



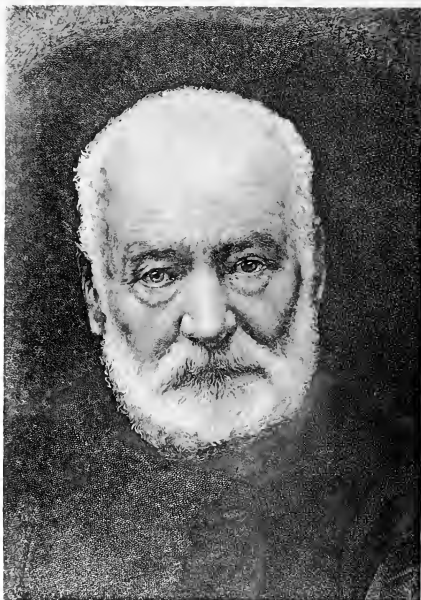


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Edition de Luxe

THE WORKS
OF
VICTOR HUGO
VOLUME X



SHAKESPEARE

LIFE OF HUGO

By F. T. MARZIALS

The Jefferson Press

Boston

New York

EDITION DE LUXE

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TO
E N G L A N D

I Dedicate this Book,
THE GLORIFICATION OF HER POET.

I TELL ENGLAND THE TRUTH; BUT, AS A LAND ILLUSTRIOUS
AND FREE, I ADMIRE HER, AND AS AN ASYLUM,
I LOVE HER.

VICTOR HUGO.

HAUTEVILLE HOUSE, 1864.

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PREFACE

THE true title of this work should be, "Apropos to Shakespeare." The desire of *introducing*, as they say in England, before the public, the new translation of Shakespeare, has been the first motive of the author. The feeling which interests him so profoundly in the translator should not deprive him of the right to recommend the translation. However, his conscience has been solicited on the other part, and in a more binding way still, by the subject itself. In reference to Shakespeare all questions which touch art are presented to his mind. To treat these questions, is to explain the mission of art; to treat these questions, is to explain the duty of human thought toward man. Such an occasion for speaking truths imposes a duty, and he is not permitted, above all at such an epoch as ours, to evade it. The author has comprehended this. He has not hesitated to turn the complex questions of art and civilization on their several faces, multiplying the horizons every time that the perspective has displaced itself, and accepting every indication that the subject, in its rigorous necessity, has offered to him. This expansion of the point of view has given rise to this book.

HAUTEVILLE HOUSE, 1864.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

PART I.—BOOK I

HIS LIFE

CHAPTER I

TWELVE years ago, in an island adjoining the coast of France, a house, with a melancholy aspect in every season, became particularly sombre because winter had commenced. The west wind, blowing then in full liberty, made thicker yet round this abode those coats of fog that November places between earthly life and the sun. Evening comes quickly in autumn; the smallness of the windows added to the shortness of the days, and deepened the sad twilight in which the house was wrapped.

The house, which had a terrace for a roof, was rectilinear, correct, square, newly whitewashed,—a true Methodist structure. Nothing is so glacial as that English whiteness; it seems to offer you the hospitality of snow. One dreams with a seared heart of the old huts of the French peasants, built of wood, cheerful and dark, surrounded with vines.

To the house was attached a garden of a quarter of an acre, on an inclined plane, surrounded with walls, cut in steps of granite, and with parapets, without trees, naked, where

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one could see more stones than leaves. This little uncultivated domain abounded in tufts of marigold, which flourished in autumn, and which the poor people of the country eat baked with the eel. The neighbouring seashore was hid from this garden by a rise in the ground; on this rise there was a field of short grass, where some nettles and a big hemlock flourished.

From the house you might perceive, on the right, in the horizon, on an elevation, and in a little wood, a tower, which passed for haunted; on the left you might see the dyke. The dyke was a row of big trunks of trees, leaning against a wall, planted upright in the sand, dried up, gaunt, with knots, ankylosès, and patellas, which looked like a row of tibias. Revery, which readily accepts dreams for the sake of proposing enigmas, might ask to what men these tibias of three fathoms in height had belonged.

The south façade of the house looked on the garden, the north façade on a deserted road.

A corridor at the entrance to the ground-floor, a kitchen, a greenhouse, and a courtyard, with a little parlour, having a view of the lonely road, and a pretty large study, scarcely lighted; on the first and second floors, chambers, neat, cold, scantily furnished, newly repainted, with white blinds to the window,—such was this lodging, with the noise of the sea ever resounding.

This house, a heavy, right-angled white cube, chosen by those who inhabited it apparently by chance, perhaps by intentional destiny, had the form of a tomb.

Those who inhabited this abode were a group,—to speak more properly, a family; they were proscribed ones. The most aged was one of those men who, at a given moment, are *de trop* in their own country. He had come from an assembly; the others, who were young, had come from a prison. To have written, that is sufficient motive for bars. Where shall thought conduct except to a dungeon?

The prison had set them free into banishment.

The oldest, the father, had in that place all his own except

his eldest daughter, who could not follow him. His son-in-law was with her. Often were they leaning round a table or seated on a bench, silent, grave, thinking, all of them, and without saying it, of those two absent ones.

Why was this group installed in this lodging, so little suitable? For reasons of haste, and from a desire to be as soon as possible anywhere but at the inn. Doubtless, also, because it was the first house to let that they had met with, and because proscribed people are not lucky.

This house,—which it is time to rehabilitate a little and console, for who knows if in its loneliness it is not sad at what we have just said about it; a home has a soul,—this house was called Marine Terrace. The arrival was mournful; but after all, we declare, the stay in it was agreeable, and Marine Terrace has not left to those who then inhabited it anything but affectionate and dear remembrances. And what we say of that house, Marine Terrace, we say also of that island of Jersey. Places of suffering and trial end by having a kind of bitter sweetness which, later on, causes them to be regretted. They have a stern hospitality which pleases the conscience.

There had been, before them, other exiles in that island. This is not the time to speak of them. We mention only that the most ancient of whom tradition, a legend, perhaps, has kept the remembrance, was a Roman, Vipsanius Minator, who employed his exile in augmenting, for the benefit of his country's dominion, the Roman wall of which you may still see some parts, like bits of hillock, near a bay named, I think, St. Catherine's Bay. This Vipsanius Minator was a consular personage,—an old Roman so infatuated with Rome that he stood in the way of the Empire. Tiberius exiled him into this Cimmerian island, Cæsarea; according to others, to one of the Orkneys. Tiberius did more; not content with exile, he ordained oblivion. It was forbidden to the orators of the senate and the forum to pronounce the name of Vipsanius Minator. The orators of the forum and the senate, and history, have obeyed; about which Tiberius, of course,

did not have a doubt. That arrogance in commanding, which proceeded so far as to give orders to men's thoughts, characterized certain ancient governments newly arrived at one of those firm situations where the greatest amount of crime produces the greatest amount of security.

Let us return to Marine Terrace.

One morning at the end of November, two of the inhabitants of the place, the father and the youngest of the sons, were seated in the lower parlour. They were silent, like shipwrecked ones who meditate. Without, it rained; the wind blew. The house was as if deafened by the outer roaring. Both went on thinking, absorbed perhaps by this coincidence between a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile.

All at once the son raised his voice and asked the father,—

“What thinkest thou of this exile?”

“That it will be long.”

“How dost thou reckon to fill it up?”

The father answered,—

“I shall look on the ocean.”

There was a silence. The father resumed the conversation:—

“And you?”

“I,” said the son,—“I shall translate Shakespeare.”

CHAPTER II

THERE are men, oceans in reality.

These waves; this ebb and flow; this terrible go-and-come; this noise of every gust; these lights and shadows; these vegetations belonging to the gulf; this democracy of clouds in full hurricane; these eagles in the foam; these wonderful gatherings of stars reflected in one knows not what mysterious crowd by millions of luminous specks, heads confused with the innumerable; those grand errant lightnings which seem to watch; these huge sobs; these monsters

glimpsed at; this roaring, disturbing these nights of darkness; these furies, these frenzies, these tempests, these rocks, these shipwrecks, these fleets crushing each other, these human thunders mixed with divine thunders, this blood in the abyss; then these graces, these sweetnesses, these *fêtes*, these gay white veils, these fishing-boats, these songs in the uproar, these splendid ports, this smoke of the earth, these towns in the horizon, this deep blue of water and sky, this useful sharpness, this bitterness which renders the universe wholesome, this rough salt without which all would putrefy, these angers and assuagings, this whole in one, this unexpected in the immutable, this vast marvel of monotony, inexhaustibly varied, this level after that earthquake, these hells and these paradises of immensity eternally agitated, this infinite, this unfathomable,—all this can exist in one spirit; and then this spirit is called genius, and you have Æschylus, you have Isaiah, you have Juvenal, you have Dante, you have Michael Angelo, you have Shakespeare; and looking at these minds is the same thing as to look at the ocean.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in a house under the tiles of which was concealed a profession of the Catholic faith beginning with these words, "I, John Shakespeare." John was the father of William. The house, situate in Henley Street, was humble: the chamber in which Shakespeare came into the world, wretched,—the walls whitewashed, the black rafters laid cross-wise; at the farther end a tolerably large window with two small panes, where you may read to-day, among other names, that of Walter Scott. This poor lodging sheltered a decayed family. The father of William Shakespeare had been alderman; his grandfather had been bailiff. Shakespeare signifies "shakelance;" the family had for coat-of-arms an arm

holding a lance,—allusive arms, which were confirmed, they say, by Queen Elizabeth in 1595, and apparent, at the time we write, on Shakespeare's tomb in the church of Stratford-on-Avon. There is little agreement on the orthography of the word Shake-speare, as a family name; it is written variously, — Shakspere, Shakespere, Shakespeare, Shakspeare. In the eighteenth century it was habitually written Shakespear; the actual translator has adopted the spelling of Shakespeare, as the only true method, and gives for it unanswerable reasons. The only objection that can be made is that Shakspeare is more easily pronounced than Shakespeare, that cutting off the *e* mute is perhaps useful, and that for their own sake, and in the interests of literary currency, posterity has, as regards surnames, a claim to euphony. It is evident, for example, that in French poetry the orthography Shakspeare is necessary. However, in prose, and convinced by the translator, we write Shakespeare.

2. The Shakespeare family had some original drawback, probably its Catholicism, which caused it to fall. A little after the birth of William, Alderman Shakespeare was no more than "butcher John." William Shakespeare made his *début* in a slaughter-house. At fifteen years of age, with sleeves tucked up, in his father's shambles, he killed the sheep and calves "pompously," says Aubrey. At eighteen he married. Between the days of the slaughter-house and the marriage he composed a quatrain. This quatrain, directed against the neighbouring villages, is his *début* in poetry. He there says that Hillbrough is illustrious for its ghosts and Bidford for its drunken fellows. He made this quatrain (being tipsy himself), in the open air, under an apple-tree still celebrated in the country in consequence of this Midsummer Night's Dream. In this night and in this dream where there were lads and lasses, in this drunken fit, and under this apple-tree, he discovered that Anne Hathaway was a pretty girl. The wedding followed. He espoused this Anne Hathaway, older than himself by eight years, had a daughter by her, then twins, boy and girl, and left her; and this wife, vanished from

Shakespeare's life, appears again only in his will, where he leaves her the worst of his two beds, "having probably," says a biographer, "employed the best with others." Shakespeare, like La Fontaine, did but sip at a married life. His wife put aside, he was a schoolmaster, then clerk to an attorney, then a poacher. This poaching has been made use of since then to justify the statement that Shakespeare had been a thief. One day he was caught poaching in Sir Thomas Lucy's park. They threw him in prison; they commenced proceedings. These being spitefully followed up, he saved himself by flight to London. In order to gain a livelihood, he sought to take care of horses at the doors of the theatres. Plautus had turned a millstone. This business of taking care of horses at the doors existed in London in the last century, and it formed then a kind of small band or corps that they called "Shakespeare's boys."

3. You may call London the black Babylon,—gloomy the day, magnificent the night. To see London is a sensation; it is uproar under smoke. Mysterious analogy! The uproar is the smoke of noise. Paris is the capital of one side of humanity. London is the capital of the opposite side,—splendid and melancholy town! Life there is a tumult; the people there are an ant-hill; they are free, and yet dovetailed. London is an orderly chaos. The London of the sixteenth century did not resemble the London of our day; but it was already a town without bounds. Cheapside was the high-street; St. Paul's, which is a dome, was a spire. The plague was nearly as much at home in London as at Constantinople. It is true that there was not much difference between Henry VIII. and a sultan. Fires, also, as at Constantinople, were frequent in London, on account of the populous parts of the town being built entirely of wood. In the streets there was but one carriage,—the carriage of her Majesty. Not a cross-road where they did not cudgel some pickpocket with that drotsch-block which is still retained at Groningen for thrashing the wheat. Manners were rough, almost ferocious; a fine lady rose at six, and went to bed at nine. Lady

Geraldine Kildare, to whom Lord Surrey inscribed verses, breakfasted off a pound of bacon and a pot of beer. Queens, the wives of Henry VIII., knitted mittens, and did not even object to their being of coarse red wool. In this London, the Duchess of Suffolk took care of her hen-house, and with her dress tucked up to her knees, threw corn to the ducks in the court below. To dine at midday was a late dinner. The pleasures of the upper classes were to go and play at "hot cockles" with my Lord Leicester. Anne Boleyn played there; she knelt down, with eyes bandaged, rehearsing this game, without knowing it, in the posture of the scaffold. This same Anne Boleyn, destined to the throne, from whence she was to go farther, was perfectly dazzled when her mother bought her three linen chemises at sixpence the ell, and promised her for the Duke of Norfolk's ball a pair of new shoes worth five shillings.

4. Under Elizabeth, in spite of the anger of the Puritans, there were in London eight companies of comedians, those of Newington Butts, Earl Pembroke's company, Lord Strange's retainers, the Lord-Chamberlain's troop, the Lord High-Admiral's troop, the company of Blackfriars, the children of St. Paul's, and, in the first rank, the Showmen of Bears. Lord Southampton went to the play every evening. Nearly all the theatres were situate on the banks of the Thames, which increased the number of water-men. The play-rooms were of two kinds: some merely open tavern-yards, a trestle leaning against a wall, no ceiling, rows of benches placed on the ground, for boxes the windows of the tavern. The performance took place in the broad daylight and in the open air. The principal of those theatres was the Globe; the others, which were mostly closed play-rooms, lighted with lamps, were used at night. The most frequented was Blackfriars. The best actor of Lord Pembroke's troop was called Henslowe; the best actor at Blackfriars was Burbage. The Globe was situate on Bank Side. This is known by a document at Stationers' Hall, dated 26th November, 1607:—

"His Majesty's servants playing usually at the Globe on the Bank Side."

The scenery was simple. Two swords laid crosswise, sometimes two laths, signified a battle; a shirt over the coat signified a knight; the petticoat of one of the comedians' wives on a broom-handle, signified a palfrey caparisoned. A rich theatre, which made its inventory in 1598, possessed "the limbs of Moors, a dragon, a big horse with his legs, a cage, a rock, four Turks' heads, and that of the ancient Mahomet, a wheel for the siege of London, and a *bouche d'enfer*." Another had "a sun, a target, the three feathers of the Prince of Wales, with the device *Ich Dien*, besides six devils, and the Pope on his mule." An actor besmeared with plaster and immovable, signified a wall; if he spread his fingers, it meant that the wall had crevices. A man laden with a fagot, followed by a dog, and carrying a lantern, meant the moon; his lantern represented the moonshine. People may laugh at this *mise en scène* of moonlight, become famous by the "Midsummer Night's Dream," without imagining that there is in it a gloomy anticipation of Dante.¹ The robing-room of these theatres, where the comedians dressed themselves pell-mell, was a corner separated from the stage by a rag of some kind stretched on a cord. The robing-room at Blackfriars was shut off by an ancient piece of tapestry which had belonged to one of the guilds, and represented a blacksmith's workshop; through the holes in this partition, flying in rags and tatters, the public saw the actors redden their cheeks with brick-dust, or make their mustaches with a cork burned at a tallow-candle. From time to time, through an occasional opening of the curtain, you might see a face grinning in a mask, peeping to see if the time for going on the stage had arrived, or the smooth chin of a comedian, who was to play the part of a woman. "*Glabri histriones*," said Plautus. These theatres were frequented by noblemen, scholars, soldiers, and sailors. They acted there the tragedy of "Lord

¹ See *L'Inferno*, Chant xx.

Buckhurst," "Gorbuduc," or "Ferrex and Porrex," "Mother Bombie," by Lilly, in which the phip-hip of sparrows was heard; "The Libertine," an imitation of the "Convivado de Piedra," which had a European fame; "Felix and Philomena," a fashionable comedy, performed for the first time at Greenwich, before "Queen Bess;" "Promos and Cassandra," a comedy dedicated by the author, George Whetstone, to William Fleetwood, recorder of London; "Tamerlane," and the "Jew of Malta," by Christopher Marlowe; farces and pieces by Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Kid; and lastly, mediaval comedies. For just as France has her "L'Avocat Pathelin," so England has her "Gossip Gorton's Needle." While the actors gesticulated and ranted, the noblemen and officers, with their plumes and band of gold lace, standing or squatting on the stage, turning their backs, haughty and easy in the midst of the constrained comedians, laughed, shouted, played at cards, threw them at each other's heads, or played at post and pair; and below in the shade, on the pavement, among pots of beer and pipes, you might see the "stinkards" (the mob). It was by that very theatre that Shakespeare entered on the drama. From being the guardian of horses, he became the shepherd of men.

5. Such was the theatre in London about the year 1580, under "the great queen." It was not much less wretched, a century later, at Paris, under "the great king;" and Molière, at his *début*, had, like Shakespeare, to make shift with rather miserable playhouses. There is in the archives of the Comédie Française, an unpublished manuscript of four hundred pages, bound in parchment and tied with a band of white leather. It is the diary of Lagrange, a comrade of Molière. Lagrange describes also the theatre where Molière's company played by order of Mr. Rateban, superintendent of the king's buildings: "Three beams, the frames rotten and shored up, and half the room roofless and in ruins." In another place, by date Sunday, 15 March, 1671, he says, "The company have resolved to make a large ceiling over the whole room, which, up to the said date (15th) has not been covered, save

by a large blue cloth suspended by cords." As for lighting and heating this room, particularly on the occasion of the extraordinary expenses necessary for the performance of "Psyche," which was by Molière and Corneille, we read: "Candles, thirty livres; door-keeper, for wood, three livres." This was the style of playhouse which "the great king" placed at the disposal of Molière. These bounties to literature did not impoverish Louis XIV. so much as to deprive him of the pleasure of giving, for example, at one and the same time, two hundred thousand livres to Lavardin, and the same to D'Epemon; two hundred thousand livres, besides the regiment of France, to the Count de Médauid; four hundred thousand livres to the Bishop of Noyon, because this bishop was Clermont-Tonnerre, a family that had two patents of count and peer of France,—one for Clermont and one for Tonnerre; five hundred thousand livres to the Duke of Vivonne; and seven hundred thousand livres to the Duke of Quintin-Lorges, besides eight hundred thousand livres to Monseigneur Clément de Bavière, Prince-Bishop of Liège. Let us add that he gave a thousand livres pension to Molière. We find in Lagrange's journal in the month of April, 1663, this remark:—

"About the same time, M. de Molière received, as a great wit, a pension from the king, and has been placed on the civil list for the sum of a thousand livres."

Later, when Molière was dead and interred at St. Joseph, "Chapel of ease to the parish of St. Eustache," the king pushed patronage so far as to permit his tomb to be "raised a foot out of the ground."

6. Shakespeare, as we see, remained as an outsider a long time on the threshold of theatrical life. At length he entered. He passed the door and got behind the scenes. He succeeded in becoming a call-boy, vulgarly, a "barker." About 1586 Shakespeare was barking with Greene at Blackfriars. In 1587 he gained a step. In the piece called "The Giant Agrapardo, King of Nubia, worse than his late brother, An-

gulafer," Shakespeare was intrusted with carrying the turban to the giant. Then from a supernumerary he became actor, thanks to Burbage, to whom, by an interlineation in his will, he left thirty-six shillings, to buy a gold ring. He was the friend of Condell and Hemynge,—his comrades whilst alive, his publishers after his death. He was handsome; he had a high forehead, a brown beard, a mild countenance, a sweet mouth, a deep look. He took delight in reading Montaigne, translated by Florio. He frequented the Apollo tavern, where he would see and keep company with two *habitués* of his theatre,—Decker, author of the "Gull's Hornbook," in which a chapter is specially devoted to "the way a man of fashion ought to behave at the play," and Dr. Symon Forman, who has left a manuscript journal, containing reports of the first representations of the "Merchant of Venice," and "A Winter's Tale." He used to meet Sir Walter Raleigh at the Siren Club. Somewhere about that time, Mathurin Régnier met Philippe de Béthune at La Pomme de Pin. The great lords and fine gentlemen of the day were rather prone to lend their names in order to start new taverns. At Paris the Viscount de Montauban, who was a Créqui founded Le Tripot des Onze Mille Diables. At Madrid, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the unfortunate admiral of the "Invincible," founded the Puño-en-rostro, and in London Sir Walter Raleigh founded the Siren. There you found drunkenness and wit.

7. In 1589, when James VI. of Scotland, looking to the throne of England, paid his respects to Elizabeth, who, two years before, on the 8th February, 1587, had beheaded Mary Stuart, mother of this James, Shakespeare composed his first drama, "Pericles." In 1591, while the Catholic king was dreaming, after a scheme of the Marquis d'Astorga, of a second Armada, more lucky than the first, inasmuch as it never put to sea, he composed "Henry VI." In 1593, when the Jesuits obtained from the Pope express permission to paint "the pains and torments of hell," on the walls of "the chamber of meditation" of Clermont College, where they often shut up a poor youth, who the year after, became fa-

mous under the name of Jean Châtel, he composed "Taming the Shrew." In 1594, when, looking daggers at each other and ready for battle, the King of Spain, the Queen of England, and even the King of France, all three said "my good city of Paris," he continued and completed "Henry VI." In 1595, while Clement VIII. at Rome was solemnly aiming a blow at Henry IV. by laying his crosier on the backs of Cardinals du Perron and d'Ossat, he wrote "Timon of Athens." In 1596, the year when Elizabeth published an edict against the long points of bucklers, and when Philip II. drove from his presence a woman who laughed when blowing her nose, he composed "Macbeth." In 1597, when this same Philip II. said to the Duke of Alba, "You deserve the axe," not because the Duke of Alba had put the Low Countries to fire and sword, but because he had entered into the king's presence without being announced, he composed "Cymbeline" and "Richard III." In 1598, when the Earl of Essex ravaged Ireland, bearing on his headdress the glove of the virgin Queen Elizabeth, he composed the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," "King John," "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Comedy of Errors," "All's Well that Ends Well," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Merchant of Venice." In 1599, when the Privy Council, at her Majesty's request, deliberated on the proposal to put Dr. Hayward to the rack for having stolen some of the ideas of Tacitus, he composed "Romeo and Juliet." In 1600, while the Emperor Rudolph was waging war against his rebel brother and sentencing his son, murderer of a woman, to be bled to death, he composed "As You Like It," "Henry IV.," "Henry V.," and "Much Ado about Nothing." In 1601, when Bacon published the eulogy on the execution of the Earl of Essex, just as Leibnitz, eighty years afterward, was to find out good reasons for the murder of Monaldeschi, with this difference however, that Monaldeschi was nothing to Leibnitz, and that Essex had been the benefactor of Bacon, he composed "Twelfth Night; or, What you Will." In 1602, while in obedience to the Pope, the King of France, styled "Renard de Béarn" by Cardinal

Aldobrandini, was counting his beads every day, reciting the litanies on Wednesday, and the rosary of the Virgin Mary on Saturday, while fifteen cardinals, assisted by the heads of the chapter, opened the discussion on Molinism at Rome, and while the Holy See, at the request of the crown of Spain, "was saving Christianity and the world" by the institution of the congregation "de Auxiliis," he composed "Othello." In 1603, when the death of Elizabeth made Henry IV. say, "She was a virgin just as I am a Catholic," he composed "Hamlet." In 1604, while Philip III. was losing his last footing in the Low Countries, he wrote "Julius Cæsar" and "Measure for Measure." In 1606, at the time when James I. of England, the former James VI. of Scotland, wrote against Bellarmine the "Tortura Forti" and faithless to Carr began to look sweetly on Villiers, who was afterward to honour him with the title of "Your Filthiness," he composed "Coriolanus." In 1607, when the University of York received the little Prince of Wales as doctor, according to the account of Father St. Romuald "with all the ceremonies and the usual fur gowns," he wrote "King Lear." In 1609, when the magistracy of France, placing the scaffold at the disposition of the king, gave upon trust a *carte blanche* for the sentence of the Prince de Condé "to such punishment as it might please his Majesty to order," Shakespeare composed "Troilus and Cressida." In 1610, when Ravaillac assassinated Henry IV. by the dagger, and the French parliament assassinated Ravaillac by the process of quartering his body, Shakespeare composed "Antony and Cleopatra." In 1611, while the Moors, driven out by Philip III., and in the pangs of death, were crawling out of Spain, he wrote the "Winter's Tale," "Henry VIII.," and "The Tempest."

8. He used to write on flying sheets, like nearly all poets. Malherbe and Boileau are almost the only ones who have written on quires of paper. Racan said to Mlle. de Gournay:—

I have seen this morning M. de Malherbe sewing with coarse gray thread a bundle of white papers, on which will soon appear some sonnets."

Each of Shakespeare's dramas, composed according to the wants of his company, was in all probability learned and rehearsed in haste by the actors from the original itself, as they had not time to copy it; hence, in his case as in Molière's, the mislaying of manuscripts which were cut into parts. Few or no entry-books in those almost itinerant theatres; no coincidence between the time of representation and the publication of the plays; sometimes not even a printed copy,—the stage the sole publication. When the pieces by chance are printed, they bear titles which bewilder us. The second part of *Henry VI.* is entitled "The First Part of the War between York and Lancaster." The third part is called "The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York." All this enables us to understand why so much obscurity rests on the dates when Shakespeare composed his dramas, and why it is difficult to fix them with precision. The dates that we have just given, and which are here brought together for the first time, are pretty nearly certain; notwithstanding, some doubt still exists as to the years when the following were written, or indeed played,—"*Timon of Athens*," "*Cymbeline*," "*Julius Cæsar*," "*Antony and Cleopatra*," "*Coriolanus*," and "*Macbeth*." Here and there we meet with barren years; others there are of which the fertility seems excessive. It is, for instance, on a simple note by Meres, author of the "*Treasure of Wit*," that we are compelled to attribute to the year 1598 the creation of six pieces,—"*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*," the "*Comedy of Errors*," "*King John*," "*Midsummer Night's Dream*," "*The Merchant of Venice*," and "*All's Well that Ends Well*," which Meres calls "*Love's Labour Gained*." The date of "*Henry VI.*" is fixed, for the first part at least, by an allusion which Nash makes to this play in "*Pierce Penniless*." The year 1604 is given as that of "*Measure for Measure*," inasmuch as this piece had been represented on Stephen's Day of that year, of which Hemynge makes a special note; and the year 1611 for "*Henry VIII.*," inasmuch as "*Henry VIII.*" was played at the time of the fire of the Globe Theatre. Various circumstances—a dis-

agreement with his company, a whim of the lord-chamberlain — sometimes compelled Shakespeare to change from one theatre to another. "Taming the Shrew" was played for the first time in 1593, at Henslowe's theatre; "Twelfth Night" in 1601, at Middle Temple Hall; "Othello" in 1602, at Harefield Castle. "King Lear" was played at Whitehall during Christmas (1607) before James I. Burbage created the part of Lear. Lord Southampton, recently set free from the Tower of London, was present at this performance. This Lord Southampton was an old *habitué* of Blackfriars; and Shakespeare, in 1589, had dedicated the poem of "Adonis" to him. Adonis was the fashion at that time; twenty-five years after Shakespeare, the Chevalier Marini wrote a poem on Adonis which he dedicated to Louis XIII.

9. In 1597 Shakespeare lost his son, who has left as his only trace on earth one line in the death-register of the parish of Stratford-on-Avon: "1597. August 17. Hamnet. Filius William Shakespeare." On the 6th September, 1601, his father, John Shakespeare, died. He was now the head of his company of comedians. James I. had given him, in 1607, the lease of Blackfriars, and afterward that of the Globe. In 1613 Madame Elizabeth, daughter of James, and the Elector-palatine, King of Bohemia, whose statue may be seen in the ivy at the angle of a big tower at Heidelberg, came to the Globe to see the "Tempest" performed. These royal attendances did not save him from the censure of the lord-chamberlain. A certain interdict weighed on his pieces, the representation of which was tolerated, and the printing now and then forbidden. On the second volume of the register at Stationers' Hall you may read to-day on the margin of the title of three pieces, "As You Like It," "Henry V.," "Much Ado about Nothing," the words "4 Augt. to suspend." The motives for these interdictions escape us. Shakespeare was able, for instance without raising objection, to place on the stage his former poaching adventure and make Sir Thomas Lucy a buffoon (Judge Shallow), show the public Falstaff killing the buck and belabouring Shallow's people, and push

the likeness so far as to give to Shallow the arms of Sir Thomas Lucy,—an outrageous piece of Aristophanism by a man who did not know Aristophanes. Falstaff, in Shakespeare's manuscripts, was written Falstaffe. In the mean time his circumstances had improved, as later they did with Molière. Toward the end of the century he was rich enough for a certain Ryc-Quincy to ask, on the 8th October, 1598, his assistance in a letter which bears the inscription: "To my amiable friend and countryman William Shakespeare." He refused the assistance, as it appears, and returned the letter, found since among Fletcher's papers, and on the reverse of which this same Ryc-Quincy had written: "*Histrion! Mima!*" He loved Stratford-on-Avon, where he was born, where his father had died, where his son was buried. He there purchased or built a house, which he christened "New Place." We say, bought or built a house, for he bought it, according to Whiterill, and he built it according to Forbes, and on this point Forbes disputes with Whiterill. These cavils of the learned about trifles are not worth being searched into, particularly when we see Father Hardouin, for instance, completely upset a whole passage of Pliny by replacing *nos pridem* by *non pridem*.

10. Shakespeare went from time to time to pass some days at New Place. In these short journeys he met half-way Oxford, and at Oxford the Crown Hotel, and in the hotel the hostess, a beautiful, intelligent creature, wife of the worthy innkeeper, Davenant. In 1606 Mrs. Davenant was brought to bed of a son whom they named William, and in 1644 Sir William Davenant, created knight by Charles I., wrote to Lord Rochester: "Know this, which does honour to my mother, I am the son of Shakespeare," thus allying himself to Shakespeare in the same way that in our days M. Lucas Montigny claimed relationship with Mirabeau. Shakespeare had married off his two daughters,—Susan to a doctor, Judith to a merchant; Susan had wit, Judith knew not how to read or write, and signed her name with a cross. In 1613 it happened that Shakespeare, having come to Stratford-on-

Avon, had no further desire to return to London. Perhaps he was in difficulties. He had just been compelled to mortgage his house. The contract deed of this mortgage, dated 11th March, 1613, and indorsed with Shakespeare's signature, was up to the last century in the hands of an attorney, who gave it to Garrick, who lost it. Garrick lost likewise (it is Miss Violetti, his wife, who tells the story), Forbes's manuscript, with his letters in Latin. From 1613 Shakespeare remained at his house at New Place, occupied with his garden, forgetting his plays, wrapped up in his flowers. He planted in this garden of New Place the first mulberry-tree that was grown at Stratford, just as Queen Elizabeth wore, in 1561, the first silk stockings seen in England. On the 25th March, 1616, feeling ill, he made his will. His will, dictated by him, is written on three pages; he signed each of them; his hand trembled. On the first page he signed only his Christian name, "William;" on the second, "Willm. Shaspr.;" on the third, "William Shasp." On the 23d April, he died. He had reached that day exactly fifty-two years, being born on the 23d April, 1564. On that same day, 23d April, 1616, died Cervantes, a genius of like growth. When Shakespeare died, Milton was eight years, Corneille ten years of age; Charles I. and Cromwell were two youths, the one sixteen, the other seventeen years old.

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE'S life was greatly embittered. He lived perpetually slighted; he states it himself. Posterity may read this to-day in his own verses:—

"Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd.
Pity me, then,

Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysel." ¹

"Your love and pity doth th' impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow." ²

"Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name." ³

"Or on my frailty why are frailer spies." ⁴

Shakespeare had permanently near him one envious person, Ben Jonson,—an indifferent comic poet, whose *début* he assisted. Shakespeare was thirty-nine when Elizabeth died. This queen had not paid attention to him; she managed to reign forty-four years without seeing that Shakespeare was there. She is not the least qualified, historically, to be called the "protectress of arts and letters," etc. The historians of the old school gave these certificates to all princes, whether they knew how to read or not.

Shakespeare, persecuted like Molière at a later date, sought, as Molière, to lean on the master. Shakespeare and Molière would in our days have had a loftier spirit. The master, it was Elizabeth,—“King Elizabeth,” as the English called her. Shakespeare glorified Elizabeth: he called her the “Virgin Star,” “Star of the West,” and “Diana,”—a name of a goddess which pleased the queen,—but in vain. The queen took no notice of it; less sensitive to the praises in which Shakespeare called her Diana than to the insults of Scipio Gentilis, who, taking the pretensions of Elizabeth on the bad side, called her “Hecate,” and applied to her the ancient triple curse “Mormo! Bombo! Gorgo!” As for James I., whom Henry IV. called Master James, he gave, as we have seen, the lease of the Globe to Shakespeare, but he willingly forbade the publication of his pieces. Some contemporaries, Dr. Symon Forman among others, so far took notice of Shakespeare as to make a note of the occupation of an evening passed at the performance of the “Merchant of Venice!”

¹ Sonnet 111. ² Sonnet 112. ³ Sonnet 36. ⁴ Sonnet 121.

That was all which he knew of glory. Shakespeare, once dead, entered into oblivion.

From 1640 to 1660 the Puritans abolished art, and shut up the playhouses. All theatricals were under a funeral shroud. With Charles II. the drama revived without Shakespeare. The false taste of Louis XIV. had invaded England. Charles II. belonged rather to Versailles than London. He had as mistress a French girl, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and as an intimate friend the privy purse of the King of France. Clifford, his favourite, who never entered the parliament-house without spitting, said: "It is better for my master to be viceroy under a great monarch like Louis XIV. than the slave of five hundred insolent English subjects." These were not the days of the republic,—the time when Cromwell took the title of "Protector of England and France," and forced this same Louis XIV. to accept the title of "King of the French."

Under this restoration of the Stuarts, Shakespeare completed his eclipse. He was so thoroughly dead that Davenant, possibly his son, re-composed his pieces. There was no longer any "Macbeth" but the "Macbeth" of Davenant. Dryden speaks of Shakespeare on one occasion in order to say that he is "out of date." Lord Shaftesbury calls him "a wit out of fashion." Dryden and Shaftesbury were two oracles. Dryden, a converted Catholic, had two sons, ushers in the Chamber of Clément XI., made tragedies worth putting into Latin verse, as Atterbury's hexameters prove; and he was the servant of that James II. who, before being king on his own account, had asked of his brother, Charles II., "Why don't you hang Milton?" The Earl of Shaftesbury, a friend of Locke, was the man who wrote an "Essay on Sprightliness in Important Conversations," and who, by the manner in which Chancellor Hyde helped his daughter to the wing of a chicken, divined that she was secretly married to the Duke of York.

These two men having condemned Shakespeare, the oracle had spoken. England, a country more obedient to conven-

tional opinion than is generally believed, forgot Shakespeare. Some purchaser pulled down his house, New Place. A Rev. Dr. Cartrell cut down and burned his mulberry-tree. At the commencement of the eighteenth century the eclipse was total. In 1707, one called Nahum Tate published a "King Lear," warning his readers "that he had borrowed the idea of it from a play which he had read by chance,—the work of some nameless author." This "nameless author" was Shakespeare.

CHAPTER V

IN 1728 Voltaire imported from England to France the name of Will Shakespeare. Only in place of Will, he pronounced it *Gilles*.

Jeering began in France, and oblivion continued in England. What the Irishman Nahum Tate had done for "King Lear" others did for other pieces. "All's Well that Ends Well" had successively two arrangers,—Pilon for the Haymarket, and Kemble for Drury Lane. Shakespeare existed no more, and counted no more. "Much Ado about Nothing" served likewise as a rough draft twice,—for Davenant in 1673, for James Miller in 1737. "Cymbeline" was recast four times: under James II., at the Theatre Royal, by Thomas Dursey; in 1695 by Charles Marsh; in 1759 by W. Hawkins; in 1761 by Garriek. "Coriolanus" was recast four times: in 1682, for the Theatre Royal, by Tate; in 1720, for Drury Lane, by John Dennis; in 1755, for Covent Garden, by Thomas Sheridan; in 1801, for Drury Lane, by Kemble. "Timon of Athens" was recast four times: at the Duke's Theatre, in 1678, by Shadwell; in 1768, at the Theatre of Richmond Green, by James Love; in 1771, at Drury Lane, by Cumberland; in 1786, at Covent Garden, by Hull.

In the eighteenth century the persistent raillery of Voltaire ended in producing in England a certain waking up. Gar-

rick, while correcting Shakespeare, played him, and acknowledged that it was Shakespeare that he played. They reprinted him at Glasgow. An imbecile, Malone, made commentaries on his plays, and as a logical sequence, whitewashed his tomb. There was on this tomb a little bust, of a doubtful resemblance, and moderate as a work of art: but, what made it a subject of reverence, contemporaneous with Shakespeare. It is after this bust that all the portraits of Shakespeare have been made that we now see. The bust was whitewashed. Malone, critic and whitewasher of Shakespeare, spread a coat of plaster on his face, of idiotic nonsense on his work.

BOOK II

MEN OF GENIUS

CHAPTER I

GREAT Art, using this word in its arbitrary sense, is the region of Equals.

Before going farther, let us fix the value of this expression, Art, which often recurs in our writing.

We speak of Art, as we speak of Nature; here are two terms of an almost unlimited signification. To pronounce the one or the other of these words, Nature, Art, is to make a conjuration, to extract from the depths the ideal, to draw aside one of the two grand curtains of a divine creation. God manifests himself to us in the first degree through the life of the universe, and in the second through the thought of man. The second manifestation is not less holy than the first. The first is named Nature, the second is named Art. Hence this reality: the poet is a priest.

There is here below a pontiff,—it is genius.

Sacerdos Magnus.

Art is the second branch of Nature.

Art is as natural as Nature.

By the word *God*—let us fix the sense of this word—we mean the Living Infinite.

The I latent of the Infinite patent, that is God.

God is the Invisible seen.

The world concentrated is God. God expanded, is the world.

We, who are speaking, we believe in nothing out of God.

That being said, let us proceed. God creates art by man. He has for a tool the human intellect. This tool the Workman has made for himself; he has no other.

Forbes, in the curious little work perused by Warburton and lost by Garrick, affirms that Shakespeare devoted himself to the practice of magic, that magic was in his family, and that what little good there was in his pieces was dictated to him by one "Alleur," a spirit.

Let us say on this point, for we must not avoid any of the questions about to arise, that it is a wretched error of all ages to desire to give the human intellect assistance from without,—*antrum adjurat ratem*. To the work which seems superhuman, people wish to bring the intervention of the extra-human,—in antiquity, the tripod; in our days, the table. The table is nothing but the tripod come back. To accept *au pied de la lettre* the demon that Socrates talks of, the thicket of Moses, the nymph of Numa, the spirit of Plotinus, and Mahomet's dove, is to be the victim of a metaphor.

On the other hand, the table, turning or talking, has been very much laughed at; to speak the truth, this raillery is out of place. To replace inquiry by mockery is convenient, but not very scientific. For our part, we think that the strict duty of science is to test all phenomena. Science is ignorant, and has no right to laugh; a savant who laughs at the possible is very near being an idiot. The unexpected ought always to be expected by science. Her duty is to stop it in its course and search it, rejecting the chimerical, establishing the real. Science has but the right to put a visa on facts; she should verify and distinguish. All human knowledge is but picking and culling. Because the false mixes with the true, it is no excuse for rejecting the mass. When was the tare an excuse for refusing the corn? Hoe the weed, error, but reap the fact, and place it beside others. Knowledge is the sheaf of facts.

The mission of science,—to study and try the depth of everything. All of us, according to our degree, are the

creditors of investigation; we are its debtors also. It is owed to us, and we owe it to others. To avoid a phenomenon, to refuse to pay it that attention to which it has a right, to lead it out, to shut to the door, to turn our back on it laughing, is to make truth a bankrupt, and to leave the draft of science to be protested. The phenomenon of the tripod of old, and of the table of to-day, is entitled, like anything else, to observation. Psychic science will gain by it, without doubt. Let us add that to abandon phenomena to credulity is to commit treason against human reason.

Homer affirms that the tripods of Delphi walked of their own accord; and he explains the fact¹ by saying that Vulcan forged invisible wheels for them. The explanation does not much simplify the phenomenon. Plato relates that the statues of Dædalus gesticulated in the darkness, had a will of their own, and resisted their master; and that he was obliged to tie them up, so that they might not walk off. Strange dogs at the end of a chain! Fléchier mentions, at page 52 of his "Histoire de Théodose"—referring to the great conspiracy of the magicians of the fourth century against the emperor—a table-turning of which, perhaps, we shall speak elsewhere, in order to say what Fléchier did not say, and seemed to ignore. This table was covered with a round plating of several metals, *ex diversis metallicis materiis fabrefacta*, like the plates of copper and zinc actually employed in biology. So you may see that the phenomenon, always rejected and always reappearing, is not a matter of yesterday.

Besides, whatever credulity has said or thought about it, this phenomenon of the tripods and tables is without any connection, and it is the very thing we want to come to, with the inspiration of the poets,—an inspiration entirely direct. The sibyl has a tripod, the poet none. The poet is himself a tripod. He is a tripod of God. God has not made this marvellous distillery of thought, the brain of man, not to be made use of. Genius has all that it wants in its brain; every

¹ Song xviii. of the Iliad.

thought passes by there. Thought ascends and buds from the brain, as the fruit from the root. Thought is man's consequence; the root plunges into earth, the brain into God,—that is to say, into the Infinite.

Those who imagine (there are such, witness Forbes) that a poem like "Le Médecin de son Honneur," or "King Lear," can be dictated by a tripod or a table, err in a strange fashion; these works are the works of man. God has no need to make a piece of wood aid Shakespeare or Calderon.

Then let us dispose of the tripod. Poetry is the poet's own. Let us be respectful before the possible of which no one knows the limit; let us be attentive and serious before the extra-human, out of which we come, and which awaits us; but let us not diminish the great workers of earth by hypotheses of mysterious assistance, which is not necessary. Let us leave to the brain what belongs to it, and agree that the work of the men of genius is of the superhuman, the offspring of man.

CHAPTER II

SUPREME Art is the region of Equals.

The *chef d'œuvre* is adequate to the *chef d'œuvre*.

As water, when heated to 100° C., is incapable of calorific increase, and can rise no higher, so human thought attains in certain men its maximum intensity. Æschylus, Job, Phidias, Isaiah, Saint Paul, Juvenal, Dante, Michael Angelo, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven, with some others mark the 100° of genius.

The human mind has a summit.

This summit is the Ideal.

God descends, man rises to it.

In each age three or four men of genius undertake the ascent. From below, the world follow them with their eyes. These men go up the mountain, enter into the clouds, disappear, re-appear. People watch them, mark them. They



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

The portrait, supposed to have been the Original from which *Droeshout* engraved the picture facing the Title page in the *First Folio* Edition of the Master's works, at present preserved in Stratford-on-Avon.

William Shakespeare. Page 26.



walk by the side of precipices. A false step does not displease certain of the lookers-on. They daringly pursue their road. See them aloft, see them in the distance; they are but black specks. "How small they are!" says the crowd. They are giants. On they go. The road is uneven, its difficulties constant. At each step a wall, at each step a trap. As they rise, the cold increases. They must make their ladder, cut the ice, and walk on it, hewing the steps in haste. Every storm is raging. Nevertheless, they go forward in their madness. The air becomes difficult to breathe. The abyss increases around them. Some fall. It is well done. Others stop and retrace their steps; there is sad weariness.

The bold ones continue; those predestined persist. The dreadful declivity sinks beneath them and tries to draw them in; glory is traitorous. They are eyed by the eagles; the lightning plays about them; the hurricane is furious. No matter, they persevere. They ascend. He who arrives at the summit is thy equal, Homer!

Those names that we have mentioned, and those which we might have added, repeat them again. To choose between these men is impossible. There is no method for striking the balance between Rembrandt and Michael Angelo.

And, to confine ourselves solely to the authors and poets, examine them one after the other. Which is the greatest? Every one.

1. One, Homer, is the huge poet-child. The world is born, Homer sings. He is the bird of this aurora. Homer has the holy sincerity of the early dawn. He almost ignores shadow. Chaos, heaven, earth; Geo and Ceto; Jove, god of gods; Agamemnon, king of kings; peoples; flocks from the beginning; temples, towns, battles, harvests; the ocean; Diomedes fighting; Ulysses wandering; the windings of a sail seeking its home; Cyclops; dwarfs; a map of the world crowned by the gods of Olympus; and here and there a glimmer of the furnace permitting a sight of hell; priests, virgins, mothers; little children frightened by the plumes; the dog

who remembers: great words which fall from gray-beards; friendships, loves, passions, and the hydras; Vulcan for the laugh of the gods, Thersites for the laugh of men; two aspects of married life summed up for the benefit of ages in Helen and Penelope; the Styx; Destiny; the heel of Achilles, without which Destiny would be vanquished by the Styx; monsters, heroes, men; thousands of landscapes seen in perspective in the cloud of the old world,—this immensity, this is Homer. Troy coveted, Ithaca desired. Homer is war and travel,—the first two methods for the meeting of mankind. The camp attacks the fortress, the ship sounds the unknown, which is also an attack; around war every passion; around travels every kind of adventure,—two gigantic groups; the first, bloody, is called the *Iliad*; the second, luminous, is called the *Odyssey*. Homer makes men greater than Nature; they hurl at each other rocks which twelve pairs of oxen could not move. The gods hardly care to come in contact with them. Minerva takes Achilles by the hair; he turns round in anger: "What do you want with me, goddess?" No monotony in these puissant figures. These giants are graduated. After each hero, Homer breaks the mould. Ajax, son of Oïleus, is less high in stature than Ajax, son of Telamon. Homer is one of the men of genius who resolve that beautiful problem of art (the most beautiful of all, perhaps), — the true picture of humanity obtained by aggrandizing man; that is to say, the creation of the real in the ideal. Fable and history, hypothesis and tradition, the chimera and knowledge, make up Homer. He is fathomless, and he is cheerful. All the depth of ancient days moves happily radiant and luminous in the vast azure of this spirit. Lyncurgus, that peevish sage, half way between a Solon and a Draco, was conquered by Homer. He turned out of the way, while travelling, to go and read, at the house of Cleophilus, Homer's poems, placed there in remembrance of the hospitality that Homer, it is said, had formerly received in that house. Homer, to the Greeks, was a god; he had priests,—the Homerides. Alcibiades gave a bombastic orator a cuff for

boasting that he had never read Homer. The divinity of Homer has survived Paganism. Michael Angelo said, "When I read Homer, I look at myself to see if I am not twenty feet in height." Tradition will have it that the first verse of the *Iliad* should be a verse of Orpheus. This doubling Homer by Orpheus, increased in Greece the religion of Homer. The shield of Achilles¹ was commented on in the temples by Damo, daughter of Pythagoras. Homer, as the sun, has planets. Virgil, who writes the *Æneid*, Lucan, who writes "*Pharsalia*," Tasso, who writes "*Jerusalem*," Ariosto, who composes "*Roland*," Milton, who writes "*Paradise Lost*," Camoëns, who writes the "*Lusiades*," Klopstock, who wrote the "*Messiah*," Voltaire, who wrote the "*Henriade*," gravitate toward Homer, and sending back to their own moons his light reflected in different degrees, move at unequal distances in his boundless orbit. This is Homer. Such is the beginning of the epic poem.

2. Another, Job began the drama. This embryo is a colossus. Job begins the drama, and it is forty centuries ago, by placing Jehovah and Satan in presence of each other; the evil defies the good, and behold the action is begun. The earth is the place for the scene, and man the field of battle; the plagues are the actors. One of the wildest grandeurs of this poem is that in it the sun is inauspicious. The sun is in Job as in Homer; but it is no longer the dawn, it is midday. The mournful heaviness of the brazen ray falling perpendicularly on the desert pervades this poem, heated to a white heat. Job sweats on his dunghill. The shadow of Job is small and black, and hidden under him, as the snake under the rock. Tropical flies buzz on his sores. Job has above his head the frightful Arabian sun,—a bringer-up of monsters, an amplifier of plagues, who changes the cat into the tiger, the lizard into the crocodile, the pig into the rhinoceros, the snake into the boa, the nettle into the cactus, the wind into the simoom, the miasma into the plague. Job is anterior to Moses. Far into ages, by the side of Abraham,

¹ Song xviii. of the *Iliad*.

the Hebrew patriarch, there is Job, the Arabian patriarch. Before being proved, he had been happy,—“the greatest man in all the East,” says his poem. This was the labourer-king. He exercised the immense priesthood of solitude; he sacrificed and sanctified. Toward evening he gave the earth the blessing,—the “berac.” He was learned; he knew rhythm; his poem, of which the Arabian text is lost, was written in verse,—this, at least, is certain as regards from verse 3 of chap. iii. to the end. He was good; he did not meet a poor child without throwing him the small coin kesitha; he was “the foot of the lame man, and the eye of the blind.” It is from that that he was precipitated; fallen, he became gigantic. The whole poem of “Job” is the development of this idea,—the greatness that may be found at the bottom of the abyss. Job is more majestic when unfortunate than when prosperous. His leprosy is a purple cloth. His misery terrifies those who are there; they speak not to him until after a silence of seven days and seven nights. His lamentation is marked by they know not what quiet and sad sorcery. As he is crushing the vermin on his ulcers, he calls on the stars. He addresses Orion, the Hyades, which he names the Pleiades, and the signs that are at noonday. He says, “God has put an end to darkness.” He calls the diamond which is hidden, “the stone of obscurity.” He mixes with his distress the misfortune of others, and has tragic words that freeze,—“The widow is desolate.” He smiles also, and is then more frightful yet. He has around him Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar,—three implacable types of the friendly busybody, of whom he says, “You play on me as on a tambourine.” His language, submissive toward God, is bitter toward kings: “The kings of the earth build solitudes,” leaving our wit to find out whether he speaks of their tomb or their kingdom. Tacitus says, “Solitudinem faciunt.” As to Jehovah, he adores him; and under the furious scourging of the plagues, all his resistance is confined to asking of God, “Wilt thou not permit me to swallow my spittle?” That dates four thousand years ago. At the same hour, per-

haps, when the enigmatical astronomer of Denderah carves in the granite his mysterious zodiac, Job engraves his on human thought; and his zodiac is not made of stars, but of miseries. This zodiac turns yet above our heads. We have of Job only the Hebrew version, written by Moses. Such a poet, followed by such a translator, makes us dream! The man of the dunghill is translated by the man of Sinai. It is that, in reality, Job is a minister and a prophet. Job extracts from his drama a dogma. Job suffers, and draws an inference. Now, to suffer and draw an inference is to teach; sorrow, when logical, leads to God. Job teaches. Job, after having touched the summit of the drama, stirs up the depths of philosophy. He shows first that sublime madness of wisdom which, two thousand years later, by resignation making itself a sacrifice, will be the foolishness of the cross,—*stultitiam crucis*. The dunghill of Job, transfigured, will become the Calvary of Jesus.

3. Another, Æschylus, enlightened by the unconscious divination of genius, without suspecting that he has behind him, in the East, the resignation of Job, completes it, unwittingly, by the revolt of Prometheus; so that the lesson may be complete, and that the human race, to whom Job has taught but duty, shall feel in Prometheus Right drawing. There is something ghastly in Æschylus from one end to the other; there is a vague outline of an extraordinary Medusa behind the figures in the foreground. Æschylus is magnificent and powerful,—as though you saw him knitting his brows beyond the sun. He has two Cains,—Eteocles and Polynices; Genesis has but one. His swarm of sea-monsters come and go in the dark sky, as a flock of driven birds. Æschylus has none of the known proportions. He is rough, abrupt, immoderate, incapable of smoothing the way, almost ferocious, with a grace of his own which resembles the flowers in wild places, less haunted by nymphs than by the Eumenides, of the faction of the Titans; among goddesses choosing the sombre ones, and smiling darkly at the Gorgons; a son of the earth like Othryx and Briareus, and ready to attempt again

the scaling of heaven against that *parvenu* Jupiter. Eschylus is ancient mystery made man,—something like a Pagan prophet. His work, if we had it all, would be a kind of Greek bible. Poet hundred-handed, having an Orestes more fatal than Ulysses and a Thebes grander than Troy, hard as a rock, raging like the foam, full of steepes, torrents, and precipices, and such a giant that at times you might suppose that he becomes mountain. Coming later than the *Iliad*, he has the appearance of an elder son of Homer.

4. Another, Isaiah, seems, above humanity, as a roaring of continual thunder. He is the great censure. His style, a kind of nocturnal cloud, lightens up unceasingly with images which suddenly empurple all the depths of this dark mind, and makes us exclaim, "He gives light!" Isaiah takes hand-to-hand the evil which, in civilization, makes its appearance before the good. He cries "Silence!" at the noise of chariots, of *fêtes*, of triumphs. The foam of his prophecy surges even on Nature. He denounces Babylon to the moles and bats, promises Nineveh briers, Tyre ashes, Jerusalem night, fixes a date for the wrong-doers, warns the powers of their approaching end, assigns a day against idols, high citadels, the fleets of Tarsus, the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Basan. He is standing on the threshold of civilization, and he refuses to enter. He is a kind of mouthpiece of the desert speaking to multitudes, and claiming for quicksands, briers, and breezes the place where towns are, because it is just; because the tyrant and the slave—that is to say, pride and shame—exist wherever there are walled enclosures; because evil is there incarnate in man; because in solitude there is but the beast, while in the city there is the monster. That which Isaiah made a reproach of in his day—idolatry, pride, war, prostitution, ignorance—still exists. Isaiah is the eternal contemporary of vices which turn valets, and crimes which exalt themselves into kings.

5. Another, Ezekiel, is the wild soothsayer,—the genius of the cavern; thought which the roar suits. But listen. This savage makes a prophecy to the world,—Progress.

Nothing more astonishing. Ah, Isaiah overthrows? Very well! Ezekiel will reconstruct. Isaiah refuses civilization. Ezekiel accepts, but transforms it. Nature and humanity blend together in that softened howl which Ezekiel throws forth. The idea of duty is in Job; of right, in Æschylus. Ezekiel brings before us the resulting third idea,—the human race ameliorated, posterity more and more free. That posterity may be a rising instead of a setting star is man's consolation. Time present works for time to come. Work, then, and hope. Such is Ezekiel's cry. Ezekiel is in Chaldæa; and from Chaldæa he sees distinctly Judæa, as from oppression you may see liberty. He declares peace as others declare war. He prophesies harmony, goodness, sweetness, union, the blending of races, love. Notwithstanding, he is terrible. He is the austere benefactor. He is the universal kind-hearted grumbler at the human race. He scolds, he almost gnashes his teeth; and people fear and hate him. The men about are thorns to him. "I live among the briers," he says. He condemns himself to be a symbol, and makes in his person, become hideous, a sign of human misery and popular degradation. He is a kind of voluntary Job. In his town, in his house, he causes himself to be bound with cords, and rests mute: behold the slave. In the public place he eats dung: behold the courtier. This makes Voltaire burst into laughter, and causes our tears to flow. Ah, Ezekiel, so far does your devotion go! You render shame visible by horror; you compel ignominy to turn the head when recognizing herself in the dirt; you show that to accept a man for master is to eat dung; you cause a shudder to the cowards who follow the prince, by putting into your stomach what they put into their souls; you preach deliverance by vomiting; be revered! This man, this being, this figure, this swine-prophet, is sublime. And the transfiguration that he announces he proves. How? By transfiguring himself. From this horrible and soiled lip comes forth the blaze of poetry. Never has grander language been spoken, never more extraordinary.

"I saw the vision of God. A whirlwind comes from the north, and a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself. I saw a chariot and a likeness of four animals. Above the creatures and the chariot was a space like a terrible crystal. The wheels of the chariot were made of eyes, and so high that they were dreadful. The noise of the wings of the four angels was as the noise of the All-Powerful, and when they stopped they lowered their wings. And I saw a likeness which was as fire, and which put forth a hand. And a voice said, 'The kings and the judges have in their souls gods of dung. I will take from their breasts the heart of stone, and I will give them a heart of flesh.' I went to them that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I remained there astonished among them seven days."

And again:—

"There was a plain and dry bones; and I said, 'Bones, rise up,' and I looked, and there came nerves on these bones, and flesh on these nerves, and a skin above; but the spirit was not there. And I cried, 'Spirit, come from the four winds, breathe, so that these dead revive.' The spirit came. The breath entered into them, and they rose up, and it was an army, and it was a people. Then the voice said, 'You shall be one nation, you shall have no king or judge but me; and I will be the God who has one people, and you shall be the people who have one God.'"

Is not everything there? Search for a higher formula, you will not find it. A free man under a sovereign God. This visionary eater of dung is a resuscitator. Ezekiel has mud on the lips and sun in the eyes. Among the Jews the reading of Ezekiel was dreaded. It was not permitted before the age of thirty years. Priests, disturbed, put a seal on this poet. People could not call him an impostor. His terror as a prophet was incontestable. He had evidently seen what he related. Thence his authority. His very enigmas made him an oracle. They could not tell which it was, these women sitting toward the north weeping for Tammuz. Impossible to divine what was the "hasmal," this metal which he pictured as in fusion in the furnace of the dream; but nothing was more clear than his vision of Progress. Ezekiel saw the quadruple man,—man, ox, lion, and eagle; that is to say, the master of thought, the master of the field, the master of the desert, the master of the air. Nothing forgotten. It is posterity complete, from Aristotle to Christopher Colum-

bus, from Triptolemus to Montgolfier. Later on, the Gospel also will become quadruple in the four Evangelists, making Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John subservient to man, the ox, the lion, and the eagle, and, remarkable fact, to symbolize progress will take the four faces of Ezekiel. At all events, Ezekiel, like Christ, calls himself the "Son of Man." Jesus often in his parables invokes and cites Ezekiel; and this kind of first Messiah paves the way for the second. There are in Ezekiel three constructions,—man, in whom he places progress; the temple, where he puts a light that he calls glory; the city, where he puts God. He cries to the temple,—no priest here, neither they, nor their kings, nor the carcasses of their kings.¹ One cannot help thinking that this Ezekiel, a species of biblical demagogue, would help '93 in the terrible sweeping of St. Denis. As for the city built by him, he mutters above it this mysterious name, *JEHOVAH SCHAMMAH*, which signifies "the Eternal is there." Then he is silent and thoughtful in the darkness, pointing at humanity; farther on, in the depth of the horizon, a continued increase of azure.

6. Another, *Lucretius*, is that vast obscure thing, *All*. *Jupiter* is in *Homer*; *Jehovah* is in *Job*; in *Lucretius* *Pan* appears. Such is *Pan's* greatness that he has under him *Destiny*, which is above *Jupiter*. *Lucretius* has travelled and he has mused, which is another voyage. He has been at *Athens*; he has been in the haunts of philosophers; he has studied *Greece* and made out *India*. *Democritus* has made him dream on matter, and *Anaximander* on space. His dreams have become doctrine. Nothing is known of the incidents of his life. Like *Pythagoras*, he frequented the two mysterious schools on the *Euphrates*,—*Neharda* and *Pombeditha*; and he may have met there the Jewish doctors. He spelt the papyri of *Sepphoris*, which, at his time, was not yet transformed into *Diocæsarea*. He lived with the pearl-fishers of the isle of *Tylos*. We may find in the *Apocrypha* traces of an ancient strange itinerary recommended, according to some, to the philosophers by *Empedocles*, the magician,

¹ Ezekiel, xliiii. 7.

of Agrigentum, and, according to others, to the rabbis by the high-priest Eleazer who corresponded with Ptolemy Philadelphus. This itinerary would have served at a later time as a standard for the travels of the Apostles. The traveller who followed this itinerary went through the five satrapies of the country of the Philistines, visited the people who charm serpents and suck poisonous sores,—the Psylli; drank of the torrent Bosor, which marks the frontier of Arabia Deserta; then touched and handled the bronze *carcan* of Andromeda, still sealed to the rock of Joppa; Balbec in Syria; Apamea, on the Orontes, where Nicanor nourished his elephants; the harbour of Eziongeber, where the vessels of Ophir, laden with gold, stopped; Segher, which produced white incense, preferred to that of Hadramauth; the two Syrtes, the mountain of Emerald Smaragdus; the Nasamones, who pillaged the shipwrecked; the black nation, Agysimba; Adribe, the town of crocodiles; Cynopolis, town of aloes; the wonderful cities of Comagena, Claudia, and Barsalium; perhaps even Tadmor, the town of Solomon,—such were the stages of this almost fabulous pilgrimage of the thinkers. This pilgrimage, did Lucretius make it? One cannot tell. His numerous travels are beyond doubt. He had seen so many men that at the end they were all mixed up in his eye, and this multitude had become to him shadows. He is arrived at that excess of simplification of the universe which is almost its entire fading away. He has sounded until he feels the plummet float. He has questioned the vague spectres of Byblos; he has conversed with the severed tree of Chyteron, who is Juno-Thespia. Perhaps he has spoken in the reeds to Oannes, the man-fish of Chaldea, who had two heads,—at the top the head of a man, below the head of a hydra, and who, drinking chaos by his lower orifice, re-vomited it on the earth by his upper lip; in knowledge awful. Lucretius has this knowledge. Isaiah borders on the archangels, Lucretius on larvas. Lucretius twists the ancient veil of Isis, steeped in the waters of darkness, and expresses out of it sometimes in torrents, sometimes drop by drop, a sombre poetry. The boundless is in Lucre-

tius. At times there passes a powerful spondaic verse almost terrible, and full of shadow: "Circum se foliis ac frondibus involventes." Here and there a vast image is sketched in the forest,—“Tunc Venus in sylvis jungebat corpora amantum;” and the forest is Nature. These verses are impossible with Virgil. Lucretius turns his back on humanity, and looks fixedly on the Enigma. Lucretius's spirit, working to the very deeps, is placed between this reality, the atom, and this impossibility, the vacuum; by turns attracted by these two precipices. Religious when he contemplates the atom, sceptical when he sees the void; thence his two aspects, equally profound, whether he denies, whether he affirms. One day this traveller commits suicide. This is his last departure. He puts himself *en route* for Death. He departs to see. He has embarked successively on all the pinnaces,—on the galley of Trevirium for Sanastrea in Macedonia; on the trireme of Carystus for Metapon in Greece; on the skiff of Cyllenus for the island of Samothrace; on the sandal of Samothrace for Naxos, where is Bacchus; on the *ceroscaph* of Naxos for Syria; on the vessel of Syria for Egypt, and on the ship of the Red Sea for India. It remains for him to make one voyage. He is curious about the dark country; he takes his passage on the coffin, and himself unfastening the mooring, pushes with foot into space this dark vessel that floats on the unknown wave.

7. Another, Juvenal, has everything in which Lucretius fails,—passion, emotion, fever, tragic flame, passion for honesty, avenging sneer, personality, humanity. He dwells in a certain given point in creation, and he contents himself with it, finding there what may nourish and swell his heart with justice and anger. Lucretius is the universe, Juvenal the locality. And what a locality! Rome. Between the two they are the double voice which speaks to land and town,—*urbi et orbi*. Juvenal has, above the Roman Empire, the enormous flapping of wings of the griffin above the rest of the reptiles. He pounces upon this swarm and takes them, one after the other, in his terrible beak,—from the adder

who is emperor and calls himself Nero, to the earthworm who is a bad poet and calls himself Codrus. Isaiah and Juvenal have each their harlot; but there is something more gloomy than the shadow of Babel,—it is the crashing of the bed of the Cæsars; and Babylon is less formidable than Messalina. Juvenal is the ancient free spirit of the dead republics; in him there is a Rome, in the bronze of which Athens and Sparta are cast. Thence in his poetry something of Aristophanes and something of Lycurgus. Take care of him, he is severe. Not a cord is wanting to his lyre or to the lash he uses. He is lofty, rigid, austere, thundering, violent, grave, just, inexhaustible in imagery, harshly gracious when he chooses. His cynicism is the indignation of modesty. His grace, thoroughly independent and a true figure of liberty, has talons; it appears all at once, enlivening, by we cannot tell what supple and spirited undulations, the well-formed majesty of his hexameter. You may imagine that you see the Cat of Corinth roaming on the frieze of the Parthenon. There is the epic in this satire; that which Juvenal has in his hand is the sceptre of gold with which Ulysses beat Thersites. “Bombast, declamation, exaggeration, hyperbole,” cry the slaughtered deformities; and these cries, stupidly repeated by rhetoricians, are a noise of glory. “Crime is quite equal to committing things or relating them,” say Tillemont, Marc Muret, Garasse, etc.,—fools, who, like Muret, are sometimes knaves. Juvenal’s invective blazes since two thousand years ago,—a fearful flash of poetry which still burns Rome in the presence of centuries. This splendid fire breaks out and, far from diminishing with time, increases under the whirl of its mournful smoke. From it proceed rays in behalf of liberty, probity, heroism; and it may be said that it throws even into our civilization minds full of his light. What is *Régnier*? what *D’Aubigné*? what *Corneille*?—scintillations of Juvenal.

8. Another, Tacitus, is the historian. Liberty is incarnate in him as in Juvenal, and rises, dead, to the judgment-seat, having for a toga its winding-shroud, and sum-

mons to his bar tyrants. The soul of a people become the soul of man, is Juvenal, as we have just said: thus it is with Tacitus. By the side of the poet who condemns stands the historian who punishes. Tacitus, seated on the curule chair of genius, summons and seizes *in flagrante delicto* these guilty ones, the Cæsars. The Roman Empire is a long crime. This crime commences by four demons,—Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero. Tiberius, the emperor's spy; the eye which watches the world; the first dictator who dared to twist for himself the law of power made for the Roman people; knowing Greek, intellectual, sagacious, sarcastic, eloquent, terrible; loved by informers; the murderer of citizens, of knights, of the senate, of his wife, of his family; having rather the air of stabbing people than massacring them; humble before the barbarians; a traitor with Archelaus, a coward with Artabanus; having two thrones,—Rome for his ferocity, Caprea for his baseness; an inventor of vices and names for vices; an old man with a seraglio of children; gaunt, bald, crooked, bandy-legged, sour-smelling, eaten up with leprosy, covered with suppurations, masked with plasters, crowned with laurels; having ulcers like Job, and the sceptre as well, surrounded by an oppressive silence; seeking a successor, smelling out Caligula, and finding him good; a viper who selects a tiger. Caligula, the man who has known fear, the slave become master, trembling under Tiberius, terrible after Tiberius, vomiting his fright of yesterday in atrocity. Nothing comes up to this mad fool. An executioner makes a mistake and kills, instead of the condemned one, an innocent man; Caligula smiles, and says, "The condemned had not more deserved it." He gets a woman eaten alive by dogs, for the sake of seeing it. He lies publicly with his three sisters, stark naked. One of them dies,—Drusilla. He says, "Behead those who do not bewail her, for she is my sister; and crucify those who bewail her, for she is a goddess." He makes his horse a pontiff, as, later on, Nero made his monkey god. He offers to the universe this wretched spectacle: the annihilation of intellect by power. Prostitute, sharper, a robber, breaking

the busts of Homer and Virgil, his head dressed as Apollo with rays, and booted with wings like Mercury; frantically master of the world, desiring incest with his mother, a plague to his empire, famine to his people, rout to his army, resemblance to the gods, and one sole head to the human race that he might cut it off,— such is Caius Caligula. He forces the son to assist at the torment of his father and the husband the violation of his wife, and to laugh. Claudius is a mere sketch of a ruler. He is nearly a man made a tyrant, a noddle-head crowned. He hides himself; they discover him, they drag him from his hole, and they throw him terrified on the throne. Emperor, he still trembles, having the crown but not sure that he has his head. He feels for his head at times, as if he searched for it. Then he gets more confident, and decrees three new letters to be added to the alphabet. He is a learned man, this idiot. They strangle a senator. He says, “I did not order it, but since it is done, it is well.” His wife prostitutes herself before him. He looks at her, and says, “Who is this woman?” He scarcely exists: he is a shadow; but this shadow crushes the world. At length the hour for his departure arrives: his wife poisons him, his doctor finishes him. He says, “I am saved,” and dies. After his death they come to see his corpse. While alive they had seen his ghost. Nero is the most formidable figure of *ennui* that has ever appeared among men. The yawning monster that the ancients called *Livor* and the moderns call *Spleen*, gives us this enigma to divine,— Nero. Nero seeks simply a distraction. Poet, comedian, singer, coachman, exhausting ferocity to find voluptuousness, trying a change of sex, the husband of the eunuch Sporus, and bride of the slave Pythagoras, and promenading the streets of Rome between his husband and wife. Having two pleasures — one to see the people clutching pieces of gold, diamonds and pearls, and the other to see the lions clutch the people; an incendiary for curiosity’s sake, and a parricide for want of employment. It is to these four that Tacitus dedicates his four first pil-lories. He hangs their reign to their necks: he fastens that

carcan to theirs. His book of Caligula is lost. Nothing easier to comprehend than the loss and obliteration of these kinds of books. To read them was a crime. A man having been caught reading the history of Caligula by Suetonius, Commodus had him thrown to the wild beasts. "Feris objici jussit," says Lampridius. The horror of those days is wonderful. Manners, below and above stairs, are ferocious. You may judge of the cruelty of the Romans by the atrocity of the Gauls. A row breaks out in Gaul: the peasants place the Roman ladies, naked and still alive, on harrows whose points enter here and there into the body: then they cut their breasts from them and sew them in their mouths, as though they had the appearance of eating them. "These are scarcely reprisals" (*Vix vindicta est*), says the Roman general, Turpilianus. Those Roman ladies had the practice, while chattering with their lovers, of sticking pins of gold in the breasts of their Persian or Gallic slaves who dressed their hair. Such is the humanity at which Tacitus is present. This view renders him terrible. He states the facts, and leaves you to draw your conclusions. You only meet a Potiphar in Rome.

When Agrippina, reduced to her last resource, seeing her grave in the eyes of her son, offers him her bed, when her lips seek those of Nero, Tacitus is there, following her with his eyes, *lasciva oscula et prænuntias flagitii blanditias*; and he denounces to the world this effort of a monstrous and trembling mother to make the parricide mis-carry by incest. Whatever Justus Lipsius, who bequeathed his pen to the Holy Virgin, has said, Domitian exiled Tacitus, and did well. Men like Tacitus are unhealthy subjects for authority. Tacitus applies his style to the shoulder of an emperor, and the marks remain. Tacitus always makes his thrust at the required spot. A deep thrust. Juvenal, all-powerful poet, deals about him, scatters, makes a show, falls and rebounds, strikes right and left, a hundred blows at a time, on laws, manners, bad magistrates, corrupt verses, liberties and the idle, on Cæsar, on the people,—everywhere.

He is lavish, like hail; he is careless, like the whip. Tacitus has the conciseness of red iron.

9. Another, John, is the virgin old man. All the ardent sap of man, become smoke and mysterious shaking, is in his head, as a vision. One does not escape love. Love, unsatiated and discontented, changes itself at the end of life into a gloomy overflowing of chimeras. The woman wants man; otherwise man, instead of human, will have a phantom poetry. Some beings, however, resist universal procreation, and then they are in that peculiar state where monstrous inspiration can weaken itself on them. The Apocalypse is the almost mad *chef-d'œuvre* of this wonderful chastity. John, while young, was pleasant and wild. He loved Jesus; then could love nothing else. There is a deep resemblance between the Canticle of Canticles and the Apocalypse; the one and the other are explosions of pent-up virginity. The heart, mighty volcano, bursts open; there proceeds from it this dove, the Canticle of Canticles, or this dragon, the Apocalypse. These two poems are the two poles of ecstacy,—voluptuousness and horror; the two extreme limits of the soul are attained. In the first poem ecstacy exhausts love; in the second, terrifies it, and carries to mankind, henceforth forever disquieted, the dreadful fright of the eternal precipice. Another resemblance, not less worthy of attention, there is between John and Daniel. The nearly invisible thread of affinity is carefully followed by the eye of those who see in the prophetic spirit a human and normal phenomenon, and who, far from disdaining the question of miracles, generalize it, and calmly attach it to existing phenomena. Religions lose, and science gains by it. It has not been sufficiently remarked that the seventh chapter of Daniel contains the root of the Apocalypse. Empires are there represented as beasts. Therefore has the legend associated the two poets! it makes the one traverse the den of lions, and the other the caldron of boiling oil. Independently of the legend, the life of John is fine. An exemplary life which undergoes strange openings, passing from Golgotha to Pat-

mos, and from the execution of Messiah to the exile of the prophet. John, after having been present at the sufferings of Christ, finished by suffering on his own account; the suffering seen made him an apostle, the suffering endured made him a magician,—the growth of the spirit was the result of the growth of the trial. Bishop, he writes the gospel; proscribed, he composes the Apocalypse,—tragic work, written under the dictation of an eagle, the poet having above his head we know not what mournful flapping of wings. The whole Bible is between two visionaries,—Moses and John. This poem of poems merges out of chaos in Genesis, and finishes in the Apocalypse by thunders. John was one of the great vagrants of the language of fire. During the Last Supper his head was on the breast of Jesus, and he could say, "My ear has heard the beating of God's heart." He went to relate it to men. He spoke a barbarous Greek, mixed with Hebrew expressions and Syrian words, harsh and grating, yet charming. He went to Ephesus, he went to Media, he went among the Parthians. He dared to enter Ctesiphon, a town of the Parthians, built as a counterpoise to Babylon. He faced the living idol, Cobaris, king, god, and man, forever immovable on his block, which serves him as throne and latrine. He evangelized Persia, which the Gospel calls Paras. When he appeared at the Council of Jerusalem, they thought they saw a pillar of the Church. He looked with stupefaction at Cerintus and Ebion, who said that Jesus was but a man. When they questioned him on the mystery, he answered, "Love you one another?" He died at the age of ninety-four years, under Trajan. According to tradition, he is not dead; he is spared, and John is ever living at Patmos as Barberousse at Kaiserslautern. There are some waiting-caverns for these mysterious everlasting beings. John, as an historian, has his equals,—Matthew, Luke, Mark; as a visionary he is alone. There is no dream approaches his, so deep it is in the infinite. His metaphors pass out from eternity, distracted; his poetry has a profound smile of madness; the reverberation of the Most High is in the eye of

this man. It is the sublime going fully astray. Men do not understand it — scorn it, and laugh. “My dear Thiriot,” says Voltaire, “the Apocalypse is filth.” Religious, being in want of this book, have taken to worshipping it; but, in order not to be thrown to the common sewer, it must be put on the altar. What does it matter? John is a spirit. It is in the John of Patmos, among all, that the communication between certain men of genius and the abyss is apparent. In all other poets men get a glimpse of this communication; in John they see it, at times they touch it, and have a shivering fit in placing, so to speak, the hand on this sombre door. That is the way to the Deity. It seems, when you read the poem of Patmos, that some one pushes you from behind; you have a confused outline of the dreadful opening. It fills you with terror and attraction. If John had only that, he would be immense.

10. Another, Paul, a saint for the Church, a great man for humanity, represents this prodigy, at the same time human and divine,—conversion. He is the one who has had a glimpse of the future. It leaves him haggard; and nothing can be more magnificent than this face, forever wondering, of the man conquered by the light. Paul, born a Pharisee, had been a weaver of camel’s-hair for tents, and servant of one of the judges of Jesus Christ, Gamaliel; then the scribes had advanced him, trusting to his natural ferocity. He was the man of the past; he had taken care of the mantles of the stone-throwers. He aspired, having studied with the priests, to become an executioner; he was on the road for this. All at once a wave of light emanates from the darkness, throws him down from his horse, and henceforth there will be in the history of the human race this wonderful thing, — the road to Damascus. That day of the metamorphosis of Saint Paul is a great day: keep the date,—it corresponds to the 25th January in our Gregorian calendar. The road to Damascus is necessary to the march of Progress. To fall into the truth and to rise a just man, a fall and transfiguration, that is sublime. It is the history of Saint Paul. From

his day it will be the history of humanity. The flash of light is beyond the flash of lightning. Progress will carry itself on by a series of scintillations. As for Saint Paul, who has been turned aside by the force of new conviction, this harsh stroke from on high opens to him genius. Once on his feet again, behold him proceed: he will no more stop. "Forward!" is his cry. He is a cosmopolite. He loves the outsiders, whom Paganism calls barbarians, and Christianity calls Gentiles; he devotes himself to them. He is the apostle of the outer world. He writes to the nations epistles on behalf of God. Listen to him speaking to the Galatians: "O insane Galatians! how can you go back to the yokes to which you were tied? There are no more Jews, or Greeks, or slaves. Do not carry out your grand ceremonies ordained by your laws. I declare unto you that all that is nothing. Love each other. Man must be a new creature. Freedom is awaiting you." There were at Athens, on the hill of Mars, steps hewn in rock, which may be seen to this day. On these steps sat the great judges before whom Orestes had appeared. There Socrates had been judged. Paul went there; and there, at night (the Arcopagus only sat at night), he said to the grave men, "I come to announce to you the unknown God." The Epistles of Paul to the Gentiles are simple and profound, with the subtlety so marked in its influence over savages. There are in these messages gleams of hallucination; Paul speaks of the Celestials as if he distinctly saw them. Like John, half-way between life and eternity, it seems that he had one part of his thought on the earth and one in the Unknown; and it may be said, at moments, that one of his verses answers to another from beyond the dark wall of the tomb. This half-possession of death gives him a personal certainty, and one often distinctly apart from the dogma, and a mark of conviction on his personal conceptions, which makes him almost heretical. His humility, bordering on the mysterious, is lofty. Peter says, "The words of Paul may be taken in a bad sense." The deacon Hilaire and the Luciferians ascribe their schism to the

Epistles of Paul. Paul is at heart so anti-monarchical that King James I., very much encouraged by the orthodox University of Oxford, caused the Epistle to the Romans to be burned by the hand of the common hangman. It is true it was one with a commentary by David Pareus. Many of Paul's works are rejected by the Church: they are the finest; and among them his Epistle to the Laodiceans, and above all his Apocalypse, erased by the Council of Rome under Gelasius. It would be curious to compare it with the Apocalypse of John. On the opening that Paul had made to heaven the Church wrote, "Entrance forbidden." He is not less holy for it. It is his official consolation. Paul has the restlessness of the thinker; text and formulary are little for him. The letter does not suffice; the letter, it is matter. Like all men of progress, he speaks with reserve of the written law; he prefers grace, as we prefer justice. What is grace? It is the inspiration from on high; it is the breath, *flatus ubi vult*; it is liberty. Grace is the spirit of law. This discovery of the spirit of law belongs to Saint Paul; and what he calls "grace" from a heavenly point of view, we, from an earthly point, call "right." Such is Paul. The greatness of a spirit by the irruption of clearness, the beauty of violence done by truth to one spirit, breaks forth in this man. In that, we insist, lies the virtue of the road to Damascus. Henceforth, whoever wishes this increase, must follow the guide-post of Saint Paul. All those to whom justice shall reveal itself, every blindness desirous of the day, all the cataracts looking to be healed, all searchers after conviction, all the great adventurers after virtue, all the holders of good in quest of truth, shall go by this road. The light that they find there shall change nature, for the light is always relative to darkness; it shall increase in intensity. After having been revelation, it shall be rationalism; but it shall always be light. Voltaire is like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus. The road to Damascus shall be forever the passage for great minds. It shall also be the passage for peoples,—for peoples, these vast individualisms,

have like each of us their crisis and their hour. Paul, after his glorious fall, rose up again armed against ancient errors, with that flaming sword, Christianity; and two thousand years after, France, struck by the light, arouses herself, she also holding in hand this sword of fire, the Revolution.

11. Another, Dante, has mentally conceived the abyss. He has made the epic poem of spectres. He rends the earth; in the terrible hole he has made he puts Satan. Then he pushes through purgatory up to heaven. Where all end Dante begins. Dante is beyond man; beyond, not without, — a singular proposition, which, however, has nothing contradictory in it, the soul being a prolongation of man into the indefinite. Dante twists light and shade into a huge spiral; it descends, then it ascends. Wonderful architecture! At the threshold is the sacred mist; across the entrance is stretched the corpse of Hope; all that you perceive beyond is night. The infinite anguish is sobbing somewhere in the invisible darkness. You lean over this gulf-poem. Is it a crater? You hear reports; the verse shoots out narrow and livid, as from the fissures of a solfatara. It is vapour now, then lava. This paleness speaks; and then you know that the volcano, of which you have caught a glimpse, is hell. This is no longer the human medium; you are in the unknown abyss. In this poem the imponderable submits to the laws of the ponderable, with which it is mixed, as in the sudden tumbling down of a building on fire, the smoke carried down by the ruins, falls and rolls with them, and seems caught under the timber and the stones; thence strange effects: the ideas seem to suffer and to be punished in men. The idea, sufficiently man to undergo expiation, is the phantom (a form that is shade), impalpable, but not invisible,—an appearance retaining yet a sufficient amount of reality for the chastisement to have a hold on it; sin in the abstract state, but having kept the human figure. It is not only the wicked who grieves in this Apocalypse, it is the evil; there all possible bad actions are in despair. This spiritualization of pain gives to the poem a powerful moral import.

The depth of hell once sounded, Dante pierces it, and re-mounts to the other side of the infinite. In rising, he becomes idealized; and thought drops the body as a robe. From Virgil he passes to Beatrice. His guide to hell, it is the poet; his guide to heaven, it is poetry. The epic poem continues, and has more grandeur yet; but man comprehends it no more. Purgatory and paradise are not less extraordinary than gehenna; but the more he ascends the less interested is man. He was somewhat at home in hell, but he is no longer so in heaven. He cannot recognize himself in angels. The human eye is perhaps not made for so much sun; and when the poem draws happiness, it becomes tedious. It is generally the case with all happiness. Marry the lovers, or send the souls to dwell in paradise, it is well; but seek the drama elsewhere than there. After all, what does it matter to Dante if you no longer follow him? He goes on without you. He goes alone, this lion. His work is a wonder. What a philosopher is this visionary! What a sage is this madman! Dante lays down the law for Montesquieu; the penal divisions of "*L'Esprit des Lois*" are an exact copy of the classifications in the hell of the "*Divina Commedia*." That which Juvenal does for the Rome of the Cæsars, Dante does for the Rome of popes; but Dante is a more terrible judge than Juvenal. Juvenal whips with cutting thongs; Dante scourges with flames. Juvenal condemns; Dante damns. Woe to the living on whom this awful traveller fixes the unfathomable glare of his eyes!

12. Another, Rabelais, is the soul of Gaul. And who says Gaul says also Greece, for the Attic salt and the Gallic jest have at bottom the same flavour; and if anything, buildings apart, resembles the Piræus, it is La Rapée. Aristophanes is distanced; Aristophanes is wicked. Rabelais is good; Rabelais would have defended Socrates. In the order of lofty genins, Rabelais chronologically follows Dante; after the stern face, the sneering visage. Rabelais is the wondrous mask of ancient comedy detached from the Greek proscenium, from bronze made flesh, henceforth a human

living face, remaining enormous, and coming among us to laugh at us, and with us. Dante and Rabelais spring from the school of the Franciscan friars, as later Voltaire springs from the Jesuits. Dante the incarnate sorrow, Rabelais the parody, Voltaire the irony,—they came from the Church against the Church. Every genius has his invention or his discovery. Rabelais has made this one: the belly. The serpent is in man; it is the intestines. It tempts, betrays, and punishes. Man, single being as a spirit and complex as man, has within himself for his earthly mission three centres,—the brain, the heart, the stomach. Each of these centres is august by one great function which is peculiar to it: the brain has thought, the heart has love, the belly has paternity and maternity. The belly may be tragic. “*Feri ventrem,*” says Agrippina. Catherine Sforza, threatened with the death of her children, kept in hostage, exhibits herself naked to her navel on the battlements of the citadel of Rimini and says to the enemy, “With this I can give birth to others.” In one of the epic convulsions of Paris a woman of the people, standing on a barricade, raised her petticoat, showed the soldiery her naked belly, and cried, “Kill your mothers!” The soldiers perforated that belly with balls. The belly has its heroism; but it is from it that flows in life corruption, in art comedy. The breast, where the heart rests, has for its summit the head; the belly has the phallus. The belly being the centre of matter, is our gratification and our danger; it contains appetite, satiety, and putrefaction. The devotion, the tenderness, which we feel then are subject to death, egotism replaces them. Easily do the affections become intestines. That the hymn can become a drunkard’s brawl, that the strophe can be deformed into a couplet, is sad. That comes from the beast that is in man. The belly is essentially this beast. Degradation seems to be its law. The ladder of sensual poetry has for its topmost round the Canticle of Canticles, and for its lowest the coarse jest. The belly god is Silenus; the belly emperor is Vitellius; the belly animal is the pig. One of those horrid Ptolemies was called the Belly,

— *Physcon*. The belly is to humanity a formidable weight: it breaks every moment the equilibrium between the soul and the body. It fills history. It is responsible for nearly all crimes. It is the bottle of all vices. It is the belly which by voluptuousness makes the sultan and by drunkenness the czar; it is this that shows Tarquin the bed of Lucrece; it is this that ends by making that senate which had waited for Brennus and dazzled Jugurtha deliberate on the sauce of a turbot. It is the belly which counsels the ruined libertine, Caesar, the passage of the Rubicon. To pass the Rubicon, how well that pays one's debts! To pass the Rubicon, how readily that throws women into one's arms! What good dinners afterward! And the Roman soldiers enter Rome with the cry, "Urbani, claudit uxores; mœchum calvum adducimus." The appetite debauches the intellect. Voluptuousness replaces will. At starting, as is always the case, there is some nobleness. It is the orgy. There is a gradation between being fuddled and being dead drunk.

Then the orgy degenerates into bestial gluttony. Where there was Solomon there is Ramponneau. Man becomes a barrel; an inner sea of dark ideas drowns thought; conscience submerged cannot warn the drunken soul. Beastliness is consumed; it is not even any longer cynical, it is empty and beastly. Diogenes disappears; there remains but the barrel. We commence by Alcibiades, we finish by Trimalcion. It is complete; nothing more, neither dignity, nor shame, nor honour, nor virtue, nor wit,—animal gratification in all its nakedness, thorough impurity. Thought dissolves itself in satiety; carnal gorging absorbs everything; nothing survives of the grand sovereign creature inhabited by the soul. As the word goes, the belly eats the man. Such is the final state of all societies where the ideal is eclipsed. That passes for prosperity, and is called aggrandizing one's self. Sometimes even philosophers thoughtlessly aid this degradation by inserting in their doctrines the materialism which is in the consciences. This sinking of man to the level of the human beast is a great calamity. Its

first fruit is the turpitude visible at the summit of all professions,—the venal judge, the simoniacal priest, the hireling soldier; laws, manners, and beliefs are a dunghheap,—*totus homo fit excrementum*. In the sixteenth century all the institutions of the past are in that state. Rabelais gets hold of that situation; he proves it; he authenticates that belly which is the world. Civilization is, then, but a mass; science is matter; religion is blessed with a stomach, feudality is digesting; royalty is obese. What is Henry VIII.? A paunch. Rome is a fat-gutted old woman. Is it health? Is it sickness? It is perhaps obesity; it is perhaps dropsy—query. Rabelais, doctor and priest, feels the pulse of Papacy; he shakes his head and bursts out laughing. Is it because he has found life? No, it is because he has felt death; it is, in reality, breathing its last. While Luther reforms, Rabelais jests. Which tends best to the end? Rabelais ridicules the monk, the bishop, the Pope; laughter and death-rattle together; fool's bell sounding the tocsin! Well, then, what? I thought it was a feast; it is agony. One may be deceived by the nature of the hiccough. Let us laugh all the same. Death is at the table; the last drop toasts the last sigh. The agony feasting,—it is superb. The inner colon is king; all that old world feasts and bursts, and Rabelais enthrones a dynasty of bellies,—Grangousier, Pantagruel, and Gargantua. Rabelais is the Æschylus of victuals; indeed, it is grand when we think that eating is devouring. There is something of the gulf in the glutton. Eat, then, my masters, and drink, and come to the finale. To live is a song, of which to die is the refrain. Others dig under the depraved human race fearful dungeons. For subterraneous caves the great Rabelais contents himself with the cellar. This universe, which Dante put into hell, Rabelais confines in a wine-cask; his book is nothing else. The seven circles of Alighieri bung and encompass this extraordinary tun. Look within the monstrous cask, and you see them there. In Rabelais they are entitled, Idleness, Pride, Envy, Avarice, Anger, Luxury, Gluttony; and it is thus that you suddenly meet

again the formidable jester. Where? — in church. The seven sins are this *curé's* sermon. Rabelais is priest. Castigation, properly understood, begins at home; it is therefore on the clergy that he strikes first. It is something, indeed, to be at home! The Papacy dies of indigestion. Rabelais plays the Papacy a trick,—the trick of a Titan. The Pantagruelian joy is not less grandiose than the mirth of a Jupiter,—jaw for jaw. The monarchical and priestly jaw eats; the Rabelaisian jaw laughs. Whoever has read Rabelais has forever before his eyes this stern opposition; the mask of Theocritus gazed at fixedly by the mask of Comedy.

13. Another, Cervantes, is also a form of epic mockery; for as the writer of these lines said in 1827,¹ there are between the Middle Ages and the modern times, after the feudal barbarism, and placed there as it were for a conclusion, two Homeric buffoons,—Rabelais and Cervantes. To sum up horror by laughter, is not the least terrible manner of doing it. It is what Rabelais did; it is what Cervantes did. But the raillery of Cervantes has nothing of the large Rabelaisian grin. It is the fine humour of the noble after the joviality of the *curé*. I am the Signor Don Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra, Caballeros, poet-soldier, and, as a proof, one-armed. No broad, coarse jesting in Cervantes. Scarcely a flavour of elegant cynicism. The satirist is fine, sharp-edged, polished, delicate, almost gallant, and would even run the risk sometimes of diminishing his power with all his affected ways if he had not the deep poetic spirit of the Renaissance. That saves his charming grace from becoming prettiness. Like Jean Goujon, like Jean Cousin, like Germain Pilon, like Primatice, Cervantes has the chimera within himself. Thence all the unexpected marvels of his imagination. Add to that a wonderful intuition of the inmost deeds of the mind, and a philosophy, inexhaustible in aspects, which seems to possess a new and complete chart of the human heart. Cervantes sees the inner man. His philosophy blends with the comic and romantic instinct.

¹ Preface to "Cromwell."

Thence does the unexpected break in at each moment in his characters, in his action, in his style,—the unforeseen, magnificent adventure. Personages remaining true to themselves, but facts and ideas whirling around them, with a perpetual renewing of the original idea, with the unceasing breathing of that wind which carries flashes of lightning,—such is the law of great works. Cervantes is militant; he has a thesis; he makes a social book. Such poets are the fighting champions of the mind. Where have they learned fighting? On the battle-field itself. Juvenal was a military tribune; Cervantes arrives from Lepanto, as Dante from Campalino, as Æschylus from Salamis. After which they pass to a new trial. Æschylus goes into exile, Juvenal into exile, Dante into exile, Cervantes into prison. It is just, for they have served you well. Cervantes, as poet, has the three sovereign gifts,—creation, which produces types, and clothes ideas with flesh and bone; invention, which hurls passions against events, makes man flash brightly over destiny, and brings forth the drama; imagination, sun of the brain, which throws light and shade everywhere, and, giving rilievo, creates life. Observation, which is acquired, and which, in consequence, is a quality rather than a gift, is included in creation. If the miser was not observed, Harpagon would not be created. In Cervantes, a new-comer, glimpsed at in Rabelais, puts in a decided appearance; it is common-sense. You have caught sight of it in Panurge; you see it plainly in Sancho Panza. It arrives like the Silenus of Plautus; and it may also say, “I am the god mounted on an ass.” Wisdom at once, reason by-and-by; it is indeed the strange history of the human mind. What more wise than all religions? What less reasonable? Morals true, dogmas false. Wisdom is in Homer and in Job; reason, such as it ought to be to overcome prejudices,—that is to say, complete and armed *cap-à-pie*,—will be found only in Voltaire. Common-sense is not wisdom and is not reason; it is a little of one and a little of the other, with a dash of egotism. Cervantes makes it stride ignorance; and, at the same time, completing his profound

satire, he gives fatigue as a nag to heroism. Thus he shows one after the other, one with the other, the two profiles of man, and parodies them, without more pity for the sublime than for the grotesque. The hippogriff becomes Rosinante. Behind the equestrian figure, Cervantes creates and gives movement to the asinine personage. Enthusiasm takes the field, Irony follows in its footsteps. The wonderful feats of Don Quixote, his riding and spurring, his big lance, steady in the rest, are judged by the donkey, a connoisseur in wind-mills. The invention of Cervantes is so masterly that there is between the man type and the quadruped complement statutory adhesion; the reasoner, like the adventurer, is part of the beast which belongs to him, and you can no more dismount Sancho Panza than Don Quixote. The Ideal is in Cervantes as in Dante; but it is called the impossible, and is scoffed at. Beatrice is become Dulcinea. To rail at the ideal would be the failing of Cervantes; but this failing is only apparent. Look well! The smile has a tear. In reality, Cervantes is for Don Quixote what Molière is for Alcestes. One must learn how to read in a peculiar manner in the books of the sixteenth century; there is in almost all, on account of the threats hanging over the liberty of thought, a secret that must be opened, and the key of which is often lost. Rabelais had something unexpressed, Cervantes had an aside, Machiavelli had a secret recess,—several perhaps; at all events, the advent of common-sense is the great fact in Cervantes. Common-sense is not a virtue; it is the eye of interest. It would have encouraged Themistocles and dissuaded Aristides. Leonidas has no common-sense; Regulus has no common-sense; but in the face of egotistical and ferocious monarchies dragging poor peoples into wars undertaken for themselves, decimating families, making mothers desolate, and driving men to kill each other with all those fine words,—military honour, warlike glory, obedience to discipline etc.,—it is an admirable personification, that common-sense coming all at once and crying to the human race, "Take care of your skin!"

14. Another, Shakespeare, what is he? You might almost answer, He is the earth. Lucretius is the sphere; Shakespeare is the globe. There is more and less in the globe than in the sphere. In the sphere there is the whole, on the globe there is man. Here the outer, there the inner, mystery. Lucretius is the being; Shakespeare is the existence. Thence so much shadow in Lucretius; thence so much movement in Shakespeare. Space,—*the blue*, as the Germans say,—is certainly not forbidden to Shakespeare. The earth sees and surveys heaven; the earth knows heaven under its two aspects, darkness and azure, doubt and hope. Life goes and comes in death. All life is a secret,—a sort of enigmatical parenthesis between birth and the death-throe, between the eye which opens and the eye which closes. This secret imparts its restlessness to Shakespeare. Lucretius is; Shakespeare lives. In Shakespeare the birds sing, the bushes become verdant, the hearts love, the souls suffer, the cloud wanders, it is hot, it is cold, night falls, time passes, forests and crowds speak, the vast eternal dream hovers about. The sap and the blood, all forms of the fact multiple, the actions and the ideas, man and humanity, the living and the life, the solitudes, the cities, the religions, the diamonds and pearls, the dung-hills and the charnel-houses, the ebb and flow of beings, the steps of the comers and goers,—all, all are on Shakespeare and in Shakespeare; and this genius being the earth, the dead emerge from it. Certain sinister sides of Shakespeare are haunted by spectres. Shakespeare is a brother of Dante. The one completes the other. Dante incarnates all supernaturalism, Shakespeare all Nature; and as these two regions, Nature and supernaturalism, which appear to us so different, are really the same unity, Dante and Shakespeare, however dissimilar, commingle outwardly, and are but one innately. There is something of the Alighieri, something of the ghost in Shakespeare. The skull passes from the hands of Dante into the hands of Shakespeare. Ugolino gnaws it, Hamlet questions it; and it shows perhaps even a deeper meaning and a loftier teaching in the second than in the first. Shakespeare shakes

it and makes stars fall from it. The isle of Prospero, the forest of Ardennes, the heath of Armuyr, the platform of Elsinore, are not less illuminated than the seven circles of Dante's spiral by the sombre reverberation of hypothesis. The unknown — half fable, half truth — is outlined there as well as here. Shakespeare as much as Dante allows us to glimpse at the crepuscular horizon of conjecture. In the one as in the other there is the possible,—that window of the dream opening on reality. As for the real, we insist on it, Shakespeare overflows with it; everywhere the living flesh. Shakespeare possesses emotion, instinct, the true cry, the right tone, all the human multitude in his clamor. His poetry is himself, and at the same time it is you. Like Homer, Shakespeare is clement. Men of genius, re-beginners,—it is the right name for them,—rise at all the decisive crises of humanity; they sum up the phases and complete the revolutions. In civilization, Homer stamps the end of Asia and the commencement of Europe, Shakespeare stamps the end of the Middle Ages. This closing of the Middle Ages, Rabelais and Cervantes have fixed also; but, being essentially satirists, they give but a partial aspect. Shakespeare's mind is a total; like Homer, Shakespeare is a cyclic man. These two geniuses, Homer and Shakespeare, close the two gates of barbarism,—the ancient door and the gothic one. That was their mission; they have fulfilled it. That was their task; they have accomplished it. The third great human crisis is the French Revolution; it is the third huge gate of barbarism, the monarchical gate, which is closing at this moment. The nineteenth century hears it rolling on its hinges. Thence for poetry, the drama, and art arises the actual era, as independent of Shakespeare as of Homer.

CHAPTER III

HOMER, Job, Æschylus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lucretius, Juvenal, Saint John, Saint Paul, Tacitus, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare.

That is the avenue of the immovable giants of the human mind.

The men of genius are a dynasty. Indeed there is no other. They wear all the crowns,—even that of thorns.

Each of them represents the sum total of absolute that man can realize.

We repeat it, to choose between these men, to prefer one to the other, to mark with the finger the first among these first, it cannot be. All are the Mind.

Perhaps, in an extreme case—and yet every objection would be legitimate—you might mark out as the highest summit among those summits, Homer, Æschylus, Job, Isaiah, Dante, and Shakespeare.

It is understood that we speak here only in an Art point of view, and in Art, in the literary point of view.

Two men in this group, Æschylus and Shakespeare, represent specially the drama.

Æschylus, a kind of genius out of time, worthy to stamp either a beginning or an end in humanity, does not seem to be placed in his right turn in the series, and, as we have said, seems an elder son of Homer's.

If we remember that Æschylus is nearly submerged by the darkness rising over human memory; if we remember that ninety of his plays have disappeared, that of that sublime hundred there remain no more than seven dramas, which are also seven odes, we are stupefied by what we see of that genius, and almost frightened by what we do not see.

What, then, was Æschylus? What proportions and what forms had he in all this shadow? Æschylus is up to his shoulders in the ashes of ages. His head alone remains out

of that burying; and, like the giant of the desert, with his head alone he is as immense as all the neighbouring gods standing on their pedestals.

Man passes before this insubmergible wreck. Enough remains for an immense glory. What the darkness has taken adds the unknown to this greatness. Buried and eternal, his brow projecting from the grave, Æschylus looks at generations.

CHAPTER IV

TO the eyes of the thinker, these men of genius occupy thrones in the ideal.

To the individual works that those men have left us, must be added various vast collective works, the Vedas, the Râmâyana, the Mahâbhârata, the Edda, the Niebelungen, the Heldenbuch, the Romancero.

Some of these works are revealed and sacred. Unknown assistance is marked on them. The poems of India in particular have the ominous fulness of the possible imagined by insanity, or related by dreams. Those works seem to have been composed in common with beings to whom our world is no longer accustomed. Legendary horror covers these epic poems. *These books have not been composed by man alone*; the Ash-Nagar inscription says it. Djinns have alighted upon them; polypterian magi have thought over them; the texts have been interlined by invisible hands; the demi-gods have been aided by demi-demons; the elephant, which India calls the sage, has been consulted. Thence a majesty almost horrible. The great enigmas are in these poems. They are full of mysterious Asia. Their prominent parts have the supernatural and hideous outline of chaos. They are a mass in the horizon like the Himalayas. The distance of the manners, beliefs, ideas, actions, persons, is extraordinary. One reads these poems with that wondering stoop of the head which is induced by the profound distance

that there is between the book and the reader. This Holy Writ of Asia has evidently been yet more difficult to reduce and put into shape than our own. It is in every part refractory to unity. In vain have the Brahmins, like our priests, erased and interpolated. Zoroaster is there; Ized Serosch is there. The Eschem of the Mazdaean traditions appears under the name of Siva; Manicheism is discernible between Brahma and Buddha. All kinds of traces blend, cross, and recross each other in these poems. One may see in them the mysterious tramp of a crowd of minds who have worked at them in the mist of ages. Here the measureless toe of the giant; there the claw of the chimera. Those poems are the pyramid of a vanished colony of ants.

The Niebelungen, another pyramid of another ant-hill, has the same greatness. What the elves have done there, the elves have done here. These powerful epic legends, the testaments of ages, tattooings marked by races on history, have no other unity than the very unity of the people. The collective and the successive, combining together, are one. *Turba fit mens.*

These recitals are mists, and wonderful flashes of light traverse them. As to the Romancero, which creates the Cid after Achilles, and the chivalric after the heroic, it is the Iliad of many lost Homers. Count Julian, King Roderigo, Cava, Bernard del Carpio, the bastard Mudarra, Nuño Salido, the Seven Infantes of Lara, the Connétable Alvar de Luna,—no Oriental or Hellenic type surpasses these figures. The horse of Campeador is equal to the dog of Ulysses. Between Priam and Lear you must place Don Arias, the old man of Zamora's tower, sacrificing his seven sons to his duty, and tearing them from his heart one after another. There is grandeur in that. In presence of these sublimities the reader undergoes a sort of insolation.

These works are anonymous, and owing to the great reason of the *homo sum*, while admiring them, while holding them as the summit of art, we prefer to them the acknowledged works. With equal beauty, the Râmâyana touches us

less than Shakespeare. The "I" of a man is more vast and profound even than the "I" of a people.

However, these composite myriologies, the great testament of India particularly, with a coat of poetry rather than real poems, expression at the same time sideral and bestial of humanities passed away, derive from their very deformity an indescribable supernatural air. The "I" multiple expressed by those myriologies makes them the polypi of poetry,—vague and wonderful enormities. The strange joinings of the antediluvian rough outline seem visible there as in the ichthyosaurus or in the pterodactyl. Any one of these black *chefs-d'œuvre* with several heads makes on the horizon of art the silhouette of a hydra.

The Greek genius is not deceived by them, and abhors them. Apollo would attack them. The Romancero excepted, beyond and above all these collective and anonymous productions, there are men to represent peoples. These men we have just named. They give to nations and periods the human face. They are in art the incarnations of Greece, of Arabia, of India, of Pagan Rome, of Christian Italy, of Spain, of France, of England. As for Germany, the matrix, like Asia, of races, hordes, and nations she is represented in art by a sublime man, equal, although in a different category, to all those that we have characterized above. That man is Beethoven. Beethoven is the German soul.

What a shadow this Germany! She is the India of the West. She holds everything. There is no formation more colossal. In the sacred mist where the German spirit breathes, Isidro de Seville places theology; Albert the Great, scholasticism; Raban Maur, the science of language; Trithemius, astrology; Ottnit, chivalry; Reuchlin, vast curiosity; Tutilo, universality; Stadianus, method; Luther, inquiry; Albert Dürer, art; Leibnitz, science; Puffendorf, law; Kant, philosophy; Fichte, metaphysics; Winckelmann, archaeology; Herder, æsthetics; the Vossiuses, of whom one, Gerard John, was of the Palatinate, learning; Euler, the spirit of integration; Humboldt, the spirit of discovery; Niebuhr, history;

Gottfried of Strasburg, fable; Hoffman, dreams; Hegel, doubt; Ancillon, obedience; Werner, fatalism; Schiller, enthusiasm; Goethe, indifference; Arminius, liberty.

Kepler gives Germany the heavenly bodies.

Gerard Groot, the founder of the *Fratres Communis Vitæ*, brings his first attempt at fraternity in the fourteenth century. Whatever may have been her infatuation for the indifference of Goethe, do not consider her impersonal, that Germany. She is a nation, and one of the most generous; for it is for her that Rücert, the military poet, forges the "geharnischte Sonnette," and she shudders when Körner hurls at her the Song of the Sword. She is the German fatherland, the great beloved land, *Teutonia mater*. Galgacus was to the Germans what Caractacus was to the Britons.

Germany has everything in herself and at home. She shares Charlemagne with France and Shakespeare with England; for the Saxon element is mingled with the British element. She has an Olympus,—the Valhalla. She must have her own style of writing. Ulfilas, Bishop of Mæsia, composes it for her, and the Gothic mode of caligraphy will henceforth keep its ground along with the writing of Arabia. The capital letter of a missal strives to outdo in fancy the signature of a caliph. Like China, Germany has invented printing. Her Burgraves (this remark has been already made¹) are to us what the Titans are to Æschylus. To the temple of Tanfana, destroyed by Germanicus, she caused the cathedral of Cologne to succeed. She is the grandmother of our history, the grandam of our legends. From all parts,—from the Rhine to the Danube, from the Raulhe-Alp, from the ancient *Sylva Gabresa*, from the Lorraine on the Moselle, and from the riparian Lorraine by the Wigalois and the Wigamur, with Henry the Fowler, with Samo, King of the Vends, with the chronicler of Thuringia, Rothe, with the chronicler of Alsace, Twinger, with the chronicler of Limbourg, Gansbein, with all these ancient popular songsters, Jean Folz, Jean Viol, Muscatblüt, with the minnesingers, those rhapsodists,—the

¹ Preface of the Burgraves, 1843.

tale, that form of dream, reaches her, and enters into her genius. At the same time, idioms are flowing from her. From her fissures rush, to the north, the Danish and Swedish, to the west, the Dutch and Flemish. The German idiom passes the Channel and becomes the English language. In the order of intellectual facts, the German genius has other frontiers besides Germany. Such people resists Germany and yields to Germanism. The German spirit assimilates to itself the Greeks by Müller, the Servians by Gerhard, the Russians by Goëtre, the Magyars by Mailath. When Kepler, in the presence of Rudolph II., was preparing the Rudolphian Tables, it was with the aid of Tycho-Brahé. German affinities go far. Without any alteration in the local and national autonomies, it is with the great Germanic centre that the Scandinavian spirit in Oehlenschläger, and the Batavian spirit in Vondel, is connected. Poland unites herself to it, with all her glory, from Copernicus to Kosciusko, from Sobieski to Mickiewicz. Germany is the well of nations. They pass out of her like rivers; she receives them as a sea.

It seems as though one heard through all Europe the wonderful murmur of the Hercynian forest. The German nature, profound and subtle, distinct from European nature, but in harmony with it, volatilizes and floats above nations. The German mind is misty, luminous, scattered. It is a kind of immense soul-cloud, with stars. Perhaps the highest expression of Germany can only be given by music. Music, by its very want of precision, which in this special case is a quality, goes where the German soul proceeds.

If the German spirit had as much density as expansion,—that is to say, as much will as power,—she could at a given moment, lift up and save the human race. Such as she is, she is sublime.

In poetry she has not said her last word. At this hour, the symptoms are excellent. Since the jubilee of the noble Schiller, particularly, there has been an awakening, and a generous awakening. The great definitive poet of Germany will be necessarily a poet of humanity, of enthusiasm, and of

liberty. Perchance, and some signs give token of it, we may soon see him arise from the young group of contemporary German writers.

Music, we beg indulgence for this word, is the vapour of art. It is to poetry what revery is to thought, what the fluid is to the liquid, what the ocean of clouds is to the ocean of waves. If another description is required, it is the indefinite of this infinite. The same insufflation pushes it, carries it, raises it, upsets it, fills it with trouble and light and with an ineffable sound, saturates it with electricity and causes it to give suddenly discharges of thunder.

Music is the Verb of Germany. The German race, so much curbed as a people, so emancipated as thinkers, sing with a sombre love. To sing resembles a freeing from bondage. Music expresses that which cannot be said, and on which it is impossible to be silent. Therefore is Germany all music until she becomes all liberty. Luther's choral is somewhat a *Mar-seillaise*. Everywhere singing clubs and singing tables. In Swabia every year the fête of song, on the banks of the Neckar, in the plains of Enslingen. The *Liedermusik*, of which Schubert's "Le Roi des Aulnes" is the *chef-d'œuvre*, is part of German life. Song is for Germany a breathing. It is by singing that she respires and conspires. The note being the syllable of a kind of undefined universal language, Germany's grand communication with the human race is made through harmony,—an admirable commencement to unity. It is by the clouds that the rains which fertilize the earth ascend from the sea; it is by music that the ideas which go deep into souls pass out of Germany.

Therefore we may say that Germany's greatest poets are her musicians, of which wonderful family Beethoven is the head.

Homer is the great Pelasgian; Æschylus, the great Hellene; Isaiah, the great Hebrew; Juvenal, the great Roman; Dante, the great Italian; Shakespeare, the great Englishman; Beethoven, the great German.

CHAPTER V

THE Ex- "Good Taste," that other divine law which has for so long a time weighed on Art, and which had succeeded in suppressing the Beautiful for the benefit of the Pretty, the ancient criticism, not altogether dead, like the ancient monarchy, prove, from their own point of view, the same fault, exaggeration, in those sovereign men of genius whom we have named above. They are exaggerated.

This is caused by the quantity of the infinite that they have in them.

In fact, they are not circumscribed. They contain something unknown. Every reproach that is addressed to them might be addressed to sphinxes. People reproach Homer for the carnage which fills his cavern, the Iliad; Æschylus, for his monstrousness; Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Saint Paul, for double meanings; Rabelais, for obscene nudity and venomous ambiguity; Cervantes, for insidious laughter; Shakespeare, for his subtlety; Lucretius, Juvenal, Tacitus, for obscurity; John of Patmos and Dante Alighieri for darkness.

None of those reproaches can be made to other minds very great, but less great. Hesiod, Æsop, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Thucydides, Anacreon, Theocritus, Titus Livius, Salust, Cicero, Terence, Virgil, Horace, Petrarch, Tasso, Ariosto, La Fontaine, Beaumarchais, Voltaire, have neither exaggeration nor darkness nor obscurity nor monstrousness. What, then, fails them? *That* which the others have.

That is the Unknown.

That is the Infinite.

If Corneille had "that," he would be the equal of Æschylus. If Milton had "that," he would be the equal of Homer. If Molière had "that," he would be the equal of Shakespeare.

It is the misfortune of Corneille that he mutilated and contracted the old native tragedy in obedience to fixed rules. It is the misfortune of Milton that by Puritan melancholy

he excluded from his work the vast Nature, the great Pan. It is Molière's failing that, out of dread of Boileau, he quickly extinguishes the luminous style of the "Etourdi;" that, for fear of the priests, he writes too few scenes like "The Poor" in "Don Juan."

To give no occasion for attack is a negative perfection. It is fine to be open to attack.

Indeed, dig out the meaning of those words, placed as masks to the mysterious qualities of geniuses. Under obscurity, subtlety, and darkness you find depth; under exaggeration, imagination; under monstrousness, grandeur.

Therefore, in the upper region of poetry and thought there are Homer, Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lucretius, Juvenal, Tacitus, John of Patmos, Paul of Damascus, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare.

These supreme men of genius are not a closed series. The author of *All* adds to it a name when the wants of progress require it.

BOOK III

ART AND SCIENCE

CHAPTER I

MANY people in our day, readily merchants and often lawyers, say and repeat, "Poetry is gone." It is almost as if they said, "There are no more roses; spring has breathed its last; the sun has lost the habit of rising; roam about all the fields of the earth, you will not find a butterfly; there is no more light in the moon, and the nightingale sings no more; the lion no longer roars; the eagle no longer soars; the Alps and the Pyrenees are gone; there are no more lovely girls or handsome young men; no one thinks any more of the graves; the mother no longer loves her child; heaven is quenched; the human heart is dead."

If it was permitted to mix the contingent with the eternal, it would be rather the contrary which would prove true. Never have the faculties of the human soul, investigated and enriched by the mysterious excavation of revolutions, been deeper and more lofty.

And wait a little; give time for the realization of the acme of social salvation,—gratuitous and compulsory education. How long will it take? A quarter of a century; and then imagine the incalculable sum of intellectual development that this single word contains: every one can read! The multiplication of readers is the multiplication of loaves. On the day when Christ created that symbol, he caught a glimpse of printing. His miracle is this marvel. Behold a book. I

will nourish with it five thousand souls, a hundred thousand souls, a million souls,—all humanity. In the action of Christ bringing forth the loaves, there is Gutenberg bringing forth books. One sower heralds the other.

What is the human race since the origin of centuries? A reader. For a long time he has spelt; he spells yet. Soon he will read.

This infant, six thousand years old, has been at school. Where? In Nature. At the beginning, having no other book, he spelt the universe. He has had his primary teaching of the clouds, of the firmament, of meteors, flowers, animals, forests, seasons, phenomena. The fisherman of Ionia studies the wave; the shepherd of Chaldaea spells the star. Then the first books came. Sublime progress! The book is vaster yet than that grand scene, the world; for to the fact it adds the idea. If anything is greater than God seen in the sun, it is God seen in Homer.

The universe without the book is science taking its first steps; the universe with the book is the ideal making its appearance,—therefore immediate modification in the human phenomenon. Where there had been only force, power reveals itself. The ideal applied to real facts is civilization. Poetry written and sung begins its work, magnificent and efficient deduction of the poetry only seen. A striking statement to make,—science was dreaming; poetry acts. With the sound of the lyre, the thinker drives away brutality.

We shall return later on to this power of the book; we do not insist on it at present; that power blazes forth. Now, many writers, few readers; such has the world been up to this day. But a change is at hand. Compulsory education is a recruiting of souls for light. Henceforth every progress of the human race will be accomplished by the literary legion. The diameter of the moral and ideal good corresponds always to the opening of intelligences. In proportion to the worth of the brain is the worth of the heart.

The book is the tool to work this transformation. A constant supply of light, that is what humanity requires. Read-

ing is nutriment. Thence the importance of the school, everywhere adequate to civilization. The human race is at last on the point of stretching open the book. The immense human Bible, composed of all the prophets, of all the poets, of all the philosophers, is about to shine and blaze under the focus of this enormous luminous lens, compulsory education.

Humanity reading is humanity knowing.

What, then, is the meaning of that nonsense, "Poetry is gone"? We might say, on the contrary, "Poetry is coming!" For he who says "poetry" says "philosophy" and "light." Now, the reign of the book commences; the school is its purveyor. Increase the reader, you increase the book, — not, certainly, in intrinsic value; that remains what it was; but in efficient power; it influences where it had no influence. The souls become its subjects for good purpose. It was but beautiful: it is useful.

Who would venture to deny this? The circle of readers enlarging, the circle of books read will increase. Now, the want of reading being a train of powder, once lighted it will not stop; and this, combined with the simplification of hand-labour by machinery, and with the increased leisure of man, the body less fatigued leaving intelligence more free, vast appetites for thought will spring up in all brains; the insatiable thirst for knowledge and meditation will become more and more the human preoccupation; low places will be deserted for high places, — a natural ascent for every growing intelligence. People will quit Faublas to read "Orestes." There they will taste greatness; and once they have tasted it, they will never be satiated. They will devour the beautiful because the refinement of minds augments in proportion to their force; and a day will come when the fulness of civilization making itself manifest, those summits, almost desert for ages, and haunted solely by the *élite*. — Lucretius, Dante, Shakespeare, — will be crowded with souls seeking their nourishment on the lofty peaks.

CHAPTER II

THERE can be but one law; the unity of law results from the unity of essence. Nature and art are the two sides of the same fact; and in principle, saving the restriction which we shall indicate very shortly, the law of one is the law of the other. The angle of reflection equals the angle of incidence. All being equity in the moral order and equilibrium in the material order, all is equation in the intellectual order. The binomial theorem, that marvel fitting everything, is included in poetry not less than in algebra. Nature plus humanity, raised to the second power, gives art. That is the intellectual binomial theorem. Now replace this $A + B$ by the number special to each great artist and each great poet, and you will have, in its multiple physiognomy and in its strict total, each of the creations of the human mind. What more beautiful than the variety of *chefs-d'œuvre* resulting from the unity of law. Poetry like science has an abstract root; out of that science evokes the *chef-d'œuvre* of metal, wood, fire, or air,—machine, ship, locomotive, æroscaph; out of that poetry evokes the *chef-d'œuvre* of flesh and blood,—Iliad, Canticle of Canticles, Romancero, Divine Comedy, “Macbeth.” Nothing so starts and prolongs the shock felt by the thinker as those mysterious exfoliations of abstraction into realities in the double region, the one positive, the other infinite, of human thought. A region double, and nevertheless one; the infinite is a precision. The profound word *number* is at the base of man’s thought. It is, to our intelligence, elemental; it has an harmonious as well as a mathematical signification. Number reveals itself to art by rhythm, which is the beating of the heart of the Infinite. In rhythm, law of order, God is felt. A verse is a gathering like a crowd; its feet take the cadenced step of a legion. Without number, no science; without number, no poetry. The strophe, the epic poem, the drama, the riotous palpitation of man, the

bursting forth of love, the irradiation of the imagination, all this cloud with its flashes, the passion,—all is lorded over by the mysterious word *number*, even as geometry and arithmetic. Ajax, Hector, Hecuba, the seven chiefs before Thebes, Œdipus, Ugolino, Messalina, Lear and Priam, Romeo, Desdemona, Richard III., Pantagruel, the Cid, Alcestes, all belong to it, as well as conic sections and the differential and integral calculus. It starts from two and two make four, and ascends to the region where the lightning sits.

Yet, between art and science, let us note a radical difference. Science may be brought to perfection; art, not.

Why?

CHAPTER III

AMONG human things, and inasmuch as it is a human thing, art is a strange exception.

The beauty of everything here below lies in the power of reaching perfection. Everything is endowed with that property. To increase, to augment, to win strength, to march forward, to be worth more to-day than yesterday,—that is at once glory and life. The beauty of art lies in not being susceptible of improvement.

Let us insist on these essential ideas, already touched on in some of the preceding pages.

A *chef-d'œuvre* exists once for all. The first poet who arrives, arrives at the summit. You will ascend after him, as high, not higher. Ah, you call yourself Dante! well; but that one calls himself Homer.

Progress, goal constantly displaced, halting-place forever varying, has a shifting horizon. Not so with the ideal.

Now, progress is the motive power of science; the ideal is the generator of art.

Thus is explained why perfection is the characteristic of science, and not of art.

A savant may outlustre a savant; a poet never throws a poet into the shade.

Art progresses after its own fashion. It shifts its ground like science; but its successive creations, containing the immutable, live, while the admirable attempts of science, which are, and can be nothing but combinations of the contingent, obliterate each other.

The relative is in science; the positive is in art. The *chef-d'œuvre* of to-day will be the *chef-d'œuvre* of to-morrow. Does Shakespeare interfere in any way with Sophocles? Does Molière take anything from Plautus? Even when he borrows *Amphitryon* he does not take him from him. Does *Figaro* blot out *Sancho Panza*? Does *Cordelia* suppress *Antigone*? No. Poets do not climb over each other. The one is not the stepping-stone of the other. They rise up alone, without any other lever than themselves. They do not tread their equal under foot. Those who are first in the field respect the old ones. They succeed, they do not replace each other. The beautiful does not drive away the beautiful. Neither wolves nor *chefs-d'œuvre* devour each other.

Saint-Simon says (I quote from memory): "There has been through the whole winter but one cry of admiration for M. de Cambray's book, when suddenly appeared M. de Meaux's book, which devoured it." If Fénelon's book had been Saint-Simon's, the book of Bossuet would not have devoured it.

Shakespeare is not above Dante, Molière is not above Aristophanes, Calderon is not above Euripides, the *Divine Comedy* is not above *Genesis*, the *Romancero* is not above the *Odyssey*, *Sirius* is not above *Arcturus*. Sublimity is equality.

The human mind is the infinite possible. The *chefs-d'œuvre*, immense worlds, are hatched within it unceasingly, and last forever. No pushing one against the other; no recoil. The occlusions, when there are any, are but apparent, and quickly cease. The expanse of the boundless admits all creations.

Art, taken as art, and in itself, goes neither forward nor

backward. The transformations of poetry are but the undulations of the Beautiful, useful to human movement. Human movement,—another side of the question that we certainly do not overlook, and that we shall attentively examine farther on. Art is not susceptible of intrinsic progress. From Phidias to Rembrandt there is onward movement, but not progress. The frescoes of the Sistine Chapel are absolutely nothing to the metopes of the Parthenon. Retrace your steps as much as you like, from the palace of Versailles to the castle of Heidelberg, from the castle of Heidelberg to Notre-Dame of Paris, from Notre-Dame of Paris to the Alhambra, from the Alhambra to St. Sophia, from St. Sophia to the Coliseum, from the Coliseum to the Propylæons, from the Propylæons to the Pyramids; you may recede into ages, you do not recede in art. The Pyramids and the Iliad stand on the fore plan.

Masterpieces have a level, the same for all,—the absolute.

Once the absolute reached, all is said. That cannot be excelled. The eye can bear but a certain quantity of dazzling light.

Thence comes the assurance of poets. They lean on posterity with a lofty confidence. “*Exegi monumentum,*” says Horace. And on that occasion he insults bronze. “*Plaudite, cives,*” says Plautus. Corneille, at sixty-five years, wins the love (a tradition in the Escoubleau family) of the very young Marquise de Contades, by promising her to send her name down to posterity:—

“*Chez cette race nouvelle,
Où j’aurai quelque crédit,
Vous ne passerez pour belle
Qu’autant que je l’aurai dit.*”

In the poet and in the artist there is the infinite. It is this ingredient, the infinite, which gives to this kind of genius the irreducible grandeur.

This amount of the infinite in art is not inherent to progress. It may have, and it certainly has, duties to fulfil

toward progress, but it is not dependent on it. It is dependent on no perfections which may result from the future, on no transformation of language, on no death or birth of idioms. It has within itself the immeasurable and the innumerable; it cannot be subdued by any occurrence; it is as pure, as complete, as sidereal, as divine in the heart of barbarism as in the heart of civilization. It is the Beautiful, diverse according to the men of genius, but always equal to itself. Supreme.

Such is the law, scarcely known, of Art.

CHAPTER IV

SCIENCE is different.

The relative, which governs it, leaves its mark on it; and these successive stamps of the relative, more and more resembling the real, constitute the movable certainty of man.

In science, certain things have been masterpieces which are so no more. The hydraulic machine of Marly was a *chef-d'œuvre*.

Science seeks perpetual movement. She has found it; it is itself perpetual motion.

Science is continually moving in the benefit it confers.

Everything stirs up in science, everything changes, everything is constantly renewed. Everything denies, destroys, creates, replaces everything. That which was accepted yesterday is put again under the millstone to-day. The colossal machine, Science, never rests. It is never satisfied; it is everlastingly thirsting for improvement, which the absolute ignores. Vaccination is a problem, the lightning-rod is a problem. Jenner may have erred, Franklin may have deceived himself; let us go on seeking. This agitation is grand. Science is restless around man; it has its own reasons for this restlessness. Science plays in progress the part of utility. Let us worship this magnificent servant.

Science makes discoveries, art composes works. Science is an acquirement of man, science is a ladder; one savant overtops the other. Poetry is a lofty soaring.

Do you want examples? They abound. Here is one,—the first which occurs to our mind.

Jacob Metzu, scientifically Metius, discovers the telescope by chance, as Newton did gravitation and Christopher Columbus, America. Let us open a parenthesis: there is no chance in the creation of "Orestes" or of "Paradise Lost." A *chef-d'œuvre* is the offspring of will. After Metzu comes Galileo, who improves the discovery of Metzu; then Kepler, who improves on the improvement of Galileo; then Descartes, who, although going somewhat astray in taking a concave glass for eyepiece instead of a convex one, fructifies the improvement of Kepler; then the Capuchin Reita, who rectifies the reversing of objects; then Huyghens, who makes a great step by placing the two convex glasses on the focus of the objective; and in less than fifty years, from 1610 to 1659, during the short interval which separates the "Nuncius Sidereus" of Galileo from the "Oculus Eliæ et Enoch" of Father Reita, behold the original inventor, Metzu, obliterated. And it is constantly the same in science.

Vegetius was Count of Constantinople; but that is no obstacle to his tactics being forgotten,—forgotten like the strategy of Polybius, forgotten like the strategy of Folard. The pig's-head of the phalanx and the pointed order of the legion have for a moment re-appeared, two hundred years ago, in the wedge of Gustavus Adolphus; but in our days, when there are no more pikemen as in the fourteenth century, nor lansquenets as in the seventeenth, the ponderous triangular attack, which was in other times the base of all tactics, is replaced by a crowd of Zouaves charging with the bayonet. Some day, sooner perhaps than people think, the charge with the bayonet will be itself superseded by peace, at first European, by-and-by universal, and then a whole science—the military science—will vanish away. For that science, its improvement lies in its disappearance.

Science goes on unceasingly erasing itself,—fruitful erasures. Who knows now what is the “Homœomeria” of Anaximenes, which perhaps belongs in reality to Anaxagoras? Cosmography is notably amended since the time when this same Anaxagoras told Pericles that the sun was almost as large as the Peloponnesus. Many planets, and satellites of planets, have been discovered since the four stars of Medici. Entomology has made some advance since the time when it was asserted that the scarabee was somewhat of a god and a cousin of the sun,—firstly, on account of the thirty toes on its feet, which correspond to the thirty days of the solar month; secondly, because the scarabee is without a female, like the sun; and when Saint Clement, of Alexandria, outbidding Plutarch, made the remark that the scarabee, like the sun, passes six months in the earth and six months under it. Do you wish to have the proof of this?—refer to the “Stromates,” paragraph iv. Scholasticism itself, chimerical as it is, gives up the “Holy Meadow” of Moschus, laughs at the “Holy Ladder” of John Climacus, and is ashamed of the century in which Saint Bernard, adding fuel to the stake which the Viscounts of Campania wished to put out, called Arnaud de Bresse “a man with the head of the dove and the tail of the scorpion.” The cardinal virtues are no longer the law in anthropology. The *steyardes* of the great Arnauld are decayed. However uncertain is meteorology, it is far from discussing now, as it did in the twelfth century, whether a rain which saves an army from dying of thirst is due to the Christian prayers of the Melitine legion or to the Pagan intervention of Jupiter Pluvius. The astrologer, Marcian Posthumus, was for Jupiter; Tertullian was for the Melitine legion. No one stood in favour of the cloud and of the wind. Locomotion, if we go from the antique chariot of Læius to the railway, passing by the *patache*, the track-boat, the *turgotine*, the diligence, and the mail, has made some progress indeed. The time is gone by for the famous journey from Dijon to Paris, lasting a month; and we could not understand to-day the amazement of Henry IV. asking of Joseph Scaliger, “Is

it true, Monsieur l'Escale, that you have been from Paris to Dijon without relieving your bowels?" Micrography is now far beyond Leuwenhoeck, who was himself far beyond Swammerdam. Look at the point to which spermatology and ovology are arrived to-day, and recollect Mariana reproaching Arnaud de Villeneuve, who discovered alcohol and the oil of turpentine, with the strange crime of having tried human generation in a pumpkin. Grand-Jean de Fouchy, the not over-credulous life secretary of the Academy of Sciences, a hundred years ago, would have shaken his head if any one had told him that from the solar spectrum one would pass to the igneous spectrum, then to the stellar spectrum, and that by the aid of the spectrum of flames and of the spectrum of stars, would be discovered an entirely new method of grouping the heavenly bodies, and what might be called the chemical constellations. Orffyreus, who destroyed his machine rather than allow the Landgrave of Hesse to see inside it,—Orffyreus, so admired by S'Gravesande, the author of the "*Matheseos Universalis Elementa*,"—would be laughed at by our mechanicians. A village veterinary surgeon would not inflict on horses the remedy with which Galen treated the indigestions of Marcus Aurelius. What is the opinion of the eminent specialists of our times, Desmarres at the head of them, respecting the learned discoveries of the seventeenth century by the Bishop of Titiopolis in the nasal chambers? The mummies have got on; M. Gannal makes them differently, if not better, than the Taricheutes, the Paraschistes, and the Cholchytes made them in the days of Herodotus,—the first by washing the body, the second by opening it, and the third by embalming it. Five hundred years before Jesus Christ it was perfectly scientific, when a king of Mesopotamia had a daughter possessed by the devil, to send to Thebes for a god to cure her. It is not exactly our way to treat epilepsy. In the same way have we given up expecting the kings of France to cure serofula.

In 371, under Valens, son of Gratian le Cordier, the judges summoned to their bar a table accused of sorcery. This table

had an accomplice named Hilarius. Hilarius confessed the crime. Ammianus Marcellinus has preserved for us his confession, received by Zosimus, count and fiscal advocate:—

“Construximus, magnifici iudices, ad cortinæ similitudinem Delphicæ infaustam hanc mensulam quam videtis; movimus tandem.”

Hilarius was beheaded. Who was his accuser? A learned geometrician and magician,—the same who advised Valens to decapitate all those whose names began with a *Theod.* To-day you may call yourself Theodore, and even make a table turn, without the fear of a geometrician causing your head to be cut off.

One would very much astonish Solon the son of Execestidas, Zeno the stoic, Antipater, Eudoxus, Lysis of Tarentum, Cebes, Menedemus, Plato, Epicurus, Aristotle, and Epimenides, if one were to tell Solon that it is not the moon which regulates the year; to Zeno, that it is not proved that the soul is divided into eight parts; to Antipater, that the heaven is not formed of five circles; to Eudoxus, that it is not certain that between the Egyptians embalming the dead, the Romans burning them, and the Pæonians throwing them into ponds, the Pæonians are those who are right; to Lysis of Tarentum, that it is not exact that the sight is a hot vapour; to Cebes, that it is false that the principle of elements is the oblong triangle and the isosceles triangle; to Menedemus, that it is not true that in order to know the secret bad intentions of men it suffices to stick on one's head an Arcadian hat with the twelve signs of the zodiac; to Plato, that sea-water does not cure all diseases; to Epicurus, that matter is divisible *ad infinitum*; to Aristotle, that the fifth element has not an orbicular movement, for the reason that there is no fifth element; to Epimenides, that the plague cannot be infallibly got rid of by letting black and white sheep go at random, and sacrificing to unknown gods hidden in the places where the sheep happen to stop.

If you should try to hint to Pythagoras how improbable it is that he should have been wounded at the siege of Troy,—

he Pythagoras, by Menelaus, two hundred and seven years before his birth,—he would reply that the fact is incontestable, and that it is proved by the fact that he perfectly recognizes, as having already seen it, the shield of Menelaus suspended under the statue of Apollo at Branchides, although entirely rotten, except the ivory face; that at the siege of Troy his own name was Euphorbus, and that before being Euphorbus he was Æthalides, son of Mercury, and that after having been Euphorbus, he was Hermotimus, then Pyrrhus, fisherman at Delos, then Pythagoras; that it is all evident and clear,—as clear as it is clear that he was present the same day and the same minute at Metapontum and Crotona, as evident as it is evident that by writing with blood on a mirror exposed to the moon, one may see in the moon what he wrote on the mirror; and lastly, that he is Pythagoras, living at Metapontum, in the Street of the Muses, the author of the multiplication-table, and of the square of the hypotenuse, the greatest of all mathematicians, the father of exact science, and that you, you are an imbecile.

Chrysippus of Tarsus, who lived about the hundred and thirtieth Olympiad, forms an era in science. This philosopher, the same who died, literally died, of laughing on seeing a donkey eat figs out of a silver basin, had studied everything, gone into the depth of everything, written seven hundred and five volumes, of which three hundred and eleven were on dialectics, without having dedicated a single one to a king,—a fact which astounds Diogenes Laertius. He condensed in his brain all human knowledge. His contemporaries named him Light. Chrysippus signifying “golden horse,” they said that he had got detached from the chariot of the sun. He had taken for device “To Me.” He knew innumerable things,—among others these: The earth is flat. The universe is round and limited. The best food for man is human flesh. The community of women is the base of the social order. The father ought to espouse his daughter. There is a word which kills the serpent, a word which tames the bear, a word which arrests the flight of eagles, and a word which

drives the oxen from the beanfield. By pronouncing from hour to hour the three names of the Egyptian Trinity, Amon-Mouth-Khons, Andron of Argos contrived to cross the deserts of Libya without drinking. Coffins ought not to be manufactured of cypress wood, the sceptre of Jupiter being made of that wood. Themistoclea, priestess of Delphi, had given birth to children, and yet had remained a virgin. The just alone having authority to swear, it is by equity that Jupiter has received the name of The Swearer. The phœnix of Arabia lives in the fire. The earth is carried by the air as by a car. The sun drinks from the ocean, and the moon from the rivers. For these reasons the Athenians raised a statue to him on the Ceramicus, with this inscription: "To Chrysippus, who knew everything."

About the same time, Sophocles wrote "Œdipus Rex."

And Aristotle believed in the story about Andron of Argos, and Plato in the social principle of the community of women, and Gorgisippus in the earth being flat; and Epicurus admitted as a fact that the earth was supported by the air, and Hermodamantes that magic words mastered the ox, the eagle, the bear, and the serpent; and Echeerates believed in the immaculate maternity of Themistoclea, and Pythagoras in Jupiter's sceptre made of cypress wood, and Posidonius in the ocean affording drink to the sun and in the rivers quenching the thirst of the moon, and Pyrrho in the phœnix existing in fire.

Excepting in this particular, Pyrrho was a sceptic. He made up for his belief in that phœnix by doubting everything else.

All that long groping is science. Cuvier was mistaken yesterday, Lagrange the day before yesterday, Leibnitz before Lagrange, Gassendi before Leibnitz, Cardan before Gassendi, Cornelius Agrippa before Cardan, Averroes before Agrippa, Plotinus before Averroes, Artemidorus Daldian before Plotinus, Posidonius before Artemidorus, Democritus before Posidonius, Empedocles before Democritus, Carneades before Empedocles, Plato before Carneades, Pherecydes before

Plato, Pittacus before Pherecydes, Thales before Pittacus, and before Thales Zoroaster, and before Zoroaster Sanchoniathon, and before Sanchoniathon Hermes,—Hermes, which signifies science, as Orpheus signifies art. Oh, wonderful marvel, this heap swarming with dreams which engender the real! Oh, sacred errors, slow, blind and sainted mothers of truth!

Some savants, such as Kepler, Euler, Geoffroy St. Hilaire, Arago, have brought into science nothing but light; they are rare.

At times science is an obstacle to science. The savants give way to scruples and cavil at study. Pliny is scandalized at Hipparchus; Hipparchus, with the aid of an imperfect astrolabe, tries to count the stars and to name them,—an impropriety toward God, says Pliny (“Ausus rem Deo improbam”).

To count the stars is to commit a wickedness toward God. This accusation, started by Pliny against Hipparchus, is continued by the Inquisition against Campanella.

Science is the asymptote of truth. It approaches unceasingly and never touches. Nevertheless it has every greatness. It has will, precision, enthusiasm, profound attention, penetration, shrewdness, strength, patience by concatenation, permanent watching for phenomena, the ardour of progress, and even flashes of bravery,—witness La Pérouse; witness Pilastre des Rosiers; witness John Franklin; witness Victor Jacquemont; witness Livingstone; witness Mazet; witness, at this very hour, Nadar.

But science is series. It proceeds by tests heaped one above the other, and the thick obscurity of which rises slowly to the level of truth.

Nothing like it in art. Art is not successive. All art is *ensemble*.

Let us sum up these few pages.

Hippocrates is outrun, Archimedes is outrun, Aratus is outrun, Avicennus is outrun, Paracelsus is outrun, Nicholas Flamel is outrun, Ambrose Paré is outrun, Vésale is outrun,

Copernicus is outrun, Galileo is outrun, Newton is outrun, Clairaut is outrun, Lavoisier is outrun, Montgolfier is outrun, Laplace is outrun. Pindar not, Phidias not.

Pascal the savant is outrun; Pascal the writer is not.

We no longer teach the astronomy of Ptolemy, the geography of Strabo, the climatology of Cleostratus, the zoology of Pliny, the algebra of Diophantus, the medicine of Tribunus, the surgery of Ronsil, the dialectics of Sphærus, the myology of Steno, the uranology of Tatius, the stenography of Trithemius, the pisciculture of Sebastien de Medici, the arithmetic of Stifels, the geometry of Tartaglia, the chronology of Scaliger, the meteorology of Stoffer, the anatomy of Gassendi, the pathology of Fernel, the jurisprudence of Robert Barmne, the agriculture of Quesnay, the hydrography of Bouguer, the nautics of Bourdè de Villehuet, the ballistics of Gribeauval, the veterinary practice of Garsault, the architectonics of Desgodets, the botany of Tournefort, the scholasticism of Abailard, the politics of Plato, the mechanics of Aristotle, the physics of Descartes, the theology of Stillingfleet. We taught yesterday, we teach to-day, we shall teach to-morrow, we shall teach forever, the "Sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles."

Poetry lives a potential life. The sciences may extend its sphere, not increase its power. Homer had but four winds for his tempests; Virgil who has twelve, Dante who has twenty-four, Milton who has thirty-two, do not make their storms grander.

And it is probable that the tempests of Orpheus were as beautiful as those of Homer, although Orpheus had, to raise the waves, but two winds, the Phœnicias and the Aparctias,—that is to say, the wind of the south and the wind of the north (often confounded, let us say in passing, with the Argestes, westerly summer wind, and the Libs, the westerly winter wind).

Some religions die away: and when they disappear, they bequeath a great artist to other religions coming after them. Serpio makes for the Venus Aversative of Athens a vase

that the Holy Virgin accepts from Venus, and which to-day is used in the baptistery of Notre Dame at Gaëta.

Oh, eternity of art!

A man, a corpse, a shade, from the depth of the past, through the long ages, lays hold of you.

I remember, when a youth, one day at Romorantin, in an old house we had there, under a vine arbour open to air and light, I espied a book on a plank, the only book there was in the house,—“*De Rerum Natura*,” of Lucretius. My professors of rhetoric had spoken very ill of it, which was a recommendation to me. I opened the book. It was at that moment about midday. I came on these powerful and calm lines:—

“Religion does not consist in turning unceasingly toward the veiled stone, nor in approaching all the altars, nor in throwing one's self prostrated on the ground, nor in raising the hands before the habitations of gods, nor deluging the temples with the blood of beasts, nor in heaping vows upon vows, but in beholding all with a peaceful soul.”¹

I stopped in thought; then I began to read again. Some moments afterward I could see nothing, hear nothing; I was immersed in the poet. At the dinner-hour I made a sign that I was not hungry; and at night, when the sun set, and when the herds were returning to their sheds, I was still in the same place reading the wonderful book; and by my side my father, with his white locks, seated on the door-sill of the low room, where his sword hung on a nail, indulging my prolonged reading, was gently calling the sheep; and they came in turn to eat a little salt in the hollow of his hand.

¹ *Nec pietas ulla est, velatum sæpe videri
Vertier ad lapidem, atque omnes accedre ad aras.
Nec procumbere humi prostratum, et pandere palmas
Ante deum delibra, neque aras sanguine multo
Spargere quadrupedum, nec votis nectere vota;
Sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri.*

CHAPTER V

POETRY cannot grow less. Why? Because it cannot grow greater.

These words, so often used, even by the lettered, "decline," "revival," show to what an extent the essence of art is ignored. Superficial intellects, easily becoming pedantic, take for revival and decline some effects of juxtaposition, some optical mirages, some exigencies of language, some ebb and flow of ideas, all the vast movement of creation and thought, the result of which is universal art. This movement is the very work of the infinite passing through the human brain.

Phenomena are only seen from the culminating point; and seen from the culminating point, poetry is immovable. There is neither rise nor decline in art. Human genius is always at its full; all the rain of heaven adds not a drop of water to the ocean. A tide is an illusion; water falls on one shore only to rise on another. You take oscillations for diminutions. To say, "There will be no more poets," is to say, "There will be no more ebbing."

Poetry is element. It is irreducible, incorruptible, and refractory. Like the sea, it says each time all it has to say; then it re-begins with a tranquil majesty, and with the inexhaustible variety which belongs only to unity. This diversity in what seems monotonous is the marvel of immensity.

Wave upon wave, billow after billow, foam behind foam, movement and again movement: the *Iliad* is moving away, the *Romancero* comes; the Bible sinks, the Koran surges up; after the aquilon Pindar comes the hurricane Dante. Does everlasting poetry repeat itself? No. It is the same and it is different. Same breath, another sound.

Do you take the *Cid* for an imitation of Ajax? Do you take Charlemagne for a plagiarism of Agamemnon? "There is nothing new under the sun." "Your novelty is the repetition of the old," etc. Oh, the strange process of criticism!

Then art is but a series of counterfeits! Thersites has a thief, Falstaff. Orestes has an imitator, Hamlet. The Hippogriff is the jay of Pegasus. All these poets! A crew of cheats! They pillage each other, *voilà tout!* Inspiration and swindling compounded. Cervantes plunders Apuleius; Alcestes cheats Timon of Athens. The Smyntean wood is the forest of Bondy. Out of which pocket comes the hand of Shakespeare? Out of the pocket of Æschylus.

No! neither decline, nor revival, nor plagiarism, nor repetition, nor imitation: identity of heart, difference of mind,—that is all. Each great artist (we have said so already) appropriates; stamps art anew after his own image. Hamlet is Orestes after the effigy of Shakespeare. Figaro is Scapin, with the effigy of Beaumarchais. Grangousier is Silenus, after the effigy of Rabelais.

Everything re-begins with the new poet, and at the same time nothing is interrupted. Each new genius is abyss, yet there is tradition. Tradition from abyss to abyss,—such is, in art as in the firmament, the mystery; and men of genius communicate by their effluvia, like the stars. What have they in common? Nothing,—everything.

From that pit that is called Ezekiel to that precipice that is called Juvenal, there is no solution of continuity for the thinker. Lean over this anathema, or over that satire, and the same vertigo is whirling around both. The Apocalypse reverberates on the polar sea of ice, and you have that aurora borealis, the Niebelungen. The Edda replies to the Vedas.

Hence this, our starting-point, to which we are returning: art is not perfectible.

No possible decline for poetry, no possible improvement. We lose our time when we say, "*Nescio quid majus nascitur Iliade.*" Art is subject neither to diminution nor enlarging. Art has its seasons, its clouds, its eclipses, even its stains, which are splendours, perhaps its interpositions of sudden opacity for which it is not responsible; but at the end it is always with the same intensity that it brings light into the

human soul. It remains the same furnace giving the same brilliancy. Homer does not grow cold.

Let us insist, moreover, on this, inasmuch as the emulation of minds is the life of the beautiful, O poets, the first rank is ever free. Let us remove everything which may disconcert daring minds and break their wings: art is a species of valour. To deny that men of genius yet to come may be peers with men of genius of the past would be to deny the ever-working power of God.

Yes, and often do we return, and shall return again, to this necessary encouragement. Emulation is almost creation. Yes, those men of genius that cannot be surpassed may be equalled.

How?

By being different.

BOOK IV

THE ANCIENT SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I

ÆSCHYLUS is the ancient Shakespeare. Let us return to Æschylus. He is the grandsire of the stage.

This book would be incomplete if Æschylus had not his separate place in it.

A man whom we do not know how to class in his own century, so little does he belong to it, being at the same time so much behind it and so much in advance of it, the Marquis de Mirabeau, that queer customer as a philanthropist, but a very rare thinker after all, had a library, in the two corners of which he had had carved a dog and a she-goat, in remembrance of Socrates, who swore by the dog, and of Zeno, who swore by the goat. His library presented this peculiarity: on one side he had Hesiod, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides, Pindar, Theocritus, Anacreon, Theophrastus, Demosthenes, Plutarch, Cicero, Titus Livius, Seneca, Persius, Lucan, Terence, Horace, Ovid, Propertius, Tibullus, Virgil, and underneath could be read, engraved in letters of gold, "Amo;" on the other side, he had Æschylus alone, and underneath, this word, "Timeo."

Æschylus, in reality, is formidable. He cannot be approached without trembling. He has magnitude and mystery. Barbarous, extravagant, emphatic, antithetical, bombastic, absurd,—such is the judgment passed on him by the

official rhetoric of the present day. This rhetoric will be changed. Æschylus is one of those men whom superficial criticism scoffs at or disdains, but whom the true critic approaches with a sort of sacred fear. The dread of genius is the first step toward taste.

In the true critic there is always a poet, even when in a latent state.

Whoever does not comprehend Æschylus is irremediably an ordinary mind. Intellectuals may be tried on Æschylus.

The Drama is a strange form of art. Its diameter measures from the "Seven against Thebes" to the "Philosopher Without Knowing it," and from Brid'oison to Œdipus. Thyestes forms part of it, Turcaret also. If you wish to define it, put into your definition Electra and Marton.

The drama is disconcerting. It baffles the weak. This comes from its ubiquity. The drama has every horizon. You may then imagine its capacity. The epic poem has been blended in the drama, and the result is this marvellous literary novelty, which is at the same time a social power,—the romance.

Bronze, amalgamation of the epic, lyric, and dramatic,—such is the romance. "Don Quixote" is *iliad*, *ode*, and *comedy*.

Such is the expansion possible to the drama.

The drama is the largest recipient of art. God and Satan are there; witness Job.

To look at art in the absolute point of view, the characteristic of the epic poem is *grandeur*; the characteristic of the drama is *immensity*. The immense differs from the great in this, that it excludes, if it chooses, dimension; that "it is beyond measure," as the common saying is; and that it can, without losing beauty, lose proportion. It is harmonious as is the Milky Way. It is by this characteristic of immensity that the drama commences, four thousand years ago, in Job, whom we have just named again, and two thousand two hundred years ago, in Æschylus; it is by this characteristic that it continues in Shakespeare. What personages

does Æschylus take? Volcanoes,—one of his lost tragedies is called “Etna;” then the mountains,—Caucasus, with Prometheus; then the sea,—the Ocean on its dragon, and the waves, the Oceanides; then the vast East,—the Persians; then the bottomless darkness,—the Eumenides. Æschylus proves the man by the giant. In Shakespeare the drama approaches nearer to humanity, but remains colossal. Macbeth seems a polar Atrides. You see that the drama opens Nature, then opens the soul: there is no limit to this horizon. The drama is life; and life is everything. The epic poem can be only great; the drama must necessarily be immense.

This immensity, it is Æschylus throughout, and Shakespeare throughout.

The immense, in Æschylus, is a will. It is also a temperament. Æschylus invents the buskin which makes the man taller, and the mask which enlarges the voice. His metaphors are enormous. He calls Xerxes “the man with the dragon eyes.” The sea, which is a plain for so many poets, is for Æschylus “a forest,”—*ἄλσος*. These magnifying figures, peculiar to the highest poets, and to them only, are true; they are the true emanations of revery. Æschylus excites you to the very brink of convulsion. His tragical effects are like blows struck at the spectators. When the furies of Æschylus make their appearance, pregnant women miscarry. Pollux, the lexicographer, affirms that there were children taken with epilepsy and who died, on looking at those faces of serpents and at those torches violently tossed about.

That is evidently “going beyond the aim.” Even the grace of Æschylus, that strange and sovereign grace of which we have spoken, has a Cyclopean look. It is Polyphemus smiling. At times the smile is formidable, and seems to hide an obscure rage. Put, by way of example, in the presence of Helen, those two poets, Homer and Æschylus. Homer is at once conquered and admires. His admiration is forgiveness. Æschylus is moved, but remains grave. He

calls Helen "fatal flower;" then he adds, "soul as calm as the tranquil sea." One day Shakespeare will say, "False as the wave."

CHAPTER II

THE theatre is a crucible of civilization. It is a place of human communion. All its phases require to be studied. It is in the theatre that the public soul is formed.

We have just seen what the theatre was in the time of Shakespeare and Molière. Shall we see what it was at the time of Æschylus?

Let us go to that spectacle.

It is no longer the cart of Thespis; it is no longer the scaffold of Susarion; it is no longer the wooden circus of Cherilus. Athens, foreboding, perceiving the coming of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, has built theatres of stone. No roof, the sky for a ceiling, the day for lighting, a long platform of stone pierced with doors and staircases, and secured to a wall, the actors and the chorus going and coming on this platform, which is the *logeum*, and performing the play; in the centre, where in our days is the hole of the prompter, a small altar to Bacchus, the *thymele*; in front of the platform a vast hemicycle of stone steps, five or six thousand men sitting pell-mell,—such is the laboratory. There it is that the swarming crowd of the Piræus come to turn Athenians; there it is that the multitude become the public, until such day when the public will become the people. The multitude is in reality there,—all the multitude, including the women, the children, and the slaves, and Plato, who knits his brows.

If it is a fête-day, if we are at the Panathenæa, at the Lenæa, or at the great Dionysia, the magistrates form part of the audience; the *proedri*, the *epistati*, and the *prytani* sit in their place of honour. If the trilogy is to be a tetralogy, if the representation is to conclude by a piece with satyrs; if

the fauns, the ægipans, the menades, the goat-footed, and the evantes, are to come at the end to perform their pranks; if among the comedians, almost priests, and called "the men of Bacchus," is to appear the favourite actor who excels in the two modes of declamation, in paralogy as well as in paracatology; if the poet is sufficiently liked by his rivals to let the public expect to see some celebrated men, Eupolis, Cratinus, or even Aristophanes figure in the chorus,—“Eupolis atque Cratinus, Aristophanesque poetæ,” as Horace will one day say; if a play with women is performed, even the old “Alceestis” of Thespis. the whole place is full; there is a crowd. The crowd is already to Æschylus what, later on, as the prologue of the “Bacchides” remarks, it will be to Plautus,—a swarm of men on seats, coughing, spitting, sneezing, making grimaces and noises with the mouth and “ore concrepario,” and talking of their affairs; what a crowd is to-day.

Students scrawl with charcoal on the wall, now in token of admiration, now in irony, some well-known verses,—for instance, the singular iambic a Phrynichus in a single word:—

“Archaiootelesidonophrunicherata.”¹

Of which the famous Alexandrine, in two words, of one of our tragic poets of the sixteenth century was but a poor imitation:—

“Métamorphoserait Nabuchodonosor.”

There are not only the students to make a row; there are the old men. Trust to the old men of the “Wasps” of Aristophanes for a noise. Two schools are in presence,—on one side Thespis, Susarion, Pratinas of Phlius, Epigenes of Sicyon, Theomis, Auleas, Chœrilus, Phrynichus, Minos himself; on the other, young Æschylus. Æschylus is twenty-eight years old. He gives his trilogy of the “Promethei,”—“Prometheus Lighting Fire,” Prometheus Bound;”

¹ Ἀρχαιοτελεσιδωνοφρυνηκήρατα.

"Prometheus Delivered," followed by some piece with satyrs,—"The Argians," perhaps, of which Macrobius has preserved a fragment for us. The ancient quarrel of youth and old age breaks out; gray beards against black hair. They discuss, they dispute. The old are for the old school; the young are for Æschylus. The young defend Æschylus against Thespis, as they will defend Corneille against Garnier.

The old men are indignant. Listen to the Nestors grumbling. What is tragedy? It is the song of the he-goat. Where is the he-goat in this "Prometheus Bound"? Art is in its decline. And they repeat the celebrated objection: "Quid pro Baccho?" (What is there for Bacchus?) The graver men, the purists, do not even admit Thespis, and remind each other that Solon had raised his stick against Thespis, calling him "liar," for the sole reason that he had detached and isolated in a play an episode in the life of Bacchus,—the history of Pentheus. They hate this innovator, Æschylus. They blame all these inventions, the end of which is to bring about a closer connection between the drama and Nature, the use of the anapæst for the chorus, of the iambus for the dialogue, and of the trochee for passion, in the same way that, later on, Shakespeare was blamed for going from poetry to prose, and the theatre of the nineteenth century for that which was termed "broken verse." These are indeed unbearable novelties. And then, the flute plays too high, and the tetrachord plays too low; and where is now the ancient sacred division of tragedies into monodies, stasimes, and exodes? Thespis never put on the stage but one speaking actor; here is Æschylus putting two. Soon we shall have three. (Sophocles, indeed, was to come.) Where will they stop? These are impieties. And how does Æschylus dare to call Jupiter "the prytanus of the Immortals?" Jupiter was a god, and he is now no more than a magistrate. Where are we going? The thymele, the ancient altar of sacrifice, is now a seat for the corypheus! The chorus ought to limit itself to executing the strophe,—that is to say, the turn to the right; then the antistrophe,—that is to say, the turn

to the left; then the epode,—that is to say, repose. But what is the meaning of the chorus arriving in a winged chariot? What is the gad-fly that pursues Io? Why does the Ocean come mounted on a dragon? This is show, not poetry. Where is the ancient simplicity? This show is puerile. Your Æschylus is but a painter, a decorator, a composer of brawls, a charlatan, a machinist. All for the eyes, nothing for the mind. To the fire with all those pieces, and let us content ourselves with a recitation of the ancient pæans of Tynnichus! It is Chærilus who, by his tetralogy of the “Curetes,” has begun the evil. What are the Curetes, if you please? Gods forging metal. Well, then, he had simply to show working on the stage their five families, the Dactyli finding the metal, the Cabiri inventing the forge, the Corybantes forging the sword and the ploughshare, the Curetes making the shield, and the Telchines chasing the jewelry. It was sufficiently interesting in that form; but by allowing poets to blend in it the adventure of Plexippus and Toxeus, all is lost. How can you expect society to resist such excess? It is abominable. Æschylus ought to be summoned before justice, and sentenced to drink hemlock like that old wretch Socrates. You will see that after all, he will only be exiled. Everything degenerates.

And the young men burst with laughter. They criticise as well, but in another fashion. What an old brute is that Solon! It is he who has instituted the eponymous archonship. What do they want with an archon giving his name to the year? Hoot the eponymous archon who has lately caused a poet to be elected and crowned by ten generals, instead of taking ten men from the people! It is true that one of the generals was Cimon,—an attenuating circumstance in the eyes of some, for Cimon had beaten the Phœnicians; aggravating in the eyes of others, for it is this very Cimon who, in order to get out of a prison for debt, sold his sister Elphinia, and his wife in the bargain, to Callias. If Æschylus is a bold man, and deserves to be cited before the Areopagus, has not Phrynichus also been judged and con-

demned for having shown on the stage, in the "Taking of Miletus," the Greeks beaten by the Persians? When will poets be allowed to suit their own fancy? Hurrah for the liberty of Pericles and down with the censure of Solon! And then what is the law that has just been promulgated by which the chorus is reduced from fifty to fifteen? And how are they to play the "Danaïdes"? and won't they sneer at the line of Æschylus: "Egyptus, the father of *fifty* sons"? The fifty will be fifteen. These magistrates are idiots. Quarrel, uproar all round. One prefers Phrynichus, another prefers Æschylus, another prefers wine with honey and benzoin. The speaking-trumpets of the actors compete as well as they can with this deafening noise, through which is heard from time to time the shrill cry of the public vendors of phallus and the water-bearers. Such is Athenian uproar. During that time the play is going on. It is the work of a living man. The uproar has every reason to be. Later . . . after the death of Æschylus, or after he has been exiled there will be silence. It is right to be silent before a god. "Æquum est," it is Plautus who speaks, "vos deo facere silentium."

CHAPTER III

A GENIUS is an accused man. As long as Æschylus lived, his life was a strife. His genius was contested, then he was persecuted,—a natural progression. According to Athenian practice, his private life was unveiled; he was traduced, slandered. A woman whom he had loved, Planesia, sister of Chrysilla, mistress of Pericles, has dishonoured herself in the eyes of posterity by the outrages that she publicly inflicted on Æschylus. People ascribed to him unnatural loves; people gave him, as well as Shakespeare, a Lord Southampton. His popularity was knocked to pieces. Then everything was charged to him as a crime, even his

kindness to young poets, who respectfully offered to him their first laurels. It is curious to see this reproach constantly re-appearing. Pezay and St. Lambert repeat it in the eighteenth century:—

“Pourquoi, Voltaire, à ces auteurs
Qui t'adressent des vers flatteurs,
Répondre, en toutes tes missives,
Par des louanges excessives?”

Æschylus, living, was a kind of public target for all haters. Young, the ancient poets, Thespis and Phrynichus, were preferred to him. Old, the new ones, Sophocles and Euripides, were placed above him. At last he was brought before the Arcopagus, and, according to Suidas, because the theatre tumbled down during one of his pieces; according to Ælian, because he had blasphemed, or, which is the same thing, had related the mysteries of Eleusis, he was exiled. He died in exile.

Then Lycurgus the orator cried, “We must raise a statue of bronze to Æschylus.”

Athens had expelled the man, but raised the statue.

Thus Shakespeare, through death, entered into oblivion; Æschylus into glory.

This glory, which was to have in the course of ages its phases, its eclipses, its ebbing and rising tides, was then dazzling. Greece remembered Salamis, where Æschylus had fought. The Arcopagus itself was ashamed. It felt that it had been ungrateful toward the man who, in the “Orestias,” had paid to that tribunal the supreme honour of bringing before it Minerva and Apollo. Æschylus became sacred. All the phratries had his bust, wreathed at first with bandolets, later on crowned with laurels. Aristophanes made him say in the “Frogs”: “I am dead, but my poetry liveth.” In the great Eleusinian days, the herald of the Arcopagus blew the Tyrrhenian trumpet in honour of Æschylus. An official copy of his ninety-seven dramas was made at the expense of the republic, and placed under the special care of the re-

corder of Athens. The actors who played his pieces were obliged to go and collate their parts by this perfect and unique copy. Æschylus was made a second Homer. Æschylus had, likewise, his rhapsodists, who sang his verses at the festivals, holding in their hands a branch of myrtle.

He had been right, the great and insulted man, to write on his poems this proud and mournful dedication, "To Time."

There was no more said about his blasphemy: it had caused him to die in exile; it was well; it was enough; it was as though it had never been. Besides, one does not know where to find that blasphemy. Palingenes searched for it in an "Asterope," which, in our opinion, existed only in imagination. Musgrave sought it in the "Eumenides." Musgrave probably was right, for the "Eumenides" being a very religious piece, the priests could not help of course choosing it to accuse him of impiety.

Let us point out a whimsical coincidence. The two sons of Æschylus, Euphorion and Bion, are said to have re-cast the "Orestias," exactly as, two thousand three hundred years later, Davenant, Shakespeare's bastard, re-cast "Macbeth." But in the presence of the universal respect for Æschylus after his death, such impudent tamperings were impossible; and what is true of Davenant, is evidently untrue of Bion and Euphorion.

The renown of Æschylus filled the world of those days. Egypt, feeling with reason that he was a giant and somewhat Egyptian, bestowed on him the name of Pimander, signifying "Superior Intelligence." In Sicily, whither he had been banished, and where they sacrificed he-goats before his tomb at Gela, he was almost an Olympian. Later on, he was almost a prophet for the Christians, owing to the prediction in "Prometheus," which some people thought to apply to Jesus.

Strange thing! it is this very glory which has wrecked his work.

We speak here of the material wreck; for, as we have said, the mighty name of Æschylus survives.

It is indeed a drama, and an extraordinary drama, the disappearance of those poems. A king has stupidly robbed the human mind.

Let us relate this robbery.

CHAPTER IV

HERE are the facts,—the legend at least; for at such a distance, and in such a twilight, history is legendary:—

There was a king of Egypt, named Ptolemy Euergetes, brother-in-law to Antiochus the god.

Let us mention it *en passant*, all these people were gods:— gods Soters, gods Euergetes, gods Epiphanes, gods Philometers, gods Philadelphi, gods Philopators. Translation: Gods saviours, gods beneficent, gods illustrious, gods loving their mother, gods loving their brothers, gods loving their father. Cleopatra was goddess Soter. The priests and priestesses of Ptolemy Soter were at Ptolemais. Ptolemy VI. was called “God-love-Mother” (Philometor), because he hated his mother, Cleopatra. Ptolemy IV. was “God-love-Father” (Philopator), because he had poisoned his father. Ptolemy II. was “God-love-Brothers” (Philadelphus), because he had killed his two brothers.

Let us return to Ptolemy Euergetes.

He was the son of the Philadelphus who gave golden crowns to the Roman ambassadors,—the same to whom the pseudo-Aristeus attributes by mistake the version of the Septuagint. This Philadelphus had much increased the library of Alexandria, which, during his lifetime, counted two hundred thousand volumes, and which, in the sixth century, attained, it is said, the incredible number of seven hundred thousand manuscripts.

This stock of human knowledge, formed under the eyes of

Euclid, and by the care of Callimachus, Diodorus Cronos, Theodorus the Atheist, Philetas, Apollonius, Aratus, the Egyptian priest Manetho, Lycophron, and Theocritus, had for its first librarian, according to some, Zenodotus of Ephesus, according to others, Demetrius of Phalerum, to whom the Athenians had raised three hundred and sixty statues, which they took one year to put up and one day to destroy. Now, this library had no copy of *Æschylus*. One day the Greek Demetrius said to Euergetes, "Pharaoh has not *Æschylus*,"—exactly as, later on, Leidrade, archbishop of Lyons and librarian of Charlemagne, said to Charlemagne, "The Emperor has not *Scava Memor*."

Ptolemy Euergetes, wishing to complete the work of the Philadelphus his father, resolved to give *Æschylus* to the Alexandrian library. He declared that he would cause a copy to be made. He sent an embassy to borrow from the Athenians the unique and sacred copy under the care of the recorder of the republic. Athens, not over-prone to lend, hesitated and demanded a security. The king of Egypt offered fifteen silver talents. Now, those who wish to realize the value of fifteen talents, have but to know that it was three-fourths of the annual tribute of ransom payed by Judea to Egypt, which was twenty talents, and weighed so heavily on the Jewish people that the high priest Onias II., founder of the Onion temple, decided to refuse this tribute at the risk of a war. Athens accepted the security. The fifteen talents were deposited. The complete copy of *Æschylus* was delivered to the king of Egypt. The king gave up the fifteen talents and kept the book.

Athens, indignant, had some thought of declaring war against Egypt. To reconquer *Æschylus* was as good as reconquering Helen. To recommence Troy, but this time to get back Homer, it was a fine thing. Yet, time was taken for consideration. Ptolemy was powerful. He had forcibly taken back from Asia the two thousand five hundred Egyptian gods formerly carried there by Cambyeses, because they were in gold and silver. He had, besides, conquered

Cilicia and Syria, and all the country from the Euphrates to the Tigris. With Athens it was no longer the day when she improvised a fleet of two hundred vessels against Artaxerxes. She left Æschylus a prisoner in Egypt.

A prisoner-god. This time the word *god* is in its right place. They paid Æschylus unheard-of honours. The king refused, it is said, to let a copy be made of it, stupidly bent on possessing a unique copy.

Particular care was taken of this manuscript when the library of Alexandria, enlarged by the library of Pergamus, which Antony gave to Cleopatra, was transferred to the temple of Jupiter Serapis. There it was that Saint Jerome came to read, in the Athenian text, the famous passage in "Prometheus" prophesying Christ: "Go and tell Jupiter that nothing shall make me name the one who is to dethrone him."

Other doctors of the Church made, from the same copy, the same verification. For, at all times, the orthodox asseverations have been combined with what have been called the testimonies of polytheism, and great efforts have been resorted to in order to make the Pagans say Christian things,—*teste David cum Sibylla*. People came to the Alexandrian library, as on a pilgrimage, to examine "Prometheus,"—constant visits which deceived the Emperor Adrian, and made him write to the consul Servianus: "Those who adore Serapis are Christians: those who profess to be bishops of Christ are at the same time devotees of Serapis."

Under the Roman dominion the library of Alexandria belonged to the emperor. Egypt was Caesar's property. "Augustus," says Tacitus, "*seposuit Egyptum*." It was not every one who could travel there. Egypt was closed. The Roman knights, and even the senators, could not easily obtain admission.

It was during this period that the complete copy of Æschylus could be consulted and perused by Timocharis, Aristarchus, Athenæus, Stobæus, Diodorus of Sicily, Macrobius, Plotinus, Jamblichus, Sopater, Clement of Alexan-

dria, Nepotian of Africa, Valerius Maximus, Justin the Martyr, and even by Ælian, although Ælian left Italy but seldom.

In the seventh century a man entered Alexandria. He was mounted on a camel and seated between two sacks,—one full of figs, the other full of corn. These two sacks were, with a wooden platter, all that he possessed. This man never seated himself except on the ground. He drank nothing but water and ate nothing but bread. He had conquered half of Asia and of Africa, taken or burned thirty-six thousand towns, villages, fortresses, and castles, destroyed four thousand Pagan or Christian temples, built fourteen hundred mosques, conquered Izdeger, King of Persia, and Heraclius, Emperor of the East, and he called himself Omar. He burned the library of Alexandria.

Omar is for that reason celebrated. Louis, called the Great, has not the same celebrity, which is unjust, for he burned the Rupertine library at Heidelberg.

CHAPTER V

NOW, is not that incident a complete drama? It might be entitled "*Æschylus Lost.*" Recital, node, and *dénouement*. After Euergetes, Omar. The action begins with a robber and ends with an incendiary.

Euergetes (this is his excuse) robbed from enthusiasm,—an unpleasant instance of the admiration of an imbecile.

As for Omar, he is the fanatic. By the way, we must say that strange historical rehabilitations have been attempted in our time. We do not speak of Nero, who is the fashion; but an attempt has been made to exonerate Omar, as well as to bring a verdict of not guilty for Pius V. Holy Pius V. personifies the Inquisition; to canonize him was enough, why declare him innocent? We do not lend ourselves to those

attempts at appeal in trials which have received final judgment. We have no taste for rendering small services to fanaticism, whether it be caliph or pope, whether it burn books or men. Omar has had many advocates. A certain class of historians and biographical critics are readily moved to pity for the sword,—a victim of slander, this poor sword! Imagine then the tenderness that is felt for a scimitar! The scimitar is the ideal sword. It is better than brute,—it is Turk. Omar, then, has been cleaned as much as possible. A first fire in the Bruchion district, where the Alexandrian library stood, was used as an argument to prove how easily such accidents happen. That one was the fault of Julius Cæsar,—another sword. Then a second argument was found in a second fire, only partial, of the Serapeum, in order to accuse the Christians, the demagogues of those days. If the fire at the Serapeum had destroyed the Alexandrian library in the fourth century, Hypatia would not have been able, in the fifth century, to give, in that same library, those lessons in philosophy which caused her to be murdered with broken pieces of earthen pots. About Omar we willingly believe the Arabs. Abd-Allatif saw at Alexandria, about 1220, “the column of pillars supporting a cupola,” and said, “There stood the library that Amrou-ben-Alas burned by permission of Omar.” Abulfaradge, in 1260, relates in his “*Dynastic History*” that by order of Omar they took the books from the library, and with them heated the baths of Alexandria for six months. According to Gibbon, there were at Alexandria four thousand baths. Ebn-Khaldoun, in his “*Historical Prolegomena*,” relates another wanton destruction,—the annihilation of the library of the Medes by Saad, Omar’s lieutenant. Now, Omar having caused the burning of the Median library in Persia by Saad, was logical in causing the destruction of the Egyptian-Greek library in Egypt by Amrou. His lieutenants have preserved his orders for us: “If these books contain falsehoods, to the fire with them. If they contain truths, these truths are in the Koran; to the fire with them.” In place of the Koran, put the Bible,

Veda, Edda, Zend-Avesta, Toldos Jeschut, Talmud, Gospel, and you have the imperturbable and universal formula of all fanaticisms. This being said, we do not see any reason to reverse the verdict of history; we award to the caliph the smoke of the seven hundred thousand volumes of Alexandria, Æschylus included, and we maintain Omar in possession of his rights as incendiary.

Euergetes, through his wish for exclusive possession, and treating a library as a seraglio, has robbed us of Æschylus. Imbecile contempt can have the same effect as imbecile adoration. Shakespeare was very near having the fate of Æschylus. He has had, too, his fire. Shakespeare was so little printed, printing existed so little for him, thanks to the silly indifference of his immediate posterity, that in 1666 there was still but one edition of the poet of Stratford-on-Avon (Hemyng and Condell's edition), three hundred copies of which were printed. Shakespeare, with this obscure and pitiful edition, waiting in vain for the public, was a sort of poor wretch ashamed to beg for glory. These three hundred copies were nearly all stored up in London when the fire of 1666 broke out. It burned London, and nearly burned Shakespeare. The whole edition of Hemyng and Condell disappeared, with the exception of forty-four copies, which had been sold in fifty years. Those forty-four purchasers saved from death the work of Shakespeare.

CHAPTER VI

THE disappearance of Æschylus! Stretch this catastrophe hypothetically to a few more names, and it seems as though you felt the vacuum annihilating the human mind.

The work of Æschylus was, by its extent, the greatest, certainly, of all antiquity. By the seven plays which remain to us, we may judge what that universe was.

Let us point out what Æschylus lost is.

Fourteen trilogies: the "Promethei," of which "Prometheus Bound" formed a part; the "Seven Chiefs before Thebes," of which there remains one piece, "The Danaid," which comprised the "Supplicants," written in Sicily, and in which the *Sicelism* of Æschylus is traceable; "Laius," which comprised "Œdipus;" "Athamas," which ended with the "Isthmiasts;" "Perseus," the node of which was the "Phoreydes;" "Etna," which had as prologue the "Etnean Women;" "Iphigenia," the *dénouement* of which was the tragedy of the "Priestesses;" the "Ethiopid," the titles of which are nowhere to be found; "Pentheus," in which were the "Hydrophores;" "Teucer," which opened with the "Judgment of Arms;" "Niobe," which commenced with the "Nurses" and ended with the "Men of the Train;" a trilogy in honour of Achilles, the "Tragic Iliad," composed of the "Myridons," the "Nereids," and the "Phrygians;" one in honour of Bacchus, the "Lycurgia," composed of the "Edons," the "Bassarides," and the "Young Men."

These fourteen trilogies in themselves alone give a total of fifty-six plays, if we consider that nearly all were tetralogies,—that is to say, quadruple dramas,—and ended with a satyrade.

Thus the "Orestias" had, as a final satyrade, "Proteus," and the "Seven Chiefs before Thebes," had the "Sphinx."

Add to those fifty-six pieces a probable trilogy of the "Labdacides;" add the tragedies,—the "Egyptians," the "Ransom of Hector," "Menon," undoubtedly connected with some trilogies; add all the satyrades,—"Sisyphus the Deserter," the "Heralds," the "Lion," the "Argians," "Amymone," "Circe," "Cereyon," "Glaucus the Mariner," comedies in which was found the mirth of that wild genius.

See all that is lost.

Euergetes and Omar have robbed us of all that.

It is difficult to state precisely the total number of pieces written by Æschylus. The amount varies. The anonymous

biographer speaks of seventy-five, Suidas of ninety, Jean Deslyons of ninety-seven, Meursius of one hundred.

Meursius reckons up more than a hundred titles, but some are probably used twice.

Jean Deslyons, doctor of the Sorbonne, theologal of Senlis, author of the "*Discours ecclesiastique contre le paganisme du Roi boit*," published in the seventeenth century a work against the custom of laying coffins one above the other in the cemeteries, in which he took for his authority the twenty-fifth canon of the Council of Auxerre: "*Non licet mortuum super mortuum mitti.*" Deslyons, in a note added to that work, now very scarce, and a copy of which was in the possession of Charles Nodier, if our memory is faithful, quotes a passage from the great antiquarian numismatist of Venloo, Hubert Goltzius, in which, in reference to embalming, Goltzius mentions the "Egyptians," of Æschylus, and "The Apotheosis of Orpheus,"—a title omitted in the enumeration given by Meursius. Goltzius adds that "The Apotheosis of Orpheus" was recited at the mysteries of the Lyeomidians.

This title, "The Apotheosis of Orpheus" opens a field for thought. Æschylus speaking of Orpheus, the Titan measuring the giant, the god interpreting the god, what more magnificent, and how one would long to read that work! Dante, speaking of Virgil, and calling him his master, does not fill up this gap, because Virgil, a noble poet, but without invention, is less than Dante; it is between equals, from genius to genius, from sovereign to sovereign, that such homage is splendid. Æschylus raises to Orpheus a temple of which he might occupy the altar himself: it is grand.

CHAPTER VII

ÆSCHYLUS is incommensurate. There is in him something of India. The wild majesty of his stature recalls those vast poems of the Ganges which walk through art with the steps of a mammoth, and which have, among the *Iliads* and the *Odysseys*, the appearance of hippopotami among lions. Æschylus, a thorough Greek, is yet something else besides a Greek. He has the Oriental immensity.

Saumaise declares that he is full of Hebraisms and Syrianisms.¹ Æschylus makes the Winds carry Jupiter's throne, as the Bible makes the Cherubim carry Jehovah's throne, as the *Rig-Veda* makes the Marouts carry the throne of Indra. The winds, the cherubim, and the marouts are the same beings,—the Breezes. Saumaise is right. The double-meaning words so frequent in the Phœnician language, abound in Æschylus. He plays, for instance, in reference to Jupiter and Europa, on the Phœnician word *ilpha*, which has the double meaning of "ship" and "bull." He loves that language of Tyre and Sidon, and at times he borrows the strange gleams of its style: the metaphor, "Xerxes with the dragon eyes," seems an inspiration from the Ninevite dialect, in which the word *draka* meant at the same time dragon and clear-sighted. He has Phœnician heresies. His heifer Io is rather the cow of Isis; he believes, like the priests of Sidon, that the temple of Delphi was built by Apollo with a paste made of wax and bees'-wings. In his exile in Sicily he often drank religiously at the fountain of Arethusa, and never did the shepherds who watched him hear him name Arethusa otherwise than by this mysterious name, *Alphaga*,—an Assyrian word signifying "source surrounded with willows."

Æschylus is, in the whole Hellenic literature, the sole example of the Athenian mind with a mixture of Egypt and

¹ "Hebraïsmis et Syrianismis."

Asia. These depths were repugnant to the Greek intelligence. Corinth, Epidaurus, Œdepsus, Gythium, Cheronea, which was to be the birth-place of Plutarch, Thebes, where Pindar's house was, Mantinea, where the glory of Epaminondas shone,—all these golden towns repudiated the Unknown, a glimpse of which was seen like a cloud behind the Caucasus. It seemed as though the sun was Greek. The sun, used to the Parthenon, was not made to enter the diluvian forests of Grand Tartary, under the gigantic mouldiness of the monocotyledons, under the lofty ferns of five hundred cubits, where swarmed all the first dreadful models of Nature, and under whose shadows existed unknown, shapeless cities, such as that fabulous Anarodgurro, the existence of which was denied until it sent an embassy to Claudius. Gagasmira, Sambulaca, Maliarpha, Barygaza, Caveripatnam, Sochoth-Benoth, Theglath-Phalazar, Tana-Serim,—all these almost hideous names affrighted Greece when they came to be reported by the adventurers on their return, first by those with Jason, then by those of Alexander. Æschylus had no such horror.

He loved Caucasus. It was there he had made the acquaintance of Prometheus. One almost feels in reading Æschylus that he had haunted the vast primitive thickets now become coal mines, and that he has taken huge strides over the roots, snake-like and half-living, of the ancient vegetable monsters. Æschylus is a kind of behemoth among geniuses.

Let us say, however, that the affinity of Greece with the East, an affinity hated by the Greeks, was real. The letters of the Greek alphabet are nothing else but the letters of the Phœnician alphabet reversed. Æschylus was all the more Greek from the fact of his being a little of a Phœnician.

This powerful mind, at times apparently crude on account of his very grandeur, has the Titanic gayety and affability. He indulges in quibbles on the names of Prometheus, Polynices, Helen, Apollo, Ilion, on the cock and the sun, imitating in this respect Homer, who made on the olive

that famous pun which caused Diogenes to throw away his plate of olives and eat a tart.

The father of Æschylus, Euphorion, was a disciple of Pythagoras. The soul of Pythagoras, that philosopher half magian and half brahmin, seemed to have entered through Euphorion into Æschylus. We have said already that in the dark and mysterious quarrel between the celestial and the terrestrial gods, the intestinal war of Paganism, Æschylus was terrestrial. He belonged to the faction of the gods of earth. The Cyclops had worked for Jupiter; he rejected them as we would reject a corporation of workers who had turned traitors, and he preferred to them the Cabyri. He adored Ceres. "O thou, Ceres, nurse of my soul!" and Ceres is Demeter, is Gemeter, is the mother-earth. Hence his veneration for Asia. It seemed then as though Earth was rather in Asia than elsewhere. Asia is, in reality, compared with Europe, a kind of block almost without capes and gulfs, and little penetrated by the sea. The Minerva of Æschylus says, "Great Asia." "The sacred soil of Asia," says the chorus of the Oceanides. In his epitaph, graven on his tomb at Gela and written by himself, Æschylus attests "the Mede with long hair." He makes the chorus celebrate "Susicanes and Pegastagon, born in Egypt, and the chief of Memphis, the sacred city." Like the Phœnicians, he gives the name of "Oncea" to Minerva. In the "Etna" he celebrates the Sicilian Dioscuri, the Palici, those twin gods whose worship, connected with the local worship of Vulcan, had reached Asia through Sarcpta and Tyre. He calls them "the venerable Palici." Three of his trilogies are entitled the "Persians," the "Ethiopid," the "Egyptians." In the geography of Æschylus, Egypt was Asia, as well as Arabia. Prometheus says, "the flower of Arabia, the heroes of Caucasus." Æschylus was, in geography, very peculiar. He had a Gorgonian city Cysthenes, which he placed in Asia, as well as a river Pluto, rolling gold, and defended by men with a single eye,—the Arimaspes. The pirates to whom he makes allusion somewhere are, according to all æt-

pearance, the pirates of Angria who inhabited the rock Vizindruk. He could see distinctly beyond the Pas-du-Nil, in the mountains of Byblos, the source of the Nile, still unknown to-day. He knew the precise spot where Prometheus had stolen the fire, and he designated without hesitation Mount Mosychlus in the neighbourhood of Lemnos.

When this geography ceases to be fanciful, it is exact as an itinerary. It becomes true and remains without measure. Nothing more real than that splendid transmission of the news of the capture of Troy in one night by bonfires lighted one after the other and corresponding from mountain to mountain — from Mount Ida to the promontory of Hermes, from the promontory of Hermes to Mount Athos, from Mount Athos to Mount Macispe, from the Macispe to the Messapius, from Mount Messapius over the river Asopus to Mount Cytheron, from Mount Cytheron over the morass of Gorgopis to Mount Egiplanctus, from Mount Egiplanctus to Cape Saronica (later Spireum); from Cape Saronica to Mount Arachne, from Mount Arachne to Argos. You may follow on the map that train of fire announcing Agamemnon to Clytemnestra.

This bewildering geography is mingled with an extraordinary tragedy, in which you hear dialogues more than human: —

Prometheus. "Alas!"

Mercury. "This is a word that Jupiter speaks not."

And where Gerontes is the Ocean. "To look a fool," says the Ocean to Prometheus, "is the secret of the sage," — saying as deep as the sea. Who knows the mental reservations of the tempest? And the Power exclaims, "There is but one free god; it is Jupiter."

Æschylus has his own geography; he has also his own fauna.

This fauna, which strikes as fabulous, is enigmatical rather than chimerical. The author of these lines has discovered and authenticated at the Hague, in a glass in the Japanese Museum, the impossible serpent in the "Orestias," having

two heads attached to its two extremities. There are, it may be added, in that glass several specimens of bestiality that might belong to another world, at all events strange and not accounted for, as we are little disposed to admit, for our part, the absurd hypothesis of the Japanese stitchers of monsters.

Æschylus at moments sees Nature with simplifications stamped with a mysterious disdain. Here the Pythagorean disappears, and the magian shows himself. All beasts are the beast. Æschylus seems to see in the animal kingdom only a dog. The griffin is a "dumb dog;" the eagle is a "winged dog,"—"The winged dog of Jupiter," says Prometheus.

We have just pronounced the word *magian*. In fact, Æschylus officiates at times like Job. One would suppose that he exercises over Nature, over human creatures, and even over gods, a kind of magianism. He upbraids animals for their voracity. A vulture which seizes, even while running, a doe-hare with young, and feeds on it, "eats a whole race stopped in its flight." He calls on the dust and on the smoke; to the one he says, "Thirsty sister of mire!" to the other, "Black sister of fire!" He insults the dreaded bay of Salymdessus: "Hard-hearted mother of vessels."

He brings down to dwarfish proportions the Greeks, conquerors of Troy by treachery; he shows them brought forth by an implement of war,—he calls them "these young of a horse."

As for the gods, he goes so far as to incorporate Apollo with Jupiter. He magnificently calls Apollo "the conscience of Jupiter."

His familiar boldness is absolute, characteristic of sovereignty. He makes the sacrificer take Iphigenia "as a she-goat." A queen who is a faithful spouse is for him "the good house-bitch." As for Orestes, he has seen him when quite a child, and he speaks of him as "wetting his swaddling-cloths,"—*humectatio ex urina*. He even goes beyond this Latin. The expression, which we do not repeat here, is to be found in "Les Plaideurs," act iii. scene 3.

If you are bent upon reading the word which we hesitate to write, apply to Racine.

The whole is immense and mournful. The profound despair of fate is in *Æschylus*. He shows in terrible lines "the impotence which chains down, as in a dream, the blind living creatures." His tragedy is nothing but the old Orphean dithyrambic suddenly launching into tears and lamentations over man.

CHAPTER VIII

ARISTOPHANES loved *Æschylus* by that law of affinity which causes Marivaux to love Racine tragedy and comedy made to understand each other.

The same distracted and all-powerful breath fills *Æschylus* and Aristophanes. They are the two inspired spirits of the antique mask.

Aristophanes, who is not yet judged, adhered to the mysteries, to Cecropian poetry, to Eleusis, to Dodona, to the Asiatic twilight, to the profound pensive dream. This dream, whence sprung the art of Egina, was at the threshold of the Ionian philosophy in Thales as well as at the threshold of the Italian philosophy in Pythagoras. It was the sphinx guarding the entrance.

This sphinx has been a muse,—the great pontifical and lascivious muse of universal rut; and Aristophanes loved it. This sphinx breathed tragedy into *Æschylus*, and comedy into Aristophanes. It had something of Cybele. The ancient sacred immodesty is in Aristophanes. At moments he has Bacchus foaming at the lips. He came from the Dionysia, or from the Aschosia, or from the great Trieteric Orgy, and he strikes one as a raving maniac of the mysteries. His wild verse resembles the bassaride hopping giddily upon bladders filled with air. Aristophanes has the sacerdotal ob-

seurity. He is for nudity against love. He denounces the Phedras and Sthenobæas, and he creates Lysistrata.

Let no one be deceived on this point; it was religion, and a cynic was an austere mind. The gymnosophists were the point of intersection between lewdness and thought. The he-goat, with its philosopher's beard, belonged to that sect. That dark ecstatic and bestial Oriental spirit lives still in the santon, the dervish, and the fakir. The corybantes were a kind of Greek fakirs. Aristophanes, like Diogenes, belonged to that family. Æschylus, by the Oriental bent of his nature, nearly belonged to it himself, but he retained the tragic chastity.

That mysterious naturalism was the ancient spirit of Greece. It was called poetry and philosophy. It had under it the group of the seven sages, one of whom, Periander, was a tyrant. Now, a certain vulgar, mean spirit appeared with Socrates. It was sagacity clearing and bottling up wisdom. Reduction of Thales and Pythagoras to the immediate true. Such was the operation. A sort of filtering, which, purifying and weakening, allowed the ancient divine doctrine to percolate, drop by drop, and become human. These simplifications disgust fanaticism; dogmas object to a process of sifting. To ameliorate a religion is to lay violent hands on it. Progress offering its services to Faith, offends it. Faith is an ignorance which professes to know, and which, in certain cases, knows perhaps more than Science. In the face of the lofty affirmations of believers, Socrates had an uncomfortably sly half-smile. There is something of Voltaire in Socrates. Socrates denounces all the Eleusinian philosophy as unintelligible and indiscernible; and he said to Euripides that to understand Heraclitus and the old philosophers, "one required to be a swimmer of Delos,"—in other words, a swimmer capable of landing on an isle which was always receding before him. That was impiety and sacrilege for the ancient Hellenic naturalism. There was no other cause for the antipathy of Aristophanes toward Socrates.

This antipathy was quite fearful. The poet showed him-

self a persecutor; he has lent assistance to the oppressors against the oppressed, and his comedy has been guilty of crimes. Aristophanes has remained in the eyes of posterity in the condition of a wicked genius,—fearful punishment! But there is for him one attenuating circumstance: he was an ardent admirer of the poet of “Promethæus,” and to admire him was to defend him. Aristophanes did what he could to prevent his banishment; and if anything can diminish one’s indignation in reading the “Clouds,” implaceable on Socrates, it is that one may see in the background the hand of Aristophanes holding the mantle of Æschylus going into exile. Æschylus has likewise a comedy, a sister of the broad farce of Aristophanes. We have spoken of his mirth. It goes very far in “The Argians.” It equals Aristophanes, and outstrips the Shrove Tuesday of our Carnival. Listen: “He throws at my head a chamber utensil. The full vase falls on my head, and is broken, odoriferous, but in a different manner from an urnful of perfume. Who says that? Æschylus. And in his turn Shakespeare will come and will exclaim through Falstaff’s lips: “Empty the jorden.” What can you say? You have to deal with savages.

One of those savages is Molière: witness from one end to the other the “Malade Imaginaire.” Racine also is in a degree one of them: see “Les Plaideurs,” already mentioned.

• The Abbé Camus was a witty bishop,—a rare thing at all times; and what is more, he was a good man. He would have deserved this reproach of another bishop: “Bon jusqu’à la bêtise.” Perhaps he was good because he had wit. He gave to the poor all the revenue of his bishopric of Belley. He objected to canonization. It was he who said, “Il n’est chasse que de vieux chiens et chasse que de vieux saints;” and although he did not like the new-comers in sanctity, he was a friend of Saint François de Sales, by whose advice he wrote novels. He relates in one of his letters that one day François de Sales said to him: “The Church laughs readily.”

Art also laughs readily. Art, which is a temple, has its laughter. Whence comes this hilarity? All at once, in the

midst of *chefs-d'œuvre*, serious figures, a buffoon stands up and blurts out,—a *chef-d'œuvre* also. Sancho Panza jostles Agamemnon. All the marvels of thought are there; irony comes to complicate and complete them. Enigma. Behold art, great art, breaking into an excess of gayety. Its problem, matter, amuses it. It was forming it, now it deforms it. It was shaping it for beauty, now it delights in extracting from it ugliness. It seems to forget its responsibility. It does not forget it, however; for suddenly, behind the grimace, philosophy makes its appearance,—a philosophy smooth, less sidereal, more terrestrial, quite as mysterious as the grave philosophy. The unknown which is in man, and the unknown which is in things, face each other; and it turns out that in the act of meeting, these two augurs, Nature and Fate, cannot keep their serious countenance. Poetry, laden with anxieties, befools—whom? Itself. A mirth, which is not serenity, gushes out from the incomprehensible. An unknown, lofty, and sinister rallery flashes its lightning through the human darkness. The shadows piled up around us play with our soul. Formidable blossoming of the unknown. The jest proceeds from the abyss.

This alarming mirth in art is called, in olden times, Aristophanes, and in modern times, Rabelais.

When Pratinas the Dorian had invented the play with satyrs, comedy making its appearance opposite tragedy, mirth by the side of mourning, the two styles ready perhaps to unite, it was a matter of scandal. Agathon, the friend of Euripides, went to Dodona to consult Loxias. Loxias is Apollo. Loxias means crooked; and Apollo was called The Crooked, on account of his oracles being always obscure and full of ambiguous meanings. Agathon inquired from Apollo whether the new style was not impious, and whether comedy existed by right as well as tragedy. Loxias answered, "Poetry has two ears."

This answer, which Aristotle declares obscure, seems to us very clear. It sums up the entire law of art. Two problems, in fact, are presented. In the full light the first prob-

lem,—noisy, tumultuous, stormy, clamorous, the vast vital causeway, offering every direction to the ten thousand feet of man; the quarrels, the uproar, the passions with their *why*; the evil, which undergoes suffering the first, for to be evil is worse than doing it; sorrows, griefs, tears, cries, rumours. In the shade, the second one, mute problem, immense silence, with an inexpressible and terrible meaning. And poetry has two ears,—one which listens to life, the other which listens to death.

CHAPTER IX

THE power that Greece had to evolve her luminous effluvia is prodigious,—even like that to-day which we see in France. Greece did not colonize without civilizing,—an example that more than one modern nation might follow. To buy and sell is not everything.

Tyre bought and sold; Berytus bought and sold; Sidon bought and sold; Sarepta bought and sold. Where are these cities? Athens taught; Athens is still at this hour one of the capitals of human thought.

The grass is growing on the six steps of the tribune where spoke Demosthenes; the Ceramicus is a ravine half-choked with the marble-dust which was once the palace of Cecrops; the Odeon of Herod Atticus at the foot of the Acropolis is now but a ruin on which falls, at certain hours, the imperfect shadow of the Parthenon; the temple of Theseus belongs to the swallows; the goats browse on the Pnyx. Still the Greek spirit is living; still Greece is queen; still Greece is goddess. A commercial firm passes away; a school remains.

It is curious to say to one's self to-day that twenty-two centuries ago small towns, isolated and scattered on the outskirts of the known world, possessed, all of them, theatres. In point of civilization, Greece began always by the construction of an academy, of a portico, or of a logeum.

Whoever could have seen, nearly at the same period, rising at a short distance one from the other, in Umbria, the Gallic town of Sens (now Sinigaglia), and near Vesuvius, the Hellenic city Parthenopea (at present Naples), would have recognized Gaul by the big stone standing all red with blood, and Greece by the theatre.

This civilization by poetry and art had such a mighty force that sometimes it subdued even war. The Sicilians — Plutarch relates it in speaking of Nicias — gave liberty to the Greek prisoners who sang the verses of Euripides.

Let us point out some very little known and very singular facts.

The Messenian colony, Zancle, in Sicily; the Corinthian colony, Corecra, distinct from the Corecra of the Absyrtides Islands; the Cycladian colony, Cyrene, in Libya; the three Phœcean colonies, Helea in Lucania, Palania in Corsica, Marseilles in France, had theatres. The gad-fly having pursued Io all along the Adriatic Gulf, the Ionian Sea reached as far as the harbour of Venetus, and Tregeste (now Trieste) had a theatre. A theatre at Salpe, in Apulia; a theatre at Squillacium, in Calabria; a theatre at Thernus, in Livadia; a theatre at Lysimachia, founded by Lysimachus, Alexander's lieutenant; a theatre at Scapta-Hyla, where Thucydides had gold-mines; a theatre at Byzia, where Theseus had lived; a theatre in Chaonia, at Buthrotum, where performed those equilibrists from Mount Chimera whom Apuleius admired on the Pœcile; a theatre in Pannonia, at Bude, where the Metanastes were,—that is to say, the "Transplanted." Many of these colonies, situated afar, were much exposed. In the Isle of Sardinia, which the Greeks named Ichnusa, on account of its resemblance to the sole of the foot, Calaris (now Cagliari) was, so to speak, under the Punic clutch; Cibalis, in Mysia, had to fear the Triballi; Aspalathon, the Illyrians; Tomis, the future resting place of Ovid, the Scordisci; Miletus, in Anatolia, the Massagetes; Denia, in Spain, the Cantabrians; Sahnydessus, the Molossians; Carsina, the Tauro-Scythians; Gelonus, the Arynphæans of Sarmatia who

lived on acorns; Apollonia, the Hamaxobians, wandering in their chariots; Abdera, the birthplace of Democritus, the Thracians, men tattooed all over,—all these towns, by the side of their citadel, had a theatre. Why? Because the theatre keeps alight the flame of love for the fatherland. Having the barbarians at their gates, it was important that they should remain Greeks. The national spirit is the strongest of bulwarks.

The Greek drama was profoundly lyrical. It was often less a tragedy than a dithyramb. It had occasionally strophes as powerful as swords. It rushed on the scene, wearing the helmet, and it was an ode armed *cap-à-pic*. We know what a Marseillaise can do.

Many of these theatres were in granite, some in brick. The theatre of Apollonia was in marble. The theatre of Salmydessus, which could be moved to the Doric place or to the Epiphanian place, was a vast scaffolding rolling on cylinders, after the fashion of those wooden towers which they thrust against the stone towers of besieged towns.

And what poet did they play by preference at these theatres? Æschylus.

Æschylus was for Greece the autochthonic poet. He was more than Greek, he was Pelasgian. He was born at Eleusis; and not only was he Eleusian, but Eleusiatic,—that is to say, a believer. It is the same shade as English and Anglican. The Asiatic element, the grandiose deformation of this genius, increased respect for it; for people said that the great Dionysus, that Bacchus, common to the West and the East, came in Æschylus's dreams to dictate to him his tragedies. You will find again here the "familiar spirit" of Shakespeare.

Æschylus, Eupatride, and Eginetic struck the Greeks as more Greek than themselves. In those times of code and dogma mingled together, to be sacerdotal was an elevated way of being national. Fifty-two of his tragedies had been crowned. On leaving the theatre after the performance of the plays of Æschylus, the men would strike the shields hung at the doors of the temples, crying, "Fatherland, fatherland!"

Let us add here, that to be hieratic did not hinder him from being demotic. Æschylus loved the people, and the people adored him. There are two sides to greatness: majesty is one, familiarity is the other. Æschylus was familiar with the turbulent and generous mob of Athens. He often gave to that mob a fine part in his plays. See, in the "Orestias," how tenderly the chorus, which is the people, receive Cassandra! The queen uses the slave roughly, and scares him whom the chorus tries to reassure and soothe. Æschylus had introduced the people in his grandest works,—in "Pentheus," by the tragedy of "The Wool-combers;" in "Niobe," by the tragedy of the "Nurses;" in "Athamas," by the tragedy of the "Net-drawers;" in "Iphigenia," by the tragedy of the "Bed-Makers." It was on the side of the people that he turned the balance in that mysterious drama, "The Weighing of Souls."¹ Therefore had he been chosen to preserve the sacred fire.

In all the Greek colonies they played the "Orestias" and "The Persians." Æschylus being present, the fatherland was no longer absent. The magistrates ordered these almost religious representations. The gigantic Æschylean theatre was intrusted with watching over the infancy of the colonies. It enclosed them in the Greek spirit, it guaranteed them from the influence of bad neighbours, and from all temptations of being led astray. It preserved them from foreign contact, it maintained them within the Hellenic circle. It was there as a warning. All those young offsprings of Greece were, so to speak, placed under the care of Æschylus.

In India they readily give the children into the charge of elephants. These enormous specimens of goodness watch over the little things. The whole group of flaxen heads sing, laugh, and play under the shade of the trees. The habitation is at some distance. The mother is not with them. She is at home, busy with her domestic cares; she pays no attention to her children. Yet, joyful as they are, they are in danger. These beautiful trees are treacherous; they hide

¹ The Psychostasia.

under their thickness thorns, claws, and teeth. There the cactus bristles up, the lynx roams, the viper crawls. The children must not wander away; beyond a certain limit they would be lost. Nevertheless, they run about, call to one another, pull and entice one another away, some of them scarcely stuttering, and quite unsteady on their little feet. At times one of them goes too far. Then a formidable trunk is stretched out, seizes the little one, and gently carries him home.

CHAPTER X

THERE were some copies more or less complete of Æschylus.

Besides the copies in the colonies, which were limited to a small number of pieces, it is certain that partial copies of the original at Athens were made by the Alexandrian critics and scholars, who have left us some fragments,—among others the comic fragment of “The Argians,” the Bacchic fragment of the “Edons,” the lines cited by Stobæus, and even the probably apocryphal verses given by Justin the Martyr.

These copies, buried but perhaps not destroyed, have buoyed up the persistent hope of searchers,—notably of Le Clere, who published in Holland, in 1709, the discovered fragments of Menander. Pierre Pelhestre, of Rouen, the man who had read everything, for which the worthy Archbishop Péréfixe scolded him, affirmed that the greater part of the poems of Æschylus would be found in the libraries of the monasteries of Mount Athos, just as the five books of the “Annals” of Tacitus had been discovered in the Convent of Corwey in Germany, and the “Institutions” of Quintilian, in an old tower of the Abbey of St. Gall.

A tradition, not undisputed, would have it that Euergetes II. had returned to Athens, not the original copy of Æschylus, but a copy, leaving the fifteen talents as a compensation.

Independently of the story about Euergetes and Omar that we have related, and which, very true in the whole, is perhaps legendary in more than one particular, the loss of so many beautiful works of antiquity is but too well explained by the small number of copies. Egypt, in particular, transcribed everything on papyrus. The papyrus, being very dear, became very rare. People were reduced to write on pottery. To break a vase was to destroy a book. About the time when Jesus Christ was painted on the walls at Rome, with the hoofs of an ass, and this inscription, "The God of the Christians, hoof of an ass," in the third century, to make ten manuscripts of Tacitus yearly,—or, as we should say to-day, to strike off ten copies of his works,—a Cæsar must needs call himself Tacitus, and believe Tacitus to be his uncle. And yet Tacitus is nearly lost. Of the twenty-eight years of his "History of the Cæsars,"—from the year 69 to the year 96,—we have but one complete year, 69, and a fragment of the year 70. Euergetes prohibited the exportation of papyrus, which caused parchment to be invented. The price of papyrus was so high that Firmius the Cyclop, manufacturer of papyrus in 270, made by his trade enough money to raise armies, wage war against Aurelian, and declare himself emperor.

Gutenberg is a redeemer. These submersions of the works of the mind, inevitable before the invention of printing, are impossible at present. Printing is the discovery of the inexhaustible. It is perpetual motion found for social science. From time to time a despot seeks to stop or to slacken it, and he is worn away by the friction. The impossibility to shackle thought, the impossibility to stop progress, the book imperishable,—such is the result of printing. Before printing, civilization was subject to losses of substance; the essential signs of progress, proceeding from such a philosopher or such a poet, were all at once lacking: a page was suddenly torn from the human book. To disinherit humanity of all the great bequests of genius, the stupidity of a copyist or the caprice of a tyrant sufficed. No such danger in the pres-

ent day. Henceforth the unseizable reigns. No one could serve a writ upon thought and take up its body. It has no longer a body. The manuscript was the body of the masterpiece; the manuscript was perishable, and carried off the soul,—the work. The work, made a printed sheet, is delivered. It is now only a soul. Kill now this immortal! Thanks to Gutenberg, the copy is no longer exhaustible. Every copy is a root, and has in itself its own possible regeneration in thousands of editions; the unit is pregnant with the innumerable. This prodigy has saved universal intelligence. Gutenberg, in the fifteenth century, emerges from the awful obscurity, bringing out of the darkness that ransomed captive, the human mind. Gutenberg is forever the auxiliary of life; he is the permanent fellow-workman in the great work of civilization. Nothing is done without him. He has marked the transition of the man-slave to the free-man. Try and deprive civilization of him, you become Egypt. The decrease of the liberty of the press is enough to diminish the stature of a people.

One of the great features in this deliverance of man by printing, is, let us insist on it, the indefinite preservation of poets and philosophers. Gutenberg is like the second father of the creations of the mind. Before him, yes, it was possible for a *chef-d'œuvre* to die.

Greece and Roman have left — mournful thing to say — vast ruins of books. A whole façade of the human mind half crumbled, that is antiquity. Here the ruin of an epic poem, there a tragedy dismantled; great verses effaced, buried, and disfigured; pediments of ideas almost entirely fallen; geniuses truncated like columns; palaces of thought without ceiling and door; bleached bones of poems; a death's-head which has been a strophe; immortality in ruins. Fearful nightmare! Oblivion, dark spider, hangs its web between the drama of Æschylus and the history of Tacitus.

Where is Æschylus? In pieces everywhere. Æschylus is scattered in twenty texts. His ruins must be sought in innumerable different places. Athenæus gives the dedication

"To Time," Macrobius the fragment of "Etna" and the homage to the Palic gods, Pausanias the epitaph. The biographer is anonymous; Goltzius and Meursius give the titles of the lost pieces.

We know from Cicero, in the "*Disputationes Tusculanæ*," that Æschylus was a Pythagorean; from Herodotus, that he fought bravely at Marathon; from Diodorus of Sicily, that his brother Amynias behaved valiantly at Platea; from Justin, that his brother Cynegyrus was heroic at Salamis. We know by the didascalies that "The Persians" were represented under the archon Meno, "The Seven Chiefs before Thebes" under the archon Theagenides, and the "Orestias" under the archon Philoeles; we know from Aristotle that Æschylus was the first to venture to make two personages speak at a time on the stage; from Plato that the slaves were present at his plays; from Horace, that he invented the mask and the buskin; from Pollux, that pregnant women miscarried at the appearance of his Furies; from Philostratus, that he abridged the monodies; from Suidas, that his theatre tumbled down under the pressure of the crowd; from Ælian, that he committed blasphemy; from Plutarch, that he was exiled; from Valerius Maximus, that an eagle killed him by letting a tortoise fall on his head; from Quintilian, that his plays were re-cast; from Fabricius, that his sons are accused of this crime of leze-paternity; from the Arundel marbles, the date of his birth, the date of his death, and his age,—sixty-nine years.

Now, take away from the drama the East and replace it by the North; take away Greece and put England, take away India and put Germany, that other immense mother, *All-men* (Allemagne); take away Pericles and put Elizabeth; take away the Parthenon and put the Tower of London; take away the plebs and put the mob; take away the fatality and put the melancholy; take away the gorgon and put the witch; take away the eagle and put the cloud; take away the sun and put on the heath, shuddering in the evening wind, the livid light of the moon, and you have Shakespeare.

Given the dynasty of men of genius, the originality of each being absolutely reserved, the poet of the Carlovingian formation being the natural successor of the poet of the Jupiterian formation and the gothic mist of the antique mystery, Shakespeare is *Æschylus II.*

There remains the right of the French Revolution, creator of the third world, to be represented in Art. Art is an immense gaping chasm, ready to receive all that is within possibility.

BOOK V

THE SOULS

CHAPTER I

THE production of souls is the secret of the unfathomable depth. The innate, what a shadow! What is that concentration of the unknown which takes place in the darkness, and whence abruptly bursts forth that light, a genius? What is the law of these events, O Love? The human heart does its work on earth, and that moves the great deep. What is that incomprehensible meeting of material sublimation and moral sublimation in the atom, indivisible if looked at from life, incorruptible if looked at from death? The atom, what a marvel! No dimension, no extent, nor height, nor width, nor thickness, independent of every possible measure, and yet, everything in this nothing! For algebra, the geometrical point. For philosophy, a soul. As a geometrical point, the basis of science; as a soul, the basis of faith. Such is the atom. Two urns, the sexes, imbibe life from the infinite; and the spilling of one into the other produces the being. This is the normal condition of all, animal as well as man. But the man more than man, whence comes he?

The Supreme Intelligence, which here below is the great man, what is the power which invokes it, incorporates it, and reduces it to a human state? What part do the flesh and the blood take in this prodigy? Why do certain terrestrial sparks seek certain celestial molecules? Where do they plunge, those sparks? Where do they go? How do they manage? What

is this gift of man to set fire to the unknown? This mine, the infinite, this extraction, a genius, what more wonderful! Whence does that spring up? Why, at a given moment, this one and not that one? Here, as everywhere, the incalculable law of affinities appears and escapes. One gets a glimpse, but sees not. O forger of the unfathomable, where art thou?

Qualities the most diverse, the most complex, the most opposed in appearance, enter into the composition of souls. The contraries do not exclude each other,—far from that; they complete each other. More than one prophet contains a scholiast; more than one magian is a philologist. Inspiration knows its own trade. Every poet is a critic: witness that excellent piece of criticism on the theatre that Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Hamlet. A visionary mind may be at the same time precise,—like Dante, who writes a book on rhetoric, and a grammar. A precise mind may be at the same time visionary,—like Newton, who comments on the Apocalypse; like Leibnitz, who demonstrates, *nova inventa logica*, the Holy Trinity. Dante knows the distinction between the three sorts of words, *parola piana*, *parola sdrucchiola*, *parola tronca*; he knows that the *piana* gives a trochee, the *sdrucchiola* a dactyl and the *tronca* an iambus. Newton is perfectly sure that the Pope is the Antichrist. Dante combines and calculates; Newton dreams.

No law is to be grasped in that obscurity. No system is possible. The currents of adhesions and of cohesions cross each other pell-mell. At times one imagines that he detects the phenomenon of the transmission of the idea, and fancies that he distinctly sees a hand taking the light from him who is departing, to give it to him who arrives. 1642, for example, is a strange year. Galileo dies, Newton is born, in that year. Good. It is a thread; try and tie it, it breaks at once. Here is a disappearance: on the 23d of April, 1616, on the same day, almost at the same minute, Shakespeare and Cervantes die. Why are these two flames extinguished at the same moment? No apparent logic. A whirlwind in the night.

Enigmas constantly. Why does Commodus proceed from Marcus Aurelius?

These problems beset in the desert Jerome, that man of the caves, that Isaiah of the New Testament. He interrupted his deep thoughts on eternity, and his attention to the trumpet of the archangel, in order to meditate on the soul of some Pagan in whom he felt interested. He calculated the age of Persius, connecting that research with some obscure chance of possible salvation for that poet, dear to the cenobite on account of his strictness; and nothing is so surprising as to see this wild thinker, half naked on his straw, like Job, dispute on this question, so frivolous in appearance, of the birth of a man, with Rufinus and Theophilus of Alexandria,—Rufinus observing to him that he is mistaken in his calculations, and that Persius having been born in December under the consulship of Fabius Persicus and Vitellius, and having died in November, under the consulship of Publius Marius and Asinius Gallus, these periods do not correspond rigorously with the year II. of the two hundred and third Olympiad, and the year II. of the two hundred and tenth, the dates fixed by Jerome. The mystery thus attracts deep thinkers.

These calculations, almost wild, of Jerome, or other similar ones, are made by more than one dreamer. Never to find a stop, to pass from one spiral to another like Archimedes, and from one zone to another like Alighieri, to fall, while fluttering about in the circular well, is the eternal lot of the dreamer. He strikes against the hard wall on which the pale ray glides. Sometimes certainty comes to him as an obstacle, and sometimes clearness as a fear. He keeps on his way. He is the bird under the vault. It is terrible. No matter, the dreamer goes on.

To dream is to think here and there,—*passim*. What means the birth of Euripides during that battle of Salamis where Sophocles, a youth, prays, and where Æschylus, in his manhood, fights? What means the birth of Alexander in the night which saw the burning of the temple of Ephesus? What tie between that temple and that man? Is it the con-

quering and radiant spirit of Europe which, destroyed under the form of the *chef-d'œuvre*, revives under the form of the hero? For do not forget that Ctesiphon is the Greek architect of the temple of Ephesus. We have mentioned just now the simultaneous disappearance of Shakespeare and Cervantes. Here is another case not less surprising. The day when Diogenes died at Corinth, Alexander died at Babylon. These two cynics, the one of the tub, the other of the sword, depart together; and Diogenes, longing to enjoy the immense unknown radiance, will again say to Alexander: "Stand out of my sunlight!"

What is the meaning of certain harmonies in the myths represented by divine men? What is this analogy between Hercules and Jesus which struck the Fathers of the Church, which made Sorel indignant, but edified Duperron, and which makes Alcides a kind of material mirror of Christ? Is there not a community of souls, and, unknown to them, a communication between the Greek legislator and the Hebrew legislator, creating at the same moment, without knowing each other, and without their suspecting the existence of each other, the first the Areopagus, the second the Sanhedrim? Strange resemblance between the jubilee of Moses and the jubilee of Lycurgus! What are these double paternities,—paternity of the body, paternity of the soul, like that of David for Solomon? Giddy heights, steep, precipices.

He who looks too long into this sacred horror feels immensity racking his brain. What does the sounding-line give you when thrown into that mystery? What do you see? Conjectures quiver, doctrines shake, hypotheses float; all the human philosophy vacillates before the mournful blast rising from that chasm.

The expanse of the possible is, so to speak, under your eyes. The dream that you have in yourself, you discover it beyond yourself. All is indistinct. Confused white shadows are moving. Are they souls? One catches, in the depths below, a glimpse of vague archangels passing along; will they be men at some future day? Holding your head between

your hands, you strive to see and to know. You are at the window looking into the unknown. On all sides the deep layers of effects and causes, heaped one behind the other, wrap you with mist. The man who meditates not lives in blindness; the man who meditates lives in darkness. The choice between darkness and darkness, that is all we have. In that darkness, which is up to the present time nearly all our science, experience gropes, observation lies in wait, supposition moves about. If you gaze at it very often, you become *rates*. Vast religious meditation takes possession of you.

Every man has in him his Patmos. He is free to go or not to go on that frightful promontory of thought from which darkness is seen. If he goes not, he remains in the common life, with the common conscience, with the common virtue, with the common faith, or with the common doubt; and it is well. For the inward peace it is evidently the best. If he ascends to that peak, he is caught. The profound waves of the marvellous have appeared to him. No one sees with impunity that ocean. Henceforth he will be the thinker enlarged, magnified, but floating,—that is to say, the dreamer. He will partake of the poet and of the prophet. A certain quantity of him now belongs to darkness. The boundless enters into his life, into his conscience, into his virtue, into his philosophy. He becomes extraordinary in the eyes of other men, for his measure is different from theirs. He has duties which they have not. He lives in a sort of vague prayer, attaching himself, strangely enough, to an indefinite certainty which he calls God. He distinguishes in that twilight enough of the anterior life and enough of the ulterior life to seize these two ends of the dark thread, and with them to tie up his soul again. Who has drunk will drink; who has dreamed will dream. He will not give up that alluring abyss, that sounding of the fathomless, that indifference for the world and for life, that entrance into the forbidden, that effort to handle the impalpable and to see the invisible; he returns to them, he leans and bends over them; he takes one step forward, then two,—and thus it is that one penetrates into the impenetra-

ble; and thus it is that one plunges into the boundless chasms of infinite meditation.

He who walks down them is a Kant; he who falls down them is a Swedenborg.

To keep one's own free will in that dilatation, is to be great. But, however great one may be, the problems cannot be solved. One may ply the fathomless with questions. Nothing more. As for the answers, they are there, but mingled with shadows. The huge lineaments of truth seem at times to appear for one moment, then go back, and are lost in the absolute. Of all those questions, that among them all which besets the intellect, that among them all which rends the heart, is the question of the soul.

Does the soul exist? Question the first. The persistency of the self is the thirst of man. Without the persistent self, all creation is for him but an immense *cui bono*? Listen to the astounding affirmation which bursts forth from all consciences. The whole sum of God that there is on the earth, within all men, condenses itself in a single cry,—to affirm the soul. And then, question the second: Are there great souls?

It seems impossible to doubt it. Why not great minds in humanity as well as great trees in the forest, as well as great peaks in the horizon? The great souls are seen as well as the great mountains. Then, they exist. But here the interrogation presses further; interrogation is anxiety: Whence come they? What are they? Who are they? Are these atoms more divine than others? This atom, for instance, which shall be endowed with irradiation here below, this one which shall be Thales, this one Æschylus, this one Plato, this one Ezekiel, this one Maccabæus, this one Apollonius of Tyana, this one Tertullian, this one Epictetus, this one Marcus Aurelius, this one Nestorius, this one Pelagius, this one Gama, this one Copernicus, this one Jean Huss, this one Descartes, this one Vincent de Paul, this one Piranesi, this one Washington, this one Beethoven, this one Garibaldi, this one John Brown,—all these atoms, souls having a sublime function among men, have they seen other worlds, and

do they bring on earth the essence of those worlds? The master souls, the leading intellects, who sends them? Who determines their appearance? Who is judge of the actual want of humanity? Who chooses the souls? Who musters the atoms? Who ordains the departures? Who premeditates the arrivals? Does the atom conjunction, the atom universal, the atom binder of worlds, exist? Is not that the great soul?

To complete one universe by the other; to pour upon the too little of the one the too much of the other; to increase here liberty, there science, there the ideal; to communicate to the inferiors patterns of superior beauty; to exchange the effluvia; to bring the central fire to the planet; to harmonize the various worlds of the same system; to urge forward those which are behind; to mix the creations,—does not that mysterious function exist?

Is it not fulfilled, unknown to them, by certain elects, who, momentarily and during their earthly transit, partly ignore themselves? Is not the function of such or such atom, divine motive power called soul, to give movement to a solar man among earthly men? Since the floral atom exists, why should not the stellar atom exist? That solar man will be, in turn, the savant, the seer, the calculator, the thaumaturge, the navigator, the architect, the magian, the legislator, the philosopher, the prophet, the hero, the poet. The life of humanity will move onward through them. The volutation of civilization will be their task; that team of minds will drag the huge chariot. One being unyoked, the others will start again. Each completion of a century will be one stage on the journey. Never any solution of continuity. That which one mind will begin, another mind will finish, soldering phenomenon to phenomenon, sometimes without suspecting that welding process. To each revolution in the fact will correspond an adequate revolution in the ideas, and reciprocally. The horizon will not be allowed to extend to the right without stretching as much to the left. Men the most diverse, the most opposite, sometimes will adhere by unexpected parts; and in these adherences will burst forth the imperious logic of

progress. Orpheus, Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Moses, Manou, Mahomet, with many more, will be the links of the same chain. A Gutenberg discovering the method for the sowing of civilization and the means for the ubiquity of thought, will be followed by a Christopher Columbus discovering a new field. A Christopher Columbus discovering a world will be followed by a Luther discovering a liberty. After Luther, innovator in the dogma, will come Shakespeare, innovator in art. One genius completes the other.

But not in the same region. The astronomer follows the philosopher; the legislator is the executor of the poet's wishes; the fighting liberator lends his assistance to the thinking liberator; the poet corroborates the statesman. Newton is the appendix to Bacon; Danton originates from Diderot; Milton confirms Cromwell; Byron supports Botzaris; Æschylus, before him, has assisted Miltiades. The work is mysterious even for the very men who perform it. Some are conscious of it, others not. At great distances, at intervals of centuries, the correlations manifest themselves, wonderful. The modification in human manners, begun by the religious revealer, will be completed by the philosophical reasoner, so that Voltaire follows up Jesus. Their work agrees and coincides. If this concordance rested with them, both would resist, perhaps,—the one, the divine man, indignant in his martyrdom, the other, the human man, humiliated in his irony; but that is so. Some one who is very high orders it in that way.

Yes, let us meditate on these vast obscurities. The characteristic of revery is to gaze at darkness so intently that it brings light out of it.

Humanity developing itself from the interior to the exterior is, properly speaking, civilization. Human intelligence becomes radiance, and step by step, wins, conquers, and humanizes matter. Sublime domestication! This labour has phases; and each of these phases, marking an age in progress, is opened or closed by one of those beings called geniuses. These missionary spirits, these legates of God, do they not carry in them a sort of partial solution of this

question, so abstruse, of free will? The apostolate, being an act of will, is related on one side to liberty, and on the other, being a mission, is related by predestination to fatality. The voluntary necessary. Such is the Messiah; such is Genius.

Now let us return,—for all questions which append to mystery form the circle, and one cannot get out of it,—let us return to our starting-point, and to our first question: What is a genius? Is it not perchance a cosmic soul, a soul imbued with a ray from the unknown? In what depths are such souls prepared? How long do they wait? What medium do they traverse? What is the germination which precedes the hatching? What is the mystery of the ante-birth? Where was this atom? It seems as if it was the point of intersection of all the forces. How come all the powers to converge and tie themselves into an indivisible unity in this sovereign intelligence? Who has bred this eagle? The incubation of the fathomless on genius, what an enigma! These lofty souls, momentarily belonging to earth, have they not seen something else? Is it for that reason that they arrive here with so many intuitions? Some of them seem full of the dream of a previous world. Is it thence that comes to them the seared wildness that they sometimes have? Is it that which inspires them with wonderful words? Is it that which gives them strange agitations? Is it thence that they derive the hallucination which makes them, so to speak, see and touch imaginary things and beings? Moses had his fiery thicket; Socrates his familiar demon; Mahomet his dove; Luther his goblin playing with his pen, and to whom he would say, “Be still, there!” Pascal his gaping chasm that he hid with a screen.

Many of those majestic souls are evidently conscious of a mission. They act at times as if they knew. They seem to have a confused certainty. They have it. They have it for the mysterious *ensemble*. They have it also for the detail. Jean Huss dying predicts Luther. He exclaims, “You burn the goose [Huss], but the swan will come.” Who sends these souls? Who creates them? What is the law of their for-

mation anterior and superior to life? Who provides them with force, patience, fecundation, will, passion? From what urn of goodness have they drawn sternness? In what region of the lightnings have they culled love? Each of these great newly arrived souls renews philosophy or art or science or poetry, re-makes these worlds after its own image. They are as though impregnated with creation. At times a truth emanates from these souls which lights up the questions on which it falls. Some of these souls are like a star from which light would drip. From what wonderful source, then, do they proceed, that they are all different? Not one originates from the other, and yet they have this in common, that they all bring the infinite. Incommensurable and insoluble questions. That does not stop the good pedants and the clever men from bridling up, and saying, while pointing with the finger at the sidereal group of geniuses on the heights of civilization: "You will have no more men such as those. They cannot be matched. There are no more of them. We declare to you that the earth has exhausted its contingent of master spirits. Now for decadence and general closing. We must make up our minds to it. We shall have no more men of genius."—Ah, you have seen the bottom of the unfathomable, you!

CHAPTER II

NO, Thou art not worn out. Thou hast not before thee the bourn, the limit, the term, the frontier. Thou hast nothing to bound thee, as winter bounds summer, as lassitude the birds, as the precipice the torrent, as the cliff the ocean, as the tomb man. Thou art boundless. The "Thou shalt not go farther," is spoken *by* thee, and it is not said *of* thee. No, thou windest not a skein which diminishes, and the thread of which breaks; no, thou stoppest not short; no, thy quantity decreaseth not; no, thy thickness becometh not thinner; no, thy faculty miscarrieth not; no, it is not true that

they begin to perceive in thy all-powerfulness that trans-
parence which announces the end, and to get a glimpse behind
thee of another thing besides thee. Another thing! And what
then? The obstacle. The obstacle to whom? The obstacle
to creation, the obstacle to the everlasting, the obstacle to the
necessary! What a dream!

When thou hearest men say, "This is as far as God ad-
vances,—do not ask more of him: he starts from here, and
stops there. In Homer, in Aristotle, in Newton, he has given
you all that he had; leave him at rest now,—he is empty.
God does not begin again; he could do that once, he cannot
do it twice; he has spent himself altogether in this man,—
enough of God does not remain to make a similar man;"—
when thou hearest them say such things, if thou wast a man
like them, thou wouldst smile in thy terrible depth; but thou
art not in a terrible depth, and being goodness, thou hast
no smile. The smile is but a passing wrinkle, unknown to the
absolute.

Thou struck by a powerful chill; thou to leave off; thou
to break down; thou to say "Halt!" Never. Thou shouldst
be compelled to take breath after having created a man! No;
whoever that man may be, thou art God. If this weak swarm
of living beings, in presence of the unknown, must feel won-
der and fear at something, it is not at the possibility of seeing
the germ-seed dry up and the power of procreation become
sterile; it is, O God, at the eternal unleashing of miracles.
The hurricane of miracles blows perpetually. Day and night
the phenomena surge around us on all sides, and, not less
marvellous, without disturbing the majestic tranquillity of the
Being. This tumult is harmony.

The huge concentric waves of universal life are boundless.
The starry sky that we study is but a partial apparition.
We steal from the network of the Being but some links.
The complication of the phenomenon, of which a glimpse can
be caught, beyond our senses, only by contemplation and
ecstasy, makes the mind giddy. The thinker who reaches so
far, is, for other men, only a visionary. The necessary en-

tanglement of the perceptible and of the imperceptible strikes the philosopher with stupor. This plenitude is required by thy all-powerfulness, which does not admit any blanks. The permeation of universes into universes makes part of thy infinitude. Here we extend the word universe to an order of facts that no astronomer can reach. In the Cosmos that the vision spies, and which escapes our organs of flesh, the spheres enter into the spheres without deforming each other, the density of creations being different; so that, according to every appearance, with our world is amalgamated, in some inexplicable way, another world invisible to us, as we are invisible to it.

And thou, centre and place of all things, as though thou, the Being, couldst be exhausted! that the absolute serenities could, at certain moments, fear the want of means on the part of the Infinite! that there would come an hour when thou couldst no longer supply humanity with the lights which it requires! that mechanically unwearied, thou couldst be worn out in the intellectual and moral order! that it would be proper to say, "God is extinguished on this side!" No! no! no! O Father!

Phidias created does not stop you from making Michael Angelo. Michael Angelo completed, there still remains to thee the material for Rembrandt. A Dante does not tire thee. Thou art no more exhausted by a Homer than by a star. The auroras by the side of auroras, the indefinite renewing of meteors, the worlds above the worlds, the wonderful passage of these incandescient stars called comets, the geniuses and again the geniuses, Orpheus, then Moses, then Isaiah, then Æschylus, then Lucretius, then Tacitus, then Juvenal, then Cervantes and Rabelais, then Shakespeare, then Molière, then Voltaire, those who have been and those who will be,—that does not weary thee. Swarm of constellations! there is room in thy immensity.

PART II — BOOK I

SHAKESPEARE.—HIS GENIUS.

CHAPTER I

“**S**HAKESPEARE,” says Forbes, “had neither the tragic talent nor the comic talent. His tragedy is artificial, and his comedy is but instinctive.” Johnson confirms the verdict: “His tragedy is the result of industry, and his comedy the result of instinct.” After Forbes and Johnson had contested his claim to drama, Green contested his claim to originality. Shakespeare is “a plagiarist;” Shakespeare is “a copyist;” Shakespeare “has invented nothing;” he is “a crow adorned with the plumes of others;” he pilfers Æschylus, Boccaccio, Bandello, Holinshed, Belleforest, Benoist de St. Maur; he pilfers Layamon, Robert of Gloucester, Robert of Wace, Peter of Langtoft, Robert Manning John de Mandeville, Sackville, Spenser; he steals the “Arcadia” of Sidney; he steals the anonymous work called the “True Chronicle of King Leir;” he steals from Rowley in “The Troublesome Reign of King John” (1591), the character of the bastard Faulconbridge. Shakespeare pilfers Thomas Greene; Shakespeare pilfers Dekker and Chettle. Hamlet is not his;—Othello is not his; Timon of Athens is not his, nothing is his. As for Green, Shakespeare is for him not only “a blower of blank verses,” a “shake-scene,” a *Johannes factotum* (allusion to his former position as call-

boy and supernumerary); Shakespeare is a wild beast. Crow no longer suffices; Shakespeare is promoted to a tiger. Here is the text: "Tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hyde."¹

Thomas Rhymer judges "Othello:"—

"The moral of this story is certainly very instructive. It is a warning to good housewives to look after their linen."

Then the same Rhymer condescends to give up joking, and to take Shakespeare in earnest:—

"What edifying and useful impression can the audience receive from such poetry? To what can this poetry serve, unless it is to mislead our good sense, to throw our thoughts into disorder, to trouble our brain, to pervert our instincts, to crack our imaginations, to corrupt our taste, and to fill our heads with vanity, confusion, clatter, and nonsense?"

This was printed eighty years after the death of Shakespeare, in 1693. All the critics and all the connoisseurs were of one opinion.

Here are some of the reproaches unanimously addressed to Shakespeare: Conceits, play on words, puns; improbability, extravagance, absurdity; obscenity; puerility; bombast; emphasis, exaggeration; false glitter, pathos; far-fetched ideas, affected style; abuse of contrast and metaphor; subtilty; immorality; writing for the mob; pandering to the *canaille*; delighting in the horrible; want of grace; want of charm; overreaching his aim; having too much wit; having no wit; overdoing his works.

"This Shakespeare is a coarse and savage mind," says Lord Shaftesbury. Dryden adds, "Shakespeare is unintelligible." Mrs. Lennox gives Shakespeare this slap: "This poet alters historical truth." A German critic of 1680, Bentheim, feels himself disarmed, because, says he, "Shakespeare is a mind full of drollery." Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's protégé, relates this: "I recollect that the comedians mentioned to the honour of Shakespeare, that in his writings he never

¹ A Groatsworth of Wit. 1592.

erased a line. I answered, 'Would to God he had erased a thousand.'¹ This wish, moreover, was granted by the worthy publishers of 1623,—Blount and Jaggard. They struck out of Hamlet alone two hundred lines; they cut out two hundred and twenty lines of "King Lear." Garrick played at Drury Lane only the "King Lear" of Nahum Tate. Listen again to Rhymer: "'Othello' is a sanguinary farce without wit." Johnson adds, "'Julius Cæsar,' a cold tragedy, and lacking the power to move the public." "I think," says Warburton, in a letter to the Dean of St. Asaph, "that Swift has much more wit than Shakespeare, and that the comic in Shakespeare, altogether low as it is, is very inferior to the comic in Shadwell." As for the witches in "Macbeth," "Nothing equals," says that critic of the seventeenth century, Forbes, repeated by a critic of the nineteenth, "the absurdity of such a spectacle." Samuel Foote, the author of the "Young Hypocrite," makes this declaration: "The comic in Shakespeare is too heavy, and does not make one laugh. It is buffoonery without wit." At last Pope, in 1725, finds a reason why Shakespeare wrote his dramas, and exclaims, "One must eat!"

After these words of Pope, one cannot understand with what object Voltaire, aghast about Shakespeare, writes: "Shakespeare whom the English take for a Sophocles, flourished about the time of Lopez [Lope, if you please, Voltaire] de Vega." Voltaire adds, "You are not ignorant that in 'Hamlet' the diggers prepare a grave, drinking, singing ballads, and cracking over the heads of dead people the jokes usual to men of their profession." And, concluding, he qualifies thus the whole scene,—“these follies.” He characterizes Shakespeare's pieces by this word, “monstrous farces called tragedies,” and completes the judgment by declaring that Shakespeare “has ruined the English theatre.”

Marmontel comes to see Voltaire at Ferney. Voltaire is in bed, holding a book in his hand; all at once he rises up,

¹ Works, vol. ix. p. 175, Gifford's edition.

throws the books away, stretches his thin legs across the bed, and cries to Marmontel, "Your Shakespeare is a barbarian!" "He is not my Shakespeare at all," replies Marmontel.

Shakespeare was an occasion for Voltaire to show his skill at the target. Voltaire missed him rarely. Voltaire shot at Shakespeare as the peasants shoot at the goose. It was Voltaire who had commenced in France the attack against that barbarian. He nicknamed him the Saint Christopher of Tragic Poets. He said to Madame de Graffigny, "Shakespeare pour rire." He said to Cardinal de Bernis, "Compose pretty verses; deliver us, monsignor, from plagues, witches, the school of the King of Prussia, the Bull Unigenitus, the constitutionalists and the convulsionists, and from that ninny Shakespeare! *Libera nos, Domine*," The attitude of Fréron toward Voltaire has, in the eyes of posterity, as an attenuating circumstance, the attitude of Voltaire toward Shakespeare. Nevertheless, throughout the eighteenth century, Voltaire gives the law. The moment that Voltaire sneers at Shakespeare, Englishmen of wit, such as my Lord Marshal, follow suit. Johnson confesses the ignorance and vulgarity of Shakespeare. Frederic II. comes in for a word also. He writes to Voltaire *à propos* of "Julius Cæsar:" "You have done well in re-casting, according to principles, the crude piece of that Englishman." Behold, then, where Shakespeare is in the last century. Voltaire insults him. La Harpe protects him: "Shakespeare himself, coarse as he was, was not without reading and knowledge."¹

In our days, the class of critics of whom we have just seen some samples, have not lost courage. Coleridge speaks of "Measure for Measure:" "a painful comedy," he hints. "Revolting," says Mr. Knight. "Disgusting," responds Mr. Hunter.

In 1804 the author of one of those idiotic *Biographies Universelles*, in which they contrive to relate the history of Calas without pronouncing the name of Voltaire, and to which

¹ LA HARPE: *Introduction au Cours de Littérature*.

governments, knowing what they are about, grant readily their patronage and subsidies, a certain Delandine feels himself called upon to be a judge, and to pass sentence on Shakespeare; and after having said that "Shakespeare, which is pronounced Chekspir," had, in his youth, "stolen the deer of a nobleman," he adds: "Nature had brought together in the head of this poet the highest greatness we can imagine, with the lowest coarseness, without wit." Lately, we read the following words, written a short time ago by an eminent dolt who is living: "Second-rate authors and inferior poets such as Shakespeare," etc.

CHAPTER II

A POET must at the same time, and necessarily, be a historian and a philosopher. Herodotus and Thales are included in Homer. Shakespeare, likewise, is this triple man. He is, besides, the painter, and what a painter!—the colossal painter. The poet in reality does more than relate; he exhibits. Poets have in them a reflector, observation, and a condenser, emotion: thence those grand luminous spectres which burst out from their brain, and which go on blazing forever on the gloomy human wall. These phantoms have life. To exist as much as Achilles, would be the ambition of Alexander. Shakespeare has tragedy, comedy, fairy-land, hymn, farce, grand divine laughter, terror and horror, and, to say all in one word, the drama. He touches the two poles. He belongs to Olympus and to the travelling booth. No possibility fails him.

When he grasps you, you are subdued. Do not expect from him any pity. His cruelty is pathetic. He shows you a mother,—Constance, mother of Arthur; and when he has brought you to that point of tenderness that your heart is as her heart, he kills her child. He goes farther in horror even than history, which is difficult. He does not content

himself with killing Rutland and driving York to despair; he dips in the blood of the son the handkerchief with which he wipes the eyes of the father. He causes elegy to be choked by the drama, Desdemona by Othello. No attenuation in anguish. Genius is inexorable. It has its law and follows it. The mind also has its inclined planes, and these slopes determine its direction. Shakespeare glides toward the terrible. Shakespeare, Æschylus, Dante, are great streams of human emotion pouring from the depth of their cave the urn of tears.

The poet is only limited by his aim; he considers nothing but the idea to be worked out; he does not recognize any other sovereignty, any other necessity but the idea; for, art emanating from the absolute, in art, as in the absolute, the end justifies the means. This is, it may be said parenthetically, one of those deviations from the ordinary terrestrial law which make lofty criticism muse and reflect, and which reveal to it the mysterious side of art. In art, above all, is visible the *quid divinum*. The poet moves in his work as providence in its own; he excites, astounds, strikes, then exalts or depresses, often in inverse ratio to what you expected, diving into your soul through surprise. Now, consider. Art has, like the Infinite, a *Because* superior to all the *Why's*. Go and ask the wherefore of a tempest from the ocean, that great lyric. What seems to you odious or absurd has an inner reason for existing. Ask of Job why he scrapes the pus on his ulcer with a bit of glass, and of Dante why he sews with a thread of iron the eyelids of the larvas in purgatory, making the stitches trickle with fearful tears!¹ Job continues to clean his sore with his broken glass and wipes it on his dunghheap, and Dante goes on his way. The same with Shakespeare.

His sovereign horrors reign and force themselves upon you. He mingles with them, when he chooses, the charm, that august charm of the powerful, as superior to feeble

¹ And as the sun does not reach the blind, so the spirits of which I was just speaking have not the gift of heavenly light. An iron wire pierces and fastens together their eyelids, as it is done to the wild hawk in order to tame it.—*Purgatory, chap. xiii.*

sweetness, to slender attraction, to the charm of Ovid or of Tibullus, as the Venus of Milo to the Venus de Medici. The things of the unknown; the unfathomable metaphysical problems; the enigmas of the soul and of Nature, which is also a soul; the far-off intuitions of the eventual included in destiny: the amalgams of thought and event,— can be translated into delicate figures, and fill poetry with mysterious and exquisite types, the more delightful that are rather sorrowful, somewhat invisible, and at the same time very real, anxious concerning the shadow which is behind them, and yet trying to please you. Profound grace does exist.

Prettiness combined with greatness is possible (it is found in Homer: Astyanax is a type of it); but the profound grace of which we speak is something more than this epic delicacy. It is linked to a certain amount of agitation, and means the infinite without expressing it. It is a kind of light and shade radiance. The modern men of genius alone have that depth in the smile which shows elegance and depth at the same time.

Shakespeare possesses this grace, which is the very opposite to the unhealthy grace, although it resembles it, emanating as it does likewise from the grave.

Sorrow,— the great sorrow of the drama, which is nothing else but human constitution carried into art,— envelopes this grace and this horror.

Hamlet, doubt, is at the centre of his work: and at the two extremities, love,— Romeo and Othello, all the heart. There is light in the folds of the shroud of Juliet; yet nothing but darkness in the winding-sheet of Ophelia disdained and of Desdemona suspected. These two innocents, to whom love has broken faith, cannot be consoled. Desdemona sings the song of the willow under which the water bears Ophelia away. They are sisters without knowing each other, and kindred souls, although each has her separate drama. The willow trembles over them both. In the mysterious chant of the calumniated who is about to die, floats the dishevelled shadow of the drowned one.

Shakespeare in philosophy goes at times deeper than Homer. Beyond Priam there is Lear; to weep at ingratitude is worse than weeping at death. Homer meets envy and strikes it with the sceptre; Shakespeare gives the sceptre to the envious, and out of Thersites creates Richard III. Envy is exposed in its nakedness all the better for being clothed in purple; its reason for existing is then visibly altogether in itself. Envy on the throne, what more striking!

Deformity in the person of the tyrant is not enough for this philosopher; he must have it also in the shape of the valet, and he creates Falstaff. The dynasty of common-sense, inaugurated in Panurge, continued in Sancho Panza, goes wrong and miscarries in Falstaff. The rock which this wisdom splits upon is, in reality, lowness. Sancho Panza, in combination with the ass, is embodied with ignorance. Falstaff — glutton, poltroon, savage, obscene, human face and stomach, with the lower parts of the brute — walks on the four feet of turpitude; Falstaff is the centaur man and pig.

Shakespeare is, above all, an imagination. Now,—and this is a truth to which we have already alluded, and which is well known to thinkers,—imagination is depth. No faculty of the mind goes and sinks deeper than imagination; it is the great diver. Science, reaching the lowest depths, meets imagination. In conic sections, in logarithms, in the differential and integral calculus, in the calculation of probabilities, in the infinitesimal calculus, in the calculations of sonorous waves, in the application of algebra to geometry, the imagination is the co-efficient of calculation, and mathematics becomes poetry. I have no faith in the science of stupid learned men.

The poet philosophizes because he imagines. That is why Shakespeare has that sovereign management of reality which enables him to have his way with it; and his very whims are varieties of the true,—varieties which deserve meditation. Does not destiny resemble a constant whim? Nothing more incoherent in appearance, nothing less connected, nothing worse as deduction. Why crown this monster, John? Why

kill that child, Arthur? Why have Joan of Arc burned? Why Monk triumphant? Why Louis XV. happy? Why Louis XVI. punished? Let the logic of God pass. It is from that logic that the fancy of the poet is drawn. Comedy bursts forth in the midst of tears; the sob rises out of laughter; figures mingle and clash; massive forms, nearly animals, pass clumsily; larvas — women perhaps, perhaps smoke — float about; souls, libellulas of darkness, flies of the twilight, quiver among all these black reeds that we call passions and events. At one pole Lady Macbeth, at the other Titania. A colossal thought, and an immense caprice.

What are the "Tempest," "Troilus and Cressida," "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," the "Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Winter's Tale?" They are fancy,—arabesque work. The arabesque in art is the same phenomenon as vegetation in nature. The arabesque grows, increases, knots, exfoliates, multiplies, becomes green, blooms, branches, and creeps around every dream. The arabesque is endless; it has a strange power of extension and aggrandizement; it fills horizons, and opens up others; it intercepts the luminous deeds by innumerable intersections; and, if you mix the human figure with these entangled branches, the *ensemble* makes you giddy; it is striking. Behind the arabesque, and through its openings, all philosophy can be seen; vegetation lives; man becomes pantheist; a combination of infinite takes place in the finite; and before such work, in which are found the impossible and the true, the human soul trembles with an emotion obscure and yet supreme.

For all this, the edifice ought not to be overrun by vegetation, nor the drama by arabesque.

One of the characteristics of genius is the singular union of faculties the most distant. To draw an astragal like Ariosto, then to dive into souls like Pascal,—such is the poet. Man's inner conscience belongs to Shakespeare; he surprises you with it constantly. He extracts from conscience every unforeseen contingency that it contains. Few poets surpass him in this psychical research. Many of the strangest pe-

cularities of the human mind are indicated by him. He skilfully makes us feel the simplicity of the metaphysical fact under the complication of the dramatic fact. That which the human creature does not acknowledge inwardly, the obscure thing that he begins by fearing and ends by desiring — such is the point of junction and the strange place of meeting for the heart of virgins and the heart of murderers; for the soul of Juliet and the soul of Macbeth. The innocent fears and longs for love, just as the wicked one for ambition. Perilous kisses given on the sly to the phantom, smiling here, fierce there.

To all these prodigalities, analysis, synthesis, creation in flesh and bone, revery, fancy, science, metaphysics, add history,—here the history of historians, there the history of the tale; specimens of everything,—of the traitor, from Macbeth the assassin of his guest, up to Coriolanus, the assassin of his country; of the despot, from the intellectual tyrant Cæsar, to the bestial tyrant Henry VIII.; of the carnivorous, from the lion down to the usurer. One may say to Shylock: “Well bitten Jew!” And, in the background of this wonderful drama, on the desert heath, in the twilight, in order to promise crowns to murderers, three black outlines appear, in which Hesiod, through the vista of ages, perhaps recognizes the *Parcæ*. Inordinate force, exquisite charm, epic ferocity, pity, creative faculty, gayety (that lofty gayety unintelligible to narrow understandings), sarcasm (the cutting lash for the wicked), star-like greatness, microscopic tenuity, boundless poetry, which has a zenith and a nadir; the *ensemble* vast, the detail profound,—nothing is wanting in this mind. One feels, on approaching the work of this man, the powerful wind which would burst forth from the opening of a whole world. The radiancy of genius on every side,—that is Shakespeare. “Totus in antithesi,” says Jonathan Forbes.

CHAPTER III

ONE of the characteristics which distinguish men of genius from ordinary minds, is that they have a double reflection,—just as the carbuncle, according to Jerome Cardan, differs from crystal and glass in having a double refraction.

Genius and carbuncle, double reflection, double refraction; the same phenomenon in the moral and in the physical order.

Does this diamond of diamonds, the carbuncle, exist? It is a question. Alchemy says yes, chemistry searches. As for genius, it exists. It is sufficient to read one verse of Æschylus or Juvenal in order to find this carbuncle of the human brain.

This phenomenon of double reflection raises to the highest power in men of genius what rhetoricians call antithesis,—that is to say, the sovereign faculty of seeing the two sides of things.

I dislike Ovid, that proscribed coward, that lickèr of bloody hands, that fawning cur of exile, that far-away flatterer disdained by the tyrant, and I hate the *bel esprit* of which Ovid is full; but I do not confound that *bel esprit* with the powerful antithesis of Shakespeare.

Complete minds having everything, Shakespeare contains Gongora as Michael Angelo contains Bernini; and there are on that subject ready-made sentences: "Michael Angelo is a mannerist, Shakespeare is antithetical." These are the formulas of the school; but it is the great question of contrast in art seen by the small side.

Totus in antithesi. Shakespeare is all in antithesis. Certainly, it is not very just to see all the man, and such a man, in one of his qualities. But, this reserve being made, let us observe that this saying, *Totus in antithesi*, which pretends to be a criticism, might be simply a statement. Shakespeare, in fact, has deserved, like all truly great poets, this

praise,—that he is like creation. What is creation? Good and evil, joy and sorrow, man and woman, roar and song, eagle and vulture, lightning and ray, bee and drone, mountain and valley, love and hate, the medal and its reverse, beauty and ugliness, star and swine, high and low. Nature is the Eternal bifronted. And this antithesis, whence comes the antiphrasis, is found in all the habits of man; it is in fable, in history, in philosophy, in language. Are you the Furies, they call you Eumenides,—the Charming; do you kill your brothers, you are called Philadelphus; kill your father, they will call you Philopator; be a great general, they will call you *le petit caporal*. The antithesis of Shakespeare is universal antithesis, always and everywhere; it is the ubiquity of antinomy,—life and death, cold and heat, just and unjust, angel and demon, heaven and earth, flower and lightning, melody and harmony, spirit and flesh, high and low, ocean and envy, foam and slaver, hurrican and whistle, self and not-self, the objective and subjective, marvel and miracle, type and monster, soul and shadow. It is from this somber palpable difference, from this endless ebb and flow, from this perpetual yes and no, from this irreducible opposition, from this immense antagonism ever existing, that Rembrandt obtains his chiaroscuro and Piranesi his vertiginous height.

Before removing this antithesis from art, commence by removing it from nature.

CHAPTER IV

“**H**E is reserved and discreet. You may trust him: he will take no advantage. He has, above all, a very rare quality,—he is sober.”

What is this? A recommendation for a domestic? No. It is the panegyric of a writer. A certain school, called “serious,” has in our days hoisted this programme of poetry:

sobriety. It seems that the only question should be to preserve literature from indigestion. Formerly, the motto was "Prolifeness and power;" to-day it is "tisane." You are in the resplendent garden of the Muses, where those divine blossoms of the mind that the Greeks called "tropes" blow in riot and luxuriance on every branch; everywhere the ideal image, everywhere the thought-flower, everywhere fruits, metaphors, golden apples, perfumes, colours, rays, strophes, wonders; touch nothing, be discreet. Whoever gathers nothing there proves himself a true poet. Be of the temperance society. A good critical book is a treatise on the dangers of drinking. Do you wish to compose the *Iliad*, put yourself on diet. Ah, thou mayest well open thy eyes wide, old Rabelais!

Lyricism is heady, the beautiful intoxicates, greatness inebriates, the ideal causes giddiness; whoever proceeds from it is no longer in his right senses; when you have walked among the stars, you are capable of refusing a prefecture; you are no longer a sensible being; they might offer you a seat in the senate of Domitian and you would refuse it; you no longer give to Cæsar what is due to Cæsar; you have reached that point of mental alienation that you will not even salute the Lord Incitatus, consul and horse. See what is the result of your having drunk in that shocking place, the Empyrean! You become proud, ambitious, disinterested. Now, be sober. It is forbidden to haunt the tavern of the sublime.

Liberty means libertinism. To restrain yourself is well, to geld yourself is better.

Pass your life in restraining yourself.

Observe sobriety, decency, respect for authority, an irreproachable toilet. There is no poetry unless it be fashionably dressed. An uncombed savannah, a lion which does not pare its nails, an unsifted torrent, the navel of the sea which allows itself to be seen, the cloud which forgets itself so far as to show Aldebaran — oh, shocking! The wave foams on the rock, the cataract vomits into the gulf, Juvenal spits on the tyrant. Fie!

We like not enough better than too much. No exaggeration. Henceforth the rose-tree shall be compelled to count its roses. The prairie shall be requested not to be so prodigal of daisies; the spring shall be ordered to restrain itself. The nests are rather too prolific. The groves are too rich in warblers. The Milky Way must condescend to number its stars; there are a good many.

Take example from the big Mullen Serpentaria of the Botanical Garden, which blooms only every fifty years. That is a flower truly respectable.

A true critic of the sober school is that garden-keeper who, to this question, "Have you any nightingales in your trees?" replied, "Ah, don't mention it! For the whole month of May these ugly beasts have been doing nothing but bark."

M. Suard gave to Marie Joseph Chénier this certificate: "His style has the great merit of not containing comparisons." In our days we have seen that singular eulogium reproduced. This reminds us that a great professor of the Restoration, indignant at the comparisons and figures which abound in the prophets, crushes Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, with this profound apothegm: "The whole Bible is in 'like' (*comme*)."³ Another, a greater professor still, was the author of this saying, which is still celebrated at the normal school: "I throw Juvenal back to the romantic dunghill." Of what crime was Juvenal guilty? Of the same as Isaiah — namely, of readily expressing the idea by the image. Shall we return, little by little, in the walks of learning, to the metonymy term of chemistry, and to the opinion of Pradon on metaphor?

One would suppose, from the demands and clamours of the doctrinary school, that it has to supply, at its own expense, all the consumption of metaphors and figures that poets can make, and that it feels itself ruined by spendthrifts such as Pindar, Aristophanes, Ezekiel, Plautus, and Cervantes. This school puts under lock and key passions, sentiments, the human heart, reality, the ideal, life. Frightened, it looks at the men of genius, hides from them everything, and says, "How

greedy they are!" Therefore it has invented for writers this superlative praise: "He is temperate."

On all these points sacerdotal criticism fraternizes with doctrinal criticism. The prude and the devotee help each other.

A curious bashful fashion tends to prevail. We blush at the coarse manner in which grenadiers meet death; rhetoric has for heroes modest vine-leaves which they call periphrases; it is agreed that the bivouac speaks like the convent, the talk of the guardroom is a calumny; a veteran drops his eyes at the recollection of Waterloo, and the Cross of Honour is given to these modest eyes. Certain sayings which are in history have no right to be historical; and it is well understood, for example, that the gendarme who fired a pistol at Robespierre at the Hôtel-de-Ville was called *La-garde-meurt-et-ne-se-rend-pas*.

One salutary reaction is the result of the combined effort of two critics watching over public tranquillity. This reaction has already produced some specimens of poets,—steady, well-bred, prudent, whose style always keeps good time; who never indulge in an orgy with all those mad things, ideas; who are never met at the corner of a wood, *solus cum sola*, with that Bohemian, Revery; who are incapable of having connection either with Imagination, a dangerous vagabond, or with Inspiration, a Bacchante, or with Fancy, a *lorette*; who have never in their life given a kiss to that beggarly chit, the Muse; who do not sleep out, and who are honoured with the esteem of their doorkeeper, Nicholas Boileau. If Polyhymnia goes by with her hair rather flowing, what a scandal! Quick, they call the hairdresser. M. de la Harpe comes hastily. These two sister critics, the doctrinal and the sacerdotal, undertake to educate. They bring up writers from the birth. They keep houses to wean them, a boarding-school for juvenile reputations.

Thence a discipline, a literature, an art. Dress right, fall into line! Society must be saved in literature as well as in politics. Every one knows that poetry is a frivolous, insignificant thing, childishly occupied in seeking rhymes, barren,

vain; therefore nothing is more formidable. It behooves us to well secure the thinkers. Lie down, dangerous beast! What is a poet? For honour, nothing; for persecution, everything.

This race of writers requires repression. It is useful to have recourse to the secular arm. The means vary. From time to time a good banishment is expedient. The list of exiled writers opens with Æschylus, and does not close with Voltaire. Each century has its link in this chain. But there must be at least a pretext for exile, banishment, and proscription. That cannot apply to all cases. It is rather unmanageable; it is important to have a lighter weapon for every-day skirmishing. A State criticism, duly sworn in and accredited, can render service. To organize the persecution of writers by means of writers is not a bad thing. To entrap the pen by the pen is ingenious. Why not have literary policemen?

Good taste is a precaution taken by good order. Sober writers are the counterpart of prudent electors. Inspiration is suspected of love for liberty. Poetry is rather outside of legality; there is, therefore, an official art, the offspring of official criticism.

A whole special rhetoric proceeds from those premises. Nature has in that particular art but a narrow entrance, and goes in through the side door. Nature is infected with demagoguery. The elements are suppressed as being bad company, and making too much uproar. The equinox is guilty of breaking into reserve grounds; the squall is a nightly row. The other day, at the School of Fine Arts, a pupil-painter having caused the wind to lift up the folds of a mantle during a storm, a local professor, shocked at this lifting up, said, "The style does not admit of wind."

After all, reaction does not despair. We get on; some progress is accomplished. A ticket of confession sometimes gains admittance for its bearer into the Academy. Jules Janin, Théophile Gautier, Paul de Saint-Victor, Littré, Renan, please to recite your creed.

But that does not suffice; the evil is deep-rooted. The ancient Catholic society, and the ancient legitimate literature, are threatened. Darkness is in peril. To war with new generations! to war with the modern spirit! and down upon Democracy, the daughter of Philosophy!

Cases of rabidness — that is to say, the works of genius — are to be feared. Hygienic prescriptions are renewed. The public high-road is evidently badly watched. It appears that there are some poets wandering about. The prefect of police, a negligent man, allows some spirits to rove about. What is Authority thinking of? Let us take care. Intellects can be bitten; there is danger. It is certain, evident. It is rumoured that Shakespeare has been met without a muzzle on.

This Shakespeare without a muzzle is the present translation.¹

CHAPTER V

IF ever a man was undeserving of the good character of "he is sober," it is most certainly William Shakespeare. Shakespeare is one of the worst rakes that serious æsthetics ever had to lord over.

Shakespeare is fertility, force, exuberance, the overflowing breast, the foaming cup, the brimful tub, the overrunning sap, the overflowing lava, the whirlwind scattering germs, the universal rain of life, everything by thousands, everything by millions, no reticence, no binding, no economy, the inordinate and tranquil prodigality of the creator. To those who feel the bottom of their pocket, the inexhaustible seems insane. Will it stop soon? Never. Shakespeare is the sower of dazzling wonders. At every turn, the image; at every turn, contrast; at every turn, light and darkness.

The poet, we have said, is Nature. Subtle, minute, keen, microscopical like Nature; immense. Not discreet, not re-

¹ The Complete Works of Shakespeare, translated by François Victor Hugo.

served, not sparing. Simply magnificent. Let us explain this word, *simple*.

Sobriety in poetry is poverty; simplicity is grandeur. To give to each thing the quantity of space which fits it, neither more nor less, is simplicity. Simplicity is justice. The whole law of taste is in that. Each thing put in its place and spoken with its own word. On the only condition that a certain latent equilibrium is maintained and a certain mysterious proportion preserved, simplicity may be found in the most stupendous complication, either in the style, or in the *ensemble*. These are the arcana of great art. Lofty criticism alone, which takes its starting-point from enthusiasm, penetrates and comprehends these learned laws. Opulence, profusion, dazzling radiance, may be simplicity. The sun is simple.

Such simplicity does not evidently resemble the simplicity recommended by Le Batteux, the Abbé d'Aubignac, and Father Bouhours.

Whatever may be the abundance, whatever may be the entanglement, even if perplexing, confused, and inextricable, all that is true is simple. A root is simple.

That simplicity which is profound is the only one that art recognizes.

Simplicity, being true, is artless. Artlessness is the characteristic of truth. Shakespeare's simplicity is the great simplicity. He is foolishly full of it. He ignores the small simplicity.

The simplicity which is impotence, the simplicity which is meagreness, the simplicity which is shortwinded, is a case for pathology. It has nothing to do with poetry. An order for the hospital suits it better than a ride on the hippogriff.

I admit that the hump of Thersites is simple; but the breastplates of Hercules are simple also. I prefer that simplicity to the other.

The simplicity which belongs to poetry may be as bushy as the oak. Does the oak by chance produce on you the effect of a Byzantine and of a refined being? Its innumera-

ble antitheses,—gigantic trunk and small leaves, rough bark and velvet mosses, reception of rays and shedding of shade, crowns for heroes and fruit for swine,—are they marks of affectation, corruption, subtlety and bad taste? Could the oak be too witty? Could the oak belong to the Hôtel Rambouillet? Could the oak be a *précieux ridicule*? Could the oak be tainted with Gongorism? Could the oak belong to the age of decadence? Is by chance complete simplicity, *sancta simplicitas*, condensed in the cabbage?

Refinement, excess of wit, affectation, Gongorism,—that is what they have hurled at Shakespeare's head. They say that those are the faults of littleness, and they hasten to reproach the giant with them.

But then this Shakespeare respects nothing, he goes straight on, putting out of breath those who wish to follow; he strides over proprieties; he overthrows Aristotle; he spreads havoc among the Jesuits, Methodists, the Purists, and the Puritans; he puts Loyola to flight, and upsets Wesley; he is valiant, bold, enterprising, militant, direct. His inkstand smokes like a crater. He is always laborious, ready, spirited, disposed, going forward. Pen in hand, his brow blazing, he goes on driven by the demon of genius. The stallion abuses; there are he-mules passing by to whom this is offensive. To be prolific is to be aggressive. A poet like Isaiah, like Juvenal, like Shakespeare, is, in truth, exorbitant. By all that is holy! some attention ought to be paid to others; one man has no right to everything. What! always virility, inspiration everywhere, as many metaphors as the prairie, as many antitheses as the oak, as many contrasts and depths as the universe; what! forever generation, hatching, hymen, parturition, vast *ensemble*, exquisite and robust detail, living communion, fecundation, plenitude, production! It is too much; it infringes the rights of human geldings.

For nearly three centuries Shakespeare, this poet all brimming with virility, has been looked upon by sober critics with that discontented air that certain bereaved spectators must have in the scraglio.

Shakespeare has no reserve, no discretion, no limit, no blank. What is wanting in him is that he wants nothing. No box for savings, no fast-day with him. He overflows like vegetation, like germination, like light, like flame. Yet, it does not hinder him from thinking of you, spectator or reader, from preaching to you, from giving you advice, from being your friend, like any other kind-hearted La Fontaine, and from rendering you small services. You can warm your hands at the conflagration he kindles.

Othello, Romeo, Iago, Macbeth, Shylock, Richard III., Julius Cæsar, Oberon, Puck, Ophelia, Desdemona, Juliet, Titania, men, women, witches, fairies, souls,—Shakespeare is the grand distributor; take, take, take, all of you! Do you want more? Here is Ariel, Parolles, Macduff, Prospero, Viola, Miranda, Caliban. More yet? Here is Jessica, Cordelia, Cressida, Portia, Brabantio, Polonius, Horatio, Mercutio, Imogene, Pandarus of Troy, Bottom, Theseus. *Ecce Deus!* It is the poet, he offers himself: who will have me? He gives, scatters, squanders himself; he is never empty. Why? He cannot be. Exhaustion with him is impossible. There is in him something of the fathomless. He fills up again, and spends himself; then recommences. He is the bottomless treasury of genius.

In license and audacity of language Shakespeare equals Rabelais, whom, a few days ago, a swan-like critic called a swine.

Like all lofty minds in full riot of Omnipotence, Shakespeare decants all Nature, drinks it, and makes you drink it. Voltaire reproached him for his drunkenness, and was quite right. Why on earth, we repeat, why has this Shakespeare such a temperament? He does not stop, he does not feel fatigue, he is without pity for the poor weak stomachs that are candidates for the Academy. The gastritis called "good taste," he does not labour under it. He is powerful. What is this vast intemperate song that he sings through ages,—war-song, drinking-song, love-ditty,—which passes from King Lear to Queen Mab, and from Hamlet to Falstaff, heart-

rending at times as a sob, grand as the *Iliad*? "I have the lumbago from reading Shakespeare," said M. Auger.

His poetry has the sharp perfume of honey made by the vagabond bee without a hive. Here prose, there verse; all forms, being but receptacles for the idea, suit him. This poetry weeps and laughs. The English tongue, a language little formed, now assists, now harms him, but everywhere the deep mind gushes forth translucent. Shakespeare's drama proceeds with a kind of distracted rhythm. It is so vast that it staggers; it has and gives the vertigo; but nothing is so solid as this excited grandeur. Shakespeare, shuddering, has in himself the winds, the spirits, the philters, the vibrations, the fluctuations of transient breezes, the obscure penetration of effluvia, the great unknown sap. Thence his agitation, in the depth of which is repose. It is this agitation in which Goethe is wanting, wrongly praised for his impassiveness, which is inferiority. This agitation, all minds of the first order have it. It is in Job, in *Æschylus*, in *Alighieri*. This agitation is humanity. On earth the divine must be human. It must propose to itself its own enigma and feel disturbed about it.

Inspiration being prodigy, a sacred stupor mingles with it. A certain majesty of mind resembles solitudes and is blended with astonishment. Shakespeare, like all great poets, like all great things, is absorbed by a dream. His own vegetation astounds him; his own tempest appals him. It seems at times as if Shakespeare terrified Shakespeare. He shudders at his own depth. This is the sign of supreme intellects. It is his own vastness which shakes him and imparts to him unaccountable huge oscillations. There is no genius without waves. An inebriated savage it may be. He has the wildness of the virgin forest; he has the intoxication of the high sea.

Shakespeare (the condor alone gives some idea of such gigantic gait) departs, arrives, starts again, mounts, descends, hovers, dives, sinks, rushes, plunges into the depths below, plunges into the depths above. He is one of those

geniuses that God purposely leaves unbridled, so that they may go headlong and in full flight into the infinite.

From time to time comes on this globe one of these spirits. Their passage, as we have said, renews art, science, philosophy, or society.

They fill a century, then disappear. Then it is not one century alone that their light illumines, it is humanity from one end to another of time; and it is perceived that each of these men was the human mind itself contained whole in one brain, and coming, at a given moment, to give on earth an impetus to progress.

These supreme spirits, once life achieved and the work completed, go in death to rejoin the mysterious group, and are probably at home in the infinite.

BOOK II

SHAKESPEARE.—HIS WORK.—THE CULMINATING POINTS

CHAPTER I

THE characteristic of men of genius of the first order is to produce each a peculiar model of man. All bestow on humanity its portrait,—some laughing, some weeping, others pensive. These last are the greatest. Plautus laughs, and gives to man *Amphitryon*; Rabelais laughs, and gives to man *Gargantua*; Cervantes laughs, and gives to man *Don Quixote*; Beaumarchais laughs, and gives to man *Figaro*; Molière weeps, and gives to man *Alceste*; Shakespeare dreams, and gives to man *Hamlet*; Æschylus meditates, and gives to man *Prometheus*. The others are great; Æschylus and Shakespeare are immense.

These portraits of humanity, left to humanity as a last farewell by those passers-by, the poets, are rarely flattered, always exact, striking likenesses. Vice, or folly, or virtue, is extracted from the soul and stamped on the visage. The tear congealed becomes a pearl; the smile petrified ends by looking like a menace; wrinkles are the furrows of wisdom; some frowns are tragic. This series of models of man is the permanent lesson for generations; each century adds in some figures,—sometimes done in full light and strong relief, like *Macette*, *Célimène*, *Tartuffe*, *Turcaret*, and the *Nephew of Rameau*; sometimes simple profiles, like *Gil Blas*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, and *Candide*.

God creates by intuition; man creates by inspiration, strengthened by observation. This second creation, which is nothing else but divine action carried out by man, is what is called genius.

The poet stepping into the place of destiny; an invention of men and events so strange, so true to nature, and so masterly that certain religious sects hold it in horror as an encroachment upon Providence, and call the poet "the liar;" the conscience of man, taken in the act and placed in a medium which it combats, governs or transforms,—such is the drama. And there is in this something superior. This handling of the human soul seems a kind of equality with God,—equality, the mystery of which is explained when we reflect that God is within man. This equality is identity. Who is our conscience? He. And He counsels good acts. Who is our intelligence? He. And He inspires the *chef-d'œuvre*.

God may be there, but it removes nothing, as we have proved, from the sourness of critics; the greatest minds are those which are most brought into question. It even sometimes happens that true intellects attack genius; the inspired, strangely enough, do not recognize inspiration. Erasmus, Bayle, Scaliger, St. Evremont, Voltaire, many of the Fathers of the Church, whole families of philosophers, the whole School of Alexandria, Cicero, Horace, Lucian, Plutarch, Josephus, Dion Chrysostom, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Philostratus, Metrodorus of Lampsacus, Plato, Pythagoras, have severally criticised Homer. In this enumeration we omit Zoilus. Men who deny are not critics. Hatred is not intelligence. To insult is not to discuss. Zoilus, Mævius, Cecchi, Green, Avelaneda, William Lauder, Visé, Fréron,—no cleansing of these names is possible. These men have wounded the human race through her men of genius; these wretched hands forever retain the colour of the mud that they have thrown.

And these men have not even either the sad renown that they seem to have acquired by right, or the whole quantity of shame that they have hoped for. One scarcely knows that

they have existed. They are half forgotten,—a greater humiliation than to be wholly forgotten. With the exception of two or three among them who have become by-words of contempt, despicable owls, nailed up for an example, all these wretched names are unknown. An obscure notoriety follows their equivocal existence. Look at this Clement, who had called himself the “hypercritic,” and whose profession it was to bite and denounce Diderot; he disappears, and is confounded, although born at Geneva, with Clement of Dijon, confessor to Mesdames; with David Clement, author of the “Bibliothèque Curieuse;” with Clement of Baize, Benedictine of St. Maur; and with Clement d’Ascain, Capuchin, definator and provincial of Béarn. What avails it him to have declared that the work of Diderot is but an “obscure verbiage,” and to have died mad at Charenton, to be afterward submerged in four or five unknown Clements? In vain did Famien Strada rabidly attack Tacitus; one scarcely knows him now from Fabien Spada, called *L’Epée de Bois*, the jester of Sigismond Augustus. In vain did Cecchi vilify Dante; we are not certain whether his name was not Cecco. In vain did Green fasten on Shakespeare; he is now confounded with Greene. Avellaneda, the “enemy” of Cervantes, is perhaps Avellanedo. Lauder, the slanderer of Milton, is perhaps Leuder. The unknown De Visé, who tormented Molière, turns out to be a certain Donneau; he had surnamed himself De Visé, through a taste for nobility. Those men relied, in order to create for themselves a little *éclat*, on the greatness of those whom they outraged. But no, they have remained obscure. These poor insulters did not get their salary. Contempt has failed them. Let us pity them.

CHAPTER II

LET us add that calumny loses its labour. Then what purpose can it serve? Not even an evil one. Do you know anything more useless than the sting which does not sting?

Better still. This sting is beneficial. In a given time it is found that calumny, envy, and hatred, thinking to labour against, have worked in aid of truth. Their insults bring fame, their blackening makes illustrious. They succeed only in mingling with glory an outery which increases it.

Let us continue.

So, each of the men of genius tries on in his turn this immense human mask; and such is the strength of the soul which they cause to pass through the mysterious aperture of the eyes, that this look changes the mask, and, from terrible, makes it comic, then pensive, then grieved, then young and smiling, then decrepit, then sensual and gluttonous, then religious, then outrageous; and it is Cain, Job, Atreus, Ajax, Priam, Hecuba, Niobe, Clytemnestra, Nausicaa, Pistoclerus, Grumio, Davus, Pasicompsa, Chimène, Don Arias, Don Diego, Mudarra, Richard III., Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, Juliet, Romeo, Lear, Sancho Panza, Pantagruel, Panurge, Arnolphe, Dandin Sganarelle, Agnes, Rosine, Victorine, Basile, Al-maviva, Cherubin, Manfred.

From the direct divine creation proceeds Adam, the prototype. From the indirect divine creation,—that is to say, from the human creation,—proceed other Adams, the types.

A type does not produce any man in particular; it sums up and concentrates under one human form a whole family of characters and minds. A type is no abridgment; it is a condensation. It is not one, it is all. Alcibiades is but Alcibiades, Petronius is but Petronius, Bassompierre is but Bassompierre, Buckingham is but Buckingham, Fronsac is but

Fronsac, Lauzun is but Lauzun; but take Lauzun, Fronsac, Buckingham, Bassompierre, Petronius, and Alcibiades, and pound them in the mortar of imagination, and from that process you have a phantom more real than them all,—Don Juan. Take the usurers one by one; no one of them is that fierce merchant of Venice, crying, “Go, Tubal, fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight before; I will have the heart of him if he forfeit.” Take all the usurers together; from the crowd of them comes a total,—Shylock. Sum up usury, you have Shylock. The metaphor of the people, who are never mistaken, confirms, without knowing it, the inventions of the poet; and while Shakespeare makes Shylock, it creates the *gripe-all*. Shylock is the Jewish bargaining. He is also Judaism; that is to say, his whole nation,—the high as well as the low, faith as well as fraud; and it is because he sums up a whole race, such as oppression has made it, that Shylock is great. Jews, even those of the Middle Ages, might with reason say that not one of them is Shylock. Men of pleasure may with reason say that not one of them is Don Juan. No leaf of the orange-tree when chewed gives the flavour of the orange, yet there is a deep affinity, an identity of roots, a sap rising from the same source, the sharing of the same subterraneous shadow before life. The fruit contains the mystery of the tree, and the type contains the mystery of the man. Hence the strange vitality of the type. For—and this is the prodigy—the type lives. If it were but an abstraction, men would not recognize it, and would allow this shadow to pass by. The tragedy termed classic makes larvæ; the drama creates types. A lesson which is a man; a myth with a human face so plastic that it looks at you, and that its look is a mirror; a parable which warns you; a symbol which cries out “Beware!” an idea which is nerve, muscle, and flesh, and which has a heart to love, bowels to suffer, eyes to weep, and teeth to devour or laugh, a psychical conception with the relief of actual fact, and which, if it bleeds, drops real blood,—that is the type. O power of true poetry! Types are beings. They breathe, palpitate, their steps are

heard on the floor, they exist. They exist with an existence more intense than that of any creature thinking himself living there in the street. These phantoms have more density than man. There is in their essence that amount of eternity which belongs to *chefs-d'œuvre*, and which makes Trimalcion live, while M. Romieu is dead.

Types are cases foreseen by God; genius realizes them. It seems that God prefers to teach man a lesson through man, in order to inspire confidence. The poet is on the pavement of the living; he speaks to them nearer to their ear. Thence the efficacy of types. Man is a premise, the type the conclusion; God creates the phenomenon, genius puts a name on it; God creates the miser only, genius Harpagon; God creates the traitor only, genius makes Iago; God creates the coquette, genius makes Célimène; God creates the citizen only, genius makes Chrysale; God creates the king only, genius makes Grandgousier. Sometimes, at a given moment, the type proceeds complete from some unknown partnership of the mass of the people with a great natural comedian, involuntary and powerful realizer; the crowd is a midwife. In an epoch which bears at one of its extremities Talleyrand, and at another Chodruc-Duclos, springs up suddenly, in a flash of lightning, under the mysterious incubation of the theatre, that spectre, Robert Macaire.

Types go and come firmly in art and in Nature. They are the ideal realized. The good and the evil of man are in these figures. From each of them results, in the eyes of the thinker, a humanity.

As we have said before, so many types, so many Adams. The man of Homer, Achilles, is an Adam; from him comes the species of the slayers: the man of Æschylus, Prometheus, is an Adam; from him comes the race of the fighters: Shakespeare's man, Hamlet, is an Adam; to him belongs the family of the dreamers. Other Adams, created by poets, incarnate, this one passion, another duty, another reason, another conscience, another the fall, another the ascension. Prudence, drifting to trepidation, goes on from the old man Nestor to

the old man *Géronte*. Love, drifting to appetite, goes on from *Daphne* to *Lovelace*. Beauty, entwined with the serpent, goes from *Eve* to *Melusina*. The types begin in *Genesis*, and a link of their chain passes through *Restif de la Bretonne* and *Vadé*. The lyric suits them, *Billingsgate* is not unbecoming to them. They speak in country dialects by the mouth of *Gros-René*; and in *Homer* they say to *Minerva*, holding them by the hair of the head: "What dost thou want with me, goddess?"

A surprising exception has been conceded to *Dante*. The man of *Dante* is *Dante*. *Dante* has, so to speak, created himself a second time in his poem. He is his own type; his *Adam* is himself. For the action of his poem he has sought out no one. He has only taken *Virgil* as supernumerary. Moreover, he made himself epic at once, without even giving himself the trouble to change his name. What he had to do was in fact simple,—to descend into hell and remount to heaven. What good was it to trouble himself for so little? He knocks gravely at the door of the infinite and says, "Open! I am *Dante*."

CHAPTER III

TWO marvellous *Adams*, we have just said, are the man of *Æschylus*, *Prometheus*, and the man of *Shakespeare*, *Hamlet*.

Prometheus is action. *Hamlet* is hesitation.

In *Prometheus* the obstacle is exterior; in *Hamlet* it is interior.

In *Prometheus* the will is securely nailed down by nails of brass and cannot get loose; besides, it has by its side two watchers,—*Force* and *Power*. In *Hamlet* the will is more tied down yet; it is bound by previous meditation,—the endless chain of the undecided. Try to get out of yourself if you can! What a *Gordian knot* is our revery! Slavery

from within, that is slavery indeed. Seale this enclosure, "to dream!" escape, if you can, from this prison, "to love!" The only dungeon is that which walls conscience in. Prometheus, in order to be free, has but a bronze collar to break and a god to conquer; Hamlet must break and conquer himself. Prometheus can raise himself upright, if he only lifts a mountain; to raise himself up, Hamlet must lift his own thoughts. If Prometheus plucks the vulture from his breast, all is said; Hamlet must tear Hamlet from his breast. Prometheus and Hamlet are two naked livers; from one runs blood, from the other doubt.

We are in the habit of comparing Æschylus and Shakespeare by Orestes and Hamlet, these two tragedies being the same drama. Never in fact was a subject more identical. The learned mark an analogy between them; the impotent, who are also the ignorant, the envious, who are also the imbeciles, have the petty joy of thinking they establish a plagiarism. It is after all a possible field for erudition and for serious criticism. Hamlet walks behind Orestes, parricide through filial love. This easy comparison, rather superficial than deep, strikes us less than the mysterious confronting of those two enchained beings, Prometheus and Hamlet.

Let us not forget that the human mind, half divine as it is, creates from time to time superhuman works. These superhuman works of man are, moreover, more numerous than it is thought, for they entirely fill art. Out of poetry, where marvels abound, there is in music Beethoven, in sculpture Phidias, in architecture Piranesi, in painting Rembrandt, and in painting, architecture, and sculpture Michael Angelo. We pass many over, and not the least.

Prometheus and Hamlet are among those more than human works.

A kind of gigantic determination; the usual measure exceeded; greatness everywhere; that which astounds ordinary intellects demonstrated when necessary by the improbable; destiny, society, law, religion, brought to trial and judgment in the name of the Unknown, the abyss of the mysterious

equilibrium; the event treated as a *rôle* played out, and, on occasion, hurled as a reproach against Fatality or Providence; passion, terrible personage, going and coming in man; the audacity and sometimes the insolence of reason; the haughty forms of a style at ease in all extremes, and at the same time a profound wisdom; the gentleness of the giant; the goodness of a softened monster; an ineffable dawn which cannot be accounted for and which lights up everything,—such are the signs of those supreme works. In certain poems there is starlight.

This light is in Æschylus and in Shakespeare.

CHAPTER IV

NOTHING can be more fiercely wild than Prometheus stretched on the Caucasus. It is gigantic tragedy. The old punishment that our ancient laws of torture call extension, and which Cartouche escaped because of a hernia, Prometheus undergoes it; only, the wooden horse is a mountain. What is his crime? Right. To characterize right as crime, and movement as rebellion, is the immemorial talent of tyrants. Prometheus has done on Olympus what Eve did in Eden,—he has taken a little knowledge. Jupiter, identical with Jehovah (*Iovi, Iova*), punishes this temerity,—the desire to live. The Eginetic traditions, which localize Jupiter, deprive him of the cosmic personality of the Jehovah of Genesis. The Greek Jupiter, bad son of a bad father, in rebellion against Saturn, who has himself been a rebel against Cœlus, is a *parvenu*. The Titans are a sort of elder branch, which has its legitimists, of whom Æschylus, the avenger of Prometheus, was one. Prometheus is right conquered. Jupiter has, as is always the case, consummated the usurpation of power by the punishment of right. Olympus claims the aid of Caucasus. Prometheus is fastened there to the *carcan*. There is the Titan, fallen, prostrate, nailed down. Mercury,



"The Oceanides—come to worship the Titan—the world suffers in
Prometheus—his carcan chokes universal life."

William Shakespeare, Page 165.



the friend of everybody, comes to give him such counsel as follows generally the perpetration of *coups d'état*. Mercury is the type of cowardly intellect, of every possible vice, but of vice full of wit. Mercury, the god of vice, serves Jupiter the god of crime. This fawning in evil is still marked to-day by the veneration of the pickpocket for the assassin. There is something of that law in the arrival of the diplomatist behind the conqueror. The *chefs-d'œuvre* are immense in this, that they are eternally present to the deeds of humanity. Prometheus on the Caucasus, is Poland after 1772; France after 1815; the Revolution after Brumaire. Mercury speaks; Prometheus listens but little. Offers of amnesty miscarry when it is the victim who alone should have the right to grant pardon. Prometheus, though conquered, scorns Mercury standing proudly above him, and Jupiter standing above Mercury, and Destiny standing above Jupiter. Prometheus jests at the vulture which gnaws at him; he shrugs disdainfully his shoulders as much as his chain allows. What does he care for Jupiter, and what good is Mercury? There is no hold on this haughty sufferer. The scorching thunderbolt causes a smart, which is a constant call upon pride. Meanwhile tears flow around him, the earth despairs, the women-clouds (the fifty Oceanides), come to worship the Titan, the forests scream, wild beasts groan, winds howl, the waves sob, the elements moan, the world suffers in Prometheus; his *carcan* chokes universal life. An immense participation in the torture of the demigod seems to be henceforth the tragic delight of all Nature; anxiety for the future mingles with it: and what is to be done now? How are we to move? What will become of us? And in the vast whole of created beings, things, men, animals, plants, rocks, all turned toward the Caucasus, is felt this inexpressible anguish,—the liberator is enchained.

Hamlet, less of a giant and more of a man, is not less grand,—Hamlet, the appalling, the unaccountable, complete in incompleteness; all, in order to be nothing. He is prince and demagogue, sagacious and extravagant, profound and

frivolous, man and neuter. He has but little faith in the sceptre, rails at the throne, has a student for his comrade, converses with any one passing by, argues with the first comer, understands the people, despises the mob, hates strength, suspects success, questions obscurity, and says "thou" to mystery. He gives to others maladies which he has not himself: his false madness inoculates his mistress with true madness. He is familiar with spectres and with comedians. He jests with the axe of Orestes in his hand. He talks of literature, recites verses, composes a theatrical criticism, plays with bones in a cemetery, dumfounds his mother, avenges his father, and ends the wonderful drama of life and death by a gigantic point of interrogation. He terrifies and then disconcerts. Never has anything more overwhelming been dreamed. It is the parricide saying: "What do I know?"

Parricide? Let us pause on that word. Is Hamlet a parricide? Yes, and no. He confines himself to threatening his mother; but the threat is so fierce that the mother shudders. His words are like daggers. "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help! help! ho!" And when she dies, Hamlet, without grieving for her, strikes Claudius with this tragic cry: "Follow my mother!" Hamlet is that sinister thing, the possible parricide.

In place of the northern ice which he has in his nature, let him have, like Orestes, southern fire in his veins, and he will kill his mother.

This drama is stern. In it truth doubts, sincerity lies. Nothing can be more immense, more subtle. In it man is the world, and the world is zero. Hamlet, even full of life, is not sure of his existence. In this tragedy, which is at the same time a philosophy, everything floats, hesitates, delays, staggers, becomes discomposed, scatters, and is dispersed. Thought is a cloud, will is a vapour, resolution is a crepuscule; the action blows each moment in an opposite direction; man is governed by the winds. Overwhelming and vertiginous work, in which is seen the depth of everything, in which

thought oscillates only between the king murdered and Yorick buried, and in which what is best realized is royalty represented by a ghost, and mirth represented by a death's-head.

"Hamlet" is the *chef-d'œuvre* of the tragedy-dream.

CHAPTER V

ONE of the probable causes of the feigned madness of Hamlet has not been up to the present time indicated by critics. It has been said, "Hamlet acts the madman to hide his thought, like Brutus." In fact, it is easy for apparent imbecility to hatch a great project; the supposed idiot can take aim deliberately. But the case of Brutus is not that of Hamlet. Hamlet acts the madman for his safety. Brutus screens his project, Hamlet his person. The manners of those tragic courts being known, from the moment that Hamlet, through the revelation of the ghost, is acquainted with the crime of Claudius, Hamlet is in danger. The superior historian within the poet is here manifested, and one feels the deep insight of Shakespeare into the ancient darkness of royalty. In the Middle Ages and in the Lower Empire, and even at earlier periods, woe unto him who found out a murder or a poisoning committed by a king! Ovid, according to Voltaire's conjecture, was exiled from Rome for having seen something shameful in the house of Augustus. To know that the king was an assassin was a State crime. When it pleased the prince not to have had a witness, it was a matter involving one's head to ignore everything. It was bad policy to have good eyes. A man suspected of suspicion was lost. He had but one refuge,—folly; to pass for "an innocent." He was despised, and that was all. Do you remember the advice that, in Æschylus, the Ocean gives to Prometheus: "To look a fool is the secret of the wise man." When the Chamberlain Hugolin found the iron spit with which Edrick

the Vendee had empaled Edmond II., "he hastened to put on madness," says the Saxon Chronicle of 1016, and saved himself in that way. Heraclian of Nisibe, having discovered by chance that Rhinomete was a fratricide, had himself declared mad by the doctors, and succeeded in getting himself shut up for life in a cloister. He thus lived peaceably, growing old and waiting for death with a vacant stare. Hamlet runs the same peril, and has recourse to the same means. He gets himself declared mad like Heraclian, and puts on folly like Hugolin. This does not prevent the restless Claudius from twice making an effort to get rid of him,—in the middle of the drama by the axe or the dagger in England, and toward the conclusion by poison.

The same indication is again found in "King Lear;" the Earl of Gloster's son takes refuge also in apparent lunacy. There is in that a key to open and understand Shakespeare's thought. In the eyes of the philosophy of art, the feigned folly of Edgar throws light upon the feigned folly of Hamlet.

The Amleth of Belleforest is a magician; the Hamlet of Shakespeare is a philosopher. We just now spoke of the strange reality which characterizes poetical creations. There is no more striking example than this type,—Hamlet. Hamlet has nothing belonging to an abstraction about him. He has been at the University; he has the Danish rudeness softened by Italian politeness; he is small, plump, somewhat lymphatic; he fences well with the sword, but is soon out of breath. He does not care to drink too soon during the assault of arms with Laërtes,—probably for fear of producing perspiration. After having thus supplied his personage with real life, the poet can launch him into full ideal. There is ballast enough.

Other works of the human mind equal "Hamlet;" none surpasses it. The whole majesty of melancholy is in "Hamlet." An open sepulchre from which goes forth a drama,—this is colossal. "Hamlet" is to our mind Shakespeare's chief work.

No figure among those that poets have created is more

poignant and stirring. Doubt counselled by a ghost,—that is Hamlet. Hamlet has seen his dead father and has spoken to him. Is he convinced? No, he shakes his head. What shall he do? He does not know. His hands clench, then fall by his side. Within him are conjectures, systems, monstrous apparitions, bloody recollections, veneration for the spectre, hate, tenderness, anxiety to act and not to act, his father, his mother, his duties in contradiction to each other, — a deep storm. Livid hesitation is in his mind. Shakespeare, wonderful plastic poet, makes the grandiose pallor of this soul almost visible. Like the great larva of Albert Dürer, Hamlet might be named “Melancholia.” He also has above his head the bat which flies disembowelled; and at his feet science, the sphere, the compass, the hour-glass, love; and behind him in the horizon an enormous, terrible sun, which seems to make the sky but darker.

Nevertheless, at least one-half of Hamlet is anger, transport, outrage, hurricane, sarcasm to Ophelia, malediction on his mother, insult to himself. He talks with the gravediggers, nearly laughs, then clutches Laërtes by the hair in the very grave of Ophelia, and stamps furiously upon the coffin. Sword-thrusts at Polonius, sword-thrusts at Laërtes, sword-thrusts at Claudius. From time to time his inaction is torn in twain, and from the rent comes forth thunder.

He is tormented by that possible life, intermixed with reality and chimera, the anxiety of which is shared by all of us. There is in all his actions an expanded somnambulism. One might almost consider his brain as a formation; there is a layer of suffering, a layer of thought, then a layer of dreaminess. It is through this layer of dreaminess that he feels, comprehends, learns, perceives, drinks, eats, frets, mocks, weeps, and reasons. There is between life and him a transparency; it is the wall of dreams. One sees beyond, but one cannot step over it. A kind of cloudy obstacle everywhere surrounds Hamlet. Have you ever while sleeping, had the nightmare of pursuit or flight, and tried to hasten on, and felt anchylosis in the knees, heaviness in the arms, the

horror of paralysed hands, the impossibility of movement? This nightmare Hamlet undergoes while waking. Hamlet is not upon the spot where his life is. He has ever the appearance of a man who talks to you from the other side of a stream. He calls to you at the same time that he questions you. He is at a distance from the catastrophe in which he takes part, from the passer-by whom he interrogates, from the thought that he carries, from the action that he performs. He seems not to touch even what he grinds. It is isolation in its highest degree. It is the loneliness of a mind, even more than the loftiness of a prince. Indecision is in fact a solitude. You have not even your will to keep you company. It is as if your own self was absent and had left you there. The burden of Hamlet is less rigid than that of Orestes, but more undulating. Orestes carries predestination; Hamlet carries fate.

And thus apart from men, Hamlet has still in him a something which represents them all. *Agnosco fratrem*. At certain hours, if we felt our own pulse, we should be conscious of his fever. His strange reality is our own reality after all. He is the mournful man that we all are in certain situations. Unhealthy as he is, Hamlet expresses a permanent condition of man. He represents the discomfort of the soul in a life which is not sufficiently adapted to it. He represents the shoe that pinches and stops our walking; the shoe is the body. Shakespeare frees him from it, and he is right. Hamlet — prince if you like, but king never — Hamlet is incapable of governing a people; he lives too much in a world beyond. On the other hand, he does better than to reign; he *is*. Take from him his family, his country, his ghost, and the whole adventure at Elsinore, and even in the form of an inactive type, he remains strangely terrible. That is the consequence of the amount of humanity and the amount of mystery that is in him. Hamlet is formidable, which does not prevent his being ironical. He has the two profiles of destiny.

Let us retract a statement made above. The chief work of Shakespeare is not "Hamlet." The chief work of Shake-

speare is all Shakespeare. That is, moreover, true of all minds of this order. They are mass, block, majesty, bible, and their solemnity is their *ensemble*.

Have you sometimes looked upon a cape prolonging itself under the clouds and jutting out, as far as the eye can go, into deep water? Each of its hillocks contributes to make it up. No one of its undulations is lost in its dimension. Its strong outline is sharply marked upon the sky, and enters as far as possible into the waves, and there is not a useless rock. Thanks to this cape, you can go amidst the boundless waters, walk among the winds, see closely the eagles soar and the monsters swim, let your humanity wander mid the eternal hum, penetrate the impenetrable. The poet renders this service to your mind. A genius is a promontory into the infinite.

CHAPTER VI

NEAR "Hamlet," and on the same level, must be placed three grand dramas,— "Macbeth," "Othello," "King Lear."

Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear,— these four figures tower upon the lofty edifice of Shakespeare. We have said what Hamlet is.

To say, "Macbeth is ambitious," is to say nothing. Macbeth is hunger. What hunger? The hunger of ten monsters, which is always possible in man. Certain souls have teeth. Do not wake up their hunger.

To bite at the apple, that is a fearful thing. The apple is called *Omnia*, says Filesac, that doctor of the Sorbonne who confessed Rabaillac. Macbeth has a wife whom the chronicle calls Gruoch. This Eve tempts this Adam. Once Macbeth has given the first bite he is lost. The first thing that Adam produces with Eve is Cain; the first thing that Macbeth accomplishes with Gruoch is murder.

Covetousness easily becoming violence, violence easily becoming crime, crime easily becoming madness,—this progression is Macbeth. Covetousness, crime, madness,—these three vampires have spoken to him in the solitude, and have invited him to the throne. The cat Graymalkin has called him: Macbeth will be cunning. The toad Paddock has called him: Macbeth will be horror. The *unsexed* being, Gruoch completes him. It is done; Macbeth is no longer a man. He is nothing more than an unconscious energy rushing wildly toward evil. Henceforth, no notion of right; appetite is everything. Transitory right, royalty; eternal right, hospitality,—Macbeth murders them all. He does more than slay them,—he ignores them. Before they fell bleeding under his hand, they already lay dead within his soul. Macbeth commences by this parricide,—the murder of Duncan, his guest; a crime so terrible that from the counter-blow in the night, when their master is stabbed, the horses of Duncan again become wild. The first step taken, the fall begins. It is the avalanche. Macbeth rolls headlong. He is precipitated. He falls and rebounds from one crime to another, always deeper and deeper. He undergoes the mournful gravitation of matter invading the soul. He is a thing that destroys. He is a stone of ruin, flame of war, beast of prey, scourge. He marches over all Scotland, king as he is, his bare legged kernes and his heavily-armed gallowglasses, devouring, pillaging, slaying. He decimates the Thanes, he kills Banquo, he kills all the Macduffs except the one who shall slay him, he kills the nobility, he kills the people, he kills his country, he kills “sleep.” At length the catastrophe arrives,—the forest of Birnam moves against him. Macbeth has infringed all, burst through everything, violated everything, torn everything, and this desperation ends in arousing even Nature. Nature loses patience, Nature enters into action against Macbeth, Nature becomes soul against the man who has become brute force.

This drama has epic proportions. Macbeth represents that frightful hungry one who prowls throughout history,

called brigand in the forest and on the throne conqueror. The ancestor of Macbeth is Nimrod. These men of force, are they forever furious? Let us be just; no. They have a goal, which being attained, they stop. Give to Alexander, to Cyrus, to Sesostriis, to Cæsar, what? — the world; they are appeased. Geoffroy St. Hilaire said to me one day: "When the lion has eaten, he is at peace with Nature." For Cambyses, Sennacherib, and Genghis Khan, and their parallels, to have eaten is to possess all the earth. They would calm themselves down in the process of digesting the human race.

Now, what is Othello? He is night; an immense fatal figure. Night is amorous of day. Darkness loves the dawn. The African adores the white woman. Desdemona is Othello's brightness and frenzy! And then how easy to him is jealousy! He is great, he is dignified, he is majestic, he soars above all heads, he has as an escort bravery, battle, the braying of trumpets, the banner of war, renown, glory; he is radiant with twenty victories, he is studded with stars, this Othello: but he is black. And thus how soon, when jealous, the hero becomes monster, the black becomes the negro! How speedily has night beckoned to death!

By the side of Othello, who is night, there is Iago, who is evil,—evil, the other form of darkness. Night is but the night of the world; evil is the night of the soul. How deeply black are perfidy and falsehood! To have ink or treason in the veins is the same thing. Whoever has jostled against imposture and perjury knows it. One must blindly grope one's way with roguery. Pour hypocrisy upon the break of day, and you put out the sun: and this, thanks to false religions, happens to God.

Iago near Othello is the precipice near the landslip. "This way!" he says in a low voice. The snare advises blindness. The being of darkness guides the black. Deceit takes upon itself to give what light may be required by night. Jealousy uses falsehood as the blind man his dog. Othello the negro, Iago the traitor, opposed to whiteness and

candour,—what can be more terrible! These ferocities of the darkness act in unison. These two incarnations of the eclipse conspire together,—the one roaring, the other sneering; the tragic extinguishment of light.

Sound this profound thing. Othello is the night, and being night, and wishing to kill, what does he take to slay with? Poison, the club, the axe, the knife? No; the pillow. To kill is to lull to sleep. Shakespeare himself perhaps did not take this into account. The creator sometimes, almost unknown to himself, yields to his type, so much is that type a power. And it is thus that Desdemona, spouse of the man Night, dies stifled by the pillow, which has had the first kiss, and which has the last sigh.

Lear is the occasion for Cordelia. Maternity of the daughter toward the father,—profound subject; maternity venerable among all other maternities, so admirably translated by the legend of that Roman girl, who, in the depth of a prison, nurses her old father. The young breast near the white beard,—there is not a spectacle more holy. This filial breast is Cordelia.

Once this figure dreamed of and found, Shakespeare created his drama. Where should he put this consoling vision? In an obscure age. Shakespeare has taken the year of the world 3105, the time when Joas was king of Judah, Aganippus, king of France, and Leir, king of England. The whole earth was at that time mysterious. Represent to yourself that epoch: the temple of Jerusalem is still quite new; the gardens of Semiramis, constructed nine hundred years previously, begin to crumble; the first gold coin appears in Ægina; the first balance is made by Phydron, tyrant of Argos; the first eclipse of the sun is calculated by the Chinese; three hundred and twelve years have passed since Orestes, accused by the Eumenides before the Areopagus, was acquitted; Hesiod is just dead; Homer, if he still lives, is a hundred years old; Læurgus, thoughtful traveller, re-enters Sparta; and one may perceive in the depth of the sombre cloud of the East the chariot fire which carries Elias away.

It is at that period that Leir — Lear — lives, and reigns over the dark islands. Jonas, Holofernes, Draco, Solon, Thespis, Nebuchadnezzar, Anaximenes who is to invent the signs of the zodiac, Cyrus, Zorobabel, Tarquin, Pythagoras, Æschylus, are not born yet. Coriolanus, Xerxes, Cincinnatus, Pericles, Soerates, Brennus, Aristotle, Timoleon, Demosthenes, Alexander, Epicurus, Hannibal, are larvæ waiting their hour to enter among men. Judas Maccabæus, Viriatus, Popilius, Jugurtha, Mithridates, Marius and Sylla, Cæsar and Pompey, Cleopatra, and Antony, are far away in the future; and at the moment when Lear is king of Brittany and of Iceland, there must pass away eight hundred and ninety-five years before Virgil says, "*Penitus toto diviso orbe Britannos*," and nine hundred and fifty years before Seneca says "*Ultima Thule*." The Piets and the Celts (the Scotch and the English) are tattooed. A redskin of the present day gives a vague idea of an Englishman then. It is this twilight that Shakespeare has chosen,— a broad night well adapted to the dream in which this inventor at his pleasure puts everything that he chooses, this King Lear, and then a King of France, a Duke of Burgundy, a Duke of Cornwall, a Duke of Albany, and Earl of Kent, and an Earl of Gloster. What does your history matter to him who has humanity? Besides, he has with him the legend, which is a kind of science also, and as true as history perhaps, but in another point of view. Shakespeare agrees with Walter Mapes, archdeacon of Oxford,— that is something; he admits, from Brutus to Cadwalla, the ninety-nine Celtic kings who have preceded the Scandinavian Hengist and the Saxon Horsa: and since he believes in Mulmutius, Cinigisil, Ceolulf, Cassibelan, Cymbeline, Cynulphus, Arviragus, Guiderius, Escuin, Cudred, Vortigern, Arthur, Uther Pendragon, he has every right to believe in King Lear, and to create Cordelia. This land adopted, the place for the scene marked out, this foundation established, he takes everything and builds his work. Unheardof edifice. He takes tyranny, of which, at a later period, he will make weakness,— Lear; he takes trea-

son,—Edmond; he takes devotion,—Kent; he takes ingratitude which begins with a caress, and he gives to this monster two heads,—Goneril, whom the legend calls Gonerille, and Regan, whom the legend calls Ragaü; he takes paternity; he takes royalty; he takes feudality; he takes ambition; he takes madness, which he divides into three, and he puts in presence three madmen,—the king's buffoon, madman by trade; Edgar of Gloster, mad for prudence's sake; the king mad through misery. It is at the summit of this tragic heap that he raises Cordelia.

There are some formidable cathedral towers, like, for instance, the Giralda, of Seville, which seem made all complete, with their spirals, their staircases, their sculptures, their cellars, their cæcums, their aerial cells, their sounding chambers, their bells, and their mass and their spire, and all their enormity, in order to carry an angel spreading on their summit her golden wings. Such is this drama, "King Lear."

The father is the pretext for the daughter. This admirable human creation, Lear, serves as a support to that ineffable divine creation, Cordelia. The reason why that chaos of crimes, vices, madnesses, and miseries exists is, for the more splendid setting forth of virtue. Shakespeare, carrying Cordelia in his thoughts, created that tragedy like a god who, having an Aurora to put forward, makes a world expressly for it.

And what a figure is that father! What a caryatid! He is man bent down by weight, but shifts his burdens for others that are heavier. The more the old man becomes enfeebled, the more his load augments. He lives under an overburden. He bears at first power, then ingratitude, then isolation, then despair, then hunger and thirst, then madness, then all Nature. Clouds overcast him, forests heap shadow on him, the hurricane beats on the nape of his neck, the tempest makes his mantle heavy as lead, the rain falls on his shoulders, he walks bent and haggard as if he had the two knees of night upon his back. Dismayed and yet immense, he throws to the winds and to the hail this epic cry: "Why

do you hate me, tempests? Why do you persecute me? *You are not my daughters.*" And then it is over; the light is extinguished,—reason loses courage and leaves him. Lear is in his dotage. Ah, he is childish, this old man. Very well! he requires a mother. His daughter appears,—his one daughter Cordelia; for the two others Regan and Goneril, are no longer his daughters, save to that extent which gives them a right to the name of parrieides.

Cordelia approaches.—"Sir, do you know me?" "You are a spirit, I know," replies the old man, with the same sublime clairvoyance of bewilderment. From this moment the adorable nursing commences. Cordelia applies herself to nourish this old despairing soul, dying of inanition in hatred. Cordelia nourishes Lear with love, and his courage revives; she nourishes him with respect, and the smile returns; she nourishes him with hope, and confidence is restored; she nourishes him with wisdom, and reason revives. Lear, convalescent, rises again, and, step by step, returns again to life. The child becomes again an old man; the old man becomes a man again. And behold him happy, this wretched one. It is on this expansion of happiness that the catastrophe is hurled down.

Alas! there are traitors, there are perjurers, there are murderers. Cordelia dies. Nothing more heartrending than this. The old man is stunned; he no longer understands anything; and embracing the corpse, he expires. He dies on this dead one. The supreme anguish is spared him of remaining behind her among the living, a poor shadow, to feel the place in his heart empty and to seek for his soul, carried away by that sweet being who is departed. O God, those whom thou lovest thou dost not allow to survive.

To live after the flight of the angel; to be the father orphaned of his child; to be the eye which no longer has light; to be the deadened heart which has no more joy; from time to time to stretch the hands into obscurity, and try to reclasp a being who was there (where, then, can she be?); to feel himself forgotten in that departure; to have lost all reason

for being here below; to be henceforth a man who goes to and fro before a sepulchre, not received, not admitted,—that would be indeed a gloomy destiny. Thou hast done well, poet, to kill this old man.

BOOK III

ZOILUS AS ETERNAL AS HOMER

CHAPTER I

“Ce courtisan grossier du profane vulgaire.”¹

THIS Alexandrine is by La Harpe, who hurls it at Shakespeare. Somewhere else La Harpe says, “Shakespeare panders to the mob.”

Voltaire, as a matter of course, reproaches Shakespeare with antithesis: that is well. And La Beaumelle reproaches Voltaire with antithesis: that is better.

Voltaire, when he is himself in question, *prodomo sua*, gets angry. “But,” he writes, “this Langleviel, alas La Beaumelle, is an ass. I defy you to find in any poet, in any book, a fine thing which is not an image or an antithesis.”

Voltaire’s criticism is double-edged. He wounds and is wounded. This is how he characterises the Ecclesiastes and the Canticle of Canticles: “Works without order, full of low images and coarse expressions.”

A little while after, furious, he exclaims,—

“On m’ose préférer Crébillon le barbare!”²

An idler of the *Œil-de-Bœuf*, wearing the red heel and the blue ribbon, a stripling and a marquis,—M. de Créqui,—comes to Ferney and writes with an air of superiority: “I have seen Voltaire, that childish old man.”

¹ This coarse flatterer of the vulgar herd.

² To me they dare to prefer Crébillon the barbarian.

That injustice should receive a counterstroke from injustice, is nothing more than right; and Voltaire gets what he deserved. But to throw stones at men of genius is a general law, and all have to bear it. Insult is a crown, it appears.

For Saumaise, Æschylus is nothing but farrago.¹ Quintilian understands nothing of the "Orestias." Sophocles mildly scorned Æschylus. "When he does well, he does not know it," said Sophocles. Racine rejected everything, except two or three scenes of the "Choephori," which he condescended to spare by a note in the margin of his copy of Æschylus. Fontenelle says in his "Remarques": "One does not know what to make of the 'Prometheus' of Æschylus. Æschylus is a kind of madman." The eighteenth century, without exception, railed at Diderot for admiring the "Eumenides."

"The whole of Dante is a hotch-potch," says Chaudon. "Michael Angelo wearies me," says Joseph de Maistre.

"Not one of the eight comedies of Cervantes is supportable," says La Harpe. "It is a pity that Molière does not know how to write," says Fénelon. "Molière is a worthless buffoon," says Bossuet. "A schoolboy would avoid the mistakes of Milton," says the Abbé Trublet, an authority as good as another. "Corneille exaggerates, Shakespeare raves," says that same Voltaire, who must always be fought against and fought for.

"Shakespeare," says Ben Johnson, "talked heavily and without any wit." How prove the contrary? Writings remain, talk passes away. Well, it is always so much denied to Shakespeare. That man of genius had no wit: how nicely that flatters the numberless men of wit who have no genius!

Sometime before Scudéry called Corneille "Corneille dé-

¹ The passage in Saumaise is curious and worth the trouble of being transcribed:—

Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis hebraïsmis et syrianismis et totâ hellenisticâ suppellectile vel farragine.— *De Re Hellenisticâ*, p. 38, ep. dedic.

plumée" (unfeathered carrion crow), Green had called Shakespeare a crow decked out with our feathers." In 1752 Diderot was sent to the fortress of Vincennes for having published the first volume of the "Encyclopædia," and the great success of the year was a print sold on the quays which represented a Franciscan friar flogging Diderot. Although Weber is dead,—an attenuating circumstance for those who are guilty of genius,—he is turned into ridicule in Germany: and for thirty-three years a *chef-d'œuvre* has been disposed of with a pun. The "Euryanthe" is called the "Ennuyante" (wearisome).

D'Alembert hits at one blow Calderon and Shakespeare. He writes to Voltaire:—

"I have announced to the Academy your 'Heraclius,' of Calderon. The Academy will read it with as much pleasure as the harlequinade of Gilles Shakespeare."¹

That everything should be perpetually brought again into question, that everything should be contested, even the incontestible,—what does it matter? The eclipse is a good trial for truth as well as for liberty. Genius, being truth and liberty, has a claim to persecution. What matters to genius that which is transient? It was before, and will be after. It is not on the sun that the eclipse throws darkness.

Everything can be written. Paper is patience itself. Last year a grave review printed this: "Homer is now going out of fashion."

The judgment passed on the philosopher, on the artist, on the poet is completed by the portrait of the man.

Baron has killed his tailor. Molière has married his own daughter. Shakespeare has "loved" Lord Southampton.

"Et pour voir a la fin tous les vices ensemble,
Le parterre en tumulte a demandé l'auteur."²

¹ Letter cv.

² "And at last, in order to see all the vices together,
The riotous pit called for the author."

That *ensemble* of all vices is Beaumarchais.

As for Byron, we mention this name a second time; he is worth the trouble. Read "Glenarvon," and listen, on the subject of Byron's abominations, to Lady Bl—, whom he had loved, and who, of course, resented it.

Phidias was a procurer; Socrates was an apostate and a thief, *décrocheur de manteaux*; Spinoza was a renegade, and sought to obtain legacies by undue influence; Dante was a pecculator; Michael Angelo was cudgelled by Julius II., and quietly put up with it for the sake of five hundred crowns; D'Aubigné was a courtier sleeping in the water-closet of the king, ill-tempered when he was not paid, and for whom Henri IV. was too kind; Diderot was a libertine; Voltaire a miser; Milton was venial,—he received a thousand pounds sterling for his apology, in Latin, of regicide: "Defensio pro se," etc. Who says these things? Who relates these histories? That good person, your old fawning friend, O tyrants, your ancient comrade, O traitors, your old auxiliary, O bigots, your ancient comforter, O imbeciles! — calumny.

CHAPTER II

LET us add a detail. Diatribe is, on certain occasions, a useful means of government.

Thus the hand of the police was in the print of Diderot Flogged, and the engraver of the Franciscan friar must have been kindred to the turnkey of Vincennes. Governments, more passionate than necessary, neglect to remain strangers to the animosities of the lower orders. Political persecution of former days — it is of former days that we are speaking — willingly availed itself of a dash of literary persecution. Certainly, hatred hates without being paid for it. Envy, to do its work, does not need a minister of State to encourage it and to give it a pension; and there is such a thing as un-

official calumny. But a money-bag does no harm. When Roy, the court-poet, rhymed against Voltaire, "Tell me, darling stoic," etc., the position of treasurer of the chamber of Clermont, and the cross of St. Michael, were not likely to damp his enthusiasm for the Court, and his spirit against Voltaire. A gratuity is pleasant to receive after a service rendered; the masters upstairs smile; you receive the agreeable order to insult some one you detest; you obey richly; you are free to bite like a glutton; you take your fill; it is all profit; you hate and you give satisfaction. Formerly authority had its scribes. It was a pack of hounds as good as any other.

Against the free rebel spirit, the despot would let loose the scribbler. To torture was not sufficient; teasing was resorted to likewise. Trissotin held a confabulation with Vidocq, and from their *tête-à-tête* would burst a complex inspiration. Pedagogism, thus supported by the police, felt itself an integral part of authority, and strengthened its aesthetics with legal means. It was arrogant. The pedant raised to the dignity of a policeman,—nothing can be so arrogant as that vileness. See, after the struggle between the Arminians and the Gomarists, with what a superb air Sparanus Buyter, his pocket full of Maurice of Nassau's florins, denounces Josse Vondel, and proves, Aristotle in hand, that the Palamède of Vondel's tragedy is no other than Barneveldt,—useful rhetoric, by which Buyter obtains against Vondel a fine of three hundred crowns, and for himself a fat prebend at Dordrecht.

The author of the book "Querelles Littéraires," the Abbé Trail cannon of Monistrol, asks of La Beaumelle: "Why do you insult M. de Voltaire so much?" "It is because it sells well," replies La Beaumelle. And Voltaire, informed of the question and of the reply concludes: "It is just; the booby buys the writing, and the minister buys the writer. It sells well."

Françoise d'Issembourg de Happoncourt, wife of François Hugo, chamberlain of Lorraine, and very celebrated

under the name Madame de Graffigny, writes to M. Devaux, reader to King Stanislaus:—

MY DEAR PAMPAM,—Atys being far off [read: Voltaire being banished], the police cause to be published against him a swarm of small writings and pamphlets, which are sold at a sou in the cafés and theatres. That would displease the marquise,¹ if it did not please the king.

Desfontaines, that other insulter of Voltaire, by whom he had been taken out of Bicêtre, said to the Abbé Prévost, who advised him to make his peace with the philosopher: “If Algiers did not make war, Algiers would die of famine.”

This Desfontaines, also an abbé, died of dropsy; and his well-known tastes gained for him this epitaph: “*Periit aqua qui meruit igne.*”

Among the publications suppressed in the last century by decree of Parliament, can be observed a document printed by Quinet and Besogne, and destroyed doubtless because of the revelations it contained, and of which the title gave promise: “*L’Arétinade, ou Tarif des Libellistes et Gens de Lettres Injurieux.*”

Madame de Staël, sent in exile forty-five leagues from Paris, stops exactly at the forty-five leagues,—at Beaumont-sur-Loire,—and thence writes to her friends. Here is a fragment of a letter addressed to Madame Gay, mother of the illustrious Madame de Girardin:—

“Ah, dear madame, what a persecution are these exiles! . . . [We suppress some lines.] You write a book; it is forbidden to speak of it. Your name in the journals displeases. Permission is, however, fully given to speak ill of it.”

¹ Madame de Pompadour.

CHAPTER III

SOMETIMES the diatribe is sprinkled with quicklime. All those black pen-nibs finish by digging ill-omened ditches.

Among the writers abhorred for having been useful, Voltaire and Rousseau hold a conspicuous rank. They were reviled when alive, mangled when dead. To have a bite at these renowned ones was a splendid deed, and reckoned as such in favour of literary constables. A man who insulted Voltaire was at once promoted to the dignity of pedant. Men in power encouraged the men of libellous propensity. A swarm of mosquitoes have rushed upon those two illustrious minds, and are yet buzzing.

Voltaire is the most hated, being the greatest. Everything was good for an attack on him, everything was a pretext: Mesdames de France, Newton, Madame du Châtelet, the Princess of Prussia, Maupertuis, Frederic, the Encyclopædia, the Academy, even Labarre, Sirven, and Calas,—never a truce. His popularity suggested to Joseph de Maistre this: “Paris crowned him; Sodom would have banished him.” Arouet was translated into *A rouer*.¹ At the house of the Abbess of Nivelles, Princess of the Holy Empire, half recluse and half worldling, and having recourse, it is said, in order to make her cheeks rosy, to the method of the Abbess of Montbazou, charades were played,—among others, this one: The first syllable is his fortune; the second should be his duty. The word was *Vol-taire*.² A celebrated member of the Academy of Sciences, Napoleon Bonaparte, seeing in 1803, in the library of the Institute, in the centre of a crown of laurels, this inscription: “Au grand Voltaire,” scratched with his nail the last three letters, leaving only, *Au grand Volta!*

There is round Voltaire particularly a *cordon sanitaire* of

¹ Deserving of being broken on the wheel.

² *Vol* meaning *theft*, *taire* meaning *to be silent*.

priests, the Abbé Desfontaines at the head, the Abbé Nicolardot at the tail. Fréron, although a layman, is a critic after the priestly fashion, and belongs to this band.

Voltaire made his first appearance at the Bastille. His cell was next to the dungeon in which had died Barnard Palissy. Young, he tasted the prison: old, exile. He was kept twenty-seven years away from Paris.

Jean-Jacques, wild and rather surly, was tormented in consequence of those traits in his nature. Paris issued a writ against his person; Geneva expelled him; Neufchâtel rejected him; Motiers-Travers damned him; Bienne stoned him; Berne gave him the choice between prison and expulsion; London, hospitable London, scoffed at him.

Both died, following closely on each other. Death caused no interruption to the outrages. A man is dead; insult does not slacken pursuit for such a trifle. Hatred can feast on a corpse. Libels continued, falling furiously on these glories.

The Revolution came and sent them to the Pantheon.

At the beginning of this century, children were often brought to see these two graves. They were told, "It is here." That made a strong impression on their minds. They carried forever in their thoughts that apparition of two sepulchres side by side,—the elliptical arch of the vault: the antique form of the two monuments provisionally covered with wood painted like marble; these two names, ROUSSEAU, VOLTAIRE, in the twilight; and the arm carrying a flambeau which was thrust out of the tomb of Jean-Jacques.

Louis XVIII. returned. The restoration of the Stuarts had torn Cromwell from his grave; the restoration of the Bourbons could not do less for Voltaire.

One night, in May, 1814, about two o'clock in the morning, a cab stopped near the barrier of La Gare, which faces Bercy, at the door of an enclosure of planks. This enclosure surrounded a large vacant piece of ground, reserved for the projected *entrepôt*, and belonging to the city of Paris. The cab was coming from the Pantheon, and the coachman had been ordered to take the most deserted streets. The closed

planking opened. Some men alighted from the cab and entered the enclosure. Two carried a sack between them. They were conducted, so tradition asserts, by the Marquis of Puymaurin, afterward deputy to the Invisible Chamber, and director of the mint, accompanied by his brother, the Comte de Puymaurin. Other men, many in cassocks, were waiting for them. They proceeded toward a hole dug in the middle of the field. This hole, according to one of the witnesses, who since has been waiter at the inn of the Mar-ronniers at La Rapée, was round, and looked like a blind well. At the bottom of the hole was quicklime. These men said nothing, and had no light. The wan break of day gave a ghastly light. The sack was opened. It was full of bones. These were, pell-mell, the bones of Jean Jacques and of Voltaire, which had just been withdrawn from the Pantheon. The mouth of the sack was brought close to the hole, and the bones were thrown into that darkness. The two skulls struck against each other; a spark, not likely to be seen by such men as those present, was doubtless exchanged between the head that had made the "Dictionnaire Philosophique" and the head which had made the "Contrat Social," and reconciled them. When that was done, when the sack had been shaken, when Voltaire and Rousseau had been emptied into that hole, a digger seized a spade, threw inside the opening all the earth which was at the side, and filled up the hole; the others stamped with their feet on the ground, so as to remove from it the appearance of having been freshly disturbed. One of the assistants took for his trouble the sack, as the hangman takes the clothing of his victim; they all left the enclosure, closed the door, got into the cab without saying a word, and hastily, before the sun had risen, those men got away.

CHAPTER IV

SAUMAISE, that worse Scaliger, does not comprehend Æschylus, and rejects him. Who is to blame? Saumaise much, Æschylus little.

The attentive man who reads great works feels at times, in the middle of reading, certain sudden fits of cold followed by a kind of excess of heat ("I no longer understand!—I understand!"), shivering and burning,—something which causes him to be a little upset, at the same time that he is very much struck. Only minds of the first order, only men of supreme genius, subject to heedless wanderings in the infinite, give to the reader this singular sensation,—stupor for most, ecstacy for a few. These few are the *élite*. As we have already observed, this *élite*, gathered from century to century, and always adding to itself, at last makes up a number, becomes in time a multitude, and composes the supreme crown,—the definitive public of men of genius, sovereign like them.

It is well with that public that at the end one must deal.

Nevertheless, there is another public, other appraisers, other judges, to whom we have lately alluded. They are not content.

The men of genius, the great minds,—this Æschylus, this Isaiah, this Juvenal, this Dante, this Shakespeare,—are beings, imperious, tumultuous, violent, passionate, extreme riders of winged steeds, "overleaping all boundaries," having their own goal, which "goes beyond the goal," "exaggerated," taking scandalous strides, flying abruptly from one idea to another, and from the north pole to the south pole, crossing the heavens in three steps, making little allowance for short breaths, tossed about by all the winds, and at the same time full of some unaccountable equestrian confidence amidst their bounds across the abyss, untractable to the "aristarchs," refractory to state rhetoric, not amiable to asthmatical *literati*.

unsubdued to academic hygiene, preferring the foam of Pegasus to asses' milk.

The worthy pedants are kind enough to be afraid for them. The ascent gives rise to the calculation of the fall. The compassionate cripples lament for Shakespeare. He is mad; he mounts too high! The crowd of college fags (they are a crowd) look on in wonder, and get angry. Æschylus and Dante make their connoisseurs blink their eyes every moment. This Æschylus is lost! This Dante is near falling! A god is soaring above; the worthy *bourgeois* cry out to him: "Look out for yourself!"

CHAPTER V

BESIDES, these men of genius disconcert.

One knows not on what to rely with them. Their lyric fever obeys them; they interrupt it when they like. They seem wild. All at once they stop. Their frenzy becomes melancholy. They are seen among the precipices, alighting on a peak and folding their wings, and then they give way to meditation. Their meditation is not less surprising than their transport. Just now they were soaring above, now they sink below. But it is always the same boldness.

They are pensive giants. Their Titanic revery needs the absolute and the unfathomable in which to expand. They meditate, as the sunshines, with the abyss around them.

Their moving to and fro in the ideal gives the vertigo. Nothing is too lofty for them, and nothing too low. They pass from the pygmy to the Cyclops, from Polyphemus to the Myrmidons, from Queen Mab to Caliban, and from a love affair to a deluge, and from Saturn's ring to the doll of a little child. *Sinite parvulos venire.* One of the pupils of their eye is a telescope, the other a microscope. They inves-

tigate familiarly these two frightful opposite depths,— the infinitely great and the infinitely small.

And one should not be angry with them; and one should not reproach them for all this! Indeed! Where should we go if such excesses were to be tolerated? What! No scruple in the choice of subjects, horrible or sad; and the idea, even if it be disquieting and formidable, always followed up to its extreme limits, without pity for their fellow-creatures! These poets only see their own aim; and in everything are immoderate in their way of doing things. What of Job?— a worm on an ulcer. What is the *Divina Commedia*?— a series of torments. What is the *Iliad*?— a collection of plagues and wounds; not an artery cut which is not complaisantly described. Go round for opinions on Homer: ask of Scaliger, Terrasson, Lamotte, what they think of him. The fourth of an ode to the shield of Achilles — what intemperance! He who does not know when to stop never knew how to write. These poets agitate, disturb, trouble, upset, overwhelm, make everything shiver, break things, occasionally, here and there. They can cause great misfortunes: it is terrible. Thus speak the Athenæa, the Sorbonnes, the sworn-in professors, the societies called learned, Saumaise, successor of Scaliger at the university of Leyden, and the *bourgeoisie* after them,— all who represent in literature and art the great party of order. What can be more logical? The cough quarrels with the hurricane.

Those who are poor in wit are joined by those who have too much wit. The sceptics lend assistance to the fools. Men of genius, with few exceptions, are proud and stern; that is in the very marrow of their bones. They have in company with them Juvenal, Agrippa d'Aubigné, and Milton; they are prone to harshness; they despise the *panem et circenses*; they seldom grow sociable, and they growl. People rail at them in a pleasant way. Well done.

Ah, poet! Ah, Milton! Ah, Juvenal! — ah, you keep up resistance! ah, you perpetuate disinterestedness! ah, you bring together these two firebrands, faith and will, in order to make

the flame burst out from them! ah, there is something of the Vestal in you, old grumbler! ah, you have an altar,—your country! ah, you have a tripod,—the ideal! ah, you believe in the rights of man, in emancipation, in the future, in progress, in the beautiful, in the just, in what is great! Take care; you are behindhand. All this virtue is infatuation. You emigrate with honour; but you emigrate. This heroism is no longer the fashion. It no longer suits our epoch. There comes a moment when the sacred fire is no longer fashionable. Poet, you believe in right and truth; you are behind your century. Your very eternity causes you to pass away.

So much the worse, without doubt, for those grumbling geniuses accustomed to greatness, and scornful of what is no longer so. They are slow in movement when shame is at stake; their back is struck with ankylosis for anything like bowing and cringing. When success passes along, deserved or not, but saluted, they have an iron bar keeping their vertebral column stiff. That is their affair. So much the worse for those people of old-fashioned Rome. They belong to antiquity and to antique manners. To bristle up at every turn may have been all very well in former days. Those long bristling manes are no longer worn; the lions are out of fashion now. The French Revolution is nearly seventy-five years old. At that age dotage comes. The people of the present time mean to belong to their day, and even to their minute. Certainly, we find no fault with it. Whatever is, must be. It is quite right that what exists should exist. The forms of public prosperity are various. One generation is not obliged to imitate another. Cato copied Phocion; Trimalecion is less like,—it is independence. You bad-tempered old fellows, you wish us to emancipate ourselves? Let it be so. We disencumber ourselves of the imitation of Timoleon, Thrascas Artervelde, Thomas More, Hampden. It is our fashion to free ourselves. You wish for a revolt: there it is. You wish for no insurrection; we rise up against our rights. We enfranchise ourselves from the care of being free. To be

citizens is a heavy load. Rights entangled with obligations are restraints to whoever desires to enjoy life quietly. To be guided by conscience and truth in all the steps that we take is fatiguing. We mean to walk without leading-strings and without principles. Duty is a chain; we break our irons. What do you mean by speaking to us of Franklin? Franklin is a rather too servile copy of Aristides. We carry our horror of servility so far as to prefer Grimod de la Reynière. To eat and drink well, there is purpose in that. Each epoch has its peculiar manner of being free. Orgy is a liberty. This way of reasoning is triumphant; to adhere to it is wise. There have been, it is true, epochs when people thought otherwise. In those times the things which were trodden on would sometimes resent it, and would rebel,—but that was the ancient system, ridiculous now; and those who regret and grumble must be left to talk and to affirm that there was a better notion of right, justice, and honour in the stones of olden times than in the men of to-day.

The rhetoricians, official and officious,—we have pointed out already their wonderful sagacity,—take strong precautions against men of genius. Men of genius are not great followers of the university; what is more, they are wanting in insipidity. They are lyrists, colourists, enthusiasts, enchanters, possessed, exalted, “rabid” (we have read the word) beings who, when everybody is small, have a mania for creating great things; in fact, they have every vice. A doctor has recently discovered that genius is a variety of madness. They are Michael Angelo handling giants; Rembrandt painting with a palette all bedaubed with the sun’s rays; they are Dante, Rabelais, Shakespeare, exaggerated. They bring a wild art, roaring, flaming, dishevelled like the lion and the comet. Oh, shocking! There is coalition against them, and it is right. We have, luckily, the “tectotallers” of eloquence and poetry. “I like paleness,” said one day a literary *bourgeois*. The literary *bourgeois* exists. Rhetoricians, anxious on account of the contagions and fevers which are spread by genius, recommend with a lofty reason, which we

have commended, temperance, moderation, "common-sense," the art of keeping within bounds, writers expurgated, trimmed, pruned, regulated, the worship of the qualities that the malignant call negative, continence, abstinence, Joseph, Scipio, the water-drinkers. It is all excellent,—only, young students must be warned that by following these sage precepts too closely they run the risk of glorifying the chastity of the eunuch. Maybe, I admire Bayard; I admire Origen less.

CHAPTER VI

RESUME: Great minds are importunate; to deny them a little is judicious.

After all, let us admit it at last, and complete our statement; there is some truth in the reproaches that are hurled at them. This anger is natural. The powerful, the grand, the luminous, are in a certain point of view things calculated to offend. To be surpassed is never agreeable; to feel one's own inferiority leads surely to feel offence. The beautiful exists so truly by itself that it certainly has no need of pride; nevertheless, given human mediocrity, the beautiful humiliates at the same time that it enchants. It seems natural that beauty should be a vase for pride,—it is supposed to be full of it; one seeks to avenge one's self for the pleasure it gives, and this word *superb* ends by having two senses,—one of which causes suspicion of the other. It is the fault of the beautiful, as we have already said. It wearies: a sketch by Piranesi bewilders you; a grasp of the hand of Hercules bruises you. Greatness is sometimes in the wrong. It is ingenuous, but obstructive. The tempest thinks to sprinkle you,—it drowns you; the star thinks to give light,—it dazzles, sometimes blinds. The Nile fertilizes, but overflows. The "too much" is not convenient: the habitation of the fathomless is rude; the infinite is little suitable for a lodging.

A cottage is badly situated on the cataract of Niagara or in the circus of Gavarnie. It is awkward to keep house with these fierce wonders; to frequent them regularly without being overwhelmed, one must be a cretin or a genius.

The dawn itself at times seems to us immoderate: he who looks at it straight suffers. The eye at certain moments thinks very ill of the sun. Let us not then be astonished at the complaints made, at the incessant objections, at the fits of passion and prudence, at the cataplasms applied by a certain criticism, at the ophthalmies habitual to academies and teaching bodies, at the warnings given to the reader, at all the curtains let down, and at all the shades used against genius. Genius is intolerant without knowing it, because it is itself. How can people be familiar with Æschylus, with Ezekiel, with Dante?

The *I* is the right to egotism. Now, the first thing that those beings do, is to use roughly the *I* of each one. Exorbitant in everything,—in thoughts, in images, in convictions, in emotions, in passions, in faith,—whatever may be the side of your *I* to which they address themselves, they inconvenience it. Your intellect, they surpass it; your imagination, they dazzle it; your conscience, they question and search it; your bowels, they twist them; your heart, they break it; your soul, they carry it off.

The infinite that is in them passes from them and multiplies them, and transfigures them before your eyes every moment,—formidable fatigue for your gaze. With them you never know where you are. At every turn the unforeseen. You expected only men: they cannot enter your room, for they are giants. You expected only an idea: cast your eyes down, they are the ideal. You expected only eagles: they have six wings,—they are seraphs. Are they then beyond Nature? Is it that humanity fails them?

Certainly not, and far from that, and quite the reverse. We have already said it, and we insist on it, Nature and humanity are in them more than in any other beings. They are superhuman men, but men. *Homo sum*. This word of

a poet sums up all poetry. Saint Paul strikes his breast and says, "Peccamus!" Job tells you who he is: "I am the son of woman." They are men. That which troubles you is that they are men more than you; they are too much men, so to speak. There where you have but the part, they have the whole; they carry in their vast heart entire humanity, and they are *you* more than yourself. You recognize yourself too much in their work,—hence your outcry. To that total of Nature, to that complete humanity, to that potter's clay, which is all your flesh, and which is at the same time the whole earth, they add, and it completes your terror, the wonderful reverberation of the unknown. They have vistas of revelation; and suddenly, and without crying "Beware!" at the moment when you least expect it, they burst the cloud, make in the zenith a gap whence falls a ray, and they light up the terrestrial with the celestial. It is very natural that people should not greatly fancy familiar intercourse with them, and should have no taste for keeping neighbourly intimacy with them.

Whoever has not a soul well-tempered by a vigorous education avoids them willingly. For great books there must be great readers. It is necessary to be strong and healthy to open Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, Pindar, Lucretius, and that Alighieri, and that Shakespeare. Homely habits, prosy life, the dead calm of consciences, "good taste" and "common-sense,"—all the small, placid egotism is deranged, let us own it, by these monsters of the sublime.

Yet, when one dives in and reads them, nothing is more hospitable for the mind at certain hours than these stern spirits. They have all at once a lofty gentleness, as unexpected as the rest. They say to you, "Come in!" They receive you at home with a fraternity of archangels. They are affectionate, sad, melancholy, consoling. You are suddenly at your ease. You feel yourself loved by them: you almost imagine yourself personally known to them. Their sternness and their pride cover a profound sympathy. If granite had a heart, how deep would its goodness be! Well,

genius is granite with goodness. Extreme power possesses great love. They join you in your prayers. They know well, those men, that God exists. Apply your ear to these giants, you will hear them palpitate. Do you want to believe, to love, to weep, to strike your breast, to fall on your knees, to raise your hands to heaven with confidence and serenity, listen to these poets. They will aid you to rise toward the healthy and fruitful sorrow; they will make you feel the celestial use of emotion. Oh, goodness of the strong! Their emotion, which, if they will, can be an earthquake, is at moments so cordial and so gentle that it seems like the rocking of a cradle. They have just given birth within you to something of which they take care. There is maternity in genius. Take a step, advance farther,—a new surprise awaits you: they are graceful. As for their grace, it is light itself.

The high mountains have on their sides all climates, and the great poets all styles. It is sufficient to change the zone. Go up, it is the tempest; descend, the flowers are there. The inner fire accommodates itself to the winter without; the glacier has no objection to be the crater, and the lava never looks more beautiful than when it rushes out through the snow. A sudden blaze of flame is not strange on a polar summit. This contact of the extremes is a law in Nature, in which the unforeseen wonders of the sublime burst forth at every moment. A mountain, a genius,—both are austere majesty. These masses evolve a sort of religious intimidation. Dante is not less perpendicular than Etna. The depths of Shakespeare equal the gulfs of Chimborazo. The peaks of poets are not less cloudy than the summits of mountains. Thunders are rolling there, and at the same time, in the valleys, in the passes, in the sheltered spots, in places between escarpments, are streams, birds, nests, boughs, enchantments, wonderful flora. Above the frightful arch of the Aveyron, in the middle of the frozen sea, there is that paradise called The Garden. Have you seen it? What an episode! A hot sun, a shade tepid and fresh, a vague exudation of perfumes on the grass-plots, an indescribable month of May perpetually reigning

among precipices,— nothing is more tender and more exquisite. Such are poets: such are the Alps. These huge old gloomy mountains are marvellous growers of roses and violets; they avail themselves of the dawn and of the dew better than all your prairies and all your hillocks can do it, although it is their natural business. The April of the plain is flat and vulgar compared with their April; and they have, those immense old mountains, in their wildest ravine, their own charming spring, well known to the bees.

BOOK IV

CRITICISM

CHAPTER I

EVERY play of Shakespeare's, two excepted, "Macbeth" and "Romeo and Juliet" (thirty-four plays out of thirty-six), offers to our observation one peculiarity which seems to have escaped, up to this day, the most eminent commentators and critics,—one that the Schlegels and M. Villemain himself, in his remarkable labours, do not notice, and on which it is impossible not to give an opinion. It is a double action which traverses the drama, and reflects it on a small scale. By the side of the storm in the Atlantic, the storm in the tea-cup. Thus, Hamlet makes beneath himself a Hamlet: he kills Polonius, father of Laërtes,—and there is Laërtes opposite him exactly in the same situation as he is toward Claudius. There are two fathers to avenge. There might be two ghosts. So, in King Lear: side by side and simultaneously, Lear, driven to despair by his daughters Goneril and Regan, and consoled by his daughter Cordelia, is reflected by Gloster, betrayed by his son Edmond, and loved by his son Edgar. The bifurcated idea, the idea echoing itself, a lesser drama copying and elbowing the principal drama, the action trailing its own shadow (a smaller action but its parallel), the unity cut asunder.—surely it is a strange fact. These twin actions have been strongly blamed by the few commentators who have pointed them out. We do not participate in their blame. Do we then approve and accept

as good these twin actions? By no means. We recognize them, and this is all. The drama of Shakespeare (we said so with all our might as far back as 1827,¹ in order to discourage all imitation),—the drama of Shakespeare is peculiar to Shakespeare. It is a drama inherent to this poet; it is his own essence; it is himself,—thence his originalities absolutely personal; thence his idiosyncrasies which exist without establishing a law.

These twin actions are purely Shakespearian. Neither Æschylus nor Molière would admit them; and we certainly would agree with Æschylus and Molière.

These twin actions are, moreover, the sign of the sixteenth century. Each epoch has its own mysterious stamp. The centuries have a seal that they affix to *chefs-d'œuvre*, and which it is necessary to know how to decipher and recognize. The seal of the sixteenth century is not the seal of the eighteenth. The Renaissance was a subtle time,—a time of reflection. The spirit of the sixteenth century was reflected in a mirror. Every idea of the Renaissance has a double compartment. Look at the jubes in the churches. The Renaissance, with an exquisite and fantastical art, always makes the Old Testament repercussive on the New. The twin action is there in everything. The symbol explains the personage in repeating his gesture. If, in a basso-relievo, Jehovah sacrifices his son, he has close by, in the next low relief, Abraham sacrificing his son. Jonas passes three days in the whale, and Jesus passes three days in the sepulchre; and the jaws of the monster swallowing Jonas answer to the mouth of hell engulfing Jesus.

The carver of the jube of Fécamp, so stupidly demolished, goes so far as to give for counterpart to Saint Joseph—whom? Amphitryon.

These singular results constitute one of the habits of that profound and searching high art of the sixteenth century. Nothing can be more curious in that style than the part ascribed to Saint Christopher. In the Middle Ages, and in

¹ Preface to "Cromwell."

the sixteenth century, in paintings and sculptures, Saint Christopher, the good giant martyred by Decius in 250, recorded by the Bollandists and acknowledged without a question by Baillet, is always triple,—an opportunity for the triptych. There is foremost a first Christ-bearer, a first Christophorus; that is Christopher, with the infant Jesus on his shoulders. Afterward the Virgin enccinte is a Christopher, since she carries Christ. Last, the cross is a Christopher; it also carries Christ. This treble illustration of the idea is immortalized by Rubens in the cathedral of Antwerp. The twin idea, the triple idea,—such is the seal of the sixteenth century.

Shakespeare, faithful to the spirit of his time, must needs add Laërtes avenging his father to Hamlet avenging his father, and cause Hamlet to be persecuted by Laërtes at the same time that Claudius is pursued by Hamlet; he must needs make the filial piety of Edgar a comment on the filial piety of Cordelia, and bring out in contrast, weighed down by the ingratitude of unnatural children, two wretched fathers, each bereaved of a kind light,—Lear mad, and Gloster blind.

CHAPTER II

WHAT then? No criticising? No.—No blame? No.—You explain everything? Yes.—Genius is an entity like Nature, and requires, like Nature, to be accepted purely and simply. A mountain must be accepted as such or left alone. There are men who would make a criticism on the Himalayas, pebble by pebble. Mount Etna blazes and slavers, throws out its glare, its wrath, its lava, and its ashes; these men take scales and weigh those ashes, pinch by pinch. *Quot libras in monte summo?* Meanwhile genius continues its eruption. Everything in it has its reason for existing. It is because it is. Its shadow is the inverse of its light. Its smoke comes from its flame. Its depth is the result of its

height. We love this more and that less; but we remain silent wherever we feel God. We are in the forest; the tortuosity of the tree is its secret. The sap knows what it is doing. The root knows its own business. We take things as they are; we are indulgent for that which is excellent, tender, or magnificent; we acquiesce in *chefs-d'œuvre*; we do not make use of one to find fault with the other; we do not insist upon Phidias sculpturing cathedrals, or upon Pinaigrier glazing temples (the temple is the harmony, the cathedral is the mystery; they are two different forms of the sublime); we do not claim for the Münster the perfection of the Parthenon, or for the Parthenon the grandeur of the Münster. We are so far whimsical as to be satisfied with both being beautiful. We do not reproach for its sting the insect that gives us honey. We renounce our right to criticise the feet of the peacock, the cry of the swan, the plumage of the nightingale, the butterfly for having been caterpillar, the thorn of the rose, the smell of the lion, the skin of the elephant, the prattle of the cascade, the pips of the orange, the immobility of the Milky Way, the saltiness of the ocean, the spots on the sun, the nakedness of Noah.

The *quandoque bonus dormitat* is permitted to Horace. We raise no objection. What is certain is, that Homer would not say it of Horace,—he would not take the trouble. Himself the eagle, Homer would indeed find Horace, the chattering humming-bird, charming. I grant it is pleasant to a man to feel himself superior, and say, "Homer is puerile; Dante is childish." It is indulging in a pretty smile. To crush these poor geniuses a little, why not? To be the Abbé Trublet, and say, "Milton is a schoolboy," it is pleasing. How witty is the man who finds that Shakespeare has no wit! That man is La Harpe, Delandine, Auger; he is, was, or shall be, an Academician. "All these great men are made up of extravagance, bad taste, and childishness." What a fine decree to issue! These fashions tickle voluptuously those who have them; and in reality, when they have said, "This giant is small," they can fancy that they are great. Every

man has his own way. As for myself, the writer of these lines, I admire everything like a fool.

That is why I have written this book.

To admire, to be an enthusiast,—it has struck me that it was right to give in our century this example of folly.

CHAPTER III

DO not look, then, for any criticism. I admire Æschylus, I admire Juvenal, I admire Dante, in the mass, in a lump, all. I do not cavil at those great benefactors. What you characterize as a fault, I call accent. I accept and give thanks. I do not inherit the marvels of human wit conditionally. Pegasus being given to me, I do not look the gift-horse in the mouth. A masterpiece offers its hospitality: I approach it with my hat off, and think the visage of mine host handsome. Gilles Shakespeare, it may be: I admire Shakespeare and I admire Gilles. Falstaff is proposed to me: I accept him, and I admire the “Empty the jorden.” I admire the senseless cry, “A rat!” I admire the jests of Hamlet; I admire the wholesale murders of Macbeth; I admire the witches, “that ridiculous spectacle;” I admire “the buttock of the night;” I admire the eye plucked from Gloster. I am simple enough to admire all.

Having recently had the honour to be called “silly” by several distinguished writers and critics, and even by my illustrious friend M. de Lamartine,¹ I am determined to justify the epithet.

We close with one last observation which we have specially to make regarding Shakespeare.

Orestes, that fatal senior of Hamlet, is not, as we have

¹ All the biography, sometimes rather puerile, even rather silly, of Bishop Myriel.—LAMARTINE: *Cours de Littérature* (Entretien lxxxiv. p. 385).

said, the sole link between Æschylus and Shakespeare; we have noted a relation, less easily perceptible, between Prometheus and Hamlet. The mysterious close connection between the two poets is, in reference to this same Prometheus, more strangely striking yet, and in a particular which, up to this time, has escaped the observers and critics. Prometheus is the grandsire of Mab.

Let us prove it.

Prometheus, like all personages become legendary,—like Solomon, like Cæsar, like Mahomet, like Charlemagne, like the Cid, like Joan of Arc, like Napoleon,—has a double prolongation, the one in history, the other in fable. Now, the prolongation of Prometheus is this:

Prometheus, creator of men, is also creator of spirits. He is father of a dynasty of Divs, whose filiation the old metrical tales have preserved: Elf, that is to say, the Rapid, son of Prometheus; then Elfin, King of India; then Elfinan, founder of Cleopolis, town of the fairies; then Elfilin, builder of the golden wall; then Elfinell, winner of the battle of the demons; then Elfant, who made Panthea entirely in crystal; then Elfar, who killed Bicephalus and Tricephalus; then Elfinor, the magian, a kind of Salmoneus, who built over the sea a bridge of copper, sounding like thunder, “non imitabile fulmen ære et cornipedum pulsu simularat equorum;” then seven hundred princes; then Elficleos the Sage; then Elferon the Beautiful; then Oberon; then Mab,—wonderful fable, which, with a profound meaning, unites the sidereal and the microscopic, the infinitely great and the infinitely small.

And it is thus that the infusoria of Shakespeare is connected with the giant of Æschylus.

The fairy, drawn over the nose of sleeping men in her carriage, covered with the wing of a locust, by eight flies harnessed with the rays of the moon, and whipped with a gossamer,—the fairy atom has for ancestor the huge Titan, robber of stars, nailed on the Caucasus, one hand on the Caspian gates, the other on the portals of Ararat, one heel on the source of the Phasis, the other on the Validus-Murus,

closing the passage between the mountain and the sea,—a colossus, whose immense shadow was, according as the rise or setting of light, projected by the sun, now on Europe as far as Corinth, now on Asia as far as Bangalore.

Nevertheless, Mab, who is also called Tanaquil, has all the wavering inconsistency of the dream. Under the name of Tanaquil she is the wife of Tarquin the Ancient; and she spins for young Servius Tullius the first tunic worn by a young Roman after leaving off the pretexta. Oberon, who turns out to be Numa, is her uncle. In "*Huon de Bordeaux*" she is called Gloriande, and has for lover Julius Cæsar, and Oberon is her son; in Spenser, she is called Gloriana, and Oberon is her father; in Shakespeare she is called Titania, and Oberon is her husband. Titania: this name unites Mab to the Titan, and Shakespeare to Æschylus.

CHAPTER IV

AN eminent man of our day, a celebrated historian, a powerful orator, one of the former translators of Shakespeare, is mistaken, according to our views, when he regrets, or appears to regret, the slight influence of Shakespeare on the theatre of the nineteenth century. We cannot share that regret. An influence of any sort, even that of Shakespeare, could but mar the originality of the literary movement of our epoch. "The system of Shakespeare," says the honourable and grave writer, with reference to that movement, "can furnish, it seems to me, the plans after which genius must henceforth work." We have never been of that opinion, and we have said so as far back as forty years ago. For us, Shakespeare is a genius, and not a system. On this point we have already explained our views, and we mean soon to explain them at greater length; but let us state now that what Shakespeare has done, is done once for

all,—it is impossible to do it over again. Admire or criticise, but do not recast. It is finished.

A distinguished critic who lately died,—M. Chaudesaigues,—lays a stress on this reproach: "Shakespeare," says he, "has been revived without being followed. The romantic school has not imitated Shakespeare. In that it is wrong." In that it is right. It is blamed for it; we praise it. The contemporary theatre is what it is, but it is itself. The contemporary theatre has for device, *Sum non sequor*. It belongs to no "system." It has its own law, and it accomplishes it. It has its own life, and it lives it.

The drama of Shakespeare expresses man at a given moment. Man passes away; that drama remains, having for eternal foundation, life, the heart, the world, and for surface the sixteenth century. That drama can neither be continued nor recomposed. Another age, another art.

The theatre of our day has not followed Shakespeare any more than it has followed Æschylus. And without reckoning all the other reasons that we shall note farther on, how perplexed would he be who wished to imitate and copy, in making a choice between these two poets! Æschylus and Shakespeare seem made to prove that contraries may be admirable. The point of departure of the one is absolutely opposite to the point of departure of the other. Æschylus is concentration; Shakespeare is diffusion. One must be much applauded because he is condensed, and the other because he is diffuse; to Æschylus unity, to Shakespeare ubiquity. Between them they divide God. And as such intellects are always complete, one feels in the condensed drama of Æschylus the free agitation of passion, and in the diffuse drama of Shakespeare the convergence of all the rays of life. The one starts from unity and reaches a multiple; the other starts from the multiple and arrives at unity.

This appears strikingly evident, particularly when we compare "Hamlet" with "Orestes,"—extraordinary double page, obverse and reverse of the same idea, and which seems written expressly to prove to what an extent two different

geniuses, making the same thing, will make two different things.

It is easy to see that the theatre of our day has, rightly or wrongly, traced out its own way between Greek unity and Shakespearian ubiquity.

CHAPTER V

LET us set aside for the present the question of contemporary art, and take up again the general question.

Imitation is always barren and bad.

As for Shakespeare,—since Shakespeare is the poet who claims our attention now,—he is, in the highest degree, a genius human and general; but like every true genius, he is at the same time an idiosyncratic and personal mind. Axiom: the poet starts from his own inner self to come to us. It is that which makes the poet inimitable.

Examine Shakespeare, dive into him, and see how determined he is to be himself. Do not expect any concession from him. It is not egotism, but it is stubbornness. He wills it. He gives to art his orders,—of course in the limits of his work; for neither the art of Æschylus, nor the art of Aristophanes, nor the art of Plautus, nor the art of Macchiavelli, nor the art of Calderon, nor the art of Molière, nor the art of Beaumarchais, nor any of the forms of art, deriving life each of them from the special life of a genius, would obey the orders given by Shakespeare. Art, thus understood, is vast equality and profound liberty; the region of the equals is also the region of the free.

One of the grandeurs of Shakespeare consists in his impossibility to be a model. In order to realize his idiosyncrasy, open one of his plays,—no matter which; it is always foremost and above all Shakespeare.

What more personal than “Troilus and Cressida”? A

comic Troy! Here is "Much Ado about Nothing,"—a tragedy which ends with a burst of laughter. Here is the "Winter's Tale,"—a pastoral drama. Shakespeare is at home in his work. Do you wish to see true despotism: look at his fancy. What arbitrary determination to dream! What despotic resolution in his vertiginous flight! What absoluteness in his indecision and wavering! The dream fills some of his plays to that degree that man changes his nature, and is the cloud more than the man. Angelo in "Measure for Measure" is a misty tyrant. He becomes disintegrated, and wears away. Leontes in the "Winter's Tale" is an Othello who is blown away. In "Cymbeline" one thinks that Iachimo will become an Iago, but he melts down. The dream is there,—everywhere. Watch Manilius, Posthumus, Hermione, Perdita, passing by. In the "Tempest," the Duke of Milan has "a brave son," who is like a dream in a dream. Ferdinand alone speaks of him, and no one but Ferdinand seems to have seen him. A brute becomes reasonable: witness the constable Elbow in "Measure for Measure." An idiot is all at once witty: witness Cloten in "Cymbeline." A King of Sicily is jealous of a King of Bohemia. Bohemia has a seashore. The shepherds pick up children there. Theseus, a duke, espouses Hippolyta, the Amazon. Oberon comes in also. For here it is Shakespeare's will to dream; elsewhere he thinks.

We say more: where he dreams he still thinks,—with a different but equal depth.

Let men of genius remain in peace in their originality. There is something wild in these mysterious civilizers. Even in their comedy, even in their buffoonery, even in their laughter, even in their smile, there is the unknown. In them is the sacred dread that belongs to art, and the all-powerful terror of the imaginary mixed with the real. Each of them is in his cavern, alone. They hear one another from afar, but never copy one another. We are not aware that the hippopotamus imitates the roar of the elephant, neither do lions imitate one another.

Diderot does not recast Bayle; Beaumarchais does not copy Plautus, and has no need of Davus to create Figaro. Piranesi is not inspired by Dædalus. Isaiah does not begin Moses over again.

One day, at St. Helena, M. De Las Cases said, "Sire, when you were master of Prussia, I would in your place have taken the sword of Frederick the Great, which is deposited in the tomb at Potsdam; and I would have worn it." "Fool!" replied Napoleon, "I had my own."

Shakespeare's work is absolute, sovereign, imperious, eminently solitary, unneighbourly, sublime in radiance, absurd in reflection, and must remain without a copy.

To imitate Shakespeare would be as insane as to imitate Racine would be stupid.

CHAPTER VI

LET us agree, by the way, respecting a qualificative much used everywhere: *Profanum vulgus*,—the saying of a poet on which pedants lay great stress. This *profanum vulgus* is rather the weapon of everybody. Let us fix the meaning of this word. What is the *profanum vulgus*? The school says, "It is the people." And we, we say, "It is the school."

But let us first define this expression, "the school." When we say, "the school," what must be understood? Let us explain it. The school is the resultant of pedantry; the school is the literary exerescence of the budget; the school is intellectual mandarinship governing in the various authorized and official teachings, either of the press or of the State, from the theatrical *feuilleton* of the prefecture to the biographies and encyclopædias duly examined, stamped, and hawked about, and sometimes, as a refinement, made by republicans agreeable to the police; the school is the circumvallating

classic and scholastic orthodoxy, the Homeric and Virgilian antiquity made use of by *literati* licensed by government,—a kind of China self-called Greece; the school is—summed up in one concretion which forms part of public order—all the knowledge of pedagogues, all the history of historiographers, all the poetry of laureates, all the philosophy of sophists, all the criticism of pedants, all the ferule of the “ignorantins,” all the religion of bigots, all the modesty of prudes, all the metaphysics of those who change sides, all the justice of placemen, all the old age of the small young men who have undergone the operation, all the flattery of courtiers, all the diatribes of censor-bearers, all the independence of valets, all the certainty of short sights and of base souls. The school hates Shakespeare. It detects him in the very act of mingling with the people, going to and fro in public thoroughfares, “trivial,” speaking the language of the people, uttering the human cry like any other man, welcome to those that he welcomes, applauded by hands black with tar, cheered by all the hoarse throats that proceed from labour and weariness. The drama of Shakespeare is the people; the school is indignant and says, “*Odi profanum vulgus.*” There is demagogy in this poetry roaming at large; the author of “Hamlet” “panders to the mob.”

Let it be so. The poet “panders to the mob.”

If anything is great, it is that.

There in the foreground, everywhere, in full light, amidst the flourish of trumpets, are the powerful men followed by the gilded men. The poet does not see them, or, if he does, he disdains them. He lifts his eyes and looks at God; then he lowers his eyes and looks at the people. There in the depth of the shadow, nearly invisible, so much submerged that it is the night, is that fatal crowd, that vast and mournful heap of suffering, that venerable populace of the tattered and of the ignorant,—chaos of souls. That crowd of heads undulates obscurely like the waves of a nocturnal sea. From time to time there pass on that surface, like squalls over the water, catastrophes,—a war, a pestilence, a royal

favourite, a famine. That causes a disturbance which lasts a short time, the depth of sorrow being immovable as the depth of the ocean. Despair deposits in us some weight as of lead. The last word of the abyss is stupor; therefore it is the night. It is, under the thick blackness, behind which all is indistinct, the mournful sea of the needy.

These overloaded beings are silent; they know nothing; they submit. *Plectuntur Achivi*. They are hungry and cold. Their indecent flesh is seen through the holes in their tatters. Who makes those tatters? The purple. The nakedness of virgins comes from the nudity of odalisques. From the twisted rags of the daughters of the people fall pearls for the Fontanges and the Châteauroux. It is famine which gilds Versailles. The whole of that living and dying shadow moves: these larvæ are in the pangs of death; the mother's breast is dry; the father has no work; the brains have no light. If there is a book in that destitution, it resembles the pitcher, so insipid or corrupt is what it offers to the thirst of intellects. Mournful families!

The group of the little ones is wan. All die away and creep along, not having even the power to love; and unknown to them perhaps, while they crouch down and resign themselves, from all that vast unconsciousness in which Right dwells, from the rumbling murmur of those wretched breaths mingled together, proceeds an indescribable confused voice, mysterious mist of language, succeeding, syllable by syllable in the darkness, in uttering extraordinary words,—Future, Humanity, Liberty, Equality, Progress. And the poet listens, and he hears; and he looks, and he sees; and he bends lower and lower, and he weeps; and all at once, growing with a strange growth, drawing from all that darkness his own transfiguration, he stands erect, terrible and tender, above all those wretched ones,—those above as well as those below,—with flaming eyes.

And he demands a reckoning with a loud voice. And he says, Here is the effect! And he says, Here is the cause! Light is the remedy. *Erudimini*. And he looks like a great

vase full of humanity shaken by the hand which is in the cloud, and from whence fall on the earth large drops,—fire for the oppressors, dew for the oppressed. Ah, you find fault with that, you fellows! Well, then, we approve of it, we do! We find it just that some one speaks when all suffer. The ignorant who enjoy and the ignorant who suffer have an equal want of teaching. The law of fraternity is derived from the law of labour. To kill one another has had its day. The hour has come to love one another. It is to promulgate these truths that the poet is good. For that, he must be of the people; for that he must be of the populace,—that is to say, that, bringing progress, he should not recoil before the pressure of facts, however ugly the facts may be. The distance between the real and the ideal cannot be measured otherwise. Besides, to drag the cannon-ball a little completes Vincent de Paul. Hurrah, then, for the trivial promiscuousness, for the popular metaphor, for the great life in common with those exiles from joy who are called the poor!—this is the first duty of poets. It is useful, it is necessary, that the breath of the people should fill those all-powerful souls. The people have something to say to them. It is good that there should be in Euripides a flavour of the herb-dealers at Athens, and in Shakespeare of the sailors of London.

Sacrifice to “the mob,” O poet! Sacrifice to that unfortunate, disinherited, vanquished, vagabond, shoeless, famished, repudiated, despairing mob; sacrifice to it, if it must be and when it must be, thy repose, thy fortune, thy joy, thy country, thy liberty, thy life. The mob is the human race in misery. The mob is the mournful commencement of the people. The mob is the great victim of darkness. Sacrifice to it! Sacrifice thyself! Let thyself be hunted, let thyself be exiled as Voltaire to Ferney, as D'Aubigné to Geneva, as Dante to Verona, as Juvenal to Syene, as Tacitus to Methymna, as Æschylus to Gela, as John to Patmos, as Elias to Horeb, as Thucydides to Thrace, as Isaiah to Esiongeber! Sacrifice to the mob. Sacrifice to it thy gold, and thy blood

which is more than thy gold, and thy thought which is more than thy blood, and thy love which is more than thy thought; sacrifice to it everything except justice. Receive its complaint; listen to its faults, and to the faults of others. Listen to what it has to confess and to denounce to thee. Stretch forth to it the ear, the hand, the arm, the heart. Do everything for it, excepting evil. Alas! it suffers so much, and it knows nothing. Correct it, warm it, instruct it, guide it, bring it up. Put it to the school of honesty. Make it spell truth; show it that alphabet, reason; teach it to read virtue, probity, generosity, mercy. Hold thy book wide open. Be there, attentive, vigilant, kind, faithful, humble. Light up the brain, inflame the mind, extinguish egotism, show good example. The poor are privation: be abnegation. Teach! irradiate! They need thee; thou art their great thirst. To learn is the first step; to live is but the second. Be at their order, dost thou hear? Be ever there, light! For it is beautiful, on this sombre earth, during this dark life, short passage to something else, it is beautiful that Force should have Right for a master, that Progress should have Courage as a chief, that Intelligence should have Honour as a sovereign, that Conscience should have Duty as a despot, that Civilization should have Liberty as a queen, that Ignorance should have a servant,—Light.

BOOK V

THE MINDS AND THE MASSES

CHAPTER I

FOR the last eighty years memorable things have been done. A wonderful heap of demolished materials covers the pavement.

What is done is but little by the side of what remains to be done.

To destroy is the task: to build is the work. Progress demolishes with the left hand; it is with the right hand that it builds.

The left hand of Progress is called Force; the right hand is called Mind.

There is at this hour a great deal of useful destruction accomplished; all the old cumbersome civilization is, thanks to our fathers, cleared away. It is well, it is finished, it is thrown down, it is on the ground. Now, up with you all, intellects! to work, to labour, to fatigue, to duty; it is necessary to construct.

Here three questions: To construct what? To construct where? To construct how?

We reply: To construct the people. To construct the people according to the laws of progress. To construct the people according to the laws of light.

CHAPTER II

TO work for the people,—that is the great and urgent necessity.

The human mind—an important thing to say at this minute—has a greater need of the ideal even than of the real.

It is by the real that we exist: it is by the ideal that we live. Now, do you wish to realize the difference? Animals exist, man lives.

To live, is to understand. To live, is to smile at the present, to look toward posterity over the wall. To live, is to have in one's self a balance, and to weigh in it the good and the evil. To live, is to have justice, truth, reason, devotion, probity, sincerity, common-sense, right, and duty nailed to the heart. To live, is to know what one is worth, what one can do and should do. Life is conscience. Cato would not rise before Ptolemy. Cato lived.

Literature is the secretion of civilization, poetry of the ideal. That is why literature is one of the wants of societies. That is why poetry is a hunger of the soul. That is why poets are the first instructors of the people. That is why Shakespeare must be translated in France. That is why Molière must be translated in England. That is why comments must be made on them. That is why there must be a vast public literary domain. That is why all poets, all philosophers, all thinkers, all the producers of the greatness of the mind must be translated, commented on, published, printed, reprinted, stereotyped, distributed, explained, recited, spread abroad, given to all, given cheaply, given at cost price, given for nothing.

Poetry evolves heroism. M. Royer-Collard, that original and ironical friend of routine, was, taken all in all, a wise and noble spirit. Some one we know heard him say one day, "Spartacus is a poet."

That wonderful and consoling Ezekiel — the tragic revealer of progress — has all kinds of singular passages full of a profound meaning: "The voice said to me: Fill the palm of thy hand with red-hot coals, and spread them on the city." And elsewhere: "The spirit having gone into them, everywhere where the spirit went, they went." And again: "A hand was stretched towards me. It held a roll which was a book. The voice said to me: Eat this roll. I opened the lips and I ate the book. And it was sweet in my mouth as honey." To eat the book is a strange and striking image,—the whole formula of perfectibility, which above is knowledge, and below, teaching.

We have just said, "Literature is the secretion of civilization." Do you doubt it? Open the first statistics you come across.

Here is one which we find under our hand: *Bagne de Toulon*, 1862. Three thousand and ten prisoners. Of these three thousand and ten convicts, forty know a little more than to read and write, two hundred and eighty-seven know how to read and write, nine hundred and four read badly and write badly, seventeen hundred and seventy-nine know neither how to read nor write. In this wretched crowd all the merely mechanical trades are represented by numbers decreasing according as they rise toward the enlightened pursuits, and you arrive at this final result: goldsmiths and jewellers, four; ecclesiastics, three; lawyers, two; comedians, one; artist musicians, one; men of letters, not one.

The transformation of the crowd into the people,—profound labour! It is to this labour that the men called socialists have devoted themselves during the last forty years. The author of this book, however insignificant he may be, is one of the oldest in this labour; "*Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*" dates from 1828, and "*Claude Gueux*" from 1834. He claims his place among these philosophers because it is a place of persecution. A certain hatred of socialism, very blind, but very general, has been at work for fifteen or sixteen years, and is still at work most bitterly

among the influential classes. (Classes, then, are still in existence?) Let it not be forgotten, socialism, true socialism, has for its end the elevation of the masses to the civic dignity, and therefore its principal care is for moral and intellectual cultivation. The first hunger is ignorance; socialism wishes then, above all, to instruct. That does not hinder socialism from being calumniated, and socialists from being denounced. To most of the infuriated, trembling cowards who have their say at the present moment, these reformers are public enemies. They are guilty of everything that has gone wrong. "O Romans!" said Tertullian, "we are just, kind, thinking, lettered, honest men. We meet to pray, and we love you because you are our brethren. We are gentle and peaceable like little children, and we wish for concord among men. Nevertheless, O Romans! if the Tiber overflows, or if the Nile does not, you cry, 'to the lions with the Christians!'"

CHAPTER III

THE democratic idea, the new bridge of civilization, undergoes at this moment the formidable trial of overweight. Every other idea would certainly give way under the load that it is made to bear. Democracy proves its solidity by the absurdities that are heaped on, without shaking it. It must resist everything that people choose to place on it. At this moment they try to make it carry despotism.

The people have no need of liberty,—such was the password of a certain innocent and duped school, the head of which has been dead some years. That poor honest dreamer believed in good faith that men can keep progress with them when they turn out liberty. We have heard him put forth, probably without meaning it, this aphorism: Liberty is good for the rich. These kinds of maxims have the disadvantage of not being prejudicial to the establishment of empires.

No, no, no! Nothing out of liberty.

Servitude is the blind soul. Can you figure to yourself a man blind voluntarily? This terrible thing exists. There are willing slaves. A smile in irons! Can anything be more hideous? He who is not free is not a man; he who is not free has no sight, no knowledge, no discernment, no growth, no comprehension, no will, no faith, no love; he has no wife, he has no children: he has a female and young ones; he lives not,—*ab luce principium*. Liberty is the apple of the eye. Liberty is the visual organ of progress.

Because liberty has inconveniences, and even perils, to wish to create civilization without it is just the same as to try cultivation without the sun; the sun is also a censurable heavenly body. One day, in the too beautiful summer of 1829, a critic, now forgotten,—and wrongly, for he was not without some talent,—M. P., suffering from the heat, sharpened his pen, saying, "I am going to excoriate the sun."

Certain social theories, very distinct from socialism such as we understand and want it, have gone astray. Let us discard all that resembles the convent, the barrack, the cell and the straight-line system. Paraguay, minus the Jesuits, is Paraguay just the same. To give a new fashion to evil is not a useful task. To recommence the old slavery is idiotic. Let the nations of Europe beware of a despotism made anew from materials they have to some extent themselves supplied. Such a thing, cemented with a special philosophy, might well last. We have just mentioned the theorists, some of whom otherwise right and sincere, who, by dint of fearing the dispersion of activities and energies, and of what they call "anarchy," have arrived at an almost Chinese acceptance of absolute social concentration. They turn their resignation into a doctrine. Provided man eats and drinks, all is right. The happiness of the beast is the solution. But this is a happiness which some other men would call by a different name.

We dream for nations something else besides a felicity

solely made up of obedience. The bastinado procures that sort of felicity for the Turkish fellah, the knout for the Russian serf, and the cat-o'-nine-tails for the English soldier. These socialists by the side of socialism come from Joseph de Maistre, and from Ancillon, without suspecting it perhaps; for the ingenuousness of these theorists rallied to the *fait accompli* has — or fancies it has — democratic intentions, and speaks energetically of the “principles of '89.” Let these involuntary philosophers of a possible despotism think a moment. To teach the masses a doctrine against liberty; to cram intellects with appetites and fatalism, a certain situation being given; to saturate it with materialism; and to run the risk of the construction which might proceed from it, — that would be to understand progress in the fashion of the worthy man who applauded a new gibbet, and who exclaimed, “This is all right! We have had till now but the old wooden gallows. To-day the age advances; and here we are with a good stone gibbet, which will do for our children and grandchildren!”

CHAPTER IV

TO enjoy a full stomach, a satisfied intestine, a satiated belly, is doubtless something, for it is the enjoyment of the brute. However, one may place one's ambition higher.

Certainly, a good salary is a fine thing. To tread on this firm ground, high wages, is pleasant. The wise man likes to want nothing. To insure his own position is the characteristic of an intelligent man. An official chair, with ten thousand sesterces a year, is a graceful and convenient seat. Great emoluments give a fresh complexion and good health. One lives to an old age in pleasant, well-paid sinecures. The high financial world, rich in plentiful profits, is a place agreeable to live in. To be well at Court settles a family well

and brings a fortune. As for myself, I prefer to all these solid comforts the old leaky vessel in which Bishop Quodvultdeus embarks with a smile.

There is something beyond gorging one's self. The goal of man is not the goal of the animal.

A moral enhancement is necessary. The life of nations, like the life of individuals, has its minutes of depression: these minutes pass, certainly, but no trace of them ought to remain. Man, at this hour, tends to fall into the stomach. Man must be replaced in the heart; man must be replaced in the brain. The brain,—behold the sovereign that must be restored! The social question requires to-day, more than ever, to be examined on the side of human dignity.

To show man the human end, to ameliorate intelligence first, the animal afterward, to disdain the flesh as long as the thought is despised, and to give the example on their own flesh,—such is the actual, immediate urgent duty of writers.

It is what men of genius have done at all times.

You ask in what poets can be useful? In imbuing civilization with light,—only that.

CHAPTER V

UP to this day there has been a literature of *literati*. In France, particularly, as we have said, literature had a disposition to form a caste. To be a poet was something like being a mandarin. Words did not all belong by right to the language. The dictionary granted or did not grant the registration. The dictionary had a will of its own. Imagine the botanist declaring to a vegetable that it does not exist, and Nature timidly offering an insect to entomology, which refuses it as incorrect. Imagine astronomy cavilling at the stars. We recollect having heard an Academician, now dead, say in full academy that French had been spoken in

France only in the seventeenth century, and then for only twelve years,—we do not remember which twelve. Let us give up, for it is time, this order of ideas; democracy requires it. The actual enlarging of thoughts needs something else. Let us leave the college, the conclave, the cell, the weak taste, weak art, the small chapel. Poetry is not a coterie. There is at this hour an effort made to galvanize dead things. Let us strive against this tendency. Let us insist on the truths which are urgent. The *chefs-d'œuvre* recommended by the manual of bachelorship, compliments in verse and in prose, tragedies soaring over the head of some king, inspiration in full official dress, the brilliant nonentities fixing laws on poetry, the *Arts poétiques* which forget La Fontaine, and for which Molière is doubtful, the Planats castrating the Cornilles, prudish tongues, the thoughts enclosed between four walls, and limited by Quintilian, Longinus, Boileau, and La Harpe,—all that, although official and public teaching is filled and saturated with it, all that belongs to the past. Some particular epoch, which is called the grand century, and for a certainty the fine century, is nothing else in reality but a literary monologue. Is it possible to realize such a strange thing,—a literature which is an aside? It seems as if one read on the frontal of art “No admittance.” As for ourselves, we understand poetry only with the door wide open. The hour has struck for hoisting the “All for All.” What is needed by civilization, henceforth a grown-up woman, is a popular literature.

1830 has opened a debate, literary on the surface, at the bottom social and human. The moment is come to close the debate. We close it by asking a literature having in view this purpose: “The People.”

The author of these pages wrote, thirty-one years ago, in the preface to “*Lucrèce Borgia*,” a few words often repeated since: “*Le poète a charge d'âmes.*” He would add here, if it were worth saying, that, allowing for possible error, the words, uttered by his conscience, have been his rule throughout life.

CHAPTER VI

MACCHIAVELLI had a strange idea of the people. To heap the measure, to overflow the cup, to exaggerate horror in the case of the prince, to increase the crushing in order to stir up the oppressed to revolt, to cause idolatry to change into a curse, to push the masses to extremities,—such seems to be his policy. His “yes” signifies “no.” He loads the despot with despotism in order to make him burst. The tyrant becomes in his hands a hideous projectile, which will break to pieces. Macchiavelli conspires. For whom? Against whom? Guess. His apotheosis of kings is just the thing to make regicides. On the head of his prince he places a diadem of crimes, a tiara of vices, a halo of baseness; and he invites you to adore his monster, with the air of a man expecting an avenger. He glorifies evil with a squint toward the darkness,—the darkness wherein is Harmodius. Macchiavelli, the getter-up of princely outrages, the valet of the Medici and of the Borgias, had in his youth been put to the rack for having admired Brutus and Cassius. He had perhaps plotted with the Soderini the deliverance of Florence. Does he recollect it? Does he continue? His advice is followed, like the lightning, by a low rumbling in the cloud,—alarming reverberation. What did he mean to say? On whom has he a design? Is the advice for or against him to whom he gives it? One day, at Florence, in the garden of Cosmo Ruccelaï, there being present the Duke of Mantua and John de Medici, who afterward commanded the Black Bands of Tuscany, Varchi, the enemy of Macchiavelli, heard him say to the two princes: “Let the people read no book,—not even mine.” It is curious to compare with this remark the advice given by Voltaire to the Duke de Choiseul,—at the same time advice to the minister, and insinuation for the king: “Let the boobies read our nonsense. There is no danger in reading, my lord. What can a great king like the

King of France fear? The people are but rabble, and the books are but trash." Let them read nothing, let them read everything: these two pieces of contrary advice coincide more than one would think. Voltaire, with hidden claws, is purring at the feet of the king, Voltaire and Macchiavelli are two formidable indirect revolutionists, dissimilar in everything, and yet identical in reality by their profound hatred, disguised in flattery, of the master. The one is malignant, the other is sinister. The princes of the sixteenth century had as theorist on their infamies, and as enigmatical courtier, Macchiavelli, an enthusiast dark at heart. The flattery of a sphinx,—terrible thing! Better yet be flattered, like Louis XV., by a cat.

Conclusion: Make the people read Macchiavelli, and make them read Voltaire.

Macchiavelli will inspire them with horror of, and Voltaire with contempt for, crowned guilt.

But the hearts should turn, above all, toward the grand pure poets, whether they be sweet like Virgil or bitter like Juvenal.

CHAPTER VII

THE progress of man by the education of minds,—there is no safety but in that. Teach! learn! All the revolutions of the future are enclosed and imbedded in this phrase: Gratuitous and obligatory instruction.

It is by the unfolding of works of the highest order that this vast intellectual teaching should be crowned. At the top the men of genius.

Wherever there is a gathering of men, there ought to be in a special place, a public expositor of the great thinkers.

By a great thinker we mean a beneficent thinker.

The perpetual presence of the beautiful in their works maintains poets at the summit of teaching.

No one can foresee the quantity of light which will be brought forth by letting the people be in communication with men of genius. This combination of the hearts of the people with the heart of the poet will be the Voltaic pile of civilization.

Will the people understand this magnificent teaching? Certainly. We know of nothing too lofty for the people. The people are a great soul. Have you ever gone on a fête-day to a theatre open gratuitously to all? What do you think of that auditory? Do you know of any other more spontaneous and intelligent? Do you know, even in the forest, of a vibration more profound? The court of Versailles admires like a well-drilled regiment; the people throw themselves passionately into the beautiful. They pack together, crowd, amalgamate, combine, and knead themselves in the theatre,—a living paste that the poet is about to mould. The powerful thumb of Molière will presently make its mark on it; the nail of Corneille will scratch this ill-shaped heap. Whence does that heap come? Whence does it proceed? From the Courtille, from the Porcherons, from the Cunette; it is shoeless, it is bare-armed, it is ragged. Silence! This is the human block.

The house is crowded, the vast multitude looks, listens, loves; all consciences, deeply moved, throw off their inner fire; all eyes glisten; the huge beast with a thousand heads is there,—the Mob of Burke, the *Plebs* of Titus Livius, the *Fex urbis* of Cicero. It caresses the beautiful; smiling at it with the grace of a woman. It is literary in the most refined sense of the word; nothing equals the delicacy of this monster. The tumultuous crowd trembles, blushes, palpitates. Its modesty is surprising; the crowd is a virgin. No prudery however; this brute is not brutal. Not a sympathy escapes it; it has in itself the whole keyboard, from passion to irony, from sarcasm to sobbing. Its compassion is more than compassion; it is real mercy. God is felt in it. All at once the sublime passes, and the sombre electricity of the abyss heaves up suddenly all this pile of hearts and entrails; enthusiasm

effects a transfiguration. And now, is the enemy at the gates, is the country in danger? Appeal to that populace, and it would enact the sublime drama of Thermopylæ. Who has called forth such a metamorphosis? Poetry.

The multitude (and in this lies their grandeur) are profoundly open to the ideal. When they come in contact with lofty art they are pleased, they shudder. Not a detail escapes them. The crowd is one liquid and living expanse capable of vibration. A mass is a sensitive-plant. Contact with the beautiful agitates ecstasically the surface of multitudes,—sure sign that the depth is sounded. A rustling of leaves, a mysterious breath, passes, the crowd trembles under the sacred insufflation of the abyss.

And even where the man of the people is not in a crowd, he is yet a good hearer of great things. His ingenuousness is honest, his curiosity healthy. Ignorance is a longing. His near connection with Nature renders him subject to the holy emotion of the true. He has, toward poetry, secret natural desires which he does not suspect himself. All the teachings are due to the people. The more divine the light, the more is it made for this simple soul. We would have in the villages a pulpit from which Homer should be explained to the peasants.

CHAPTER VIII

TOO much matter is the evil of our day. Hence a certain dulness.

It is necessary to restore some ideal in the human mind. Whence shall you take your ideal? Where is it? The poets, the philosophers, the thinkers are the urns. The ideal is in Æschylus, in Isaiah, in Juvenal, in Alighieri, in Shakespeare. Throw Æschylus, throw Isaiah, throw Juvenal, throw Dante, throw Shakespeare into the deep soul of the human race.

Pour Job, Solomon, Pindar, Ezekiel, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Theocritus, Plautus, Lucretius, Virgil, Terence, Horace, Catullus, Tacitus, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Tertullian, Petrarch, Pascal, Milton, Descartes, Corneille, La Fontaine, Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau, Beaumarchais, Sedaine, André Chénier, Kant, Byron, Schiller,—pour all these souls into man. And with them pour all the wits from Æsop up to Molière, all the intellects from Plato up to Newton, all the encyclopædists from Aristotle up to Voltaire.

By that means while curing the illness for the moment, you will establish forever the health of the human mind.

You will cure the middle class and found the people.

As we have said just now, after the destruction which has delivered the world, you will construct the edifice which shall make it prosper.

What an aim,—to make the people! Principles combined with science; every possible quantity of the absolute introduced by degrees into the fact; Utopia treated successively by every mode of realization,—by political economy, by philosophy, by physics, by chemistry, by dynamics, by logic, by art; union replacing little by little antagonism, and unity replacing union; for religion God, for priest the father, for prayer virtue, for field the whole earth, for language the verb, for law the right, for motive-power duty, for hygiene labour, for economy universal peace, for canvas the very life, for the goal progress, for authority liberty, for people the man,—such is the simplification.

And at the summit the ideal.

The ideal!—inflexible type of perpetual progress.

To whom belong men of genius if not to thee, people? They do belong to thee; they are thy sons and thy fathers. Thou givest birth to them, and they teach thee. They open in thy chaos vistas of light. Children, they have drunk thy sap. They have leaped in the universal matrix, humanity. Each of thy phases, people, is an avatar. The deep essence of life, it is in thee that it must be looked for. Thou

art the great bosom. Geniuses are begotten from thee, mysterious crowd.

Let them therefore return to thee.

People, the author, God, dedicates them to thee.

BOOK VI

THE BEAUTIFUL THE SERVANT OF THE TRUE.

CHAPTER I

AH, minds, be useful! Be of some service. Do not be fastidious when it is necessary to be efficient and good. Art for art may be beautiful, but art for progress is more beautiful yet. To dream revery is well, to dream Utopia is better. Ah, you must think? Then think of making man better. You must dream? Here is the dream for you,—the ideal. The prophet seeks solitude, but not isolation. He unravels and untwists the threads of humanity, tied and rolled in a skein in his soul; he does not break them. He goes into the desert to think — of whom? Of the multitude. It is not to the forests that he speaks; it is to the cities. It is not at the grass bending to the wind that he looks; it is at man. It is not against lions that he wars; it is against tyrants. Woe to thee, Ahab! woe to thee, Hosea! woe to you, kings! woe to you, Pharaohs! is the cry of the great solitary one. Then he weeps.

For what? For that eternal captivity of Babylon, undergone by Israel formerly, undergone by Poland, by Roumania, by Hungary, by Venice to-day. He grows old, the good and dark thinker; he watches, he lies in wait, he listens, he looks,—ear in the silence, eye in the night, elaw half stretched toward the wicked. Go and speak to him, then, of art for art, to that cenobite of the ideal. He has his aim, and he walks

straight toward it; and his aim is this: improvement. He devotes himself to it.

He does not belong to himself; he belongs to his apostleship. He is intrusted with that immense care,— the progress of the human race. Genius is not made for genius, it is made for man. Genius on earth is God giving himself. Each time that a masterpiece appears, it is a distribution of God that takes place. The masterpiece is a variety of the miracle. Thence, in all religions, and among all peoples, comes faith in divine men. They deceive themselves, those who think that we deny the divinity of Christ.

At the point now reached by the social question everything should be action in common. Forces isolated frustrate one another; the ideal and the real strengthen each other. Art necessarily aids science. These two wheels of progress should turn together.

Generation of new talents, noble group of writers and poets, legion of young men, O living posterity of my country, your elders love and salute you! Courage! let us consecrate ourselves. Let us devote ourselves to the good, to the true, to the just. In that there is goodness.

Some pure lovers of art, affected by a pre-occupation which in its way has its dignity and nobleness, discard this formula, "Art for progress," the Beautiful, Useful, fearing lest the useful should deform the beautiful. They tremble lest they should see attached to the fine arms of the Muse the coarse hands of the drudge. According to them, the ideal may become perverted by too much contact with reality. They are solicitous for the sublime if it is lowered as far as humanity. Ah, they are mistaken.

The useful, far from circumscribing the sublime, increases it. The application of the sublime to human things produces unexpected *chefs-d'œuvre*. The useful, considered in itself and as an element combining with the sublime, is of several kinds; there is the useful which is tender, and there is the useful which is indignant. Tender, it refreshes the unfortunate and creates the social epopee; indignant, it flagellates the

wicked, and creates the divine satire. Moses hands the rod to Jesus; and after having caused the water to gush from the rock, that angust rod, the very same, drives the vendors from the sanctuary.

What! art should grow less because it has expanded? No. One service more is one more beauty.

But people cry out: To undertake the cure of social evils; to amend the codes; to denounce the law to the right; to pronounce those hideous words, "bagne," "galley-slave," "convict," "girl of the town;" to control the police-registers; to contract the dispensaries; to investigate wages and the want of work; to taste the black bread of the poor; to seek labour for the work-girl; to confront fashionable idleness with ragged sloth; to throw down the partition of ignorance; to open schools; to teach little children how to read; to attack shame, infamy, error, vice, crime, want of conscience; to preach the multiplication of spelling-books; to proclaim the equality of the sun; to ameliorate the food of intellects and of hearts; to give meat and drink; to claim solutions for problems and shoes for naked feet,—that is not the business of the azure. Art is the azure.

Yes, art is the azure; but the azure from above, from which falls the ray which swells the corn, makes the maize yellow and the apple round, gilds the orange, sweetens the grape. I repeat it, one service more is one more beauty. At all events, where is the diminution? To ripen the beet-root, to water the potatoes, to thicken the lucern, the clover, and the hay; to be a fellow-workman with the ploughman, the vine-dresser, and the gardener,—that does not deprive the heavens of one star. Ah, immensity does not despise utility, and what does it lose by it? Does the vast vital fluid that we call magnetic or electric lighten less splendidly the depth of the clouds because it consents to perform the office of pilot to a bark, and to keep always turned to the north the small needle that is trusted to it, the huge guide? Is the aurora less magnificent, has it less purple and emerald, does it undergo any decrease of majesty, of grace and radiance, be-

cause, foreseeing the thirst of a fly, it carefully secretes in the flower the drop of dew which the bee requires?

Yet, people insist: To compose social poetry, human poetry, popular poetry; to grumble against the evil and for the good; to promote public passions; to insult despots; to make rascals despair; to emancipate man before he is of age; to push souls forward and darkness backward; to know that there are thieves and tyrants; to clean penal cells; to empty the pail of public filth,—what! Polyhymnia, sleeves tucked up to do such dirty work? Oh, for shame!

Why not?

Homer was the geographer and the historian of his time, Moses the legislator of his, Juvenal the judge of his, Dante the theologian of his, Shakespeare the moralist of his, Voltaire the philosopher of his. No region, in speculation or in real fact, is shut to the mind. Here a horizon, there wings; right for all to soar.

For certain sublime beings, to soar is to serve. In the desert not a drop of water,—a horrible thirst; the wretched file of pilgrims drag along overcome. All at once, in the horizon, above a wrinkle in the sands, a griffin is seen soaring, and all the caravan cry out "There is water there!"

What thinks Æschylus of art as art? Certainly, if ever a poet was a poet, it is Æschylus. Listen to his reply. It is in the "Frogs of Aristophanes, line 1039. Æschylus speaks:—

"Since the beginning of time, the illustrious poet has served men. Orpheus has taught the horror of murder, Musæus oracles and medicine, Hesiod agriculture, and that divine Homer, heroism. And I, after Homer, I have sung Patroclus, and Teucer the lion-hearted; so that every citizen should try to resemble the great men."

As all the sea is salt, so all the Bible is poetry. This poetry talks politics at its own hours. Open 1 Samuel, chapter viii. The Jewish people demand a king:

" . . . And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee,

but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. . . . And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. . . . And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep; and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day."

Samuel, we see, denies the right divine; Deuteronomy shakes the altar,—the false altar, let us observe; but is not the next altar always the false altar? "You shall demolish the altars of the false gods. You shall seek God where he dwells." It is almost Pantheism. Because it takes part in human things, is democratic here, iconoclast there, is that book less magnificent and less supreme? If poetry is not in the Bible, where is it?

You say: The muse is made to sing, to love, to believe, to pray. Yes and no. Let us understand each other. To sing whom? The void. To love what? One's self. To believe in what? The dogma. To pray to what? The idol. No, here is the truth: To sing the ideal, to love humanity, to believe in progress, to pray to the infinite.

Take care, you who are tracing those circles round the poet, you put him beyond man. That the poet should be beyond humanity in one way,—by the wings, by the immense flight, by the sudden possible disappearance in the fathomless,—is well; it must be so, but on condition of re-appearance. He may depart, but he must return. Let him have wings for the infinite, provided he has feet for the earth, and that, after having been seen flying, he is seen walking. Let him become man again, after he has gone out of humanity. After he has been seen an archangel, let him be once more a brother. Let the star which is in that eye weep a tear, and that tear be the human tear. Thus, human and

superhuman, he shall be the poet. But to be altogether beyond man, is not to be. Show me thy foot, genius, and let us see if, like myself, thou hast earthly dust on thy heel.

If thou has not some of that dust, if thou hast never walked in my pathway, thou dost not know me and I do not know thee. Go away. Thou believest thyself an angel, thou art but a bird.

Help from the strong for the weak, help from the great for the small, help from the free for the slaves, help from the thinkers for the ignorant, help from the solitary for the multitudes,—such is the law, from Isaiah to Voltaire. He who does not follow that law may be a genius, but he is only a useless genius. By not handling the things of the earth, he thinks to purify himself; he annuls himself. He is the refined, the delicate, he may be the exquisite genius; he is not the great genius. Any one, roughly useful, but useful, has the right to ask on seeing that good-for-nothing genius: "Who is this idler?" The amphora which refuses to go to the fountain deserves the hooting of the pitchers.

Great is he who consecrates himself! Even when overcome, he remains serene, and his misery is happiness. No, it is not a bad thing for the poet to meet face to face with duty. Duty has a stern resemblance to the ideal. The act of doing one's duty is worth all the trial it costs. No, the jostling with Cato is not to be avoided. No, no, no; truth, honesty, teaching the crowds, human liberty, manly virtue, conscience, are not things to disdain. Indignation and emotion are but one faculty turned toward the two sides of mournful human slavery; and those who are capable of anger are capable of love. To level the tyrant and the slave, what a magnificent effort! Now, the whole of one side of actual society is tyrant, and all the other side is slave. To straighten this out will be a wonderful thing to accomplish; yet it will be done. All thinkers must work with that end in view. They will gain greatness in that work. To be the servant of God in the march of progress and the apostle of God with the people,—such is the law which regulates the growth of genius.

CHAPTER II

THERE are two poets,—the poet of caprice and the poet of logic; and there is a third poet, a component of both, amending them one by the other, completing them one by the other, and summing them up in a loftier entity,—the two statures in a single one. The third is the first. He has caprice, and he follows the wind. He has logic, and he follows duty. The first writes the *Canticle of Canticles*, the second writes *Leviticus*, the third writes the *Psalms* and the *Prophecies*. The first is *Horace*, the second is *Lucan*, the third is *Juvenal*. The first is *Pindar*, the second is *Hesiod*, the third is *Homer*.

No loss of beauty results from goodness. Is the lion less beautiful than the tiger, because it has the faculty of merciful emotion? Does that jaw which opens to let the infant fall into the hands of the mother deprive that mane of its majesty? Does the vast noise of the roaring vanish from that terrible mouth because it has licked *Androcles*? The genius which does not help, even if graceful, is deformed. A prodigy without love is a monster. Let us love! let us love!

To love has never hindered from pleasing. Where have you seen one form of the good excluding the other? On the contrary, all that is good is connected. Let us, however, understand each other. It does not follow that to have one quality implies necessarily the possession of the other; but it would be strange that one quality added to another should make less. To be useful, is but to be useful; to be beautiful is but to be beautiful; to be useful and beautiful is to be sublime. That is what *Saint Paul* is in the first century, *Tacitus* and *Juvenal* in the second, *Dante* in the thirteenth, *Shakespeare* in the sixteenth, *Milton* and *Molière* in the seventeenth.

We have just now recalled a saying become famous: “Art

for art." Let us, once for all, explain ourselves in this question. If faith can be placed in an affirmation very general and very often repeated (we believe honestly), these words, "Art for art," would have been written by the author of this book himself. Written? Never! You may read, from the first to the last line, all that we have published; you will not find these words. It is the opposite which is written throughout our works, and, we insist on it, in our entire life. As for these words in themselves, how far are they real? Here is the fact, which several of our contemporaries remember as well as we do. One day, thirty-five years ago, in a discussion between critics and poets on Voltaire's tragedies, the author of this book threw out this suggestion: "This tragedy is not a tragedy. It is not men who live, it is sentences which speak in it! Rather a hundred times 'Art for art!'" This remark turned, doubtless involuntarily, from its true sense to serve the wants of discussion, has since taken, to the great surprise of him who had uttered it, the proportions of a formula. It is this opinion, limited to "Alzire" and to the "Orpheline de la Chine," and incontestable in that restricted application, which has been turned into a perfect declaration of principles, and an axiom to inscribe on the banner of art.

This point settled, let us go on.

Between two verses, the one by Pindar, deifying a coachman, or glorifying the brass nails of the wheel of a chariot, the other by Archilochus, so powerful that, after having read it, Jeffreys would leave off his career of crimes and would hang himself on the gallows prepared by him for honest people,—between these two verses, of equal beauty, I prefer that of Archilochus.

In times anterior to history, when poetry is fabulous and legendary, it has a Promethean grandeur. What composes this grandeur? Utility. Orpheus tames wild animals; Amphion builds cities; the poet, tamer and architect, Linus aiding Hercules, Musæus assisting Daedalus, poetry a civilizing power,—such is the origin. Tradition agrees with reason.

The common-sense of peoples is not deceived in that. It always invents fables in the sense of truth. Everything is great in those magnifying distances. Well, then, the wild-beast-taming poet that you admire in Orpheus, recognize him in Juvenal.

We insist on Juvenal. Few poets have been more insulted, more contested, more calumniated. Calumny against Juvenal has been drawn at such long date that it lasts yet. It passes from one literary clown to another. These grand haters of evil are hated by all the flatterers of power and success. The mob of fawning sophists, of writers who have around the neck the mark of their slavery, of bullying historiographers, of scholiasts kept and fed, of court and school followers, stand in the way of the glory of the punishers and avengers. They croak around those eagles. People do not willingly render justice to the dispensers of justice. They hinder the masters and rouse the indignation of the lackeys. There is such a thing as the indignation of baseness.

Moreover, the diminutives cannot do less than help one another, and Cæsarion must at least have Tyrannion as a support. The pedant snaps the ferules for the benefit of the satrap. There is for this kind of work a literary sycophancy and an official pedagogism. These poor, dear-paying vices; these excellent indulgent crimes; his Highness Rufinus; his Majesty Claudius; that august Madame Messalina who gives such beautiful *fêtes*, and pensions out of her privy purse, and who lasts and who is perpetuated, always crowned, calling herself Theodora, then Fredegonde, then Agnes, then Margaret of Burgundy, then Isabel of Bavaria, then Catherine de Medici, then Catherine of Russia, then Caroline of Naples, etc.,—all these great lords, crimes, all these fine ladies, turpitudes, shall they have the sorrow of witnessing the triumph of Juvenal! No. War with the scourge in the name of sceptres! War with the rod in the name of the shop! That is well! Go on, courtiers, clients, eunuchs, and scribes. Go on, publicans and pharisees. You will not hinder the republic from thanking Juvenal, or the temple from approving Jesus.

Isaiah, Juvenal, Dante,—they are virgins. Observe their eyes cast down. There is chastity in the anger of the just against the unjust. The Imprecation can be as holy as the Hosanna; and indignation, honest indignation, has the very purity of virtue. In point of whiteness, the foam has no reason to envy the snow.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY proves the working partnership of art and progress. *Dictus ob hoc lenire tigres*. Rhythm is a power,—a power that the Middle Ages recognize and submit to not less than antiquity. The second barbarism, feudal barbarism, dreads also this power,—poetry. The barons, not over-timid, are abashed before the poet. Who is this man? They fear lest a manly song be sung. The spirit of civilization is with this unknown. The old donjons full of carnage open their wild eyes, and suspect the darkness; anxiety seizes hold of them. Feudality trembles; the den is disturbed. The dragons and the hydras are ill at ease. Why? Because an invisible god is there.

It is curious to find this power of poetry in countries where unsocialness is deepest, particularly in England, in that extreme feudal darkness, *penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos*. If we believe the legend,—a form of history as true and as false as any other,—it is owing to poetry that Colgrim, besieged by the Britons, is relieved in York by his brother Bardulph the Saxon; that King Awlof penetrates into the camp of Athelstan; that Werburgh, prince of Northumbria, is delivered by the Welsh, whence, it is said, that Celtic device of the Prince of Wales, *Ich dien*; that Alfred, King of England, triumphs over Gitro, King of the Danes; and that Richard the Lion-hearted escapes from the prison of Losenstein. Ranulph, Earl of Chester, attacked in his castle of Rothelan, is

saved by the intervention of the minstrels, which was still authenticated under Elizabeth by the privilege accorded to the minstrels patronized by the Lords of Dalton.

The poet had the right of reprimand and menace. In 1316, on Pentecost Day, Edward II. being at table in the grand hall of Westminster with the peers of England, a female minstrel entered the hall on horseback, rode all round, saluted Edward II., predicted in a loud voice to the minion Spencer the gibbet and castration by the hand of the executioner, and to the king the hoof by means of which a red-hot iron should be buried in his intestines, placed on the table before the king a letter, and departed; and no one said anything to her.

At the festivals the minstrels passed before the priests, and were more honourably treated. At Abingdon, at a festival of the Holy Cross, each of the twelve priests received fourpence, and each of the twelve minstrels two shillings. At the priory of Maxtoke, the custom was to give supper to the minstrels in the Painted Chamber, lighted by eight huge wax-candles.

The more we advance North, it seems as if the increased thickness of the fog increases the greatness of the poet. In Scotland he is enormous. If anything surpasses the legend of the Rhapsodists, it is the legend of the Scalds. At the approach of Edward of England, the bards defend Stirling as the three hundred had defended Sparta; and they have their Thermopylæ, as great as that of Leonidas. Ossian, perfectly certain and real, has had a plagiarist; that is nothing; but this plagiarist has done more than rob him,—he has made him insipid. To know Fingal only by Macpherson is as if one knew Amadis only by Tressan. They show at Staffa the stone of the poet, *Clachan an Bairdh*,—so named, according to many antiquaries, long before the visit of Walter Scott to the Hebrides. This chair of the Bard—a great hollow rock ready for a giant wishing to sit down—is at the entrance of the grotto. Around it are the waves and the clouds. Behind the *Clachan an Bairdh* is heaped up and raised the superhuman geometry of basaltic prisms, the bell-mell of colonnades

and waves, and all the mystery of the fearful edifice. The gallery of Fingal runs next to the poet's chair; the sea beats on it before entering under that terrible ceiling. When evening comes, one imagines that he sees in that chair a form leaning on its elbow. "It is the ghost!" say the fishermen of Mackinnon's clan; and no one would dare, even in full day, to go up as far as that formidable seat; for to the idea of the stone is allied the idea of the sepulchre, and on the chair of granite no one can be seated but the man of shade.

CHAPTER IV

THOUGHT is power.

All power is duty. Should this power enter into repose in our age? Should duty shut its eyes? and is the moment come for art to disarm? Less than ever. The human caravan is, thanks to 1789, arrived on a high plateau; and the horizon being more vast, art has more to do. This is all. To every widening of horizon corresponds an enlargement of conscience.

We have not reached the goal. Concord condensed in happiness, civilization summed up in harmony,—that is far off yet. In the eighteenth century that dream was so distant that it seemed a guilty thought. The Abbé de St. Pierre was expelled from the Academy for having dreamed that dream,—an expulsion which seems rather severe at a period when pastors carried the day, even with Fontenelle, and when St. Lambert invented the idyll for the use of the nobility. The Abbé de St. Pierre has left behind him a word and a dream: the word is his own,—“Benevolence;” the dream belongs to all of us,—“Fraternity.” This dream, which made Cardinal de Polignac foam and Voltaire smile, is not now so much lost as it was once in the mist of the improbable. It is a little nearer; but we do not touch it. The people, those orphans

who seek their mother, do not yet hold in their hand the hem of the robe of peace.

There remains around us a sufficient quantity of slavery, of sophistry, of war and death, to prevent the spirit of civilization from giving up any of its forces. The idea of the right divine is not yet entirely done away with. That which has been Ferdinand VII. in Spain, Ferdinand II. in Naples, George IV. in England, Nicholas in Russia, still floats about; a remnant of these spectres is still hovering in the air. Inspirations descend from that fatal cloud on some crown-bearers who, leaning on their elbows, meditate with a sinister aspect.

Civilization has not done yet with those who grant constitutions, with the owners of peoples, and with the legitimate and hereditary madmen, who assert themselves majesties by the grace of God, and think that they have the right of manumission over the human race. It is necessary to raise some obstacle, to show bad will to the past, and to bring to bear on these men, on these dogmas, on these chimeras which stand in the way, some hindrance. Intellect, thought, science, true art, philosophy, ought to watch and beware of misunderstandings. False rights contrive very easily to put in movement true armies. There are murdered Polands looming in the future. "All my anxiety," said a contemporary poet recently dead, "is the smoke of my cigar." My anxiety is also a smoke,—the smoke of the cities which are burning in the distance. Therefore, let us bring the masters to grief, if we can.

Let us go again in the loudest possible voice over the lesson of the just and the unjust, of right and usurpation, of oath and perjury, of good and evil, of *fas et nefas*; let us come forth with all our old antitheses, as they say. Let us contrast what ought to be with what actually is. Let us put clearness into everything. Bring light, you that have it. Let us oppose dogma to dogma, principle to principle, energy to obstinacy, truth to imposture, dream to dream,—the dream of the future to the dream of the past,—liberty to despot-

ism. People will be able to sit down, to stretch themselves at full length, and to go on smoking the cigar of fancy poetry, and to enjoy Boccaccio's "Decameron" with the sweet blue sky over their heads, whenever the sovereignty of a king shall be exactly of the same dimension as the liberty of a man. Until then, little sleep. I am distrustful.

Put sentinels everywhere. Do not expect from despots a large share of liberty. Break your own shackles, all of you Polands that may be! Make sure of the future by your own exertions. Do not hope that your chain will forge itself into the key of freedom. Up, children of the fatherland! O mowers of the steppes, arise! Trust to the good intentions of orthodox czars just enough to take up arms. Hypocrisies and apologies, being traps, are one more danger.

We live in a time when orations are heard praising the magnanimity of white bears, and the tender feelings of panthers. Amnesty, clemency, grandeur of soul; an era of felicity opens; fatherly love is the order of the day; see all that is already done; it must not be thought that the march of the age is not understood; august arms are open; rally still closer round the emperor; Muscovy is kind-hearted. See how happy the serfs are! The streams are to flow with milk, with prosperity and liberty for all. Your princes groan like you over the past; they are excellent. Come, fear nothing, little ones! so far as we are concerned, we confess candidly that we are of those who put no reliance in the lachrymal gland of crocodiles.

The actual public monstrosities impose stern obligations on the conscience of the thinker, philosopher, or poet. Incorruptibility must be the option. It is more than ever necessary to show men the ideal,—that mirror in which is seen the face of God.

CHAPTER V

THERE are in literature and philosophy men who have tears and laughter at command,—Heraclitus wearing the mask of a Democritus; men often very great, like Voltaire. They are irony keeping a serious, sometimes tragic countenance.

These men, under the pressure of the influences and prejudices of their time, speak with a double meaning. One of the most profound is Bayle,¹ the man of Rotterdam, the powerful thinker. When Bayle coolly utters this maxim, "It is better worth our while to weaken the grace of thought than to anger a tyrant," I smile; I know the man. I think of the persecuted, almost proscribed one, and I know well that he has given way to the temptation of affirming merely to give me the longing to contest. But when it is a poet who speaks,—a poet wholly free, rich, happy, prosperous almost to inviolability,—one expects a clear, open, and healthy teaching, one cannot believe that from such a man can emanate anything like a desertion of his own conscience; and it is with a blush that one reads this:—

"Here below, in time of peace, let every man sweep his own street-door. In war, if conquered, let every man fraternize with the soldiery. . . . Let every enthusiast be put on the cross when he reaches his thirtieth year. If he has once experienced the world as it is, from the dupe he becomes the rogue. . . . What utility, what result, what advantage does the holy liberty of the press offer you? The complete demonstration of it is this: a profound contempt of public opinion. . . . There are people who have a marvellous facility for railing at everything that is great,—they are the men who have invented the Holy Alliance; and yet nothing has been invented more august and more salutary for humanity."

These things, which lower the man who has written them, are signed *Goethe*. Goethe, when he wrote them, was sixty years old. Indifference to good and evil excites the brain,—

¹ Do not write *Bayle*.

one may get intoxicated with it; and that is what comes of it. The lesson is a sad one. Mournful sight! Here the helot is a mind.

A quotation may be a pillory. We nail on the public highway these lugubrious sentences; it is our duty. Goethe has written that. Let it be remembered; and let no one among the poets fall again into the same error.

To go into a passion for the good, for the true, for the just; to suffer with the sufferers; to feel in our inner soul all the blows struck by every executioner on human flesh; to be scourged with Christ and flogged with the negro; to be strengthened and to lament; to climb, a Titan, that wild peak where Peter and Cæsar make their swords fraternize, *gladium cum gladio copulemus*; to heap up for that escalate the Ossa of the ideal on the Pelion of the real; to make a vast repartition of hope; to avail one's self of the ubiquity of the book in order to be everywhere at the same time with a comforting thought; to push pell-mell men, women, children, whites, blacks, peoples, hangmen, tyrants, victims, impostors, the ignorant, proletaries, serfs, slaves, masters, toward the future (a precipice to some, deliverance to others); to go forth, to wake up, to hasten, to march, to run, to think, to wish,—ah, indeed, that is well! It is worth while being a poet. Beware! you lose your temper. Of course I do; but I gain anger. Come and breathe into my wings, hurricane!

There has been, of late years, an instant when impassibility was recommended to poets as a condition of divinity. To be indifferent, that was called being Olympian. Where had they seen that? That is an Olympus very unlike the real one. Read Homer. The Olympians are passion, and nothing else. Boundless humanity,—such is their divinity. They fight unceasingly.

One has a bow, another a lance, another a sword, another a club, another thunder. There is one of them who compels the leopards to draw him along. Another, Wisdom, has cut off the head of Night, twisted with serpents, and has nailed it to his shield. Such is the calm of the Olympians.

Their angers cause the thunders to roll from one end to the other of the Iliad and of the Odyssey.

These angers, when they are just, are good. The poet who has them is the true Olympian. Juvenal, Dante, Agrippa d'Aubigné, and Milton had these angers; Molière also. From the soul of Alcestes flashes constantly the lightning of "vigorous hatreds." Jesus meant that hatred of evil when he said, "I am come to bring war."

I like Stesichorus indignant, preventing the alliance of Greece with Phalaris, and fighting the brazen bull with strokes of the lyre.

Louis XIV. found it good to have Racine sleeping in his chamber when he, the king, was ill, turning thus the poet into an assistant to his apothecary,—wonderful patronage of letters; but he asked nothing more from the *beaux esprits*, and the horizon of his alcove seemed to him sufficient for them. One day, Racine, somewhat urged by Madame de Maintenon, had the idea to leave the king's chamber and to visit the garrets of the people. Thence a memoir on the public distress. Louis XIV. cast at Racine a killing look. Poets fare ill when, being courtiers, they do what royal mistresses ask of them. Racine, on the suggestion of Madame de Maintenon, risks a remonstrance which causes him to be driven from Court, and he dies of it. Voltaire at the instigation of Madame de Pompadour, tries a madrigal (an awkward one it appears), which causes him to be driven from France; and he does not die of it. Louis XV. on reading the madrigal,—*"Et gardez tous deux vos conquêtes,"*—had exclaimed, *"What a fool this Voltaire is!"*

Some years ago, "a well-authorized pen," as they say in official and academic *patois*, wrote this:—

"The greatest service that poets can render us is to be good for nothing. We do not ask of them anything else."

Observe the extent and spread of this word, "the poets," which includes Linus, Musæus, Orpheus, Homer, Job, Hesiod, Moses, Daniel, Amos, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Esop, David,

Solomon, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Pindar, Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Stesichorus, Menander, Plato, Asclepiades, Pythagoras, Anacreon, Theocritus, Lucretius, Plautus, Terence, Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Juvenal, Apuleius, Lucan, Persius, Tibullus, Seneca, Petrarch, Ossian, Saâdi, Ferdousi, Dante, Cervantes, Calderon, Lope de Vega, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Camoëns, Marot, Ronsard, Régnier, Agrippa d' Aubigné, Malherbe, Segrais, Racan, Milton, Pierre Corneille, Molière, Racine, Boileau, La Fontaine, Fontenelle, Regnard, Lesage, Swift, Voltaire, Diderot, Beaumarchais, Sedaine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, André Chénier, Klopstock, Lessing, Wieland, Schiller, Goethe, Hoffmann, Alfieri, Châteaubriand, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Burns, Walter Scott, Balzac, Musset, Béranger, Pellico, Vigny, Dumas, George Sand, Lamartine,—all declared by the oracle “good for nothing,” and having uselessness for excellence. That sentence (a “success,” it appears) has been very often repeated. We repeat it in our turn. When the conceit of an idiot reaches such proportions it deserves registering. The writer who has emitted that aphorism is, so they assure us, one of the high personages of the day. We have no objection. Dignities do not lessen the length of the ears.

Octavius Augustus, on the morning of the battle of Actium, met an ass that the owner called Triumphus. This Triumphus, endowed with the faculty of braying, appeared to him of good omen; Octavius Augustus won the battle, remembered Triumphus, had the ass carved in bronze and placed in the Capitol. That made a Capitoline ass, but still an ass.

One can understand kings saying to the poet, “Be useless;” but one does not understand the people saying so to him. The poet is for the people. “Pro populo poëta,” wrote Agrippa d' Aubigné; “All things to all men,” exclaimed Saint Paul. What is a mind? A feeder of souls. The poet is at the same time a menace and a promise. The anxiety with which he inspires oppressors calms and consoles the oppressed. It is the glory of the poet that he places a restless pillow on the purple bed of the tormentors; and, thanks to him, it is often that the

tyrant awakes, saying, "I have slept badly." Every slavery, every disheartening faintness, every sorrow, every misfortune, every distress, every hunger, and every thirst have a claim on the poet; he has one creditor,— the human race.

To be the great servant does not certainly derogate from the poet. Because on certain occasions, and to do his duty, he has uttered the cry of a people; because he has, when necessary, the sob of humanity in his breast,— every voice of mystery sings not the less in him. Speaking so loudly does not prevent him speaking low. He is not less the confidant, and sometimes the confessor, of hearts. He is not less intimately connected with those who love, with those who think, with those who sigh, thrusting his head in the twilight between the heads of two lovers. The love poems of André Chénier, without losing any of their characteristics, border on the angry iambic: "Weep thou, O virtue, if I die!" The poet is the only living being to whom it is granted both to thunder and to whisper, because he has in himself, like Nature, the rumbling of the cloud and the rustling of the leaf. He exists for a double function,— a function individual and a public function: and it is for that that he requires, so to speak, two souls.

Ennius said: "I have three of them,— an Oscan soul, a Greek soul, and a Latin soul." It is true that he made allusion only to the place of his birth, to the place of his education, and to the place where he was a citizen; and besides, Ennius was but a rough cast of a poet, vast, but unformed.

No poet without that activity of soul which is the resultant of conscience. The ancient moral laws require to be stated; the new moral laws require to be revealed. These two series do not coincide without some effort. That effort is incumbent on the poet. He assumes constantly the function of the philosopher. He must defend, according to the side attacked, now the liberty of the human mind, now the liberty of the human heart,— to love being no less holy than to think. There is nothing of "Art for art" in all that.

The poet arrives in the midst of those goers and comers that we call the living, in order to tame, like ancient Orpheus,

the tiger in man,— his evil instincts,— and, like the legendary Amphion, to remove the stumbling-blocks of prejudice and superstition, to set up the new blocks, to relay the corner-stones and the foundations, and to build up again the city,— that is to say, society.

That this immense service — namely, to co-operate in the work of civilization — should involve loss of beauty for poetry and of dignity for the poet, is a proposition which one cannot enunciate without smiling. Useful art preserves and augments all its graces, all its charms, all its prestige. Indeed, because he has taken part with Prometheus,— the man progress, crucified on the Caucasus by brutal force, and gnawed at while alive by hatred,— Æschylus is not lowered. Because he has loosened the ligatures of idolatry; because he has freed human thought from the bands of religions tied over it (*arctis nodis religionum*), Lucretius is not diminished. The branding of tyrants with the red-hot iron of prophecy does not lessen Isaiah; the defence of his country does not taint Tyrtæus. The beautiful is not degraded by having served liberty and the amelioration of human multitudes. The phase “a people enfranchised” is not a bad end to a strophe. No, patriotic or revolutionary usefulness robs poetry of nothing. Because the huge Grütli has screened under its cliffs that formidable oath of three peasants from which sprang free Switzerland, it is all the same, in the falling night, a lofty mass of serene shade alive with herds, where are heard innumerable invisible bells tinkling gently under the clear twilight sky.

PART III.—BOOK I

CONCLUSION

AFTER DEATH.—SHAKESPEARE.—ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

IN 1784, Bonaparte, then fifteen years old, arrived at the Military School of Paris from Brienne, being one among four under the escort of a minor priest. He mounted one hundred and seventy-three steps, carrying his small trunk, and reached, below the roof, the barrack chamber he was to inhabit. This chamber had two beds, and a small window opening on the great yard of the school. The wall was white-washed; the youthful predecessors of Bonaparte had scrawled upon this with charcoal and the new-comer read in this little cell these four inscriptions that we ourselves read thirty-five years ago:—

It takes rather long to win an epaulet.—*De Montgieray.*
The finest day in life is that of a battle.—*Vicomte de Tinténiac.*
Life is but a long falsehood.—*Le Chevalier Adolphe Delmas.*
All ends under six feet of earth.—*Le Comte de la Villette.*

By substituting for “an epaulet” “an empire,”—a very slight change,—the above four inscriptions were all the destiny of Bonaparte, and a kind of “Mene Tekel Upharsin”

written beforehand upon that wall. Desmazis, junior, who accompanied Bonaparte, being his room-mate, and about to occupy one of the two beds, saw him take a pencil (it is Desmazis who has related the fact) and draw beneath the inscriptions that he had just read a rough sketch of his house at Ajaccio; then, by the side of that house, without suspecting that he was thus bringing near the island of Corsica another mysterious island then hid in the deep future, he wrote the last of the four sentences: "All ends under six feet of earth."

Bonaparte was right. For the hero, for the soldier, for the man of the material fact, all ends under six feet of earth; for the man of the idea everything commences there.

Death is a power.

For him who has had no other action but that of the mind, the tomb is the elimination of the obstacle. To be dead, is to be all-powerful.

The man of war is formidable while alive; he stands erect, the earth is silent, *siluit*; he has extermination in his gesture; millions of haggard men rush to follow him,—a fierce horde, sometimes a ruffianly one; it is no longer a human head, it is a conqueror, it is a captain, it is a king of kings, it is an emperor it is a dazzling crown of laurels which passes, throwing out lightning flashes, and allowing to be seen in starlight beneath it a vague profile of Cæsar. All this vision is splendid and impressive; but let only a gravel come in the liver, or an excoriation to the pylorus,—six feet of ground, and all is said. This solar spectrum vanishes. This tumultuous life falls into a hole; the human race pursues its way, leaving behind this nothingness. If this man hurricane has made some lucky rupture, like Alexander in India, Charlemagne in Scandinavia, and Bonaparte in ancient Europe, that is all that remains of him. But let some passer-by, who has in him the ideal, let a poor wretch like Homer throw out a word in the darkness, and die,—that word burns up in the gloom and becomes a star.

This vanquished one, driven from one town to another, is

called Dante Alighieri,—take care! This exiled one is called Æschylus, this prisoner is called Ezekiel,—beware! This one-handed man is winged,—it is Michael Cervantes. Do you know whom you see wayfaring there before you? It is a sick man, Tyrtæus; it is a slave, Plautus; it is a labourer, Spinoza; it is a valet, Rousseau. Well, that degradation, that labour, that servitude, that infirmity, is power,—the supreme power, mind.

On the dunghill like Job, under the stick like Epictetus, under contempt like Molière, mind remains mind. This it is that shall say the last word. The Caliph Almanzor makes the people spit on Averroes at the door of the mosque of Cordova; the Duke of York spits in person on Milton; a Rohan, almost a prince,—“*duc ne daigne, Rohan suis,*”—attempts to end-gel Voltaire to death; Descartes is driven from France in the name of Aristotle; Tasso pays for a kiss given a princess twenty years spent in a cell; Louis XV. sends Diderot to Vincennes; these are mere incidents; must there not be some clouds? Those appearances that were taken for realities, those princes, those kings melt away; there remains only what should remain,—the human mind on the one side, the divine minds on the other; the true work and the true workers; society to be perfected and made fruitful; science seeking the true; art creating the beautiful; the thirst of thought, torment and happiness of man; inferior life aspiring to superior life. Men have to deal with real questions,—with progress in intelligence and by intelligence. Men call to their aid the poets, prophets, philosophers, thinkers, the inspired. It is seen that philosophy is a nourishment and poetry a want. There must be another bread besides bread. If you give up poets, you must give up civilization. There comes an hour when the human race is compelled to reckon with Shakespeare the actor and Isaiah the beggar.

They are the more present that they are no longer seen. Once dead, these beings live.

What life did they lead? What kind of men were they? What do we know of them? Sometimes but little, as of

Shakespeare; often nothing, as of those of ancient days. Has Job existed? Is Homer one, or several? Méziriac made Æsop straight, and Planudes made him a hunchback. Is it true that the prophet Hosea, in order to show his love for his country, even when fallen into opprobrium and become infamous, espoused a prostitute, and called his children Mourning, Famine, Shame, Pestilence, and Misery? Is it true that Hesiod ought to be divided between Cumæ in Æolia, where he was born, and Ascera, in Bœotia, where he had been brought up? Velleius Paterculus makes him live one hundred and twenty years after Homer, of whom Quintilian makes him contemporary. Which of the two is right? What matters it? The poets are dead, their thought reigns. Having been, they are.

They do more work to-day among us than when they were alive. Others who have departed this life rest from their labours; dead men of genius work.

They work upon what? Upon minds. They make civilization.

"All ends under six feet of earth"? No; everything commences there. No; everything germinates there. No; everything flowers in it, and everything grows in it, and everything bursts forth from it, and everything proceeds from it; Good for you, men of the sword, are these maxims!

Lay yourselves down, disappear, lie in the grave, rot. So be it.

During life, gildings, caparisons, drums and trumpets, panoplies, banners to the wind, tumults, make up an illusion. The crowd gazes with admiration on these things. It imagines that it sees something grand. Who has the casque! Who has the cuirass? Who has the swordbelt? Who is spurred, morioned, plumed, armed? Hurrah for that one! At death the difference becomes striking. Juvenal takes Hannibal in the hollow of his hand.

It is not the Caesar, it is the thinker, who can say when he expires, "Deus fio." So long as he remains a man his flesh interposes between other men and him. The flesh is a cloud

upon genius. Death, that immense light, comes and penetrates the man with its aurora. No more flesh, no more matter, no more shade. The unknown which was within him manifests itself and beams forth. In order that a mind may give all its light, it requires death. The dazzling of the human race commences when that which was a genius becomes a soul. A book within which there is something of the ghost is irresistible.

He who is living does not appear disinterested. People mistrust him; people dispute him because they jostle against him. To be alive, and to be a genius is too much. It goes and comes as you do, it walks on the earth, it has weight, it throws a shadow, it obstructs. It seems as if there was importunity in too great a presence. Men do not find that man sufficiently like themselves. As we have said already, they owe him a grudge. Who is this privileged one? This functionary cannot be dismissed. Persecution makes him greater; decapitation crowns him. Nothing can be done against him, nothing for him, nothing with him. He is responsible, but not to you. He has his instructions. What he executes may be discussed, not modified. It seems as though he had a commission to execute from some one who is not man. Such exception displeases. Hence more hissing than applause.

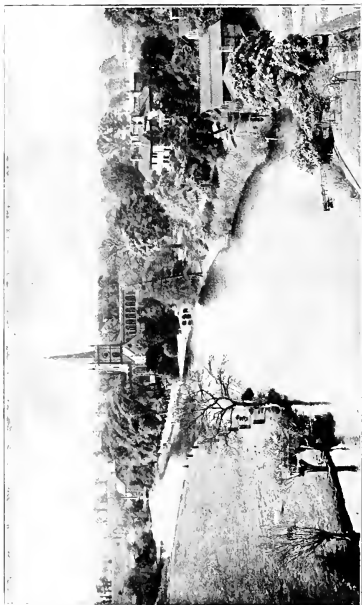
Dead, he no longer obstructs. The hiss, now useless, dies out. Living, he was a rival; dead, he is a benefactor. He becomes, according to the beautiful expression of Lebrun "*l'homme irréparable*." Lebrun observes this of Montesquieu; Boileau observes the same of Molière. "*Avant qu'un peu de terre*," etc. This handful of earth has equally aggrandized Voltaire. Voltaire, so great in the eighteenth century, is still greater in the nineteenth. The grave is a crucible. Its earth, thrown on a man, sifts his reputation, and allows it to pass forth purified. Voltaire has lost his false glory and retained the true. To lose the false is to gain. Voltaire is neither a lyric poet, nor a comic poet, nor a tragic poet: he is the indignant yet tender critic of the old world; he is the mild reformer of manners; he is the man who

softens men. Voltaire, who has lost ground as a poet, has risen as an apostle. He has done what is good, rather than what is beautiful. The good being included in the beautiful, those who, like Dante and Shakespeare, have produced the beautiful, surpass Voltaire; but below the poet, the place of the philosopher, is still very high, and Voltaire is the philosopher. Voltaire is common-sense in a continual stream. Excepting in literature, he is a good judge in everything. Voltaire was, in spite of his insulters, almost adored during his lifetime; he is in our days admired, now that the true facts of the case are known. The eighteenth century saw his mind: we see his soul. Frederick II., who willingly railed at him, wrote to D'Alembert, "Voltaire buffoons. This century resembles the old courts. It has a fool, who is Arouet." This fool of the century was its sage.

Such are the effects of the tomb for great minds. That mysterious entrance into the unknown leaves light behind. Their disappearance is resplendent. Their death evolves authority.

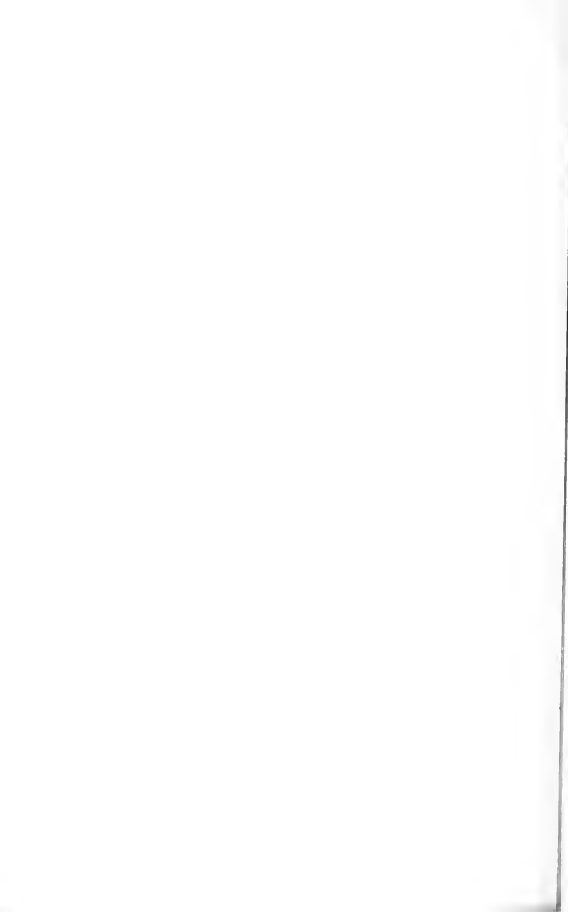
CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE is the great glory of England. England has in politics Cromwell, in philosophy Bacon, in science Newton,—three lofty men of genius. But Cromwell is tinged with cruelty and Bacon with meanness; as to Newton, his edifice is now shaking on its base. Shakespeare is pure, which Cromwell and Bacon are not, and immovable, which Newton is not. Moreover, he is higher as a genius. Above Newton there is Copernicus and Galileo; above Bacon there is Descartes and Kant; above Cromwell there is Danton and Bonaparte; above Shakespeare there is no one. Shakespeare has equals, but not a superior. It is a singular honour for a land to have borne that man. One may say to that land, "Alma parens." The native town of Shakespeare is an elect



STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

Shakespeare lies buried in the church shown in the center of the picture.
William Shakespeare, Page 253



place; an eternal light is on that cradle; Stratford-on-Avon has a certainty that Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chio, Argos, and Athens—the seven towns which disputed the birthplace of Homer—have not.

Shakespeare is a human mind; he is also an English mind. He is very English,—too English. He is English so far as to weaken the horror surrounding the horrible kings whom he places on the stage, when they are kings of England; so far as to depreciate Philip Augustus in comparison with John Lackland; so far as expressly to make a scapegoat, Falstaff, in order to load him with the princely misdeeds of the young Henry V.; so far as to partake in a certain measure of the hypocrisies of a pretended national history. Lastly, he is English so far as to attempt to attenuate Henry VIII.; it is true that the eye of Elizabeth is fixed upon him. But at the same time, let us insist upon this,—for it is by it that he is great,—yes, this English poet is a human genius. Art, like religion, has its *Ecce Homo*. Shakespeare is one of those of whom we may utter this grand saying: He is Man.

England is egotistical. Egotism is an island. That which perhaps is needed by this Albion immersed in her own business, and at times looked upon with little favour by other nations, is disinterested greatness; of this Shakespeare gives her some portion. He throws that purple on the shoulders of his country. He is cosmopolite and universal by his fame. On every side he overflows island and egotism. Deprive England of Shakespeare and see how much the luminous reverberation of that nation would immediately decrease. Shakespeare modifies the English visage and makes it beautiful. With him, England is no longer so much like Carthage.

Strange meaning of the apparition of men of genius! There is no great poet born in Sparta, no great poet born in Carthage. This condemns those two cities. Dig, and you shall find this: Sparta is but the city of logic; Carthage is but the city of matter; to one as to the other love is wanting. Carthage immolates her children by the sword, and Sparta sacrifices her virgins by nudity; here innocence is killed, and

there modesty. Carthage knows only her bales and her cases; Sparta blends herself wholly with the law,—there is her true territory; it is for the laws that her men die at Thermopylæ. Carthage is hard. Sparta is cold. They are two republics based upon stone; therefore no books. The eternal sower, who is never mistaken, has not opened for those ungrateful lands his hand full of men of genius. Such wheat is not to be confided to the rock.

Heroism, however, is not refused to them; they will have, if necessary, either the martyr or the captain. Leonidas is possible for Sparta, Hannibal for Carthage; but neither Sparta nor Carthage is capable of Homer. Some indescribable tenderness in the sublime, which causes the poet to gush from the very entrails of a people, is wanting in them. That latent tenderness, that *flebile nescio quid*, England possesses; as a proof, Shakespeare. We may add also as a proof, Wilberforce.

England, mercantile like Carthage, legal like Sparta, is worth more than Sparta and Carthage. She is honoured by this august exception,—a poet. To have given birth to Shakespeare makes England great.

Shakespeare's place is among the most sublime in that *élite* of absolute men of genius which, from time to time increased by some splendid fresh arrival, crowns civilization and illumines with its immense radiance the human race. Shakespeare is legion. Alone, he forms the counterpoise to our grand French seventeenth century, and almost to the eighteenth.

When one arrives in England, the first thing that he looks for is the statue of Shakespeare. He finds the statue of Wellington.

Wellington is a general who gained a battle, having chance for his partner.

If you insist on seeing Shakespeare's statue you are taken to a place called Westminster, where there are kings,—a crowd of kings: there is also a corner called "Poets' Corner." There, in the shade of four or five magnificent monuments where some royal nobodies shine in marble and bronze, is

shown to you on a small pedestal a little figure, and under this little figure, the name, "WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE."

In addition to this, statues everywhere; if you wish for statues you may find as many as you can wish. Statue for Charles, statue for Edward, statue for William, statues for three or four Georges, of whom one was an idiot. Statue of the Duke of Richmond at Huntley; statue of Napier at Portsmouth; statue of Father Mathew at Cork; statue of Herbert Ingram, I don't know where. A man has well drilled the riflemen,—he gets a statue; a man has commanded a manœuvre of the Horse Guards,—he gets a statue. Another has been a supporter of the past, has squandered all the wealth of England in paying a coalition of kings against 1789, against democracy, against light, against the ascending movement of the human race,—quick! a pedestal for that; a statue to Mr. Pitt. Another has knowingly fought against truth, in the hope that it might be vanquished, and has found out one fine morning that truth is hard-lived, that it is strong, that it might be intrusted with forming a cabinet, and has then passed abruptly over to its side,—one more pedestal; a statue for Mr. Peel. Everywhere, in every street, in every square, at every step, gigantic notes of admiration in the shape of columns,—a column to the Duke of York, which should really take the form of points of interrogation; a column to Nelson, pointed at by the ghost of Caracciolo; a column to Wellington, already named: columns for everybody. It is sufficient to have played with a sword somewhere. At Guernsey, by the seaside, on a promontory, there is a high column, similar to a lighthouse,—almost a tower; this one is struck by lightning; Æschylus would have contented himself with it. For whom is this? — for General Doyle. Who is General Doyle? — a general. What has this general done? — he has constructed roads. At his own expense? — no, at the expense of the inhabitants. He has a column. Nothing for Shakespeare, nothing for Milton, nothing for Newton; the name of Byron is obscure. That is where England is,—an illustrious and powerful nation.

It avails little that this nation has for scout and guide that generous British press, which is more than free,—which is sovereign,—and which through innumerable excellent journals throws light upon every question,—that is where England is; and let not France laugh too loudly, with her statue of Négrier; nor Belgium, with her statue of Belliard; nor Prussia, with her statue of Blücher; nor Austria, with the statue that she probably has of Schwartzemberg; nor Russia, with the statue that she certainly has of Souwaroff. If it is not Schwartzemberg it is Windischgrätz; if it is not Souwaroff, it is Kutusoff.

Be Paskiewitch or Jellachich,—they will give you a statue; be Augereau or Bessières,—you get a statue; be an Arthur Wellesley, they will make you a colossus, and the ladies will dedicate you to yourself, quite naked, with this inscription: “Achilles.” A young man, twenty years of age, performs the heroic action of marrying a beautiful young girl: they prepare for him triumphal arches; they come to see him out of curiosity; the grand-cordon is sent to him as on the morrow of a battle; the public squares are brilliant with fireworks; people who might have gray beards put on perukes to come and make speeches to him almost on their knees; they throw up in the air millions sterling in squibs and rockets to the applause of a multitude in tatters, who will have no bread to-morrow; starving Lancashire participates in the wedding; people are in ecstasies; they fire guns, they ring the bells,—“Rule Britannia!” “God save!” What! this young man has the kindness to do this? What a glory for the nation! Universal admiration,—a great people become frantic; a great city falls into a swoon; a balcony looking upon the passage of the young man is let for five hundred guineas; people heap themselves together, press upon one another, thrust one another beneath the wheels of his carriage; seven women are crushed to death in the enthusiasm, and their little children are picked up dead under the trampling feet; a hundred persons, partially stifled, are carried to the hospital: the joy is inexpressible. While this is going on in London, the cut-

ting of the Isthmus of Panama is interrupted by a war; the cutting of the Isthmus of Suez depends on one Ismail Pacha; a company undertakes the sale of the water of Jordan at a guinea the bottle; walls are invented which resist every cannon-ball, after which missiles are invented which destroy every wall; an Armstrong cannon-shot costs fifty pounds; Byzantium contemplates Abdul-Azis; Rome goes to confession; the frogs, encouraged by the stork, demand a heron; Greece, after Otho, again wants a king; Mexico, after Iturbide, again wants an emperor; China wants two of them,—the king of the Centre, a Tartar, and the king of Heaven (Tien Wang), a Chinese. O earth! throne of stupidity.

CHAPTER III

THE glory of Shakespeare reached England from abroad. There was almost a day and an hour when one might have assisted at the landing of his fame at Dover.

It required three hundred years for England to begin to hear those two words that the whole world cries in her ear: "William Shakespeare."

What is England? She is Elizabeth. There is no incarnation more complete. In admiring Elizabeth, England loves her own looking-glass. Proud and magnanimous, yet full of strange hypocrisies; great, yet pedantic; haughty, albeit able; prudish, yet audacious; having favourites but no masters; her own mistress, even in her bed; all-powerful queen, inaccessible woman,—Elizabeth is a virgin as England is an island.

Like England, she calls herself Empress of the Sea, *Basilea maris*. A fearful depth, in which are let loose the angry passions which behead Essex and the tempest which destroy the Armada, defends this virgin and defends this island from every approach. The ocean is the guardian of

this modesty. A certain celibacy, in fact, constitutes all the genius of England. Alliances, be it so; no marriage. The universe always kept at some distance. To live alone, to go alone, to reign alone, to be alone,—such is Elizabeth, such is England.

On the whole, a remarkable queen and an admirable nation.

Shakespeare, on the contrary, is a sympathetic genius. Insularism is his ligature, not his strength. He would break it willingly. A little more and Shakespeare would be European. He loves and praises France; he calls her “the soldier of God.” Besides, in that prudish nation he is the free poet.

England has two books: one which she has made, the other which has made her,—Shakespeare and the Bible. These two books do not agree together. The Bible opposes Shakespeare.

Certainly, as a literary book, the Bible, a vast cup from the East, more overflowing in poetry even than Shakespeare, might fraternize with him; in a social and religious point of view, it abhors him. Shakespeare thinks, Shakespeare dreams, Shakespeare doubts. There is in him something of that Montaigne whom he loved. The “to be or not to be” comes from the *que sais-jé?*

Moreover, Shakespeare invents. A great objection. Faith excommunicates imagination. In respect to fables, faith is a bad neighbour, and fondles only its own. One recollects Solon’s staff raised against Thespis. One recollects the torch of Omar brandished over Alexandria. The situation is always the same. Modern fanaticism has inherited that staff and that torch. That is true in Spain, and is not false in England. I have heard an Anglican bishop discuss the Iliad and condense everything in this remark, with which he meant to annihilate Homer: “It is not true.” Now, Shakespeare is much more a “liar” than Homer.

Two or three years ago the journals announced that a French writer was about to sell a novel for four hundred thousand francs. This made quite a noise in England. A Con-

formist paper exclaimed, "How can a falsehood be sold at such a price?"

Besides, two words, all-powerful in England, range themselves against Shakespeare, and constitute an obstacle against him: "Improper, shocking." Observe that, on a host of occasions, the Bible also is "improper" and Holy Writ is "shocking." The Bible, even in French, and through the rough lips of Calvin, does not hesitate to say, "Tu as pailardé, Jerusalem." These crudities are part of poetry as well as of anger; and the prophets, those angry poets, do not abstain from them. Gross words are constantly on their lips. But England, where the Bible is continually read, does not seem to realize it. Nothing equals the power of voluntary deafness in fanatics. Would you have another example of their deafness? At this hour Roman orthodoxy has not yet admitted the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, although averred by the four Evangelists. Matthew may say, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without. . . . And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas. And his sisters, are they not all with us?" Mark may insist: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?" Luke may repeat: "Then came to him his mother and his brethren." John may again take up the question: "He, and his mother, and his brethren . . . Neither did his brethren believe in him. . . . But when his brethren were gone up." Catholicism does not hear.

To make up for it, in the case of Shakespeare, "somewhat of a Pagan, like all poets"¹ Puritanism has a delicate hearing. Intolerance and inconsequence are sisters. Besides, in the matter of proscribing and damning, logic is superfluous. When Shakespeare, by the mouth of Othello, calls Desdemona "whore," general indignation, unanimous revolt, scandal from top to bottom. Who then is this Shakespeare? All the biblical sects stop their ears, without thinking that Aaron addresses exactly the same epithet to Sephora, wife of Moses.

¹ Rev. John Wheeler.

It is true that this is in an Apocryphal work, "The Life of Moses." But the Apocryphal books are quite as authentic as the canonical ones.

Thence in England, for Shakespeare, a depth of irreducible coldness. What Elizabeth was for Shakespeare, England is still,—at least we fear so. We should be happy to be contradicted. We are more ambitious for the glory of England than England is herself. This cannot displease her.

England has a strange institution,—“the poet laureate,”—which attests the official admiration and a little the national admiration. Under Elizabeth, England’s poet was named Drummond.

Of course, we are no longer in the days when they placarded “Macbeth, opera of Shakespeare, altered by Sir William Davenant.” But if “Macbeth” is played, it is before a small audience. Kean and Macready have tried and failed in the endeavour.

At this hour they would not play Shakespeare on any English stage without erasing from the text the word *God* wherever they find it. In the full tide of the nineteenth century, the lord-chamberlain still weighs heavily on Shakespeare. In England, outside the church, the word *God* is not made use of. In conversation they replace “God” by “Goodness.” In the editions or in the representations of Shakespeare, “God” is replaced by “Heaven.” The sense suffers, the verse limps; no matter. “Lord! Lord! Lord!” the last appeal of Desdemona expiring, was suppressed by command in the edition of Blount and Jaggard in 1623. They do not utter it on the stage. “Sweet Jesus!” would be a blasphemy; a devout Spanish woman on the English stage is bound to exclaim, “Sweet Jupiter!” Do we exaggerate? Would you have a proof? Let us open “Measure for Measure.” There is a nun, Isabella. Whom does she invoke? Jupiter. Shakespeare had written “Jesus.”¹

¹ On the other hand, however, in spite of all the lords-chamberlain, it is difficult to beat the French censorship. Religions are diverse, but bigotry is one, and is the same in all its specimens. What we are about

The tone of a certain Puritanical criticism toward Shakespeare is, most certainly, improved; yet the cure is not complete.

It is not many years since an English economist, a man of authority, making, in the midst of social questions, a literary excursion, affirmed in a lofty digression, and without exhibiting the slightest diffidence, this:—

"Shakespeare cannot live because he has treated specially foreign or ancient subjects — 'Hamlet,' 'Othello,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Macbeth,' 'Lear,' 'Julius Cæsar,' 'Coriolanus,' 'Timon of Athens,' etc. Now, nothing is likely to live in literature except matters of immediate observation and works made on contemporary subjects."

What say you to the theory? We would not mention it if this system had not met approvers in England and propagators in France. Besides Shakespeare, it simply excludes from literary "life" Schiller, Corneille, Milton, Virgil, Euripides, Sophocles, Æschylus, and Homer. It is true that it surrounds with a halo of glory Aulus-Gellius and Restif of

to write is an extract from the notes (on "Richard II." and "Henry IV.") added to his translation by the new translator of Shakespeare:—

"'Jesus! Jesus!' This exclamation of Shallow was expunged in the edition of 1623, conformably to the statute which forbade the uttering of the name of the Divinity on the stage. It is worthy of remark that our modern theatre has had to undergo, under the scissors of the censorship of the Bourbons, the same stupid mutilations to which the censorship of the Stuarts condemned the theatre of Shakespeare. I read what follows in the first page of the manuscript of 'Hernani,' which I have in my hands:—

'Received at the Théâtre-Français, Oct. 8, 1829.

'The Stage-manager,

'ALBERTIN.'

"And lower down, in red ink:—

'On condition of expunging the name of "Jesus" wherever found, and conforming to the alterations marked at pages 27, 28, 29, 62, 74, and 76.

'The Secretary of State for the Department of the Interior,

'LA BOURDONNAYE.'

We may add that in the scenery representing Saragossa (second act of "Hernani") it was forbidden to put any belfry or any church, which made resemblance rather difficult, Saragossa having in the sixteenth century three hundred and nine churches and six hundred and seventeen convents.

Bretonne. O critic, this Shakespeare is not likely to live, he is only immortal!

About the same time, another — English also, but of the Scotch school, a Puritan of that discontented variety of which Knox is the head — declared poetry childishness; repudiated beauty of style as an obstacle interposed between the idea and the reader; saw in Hamlet's soliloquy only "a cold lyricism," and in Othello's adieu to standards and camps only "a declamation;" likened the metaphors of poets to illustrations in books,— good for amusing babies; and showed a particular contempt for Shakespeare, as besmeared from one end to the other with that "illuminating process."

Not later than last January, a witty London paper,¹ with indignant irony, was asking which is the most celebrated, in England, Shakespeare or "Mr. Calcraft, the hangman:"—

"There are localities in this enlightened country where, if you pronounce the name of Shakespeare they will answer you: 'I don't know what this Shakespeare may be about whom you make all this fuss, but I will back Hammer Lane of Birmingham to fight him for five pounds.' But no mistake is made about Calcraft."

CHAPTER IV

AT all events, Shakespeare has not the monument that England owes to Shakespeare.

France, let me admit, is not, in like cases, much more speedy. Another glory, very different from Shakespeare, but not less grand,— Joan of Arc,— waits also, and has waited longer for a national monument, a monument worthy of her.

This land which has been Gaul, and where the Velledas reigned, has, in a Catholic and historic sense, for patronesses two august figures,— Mary and Joan. The one, holy, is the Virgin; the other, heroic, is the Maid. Louis XIII. gave

¹ Daily Telegraph, 13 Jan., 1864.

France to the one; the other has given France to France. The monument of the second should not be less high than the monument of the first. Joan of Arc must have a trophy as grand as Notre-Dame. When shall she have it?

England has failed utterly to pay its debt to Shakespeare; but so also has France failed toward Joan of Arc.

These ingratitude require to be sternly denounced. Doubtless the governing aristocracies, which blind the eyes of the masses, deserve the first accusation of guilt; but on the whole, conscience exists for a people as for an individual. Ignorance is only an attenuating circumstance; and when these denials of justice last for centuries, they remain the fault of governments, but become the fault of nations. Let us know, when necessary, how to tell nations of their shortcomings. France and England, you are wrong.

To flatter peoples would be worse than to flatter kings. The one is base, the other would be cowardly.

Let us go further, and since this thought has been presented to us, let us generalize it usefully, even if we should leave our subject for a while. No; the people have not the right to throw indefinitely the fault upon governments. The acceptance of oppression by the oppressed ends in becoming complicity. Cowardice is consent whenever the duration of a bad thing, which presses on the people, and which the people could prevent if they would, goes beyond the amount of patience endurable by an honest man; there is an appreciable solidarity and a partnership in shame between the government guilty of the evil and the people allowing it to be done. To suffer is worthy of veneration; to submit is worthy of contempt. Let us pass on.

A noteworthy coincidence: the man who denies Shakespeare, Voltaire, is also the insulter of Joan of Arc. But then what is Voltaire? Voltaire—we may say it with joy and sadness—is the French mind. Let us understand: it is the French mind, up to the Revolution exclusively. From the French Revolution, France increasing in greatness, the French mind grows larger, and tends to become the European

mind; it is less local and more fraternal, less Gallic and more human. It represents more and more Paris, the city heart of the world. As for Voltaire, he remains as he is,— the man of the future, but also the man of the past. He is one of those glories which make the thinker say yes and no; he has against him two sarcasms, Joan of Arc and Shakespeare. He is punished through what he sneered at.

CHAPTER V

IN truth, a monument to Shakespeare, *cui bono*? The statue that he has made for himself is worth more, with all England for a pedestal. Shakespeare has no need of a pyramid; he has his work.

What do you suppose marble could do for him? What can bronze do where there is glory? Malachite and alabaster are of no avail; jasper, serpentine, basalt, red porphyry, such as that at the Invalides, granite, Paros and Carrara, are of no use,— genius is genius without them. Even if all the stones had a part in it, would they make that man an inch greater? What vault shall be more indestructible than this; “The Winter’s Tale,” “The Tempest,” “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” “The Two Gentlemen of Verona,” “Julius Cesar,” “Coriolanus”? What monument more grandiose than “Lear,” more wild than “The Merchant of Venice,” more dazzling than “Romeo and Juliet,” more amazing than “Richard III.”? What moon could throw on that building a light more mysterious than “The Midsummer Night’s Dream”? What capital, were it even London, could produce around it a rumour so gigantic as the tumultuous soul of “Macbeth”? What framework of cedar or of oak will last as long as “Othello”? What bronze will be bronze as much as “Hamlet”? No construction of lime, of rock, of iron and of cement, is worth the breath,— the deep breath of

genius, which is the breathing of God through man. A head in which is an idea,—such is the summit; heaps of stone and brick would be useless efforts. What edifice equals a thought? Babel is below Isaiah; Chocps is less than Homer; the Coliseum is inferior to Juvenal; the Giralda of Seville is dwarfish by the side of Cervantes; St. Peter of Rome does not reach to the ankle of Dante. How could you manage to build a tower as high as that name: Shakespeare.

Ah, add something, if you can, to a mind!

Suppose a monument. Suppose it splendid; suppose it sublime,—a triumphal arch, an obelisk, a circus with a pedestal in the centre, a cathedral. No people is more illustrious, more noble, more magnificent, and more magnanimous than the English people. Couple these two ideas, England and Shakespeare, and make an edifice arise therefrom. Such a nation celebrating such a man, it will be superb. Imagine the monument, imagine the inauguration. The Peers are there, the Commons give their adherence, the bishops officiate, the princes join the procession, the queen is present. The virtuous woman in whom the English people, royalist as we know, see and venerate their actual personification,—this worthy mother, this noble widow, comes, with the deep respect which is called for, to incline material majesty before ideal majesty; the Queen of England salutes Shakespeare. The homage of Victoria repairs the disdain of Elizabeth. As for Elizabeth, she is probably there also, sculptured somewhere on the surbase, with Henry VIII., her father, and James I., her successor,—pygmies beneath the poet. The cannon booms, the curtain falls, they uncover the statue; which seems to say, “At length!” and which has grown in the shade during three hundred years,—three centuries; the growth of a colossus; an immensity. All the York, Cumberland, Pitt, and Peel bronzes have been made use of, in order to produce this statue; the public places have been disencumbered of a heap of uncalled-for metal-castings; in this lofty figure have been amalgamated all kinds of Henrys and Edwards; the various Williams and the numerous Georges have

been melted, the Achilles in Hyde Park has made the great-toe. This is fine; behold Shakespeare almost as great as a Pharaoh or a Sesostris. Bells, drums, trumpets, applause, hurrahs.

What then?

It is honourable for England, indifferent to Shakespeare.

What is the salutation of royalty, of aristocracy, of the army, and even of the English populace, ignorant yet to this moment, like nearly all other nations,—what is the salutation of all these groups variously enlightened to him who has the eternal acclamation, with its reverberation, of all ages and all men? What orison of the Bishop of London or of the Archbishop of Canterbury is worth the cry of a woman before Desdemona, of a mother before Arthur, of a soul before Hamlet?

And thus, when universal outcry demands from England a monument to Shakespeare, it is not for the sake of Shakespeare, it is for the sake of England.

There are cases in which the repayment of a debt is of greater import to the debtor than to the creditor.

A monument is an example. The lofty head of a great man is a light. Crowds, like the waves, require beacons above them. It is good that the passer-by should know that there are great men. People may not have time to read; they are forced to see. People pass by that way, and stumble against the pedestal; they are almost obliged to raise the head and to glance a little at the inscription. Men escape a book; they cannot escape the statue. One day on the bridge of Rouen, before the beautiful statue due to David d'Angers, a peasant mounted on an ass said to me: "Do you know Pierre Corneille?" "Yes," I replied. "So do I," he rejoined. "And do you know 'The Cid'?" I resumed. "No," said he.

To him, Corneille was the statue.

This beginning in the knowledge of great men is necessary to the people. The monument incites them to know more of the man. They desire to learn to read in order to know what

this bronze means. A statue is an elbow-thrust to ignorance.

There is then, in the execution of such monuments, popular utility as well as national justice.

To perform what is useful at the same time as what is just, that will at the end certainly tempt England. She is the debtor of Shakespeare. To leave such a debt in obedience is not a good attitude for the pride of a people. It is a point of morality that nations should be good payers in matters of gratitude. Enthusiasm is probity. When a man is a glory in the face of his nation, that nation which does not perceive the fact astounds the human race around.

CHAPTER VI

ENGLAND, as it is easy to foresee, will build a monument to her poet.

At the very moment we finished writing the pages you have just read, was announced in London the formation of a committee for the solemn celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Shakespeare. This committee will dedicate to Shakespeare, on the 23d April, 1864, a monument and a festival which will surpass, we doubt not, the incomplete programme we have just sketched out. They will spare nothing. The act of admiration will be a striking one. One may expect everything, in point of magnificence, from the nation which has created the prodigious palace at Sydenham, that Versailles of a people. The initiative taken by the committee will doubtless secure the co-operation of the powers that be. We discard, for our part, and the committee will discard, we think, all idea of a manifestation by subscription. A subscription, unless of one penny,—that is to say, open to all the people,—is necessarily fractional. What is due to Shakespeare is a national manifestation:—a holiday, a public *fête*, a popular monument, voted by the Cham-

bers and entered in the Budget. England would do it for her king. Now, what is the King of England beside the man of England? Every confidence is due to the Jubilee Committee of Shakespeare,—a committee composed of persons highly distinguished in the press, the peerage, literature, the stage, and the church. Eminent men from all countries, representing intellect in France, in Germany, in Belgium, in Spain, in Italy, complete this committee, in all points of view excellent and competent. Another committee, formed at Stratford-on-Avon, seconds the London committee. We congratulate England.

Nations have a dull ear and a long life,—which latter makes their deafness by no means irreparable: they have time to change their mind. The English are awake at last to their glory. England begins to spell that name, Shakespeare, upon which the universe has laid her finger.

In April, 1664, a hundred years after Shakespeare was born, England was occupied in cheering loudly Charles II., who had sold Dunkirk to France for two hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling, and in looking at something that was a skeleton and had been Cromwell, whitening under the north-east wind and rain on the gallows at Tyburn. In April, 1764, two hundred years after Shakespeare was born, England was contemplating the dawn of George III.,—a king destined to imbecility,—who at that epoch, in secret councils, and in somewhat unconstitutional asides with the Tory chiefs and the German Landgraves, was sketching out that policy of resistance to progress which was to strive, first against liberty in America, then against democracy in France, and which, during the single ministry of the first Pitt, had, in 1778, raised the debt of England to the sum of eighty millions sterling. In April, 1864, three hundred years since Shakespeare's birth, England raises a statue to Shakespeare. It is late, but it is well.

BOOK II

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE nineteenth century springs from itself only; it does not receive its impulse from any ancestor; it is the offspring of an idea. Doubtless, Isaiah, Homer, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, have been or could be great starting-points for important philosophical or poetical formations; but the nineteenth century has an august mother,—the French Revolution. It has that powerful blood in its veins. It honours men of genius. When denied it salutes them, when ignored it proclaims them, when persecuted it avenges them, when insulted it crowns them, when dethroned it replaces them upon their pedestal; it venerates them, but it does not proceed from them. The nineteenth century has for family itself, and itself alone. It is the characteristic of its revolutionary nature to dispense with ancestors.

Itself a genius, it fraternizes with men of genius. As for its source, it is where theirs is,—beyond man. The mysterious gestations of progress succeed each other according to a providential law. The nineteenth century is born of civilization. It has a continent to bring into the world. France has borne this century; and this century bears Europe.

The Greek stock bore civilization, narrow and circumscribed at first by the mulberry leaf, confined to the Morea; then civilization, gaining step by step, grew broader, and formed the Roman stock. It is to-day the French stock,—

that is to say, all Europe,—with young shoots in America, Africa, and Asia.

The greatest of these young shoots is a democracy,—the United States, the sprouting of which was aided by France in the last century. France, sublime essayist in progress, has founded a republic in America before making one in Europe. *Et vidit quod esset bonum.* After having lent to Washington an auxiliary, Lafayette, France, returning home, gave to Voltaire, dismayed within his tomb, that formidable successor, Danton. In presence of the monstrous past, hurling every thunder, exhaling every miasma, breathing every darkness, protruding every talon, horrible and terrible, progress, constrained to use the same weapons, has had suddenly a hundred arms, a hundred heads, a hundred tongues of fire, a hundred roarings. The good has transformed itself into a hydra. It is this that is termed the Revolution.

Nothing can be more august.

The Revolution ended one century and began another.

An intellectual awakening prepares the way for an overthrow of facts,—and this is the eighteenth century. After which the political revolution, once accomplished, seeks expression, and the literary and social revolution completes it: this is the nineteenth century. With ill-will, but not unjustly, has it been said that romanticism and socialism are identical: hatred, in its desire to injure, very often establishes, and, so far as is in its power, consolidates.

A parenthesis. This word, *romanticism*, has, like all war-cries, the advantage of readily summing up a group of ideas. It is brief,—which pleases in the contest; but it has, to our idea, through its militant signification, the objection of appearing to limit the movement that it represents to a war-like action. Now, this movement is a matter of intellect, a matter of civilization, a matter of soul; and this is why the writer of these lines has never used the words *romanticism* or *romantic*. They will not be found in any of the pages of criticism that he has had occasion to write. If to-day he derogates from his usual prudence in polemics, it is for the

sake of greater rapidity and with all reservation. The same observation may be made on the subject of the word *socialism*, which admits of so many different interpretations.

The triple movement—literary, philosophical, and social—of the nineteenth century, which is one single movement, is nothing but the current of the revolution in ideas. This current, after having swept away facts, is perpetuated in minds with all its immensity.

This term, "*literary '93*," so often quoted in 1830 against contemporaneous literature, was not so much an insult as it was intended to be. It was certainly as unjust to employ it as characterizing the whole literary movement as it is iniquitous to employ it to describe all the political revolutions; there is in these two phenomena something besides '93. But this term, "*literary '93*," was relatively exact, inasmuch as it indicated, confusedly but truthfully, the origin of the literary movement which belongs to our epoch, while endeavouring to dishonour that movement. Here again the clairvoyance of hatred was blind. Its dabbings of mud upon the face of truth are gilding, light, and glory.

The Revolution, turning climacteric of humanity, is made up of several years. Each of these years expresses a period, represents an aspect, or realizes a phase of the phenomenon. Tragic '93 is one of those colossal years. Good news must sometimes have a month of bronze. Such a month is '93.

Listen to the immense proclamation proceeding from it. Give attention, remain speechless, and be impressed. God himself said the first time *Fiat lux*, the second time he has caused it to be said.

By whom?

By '93.

Therefore, we men of the nineteenth century hold in honour that reproach, "You are '93."

But do not stop there. We are '89 as well as '93. The Revolution, the whole Revolution,—such is the source of the literature of the nineteenth century.

On these grounds put it on its trial, this literature, or seek

its triumph; hate it or love it. According to the amount of the future that you have in you, outrage it or salute it; little do animosities and fury affect it. It is the logical deduction from the great chaotic and genesiacal fact that our fathers have witnessed, and which has given a new starting-point to the world. He who is against that fact is against that literature; he who is for that fact is on its side. What the fact is worth the literature is worth. The reactionary writers are not mistaken; wherever there is revolution, patent or latent, the Catholic and royalist scent is unfailing. Those men of letters of the past award to contemporaneous literature an honourable amount of diatribe; their aversion is convulsive. One of their journalists, who is, I believe a bishop, pronounces this word *poet* with the same accent as the word *Septem-
tembrist*; another, less of a bishop, but quite as angry, writes, "I feel in all this literature Marat and Robespierre." This last writer is rather mistaken; there is in "this literature" Danton rather than Marat.

But the fact is true: democracy is in this literature.

The Revolution has forged the clarion; the nineteenth century sounds it.

Ah, this affirmation suits us, and, in truth, we do not recoil before it; we avow our glory,—we are revolutionists. The thinkers of the present time,—poets, writers, historians, orators, philosophers,—all are derived from the French Revolution. They come from it, and it alone. It was '89 that demolished the Bastille; it was '93 that took the crown from the Louvre. From '89 sprung Deliverance, and from '93 Victory. From '89 and '93 the men of the nineteenth century proceed: these are their father and their mother. Do not seek for them another affiliation, another inspiration, another insufflation, another origin. They are the democrats of the idea, successors to the democrats of action. They are the emancipators. Liberty bent over their cradles,—they all have sucked her vast breast; they all have her milk in their entrails, her marrow in their bones, her sap in their will, her spirit of revolt in their reason, her flame in their intellect.

Even those among them (there are some) who were born aristocrats, who came to the world banished in some degree among families of the past, who have fatally received one of those primary educations whose stupid effort is to contradict progress, and who have commenced the words that they had to say to our century with an indescribable royalist stut-tering,—these, from that period, from their infancy (they will not contradict me), felt the sublime monster within them. They had the inner ebullition of the immense fact. They had in the depth of their conscience a whispering of mysterious ideas; the inward shock of false certainties troubled their mind; they felt their sombre surface of monarchism, catholicism, and aristocracy tremble, shudder, and by degrees split up. One day, suddenly and powerfully, the swelling of truth within them prevailed, the hatching was completed, the eruption took place; the light flamed in them, causing them to burst open,—not falling on them, but (more beautiful mystery!) gushing out of these amazed men, enlightening them, while it burned within them. They were craters unknown to themselves.

This phenomenon has been interpreted to their reproach as a treason. They passed over, in fact, from right divine to human right. They turned their back on false history, on false tradition, on false dogmas, on false philosophy, on false daylight, on false truth. The free spirit which soars up,—bird called by Aurora,—offends intellects saturated with ignorance and the fœtus preserved in spirits of wine. He who sees offends the blind; he who hears makes the deaf indignant; he who walks offers an abominable insult to cripples. In the eyes of dwarfs, abortions, Aztecs, myrmidons, and pygmies, forever subject to rickets, growth is apostasy.

The writers and poets of the nineteenth century have the admirable good fortune of proceeding from a genesis, of arriving after an end of the world, of accompanying a reappearance of light, of being the organs of a new beginning. This imposes on them duties unknown to their predecessors — the duties of intentional reformers and direct civilizers.

They continue nothing; they remake everything. For new times, new duties. The function of thinkers in our days is complex; to think is no longer sufficient,—they must love; to think and love is no longer sufficient,—they must act; to think, to love, and to act, no longer suffices,—they must suffer. Lay down the pen, and go where you hear the grape-shot. Here is a barricade; be one on it. Here is exile; accept it. Here is the scaffold; be it so. Let John Brown be in Montesquieu, if needful. The Lucretius required by this century in labour should contain Cato. Æschylus, who wrote the “Orestias,” had for a brother Cynegyrus, who fastened with his teeth on the ships of the enemies: that was sufficient for Greece at the time of Salamis, but it no longer suffices for France after the Revolution. That Æschylus and Cynegyrus are brothers is not enough; they must be the same man. Such are the actual requirements of progress. Those who devote themselves to great and pressing things can never be too great. To set ideas in motion, to heap up evidence, to pile up principles, that is the redoubtable movement. To heap Pelion on Ossa is the labour of infants beside that work of giants, the placing of right upon truth. To scale that afterward, and to dethrone usurpations in the midst of thunders,—such is the work.

The future presses. To-morrow cannot wait. Humanity has not a minute to lose. Quick! quick! let us hasten; the wretched ones have their feet on red-hot iron. They hunger, they thirst, they suffer. Ah, terrible emaciation of the poor human body! Parasitism laughs, the ivy grows green and thrives, the mistletoe is flourishing, the tapeworm is happy. What a frightful object the prosperity of the typeworm! To destroy that which devours,—in that is safety. Your life has within itself death, which is in good health. There is too much misery, too much desolation, too much immodesty, too much nakedness, too many brothels, too many prisons, too many rags, too many crimes, too much weakness, too much darkness, not enough schools, too many little innocents growing up for evil! The trucklebeds of poor girls are suddenly

covered with silk and lace,—and in that is worse misery; by the side of misfortune there is vice, the one urging the other. Such a society requires prompt succour. Let us seek for the best. Go all of you in this search. Where are the promised lands? Civilization would go forward; let us try theories, systems, ameliorations, inventions, progress, until the shoe for that foot shall be found. The attempt costs nothing, or costs but little,—to attempt is not to adopt,—but before all, above all, let us be lavish of light. All sanitary purification begins in opening windows wide. Let us open wide all intellects. Let us supply souls with air.

Quick, quick, O thinkers! Let the human race breathe; give hope, give the ideal, do good. Let one step succeed another, horizon expand into horizon, conquest follow conquest. Because you have given what you promised do not think you have performed all that is required of you. To possess is to promise; the dawn of to-day imposes on the sun obligations for to-morrow.

Let nothing be lost. Let not one strength be isolated. Every one to work! there is vast urgency for it. No more idle art. Poetry the worker of civilization, what more admirable? The dreamer should be a pioneer; the strophe should mean something. The beautiful should be at the service of honesty. I am the valet of my conscience; it rings for me: I come. "Go!" I go. What do you require of me, O truth, sole majesty of this world? Let each one feel in haste to do well. A book is sometimes a source of hoped-for succour. An idea is a balm, a word may be a dressing for wounds; poetry is a physician. Let no one tarry. Suffering is losing its strength while you are idling. Let men leave this dreamy laziness. Leave the kief to the Turks. Let men labour for the safety of all, and yet them rush into it and be out of breath.

Do not be sparing of your strides. Nothing useless; no inertia. What do you call dread nature? Everything lives. The duty of all is to live; to walk, to run, to fly, to soar, is the universal law. What do you wait for?

Who stops you? Ah, there are times when one might wish to hear the stones murmur at the slowness of man!

Sometimes one goes into the woods. To whom does it not happen at times to be overwhelmed? — one sees so many sad things. The stage is a long one to go over, the consequences are long in coming, a generation is behindhand, the work of the age languishes. What! so many sufferings yet? One might think he has gone backward. There is everywhere increase of superstition, of cowardice, of deafness, of blindness, of imbecility. Penal laws weigh upon brutishness. This wretched problem has been set, — to augment comfort by putting off right; to sacrifice the superior side of man to the inferior side; to yield up principle to appetite. Cæsar takes charge for the belly, I make over to him the brains, — it is the old sale of a birth-right for the dish of porridge. A little more, and this fatal anomaly would cause a wrong road to be taken toward civilization. The fattening pig would no longer be the king, but the people. Alas! this ugly expedient does not even succeed. No diminution whatever of the malady. In the last ten years — for the last twenty years — the low water-mark of prostitution, of mendicity, of crime, has been stationary, below which evil has not fallen one degree. Of true education, of gratuitous education, there is none. The infant nevertheless requires to know that he is man, and the father that he is citizen. Where are the promises? Where is the hope? Oh, poor wretched humanity! one is tempted to shout for help in the forest; one is tempted to claim support, assistance, and a strong arm from that grand mournful Nature. Can this mysterious *ensemble* of forces be indifferent to progress? We supplicate, appeal, raise our hands toward the shadow. We listen, wondering if the rustlings will become voices. The duty of the springs and streams should be to babble forth the word "Forward!" One could wish to hear nightingales sing new Marseillaises.

Notwithstanding all this, these times of halting are nothing beyond what is normal. Discouragement would be puerile. There are halts, repose, breathing spaces in the march of peo-

ples, as there are winters in the progress of the seasons. The gigantic step, '89, is all the same a fact. To despair would be absurd, but to stimulate is necessary.

To stimulate, to press, to chide, to awaken, to suggest, to inspire,—it is this function, fulfilled everywhere by writers, which impresses on the literature of this century so high a character of power and originality. To remain faithful to all the laws of art, while combining them with the law of progress,—such is the problem, victoriously solved by so many noble and proud minds.

Thence this word *deliverance*, which appears above everything in the light, as if it were written on the very forehead of the ideal.

The Revolution is France sublimed. There was a day when France was in the furnace,—the furnace causes wings to grow on certain warlike martyrs,—and from amid the flames this giant came forth archangel. At this day by all the world, France is called Revolution; and henceforth this word *revolution* will be the name of civilization, until it can be replaced by the word *harmony*. I repeat it: do not seek elsewhere the starting-point and the birth-place of the literature of the nineteenth century. Yes, as many as there be of us, great and small, powerful and unknown, illustrious and obscure, in all our works good or bad, whatever they may be, — poems, dramas, romances, history, philosophy,—at the tribune of assemblies as before the crowds of the theatre, as in the meditation of solitudes; yes, everywhere; yes, always; yes, to combat violence and imposture; yes, to rehabilitate those who are stoned and run down; yes, to sum up logically and to march straight onward; yes, to console, to succour, to relieve, to encourage, to teach; yes, to dress wounds in hope of curing them; yes, to transform charity into fraternity, alms into assistance, sluggishness into work, idleness into utility, centralization into a family, iniquity into justice, the *bourgeois* into the citizen, the populace into the people, the rabble into the nation, nations into humanity, war into love, prejudice into free examination, frontiers into solderings,

limits into openings, ruts into rails, vestry-rooms into temples, the instinct of evil into the desire of good, life into right, kings into men; yes, to deprive religions of hell and societies of the galley; yes, to be brothers to the wretched, the serf, the fellah, the *prolétaire*, the disinherited, the banished, the betrayed, the conquered, the sold, the enchained, the sacrificed, the prostitute, the convict, the ignorant, the savage, the slave, the negro, the condemned, and the damned, — yes, we are thy sons, Revolution!

Yes, men of genius; yes, poets, philosophers, historians; yes, giants of that great art of previous ages which is all the light of the past,—O men eternal, the minds of this day salute you, but do not follow you; in respect to you they hold to this law,—to admire everything, to imitate nothing. Their function is no longer yours. They have business with the virility of the human race. The hour which makes mankind of age has struck. We assist, under the full light of the ideal, at that majestic junction of the beautiful with the useful. No actual or possible genius can surpass you, ye men of genius of old; to equal you is all the ambition allowed: but, to equal you, one must conform to the necessities of our time, as you supplied the necessities of yours. Writers who are sons of the Revolution have a holy task. O Homer, their epic poem must weep; O Herodotus, their history must protest; O Juvenal, their satire must dethrone; O Shakespeare, their “thou shalt be king,” must be said to the people; O Æschylus, their Prometheus must strike Jupiter with thunderbolts; O Job, their dunghill must be fruitful; O Dante, their hell must be extinguished; O Isaiah, thy Babylon crumbles, theirs must blaze forth with light! They do what you have done; they contemplate creation directly, they observe humanity directly; they do not accept as a guiding light any refracted ray,—not even yours. Like you, they have for their sole starting-point, outside them, universal being: in them, their soul. They have for the source of their work the one source whence flows Nature and whence flows art, the infinite. As the writer of these lines said forty years ago:

“The poets and the writers of the nineteenth century have neither masters nor models.”¹ No; in all that vast and sublime art of all peoples, in all those grand creations of all epochs,—no, not even thee, Æschylus, not even thee, Dante, not even thee, Shakespeare,—no, they have neither models nor masters. And why have they neither masters nor models? It is because they have one model, Man, and because they have one master, God.

¹ Preface to “Cromwell.”

BOOK III

TRUE HISTORY.—EVERY ONE PUT IN HIS RIGHT PLACE

CHAPTER I

HERE is the advent of the new constellation.

It is certain that at the present hour that which has been till now the light of the human race grows pale, and that the old flame is about to disappear from the world.

The men of brutal force have, since human tradition existed, shone alone in the empyrean of history; theirs was the only supremacy. Under the various names of kings, emperors, captains, chiefs, princes,—summed up in the word heroes,—this group of an apocalypse was resplendent. They were all dripping with victories. Terror transformed itself into acclamation to salute them. They dragged after them an indescribable tumultuous flame. They appeared to man in a disorder of horrible light. They did not light up the heavens,—they set them on fire. They looked as if they meant to take possession of the Infinite. Rumbling crashes were heard in their glory. A red glare mingled with it. Was it purple? Was it blood? Was it shame? Their light made one think of the face of Cain. They hated one another. Flashing shocks passed from one to the other; at times these enormous planets came into collision, striking out lightnings. Their look was furious. Their radiance stretched out into swords. All that hung terrible above us.

That tragic glare fills the past. To-day it is in full process of waning.

There is decline in war, decline in despotism, decline in theocracy, decline in slavery, decline in the scaffold. The blade becomes shorter, the tiara is fading away, the crown is simplified; war is raging, the plume bends lower, usurpation is circumscribed, the chain is lightened, the rack is out of countenance. The antique violence of the few against all, called right divine, is coming to an end. Legitimacy, the grace of God, the monarchy of Pharamond, nations branded on the shoulder with the *fleur-de-lis*, the possession of peoples by the right of birth, the long series of ancestors giving right over the living,—these things are yet striving in some places; at Naples, in Prussia, etc.; but they are struggling rather than striving,—it is death that strains for life. A stammering which to-morrow will be utterance, and the day after to-morrow a full declaration, proceeds from the bruised lips of the serf, of the vassal, of the *prolétaire*, of the pariah. The gag breaks up between the teeth of the human race. The human race has had enough of the sorrowful path, and the patient refuses to go farther.

From this very time certain forms of despotism are no longer possible. The Pharaoh is a mummy, the sultan a phantom, the Cæsar a counterfeit. This stylite of the Trajan columns is anchylosed on its pedestal; it has on its head the excrement of free eagles; it is nihility rather than glory; the bands of the sepulchre fasten this crown of laurels.

The period of the men of brutal force is gone. They have been glorious, certainly, but with a glory that melts away. That species of great men is soluble in progress. Civilization rapidly oxidizes these bronzes. At the point of maturity to which the French Revolution has already brought the universal conscience, the hero is no longer a hero without a good reason; the captain is discussed, the conqueror is inadmissible. In our days Louis XIV. invading the Palatinate would look like a robber. From the last century these realities began to dawn. Frederick II., in the presence of Voltaire,

felt and owned himself somewhat of a brigand. To be a great man of matter, to be pompously violent, to govern by the sword-knot and the cockade, to forge right upon force, to hammer out justice and truth by blows of accomplished facts, to make brutalities of genius,—is to be grand, if you like; but it is a coarse manner of being grand,—glories announced with drums which are met with a shrug of the shoulders. Sonorous heroes have deafened human reason until to-day; that pompous noise begins now to weary it. It shuts its eyes and ears before those authorized slaughters that they call battles. The sublime murderers of men have had their time; it is in a certain relative forgetfulness that henceforth they will be illustrious and august; humanity, become greater, requires to dispense with them. The food for guns thinks; it reflects, and is actually losing its admiration for being shot down by a cannon-ball.

A few figures by the way may not be useless.

All tragedy is part of our subject. The tragedy of poets is not the only one; there is the tragedy of politicians and statesmen. Would you like to know how much that tragedy costs?

Heroes have an enemy; that enemy is called finance. For a long time the amount of money paid for that kind of glory was ignored. In order to disguise the total, there were convenient little fireplaces like that in which Louis XIV. burned the accounts of Versailles. That day the smoke of one thousand millions of francs passed out the chimney of the royal stove.

The nation did not even take notice. At the present day nations have one great virtue,—they are miserly. They know that prodigality is the mother of abasement. They reckon up; they learn bookkeeping by double entry. Warlike glory henceforth has its debit and credit account: that renders it impossible.

The greatest warrior of modern times is not Napoleon, it is Pitt. Napoleon carried on warfare; Pitt created it. It is Pitt who willed all the wars of the Revolution and of the

empire; they proceeded from him. Take away Pitt and put Fox in his place, there would then be no reason for that exorbitant battle of twenty-three years, there would be no longer any coalition. Pitt was the soul of the coalition, and he dead, his soul remained amidst the universal war. What Pitt cost England and the world, here it is. We add this bas-relief to his pedestal.

In the first place, the expenditure in men. From 1791 to 1814 France alone, striving against Europe, coalesced by England,—France constrained and compelled, expended in butcheries for military glory (and also, let us add, for the defence of territory) five millions of men; that is to say, six hundred men per day. Europe, including the total of France, has expended sixteen millions six hundred thousand men; that is to say, two thousand deaths per day during twenty-three years.

Secondly, the expenditure of money. We have, unfortunately, no authentic total, save the total of England. From 1791 to 1814 England, in order to make France succumb to Europe, became indebted to the extent of eighty-one millions, two hundred and sixty-five thousand, eight hundred and forty-two pounds sterling. Divide this total by the total of men killed, at the rate of two thousand per day for twenty-three years, and you arrive at this result,—that each corpse stretched on the field of battle has cost England alone fifty pounds sterling.

Add the total of Europe,—total unknown, but enormous.

With these seventeen millions of dead men, they might have peopled Australia with Europeans. With the eighty millions expended by England in cannon-shots, they might have changed the face of the earth, begun the work of civilization everywhere, and suppressed throughout the entire world ignorance and misery.

England pays eighty millions for the two statues of Pitt and Wellington.

It is a fine thing to have heroes, but it is an expensive luxury. Poets cost less.

CHAPTER II

THE discharge of the warrior is signed: it is splendour in the distance. The great Nimrod, the great Cyrus, the great Sennacherib, the great Sesostris, the great Alexander, the great Pyrrhus, the great Hannibal, the great Caesar, the great Timour, the great Louis, the great Frederic, and more great ones,—all are going away.

It would be a mistake to think that we reject these men purely and simply. In our eyes five or six of those that we have named are legitimately illustrious; they have even mingled something good in their ravages; their definitive total embarrasses the absolute equity of the thinker, and they weigh nearly even weights in the balance of the injurious and the useful.

Others have been only injurious. They are numerous, innumerable even; for the masters of the world are a crowd.

The thinker is the weigher. Clemency suits him. Let us therefore say, Those others who have done only evil have one attenuating circumstance,—imbecility.

They have another excuse yet,—the mental condition of the human race itself at the moment they appeared; the medium surrounding facts, modifiable, but encumbering.

It is not men that are tyrants, but things. The real tyrants are called frontier, track, routine; blindness under the form of fanaticism, deafness and dumbness under the form of diversity of languages; quarrel under the form of diversity of weights, measures, and moneys; hatred resulting from quarrel, war resulting from hatred. All these tyrants may be called by one name,—separation. Division, whence proceeds irresponsible government,—this is despotism in the abstract.

Even the tyrants of flesh are mere things. Caligula is much more a fact than a man; he is a result more than an existence. The Roman proscriber, dictator, or Cæsar, refuses the vanquished fire and water,—that is to say, puts his

life out. One day of Gela represents twenty thousand proscribed, one day of Tiberius thirty thousand, one day of Sylla seventy thousand. One evening Vitellius, being ill, sees a house lighted up, where people were rejoicing. "Do they think me dead?" says Vitellius. It is Junius Blesus who sups with Tuscus Cæcina, the emperor sends to these drinkers a cup of poison, that they may realize by this sinister end of too joyous a night that Vitellius is living. (*Reddendam pro intempestiva licentia mœstam et funebrem noctem qua sentiat vivere Vitellium et imperare.*) Otho and this same Vitellius forward assassins to each other. Under the Cæsars, it is a marvel to die in one's bed; Pison, to whom this happened, is noted for that strange incident. The garden of Valerius Asiaticus pleases the emperor; the face of Statilius displeases the empress,—state crimes: Valerius is strangled because he has a garden, and Statilius because he has a face. Basil II., Emperor of the East, makes fifteen thousand Bulgarians prisoners; they are divided into bands of a hundred, and their eyes are put out, with the exception of one, who is charged to conduct his ninety-nine blind comrades. He afterward sends into Bulgaria the whole of this army without eyes. History thus describes Basil II.: "He was too fond of glory."¹ Paul of Russia gave out this axiom: "There is no man powerful save him to whom the emperor speaks; and his power endures as long as the word that he hears." Philip V. of Spain, so ferociously calm at the *auto-da-fés*, is frightened at the idea of changing his shirt, and remains six months in bed without washing and without trimming his nails, for fear of being poisoned, by means of scissors, or by the water in the basin, or by his shirt, or by his shoes. Ivan, grandfather of Paul, had a woman put to the torture before making her lie in his bed; had a newly married bride hanged, and placed the husband as sentinel by her side, to prevent the rope from being cut; had a father killed by his son; invented the process of sawing men in two with a cord; burns

¹ Delandine.

Bariatinski himself by slow fire, and, while the patient howls, brings the embers together with the end of his stick. Peter, in point of excellence, aspires to that of the executioner; he exercises himself in cutting off heads. At first he cuts off but five per day,—little enough; but, with application, he succeeds in cutting off twenty-five. It is a talent for a czar to tear away a woman's breast with one blow of the knout.

What are all those monsters? Symptoms,—running sores, pus which oozes from a sickly body. They are scarcely more responsible than the sum of a column is responsible for the figures in that column. Basil, Ivan, Philip, Paul, etc., are the products of vast surrounding stupidity. The clergy of the Greek Church, for example, having this maxim, "Who can make us judges of those who are our masters?" what more natural than that a czar,—Ivan himself,—should cause an archbishop to be sewn in a bear's skin and devoured by dogs? The czar is amused,—it is quite right. Under Nero, the man whose brother was killed goes to the temple to return thanks to the gods; under Ivan, a Boyard empaled employs his agony, which lasts for twenty-four hours, in repeating, "O God! protect the czar." The Princess Sanguzko is in tears; she presents, upon her knees, a supplication to Nicholas: she implores grace for her husband, conjuring the master to spare Sanguzko (a Pole guilty of loving Poland) the frightful journey to Siberia. Nicholas listens in silence, takes the supplication, and writes beneath it, "On foot." Then Nicholas goes into the streets, and the crowd throw themselves on his boot to kiss it. What have you to say? Nicholas is a madman, the crowd is a brute. From "khan" comes "knez;" from "knez" comes "tzar;" from "tzar" the "czar,"—a series of phenomena rather than an affiliation of men. That after this Ivan you should have this Peter, after this Peter this Nicholas, after this Nicholas this Alexander, what more logical? You all rather contribute to this result. The tortured accept the torture. "The czar, half putrid, half frozen," as Madame de Staël says,—you made him yourselves. To be a people, to be a

force, and to look upon these things, is to find them good. To be present, is to give one's consent. He who assists at the crime, assists the crime. Unresisting presence is an encouraging submission.

Let us add that a preliminary corruption began the complicity even before the crime was committed. A certain putrid fermentation of pre-existing baseness engenders the oppressor.

The wolf is the fact of the forest; it is the savage fruit of solitude without defence. Combine and group together silence, obscurity, easy victory, monstrous infatuation, prey offered from all parts, murder in security, the connivance of those who are around, weakness, want of weapons, abandonment, isolation,—from the point of intersection of these things breaks forth the ferocious beast. A dark forest, whence cries cannot be heard, produces the tiger. A tiger is a blindness hungered and armed. Is it a being? Scarcely. The claw of the animal knows no more than does the thorn of a plant. The fatal fact engenders the unconscious organism. In so far as personality is concerned, and apart from killing for a living, the tiger does not exist. Mouravieff is mistaken if he thinks that he is a being.

Wicked men spring from bad things. Therefore let us correct the things.

And here we return to our starting-point: An attenuating circumstance for despotism is — idiocy. That attenuating circumstance we have just pleaded.

Idiotic despots, a multitude, are the mob of the purple; but above them, beyond them, by the immeasurable distance which separates that which radiates from that which stagnates,—there are the despots of genius; there are the captains, the conquerors, the mighty men of war, the civilizers of force, the ploughmen of the sword.

These we have just named. The truly great among them are called Cyrus, Sesostris, Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar, Charlemagne, Napoleon; and, with the qualifications we have laid down, we admire them.

But we admire them on the condition of their disappearance. Make room for better ones! Make room for greater ones!

Those greater, those better ones, are they new? No. Their series is as ancient as the other; more ancient, perhaps, for the idea has preceded the act, and the thinker is anterior to the warrior. But their place was taken, taken violently. This usurpation is about to cease; their hour comes at last; their predominance gleams forth. Civilization, returned to the true light, recognizes them as its only founders; their series becomes clothed in light, and eclipses the rest; like the past, the future belongs to them; and henceforth it is they whom God will perpetuate.

CHAPTER III

THAT history has to be re-made is evident. Up to the present time, it has been nearly always written from the miserable point of view of accomplished fact; it is time to write it from the point of view of principle,— and that, under penalty of nullity.

Royal gestures, warlike uproars, princely coronations; mariages, baptisms, and funerals, executions and fêtes; the finery of one crushing all; the triumph of being born king, the prowess of sword and axe; great empires, heavy taxes; the tricks played by chance upon chance; the universe having for a law the adventures of any being, provided he be crowned; the destiny of a century changed by a blow from the lance of a fool through the skull of an imbecile; the majestic *fistula in ano* of Louis XIV.; the grave words of the dying Emperor Mathias to his doctor, trying for the last time to feel his pulse beneath his coverlet and making a mistake,—“*Erras, amice hoc est membrum nostrum imperiale sacrocasarcum* ;” the dance, with castanets of Cardinal Rich-

elieu, disguised as a shepherd before the Queen of France, in the private villa of the Rue de Gaillon; Hildebrand completed by Cisneros; the little dogs of Henri III.; the various Potemkins of Catherine II.,—Orloff here, Godoy there, etc.; a great tragedy with a petty intrigue,—such was history up to our days, alternating between the throne and the altar, lending one ear to Dangeau and another to Dom Calmet, sanctimonious and not stern, not comprehending the true transitions from one age to the other, incapable of distinguishing the climacteric crises of civilization, making the human race mount upward by ladders of silly dates, well versed in puerilities while ignorant of right, of justice, and of truth, and modelled far more upon Le Ragois than upon Tacitus.

So true is this, that in our days Tacitus has been the object of strong attack.

Tacitus on the other hand,—we do not weary of insisting upon it,—is, like Juvenal, like Suetonius and Lampridius, the object of a special and merited hatred. The day when in the colleges professors of rhetoric shall put Juvenal above Virgil, and Tacitus above Bossuet, will be the eve of the day in which the human race shall have been delivered; when all forms of oppression shall have disappeared,—from the slave-owner up to the pharisee, from the cottage where the slave weeps to the chapel where the eunuch sings. Cardinal Du Perron, who received for Henri IV. blows from the Pope's stick, had the goodness to say, "I despise Tacitus."

Up to the epoch in which we live, history has been a courtier. The double identification of the king with the nation and of the king with God, is the work of courtier history. The grace of God begets the right divine. Louis XIV. says, "I am the State!" Madame du Barry, plagiarist of Louis XIV., calls Louis XV. "France;" and the pompously haughty saying of the great Asiatic king of Versailles ends with "France, your coffin taints the camp!"

Bossuet writes without hesitation, though palliating facts here and there, the frightful legend of those old thrones of

antiquity covered with crimes, and, applying to the surface of things his vague theocratic declamation, satisfies himself by this formula: "God holds in his hand the hearts of kings." That is not the case, for two reasons,—God has no hand, and kings have no heart.

We are only speaking, of course, of the kings of Assyria.

History, that old history of which we have spoken, is a kind of person for princes. It shuts its eyes when a highness says, "History, do not look this way." It has, imperturbably, with the face of a harlot, denied the horrible skull-breaking casque with an inner spike, destined by the Archduke of Austria for the Swiss magistrate Gundoldingen. At the present time this machine is hung on a nail in the Hôtel de Ville of Lucerne; anybody can go and see it: yet history repeats its denial. Moréri calls St. Bartholomew's day "a disturbance." Chaudon, another biographer, thus characterizes the author of the saying to Louis XV., cited above: "A lady of the court, Madame du Barry." History accepts for an attack of apoplexy the mattress under which John II. of England stifled the Duke of Gloucester at Calais.¹ Why is the head of the Infant Don Carlos separated from the trunk in his bier at the Escorial? Philip II., the father, answers: "It is because the Infant having died a natural death, the coffin prepared for him was not found long enough, and they were obliged to cut off the head." History blindly believes in the coffin being too short. What! the father to have his son beheaded! Oh, fie! Only demagogues would say such things.

The ingenuousness with which history glorifies the fact, whatever it may be, and however impious it may be, shines nowhere better than in Cantemir and Karamsin,—the one a Turkish historian, the other a Russian historian. The Ottoman fact and the Museovite fact evidence, when confronted and compared with each other, the Tartar identity. Mos-

¹ There was but one John of England, who put to death (as is supposed) his nephew Arthur, Duke of Bretagne. Perhaps this is what Hugo had in mind.

cow is not less sinisterly Asiatic than Stamboul. Ivan is in the one as Mustapha is in the other. The gradation is imperceptible between that Christianity and that Mahometanism. The Pope is brother of the Ulema, the Boyard of the Pacha, the knout of the bowstring, and the moujik of the mute. There is to men passing through the streets little difference between Selim who pierces them with arrows, and Basil who lets bears loose on them. Cantemir, a man of the South, an ancient Moldavian hospodar, long a Turkish subject, feels, although he has passed over to the Russians, that he does not displease the Czar Peter by deifying despotism, and he prostrates his metaphors before the sultans: this crouching upon the belly is Oriental, and somewhat Western also. The sultans are divine; their scimitar is sacred, their dagger is sublime, their exterminations are magnanimous, their parricides are good. They call themselves merciful, as the furies are called Eumenides. The blood that they spill smokes in Cantemir with an odour of incense, and the vast slaughtering which is their reign blooms into glory. They massacre the people in the public interest. When some padischah (I know not which) — Tiger IV. or Tiger VI.— causes to be strangled one after the other his nineteen little brothers running frightened round the chamber, the Turkish native historian declares that “it was executing wisely the law of the empire.” The Russian historian, Karamsin, is not less tender to the Tzar than was Cantemir to the Sultan; nevertheless, let us say it, in comparison with Cantemir’s, the fervency of Karamsin is lukewarmness. Thus Peter, killing his son Alexis, is glorified by Karamsin, but in the same tone in which we excuse a fault. It is not the acceptation pure and simple of Cantemir, who is more upon his knees. The Russian historian only admires, while the Turkish historian adores. No fire in Karamsin, no nerve,—a dull enthusiasm, grayish apotheoses, good-will struck into an icicle, caresses benumbed with cold. It is poor flattery. Evidently the climate has something to do with it. Karamsin is a chilled Cantemir.

Thus is the greater part of history made up to the present

day: it goes from Bossuet to Karamsin, passing by the Abbé Pluche. That history has for its principle obedience. To what is obedience due? To success. Heroes are well treated, but kings are preferred. To reign is to succeed every morning. A king has to-morrow: he is solvent. A hero may be unsuccessful,—such things happen,—in which case he is but a usurper. Before this history, genius itself, even should it be the highest expression of force served by intelligence, is compelled to continual success. If it fails, ridicule; if it falls, insult. After Marengo, you are Europe's hero, the man of Providence, anointed by the Lord; after Austerlitz, Napoleon the Great; after Waterloo, the ogre from Corsica. The Pope anointed an ogre.

Nevertheless, impartial Loriquet, in consideration of services rendered, makes you a marquis. The man of our day who has best executed that surprising gamut from Hero of Europe to Ogre of Corsica, is Fontanes, chosen during so many years to cultivate, develop, and direct the moral sense of youth.

Legitimacy, right divine, negation of universal suffrage, the throne a fief, the nation an entailed estate, all proceed from that history. The executioner is also part of it; Joseph de Maistre adds him, divinely, to the king. In England such history is called "loyal" history. The English aristocracy, to whom similar excellent ideas sometimes occur, have imagined a method of giving to a political opinion the name of a virtue,—*Istrumentum regni*. In England, to be a royalist, is to be loyal. A democrat is disloyal; he is a variety of the dishonest man. This man believes in the people,—shame! He would have universal suffrage,—he is a chartist! are you sure of his probity? Here is a republican passing,—take care of your pockets! That is clever. All the world is more witty than Voltaire: the English aristocracy has more wit than Macchiavelli.

The king pays, the people do not pay,—this is about all the secret of that kind of history. It has also its own tariff of indulgences. Honour and profit are divided,—honour

to the master, profit to the historian. Procopius is prefect, and, what is more, Illustrious by special decree (which does not prevent him from being a traitor); Bossuet is bishop, Fleury is prelate prior of Argenteuil, Karamsin is senator, Cantemir is prince. But the finest thing is to be paid successively by For and by Against, and, like Fontanes, to be made senator through idolatry of, and peer of France through spitting upon, the same idol.

What is going on at the Louvre? What is going on at the Vatican, in the Seraglio, Buen Retiro, at Windsor, at Schoenbrunn, at Potsdam, at the Kremlin, at Oranienbaum? Further questions are needless; for there is nothing interesting for the human race beyond those ten or twelve houses, of which history is the door-keeper.

Nothing can be insignificant that relates to war, the warrior, the prince, the throne, the court. He who is not endowed with grave puerility cannot be an historian. A question of etiquette, a hunt, a gala, a grand levee, a procession, the triumph of Maximilian, the number of carriages the ladies have following the king to the camp before Mons, the necessity of having vices congenial with the faults of his majesty, the clocks of Charles V., the locks of Louis XVI.; how the broth refused by Louis XV. at his coronation, showed him to be a good king; how the Prince of Wales sits in the Chamber of the House of Lords, not in the capacity of Prince of Wales, but as Duke of Cornwall; how the drunken Augustus has appointed Prince Lubormirsky, who is starost of Kasimirov, under-cupbearer to the crown; how Charles of Spain gave the command of the army of Catalonia to Pimentel because the Pimentels have the title of Benavente since 1308; how Frederic of Brandenburg granted a fief of forty thousand crowns to a huntsman who enabled him to kill a fine stag; how Louis Antoine, grand-master of the Teutonic Order and Prince Palatine, died at Liège from displeasure at not being able to make the inhabitants choose him bishop; how the Princess Borghèse, dowager of Mirandole and of the Papal House, married the Prince of Cellamare, son of the

Duke of Giovenazzo; how my Lord Seaton, who is a Montgomery, followed James II. into France; how the Emperor ordered the Duke of Mantua, who is vassal of the empire, to drive from his court the Marquis Amorati; how there are always two Cardinal Barberins living, and so on,—all that is the important business. A turned-up nose becomes an historical fact. Two small fields contiguous to the old Mark and to the duchy of Zell, having almost embroiled England and Prussia, are memorable. In fact, the cleverness of the governing and the apathy of the governed have arranged and mixed things in such a manner that all those forms of princely nothingness have their place in human destiny; and peace and war, the movement of armies and fleets, the recoil of the progress of civilization, depend on the cup of tea of Queen Anne or the fly-flap of the Dey of Algiers.

History walks behind those fooleries, registering them.

Knowing so many things, it is quite natural that it should be ignorant of others. If you are so curious as to ask the name of the English merchant who in 1612 first entered China by the north; of the worker in glass who in 1663 first established in France a manufactory of crystal; of the citizen who carried out in the States General at Tours, under Charles VIII.: the sound principle of elective magistracy (a principle which has since been adroitly obliterated); of the pilot who in 1405 discovered the Canary Islands; of the Byzantine lute-maker who in the eighth century invented the organ and gave to music its grandest voice; of the Campanian mason who invented the clock by establishing at Rome on the temple of Quirinus the first sundial; of the Roman lighterman who invented the paving of towns by the construction of the Appian Way in the year 312 B. C.; of the Egyptian carpenter who devised the dove-tail, one of the keys of architecture, which may be found under the obelisk of Loxor; of the Chaldean keeper of flocks who founded astronomy by his observation of the signs of the zodiac, the starting-point taken by Anaximenes; of the Corinthian calker who, nine years before the first Olympiad, calculated the power of the

triple lever, devised the trireme, and created a tow-boat anterior by two thousand six hundred years to the steamboat; of the Macedonian ploughman who discovered the first gold mine in Mount Pangæus,—history, does not know what to say to you: those fellows are unknown to history. Who is that, — a ploughman, a calker, a shepherd, a carpenter, a lighterman, a mason, a lutemaker, a sailor, and a merchant? History does not lower itself to such rabble.

There is at Nüremberg, near the Egydienplatz, in a chamber on the second floor of a house which faces the church of St. Giles, on an iron tripod, a little ball of wood twenty inches in diameter, covered with darkish vellum, marked with lines which were once red, yellow, and green. It is a globe on which is sketched out an outline of the divisions of the earth in the fifteenth century. On this globe is vaguely indicated, in the twenty-fourth degree of latitude, under the sign of the Crab, a kind of island named Antilia, which one day attracted the attention of two men. The one who had constructed the globe and drawn Antilia showed this island to the other, placed his finger upon it, and said, "It is there." The man who looked on was called Christopher Columbus; the man who said, "It is there," was called Martin Behaim. Antilia is America. History speaks of Fernando Cortez, who ravaged America, but not of Martin Behaim, who divined it.

Let a man have "cut to pieces" other men; let him have "put them to the sword;" let him have made them "bite the dust,"—horrible expressions, which have become hideously familiar,—and if you search history for the name of that man, whoever he may be, you will find it. But search for the name of the man who invented the compass, and you will not find it.

In 1747, in the eighteenth century, under the gaze even of philosophers, the battles of Raucoux and Lawfield, the siege of Sas-de-Gand and the taking of Bergop-Zoom, eclipse and efface that sublime discovery which to-day is in course of modifying the world,—electricity. Voltaire himself, about

that year, celebrated passionately some exploit of Trajan.¹

A certain public stupidity is the result of that history which is superimposed upon education almost everywhere. If you doubt it, see, among others, the publications of Périssé Brothers, intended by the editors, says a parenthesis, for primary schools.

A prince who gives himself an animal's name makes us laugh. We rail at the Emperor of China, who makes people call him "His Majesty the Dragon," and we placidly say "Monseigneur le Dauphin."

History is the record of domesticity. The historian is no more than the master of ceremonies of centuries. In the model court of Louis the Great there are four historians, as there are four chamber violinists. Lulli leads the one, Boileau the others.

In this old method of history,—the only authorized method up to 1789, and classic in every acceptance of the word,—the best narrators, even the honest ones (there are few of them), even those who think themselves free, place themselves mechanically in drill, stitch tradition to tradition, submit to accepted custom, receive the pass-word from the ante-chamber, accept, pell-mell with the crowd, the stupid divinity of coarse personages in the foreground,—kings, "potentates," "pontiffs," soldiers,—and, all the time thinking themselves historians, end by donning the livery of historiographers, and are lackeys without knowing it.

This kind of history is taught, is compulsory, is commended and recommended; all young intellects are more or less saturated with it, its mark remains upon them, their thought suffers through it and releases itself only with difficulty,—we make schoolboys learn it by heart, and I who speak, when a child, was its victim.

In such history there is everything except history. Shows of princes, of "monarchs," and of captains, indeed; but of the people, of laws, of manners, very little; and of letters, of

¹ For Trajan, read Louis XV.

arts, of sciences, of philosophy, of the universal movement of thought,—in one word, of man,—nothing. Civilization dates by dynasties and not by progress; some king or other is one of the stages along the historical road; the true stages, the stages of great men, are nowhere indicated. It explains how Francis II. succeeds to Henri II., Charles IX. to Frances II., and Henri III. to Charles IX.; but it does not tell us how Watt succeeds to Papin, and Fulton to Watt; behind the heavy scenery of the hereditary rights of kings a glimpse of the mysterious sovereignty of men of genius is scarcely obtained. The lamp which smokes on the opaque façades of royal accessions hides the starry light which the creators of civilization throw over the ages. Not one of this series of historians points out the divine relation of human affairs,—the applied logic of Providence; not one makes us see how progress engenders progress. That Philip IV. comes after Philip III., and Charles II. after Philip IV., it would indeed be shameful not to know; but that Descartes continues Bacon, and that Kant continues Descartes; that Las Casas continues Columbus, that Washington continues Las Casas, and that John Brown continues and rectifies Washington; that John Huss continues Pelagius, that Luther continues John Huss, and that Voltaire continues Luther,—it is almost a scandal to be aware of this!

CHAPTER IV

IT is time that all this should be altered. It is time that the men of action should take their place behind, and the men of ideas come to the front. The summit is the head. Where thought is, there is power. It is time that men of genius should precede heroes. It is time to render to Cæsar what is Cæsar's, and to the book what is the book's: such or such a poem, such a drama, such a novel, does more work than all the Courts of Europe together. It is time

that history should proportion itself to the reality, that it should allow to each influence its true measure, and that it should cease to place the masks of kings on epochs made in the image of poets and philosophers. To whom belongs the eighteenth century,—to Louis XV. or to Voltaire? Confront Versailles with Ferney, and see from which of these two points civilization flows.

A century is a formula; an epoch is a thought expressed,—after which, civilization passes to another. Civilization has phrases: these phrases are the centuries. It does not repeat here what it says there; but its mysterious phrases are bound together by a chain,—logic (*logos*) is within,—and their series constitutes progress. All these phrases, expressive of a single idea,—the divine idea,—write slowly the word Fraternity.

All light is at some point condensed into a flame; in the same way every epoch is condensed into a man. The man having expired, the epoch is closed,—God turns the page. Dante dead, is the full-stop put at the end of the thirteenth century: John Huss can come. Shakespeare dead, is the full-stop put at the end of the sixteenth century; after this poet, who contains and sums up every philosophy, the philosophers Pascal, Descartes, Molière, Le Sage, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Diderot, Beaumarchais can come. Voltaire dead, is the full-stop put at the end of the eighteenth century: the French Revolution, liquidation of the first social form of Christianity, can come.

These different periods, which we name epochs, have all their dominant points. What is that dominant point? Is it a head that wears a crown, or is it a head that bears a thought? Is it an aristocracy, or is it an idea? Answer yourself. Do you see where the power is? Weigh Francis I. in the scales with Gargantua: put all chivalry in the scale against "Don Quixote."

Therefore, every one to his right place. Right about face! and let us now regard the centuries in their true light. In the first rank, minds; in the second, in the third, in the

twentieth, soldiers and princes. To the warrior the darkness, to the thinker the pedestal. Take away Alexander, and put in his place Aristotle. Strange thing, that up to this day humanity should have read the Iliad in such a manner as to annihilate Homer under Achilles!

I repeat it, it is time that all this should be changed. Moreover, the first impulse is given. Already, noble minds are at work; future history begins to appear, some specimens of the new and magnificent though partial treatments of the subject being already in existence; a general recasting is imminent,—*ad usum populi*. Compulsory education demands true history; and true history will be given: it is begun.

Effigies must be stamped afresh. That which was the reverse will become the face, and that which was the face will become the reverse. Urban VIII. will be the reverse of Galileo.

The true profile of the human race will re-appear on the different proofs of civilization that the successive ages will offer.

The historical effigy will no longer be the man-king; it will be the man-people.

Doubtless,—and we shall not be reproached for not insisting on it,—real and veracious history, in indicating the sources of civilization wherever they may be, will not lose sight of the appreciable utility of the sceptre-bearers and sword-bearers at given periods and in special states of humanity. Certain wrestling matches necessitate some resemblance between the two combatants; barbarity must sometimes be pitted against savageness. There are cases of progress by violence. Cæsar is good in Cimmeria, and Alexander in Asia; but for Alexander and Cæsar the second rank suffices.

Veracious history, real history, definitive history henceforth charged with the education of the royal infant,—namely, the people,—will reject all fiction, will fail in complaisance, will logically classify phenomena, will unravel profound causes, will study philosophically and scientifically the suc-

cessive commotions of humanity, and will take less account of the great strokes of the sword than of the grand strokes of the idea. The deeds of light will pass first; Pythagoras will be a much greater event than Sesostris. We have just said it,—heroes, men of the twilight, are relatively luminous in the darkness; but what is a conqueror beside a sage? What is the invasion of kingdoms compared with the opening up of intellects? The winners of minds efface the gainers of provinces. He through whom we think, he is the true conqueror. In future history, the slave Æsop and the slave Plautus will have precedence over kings; and there are vagabonds who will weigh more than certain victors, and comedians who will weigh more than certain emperors.

Without doubt, to illustrate what we are saying by means of facts, it is useful that a powerful man should have marked the halting-place between the ruin of the Latin world and the growth of the Gothic world; it is also useful that another powerful man, coming after the first, like cunning on the footsteps of daring, should have sketched out under the form of a catholic monarchy the future universal group of nations, and the beneficial encroachments of Europe upon Africa, Asia, and America. But it is more useful yet to have written the “*Divina Commedia*” and “*Hamlet*.” No bad action is mixed up with these great works; nor is here to be charged to the account of the civilizer a debt of nations ruined. The improvement of the human mind being given as the result to be obtained, Dante is of greater importance than Charlemagne, and Shakespeare of greater importance than Charles the Fifth.

In history, as it will be written on the pattern of absolute truth, that intelligence of no account, that unconscious and trivial being,—the *Non pluribus impar*, the Sultan-sun of Marly,—will appear as nothing more than the almost mechanical preparer of the shelter needed by the thinker disguised as a buffoon, and of the environment of ideas and men required for the philosophy of *Alceste*. Thus Louis XIV. makes Molière’s bed.

These exchanges of parts will put people in their true light; the historical optic, renewed, will re-adjust the *ensemble* of civilization, at present a chaos: for perspective, that justice of geometry, will size the past,—making such a plan to advance, placing another in the background. Every one will assume his real stature; the head-dresses of tiaras and of crowns will only make dwarfs more ridiculous; stupid genuflexions will vanish. From these alterations will proceed right.

That great judge We ourselves,—We all,—having henceforth for measure the clear idea of what is absolute and what is relative, deductions and restitutions will of themselves take place. The innate moral sense within man will know its power; it will no longer be obliged to ask itself questions like this,—Why, at the same minute, do people revere in Louis XV. and all the rest of royalty the act for which they burn Deschauffours on the Place de Grève? The quality of kingship will no longer be a false moral weight. Facts fairly placed will place conscience fairly. A good light will come, sweet to the human race, serene, equitable, with no interposition of clouds henceforth between truth and the brain of man, but a definitive ascent of the good, the just, and the beautiful toward the zenith of civilization.

Nothing can escape the law which simplifies. By the mere force of things, the material side of facts and of men disintegrates and disappears. There is no shadowy solidity; whatever may be the mass, whatever may be the block, every combination of ashes (and matter is nothing else) returns to ashes. The idea of the atom of dust is in the word “granite,”—inevitable pulverizations. All those granites of oligarchy, aristocracy, and theocracy, are doomed to be scattered to the four winds. The ideal alone is indestructible. Nothing lasts save the mind.

In this indefinite increase of light which is called civilization, the processes of reduction and levelling are accomplished. The imperious morning light penetrates everywhere,—enters as master, and makes itself obeyed. The light is at work;

under the great eye of posterity, before the blaze of the nineteenth century, simplifications take place, excrescences fall away, glories drop like leaves, reputations are riven in pieces. Do you wish for an example,—take Moses. There is in Moses three glories,—the captain, the legislator, the poet. Of these three men contained in Moses, where is the captain to-day? In the shadow, with brigands and murderers. Where is the legislator? Amidst the waste of dead religions. Where is the poet? By the side of Æschylus.

Daylight has an irresistible corroding power on the things of night. Hence appears a new historic sky above our heads, a new philosophy of causes and results, a new aspect of facts.

Certain minds, however, whose honest and stern anxiety please us, object: “You have said that men of genius form a dynasty; now, we will not have that dynasty any more than another.” This is to misapprehend, and to fear the word where the thing is reassuring. The same law which wills that the human race should have no owners, wills that it should have guides. To be enlightened is quite different from being enslaved. Kings possess; men of genius conduct,—there is the difference. Between “I am a Man” and “I am the State” there is all the distance from fraternity to tyranny. The forward-march must have a guide-post. To revolt against the pilot can scarcely improve the ship’s course; we do not see what would have been gained by throwing Christopher Columbus into the sea. The direction “this way” has never humiliated the man who seeks his road. I accept in the night the guiding authority of torches. Moreover, a dynasty of little encumbrance is that of men of genius, having for a kingdom the exile of Dante, for a palace the dungeon of Cervantes, for a civil list the wallet of Isaiah, for a throne the dunghill of Job, and for a sceptre the staff of Homer.

Let us resume.

CHAPTER V

HUMANITY, no longer owned but guided,—such is the new aspect of facts.

This new aspect of facts history henceforth is compelled to reproduce. To change the past, that is strange; yet it is what history is about to do. By falsehood? No, by speaking the truth. History has been a picture; she is about to become a mirror. This new reflection of the past will modify the future.

The former king of Westphalia, who was a witty man, was looking one day at an inkstand on the table of some one we know. The writer, with whom Jerome Bonaparte was at that moment, had brought home from an excursion among the Alps, made some years before in company with Charles Nodier, a piece of steatitic serpentine carved and hollowed in the form of an inkstand, and purchased of the chamois-hunters of the Mer de Glace. It was this that Jerome Bonaparte was looking at. "What is this?" he asked. "It is my inkstand," said the writer; and he added, "it is steatite. Admire how Nature with a little dirt and oxide has made this charming green stone." Jerome Bonaparte replied, "I admire much more the men who out of this stone made an inkstand."

That was not badly said for a brother of Napoleon, and due credit should be given for it; for the inkstand is to destroy the sword. The decrease of warriors,—men of brutal force and of prey; the undefined and superb growth of men of thought and of peace; the re-appearance on the scene of the true colossals,—in this is one of the greatest facts of our great epoch. There is no spectacle more pathetic and sublime,—humanity delivered from on high, the powerful ones put to flight by the thinkers, the prophet overwhelming the hero, force routed by ideas, the sky cleaned, a majestic expulsion.

Look! raise your eyes! the supreme epic is accomplished. The legions of light drive backward the hordes of flame.

The masters are departing; the liberators are arriving! Those who hunt down nations, who drag armies behind them, — Nimrod, Sennacherib, Cyrus, Rameses, Xerxes, Cambyses, Attila, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Alexander, Cæsar, Bonaparte, — all these immense wild men are disappearing. They die away slowly, — behold them touch the horizon; they are mysteriously attracted by the darkness; they claim kindred with the shade, — thence their fatal descent. Their resemblance to other phenomena of the night restores them to that terrible unity of blind immensity, a submersion of all light; forgetfulness, shadow of the shadow, awaits them.

But though they are thrown down, they remain formidable. Let us not insult what has been great. Hooting would be unbecoming before the burying of heroes; the thinker should remain grave in presence of this donning of shrouds. The old glory abdicates, the strong lie down: mercy for those vanquished conquerors! peace to those warlike spirits now extinguished! The darkness of the grave interposes between their glare and ourselves. It is not without a kind of religious terror that one sees planets become spectres.

While in the engulfing process the flaming pleiad of the men of brutal force descends deeper and deeper into the abyss with the sinister pallor of approaching disappearance, at the other extremity of space, where the last cloud is about to fade away, in the deep heaven of the future, henceforth to be azure, rises in radiance the sacred group of true stars, — Orpheus, Hermes, Job, Homer, Æschylus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hippocrates, Phidias, Socrates, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes, Euclid, Pythagoras, Lucretius, Plautus, Juvenal, Tacitus, Saint Paul, John of Patmos, Tertullian, Pelagius, Dante, Gutenberg, Joan of Arc, Christopher Columbus, Luther, Michael, Angelo, Copernicus, Galileo, Rabelais, Calderon, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Kepler, Milton, Molière, Newton, Descartes, Kant, Piranesi, Beccaria, Dide-

rot, Voltaire, Beethoven, Fulton, Montgolfier, Washington. And this marvellous constellation, at each instant more luminous, dazzling as a glory of celestial diamonds, shines in the clear horizon, and ascending mingles with the vast dawn of Jesus Christ.

THE END.



LIFE
OF
VICTOR HUGO

BY
FRANK T. MARZIALS

EDITED BY
PROF. ERIC S. ROBERTSON, M.A.



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NOTE

THE reader would thank me very little for enumerating here all the books and periodicals consulted during the composition of this biography. My sheaf has been gleaned from many fields. Two debts, however, I feel in honour bound to acknowledge, one to Madame Hugo's "Victor Hugo raconté par un Témoin de sa vie," and the other to M. Biré's "Victor Hugo avant 1830."

F. T. M.



LIFE OF VICTOR HUGO

CHAPTER I

THERE are some men round whose name and fame and work it would almost seem as if human opinion were destined to rage in never-ending strife. Such a man was Victor Hugo. For upwards of sixty years he remained conspicuous among his contemporaries, an object of passionate admiration, and almost equally passionate dislike. During the earlier portion of that period he stood in the forefront of the great battle between the Romantic and Classical schools in French literature. To his followers he was the man of men, the "inpeceable master," the genius of his age, a kind of sun-god dispelling the drear darkness of poetic routine and ancient night. To his adversaries he was a mere savage, a monster, rudely violating his mother tongue, and setting all sane traditions at defiance. Then, when that battle had in a measure fought itself out, came even fiercer warfare in the world of politics. The Revolution of 1848, fitful, sudden, erratic, drove Louis Philippe from the throne of France. A short-lived Republic followed. But in the Republic was soon visible what some hailed as the dawn, and others cursed as the coming night of Imperialism. Among those who cursed was Victor Hugo, and his talents in that kind were simply magnificent. What winged words, tipped with venom and flame, did he not discharge at Napoleon III. ! And how cordially the Imperialists hated him in return ! But even when the Empire had been swept into the dust-heap of human failures — even then, amid the shouts that hailed the

poet as the laureate of French democracy, discordant voices might still be heard. Not yet had unanimity been reached. A new literary school arose professing to be neither classical nor romantic, but "naturalist." Facts, realism, science, such were, and are, the watchwords of M. Zola and his Comus-rout. Weighed in a balance that takes no account of what is ideal, or beautiful, or sublime, no wonder if Victor Hugo's work is found lighter than vanity itself. He is arraigned for artificiality, for preferring an epic grandeur to the actual proportions of life, and ridiculed for his mediæval "bric-à-brac," his empty, sonorous rhetoric. "He never followed after truth," such is M. Zola's conclusion; "he was never the man of his age." And if this be the verdict of the last coarse school in French literature, how does his reputation stand among daintier critics of an approved Atticism, like M. Scherer and Mr. Matthew Arnold? The latter praises Sainte-Beuve for having early "seized the weak side of Victor Hugo's poetry," its "emptiness," "theatricality," "violence," and quotes, as "a description never to be forgotten of Victor Hugo as a poet," the statement of Sainte-Beuve that he was a "Frank, energetic and subtle, who had mastered to perfection the technical and rhetorical resources of the Latin literature of the decadence." After this, if one has been watching the battle-field at all impartially, one is glad to see a bold, or it may be even a rash, diversion in the poet's favour; one is glad to see Mr. Swinburne swinging down upon the enemy in full charge, and to hear him shouting his mighty war-cry in praise of the "great master whose name is the crowning glory of the nineteenth century," of the "greatest writer whom the world has seen since Shakespeare," "the greatest Frenchman of all times"!

Thus for upwards of sixty years has the strife of tongues raged round Victor Hugo. And it is a strife in which whosoever speaks of him at all is almost constrained to take a part. The man was pre-eminently a fighter. How is it possible to avoid controversy in discussing his life and works? So with every desire, as far as in me lies, to live peaceably

with all men, I cannot but feel that before faring very far forward, I too shall be drawn into the conflict; and, standing as it were upon the battle's brink, I almost hesitate.

"This century of ours was two years old, the Sparta of the Republic was giving place to the Rome of the Empire, and Bonaparte the First Consul developing into Napoleon the Emperor, . . . when, at Besançon, . . . there came into the world a child of mingled Breton and Lorraine blood, who was colourless, sightless, voiceless, and so poor a weakling that all despaired of him except his mother. . . . That child, whose name Life appeared to be erasing from its book, and whose short day of existence seemed destined to pass into night with never a morrow — that child am I." Thus, in lines which most Frenchmen know pretty well by heart, has Victor Hugo related the incidents of his birth. To put the matter more prosaically, he was born at Besançon, in the extreme east of France, on February 26, 1802.

His father, Joseph Léopold Sigisbert Hugo, was an officer in the French army, and aged some twenty-nine years at the time of Victor's birth. Under what circumstances he had become a soldier is not quite clear. His own memoirs — for he too wielded the pen, and has left memoirs — are somewhat reticent on the point. The family record suggests that he first embraced the career of arms in 1788 as a "cadet." My own impression is that he entered the ranks quite humbly as one of the numerous volunteers who, at the approach of the Revolution, came forward to do its work and defend the country. Be that as it may, in 1793-4 we find him already a captain — for among good republicans promotion was rapid in those days — and actively engaged in the war against the royalists of La Vendée. He has changed his name to "Brutus," which is a sign of the times, and helps to memorialise the Convention in denunciation of the Girondists, and in praise of "the sublime Constitution" of 1793; and he "swears," in common with his co-signatories, to "shed the

very last drop of his blood to crush all tyrants, fanatics, royalists, and federalists." He is also somewhat busily engaged as secretary to the military commissions which are condemning the unhappy royalists to death, or purveying victims for the infamous Carrier's revolutionary tribunal at Nantes. Dirty work at best, and there seems no reason to doubt that he hates it, and does what in him lies — as he claims for himself, and Madame Hugo claims for him — to mitigate the horrors of that fratricidal war. Thence, the rising in La Vendée being crushed, he is transferred to Paris, and employed for some two years in semi-military semi-legal work at the War Office; and thence again passes to the Army of the Rhine, under Moreau, and is attached to the personal staff of that great general, who for a time almost seems to be the predestined rival of the rising young Napoleon. Such is Victor Hugo's father, who, after a creditable, and one may almost say distinguished military career, is commanding his battalion at Besançon in 1802.

As to the boy's mother, she had had, if we may trust a passage in the preface to "*Les Feuilles d'Automne*," a troubled childhood; had been a *brigande*, as the insurgent royalists were called, "like Madame de Bonchamp and Madame de Larochejaquelein," and had been compelled to "fly," she, "a poor girl of fifteen," across the ensanguined fields of "the Bocage." But here, I think, some little allowance must be made for poetic licence. M. Trébuchet, the father of this young lady, was a shipowner at Nantes; and we are told, on the excellent authority of his granddaughter,¹ that he was "one of those honest citizens who never travel beyond the confines of their own city, and of their once settled opinion." Clearly not the man to go careering about the Bocage with his three motherless daughters, or to allow one of them to

¹ The reference here, and throughout, when I quote from Madame Hugo, is to her "*Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*," which was clearly written under Victor Hugo's own eye, and may almost be treated as his autobiography. It is re-published in the complete edition of his works.

take what the French call "the key of the fields" on her own account. Moreover, I think we may regard it as pretty certain that Madame Hugo, with her skill in selecting the picturesque points in the family history, would not have neglected so striking an episode, unless it had lain beyond the confines of fact, and in the cloudland of legend or imagination. Still, though Mademoiselle Trébuchet may never have borne arms in her own person, she was a royalist, and the daughter of a royalist; and there must have been many obstacles to the wooing of the handsome young republican officer, who, in his frequent visits to Nantes, hovered about the dovecote of the worthy shipowner. "Love," however, here again, was "lord of all," as in the far-off days when the English lady "would marry the Scottish knight." Sigisbert Hugo, for the now obsolete "Brutus" had been dropped, held to his suit. Sophie Trébuchet was nothing loath. Her father suffered himself to be persuaded, consented even to leave Nantes for a time, and take his daughter to Paris, where the bridegroom elect was, for the nonce, driving the clerkly quill at the War Office. So all went well. The marriage took place in 1796. A first-born son, Abel, came into the world, at Paris, on the 15th November, 1798; a second, Eugène, was born at Nancy on the 16th of September, 1800; and Victor followed on the 26th of February, 1802.

Having thus spoken of the poet's father and mother, perhaps a word may fittingly be said of his ancestry. Whereupon I enter at once into the strife of tongues. According to Madame Hugo, to Victor Hugo himself, to M. Barbou, Victor Hugo's enthusiastic biographer, the Hugos were a noble family, "illustrious both in literature and in arms," and Madame Hugo half apologizes for not carrying their genealogy further back than 1532, saying that all earlier records had perished at the pillage of Nancy, in 1670. Now that there was a noble family of Hugos is indisputable. Unfortunately there is nothing to show that our Hugos were in any way connected with them. M. Biré, who has gone into this matter with great care and minuteness, establishes

the point pretty conclusively. Victor's father was a soldier who had entered the army as a volunteer at the outset of the Revolution. He speaks of his own people at *honnêtes gens*, which may be regarded as the equivalent of worthy and respectable. As a matter of fact they belonged to the upper artisan class. The poet's grandfather was a carpenter. Three of his aunts were sempstresses; one was married to a baker; another to a hair-dresser. It is scarcely possible, as Madame Hugo asserts, that five of his uncles should have fallen in battle at Weissenbourg, for there were but five altogether, and three lived till long after the date of that engagement. Nor, I repeat, is there anything whatever to connect all these worthy people with the knights and esquires, privy counsellors, and bishops of the — I was going to say other branch, but it should rather be other tree of the Hugos. There is evidence, on the contrary, to show that no connection existed.

And here, perhaps, the judicious reader may be tempted to ask, "What can all this possibly matter? Grant that the poet's origin was more humble than has hitherto been supposed, and that, instead of coming from a class which even its admirers would admit to have become somewhat effete at the end of the eighteenth century, he sprang from a race of sturdy and energetic artisans — grant all this, and how can it affect him injuriously? In default of ancestral honour may not a man like Victor Hugo claim the greater honour of being himself an ancestor, and rooting, as it were, a mighty and perdurable name?" True, most true. But not quite the point here at issue. If the poet had said nothing about his family, no one else would have said anything about it either. But he did say something, and that something was neither accurate in statement nor suggestion; and, unfortunately, inaccuracies of a similar kind exist throughout his works. Here is the crux. Here is the question which the biographer cannot blink — a question similar in kind to that which has to be faced by the admirers of Chateaubriand and Shelley and Goethe, and various other great men. Did

Victor Hugo knowingly palter with fact? Did he advisedly, and in full knowledge of what he was doing, present it in a light that was not the light of truth? Genius is quite compatible with charlatanism, else were we led to the conclusion, too evidently absurd, that the great Napoleon was no genius. Are we compelled by the verities of criticism to believe that there was a baser alloy of quackery mingled with the fine gold of the genius of Victor Hugo? Such is the problem; and before I have done I shall have to endeavour to find some solution to it. But that must be further on in our story, and when we have collected additional materials on which to found a sane and equitable judgment. Meanwhile it will be fitting to return to the birth-place and birth-time of the little weakling child, whose future career was to suggest these delicate ethical questions.

We left him at Besançon on the 26th of February, 1802, the doctor declaring that he could not live, the mother fully determined that he *should* live,—and prevailing. Not thus, in what Hood, the unrivalled punster, called “Babbicombe Bay” and “Port Natal,” was the argosy that carried the child’s superb fortunes to be wrecked—not thus, prematurely, was to close a career destined to be remarkable for its magnificent vitality. “Victor Marie,” so was the boy christened; and the name proved of happy augury. In his first fight he came off victor over death. Within six weeks he had so far gained strength as to be able to bear removal to Marseilles; and thence, though still very delicate, he was taken about to Corsica and Elba, from station to station, in the wake of a wandering military father.

“Blood and iron”! Prince Bismarck himself might have been satisfied if he had lived during the first fifteen years of this century; for the times were certainly of iron, and blood ran without stint. As we think of the great battle-field that Europe then was, and listen to the echoes that history brings to us, we almost seem to hear again the roar of the old cannon, and the tramp of armed men, and the wail of those who mourn for their dead. And if such be the impression

which Napoleon's campaigns still produce on us, who live in these later days, and have heard the rumour of other armies marching and counter-marching, and the crash of other empires in their fall — what must have been the impression made on an ardent, imaginative boy, himself partly nurtured in the camp, and whose father was daily staking his life in the great war game? The poet has told us, and with some pomp and circumstance, in one of his earlier odes, how his cradle had oft been rested on a drum, and water from the brook brought to his childish lips in a soldier's helmet, and how the glorious tatters of some worn-out flag had been wrapped round him in his sleep. Without accepting this quite literally, we may yet, I think, easily picture to ourselves how the boy was influenced by the varied experiences, journeyings, and anxieties of his earlier years. Surely the fierce war-goddess, then crying havoc over the ravaged fields of Europe, was, in her strange wild way, no unfit "nurse for a poetic child."

Memory plays strange pranks with us all, and often hoards with a miser-like tenacity some worthless odd and end, while she squanders real treasure like a prodigal. Victor's first recollection comes strangely, and yet with a sort of "touch of nature," among the stirring incidents of his boyhood. His father had gone off, in 1805, to join the army in Italy under Masséna. His mother had brought her little brood to Paris. And here he remembered — it was the first dawn-streak on the horizon of his mind — how he used to go to school with his brother, and how, being a very tiny and very frail scholar, he would mostly be taken, on arrival at school in the early morning, to the bedroom of Mademoiselle Rose, the schoolmaster's daughter, and how, perched up on her bed, he would watch her at her toilet. But soon matters of graver import began to find a place in his memory. His father, after doing good service under Masséna, had passed into the army of Joseph Bonaparte, then King of Naples; had tracked and captured Fra Diavolo, the famous brigand chief, tracked him almost literally like a hare; and had been rewarded with the

command of a regiment and the governorship of the province of Avellino. Peace, or something like peace, reigned in Southern Italy; and Madame Hugo set off, at the end of October, 1807, to rejoin her husband. So little Victor journeyed, in the dear, tedious, lumbering old *diligences* of those days, across a rain-soddened France, and then — in a sledge for the nonce — through the snows of the Mont Cenis Pass, and then, in *diligences* again, by Parma, and Florence, and Rome the Imperial City, and Naples with her peerless bay, and so on to Avellino. Alexandre Dupias, the great Alexandre, most charming of narrators, has developed several chapters of those light bright memoirs of his to the history of Victor Hugo's childhood and youth; and he bears witness, from conversations held forty years afterwards, to the singular faithfulness of the impressions left on the child's mind by that Italian journey. On one point we scarcely need his assurances or those of Madame Hugo. Both tell us how much the little traveller was affected by the dismal spectacle of the bodies of executed brigands, hanging from the trees at pretty frequent intervals along the road. All through life every form of capital punishment — gibbet or guillotine — retained for him a kind of morbid fascination. There is, in his house at Guernsey, a picture grisly and horrible, executed by himself, showing a poor human body, the body of John Brown, the negro liberationist, "hanged by the neck" till it seems reduced by time and the weather's indignities to mere shreds and tatters of what once was man. Among the most powerful passages in "L'Homme qui rit" — indeed I think the most powerful — is the description of the corpse hanging in chains on the top of Portland Hill, and terrifying poor little Gwynplaine by the execution of a hideous dance to the wintry pipings of the wind.

At Avellino life went very pleasantly. As governor of the province, Col. Hugo occupied a marble palace, all fissured, it is true, by a recent earthquake, but not the less enchanting on that account to the eyes and fancy of childhood. Then there was a deep wooded ravine in close proximity, and there

were nuts to heart's desire, and — charm of charms to the natural boy! — no lessons, nothing to dim the cloudless blue of perfect idleness. So the three little Hugos enjoyed halcyon days with their kind father in the sunny South, amid the mountains and gorges of Avellino; but days all too short, and flitting almost with the rapidity of the halcyon's wing. Kings were "on promotion" at that time. Joseph Bonaparte, after reigning over Naples till June, 1808, was placed by his imperious no less than imperial brother upon the Spanish throne, which had just been iniquitously wrested from the reigning Bourbons. Col. Hugo stood high in Joseph's favour. When the latter moved to Madrid, Col. Hugo received an honourable and pressing invitation to follow. Such a proposal was by no means to be refused. As a known adherent of the disgraced Moreau, or for other reasons which have been variously explained, the Colonel had little to expect from Napoleon, and it was clearly his policy to remain attached to the Bonaparte, who appreciated his services. But Spain, with her national pride excited to blood-heat, was as yet no place for the education of three French boys, or the residence of a French lady. Again did it become necessary for father and children to part. So sorrow reigned on either side, and the lads turned their faces towards Paris very sadly.

Madame Hugo, the elder, if we may credit her daughter-in-law's testimony, entertained no great admiration for the beauties of nature, and had watched the Alps and the Apennines with some indifference. But she liked a garden; and attached to the house which she took shortly after her return to Paris, was a garden that was more than a garden, that was a park, a wood, a piece of the country dropped into the midst of the great city, a place of enchantment, a very Broceliande, where magicians might weave their spells, and monsters lurk in secret places, and knights and ladies wander at will, and everything unforeseen and unexpected happen quite naturally. In this place of delight, which had belonged in pre-revolution days to the convent of the Feuillantines, the

three boys were as happy as the exigencies of education would allow. Abel, the eldest, was now old enough to go as a boarder to the Lycée, or public school; and Eugène and Victor were sent to a somewhat humble day-school not far from their home, and kept by a certain Larivière,—a worthy pedagogue, formerly a priest, whom the Reign of Terror had unfrocked and frightened into marriage. But in play-time, and especially on Sundays, when Abel had his weekly holiday, what pleasures did the garden not offer! Thither too would come not unfrequently, taking her gentler part in the boys' rougher games, the little lady whom the poet afterwards married. No wonder that the sunshine of the old place lived so bright in his memory.

And besides the tenants with which the imagination of these bright children peopled the dainty wilderness and the ruined ecclesiastical buildings of the Feuillantines, there was a tenant in flesh and blood to whom attached an interest quite as romantic. This was General Lahorie, Victor's godfather. For General Lahorie, an old friend and companion in arms of General Hugo, lay here in hiding. He was one of the officers implicated in Moreau's conspiracy against Napoleon, and had been condemned to death,¹ as we are told—but I think that extreme penalty must have been commuted—and then tracked from one place of refuge to another, till at last Madame Hugo had generously afforded him sanctuary in a ruined chapel in her garden. Here he appears to have remained some eighteen months, and was to the boys the pleasantest of companions. He would tell them numberless stories, "true stories," doubtless, of adventure and peril "i' the imminent deadly breach," stories calculated to fire their young blood, and make them long for the time when they too should be old enough to handle sword or musket. He would also go over their lessons in the evening, and read Tacitus with little Victor, now a progressing and very advanced young scholar of nine or ten. Ought we also to be-

¹ Condemned in his absence, as is possible according to French law.

lieve that he first lit in that young gentleman's mind the bright pure flame of democratic republicanism — a flame destined to smoulder there for a time, and afterwards to burst forth as a beacon to the nations? We ought to believe this, or something like it, for Victor Hugo tells us so, and represents the general, in a very striking passage, as saying "fit things" on liberty, and on Napoleon as liberticide, while overhead the illuminations of some imperial fête were bravely flaring. But, alas, that critics should be so troublesome! Why can they not, according to Lord Melbourne's recommendation, "let it alone"? M. Biré, I fear, makes it very difficult for us to give full credence to this pretty story.

Whether or not General Lahorie held the antithetical conversation reported by his godson, certain it is that the days went pleasantly by in the house and garden of the Feuillantines. And beating as it were round the happy shores of childhood, adding a kind of zest to the brightness and mirth, were the ceaseless wild surges of battle. Wars and rumours of wars, these sent their voices continually into that joyous home. Now the boys would be listening to such bulletins of the imperial campaigns as the Government vouchsafed to impart to its lieges — bulletins that spoke of successes very often, and of reverses never at all, and were not altogether quite ingenuous perhaps. Then would come the visit of a colonel uncle, all resplendent in gold lace, and producing on his little nephews, so Victor tells us, the effect of Michael the archangel, as seen in glory. He too might have tales to tell of even newer combats than those described by General Lahorie. There would also be letters at fairly frequent intervals from General Hugo, now higher than ever in Joseph's favour, and busily engaged, among other battlings, in tracking the guerilla chief, El Empeinado, as he had before tracked Fra Diavolo in Italy.

And presently the children were to be taken into closer contact with war. For towards the end of 1810, or thereabouts, it occurred to King Joseph that appearances, the royal prestige, demanded the presence at his court of the fam-

ilies of his generals and high dignitaries. His government was crumbling under the hatred of the Spanish people. He wished by all means in his power to give it a look of stability and permanence. So General Hugo, now enrolled as a count or marquis among the nobles of Spain, and a governor of provinces, received a gentle hint that Madame Hugo might advantageously take up her residence in the Peninsula. She started for Madrid, with her three boys, in the ensuing spring.

As far as Bayonne nothing very noteworthy happened. The journey was a nine days' *diligence* drive and no more. But from Bayonne onwards adventures might be expected. At that point the travellers would enter a hostile country, all swarming with insurgent patriots and brigands. To proceed alone, and without an escort, would have been madness. Madame Hugo waited at Bayonne for about a month, and then attached herself to the military convoy which was to take to Madrid the periodical subsidy of the French government. It was a notable procession. First came a small body of troops — cavalry, infantry, and artillery, with two cannon. In the midst the waggons containing the "treasure." Then the antiquated, huge, travelling carriage of Madame Hugo, who, as the wife of a governor, had successfully contested precedence with a duchess of Spain. Then an interminable line — more than two miles long, we are told — of vehicles of every form and description — all green and gold for the most part, those being the Imperial colours — and creaking, groaning, jingling on their way, with much crackling of whips and swearing in every tongue, and an intolerable cloud of dust. On either side of the line were more soldiers, and, forming the rear-guard, more soldiers still, and a couple of cannon. Upwards of two thousand men: such was the force required to convoy money across Spain in the days when Joseph was king. Nor does it appear that there was a man too many. Scarcely a month previously another convoy had been robbed and massacred at Salinas.

No such evil chance befel the cavalcade of which the Hugos

formed part. Does not the boat that conveys the fortunes of Cæsar at all times enjoy special immunities? Yet were adventures, and even perils, not altogether wanting. Near Salinas again there was an attack on the part of the Guerillas, but badly planned, and resulting only in some smart sharp-shooting — sharp-shooting, however, carried on at sufficiently close quarters to allow of a brace of bullets being lodged in the family coach. A little farther on the road, that same coach as nearly as possible fell over into a precipice, and was only saved, with its occupants, by the prompt arms and hands of a company of Dutch soldiers, whose good-will Madame Hugo had secured by benevolences of food. Further on an axle-tree broke, and the little party were almost left behind to the tender mercies of the Guerillas. Everywhere too there was evidence of the hatred of the inhabitants. The houses in which Madame Hugo and her children were quartered seemed deserted, and offered the most sinister hospitality to the travellers. All was done to make them feel that they were the guests of fear and harsh necessity.

Over the months of Victor's sojourn in Spain it is not my purpose to linger. He reached Madrid in June, 1811, and was shortly after placed, with his brother, Eugène, in a great dreary aristocratic school kept by the monks. Here the lads were far from happy among schoolfellows of a hostile nation, and relatively much less advanced in learning. Winged words hurtled in the air pretty constantly, and blows followed, and, on one occasion at least, the use of Spanish steel. Often must the two younger brothers have cast envious glances — such glances as the caterpillar may be supposed to cast at the butterfly — when looking at Abel Hugo, now promoted to the dignity of page in the royal household, and gaily glittering in his uniform of blue, silver, and gold. But deliverance from this Spanish dungeon was at hand. The plot had begun to thicken in the Peninsula. The tide of conquest was turning. In January, 1812, Ciudad Rodrigo fell into Wellington's hands. Three months later he took the commanding position of Badajoz. In July came

the victory of Salamanca. Events either accomplished or looming rendered Spain a quite unfit sojourn for French women and children at the beginning of that year. Their presence could scarcely act, even in appearance, as a kind of flying buttress to the tottering French monarchy. Ere March had blustered itself into April, Madame Hugo and her two younger boys were on their way back to the garden of the Feuillantines. Abel remained behind to take his boy-soldier's part in the conclusion of a war disastrous to the French arms.

The disproportion between the ages of the boys and their advancement in learning rendered it difficult to place Eugène and Victor in a public school. M. Larivière was accordingly engaged to teach them their humanities. And as regards this worthy pedagogue, as indeed with regard to the whole tendency of the young Hugos' early education, there are several observations which ought to be made, and may fittingly here find a place. Victor Hugo's first works, as we shall presently see, were the outcome of very strong monarchical and legitimist convictions, and animated throughout by the spirit of Roman Catholic Christianity. His later works, the works of the last thirty years of his life, were, on the contrary, fiercely democratic and anti-clerical. Whereas he had in his youth execrated the Revolution, and blessed kings and priests, he came afterwards to speak of the Revolution in terms of rapture, and to regard kings and priests as the twin pests that afflict mankind. Of this change in his convictions he was very proud. He reverts to the subject again, and yet again, in verse and prose. If Murat, he asks, is to be praised and honoured because, "having been born a stable-boy, he became a king," should not that man be honoured more who has achieved the rare and difficult ascent from error to truth, and, having been "born an aristocrat and a royalist, has become a democrat"? As to M. Larivière,—whom he calls, apparently for the purpose of intensifying his clerical and aristocratic character, the "Abbé de la Rivière,"—that poor, mild old gentleman's instructions are used by his pupil to

point the most terrible moral. He stands forth as the type of the priest-teacher, "inoculating young intelligences with the old age of prejudice," "taking from childhood its dawn and substituting night," "making crooked that which nature has made straight," and, as a last "terrible *chef d'œuvre*," "manufacturing deformed souls like that of Torquemada, and producing unintelligent intelligences like that of Joseph de Maistre." "To this perilous teaching"—perilous indeed—"were subjected" Eugène and Victor Hugo. No wonder that the latter was proud of having come through such an ordeal, if not unscathed at the time, yet at least with powers of ultimate recuperation.

Now, as regards all this, it is quite clear that great allowance must again be made for the poetic temperament. Victor Hugo's ancestry was not, by any means, as aristocratic as he seems to have supposed. "Brutus" Hugo, the son of a carpenter, had been an ardent republican; was probably a republican still, though of a less advanced type, at the time of Moreau's conspiracy; seems never to have been a very enthusiastic imperialist, and was no more than a perfunctory royalist when Louis XVIII. again sat on the throne of France. In religion we are told that he was, "like most of the soldiers of the empire, an anti-clerical." Madame Hugo unquestionably *was* a royalist. Here indeed a sinister influence must be admitted. Her politics were, as seen from her son's ultimate standpoint, very bad. But her religion? She had none. She was as freethinking a countrywoman of Voltaire as need be. When Eugène and Victor were at the school at Madrid, the fathers wanted them to serve the mass like the other pupils. She refused; and, when the fathers insisted, declared that her sons were Protestants. "She was," says her daughter-in-law, "in favour of an entire freedom of education, . . . and interfered no more with the intellects of her children than with their consciences," allowing them to read indiscriminately Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and even the most unsavoury novels of the last century. Whatever may have been the faults of such a system of training, it can

scarcely be accused of a tendency to superstition. While as to poor old M. Larivière, the priest who had abandoned his orders, and married his cook — with whom he lived in homeliest fashion, — surely the faith of the most orthodox agnostic would have had nothing to fear from *his* teaching. In truth, Victor Hugo loved antithesis over much. It filled his memory unduly with glooms and gleams. There was not that difference which he imagined between his later creed and the influences that had surrounded his childhood.¹

In 1813, "municipal improvement" cast a covetous eye on the beautiful wilderness of the Feuillantines. New streets were to be built there; and Madame Hugo, on the last day of the year, moved to a house in the Rue Cherche-Midi, near to some old friends, the Fouchers, whom we shall meet again in the course of our narrative. The new year, of which this 31st of December was the eve, proved to be an eventful one in the annals of the Hugo family, no less than in the annals of Europe. On the 9th of January, 1814, General Hugo, who had perforce left Spain after the defeat of the French arms at Vittoria in the preceding June, received orders to assume command at Thionville, on the Eastern frontier, and to defend the place against the approaching allies. In April Napoleon abdicated, and Louis XVIII. re-entered Paris, to the gratification of all good royalists, — Madame Hugo's enthusiasm flaring so high that it does not seem even to have been damped by the quartering upon her of a Prussian colonel and fifty Prussian soldiers. Shortly afterwards she went to Thionville, to "settle some important family matters" with her husband, as her daughter-in-law tells us. Speaking more particularly, she went, as would appear from M. Barbou's life of the poet, to arrange the terms of a separation by mutual consent. How had this come about? Was

¹ M. Lesclide, who has published a volume of Victor Hugo's *Table Talk*, says, "We all know what a thoroughly monarchical and Christian education he had received." This was evidently the impression which Victor Hugo's conversation left on those about him — probably the impression in his own mind.

political incompatibility at the bottom of it, as M. Barbou would have us believe? I trow not. General Hugo's principles were scarcely of that inflexible character; and there are rumours of other reasons. Anyhow, General Hugo seems at about this time to have determined that his two younger sons should be sent to school,¹ and educated in view of the *École Polytechnique*, which is the recognized avenue in France to various kinds of government employment, and in particular to admission into the corps of military engineers.

To school the two boys went accordingly, to a certain Pension Cordier² et Decotte, where they speedily pushed themselves into a position of some prominence. The future king of men — for such Victor Hugo unquestionably became — began by being a king of boys. He and his brother led rival parties among their school companions, and exercised most despotic rule. That some of this ascendancy was attributable to the fact that they occupied the aristocratic position of parlour-boarders, is possible. Native force of character and intellect must, however, have had something to do with it besides. For the rest, if we try to picture to ourselves what Victor was as a schoolboy, we shall, I think, have the image of a fine manly intelligent lad, fast developing into a fine manly young fellow. Though he was already rhyming apace, and to excellent effect, as we shall presently see, yet had he none of the poetic sensitiveness that shrinks and shivers at the rude contact of school life. He was no Shelley to make himself prematurely miserable over the want of harmony in his little world. Rather did he drink delight of battle with his peers, as occasion presented. He seems, too, to have studied zealously — reserving a large place in his thoughts,

¹ According to M. Barbou, and others, it was after the second restoration of the Bourbons, in 1815, that General Hugo determined to send the boys to school. But this does not agree with Madame Hugo's narrative, and it is difficult to reconcile some of the incidents which she relates with the view that the boys were not at school before the second entry of the allies into Paris. The question, however, is of no particular importance.

² Cordier, by the by, was another unfrocked priest, an intense admirer of Rousseau.

no doubt, for Chateaubriand, who was the idol of young France at that time — but still applying himself honestly and well to the school curriculum, and following assiduously the course of lectures at the Collège Louis le Grande. For mathematics especially he appears to have shown great aptitude; and, in the general annual competition of all French scholars for the University prizes of 1818, he obtained the fifth place for physics.

This was the last year of his school life. In August, 1818, being then sixteen years of age, he left the Pension Cordier et Decotte, fully determined for his own part that he would not try to obtain admission to the Ecole Polytechnique, or be a soldier. He had, in fact, made up his mind to pursue a quite different career.

CHAPTER II

IN the lives of the great majority of men there is a clearly marked boundary line, a kind of natural frontier as it were, between the years of preparation and the years of performance. At a certain point education ends, and ends definitely. The man has gone through his school or college course, and then, his training being over and done with, he addresses himself to maturer tasks and duties. But in Victor Hugo's life there is no such break. Though, with the arbitrariness of the biographer, I have used the conclusion of his school course to mark the end of a chapter, yet in truth the severance of his connection with the Pension Cordier was by no means an epoch-making event in his career. Long before he left that establishment he had commenced what was to be his life work. Already had he earned a reputation as a poet, and shown his facility and aptitude as a writer. Deliverance from lessons and lectures merely meant, in his case, greater freedom to pursue the avocations which he was al-

ready pursuing. In order, therefore, to take up his literary life from its commencement, it is necessary to go some little way back.

Verse, verse, and yet again verse — such had been the boy's delight almost from the time when he first went to school. Genius was his unquestionably. Boon nature had given him that priceless gift without stint or measure. And the circumstances of his childhood had been such as to develop and foster the gift, and favour its early manifestation. We have seen what a panorama of moving sights had already passed before his eyes — Italy in her beauty, Spain in her picturesque, war in its grandeur and pomp, its misery and haggard horror. Young as he was, he had seen many men and cities. He must have known, boyishly no doubt, but still very really, the poignant emotions of France as news came to her, however fitfully, of defeat in Spain, of the melting away of the Grand Army into the snows of Russia, and of the culminating disaster of Waterloo. All this had found a place in his mind, had vivified thought and feeling, and given him something whereof to sing. So he piped his boyish songs without cessation. "During the three years which he spent at the Pension Decotte," says Madame Hugo, "he wrote verses of every possible kind: odes, satires, epistles, poems, tragedies, elegies, idyls, imitations of Ossian, translations of Virgil, of Lucan, of Ausonius, of Martial; songs, fables, tales, epigrams, madrigals, logogriphs, acrostics, charades, rebuses, impromptus. He even wrote a comic opera." It was Théophile Gautier, if I remember right, who declared that a poet ought to exercise his prentice hand on at least fifty thousand lines of verse before writing anything for publication. Victor Hugo must have fulfilled this hard saying almost to the letter.

And soon his verse was to receive public recognition. The French Academy, that august body, had proposed as the subject for the prize of French poetry, to be awarded in 1817, "The happiness that study can procure in every situation of life." Scarcely a very fit theme on which to poetise, as

we should now consider. What composer was it, Grétry or Méhul, who gave it as his opinion that the words of a song or opera mattered not at all, and that there would be no difficulty in setting to music *The Gazette of Holland*? And similarly it would almost seem as if the Academicians of the commencement of this century held that any proposition, however prosaic, could be "set" to verse. "Happiness procured by study in every situation of life"—what dreary didacticism do the words suggest! Nevertheless, young Victor applied himself to the task bravely. With the readiness of pen which he already possessed, to write the requisite number of lines, even on such an untoward subject, was comparatively easy. But how should he get the poem, when written, to the Academy? Schoolmaster Decotte was his rival as a poet, and not at all likely to help him. Fortunately a friendly usher, in whom he had confided, turned the difficulty by a clever ruse—took the boys for a walk in the direction of the Institute, set them looking at the fountains before that abode of learning, and, while they were thus employed, scampered off with Victor, and deposited the precious manuscript in the secretary's office. With what anxiety the result was expected need not here be told. Is there one of us who has not gone through similar experiences? The Academy delivered judgment on the 25th of August, 1817, divided the prize between a M. Leburn and Saintine,—afterwards well known as the writer of "*Picciola*," the story of the prison flower,—and then gave an honourable mention, ninth in order, to Victor Hugo's lines. The boy had taken occasion in the poem to refer to his age, and this, contrary to the accepted tradition, seems to have stood him in good stead with the venerable Academicians.

An honourable mention from the Academy, even with no higher place than the ninth, was a title to distinction for a lad of fifteen. Victor, who a year before, on the 10th of July, 1816, had written in one of his copy books, "I will be Chateaubriand or nothing," must have felt that he had placed his foot on the first rung of the ladder of fame. Complimentary

verse flowed in upon him. His erewhile rival, H. Decotte, abandoned the poetical field, beaten. The boy became a boy of mark in his little world, and was not even quite unknown, as a sort of poetic prodigy, in the great world outside the school precincts.¹ So there was much more versifying as may be supposed, and a considerable amount of prose writing too.

Abel, the eldest of the three brothers, had abandoned the military profession after the fall of Joseph Bonaparte, and was apparently devoting himself to business of some sort, and living the pleasant life of young bachelorhood in Paris. Among his numerous friends were several who had a turn for letters. He himself possessed strong literary tastes, and was soon to devote himself entirely to literature, and become a voluminous writer and compiler. With all these author-aspirants Eugène and Victor were on the best of terms. As schoolboys they must have been under comparative restraint; but still they were able to join with their elders in periodical cheap dinners, at which the readings and recitations, though doubtless immature, were doubtless also better than the fare. So no wonder if the *Ecole Polytechnique*, and the military engineering beyond it, receded gradually into the background. To besiege and carry Parnassus, if I may use a well-worn image which would have occurred quite naturally to any writer of the time — to besiege and carry that high embattled hill of Poesy, soon seemed to young Victor the only strategic operation worth pursuing.

This was not a view calculated to commend itself to a military father. General Hugo probably thought that literature and loafing were synonymous terms; does not seem to have been mollified by the fact that Victor had inscribed his name as a law student; and, in fine, adopted the particularly

¹ M. Barbou seems to assign to this date the famous epithet of "sublime child," which Chateaubriand, or somebody else, did, or did not, apply to Victor Hugo. Madame Hugo assigns to it a later date. The whole matter, much discussed as it has been, seems scarcely worth discussion.

stern form of parental argument which consists in cutting off the supplies. Accordingly, when the two boys left school in the August of 1818, they went to live with their mother, and, as would appear, at her charges. *She* had no objection to literature as a profession, and possibly knew of no particular reason why her estranged husband should enjoy the luxury of having his own way. Perhaps, with the prescience of love and motherhood, she even foresaw that, in the case of one of her sons at least, letters would prove to be the path of glory.

On the 3rd of May, 1818, Eugène had obtained a marigold as a prize for an ode sent to the competition of the "Floral Games" of Toulouse. Victor, not to be behindhand, sent three odes to the competition of 1819. For one of these he obtained an honourable mention only; but the other two were more successful, and won respectively a golden lily and a golden amaranth. Prize poems are but questionable products of human industry at the best. These two, however, certainly possessed exceptional merit, and, as the work of a boy of seventeen, are very remarkable. One was on the Virgins of Verdun, who, preferring death to dishonour, had been infamously put to death, by the revolutionary tribunal, for giving money and help to some emigrant nobles; the other was on the re-erection of the statue of Henry IV., overthrown during the Revolution, and now, in these happier Restoration days, replaced on its pedestal with a burst of popular enthusiasm. Both poems were republished three years afterwards, in June, 1822, in the volume of "Odes," and form part of the collected works. Nor need I say more of them here. Neither must I linger, as I am tempted to do, over the performances of the next year or so, the further competitions at Toulouse and the Academy, the poems, political or satirical, which the boy published or wrote. But, hurrying as I am, I cannot forbear to stop one moment to catch a glimpse of young Victor through the eyes of an older poet, Soumet, who, coming from Toulouse at the beginning of 1820, thus described him to a friend: "This child has a very remarkable head, really a study for Lavater. I asked him what he in-

tended to be, and if he purposed devoting himself entirely to literature. He answered that he hoped one day to become a peer of France, . . . and he will succeed."

So we catch sight of him in the first dawn-flush of his fame and young ambition, a noticeable lad who means ere his day of life has worn to evening to win a victor's palm. Meanwhile he and his brother Abel have started a paper. It is to be published twice a month, and the first number has appeared in December, 1819. The title is the *Conservateur Littéraire*, or *Literary Conservative*—a title that rather raises a smile as one thinks how very soon the younger of the two editors is to become the most ardent of innovators in matters literary, and how ultimately he will become the fiercest of Radicals in matter political. As to the causes that have led to the establishment of the periodical—these are not far to seek. Madame Hugo and her sons were anything but rich. Some effort at remunerative work had evidently to be made. According to a friendly article in the political *Conservateur*, Chateaubriand's paper, the literary *Conservateur* was started by the young Hugos with the pious object of repaying to their mother the debt of gratitude which they owed for their education. They wished to add to the graces of her life. "Happy youths," said the article, "to have had a mother who has appreciated the value of education! Happy mother, to see her efforts on their behalf so crowned"!

Into the work of writing for the *Conservateur Littéraire*, Victor entered with characteristic industry. The duties of editor he appears to have shared with his brother Abel; and there were several other writers, of whom, so far as I know the names, one only, Alfred de Vigny, can be said to have made a permanent mark in literature. But the most prolific contributor, without any comparison at all, was Victor himself. Poetry, history, politics, the story of Bug Jargal in its earliest form, literary criticism in profusion, art criticism, dramatic criticism, the boy flamed out his thoughts with the lavish prodigality of a young prince. The periodical lasted from December, 1819, to March, 1821, and forms three vol-

umes. Of these he is said to have written at least two.¹ Later, in 1834, when he began to feel the necessity of giving some account of the changes in his opinions, he made a selection from his earlier writings of this period, and published it as a "Journal of the ideas, opinions, and studies of a young Jacobite in 1819."² But this selection, which is made without any direct reference to the *Conservateur*, is fragmentary only. The exhibited specimens give but a faint idea of the wealth of the mine from which they are drawn. This however is to be noted: young as he was, and I shall have to make the same remark presently in speaking of his earlier verse, he had already acquired a singular mastery over his pen. If his style did not yet possess the individuality, the brilliant colour and music which it acquired ten years afterwards,—if, in a word, it was still a classical and not a romantic style,—yet it was a very good style of its kind. As Carlyle in his first essays was to show that the writer of "Sartor Resartus" might, if so minded, have written his mother tongue excellently in the ordinary way; as Turner in his earlier drawings was to demonstrate that the most imaginative and splendid of colourists had in him the stuff of a minute and patient draughtsman—so, in these prentice papers, did Victor Hugo prove how well he could have walked in the old paths of literature, and that it was not because these were closed to him that he boldly hewed out for himself paths new and untrod.

But the days of innovation were not yet. The *Conservateur Littéraire* was conservative in reality as well as title. The great poetical event of the year 1819, an event marking a very important date in the history of French poetry, was the publication of the posthumous poems of André Chénier. Victor Hugo, reviewing the volume, speaks, as a matter of course, of the writer's royalism, of his martyrdom on the revolutionary scaffold, and pays a tribute too, it must be admit-

¹ So Mr. Biré says. The *Conservateur Littéraire* is now a bibliographical rarity, a black swan among books.

² It forms part of the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées."

ted, to the power of the verse. But then what reserve in the praise, what almost admissions that Chénier's "style is incorrect and sometimes barbarous," his "ideas vague and incoherent," his "imagination effervescent," his "sentences mutilated," his "familiarity" with the "language" "wanting." And, while treating Chénier thus half-heartedly — Chénier, who was the real herald of the romantic movement in French poetry,— the young reviewer has words of gracious recognition for the Abbé Delille, the almost last withered twig upon the classic tree. He speaks of the "elegance and harmony of Delille's style," and praises his "pretty poem" on the "Departure from Eden,"—praising Delille especially for "having changed into a tender commiseration the savage anger which Adam, in Milton's work, had testified against Eve," and for having proved, "by this happy inspiration," "how well he knew the delicacies of the French Muse." Victor Hugo praising Delille at the expense of Milton, this is indeed a Saul among the classic prophets. But it is as nothing to his praising Corneille and Racine at the expense of Shakespeare.

"We have never understood," says he, "the distinction which people seek to establish between the classic style and the romantic style. The plays of Shakespeare and Schiller only differ from the plays of Corneille and Racine in that they are more faulty. That is the reason why, in the former, recourse must be had to greater scenic pomp. French tragedy despises such accessories because it goes straight to the heart, and the heart hates whatever disturbs its interest."

We are very far here from the spirit which was soon to animate the young romantic school, and to induce Petrus Borel to declare that if he could have met the deceased Racine in a theatre of to-day, he would have horsewhipped him before the public!

As regards the poetry which Victor wrote at this time, and published in June, 1822, under the title "*Odes et Poésies Diverses*," the same criticism holds good. It is emphatically classical, not romantic poetry. There are the stock classical apostrophes, to "unhappy Vendée;" to the "light spectres,"

which had been in life the virgins of Verdun; to the dead Duke of Berry, assassinated in 1820; to the new-born Duke of Bordeaux; to the river Jordan, which had supplied water for that young prince's baptism; to the "peoples" who had wrongly made a hero of "Buonaparte," the "formidable inheritor of the spirit of Nimrod." There is here and there also an "O thou!" which sounds distinctly like an echo from the emphatic eighteenth century. And a rhetorical periphrasis too often takes the place of an immediate direct word. Nor are those final notes of exclamation wanting which, according to Coleridge's splenetic remark, seemed to be used by French poets as a kind of hieroglyphics to draw attention to their own cleverness. All these objections are fairly chargeable against the odes; and there is in them besides only too much of that which has so often been the bane of French poetry, eloquence. We English escape that danger with greater ease, for in our mother tongue the distinction between the language of public speech and the language of verse is sharp and clear. Whole classes of words cannot be used indifferently in either. But French is a more homogeneous tongue, and though there is in it a real distinction of a similar kind, that distinction is far less obviously marked. And here, moreover, the young poet's very subjects, and the spirit in which he addressed himself to them, were such as to tempt him into eloquent prose.

"There are," said he, in his original preface, "two intentions in the publication of this work, a political intention, and a literary intention; but in the author's thought the first of these is a consequence of the latter, for the history of men affords no material for poetry, unless that history be regarded in the light of monarchical ideas and religious faith."

Here we seem well in the regions of rhetoric.

But if the odes are formed on older models, and have the faults of an obsolete school, they are excellent samples of the achievements of that school. They possess little force and fervour, and eloquence most real if misplaced, a power of compelling language into metre without recourse to the ob-

vious inversions which French verse,— and English verse also for that matter,— tolerated all too long. “Madre del oro” was the name given by Sir Walter Raleigh to I know not what wonderful yellow metal, supposed in nature’s alchemy to be the generator of the gold he went forth to seek. “Madre del oro!”— if we have not in these first verses of Victor Hugo the fine gold of a renovated French poetry, we have, at least, the matrix from which it would emerge.

CHAPTER III

THE first collection of the “Odes” was published in June, 1822; and though the book produced much less sensation than had been produced two years before by Lamartine’s “Méditations,” yet it clearly “numbered good intellects.” But that highest pleasure which a first great success can bring was denied to the young poet: his mother had died on the 27th of June, 1821.

Of her a word may fittingly here be said. She was evidently a woman of strong character, trained in habits of independent action by her husband’s long absences. Thus she had been led to assume towards her sons, and especially towards the two younger, a position of double parentage. Loving them with a mother’s love and entire devotion, she at the same time ruled them with a father’s firm hand. Of Victor’s capacity she entertained, and with more than abundant cause, a very exalted opinion. “She looked forward,” M. Asseline says, “with the greatest confidence to the future of her son, holding that he might, with even greater justice than Fouquet,” Louis XIV.’s overweening “*Surintendant*, adopt as his device the words *quo non ascendam?* ‘to what may I not rise?’” That to such a mother Victor should, on his side, have been greatly devoted, was but natural. That her death would leave a terrible blank in his life

was clear. It must also have made a considerable difference in his circumstances. The father married again, and under somewhat peculiar conditions, on the 20th of July, 1821, within a month of his first wife's demise. *He* seems to have given his son at this time neither material nor moral support. So the youth of nineteen, left to his own devices, went very sadly on his own way; lived as he could, "and thereto soberly," as Chaucer has it — lived, in fact, as he afterwards represented Marius to have lived in the "*Misérables*," on almost nothing; — worked very hard; and, being out of sorts and quarrelsome, fought a duel with a soldier, who ran him through the arm. "Here am I alone," he wrote to a friend on the 14th of August, "and I have a whole long life to live through, unless" . . .

"Unless!" — what does the word point to? Suicide, or the possibility of some presence that would make life no longer a solitude? Scarcely the former; for here Love takes in hand the web of Victor Hugo's story, and weaves it with threads of purest gold and silk of daintiest dye; and the fabric so woven is, as I think, altogether beautiful.

But, to tell this love-tale aright, I must go a good way back — go back indeed to a time anterior to Victor's birth, — to the days when his father was doing War Office work in Paris.

For among Major Hugo's civilian colleagues at the War Office was a certain Pierre Foucher, a man of culture and ability, with whom the Major entertained very amicable relations. Both were married at about the same time; and Major Hugo, acting as best man to his friend, lifted up his glass at the wedding dinner, and gave utterance to this wish, "May you have a daughter, and I a son, and we will arrange a marriage between them. I drink to their joint health and prosperity." A prophetic toast truly. Major Hugo did have a son: he had three; and M. Foucher had a daughter, Adèle, of whom we have already caught a glimpse in the garden of the Feuillantines — a little trotting creature, just made to be tossed in a swing, or laughingly charioted in a wheel-barrow.

Later, in 1814, we catch a glimpse of her again, going arm in arm with Victor, for the two families had remained on the friendliest terms, to see some royal procession of the restored Bourbons. Later yet, in the winter of 1819-20, we see a small party of friends, almost a family party, meeting night after night at M. Foucher's private apartments in the War Office. He is there, of course, and his wife and son — and Miss Adèle too, we may be sure; and with them are Madame Hugo and her two sons. It is the quietest of quiet parties, for M. Foucher is somewhat of an invalid, and save when he and Madame Hugo take a pinch of snuff together, little is said. But there are other pleasures than those of speech; and as Victor sits in the half-light watching that dark handsome girl at her needle, he thinks that never did hours pass so happily. Indeed when winter comes again, he shows his pleasure in a manner at once imprudent and obvious. Madame Hugo reads his love glances. M. Foucher observes that "Miss Adèle" sees them too — the expression is her own — "without displeasure." Parents are so unreasonable! Victor is penniless. Miss Foucher has nothing. Both are too young to think of marriage. Tears and separation — what other issue is possible?

But not thus was Victor Hugo to be baffled and beaten; not thus was his first love to pass out of his life and heart. Sighs and the languors of passion, day dreams and the enchanted reveries of youthful hope, all to which the poetic temperament turns so naturally for comfort, he thrust resolutely to one side. With the tenacity and strength of will that characterized him through life, he set himself to overcome every obstacle. If industry and strenuous effort could make the marriage possible, Adèle Foucher should be his wife. In simple truth, and with no embellishment of rhetoric or imagination, did he vow to himself, in Lord Tennyson's words,

"To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds
Until he won her."

Of course there were occasional meetings. After Madame Hugo's death the two lovers seem to have come together for one sad interview. Then there is a little confusion of dates. But in July, 1822, as I gather, the opposition of the Fouchers was finally overcome. They had gone to Dreux, taking their daughter with them. Victor followed, as the sunflower turns towards the sun. M. Foucher says: "While I thought him quietly in Paris, the young poet had followed us on foot to Dreux, where we had gone to spend a few days. We discovered him roaming round the house, and I was compelled to come to some understanding with him. At our interview he displayed an unalterable resolve." What was to be done in the face of such perseverance? Everything pleaded for the lovers — Adèle's tears and Victor's energy and confidence in the future. "For ourselves," says M. Foucher again, "that to which we attached special importance was the uprightness of his character, and the innocence of his tastes." So they were engaged, and the "moments" doubtless "ran themselves in golden sands" at Dreux, and afterwards in Paris when the lovers returned thither. Prudence, of course, still counselled delay. But the first edition of the "Odes" realized a profit of 700 francs. In September Louis XVIII., most opportunely, gave the poet a pension of 1,000 francs from his privy purse.¹ Then the young couple were to be spared the expense of house-keeping, for they were to live with the Fouchers. And was not Victor full of work, and already nearly famous? In brief, the marriage took place on the 12th of October, 1822.

Does this love-tale, so beautiful in its beginning — beautiful with strong tender passion, and energy, and high resolve — does it continue beautiful to the end? There is, to quote Lord Tennyson again, a fierce light that beats against a throne; and of both Victor Hugo and Madame Hugo it may be said that they sat enthroned among their

¹ He had already sent Victor Hugo 500 francs some months before for the ode on the assassination of the Duc de Berry.

fellow men, and that the fierce light did not spare them. When I think of the episodes of this courtship and marriage, of the glow, as of early summer, which this time reflected upon the poet's verse, I confess that there also comes back to my mind an autumn picture—"autumn in everything," as Mr. Browning sings—that has been sketched for us by M. Asseline, Madame Hugo's cousin.

We are at Guernsey, at Hauteville House, during the days of the poet's exile. Some forty-three years or so have passed since his marriage. Madame Hugo—but why not tell the tale in M. Asseline's own words, which are wanting neither in skill nor pathos?

"There are," he says, "certain hours of life that sorrow marks for her own. I went one autumn day into Madame Victor Hugo's drawing-room at Hauteville, and found her alone, sunk in sad thoughts, and lying back seemingly exhausted. Her eyes had already grown very weak, and she could not see how painfully I was impressed at finding her so poorly. 'You are not to dine with me to-day,' she said. 'And why?' 'Our gentlemen have organized a little merry-making at Madame Drouet's, and they are expecting you.' 'But I prefer to dine with you; I shall certainly not leave you alone.' 'No, I shall dine with my sister; and really I should take it ill if you stayed. I insist on your going to Madame Drouet's. It will please my husband. There are few opportunities of pleasure-making here. I repeat that you are expected. Go, you will laugh, and the time will pass gaily.' I looked at my cousin as she sat in the shadow of the great curtains with their heavy folds. Her forehead was of marble, her lips without colour, her eyes almost lifeless. Then I drew my armchair nearer to hers, and we lost ourselves in endless talk. . . . The day was waning. We exchanged no thoughts that were not of sadness. 'Go, go,' she said at last; 'you would only make me cry!' I took a few steps towards the door. She called me back: 'You will write down for me that fine passage of verse you were quoting a moment ago:—

"Time, the old god, invests all things with honour,
And makes them white."

And now be quick and join your cousins; don't keep them waiting."

One can almost see her as she sits there in the gloaming of her life, thronged by shadows from the past. And who was the Madame Drouet to whose house her husband and sons had gone for merriment? She was an actress, and long years before had won the poet's good-will by taking the

somewhat inferior part of the Princess Negroni in his play of "Lucrèce Borgia;" and she had too figured as Lady Jane Grey in "Marie Tudor." She had also been, if we may believe his assertion, the most beautiful woman of this century; but then the statement seems to have been made in her presence, which would excuse a little flattery, and Victor Hugo, moreover, never stood in sufficient awe of a superlative. The very fairest among the many million daughters of Eve born into this world of ours between the years 1800 and 1875, or thereabouts! That were indeed a proud position. One rather ventures to doubt whether Madame Drouet^t, even in the noon of her beauty, can have been quite so beautiful as *that*. Superlatives apart, however, there can be no question of her real graces of face and form. Are we not told that the record of them remains, modelled into Pradier's colossal statue of the town of Lille, on the Place de la Concorde, at Paris?

This lady had helped Victor Hugo to escape from Paris in the bad days of December, 1851, after the *Coup d'Etat*. She had followed him to Brussels and Guernsey. She was, I am quoting M. Asseline again, "the veiled witness of his labours," "the discreet confidant of his genius," his "muse," his "very soul," his "Beatrice." Much of his verse was inspired by her. During later years she was his constant daily companion. Nor, especially as seen in the beautiful still starlight of age, can she be regarded as aught save a gracious and dignified figure. There was something queenly, we are told, in her crown of silver hair, with its sheen of palest gold. "I do not think," says M. Asseline, "that any one ever possessed more tact. In a delicate position she evinced a perfect dignity, and an irreproachable delicacy of conduct. Her tenderness" for Victor Hugo "had with years melted into veneration. A kind of august effluence seemed to pass from one to the other."

Dante's wife, who bore his children, and finds no place in his verse—I have often wondered what she thought of Beatrice. And Beatrice was, after all, but an ideal, and as

a vision of one dead and seen in glory. Madame Drouet was no vision. She was a woman of very real flesh and blood, whose influence on the poet was persistent and diurnal. Such a Beatrice might well be among the shadows that collected round Madame Hugo as she sat all alone that autumn evening in the gloom of the old oak and tapestry of Hauteville House.

But, after all, I have no wish to exaggerate, or weigh upon this matter unduly. There are many shadows that will haunt age and ill-health, even when there is no Madame Drouet in the case; and to endeavour to find the truth in the obscure heart-relations of two human beings is mostly groping and guess work. Through what vicissitudes of love the poet and his wife had passed, who shall tell? "*L'Homme qui rit*" is the latest but one of his novels, and in it there is a passage which would seem to have been suggested rather by his feeling for her than for his silver-haired Beatrice:

"The heart," he says, "grows saturated with love, as with some divine salt which keeps it from decay. Hence the incorruptible adherence of those who have loved one another from the dawn of life, and the freshness of an old love that is prolonged. There exists an embalment of love. It is of Daphnis and Chloe that are made Philemon and Baucis. In such cases old age is like youth, as evening is like morning."

As to Madame Hugo, within a year of her death, in 1868, and almost blind, she writes: "My husband is leaving Brussels the day after to-morrow. He is young, and of exceptional strength; he is happy and covered with glory, which is my greatest joy."

And so, by a natural transition, we go back to the year 1822, when life and love were in their morning glow together, and the young poet was looking forward gaily, confidently, to his new life and its responsibilities. Money was of the scarcest; work was a necessity; and from work Victor Hugo never shrank. Within a couple of months of his marriage he had written two more odes — one, of considerable

beauty, on Louis XVII., the poor little captive king. A second edition of the odes appeared before the end of the year. And moreover he was busy with a novel begun in May, 1821, set aside for a time after his mother's death, and to be soon published anonymously in February, 1823.

This novel is "*Han d'Islande*," and may not unfairly be described as a very juvenile work, which would long since have faded into the night of oblivion if it were not for the reflected light of "*Nôtre Dame de Paris*" and the "*Misérables*." Victor Hugo himself, writing in 1833, calls it the production "of a young man, of a very young man;" says that it was written "during an attack of fever;" declares that only the love passages have any basis of reality; and concludes that if it "be worth classing at all, it can only be classed as a fantastic novel." After so frank an admission, the critic is, of course, half disarmed. He can do no more than put the arrows of his satire back into the quiver. So I shall not dwell unduly on the character and habits of Han, the hero, though these can scarcely be accepted quite seriously.

For Han is a kind of "man-beast of boundless savagery," who, living his baleful life in the Norway of 1699, indulges cannibalistic propensities, tears his human prey with long claw-like nails, and assuages his grief for the death of his son by cutting that young man's skull in two, and using the upper half as a drinking cup. An eccentric way of showing honour to the deceased, no doubt, but not more eccentric than the beverages quaffed out of this amazing vessel. Han's "particular vanities, as Mr. Stiggins would have said — and by the by he resembled that worthy in the character of his gloves, which were very large and worn constantly, so as to hide his talons,—his particular vanities were the "blood of men and the waters of the seas." Pah! how nauseous and improbable! Of human blood I say nothing, and for sufficient reasons; but sea water! Even when put into the plural, and set before an ogre, I defy him to drink it out of anything but bravado. Canning, speaking in the

dark ages of gastronomy, declared that if any one said he preferred dry champagne to sweet, he told a lie. I am bold to make the same assertion with regard to Han, if he alleged any real liking for his "waters of the seas."

It will be gathered from the above that "Han d'Islande" is a book in which the horrible plays a considerable part. And this is so. With such a protagonist as Han, murder and bloodshed are not likely to be wanting. Part of the scene is laid in the dead-house at Drontheim; and the keeper of the dead-house, a fantastic pedant of the name of Spiagudry, is a not unimportant actor in the story. Among the other *dramatis personæ* are an old noble, Schumacher, kept in prison by the intrigues of his enemies; his sweet and lovely daughter Ethel; and the son of one of Schumacher's chief enemies, a young officer, called Ordener, who, for love of Ethel, dares Han in his lair, to get possession of a casket containing the proofs of Schumacher's innocence. Among the incidents are a revolt of miners, and a terrible massacre of soldiers, after which "certain poor goatherds" see "in the gloaming" a "beast with a human face, drinking blood, and sitting upon heaps of the slain." There is finally a good deal of "business" of one kind and another. Han delivers himself up to justice for no very obvious reason, and sets fire to his prison and the contiguous barracks, perishing in the conflagration. Schumacher's enemies receive the reward of their misdeeds. He is released and reinstated in royal favour; and Ordener and Ethel are married and live happy ever after.

A book of an obsolete type, of a type which seems to have been popular at the beginning of this century, when Maturin and "Monk" Lewis were writers of renown, but now altogether of the past. Think what inextinguishable laughter would play like sheet lightning round such a book if published in this year of grace 1888. And yet it may be safely affirmed that of the novels published in 1888 not one in a hundred will be equally well written, or show such in-born power of clear and effective narration. Smile as we may at

Han and his blood and bones, the man who at twenty could write this book had a great future before him.

"Han d'Islande" was criticised pretty freely, especially by the liberal journalists; but it won the favour of Charles Nodier, himself a novelist of no mean renown, a critic, a bibliophile, and also incidentally a graceful poet. He, a much older man than Victor Hugo, took the latter into his affectionate regard, and introduced him to his own wide circle of friends. Nor was this the only piece of good fortune that the book brought with it. The publication took place in the first part of February, 1823, and before the month had run its course, the king increased the poet's pension by 2,000 francs, and thus enabled him, in the following month, to leave M. Foucher's hospitable dwelling, and set up house-keeping for himself. But joy and sorrow,—such are the alternations of human life. As the rapture of the young couple's marriage-day had been broken in upon by the suddenly-declared insanity of Victor's brother Eugène, so now did a sad bereavement come to mar the happiness of the first months of their wedded life. A son was born to them in August, and in October the baby died.

That the poet worked hard at this time was almost a matter of course. In this very year 1823 he seems to have written upwards of twenty odes. In May, 1823, after some squabble with his publishers, he brought out a second edition of "Han d'Islande." In July there appeared the first number of a periodical, the *Muse Française*, that lasted just a year, and to which he contributed two odes and five prose articles. These last were afterwards reproduced, but with certain alterations, in the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées." They include a not very remarkable paper on Byron, then just deceased, and one, of greater importance, on "Quentin Durward." The latter has a special interest as showing what was the ideal of a novel formed, even at this early date, by the future author of "Nôtre Dame de Paris" and the "Misérables." "The novel as written by Walter Scott," he says, "is picturesque but prosaic. There is an-

other novel that remains to be created, a novel more beautiful, to our thinking, and more complete. That novel will be at once a drama and an epic, it will be picturesque but poetical, real and also ideal, true and at the same time great. It will graft Walter Scott into Homer." Sir Walter prosaic—that may well seem a hard saying. Nor can one quite avoid a smile at reading, among the suppressed passages of the article, a paragraph in which the loyal and patriotic Victor falls foul of "that Scotchman" for selecting Louis XI. from among the roll of French kings as one of the characters of his novel. "None but a foreigner," he says, indignantly, "would have thought of such a thing. Well may we recognize in this an inspiration of the English muse!" Little can the poet have foreseen, when he shot this shaft at perfidious Albion, what a part the same Louis XI. would play in his own novel of "Nôtre Dame."¹

A second volume of odes, under the title of "Nouvelles Odes," appeared in March, 1824. The preface is an important document, as showing how little, even yet, the poet was prepared to step forward as the leader of the Romantic movement. He declares that, "for his part, he is profoundly ignorant of what the *Romantic* style and the *Classic* style may happen to be;" deplores the division of contemporary literature into two hostile camps; is anxious to be a messenger of peace between the contending parties; is anxious, above all, to guard against all "suspicion of heresy in the quarrel"; is full of "respect" for the "great name of Boileau," who, as he says, "shares with our Racine the great honour of having fixed the French language, a fact which in itself would suffice to prove that he too had a creative genius." And in a long letter to the *Journal des Débats*, dated the 26th of July, 1824, he takes up the same points, and is at great pains to prove that he had in no way innovated in his use of language, and that writers recognized as classic had em-

¹ The preface to the "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées" implies, not quite ingenuously, that the various papers had been reprinted without alteration.

ployed expressions and images analogous to those for which he had been censured.

The preface moreover contains one or two eloquent passages of what may be described as "throne and altar" literature; and the same spirit breathes in the odes themselves. But for detailed analysis I have unfortunately no space. What has been said of the first volume of the odes must do duty for criticism on the second. Both deal with the same class of subjects, and in much the same way. That treating so often of the matter of politics, the verse has a tendency to eloquence rather than poetry, is true. Yet can one not help admiring the virility of the themes selected. There was something of manhood in a lyre that vibrated so readily to any large national interest or feeling. And as the poet went on striking the strings, he decidedly acquired greater skill as a musician. The poetic quality of the verse in the second volume is better than in the first.

Louis XVIII. was a gentleman of the old school, who loved his ease and his Horace, and possessed a full share of the old French courtly *esprit*. Though he certainly read the young poet's poems, it may be doubted whether their fervour was quite to his taste. But neither he nor his successor, Charles X., could afford to overlook a writer of such unmistakable power and so eminently "well-thinking." The most popular poet of the time was without doubt Béranger, whose songs, borne on the wings of music, were finding their way into every hamlet of France. And Béranger was not "well-thinking" at all. As he explained in some of the wittiest and most deftly turned of his ringing couplets, the king could not be counted among his friends. His verses, now half wrapt in oblivion, were then as pebbles from the brook, thrown by some master-slinger and whistling round the monarchy and the accepted faith. They were a distinct political power. All the more did it behove the Government to encourage writers who were good royalists and good Catholics. Accordingly, some very acceptable rewards in money had been bestowed on Victor Hugo by Louis XVIII. Charles X., who

succeeded his brother on the 16th of September, 1824, added to these a coveted distinction. On the 29th of April, 1825, Victor Hugo, and his brother-poet and friend, Lamartine, were made knights of the Legion of Honour. Madame Hugo tells how her husband and herself, and their infant daughter, Léopoldine, born in the previous year, were just starting in the *diligence* for Blois, on a visit to General Hugo, when the letter announcing Victor's nomination was placed in his hands. A pleasant surprise for the father, when they reached their destination, as may be supposed. He detached the piece of red ribbon from his own buttonhole, and transferred the honourable badge to the coat of his son. As a further mark of royal favour, the poet received, while at Blois, an invitation to the king's coronation at Reims, on the 29th of May. He went. But the ode in which the event is commemorated is scarcely one of his happiest efforts.

This same year 1825 marks the point at which Victor Hugo's genius, which had hitherto been flowing on in a fairly smooth and even bed, suddenly takes the decisive leap in its rush towards Romanticism. So far he had not given in his adherence to the new school. He seemed unaccountably to be hesitating, temporising, hanging back. Henceforward there will be no doubt as to his position. In the poems written during this year, especially the ballads, there is a marked advance. In the preface to the third volumes of the odes published in the October of the following year, 1826, there is an entire difference of tone. As Madame Hugo says, he there "resolutely unfurls the standard of liberty in literature." In 1827 he was rallying to that standard the flower of the intellectual youth of France, and boldly standing forward as their acknowledged chief.

CHAPTER IV

THE nineteenth century dawns sooner, I think, in Germany than in either of the other two great intellectual countries of Europe. Possibly the admirers of the eighteenth century would account for this by saying that there is some slight haze, as of early morning, in the German genius, and that our own age is nebulous, and lacks definiteness and clear precision. I would rather suggest, as one of many explanations, that Germany had no great classic literature from which to emancipate herself. It was not till the eighteenth century had passed its meridian that she could boast of writers who, as artists in language, rank with the great poets and prose-men of England and France. Her literature, being young, was untrammelled by the past, and, like Chaucer's monk —

"lette old thinges pacc,
And held after the newe world the trace."

Accepting this explanation for what it is worth, of the fact itself there can, I think, be no question. Take a piece of literary criticism by Dr. Johnson, or of art criticism by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and compare it with a piece of criticism by Lessing, and the great relative modernness of the latter is at once apparent. It is the criticism of intuition and imagination as opposed to the old criticism of plain common sense. So too in poetry, Schiller, and even Olympian and semi-classic Goethe, were precursors.

Close after the Germans came our own great poets of the last decade of the eighteenth, and the beginning of this century. And here the task was in some ways harder. A strong current had to be stemmed, an effort towards emancipation to be made. Pope and even Dryden were still a living influence, when Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Shelley, Keats, and Byron undertook, each after his several kind,

to renew the language of poetry, break up the mould in which verse had so long and so mechanically been cast, and give to words and rhythm their full music, and freedom, and varied charm. To shake off the trammels of an immediate past was the first work which these great poets had to do. But in doing it what help did they not receive from a still earlier past? If their own practice and theories were called in question, could they not appeal to such precedent and authority as few Englishmen at least were likely to gainsay? What names had the "classic" school in English poetry to put beside the names of Shakespeare and Milton? Was there any classicist, however hide-bound, however full of reserves and doubts, who could boldly refuse to admit the greatness of Chaucer, and Spenser, and of the dramatists of the days of Elizabeth and James I.?

France stood in a different position from either Germany or England. Unlike Germany, she already possessed a body of literature universally recognized as of supreme importance and high artistic merit. Unlike England, the body of literature which she possessed was, on the poetical side at least, almost wholly classical. No one certainly would desire to diminish in aught the lustre that lingers round the names of Villon, the poet-thief, and Charles d'Orléans, the poet-prince, or to deny the wit and vigour of Clément Marot, and the grace of Ronsard. But to put these names in juxtaposition with those of Shakespeare or Milton, were to court ridicule. None but an enthusiast would even put them beside the names of Racine and Corneille, of Molière and Lafontaine. Sainte-Beuve did not venture to do it even in the full ardour of his romantic time. The later men, in truth, were so great that they dwarfed and hid the earlier. The French Romantic movement had to fight its way against the opposition of Racine, and with no such pioneer as Shakespeare.

And so it came tardily. Victor Hugo did not decisively and openly take up the standard till 1826; and in 1826, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott had long executed their best work, and Keats, Shelley, and Byron were dead.

Yes, the movement came tardily; and, did space allow, there would be an interest in marking its course. Chateaubriand helped it forward unquestionably by his eloquent insistence on the picturesque beauty of the Christian faith as seen in history, and by his largely-executed pictures of nature. Madame de Staël helped it too by giving to the French mind a glimpse, and more than a glimpse, of Germany. England assisted likewise, through the influence of Byron, whose fame, unlike that of his poet contemporaries, overleapt the narrow seas, and became European,—and also through the influence of Scott. In 1819 came the publication of the fragments left by André Chénier, who had been done to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal but a day or two before the fall of Robespierre in 1793. Poor André Chénier!—legend, which in its way is often truer than history, speaks of him as striking his forehead just before the fall of the fatal axe, and exclaiming, “There was something *there!*” Yes, there was something there, no doubt, something no less important than a renovation of the poetics of France. Half a Greek in blood, more than half a Greek in spirit, with a knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity to which Keats made no pretension, and a command over language—a verbal brush-power, if I may use the expression—scarcely inferior to Keats’ own—he was distinctly the greatest force that had appeared in French poetry since the setting of the *Grand Siècle* of Louis XIV.

Chénier’s poems were first published in 1819. In 1820 appeared Lamartine’s “*Méditations*,” and the Romantic movement though not in an aggressive way, was definitely started. The latter book at once took the world by storm. There was something of novelty and delight in verse of such exceeding harmony. It seemed to flow like a wide and beautiful river, large and limpid, and mirroring of preference in its waters the far heavens above—and reflecting the banks too, but these last somewhat less definitely, and with no strong precision of outlines. At the same time there was a young officer in the royal guard, Alfred de Vigny by name,

who was writing what the world will not willingly let die. He wrote little, whether then or afterwards. The poems which he published during his life, though he lived long, fill a slender volume only; and an equally slender volume, "*Les Destinées*," appeared after his death. But among the earlier poems are "*Eloa*," the story of the angel born of one of Christ's tears, and "*Madame de Soubise*" a story of St. Bartholomew, and "*Dolorida*," and "*La Frégate la Sérieuse*"; and pervading the later verse there is a sombre stoicism of singular individuality and power. Judging by quality, as a poet should be judged, Alfred de Vigny keeps the pride of place which he won for himself in the years following 1820.

Victor Hugo, as we have seen, had hesitated somewhat before openly giving his adherence to the movement. When he did do so, he leaped almost at once into the position of its acknowledged chief. Of the men who might, perhaps, have contested his chieftaincy, Lamartine, though equally copious, never had his fire and overmastering energy, and De Vigny wrote little, wrote fastidiously, and was in no sense a leader of men. The third volume of the odes (together with certain ballads) appeared in October, 1826, with a preface more advanced in tone than any the poet had yet published. The verse itself was in every sense newer, especially in the ballads. These were not our modern-antique friends, of which we have had so many lately, the ballades with an *e*—one of those complicated exotic forms of verse from which the real essence of poetry seems somehow to evaporate with such ease. They were ballads with a story in them, or some fantastic, light, tripping, aerial description of the legendary creatures, sylph or fairy, *peri* or gnome, that haunted the Middle Age or Eastern imagination. There was a Devil's frolic, and a giant's monologue—things which would have been an abomination to the plain eighteenth century—and there were love-stanzas to a mediæval Madeleine. The whole is full of grace and music.

At the same time Victor Hugo was writing a very serious

drama. Whether this play was originally planned for actual performance, is a moot point. In France, as we all know, there is not the same practical divorce that there is in England between literature and the stage. Nearly every French writer of power in verse or fiction feels drawn, sooner or later, into the glare of the foot-lights. There is no inherent improbability therefore, but rather the reverse, in Madame Hugo's statement that her husband thus early felt the general attraction, and wrote his drama with a view to its performance by the great actor Talma. M. Biré, however, doubts the story, and gives cogent reasons for his doubts. I shall not venture to decide between the two. What is certain is that Talma died at about this time, and that "Cromwell," for such was the subject of the piece, soon acquired such gigantic proportions as effectually relegated it to the position of a drama "for the closet."

But if the play was for the closet, the preface was for the battle-field. As Cardinal Newman tells us he has ever dated the beginning of the Tractarian movement from the preaching of Keble's Assize sermon at Oxford, so might many an ardent Romanticist date the origin of the Romantic movement from the publication of the "Préface de Cromwell" in October, 1827. "It shone in our eyes like the Tables of the Law on Mount Sinai," says Théophile Gautier, "its arguments seemed to us irrefutable." Never did some sixty pages of eloquent prose come into the world with more aggressive opportuneness.

"The present generation," I am quoting Théophile Gautier again, "must have some difficulty in conceiving the state of effervescence in people's minds at that time. A movement similar to the Renaissance was in progress. The sap of a new life flowed everywhere impetuously. All things were simultaneously germinating, quickening, burgeoning, bursting into leaf and blossom. The flowers exhaled a passionate perfume, the very air was an intoxicant; we were mad with lyric ardour and art. We seemed to ourselves to have discovered the great lost secret — and so we had, the lost secret of poesy."

It was among minds just ripening for this state of ecstasy that the celebrated "Préface" came like a summons to arms

and conquest. Nor did the trumpet now give an uncertain sound. There was no halting, no hesitation any longer, no doubt as to what the difference between the Classic and Romantic schools might happen to be. Boldly, perhaps even rashly, did the writer declare that there had been three ages of poetry, each answering to a given state of society, the ode for primitive times, the epic for antiquity, the drama for to-day. "The ode," so the writer declares, "sings of eternity, the epic solemnizes history, the drama paints life." But to paint life, the drama must often be prepared to set the beautiful to one side. Nay, it is a law of the highest art that the beautiful itself will be enhanced by the juxtaposition of what is ugly. Thus the grotesque comes into being. As to the "unities," they are naught. As to Racine, he is a "divine poet," if you like, but not a dramatist, not, above all, to be accepted as the typical writer of French verse. And in a brilliant passage the writer describes his ideal of what a dramatic style should be.

"Dramatic verse," he cries, "should be free, frank, direct, sufficiently outspoken to say everything without prudery or affectation; able to pass by natural transition from the comic to the tragic, from the sublime to the grotesque; by turns matter-of-fact and poetical, at once artistic and inspired, profound and full of surprises, large and true; skilful to vary the pauses in the line so as to break the monotony of the alexandrine; rather prone to run a sentence from one line to another than to imbroid it by inversion of the words out of their ordinary sequence; faithful to the rhyme, that queen-slave, that supreme grace of our poetry, that generating power of our verse; inexhaustible in variety; too subtle for analysis in its elegance and technical qualities; able, like Proteus, to take a thousand shapes without changing its real type and character; sober of declamatory speech; playful in the dialogue; faithful to the character of the person represented; mindful to keep its due place, and only beautiful as it were fortuitously, in spite of itself, and unconsciously; by turns lyric, epic, dramatic; able to run over the whole poetic scale, and go from the bottom to the top, from the highest to the most vulgar thoughts, from the most broadly comic to the most grave, from the most concrete to the most abstract, and yet never passing outside the limits of a spoken scene."

Racine not a dramatist! Shakespeare the "highest poetic altitude of modern times"! O evil days, O perversion of

public taste! cried the outraged classicists. O dawn of a new and splendid era! answered their Romantic opponents. But Victor Hugo was mindful of the fact that an artist's theories must be proved by his practice, not his reasoning. As Shelley says,

"It is a dangerous invasion
When poets criticise. Their station
Is to delight, not pose."

So together with the "Préface de Cromwell" came "Cromwell" itself. Unfortunately the edifice is, I think, scarcely as striking as the portico. The play is hardly one of the poet's great plays. The whole action turns on Cromwell's desire to be crowned king, and the plot, in so far as it can be called a plot, consists in the exhibition of the various forces opposed to the realization of his wishes—the last words being Cromwell's half-musing aside, "When then shall I be a king?" But even so we scarcely reach a very striking or effective dramatic climax. The first act, I confess, always seems to me better adapted to the libretto of an opera than to a serious historical drama. For there are degrees of admissible improbability even on the stage. We allow a larger latitude to poetry than to prose, and to music than to either. And so it seems to want a chorus of male voices to give even an air of probability to this meeting of Roundheads and Cavaliers, for the most part quite unknown to each other, who have come together in a public tavern-room to declaim treason and conspire against the Protector. How is secrecy imaginable in such conditions without basses and tenors, and a full orchestra?

But lest this criticism should be taxed with frivolity, I hasten to add—what indeed scarcely any one would now think of denying,—that with "Cromwell" the language of the poetical drama in France made an immense stride. And at the same time Victor Hugo was renovating the language of poetry generally, was reviving ancient and forgotten metres, inventing new metres, and pouring a new and spark-

ling wine into the old bottles of French verse. The "*Chasse du Burgrave*," with its echoing rhymes, and the "*Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean*," are dated respectively January and June, 1828; and in January, 1829 again heralded by a warrior-preface came out the first edition of the "*Orientales*."

A brilliant, a superb book. It opens with a description of the cloud from the Lord that broke in fire on Sodom and Gomorrah; and it almost closes with a kind of dreamily expressed desire that the mists on the French horizon should suddenly break, and disclose a Moorish town sending up, like a rocket, through the evening sky, its minarets of gold. But why tantalise the reader thus? An English book is for English readers; else might I here quote freely. And translated verse? A translation that renders the music and colour of the original—that is at once really a translation and really poetry—such a translation is far rarer than a good poem. I am too obviously no Rossetti nor Fitzgerald, and have no intention of courting ruin by an attempt to emulate their renderings of the poetry of early Italy and of Omar's "*Eastern lay*." Not for me is it to "*English*" Victor Hugo's masterpieces. I must ask my readers, therefore, if so be that French is unknown to them, to imagine the indolent swaying music to which "*Sara the Bather*" swings to and fro in her hammock over the waters of the fountain; and the superb march-movement of the "*Djinns*," those Eastern imps, who, as the verse swells in syllables and power, seem hurrying from some distance beyond distance till we hear round us the roar of their wings and the tumult of their onset,—sounds that gradually die away as, baffled and beaten, they retreat into the silence from whence they came. I must ask my readers too take my word for the light that palpitates through it all, and the brilliant colour, and the great variety of tone,—the energy of the ode to Napoleon, the light grace of "*Sultan Achmet's*" offer of love to the beauty of Grenada, the tragic directness of swift vengeance in the story of the maiden done to death by her brothers because her veil has been uplifted.

That these "Orientales" are of a doubtful Orientalism has been whispered by the erudite. But what can that possibly matter? Byron's "Bride of Abydos," "Giaour," and "Lara," Moore's "Lalla Rookh," these "Orientales" themselves, must be judged as poems, as pieces of art whose "motive" is of the Morning-land, and not merely from the standpoint of the traveller and the historian. And whatever be the verdict on Byron and Moore, there can be no doubt that as pieces of art these poems of Victor Hugo are superb. The workmanship is of the finest quality. This is scarcely the time and place for a discussion on the technicalities of French verse, else might one here descant learnedly on "rich" rhymes, and "supporting consonants," and the "cæsura," and the relations of the sentence to the line. Suffice it to say that judged by the highest standard in such matters, neither the "Orientales," nor any of the other verse of Victor Hugo's maturity, can be found wanting. Does this statement coming from an English critic seem to require support? We may accept the testimony of Théophile Gautier and M. de Banville freely; for if Gautier and M. de Banville are not artists in words, they are nothing; and their reverence for Victor Hugo's technique amounts almost to a superstition.

As to metre, he seemed to play with it. Sainte-Beuve gave him at about this time an old copy of Ronsard, inscribing it to the "greatest lyrical inventor French poetry has known since Ronsard;" and the praise had been fairly won. I shall take but one example from the "Orientales"—the *Djinns*, to which I have already referred. The first verse is in lines of two syllables, the second verse in lines of three, and so on till the central verse, where ten syllables are reached,—after which the verses decline, in the same way, till the last verse, which consists of lines of two syllables again. A mere feat of verbal juggling the reader will say, and no more to be ranked as poetry than an acrostic. Not at all. The poem is poetry, and poetry of a high order, and the lines of varying length are so used as to

emphasize the idea, and give it its fullest force. I know no finer *crecendo* and *diminuendo* in verbal music.

No wonder that poetry of this freshness and beauty, on its first blossoming into that ardent young world, acted as a kind of lyrical intoxicant. No wonder that the youth of the time hailed the writer as their hero, their demi-god. M. Amaury-Duval, writing of days just anterior to these, and of the joyous simple dances in Nodier's rooms at the Library of the Arsenal, says:

"The attitude of the poet in society was quiet and almost grave, and contrasted with a beardless face full of sweetness and charm. He did not take part, like Alfred de Musset¹ and the rest, in our youthful amusements; but the serious side was not really, I think, the most important side of his character. Did he consider it necessary to affect gravity in view of his high mission? If so, he was taking unnecessary trouble: his works alone, and his genius would have sufficed to awe us into respect and admiration."

And Théophile Gautier, writing of the subsequent days of 1830, when the great battle of "Hernani" had been fought and won, tells us of the inward tremors with which he first sought an audience with the "Master,"—of his going three times up the stairs, before he mustered courage to ring the bell,—and then, half whimsically, compares his actual entry to that of Esther into the presence of Ahasuerus.

So between 1826 and 1830 was the "Master" held in reverence by the young Romantic school. They gathered round him as round their natural leader. And what brilliant names did the band contain! Saint-Beuve was one of them. He first made the poet's acquaintance in January, 1827. They were brought together in this way: Sainte-Beuve had written two perfectly independent but sympathetic articles, on the "Odes et Ballades," for the *Globe* newspaper, a very distinguished organ of that time. Victor Hugo called to thank him for the articles. He returned the call, and there resulted a very close intimacy and friend-

¹ Who has left so charming a memento of these evenings in the "Réponse à M. Charles Nodier," dated August, 1843.

ship, destined too soon to pass into indifference and a very armed neutrality. The whole story of their relations is curious. I shall not, however, attempt to write it here. Suffice it to say, that while the friendship lasted either poet was not without influence on the other, and the flame of mutual admiration flared high. Sainte-Beuve afterwards asserted, in one of his interesting autobiographical notes, written long after this date, that the only time in his life when his singularly fluid nature had been really fixed and congealed was "in Victor Hugo's world," adding, however, that it was "then only by the effect of a charm." And at the time he sang his friend's praises *fortissimo*. As to Victor Hugo, *he*, as we know, always had a tendency to superlatives. There is one of his odes, written in December, 1827, and addressed "To my friend S. B.,"—who can be none other than Sainte-Beuve,—in which he addresses that young gentleman as an "eagle," a "giant," a "star," and exhorts him to make the acquaintance of the lightning, and to roll through the realms of thought like a "royal meteor" with trailing locks. We, who chiefly know a later Sainte-Beuve, can scarcely recognise him in the character of a comet; and, even then, he himself, for he was always very reasonable, must sometimes have smiled at these grandiose epithets. Sitting somewhat apart in the shadow, and rhyming a sonnet to a white cap, or an eye of jet—this is how he lives in Alfred de Musset's reminiscences, and I take it the sketch is truer to nature.

Alfred de Musset—he too was one of the band that pressed round the "Master." Ah, charming and admirable poet, whose verse, to use his own poignant image, always trailed after it a drop of blood—whose life was ruined all the more irretrievably because he had glimpses of a better heaven than that sky of Paris that lowered above his head—poor "Enfant du Siècle," child of this age of ours which gave its offspring no better refuge against the sorrows of our human lot than drink—surely as a kind of epitaph over his career might fittingly be used those lines of Wordsworth,

"We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

And there is another of Victor Hugo's followers to whom these words would equally apply: poor Gérard de Nerval, who, after leading hither and thither a strange incoherent existence, hanged himself, in a hideous nook of old Paris, in January, 1855. But these are pitiful memories. I must not incongruously forget that we are looking at the generation of 1830 in its spring. There was no thought of the distant days of winter and death when Sainte-Beuve, and Musset, and Gérard de Nerval and the two Deschamps, and De Vigny, and the exuberant, inexhaustible Dumas, and Delacroix, "the Hugo of paint,"—when all these and many more poets, writers, artists, used to meet in the brave days of the Romantic movement, and recognized Victor Hugo as their chief.¹

CHAPTER V

MEANWHILE was no effort to be made towards rescuing the French stage from the thralldom of Classicism? Was the "Préface de Cromwell" to remain a barren manifesto, an empty trumpet blast preceding no advance of conquering arms? Was the author of "Cromwell" to rest content with a mere literary triumph, while the theatre could still boast itself unassailed and unwon? Not thus did Victor Hugo understand his duties as leader of the Romantic movement.

And here this England of ours did yeoman's service, and pioneered the attack most effectually. In July and August, 1822, a company of English actors had endeavoured to perform the plays of Shakespeare for the benefit of the Parisian public, but had been met with an organized opposition, and

¹ They called their brotherhood the *Cénacle*, from the upper room in which our Lord had partaken of the Last Supper with His disciples.

cries of "Speak French," "Down with Shakespeare, he is one of Wellington's aide-de-camps," and other popular amenities of a similar kind. In the latter part of the summer of 1827, the attempt was renewed. The great John Kemble's lesser brother Charles came over from London,—in some trepidation, as his daughter Frances tells us—and with him other English actors and actresses, among whom was a certain Irish girl called Miss Smithson. They took the fickle Parisians by storm. Since 1822 the Romantic movement had waxed and grown strong. Shakespeare became the rage. That young France in the least understood his language can very safely be denied. But the situations were new and striking, and the whole thing unconventional, and in accord with the whim of the hour. Miss Smithson especially achieved a real triumph,—“received a rather disproportionate share of admiration,” is the form in which Frances Kemble puts it. And that fair critic speaks also somewhat slightly of Miss Smithson's “figure and face of Hibernian beauty,” and of her “Irish accent.” As to the niceties of the brogue, they were, no doubt, as Frances Kemble says, lost upon French ears, which would know no distinction between the English of Dublin and the English of London. But as for the “Hibernian beauty,” most of us, I think, would be inclined to say that the term is scarcely one of reproach, and that Erin's daughters are not among the ill-favoured of the earth. Anyhow, Miss Smithson, brogue, beauty, and all, was for the hour the idol of the French public:—and one Frenchman of genius, Berlioz the composer, the Hugo of music, conceived for her a passion which has become historical, and married her five years afterwards, when her hour of popularity had passed, and she was ruined, and possibly a cripple for life. The Romanticists, it will thus be seen, carried romance beyond the sphere of their art.

Charles Kemble's visit to Paris took place in September, 1827. In October is dated the “*Préface de Cromwell*.” And in the following May, Edmund Kean made a flitting

appearance on the French boards. He was drunk, according to the French tradition, when he came on the stage to play Richard III., and having kept the audience waiting for a very long time, was badly received; but as he warmed to his work, his genius carried all before him. There was no resisting it. And his performance of Shylock, two or three days afterwards, made a lasting impression. I seem to remember, not so very many years ago, a dramatic feuilleton of Jules Janin, the famous critic, in which he spoke of the thrill of horror that went through the house at the deadly realism with which the Jew sharpened his knife upon his sleeve.

So with Shakespeare the romantic drama, in its right royal English dress, first found a place upon the Parisian stage. But obviously that was not enough. To really move a nation's heart, it is imperative to use that nation's speech. A foreign play is for the cultivated few only. It was for the French writers to "dare to follow," now that Shakespeare had "cleared the way." Accordingly, in the early part of 1829, Alexandre Dumas rushed forward with his play of Henry III., which came upon the public as something young, fresh, and full of exuberant life; and, on the 24th of June, Victor Hugo had finished "*Marion de Lorme*."

The Théâtre Français, the Porte-Saint-Martin, and the Odéon all competed for the play; and the Théâtre Français, as first in the field, was preparing to put it on the stage. But here the Government intervened. There is one of the acts, the fourth, in which Louis XIII. shows pitifully, and as a mere tool in the hands of his imperious minister, Cardinal Richelieu. Now in July, 1829, the monarchy of the elder branch of the Bourbons was tottering to its fall. The attacks made upon it from all sides were incessant and most bitter. The king especially was accused of being under priestly government. M. de Martignac, the Home Minister, may therefore be forgiven if he thought the moment inopportune for the production of a play which might easily be used politically as a weapon of offence. Naturally Victor Hugo

took a different view. He appealed from the minister to the king. The king granted him a private audience on the 7th of August; received him with the greatest affability and kindness; but, on reflection, did not see that it would be safe to yield. He, however, as some indemnity, offered the poet an increase of 2,000 francs to his existing pensions. This Victor Hugo thought it right to refuse, though in most loyal, and one may almost say humble, terms; whereupon he became more popular than ever, and the opposition journals talked of his incorruptibility.

But, as Madame Hugo rightfully says, "Victor Hugo was not one of those men who are discouraged by a check." He at once set to work, began "*Hernani*" on the 29th of August, and, on the 1st of October, read it to the Committee of the Théâtre Français.

Then there ensued, as before, a great battle, a series of skirmishes, excursions and alarms, affairs of outposts. On the 18th of December Victor Hugo wrote to a friend:

"You know that I am overwhelmed, overburdened, crushed, throttled. The Comédie Française, '*Hernani*,' the rehearsals, the green-room rivalries of actors and actresses, the intrigues of the newspapers and the police; and, on the other hand, my private affairs, which are much embroiled, my father's inheritance not yet settled, our property in Spain of which Ferdinand VII. has taken possession, the compensation due to us in Saint Domingo and kept back by Boyer, our sands at Sologne which have been on sale for the last twenty-three months, our houses in Blois which our stepmother is trying to keep away from us, consequently nothing, or next to nothing, to be saved out of the wreck of a considerable fortune. Such is my life."

Not a very happy picture, certainly. But our immediate interest is with those special troubles that thickened round the production of "*Hernani*." To begin with, the performers were hostile. Mdle. Mars, the great tragic actress, on whom had naturally devolved the chief part of Doña Sol, was a woman of fifty, and had little sympathy, as may be supposed, with novelties. Alexandre Dumas relates, in his sparkling way, how she would interrupt the rehearsals again and again, and worry the poor author with poetical sugges-

tions. It was not till he threatened to take the part from her that she was brought to reason. Her frigidity froze the other actors; and the bitterness of a terrible winter tended to freeze them still more. Meanwhile the press was not idle. Scraps and detached passages of the play leaked out, and were travestied and ridiculed. One scene was burlesqued upon the stage. The censorship also "made its reserves," contested admissibility of certain passages, insisted upon changes in various lines, had to be reasoned with, bullied, cajoled. Finally the *claque*, the paid applauders who in a French theatre direct the popular enthusiasm, turned mutinous. Their loyalty could not be depended upon. They might even desert in the hour of battle, and go over to the enemy.

But against all forms of opposition, whether open and angry, or occult and insidious, Victor Hugo showed a most admirable tenacity and courage. "We should not, perhaps, be able fully to understand the essentially militant character of his political and literary life," says Madame Hugo, "if we did not know from what a soldier-family he sprang." And here he showed himself a born fighter. If the *claque*, those hired mercenaries, would not support his cause, he would rely on the enthusiasm of volunteers. Word went forth among the students of the "Quartier Latin," the younger journalists, the artists going through their apprenticeship in the various "ateliers," that the future of the French drama, nay, of French poetry itself, was at stake. Théophile Gautier has told how Gérard de Nerval acted as recruiting sergeant, and went round distributing tickets for the first performance, and with what a passion of joy he, Gautier, received six orders, in solemn trust, with an adjuration to bring none but sure hands. Each ticket bore inscribed upon it the Spanish word, *hierro*, "iron."

And what a strange young generation they were to whom this call was addressed! Together with a genuine enthusiasm for everything relating to art, using the word in its most extended sense, how much of folly and wilful eccentricity!

Eccentricity, indeed, was their goddess. They hated with an undying hate the peaceful "bourgeois" who paid his debts, lived cleanly, foreswore sack, and cultivated only the prose of life. Such a man, according to one of these cannibalistic young gentlemen, was only fit to be eaten. To "asphyxiate" him "with the smell of punch, patchouli, and cigars"¹ seemed a desirable object. To adopt a name that could by no means be mistaken for *his* commonplace name was a clear duty. Thus, if the Romantic aspirant had been christened "Jean," he added a mediæval *h*, and called himself "Jehan;" if his name were plain "Pierre," he called himself "Petrus." Or else he gave a kind of pseudo-foreign air to his cognomen, and "Auguste Maquet" became "Augustus McKeat," and "Théophile Dondey" became "Philothée O'Neddy." There was one daring spirit who even ventured to designate himself as "Napoleon Tom." Napoleon Tom! I declare there is a touch of genius in the combination. When one thinks of it, when one considers the absurdity of these outlandish designations, even the inexplicable seems streaked with a dawn of explanation, and one almost ceases to wonder whence Victor Hugo derived the amazing English names in "L'Homme qui rit." Even "Govicum," the pot-boy, and "Lord Tom Jim Jack," seem to have prototypes.

Nor were outward and visible signs of eccentricity wanting in the youthful band that crowded round the door of the pit of the Théâtre Français on the memorable 25th of February, 1830, when "Hernani" was to be first presented to the public. They have been often described. According to Madame Hugo they were "strange, uncouth, bearded, long-haired, dressed in every manner except according to the existing fashion, in loose jerkins, in Spanish cloaks, in Robespierre waistcoats, in Henry III. bonnets, having every century and every country upon their shoulders and heads." No wonder that the peaceful burgesses were "stupefied and indignant." Théophile Gautier especially "insulted their

¹ The expression is that of Gavarni the great caricaturist, who, however, came into vogue a little later.

eyes." His locks, like those of Albert Dürer, flowed far over his shoulders, and he wore a scarlet satin waistcoat of mediæval cut, a black coat with broad velvet facings, trousers of a pale sea-green seamed with black velvet, and an ample grey overcoat lined with green satin. Well might he speak enthusiastically, in after years, of the "phantasy of individual taste" that had "regulated" the "costumes" of the "champions of the ideal" who waited outside the Théâtre Français. His encomiums on their "just sense of colour" one feels inclined, in view of the sea-green trousers, to accept more doubtfully. As to the scarlet waistcoat, it has a place in history. It flames in the forefront of the Romantic battle like the white plume of King Henry of Navarre at Ivry.

Our young friends were admitted into the theatre at two, and the public were not to enter till seven. What was to be done meanwhile in the great ghostly unlit place? Talk offered a resource, and cat-calls, and endless songs, which the Government papers of the following day described as "impious," and the opposition journals as "obscene." The more prudent of the band had provided themselves with sausages, ham, chocolate, and bread: and an improvised picnic made the time pass pleasantly. When the audience began to assemble, they were greeted by a fine smell of garlic. O abomination of desolation! This is the holy of holies of the drama, in the "House of Molière"! Mdlle. Mars was furious. She had acted, she declared to Victor Hugo, before every kind of public: it was to him, to him that she must owe the indignity of acting before such a public as *that*!

However at last the performance began, and began coldly. But, as it proceeded, the admirable vigour of the verse, and, one may add, the stage effectiveness of the situations, began to produce their due effect. At the second act, where Hernani and Don Carlos, rivals in their love for Doña Sol, exchange words of hate and defiance, the clapping of the author's followers found an echo in a few boxes. This temporary success was, however, jeopardised by the scene in

which Don Ruy Gomez too lengthily catalogues his pictured ancestry on the wall; though, in the end, his refusal to violate his ideal of hospitality at Don Carlos' bidding, "brought down the house." Strangely enough, Charles V.'s long monologue before the tomb of Charlemagne first really clinched success and made victory certain. Poetry went for something in those days, and undramatic as that soliloquy may be, each line, as it flashed upon the audience, woke in them a glowing enthusiasm. Before the applause had died down, an unknown publisher accosted the author, and offered six thousand francs for the right to publish the play, saying that at the end of the second act he had intended to propose two thousand francs, at the end of the third four, and that he should greatly prefer to close the bargain there and then, as at the end of the performance he might be tempted to give ten thousand. Victor Hugo, whose whole possessions happened at the moment to consist of fifty francs, or £2, laughingly concluded the bargain.

The fifth act was a triumph. Mdlle. Mars acted it superbly. In her love duet with Hernani—that duet which vaguely reminds one of the duet between Juliet and Romeo,—her voice rendered admirably the music of the verse, and thrilled to its emotions. When Ruy Gomez, having first sounded his fatal horn, came to claim Hernani's life, she sprang up with an energy which was new even to her admirers, like a tiger in defence of her whelps.—And we too have seen that act not inadequately performed. We too have heard a silvery voice descanting sweetest love-music with Hernani; have watched the dawning horror on the face as the meaning of Ruy Gomez' visit became apparent; have seen the frail shape dilate in fierce defiance, and then sink down in passionate appeal for mercy; have noted how, amid the gathering darkness of death, love still flickered on in look and speech. So does Sarah Bernhardt act the part of Doña Sol; and to those who have seen the play thus acted it will scarcely seem strange that the first performance of "Hernani" came to a successful close.

But how about the second performance, when the appeal would be to the general public, not the cultured few? The first performance had been like Ligny or Quatre Bras before Waterloo. The great battle had still to be fought. And fiercely did it rage. Verse after verse, as the play went on, was assailed with Homeric laughter. Victor Hugo's friends replied with volley on volley of applause. And so again the toilsome evening wore through. Nor was this yet in any wise the end. After the third performance, the author had only one hundred tickets at his disposal; and the enemy were more eager than ever in the attack.

"Then indeed," says Madame Hugo, "did the real struggle begin. Each performance became an indescribable tumult. The boxes sneered and tittered; the stalls whistled; it became a fashionable pastime to go 'and laugh at "Hernani." Every one protested after his own manner, and according to his individual nature. Some, as not being able to bear to look at such a piece, turned their backs to the performers; others declared aloud that they could stand it no longer, and went out in the middle of the acts, and banged the doors of their boxes as they went. The more peaceable . . . ostentatiously spread out and read their newspapers."

For five and forty nights did the actors and Victor Hugo's volunteers stand in the breach and carry performance after performance to the end; and it was not till June 18, 1830, when *Mdlle. Mars* required a holiday, that the piece was withdrawn.

Thus was fought and won the great battle, or rather campaign, of "Hernani." Romantic drama had made good its position on the French stage.

And shall we throw up our caps at the victory, and cry huzza with the "hirsute generation"¹ of 1830? Yes and no, I think. Dante, as it has always seemed to me, and I say it reverently, strikes a false note when he tells how —

"Cinabue thought
To lord it over painting's field, but hark!
The cry's Giotto's, and his name eclipsed;"

¹ M. Zola's expression, "*la race chevelue*."

for the success of an artist in no sense detracts from the merits of his predecessors. And so, though quite prepared to admit that the French stage stood in need of a revival at the beginning of this century, and that the classical drama was senile and dying, yet am I not prepared to say that the French classical drama, in its first vigour and freshness, was anything but a superb product. Of course we must judge it by standards different from those which we are in the habit of applying. Taking Shakespeare as our great exemplar, what we look for, what delights us, in the higher drama, is an infinite play of life, a large variety of character, the evidence, in conception and language, of unrestrained power — power braving all danger, heedless of difficulty, and grandly daring if, by any means, it can enlarge the scope of art. The ideals of the French dramatists of the great period, Racine, Corneille, Molière, were quite other. What they aimed at was rather to circumscribe than to enlarge, rather to select, simplify, and concentrate than to hold the mirror up to nature, and show life in all its complexity. Shakespeare, having to paint a lover and jealous husband in Othello, gives to the love and jealousy, all important as they are, only a relative influence in the man's portrait. Othello — the soldier so essentially a soldier that he regards even the peaceful time of his courtship as "wasted," — has a being and personality apart from his relations with Desdemona. Racine would have treated the story quite differently. *His* Othello would have been a lover, and jealous — and have been nothing else. Our whole attention would have been concentrated on that one point. The poet would have held himself false to his art if he had endeavoured to amuse us with matters which he, justly or unjustly, regarded as of secondary interest. Not love and jealousy under certain particular circumstances, and in a given individual of warlike habits and dark complexion, — but love and jealousy apart from all such adjuncts, and in their most concentrated form — such, according to his conception, would have been the proper matter of a drama. A false conception, the English reader is

at once tempted to exclaim. And yet I don't know. It seems to me at least a perfectly admissible conception. Granting at once, and of course, that Shakespeare's art is unapproachable, yet it does not follow that there is no room in the world for art of another kind. And if we once allow this, then can we certainly not withhold our meed of admiration from those whose art of that other kind was perfect. Nay, as regards Shakespeare himself, is the advantage in artistic method so invariably on his side? Does he always profit by giving full rein to the power that is in him? Take *Timon of Athens* and compare him with *Alceste*, the misanthrope of Molière. *Timon*, in his hatred for his fellows, almost casts away his humanity, and lowers himself to the level of one of Swift's yahoos. *Alceste*, so far from dropping his humanity, remains a gentleman. Here we have, on the one side, unbridled power, and, on the other, measure, restraint, reasonableness, tact. The art in which these qualities attained their highest ideal, as they did in the work of the French poets of the seventeenth century, is, of its own kind, great art.

However, though the subject is alluring, I must not be tempted to dwell on the beauties of Racine, Corneille, Molière, and of Lafontaine whose verse is as the very daintiest goldsmith's work in human language. My immediate purpose will be sufficiently answered if I have made it clear that the Classical party had something to say for itself when opposing "*Hernani*."

That play was first produced on the 25th of February, 1830. It was followed on the 11th of August, 1831, by "*Marion de Lorme*," which had been previously prohibited by the Government of Charles X. This was followed in turn, on the 22nd of November, 1832, by "*Le Roi s'amuse*," which seems to have been made the occasion of a political manifesto, and was prohibited by the Government of Louis Philippe. Then came "*Lucrèce Borgia*," in the beginning of 1833; "*Marie Tudor*," on the 6th of November in the same year; "*Angelo Tyran de Padoue*," on the 28th of

April, 1835; "Ruy Blas," on the 8th of November, 1838; and, finally, "Les Burgraves," on the 8th of March, 1843. The last-named failed to secure such success as to tempt Victor Hugo to work any more for the stage. It was only performed some thirty times, and met with great opposition.

And of the plays which Victor Hugo thus composed in view of the footlights, what shall we say? Clearly in composing them he was animated by the very highest literary ambition. It is difficult to read the "Préface de Cromwell," and the prefaces to each of the plays, without coming to the conclusion that he had braced himself to no less a task than taking the drama where Shakespeare left it, and carrying it to greater heights of historical accuracy and social and philosophic truth. A magnificent ideal without doubt; and to the honour due to those who fail in the greatest attempts, he is unquestionably entitled. For failure to reach such high altitude, there obviously is. Of Victor Hugo's social philosophy I shall have occasion to speak hereafter. Suffice it to say here that one can scarcely think without a smile of the light in which it would have appeared to Shakespeare's preeminently large and equitable spirit. Nor can the historical pretensions be taken very seriously. This is a point on which Victor Hugo seems clearly to have been in the habit of deceiving himself. In his view, it was part of his mission as a playwright to "explain history;" and in a note to "Marie Tudor" he says:

"So that the reader may be in a position, once for all, to appreciate the more or less of historical certainty contained in the author's works, as also the quantity and quality of historical research undertaken by him in view of each of his dramas, he thinks it his duty to print here, as a specimen, the list of the books and documents consulted in writing 'Marie Tudor.' He could publish a similar catalogue as regards each of his other pieces."

The list thus announced with some little pomp is only calculated to inspire a moderate amount of confidence. It contains more than one obvious misnomer, and opens with a history of Henry VII. by "Franc Baronum," who cannot

well be any other than our old acquaintance Francis Bacon. But, to let such trifles pass, what is of infinitely greater importance, the character of Queen Mary, as presented in the drama, is quite unhistorical and false. Poor Bloody Mary, we know her story very well. It has been told for us, with even more than his customary picturesqueness and skill, by Mr. Froude. It has been dramatised for us by Lord Tennyson.

"Mother of God,

Thou knowest never woman meant so well,
And fared so ill in this disastrous world.
My people hate me and desire my death.
 My hard father hat'd me;
My brother rather hated me than loved;
My sister cowers and hates me. . . .
My husband hates me and desires my death."

Poor virtuous Mary, with the bigot-creed and the narrow intellect, who worked such ruin even to the cause she loved, who having the lion spirit of her race, yet did such packal's work,—and all the time hungered so in her woman's heart for the child that never came and the love that never was hers—surely there is scarce a more pathetic figure in history. The Mary of Victor Hugo is the paramour of I know not what Italian adventurer, and prepared at any moment to cry her shame to the whole court, to her future husband's ambassador, to anybody who will listen. No one, however great he may be, has a right to play such fantastic tricks with a real character—still less to call the bespattering, history.

But if Victor Hugo has failed to improve on Shakespeare's social philosophy or history, has he at least equalled him in peopling the stage with living, acting, feeling, thinking men and women—human creatures of intensest vitality, but whose characters will yet bear the most minute dissection? No, no, the later poet, great as he is, has not done this. I am far from agreeing with those critics, as M. Zola for instance, who hold that all his *dramatis personæ* are mere marionettes, tricked out in doublet and trunk-hose, ruff and farthingale, all the frippery of any particular time, and with

wood, wire, and bran where flesh, nerves, and blood should be. But if this is malevolent exaggeration, yet is it unfortunately true that in many of his characters, and those often the most important, a certain mechanical something is too obvious. Explaining the genesis of Triboulet, in "*Le Roi s'amuse*," and Luerèce Borgia, in the play of the same name, the author tells us —

"Take the most hideous, repulsive, complete physical deformity; place it where it will be most striking—at the lowest, meanest, most despised stage of the social edifice; light up that miserable creature from all sides with the sinister light of contrast; and then throw into him a soul, and put into that soul the purest feeling given to man, the feeling of fatherhood. What will happen? Why that sublime feeling, heated according to certain conditions, will transform before your eyes the degraded creature; the being that was small will become great; the being that was deformed will become beautiful. In its essence this is '*Le Roi s'amuse*.' Well, and it is also '*Lucrèce Borgia*.' Take the most hideous, repulsive, complete moral deformity; place it where it will be most striking, in a woman's heart, with all such adjuncts of physical beauty and royal grandeur as may give prominence to crime; and now mingle with all this deformity a pure feeling, the purest feeling that a woman can experience, the feeling of motherhood; in your monster place a mother's heart; and the monster will become interesting; and the monster will make you weep; and that creature that inspired only terror, will excite pity, and that deformed soul will become almost beautiful in your eyes. Thus fatherhood sanctifying physical deformity—that is what we have in '*Le Roi s'amuse*;' motherhood sanctifying moral deformity—that is what we have in '*Lucrèce Borgia*.'"

To me, I confess, in all this there is something mechanical and forced. Human characters are not compact of such tremendous contrasts. Certainly a monster like Triboulet—for in moral repulsiveness he is pretty nearly the fellow of Luerèce—may love his offspring. Love is a flower that will grow almost anywhere. But it is scarcely a flower that will give out its fullest, purest perfume when growing out of so polluted a soil. And the attempt to excite interest by dwelling on the difference between soil and product can only lead to exaggeration and falsehood. Or take again the character of Marion de Lorme. Marion de Lorme is a noted courtesan. Her life is a byword. Scarce a noble about the

Court but can boast of her favours. Yet she becomes again all dainty-pure, as in her maidenhood, through her love for Didier. In other words, she abandons the world of realities, and becomes an antithesis.

Nor is it possible to place such lover-heroes as Hernani, Didier, and Ruy Blas beside Shakespeare's real men. They belong, all three of them, to a distinctly obsolete Byronic type, and talk too gloomily and too much of the fates, and destiny, and evil stars, and such other moody and uncomfortable matters. As to Ruy Blas, I go even further, and express disbelief in him altogether. What! here is a poet of fine intellect and noblest sentiments, though wearing, for the sake of contrast, a lackey's coat; he is in love with the queen; he is left behind at Court by his master, for wicked purposes, in a position of power, and displays in that position the highest qualities of a statesman and a patriot: and yet, when his master comes back — a step which even imbecility might have anticipated — and declares an intention of dishonouring the queen, he, the poet and man of action, can find nothing better to do than whine like a whipped cur — no more effective way of defending l's love than praying in churches and wandering about the streets! Bah! any man with a spark of manhood — having such advantages on his side too — would have made short work of Don Salluste de Bazan. Ruy Blas does not hold together as a man, a poet, a statesman, or a lackey. The best criticism on his character and conduct remains that of the spectators in the gallery when the play was first produced. They, we are told, used to cry out in their jargon, as he stooped down to pick up his master's handkerchief, "Don't pick it up, you fool; have him run in."

A second Shakespeare? Hardly. Superb as are Victor Hugo's gifts, he is unable to sustain that comparison. But still, without being a Shakespeare, it is possible to be a very powerful dramatist: and Victor Hugo's plays possess merits of the highest kind. Of course, in judging them, we must always bear in mind that they were written directly in view of

the stage. They are not, like Mr. Browning's dramas, for example, literature and literature alone. They are intended, and rightly, to show life according to theatrical conditions and as seen through an atmosphere of stage illusion. And when so regarded their strong points are not to be gainsaid. Each is constructed on lines so large and easily intelligible as not to disconcert the average spectator. The introduction is in every case deftly managed: we are placed at once, without long and tedious explanations, in the centre of the subject. The plot is skilfully combined for the purpose of exciting curiosity and retaining interest. If the incidents are too often those of a melodrama, and are caused rather by what may be called accident than development of character, yet no one can deny their stage effectiveness, and the opportunities they afford to the actor. Doña Sol (in "Hernani"), Marion de Lorme, the Queen (in "Ruy Blas"), have each the most excellent parts. So has Triboulet, whatever we may think, on reflection, of his truth to nature. No one who has seen M. Coquelin as Don César, that roystering, brave, blackguard cavalier, can have any doubt of the author's power to produce a strongly vitalised character, at least for the stage. And to these gifts we must add a singular power in the management of dialogue. This, however, is praise which must be mainly restricted to the dramas in verse. For, by a singular phenomenon, the personages in Victor Hugo's stage-world speak far less naturally and forcibly when speaking in prose than when speaking to the cadence of metre. The difficulties of rhyme seem to nerve the dramatist to greater efforts, just as a minor poet will often succeed better in a sonnet than a simple ballad. So here the dialogue when in verse is almost invariably natural, alert, incisive, quick in thrust and parry as a rapier, now flashing with the brightest gems of imagination, now trembling with passion or sorrow.

Yet there are critics ready enough to tell us that, even from the stage point of view, Victor Hugo's "theatre" "threatens ruin," nay, that it lies in ruins already. Such

critics hold that his art has permanently lost its power to charm and electrify an audience, and can never again possess more than an interest of literary curiosity. But this surely is altogether an exaggeration. I am prepared to give over to the tormentors the plays in prose, "Angelo," "Marie Tudor," and "Lucrèce Borgia"; for Victor Hugo, when writing these dramas in prose, became as one who throws away his arms in the hour of battle, and courts defeat. I am ready to allow that "Les Burgraves," notwithstanding the great power of the verse, is constructed on lines too large and epic for the modern stage,—that Barbarossa waking white-haired at his country's need from his immemorial slumber, and the other old Rhineland demigods, with their hatreds that endure threescore years and ten, are fitter for the twilight of imagination than the comparative reality of the theatre. Even stage illusion cannot raise mere flesh and blood to such heroic proportions. But "Hernani," and "Marion de Lorme" and "Ruy Blas"? Time has told on them no doubt. Fashions change in fifty years. Yet to the criticism that holds them to be moribund or dead, one may fitly answer that there is in each a soul of poetry that will for ever keep it alive. Grant that in certain respects they are rather melodramas than dramas, yet are they melodramas set to incomparable verse. Music will make them immortal, a kind of superb verbal orchestration that for variety and power, for "sonority" and brilliance of effect, has no equal in French dramatic verse. Even if they had no other excellences, they would live,—as an opera may live though the libretto is naught. Never, I think, will the time come when such stage music will altogether fail of its appeal.

Was the "name" of "Cimabue" so entirely "eclipsed" when Giotto arose over the horizon? Did Racine and classic tragedy entirely suffer defeat in the great battle of "Hernani"? Between 1830 and 1838, "Hernani," "Marion de Lorme," "Le Roi s'amuse," "Lucrèce Borgia," "Marie Tudor," "Angelo," and "Ruy Blas" strutted bravely on the boards. But in those same years there was "a cer-

tain sorry little scrub," who "went up and down" Paris, "none" much "caring how;" and that "little scrub"—a lean slip of a girl, with intense dark Jew eyes, who bore the name of Rachel,—proved to have power enough, when once her genius had declared itself, to stem the onset of Romanticism, and in her turn to take the world by storm with the old classic drama. Not as Doña Sol, Marion de Lorme, nor the Queen of Spain, did the incomparable actress¹ achieve her triumphs. Fine as these parts are, she felt that in such characters as Racine's Phèdre there is a deeper, more poignant life; that through all changes of dramatic form the heart-strings of humanity are more passionately a-quiver in the older plays. And so once again Racine's beautiful old word-music, which is, as one may say, so purely of the strings, prevailed on the French stage.

But Victor Hugo's more varied orchestra of words and effects has in turn had its revivals, and that three at least of his plays will live, and live for the stage, I make no question.

CHAPTER VI

"**V**ICTOR in drama" with "Hernani," Victor in poetry with "Les Orientales," it remains for us now to consider Hugo as "Victor in romance"² with *Nôtre Dame de Paris*." But in order to do this, I must retrace my steps somewhat. His last play, "Les Burgraves," was produced in 1843; and to take up the thread of the novels it is necessary to go back some twenty years, to 1823 when "*Han d'Islande*" was first published.

Of that book I have already spoken; nor is it necessary to say more about it here. It is in every sense a juvenile

¹ Victor Hugo, characteristically, thought little of Rachel.

² See first line of Lord Tennyson's Sonnet to Victor Hugo:

"Victor in drama, Victor in romance."

production, and only interesting as the start-point of a great career. Three years afterwards, in January, 1826, appeared "Bug Jargal." That short novel had indeed seen the light already in an earlier, simpler, and shorter form. It had been first written, according to the preface of 1832, in 1818, when the author was sixteen years old — written for a wager in fifteen days, and published in the *Conservateur Littéraire*. But in 1826 it reappeared in its present shape, greatly altered, and, in fact, rewritten. It must therefore be regarded as the author's first step, or rather stride forward in novel-writing, after "Han d'Islande."

"Bug Jargal" is a story of the rising of the slaves in St. Domingo. The author supposes that in 1793, or thereabouts, a number of French officers determine to relate their adventures for the purpose of beguiling the tedium of the long evenings by the camp fire. When Captain Léopold d'Auverney's turn comes round, he first declares that there has been nothing in his career worthy of fixing their attention. But then being pressed, he tells his tale. Though not born in St. Domingo he had been brought up there, and was living with his uncle, and betrothed to Marie his beautiful cousin. One of the slaves, a negro prince in his native Africa, also entertains for Marie a passionate attachment. This slave, Bug Jargal by name, is as generous as he is brave, fulfilled with every noble sentiment, a hero of romance. Jealousy against his white rival finds no lasting home in his breast. He tramples it under foot, and swears eternal friendship and brotherhood. On the very night of D'Auverney's marriage the insurrection breaks out. Murder, incendiarism, outrage, stalk through the island. The bride and bridegroom have been separated by an untoward chance. Bug Jargal saves the former, and, afterwards, when D'Auverney is taken prisoner, and is about to be tortured to death, saves him too. He himself is shot by a lamentable accident. As to Marie she soon dies; and D'Auverney also, shortly afterwards, finds an end to his sorrows, for within a few days of the telling of his tale, he falls on the field of battle.

Such, very shortly stated, is the story of Bug Jargal; and it is told with unmistakable power and interest. That the hero's character is altogether life-like I will not affirm. Negroes, or even white men, of his stamp are rare. But in the world of art there is room for more than the prose of our every-day experience; and though Carlyle would certainly have objected to recognise the possibility of "the hero as nigger," we need scarcely be so exclusive. Decidedly the culminating point of the story is the description of the struggle between D'Auverney and a hideous, powerful hunchback, Habibrah, on the brink of a yawning gulf in a cavern. The prentice hand that wrought that scene was rapidly becoming the master hand that would produce the scene in which Claude Frollo falls from the topmost tower of Nôtre Dame.

Victor Hugo's next venture in fiction was "*Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*," the "last day of a man condemned to death." This book appeared anonymously¹ in February, 1829, just three years after "*Bug Jargal*," and a month, it may be remembered, after the "*Orientales*." It appeared therefore when the author was in the plenitude of his powers; and a remarkable harrowing book it distinctly is. A story? No, not exactly a story. Rather a psychological study, an endeavour to sound, with the plummet of imagination, the dark places in the soul of a man who has forfeited his life to human justice, and is about to be launched into eternity. The book is autobiographical in form, and the supposed writer describes the ghostly march of his own emotions through the horror of great darkness by which he is surrounded. He is evidently an educated man, a man not at all vitiated by a career of crime, but blameless except in respect of the one act that has brought him to this extremity. His kindlier better feelings are unimpaired. He thinks of his mother, his wife, his child—"a little girl of three years old, gentle, rosy, frail, with large black eyes and long auburn locks." The shame that will splash up to them from

¹ In the third edition, however, also dated 1829, and now before me, Victor Hugo's name is given on the title-page.

his spilt life tortures him. In the midst of the ghastly nightmare of his waking and sleeping existence come visions of his childhood — of a garden — (Ah! poet, was not that a reminiscence of the Feuillantines and thine own child-love?) — in which he was wont to play with a little dark-eyed Spanish girl, till one day, as they read a book together, like Paolo and Francesca in the “*Inferno*,” their lips met, and “On that day they read no more therein.” Then he tries to look death in the face, but it daunts him. Anon he rages like some trapped animal; and so he passes to his hideous end.

Victor Hugo describes the man’s torture well. The writer who afterwards pictured so vividly the storm of guilty love that raged in the heart of Claude Frollo the priest, and the fierce battle of rectitude against self-preservation in the brain of Jean Valjean, was not likely to fail when dealing with such a theme. Nor does it at all impair the artistic merit of the book, viewed as a psychological story, that the evil deed by which the condemned man has brought himself within the clutches of the law should be kept so entirely out of sight. Accepting the author’s first description of his work as that of a “dreamer,” a “philosopher,” a “poet,” bent on “observing nature for the benefit of art,” then have we comparatively little concern with the specific murder committed. Our interest is properly concentrated on the criminal, not the victim.

Directly, however, the author changes his front, as he did after the issue of the first few editions, and asks us to regard his book mainly as a serious argument in favour of the abolition of capital punishment, then one has a right to ask what crime had this amiable murderer committed. Doubtless it was a hard thing that he should be made to walk through the valley of the shadow of death prematurely, and in this particularly horrible manner. Yet, after all, the act for which he suffered was his own. But his victim, how had he deserved death? The light of the sun was as pleasant to him as to his murderer. Life smiled with equal kindness on both. If it were repugnant to the one to be executed,

it must have been far from agreeable to the other to be poisoned, throttled, or shot. And *he* had no choice in the matter. He was but a passive agent; while the poor criminal, with whose pains we are called upon to sympathise, might have kept his life out of jeopardy by simply observing the most ordinary rules of moral conduct. Surely the sufferings of the murderer constitute in this matter no argument at all. To dwell upon them eloquently, passionately, and to keep the sufferings of the victim out of sight, is to appeal to emotion and prejudice, not reason. Viewed as a pamphlet in favour of the abolition of capital punishment, the "*Dernier Jour*" is singularly inconclusive.

Unfortunately a similar weakness runs through nearly all Victor Hugo's polemics on the question. It was Alphonse Karr, if I remember right, who wittily observed that he saw no objection to the abolition of capital punishment, but thought "*Messieurs the assassins*" ought first to show the way. Victor Hugo saw no necessity for that preliminary step on the assassins' part. Of course it was wrong to commit murder, very wrong; but the wrong was not of such a nature as to make the murderer liable to forfeit his own life in return. No wrong could be heinous enough for that. Judging on *à priori* grounds, he held strongly that society does not possess the right, even in self-defence, to cut short the existence of any of its members. Into the question whether that particular form of punishment was best calculated to act as a preventive for that particular class of crime, he seldom entered.

Nor can it be denied that something morbid mingled at last with Victor Hugo's genuine sympathy for any man condemned to death. In October, 1853, a murder was committed in Guernsey. The murderer, a sort of Government clerk called Tapner, belonged essentially to the class of human vermin. He was drunken; he was debauched. He lived with two sisters, of whom one was his wife, and the other his mistress. He had committed his crime with premeditation, and under circumstances of peculiar atrocity, first kill-

ing and robbing his victim — a woman — and then setting fire to her house to obliterate all traces of his deed. He was more than suspected of having done the same thing before. Of his guilt there could be no manner of question; and the law sentenced him to its extreme penalty. Whereupon Victor Hugo moved heaven and earth to save the man; and from his point of view was, of course, quite justified in so doing. But when the law had taken its course, and no mark of interest or sympathy could be of further practical avail, he made a kind of pilgrimage to the scenes — hallowed, I was going to say, by Tapner's presence. He visited the dead man's cell, followed his course to the place of execution, moralised on the view to be seen from the spot, hunted up and examined the gibbet in an out-house where it had been deposited, purchased for three francs a posthumous cast of the deceased's head, and finally discovered the place of interment, and gathered a bunch of grass from the grave. After this, I think Victor Hugo is a little hard upon the inhabitants of Guernsey for their eagerness to possess small pieces of the rope as relics.

But if the description of this pilgrimage, in the author's "*Choses Vues*," rings a little false, it would be unjust not to recognise that the passionate zeal with which he strove to give effect to his convictions respecting the abolition of capital punishment were worthy of all praise. The cause was dear to his heart, and to the hearts of his sons. One of the latter suffered imprisonment for it in 1851. He himself gave it time and energy without stint — was instant in its advocacy, in season and out of season. Never did he omit an opportunity of urging with tongue and pen that the existing laws should be changed; — never did he forbear to plead for the life of any one condemned to death whose case came under his notice. From John Brown, the martyr of negro emancipation, down to wretches like Tapner, the large mantle of his clemency would have been thrown over all without distinction. And that his zeal to save even the most criminal life came of a strong humanity, there can be no doubt.

But all this has led us a little away from the series of his earlier novels—which is our immediate subject. The “*Dernier Jour*” was published in 1829. In February to June, 1830, came the battle of “*Hernani*.” In July, 1830, the monarchy of the elder branch of the Bourbons passed away, and Louis Philippe was made King of the French. And in the autumn and winter of the same year, Victor Hugo was hard at work on a novel of greater scale than he had yet attempted. He had, some little time before, incautiously entered into an engagement with a publisher to write the book by a given time. That time had passed. Something had angered the publisher. Law proceedings were threatened. Haste was imperative. The poet, as Madame Hugo tells us, “purchased a bottle of ink, and a great grey knitted woollen wrapper that covered him from his neck to his toes; locked up all his clothing so that he might have no temptation to go out; and entered into his novel as if it had been a prison. . . . Thenceforward he never left his desk save to eat and sleep. His only relaxation was an hour’s after-dinner chat with a few friends, to whom he sometimes read the pages written during the day.” “He had been,” Madame Hugo adds, “very melancholy” when his incarceration began. But “with the first few chapters, his melancholy departed; his creation seized hold of him; he felt neither weariness nor the winter’s cold; in December he worked with his windows open.” And well might an inner fire of enthusiasm give heat to that almost monastic seclusion of five months’ duration. The poet-novelist was at work upon a masterpiece. On the 13th of February, 1831, appeared “*Nôtre Dame de Paris*.”

A great book, a magnificent book most unquestionably, a book before which the critic may fitly throw down all his small artillery of carpings and quibblings, and stand disarmed and reverent. That Victor Hugo had realised his ambition of crowning with poetry the prose of Sir Walter Scott, I shall not affirm. But then it scarcely seems as if any such crowning were needed, or possible; for the good Sir Walter’s faults

lay neither in lack of imagination, nor lack of fervour, nor an absence of elevation of tone, nor, in short, in a deficiency of aught that goes to the making of poetry. "Quentin Durward" deals with the same period as "Nôtre Dame de Paris," and if one places the two books side by side in one's thoughts, such differences as there are will hardly seem to be differences in degree of poetical inspiration. Our own great novelist's work is fresher, healthier perhaps, more of the open air. A spirit of hopefulness and youth and high courage seems to circulate through his pages — a sort of pervading trust that the good things of this world come to those who deserve them, that merit has its prizes, and unworthiness its punishments. There is blood enough and to spare in the book, and a good deal of hanging and much villainy. But our feelings are not greatly harrowed thereby. We need not weep unless so minded. If a good tall fellow is lopped down here and there,—like the worthy Gascon whom Dunois strikes through the unvisored face—the tragedy comes before we have known the man long enough to grow greatly interested in him. We are only affected as by the death of a very casual acquaintance.¹ And such sufferers as the Wild Boar of the Ardennes deserve their fate too thoroughly to cause us the most passing pang. So does Scott, in his genial kindness, temper for us the horrors of the Middle Ages. He does not blink them, as M. Taine erroneously seems to hold. He presents them, with consummate art, so that they shall not cause unnecessary pain. Victor Hugo, in "Nôtre Dame," was animated by a quite other spirit. After the manner of his nation—for French fiction tolerates an amount of unmerited misery to which the English reader would never submit—he looks upon life far more gloomily. Claude Frollo may perhaps deserve even the appalling agony of those eternal moments during which he hangs suspended from the leaden gutter at the top of the tower of Nôtre Dame, and has a hideous foretaste of his imminent death. Quasimodo is at

¹ The murder of the Bishop of Liège is, I admit, an exception.

best but an animal with a turn for bell-ringing, and, apart from his deformity and deafness, not entitled to much sympathy. But Esmeralda, poor Esmeralda, who through the deep mire of her surroundings has kept a soul so maidenly and pure, who is full of tender pity for all suffering, and possesses a heart that beats with such true woman's love — what had she done that Victor Hugo should bestow the treasure of that love upon the worthless archer-coxcomb, Phœbus de Chateaupers, that he should make her frail harmless pretty life, a life of torture, and cause her to die literally in the hangman's grasp? Was it worth while that Esmeralda's mother, Paquerette la Chantefleurie, should find her child again, after long years of anguish, only to relinquish her, after one brief moment of rapture, for that terrible end? Quentin's courage and practical sagacity are crowned with success: he saves the woman he loves. But by what irony of fate does it happen that Quasimodo's heroic efforts to defend Esmeralda have for only result to injure those who are trying to save her, and the hastening of her doom?

Gloom, gloom, a horror of darkness and evil deeds, of human ineptitude and wrong, such is the background of "Nôtre Dame." If Scott gives us a poetry of sunshine and high emprise, Victor Hugo gives us, and here with a more than equal puissance, the poetry of cloud-wrack and ungovernable passion. There is no piece of character-painting in "Quentin Durward" that, for tragic lurid power and insight, can be placed beside the portrait of Claude Frollo.¹ Lucid and animated as are such scenes as the sacking of the bishop's palace, and the attack on Liège, they are not executed with such striking effects of light and shade as the companion scene in "Nôtre Dame," the attack of the beggars on the cathedral. Scott's landscape is bright, pleasant, the reflection of a world seen by a healthy imagination and clear in the sunlight of a particularly sane nature. Victor Hugo's world in "Nôtre Dame" is as a world seen in fever-vision, or sud-

¹ Brian de Bois Guilbert is the corresponding character in Scott,—a character equally passionate, but not, I think, analysed so powerfully.

denly illumined by great flashes of lightning. The mediæval city is before us in all its picturesque huddle of irregular buildings. We are in it; we see it: the narrow streets with their glooms and gleams, their Rembrandt effects of shadow and light; the quaint overhanging houses each of which seems to have a face of its own; the churches and convents flinging up to the sky their towers and spires; and high above all, the city's very soul, the majestic cathedral. And what a motley medley of human creatures throng the place! Here is the great guild of beggar-thieves even more tatterdemalion and shamelessly grotesque than when Callot painted them for us two centuries later. Here is Gringoire, the out-at-elbows unsuccessful rhymist of the time. Anon Esmeralda passes accompanied by her goat. She lays down her little mat, and dances lightly, gracefully to her tambourine. See how the gossips whisper of witchcraft as the goat plays its pretty tricks. And who is that grave priest, lean from the long vigils of study, who stands watching the girl's every motion with an eye of sombre flame? Close behind, in attendance on the priest, is a figure, scarcely human, deformed, hideous, having but one Cyclops eye — also fastened on the girl. Among the bystanders may be seen the priest's brother, Jehan, the Paris student of the town-sparrow type that has existed from the days of Villon even until now. Before the dancer has collected her spare harvest of small coins, a soldier troop rides roughly by, hustling the crowd, and in the captain the poor child recognises the man who has saved her from violence some days before — the man to whom, alas, she has given her heart. In such a group as this what elements of tragedy lie lurking and ready to out-leap? That priest in his guilty passion will forswear his priestly vows, stab the soldier, and, failing to compass his guilty ends, give over the poor child-dancer to torture and death. The deformed Cyclops, seeing the priest's fiendish laughter as they both stand on the top of Notre Dame tower, watching the girl's execution, will guess that *he* is the cause of her doom, and hurl him over the parapet. And the student too will be entangled in

the tragic chains by which these human creatures are bound together. His shattered carcass will lie hanging from one of the sculptured ornaments on the front of the Cathedral.

Living, living,—yes, the book is unmistakably palpitatingly alive. It does not live, perhaps, with the life of prose and every-day experience. But it lives the better life of imagination. The novelist, by force of genius, compels our acceptance of the world he has created. Esmeralda, like *Oliver Twist*, and even more than *Oliver Twist*, is an improbable, almost impossible being. No one, we conceive, writing nowadays, with Darwinism in the air, would venture to disregard the laws of inherited tendency so far as to evoke such a character from the cloud-land of fancy. If he did, Mr. Francis Galton would laugh him to scorn. The girl's mother—one does not want to press heavily upon the poor creature, and it must therefore suffice to say that she was far from being a model to her sex. The father was anybody you like. From such parentage of vice and chance what superior virtue was to be expected? And, failing birth-gifts, had there been anything in education or surroundings to account for so dainty a product? Far from it. The girl from her infancy had been dragged through the ditches that lie along the broad highway of life, and is dwelling, when we came across her, in one of the foulest dens of the foul old city. She is almost as impossible as Eugène Sue's *Fleur de Marie* in the "Mysteries of Paris." And yet, impossible as she may be, we still believe in her. She is a real person in a real world. That Paris of gloom and gleam may never have existed in history exactly as Victor Hugo paints it for us. It exists for all time notwithstanding. And Claude Frollo exists too, and Jehan, and Gringoire, and Coppenole, the jolly Flemish burgher, and Phœbus, and the beggars,—all the personages of this old-world drama. I should myself as soon think of doubting the truth of the pitiful story told by *Damoiselle Mahiette*, of how poor Paquerette loved and lost her little child, as I should think of doubting that *Portia* did, in actual fact, visit Venice, disguised as a learned judge from Padua,

and, after escaping her husband's recognition, confound Shylock by her superior interpretation of the law.

In the "Orientales" and "Hernani," Victor Hugo had shown himself a magnificent artist in verse. In "Nôtre Dame de Paris," he showed himself a magnificent artist in prose. The writing throughout is superb. Scene after scene is depicted with a graphic force of language, a power, as it were, of concentrating and flashing light, that are beyond praise. Some of the word-pictures are indelibly bitten into the memory as when an etcher has bitten into copper with his acid. Henceforward there could be no question as to the place which the author of the three works just named was entitled to take in the world of literature. Byron was dead, and Scott dying. Chateaubriand had ceased to be a living producing force. Goethe's long day of life was drawing to its serene close. Failing these, Victor Hugo stepped into the first place in European literature, and that place he occupied till his death.¹

And what light did Olympian Goethe, the star that was setting, throw upon "Nôtre Dame de Paris"? A light not altogether benignant, nor, if one may venture to say so in all humility and reverence, altogether just.

"Victor Hugo has a fine talent," he said in one of his conversations with Eckerman, "but he is imbued with the disastrous romantic tendencies of his time. This is why he is led astray, and places beside what is beautiful that which is most unbearable and hideous. I have been reading 'Nôtre Dame de Paris' these last few days, and it required no small dose of patience to endure the torments which that perusal cost me. It is the most detestable book ever written. . . . What shall we think of a time that not only produces such books, but enjoys them?"

Whereupon one sighs to think that even the gods sitting on Olympus are in some slight sort subject to the infirmities of age, and lose the power of looking with an equally large equity upon the present and future, as well as upon the past.

¹ I am not here, of course, arguing any question as to the relative greatness of Byron as compared with Wordsworth or Coleridge, who were then still alive. But neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge had, like Byron, a European name.

CHAPTER VII

WITH the year 1831, and the publication of "Nôtre Dame de Paris," we have reached, as it were, a high tableland in the career of Victor Hugo. He has achieved the most honourable, one may even say the most splendid distinction. He possesses a band of enthusiastic admirers and disciples. If his fame is still contested, it is with such clamour as in itself implies homage, for none but the very great excite in their opponents that kind of anger. He is happy in his children, Léopoldine, Charles, François Victor. He is still young, moreover, not yet thirty, in the first full flower of his manhood. As we scan the portrait, somewhat idealized, perhaps, that Théophile Gautier has left of him at this time, we certainly see a man well dowered with life's best gifts.

"What most struck one at first sight in Victor Hugo was a truly monumental brow that rose like a white marble entablature over his quietly earnest face. . . . The beauty and vastness of that forehead were in truth well-nigh superhuman. It seemed to afford room for the greatest thoughts. Crowns of gold or laurel would fitly have found a place there, as on the brow of a Cæsar or a god. . . . It was set in a frame of light, long, auburn hair. But though the hair was somewhat long, the poet wore neither beard, moustachios, whiskers, nor imperial, the face being most carefully shaven, and of a particular kind of paleness, burnt through, as it were, and illumined by two eyes of bronze-gold, like the eyes of an eagle. The drawing of the mouth was firm and decided, with lips curved and bent down at the corners, lips that, when parted by a smile, displayed teeth of dazzling whiteness. His dress consisted of a black frock coat, grey trousers, a little turned-down collar,—a 'get-up' of absolute respectability and correctness. No one would have suspected that this perfect gentleman could be the chief of those bearded and dishevelled hordes who were the terror of the smooth-chinned citizen. Such Victor Hugo appeared to us when first we met; and the image has never faded from our memory. We cherish with pious care that portrait of him as he was, young, handsome, smiling, radiant with genius, and shedding round him a sort of phosphorescence of glory."

Surely the man of whom such a portrait could at all truthfully be drawn ought not to have found the waters of life

bitter. Surely he can have had no quarrel with fate. And yet, by a strange irony, the volume of poems which Victor Hugo published in the latter part of this same year, 1831, bears the sad-sounding title of "*Feuilles d'Automne*" ("Autumn Leaves"), and is, in its pervading tone, melancholy with the rustle of dead hopes. Yes, even at thirty, youth and so many of its illusions had flown—even to this pre-eminently successful man success seemed to mean so little. So he sings of his sorrows in delightful verse, sings of the child that he had once been, and in whose presence the man that he now is "almost blushes"—sings of that child's earliest memories, his mother's love, his boyish aspirations, his glimpses of the great Napoleon—sings a dirge over the "best time of life flown without hope of return." And mingled with all this "pathetic minor," come some few love-verses—for what poet, however tearful, ever forbore for any long time to sound love's tremulous string? and verses also that seem set to the music of children's voices and laughter. Here the poet was striking a congenial chord, and with a master's hand. What child-poetry will compare with his? As in the days of old, "out of the strong came forth sweetness," so from this poet of storm and battle, this cloud-compeller, whose words often boom and reverberate like thunder, so from him, when childhood was his theme, have come some of the gentlest, most graceful, most delicate, most tender of human words. He never seems to think of the little folk without a mental caress. His thought smiles to them. His fancy seems to make itself a child in their company. His sympathies are keenly wrung by their sorrows. "*Le livre des Mères*"¹ (the "Mother's book"), such has been the title given to a selection from his poems on childhood and infancy, and no title could be more appropriate. Throughout his life, in his extreme age as in his early manhood, he loved the little ones with almost a mother's heart.

¹ "*Les Enfants, le livre des Mères.*"

If one comes to ask why at this particular moment in Victor Hugo's career, and even for some time afterwards, the prevailing tone in his verse should have been a tone of sadness and disenchantment, the reply can only be given vaguely, and as a matter of guess work. There may have been nothing more in the feeling which here finds expression than the melancholy often accompanying the first approach of middle age. Youth's battle is over; success has been achieved, the heights breasted and won; and now, when the ardour of onset has cooled, the result seems poor and unprofitable — the tableland of life, bleak, barren, and cold. Was it worth while storming the ascent for this? Could but youth and its illusions, and the old delight of battle, come back once more! Such, consciously or unconsciously, may have been the state of Victor Hugo's mind at this period. Whether he had other causes of sadness, self-dissatisfaction, or what not, is unrevealed. On this, as on many other questions relating to his real inner life, we are much in the dark. There are few men whose inmost nature it is more difficult to reach. In inaccessibility, as in so many other things, he bears no small resemblance to a king. Even his verse, like the state and pageantry surrounding a monarch, seems in one sense rather to hide than really to reveal him. No doubt the feelings and thoughts to which it gives expression are for the most part genuine. The poet had had such feelings and thoughts. But in showing them to the world, in clothing them in their art dress, they necessarily underwent a transformation into "something rich and strange," or at any rate something not quite the same. What was the real actual Hugo behind them? This it is very far from easy always to discover. Possibly, as time goes on, the publication of his correspondence will throw light on some obscure points. Meanwhile it must remain to some extent a problem, that the man who was afterwards to front with undaunted serenity, exile, old age, the death of those he most loved, should now, amid the full leafage of his June, have faltered and talked of autumn and its falling leaves. In the tremendous trials,

public and private, of his later life, he "bated no jot of heart or hope," but "still kept up and steered right onward," thereby giving to mankind an example of fortitude and high courage. Why do the volumes of verse dated respectively 1831 and 1835 bear titles so suggestive of sadness as "Autumn Leaves," and "Songs of the Twilight"?

Of the succession of plays produced in the middle period of Victor's Hugo's career, I have already spoken; nor need I criticise them again here, and linger over the incidents attendant on their production, and the lawsuits to which they gave rise. The only real importance of the latter in the poet's career is the evidence they afforded of his power as an orator, for he spoke in his own defence, and spoke well,—whereof, as Carlyle would have said, might come much.

Of his prose it is necessary to speak at greater length. Considering what a brilliant success he had achieved with "Nôtre Dame," one cannot but wonder, even when all explanations have been given, that he did not almost immediately turn to fiction again, instead of resolutely putting it to one side for thirty long years. His first prose-work after "Nôtre Dame" was entitled "Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées" (Literature and Philosophy Commingled"), and appeared in the early part of 1834. There is a preface, of course. Victor Hugo, in the good old days, never sent out a book on its embassy without a herald-preface, duly attired in the cloth-of-gold and brocade of rhetoric, to announce its qualities and purpose. So here he explains why he has unearthed from the *Conservateur Littéraire*, which he does not name by-the-by, the articles that had slumbered there since 1819, and placed them in juxtaposition with the jottings of 1830 and various papers of later date, and notably, one on Mirabeau, written in 1834. A conscientious desire to study the development of his own mind has been the determinant cause. *That* was the point from which he started. *This* is the point he has reached. And every stage of the progress, as he declares — pro-

testing therein perhaps a little too much — has been presided over by “uprightness, honour, a real conviction, and disinterestedness.” Of the somewhat miscellaneous contents of the book, the paper on Mirabeau is decidedly the finest and most striking. It may be read advantageously with what Carlyle has written on the same subject.

To this same year, 1834, belongs a powerful apologue entitled “Claude Gueux,” which appeared in the *Revue de Paris*. It is the story of a workman, not over-idealized but with fine elements in his character, who, acting judiciously according to his lights, kills the governor of the prison in which he is confined. Moralizing whereon, the author preceeds to plead eloquently the cause of the poor and ignorant, the cause of education, and, what seems strange, yet shows the state of Victor Hugo’s opinions at this time, the cause of religion and the gospel. “Sow the villages with the gospel!” he cries. “Let there be a Bible in every hut!” “Jesus had better lore to teach than Voltaire.”

Next in order of publication comes a voluminous work issued in the beginning of 1842,¹ and entitled “Le Rhin” (“The Rhine”). It purports to consist of a series of letters written to a friend in Paris, and giving a traveller’s experiences amid the beauties and picturesqueness of the glorious old Rhineland. Here, as in the volume entitled “Choses Vues” (“Things Seen”), which has appeared within the last few months, the author shows himself, for the most part, without his prophet’s robe, and describes simply what happened simply, and graphically what lent itself to imaginative picturing. On the perfect accuracy of the erudition displayed, I will offer no opinion. I am willing to take it on trust. But no special trustfulness is required to accept for truth the “Legend of the Handsome Pécopin and the Beautiful Bauldour,” and their sad separation of a hundred years. “Dull would he be of soul” who refused to accompany the poet into the “fairylaud forlorn” of their sorrows, and to follow the superb tramlings and

¹ Greatly added to in later editions.

hurryings of Pécopin's wild ride through the enchanted forest.

Contemporaneously with these volumes of prose, Victor Hugo published three volumes of verse: "*Les Chants du Crépuscule*" (Songs of the Twilight"), issued in 1835; "*Les Voix Intérieures*" ("Voices Within"), in 1837; and "*Les Rayons et les Ombres*" ("The Rays and the Shadows"), in 1840.

These volumes are full of good things, but how shall I characterize them? How try to photograph into poor prose the evanescences of a great singer's verse? We have here again memories of the poet's childhood, of "what took place at the Feuillantines in 1813." We have recollections of former events in his career, of his interview with Charles X. on the 7th of August, 1829, when the performance of "*Marion de Lorme*" was in question. We have hymns of praise and thanksgiving over the Revolution of 1830; and also, in more than one piece, strains drear and melancholy with the recurring troubles and uncertainties of the time. Napoleon comes in for a good deal of adulation; for are we not in the days just anterior to the bringing back of the great dead from St. Helena, and his second interment beneath the dome of the Invalides? And the contrast between the condition of the rich and the poor is vigorously shown. One piece of invective, against the man who had betrayed the Duchesse de Berry, foreshadows the tremendous denunciations of the Second Empire in the "*Châtiments*." Love poems, too, again we have, and some few songs. And throughout, if the general tone no longer possesses the gladness of youth, yet has it distinctly less of the melancholy of age than in the "*Feuilles d'Automne*." "*Olympio*"—for under that name the poet seems here to idealize himself—*Olympio* is attacked, mis-said, reviled; storms gloom, and lightnings flicker and flash round him, as they did of old round the hoar mount whose name he has borrowed; and in his less prophetic and more human character he visits again the places hallowed by the memories of love, and mourns in

memorable verse, as Lamartine had mourned before; as nearly all poets have mourned, over the mutability of things and nature's impassiveness. But, after all, Olympio is not un-comforted. He looks from this lower world to the world which is invisible, and determines to keep his soul's tranquillity unruffled, as a mountain keeps eternal and unmoved its coronet of snow. At which the reader may perhaps feel a little inclined to smile. But if he does he should balk the wish. For, in point of fact, life's storms beat their hardest round Olympio's head, and he did bear it above the clouds to the end. That there was a strong element of theatricality in his nature cannot be denied. Are we not told that Shakespeare himself had killed bees "with a flourish"? But behind the theatricality was a man, and a great man.

And now he was aspiring to be a member of the Academy, which somewhat fluttered the thirty-nine immortals, "seated," as Mr. Browning irreverently puts it, "by gout and glory," in their thirty-nine arm-chairs. Of course, looking at his genius and literary position, he ought to have been elected at once, and without demur. But academies are conservative, and by their very nature seldom march in the van of any literary or artistic movement. So he knocked at the door thrice before he gained admittance; was rejected in 1836 in favour of a M. Dupaty, who has left no great name of any kind; was rejected in 1839 in favour of M. Molé, whose name, or so much of it as remains, is philosophico-political rather than literary; was rejected in 1840 in favour of a scientific M. Flourens; and, finally, was elected in 1841.

Certain persons there were at the time, and Alexandre Dumas and Alphonse Karr were among them, who blamed the poet for wishing to be an Academician; and Mr. Cappon, in his recent clever book on Victor Hugo, echoes the thought, and asks, "if a green border on his vestment, and a *fautcuil*, even in that weighty assembly, could add any real distinction to the author of 'Hernani' and the 'Voix Intérieures'?" Perhaps not; and yet the feeling that here finds utterance seems to me, I confess, somewhat overstrained. Doubtless

very great men: Balzac, André Chénier, Rousseau, Pascal, Molière, Beaumarchais, Dumas himself, have sat in that forty-first arm-chair of which M. Arsène Houssaye has wittily written the history — that imaginary forty-first arm-chair which has been occupied by those who ought to have belonged to the Academy, and yet never found admittance there. But the forty-first arm-chair is one only, and the others are forty, and, strength for strength, the forty are stronger than the one. The French Academy is a body that no writer, however great, can afford to despise. Nor, looking at the matter in a larger, less personal aspect, is it fitting that a writer who is really great, should arrogantly refuse to contribute his share of lustre to a body so linked with all the nation's past. Therefore it seems to me that Madame Hugo's apology for her husband is scarcely needed. He wished to take an active part in politics, she tells us; and to do this a peerage was necessary, and to be eligible for a peerage he must be an Academician. Hence his candidature.

Be it so. But Madame de Girardin, who, under the pseudonym of Vicomet de Launay, acted as the chronicler of the time, has left an account of his reception on the 3rd of June, 1841, and tells us that he by no means seemed to regard the ceremony as a thing of naught, and took his position as an Academician very seriously. She tells us, too, how it had been expected that he would, in his speech, riddle with sarcasm his "classical" opponents. But those who anticipated mischief were disappointed. Victor Hugo's address soared out of petty personal regions, dealt largely with Napoleon, whose praise was, for the nonce on everybody's tongue, and somewhat, generally, with the high mission of the thinker and the writer. Nor did the same amenity fail him on the two subsequent occasions when it fell to his lot to speak at the Academy. On the 16th of January, and again on the 27th of February, 1845, he had to reply to the reception speeches of Saint-Marc Girardin and Sainte-Beuve. With neither writer can he have been in any sympathy.

Girardin, in his lectures on dramatic art, had spoken of Victor Hugo's works with perfect courtesy,—for when did a discourteous word proceed from those refined and Attic lips?—but still critically and without enthusiasm, and was essentially a classic; while with Sainte-Beuve, Victor Hugo was now on that curious footing of reticent hostility which each maintained towards the other to the end. But, in addressing both, his words were those of entire good taste; and his critical account of Sainte-Beuve's works was more than just; it was generous and kindly.

And did the Academy prove a stepping-stone to the peerage as Victor Hugo had hoped? Most certainly it did. With Louis Philippe he had for some time been on the best terms. His unique literary position more than justified his elevation. There was nothing in his views, as expressed so far, to make it probable that he would be a factious opponent of Guizot's Ministry, by which the King's Government was then conducted, or to the Government itself. And accordingly, on the 13th of April, 1845, he was made a peer. But of his doings in that capacity, and of his politics generally, I purpose to speak in another chapter.

Before doing so, however, it may be as well to say a few words about the poet's residence in the Place Royale, which he occupied from the autumn of 1832 till nearly the time when the *Coup d'Etat* drove him from Paris.¹ The house, we are told, I don't know how truly, had long, long years before been occupied by Marion de Lorme. It has been several times described. I quote M. Barbou's description, rather than M. de Banville's, because, though less poetical, it is perhaps more precise.

"The suite of apartments," he says, "was on the second floor, and approached by a wide and handsome staircase. A door opened into the dining-room, which was adorned with some fine tapestry, representing scenes in the 'Romaunt of the Rose.' . . . The study was a room full of quaint pieces of furniture, and overlooking an

¹ The house which he then occupied was in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne. It has been described by Théophile Gautier.

inner courtyard. The ceiling was decorated with a painting by Auguste de Châtillon, called *Le Moine Rouge*, 'the red monk,' a strange production, . . . its subject being a priest robed in red, lying at full length, and reading a Bible held up by a nude female figure. . . . The *salon* might almost be described as a picture gallery, so numerous were the artists . . . who had sought the honour of being allowed to contribute to its decoration. At one end was a high mantel-piece, fashioned according to the poet's taste, covered with drapery, and supporting some fine china vases. On the left was a sort of dais . . . on which it has been alleged that Victor Hugo, in his vanity, used to sit on a throne, . . . beneath a canopy, and extend his hand to be kissed by his admirers, who would mount the steps upon their knees. . . . Some arm-chairs of the time of Louis XV., made of gilt wood, and covered with tapestry, completed the furniture of the reception room. . . . Opposite the dais were three large windows reaching to the ground, and opening on to a balcony that ran the whole length of the *salon*, and overlooked the Square."

The picture is of a luxuriously artistic dwelling, and reminds us, in some of the details, of the interior decoration of Hauteville House, Guernsey, where the poet's taste in such matters was hereafter to find such full expression. The story of the dais and canopy, and the semi-religious function connected herewith, we might, I think, at once laugh away, even without M. Barbou's indignant disclaimer. Victor Hugo was, no doubt, inclined to pontificate on public occasions, and, in later years, spoke only too often *urbi et orbi*, to the city of Paris and to the world. But in private life, all evidence goes to prove that he was pleasant, genial, simple, a charming host, and fulfilled with an old-world charm of manner and courtliness. Forster, for instance, tells us with what "infinite courtesy and grace" he received Dickens and himself; and after descanting on the "noble corner house," the "gorgeous tapestries, the painted ceilings, the wonderful carvings, and old golden furniture," goes on to say:

"He was himself, however, the best thing we saw; and I find it difficult to associate the attitudes and aspect in which the world has lately wondered at him, with the sober grace and self-possessed quiet gravity of that night of twenty-five years ago. Just then Louis Philippe had ennobled him, but the man's nature was written noble. Rather under the middle size, of compact close-buttoned-up figure, with ample dark hair falling loosely over his close-shaven face, I never saw upon features so keenly intellectual such a soft and sweet geniality, and

certainly never heard the French language spoken with the picturesque distinctness given to it by Victor Hugo. He talked of his childhood in Spain, and of his father having been governor of the Tagus in Napoleon's wars; spoke warmly of the English people and their literature; declared his preference for melody and simplicity over the music then fashionable at the Conservatoire;¹ referred kindly to Ponsard;² laughed at the actors who had murdered his (Ponsard's) tragedy at the Odéon, and sympathized with the dramatic venture of Dumas. To Dickens he addressed very charming flattery in the best taste; and my friend long remembered the enjoyment of that evening."

But all testimony is to the same effect. M. Legouvé, the Academician, having to describe an interview with the great man, says, "he showed himself, on this occasion, what in private life he invariably was, unaffected, amusing, full of anecdote and pleasantry." M. Lesclide, his private secretary in later years, speaks to similar effect, and insists on "the charm of his conversation, which was easy, simple, yet full of colour, and, when he was animated, of an ardent enthusiasm." M. de Banville, who mentions the throne-and-daïs story as an invention of the small paragraphists of the press, says he "had indeed other tigers to comb"—a dignified foreign equivalent for "other fish to fry,"—than

"to play at royalty. He was then, as we have ever seen him, affable, full of welcome, thinking of every one, forgetful of himself, and retaining no trace of his aristocratic breeding, save an exquisite politeness and familiar courtesy. When in his house, you felt at home, free, happy, at ease, and warmed by a pleasant atmosphere of affection and tenderness. It was hospitality of the real right kind—that which you will find in a king's palace, and a woodcutter's hut."

Nor would it be right to forget the part which Madame Hugo contributed to the charm of this delightful hospitality. M. de Banville not only speaks enthusiastically of her dark beauty, calling her "the Muse of Romanticism," but also speaks of "the sovereign grace" with which she "did the honours" of her salon, and helped to make it a place where "all the men of that time who had achieved fame" delighted to congregate.

¹ Like many great verbal melodists, he had no ear or real liking for music.

² Whom the classical party had set up as his rival.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Revolution of July, 1830, which drove Charles X. from the throne of France, was a mistake, but an excusable mistake. The Revolution of February, 1848, which cut short the reign of Louis Philippe, was a mistake without an excuse. No doubt the Citizen King's government had committed errors, as what government has not? The suffrage was too restricted, the number of place-men in Parliament excessive. And that Guizot, the minister who in himself personified the policy of the last years of the reign, thought overmuch of the opinion of the Chambers, and over little of the opinion of the country, cannot be denied. But such reasons, however valid for the overturning of a ministry, were certainly not adequate reasons for upsetting a government, and casting a great nation adrift to the chances of revolution, anarchy, and imperialism.

Nor does it seem that at the time Victor Hugo would have repudiated this view. In order, however, to understand the part he took in politics during the stormy days from 1848 to 1851, it is necessary to go back, and to follow the course of his opinions from an earlier date.

Long years before, when he and the Government of the Restoration were young together, he had been an ardent royalist. His royalism, no doubt, cooled a good deal before the great three days of July, 1830, which sent Charles X. into exile; but still there is no strong evidence anywhere, that up to that time he went very fiercely into opposition. Madame Hugo makes much of the "*Ode à la Colonne*" (the "*Ode to the Column*"), published in 1827, under the following circumstances. The Austrian ambassador had asked a certain number of French marshals to an entertainment;—they came, and were announced with their names shorn of the titles won in battle against the Austrian arms. Whereupon they withdrew. And Victor Hugo, a few days

afterwards, published his fine ode, all quivering with patriotic indignation. But such an act need not at all necessarily have been an act of declared opposition. M. Biré shows almost conclusively that it was not; and that the king, on this occasion, shared the sentiments of the poet. The fact is, that with the death of Napoleon, imperialism had ceased for a time to be a practical factor in French politics, and that Victor Hugo might declare himself, in sonorous verse, to be the Memnon tuneful in the rays of the Imperial sun, without greatly hurting anybody's susceptibilities. The admiration was felt to be poetical only. When, therefore, he claimed in the preface to "*Marion de Lorme*," dated August, 1831, to have "been for many years in the most laborious, if not the most illustrious, ranks of the opposition," he seems clearly to have been deceiving himself. His royalism had certainly undergone a change since he wrote about the Virgins of Verdun, and La Vendée, and the consecration of Charles X. But he had drawn his pension regularly, and spoken of the king with politeness, if not enthusiasm. The evidence, in short, of his long years of patient labour for the overthrow of the government is wanting.

After the Revolution of 1830 his opinions took an added tinge of liberalism. He marched with the times. In the preface to "*Marion de Lorme*" that Revolution is characterized as "admirable." In the preface to "*Le Roi s'amuse*," dated November, 1832, we are told that "in July, 1830," "France had done three good days' work, had advanced three great stages along the road of civilization and progress." The "*Feuilles d'Automne*" contains a poem in favour of the "oppressed nationalities,"—"Greece, our disembowelled mother," and "bleeding Ireland, dying upon her cross," and "Germany in chains, struggling against ten kings," and Poland "dead and dishevelled, violated by a hideous Cossack." A portion of the "*Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées*" is entitled a "Journal of the Ideas and Opinions of a Revolutionist of 1830," and opens with this

declaration: "What we require after July, 1830, is a republic in fact, and a monarchy in word."

This last quotation may fairly be accepted as representing the attitude of Victor Hugo's mind from 1830 to 1848; and that attitude may still further be illustrated by another quotation from the same journal.

"The republic, in the view of some persons, is the warfare of those who possess neither a halfpenny, nor an idea, nor a single virtue, against whosoever possesses any one of these three things. The republic, as I understand it—that republic which is not yet ripe, but which will embrace the whole of Europe a century hence—is society entirely self-governed; self-protected through the national guard; self-judged through the jury; self-administered through the municipality; self-directed through the suffrage. In that republic the four members of the monarchy—the army, the magistracy, the administrative organization, the peerage, are only four inconvenient excrescences which will gradually wither and soon die."

Thus Victor Hugo was at this time what we should now call an "opportunist." He looked forward in the future to certain political and social changes. But meanwhile he had no desire to hurry matters—rather thought, on the contrary, that undue haste would cause accidents and delay—and was quite content to make the best use possible of existing institutions. Thus, for instance, though the peerage might prove in 1930 or thereabouts to be "an inconvenient excrescence," there was no reason why he should not, while that consummation was still remote, be a peer, and a useful peer—exercising his judicial functions reasonably and well, as it seems he did—and making speeches on copyright, on Poland, on the defence of the coast, on the readmission of the Bonaparte family into France, and on the aspirations of Pope Pius IX. towards a united Italy.

A republican in theory, a monarchist in practice, a liberal in his acceptance of the sonorous watchwords of liberalism, a conservative in his conviction that great immediate political changes would be an unmixed evil, a poet in his sympathy for the poor and down-trodden, a practical man in his appreciation of the fact that any bettering of the condition of the

masses must be a work of time and patience — such was Victor Hugo when the Revolution of February, 1848, broke suddenly upon constitutional monarchy in France.

That it came on him, at first, as a blow, seems unquestionable;—and all honour to the feeling, the blow was a blow to France. On the 24th of February, the king weakly abdicated rather than cause any effusion of blood; and the widowed Duchess of Orleans, with her two children, the Comte de Paris and the Duc de Chartres, went to the Chambers to see if it were yet possible to save the crown for the elder. It was a brave, a desperate expedient, and might perchance have been successful, so did the woman's sorrows and gallant bearing impress the Assembly, had not Lamartine, the poet, thrown the weight of his popularity and eloquence into the adverse scale. Victor Hugo at that time favoured the appointment of the Duchess as Regent, and vainly proclaimed her rights on the Place de la Bastille. When it became clear that the monarchy was gone, he hesitated for some time as to his future political course. In the month of April he was put forward as a candidate to represent Paris in the "Assemblée Constituante," which was to be called together for the purpose of framing a constitution. But his name only came out forty-eighth on the list,—Lamartine's being first,—and he was unsuccessful. On the 4th of June, however, a supplementary election proved more propitious. 86,965 votes were recorded in his favour, and he entered the Assembly. Among those elected with him was Louis Napoleon, then living as a very unattached prince in England.

Victor Hugo's address to the electors fairly represents the attitude he was to hold in the Assembly. There were two republics in possibility, he declared — one that would run up the red flag, erect a statue to Marat, make half-pence out of Napoleon's column, abolish property, destroy family ties, parade guillotined heads on the top of pikes, — and, in short, exhibit the ghastly phantasmagoria of 1793, which Victor Hugo was afterwards to regard with so much

complacency. The other republic, on the contrary, was really to be a very respectable and quite affair, and to inaugurate a reign of peace, plenty, and brotherhood. It will thus be seen that the poet at this time spake the words of sobriety and wisdom. His sympathy for the poorer classes was, as it had always been, ardent and openly expressed. But he would have nothing to say to national workshops and other quack remedies for their troubles. No doubt he had crotchets of his own, such as the abolition of capital punishment; but they were harmless and even beneficent crotchets when compared with the wild theories thrown hither and thither like Greek fire in that assembly of all the eccentricities. At no period of his subsequent life did he show the same sanity and equipoise of political judgment, as when sitting in the Constituent Assembly as a conservative republican.

A very short experience served to sicken France of the democratic government inaugurated in February, 1848. The constitution—a thoroughly bad one—framed by the Constituent Assembly, provided for the election of a president by universal suffrage. That election took place on the 10th of December, with this result—that Lamartine, who had started in the previous February with unbounded popularity, and had really rendered great services to France, was nowhere; that General Cavaignac, who represented moderate republicanism, only secured 1,448,107 votes, and that Louis Napoleon headed the poll with 5,434,226 votes.

And what did Louis Napoleon represent? Personally he represented a past that was simply ridiculous—a farcical landing at Boulogne with a tame eagle, a temporary imprisonment in a bathing machine, a hoplessly abortive attempt at Strasburg to incite a regiment to mutiny. But, of course, his name represented something essentially different, it represented a past to which Frenchmen of nearly all shades looked back as one of glory—a past in which revolutionary passion had been curbed by a strong, firm hand. And then that name had been so superbly advertised! Think

how the Napoleonic legend had been preached to the people, and by what effectual tongues. Béranger, the most popular poet of his day, had given it a voice through the length and breadth of the land. Thiers had devoted to its proclamation the beautiful lucidity of his prose. Victor Hugo had sung it again and yet again in impassioned verse. Not nine years before, the body of the great emperor had been borne through the streets of Paris, with all outward signs of a nation's mourning, and the country had re-echoed with the dead man's fame. And now, when the time was ripe, the nephew appeared transfigured by the uncle's glory. Every one, the most illiterate voter, knew Louis Napoleon's name; and in such a case to be known is everything. He was simply by far the best advertised among the candidates.

Victor Hugo has described, in the opening of his scathing book, "*Napoléon le Petit*" ("Napoleon the Little"), how in the gathering darkness of a winter afternoon, on the 20th of December, 1848, Louis Napoleon ascended the tribune of the Assembly, and swore in "the presence of God, and before the French people, to remain faithful to the democratic Republic one and indivisible, and to fulfil all the duties imposed on him by the Constitution."

To what extent did the Prince President mean to keep that oath? Who shall tell? The man was a mystic, a visionary, a fatalist, and in his strangely compounded intellect had probably a kind of belief in some personal mission of his own that absolved him from the petty trammels of honour. That the "democratic Republic" was in evil case even at that time is clear; and also that the "Constitution" was pretty nearly unworkable anyhow, and absolutely unworkable when subjected to the strain and jars of disloyalty. Victor Hugo, in his polemics, lays all the blame for subsequent events on Louis Napoleon's turpitude, on his intrigues for the consolidation of his own power, his constant attempts to discredit parliamentary government, his settled determination by all means to reach the Empire. But there is, of course, a different side to all this. If the advanced radical party, to

which Victor Hugo was so soon to belong, had not thoroughly frightened France, imperialism would have been impossible. The wild talk of the revolutionists, frothy with the froth of blood, the horrors of the insurrection of June, 1848, the martyrdom of the Archbishop of Paris, shot down as he strove to put an end to a fratricidal war — such were the arguments that told so heavily in Louis Napoleon's favour. He was borne to his evil goal by the faults of his enemies. Of course he took advantage of their faults. It was by playing on the fears which they excited that he secured the co-operation of statesmen of the highest character and intellect, who would, in calmer times, have been the first to oppose his designs.

Meanwhile, what part was Victor Hugo taking in public affairs? At first he favoured Louis Napoleon. They had both been elected to the Constituent Assembly at the same time, and when the question was debated whether the Prince, then still in London, should be admitted into France to take his seat, Victor Hugo voted in his favour. He also supported his candidature for the Presidency. At the same time, he was speaking and voting as a conservative republican, and on the 29th of January, 1849, we find him opposing the radical party who objected to the dissolution of the Assembly.

But in May, when the dissolution took place, and a new Assembly, the *Assemblée Législative* — far more conservative than the old — came into existence, Victor Hugo's attitude changed altogether. He had again been elected by the City of Paris, and now took up openly the position of extreme radicalism from which he never afterwards retreated. What had led to this change of front? We are not able to answer the question with any degree of precision. Victor Hugo himself, in one of his pompous later prefaces, tells us that —

“After June, 1849, the lightning flash that leaps out of events entered into the author's mind. That kind of flash is indelible. A flash of lightning that remains permanent — such is the light of truth in the human conscience. In 1849 that light shone definitely for him.

When he saw Rome trodden down in the name of France; when he saw the majority, hypocritical so far, suddenly throw away the mask behind which it had, on the 4th of May, 1848, cried seventeen times, 'Long live the Republic!' when he saw, after the 13th of June, the triumph of all the coalitions hostile to progress; when he saw that cynical joy, sadness filled his heart; he understood; and at the moment when the hands of the conquerors were held out to draw him into their ranks, he felt in the bottom of his soul that he too was one of the conquered. A corpse lay on the ground, and all cried, 'Lo, the Republic lies there!' He went and looked at that corpse, and recognized that her name was Liberty. Then he stooped towards her, and took the dead to his bosom as his wife. Before him, as he looked into the future, were overthrow, defeat, ruin, insult, exile, and he said, 'It is well!'

Not, perhaps, without a certain kind of eloquence all this, but decidedly a little vague; and as the poet does not appear, even at the time, to have condescended to more detailed explanation, one can scarcely wonder that the change in his opinions was regarded with suspicion. As he afterwards said, very characteristically, "I was accused of apostasy when I thought myself an apostle." Veillot, the acrid Roman Catholic journalist, writing, as usual, with a pen dipped in gall, simply accounted for his conversion by saying that he felt altogether outrivalled among the orators of the more Conservative ranks, and saw that his only chance of securing personal preeminence was among the Radicals. Montalembert, the eloquent Liberal Catholic, in one of their many word-duels, openly cast at the poet a rankling accusation of "having flattered and then denied every cause."

The party polemics of the day one may rightly set to one side. Victor Hugo's attitude during the years 1849, 1850, and 1851 is entirely to be commended in so far as it was attributable to a clear foresight on his part that Louis Napoleon aimed at a personal despotism. Where he seems to have gone wrong was in thinking that the imperialist designs could best be frustrated by ultra-radical means. By openly allying himself, therefore, to a party whose violence of act and speech formed the future Emperor's stock-in-trade, he simply played into the enemy's hands. That he should speak well and eloquently in his new cause was al-

most a matter of course. Together with a powerful voice, audible even amid the storms of a popular Assembly, Victor Hugo had all the other parts of an orator — perfect self-possession and confidence, a command of ready and striking language — and language not too delicate in its effects for the speaker's art — and an inborn feeling for form. His passion moved, and his sarcasm went barbed to its mark. That his speeches contained some verbal glitter is undoubtedly true. They seem to crackle every here and there, as one may say, with the tinsel of antithesis. But of their telling brilliancy there can be no question. Whether they are a statesman's speeches is a different matter. Let us take an instance. We have reached the 17th of July, 1851, and a great question is being debated in the Assembly. According to the constitution, Louis Napoleon's tenure of office will expire in 1852; but a revision of the constitution has been proposed. Failing such revision, the Prince President must retire into private life. Will he do so? And, if not, what means will he adopt to remain in power? Now, if ever, it seems desirable to use moderation for the purpose of conjuring the advancing peril, and showing that the republican party is not really a portent and a bugbear, but capable of right reason and good government. Yet this is the occasion which Victor Hugo selects for an harangue, eloquent indeed, but calculated to give a tongue to every worse accusation brought against the extreme radicals, and to alienate altogether those on whose help the republicans might have counted in any future struggle against the President. He glorifies the Revolution of 1793 as the "era foreseen by Socrates, and for which he drank the hemlock; as the work wrought by Jesus Christ, and for which he was nailed to the cross." He declares the Republic and the Revolution to be indissolubly bound together. He mingles, for common insult and execration, all kinds of monarchy, constitutional as well as unconstitutional. He proposes, as a practical measure, that all judges should be elected by universal suffrage, and the greater political questions decided by direct

appeal to the same tribunal. He speaks glibly of the "United States of Europe,"¹ and heralds the "august proclamation of the Rights of Man." In short, he makes a vivacious and telling speech, and plays the game of the ambitious Prince President most effectually. It was speeches of this kind that helped to make the *Coup d'Etat* possible, and gave Louis Napoleon his immense popular majorities.

But here, amid all this storm of politics, these lightnings of vivid speech and thunderings of revolution, we may fittingly pause once more for the purpose of getting a glimpse of the poet among his family and friends. The place of meeting is not of happy augury. It is none other than the Conciergerie prison, in which his two sons, and Paul Meurice and Auguste Vacquerie — the whole staff of the *Evénement*,² Victor Hugo's paper — had been confined for various press delinquencies. But what a merry party they are as M. de Banville drops in upon them! There is the poet himself, who has come to spend the day with the prisoners, and Madame Hugo, and their daughter, Adèle. The young men are "handsome, gay," full of life and spirits, making a jest of their incarceration. The parents are proud to see them in such good heart, and the father caresses their abundant locks. He, too, is "gay, smiling, happy . . . prodigal of winged words, of crystallized sayings, of amusing anecdotes, delightfully familiar, and a thousand times more witty than those who make trade and merchandize of wit." So does the dismal old place ring with their bright talk and laughter, and the day lightly, quickly pass, and fade into the night.

For now the 2nd of December, 1851, is upon us. The *Coup d'Etat*, however, belongs rather to the general history of France than to my immediate subject, and I need not

¹ "Really, this is going too far," cried Montalembert when the orator had reached this point, "Hugo is crazy!"

² Started on the 1st of April, 1848, with this motto: "Intense hatred of anarchy; tender love for the people."

tell its full story here. We all of us know how, during the fatal night from the 1st to the 2nd, the leading deputies from whom any organized resistance was to be expected, were arrested and lodged in prison! how, on the following day, a proclamation was published declaring the National Assembly dissolved, and appealing to universal suffrage to ratify the President's acts; how every printing-press in the capital was gagged; how every attempt at resistance was ruthlessly suppressed; how, in fine, the hand of an iron despotism seized France in its grasp.

Victor Hugo has himself told us the share which he took in resisting the President's usurpation. The news of what had happened in the night reached him at eight o'clock in the morning. He breakfasted hurriedly, kissed his wife and daughter, and sallied forth to meet the other Republican deputies. The meeting took place, and there was some speaking and determination, and then separation in various directions to see if it were possible to induce the people to rise. But from the first it must have been clear that any very effectual rising was problematic. The Assembly was unpopular with the masses, who remembered besides the punishment they had received during the insurrection of June, 1848, and had little care to try conclusions with the troops again. Moreover Louis Napoleon's appeal to universal suffrage was a skilful move. So the first day wore through in somewhat sterile agitation, and Victor Hugo slept, or rather spent a sleepless night, in the house of a stranger—in a delightful domestic nest which he describes with an artist's feeling for the effectiveness of contrast.

The next morning he visited his own home; learned that a police-officer had been to the place the day before; went off in a cab to the classic region of revolt, the Faubourg Saint Antoine; found that there had already been some fighting; that the barricade erected mainly by the representatives was taken, and Representative Baudin killed. Here, in view of the entire apathy of the Faubourg, Victor Hugo acknowledges that he felt the cause of resistance to

be well-nigh hopeless. Nevertheless he did not surcease from his efforts. There were more meetings, more harangues of the people, more endeavours to issue proclamations, though the difficulty of getting anything printed was almost insuperable, and another flying visit to his home. Then, after an evening all lurid with battle and the coming storm, he found refuge for the night once more in a friend's house.

The third day, further proclamations; and also, which is more perhaps to the purpose, greater signs of a popular rising—barricades in every direction, which Victor Hugo visits,—and a great deal of firing. The hearts of the insurgents are elate; and Victor Hugo is even considering whether it may not be desirable to spare the life of Louis Napoleon when taken, and so help on the cause of the abolition of capital punishment. But at this moment the troops, who have hitherto been acting more or less fitfully, put forth their whole power. The boulevards are swept with grape. Volleys of musketry are fired in every direction. The people in the streets are bayoneted and sabred down.

This, according to Victor Hugo's constant contention, was mere murder, a cowardly massacre of non-combatants, having for its only object intimidation. And even M. de Maupas, the Prefect of Police at the time, and one of the four chief agents in the *Coup d'Etat*, seems to admit that the President's military adviser, Saint Arnaud, had purposely allowed the insurrection to gather head so as to quell it more effectually and for ever. If this were really Saint Arnaud's object, he succeeded most entirely. Paris was thoroughly cowed. There were, during the same evening and night of December 4th, further barricades defended and taken, further deeds of violence. But the fight was virtually spluttering out. Victor Hugo fled from place to place, striving in vain to kindle the dying embers, seeing on his way many a scene of blood and sorrow, to be thereafter chronicled in his "Histoire d'un Crime," or to find a place and irretrievably lost. From the 5th he was a mere fugitive, in his poetry and fiction. But the game was played out.

flitting hither and thither, and lurking in one hiding-place after another. Madame Drouet's devotion here stood him in good stead; and on December 14th, by means of a false passport and a disguise, he succeeded in reaching Brussels.¹

CHAPTER IX

AS one who has suffered shipwreck upon the stormy waters of life and bravely struggles to the shore, so did Victor Hugo reach Brussels on December 14, 1851. The cause for which he had fought lay in ruins; the party to which he belonged was hopelessly beaten and dispersed; his private fortune, the result, as he tells us, of his own toil, was greatly impaired. Yet not for a moment did he bate heart or hope. "Never once," his son says, "did his best friends, his own family, . . . hear from his lips a single word of discouragement or sadness that might betray the secret emotions caused by so terrible a wrench from all that he held dear." His pen was his sword, and with his pen he determined to attack the master of legions, by whom he had been driven from the soil of France.

Brussels was already full or filling with refugees. They were republicans for the most part, though with a smaller proportion of royalists, and mixed in character as well as politics. Many were men of mark, General Lamoricière, Emile de Girardin the famous journalist, and others. But Victor Hugo, of course, overtopped them all. In January he had taken up his quarters at No. 27, in the picturesque beautiful Grande Place, the great square where Counts Egmont and Horn were beheaded when Alva ruled in the Netherlands—the square that witnessed the ball on the night before Waterloo; and there, in a fairly-large apartment com-

¹ M. de Maupas says the Government could easily have laid hands upon him if it had wished to do so; and this seems quite probable.

manding a full view of the Hotel de Ville and its beautiful spire, he received many visitors, and worked assiduously. The visitors would come and go while he was writing. But they never took off his attention; for at the point of his pen he felt, as it were, his adversary's sword in the great duel between them, and his whole soul was in the combat. At first he intended to open his attack with a history of the *Coup d'Etat*; and he states that he actually commenced the "Histoire d'un Crime" on December 14th, the very day of his arrival in Brussels. But soon he seems to have felt that the times required something more stirring than a history, however impassioned, some more direct appeal to God and man against the wrong that had been perpetrated. Accordingly, though he completed the "Histoire d'un Crime" on May 5th, 1852, he did not publish it then, nor for twenty-five years afterwards. Now, with a pen all quivering with indignation, he was writing one of the most superb pieces of invective in literature, "Napoléon le Petit."

I know no other work that is quite like it. Macaulay's article on Barrère is cold by comparison. Even Milton's "Eikonoklastes" is not so uniformly at white heat. Almost literally the language seems molten with passion, and rolls in a stream like lava, lurid, scorching, devouring. As the reader is rushed through page after page, the horror of Louis Napoleon's crimes deepens upon him. What manner of ruler can this have been who solemnly swore his oaths before God and man, and then violated them so cynically? What kind of government was this which he had instituted? What crimes were these, what mire of blood, what infamy of cruel persecution, through which he had crawled his way to power? What eloquence had he quenched in the process? By what abject tools had he been absolved and declared innocent? So, through chapter after chapter, is the reader borne breathless and indignant,—noting every here and again some passage of brilliant rhetoric, like the famous description of Mirabeau as the incarnation of a New World speaking to the Old.

The book burst into that newer world like a bomb-shell in July, 1852;— and one of the effects of the explosion was to blow Victor Hugo himself out of Belgium. The country was given to hospitality, and not unmindful to entertain strangers and political refugees; and it was a country where the liberty of the press had due recognition. But, for all that, it was a very little country beside a very large country, and to suffer the *de facto* government of France to be outraged, might prove perilous. So, as the existing laws did not provide adequate machinery for causing Victor Hugo to “move on,” a special law was passed to enable the government to get rid of such a dangerous guest. His sons, who had heard the thunder of the *Coup d'Etat* from behind the prison walls of the Conciergerie, had joined him on their release in January, 1852; and all three together left Antwerp on the 1st of August, and, merely passing through England, landed in Jersey on the 5th.

The house which the Hugo family occupied in the island stands on the low shore, a little way out of St. Helier, and bears the designation of 3, Marine Terrace. It is an ordinary seaside house enough, stuccoed and slate-roofed, with no pretensions or special character, but deriving a slightly French look from its green shutters. Along the back towards the shore, there is a greenhouse with grapes, and then a little garden with some evergreens, and then a strip planted with tamarisks,— which, as I was told, I know not how truly, had been brought from France, and, with an exile's tenderness, set there by Victor Hugo himself. A sort of sandy ridge hides the sea from the lower rooms. Beyond this ridge stretch the sands, all studded with rocks, and then comes the encircling waters — a peaceful, sunny expanse on a fine day, but, with a rising tide and a stormy wind a very devil's caldron of frothing yeast.”

The house has as few pretensions internally as externally, and as the autumn began to gather, seemed dreary enough to the exiles. “There is nothing so icy cold as that English whiteness,” says Victor Hugo, describing in after years the

effect of the whitewashed walls. "The place was like a piece of built methodism." Why then had they chosen to live there? A little by the choosing of chance, and because it happened to be the first dwelling they had found to let. A little, too, as M. Vacquerie tells us in his "*Miettes de l'Histoire*," because it was near the town, and Mdlle. Hugo's twenty summers craved some amusement. Madame Hugo, who had been ill at the time of the *Coup d'Etat*, and seems to have so far remained in France, soon joined her husband and sons. Let us look at the group first through her eyes, and then through the eyes of the poet himself.

"Our life," she writes to one of her relations, on the 13th of October, "is regular, quiet, and in part devoted to work. The country is superb, and all articles of food are abundant, easily obtained, and a little cheaper than in Paris. The land is pre-eminently that of freedom. Policemen are unknown. Passports are papers of which the meaning is not understood. Everybody comes and goes as suits his particular fancy. . . . The Queen of England is greatly worshipped. . . . I am extremely pleased with Charles. He accepts his new life as a philosopher — wears thick boots and coarse clothing, grows stout, fishes, is followed by a dog which has taken a fancy to him, is in excellent spirits, and thereby gives life to our home. He has begun a book of which three-quarters are finished, but the arrival of M. and his wife have interrupted him. . . . The sojourn here of Toto (François Victor Hugo) has prevented young Charles, whom his father calls the 'indefatigable idler,' from continuing to work at his volume. Charles works for twelve hours at a stretch, and then the slightest thing disturbs him. For the rest, he has entirely given up dress and all frivolous spending of money. Exile has been of the greatest benefit to my dear child. . . . It does not suit my daughter so well, nor, indeed, did her moral health require so heroic a remedy. But winter is coming soon, and here people dance a great deal, stupidly, but still they dance. Get Victor (François) to tell you what the dancing routs of Jersey are like."

Does not this extract introduce us pleasantly, familiarly, to the Hugo family? Does it not bring before us the kind of change which transportation from Paris had produced in their lives? How dull the gaieties of St. Helier seem to these gay young Parisians! How much, as we learn further from M. Asseline, the young men miss the dissipations of the metropolis of pleasure! But they accept the inevitable

cheerfully, and put a good face on evil fortune. They work, they ride, they fish, they fence, they bathe, they take photographs.¹ Charles, who had evidently been developing dandy tastes upon the boulevards, now dresses manfully in homespun; and Miss Adèle will gladly accept the Jersey dances in default of more brilliant assemblies.

Victor Hugo, too, has painted us a picture of his home at this time — a picture as severe and gloomy as a Spagnoletto or Zurbaran — dead earnest every brush-stroke of it:

"Those who dwelt in this house . . . of melancholy aspect . . . were a group, or let us rather say a family. They were exiles. The eldest was one of those men who, at a given moment, are no longer wanted in their native land. He was leaving a popular assembly; the others, who were young, were leaving a prison. To have written aught, is not that a sufficient motive for bolts and bars? Whither should thought lead if not to a dungeon?

"The prison had released them into exile.

"The eldest, the father, had all his dear ones by his side, with the exception of his eldest daughter, who had been unable to follow him. His son-in-law was with her.²

"Silent they often leant over a table, or sat on a bench, grave, musing together, thinking without speech of the two who were away. . . . One morning, at the end of November, two of the inhabitants of this place, the father and the younger of the sons, were sitting in the parlour. They were silent like men after a shipwreck.

"The rain fell, the wind howled, the house was as it were deafened by the external clamour. Both were sunk in thought, absorbed, perchance, in considering the coincidence of a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile.

"Suddenly the son lifted up his voice" [I am translating quite literally], "and questioned the father:

"What do you think of this exile?"

"That it will be long."

"How do you intend to employ it?"

"I shall contemplate the ocean."

"There was a silence. The father resumed:

"And you?"

"I," said the son, "I shall translate Shakespeare."

¹ M. Vacquerie, who was one of the party, thus describes their occupations.

² The reference here, I imagine, is to the daughter who was sleeping her long sleep by the waters of the Seine.

Fortunately there is evidence that Victor Hugo was not always in this tragic mood during his residence at Marine Terrace; for on the door of one of the upper rooms are scratched, in his handwriting and with his signature, the words "spes," "pax"—"hope" and "peace." And, more fortunately still, he did a great deal during his nineteen years of exile besides contemplating the ocean. He wrought without remission, at prose and verse. And the firstfruits of his toil was a volume of poems, published in 1853. His Muse had been all but silent since she sang of the burial of the great Napoleon in 1840; she now put a sterner string to her lyre, and sang of the misdeeds of Napoleon "the Little." The title of the new book frankly indicates its character. It is called "*Les Châtiments*."

A terrible book, a book of lashing invective and sarcasm, a book well named "*The Chastisements*," for in verse after verse one watches as it were the wriggle of the lash—ay, sees the spurt of blood where it falls, and hears the sharp cry of pain. Is such a book justifiable one is tempted to ask? Is there not something cruel in thus using the pen as a Russian soldier would use a knout? But here, I think, Victor Hugo must be exonerated. There is no sign throughout his life that he ever employed his tremendous literary power for the mere purpose of inflicting pain. He could hit out freely enough on occasion, and probably took a certain pleasure—as what pugilist does not?—in the skill and vigour with which he delivered his blows. But he had not simply the mauling of his opponents in view. He really fought for what he had persuaded himself, rightly or wrongly, were causes of momentous importance. The Empress of the French,¹ it is said, had a strong desire to see this very book, and, after reading it, observed, "M. Victor Hugo must hate us very much." And so he did. He hated the Emperor with a gamekeeper's hatred of a stoat or a pike, as a noxious thing to which no "law" could justifiably be given.

¹ Of the Empress he always spoke with perfect courtesy.

So in the face of the Empire and its orgies, he evokes the crime on which it had been founded, and the victims it had done to death, or sent to rot in the penal settlement of Cayenne. He takes for the title of each of the books into which the volume is divided, one of the cant expressions used by the supporters of the *Coup d'Etat*, "Society is saved," "Order is re-established," "Religion is glorified," and flashes upon the words the fierce light of his satire. Poor Louis Napoleon, how sadly he fares in the hands of this angry opponent; what ignominy is heaped upon his head! Did his uncle, the great Napoleon, deserve punishment for arresting the march of Liberty? It might have seemed that that punishment had fallen when he saw the Grand Army melt into an interminable horror of snow during the retreat from Moscow. But not so. The full thunderbolt of God's wrath had not yet fallen. Was the punishment consummated amid the wild confusion of defeat at Waterloo? Still not yet. There were worse things in store for the ruined Emperor. Yes, worse things than that; and even worse things than to be chained to the rock of St. Helena. The worst chastisement of all lay in his nephew's guilt and shame. Translate this back in thought from bald prose to such verse as makes of each situation — Moscow, Waterloo, St. Helena — a mighty picture, and you will understand the peculiar kind of lyrical satire that infuses most of this book. Or take another poem, the "*Souvenir de la Nuit du 4*" ("Reminiscence of the Night of the 4th"). It is the account, which Victor Hugo has also written in prose, of an incident he had witnessed on the evening of the 4th of December, when he was hurrying hither and thither in Paris for the purpose of stirring the people to resistance. A child, a boy of seven, had been shot down as he ran across the street. Some one had carried him to the room where he lived with his grandmother — a place quite humble, but decent, and every way respectable. The little corpse lay in the old woman's arms, and she was murmuring over it half-broken words, "to think that he called me grandmama this morning," "only seven years old,"

"the masters at his school were so pleased with him," "he was all that I had left of his mother." Then they took the child and undressed him. There was a top in the pocket. As they drew off his socks the grandmother started; "Don't hurt him," she cried, and taking the poor, cold feet into her withered hands, she tried to warm them at the hearth. Then she burst into terrible sobs. Why had they killed her child? What had he done? What government of murderers and brigands was this?

"Mother," says the poet, taking up his parable,

"Mother, it is clear that when you asked that question you did not understand politics. M. Napoléon—for that, it seems, really is his name—is poor and a prince; he is fond of palaces; it pleases him to have horses, lacqueys, money for his play, his table, his pleasures, and his hunting. At the same time he acts as the saviour of the family, the church, and society; he also desires to have Saint Cloud for residence, where, mid the roses of summer, the prefects and mayors may come and worship him. And that is why it is necessary that old grandmothers with their poor, gray, trembling fingers should sew the shrouds of seven-years old children."

This is a very fine poem. There is a simplicity and directness about it beyond praise. Almost each line is self-sufficient, pregnant, and decisive, like a line from a dialogue of Euripides.

And here, perhaps, it may be convenient to take a general survey of what Victor Hugo wrote and thought about Louis Napoleon and his government. Of "Napoléon le Petit" I have already spoken, and also of the "Châtiments." The third book in which he treated of the *Coup d'Etat*, the "Histoire d'un Crime," was written in the first six months of 1852, but a good deal "worked upon" afterwards, as I should gather from the style, and not published till 1877. All three books may, for my present purpose, be taken together.

That they are in any sense impartial cannot be affirmed. When Michelet, the historian, was accused of partiality, he boldly accepted the charge, and declared that he was, and should ever remain, partial, strongly partial on the side of

justice and right. Victor Hugo would have rebutted any similar attack with the same reply. Was there anything to be said, he would have asked wonderingly, in favour of Louis Napoleon and his rout? Consequently, if we want to know how it came to pass that imperialism became possible in France, that the country ratified the *Coup d'Etat* and acclaimed the Empire by such overwhelming majorities, and that men of high character and ability, such as Montalembert, went with the President up to December, 1851, and some few even beyond — if we want information on these and kindred matters, we must look elsewhere. On these points Victor Hugo will not enlighten us. In his view Napoleon and his immediate instruments were malefactors, and all who supported them knaves, cowards, fools.

Such a way of looking at an important historical event is obviously a little wanting in discrimination. Nor can one altogether avoid a feeling of scepticism when noting throughout these books what a dark cloud of infamy hovers over the one party, and what a brilliant light of virtue and glory illumines the other. Every general on the side of the *Coup d'Etat* is venal, every soldier drunken, every police-agent shameless. If one of these fautors of crime meets an honest patriot he hangs his head, stammers, and has nothing to say for himself. If insulted, however grossly, he reviles not again. Officers who are about to order wholesale butchery, offer their cheeks to the smiter with a compunction that would be quite edifying, if it did not so obviously spring from the terrors of an evil conscience. But what a change when we come to the other, the right side! What courage, what ardent patriotism, what disinterestedness, what eloquence, what capacity for saying the right and telling thing exactly at the proper moment! The men of action among these advanced Republicans are heroes, the men of thought or speech geniuses. Here is So-and-so of whom the world never heard very much; he is a "pamphleteer like Courier, and a song-writer like Béranger."

Now, of course, there is exaggeration in all this. The

supporters of the *Coup d'Etat* were not uniformly venal. Many had persuaded themselves that Louis Napoleon's strong hand was needed to save them from the vagaries of Victor Hugo's friends. The opponents of the *Coup d'Etat* were not uniformly the salt of the earth. They were a mixed body of men like the rest of us — good and evil together. And as to So-and-so, we may be quite sure, without reading a word of his pamphlets or his songs, that he bore no resemblance to either Courier or Béranger. But when one looks beyond the exaggeration, when one tries to get to the real essential history of the *Coup d'Etat*, then I fear it must be admitted that Victor Hugo's view is not substantially unjust. The *Coup d'Etat* was an act of illegality. It violated an existing constitution. It could only have been justified by the extreme peril of society. But in December, 1851, no such terrible peril existed. Though the future of France was dark, it was not desperate. The difficulties ahead were not insuperable. And in looking for a solution of these difficulties, Louis Napoleon was guided rather by his own selfish interests than by care for the well-being of France. Therefore the government which he founded was a government of decay. It had no root in the better aspirations of the country, and could produce no ultimate fruit. In the *Coup d'Etat* lurked the germs of Sedan. Accordingly history, for all her large tolerance, will refuse to obliterate Victor Hugo's terrible words. Those words will live by their literary power. They will live also, too many of them, by their truth.

But now another *Coup d'Etat* comes across our way,— yes, in territory subject to her gracious Majesty the Queen, another *Coup d'Etat*— for so does Charles Hugo designate the events that led to his father's expulsion from Jersey. The reader, however, need be under no alarm. This was a *Coup d'Etat* without effusion of blood. No barricades were erected in the streets of St. Helier. No volleys of grape and musketry mowed down the peaceful citizens of that bright and busy town. No autocratic English governor determined to suppress the liberties of the island, and march through

crime to his nefarious ends. Comparatively speaking, this political event must be regarded as a tame affair.

Divested of a good deal of extraneous matter, its history appears to be somewhat as follows: in 1854-5, the English and French armies were fighting side by side in the Crimea. A close and friendly alliance united the two countries, and mutual civilities took place between their respective rulers. This was naturally gall and wormwood to the French exiles. To them the Emperor appeared simply as a criminal and outlaw; and France, so long as he held sway, ought, in their view, to have been under a kind of international interdict. Accordingly they wrote and spoke very intemperately about the alliance, and with peculiar and offensive virulence about the Emperor's visit to the Queen, and the Queen's visit to the Emperor. This was, of course, not calculated to please the English public. To be hospitable is one thing, but to be lectured and insulted by one's guests is another. English feeling rose pretty high, as it was sure to do when England's sons were shedding their blood against the same enemy as the sons of France. Nor in such a cause was Jersey likely to be behind the rest of the Empire. The French exiles in the island had always been particularly busy. They were a small active band, living in the kind of agitation that exile fosters, seeing the baleful shadow of the Emperor everywhere, keeping the keenest of noses for a spy, writing apace, issuing a newspaper, *L'Homme* ("Man"), to which they confided the story of their wrongs and hopes — and, in short, looking at everything through the somewhat narrow lens of their own position. Sooner or later a collision between them and the islanders seemed inevitable. On the 10th of October, 1855, *L'Homme* published a letter that had been addressed by three of the London exiles to the Queen. Why had the Queen gone to Paris? the letter asked. She herself was, so the writers were pleased to say, "as honest a woman as it was possible for a queen to be." What did she mean by going to Paris, where she had "put Canrobert in his bath" — a graceful allusion to the Order of the Bath, —

“drunk champagne, and kissed Jérôme Bonaparte,”—where she “had sacrificed everything, her dignity as a queen, her scruples as a woman, her pride as an aristocrat, her feelings as an Englishwoman, her rank, her race, her sex, everything, even to her shame, . . . even to her honour”? That this letter was in the worst possible taste needs no demonstration. The people of Jersey, who, as Madame Hugo had remarked on first landing in the island, were particularly loyal, and greatly attached to the Queen, took it in very evil part. They were in no mood to appreciate the subtle distinction drawn by Charles Hugo. *L'Homme* had possibly published the letter without endorsing its sentiments; but *L'Homme* had published the letter. That was enough. An indignation meeting was held on the 13th of October, and, amid great enthusiasm, resolved to petition the governor to suppress the paper. Then the mob made an attack on the publishing office; but not a very determined attack, for the besiegers were effectually put to flight by a shower and one policeman. However, the town was in an uproar, the exiles were in peril, and Victor Hugo sent his manuscripts into hiding. Whereupon the governor ordered the editorial staff of *L'Homme* to leave the island. This raised the spirit of the exiles; and Victor Hugo drew up a protest,—in which, after referring, not very relevantly, to the “glove of Castlereagh,”—whom I take to be our old friend Lord Castlereagh,—he went on to declare that Louis Napoleon was very wicked, that the English Government had for ally “the crime-emperor,” and that England would shortly become “an annexe of the French Empire.” “And now,” the protest concluded, “expel us.” Whereupon they were expelled. The protest is dated the 17th of October, and on the 31st Victor Hugo and his son François Victor left by the steamer for Guernsey.

To what extent this expulsion was legal according to the Constitution of Jersey, I do not know. The act was clearly one which the exiles had done their best to provoke, by going counter in a very offensive way to a popular feeling. This,

however, does not justify it; and whether lawful or not, it seems clearly to have been a mistake. *L'Homme* and the exiles were not doing much harm to any one, and might well have been left alone. That the expelled should have regarded this new misfortune as due to the Machiavellian influence of the Emperor, is comprehensible enough. To their fevered fancy the Emperor was ubiquitous; — did not Victor Hugo himself consider that Lord Palmerston had refused to respite Tapner, the murderer, out of deference to the wishes of that potentate? But we, who look at these things with the unbiased eyes of posterity, may rest content with simpler explanations.

CHAPTER X

WITH the transfer of the poet's home from Jersey to Guernsey, we may, for a time at least, bid farewell to politics, and return to literature. It was while living at Hauteville House, Guernsey, that he published the masterpieces of his later life.

But first a word as to the house itself — a house which will for ever be associated with Victor Hugo, as Abbotsford is associated with Scott, and Rydal Mount with Wordsworth. It stands about half way up a little narrow picturesque ill-paved street that ascends from St. Peter Port to the Haute Ville, and is, externally, as respectable a house as need be, such a house as a well-to-do country solicitor or doctor might inhabit, with a little front yard containing two trees — evergreen oaks if I remember right — and a door standing well in the centre, and two windows on each side of the door. But once within, we bid farewell to the commonplace directly. Victor Hugo was evidently an æsthete “before letters,” an æsthete before the time when old oak, blue china, and tapestry had become fashionable. He must for years have collected these articles with assiduity and excellent dis-

erection. The place is full of them: old oak, tiles, and a tapestried ceiling in the dining-room; old oak in the billiard- and smoking-rooms; old oak in the almost palatial guest-chamber prepared for Garibaldi, and to which Garibaldi never came; and tapestry pretty well everywhere. Everywhere too, inscriptions in Latin or French, containing, as one may suppose, the quintessential wisdom which the poet-philosopher had distilled from the leaves of the Tree of Life: "The People are now little, but they will be great;" "Night, death, life;" "Life itself is an exile." There are portraits too of Victor Hugo,¹ and one of Madame Hugo, painted when she would be about thirty-five, a dark, handsome woman, with fine white arms and shoulders, and a face puissant, though scarcely intellectual, and an almost voluptuous look in the eyes. A few drawings executed by the poet are there also; for this man of many aptitudes was a busy draughtsman, and with any kind of instrument, and any sort of pigment — ink, sepia, cigar ash, charcoal, mulberry juice, burnt onion, tooth paste,—would draw the vividest, most fantastic pictures, and might unmistakably have been a notable imaginative painter if he had not been the first poet of his time. At the back of the house a garden, fairly large and delightfully situated, tosses into every room the perfume of its flowers.

But all this while we have not penetrated into the temple's inner shrine, not reached the place where the poet's thoughts were moulded into their often perfect form of words. In order to get to this, we must leave the ground floor where are the dining-room and billiard-rooms; must pass the drawing-room with its somewhat rococo gilding; must go higher still, past the Garibaldi chamber on the next floor; and then up another flight of stairs, and through a short book-shelved corridor, when we shall find ourselves in a curious sort of glass-enclosed place, a place more like a photographer's studio than anything else to which I can compare it; and there,

¹ Not very satisfactory portraits. Victor Hugo said in later life, "I really was a better looking young fellow than they used to paint me."

there in one corner, we shall see a black shelf, a kind of simple standing-desk;—and at that shelf Victor Hugo wielded his untiring pen.

With such a view! Through all the glass sides of the place, wherever one looks, there is a very festival of nature's beauty. To the right is the green slope of the hill, gardens and trees, and a fort. Beyond lies the great encircling sea, with the long straight spine of Sark on the horizon. Nearer in are the twin islands of Jethou and Herm, and, dotted here and there, rocks round which the white foam chafes almost constantly. Back towards the shore again, Castle Cornet stands on its rock below us,—and there is the port, and the shipping, and the long low line of the coast trending out at Saint Sampson; and back again, further along the left, the town rising against the hill, and the red-roofed houses jostling one another at our feet. Well had this eagle spirit chosen his eyrie. One likes to think of him watching the changes of light and shadow that play over this superb expanse of land and sea, and seem to give it almost a voice.

Close to this unique study is the little garret room in which Victor Hugo mostly slept. When I saw it, his father's sword lay on the bed, and there were on the walls two pictures of Victor Hugo himself as he lay dead.

But death was not yet in the winter of 1855-6, when Victor Hugo would be moving into Hauteville House. He was then a hale and hearty middle-aged man of fifty-four or so, with over thirty years more of good work in him; and life, even life in the saddened garb of exile, must have smiled at him not unpleasantly as he set up his household gods in his new abode, and began to adorn it to his taste. One of his favourite sayings, we are told by M. Asseline, was to the effect that "a little work is a burden, and much work a pleasure." And if we take this wholesome motto for true, as it indubitably is, he had many a happy hour in that glass study of his. His habits seem to have been very regular. He would rise at six, or shortly after, refresh himself with a sight of nature in her first morning beauty from the sort of

balcony that runs round the top of the house, and then write steadily, without interruption, till twelve.

"After this, with his legs a little stiff, for he had acquired the habit of standing as he wrote, and of walking when in the act of composition, he would come slowly down the stairs, the tapestry deadening the sound of his steps, and would lightly shake off his graver thoughts, and give them a holiday for the rest of the day. He was now no longer the poet, the inspired prophet of a few minutes ago; he was the friend who came to be with his family, the dear kind friend who had always some pleasant word for greeting, and a tender caress for farewell. Ah, admirable great man! And how can I, when the word work is mentioned, not call to mind the ingenious tender devices by which he beguiled us to follow his example; for he did not like to see any one idle about him. 'No day without its line,' he was wont to say."

So even Charles, "the indefatigable idler," who had now reached the age of twenty-nine, having been born on the 2nd of November, 1826, was won to labour, and wrought at his novels pretty regularly; while François, who was two years younger, having been born on the 22nd of October, 1828, set himself assiduously to the gigantic task of translating Shakespeare.

The latter was the more serious spirit of the two. "The younger is the austere one," said Victor Hugo in the somewhat grandiloquent account which he gave of his two sons in the introduction to Charles Hugo's "*Hommes de l'Exil*;"—"he never loses an hour, he entertains a religious respect for time, his habits are at once those of a Parisian and a monk;" and the young man himself describes his existence at this time as that of a "Benedictine," and speaks of its "salutary monotonousness," and the health, content, and serenity of the household. In their opinions on political, literary, and social matters, the sons were closely in accord with the father. This indeed was counted to them for sin by Veuillot, of the venomous pen, who complained that, however much they might grow in years, they never seemed to put forth any branch or twig that ventured to stray beyond the paternal enclosure. But, after all, their father was Victor Hugo; and, with such a father, a certain ductility of mind

was excusable. Most of us, I think, will consider that there is something beautiful, and one may almost say august, in the sight of these three men so bravely, and with such unity of purpose, doing battle against adverse fortune.

And what was the first jar of honey that came from this busy hive? A book of poems by Victor Hugo, with a preface dated March, 1856, and "*Les Contemplations*" for title.

The book is divided into two parts, of which the first is called "*Formerly*," and contains poems either written between the years 1830 and 1843, or relating to these years; while the second is called "*To-day*," and refers, in the same manner, to the years intervening between 1843 and 1855. And why should the poet thus have taken the year 1843 as marking so distinct an epoch in his life, and separating the present from the past? Because it was in that year that he had lost his elder daughter, Léopoldine. She had been married, on the 15th of February, to Charles Vacquerie, the brother of one of Victor Hugo's staunchest admirers. The marriage was a marriage of love on both sides, and altogether happy. But on the 4th of September death stepped in, and turned the joy of both families into mourning. The Vacqueries lived at Villequier on the Seine. The young couple went out on the day in question for a sail down the river. A sudden wind upset the boat. The young bride seems to have lost her presence of mind, and resisted all her husband's efforts to detach her from the sinking craft. He was an expert swimmer, and would probably have taken her safely to the shore if she had yielded to his efforts. That he might easily have saved himself there seems no question. As it was, both were drowned.¹

Such is the terrible tragedy that gives its tone to much of the second part of the "*Contemplations*." The father looks back into his daughter's short life — he sees her in her childhood,—“Ah, do you remember the pretty little dress she wore?” He thinks of her as she used to dance about his

¹ There is a striking account of the accident in Alphonse Karr's "*Guêpes*" for September, 1843.

desk as he sat at work, and scribble her formless pictures, her little lisplings of art, over his papers,—“and, I don’t know how it happened,” he says, “but my best lines always seemed to spring into life on the parts of the paper that she had touched.” He hears her at her play, too, listens to her pretty child-warblings of pleasure, as in the summer days she flitted here and there beneath his window. Then memory brings back the happy evenings they used to spend together—the book, or story—all that gracious companionship—there is none surely more beautiful—between an intelligent girl and her father. Gone, gone, things of the past, covered one and all by the cere-cloth of death. And with the thought of death come the obstinate questionings, the dark misgivings, that death suggests. Does she know aught in the grave where she lies? Feeling so cold in her narrow bed, does she ask, “has my father forgotten me?” Forgotten? How could that be? Twelve years afterwards, addressing his wife, he can say that no single day has passed on which they have not incensed her name with love and prayer. And in that same twelfth year, being in Guernsey, on All Souls’ Day, the “Day of the Dead,” as the French call it, he turns his accustomed thought to the little churchyard by the Seine, and would so fain go thither once more and carry to the grave his tribute of flowers; failing which—for the bitter waters of exile flow between him and the place—he wafts to his dead child, wherever she may be, the spirit of the book in which her memory is enshrined.

But though Léopoldine Vacquerie occupies so important a place in the “Contemplations,” she by no means fills the book to the exclusion of other subjects. Victor Hugo’s last volume of poems, exclusive of the “Châtiments,” was “*Les Rayons et Les Ombres*,” published in 1840; we are now in 1856, and in the years between there is room for many poetic moods. So he gives us here poems of all sorts and kinds, from love poems that for “motive,” aye, and fresh lyrical directness, are not unlike those written by Burns in honour of “Bonnie Jean,” to poems that are as the “trumpet of

a prophecy" of the good things in store when Christ shall have converted Belial, and other equally desirable, if remote, results have been attained. Some poems, too, there are here that may fittingly be called satires, in the old acceptance of the term. In short, essentially a miscellaneous volume of verse, and also, in some sort, a link between the poet's earlier and later manner.

For now we reach a new and admirable development in his genius. With certain minor differences, the volumes extending from the "*Fenilles d'Automne*" to the "*Contemplations*" are, if we except the "*Châtiments*," fairly similar in form and manner. But in the two first volumes of the "*Légende des Siècles*," the poet gives us something novel, striking, superb. No doubt there were, here and there in Victor Hugo's former works, passages, as notably the description in the "*Burgraves*" of Barbarossa sleeping his age-long sleep, which, read in the light of the later book, seem presageful of its characteristic beauties. Such passages are, however, rare. They are as the one swallow that does not make a summer. The "*Légende des Siècles*" came upon us in the autumn of 1859 like a revelation.

Seldom, surely, can poet have chanced upon a subject, or class of subjects, more in harmony with his genius. Not history did Victor Hugo now propose to paint — history with her severe outline, her impartial calm, her attitude of strict equity. What he here took for his model was history's strange shadowy sister, who sometimes looks as if she were history's double, and sometimes takes her place, and sometimes mocks and mimics her, and sometimes, most often, perhaps, while maintaining a certain resemblance, assumes proportions, large, heroic, real yet unreal, and sometimes seems so altogether unlike that it is difficult to trace any relationship at all. Legend was to be his subject; the "*Legend of the Ages*" was to inspire him for the nonce. Or, to change the image, like a paladin of old venturing forth on some hard quest, he had set himself to conquer and make his own the cloud-land of fancy and imagination that has

gathered from the dawn of time round the sober world of fact.

And well was he equipped for the adventure. Only a great poet can leave with impunity the solid ground of nature, and attempt to give reality to the supernatural. As we read the "Ancient Mariner," it never occurs to us to question any of the incidents of that uncanny voyage. The old man's spell is on us, as it was on the wedding guest. Coleridge utters his words of magic, and the transformation is effected. We see for the time with his eyes. And so, in this wonderful work, Victor Hugo holds each of us, "like" any "seven-years child," while he unfolds many a marvellous tale. We never think of doubting what lives so fully in his imagination, what he reproduces so vividly. As well might we doubt the reality of those scorching fires of Hell that had left their mark, as his contemporaries thought, upon the face of Dante; or of the fearful sights and sounds that beset Christian on his way through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. These things seem natural enough in the world which a great imagination creates. And so here, when Eblis, at work in his laboratory of evil, takes all God's best gifts and transforms them into the locust, and God in turn takes the locust and makes of it a sun, we are not astonished. When the lions to which Daniel has been thrown speak to us their grave thoughts, we listen without surprise. When the archangel shears off the head of the Emperor Ratbert, and wipes his sword upon the wind-vexed evening clouds, our only feeling is one of satisfaction that justice has been done. We follow unhesitatingly Canute the Parricide in his march of horror, when, being dead, he fares forth into the darkness, and takes the snow of the mountain to make him a winding-sheet, and feels its whiteness sullied, drop after drop, by a red rain of blood, and so wanders on for ever, afraid to appear in the light of God's countenance. But here a quotation will help me, for a part of this poem has been excellently rendered by Mr. Garnett:

"Evening came

And hushed the organ in the holy place,
 And the priests, issuing from the temple doors,
 Left the dead king in peace. Then he arose,
 Opened his gloomy eyes, and grasped his sword,
 And went forth loftily. The massy walls
 Yielded before the phantom, like a mist.
 There is a sea where Aarhus, Altona,
 And Elsinore vast domes and shadowy towers
 Glass in deep waters. Over this he went
 Dark, and still Darkness listened for his foot
 Inaudible, itself being but a dream.
 Straight to Mount Savo went he, gnawed by time,
 And thus, 'O mountain, buffeted of storms,
 Give me of thy huge mantle of deep snow
 To frame a winding-sheet.' The mountain knew him,
 Nor dared refuse, and with his sword Canute
 Cut from its flank white snow, enough to make
 The garment he desired; and then he cried,
 'Old mountain! death is dumb; but tell me thou
 The way to God.' More deep each dread ravine
 And hideous hollow yawned, and sadly thus
 Answered that hoar associate of the clouds:
 'Spectre, I know not, I am always here.'
 Canute departed, and with head erect,
 All white and ghastly in his robe of snow,
 Went forth into great silence and great night,
 By Iceland and Norway. After him
 Gloom swallowed up the universe. He stood
 A sovran kingdomless, a lonely ghost
 Confronted with Immensity. He saw
 The awful Infinite, at whose portal pale
 Lightning sinks dying; Darkness, skeleton
 Whose joints are nights, and utter Formlessness
 Moving confusedly in the horrible dark,
 Inscrutable and blind. No star was there,
 Yet something like a haggard gleam; no sound
 But the dull tide of Darkness, and her dumb
 And fearful shudder. 'Tis the tomb,' he said:
 'God is beyond!' Three steps he took, then cried,
 'Twas deathly as the grave, and not a voice
 Responded, nor came any breath to sway
 The snowy mantle, with unsullied white
 Emboldening the spectral wanderer.
 Sudden he marked how, like a gloomy star,
 A spot grew broad upon his livid robe;
 Slowly it widened, raying darkness forth;
 And Canute proved it with his spectral hands:
 It was a drop of blood."

But in the world of legend there are other things besides the supernatural and marvellous. There are things which copy fact so closely as to be almost undistinguishable from it. That Philip II., the "patient writer of the Escorial," as Motley calls him, sat at his desk, day after day, compassing the downfall of England, this we know. And may it not be true that some last puff of the tempest that scattered the Armada did actually penetrate into the Escorial garden and deflower the little Infanta's rose, bringing a flush of surprise and anger into her sweet child's face? "Madam," is the duenna's explanation and comment, "everything in the world belongs to princes except the wind." Was ever moral of a great event so daintily enforced? But there is another poem in the "*Légende*" in which we hug reality even more closely, the poem entitled "*Les pauvres Gens*" ("Poor Folk"). The world is not so ill a place but that this touching and beautiful story has had its counterpart, many a time and oft, among the authentic annals of the poor. The fisherman who takes two little orphans into his already overbrimming family belongs fortunately to a world not altogether of legend.

Between the story of the "*Pauvres Gens*" on the one hand, and Canute the Parricide on the other, come legends of chivalry — of the mighty battle between Roland and Oliver, of the taking of Narbonne by Aymerillot, of the Cid, of other paladins; — legends of the East, of Sultan Mourad saved from the last extremity of hell by his kindness to a swine; legends of the Renaissance, and of Pan singing his strange wild song on Olympus before the gods; legends of to-day; and also apocalyptic visions of the future.

For these last I confess to not caring very greatly. They are the preludes to a class of poem which finally invaded Victor Hugo's art, and made it too often diffuse, formless, and void of interest. The singular advantage to the poet of the subjects which he mainly treated in the "*Légende*" was their comparatively concrete character. Each contained a story; and, as he was an excellent story-teller, and a great

artist to boot, he naturally set himself to tell his story as well as possible, and with as little abstract disquisition and declamation as might be. Thus the legends did him the inestimable service of holding his work together, of forcing him to concentrate himself.

Language and verse too are of the highest quality. There is a force, an almost rugged strength about the former quite new in French poetry. As Milton takes English, and hews it, like a sculptor hewing marble, into shapes of imperishable beauty, so here Victor Hugo takes French, a far less plastic material, and moulds it to his every purpose in his puissant hands. He never violates its laws, for, rash innovator as he has been called, he thoroughly respects the material in which he works. But he bends it to his fancy and imagination, and the result is superb. And as with the language, so with the verse. The French alexandrine becomes ductile to his touch, and as fit as our own blank verse for every highest poetic use. The "*Légende des Siècles*" is the work of a great master. It marks an epoch in the history of French literature.

And with the prodigality of genius Victor Hugo was about to give to the world, beside this masterpiece in verse, a masterpiece in prose. The "*Légende des Siècles*" had appeared in the autumn of 1859. On April 3, 1862, was published simultaneously in Paris, Brussels, London, New York, Madrid, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Turin, the first volume of the "*Misérables*."

The book had been begun, we are told, long years before, even so far back as in the days anterior to 1848, and had afterwards been gradually worked upon, added to, altered. And it bears in some respects the mark of this slow fitfulness of growth. Not that there is any want of unity of effect or purpose. That is very far from being the case. But the unity, to use a very old image, which, however, is here so apposite that I must be forgiven for making it do service once more — the unity is that of a Gothic cathedral, and quite compatible with all kinds of episodic additions

and outgrowths. These, in the "Misérables," are of very diverse interest and value. It would be too much to affirm that a description of the battle of Waterloo was essential to the book. No doubt the father of Marius, the second hero, is all but slain in that "king-making victory," and Marius himself greatly influenced in after years by the manner of his father's rescue. But to hold it necessary on this ground to give a full account of the battle is taking a very liberal view of the novelist's functions. Nevertheless few of us would wish Victor Hugo's description unwritten. It may or may not be strategically exact — of this I am no judge. It is at least a fine effective piece of battle painting, and not to be spared. But when Marius in turn is rescued, and the novelist thereupon thinks it incumbent upon him to give an account of the origin and history of the sewers through which the wounded youth is borne,—why then we feel inclined to use the reader's privilege of "skipping." Except to a specialist, the sewers of Paris, regarded in their historical aspect, can scarcely have an interest for any one; and the specialist would probably regard Victor Hugo's erudition as not beyond cavil.

However, this is but playing in the outskirts of a mighty book, or, to go back to our cathedral image, entering by some little lateral door, and peeping at the side-chapels and sacristy to the neglect of the great dim nave and soaring choir. Let us enter, as enter we should, by the west portal which Victor Hugo himself has prepared for us.

"So long," says the preface, "as, owing to the operation of laws and customs, there exists a social damnation creating artificial hells in the midst of civilization, and complicating destiny, which is Divine, with an element of human fatality; so long as the three problems of the age, the degradation of man through proletarianism, the fall of woman through hunger, the atrophy of the child through night, are unsolved; so long as in certain regions social asphyxia is still possible; or, in other words, and looking at the matter from a more extended standpoint, so long as ignorance and misery remain upon the earth—so long books of this kind may not be without use."

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Of the influence of laws and customs in all this, I may have somewhat to say hereafter. Meanwhile we will look into the "artificial hells" of which the novelist speaks.

Jean Valjean the hero, the leading character of the book, is a convict. He had stolen a loaf of bread for his starving sister and her seven starving children, and had thereupon been sent to the hulks. Here he remained for several years, and at last, when the story begins, comes forth into the world again, bearing in his heart a bitter hatred for his fellow-men. His first experiences of outside life are not calculated to dispel this feeling. Though able and willing to pay for a night's lodging, he is driven from place to place, and at last even barked and bitten out of a dog-kennel. Then a kindly soul directs him to the dwelling of the good bishop, Myriel. The man is quite worn out and desperate, and makes no attempt to conceal his character. But the saintly bishop entertains him hospitably, and as an equal, and sets him to sleep in the guest-chamber of the house. Jean Valjean wakes in the middle of the night. Evil and good contend in his breast. He rises stealthily, and steals his generous host's small supply of silver plate. In the morning he is found by the rural police with the spoons and forks on him, and naturally brought back as a thief. But M. Myriel obtains his release by saying that the articles have been given to him, and adds to the gift two silver candlesticks. Even yet, however, the evil in Jean Valjean's heart is not conquered. In a strange state of mental perturbation, he robs a child of a two-franc bit. Then a great horror of himself comes over him.

Nor is his repentance transient. We next find him as a beneficent manufacturer, under the name of M. Madeleine, making his own fortune and that of the district in which he has settled. He is honest, kindly, and generous. One of his good works is to rescue a poor sick girl called Fantine, who has been seduced and heartlessly abandoned by a Paris student—a poor girl who, to support her little daughter, has sold all—her shame, her teeth, her hair. But just as he

is about to bring together the dying mother and her child, a terrible complication arises in his own affairs. He hears that a man has been arrested for his own old theft of the two-franc bit, and may possibly be condemned. Then a fearful conflict arises in his breast. Is it his duty to give himself up to justice, to cut short his own most useful career, to go back to the living death of the hulks? Fiercely does the tempest rage in his brain. For a whole night it sways this way and that. At last right prevails. With immense difficulty he succeeds in reaching the place of trial in time to save the false Jean Valjean.

Does the reader follow Victor Hugo's thought? Here, he seems to say, is a man who has achieved the immensely difficult task of reforming his own character, a man who is good, wise, useful,—and yet, because of his past, because in a moment of fierce mental crisis he has deprived a child of two francs, he is branded and irretrievably ruined.

So poor Jean Valjean is retaken, and sent back to the hulks. But he escapes; and finds poor little Cosette—who meanwhile has been villainously used by the people to whom Fantine had confided her—and hides himself from pursuit in the great wilderness of Paris. There the child grows into a beautiful girl; and Love takes her destiny in hand, as Love sometimes does take in hand the destiny of men and maidens, and she gives her heart to Marius de Pontmercy. But though Love be ready enough to direct our lives, he does not always lead them into the smoothest of paths, and Cosette and Marius have to pass over many rocks and direful places. Jean Valjean, too, has his troubles. Indeed one rather pities him than the two lovers, for they have youth and its hopefulness on their side, while he is old, and Cosette is his all. However, here again, he conquers all lower feeling, resigns his more than daughter to her lover, saves that lover's life at the risk of his own, and without that lover's knowledge; and then dies, almost forsaken, except at the very last, by those for whom he had done so much.

But how, by any weak process of epitome or analysis, con-

vey to the reader any impression of the power of this great book? There are chapters upon chapters in it that for grandeur and pathos cannot be surpassed. Such is the chapter to which I have already alluded, the chapter entitled "*Une tempête sous un crâne*," describing the storm in Jean Valjean's brain when he is debating whether he should deliver himself up to justice. Such are the chapters relating to poor little Cosette,—her terrified walk in the dark to the village well—her little broken wooden shoe put out on Christmas eve in the hope that some Santa Claus might pass that way—though, heaven knows, no Santa Claus had ever put anything into it on previous occasions. Such—I am quoting almost at hazard—is the short chapter comparing Jean Valjean's position to that of a man lost and sinking in mid-ocean. And everywhere the descriptions live, the events move. We see it all. Each scene is present to us. And the characters live too. Bishop Myriel, apostolic as he may be, is no lay figure. Jean Valjean is a man of very real flesh and blood. Poor Fantine one seems to know; and Cosette most certainly; and Marius as a "*jeune premier*" of a very French type. Marius' royalist grandfather, M. Gillenormand, is also genuine enough, if somewhat caricatured. And there are two characters that live not only as individuals, but as types. These are, Javert, the ideal policeman, whose life is wrecked on finding that Jean Valjean, though a convict, is not a scoundrel;—and Gavroche, the little street arab, the town sparrow of Paris. The latter with his light gaiety, his ready wit, his queer kindliness, his pluck under fire, may be said to have won a place in universal literature beside Gil Blas and Don Quixote, and mine uncle Toby, and Sam Weller. Did not M. Renan lately inform us how many years of study and anxious thought it had taken him to reach the high serenity of Gavroche's religious opinions?

Victor Hugo was not one of those novelists who are fond of masquerading in their own novels. We can nowhere point to any character of his and say that it is merely Victor Hugo in another dress, and represents either what he thought

himself to be, or wished himself to be thought. The character who comes nearest to be an exception to this is Marius de Montmercy, whose experiences have a very suggestive similarity to the early experiences of the novelist. Both have been brought up in monarchical opinions. Both have imperialist fathers who have served under Napoleon. Both work through imperialism to republicanism. Both fall in love — though that perhaps is not distinctive, — and in both cases the love-idyl is connected with a garden. Both, too, are crossed in love — separated by untoward chance, from the object of their affections; — and both pass through a season of penury and almost want; and finally the love-suits of both are crowned with success.

The publication of the “*Misérables*” was an event, as many of us can very well remember. The power and pathos of the book were unmistakable. Vigour in the painting of the scenes, admirable, effectiveness in narration, real vitality in the characters, intense sympathy with the down-trodden and suffering, a style such as no other contemporary, and but few writers of any other time could handle — when a novel possesses qualities like these, it is a very great novel. Here, as in the “*Légende des Siècles*,” Victor Hugo was at his best. So every one read the book, and nearly every one admired it, and it flew into all lands upon the wings of many languages. When the publication was complete, on the 16th of September, 1862, M. Lacroix, the publisher, gave a grand banquet to the author at Brussels. Thither flocked liberal journalists and literary men from Paris, and writers from various quarters, and all was conviviality and congratulation.

But soon the busy worker was at work again. In the spring of 1864 appeared his book entitled “*William Shakespeare*” — a book, as Mr. Swinburne admits, that “throws more light on the greatest genius of our own century than on the greatest genius of the age of Shakespeare.” And in good sooth the light it throws on the latter is scarcely blinding. But it shows what Victor Hugo himself had come to regard as the poet’s mission. The poet, as he here tells us,

"for a truth, is a priest. There is but one pontiff here below,—genius." Whereupon, if we ask by what signs we are to recognise our spiritual pastors and masters, we are told that they are "the men who represent the total sum of the absolute realisable by man," that they attain to the "highest summit of the human spirit," "the ideal," where "they occupy thrones," and that their thoughts plunge into the abyss of the infinite. Alas, it was an evil day when Victor Hugo embraced these ecclesiastical opinions. Exile had served him well in many ways. It had forced him to concentrate himself on great work, as he had not done, latterly at least, amid the mental dissipations of Paris. But clearly brooding in solitude, and receiving the adulation of his own party, were not without danger. To few is it given in this world to pontificate with advantage, or even with impunity.

Meanwhile, during the publication of all these books, the snows of age were gathering on the poet's head. He had left France in 1851 a middle-aged man of forty-eight. In the autumn of 1865, when his next volume after "*William Shakespeare*" appeared, he had reached the riper age of sixty-two. But though the "*Chansons des Rues et des Bois*" ("The Songs of the Streets and the Woods") is thus not the production of a young man, yet it is, in the class of subjects treated, and the mode of treatment also, the most juvenile of the books written by Victor Hugo after he was out of his teens. "There is a certain moment of life," he says in the preface, "when . . . the desire to look back becomes irresistible. Our youth, dead in her beauty, reappears to us and insists on claiming our thoughts." So the poet sings here of youth's light gossamer loves, the very this-tledown of early passion—sings, though with less of sensuality, almost as Béranger had sung of Lisette—sings, though with less of real feeling, as Burns had sung of Bonnie Jean and Highland Mary. Does the singing sound false at all? is the reader inclined to ask; does the quavering falsetto of age mar the delivery of the notes? Why, no; one cannot fairly say that there is any defect of this kind.

If the book were a young man's book, one would accept it as genuine enough, and have nothing but praise for the deft skill, the admirable craftsmanship of the versification. Our only feeling of incongruity comes from a knowledge that the writer must long have put away the childish things of which he speaks.

A novel comes next in the long roll of Victor Hugo's works, a novel with a short preface dated March, 1866. It is entitled "*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*" ("The Toilers of the Sea"), and the scene is laid partly in Guernsey and partly on a lone rock-reef amid the ever-boiling waters. Gilliatt and Déruchette are the hero and heroine — the latter a pretty piece of not very distinctive womanhood — the former a fine fellow, gifted with a strength of body and will beyond mortal. Poor Gilliatt! the fates were decidedly harsh to him. Why does Déruchette unwittingly and unintentionally win his heart by writing his name in the snow? Why, when her uncle's steamer is lost, does she — like any princess of romance sure of the inestimable value of her charms — proclaim that she will marry whomsoever rescues the wrecked vessel? Ought pretty girls to make such rash vows, especially when they have no intention of keeping them? Vainly does Gilliatt go forth to the reef where the boat has been cast by the sea; vainly does he fight for long weeks against mechanical difficulties wellnigh insurmountable, against the weather's worst inclemencies, against hunger and thirst, against growing weakness, against a monstrous devil-fish of the deep, against the full fury of an Atlantic storm; vainly does he conquer all these, rescue the steamer's engine and bring it back single-handed to St. Sampson. When he presents himself, all weather-scarred and hacked with toil, before Déruchette, he finds that that young woman has, during his absence, given her heart to a pretty young clergyman. Hyperion to a satyr they stand before her. Gilliatt recognizes his defeat; magnanimously helps his rival to a somewhat unceremonious marriage; and suffers the sea to swallow him up just as the boat containing the bride and bridegroom dips

below the horizon. An unhappy ending certainly. A man of this power might have done mankind some service. Pity so strong a craft should have foundered in the wake of a light little feather-brained pleasure-boat like *Miss Déruchette*. But such things have happened since the days of Solomon, and were possibly not even unknown before the reign of that wise monarch.

It were idle to declare that "*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*," notwithstanding some grand seascapes, and a kind of Titanic heroism in the principal character, is at all comparable with so majestic a work as "*Les Misérables*." But at least the world to which it introduces us is a sufficiently real world for all art purposes. The secondary personages are quite possible — some even apparently sketched from actual life — and Gilliatt himself is a character that the world of fiction could ill spare. When, however, we come to Victor Hugo's next novel, "*L'Homme qui rit*" (the "*Laughing Man*"), published in 1869, we are carried to regions the like whereof were never trodden by human foot nor conceived by a healthy imagination. "The repulsiveness of the scheme of the story," says Mr. Louis Stevenson, "and the manner in which it is bound up with impossibilities and absurdities discourage the reader at the outset, and it needs an effort to take it as seriously as it deserves." Mr. Louis Stevenson is a critic from whom one differs with doubt — feeling that he may probably be right; but yet I confess to not seeing how such a book can deserve to be taken seriously at all. To me it is simply a preposterous, an impossible book. That Victor Hugo possessed no knowledge of the England of Queen Anne's day is abundantly clear. That his knowledge of the England of any day was of the most fantastic character scarcely needs formal proof. The historical names in this book are misspelt in a way that shows ignorance as well as carelessness. The English names which he invents for his imaginary characters, Lord Tom-Jim-Jack, Govicum, the pot-boy, Phelem-ghe-madone, the prize-fighter, Barkilphedro, the courtier-parasite, are names to excite derision. Whether

Southwark was pronounced "Soudric" in Queen Anne's days, I don't know. It certainly is not pronounced "Sousouore" now. Neither is "Fibi" or "Vinos" at all likely to convey to a French ear the sound of the English "Venus" or "Phœbe." Neither are Englishmen in the habit of addressing God as "My Lord," though Victor Hugo gravely assures us that this is the case, and bases moral teachings on that form of address to the deity. Neither was a "wapentake" a kind of superior policeman. Neither was James II. in any sense a "jovial" monarch. Nor, in short, does anything in this fantastic book bear any resemblance to anything that ever was or ever will be.

However, let us take the book out of the region of history and political purpose altogether, and regard it simply as a novel. Let us accept it as true that a king — James II. if you like — has, for eccentric purposes of his own, ordered a set of polyglot scoundrels to cut off a boy's lips, so that he shall wear an eternal grin upon his face; and then let us follow the boy's fortunes — his meeting with Dea, the little blind girl, with Ursus the kindly misanthropic tramp; his growth to manhood; his love for Dea; his love passages with Lady Josiane the virgin harlot; his recognition as a peer of the realm; his single speech to their lordships; his return to Ursus and Dea; and his death. Let us look at the persons he comes across in the course of his career. Can it be said that a single one of them lives? They all strut about in a galvanic sort of a manner certainly, and they all talk, and in exactly the same way. But does a single one of them live? Can one of them, with the single doubtful exception of Lady Josiane, be said to have a human character? And how many of the scenes possess even as much likelihood as is required for the purposes of fiction? Certainly not the sinking of the vessel containing the polyglot scoundrels aforesaid, nor the amazing trial, nor the wonderful prize-fight in which foul blows are freely allowed. Of course there are striking scenes and pieces of literary art. A writer like Victor Hugo does not write a long book without showing signs of

his power. Charles Reade held him to be the one great genius of this century, adding, however, that he sometimes had the nightmare. In "*L'Homme qui rit*" the nightmare decidedly predominates.

Place the book in thought, for a moment, beside Thackeray's "*Esmond*." Both relate to the same period of English history. The one reproduces faultlessly the spirit of that period, and makes the days of Queen Anne live for us again. The other, with far greater professions of accuracy and research, is an absurd caricature. Victor Hugo was the great romanticist of his time: Thackeray the great English classic of his generation. There were things that Victor Hugo could do magnificently, and that Thackeray could not touch. But in such comparison as this the Frenchman's work is "as the small dust of the balance," and kicks the beam. Place "*L'Homme qui rit*" beside "*Esmond*," and its unreality becomes doubly glaring.

The publication of "*L'Homme qui rit*" takes us to 1869, and therefore to the eve of Victor Hugo's re-entry into France. If we look back to the fourteen years of his sojourn in Guernsey, we shall see that they had been filled with excellent work. Indeed his pen had been so prolific as to leave me scant space for the chronicling of domestic events. This, however, is the less to be regretted, inasmuch as the years in question were, for the most part, barren of striking incident. Guernsey had been like a haven of refuge after the storms in Paris, Brussels, and Jersey. Of the way of life at Hauteville House, a word has already been said. The morning was spent in work. At twelve came the French breakfast, or early lunch. Then there were long walks—for the poet was here an unwearied pedestrian, as he had always been when in Paris;—and many huntings about for bric-à-brac of various kinds; and billiards; and other forms of amusement. With the society of Guernsey, I was informed, locally, that the Hugos did not mix very much. Every Thursday a dinner was given to some of the poorest children in the island. Of course the poet paid the penalty

of greatness in having an enormous correspondence. With the success of his books wealth had returned, and his well-known generosity tempted applicants from all quarters. Literary letters also flowed in upon him. Scarce a French author-aspirant who did not wish to submit his verse or prose to "the Master." Towards such "the Master" was not always quite ingenuous. It has been said of Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and George Sand, that the first answered young writers by saying, "Thank you, you are very good;" the second, "Thank you, you are very great;" and that the woman alone had sufficient candour to express an honest opinion on the productions submitted to her judgment. The bill is a true one. Victor Hugo's praises on such occasions were perfectly indiscriminate, and often — as in the case of M. Maxime du Camp — quite absurdly fulsome.

The years between 1856 and 1870 are marked by four events of capital importance in the domestic annals of the Hugos — for it seems unnecessary to give any record here of summer trips to Brussels, Zealand, and elsewhere. It was during these years that François Hugo loved and lost a Guernsey girl to whom he was engaged, and greatly attached; that Adèle Hugo, much against her father's wish as I gather, married an English naval officer; and that Charles Hugo married, at Brussels, a ward of M. Jules Simon, the eminent orator, writer, and statesman. And it was on the 28th of August, 1868, and also at Brussels, that Madame Hugo bade to her husband and children her last farewell. She had asked to be buried beside her daughter, at Villequier.

So, amid the joys and sorrows that are common to the greatest as well as the least of men, did the years of the poet's exile wear to a close. But before passing on, it is only just to record the impression which he left on the mind of one who knew him well at this time:

"He was good enough," says M. Asseline, "to accept my friendship, and to give me his own in return. I was long his neighbour, and often his guest. We have travelled together.¹ With his sons

¹ All testimony is unanimous that he was the most delightful of

he was ever radiant, the gayest, and most alert of us all. Everywhere, and at all times, I have seen him gracious and good,—I am describing him here as I have known him in the intimacy of private life, and such as he shows himself in his letters—kindly and indulgent to his own people, and full of good-will towards all. It is not right that future generations should only remember Victor Hugo as 'the Master,' the pontiff-king. There was also in him the man, the kindly relation, the friend, and in each of these characters he was most lovable."

CHAPTER XI

IN August, 1870, the eyes of all the world were turned towards the frontier lands between Germany and France. At the news of the first disasters to the French arms, Victor Hugo left Guernsey and hurried to Brussels. Thither, in the first days of that terrible September, came tidings of the Emperor's capitulation at Sedan; and, on the 4th, the news of the revolution which had swept away the wreckage of the Empire, and established a Republic on the ruins. Victor Hugo might have returned to his native land in 1859, and again ten years afterwards; but though his son François had accepted the later amnesty, and had for some months been doing opposition journalistic work,¹ he had haughtily declared that, so long as Louis Napoleon held criminal sway, he should not deign to put his foot on French soil. Now, however, the way was open. The Empire was gone; the country in sore need. On the 5th he took the train from Brussels to Paris.

M. Claretie, the voluminous novelist, dramatist, journalist, who has just been made an Academician, accompanied the poet on this somewhat memorable journey, and has told its incidents. He describes how Victor Hugo, wearing a soft felt hat, and carrying a small travelling bag slung across

travelling companions, uniformly good-tempered and ready to be pleased.

¹ On the *Rappel*, in Paris.

his shoulders, took his ticket for Paris — the very Mecca of all Frenchmen — with a very natural emotion; how he sat in the train watching for the first glimpse of the old loved country; how tears filled his eyes at the sight of some of Vinoy's defeated soldiers, and how he tried to cheer the poor worn-out wretches by shouts of "Vive la France! Vive l'Armée! Vive la Patrie!" Then the shades of evening began to gather, and it was ten o'clock before the train reached its destination. Charles Hugo was accompanying his father. But on the platform were François Hugo, and the poet's friends and disciples, M. Vacquerie and M. Paul Meurice.

These raised a great shout of "Vive Victor Hugo!" — but there were wounded men in the train, and the shout was silenced; — to be taken up again, however, outside the station, by thousands upon thousands of throats, and to roll, like a great sea of acclamation, all along the way to Paul Meurice's house. "Never," says M. Alphonse Daudet, the novelist, — "never can I forget the sight as the carriage passed along the Rue Lafayette, Victor Hugo standing up and being literally borne along by the multitude."

So there was great and pardonable excitement, on either side, as the old man, whose vigour was still that of youth, came back among the people he loved so well; — and he spake to them words, not unfitting nor wanting in appropriate eloquence, on the duty of defending and saving Paris, and the immediate duty, above all, of being at unity among themselves.

But his words lost their magic when addressed to other than French hearts. As the ring of iron drew ever closer and closer round the doomed city, it occurred to him that he might with advantage address an appeal to the advancing Prussians. They, however, were scarcely in a mood to be moved by antithetical distinctions between the Empire and France's new government, still less to listen patiently to panegyrics of Paris as the place where "men learn to live," "the city of cities," "the city of men," the city occupy-

ing the position of pre-eminence formerly occupied by Athens and Rome,—the “centre” beside which “Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, Munich and Stuttgart,” were but as provincial capitals. When the beast that lurks in the dark places of our humanity is roused and roaring, no remembered services, however great, will appease his rage. Did not the people of Selkirk throw stones at Sir Walter Scott’s carriage during the Reform agitation, and the populace of London break the Duke of Wellington’s windows? Nay, within a very few months of the issue of this manifesto, was not Victor Hugo himself, when speaking in defence of the Communards, to have his hour of unpopularity among his own countrymen, and to be bitterly assailed and reviled, even by such approved liberals as M. Sareey? Could it be reasonably expected that the Germans, who owed Victor Hugo nothing, should be stayed in the full rush of conquest by invidious comparisons between their own cities and Paris? They have somewhat to answer for in connection with the war. But that they took this manifesto very ill, and even suggested the propriety of “hanging the poet,” can scarcely excite our wonder.

The poet, meanwhile, has decided to remain in the beleaguered city, and take his share in its perils. That he should be a personage there, or, indeed, anywhere, is a matter of course; and pieces from the “*Châtiments*” are freely recited for patriotic purposes, and one of the cannon presented to the city by the Society of Men of Letters is christened with his name. But he takes no very active part in such politics as are possible, and refuses to abet any revolutionary movement that might hamper the defence. As usual, he bears a brave heart, cheering all those about him by his gay endurance of the privations incident to a siege. He even wears the little military *képi* of the National Guard, incurring thereby the contempt of General Trochu, whose sneers he afterwards answers in kind. His sons are in Paris also, and his two infant grandchildren, Georges and Jeanne — of whom he is to write so often and so pathetically; and on the 1st of January, amid the flash of swords and the sparkle of bayonets, he takes

to the little ones his new year's gift of toys. He wanders about the city a great deal, too, revisiting the old haunts so familiar in days of yore; and once, when musing in the place where the garden of the Feuillantines had been,—musing of his far-distant childhood, of his mother, of the wife he has lost,—a bombshell breaks in rudely upon his meditations. Anon the poor little baby Jeanne falls ill, for the unnatural diet tells heavily on infant life, and a great fear falls upon the grandfather's heart lest the child should die. He writes a good deal, of course, writes much of the verse that finds a place in the "*Année Terrible*," published two years afterwards: verse denunciatory of Louis Napoleon, and the Prussians, and kings, and priests, and full of patriotism; but inferior, as I venture to think, to the verse which he would have written, in less didactic days, on the terrible tragedy being enacted before his eyes. And all this while the weary weeks of the siege are crawling onwards, with hope now and again of some successful sortie or of relief from without, and the persistent accumulated horrors of war, famine, and winter; and finally the dread certainty that everything is in vain, that General Trochu has no plan, has never had a plan, and that capitulation is inevitable.

So came the end; and on the 8th of February, 1871, elections were held, with Germany's consent, to determine whether poor France should drain the cup of war to the last dregs, or submit to be dismembered and despoiled. Victor Hugo was elected second on the list, with 214,169 votes, by the Department of the Seine, and reached Bordeaux, where the Assembly was to meet, on the 14th. Seldom has popular assembly had to decide on a more momentous issue, or been placed between the horns of a more dreadful, a more hideous dilemma.

Victor Hugo spoke in the Assembly itself three times, and in committee once. He spoke in favour of the continuance of the war, in favour of the deputies from Alsace and Lorraine retaining their seats in the Assembly, even after the cession of the two provinces; in favour of the retention of Paris as the seat of government; in favour of recognizing the election of Garibaldi, which it had been proposed to annul. The last

speech was violently interrupted. Garibaldi's name was of an ill savour in the Assembly. France, in her hour of anguish, had turned towards her rural gentry, and a great proportion of the members were royalists and good Catholics. To these Garibaldi's anti-clerical opinions were a stone of stumbling. Victor Hugo had already, in his first speech, offended their susceptibilities by ill-advised remarks on the Pope. When therefore he declared that Garibaldi "was the only general who had fought on the French side, and not been defeated," there arose a mighty hubbub,—in the midst of which he, then and there, resigned his seat.

Not an altogether dignified proceeding perhaps. If a man, however eminent, enters parliamentary life, he must accept its conditions. He can hardly expect a miscellaneous popular assembly to listen to him as the College of Cardinals listen to an allocution from the Papal chair. Though, however, Victor Hugo certainly exhibited some petulance on this occasion, yet it cannot be a matter of regret to his admirers that he abandoned a sphere for which he was not certainly now, if he ever had been, well fitted. His few speeches in the Assembly are sufficient to show how entirely he had become unfitted for practical politics.

This happened on the 8th of March. On the 13th, and just as he was about to take his departure from Bordeaux, a terrible calamity fell upon him. He had on that day invited a few friends to a farewell dinner. Charles Hugo was to be of the party, and started in a cab for the place of meeting. When the cab arrived, he was found to be dead, struck down by a fit of apoplexy. The father took the body of his son to Paris, and buried it there on the memorable 18th of March, amid the first sputterings and mutterings of the horrible insurrection of the Commune,—buried it with funeral procession of promiscuous National Guards, and with insurgents on the barricades presenting arms to the dead. Then, on the 21st of March, he went on to Brussels to settle his son's affairs.

But not here, and not yet, was this stormy petrel of politics to find rest. From Brussels he watched, as may be supposed,

with an intense absorbing interest — all Europe was watching it too — the outbreak of revolutionary passion in Paris. His sympathies, on the whole, were on the side of the Commune. Was not Paris the first city of the world? Was she not, above all other cities, entitled to govern herself? Was not the majority of the Assembly a majority of reactionists? Was it not their ineptitude that had goaded the people of Paris into revolution? Accordingly, though forced to admit that the movement, involving as it did a civil war almost within gunshot of the Germans, was at least inopportune, and though constrained to condemn many of the actions of the Communards, their murders and incendiarism, and the destruction of Napoleon's column, yet as I have said, his sympathies were, on the whole, rather with them than with the party of order. So when they were defeated and ruthlessly punished, he lifted up a voice of protest. The Belgian Government had decided not to treat them as political refugees, but as the enemies of mankind, and to refuse them admittance into the country. He, on his side, declared, publicly and with pomp, in a letter to the *Indépendance Belge*, dated the 26th of May, that if any escaped Communard came to his dwelling, "Place des Barricades, No. 4," he should be taken in and protected. This letter, not altogether unnaturally, exasperated the loyal Belgians. Some fifty of them collected, on the night of the 27th, before his house, and threw stones at the windows, and howled out their execrations; and on the 30th of May the Government, for the second time, intimated to him that he must go elsewhere. Accordingly, on the 2nd of June, he had made his way into Luxembourg.

But from this date, at last, something like comparative peace is reached. Of course a man like Victor Hugo, with his passionate convictions, keen interest in public affairs, and full assurance that he possesses a seer's foresight for the direction of mankind, is not likely to abandon politics altogether. In this same year, 1871, we find him refusing, ultra-liberal as he is, to accept an electoral mandate, but presenting himself once more and this time unsuccessfully, as a

candidate for re-election to the Assembly; and on the 30th of January, 1876, he is elected to the Senate. But practically, after June, 1871, his career as an active politician is over. If he still writes and speaks in favour of the amnesty, the necessity of making Paris once more the capital of France, and other matters political and social, he does so as a publicist only, and not as a militant party man. More and more, as the end draws near, does he withdraw from the arena.

But still he wrote apace. Many poets of renown have not, in their whole lives, written as much as he published between 1872 and 1885, that is, between his seventieth and eighty-third years. The volumes during that period followed one another so rapidly that it is scarcely possible for the epitomizing biographer to do more than barely catalogue their titles. First, on the 20th of April, 1872, appeared "*L'Année Terrible*," to which I have already referred, using it as a record of the poet's life during the siege. It is dedicated "to Paris, the Capital of the Nations." Next, on the 20th of February, 1874, came out his last novel, "*Quatre-vingt Treize*" ("Ninety-three"). This was written mainly during a season of retirement at Guernsey, and may occupy a place among his books by the side of the "*Travailleurs de la Mer*," and far above "*L'Homme qui rit*." The story is comparatively simple. A republican battalion—we are, as the title of the book implies, in 1793—has found in the woods of the Vendée a poor woman and her three children, and has taken the children into its affection. The children are captured by the royalists, and the mother is wounded and left for dead. Then the royalists in turn are defeated, and take refuge in a castle, where they are besieged, and in sore straits. Whereupon they offer to give up the three children if allowed by the besiegers to go forth safe and sound;—otherwise the children will be burnt. This is a bargain which the attacking party, notwithstanding the love they bear to the little things, cannot accept, and the assault begins. It is of a terrible character. The royalists are killed one by one, all except their Marquis-chief, who is wonderfully saved through

a sort of moving stone in the wall. The last man left, as he is dying, musters his remaining strength to light the slow match which is to set fire to the tower on the bridge in which the children are confined. Nothing can save them. The flames are flickering up in long tongues, higher, higher, higher, from the lower storey. Suddenly the mother, who has recovered from her wound, and for long days has been looking for her children, appears on the scene with a lamentable cry:

"The figure they saw there was no longer Michelle Fléchar, it was a Gorgon. Those who are miserable are formidable. The peasant woman was transfigured into one of the Eumenides. This commonplace village wife, vulgar, ignorant, incapable of thought, had suddenly acquired the epic proportions of despair. Great sorrows are a gigantic enlarging of the soul; this mother now represented maternity; everything that epitomizes humanity is superhuman; she stood there, on the border of that ravine, before that conflagration, before that crime, like some sepulchral power; she had the cry of a beast, and the gesture of a goddess; her visage, from which curses proceeded, seemed like a flaming mask. Nothing could be more sovereign than the lightning that flashed from her tear-drowned eyes; her look cast thunderbolts on the conflagration."

Her anguish is so terrible that it excites compassion even in the iron heart of the escaped royalist chief, still lurking in the adjacent woods. He returns to the castle with the key of the tower, saves the children, and is, of course, taken. The republican chief, who happens to be his nephew, does not, however, consider that he ought to be guillotined as the consequence of an act of humanity and allows him to go free. Whereupon the nephew is himself guillotined by order of a delegate from the Convention, who has educated him, and loves him with a passionate love. As his head falls, the delegate shoots a bullet through his own heart.

Now, of course, it must at once be apparent that such a story demands certain concessions on the reader's part. He must, for instance, be prepared to take for granted the probability that three little peasant children should acquire an importance so disproportionate in the contest between bodies of armed men. He must further be ready to accept

it as likely that the royalists would, out of the merest wantonness — for at that stage their own fate was sealed — do their best to burn the pretty little creatures. He must also make up his mind to receive, with as much confidence as he can command, a good deal of quasi-history. And if he further thinks that the mother would be a more pathetic figure if less purely animal, I, for one, shall not blame him. But, having once made these concessions and reserves, he will be a reader difficult to please if he does not admit that the fighting in the book is done in a masterly way, that the description of the children at their play in the tower is a pretty, smiling, happy picture of childhood; and that the book generally, though now and then, as in the passage quoted, somewhat thunderous in style, is yet full of passages of striking graphic prose.

Passing by Victor Hugo's rather pompous account of his two sons, given as an introduction to Charles Hugo's "*Hommes de l'Exil*," published in October, 1874, we come next to the three volumes of "*Actes et Paroles*" ("Deeds and Words"), published respectively in May, 1875, November, 1875, and July, 1876. These volumes contain his utterances on public matters between 1841 and 1851, 1852 and 1870, 1870 and 1876 — all utterances of capital importance to the biographer, but with which the reader need not here be detained. For on the 26th of February, 1877, we come to what should interest him more, to the issue of a new series of the "*Légende des Siècles*."

Are these two volumes, then, equal to the two volumes published eighteen years before? Hardly. As time went on, the habit of preaching had grown terribly on the poet. He did it not only in his speeches, where the preaching may have been admissible, and in his prose, where it might have been spared, but in his verse, which at last it almost drowned. He had preached a great deal, a very great deal, in "*L'Année Terrible*." He preached a great deal in these two later volumes of the "*Légende des Siècles*;" and in "*Le Pape*," published in April, 1878, and "*La Pitié Suprême*," published in February, 1879, and "*Religions et Religion*,"

published in April, 1880, and "L'Anc," published in October, 1880, he may be said to have done nothing but preach. When, however, in the volumes of the "Légende" now immediately before us, he condescends to leave the pulpit and to become once more the minstrel, the teller of stories, the poet, then all his old skill comes back to him, and he is the Hugo whom no one can approach. Beside the masterpiece of the first series one can place, for power and weird horror, "L'Aigle du Casque" ("The Eagle on the Helmet"), the story of the unequal combat between Tiphaine the hardened warrior and Angus the stripling, and of the fierce chase of the latter through the woods — and then of the punishment inflicted on Tiphaine for his misdeeds by the bronze eagle upon his helm. Nor, for pathos, does the earlier series contain a story more touching than the story of "Petit Paul" ("Little Paul"), the poor motherless child whose father marries again, whose grandfather takes the mother's place, and then dies also, leaving the helpless three-years mite doubly forlorn, forsaken, misused, until one winter night he strays out to the churchyard where his grandfather lies, and is found sleeping the sleep that has no earthly morrow. Two battles pieces also, "Jean Chouan," and "Le Cimetière d'Eylau" ("The Cemetery of Eylau"), the latter full of musketry-crash and cannon music — these should be mentioned as equal to the poet's best. Why, why in the days of isolation and comparative solitude, in Jersey and Guernsey, had it ever been borne in upon him that he had a prophet's mission. Why did he not rest content with the poet's laurel?

Of the books just enumerated I do not propose to say very much. "Le Pape" is constructed upon a most ingenious plan. The poet-pontiff supposes that the real Pope dreams a dream, and in that dream delivers Victor Hugo's philosophy *ex cathedrâ* to whomsoever will hear. Pope and anti-Pope thus exchanging sentiments — the idea is a happy one. In "La Pitié Suprême" the poet surveys all history, and expresses his compassion at once for wicked kings and suffering peoples. In "Religions et Religion" he demonstrates

the futility of all dogmatic teaching, and preaches a pure deism — the belief in a vague being, whose “solstice” is “Conscience,” whose “axis” is “Justice,” whose “equinox” is “Equality,” whose “vast sunrise” is “Liberty.” In “*L’Ane*,” a very learned ass explains to philosopher Kant, at some considerable length, that human knowledge comes to very little — a position which Kant is finally constrained to admit. Whereupon the poet epiloguises, and assures Kant that all things, even evil things, are working for good.

Three other books of verse did this most prolific writer produce.¹ “*L’Art d’Etre Grandpère*” (“The Art of Being a Grandfather”), published in May, 1877; “*Les Quatre Vents de l’Esprit*” (“The Four Winds of the Spirit”), published in June, 1881; and “*Théâtre en Liberté*,” published in 1886, after his death. Over each of these one might willingly linger. The last is a book of plays not intended for the stage. The “*Quatre Vents de l’Esprit*” is a really important work, divided into four books — satirical, dramatic, lyrical, and epic — and containing poems of very diverse value. “*L’Art d’Etre Grandpère*” is a monument of the old man’s tenderness for his two grandchildren, and a book of singular grace. In what does the “art of being a grandfather” consist? does the reader ask? In being full of love, and delicate sympathy, and undeviating indulgence, Victor Hugo would reply. To the father is committed the rod of discipline. *He* may have to be occasionally stern. But the grandfather — no such harsh duty is his. He may give the little folks all they ask for, may gratify their every whim, may carry jam to them in moments of penitential retirement, may spoil them to his heart’s content. It is his privilege, his joy; and if any one ventures to ask whether such a mode of education be the best devisable, he has his answer ready: Have sterner methods succeeded very well in the education of mankind? Whereupon one trusts that Master Georges and Miss Jeanne were unspoilable, and felt

¹ It is said that there are a great many more in MS. and to be published.

the exceeding beauty of the love which their grandfather lavished upon them.

And who would churlishly have begrudged to the old man the happiness which he derived from the constant society of these two children? His own children were all now gone, for François Hugo had died in Paris, after a long illness, on the 26th of December, 1873, and his daughter was divided from him by the terrible separation of insanity. What wonder if his heart went out to these last scions of his race — if he watched them, treasured their little sayings and doings, played with them, told them his beautiful stories, drew pictures for them, was a child again in their company.

Nor must it be supposed that the last years of this great man's life were anything but bright and happy. In December, 1871, on his return to Paris, he took apartments at No. 66, Rue de la Rochefoucauld, whence he removed, in 1873, to No. 21, Rue de Clichy.¹ Here he lived with Madame Charles Hugo, and his two dear grandchildren; and Madame Drouet lived there, too, doing the honours of the salon, in which he received his friends and admirers. These, as may be supposed, flocked thither. The place became the rendezvous of all that was greatest in literary France. For upwards of forty years the man had been the foremost writer in his country, one may even say the foremost poet in the world. During nineteen of those years he had been an exile in a cause which was now triumphant. Everything conspired to exalt him and do him honour. His plays were revived amid universal enthusiasm. His earlier books were spoken of with reverence, the new received with an almost-unanimity of praise. Nor, amid all this passion of admiration, did he pretermitt the literary toil in which he took such keen pleasure. As he had laboured in Jersey and Guernsey, so he laboured amid the

¹ In 1878 he was driven away from the Rue de Clichy by the importunity of visitors, and went to live in a quieter place, No. 130, Avenue d'Eylau, near the Bois de Boulogne. Madame Charles Hugo married M. Lockroy, the Deputy, and lived with Georges and Jeanne next door. Madame Drouet died two or three years before the poet.

distractions of Paris, neither hindered by the claims of society and attendance at the Senate, nor with brain in aught beclouded, nor hand made weaker by old age. Old age! Until quite at the last he never seems to have felt its touch. As one reads the record of his secretary, M. Lesclide, one is simply amazed at the man's marvellous vitality. He might be a young fellow of twenty for the things he does and the energy he displays. He never wears a great coat: he never carries an umbrella. His favourite form of relaxation is riding on the top of an omnibus. He goes up in a balloon — a kind of amusement which Madame Drouet by no means enjoys. He is fond of little excursions in the environs of Paris, and is on such occasions the blithest of companions, as frolic as a boy, pleased with everything, the scenery, the flowers, the fare at the inn, all the little incidents of the day. Well may M. Banville say that he is younger in these later times than he had been at thirty. At thirty he was writing of "Autumn Leaves," and singing "Songs of the Twilight." Now, with life near its end, he is full of peace, looking death cheerfully in the face, confident in the hope of a world beyond the grave; and ardent, too, in his faith that a happier age is dawning for mankind.

So does a serene and beautiful light linger upon the evening of his day of life. When one remembers how sadly the careers of such men as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, wore to a close — how painful are the concluding chapters of most biographies — one can, I think, but be glad that a great man should thus live greatly to the end.

For now death at last struck the fatal blow. The poet was not to have his wish, and dandle a child of Jeanne upon his knee. On May 13, 1885, he seems to have caught a chill during one of his omnibus rides. Heart and lungs became affected. He suffered greatly and wished for the end. On the 22nd that wish was answered. His last word, his last conscious act, were for his grandchildren.

In a memorandum given by the poet some few months before to his friend M. Vacquerie, he had said, "I give 50,000

frances to the poor. I wish to be taken to the grave in their hearse. I refuse the prayers of all churches. I ask for a prayer from every human soul. I believe in God." Such were his scant directions as to his own obsequies. But the country felt at once that its great dead ought to be buried with all national honour. He had been the foremost poet, not only of France, but of his generation. On the Republic he had very special claims, as having been her champion in evil days, and having suffered on her behalf loss of fortune and exile. So a public funeral was fittingly decreed, and the Government decreed also that the Panthéon,—that edifice of many vicissitudes, where Mirabeau and Marat had lain for awhile, and Rousseau and Voltaire,—should be unchurchd once more to receive him. Accordingly, on the morning of May 31st, the body was placed beneath the Arc de Triomphe, in a coffin palled with black and silver and royal purple, and lay there in state till the following day when it was borne to its last home, in a pauper's hearse indeed, but otherwise with such pomp, such a mighty procession, such signs of national mourning, such votive wreaths from every land, as Paris itself had scarcely seen since the day of Napoleon's funeral.¹

CHAPTER XII

ON February 26, 1880—that is on his seventy-eighth birthday—Victor Hugo wrote a preface for the collected edition of his writings. It is a short preface, and in it there occurs the following passage:

"Of the value of the sum of work here presented, time alone can decide. But this at least is already certain, and satisfies the author, that in our own day, in the present tumult of opinions, amid the violence of existing prejudices, and notwithstanding all passions, anger, and

¹ Victor Hugo's personal estate in England alone was sworn under £92,000, and he had real property in Guernsey besides. Nearly all his money is said to have been invested in foreign (not French) funds.

hatred, there is no reader, be he who he may, who, if he is himself worthy of respect, will lay down the book without respecting the author.

This is a proud claim to be inscribed, as it were, over the very portal of the edifice reared by the writer's genius. It fronts us there. We cannot pass it by. Let us endeavour to meet it quite honestly.

Respect, respect — why should any of us have to pause for a moment, doubting, before he gives a reply to the challenge? No one would hesitate if similarly challenged on behalf of Scott. Why does not the assent come so readily, so universally in the case of Victor Hugo?

For this reason — that, if one examines his life at all minutely, it is scarcely possible to avoid the conclusion that the facts do not always agree with his presentation of them, and further, that the differences have at least a look of being designed so as to add to his prestige and glory. Here at once we are met by something that checks respect, inasmuch as it needs explanation. How shall we explain it? In the partly analogous cases of Goethe and Shelley, apologists have said, and said truly, that the poet often sees things differently from other men, that he sees them surrounded by a haze of imagination, in which their real outlines are blurred and lost, and that, as regards past events especially, he sees his remembered feelings in connection with them rather than the events themselves. To the full benefit of such an excuse Victor Hugo is clearly entitled. Though he claimed for himself a memory of extraordinary and minute accuracy, yet there seems no doubt that that faculty sometimes played him tricks, especially when matters affecting himself were involved. Why, for instance, should he have alleged that M. Piétri, one of Louis Napoleon's myrmidons, had offered 25,000, and even 50,000 francs for his capture alive or dead? Had he not brooded over the importance of the capture till he imagined the reward?

The poetic vision will not however, I fear, account for all that here needs explanation. The fact is, and one says it sadly, there was a strong element of theatricality about the

man. Great as he was, he liked to appear greater. His statements about himself, his surroundings, the events in which he had himself taken part, bear often the same proportion to fact that the stage bears to real life. They lack the simplicity of truth. They are, in effect, false. There, the murder is out! and if there be any one who cannot esteem a character tainted with theatricality, why then he must leave Victor Hugo unhonoured.

But I, for one, shall not agree with him. Behind the actor in Victor Hugo there was a man, and a great man — a man, in his private life, simple, genial, kindly, and in his public life fulfilled with passionate convictions for which he was prepared to battle and to suffer. In the essential heart of him, he was genuine enough. The theatricality, the vainglory, were of the surface.

And what the opinions which, from the year 1849 onwards, had seized so fast a hold on his whole being? Substantially they were the opinions of Rousseau, as held by Robespierre. Man, according to these theorists, was originally good, kindly, beneficent. If he seemed to be something different it was because he had been deformed by vicious institutions — the rule of kings, the inventions of priests, the tyranny of aristocracies, the pressure of iniquitous laws. Once remove these evil influences, and he would at once go back to a state of nature, which was a state of excellence. Once let the Rights of Man prevail, and those rights would be exercised in the most unselfish and excellent manner. The voter would invariably vote according to his conscience, and with a single eye to the general good. The ruler would rule simply as the voters' delegate, and for the common advantage. Man all over the world would be the brother of man, wars would cease, property be equalized, and everybody, according to the pleasant old saying, live happy ever after.

And because the French Revolution had done so much to clear away pre-existing institutions, and to give man an entirely unencumbered piece of high tableland on which to rear the edifice of the future, therefore Victor Hugo felt for the

French Revolution a boundless love and veneration. He is never weary of singing its praises. He returns to the subject with an added zest on every possible opportunity. The "French Revolution," he tells us, for instance, "is the mightiest step taken by the human race since Christ. It is the consecration of humanity." "It was an immense act of probity." "It was nothing else than the ideal bearing the sword, . . . and closing the portals of evil, and opening the portals of good." "It promulgated truth." "It may be said to have created man over again, by giving him a second soul, a sense of right." It rendered all savage upheavals of the masses for ever impossible — this was written before the outbreak of the Commune,— and, in short, it was a movement quite marvellous and miraculous in its beneficent effects.

And if the movement itself had such a transcendent character, the actors in it were no less heroic. Michelet, the historian, asseverates, in his somewhat wild way, that the Assembly that nominally governed France during the Reign of Terror was "a majestic assembly, sovereign among all assemblies, founding, organising, representing, above any other human force, the inexhaustible fecundity of nature." Victor Hugo, not to be outdone, says of this Assembly — an Assembly, be it remembered, chiefly remarkable for grotesque ineptitude and cowardice — that it was to all other representative bodies what the Himalayas are to other mountains.

But how, indeed, could he be expected to speak otherwise? For had not this Assembly helped to found "the Republic," and was not "the Republic" the fetish of his later years? No cavalier, in the good old days, can ever have believed more passionately in the divine right of kings than he believed in the divine right of this particular form of government. It was not, in his mind, a government like any other, applicable or not applicable in a given case, according to a country's history, traditions, circumstances — a government which any country, by the exercise of its volition, might accept or reject at will. It was a government of right as opposed to wrong, a something supreme and absolute, which it would have been

blasphemy even to question, a universal panacea for every ill to which political or social man is heir. It meant the realised ideal for which the Revolution had prepared,—“the end of prostitution for woman, the end of starvation for man, the end of night for the child.” It meant “brotherhood, concord, dawn.” It meant universal peace, and universal benevolence, and the extinction of poverty, and a regenerated world.

Now to all this philosophy of the eighteenth century, and the political and social theories founded upon it, there is but one word to apply, and that word is, “obsolete.” They tottered to their fall under Burke’s attack, and from the date when Darwin published his great work they became things of the past. As soon as the idea of development had taken possession of men’s minds, it became difficult for any really serious thinker to regard man apart from his history, and as a creature originally beneficent and good, and only led into evil by pernicious laws and institutions. Man has grown to be what he is, grown by slow, patient effort, prolonged from generation to generation, grown by the help of the very institutions which the eighteenth century regarded as the origin of all his woes. He is not, as Rousseau and his school held, a kind of abstract being, under the exclusive guidance of his intellect, who can be divorced from every influence of the past, and trusted to be always reasonable. His past forms part of himself and his reasonableness mainly depends upon it. Carry him back to a “state of nature,” in his remotest days, and you carry him back to the state of the savage, and even worse. Behind the savage there is the brute, far enough removed in history, but lurking all too near to the heart of each one of us, and easily roused, and with difficulty appeased. How idle to suppose that he can be suppressed by cancelling all that has taken place since he held undisputed sway!

And with the crumbling of Rousseau’s worm-eaten philosophy, the French Revolution assumes its right proportions as a movement in which the brute in man played an all too important part. The history of 1793 has been rewritten for

us lately, with an almost superabundance of detail, by M. Taine. It is scarcely a history over which one feels inclined to join in Victor Hugo's hosannas.

While as to "the Republic"—why "the Republic" is a good form of government enough under certain conditions. It is a better form of government doubtless than the Empire; for it has possibilities of continued life—and those the Empire never had. But even in France, which Victor Hugo held to be the vanguard of the nations—even in Paris, which he considered to be the Holy City of the human race,—can it be said that even there "the Republic" has brought in its train all the blessings he anticipated? Is woman's purity more conspicuously honoured there than elsewhere? Is man less subject to poverty and the other ills of life? Is the child treated so exceptionally well? The government of France is doubtless doing its best under difficult conditions. But can we as yet regard it as showing to all governments a brilliant example of "brotherhood" and "concord"? Can it be said to have its being in a rose-flush of perpetual "dawn"?

So I fear that Victor Hugo's claim to be considered as a prophet must be rejected, somewhat sadly. In truth, he was in one sense, but a "laudator temporis acti." The doctrines which he preached in politics, social philosophy, and religion, were but the Gospel according to Jean Jacques, as Carlyle called it in derision, the Gospel of Rousseau, as it had taken shape in 1793. Apart from the cry for heads, he was the intellectual continuator of Robespierre. From that old wind-withered tree what fruit could be gathered for the healing of the nations?

But, very fortunately for mankind, the truth or falsehood of a great writer's systematized opinions is no measure of the value of his work. Pictures of the most superb power may be painted on very indifferent canvas, just as immortal music may be allied to words that are almost meaningless. Who thinks of Godwin's poor thin philosophy when watching the unearthly pageant of "Prometheus Unbound," and

listening to the enchanted verbal harmonies of Shelley's verse? And similarly, we can disregard Victor Hugo's political system, and consider him only as a poet and a prose writer; and then, if he be not a delight to us, the fault is ours.

Of course, in the enormous mass of his work, there is much that is unequal. His early writings are those of a child. His later writings are often marred by didacticism and tricks of manner. What I have ventured to call the theatrical element in his character not unfrequently gives to his prose and verse a tone of exaggeration, unreality, and violence. But in considering the place he holds in literature, all such faults may fitly be brushed to one side. He should be judged by his best, and that best is not only immense in quantity, but of a quality so excellent that the critic experiences some trouble in adequately speaking of it without falling into what may seem to be hyperbole.

As a novelist he holds rank with the highest. There are two of his books, at least, which the world will not easily let die. One of them, "*Nôtre Dame de Paris*," has been published now for fifty-seven years; the other, "*Les Misérables*," for upwards of a quarter of a century. Neither, whatsoever M. Zola may say, has at all waxed old. There is in each a salt of genius which will for ever preserve it from decay. Vivid powers of description, admirable skill as a narrator, the faculty of creating real characters, and interesting us in their fortunes, the power of marshalling their actions to definite ends, pathos, passion, a noble intolerance of wrong and a style of marvellous richness and brilliancy — all these he displayed in "*Nôtre Dame*" and "*Les Misérables*." What more would you have? They hold an honourable place in the permanent literature of the world.

As a dramatist he takes rank, if not with the very highest, if not on that unapproachable peak where Shakespeare dwells alone, yet high upon the spurs of the great mountain. Here, again, he displayed excellent gifts of invention, and also a real playwright's instinct for what is scenic and effective. Working for the stage, he adapted himself to its conditions,

and succeeded in making an audience accept plays that were in a high sense literature. Then too in his dramas there was room for the display of his supreme gift, his gift as a poet.

And that he was a poet, and a great poet, who shall be bold to question? Speaking lately, in the preface to a dictionary of Victor Hugo's similes, M. Coppée¹ says —

"Among all the poets of mankind Victor Hugo is the one who has invented the greatest number of similes, and those the best carried out, the most striking, the most magnificent. . . . He is the greatest lyric poet of all ages."

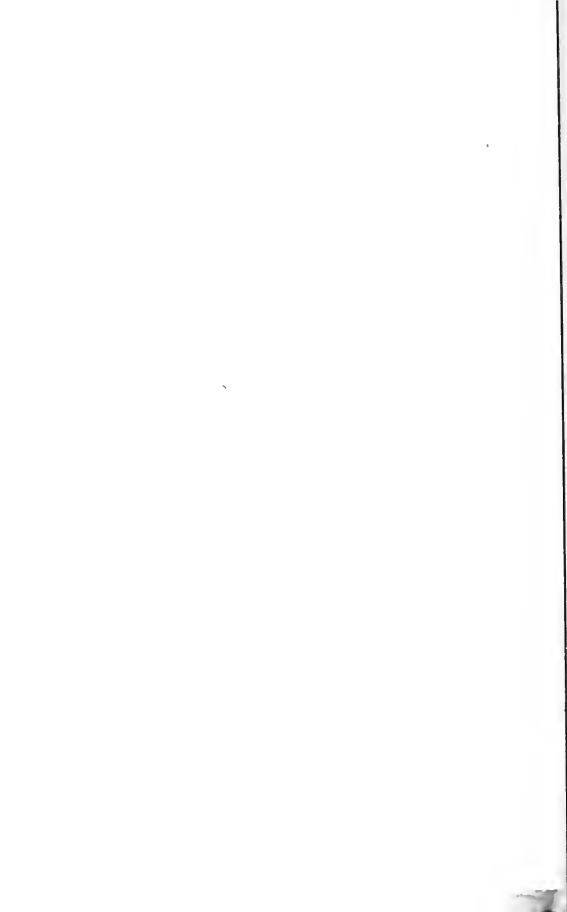
Without quite endorsing these superlatives, one may at least claim for him a place in the very first rank of the world's singers. The mere enumeration of the points at which he touched the highest excellence is itself eloquent. As a song writer he has had few equals. His songs have the essential lyric qualities, spontaneous tunefulness, light delicacy of touch,—all that we are accustomed to associate with the flutter and warble of a bird. As a satirist he is direct, trenchant, terrible, a swordsman whose weapon draws blood at every stroke. As a writer of reflective verse — I am not speaking here of the didactic work of his later life — he is weighty and impressive, and, amid all his philosophising, remains a poet. As a narrator, he is singularly lucid and striking, and possesses to the full the story-teller's gift of awakening and retaining interest. By turns sublime and playful, roughly strong and daintily delicate, full of love-passion and a sweet, fatherly tenderness,—he seems to touch at will all the organ stops in our nature. And what regal command over rhymes, rhythms, and metre! what a rich verbal palette! what superb freedom of power in its use! His words are as pigments, and as pigments, if that were conceivable, which appeal to the ear as well as to the eye. They seem to give out at once colour and sound.

Ah, he was more than the prophet or apostle of a narrow sect. And when time has done its worst and best with his

¹ In my judgment the foremost living French poet.

work -- has disintegrated the quartz and washed away the clay -- there will remain a treasure of gold, without which mankind would be appreciably the poorer. He was one of the world's great poets, and his verse will continue through the after-time as a living force, because, while perfect in workmanship, it is broad-based upon the universal human heart, and so eternal.

THE END.







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