

Notches on The Stick

To review the pages of Victor Hugo we are never reluctant. He has gained our suffrage and sympathy to a greater extent than any modern author; and to no Frenchman of his times, as it appears to us, do the terms of greatness more evidently apply. Of supreme mark as a writer, he is also one of the skalds of freedom,—a prophet of humanity, whose life was dedicated and whose eyes were directed to the future. He reminds us of a mountain which rises through all the zones of magnificence and splendour, broadly and luxuriantly based; while its summit surpasses the cloud and reaches the snow, its living and fiery root is at the world's centre. He is of the race of giants, great in hatred and scorn, greater in love, in sympathy and pity.

The world's latest heritage from this princely giver is the Letters, recently published. Of these the second exceeds the first in interest and significance, as belonging to the maturity of his powers, the storm and stress of his life. He was at all times a generous praiser, but was at the earliest period of his literary history addicted to indiscriminate compliment, as appears in the first volume of his correspondence. But here in this second series Hugo is seen in his epical and heroic development, the foe of tyrants, the assailant of thrones and autocracies, the genius of poetry and romance, the champion of the trodden and miserable, the prophet of the people, the ardent patriot and lover of France, the embodiment of conscience united to great intellect,—poet, novelist, dramatist, pamphleteer, as the spirit might move him; "ready to write or fight, to starve or rot, to go to banishment or the barricade, for the sake of his high ideas and deep convictions; the Frenchman most loved by the liberty-loving young men of France, and most hated by the malefactor whom he pilloried in history as Napoleon the Little."

Some fragments of these letters may serve to indicate the range of his subjects and interests, as well as the vivid style of his epistolary expression. Language breathed through a trumpet, or belched in smoke and flame, when his heart was stirred, and, whatever its form, it did not lack vigor or picturesqueness. But it was not till Napoleon III perpetrated the crime by which the liberties of France were strangled that the Etna-like spirit of the patriot-poet shook and was shaken, and he uttered such indignant sentiments as, with sixty-seven representatives of the people, sent him into banishment. It is not to a usurper we must look for disinterested motives, or generous rewards; he is for himself. "Formerly," says one writer, "when Louis Napoleon was an exile from France, Victor Hugo had procured him permission to return. His gratitude was like his patriotism—worthy of a bandit."

Following his expulsion from his native country come accounts of his residence at Brussels, and of his authorship while there. He, "sat down to write the history of the crime by which brute force and perfidy had seized the government. In a white heat of splendid wrath he began to write his remorseless record;" He says: "I shall treat the Bonaparte in proper fashion. I will see to the fellow's historical future. I will hand him down to posterity by the ears." He has fulfilled his promise. We have a glimpse of his privation at Brussels: "I have a tiny bed, two straw-bottomed chairs and no fire in winter. I work all day, make my own bed, and live on three francs a day for all my expenses." This is the life of an exile, but of an exile who can make himself feared. So the first Napoleon banished and dreaded the author of living words that were a menace to him—the contumacious, impracticable De Stael.

For a season Hugo became a sojourner, pitching his tent, but soon bidden by the watchmen of a tyrant to move on. Napoleon procured his expulsion from Brussels and from Belgium. So he left the mainland and erected his conning-tower of liberty on one of the islands of the sea. Jersey, in the English Channel was his

Much in Little

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first refuge, and when driven thence, he found a resting-place in Guernsey, where he spent the last of his eighteen years of exile. The country-folk of the islands revered and loved him; and how deeply and sympathetically he entered into their estate his "Joilers of the Sea" reveals. Literature was his pursuit and consolation.

But his heart yearned for his native land, and burned with indignation toward his oppressor. "Napoleon the Little," he says, "has driven me out. Who knows if I shall not be one of those who will drive him out of Paris." When the object of his wrath had been well roasted in the fiery furnace of his poetic prose he was not content. "I will turn the wretch over on the gridiron," he says; and so he did;—"and grilled him on the other side," in the scorching verse of his "Châtiments." The world went hardly with him, but he never dreamed of retracting his powerful words. He expected to suffer. He wrote from Brussels, at the close of the year 1851: "The year closes on a great ordeal for us all—our two sons in prison and I in exile. That is hard, but good. A little frost improves the crop. As for me, I thank God." A few days after his mood is brighter still: "I have never felt more light-hearted. The events in Paris suit me. They reach an ideal point in atrocity as well as in grotesqueness. There are creatures like Troplong, like Dupin, whom I cannot help admiring. I like complete men. These wretches are perfect specimens. They attain the climax of infamy. Bonaparte is well surrounded. . . . I have done my duty; I am vanquished but happy. A conscience at rest is like a clear sky within one's self."

Thus did he forego home and country, thus did he face nature in her wildest, rudest forms, yet did he not bewail his fortune. "The sea howls among the rocks," he wrote from Jersey, during an equinoctial storm; "the wind roars like a wild beast; the trees writhe on the hills; nature rages round me. I look her full in the face and say to her,—'What right have you to complain, Nature, you that are in your abode; while I who have been driven from my country and my home, I smile!' That is my dialogue with the north wind and the rain." He contrasts his lot with that of his friend, while writing to Emile Deschanel: "All is rosy for you, somber for me. You are married to success, to happiness, to an enamored public, to applause, to smiles; I have wedded the sea, that hurricane, a vast sandy shore, sadness, and the starry canopy to heaven." And to another friend, Villemain, he writes, deploring the absence of his books: "You refresh your mind at the sacred limpid springs from which human thought filters and falls throughout the ages. I am in the wilderness, alone with the sea and with grief, drinking from the hollow of my hand." The prophets like Elijah at Horeb must utter a cry of woe; but the note of hope and of joy are not lost in his despondency. He finds his resources in Man and God, in reflection and beneficence. "In my life on this rock," he writes from Guernsey, "my hand has gradually become detached from everything except the great manifestations of the conscience and the intellect." And again "Every Tuesday I give a dinner to fifteen little children, chosen from among the most poverty-stricken of the island, and my family and I wait on them. I try by this means to give this feudal country an idea of equality and fraternity." But tolerable as his days in Guernsey might have been made, no heart in Europe was happier than his when the tyrant had fallen and he was free to hasten to France and to Paris again.

There were men in Europe of like spirit with himself who sustained each other with sympathetic, cheering words. Mazzini, Kossuth, Garibaldi, stood for popular liberty at the time when Napoleon seized the reins of power in France. The latter patriot writing in 1863 "from his island farm on Caprera," joins hand with Hugo: "With you I should like to see the universal agreement which would make war useless. Like you I await with confidence the regeneration of peoples. But to realize truth without suffering, and to tread the triumphal path of justice without besprinkling it with human blood, is an ideal that has hitherto been sought in vain. It is for you who are the torch-bearer, to point out a less cruel way; it is for us to follow you."

Hugo foresaw the destiny of the cause of popular liberty in America, and the abolition of that criminal anachronism, negro slavery. "It is impossible," he writes, more than twenty years before the great event, "that the United States shall not before long give up slavery. Slavery in such a country! Was there ever such a monstrous contradiction? It is barbarism installed in the very heart of a society which is the affirmation of civilization. Liberty in chains; blasphemy proceeding from the altar; the negro's fetters riveted to the pedestal of Washington's statue! It is unheard of. I go further—it is impossible. It is a phenomena which will disappear of itself. The light of the nineteenth century is sufficient to dissolve it. . . . The United States must either give up slavery or give up liberty! They will not give up liberty! They must either give up slavery or the Gospel! They will not give up the Gospel!"

And when John Brown had perished on the Scaffold in Virginia he wrote to George Sand from Guernsey: "I am overwhelmed with grief. They have killed John Brown. And it is a republic which has done this! What sinister folly it is to be an owner of men; and see what it leads to! Here is a free nation putting to death a liberator! The crimes of kings one can understand, but crimes committed by a people are intolerable to a thinker." And again, he writes: "There is but one God. With but one father we are all brothers. It was for this truth that John Brown died. . . . Slavery will disappear. What the Southern States have just killed is not John Brown, but Slavery. Henceforth the American Union may be looked on as broken up. I deeply regret it, but it is a foregone conclusion."

Hugo—brotherly soul that he!—was!—could yet stand on his dignity. When a certain Bishop de Segur condescended to poor satire, the intended victim [addressed him in the words which follow: "I was not aware of your existence. I am informed today that you do exist, and even that you are a Bishop. . . . In Les Misérables there is a bishop who is good, sincere, humble, brotherly, endowed with wit as well as kindness, and who unites every virtue to his sacred office. I suppose that is why Les Misérables seems to you an infamous book. From which it must be inferred that the book would be to you an admirable one if the bishop in it were a malignant slanderer, an insulter, a tasteless and vulgar writer, a scribbler of the basest kind, a circulator of police court scandal, a croziered and mitered liar. Would the second bishop be more true to life than the first?"

"The question concerns you, sir. You are a better judge of Bishops than I am." One wonders if his reverence continued silent.

Faith in the immortal life has inspired some of his loftiest words, and he has expressed the chastening, elevating power of sorrow in great hearts. Smitten by many afflictions he endured in hope. Hear him: "I no longer live; I suffer; my eyes are fixed on heaven; I wait. Alas! What an angel I have lost! . . . Death has its revelations. Light comes, for us, with our grief. I have faith; I believe in a future life. How could I do otherwise? My daughter was a soul; I saw this soul; I touched it. It was with me for eighteen years; my eyes are still full of its radiance. Even in this world she visibly belonged to the life above. . . . Misfortune brings understanding. How many things have I seen in myself and outside myself since my sorrow! The highest hopes spring from the deepest griefs. Let us thank God for having given us the right to suffer, since it brings with it the right to hope. . . . All that God does is good; but when he works through man the tool sometimes goes wrong and plays tricks in spite of the

52 BOILS

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workman. . . God does not hurry. He has no lack of time. I am therefore in no hurry. It pains me to wait, but I wait, and I find that waiting is good." And again: "I believe in God because I believe in man. The acorn proves to me the oak, the ray the star."

His exile life on the Channel Islands is reflected in these letters as in his romance. There he saw the grandeur and glory of nature, and God enshrined there: "Perched here as it were on the summit of a rock, with the grandeur of waves and sky before me, I dwell in the immense dream of the ocean. I am gradually becoming a somnambulist of the sea; and in the face of all these stupendous phenomena I end by being only a sort of witness of God." Great thoughts are native to him, and a look at the universe inspires them. To him God is the self-evident: "Whoever despairs of man despairs of God—that is to say, does not believe in him. . . . I believe in God more than in myself. I am more certain of the existence of God than of my own. . . . A few minds in our day obtain notoriety by means of negation; affirmation is left to the great souls!"

Hugo grew beautifully old; his white head was in the eyes of men a crown of glory. He lived to become one of the most venerable figures of his time, revered among the wisest and greatest of his countrymen. He writes, in one of his latest letters: "Old age is the age of adding up, for thoughts as well as for years, for the mind as well as for life. Only the total of years is overwhelming, the total of thoughts is sustaining. Hence the result that while the body decays the mind expands. There is a sort of dawn within it. This mysterious rejuvenation, this doubling of the moral and intellectual forces while the material force is sinking, this growth in decay, what a magnificent proof it is of the soul! The mind creates up to the last moment—sublime promise of the great unknown life which it is about to enter. Its span augments. The process resembles and unfolding of the wings." His sense of spiritual nature and eternal destiny of man is, among modern poets, equalled only by that of Browning.

The New Brunswick Magazine sustains the reputation it has acquired by an array of articles in the August number quite equal to that in the foregoing issue. It is opened by Rev. W. O. Raymond's second article, entitled, "At Portland Point." Dr. George Stewart gives an account of "An Early New Brunswick Magazine," entitled "The Guardian," W. R. Reynolds, the editor, reprints his account of "The Loss of the Royal Tar," originally printed in the St. John Telegraph, Oct. 26, 1896. James Hannay disputes with Dr. W. F. Ganong, "The Site of Fort La Tour," and gives excellent reasons for his opinion "that it was at the mouth of the River St. John and not at Jemseg where former writers had placed it." "The story of 'Brook Watson' is given by Clarence Ward. These articles, together with "In the Editor's chair," "Provincial Bibliography," "Notes and Queries," etc., make up a valuable and readable number.

PASTOR FELIX

Review of the Medical Record.

The article of greatest general interest in the Medical Record for 20th August is that on the control of Tuberculosis by Dr. H. H. Spiers. The theory is put forward that the "suspension of atmospheric influence" is the chief factor in producing consumption, and that if we all possessed sound lungs to start with, and could then continually supply them with plenty of pure air, through air passages of normal capacity, tuberculosis would not require control, for it could not exist. Unfortunately, we are still very far from this ideal condition. Education has accomplished much, and step by step we rise in civilization, but much remains to be learned. By and bye we will understand that he who asks in marriage must have a clean family and personal health register, and should require the same of his partner. Now many puny children are born of sickly parents. With little vital capacity, defective lung tissues,

enlarged tonsils, malformations of the upper air passage, or catarrhal nasal membranes they are unable to absorb sufficient oxygen for their needs or to resist the influence of the impure atmosphere of our cities, or the impoverished air of our badly ventilated and overheated rooms, and so fall easy victims to the ubiquitous microbe of consumption. Many children who are born perfectly healthy acquire one or more of these conditions as the result of measles, whooping cough or other infantile diseases. This should be carefully guarded against. The duty of the hour is to teach the people that all the conditions out of which consumption grows are preventable, and that therefore consumption itself is preventable. It should be education today with a view to legislation tomorrow.

In the news of the week it is stated that the loss of the American navy during the 142 days of war were 2 officers and 18 men killed, and 3 officers and 40 men wounded; in the army 23 officers and 231 men were killed, and 8 officers and 1,356 men wounded; total 25 officers and 249 men killed, and 90 officers and 1,356 wounded; that Behring has patented his diphtheria anti-toxin and warns American and Canadian manufacturers of it to go out of business or be sued. (The Record says "the effrontery of the man is beyond belief"); that 200 quacks are practising medicine in Dawson City; that the plague is again epidemic in Bombay; that several deaths and many cases serious of illness have lately occurred among children in London from eating "hokey-pokey," and that the daily papers demand the extinction of the itinerant ice-cream man.

Under the heading Reviews and Notices no less than 38 new works on medical subjects are submitted to the scalpel of the critic, and each in turn, after being duly "opened up," is gravely declared to be good. Surely this Reviewer is the prince of optimists.

The recent meeting of the British Medical Association at Edinburgh is being dealt with in the Society reports. A fellow with a statistical craze calculated that 739,513 cups of tea and coffee, and 453,219 ices were consumed at the various social functions held in connection with his meeting, but it is not recorded that he made any attempt to estimate the number of "wee drappies o' it" that were forever destroyed by the visiting medicos and their friends during the same week in the old Scotch town. He evidently knew where to stop.

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Animals That Don't Drink.

There are some animals which never drink; for instance, the lambs of Patagonia and certain gazelles of the Far East. A number of snakes, lizards, and other reptiles live in places devoid of water. A bat of Western America inhabits waterless plains. In parts of Lozere, France, there are herds of cows and goats which hardly ever drink, and yet produce the milk for Roquefort cheese.

Uncertain.

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