

Familiar Studies of Men & Books

By

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PREFACE

BY WAY OF CRITICISM.

THESE studies are collected from the monthly press. One appeared in the NEW QUARTERLY, one in MACMILLAN'S, and the rest in the CORNHILL MAGAZINE. To the CORNHILL I owe a double debt of thanks; first, that I was received there in the very best society, and under the eye of the very best of editors; and second, that the proprietors have allowed me to republish so considerable an amount of copy.

These nine worthies have been brought together from many different ages and countries. Not the most erudite of men could be perfectly prepared to deal with so many and such various sides of human life and manners. To pass a true judgment upon Knox and Burns implies a grasp upon the very deepest strain of thought in Scotland, - a country far more essentially different from England than many parts of America; for, in a sense, the first of these men re-created Scotland, and the second is its most essentially national production. To treat fitly of Hugo and Villon would involve yet wider knowledge, not only of a country foreign to the author by race, history, and religion, but of the growth and liberties of art. Of the two Americans, Whitman and Thoreau, each is the type of something not so much realised as widely

sought after among the late generations of their countrymen; and to see them clearly in a nice relation to the society that brought them forth, an author would require a large habit of life among modern Americans. As for Yoshida, I have already disclaimed responsibility; it was but my hand that held the pen.

In truth, these are but the readings of a literary vagrant. One book led to another, one study to another. The first was published with trepidation. Since no bones were broken, the second was launched with greater confidence. So, by insensible degrees, a young man of our generation acquires, in his own eyes, a kind of roving judicial commission through the ages; and, having once escaped the perils of the Freemans and the Furnivalls, sets himself up to right the wrongs of universal history and criticism. Now, it is one thing to write with enjoyment on a subject while the story is hot in your mind from recent reading, coloured with recent prejudice; and it is quite another business to put these writings coldly forth again in a bound volume. We are most of us attached to our opinions; that is one of the "natural affections" of which we hear so much in youth; but few of us are altogether free from paralysing doubts and scruples. For my part, I have a small idea of the degree of accuracy possible to man, and I feel sure these studies teem with error. One and all were written with genuine interest in the subject; many, however, have been conceived and finished with

imperfect knowledge; and all have lain, from beginning to end, under the disadvantages inherent in this style of writing.

Of these disadvantages a word must here be said. The writer of short studies, having to condense in a few pages the events of a whole lifetime, and the effect on his own mind of many various volumes, is bound, above all things, to make that condensation logical and striking. For the only justification of his writing at all is that he shall present a brief, reasoned, and memorable view. By the necessity of the case, all the more neutral circumstances are omitted from his narrative; and that of itself, by the negative exaggeration of which I have spoken in the text, lends to the matter in hand a certain false and specious glitter. By the necessity of the case, again, he is forced to view his subject throughout in a particular illumination, like a studio artifice. Like Hales with Pepys, he must nearly break his sitter's neck to get the proper shadows on the portrait. It is from one side only that he has time to represent his subject. The side selected will either be the one most striking to himself, or the one most obscured by controversy; and in both cases that will be the one most liable to strained and sophisticated reading. In a biography, this and that is displayed; the hero is seen at home, playing the flute; the different tendencies of his work come, one after another, into notice; and thus something like a true, general

impression of the subject may at last be struck. But in the short study, the writer, having seized his "point of view," must keep his eye steadily to that. He seeks, perhaps, rather to differentiate than truly to characterise. The proportions of the sitter must be sacrificed to the proportions of the portrait; the lights are heightened, the shadows overcharged; the chosen expression, continually forced, may degenerate at length into a grimace; and we have at best something of a caricature, at worst a calumny. Hence, if they be readable at all, and hang together by their own ends, the peculiar convincing force of these brief representations. They take so little a while to read, and yet in that little while the subject is so repeatedly introduced in the same light and with the same expression, that, by sheer force of repetition, that view is imposed upon the reader. The two English masters of the style, Macaulay and Carlyle, largely exemplify its dangers. Carlyle, indeed, had so much more depth and knowledge of the heart, his portraits of mankind are felt and rendered with so much more poetic comprehension, and he, like his favourite Ram Dass, had a fire in his belly so much more hotly burning than the patent reading lamp by which Macaulay studied, that it seems at first sight hardly fair to bracket them together. But the "point of view" was imposed by Carlyle on the men he judged of in his writings with an austerity not only cruel but almost stupid. They are too often broken outright on the Procrustean bed; they are probably always disfigured. The

rhetorical artifice of Macaulay is easily spied; it will take longer to appreciate the moral bias of Carlyle. So with all writers who insist on forcing some significance from all that comes before them; and the writer of short studies is bound, by the necessity of the case, to write entirely in that spirit. What he cannot vivify he should omit.

Had it been possible to rewrite some of these papers, I hope I should have had the courage to attempt it. But it is not possible. Short studies are, or should be, things woven like a carpet, from which it is impossible to detach a strand.

What is perverted has its place there for ever, as a part of the technical means by which what is right has been presented. It is only possible to write another study, and then, with a new "point of view," would follow new perversions and perhaps a fresh caricature. Hence, it will be, at least, honest to offer a few grains of salt to be taken with the text; and as some words of apology, addition, correction, or amplification fall to be said on almost every study in the volume, it will be most simple to run them over in their order. But this must not be taken as a propitiatory offering to the gods of shipwreck; I trust my cargo unreservedly to the chances of the sea; and do not, by criticising myself, seek to disarm the wrath of other and less partial critics.

HUGO'S ROMANCES. - This is an instance of the "point of

view." The five romances studied with a different purpose might have given different results, even with a critic so warmly interested in their favour. The great contemporary master of wordmanship, and indeed of all literary arts and technicalities, had not unnaturally dazzled a beginner. But it is best to dwell on merits, for it is these that are most often overlooked.

BURNS. - I have left the introductory sentences on Principal Shairp, partly to explain my own paper, which was merely supplemental to his amiable but imperfect book, partly because that book appears to me truly misleading both as to the character and the genius of Burns. This seems ungracious, but Mr. Shairp has himself to blame; so good a Wordsworthian was out of character upon that stage.

This half apology apart, nothing more falls to be said except upon a remark called forth by my study in the columns of a literary Review. The exact terms in which that sheet disposed of Burns I cannot now recall; but they were to this effect - that Burns was a bad man, the impure vehicle of fine verses; and that this was the view to which all criticism tended. Now I knew, for my own part, that it was with the profoundest pity, but with a growing esteem, that I studied the man's desperate efforts to do right; and the more I reflected, the stranger it appeared to me that any thinking being should feel otherwise. The complete letters shed,

indeed, a light on the depths to which Burns had sunk in his character of Don Juan, but they enhance in the same proportion the hopeless nobility of his marrying Jean. That I ought to have stated this more noisily I now see; but that any one should fail to see it for himself, is to me a thing both incomprehensible and worthy of open scorn. If Burns, on the facts dealt with in this study, is to be called a bad man, I question very much whether either I or the writer in the Review have ever encountered what it would be fair to call a good one. All have some fault. The fault of each grinds down the hearts of those about him, and - let us not blink the truth - hurries both him and them into the grave. And when we find a man persevering indeed, in his fault, as all of us do, and openly overtaken, as not all of us are, by its consequences, to gloss the matter over, with too polite biographers, is to do the work of the wrecker disfiguring beacons on a perilous seaboard; but to call him bad, with a self-righteous chuckle, is to be talking in one's sleep with Heedless and Too-bold in the harbour.

Yet it is undeniable that much anger and distress is raised in many quarters by the least attempt to state plainly, what every one well knows, of Burns's profligacy, and of the fatal consequences of his marriage. And for this there are perhaps two subsidiary reasons. For, first, there is, in our drunken land, a certain privilege extended to drunkenness. In Scotland, in particular, it is almost respectable, above all

when compared with any "irregularity between the sexes." The selfishness of the one, so much more gross in essence, is so much less immediately conspicuous in its results that our demiurgeous Mrs. Grundy smiles apologetically on its victims. It is often said - I have heard it with these ears - that drunkenness "may lead to vice." Now I did not think it at all proved that Burns was what is called a drunkard; and I was obliged to dwell very plainly on the irregularity and the too frequent vanity and meanness of his relations to women. Hence, in the eyes of many, my study was a step towards the demonstration of Burns's radical badness.

But second, there is a certain class, professors of that low morality so greatly more distressing than the better sort of vice, to whom you must never represent an act that was virtuous in itself, as attended by any other consequences than a large family and fortune. To hint that Burns's marriage had an evil influence is, with this class, to deny the moral law. Yet such is the fact. It was bravely done; but he had presumed too far on his strength. One after another the lights of his life went out, and he fell from circle to circle to the dishonoured sickbed of the end. And surely for any one that has a thing to call a soul he shines out tenfold more nobly in the failure of that frantic effort to do right, than if he had turned on his heel with Worldly Wiseman, married a congenial spouse, and lived orderly and died reputably an old man. It is his chief title that he

refrained from "the wrong that amendeth wrong." But the common, trashy mind of our generation is still aghast, like the Jews of old, at any word of an unsuccessful virtue. Job has been written and read; the tower of Siloam fell nineteen hundred years ago; yet we have still to desire a little Christianity, or, failing that, a little even of that rude, old, Norse nobility of soul, which saw virtue and vice alike go unrewarded, and was yet not shaken in its faith.

WALT WHITMAN. - This is a case of a second difficulty which lies continually before the writer of critical studies: that he has to mediate between the author whom he loves and the public who are certainly indifferent and frequently averse. Many articles had been written on this notable man. One after another had leaned, in my eyes, either to praise or blame unduly. In the last case, they helped to blindfold our fastidious public to an inspiring writer; in the other, by an excess of unadulterated praise, they moved the more candid to revolt. I was here on the horns of a dilemma; and between these horns I squeezed myself with perhaps some loss to the substance of the paper. Seeing so much in Whitman that was merely ridiculous, as well as so much more that was unsurpassed in force and fitness, - seeing the true prophet doubled, as I thought, in places with the Bull in a China Shop, - it appeared best to steer a middle course, and to laugh with the scorners when I thought they had any excuse, while I made haste to rejoice with the rejoicers over what is

imperishably good, lovely, human, or divine, in his extraordinary poems. That was perhaps the right road; yet I cannot help feeling that in this attempt to trim my sails between an author whom I love and honour and a public too averse to recognise his merit, I have been led into a tone unbecoming from one of my stature to one of Whitman's. But the good and the great man will go on his way not vexed with my little shafts of merriment. He, first of any one, will understand how, in the attempt to explain him credibly to Mrs. Grundy, I have been led into certain airs of the man of the world, which are merely ridiculous in me, and were not intentionally discourteous to himself. But there is a worse side to the question; for in my eagerness to be all things to all men, I am afraid I may have sinned against proportion. It will be enough to say here that Whitman's faults are few and unimportant when they are set beside his surprising merits. I had written another paper full of gratitude for the help that had been given me in my life, full of enthusiasm for the intrinsic merit of the poems, and conceived in the noisiest extreme of youthful eloquence. The present study was a rifacimento. From it, with the design already mentioned, and in a fit of horror at my old excess, the big words and emphatic passages were ruthlessly excised. But this sort of prudence is frequently its own punishment; along with the exaggeration, some of the truth is sacrificed; and the result is cold, constrained, and grudging. In short, I might almost everywhere have spoken more strongly than I

did.

THOREAU. - Here is an admirable instance of the "point of view" forced throughout, and of too earnest reflection on imperfect facts. Upon me this pure, narrow, sunnily-ascetic Thoreau had exercised a great charm. I have scarce written ten sentences since I was introduced to him, but his influence might be somewhere detected by a close observer. Still it was as a writer that I had made his acquaintance; I took him on his own explicit terms; and when I learned details of his life, they were, by the nature of the case and my own PARTI-PRIS, read even with a certain violence in terms of his writings. There could scarce be a perversion more justifiable than that; yet it was still a perversion. The study indeed, raised so much ire in the breast of Dr. Japp (H. A. Page), Thoreau's sincere and learned disciple, that had either of us been men, I please myself with thinking, of less temper and justice, the difference might have made us enemies instead of making us friends. To him who knew the man from the inside, many of my statements sounded like inversions made on purpose; and yet when we came to talk of them together, and he had understood how I was looking at the man through the books, while he had long since learned to read the books through the man, I believe he understood the spirit in which I had been led astray.

On two most important points, Dr. Japp added to my knowledge,

and with the same blow fairly demolished that part of my criticism. First, if Thoreau were content to dwell by Walden Pond, it was not merely with designs of self-improvement, but to serve mankind in the highest sense. Hither came the fleeing slave; thence was he despatched along the road to freedom. That shanty in the woods was a station in the great Underground Railroad; that adroit and philosophic solitary was an ardent worker, soul and body, in that so much more than honourable movement, which, if atonement were possible for nations, should have gone far to wipe away the guilt of slavery. But in history sin always meets with condign punishment; the generation passes, the offence remains, and the innocent must suffer. No underground railroad could atone for slavery, even as no bills in Parliament can redeem the ancient wrongs of Ireland. But here at least is a new light shed on the Walden episode.

Second, it appears, and the point is capital, that Thoreau was once fairly and manfully in love, and, with perhaps too much aping of the angel, relinquished the woman to his brother. Even though the brother were like to die of it, we have not yet heard the last opinion of the woman. But be that as it may, we have here the explanation of the "rarefied and freezing air" in which I complained that he had taught himself to breathe. Reading the man through the books, I took his professions in good faith. He made a dupe of me, even as he was seeking to make a dupe of himself, wresting

philosophy to the needs of his own sorrow. But in the light of this new fact, those pages, seemingly so cold, are seen to be alive with feeling. What appeared to be a lack of interest in the philosopher turns out to have been a touching insincerity of the man to his own heart; and that fine-spun airy theory of friendship, so devoid, as I complained, of any quality of flesh and blood, a mere anodyne to lull his pains. The most temperate of living critics once marked a passage of my own with a cross and the words, "This seems nonsense." It not only seemed; it was so. It was a private bravado of my own, which I had so often repeated to keep up my spirits, that I had grown at last wholly to believe it, and had ended by setting it down as a contribution to the theory of life. So with the more icy parts of this philosophy of Thoreau's. He was affecting the Spartanism he had not; and the old sentimental wound still bled afresh, while he deceived himself with reasons.

Thoreau's theory, in short, was one thing and himself another: of the first, the reader will find what I believe to be a pretty faithful statement and a fairly just criticism in the study; of the second he will find but a contorted shadow. So much of the man as fitted nicely with his doctrines, in the photographer's phrase, came out. But that large part which lay outside and beyond, for which he had found or sought no formula, on which perhaps his philosophy even looked askance, is wanting in my study, as it was wanting in

the guide I followed. In some ways a less serious writer, in all ways a nobler man, the true Thoreau still remains to be depicted.

VILLON. - I am tempted to regret that I ever wrote on this subject, not merely because the paper strikes me as too picturesque by half, but because I regarded Villon as a bad fellow. Others still think well of him, and can find beautiful and human traits where I saw nothing but artistic evil; and by the principle of the art, those should have written of the man, and not I. Where you see no good, silence is the best. Though this penitence comes too late, it may be well, at least, to give it expression.

The spirit of Villon is still living in the literature of France. Fat Peg is oddly of a piece with the work of Zola, the Goncourts, and the infinitely greater Flaubert; and, while similar in ugliness, still surpasses them in native power. The old author, breaking with an ECLAT DE VOIX, out of his tongue-tied century, has not yet been touched on his own ground, and still gives us the most vivid and shocking impression of reality. Even if that were not worth doing at all, it would be worth doing as well as he has done it; for the pleasure we take in the author's skill repays us, or at least reconciles us to the baseness of his attitude. Fat Peg (LA GROSSE MARGOT) is typical of much; it is a piece of experience that has nowhere else been rendered into

literature; and a kind of gratitude for the author's plainness mingles, as we read, with the nausea proper to the business. I shall quote here a verse of an old students' song, worth laying side by side with Villon's startling ballade. This singer, also, had an unworthy mistress, but he did not choose to share the wages of dishonour; and it is thus, with both wit and pathos, that he laments her fall:-

Nunc plango florem

Aetatis tenerae

Nitidiorem

Veneris sidere:

Tunc columbinam

Mentis dulcedinem,

Nunc serpentinam

Amaritudinem.

Verbo rogantes

Removes ostio,

Munera dantes

Foves cubiculo,

Illos abire praecipis

A quibus nihil accipis,

Caecos claudosque recipis,

Viros illustres decipis

Cum melle venenosa. (1)

(1) GAUDEAMUS: CARMINA VAGORUM SELECTA. Leipsic. Trubner.

1879.

But our illustrious writer of ballades it was unnecessary to deceive; it was the flight of beauty alone, not that of honesty or honour, that he lamented in his song; and the nameless mediaeval vagabond has the best of the comparison.

There is now a Villon Society in England; and Mr. John Payne has translated him entirely into English, a task of unusual difficulty. I regret to find that Mr. Payne and I are not always at one as to the author's meaning; in such cases I am bound to suppose that he is in the right, although the weakness of the flesh withholds me from anything beyond a formal submission. He is now upon a larger venture, promising us at last that complete Arabian Nights to which we have all so long looked forward.

CHARLES OF ORLEANS. - Perhaps I have done scanty justice to the charm of the old Duke's verses, and certainly he is too much treated as a fool. The period is not sufficiently remembered. What that period was, to what a blank of imbecility the human mind had fallen, can only be known to those who have waded in the chronicles. Excepting Comines and La Salle and Villon, I have read no author who did not appal me by his torpor; and even the trial of Joan of Arc, conducted as it was by chosen clerks, bears witness to a dreary, sterile folly, - a twilight of the mind peopled with

childish phantoms. In relation to his contemporaries, Charles seems quite a lively character.

It remains for me to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. Henry Pyne, who, immediately on the appearance of the study, sent me his edition of the Debate between the Heralds: a courtesy from the expert to the amateur only too uncommon in these days.

KNOX. - Knox, the second in order of interest among the reformers, lies dead and buried in the works of the learned and unreadable M'Crie. It remains for some one to break the tomb and bring him forth, alive again and breathing, in a human book. With the best intentions in the world, I have only added two more flagstones, ponderous like their predecessors, to the mass of obstruction that buries the reformer from the world; I have touched him in my turn with that "mace of death," which Carlyle has attributed to Dryasdust; and my two dull papers are, in the matter of dulness, worthy additions to the labours of M'Crie. Yet I believe they are worth reprinting in the interest of the next biographer of Knox. I trust his book may be a masterpiece; and I indulge the hope that my two studies may lend him a hint or perhaps spare him a delay in its composition.

Of the PEPYS I can say nothing; for it has been too recently through my hands; and I still retain some of the heat of

composition. Yet it may serve as a text for the last remark I have to offer. To Pepys I think I have been amply just; to the others, to Burns, Thoreau, Whitman, Charles of Orleans, even Villon, I have found myself in the retrospect ever too grudging of praise, ever too disrespectful in manner. It is not easy to see why I should have been most liberal to the man of least pretensions. Perhaps some cowardice withheld me from the proper warmth of tone; perhaps it is easier to be just to those nearer us in rank of mind. Such at least is the fact, which other critics may explain. For these were all men whom, for one reason or another, I loved; or when I did not love the men, my love was the greater to their books. I had read them and lived with them; for months they were continually in my thoughts; I seemed to rejoice in their joys and to sorrow with them in their griefs; and behold, when I came to write of them, my tone was sometimes hardly courteous and seldom wholly just.

R. L. S.

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CHAPTER I - VICTOR HUGO'S ROMANCES

Après le roman pittoresque mais prosaïque de Walter Scott il leste un autre roman à créer, plus beau et plus complet encore selon nous. C'est le roman, à la fois drame et épopée, pittoresque mais poétique, réel mais idéal, vrai mais grand, qui enchassera Walter Scott dans Homère. - Victor Hugo on QUENTIN DURWARD.

VICTOR HUGO'S romances occupy an important position in the history of literature; many innovations, timidly made elsewhere, have in them been carried boldly out to their last consequences; much that was indefinite in literary tendencies has attained to definite maturity; many things have come to a point and been distinguished one from the other; and it is only in the last romance of all, QUATRE VINGT TREIZE, that this culmination is most perfect. This is in the nature of things. Men who are in any way typical of a stage of progress may be compared more justly to the hand upon the dial of the clock, which continues to advance as it indicates, than to the stationary milestone, which is only the measure of what is past. The movement is not arrested. That significant something by which the work of such a man

differs from that of his predecessors, goes on disengaging itself and becoming more and more articulate and cognisable. The same principle of growth that carried his first book beyond the books of previous writers, carries his last book beyond his first. And just as the most imbecile production of any literary age gives us sometimes the very clue to comprehension we have sought long and vainly in contemporary masterpieces, so it may be the very weakest of an author's books that, coming in the sequel of many others, enables us at last to get hold of what underlies the whole of them - of that spinal marrow of significance that unites the work of his life into something organic and rational. This is what has been done by QUATRE VINGT TREIZE for the earlier romances of Victor Hugo, and, through them, for a whole division of modern literature. We have here the legitimate continuation of a long and living literary tradition; and hence, so far, its explanation. When many lines diverge from each other in direction so slightly as to confuse the eye, we know that we have only to produce them to make the chaos plain: this is continually so in literary history; and we shall best understand the importance of Victor Hugo's romances if we think of them as some such prolongation of one of the main lines of literary tendency.

When we compare the novels of Walter Scott with those of the man of genius who preceded him, and whom he delighted to honour as a master in the art - I mean Henry Fielding - we

shall be somewhat puzzled, at the first moment, to state the difference that there is between these two. Fielding has as much human science; has a far firmer hold upon the tiller of his story; has a keen sense of character, which he draws (and Scott often does so too) in a rather abstract and academical manner; and finally, is quite as humorous and quite as good-humoured as the great Scotchman. With all these points of resemblance between the men, it is astonishing that their work should be so different. The fact is, that the English novel was looking one way and seeking one set of effects in the hands of Fielding; and in the hands of Scott it was looking eagerly in all ways and searching for all the effects that by any possibility it could utilise. The difference between these two men marks a great enfranchisement. With Scott the Romantic movement, the movement of an extended curiosity and an enfranchised imagination, has begun. This is a trite thing to say; but trite things are often very indefinitely comprehended: and this enfranchisement, in as far as it regards the technical change that came over modern prose romance, has never perhaps been explained with any clearness.

To do so, it will be necessary roughly to compare the two sets of conventions upon which plays and romances are respectively based. The purposes of these two arts are so much alike, and they deal so much with the same passions and interests, that we are apt to forget the fundamental

opposition of their methods. And yet such a fundamental opposition exists. In the drama the action is developed in great measure by means of things that remain outside of the art; by means of real things, that is, and not artistic conventions for things. This is a sort of realism that is not to be confounded with that realism in painting of which we hear so much. The realism in painting is a thing of purposes; this, that we have to indicate in the drama, is an affair of method. We have heard a story, indeed, of a painter in France who, when he wanted to paint a sea-beach, carried realism from his ends to his means, and plastered real sand upon his canvas; and that is precisely what is done in the drama. The dramatic author has to paint his beaches with real sand: real live men and women move about the stage; we hear real voices; what is feigned merely puts a sense upon what is; we do actually see a woman go behind a screen as Lady Teazle, and, after a certain interval, we do actually see her very shamefully produced again. Now all these things, that remain as they were in life, and are not transmuted into any artistic convention, are terribly stubborn and difficult to deal with; and hence there are for the dramatist many resultant limitations in time and space. These limitations in some sort approximate towards those of painting: the dramatic author is tied down, not indeed to a moment, but to the duration of each scene or act; he is confined to the stage, almost as the painter is confined within his frame. But the great restriction is this, that a

dramatic author must deal with his actors, and with his actors alone. Certain moments of suspense, certain significant dispositions of personages, a certain logical growth of emotion, these are the only means at the disposal of the playwright. It is true that, with the assistance of the scene-painter, the costumier and the conductor of the orchestra, he may add to this something of pageant, something of sound and fury; but these are, for the dramatic writer, beside the mark, and do not come under the vivifying touch of his genius. When we turn to romance, we find this no longer. Here nothing is reproduced to our senses directly. Not only the main conception of the work, but the scenery, the appliances, the mechanism by which this conception is brought home to us, have been put through the crucible of another man's mind, and come out again, one and all, in the form of written words. With the loss of every degree of such realism as we have described, there is for art a clear gain of liberty and largeness of competence. Thus, painting, in which the round outlines of things are thrown on to a flat board, is far more free than sculpture, in which their solidity is preserved. It is by giving up these identities that art gains true strength. And so in the case of novels as compared with the stage. Continuous narration is the flat board on to which the novelist throws everything. And from this there results for him a great loss of vividness, but a great compensating gain in his power over the subject; so that he can now subordinate one thing to another in

importance, and introduce all manner of very subtle detail, to a degree that was before impossible. He can render just as easily the flourish of trumpets before a victorious emperor and the gossip of country market women, the gradual decay of forty years of a man's life and the gesture of a passionate moment. He finds himself equally unable, if he looks at it from one point of view - equally able, if he looks at it from another point of view - to reproduce a colour, a sound, an outline, a logical argument, a physical action. He can show his readers, behind and around the personages that for the moment occupy the foreground of his story, the continual suggestion of the landscape; the turn of the weather that will turn with it men's lives and fortunes, dimly foreshadowed on the horizon; the fatality of distant events, the stream of national tendency, the salient framework of causation. And all this thrown upon the flat board - all this entering, naturally and smoothly, into the texture of continuous intelligent narration.

This touches the difference between Fielding and Scott. In the work of the latter, true to his character of a modern and a romantic, we become suddenly conscious of the background. Fielding, on the other hand, although he had recognised that the novel was nothing else than an epic in prose, wrote in the spirit not of the epic, but of the drama. This is not, of course, to say that the drama was in any way incapable of a regeneration similar in kind to that of which I am now

speaking with regard to the novel. The notorious contrary fact is sufficient to guard the reader against such a misconception. All that is meant is, that Fielding remained ignorant of certain capabilities which the novel possesses over the drama; or, at least, neglected and did not develop them. To the end he continued to see things as a playwright sees them. The world with which he dealt, the world he had realised for himself and sought to realise and set before his readers, was a world of exclusively human interest. As for landscape, he was content to underline stage directions, as it might be done in a play-book: Tom and Molly retire into a practicable wood. As for nationality and public sentiment, it is curious enough to think that Tom Jones is laid in the year forty-five, and that the only use he makes of the rebellion is to throw a troop of soldiers into his hero's way. It is most really important, however, to remark the change which has been introduced into the conception of character by the beginning of the romantic movement and the consequent introduction into fiction of a vast amount of new material. Fielding tells us as much as he thought necessary to account for the actions of his creatures; he thought that each of these actions could be decomposed on the spot into a few simple personal elements, as we decompose a force in a question of abstract dynamics. The larger motives are all unknown to him; he had not understood that the nature of the landscape or the spirit of the times could be for anything in a story; and so, naturally

and rightly, he said nothing about them. But Scott's instinct, the instinct of the man of an age profoundly different, taught him otherwise; and, in his work, the individual characters begin to occupy a comparatively small proportion of that canvas on which armies manoeuvre, and great hills pile themselves upon each other's shoulders. Fielding's characters were always great to the full stature of a perfectly arbitrary will. Already in Scott we begin to have a sense of the subtle influences that moderate and qualify a man's personality; that personality is no longer thrown out in unnatural isolation, but is resumed into its place in the constitution of things.

It is this change in the manner of regarding men and their actions first exhibited in romance, that has since renewed and vivified history. For art precedes philosophy and even science. People must have noticed things and interested themselves in them before they begin to debate upon their causes or influence. And it is in this way that art is the pioneer of knowledge; those predilections of the artist he knows not why, those irrational acceptations and recognitions, reclaim, out of the world that we have not yet realised, ever another and another corner; and after the facts have been thus vividly brought before us and have had time to settle and arrange themselves in our minds, some day there will be found the man of science to stand up and give the explanation. Scott took an interest in many things in

which Fielding took none; and for this reason, and no other, he introduced them into his romances. If he had been told what would be the nature of the movement that he was so lightly initiating, he would have been very incredulous and not a little scandalised. At the time when he wrote, the real drift of this new manner of pleasing people in fiction was not yet apparent; and, even now, it is only by looking at the romances of Victor Hugo that we are enabled to form any proper judgment in the matter. These books are not only descended by ordinary generation from the Waverley novels, but it is in them chiefly that we shall find the revolutionary tradition of Scott carried farther that we shall find Scott himself, in so far as regards his conception of prose fiction and its purposes, surpassed in his own spirit, instead of tamely followed. We have here, as I said before, a line of literary tendency produced, and by this production definitely separated from others. When we come to Hugo, we see that the deviation, which seemed slight enough and not very serious between Scott and Fielding, is indeed such a great gulph in thought and sentiment as only successive generations can pass over: and it is but natural that one of the chief advances that Hugo has made upon Scott is an advance in self-consciousness. Both men follow the same road; but where the one went blindly and carelessly, the other advances with all deliberation and forethought. There never was artist much more unconscious than Scott; and there have been not many more conscious than Hugo. The passage at

the head of these pages shows how organically he had understood the nature of his own changes. He has, underlying each of the five great romances (which alone I purpose here to examine), two deliberate designs: one artistic, the other consciously ethical and intellectual. This is a man living in a different world from Scott, who professes sturdily (in one of his introductions) that he does not believe in novels having any moral influence at all; but still Hugo is too much of an artist to let himself be hampered by his dogmas; and the truth is that the artistic result seems, in at least one great instance, to have very little connection with the other, or directly ethical result.

The artistic result of a romance, what is left upon the memory by any really powerful and artistic novel, is something so complicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name upon it and yet something as simple as nature. These two propositions may seem mutually destructive, but they are so only in appearance. The fact is that art is working far ahead of language as well as of science, realising for us, by all manner of suggestions and exaggerations, effects for which as yet we have no direct name; nay, for which we may never perhaps have a direct name, for the reason that these effects do not enter very largely into the necessities of life. Hence alone is that suspicion of vagueness that often hangs about the purpose of a romance: it is clear enough to us in thought; but we are not used to

consider anything clear until we are able to formulate it in words, and analytical language has not been sufficiently shaped to that end. We all know this difficulty in the case of a picture, simple and strong as may be the impression that it has left with us; and it is only because language is the medium of romance, that we are prevented from seeing that the two cases are the same. It is not that there is anything blurred or indefinite in the impression left with us, it is just because the impression is so very definite after its own kind, that we find it hard to fit it exactly with the expressions of our philosophical speech.

It is this idea which underlies and issues from a romance, this something which it is the function of that form of art to create, this epical value, that I propose chiefly to seek and, as far as may be, to throw into relief, in the present study. It is thus, I believe, that we shall see most clearly the great stride that Hugo has taken beyond his predecessors, and how, no longer content with expressing more or less abstract relations of man to man, he has set before himself the task of realising, in the language of romance, much of the involution of our complicated lives.

This epical value is not to be found, let it be understood, in every so-called novel. The great majority are not works of art in anything but a very secondary signification. One might almost number on one's fingers the works in which such

a supreme artistic intention has been in any way superior to the other and lesser aims, themselves more or less artistic, that generally go hand in hand with it in the conception of prose romance. The purely critical spirit is, in most novels, paramount. At the present moment we can recall one man only, for whose works it would have been equally possible to accomplish our present design: and that man is Hawthorne. There is a unity, an unwavering creative purpose, about some at least of Hawthorne's romances, that impresses itself on the most indifferent reader; and the very restrictions and weaknesses of the man served perhaps to strengthen the vivid and single impression of his works. There is nothing of this kind in Hugo: unity, if he attains to it, is indeed unity out of multitude; and it is the wonderful power of subordination and synthesis thus displayed, that gives us the measure of his talent. No amount of mere discussion and statement, such as this, could give a just conception of the greatness of this power. It must be felt in the books themselves, and all that can be done in the present essay is to recall to the reader the more general features of each of the five great romances, hurriedly and imperfectly, as space will permit, and rather as a suggestion than anything more complete.

The moral end that the author had before him in the conception of NOTRE DAME DE PARIS was (he tells us) to "denounce" the external fatality that hangs over men in the form of foolish and inflexible superstition. To speak

plainly, this moral purpose seems to have mighty little to do with the artistic conception; moreover it is very questionably handled, while the artistic conception is developed with the most consummate success. Old Paris lives for us with newness of life: we have ever before our eyes the city cut into three by the two arms of the river, the boat-shaped island "moored" by five bridges to the different shores, and the two unequal towns on either hand. We forget all that enumeration of palaces and churches and convents which occupies so many pages of admirable description, and the thoughtless reader might be inclined to conclude from this, that they were pages thrown away; but this is not so: we forget, indeed, the details, as we forget or do not see the different layers of paint on a completed picture; but the thing desired has been accomplished, and we carry away with us a sense of the "Gothic profile" of the city, of the "surprising forest of pinnacles and towers and belfries," and we know not what of rich and intricate and quaint. And throughout, Notre Dame has been held up over Paris by a height far greater than that of its twin towers: the Cathedral is present to us from the first page to the last; the title has given us the clue, and already in the Palace of Justice the story begins to attach itself to that central building by character after character. It is purely an effect of mirage; Notre Dame does not, in reality, thus dominate and stand out above the city; and any one who should visit it, in the spirit of the Scott-tourists to Edinburgh or

the Trossachs, would be almost offended at finding nothing more than this old church thrust away into a corner. It is purely an effect of mirage, as we say; but it is an effect that permeates and possesses the whole book with astonishing consistency and strength. And then, Hugo has peopled this Gothic city, and, above all, this Gothic church, with a race of men even more distinctly Gothic than their surroundings. We know this generation already: we have seen them clustered about the worn capitals of pillars, or craning forth over the church-leads with the open mouths of gargoyles. About them all there is that sort of stiff quaint unreality, that conjunction of the grotesque, and even of a certain bourgeois snugness, with passionate contortion and horror, that is so characteristic of Gothic art. Esmeralda is somewhat an exception; she and the goat traverse the story like two children who have wandered in a dream. The finest moment of the book is when these two share with the two other leading characters, Dom Claude and Quasimodo, the chill shelter of the old cathedral. It is here that we touch most intimately the generative artistic idea of the romance: are they not all four taken out of some quaint moulding, illustrative of the Beatitudes, or the Ten Commandments, or the seven deadly sins? What is Quasimodo but an animated gargoyle? What is the whole book but the reanimation of Gothic art?

It is curious that in this, the earliest of the five great romances, there should be so little of that extravagance that

latterly we have come almost to identify with the author's manner. Yet even here we are distressed by words, thoughts, and incidents that defy belief and alienate the sympathies. The scene of the IN PACE, for example, in spite of its strength, verges dangerously on the province of the penny novelist. I do not believe that Quasimodo rode upon the bell; I should as soon imagine that he swung by the clapper. And again the following two sentences, out of an otherwise admirable chapter, surely surpass what it has ever entered into the heart of any other man to imagine (vol. ii. p. 180): "Il souffrait tant que par instants il s'arrachait des poignes de cheveux, POUR VOIR S'ILS NE BLANCHISSAIENT PAS." And, p. 181: "Ses pensees etaient si insupportables qu'il prenait sa tete a deux mains et tachait de l'arracher de ses epaules POUR LA BRISER SUR LE PAVE."

One other fault, before we pass on. In spite of the horror and misery that pervade all of his later work, there is in it much less of actual melodrama than here, and rarely, I should say never, that sort of brutality, that useless insufferable violence to the feelings, which is the last distinction between melodrama and true tragedy. Now, in NOTRE DAME, the whole story of Esmeralda's passion for the worthless archer is unpleasant enough; but when she betrays herself in her last hiding-place, herself and her wretched mother, by calling out to this sordid hero who has long since forgotten her - well, that is just one of those things that readers

will not forgive; they do not like it, and they are quite right; life is hard enough for poor mortals, without having it indefinitely embittered for them by bad art.

We look in vain for any similar blemish in *LES MISERABLES*. Here, on the other hand, there is perhaps the nearest approach to literary restraint that Hugo has ever made: there is here certainly the ripest and most easy development of his powers. It is the moral intention of this great novel to awaken us a little, if it may be - for such awakenings are unpleasant - to the great cost of this society that we enjoy and profit by, to the labour and sweat of those who support the litter, civilisation, in which we ourselves are so smoothly carried forward. People are all glad to shut their eyes; and it gives them a very simple pleasure when they can forget that our laws commit a million individual injustices, to be once roughly just in the general; that the bread that we eat, and the quiet of the family, and all that embellishes life and makes it worth having, have to be purchased by death - by the deaths of animals, and the deaths of men wearied out with labour, and the deaths of those criminals called tyrants and revolutionaries, and the deaths of those revolutionaries called criminals. It is to something of all this that Victor Hugo wishes to open men's eyes in *LES MISERABLES*; and this moral lesson is worked out in masterly coincidence with the artistic effect. The deadly weight of civilisation to those who are below presses sensibly on our shoulders as we read.

A sort of mocking indignation grows upon us as we find Society rejecting, again and again, the services of the most serviceable; setting Jean Valjean to pick oakum, casting Galileo into prison, even crucifying Christ. There is a haunting and horrible sense of insecurity about the book. The terror we thus feel is a terror for the machinery of law, that we can hear tearing, in the dark, good and bad between its formidable wheels with the iron stolidity of all machinery, human or divine. This terror incarnates itself sometimes and leaps horribly out upon us; as when the crouching mendicant looks up, and Jean Valjean, in the light of the street lamp, recognises the face of the detective; as when the lantern of the patrol flashes suddenly through the darkness of the sewer; or as when the fugitive comes forth at last at evening, by the quiet riverside, and finds the police there also, waiting stolidly for vice and stolidly satisfied to take virtue instead. The whole book is full of oppression, and full of prejudice, which is the great cause of oppression. We have the prejudices of M. Gillenormand, the prejudices of Marius, the prejudices in revolt that defend the barricade, and the throned prejudices that carry it by storm. And then we have the admirable but ill-written character of Javert, the man who had made a religion of the police, and would not survive the moment when he learned that there was another truth outside the truth of laws; a just creation, over which the reader will do well to ponder.

With so gloomy a design this great work is still full of life and light and love. The portrait of the good Bishop is one of the most agreeable things in modern literature. The whole scene at Montfermeil is full of the charm that Hugo knows so well how to throw about children. Who can forget the passage where Cosette, sent out at night to draw water, stands in admiration before the illuminated booth, and the huckster behind "lui faisait un peu l'effet d'etre le Pere eternel?" The pathos of the forlorn sabot laid trustingly by the chimney in expectation of the Santa Claus that was not, takes us fairly by the throat; there is nothing in Shakespeare that touches the heart more nearly. The loves of Cosette and Marius are very pure and pleasant, and we cannot refuse our affection to Gavroche, although we may make a mental reservation of our profound disbelief in his existence. Take it for all in all, there are few books in the world that can be compared with it. There is as much calm and serenity as Hugo has ever attained to; the melodramatic coarsenesses that disfigured NOTRE DAME are no longer present. There is certainly much that is painfully improbable; and again, the story itself is a little too well constructed; it produces on us the effect of a puzzle, and we grow incredulous as we find that every character fits again and again into the plot, and is, like the child's cube, serviceable on six faces; things are not so well arranged in life as all that comes to. Some of the digressions, also, seem out of place, and do nothing but interrupt and irritate. But when all is said, the book

remains of masterly conception and of masterly development, full of pathos, full of truth, full of a high eloquence.

Superstition and social exigency having been thus dealt with in the first two members of the series, it remained for LES TRAVAILLEURS DE LA MER to show man hand to hand with the elements, the last form of external force that is brought against him. And here once more the artistic effect and the moral lesson are worked out together, and are, indeed, one. Gilliat, alone upon the reef at his herculean task, offers a type of human industry in the midst of the vague "diffusion of forces into the illimitable," and the visionary development of "wasted labour" in the sea, and the winds, and the clouds. No character was ever thrown into such strange relief as Gilliat. The great circle of sea-birds that come wanderingly around him on the night of his arrival, strikes at once the note of his pre-eminence and isolation. He fills the whole reef with his indefatigable toil; this solitary spot in the ocean rings with the clamour of his anvil; we see him as he comes and goes, thrown out sharply against the clear background of the sea. And yet his isolation is not to be compared with the isolation of Robinson Crusoe, for example; indeed, no two books could be more instructive to set side by side than LES TRAVAILLEURS and this other of the old days before art had learnt to occupy itself with what lies outside of human will. Crusoe was one sole centre of interest in the midst of a nature utterly dead and utterly

unrealised by the artist; but this is not how we feel with Gilliat; we feel that he is opposed by a "dark coalition of forces," that an "immense animosity" surrounds him; we are the witnesses of the terrible warfare that he wages with "the silent inclemency of phenomena going their own way, and the great general law, implacable and passive:" "a conspiracy of the indifference of things" is against him. There is not one interest on the reef, but two. Just as we recognise Gilliat for the hero, we recognise, as implied by this indifference of things, this direction of forces to some purpose outside our purposes, yet another character who may almost take rank as the villain of the novel, and the two face up to one another blow for blow, feint for feint, until, in the storm, they fight it epically out, and Gilliat remains the victor; - a victor, however, who has still to encounter the octopus. I need say nothing of the gruesome, repulsive excellence of that famous scene; it will be enough to remind the reader that Gilliat is in pursuit of a crab when he is himself assaulted by the devil fish, and that this, in its way, is the last touch to the inner significance of the book; here, indeed, is the true position of man in the universe.

But in *LES TRAVAILLEURS*, with all its strength, with all its eloquence, with all the beauty and fitness of its main situations, we cannot conceal from ourselves that there is a thread of something that will not bear calm scrutiny. There is much that is disquieting about the storm, admirably as it

begins. I am very doubtful whether it would be possible to keep the boat from foundering in such circumstances, by any amount of breakwater and broken rock. I do not understand the way in which the waves are spoken of, and prefer just to take it as a loose way of speaking, and pass on. And lastly, how does it happen that the sea was quite calm next day? Is this great hurricane a piece of scene-painting after all? And when we have forgiven Gilliat's prodigies of strength (although, in soberness, he reminds us more of Porthos in the Vicomte de Bragelonne than is quite desirable), what is to be said to his suicide, and how are we to condemn in adequate terms that unprincipled avidity after effect, which tells us that the sloop disappeared over the horizon, and the head under the water, at one and the same moment? Monsieur Hugo may say what he will, but we know better; we know very well that they did not; a thing like that raises up a despairing spirit of opposition in a man's readers; they give him the lie fiercely, as they read. Lastly, we have here already some beginning of that curious series of English blunders, that makes us wonder if there are neither proof-sheets nor judicious friends in the whole of France, and affects us sometimes with a sickening uneasiness as to what may be our own exploits when we touch upon foreign countries and foreign tongues. It is here that we shall find the famous "first of the fourth," and many English words that may be comprehensible perhaps in Paris. It is here that we learn that "laird" in Scotland is the same title as "lord" in

England. Here, also, is an account of a Highland soldier's equipment, which we recommend to the lovers of genuine fun.

In L'HOMME QUI RIT, it was Hugo's object to 'denounce' (as he would say himself) the aristocratic principle as it was exhibited in England; and this purpose, somewhat more unmitigatedly satiric than that of the two last, must answer for much that is unpleasant in the book. The repulsiveness of the scheme of the story, and the manner in which it is bound up with impossibilities and absurdities, discourage the reader at the outset, and it needs an effort to take it as seriously as it deserves. And yet when we judge it deliberately, it will be seen that, here again, the story is admirably adapted to the moral. The constructive ingenuity exhibited throughout is almost morbid. Nothing could be more happily imagined, as a REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM of the aristocratic principle, than the adventures of Gwynplaine, the itinerant mountebank, snatched suddenly out of his little way of life, and installed without preparation as one of the hereditary legislators of a great country. It is with a very bitter irony that the paper, on which all this depends, is left to float for years at the will of wind and tide. What, again, can be finer in conception than that voice from the people heard suddenly in the House of Lords, in solemn arraignment of the pleasures and privileges of its splendid occupants? The horrible laughter, stamped for ever "by order of the king" upon the face of this strange spokesman of

democracy, adds yet another feature of justice to the scene; in all time, travesty has been the argument of oppression; and, in all time, the oppressed might have made this answer:

"If I am vile, is it not your system that has made me so?"

This ghastly laughter gives occasion, moreover, for the one strain of tenderness running through the web of this unpleasant story: the love of the blind girl Dea, for the monster. It is a most benignant providence that thus harmoniously brings together these two misfortunes; it is one of those compensations, one of those afterthoughts of a relenting destiny, that reconcile us from time to time to the evil that is in the world; the atmosphere of the book is purified by the presence of this pathetic love; it seems to be above the story somehow, and not of it, as the full moon over the night of some foul and feverish city.

There is here a quality in the narration more intimate and particular than is general with Hugo; but it must be owned, on the other hand, that the book is wordy, and even, now and then, a little wearisome. Ursus and his wolf are pleasant enough companions; but the former is nearly as much an abstract type as the latter. There is a beginning, also, of an abuse of conventional conversation, such as may be quite pardonable in the drama where needs must, but is without excuse in the romance. Lastly, I suppose one must say a word or two about the weak points of this not immaculate novel; and if so, it will be best to distinguish at once. The large

family of English blunders, to which we have alluded already in speaking of LES TRAVAILLEURS, are of a sort that is really indifferent in art. If Shakespeare makes his ships cast anchor by some seaport of Bohemia, if Hugo imagines Tom-Tim-Jack to be a likely nickname for an English sailor, or if either Shakespeare, or Hugo, or Scott, for that matter, be guilty of "figments enough to confuse the march of a whole history - anachronisms enough to upset all, chronology," (1) the life of their creations, the artistic truth and accuracy of their work, is not so much as compromised. But when we come upon a passage like the sinking of the "Ourque" in this romance, we can do nothing but cover our face with our hands: the conscientious reader feels a sort of disgrace in the very reading. For such artistic falsehoods, springing from what I have called already an unprincipled avidity after effect, no amount of blame can be exaggerated; and above all, when the criminal is such a man as Victor Hugo. We cannot forgive in him what we might have passed over in a third-rate sensation novelist. Little as he seems to know of the sea and nautical affairs, he must have known very well that vessels do not go down as he makes the "Ourque" go down; he must have known that such a liberty with fact was against the laws of the game, and incompatible with all appearance of sincerity in conception or workmanship.

(1) Prefatory letter to PEVERIL OF THE PEAK.

In each of these books, one after another, there has been some departure from the traditional canons of romance; but taking each separately, one would have feared to make too much of these departures, or to found any theory upon what was perhaps purely accidental. The appearance of QUATRE VINGT TREIZE has put us out of the region of such doubt. Like a doctor who has long been hesitating how to classify an epidemic malady, we have come at last upon a case so well marked that our uncertainty is at an end. It is a novel built upon "a sort of enigma," which was at that date laid before revolutionary France, and which is presented by Hugo to Tellmarch, to Lantenac, to Gauvain, and very terribly to Cimourdain, each of whom gives his own solution of the question, clement or stern, according to the temper of his spirit. That enigma was this: "Can a good action be a bad action? Does not he who spares the wolf kill the sheep?" This question, as I say, meets with one answer after another during the course of the book, and yet seems to remain undecided to the end. And something in the same way, although one character, or one set of characters, after another comes to the front and occupies our attention for the moment, we never identify our interest with any of these temporary heroes nor regret them after they are withdrawn. We soon come to regard them somewhat as special cases of a general law; what we really care for is something that they only imply and body forth to us. We know how history continues through century after century; how this king or

that patriot disappears from its pages with his whole generation, and yet we do not cease to read, nor do we even feel as if we had reached any legitimate conclusion, because our interest is not in the men, but in the country that they loved or hated, benefited or injured. And so it is here: Gauvain and Cimourdain pass away, and we regard them no more than the lost armies of which we find the cold statistics in military annals; what we regard is what remains behind; it is the principle that put these men where they were, that filled them for a while with heroic inspiration, and has the power, now that they are fallen, to inspire others with the same courage. The interest of the novel centres about revolutionary France: just as the plot is an abstract judicial difficulty, the hero is an abstract historical force. And this has been done, not, as it would have been before, by the cold and cumbersome machinery of allegory, but with bold, straightforward realism, dealing only with the objective materials of art, and dealing with them so masterfully that the palest abstractions of thought come before us, and move our hopes and fears, as if they were the young men and maidens of customary romance.

The episode of the mother and children in QUATRE VINGT TREIZE is equal to anything that Hugo has ever written. There is one chapter in the second volume, for instance, called "SEIN GUERI, COEUR SAIGNANT," that is full of the very stuff of true tragedy, and nothing could be more delightful than the

humours of the three children on the day before the assault. The passage on La Vendee is really great, and the scenes in Paris have much of the same broad merit. The book is full, as usual, of pregnant and splendid sayings. But when thus much is conceded by way of praise, we come to the other scale of the balance, and find this, also, somewhat heavy. There is here a yet greater over-employment of conventional dialogue than in L'HOMME QUI RIT; and much that should have been said by the author himself, if it were to be said at all, he has most unwarrantably put into the mouths of one or other of his characters. We should like to know what becomes of the main body of the troop in the wood of La Saudraie during the thirty pages or so in which the foreguard lays aside all discipline, and stops to gossip over a woman and some children. We have an unpleasant idea forced upon us at one place, in spite of all the good-natured incredulity that we can summon up to resist it. Is it possible that Monsieur Hugo thinks they ceased to steer the corvette while the gun was loose? Of the chapter in which Lantenac and Halmalho are alone together in the boat, the less said the better; of course, if there were nothing else, they would have been swamped thirty times over during the course of Lantenac's harangue. Again, after Lantenac has landed, we have scenes of almost inimitable workmanship that suggest the epithet "statuesque" by their clear and trenchant outline; but the tocsin scene will not do, and the tocsin unfortunately pervades the whole passage, ringing continually in our ears

with a taunting accusation of falsehood. And then, when we come to the place where Lantenac meets the royalists, under the idea that he is going to meet the republicans, it seems as if there were a hitch in the stage mechanism. I have tried it over in every way, and I cannot conceive any disposition that would make the scene possible as narrated.

Such then, with their faults and their signal excellences, are the five great novels.

Romance is a language in which many persons learn to speak with a certain appearance of fluency; but there are few who can ever bend it to any practical need, few who can ever be said to express themselves in it. It has become abundantly plain in the foregoing examination that Victor Hugo occupies a high place among those few. He has always a perfect command over his stories; and we see that they are constructed with a high regard to some ulterior purpose, and that every situation is informed with moral significance and grandeur. Of no other man can the same thing be said in the same degree. His romances are not to be confused with "the novel with a purpose" as familiar to the English reader: this is generally the model of incompetence; and we see the moral clumsily forced into every hole and corner of the story, or thrown externally over it like a carpet over a railing. Now the moral significance, with Hugo, is of the essence of the romance; it is the organising principle. If you could

somehow despoil LES MISERABLES OR LES TRAVAILLEURS of their distinctive lesson, you would find that the story had lost its interest and the book was dead.

Having thus learned to subordinate his story to an idea, to make his art speak, he went on to teach it to say things heretofore unaccustomed. If you look back at the five books of which we have now so hastily spoken, you will be astonished at the freedom with which the original purposes of story-telling have been laid aside and passed by. Where are now the two lovers who descended the main watershed of all the Waverley novels, and all the novels that have tried to follow in their wake? Sometimes they are almost lost sight of before the solemn isolation of a man against the sea and sky, as in LES TRAVAILLEURS; sometimes, as in LES MISERABLES, they merely figure for awhile, as a beautiful episode in the epic of oppression; sometimes they are entirely absent, as in QUATRE VINGT TREIZE. There is no hero in NOTRE DAME: in LES MISERABLES it is an old man: in L'HOMME QUI RIT it is a monster: in QUATRE VINGT TREIZE it is the Revolution. Those elements that only began to show themselves timidly, as adjuncts, in the novels of Walter Scott, have usurped ever more and more of the canvas; until we find the whole interest of one of Hugo's romances centring around matter that Fielding would have banished from his altogether, as being out of the field of fiction. So we have elemental forces occupying nearly as large a place, playing (so to speak)

nearly as important a ROLE, as the man, Gilliat, who opposes and overcomes them. So we find the fortunes of a nation put upon the stage with as much vividness as ever before the fortunes of a village maiden or a lost heir; and the forces that oppose and corrupt a principle holding the attention quite as strongly as the wicked barons or dishonest attorneys of the past. Hence those individual interests that were supreme in Fielding, and even in Scott, stood out over everything else and formed as it were the spine of the story, figure here only as one set of interests among many sets, one force among many forces, one thing to be treated out of a whole world of things equally vivid and important. So that, for Hugo, man is no longer an isolated spirit without antecedent or relation here below, but a being involved in the action and reaction of natural forces, himself a centre of such action and reaction or an unit in a great multitude, chased hither and thither by epidemic terrors and aspirations, and, in all seriousness, blown about by every wind of doctrine. This is a long way that we have travelled: between such work and the work of Fielding is there not, indeed, a great gulph in thought and sentiment?

Art, thus conceived, realises for men a larger portion of life, and that portion one that it is more difficult for them to realise unaided; and, besides helping them to feel more intensely those restricted personal interests which are patent to all, it awakes in them some consciousness of those

more general relations that are so strangely invisible to the average man in ordinary moods. It helps to keep man in his place in nature, and, above all, it helps him to understand more intelligently the responsibilities of his place in society. And in all this generalisation of interest, we never miss those small humanities that are at the opposite pole of excellence in art; and while we admire the intellect that could see life thus largely, we are touched with another sentiment for the tender heart that slipped the piece of gold into Cosette's sabot, that was virginally troubled at the fluttering of her dress in the spring wind, or put the blind girl beside the deformity of the laughing man. This, then, is the last praise that we can award to these romances. The author has shown a power of just subordination hitherto unequalled; and as, in reaching forward to one class of effects, he has not been forgetful or careless of the other, his work is more nearly complete work, and his art, with all its imperfections, deals more comprehensively with the materials of life than that of any of his otherwise more sure and masterly predecessors.

These five books would have made a very great fame for any writer, and yet they are but one facade of the monument that Victor Hugo has erected to his genius. Everywhere we find somewhat the same greatness, somewhat the same infirmities. In his poems and plays there are the same unaccountable protervities that have already astonished us in the romances.

There, too, is the same feverish strength, welding the fiery iron of his idea under forge-hammer repetitions - an emphasis that is somehow akin to weaknesses - strength that is a little epileptic. He stands so far above all his contemporaries, and so incomparably excels them in richness, breadth, variety, and moral earnestness, that we almost feel as if he had a sort of right to fall oftener and more heavily than others; but this does not reconcile us to seeing him profit by the privilege so freely. We like to have, in our great men, something that is above question; we like to place an implicit faith in them, and see them always on the platform of their greatness; and this, unhappily, cannot be with Hugo. As Heine said long ago, his is a genius somewhat deformed; but, deformed as it is, we accept it gladly; we shall have the wisdom to see where his foot slips, but we shall have the justice also to recognise in him one of the greatest artists of our generation, and, in many ways, one of the greatest artists of time. If we look back, yet once, upon these five romances, we see blemishes such as we can lay to the charge of no other man in the number of the famous; but to what other man can we attribute such sweeping innovations, such a new and significant presentment of the life of man, such an amount, if we merely think of the amount, of equally consummate performance?