

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

VICTOR HUGO

*The Hunchback
of Notre-Dame*

Complete and Unabridged



THE HUNCHBACK
OF NOTRE-DAME
(Notre-Dame de Paris)

Victor Hugo



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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INTRODUCTION

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE-DAME (*Notre-Dame de Paris*) is a dramatic historical romance set in medieval times. Victor Hugo's first great novel, it is centred on the life of the great Gothic cathedral of Notre-Dame on the Ile de la Cité in the heart of Paris – the focal point of French pride, religious life and ceremonial occasion. The date is 1482, the year before Louis XI died. The principal characters are the beautiful La Esmerelda, a gypsy dancer, who is in love with Captain Phoebus; Claude Frollo, the hypocritical and demented archdeacon, whose evil passion, fuelled by celibacy, for La Esmerelda causes him to denounce her as a witch; and, most famous of all, the hero Quasimodo, the 'Hunchback of Notre-Dame', a deformed bell-ringer and creature of the cathedral, whose devotion to La Esmerelda saves her, for a time, when she is confronted by a mob and seeks refuge and protection in the belfry. La Esmerelda is however doomed to meet a tragic end, while Quasimodo exacts a terrible revenge on Frollo on the pinnacles of Notre-Dame itself.

Hugo was a champion, along with Charles Nodier and Madame de Staël, of Gothic architecture and Notre-Dame, begun in the rounded Romanesque period and finished in the pointed Gothic style, provided him with wonderful scope for the encyclopedic digressions for which he is famous, as well as a chance to expound his philosophical beliefs about democracy and evolutionary cultural advance. Hugo began writing *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* on 25 July 1830. Two days later there was revolution on the streets of Paris, and on 28 July his fifth child, called Adèle after his wife, was born. Charles X was driven out in the revolution and the more constitutional Louis-Philippe came to the throne. Chateaubriand's rather apposite comment was that Paris had seen 'yet another government fling itself from the towers of Notre-Dame'. After this interruption, Hugo began writing again in earnest in September and the book, of almost 200,000 words, was finished in just four and a half months, by mid-January 1831. Critics such as Prosper Mérimée and Goethe were not kind, but the public responded enthusiastically and 3,100 copies were

sold in the eighteen months following publication – a good seller by the standards of the time. *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* first appeared in an English translation in August 1833. The novel had its own beneficial effect on the cathedral of Notre-Dame for, as the current *Michelin Guide* to Paris puts it: 'Gradually the building began to fall into disrepair, until in 1841, in accordance with popular feeling roused by the Romantic Movement and Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, the July Monarchy ordered that the cathedral be restored.' The novel is the subject of a classic, black-and-white film starring Charles Laughton.

Victor Marie Hugo (1802-85) is one of the greatest writers in the illustrious pantheon of French poets, playwrights and novelists. He was born at Besançon in eastern France, the third son of a major in Napoleon's army. Hugo père went on to become a general and was created a count. Despite the peripatetic nature of life in army families, the young Victor Marie received a good education in Italy, Spain and Paris. His literary talent showed itself at an early age and he won a prize for a poem at school. In 1819 he co-founded the review – Le Conservateur littéraire – which established him as a leading figure in the Romantic movement in France. Victor Hugo's output was prodigious, ranging from twenty volumes of poetry, ten plays and nine novels to a huge corpus of general writing on a wide variety of issues. His political creed was liberal and he was a firm believer in republicanism, universal suffrage and free education for all. Despite his republicanism, Hugo maintained a personal friendship with Louis-Philippe and honours were heaped upon him – Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (1837), election to the Académie française (1841) and creation as a Père de France, equivalent to being elevated to the House of Lords in Britain (1845). Following the revolutions which shook France and much of continental Europe in 1848, Hugo became a member of the Constituent Assembly. However, he was a noted critic of the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon and he was forced into exile in Brussels, Jersey and latterly at Hauteville House in Guernsey where he remained with his wife Adèle and family (with his mistress Juliet Drouet nearby) for fourteen years. Swinburne described Hugo as 'the greatest writer born in the nineteenth century' while the frequently unsympathetic critic W.E. Henley opined that he was 'far and away the greatest artist in words that modern France has seen'. Hugo returned to Paris from exile in Guernsey in 1870, again serving as a deputy, and later becoming a senator in the Third Republic. His funeral was an occasion of great pomp and ceremony, his body lying in state beneath the Arc de Triomphe prior to burial in the Panthéon.

FURTHER READING

A. Maurois: *A Biography of Victor Hugo* 1956

Also studies by E. M. Grant (1945), R. B. Grant (1968) and
J. P. Houston (1974)

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THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE-DAME

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

The Great Hall

ONE MORNING, three hundred and forty-eight years, six months and nineteen days ago, the Parisians were awakened by a grand peal from all the bells, within the triple enclosure of the City, the University and the Town.

Yet the 6th of January, 1482, was not a day of which history has preserved any record. There was nothing remarkable in the event that so early in the morning set in commotion the bells and the bourgeois of Paris. It was neither a sudden attack made by Picards or by Burgundians, nor a shrine carried in procession, nor a student fight in the city of Laas; nor the entry of 'our most dread lord the King,' nor even a goodly stringing up of thieves, male and female, on the Place de la Justice. Nor was it a sudden arrival, so common in the fifteenth century, of some ambassador and his train, all belaced and beplumed. Only about two days ago, indeed, the last cavalcade of this kind, Flemish envoys commissioned to conclude the marriage treaty between the young dauphin and Margaret of Flanders, had made entry into Paris, to the great annoyance of Cardinal Bourbon. To please the king, his Eminence had undertaken to give gracious reception to the rough crowd of Flemish burgomasters, and to entertain them at his Hôtel de Bourbon with a 'very fine morality, burletta and farce,' whilst a beating rain was all the time drenching his magnificent tapestries at his portals.

But on this 6th of January, what 'set in motion the whole *populaire* of Paris,' as Jehan of Troyes, the old chronicler, phrases it, was the fact of its being a double holiday, united since time immemorial – the Epiphany, or Feast of the Kings, and the *Fête des Fous*, or Feast of the Fools. To celebrate such a day there was to be a bonfire kindled on the Place de Grève, a maypole raised at the Chapelle de Braque, and a mystery performed in the Palace of Justice. Proclamation had been made the evening before, to the sound of the trumpet, in all the public

squares by the provost's men in fine coats of purple camlet, with great white crosses on the breast.

Crowds of people had accordingly been flocking all the morning, their houses and shops shut up, from all quarters of the town towards one of the three places appointed. Everyone had made his selection – the bonfire, the maypole, or the mystery. Thanks to the good common sense so characteristic of the Parisian sight-seers, the greater part of the multitude directed their steps either towards the bonfire, which was quite in season, or towards the mystery which was to be performed in the Grande Salle, or great hall of the Palace of Justice, well roofed and well sheltered – wisely leaving the poor, ill-garlanded maypole to shiver all alone under a January sky in the cemetery of the Chapelle de Braque.

The greatest crowds, however, were to be found on the approaches to the Palace of Justice, because it was known that the Flemish ambassadors, who had arrived two days previously, intended to be present, not only at the performance of the mystery, but also at the election of the Fool's Pope, which was likewise to take place in the Great Hall.

On that day it was no easy matter to make one's way into the Great Hall, then and long afterwards considered to be the largest covered apartment in the world (Sauval, the Paris historian, it is hardly necessary to state, had not yet measured the great hall in the chateau of Montargis). The open square in front of the Palace, thronged with people, presented to the gazers from the windows the aspect of a sea into which five or six streets, like the mouths of so many rivers, every moment discharged fresh floods of human heads. The waves of this deluge, constantly increasing, broke against the angles of the houses that projected here and there, like so many promontories, into the irregularly shaped basin of the square. In the centre of the high Gothic façade of the Palace, the great triple-faced staircase, continually ascended and descended by the restless multitudes, with currents breaking on the intermediate landing or streaming over the two lateral slopes, flowed like a waterfall tumbling into a lake. In the square itself, the noise made by the shouting, laughing, tramping of these thousands of feet, great as it was, was redoubled every now and then, as something occurred to check, disturb or eddy the stream that surged towards the great staircase. At one time it was an archer clubbing somebody; at another it was the prancing horse of a provost's sergeant kicking right and left – the regular good old way to establish order, handed down from the *provostry* to the *constabulary*, from the *constabulary* to the *marshalsea*, and from the *marshalsea* to the *gendarmerie* of our Paris of today.

At the doors, at the windows, at the skylights, and on the roofs, swarmed thousands of good-natured *bourgeois* faces, looking calmly and quietly at the Palace, at the crowd, and asking nothing more to look at; for many honest Paris folks are quite content with gazing at the gazers, and can even regard a wall with intense interest when they think there is something going on behind it.

If we, men of 1830, could possibly mingle in imagination with those Parisians of the fifteenth century, and enter with them, pulled, elbowed, crushed, into the Great Hall, that proved so small on this 6th of January, 1482, we should witness a spectacle at once interesting and charming, where everything would be so very old as to appear perfectly new.

If the reader consent, we shall cross the threshold of the Great Hall together. Let me endeavour to reproduce the impression made on his senses as we struggle through the surging crowd in frock, smock, jerkin, doublet, and every conceivable dress of the period.

At first our ears are stunned with the buzzing, our eyes are dazzled with the glare. Over our heads is the roof, consisting of a double vault of pointed arches, lined with carved wood, painted light blue, and sprinkled with golden *fleurs-de-lis*. Under our feet the marble floor, like a checkerboard, is alternated with black and white squares. A few paces from us stands an enormous pillar, then another, then a third, seven altogether, extending the whole length of the Hall, and supporting the central line that separates the double vaults of the roof. Around the first four are dealers' stands glittering with glass and tinsel ware; around the other three are oaken benches, worn and polished by the gowns of the layers and the breeches of those that employ them. Everywhere around the building, along the lofty walls, between the doors, between the windows, between the pillars, appears an interminable line of the statues of the kings of France, from Pharamond down – the sluggards, with arms pendent and eyes downcast, the warriors, with arms and heads boldly raised on high. In the long Gothic windows, the stained glass shines with a thousand colours. In the wide entrances the doors are richly and delicately carved. Everywhere all around – on vaults, pillars, walls, lintels, panels, doors, and statues – glows a rich tint of blue and gold, already a little faded, but even seventy years later, in spite of dust and cobwebs, Du Breul, the historian, will see enough to admire it from tradition.

If the reader now represents to himself this vast hall, visible in the pale light of a January day, filled with a motley and noisy mob drifting along the walls and eddying around the seven pillars, he will have some faint idea of the picture in general, whose curious details we shall now

try to indicate more precisely.

It is certain, that if Ravaillac had not assassinated Henry IV, no documents of his trial would have been deposited in the Palace registry, no accomplices would have been interested in causing the said documents to disappear, no incendiaries would have been obliged, lacking a better method, to burn the registry in order to burn the documents, and to burn the Palace in order to burn the registry. Therefore there would have been no fire of 1618. The old Palace would be still standing, with its Grand Hall, and I could say to my reader, 'Go and look at it' – which would be a great convenience for us both; saving me from writing, him from reading, my imperfect description. Which goes to prove the novel truth: the results of great events are beyond calculation.

It is true that it is very possible that Ravaillac did not have any accomplices; secondly, that his accomplices, if by chance he had any, had nothing to do with the conflagration of 1618. There are two other explanations, both very plausible. According to the first it was set on fire and consumed by a shooting star, a foot wide and 2 cubit high, that fell on the Palace, as everyone knows, on the 7th of March after midnight. For the second is quoted the quatrain of Théophile:

Certes, ce fut un triste jeu
Quand à Paris Dame Justice,
Pour avoir mangé trop d'épice,
Se mit tout le palais en feu. *

But whatever we may think of this triple explanation, political, physical and poetical, one fact is unfortunately but too true – the burning itself. Thanks to this catastrophe, thanks especially to the various successive restorations which effectually finished up whatever little the conflagration had spared, we have hardly any remains today of this first abode of the kings of France, of this palace, the elder sister of the Louvre, already so old in the times of Philip the Fair that traces could then be found of the magnificent buildings erected by King Robert and described by Helgaldus. Almost every portion of it has disappeared. What has become of the chamber of the chancellery, where Saint Louis 'consummated his marriage'? The garden where he administered justice 'clad in a cotte of camlet, a surcoat of tiretaine without sleeves, and over all a mantle of black sendal, reclining upon carpets by the side

* It was certainly poor fun when Lady Justice set fire to her palace in Paris just because she had eaten too many sugar-plums (bribes).

of Joinville?' Where is the chamber of the Emperor Sigismond? that of Charles IV? that of John Lackland? Where is the staircase whence Charles VI proclaimed his gracious amnesty? Where are the flagstones on which Marcel murdered, before the young dauphin's eyes, the Marshals of Normandy and of Champagne? Where is the gate at which Anti-pope Benedict's bull was torn to pieces, and from which those who had brought it started on their procession through Paris, coped and mitred in derision, to make *amende honorable*? Where is the Great Hall itself with its gildings, its azure, its pointed arches, its statues, its pillars, its vast vaulted roofs all checkered and variegated with carvings? and the golden chamber? Where is the marble lion, kneeling at the gate, like the lions before Solomon's throne, head clown, tail between legs, in the attitude of humility that force should present when before Justice? Where are the beautiful doors, the splendid windows? Where the chiselled ironwork that threw Biscornette into despair? Where is Du Hancy's delicate cabinet-work? What has time, what have men done with these wonders? What has been given to us in exchange for all this Gallic history, for all this Gothic art? For art, we have the heavy flat arches of De Brosse, the tasteless architect of the portal of St Gervais; and for history, we have the twaddling Souvenirs of the Big Pillar, still resounding with the Patrus' small gossip. Neither being much to speak of, let us return to the story taking place in the real Great Hall of the real old Palace.

The two ends of this gigantic parallelogram were occupied differently. At the west end could be seen the famous Marble Table, said to be of one single block, and so long, wide and high that 'no other such slice of marble was ever seen in the world,' as is recorded by the old chroniclers in a style that would have given an appetite to Gargantua. The east end contained the little chapel lately built by Louis XI, in which he had himself sculptured in stone kneeling before the Virgin, and to which he had also brought, without concerning himself with their two niches thus left vacant in the file of royal statues, the statues of Charlemagne and Saint Louis – two saints whom he supposed to be very much in favour in Heaven as kings of France. The little chapel itself, in all the charms of newness – it had hardly been built six years – was characterised all through by the exquisite taste in delicate architecture, wonderful sculpture and fine, deep carving, which, ending our Gothic era, is perpetuated to the middle of the sixteenth century in the fairy-like fancies of the Renaissance. The little *rosace à jour*, in particular, a wheel-shaped window over the portal, was a masterpiece of such lightness and elegance that it could be called a star of lace.

Towards the middle of the Hall, opposite the main entrance, a

balcony covered with gold brocade, backed by the wall, and accessible by a private entrance from a corridor opening into the Gilded Chamber, had been erected for the special honour of the Flemish envoys and the other grand personages invited to the representation of the mystery.

This entertainment was to be given, according to ancient customs, on the Marble Table, where all the preparations had been made since the morning. The thick marble slab, scratched by the heels of the Basochians – a famous guild of lawyers' clerks – supported a solid construction of wood, sufficiently elevated, whose upper surface, high enough to be visible from the farthest parts of the hall, was to serve as the stage, while the interior masked with curtains, was to be the actors' dressing-room. A ladder, standing artlessly outside, was to connect dressing-room and stage, and help exits and entrances by its solid rungs. By this ladder and this only, actor the most unexpected, scene the most entrancing effect the most telling, was to gain access to the stage. Innocent yet venerable infancy of the mechanical resources of theatrical art!

At each of the four corners of the Marble Table stood a sergeant of the bailiff of the Palace to preserve order. The regular guardians of the people's amusements, whether on holidays or days of execution, there they now stood, stiff and motionless as statues.

The play was not to begin until the great clock of the Palace had struck the last stroke announcing noon. This was, no doubt, rather late for a mystery, but as ambassadors were to be present their convenience was to be regarded.

The most of the crowd had been waiting all the morning. A good many of these honest sight-seers had shivered on the grand staircase at daybreak; some even insisted that they had passed the night close to the great doorway so as to make sure of being the first to enter. The crowd, continually increasing, became by degrees too great for the room and, like a river overflowing its banks, began to rise along the walls, to swell around the pillars, and even inundate the window-sills, the tops of the columns, the cornices and every projection of the sculptures. As a matter of course, impatience, discomfort, weariness, the unrestraint of the occasion, the quarrels continually springing up from unavoidable causes – a sharp elbow, – a heavy heel, – the long day, – all these sources of discontent at last began to tell. The noise made by a crowd so squeezed, packed, crushed, trodden on, smothered, began to assume a tone of decided acrimony. Complaints and imprecations began to be plainly heard, against the Flemings, the Provost of the Merchants, Cardinal Bourbon, the Governor of the Palace Margaret of Austria, the