

THE BOY ON THE BARRICADE.

("Sur une barricade.")

[June, 1871.]

Like Casabianca on the devastated deck,
In years yet younger, but the selfsame core.
Beside the battered barricado's restless wreck,
A lad stood splashed with gouts of guilty gore,
But gemmed with purest blood of patriot more.

Upon his fragile form the troopers' bloody grip
Was deeply dug, while sharply challenged they:
"Were you one of this currish crew?"--pride pursed his lip,
As firm as bandog's, brought the bull to bay--
While answered he: "I fought with others. Yea!"

"Prepare then to be shot! Go join that death-doomed row."
As paced he pertly past, a volley rang--
And as he fell in line, mock mercies once more flow
Of man's lead-lightning's sudden scathing pang,
But to his home-turned thoughts the balls but sang.

"Here's half-a-franc I saved to buy my mother's bread!"--

The captain started--who mourns not a dear,
The dearest! mother!--"Where is she, wolf-cub?" he said
Still gruffly. "There, d'ye see? not far from here."
"Haste! make it hers! then back to swell their bier."

He sprang aloof as springald from detested school,
Or ocean-rover from protected port.

"The little rascal has the laugh on us! no fool
To breast our bullets!"--but the scoff was short,
For soon! the rogue is racing from his court;

And with still fearless front he faces them and calls:

"READY! but level low--she's kissed these eyes!"
From cooling hands of men each rifle falls,
And their gray officer, in grave surprise,
Life grants the lad whilst his last comrade dies.

Brave youth! I know not well what urged thy act,
Whether thou'lt pass in palace, or die rackt;
But then, shone on the guns, a sublime soul.--
A Bayard-boy's, bound by his pure parole!
Honor redeemed though paid by parlous price,
Though lost be sunlit sports, wild boyhood's spice,
The Gates, the cheers of mates for bright device!

Greeks would, whilom, have choicely clasped and circled thee,
Set thee the first to shield some new Thermopylae;
Thy deed had touched and tuned their true Tyrtæus tongue,
And staged by Aeschylus, grouped thee grand gods among.

And thy lost name (now known no more) been gilt and graved
On cloud-kissed column, by the sweet south ocean laved.
From us no crown! no honors from the civic sheaf--
Purely this poet's tear-bejewelled, aye-green leaf!

H.L.W.

TO HIS ORPHAN GRANDCHILDREN.

("O Charles, je te sens près de moi.")

[July, 1871.]

I feel thy presence, Charles. Sweet martyr! down
 In earth, where men decay,
I search, and see from cracks which rend thy tomb,
 Burst out pale morning's ray.

Close linked are bier and cradle: here the dead,
To charm us, live again:
Kneeling, I mourn, when on my threshold sounds
Two little children's strain.

George, Jeanne, sing on! George, Jeanne, unconscious play!
Your father's form recall,
Now darkened by his sombre shade, now gilt
By beams that wandering fall.

Oh, knowledge! what thy use? did we not know
Death holds no more the dead;
But Heaven, where, hand in hand, angel and star
Smile at the grave we dread?

A Heaven, which childhood represents on earth.
Orphans, may God be nigh!
That God, who can your bright steps turn aside
From darkness, where I sigh.

All joy be yours, though sorrow bows me down!
To each his fitting wage:
Children, I've passed life's span, and men are plagued
By shadows at that stage.

Hath any done--nay, only half performed--

The good he might for others?

Hath any conquered hatred, or had strength

To treat his foes like brothers?

E'en he, who's tried his best, hath evil wrought:

Pain springs from happiness:

My heart has triumphed in defeat, my pulse

Ne'er quickened at success.

I seemed the greater when I felt the blow:

The prick gives sense of gain;

Since to make others bleed my courage fails,

I'd rather bear the pain.

To grow is sad, since evils grow no less;

Great height is mark for all:

The more I have of branches, more of clustering boughs,

The ghastlier shadows fall.

Thence comes my sadness, though I grant your charms:

Ye are the outbursting

Of the soul in bloom, steeped in the draughts

Of nature's boundless spring.

George is the sapling, set in mournful soil;

Jeanne's folding petals shroud
A mind which trembles at our uproar, yet
Half longs to speak aloud.

Give, then, my children--lowly, blushing plants,
Whom sorrow waits to seize--
Free course to instincts, whispering 'mid the flowers,
Like hum of murmuring bees.

Some day you'll find that chaos comes, alas!
That angry lightning's hurled,
When any cheer the People, Atlas huge,
Grim bearer of the world!

You'll see that, since our fate is ruled by chance,
Each man, unknowing, great,
Should frame life so, that at some future hour
Fact and his dreamings meet.

I, too, when death is past, one day shall grasp
That end I know not now;
And over you will bend me down, all filled
With dawn's mysterious glow.

I'll learn what means this exile, what this shroud
Enveloping your prime;

And why the truth and sweetness of one man
Seem to all others crime.

I'll hear--though midst these dismal boughs you sang--
How came it, that for me,
Who every pity feel for every woe,
So vast a gloom could be.

I'll know why night relentless holds me, why
So great a pile of doom:
Why endless frost enfolds me, and methinks
My nightly bed's a tomb:

Why all these battles, all these tears, regrets,
And sorrows were my share;
And why God's will of me a cypress made,
When roses bright ye were.

MARWOOD TUCKER.

TO THE CANNON "VICTOR HUGO."

[Bought with the proceeds of Readings of "Les Châtiments" during
the Siege of Paris.]

[1872.]

Thou deadly crater, moulded by my muse,
Cast thou thy bronze into my bowed and wounded heart,
And let my soul its vengeance to thy bronze impart!

L'ART D'ÊTRE GRANDPÈRE.