

**TRANSLATIONS
FROM THE POEMS
OF VICTOR HUGO**

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Translations from the Poems of Victor Hugo by Victor Hugo & Henry Carrington

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VICTOR HUGO & HENRY CARRINGTON

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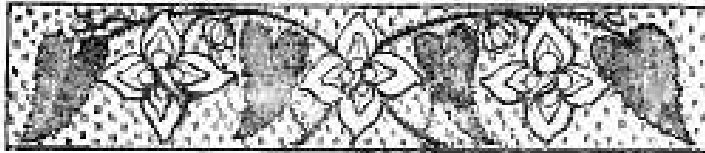
P 2
22
P 3
1856

I DEDICATE
THESE TRANSLATIONS
TO
MY WIFE AND CHILDREN,
AT WHOSE INSTANCE THEY WERE MADE.

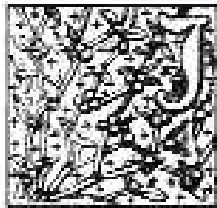
Deanery, Bocking.
September 30, 1855.

"Qu'importe! les coeurs sont lyres
Les temps qui viennent feront
Ce qu'ils pourront de mes livres.
Et de moi, ce qu'ils voudront."

—*Chaque des rimes et des loix.*



Prefatory Notice.



It has been said that in these days we know too much about our great men. The "fierce light" that beats around the lives of men of genius exaggerates and often distorts every unimportant detail, every subsidiary feature, so that we are shown shreds and patches rather than any comprehensive or comprehensible unit, and a jargon of discussion rises in place of a calm judgment. It is as though some great old picture were exposed to a glare so intense that only its cracks and scores would attract notice, while the design as a whole was lost. Victor Hugo, however, is not likely to suffer, nor will our estimate of him undergo much change, from anything that other men may say

about him. Partly from the fact that his personality was of the least complex nature ; partly because in his works, and especially in his poems, he gave himself so entirely and unreservedly to the world that they always remain his most faithful biography.

In a brief notice like the present, it will be more useful to turn our attention to a few points in this intimate connection between the poet and his creations than to attempt to follow step by step the traces of the long life which began at Besançon, *Septidi ventôse an X de la République* (Feb. 26, 1802), and ended in Paris, May 22, 1885 traces inseparably interwoven with nearly a century of French history.

Victor Hugo was deeply influenced by the accidents of his birth and parentage. His father, a Lorrainer of probably Teutonic origin, a good man and excellent soldier, who was among the first to defend the Republic and the last to abandon the Empire ; his mother, a Breton, daughter of an armourer, by name Trébuchet, a free-thinker in religion, but a strong royalist in politics : here we have the basis of Victor Hugo's first modes of thought. It was the basis of something more vital ; of that catholicity which enabled him to see good in the upholders of the most diverse *régimes* ; to

paint Lantenac* in that prose epic of the Revolution " '93," with a touch not less profoundly sympathetic than that which drew the initiators of the New Idea—

" Fidèle enfin au sang qu'ont versé dans ma veine,
Mon père vieux soldat, ma mère vendéenne."

When Victor was four or five years old, Major Hugo was charged by Joseph Bonaparte to root out brigandage from his new dominions, in performance of which mission he captured the famous Fra Diavolo. As a reward he was made Governor of Avellino, and on receiving the appointment he summoned his wife and children to join him. The youngest, a thoughtful little boy, with a sweet face, was too young to remember very much of these travels; yet it is likely that the rays of the southern sun burnt themselves into his brain and set their

* "Possibly you don't know what a gentleman is," says the Marquis. "Well, here is one, 'tis I. Look, 'tis curious; some one who believes in God, tradition, the family, his ancestors, the example of his father; in fidelity, loyalty, duty towards his prince, respect for the old laws, in virtue, in justice." The words are spoken to Lantenac's revolutionary nephew, Gauvain, Hugo's own ideal hero, whose pure character found a close counterpart in the one lofty spirit of the Commune—Rossel.

mark on his mental and physical development. What is beyond doubt is that the later residence in Spain, where General Hugo followed King Joseph when his brother, much against his will, changed the seat of his precarious royalty, left an impression never to be cancelled on Victor Hugo's genius. The walls of the Jesuit College to which, to their sorrow, his brother Eugène and himself were relegated six weeks after their arrival at Madrid, could not shut out the glow of light and colour, the atmosphere yet more eastern than southern, which later was so deeply to affect one who had somewhat in common with Hugo, though his gifts were doomed to immaturity: the young French painter who died a hero, Henri Regnault. Spain was to Victor Hugo what Italy was to Goethe—a distinction fraught with significance. He carried away from his sojourn of hardly more than a year much besides the name of Hernani—the first place where he halted on Spanish ground, and where first he began to realise how the “imperturbable blue sky of Spain” needs for a balance the grave aspect of her towns.

The affairs of the unstable monarchy became more and more complicated, and early in 1812, Mme. Hugo took Eugène and Victor back to the old convent of the Feuillantines which had been

their home before they left Paris. The garden, their childhood's fairyland, seemed to have grown smaller in their absence, and it lost its charm when they were set to turn gardeners and bring its wildness into order. Through life Victor only loved a garden where birds, flowers, and trees were left to their own devices.

It was natural that his mother, not his father, should give their first direction to the poet's opinions. "The child thinks with the mother, the man will think with the father," General Hugo is reported to have said. Thus the poems written in boyhood savour of an ardent Royalism. Then the first strong influence he was conscious of, outside his home, that of Chateaubriand, filled up the space his mother had left vacant, and added altar to throne. The *Genie du Christianisme* may not seem to English readers a work calculated to attain the end proposed by its author, the restoration of Catholicism in France to the place held before the Revolution; but its extraordinary, if passing, imprint on what was then the young generation of educated Frenchmen, is not to be disputed. It was characteristic of the time and country that rhetoric and sentiment succeeded where harder reasoning would probably have failed.

Victor Hugo was borne away with the returning