

VICTOR HUGO.*

ALL of my generation—all who have reached the age of forty, have known Hugo from childhood. To Hugo I owe my first emotions. My family then lived at Lyons, which to people of the south of France is a place of exile. Black, foggy, comfortless, it is a dreary home for children who need gaiety and sunshine. Our sun was Victor Hugo. My elder brother, having a little pocket-money to spend, invested it in the large illustrated *livraisons* of the poet's works,—the popular edition, with plates, by Beaucé,—and at night, lying in the same bed, we devoured the feast of poesy with the appetite natural to lads twelve years old. Many a time, wrapping the candle in thick paper lest the light should betray us, have we lain awake till dawn to read Victor Hugo. "Are you asleep, children?" Papa Daudet would cry from the next room, and we would be silent, pretending to sleep. When, by and by, we returned to the interrupted reading, our alarm gave zest to the banquet. He who thus charmed us was to us more than human. We murmured the cadence of his cradle-song; we caught the throb, the rhythmic beat of his ballad:

" Par saint Gille!
Viens nous-en,
Mon agile
Alezan;
Viens, écoute,
Par la route,
Voir la joûte
Du roi Jean . . ."

—and with feverish hand we turned the pages of the "Feuilles d'Automne," the "Chants du Crépuscule," the "Orientales," and all those noble works in whose sonorous names I still feel the magic of old, though less in the words themselves than in the memory of my earliest sensations.

After those nights of poetic enthusiasm came my school days,—the period of formal and wearisome drilling in text-books, rules, and grammars. To understand what I suffered during that epoch one must recall the condition of our provincial schools in 1851. Hugo was still under the ban of the university. I can only remember one professor at Lyons who read us any of the poet's works, and I think of him gratefully still. All the rest considered Hugo's name a synonym for false taste and false style. A professor of rhetoric used to read and ridicule a few passages, a few detached phrases, as an example of

errors that we should avoid. He recited them with absurd emphasis and shook in his chair with laughter. My school-mates were servile enough to join in the merriment, applauding their teacher; for my part I was as sorely wounded by these sarcasms as though they had been directed at myself. Whatever was quoted as false, harsh, or trivial, seemed to me excellent. I heartily approved of it. I had the divine instinct of childhood, the freshness of impression which no university tutor could wrest from me.

In 1857, when I came to Paris, Hugo was in exile. I now had my second revelation of the poet. It was the hour when the "Châtiments" was in everybody's hands. Its sale was forbidden in France, but the Belgian editions passed from friend to friend. Hugo was no longer the poet only; he had become the great citizen—the mouth-piece of the outraged conscience of the nation. This book brought him into our modern life. All our young men, of whom Gambetta was one, knew the "Châtiments" by heart. I can recall Castagnary, who is today a Councilor of State, and was then an attorney's clerk,—I can recall him as he declaimed Hugo's verses in a café near the Tuileries, a meeting-place of the body-guard, the armed retainers of the castle. In his waistcoat, with large lappels, à la Robespierre,—made from the velvet of an old arm-chair,—I can see him still, standing on a table and reciting, in his soft and flute-like voice, the strophes of the "Manteau Impérial:"

" Chastes buveuses de rosée,
Qui, pareilles à l'épousée,
Visitez le lis du coteau,
Ô sœurs des corolles vermeilles,
Filles de la lumière, Abeilles,
Envolez vous de ce manteau!

Ruez vous sur l'homme, guerrières!
Ô généreuses ouvrières—
Aveuglez l'immonde trompeur!
Acharnez-vous sur lui, farouches.
Et qu'il soit chassé par les mouches,
Puisque les hommes en ont peur!"

Our pretorian guards understood little of the allegory, but they were charmed by the harmony of the language and the meter, and unwittingly applauded the ode of retribution.

From that moment all eyes in France turned to the exile's island. From time to time came master-works therefrom,—the "Contempla-

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tions," the "Chansons des Rues et des Bois," the "Misérables," the "Travailleurs de la Mer," "L'Homme qui Rit," and the admirable "Légende des Siècles," which marked a forward step in the poet's life-labors. Each was received with unanimous acclamation. Admiration held us bound to the poet. We read with affectionate sorrow his noble and mournful dedications :

"Livre qu'un vent t'emporte
En France où je suis né :
L'arbre déraciné
Donne sa feuille morte. . . ."

were made to Guernsey. The Empire was so confident of its stability that it ceased to trouble itself about these matters,—the lyre could be no serious rival to the sword. The doors of his country were opened, but Hugo would not come in. He continued his protest by submitting to voluntary exile; he was one of those whom the success of brute force could not tame.

"S'il n'en reste que dix, je serai le dixième,
Et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là."

And below them the flaming initials: V. H.

The attitude of his friends, the romanticists, served as example to us of a younger generation. All were faithful to him; even those who accepted the Empire, like Théophile Gautier and Sainte-Beuve, refused to desert the veteran. In the closing days of the Empire, "Hernani" was represented at the Théâtre Français. Édouard Thierry, a romanticist, was the manager, and it was he who put the heroic drama on the stage. The audience received it very warmly. So, by his memory and by his books, during the entire reign of Napoleon III., Hugo lived in the midst of us.

All the poets of to-day, who are his sons, sent him their enthusiastic homage, for the imperial police could not close the mouth of the muse. Banville wrote his "Ballade à Victor Hugo, Père de tous les Rimeurs." Its sad refrain expressed the thought which dwelt in our hearts and presided at our gatherings :

"Gautier parmi ces joailliers
Est prince, et Leconte de Lisle
Forge l'or dans ses ateliers :
Mais le Père est là-bas dans l'île."

We could imagine him, "le Père," seated on those rocks which he loves to describe, on the shore of the sounding sea, the coast-line of France traced dimly on the horizon. We could see his eyes follow the white sails, innocently cruel in their invitations to him who could not follow them to his fatherland. His banishment clothed him with a wild and sublime majesty. Guernsey was only a pedestal for his fame, an observatory from which he viewed and encouraged us.

"Islands," said a friend of mine the other day, "occupy a large place in the history of our time. Think of Corsica and Saint Helena, of Guernsey and Caprera! Things that exceed the common stature of humanity take place on the islands." The island where Hugo lived is no less glorious than that which saw the birth of Napoleon.

To visit our proscribed king the seas had to be crossed. From time to time pilgrimages

Those eighteen years of banishment did much to keep his fame untarnished. He reigned without diminution of popularity. He would have been less great had he not suffered proscription. His terrible ordeal was of use to him; it not only added to his lyre a new and powerful chord, it also served, by keeping his life remote, to prevent his admirers from ever growing weary of him.

But at last the king came home again, and events combined to give him a welcome worthy of his renown. The prophecy of the poet was fulfilled. Improbable as they had sounded when foretold, in the early days of the victorious empire, all the predicted chastisements were turned to reality. Sedan was, indeed, a sorry counterpart of the First Empire,—the inglorious collapse of the edifice of December. France, alas! seemed to bend beneath the blow; defeat struck not the sovereign alone, but the nation. All was wreck and ruin. Prussia's iron band was closing around Paris. It was therefore a day full of emotion for us all when, amid the anguish of invasion, we learned that Victor Hugo was coming. He came at the very moment when the investment was complete, with the last train, the last breath of free air. On the way, he had seen the Bavarians; he had seen villages burnt with petroleum, and he came to imprison himself in Paris. On his arrival at the Saint-Lazare station, a memorable ovation was given him by the people,—a clamorous people, stirred by the revolutionary spirit, ready for great deeds, rejoicing in its reconquered liberty rather than frightened by the cannon which growled at its ramparts. I can see the carriage making its way down the Rue d'Amsterdam, Victor Hugo standing upright in it, borne by the mob, and weeping. Surely, this was the pinnacle of greatness: that a poet's destiny should thus be made part of occurrences so fateful.

On the morrow, the memory of this great reception was swept away in a wave of lamentable events. But at least the poet was among us; his poems were read in the theaters, in the guard-rooms, even in the forts,

while the shells were whistling through the air. It was during the siege that I saw him for the first time face to face. I was at the Théâtre Français, the vestibule of which had been turned into a hospital. Beds were laid in rows under the mirrors; Édouard Thierry, the manager, in the cap of the ambulance service, the red cross on the ground-work of white worked upon his sleeve, was directing the dressing of wounds; Madam Favart, Nathalie, and Madeleine Brohan, were tending the wounded; and the poet, with the *képi* of a national guard upon his head, was passing silent and sorrowful among the beds of the vanquished.

Hugo took up his abode in the Rue de Clichy. All Paris, which had suffered his absence so long, came there to visit him; there were dinners and parties every day at his house. I, among the rest, went to call on the master, and took my wife, who, being reared in a family of artists, knew Hugo's poetry as well as I, and held him in equal regard. Flaubert was to introduce us. In a troubled voice we asked the porter to tell us on which story Victor Hugo lived. The simple words seemed hard to pronounce. We were asking on which story lived Bug-Jargal, Hernani, Ruy-Blas. Could they inhabit a *bourgeois* lodging in the Rue de Clichy? The poet lived on the third story; his rooms were adorned with works of art; in the drawing-room were fine pieces of bronze and a large Venetian chandelier.

In meeting Victor Hugo, my preconceived ideas suffered no shock. His simple, peaceful dignity fascinated me. I contemplated at leisure that extraordinary forehead; those cheeks which had the tint of a rock embrowned by the sea-winds; the beard and hair short and bristling, shaded like old wood-moss; the eye deep and soft, generally motionless, fastened upon an image within itself. After my first visit, I could chat with him familiarly, and on these occasions the cold eyes would brighten, and Hugo would regard me with the expression of playful slyness which he sometimes assumes. Those who talk freely with the poet are few. His genius inspires too much respect.

I spent a delicious evening—for, to have heard Hugo talk, is one of the pleasantest recollections of my literary life. He has a prodigious memory which forgets nothing, grasps the entire century, links together twenty generations, and passes with all the freshness of youth from M. de Talleyrand to M. de Broglie, from the first Bonaparte to Napoleon III. We, like him, had seen the siege of Paris; but, unlike us, he had seen the War in Spain. His mode of address is

an original mixture of lofty politeness and easy good-nature, having something of the manner of an old French peer, who in antique style kisses the hand of a lady,—and combined with this something also of the affectionate familiarity of the exile.

Madame Drouët did the honors of Hugo's drawing-room. She was his companion in banishment, his invaluable friend, and, as she stood beside us smiling, her hair white as swan's down, she amply justified the reputation for beauty which she enjoyed in her day. The poet's grandchildren entered the room, all tumbled and disordered. Jeanne and Georges are the children of Charles Hugo, the poet's eldest son, who died in 1871, and was brought by his father from Bordeaux to Paris at the moment when the revolution of March 18 burst on us. The barricades of the Place de la Bastille opened respectfully before the mourning father, and let the hearse go by which held the body of his son. This son, whose death was so deeply lamented, left Victor Hugo two charming children, who love him and are worshiped by him. Their grace and dainty qualities he has sung in "l'Art d'être Grand-Père." Their mother, who accompanied them, is a very pretty young woman, with large, bright eyes, a person of elegance and fashion, who knows how to bring to the poet all that he needs of the bustle and gossip of Paris. Near her stood one who was to become her second husband,—Édouard Lockroy, who, in the last days of the Empire, founded the newspaper "Le Rappel," having for partners Meurice, Vacquerie, and the two sons of Victor Hugo. Lockroy's face is bright and lively, typical of Paris which has chosen him for its deputy,—a witty, saucy face, without fear or reproach, young, in spite of its prematurely whitened hair. I knew him as an art-student, when he was leaving the studio, a true *rapin*, fond of making caricatures. He might have become a painter, too, but his father, an author and actor, had played in Hugo's romantic dramas, and that achievement, it appears, marked out the son for a career of adventure. And, in truth, the jovial fellow, taking life broadly, asking no better than to laugh, met with adventures in abundance. He was sent to Syria by an illustrated paper to sketch the massacres of Christians by the Druses. He was found by M. Renan under some forlorn Mussulman roof, abandoned, robbed, shivering with fever. Still thirsting for travel and excitement, he donned a red shirt, and accompanied the cosmopolitan hero, whom Italy so loudly mourns to-day. He took part in nearly all the expeditions of Garibaldi. At present he is simply the wittiest of our deputies.

Vacquerie, a masterly writer, I also saw, and Meurice, his inseparable crony. Both were recruits, though now promoted, of the great wars of romanticism. One is tall, the other short: Auguste Vacquerie thin and long,—a Norman Don Quixote; Paul Meurice of Kalmuck build, with hair brushed straight and mustache hard and stiff. Both formed part of the family. Then came the intimate friends of the house,—Paul de Saint Victor, the author of "Hommes et Dieux," the most delicate worker in prose known to our literature since Gautier; Théodore de Banville, the latest, but not the least fervid of the romanticists; Leconte de Lisle, chief of the poetic school of the Parnassians; Emile de Girardin, Ivan Tourguéneff, Gustave Flaubert, Monselet, and others whom I forget. Of those whom I saw in Hugo's drawing-room, surrounding him under the chandelier, listening to him, hymning his glory, some are no more. Flaubert, Girardin, Saint-Victor,—the novelist, the journalist, the critic: these have passed out of the circle of the poet's friends. Death has taken them from us.

In the midst of the tributes paid by so many master-minds to Victor Hugo, as to a king who, after a long voyage, returns to take possession of his throne, I felt more than once a very singular emotion. One notices that, in spite of all, the poet retains evidences of his adventurous life, even in the short and easy jacket which he wears. One thinks involuntarily of the promiscuous society with which he must so long have mingled. Of the flood of visitors who thronged Hugo's drawing-room, many came and were received who had never been seen there before December. I often reflected on the life of exiled kings, as I stood in this throng and saw the purest diamond in Parisian society rubbed by the commonest pebble. Kings, as well as proscribed poets, must adopt the same tolerant mode of existence, make the same submission to social necessities, permit the same facility of intercourse. I will add, moreover, that the serious side of my book, "Les Rois en Exil," was studied in the drawing-room of Victor Hugo.

In those days, when the great poet talked more than to-day, he would install himself on a narrow, little sofa, where there was only room for two. Each of us, in turn, would there take seat beside him and chat for a few moments. Now, in later days, the evenings are less prolonged than of old, and come to an end about ten o'clock; but when I first used to go to the Rue de Clichy, we still indulged in those midnight cups of tea which Hugo would fortify with rum and transform to grog of formidable strength. One day

he served me himself, and emptied into both our cups about half a bottle of rum mixed with Spanish wine, thus concocting an old Guernsey sea-dog's "night-cap." I felt scorched for a week, but Hugo drank it without winking, and with Olympian serenity.

His health, in fact, is wonderfully robust. His eighty years are full of sap. At table, he is well worth watching. Sound in digestion, strong in appetite, between each dish he pours out huge draughts of sweet wine. He eats slowly, with majestic air, masticating his food like an old lion. You feel that he is a man always in good health; one who bathes every morning in cold water; who works with open windows; who, when he comes home in winter from the Senate, does not even close the carriage windows. He seems to grow no older. His voice alone has changed somewhat. There are longer pauses in his speech. His words seem to come from a distance.

His life has always been scrupulously exact. In the days of the Rue de Clichy, he rose at five and went out at eight, save in extraordinarily bad weather. Like Montaigne and Madame de Staël, he always loved the great city, even its gutters, even its evil spots. But since his return from exile this passion has grown stronger than ever. Who does not know the lines which he addressed to Paris at the moment of his return,—the lines which breathe so deep an affection:

"J'irai, je rentrerai dans ta muraille sainte,
O Paris!
Je te rapporterai l'âme jamais éteinte
Des proscrits."

He had scarcely arrived in the beloved city before he was anxious to know its new districts, its latest passages, its broad avenues, now filled with the noise of the horns of the tramway conductors, the Seine covered with ferry-boats. All those innovations of late years, which give Paris a new physiognomy, rejoiced the heart of the poet. His greatest pleasure, at early morning, was to climb to the top of an omnibus, and so traverse the whole city, passing the sumptuous boulevards, the workmen's quarters, the districts of the poor, until he reached the gloomy streets of the suburbs, near the fortifications where, along the walls that skirt the yards of low, one-storied houses, grow in luxuriance the dandelion and the nettle. Every day, in the heart of Paris, which is undergoing so many changes, Victor Hugo would discover some picturesque, unknown corner; and it is in this manner, on the top of an omnibus, observing and dreaming, at the time when the streets awaken to their morning life,

that he has written most of his latest poems. Indeed, there can be no better observatory, none more propitious to the flashing glance of thought, the straying of the imagination, than this humble post on the public conveyance, which, going from one barrier to the other, making its easy journey in three-quarters of an hour, introduces you successively to all the quarters of Paris, revealing and anon concealing, as in a dream, the rich first floor, with its heavy, ornamented curtains half-opened, and with its creamy waves of muslin, and, farther on, the poorer suburbs, where the eye looks into basements sombre and bare, for which a tin reflector steals from the street a few rays of sunlight, or where, for the needs of work or of trade, the gas is lighted before noon. Victor Hugo was known to his neighbors on the omnibus. They had learnt the name of the fine-looking, strong, old man, in his short jacket, with a felt hat on his head, who took his place beside them and politely passed their change. Sometimes the conductor had to inform them, whispering in their ear, "It is Victor Hugo." But the poet's wish to be unrecognized was more gallantly respected than that of a queen on her travels. His desire was understood by all, and while they might glance at him aside, out of a corner of the eye, they pretended not to know him. In the south of France, at Marseilles for example, where everything is expressed, where the people are turbulent and enthusiastic, the carriage would have been unharnessed, the pavements lined with people, the drive interrupted. In Paris, the citizens are of finer instinct, their discretion is exquisitely delicate. At the time of François Victor Hugo's death—François, the last of his sons,—the poet, leaving the deserted home, the distracted household, and seeking solitude in the crowd, had contracted an almost daily habit of lunching on a cutlet or a couple of eggs, and of reading the papers at a tavern in the district of Saint Georges. It was a meeting-place of painters and men of letters. One of my friends, a poet, who took his meal at the same hour, would sometimes find himself seated at a table near the master. Often he would pass him the newspaper, the salt forgotten by the waiter, or the bottle of ice-water. He was sorely tempted to make himself known, for Hugo would have recalled his name. But he was discreet, and held his peace, and even now, his dream, his most ardent desire, is to be introduced to the poet.

When his morning ride is over, Victor Hugo comes home, takes lunch, and, if there be no session in the Senate, writes and works

till evening. In his wonderful organism, so healthy and well balanced, the production of literary work has never been for a moment arrested, either by sorrow or by exile. His capacity resembles a vast spring of water, a Vaucluse fountain fed perennially by the fall of snow and recent rain, drawing from unfathomable depths into the sunlight, with astonishing fullness, force, and regularity, its overflowing waters, bubbling and clear. What glorious verses, what waves of thought and imagery, still lie hidden beneath the soil! Victor Hugo will never check the supply; he can keep nothing back; he would give us all he has. It is admirable to hear him talk, with his placid smile, and the serene tranquility of a sage, concerning the few years which are left him to live, the grand schemes which he carries in his head, and which he would not leave unfinished. Happily, there is no limit at hand beyond which his green old age may not expand, and here, in these latest months, is a splendid work which the whole world reads with admiration,—"*Torquemada*," the dramatic epic of the Inquisition.

Hugo himself reads nothing, for he has no time to spare. No literary work of our day has ever passed under his eyes. He has never read one of my books. On one occasion, when he was about to pay me some compliment, I hastened to interrupt him. His almost paternal friendship for the man is more dear to me than would be his esteem for the writer. By way of exception, however, he read the articles which Emile Zola devoted to him in the "*Figaro*." In the midst of the great concert of admiration which France performed at the feet of the old poet, one discordant note, and one alone, was heard. The novelist attacked Hugo with zeal, often with harshness. He had no personal antipathy for the poet, but made the attack in accordance with his literary theories. In assailing the author of "*Notre Dame de Paris*" he meant to assail the chief of the romantic movement. For my own part, without being at all embarrassed by the recollection of those attacks, I told Hugo how sincerely I prized the abilities of Emile Zola. And Zola, on his side, knows perfectly well what I think of the criticisms showered by him on the patriarch of romanticism. Whatever may be said or done, Hugo's literary influence is unbounded, and we all are subject to it, Zola as well as the rest. Hugo has invented a language and has imposed it on his epoch. It is a violent language and a bold one; it is full of resonance and color; it is, in brief, the language of the nineteenth century, the only language that can express the passions and paint the aspects of our society, which a complex civil-

ization has thrown into disorder. We may regret the language of the seventeenth century, or that of Voltaire. But, whether we will or no, from the day we take a pen in hand, we must write the language of Victor Hugo. Verse-maker or prose-maker, none escapes him, not even Balzac: nay, Balzac less than others, for the keen steel of Balzac's tools was tempered in the master's forge. For this reason we should only speak of him and his work with a profound sentiment of gratitude and admiration. A dutiful son, though he be strong and tall, will not war with his grandfather, particularly if his weapons are borrowed from the elder's panoply.

Moreover, whatever inevitable signs of weakness may be shown by a genius which is too prolific to be always perfect, Victor Hugo performs in our country, at the present time, an office which is his alone, and the glory of which none can dispute. Without Hugo, I am fond of repeating, France, being devoted to prose, would have lost the habit of the great language of poetry. Save a few stage verses, which are the better received the more they resemble prose, I can say in sober earnest, that the poems of Victor Hugo are the only poems to which the French public lends ear to-day. The sisterhood which worshiped Lamartine, the lily-browed and fair-tressed maidens, have long since closed their dreamy eyes. Our young men have forgotten Musset, and care no more for wild orgies. Pierre Dupont is forgotten; Béranger, the great Béranger whom Châteaubriand admired, is sung no more, not even in the tap-rooms. Those admirable artists, Baudelaire and Gautier, who are dead, Banville and Leconte de Lisle, who live, have no fit renown outside the narrow circle of men of letters and men of taste. As for the young contemporary poets, with the possible exception of François Coppée, they know that their flasks, filled with refined essences, are not to the taste of the public. In this general disarray of our poets, Hugo alone covers the retreat: blowing the horn of Roncevaux, creating the din and doing the work of an army.

If fame so great as his brooks few contradictions, in practical life on the other hand it has its inconveniences. Unless he learns to keep his working-hours free from the trespass of the importunate, the life of a distinguished man of our time is no longer his own. The folks who scribble and rhyme have not always observed, in their relations with Victor Hugo, the discretion and reserve which we have applauded in his fellow-travelers of the omnibus. They deny the poet his free and peaceful enjoyment of his small fragment of life, some corner, some particle of which is being daily

worn away by the current of the century. Worthy people, thinking no harm, write to Victor Hugo, begging a reply and demanding his opinion of several stout volumes of five hundred pages each. Well, I really am not spiteful, but I cannot conceal the satisfaction with which I now shatter their illusions, the joy with which I say to them: "Write, good friends, send Victor Hugo your volumes; Victor Hugo will not read them. Victor Hugo will not even open your letters." He has two good watch-dogs, Mme. Drouët and Richard Lesclide, the latter an enthusiast from Bordeaux, whose admiration for the poet made him take the part of secretary. It is Mme. Drouët and Richard Lesclide who read and reply. While they are thus engaged, the poet is at leisure to write poetry. What would become of him, ye gods! if he had merely to open the mail which reaches him every morning from France and from abroad. What would he do with the particularly impertinent letters which sometimes find their way into his correspondence. Hugo once received a request from a country lawyer, quite unknown to him, who wanted one hundred thousand francs by return of post, or was else determined to blow out his brains. Nobody can imagine, indeed, what strange demands we literary people, who are somewhat before the public, are liable to receive. It is barely six weeks ago that a young Prussian countess, whose name I had never heard, took to sending me letters and notes of every size and shape. She said that she needed eighty thousand francs to unite her to the man of her choice, and make her life happy. She added that nothing could be easier for me than to obtain this sum among my Parisian friends. If I could obtain it, I confess I would put it to another use than that of joining this unknown Dorothea to her Hermann.

After his correspondence, the reception of visitors causes a considerable waste of the poet's time. Admiration is naturally as indiscreet as it is candid. All who go through Paris want to see Victor Hugo: from the Emperor of Brazil and the King of the Sandwich Islands to the English or American young ladies who, with a letter of introduction in their hand, and a guide-book under their arm, go to see the poet after they have paid their respects to the tomb of Napoleon, the treasure of Notre Dame, and the well of Grenelle. Victor Hugo's household undertakes to defend him from the enthusiasm of travelers and the attentions of foreigners. But, in the days when the poet lived in the Rue de Clichy, this defense was difficult. The easiest way to save him from vulgar impertinence was to remove him from the center of Paris.

He has been living for several years in one of the avenues which lead from the Arc de Triomphe to the fortifications. A recent decision of the Municipal Council of Paris has changed its name from the Avenue d'Eylau to the Avenue Victor Hugo. The district is in a state of transition, being not yet wholly Paris, and nevertheless being no longer the country. Its mansions, all of white, too high to stand solitary, seem unstable enough to cause alarm, and look like children's toy-houses, lost in the monotonous expanse of building-sites clotted with scanty grass and heaped with rubbish, enclosed by gray palings, with a cabbage-garden or a patch of artichokes kept in order by the janitor of the place, and here and there with a board marking the lots which are for sale and giving the address of the agent. Few go by in the day-time; a white-washer's cart may be seen, or a market-gardener's, or perhaps a couple of red-trousered soldiers strolling disconsolate through the neighborhood. At night there is complete solitude: gas-lamps stand at long distances apart, in a melancholy row, serving no other purpose than that of making the night more visible; and beyond, in the endless darkness of the avenue, shining like a light-house to the visitor who has lost his way, are the kitchens of two little solitary residences, always open and always gleaming, throwing their hospitable light over five or six yards of the pavement. Those two residences are the home of Victor Hugo. They are built in the English fashion, after the style now popular in the belt of houses which gird Paris,—commodious and private, having neither janitor nor neighbors, realizing the dream of being truly at home.

The poet occupies one of them. In the neighboring house, which has a door in its wall, live the grandchildren of Victor Hugo, with their mother and Édouard Lockroy, her second husband. I name the children first because they are the masters, and, in a degree, the tyrants of the two houses. The mode of life, indeed, has undergone no change in the new home. We occasionally go to dinner in the Avenue Victor Hugo, as we went in the Rue de Clichy, and we are still fascinated by the simple welcome that awaits us. The evening receptions are attended by the same friends as of old; but there is less crowding and more intimacy.

This dwelling, which to the stranger seems so modest, has had its day of epic grandeur; it is for ever memorable to those who, like myself, witnessed the rejoicings of February 25, 1881. On that day it became for an instant the center of the first city in the world: for the whole of Paris came to its doors to lay there a tribute of admiration. In 1879, when

"Ruy Blas" was revived at the Théâtre Français, Victor Hugo had already been acclaimed by those whom convention calls "All Paris." The emotion and cheers of this distinguished throng, which saw the old master-work revived after so many years, were very sweet to Victor Hugo. In 1880, at the fiftieth anniversary of "Hernani" he saw his bust crowned, amid the actors, by the hands of Sarah Bernhardt; and on that day he truly felt that, being still alive, he had passed into immortality. But there still was wanting the popular festival, more spontaneous, conceived on a grander scale, which should show the poet how deeply his work had penetrated France, how much he was loved even by those who could scarcely read,—by the poor, the artisans, the "misérables" for whom he had often written, whose sufferings he had told, whose cause he had championed. All were full of gratitude, and the seed sown in the shadow, in so many thousand hearts, was bound to bear at least one glorious harvest.

Such was the character of last year's festival. Springing from an instinctive and enthusiastic movement of public opinion, it took as its pretext the celebration of the eightieth birthday of the poet, who, in reality, was only seventy-nine. An immense crowd, such as Paris alone can gather, passed in surging waves, for hours together, beneath Hugo's windows. They came from all points of the city, and formed a procession in the Place de l'Étoile. The trumpeters went first, sounding their brazen melodies; the corporation followed after, bearing their ensigns as before a sovereign. Flowers were carried in the crowd, and crowns and flags. Banners floated in the wind, and on these standards of peace, inscribed, not with the names of bloody victories, but with the date of the greatest battles of thought, I could read "Hernani," "Les Feuilles d'Automne," "Les Orientales," and see all the dreams of my childhood passing before me in a worthy apotheosis.

I walked in the throng with my wife and children. We advanced with difficulty, so long was the procession. We were placed by chance amid a group of freemasons, who were marching behind their banner, each carrying his scarf in a shoulder-knot, as on a holiday. We marched behind a poorly dressed couple, a man and a woman, and when we came in sight of the house, covered already with tributary flowers, and observed the poet standing with his grand-children, while all Paris defiled before his window—

"Put on your scarf," cried the woman in front of us.

"I dare not," replied her husband, "it is too dirty."

"What does that matter?" cried she. "He will not see it."

So the old, soiled scarf was brought out, having done duty at all the ceremonies of the order; and as we passed the house our friend rolled it around him. In truth, the poet did not see the scarf,—this simple token of respect,—but I afterward related to him the little dialogue, and he smiled.

I did not go to see Hugo on the day of the festival. I remained in the street with the crowd, and shouted like the rest—like a hundred thousand other Parisians. But I did go the next day. The house wore a new aspect. The crowns were heaped up in the

conservatory; in the drawing-room hung banners and garlands, grouped with excellent taste amid palms and bouquets; the furniture was hidden beneath the flower-offerings. The children were there, wearied with standing so long at the window and replying with their little hands to the acclamations of the crowd. Alone, unwearied, amid the gifts of our City of Light, which, in one day, had paid its debt of gratitude to him who adds so much to its splendor, appeared Victor Hugo, still calm, serious, majestic, his serenity unbroken by the most glorious homage which has ever been received by man living among men.

Alphonse Daudet.



THE POET YEARS.

(1807 TO 1812.)

(Longfellow, Whittier, Mrs. Browning, Dr. Holmes, Tennyson, Poe, and Robert Browning were born during these years.)

DROP those six pages from the century's story,
And how much of its radiance were gone;
Drop from the day its crowning sunset glory,
The calm light of its dawn!

From that glad spring-time broke a full-voiced bevy,
With singing every heart and house to fill—
Perennial, though bound and stark and heavy
The wintry earth lies still.

The robin, caroling so cheer, so docile;
The shy wood-thrush's chiming vesper-bell;
New England's bobolink, old England's throistle,
With blithe or plaintive swell;

The British blackbird's musical elations
America's wide vales and corn-fields thrill;
Far Britain hears the nightly iterations
Of mourning whip-poor-will.

And both lands catch the wild-bird notes obscurer
That yet rise ever and again so strong,
So high and clear—his flight than petrel surer,—
Imperial his song.

O choral jubilant! O years of healing,
Of joy and light and solace, hope and peace!
Long, long ere shall be hushed your anthem pealing,
Your consolation cease!

James T. McKay.