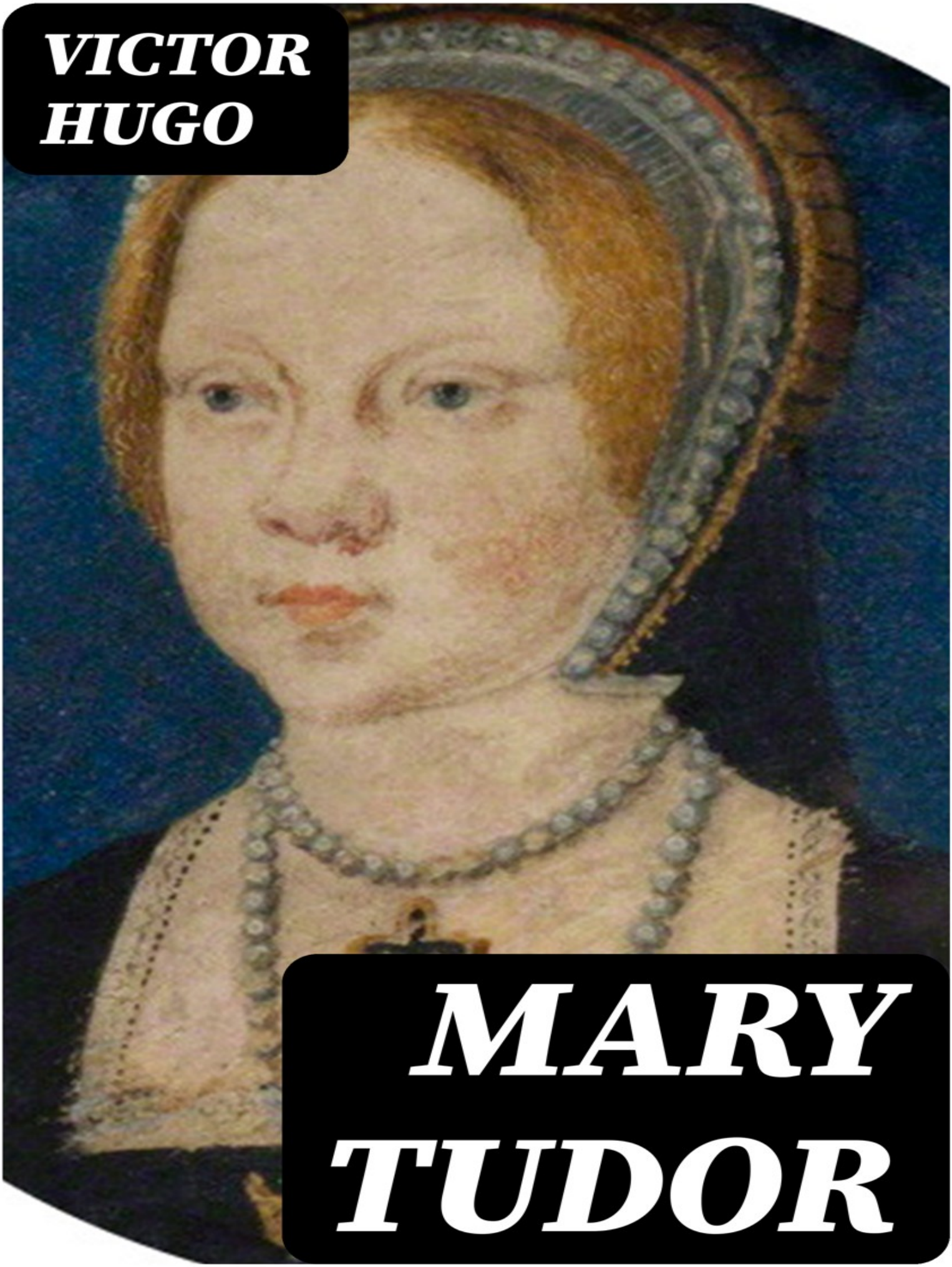
VICTOR HUGO



MARY TUDOR

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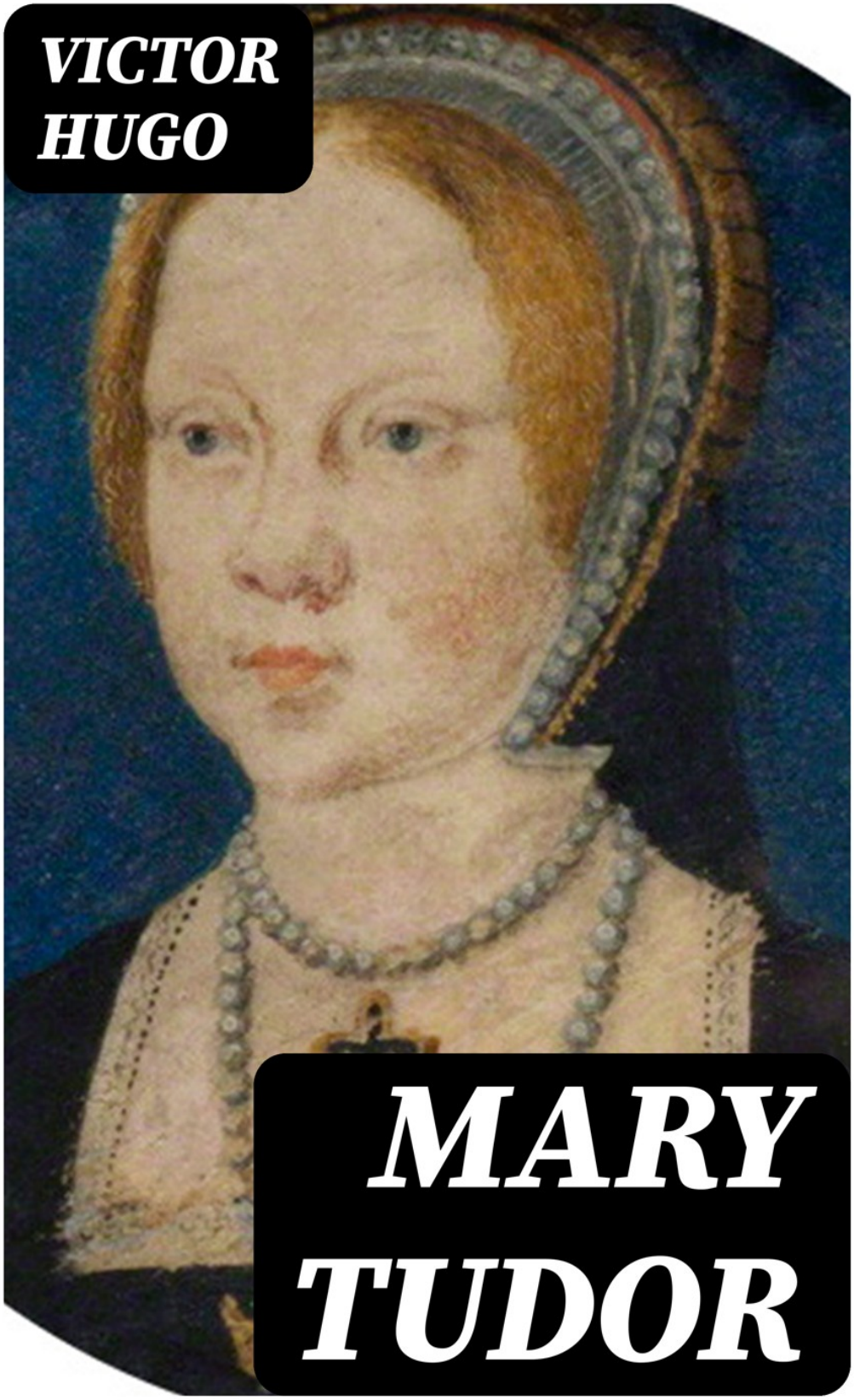

MARY TUDOR

Victor Hugo

Mary Tudor

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Table of Contents

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

There are two ways of arousing the enthusiasm of the public at the theatre: by the great and by the true. The great captivates the masses, the true impresses the individual spectator.

The aim of the dramatic poet, whatever his general ideas concerning art, should be therefore, first of all, to seek the great, like Corneille, or the true, like Molière; or, better still, —and this is the highest elevation that genius can attain,— to aspire to both the great and the true, the great in the true, the true in the great, like Shakespeare.

For, let us observe in passing, it was given to Shakespeare—and therein consists the sovereignty of his genius—to reconcile, to unite, to amalgamate constantly in his work these two qualities, truth and greatness,—qualities almost the opposite of each other, or, at all events, so distinct that the defect of either of them constitutes the opposite of the other. The stumbling-block of the true is the petty; the stumbling-block of the great is the false. In all of Shakespeare's works there is greatness which is true, and there is truth which is great. At the centre of all his creations, we find the point of intersection of greatness and truth; and where these great things and these true things meet, art is complete. Shakespeare, like Michelangelo, seems to have been created to solve that strange problem of which the mere enunciation seems absurd: to remain always within the limits of nature, while going outside of

them now and again.—Shakespeare exaggerates proportions, but he maintains the relations of things. Marvellous omnipotence of the poet! he makes things higher than ourselves, which live as we do. Hamlet, for example, is as true as any one of us, and greater. Hamlet is colossal, yet real. It is because Hamlet is not you, or I, but all of us. Hamlet is not *a* man, he is man.

Constantly to distinguish the great through the true, and the true through the great—such, is, therefore, according to the author of this drama, the proper end of the poet on the stage,—always, be it said, upholding such other ideas as he may have developed elsewhere touching these matters. And those two words, *great* and *true*, contain everything. Truth contains morality, the great contains the beautiful.

This end it will not be supposed that he has the presumption to believe that he has ever attained; but he may be permitted to do himself the justice to say thus publicly that he has never sought any other end on the stage down to this day. The new drama that has recently been performed is a further effort toward that radiant goal. What is, in truth, the thought that he has tried to represent in "Mary Tudor?" It is this: a queen who is a woman. Great as queen; true as woman.

As he has already said elsewhere, the drama as he conceives it, the drama as he would like to see it created by a man of genius, the drama according to the nineteenth century, is not the lofty, impossible, sublime, Spanish tragi-comedy of Corneille; it is not the abstract, amorous, imaginative, and discreetly elegiac tragedy of Racine; it is not the profound, sagacious, keen-sighted, too pitilessly

satirical comedy of Molière; it is not the philosophically inclined tragedy of Voltaire; it is not the revolutionary comedy of Beaumarchais; it is no more than all these, but it is all these at the same time; or, to speak more truly, it is none of them. It is not, as in the works of these great men, a single aspect of things constantly and persistently placed before the eyes, but it is everything considered at once in all its aspects. If there were a man living to-day who could reconstruct the drama as we understand it, that drama would be the human heart, the human brain, human passion, the human will; it would be the past revived for the behoof of the present; it would be the history that our fathers made placed side by side with the history that we are making; it would be a commingling on the stage of all things that are commingled in life; it would be an émeute here, and a love-talk there, and in the latter a lesson for the people, and in the former a cry for the heart; it would be laughter and tears; it would be good, evil, the high, the low, fatality, providence, genius, chance, society, the world, nature, life; and above all these one would be conscious that something great was soaring!

To this drama, which would be a never-failing source of instruction for the multitude, everything would be allowable, because it would be of its essence to abuse nothing. It would have on its side such a reputation for loyalty, elevation of mind, usefulness, and conscientiousness, that no one would ever accuse it of seeking effect and sensations where it had sought only a moral lesson. It could take François I to Maguelonne's hovel without arousing suspicion; it could, without alarming the sternest moralists,

cause pity for Marion to gush from Didier's breast; it could, without being accused of over-emphasis and exaggeration like the author of "Mary Tudor," display freely on the stage, in all its awe-inspiring reality, that dread triangle that appears so often in history: a queen, a favourite, a headsman.

The man who shall create this drama will require two qualities—conscientiousness and genius. The author who is now speaking has only the first, as he well knows. He will nevertheless continue what he has begun, hoping that others will do better than he. To-day an enormous public, constantly increasing in intelligence, sympathizes with all the serious efforts of art. To-day every high-minded critic assists and encourages the poet. The other judges matter little. So let the poet come forth! As for the author of this drama, sure of the future that is in store for progress, certain that, in default of talent, his perseverance will some day be counted in his favour, he gazes with serene and tranquil confidence upon the multitude which every evening encompasses this incomplete work with so much curiosity, anxiety and attention. In presence of that multitude, he realizes the responsibility that rests upon him, and he accepts it calmly. Never in his works does he lose sight for an instant of the people whom the stage civilizes; of history, which the stage explains; of the human heart, to which the stage gives counsel. To-morrow he will lay aside the work that is done for the work that is to do; he will turn his back upon that multitude, to return to his solitude—a profound solitude sheltered from every evil influence of the outside world, where youth, his friend, comes now and then to grasp

his hand, where he is alone with his thoughts, his will, and his independence. His solitude will be more than ever dear to him, for only in solitude can one work for the multitude. More than ever he will keep his spirit, his thought, and his work aloof from all coteries, for he knows something greater than coteries—parties; something greater than parties—the people; something greater than the people—mankind.

November 17, 1833.