Ruy Blas *L'Homme Qui Rit* *Esmeralda* *Jean Valjean* *Quasimodo*

ARM IN ARM WITH HUGO IN PARIS

By Clara E. Laughlin

With Sketches by James E. Davis

POULTNEY BIGELOW tells me that in his most recent book he pleads for a Chair of Travel in every college and university. It is surprising that in these days when travel is a factor in almost everyone's life the plea should seem a novel one. In all probability it will be effective; and within a decade or so youth will be taking for granted that travel has always been taught as one of the fine arts.

Let us hope that by no hocus pocus a false start is made and travel gets listed as one of the sciences. (I know persons who will strive to do just that: and we mustn't let them — travel is far too much standardized *now*.) And let us be equally hopeful (and vigilant!) that no well meaning but stupid faculty lists travel as a sort of philosophy, or "lumps" it with the history of art, or in any other wise misrepresents the glorious thing.

Travel is adventure, romance, magic; it is Aladdin's Lamp and Anybody's Wishing Ring. We must permit no one to essay the teaching of it who hasn't a light heart and a deep sympathy, a gay spirit and a fine camaraderie; who isn't a brother of the open road to all our yesterdays.

Travel can be taught as poetry is taught, or painting, or music; one may learn the fundamentals of good traveling, study the best examples. Then he should fare forth to develop a technique of his own.

I am a joyous traveler and have been besought by many to "teach my method". This I have undertaken to do, not in a classroom but in books, in lectures, and in home study courses. And, asked to give an example for this travel book number, I thought I'd invite you to a Paris stroll with Victor Hugo.

When we travel, we leave behind us — in camphor with other things useful at home but hampering abroad — many restrictions. Stupid, vulgar travelers leave their manners (if they have any) at home. Gentler, wiser folk take their very best manners abroad, because they expect to spend much time in very distinguished company. What those gentler, wiser folk leave behind them is a packing trunk full of work-aday fetters which bind a body to one time, one place, one set of acquaintances. What they fare forth to is freedom to choose — to choose their time, their place, their company.

Now, the still embodied great incline to be very busy, and necessarily inaccessible; even when "met" they are not easy to know. But who cares? The world is full of great folk who are no longer busy, who are set free for unlimited companionability, and who are not standoffish at all, because we know so much about them that they *can't* be.

I often go to breakfast with Dumas; and he cooks it for me and tells me of Porthos the while. If I prowled about with Anatole France the way I do with Balzac, I'd be terribly talked about even in Paris. And as for Victor Hugo — Well! But Juliette only smiles and isn't jealous at all.

I have met you beside the Unknown Soldier's grave beneath the Arc de Triomphe, and you have said something about the sight it must have been to see "the poor man's coffin" of Hugo lying there. Then we have looked down the broad avenue Victor Hugo toward the place Victor Hugo with the Hugo monument. The house in which he died is no longer standing, though its site is commemorated at No. 124 avenue Victor Hugo; but even if it were there, it is not the place I should take you, to make his acquaintance. Nor is it possible to feel any nearer to him by visiting his grave in the gruesome vaults of the Panthéon — though Balzac's grave, in Père Lachaise, is a place where one feels very near not to Balzac alone but also to Hugo, who reveals the depths in himself few times so unreservedly as he does at Balzac's bier.

The site of Hugo's earliest Paris home (at 24 rue de Clichy) is covered now by the place de la Trinité; and the school he attended then (he was three years old), where his scholastic day began by watching the schoolmaster's daughter get out of bed and draw her stockings on, is also gone. It was there that he made his first dramatic essay, wearing a sheepskin.

There are, indeed, few houses left in which he dwelt. But I can assure you that some of them are easy to find, nevertheless, and well worth seeking.

That convent garden of the Feuillantines, "big, deep, mysterious, shut in by high walls from the gaze of the curious", where Victor found fairies in the gloaming and told tales about them to tiny Adèle Foucher, was not far from where Vincent d'Indy now has his Schola Cantorum (on the site of a Benedictine chapel where James II of England was buried), and the tablet commemorating the vanished convent and its garden is on number 8 rue des Feuillantines, still shadowed by "the sombre dome of Val-de-Grâce".

There you may (if you have taken the right sort of glasses with you on

your travels) see Madame Hugo, royalist and idealist, bringing up her boys in her own womanish way, hoping to make them more satisfying to her than their Bonapartist father who was then at Madrid with Joseph Bonaparte; for, in addition to the complete variance of political and other sentiments between General Hugo and his wife, there was the matter of the Comtesse de Salcano with whom the general was rather more than solacing himself for the absence of his family.

Victor was nine years old when Paris resounded with rejoicings at the birth of the King of Rome. We can imagine Madame Hugo's comment on it to her boys, playing in their old convent garden. In that year Madame took her boys to Spain for a visit to their father, who seems to have been shocked at their haphazard education and to have ordered them to be done with knights and fairies and get sternly to work preparing for l'Ecole Polytechnique.

Of the hôtel de Toulouse in rue du Cherche-Midi, where the Fouchers lived, nothing remains; nor is it easy to feel the Hugos in that street, although Madame Hugo had a dwelling opposite the Fouchers while her sons were going to the gloomy school in rue Sainte-Marguerite (now swept away by the boulevard Saint-Germain) where Victor prepared himself to become a polytechnician by composing "odes, satires, elegies, epigrams, romances, fables, madrigals, tragedies, and even a comic opera".

I have many interests in rue Bonaparte, and often when I am walking thereon, past the Beaux-Arts toward Saint-Germain-des-Prés, I seem to fall into step behind a lady and her two sons going to spend the evening with the Fouchers at hôtel de Toulouse. The boys (Eugène and Victor) walk arm in arm ahead of their mother, who wears a gown of coxcomb merino and a cashmere shawl. Arrived at the Fouchers', they will assume their accustomed places: Madame Hugo with her work on one side of the fireplace, facing M. Foucher with his pipe and his snuff box; Madame Foucher and Adèle a little apart, bent over their needlework; the Hugo boys and young Foucher sitting in a silent, respectful group. Scarcely a word spoken all evening; but everyone is content.

The Hugo dwelling in rue Bonaparte (then called rue Petits-Augustins) was in a building which had been part of the convent of the Petits-Augustins founded by Marguerite of Valois. Madame Hugo's bedroom was a portion of the chapel; and the boys from their study window looked down into the court of the convent which was then serving as the Museum of French Monuments and was crowded with those masterpieces of art which the heroic Alexandre Lenoir had saved from the destructive fury of Revolutionary mobs. That collection, which moved Michelet to his passion for the Middle Ages, profoundly impressed Victor Hugo also and had its great share in molding his genius.

(Lovers of fiction have much hereabouts to tempt them to loiter; for of the two narrow streets which run more or less into the Beaux-Arts, rue Visconti has its melancholy associations with Balzac, who lost so much money there in his printing business that he was never able to pass the street without shuddering; and rue des Beaux-Arts was where Thackeray lodged when he was an art student.)

Madame Hugo's jealousy when she realized Victor's attachment for Adèle Foucher caused a rift in the relations with hôtel de Toulouse; and when Madame Hugo died, in June, 1821, in

a little home she had taken on rue de Mézières, Adèle did not even know of the sorrow of the Hugo boys as they carried their mother's body across the Place to the church of Saint-Sulpice, and thence to the cemetery of Montparnasse.

A few weeks later, General Hugo married Madame Salcano "in order to legalize the purely religious ties which had hitherto united them"; and he declined to contribute anything to Victor's support unless the latter would abandon the pursuit of literature. But Victor's determination was unshakable; for his "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Berry" had attracted the attention of Châteaubriand, who invited the young poet to call on him and was supposed to have dubbed him "the Sublime Child". And also he had been sought out by Lamartine and encouraged in his aspirations.

Victor had eight hundred francs, earned by his own efforts, and with this as his sole capital he went to live in a garret in rue du Dragon, number 30, where he shared the meagre accommodations, and the expense, with a young cousin come from Nantes to study law.

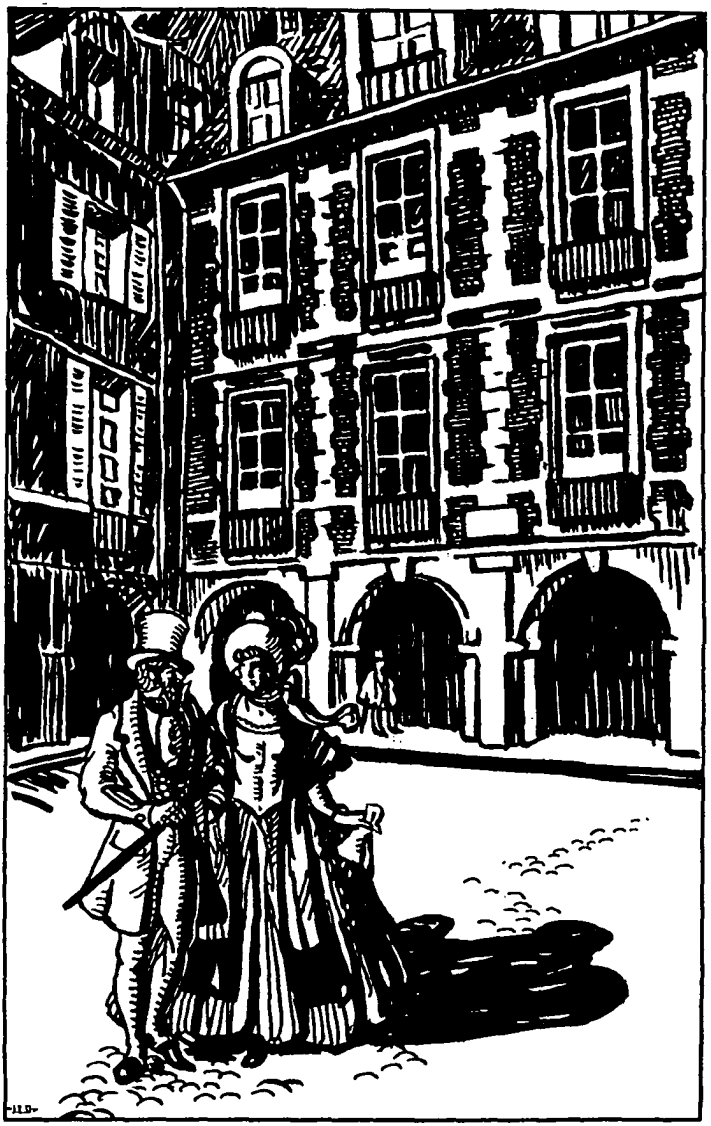
This house is still standing; of all the Paris dwellings of Hugo it is the only one besides that in the place des Vosges which remains. Here Victor lived for a year on seven hundred francs, never borrowing a sou and even lending five francs to a friend on more than one occasion. Do you know rue du Dragon? The proper approach to it is through the cour du Dragon (whither Anatole France was led in his search for "the deserving poor") which we'll enter from rue de Rennes, "kittycorners" from Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

The sort of life "the Sublime Child" lived here, he described years later in "Marius". Do you remember the mutton chop, costing six or seven sous, which he cooked for himself and on which he lived three days? "The first day he ate the meat, the second day he ate the fat, and the third day he gnawed the bone!"

Then the King granted him a pension of one thousand francs, and M. Foucher permitted him to marry Adèle.

All the early homes of the young couple (and they had not a few!) are swept away. But one of the many reasons for strolling through rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs is that we may fancy we are going to call on the Hugos, in 1830, when the furor over "Hernani" was at its height. We shall find Madame Hugo dismayed by the notice of ejection she has just received. Their landlady lives on the ground floor of this little house, and she has just been upstairs to tell her tenants, kindly but firmly, that "we can no longer stay together"; that the noise above her head, at unseemly hours of the night, makes life unendurable. "I am truly very sorry", she says to Madame Hugo. "I like you very much. But your husband has such a dreadful trade. You never sleep — you and your friends."

So the man with the dreadful trade seeks for himself and his family a dwelling where they are least likely to disturb their neighbors, and locates in what he calls "the desert of Francis I" where some "subdivision" promoters have laid out a new residence district between the cours la Reine and the Champs-Elysées — where the Grand Palais now is. To give "tone" to this desert, they have brought up from Moret, near Fontainebleau, that architectural bijou with Goujon sculptures on its façade which is called the Francis I House. And for Jean Gou-



Victor Hugo's House in the Place Royale

jon they have named the street into which the Hugos now move.

Here Victor, shutting himself away from that adulant and noisy world which never sleeps, wrote "Notre Dame de Paris", in five months — finishing it with the last drop of ink from that big bottle wherewith he started; so that his first thought was to call it "What There Is in a Bottle of Ink".

You and I are coming here to call, one day, and are a little bit astonished to find two young men in the street, in front of Hugo's house (it was number 6) who seem convulsed with merriment. You recognize one of them — Gérard de Nerval — and he confides to you that Théophile Gautier, having been thirty times to see "Hernani" at the Théâtre-Français, has come to offer his homage to the author; he has carefully wrought the jeweled sentences in which he will express his worship, but he has made two journeys up the front stairs to Victor Hugo's apartment without mustering courage to ring the bell. The jibes of his companions have sent him up a third time. He has not emerged. They are wondering if he has died of fright.

We enter — you and I — and find Théophile sitting on the stairs.

Regarding the interview that follows, there is much we'd like to relate; but perhaps nobody would listen to us if we let our tale grow too long.

We'll make just one more call on Victor — and forego, for the present, those strolls about Paris we'd delight to share with him if this were a more leisurely age and writers didn't have to purvey tabloid sizes.

It was doubtless when he was making studies for his play of "Marion Delorme", which he wrote in 1829 when he was living in rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, that Hugo became enamored of the house in the place Royale which, despite its many distinguished occupants and associations, was destined to become the Musée Victor-Hugo and the shrine of Hugo lovers. (They call it place des Vosges now, and his house is number 6.)

The first tenant of that house was the Maréchal de Lavardin who was with Henry IV when the latter was assassinated. (We seem to feel the consternation that reigned here when the Maréchal returned from that fateful ride.) In Marion Delorme's day, all the masculine part (at least) of the great world came here. Alfred de Vigny, who was one of the little group to whom Hugo read his drama when it was just finished, had already used this house in the place Royale as a background in his novel "Cinq-Mars", published in 1826. (Yet Dumas did not scorn to use it again, nearly twenty years later, when he gave it to Lady de Winter for her mansion, and hither brought D'Artagnan to discover the brand on Milady's shoulder.)

It is a January morning in 1833 when we come to this historic house to call on Hugo, who has been living here since the preceding October. On our way in we meet a charmingly pretty young actress and artists' model, coming out. Her name is Juliette Drouet (a stage name it is, but the only one by which anybody knows her) and she is twenty seven years old. When she was nineteen, she sat to Pradier for the statue of Strasbourg which has been the focus of so much emotion in the place de la Concorde. She is not greatly gifted as an actress, but she manages to get small parts at the Odéon and the Théâtre Porte Saint Martin. And hearing that M. Hugo is about to have a new play, "Lucretia Borgia", produced at the latter theatre, she has called on him to entreat the leading part.

We find that Victor, who was not very susceptible to actresses, has been strangely moved by this one. But we do not suspect that in little more than a fortnight he will be deep in that affair with her which lasted till he died, more than half a century later.

When we leave the house we seem to see, beneath the arcades that Henry IV ordered because he had loved such shady shelters in his sunny southland, the poor girl of the streets, roughly treated by a well dressed man — an incident which gave birth to "Fantine" and started "Les Miserables" to germinate.

These are just hints at what one may do who has a fancy for associating with Victor Hugo — or with any other of the Olympians — in Paris. And witness how we, while Gautier sits awebound on the stairs, walk right in and are not afraid of anything.

I don't know how it is with *you*. But for me, who once after a long journey thither circled round and round the house and garden of Henri Fabre (near Orange, in Provence) without mustering courage to ring the gate bell, it is a great thing to be so temerarious with the gods of yesteryears.