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Victor Hugo's life and works during his exile at Guernesey

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS

VICTOR HUGO'S LIFE AND WORKS
DURING
HIS EXILE AT GUERNESEY

Submitted by

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VICTOR HUGO'S LIFE AND WORKS
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Outline of Thesis

- I Brief sketch of Victor Hugo's life as a whole with a list of his works written:
 - A Before his exile at Guernesey
 - B After his exile at Guernesey
- II Victor Hugo's life at Guernesey
 - A His private life
 - 1 Occasion for coming to Guernesey
 - 2 The island of Guernesey and its inhabitants
 - 3 Hauteville-House
 - 4 Hugo's interest in poor children
 - 5 Madame Hugo
 - B His return to writing
 - C His attitude toward existing political affairs
 - 1 His refusal to return to France after the amnesty
 - 2 His lack of sympathy for the Empire of France during the foreign wars
 - 3 His introduction to the Paris Guide
 - 4 His return to France after the fall of the Empire
- III Character of Hugo
 - A Appearance
 - B Temperament and characteristics
 - C Education

- D Ideas expressed showing his character
- IV Victor Hugo the author
- A Characteristics
 - 1 Indefatigable worker
 - 2 Versatile writer
 - 3 Romanticist
 - B Elements found in his works
 - 1 Spanish influence
 - 2 Imagination
 - 3 Excess of feeling
 - C Types of literature written by Hugo
 - 1 Poetry
 - a Lyric
 - b Drama
 - c Satire
 - d Epic
 - 2 Prose
 - a Drama
 - b Novel
 - c Criticism
- V Discussion of works ^{published} ~~written~~ at Guernesey in the order of their appearance
- A Les Contemplations
 - B La Légende des Siècles (the first series)
 - C Les Misérables
 - D William Shakespeare

E Chansons des rues et des bois

F Les Travailleurs de la mer

G L'Homme qui rit

VI **H** *An appreciation of his lyric poems of this period*
Hugo's ideas expressed in his works on:

A Pessimism and optimism

B Social peace

C Justice and pity

D Suicide

E Religious faith

1 God

2 Conscience and death

F Philosophy regarding nature and immortality

Summary:

Victor Hugo's place in literature

A In the literature of France

B In the literature of the world

VICTOR HUGO'S LIFE AND WORKS
DURING
HIS EXILE AT GUERNESEY

I

Victor Hugo easily holds the place of the foremost French writer of the nineteenth century. He is renowned not only in his own century, but in the whole period of French literature; not only in France, but in the world.

Victor Marie Hugo was born at Besaçonⁿ on February 26, 1802. His father, General Sigisbert Hugo, of Lorraine, was an officer in the service of Napoleon and later of Joseph. His mother, who was Sophie Trébuchet of Vendée, was of a family of royalists and strict Catholics. Some of Victor Hugo's admirers claim he was the grandson of a carpenter; others say he had ancestors among the nobility. Victor Hugo himself had disdain for such controversies. However, he was proud that his father, Joseph-Léopold-Sigisbert Hugo, was a general of the Empire and a soldier who was known for his bravery and his mercy to the conquered. (1) Madame Hugo writes that Hugo's mother was the daughter of a ship owner. Séché doubts that he had sufficient money for that. He probably was a sailor. Doubtless his mother, a royalist and Catholic, was independent in her ideas and did not sacrifice them in marrying General Hugo. (2)

As a child, Victor Hugo followed his father from garrison to garrison in Corsica (1802-1805), in Italy

(1) Séché, Léon: Le Cénacle de Joseph Delorme, Vol. I, Victor Hugo et les poètes, page 16

(2) Ibid., pages 27-30

(1807-1808), and in Spain (1811-1812). He did not retain very exact images of these early travels, but a general impression of colored and magnificent visions.

In 1812 Victor Hugo returned to Paris. There his mother left at the disposal of him and his two brothers an entire library upon which he could draw without limit. Victor read everything. He entered boarding school where, after studying mathematics for a short time, he devoted himself resolutely to literature. At fourteen he translated Vergil. Already he composed satires, odes, epistles, and even a tragedy. He wrote, "Je veux être Chateaubriand ou rien". (1) The next year he won the prize for poetry offered by the French Academy. In 1817 he left college.

At first Victor Hugo closely copied the classical style in his writing by adhering to fixed forms. All his ideas were expressed in a flowery style. This gave dignity to his later writing. Although, he admired Chateaubriand, a romanticist, he copied only the form of his writing, not the great ideas. (2)

Victor Hugo married Mademoiselle Adèle Foucher, the daughter of a friend of his family, whom he knew from childhood. Soon afterward his mother died.

On April 29, 1825, the young writer was named knight of the Légion d'honneur at the same time that Lamartine was

- (1) Mabillean, Léopold ; Les Grands Écrivains Français,
Victor Hugo, page 9
(2) Ibid., pages 6-14

made knight. (1) Only four years later he became a bonapartist, liberal, and romanticist, for a political evolution followed the literary one marked by the preface of Cromwell. He perceived finally that the century had only one great man, Napoleon, and only one great thing, liberty. (2)

Victor Hugo came to know that art resides rather in the sincere translation of a personal impression than in the eyes of an indifferent virtuosity. (3) In his early poetry he did not express any real sentiment. Later he learned to emphasize ideas rather than form. He began to write about the impressions of his youth in Italy and in Spain. Then he wrote of chivalry. The new generation sighed for a bold, forceful, and energetic art, and Victor Hugo found himself in the nick of time to offer it. A violent and terrible strife had broken out between the romanticists and the classicists. The theatre opened to all a marvelous battlefield. The appearance of Victor Hugo's Hernani was an event for Romanticism.

In 1841 he was elected to the French Academy.

When his daughter Léopoldine was drowned with her husband two months after their wedding, Victor Hugo was so grieved that he did not write for some time. His poetry, when it did appear again, showed great art and expression

(1) Mabilleau, Léopold : Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 29

(2) Ibid, pages 56-57

(3) Ibid, page 17

of deep feeling.

To distract his sorrows he turned more and more toward political and social action. In 1845 he was named peer of France. From then until about 1850 the poet gave place to the political man. Although he had been a "Vendéen", a legitimist, and a Catholic, he was now a liberal, and was the leader and great orator of the democratic party. His numerous discourses of the most ardent liberalism provoked vigorous reproaches upon his pretended apostasy.

All his political and social theories were a consequence of his literary system or of his imagination. In politics Victor Hugo's great pride hindered him from distinguishing between what it was necessary to say or keep silent. He came to be suspected. Under pain of death or deportation he voted for all the laws of mercy and of social reparation which were proposed, but he voted them as a dreamer rather than as a statesman, without presenting any efficacious project. He wished to suppress misery, but he was of no assistance to the sociologists and economists. (1)

He made a campaign against Louis Bonaparte, and was proscribed, in the coup d'état of December 2, 1851, at the head of the list of proscriptions. He spent eighteen years in exile, first in Brussels, then in Jersey, and finally in Guernesey.

(1) Mabileau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, pages 81-82

This cruel banishment from his country resulted in good fortune for his genius. One sees a new Hugo appear animated with a revengeful anger. Not until his solitude in Jersey did he discover the harmony of nature between his imagination and the sea. He no longer used simple perceptions or abstract ideas, but a single process of conception and of expression, the metaphor, and the metaphor more and more independent of the exterior world, more and more subordinate to the state of the soul. (1) From Brussels came his virulent pamphlet, Napoleon le Petit, and les Châtiments, a collection of lyric satires. At Guernesey he wrote his best works--the first series of la Légende des siècles, les Misérables, and many others.

On September 4, 1870, the Empire fell, and the doors of his country were again open to Victor Hugo. He was in Paris during the siege, which he later described in his l'Année terrible. His thought was again turned to political and social actions. In his novel Quatre-vingt-treize is found a new affirmation of his faith in the Revolution and in the future which it had opened to France. He was elected senator in 1875.

During his later life he published the second and third series of la Légende des siècles and l'Art d'être grand-père besides some other less renowned works.

His last years were a long exaltation. Il "entra

(1) Mabilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, pages 83-85

vivant dans l'immortalité". (1) His political and social ideas, which had appeared of a Utopian nature, displayed some practical realization with the downfall of the Empire and the return of the Republic. France made him a hero, personifying the national spirit. He was considered as a prophet, a pope charged with showing France the Ideal and maintaining the worship of it.

M. Thiers, a very practical and positive man, said Utopists were necessary in order to recall to others that life does not hold everything in the present moment, that humanity marches toward an ever fleeing end, and that it must eternally revolt against that which is, out of regard for that which is to be. (2)

All France felt that something great and useful disappeared, and that the day of Victor Hugo's death, May 22, 1885, was a day of grief for the country and for humanity.

The following is a list of Victor Hugo's works and the date of their publication, with the exception of those published at Guernesey, which are discussed later.

Those published before his exile at Guernesey:

- 1822 His first volume of Odes
- 1823 Han d'Islande, a serious novel
- 1824 Odes
- 1825 Bug-Jargal, Odes, Ballades

(1) Mabileau, Léopold : Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, Page 92
(2) Ibid., pages 92-94

1827 Cromwell, a drama

Lyrics:

1828 Les Orientales

1831 Les Feuilles d'Automne

1835 Les Chants du crépuscule

1837 Les Voix intérieures

1840 Les Rayons et les ombres

Dramas in verse:

1830 Hernani, Marion Delorme

1832 Le Roi s'amuse

1838 Ruy Blas

1843 Les Burgraves

Dramas in prose:

1833 Lucrece Borgia, Marie Tudor

1835 Angelo

1831 Notre-Dame de Paris, a historical novel

Those published after his exile at Guernesey:

1872 L'Année terrible

1874 Quatre-vingt-treize

1877 The second series of La Légende des siècles

1877 L'Art d'être grand-père

1879 La Pitié suprême

1878 Le Pape

1880 L'Ana, Religion et Religions

1881 Les Quatre vents de l'esprit

1882 Torquemada, a drama

1883 The third series of la Légende des siècles

1883 L'Histoire d'une crime (le coup d'état)

These, written after his exile, were left unpublished:

Le Théâtre en liberté

Choses vues

La Fin de Satan

Toute la lyre

His correspond^{ence}

(1)

(1) Nouveau Larousse Illustré, Dictionnaire Universel
Encyclopédique, Volume Y., page 177

II

During the period of his exile at Guernesey Victor Hugo wrote his most important works. It is with this period that we shall deal henceforth.

After his banishment on December 2, 1851, Victor Hugo spent a short time in Brussels. From there he went to the island of Jersey.

While he was in Jersey, the Queen of England, Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, and the princess visited France, bowed at the tomb of Napoleon, and enjoyed all that Paris had to offer at the Exposition universelle of Paris in 1855. In the French newspaper, l'Homme, of Jersey appeared, on October 10, 1855, a letter to the Queen, which severely criticized her for visiting Napoleon III. The people of Jersey did not agree with the sentiments of this letter. Consequently, the editor-in-chief and others connected with the paper were ordered to leave the island. Victor Hugo wrote a protestation in most violent terms, signed by himself, his son, and a certain number of proscribed people. The twenty-seventh of October the mayor signified to the poet that, in virtue of a decision of the Crown, the sojourn on the island was forbidden him and his son. On October 31, 1855, Victor Hugo and his son François-Victor left Jersey and went to the more secluded island of Guernesey to make their home. Two days later Madame Hugo, his daughter Adèle, and his son Charles joined him there. (1)

(1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 80-83

Guernesey is less an English island than a Norman island in regard to its origin, language, and climate. The capital, Saint-Pierre-Port, where Victor Hugo resided, is a picturesque and charming city. In it one finds a Gothic church; old, narrow, irregular, fantastic, and amusing streets; stairways up the mountain side; houses over one another so that all look out upon the sea, where all kinds of boats and steamers are seen. (1)

French is the native language of the merchants of Saint-Pierre-Port. They speak English only to reply to the aristocratic colony. The official language of the island is French, and it is in this language that the Gazette Officielle is printed.

There were four distinct classes of society in Guernesey. The first class was composed of nobility, the gentry, high officials, professors from Cambridge and Oxford, rectors, and strangers of distinction. In the second class were vicars, music masters, chief merchants, and business men. Clerks of stores, glaziers, cabinet makers, and reapers were included in the third class. In the fourth class were beggars and vagabonds. (2)

The people of Guernesey generally treated Victor Hugo with coldness and indifference. Especially was this true of the middle class. The daughter of the bailiff, Miss Carey, admired him very much. Through her the best society of the island was sometimes present at Hauteville-House. She realized

(1) Ibid., page 85 .

(2) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey pages 12-14

that Guernesey would be famous only for Victor Hugo's having been there. When a troupe of actors came there to play Hernani for him, the bailiff and Stapfer, a French master, saw that a fair crowd was present at the performance, which was quite well received, although it was given under difficulties. The newspapers took no note of his coming and going. The people reproached him for his republicanism, the excessive liberty of his words and acts in regard to all crowned heads and particularly in regard to the Queen of England. (1)

With the sum that he received from les Contemplations in 1856 Victor Hugo purchased Hauteville-House. He took great care to make it a true home, giving to each room the splendor of an ode and wishing that his lodging might be a poem.

The exterior of Hauteville-House was sad and commonplace. On the outside it seemed almost a prison; on the inside, almost a fairy palace with its beautiful tapestries, magnificent furniture, and wonderful carvings. On the mantle of his drawing-room on two scrolls which broke the line of the pillars, one read the names which the poet considered as the most glorious of humanity: Moses, Socrates, Christ, Columbus, Luther, Washington, Job, Isaiah, Homer, Aeschylus, Lucretius, Dante, Shakespeare, and Moliere. In the dining-room stood the famous armchair of the ancestors, a monumental seat similar to a throne where no living person could sit down, for its arms were closed by an iron chain. On the

(1) Stapfer, Paul; Victor Hugo À Guernesey, pages 15-17; 95-107

right arm of the chair one read "Georges, 1535"; on the left, "Joseph-Léopold-Bigisbert, 1825". The first was an ancestor, the second his father. On the back was carved the coat of arms of the Hugos of Lorraine. (1)

In his belvédère, or look-out, the poet worked. It was a room entirely covered with glass like a greenhouse. He slept on a low bed with paper and pencils in reach to take notes if an inspiration came to him in his sleep. A desk was close by. Here he created his masterpieces in a room in which there were no tapestry, decorations, luxury, or objects of art--no other beauty than the view of the sky and the sea. Here disorder and chaos reigned. Here the author rose early, wrote one hundred lines of verse or twenty pages of prose before noon. It was one of the principles of his excellent hygiene to work standing. At noon he came downstairs and spent the rest of the day free from writing. (2)

At Hauteville-House were Mme. Hugo and the two sons François-Victor and Charles; Mme. Chenay, Mme. Hugo's sister; and Hennett de Kesler, a companion and faithful friend of the poet. François-Victor translated all of Shakespeare's works into French; Charles, the other son, wrote novels.

Although most of the people of the island payed little attention to the genius in their midst, he took an interest

- (1) Biré, Edmond : Victor Hugo après 1852 , pages 102-109
(2) Biré, Edmond : Victor Hugo après 1852 , page 110; and
Stapfer, Paul Victor Hugo à Guernesey , pages 37 and 38

in the less fortunate of them. Every Wednesday Victor Hugo entertained poor children at breakfast. The number of these children increased from eight to forty during the time he was there. He gave an annual, public festivity at Christmastime. There were a Christmas tree and candy, clothing, and toys for the children. The prominent people of the city attended this festivity. On one such an occasion, the poet in a speech to the people spoke thus: (1)

"Je n'ajouterais plus qu'un mot. Il y a deux manières de bâtir des églises. On peut bâtir des églises en pierre ~~et en os.~~ ^{marbre, et on peut bâtir aussi des églises en chair et en os.} Un pauvre que vous avez soulagé, c'est une église que vous avez bâtie et d'où la prière et la reconnaissance montent vers Dieu!" (2)

Mme. Hugo was a majestic and imposing person. Her mind was exact and sensible. To her most judicious judgment she joined a delicate and pure taste, a scrupulous care for speaking French correctly and for making the language respected. (3) She would say, "On ne travaille qu'à Paris; on ne s'amuse qu'à Paris". (4)

In August, 1868, Mme. Hugo died. She had been very happy in her early years, but her later years were sad. She was gentle, patient, and forgiving. As sorrows came, she thought more of the future life where she would meet her loved ones. Although she had published some books, she never spoke of her writing. Indeed, she wrote word for word as

- (1) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, Pages 53-56
- (2) Ibid., page 56
- (3) Ibid., pages 66-67
- (4) Ibid., page 66

as her husband dictated the book entitled: Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie. Many sorrows came to her. Her daughter Léopoldine was drowned. Adèle married an English officer and went to America where her husband soon died. She returned, but her mind was affected by her misfortune. Mme. Hugo's two sons no longer stayed at Guernesey. Her husband frequently enjoyed the hospitality of Mme. Drouet.

In her later years Mme. Hugo was seldom at Guernesey, for she was obliged to spend most of her time in Paris having her eyes treated. Here she was visited by many friends. It was her wish to be buried by her daughter at Villequier, a humble Norman cemetery near Paris. Her death caused the poet great grief. With her the past and his old friendships were forever gone. (1)

For several years previous to his exile Victor Hugo had almost ceased writing and had devoted himself to political and social affairs. However, the secluded life of his exile encouraged a return to writing. Brunetière says that there are no other examples of such an avalanche of verse, such an enormous production of literature as his during this period. (2) His long silence had rendered him more a master of his instrument. Later, however, the isolation from friends and country made him believe he was a Napoleon at St. Helena, that he was the greatest writer, and that he could have no faults in

(1) Biré, Edmond : Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 208-216

(2) Brunetière, Ferdinand Histoire de la Littérature Française, Volume IV, pages 360-361

his writing. Consequently, his works grew worse from year to year. (1) His lofty spirit seemed to repose. After so many dramas and epics one sees him become enamored with pastorals and sensual imaginations in Chansons des rues et des bois. Nevertheless, his imagination forms the unity of his genius in this as in his other works.

It will be remembered that Victor Hugo's political ideas changed. When he was a youth, he was a royalist. Then, he became a doctrinaire, but he was not a republican before 1849.

In 1859, when the war with Italy was ended, Napoleon III appeared as the arbiter and master of Europe. On the sixteenth of August of that year this decree was published:

"Amnistie pleine et entière est accordée a tous les individus qui ont été condamnés pour crimes ou délits politiques, ou qui ont été l'objet des mesures de sûreté générale". (2)

To this amnesty Victor Hugo replied by the following declaration, dated August 18, 1859:

"Declaration

Personne n'attendra de moi que j'accorde, en ce qui me concerne, un moment d'attention à la chose appelée amnistie.

Dans la situation où est la France, protestation absolue, inflexible, éternelle, voilà pour moi le devoir.

Fidèle à l'engagement que j'ai pris vis-a-vis de ma conscience, je partagerai jusqu'au bout l'exil de la liberté. Quand la liberté rentrera, je rentrerai!" (3)

(1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, page 224

(2) Ibid., page 116

(3) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, page 116

From this moment Victor Hugo ceased to be proscribed. He was a voluntary exile. His proud attitude and determination won him exaltation from the republicans.

Biré says the poet did not return to France quite simply because he could not do so while Napoleon III was on the throne. To return was impossible, because he had written Napoleon le Petit and les Châtiments, and had scattered widely pamphlets, poems, and discourses in which he treated the emperor as a bandit and assassin. Furthermore, he had taken a hundred times, not only before his conscience, but before Europe and the world, the pledge not to reenter France while Napoleon remained there. His pride would not permit him to go back to his country. (1)

In the war between France and Mexico the proscribed citizen took the part of Mexico. He wrote Mexico that it was the Empire, not France, fighting that country. He sent out invectives against the generals and armies taking part in the Crimean War. In the war with China he called France and England bandits. (2)

Napoleon III, in 1867, prepared for a second universal Exposition at Paris. An editor, in view of this, published a Paris Guide, the introduction of which Victor Hugo wrote. He condemned all France before 1789 and eulogized the Revolution. He predicted a time when, with Paris as the center of Europe, France would lead in forming a united states of Europe. (3)

(1) Ibid., pages 117-119

(2) Biré, Edmond, Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 162-164

(3) Ibid., pages 194-199

At this exposition Napoleon permitted Hernani to be played. It had been forbidden for some time. During the season it was given seventy-one times.

In the spring of 1870, Louis Napoleon asked the nation to confirm the Empire by a vote. The policies of the Empire were sanctioned by a substantial majority. Before the election Victor Hugo wrote a protestation against the re-establishment of the Empire. The war broke out with Prussia on July 15. A month later the exiled poet went to Brussels. The Empire fell on September 4. On the following day he bought a ticket for Paris. At the railway station of the metropolis, a considerable crowd awaited the poet and greeted him heartily. Victor Hugo, an exile for eighteen years, had returned at last to his native country. (1)

(1) Ibid., pages 225-226

Victor Hugo had a striking countenance. Mabileau describes him in this manner: "He had a forehead truly monumental which like a fronton of marble crowned his face with a serious placidity; two fawn-colored eyes like the pupils of an eagle, and a mouth with lips curved and corners uplifted in a firm and willful line, which, upon half opening to smile, revealed teeth of a dazzling whiteness. His was an air of pensive grandeur and grave nobility. Never did poetry express itself in a manner more definite and more sovereign on a human countenance." (1)

Stapfer describes Hugo as he saw him going for a walk at Guernesey. "This old man of sixty-five years advanced steady and straight, wearing a soft hat with a large brim, always without cane as without umbrella, a mantle cast over his left shoulder if the sky was threatening, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders held back, putting lightly on the ground the point of his shoes, which indicated the admirable arch of his foot. He was almost always in a dress jacket, and one could not say that his clothes were well taken care of, but he could dress himself as he wished, he would have given a grand air to the rags of a beggar. So elegant and noble was his gait that, to render the impression of it, I imagined instantly that Homeric paraphrase, by which I often amused myself in designating him in my intimate correspondence--'l'homme à la

(1) Mabileau, Léopold; Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 65

jambe de prince'". (1) He impressed one with an extreme politeness of language and of manners.

As for his temperament, Victor Hugo was less of Lorraine than of Brittany, more of Nantes than of Besançon. He owed to the Trébuchets and the Le Normands, his mother's people, marvelous qualities of mind and imagination, the temperament of understanding affairs, which made him the grandest poet of his century and the most practical man, the most careful of his interests. (2)

The poet had an instinct for grandeur and an innate sense for expressing the sublime by simplicity. He was neither historian, psychologist, nor moralist, but, as Mabilleau thinks, the most prodigious visionary that has ever penetrated the material world in its different forms in order to make them subject to the laws of his mind and to translate them into images full of meaning. (3)

In his speech he was always exact, and was called "the grammarian of Hauteville-House". He was careful not to cause his friends to suffer prejudice because of their association with him. In fact, he was very good and considerate of all--his friends, his servants, animals, tiny worms. However, he could not endure the critic. A letter Mérimée had written criticizing Victor Hugo was published after Mérimée's death. Upon reading this, Victor Hugo added a page to his Histoire d'un Crime, in which he showed a great dislike for his critic. (4)

- (1) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, pages 19, 20
- (2) Séché, Léon: Le Cénacle de Joseph Delorme Vol. I, pages 45-4
- (3) Mabilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 90
- (4) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 150-153

In William Shakespeare, he said that he did not recognize any right belonging to the critic, except that of keeping silent. (1)

Stapfer says that in their many talks together the poet never repeated any stories. He remembered what he had told, when, and under what circumstances. He enjoyed family life and was never gayer, happier, or more content than when his wife was at Hauteville-House.

It is generally known that one of the most outstanding characteristics of Victor Hugo was his egotism. He recognized only one classic in the nineteenth century--himself. He claimed that he knew French the best of any in his day. After him came Sainte-Beuve, then Mérimée.⁽²⁾ As for his unmeasured pride, he was not ignorant of it, as his words indicate: "They accuse me of being proud. It is true. My pride makes my strength." (3) Sometimes he pleasantly called himself the "great misunderstood classic" and the "great misunderstood doctor".

Once Victor Hugo was traveling in England, in the same compartment with two English ladies. They, not knowing who he was, remarked to him in French that it must put him ill at ease not to know English when traveling in England. "Mesdames", he replied, "When England wishes to speak with me, she will learn my language." (4)

(1) Ibid., page 175

(2) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 131

(3) Ibid., page 134

(4) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, pages 190-191

In speaking of his education, Victor Hugo confessed that he was almost absolutely ignorant of Greek and of Greek literature, except for Aeschylus and Homer, which he had read in Latin translations. He knew the Latin language and literature thoroughly. Eight authors especially he had read so often and so completely that he could recite entire pages of them by heart. They were: Horace, Juvenal, Vergil, Lucretius, Justin, Tacitus, Quintus Curtius, and Sallust. (1) There was something epic in Horace's Odes that delighted him, and he knew them all by memory. Indeed, he said that he had memorized six thousand Latin lines. He was as familiar with their structure as with that of French lines. In 1815, at that time a pupil in rhetoric, he read and learned about thirty lines of Vergil every evening; then he read three or four translations in verse and tried to translate the same passage better or at least as well. (2) "That gymnastic," he said, "has been marvelously useful to me." (3)

Although he lived on English land eighteen years, the poet never learned English. It is said that he knew only the words "Christmas" and "iron". (4)

As a young man, he had made a profound study of mathematics. He had come to the conclusion that it was necessary to begin the teaching of that science by conic sections in

(1) Ibid., pages 68-69

(2) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernésey, pages 192-193

(3) Ibid., page 193

(4) Ibid., page 191

place of demonstrating first the propositions of Euclid. (1)

Hugo had a love for music, but did not distinguish between commonplace and sublime melodies. His outstanding sense was visual.

It was his idea that in history and biography, the great moral facts alone are important. Exterior peculiarities, the color of the hair, the place of birth, etc., are not.

Many of the ideas expressed by Victor Hugo are interesting in that they reveal his own character and tastes. To him literary glory was comparable to a plant or to a building: it is necessary that it have deep roots or solid foundations. The works which an author writes to-day and which are ignored can remain obscure for a long time, perhaps until the end of his life, and later may be the titles of his future glory. (2) He considered the magic of magicians absolutely unexplainable--a part of nature which we begin to know and do not yet explain. It was his opinion that the young men of his generation were the old men of the day, that the men of his own age were the real youth, because they had faith. He opposed the weakness of scepticism, saying it was better to affirm error than to affirm nothing at all. (3) He did not believe in the education of women. (4)

Victor Hugo had very definite likes and dislikes concerning the works of other authors. He said Plautus was equal to Molière and would be equal to Shakespeare if he had

(1) Ibid., page 29

(2) Ibid., page 147

(3) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 26

(4) Ibid., page 81-82

tragic grandeur. He was less of a philosopher than Molière, less profound, but more a poet in his style. Hugo avoided reading Plautus, because when he began reading one of his comedies, he could not leave it, and he had his work which he wished to finish.(1) He did not like Goethe, and said that neither Goethe nor any German poet has known how to give reality to dramatic characters. However, he was not very familiar with German literature or English literature.(2) Molière he considered a great writer, and thought l'Étourdi the best written of all his comedies.(3) Alfred de Musset was a charming poet, but not a great poet; superior to Béranger, but inferior to Lamartine.(4) He detested Bossuet almost as much as the Bourbons. Balzac, to him, was neither an artist nor a writer, for he lacked form and style. Hugo saw faults in Shakespeare, but liked him on the whole. He never was able to digest the last two acts of Hamlet. The poet once remarked, "I admire all in Homer, in Shakespeare, and in the Bible".(5) "To the human element Shakespeare adds the superhuman element, and it is by that that he is great. Every true poet is a creator of types; it is the essence of types to be above nature and to be superhuman".(6) Perhaps the writer most severely criticized by Hugo was Racine. He op-

(1) Ibid., page 193

(2) Ibid., page 47

(3) Ibid., page 116

(4) Ibid., page 127

(5) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 167

(6) Ibid., page 111-112

posed the conservatism of Racine. Racine, he thought, was overrated. He admired his epistolary style and recognized in him a certain talent for composition, a general psychology of the passion of love, but he was an author of the second or third order--a poet essentially bourgeois. He said Racine was not sure of his instrument; he wrote sometimes very badly and used incorrect French and false images.(1)

(1) Ibid., pages 50,115,165

IV

As an author, Victor Hugo worked incessantly. He rose early, ate breakfast, worked till eleven, ate lunch, walked for about two hours, worked again till six-thirty, ate dinner, and played cards till ten.(1) While he was writing la Légende des siècles, he continued his labor at night, and for a time did not even read the newspapers. Often he would remark, "Peu de travail ennui; beaucoup de travail amuse".(2)

His objective power permitted him to embrace a domain without limits: nature, man, history, the entire universe.

Romanticism made itself felt in France in the nineteenth century. Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre were the prophets of the new movement. After these, Chateaubriand did the most. He prepared the way for the literary revolution of which Lamartine, Hugo, George Sand, and Michelet were going to be the apostles. Victor Hugo gradually chose romanticism. Indeed, romanticism did not exist, properly speaking, before Victor Hugo.(3) The appearance of his Hernani was an event in its history. He attacked classic tradition, a sort of "ancien régime", and took and demolished the "bastille of rhymes".(4)

Hugo's works at times show a Spanish element, for it will be remembered that he spent a part of his childhood in Spain. His high-spirited turn of thought and expression

- Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey,
(1) Ibid., pages 36-40
(2) Asseline: Victor Hugo intime, page 209
(3) Mabillean, Léopold: Les grands Écrivains Français,
Victor Hugo, pages 47-51
(4) Ibid., page 78

and his emphasis of feeling give a Spanish character to his work. Often he chose Spain for the setting of his imaginary creations, as in Hernani, Ruy Blas, and Avila.

Imagination became the deep root of his multiple and diverse genius which took so many forms, not idealistic fancy, the spiritual creation, but physical plasticity. (1) Another characteristic mark in the author's manner is the excess of feeling employed in the drama. Everything in the characters' actions is excessive, heroic, superhuman, imaginary, and composed with a purpose of striking the senses and the mind. (2) Swinburne writes, "Hugo has in the tone and color of his genius more of the Hebrew than of the Greek. In his love of light and freedom, wisdom and justice, he is not of Jerusalem but of Athens". (3)

The types of literature written by Victor Hugo cover a wide range. He wrote both poetry and prose. In his poetry are found examples of the lyric, the drama, the satire, and the epic; in his prose, the drama, the novel, and literary criticism.

- (1) Mabileau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 31
- (2) Ibid., page 60
- (3) Swinburne, Algernon: Victor Hugo, page 164

During his exile at Guernesey Victor Hugo published his most important works. The first to appear was les Contemplations(1), which was almost entirely finished when he left Jersey. Only three poems were written in Guernesey: Spes, les Mages, À celle qui est restée en France.

From April, 1845, when he published his third volume of Letters on the Rhin, the poet had published nothing in France. At Brussels he published les Châtiments in 1853. On April 26, 1856, appeared the two volumes of les Contemplations. This important date in the work of the poet marks the point in which all his lyric gifts, all his superiority as a verse writer have their full development, but in which, at the same time, his defects are accentuated and enlarged.

The collection is divided into two parts: Autrefois and Aujourd'hui, and each of these parts is divided into three books. The first book of the second part has for its title Pauca Meae. It contains the poems inspired by the death of his daughter. Several are admirable, especially the stanzas, À Villequier:

"Je viens à vous, Seigneur, Père auquel il faut croire;
Je vous porte, apaisé,
Les morceaux de ce coeur tout plein de votre gloire
Que vous avez brisé..."

The second book of the same part contains poems of love: l'Ame en fleur. Biré thinks that Victor Hugo did not show good taste in placing these poems so near those about the

(1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 86-97

death of his daughter, that one does not make a bouquet of such poems to place on the tomb.(1)

The volume of Autrefois extends from 1830 to 1843. A large number of truly beautiful poems are found in it: le Revenant, Aux arbres, Melancholia, la Vie aux champs, l'Enfance, Quia pulvis es, Intérieur, Insomnie, Építaphe. Besides the vigorous powerful sketches, there are at times simple, but masterful sketches.

The first volume is filled with pleasant things; the second, on the contrary, is full of dark, formidable things. In the first we find these titles: Vere novo, Permier mai, Chanson, Égolgue, Billet du matin, la Fête chez Thérèse, En écoutant les oiseaux. In the second volume are these titles: Pleurs dans la nuit, À la fenetre pendant la nuit, Voyage de nuit, Horror, Ce que c'est que la mort, Dolor, Cadaver.

In the second part of les Contemplations the poet becomes a thinker or rather a revealer. Indeed, Biré calls this part no less than the gospel and the apocalypse of a new religion.(2) He had a vision in Jersey, which he expresses in la Bouche d'Ombre:

"Arbres, roseaux, rochers, tout vit! tout est plein d'âmes
Mais, comment? Oh! voilà le mystere inouï".

Biré says Victor Hugo uses too many repetitions and too many words in les Contemplations. Besides this defect, a new one appeared for the first time--the double substantitive; for example, la bouche tombeau and la fosse silence.(3)

(1) Biré, Edmond : Victor Hugo après 1852, page 87

(2) Biré, Edmond : Victor Hugo après 1852, page 90

(3) Ibid; pages 93-95

Mabilleau does not think this collection of poems presents the same homogeneity found in les Chatiments. (1) The tone is different; the anger of the first moment has vanished. Swinburne has these words of praise for les Contemplations: "No book had ever in it more infinite and exquisite variety; no concert ever diversified and united such inexhaustible melodies with such unsurpassable harmonies". (2)

In 1859 appeared the first series of la Légende des siècles, a series of tales and epic scenes in which Victor Hugo shows the development of human kind from century to century. In Larousse (3) this poem is considered the grandest and most varied work of the poet as well as the simplest in magnificence.

This great poem is dedicated to France with these few verses:

"Livre, qu'un vent t'emporte
En France, où je suis né
L'arbre déraciné
Donne sa feuille morte" (4)

Its subtitle is Histoire--les petites épopées. In his preface, Victor Hugo says this first series is only a commencement, but complete in itself, as a tree is a whole and yet is the beginning of a forest. His purpose is to express humanity in a kind of cycle; to paint it successively and simultaneously under all its aspects, history,

(4) Dedication of La Légende des siècles

(1) Mabilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 85

(2) Swinburne, Algernon: Victor Hugo, page 81

(3) Nouveau Larousse Illustré, Dictionnaire Universel Ency-

fable, philosophy, religion, science, which advance in a single and immense movement toward the light; and to portray Man in his contrasting emotions. Human kind, the poet believes, has two aspects: the historical aspect and the legendary aspect. One is no less true or conjectural than the other. However, it is the legendary aspect that prevails in these poems. The work is upon being under its triple face: humanity, evil, infinity; the progressive, the relative, the absolute.(1)

At the beginning, the poet describes a vision from which this book came. In a dream he sees a wall of the centuries of griefs, tears, and horrors. All the past is mingled together. Finally, the mist clears. The past disappears, and a vision of the future appears, in which all oppositions are reconciled, and all strifes expire.

The first section of the book is entitled d'Eve à Jésus.(2) The formation of the human race itself is the theme of the first poem. In the second poem the formation of moral conscience is related, with Cain as the central figure. If man had always been pure and innocent as he came from the hands of God, conscience would have been useless for him. Conscience was born with the first crime. The Bible furnished the author with inspirations for two other superb poems in this section--Booz endormi and Première rencontre du Christ avec le tombeau. The latter,

(1) Preface of La Légende des siècles

(2) Rigal, Eugène: Victor Hugo, poète épique, pages 41-44

which concludes the first section is an account of the resurrection of Lazarus.

From this point in the cycle there is an enormous omission. Greece is not mentioned. Rome is represented only in the midst of the decadence by le Lion d'Androclès. The middle age occupies not less than five sections: I' Islam, le Cycle héroïque chrétien, les Chevaliers errants, les Trônes d' Orient, and Ratbert.

The sixteenth century is described in four of its aspects. Its spirit and its genius are found in le Satyre; the power of Spain in La Rose de l'Infante; the inquisition in les Raisons du Momotombo; and the condottieri in la Chanson des aventuriers de la mer. The use of Swiss mercenaries in the armies of Europe, an unimportant event in the seventeenth century, inspires le Régiment du baron Madruce. There is nothing on the Reformation, nothing on the eighteenth century and the Revolution.

Hugo's own century, the nineteenth, he pictures in a manner that one could not call characteristic in Après la bataille, le Crepand, les Pauvres Gens, and Paroles dans l'épreuve. M. Jules Lemaître (1) declared that he was angry to state that, having lived in the century which has best understood history, Victor Hugo has seen in humanity only an immense apocalyptic Guignol in which the popes and kings appear like swine and tigers. M. Émile Faguet (2) regrets to find in his characters only abstract types.

(1) Mabilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français,
Victor Hugo, pages 89-90

(2) Mabilleau, Léopold: " " " " page 90

The twentieth century is represented by the two symbols: Pleine Mer and Plein Ciel. Under the title of Hors des Temps the vision of the trumpet of the judgment finishes the work.

The poem of Dieu should be the introduction and the poem of la Fin de Satan the conclusion of la Légende des siècles. These poems were announced in the preface of the first series, but were not published until after the poet's death.

Rigal finds two defects in these poems. (1) They are disorder and the intrusion of parasite pieces. The omissions, which are so conspicuous to the reader, are doubtless the result of the fact that the poet did not write steadily on one piece, but labored for years on a work, along with as many as eight or nine other great works. La Légende des siècles lacks proportions, harmony, or plans. In some parts everything goes to the extreme-- thought, word, sentiment. There are false ideas and even an absence of ideas. Nevertheless, these empty lines are made to hold themselves as erect as the full ones. (2)

In spite of these grave criticisms, la Légende des siècles remains a masterpiece in French literature. Mabileau says it is not a treatise of philosophy; it is a series of poems, without precedents since la Chanson de Roland in the literature of France. (3) Biré considers le

(1) Rigal, Eugène: Victor Hugo, poète épique, page 43

(2) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, page 125

(3) Mabileau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 88

Petit roi de Galice, Eviradnus, and Ratbert as little epics. Aymerillot and le Mariage de Roland are simple, but beautiful, episodes. Le Satyre, la Rose de l'Infante, and les Mauvres Gens are good. Eviradnus, Biré thinks, is, perhaps, with l'Expiation, his masterpiece. (1)

When we remember that these poems comprise only the first series, and that two other series appeared later, we realize the immense proportions of la Légende des siècles. Swinburne considers the three series as the greatest work of the century. (2) To him no part is more or less great than another. All display perfect expression in perfect harmony. The unity of the book is not logical, but spiritual. In this great work Swinburne finds Victor Hugo "as much a seer as a singer, an evangelist no less than an artist". (3)

The first part of les Misérables (4), Fantine, was published on April 3, 1862. On the thirteenth of June of that year appeared the fifth and last part, Jean Valjean. Victor Hugo was then sixty years old. Originally the novel was to be in two volumes entitled: le Manuscrit de l'Évêque.

The day les Misérables was published Victor Hugo certainly won one of his most splendid victories. The first part ranks among his most beautiful works. One recognizes on each page the hand of a master. Mlle. Bap-

- (1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 120-124
- (2) Swinburne, Algernon C.: Victor Hugo, page 145
- (3) Ibid., page 152
- (4) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 126-149

tistine, the sister of the bishop, and Sister Simplice are two charming characters. The portrait of Mgr. Myriel is almost a masterpiece. Javert, the officer of peace, a slave to his duties, becomes a type.

However, it is in the study of the soul of Jean Valjean perhaps that one finds the most admirable places. His soul rises from the obscure depths of crime to the luminous summits of Christian virtue. The scene in which he robs Mgr. Myriel, who has given him hospitality, of the six silver covers is portrayed with a finished art. When he repents and comes to fall on his knees before the door of the bishop, this unexpected event is at once touching and superb. Probably nothing in the modern novel can compare with the struggle and rise of the soul of Jean Valjean as portrayed in les Misérables.

Before this, Victor Hugo has made each of his dramas and novels rest upon an antithesis. He associates in the same soul the most opposite emotions, as baseness and sublimity. This virtue does not overcome the vice and crime; it exists with them. In les Misérables he has changed all that. Jean Valjean is not a criminal who displays both robbery and benevolence, crime and saintliness. He is a man who, after having failed, after having fallen, rises; but he rises because he has changed; he is converted. The heavenly indulgence and the sublime pardon of the man of God have overcome him. He becomes good, beneficent, gentle,

and humble; he sacrifices himself through the love of justice; he rises to the supernatural of Christian virtue; and the thought of the bishop never leaves him. His word is for him, on every occasion, light and strength.

The idea that dominates all the first part of the book is the Christian idea, the Catholic idea of reinstatement by repenting. The second book is closed with the account of the saintly Sister Simplice, who had just told an admirable and pious falsehood--she who had never told a lie before, but who did it now to spare a life. The first part about the bishop was written before 1848, before Victor Hugo wrote his invectives against the clergy. Later he gave the bishop some of his own ideas on philosophy; for instance, when Mgr. Myriel talks to the member of the National Convention.

The first two books are far the most beautiful of the work. With the third the long digressions commence. Now, the double object of the work is to be the love affair of Marius and Cosette and the struggle between Jean Valjean and Javert. Biré thinks three or four books would have been enough, but the author gives us eight. (1)

Some critics claim that Victor Hugo lacked invention and borrowed too much from Eugene Sue, Alexandre Dumas, and Balzac. Biré does not criticize him for this, for what he has borrowed he has greatly improved. (2)

Besides the characters mentioned before, there are

(1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, page 140
(2) Ibid., pages 141-142

others that are not to be forgotten. Cosette, delightfully depicted as a child, becomes commonplace as a young woman. Marius is in the book to represent Victor Hugo, the Victor Hugo of the Restoration, to show that the son of an officer of the Empire has been separated from his father, reared among royalist ideas, and how in his early youth he has broken from these ideas and become, at the price of the most generous sacrifices, liberal and republican. Marius has in his character Victor Hugo's own traits, acts, gestures--all the history of his life. The colonel baron Pontmercy is the general comte Hugo. Like Javert, the agent of the police, and Gavroche, the urchin of Paris, M. Gillenormand, le grand bourgeois, is a veritable creation: he will live.

^PIn the last eight books there is a strange mixture of defects and good qualities. From the social viewpoint, in spite of the pretensions of the author, Biré considers the book is of no value. (1) It portrays the unfortunate, but offers no remedy for them. The number of his readers is increased because in this book he eulogizes all the leaders of the Revolution. He has no good words for the Restoration, although Louis XVIII, in 1825, named Victor Hugo knight of the Légion d'honneur. He portrays Napoleon as a hero. Louis-Philippe finds some favor with him.

Swinburne states thus the keynote of les Misérables:

(1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 145-146

"Redemption by acceptance of suffering and discharge of duty in absolute and entire obedience to the utmost exaction of conscience when it calls for atonement, of love when it calls for sacrifice of all that makes life more endurable than death." (1)

His book entitled William Shakespeare Biré says should be Victor Hugo célébré par lui-même. (2) In it the author discusses the fourteen men whom he considers as literary geniuses of the world, one of which is Shakespeare. The works of all these he compares with his own. Whatever each did he himself has done more perfectly.

In 1865 appeared les Chansons des rues et des bois. (3) Most of these poems are too long. One song has ninety-seven couplets. There are some beautiful strophes, such as: la Meridienne du lion, Souvenir des vieilles guerres, Une alcôve au soleil levant, l'Ordre du jour Floréal. Along with these are many bad quatrains, commonplaces, and repetitions. Some of the poems written in his later years he has dated for 1827, 182-, etc., in order to make it appear that he was a republican at that time, when in reality in 1827 he claimed to be a loyal and faithful subject of the king.

Les Travailleurs de la Mer appeared in 1866. The book opens in a charming manner. It is Christmas morning in Guernesey in 182-. Snow is on the ground. The most charm-

- (1) Swinburne, Algernon Charles: Victor Hugo, page 101
(2) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, page 165
(3) Ibid., pages 176-183

ing girl of the country goes along the road, stoops, and writes in the snow the name of Gilliatt. The young sailor, Gilliatt, soon passes by and sees his name in the snow. He falls in love with the girl, who is Déruchette, an orphan. Her uncle, Lethierry, who has adopted her, has been robbed of a considerable sum of money. He owns the first steamship coming to Guernesey. As he is getting old, he intrusts the command of the steamer to Clubin, a friend. Clubin finds the thief and demands the money of him, which he intends to keep for himself. He has the ship wrecked on the rocks, but not where he planned to wreck it. Instead of escaping with the money, he loses his life. Lethierry's fortune is ruined. He promises the hand of his niece to the one who will rescue the engine of his ship. Gilliatt works three months, saves the engine, and finds the money. He returns these to Lethierry, who offers him Déruchette's hand. However, Gilliatt has learned that she loves the minister of the protestant parish; so he says he does not wish to marry. He is a witness at their wedding and watches the ship take them to England. Then, he seeks death in the sea.

Les Travailleurs de la Mer might have been very successful if it had been written in one volume instead of three. Its descriptions are too long; there are too many technical words. In the end Fate replaces God. Man should struggle against laws and things. If he is conquered, there remains for him the supreme resource, suicide. Never-

theless, the book contains many original and charming scenes.

In the mind of Victor Hugo les Travailleurs de la Mer was a true epic. He affirmed the existence of the great serpent of the sea. (1)

Swinburne, as in the case of Hugo's other works, has only praise for this novel. "None," (of his five great romances), he says, "is to me personally a treasure of greater price than les Travailleurs de la mer. The splendid energy of the book makes the superhuman energy of the hero seem not only possible, but natural, and his triumph over all physical impossibilities not only natural but inevitable." (2)

L'Homme qui rit appeared in 1869. (3) These four volumes are at once a novel and a pamphlet. The setting is in England in the time of Queen Anne. The hero, Gwynplaine, of noble parentage, had been banished by the king after the death of his parents. The king ordered the child to be disfigured. His mouth was stretched from ear to ear so that he always appeared to be laughing. Later, his identity became known, and he became a member of the House of Lords. He had liberal ideas and was disgusted with aristocracy. In the end he committed suicide.

L'Homme qui rit is far too long. The events and the

- (1) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 154
- (2) Swinburne, Algernon Charles: Victor Hugo, page 108
- (3) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, pages 216-224

style are monotonous. As les Travailleurs de la mer is far from being equal to les Miserables, l'Homme qui rit is not nearly so good as les Travailleurs de la mer. The author exaggerates the vices of aristocracy. He does not know England's customs and people at the time of Queen Anne.

VICTOR HUGO

Victor Hugo is truly a great lyric poet. In the collections of lyrics which he published during his exile there are a number of beautiful poems.

A charming poem serves as the preface for Les Contemplations. One day the poet stood at the edge of the sea. The voice of an unseen person spoke to him and told him that he did well in seeking wisdom from the sea.

"La mer, c'est le Seigneur, que, misère ou
bonheur,

Tout destin montre et nomme;

Le vent, c'est le Seigneur; l'astre, c'est le
Seigneur;

Le navire, c'est l'homme.--"

In his first poem of the first book, A ma fille, he teaches his daughter resignation. No one is completely happy. There is a sacred law to which one must conform: to hate nothing, to love or pity everything. Le Firmament est plein is a beautiful description of the joyousness of spring. In Quia Pulvis Es the leaves that remain on the trees and those that the wind blows away converse. The leaves who pass say that God gives to the dead the real good, the true kingdoms, for the living are phantoms, while those that have gone are living. The short poem,

Épitaphe, is very beautiful. A child who lived, played, and laughed has been taken away. Why has nature done this? It is no more happy for having claimed the child, and the empty heart of the mother is as great an abyss as nature itself. In Aux arbres the poet walks among the trees and comes to know the heart of nature. He has fled from man to seek God. As perfume rises to the sky, so does his adoration mount to God. He has chased away every bitter thought and is full of oblivion as the trees are full of silence. It is in the shady forest that he wishes to sleep in his grave.

L'Autrefois, the first division of Les Contemplations, is composed for the most part of happy themes. Aujourd'hui, the second division, has somewhat sad themes.

At the beginning of Aujourd'hui is the collection of poems called Panca Meae, in memory of Hugo's daughter who was drowned. He recalls many happy memories of her childhood. It is hard to understand why God allowed her to be taken away. The poet visits her grave again and again. In these lines he expresses his great sadness and longing for the departed soul.

"Pendant que le marin, qui calcule et qui doute,
Demande son chemin aux constellations;

Pendant que le berger, l'oeil plein de visions,
Cherche au milieu des bois son étoile et sa route;
Pendant que l'astronome, inondé de rayons,

"Fèse un globe à travers des millions de lieues,
Moi, je cherche autre chose en ce ciel vaste et pur.
Mais que ce saphir sombre est un abîme obscur!
On ne peut distinguer, la nuit, les robes bleues
Des anges frissonnants qui glissent dans l'azur."

A quoi songeaient les deux cavaliers dans la forêt is about two horsemen who talked as they rode. One spoke of the half-open tombs of the living, the other of the closed tombs of the dead. The first thought the living were unhappy, but the dead were at rest. The second bade him to be silent that he might not sadden the spirits of those who once loved him. A Villequier is one of the most beautiful of this group of poems. It is difficult for the poet to see why God has taken away one who means so much happiness to him. It seems that death is necessary in God's great plan. However, God appears unmerciful in working out His purposes. At last the poet is submissive to what is necessary. Yet he begs to be permitted to weep.

One of the later poems of this collection is Spes. Everything is enveloped in obscurity. Immensity says death; eternity says night. Nevertheless, one ray of hope

is more than all this night of obscurity. Another of the later poems is Les Mages. In it Hugo discusses the value of thinkers to the world. The mass of human beings can not fathom the meaning of heaven or of the grave. The thinkers push aside the veil of shadows and reveal God to man. They with Christ at the head are combatants of ideas. There is nothing which man does not attempt. The only pontiffs are the thinkers, the wrestlers with great hopes.

At the end of the book is the poem, A Celle qui est restée en France, which is a poem of dedication. Hugo does not give this book to nature, who claims it, but to the tomb. In this book he has put his soul, the specter of his life. Formerly, every September he visited the grave of his daughter. Now he can not go to take flowers to her grave. He is sending this book in his place. It is his desire that her soul may take it and make a divine psalm of it.

The lyrics in Les Chansons des rues et des bois are of a lighter vein than those in Les Contemplations. Many of them are poems of love with no very great depth of feeling, but of a somewhat frivolous nature.

However, there are a few worthy to be mentioned. In Ordre du jour de Floréal, May enters joyously, victorious, and puts winter to flight with flowers. Fêtes de village

en plein air depicts scenes at a village festival.

Everyone is gay and happy, whether shepherd or king. A very vivid description of an old man continuing to sow his seed late into the evening is found in Saison des Semailles. Le Soir. Une Alcôve au soleil levant is a beautiful poem. In the quiet alcove, illuminated by the dawn, a child sleeps peacefully. It knows nothing of good, evil, the heart, or the senses. It dreams of a path in the dawn where angels are the passers-by. In La Méridienne du lion a powerful lion is sleeping at noon in the desert. Everything is silent while the master of the desert sleeps.

Hugo's talent as a writer of lyrics appears to diminish in his later years. Les Chansons des rues et des bois lack the beauty and depth of Les Contemplations.

VI

In Victor Hugo's works we find the poet's own ideas expressed on different subjects, such as philosophy, religion, and social welfare.

Some have called Victor Hugo a pessimist. Rigal⁽¹⁾ sees in his writings no pessimism, but rather optimism. He says in these facts the poet admitted neither variation nor hesitation. The existence of an all-powerful God who has created the world, who loves his creatures, who will recall them to him, over whom evil could not prevail even to-day, and before whom evil will disappear later, these are the ideas that compose the soul and epic works of Hugo. The thought of evil disturbs him, but he never loses his support, faith. He does not understand God's ways, but he believes optimism is true. He takes three forms from which result three sources of inspiration for his poetry. Each man can be consoled for the existence of evil, because he has, in order to be revenged for it in this world, not only the joy of accomplishing good but also another life. Humanity itself can be consoled for the existence of evil, because evil will end, and we can hasten the falling of it.

Stapfer says, "What distinguishes Victor Hugo among all modern poets is that with him doubt and melancholy never have the last word. He is an optimist. He hopes. He believes in God and in the immortality of the soul, as our

(1) Rigal, Eugène : Victor Hugo, poète épique, pages 124-125

(2) Stapfer, Paul Victor Hugo apGuernesey page 244

bitter tests, does not take refuge in suicide. (1)

Victor Hugo's religious faith was firm. He believed that God has neither beginning nor end. He exists from all eternity--He is the only truly substantial reality. He is the Creator always in deed and the good Providence to whom man prays for his welfare. Prayer is never lost. (2)

The poet told of once trying to let a bee that had been shut up in his room out one of the windows. It would not go out. It did not see the opening, but rushed in the other direction. Finally, he caught it, much against its will, and freed it. People, he said, are like the bee in regard to Providence. They have their own little plans and cannot see beyond their noses. God, wishing to open for them something better, causes them to suffer for a little while. They complain because their plans are crossed, and do not see that God is working out a much better plan for them. (3)

On one of Stapfer's visits to Hauteville-House, the poet talked of God in this manner. "Oh! how poor is atheism! how little it is! God is. I am more certain of His existence than of my own--If God lends me life, I wish to write a book in which I shall show that prayer is necessary

(1) Ibid., page 144

(2) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 155

(3) Ibid., pages 156-160

to the soul, that it is useful and efficacious. As for me, I do not spend four continuous hours without praying. I pray regularly each morning and each evening. If I awake in the night, I pray. What do I ask of God? To give me his strength. I know what is good and what is evil; but I am weak. I have the consciousness of my weakness, and in myself alone I do not find the strength to do that which I know is good---God sustains us and envelops us. We are in Him. We have in Him life, movement, and being. He is the Author of all. He is the Creator. But it is not true to say He has created the world. For He creates it eternally. He is the soul of the universe. He is the I Am of the infinite".(1)

Victor Hugo is also a poet of conscience and of death.(2) Never, doubtless, has any poet spoken of moral liberty, of duty, and of conscience with as much clearness, force, and depth as he has. La Légende des siècles shows us that virtue surpasses knowledge, and that man is noble in proportion to the efforts that he makes in religious and moral search. It is especially for being at peace with his conscience that man should do good. When the duty of man is finished, that of God commences. "En faisant ton devoir, tu fait à Dieu sa dette"(3) is a fine line of l'Année terrible. This debt is exacted at death. To Hugo death is not a cause for fear, but a revelation, an enfranchisement.

(1) Stapfer, Paul : Victor Hugo à Guernesey, pages 75-76

(2) Rigal, Eugène Victor Hugo, poète épique, pages 127-132

(3) Ibid., page 129

Victor Hugo's ideas of nature and immortality were closely allied. He found in the contemplation of nature itself the depository of eternal truth.

"Tout parle, l'air qui passe et l'alcyon qui vogue,
Le brin d'herbe, la fleur, le germe, l'élément.

T'imaginai-tu donc l'Univers autrement?--
et tout

Non, tout est une voix, est un parfum,

Tout dit, dans l'infini, quelque chose à quelqu'un". (1)

He had the profound feeling of the universal and mysterious solidarity of things. He considered as real, and not merely as imaginary, the invisible threads which bind our souls to things. "Everything is full of souls...The trees are religious...Blood flows in the veins of the marbles...That mule is a sultan". (2) The poet believed that the fields and the meadows, the lake, the flowers, the plain, the clouds, the ocean, the forests, the lighthouse, and the stars knew him. The beasts also knew him and returned to him the fraternal love that he had for them. (3)

It was Hugo's belief that if a man does not obey the divine law, he is punished and descends one or several degrees on the ladder of beings. The least

(1) Mabileau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 86

(2) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 151

(3) Ibid., pages 149-154

guilty become animals. Those more criminal become plants or trees; those still worse become rocks or pebbles. Thus, the world is an inferno. Dante had written over the door of his inferno: "Leave all hope, you who enter!" Victor Hugo has written: "Hope, hope, hope, unfortunate ones!" (1) You will mount again some day this ladder which your faults have made you descend. Those who are men may become angels. Biré recognized that this philosophy is none other than the old metempsychosis of Pythagoras and of the Druids. (2)

The poet believed in a conscience that indicates to one's soul the right, and that no other demonstration of the existence of God is necessary. Evil must disappear in time, absorbed in good. Hell exists, and the earth, a place of testing, is part of it. Human life is probably only one step in an endless series of metamorphoses and of tests destined to render us worthy, by degrees, of an existence more and more elevated. He believed in the immortality of the soul, for as his body weakened his intelligence became stronger. "I know that I am immortal," (3) he declared. Those who felt they would be immortal he believed would be; while those who ~~do~~ not believe in immortality perhaps would not have it. (4)

- (1) Biré, Edmond: Victor Hugo après 1852, page 92
(2) Ibid., page 93 (4) Ibid., pages 224-232
(3) Stapfer, Paul: Victor Hugo à Guernesey, page 232

SUMMARY

Victor Hugo holds a prominent place in the literature of France. At his death his contemporaries realized that through him literature had been renewed.

Poets and thinkers no longer marched in his footsteps, but remembered that he had opened the way. They did not dare to call him "master", they called him "father". (1)

He created the instrument of modern poetry, language, and versification. (2)

Mabilleau says that perhaps the highest expression of personal poetry in France is found in these collections of poems: Feuilles d'automne,

Chants du crépuscule, Voix intérieures, les Rayons et les

Ombres. (3) Hugo wrote many verses in honor of his daughter

Léopoldine, who was drowned. Veillot said, "The noble thoughts and the beautiful lines consecrated to that dear memory--There are not any more beautiful, neither in the French language nor in the Christian language". (4)

Les Châtiments, (5) the most perfect kind of poetic

eloquence, realize a new literary type, which one has justly called the "lyric satire", a mixture of invectives and of fancy, of brutal irony and of delicate reverie, which, according to Mabilleau, remain in all history without a true antecedent. Neither Archilochus, nor Persius, nor

(1) Mabilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 94

(2) Nouveau Larousse Illustré, Volume V, page 177

(3) Mabilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, page 72

(4) Ibid., page 77

Juvenal could compare with him.

Victor Hugo represents the most powerful imaginative organization which was ever manifested in French poetry and perhaps in universal poetry. He has created expressions which rendered for the first time accessible states of soul having remained until then outside of a clear consciousness and art. He has introduced many images and metaphors, rhymes and rhythms, and has invented an original style and rhetoric. Few men have cast as many ideas in circulation as Victor Hugo has. What served him most was his intense observation of visible nature and his incessant meditation on the images which it brought him. Finally, he offered romanticism a formula, renewed the imagination and the language, and forced a whole generation to model its brain on his. (1)

Émile Faguet estimates the poet's contribution to French literature in these words: "The style of Hugo has been nothing less than a revolution in the French language...Like almost all those who invent a style, Victor Hugo has created a language with new images... Victor Hugo is one of the greatest names in our literature...One of our great classics. He is our greatest lyric poet; he is almost our only epic poet. He would be, as to style and rhythm, the most skillful artist in verse that we have, if La Fontaine did not exist. Thus he will live as long as the French language". (2)

- (1) MaBilleau, Léopold: Les Grands Écrivains Français, Victor Hugo, pages 201-204
- (2) Fasnacht, Eugène: Select Specimens of the Great French Writers, pages 520-522

Victor Hugo is a writer whom not only France but the world claim. Swinburne offers these words of praise for him: "Victor Hugo is the greatest Frenchman of all time. Above all other apostles who have brought us each the glad tidings of his peculiar gospel, the free gifts of his special inspiration, has this one deserved to be called by the most beautiful and tender of all human titles--the son of consolation. We know of no such great poet so good, of no such good men so great in genius....Poet, dramatist, novelist, historian, philosopher, and patriot, the spiritual sovereign of the nineteenth century was before all things and above all things a poet." (1)

(1) Swinburne, Algernon Charles: Victor Hugo, pages 5-6-8

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