Romanticism in Literature and Life.*

Every year the delvers in the French archives are increasing in number, and year by year the study of Romanticism is growing less Romantic. Files of letters in the Bibliothèque Nationale, long withheld from publication for personal reasons, have been turned over to the printers; old desks and family records are being opened to student and savant. The doctor's degree and the *fureur de l'inédit* — the phrase is hardly translatable — are filling the bookstores with volumes of literary antiquarianism; and, if the present rate of publication continues, the seekers after "sources" will soon be without resource.

One class of books, however, we have always with us, and shall have: secondary works, books about books. Of these the most interesting — the most valuable too, perhaps, in an age tending all too swiftly toward a purely unilingual culture — are the books which make available in English, facts or fiction originally published in another tongue. Whatever the scholar may think of such productions, their popular value cannot be denied, especially when they are written with the wit and cleverness which characterize Mr. Francis Gribble's studies in French literary history.

"Passions of the French Romantics" *(sic)* is the latest of a series of several volumes dealing with the personal life — one might almost say the amative life — of various French writers, from Rousseau to the great Romanticists. Why Mr. Gribble calls them "Romantics" we cannot imagine, unless he is attempting to anglicize the French *romantiques*. The authors considered are Bernardin de Saint-Pierre *(que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère!)*, Lamartine, Vigny, Musset, Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Dumas *père*, and Mérimée; Balzac and Gautier being excluded for no very evident reason, while George Sand finds an immoral immortality in an earlier volume of the series. The sources used, most of which Mr. Gribble mentions in his preface, are recent French biographies; how closely he has followed them may be judged from the present reviewer's letter in a recent number of The Dial (June 16, 1910, p. 416). Yet stories, whatever their origin, "ought to be entertaining if properly told"; so we may accept this statement of the preface in lieu of apology, seeing that the improper properly told constitutes a really difficult type of art.

And Mr. Gribble tells his stories with all the propriety permitted by his subjects. The half-cynical detachment of his attitude is only surpassed by the sprightly humor which never fails to lend interest to his pages. A richly allusive style is his, teeming with parody, — irregular, full of suspensions and antitheses, a style conforming to no rule save that of interest. For a *chronique scandaleuse* such a style would be perfection; yet there are passages in the loves of the Romantic school that can not be seriously treated as parts of a *chronique scandaleuse*. Here at least, it must be admitted, Mr. Gribble fails. The tragedy of Vigny's disillusionment, the pathos of Sainte-Beuve's love for Mme. Hugo, the lyrical devotion of Lamartine, are things as far beyond his comprehension as the style that could adequately portray them is beyond his power. Comedy speaks with one voice, one mask; Tragedy with another.

Clever and sprightly, nevertheless, the volume certainly is; and if picturesqueness be occasionally obtained by the sacrifice of important detail, as comparison with M. Séché's careful studies will show, we need not complain of it in a work of this sort. For the volume should stir up popular interest in the French Romanticists; and it should undoubtedly correct some false impressions.

One of these latter is the popular opinion of Victor Hugo as a man. What Americans know of the arch-Romanticist is derived mainly from Barbou's book, "Victor Hugo and his Times," long since translated into English, and the life of the poet written by his wife. Now both of these biographies were written under the eye of the master, the second one being dictated to Mme. Hugo by the poet himself; and although extremely interesting, they are in a sense works of fiction, and the truth is not in them. It was reserved for a later scholar, M. Edmond Biré, to give us the negative side in a series of studies, as remarkable for their stinging irony as for their scholarly acumen. With this material to draw from, Mr. Gribble shows us how Victor Hugo, when he came to dictate his autobiography, was carried away by his poet's imagination; how he falsified his genealogy to prove himself of noble family, how he magnified his

*The Passions of the French Romantics. By Francis Gribble. Illustrated. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

precocity by antedating his earlier works, how he invented the phrase "enfant sublime" and attributed it to Chateaubriand for his greater glory. "That fact," as Mr. Gribble remarks, "is more sublime even than the eulogy itself." He tells us how Hugo concealed his failures, how he made twelve editions out of 1500 copies of *Han d'Islande*, how he published *Amy Robsart* under the name of his eighteen-year-old brother-in-law, who had nothing to lose, and lost nothing by the failure of the play. He pictures Hugo stepping out on his balcony, at a certain hour every day, to show himself, monarch-like, to the curious throng, and quotes, as further proof of the poet's megalomania, this incident from the *Souvenirs sur Turgueneff:*

"One evening Hugo's admirers, assembled in his drawing-room, were competing with one another in the eulogy of his genius; and the idea was thrown out, among others, that the street in which he lived ought to bear his name.

"Some one suggested that the street was too small to be worthy of so great a poet, and that the honour of bearing his name ought to be assigned to some more important thoroughfare.

"Then they proceeded to enumerate the most popular quarters of Paris, in an ascending scale, until one man exclaimed with enthusiasm that it would be an honour for the city of Paris itself to be renamed after the man of genius.

"Hugo, leaning against the mantelpiece, listened complacently to his flatterers outbidding each other. Then with the air of one engaged in deep thought, he turned to the young man, and said to him in his grand style —

"'Even that will come, my friend. Even that will come.'"

"Not one of us, were he even a little dog, but feels himself the centre of the universe," says M. Anatole France. Few men, however, imagine that the universe is so becogged into the axis of their own genius.

Yet the disclosure of Hugo's relations with the fair sex surpasses even this, and proves conclusively that the building of the Hugo legend was the poet's greatest work of art. To make a muse out of a mistress, even when she be originally another man's mistress, was not uncommon in the age of Romanticism, but to make of such a mistress a Madonna Beatrice, and force the world to swallow her, halo and all, is indubitably beyond the capacity of all but the highest type of genius. Yet this is what Hugo did for his Egeria, Juliette Drouet. And Mr. Gribble shows us the whole stupendous process of the apotheosis: Hugo collecting a public subscription to reclaim the repentant Magdalen — she was, by the way, the artist's model immortalized in the statue of Strasbourg,—employing the proceeds of this subscription to set up a second establishment, printing verses to her in the same volume with verses to his wife; while Madame Hugo, in the meantime, was consoling herself with Sainte-Beuve, whose services as herald of Hugo's glory prevented for years a definite rupture. He shows us Hugo in after years, unfaithful even in his infidelity, caught *in flagrante delicto* by an irate husband, and obliged to show the medal which proved him Peer of France to escape arrest. He pictures him laying siege to Juliette's maids, and setting up a third establishment for one of them in his seventies. But most wonderful of all, perhaps, he shows us Mme. Hugo and her relatives reconciled with Juliette, so that the mistress-muse accompanies the Hugos in their exile, and sat at the poet's side in a banquet given in their honor, while Mme. Hugo, voluntarily (?) and in exquisitely chosen words proposed a toast to her forgiven rival. Well! we should find it all pretty hard to believe, did we not know that they order these things differently in France. And lastly, Mr. Gribble shows us Hugo, the author of *L'art d'etre grand-père*, taking his muse into his own household after his wife's decease, to be a companion to his grandchildren; and when she died there a few years later, Paris had crowned her, as Mme. Hugo's cousin had crowned her long before, "the poet's immortal Beatrice, the sceptre-bearer of his glory."

Scarcely less interesting, though for different reasons, is the story of Mérimée's *Inconnue* and the narration of Musset's love-affairs subsequent to George Sand. The "grande passion" of Lamartine and the disillusionment of Vigny are, on the other hand, no subjects for Mr. Gribble's pen, and the lover of these poets would do well to pass them by. It is clever to say that Lamartine "was prone, like all the Romantics, to confuse the love of God with the love of his neighbour's wife," but epigrams will not pay us for everything. There is a certain disillusionment in the thought that Vigny's sorrow was caused by the betrayal of an actress like Marie Dorval, and even the thought of Musset consoling himself with the Pandemians of the pavement will tarnish, for some of us, the splendor of the *Nuits*. Alas! as long as we are Anglo-Saxons we shall rejoice that there exists no contemporary biography of Shakespeare.

Wherein, then, apart from the sempiternal interest of gossip, lies the justification of such studies? The need of some justification our author evidently feels, and he indicates it at

the conclusion of his preface. "The Romantic school was a period of experiments in life as well as in literature," says Mr. Gribble, "and there is nothing unnatural in a curiosity to know whether they failed or succeeded." This is why he has collected these stories, — "to help students to consider for themselves whether —or how far—the Romantics [*quel tic!*] really served the cause of the liberty of the human spirit by that anarchism in their amours which was their common characteristic." But no Conclusion helps the student in his conclusions; and no analysis tells us how the principle of Romanticism developed and why it was bound to fail.

Is the whole matter, after all, so perfectly obvious? That Rousseau inaugurated a new literature, a new conception of love, an apotheosis of sentiment which was to culminate in the vagaries of "1830," we all know; but it is not so easy to trace the development of that earlier conception into the confusion of love and religion which was the ruin of Musset and many another. M. Lasserre has done it, in his *Romantisme français*, a book which the serious student of this period cannot afford to miss. The mistake of the great Romantic poets was their attempt to live out their dreams, a mistake which led to the most humiliating contacts with reality. Nor was this all. The Romanticists suffered one and all, as some of us are suffering to-day, from that self-poisoning through literature, which, like opium, spoils for us the flavor of all natural food. Nordau has analyzed the habit in his "Paradoxen," and La Rochefoucauld has stated the axiom in its extreme form. "There are men," says the great French moralist, "who never would have loved, if they had not heard others speak of love." And M. Lasserre shows us how this mania of love, of passion as the supreme end of life, spread its virus in a world wherein the bounds of conventional self-expression had been overthrown by the French Revolution and the coming of the Third Estate into literature and life. For the essentially bourgeois character of Romanticism may be verified in the vogue of Miss Marie Corelli, and its constant qualities may be noted in the love-letters of any maid-servant who has learned to read.

A false conception of human life, it is no wonder that the Romantic theory came to the ground. Those who grasp at soap-bubbles will get only a drop of dirty suds, and they are indeed lucky who do not receive it in their eyes. "Almost all the passions of the Romantics," remarks Mr. Gribble, "ended in some sort of disappointment or some sort of anti-climax." So our experimenters found out that the theory of passion *per se*, or even the theory of love *per se*, does not square with any of the facts of life. The social organism may exist because of love, but it does not in any sense exist for the sake of love.

With this we may return to Mr. Gribble's book, to add a final word. The volume is well illustrated, and the type large and pleasant to the eye. All in all, one could find far worse reading for a vacation trip than "Passions of the French Romantics." It reads very easily, this clever collection of literary gossip—perhaps because it was undoubtedly written very easily. And in respect of its humorous qualities at least, no higher praise could be conceived.

LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS.