"NINETY-THREE."

VICTOR HUGO'S NEW NOVEL.

Readers will be glad to see the following sketch of M. Hugo's new book which is taken from *The Athenæum*. The work is coming out simultaneously in ten languages, of which ten, German is not one.

It opens with the civil war of La Vendée. There is the stronghold of the dying Monarchy, and the struggling Republic has difficulty in keeping the Britons at bay. The second book finds us still involved in the Chouan insurrection, but we are transferred from land to sea. An English frigate, manned by *émigrés* and Breton sailors, called the Claymore, sails from Jersey for the coast of France, having on board the most influential and dangerous chief of the insurgents, the Marquis de Lantenac. This nobleman, who is destined to take a prominent part in the story, M. Hugo has endeavored to represent as the type of the resisting nobility, fearless, a slave to his duty, relentless in warfare, shooting his prisoners, men and women, and killing the wounded, but still retaining a kind of fearful grandeur. Here is an instance of his idea of duty. The Claymore, while issuing gallantly from the narrow channel between Sark and Jersey, gets into a heavy sea, and, by the neglect of a gunner one of the carronades becomes loose, and begins rolling ungovernably below from one end of the ship to the other, crushing and killing with every roll, and jeopardizing the safety of the craft. The guilty gunner bravely jumps forward with a crowbar, and, at the imminent risk of his life, tries to repair his mistake, and at length succeeds in overturning the carronade, not before, however, the ship has been utterly disabled. The man's brave conduct deserves a recompense, and the commander of the Claymore takes him before the austere De Lantenac, who has looked on unmoved, and asks whether the man has not merited a special reward. "You are right," answers this personage; and he takes the cross of Saint Louis, and pins it himself to the sailor's jacket. "And now," he adds, turning round to the commander, "let this man be shot! his courage has been rewarded. Let his negligence be punished! In the War we are waging negligence is a crime." "I think La Vendée has at last got a head," is the remark of the commander with which the chapter closes. This scene may be a little forced, and a foil on the character of a man of iron, however inflexible, yet it shows the spirit which inspired the leaders of the Chouans. It is the more to be regretted that these fine pages, and what follows after, should be disfigured by one of those measure descriptions of impossibilities M. Victor Hugo will perforce indulge in, the narrative of the struggle between the gunner and the carronade, full of false expressions, replete with inadmissible metaphors, and at times perfectly ridiculous. The tone of the story rises again when the Claymore suddenly finds itself surrounded by the Republican squadron, in a sinking state, and with but one cannon. All these Bretons will fight to the death, and the Claymore's fate is certain, but the Marquis de Lantenac, for whose transfer to France the ship was equipped, must be saved, and taken to the coast in a gig through night and wind. The captain calls for a volunteer; one man comes forward. The slender boat is launched and steals away in the darkness; but it has scarcely gone a mile, when the volunteer who holds the oars drops them, rises, and says, looking the Marquis in the face, "I am the brother of the man you ordered to be shot, and you are a dead man!" The Marquis de Lantenac's eloquence, however, subdues the murderous propensities of his companion, Halmalo. In fact he makes a slave of the fellow before they have reached the coast of Brittany. The nobleman is now at home; his estates are at hand; but he shows himself while the Blues are there is tantamount to death. At his masters' bidding, Halmalo goes on a mission along the coast. "If you succeed," is Lantenac's parting word, "I will make you Chevalier of Saint Louis." "And if I fail?" asks Halmalo. "I will have you shot like your brother." "Very good, my lord," replies Halmalo; and the sailor disappears in the dreary underwood of the country, while Lantenac pursues his own way. Ascending an eminence, he looks for a signal which is to come from a village close by. A rustling noise overhead attracts his attention—it is a sheet of printed paper carried by the wind. Lantenac takes it up, and finds it to be a proclamation of the Republican commander setting a price on his head, and that commander is no other than the marquis's nephew, the Vicomte Gauvain, who has thrown in his lot with the revolution. Scarcely has he read the sinister print when a sound of bells becomes audible from all sides of the country. It is the tocsin. "Can they be aware of my arrival?" mutters Lantenac; "the tocsin is surely sounded for me." He turns away nothing daunted, and beholds a tall ragged man, who looks at him steadfastly. "Where are you going?" inquires the man.—"To the farm of Herbe-en-Pail," is the rejoinder of the fugitive.—"De nothing of the kind, Monsieur le Marquis; the 'Blues' are there."—"You know me?" exclaims the Marquis; "very good; give me up; the reward is a fine one; you are a beggar, and it will make a rich man of you."—"I beg," retorts the mendicant with hauteur, "but I do not betray. Come; I will shelter you for the night in my hovel. I know little about politics and care still less; provided you are not here for harm, I am yours." Next morning Lantenac sets out again. He is in the midst of a wild glen, when suddenly he is aware of being surrounded; for on all sides, from behind every tree, from under every bush, wild-looking men, armed to the teeth, bound toward him. Lantenac believes he is in an ambuscade. He coolly takes off his hat, pins a white cocarde on it and says: "I am the man you are looking for; I am the Marquis de Lantenac. Now then, be quick. In one! two!" To this proud defiance the reply is a cry of "Vive Lantenac!" The leader is among his own friends. The whole country has risen in arms to find and join him. They are ten thousand at least, and on the next day they will be fifty thousand. Lantenac is now at the head of the insurrection. The commander of the Claymore was not wrong when he said that Vendée had a head at last. This is how he begins his leadership. An inferior officer is asking for his orders:

"Gavard, qui était allé donner quelques consignes, revint: 'Mon général, j'attends vos commandements.'—'D'abord, le rendez-vous est à la forêt de Fougères. Qu'on se disperse et qu'on y aille.'—'L'ordre est donné.'—'Ne m'avez-vous pas dit que les gens d'Hibou-en-Pail avaient bien reçu les bleus?'—'Oui, mon général.'—'Vous avez brûlé la ferme?'—'Oui.'—'Vous vous êtes brûlé la hanneau?'—'Non.'—'Brûlez-le.'—'Les bleus ont essayé de se défendre; mais ils étaient cent cinquante et nous étions sept mille.'—'Qu'est-ce que c'est que ces bleus là?'—'Les bleus de Santerre.'—'Qui a commandé le roulement de tambours pendant qu'on coupait la tête au roi. Alors c'est un bataillon de Paris?'—'Un demi-bataillon.'—'Comment s'appelle ce bataillon?'—'Mon général, il y a sur le drapeau: Bataillon de Bonnet-Rouge.'—'Les bêtes féroces.'—'Que tant-il faire des blessés?—'Achevez-les.'—'Que faut-il faire des prisonniers?—'Fusillez-les.'—'Il y en a environ quatre-vingts.'—'Fusillez-tout.'—'Il y a deux femmes.'—'Aussi.'—'Il y a trois enfants.'—'Ecoutez-les. On verra ce qu'on en fera.' En le marque poussa son cheval."

The terrible orders are executed; the greater portion of the battalion first introduced is shot, and with them Michelle Fléchard, the poor starving woman they had saved, only the children being spared and retained as hostages. The beggar comes upon the scene of carnage; Michelle Fléchard still breathes; he carries her to his hovel, and on remembering that this is the work of the man he held in his power a few hours before, he mutters between his teeth, "Si j'avais sa!"

This brings to a close the first part of the work, which constitutes its prologue. The novel now leaves Brittany and the scene of civil war, and takes us into Paris, where the revolutionary party is reigning. There is introduced one of the most original of M. Victor Hugo's characters, Cimourdain, a revolutionist pitiless, carrying in his passionate love for liberty the furious hatred of a renegade ecclesiastic. We reach the culminating point of the novel—a conversation between Robespierre, Danton, and Marat, profoundly characteristic, full of the violence of these three dominating spirits of the French Revolution. The description M. Victor Hugo gives of them is one of the few passages that can bear translation; we may quote it in English without damaging the text:

"On the 26th of June, 1793, three men were seated around a table in a room of the wineshop of the Rue du Paon. Their chairs were wide apart; each was seated at one of the sides of the table, leaving a fourth place empty. It was about 8 o'clock in the evening; there was still some light in the street, but the room was dark, and a lamp, hanging from the ceiling, threw a dim glimmer on the table. The first of these three men was pale, young, grave, with thin lips and a cold look. A nervous twitch in the cheek must have spoilt his attempts to smile. He was powdered, gloved, brushed, and buttoned; there was not a crease in his bright blue coat. He wore nankeen trousers, white stockings, a frilled shirt, and shoes with silver buckles. The two other men were—one a kind of giant; the other, a kind of dwarf. The tall man, negligently dressed in a vest coat of scarlet cloth, his neck bare, his untied cravat falling lower than the frill, his waistcoat open, with many buttons missing, wore top boots, and his hair was straight and in disorder, although it revealed traces of dressing and care. There was something of a mane about it. His face was pock-marked; he had an angry wrinkle between the eyebrows, and an expression of kindness at the corner of the lips; thick lips, large teeth, a bargeman's fist, a unutterable eye. The dwarf was a yellowish man, who, seated, seemed deformed; his head was thrown backwards, his eyes were bloodshot; his face was covered with livid patches; a handkerchief was tied over his greasy and flat hair. No forehead; an enormous and terrible mouth. He wore ordinary trousers, slippers, and a waistcoat, which looked as if it was of white satin, and over this waistcoat a jacket, in the folds of which a hard and straight line revealed a pouard. The first of these men was named Robespierre; the second, Danton; the third, Marat. They were alone in the room. There was a glass and a bottle of wine before Danton; a cup of coffee before Marat; and a heap of papers before Robespierre. A map of France was stretched out on the table."

Here, then, we have the three leaders of the Convention together. Whether any such meeting ever took place we seriously doubt; but that is of little moment. The author's object is to place face to face the three typical figures of the crisis. The result of the conversation of the three conventionals is that the expiatory Cimourdain starts for La Vendée, with full powers from the Committee of Public Safety, over the military commanders of the Republican troops. "If the man made a mistake, or proved weak in duty, what would you do?" asked Robespierre. "I would put him to death," replies Cimourdain. What this engagement leads him to will be seen hereafter.

Again the scene is transferred to Brittany. There the Vicomte Gauvain struggles against his uncle Lantenac. The latter has become the most formidable spirit of the insurrection. He asks for no quarter and gives none. He is everywhere and nowhere, now burning a village guilty of partiality for the "Blues," now surprising detached corps of enemies and slaughtering them. But the young and brilliant Gauvain is a match for the old Marquis. He comes from the same stock, only he possesses in a nobler form the qualities of his race. He is dauntless, generous, straightforward, ardently republican, but the bloody character of civil war wounds his sensitiveness, and he discards even necessary cruelty. This probably led Robespierre, Danton, and Marat, to dispatch Cimourdain with superior powers to Brittany. Gauvain's energy requires a stimulus, nevertheless his contest with his relative is most bitter. Lantenac has written to Gauvain, "If my dear nephew falls in my hands, I will have him shot like a dog;" and Gauvain replied, "If my excellent uncle ever becomes my prisoner, I will have him guillotined like a traitor." In a battle in the streets of a village, between "Whites" and "Blues," Lantenac aims himself a cannon at Gauvain, who defies him and snaps his fingers at his attempt. The victory seems to belong to the younger. In one of these skirmishes, won for the Republicans by the valor of Sergeant Radoub and the few men of the Bonnet-Rouge battalion; survivors of the massacre alluded to before, Gauvain turns to them and exclaims, "You are only twelve in number, but you are worth a thousand," M. Victor Hugo adds: "A word of the chief was the Cross of Honor of those times." When the war is at its height, Cimourdain arrives, and—a test for the stern execution of his duty—he finds out that Gauvain was his pet pupil when he officiated as a priest in one of the villages close by. This contrast between the two men leads to the most moving episode of the book.

The second and third volumes mainly consist in scenes that can be hardly detailed—battles, hecatombs of men, acts of devotion, and cruelty; in a word, in scenes and acts common in those awful strifes, of which the cause of quarrel is a compound of politics and religious feeling. We come to the concluding chapters of the third and last volume. They deserve a clear explanation.

Gauvain and the priest Cimourdain, hand in hand, have done wonders. The insurrection has been all but quelled. Gauvain has done the fighting, Cimourdain has executed the terrible orders of the Convention. The contest is now reduced to a struggle of four thousand against thirteen. Lantenac and eighteen companions allow themselves to be surrounded in the dungeon of La Tourgue, yet they resist, and will die rather than surrender. Lantenac has kept the children adopted by the Batailion du Bonnet-Rouge as hostages; they shall be killed unless free passage is granted. Nothing can exceed the epic grandeur of the story of the closing scene. La Tourge is completely invested. There is not the remotest hope of escape. The place is assaulted by the Republicans; the nineteen Chouans resist gallantly, but are driven from story to story. Their fate is sealed, when a secret door suddenly flies open. Halmalo the sailor appears, and shows them a secret passage which will take them into the woods. This, by the way, is very theatrical; it recalls to minds us of the cupboards and windows of "Hernani," and the secret doors of "Angelo." Lantenac retreats with the last men remaining, while a seventh, a wounded, dying Chouan, sets fire to the tower. The Republicans soon penetrate into the room; they know the unfortunate children are above and in imminent peril, but the attempts to break open the iron door through which they can be reached prove unavailing; all hope is abandoned, and below the shrieks of Michelle Fléchard (who has recovered) add to the horror of the situation. But a strange scene ensues. The old Marquis hears from afar Michelle Fléchard, and remembers the baby hostages. His heart melts; he retraces his steps, enters the tower amid the Republicans, who recoil, astounded at such audacity, and one by one saves the babes. As he emerges from the flames with the last one, Cimourdain lays his hand on his shoulder, saying, "I arrest you." "I approve you," coolly answers the Marquis.

He is thrust into a cellar. A court-martial will sit upon him in two hours; his time has come. Gauvain opens the door and walks up to his uncle; the Marquis insults him, taking his visit as a taunt. But Gauvain takes off his hooded cloak, throws it on the prisoner's shoulders, and thrusts him out, calling to the sentinel to let the commander pass, so that when Cimourdain and the members of the court-martial enter the prison, they find the captive in the place of the uncle. "Nay, it is impossible; you are not guilty; he has escaped without your help," cries the priest, wringing his hands. "Not so," Gauvain gravely answers, "I am guilty. I set him free; I deserve death, do your duty." And the father condemns his child.

Next morning, at dawn, the guillotine is erected, and Gauvain walks serenely toward the horrible machine. "Pardon, pardon!" is the universal cry of the soldiers. He must die. But as his head falls, the report of a firearm is heard; Cimourdain has killed himself, after enforcing the law against his friend and pupil. Few will pursue this final episode without emotion.

Our analysis must now come to an end. We cannot better express our general impression than by giving to this work a place between "Les Travailleurs de la Mer" and "Les Misérables." It is Hugo all over, overflowing with that strange mixture of faults and excellencies from which none of his works is free; often perplexing, sometimes grotesque, often admirable. The types in "Quatrevingtdrize" are many and grand. They remind us of Jean Valjean, of Eponine, of that legion of august and legendary characters which he has created. Gauvain is the stanch, ardent Republican of the Danton cast, seeking in clemency and union, rather than in repression and inflexibility, the means of marshaling Republican France under one banner. Lantenac is a magnificent embodiment of the last Bretons. Cimourdain is the true incarnation in revolution of what Lantenac is in royalism.

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