

BÉRANGER:

TWO HUNDRED

OF HIS

LYRICAL POEMS,

DONE INTO ENGLISH VERSE.

BY

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## APPENDIX.

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### BÉRANGER'S PREFACE TO HIS EDITION OF 1833.

IN the very act of taking leave of the public, the acknowledgments which I owe it become more profoundly impressed upon my feelings; and the more vividly do I retrace all the tokens of interest that it has been heaping upon me, through a period of more than twenty years, since it first took cognizance of my name.

Such, indeed, has been its good-will, that it rested only with myself to imbibe a false notion of the merit of my works. I have, however, always preferred attributing my popularity, dearly as I prize it, to the patriotic tendency of my sentiments, to the constancy of my opinions, and, I venture to add, to the disinterested zeal with which I have defended and propagated them.

Let me then be permitted, in a quiet chit-chat, to account with this same public for certain circumstances and impressions peculiar to myself, and connected with the publication of the lyrics, that it has received with so much favor. The detail will be given in such familiar tone, that the public will, at least, therein discover what store I set by its approbation.

And I must commence by speaking of this latest volume.

Each of my publications has been, for myself, the result of a most painful effort. This one alone has caused me more uneasiness than all the others put together. It is the last; and unfortunately it comes too late. It should have made its appearance

immediately after the Revolution of July: my humble mission was then ended. My publishers know why I was not permitted to bring the part I played to an earlier close; henceforward, it is wanting in the interest that, under the reign of legitimacy, it might have possessed. Many of the songs of this new collection belong to a period already long passed away from us; several of them will even stand in need of explanatory notes.

My songs—they are myself. And therefore will the mournful progress of years make itself apparent, just in proportion as the volumes go on increasing—a fact, indeed, that makes me fearful, lest this one seem a very grave affair. If, for this, many persons will reproach me, some, I trust, will be all the more obliged. They will recognize in the spirit of this present epoch, no less than in my own age, sufficient cause for my choice of subjects being increasingly serious and philosophical. The songs, to which I have given birth since 1830, seem, in truth, rather to link themselves with questions of social interest, than with purely political disquisitions. And at this need any one be surprised? Once granted that the principle of government, for which we have contended, has been again enforced, and it is in the course of things that intelligent minds should feel the need of applying it, practically, to the benefit of the masses. The good of humanity has been the dream of my life. For this I am, without doubt, indebted to the class in which I was born, and to the practical education which I therein received: many remarkable circumstances must, however, have conspired to render it permissible for a writer of songs to mix himself up with high questions of social amelioration. Happily, a host of men, young and full of courage, enlightened and zealous, have, of late, widely opened up these subjects, and have indeed rendered them almost trite. Some of my compositions will, I hope, prove to these lofty spirits my sympathy with their generous enterprise.

Of the songs that belong to the epoch of the Restoration I have nothing to say, unless it be that they issued all entire from the prison of *La Force*. I should scarcely have cared to print

them, did they not complete that sort of lyrical *mémoire*, which I have been publishing since 1815. Besides, I have no fear of being reproached with only making a show of courage, when the enemy has disappeared. It may even be noticed that my imprisonment, though sufficiently long, by no means soured me; for it is a fact, that I then thought I saw the approaching accomplishment of my prophecies made against the Bourbons: and this is a fit time for a word of explanation, touching the petty war that I have waged against the princes of the fallen branch.

My enthusiastic and unwavering admiration for the genius of the Emperor, all the idolatry with which he inspired the people, who never ceased to see in him the representative of a triumphant equality—this admiration, this idolatry, which ought, some day, to have made of Napoleon the noblest object of my Muse, never blinded me to the continually increasing despotism of the Empire. In 1814, I only saw, in the fall of the Colossus, the miseries of a country which the Republic had taught me to adore. On the return of the Bourbons, whom I regarded with indifference, their weakness seemed as though it ought to render easy the restoration of the national liberties. We were assured that with these the Bourbons would identify themselves. Despite the Charter, I had small faith in the promise: but it was possible to have fastened these liberties upon them. As for the people, from whom I have never cut myself adrift—after the fatal winding up of such protracted wars, their feelings did not at first appear to me as decidedly adverse to the masters who had just been dug up for their benefit. Then it was that I hymned the glory of France; I hymned it in the presence of foreigners, throwing, nevertheless, some ridicule on that epoch, without, however, being yet in open arms against the restored Royalty.

I have been reproached with opposing the Bourbons in a spirit of bitter hatred. What I have just said is a reply to that accusation—one that, I am sure, few persons now-a-days would take the trouble to repel, and which formerly I received in silence.

The illusion did not last long; a few months sufficed for al-

lowing all parties to understand each other, and for opening the least clear sighted eyes—I speak only of the *governed*.

The return of the Emperor soon came, dividing France into two camps, and constituting the Opposition which triumphed in 1830. It raised up again the national standard, and restored to it its future career, in spite of Waterloo and of the disasters which it brought upon us. During the “hundred days,” the popular enthusiasm did not mislead me: I saw that Napoleon was unable to govern, constitutionally—it was not for such a purpose that he had been bestowed upon the world. \* To the best of my ability I gave utterance to my fears, in the song entitled, *la Politique de Lise*,\* the form of which has so little to do with its real meaning. As my first collection proves, I had not yet dared to let song take a loftier flight; but her wings were sprouting. It was easier for me to hand over those Frenchmen to ridicule, who blushed not to invoke, with unholy vows, the triumph and the return of foreigners in arms. I had shed tears at their first entry into Paris; I did the same, at the second: there are, perchance, some persons who can accustom themselves to such sights.

I became, then, perfectly convinced that, even if the Bourbons were what their partisans still dared to represent them, it was no longer possible for them to govern France, nor for France to instil into them those liberal principles, which, since 1814, had resumed all the ascendancy that they had lost under the “reign of terror,” the Directorial anarchy, and the glory of the Empire. For this conviction, which has never since left me, I was originally less indebted to the calculations of my own reason, than to the instinct of the people. That instinct I have studied with a religious carefulness, on the occurrence of every great event, and I almost always waited until its manifestations of feeling seemed to coincide with my own reflections, ere I made these the rule of my conduct, in the part which the Opposition of that day appointed me to play. The People—they are my Muse.

\* “A political treatise for the use of Liz,” No. 46 in the foregoing collection.—*Translator*.

It was this Muse that made me resist those pretended sages, whose counsels, founded on chimerical hopes, pursued me many a time and oft. The two publications, that brought upon me judicial condemnation, exposed me to finding myself abandoned by many political friends. Of this I ran the risk. The approbation of the masses still clung to me, and the friends came back.

I hold to having it thoroughly understood that at no epoch of my life, as a song-writer, did I give any one the right to say to me, "Do, or do not do that; go, or go not so far!" When I sacrificed the humble appointment that I owed to M. Arnault alone, and which was then my only resource, certain persons, to whom I have continued to feel profoundly grateful, made me advantageous offers that I might, without blushing, have accepted: but their political position was so influential, that they must sometimes have stood in my way. My independent humor resisted the seductions of friendship; and I was thus both surprised and vexed, when pointed out as the pensioner of such or such a one, of Peter or of Paul, of James or of Philip. If this could have been the case, I should have made no mystery of it. It is because I know what influence a feeling of gratitude exercises upon me, that I have feared to contract such obligations, even to men whom I esteem the most.

There is one, whom my readers will at once have named—M. Lafitte. Possibly, his entreaties might at length have got the better of my refusals, if misfortunes, that all France has deplored, had not happened to put an end to the unwearying generosity of this great and excellent citizen, the only man of our days who has known how to render wealth popular.

The Revolution of July was ready also to make my fortune; I treated it as a power that might take some caprices into its head, which it were well to be in a position to resist. All, or nearly all my friends became members of the ministry; there are one or two of them still hanging on to that slippery climbing-pole. I am glad to believe that they are hooked up to it by the skirts, in spite of all their efforts to descend. I might, there-

fore, have had my share in the distribution of appointments; but unfortunately I have no relish for sinecures, and all compulsory work has become insupportable to me, still perhaps excepting that of a copying clerk. Backbiters have said that I made a parade of honesty. Fie! I did but parade my indolence. This failing has been my substitute for many qualifications; and I recommend it therefore to not a few of our honest men. It lays one open, nevertheless, to some singular reproaches. It is to this laziness, so agreeable, that certain rigid censors have attributed the distance at which I held myself from those of my honorable friends who had the misfortune to get into power. Doing too much honor to what they are pleased to call my clear head, and too forgetful of the infinite distance between plain good sense and the science of state affairs, the censors pretend that my counsels might have enlightened more than one of the ministers. To believe them—ensconced behind the velvet arm-chairs of our statesmen, I might have conjured the winds, sent the storms to the right about, and set France swimming in a very ocean of delights. We might all be possessed of liberty, to re-sell, or rather to bestow, since we know not yet exactly its value. Ah, gentlemen, you, my two or three friends, who take a song-writer for a magician, have you never been told that power is a bell, that hinders those who ring a peal on it, from hearing any other sound? Without doubt, ministers sometimes consult those whom they have at their elbows; consulting is a mode of speaking of one's self, that is very rarely neglected. But it would not suffice to consult, in good faith, those who would be apt to give advice after the same fashion. Action must follow; and for this, characteristics are requisite. The purest intentions, the most enlightened patriotism do not always bestow these. Who has not seen exalted personages go away from a counsellor under the influence of a bold resolve, and a moment later, return to him, from I know not what charmed spot, betraying all the embarrassment that arises from having belied the wisest resolutions? "Oh!" say they, "we won't be caught again! what work it is!" The one



who has most sense of shame adds, "I should just like to see you in my place." When a minister makes that remark, rest assured that he has no judgment left. There is one, however, and one only, who, without having lost his senses, has often repeated this expression, in the most perfect good faith; but then, he never addressed it to a friend.

I have known but one man, from whom, if he had come into power, I could not possibly have kept myself aloof. With his imperturbable good sense, the more fit he was to give the soundest advice, the more did his diffidence of himself cause him to seek that of persons whose judgment he had previously ascertained. His determination once taken, he followed it out with firmness, but without vamping. If he had received the idea of it from any one else, which was rarely the case, he did not forget to give that other the credit of it. This man was Manuel, to whom France yet owes a monument.

Under the honeyed administration of M. de Martignac, when, weary of so long a struggle against legitimacy, several of our political leaders were laboring at the famous fusion of parties, one of them exclaimed, "How fortunate it is for us that that man is dead!" a funeral eulogium telling of all that the living Manuel would not have done, at that epoch of hypocritical promises and fatal concessions!

I, for my part, can assert what he would have done during the Three Days. The rue d'Artois, the Hôtel de Ville, and the Barricades would have seen him, each in turn, planning here, and fighting there: but he would have commenced with the Barricades, for his spirit of the old soldier would have felt more at home there, in the midst of all the gallant populace of Paris. Yes, he would have done his work, at the very cradle of our Revolution. Certes, no one would have had to say of him—as they did say of some—that they are like the registrars of the municipality, they fancy themselves the fathers of the children, whose certificates of birth they have only filled up.

It is probable that Manuel would have been forced to bear a

part in the affairs of the new Government. I would have followed him, with my eyes shut, through all the pathways which it might have been requisite for him to take, in order to reach again, and speedily without doubt, the modest nook that we shared together. A patriot above all things, he would have returned to private life, without showing any ill-humor, and without any covert designs. At this time of day, he would probably have still belonged to the Opposition, but without feeling any personal hatred, since the possession of power makes one indulgent, but also without despairing of the country, for he had unbounded confidence in the people.

The welfare of France was his unceasing occupation; and could he have promoted that welfare through other means than his own, his delight would not have been in any degree diminished. I have never met with a man less ambitious, even of celebrity. The simplicity of his habits made him long for country life. So soon as he was assured that France no longer needed him, I hear him exclaim: "Come, let's away, and pass our time in the country!"

His political friends did not always thoroughly appreciate him; but if any embarrassment or any danger arose, they would all flock to him, trusting to his immovable sagacity and his unshaken courage. His genius was in this respect akin to their friendship—it was at the very moment of a crisis that he possessed it in all its fulness, and then it was that many makers of phrases, who bear the name of orators, bowed the head before him.

Such was the man, whom I never should have quitted, had he even been compelled to grow old in a position of eminence. Far from him the thought of muffling me up in any title, or official employment; he respected my peculiar tastes. Only as a simple volunteer would he have cared to keep me by his side, on the field of his battle against power. And I, in remaining with him, I should at least have been the means of saving for him just so much of his time, as he would have consumed, daily, in visiting

me, if I had been obstinately bent on living in our quiet retreat. In his heart, the loftiest sentiments were united with the gentlest affections; he was no less a tender friend than a devoted citizen.

These latter words will suffice in justification of this digression, which, moreover, cannot be displeasing to honest patriots. They have never more regretted Manuel than since the Revolution of July, despite some folk who, perchance, are whispering very low, "How fortunate for us that the fellow is dead!"

But it is time to cast a general glance upon my lyrics, and I commence by avowing that I anticipate the reproaches, which several amongst them must have brought down upon me, on the part of those rigid censors, who are little disposed to pardon any thing, even in a book which makes no pretence of being a handbook for the instruction of young ladies. I shall only observe, if not as a defence, at least as a palliation, that those songs, the frolicsome ebullitions of youth and of relapses into it, have been exceedingly useful, as associates lent to grave refrains and political couplets. Without their help, I am inclined to believe that these latter would not have been enabled to proceed so far; nor to descend so low; nor even to soar so high—let this last expression scandalize, as it may, your drawing-room virtues.

Some of my songs have also been pronounced impious—the poor little dears!—by Messrs. the King's Proctors, the Attorneys General, and their substitutes, who are all a very Religious set of persons—in Court. On this point, I can but repeat what has been said a hundred times. When, in our days, Religion fashions herself into a political instrument, she exposes herself to finding her sacred character unrecognized: the most tolerant become intolerant of her; believers, who put faith in things very different from those that she then teaches, proceed sometimes, by way of reprisal, to attack her even in her sanctuary. I, who am one of these believers, have never proceeded to such extremes: I have contented myself with raising a laugh against the livery of Catholicism. Is this impiety?

After all, very many of my songs are but the suggestions of inward feeling, or the whims of a wandering mind : these are my especial pets—and that is just all the good I choose to say of them to the public. I will only again observe that, in throwing much variety into my collections, those last mentioned cannot have been altogether useless, in promoting the success of the political lyrics.

As for these, the latest—to believe only the most decided opponents of the opinions which I have defended for fifteen years—they have exercised a powerful influence on the masses, the only fulcrum of the lever through which, henceforth, great achievements are rendered possible. To the honor of this influence I did not lay claim at the moment of victory : my courage melted away at the shouts to which it gave birth. I believe, in fact, that defeat jumps better with my humor. To-day, then, I venture to claim my share in the triumph of 1830, a triumph that I only knew how to chant, long after its occurrence, and in the face of the funeral honors paid to the citizens to whom we owe it. My farewell song betrays this outbreak of political vanity, aroused doubtless by the flattery which an enthusiastic youth has lavished, and still lavishes upon me. Foreseeing that ere long oblivion will enwrap the songs and the songster, this is an epitaph which I have been willing to prepare for our common tomb.

Despite all that friendship has been enabled to do ; despite commendations the most exalted, and despite the indulgence of the interpreters of public opinion, I have always thought that my name would not survive me, and that my reputation would decline so much the more rapidly, in that it has of necessity been greatly exaggerated by the party interest that hung upon it. Some, from its extent, have predicted its duration ; I myself have made a different estimate, which will be realized by my manner of life, should I grow older, ever so little. " What's the use of telling us this?" some short-sighted persons will observe. It is in order that my country may, above all things, think well of me for having given myself up to that style of poetry, which I believed might be most useful to the cause of liberty, when I could have

essayed a more enduring success in the style that I had originally cultivated.

As to going here into a conscientious examination of these fugitive productions, I confess that my courage fails me. I fear lest I should be taken at my word, if I set about exposing their faults; and that readers should turn a deaf ear to those paternal cajoleries with which I might address my effusions; for, after all, they cannot be entirely devoid of merit. Besides, notwithstanding the kindness with which critics have treated me, it would perhaps be pushing my ingratitude a little too far, thus to take their work out of their hands. I repeat it then; my courage fails me. No one sets fire to his house, until he is insured. What I can say, in advance, to those who constitute themselves the executors of great literary works, is, that I am entirely innocent of those exaggerated eulogiums that have been lavished on me; that never has it happened that I have solicited the smallest favorable notice; that I have even gone so far as to beseech friendly journalists to be for me more sober in their praises; that far from wishing to add buzz to buzz, I have avoided the ovations which augment them; have kept myself aloof from the coteries that propagate them; and have closed my door against the travelling agents of fame, those gentry who undertake to hawk your reputation about, in the Provinces, or even abroad, where they have access to magazines and reviews.

I have never urged my pretensions to a higher place, than is indicated by the title of song-writer, thoroughly convinced that in making it my sole glory to hold fast to this title, to which I owe so much, I am also indebted to it for being criticised with so much indulgence—stationed thereby far away from and far below all the great celebrities of my times. The yearning after this special position has always kept me from any notion of running after literary distinctions, the most coveted, and the most worthy of being so; and this, notwithstanding all the instances of influential and devoted friends, who in the pursuit of these promised me, I am ashamed to say, better success than Benjamin Constant met

with—that great public man, great orator, great writer. Poor Constant !\*

To those who may doubt the sincerity of my words, I would reply, that poetical dreams, the most ambitious, amused my youth, and there is scarcely any one elevated branch of composition, which I have not silently essayed. At twenty, in order to fulfil my unbounded expectations, without the benefit of study, even of that of Latin, I sought to fathom the genius of our tongue and the mysteries of style. The most noble encouragement was at that time given me. I ask you, then, do you believe that nothing of all this is left me, and that to-day, looking back with profound regret on the little that I have effected, I should be disposed to exaggerate its value in my own eyes? I have, indeed, made useful my poet's life, and therein lies my consolation. A man was needed, who could speak to the People the language that they comprehend and love, and who might give rise to imitators, for varying and multiplying versions of the same text. I have been that man. "Liberty and our country," it may be said, "could very well have dispensed with your strains." Liberty and our country are not such grand dames as some suppose: nor do they turn up their noses at the co-operation of any thing that is popular. There would be injustice, it seems to me, in passing any judgment on my songs, in which no allowance should be made me for the influence that they have exercised upon them. There are moments, for a nation, in which the best music is that of the drum that beats the charge.

After all, if it be found that I do rate far too high the importance of my couplets, let the veteran be forgiven for having, on occasion of his retirement, exaggerated just a little, the statement of his services. It may even be observed that I scarcely make allusion to my wounds; nor, besides, does the recompense that I solicit cause the addition of a single centime to the budget.

\* Benjamin Constant did not obtain the place in the French Academy, to which his admirers believed him fully entitled.—*Translator.*

As a professed song-writer, I deem it necessary to reply to a critical remark, that I have seen several times reproduced. I have been reproached with having perverted song itself, in making it take a tone more elevated than that of the Collés, the Panards, and the Désaugiers. It would be in bad taste to contest the point, since therein, to my thinking, consists my success. In the first place, however, I would call to mind, that song, like several other kinds of composition, embraces the whole language, and that, doing so, it is capable of embodying tones the most diametrically opposite. I may add that, since 1789, the People having put their hand to public affairs, their feelings and their patriotic notions have acquired a prodigious development: this our history proves. Song, that has been defined to be "the expression of popular sentiment," must needs, since that time, have elevated itself to the height of those impressions of joy or sorrow, which triumphs or disasters produced upon the most numerous class. Wine and love could now do little more than furnish frameworks for such ideas as might pre-occupy a people excited by the Revolution; and it was no longer with deceived husbands, greedy proctors, and Charon's barks alone, that any one could achieve the honor of being chanted by our artisans and our soldiers around the tables of the common public gardens. Nor was this success yet sufficient; it was essential, further, that the sentiments of the people should be able to find their way into drawing-rooms, with the view of acquiring there an influence that might be beneficial. Thence arose the need of perfecting the style and the poetry of song.

I have not, myself alone, written all the lyrics of the last fifteen or eighteen years. Let all the collections be turned over, and it will be seen that it has been in a style the most grave, that the people have chosen to be addressed on the subject of their disappointments and their expectations. They owe, doubtless, this acquired taste for a lofty diapason to the immortal *Marseillaise*, which has never passed from their memories, as may have been noticed in the Great Week.

Why have our youthful and noble poets disdained the suc-

cesses which, without injury to their other works, the cultivation of song might have secured them? Our cause would have gained by it; and I venture to tell them, that they themselves would have profited by descending sometimes from the heights of our ancient Pindus, which is a little more aristocratic than the genius of our good French tongue would have it. They would, doubtless, have been compelled in a measure to abandon the pomp of terms; but, by way of compensation, they would have accustomed themselves to concentrating their fancies in short compositions, varied, and more or less dramatic—compositions that seize hold upon the instincts of the masses, even when their happiest details pass unnoticed. This would be, according to my notion, to bring poetry down to ordinary range. It may be, perchance, an obligation imposed upon us by the simplicity of our language, though one to which we seldom conform. La Fontaine, however, has sufficiently proved its advantages.

I have sometimes thought, that, if contemporary poets had reflected that henceforth it is for the People that letters must be cultivated, they would have envied me the small palm branch which, failing themselves, I have succeeded in plucking, and which, without doubt, would have been perennial, if interwoven with others more gloriously distinguished. When I say the People, I mean the masses—the lowest class, if so you will have it. They are not alive, indeed, to your refinements of intellect, to your delicacies of taste; so be it—but for that very reason they compel authors to conceive more boldly and more broadly, in order to engage their attention. Suit, therefore, to their strong calibre both your subjects, and your mode of working them out. It is neither abstract ideas, nor types, that they demand. Show them the human heart, naked! Shakspeare, it seems to me, was laid under this fortunate compulsion. But what will become of the perfection of style? Does any one believe that the inimitable verses of Racine, applied to one of our best melodramas, would have prevented its success, even at a minor theatre of the Boulevards?



Invent, imagine, for those who do not all know how to read! write for those who, themselves, know how to write!

Following deep-rooted habits, we still form prejudiced opinions of the People. They only present themselves to us as a mob, gross and incapable of lofty, generous, or tender impressions. Nevertheless, there are worse judges amongst us, even in literary matters, and above all in connection with the drama. If any poetry yet remains in the world, it is, I doubt not, in their class that we must look for it. Let poets, then, essay to write for them: but to do so, the People must be studied. When, perchance, we do make an effort to obtain their applause, we treat them as do those Monarchs, who, on their days of munificence, throw sausages at their heads and drown them in adulterated wine. Look at our painters: if they represent a populace, even in their historical compositions, they seem to take pleasure in making it hideous. Might not this populace say to those who thus depict it—"Is it our fault, if we are miserably ragged, if our features are sunken by want, sometimes even withered by vice? Ay, in these haggard and worn features, has shone out the enthusiasm of courage and of liberty; ay, beneath these rags runs blood that we lavish at our country's voice! You must paint us when our souls are wrought up to excitement: it is then that there is beauty in our looks!" And the people would be right in so saying.

With some few exceptions, all that belongs to letters and to the arts has sprung from the lower classes; whilst we are all too much like *parvenus* desirous of having their origin forgotten, or, if we be content to tolerate our family portraits amongst us, it is on condition that they be made into caricatures. A happy mode of ennobling ourselves, truly! The Chinese are wiser: they enoble their ancestors.

Napoleon, the greatest poet of modern times, and perhaps of all time, when he disengaged himself from the aping of ancient monarchical forms, took measure of the People, as our poets and our artists ought to measure them. He willed, for instance, that

the representations, given gratis, should be composed of the masterpieces of the French drama. Corneille and Molière often did the honors, and it was remarked that their plays were never applauded with nicer discrimination. The great man had early learned, in camps and in the midst of revolutionary troubles, to what degree the instinct of the masses, if skilfully set in motion, may be exalted. One might be tempted to believe, that it was in order to satisfy this instinct, that he himself so wearied out the world. The love for his memory, borne by a new generation that has not known him, proves sufficiently well what power over the People the poetical emotion can obtain. Let our authors, then, labor earnestly for a crowd so well prepared to receive the instruction that it needs. In sympathizing with it, they will end by raising its moral tone; and the more they add to its intelligence, the further will they extend the domain of genius and of glory.

The young will, I trust, forgive me for these observations, which I venture here, only for their benefit. There are few of them ignorant of the interest with which they all inspire me. How many a time have I heard myself reproached for applause bestowed on their most audacious innovations! Could I do otherwise than applaud, even if I blamed them slightly? In my garret, at their age, under the reign of the Abbé Delille, I had myself projected the scaling of many a barrier. A voice, I know not whence, cried to me—"No; the Latins and the Greeks themselves should not serve for models: they are torches; learn how to use them!" Already had the literary and poetical portions of the admirable works of M. de Chateaubriand snatched me from the leading-strings of the Le Batteuxs and the La Harpes—a service that I have never forgotten.

I confess, however, that I should not have been willing, at a later period, to see a return to the dead language of Ronsard, the most classical of our antique authors; I should not, above all, have consented to any turning of the back upon our age of enfranchisement, only for the purpose of rummaging amid the winding-sheets

of the Middle Age, unless it were to measure and to weigh the chains, with which the great Barons loaded those poor serfs, our forefathers. I was wrong, perhaps, after all. It was when, across the Atlantic, he believed that he was steering towards Asia, the cradle of the ancient world, that Columbus discovered a new one. Courage, then, O youthful race! You have some grounds for your boldness; but since you have the future on your side, show somewhat less of impatience towards the generation that has preceded you, and that still marches at your head, by right of age. That generation also has been rich in distinguished talents, and all were more or less consecrated to the progress of those liberties, whose fruits will scarcely ripen, save for yourselves. It was in the midst of death-and-life struggles at the tribune, to the echoes of long and bloody combats, in the sorrows of exile, and at the foot of scaffolds, that by brilliant and numerous successes, they set up the worship of the Muses, and said to barbarism—"Further thou shalt not go!" And barbarism, you know it well, halts only at the sight of Glory.

As for me, to whom, so far, the young have only been the source of self-congratulation, I shall not wait until they call to me—"Back, good man! let us pass by!" as ingratitude might do ere long. I quit the lists, whilst still I have force to drag myself away. Too often, in the evening of life, we allow ourselves to be surprised by sleep upon our chairs, whereon it comes to nail us. Better were it to go off and await it on the couch, of which then such need is felt. I hasten to retreat to mine, although it be a somewhat hard one.

"What! you'll write no more songs?" I do not promise that: for pity's sake, let us have a clear understanding. I promise not to publish any more. To joys of labor succeeds the annoyance of feeling one's need of a livelihood. Like it, or not—we must traffic with the Muse. The trade wearies me; I retire from it. My ambition has never gone beyond a crust of bread for my old age: it is satisfied, though I be not even an elector, nor can ever hope for the honor of being eligible, in spite of the

Revolution of July, to which, on that account, I owe no grudge.\* "You'll very soon be tired of composing songs for yourself alone!" some one will say. Well! and can I do nothing else than write couplets for my fête-day? I have not abandoned the hope of being useful. In the retreat, to which I purpose confining myself, recollections will come pressing on me in crowds. These are an old man's intrigues. Our epoch, agitated by so many ultra passions, will hand down few unbiassed judgments upon the contemporaries who occupy, or have occupied, the stage, who have prompted the actors, or hung about behind the scenes. I have been personally acquainted with a large number of men who have made their mark during a score of years; and concerning all those whom I have not seen, or of whom I have had but a glimpse, my memory has stored up a multitude of facts, more or less characteristic. I desire to compose a sort of Historical Dictionary, wherein, under each name of our notabilities, political and literary, young or old, my numerous recollections will be classified, as will be the opinions which I shall allow myself to pronounce, or which I shall borrow from competent authorities. This labor, not involving much fatigue, nor requiring profound knowledge or the talent of a prose writer, will occupy the remainder of my life. I shall find pleasure in rectifying many errors and calumnies to which an envenomed strife always gives rise; for it is not, it may well be imagined, in any disparaging spirit, that I have formed this project. Fifty years hence, those who would write the history of these days, so fruitful in events, will only have to consult, I much fear, documents tainted by partiality. The notes that I shall leave behind me at my death may inspire some confidence, even when they may chance to be severe, for I do not pretend to be nothing but a panegyrist. Historians know so many things, that they will then know, without

\* The Revolution of February 1848, and his own subsequent election to the National Assembly, falsified Béranger's predictions. His earnest and successful plea to be excused confirmed, however, the honesty of the above remark.—*Translator.*

doubt, that I have had little cause to complain of men, even of men in power ; that, if I have been nothing, it is as others have been something—I mean, from taking pains to that end : and they will not therefore have to reckon me on the list of disappointed and chagrined applicants. They will know furthermore, perhaps, that I have enjoyed the reputation of being an observer sufficiently close, sufficiently precise, and gifted with sufficient penetration ; and that, finally, I have always attributed the evil that I have seen done in my time, rather to the weakness than to the malicious intention of individuals. Materials gathered together in this spirit are so often wanting, that future historians cannot but draw largely upon those that I shall leave. France, some day, may be obliged to me for this. Who knows whether it may not be owing to this work of my old age, that my name may chance to survive me ? It would be droll that posterity should speak of the judicious, the grave Béranger—why not ?

But here are many pages running on, one after another, without too much of point, and especially, without necessity. Would any one believe, from the length of this preface, that I have always shrunk from gossiping with the public, about myself, otherwise than in songs ? I fear, indeed, that I have most strangely abused the privilege that the moment of farewell confers : there remains, however, still, one debt of the heart that I must acquit.

At the risk of having the air of soliciting for my new lyrics the indulgence of journals, already put by me so often to the proof, I am bound to testify my gratitude to their editors, for the assistance that they have lent me, in my small warfare with Power. Those of my own creed have more than once braved the scissiors of the Censor and the claws of the hand of Justice, in order to come to my aid, at a time of danger. No one doubts that, but for them, I should have been made to pay more dearly for the boldness of my attacks. I am not one of those who forget their obligations to the periodical press.

I esteem it a duty to add that, even the journals advocating

opinions the most entirely at variance with my own, whilst combating stoutly against my principles, have seemed to me almost always to keep within such bounds as a man firmly convinced on his own part has the right to expect from his adversaries, especially when he only meddles with those who are in a position to take revenge.

I attribute such general good-will to the influence that is exercised in France by the class of writings to which I have exclusively given myself up. This alone would suffice to rid me of all desire to hook on any other title to that of Song-writer, the one which has endeared me to my fellow-citizens.



### DEDICATION OF THE EDITION OF 1833.

TO M. LUCIEN BONAPARTE, PRINCE OF CANINO.

PASSY, 15th January, 1833.

IN 1803, destitute of all resources, weary of disappointed hopes, and rhyming on without aim and without encouragement, without instruction and without notice, I bethought me (and how many such ideas had led to no result!) that I would put up my crude poetical works and address them, through the post, to the brother of the First Consul, M. Lucien Bonaparte, already noted for his great oratorical ability, and for his love of the arts and literature. The letter which accompanied them, I still remember, was worthy of a young and ultra-republican brain, bearing the stamp of wounded pride—wounded by this very need of having recourse to a protector. Poor, unknown, and so often disappointed, I dared not reckon on the success of a step in which there was no one to back me: but on the third day, oh! joy ineffable, M. Lucien summons me to his presence, makes himself acquainted with my circumstances, which he at once alleviates,