



Friends of the Priaulx Library

Friends of the Priaulx Library Newsletter

Issue 2 2014

A Gift From Victor Hugo A look at the notes Hugo left to his friends in the Priaulx Library book collection By Amanda Bennett

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STOP PRESS

From 17th July & closing mid/late September

The Shadow of War – Life in Guernsey 1914-1918 Exhibition

At The Priaulx Library

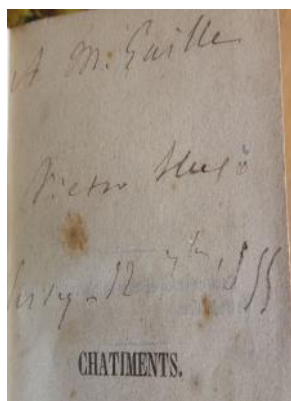
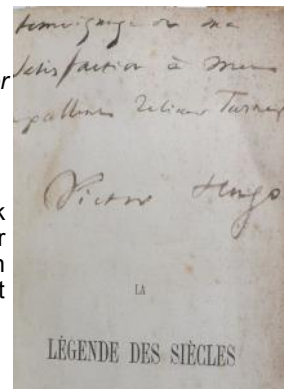
A number of interesting books have made their way into the Priaulx Library collection in which Victor Hugo has inscribed his name, and in some cases, a brief note. It is worth examining some of these notes in more detail as they provide a little insight into the lives of the people that he knew.

La Légende des Siècles. Édition Hetzel, 1859

"Témoignage de ma satisfaction à mon excellent Relieur Turner. Victor Hugo"

["A token of my appreciation to my excellent bookbinder, Turner"]

The book was evidently a gift of appreciation, and Turner probably did work on Victor Hugo's own library, which is still intact in Hauteville House. Turner obviously appreciated the gift as he has rebound the book in full leather with gilded spine lettering and tipped a photographic portrait of Hugo at the front of the book!



Châtiments. Geneva, 1853

This first edition of Hugo's poetry was published in Geneva, but printed in Jersey, where it was written. It was Hugo's most scathing work – a series of poems satirising the French Emperor Louis-Napoléon to whom the outspoken Hugo owed his exile from France. A gift to an unknown 'M. Guille', the small volume is dated in Hugo's hand, 'July 12th, 1855', a little over a month before Hugo abandoned life in Jersey for a more permanent residence in Guernsey.

Notre-Dame de Paris. Paris, 1865

The first illustrated edition of *Notre-Dame de Paris* – a handsome folio volume with seventy engraved drawings by Brion would certainly have made a very fine gift. In this case, the gift was to one of his closest friends, Louis Eugène Hennett de Kesler. Hugo writes:

"Au courage dans l'exil à mon compagnon M. Kesler. Victor H."

["Courage in exile, to my companion, Mr. Kesler"]

The excitable and outspoken Kesler was an atheist, revolutionary, and fellow exile in Guernsey. He had lodgings in Pedvin Street initially, but got into debt as he was only scraping a living being a French tutor. Hugo offered Kesler a room at Hauteville House, his food provided, and his expenses met, at no cost, so that he could pay off his debts. Hugo wrote, "It is what I would offer to my brother". Kesler died in 1870, having never returned to France, and Hugo spoke at his funeral - the speech was reproduced in *La Gazette de Guernsey*. Kesler's grave is in Le Foulon Cemetery. On his gravestone are inscribed the words: "A Kesler, son compagnon d'exil, Victor Hugo", words very close to the text of the book dedication.

