

# VICTOR HUGO

HERNANI

# Victor Hugo Hernani

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=25229980](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25229980)*

*Hernani:*

# Содержание

PREFACE	4
VICTOR HUGO	6
HISTORICAL NOTE TO «HERNANI»	48
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	51

# Victor Hugo

## Hernani

### PREFACE

The text of this edition is the same as that of the *édition définitive*, Paris, 1880. The unusual length of the introduction will be pardoned, it is hoped, in view of the paucity of general reviews of modern French literature that are available for students in schools and some colleges. It contains the matter which I should require a class of my own to get up for examination in connection with reading this play or any other of Hugo's works. The Historical Note is a necessity, and is introduced before the play to save students from confusion and waste of time.

Mr. H.A. Perry and Dr. John E. Matzke, in their editions of «Hernani», have so thoroughly annotated it that it has been impossible to avoid the appearance of following them very closely; and there are indeed several notes for which I am directly indebted to them. Without their indications, I should in other cases have been obliged to spend a great deal more time in looking up references than has been necessary. It would be unfair to Dr. Matzke, in particular, not to pay tribute to the completeness of his notes, which leave his successor little chance

for originality.

GEORGE McLEAN HARPER. PRINCETON  
UNIVERSITY June 16, 1894.

# VICTOR HUGO

For American and English readers who are at all well informed about modern European literature the name of Victor Hugo stands out more prominently than any other as representing the intellectual life of France since the fall of Napoleon. Even the defects of his character are by many considered typically French. They see him excessively conceited, absurdly patriotic, a too voluminous producer of very varied works; and it is not unusual to find that such readers believe him to be all the more French for these peculiarities. It would open their eyes if they should read what M. Ferdinand Brunetière, the most authoritative French critic of our generation, says of Victor Hugo. They would be surprised, if they conversed with intelligent Frenchmen generally, to hear their opinions of him. Indeed if they had a wider acquaintance with French letters and French character they would not need M. Brunetière or any other guide, because they would feel for themselves that Hugo must seem to the French just as peculiar, just as phenomenal, as he does to foreigners. For it is only to superficial readers that French literature can appear to be in the main frivolous or eccentric. Dignity is not necessarily severe. It cannot be heavy; indeed, grace is of its essence. And dignity is the note of French literature in the seventeenth century, its Augustan age. To say that seriousness is the note of the eighteenth-century literature

in France may sound less axiomatic, but I think it is even more true. No men are more serious than those who believe it to be their mission to revolutionize and reform society. We may not now take Diderot and Voltaire and Rousseau as seriously as they took themselves; but that is partly because their purposes have been to a large extent achieved, and the result is an old story to us. The note of the nineteenth century in French literature is harder to catch, perhaps cannot be caught; for the voices are many, and we are too near the stage. But if anything is evident it is that this epoch is marked by severe and conscientious industry. Criticism has been developed into an almost perfect instrument for quick, sure testing of literary claims. A perverse book may, through neglect, through its insignificance, or indeed through its very absurdity, find a large number of gentle readers in England or America. In France less favor would be shown it. The artistic sense is more widely diffused there; life centres in Paris, where values can be readily compared; and, above all, the custom of personal journalism prevails in France. A man is not going to waste his time in reading a new book if the critic most competent to judge condemns it over his own signature in the morning paper. And if a new book is so insignificant that no critic reviews it, the condemnation of silence is even more annihilating. Then, too, the competition for literary honors is intense. The rewards are greater than in any other country: a seat in the Academy; a professor's chair in the College de France; an office of dignity and pecuniary value under government; the knowledge that a

successful French book will sell from St. Petersburg to Madrid, and from Amsterdam to Constantinople – all over the world, in fact; for in nearly every country people read two languages – their own and French. In this competition it may not always be the best-written books that come to the front; but the chance of their doing so is immensely greater than elsewhere. And another beneficial result is the careful toil bestowed upon the preparation of books, the training to which authors submit themselves, the style and finish, the lopping off of eccentricities and crudities, the infinite pains, in short, which a writer will take when he knows that his fate depends on his pleasing first of all a select and cultivated audience of *connoisseurs*. No journeyman work will do.

It was by such a tribunal that Victor Hugo was judged, long before his name was known outside of France. And yet, although the popular voice has been immensely favorable to him for two generations, this high court of criticism has not decided the case. The position of Victor Hugo is by no means definitely established, as Alfred de Musset's is established, and Balzac's. But, whatever be the verdict, Victor Hugo, because of the power and quantity of his work, and his long life, certainly is the most imposing figure of this century in French literature.

It is often a questionable proceeding to make one man's life and works interpret for us the doings of his contemporaries, to try to find in one term the expression for a whole series of events. It is the most convenient method, to be sure, but not on

that account the most reliable. When therefore I remembered that Victor Hugo entered into prominence only a little after the beginning of our century, and that although dead he yet speaks, for the definitive edition of his works is not completed, and every year adds new volumes of posthumous books to that enormous succession; when I perceived how convenient it would be to make him the central and distributive figure of this whole epoch in French literary history, – I regarded the chronological coincidence rather as a temptation than as a help, and resolved not to yield to the solicitations of a mere facile arrangement. For I had no great belief in Victor Hugo's fitness to be called the representative and interpreter of his age. I was under the influence of the prevailing Anglo-Saxon opinion of him as an egoist, whom even the impulses of his mighty genius could not break loose from absorbed contemplation of self.

Even a critic so appreciative of national differences as Lowell expressed this opinion when he said: «In proportion as solitude and communion with self lead the sentimentalist to exaggerate the importance of his own personality, he comes to think that the least event connected with it is of consequence to his fellow-men. If he change his shirt, he would have mankind aware of it. Victor Hugo, the greatest living representative of the class, considers it necessary to let the world know by letter from time to time his opinions on every conceivable subject about which it is not asked nor is of the least value unless we concede to him an immediate inspiration.»

Let us take another of these estimates, which might well deter one from considering Hugo as capable of representing any body of men or any mass of life. I quote Mr. W. E. Henley, in «Views and Reviews», a little volume of bright and suggestive «appreciations», as he calls them: «All his life long he was addicted to attitude; all his life long he was a *poseur* of the purest water. He seems to have considered the affectation of superiority an essential quality in art; for just as the cock in Mrs. Poyser's Apothegm believed that the sun got up to hear him crow, so to the poet of the «Légende» and the «Contemplations» it must have seemed as if the human race existed but to consider the use he made of his oracular tongue.»

These are but two of the many expressions of disgust anybody may encounter in reading English or American criticism of Victor Hugo. But not discouraged by such estimates, and fortifying myself rather with the thought of how the French themselves esteem him, I began to read Victor Hugo again with a view of determining whether or not he could be accepted as the unifying representative, the continuous interpreter, of French literature since the fall of Napoleon. And as a result I can say that, for me, this one man's life and works formulate nearly all the phenomena of French literary history from the battle of Waterloo down to the present day. Except comedy and the realistic novel, he has excelled in every kind of literature which the French have cultivated during this century. With these two notable exceptions, he has been a champion, a precursor, what the Germans call a

*Vorfechter*, in every great literary movement.

Nothing more deplorable can be conceived than the intellectual condition of France under the First Empire. The fine ideals of the young republic were a laughingstock, a butt of saddest ridicule. For there is nothing men hate so much as the thought of a pure ideal they have once cherished and since shrunk away from; and the remembrance of a lost opportunity to be one's true self is the bitterest of griefs; and no reproach stings deeper than this, of a former and nobler state of conscience which was not obeyed. Liberty was borne down under a weight of circumstance all the more oppressive because it was thought that the new order of things was the natural product of the Revolution; and indeed it looked so. Literature was bidden to flourish by the despot. He posed as a protector of the arts, and at his command the seventeenth century was to begin again and a new Corneille, a new Boileau, a new Molière, were to adorn his reign. But he who conquered Italy could not compel unwilling Minerva, and the victor of the Pyramids could not reanimate a dead past. The writings of the period 1800-1815, indeed the whole intellectual life of that time, its art, its music, its literature, its philosophy, are what might have been expected.

After the downfall of Napoleon what intellectual ideals remained in France? With what equipment of thoughts and moral forces did she set out at the beginning of this new epoch? With no equipment that was at all adequate for solving the staggering problems set for her to solve. Just think of them! She

had to deal with monarchy and a state church all over again. She had to decide between the spirit of the old *règime* and the spirit of '89. There was a contradiction in her past, and she had to turn her back on one or the other fascinating epoch in her history – either on Louis Quatorze and the *grand siècle* with all its glory of treasured acquirement, its shining names, its illustrious and venerable institutions, or on the less attractive men and measures and purposes of the Revolution; and these latter, though apparently less worthy of proud contemplation, impressed the conscience and the political sense as being the things fullest of life for the dawning future. The most loyal conservative must have felt an awkward consciousness that the things he hated would in the end prevail.

Such, then, was the intellectual condition of France in 1815 – uncertainty and division and dearth of ideals and purposes, in the face of a future full of perplexing problems. But she was strangely hopeful. She has never been otherwise. The French are the most elastic people in Europe, and no defeat has ever discouraged them. And she was in love with herself as much as ever, and as fully convinced of her right to the leading place among all nations. Indeed it did not occur to her that she had ever surrendered that right.

What have been the principal lines of movement in French literature since 1815? In order to answer this question we must not merely follow the traces of political history and say that literature changed with the government. Such a solution would

be facile, but would do violence to the facts. The matter is very indeterminate, and the best way to bring it into a clear arrangement is to ask ourselves who were the influential writers of any given period and what did they stand for. In 1815 there were three men prominent in French letters and life. Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Lamennais. Victor Hugo was born in 1802, and by 1817 he had become a literary man, not by intention merely, but by writing. He came upon the scene, therefore, when these three men were at the height of their activity; for Chateaubriand was born in 1768, Lamartine in 1790, and Lamennais in 1782; and they, appreciating the need of leadership in France under the newly restored monarchy, had thrown themselves enthusiastically into the work of instructing the people. Let us inquire who they were and what was the nature of their activity; or, in other words, what was the first public literary atmosphere that surrounded Victor Hugo.

Chateaubriand at the age of seventeen was a captain of cavalry under Louis XVI. When the Revolution broke out he came to America on a royal commission to find the northwest passage. He brought letters of introduction to the chief personages of the new world, and was much impressed with the simple and gracious reception given him by Washington, and with his unpretentious mode of life. After the failure of his geographical researches, the young officer plunged into the forest and started alone, on foot, for the Southwest, his head full of romantic ideas about the beauty of primitive civilization, or absence of civilization,

put there no doubt by Jean Jacques Rousseau, of whom he was an ardent admirer and a disciple. We are told that one evening in an Indian wigwam he discovered a torn page of an English newspaper and read of the ravages of the Revolution and the flight and arrest of Louis XVI. His loyalty was awakened, and after two years of sentimental wanderings in the forests of the Mississippi valley he returned to France and enlisted with the Royalists. They received him with suspicion, and even after his recovery, in exile, from a severe wound received in their cause, they refused him fellowship. He lived in London and Belgium and the island of Jersey, composing his first work, an «Essai sur les Révolutions», 1797, in which his ideas, both of politics and of religion, are still in a line with those of Rousseau. Shortly after its publication some inward experience of the reality of life and its dependence upon God gave him an impulsion in a new direction, and he began his great apology for the Christian faith, entitled «Le Génie du Christianisme», 1802, of which «Atala» and «René» are only episodes. At this time Napoleon was re-establishing order, and as he considered religion necessary to political security, and was just then courting the Pope, he showered favors upon the young author, to the latter's manifest harm, for they made him fickle and ambitious, and turned his natural sentimentality into the most repulsive egoism. His masterpiece was «Les Martyrs», a sort of Christian epic, which appeared in 1809; and thereafter he was regarded as the leader in a conservative reaction back to Rome and back to royalty.

Alphonse de Lamartine was a poet of greater significance, though in his early years he stood in a secondary place, owing to Chateaubriand's influence with the clerical and royalist party, and indeed with all those who longed for peace and a revival of religious faith in France. His early life was as interesting as Chateaubriand's, and, like his, its years of transition from boyhood to active manhood were spent in foreign lands. His poetry is characterized by a certain softness and sweetness peculiar to itself, reminding one somewhat of English Cowper. It is contemplative and religious; but that does not say all, for its range is wide, and Wordsworth has demonstrated to us what a world of thought and fancy there may be in meditative poetry. The chief of his works are: the volume entitled «Les Meditations», which contains that fine poem «Le Lac»; «Les Harmonies»; «Jocelyn»; «La Chute d'un Ange»; «Graziella»; «Voyage en Orient», and «L'Histoire des Girondins». Lamartine succeeded in being a guide to his people in so far as he attracted them by his beautiful verse to a more serious contemplation of themselves and the world, to a renewed interest in true religion, to an appreciation of the fact that Christianity was still alive and capable of inspiring enthusiasm. The feeling had prevailed in France that vital Christianity was incompatible with the cultivation of the fine arts. Lamartine proved this to be untrue. He failed, however, when it came to writing history or engaging in politics, because, as Lowell long ago perceived, and as people now generally acknowledge, Lamartine was a sentimentalist, that

is, a man who cultivated fine sentiments because they were beautiful and not because they were right, and who performed fine actions to be seen of men; in other words, an egoist, an artist spoiled by artificiality. Apart, however, from all question of the intrinsic merit of his work, his tendency was, like that of Chateaubriand, in the direction of recognizing religion and looking back to monarchical rather than republican France for inspiration and example.

Félicité de Lamennais lived a life whose details belong as much to the history of philosophy, or to ecclesiastical history, as to that of belles-lettres. First a priest, and the most ardent Catholic in France, he afterward turned against Rome and led a movement towards religious independence. There are few more interesting figures, chiefly because great religious leaders have been so rare in modern France. At the time when Victor Hugo was beginning to write, Lamennais was ardently engaged in an effort to establish the supremacy of Rome, not only over private conscience, but over political institutions, and although from his subsequent actions he is known to the world as a liberal and a heretic, yet at that time, having published in 1817 his «Essai sur l'Indifférence en Matière de Religion», he was the most jealous conservative and the most fiery churchman in France.

Thus a superficial glance has sufficed to show that the first movement which stirred literary France after 1815 was a reaction in favor of monarchy and Rome; that its champions were Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Lamennais; that its effort

was mainly through poetry; that its honor was its high political and moral purity; that its defect was its sentimentality; that its ultimate inefficacy was due to its running counter to the tendency of the age. Into this movement Victor Hugo inevitably fell; by it he was for a long time carried; with it he at first kept step bravely.

At this point let us take a glance at Victor Hugo's early life. He was born in 1802, of respectable and educated parents. His father was an army officer of increasing distinction under the Empire; his mother a sympathizer with the exiled Bourbons. During Victor's early childhood he, with his mother and brothers, moved about through Italy, following his father's campaignings under Joseph Bonaparte; but when the boys were old enough to attend school their mother took them to Paris, while the father fought through a guerilla war against the brigands headed by Fra Diavolo. After several years of tranquillity in France, Madame Hugo and her sons were again called to follow the fortunes of the head of the family, this time in Spain. The father won a generalship in the French army in that conquered country, and became majordomo of the palace at Madrid. The boys attended school in a college for noblemen's sons, and were badly treated by the young Spaniards, who could not forget that the French lads were the children of one of their conquerors. But after a brief sojourn in Spain they returned to Paris, and there the poet-life of Victor Hugo began, and began in earnest; for during three years, at school and at home, he composed verses of all sorts, and in 1817, in competition for a prize offered by the National

Academy, he wrote an ode which, although not successful in the contest, brought him into public notice.

The next year he won a prize in the Floral Games of Toulouse, with a poem which is published among his other works, and which is one of the most remarkable productions of precocious genius known to literary history. In 1821 he had his first taste of the bitterness of life, and his boyhood came to an abrupt termination, in the death of his excellent mother. On the same day he became engaged to a young girl who had for a long time been his schoolmate and almost a member of his own home-circle. Her parents allowed his suit, but postponed the marriage until he should have proved himself capable of supporting a family. He set to work with feverish ardor and undertook almost every kind of literary production – odes, plays, novels. The first of his successes under this new stimulus were two remarkable stories, «Bug Jargal» and «Han d'Islande», stories which indicate a strange and exuberant imagination, tropical in its fervor, its singularity, its fecundity.

But it was in 1826, by the publication of his «Odes et Ballades», that he laid the real corner-stone of his fame. The king, Louis XVIII, liked the poems, for a natural reason, as we shall see, and gave their author a pension of one thousand francs, which in those days, and in economical France, seemed a large sum, and the young people were permitted to marry. It will be interesting to observe what was the character of the «Odes et Ballades». They are almost all political and religious,

and all thoroughly conservative; all in praise of the Bourbons, condemnatory of the Revolution; silent as to Napoleon, or nearly so, and glowing with devotion to the Roman Catholic Church. They remind us of what Wordsworth twenty-five years earlier wrote, in a precisely contrary spirit, when he was influenced by the hopes inspired by the first events of 1789, and before the subsequent outrages changed him into a stiff British church-and-state conservative. These early effusions of Hugo are noble pieces of versification, and wonderful enough as the works of a very young man; but they cannot be called poetry of a high order, nor do they even give promise of what he was to do later, except that towards the last we begin to find poems which bid us expect great things in the way of style.

Two years afterward, in 1828, appeared a second volume of poems, «Les Orientales», a collection of dream-pictures of Eastern life, in somewhat the same manner as the efforts of Thomas Moore which were popular with young ladies of the last generation, but infinitely superior to all the «Lalla Rookhs» and other impossibilities of that little Irish dandy. The fact is that some of Hugo's most beautiful lyrics are to be found in this collection, and certainly some of his greatest successes in passionate, highly-colored description. He was a man whose heart grew slowly, however, and we look in vain as yet for poems which could teach us much about life and how to bear it patiently or enjoy it nobly.

But we are now in the midst of the four years during which

Victor Hugo was changing his attitude towards art entirely, 1826-1830. Up to this time he had not entered specially into the business of criticism, had not made theories about writing, but simply written, either celebrating his political heroes or letting his fancy wander through distant lands, which were full of glamour because distant. He had gathered about him a circle of interesting people; indeed he was already the young king of nearly all the rising literary men and women in Paris. It was natural that there should be a great deal of discussion among them about the rules and proprieties of their art; but Victor Hugo was still, in this matter as in every other, a conservative.

In 1827 he surprised this little world of admirers with a drama, «Cromwell», in the preface to which he expounded some advanced views in regard to dramatic writing. His opinions were debated, and all Paris was divided into their supporters and opponents. In 1830 appeared «Hernani», which he succeeded in having played at the Théâtre français, in spite of the opposition of the Academy, which saw in it a menace to good literature.

There are few exciting events in the history of literature. It is in the main a record of quiet, intellectual lives, a story of thoughts and tendencies. The account of a single border feud will present a greater number of striking incidents than the history of the forces which have produced our English poetry or Germany's philosophy. And the few memorable anecdotes of a concrete character which are scattered here and there in the chronicles of literature usually attract more attention than

they deserve. They are suitable chiefly to awaken the interest of children and ignorant people. Out of ten persons who will tell you that Demosthenes practised oratory by the sea-shore, with a pebble in his mouth, not more than one has any notion what his orations themselves were about. The man who is most set agog by the story of Shakespeare's poaching exploit is the least likely to have read his plays. The same thing might be said of the hubbub occasioned by the first representation of Victor Hugo's «Hernani», on February 25, 1830. There is a temptation to make «Hernani» the text of disquisitions on Romanticism, forgetting that it is a drama of high intrinsic merit, and that the question of positive value is, after all, the essential one.

Word was passed about among those who regarded Hugo's new theories with aversion, and a large and mainly hostile audience was assembled on that memorable night, the most eventful *premiere* since the first representation of Corneille's «Cid», nearly two hundred years before. Everybody knows what happened. Everybody knows how fashion and aristocracy and journalism combined to kill the new piece, which was said to have been written in defiance of the rules followed by Racine and Voltaire; how the regular theatre-goers hissed, and were howled at in turn by the worshippers of novelty, frowsy, long-haired young artists and penny-a-liners and students, from the left bank of the Seine, who had been brought over to support the play. One of the most sacred institutions of the French theatre is the *claque*, or body of hired applauders. Now on this occasion there was no

*claque*, for the friends of Victor Hugo had distributed free tickets in the Latin Quarter, and their recipients were present, ready to raise the roof if necessary. The hissing and hooting began almost with the first line, and continued for several hours, until the actors had mouthed through the whole tragedy; and yet it was considered that «Hernani» had won the day.

To us such a way of supporting the fine arts and defending the canons of literary taste, indeed even such widespread and frenzied interest in anything except business, sport, politics, and religion, seems, to say the least, remarkable. But we must remember that the French go to the theatre even more than we go to church; that in February 1830 it was not safe to get excited about politics in Paris; that athletics were neglected in France previous to 1871; and that possibly the French might disagree with us in our estimation of business as the chief end of man. But although I admire the French for this fine capability of theirs, – this capability of taking an excited interest in the things of the mind, I cannot help thinking that the critics and historians have made too much of that fracas on the 25th of February, 1830, in the Théâtre français. They tell us that this was the first great fight between the Romanticists and the Classicists.

We can learn what these words mean only by getting the critics to indicate to us a piece of art-work constructed according to the Romanticists and another constructed according to the Classicists, and then comparing them and picking out the essential differences. They say «Hernani» is a drama of the

Romanticists, and that seventeenth-century tragedy was classical. We find, indeed, that Victor Hugo's drama differs from Racine's; «Hernani» is based upon life in Spain, and not in Greece or Rome, and the period is the sixteenth century, and not the age of Pericles or Tiberius Caesar. But if this is all, then Corneille was a Romanticist, for his first successful tragedy, the «Cid», is also a drama of Spanish life, and is set, moreover, in the Middle Ages. But, they say, this is not all: «Hernani» is romantic because it contains a mingling of the comic and the heroic, inasmuch as there are in it words and notions of common use, where the author might have employed expressions and ideas consecrated and set apart wholly to the service of poetry.

And this is true. Victor Hugo does use both phrases and thoughts that no writer of French tragedy had dared to use before. And here, rather than anywhere else, do we find what we mean when we say he was a Romanticist. I have heard one definition of the term as applied to French literature, which said that the essence of Classicism was the seeking of material in the life of Greece and Rome, and that the essence of Romanticism was the seeking of material in the life of the Middle Ages. The true definition, I think, however, is this, if any be possible: Classicism in literature consists in limiting the choice of a writer within a certain range of special terms and special ideas, these terms and these ideas being such as the best authors of the past have considered beautiful and appropriate. Romanticism is the theory – a more generous one – which would permit and encourage a

writer to look for his material and his terms among thoughts and expressions more common in everyday experience, with large freedom of choice. As a matter of fact, the poet who is no longer bound by the examples of Racine and Voltaire will naturally turn to the Middle Ages for inspiration and material, because Racine and Voltaire have nearly exhausted the resources of Greece and Rome.

It would be foolish to take pride in the discovery, for so much has been written on this subject that surely some one has expressed my idea long ago; but I do think that the whole question of Classicism, and the thing itself, sprang almost entirely from Racine. At any rate they are purely French in origin. The old stupid German Classicism which Lessing demolished, the eighteenth-century English Classicism which Scott and Wordsworth demolished, both had their source in France. And in France Racine ruled supreme. He built his tragedies after a severe pattern, and made them very beautiful, but wholly artificial. People liked them, in that stiff and conventional age, and were far enough from investigating whether they and the dramas of Sophocles and Seneca were in truth built on the same plan. They took that for granted. Henceforth to their minds there was only one way of making a tragedy: it must not violate the three unities, of time, place, and action; it must deal exclusively with exalted, heroic, and terrible emotions; it must contain only poetical expressions; it must be composed in Alexandrine couplets, with certain minor points of agreement

with the versification of Racine. In short, a writer of tragedy must think like Racine and rhyme like Racine, and, above all, he must never under any circumstances employ a term or indicate an action which might be called vulgar. From France the fashion spread all over Europe. It affected Italy, even down to Alfieri, who at the end of the last century was hampered by this spirit of obedience to Racine. It made English literature of the eighteenth century what it was, and kept it from being what it might have been. Her acceptance of this theory was one of the reasons why Germany had no literature of great account from the time of Luther and Hans Sachs to the day of brave old Lessing, who was the first man of consequence to see what was the matter, and to set to work remedying it by destructive criticism and constructive example. If it is the glory of Germany that her Lessing was the sharpest-eyed man in Europe and the first person sound enough, independent enough, blunt enough, and skilful enough to change the fashion; to us of English speech belongs the pride of saying that it was back to Shakespeare's large humanity that the reformers turned. For Shakespeare is the great Romanticist. It was in Shakespeare that Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, and the later German Romanticists, whether as critics or translators or poets, studied literary art. The Germans Tieck and Schlegel and Herder and von Arnim, justly celebrated as students of mediaeval literature and as original producers, were pre-eminently Shakespearean scholars. And now the French make a great stir of self-gratulation when, as late as 1830, one of their

own poets falls into line and discovers that Shakespeare, and not Racine, had defined the true boundaries of the tragedian's art.

Racine tolerated no mingling of the comic and the tragic, as if laughter never followed tears. Shakespeare constantly mingles them. Racine would have been horrified at the thought of descending occasionally to prose, or introducing real songs (the choruses in «Esther» are hardly of that character) in tragedy. Shakespeare, better acquainted with this mad, sweet, awful world of ours, is no more afraid of sudden contrasts than Nature is herself. Racine could never have brought himself to say «handkerchief» in a tragedy. Shakespeare does not say that Othello demands of Desdemona a quadrangular tissue of snowiest cambric, but comes plump out with the word, and it wrecked Alfred de Vigny's French translation of «Othello» when it was first performed in Paris, in 1829, and the actor uttered the unhappy word *mouchoir*.

I do not mean to imply that Victor Hugo would not have emancipated himself from the thralldom of Racine had he never read our Shakespeare. He would doubtless have felt cramped, and have sought room for expansion. He would doubtless have done what he did do, in one respect, and that is, have turned to mediaeval and later European history for the inspiration of novels such as «Notre Dame de Paris», of plays like «Hernani» and «Ruy Blas», and of a number of his lyrics. The Germans had already set him an example in the matter of utilizing folklore and the mediaeval epics and mediaeval history. The brothers Grimm,

those quiet, indefatigable giants, had opened up in Germany a wonderful mine, not only for philological research, but of poetical inspiration. Since the days when Goethe helped himself so nobly in the old German storehouse, drawing thence his best dramatic product, from «Götz von Berlichingen» to «Faust»; and Schiller even more abundantly, – since the days of these great men no German poet except Richard Wagner has availed himself of these riches to make a really great art-work, such as Tennyson has done with the Arthurian romances and William Morris with the Norse sagas.

We have seen that the conservative reaction, represented by Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Lamennais, and Hugo, lasted from 1815 to 1830, and that the new spirit, of Romanticism, which had been working all along, finally became dominant then. The political revolution of 1830, often called the Revolution of July, had dethroned Charles X, and brought in, with a more liberal constitution, Louis Philippe, a prince of the house of Orleans. This event proved to be a great stimulus to literary activity and a guarantee of literary freedom. It went far towards destroying the expectation of reviving a state of society and a tone of thought modelled after seventeenth-century life. It weakened the monarchical tendency altogether, for it divided the hopes of conservatives and proved that the Bourbons were not the only possible kings of France, but that many monarchists would take a king wherever they could get him. As is usual, and not in politics merely, but in all combinations of human effort where

supremacy must be maintained by compromise, the unsuccessful minority, the hungry opposition, was freer from division, more single in aim, and purer in method, than the party in power. There is sometimes no party tonic like defeat, and nothing is so recuperative as retirement for a season. So then after fifteen years of invigorating rest, the republican party was more capable in 1830 than in 1815 of inspiring the enthusiasm of men who desired well for their country. It had been so far purified that a young poet like Hugo might be attracted towards it as to the saving remnant of his people. His drift in the direction of republicanism was hastened by the fact that his next two dramas, «Marion De Lorme», 1831, and «Le Roi s'amuse», 1832, were kept from being performed by ministerial order, because they displayed two revered kings of France, Louis XIII and Francis I as the shallow, pleasure-loving men they were.

A new era for French literature began in 1830. We are justified in saying this, because the great names of the former decade had lost their brilliancy, and another set of writers began to be celebrated and to be looked upon as establishing the tone of thought. The character of the product, too, is different. There was a larger freedom in the choice and treatment of subjects, the literatures of England and Germany were being studied and translated. For the first time, also, was there in France any widespread appreciation of Dante. The fact I wish to establish is merely that the spirit had completely changed, and no argument beyond the evidence of our senses is necessary.

Pursuing still our old method of investigation, if we want to know what the new spirit was, we must first inquire who were the prominent men that breathed it, and then possibly attempt a definition. As Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Lamennais set the tone in 1815, so Hugo with his friends and others of the same free spirit did in 1830. About this powerful, enthusiastic man and his cultivated young wife, in their simple home, there gathered a number of literary men and women, who were called the *cenacle* or symposium. They, with other persons whom their influence touched, had a common tendency, which in the case of some was clearly enough defined to be called a common conscious purpose. The German poet Heine was living in Paris at that time, and we know very well what object he set before his eyes. Matthew Arnold, in his fine essay on Heinrich Heine, quotes the great singer's own words, and makes them the text of an illuminating criticism. They represent exactly the sentiment of Hugo and his friends at that time. Hear them: «I know not if I deserve that a laurel-wreath should one day be laid on my coffin. Poetry, dearly as I have loved it, has always been to me but a divine plaything. I have never attached any great value to poetical fame; and I trouble myself very little whether people praise my verses or blame them. But lay on my coffin a *sword*: for I was a brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity.»

If you have read any of the so-called *comédies et proverbes* of Alfred de Musset, as «Fantasio» and «On ne badine pas avec l'amour», you must have felt how those short recitals of passion

are breathed through and through with the spirit of revolt against conventional opinion; how high they stand above whatever is commonplace; how little they derive their pulsating interest from what is usual and accepted. You know how it is when you listen to an orator who employs false methods of exciting the emotions: how he drops his voice at the end of certain phrases; how he whines through certain cadences; how he tries his battery of anecdotes; how he grows warm at the conclusion, and sits down amid a hush and thrill, very likely, leaving in shallow minds the impression that he has made an effective appeal. Yet to the discriminating listener it is instantly apparent that he has been merely following the conventional method, and very possibly has not meant a word of what he said; and when a simpler, freer man gets up and talks sensibly and calmly you see wherein the vice of conventionality lies. It is in deceiving the performer himself and corrupting his power to judge himself or form a critical estimate of what he is doing. The result is that he fails to observe that he is doing nothing original. And so he goes on feeding us with husks of commonplace. Now, every generation demands, and would, if it were untrammelled by convention, produce, its own interpretation of the phenomena of life. The radicals of our fathers' time are conservatives for us, and we ourselves, however vigorous our protest against present oppressions, shall in our old age be considered so much detritus, to be got rid of by the hot young builders of that day. So the Romanticists of 1830, being soldiers in the war of liberation of humanity, were the deadly

enemies of what is commonplace, of what is conventional; were radicals in politics, in religion, and in their aesthetics. One of the most interesting subjects for historical investigation is the development of aesthetic theories. And of all periods when art theories have undergone great changes, this period of 1830 in France is one of the most interesting.

They hoped, these brilliant enthusiasts, to bring about a new French Revolution, bloodless, of the spirit rather than of the form. Here are their names: Lamartine (for he had gone over to the Romanticists), Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Beranger, Alfred de Vigny, Balzac, George Sand, Alexandre Dumas, Sainte-Beuve. You perceive that although the original revolt was against the dramatic fetters imposed by Racine and Boileau and Voltaire, the revolution had extended over the whole range of literature – against conventionality in criticism, in lyric poetry, in fiction; just as the revolt of the American colonies soon got far beyond the original grievance about the tax on tea. Their common tendency was protest against conventionality. They went too far under this impulse. Alfred de Musset, for instance, translated liberty into libertinism, and marred the innocent bloom of his art by the licentiousness of his life. Victor Hugo, the devout, God-fearing youth, became a sentimentalist and skeptic; a poet could not do worse, and the effect is seen in a marked diminution of creative force. He no longer possessed his old earnestness, and thus his work of this period fails to touch our hearts with fire. The self-consciousness of youth, instead of

melting into that ever-present recognition of the Divine which is the true culture of a mature man, only stiffened into an odious self-conceit, which is Victor Hugo's ugliest blemish. George Sand advocated and practised free-love. Béranger, the Robert Burns of France (but not nearly so great a poet), overdid his office of convivial songster, and one pities him and dreads the effect of his influence. Dumas' private life was a long scandal, saved from ignominy only by the contrast between its ludicrousness and his genius. His lack of restraint affected his work too, for had he possessed more restraint he would have written fewer books, and they might all have been as good as «Les Trois Mousquetaires».

Alfred de Vigny is a beautiful exception. Although he followed Victor Hugo with all the ardor of his chivalrous nature, he preserved at the same time a measure, a moderation, a grace, a consistency, which the coldest Classicist might have envied. He was born in 1799, of a family of soldiers, and tells us he learned war at the wounded knees of his warrior father. In his early life he was constantly laying down the pen for the sword. While in garrison at Paris he was to be found chiefly in the libraries, and it was in camp, in the Pyrenees, that he wrote his celebrated historical novel, «Cinq Mars». I have already mentioned his fine translation of «Othello», which met with such strange and undeserved disaster in 1829. He cultivated English literature assiduously, and drew inspiration from Milton – and Ossian. The rhapsodies of the pseudo-Ossian were causing a great stir

throughout Europe, and were eagerly read and applied by the Romanticists as a proof of what could be done in defiance of the rules of Boileau. Alfred de Vigny, too, like almost every novelist from that day to this, was profoundly influenced by Walter Scott. He fortified his position with several other plays, of which the best known is «Chatterton». But the works from his hand which our generation reads most are «Cinq Mars» and his lyric poems.

Alfred de Musset was a poet of such great importance that it is impossible to say, in a brief sketch like this, anything at all adequate about his delicate qualities of heart and mind, his strange, sad life, his wonderful achievements, and his growing fame. He will live perhaps when all his contemporaries are forgotten, except Hugo. Hugo himself has no other rival so dangerous.

Of Balzac, George Sand, and Dumas it is hardly necessary to speak in this connection: being novelists, they have the advantage of being read – which is not always the case with poets. The development of the novel has been the only concerted movement of great importance in French literature since the early days of Romanticism. From Balzac, the father of the realists, Hugo, the extreme of idealists, learned little. There seems to be absolutely no artistic relation between them. George Sand and Dumas were, of course, idealists, romantic to the last degree, and although Hugo in his novels manifestly strains after reality, he is much more in line with them than with Balzac. But Hugo is not a novelist at all in the sense that Balzac or George Sand or Dumas

are novelists. He has written certain prose works of imagination, entitled «Les Misérables», «Les Travailleurs de la Mer», «Notre Dame de Paris», and so forth, but the matter in each case is essentially poetical, and it seems to me that the language is neither that of prose nor that of verse.

There remains one other member of the *cénacle* who is not so well known that mention of him here would seem superfluous, and who yet had much influence over Hugo. Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) was one of the greatest literary critics the world has known – perhaps the greatest. At the age of twenty-four he published his «Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au seizième siècle», a work of deep maturity, showing a marvellous grasp of fact and a spirit of rare discrimination. Some men seem born with literary taste. There are boys of ten who appreciate poetry better than most educated men of forty, and can tell you the reasons, more or less correctly, for their opinions. The end and aim of all literary education should be to create and foster this faculty of apprehension and discrimination. Some come by it naturally. For others it can only be the result of large and varied reading and considerable experience in affairs, and of a culture of the heart. To Sainte-Beuve it was given in abundant measure at an early age, and he strengthened it by assiduous labor. No other language can boast a body of criticism at all comparable with his «Causeries du Lundi» and «Nouveaux Lundis». In English we prize jealously, as things unparalleled

in our language and precious beyond expression for their rare beauty and usefulness, the literary criticisms of Matthew Arnold. Imagine a Matthew Arnold without prejudices, without hobbies, without mannerisms, who should give us a complete body of criticism covering the whole range of English literature, not merely discussing and estimating and comparing authors, but telling us the contents of their writings! This is Sainte-Beuve's secret. He makes us see the man he is talking about, he makes us know and appreciate his productions, and then, with a few brief, luminous suggestions, leaves the whole matter to settle itself properly in our minds. Sainte-Beuve also wrote poetry of no inconsiderable merit, but passes this severe condemnation upon all the poetry of himself and his friends, at this epoch, saying: «Il est résulté de ce concours de talent, pendant plusieurs saisons, une très-riche poésie lyrique, plus riche que la France n'en avait soupçonné jusqu'alors, mais une poésie très-inégale et très-mêlée. La plupart des poètes se sont livrés, sans contrôle et sans frein, à tous les instincts de leur nature, et aussi à toutes les prétentions de leur orgueil, ou même aux sottises de leur vanité. Les défauts et les qualités sont sortis en toute licence, et la postérité aura à faire le départ. Rien ne subsistera de complet des poètes de ce temps.»

But Victor Hugo outlived all parties and groups and associations of which he was a member in that early time, and his life subsequent to the exciting days of 1830 was a steady development and contains in itself a reflection of nearly

everything that was going on in France.

We may consider him under three aspects: as dramatist, novelist, and lyric poet. He is greatest under the last aspect. Through all his life he expressed himself in song. Perhaps no other poet has done this so thoroughly, so beautifully, and for so long a period. So I shall speak of his personality and actual experiences when I come to consider his lyric poetry, and shall first give an account of his work for the stage and in prose fiction.

In 1827 appeared a so-called historical drama, «Cromwell», which was not remarkable for much except its lack of historical truth, and its preface, in which the young man outlined his theories and laid down the programme of attack upon the classical ideas. This attack was in reality first made with «Hernani» in 1830. «Marion De Lorme», which appeared in 1831, is a much weaker play, and abounds in all the excesses to which Romanticism was prone. Apart from the substance, which is repulsive and harrowing, when not trivial and weak, the form of the drama is loose, and one can very easily understand how such a production would offend an ear trained to the stately, chaste, and elegant dialogue of the elder poets. If this is all Romanticism has to offer, let us have back our Corneille and Racine. «Le Roi s'amuse» (1832) suffers from the same faults, and offends even more against good taste. These pieces are both strong in the main, though there are weak passages in both, but their strength is not healthy or beautiful. Victor Hugo himself called attention to the fact that he depended for his effect, in these two plays,

upon the principle of contrast. It is a principle which he has employed in nearly all his work, and which is indeed one of the strongest elements of artistic effect, always and everywhere, with all writers. Hugo, however, uses it too deliberately and too exclusively. In «Le Roi s'amuse», for example, he has chosen a most repulsive figure, Triboulet, whom he makes hideous both externally and internally, by every device known to art, and in this character he implants a pure flower of paternal love. Then he stands off and says: «Behold what I have done! How deformity looks black behind that white virtue!» The principle is useful, but he makes a forced application of it. In his novels, too, every reader will recall instances where a contrast has been insisted upon till one's patience is exhausted.

«Lucrèce Borgia» (1833) illustrates the same point. It is a piling of horror upon horror for the sake, apparently, of bringing into sufficient relief a few passages of great moral beauty. This is as undignified as it is useless. Virtue needs no such setting. M. Vinet says that in this drama Hugo pandered to the false taste of the age, which demanded horrors and violence and sensuous appeals, instead of leading it, as he could, to follow better principles of taste.

«Marie Tudor» (1833) is, like «Cromwell», unhistorical. It is not one of Hugo's greatest plays, nor is «Angelo» (1835), another drama, in prose, founded on history; but «Ruy Blas» (1838) is generally acknowledged to be, after «Hernani», the best of his dramas. It was followed, in 1843, by «Les Burgraves», the

last of his plays written for the stage. My judgment may be too unenthusiastic, and I acknowledge that only time can sift the true from the false, the excellent from the second-rate; but I would not exchange the little volume of Musset's unpretending «Comédies et Proverbes» for all the «Hernanis» and «Ruy Blas» in the world, and that for the simple reason that Musset is more sincere.

We have seen that at a very early age Victor Hugo wrote two stories, «Bug Jargal» and «Han d'Islande». In 1831, while in the full heat of his dramatic activity, he yet found time, by shutting himself up and going out but once for six months, to write «Notre Dame de Paris», which is one of his masterpieces of prose, an historical novel built on a scale of gigantic proportions, and presupposing exhaustive archaeological research. It is a vast picture, full of glaring lights and awful shadows, of Paris in the Middle Ages, with the cathedral of Notre Dame as background, and indeed as one of the characters.

A man who had produced so many strong plays and this remarkable novel, not to mention his lyric poetry, could not longer be refused admission into the national galaxy of great men, and in 1841 Hugo was elected a member of the Academy. Two years later he was created a peer of France. In spite of these anchors to conservatism, as one would suppose them, a title of rank and a seat among the immortals, Hugo became more and more radical in politics, drifting gradually towards the conception of an ideal republic, and bending his course

thitherward. When Louis Bonaparte, not content with his election to the presidency in 1848, overthrew the government, and proclaimed himself Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, by the infamous *coup d'état* of December 1851, there was no enemy more irreconcilable than Victor Hugo. The brave poet was banished, and did not touch the soil of France again till 1870, after Sedan, when the wicked Empire had ignominiously dissolved. Although included in an amnesty, he had not been willing to return until the Babylonian woe was past. Most of his exile he spent on the island of Jersey, under the English flag. From there he issued a political pamphlet, «Napoléon le Petit», and a succession of volumes of poetry. His second great work of fiction, «Les Misérables», appeared in 1862, followed by «Les Travailleurs de la Mer», in 1866, and by «Quatre-vingt-treize», in 1874. «L'Homme qui Rit», 1866, was an unsuccessful attempt at an historical novel, with the scene in England. Of his novels «Les Misérables» is incomparably the best. «Les Travailleurs de la Mer», while powerful in its unity and intensity, is too full of technical terms and of idiosyncrasies to be either easy or pleasant reading. «Notre Dame de Paris» and «Quatre-vingt-treize» are the most popular, next to «Les Misérables». In «Les Misérables» Hugo employed that short, choppy style which has come to be known as Hugoesque. To many readers it is decidedly wearisome, though by others it is considered the acme of nervous, terse expression.

But it is as a lyric poet, I fancy, far more than as a dramatist,

a novelist, or a political pamphleteer, that Victor Hugo will be known,

«When time has swept both friends and foes.»

Unfortunately, foreign students of French literature are less likely to seek acquaintance with his poems than with his plays and novels. The peculiar character of French versification repels us. We, accustomed to a more heavily accented line, cannot quickly sharpen our ears to the delicate modulations we encounter there. But when once the ear is attuned to these fainter harmonies, a wonderful revelation is made to us in the long succession of songs that rose from the lips of Victor Hugo; and I think it is safe to say that he is at least the greatest French lyric poet.

His poetry is so intimately the product of his life, that to appreciate it we must know something more of that life, especially the emotions and incidents connected with his home and family. His marriage relation was one of perfect harmony, if one may judge of such matters; and he was happy in his home. His wife was evidently the companion of his thought. His children were two sons and a daughter. In this daughter the poet's deepest love was centred, and her graces are the theme of many of his loveliest songs, while her premature death by drowning, with her young husband, in 1843, was the occasion for that one of his lyrics which contains the fullest portion of moral grandeur, «A Villequier». It is the heartbroken cry of a strong man whom the hand of God has at last led back to faith and submission along

paths of darkest sorrow. For it must be remarked that Victor Hugo, intoxicated with success and the atmosphere of protest which he himself had done so much to create, had for many years apparently lost sight of his young manhood's conviction of the immanence of a God in the lives of men. After his daughter's death it was upon his granddaughter Jeanne that his affection took root – the same Jeanne whom he afterwards celebrated, throughout his old age, in the poems which are found in the volume entitled «L'Art d'être Grand-père», and who was the idol of the French nation. She was married a few years ago to a son of Alphonse Daudet.

In the volumes of lyrics from 1822 to 1853, including «Odes et Ballades», «Les Orientales», «Les Feuilles d'Automne», «Les Chants du Crépuscule», and «Les Voix intérieures», there is a marked change in the views of the author as to religion and politics, from conservatism to radicalism, from conviction to uncertainty and almost indifference; and there seems to be a loss of energy when we compare the first with the last productions, though there is a gain, of course, in technical skill. But in all that time there was only an evolution, not a deep moral change imposed from without, for the life of his heart was, all those years, serene. But his exile broke this succession of tranquil years and growing thoughts, and from 1852 to 1870, from «Les Châtiments» to «L'Année terrible», there runs through his volumes a deep undertone of solicitude for the welfare of France, and more especially of sad personal yearning to be back

upon her soil. «L'Année terrible», the year of the invasion of France, the siege of Paris, and the Commune, brought him back. The very day that Napoléon le Petit followed his conquerors out of French territory, Victor Hugo entered, and proceeding to Paris, threw himself passionately into the national defence. It may seem a strange thing to say, but this year of disaster must have been a grand and almost a joyous one in Hugo's life. It was the vindication of his exile, in so far as that had been voluntary. It gave him a chance, which he embraced, of translating his heroic words into deeds. Any true man who had for years been writing about the glory of his country and the sacred duty of maintaining her honor must have felt a proud and awful joy in the opportunity to talk now with deeds and words.

The rest of his life, from 1872 to 1885, was spent in conspicuous eminence, on a throne of popularity where he sat the autocrat of republican France, without a rival, and with scarce an enemy. It is true that his career as an active politician was a failure, but then it must have been soon apparent to him that he ought never to have entered upon it, and that he could be more useful and incomparably more distinguished in his own work. He died in Paris, on the 22d of May, 1885. His funeral was a demonstration which has seldom been equalled in the world's history for solemn pomp and the proud grief of a nation.

The question of the man's personality need not enter into our estimate of a dramatist, a novelist, or an historian, though as a matter of fact it does. But we can hardly consider lyric poetry

merely with reference to its intrinsic quality. Lyric poetry is generally a record of its author's most intimate emotions; it is a sublimation of his life: and this is peculiarly true in the case of Victor Hugo. For, after all, his chief subject was himself. It is certainly permissible, and we can readily understand that it is indeed almost necessary, that a lyric poet should view the world subjectively. One can therefore find no fault with Victor Hugo for this. But it is a marked characteristic of his work that he cannot get outside of himself, that he is rarely carried away by his passion for the beautiful and the true, though this passion he did really possess. So although we cannot blame his egoism as a fault, we must deplore it as a defect; for on account of it alone he falls short, in the opinion of many critics, of being a great world-poet, one of the supreme consolers and sustainers of humanity.

There is a fine essay on Victor Hugo by Mr. Frederic W. H. Myers, [note: In volume v of *The Nineteenth Century*.] which all students of the poet ought to read, not only because it is a very thorough criticism on Hugo as a lyric poet, but also because it is a masterly piece of work altogether, and full of suggestions. Mr. Myers says: «In his moral nature we shall find much that is strong, elevated, and tender; a true passion for France, a true sympathy for the poor and the oppressed, a true fondness for children. Further than this it will be hard to go; so plain will it be that the egoism which penetrates M. Hugo's character is a bar to all higher sublimity, and has exercised a disastrous effect on his intellectual as well as on his moral character.

«In calling M. Hugo egoistic I am far from accusing him of vulgar self-seeking – of an undue regard for any tangible form of personal advantage. What I mean is that he seems never to forget himself; that whatever truth he is pursuing, whatever scene he describes, his own attitude in regard to it is never absent from his mind. And hence it results that all other objects are unconsciously made secondary to the great object of making an impression of the kind desired. From the smallest details of style up to the most serious steps in political conduct this preoccupation is visible. It was the same spirit which prompted the poet to begin one of his most solemn elegiac poems with the repeated assertion «that it should never be said that *he* kept silence, that *he* did not send a sombre strophe to sit before his children's tomb», and which prompted the politician to resign in a moment the trust which Paris had committed to him, because the Assembly would not listen to him with the respect which he thought his due.»

Mr. Myers seems too sparing of his praise for what Hugo did that is excellent in poetry, passing without mention some of his sweetest songs and most stirring outbursts of grandeur. His essay came as antidote to the immoderate eulogy published just before by Mr. Swinburne, and overdoes its promise of giving us a calmer estimate of Hugo. Mr. Myers does not do justice to the contents of Hugo's poetry, and he is perhaps not as susceptible of being ravished by the form as Swinburne was. Yet there is truth in what Mr. Myers says when he tells us that he thinks Hugo's «central distinction lies in his unique power

over the French language, greatly resembling Mr. Swinburne's power over the English language, and manifesting itself chiefly in beauty and inventiveness of poetical form and melody.» Mr. Edward Dowden speaks with high praise of Hugo's successful efforts «to reform the rhythm of French verse, to enrich its rhymes, to give mobility to the caesura, to carry the sense beyond the couplet, to substitute definite and picturesque words in place of the *fadeurs* of classical mythology and vague poetical periphrasis.» And this is indeed Hugo's chief distinction and the chief distinction of all the Romanticists, for their pretended searching of foreign literature and mediaeval history brought them less poetical material than variety and vigor of poetical form.

The two most characteristic classes of subjects of Victor Hugo's poems are politics, in a wide sense of the word, and his own family life. He is not a great poet of nature, though some of his sea-pictures are very remarkable. He was prevented by his egoism from being a great interpreter of the heart or a great preacher of divine truth. But Mr. Myers, with much reason apparently, finds a fundamental weakness in Hugo's early political poetry also. He tells, and proves it too, that Hugo had not fully made up his mind, prior to his banishment, what his political ideal was. He sang the praises of the Bourbons when they were on the throne; but then he was a mere boy, and I have shown how at that time he was under the potent influence of the period, which made for conservatism. That surely is a part

of his history of which he has no reason to be ashamed, even though he soon emancipated himself from royalist tendencies. But what is harder to understand, for a foreigner, is how he could have become a worshipper of Napoleon and a friend of Louis Bonaparte. It is only the French who could thus kiss the hand that smote them, and love a tyrant because he brought them false glory – the glory of victory in unjust wars. Patriotism of that sort is a national vice, and the French have it in their blood. We might suppose that when he had not only got rid of his Bourbon blindness, but recovered from his Napoleonic fever, Victor Hugo would at last find favor in Mr. Myers's eyes, as a republican, and a republican who suffered eighteen years of exile for his opinions. But no; Mr. Myers's praise is strictly qualified, and again he convinces us that he is right: «We find the same vagueness and emptiness in M. Hugo's praises of the Republic, and yet there is no subject on which a political preacher in France needs to be more explicit. For under the name of Republic are included two forms of government as dissimilar as forms of government can be. A republic may be constructed, like the American republic, on individualistic principles, reducing the action of government to a minimum, and leaving every one undisturbed in the pursuit of private well-being. Or it may be constructed on socialistic principles», etc. And he goes on to say that «no real instruction on these points can be got from M. Hugo's writings or speeches.»

Mr. Myers carries his condemnation even into the sphere of love-poetry, declaring that Hugo did not write the very best love-

poetry because his love was always a refined egoism, and that his poetry suffers from «the want which separates patronage and desire from chivalry and passion.»

I have purposely quoted some of the severest things I could find in first-class criticism, because I wish to conclude with words of praise, which will carry more weight if it is perceived that they were not blindly penned. It is in itself a great achievement to have done so much honest work of a high character as Hugo did. It is no small distinction to have guided a people's hopes for eighteen years from his island of exile. It is a noble end of a zealous life to have worn for fifteen years the crown of such a nation's kingship. But when even these proud honors are forgotten, children's voices will still repeat and men's hearts still echo a hundred songs of the greatest lyric poet of France.

# HISTORICAL NOTE TO «HERNANI»

«HERNANI» is an historical tragedy. Its real hero is that inscrutable great man upon whom fortune bestowed first the throne of Spain and presently the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, with the title Charles the Fifth. Although Hugo, as a dramatist may do with perfect right, departs in many instances from historical fact, the play demands for its proper enjoyment some information concerning the nature of the imperial office and the character of Charles.

An earlier and mightier Charles, king of the German conquerors of Gaul, was by Pope Leo III, on Christmas Day, A.D. 800, crowned in the basilica of St. Peter head of the Roman Empire, which was believed to be still, with unimpaired authority, the same as that of Augustus. From its connection with the Church as the temporal complement of the spiritual reign of Christ's vicar, the Empire was thenceforth most frequently denominated the Holy Roman Empire. Its vitality was never greater than under Charlemagne himself. Its limits, both in the minds of men and on the map of Europe, were at no time during the next seven hundred years really greater than in his reign. In general the Emperors claimed dominion over Italy, Germany, the Low Countries, and much of what is now the Austrian Empire,

Switzerland, and France, besides the precedence over all other kings and potentates. They desired to be considered, and by most men were considered, to be in temporal things the counterpart of the Popes in things spiritual, and with jurisdiction no less widespread. It was traditional that the king chosen by the seven great princes, or electors, of Germany, should proceed to Rome, there to be crowned Emperor by the Pope. With not a few exceptions these honors were confined for long periods of time to certain families. The first member of the house of Hapsburg who won the election was Rudolf (1272-1292), founder of the present Austrian dynasty. Another Hapsburger, Albert I, was chosen in 1298, and another, Albert II, in 1438; since when, until the annihilation of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, all the Emperors, with two exceptions, have been of that house.

None of his successors made such an impression upon the imagination of contemporary and following generations as was produced by the stupendous figure of Charles the Great. His reputation was well-earned. He can be called, better than any other man, the creator of mediaeval Europe. In his day looked upon as a Roman, the French have adopted him as the father of their nationality, and he is the hero of their ancient epic poetry. Yet, as Mr. Bryce declares, he was entirely German: «No claim can be more groundless than that which the modern French, the sons of the Latinized Kelts, set up to the Teutonic Charles. At Rome he might assume the chlamys and the sandals (marks of a Roman patrician), but at the head of his Frankish

host he strictly adhered to the customs of his country, and was beloved by his people as the very ideal of their own character and habits. Of strength and stature almost superhuman, in swimming and hunting unsurpassed, steadfast and terrible in fight, to his friends gentle and condescending, he was a Roman, much less a Gaul, in nothing but his culture and his schemes of government, otherwise a Teuton. The centre of his realm was the Rhine; his capitals Aachen and Engilenheim; his army Frankish; his sympathies – as they are shown in the gathering of the old hero-lays, the composition of a German grammar, the ordinance against confining prayer to the three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin – were all for the race from which he sprang, and whose advance, represented by the victory of Austrasia, the true Frankish fatherland, over Neustria and Aquitaine, spread a second Germanic wave over the conquered countries.» (Bryce: «Holy Roman Empire», pp. 71 and 72.)

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.