but, like men who have small faith in anything, they were little inclined to overturn institutions in place of which they had nothing to put. They differed, but they understood each other, and, with the reserves which their particular interests made necessary, they were in sympathy with each other. Character, habits, and views of life being thus similar, a fusion of the literary and social worlds took place, which gave French society a solidarity contributing not a little to its brilliancy and force. The higher grades of society were in perfect affinity with the men of letters and philosophers, and had acquired from

them a fine and instructed taste in literature and art, while the lettered race had in their turn been taught an appreciation of social amenities, and a tolerance for other standards than their own—qualities which do not readily belong to their profession. This fusion of literary and social elements was thoroughly in accord with the genius of the nation, with its lively social temperament, its quick perceptions, its active and facile intelligence, and its turn for wit and satire. The effect on French society was seen in the growth and in the importance of the *salon,* that institution where the forces of society and those of literature met as on common ground, and whose judgments on every matter of religion, politics, art, and literature were none the less influential, that they emanated, like the vague dictates of fashion, from no formally recognised authority.

The influence on French literature of this alliance is to be seen in the polished clearness of style, the fine common-sense as of a literature ever mindful of its worldly audience in the *salons,* and the general absence of all tendencies to mysticism and literary exaltations. But, on the other hand, in a social state so full of injustice as was that which preceded the Revolution, this union between the world of society and that of literature could not be effected without considerable sacrifice to the deeper spirit of the latter. In both, indeed, it implied a sceptical basis. What literature might gain in style, in clearness, and in brilliancy of presentation, it was apt to lose in depth and earnestness, and in the magical power of high ideal art. Its

best art took the form of clever raillery and satire, and its philosophy was such as might be talked out at a drawing-room sitting.

Into this soil the plough of the Revolution had gone deep. At the commencement of the century the great Parisian *salons* had disappeared or lost their importance. Of that brilliant world there survived but the fragments which once or twice a-week still gathered in the rooms of Madame d'Houdetot and a few aged Academicians. The new *salons* that arose with the Restoration had a specially artistic or a specially political tone, and possessed little significance beyond that of a party reunion. If the old organisation of Parisian society could have held its ground anywhere against the new tendencies which divided it since the Revolution it would have been in such *salons* as those of Madame de Rumford and Madame de Recamier. To that of the latter, Chateaubriand, as the central figure, gave the desirable literary prestige. In most respects Chateaubriand, the first great literary name of France since the Revolution, was the very antithesis of the spirit of the eighteenth century, but he furnishes, perhaps, the most characteristic type of the period of transition. By his name and family traditions, by his professed political faith and his personal relations with royalty, and, still more profoundly, by his radical indifference to political ideals, which made his acceptance of any rather a matter of taste and circumstance than of settled conviction, he belonged to the past. He had served the Empire, but became a bitter enemy to it

when he realised that under Napoleon even the author of 'René' and 'Le Génie du Christianisme' could play but a very secondary part. Afterwards, in the service of the Bourbons, his restless vanity made him a difficult and troublesome adherent; and, on his dismissal, he rallied that formidable opposition which eventually drove Charles X. from the throne. As a writer, there were in Chateaubriand the elements of a great temporary success, as well as the stuff out of which a higher and more durable kind of success is made. In his novel of 'René,' he was the first to give expression to that consuming fire of passion and unrest, the mad desire to torture the finite till it should yield an impossible infinite, which marked the first wild movements of the enfranchised European mind. Planted in the not uncongenial soil of German idealism and romance, this gave us Goethe's 'Werther,' and, in the harder ground of English realism and love of conventions, Byron's poetry of passion and Byron's satire. But both of these—the first in the thoroughness of its reflective self-analysis, and the second in the vigorous sincerity of its scorn—contained the germs of a higher thought. The work of Chateaubriand was not so sincere, and consequently not so exhaustive, as to lead the way to a fuller and better solution of life. He is anxious to make use of the truths of nature so far as they will give more play and freedom to his pencil, but he is equally anxious to bring his work into a superficial appearance of accord with the orthodoxy of his time. Hence at once his sentimental exaggeration

of nature in its aspects of feeling and passion, and his sentimental use of religion as a cover and as a counterweight to the same, neither more than half true even to himself, each holding to the other no sounder relation than that of a reaction from excess. Chateaubriand's malady was that of his time; and his first great work, 'Le Génie du Christianisme,' appeared at a moment of general, though as yet superficial, reaction in favour of Catholicism.

In 1802 the Church was just rising from the blow which the Revolution had dealt at the influence of the priesthood. It was once more receiving the official support of the Government; the concordat between Church and State had been arranged, the places of worship reopened, and the whole machinery reorganised. But to reinstate the Church officially was one thing, and to restore it to its former influence another, requiring a work of inward adaptation to new circumstances which lay within the sphere of Napoleon or Chateaubriand's powers as little as it entered into their designs. Neither indeed aimed at more than regaining for the Church as much credit as would serve to establish it with outward decorum. For this work the genius of Chateaubriand was excellently fitted. In the wide fields of Church history, which had seemed to the eighteenth-century philosopher little else than an unfruitful collection of fables and deceptions, it was easy for Chateaubriand to bring into relief in the histories of saints and martyrs, in Scripture and in tradition, the poetic aspects which

the followers of Voltaire had left in the shade. Philosophers of that now ancient school might laugh at a defence which was founded more on rhapsody than on argument, and even the more rigid of the orthodox might find something dangerous and illogical in this plea for Christianity on the score of its beauties; but Chateaubriand's great works, 'Le Génie du Christianisme,' 'L'Itinéraire,' and 'Les Martyrs,' dressing Christianity in new colours of romance and poetry, appeared just at a time when the mass of French readers, fatigued by Voltairean cynicism and the excesses of disbelief under the Terror, were prepared to welcome such a brilliant justification. The 'Génie du Christianisme' had a success which made the author at once one of the most prominent figures of the time.

This was the work of a man but half in earnest with the Church. With the advent of the Restoration, when institutions had again a breathing-space to consider their relations to the world around them, it was felt that another kind of effort was required if the Church was to regain her ancient influence. Before the Revolution, its authority had been accepted, along with the whole monarchical constitution, as an established fact. It had been closely allied with the old nobility of France. Its fundamental doctrines—the idealism that lies at the centre of every great institution—had not been obtruded on the social world. Its position had been rather tacitly recognised than seriously discussed, and the gap between its severe theories and the easy practice of its adherents had

been bridged over, partly by the work of the casuists, and partly by the compromise which the common-sense of the practical world is accustomed to make between an active life and an ideal one. This easy attitude was no longer possible. If the Catholic Church was to become once more a centre of real power in France, it must make new efforts to bring itself to the level of the world around it. The old and apparently decayed tree must send forth fresh leaves. The result was a remarkable attempt to develop a side of the Church which might meet the new liberal and democratic spirit of the time—an attempt to which neither genius nor devotion was wanting. In their journal 'L'Avenir,' Lamennais, and his two disciples Lacordaire and Montalembert, faced the revolutionary spirit with its own weapons. Adopting the cry of absolute liberty, they strove to wrest the educational system from the hands of the Government, and, under plea of their right, to set up schools of their own, to bring it under the control of the priesthood—a plea which has remained the *cheval de bataille* of the Church ever since.

Perceiving the danger that threatened the monarchical system in France, they laboured to destroy the general identification of the Church and the old *régime*, and to bring to the front the popular and democratic element, which, buried under centuries of Papal incrustations, undoubtedly lies at the root of the religion whose first professors were the scorn of the opulent and powerful.

The central figure of this movement was the Abbé Lamennais. Born at Saint-Malo, the birthplace of Chateaubriand, under the melancholy skies and severe horizons of the Breton country, he had the same ardent temperament, the same tendency to make ecstasy and reverie the basis of life, and something of the same irritable egoism, which characterised the author of 'Le Génie du Christianisme.' But in Lamennais these qualities were more finely directed by a mind purely devoted to truth, and rather under the sway of ideal systems than that of temporary interests and passions. The Catholic clergy, however, soon began to have their doubts of this coadjutor, who spoke a language and was actuated by a spirit suspiciously akin to those of their inveterate enemies, the Republican apostles of liberty. To them he seemed to be making religion a cover for the propaganda of the Socialists. At best, he was in their eyes one of those dangerous dreamers who ill accord with the policy and discipline of the Church. After much dissension, and a journey to Rome, made by Lamennais and his two friends in the hope of securing the authority of the Head of the Church for their work, the matter ended by a formal condemnation, in an encyclical letter from the Pope, of 'L'Avenir' and its doctrines, though without mention of names. Lacordaire and Montalembert submitted unconditionally and in their hearts: not so, as we might suppose, the man to whom his ideas, the fruit of long intellectual travail and sufferance of heart, had grown dear. And

Catholicism lost its most brilliant and gifted writer, as the current of things drew Lamennais gradually into the vanguard of Republicans and Socialist writers.

"A rash speculator, and extremely ignorant of history," says Guizot, with all the instinctive dislike of a haughty, reserved, anti-popular nature, fond of authority in practical affairs, and in intellectual matters tending to compromises, for the ardent, melancholy, meditative Abbé. But Lamennais knew history just in the way that Guizot did not—not as a complicated development of political machinery, but as the long record of the often quenched, often relumed hopes of men in their struggle to realise an ideal traced in obscure but ineffaceable characters on the groundwork of human nature itself.

So ended the attempt of Lamennais to unite Catholicism with the forward movement of thought in France. He had sought to give it a new basis on the liberal and democratic philosophy of the age, as Chateaubriand had sought for it new colours of sentiment and romance. Lamennais had tried to reform it after its original mould. Chateaubriand contented himself with gilding and repainting it to the taste of the time. It is true that to this task the latter brought that magnificent style which is his best contribution to literature,—a style noble and opulent, which had just begun to heave with the greater spirit of the nineteenth century, but which, not yet broken into mere tossing and turbulence of movement, had preserved

something of the pure outlines of the language of Bossuet.

It was this work of gathering the sentimental and romantic forces of the age about the traditions of the past that, more than any political support which, in his fluctuating and restless career, he gave either to Church or king, has identified the name of Chateaubriand with the ancient Royalism and Catholicism of France. All the waywardness of Chateaubriand, his fierce liberalism in the 'Débats,' his coquettings with the National and the Republican party, never made the Papacy or the Bourbons forgetful of this great work. Somewhere about the year 1843, in those brilliant "Chroniques Parisiennes" which Sainte-Beuve wrote for the 'Revue de Suisse,' among the *on dits* of the Parisian world which he sends to his "dear Oliver," the editor, is one that the Pope is to have Chateaubriand crowned with laurel *à la* Petrarch—in which rumour that by no means credulous critic thinks there may be something. Some such tribute indeed the Pope might well owe to Chateaubriand. The grand romantic Catholic works, 'Le Génie du Christianisme,' 'Le Pèlerinage,' and 'Les Martyrs,' are amongst the few known modern books which the sage censorship of the Church dares to stamp "*à l'usage de la jeunesse*"; and the great works of Chateaubriand, if they now count for little in the busy world of men, have still a large circulation, and an undisputed prestige as prizes in Catholic seminaries.

CHAPTER III.

THE ODES—ROYALIST AND CATHOLIC SENTIMENT—PROSPECTS—THE CLERICAL ALLIANCE.

It was in this Royalist-Catholic current of literature that the young Hugo, who in the year 1820 had just come to Paris, was first caught. In the original preface to the Odes, which he published in 1822, he says that they are meant "to speak the language of consolation and religion to an old society which has come forth reeling from the orgies of atheism and anarchy." He is full of ardour for religion, which as yet he tends to identify with the Catholic Church—and for order, which for him means the rule of the Bourbons. Voltaire and Napoleon are names of hate to him who was afterwards to apostrophise the genius of his country in the line—

> "O drapeau de Wagram, O pays de Voltaire!"

The author of 'The Genius of Christianity' is for him a luminary that can be put in the balance against the Revolution. "After the Revolution, Chateaubriand arises, and the proportion of things is kept."[1]

[1] "Après la Révolution Chateaubriand s'élève, et la proportion est gardée."—Preface to Odes.

He looks upon himself as a pupil in the school of Chateaubriand and Lamennais (the latter was still the Catholic dogmatist), and sees in their work, as in his own, a sign of the renascence of order in letters and institutions—of the rise of a new religious and monarchical society on the ruins of revolution. More especially is his muse consecrated to the service of the loyal dead, the victims and heroes in the struggle. Odes to the Maidens of Verdun, to Mademoiselle de Sombreuil, on the Surrender of Quiberon, on the birth of the Duc de Bordeaux; odes to Liberty the august Sister of Kings, to La Vendée—dearer to him then, as he afterwards said, than France itself; odes in which he sees the angel of wrath chasing the culpable century of Voltaire into the abysses of eternity,—show how busily the young poet was engaged in making green and beautiful again the blackened and wasted fields where the Revolution had passed.

To Hugo's young ideas the great conflict of the Revolution has left on the one side a starry choir of royalist heroes and martyrs, on the other a discomfited crew of sophists and atheists. The monstrous edifice constructed by the latter has gone to pieces,—sole monument of it left, the man on the rock of St Helena, a solitary fragment of a world submerged. Discarded faiths are welcome home again, and a new Europe, fair in arts, literature, and society, is rising out of the unsightly past.

It would be unfair to press too much the rhapsodies of a youth of twenty. Much is due to the associations

of Les Feuillantines and the influence of a strong-minded mother of a decidedly royalist creed, tempered, however, in her by something of Voltairean philosophy. The reminiscences, too, of the Imperial rule were not of the brightest. The inveterate distaste which the autocrat had shown for his father; the studied neglect of the elder Hugo's claims to honour and promotion; the spectacle of such hardy veterans of France, who had seen the Republic, bent, as Hugo at this time describes them, under the yoke of the tyrant; the proscription and execution of his godfather General Lahorie,—all contributed to excite in the young poet's mind a strong reaction in favour of a more equable and constitutional rule. When we read his ardent lines at this time on the benefits of royalty, we must keep in mind that it is this contrast between the government of a wise and considerate monarch careful of his people's interests, and the relentless autocracy of the Emperor, that he seeks to bring into light. It is no idol of absolutism that he admires, but an ideal of mild paternal rule that had been long absent from France:—

> "Oh, que la Royauté, peuples, est douce et belle !—
> A force de bienfaits elle achète ses droits."

The distinction is made even in the unpublished essays of his school-days, in one of which he remarks—"The more one loves kings, the more ought one to hate tyrants."

To this attitude the influence of the writings of Chateaubriand has given, perhaps, a warmer colour

than was quite natural. Catholicism and monarchy were seen under the idealism which the author of 'Le Génie du Christianisme' had shed about them. Chateaubriand was then the great, almost the sole, luminary in the literary horizon, and the mind of the young poet of the 'Odes and Ballads' naturally caught and reflected something of the glow which was all around. Hugo's career bears throughout the mark of a highly susceptible and impressionable nature, quick to take the colour of the life around him, and all unguarded by those iron-cast systems of thought which enable men of another mould to traverse unsympathetically all currents of thought foreign to their own. The growth of such a nature, till it reaches maturity, is but a continued overlaying of old intellectual strata by new. Amidst all changes, however, and possibilities of change, there is in Hugo the fixed centre of a soul which seeks truth with devotion; and after all, that is the only kind of consistency which has any real value. Of the poet's *devoir* in life especially, he has a high conception, and quotes with admiration Milton's great utterances on that subject. In this strength of moral purpose and loftiness of aim lay the solid guarantees of a great future for Victor Hugo, for his talent was a kind of natural force organised by no special intellectual faculty, and, apart from such moral direction, would but have gone brilliantly astray.

With regard to his worldly prospects at this time, doubts frequently assail him. For one thing, poetry does not seem, notwithstanding the recent success of

Lamartine's 'Méditations,' to be much in demand in the metropolis. Booksellers are reluctant to displace other and more lucrative ware in their windows by a volume of odes. So much, too, hangs on success, and even on speedy success. Mdlle. Adèle Foucher, whom we heard of as a little girl at Les Feuillantines, is now a grown young lady, and attends with no small interest the result of Victor's war with fates and mortals in Paris. Were there only one's self to consider, the battle could be fought out under almost any conditions, and with stoical acceptance of results. For a philosopher the tub of Diogenes will in extremities suffice, but the tub of Diogenes will not possibly hold two. For two long years, we learn from 'Victor Hugo Raconté,' he led an active though feverish and excited existence, "full of dreams, hopes, and anxieties." In such a struggle there would be many alternations of hope and depression, but on the whole he seems to have looked on this doubtful future with a hopeful and undaunted spirit.

"Nothing," he writes, "is to be despaired of, and a little check does not damp great courage. I neither conceal from myself the uncertainties nor even the gloomy prospects of the future; but I have learned from a strong-minded mother that one may to a certain extent command events. Many walk with trembling steps on firm ground; but when one enjoys a quiet conscience and possesses a legitimate object, one must walk with a firm step on ground that sinks and trembles."

But if the chances in high literature were—as they must ever be—doubtful, the prospects of a pseudo-literary career in connection with the dominant parties in the State were at this time unusually good, had Hugo been inclined for that kind of work. The clerical party in particular was on the outlook for clever young men with literary or oratorical talent to support and popularise its cause, and seems to have made some overtures to Victor on this subject. A friend of this period, the Duc de Rohan, a *grand seigneur* whom a sudden bereavement and want of fit occupation had disposed towards ecclesiastical orders and an occasional sojourn in a monastic cell, persuaded the young poet, still in the first flush of Catholic idealism, to visit the Abbé Fraysinous, then a prominent figure in the arena of ecclesiastical politics. The Abbé, a clever, worldly sort of man, who understood men from the point of view of diplomacy and intrigue, advised Hugo to try the political arena, and promised him the powerful support of the clergy. Victor, however, was not much impressed by the mundane sagacity of his counsellor, and declined his proffers.

Of more importance was the next religious adviser, to whom his friend, seeing that a different kind of influence was required, introduced him. This was the Abbé Lamennais, at that time still an orthodox defender of the faith, and best known as the author of the famous 'Essay on Indifference in matter of Religion'—a work in which he attempts, with great

vigour of style, and an able though narrow logic, to prove that the authority of the Church is the only possible basis of political order and religious faith. Intellectually, Lamennais was still under the narrowest traditions of the Roman Church. His views of historical facts were those of a Roman seminarist. But the influence of the man Lamennais was a much greater and much richer thing than that of his books. His was a passionate, devout nature, risen in earnest protest against an era of indifferentism and materialism which he saw had begun, and for which he had as yet found no cure but submission to the authority of the Church. Submission he accordingly preaches with his whole soul, as one who never doubted that the Church was, by grace of God, exempt from the tendencies to error which he saw in humanity—a mistake not likely to be made by better educated Guizot, looking on history with the practised eyes of a Cabinet Minister, but for all that the only logical theory of the ordained priest which has ever been presented.

To Lamennais, then, as the chief luminary in the religious world, Hugo, with his friend the Duc de Rohan, proceeded. Curiously enough, it was at Hugo's old home, Les Feuillantines, that Lamennais was then living. He has been described as a "little, meagre man, of apparently feeble constitution, but with eyes full of strange fire, and a cliff-like brow bespeaking genius,"—"the terrible and austere visage of the great Lamennais," says George Sand. Little care was taken of the outer man—"old grey coat, shirt of brown linen,

black silk cravat now little better than a rag, faded blue stockings, and coarse hobnailed shoes." "Dear Abbé," said the Duke, presenting Victor, "I bring you a penitent." The interview, as described in the anonymous Life of Hugo, wears throughout too much the air of a Romish ceremony to seem instructive to the Protestant mind. At bottom, however, we may conceive Hugo—then but twenty years of age, and already somewhat startled at some aspects of the Parisian world to which his friend, the dramatist Soumet, had introduced him—as not unwilling to hear the word of a sage upon the life which was opening to him. But the problem of life is ever a new one for every man capable of finding any problem in it; and the young poet soon found that the best that saints or sages could give him was the infinite but vague encouragement of their own struggle in the world. The friendship thus begun continued, but without reaching any great degree of intimacy, to the end of Lamennais's life. So far, however, was it from yielding the results which the dominant party might then have expected from it, that both Lamennais and Hugo had in a few years ceased to see in King and Pope the symbols of order and religion, and were both destined to become in their different ways the chief names on the opposite side.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY POETIC NOTES—THE BALLADS—MEDIEVALISM—EASTERN THEMES—'LES ORIENTALES'—THE IDEAL EAST.

THE merit of Hugo's first contribution to poetic literature, the 'Odes and Ballads,' composed mostly between the years 1820 and 1825, has been long lost sight of in the splendour of his maturer work. Of the earlier odes, indeed, nothing very favourable can be said. They are remarkable for a certain vigour and richness of language, but in general there is more facility than fineness of invention. Hugo, in fact, was the author of many volumes before he reached his higher notes. His genius, rich and complex, full of new and almost heterogeneous elements, preluded on many different keys before it gave forth a full and harmonious tone. Even in these youthful poems, however, one may see what promise there lay for French literature. The richness of imagery, the not ungraceful freedom and novelty of expression, and the really melodious line, free from all the stiffness and languor that beset the Alexandrine in less skilful hands, show genius, if still

in a smouldering and smoky condition—jets of flame forcing their way through amidst much crackling and combustion of green wood. Already in some of the later odes, such as that on the Ruins of Montfort l'Amaury, and that to Ramon, Duke of Benavente, we can see more completeness of conception and more gathered skill; but it is in the Ballads particularly, where the themes admit of lighter and more fanciful treatment, that we first get pure and sustained notes, of a fine quality if not yet very full in tone. In these he is more master of the material; and the delicate graces of his style, the tender turns of his fancy, and his power over the word, come fully out. We may notice, too, his treatment of these subjects, taken mostly from medieval history or legend. There is nothing too fixed or positive in it, little support is sought from local realism or historical framework; but it is the fantastic, credulous spirit of the olden time itself, with its loves and wars, superstitions and faiths, that moves in these songs. They are true breaths from a bygone age—leaves floated hither from a sunken Gothic world. Hear, for instance, the chant of this Celtic giant, no inapt type of Hugo's genius:—

"O guerriers, je suis né dans le pays de Gaules,
Mes aïeux franchissaient le Rhin comme un ruisseau,
Ma mère me baigna dans la neige des pôles
Tout enfant, et mon père aux robustes épaules
De trois grands peaux d'ours décora mon berceau.

. . . .

Dans la poudre et le sang, quand l'ardente mêlée
Broie et roule une armée en bruyants tourbillons,

Je me lève, je suis sa course échevelée,
Et comme un cormoran fond sur l'ond troublée,
Je plonge dans les bataillons !

. . . .

O ! quand mon tour viendra de suivre mes victimes,
Guerriers ! ne laissez pas ma dépouille au corbeau ;
Ensevelissez-moi parmi des monts sublimes,
Afin que l'étranger cherche en voyant leur cimes
Quelle montagne est mon tombeau !"[1]

The large-limbed monster is perfectly set to music here. It does not matter much that the strain is a wild hyperbole, and that the careful historian might be at a loss to assign a date to this gigantic warrior. The note, trying as it is, is perfect and sustained, and, dated or not, the Celtic giant is a true emanation from a wild warring life of the past. In this short poem, moreover, we may note a fundamental element in Hugo's poetic talent—a power of expressing the physically grand without labour. His art does not lose

[1] "O warriors, I was born in the antique Gallic lands;
My fathers in their course took the Rhine at a bound;
My mother bathed me in the snows of northern strands
At my birth; and my sire, whose mere stride shook the ground,
With three great skins of bears wound my cradle around.

. . . .

In the dust and blood of battle, when blent in war-array,
A host in the struggle is rolling and rending,
Then I rise, and in the thick of the fiercely mixing fray,
As a cormorant that swoops on the ocean's stormy way,
I plunge in the ranks of the contending !

. . . .

Oh, when my day has come to follow those I've slain,
Warriors, my carrion shall not rot on the ground ;
But bury me amongst those mountains high and bleak,
So that the stranger, when he sees a distant peak,
May be told that there is my mound !"

but rather gains in fineness and simplicity from the vastness of the materials he occasionally chooses. In this direction he has a power of remote poetical suggestion akin to Milton's power of dealing with the great legendary spaces in history. His song, like that of the great English poet, seems at times to reach us from a height where his vision and language have lost the habitual limitations of men. This is the grand bass chord in Hugo's lyre—fully developed, however, only in his later poetry, especially in his great poem "The Legend of the Centuries," where he traverses with unfailing vigour and variety of invention the immense legendary wastes of the past, filled with obscure and gigantic shapes which can neither be touched too definitely nor left vague.

Readers of Hugo's poetry may remember the closing lines of "La Confiance du Marquis Fabrice,"[1] where the weird legendary tone of the story is finely resumed at the end in a felicitous example of this faculty of expressing a sublime vastness.

In the very moment of a treacherous and bloody triumph, at the table of the banqueting-hall filled by his warriors, the head of the tyrant King Ratbert has been struck off by an invisible hand. The astonished courtiers had not seen the mysterious weapon which dealt the blow, only—

> "Seulement, ce soir-là, bêchant pour se distraire
> Héraclius le Chauve, Abbé de Joug-Dieu, frère

---

[1] La Légende des Siècles. Prem. Sér.

> D'Acceptus, archevêque et primat de Lyon,
> Étant aux champs avec le diacre Pollion,
> *Vit dans les profondeurs par les vents remuées*
> *Un archange essuyer son épée aux nuées.*"

There is the real colour of the early centuries here. Indeed the basis is probably a small and insignificant suggestion from Gregory of Tours, improved by the perfect art which Hugo shows at his best in these cunningly wrought lines.

Side by side with the large and flowing manner which is peculiarly his own, we may notice also a power of the subtlest grace—a fineness of touch which can render beauties delicate and difficult to seize as the iridescent gleam on an air-bell. What quaint turns of fancy and nice choice of word and phrase are there not, for instance, in the ballad, "À Trilby, le Lutin d'Argail"? The fantastic movement of the theme is supported with wonderful lightness and ease:—

> "C'est toi, Lutin ! Qui t'amène ?
> Sur ce rayon du couchant
> Es-tu venu ? ton haleine
> Me caresse en touchant !
> À mes yeux tu te révèles ;
> Tu m'inondes d'etincelles !
> Et tes frémissantes ailes
> Ont un bruit doux comme un chant."

Noticeable, on the other hand, for a fine dramatic depth and vigour of conception, are such ballads as "Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean" and "La Fiancée du Timbalier." In the former, the warlike humour of a

feudal age, its range of feeling in art and beauty, and even some reflection of its social pressure, are very skilfully brought out. For mere skill of hand it is worthy of notice. In form an imitation of the Minnesinger's art, it is as deft in movement and as choice in rhymes as if it had been sung at Hermann of Thuringia's table or at the Court of the Hohenstauffens. The curt truncated phrase expresses baronial *brusquerie* and imperiousness to the life:—

> "Nous qui sommes,
> De par Dieu
> Gentilshommes
> De haut lieu,
> Il faut faire
> Bruit sur terre,
> Et la guerre
> N'est qu'un jeu."

In "La Fiancée du Timbalier" we have a good example of his peculiar power with rhythm. A story of feudal warfare, its measure suggests exactly the continued fanfare of trumpets and passing of mounted cavaliers which are recorded in the tale. The Duke of Brittany is returning from the wars. The good folks of some Breton town have turned out to see his army pass, and amongst others the betrothed of a drummer in the Duke's service, who expects to see her lover in the procession:—

> "'Le duc triomphant nous rapporte
> Son drapeau dans les camps froissé;
> Venez tous sous la vieille porte
> Voir passer la brillante escorte,
> Et le prince, et mon fiancé!

'Mes sœurs, à vous parer si lentes,
Venez voir près de mon vainqueur,
Ces timbales étincelantes
Qui, sous sa main toujours tremblantes,—
Sonnent et font bondir le cœur !

. . . . . .

'Voici les chasubles des prêtres
Les hérauts sur un blanc coursier,
Tous, en souvenir des ancêtres,
Portent l'écusson de leurs maîtres
Peint sur leur corselet d'acier.

'Admirez l'armure persane
Des Templiers craints de l'enfer;
Et sous la longue pertuisane,
Les archers venus de Lausanne,
Vêtus de buffle, armés de fer.

'Le duc n'est pas loin : ses bannières
Flottent parmi les chevaliers;
Quelques enseignes prisonnières,
Honteuses, passent les dernières. . . .
Mes sœurs! voici les timbaliers. . . .'

Elle dit et sa vue errante
Plonge, hélas! dans les rangs pressés;
Puis dans la foule indifférente,
Elle tomba, froide et mourante . . .
——Les timbaliers étaient passés." [1]

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[1] " 'Triumphant the Duke marches homeward,
With flags in the field grown older ;
Haste ye to see his brilliant guard,
Haste ye all to the old port ward,
To see the prince pass and my soldier !

'Haste, my sisters, dallying like brides
Over their tresses,—haste and greet
My hero, the timbalier that rides
With the war-drums sounding at his sides,—
Oh, the heart bounds to hear them beat !

. . . . .

In all this we have as yet, it is true, little more than the fantastic and unformed thought of a youthful poet travelling far in remote and ideal lands in search of fitting themes, and readily caught up in all the great spiritual currents of the time,—first by the Royalist and Catholic reaction; then by the romantic idealism of the middle ages, *plus beaux sinon meilleurs;* then, later on, as we may see in "The Two Isles" and the "Ode to the Column," by the "Napoleonic Legend," or, more properly, by that ideal of France as the premier nation of Europe, which it is not easy to detach from the history of Napoleon I., and which, as much as anything else, proved fatal to the less brilliant and powerful *régimes* which followed the First Empire.

'Look where the priests come in white vests,
The heralds on their gay steeds wheel,
All bearing their master's crest,
Ancestral renown to attest,
Painted on their corselets of steel.

'Admire the armour Persian-wrought,
Of the Templars dreaded of hell;
And with halberts bravely in port,
Steel-armed and in stout buff-coat,
The bowmen of Lausanne ye know well.

'The Duke advances, his standard
Floats high among the cavaliers,
Strange ensigns pass in the rearward,
Gay banners their masters could not guard. . . .
Sisters, here are the timbaliers. . . .'

So she spoke, with glances darting
O'er the ranks, alas! pressing on;
Then, 'midst the crowd unremarking,
She sank cold, the life breath parting. . . .
——The timbaliers were gone!"

The same romantic fancy drew Hugo in 'Les Orientales' to the Eastern world in search of themes. In its highly coloured scenes he has the same scope as in the feudal world of the past. Life there is in appearance greater in action and passion, because it is more natural and less moulded by the pressure of a highly conventional society such as that of the West. The dervish; the favourite sultana; the chant of the Turkish pirates; the wild hate and wild love of oriental Spain, well beloved of Hugo; dialogues between poet and caliph, between pasha and dervish; the word of the Lord being still, as of old through Nathans and Jonahs, sent direct to kings and rulers in these countries, or at least still capable of being decorously so represented; the Albanian mountaineer and the Arab of the desert,—such are the figures and scenes that at this date throng the stage of the poet's world.

In his preface to the 'Orientales' he tells us that "it seemed to him that a great poetry shone for us afar off there. There, in truth, all is great, rich, and fertile. . . . It seems to him that hitherto we have been too much accustomed to regard the modern epoch in the century of Louis XIV., and antiquity in Rome and Greece. Should we not have a higher and wider view of things, in studying the modern era in the middle age, and antiquity in the East?" Hugo, as has more than once happened to him, here gives a higher theory of his work than it realises. In his 'Orientales' the poetry of Eastern life goes nowhere deeper than the sparkle and colour of its surface,

which is painted at times with something of the hard vigour of Byron; at times—as in "Sara la Baigneuse" and "La Captive"—with the softer and more delicate graces of the school of *poëtes-ciseleurs.* As a sample of his work at this period, we give a stanza from "La Captive." The subject is a captive at Smyrna, half in love with her Eastern prison for those soft Ægean breezes:—

> "Mais surtout quand la brise
> Me touche en voltigeant,
> La nuit, j'aime être assise,
> Être assise en songeant.
> L'œil sur la mer profonde,
> Tandis que pâle et blonde
> La lune ouvre dans l'onde
> Son éventail d'argent."

In these last lines we seem with exquisite art to wake as from the half-unconscious melancholy of reverie.

It is worth notice that both Goethe and Emerson appear to have had a like high conception of a great poetry of the East. For them, however, its value lay more consciously in the counterpoise which the calm and more purely meditative character of Eastern thought furnishes to the vigorous, bustling, practical culture of Europe, much immersed in temporary interests of many kinds—social, political, and industrial. Both were men who set great store on inner freedom of spirit, and sought to rise in their outlook on life, not only above the limitations of national habits and thought, but even above the deep-seated mental ten-

dencies of race, and the pressure, enormous though unfelt, of the atmosphere of European culture and civilisation. More than once in his 'West-Ostlicher Divan,'—a work in which Goethe's calm wisdom works under a canopy of oriental culture as beneath its native sky,—does the poet of Weimar enforce this contrast between the pure intellectualism of Eastern thought and the truculent militant culture of the West :—

> "Grant it, the poets of Eastern lands
> Are greater than we here in the West ;
> But in one thing at least we equal them quite,
> And that is—hating our neighbour with all our might."

Such a view of the East must, of course, be held with many reservations in favour of the greater vitality and more positive and progressive life of the West; but it may be useful as affording a point of view from which to criticise the huge, restless, industrial civilisation of modern Europe. A similar sentiment seems to have been in Mr Matthew Arnold's mind when he wrote :—

> "The East bowed low before the blast
> In patient deep disdain ;
> She let the legions thunder past,
> And plunged in thought again."

Hugo's ideas on this subject are characteristically different, and are rather part of a temporary enthusiasm —which had also invaded the painting of the time— for the richness and glow of Eastern colouring, than of a grand comparison between civilisations. The differ-

ence indicates Hugo's weak side—the element wanting in a poetic genius, in other respects of the fullest and completest. The philosophic faculty, so prominent in Goethe—which compares things so effectively by their intellectual significance, and which likes to generalise the phenomena of life in pregnant sayings and maxims —is wanting in Hugo; and to an age so imbued with the style and thought of the Germans, and so accustomed, therefore, to seek this element in poetry, its absence in Hugo's works has contributed as much as anything else to the qualified esteem in which they are held in certain cultured circles. Neither in his 'Orientales' nor elsewhere has Hugo been successful in bringing out the profounder significance of the East. That with him remains, as it were, hidden under merely pictorial aspects. He seems, indeed, to have caught his inspiration from the art of the painter, and his imagination remains enchained to the forms of mosque and minaret, and the picturesque irregularity of Eastern cities.

Hugo's pictures, indeed, if they as yet lack the reflective element which has its value in poetry, do not always want the profound reason that underlies all good art. But at present, more occupied with the artistic side of poetry, he seeks that higher aspect unconsciously and at hazard amidst the instincts of the artist.

In the poet the artist and philosopher meet, and he may use the methods of both to represent his thought. In the 'Orientales' Hugo is inclined to be the mere

poet-artist. Goethe, on the other hand, tended to make poetry a philosophy—not, however, as inferior poets of his style do, a mere drapery for philosophic thought: his form is always essentially necessary for the full significance of the matter. But his verse often seems as if it might easily cast its poetic garments, and walk as well in the garb of plain prose—*sermo pedestris.* In this as in almost every other essential respect, the two great poets of our century stand in complete antithesis to each other.

CHAPTER V.

THE LITERARY CONFLICT — CLASSICS AND ROMANTICS — THE FRENCH ACADEMY—LITERARY REFORM — THE "CÉNACLE"— TRADITIONS OF FRENCH LITERATURE—"ABSOLUTE LIBERTY" —ART AND "POETIC ARTS."

WITH the publication of the 'Odes and Ballads,' and of a successful but inferior novel 'Hans of Iceland,' Hugo may be said to have got over the first struggle of a literary career. King Louis XVIII., as a sort of reward for the support given to Royalist traditions in these early poems, had bestowed on the poet a pension of 1000 francs—shortly afterwards augmented by a second of 2000 francs. On the strength of the first pension and his improved prospects, he had married Mdlle. Foucher, the companion of his early years; and the young couple were now comfortably established in the Rue de Vaugirard, No. 90.

To a great poet, even if he lived in isolation and in an environment outwardly calm, life could never be other than a severe struggle in the slow evolution of ideas from one stage to another,—a long-continued effort to express in a fitting form a new spirit which

finds all previous modes of expression lame and impotent for its needs, and in fact suddenly become obsolete for the higher purposes of thought. The history of this struggle, though it may be read in large characters in the development of literature, remains mostly obscurely recorded in the life of the man who has been the most potent instrument for thus fixing in our general speech new methods and new results of thinking. For the best part, indeed, it is a history which is unrecordable, lying in an inward and incommunicable travail of spirit upon language—in appearance the most plastic of mediums, but really the most refractory to new impressions. It was Goethe himself who estimated his work in these terms, "In one thing I am almost a master, the writing of German."

In the case of Hugo, who was an ardent advocate of what he called liberalism in style and language, many things contributed to give his work, instead of the healthfully unconscious action of a natural tendency, the exaggerated character of art worked out to suit the necessities of a theory. For one thing, the great conflict which for some years agitated the literary and even the social world of France, stood in essential though undeclared connection with the political questions of the time, and was, in fact, the forerunner of the political contest about to commence. Great interests often encounter one another at first on partial issues; and under the fiercely debated question of the Classic and Romantic style in art, lay really another question as to the extent of the influence

which the new democratic elements in the nation were to have on art and literature, and, consequently, on the life of the people. As Hugo himself has said, "when one breaks ground in a question of art, the first blow of the pick lays open literary problems; the second, social problems." Thus, notwithstanding temporary disturbances and reactions, the whole weight of Conservative opinion in politics tended to range itself on the side of the Conservatives in literature, and inevitably gave to a literary contest something of the heat and excitement of a political one.

On the literary question, Hugo had almost from the outset found himself at variance with the high traditions of French literature. In another country this would probably have had no greater result than a war between the poet and some ancient critics, which would have been forgotten as soon as it was over, and after which the former would have been left to continue in freedom and repose the development of his talent, and would probably, under the mellowing and refining influences of time, have brought it more into line with the classic works of French literature. But in this as in all other respects, Hugo's work was destined to be performed always under the strain of revolution, and to be disagreeably accentuated by the necessity of constant opposition. In France, a country whose institutions are in other respects the most favourable to progress and development, the traditions of literature are, by a curious but perhaps not inconsistent exception, supported by an organisation

which, in real influence and historical fame, has no parallel amongst the literary institutions of the world. Founded by Richelieu at the very opening of the classical period in literature, the French Academy has always been recognised as the chief authority in literary matters, and this in spite of the fact that its members have been chosen oftener for their political and social than for their literary eminence. It is remarkable that France, that country of revolutionary progress, has succeeded in developing in the Academy one of the most solid and least objectionable of Conservative institutions, the influence of which by its very nature is incapable of much abuse. Slow as it may occasionally be to recognise literary merit, particularly of a new order, and often making ridiculous if not wilful errors in its choice of candidates, there are yet few names of great eminence in literature which have remained outside of its ranks. That fact in itself is a sufficient guarantee for the general solidity of the Academical opinion. No one can fail to observe in the articles of its average literary members the good taste and freedom from eccentricity, the cultured breadth of view, and the finely moderated tone, which connection with an honoured and powerful corporation communicates to an ordinary literary talent. No doubt, on the whole, it is kindlier and more beneficial to mediocrity than to genius, and it is certain that in a country less advanced in society and politics its influence would be much less advantageous, perhaps almost wholly bad; but after all deductions, it must remain, even in

the eyes of the instructed Radical, the noblest kind of Conservative organisation that could form itself in the midst of a nation. Thus constituted, the Academy has always watched jealously over the purity of the French language and literature, and has been apt to look with disfavour on all innovations and new methods. Such was the influence against the whole force of which Hugo was to contend.

The question over which Classics and Romantics fought with such fervour was in reality a grave one, involving important issues in life and morals; but at the first it seemed to present itself as a simple matter of literary reform—a question of style, or even of vocabulary.

The language which the young French writers of the nineteenth century found in their hands, was the language bequeathed to them by the great men of the eighteenth century, Voltaire and the Encyclopedists. At the hands of these writers, distinguished more for their philosophic than for their poetic power, it had undergone a process which tended to banish the more simple and direct expressions of the old Gallic idiom, the words which carry colour and sentiment. For these were substituted a more artificial style of phrase, and words better fitted to express the philosophical relations of things, and appealing more to the understanding than to the senses. And as philosophic thought makes its impression by a clear and logical arrangement of ideas rather than by images and pictorial expressions, the weight of the work was

thrown upon the disposition of phrases and the construction of periods. Almost the only poetical element that remained was a certain brilliancy of phrase, natural to the quick wit or *esprit* which has always been a characteristic of the national genius. Hence arose a style, polished, brilliant, and clear-cutting, admirably adapted for epigram and the satirical and complimentary verse that Voltaire wrote so well, and for the half-philosophic, half-artistic works of Diderot, but quite unfitted to carry the wealth of colour and feeling that higher poetry requires. It was a fine and flexible instrument for the philosopher—that is, for the philosopher of the time, for the higher abstractions of later German metaphysic have developed a philosophical language which lies almost outside of literary art; but it was not delicate or sensitive enough for the poet. In short, the language of the eighteenth century was the natural vehicle for the spirit of the eighteenth century. That was a fine and critical spirit, of keen observation and powerful in analysis, and in its aims comprehensive and elevated, but narrow in its philosophical method, and incapable of understanding the rich complexity of the spiritual and sensuous nature of man. It tended, therefore, to reject many higher truths which could find no place in its imperfect system, and, with all its elevation, was remarkably deficient in tenderness and pity, and the finer spirit of love.

Very different was the spirit of the age that followed. For a quarter of a century the roll of the

drum and the rumble of cannon had been incessant in France. Wars and revolutions, and the enthusiasm and suffering that accompany them, had stirred to their depths the hearts of men; and the symbols of new faiths and new ideals had passed with the badges of the Republic and the eagles of Napoleon through the astonished countries of Europe. Liberty, Fraternity, Equality! It is an old, and, it would seem, a discredited watchword now; but it was new then, and under its spell the ancient edifice of Royalist and Catholic France went rushing to the ground. Even in the war-cry of Napoleon—Empire, Glory, and Destiny—there lay a deeper and more hopeful idealism than inspired the author of 'Rameau's Nephew,' or the philosophic historian of 'Les Ruines.' From the troubled times of the Republic and the Empire, France came forth with a changed and deeper spirit, a spirit which naturally sought out another language and other forms of art than those in which the century of Voltaire revealed itself. It was in the works of Chateaubriand that the new spirit first announced itself in literature. If in his political attitude and opinions he was part of a reactionary movement, his style and the latent influences of his thought were essential contributions to a literary revolution. He was the first who opened the gates of French literature for the freer phrase, the lavish and glowing descriptions, and in general for the romantic spirit with all its train of mysticism, exaltation, and sublimity. It is curious to notice in the chorus of criticism

approving and disapproving which hailed 'Atala' and 'Le Génie du Christianisme,' the invincible distaste which the fine-scented critics, trained in the literary traditions of the eighteenth century, showed for a writer who made Atala say of her lover that "*he is beautiful as the desert with all its flowers and all its breezes*," and spoke of the moon as "*spreading through the woods the great secret of melancholy which she loves to reveal to the ancient oaks and to the antique coasts of the seas.*" These were critics, however, who adhered to the philosophical as well as the literary tradition of the past; and it is not less curious to see how ready critics of another type more or less under the influences of the eighteenth century in their literary tastes, but opposed to its philosophy, were to overlook offensive novelties of style for the sake of the general tendency of the work. Experienced writers like M. de Bonald, as well as solid young men like Guizot, at that time dangling about some of the older *salons*, and picking up the literary graces to ornament a career, were quick to recognise that in Chateaubriand's style alone, with its fine power of rendering mysterious sentiment, its tendencies to reverie and to portray the grave and elevated aspects of things, there was something capable of undermining, in the public estimation, at least, the philosophy of Voltaire.

But the innovations of Chateaubriand, important as they seemed in the eyes of the older critics, lay rather in a freer use of phrase and figures than in any decidedly new manipulation of the language. In his

choice of words, and in the general reserve of his style, he remained within the literary tradition of the past. While the critical warfare over Chateaubriand's works was subsiding, and the distinguished author himself was playing a more conspicuous part in the political world as diplomatist and minister, the Academicians were startled by a fresh literary movement, more radical in its nature and of more formidable dimensions. As far back indeed as the year 1820, the 'Méditations' of Lamartine had sounded a new note in poetry; and though the genius of the poet was of a kind too delicate and individual to form the centre of a great literary movement, there was much in the loose and flowing graces of his muse to awaken the sense of novel and untried chords in poetry. But in a few years more the development in literature had reached a stage when it began to be more conscious of its nature and tendencies, and consequently to theorise and defend itself on new principles of criticism. The result was a league of all those in the various departments of art and literature whose sympathies were with the new movement. The centre of this was the famous "Cénacle"—a literary reunion which dated from the foundation of the Muse Française in 1823, by Hugo, De Vigny, Nodier, Deschamps, and others. In the summer evenings of 1827, a group of young artists, journalists, and poets were in the habit of assembling at different houses, but most frequently at the gardens of "Mother Saquet"—*la mère Saquet*—a place of entertainment in the suburbs—to discuss, in familiar social reunion,

questions of art and literature. Nearly all were men whose names stood afterwards in the first ranks of contemporary art; and there were some whose reputation was to be European,—the sculptor David; the painters Boulanger and the Deverias; that finest of wits, Sainte-Beuve, then still in the enthusiasm of youth and poesy, and not yet the judicial and somewhat satirical critic of the later development of the Romantic school; Alfred de Musset, indifferent enough about theories and morals of art, though not disinclined to spend some of his wit and genius in brilliant literary antics that would shock the sober and conservative gentlemen of the Academy, but destined also to pass ere long out of the central current. Occasionally, too, the versatile Nodier, the melancholy Rabbe, and the brothers Deschamps—stout champions in the critical journals and reviews. Lastly, the chief figure in the literary group, Victor Hugo—"notre grand Victor," as Sainte-Beuve used at this time to call him—a half-Teutonic type in this brilliant assembly of Parisian wits, impressing with all the earnestness and enthusiasm of his nature a moral and theoretical character on the movement. Besides these names, however, as the conflict gained prominence, almost all that was young and hopeful in these days was ere long on the side of Romanticism, and eager to trail a pike in the great war against classical traditions.

In literature, the aim of the new school was to enlarge the poetic vocabulary by the use of words which the critical taste of the preceding age had pronounced

inadmissible, particularly in the higher kinds of poetry, and to substitute the direct and natural word—*le mot propre*—for the artificial periphrase which had so long been in vogue. They felt that the language of literature bore too much the imprint of the thought of another and more reserved age, and that for their own use it was lacking in freedom and naturalness. As Schlegel remarked, there were many things which could not be mentioned at all in French poetry; and long before him, Voltaire had made a similar observation.[1] They sought to expand it beyond those limits which had sufficed for the philosophic elegance of Voltaire, or for the majestic simplicity of the great writers of the seventeenth century. The literary stores of early French literature, of the old Gallic idiom in Montaigne, Rabelais, and Villon, were ransacked for analogies and examples, to which the new school added an audacity of turn and expression, and also an elevation of thought, all their own.

As far as language went, their views were not dissimilar to those with which Wordsworth and Coleridge, in their efforts for literary reform, had made the English public acquainted; but while the Englishmen had in their favour those great models in English literature — the writers of the Elizabethan age, to

[1] "Il n'est rien que le Dante n'exprimât, à l'exemple des anciens; mais nous, comment pourrions-nous aujourd'hui imiter l'auteur des Georgiques, qui nomme sans détour tous les instruments de l'agriculture? . . . Ils (nos bons poëtes) ont embelli la langue Française; mais ils en ont resserré les agréments dans des bornes un peu étroites." —Discours à l'Académie.

whom they so frequently appealed — the Romantic school had to make their way against all the great traditions of French literature, and to overcome the long-established authority of the great authors of its most brilliant epoch. The only tradition in their favour was the ominous one of Ronsard and the other sixteenth-century reformers of the "Pleiad." In proportion, therefore, as the prejudices in favour of reserve in style and language, and in general of the observance of all literary etiquette as laid down by the great Boileau, "Legislateur du Parnasse," were strong in France, and lay deep in the national spirit as it had been formed by the powerful but highly conventional literature of "the Great Century," so the reaction tended to assume a violent and exaggerated character. It seemed as if all precepts and principles in literature were to be thrown in a body to the winds. As previously Malherbe, overlooking the fact that the decorum of words must be determined almost wholly by the context, had laid too much stress on their character, considered abstractly and in themselves, and Boileau too much on abstract general rules of composition; so now the new writers were in danger of forgetting that there are principles at all, and even proprieties which, although they do not constitute the essence of poetry, may much enhance its value.

Among the voices raised on behalf of this absolute liberty in literature, Hugo's was the highest and most uncompromising. "We hear every day," he says in one of his polemical prefaces which is of the year

1826, "of the dignity of one kind of literature, of the proprieties of another, of the limits of this kind and the freedom of that: *tragedy* forbids what the *novel* allows; the *song* tolerates what the *ode* proscribes, &c. The author of this book" ('Odes et Ballades,' third edition) "has the misfortune to understand nothing of all that. . . . It seems to him that what is really true and beautiful is everywhere true and beautiful; what is dramatic in a novel will be dramatic on the stage; . . . that finally and always, the only true distinction in works of art is that of the good and the bad."

Hugo seems here to overlook the fact that art has not quite the freedom of nature; that an artistic product differs from a natural one in being presented to us as a complete whole, imitating nature indeed, but in reality leaving out many elements according to the range of the medium employed. Hence a work of art, in comparison with nature, must always be a conventional whole, and come under a law of harmony which, compared with the harmony of nature, appears as narrow and limited as nature is richer and more complex than art. To the artist, therefore, there is a gain in observing certain limits which in one sense are not natural—that is, they are not in nature objectively viewed, but they are in mind, in the laws of our æsthetic perception. In spite of Hugo's protest, there is no doubt that dramatic freedom and familiarity of style would be out of place in the ode, as would beauties of description and fine trains of reflection which might be faultlessly beautiful in other poetic forms.

It is true indeed, and in this lies the significance of Hugo's protest, that it is impossible to say beforehand what a great artistic genius, with new ideas at his command, and using the new methods which art is continually developing, may be able to do with materials which have hitherto been judged and been found incongruous. This is the unknown factor which makes all "Poetic Arts," whether of Horace or of Boileau, mere philosophical reviews of a past stage of literature, and of little or no avail for the future. If there was something objectionable in Hugo's manner of stating his doctrine, on the whole his attitude against the older school of criticism was a sound one; and considering what he was afterwards to accomplish, we need not quarrel too much with the unusual formula, "I follow conscience"—*Je suis conscience*—which at this time appears in his theory of art. It is partly the assertion that the perceptions of a true artist contain a higher reason than the abstract rules of the critic, and partly it points to the unconscious way in which every great force works out an end or reason latent in it; for even in the individual life, consciousness is but a light moving fitfully on the surface of a great deep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DRAMA AND THE CRITICAL SCHOOL OF BOILEAU—TRAGEDY UNDER THE "GRAND MONARCH"—REACTION IN FAVOUR OF FREER ART—TALMA.

It was not, however, the merit of his critical prefaces, nor even that of his 'Odes and Ballads,' which gave Hugo a worthy title to the chieftainship of the "*Romantiques*," as the writers of the new school were called. The question was to be fought out on a different ground, that of the drama.

Amongst other nations the drama, as being in the best sense a popular form of literature, had freely adapted itself to the tastes of the time and of the people to whom it was presented; but in France a great critical literature rising contemporaneously with a great art, and consolidated by its organisation in the famous Academy, had steadily impressed upon the drama the high but somewhat mythical traditions of an origin in Greek tragedy. In their admiration for the purity of *genres*, and for the well-conceived but by no means universal conditions of Greek art, they had sought to banish from serious dramatic literature

everything that was not in accord with the single high-wrought dramatic tone with which Sophocles conducted the gigantic figures of Œdipus or Ajax across the Greek stage. The lyric note which swells with such fine superfluity in Shakespeare; the light line which Calderon bends so easily to the quick play of sentiment and passion, and his frank and catholic morality; the reflective power and meditative freedom of the dramatic literature of Germany,—all these, with their tendency to draw the severer structure of the ancient drama out of shape, were, as far as possible, pressed out of the French theatre by the taste of a critical school more distinguished for its sense of measure and proportion than for its appreciation of other qualities. The rigid observance of the division between tragedy and comedy alone, and the standard of taste in details that naturally accompanied it, implied an enormous limitation of the method and materials at the command of the dramatist; and when to this we add the train of more mechanical rules conceived in the same spirit, the dramatic unities of time, place, and action, the use of the high-stepping Alexandrines encumbered with metrical restrictions which drew it into monotone and periphrase, it is evident that French tragedy was an essentially artificial growth, and sure in all but the very ablest hands to degenerate into affectation and untruth. Even in the ablest hands, indeed, it proved singularly incapable of sustaining itself.

As a merely literary form, the drama is as free as

any other kind of literature, and there have been many attempts to reach ideals of dramatic work different from those intended for stage representation. Lessing's reflective drama, "Nathan der Weise," Goethe's "Tasso" and classical "Iphigenia," were forms which were in special sympathy with the new artistic and philosophic culture of the time, and found outside the stage a natural audience in the numerous literary and æsthetic circles of Germany. But that the drama of Corneille and Racine should have developed, under all its restrictions, so much life and vigour as to become the national drama of a great nation, was due not only to the artificial support of a powerful critical literature, but also to the fact that it had an exceptional basis, not, properly speaking, in the national life, which is better represented by the incomparable comedians of France from Molière to Beaumarchais, but in the life of the brilliant, refined, and all-predominant aristocratic circle that filled the Court of the "Grand Monarch."

The age which had Louis XIV. for its king, and Bossuet for its preacher, saw monarchy and Catholicism under the most brilliant aspect it was capable of assuming. All the glory and power of a great nation were concentrated as they have rarely been at the Court of the Grand Monarch. Himself the most exalted figure in Europe, his Court was crowded with men great in every department of life, and content that that greatness should appear as minor rays about the glory of a throne: warriors, statesmen, *savants*,

and high ecclesiastics—all the pomp of a great feudal nobility compressed into the circle of a Court; and hanging round this assemblage as resplendent satellites the great orbs of French literature—Corneille, Bossuet, Racine, and Molière. Assuredly a Court unparalleled for grandeur both in show and substance. No wonder that Bossuet, dazzled, universal historian as he was, by the converging effulgence of all things around him, cries aloud in one of his sermons, "I intrigue not for favour, I am not paying court, but I feel—I feel the happiness of my country, and I render thanks to God." There were black spots enough under this shining surface if the Bishop of Meaux had thought of looking for them; but the thin soil of this courtly civilisation was exactly that on which such stately flowers of culture and poesy as the funeral orations of Bossuet and the tragedies of Racine might flourish.

But for the age that followed, the centre of great influences lay outside of the Court, in Voltaire and the coterie of Encyclopedists; and the French drama, while still preserving its traditions as to form, had lost the support of a suitable contemporary life, without gaining much from the spirit of an age rather philosophic than poetic. The tendencies inherent in its form to coldness and artificiality, came into relief when the spirit within was no longer the exalted Catholicism and Royalism of the seventeenth century, but the cold, clear, philosophic intellect of the age of Voltaire.

In these later times the classic drama had, in the

hands of Casimir Delavigne, sunk into a state of evident feebleness. Even outside of the Cénacle, where the names highest in honour were those of Shakespeare and Beethoven, and in circles little under purely literary influences, a feeling in favour of a freer manner in art, especially in those arts which are in more immediate sympathy with the general public, such as the dramatic and operatic, was gaining ground. Just then, for the first time, Shakespeare's plays were being acted with success by English actors to a Parisian audience. "Hamlet raises his hideous head," announced a critic of the old school in his journal. At the Odeon Theatre, another novelty in Weber's "Freischütz" was being given. There, too, or at some other Parisian theatre, was the musician Berlioz, then earning his bread, unknown to fame, as a *chef d'orchestre*, with visions of "crescendos spreading like conflagrations," and a whole world of wild romantic music fermenting in his head, to appear later victoriously wrought out into such famous works as the "Symphonie Fantastique" and "Condamnation de Faust." In painting, at the *salon* of 1824, Delacroix's famous picture, the "Massacre of Scio," had startled the followers of the classical school in that art; and the spiritual and melancholy genius of Ary Scheffer, painter of souls, as Guizot calls him, had naturally embraced the new creed. Even in sculpture, David, an enthusiastic member of the Cénacle, strove to give that severe art something of lyrical and romantic feeling.

On the stage, Talma, now an old man, was still the great figure. He too, after a lifetime spent in representing the heroic personages of the classical drama, would fain have had something more natural—and indeed, by various devices and innovations in scenery and costume, had long sought to bring the dignified tragedy of Corneille and Racine nearer the actual truth of life. "More truth—I want more truth," he complained to Hugo, whom he met about this time at the table of Baron Taylor of the Théâtre Français; and related to the young poet how he had once horrified the Parisians by playing Marius with bare legs. Hugo comforted the old tragedian by confiding to him the conception of a new drama, which was to be the very mirror of nature in its free mixture of all the elements of life, and even recited some parts from "Cromwell," on which he was then at work. Talma approved heartily, and promised his powerful support. But the old actor did not live to see the rise of the new drama, and died not long afterwards, without ever having got nearer to truth than the Shakespeare of Ducis and playing Marius with bare legs.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MANIFESTO OF THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL—HUGO'S THEORY OF THE GROTESQUE—THE GROTESQUE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE—THE DRAMA OF 'CROMWELL'—HUGO AND THE CENSORSHIP.

In October 1827, what may be called the public manifesto of the new school, laying down a comprehensive theory of the movement with its aims and aspirations, appeared in the famous preface which Hugo published with the drama of 'Cromwell.' The young leader of the Romanticists is not contented with simply removing the restrictions which the critical school of Boileau had put upon art, but ventures boldly upon the hazardous work of making a theory of his own. Sketching rapidly and cleverly—for Hugo was a practised critic—the appearance of what he calls an element of grotesque in modern literature, he dwells on the powerful and impressive use of it in the work of Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. As he treats it, the *grotesque* may be said to consist of all that is painful, sorrowful, and even horrifying to the imagination: in its material aspect, therefore, it is whatever is ugly or deformed.

This element exists in nature side by side with what is noble and beautiful; and the art that can find no fit expression for it is so much the poorer, and even lacks one of the most potent means of heightening the effect of what is beautiful and sublime:—

"The fertile union of the grotesque and the sublime is that which has given birth to the modern genius, so complex, so varied in its forms, so inexhaustible in its creations—and in that quite the opposite of the genius of the ancients in its uniform simplicity. The grotesque of the ancients is hidden and timid; but in the spirit of the moderns it plays, on the contrary, a *rôle* of immense importance. It creates the deformed and the horrible—the comic personage and the buffoon. It has discovered for modern art the awesome dance at the Sabbat of witches in the gloom, . . . and these hideous figures invoked by the austere genius of Milton and Dante. It has given us Scaramouch and Crispin and Harlequin, the sorceresses of 'Macbeth,' and the Mephistopheles of 'Faust.'

"This contact with deformity has given to the sublimity of the modern genius something purer, grander, more sublime, in short, than we find in the beauty of antique art."

For the English reader Hugo's theory is easily illustrated. Perhaps no literature furnishes so many examples of the grotesque in high art as our own. From its rise in Chaucer—who paints with the same inimitable power the heroic knight and the drunken miller, and puts the gentle graceful figure of the Prioress beside that of the Wife of Bath,—through the ideal world of Spenser, teeming with the fantastic creations of the medieval mind, to its matured power in Shakespeare, whose limitless art contains all forms, and with whom, one might think, thought had swept

the domain of the grotesque, had not Milton, with a last supreme effort of conception, enlarged it till it hung full of gloomy splendour and nameless horrors on the borders of chaos and ancient night,—no poetry can show such masterly combinations of sublime and grotesque elements.

Considered more deeply, indeed, the grotesque in art, whether tragic or comic, is the gleam of the human spirit on an abysmal profundity of evil which comes not wholly within the compass of intelligence; it is a luminous margin on an outer kingdom of darkness. Is not the vacant gabble of Launcelot Gobbo a laugh caught on the great face of the Inane itself; and in what latitudes of darkness must Shakespeare have clutched for the soul of Richard III.? The frenzied discourse in that hovel where three immortal madmen mingle their babble with the flouting of the storm without, is it not a window open on high seas of the grotesque, but a grotesque which includes the subtlest play of reason and the finest element of the beautiful?

In this Shakespeare is but the highest expression of the English genius, at once solid and real and profoundly ideal. From Chaucer to Carlyle and Hawthorne, the great traditions of English literature are in favour of a bold alliance of the grotesque and the sublime. The powerful hands of our great dramatist alone have cracked the narrow moulds of Greek art for ever, and thrust poet and artist out on a wider sea.

But it is one thing to say that there is here a new and fertile domain for art, and another to venture upon

it with success. If we leave one kind of reason behind, it is but to seek a higher. We may grant to Hugo, or not, that "all that is in nature is in art"; but the more freedom is taken, the more is genius required—the more incongruous the materials appear, the more skill is needed to compound them into a real work of art. The drama of 'Cromwell,' it may be admitted, does not reach the ideal of the preface. It has fine passages and some vigorous strokes of character. Its stage shows a mixture of life carefully prepared according to the recipe of the Romantic school; all tones—gay, grave, sublime, and grotesque—are freely used. Buffoons, astrologers, fortune-tellers mingle in the crowd with stern Roundheads and gay libertines erst of Whitehall. Light lyrics from the rhyming cavaliers of Charles and the incantations of the sorcerer appear alongside of sublime orations from Milton and the exalted harangues of republican idealists; but all hangs loosely on the action of the drama, like heavy ornament. It is the vigorous but crude and forced work of a young poet overloaded with his matter.

The length of 'Cromwell,' however, and the number of personages that figure on its stage, made it unsuitable for public representation; and though a sharp paper warfare arose over it in the critical journals, the great public contest did not take place till the appearance of the famous 'Hernani' some two years after.

In the interval, Hugo was occupied with the 'Orientales,' which he published in 1828, and with his

drama of 'Marion de Lorme.' The suppression of this drama by the censorship, is a fact which of itself sufficiently indicates the democratic tendency which was already finding its way into his work. In 'Marion,' the free manner in which the profligacy of the courtiers and the arbitrary rule of Richelieu were exposed, doubtless gave offence at the Court of Charles X. But the action of the censorship was ill-advised. It tended to create amongst the younger authors a feeling against a king too much under the sway of the clerical party and the Jesuits, and united journalists and writers of all parties, indignant at the restrictions put upon literature, with the Romanticists in disapprobation of the Legitimist policy. In the matter of theatrical censorship, indeed, Hugo had plenty of trouble for some years to come, and the history of his communications with the ministers both of Charles and Louis Philippe is a revelation of the sense of insecurity which haunted these monarchs.

In 'Hernani,' which was ultimately allowed to pass, not a few lines were struck out, not because they contained any general reflections against royalty, but evidently because an anti-royalist sentiment which was strictly dramatic in the mouths of the banditti and the revolted nobles who figure in the play, might too readily find an echo in the audience. One of those lines, in which the brigand Hernani uses an expression natural enough to one in his position, "*Think you, then, that kings are sacred to me?*" had to be changed into, "*Think you, then, that for us there are any names*

sacred?" An instructive glimpse, this, into the delicate precautions taken to fence about a throne in the midst of this mobile and satirical people of Paris, and a singular testimony, also, to the importance of the theatre there.

The fertile and flowing genius of Hugo, however, did not suffer much from the repressive measures of authority. 'Marion de Lorme' had been suppressed in July 1829; and in September of the same year 'Hernani,' the best and most successful of his dramas, was completed. It was received with acclamations by the literary circle to whom, in the ordinary custom, it was first read, and was immediately accepted by the Théâtre Français. And now, on both sides, preparations commenced for the contest that was impending.

CHAPTER VIII.

'HERNANI'—INITIAL DIFFICULTIES—THE *CLAQUE*—THE YOUNG LEGIONS AT THE THEATRE—A BATTLE—A CONTESTED VICTORY.

FROM the outset Hugo's drama was beset with hindrances and obstacles of all kinds. Even at the stage recitals, the actors, who had imbibed the classical prejudices around them, worked in a half-hearted manner at their parts, and Mdlle. Mars, the chief lady at the Théâtre Français, and a ruling power there, drove Hugo nearly frantic with her querulousness and impertinence. Everything that is new has to struggle, with more or less labour, into its place in the world. In the case of individuals, the conflict is eased by the fact that Death, equally busy with Birth, is continually making room for the new. Institutions, however, and corporate interests of all kinds—social, political, or artistic—make a harder fight. Even when at heart quite defunct, the assemblage of vested interests which have grown round them give a semblance of life, and they stand like the ancient oak, strong as ever in appearance, though rotted inwardly.

Amongst the multitude of those connected with theatrical affairs—actors, critics, stage-workmen, *claqueurs*—none were willing to recognise that the old classical drama was in a state of hopeless decay, and almost all ranged themselves in a more or less hostile attitude towards the new play. At the French theatres it was customary to support new ventures by a powerful body of *claqueurs*, or men regularly organised to make applause; but it was found that even these poor mercenaries, unwilling to consider themselves mere machines, and attached by use and wont to the plays of Delavigne and the classical dramatists which they had so long been accustomed to applaud, could not be depended on to fight for 'Hernani.' Yet in face of the furious opposition that was to be encountered, something of the kind was necessary. The Academicians, who had gone so far as to petition the king to forbid the appearance of any drama from the Romantic school,—Charles wittily replied that he had only his place in the boxes,—would be sure to exert all their influence to make the new play a failure. In these circumstances, Hugo and the directors fell upon the expedient of making a free pit, which should be filled by the friends of the new school, who were mostly to be found amongst the young and enthusiastic art-students in Paris. Nothing could be more to the mind of these young legions themselves than this muster in force for an open defiance of the old *perruques* or big-wigs of the Academy. When the *rappel* was beaten throughout the studios and the

various art-workshops of Paris, the enthusiasm was unbounded. The difficulty was to select amongst the number of volunteers; and it was an envied distinction to have received one of those slips stamped "*hierro*," which signified that the bearer was enlisted for the campaign with the Romantic army.

On the 25th February 1830, people passing in the Rue de Richelieu were astonished to see assembled early in the afternoon, at the door of the Théâtre Français, hundreds of strange-looking youths, long-haired, long-bearded, with fantastic moustaches, and dressed in every sort of style except that which was customary—in Spanish cloaks, doublets, caps *à la* Henri III., and mostly without shirt-collar, a badge of the *bourgeoisie* which the ultra-Romantics had forsworn,—in short, in the fashion of every epoch but their own. Prominent among this motley crowd of artists, sculptors, architects, and authors, and in a sort captains of different sections amongst them, were Louis Boulanger; Gérard de Nerval, translator of 'Faust,' and later a *collaborateur* with Heine, who describes him as "rather a soul than a man"; Petrus Borel, famous mostly for a magnificent beard; enthusiastic Ernest de Saxe-Coburg, happily transplanted from a doubtful footing at a petty German Court to the cosmopolitan circles of Paris; and, conspicuous among the conspicuous, youthful Théo Gautier, flaming in the scarlet doublet which has become legendary, with silver-grey trousers, and hair that fell in long locks on his shoulders.

In the eyes of these enthusiastic youths the contest about to commence was one between the lovers of poetry, of liberty, of the ideal, against all that represented the worldly and conventional elements of society. More than forty years after, Théophile Gautier, grown old and full of wise saws and sad reflections, writes with an after-taste of youthful feeling about this great moment:—

"*25th February* 1830.—That date is written in flaming characters on the background of our past, the date of the first representation of 'Hernani'! That evening determined our career. [Gautier had been hesitating between literature and painting.] There we received the impulse that holds us forward still after so many years, and which will carry us to the end. Long years have flown past since then, but the fascination is ever the same for us. We abate nothing of the enthusiasm of our youth, and every time that the magic sound of the horn [of Hernani] resounds, we raise our head like an old war-steed ready to begin again the conflicts of yore."

By some mistake in the arrangements, this young army of Romanticists had to wait six hours before the commencement of the play. There are certainly few audiences whose enthusiasm could survive such a trial as six hours' waiting in the dimly lighted interior of a large theatre; but, *qu'on est bien à vingt ans*—one is full of resources at twenty. Scenes from the new drama were recited with enthusiasm; songs were sung which next day adverse critics in the journals declared were of a doubtful character, both as to politics and morals; and finally, as the hour of dinner approached, the theatre was turned into a vast dining-hall. Benches were used as tables, handkerchiefs served as napkins,

sausages, bread, and other edibles made their appearance; and when the time for opening arrived, the decorous *bourgeoisie*, pouring into their seats in the boxes, were astonished and indignant to find what seemed an orgie of Bohemians going forward within the walls of the sedate and respectable Théâtre Français.

The demand for tickets had been enormous. All that was brilliant and notable in Parisian society was there—politicians, artists, authors, journalists, men of the world, and men of letters. So difficult was it to procure tickets, that celebrities like Benjamin Constant and Thiers had applied direct to Hugo. When the curtain rose, expectation, intense on both sides, for a while kept the peace; but ere long the unwonted freedom of the language and the dramatic situations began to call forth the sneers and hisses of the adverse party, answered by thunders of applause on the part of the young men. At times the conflict became a purely physical one, in which the youth and enthusiasm, and occasionally, it must be added, the indomitable impudence, of the Romanticists, generally carried off the victory against the forces of irony, cynicism, conservatism, and envy in the supporters of the older dramatic school.

The vigorous acting of Joanny, an old soldier who had served under Hugo's father, and who alone of the actors had much enthusiasm for his part, that of Don Ruy Gomez, carried the gallery scene successfully through; and the great monologue of Charles V. at the tomb of Charlemagne drew a tumult of applause from the majority of the audience. The last scene, in

which the part of Doña Sol was powerfully rendered by Mdlle. Mars, also secured the general approbation of the house; and when the curtain fell, the new school could congratulate itself on a considerable though hard-won victory. Hugo went home with the consciousness of a great dramatic future before him; and the gathered bands of Bohemia dispersed to their studios and lodgings, to rehearse gleefully far into the night the critical moments of the fray,—how grandly Diveria led the assault there, or Borel here—how the audacious wit of Gautier and Saxe-Coburg carried dismay into the ranks of the Philistines. *Hac fugerent Graii, hac premeret Trojana juventus.*

In such manner was the temporary victory which the suffrages of a temporary public can give, secured for 'Hernani.' For the judgment which gives final victory, it had naturally longer to wait, and to pass through all the reactions and oscillations to which critical as well as general opinion is subject in these matters. The best, the only decisive victories, are not those of a day, but slowly detach themselves from the years, when all that has less strength and persistence has crumbled away. Time, that devours meaner things, gives to what is destined to last the indefinable halo of legend and history. As Goethe has remarked, a book may have its history (*Erlebtes*), of which no critical opinion can rob it; and apart altogether from its merits, 'Hernani' has a prominent place in the history of French literature. Half a century has rolled away since that contest, and much that was then making

noise and tumult in the world, literary or social, lies silent now and forgotten in the waste places of the past, while 'Hernani' still remains in the tide of the times, as that which men continue to find of profit.

Thirty years afterwards, when a revival of this drama took place, its author being then in exile at Guernsey, the performance went forward amidst continued rounds of applause. Its most persistent opponents had passed away, and the greater part of the literary world had come to accept the literature of the new school at least as an accomplished fact.

In 1830, however, the victory continued a contested one, still requiring some support from the Bohemians of the studios; and after thirty-two representations to crowded houses whose enthusiasm for the contest did not seem to abate, 'Hernani' was withdrawn. Similar battles took place over the other dramas of Hugo, with the exception of 'Lucrezia Borgia,' which was a complete success at the Théâtre Porte St Martin. For the next twelve years Hugo continued to write for the theatre, and 'Le Roi s'amuse,' 'Marie Tudor,' 'Angelo,' 'Ruy Blas,' made for the most part much the same profitable but tumultuous advent on the stage. It is noteworthy, however, that in his later dramas the basis of Hugo's dramatic popularity had changed, and that 'Ruy Blas' and 'Les Burgraves' found support more in the boxes, and opposition more in the pit; and in this we think the latter again proved itself the better judge.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARACTERISTICS OF 'HERNANI'—HUGO'S HISTORICAL FIGURES —HIS CONCEPTION OF CHARACTER—HISTORICAL PROPRIETY.

In the drama which won a sort of public victory for the Romantic school in France, it is curious to see how far we have left behind the traditions of the "great century." Those royally draped personages who had so long kept the boards with imperial speech and mien, seemed suddenly to become as mythical as the fabled heroes of antiquity. Great characters are indeed brought upon the stage; but so far from being shown only in the heroic vein, they are exhibited, with the new school, oftener in what we might call an unhistoric, and even sometimes anti-historic aspect. In the drama of 'Hernani,' for instance, we see a great historical figure of the sixteenth century, the Emperor Charles V.; and we first make our acquaintance with him there in the character of a jealous lover, who bribes the duenna of the lady, and conceals himself in a press to watch the reception of a successful rival, the brigand Hernani. This is in the first act, and the situation is ere long complicated by the appearance of

the guardian and husband-to-be of the lady. This is Don Ruy Gomez, a nobleman of great name and valour, but of advanced years. Charles, who as yet is only King of Spain, brings the whole company, himself included, cleverly out of a difficult situation by declaring that he had come in secrecy to take counsel with Don Gomez regarding the impending election to the imperial crown, and that Hernani is his attendant. After some interrogations and expressions of surprise, not unnatural, on the part of Don Ruy Gomez as to how the king made his way to the lady's chamber, questions which do not find the ingenuity of Charles at fault, the veteran hidalgo appears satisfied, and falls into an animated discussion with the king on matters of high state policy. As the personages leave the stage, a covert exchange of menaces takes place between the king and the brigand.

To this free treatment of historical names the style and ordinary details correspond. In some of its qualities, indeed, the style comes near the standard which Hugo had laid down in the preface to 'Cromwell.' It is bold, animated, vivid, and familiar, full of accents and phrases which had before been the property only of comedy, but readily capable of elevation when required. But for all that, and notwithstanding the freer versification, it does not lie so close to nature as the "language of Molière," and its freedom when elevated is better than its interpretative power when it is familiar. As an example of the familiarity of style and thought which Hugo on occasion uses in this

tragedy, we give part of the dialogue which takes place between the king and Hernani in the chamber of Doña Sol:—

"*Don Carlos.* Chacun son tour, messire;
Parlons franc. Vous aimez Madame et ses yeux noirs;
C'est fort bien. J'aime aussi Madame, et veux connaître
Qui j'ai vu tant de fois entrer par la fenêtre,
Tandis que je restais à la porte.
Hernani. En honneur,
Je vous ferai sortir par où j'entre, seigneur.
Don Car. Nous verrons. J'offre donc mon amour à Madame.
Partageons, voulez-vous? J'ai vu dans sa belle âme
Tant d'amour, de bonté, de tendres sentiments,
Que Madame, a coup sur, en a pour deux amants.
Or, ce soir, voulant mettre à fin mon entreprise,
Je me couche, j'écoute, à ne vous céler rien,
Mais j'entendais très-mal et j'étouffais très-bien;
Et puis je chiffonairais ma veste à la française.
Ma foi, je sors."[1]

That is evidently a considerable distance from the easy, graceful turns in the dialogue of the great dram-

[1] "*Don Carlos.* Every one in his turn, sir;
Let us speak out. You are in love with Madame and her black eyes;
That's well. But I too love Madame, and would fain know
Who it is that I see so often find an entrance by the window,
While I find none at the door.
Hernani. By my honour,
I will make you go out the same way as I enter.
Don Carlos. We shall see. I am a suitor then for
Madame's favour. Let us share, if you like. In her fine soul
I have seen such stores of love, of goodness, of tender sentiment,
That Madame has, I am sure, enough for two lovers.
Now, this evening, wishing to bring my project to an end, I
Hid myself here and listened,—for I'll not make a
Secret of it,—but I heard very poorly, and was in decided danger
Of choking, not to speak of my doublet getting ruffled
Like a Frenchman's. By my faith, I started out."

atists. The wit is forced, artificial in the highest degree. But, generally speaking, it is when the characters are historically great, and the situation intense, that the natural note in the Romantic drama gives it a new range of thought, and a far freer movement than was possible within the limits of the old French drama. In the monologue of Charles at the tomb of Charlemagne, we have a favourable specimen of Hugo's graver style. We give a few lines from this famous scene :—

> "O ciel ! être ce qui commence [1]
> Seul, debout, au plus haut de la spirale immense !
> D'une foule d'états l'un sur l'autre étagés,
> Être la clef de voûte, et voir sous soi rangés
> Les rois, et sur leur tête essuyer ses sandales ;
> Voir au-dessous des rois les maisons féodales,
> Margraves, cardinaux, doges, ducs à fleurons ;
> Puis évêques, abbés, chefs de clans, hauts barons ;
> Puis clercs et soldats ; puis loin du faîte où nous sommes
> Dans l'ombre, tout au fond de l'abîme,—les hommes.
> Les hommes ! c'est-à-dire une foule, une mer,
> Un grand bruit, pleurs et cris, parfois un rire amer.
> . . . .

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[1] "O heaven ! to be at that eminence,
Alone, and at the height of that spiral immense !
To see beneath the states ranged in stage under stage,
To be the key-stone, and see bending in homage
The heads of kings, and under kings the long array
Of mighty feudal houses in the pride of sway ;
Margraves, doges, dukes, haughty cardinals,
Bishops and abbés, barons, chiefs and seneschals ;
Then, beneath, clerks and soldiers ; then, far from our height,
Away in the darkness, at the depth of th' abyss, quite,—
Men !—the crowd, that is, a sea aye in storms or smiles,
A great noise, groans and tears, a bitter laugh by whiles.
. . . .

> Ah, le peuple !—océan !—onde sans cesse émue,
> Où l'on ne jette rien sans que tout ne remue !
> Vague qui broie un trône et qui berce un tombeau !
> Miroir où rarement un roi se voit en beau !
>
> . . . .
>
> Gouverner tout cela !"

The general tendency of work like this is unmistakable. The whole grandeur of the social edifice of Europe is here gathered together and reflected in the person of one man, whose life is constantly presented on a level with that of ordinary men. It is an old text that Hugo preaches from— *Vide quam parvula sapientia !* (See what little wisdom governs a world !) and the saying of the Swedish chancellor meant probably nothing more than Hugo does here,—not that exceptionally little wisdom is to be found amongst the counsellors of state, but that the vast mechanism of kingdoms turns on the same small pivots, and receives impetus and check from the same petty accidents of feeling and situation, on which we count in the ordinary and unhistoric affairs of men. But if the text is an old one, there is a modern note in the discourse. In that "Ah, the people !" the democratic heart of the poet has burst forth, and passes rather beyond what we should expect from Charles V.

The manner in which Hugo handled great historical

> Ah, the people !—mighty ocean whose restless mind
> Is swayèd to and fro by every lightest wind !
> The wave that laps the throne and rocks the kingly tomb,
> The mirror where monarchs may ofttimes read their doom !
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To govern all that !"

personages like Charles V., Francis I., or Mary Tudor, was specially distasteful to the severer school of critics. His dramas, indeed, are in no proper sense historical. Not only are the scenes and situations unhistoric, but in general they tend to obscure the traditional character of great names. It may be said that the propriety of such *quasi* revelations is doubtful, and that we have a right to expect that such glimpses as we may get of historical figures should be in keeping with the public side of their life, and even with the legendary colour which time has given to their names. It is not the dramatist's business to overturn these traditions, but rather to use them. Hugo has been accused of defacing history in this way. A witty critic has said of his historical personages, that they do not seem to be aware of the names they bear. There is considerable point in the remark; and the best that can be said on the author's behalf is, that he is already working, perhaps somewhat outside of the dramatist's province, at a new tradition of these high personages, and one which is not without its truth. For our own part, we should be inclined to object not so much to the positive untruth of what is shown us, as to its undue prominence amongst other qualities which require representation by the laws of human nature as well as by those of historical propriety.

The drama of Hugo is not, as adverse critics have said, a mere drama of intrigue, in which the personages on the stage have no further play of character

than that required to work out the situation of the moment. In his dramas the situations rise naturally enough out of the characters; but it is in the characters themselves that we are conscious of something strained and unnatural—of a false theatrical relief which they receive in being made the mere exponents of a violent passion or tendency, which leaves no room for the full play of nature in them. In 'Le Roi s'amuse,' for example, it is not so much Francis I. that we see, as a light heedless voluptuary, absolutely without other qualities, let alone those which we expect to find in the conquered of Pavia; in 'Lucrezia Borgia,' not so much Lucrezia Borgia, in spite of that well-conceived scene with the Duke of Ferrara, as an embodiment of maternal passion before which all other considerations of heaven or earth not only give way, but cease to exist or show themselves; in Don Ruy Gomez, not so much the full figure of a Castilian noble, as an infatuate pride unleavened by any other elements of humanity.

Within these limits Hugo works with great power and effect. His conceptions are vigorous, and contain much truth, moral and other, as to the nature and power of the passions. But it is not the truth of passion as it works in the human breast, swaying and bending to circumstance, relaxing, relenting, and anew gathering force, that he can paint for us; what he gives us is really an abstract history of the length and breadth, height and depth, of a passion, when everything else has been cleared out of the individual to

make room for it. With what labour and artifice is the transition of Charles V. from the dominion of one passion to that of another effected! And yet it is the best conception of the kind in Hugo's dramatic work. Usually, when two tendencies meet in one of his personages, each is satisfied as if it alone existed. The soul is given up alternately to both, and no communicating current runs between, exercising a reflex and modifying influence on each. Triboulet's profound love for his daughter, and his visions of a happy old age with her in some peaceful corner of the provinces remote from Court-life, the tender ecstasy of his sorrow which makes him so gentle and considerate towards her, count for nothing in his heart when he deals with others. That deep fund of idealism sends not forth a single bubble to the surface, when the question of the assassination of the king is before him with all its terrible accessories. In his dramas Hugo does not seem to penetrate to the centre of a character, but to work from the outside according to a theory, and only at certain stages to introduce himself, when he is then inclined to strain a part to the injury of the whole. Hence he is deepest in monologue; and though vivacious in dialogue, mostly only by the external clash of the situation. In general, it is as a lyrical poet, by his fine command of language, and the power with which he carries his imagination into accessories, that he lifts his dramas above those of the playwright. A strong intense situation is the most favourable to his genius. There the vigour of

his imagination and his poetical fulness carry him victoriously through. At such times he is master of all tones, and passion, and tenderness; pity and despair are fused with wonderful power in an atmosphere made electrical with strong feeling. But, generally speaking, the skeleton of Hugo's theoretical construction in his dramas is too easily seen below the movement of the surface: the determined way in which everything makes towards a preconcerted end or effect is too obvious. If the ideal of the Romantic drama was to be as natural as possible in its representation of life, life does not so hasten, a straight and undeviating stream, to its end, but, making here a leap and there a detour, rolls at one time swift and strong, and at another languid and pensive, as if it stayed to catch the full reflection of the heavens above—and the force of the fate that draws it onward is felt none the less. Consider, for instance, the effect of that night scene in the tent of Brutus, and that demand for music before the tragic morrow. There we have the working of a full dramatic genius. [1]

In this severe concentration of the interest, where the dramatist seems to refuse to glance aside at any other characteristics of human nature than those that are the immediate theme of the play, Hugo shows the old French tendency to the abstractness and clearness of

[1] "*Brutus.* Bear with me, good boy, I am much forgetful.
Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes awhile,
And touch thy instrument a strain or two?"
—*Julius Cæsar*, act iv. sc. 3.

a systematised art, rather than to the depth and comprehensiveness of a more natural one, and holds more of the old classical drama of France than of the theatre of Shakespeare and Calderon. *Naturam tamen expellas!*

CHAPTER X.

THE FUNCTION OF THE DRAMA—HUGO'S RANGE AS A DRAMATIST—DEMOCRATIC TENDENCIES.

In the drama of 'Hernani,' Hugo had given the public what he intended to be the first of a series of works of similar aims and import,—"the Moorish portal," as he calls it, "to a great Gothic edifice." In it, as in 'Cromwell,' his attention had been mostly occupied with the literary aspect of the question. The mask and cothurnus of the old French stage were to be abandoned, and human nature to appear in its native mixture of strength and weakness, pettiness and grandeur. But beneath the literary question, as he himself has remarked, there lay a social, or a politico-social one. This latter seems gradually to have risen into greater prominence in his mind when the first struggle for freedom in dramatic form was over.

His success as a dramatist had brought him into close contact with the great public. He was no longer merely the first figure of a literary *cénacle,* whose members were but struggling into reputation; he had

become a Parisian celebrity, the dramatic poet of the day, amongst a people who most honour and appreciate that form of literary merit. He stood now before the crowd as one pedestalled, a thousand voices rising in applause or hostility around him—a position difficult to keep, and still more difficult to resign. In this the dramatic poet is very differently situated from the maker of meditative poems or epics, or from the philosophic thinker. Their fame lies not so much in the popular mouth. Their course is only across the great heavens, where they are constellations for the most part unobserved by the masses, and on which men meditate alone and in silence. But the dramatist's fame in its first aspect lies in the eyes of the great public, and, depending on their suffrages, is constantly won and constantly contested. There is something intoxicating for a great poet in this near contact of his ideals with the popular mind. His genius is fired, and the struggle has an ardour all its own. New rivals are ever appearing; and the charm of novelty, which is almost legitimate in this sphere, continually threatens to draw the regards of the public away from established reputations. Long ago Æschylus, weary of the conflict, retired from the fervid world of Athens and the festivals of Bacchus to the Sicilian shore; and on the same stage where Hugo now figures, the great Corneille before him had felt—Titan though he was—the strain of these exciting contests.

Hugo seems to have accepted the success of 'Hernani' as indicating that a great career lay open to him

on the stage. He welcomes without reserve the close contact into which his new work brings him with the people, and it is evident he is somewhat under the intoxication of the footlights; yet all this in a noble way, and one very characteristic of the enthusiastic, confiding, confident temperament of the man. Visions unroll themselves before him of a great work of social, political, and moral education to be accomplished by means of the drama. The theatre is to be an instrument for preparing the people for a higher civilisation. The poet, too, is he not a priest, or still more, a prophet who should speak direct to the great masses of humanity? To this work, then, Hugo sets himself with the noblest resolutions, which he announces—for this also is characteristic of him—in a sufficiently loud way:—

"The theatre," he writes in the preface to his 'Lucrezia Borgia,' "it cannot be too often repeated, has an immense importance in our time—an importance which tends to increase steadily with the progress of civilisation. The theatre is a rostrum. The theatre is a professor's chair. The theatre speaks loud and strong. . . . The author of this play knows that the drama, without exceeding the limits of art, has a natural mission, a social mission, a human mission. When he sees every evening this intelligent and progressive people which has made Paris the mother city of progress, range itself before the curtain which is about to rise and reveal his thought, . . . he interrogates himself severely as to the tendency of his work, for he feels himself responsible, and he does not wish that this crowd should one day be able to bring him to account for what he has taught them The poet, too, has his cure of souls. The multitude must not leave the theatre withoutc arrying with it some lesson of profound and austere morality. He hopes therefore, with the aid of God, never to bring on the scene (as long, at least, as these serious times last) any but matters full of instruction and counsel."

In this manner does Hugo announce himself as a poet-prophet sent to Paris in the nineteenth century. It is not difficult to imagine the flight of polite sneers and epigrammatic witticisms that this new utterance of Hugo's would draw from the accomplished Academicians and men of letters. "Prophets and mystics," writes Sainte-Beuve to his Swiss editor, "are not relished here." Sainte-Beuve was only half right, and mistook the elegant world of *doctrinaire* politics, and the lettered circles of the reviewing profession, for that great Paris of the people which has in the nineteenth century accredited more prophets and mystics to the rest of Europe than all the other great cities taken together. In truth, if a modern St Paul were to appear in these times, he might do well, after mature consideration of London and Berlin, to betake himself to *Lutetia Parisiorum,* where, notwithstanding an abundance of doubtful appearances, he would be likely to find the best audience. In that bright shrewd world of Parisians, so distrustful of high moral pretensions, below a surface of light scepticism, epigrammatic brilliancy, and an incorrigible habit of raillery even for things which at heart they respect, there is a fine intelligence, a chivalric enthusiasm for ideas, and a candour and openness of mind which a new apostle would find more fruitful soil than the dull formalism of Berlin or the thick mundaneity of London.

Even at this time, indeed, the Parisians are not without a genuine apostle in the Abbé Lamennais—ill-bestead at present—the fiery-tempered but devout and deeply

meditative man, in an element of clericalism, Jesuitism, and political opportunism, and soon to throw himself into the arms of the democratic brotherhood, and preach with tongue of fire the cause of the "disinherited"—*mes frères les déshérités,* as Prudhon, that other prophet of Socialism, calls them. Below all this there is a certain ferment of spirits which bodes ill for the present establishment of things—"the dull sound of approaching revolution," with the movement of which, as yet subterranean, Hugo from his watch-tower can see the surface of Europe undulating—a movement which, it is not difficult to foresee, will have its grand eruption in the city of Paris, when there will be no want of apostles, true or false.

Hugo, with all the affinity of genius for the deep spiritual movement of the time, was quick to feel the change, which was necessary not only in the style but in the subject-matter of the drama, if it was really to become a new national drama, representative of the new national life. The lofty heroes of Corneille and Racine—Agamemnon, Augustus, Mithridates, and the Cid, personages whose life could be fitly exhibited only on a plane far above the ordinary level—had been appropriate spectacles for an age whose significance was summed up in the figure of the Grand Monarch. The fortunes of these great historical figures, that fill by themselves the otherwise almost blank walls of the past ages, were properly represented as involving a high and severe morality, in which the freer play of nature and the more subtle returns of character were

disregarded. It is not that these figures of the old classical drama lack the touches of nature, but there is a conventional reserve in their display of it which had become alien to modern sentiment. This reserve—the *pudeur scenique* which has been so much admired in the noble old French drama—accorded as little with the genius of Hugo as with the temper of the time. The personages whom we see on Hugo's stage, the Triboulets, Marions, Lucrezias, require a freer kind of treatment, and he trusts to the splendour of his imagination to raise scenes and figures not in themselves noble to the height of tragic beauty. In this respect his art already clearly betrays the influence of democratic ideals. His aim is to vindicate the innate beauty of human nature, even in types hitherto considered only as ignoble and despicable. New and larger ideas of humanity are to correct the unbending and conventional morality of the older drama. In Victor Hugo, democracy had found a *sacer vates*, even while his political attitude was yet reserved and cautious. Thus is it always. We move onward according to the deep and slowly revealed tendencies of our nature, in a manner and towards an end of which we are at the time only half conscious.

In the dramas which followed 'Hernani,' the development of this social idea, equivalent to a sort of new democratic Christianity, becomes a marked feature; and indeed it is in this moral aspect that we must look for the ultimate significance of his theory of the sublime and the grotesque. Instead of the heroic names which

for centuries had been the stock-in-trade of tragic writers, he brings upon the stage as heroes and heroines persons of the most doubtful and even degraded character,—the light-minded courtesan Marion de Lorme, the fierce and unchaste Lucrezia Borgia, the diseased and deformed buffoon Triboulet. On such miserable and defective types of humanity his imagination broods till something of the primitive-divine element which may linger in them reveals itself to him. This he seizes upon, and makes it the main source of interest in the drama. The morality of this procedure has been found fault with, as tending to make ideals out of characters sunken in vice; but it should be kept in mind that he does not seek to palliate their crimes, nor in any case does he let them escape their doom at the hands of inexorable fate. In this respect the morality is austere though compassionate, nowise condoning the crime—exacting the retributive account from the criminal, yet bringing him, by some finely touched traits, within the circle of the human, from which we had ejected him as a monster. The paternal love that could refine the soul of the buffoon Triboulet, the purifying affection in Marion de Lorme and in Lucrezia Borgia, the rich idealism that lights up the clouded and deformed life of the Hunchback of Notre-Dame, have all so far the same meaning, that they exemplify the worth of human nature and its fine possibilities even in degraded and sunken types. They are revelations of a noble or divine element in it, which the worst circumstances cannot annihilate.

This, it must be admitted, is a narrow range of dramatic power; but within these limits there is a genuine creative force of genius. These morally and physically distorted beings are not the products of a morbid mind. Nor are they studies of disease with a merely scientific interest, as so many of Goethe's creations are. They show what a man of large and healthy nature, and with ample faculty, has to give in the way of pity and sympathy to fellow-creatures irremediably injured by fate. He has sought to awaken in us a genuine interest and compassion for the humanity in them, and to give a real poetic colour to types which have hitherto lain beyond the nice touch of higher art.

CHAPTER XI.

'LE ROI S'AMUSE'—THE TYPE ARISTOCRAT IN HUGO'S DRAMAS —TRIBOULET AS HERO—THE NEW SOCIAL IDEAS—MORAL TEACHING.

For the study of the new social ideas which as yet only in their moral aspect had begun to influence the work of Hugo, the most valuable of his dramas is 'Le Roi s'amuse.' In the opening scenes of this play we see the glitter of life at the Court of Francis I. A brilliant crowd of Court gallants and gay dames of fashion, Court balls and suppers, the dance and the song, love and intrigue, exquisite *persiflage* on the part of gentlemen too well-bred to touch the serious side of things, smiles and coquetry from the ladies,—all the elements and all the appearance of a continual revel, —a central figure in the throng, the king, exhibited as a thoughtless voluptuary of the facile, good-natured kind. In slight relief amongst these general types of Court-life, but in no marked dissonance with his surroundings, is the figure of the poet Clement Marot, light-hearted maker of epigrams and *rondeaux* which are much in the Court taste. It is not, however, on

any of these that the chief interest of the drama is thrown, but on a figure that stands in strange contrast with the gay world around it—that of Triboulet, the Court buffoon, a man deformed alike in body and mind, an object of contempt and contumely to all who know him.

In the earlier scenes of the play the malicious and spiteful side of Triboulet's character is made prominent. He uses his licence as a jester to take it out of these courtly loungers, and in general of the whole world, which is the natural enemy of the poor deformed buffoon. *Savants*, poets, courtiers, Triboulet will none of them, and can too easily perceive, from the sad vantage of a position which finds no consideration amongst men, that they are all rogues or fools. He is ever ready to guide the king's fancy in a direction dangerous to them, and avenges himself for their contempt by exciting the light-brained, amorous Francis to new prey at their expense. We find him hinting to the king that the royal amours lack, perhaps in their facility, a zest which is desirable. Is there not a real conquest possible amongst the Court ladies?

> "But, sire, at times your Majesty must feel a void,
> 'Mongst all the dames around not to know one
> Whose eye says proudly No, whose heart in weaker tones
> Says Yes!"

A delicate touch, that, to come from such a deformed and abject being as Triboulet. So thinks the king, who asks sharply, "*Qu'en sais tu?*"—"What dost thou know of it, thou poor wretch? Thinkest thou no

woman in the world loves me for myself?" "Without knowing who you are?" demands Triboulet, incredulously. "Yes," replies the king, thinking to himself of the young *bourgeoise* in Bussy Alley. Triboulet, little suspecting that his jealously guarded daughter is the woman in question, infers with satirical assurance that she must be "of the people," and advises Francis not to meddle with the wives of the burghers, who "are not so easy to deal with on these matters as *les gentilshommes*,"—and finally suggests instead, "there is Madame de Cossé," a lady who had had a good deal of the king's attention at the ball. The king, however, has his difficulties. "There is the Count de Cossé," a jealous and somewhat uncompromising husband. "There is the Bastille," callously replies the jester. Francis cannot, however, make up his mind to that. "Well, make him a duke then," is Triboulet's last word.

There is a ferocious cynicism in the poor jester's speeches here; but bitter and inhuman as they are, we feel there is a sort of justice in them. In Triboulet's satirical wit the destructive egotism of the king and the debasing sycophancy of the courtiers, mostly only too glad to sacrifice honour for title and office, are reflected in their naked ugliness. The buffoon is within his right in speaking of them as they are. His coarse cynicism has the savour of salt in the corrupt refinement around him.

But there is a darker thread still to unwind in the heart of Triboulet. He has not been the mock of a

thoughtless world so long, without souring towards the good as well as the evil in it. He vents his hate upon the one as recklessly as upon the other; for, in the bitter enmity of his heart, he sees all men alike merciless to him. In the fifth scene the last black touch is given to the character of the Court buffoon. That scene shows us M. de St Vallier, an aged chevalier of ancient family, "*sang de Poitiers, noble depuis mille ans*," who has come, with his white hairs and clad in deep mourning, to reproach the king for the dishonour of his daughter, Diana de Poitiers. On his entrance, the old Count of St Vallier is greeted first by Triboulet, who, with a fool's licence, takes the word out of the king's mouth, and in an outrageous speech makes sport of the mission which has brought the indignant father to Court. The speech of the Count, who deigns to notice the jester's ebullition only in an incidental way, is a characteristic effort of Hugo. It is vigorous and direct. The passionate sense of dishonour in the old noble's heart pours itself out in a torrent of well-aimed invective and reproaches. But in him, too, the strong and harsh lines which Hugo loves in portraiture are noticeable. The reproaches are too well reasoned, the invective too sustained. We are made to feel that there is very much of the great *seigneur*, and very little of the father, in the speech. There is never a tremble in it, no sob or cry, such as is wrung from the heart when a deep chord of love is to pass out of it for ever. The stern pride of the aristocrat rings alone in every phrase. It is "Diana of Poitiers, Countess of

Brézé," with all her titles, that has suffered dishonour. For him his daughter exists no longer. "Sire," he says to the king,

> "I come not here to seek my daughter,—
> What shame has touched is henceforth nought of mine.
> Keep her."

Hugo has been at pains to set before us more than once the imposing ideal of manhood which the old aristocracy tended to develop. In the Ruy Gomez of 'Hernani' and the Count de St Vallier of the present drama, we see aristocrats of the grand *chevaleresque* type—men with a high sense of honour, and a strict though narrow ideal of duty, but defective in humanity. The sense of honour is based, not on the natural dignity of man, but on the pride of long descent and high rank; and the ideal of duty is a conventional one that belongs to themselves as superior to other men. In the drama of 'Hernani,' when King Charles insists with threats that Don Gomez shall surrender to him the brigand chief, who for the time has found hospitable shelter in his castle, the proud Spaniard takes the king to the hall where are ranged the portraits of his ancestors, and pointing to them one by one and enumerating their famous achievements in war and policy, asks if he, Don Ruy Gomez, the last of his race, is to stain the long lustre of this ancestral record by an act so dishonourable. But all that does not prevent the high-minded hidalgo carrying his implacable jealousy so far as to bring about the death of his ward and her

husband; and to satisfy his resentment, the fortunes of the noble houses of Silva and Arragon, united in Hernani and Doña Sol, sink into black night.

This severe and narrow ideal, as we see it in Don Ruy Gomez and St Vallier, enlarged by no ideas of humanity or religion, unsoftened by any natural sentiment, is what Hugo presents to us as the highest general form of aristocratic development. In both cases the same strong typical outline, in which all fine individuality is lost, gives that disagreeable prominence to the theoretic skeleton so characteristic of Hugo's art.

We have already seen what Triboulet is. Vile by nature, he is made viler by his profession. There is no single circumstance about him, inwardly or outwardly, which could give him any title to self-respect. In him, therefore, there is no adventitious help to virtue. If any ray of it shine forth there, it is of the purest, free from alien matter or motive. For, by decree of nature as by that of men, he is an outcast from humanity. No one happy gift to satisfy soul or sense has nature given to Triboulet. He does not share with men even their coarser pleasures or vices. He seems neither a lover of wine nor a miser. He stands an isolated and bitter spectator of the world around him. It is as he says to the king, "I laugh in my sleeve at the ball, at your games and your amours; my part is that of a critic, while you are at your enjoyment; you are happy as a king is, sire, and I as a hunchback may be." "Heureux—comme un bossu."

Triboulet sums up his unhappy existence in that phrase. So it seems at least. But the veil is to be raised that still hangs over a portion of this miserable and well-nigh inhuman life. On Triboulet's gloomy path through the world there fell once one bright ray—"rayon de paradis tombé dans mon enfer." A womanly soul had taken pity on him, and had found it needful to love him for his very misery and loneliness, and her love was that which had first brought light into his sombre existence. She died, passing away like what Triboulet might have thought a bright dream, but that she left behind her a daughter, his and hers, to preserve, Vestal-like, from utter extinction, the soft fire of love in the jester's heart. This daughter Triboulet keeps carefully guarded from the attempts of Court or city gallants, in a secluded dwelling in Bussy Alley. There, away from the jests and gibes of the courtiers, the bitter soul of the buffoon softens into something human, and even exhales itself, under the mild rain of filial caresses, in tears and tender fantasies.

Here the contrast between Triboulet the buffoon and Triboulet the father becomes a startling one. The same Triboulet who had no bounds to his mockery of the old Count de St Vallier's mission, who would have Madame de Cossé carried off and Monsieur sent to the Bastille, shows when in the company of his daughter a most delicate sense for the ideal of grace and maidenhood he sees in her. While with her he feels that there is a divine power in the world, and is constrained to appeal to its protection.

"O Dieu ! dans cet asile
Fais croître sous tes yeux, préserve des douleurs
Et du vent orageux qui flétrit d'autres fleurs,
Garde de toute haleine impure, même en rêve,
Pour qu'un malheureux père, à ses heures de trêve,
En puisse respirer le parfum abrité,
Cette rose de grace et de virginité !" [1]

Violent as the contrast is between the two aspects of Triboulet's character, we do not think the poet goes beyond nature here. In the outer world Triboulet has so little to hope or fear from men, is so little dependent on them for happiness or good offices of any kind, that he scarcely regards himself as of the race. They, the whole world in which he lives his life of buffoon, may despise him, but nothing of that kind can vex him further. Amongst them he is content with the *rôle* of a spirit of evil and malice. But the stoicism with which he confronts hazards there, goes to the ground before the thought of the daughter he loves. Here he touches a something infinite in life, and in her presence the lips of the hardened Triboulet move tremblingly in prayer, "Mon Dieu, merci!"

The weakness in the conception of Triboulet does not consist in the fact that there are two sides to his character, but in the harsh way in which these two sides stand apart in his soul. At length they are

[1] "Oh grant it, God, that in this spot secure
This graceful rose may bloom free from all pains,
From wasting winds of passion, from the stains
Of impure breaths, and even in fancies chaste,—
That her unhappy father thus may taste
The sweet delights of home which she perfumes."

brought together in an accidental manner. The young gallants at the Court of Francis, eager to repay Triboulet for many a malicious turn, discover at last the one spot where he is vulnerable, and think it a good joke to revenge themselves by carrying his daughter forcibly off to the Court, where she falls a prey to the violence and art of the king.

The next day the jester appears as usual in the ante-chamber, where the courtiers gather of a morning to await the appearance of the king. Triboulet, who is not without his suspicions as to the authors of his misfortune, soon divines from the behaviour of the young nobles that his daughter is in the palace, in the king's chamber indeed, at that very moment. He attempts to force his way in, but is withheld by the courtiers. In despair the jester then turns upon them with the savage and bitter eloquence of his tongue: "*Courtisans! courtisans! démons! race damnée!*" He reproaches them scornfully, "What need had you to take my daughter? Are there not lords enough ready to reach the good graces of the king through their wives and sisters? . . . Shame that the blood of Charlemagne, a Montmorency, a Pardaillan, the greatest names in France, should have stooped to rob a poor man of his daughter! . . . But no, it cannot be that descendants of these proud houses could have fallen so low. . . . *Vous êtes tous bâtards!*"

So continues Triboulet, with rage as if of a brute animal wounded, and throws himself again against the door of the king's chamber. But his force is exerted

in vain. "All against me!" he cries, the sobs now breaking through his speech. "O Marot"—turning suddenly to the maker of roundelays, who stands by, —"Marot, you have often made sport of me; but if you have still a soul, the inspiration of the poet, a heart that is with the people, under that livery, tell me where they have her! She is hidden there, is she not? Oh, amongst those demons! Let us make common cause; are we not of the people, and brothers?" But Marot can do nothing, if he wished, and the jester, with the agony of despair in his heart, turns in a last appeal to the courtiers: "See, my lords, I ask pardon at your feet. Have pity on me; I am ill. I would have taken the joke better another time; but, look you now, I have sufferings in my body that I do not speak of. One has his bad days, when one is so ill-made as I am. Many years now I have been your buffoon. I ask pardon, mercy! This poor Triboulet, who has given you many a good laugh! Truly, I don't know what more I can say to you. Give me back my child, my lords; give me back my daughter." And so the speech of the jester wanders movingly in his distraction.

We shall but briefly indicate the concluding scenes of the third act, in which Blanche, the jester's daughter, escaped in disorder—"*éperdue, égarée, en désordre*"—from the chamber of the king, appears. The subject is one which only the fine touch of the highest poetry can safely meddle with. Those who have read Calderon's drama, 'The Alcalde of Zalamea,' may compare what the soft grace of the Spanish poet's style has done to

cover a still freer treatment of a similar subject. Hugo wants much of Calderon's skill, but there is a finer reserve in the conduct of his drama. The delicacy in the poor buffoon's reception of his daughter is finely marked:—

> "Oui, pleure,
> Chère enfant, je t'ai trop fait parler, tout à l'heure
> N'est-ce pas? pleure bien. Une part de douleurs
> A ton age, parfois, s'écoule avec les pleurs.
> Verse tout, si tu peux, dans le cœur de ton père.
> Blanche, quand j'aurai fait ce qui me reste à faire,
> Nous quitterons Paris. Si j'échappe pourtant!
> Quoi, suffit-il d'un jour, pour que tout change tant!" [1]

On one side Triboulet is but the old type of French popular hero, *"le plébéien rusé,"* who plays his malicious tricks on great dignitaries and simple folks, of consummate wit and effrontery, without scruple or sense of honour, and never at a loss for lies and evasions. But in the nineteenth century a new democratic ideal of man has been reflected on him, and there are heights and depths in his consciousness which Panurge never knew. He has become at once worse and better. He is no longer at ease in his own character. The *rôle* of clever rogue does not sit lightly upon him. He has become morose, bitter, and

[1] "Yea, weep, my child;
But now I made thee tell too much, and foiled
Thy modest speech. Yea, weep, for at thy age
Oft sorrow doth itself with tears assuage.
Pour out thy woes then in a father's heart;
And, Blanche, when once I have performed the part
Which still remains to do, we'll quit this place.
What! in a day all things so changed in face!"

calculating in his malice. He works confusion and disaster, not out of mere *gaîté de cœur* and that he may have matter to laugh, but because he hates his position and the world that has made him what he is. Thus has this representative plebeian type been enlarged, and the transformation, and to some extent elevation, of the hopelessly immoral and undignified old popular hero been effected. Not that in Triboulet there is any achieved success, any numerical gain to the kingdom of good. Triboulet remains a very certain sinner still. It is but that there is some light where before was but deep darkness—light arisen in a soul thrown out from the great womb of being, so clogged by evil conditions that it might seem radically worthless and incapable of good, and the dissolution of the evil elements which mischance had brought together in its individuality the best fate it could meet. It is on such types of the outcast and the "disinherited" that Victor Hugo loves to spend the force of his genius, and with perhaps more success than would at first appear; for if his art loses much by being strained to fit a theory, or rather by its innate tendencies towards such contrasts, he forces us to consider anew what natural funds of good, on which we might found hopes of improvement, remain to human nature even at its worst. And in these days, when a thread of scientific fatalism is apt to mingle with our views on such subjects, Hugo's teaching is as opportune as it is true. Indeed it is essentially a revival of the purer traditions of Christianity.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEW TRAGIC PATHOS—INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENT ON DRAMATIC LITERATURE—GOETHE'S AUDIENCE—GERMAN CULTURE—HUGO'S AUDIENCE—PARISIAN COSMOPOLITANISM.

THERE is, no doubt, some truth in the objections Goethe was wont to urge against the work of the new French school. They began to declare, he says in those conversations which he held with Eckermann shortly before his death, the representation of noble sentiments and deeds tedious, and attempt to represent all sorts of abominations. Victor Hugo, in particular, he charged with the tendency to "afflict the reader with types of the unsupportable and hideous." Between the calm and philosophic artist, the scientific physiologist of humanity, and the impetuous, enthusiastic, mystery-loving poet of democracy, there was a natural antipathy. But it is curious to find the sage of Weimar making the same objections to Hugo's work which De Quincey was, just about that time, in his review of 'Wilhelm Meister,' raising against the Bohemian rout, crazy play-actors and harpers, and morbid womanhood, as the English critic looks

at them, which Goethe had introduced to the public.

The truth is, that Goethe belonged very much to the movement which he thus reprobated. Although stopping short at a scientific and artistic interest in these types of what is morally or physically deformed, he is never tempted, as Hugo is, under the influence of a moral idea to raise them into the region of the heroic or sublime. For the rest, the sublime is not native ground to Goethe. But the really remarkable feature in the new French literature is the change in the centre of interest. The tragic pathos which was formerly found in the fatal disasters encountered by lives naturally destined for a noble and triumphant career, is now sought in the painful struggle which beings, to whom fortune has left little but some inalienable instincts of the heart, have with their miserable destinies. The tragic interest lies always in the doubtful struggle of these primitive instincts, arriving at some consciousness of an ideal in themselves, to rescue the whole nature from the force of habit and the net of circumstances which an unhappy past weaves around a life. In Hugo's novels especially, this struggle of a soul combating darkly amidst the obscurations and hindrances which fate has crowded upon it, is powerfully put before us. From such an art we are not to expect the graceful ideals of classic literature, nor even the æsthetic limitations which were natural to Goethe's treatment of such matter. Its instinct and its intention were to extend the

domain of the beautiful and the heroic in literature; and in any view, its result has been to enlarge the range and increase the methods of art—and that means to enlarge our consciousness as to the value of life.

It is curious also to compare the external conditions under which the drama of Goethe and that of Hugo developed themselves, and which indicate the different influences at work on the genius of the two poets. The audience for which a poet writes may be more or less of an ideal one; but even when most ideal, there is always some local audience, which, scattered or assembled, vaguely known or seen face to face, reflects the character of that other, and counts for something in many a tone which will have grown obscure to other ages, and many an omission which time will have made into a gap.

Hugo's audience, though in some respects, as we have seen, critical enough, differed much in its culture and sympathies from that of Goethe. In Germany, Lessing, Herder, Winckelmann, and others, had formed in that theoretical and meditative nation a peculiar public, composed of literary and æsthetic coteries, which took their tone from the numerous centres of literary and philosophical activity spread throughout the country, at Halle, Jena, Berlin, and other places. It was a highly and comprehensively cultured audience, amongst which such masterpieces of the reflective drama as 'Tasso,' 'Iphigenia,' and 'Faust' arose —an audience whose lives were in fine sympathy with the intellectual struggle and subjective develop-

ment of life depicted in these works. The public for which Hugo wrote had, contrariwise, taken a greater part in the social and political movement of Europe than in that which was purely intellectual. It had a narrower sense in matters of art and literature, but it was cosmopolite in its social elements, and had the free and large life of a great European centre.

The audience for whom 'Iphigenia' and 'Faust' were written was, it has been said, everywhere at home except at home. The interests of Athenian art, the wisdom of the ancient Indians, all phases of the historical development of humanity which had found expression in great epochs of art and literature, the wisdom of Sadi, the wit of Lucian, the art of Sophocles, and that of the sculptor of the Laocoön, were familiar to it. But on the other hand, full as it was of new ideas and theories, with which Herders, Haamans, Baaders, and Hegels had inundated every domain of speculation, its contact was imperfect and unintelligent with the new pulse of life which had begun to beat in the social and revolutionary movements of Europe. It represented but the intellectual side of progress. Nowhere, on the other hand, did the practical and social side of the movement make itself felt so powerfully as in the country which had thrown up, in the successive eruptions of revolution, a Philippe Egalité, a Mirabeau, a Danton, and a Napoleon. France, which in point of literary activity was just then inferior to Germany, remained yet, as Goethe admitted to Eckermann, the most intelligent people in Europe. France

indeed is, and has long been, the nation which has shown most sympathy for social and political interests, not confined to its own horizon, but the common interest of Europe, and, with all its errors, has done most to assert the rights of humanity against conventions which had for centuries degraded men till they had become unconscious of their degradation.

It was not, then, in "these men of the *Globe*," whom Goethe, from the political darkness of a German principality, so much admired,—the *doctrinaire* party of Guizot and Villemain, who, under a formal political Liberalism, sought to suppress real questions of social progress,—that the hope or the strength of France lay. Goethe's mistake here was as profound as it was characteristic. It was in the work of the man whom he judged so severely that the greater traditions of France were to find their full representation in literature.

CHAPTER XIII.

LYRICAL POETRY—'LES FEUILLES D'AUTOMNE,' ETC.—HIS LIFE AND HIS POETRY.

During the years from 1830 to 1843, over which Hugo's career as a dramatic author runs, he had published at intervals four volumes of poetry, 'Les Feuilles d'Automne,' 'Chants du Crépuscule,' 'Voix Intérieures,' and 'Rayons et Ombres.' From these, far more than from the dramas, we can learn something of the mould the poet's mind was taking in these years. A reflective and somewhat sombre melancholy characterises the earlier poetry of this period. This mood might at first seem strange in one whose career had been full of successes, who at the age of thirty years, and in the spring of a robust manhood, had won almost all in the way of fame and happiness that the world has to give. But this plenitude and satisfaction of his ambitions only brought him all the sooner face to face with the profounder problems of life, and left him more leisure to reflect on the changes which time works within, more room for the feeling that the years take away more than they

bring. Within, in the way of hopes and affections, even of tender illusions, what has not been lost in this fast-flowing stream of life! His mother, the brave strong-minded mother to whom he owed so much—his father, that veteran in the campaigns of the Republic and the Empire—with many other friends of his youth, —sleep oblivious of his further career, as of all earthly affairs. His ancient ideals of Royalism and Catholicism, too, have departed, leaving but "poetic and religious" ruins behind them.

> "Whither so fast away, O youthful years?
> Quickly ye fly, with all youth's hopes and fears."

Sunt lacrymæ rerum is his cry. The flight of time and what it carries with it, the inanity of human hopes and ambitions sent to sleep in the tomb, are his meditations. The light themes of his earlier poetry, with its fantastic and romantic melancholy, have given place to the lines full of grave and meditative beauty, which welcome the return of a friend saddened by years and experience from a long voyage in the East, or those which chronicle the death of Rabbe, "Sévère historien dans la tombe endormi."

In looking over the poems of this period, the general impression we receive is that of a man in earnest meditation on the life around him as well as that within him, and using his art rather as an aid in this, as the instrument natural to his mind, than as an end in itself. *Songeur*, one may see, is his favourite word for this side of himself—a word well expressing the rapt

gaze he directs on things, and not without a hint, too, of the way in which his thought exhales itself in visions. The very variety of his themes indicates the moralist. He takes no care to manage his talent, but attacks all subjects—*quicquid agunt homines*—with the indifference of a philosopher for whom there are no considerations of art. He is a man of large and healthy nature, whose abundant faculty turns easily to every side of life—a mind capable of reflecting in its limpid depths the whole spectacle of human affairs.

But, on one side, we still feel a want in Hugo's poetry. The thought which it contains is not of potent quality. On the whole, it comes from a fund of ideas which are rather commonplace than otherwise. It is not well organised, and seeks the mysterious, unfathomable side of things, only to fall back foiled in the attempt to win a definite result from them. The best side of his thinking lies entirely latent in the descriptive power with which the things themselves are put before us. This descriptive power—and here we use the term in its widest sense—is of singularly fine quality, fresh, varied, and subtly penetrative. For the present one must judge of Hugo's profundity as an interpreter of life by this power, rather than by the more logical movement of his thought, which has had much less training.

In other respects the robust character of Hugo's talent is evident in the vigour and reality of his themes. He tends steadily to the real world of things, or at least to those aspects of them which are commonly felt and

have a universal interest. The territory of his genius is no nebulous region like that of Lamartine's, through which the poet's spirit cleaves, with delicate quivering radiance, a thin way of light for us, but the broad sunlit fields of the working world. His art is but the finer expression of the ordinary occupations and meditations of men. But the fineness of that expression makes him a potent moralist, even if a commonplace one. He notes the changes which other men have forgotten, the sudden growth of novelties which they have ceased to remember were not always there, the unheeded subsidence of things once great, the evolutions which Time is privily conducting through the portals of the days.

The cannon of the Invalides are silent when Charles X. dies in exile, forgotten by the capital where his fathers and he had ruled; but Hugo does not forget the descendant of the great Louis, and in verses that change and mix their strain as they recall the glories of Versailles, of St Cloud, and the Louvre, the stately homes of the Bourbon, "where a Corsican has sculptured his eagle," he sings the dirge of him whose last resting-place is not among the royal tombs in grey St Denis:—

> "Rien qui ne tombe et ne s'efface,
> Mystérieux abîme où l'esprit se confond,
> À quelque pieds sous terre un silence profond
> Et tant de bruit à la surface."

So often does he use this kind of theme, that one might think he was pleading with his mobile country-

men for more consideration for the men and traditions that pass so rapidly amongst them from reputation to oblivion. Now it is the destiny of Napoleon and the Arc de Triomphe that is his text, now that of Louis XVII. or Charles X., or the memories that gather round an old chateau of the times of Louis XIII.:—

> "O temps evanouis! O splendeurs éclipsées!
> O soleils descendus derrière l'horizon!"

Again, it is a word addressed to the rich and powerful, to the brilliant crowd that fills the ball-room of the Hôtel de Ville, to remind them that in this same city, away in the dark *faubourgs*, there is another population, ill housed and ill fed, savage and ignorant—a population that may some day have the fancy to inquire how its accounts are kept by its brethren of the State saloons.

At another time it is a message to the contemplative soul that has inward as well as outward difficulties to struggle with, such as we have in the poems of a meditative character addressed to Mdlle. L. B. (Mdlle. Louise Bertin, daughter of the editor of the 'Débats,' a lady of high culture and accomplishment)—poems which, though they seek to give reassurance and consolation, rather reflect the doubt and indecision in the poet's own mind at this time. These verses to Mdlle. L. B. are all of the same cast, and look as if they were a poetic summary of discussions carried into deep seas of thought, whence few, even of Delian divers, return with pearls in their

hands. *What can you believe? Âme, que croyez-vouz? —cette question sombre,* a question to which Hugo has no very definite answer. Just escaped from the traditions of a Church which has dogmatical solutions or suppressions of all the spiritual problems of life, he tends to regard any obscurity in which the ulterior destinies of men are shrouded as a malady of life. The poems of this time show him still in that grave monument of transition which weighed so heavily on the spirits of the time. To every man, indeed, there comes the time when the hopes and ideals of his earlier years, if they do not leave him altogether, lose at least that freshness and brightness which are about the dawn of things. The old enthusiasms may subsist, the old beliefs live on; but the enthusiasm and belief are modified by the knowledge that all truths must in time lose or change their meaning. To this age in particular, which a better acquaintance with the history of human affairs in the past has taught to put less absolute trust in the watchwords of their time, the reaction from enthusiasm is inevitable. For its larger horizon and deeper sense of life, it must pay with diminished faith and earlier resignation. Other ages have fought for the truths they had sight of, never doubting that they were eternal; but the great spirits of this epoch have worked valiantly on in doubt, and often in despair, with a growing consciousness of the inane at the surface of human things, of the fragmentary nature of the truths and creeds and parties that war together on the battle-field of the world—a con-

sciousness which has been but hardly balanced in the best by the sense of a deep divine travail below.

To Hugo, such a period had now arrived, and the scattered members of a sad-coloured philosophy may be gathered from these poems. To a friend who had returned from travels in the East he writes:—

"Ami, vous revenez d'un de ces longs voyages
Qui nous font viellir vite et nous changent en sages,
Au sortir du berceau.
De tous les océans votre course a vu l'onde,
Hélas! et vous feriez une ceinture au monde
Du sillon du vaisseau.
. . . .
Voyageur, voyageur, quelle est notre folie!
Qui sait combien de morts à chaque heure on oublie
Des plus chers, des plus beaux?
Qui peut savoir combien toute douleur s'émousse,
Et combien sur la terre un jour d'herbe qui pousse
Efface de tombeaux?"[1]

Sounding the abysses of life, he finds them unfathomable—as far, at least, as the destinies of the individual are concerned. The history of great and

[1] "You come, my friend, from one of these long voyages
Which make us old so soon, and change us to sages,
Our day not well begun.
Of each ocean your course has seen the watery waste,—
Alas! the furrow that your vessel's keel has traced
The world around has run.
. . . .
O voyager, voyager, what folly then is ours!
Who knows the memories that every hour devours
Of our bravest and best?
How quickly, who knows, our dearest griefs will pass?
Who knows the dead effaced by a day's growth of grass
On the grave where they rest?"
—*Feuilles d'Automne*, 6.

small, of Napoleon as of the day-labourer, is that of a dim struggle with half-visible powers, at the end of which Fate will write *Vanitas!*

"De quoi demain sera-t-il fait?
L'homme aujourd'hui sème la cause,
Demain Dieu fait mûrir l'effet.

. . . .

Demain, c'est le cheval qui s'abat blanc d'écume ;
Demain, O conquérant, c'est Moscou qui s'allume,
La nuit comme un flambeau.
C'est votre vieille garde jonchant la plaine
Demain, c'est Waterloo ! demain, c'est Sainte-Hélène ;
Demain, c'est le tombeau."[1]

Yet in this very element of uncertainty lies the spring of the highest human effort. Lessing did not put the case too strongly when he declared for pursuit rather than for possession of the truth. In the pursuit lies the real education and development of man. If we could see the white light of truth, which shines everywhere the same, the whole edifice of human civilisation, which rests entirely on the broken side-lights which reach man, would sink into the undisturbed repose of the Eternal. Unbelief is certainly

[1] "To-morrow—who knows what it will bring?
To-day man is sowing the seed,
To-morrow God's harvest will spring.

. . . .

To-morrow, the war-steed prancing o'er the plains ;
To-morrow, O conqueror, 'tis Moscow in flames,
A torch lit in the gloom.
To-morrow, 'tis the Guards that pass the Beresina ;
To-morrow, Waterloo ! to-morrow, St Helena ;
To-morrow, 'tis the tomb.
—*Chants du Crépuscule*. 2.

a malady when it means want of belief in anything that is required to make life useful or noble; but there is much to believe and hold fast although we may not be able to give a categorical answer to certain questions which Church catechisms resolve with such clearness and facility. From Moses to Goethe there is evidence enough of a divinity in life in which not to believe is fatal; but for the rest, the heavens will not fall though this or that *credo* crumble away. Towards some such conclusion Hugo is at times evidently tending, if we read below the plaintive emphasis natural to one who but a few years before had sung with full voice the rejuvenescence of Catholicism:—

> "Puisque Dieu l'a voulu, c'est qu'ainsi tout est mieux !
> Plus de clarté peut-être aveuglerait nos yeux.
> Souvent la branche casse où trop de fruit abonde.
> Que deviendrons-nous si, sans mesurer l'onde,
> Le Dieu vivant, du haut de son éternité,
> Sur l'humaine raison versait la vérité ?
> Le vase est trop petit pour la contenir toute :
> Il suffit que chaque âme en recueille une goutte,
> Même à l'erreur mêlée ! . . .
> Enfants ! résignons-nous et suivons notre route.
> Tout corps traîne son ombre et tout esprit son doute." [1]

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[1] "Since God has willed it so, it must be for the best ! More light, it may be, would dazzle our eyes. The branch that is too heavy with fruit often breaks. What should become of us, if God, from the height of His eternal being, poured truth in unmeasured floods on the human spirit ? The vase is too small to receive the whole, and for each soul it is enough to gather a drop, even mingled with error. . . . Children, let us resign ourselves, and follow our path. Each body brings its shadow with it, and each spirit its doubt."—À. Mdlle. L. B., Voix Intérieures, 28.

The spectres that haunt higher lives, and the woes and wants that wreck lower ones, are represented,—the former in poems to Dante ("Quand le poëte peint l'infer, il peint sa vie"),[1] to Byron,[2] of all English contemporary poets the most accessible to the Continental mind, and much admired by the Romantic school—and the latter by such psychological studies as that of the exhausted voluptuary, "Il n'avait pas vingt ans,"[3] or that of the joyless man of wealth, "À un Riche."[4]

Amidst those darkly coloured pictures of life we may notice where he finds consoling aspects. Like a nest fairly built and furnished on the barren side of the cliff, the domestic interior of the poet affords him a solid centre for a happy and active life. In such poems as "Je me fais bien petite dans mon coin près vous,"[5] "Pendant que la fenêtre était ouverte,"[6] and "Aux Enfants,"[7] we have a pleasant glimpse of him cheerfully at work under the domestic sunshine. To these influences, indeed, Hugo owes some of his finest poems. No poet has entered with such full sympathy and intelligence into the wonderland of children's life, its joys and miseries and fantasies, and none has touched so finely the tender chords which attach adult life to that infantile world.

[1] Voix Intérieures.
[2] Feuilles d'Automne, 11.
[3] Chants du Crépuscule, 10.
[4] Voix Intérieures, 19.
[5] In 'Les Contemplations,' but written before exile.
[6] Voix Intérieures, 9.
[7] Ibid., 22.

> "Le bruit joyeux qui fait qu'on rêve, le délire
> De voir le tout petit s'aider du doigt pour lire,
> Les fronts pleins de candeur qui disent toujours oui,
> L'éclat de rire franc, sincère, épanoui,
> Qui met subitement des perles sur les lèvres,
> Les beaux yeux naïfs, admirant mon vieux Sèvres,
> La curiosité qui cherche à tout savoir,
> Et les coudes qu'on pousse en disent: Viens donc voir!"[1]

English taste with the element of Roman reserve in it, may not follow him with pleasure in such poems as "Le Revenant,"[2] where he seems to rifle the maternal breast of its secrets; but when he brings together, as he has so often done, the extremes of age in the grandfather of many years, and the grandchild whose time in the world may yet be counted by months, there is a quiet felicity and depth in his work, a natural and perfect command of the subject, which makes his art here essentially distinct from that in his more laboured if more sublime essays.

He loves, too, to consider the refuge which the world of art provides for the contemplative nature of man. His thoughts go back to the early efforts of artists to express their sense of the spirit that moves

[1] "The joyous noise that throws one into reverie; the ecstasy
of seeing a very little man help himself with his finger to read;
the bright faces full of candour that always say 'yes';
the burst of laughter, fresh, sincere, unrestrained,
which brings of a sudden rows of pearls on the lips;
the fine ingenuous eyes admiring my old Sèvres;
the curiosity that would fain know everything,
and the elbow-push that the one gives the other, as he says,
Come and see!"

[2] Contemplations, 23.

in the world and in the soul of man. The mystery which the visionary eye of Albert Dürer—"the old painter, melancholy and meditative of spirit"—saw in nature; the music of Palestrina, ancient master in the universe of sound; the pastoral melodies of Virgil, "the master divine"; and in these later times the sublime statuary of David,—are expounded as revelations of the meaning which lies beneath the face of nature and the technical form of art. The function and source of artistic inspiration are everywhere the same. He knows the inner movements of most other arts as well as his own, and can divine the secrets of the master in music or sculpture, just as Handel can interpret for us the language of Isaiah, and drain with cunning alchemy the wild spirit of the Hebrew prophet into an orchestral score. Even Berlioz himself, the most eloquent of musicians, could not have described the mingling harmonies of the orchestra more finely than Hugo has done:—

> "Écoutez! écoutez! du maître qui palpite;[1]
> Sur tous les violons l'archet se précipite.
> L'orchestre tressaillant rit dans son antre noir,
> Tout parle. C'est ainsi qu'on entend sans les voir,
> La soir, quand le campagne élève un sourd murmure,
> Rire les vendangeurs dans une vigne mûre.

[1] "Listen, oh listen! at the master's measured beat;
O'er all the violins vague sheets of music sweep.
The orchestra's quivering laugh runs along the strings,
And from its corner dark some tiny clarion sings.
All has voice. So one hears in the country at eves
The laughter of the vintagers at work amidst the leaves;

Comme sur la colonne un frêle chapiteau,
La flûte épanouie a monté sur l'alto,
Les gammes, chastes sœurs dans la vapeur cachées,
Vidant et remplissant leurs amphores penchées,
Se tiennent par la main et chantent tour à tour."

And as the graceful scroll surmounts the pillar's height,
The flutes ascend in *alto* on their airy flight.
The sisters sweet of chords, guardians of melodies
Refill and pour their urns, veilèd from the gaze,
And linking hand in hand take up the chant in turn.
—*Rayons et Ombres*, 35.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS ON THE HORIZON—THE POET OF PARIS—CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS LYRICAL GENIUS.

FROM the examination which we made in the last chapter of the poetry of this date, it is evident that the period was one of much doubt and hesitation in Hugo's life. Art-problems had been partially disposed of; but grave social and political questions were thrusting themselves forward, and with regard to these his attitude is far from being finally adjusted. He has left the Old, but has not grasped the New with sufficient conviction. His sympathies are clear, but are not supported by any great store of ideas or principles. His career shows he is to some extent a man who waits in these respects, and allows certain problems to work themselves out in his life.

For one thing, the latter part of Louis Philippe's reign was not a time of inspiration or enthusiasm. The dynasty of the elder Bourbons, with its old aristocratic environment, had been swept away; but the most hopeful had to recognise that the ideal was as

far off as ever. The State was in the hands of men who were bent on obliterating every idea that belonged to the days of the Revolution,—the idea of the sovereignty of the people—the idea of France as the enlightener of Europe—the idea of social evolution. They were men of the *haute bourgeoisie*, closely connected with high financial circles, and studious of the sentiments of the Exchange. The farthest horizon of their views included nothing beyond peace at any price, and the prosperity of trade and of all who were fortunate enough to be connected with trade. They were careful to recognise and support the interests of every section of the great middle class—of the professions, the press, the university, the commercial circles, higher and lower. But beyond this, nothing. It was, as a clever Italian critic has said, the *bourgeoisie* form of the imperial *panem et circenses.*

In the midst of this general relaxation, Hugo, whose genius seeks always some great actuality to stimulate it, found a sort of subject in the idea of the great city in which he dwelt,—Paris with its triumphal columns and arches, its revolutions and imperialisms, its spectacles and phases, and particularly its great future as the centre of new ideals. But as yet there is no fiercely democratic note in his poetry. Look over these volumes from 'Feuilles d'Automne' to 'Rayons et Ombres,' and you will find nothing more definite than an occasional vague salutation to Progress or Liberty, and some murmurs about the mystery of life. The poetry of this period has less of the po-

lemical element in it than any he ever afterwards wrote. But for that very reason, it is the period of some of his happiest lyrical inspirations. His verse is less meagre in thought than in his early work, and is more melodious than in his later. There is more tenderness, more flow, and more grace. These volumes may be read with pleasure by many readers who have less sympathy with him in his austerer and profounder poems. It is a time of free poetic impulse with him, when he comes nearest the lyrical art of Lamartine and De Musset, with less fineness but more vigour and reality in his note. He is no longer the poet of Royalism and the Restoration, nor of Orientalism, nor even of Romanticism, at least in the fervent militant aspect it wears in his dramas; and he has not yet become the strenuous prophet of advanced ideals, the *vates* of democracy. At present, as we have said, he belongs in a special sense to Paris and the Parisians. He is the poet of the great city, brimful of its life and traditions, drawing his themes and his inspiration from its streets, the reflection of its humours and heroisms. He is Horace chanting the victories at the Metaurus and Actium, chronicling the passage of men and things at Rome, moralising its destinies, and singing its secular ode. Not since Horace sang Rome, and Dante Florence, has a great poet's life—and this holds true from end to end of Hugo's career—been more curiously interwoven with that of a great city.

And after all, the city is a great one. It has been

for more than one age the centre to which the eyes of men from all quarters of Europe have turned in hope or in apprehension. Doubtless to many well-disposed persons, to whom the roar of machinery and the thousandfold clanking of shipbuilding-yards are the most promising kinds of noise, London or Liverpool or Glasgow will seem more admirable places; and their repute, indeed, is that of cities more single-minded and devoted to the business of money-making—a business requiring much steadiness and order, and the avoidance of sudden changes. It is a favourite maxim with people of this turn, "Happy is the country that has no history." What wisdom may lie in this dictum we may leave undisturbed. The benefits of a quiet political life are not to be doubted. At the same time, it is true both of individuals and nations that it is in the storm and stress of their lives that the basis is aid of all that is great and enduring. It was no quiet period, that of England in the seventeenth century under her Hampdens and Pyms and Miltons; but it was then that the lines of political progress and constitutional freedom were laid down which she has followed ever since with success.

As for Hugo, although in these days his attitude is one of reserve and caution, and that of a spectator rather than an actor, he is too true a son of the Revolution to doubt but that all the turmoil and conflict will ultimately issue in a higher civilisation. On this furious maelstrom of parties and sects, where all currents of thought mix confusedly and strive for mas-

tery, he looks with anxiety, but with hope. He knows well the foibles of this city of revolutions, the weakness of this mobile and excitable "people of Paris"; but in their visionary programmes, their wild outbreaks on behalf of ideals that can be realised only in the slow processes of time, he loves to see the spirit of what is noble and good. He admires the lively and sympathetic intelligence which has so often stirred them to do battle, and not quite unsuccessfully, for mere ideals. Nowhere does the idea of the thinker so rapidly take root and pass into action.

In a fine poem, the fourth of the 'Voix Intérieures,' we see what colour the Napoleonic legend is taking in Hugo's mind, and how readily it blends with the democratic ideal of the city of Paris. The soldiers of "quatre-vingt-seize" and of "mil-huit-cent-onze" (1796 and 1811) are alike the offspring of Parisian ideals, the protest of Paris against the elder divinities. The first part of the poem moralises over the Triumphal Arch, whose lofty front is said to need only the legendary halo which time will give it to complete its glory. Then changing the meditative flow of the Alexandrine into a quick chant, the poet sings the city by the Seine:—

> "Oh, Paris est la cité mère![1]
> Paris est le lieu solennel
> Où le tourbillon éphémère
> Tourne sur un centre éternel!

---

[1] "O Paris! city maternal!
The sacred home of the storm
That rolls round a centre eternal
With a fury each age new-born.

Paris! feu sombre ou pure étoile!
Morne Isis couverte d'une voile!
Arraignée à l'immense toile
Où se prennent les nations!
Fontaine d'urnes obsédée!
Mamelle sans cesse inondée,
Où pour se nourrir de l'Idée
Viennent les générations!

Quand Paris se met à l'ouvrage
Dans sa forge à mille clameurs,
A tout peuple heureux, brave ou sage,
Il prend ses lois, ses dieux, ses mœurs,
Dans sa fournaise, pêle-mêle,
Il fond, transforme et renouvelle
Cette science universelle
Qu'il emprunte à tous les humains;
Puis il rejette aux peuples blêmes
Leurs sceptres et leurs diadèmes,
Leurs préjugés et leurs systèmes,
Tout tordus par ses fortes mains!

. . . . . .

O Paris! radiant star or fire clouded!
Sad Isis in her veil shrouded!
Arachne whose great web is crowded
With nations allured by thy light!
Fountain, whose urns ever well!
Mother, whose breasts ever swell,
Nourishing the generations well
With thy ever-flowing might!

When Paris is bent at her labour,
And her thousand-fired forge is in roar,
She seizes from the nations that waver
Their gods and their laws and their lore,—
Refounding and moulding anew,
Till a fabric riseth to view,
Built out of thoughts far brought.
She spurns before peoples affrighted
Their sceptres and diadems blighted,
In her strong hands twisted to nought.

Ville, qu'un orage enveloppe!
C'est elle, hélas! qui, nuit et jour
Réveille le géant Europe
Avec sa cloche et son tambour
Sans cesse, qu'il veille ou qu'il dorme,
Il entend la cité difforme
Bourdonner sur sa tête énorme
Comme un essaim dans la forêt.
Toujours Paris s'écrie et gronde.
Nul ne sait, question profonde!
Ce que perdrait le bruit du monde
Le jour où Paris se tairait."

Paris, a great bell-tower sounding the tocsin in the ears of the slumbering giant Europe!—one of those large images which our poet loves. Changing the strain again into slow quatrains, which foretell in sombre rhythm the decay which will overtake the great city in the ages to come, he sings the day when Paris shall send forth sounds neither of war nor of merry-making, and the noise of riot and revolution shall rise no more from her streets—when the Seine shall glide again through murmuring reeds, where her famous quays and bridges once stood,—the day when Paris shall take her place by ancient Thebes and Tyre,

City enveloped by the storm!
Day and night resound her drum and bell,
Waking giant Europe with alarm,
Who, whether he keepeth vigil well,
Or whether in slumber he drowses,
Heareth the tempest that browses,
As when winds in the forest are high.
Paris ever moans as one tossed.
Who can tell how much in the host
Of the world's great sounds will be lost,
When the voice of Paris is at rest?"

and the quiet dead Rome of the Cæsars. Then to the waste city, where some noble monuments of its greatness still stand, will come the wanderer of a thousand years hence, to meditate over her silence and ruins. Then perchance, in the dusk of evening, will a sudden gleam light up the summit of the Great Arch, and the eagle of brass asleep at the top will dress himself and spread his wings; and from sculptured arch and column the soldiers and steeds — soldiers of "quatre-vingt-seize" and "mil-huit-cent-onze"—will start to life, and sounding trumpets, charge victoriously as of old; and far in the distance, its cross gleaming through the darkness, Notre Dame will chant a vague *Te Deum.* A wild flight of fancy, no doubt, the romantic vein with lugubrious fantastic sentiment much in predominance. But other veins, too, are discernible, running like fine threads through the dross and ore of looser imaginations; the old classic vein, for instance, somewhat transformed, but retaining in its limpid simplicity of phrase and firm outlines something of the old strain. Look at this bit of modern classic landscape with which his poem to Virgil ends:—

> "Nous laisserons fumer, à côté d'un cytise,
> Quelque feu qui s'éteint sans pâtre l'attise,
> Et l'oreille tendue à leurs vagues chansons,
> Dans l'ombre, au clair de lune, à travers les buissons
> Avides, nous pourrions voir à la dérobée,
> Les satyres dansants qu'imite Alphésibée." [1]

This complexity of elements is a remarkable feature

[1] Voix Intérieures, 7.

in Hugo's genius, and remains with him, but in a softened and more finely assimilated state, to the end. A man of wide artistic sympathies, standing in a retrospective and imitative age, at the end of a long development of forms and methods of art, chords from many diverse worlds of poetry pass sounding through his song. More than most men, he requires time to fuse the different elements in his talent and reach his complete note. All the more is this necessary that his artistic faculty is little under the control of a co-ordinating power of reflection, but seems almost wholly natural, unconscious, fatal in its inner movement. He has an eye that takes in with fine observation the features of things, a command of large and striking figures, a facile and inexhaustible invention, "the pole-star of poetry," the spring of which with him lies less in logical or reflective connections than in a fine instinct and wide associative power for all analogies of sentiment, of colour, and form in the world.

For all its beauties, however, the poetry of this period has still many of the defects which we found in his work at the outset. His genius is so abundant that he is somewhat careless in the cultivation of it on certain sides. He abandons himself too unthinkingly to every impulse of fancy, and expands on lines of thought which please him, without any consideration for their place in the whole: he amasses details occasionally without sufficient selection and arrangement; one would say he never rejected a metaphor that met him on the way, unless, indeed, it were not

large enough. His powers are great, but his taste is so doubtful or so catholic that we are reminded of Schiller's saying—

> "Warum will sich Geschmack und Genie so selten vereinen?
> Jener fürchtet die Kraft, dieses verachtet den Zaum."[1]

He often falls into false sentiment, especially into the false pathetic; and once there, spreads and enlarges himself like a lake. But he puts everywhere beauties which may well redeem his worst poems. He has innumerable fine touches, fine lines, fine passages. His power of characterising things, real or ideal, of catching the vanishing gleam which this or that light throws upon their surface, is unrivalled. Look, for example, at the lines in which he describes one of his household gods:—

> "Car, ainsi que d'un mont tombent de vives eaux
> Le passé murmurant sort et coule à ruisseaux
> De ton flanc, O géant Homère!"

Or his picture of the Seine in its anticipated desolation:

> "Lorsqu'elle coulera la nuit, blanche dans l'ombre,
> Heureuse en endormant son flot longtemps troublé
> De pouvoir écouter enfin ces voix sans nombre
> *Qui passent vaguement sous le ciel étoilé.*"

As we have indicated, it is in the art of composition that his poems are defective. His manner of composition is large, grandiose even; but there is in the longer poems of this period an inward looseness of

[1] "Why are taste and genius so seldom united?
Strength frightens the first, the other despises the rein."

structure, a want of leading lines to support the masses of colour and ornamental detail which his fertile invention lavishes on every subject. Such poems are like great edifices, which at a distance are imposing wholes, with striking variety and originality of outline, but a little nearer betray conspicuous faults, until we come quite close, when, in the astonishing amount of fine sculpture in the details—from portal to finial everywhere the same lavish hand—we overlook some ungainliness in the proportions. In some of his shorter pieces, however, there is a wild lyrical inspiration which courses in one molten current from end to end. The love-song of Gastibelza, for instance, is a new Phrygian note, the very breath of ecstasy and passion, yet combined with crystalline clearness and delicacy of expression—a rare union of the romantic imagination of the North with the clear sensuous form of Southern art:—

> "Gastibelza, l'homme à la carabine
> Chantait ainsi;
> Quelqu'un a-t-il vu Doña Sabine,
> Quelqu'un d'ici.
> Dansez, chantez, villageois! la nuit gagne
> Le mont Falu;
> Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
> Me rendra fou."

But although we have in these volumes the work of a great poet, we have nothing that can be called a great poem—nothing that would fairly outweigh the contributions of Lamartine and De Musset to poetical literature. Partly this may have been owing to the

fact that in these years his best energies were given to the drama. But when we find that a few years after the publication of these poems Hugo's poetic productivity ceased, or almost so, for a lengthened period, it is evident that other and more permanent causes were at work — causes which, as they had affected the past, were to determine, in a large measure at least, the future.

CHAPTER XV.

DECAY OF THE ROMANTIC IMPULSE—DEFECT OF THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL—THE GREAT EBB—A FALSE POSITION—WEAK SIDE OF A STRONG CHARACTER—THE POET AND THE WORLD.

THE problem which exists in Hugo's life as to his apparent loss of creative power about this time does not stand alone. There can be no doubt that the impulse which the Romantic movement gave to literature decayed with singular rapidity. The poetry of the whole school was weak in what is properly called thought—that is, a well-organised fund of ideas controlling and fecundating the store of sentiments and impressions. The element of thought steadies and supports. An individual can have but a limited range of impressions and perceptions, and these wear like other things with use, and require to be continually renewed and deepened. Here thought, in the strict sense of the word, comes to help, effecting those slight changes of centre, of points of view, linking the progress of perceptions in one region to those in another, and thus refreshing the entire store. In the moral and psychological fields especially, a well-organised thought is one of the essential elements of great

poetry, and can keep, without much help from actual surroundings, the world continually new for a Goethe or a Schiller.

But the Romantic school, and the poets of this period in general, whether strictly of the Romantic circle or not, lived by sentiment and intuition alone. Their fund of ideas was insufficient; and when, in Hugo's phrase, the book of their heart was written on every page, which was soon done, they had nothing to do but confess themselves bankrupt—a confession which may be read in many a fine piece of work from these "Children of the Century." Here is one of many from Alfred de Musset:—

> "Jai perdu ma force et ma vie
> Et mes amis et ma gaîté,
> J'ai perdu jusqu'à la fierté,
> Qui faisait croire à mon génie.
>
> Quand j'ai connu la vérité
> J'ai cru que c'était une amie;
> Quand je l'ai comprise et sentie,
> J'en étais déjâ dégouté.
>
> Et pourtant elle est eternelle
> Et ceux qui sont passés d'elle
> Ici-bas ont tout ignoré.
>
> Dieu parle, il faut qu'on lui réponde;
> Le seul bien qui me reste au monde
> Est d'avoir quelquefois pleuré." [1]

---

[1] Here, too, is that of Antony Deschamps, which is not less from the depths:—

> "Cependant quand je songe à tous mes chers amis,
> Quand je vois a trente ans, ma pauvre âme flétrie,
> Comme un torrent d'été, ma jeunesse tarie,
> J'entr'ouvre mon linceul et sur moi je gémis."

In truth, the young men of that period had developed early, and were ageing with corresponding rapidity. Most of them had made names as writers and artists before they had attained their majority—names to which many of them added little or nothing in after-years. A work produced in the first flush of youth and the first fermentation of the Romantic movement, and after that little but lees.

> "Il combattit vaillant le combat romantique,
> Où sa lyre a frémi d'une héroïque ardeur."[1]

These lines from the epitaph of Antony Deschamps express the sum-total of many reputations which at one time promised much more. Even the greater talents entered upon their career with an access of enthusiasm and inspiration which did not hold out. One might say they took wing at a height which they could not maintain. Sainte-Beuve, whom in earlier days Hugo had saluted as a brother eagle, abandoned his pinions, and consented to become famous as a weekly critic; Gautier became the journalist that in other days he had regarded with disdain; and Alfred de Musset, although his vein was too genuine to run quite dry, was only a more gigantic specimen of the crowd of geniuses, "with a fine career behind them"—Deverias, Deschamps, Borels, Gérard de Nervals, Boyers—whom the ebbing of Romanticism left stranded. Even Lamartine in later years seems to be but pain-

[1] "Bravely he fought the great Romantic fight,
Where his lyre resounded with heroic ardour."

fully raking amongst the ashes of a fire slowly burning out:—

"Un poëte mort jeune à qui l'homme survit."

The more solid genius of Hugo alone revived, after a decade of silence, under fresh inspiration, and putting forth new powers with the years, clarifying and strengthening its multiform force, shone ever more brightly to the end.

But it is evident that Hugo, too, felt the drain. We have noticed the want of large and procreative thought in his work. It was not that he quite wanted faculty in this respect—he has great theorising power—but the very abundance of his impressions and intuitions has made him neglect its development. Hence in the poetry of this time we feel the presence of no deep synthesis. He has no great combinations, and does not go beyond the first bound of his thought, or at most only a series of bounds. Like many of his contemporaries, therefore, when he had written off his earlier impressions, he probably found himself a little out of work.

A man of Hugo's power, it is true, could have renewed and refilled himself, as he afterwards did, by the studies and discipline of a contemplative life. He had this advantage over most of his contemporaries, that his life, energetic and well ordered, was never of a kind to waste its flame. The sources of a new growth of sentiment and perception lay uninjured in him. But, for a high contemplative development, his circumstances were, in our opinion, rather unfavour-

able than otherwise. In the very amplitude of life in this great city there is something retarding to his highest growth. In many respects Paris has been serviceable to him. Placed there as in a watch-tower, in a great centre of European life, where all manner of men and ideas find a welcome, his was indeed no narrow environment out of which a gifted nature instinctively struggles. The difficulty for Hugo lay rather on the other side, in the immense effort required to rise above the pressure of a society great enough to give even its temporary ends and aspects a sort of grandeur, to overcome the fascinations which life there presents, with its endless variety of interests, its great political and social currents, its academical and popular distinctions, and that fine art of lionising (*l'art de célébrer*) in which Joseph de Maistre declares the Parisians excel. In short, Paris is not without danger for Hugo in these days. Its great social and political life threatens to absorb even his powerful genius, by drawing it into a sphere of minor and temporary ends.

This is Hugo's weak side. He is by no means content to be merely the great artist working in the shade of the Muses; he is avid of fame, and will not let the smallest prize pass him. He would be at once the disciple of Virgil and Dante, and the rival of Dumas and Sue on the *boulevards*. There is more loss than instruction in the sight of a great poet struggling for Academical titles, knocking twice, thrice, four times at the door of the Academy—as if a green border on his

vestment and a *fauteuil* even in that weighty assembly could add any real distinction to the author of 'Hernani' and the 'Voix Intérieures.' In Paris, no doubt, the Academy is a great institution, but does not cast its shadow far into the outer world; and Victor Hugo is a citizen of the ages, and ought to comport himself as such. Since 1836 he has thrice canvassed for admission to this institution of letters, and thrice been rejected—first for M. Dupaty, then for M. Molé, then for M. Flourens. At length in 1841 he succeeded in finding votes sufficient to make him a member. In 'Victor Hugo Raconté,' a biography written by his wife, and probably much inspired by himself, a sort of apology is made for these proceedings, which seem somewhat ignoble in one whose professed aims were so lofty, and whose real career lay so far above these Academic rivalries. It is there stated that his aim was to open a way for himself to politics, and that in the Academical honour he only sought the necessary avenue to the Chamber of Peers, the only parliamentary arena where the electoral law of France then allowed a man of his means to figure.

It is well to have an explanation in this case; but in these matters the whole career of Victor Hugo has but one tale to tell. The truth seems to be, that in this man, otherwise strong enough, there is something akin to a child's love of applause, a child's joyous expansiveness in the favour and approbation of others, an undue craving for the outward marks of honour and esteem. All these have been his so long. From

childhood upwards almost one long triumph — *Io triumphe dum procedit victor*—all the first prizes of life, the most coveted, the most enjoyed, caught at a bound. But Nemesis, although slow of foot, is on the road. Distinction he has won easily. Command, greatness, being higher things, are sold dearer, and require new training. Envy is assailing him, he complains. "The mouth of the friend which once smiled now bites." He is drifting right into the centre of the mass of struggling ambitions, which, like pent serpents, twine and revolve round each other in this city of Paris, and he is aggrieved to find that men will give him no more credit for disinterestedness, for pure love of the ideal, than they are conscious of in themselves—that they see personal ambition in his grand theories, vanity and egotism in his enthusiasm. Practical men will smile at him as a visionary, and make sport of opinions couched in the language and accents of Isaiah. For there is no wisdom of the serpent in him; he exposes his weak side—his foibles—as ingenuously as he insists on his merits. How naively in after-years he will complain, in his exile at Jersey, of being excluded from the public gaze:—

> "Dans une île en lutte aux eaux sans nombre,
> *Où l'on ne me voit plus*, tant je suis couvert d'ombre."

On this side he has no cautious reserves, none of the decorum other men are careful to observe in the exhibition of their feelings. He is perhaps too conscious of strength and fundamental sincerity to be careful in these respects. He trusts with the simplicity of a

child to the honesty of his meaning, and looks not too closely for other elements. He clamours with filial affection that his father's name be inscribed amongst those of other French veterans on the Arch of Triumph, where Napoleon had omitted it. In the meantime he will repair the wrong, he declares, by inscribing it on the dedicatory leaf of the 'Voix Intérieures'; and he closes his poem on the Arch—that fine tribute to the ideal genius of France—by two lines, in which he says he regrets nothing before its sublime wall but "*Phidias absent et mon père oublié*" (the absence of Phidias and the omission of my father).[1] After all, in that part of the preface where he touches on this subject, he declares that "he acts as any other one would act in the same situation. . . . It is merely a duty he accomplishes, without noise, without anger, without astonishment. Nor will any one be astonished to see him do what he does." "*Personne ne s'étonnera non plus de le voir faire ce qu'il fait.*"

This self-consciousness of a great poet made haggard, we fear, by the thought of celebrating biographies and the general gaze of popular environment, is a characteristic spectacle of our century. Everything that touches him is raised into undue prominence, and receives a significance which time alone confers or denies in such cases. He is constantly expounding and theorising himself; and his expositions in this kind have not the same excuse as Goethe's, which were made in old age, and are cool and instructive

[1] The father's name has since been inscribed.

analyses of his motives and methods, the work of a scientific student of life, who takes his own work only as the most convenient object for experiment and illustration. In those prefaces which are so prominent a feature in this part of Hugo's life, we are apt at last to tire of this continual assertion of the purity and greatness of his aims, this constant theorising of himself on the same line with Homer and Æschylus and Shakespeare, this grandiose treatment of facts which have often only a temporary or purely individual significance. He takes an attitude, and makes a strong speech on the impulse of the moment: in his ardour he raises a question of the day into the importance of a world-crisis. How plaintively, for instance, in his preface to 'Le Roi s'amuse,' he reflects on a Government that, by interdicting his drama, have forced him into a political attitude, have obliged him to defend his rights by instituting a law process in the interests of justice and public liberties! They have forced him, he cries, into a political *rôle*,—"have forced an artist to quit his task—his conscientious, tranquil, sincere, and profound task; his task of the past and the future; his holy task which he would not have left for an instant, and much against his will, to mingle, indignant, offended, and severe, amongst the irreverent and railing crowd that for fifteen years have regarded, with laughter and hisses, some poor devils of political hacks who imagine they are building a social edifice because they trot with memorandums in their hands between the Tuileries and the Palais

Bourbon. And who is the man on whom they have put this injury? Who is the man whose drama they have suppressed on a pretended charge of immorality?" Hugo will tell us. "He is a man of known honour, tried, proved, and established—a rare and venerable thing in these times. He is a poet who would be the first to revolt at any theatrical licence. He is an artist devoted to art, and who has never sought success by unworthy means."

These are Hugo's own expressions. We add nothing. Such language shows a want of balance in Hugo's life. We have the high-wrought imagination of the poet, the fantasies of the student of the ideal, carried into an arena where they must vulgarise themselves to be understood. The secret of much that is indecorous in his speech and life lies here. In general, the thinker or artist is more suited for the part of a spectator than that of a partisan. He has the capacity of living for great ends, which only slowly evolve themselves from the confusion of temporary interests and ambitions; and while he keeps this high ground of vantage, he can judge securely the men and affairs of the day. He can work wisely for that which is too remote and ideal to move other men to action; but for that very reason he has rarely their power of making a temporary profit out of the issues of the hour. The destinies of humanity work forward in a series of petty scuffles, where the great principles which lie beneath the surface are equally ignored by contending parties. The thinker, whether he be poet or philosopher, who

gives to these underlying truths their just prominence, is looked upon as a visionary and dreamer. The centuries will probably show he was right, for they carry Cæsar and his fortunes ever safely. But what men, except in times of unusual enthusiasm, desire, is a solution for the hour—a mode of living with some difficulty which has begun to cry aloud, and by no means to attempt the hazardous feat of bringing their life and surroundings into harmony with what they believe in their hearts. Much rather, and far more frequently, do they attempt the reverse process, that of bringing their beliefs round to the interests of their circumstances; and one has constantly to note the fatal power of this tendency over men made for nobler things. Poets and philosophers, then, stand best at some little distance from the arenas of life, where they have inward freedom for the wise survey and calm judgment which we expect from them. They alone conduct the strategical movement of the ages, but they had better leave it to others to lead the battalions into the fray.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DECADE OF SILENCE — SEEKING AN ACTIVE CAREER — SAINTE-BEUVE'S 'CHRONIQUES PARISIENNES' — PONSARD'S CLASSIC DRAMA—A NEW FIELD.

THE result, however, of the various pressure, inward and outward, on Hugo's life at this time, was a resolve to make such a fundamental change in his life as was implied in seeking a political career. A decade of ardent and continuous literary work which had placed him in the front rank of contemporary literature, is succeeded by a decade which is all but lost to his literary life. In the last published volume of his earlier poetry, 'Les Rayons et Ombres,' there are signs that he is already contemplating the change. He is to quit this high vocation of the artist, this "holy task —task of the past and future, tranquil, sincere, profound"—to become an orator at the tribune and *homme politique.* He has discovered that there is egotism in the poet who holds himself aloof from the political arena. Shame, he cries, on the thinker who is content so to mutilate his life!

> "Honte au penseur qui se mutile,
> Et s'en va chanteur inutile
> Par la porte de la cité."[1]

Is he not rather the very man, Hugo asks in the preface to the same volume, whose far-seeing vision can best pilot the ship of state through troubled times?—"especially if he be one who has hitherto kept himself free from all immediate contact with the Government and the political parties—who has no engagement, no chain, which might prevent him acting freely for the general weal equally with king or people. For such a poet-politician there might be great work—*un grand œuvre.* Following the inspiration of his genius with a heart full of sympathy and a countenance filled with peace, he would come alike as a friend by turns to the spring on the plains, to the prince in the Louvre, to the proscribed in their prison." In short, Hugo seems to be forming some ideal of an active career in which the parts of a poet, a privy councillor, and a sort of state-prisoner philanthropist might be harmoniously united,—an ideal, perhaps, not altogether impossible for a man to whom long years of great work should have given a high and undisputed authority as of a *pater patriæ*, or father of his country, but not to be thought of in connection with one whose attitude and tendencies were still a problem to most, and even to himself—who had still much to do before his idea of the world, and his power of unfolding it, could be thoroughly developed. The very manner of the pro-

[1] Rayons et Ombres, I.

posal, with its effusiveness, its want of prudent reserves, is a sufficient augury of the success it would be likely to have. Like much of this date that belongs to Hugo, it bears the stamp of a mind sanguine, full of energy, conscious of great powers, but very far from having arrived at a true knowledge of itself or of the conditions under which it may do its best work.

Doubtless, in the state of literature at this time, and in the growing distaste of the public for his later dramas, we may also find some explanation of Hugo's readiness to abandon the field of literature, at least for a time. Hugo is not a man who would be content to write for posterity alone; he must have an immediate and appreciative audience. When his dramas,—which had long been his chief stimulus, bringing him as they did in close contact with an everyday public—a real, visible public, whose applause could be heard and understood by all men,—began to lose favour, Hugo seems to have found no sufficient interest in the inward organisation of his literary powers. It seems as if he was weary of the exercise of a mere talent which, in the absence of an immediate operation on a Parisian public, had for him no ideas or ends of significance in themselves. It could not quite be so, and yet there can be no doubt that the want of sufficient success at the theatres did much to make Hugo, a poet whose finest powers were by no means dramatic, transfer his energies from the literary to the political field. A few notes, therefore, about the fiction-reading, theatre-frequenting public of Paris at this time—

1842-43—drawn mostly from the gossipy 'Chroniques Parisiennes,' which Sainte-Beuve wrote for the 'Revue Suisse,' may not be uninstructive.

Hugo's dramas, as we have said, are on the whole losing favour with the great public. A curious change has taken place in the ranks of his supporters. The boxes, now that his reputation is so far established, are more favourable than the pit. Actors, managers, and reviews are now with him, but the ordinary public is indifferent. 'Ruy Blas' succeeds in a way at the new Théâtre de la Renaissance, but much less than the new Comic Opera, which is running with it on alternate nights, and to which the charming Madame Anna Thillon is drawing all Paris. Hugo determines to make one great stroke more for the public attention, and writes 'Les Burgraves.' 'Les Burgraves' is an entirely new style of drama, of large grandiose outlines, dealing with the half-legendary times of baronial wars under Barbarossa. There are great epic figures of the Emperor, and gigantic patriarchal counts of the Rhine, difficult to make lifelike to a Parisian audience. 'Les Burgraves,' represented March 1843, is not a success. "Beautiful," writes Jules Janin in the 'Débats,' which is bound to praise, "but above all, solemn." "In good French," adds Sainte-Beuve, commenting on the other's judgment, "wearisome."

A great actress, too, is making the classic drama popular again,—Mademoiselle Rachel, whose grand style kept alive for eighteen years the taste for

classic tragedy, and was the cause, according to Gautier, of the failure of the Romantic school to develop successfully the new drama in France—an opinion which is surely not worth noticing, except as reflecting in a small way the contemporary chatter of the journals on such subjects. Old French tragedy, then, is being revived with great success.

About this time, too, a young and unknown man from the provinces arrives in Paris with a tragedy, 'Lucrèce,' modelled somewhat on the severer style of the old French dramatists, and without a preface, as Sainte-Beuve maliciously remarks. 'Lucrèce' is played six weeks after 'Les Burgraves' with complete success. Every one deserts Hugo for Ponsard, and the young provincial is dined and feasted everywhere till he is in danger of losing his head.

Corneille come again—Corneille *retrouvé*—is the word in the *salons;* and even Cousin proposes that the Academy's prize for the best tragedy, a prize which had been long in abeyance, should be awarded to the new dramatist. The French *esprit* exhales itself in epigrams against the Romanticists. "*C'est une rentrée dans la langue Française*" (a return to the French language) is the contribution of M. de Barante. Even Sainte-Beuve, not given to overflowing, judges the new drama to be "a noble return to the severer muses." Nor, on the other side, are the Romanticists behind in witticisms. "*C'est du style vielli,*" pronounces De Vigny; "*il mérite un accessit.*" Nothing but Roman and Greek tragedies will take just now

with a public tired of the extravagances of the new school, and somewhat debilitated with sensations. Classic tragedy accordingly comes in floods from Madame de Girardin, Latour, and others. Some of the Romantic writers even attempt a sort of counter-classicism, a revival of the real old Greek tragedy. MM. Vacquerie and Meurice, close friends of Hugo, translate the 'Antigone,' of Sophocles for the theatre, and have also their fortnight's success. The wind blows towards Greece for the quarter of the hour, reports Sainte-Beuve to his Swiss editor. That clear-judging critic, with his spiritual cynicism, looks somewhat contemptuously at the frothy state of literature in these days; and his notices to the 'Revue Suisse' bristle with sarcasms. He dislikes the Romantic school for its extravagance and want of measure, and finds the neo-classics dull and wanting in original force. "*Exoriare aliquis,*" he sighs. If some one would arise!

But the great success in these days is neither Hugo nor Ponsard, but Eugène Sue, who is at present publishing his 'Mysteries of Paris.' The 'Mysteries' have an immense vogue, not only in Paris but in the provinces. All literary reputations are for the time overshadowed by that of Sue. Parisian society, especially the feminine part of it, seems to divide its attention between the *feuilleton* where Sue's novel appears, and the great criminal trials, the process Danon-Cadot or the process Lacoste, the subject-matter in both being much akin, and the style in the hands of a good

advocate not dissimilar. "Où va tout cela?" asks Sainte-Beuve. "What is all that to come to?"

Such is the temporary environment of the literary man in Paris at this time, in a high degree frothy and insignificant, as indeed most environments regarded in their temporary aspects are. Voyaging in such latitudes, Hugo had need of less sensitivity to immediate public opinion, of more regard for his eternal surroundings, and less for those of the hour. Otherwise, what fate is before him, strong as he is, but to be the prey of that nausea and relaxation of spirit which have overtaken all the finer spirits in these times? Even Sainte-Beuve, by nature somewhat of a caterer for the tastes of the hour, and collector of *salon* criticisms, has at bottom too good instincts to live without protest in this atmosphere, and is finally constrained to wrap himself up in a sort of artistic cynicism or indifference. His life may go with the current, but his fine judgment and critical candour would look beyond to the greater horizons.

Hugo, then, yielding to a pressure which came from various quarters, began to take refuge in the thought of a political career, supplemented by steady routine work in his chair at the Academy; for he is a man of much energy, and must always be occupied. He had been made an Academician in 1841, and four years later Louis Philippe made him a peer of France, so that the Tribune now lay open to him, and, as Madame Hugo says in 'Hugo Raconté,' a new existence.

BOOK II.

POLITICS—*THE COUP D'ÉTAT.*

CHAPTER I.

LITERARY POLITICIANS IN FRANCE—CHATEAUBRIAND—LAMARTINE—HUGO AS POLITICIAN—FATE AND TENDENCY.

IN these days the leaders of French literature seem to be smitten with a general craving for political distinction and the triumphs of the Tribune. The destruction of the old political fabric by a series of revolutions had opened up avenues by which men of a popular talent in oratory or literature might easily reach the highest offices of state, or wield, outside of the ministries, an immense political power throughout the country. Things had drifted out of the old grooves before new channels had been fixed for them. It was a time of transition, when the barriers mostly of usage and tradition that separate the different routes of ambition scarcely existed. More than that, it was a time of struggle and experimental effort, when every strong element in the national life seemed called upon to assist directly in a new unification of political elements. The old ruling caste had been broken, and the new class of professional parliamentary politicians had

not yet an organisation and a body of traditions which could command the respect of the nation. Hence every man who had in any path won a distinction which could give his opinions weight with the people was of exceptional value to the Government. In the absence of a strong and purely professional class of statesmen, the best elements from the legal profession, from literature, from science, from the university, from the financial circles, were drawn into the political world. Thus of the three great names in the literature of this period—Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Hugo—it was the fate of each to become successively conspicuous in the political history of their time.

Chateaubriand had been the first to seek in a great literary talent a means of political advancement—to make it, in fact, the basis of a political career. Even under the first Napoleon it had speedily won for him a diplomatic position; but he was not long in discovering that under the military despotism of the First Empire a literary man had only a very secondary part to play, and the unjustifiable execution of the Duc d'Enghien gave him an opportunity of deserting with all the honours. In the very nick of time, when it was essential to popularise the Restoration in France, he had published a pamphlet, 'Bonaparte and the Bourbons,' in which he exhausted all the resources of irony and sarcasm in describing the first revolutionaries, "that mob of half-naked kings, in all the dirt and debasement of indigence, deformed and distorted by their work, with no virtue to recommend them but

the insolence of misery and the pride of rags. But they at least," he continues, "had the semblance of noble ends in their cause, of which even the pretension was wanting to the despotism of Napoleon. . . . We only accepted the Empire because we were ashamed to recall the son of St Louis." Louis XVII., judiciously overlooking previous fugitive pieces from Chateaubriand in a different strain, pronounced the pamphlet to be worth an army, and when he ascended the throne appointed the author ambassador to Sweden. Until 1824, when he was Minister under Charles X., he continued a pure Royalist; but when his restless vanity and disregard of anything but his own interests as a figure in the political world made his dismission a necessity, his attitude through the years that followed took every shade of political opinion. After the Revolution of July had sent the elder branch of the Bourbons into exile, while he continued formally to acknowledge the son of the Duchesse de Berry as his king, he sought popularity by intimate alliances with the leaders of Constitutional or even Republican and Democratic parties. He had been successively a supporter of the Empire, an ultra-Monarchist, a Constitutionalist on the side of the king, a Liberal on the side of the people, and in these times has a sort of illicit connection with the Democrats, holding mysterious conclaves with Lamennais and Béranger. He pays visits, however, to "his king" in London all the same. He died a few years later, just at the Revolution of '48, a restless, discontented, vainglorious man, who had

dissolved the fine genius within him in a series of brilliant but unsubstantial performances. He was, however, perhaps the best writer of French prose in these later times,—in his earlier works of a style at once simple and majestic, mostly surpassing the matter—the mark of an ill-regulated talent which went to waste with the years.

Between the career of Chateaubriand and that of Lamartine there is in general outline a considerable resemblance. Like the older author, a great work, 'Les Méditations,' produced at the commencement of his career, and never surpassed by later efforts, had made his reputation, and gained for him an auspicious entrance into the diplomatic world, where his promotion was rapid. Like his predecessor, also, a sort of satiety of emotions and experiences in European society seems to have driven him to travels in the East in search of new colours and forms of life. On his return he commenced to take a prominent part in politics, mostly in opposition to the frigid constitutionalism of Guizot, and the policy of repression and resistance. In these times he is much heard of in letters and pamphlets, tribune orations and public addresses—is advocating a great scheme of a journal of the masses, in whom he at present thinks lies the true moral power of the nation. He was of a loyal, generous spirit—extravagant rather in his language and methods than in his aims—more sincere and chivalrous in his relations than Chateaubriand, though, like him, aiming always too much at making a figure

in grand situations,—a constitutional Monarchist by principle, but popularly inclined by his sympathies with a people susceptible to oratory. For Lamartine is a great orator—perhaps one of the greatest in improvising talent. He has a marvellous eloquence, ready for all occasions—marvellous in its power of solving or evading for the time all difficulties, of soothing all susceptibilities, of holding forth hopes and flattering ideals, of tracing grand programmes and ennobling expedients of the day by presenting them under the outlines of a great policy which is to reconcile the ideal with the real, dignity with expediency, —the utterance of a highly sympathetic nature which instinctively seeks to satisfy every clamouring and agitated interest as far as speech can satisfy it. Drawn rapidly by the popularity he had so long courted into the Revolution of 1848, Lamartine went to bed one day a professed Monarchist, and re-entered it the next a Republican leader. During the stormy months that followed, he made a conspicuous figure as a sort of mob-orator for the Provisional Government. But his popularity was short-lived, none of the great parties feeling sure that their particular interests were safe in his hands; and after an unsuccessful candidature for the Presidency of the Republic in 1851, when there were but 8000 votes in his favour against the hundreds of thousands registered for Louis Napoleon, he withdrew from public affairs, to end his brilliant career in poverty, and what for him was oblivion. He had the bitter fate, says a French writer, to see his

part finish before his life—"*de finir avant de mourir.*" Sainte-Beuve describes these literary politicians wittily, and not without truth, as "geniuses out of work, who take to politics when their youth is gone, and become illustrious citizens for want of something better to do." "Accordingly," he says, "they seek, before all, emotions and *rôles.*"

As for Hugo, who, third of the great literary chiefs of France, entered the political arena, we must keep in mind that it was only after a long and absorbing career in literature, and when he seemed to have worked out and exhausted all the impulses at the root of his literary activity, that he thought of throwing himself into the war of politics. Years ago, when Abbé Fraysinous had sought to engage him on the side of the Clerical party, his answer had been a clear and resolute No. "*Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ.*" If he seeks the other sphere now, it is, as we have seen, largely owing to that defect in his training and culture which makes him unable to find new veins of thought, new ideals for inspiration, unless in close contact with the actual life around him. The want of the philosophical element in him had made him unusually dependent on his surroundings. To the last his conceptions have difficulty in getting beyond the currents of Parisian life, the circle of Parisian thought, Parisian interests, Parisian philosophy of the world's doings. His work is in great part a large idealisation of the Arc de Triomphe, of Notre Dame, of Parisian politics, the *salon,* and the *boulevard*

theatres, and the part he himself plays in all that. It is fortunate for him that these are mostly important elements in European civilisation, otherwise we should have had but chronicles of the parish.

For the career of an active politician, however, Hugo's qualifications were evidently not of the best. He appears not to have sufficiently considered the difference between the audience which listens, in its calm and reflective moods, to the written speech of the poet, and that which, racked by contending interests, and fully alive only to the immediate and practical issues of questions, awaits the orator at the tribune or public platform. Paris was not the best place to teach him the distinction between the silent but profound approbation of the one, and the tumultuary applause of the other. There have been poets who would have been able statesmen, because they could have readily altered their speech and methods, and even shifted the plane of their thoughts, to suit the difference of their situation. But Hugo carries into the one arena all the arts and methods which he has learned in the other. He becomes involved in the ordinary ambitions and interests of the day, but he still speaks with the accents of one delivering oracles, and believes himself inviolable as a priest of Apollo. He has nothing of that prudent reserve in which ordinary men, who deal with others as antagonists and rivals, learn to intrench themselves; he has nothing of their hardly learned science in pursuing ends by the indirect line that leads safely through the conflicting interests, the jealousy and opposition, of

others. That unguarded style of self-dilation which he has acquired in literature, may be pardoned in the poet, but becomes foolishness in the politician. He wants patience, and is eminently incapable of seeing things from any point of view but his own—and his own is generally of that aspiring kind which needs skilful presentation before a practical assembly. He had, it is true, those great qualities which will gain for their possessor distinction and even authority anywhere. Intellectual resources of an uncommon kind, sincerity, fidelity to his principles, and indomitable persistency, were his; but, for the arena which he had chosen, his defects outweighed his virtues—and Hugo was never able to make any figure as a practical politician. For such a man there may be a field in politics, but it is assuredly not the parliamentary one. It is a higher. He may, as Mazzini did, keep alive in times of depression the better traditions of his country: from his independent station he may influence and raise its destinies more securely than if he were in the trammels of office; but he will never govern Ministries or political assemblies.

Such, indeed, in the end, was the destiny in store for Hugo. His life, which at present hangs problematical between conflicting tendencies,—almost, we might say, without a central impulse or aspiration strong enough to make it productive,—found, after ten long years of waiting, a work which called forth all its reserves of strength and capacity—which reconciled its diverse and apparently incompatible demands, and set it in a

great light before all Europe. The events of 1851, which tested so severely all the elements of French society, found Hugo ready to cast in his lot with the persecuted remnant that for the time represented what of truth and courage was left in France. He had his reward. From the time that he chose his side, his genius took a higher wing. His new position sundered him at once from all the weaker and worse influences of the Parisian world. It concentrated his energies and his ambition. It gave him the stimulus and supplied him with the materials which he required; and in the later period of his career he became, by the simple fact of his having followed the truth without compromise, the poet, not of Paris or France alone, but of popular effort and aspiration all over Europe. In such matters there is a guidance by faith and intuition, which is at least as good as the guidance by reason. Had he calculated the effect on his life of his adhesion to the party of protest against the Second Empire as deeply as Goethe would have done in the same situation, he could assuredly have done nothing that would have contributed more to his development or to the satisfaction of his highest ambitions; and he might very probably have done that which would have contributed less:—

ὄυποτε τὰν Διὸς ἁρμονίαν
θνατῶν παρεξίασι Βουλάι.

CHAPTER II.

POLITICAL SURVEY—THE *BOURGEOISIE* AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS —HUGO'S ATTITUDE.

At this stage in Hugo's life, where it is evidently drifting rapidly towards the troubled waters of politics, it may be well to glance at the historical sequence of events in France, and note the condition at which they are arriving.

In the month of July 1830, Hugo had been quietly working at his novel of 'Notre Dame,' when the sound of the tocsin and the rumble of artillery-waggons on the streets told him that revolution was once more abroad in Paris. For a day his house was blockaded by the military arrangements of the combatants. On the next the soldiers retired before the revolutionaries, and Charles X. slowly and reluctantly took his way into exile, while the representative of the younger branch of the Bourbons was preparing to take his seat on the vacant throne.

The rough work of that revolution had been done by the democratic bands from the *faubourgs*, but the

fruits were gathered by the leaders of the *bourgeoisie.* These latter had been incensed enough by the aristocratic domination of M. de Villèle to give the rising their support, but on its successful termination they were somewhat alarmed at the inauspicious ease with which a revolution could be effected. They had beaten the aristocrats, but they felt they had given the democrats a lesson and an example in revolution. "Moi aussi," said M. Royer-Collard, "je suis des victorieux, triste parmi les victorieux." They were therefore more than ever determined to maintain the charter under which the elder dynasty had ruled, and the balance of political power which it made between the various classes in the State, with as little change as possible. They had no love for Republican ideals. They were mostly men who, like Royer-Collard and Guizot, admired the constitution of England, and the balance of political power which held its ground there. In calling Louis Philippe to the throne, they did not appeal to the popular suffrage—a step which would have given the new monarchy a character which they particularly wished to avoid—but arbitrarily selected him by agreement amongst themselves. The policy of their Ministries therefore became, especially under Casimir Périer and Guizot, a policy of resistance and repression, as it was called—that is, of resistance to all ideas of social and political development, and of severe repression of any movements in favour of the same,—a policy of immobility.

The contest which terminated in the Revolution of

July had been one between the interests and pride of the aristocracy and the interests and pride of the *bourgeoisie;* and when the latter had won the victory, they were not disposed to make any changes which would encroach on their political power as a class. To develop an educational system outside of priestly influence; to secure for the various middle-class professions—for lawyers, journalists, and merchants—the leading part in the government of the nation; to foster the interests of the great commercial circles from which they drew the majority of their supporters; to develop and liberalise the university, the legal profession, the Bourse, and all other great *seminaria* of their class,—these were the natural and in themselves laudable instincts of the *bourgeoisie* Ministries. But these form but a single plane of the national interests. Within, there was the question of social development, bringing with it many other questions affecting the economical and industrial interests of the country, and seriously threatening in particular the favourite middle-class doctrine of unlimited competition. Without, there was the great question of international relations, of the attitude which France was to take amongst the nations of Europe, and where she was to throw the weight of her sympathy, her diplomatic influence, and, if need were, her military power, amidst the conflicting interests of dynasties, races struggling for unity, insurgent populations, Monarchical and Republican parties. Both of these were questions with which a Government which saw all things from the

standpoint of the interests of the *bourgeoisie* was ill fitted to deal. The first it met by a blind policy of resistance and repression; to evade the second, it invented or borrowed the principle of non-intervention, which was merely a cover for a loose and somewhat timid opportunism in foreign affairs. In the higher sphere of statesmanship the *bourgeoisie* Governments —which, after all, are the best we can have in these times—have not yet got beyond a disguised materialism. They lack principle and character. They initiate nothing, but are ready to make compromises with everything that establishes itself.

For a time our poet seems to have conceived high hopes of the new Government. In the poem to "Young France," written a fortnight after the events of the Three Days, he hails "*un siècle pur et pacifique*"—a pure and peaceful age—and a magnificent future for France, as the leader of political and social development in Europe. But these illusions were soon to pass away. What Republican writers call the narrow views, the selfish instincts, the policy at once timorous and tyrannical of the new Government, soon became apparent, and in 1832 we find Hugo saying that "it is profoundly sad to see how the Government of July is ending—*mulier formosa superne.*" From that utterance, however, something is to be deducted, it having been made in a moment of irritation caused by the suppression of 'Le Roi s'amuse.' But throughout Hugo's writings other evidences of dissatisfaction are not wanting. In the war of factions and party in-

terests—"a chaos without rays," as he describes them —he does not find reason to side heartily with any. He sees the blindness of the ruling politicians, the inutility of their constitutional cries, in face of the greater social problems that seek solution. In the preface to his 'Philosophical Reflections,' written in 1834, he touches the centre of the matter when he says, if he were a politician he would commence by demanding one thing, the substitution of social for political questions. He marks the selfishness of the governing class, absorbed in amassing riches—of their leaders, lost in a struggle of personal ambitions and rivalries.

"Givers of place," he cries, "receivers of place, petitioners for place, and retainers of place. . . . It is a pity to see all these people who put a tricoloured cockade round their domestic pot. Hazard and intrigue, coterie and lottery." They are doing little, he thinks, to meet the needs of the ever-increasing masses in the way of education, discipline, and a better social life. To the brilliant assembly that dances away the midnight hours at the State balls of the Hôtel de Ville he recalls the other face of Parisian life, the dark *faubourgs* lying forgotten in their indigence and misery.

But neither is he an uncompromising supporter of the clubs and the democrats. He fears the fierce excesses of that hydra of the dens of Paris, were it to raise its hundred heads again in the streets. He dreads to hear amidst these continual struggles the

drum of the *émeutier*, the insurrectionist, sounding through the city, to be surely answered by the volleys of the Ministry's cannon. The doubtful elements in the democratic party make as yet a strong impression on his mind. Among its representatives there are still some foolish enough to speak as if they were equally hostile to culture and morality in general as they are to Pope and King, and who seem to make of it, as Hugo somewhat bitterly said in one of his earlier writings, "a war of all those who have neither money, nor ideas, nor virtue, against all who have any of the three." The time he considers to be one of transition, of preparation for a republic which shall be a definite social construction, and not a mere political form. In the meantime he "conscientiously accepts Louis Philippe as his king."[1]

Hugo may thus be considered at this date as a sort of constitutional Monarchist, such as there are at present many in France,—a constitutional Monarchist until some better form become possible.

[1] *Vide* 'Hugo Raconté' and 'Journal d'un Révolutionnaire.'

CHAPTER III.

THE MONARCHY OF LOUIS PHILIPPE—GUIZOT—*BOURGEOISIE* DOMINATION.

FROM the beginning it was improbable that the monarchy of Louis Philippe should take any deep root in the national life. A king who was formally presented to his people by Lafayette as the best form of a republic (*voici la meilleure république!*), and apologised for by Thiers as a "*roi qui règne mais ne gouverne pas*" (a king who reigns but does not govern), must have seemed somewhat of a mockery even to himself. It was a monarchy poised between contending factions and classes in the State. It could not look for support to the ancient traditions of kingship, now indeed well-nigh extinct; and the conduct of its political advisers, so far from strengthening or extending the popular element in it, drew it into bitter conflict with all the ideas represented by the progressive and Republican parties. It stood for no great principle or tendency with which the French nation could identify itself. Its theory and its practice were steadily opposed even

to the most moderate opinions of the party whose energetic action had paved the way for its establishment. The workmen who fought in the Revolution of July at the Porte St Denis and the Marché des Innocents, were led by journalists and politicians who taught them to cry "*Vive la Charte!*" but they understood little of the issues that lay in that cry. It was the sight of the tricolour, the old pride of imperial France, and the vague hope of better times, that brought the Faubourg St Antoine to the help of the alarmed middle class whose interests were in danger; and when the men in blouses had done their work, they were sent back to their dens, and a great era of trade and finance, of colossal fortunes and parliamentary rule for the middle class, began.

The weakness of the origin and position of the new Government was felt equally in its home and foreign policy. In the latter, the action of the Ministers was dictated by dynastic considerations which pressed hard upon Louis Philippe. He had to purchase, by diplomatic concessions, the support of England, and to manage the scarcely veiled hostility of the autocratic Powers. Hence, to a nation which regarded itself as having a mission to support the sacred ideas of Liberty and Progress wherever they appeared in Europe, the timorous foreign policy of the Government, and its rather ignoble application of the principle of non-intervention, were disappointing. The Republicans chafed angrily at Belgium lost to French influence and to the roll of European republics; at the treat-

ment of the Spanish insurgents; at the abandonment of Italy—delivered, said Garnier Pagès, expiring to a congress of diplomatists; and Frenchmen of all parties felt humbled when Poland fell, unsupported in her last desperate struggle against the Russian autocrat. For, in spite of all her errors, the support of France, even if it go no further than sympathy, is a strength to every suffering cause in Europe; and in one way or other that fact has always found an expression in the best Frenchmen. "*Dors, O ma Pologne,*" Lamennais sang in his dithyrambic prose, "*en ce qu'ils appellent ta tombe! Moi, je sais que c'est ton berceau.*" [1]

The task of governing France was indeed at this time a difficult one, and the ablest statesman might have failed to satisfy the democratic party in the matter of government and reform; but the man who in the last years of Louis Philippe's reign guided the policy of the State, was not in the least disposed to try. In Guizot the policy of resistance and repression found its ablest representative. Of grave and sober character, given to serious studies of the constitutional historical kind, and disposed always to appeal to the practical and moderate instincts in men, the character of Guizot has an appearance of solidity which contrasts favourably with the excitement and extravagance of many of the men around him. But beneath an exterior ordinarily calm and prudently disposed, there lay more egotism and vanity, and a

[1] "Sleep, O my Poland, in what they call thy tomb;
But I, I know it is thy cradle."

more bitter depth of prejudice, than are often found in demonstrative types of men. The prejudices and passions which were not allowed to colour his style and language, sat none the less enthroned in his heart, and directed his thought and action. With inflexible dogmatism he was bent upon working out one kind of balance of forces in the State, when the real centre of social power demanded another. His intellect—keen, clear, and precise — could distinguish the external political aspects of things, and classify them with great ability, but was feeble in dealing with the more undefined moral and social forces which underlie them. Hence he was a better commentator on remote ages than those nearer his own. His knowledge of political solutions and equilibriums in the history of the past, seems to have helped to make him slight ideas which were not fully represented there. In these trying times he sits intrenched behind a fortress of historical learning, like the Professor of History that he was, blind to new needs, impregnable to new demands,—a man of integrity, capacity, and culture beyond most politicians, but hopelessly out of sympathy with the great forces around him. Sceptical Sainte-Beuve and republican Caussidière alike pronounce him the Minister the most antipathetic to the national spirit that France has ever had.

Does the cry go that France is in danger of a *bourgeoisie* domination ? Guizot searches his historical repertory, and comes forward with his reply. It needs, he reasons, a conquest of force or faith to found a dominant

class: the history of all times and peoples proves it. But the *bourgeoisie* is capable of neither kind of conquest; therefore it cannot found a dominant class. In short, the reasoning here is simply, to use his own formula, "*l'histoire n'offre pas d'example*" (history has no instance of such). But what shall we say of the power of money and monetary interests—of the careful infiltration into the nation, through *bourgeois* professors, jurisconsults, *littérateurs*, of economical and social ideas, which are certainly not distinctive either of the aristocracy, or the Church, or the proletariat in France, but in many ways opposed, or believed to be opposed, to the interests of each of these? In whose hands does the electoral law of 1817 put the political power? Whose interests rule in all these great institutions which form and guide the public opinion? Indeed, at this time France is governed mainly by three professors—Guizot, Villemain, and Cousin. The university, the colleges, the Academy—philosophy and grave literature—internal and external departments of State—are all much under their influence, and partly under their actual sway. Where does the centre of all that power, be it neither a conquest of force nor of faith, lie? What occult power is it that excludes on the one side men like Lacordaire and Ravignan, and on the other men like Lamennais and Comte, from all titular authority in the education of the nation, and makes them wandering, and in the case of the latter irresponsible, disseminators of thought? It is doubtless an

opinion that their teaching goes beyond the safe line of a public instructor. Guizot speaks in severe language of the immorality of Comte's ideas on the occasion of the latter having come to him to propose a public chair for a general history of the sciences.[1] But the opinion that excludes men of all these types is distinctive neither of the aristocracy who would readily install the one class, nor of the lower classes who would readily install the other. It is really a mark of the fact that middle-class ideas and ends rule in our educational system and institutions, as they rule in the legal and financial worlds—and to such an extent that we can scarcely now conceive of these as existing under other ideas. It was not a middle-class Government that made Goethe a Privy Councillor, or gave Fichte a Chair, or offered one to Spinoza. A middle-class Government would be incapable of such doings. The domination of the *bourgeoisie* has its good side—civilisation owes much to it; but it is none the less a domination more subtle and far-reaching than the domination of either kings or aristocracies has ever been in Western Europe.

[1] Guizot's Memoirs, vol. iii.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHURCH AND THE CONSERVATIVE *BOURGEOISIE*—PROGRESSIVE POLITICIANS—PARLIAMENTARY DIFFICULTIES—THE REPUBLICAN AND RADICAL FORCES—BLANQUI, PROUDHON, LAMENNAIS, ETC.

In the France of this time, however, rule according to the exclusive ideas of a *bourgeoisie*, as conceived by Guizot, is not an easy matter. On every side the Government has to keep at bay hostile forces, which represent ideals more or less at variance with the policy of the *juste milieu*, or "golden mean," favoured by the Ministers. Catholicism in its hierarchy holds somewhat aloof, and sells its neutrality dear. It has no great esteem for the official religion of Cousin, and protests in a quiet but persistent way against the limitations which the *doctrinaires* would put upon its authority. At heart it looks upon them as a milder species of free-thinkers. Lacordaire, in his letters to Madame Swetchine, expresses the higher Catholic opinion when he describes them as "a Government whose men and principles are ambiguous, and mingle a drop of poison in almost everything." Legitimism

also, led by the eloquent Berryer—one of those orators whom God sends to console a lost cause, says a Republican writer—has not quite forgiven its defeat, and makes dashes now and again, though without real hope of victory.

But the chief danger lay in the growing strength of the Radical parties,—parties who could scarcely be said to agree in much else than in their common doctrine of the "sovereignty of the people," as it was called, in contrast to the theory of the *doctrinaires* that the king's right rested on dynastic inheritance, and although limited by constitutional rights, owed nothing of its legality to popular election or sufferance.

Within the Chamber these progressive parties were represented by a strong *côte gauche*, or Left Side, led by Odillon Barrot, Lafitte, and others; and also by a more advanced section of Republicans, headed by Garnier Pagès and Arago. Between these and the Government, the Centre proper, there was the *centre gauche*, or Left Centre, where M. Thiers was usually found,—a party not differing much in its principles from that of the Government, but more inclined to make concessions to popular demands, and coalescing sometimes to the right hand, sometimes to the left. The various moods of Conservatism ranged themselves on the right side (*côté droit*), extending from a section that gave the Ministry a cordial support, into ever darker shades of inflexibility and opposition.

That section of the Left which really represented the opinions of the *bourgeoisie*—the section headed by

Barrot and Lafitte—were at heart in favour of constitutional government under a monarchy, but they sought a better representation of popular ideals and tendencies than Guizot and his party were inclined to grant. They had not, at least at first, shown themselves violently disposed against the new *régime*, but had been content with demanding from the king a policy of conciliation—"*politique de confiance*." This Louis Philippe, it must be admitted, had done his best to give them; but the subdivision of the *bourgeoisie* and their leaders into different sections, warring more for place and power than for principles, frustrated all his efforts. He had tried in vain every kind of Ministry and every kind of combination, in order to make a Government strong enough to secure respect. In 1837 he had tried a policy of concession, represented by the Ministry of M. Molé; but a coalition, in which all the great rival politicians—Guizot, then in the Right Centre, Thiers of the Left Centre, Barrot of the Left Side, Garnier Pagès of the Republicans, and Berryer of the Legitimists—were united, had overthrown the Ministry. Then, after various combinations of Left Centre and Centre proper, of Left Centre and Left Side, all unable to make themselves permanent, he tried a Cabinet of mediocrities under Soult—a Cabinet in which all the greater politicians were left out, their rivalries (*grands amours propre*), as Louis Philippe sadly remarked, beginning to make all Ministries impossible. This forlorn expedient could ill succeed, even temporarily; and after trying for a short time a Ministry under M.

Thiers, with the Left Side as its basis, he again fell into the hands of M. Guizot—after all, the strongest man he could get—who at least conducted him with dignity and a sort of sublime obstinacy to his fall.

In such a condition of parliamentary politics there was no good augury of stable government for France: a Chamber majority kept together by fears and temporary interests, by bribes and political shuffling—the whole a broken crust which the first strong impulse from below would throw into confusion.

For years the Republican party, of little note under Charles X., had been steadily increasing in numbers and power. Its force was but poorly represented in the Chambers; but outside it comprised men of all ranks and callings—men of letters, men of science, journalists, artists, political philosophers, professional agitators, artisans, and workmen. Above the lowest revolutionary stratum of the *faubourgs*, that want and misery, more than anything else, induced to rise at the call of the demagogues, there was a mass of higher workmen, mechanics, artisans, and suchlike, men of some education and intelligence, interested in literature and the sciences, cultured enough to appreciate and covet the refinements of life which they saw in the higher grades of society, and inclined, therefore, to join any movement which they thought would bring these more easily within their reach—a class dangerous to the Government by its mobility and susceptibility, as well as by the intelligence which it brought to the rank and file of the advanced Republicans.

Amongst these, too, were to be found men who meditated much on political and social ideals, and whose action had, as its mainspring, noble even if impracticable ideas of progress and higher civilisation; and in their ranks socialistic philosophers of all types—Fourier, Leroux, Proudhon, Louis Blanc—found devoted followers. Besides these, there lay in another stratum of society a strong contingent to the Republican cause, a miscellaneous host of journalists, professional men, club-leaders, and practical organisers of all shades and gradations of political opinion, from fine Republicans like Armand Carrel and Marrast, to Communists and club-orators like Cabet and Barbès,—such a collection of quick-brained, excitable, intelligent political enthusiasts as only Paris could produce—men to whom, as Louis Blanc says, the brilliant intellect, the cynical wit, and chivalrous contempt of danger which had distinguished the old French aristocracy, seemed to have descended. Some there were, however, of grimmer aspect—the terrible Blanqui, for instance, darkest of revolutionaries in the eyes of industrious Parisians, a possible Catiline, hanging, with innumerable forces of desperadoes from the *faubourgs*, like a thunder-cloud over their heads: not so bad as he seems, however, according to the testimony of more moderate men like Lamartine.

Above the general mass of revolutionaries, partly stimulating and controlling it, but occasionally carried along by its impulsive movement, were men of such European note as Proudhon, violent in language and

doctrine, the author of fierce sentences seasoned for the democratic palate, a disciple after his manner of the new German logic, the sworn foe of sentiment and poetry, a thoroughly characteristic type of the earlier stages of democratic philosophy; Louis Blanc, of more culture and training, high-souled, mingling the ideal with the practical, earnest on the question of the organisation of labour, and bitter against the doctrine of unrestricted competition. Here, too, we may count our old friend Abbé Lamennais, now become the apostle of the proletaries. He has grown ever sterner in his language towards all the dignitaries of the world, whether they derive from Pope or King—has lost belief in all the kinds of rule and rulers he sees about him—and in these times is especially severe on the plausible eclecticism of Cousin and the kindred politics of Guizot; he has lost faith in everything indeed, except in an indestructible fund of virtue in "the people,"—a virtue which he ascribes not to any exceptional humanity in them, but simply to their position. "*Classe exploitante et classe exploitée!*" he cries, as he looks upon the social organisation. So thought Luther as he rode through the forests at Wartburg: "*Hounds and hares!*" But Luther did not attempt to make that synthesis of the doctrines of Christianity and social organisation, the want of which Lamennais regards as the main defect in the constitutions of Europe, and has set himself to supply.

Such were the nature and extent of the forces which made the Revolution of 1848 possible. The Govern-

ment of the Conservative *bourgeoisie,* wanting the support both of the ideas of the Church and the aristocracy, and those of the Liberal and progressive parties, had no foundation in the national life; and when the emergency came, it naturally lacked that confidence in itself and its principles which alone can inspire a representative Government to vigorous and decisive measures. On the one side is a blind, and latterly vacillating, policy of resistance; on the other, a combination of interests which, opposite as they were, had been equally vexed and irritated; and below all, an impulsive democracy working up gradually for a storm under the winds of wild doctrine, which orators of all kinds, from Lamennais to Blanqui, are letting loose upon it. Yet Guizot still thinks that if the *bourgeois* and the *gentilshommes* —the middle class and the nobility—could unite their forces, there were an end of revolutions, but has to admit that the jealousy of his ordinary *bourgeois* followers is too great to make that combination possible.[1]

[1] See Guizot's Memoirs.

CHAPTER V.

REVOLUTION OF FEBRUARY — THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE "PATRIOTS" — LAMARTINE'S ELOQUENCE — 'L'ÉVÉNEMENT.'

In February 1848 the storm which prescient eyes had seen gathering burst suddenly enough upon the Orleans dynasty, and the monarchy of Louis Philippe, which had had the support of none of the great forces that give long life to institutions, went almost undefended to the ground. As in the Revolution of July 1830, the work at the barricades was done by the lower masses of Republicans; and now, as then, when the victory was gained, that portion of the *bourgeoisie* which had united its forces with the Democrats found themselves in a somewhat embarrassing situation. But this time the Republicans were more on the alert to secure the fruits of victory; and Thiers, Barrot, and other leaders of the constitutional opposition, who at first thought, when Guizot resigned, that they had overthrown the Ministry while preserving the constitution, found that the democratic forces were beyond their control. Paris continued barricading, and the spirit of

the insurgents increased, till all hope of saving the dynasty was at an end; and the Royal family, with the terrible traditions of the first Revolution in their minds, fled the country—Louis Philippe to England, and the Duchess of Orleans with her children across the Rhine to Ems. A Provisional Government was then established, in which Lamartine and Garnier Pagès, Ledru-Rollin and Caussidière, represented various shades of Republican opinion. Then in its turn the new Government began to experience the difficulty of satisfying the often extravagant and impracticable hopes which the success of the insurrection had excited amongst the extreme parties. The club-leaders aspired to rule the situation; democratic and socialistic agitators, from all parts of France, hurried to the capital to reinforce, by their presence and harangues, the elements of insurrection — stormy petrels shrieking in the wind, and dipping their wings joyously in the rising billows of revolution. Patriots and apostles of liberty from every country of Europe—Germans, Poles, Italians, Irishmen —appeared in Paris to support the claims of their respective nations. Excited deputations from the clubs and the workmen come to harangue the members of the Government in the midst of their official work; occasionally, too, ragged St Antoine itself, distrustful of all leadership, streams through the streets, fiercely and inarticulately tumultuous, to do its own mission to the statesmen at the Hôtel de Ville. It was in these days that Lamartine became, for a short time, a conspicuous figure in political history. As Minister of Foreign

Affairs in the Provisional Government, he had the difficult task of soothing the distressed patriots from oppressed nationalities, and their sympathising friends in France, on the subject of the international relations between the new representatives of France and the other Governments of Europe. In general, indeed, his eloquence was the only weapon which the Provisional Government in its earlier days possessed to disarm the tumultuous congregations of Democrats that daily threatened to disturb the security of the new order of things. But the steadier forces of the nation soon began to make their power felt. The National Guard rallied firmly to the support of the moderate party, and order was maintained till the general election for the National Assembly on 27th April, when the vast majority of deputies of moderate and constitutional opinions put an end to all hopes of domination on the part of the Socialists and advanced Democrats.

The condition of affairs in 1848 seemed to Hugo a fit occasion for securing a more prominent position in politics. He had been elected to the National Assembly as one of the deputies from the department of the Seine. His votes in that Assembly were those of a moderate but Liberal politician. His advice to rulers had constantly been to occupy themselves more with the actual social condition and requirements of the masses,—"that great and laborious class where there is so much courage, so much intelligence, so much patriotism—where there are so many useful germs, and at the same time such dangerous fermentations." But he

was opposed to the socialistic programmes for the organisation of labour, to the national workshops, and he supported measures against the Radical clubs. He did not consider the time ripe for the schemes of the socialistic reformers; and while intimating that he had sympathy with their ideas of progression, and especially with their championship of oppressed nationalities, he generally gave his support to the anti-democratic party, except in such questions as the laws for the regulation of the press and the abolition of the penalty of death, on which he had long held advanced opinions.

With the view of extending his influence, he also at this time founded a journal ('L'Événement')—amongst the editors of which were his two sons, Charles and François-Victor; so that now his political opinions had a double expression, at the tribune and in the press. But notwithstanding his popularity at the elections, Hugo found that he had little influence with practical politicians. In vain did 'L'Événement' preach the comprehensive doctrine that the poet, as a man of the highest faculty, was equal to all demands, and at least as capable of political functions as successful merchants and lawyers. Hugo was too little of a party man to win the confidence of leaders or followers. But France was on the eve of another revolution, and events were taking a course which drew him into close alliance with a party towards whom he had hitherto held an attitude of reserve, if still of sympathy—the party of the Democrats.

CHAPTER VI.

LOUIS NAPOLEON MADE PRESIDENT—THE PRESIDENT'S AMBITIONS —HUGO'S ALLIANCE WITH THE *LEFT*—ORATIONS AT THE TRIBUNE—THE PRESIDENT'S ALLIES—PREPARATIONS—THE *COUP D'ÉTAT.*

In 1848, Louis Napoleon, the heir to the traditions of the Imperial throne, had, under the protection of the newly founded Republic, re-entered France. He had made a Republican profession of faith, and had been elected to the first Assembly. In a time of doubt and disorder, the number of his adherents had rapidly increased; and when the Assembly resolved that a general vote of the people should substitute a regular President as head of the Republic in place of the temporary dictatorship of Cavaignac, he was one of the candidates. General Cavaignac and Lamartine were two of the others. The result of the vote was an immense majority in favour of Louis Napoleon. Lamartine, in particular, seemed to be forgotten, and retired from public life to console himself by writing a history of the Revolution of '48, and the part he played therein, in a strain of sentimental eloquence and egotism, and

a somewhat watery vein of patriotism, which make it a very fair picture of the time and the man.

Louis Napoleon had not been long in office when it became apparent that his ambitions went beyond a mere Presidency. A Second Empire began to be spoken of in certain circles. The political appointments in Paris and the provinces were filled by Bonapartists—a party which till then had made no figure whatever in politics, but which was being rapidly recruited by ambitious and place-hunting politicians of all kinds. But the hopes of Napoleon had a sounder basis. In the provinces and in the army the traditions still associated with the name counted for something in his favour; and of still greater value to his cause were the associations of disorder and anarchy connected with the name of the first Republic—associations which the injudicious demands of the wilder Democrats helped to reinforce, and which the Government used to discredit the whole body of Republicans. The *bourgeoisie*, who feared any tampering with their trading and financial interests, were inclined to look sympathetically on the rapidity with which Louis Napoleon, once seated in the President's chair, had changed his friendly attitude towards the advanced Republicans into one of determined hostility. They knew that their immediate interests, at least, would be safe under his rule; that the Bourse would be steadier at the proclamation of the Empire than in the early days of a Republic—which had not quite got itself into shape. Many, perhaps, would have

been pleased to see the name of the Republic preserved; but it is evident that most were not unwilling to escape from the difficulties and hazards which attended its continuation. To such the new Empire was as much of a compromise as the monarchy of Louis Philippe had been.

The danger drew all sections of resolute Republicans together. Hugo, who at first—moved probably by some sentiment of those Napoleonic traditions he had so often celebrated in song—had been friendly to the President, now took his place as one of the most outspoken orators of the Left, and unmasked, with all the resources of his energetic and highly coloured language, the designs entertained by the head of the Government. The idea of France under such domination as that of the hero of the Strasbourg adventure was intolerable to him. The despotism of a really strong man—of a Frederick the Great or the first Napoleon—has always at least something that repays a nation, because it is strong enough to be real and sincere in its conduct of the national interests; but the despotism of the mediocre, supported by incessant intrigue and corruption, is simply a series of degradations. Hugo's opposition, accordingly, became ever more bitter; and his attitude tended to identify him more and more with the advanced Democrats, who were the only party in irreconcilable opposition to the President. In July 1851 his son Charles was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for advocating the abolition of the penalty of death. In the same

month the Assembly debated a revision of the constitution, with the view of prolonging the tenure of the President's office. On that occasion Hugo spoke for four hours at the tribune. We give a few passages from this speech, in which, leaving the narrower aspects of the question, Hugo combats the real end of the proposal, and labours to destroy the associations of Imperial glory which operated so powerfully in favour of a Second Empire.

"But journals of another colour, which express unquestionably the opinions of the Government, for they are sold in the streets by privilege to the exclusion of all others—these journals cry to us: 'You are right: Legitimacy is impossible—the monarchy of divine right and of principle is dead; but the other, the monarchy of glory, of empire—that is not only possible, but necessary.' Such is the language held to us. Let us see. Where is your glory? I seek for it. I look for it around me. Of what is it composed?

"*M. Lepic.* Ask your father.

"*Hugo.* What are its elements? What is it that we have before our eyes? All our liberties waylaid, one after the other, and garotted; the universal suffrage betrayed, abandoned, mutilated; socialistic programmes ending in a policy of Jesuits; for government an immense intrigue. History will say a conspiracy—(lively sensation)—and I know not what underhand understanding, which is preparing to manufacture an empire out of a republic, and which makes five hundred thousand officials a sort of Bonapartist freemasonry in the midst of the nation! every reform adjourned or mocked at; disproportionate taxes, which burden the people, maintained or re-established; a state of siege weighing on five departments; Paris and Lyons put under surveillance; amnesty refused, transportation aggravated; groans in the prisons of Bône, tortures at Belle-Isle; cells where one would not leave mattresses to rot, but where men are let rot; the press gagged; the jury packed; not enough justice, and far too much

police; misery below, and anarchy above; absolutism, repression, iniquity! Outside, the corpse of the Roman republic. . . . The gallows—that is, Austria—erected over Hungary, over Lombardy, over Milan, over Venice; Sicily given over to fusilades; the hope that nationalities had in France destroyed; the friendly bond of peoples broken; everywhere right trampled under foot, in the north as in the south, at Cassel as at Palermo; a secret coalition of kings waiting their opportunity; our diplomacy mute, I will not say in the plot; one who is always cowardly before one who is always insolent; Turkey left without support against the Czar, and forced to abandon the proscribed; Kossuth in the agony of a prison in Asia Minor. That is where we are! France hangs her head. Napoleon shivers with shame in his tomb, and five or six thousand scoundrels cry, *Vive l'Empereur!* Is that what you call your glory, perchance? (Sensation and interruption.)

"No one is thinking of an empire, you cry. I have a habit of tearing off masks. No one is thinking of an empire, you say. What do these hired cries of *Vive l'Empereur* mean then? Just a question—Who pays them? What mean, then, those allusions to General Changarnier, to pretorians in debauch, which you applaud? What do these words of M. Thiers, so applauded by you, mean—*The empire is made?* What is the meaning of this ridiculous and mean soliciting of a prolongation of power? What is this prolongation, if you please? It is the consulship for life. And to what does the consulship for life lead? To the Empire. There is an intrigue here!—an intrigue, I tell you! I have the right to look into it. I will search into it. Come, let us have light on all that!

"We must not have France taken by surprise some fine morning, and finding herself with an emperor without knowing why.

"An emperor! Let us discuss the pretension a little.

"What! because there has been a man who gained the battle of Marengo and who has reigned, you wish to reign, you who have gained only the sham fight at Sartory! . . .

"What! after Augustus, Augustulus! What! because we have had Napoleon the Great, we must have Napoleon the Little!

"(Left applauds, Right clamours; inexpressible tumult.)"

In such manner did Hugo and some determined deputies of the Left strive against the forces of Cæsarism, which, installed in name of the Republic, were already working for its overthrow. But mere oratorical protests could do little to balance the combination of interests which the President and his agents were cleverly bringing into play on the other side. The support of the high financial circles, the favour of the army, the command of a host of officials all over the country, who are, as usual, made the instruments of a quiet but effective repression of all hostile opinions and movements—against all that, the Democrats were not even able to form an alliance with any of the moderate or Liberal parties. The moneyed classes had been too much alarmed by the programmes of reconstruction which the leaders of the advanced party had promulgated during their short reign, and were perhaps willing to risk something in the way of Imperialism. Solid periodicals like the 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' while hinting their distaste for the "barbarous rule of absolutism," are determined to see no danger of that in the President's conduct, and are loud in their praises of the President's good faith: in his new attitude of extreme opposition to the democratic programmes, and in his declaration that he will adhere to the constitution of the Republic, the 'Review' finds "the perfume of a good conscience." Cleverly also did Louis Bonaparte, while flattering the army at great reviews, meant to recall the Imperial traditions, soothe, on the other hand, the susceptibilities of the *bourgeoisie*

by occasionally disclaiming the significance of these Imperial parades, and by showing more than usual solicitude for the commercial interests. His adherents were careful to keep alive the "detestable *souvenirs*" of the first Revolution, and filled the journals with their expositions. In reality, whatever danger there had been of a rule of Louis Blanc and the socialists, had long passed away; and these attacks, so frequent in the periodical literature of the time, are merely meant to scare the *bourgeoisie*, and serve as covers for the assault which the President is preparing to make upon the constitution of the Republic. The danger is now quite of another kind.

Amongst the interests which conceived themselves endangered by a Republican *régime*, and were therefore disposed to favour the cause of Imperialism, the Church held an important place. The Catholic party, and especially the Jesuits, who, notwithstanding Guizot's efforts, had been gradually extending their power under the reign of Louis Philippe, found their influence seriously threatened by the Revolution of 1848; and a large section of the Catholic clergy and laymen, readily abandoning the principle of liberty which had been their watchword under the previous Government, now gave their support to despotism, with the idea that its force would be exerted to maintain the waning influence of the priesthood. On this subject we quote the words of Montalembert, himself a devoted son of the Church, and a politician who had long supported her claims in the long struggle with the secular power:—

"The clergy," he says, "and those Catholics who had so long applauded the independence of his [Lacordaire's] voice, suddenly fell a prey to an unpardonable illusion, and to a prostration unexampled in the history of the Church. Names which had figured in those memorable manifestoes, in which Christian freedom was invoked under the shadow of public liberty, suddenly appeared at the foot of orations and pastorals, which borrowed the forms of Byzantine adulation in order to greet the mad dream of an orthodox absolutism. All the cynicism of political apostasy was acted over again and outdone by the shameful ranting of the principal organs of public opinion in the press. . . . They were to be seen crying down all the rights of political liberty, loudly calling in force to the assistance of faith, affirming that the law of God must be forced upon all—lauding and regretting the Inquisition, declaring the ideal principles of liberty to be anti-Christian, even civil tolerance to be a crime."[1]

Such were the forces which, skilfully managed by Louis Bonaparte and a group of unscrupulous politicians, became the foundation of the Second Empire. But for all the support he received from alarmed interests, the *coup d'état* was too daring a violation of the national honour, of the prestige to which France aspired as the vanguard of liberal ideas in Europe, to be accomplished with even the semblance of legality. At the very most, the man who had but a short time ago sworn to protect the constitution of the Republic, could count only on the sombre acquiescence of the men of conscience and principle who were driven by the fear of worse disorder to his side.

The President's measures for the overthrow of the constitution were cunningly taken. The whole enterprise was planned and carried out in a thoroughgoing

[1] Montalembert, 'Vie de Lacordaire.'

spirit of political cynicism and contempt for the most ordinary civil rights. Its three leading ideas were: the corruption of the soldiery, many of the officers being bought over with money and with promotion at the expense of their less yielding superiors; the forcible repression of the more resolute leaders of the *bourgeoisie*, till the time for constitutional opposition was past; the utter destruction of the Republican party, the only one that was capable of organising an armed opposition. In one night—that of 2d December 1851, the anniversary of Austerlitz—the chiefs of the Democratic and Royalist parties, as well as a number of deputies representing moderate opinions, such as Thiers, Changarnier, and Cavaignac, were arrested, and in the morning a decree of the President declared the National Assembly dissolved. The journals were suppressed or gagged; the printing-offices occupied by soldiers, so that neither protest nor proclamation on the part of opponents could reach the people. Two hundred and twenty deputies, mostly members of the Right, who gathered in haste at the Mairie of the 10th Arrondissement to protest, and who decreed unanimously the dismission of the President, were dispersed by soldiers. Resistance everywhere in Paris and the provinces was put down in blood. Frenchmen were transported wholesale as convicts to Cayenne and Algeria for the crime of defending a constitution which the President had sworn to uphold. Arbitrary commissions of his adherents judged and confiscated, without even a pretence of the ordinary forms of legal

procedure or authority. The hero of the *coup d'état* had evidently laid to heart Machiavelli's advice to a usurper, to do all the crimes he had to do at one blow, so that he might not need to begin anew every day; and broke at once—while a crime more or less was of little consequence—every power that was hostile to him. A domination equal for a time to that of Sulla commenced in a country which had considered itself the freest in Europe: for twenty years, it has been said, there was no such thing as public opinion in France.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OPPOSITION TO THE *COUP D'ÉTAT*—'HISTOIRE D'UN CRIME' —THE FEELING IN THE *FAUBOURGS*—THE STRUGGLE—REPRESSION OF THE OPPOSITION—HUGO'S FLIGHT.

THE opposition which the *coup d'état* had to encounter was never of a very formidable kind. Of the representatives, all the generals, the most influential of the *bourgeoisie* leaders, the most active of the Republican party, and, in addition, every possible chief of barricades, had been seized and incarcerated. The task of organising an active resistance thus fell upon those members of the Opposition who were left at liberty because the advisers of the *coup d'état* did not think it necessary to incur the odium of the imprisonment of those who were either not pronounced politicians, or not known as men of action and capable organisers. Amongst these, Hugo was one of the most active, and his name speedily became prominent at the foot of protests and proclamations which continued to incite the people to resistance. He has himself written the history of the struggle in a book, 'L'Histoire d'un Crime,' which is a masterpiece of that

French prose style which came in with the Revolution and the bulletins of Napoleon,—a style somewhat infected with rhetoric and rodomontade, in which the sublime and the eloquent depend too much upon an artificial arrangement of pauses and line-spaces, and the thought is drawn out of shape to pack itself up in phrases,—a style in which trivial events are recounted with an emphasis which might become the achievements of a great army. But a depraved style may have its merits, especially in such vigorous hands as those of Hugo. Nay, more—it has generally some quite peculiar power of representing certain facts and modes of feeling which are characteristic of the time, or of some powerful and original mind like that of Tacitus or Carlyle. The depraved style need be neither a weak nor a conventional one, and in its artistic resources and power of expression may rank far above styles which come nearer to the classical standard. Without going so far, however, as to say that Hugo's style in 'L'Histoire d'un Crime' is altogether free from that conventional depravity which is fatal, we may yet consider the book as of remarkable merit—a clear and brilliant account of events,—the narrative, the action, conversation, and character of the various figures being all given with a light dramatic vivacity, a dramatic mixture of clearness and tumult, which render excellently the hasty movement and improvised attitudes of the actors in the struggle of the *coup d'état.*

The hopes of all those who were opposed to the

coup d'état were placed on a general rising of the masses. "Will the *faubourgs* rise?" the men of the Right demanded of the men of the Left,—the question itself betraying something of the hopeless severance of interests and sympathies between the different classes which made Louis Bonaparte's enterprise possible. So, too, many of the *bourgeoisie* gave up their arms to bands of workmen assembled for resistance, and cried *Vive la République!* but kept for the most part prudently within their houses. To stir the *faubourgs,* then, into action, committees of the most active members of the Left—on which were Edgar Quinet, Jules Favre, Victor Hugo, Pelletier, De Bourges, and others—were formed. In spite of the vigilance of police agents, a class who seemed to devote themselves very heartily to the service of the *coup d'état,* placards denouncing the violation of the constitution, and calling the people to arms, were posted in the streets. Hugo himself, with characteristic energy, hurried from quarter to quarter where barricades were being erected, inspecting, advising, and encouraging. But from the beginning there was a general lack of enthusiasm amongst the masses for this struggle. "*Calme profond dans les faubourgs,*" reports De Bourges. St Antoine is silent, St Marceau inert. A few barricades are resolutely defended; some notable deaths are recorded—that of Deputy Baudoin at the barricade Ste Marguérite, and at some other that of Denis Dussoubs, while heroically haranguing the soldiery on the opposite side. But in general, the

history of these affairs is swift dispersion of the barricaders before bayonet-charges and grape-shot. At few barricades is there sufficient preparation either in numbers or arms for defence. Hugo visits one where there are only two men, because, as one of them told him, there were only two muskets. The *faubourgs,* it was clear, were not in a fighting mood, and Hugo has to confess that, "for the first time in sixty years, Paris, the city of intelligence, did not seem to understand."

Perhaps it is not wonderful that they did not "understand." The workmen were still of the same generation that, three years before, had been shot down in hundreds "for the sake of public security." You will not readily get a generation to make its crusade twice. And after all, it was not plain to the workmen where their actual interests were involved. They heard that the Royalist members were dispersed by military, as those who hear that a blow has been struck at their enemies. They heard that Cavaignac, Thiers, Changarnier were imprisoned; but were these not the men who had ruthlessly repressed them in other times? Besides, did not the placards of Bonaparte tell them that their electoral disabilities were removed, and universal suffrage re-established? It was no wonder then, if, notwithstanding some private doubts, the groups of workmen that stood for a while to read the proclamations of the President, mostly passed silently on their way without any signs of dissatisfaction. If one in a hundred spoke, says a Republican scout, it was to say, *Good!*

From the first, the cooler heads amongst the Republicans had seen that the situation was a hopeless one. "You are nursing illusions," said Proudhon to Hugo, whom he met on the street; "the people are taken in, and will not stir. Bonaparte will win. That fudge, the re-establishment of universal suffrage, has caught the ninnies. Bonaparte passes for a socialist." Whereupon follows a dialogue in the later prose style:—

"(*Proudhon.*) 'What do you hope for?'
'Nothing,' I said.
'And what will you do?'
'Everything.'
'Adieu,' he said."[1]

Hugo, however, with characteristic intensity of will, continued to hope, or at least to struggle, till the last. But the last soon came. On the 4th there was the massacre at the Boulevard Montmartre, in which eight hundred were slain—men, women, and children. On the 5th, over three hundred men were taken at the barricades or in the surrounding houses, and shot without trial, or even so much as a note taken of their names. They were buried in Montmartre Cemetery with their heads above ground, says Hugo ("*et qu'on y enterra la tête dehors*"), that their relatives might know them. The Committee of Insurrection, hunted from house to house, scarcely knew where they could assemble. Hugo in particular was a marked man, and the subject of special consultations at the Élysée. On the 6th the leaders met for the last time, and then

[1] Histoire d'un Crime.

dispersed, each to find his way across the frontier as he best could. Hugo, indeed, having word of some intended movement to take place in Belleville, waited till the 12th. But nothing stirred,—"*rien ne remua*"; and on the 14th he succeeded, not without trouble, in reaching Brussels, to begin those years of exile which ended only with the fall of Louis Napoleon.

The retrospect of the struggle which he gives in 'L'Histoire d'un Crime' is not without its pathos:—

> "Le 3 tout venait à nous, le 5 tout se retira de nous. Ce fut comme une mer immense qui s'en va. . . . Sombre marées du peuple. . . . Le peuple recula. Il recula le 5, le 6 il disparut. Il n'y eut plus rien à l'horizon, qu'une sorte de vaste nuit commençante. Cette nuit a été l'empire."[1]

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[1] "On the 3d all came to us, on the 5th all withdrew from us. It was like the ebb of an immense sea. . . . Inscrutable tides of the people. . . . The people drew back—drew back on the 5th; on the 6th disappeared. There was nothing then on the horizon but a sort of vast night coming on. That night has been the Empire."—Histoire d'un Crime.

BOOK III.

FIRST YEARS OF EXILE—PROTESTS AND VINDICATIONS—'LES CHÂTIMENTS'—'LES CONTEMPLATIONS.'

CHAPTER I.

THE REFUGEES AT BRUSSELS—HUGO'S SITUATION—A LONG SILENCE BROKEN.

AT Brussels, as a near city of refuge, a mass of fugitives from the *coup d'état* had collected—expatriated Frenchmen of all ranks, for the most part of Republican opinion, but including also many notable men from the Royalist party, the whole causing no small solicitude to M. Baron le Hody and his subordinates of the Belgian police. Such a tide of broken Republicanism as was then pouring over the frontier into Belgian territory—its numbers estimated by some at about seven thousand — was looked upon by the authorities as little better than an invasion of galley-slaves. The Government, naturally Conservative in its sympathies, —corrupt, say the sterner Democrats,—and standing besides in some awe of the new ruler of France, deals harshly enough with many of the fugitives—imprisons some, expels others, and puts the rest under police surveillance.

Of the vast number thus turned adrift on the world

to find new relations and modes of subsistence, some will sink and some will swim, but for the most part with obscure destinies which history is not concerned to follow. Of the more remarkable we learn something from Charles Hugo's book, 'Les Hommes d'Exil': Camille Berru, once editor of the 'Événement,' forced by want to turn "professor of swimming" at a bathing establishment in Brussels, becoming finally, however, a successful man on the editorial staff of 'L'Indépendance Belge'; Barbès, a Republican of the old stamp, living, a solitary valetudinarian, at La Haye, amidst "the immense indifference of men"; Ribeyrolles, representative of feverish, militant, democratic journalism, latterly an emigrant to Brazil, where he died of yellow fever and the heart-sickness of the exile. Cournet, Schœlcher, General Lamoricière, a Royalist soldier, and others have their various histories, with the lights and shadows of an exile's life. Amongst those of more settled careers — physicians, lawyers, professors, engineers, and merchants — many, like Dufraisse, Labrousse, and Gambon, establish themselves with success, and gain a new repute in the land of their adoption. But the general lot is doubtless a hard one, and those who survive are, as the younger Hugo says, those who are stronger than misfortune.

Victor Hugo also, on the merely material side of his existence, had been sharply stricken by the *coup d'état*. The foundation of a comfortable fortune—the fruit of many years of hard labour—had given way under him at a time when it must have been doubtful

to him where and how he was to recommence.[1] It is true, as we look back now upon his long career, we may easily find that the greater part of his work—the part the most remarkable for its thought and the richest in artistic developments—belongs to those years of exile. But everything in his conduct shows that all that lay as yet latent and unconscious in him, even unsuspected by himself. For many years he had been prompted to no great literary work. Except for some occasional poems, afterwards published in 'Les Contemplations,' his genius had lain dormant. The fiery inspiration that runs through the long roll of 'The Legend of the Centuries,' or the massive blocks of thought that are tumbled about in 'The Four Winds of the Spirit,' are not of a kind to take definite shape in discourses at the Academy or orations at the tribune. They were in him, indeed, these mighty conceptions, but as yet only in the form of a haughty energy, an indomitable will, and in the vague, and what we should have called, had he never justified it, vaunting sense of power with which he confronted the victorious *coup d'état*.

To Hugo, too, the loss of Parisian society—separation from "the city of intelligence," as he fondly calls it—seemed no slight misfortune. All the pleasant habitudes of his daily life were lost. The Parisian *salons* of art and politics, the chair at the Academy,

[1] "Dans la grand chute de tout qui survient alors, le commencement d'aisance ébauché par son travail s'écroule; il faudra qu'il recommence." —*Mes Fils*, Victor Hugo's Preface to 'Les Hommes d'Exil.'

the autumns at M. Bertin's country house, all the circles where he was a familiar yet distinguished figure, the great public that was ever pointing with its finger,—from all that he had been violently removed, thrust out of sight into what seemed at times, especially after his removal to Jersey, something like obscurity—"*où l'on ne me voit plus, tant je suis couvert d'ombre.*"

In the end, indeed, it was better for him; and Hugo himself, coming to recognise this, speaks with all the *naïve* wonder of one whose powers had hitherto been somewhat dissipated in the excitements of Parisian life, of the "strange wisdom which isolation develops in profound souls,"—akin to antique divination, he thinks, carrying the idea, as he does everything, by preference to the mysterious pole of the universe, rather than to where science and philosophy cross their sparse lights over the secrets of life. The great lines of thought which had moved with confusion and impropriety enough in the confined space of addresses to the theatre public or the Academy public of Paris, now took their natural shape, and, in their own dimensions like themselves, stood out in the solitude of exile with its greater affinities.

But this did not happen all at once. The first works which he sent forth from his refuge at Brussels are little more than a violent protest against the men and measures of the new *régime.* There, at his residence in the Grande Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, No. 27, he is busily employed recalling his own experiences,

making memoranda, and gathering materials from the wandering exiles that daily visit him, for those vengeful works 'Napoléon le Petit' and 'L'Histoire d'un Crime.' There too, after many silent years, the poet took up his lyre again, to which time had added a powerful brazen cord, and the thunders of 'Les Châtiments' broke fiercely about the hero of the *coup d'état* and his servitors.

CHAPTER II.

'LES CHÂTIMENTS'—THE SATIRE IN 'LES CHÂTIMENTS'—THE NEW *RÉGIME*—*LE BON BOURGEOIS*—HUGO AS A SATIRIST—THE LYRICAL OVERFLOW.

THE first point which the satire of 'Les Châtiments' fastens on is the baseness of the men and means by which the *coup d'état* was accomplished. The secret conspiracy against the liberties of the nation; the corruption of the soldiery; the *bizarre* alliance of the priesthood in a cause at least doubtful, and established by measures which showed a contempt for the ordinary principles of justice; the betrayal of the great traditions of the nation in the very name of these traditions,—all these in turn are scathingly exposed. The Second Empire had been founded by a group of obscure and intriguing politicians,—men eminent neither in war nor in State councils, who had no particular political principles, and saw in the *coup d'état* only an excellent chance of getting at the treasury and official dignities of a great nation. The corruption of a nation generally descends from its governors, and Hugo was quick to see how an empire thus founded would be

continued. From the first his satire struck heavily at the social and political corruption which, it is now widely acknowledged, were eminently characteristic of the Second Empire:—

"Victoire, il était temps, prince, que tu parusses![1]
Les filles d'opéra manquaient de princes russes.
. . . .
L'argent devient rare aux tripots; les journaux
Faisaient le vide autour des confessionaux;
Le Sacré-Cœur, mourant de sa mort naturelle,
Maigrissait; les protêts, tourbillonnant en grêle,
Drus et noirs, aveuglaient le portier de Magnan;
On riait aux sermons de l'abbé Ravignan;
Plus de pur-sang piaffant aux portes des donzelles;
L'hydre de l'anarchie apparaissait aux belles
Sous la forme effroyable et triste d'un cheval
De fiacre les traînant pour trente sous au bal.
La désolation était sur Babylone.
Mais tu surgis, bras fort; tu te dresses, colonne:
Tous renaît, tout revit, tout est sauvé. Pour lors
Les figurantes vont récolter des milords:

[1] "All hail, my prince! thy star arose in time;
The opera girls had felt affairs decline.
. . . . .
The shrines lacked gifts, and the priest in his chair,
Forsaken by penitents, sat in empty air;
And the Holy-Heart, by nature's decay o'erta'en,
Grew thin; and protests, falling on all sides like rain,
Blinded the porter that keeps Magnan's door.
They laughed at Ravignan's sermons and lore.
No more of blood-royal mounting the damsel's stair.
The hydra of anarchy was seen by the fair
In the melancholy shape of a sixpenny hire,
That dragged them to the ball in their evening attire.
Desolation on Babylon had laid her hand;
Then didst thou arise like a pillar in the land.
All revived and came to life—all is saved; once more
The ballet girls have their harvests of milords.

> Tous sont contents, soudards, franc viveurs, gent dévote;
> Tous chantent, monseigneur l'archevêque, et Javotte."[1]

That is Hugo's reply to the "Prince's" pretension of having "saved society." Vengefully personal, too, is his description of the chief actor:—

> "Alors il vint, cassé de débauches, l'œil terne,
> Furtif, les traits pâlis,
> Et ce voleur de nuit alluma sa lanterne
> Au soleil d'Austerlitz!"[2]

Not without scathe either is "*le bon bourgeois*" let pass—the decent citizen, who prefers his comforts and a steady Bourse to ideals of liberty and politics—an acquiescent rather than an active element in the affair, and not much worth making historical in the eyes of such enraged lions as Hugo and Lacordaire,—the latter of whom scornfully sums him up in the famous "thirty millions of men who do not know how to stand by anything, and who have lost the political sentiment of religion and right." There is not less scorn in Hugo's notice of him, as acquiescent, dully acquiescent, in the disastrous event:—

> "Il est certains bourgeois, prêtres du dieu Boutique[3]
> Plus voisins de Chryses que de Caton d'Utique,

---

[1] All are pleased—monks, police, libertines, the devout;
All sing, his Grace and Betty lead the shout."

[2] "Then he came, whose fire debauch had damped,
Pale, furtive in look and speech;
And this brigand of the night lit his lamp
At the sun of Austerlitz!"

[3] "You know the decent trader, sworn priest of god shop,
Little of a stoic, and something of a fop,

Mettant par-dessus tout la rente et le coupon,
Qui voguant à la Bourse et tenant un harpon,
Honnêtes gens d'ailleurs, mais de la grosse espèce.

. . . .

Ils ont voté. Demain ils voteront encor.

. . . .

Que voulez-vous? la Bourse allait mal; on craignait
La république rouge, et même un peu la rose;
Il fallait bien finir par faire quelque chose;
On trouve ce coquin, on le fait empereur.

. . . .

Or quand on dit du mal de ce gouvernement,
Je me sens chatouillé désagréablement.
Qu'on fouaille avec raison cet homme, c'est possible;
Mais c'est m'insinuer à moi, bourgeois paisible
Qui fit ce scélérat empereur ou consul,
Que j'ai dit oui par peur et vivat par calcul."

There is much vigorous satire of this kind in 'Les Châtiments,' but its satirical side is not its strongest. For the true typical portraiture which makes the satirist's work at once so powerful and instructive, Hugo has little faculty. Often we have nothing but a

The first place in his thoughts for coupons and per cent,
With a rake in his hands he scours the Bourse intent,—
An honest fellow, too, though somewhat grossly made,—
He has voted 'Yes.'

. . . .

What else was there to do? Rates were falling on 'Change;
The Red Republic was before us, so they said.
We had to end, in short, by making some one the head:
We found this rogue at hand, and made him emperor.

. . . .

Now any one I hear miscalling this man's rule,
I have an idea he is calling me a fool.
About him they may be right,—possibly enough;
But 'tis to say that I, a peaceful trader, am a muff,
And in making this scoundrel an emperor was fain
To vote Yes for fear, and cry Hurrah for gain."

—*Les Châtiments* (*Le bon bourgeois dans sa maison*).

flow of magnificent invective, a string of names—Morny, Magnan, Sibour, Troplong, Maupas—with opprobrious epithets attached to them. In his satire there is a want of that universal element which mixes with the individual features, and gives us assurance of the satirist's insight and of the general truth of his view.

Neither the life nor the character of Hugo was of a kind likely to produce a great satire, in the ordinary sense of the word. His impetuous exuberant temperament was not a good soil for that sort of growth. His intellect found its own way rapidly and intuitively into things, and he took the less note of the fine diversities and reservations which influence the action of others, that he himself always chose the short and open road to his ends. He saw and judged results better than processes. His life, too, had been hitherto, in the best sense of the words, one of enjoyment and fruition. Even the *coup d'état* could not all at once make a satirist out of one who had been for twenty years the popular poet in France, and the worshipped king of the young literary world. It is an indurated, not simply a deeply wounded heart, out of which the satire of Juvenal comes. He had not been long silent like the Roman satirist, nor long scorched in the fire like Dante. It is his first great defeat—his first fatal encounter with the gods, who have at length hurled this Titan from his eminence to the lonely isle where he rages at a distance. But there is no great depth of bitterness in his words. There is indignation of a

flaming kind, expressing itself in fierce, direct, personal invective, but not the quiet molten surface of iron that has begun to flow.

But it is not, after all, as satire chiefly that we should look on this volume of 'Les Châtiments,'—at least not as the satire the traditional form and limits of which have descended to us from the ancients. It is the satire of the nineteenth century, which has enlarged, some will say mixed and confounded, the various forms of art. It is less perfect, because it has a wider range of feeling. To rest on a single note is alien to the modern spirit. All its great works abound in lyrical, dramatic, and epic elements, more or less completely fused. Its history has become a dithyramb, the severer kind of critic growls; and it loves to mingle the lyrical cry with the austere voice of satire. Its favourite form of art is the novel, which gives most play to this thirst for variety and change of note.

Hugo's work is a remarkable example of these various tendencies. Look at the lyrical overflow in such a line as this:—

"*Vents qui jadis meniez Tibère vers Caprée,*"—

a line which, nevertheless, occurs in one of the severer passages of the book. The presence of such rhythms means that 'Les Châtiments' is not simply a satire. It is more than that: it is a song of consolation for the exiled; a requiem for the fallen brave of the Republic; a monument—a brazen tablet of history to face the corruption of men and records; a prophetic chant and a cry of defiance!

What a defiant breath, for instance, there is in the following, with its impetuous rhythm, and the wild melancholy of its sentiment!—

"Pour les bannis opiniâtres [1]
La France est loin, la tombe est près.
Prince, préside aux jeux folâtres,
Chasse aux femmes dans les théâtres,
Chasse aux chevreuils dans les forêts ;
Rome te brûle le cinname,
Les rois te disent : mon cousin.
Sonne aujourd'hui le glas, bourdon de Notre-Dame,
Et demain le tocsin !

. . . .

Les forçats bâtissent le phare
Traînants leurs fers au bord des flots !
Hallali ! Hallali ! fanfare !
Le cor sonne, le bois s'effare,
La lune argente les bouleaux ;
A l'eau les chiens ! le cerf qui brame
Se perd dans l'ombre du bassin.
Sonne aujourd'hui le glas, bourdon de Notre-Dame,
Et demain le tocsin !

. . . .

---

[1] "For the exiles who yield not to fate,
France is far, the tomb is near.
Prince, preside at thy orgies in state,
Hunt in the theatres for thy mate,
And follow in the forests the deer.
For thee Rome burns the balm,
The monarchs salute thee in turn.
Sound the knell to-day, great bell of Notre-Dame,
And to-morrow, sound the storm.

. . . .

Wearily at work on the mound,
The convicts drag their chains by the seas.
Hallalee ! the horn is wound,
Hallalee ! the woods resound,
The moonlight silvers the trees.

La Guyane, cachot fournaise,
Tue aujourd'hui comme jadis ;
Couche-toi, joyeux et plein d'aise,
Au lit où coucha Louis seize,
Puis l'Empereur, puis Charles dix ;
Endors-toi, pendant qu'on t'acclame,
La tête sur leur traversin.
Sonne aujourd'hui le glas, bourdon de Notre-Dame,
Et demain le tocsin !"

As we have said, the note in 'Les Châtiments' is often varied. It is pleasant to find the fierce floods of angry rhythm softening at times into the meditative quiet and tenderness of such lines as these, taken from the poem "Aux Morts du 4 Décembre":—

"Jouissez du repos que vous donne le maître,[1]
Vous étiez autrefois des cœurs troublés peut-être,
Qu'un vain songe poursuit;

Hear the stag-bell, the hounds follow well,
To the shade of the bay he doth turn.
Sound the knell to-day, Notre-Dame's great bell,
And to-morrow, sound the storm !

. . . . . .

Guiana, that dungeon well fired,
Kills to-day as well as of yore.
Couch thyself, then, joyous, admired,
Where the sixteenth Louis retired,
Where the Emperor, where Charles slept before,—
Slumbering, loud acclaims round thee swell,
Thy head on the pillow they have worn.
Then great bell of Notre-Dame, to-day sound the knell,
And to-morrow, sound the storm !"

—*Les Châtiments.*

[1] "Rejoice in the rest that the master has given,
Troubled souls you were, perhaps, once sorely driven,
Pursued by vain dreams;

L'erreur vous tourmentait, ou la haine ou l'envie;
Vos bouches, d'où sortait la vapeur de la vie,
Étaient pleines de bruit."

Some error racked your lives, some envy or hate;
Your mouths, with the vapour of life all inflate,
Gave forth noises and gleams."

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY IN 'LES CHÂTIMENTS'—THE FIRST AND THE SECOND EMPIRE—"L'OBÉISSANCE PASSIVE" AND "L'EXPIATION"—DEVELOPMENT OF HUGO'S LYRICAL TALENT.

ONE of the main ideas in 'Les Châtiments,' and one which most frequently guides its satirical strokes, is the contrast which the Second Empire in its origin and aims makes with the first. Louis Bonaparte had made his way to the crown by overturning the constitution which he had sworn to protect. He had worked to undermine the Republic while he was yet its chief magistrate. He had daringly violated the rights of the representatives of the people, and established an empire by extensive corruption of officials and by slaughter of the citizens. But all this is not enough: his uncle had done much the same, and there may be some who see no reason to be ashamed of the Second Empire, since France seems to have condoned the first. It might appear as if the world had one standard by which to judge great historical criminals, and another for the ordinary offences of men against society. It is no doubt true that radical

changes in the constitution of a nation are inevitably accompanied by some degree of illegality, and perhaps of injustice to a minority; but they are not on that account outside of a great moral order, according to which men in the long-run will judge them. In estimating the character of Augustus, no historian lays a bad stress on the fact that he finally overthrew the Republic—though Brutus is none the less the "last of the Romans." So, too, most dominations of Hapsburgs, Hohenzollerns, or others, have been originally founded on a large view of equity, demanded by the circumstances of the time.

In the case of the first Napoleon also, it may be said that the Empire was then not only the best solution possible, but, what is more important, with all its faults it had in the end the inevitable result of diffusing more widely the ideas of progress and liberty, of class enfranchisement, and of national as distinguished from dynastic rights. It rendered hopelessly obsolete the political and dynastic ideas associated with the long-venerated name of Bourbon, and gave the requisite prestige amongst peoples to the nation that best represented popular rights and the new consciousness of a people's dignity. As a monarchy it had been founded mainly on ideal elements which in epoch after epoch have gathered thousands of invincible enthusiasts round the central light and force which are found in Alexanders, Mahomets, and Duke Godfreys. Poets, warriors, and statesmen, as well as the rude soldiery and denizens of the *faubourgs,*

unanimously hailed the first Napoleon emperor. They feel that the ultimate result of such a man is ever in favour of truth. His presence calls into play great ideal forces which slumber unawakened in the ordinary and conventional round of life. Such forces gather naturally round him who can give them scope. Often mistaken in their immediate ends and projects, sometimes unscrupulous in their means, and allied with the baser elements never wanting in great movements, they ever, whether they be medieval crusades or tumultuous uprising of desert Arabs in response to the visions of the prophet—they ever indicate that men have burst forth from the narrower bounds of their existence, and leaving for a time lower aims behind them, have set their faith in great ideals of progress and enlightenment. That such great world-movements should be either frequent or long-continued is perhaps not desirable, but they give civilisation the needful impulse on a higher plane of progress. Each stands at the commencement of a new and better era.

In the history of the foundation of the Second Empire there are none of these nobler elements. The mistaken devotion of the peasantry to a great name which it was Louis Napoleon's sad destiny to make inglorious, the fears of the trading classes, and the interests of a host of officials and political adventurers—these were the comparatively ignoble forces on which the rule of Napoleon III. was based. And after all, there was nothing either in the character or

ability of the man to repay a proud people for the loss of its liberties and its prestige. For it should be kept in mind, that to erect a despotism in France at the very time when the peoples all over Central Europe were engaged in a struggle with princes for constitutional freedom, was to compromise seriously the cause of progress, and to deal a deadly blow at the highest traditions of the nation.

To bring out these very different aspects of the two Empires is the object of Hugo's greatest efforts in 'Les Châtiments.' In two poems in particular—" À l'Obéissance Passive " and " L'Expiation "—his ideas on the subject are expressed with a force and splendour of imagination which will do something, together with events, to fasten in history a two-faced legend of the Napoleons: the one in whose very fall there is the immense grandeur of a setting sun; the other with the *coup d'état* at the beginning of his career, and Sedan —that collapse—at the end.

In these two poems we see Hugo in two different but very characteristic veins. The first—" À l'Obéissance Passive"—is in that wild Phrygian strain, the very breath of revolutionary fervour, which Hugo alone could supply with the fiery stream of language urged into every wild form of metaphor, apostrophe, and rhythm, and yet with a striking felicity of phrase and thought even in its extravagance. No word, no thought, comes amiss to him; all fuses in the divine fury of his verse:—

" Au levant, au couchant, partout, au sud, au pôle,
Avec de vieux fusils sonnant sur leur épaule,
Passant torrents et monts,
Sans repos, sans sommeil, coudes percés sans vivres,
Ils allaient, fiers, joyeux, et soufflant dans les cuivres,
Ainsi que des démons!

. . . .

Eux, dans l'emportement de leur luttes épiques,
Ivres, ils savouraient tous les bruits héroïques,
Le fer heurtant le fer,
La Marseillaise ailée et volant dans les balles,
Les tambours, les obus, les bombes, les cymbales,
Et ton rire, O Kléber!"[1]

The other poem which we have mentioned—" L'Expiation "—is in that large, grandiose, somewhat sombre style of composition which Hugo brought to perfection in his later years. The conception of the poem is, as usual with Hugo, highly ideal—a horizon of fantasy and mysticism, breaking here and there into curious incongruities when it comes into too close contact with the actual world, but within this fantastic horizon a very definite and even realistic way of looking at things. That which keeps those two poles

[1] " From east to west, south and north, from zone to zone,
With their ancient muskets on their shoulders thrown,
Passing torrent and height,
Careless of rest or sleep, in tatters and unfed,
Blowing their bugles, they marched merrily ahead,
Like demons of the fight.

. . . .

It was theirs in these times, these days of epic fights,
To revel high in all heroic sounds and sights,
Steel splintered to the shaft.
The wingèd Marseillaise afloat amongst the balls,
The drums, the shot and shell, the bomb that bursting falls,
And, O Kléber, thy laugh!"

in sympathy is the wonderful imaginative power of his language—his style, in the narrower sense of the term. Leave that element out of sight for a moment, and the conception seems an empty, barren grandiosity, the details commonplace and of doubtful taste. But to do that is a false sort of abstraction into which the critical intellect is apt to fall. In a work of art the style harmonises everything and determines the value of everything, and in Hugo's language there is an imaginative power which brings all the parts of his conception into affinity, raising details of actual events with subtle art into a sort of colossal grandeur, and bringing his vast fantastic horizon into the sphere of the real by its command over all the keys of association and suggestion. This power does not lie in his figurative language alone, which has been so often the subject of remark, with the original splendour of its images, vast, immense, seeming to lighten across the horizon like a flash; it is often the result of the utmost simplicity of means, as in his description of the great exile at St Helena :—

> "Toujours l'isolement, l'abandon, la prison;
> Un soldat rouge au seuil, la mer à l'horizon."

The idea in "L'Expiation" is, that what was guilty in the despotism of the great Emperor found its expiation, not in the retreat from Moscow, not at Waterloo, not in the lonely exile of St Helena—sombre stages in his career which are painted with great force —but in the *coup d'état* of 2d December, when the

Emperor in his tomb is awakened by a voice which tells him that his name is the instrument which a few intriguers are using to dishonour the land of his glories. The whole conception is characteristic of Hugo's contempt for the narrow realistic bounds of nineteenth-century art. The voice which plays a highly dramatic part throughout, is quite passable as long as it is confined to the response "*non*"; but when brought out of its monosyllabic mystery to dissertate on Fould, Magnan, and the rest, not even Hugo's art can quite overcome a sense of the incongruous. Other blots, too, there are with a well-known mark upon them:—

> "Les aigles qui passaient ne le connaissaient pas."

But they are the faults of this large free style, and often near of kin to its virtues; and Hugo never stops to consider whether he has hit or missed.

We give a few lines from the third part, which shows Napoleon in his last exile:—

> "Il est au fond des mers que la brume enveloppe [1]
> Un roc hideux, débris des antiques volcans.
> Le Destin prit des clous, un marteau, des carcans,
> Saisit, pâle et vivant, ce voleur du tonnerre,
> Et joyeux, s'en alla sur le pic centenaire
> Le clouer, excitant par son rire moqueur
> Le vautour Angleterre à lui ronger le cœur.

---

[1] "Far in the ocean where sea hazes hang alway,
Stands a rock, hideous mark of old volcanic play.
There Fate, with vengeful glee, bore the Titan pale and weak,
And nailed him quivering to its visionary peak,
And set with mocking laugh at the thunderer's vanished art,
The vulture of England to prey upon his heart.

Evanouissement d'une splendeur immense!
Du soleil qui se lève à la nuit qui commence,
Toujours l'isolement, l'abandon, la prison;
Un soldat rouge au seuil, la mer à l'horizon.
Des rochers nus, des bois affreux, l'ennui, l'espace,
Des voiles s'enfuyant comme l'espoir qui passe.
Toujours le bruit des flots, toujours le bruit des vents!
Adieu, tente de pourpre aux panaches mouvants!
Adieu, le cheval blanc que César éperonne!
Plus de tambours battant aux champs, plus de couronne."

In general, in comparing the poetry of 'Les Châtiments' with that of earlier years, we may notice Hugo's tendency to leave the soft melodious line that once marked the kinship of his work to the art of Lamartine and De Musset, for something stronger and more emphatic in its structure. Strength and emphasis are the deeper elements in him, and those which in these times he naturally tends to develop. He had used, as a flexible talent can, the line of soft elegiac complaint and meditative melancholy which had been the vogue in other days; but now that he has all the freedom of the master's matured power, and the past has in many ways lost its hold upon him, the native characteristics of his genius come fully out.

Oh, the fading of a splendour that earth could hardly bound!
From the rise of sun to the night that darkens round,
Isolation, solitude, sadness of the grave,
A red soldier at the door, for horizon the wave.
Rugged rocks and gloomy woods, weariness and space,
A sail traversing ocean, like hope that flies apace.
Nought but the sound of winds, but the floods that idly sway.
Adieu, the purple tent, the battle-plain's array!
Adieu, the fair white steed that Cæsar calls his own!
Gone the drums that beat the charge, the sceptre and the crown."

His line is more dramatic than ever in its structure, full of strong emphases, breaks, cuts, cries, changes of key. The phrases are short and energetic; there is less melody, but more rhythmic accent.

Hugo's genius, unlike that of most of his notable contemporaries, had lived into another age, in which the passions were deeper and more serious than they had been in the brilliant days of the Romantic movement. The old line would not express the weight and mystery of the universe in which he now lives. The new line and the new style are its fit embodiment; and Hugo, whose genius sought naturally the profound and mysterious side of things, develops in every department a wonderful variety of new artistic methods and resources. Rhythm and accent, with their wild suggestiveness, take the place of melody in his purely lyrical poems. Every dash, hiatus, or break that can add a shade of significance to the thought, or give it additional emphasis, is used with the utmost freedom, and has a value equivalent to that of language proper. The management of these elements, always a remarkable feature in Hugo's versification, now becomes something marvellous, and with his command of remote imaginative suggestion, gives his poetry, especially his *chansons*, a strong and peculiar character of originality. As an example, take the following verses from a poem in 'Les Châtiments,' entitled "Le Chasseur Noir." Notice how the poet has taken the refrain out of its ordinary rank and given it an organ-toned grandeur and amplitude,

which reduce the stanzas to mere piping interludes :—

"Qu'est-tu, passant ? Le bois est sombre,[1]
Les corbeaux volent en grand nombre,
Il va pleuvoir.—
Je suis celui qui va dans l'ombre,
Le Chasseur Noir.'

Les feuilles des bois, du vent remuées,
Sifflent. . . . On dirait,
Qu'un sabbat nocturne emplit de huées
Toute la forêt ;
Dans une clairière au sein des nuées,
La lune apparaît.

Chasse le daim, chasse la biche,
Cours dans les bois, cours dans la friche,
Voici le soir.
Chasse le czar, chasse l'Autriche,
O Chasseur Noir !

---

[1] "Who art thou, horseman ? The wood is sombre,
The ravens fly past without number,
There is rain in the sky.—
I am he that waketh while others slumber,
The Black Horseman I.

The leaves of the wood in the wind drifting,
Rustle. . . . One would say,
The midnight round of the witches shifting
Moves through the forest way ;
And the moon from a gap where the clouds are rifting
Shoots a ghostly ray.

Chase the buck, then, horseman, chase the doe,
Scour the leas and woodlands as you go,
The night is on your track.
Chase the Czar of the North, chase the Austrian foe,
O horseman in black !

> Les feuilles des bois, du vent remuées,
> Sifflent. . . . On dirait,
> Qu'un sabbat nocturne emplit de huées,
> Toute la forêt ;
> Dans une clairière au sein des nuées,
> La lune apparaît."

Such poetry lies near the wilder chords in the human breast. There is a strain of the worship of Mother Cybele in it, a clash of invisible cymbals, and a movement of Corybantic impetuosity. A wild unchastened force like that shown by Byron is at the centre of it —though here Celtic softness, as there Saxon sense, tempers the elements.

But if Hugo likes at times to play in his wonderful manner on these vague keys of emotion, at others this wild, almost licentious, movement of imagination is united with great clearness of expression and suggestion. It is to this union of fantastic freedom in the thought with a certain lucidity of phrase, that his work owes part of its peculiar charm. No doubt, to effect the combination, an epithet here and there is overstrained, or figurative and literal speech curiously mixed; but where there is so much imaginative power and artistic skill, more formal defects are scarcely felt, and ceasing to be felt, or almost so, cease to be defects. As a last example from 'Les Châtiments' we give the

> The leaves of the wood in the wind drifting,
> Rustle. . . . One would say,
> The midnight round of the witches shifting
> Moves through the forest way ;
> And the moon from a gap where the clouds are rifting
> Shoots a ghostly ray."

"Promenade at Rozel-Tower," which, in addition to being a fairly good illustration of what we mean, has the merit of being short enough to be given in full:—

"Nous nous promenions parmi les décombres,[1]
À Rozel-Tower,
Et nous écoutions les paroles sombres
Que disait la mer.

L'enorme océan—car nous entendîmes
Ses vagues chansons—
Disait: 'Paraissez, vérités sublimes
Et bleus horizons!

'Le monde captif, sans lois et sans règles,
Est aux oppresseurs;
Volez dans les cieux, ailes des grands aigles,
Esprits des penseurs!

'Naissez, levez-vous sur les flots sonores,
Sur les flots vermeils;
Faites dans la nuit poindre vos aurores,
Peuples et soleils!

---

[1] "We were wandering amongst the ruins that lie
Around Rozel-Tower,
And the voice of the sea, with its deep sombre cry,
Ascended that hour.

The ocean immense we heard from time to time
Its vague chant renew.
'Appear then,' it said, 'O ye verities sublime,
Ye horizons of blue!

'Without law, without rule, the world evermore
Is a tyrant's cage.
Seek the skies, then, ye wings of great eagles that soar
Ye thoughts of the sage.

'Arise, ascend with the floods sonorous—
Vermeil floods of dawn.
The night-clouds will fade in your coming auroras,
Suns and races of man!

'Vous,—laissez passer la foudre et la brume,
Les vents et les cris,
Affrontez l'orage, affrontez l'écume,
Rochers et proscrits!' "

'And ye—let the mist and the thunder go past,
The winds and the broils;
Set your face to the foam, set your face to the blast,
Ye rocks and exiles!'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREE PROTESTS—'NAPOLÉON LE PETIT'—PERSONAL AND EPIC-NATIONAL.

Of the three works by which Hugo put an ineffaceable brand upon the character of the third Napoleon and his rule, 'Les Châtiments' is the greatest in grandeur of design and execution. Elsewhere history holds the man of the 2d December and of Sedan with a rigorous enough grasp; but there legend has seized him, and has as it were gibbeted him across the great story of the uncle. But there is a certain greatness even in that position. Poetry like that of 'Les Châtiments' can scarcely touch an object, however scornfully, without giving it a sort of grandeur. He is there on the same line with Tiberius and Sejanus, with Richard II. and Philip II., and the other great figures of criminals whom history forms partly from fact, partly from legend—the legend perhaps holding more of the truth. Not that outwardly he much resembles them; but allowing for difference of time and circumstances, he is in Hugo's eyes equally culpable. The satire, even while it denies him in so many words the

right to this "bad eminence," inevitably accords him, in its style and treatment, great historical dimensions, by setting him as a chief figure amongst great forces moving in the light of poetical legend, the traditions of the first Republic, of the Empire, of the army—"*soldats dônt l'Afrique avait hâlé la joue.*" Something of all that grandeur is reflected on him.

In 'Napoléon le Petit' this poetical element, with its tendency to heighten the scene, is left out. The story of the *coup d'état* is steadily kept at the level which, in Hugo's opinion, belongs to the character and achievements of Louis Bonaparte. The part he took in the affair personally is the chief subject of consideration. All the details of his conduct, his falsehoods, his ruses, his methods of statecraft, are numbered and weighed; and when the injustice and the crimes that mark every step of Bonaparte's career at this period have been made clear, in the concluding chapters of the book Hugo, summing up the indirect but inevitable consequences of the *coup d'état* for the national life, makes some of the most eloquent and powerful appeals ever delivered on behalf of public justice and morality to a people. "The spectacle," he declares, "of a success like that of M. Bonaparte's, elevated to the chief place in the State, is sufficient of itself to demoralise a people."

'L'Histoire d'un Crime,' which we have already mentioned, has also its merit. It is the rounded epic of the Second Empire from its origin to its fall. Written partly from the memoranda which in these

days of his exile Hugo made at Brussels, it remained unfinished until, twenty years afterwards, time had made good the author's auguries, and had proved, even to the minds of those who judge only by success, that the leading features in his estimate of the third Napoleon were correct. Then, when Frenchmen had begun to understand the logic of history that brought the *coup d'état* and Sedan together in the career of the same man, 'The History of a Crime' appeared, with its rapid, vigorous, dramatic sketches of the opening events, and the various elements that mix in conflict there, and the sadly solemn pages of its close, where a man is seen walking into the gulf, leading a nation behind him—a book that brings into relief the connection between beginning and end. This was not revenge on a fallen foe, but stern justice dealt out to a great criminal who had put himself above the reach of every other form of it. It is one of Hugo's great merits that he had at once the power and the will to perform this service for mankind—the strength of will here really lying, not in any superficial form of resentment, but deep in the very nature of the man.

This trilogy constitutes Hugo's grand accusation of the Second Empire, and his vindication of the motives and conduct of those who, in spite of oppression and calumny, continued to oppose it. To him it was a sacred labour, the first work of his exile,—after the accomplishment of which he felt himself free to turn his attention elsewhere.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXILES AT JERSEY — ENGLISH SYMPATHIES AND ANTIPATHIES — THE RIOT — EXPULSION — HUGO'S RADICALISM — NEW LITERARY PROJECTS — PHILOSOPHY — "IBO" — PHILOSOPHY IN 'LES CONTEMPLATIONS.'

After a short stay at Brussels, from which the prejudice of the authorities caused his removal, Hugo had betaken himself to the island of Jersey. There he was a conspicuous figure amongst the little band of exiles, including his two sons Charles and François-Victor, who had chosen this territory—half French in the race and nomenclature of its population — as their residence. To commence with, the exiles had met with a very general sympathy from the English. The newspapers had for a time been unanimous in their condemnation of the *coup d'état;* and the Jersey proscription, supported by public opinion, and counting amongst its members some active and talented writers, kept up in the columns of its journal 'L'Homme,' in pamphlets, collective protests, funeral orations, Republican anniversaries, and every variety of utterance, a continual assault on the Government of M.

Bonaparte. For a time things went well with the refugees. Bazaars, countenanced by the governor of the island, were organised in their favour; English newspapers welcomed their contributions; and Hugo's 'Napoléon le Petit' found a ready sale with the English public. But ere long the resources of diplomacy were brought into play against this menacing phantom of the Jersey emigration. The high State officials of England, never probably very profound in their sympathy with the French Republicans, began to find that their interests lay decidedly on the other side. The Crimean war was on the horizon, and the advantages of an alliance with France threw a veil over the crimes of its ruler, and disposed the English public to look with less indulgence on the work of propaganda carried on by the exiles. The force of prescription, too, in these matters is inevitable. To the ordinary English mind, M. Bonaparte—lately crowned Emperor of the French with a due amount of ecclesiastical and political solemnities, holding *levées*, and managing diplomatic interests and police agencies in the ordinary orthodox way, and dangling, besides, the bait of an important alliance before its eyes—came to seem a decidedly more respectable phenomenon than a band of exiles, mostly of broken fortunes and extreme political opinions, and having amongst them, in the solidarity of proscription, some men perhaps of doubtful character. In the natural course of things, then, their position came to be one of sufferance, requiring some prudence, and at least ordinary reserve of speech,

on their part. But to the acerbity not unnatural in exiles, the Jersey proscription added the loquacity and vehemence of French Republicans, and a French incapacity of understanding the style and modes in which they might best influence English opinion. Ominous warnings from the Government, and some petty interferences on the part of local authorities, were met by high-sounding protests on behalf of the rights of man, rhetorical defiances, grandiose announcements of Republican virtue and resolution—all the *étalage,* in short, of the Frenchman in such circumstances. The explosion soon came. The ostensible cause was a letter written by Félix Pyat and two other refugees, in which the visit of Queen Victoria to the Emperor at Paris was commented on with considerable freedom of speech. The letter was published by the Jersey journal 'L'Homme'; and although that paper had little or no circulation outside of the refugees and their friends, the result was a riotous attack on the printing-office of the journal. According to the refugees, the whole affair had been fomented by the authorities themselves, in order to have a pretext for adopting severe measures. In any case, it is scarcely worth while to examine the details: a natural antipathy on the part of the authorities, an ill-advised and deeply ignorant patriotism, cunningly stirred up by officialdom, on the one side—and on the other, reckless utterance and a defiant kind of expostulation, which rather irritated than calmed those to whom it was addressed. The matter would have ended with the expulsion of three

of the exiles who had taken the chief part in the editing of the paper; but the rest, amongst whom was Hugo, considered it necessary to join in a public protest against this violation of the right of asylum, and, as a consequence, they also received notice to quit the island. The Jersey proscription thus broken up, the some six-and-thirty individuals who had composed it went their different ways—some to London or Belgium, others to the new lands across the Atlantic, where their conflict with the old political organisations of Europe would be less likely to prejudice their careers. Hugo, a refugee now for the third time, transferred himself to Guernsey, which continued to be his abode till circumstances again permitted him to enter France.

From this time we must look upon Hugo as one at open war with the general political system of Europe and the traditions upon which it rests. Henceforth his works, besides their more purely artistic side, form a sort of critical examination of the ideas which lie at the root of our social system. They are one long vast polemic against what is corrupt or false in its social and ecclesiastical hierarchies, its criminal jurisprudence, its diplomacy and war. Most of its leading features, in short, from its priesthood to its police agencies, are attacked as being founded on conceptions contrary to the real interests of humanity. It is not that the opinions on these subjects differ very much from those held by modern Liberals and reformers of the moderate type. There are few or none of his

views which have not been those of many thinkers, political philosophers, and State-philanthropists whose names carry with them no associations of revolution. It is more the thorough frankness of expression, the distrust of harsh and repressive methods, and the sincerity of his sympathy with classes universally treated as dangerous by the wisdom of modern statesmanship, that have become the notes of a Democrat. It is by these, rather than by any real difference of beliefs, political or other, that he is to be distinguished amongst the general body of those who fight on the side of civil progress and liberty. But the difference of sympathies here is all-important. While the ordinary Liberal, wanting faith in the virtues of the people, readily falls under the sway of prejudices and traditions inherited from the political systems of the past, is prone to compromises and subject to reactions, the Radical or Democrat, with more confidence in the popular elements of the nation, studies how to bring the new and ever-growing forces into healthy play, and seeks in readjustment, and not in mere repression, the remedy for the social disorders that always accompany their advent. Some such change as this may be admitted to have taken place in Hugo's attitude—a change not so much from one set of opinions to another, as in the force with which these opinions are expressed, and in the extent to which he is prepared to sacrifice other considerations to them. He had long been a Republican in theory and a freethinker of the religious type, without considering it necessary to attack the prin-

ciple of monarchy, or that of Church authority in religion; but he had never been, and he never became, an adherent of any of the particular forms of socialism.

The *coup d'état,* and his experiences since that event, had naturally the effect of uniting his fortunes more closely to those of the Democratic party. They had become his brethren in misfortune. Like him, they had been proscribed and culumniated—denominated a "party of crime" by the successful Revolutionaries. His voice is henceforward to be their great vindication in history; his songs are to cheer them through years of exile and suffering. He had been brought into more sympathetic contact with the masses, and had discerned that the terrors which authority in its various high places is wont to conjure up in connection with that large portion of mankind, are in a great degree imaginary. That they are ignorant and incapable of rule, he knew; but that should only make their rulers more careful that their cause is not prejudiced by their incapacity and errors. That they are liable to excesses is also true. Hugo has given us some perfect pictures of the desperate types which want and neglect can produce amongst them. But these excesses, he reminds us, come under the ordinary laws of human nature, and would disappear with proper treatment; and, at the worst, it is mere sophistry that would presume to count their aberrations with the cruelties which despotisms and autocracies, and even constitutional Governments, have perpetrated with comparative impunity. The crimes of those — and

this is the general sense of Hugo's thought on the subject—who are miserable and oppressed, are at least more pardonable than the crimes of the selfish and pampered classes, and are more easily cured.

Hugo, with his usual energy, was already at work on his new themes. From Jersey he carried with him in manuscript the first sheets of 'La Légende des Siècles' and the earlier chapters of 'Les Misérables,'—those two great appeals on behalf of the people which remain a standing defence of the Democratic idea in its double aspect. But before the completion of either of these works a third appeared, which, besides its intrinsic merits, is of considerable importance to those who would know how the Parisian dramatist and rival of Dumas on the *boulevards* became a competitor with Goethe in works of epic extent and significance—how the poet of 'Les Orientales' and 'Feuilles d'Automne' became the poet of 'La Légende des Siècles' and 'Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit.'

It was thus a double necessity which forced Hugo to make what may be called his philosophy of life. He had to transform a lyrical poetry of vague, wandering impressions—a poetry which was sentimental, sensuously luxurious, or mystic and ideal by turns, which was optimistic or pessimistic as his mood chanced to make it—into a poetry every line of which has its place in a great and well-defined universe of thought. His theoretical faculty, indeed, had never wanted exercise. He had put forth almost as many theories of æsthetics as he had volumes. But his theorising had never been

anything more than an eloquent exposition of his attitude at the moment, of some question which his personal interests at the time urged him to consider. A hastily improvised philosophy of conservatism and religion had accompanied his early odes; speculations on orientalism, his songs of the East, and theories of the Romantic principle in art, his dramas. So in his poems, taken severally, one philosophy of life, or at least some fragment of a philosophy, emerges after another—asceticism at one time, naturalism at another, and, again, supernaturalism. In these earlier poems the character of his thought is not to be fixed, for it shows no fixity. He has the vice of the age, as he has its virtues. He throws out a theory on any subject, political or literary, with a facility which makes his work in that way rather brilliant than solid; but he supports it with so much vigour, so much variety of striking analogies and comparisons, and occasionally with such just observation, that we find it interesting and instructive even where we least agree with its conclusions. In short, his intellect has hitherto been at the service of his fancy, or even his fantasies; and these have been of an unsettled, wandering kind, such as belong to a nature without ordinary boundaries, of large appetites, and uncontrolled and often conflicting tendencies. At one time it is military glory that has caught his imagination—he has the "cannon-fever," and cries passionately, "Had I not been a poet, I would have been a soldier;" at another, it is the pastoral strain that is uppermost. He is the frequenter of the divine orches-

tra, and if he had not been a thinker, he would have been a man of the woods.[1] Now his ideal of life will be that of the artist at his quiet solitary task: "*Si nous pouvions quitter ce Paris triste et fou*," he murmurs (if we could but leave this sad, mad world of Paris, and go somewhere, no matter where, if there be trees and turf); now it will be the roar of public assemblies that entices him, then the mantle and austere solitude of the prophet: he is John at Patmos, or has fled Paris—"*comme le noir prophète fuyait Tyr*"—as the gloomy prophet fled Tyre.

There is strength in this as well as weakness. It is but the natural amplitude of human nature which this man has preserved better than most. The magnificent abundance of nature here reminds us of the description which Maurice de Guérin's sister gave of him. "What a man," she writes, "Hugo is! I have just learnt something of him: he is divine, he is infernal, he is wise, he is mad, he is people, he is king; he is man, woman, painter, poet, sculptor; he is everything, has seen everything, done everything, felt everything; he astonishes me, repels me, enchants me."

But the individual is not readily intelligible, and consequently not effective, under this large aspect. The time had now come for Hugo to mark more definitely his attitude in the world, to work out the deeper tendencies in him and suppress the more superficial, to

[1] "Je suis l'habitué de l'orchestre divin;
Si je n'étais songeur, j'aurais été sylvain."
—*Les Contemplations*, Bk. i. 27.

lay new foundations and fix the boundaries of his thought. A period had come which, if we cannot properly term it one of transition, was that in which he arrived at a clear consciousness of the work that lay before him—of his duty,—and he henceforward went his way without faltering.

To understand the inward side of Hugo's struggle at this epoch in his life, we must keep in mind the small place which either philosophy or philosophical methods had had in his training. His poetry had hitherto been a poetry of impressions and intuitions loosely connected by some subtle play of fancy or feeling. When the subject is concrete, his poem is clear and full of light; when it is not, he wanders into the vague, where his splendid power of carving out dim impressive shapes in a manner covers his weakness. The rapid, facile generalisations of which his prose writings are full, and which lead him easily to this or that side of a smaller subject, on a greater or more abstract are easily seen to lead nowhither, one view after another demanding recognition, and the data being as various as the nature of things.

These were decided defects in the intellect of the poet who was now advancing to his great epic themes. What sort of a struggle he had with them we may see in the later poems of 'Les Contemplations,' the first volume which he published from his Guernsey home in 1856. In Book VI. there is a poem headed "Ibo" (I shall go), of date 1853, in which Hugo announces in his old confident way his intention of attacking,

of solving, the great problem of humanity. "I will penetrate," he says, "to the hidden secrets; the laws of our problem, I shall possess them: I will enter into the tabernacle of the unknown, and go forward to the threshold of the shadow and the void":—

> "Jusqu'aux portes visionnaires
> Du ciel sacré:
> Et si vous aboyez, tonnerres,
> Je rugirai."

In that "Ibo" we see that neither time nor exile has cured the poet of certain faults. There is the same vaunting ambition which announces its leap before it has even considered the height—the same extravagance of language, which is just saved from being ridiculous because the achievement which follows is, after all, very considerable. Nor can it be said that Hugo did much in 'Les Contemplations' to fulfil these magnificent promises. The philosophical element in that book is of no great value. The prominent feature in his thinking on this ground is a vague all-embracing principle of unity, which brings things together at that point where their characteristic differences are lost, and remains, therefore, abstract and empty. To follow him we must rise to that plane of thought where resemblances count for much and differences for little. We must class the daisy with the sun, for the daisy too has rays; plants and animals have the sentiments and speak the language of humanity; the sky is a church, and the rising of Luna the elevation of the host; God Himself officiates. His

generalisations bring Virgil and Isaiah, Zoroaster and Abraham, under the same category. Persius, Archilochus, and Jeremiah "have the same gleam in their eyes." This cosmic unity is sometimes founded on the most fantastic analogies, as, for instance, in the poem entitled "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre," the last in the book. And yet the skill he shows in keeping himself at the height of his conceptions is remarkable. The curious range of his illustrations, and his unique power of characterising things and their relations from his point of view, give a sort of value to a philosophical conception which would be worthless in other hands. His wild imagination has free play in such subjects—

> "Phryné meurt, un crapaud saute hors de la fosse ;
> Ce scorpion au fond d'une pierre dormant,
> C'est Clytemnestre aux bras d'Egysthe son amant."

Looked at in its details, his metaphysic is rambling. Fragments from all systems find themselves neighbours in his. His faculty for organising ideas on abstract lines is small; there was always something loose and imperfect in the structure of his longer poems, and he is but finding his way as yet. We see the awkward movement of a vigorous mind in a region where it has no great landmarks.

The universe he is making for himself is a great one—fertile veins opening up to him in every direction in it—but is still in a somewhat chaotic state, requiring much toil to bring order and light into it. We can see its foundations are laid deep in a grand naturalism which discards all conventions and superficial varieties

of things in order to get at their true tendencies. Nor does it want spiritual elements of the highest kind in its conception of humanity, historically and in the individual consciousness; and the consciousness of man is taken as the index of that obscurer life which exists in the lower forms of the universe. But all this has to be worked out on its concrete side. The vague metaphysic and philosophy of history which we find in the later poems of 'Les Contemplations,' are but the preparatory studies for the stronger work of that kind in 'La Légende des Siècles,' and 'Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit.' He is to go—*Ibo*—but he has not yet found the path.

CHAPTER VI.

'LES CONTEMPLATIONS'—"THEN AND NOW"—HUGO'S FEMININE IDEAL—GROWTH OF NATURALISM—'PAUCA MEÆ'—TENNYSON'S 'IN MEMORIAM'—ETHICAL FEELING IN HUGO.

In our last chapter we spoke of the philosophical element in 'Les Contemplations.' But the merit of the poet does not lie in his metaphysic. The scholasticism of Dante and the theology of Milton are not the valuable parts of the 'Divina Commedia' or 'Paradise Lost,' though they represent a power of synthesis which in various forms helps to give the work of these masters its perfection. Hugo had missed the severe discipline of philosophical studies by which their minds had been formed. The desultory character of his education had developed his poetic susceptibility and the range of his intuitions in excess of the organising power of his thought. And in view of the work which he meditates, he has now got to overcome, as far as he is able, this defect. Not that we are to expect a completely linked philosophical system from him. It is not the poet's business to bring such a system to the surface out of the chaos of things, but

only to find the essential facts, and to insist on them with such unity of sentiment and insight as indeed implies a system, a synthesis, but one which has neither the merits nor defects of a metaphysic. 'Les Contemplations' shows him labouring towards this end, but its value still lies largely on the other side. It is still in some measure a poetry of impressions and intuitions which want placing, or what we may call, to use a word of philosophic kindred, orientation.

It is time, however, that we should look at some other sides of this work, which stands so curiously between Hugo's earlier and his later productions. Outwardly 'Les Contemplations' is divided into two parts, which Hugo has headed respectively "Autrefois" and "Aujourd'hui," or "Then and Now," as we may say, —a title which has a general reference to the changes in the poet's life, but is also more formally and precisely connected with the death of his daughter Leopoldine in 1843. In the preface—which is full of the old eloquence, but shorter than it used to be—Hugo gets gradually discreeter in this respect; he tells us that there are twenty-five years in the two volumes. They are, he says, the memoirs of a soul. "They are all the impressions, all the memories, all the realities, all the vague phantasms, gleeful or sombre, that a human consciousness may contain. They are the record of a human existence in its passage from the cradle to the grave, from mystery to mystery—of a spirit which makes its way from gleam to gleam, leaving behind it in succession youth, love, illusion, struggle, despair,

and which halts in dismay at the threshold of the infinite. The beginning is a smile, the continuation a sob, and the end a blast of the trumpet of the abyss." These words, which are not too lofty for Hugo's work, taken in its great cycle from 'Les Orientales' to 'Les Quatre Vents,' seem now a little too heavy for 'Les Contemplations.' The blast of the abyss is not there; the time, as we have seen, was not come. Nor, we may add, is there the smile. If there is, it is but a very superficial and momentary relaxation of the grave, even sombre, visage which the mental eye follows from page to page of 'Les Contemplations.'

Most of the poems in the first volume take us back, either by their date or contents, to Hugo's life at Paris, and are very various in their themes. Youthful loves; domestic reminiscences; the voice of nature in the woodlands; fragments of the great romantic discussion, now wellnigh gone to pieces, or rather dissolved into a question of wider issues; dawnings of the cosmic philosophy before mentioned; hints, too, that his eye is resting with closer attention on the great problem of the masses,—these fill up the years between 1830 and 1843.

The great range of Hugo's talent—the variety in his work—is already an old story. His amorous or *quasi* amorous poetry, for instance, occupies but a very small place in the whole; yet the poems of this kind in 'Les Contemplations,'—those headed "Lise," "Vieille chanson du jeune temps," "La coccinelle," and some others of a like strain,—are perfect in their way, fresh and

delicate in their sentiment, and with a charming novelty of conception. That picture of young sixteen *masculine*, gloomy, embarrassed, awkward, with young sixteen *feminine*, alert, natural, and somewhat malign, is finely given. The essential moment is, as always with Hugo in these things, happily seized, and the whole scene, action, and accessories put before you at the least expense, with the light suggestive touch necessary in these things:—

> "Je ne vis qu'elle était belle
> Qu'en sortant des grands bois sourds.
> 'Soit; n'y pensons plus!' dit elle.
> Depuis, j'y pense toujours."[1]

But the sentiment in all of these poems is general rather than individual. They are all retrospective—the songs of a past time, of feelings and situations which will not return. That sage muse Melancholy has inspired them. We have but to compare this "Old Song of a Young Time," notwithstanding its early date, with the passionate lyrism of "Gastibelza," to see with what fine judgment the poet reserved the former for its place in this volume.

One may notice, too, that Hugo's idea of woman in poems of this kind is decidedly that of the Latin races. A bright, graceful, susceptible creature—responsive mainly, if not altogether, on the chord of sentiment—is the figure which in various situations appears and reappears in these idyls of Hugo. It is not that his sympathies are confined to this type. His poems to

[1] Vieille chanson du jeune temps, Bk. I. xix.

Mdlle. Bertin, and other works, sufficiently prove the contrary; but this is the type which his art can treat most successfully. Esmeraldas, Blanches, Lisas, Rosas, Fatimas—they are all from the same stratum, and differ only in the accidents of their life and circumstances. The portentous Josiane in "L'Homme qui rit" is an abnormal formation found at the same level. Even in that fine poem, "Paroles dans l'Ombre," where we have what is presumably a glimpse at the poet's domestic life, the pretty childlike complaint of the wife—"Je veux qu'on songe à moi"—is a note of the same kind. The contrast is certainly fine between the grave strength of the man, absorbed in his meditative labour, and the slighter feminine figure that watches the door and picks up his pen when it falls; but it would not so readily have occurred to a poet of Teutonic race to express that by a line like this:—

"Vous êtes mon lion, je suis votre colombe."

The naturalism of the Latin races has kept this type in its purest form in their literature. It was Goethe's great type, too, as we may see in his Clärchen and Margaret. It is the unalterably poetic type, that eminent Italian critic De Sanctis contends; Francesca, not Beatrice, is *the woman* of the 'Divina Commedia.' "The woman whom Dante seeks in Paradise, behold he has found her here in the infernal region."[1]

[1] "Francesca è rimasta il tipo onde sono uscite le piu care creature della fantasia moderna: esseri delicati, in cui niente è che resiste e reagisca. . . . Qui è la *tragedia* della donna, variata da mille

This is one form of the old quarrel between art and morality. The strong woman, it is agreed, with her power of resistance and reaction, is "respectable but inæsthetic." One might almost say that it is only in the traditions and literature of the Anglo-Saxon race that we find a steady tendency towards an ideal of another and surely a higher kind. Naturalism is, indeed, the perennial source of great art. Deviation on conventional lines, however moral and instructive, is the mark of a second-rate artist, or an inferior department of art. But naturalism does not refer to any stage of nature which is fixed within certain unalterable limits. The naturalism of one age or of one race may contain more or finer elements than that of another age or another race; and the influence of the Anglo-Saxon, now become one of the most powerful and widely spread races of the world, will do much for the evolution of a new universal type in great art. These things belong to the great march of the ages. It took centuries to make a Briseis, and centuries more to make a Gretchen; and art is as slow in discovering as nature is in forming them.

As far as Hugo himself is concerned, however, the predominance of certain types of womanhood has a

incidenti, ma con lo stesso fondo. L'uomo nella sua lotta resiste, e vinto anche, l'anima rimane indomata e ribelle: il suo tipo è Prometeo. L'uomo che resista e vinca, puo in certi casi essere un personaggio poetico; ma l'aureola della donna è la sua fiacchezza; ne moralista otterrà mai che la donna invasa e signoreggiata dalla passione, ove dalla lotta esca vincitrice, sia altro mai che un personaggio inestetico, virtuoso, rispettabile, ma inestetico."—Francesco De Sanctis, *Nuovi Saggi Critici*.

sufficient reason in the nature of his artistic faculty. As a poet, his power lies in representing the instinctive rather than the reflective movement in human nature. In the one he is true and natural; his hand is sure, and his conceptions have the utmost delicacy and simplicity. Who, for instance, has given us pictures of child-life that will for a moment compare with Victor Hugo's? In the other he is not to be trusted, even in inferior *genres,* where less power and less knowledge are required. It is a question whether he will turn out a Bishop Myriel or a Barkilphedro. He is full of violence and exaggeration, forces nature more than he follows her, and seeks abnormal types and situations. Work like that of Goethe's 'Tasso' or 'Wilhelm Meister' is entirely alien to his genius. We suspect him of thinking they are poor affairs.

Here, then, we see the tendencies which are moulding the poetry of his later years. While philosophy is invading it at one end, in its epic subjects, all metaphysical and abstract elements are being thrown out of it at the other, in its purely lyrical subjects. In these, now that the medieval and romantic oriental phases are past, he seeks only themes and sentiments which are natural, universal. Past, too, is the sickly elegiac phase—what of it, at least, he was ever affected by,—the cry of De Musset's "Child of the Century." The beauty of the flower—the song of the shepherd or the birds—Lisa, who passes with a flower in her corset, —these are now his lyrical subjects. And this double process goes on, till we have at one end the smallest

and finest of lyrical notes, and at the other the organ-tones of his great poems. But the impulse at the centre is one and the same. The truth of nature has everywhere become his aim. His great poems are a rectification of philosophy, which has strayed from her teaching, an attack on the conventions which have taken the place of her laws; and his smaller are an expression of her harmonies and the beauty of her results.

This kind of naturalism suggests many of the themes in 'Les Contemplations.' "Aimons toujours! aimons encore!" "Ce qu'un prêtre édifie, un prêtre le détruit;" "Pourquoi ne vas-tu prier dans les églises;" "Si Dieu n'avait fait la femme, il n'aurait pas fait la fleur;" "Cette femme a passé;" "Je suis fou;" "C'est l'histoire;" "Si nous pouvions quitter ce Paris triste et fou."

Even the cannon-fever has worn itself out; the "bravo's art" is seen to be an illusion.

> "Moi, je préfère, O fontaines!
> Moi, je préfère, O ruisseaux!
> Au Dieu des grands capitanes
> Le Dieu des petits oiseaux!"[1]

This is not, as it might once have been, a passing mood; it is part of a thought which is being systematised in this direction.

These are simple subjects; but Hugo's manner of treating them is profound, deepening our sense of life,

[1] "As for me, I prefer, O fountains! as for me, I prefer, O streams! to the God of great captains the God of little birds."—Book II. xviii.

and refreshing our impressions of its ordinary joys and sorrows. The matter is old as the heavens. Love and death, childhood and old age, in forms which are familiar to all. Hugo is too strong on this ground to seek strange situations. Reading these poems in our times is like coming to Homer from one of the metaphysical poets. We are in no cranny of the universe; there is air and space and a great sky above us. Books IV. and V. furnish, perhaps, the finest examples. The death of his daughter gave rise to a series of poems which are a very complete expression of the inevitable tragedy of life—that of living on when those who made life valuable have passed away. Death is the great Musagetes, it has been said, and Hugo's theme here is the same that inspired a fine poem of Lord Tennyson's, 'In Memoriam.' Both have succeeded in grouping with wonderful effect the lights and melodies of existence round this sombre centre; but there are notable differences. Instead of the clever, but somewhat artificial, synthesis by which Tennyson has made one long poem of this subject, Hugo has given us a number of shorter ones. This latter appears to us the better and more natural method. There is a sort of factitious grandeur in the other; but a great poem requires a great subject, and notwithstanding the English laureate's example, the demise of a friend will probably continue to be considered a theme for elegies of more moderate dimensions. On the other hand, if the subject is enlarged, new keys struck, other scenes introduced, till a sort of

epic of life, with its situations in an artificial subjective order, is made to pass before us, then the steady predominance of the central subject, though producing here and there certain specious effects, is unnatural and monotonous. The shadow is where the light ought to be, and *vice versâ.* The conception does not allow the poet's grief that freedom and spontaneity which it should have. He has to take up an extreme phase at the thirtieth stanza, and a mitigated phase at the fiftieth; to have one kind of doubt at this part, and another at that; to be manœuvring transitions and contrasts throughout a poem which is meant to be the utterance of one stricken by a great sorrow.

Hugo, as we have said, is more natural. From the first poem after his daughter's death, "Trois ans après," that bitter "cry of the human" in protest against its inevitable destiny, through all the various forms which his grief takes of reminiscences, fantasies, speculations hazarded beyond the region of the known, to the poems where it has become an undertone, or a sudden pang of reminiscence, or a shadow seen only by himself on the ordinary face of life, everything is natural and spontaneous. There is a free, not an artificial, arrangement of light and shade, and each poem has that which is in harmony with its mood. There is no attempt to guide grief in the ways of metaphysical sequence. What logic there is in the order of the series is the subtle unsystematisable logic of the heart—its sorrow gathering force silently amongst one kind of associations, and relaxing amongst others; concentrat-

ing itself into a sharp cry in one scene, and diffused as a soft veil of melancholy over another. This is the only way in which a grief of this nature can be made a fit subject for extended representation. Hugo took it, because he did not have the idea of making a great poem, but simply wrote down his grief at the times and with the intervals which are part of its natural history.

Every style has its defects and compensations. We may at times feel the want of a powerful synthesis in Hugo, but the freshness and spontaneity of ntterance in these later lyrics are irresistible. There is no appearance of external labour on the line—the words seem to have leapt at once from the heart. Look at the commencement of the first poem after his daughter's death.

> " Il est temps que je me repose ;
> Je suis terrassé par le sort.
> Ne me parlez pas d'autre chose
> Que des ténèbres où l'on dort." [1]

There is a wild humanity, a Promethean touch in this poem. The poet seems at first to refuse to bow his head. Has he not laboured from before the dawn till the evening, and this is his reward? Better to have lived a common lot *far from thy face*—to have been a man who passes in the street holding his child by the hand. We have said Promethean, but perhaps there is more of the antique Hebrew strain here,—

[1] "It is time that I rest from my labour. I am stricken by fate. Speak to me of naught but the shades where the dead rest."

acknowledgment of austere inexplicable laws, but the bitterness of the heart rising into a cry that looks like revolt, and is reprehensible in the eyes of Bildad the Shuhite and his friends :—

"O Dieu ! vraiment, as-tu pu croire
Que je préférais, sous les cieux,
L'effrayant rayon de ta gloire
Aux douces lueurs de ses yeux !

Si j'avais su tes lois moroses,
Et qu'au même esprit enchanté
Tu ne donnes point ces deux choses,
Le bonheur et la vérité,

Plutôt que de lever tes voiles,
Et de chercher, cœur triste et pur,
À te voir au fond des étoiles,
O Dieu sombre d'un monde obscur,

J'eusse aimé mieux, loin de ta face,
Suivre heureux, un étroit chemin,
Et n'être qu'un homme qui passe
Tenant son enfant par le main !" [1]

There is a free ethical feeling here, as in many of these poems, akin to that which we may find in Job or Isaiah—devout, but very real and human. Hugo

[1] "O God ! truly, couldst thou believe that under the skies I should choose the terrible ray of Thy glory, and not the soft beam of her eyes !

Had I known Thy morose laws, and that to the same spirit intoxicate, Thou givest not these two things, happiness and truth,

Rather than to raise Thy veils and search, a sad heart and pure, for Thy ways in the depth of the stars, O sombre God of an obscure world !

I would have sought, far from Thy face, to walk with contentment in a narrow path, and to be but a man that passes in the street holding his child by the hand !

lives in too great a world of thought to weep over the decay of creeds at such a moment. Is the law of the universe, then, anything different for us than it was for Abraham or Zoroaster? There is a reason why in the rhythmic beat of his verse there should be something like the parallelism of ancient Hebrew poetry. "And now," he says, "I would be left alone; I have finished, and fate is the victor."

But that is the first outburst; calmer moods come. He is resigned, and recognises that the life of man is in these things under laws not to be searched out:—

> "Il doit voir peu de temps tout ce que ses yeux voient;
> Il vieillit sans soutiens.
> Puisque ces choses sont, c'est qu'il faut qu'elles soient,
> J'en conviens, j'en conviens!"

Then we have poems which are sometimes fine reflections of the way in which the fantasy hovers about the graves of the dear dead, or sometimes reminiscences of scenes where their figures were familiar. In both, Hugo is peculiarly powerful, seizing deftly the vague, sombre chords of fancy in the one world, and painting with firm delicacy and tenderness of touch in the other. The poems "Elle avait pris ce pli dans son âge enfantin"[1] and "À Mademoiselle Louise B."[2] are masterpieces of the latter kind.

Of the philosophical poems in 'The Contemplations' we have already spoken. Those of the most ambitious kind are to be found in Book VI., "On the Borders of the Infinite." His philosophy, as we have

[1] Book IV. 5. [2] Book V. 5.

said, is still much in the vague, vast, cosmic, bringing together the distant ends in nature and in the history of man, and orienting itself with difficulty in a mass of great analogies and far-reaching fancies. But the reason in its highest exercise finds a powerful auxiliary in the imagination—the metaphors of Bacon are philosophical conceptions, the fantasy of Plato is the precursor of his theories; and in Hugo's analogies there is a curious felicity which is no bad augury for his later work in this way. That characterisation of Rabelais, for instance:—

> "Rabelais, que nul ne comprit;
> Il berce Adam pour qu'il s'endorme,
> Et son éclat de rire énorme
> Est un des gouffres de l'esprit!"[1]

With these philosophical poems, 'The Contemplations,' that bridge between the earlier and later phases of Hugo's thought, ends.

[1] "Rabelais, that none understood—he rocks Adam to sleep in his cradle; and his burst of enormous laughter is one of the abysses of the spirit."—Book VI. 23.

BOOK IV.

THE *MAGNUM OPUS*—THE SOCIAL NOVELS—PRACTICAL ISSUES—RE-ENTRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE SECOND EMPIRE—CHANGES IN PARIS—GROWING OLD IN EXILE—REFUSAL OF THE AMNESTY—THE *MAGNUM OPUS.*

MEANTIME the years were passing, and the cause of the exiles seemed to have become even more desperate. The third Napoleon had the appearance of prospering. With the whole power of France concentrated in his hands, he was playing a pretentious part in European politics, and for a time with success. The Crimean war had done something to destroy old national prejudices between France and Britain. The campaign against Austria on behalf of Italian freedom, if it had cooled the Clerical party had pleased the Republicans, and the victories of Solferino and Magenta had brought the Empire a degree of military prestige. These enterprises, it is true, had little or no profitable result for France, and were but stages on the road to destruction. The war with Austria, in liberating the northern States of Italy, had laid the foundations of a powerful and inevitably antagonistic State on her very frontiers. And this adventurous policy abroad served,

as is often the case, to cover corruption and stagnancy of life at home. Internally, indeed, there was a subtle and marked decline of force in France. Most of the great names which had illumined her history since the Restoration were those of men now in the grave, or sinking thither in public neglect and oblivion. Sainte-Beuve alone of the great race begins in these times to draw ahead under Imperial patronage, and enjoys a sort of revenge for the neglect of his old friends the *doctrinaires*. He is made, not without some difficulty, a senator, and holds notable assemblies at his house of a new generation of literary men—Renan, Taine, St-Victor, Schérer, and others. These are mostly quiet men politically, with more erudition and less genius than their predecessors. On the whole, it is a wonderful change from the Paris of Lamartine and Béranger. The voices of enthusiasm in all its shapes—political, religious, or romantic—have mostly fallen silent, in the grave or out of it. Instead of Chateaubriand and Lamennais, we have the finely attenuated sentiment of Renan, and the sombre fatalism of Leconte de Lisle. A solitary note at intervals, pamphlet or protest from some wandering exile, is all that breaks the calm of despotism. Feasts at Compiègne, military parades, and the immense luxuries of the Imperial Court, are at present the chief interests at Paris. All goes well, as it seems, with the Second Empire. The whole world has accepted it as it usually accepts an established fact, without much troubling itself about the character and significance of the new phenomenon. Louis Bona-

parte had secured a place amongst the rulers of the world, "*Les rois te disent mon cousin;*" and what signified the protests of a few dreamers and mystics who had neither political power nor battalions?

Even Hugo in those days must have felt the weight of defeat. Removed from the brilliancy of surroundings at Paris to the solitude of his rocky isle, where the most familiar voices were the eternal murmur of ocean and the cry of the chough in the winds, a sense of deprivation, even in the midst of his great labours and increasing fame, is often uppermost in him. He is "in the sinister unity of night." Hugo is not of those in whom the severe ideal joys of labour tend to silence the more instinctive desires of the heart. His is an ample nature, every side of it healthfully active. There is something of John of Patmos in him, and something also of Alexander Dumas. Our traditional classifications of men break down before this great natural force of his asserting itself in every direction. It is not, however, wonderful that occasional complaints escape him. He sees his vigorous manhood declining into old age in a foreign land. His hair is becoming white and his eyes dimmer amongst strangers, and he who was a notable figure in Parisian *salons*, passes solitary days in promenades at the seashore under the hazy skies of the Channel Islands.

At times even, as we may notice in that poem of 'Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit' headed "Pati," that last solution of difficulties, the death of the Roman stoic, had, in a meditative mood, crossed the mind of

the poet. But only as a mere speculation to be rejected as an inadequate conclusion, not, however, without some appreciative touches in the lines, showing what extent of sympathy there was in his energetic spirit, not naturally strong in patience and endurance, but strong in courage and faculty, for the proud contempt with which a Brutus or a Cato relinquished a world become unworthy:—

> "Que leur faisait la vie? Est-ce que ces romains
> Tenaient à voir passer les chars sur les chemins
> Et le vent courber les brins d'herbes?"[1]

Latterly, indeed, it was in his power to have returned to France. In 1859, Napoleon had proclaimed an amnesty from which Hugo was not excluded. But he refused, as ten years later he refused in still more haughty words, to benefit by a grace from an authority he would not acknowledge. In the last poem of 'Les Châtiments,' he had declared that he would accept exile without end, "*n'eût il ni fin ni terme,*" rather than re-enter France while the Empire existed. If but a thousand remain to protest, he will be one of them; if only ten, he will be the tenth; and if there rest but one, it will be he—"*et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là!*" Perhaps there was some reminiscence here of that other stern *nunquam revertar*, which expressed the determination of the great Florentine exile never to return unless honourably—only that its form, in the

[1] "What was life to them? Think you these Romans cared to see the chariots pass on the public ways, and the wind bending the blades of grass?"

manner of our poet and his time, is somewhat more expansive.

Hugo's resolve, whatever we may think of his manner of announcing it, was at bottom a wise one. He was labouring at a great work, or rather a series of great works, which required the concentration of the mind at a height far above the level of temporary social and political interests. For this no home was more suitable than the one where he was. At Guernsey, he had a repose of mind and an internal freedom which he could scarcely have found in Paris, in the midst of imperial glories, and in daily contact with the effervescence of party politics. It was the perennial, not the parliamentary, aspects of the struggle which had to grow clear to his mind. The plane of vision in his later works is more that of the prophet than that of the politician. Reading Tacitus and Montluc and the story of the Cid, and all those great old volumes that know little of abstract principles, but touch life on the quick, with nothing of France nearer to him than the haze of Cherbourg, was excellent preparation for the work of 'The Legend of the Centuries.'

That work, besides, was of the kind which is naturally born in exile. Lamennais, condensing previous observations on the subject, has said of Dante's poem that it is at once a cradle and a grave; and 'The Legend of the Centuries' also has this double character. On the one hand, it is a sombre retrospect of the past, and evokes a consciousness of it so complete

and just, notwithstanding some minor defects, as to be a fatal judgment on it, and the principles and ideas by which it existed. On the other hand, it is only in the light of a new and better ideal of life that this view of the past would be justifiable or tolerable. On this latter side, 'The Legend' is the epopee of the dawn. Humanity, or more strictly the people, is a great Titan, whose front has been long soiled in the dirt; but he has found his way from his den to the light, and will not be much longer abused. As 'Les Châtiments' was Hugo's protest addressed to France against the *coup d'état*, 'La Légende' is his protest to the world against all that makes *coups d'état* or autocratic imperialisms possible. He has comprehended that it is not the force of evil in a few Louis Napoleons or De Mornys or Maupas that carries through a 2d December, but a gulf of error and ignorance which lies behind it. He sees, as the years pass, that such a fact as the imperialism of the third Napoleon may for that reason have right to a longer duration than he at first accorded it, and that his appeal must be to the future,—to the future of France, it may be, or if not, to that greater future before which, in all times, Isaiahs and Dantes, overborne by temporary evil, have carried with assurance their cause.

CHAPTER II.

'THE LEGEND OF THE CENTURIES'—LEGEND AND REALITY—A MODERN CYCLE—GOETHE, SHELLEY, AND HUGO—THE DEMOCRATIC LEGEND OF HUMANITY.

It has been said that the legend-making epochs of man's history are past, and that the marvellous being now looked for in the real, there is no longer any place for that play of imagination which once constructed the legendary world. Yet the fact that none of the great elements of life ever entirely disappear, but only undergo a change, might suggest that somewhere, and in some form or other, a successor to old Carlovingian legends and expired Arthurian cycles may exist. Men are always complaining that idealism belongs to another age than their own; but when a great artist comes, be he a Turner or a Hugo, you find that the plane of his thought is the ideal. And naturally, for the real remains as of old, and after all that positive science has done with it, a very inscrutable fact. Of that part of reality in particular which finds expression in the life of man, all that has been done is to note some special formulas for phenomena

whose relations stretch beyond our philosophy, and seem to have a sort of infinitude. When a Whig historian paints Clarendon in shade and Hampden in light, we say he is right—he would be a still smaller formulist did he do otherwise; but if he thinks his formula is comprehensive, let him try it on Napoleon. No age, indeed, has had such a variety of distinct and irreconcilable formulas as the present one—formulas which, in the numbers and intelligence of their adherents, would seem to show how little has been done to fix the lines and mark the boundaries of man's thoughts and fancies in this region. Agnostic formulas, Romish formulas, Anglican formulas, Positivist, Socialistic, or Democratic formulas—the chances for the general reader are that each new book he takes up, be it a history or a poem or a novel, reflects or consciously inculcates a fundamentally different view of life. It is true we are not quite without guidance in the midst of these contending philosophies, were it only that of observing where men of a certain culture and capacity stand. The main stream, although here and there it may be in detour, is where Emerson and Mr Arnold are, and not where Canon Liddon and Cardinal Newman are.

But what more concerns us here is, that this twilight of opinion, in which fantasy ranges freely round the horizon of man's hopes and aspirations, is eminently favourable to a play of imagination as free as that in the old legendary cycles. Our age has here a fund of ideas, in which fantasies and vague ideals

mix as harmoniously with the real as legend and matter of fact in a great epic age; and in Goethe's 'Faust,' Shelley's 'Prometheus,' and Hugo's 'Legend of the Centuries,' we have a series of cyclic poems which have a subject as real, and yet as full of ideal and legendary matter to us, as the history of Arthur or of Charlemagne was to our ancestors. This subject is the history of mankind viewed as a progressive, connected, but still, on many sides, unintelligible fact. In other words, the legend of the nineteenth century is the legend of humanity, with its blurred pathos, its grand traditions and heroisms, great gleams of light traversing a background in deep shade, its constant passage of men and things hastening to oblivion, and the obscure reason that guides its destinies. It is a theme which looks backwards and forwards, and contains as a natural part of itself the matter of all past legends.

How Goethe treated this subject is well known. Various forms of it, indeed, long haunted his mind. Prometheus, Mahomet, the Wandering Jew, were subjects that in different ways showed the whole circumference of the human; but of the first there is only a prologue—of the second, a fine choral song—and the last never went beyond the title. Goethe's 'Faust' drew into itself all the stores of thought he had on the subject, and all the resources of his art. But the weak side of that great poem is no secret. The conception is fundamentally a historic one, with its roots in the past and its development in the future; and

Goethe confessedly had not, in a sufficient degree at least, the historic sense. All of the great epic of humanity that he has been able to seize and embody with the power of a great master is a dramatic moment—a stage, the sceptical one, of its history. That is the first part of 'Faust,' where the movement of humanity is exposed in the aspect of the individual struggle. The rest is a philosophical construction, the value of which he himself would have judged by its obscurity and want of great leading lines. "Bring me no riddles," he has said; "I have enough of my own."

Goethe himself has told us why he did not possess the historic sense. He wanted enthusiasm, as he calls it—that is, he wanted faith, and understood the movement of humanity far better on its side of conscious construction than on its side of unconscious evolution. Without that kind of faith, and the insight it brings with it, a great poet may write the 'Battle of the Frogs and Mice' as Leopardi has written it, or the 'Reineke Fuchs' as Goethe, but he will scarcely be the poet to express the highest conceptions of the nineteenth century with regard to the history of mankind, or to satisfy its vague, undefined sense of the destiny that mixes or rules in that long development. In 'Faust,' as everywhere, Goethe is a master of wise sentences, but he lacked the enthusiasm or faith to write the great epopee of humanity.

Hugo took up the subject just on that side, the ideal historic, which Goethe had striven to make sub-

ordinate in his dramatic conception, but the inevitable presence of which eventually drew his drama out of shape. The form which the French poet selected was one eminently adapted to the subject and his power of treating it. It consists of a series of poems, each of which, standing artistically independent of the others, is yet, by its place and content, part of the fundamental conception which the whole develops. The parts have a connection, therefore, but not of a kind which requires a complete philosophical construction. He deals everywhere with the primordial elements of life, not with the formulas under which we regard this or that age—scarcely even with the formulas which were in its consciousness. Hence, if his work lacks the refined intellectual interest which belongs to that of a poet whose matter is really modes of thought, the subjective drama of the consciousness, it gains in massiveness, simplicity, and poetic colour. He stands close in his subtlest and most fantastic moods to the real forms and colours of nature. Much of his success is owing to the fact that he can find in these a complete expression for the highly general and abstract thought of our time.

The subject of 'The Legend of the Centuries' is simply the history of humanity regarded from the only point of view which makes it a connected whole—the point of view, namely, of its progress. The oldest legend which embodied this idea was that of Prometheus, in which, as treated by Æschylus, there was some obscure expression of the passing of humanity

from an old law to a new. The growth of the conception in modern times may be measured by the fact that, while Æschylus hints at a reconciliation between Prometheus and Jove, Shelley boldly sings the fall of the oppressor. But Prometheus is essentially an aristocratic figure, and Hugo has put in his place two figures which more fitly embody the democratic idea of progress—those of the Satyr and the Titan Phtos. But while Hugo has made use of these as well as of most of the old legends which symbolise the struggle of humanity, they are nothing more than incidental illustrations of the main theme—the development of humanity,—not of thought, or art, or science, which have their special stages, and are best represented by a few elevated intellects,—but of the *life* of humanity as it ascends through phase after phase of ideals, illusions, and disillusions, towards freedom and light. All the old legends, old Hebrew stories, classic Titans and Satyrs, Charlemagne, traditions of the Caliphs, of the Cid, and the Paladins, find a place in Hugo's conception, because they have all been moments in its growth. The truth that there is in all of these is brought under one point of view, and thus refined and illumined, is the truth of 'The Legend of the Centuries.' But alongside of this, there still remains to be noticed what is perhaps the most original part of Hugo's work—the manner, namely, in which he contrives to make actual historic fact enter this atmosphere of legend, so as not only not to lose its reality, but to contribute its significance to the idea of the whole.

The variety of Hugo's art, and the subtle depth of thought he can display on such large subjects, are best seen here. Pictures of Mahomet and Philip the Second; songs of Sophocles and the Sea Adventurers; characterisations of Shakespeare and Theocritus,—in them all there is, as the ground, a profound synthesis new to readers of Hugo, and in the form a massive simplicity, which give them a certain affinity to the legendary aspects of history.

For the rest we will not say that Hugo has always been successful in giving the parts of his subject a clear sequence and development. There are gaps and inconsequences, explicable or otherwise; occasionally he seems to linger arbitrarily over one phase, and touch another too cursorily. But if we keep in mind that his main idea is the progress of humanity, in the democratic sense of the phrase, not its special philosophic, or artistic, or religious movement, many of these defects are seen to be more apparent than real. 'The Legend of the Centuries' is a work which shows on one side a vast labour of fantasy, but it is fantasy which is controlled throughout by the great, sombre, abiding reality of its subject. It is the epopee of mankind, the great democratic legend which Shelley would fain have written.

CHAPTER III.

'THE LEGEND OF THE CENTURIES': "JUVENTUS MUNDI"—A HEBREW IDYL: "BOAZ ASLEEP"—HUGO'S IDEA OF THE PHILOSOPHER—THE MORAL DECADENCE OF ROME, ETC.

THE song begins with the great Hebrew story of the first pair, with this remarkable difference, however, that the moment which is made the significant one is not the fall of the woman through partaking of the fruit of the forbidden tree, but her consecration by the principle of maternity. Here already Hugo's avoidance of the theological or philosophical aspect, and his preference for what may be called the natural side of the history of the human, are evident. In the "Sacré de la Femme" there is an attempt to represent the first vague manifestation of a higher life on the earth. There is a peculiar quietness in this opening poem, an absence of high colour, even of definite images. It represents the rising of a great indefinable light, the unanalysable consciousness which precedes clear knowledge—"*jour éclairant tout sans rien savoir encore.*" Things have not yet asserted their character of difference, but all—stars and seas, trees and flowers, man

and animals—reflect with a sort of primeval fraternity the early rays of divine light. The characterisations are of a large, indefinite, yet suggestive kind, very suitable to the subject: "*La prière semblait à la clarté mêlée.*"[1] The mystery of sex is but hinted at in the line—

> "Eve qui regardait, Adam qui contemplait"[2]—

and in the strange movements of sympathy which betray nature's consciousness of the maternity of Eve.

In the second poem, "La Conscience," evil has made its appearance in the world, and with it has arisen a moral consciousness new to man—*conscience*, that indication of a divided nature. Its growth is symbolised in the person of the murderer Cain fleeing from an eye which seems ever to regard him from the depth of the heavens. There is a fine sense shown in the manner in which the colour of the poem develops with the subject. Already it is more definite, but still with a grand simplicity of language and images appropriate to the undeveloped life and great unpopulated plains of the early world. The figure of Cain, too, is given in a large sombre profile, which catches the imagination:—

> "Cain se fut enfuï de devant Jehovah.
> Comme le soir tombait, l'homme sombre arriva
> Au bas d'une montagne en une grande plaïne."[3]

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[1] "Prayer seemed mingled with the light."

[2] "Eve regarding, Adam contemplating."

[3] "Cain fled before Jehovah. As evening descended, the man of sombre spirit arrived at the base of a mountain in a wide plain."

But the eye still regards him from out the shadows of night, and crying, "I am too close," Cain continues his flight:—

> "Il reveilla ses fils dormant, sa femme lasse,
> Et se remit à fuir sinistre dans l'espace.
> Il marcha trente jours, il marcha trente nuits.
> Il allait, muet, pâle et frémissant aux bruits,
> Furtif, sans regarder derrière lui, sans trève,
> Sans repos, sans sommeil; il atteignit la grève
> Des mers dans le pays qui fut depuis Assur.
> 'Arrêtons-nous,' dit-il, 'car cet asile est sûr.
> Restons-y. Nous avons du monde atteint les bornes.'
> Et, comme il s'asseyait, il vit dans les cieux mornes
> L'œil à la même place au fond de l'horizon." [1]

The poem which follows is one of those ingenious fables in which the mystic religious spirit of the East embodied its early conceptions of the struggle between the principles of Good and Evil in the universe. It is a mere fantasy, representing the minute mosaic ingenuity of the oriental mind at work on the great problem.

In the next poem we are again in the large spiritual universe of the Hebrew, uncomplicated by metaphysical elements. The subject is Daniel amongst the lions—not, certainly, the finest of the old Hebrew stories, but

[1] "He woke up his sons that slept, his wife tired of the way, and began again his moody flight into space. He marched for thirty days, he marched for thirty nights. He went on, mute, pallid, and shuddering at every sound, furtively, without looking behind him, without truce, without rest, without sleep; he reached the strand of the seas in the country since called Assur. 'Let us stop here,' he said, 'for this is a sure refuge. Let us stay here. We have reached the limits of the world.' And as he sat himself down, he beheld in the sombre skies the eye in the same place in the depth of the horizon."

very suitable for Hugo here as having a possible affinity with his cosmic philosophy. Hence he has given such an original turn to the story by reading it, so to speak, from the lions' point of view, that the whole strikes us with the force of a new creation. The four lions—the lion of the desert, the lion of the forest, the lion of the mountains, and the lion of the coast—are fine instances of Hugo's power of giving a voice to the voiceless part of creation. The characterisation of each is as fine and as individual as if they were human. Indeed Hugo's cosmic philosophy has its root in this artistic power as much as in any metaphysical conception.

> "Le lion qui jadis, au bord des flots rôdant,
> Rugissait aussi haut que l'océan grondant,
> Parla le quatrième, et dit: 'Fils, j'ai coutume,
> En voyant la grandeur, d'oublier l'amertume,
> Et c'est pourquoi j'étais le voisin de la mer.
> J'y regardais—laissant les vagues écumer—
> Apparaître la lune et le soleil éclore,
> Et le sombre infini sourire dans l'aurore;
> Et j'ai pris, ô lions, dans cette intimité
> L'habitude du gouffre et de l'éternité;
> Or, sans savoir le nom dont la terre le nomme,
> J'ai vu luire le ciel dans les yeux de cet homme;
> Cet homme au front serein vient de la part de Dieu.'"[1]

[1] "The lion that of old, crunching his food on the border of the floods, was wont to roar with a voice powerful as that of the ocean in wrath, spoke fourth, and said: 'My sons, it is my habit, when I look on greatness, to forget my bitterness, and for that reason was I neighbour to the sea. There I beheld—while the waves foamed around—the moon come out and the sun expand himself, and the sombre infinite smile in the dawn; and in this intimacy, O lions, I learned the ways of eternity and the abyss. Now, without knowing the name by which the earth names him, I have seen the gleam of heaven in the eyes of

The background, too, of this picture is well managed. Gur, the great city by the sea, where the masts of many ships rose like a forest, where the Abyssinian came to sell his ivory, the Amorrhean his amber, and the men of Ashur their corn. In these the first streak of historical reality, shining dimly from that ancient commerce by the great sea, begins to colour this epic of the centuries.

The fifth poem, which tells us in four lines how God chose two artists to decorate the temple, one to sculpture the real and the other the ideal, is a wholesome reminder, occurring here, of a dualism which is not a mere phase of art or thought, but eternal in the human spirit. The poem is at least a pretty analogy, and may also presage some change of note in the succeeding poems.[1]

In "Booz Endormi" which follows, the thicker legendary haze which hangs over the previous poems is clearing away, and we get almost full historic colour, and even a certain richness of detail. The subject is the ancient story of Ruth and Boaz; and here again Hugo has set the antique Hebrew idyl in a wonderfully new light by simply reversing the position of the figures in his picture. That which is the background in the Biblical story is made the foreground in his. The interest is altogether concentrated on Boaz.

this man. This man of serene countenance comes to us with a message from God.'"

[1] Perhaps it may be only our poet's complacent self-consciousness —"Here, gentle reader, we give both real and ideal as the subject requires;" perhaps a poet's freak.—*Guarda e passa.*

"Booz s'était couché de fatigue accablé ;
Il avait tout le jour travaillé dans son aire ;
Puis avait fait son lit à sa place ordinaire ;
Booz dormait auprès des boisseaux pleins de blé.
. . . .
Cet homme marchait pur loin des sentiers obliques,
Vêtu de probité candide et de lin blanc ;
Et toujours du côté des pauvres ruisselant
Ses sacs de grain semblaient des fontaines publiques.

Booz était bon maître et fidèle parent ;
Il était généreux, quoiqu'il fut économe ;
Les femmes regardaient Booz plus qu'un jeune homme,
Car le jeune homme est beau, mais le vieillard est grand.

Le vieillard qui revient vers la source première,
Entre aux jours éternels et sort des jours changeants ;
Et l'on voit de la flamme aux yeux des jeunes gens,
Mais dans l'œil du vieillard on voit de la lumière.

Donc Booz dormait la nuit parmi les siens,
Près des meules, qu'on eut prises pour des décombres ;
Les moissonneurs couchés faisaient des groupes sombres ;
Et ceci se passait dans des temps très-anciens." [1]

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[1] "Boaz had laid himself to sleep overcome by fatigue: all the day he had laboured on his threshing-floor; then having made his bed there, as his custom was, Boaz slept amongst his bushels of barley. . . .

"This man walked uprightly far from crooked ways, clothed about with spotless probity and in a robe of white linen; and his sacks of grain that ran ever freely towards the side of the poor seemed like public fountains.

"Boaz was a good master, and a loyal kinsman, and generous although economical withal; the eyes of the women looked on Boaz more than on a young man, for the young man has beauty, but the old man has greatness.

"The old man who is returning towards the great source, is entering upon the day that is eternal and leaving the day which is changing; it is fire that we see in the eyes of youth, but in the eye of the old man we see light.

"Boaz then slept the night amidst his men, near the millstones,

This is a very beautiful kind of pastoral which Hugo has found in this ancient Hebrew world, curiously different in spirit from that of the Sicilian muses, where Greek paganism lives immortal with its sunshine and piping shepherds. Here, too, there is a rich pastoral region and the mild air of a sunny land, the flocks and bees and a waving harvest, but in the midst of them the profound Hebrew spirit that gives its deep contemplative hue to all around it. The great old Hebrew type of man has everywhere a certain resemblance. Hugo has here chosen, probably for the sake of the fine local colour, to represent it by Boaz, a man of primitive times, a wise and temperate master of flocks, kind to the poor, and, in the language of his own race, with the fear of God in all his ways. Subtly enough does Hugo spread over his poem this antique Hebrew colour of the universe. Boaz sleeps in the open barn amidst his corn-heaps, his harvesters lying around him in dark groups that the night has made indistinct. While he sleeps, a vision from that Infinite power, the conception of which fills his soul, descends and prefigures to him a long line of descendants, culminating in the glory of the Messiah. But Boaz cannot believe :—

> " Une race naîtrait de moi ! Comment le croire ?
> Comment se pourrait-il que j'eusse des enfants ?
> Quand on est jeune on a des matins triomphants ;
> Le jour sort de la nuit comme d'une victoire ;

---

that looked like a shapeless heap in the darkness ; the harvesters lay in dark groups around him ; and this took place in very ancient times."

Mais vieux, on tremble ainsi qu'à l'hiver le bouleau.
Je suis veuf, je suis seul, et sur moi le soir tombe;
Et je courbe, O mon Dieu! mon âme vers la tombe,
Comme un bœuf ayant soif penche son front vers l'eau.

. . . .

Ruth songeait et Boaz dormait; l'herbe était noire;
Les grelots des troupeaux palpitaient vaguement;
Une immense bonté tombait du firmament;
C'était l'heure tranquille où les lions vont boire."[1]

It is evident that in subjects like this Hugo has found something well suited to his genius. The composition, ordinarily his weak side, is finished—perfect, we might say. There is fulness, but no superfluity or loss of clear outlines. Everything is given with a light but marvellously suggestive touch. The poem ends with a picture which resumes so finely into itself all the tones of pastoral peace and antique piety, that, although we have already quoted so much, we may be pardoned for giving these few lines more:—

"Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérimadeth:[2]
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre;
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs d'ombre
Brillait à l'occident, et Ruth se demandait,

---

[1] "A race arise from me! How to believe it? How could it be that children should be born to me? In youth our mornings are triumphant; the day issues forth from night as from a victory. But in age we shake like the elm in the winds of winter. I am lone; I am widowed, and the evening falls upon me; and I bend, O my God! my soul towards the tomb, as an ox athirst lowers his front to the streams. . . . Ruth lay thinking and Boaz slept. The blade was dark in the night; the bells of the flock beat faintly. It was the quiet hour when the lions come to drink."

[2] "All was at rest in Ur and Jerimadeth: the stars were enamels on the sombre depths of the heavens; the crescent, floating light and

> Immobile, ouvrant l'œil à moitié sous ses voiles,
> Quel Dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
> Avait en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
> Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles."

After this, in significant juxtaposition, comes another old Biblical story, that of Balaam the prophet. Hugo introduces Balaam here as a type of the philosopher who, understanding much of God's ways in the world, can yet see no God therein. In a theme of this kind our poet, it is almost needless to say, has none of the mastery which he shows in "Boaz Asleep." Local colour and the natural aspects of life are here very subordinate elements, because they contain little or nothing to explain the main conception, and with their insignificance half of Hugo's strength is gone. Of philosophy and its place in the world he evidently knows nothing, and neither here nor elsewhere in this review of the centuries is there anything of value on the subject. Yet even from the legendary side of history, and even from Hugo's view of it, the names of Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Spinoza, might have been framed in a fitting compartment near those of Virgil, and Theocritus, and Dante. But that is just the work which Goethe could do, and in fact did, in these remarkable characterisations of Plato and Aristotle, and which Hugo cannot do. This is doubtless one of the reasons why the idealism of the New Testament is,

clear amongst those flowers of the night, shone in the west, and Ruth asked herself, as she lay motionless, half raising her eyelids, what deity, what harvester of the eternal summer, had, in leaving, carelessly cast that golden sickle in the field of the stars."

comparatively speaking, so slightly represented by a single poem, "Christ's first encounter with the Grave." Hugo's art is on this side a veritable "restoration of the flesh," and the subtle metaphysical element in such a poem as Browning's "Death in the Desert" lies outside of his sphere.

From these themes we pass in the second section of 'La Légende' to the decadence of Rome, which at first one might think was poorly represented by the story of Androcles and the lion; and, indeed, the fundamental idea, that the general corruption of that age had placed man on a lower level than the brutes, is expressed by one of those antithetical conceits which are amongst the doubtful successes of Hugo:—

> "Pensif tu secouas ta crinière sur Rome,
> Et l'homme étant le monstre, O lion, tu fus l'homme."

Round this centre, however arbitrarily chosen it might seem, but really in accordance with his peculiar talent, Hugo contrives to assemble, with his usual skill, the essential facts in the demoralisation of the Empire.

Then away to "Islam," where we have a fine picture of the aged Mahomet, gathering in his last hours his people around him to bid them farewell. The legend of Sheik Omer and St John is inferior.

CHAPTER IV.

HUGO AS INTERPRETER OF THE PAST IN 'THE LEGEND'—KINGS AND PALADINS—THE CID—EVIRADNUS—SOME PECULIARITIES—DEMOCRATIC CONCEPTION OF HISTORY—THE SATYR—"SONG OF THE SEA-ADVENTURERS"—THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

THE opinion which we may form of Hugo's success in rendering the physiognomy of the ages will of course depend on the point of view from which we regard the past. His pictures, especially in the later centuries, seem to be arbitrarily chosen. But this is more in appearance than in fact. After poems which illustrate the pious simplicity and security of antique life in such legends as that of Boaz, he passes to the kindred simplicity of Arab civilisation. He takes it at the moment when it has received from the idealism of Mahomet a high ethical value which his treatment brings skilfully into relief. Roman civilisation he has practically passed over, evidently regarding it as having had no great spiritual elements which might survive for later ages when its peculiar institutions had passed away. Hence its significant moment in

this history, and that which Hugo has selected for representation is the last stage of its decadence. It is not within the scope of Hugo's work to give any prominence to the material and merely formal aspects of civilisation. The relation, a shadowy enough one, which exists between Mohammedanism and Christianity, is touched upon in the legend of Sheik Omer, and the fine superiority in the Christian sphere of the miraculous indicated.

After this we enter upon the moral and social aspects of life in the middle ages of Europe. Here begins a sort of contrast which Hugo works out on a grand scale. The civilisation of Christendom, superior in its material aspects, presenting a more complex organisation to the analysing eye of the constitutional historian or political economist, shows a certain loss in direct moral and social resources. The increase of mechanism presages a great development, but for long there is an absence of the old spiritual freedom and light, a forgetfulness of the real ends of life, and in consequence an artificial perversion of it which would seem incredible to us were we not still somewhat under the influence of its traditions. This perversion Hugo has treated on one of its sides only, but that one which has the most immediate and far-reaching effects on the life of the people—the relation between the rulers and the ruled. The ruler, instead of being the wise judge, the spiritual teacher or leader, the man who, even in his wayward moments, knew most about the laws of life, and listened readily to the voice of

God in the mouth of prophet or dervish, has become a mere bird of prey—a highly unintelligent personage for whom a fancied superiority of lineage is a fundamental law of the universe. Crafty, plundering Spanish and Italian princes, marauding barons of the Rhineland and other countries, ambitious and avaricious hierarchs, are represented by the Duke Jorge, Ruy le Subtil, the Ratbert and Afranus of these poems. It is of little import that the personages are mostly obscurely historical. Hugo is evidently of opinion that they are fair types of the rulers of their time; and on this point many will think that the poet's arrangement of light and shadow in these centuries is more in accordance with facts than that of the ordinary historian, whose eye is mostly fixed on some glancing military aspect of the age, or some great political evolution or subsidence. Not to speak of rulers whose names are mere synonyms for evil, amongst the centuries of buried crime alone that sleeps honourably in the vaults of the house of Hapsburg what justification might be found for the gloomy colour which Hugo here gives to his Song of the Centuries! But although such well-known historical matter guides and supports the poet in his work, these names do not themselves appear. His mind seems to dwell rather on the obscure and more forgotten wrongs of the past. If the crimes are notorious in the later and better known part of a dynasty's history, what untold miseries have the governed had to suffer at the hands of the governors

in the unfrequented and waste districts of the past! How many unrecorded assassinations, how many obscure villages of the early centuries sent up in smoke and flame to the skies at the caprice of some tyrant, "man of evil that the night now covers," as Hugo says of Ratbert! Many that are known of, more of which there is no record,—unknown to the historian, whether he be of the philosophic, constitutional, Whig, or Tory type—only represented, they and their sad destinies, by a few shadowy pictures in some such work as this of Hugo's. From this point of view it is difficult to find fault with the sombre strain in this part of 'The Legend of the Centuries.'

Amongst the most interesting of Hugo's creations in this half-forgotten world of history and romance are the figures of the great Paladins—Roland, the Cid, Eviradnus. These are represented as strong-handed upholders of justice on the earth given over to a riot of rulers, and in their magnanimity and warlike virtues we see the kind of force which kept society from utter corruption. Of somewhat similar import is the tale of "Aymerillot"—the young squire in the army of Charlemagne, who takes the town of Narbonne when all the dukes and counts in the train of the emperor had refused the enterprise. The story is excellently told. The characterisation of Charlemagne and the great *seigneurs* is a fine specimen of Hugo's large, flowing style in such work, and of his power of reaching reality in those antique tales. Indeed, if anything could revive the faded legends of these centuries, it

would be Hugo's happy descriptive stroke, and the original manner in which he brings them under the light of modern ideas.

The highest type of this warring, chivalric man is Ruy Diaz, the Cid. In this volume, however, the Cid makes no great show, and is taken merely on the side of the antique piety and directness of his manners. But in the new series of 'La Légende,' Hugo enlarges the ideal element in this figure until it becomes a sort of great antagonist to the type of violence and iniquity which is represented by kings and princes. In this volume the poet's greatest success is undoubtedly Eviradnus, the Alsatian chevalier. Eviradnus is a thoroughly original conception, and one which has also a kind of universal significance. The knight of La Mancha is melancholy; but Eviradnus is sombre, lugubrious—*lugubre*: Hugo has not missed the word in his description. But this lugubriousness—which belongs to most of these cavaliers as a characteristic of men who feel the weight of their single-handed fight against a world of injustice—is so finely blended in Eviradnus with the other elements of his character,—with his laconic generosity, with the austere grandeur of his life, with his old age—and is, moreover, so much in tone with the sombre, gigantesque character of the accessories,—that it is no defect, but a merit. It brings the figure of the chevalier into harmony with the old keep of Corbus, and the great hall, with high arched vault and massive pillars, between which are ranged a long line of iron knights on iron steeds, grim

effigies of the ancestors of Mahaud, Marchioness of Lusatia.

In Hugo's style there is that which is as specially adapted to the peculiar world of these legends, as the language and versification of Spenser are to that region of enchanted gardens and magic seas through which we voyage in the 'Faery Queen.' In these poems, his world, like that of Spenser, has taken so completely in every part the peculiar ideal hue of his imagination, that it seems as if steeped in one colour. But he has learned to paint in that monochrome as few could do from a full palette.

In the next section, "Les Trônes d'Orient," we are again in the East, where two powerful poems, "Zim-Zizimi" and "Sultan Mourad," picture for us the corruption of Mohammedanism. Of these poems, and others which treat with strange impressiveness figures of such remote and legendary antiquity as those of Téglath-Phaleser, Chrem, Belus, and Nimrod, no suitable conception could be given unless by extensive quotation. Hugo alone has the secret of these immense enumerations in which he delights, and in which the men and things of some long-forgotten age are made to pass before us like a train of shadows, each slightly but distinctly outlined. Take a few lines from the description of "Sultan Zizimi":—

> "Les rajahs de Mysore et d'Agra sont ses proches,[1]
> Ainsi qu'Omar qui dit, 'Grâce à moi Dieu vaincra.'
> Son oncle est Hayraddin, sultan de Bassora.

[1] "The rajahs of Mysore and of Agra are his kinsmen, as well as

Les grands cheiks du désert sont tous de sa famille,
Le roi d'Oude est son frère, et l'épée est sa fille.

Il a dompté Bagdad, Trébizonde et Mossul,
Que conquit le premier Duilius, ce consul
Qui marchait precédé de flûtes tibicines;
Il a soumis Gophna, les forêts abyssines,
L'Arabie, où l'aurore a d'immenses rougeurs,
Et l'Hedjaz, où le soir, les tremblants voyageurs,
De la nuit autour d'eux sentant rôder les bêtes."

It is evident that a poetry like this does not lie under the strict proprieties of more realistic *genres*. Inconsistencies and incongruities are, after all, merely relative, and tend to disappear as the range of our sympathy widens with increase of knowledge and feeling. There is a fusing-point for incongruities which, at a lower degree of imaginative heat, would be inadmissible combinations. Hence such strange mixtures of literal and figurative language as that in the line—

"*Le roi d'Oude est son frère, et l'épée est sa fille.*"

Or his description of Boaz—

"*Vêtu de probité candide et de lin blanc.*"

---

that Omar who said, 'Thanks to me, God will conquer.' His uncle is Hayraddin, the Sultan of Bassora. The great sheiks of the desert are all of his house; the King of Oude is his brother, and the sword is his daughter.

He has tamed Bagdad, Trebizonde, and Mossul, that Duilius was the first to conquer, the consul whose march was headed by a band of flutes. He has reduced Gophna, the Abyssinian forests, and Arabia, where are immense red glows on the horizon at dawn; and Hedjas, where voyagers in the evening tremble to feel in the waste of night around them the roaming of savage beasts."

In the section "Italie-Ratbert," the poet's bitter conception of the part which kings and priests have played in the history of the past, receives full expression. In the confidence of the Marquis Fabricius, in particular, Hugo has been successful in finding a subject which, with the colour and details of an ancient chronicle, has a large amount of real human interest. In the story of the aged warrior and his little grand-daughter, a fine pathetic thread is woven through a gloomy history.

After this we reach the sixteenth century. Here begins a new era, the character of which is indicated by the title, "Renaissance Paganisme." The chief features of the sixteenth century, its fine artistic instincts, its sensuous richness, and the enlargement of its intellectual horizon, are figured to us in the story of a satyr, who is half brute, half god in his innocent licence and the plenitude of his sensuous perceptions. Taken to Olympus for judgment, he astonishes Jupiter and the gods by a wonderful song, in which, wandering out of one poetic ecstasy into another, he sings primordial things—the nature of the animal, of man, and of the all-nourishing earth which rears them. As he sings, and his strain rises to a higher mood, he gradually loses his Silenus-like appearance, and takes a nobler aspect, until finally, when the gods have begun to recognise a being greater than themselves, he declares himself Pan, the spirit that moves through all things.

This theme is one which has tempted most of the great poets from Æschylus to Schiller to spread their

wings, but Hugo's conception remains strikingly original in its bold allegorical outlines. The curious propriety of his imagery in these peculiar subjects is very noticeable in this poem. What a magnificent suggestion of space and light for a cosmogonic song there is in the lines which describe the satyr's appearance in Olympus!—

> "C'était l'heure où sortaient les chevaux du soleil,
> Le ciel tout frémissant du glorieux réveil
> Ouvrait les deux battants de sa porte sonore."[1]

This neo-classic drapery, generally of no great value, serves as an excellent decoration for this legend of the Satyr, and the reader will appreciate such descriptions as that of the threshold of Jove, and that of the four horses of the sun, the last of which "shook stars behind him into the night." The satyr himself is put before us with all the vigour which Hugo shows in dealing with abnormal objects. He lives in a great wood at the foot of Mount Olympus. His habits are the traditional ones—chasing Chloë and Lycoris in their walks, and lying in ambush for the Naiads at the streams:—

> "Il vivait là, chassant, rêvant, parmi les branches,
> Nuit et jour, poursuivant les vagues formes blanches."

He has the immodest innocence of the early world, the large thirst of the ancient gods for all that is beautiful. He is, indeed, of kin to the ancient race of fauns,

[1] "It was the hour when the coursers of the sun came forth, and the heaven, all quivering with the glorious awakening of day, threw open the folding-doors of her wide portal."

some of whom Hugo has introduced into his poem, and characterised with the same happy familiarity that he shows with the shades of ancient Egyptian or Bactrian kings. But there is a mystery about this faun :—

> "On connaissait Stulcas, faune de Pallantyre;
> Gès, qui le soir, riait sur le Ménale assis;
> Bos, ægipan de Crète; on entendait Chaysis,
> Sylvain du Ptyx que l'homme appelle Janicule,
> Qui jouait de la flûte au fond du crépuscule;
> Anthrops, faune du Pinde, était cité partout;
> Celui-ci, nulle part."[1]

The faun, brought to Olympus by Hercules, is made to sing for the amusement of the gods. Mercury lends him his pipe with a contemptuous smile. There is a finely felt pathos in the description of his appearance amongst the Olympians, the symbol of man's first rude attempts in the divine art; awkward and fearful he is yet before the Olympians, the poor Ægipan :—

> "L'humble ægipan, figure à l'ombre habituée
> Alla s'asseoir rêveur derrière une nuée,
> Comme si moins voisin des rois, il était mieux;
> Et se mit à chanter un chant mysterieux.
> L'aigle qui seul n'avait pas ri, dressa la tête.
>
> Il chanta, calme et triste."[2]

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[1] "Stulcas was known, the faun of Pallantyre, and Gès, who sat at evening upon Menelus and laughed; Bos, the satyr of Crete; Chaysis one could hear; and Sylvan of the Ptyx, which men call Janiculum, was heard playing his flute in the depths of twilight; Anthrops, the faun of Pindus, was spoken of everywhere; this one, nowhere."

[2] "The humble satyr, a being accustomed to the shade, went and sate himself meditatively behind a cloud, as if he felt better at some little distance from the kings, and began to sing a mysterious song. The eagle, who alone had not laughed, raised his head.

"He sang, quiet and sad."

Then, as he sings, on Mount Taygetus, on Mysis, and Olympus, the beasts and trees are moved. All nature feels a new influence come into the world. The faun seems to forget that he is amongst the gods. He sings the "monstrous earth," and in his prelude the waters of the sea seem to be traversing sand and beach, grasses and green reeds. His song is vast. The sap and the sources, the great plenitude of night, of silence, of solitude; the mosses and trees, the subterranean combat of plants, Dodona and Cithæron, and finally, the animals.

It would be too much to say that Hugo is everywhere at the height of this subject. There is great imaginative force in the faun's song, but in parts it has a little too much the character of an immense and disorderly passage of gigantic images and epithets. But at times the utterance is of Delphic power and solemnity:—

> "Les animaux aînés de tout sont les ébauches
> De sa fécondité comme de ses débauches.
> Fussiez-vous dieux, songez en voyant l'animal!
> Car il n'est pas le jour, mais il n'est pas le mal.
> Toute la force obscure et vague de la terre
> Est dans la brute, larve auguste et solitaire;
> La sibylle au front gris le sait, et les devins
> Le savent, ces rôdeurs des sauvages ravins;
> Et c'est là ce qui fait que la Thessalienne
> Prend des touffes de poil aux cuisses de l'hyène,
> Et qu'Orphée écoutait, hagard presque jaloux,
> Le chant sombre qui sort du hurlement des loups."[1]

---

[1] "The animals, eldest of things, are the first rude strokes of nature's fecundity, as well as of her extravagances. Were you gods

But the faun's song is not ended. Phœbus offers him the lyre with respect. The faun tranquilly takes it, and proceeds to sing *mankind*—the sombre figure of humanity slowly emerging from the mists of superstition, from the yoke of false gods. As the faun sings the emancipation of man, his stature seems to enlarge. He becomes greater than Polyphemus, than the Titans; greater than Mount Athos. The gods affrighted see this strange being assume a formless magnitude, while the tones of the lyre roll and swell like the chant of a great organ, and the Satyr thunders to the confounded Olympians:—

> "Place à tout!
> Je suis Pan, Jupiter, à genoux!"

In this way the antique conception of the satyr has been finely enlarged by Hugo for the requirements of modern thought. The poem owes something, too, to Virgil's beautiful pastoral legend of the surprised Silenus. There, also, a satyr sings the cosmic beauty of the universe, and a legendary passage of the centuries. A strong line or two—"*namque canebat uti magnum per inane coacta*"—a flight with light and rapid wing through the ancient myths, Prometheus, the Saturnian times, and all the traditions which

even, the sight of the animal might set you thinking. For if he is not the clear day, neither is he wholly the darkness. All the obscure and vague force of the earth is in the brute, that august and solitary mask. The grey-fronted sibyl knows that, and the seers know it, that wander by the wild ravines; and it is for that that the Thessalian hag draws tufts of hair from the thighs of the hyena, and that Orpheus listened, haggard and all but jealous, to the sombre song that comes from the howl of the wolves."

Apollo left amongst men; then the song ends with some sweet pastoral notes which sink away with the twilight while the shepherds lead their flocks to the fold: the finest art of moulded lines, perfect clearness and radiancy, but unfertile except in an exquisite æstheticism, which, it is true, is a perpetual stimulus, and which keeps the secret of its consciousness with a tenacity akin to that of nature herself. In his later poetry Hugo comes nearer to this finely sensuous art than most moderns, although it is apt to be drawn out of shape by the greater complexity and turbulence of modern sentiment.

In the next poem we touch the firm ground of historical fact. In "The Rose of the Infanta" a real historical figure appears on these legendary walls of the centuries—that of Philip II., raised to this bad eminence as a type of misruling kings. The gloomy figure of the sombre, silent, inscrutable bigot, whose existence lay like a shadow of evil over Europe, and the bright innocence of the infant princess, are woven into a wonderfully finished picture, wrought out in Rembrandtesque light and shade.

Then, after a bitter grotesque on the same subject of the bigotry of rulers and priests, entitled "The Reasons of Momotombo," the grave sombre strain of 'La Légende' is changed, in the "Song of the Sea-Adventurers," into a light free strain, happily expressive of the maritime adventure of the sixteenth century. In the rhythm there seems to be some curious imitation of the movement of the galley

oscillating between the lapping water and the sweep of oars:—

> "En partant du golfe d'Otrante
> Nous étions trente
> Mais en arrivant à Cadiz,
> Nous étions dix,
> Tom Robin, matelot de Douvre,
> Au Phare nous abandonna
> Pour aller voir si l'on découvre
> Satan que l'archange enchaîna,
> Quand un bâillement noir entr'ouvre
> La gueule rouge de l'Etna."

In the poem that follows, the mercenaries of the seventeenth century, who played a considerable part in fixing the political destinies of peoples, are represented by "The Swiss Imperial Guard." Then in the division headed "Maintenant," we are brought to the present epoch, which will as yet scarcely stand out in legendary aspect, and is therefore in this respect rather poorly represented by an incident from the military career of the elder Hugo, another from Hugo's own childhood—an idyl of fisher-life, and a reflective poem on the soldiers of the Revolution—considerable poems, especially the fisher idyl, but wanting greatness of outline for this place.

"Pleine Mer" and "Plein Ciel" represent "vague mirrors of the future," the twentieth century. But if it is difficult to seize the legendary side of the present time, it is almost impossible to divine the particular mixture of fantasy and reality which will form that of the future. We cannot think that Hugo has

been fortunate in selecting a merely mechanical development in means of locomotion to represent the march of the centuries, and to suggest the long-expected victory of humanity over all the forces of ignorance, superstition, and evil. In the modern world, it is true, mechanical and industrial development is the necessary condition of moral development, but in itself it has no value for life; and Ruskin's sarcasm about carrying fools twenty miles an hour faster than before is not without its force. Even if all the benefits certain of the party of progress expect from the invention of air-locomotives and similar apparatus, were to be realised—such as the abolition of frontiers, the cessation of wars, &c.—the inventions themselves are not the poetic, because they are not the really significant and interesting, aspect of development. If the poet meant to value life on this side, he should have signalised the invention of printing — nay, of gunpowder, one of the greatest democratic forces.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW (SECOND) SERIES—MORE CRITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS — VARIETY OF POETIC POWER IN 'THE LEGEND'—STYLE AND METHODS—FUNCTION OF THE GREAT POET.

HUGO'S great review of the centuries seems, then, to terminate in the first series in a play of imagination not very different from the gambols of Jules Verne. But he returns to complete his work. The second series, published many years afterwards, is a work in which the critical and reflective element is more predominant. In some respects, however, it seems to be merely supplementary of the first, and supplies some conspicuous gaps there in the representation of the critical epoch of Greek history and some aspects of earlier civilisations. Hence, if the new series wants something of the sequence and continuity of the first, and indeed has somewhat the effect of disorganising the order of the work, it adds immensely to its completeness in bringing out the religious and æsthetic side in the development of man which the first series, mainly occupied with the social aspect, had neglected.

But it is impossible wholly to separate these sides of humanity, as it is practically impossible to do them all justice when united, and in this lies the intractability of Hugo's conception. The subject is too vast for one man, and even amongst great poets it is only the magnitude and variety of Hugo's resources that could have seemed at all adequate. From the large mythological fresco of the "Satyr" to the profound cry in the "Song of Sophocles," from the pastoral sublimity of "Boaz Asleep" to the picturesque medieval life in "Aymerillot," or the cunning fantasy of the "Sea-Adventurers' Song," or the solemn expanses of thought in the Prologue to the New Series, and the gloomy splendours of imagination in the "Epopee of the Worm," what a masterful hand has everywhere laid hold of the varied matter of life, and moulded it in supremely significant forms of art! Yet throughout this long work the strong originality of Hugo is not less apparent in the freshness and power of his conceptions than in his language and style. There is nothing conventional in his manner of regarding and describing an object. Look, for instance, at the way in which he describes, in the poem of "Aymerillot," the barons in the train of Charlemagne. It is not the classic style of art, nor the romantic chivalric style in which Chaucer, mingling some fine natural touches, paints Demetrius of Ind, still less is it the subjective art of the later poets. It has learned something from all these; but its chief characteristic is a natural profundity, as of a man who had rubbed away all the

artificial coatings of things, the garment in which this or that mode has draped life, and reached the natural form. Take the reply of Hugo de Contentin to Charlemagne as an example.

> " Hugo de Cotentin salua l'empereur.[1]
>
> Sire c'est un manant heureux qu'un laboureux !
> La drôle gratte un peu la terre brune ou rouge,
> Et quand sa tâche est faite, il rentre dans son bouge.
> Moi j'ai vaincu Tryphon, Thessalus, Gaïffer ;
> Par le chaud, par le froid, je suis vêtu de fer.
> Au point de jour, j'entends le clairon pour antienne ;
> Je n'ai plus à ma selle une boucle qui tienne ;
> Voilà longtemps que j'ai pour unique destin
> De m'endormir fort tard pour m'éveiller matin
> De recevoir des coups pour vous et pour les vôtres.
> Je suis très-fatigué. Donnez Narbonne à d'autres."

This is naturalism, but it is the naturalism of a late age, which has learned all that is to be got from more artificial styles. But the plain, uncoloured ground of this style, with its strong and often homely phrase, is precisely that needed for Hugo's peculiar effects. His audacious epithets and metaphors no longer struggle amongst thickets of language, but are condensed, and pass like flashes over this plain ground. The style of

[1] " Hugo de Cotentin made salute to the emperor.
" Sire, a happy clown indeed is the labourer ! The fellow scratches a little some brown or red earth, and when his task is done, he enters into his hut again. But I, I have conquered Tryphon, Thessalus, Gaiffer ; in winter's frost or in summer's sun, I am clad in iron. At daybreak the anthem I hear is the sound of the war-clarion ; on my saddle there is scarcely a buckle that holds ; for long it has been my only fate to go to sleep very late in order to rise very early, to receive blows for you and your people. I am very fatigued. Give Narbonne to some other."

these later poems is that of a great master, at bottom clear and simple, but capable of rendering at a stroke every turn of the poet's fancy. How easily, in those passages where he has to describe Eviradnus or the Marquis Fabrice, it takes on the ideal colour required! A single line brings the Marquis before us in the warlike glory of other days: "*C'était le temps,*" he says, "*où mon clairon sonnait superbement à travers l'Italie.*"[1]

The second series also shows Hugo evolving new methods for overcoming the vast intractability of his subject. In the poems, which may be read together as a philosophic series, as, for instance, from "Les Sept Merveilles" to "Les Chutes," his method consists in successive enlargements of the intellectual horizon, according to which the poet first presents to us an imperfect one-sided view of things, and then takes us to higher stages of thought, in which we find a ground for reversing the conception of life suggested in what preceded, or rather of merging it in a greater idea. This method is very suitable for the scale of Hugo's work. It gives to each stage of the whole conception a poetic relief, which would be lost in the philosophic manner of stating everything in terms which imply the conclusion. It is a method akin to the natural development of the mind, and reflects its successive advance from one point of view to another, the gradual deepening and widening of man's thoughts about life, the conception of which Hugo ends by carrying

[1] "It was the time when my bugle sounded proudly across Italy."

to a high degree of completeness. In one sense, perhaps, he adds nothing to thought. There is no new principle brought forward, only a fuller and more rounded view of the subject given. It is not in new conclusions, but in the new experience which they contain, that progress here consists. Some poor sectary who, in the confusion of things, has blindly built a conclusion on a meagre experience, will unfruitfully enough preach the same ultimate word as Hugo in "L'Abîme," that all the glory of the world rests on God. But the poet seeks to lead the thought through that cycle of experience which alone makes the conclusion of any value.

'The Legend of the Centuries' does not end with the second series. Another volume at least, according to the promise of the poet, may be expected; and the plan of the work is loose and large enough to admit of indefinite additions. Perhaps this is much the same thing as to say there is no precise plan; and certainly, except in the first series, it is difficult to find any significant order. In magnitude and variety the work truly enough represents its subject, as far as it can be comprehended by the mind of one man, or even of one century. Many phases of human life and thought are brought into light; and if many more are left dark, Hugo's poem still gives us a fuller review of the spiritual development of humanity than could be easily got in any other form. After all, this kind of work is likely always to be left for the poet, for the great poet.

His methods are the finest and most suggestive; no others can hope to compass the vastness of the materials here. The book of the ordinary universal historian is little better than a chaos; there is an appearance of order on the surface, and below a real confusion of all systems and modes of viewing life, from Herodotus to Machiavelli. The methods of the essayist, the biographer, the critic, of the moralising or generalising historian, do not condense sufficiently. All require fifty lines where the poet requires one. Their speech does not require, and cannot indeed carry, the same quantity of thought. There is only, besides the poet, the pure metaphysician, whose instrument, in its high technical perfection, can deal effectively with the multiplicity of matter; and he is esoteric, straining things to an obscure intellectual essence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POLITICO-SOCIAL QUESTION—THE CIVILISATION OF THE *BOURGEOISIE*—HUGO'S ATTACK ON SOCIETY—"THE SUPPORT OF EMPIRES"—'LES QUATRE VENTS DE L'ESPRIT'—LATER POETRY AND SATIRE—THE PRIESTHOOD—THE PENAL CODE.

As far back as the days of the Revolution of 1830, Hugo had said, if he were a politician, his first demand would be that social questions should be substituted for political ones. To do him justice, he had never lent his name to any of the fantastic and imperfect schemes of the extreme sections of the party of progress. He knew the difficulty and the danger of carrying through *a priori* projects of reconstruction, and he seems to have considered the legislative machinery in the hands of a constitutional monarchy like that of Louis Philippe, or a moderate republican government, quite sufficient, if honestly worked, for all the purposes of social reform. If, at least latterly, he preferred the republican to the monarchical form, it was because he saw that, in the end, a reality is better than a fiction, and that the prejudices and traditions which impede the social development of the people find

a stronger rallying-point in the old form than in the new; partly also because he had found that the Republicans alone could be trusted to oppose actively and efficiently the reactionary and absolute form of government established by Louis Napoleon. But of all men Hugo, with his original cast of mind, and his habit of looking straight at things, was least likely to lay stress upon names and forms when the really needful thing was a change in the spirit of institutions. Republic or constitutional monarchy, it is evident that the real governing body remains the same—the great and energetic class of the *bourgeoisie.* The ideas which predominate in the civilisation of our time, in our industry and commerce, in our politics, even in our arts and letters, are those which specially belong to this class, and to the kind of culture which widely diffused wealth, united with constant activity for practical and money-getting ends, is likely to produce. The tendencies of this culture have been marked and criticised by some of the ablest and most clear-sighted writers of our time. Carlyle has perhaps the most thoroughly exposed the mechanical and corrupted kind of energy which its chief motive power, the desire of wealth, engenders; Emerson has long preached on the absence of real moral value in its great activity; Ruskin and Matthew Arnold on its coarse tastes and misdirected cultivation of the beautiful. Even its favourite economical principles, unrestricted competition, free contract, &c., have to stand the assault of thinkers who think that the growth of great capitalists

is a poor compensation for the general insecurity of life amongst the working population. Hugo's criticism is neither so comprehensive nor so fine-searching as that of the writers we have mentioned. In this particular sphere the literary traditions of the Latin races are really inferior to those of Englishmen and Germans. The former are more in the habit of examining the logical consistency, the justice or injustice of things from a given point of view, than in searching out the subtle relations between morals and life. Amongst Latin peoples, priestly protection has been fatal to research in this direction.

It is partly for this reason that Hugo's criticisms and analysis of social elements seem crude and harsh to those accustomed to the finer moral estimates of English writers; partly also that they are the criticisms of a man engaged in the actual conflict of politics, not the impartial utterances of a spectator. He does not, for instance, paint the *bourgeois* fairly as he is—a man encumbered with contrary traditions of conservatism and progress, between which he cannot rightly decide; without the aristocrat's respect for precedent, but incapable of innovation from timidity of spirit and readily accepting facts when once they have gained a footing; energetic and well trained in the money market to develop the mechanical side of civilisation, but ill prepared for the management of the great social interests which the possession of wealth puts into his hands; honest in most cases, or striving to be so, but lost amid the conventional aspects of life, and conscien-

tiously supporting all sorts of mummery, in which at heart he has little belief—his belief being only that this is the way the world is governed and society preserved. Hugo scarcely does justice to this important personage—now become partly obstructive in the path of civilisation—in place of the older aristocratic figure, which has grown decrepit and easily removable. In "Les Châtiments" the portrait of the *bon bourgeois* was somewhat too much in the direction of the ridiculous. Later, in the "Satirical Book" of 'The Four Winds of the Spirit,' the portrait is that of a darker type, and has an almost saturnine visage. He is found there under the title, "The Support of Empires."

> "Puisque ce monde existe, il sied qu'on le tolère.[1]
> Sachions considérer les êtres sans colère.
> Cet homme est le bourgeois du siècle où nous vivons.
> Autrefois il vendait des suifs et des savons,
> Maintenant il est riche ; il a prés, bons, vignobles.
> Il déteste le peuple, il n'aime pas les nobles ;
> Etant fils d'un portier, il trouve en ce temps-ci
> Inutile qu'on soit fils des Montmorency.
> Il est sévère. Il est vertueux. Il est membre
> Ayant de bons tapis sous les pieds en décembre,
> Du grand parti de l'ordre et des honnêtes gens.
> Il hait les amoureux et les intelligents ;

[1] "Since this world exists, it is well to be tolerant of it. Let us learn to consider its creatures without anger. This man is the *bourgeois* of the century in which we live. In other times he sold soaps and tallow, now he is rich ; he has meadows, goods, vineyards. He detests the people ; he does not like the nobility. Being the son of a porter, he finds that in these times there is no good in being the son of a Montmorency. He is severe. He is virtuous. He has good carpets under his feet in December, and therefore he belongs to the great party of order and honest folks. He hates men who are intel-

Il fait un peu l'aumône, il fait un peu l'usure.
Il dit du progrès saint, de la liberté pure,
Du droit des nations: Je ne veux pas de ça!
Il a ce gros bon sens du cher Sancho Panza,
Qui laisserait mourir à l'hôpital Cervantes.
Il admire Boileau, caresse les servantes,
Et crie, apres avoir chiffonné Jeanneton,
À l'immoralité de roman feuilleton.
À la messe où sans faute il va chaque dimanche,
Il porte sous son bras Jésus doré sur tranche,
Le crèche, le calvaire, et le Dies illa.
—Non qu'entre nous je crois à ces bêtises-là,
Nous dit-il.—S'il y va, cela tient à sa gloire;
C'est que le peuple vil croira, le voyant croire.
C'est qu'il faut abrutir ces gens, car ils ont faim,
C'est qu'un bon Dieu quelconque est nécessaire enfin.
Là-dessus, rangez-vous, le suisse frappe, il entre,
Il étale au banc d'œuvre un majestueux ventre,
Fier de sentir qu'il prend dans sa dévotion,
Le peuple en laisse et Dieu sous sa protection."

The book[1] from which we have just quoted, contains some of Hugo's finest satire on the corrupt elements

ligent and men who love. He does a little in the matter of alms-giving, and a little in the matter of usury. He says of sacred progress, of untainted freedom, of the right of peoples,—I want none of that! He has the gross common-sense of good Sancho Panza, who would leave Cervantes to die at the hospital. He admires Boileau, caresses the servants, and after teasing Jeanneton, cries out about the immorality of the newspaper novel. At Mass, where without fail he goes every Sunday, he carries under his arm engravings of Jesus, the manger, Calvary, and the *Dies Illa.*—Not that, he tells us between us, I believe in all that nonsense.—If he goes, that belongs to his high function; the vile populace will believe, seeing him believe. These people must be kept degraded, for famine is upon them; and, after all, some kind of God is necessary. Take your place, then; the porter knocks and our great man enters, and displays a majestic belly in the pew, proud to feel that in his devotions he keeps the people in leash, and God under his protection."

[1] Published 1873, but written in part long before.

in modern society. We have already said that for a satirist his perception of character is not sufficiently delicate. His judgment is sound, but his analysis fails somehow to get at the real structure of the subject. His "Anima Vilis," for instance, is the abortion of a fine satiric subject, the hireling man of letters, the modern parasite of Cæsar. He confounds in the same grave sarcasm the literary bravo of Emperor or Pontiff with the narrow-minded but honest Nisard, who moves about in an obsolete intellectual armour which it would be as reasonable to ask him to put off as to ask Hugo to assume. To him they are all alike — Merimée, Planche, and Nisard—sufficiently described as "emanations from the ancient spirit of night, and ignorance, and hate." But in a more general sort of satire—satire directed against a whole class of things or persons representing false tendencies which have established themselves and live, surviving all formal changes, perennial in our civilisation — such later works of Hugo as 'Les Quatre Vents' and 'Religion et Religions' are unequalled for a certain comprehensive depth of thought and sincerity of speech. On this side his work in these years has been constantly gaining in grandeur and clearness of outline. It is true, there is a terrible magnitude in Hugo's impeachment of civilisation. It seems to be an impeachment of the whole history of mankind, and, by inference, of God Himself:—

"History is an old story used up as long ago as Herodotus. God does not remake it, but dotingly repeats Himself. He re-

casts Tiberius and replates Nero. He blows up war with his old clarion, and hands over, with a little variety of details, Bonaparte to the Russians and Darius to the Scythians. Not a crime but has been committed a hundred times. He kneads in a Semiramis to make a Catherine. In short, God has but a single pattern to make man by. . . . I have seen the first man, and wait now for the second."[1]

Words like these do not mean that Hugo is without hope of improvement in the human race and their affairs. They rather indicate his perception of a profound change that is needed and may be near. He is waiting the "second man."

In reading the later works of Hugo, everything depends upon the nicety with which we touch that vast horizon of history and philosophy mingled which is always before him. He is always, prophet-like, interrogating the gulf. History, the backward abysm, is for him a sort of dark shoreless sea, strewn with wrack, over which comes, at long intervals, the light of some great pharos—Isaiah or Tacitus, Dante or Milton. The rest is but a kind of disguised obscurity. Philosophy, the forward abysm, is "the science of being severe, steep, hard of ascent," a science not quite to be identified with the discursive method of the "higher reason"— though Kant and "sombre Hegel" are spoken of with a vague respect—still less with the narrow logical movement of scholasticism and "reflexion-philosophies"; but something for which the full power of the spirit, using at one time the divining gaze of poet or prophet, at another the con-

[1] Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit—"Dieu éclaboussé par Zoïle."

ceptions of reasoned science or metaphysic, is needed. It is from these abysmal regions that the satire of Hugo, bitter and contemplative, comes. The thought which it contains, even where it leaves us with small logical result, has a power both of expanding and steadying the mind in these highest regions of speculation. It serves to guide and control the intellect, apt in the complexity of minor methods to lose sight of great lights.

Curious enough is the gleam occasionally thrown on things from these far horizon lights of Hugo's. Take the following lines on a favourite, if somewhat mystic, conception of his, the gulf—*le gouffre* :—

> " Mais n'attends pas du gouffre où s'effacent les âges,[1]
> N'attends pas du grand tout, farouche, illimité,
> Où flotte l'invisible, où dans l'obscurité,
> L'aile des tourbillons heurte l'aile des aigles,
> Une explication de Dieu selon les règles.
> . . . .
> Ne confonds pas l'abîme avec un clerc ; distingue
> Entre Oxford et la nuit, entre l'aube et Goettingue.
> . . . .
> De quelle vérité la gouffre est-il l'apôtre ?

---

[1] " But expect not from the gulf where the ages lose themselves,
Expect not from the grand whole untameable and boundless,
Where the invisible floats, where in the obscurity
The wing of the whirlwinds hurtles with the wing of the eagles
An explanation of God in full form.
. . . .
Confound not the abyss with a clerk ; distinguish
Between Oxford and the night, between the dawn and Goettingen.
. . . .
Of what truth is the gulf the apostle ?

Tâche de le savoir ; mais n'en espère point
Un cours de faculté suivi de point en point.
La lumière dévore et le collége broute ;
L'enseignement d'en haut ne suit pas l'humble route
Par où passe en boîtant l'enseignement d'en bas.
Le mystère a ses lois, la Sorbonne a ses bâts ;
La science de l'Être, âpre, escarpée, ardue. . . .
Je ne te cache point qu'il se peut qu'on l'apprenne
Dans la profondeur bleue, ineffable et sereine,
Ou dans la pâle horreur des brouillards infernaux,
Autrement qu'à Bologne au collége Albornoz."

This sort of thought is not with Hugo a mere intellectual exercise—phrasing to be taken up in one key and dropped in another. It is from the very same heights of truth that he makes practical judgments on great social structures in such poems as "Les Bonzes" or "Au Prêtre," where he assails the priestly class, or rather its corruptions. Those who know Hugo's picture of Bishop Myriel in 'Les Misérables,' or his poem "Les Enterrements Civils" in 'The Legend of the Centuries,' will acquit him of any presumptuous denials in face of the mystery and unknown infinitude of life, and of irreverence towards anything that sincerely

Seek to know ; but hope not
An academical course continued from point to point.
The light devours and the college nibbles ;
The higher instruction does not follow the humble path
Where the lower passes limping.
The mystery has its laws, the Sorbonne has its panniers ;
The science of Being, severe, steep, hard of ascent. . . .
I do not hide from thee that it may be one learns
In the blue depths, ineffable and serene,
Or in the pale horror of infernal mists,
Differently than at Bologna, in the college Albornoz."
—*Religion et Religions*, IX.

represents them. Few men have more steadily kept in mind that things *here* and *now* may have issues of unknown magnitude *elsewhere* and *after*. But before the pretensions of the Church to authority and absolute knowledge on the subject, and especially before the abuse of the priestly function, he is severe and uncompromising. He will not have a thinly disguised worldling, amiable or otherwise, thrust upon him as the representative of these mysteries: instead of a mind furnished with the simplicity of truth, to have a man furious for dogma and careless of truth, full of the diplomatic reserves and worldly stratagems which even business men in their better moments sigh over in one another, and running an emulous career with all those who seek first wealth, and power, and high social place—this Hugo has come to find ever more intolerable.

Himself a believer in God and the immortality of the soul, he refuses to accept a Deity " signed Sanchez, Trublet, De Maistre, Ignatius," and some of his finest satiric lines are those in which he exposes the pretensions of absolute theologies. " *Pas de religion qui ne blasphème un peu,*"[1] he says in his crushing, direct style of attack. Religion is to him as natural a fact in man as any of his instincts. It is but the circle of the infinite which he touches with all his faculties when rightly and freely used. All dogmatic faiths are mere abortions of the divinity which surrounds man.

Another point in Hugo's arraignment of society is

[1] "No religion but blasphemes a little."—*Religion et Religions*, II.

its harsh penal code and its rigorous application of the *lex talionis,* or law of revenge, especially when that is carried so far as to impose the penalty of death. In England this right has never been made a great public question; but in some Continental countries, France and Italy in particular, whether from the greater abuse of this right, or from the more lively repugnance these emotional peoples have for a formal execution by law, it has to encounter a formidable and increasing opposition. Beccaria, the great Italian jurist who advocated its abolition, denied, first, society's right to inflict this degree of penalty; and secondly, its efficacy as a deterrent. Hugo does not discuss these two very debatable points. For him these extremities of the penal code in general involve a social-economical question between the rich and cultured and the poor and ignorant, between "those who have not and those who have." His view is, that the criminal in these matters is mostly the product of an unjust social state. Educate and enlighten, afford a fair chance for a natural and satisfying life, and the apparent necessity for Draconic laws will disappear. Nay, until you have done this, so far from having the right to inflict extreme penalties for crime, you are amongst those mainly responsible for its existence:—

> "Je dis qu'ils ont le droit, du fond de leur misère,[1]
> De se tourner vers vous, à qui le jour sourit,
> Et de vous demander compte de leur esprit;

---

[1] "I say they have the right, from the depths of their misery, to turn to you for whom the day is bright, and to ask from you an ac-

. . . .
Je dis que ce sont eux qui sont les dépouillés;
Je dis que les forfaits dont ils se sont souillés
Ont pour point de départ ce qui n'est pas leur faute."

This movement against the rigours of the penal code finds most of its support, however, amongst the Radicals and advanced Republicans. As we see in Hugo, it is closely connected with certain of their social and economical views. For the rest, the penalty of death has for the whole party of progress the foulest historical odour. Scaffold, axe, hemlock-cup, or fagot—these have been the fate of the best of the human race since there has been any record of its doings. And perhaps the best still fall. Such a fact need not be without its weight on the fine balance of the human consciousness. It is the interests of humanity to disown rights so frightfully liable to abuse.

count of their spirit. . . . I say that they are the ones who have been despoiled; I say that the misdeeds with which they are stained have for commencement what is no fault of theirs."

CHAPTER VII.

THE *SOCIAL* NOVELS — HUGO AS A NOVELIST — THE "GODDESS OF LIMIT"—THE NOVEL AS A VEHICLE FOR THINKERS—GOETHE, RICHTER, HAWTHORNE, ETC. — GILLIATT ('TOILERS OF THE SEA').

'THE Legend of the Centuries' was published in 1859. In his preface to the work Hugo had promised two other poems, 'La Fin de Satan' and 'Dieu,' which should form a trilogy with the first-mentioned. For most men this would have been occupation enough for the later years even of a busy life. Such a lifetime of successful work now lay behind him as it is rarely given even to the most abundant and powerful writers to achieve. But Hugo is of that great modern race of authors whose facility in production can be explained only by the looser forms of modern art and the accumulated stores of thought and language at the service of a strong inventive faculty. Something, too, may be due to the business-like energy of some of our great writers, and few possess more of this quality than Hugo. Besides the great poems we have mentioned, he is working in these years of exile on many poems which appeared

only in later collections; and so far from reserving himself even for such works as 'The Four Winds of the Spirit,' or those announced in the preface to 'The Legend of the Centuries,' he has been preparing to enter into another field of work with equally vast projects.

This new field was the novel. It is true, as a form of literature it was not new to him. Not to speak of his youthful attempts in 'Bug-Jargal' and 'Hans of Iceland,' many years before, he had given the world a somewhat famous novel in the 'Hunchback of Notre Dame,' a work which shows a great deal of Sir Walter Scott's manner, although much transformed and disguised by the strange genius of Hugo. But the 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' belongs wholly to that period when he looked upon his art as mainly an illustration of the alliance of the sublime and the grotesque. When he took up the novel form again, it was with the intention of making it a vehicle for the social ideas which have a higher but less popular expression in his poetry. Hugo's recurrence to the novel, indeed, indicates his strong desire to reach a larger public than that which would welcome 'The Legend of the Centuries.' He would like to have the touch of the people, to work with immediate and palpable effect upon them, and upon that large class of readers in all ranks who have learned to read nothing but novels; and perhaps, also, to hear again those immense acclamations to which he had been accustomed in the days of his dramatic successes.

It is curious indeed to observe how naturally the

principle of the sublime and the grotesque has developed its political affinities, and shows itself as a social theory in the Jean Valjean and Gilliatt of later works, rather than as the æsthetic principle represented by earlier Triboulets and Quasimodos. The moral centre of both is a profound compassion for the evil and ignorance in the world. He is reluctant to consider them as other than an accident, a matter of circumstance, of false position, of misunderstood relations, which a better adjustment of things would almost eliminate. Goethe, wise as he was, was surely mistaken in thinking the tendency of this art a morbid one. It is not likely, indeed, to produce those beautiful forms which belong to the serene objectivity of classic art. Its beauties are of another kind, and are so many victories in a kingdom of pain and darkness, into which classic art never sought to penetrate, but which, in these days, is becoming somewhat of a burden on the conscience of humanity. This long life-struggle of Hugo with the existence of evil is not without its sublimity.

Nevertheless the "Goddess of Limit" is still great; and it seems to us that the novel is a form really more unsuitable to Hugo's genius than the drama. In its ordinary shape, indeed, the novel is a looser form of the drama, requiring less supreme and condensed expression; supporting itself more, like a tale, by the aid of description and narration; and relying more on the artifice of suspending the reader's interest, and less on the quality of the thought. The

scene and accessories which must be kept subordinate in the drama, may in this loose form be raised into a prominence which relieves the author of what is after all the prime matter, the exhibition of life and character. It may be with success a very superficial picture of manners, or it may be the drapery of a philosophical theory. It allows digressions, reflective excursions of all kinds, moral, scientific, or satirical. Its liberty in dealing with details and representing all kinds of incidents has no parallel in other forms of literature. Dickens will lay himself out to any extent on the description of a clock-case, and Hawthorne on a theory of lunacy, and both will succeed. It might be thought that these are the conditions of art which would suit a writer who is full of creative power, and who follows his genius more than he studies principles of proportion and harmony. But the case is precisely the contrary. Just because in the novel the materials are so varied and so loosely connected, great care is shown by the masters in this *genre* to observe certain proportions and tones, without which the novel becomes a coarse and inferior form of art. Each has spent a lifetime in finding the peculiar limits of his art, and how to work within them. What a quaint fund of observation, for instance, Hawthorne has to dispose of, but how skilfully he has learned to place it! With what judgment George Eliot arranges her details, and Tourgenieff holds his hand! These writers have learned all the resources of their art. They reach dramatic

intensity without falling into that dramatic abruptness unsuitable to the low-pitched tone of the novel; they make the dialogue profound without destroying the easy and familiar style which conversation should have there; and they have patiently studied how to give to their scientific and philosophical knowledge a form in complete harmony with the general matter and methods of their art.

In most of these respects Hugo's work is defective. Technical and scientific matter is taken straight from the encyclopedia, or the work of the specialist, and shot down in an artistically raw state anywhere. It is mostly the same with local habits and peculiarities. Everything is odd and incredible, because there is no sufficient preparation for it, and because his style and language rather accentuate than soften what is strange in the matter. There is a mixture of a fine ideal interest with all the sensationalism of incident, and the artifices for exciting interest, to which we are accustomed in a third-rate novel.

Moreover, while it presents irresistible temptations to what is weak in a spirit like Hugo's—large and abundant, inclined to a theory of inspiration in art, and having for device "*Poussez le cheval*"—it has not the real freedom of a higher form. There is no room for the impetuous style in it—it has few places for those *élans* of genius in which Hugo's strength lies. In its familiar representation of life, great things and ideas require a veil of commonplace, and appear only in a sort of *incognito*—its highest effects are pathetic

rather than sublime. In short, the novel has all the marks of an inferior *genre*, and few of the really great writers who have been attracted by its facility and popularity have been able to find satisfaction within its limits. Sir Walter Scott remains its greatest master. By Goethe it was turned into a sort of philosophical form, in which his genius mixed at will fine dramatic pictures with philosophical disquisitions, scientific observations, and notes on everything that interested him; and he succeeded in making De Quincey wonder that the countrymen of Miss Austen and Sir Walter Scott had a thought to bestow on such a poor specimen of the novel as 'Wilhelm Meister.' Richter's strange genius distorted it in giving it poetic range and exaltation. George Sand struggled valiantly with its impotency—bringing, like Hawthorne, the gathered art of a lifetime to naturalise in this unraised form the ideal side of life. Balzac, who neither cared for nor understood poetry, accepted it heartily with all its limits and conditions, and left us 'The Human Comedy,'—next to Scott's the most considerable work which belongs to this department of literature.

Thus in many ways the real value of Hugo's thought is, if not quite lost, impaired, even for the most sympathetic reader, by the choice of a form unsuitable to his talent. But, for all, that cannot be the last word on Victor Hugo's novels. Amidst all the obscurations which gather thickly about his genius in this field, such works as 'Les Misérables' and 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer' show in every page

the hand of the master. There are potent qualities in the thought. Notwithstanding a certain specious epigrammatic brilliancy, due to the habit of dressing up odds and ends of remarks in unnaturally emphatic ways, there are below this coruscating surface large and solid layers of thought. The character of Gilliatt, for instance, in 'The Toilers of the Sea,' is boldly and truly conceived—a lonely and unfriended man, whose undisciplined strength of body and soul is wasted in an unfruitful struggle with a fate with which he can nowhere intelligently grapple, and by which he is at last, in silent wonderment at the world about him, content to be destroyed,—the story, we judge, of many a strong unillumined soul in the darker strata of society—at least typical of much that takes place there. The one side of Gilliatt's life is well brought out—the man's heroic energy and noble capacity for devotion; but the side which the modern reader expects to have explained to him—the inward struggle in this man's soul, the great heart and the limited intellectual horizon, the confused touch of the conventional side of life—is the side which Hugo leaves dark. All over the work, it is true, you find evidences of the fulness and delicacy of the conception; but these want artistic relief: he mostly settles down on the outward aspect of his subject, where he works with such vigour amongst details and accessories of no great importance, and with such glowing colours, that many readers see but the coarsely painted canvas of an inferior artist.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WORLD IN HUGO'S NOVELS—HIS SENSE OF REALITY—THE PSEUDO-SUBLIME—EXAGGERATION AND HIGHER TRUTH—THE SOCIAL AND PRACTICAL SIDE OF HUGO'S IDEALISM — HIS "BISHOP MYRIEL."

FOR many, too, a difficulty may exist in the peculiar constitution of Hugo's universe, and the sort of reality which he seeks to picture and explain for us. To one kind of reality we in England are sufficiently accustomed. The well-known types of the professional man, of the society man, of the political man; the mild amours of Anglican curates and the domestic jocularities of deans; the whole withered world of Thackerayan picture and satire,—are of little import to any one not bred up on the collects, ecclesiastical and secular, of Anglicanism. Thackeray's major and Thackeray's parson, these are too often the grimaces of humanity immortalised in our English fiction. Our matter is too conventional, and our best work wants that elevation of thought and universal interest which are found in the studies of Balzac or George Sand or Tourgenieff. When another age more catholic in its feelings and

ideas has come, it will scarcely care to unearth this little world of ours.

Of course, in the limited horizon of the English novel, a sort of superficial likelihood in the order of things is the great affair. To suggest a man's social standing or character from the style of his necktie, or his observance of etiquette, or from the tone which the duke or the parson assumes towards him, is amongst its chief secrets. Of this kind of realism there is in Hugo's works little or nothing. He is about as capable of understanding it as Plato would have been. Of the outward aspect of his world—the world at least which we find in his novels—we have already spoken. That side is of a coarse, sensational character, abounding in the marvellous and gigantesque. But this is as much the counterpart of a profound sense of the life in things as Cervantes's humorous exaggeration on the surface of his great work is the counterpart of the reflective melancholy below. The characteristic of Hugo's world, on its inward side, is a prodigious faculty of living which he finds in the human soul, its vast and mysterious powers of feeling, comprehending, enjoying, and aspiring—this is the sphere of realism in his novels. Every faculty in man is the organ of the infinite and divine; but narrow and ignoble systems of society pervert and degrade his use of himself. For the full development of his nature requires that he should stand in true, and not in false or merely conventional relations to the universe around him. Falsehood is necessarily fatal to the higher life, and would be equally so

to the lower, did not the conventions of the social state support and encourage it. There is nothing good or beautiful outside of what is true; there is nothing noble or sacred outside of what is natural.

The reality which we find in Hugo's works is thus something closely akin to the infinite element in it—something in the normal functions of life which, freed from the reactions and relaxations incident to matter, would be seen of divine and infinite force. With Hugo this view has all its logical issues. "*Je suis le têtard d'un archange,*" he once cried, rounding off a discussion on the subject.

Life, then, has possibilities which society does not seek to develop, mysterious depths which society does not recognise, but carefully covers and refuses to consider as other than unsightly and abnormal; but all the same, under the thin crust of conventions the hidden flood rolls loud and deep, and here and there the surface has begun to crack ominously. It is very much because Hugo looks so steadily at this side of life, and so much neglects the merely conventional, that we are ready to accuse him of exaggeration and sensationalism. No doubt, were his art and his methods in this *genre* less defective, we should not feel so; no doubt, also, such charges are occasionally correct—his idea of the heroic, in particular, has an unfortunate spectacular element in it. Does it ever occur to him that a committee of Radical leaders framing, under the first impulse of defeat, magnanimous resolutions to die—or a Gavroche, street Arab of Paris, gaily helping to

shoot down men from a street barricade, and dying gallantly there—are not the steadiest and profoundest kinds of heroism, especially not the kind that has done the best work in the world? Are not *February* and *July revolutions* balanced by *June massacres* and *December coups d'état?* It is unfortunate for France that neither in his life nor his works has Hugo made a sufficient distinction here. The work is all the heavier for those who come after him; and in this respect he has left the victory to that much-vilified class of Nisards, Planches, Sainte-Beuves, adherents mainly of the old classical school, representatives "of the ancient spirit of ignorance and hate" it may be, but representatives also of the fine taste, the sober judgment and self-criticism, that were once the distinctive qualities of French literature. The way of progress, unfortunately, lies over much that is estimable.

But when you have said all that is to be said on this weak side of Hugo, his great merit, the freshness and moral power in his conception of life, remains. Those heroes and heroines of his are not made in the moulds of a temporary social species; but they are not simple exaggerations of human nature. They exhibit it under the higher laws of action and passion which we are content to recognise occasionally in the life of the artist, or poet, or apostle, but less willingly concede as the birthright of mankind in general. His characters, his Jean Valjean, Gilliatt, Bishop Myriel, Josiane, have a greater range of being—greater *abandons* and greater returns than the conventions of

society, whether they are fixed in laws and institutions, or simply in a sort of public opinion, allow for. But there is no doubt he is right. There is a greater movement in the soul, both for good and for evil—even a greater oscillation between the two than ordinary social judgments recognise. We are mostly both better and worse than we appear to be, for nature makes us larger than the outward type which we present to the world, and which ordinary art is content to copy. We read Shakespeare's Sonnets with appreciation, in spite of Mr Hallam; and we have a certain delight in recognising that Lear and Brutus, Don Quixote and Mephistopheles, are but our ordinary humanity, thrown by fate and circumstance outside of the social pressure. In an age of great mechanical energy, in which materialism passes readily for the true realism, it may be well to be reminded of these things.

But this general truth takes a peculiar form in Hugo's hands. It is the platform from which he pleads for a more practical recognition of the natural fraternity in men, a more charitable view of those who have fallen under the ban of social judgment and find life difficult or hopeless. As in his dramas, the heroes of his novels are in one sense or another social outcasts: in 'Les Misérables,' the convict from the galleys, whom timely aid and kindly treatment have rescued from the evil surroundings, but who struggles in vain for the rest of his life against the social and legal prejudices which bind him to the past; in 'The

Toilers of the Sea,' it is Gilliatt, a silent magnanimous soul, typical of a strength and virtue which finds it difficult to get the hall-mark, and is easily overlooked amongst more conventional but inferior forms. In all cases their fate is the same. The wall of destiny is too high, and the end is tragic defeat from the worldly point of view—tragic self-victory from the eternal. Hugo's later experiences had probably given him a rich store of information in this direction. He was intimately acquainted with the history of men like Barbès, Blanqui, and many less known democrats—men endowed with considerable qualities of heart and mind, but who had thrown themselves somewhat rashly against the social world around them. He could estimate better than most what was true and what was false in the current opinion about them. He could see what was harsh and arbitrary in the expedients which authority, frightened into injustice, made use of against such men. Nay, more, he had seen how this appetite for legislative oppression may lead society to acquiesce in judicial crimes which, in any other case, would be held of the darkest dye. He had seen men of noble aims and irreproachable lives treated as the lowest criminals. He had himself been put under ban, and denominated the leader of a "party of crime." He is therefore inclined to dwell on the unprofitable side of too much government by police, and to expose its tendencies to create criminals rather than to reform them. In the Police Inspector and the Judge in 'Les Misérables,' he pictures the baneful effect of too great

devotion to the formalities and machinery of justice. One of his finest strokes at this tendency of officialdom to harden men into a sort of greedy feeders of the gallows and the galleys, is to be found in his well-known portrait of Bishop Myriel in 'Les Misérables':—

"He had a strange manner peculiarly his own of judging things. I suspect he learned it from the Gospels. He one day heard in a drawing-room the story of a trial which was shortly to take place. A wretched man, through love of a woman and a child he had by her, having exhausted his resources, coined false money, which at that period was an offence punished by death. The woman was arrested while issuing the first false piece manufactured by the man. She was detained, but there was no proof against her. She alone could charge her lover and ruin him by confessing. She denied. They pressed her, but she adhered to her denial. Upon this the royal *procureur* had an idea; he pretended infidelity on the lover's part, and contrived, by cleverly presenting the woman with fragments of letters, to persuade her that she had a rival, and that the man was deceiving her. Then, exasperated by jealousy, she denounced her lover, confessed everything, proved everything. The man was ruined, and would shortly be tried with his accomplice at Aix. The story was told, and everybody was delighted at the magistrate's cleverness. The Bishop listened to all this in silence, and when it was ended, he asked, 'Where will this man and woman be tried?' 'At the assizes.' Then he continued, 'And where will the royal *procureur* be tried?'"

Here, as elsewhere, the truths which Hugo is bent upon making prominent, are just those which the easy optimism of society overlooks, but he has no particular social system to impress upon you. Let the spirit and tendency be right, and wonderful results will be gradually worked out. All the same, it is not necessary to think highly of the wisdom of those who are

continually enlarging on the difficulties and dangers of "ideal systems," and the impossibility of human nature working under them. Is there anything more wonderful than the way in which human nature has worked hitherto under systems of polity and religion, which are at least ideal enough on their theoretical side, and which, apart from experience of the facts, would have been pronounced impossible?

CHAPTER IX.

SUCCESS OF 'LES MISÉRABLES'—THE BANQUET AT BRUSSELS—LIBERALISM REVIVING — SAINTE-BEUVE'S COMMENTS — REVIVAL OF 'HERNANI' IN 1869—COMMENCEMENT OF TRIUMPH.

THE first of Hugo's great "social novels," 'Les Misérables,' appeared in 1863 simultaneously in nine languages. Its success was very great. To many readers, no doubt, it was nothing more than a curious and wonderfully impressive story, not without extravagance; but by the mass of Radical and Republican politicians it was hailed as a brilliant and popular manifest of their doctrines. It was dramatised by his son for the Brussels stage; and its representation was made the occasion of a grand banquet there—one of those great public triumphs of which the career of Victor Hugo, especially towards the latter end of it, is full.

The banquet, given by the Belgian editors, Messrs Lacroix and Verbroeckhoven, was attended by the principal magistrates of Brussels. Hugo presided, the burgomaster on his right, and the President of the

Chamber on his left, and surrounded by many influential writers and journalists, representing the Liberal parties of France and Belgium. The speeches were more complimentary than political, but as a whole there could be no mistake as to the character of the manifestation. At the least it was a great public recognition of the man who represented to the whole of Europe unbending hostility to the Second Empire, and to Imperialism in general. It was crowning the man who had fought to the last against the *coup d'état;* who had lent the whole force of his genius, and the weight of a name now the first in Europe, to the cause of democracy and freedom of thought. Practically, it was the beginning of victory for Hugo in the long contest into which he had entered ten years before. The best victories are those which come forth slowly but surely from the confusion of things. Louis Napoleon had had his day, but the moment of reaction —obstructive enough for that which is coming, fatal for that which is going—had arrived, and the reviving forces of Liberalism, not yet of much account in the practical sphere of politics, found a rallying-point in the life and work of the poet.

Whatever others of the Imperial train might think, Sainte-Beuve, a prophet still though blessing Barak, marks the setting in of the tide, and utters a note of warning to his correspondent, Princess Mathilde. "I am struck," he writes, "by this demonstration of a menacing and triumphant Coblentz. They (the Court) think nothing of that at Compiègne, in that isolated

and gilded world. . . . But what is ridiculous to-day may not be so to-morrow (*Tel est ridicule aujourd'hui qui ne l'est pas demain*)."

It is true that in these days Sainte-Beuve is making another change of face. He appears to be getting cooler towards Imperialism, especially towards the chief figure of Imperialism, and has repeatedly refused to write an article on the 'Life of Cæsar,' composed by the Emperor's own hands. Indeed, Sainte-Beuve's critical faculty was too real and true to work otherwise than conscientiously. He was at length, in 1867, nominated to the Senate, where he formed, almost alone, a sort of opposition, and was especially severe on the intrigues of the clerical party (*ces hommes noirs*). He had drifted through many phases of belief into a settled scepticism. "There is no longer any possibility," he writes, "of believing in the old histories and the old Bibles. . . . Men remain very small, very foolish, and still the same as before in the times of our old moralists." Yet the natural history of man's spiritual development has surely some real import for us still. In this last attitude death took Sainte-Beuve, in October of 1869, just before the revolution that threw the Bonaparte dynasty once more out of France. He was buried, according to his own instructions, without ceremonies, beside his mother in Montparnasse cemetery, to the last a hard-working and conscientious critic.

Within France, too, the enthusiasm which attended the revival of 'Hernani,' during the Paris Exhibition

of 1869, was another of Hugo's great triumphs. It could scarcely be otherwise. Hugo was outliving opposition. The great generation, of whose greatness he was no small part, had almost passed away. Lamennais slept tombless amongst the poor at Père Lachaise. Lamartine, too, was gone, and Lacordaire, the last great representative of the attempt to reconcile the tendencies of Radicalism and Roman Catholicism. The old Academicians, to whom 'Hernani' had been a mere fantastic novelty, had yielded up their chairs at the Institute to new ones, to whom it was at least a great literary tradition. The rising generation of artists and men of letters were moved to enthusiasm at the sight of a drama over which their predecessors had had many a famous contest forty years before. The poet himself, living in the isolation of his rocky island-home, had been for long as much a legend, a name, as an actuality. Nor was the man unworthy of the halo which in these later days had gathered about his name. Removed from the revel of the great city to the soothing grandeur of the sea-horizons at Guernsey, his nature seems to have gained in serenity and depth. In spite of the occasional French emphasis, his later poetry has for its chief characteristics a quiet depth and force. His language has got the peculiar perfection of great power, lightly and easily wielded. It is but the slight curl of a wave, perhaps, but we see that it has come from far, and that the force behind it that carved it so lightly and yet so firmly

is that of the great deep. 'The Four Winds of the Spirit' is full of this peculiar charm, the ease and perfection of the master's hand in his old age.

> "Heuréux les éprouvés ! voilà ce que je vois ;
> Et je m'en vais, fantôme, habiter les décombres.
> Les pêcheurs dont j'entends sur les grèves la voix
> Regardent les flôts croître ; et moi, grandir les ombres.
>
> Je souris au désert ; je contemple et j'attends ;
> J'emplis de paix mon cœur qui n'eut jamais d'envie ;
> Je tâche, craignant Dieu, de m'éveiller à temps
> Du rêve monstrueux qu'on appelle la vie.
>
> La mort va m'emmener dans la sérénité ;
> J'entends ses noirs chevaux qui viennent dans l'espace.
> Je suis comme celui, qui s'étant trop hâté,
> Attend sur le chemin que la voiture passe."

CHAPTER X.

'I WILL ENTER WHEN LIBERTY ENTERS" — THE REVOLUTION AND THE SECOND EMPIRE—A PICTURE FROM THE EXILE.

"I WILL enter when liberty enters," Hugo had replied to friends who urged him to take advantage of the second general amnesty proclaimed in 1869. When liberty should enter, or in what guise, were matters which, in 1869, were still dark to the keenest-sighted politicians. Hugo, however, was not a man easily deprived of his hopes; great as his other gifts are, energy and persistence are amongst his prominent qualities. Besides, his judgment in these matters was founded on a larger view of the situation than that generally taken by professional politicians, who are mostly too much engaged in manœuvres to note the grand tendencies of affairs. The Second Empire, strong enough in appearance, with its pretorian cohorts and well-organised bureaucracy, wanted some of the more solid elements of governments. For the great body of Frenchmen the ideal of France, though obscured for the time, remained still that of the

nation who had taken the lead in the social and political progress of Europe. In this respect it was vain to expect that France should deny her past. The French Revolution, with all its errors, remains the date of the emancipation of peoples. We have no doubt but that a Teutonic nation would have achieved it with more temperance, both of action and speech; but then, as a matter of fact, they left it to the French nation to perform with such qualities of strength and weakness as they had. Nothing, not even *coups d'état* and Sedans, can overlay the importance of that fact in the history of Western civilisation. All political progress, constitutions, and reform bills, must legitimately be deduced from it. The alternative, then, always remained before the eyes of the French people, that of choosing between the greatest pages of their history, or accepting a rule which, though it had some traditional connection with the past, was a virtual reversal of it.

No man had done as much as Hugo to keep these facts before not only France but Europe. On that side, France has accepted Victor Hugo as the man who has best represented all that is great in her past. To Frenchmen he will always be something more than a great poet; and amongst them the tradition of his life will not be allowed to sleep as that of Milton in England, or be ignored in all but its imperfect aspects. It has been said that some men represent the conscience of the nation or society to which they belong, and Hugo's refusal to enter had almost the value of

a national protest. Nor was it without sacrifice. He has felt the exile's weariness in the streets of strange cities. That soft land of France is unforgettable, even to the poet whose mind is filled with the magnificent apocalyptic visions of his later poetry. Occasional plaints escape him:—

> "Le mois de mai sans la France,
> Ce n'est pas le mois de mai."

We have a picture of his life in this his last year of exile from the pen of his son Charles. It occurs in 'Les Hommes de l'Exil,' and is entitled "A Visit to Victor Hugo." There is something of the vigour and freedom of the father's manner in it, but wanting the imaginative potency. The matter is rather decorated than illumined:—

"I have returned not from Guernsey, but from the back of my garden. My garden is not large. Ten steps take you from end to end of it. It is merely an alley, a plot of turf and a flower-border—just the spot for a mother, a child, or a flight of birds. At the foot of my garden there is a nondescript building. All that is visible of it is the roof. The rest of it—the three windows, the door, and the wooden balcony, are entirely hidden by an immense curtain of fresh vines. The wall is foliage, the door verdure, the skylight twigs of vine, the window shadow. Nothing more wildly rustic than this little house, full at once of spiders and butterflies. If you were not in the city you would think yourself in the forest. Imagine the den of Caliban at Brussels. You mount a staircase—it is a ladder. You enter a chamber—it is a hayloft. For furniture—a camp-bed, a table, and a reading-desk. No chairs. The floor is bare, the walls and ceiling are bare. . . . The three windows, very high, but invaded by the green growth, scarcely let the sun pass. To make up, the roof lets the rain in. It is charming.

To lodge there is almost to lodge under the stars. It is to have the abode of the owl for one's private room. One must be athirst for solitude, for poetry, and for foliage, to find pleasure in this savage retreat, which is not so much a nest as a den.

"Well, it is there, in this cabin, that for two months of the summer every year I entertain a hermit.

"The hermit is my father. . . .

"My father is sixty-seven years of age. . . . He might well be old, if a life of struggle and work had not kept him young. He has overtaken age before age has overtaken him. His hair is white, but his moustache is grey, his eye clear, his foot firm, and his carriage excellent.

". . . He works standing, rises at five in the morning, summer and winter, plunges as soon as he leaves his bed into a bath of the temperature of the air, and if it is winter, breaks the ice of his bath, and makes the Beresina part of his hygiene. He awakes pleased, and goes to bed satisfied. He walks, talks, writes twenty pages and ten letters in the day; he respires force, hope, and the certainty of the morrow, and smiles to the future as to a friend who approaches. He knows how it stands with the Empire, and how with the Revolution. Furthermore, he has written 'Les Châtiments,' and that is enough to keep him in good spirits. In short, he bears on his face all the appearance of a robust exile, capable of seeing a dynasty interred."

Then the elder Hugo's opinion on the political situation in France is given:—

"'The opposition, if it means work, will henceforth concentrate all its efforts in the press and at the tribune on one point —the abolition of the preliminary oath (*serment préalable*). The men who would renounce voluntary exile—that is, the only exile which is an example to engage in this supreme struggle, will first wait till the frontier is open to their dignity, till their mouth has not to stammer a perjury by way of oath-taking. To swear faith to the *coup d'état* is to forget the future and sink the past. . . . Let the radical opposition, then, demand the abolition of the oath! The day when the oath disappears, on this day only may liberty hope and the dictatorship tremble.'

"I listened to my father speaking," continues Charles, "and I seemed to hear in his words at once the cry of a conscience against the dictatorship, and the sigh of a soul for its native land.

"For he would like to see it, he too! For to enter it would be his fond dream. For now it is eighteen years since he quitted that tomb of his ancestors and that nest of his loves. Eighteen years now that he has been absent, and that after having seen his home destroyed, his family dispersed and in mourning, the ashes of his hearth thrown to all the winds, he sees his very work proscribed and his name exiled. What need to deny it? The defeat of December has been for him a great shipwreck. For forty years he had breathed the stormy and animating air of Paris. That mysterious collaboration of the crowd with his thought, of those millions of intelligences with his will, these vast rays from the outer world, that excited youth, these successes succeeded by tempests, these breaths and emanations of a great public, these noises,—all that was what the book, the theatre, and even the tribune was for him; and his whole work up to 1851 is, if you like to call it so, the outlook of his spirit on the century, but it is also his window which opens on Paris. At present this window opens on the ocean, a force still, but scarcely a joy."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEPHEW SEEKING HIS AUSTERLITZ—THE TWO PORTRAITS OF LOUIS NAPOLEON—THE REVERSE OF THE NAPOLEONIC LEGEND—SEDAN—THE DUEL BETWEEN POET AND EMPEROR ENDED—SIGNIFICANCE OF VICTORY.

BUT in 1869 things were marching to their end. The nephew, too, was seeking his Austerlitz. It would really seem as if Louis Bonaparte, estimating the great things of the world only on their small side—a mistake easy for monarchs—had confounded the grand reserves, the well-timed audacity of such men as Cæsar, Cromwell, and Napoleon, with the subterfuges and unscrupulousness of a political intriguer, and lost sight of the great ideal forces—scientific, philosophical, and moral—which find expression in them. Life may be a poor affair, as the old proverb says—*flebile ludibrium*—but not so poor as that. You cannot intrigue an Austerlitz or a Waterloo with any number of police agencies and newspaper powers at your back. As representing what one may hope is the last attempt to found a European tyranny, the history of Louis Bonaparte deserves consideration. What sort of a man it is that would make the attempt

in our time, and what sort of men and interests, not always wholly bad, will serve him, military Saint-Arnauds, literary Mérimées, and even Sainte-Beuves, legal Dupins, De Mornys of ambiguous birth,—all this it has been part of Hugo's work to drag into the light.

Of the chief actor himself, Hugo has given two readings, each accenting different elements. In the one, Louis Bonaparte is presented to us as a man who had come to regard the world as wholly organised on hypocrisy and falsehood—as a place in which self-interest assumed the name of truth or prudence, and in which immorality was covered with a formal homage to virtue. Great men were simply those who had the sense not to let such vain words as truth, honesty, or justice stand in the way of their interests. The world was a comedy in which things wandered much at hazard, and a clever, unscrupulous man might dexterously win the suffrages even of the decorous. Why should not an Austerlitz fall to his lot as well as to another's?

> "Je puis vaincre la Prusse; il est aussi malin [1]
> D'assiéger Tortoni que d'assiéger Berlin.
> . . . .
> L'Angleterre et l'Irlande à grand bruit se querellent;
> D'Espagne sur Cuba les coups de fusils grêlent;
> Joseph pseudo-César, Wilhelm prêtre Attila
> S'empoignent aux cheveux; je mettrai le holà.
> . . . .

[1] "I can conquer Prussia; it is quite as clever to lay siege to Café Tortoni as to Berlin. . . . England and Ireland are having high words. From Spain there comes a hail of musket-shot on Cuba. Joseph the pseudo-Cæsar, and William a priest-Attila, are at daggers-drawn. I can take the matter in my own hands. . . . I shall have

Et j'aurai cette gloire, à peu près sans débats,
D'être le Tout-Puissant et le Très-Haut d'en bas.

. . . .

Que faut-il donc pour cela ? prier Magne
D'avancer quelque argent à Lebœuf et choisir,
Comme Haroun escorté le soir par son vizir,
L'heure obscure où l'on dort, où la rue est déserte,
Et brusquement tenter l'aventure ; on peut, certe,
Passer le Rhin, ayant passé le Rubicon.

. . . .

Saint Arnaud manque,
J'ai Bazaine. Bismarck me semble un saltimbanque ;
Je crois être aussi bon comédien que lui.
Jusqu'ici j'ai dompté le hasard ébloui ;
J'en ai fait mon complice, et la fraude est ma femme.
J'ai vaincu, quoique lâche, et brillé quoique infâme.
En avant ! j'ai Paris, donc j'ai le genre humain.
Tout me sourit, pourquoi m'arrêter en chemin ?
Il ne me reste plus à gagner que le quine.
Continuons, la chance étant une coquine.

. . . .

J'escamotai la France, escamotons l'Europe.
Décembre est mon manteau, l'ombre est mon enveloppe ;

---

the glory almost without expense of being the All-Powerful and the Very Great here below. . . .

"And what is all that is needed for that ? To ask Magne to advance some money to Lebœuf, and to choose, like Haroun escorted in the evening by his vizier, the obscure hour when everything is asleep, when the streets are deserted, and suddenly make the venture ; certainly, one can pass the Rhine, having passed the Rubicon. . . . Saint Arnaud is no longer with me, but I have Bazaine. Bismarck seems to me a mountebank ; I think I am as good a comedian as he. Hitherto I have tamed chance dazzled at my success. I have made it my accomplice, and deception is my wife. I have conquered although a coward, and shone although infamous. Forward ! I have Paris, and with Paris the human race. All smiles on me, why halt midway ? I have nothing now to gain but the grand throw. Let us go forward, chance being something of a scamp. . . . I tricked France, let us trick Europe. December is my mantle, the shade is my covering. The eagles are fled, I have but the falcons ; but no

Les aigles sont partis, je n'ai que les faucons;
Mais n'importe! Il fait nuit. J'en profite. Attaquons.
. . . .
Or il faisait grand jour. Jour sur Londres, sur Rome,
Sur Vienne, et tous ouvraient les yeux, hormis cet homme,
Et Berlin souriait, et le guettait sans bruit.
. . . .
Ce suicide prit nos fiers soldats, l'armée
De France devant qui marchait la renommée,
Et sans canons, sans pain, sans chefs, sans généraux,
Il conduisit au fond du gouffre les héros.
Tranquille il les mena lui-même dans le piége.
—Où vas-tu? dit la tombe. Il répondit: que sais-je?"

—*L'Année Terrible: Août.*

In "The Four Winds of the Spirit" Hugo seizes the other expression on this Imperial visage,—that of a man eager, not for glory or power to wield powerfully—rather embarrassed indeed with them than otherwise—but athirst for the great luxuries of life; a mere sensualist, who saw and took a good opportunity for having his turn in life, but scarcely expected it to last, having occasionally some vague idea that the world was full of greater and better forces than those in him, and aware that the fact must eventually be known. In Hugo's opinion these two readings comprehend the range and oscillation of character in the hero of the *coup d'état.*

matter. It is night. I take advantage of it. Let us attack. . . Now it was broad daylight, daylight on Loudon, on Rome, on Vienna, and all had their eyes open but this man, and Berlin smiled and noiselessly lay in wait for him. . . . This suicide took our gallant soldiers, the army of France, at whose head renown marched, and without cannons, without bread, without chiefs, without generals, he led the heroes to the bottom of the gulf. Tranquilly he led them himself into the snare.—Whither goest thou, said the tomb? He answered, What know I?"

"Tu savais bien qu'un jour il faudrait choir enfin,
Mais tu n'imaginais ni Séjan, ni Rufin.
Tu te croyais de ceux que la haine publique
Frappe furtivement d'un coup de foudre oblique ;
Tu t'étais figuré qu'on te renversait
Sans te faire de mal, doucement en secret,
Avec précaution, sans bruit, à la nuit close,
Et prient un ami de te dire la chose,
Ainsi qu'on pose à terre un vase précieux ;
Tu t'étais fait d'avance, au loin, sous de beaux cieux,
Dans ton palais plus fier que la villa Farnèse,
Un lit voluptueux pour tomber à ton aise.
Point. C'est en plein midi que le peuple a tonné.
L'horizon était bleu, l'éclair l'a sillonné.
La tonnerre au grand jour, au milieu de la foule,
Est tombé sur ton front comme un plafond qui croule ;
Et ceux qui t'ont vu mettre en poudre en un moment,
Se sont épouvantés de cet écrasement.
Et les sages ont dit, te regardant par terre,
Que les temps sont mauvais, que le pouvoir s'altère,
Quand un gueux, un gredin, un faquin, un maraud,
Fait pour ramper si bas, peut tomber de si haut."[1]

---

[1] "You knew very well that one day there would be a fall, but you had in your mind neither Sejanus nor Rufinus. You thought yourself of those whom the public hate strikes slyly as with a thunderbolt that had glanced aside. You had been imagining that they would overturn you without hurting you, gently, in secret, with precaution, without noise, at dead of night, and request one of your friends to inform you, as one would deposit a precious vase on the ground. You had made for yourself beforehand, far away, under beautiful skies, in your palace prouder than the Villa Farnese, a soft bed on which to fall at your ease. Never. It was full mid-day when the people thundered. The horizon was blue when the flash traversed it. In the great light of day, in the midst of the crowd, thunder has driven in thy forehead as a scaffolding that gives way; and those who have seen you ground to powder in a moment, have been affrighted at this ruin. And wise men, seeing you stretched on your back, have said that the times are bad, that authority is weakened, when a beggarly rascal, a sneak, a knave made to sprawl on the ground, can fall from such a height."

Thus this ill-starred Bonaparte, gibbeted lugubrious in the heavens, balances at the other end of the centuries the Tiberius of Tacitus, and has become a sad, but in many ways instructive and even hopeful, spectacle for humanity. Hopeful we say, for it was the logic of a false position that drew him inevitably into the gulf.

When an institution has ceased to represent a real force in the world, every movement it makes, whether on this side or on that, shakes it to its fall. When monarchs go into delirium in these times, the Greeks have a chance of profiting. King William of Prussia was probably as averse as any one to have a free and republican France as his neighbour, and to give the last blow to a monarchy which was still a sympathetic existence for all other autocracies in Europe. "*Quelle idée avez-vous eue de faire cette guerre?*" the King is reported to have said, with contemptuous commiseration, to the Emperor. "What was your idea in making this war?"

Sedan indeed took the measure of many things. It summed up not only the work of "the man of the 2d December," but there and then, also, the shadow of the Hapsburg dynasty left the German horizon, and the imperial power passed into the hands of a line which, though possessed of narrow and obsolete opinions, had preserved whatever of the virtues of kingship might still linger into these times.

Thus was one work of Hugo's carried to a triumphant end. The twenty years' duel between the poet

and the Emperor had been decided, in appearance, by the intervention of an indifferent agent. But in reality, Louis Bonaparte had been pushed into the abyss, haggard and reluctant, by the necessities of a false position. It was the end of an Imperialism in which there were no real imperial qualities. Hugo proved robust enough, as his son had prophetically said, to see a dynasty interred. He lived to see the third Napoleon descend uncrowned into an exile's tomb; and yet another of the race, the heir to the sadly shrivelled traditions of Imperialism, perish in a miserable brawl of colonists and savages. On this side, the poet's career has a significance of a much wider kind than that which belongs to the political movement in France, important as that may be to Europe generally. The victory of such a man as Hugo, representing purely spiritual and intellectual forces, over an arbitrary practical power, with the immense political resources of absolutism behind it, enables us to estimate in some degree the march and the nature of that kind of progress which we call civilisation. It measures for us the growing power of high and free thought to work directly on the chaotic mass of feeling and half-awakened intelligence of "the people." Such victories as those of a Socrates and Dante will no longer have the supreme tragic element in them—will no longer be victories in the ideal world only, but also conquests in actual life. This closer relationship between the best thought and the popular intelligence owes much also to the popular

developments of art in these later days. The great thinker does not now depend only on the feeble body-guard of a select circle of disciples. The hosts that follow him outnumber great armies, and the chorus of their voices startles Cæsar on his throne. Hence it is that certain defects as well as certain virtues have become more prominent in him. There is less patience, less reserve, more sacrifice for popular effects; but also a higher courage, a profounder consciousness of his mission. In this respect both the weakness and the strength in the spirit of modern civilisation find perhaps their best representatives in France and Victor Hugo.

CHAPTER XII.

HUGO ENTERS FRANCE—FIRST SIGHT OF FRENCH SOLDIERS—PARIS UNDER THE SIEGE — HUGO AND THE COMMUNE — THE RIOT AT BRUSSELS — *PLEBS* - CALIBAN — FRANCE AND GERMANY.

THE news of the capitulation of the French army at Sedan had been the signal for a revolution, which once more bore the Bonaparte dynasty out of France. At last Hugo felt at liberty to enter his native land. The first news of the French disasters had brought him to Brussels to await events; and on the 5th September 1870, the morrow of the proclamation of the Republic, he took his ticket at Brussels station for Paris. The re-entry was a triumph for him of a solid enough kind; but it was a triumph terribly overcast by the condition in which he found his country. Her last army had been blindly led into a trap; her soldiers were demoralised by defeat and distrust; one Government had been swept away in the storm, another was struggling in the anarchy of revolution to establish itself on the ruins, and the Germans were marching on Paris.

On his way through France, the poet saw at Lan-

drecies some of General Vinoy's troops retreating on Paris — sullen and haggard soldiers, with defeat and discouragement written in their looks. It was in vain that the old man, who had lived all his life in the proud illusion that the French army was invincible, shouted encouragingly from his carriage—"*Vive la France! Vive la patrie!*" The worn and disheartened groups, resting by the wayside from the pursuit of Prussian Uhlans, made no response, and looked, says one who was present, as if they did not comprehend.

The events which followed the surrender at Sedan are well enough known not to need more than a passing notice here. The well-ordered and scientific advance of the Germans on Paris; the struggles of "the Government of the National Defence" to make this great modern city an effective military machine for offence and defence; the manifestations, promenades, and orations; the immense enrolment of civilians in the National Guard; the lawyer trotting to the Courts, and the merchant to the Exchange, with muskets on their shoulders, highly delighted with their military apparel, spectators say; grand projects of balloon warfare, of infernal machines for destroying the whole German army, of a levy *en masse*,—these are the things that come uppermost in accounts of Paris under the siege. But little or nothing comes of it all. The military talent at the service of the Government, even if decent, is evidently not equal to the situation; and every kind of authority is weakened by defeat and sudden political changes. Vigorous attacks on the

enemy are occasionally made, and with success; but there is always something wanting to make success complete or permanent. Places are retaken by the promptness and fire of the French assault, but lost again almost immediately, because some general had not got his forces to the front in time, or because the soldiers lacked steadiness and discipline, and took no precautions to hold that which they had won. The Radicals and Communists also begin to think they could do better than the Government. Tumultuary assemblies of National Guards from Montmartre and Belleville march to the Hôtel de Ville, and demand a bolder and more active style of defence—more sorties, a change of arms, a complete change in the military system, which they declare still continues to be that of the Empire. The extreme Radicals have got the idea that the officials, both civil and military, are of the decorous routine type—very serviceable for levying taxes and marching armies in time of peace, but very ineffective in this supreme hour of struggle. The Radicals were probably right in their opinion; and it is probable that some final conviction of this fact spread itself widely enough to make the abortive experiment of the Commune possible. The history of Rossel shows how a strong-minded man, of clear direct perceptions, could throw himself, in despair at the official imbecility around him, into the hands of the extreme revolutionaries. But the energy of advanced Radicalism was too expensive an agent for the Parisian *bourgeois*, who would probably have preferred a Prus-

sian occupation to government by Pyat and Blanqui; and the Commune, after having lived long enough to show its military and financial incapacity, was suppressed in blood.

Hugo's place in this confused world, where two great classes, the *bourgeoisie* and the proletariat, were struggling for power, circled round by hostile cannon, was that of general counsellor and friend to all parties. During the brief rule of the Commune he remained in Paris, and did what he could to moderate the extreme counsels of the men then in power. On its suppression his voice was equally impressive in appeals to the victorious Republicans to refrain from sanguinary reprisals. Indeed the generous ardour with which he besought mercy for the vanquished Communists once more tended to identify his name with their cause, and brought him during this period of intense excitement into some discredit with the mass of his countrymen. It was the cause also of the last of those public conflicts with authority which are amongst the curiosities of his long and wonderful career. At Brussels, whither he had come to arrange the affairs of his son Charles, recently deceased, he protested openly against the Belgian Government's refusal to grant the Communists the ordinary right of asylum as political offenders, and publicly advertised his own house there as a shelter for any fugitive soldiers of the Commune. The consequences came near being of a serious kind for the poet. In Belgium the priest is still potent; and on the 27th May 1871,

a mob of Brussels workmen, instigated, it is said, by some persons of authority [1] and influence, made a night attack on the house where Hugo along with his two grandchildren and their widowed mother were residing. The rioters did considerable damage to the house, and were only prevented from proceeding to extremities by the tardy intervention of the police. Two days after, Hugo received notice from the Government to quit Belgium immediately.

These affairs, as we have seen in the case of the Jersey expulsion, happen always in the same manner. The prejudices of some poor unillumined section of the *plebs* are excited by some clever misrepresentation against the man who has their interests most at heart. A riot follows, which the *optimates* foster up to a certain point, but generally repress where it might become a grave scandal. Then comes an order *de par le roi* to quit the country. Some good words are thrown to poor *plebs*-Caliban, who retires with the pleased humour of a savage who has taken a scalp, and is naturally ready next day, if the fancy takes him, to assault his master. But the *optimates* prefer him thus.

It must have caused the great poet of democracy some melancholy reflections as to the amount of education the masses still require in the judgment of men and interests. But Hugo has studied this ill-cut figure of Caliban with other intentions than those of

[1] M. Kervyn de Lettenhove, son of the Minister of the Interior, was one of the leaders in this affair, according to M. Barbou, a biographer of Hugo.

the aristocratic Shakespeare. He knows that there resides in him, too, a fine Ariel spirit, pent in worse confinement than that of cloven pines—the confinement of ignorance. Compare those curt but faithful delineations of mob or populace which appear in some of Shakespeare's plays with the equally profound but more detailed studies of the popular instincts which we find in that wonderful record of a dark year, Hugo's 'L'Année Terrible,' and then compute the growth of conscience or consciousness in humanity. Here, for instance, is a picture of a typical figure in Parisian revolutions—the *Pétroleuse*, or some such unfortunate. It is faithfully painted, but there are profoundly pitiful touches in it:—

"La prisonnière passe, elle est blessée. Elle a [1]
On ne sait quel aveu sur le front. La voilà !
On l'insulte ! Elle a l'air des bêtes à la chaîne.
On la voit à travers un nuage de haine.
Qu'a-t-elle fait ? Cherchez dans l'ombre et dans les cris,
Cherchez dans la fumée affreuse de Paris.
Personne ne le sait. Le sait-elle elle-même ?
Ce qui pour l'homme est crime est pour l'esprit problème.
La faim, quelque conseil ténébreux, un bandit
Si monstrueux qu'on l'aime et qu'on fait tout ce qu'il dit.

---

[1] "The prisoner passes, she is wounded. There is
One hardly knows what sort of avowal on her forehead. There she is !
They insult her. She has the air of a beast on the chain.
Their eyes behold her through a veil of hate.
What has she done ? Seek in the darkness and the tumult,
Seek in the frightful density of Paris.
Nobody knows. Does she know herself, think you ?
What for man is a crime, is a problem for the spirit.
Famine, some dark counsel of ignorance, a bandit,
Such a monster that she loves him, and does all he says.

C'est assez pour qu'un être obscur se dénature.
Ce noir plan incliné qu'on nomme l'aventure.
La pente des instincts fauves, le fatal vent
Du malheur en courroux profond se dépravant.
. . . Pas de pain sur la table ;
Il ne faut rien de plus pour être épouvantable.
Elle passe au milieu des foules sans pitié.
Quand on a triomphé, quand on a châtié,
Qu'a-t-on devant les yeux ? la victoire aveuglante.
Tout Versaille est en fête. Elle se tait sanglante.
Le passant rit, l'essaim des enfants la poursuit
De tous les cris qui peut jeter l'aube à la nuit.
L'amer silence écume aux deux coins de sa bouche ;
Rien ne fait tressaillir sa surdité farouche ;
Elle a l'air de trouver le soleil ennuyeux ;
Une sorte d'effroi féroce est dans ses yeux."

On his expulsion from Brussels—his fourth exile, as he calls it, "*Exil de Belge, peu de chose*"—Hugo returned to Paris to play, as delegate, or latterly as senator, the part of a moderate counsellor between contending factions in the new Republic. In what

Reason enough there for an obscure being to defeature herself.
The dark inclined plane we call accident.
The drift of untamed instincts, the fatal wind
Of misfortune sinking down into bitter wrath.
. . No bread on the table ;
Nothing more is needed to make one terrible.
She passes in the midst of crowds that are pitiless.
When we have finished triumphing and chastising,
What have we before our eyes ? victory wanting vision.
All Versailles is *en fête.* Her bleeding mouth keeps silence.
The passer-by laughs ; a swarm of children follow her
With shouts such as the dawn may fling at the night.
Bitter silence with her ; there is foam at the corners of her mouth.
But nothing cau shake that savage deafness of hers ;
She has the air of one to whom the sun is a weariness ;
There is a sort of fierce affright in her eyes."

—*L'Année Terrible : June.* IX.

are called practical politics, indeed — that is, the manœuvres of the parliamentary arena—his voice is not, any more than it ever was, an influential one. His influence lies elsewhere, and is of the slow-working permanent kind that belongs to the thinker, not the temporary evanescent pressure the ordinary politician puts upon men and things. In one respect, at any rate, France can scarcely overestimate the value of Victor Hugo to her. When all was over in the Franco-Prussian war, and many thought France finished as a leading Power in Europe, the poet was amongst the first to raise his head and revive the broken spirits of his countrymen. We do not indeed think that he is quite just in his view of the great conflict which took place between Germany and France. The steadiness and intellectual power of the Germans, even if they want the civil courage of the Englishman and Frenchman, have a right to their reward. The scales in which the god of battles weighs nations are not so entirely unjust. The march of the Germans on Paris was no sin against light and civilisation, but really the simplest method of proving, for us and for after-ages, what kind of force there is in French society and what kind there is not, and was, in all seriousness, a very proper reply to the endless vaunting of many Frenchmen.

But if Germany has the force of discipline and steady patient labour, France has the force of great tendencies, of a sounder and freer development. Time is with her. She has done something, much even, to

meet the social and political pressure of the future, while Germany has done little but perfect a laborious military organisation, and is drifting on the great problems of the time with less preparation than any of the great European nations, and consequently with more disposition to repress and evade them. Where Hugo, therefore, has contented himself with reminding his countrymen of this fact, and illustrating with the resources of genius these fine truths apt to be lost in the coarse logic of materialists and politicians of the day, he has done service of no less value to Europe than to France. France, he has a right to say, will conquer in progress "by her light"—"*l'avenir sera meilleur.*"

CHAPTER XIII.

GREEK AND HEBREW ELEMENTS IN CIVILISATION—PROPHET AND PHILOSOPHER IN ULTIMATE ANTITHESIS—THE LAW OF THE MEAN—THE INCREMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS—HUGO'S THEORY OF ART—DUALISM OF ART.

THE life of Western Europe, as represented by its art, its literature, and its society, takes its immense power of development from the fact that it is mainly the product of two very different civilisations—the Hebrew and the Greek. The highest expression of the one was the prophet, of the other the philosopher,—the man who seeks to quicken and in a sense construct our perception of an infinite natural power in the universe, having a definite moral tendency, and the man who seeks to place all things in a system of which man himself is the centre—the man of mystery and faith, a believer in the unconscious tendency of power, and the man of reasoned truths, a believer in the conscious direction of power, and to whom man is the measure of all things. The one is constantly seeking to educe, or, we might say, create a new spiritual consciousness in mankind; the other is con-

stantly testing, criticising this increment of conscience, endeavouring to purify it for the intellect, and to place it in a system of truths. The antithesis between these two types, though resolvable in theory and destined ultimately to disappear, still holds in many different guises a great place in our life. In the higher fields of art and thought particularly, it still forms a practical gulf between men who understand the problem perfectly on its merely intellectual side. It is a difference of centre which has often made them unintelligible to each other. Luther and Erasmus, Goethe and Hugo, Guizot and Lamennais, front each other, eternally different sides of the human spirit—the sign of disease, says Novalis, speaking of a similar separation of poet from philosopher, but also the sign of a rich and full development, and that our civilisation has not nearly reached its close.

Here, however, we have to speak of this antithesis only as it appears in art, and specially in the art of Victor Hugo. The mean is the best, was the first and the last word of the Greeks—an eminently rational people, struck by the infinitude of desire in man, and not readily conceiving the possibility of a law for the movement of nature, except such as man himself might with full scientific consciousness, and in a somewhat external manner, impose upon his life. Even Plato held in fear that tendency to the infinite, which, in the intellectual sphere, is one of the great merits of his work. The history of Greece shows us, however, that for the conduct of life, socially and morally, this law of

the mean proved insufficient; and the brilliant fabric of Greek society, built only on one side of human nature, was soon dissolved, and a new civilisation, which represented better, with its infusion of ideal and ascetic elements, the full nature of man, arose.

But the law of the mean thus formally dethroned as the highest rule in life, has practically preserved itself in many things, for the reason that it is the safest, and perhaps profoundest, law for any combination or organisation too artificial to contain the law of its own development. It is the law of Aristotle's morality. It is the law by which the most superficial aspect of beauty may be expressed. It may be said to be the accepted law for social life on its material side, and is there expressed in the highest virtue of prudence. But while we are somewhat ashamed to confess that the principle we have virtually adopted for society is nothing better than the old pagan law of the mean, and are careful to profess something higher, there is one region in which it is defended as the highest ideal—the grand principle of excellence. This is the region of art which the Greeks have so filled with their masterpieces, that the observance of severe proportion, of restraint in expression, and the general artistic repose which are the marks of their work, have come to be accepted by many as the unalterable conditions of the best art.

In one sense, of course, the law of limit is eternal, but the standards of proportion and expression in Greek art are not its last expression. The severe

proportion and lucidity of the Greek were the natural outcome of life organised wholly for the finite and temporary ends of society. He had everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by relaxing his sense of measure and pushing the spirit to exaltations which for him had no deep spiritual significance. In many respects he had to hold life more firmly than we who handle life freely, with an additional two thousand years of well-recorded experience. He had made a narrow path for himself in an untravelled waste, and did well to keep to it; for in his art exaltation or licence of form represented no new spirit in the matter, but was simply an indication of decay.

What was natural in him may become artificial in us. The old French critics, who accepted the strict proprieties of Greek poetry, and its standard of measure in expression, lost sight of the difference between theory and art, and laid too much stress on the scientific side of the latter in supposing that the reason of creative genius is the same thing, in precisely the same stage, as the reason of the critic and philosopher. The reason of the philosopher is but the term for the very varying power in men of placing their ideas properly in a system, and thus fixing their value. But the things which one age can find no reasonable place for, another age is more successful with; and the more subtly working and less self-conscious reason of genius is but the anticipation of the higher reason of a time coming. We can all theorise Hamlet and Lear now; but to the critics of the old French school, men of

great reasoning power as fairly used as men commonly use it, these dramas appeared the work at best of a barbaric genius.

Thus the range of our art increases with the growth of the general consciousness. We get larger views of the relations of things. Our minds are able to make wider combinations and catch remoter analogies, and we have a proportionately freer use of metaphor and comparison—freer transitions from tone to tone, from topic to topic. Longinus reproaches Plato with a metaphor which our larger apprehension of humour would receive without cavil. For us, Lear's fool need not stand so far apart from Lear as would have been necessary in ancient tragedy, though perhaps it is only a Shakespeare who can make use of that fact. It will always remain, then, for the great artist, poet or other, to show us what new liberties are possible. In proportion as our consciousness enlarges and goes more into the inner nature of things, our speech will become freer, and our art acquire larger powers of suggestion. The critic cannot hope to circumscribe the circle in which genius is to move. All he can do is to pronounce, after the fact, that such and such combinations have or have not succeeded, and to this he may add explanations and theories which are, however, rather illustrative than absolute.

What Boileau remarks of the Ode, that it makes a rule of sometimes observing no rules, is in some measure true of poetry generally. This precept, the great critic says, is a mystery of art, and it is this side of

art which Hugo emphasises, and which the Romantic movement of 1830 brought into credit. He dwells with more fondness on the instinctive side of poetry than on its scientific aspect. Indeed, if we judged him by such later utterances as we find in that strange but powerful poem, "Le Cheval," which opens 'Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois,' we might think he had lost sight of everything but the half-unconscious power of genius—that is, half-unconscious of itself and its processes. "Le Cheval" (the Horse) is the new Pegasus which Hugo describes as the steed of the abyss, born of the sea like Astarte, the beat of whose hoofs is the measure of the verse of Æschylus:—

> "Il n'est docile, il n'est propice,
> Qu'à celui qui, la lyre à la main,
> Le pousse dans le précipice,
> Au delà de l'esprit humain.
>
> Plus d'un sur son dos se déforme ;
> Il hait le joug et le collier ;
> Sa fonction est d'être énorme
> Sans s'occuper du cavalier."[1]

This is equivalent to a theory of inspiration which, after all, is but a name for the easy and unconscious manner in which great power employs all logical and

[1] "None can tame or command him fairly,
But the rider who, lyre in hand,
Will spur to the gulf where barely
The human spirit can land.

Not a few look foolish in mounting ;
A bridle and yoke are his fear ;
He is meant to be great without counting
At all on his cavalier."

—*Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*, I.

mechanical processes in the expression of itself. It is the free energy of spirit, the noble outline which a vast force naturally makes when it moves, something akin to the carven line of a mountain-range or the curl of a wave of ocean. There is this character in the human spirit when it is free and at its best in an Isaiah or a Shakespeare.

Our two theories of art, then, must stand facing each other in a sort of intelligible contradiction—Greek tendencies to the mean, to restraint and proportion, hanging rather on the one side, and Hebrew tendencies to the infinite rather on the other. The great workers will always have much of both, but the one theory will continue to be the best expression of those who do most to enlarge, and, so to speak, new-create the general consciousness; the other, of those who do most to refine and steady it. Thus theories of art have to follow theories of knowing and being into the philosophic gulf of dualism, for the reason that while man has a consciousness of the whole, he is but a part, and can view himself either as a free unit or as a shuttle, weaving with considerable unconsciousness in the universal plan.

CHAPTER XIV.

"*ON SE FAIT TOUJOURS LE POÉTIQUE DE SON TALENT*"—HUGO'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE AND LIFE—THE WORD.

It was said by Madame de Staël, with her usual power of packing truths in neat epigrammatic phrase, "*On se fait toujours le poétique de son talent*"—we always make our poetic theory in accordance with our talent. The slight satirical edge which the French lady puts on her remark, however, does something to spoil the meaning for the sake of the form. For, not to speak of such a case as that of Byron, who, conscious perhaps of an undisciplined waste of power, had a real inclination for a theory opposed to his talent, we may consider that in a well-developed mind the poetry and the poetic theory are equally expressions of the degree and nature of insight in the man. Through all the phases of his career, for instance, Hugo's theories of art go step by step not only with the development of his talent, but with that of his philosophy and religion, his conceptions of humanity and nature. Even in his politics the new side of things which he sees and emphasises corresponds exactly with the new expression

of his art theory. In these matters Hugo moves always as a whole, like an entirely honest and resolute man. Hence the later expression of his theory accords perfectly with the profound sense of the mysterious in life, which is a prominent feature in his later works.

For him this mystery lies in the half-hidden nature of the force that works in things. Most men accustom themselves to look at the working of nature under some mathematical or logical formula, grown into common use; they make or receive calculations of her coming and going; they note antecedents and consequents sufficient to fix, or nearly so, the order of her appearances; they make psychological divisions of mind, and seem to track each manifestation of power to its particular source. In this they do wisely. For the ordinary purposes of life, and even for the higher ends of intelligence, the growth of the synthetic conception depends upon the analysis that has preceded. In this method, however, there lies some danger of dulling the mind to any other kind of reality than that expressed in sequence and quantity. Hugo, for whom the physico-mathematical view of the universe has no great interest, is constantly seeking to penetrate to another and obscurer side of reality. But behind phenomena, says Goethe, is the void, and it often seems as if Hugo were interpellating the void. This is particularly the case when he deals with inanimate nature. The great natural elements—the wind and the sea—are used with peculiar effect as

the dark exponents of the infinite force which moves in the universe. Those who have read 'The Toilers of the Sea,' or 'The Man who Laughs,' will understand the strange life with which elemental nature is endowed in Hugo's conception of it. We give part of his description of the struggle of the Basque smugglers with the storm:—

"The bellowing of the abyss—nothing is comparable to this. It is the immense bestial voice of the world. What we call matter,—that unfathomable organism, that amalgamation of immeasurable energies wherein one sometimes recognises an imperceptible amount of horrifying intention, that cosmos blind and nocturnal, that Pan incomprehensible,—has a cry—a cry strange, prolonged, obstinate, continued, which is less than the word and more than the thunder. This cry is the tempest."

But prose is not a perfectly natural vehicle for Hugo, and always draws him into a sort of exaggeration. It is in his poetry only that this conception of nature is expressed with truth and delicacy, in such a poem for instance as "Quels sont ces bruits sourds,"[1] or in his 'Songs of the Streets and the Woods,' where he finds a new pastoral note in a peculiar mingling of ancient and modern idealisms of nature. The mighty mother lives again in antique freshness and divinity. One may hear at Nanterre the vague flutes of Haemes; and the dance of the fauns turns merrily in the depths of the forest of Meudon:—

"Orphée, aux bois du Caystre
Ecoutait, quand l'astre luit,
Le rire obscur et sinistre
Des inconnus de la nuit.

[1] Voix Intérieures, 24.

Phtas, la sibylle thébaine,
Voyait près de Phygalé
Danser des formes d'ébène
Sur l'horizon étoilé.

Eschyle errait à la brume
En Sicile, et s'enivrait
Des flûtes du clair de lune
Qu'on entend dans la forêt.

Shakespeare, aux aguets derrière
Le chêne aux rameaux dormants,
Entendait dans la clairière
De vagues trépignements.

O feuillage, tu m'attires;
Un dieu t'habite; et je crois
Que la danse des satyres
Tourne encore au fond des bois." [1]

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[1] "Orpheus in the woods of Cayster
Listened, when the star was bright,
To the laugh, obscure and sinister,
Of the unknown ones of night.

Phtas, the Theban sibyl,
Watching Phygalian heights,
Saw the ebon forms dancing
On the far horizon lights.

Æschylus roaming the hazes
Of Sicily, took delight
In the flutes of mellow phrases
That wake in the pale moonlight.

Shakespeare at watch by the old oak,
Its slumbering branches o'erhead,
Heard the patter of fairy folk
Vaguely, where the sunshine played.

O foliage, thou'rt dear to me;
A deity dwells in thy shade;
And the dance of the satyrs I see,
Still turning round in thy glade."

His interpretation of the universe has the same strain throughout. Reality, the mysterious voice, hardly conscious, hardly intelligible in elemental nature, reaches a higher stage in the animal:—

> "Et qu' Orphée écoutait, hagard, presque jaloux,
> Le chant sombre qui sort du hurlement des loups."

In man this voice has become the word, *le Verbe*, a mysterious spiritual existence that delights to serve Dante, but will not come at the call of Nero. The real word will not lend itself to any untruth. True speech is the faculty only of the pure in heart, the divine *logos*, after which all the voices of nature strive, from the inarticulate wail of matter to the power of the word in a Shakespeare. In this way does Hugo seize all truth with the intense intuitive gaze of the mystic, not explaining things as the philosopher does by placing them in a system, but stimulating and awakening a new sense of reality in them.

And what is the power of the word in Victor Hugo? It is with great difficulty that a new conception of life is born into the world and fitly introduced to the knowledge of men. It needs a new language, with new accents, new emphasis, new phrases, words new in all but their letters. These are the external forms of the inward and unseen reality. Without these it remains dim and undefined, an impalpable idea of the higher reason which men can make little use of. But once fixed in the word, it takes sure possession of the world. The categories of Aristotle make statute-laws,

and the metaphors of St Paul become institutions. Hugo's speech is the fit expression of his universe. As the language of Goethe is sober and reflective, of the finest texture and subtle connecting power, turning flexibly round the many sides an object has for the mind, the language of Hugo is broken and impetuous, bent upon expressing the deep natural throb in things, the great tendency in them. It is impatient of systematic explanations, and misses the many philosophical aspects of things. It is stimulating and encouraging, flashing sudden lights upon a great waste of life and again leaving much in darkness—"*phare aux feux tournants dans l'océan des astres.*"

CHAPTER XV.

MINGLING OF RACE-CULTURES IN HUGO—'LES CHANSONS DES RUES ET DES BOIS'—THE GALLIC VEIN—FACULTY AND CHARACTER—OVATIONS AND TRIUMPHS—HIS OPTIMISM—SUMMARY OF THE CENTURIES—CONCLUSION.

HUGO is a prophet complicated by a Parisian. The mingling of races and different national cultures is beginning to tell on modern types. The mystic imaginative genius of the Teuton, tending in all its phases, humorous or serious, beyond the mean, to something that is gigantic and overshadows the actual, condensing itself readily into prophetic fervour, or moving *clairvoyant* in cloudy regions of mysticism, —this Teutonic genius is united in Hugo with the more sensuous, flexible, amiable spirit of the Southern races, highly sympathetic with the actual and familiar sides of life, and holding higher truths oftener in the guise of light irony than pressing them to a conclusion. Hugo will not let himself be narrowed; he brings to full working power all the elements in his nature. The poet of "Sarah la baigneuse" balances the poet of 'Hernani' and 'La Roi s'amuse'—the Parisian

orator and Academician, the prophet of Guernsey; and if he has written 'La Légende des Siècles,' he has also written, almost at the same time, 'Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois.' In these latter, the morose sage, wandering on the shore of the ocean and meditating the sombre epic of humanity, seems to have forgotten his apocalyptic visions and to have transported himself to some charming suburban wood, where he tunes his pipe to Suzon and Annette dancing on the green.

> "Etre riche n'est pas l'affaire;
> Toute l'affaire est de charmer."

Nay, so far at times does the poet carry this vein, that we might think he had bitten too deeply "in the apple of Moschus." Very delicate and curious is the workmanship on these verselets from the woods. What piquant phrase, what happy caprices, passing all the elaboration of art! What quaint suggestiveness of speech!—"*Un paysage en latin.*" How the light Gallic lyric plays over the abyss!—

> "Sénèque, aujourd'hui sur un socle,
> Prenait Chloë sous le menton;
> Fils, la sagesse est un binocle
> Braqué sur Minerve et Goton."

But this sudden emergence of the old Gallic vein, with its malicious vivacities and sly ingenuousness, is quite wholesome. There is no musty odour of the empty amphora here. It is but the smiling return which a healthy old age may make upon the time of its youth—the sage gaiety of an old man who par-

ticipates, with an almost impersonal joy, in the eternal spring. The result, however, at the first glance, is somewhat extraordinary. The comic liberties he takes with language; the sallies of thought, ludicrous on one side and profound on the other; something of Plato's idealism and something of the frank laugh of Villon; all the overflow of the great veins of thought and association opened up in 'La Légende,' running freely through idyls of Lalage and Jeanneton,—constitute such a union of profundity and lightness as is only found when a great master, in the fulness of his power and experience, makes a gambol in his art.

A fit conception of such a man—the fully harmonised expression of many diverse tendencies—is difficult to form. As Victor Hugo once said of Balzac, "He is a world; let us speak no more of him!" There is something of a gigantic, primordial, untamed force in him, which has a natural delicacy of its own, but has run through the whole gamut of action and passion without the ordinary restrictions. He is a man of vast ambitions, contracted at last by fate into one, in which he has achieved success enough to satisfy even him.

The predominant expression about him, mentally and physically, is energy. A large, vigorous frame, surmounted by a head of leonine aspect; the nose strong, somewhat Roman in outline; keen black eyes, with vision of such range that he can recognise a friend on the street from the towers of Notre Dame; the brow is a perfect dome, that looks fit to be the

storehouse of the greatest creative genius since Goethe. The mental side is to correspond. A quick and comprehensive intellect—strongest in its intuitive movement, but by no means deficient in the more deliberate logical one, only impatient of slow processes, and apt to omit small connecting links. Temperament and intellect alike make him direct. He goes straight to the mark, seizes great tendencies with surety, and does not calculate detours. For a man who has speculated so widely, his thinking shows unusually few traces of the use of any particular method—inductive, comparative, historical, or other. His mind does not work in the invisible grasp of a method always gravitating towards one kind of conclusion, but judges things freely as they present themselves. In this sense his is an original intellect, and what he says discovers, either in manner or in thought, a new force for the world.

The imagination and memory that feed such creative power as Hugo's are, of course, of the strongest; but the important thing is their direction, which is objective, pictorial, fastening on the outward shape and colour of objects. His imagination is full of this detail, and whatever he remembers is remembered with place and circumstance. He is a considerable designer, and is capable of illustrating his own works. In travelling, M. Barbou says, he sketches everything that strikes him—a detail of a gate, a cloud-form, an old belfry. For this potent imagination the most abstract ideas present them-

selves as if they had shape and colour. "Cato," he says, "has this syllable, No, in the reins."

The moral force, it has often been said, is but another phase of the intellectual. In some cases it is not so easy to trace them to one root, but in Hugo they are scarcely distinguishable from each other. He has none of the hesitations and compromises of other men in his speech. He looks things in the face and says the word. This is the basis of his intellectual strength, and it makes him a great moral force, whose instinctive tendencies cannot be thwarted. He has a prophet's dislike of *nuances* and compromises, and describes Sibour and the bishops, Nisard, Montalembert, and Planche, as Isaiah might have described the priesthood and star-gazers of Babylon.

But these are the mere fragments of a man. Look again at this robust veteran, eighty years of age, who still sleeps on the hardest of beds and meditates great poems, to be finished ere he dies.[1] The countenance is full and massive, but with clear, firm contours, the type found in men who unite great active and great contemplative powers. It has the look of a great, nervous force, much exercised, but well covered and supported by strength of bone and muscle. In discussion it is animated, the whole strength of the man

[1] In these later years he has published the following works:— 'L'Art d'être Grand-père' (1877), 'Le Pape' (1878), 'La Pitié Suprême' (1879), and (1884) the complement of 'La Légende des Siècles.'

bursting freely forth in rapid energetic language, with tremendous jets of expression, emphasised by a firm ample kind of gesture; evidently a man who wields joyfully the power of living, and holds tenaciously to life with all his faculties. Such immense energy cannot easily believe in its own decay. In repose it is a meditative, somewhat sombre face. He has gazed long at the depths—the gulf, as he calls it—and the abyss reflects itself there. He has seen so much pass, too: Cæsar and Davus, revolutions and consular triumphs, the men of two generations, Chateaubriand, Charles X., Béranger, Lamartine, Rabbe, Louis Philippe, Lamennais, Gautier, Sainte-Beuve, the Deverias, the Deschamps, friends and enemies,—he has seen all these voices go silent in the tomb, and has had the last word of every one:—

> "J'ai coudoyé les rois, les grands, le fou, le sage,
> Judas, César, Davus,
> Job, Thersite, et je suis effaré du passage
> Des hommes que j'ai vus."[1]

An exceptional career, even amongst great ones. When he departs, France will have lost, not a power, for that lies secure for her in his work, but the most remarkable monument of a century of her history.

For, thanks to a vigorous constitution and temperate habits, he still lives, this old man with white hairs, who was born "when the century was two years old."

[1] "I have elbowed the great, the fool, and the sage, Judas, Cæsar, Davus, Job, Thersites, and I am affrighted to think of the men I have seen pass away."—Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit, 53.

He has entered living, as an orator once said, into immortality. Few men, even amongst statesmen, monarchs, and great generals, have had anything like the immense public triumphs the Parisians have accorded to Victor Hugo. It is true he has played too great a part in things not to be the object of much animadversion even yet, but he has lived down many hatreds and calumnies; men of all parties feel they owe much to the man who represents with such power and splendour the civilisation of France. These later years of his life have been filled with ovations both of a popular and a more select kind. Now it is the hundredth representation of 'Hernani,' or the golden wedding of 'Hernani,' with grand banquet from the press, and odes from all the young poets; now such a *fête* as that of 27th February 1881, when the poet stood at the window of his house in the Avenue de Victor Hugo, receiving from mid-day to twilight the acclamations of an endless procession of people, —city magistrates, deputies, artists, men of letters, students, workmen, colleges, and schools defiling before him.

Goethe has remarked on the value of optimism in great men, that posterity will not care to burden itself with evil prophecies, but will prize that which is helpful to it. Hugo has this force also amongst others. Amidst the general decay of hope amongst prophets and philosophers, and owl-like flight of Cassandras through the gloom—while our Laureate relegates with wonderful equanimity the development of humanity

to the scientific movement of remote ages, and our chief practical and scientific thinkers see a great future only on the other side of the Atlantic—it is a help to find this great voice speaking hopefully on the future of Europe. Is European civilisation, then, incapable of reaching its full proportions on its native soil? Why? might we not ask. Does Europe not grow corn and wine as successfully as America, and are there not as much vigour of will and higher faculty here as there? Many will think more. Or is it that the parasitic growth on our social structure is too thick in the opinion of desponding philosphers? Hugo, at any rate, is not amongst the faint-hearted. Here is one of his latest summaries of our prospects. It has the usual eccentricity of pause and emphasis, and wants small logical links, which, however, the wiser kind of reader will not find it difficult to supply:—

"We are entering into great centuries. The sixteenth century will have been the century of painters, the seventeenth the century of men of letters, the eighteenth the century of philosophers, the nineteenth the century of apostles and prophets. To suffice for the nineteenth century, one must be painter as in the sixteenth, man of letters as in the seventeenth, philosopher as in the eighteenth; and besides, one must have, like Louis Blanc, that religious love of humanity which constitutes apostleship and makes the future clearly discernible. In the twentieth century war will be dead, the frontier will be dead, the scaffold will be dead, royalty will be dead, dogmas will be dead; and man will survive. There will be overhead of us all but one great country, the whole earth—and one great hope, the whole heaven."

To the last, we see, prose continues a very unfit medium for this wide-glancing intuitive intellect. In it his thought has an appearance of fantasy and exaggeration, and sometimes, indeed, the reality of them. Prose does not lend itself readily to the theory of inspiration; it requires coolness and elaboration, and, worst of all for Hugo, a whole world of power in the way of suggestion, association, and great lights for thought vanishes when he leaves poetry for prose. He has not learned how to supply these, and is forced into a bad style and exaggerations of all kinds. It is curious to observe the difference of development in his prose and his poetry. While the former has become ever more laden with antitheses, climaxes, exaggerations, the latter, notwithstanding some audacities and occasional fine fantastic work, has grown steadily in real simplicity and directness, till in the works of these later years, such as 'Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit,' or 'Religion et Religions,' his line has the quiet and unassuming but profoundly subtle art which we find in an Epistle of Horace.

To end with, we may say Victor Hugo has, amongst other things, been the requisite antidote in an age when everything is so covered with conventional forms that the ablest find it difficult to speak the truth they know. If, in his haste to destroy the supports of social and religious systems which have weighed oppressively on men, he has seemed to make the Infinite an almost indefinable, and, consequently, almost lawless force in the world, the abuse of those

systems has given such attacks all their weight. "*Pas de religion qui ne blasphème un peu,*"[1] contains a wholesome warning to those who erect their little systems under pretence of the Absolute. He is indeed the enemy of any attempt to put the Infinite in formulas; but in his perception of what is good and true, and in his manner of holding fast to what he has so found, there is the essence of all real worship and all real belief.

[1] "No religion but blasphemes a little."—Religion et Religions, II.

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