

A New Translation of Hugo *

IN attempting an English version of the romances of Victor Hugo, the publishers have had to face the task of chasing, capturing and impaling that most elusive and volatile Ariel of tongues, the French language. To bottle Molière's speech is an undertaking from which the most daring trans-

* Notre Dame de Paris. By Victor Hugo. Tr. by Isabel F. Hapgood. 2 vols. \$3. By Order of the King. Same translator. 2 vols. \$3. The Tollers of the Sea. By Victor Hugo. Same translator. 2 vols. \$3. Ninety-Three. By Victor Hugo. Tr. by Mrs. Nathan H. Dole. 2 vols. \$3. History of a Crime. By Victor Hugo. Tr. by Huntington Smith. 2 vols. \$3. New York: T. Y. Crowell & Co.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

lator might well draw back; and when the task is that of Englishing some two thousand pages from the creator of 'Les Misérables,' it calls for a Hercules among interpreters. The work has not fallen entirely to one pair of hands, however, but has been apportioned among Miss Isabel F. Hapgood, Mrs. Nathan H. Dole and Mr. Huntington Smith. The lion's share has fallen to Miss Hapgood, whose Russian work is so well-known, and her name appears upon the title-pages of the translations of 'Notre Dame de Paris,' 'L'Homme qui Rit' and 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer.' To Mr. Smith has been assigned the 'History of a Crime,' and to Mrs. Dole the 'Ninety-Three.'

Miss Hapgood's work is remarkable chiefly for its painstaking, almost finical, accuracy and adherence to the text. So painfully literal is she at times in the rendering of a phrase or devious turn of thought, that sometimes the result is a statement so bold and lacking in Hugoan picturesqueness, that it might serve as a model for a writer on trigonometry, while at other times the phrasing is almost bathetic. Still, she must be accorded the virtue of consistency, and were a test to be made by comparative parallelisms of the French and the English, it would only exemplify with what conscientiousness and scrupulous nicety she has performed her task. Yet, oddly enough, Miss Hapgood is the only one of the trio who deviates from an exact rendering of the titles, as she has done with 'L'Homme qui Rit' ('By Order of the King'), when exactitude, it seems to us, would have been better for every reason. Mr. Smith shows himself to be a thoughtful reader and possessed of a not unsympathetic touch, and he has imparted to his translation a more vigorous swing than his collaborators. Mrs. Dole, too, has freed herself now and again from the trammels of literalness, and has infused into her work a dash and freedom that is lacking in Miss Hapgood's. Her rendition is therefore the more luminous. As an example of their respective methods of treating their subjects, we select two of the best known and most striking incidents in the romances under consideration. The first is from the story of Claude Frollo's fall from the towers of Notre Dame, as Miss Hapgood has it.

A fall from such a height is seldom perpendicular. The Archdeacon, launched into space, fell at first head foremost, with outspread hands; then he whirled over and over many times; the wind blew him upon the roof of a house, when the unfortunate man began to break up. Nevertheless he was not dead when he reached there. The bell-ringer saw him still endeavor to cling to a gable with his nails; but the surface sloped too much and he had no more strength. He slid rapidly along the roof like a loosened tile, and dashed upon the pavement. There he no longer moved.

The following excerpt from 'Ninety-Three' is taken from the vivid chapters on the runaway cannon, as Mrs. Dole renders them.

A soul—strange to say, one would have thought the cannon also had a soul; but a soul full of hatred and rage. This sightless thing seemed to have eyes. The monster appeared to be in wait for the man. . . . It was a strange, gigantic insect of metal, having or seeming to have the will of a demon. For a moment this colossal locust would beat against the low ceiling overhead, then it would come down on its four wheels like a tiger on its four paws and begin to run at the man. He, supple, nimble, expert, writhed away like an adder from all these lightning movements. He avoided a collision, but the blows which he parried fell against the vessel, and continued their work of destruction.

We do not mean, however, to cavil at the method employed in carrying out the undertaking, for as a whole, whatever its minor faults, it has been faithfully and thoroughly done. Any endeavor to set before the public comprehensive and trustworthy editions of such masters as Hugo deserves commendation, and these five romances, with 'Les Misérables,' which preceded them from the same house, furnish us in a mother-tongue with the best fruits of one phase of the Protean intellect which informed them. Intelligent study of Victor Hugo's work is an education in itself. Profound as the sea, whose beauty and majesty he has caught in all her varying moods and pictured as perhaps none other

has ever done, he is at times as shallow as the shoals along her shore. Consumed by an egotism that amounted to an apotheosis of self, yet burning with a love for his kind that was almost divine; soaring with eagle-sweep at times, till the eye is dazzled in following him, yet again fluttering to the ground with the impotence of a fledgling,—brilliant, daring, impetuous, heroic, yet erratic, selfish, intractable, despotic,—how posterity may construe this colossus of inconsistencies we cannot predict, but by the consensus of present opinion, his place is among the giants.