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BALZAC

BY
FREDERICK LAWTON

DEDICATED,

In remembrance of many pleasant and instructive
hours spent in his society, to the sculptor

AUGUSTE RODIN,

whose statue of Balzac, with its fine, synthetic
portraiture, first tempted the author to write
this book.

PASSY, PARIS, 1910.

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CONCLUSION: THE MAN AND HIS PORTRAITS

PREFACE

Excusing himself for not undertaking to write a life of Balzac, Monsieur Brunetiere, in his study of the novelist published shortly before his death, refused somewhat disdainfully to admit that acquaintance with a celebrated man's biography has necessarily any value. "What do we know of the life of Shakespeare?" he says, "and of the circumstances in which *Hamlet* or *Othello* was produced? If these circumstances were better known to us, is it to be believed and will it be seriously asserted that our admiration for one or the other play would be augmented?" In penning this quirk, the eminent critic would seem to have wilfully overlooked the fact that a writer's life may have much or may have little to do with his works. In the case of Shakespeare it was comparatively little—and yet we should be glad to learn more of this little. In the case of Balzac it was much. His novels are literally his life; and his life is quite as full as his books of all that makes the good novel at once profitable and agreeable to read. It is not too much to affirm that any one who is acquainted with what is known to-day of the strangely chequered career of the author of the *Comedie Humaine* is in a better position to understand and appreciate the different parts which constitute it. Moreover, the steady rise of Balzac's reputation, during the last fifty years, has been in some degree owing to the various patient investigators who have gathered information about him whom Taine pronounced to be, with Shakespeare and Saint-Simon, the greatest storehouse of documents we possess concerning human nature.

The following chapters are an attempt to put this information into sequence and shape, and to insert such notice of the novels as their relative importance requires. The author wishes here to thank certain French publishers who have facilitated his task by placing books for reference at his disposal, Messrs. Calmann-Levy, Armand Colin, and Hetzel, in particular, and also the Curator of the *Musee Balzac*, Monsieur de Royaumont who has rendered him service on several occasions.

BALZAC

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The condition of French society in the early half of the nineteenth century—the period covered by Balzac's novels—may be compared to that of a people endeavouring to recover themselves after an earthquake. Everything had been overthrown, or at least loosened from its base—religion, laws, customs, traditions, castes. Nothing had withstood the shock. When the upheaval finally ceased, there were timid attempts to find out what had been spared and was susceptible of being raised from the ruins. Gradually the process of selection went on, portions of the ancient system of things being joined to the larger modern creation. The two did not work in very well together, however, and the edifice was far from stable.

During the Consulate and First Empire, the Emperor's will, so sternly imposed, retarded any movement of natural reconstruction. Outside the military organization, things were stiff and starched and solemn. High and low were situated in circumstances that were different and strange. The new soldier aristocracy reeked of the camp and battle-field; the washer-woman, become a duchess, was ill at ease in the Imperial drawing-room; while those who had thriven and amassed wealth rapidly in trade were equally uncomfortable amidst the vulgar luxury with which they surrounded themselves. Even the common people, whether of capital or province, for whose benefit the Revolution had been made, were silent and afraid. Of the ladies' *salons*—once numerous and remarkable for their wit, good taste, and conversation—two or three only subsisted, those of Mesdames de Beaumont, Recamier and de Stael; and, since the last was regarded by Napoleon with an unfriendly eye, its guests must have felt constrained.

At reunions, eating rather than talking was fashionable, and the eating lacked its intimacy and privacy of the past. The lighter side of life was seen more in restaurants, theatres, and fetes. It was modish to dine at Frascati's, to drink ices at the Pavillon de Hanovre, to go and admire the actors Talma, Picard, and Lemercier, whose stage performance was better than many of the pieces they interpreted. Fireworks could be enjoyed at the Tivoli Gardens; the great concerts were the rage for a while, as also the practice for a hostess to carry off her visitors after dinner for a promenade in the Bois de Boulogne.

Literature was obstinately classical. After the daring flights of the previous century, writers contented themselves with marking time. Chenedolle, whose verse Madame de Stael said to be as lofty as Lebanon, and whose fame is lilliputian to-day, was, with Ducis, the representative of their advance-guard. In painting, with Fragonard, Greuze and Gros, there was a greater stir of genius, yet without anything corresponding in the sister art.

On the contrary, in the practical aspects of life there was large activity, though Paris almost alone profited by it. Napoleon's reconstruction in the provinces was administrative chiefly. A complete programme was first started on in the capital, which the Emperor wished to exalt into the premier city of Europe. Gas-lighting, sewerage, paving and road improvements, quays, and bridges were his gifts to the city, whose general appearance, however, remained much the same. The Palais-Royal served still as a principal rendezvous. The busy streets were the Rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Honore on the right bank, the Rue Saint-Jacques on the left; and the most important shops were to be found in the Rue de la Loi, at present the Rue de Richelieu.

The fall of the Empire was less a restoration of the Monarchy than the definite disaggregation of the ancient aristocracy, which had been centralized round the court since the days of Richelieu. The Court of Louis XVIII. was no more like that of Louis XVI. than it was like the noisy one of Napoleon. Receiving only a few personal friends, the King allowed his drawing-rooms to remain deserted by the nobles that had returned from exile; and the two or three who were regular visitors were compelled to rub elbows with certain parvenus, magistrates, financiers, generals of the Empire whom it would not have been prudent to eliminate.

In this initial stage of society-decentralization, the diminished band of the Boulevard Saint-Germain—descendants of the eighteenth-century dukes and marquises—tried to close up their ranks and to differentiate themselves from the plutocracy of the Chaussee d'Antin, who copied their manners, with an added magnificence of display which those they imitated could not afford. In the one camp the antique bronzes, gildings, and carvings of a bygone art were retained with pious veneration; in the other, pictures, carpets, Jacob chairs and sofas, mirrors, and time-pieces, and the gold and silver plate were all in lavish style, indicative of their owner's ampler means. One feature of the pre-Revolution era was revived in the feminine *salons*, which regained most, if not the whole, of their pristine renown. The Hotel de la Rochefoucauld of Madame Ancelot became a second Hotel de Rambouillet, where the classical Parseval-Grandmaison, who spent twenty years over his poem *Philippe-Auguste*, held armistice with the young champion of the Romantic school, Victor Hugo. The Princess de Vaudemont received her guests in Paris during the winter, and at Suresnes during the summer; and her friend the Duchess de Duras' *causeries* were frequented by such men as Cuvier, Humboldt, Talleyrand, Mole, de Villele, Chateaubriand, and Villemain. Other circles existed in the houses of the Dukes Pasquier and de Broglie, the countess Merlin, and Madame de Mirbel.

With the re-establishment of peace, literary and toilet pre-occupations began to assert their claims. The *Ourika* of the Duchess de Duras took Paris by storm. Her heroine, the young Senegal negress, gave her name to dresses, hats, and bonnets. Everything was *Ourika*. The prettiest Parisian woman yearned to be black, and regretted not having been born in darkest Africa. Anglomania in men's clothes prevailed throughout the reign of Louis XVIII., yet mixed with other modes. "Behold an up-to-date dandy," says a writer of the epoch; "all extremes meet in him. You shall see him Prussian by the stomach, Russian by his waist, English in his coat-tails and collar, Cossack by the sack that serves him as trousers, and by his fur. Add to these things Bolivar hats and spurs, and the moustaches of a counter-skipper, and you have the most singular harlequin to be met with on the face of the globe."

Among the masses there were changes just as striking. For the moment militarism had disappeared, to the people's unfeigned content, and the Garde Nationale, composed of pot-bellied tradesmen, alone recalled the bright uniforms of the Empire. To make up for the soldier excitements of the *Petit Caporal*, attractions of all kinds tempted the citizen to enjoy himself after his day's toil was finished—menagerie, mountebanks, Franconi circus, Robertson the conjurer in the Jardin des Capucines. At the other end of the city, in the Boulevard du Temple,

were Belle Madeleine, the seller of Nanterre cakes, famous throughout Europe, the face contortionist Valsuani, Miette in his egg-dance, Curtius' waxworks. By each street corner were charlatans of one or another sort exchanging jests with the passers-by. It was the period when the Prudhomme type was created, so common in all the skits and caricatures of the day. One of the greatest pleasures of the citizen under the Restoration was to mock at the English. Revenge for Waterloo was found in written and spoken satires. Huge was the success of Sewrin's and Dumersan's *Anglaises pour rire*, with Brunet and Potier travestied as *grandes dames*, dancing a jig so vigorously that they lost their skirts. The same species of *revanche* was indulged in when Lady Morgan, the novelist, came to France, seeking material for a popular book describing French customs. Henri Beyle (Stendhal) hoaxed her by acting as her cicerone and filling her note-books with absurd information, which she accepted in good faith and carried off as fact. On Sundays the most respectable families used to resort to the *guinguettes*, or *bastringues*, of the suburbs. Belleville had its celebrated Desnoyers establishment. At the Maine gate Mother Sagnet's was the meeting-place of budding artists and grisettes. At La Villette, Mother Radig, a former canteen woman, long enjoyed popularity among her patrons of both sexes. All these scenes are depicted in certain of Victor Ducange's novels, written between 1815 and 1830, as also in the pencil sketches of the two artists Pigal and Marlet.

The political society of the Restoration was characterized by a good deal of cynicism. Those who were affected by the change of *regime*, partisans and functionaries of the Empire, hastened in many cases to trim their sails to the turn of the tide. However, there was a relative liberty of the press which permitted the honest expression of party opinion, and polemics were keen. At the Sorbonne, Guizot, Cousin, and Villemain were the orators of the day. Frayssinous lectured at Saint-Sulpice, and de Lamennais, attacking young Liberalism, denounced its tenets in an essay which de Maistre called a heaving of the earth under a leaden sky.

The country's material prosperity at the time was considerable, and reacted upon literature of every kind by furnishing a more leisured public. In 1816 Emile Deschamps preluded to the after-triumphs of the Romantic School with his play the *Tour de faveur*, the latter being followed in 1820 by Lebrun's *Marie Stuart*. Alfred de Vigny was preparing his *Eloa*; Nodier was delighting everybody by his talents as a philologian, novelist, poet, and chemist. Beranger was continuing his songs, and paying for his boldness with imprisonment. The King himself was a protector of letters, arts, and sciences. One of his first tasks was to reorganize the "Institut Royal," making it into four Academies. He founded the Geographical and Asiatic Societies, encouraged the introduction of steam navigation and traction into France, and patronized men of genius wherever he met with them.

Yet the nation's fidelity to the White Flag was not very deep-rooted. Grateful though the population had been for the return of peace and prosperity, a lurking reminiscence of Napoleonic splendours combined with the bourgeois' Voltairian scepticism to rouse a widespread hostility to Government and Church, as soon as the spirit of the latter ventured to manifest again its inveterate intolerance. Beranger's songs, Paul-Louis Courier's pamphlets, and the articles of the *Constitutionnel* fanned the re-awakened sentiments of revolt; and Charles the Tenth's ministers, less wisely restrained than those of Louis XVIII., and blind to the significance of the first barricades of 1827, provoked the catastrophe of 1830. This second revolution inaugurated the reign of a bourgeois king. Louis-Philippe was hardly more than a delegate of the bourgeois class, who now reaped the full benefits of the great Revolution and entered into possession of its spoils. During Jacobin dictature and Napoleonic sway, the bourgeoisie had played a waiting role. At present they came to the front, proudly conscious of their merits; and an entire literature was destined to be devoted to them, an entire art to depict or satirize their manners. Scribe, Stendhal, Merimee, Henry Monnier, Daumier, and Gavarni were some of the men whose work illustrated the bourgeois *regime*, either prior to or contemporaneous with the work of Balzac.

The eighteen years of the July Monarchy, which were those of Balzac's mature activity, contrasted sharply with those that immediately preceded. In spite of perceptible social progress, the constant war of political parties, in which the throne itself was attacked, alarmed lovers of order, and engendered feelings of pessimism. The power of journalism waxed great. Fighting with the pen was carried to a point of skill previously unattained. Grouped round the *Debats*—the ministerial organ—were Silvestre de Sacy, Saint-Marc Girardin, and Jules Janin as leaders, and John Lemoinne, Philarete Chasles, Barbey d'Aurevilly in the rank and file. Elsewhere Emile de Girardin's *Presse* strove to oust the *Constitutionnel* and *Siecle*, opposition papers, from public favour, and to establish a Conservative Liberalism that should receive the support of moderate minds. Doctrines many, political and social, were propounded in these eighteen years of compromise. Legitimists, Bonapartists, and Republicans were all three in opposition to the Government, each with a programme to tempt the petty burgess. Saint-Simonism too was abroad with its utopian ideals, attracting some of the loftier minds, but less appreciated by the masses than the teachings of other semi-secret societies having aims more material.

Corresponding to the character of the *regime* was the practical nature of the public works executed—the railway system with its transformation of trade, the fortification of the capital, the commencement of popular education, and the renovation of decayed or incompleted edifices. Unfortunately, the rapidity of the development and the rush of speculation prevented any co-ordinating method in the effort, so that the epoch was poor in its architectural achievement compared with what had been produced in the past. Even other branches of art

were greatest in satire. Daumier's *Robert Macaire* sketches and the *Mayeux* of Travies had large material supplied them in the various types of citizen, greedy of pleasure and gold. The *mot*: "Enrichissez-vous," attributed to Guizot, was the axiom of the time, accepted as the *nec plus ultra* by the vast majority of people. It invaded all circles with its lowering expedience; and he who was to depict its effects most puissantly did not escape its thrall.

When Balzac began to write, no French novelist had a reputation as such that might be considered great. Up to the epoch of the Restoration, the novel had been declared to be an inferior species of literature, and no author had dreamed of basing his claims to fame on fiction. Lesage had been and was still appreciated rather on the ground of his satire; and the Abbe Prevost, his slightly younger contemporary, received but little credit in his lifetime for the *Manon Lescaut* that posterity was to prize. Throughout the eighteenth century, he was chiefly regarded as a literary hack who had translated Richardson's *Pamela* and done things of a similar kind to earn his livelihood. Rousseau too was esteemed less for his *Nouvelle Heloise* than for his political disquisitions. No novelist since 1635 had ever been elected to the French Academy on account of his stories. Jules Sandeau was the first to break the tradition by his entrance among the Immortals in 1859, to be followed in 1862 by Octave Feuillet.

Lesage was the writer who introduced into France with his *Gil Blas* what has been called the personal novel—in other words, that story of adventures of which the narrator is the hero, the aim of the story being to illustrate first and foremost the vicissitudes of life in general and those of a single person in particular. The subsequent introduction of letters into the personal novel, which allowed more than one character to assume the narrator's role, brought about a change which those who initiated it scarcely anticipated. Together with the larger interest, due to there being several narrators, came a tendency to introspection and analysis, diminishing the prominence of the facts and enhancing the effect produced by these facts on the thoughts and feelings of the characters. It was this development of the personal novel at the commencement of the nineteenth century, exhibited in Chateaubriand's *Rene*, Madame de Stael's *Corinne*, Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, George Sand's *Indiana*, and Sainte-Beuve's *Volupte*, which contributed so much to create and establish the Romantic School of fiction with its egoistic lyricism.

The historical novel, which more commonly is looked upon as having been the principal agent in the change, gave, in sooth, only what modern fiction of every kind could no longer do without, namely, local colour. The so-styled historical novels of Madame de la Fayette —*Zayde* and the *Princesse de Cleves*—in the seventeenth century, and those of Madame de Tencin and Madame de Fontaines in the eighteenth, were simply historic themes whereon the authors embroidered the inventions of their imaginations, without the slightest attention to accuracy or attempt at differentiating the men and minds of one age from those of another; nor was it till the days of Walter Scott that such care for local colour and truth of delineation was manifested by writers who essayed to put life into the bones of the past.

Even Lesage, so exact in his description of all that is exterior, lacked this literary truthfulness. His Spain is a land of fancy; his Spaniards are not Spanish; *Gil Blas*, albeit he comes from Santillana, is a Frenchman. Marivaux was wiser in placing his *Vie de Marianne* and his *Paysan parvenu* in France. His people, though modelled on stage pattern, are of his own times and country; and, in so far as they reveal themselves, have resemblances to the characters of Richardson.

To the Abbe Barthelemy, Voltaire, and Rousseau the novel was a convenient medium for the expression of certain ideas rather than a representation of life. The first strove to popularize a knowledge of Greek antiquity, the second to combat doctrines that he deemed fallacious, the third to reform society. However, Rousseau brought nature into his *Nouvelle Heloise*, and, by his accessories of pathos and philosophy, prepared the way for a bolder and completer treatment of life in fiction. Different from these was Restif de la Bretonne, who applied Rousseau's theories with less worthy aims in his *Paysan perverti* and *Monsieur Nicolas, ou Le Coeur humain devoile*. If mention is made of him here, it is because he was a pioneer in the path of realism, which Balzac was to explore more thoroughly, and because the latter undoubtedly caught some of his grosser manner.

The novelists and dramatists whom Balzac made earliest acquaintance with were probably those whose works were appearing and attracting notice during his school-days—Pigault-Lebrun, Ducray-Duminil, and that Guilbert de Pixerecourt who for a third of the nineteenth century was worshipped as the Corneille of melodrama. These men were favourite authors of the nascent democracy; and, in an age when reprints of older writers were much rarer than to-day, would be far more likely to appeal to a boy's taste than seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors. At an after-period only, when he had definitely entered upon his maturer literary career, was he to take up the latter and use them, together with Rabelais, La Bruyere, Moliere, and Diderot, as his best, if not his constant, sources of inspiration. In the stories of the first of the three above-mentioned modern writers, the reader usually meets with some child of poor parentage, who, after most extraordinary and comic experiences, marries the child of a nobleman. In those of the second, the hero or heroine struggles with powerful enemies, is aided by powerful friends, and moves in an atmosphere of blood and mystery until vice is chastized and virtue finally rewarded. The two writers, however, differ more in their talent than in their methods, the first having an amount of originality which is almost entirely wanting to the second. With both, indeed, the main object is to impress and astonish, and the finer touches of

Lesage and Prevost are seldom visible in either's work. As for Pixerecourt, whose fame lasted until the Romantic drama of the older Dumas, Alfred de Vigny, and Victor Hugo eclipsed it, he wrote over a hundred plays, each of which was performed some five hundred times, while two at least ran for more than a thousand nights.

If it was natural that Balzac should familiarize himself in his adolescence with such writers of his own countrymen as every one discussed and very many praised, it was natural also he should extend his perusals to the translated works of contemporary novelists on the further side of the Channel, the more so as the reciprocal literary influence of the two countries was exceedingly strong at the time, stronger probably than to-day when attention is solicited on so many sides. To the novels of Monk Lewis, Maturin, Anne Radcliffe, and other exponents of the School of Terror, as likewise to the novels of Godwin, the chief of the School of Theory, he went for instruction in the profession that he was wishing to adopt. Mrs. Radcliffe's stories he thought admirable; those of Lewis he cited as hardly being equalled by Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*; and Maturin—oddly as it strikes us now—he not only styled the most original modern author that the United Kingdom could boast of, but assigned him a place, beside Moliere and Goethe, as one of the greatest geniuses of Europe. And these eulogiums were not the immature judgements of youth, but the convictions of his riper age. As will be seen later, the influence remained with him. In all he wrote there enters some of the material, native and foreign, out of which Romanticism was made.

To the true masters of English fiction his indebtedness was equally large, exception made perhaps for Fielding and Smollett; and one American author should be included in the acknowledgment. Goldsmith, Sterne, Walter Scott, and Fenimore Cooper were his delight. The first and last of Richardson's productions he read only when his own talent was formed. *Pamela* and *Sir Charles Grandison* he chanced upon in a library at Ajaccio; and, after running them through, pronounced them to be horribly stupid and boring. But *Clarissa Harlowe*, on the contrary, he highly esteemed. Already in 1821 he had studied it; and, when composing his *Pierrette*, towards the end of the thirties, he spoke of it as a magnificent poem, in a passage which brands the procedure of certain hypocrites, their oratorical precautions, and their involved conversations, wherein the mind obscures the light it throws and honeyed speech dilutes the venom of intentions. The phrase, says Monsieur Le Breton, in his well-reasoned book on Balzac, is that of a man who was conversant with the patient analysis, the conscientious and minute realism of this great painter of English life. In Monsieur Le Breton's opinion, Balzac's long-windedness is, in a measure, due to Richardson, who reacted upon him by his defects no less than by his excellencies.

Throughout Balzac's correspondence, as throughout his novels, there are numerous remarks which are so many confessions of the hints he received in the course of his English readings. In one passage he exclaims: "The villager is an admirable nature. When he is stupid, he is just the animal; but, when he has good points, they are exquisite. Unfortunately, no one observes him. It needed a lucky hazard for Goldsmith to create his *Vicar of Wakefield*." Elsewhere he says: "Generally, in fiction, an author succeeds only by the number of his characters and the variety of his situations; and there are few examples of novels having but two or three *dramatis personae* depending on a single situation. Of such a kind, *Caleb Williams*, the celebrated Godwin's masterpiece, is in our time the only work known, and its interest is prodigious."

Sterne, even more than Scott, was Balzac's favourite model. Allusions to him abound in the *Comedie Humaine*. *Tristram Shandy* the novelist appears to have had at his fingers' ends. Not a few of Sterne's traits were also his own—the satirical humour, in which, however, the humour was less perfect than the satire, the microscopic eye for all the exterior details of life especially in people's faces and gestures and dress; and both had identical notions concerning the analogy between a man's name and his temperament and fate.

Scott and Cooper being Balzac's elder contemporaries, it happened that their books were given to the French public in translation by one or the other of the novelist's earlier publishers, Mame and Gosselin. His taste for their fiction was no mere passing fancy. It was as pronounced as ever in 1840, at which date, writing in the *Revue Parisienne*, he declared that Cooper was the only writer of stories worthy to be placed by the side of Walter Scott, and that his hero Leather-stocking was sublime. "I don't know," said he, "if the fiction of Walter Scott furnishes a creation as grandiose as that of this hero of the savannas and forests. Cooper's descriptions are the school at which all literary landscapists should study: all the secrets of art are there. But Cooper is inferior to Walter Scott in his comic and minor characters, and in the construction of his plots. One is the historian of nature, the other of humanity." The article winds up with further praise of Scott, whom its author evidently regarded as his master.

The part played by these models in Balzac's literary training was to afford him a clearer perception of the essential worth of the Romantic movement. Together with its extravagancies and lyricism, Romantic literature deliberately put into practice some important principles which certain forerunners of the eighteenth century had already unconsciously illustrated or timidly taught. It imposed Diderot's doctrine that there was beauty in all natural character. And its chief apostle, Hugo, with the examples of Ariosto, Cervantes, Rabelais and Shakespeare to back him, proved that what was in nature was or should be also in art, yet without, for that, seeking to free art from law and the necessity for choice.

This spectacle of a vaster field to exploit, this possibility of artistically representing the common, familiar things of the world in their real significance, seized on the youthful mind of

him who was to create the *Comedie Humaine*. It formed the connecting link between him and his epoch, and in most directions it limited the horizon of his life.

CHAPTER II

BOYHOOD

For all his aristocratic name, Honore de Balzac was not of noble birth. The nobiliary particule he did not add to his signature until the year 1830. In his birth certificate we read: "To-day, the 2nd of Prairial, Year VII. (21st of May 1799) of the French Republic, a male child was presented to me, Pierre-Jacques Duvivier, the undersigned Registrar, by the citizen Bernard-Francois Balzac, householder, dwelling in this commune, Rue de l'Armee de l'Italie, Chardonnet section, Number 25; who declared to me that the said child was called Honore Balzac, born yesterday at eleven o'clock in the morning at witness's residence, that the child is his son and that of the citizen, Anne-Charlotte-Laure Sallambier, his wife, they having been married in the commune of Paris, eighth arrondissement, Seine Department, on the 11th of Pluviose, Year V."

The commune referred to in the birth certificate was Tours. There in the street now rechristened and renumbered and called the Rue Nationale, a commemorative plate at No. 29 bears the following inscription: "Honore de Balzac was born in this house on the 1st of Prairial, Year VII. (20th of May 1799); he died in Paris on the 28th[*] of August 1850."

[*] The registered date of Balzac's death was the 18th of August. The date on the commemorative plate is wrong. See also in a subsequent chapter, M. de Lovenjoul's remark on the subject.

This former capital of Touraine, which the novelist says disparagingly in the *Cure of Tours* was in his time one of the least literary places in France, has had, at any rate, an honourable past. It was one of the sixty-four towns of Gaul that, under Vercingetorix, opposed the conquest of Caesar; and to it, in 1870, the French Government retired when the Germans marched on the capital. Its ancient industry in silk stuffs, established by Louis XI. in the fifteenth century, raised its population to eighty thousand. By revoking the Edict of Nantes, King "Sun" chased away three thousand of the wealthy, manufacturing families, who migrated to Holland; and Tours lost, with a quarter of its inhabitants, its weaving supremacy, which fell into the hands of Lyons. Situated on the Loire, in a rich but flat district, its surroundings are less interesting than its own architectural possessions, including a cathedral of mingled Gothic and later styles, a bit of the Norman-English Henry the Second's castle, and its three bridges. The fine central one, of fifteen arches and a quarter of a mile long, is a prolongation of the Rue Nationale, and has near it statues of Rabelais and Descartes.

Balzac's father, who at the time of Honore's birth was fifty-three years of age, was not a native of Tours. He came from Nougayrie, a small hamlet close to Canezac in the Tarn Department and province of Languedoc. He was, therefore, a man of the south. On the registers he was inscribed as a son of Bernard-Thomas Balssa, *laboureur*, or peasant farmer; but he subsequently changed his name to Balzac. Recent investigations have disclosed the fact that—whether by his own initiative or that of his son—he was the first to employ the "de" before the family name, prefixing it in the announcements made of the marriage of his second daughter Laurence.

Although of humble origin, the elder Balzac acquired both education and position. He embraced the legal profession, and was said by his son to have acted as secretary to the Grand Council under Louis XV., by his daughter Laure to have been advocate to the Council under Louis XVI. There is no documentary proof that he held either of these offices; but he figured in the Royal almanacs of 1793 as a lawyer, and would seem to have served the Republican Government, although his children subsequently asserted that he had always been an unswerving Royalist. The family tradition was that he had become suspect to Robespierre through his efforts to save several unfortunates from the guillotine, and would himself have perished had not a friend succeeded in getting him sent on a mission to the frontier to organize the commissariat department there. Thenceforward attached to the War Office, he returned to Paris, and in 1797 married Laure Sallambier, the daughter of one of his hierarchic chiefs, she being thirty-two years his junior. The next year he went to Tours as administrator of the General Hospice, and remained there for seventeen years.

The father of the novelist was a man out of the common. A contemporary of his, Le Poitevin Saint-Alme, relates that he united in himself the Roman, the Gaul, and the Goth, and possessed the attributes of these three races—boldness, patience, and health. He avowed himself a disciple of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, considering a return to nature to be the main condition of happiness. He shunned doctors, advocated exercise, long walks, woollen garments for every season, and a more scientific propagation of his species. His daughter—afterwards Madame Surville—says of him in the short biography she wrote of her brother: "My father often railed at mankind, whom he accused of unceasingly contributing to their own misfortune. He could never meet an ill-formed fellow-creature without fulminating against parents and governments, who

were less careful to improve the human race than that of animals."

In addition to his notions on hygiene, he interested himself in the problems of sociology, anticipating Fourier and Saint-Simon, and writing numerous pamphlets on philanthropic and scientific questions. Large traces of his influence are found in his son's books. His hobby was health cultivation. Every man, he said, ought to strive for an equilibrium of the vital forces. In his own case there was an extra reason for his aiming at longevity. Being still unmarried at the age of forty-five, he had sunk most of his fortune in life annuities, one of which was a tontine; and, after his marriage, he encouraged his family to hope for his surviving all the competitors of his series, and thus being able to bequeath them a huge capital. This hope was not realized. His death occurred in 1829, when he was eighty-three, and the twelve thousand francs income accruing from his annuities disappeared.

His memory was extraordinary. At seventy, happening to meet a friend of his childhood, whom he had not seen since he was fourteen, he unhesitatingly began speaking to him in the Provencal tongue, which he had ceased using for half a century. Equally great was his benevolence. On one occasion, hearing that his friend General de Pommereul was in monetary difficulties, he called at the General's house, and, finding only Madame de Pommereul, said to her, as he placed two heavy bags on the table: "I am told you are short of cash. These ten thousand crowns will be more useful to you than to me. I don't know what to do with them. You can give me them back when you have recovered what has been stolen from you." Having uttered these few brusk words, he turned and hurried away. Later we shall meet with a younger General de Pommereul, to whom the novelist dedicated his *Melmoth Reconciled*, adding, "In remembrance of the constant friendship that united our fathers and subsists between the sons."

When young, the novelist's father must have been endowed with great physical strength. He used to relate that, during the time he was a clerk to a Procureur, he was requested one day to cut up a partridge at his master's table. With the first dig of the knife, he not only severed the partridge but the dish also, and drove his weapon into the wood of the table. Detail worth noticing, this feat procured him the respect of the Procureur's wife. The portrait sketched of him by his daughter Laure represents him, between sixty and seventy, as a fine old man, still vigorous, with courteous manners, speaking little and rarely of himself (in this very different from Honore), indulgent towards the young, whose society he was fond of, allowing to all the same liberty that he claimed for himself, upright and sound in judgment notwithstanding his eccentricities, of equable humour, and so mild in character that he made every one around him happy. Delighting in conversation, now grave, now curious, now prophetic, he was always eagerly listened to by his elder son, whose indebtedness to him cannot be doubted.

Balzac's mother, who was married at eighteen, was a Parisian by birth. Her father was Director of the Paris Hospitals. At the Hotel-Dieu there is a Sallambier ward which perpetuates his memory. A small, active woman of nervous temperament, irritable and inclined to worry about trifles, she yet had abundant practical sense—a quality less developed in her husband. Her daughter tells us she was beautiful, that she had remarkable vivacity of mind, much firmness and decision, and boundless devotion to her family. Her affection, however, was expressed rather by action than in speech. She had great imagination, adds Madame Surville; and, says the novelist, "this imagination, which she has bequeathed me, bandies her ever from north to south and from south to north." Exceedingly pious, with a bias to mysticism, she possessed a library of books bearing on such doctrines, which were read by her son and afterwards utilized by him in his fiction.

Honore was the second child of his parents. The first dying in infancy through the poorness of Madame Balzac's milk, he was sent to a house on the outskirts of the town and suckled by a foster-mother. His sister Laure, a year younger than himself, was submitted to the same treatment, and the two children remained away from home until they were four and three years old respectively. From her remembrance of him, when both were toddling mites, his sister speaks of him as a charming little boy, whose merry humour, shapely, smiling mouth, large brown eyes, at once bright and soft, high forehead and rich black hair caused him to be noticed a great deal in their daily outings.

In 1804 came the first important event of his life, a visit to Paris to see his maternal grandparents. It was a wonderful change from his home surroundings in Tours, where a certain severity prevailed. Here he was spoiled to his heart's content; and his happiness was rendered complete by Mouche, the big watch-dog, with whom he was on the best of terms. One evening a magic-lantern exhibition was given in the grandson's honour. Noticing that Mouche was not among the spectators, he rose from his seat with an authoritative: "Wait." Then, going out, he shortly after came back, dragging in his canine friend, to whom he said: "Sit down there, Mouche, and look; it will cost you nothing. Granddad will pay for you!" A few months later his grandfather died, and the widow went to live with the Balzacs at Tours. This death made a deep impression on the child's mind, and for a while dwelt so constantly in his memory that, on one occasion, when Laure was being scolded by her mother for an offence which the culprit aggravated by a fit of involuntary tittering, he approached his sister and whispered in her ear, with a view to restoring her gravity: "Think of grandpapa's death."

Distinguished in these juvenile years more by kindness than cleverness, he nevertheless manifested a certain inventiveness in improvizing baby comedies which had more appreciative audiences than some of his maturer stage productions. On the contrary, his conception of music and his own musical execution had no admirers beyond himself. For hours he would scrape the

chords of a small, red violin, drawing from them most excruciating sounds, himself lost in ecstasy, and most amazed when he was begged to cease his concert, which was somewhat calculated to give his friend Mouche the colic.

The boy's initial steps in the path of learning were taken under the care of a nursery governess, Mademoiselle Delahaye, whom he quitted to attend the principal day-school in the town, known as the Leguay Institution. When he was eight he entered the College school at Vendome, a quiet spot in Touraine, with something of the aspect of a university town. On the registers of the school may be read the following inscription: "No. 460, Honore Balzac, aged eight years and five months. Has had small-pox; without infirmities; sanguine temperament; easily excited and subject to feverishness. Entered the College on June 22nd 1807; left on the 22nd of August 1813."

An old seventeenth-century foundation of the Oratorians, the school possessed at this period a renown almost equal to that of Oxford and Cambridge. In his *Louis Lambert*, Balzac gives us a description of the place. "The College," he says, "is situated in the middle of the town and on the little river Loir, which flows hard by the main school-buildings. It stands in a spacious enclosure carefully walled in, and comprises all the various establishments necessary in an institution of this kind—a chapel, a theatre, an infirmary, a bakery, gardens, watercourses. The College, being the most celebrated centre of education in France, is recruited from several provinces and even from our colonies, so that the distance at which families live does not permit of parents' seeing their children. As a rule, pupils do not spend the long holidays at home, and remain at the College continuously until their studies are terminated." As a matter of fact, Balzac passed his six years there without once returning to Tours, being entirely cut off from his family, save for such rare visits as were suffered from its members.

The school life was semi-monastic, with a discipline of iron. "The leathern ferule played its terrible role with honour" among Minions, Smalls, Mediums, and Greats. There were, however, certain mitigations —long walks in the woods, cards, and amateur theatricals during vacation; gardening and pigeon-fancying; stilt-walking, sliding and clog-dancing; and, withal, the joys of a chapman's stall set up in the enclosure itself.

Louis Lambert is a slice of autobiography, attempting also a portrait of the novelist, psychologically as well as outwardly, while he was at Vendome. Although the author speaks of himself as distinct from his hero, they make up one and the same individual. Of himself he says: "I had a passion for books. My father, being desirous I should enter the Ecole Polytechnique, paid for me to take private lessons in mathematics. But my coach, being the librarian of the college, let me borrow books, without much troubling about what I chose, from the library, where during playtime he gave me my tuition. Either he was very little qualified to teach, or he must have been pre-occupied with some undertaking of his own; for he was only too willing I should read in the hours he ought to have devoted to me, himself working at something else. Thus, by virtue of a tacit agreement between us, I did not complain of learning nothing, and he kept secret my book-borrowing. This precocious passion led me to neglect my studies and instead to compose poems, which indeed were of no high promise, if judged by the following verse: 'O Inca! O roi infortune,' commencing an epopee on the Incas. The line became only too celebrated among my companions, and I was derisively nicknamed the poet. Mockery, however, did not cure me, and I continued my efforts in spite of the apologue of the Principal, Monsieur Mareschal, who one day related to me the misfortunes of a linnet that tried to fly before being fully fledged. He wished, no doubt, to turn me from my inveterate habit. As I continued to read, I was continually punished, and grew to be the least active, most idle, most contemplative pupil of the Smalls."

And now for the *alter ego*. "Louis Lambert was slender and thin, not more than four feet and a half in height, but his weather-beaten face, his sun-browned hands seemed to indicate a muscular vigour which he had not in a normal state. So, two months after his entering the college, when his school life had robbed him of his well-nigh vegetable colour, we remarked that he became pale and white like a woman. His head was unusually big; his hair, beautifully black and naturally curly, lent an ineffable charm to his forehead, the size of which struck us as extraordinary, though, as may be imagined, we little recked of phrenology. The beauty of this prophetic forehead resided chiefly in the extremely pure cut of the two brows, under which shone his dark eyes—brows that appeared to be carved in alabaster. Their lines had the somewhat rare luck to be perfectly parallel in joining each other at the beginning of the features. These latter were irregular enough, but the irregularity disappeared when one saw his eyes, whose gaze possessed an astonishing variety of expression. Sometimes clear and terribly penetrating, sometimes angelically mild, this gaze grew dull and colourless, so to speak, in his contemplative moments. His eye then resembled a pane of glass no longer illuminated by the sun. The same was true of his strength, which was purely nervous, and also of his voice. Both were equally mobile and variable. The latter was alternately sweet and harmonious, and then at times painful, incorrect, and rugged. As for his ordinary strength, he was incapable of supporting the fatigue of any games whatever. He seemed obviously feeble and almost infirm; but once, during his first year at school, one of our bullies having jeered at this extreme delicacy that rendered him unfit for the rough games practised in the playground, Lambert with his two hands gripped the end of one of our tables containing twelve desks in two rows; then, stiffening himself against the master's chair and holding the table with his feet placed on the bottom cross-bar, he said: 'Let any ten of you try to move it.' I was there and witnessed this singular display of strength. It was impossible to drag the table from him. He appeared at

certain moments to have the gift of summoning unusual powers, or of concentrating his whole force on a given point."

That *Louis Lambert* is an attempted revelation of Balzac's adolescent mind we have both Madame Surville's and Champfleury's additional testimony to prove. Discounting the exaggerations, due either to literary morbidity of the kind that produced Chateaubriand's *Rene* and Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme*, or to the natural vanity of which the novelist had so large a share, there yet remains a considerable substratum of truth in this record of twin, boyish existence, which affords a valuable secondary help towards understanding its author's character.

The major punishment inflicted at Vendome was imprisonment in the dormitory. Referring to himself and his double, Balzac says: "We were freer in prison than anywhere. There we could talk for days together in the silence of the room, where each pupil had a cubicle six feet square, whose partitions were provided with bars across the top, and whose grated iron door was locked every evening and unlocked every morning under the surveillance of a Father, who assisted at our going to bed and getting up. The creak of the doors, turned with singular celerity by the dormitory porters, was one of the peculiarities of the school. In these alcoves we were sometimes shut up for months on end. The scholars thus caged fell under the stern eye of the Prefect, who came regularly, and even irregularly, to see whether we were talking instead of working at our tasks. But nutshells on the stairs or the fineness of our hearing nearly always warned us of his arrival, so that we were able to indulge safely in our favourite studies."

One of the confinements was inflicted on Honore for his faulty Latin and impertinence. "Caius Gracchus was a noble heart," he translated with a free paraphrase of *vir nobilis*. "What would Madame de Stael say, if she happened to learn you had thus misconstrued the sense?" asked the master. (Madame de Stael was supposed to be Louis Lambert's patroness.) "She would say you are a stupid," muttered Honore. "Mister poet, you will go to prison for a week," retorted the master, who had overheard the comment.

Among the long walks enjoyed by the pupils on Thursdays, when there were no lessons, was one to the famous castle of Rochambeau. In 1812, Balzac paid his first and impatiently anticipated visit to this spot. "When we arrived on the hill," he says, "whence the castle was visible, perched on its flank, and the winding valley with the glittering river threading its way through a meadow artistically laid out by Nature, Louis Lambert said to me: 'Why, I saw this last night in a dream.' He recognized the clump of trees under which we were, the arrangement of the foliage, the colour of the water, the turrets of the castle, in fine, all the details of the place. . . . I relate this event," he continues, "first because each man can find in his existence some phenomenon of sleeping or waking analogous to it; and next, because it is true and gives an idea of Lambert's prodigious intelligence. In fact, he deduced from the occurrence an entire system, possessing himself, like Cuvier, in another order of things, of a fragment of life to reconstruct a whole creation." And Lambert is made to develop a theory of the astral body and astral locomotion. The younger self announces also: "I shall be celebrated—an alchemist of thought."

With such notions in his head at this early age, it was not surprising he should have begun, while in his tender teens, a metaphysical composition entitled *Treatise of the Will*. After working for six months on it, a day of misfortune arrived. The pieces of paper on which it had been written were hidden away from all eyes in a locked box, which gradually assumed the weird attraction of a Blue Beard's secret chamber to his mocking class-companions, so that at length their inquisitiveness drove them to essay capturing the said box by violence. Amidst the noise caused by the child-author's desperate defence of his treasure, Father Hagoult suddenly appeared; and, being apprized of what was inside the box, insisted on its being opened. The papers were at once confiscated, and were never given back. Their loss caused the boy a serious shock, which, combining with debility of longer standing, brought on a malady that necessitated his leaving the school. The Principal himself advised the removal. In 1813, between Easter and prize distribution, he wrote to Madame Balzac asking her to come immediately and fetch her son away. The lad, he explained, was prostrated by a kind of coma, which alarmed his teachers all the more as they were at a loss to account for it. To them Honore was simply an idler. It did not occur to them that his condition was owing to cerebral fatigue. Thin and sickly-looking at present, he had the air of a somnambulist, asleep with his eyes open, oblivious of the questions put to him, and unable to answer when asked: "What are you thinking of? Where are you?" His return home produced a painful impression. "So this is how the college authorities remit to us the nice children we entrust to them," exclaimed his grandmother. And it must be confessed that the good Fathers, engrossed by the training of their charges' souls, paid but little attention to the bodies.

In the rooms where the pupils worked, the exhalations by which the air was constantly vitiated mingled with the smells left by the debris of lunches and teas and by other accumulated dirt. There were also cupboards and closets where each pupil used to keep his private booty — pigeons killed on fete days or dishes pilfered from the refectory. Swept only once a day, the place was always filthy, and was further rendered disagreeable by odours coming from the wash-house, dressing-room, pantries, etc. All this with the mud brought in from the outside playgrounds made the atmosphere insupportable. Moreover, the pupils' petty ailments and pains were almost entirely unheeded. In winter chaps and chilblains were Honore's unceasing lot. His woman's complexion, and especially the skin of his ears and lips, cracked under the least cold; his soft white hands reddened and swelled. Constant colds harassed him; and, until

he was inured to the Vendome regimen, pain was his daily portion.

A lively recollection of what he went through in these school-days persisted during his maturer years. Writing in 1844 to Monsieur Fontemoing, one of his few boy-companions that he maintained relations with, he said: "When David is ready to inaugurate his statue of Jean Bart in Dieppe, I shall perhaps be there to enjoy the spectacle; and then we will spend one or two days recalling to mind the cages, wooden breeches and other Vendomoiseries."

His memory was probably less faithful in 1832, when striving to reproduce the tenour of the lost *Treatise of the Will*. At thirteen he could scarcely have had such definite notions of intuition and other operations of the mind; and there must be a fairly long antedating of reflection in attributing to Louis Lambert, even with the latter's two years seniority, thoughts like the following:—

"Often amid calm and silence, when our inner faculties are lulled and we indulge in sweet repose, and darkness hovers round us, and we fall into a contemplation of other things, straight an idea darts forth, flashes through the infinite space created by our brain, and then, like a will-o'-the-wisp, vanishes never to return—an ephemeral apparition like that of such children as yield boundless joy and grief to bereaved parents; a species of still-born flower in the fields of thought. At times also the idea, instead of forcibly gushing and dying without consistence, dawns and poises in the fathomless limbo of the organs that give it birth; it tires us by its long parturition; then it develops and grows, is fertile, rich, and productive in the visible grace of youth and with all the qualities of longevity; it sustains the most inquiring glances, invites them, and never wearies them. Now and again ideas are generated in swarms, one evolves another; they interlace and entice, they abound and are dalliant; now and again, they arise pale and looming, and perish through want of strength or nourishment—the quickening substance is insufficient. And, last of all, on certain days they plunge into the abysses, lighting up their depths; they terrify us, and leave us in a soul despair. Our ideas have their complete system; they are a kingdom of nature, a sort of efflorescence of which a madman perhaps might give an iconography. Yes, all attests the existence of these delightful creations I may compare to flowers. Indeed, their production is no more surprising than that of perfumes and colour in the plant."

Still, without being a Pascal, Balzac in the first half of his teens, was evidently not an ordinary child. There was a ferment of thought, as he said, reacting on itself and seeking to surprise the secrets of its own being. Fostered by the moral isolation in which he lived during these six years, his self-analysis grew unwholesome, there being little or nothing on the physical side to counterbalance it. Fortunately, the return to saner surroundings occurred before the evil was irremediable. Running wild for a few months in the open air, he recovered his natural vivacity and cheerfulness. Every day he went for a long ramble through one or another of the landscapes of Touraine, and on his way home enjoyed the magnificent sunsets lighting up the steeples of his native town and glinting on the river covered with craft, both large and small. To check his reveries, Madame Balzac forced him to amuse his two sisters Laure and Laurence and to fly the kite of his little brother Henry,[*] who had been born while he was at Vendome.

[*] The name is spelt in the English way.

On Sundays and fete days he regularly accompanied his mother to the Cathedral of saint-Gatien, where he must have been an observant spectator if not consistently a devout listener. He prayed by fits and starts; and in the intervals studied closely and with an eye for effect the appearance of priestly persons and functions, with altar and stained-glass window in the background, and gathered materials for his Abbes Birotteau, Bonnet, and others. The period was one of compensation and adjustment. What he had been striving to assimilate had now the leisure to arrange itself in his brain, which was no longer overheated.

As soon as his health was considered sufficiently strong, he began attending classes at the institution of a Monsieur Chretien, and supplemented them by private lessons received at home. His conviction that he would become a famous man was as strong as ever, and his naive assertion of it was frequent enough to provoke great teasing in the domestic circle. Far from being irritated, he laughed with those that laughed at him, his sisters saying: "Hail to the great Balzac!" On the part of his elders the bantering was intended to damp his exalted notions, which they regarded as ill-founded, judging him, as his Vendome professors, by the smallness of his Latin and Greek. His mother in particular had no faith in his prophecies nor yet in his occasional utterances of deeper things than his years warranted: "You certainly don't know what you are talking about," was her habitual snub. And, when Honore, not daring to argue further, took refuge in his sly, not to say supercilious, smile, she taxed him with overweeningness—an accusation that had some truth in it. She might well be excused for her scepticism, for the youth had also large ignorance in some of the commoner things of life, and, moreover, allowed himself to be taken in easily. Laure seems to have traded a good deal on his credulity for the sake of fun. One day she gave him a so-called cactus seedling, supposed to have come from the land of Judaea. Honore preserved it preciously in a pot for a fortnight, only to discover at length that this plant was a vulgar pumpkin.

At the end of 1814, Monsieur Balzac came to reside in Paris, being placed at the head of the Commissariat of the First Military Division; and Honore's education was continued in the capital, for a while at the establishment of a Monsieur Lepitre, Rue Saint-Louis, and then at another kept by Messieurs Sganzer and Beuzelin, Rue de Thorigny, both being situated in the Marais Quarter, near his father's house. So far as the subjects of the curriculum were

concerned, he was still a mediocre pupil. However, literature began to attract his attention and efforts, and one composition of his for an examination—the speech of Brutus's wife after the condemnation of her sons—treasured up by his sister Laure, is mentioned by her as exhibiting some of the energy and realistic presentment in which he was ultimately to excel.

When he was seventeen, his father, seeing that there was no chance of his getting into the Ecole Polytechnique, decided to put him into the legal profession; and, for the purpose of preliminary training, induced a solicitor friend, Guillonnet de Merville,[*] to take him into his office in the place of a clerk—no other than Eugene Scribe, the future dramatist—who had just quitted law for literature. During the eighteen months passed here, Balzac went to lectures at the Sorbonne University, and was coached by private tutors. Among the College professors he heard were Villemain, Guizot, and Cousin. These great teachers converted his passion for reading into more serious habits of study; and, in order to profit more by their lessons, he often spent his leisure hours in the libraries of the city and sought out old books of value in the cases of the dealers along the Quays.

[*] *An Episode under the Terror* was dedicated to him.

The pocket-money required for such purchases was principally supplied by his grandmother, who permitted him to win from her at whist or boston in the evenings he remained at home. A friend of his grandmother's that lived in a neighbouring flat was likewise very kind to him. She was an old maiden lady who had been acquainted with Beaumarchais, and delighted to chat with her protege about the author of the *Mariage de Figaro*. Though now a young man, Honore was not tall; five feet two was his exact height. Retaining his childish love of laughter and fun of every kind, he showed at present greater facility in learning, with a faculty of memory that was prodigious. Having to go with his sisters to balls, he took lessons in dancing; but, happening to meet with an unlucky fall, and resenting the smiles and giggling his accident called forth among the girls, he renounced attempts at tripping on the light, fantastic toe, and devoted subsequent visits to the task of jotting down notes.

A second period of eighteen months in the office of a notary, Maitre Passez, completed his law apprenticeship. In the first pages of *Colonel Chabert* the novelist gives us a sketch of the interior where he acquired his knowledge of chicane. Our nostrils are familiarized with its stove-heated atmosphere, our eyes with the yellow-billed walls, the dirty floor, the greasy furniture, the bundles of papers, the chimney-piece covered with bottles and glasses and bits of bread and cheese; and our ears are assailed by the quips and jokes and puns of the clerks and office-boys who were his companions for a time. He lingers over his reminiscences, which, though pleasant from their connection with his lost youth, had none the less to do with men and things that settled the foundation of his maturer pessimism. An article of his in 1839, entitled the *Notary*, says:—

"After five years passed in a notary's office, it is hard for a young man to conserve his candour. He has seen the hideous origins of all fortunes, the disputes of heirs over corpses not yet cold, the human heart in conflict with the Code. . . . A lawyer's office is a confessional where the various passions come to empty out their bag of bad ideas and to consult about their cases of conscience while seeking means of execution."

While we have no conclusive evidence on the point, it is yet probable that, at least for a while, Balzac had, during these years of legal training, serious thoughts of adopting law as his career. Otherwise he would scarcely have troubled to gain such an extensive acquaintance with everything appertaining to its theory and practice—knowledge which he afterwards utilized in several of his books, notably in *Cesar Birotteau* and the *Marriage Contract*. However, in 1819, he had definitely made up his mind to follow Scribe's example. At this date his father informed him that an opportunity offered itself for him to become a junior partner in a solicitor's practice, which might be ultimately purchased with money advanced him and the dowry that an advantageous marriage would bring. When the newly-fledged Bachelor of Laws declared that it was impossible for him to accept the proposal, and that he had determined to become a man of letters, trusting to his pen for a living, the elder Balzac's astonishment was unbounded. If any echoes of his son's recent cogitations and conversations on the subject had come to the father's ears, they had been deemed so much empty talk; and the friends who were consulted in the dilemma had nothing more encouraging to say. One of them pronounced that Honore was worth nothing better than to make a scrivener of or a clerk in some Government department. The poor fellow had a good handwriting —this, indeed, deteriorated later. Through his parents' influence, it was thought he might ultimately attain a moderate competency. Perhaps Laure, the favourite sister and early confidante of the novelist, may have used persuasion at this juncture with her father and mother. At any rate, as the issue of a great deal of lively discussion, the parents agreed to let Honore make a two years' experiment as a free lance in the ranks of the book-writing tribe. By the end of that time, they no doubt imagined he would be glad enough to re-enact the parable of the prodigal son and start in some safer trade.

CHAPTER III

It happened that Honore's enlistment in the army of *litterateurs* coincided with considerable changes in his parents' circumstances. His father had just been retired on a pension and had recently lost money in two investments. As there were a couple of daughters to be provided for, the family, for the sake of economy, quitted Paris and went to live at Villeparisis, six leagues distant from the capital, where a modest country-house had been bought. Honore, by dint of insistence, obtained permission to remain in Paris, where he would be freer to work and could more easily get into relations with publishers; and a meagrely furnished attic-study was rented for him at No. 9 Rue Lesdiguieres, a street near the Arsenal, still bearing the same name. A small monthly allowance was made him, just enough to keep him from starving; and an old woman, Mother Comin—the Iris-messenger, he facetiously called her—who had been in the family's service and was staying on in the city, undertook to pay him occasional visits and to report should he be in difficulties.

The novelty of his semi-independence caused him at first to look with cheerful eye on his narrow surroundings. To his sister he wrote in April 1819:—

"Here are some details about my way of living. I have taken a servant.

"A servant! What can you be thinking of!

"Yes; a servant. His name is as funny as that of Dr. Nacquart's domestic. The Doctor's is Tranquil; mine is Myself. He is a bad acquisition! . . . Myself is idle, clumsy, and improvident. When his master is hungry and thirsty, he has sometimes neither bread nor water to give him; he does not know how to protect himself against the wind, which blows through the door and window like Tulou through his flute, but less agreeably. As soon as I am awake, I ring for Myself, and he makes my bed. He sets to sweeping, and is not very deft in the exercise.

"Myself!

"Yes, Sir.

"Just look at the cobweb where that big fly is buzzing loud enough to deafen me, and at those bits of fluff under the bed, and at that dust on the windows blinding me.

"Why, sir, I don't see anything.

"Tut, tut! hold your tongue, impudence!

"And he does, singing while he sweeps and sweeping while he sings, laughs in talking and talks in laughing. He has arranged my linen in the cupboard by the chimney, after papering the receptacle white; and, with a three-penny blue paper and bordering, he has made a screen. The room he has painted from the book-case to the fireplace. On the whole, he is a good fellow."

In the introduction to *Facino Cane*, which Balzac wrote some fifteen years later, there is a return of memory to this sojourn in the Lesdiguieres garret. "I lived frugally," he says; "I had accepted all the conditions of monastic life, so needful to the worker. When it was fine, the utmost I did was to go for a stroll on the Boulevard Bourdon. One hobby alone enticed me from my studious habits, and even that was study. I used to observe the manners of the Faubourg, its inhabitants, and their characters. Dressed as plainly as the workmen, indifferent to decorum, I aroused no mistrust, and could mix with them and watch their bargaining and quarrelling with each other as they went home from their toil. My faculty of observation had become intuitive; it penetrated the soul without neglecting the body, or rather it so well grasped exterior details that at once it pierced beyond. It gave me the power of living the life of the individual in whom it was exercised, enabling me to put myself in his skin, just at the dervish of the *Arabian Nights* entered the body and soul of those over whom he pronounced certain words."

The would-be man of letters pushed his hobby even to dogging people to their homes, and to registering in note-book or brain their conversations—records of joys, sorrows, and interests.

"I could realize their existence," he affirms; "I felt their rags on my back. I walked with my feet in their worn-out shoes; it was the dreaming of a man awake. . . . To quit my own habits and become another by the intoxication of my moral faculties at will, such was my diversion. To what do I owe this gift? Is it second sight? Is it one of those possessions of the mind that lead to madness? I have never sought out the causes of this gift. I have it and use it—that is all I can say."

Honore's 'prentice attempts at producing a masterpiece oscillated between the novel and the drama. Two stories, entitled respectively *Coquecigrue* (an imaginary animal) and *Stella*, were abandoned before they were begun. A comic opera had the same fate. The *Two Philosophers*, a farce in which a couple of sham sages mocked at the world and quarrelled with each other, while secretly coveting the good things they affected to despise, appears to have been worked at, but uselessly. Next a tragedy, tackled with greater resolution, was composed and entirely finished. Curiously, the subject of it, *Cromwell*, was the same as that chosen by Victor Hugo, a few years later, to achieve the overthrow of classicism and the substitution of Romanticism in its stead.

The drama was written in verse, a form of literary composition foreign to Balzac's talent. Even during the months he laboured at his task, he confessed to Laure, 'midst his sallies of joking,

that what he was writing teemed with defective lines. He polished and repolished, however, hoping to overcome these drawbacks, upheld by his invincible self-confidence. The piece, as sketched out in his correspondence, made large alterations in English history. Its interest hinged chiefly on the dilemma created in Cromwell's mind by his two sons falling into the hands of a small Royalist force, and by Charles's ordering them to be given up without conditions to their father, although the King was a prisoner. Posed in the third act, the dilemma was solved in the fourth by Cromwell's decision to condemn the King, notwithstanding his generosity. At the close of the play, the Queen escaped from England, crying aloud for vengeance, which she intended to seek in all quarters. France would combat the English, would defeat and crush them in the end.

"I mean my tragedy to be the breviary of peoples and kings," he proudly informed his sister. "It is impossible for you not to find the plan superb. How the interest grows from scene to scene! The incident of Cromwell's sons is most happily invented. Charles's magnanimity in restoring to Cromwell his sons is finer than that of Augustus pardoning Cinna." In blowing his own trumpet Balzac was early an adept.

To stimulate his imagination and reflection, he transferred his daily walk from the Jardin des Plantes to the Pere Lachaise Cemetery. "There I make," he explained, "studies of grief useful for my *Cromwell*. Real grief is so hard to depict; it requires so much simplicity." His garret had still its charm. "The time I spend in it will be sweet to look back upon," he said. "To live as I like, to work in my own way, to go to sleep conjuring up the future, which I imagine beautiful, to have Rousseau's Julie as a sweetheart, La Fontaine and Moliere as friends, Racine as a master, and Pere Lachaise as a promenade ground! Ah! if it could only last for ever!" His dreaming led him on to wider anticipations even than those of literary glory. "If I am to be a grand fellow (which, it's true, we don't yet know), I may add to my fame as a great author that of being a great citizen. This is a tempting ambition also."

At the end of April 1820, he went to Villeparisis with his completed tragedy. Counting on a triumph, he had requested that some acquaintances should be invited to the house to hear it read aloud. Among those present was the gentleman who had advised his turning clerk in the Civil Service. The reading commenced, and, as it progressed, the youthful author noticed that his audience first showed signs of being bored, then of being bewildered, and lastly of being frankly dissatisfied and hostile. Laure was dumbfounded. The candid gentleman broke out into uncompromising, scathing condemnation; and those who were most indulgent were obliged to pronounce that the famous tragedy was a failure. Honore defended his production with energy; and, to settle the dispute, his father proposed it should be submitted to an old professor of the Ecole Polytechnique, whom he knew, and who should act as umpire. This course was adopted; and the Professor, after careful examination of the manuscript, opined that Honore would act wisely in preferring any other career to literature.

The verdict was received with more calmness than might have been expected. Instead of twisting his own neck, as he had hinted he might, if unsuccessful, the young author quietly remarked that tragedies were not his forte and that he intended to devote himself to novels.

As the price of their assent to his continuance in writing, Honore's parents stipulated that he should quit his garret and come home. The return was all the more advisable as Laure was about to be married to a Monsieur Surville, who was a civil engineer, and a gap was thus created in the home circle, which his presence could prevent from being so much felt.[*] His health besides had suffered during his fifteen months of self-imposed privations. In after-life he complained much to some of his friends—Auguste Fessart and Madame Hanska amongst others—of his parents' or rather his mother's hardness to him while he was in the Lesdiguieres Street lodgings, and asserted that, if more liberality had then been displayed, most of his subsequent misfortunes would have been avoided. This is by no means certain. His troubles and burdens would seem to have been caused far more by mistakes of judgment and improvidence than by any stress of circumstance.

[*] Laurence, the younger sister, was married in 1821, twelve months after her sister. Her husband was Monsieur de Montzaigle. She died before the close of the decade.

For the next five years he remained with his father and mother, excepting the occasional visits paid to Touraine, L'Isle-Adam, or Bayeux, at which last place his sister Laure was settled for a while. In a letter to her there he banteringly spoke of his desire to enter the matrimonial state: "Look me out some widow who is a rich heiress," he said; "you know what I require. Praise me up to her—twenty-two years of age, amiable, polite, with eyes of life and fire, the best husband Heaven has ever made. I will give you fifty per cent on the dowry and pin-money." He alluded to his mother's worrying disposition and susceptibility: "We are oddities, forsooth, in our blessed family. What a pity I cannot put us into novels." This he was to do later.

Beforehand there was his Romantic cycle to be run through, in more than forty volumes, if Laure's statement could be believed. What she meant no doubt was sections of volumes or else tales; and even the composition of forty tales in five years would be a considerable performance. True, there were partnerships with Le Poitevin de l'Egreville,[*] Horace Raisson, Etienne Arago. And the material turned out was of the coarsest kind, generally second-hand, a hash-up of stories already published, imitations of Monk Lewis, Maturin, Mrs. Radcliffe, and French writers of the same school, with a little shuffling of characters and incidents. The preface to the novel that opened the series—*The Heiress of Birague*—speaks of an old trunk bequeathed by an uncle and filled with manuscripts, which the author had merely to edit. And

the apology had more truth in it than he meant it to convey.

[*] Son of Le Poitevin Saint-Alme.

Balzac was quite aware of the small merit of this hack-work. To Laure he confessed: "My novel is finished. I will send it to you on condition of your not lending it or boasting of it as a masterpiece." He could appreciate better achievement, and spoke of *Kenilworth* as the finest thing in the world. His excuse was that he had no time to reflect upon what he wrote. He must write every day to gain the independence that he sought; and had none but this ignoble way, as he said, of securing it.

Moreover, there was still the dreaded possibility of his having to embrace another profession than literature. The notary was dead and the business had been taken over by some one else, so that this danger no longer threatened him; but the candid friend was inquiring about a second sinecure. "What a terrible man!" exclaimed Honore.

He indulged in a fit of premature discouragement, seeking for some one or something to cast a little brightness over what he deemed his dull existence. "I have none of the flowers of life," he lamented; "and yet I am in the season when they bloom! What is the good of fortune and joys when youth is past? Of what use the actor's garments if one does not play the role? The old man is one who has dined and looks at others eating. I am young and my plate is empty, and I am hungry, Laure. Will ever my two only, immense desires—to be celebrated and to be loved—be satisfied?" They were, but at a cost that was dearly paid.

However great Balzac's potential genius, it was too little developed, too little exercised at this period for him to produce anything of real, permanent worth. The fiction in which he was destined to excel, the only fiction he was peculiarly fitted to write, demanded maturity of experience that he could hardly acquire before another decade had passed over his head. Yet the stories he reeled off had a certain market value. *The Heiress of Birague* was sold for eight hundred francs, *Jean-Louis*, or the *Foundling Girl*, for thirteen hundred; and a higher price still was obtained (whether the money was actually received is uncertain) for the *Handsome Jew*, afterwards republished under a fresh title, *The Israelite*.

Contemporary critics declined to acknowledge that, in these books and their congeners,[*] there were some traces of a master-hand. To-day the traces are perceptible, because criticism has a better opportunity of discovering them. Here and there, and especially in *Argow, the Pirate*, is to be noticed a beginning of the realism that was afterwards the novelist's excellence. The theme, that of a brigand purified by love, is, as Monsieur le Breton remarks in his study of Balzac, a romantic one in the manner of Byron, and has things in common with Walter Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*, Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal*, and Pixerecourt's *Belveder*. There is an atmosphere of imagination in it, the action is quick, and the characters are strongly though distortedly drawn. Moreover, a breath of healthy sentiment runs through the story, which is not always the case in the later and more celebrated novels. Balzac must have learnt much and acquired much that was useful to him during this puddling of his ore in the furnace of his early efforts; and, if in his maturer age he retained certain defects of the Romantic school, it was because a lurking sympathy with them in his nature prevented his shaking himself free of them, when he reformed his manner.

[*] Other youthful productions were The Centenarian, The Last Fairy, Don Gigadas, The Excommunicated Man, Wann-Chlore, or Jane the Pale, The Curate of the Ardennes, and Argow, the Pirate.

The style of his letters at this same period was admirable, sparkling with wit and with a humour that unfortunately grew rarer, bitterer, and even coarser often, in his later career. Some of his rapidly sketched pictures were incidents of home life. This one represents his mother's fidgety disposition:—

"Louise, give me a glass of water."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Ah, my poor Louise, I'm in a bad way; I am indeed!"

"Nonsense, Ma'am!"

"It's worse than other years."

"Lud! . . . Ma'am!"

"My head is splitting. . . . . Oh, Louise! The shutters are slamming; it's enough to break all the panes in the drawing-room."

Already, with the faculty of exaggeration which characterised him all his life, he anticipated gaining within the next twelvemonth no less than twenty thousand francs; forgetting the small result of his *Cromwell*, he spoke of having a lot of theatrical pieces in hand, plus an historical novel, *Odette de Champdivers*, and another dealing with the fortunes of the R'hoone family. R'hoone was an anagram of his own name Honore. Lord R'hoone was one of his pseudonyms. And "Lord R'hoone," he told Laure, "will soon be the rage, the most amiable, fertile author; and ladies will regard him as the apple of their eye. Then the little Honore will arrive in a coach with head held up, proud look, and fob well garnished. At his approach, amidst flattering

murmurs from the admiring crowd, people will say: 'He is Madame Surville's brother.' Then men, women, and children, and unborn babes will leap as the hills. . . . And I shall be the ladies' man, in view of which event I am saving up my money. Since yesterday I have given up dowagers, and intend to fall back on thirty-year-old widows. Send all you can find to Lord R'hoone, Paris. This address will suffice. He is known at the city gates. N.B.—Send them, carriage paid, free of cracks and soldering. Let them be rich and amiable; as for beauty, it is not a *sine qua non*. Varnish wears off, but the underneath earthenware remains."

Through all these displays of fireworks one fact stands out, that Balzac was in too great a hurry to reap fame and wealth—wealth especially. It was his hurry that inspired his constant complaint: "Ah! if only I had enough bread and cheese, I would soon make my mark and write books to last." This was not altogether true nor just to his parents. He had his bread and cheese and a home to eat it in, which authors have not always enjoyed who have gained immortality by their unaided pen. Although his family were anxious to see him independent, they did not oblige him to depend upon what he earned. Nothing at the moment prevented him from striving to produce something of good quality and spending the time necessary over it. He saw the better, but followed the worse.

"My ideas," he wrote to Laure, "are changing so much that my execution will soon change also. . . . In a short time there will be the same difference between the me of to-day and the me of to-morrow as exists between the young man of twenty and the man of thirty! I am reflecting; my ideas are ripening. I recognize that Nature has treated me favourably in giving me my heart and my head. Believe in me, dear sister, for I need some one to believe in me. I do not despair of doing something one day. I see at present that *Cromwell* had not even the merit of being an embryon. As for my novels, they are not up to much."

How could they be when he supplied them, so to speak, machine-made! "Citizen Pollet" button-holed him in August 1822 and induced him to sign an agreement binding him to deliver a couple of these stories by the 1st of October. Six hundred francs were paid cash down, and the rest in deferred bills. The second of the couple was the *Curate of the Ardennes*, which Laure helped him to write.

It surprises at first sight to read that the demand for this cheap fiction was so great in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The explanation is that, during the last years of the Empire, the article had scarcely been in the market at all, so that, in the Restoration period, which was one of peace and leisure, there was quite a rush for it. On the whole, Balzac did not manage to hit the public fancy with his work in this line. The further he went with it the less he liked it, and such bits of better stuff as he introduced in lieu of the blood and mystery rather lessened than increased the saleableness of his books. For the printing of the *Last Fairy* he had to pay, himself; and he was obliged to own, after five years' catering for popular taste, he was no nearer emerging from obscurity than he had been at the commencement. It was discouraging and humiliating; he had started with such confidence and boasting. Now those who had spoken against his literary vocation seemed to be justified, and those who had been most inclined to believe in him were sceptical.

However, there was still one woman who kept her faith in his capacity for soaring above the common pitch. She it was who, understanding him better than his own family, became a second mother to him. Attracted by him, in spite of his weaknesses of conceit, loudness, and vulgarity, she polished his behaviour, guided his perceptions, corrected his pretentiousness, influencing him through the sincerity and strength of her affection.

Twenty-two years his senior, she was the daughter of a German harpist named Henner, in favour at the Court of Louis XVI., whom Marie-Antoinette had married to Mademoiselle Quelpee-Laborde, one of her own ladies-in-waiting. Both King and Queen stood as god-parents to the Henners' little girl, who, when grown up, was married to a Monsieur de Berny, of ancient, noble lineage, and bore him nine children. The date at which Balzac made her acquaintance has been variously stated. Basing themselves upon his *Love-story at School*, some writers have supposed he knew her when he was a boy, but there is no evidence to confirm this hypothesis. The first definite mention of her and her family occurs in a gossipy letter he wrote to Laure in 1822 from Villeparisis, where the de Berny family were settled: "I may tell you," he says, "that Mademoiselle de B. has narrowly escaped being broken into three pieces in a fall; that Mademoiselle E. is not so stupid as we imagined; that she has a talent for serious painting and even for caricature; that she is a musician to the tips of her toes; that Monsieur C. continues to swear; that Madame de B(erny) has become a bran, wheat, and fodder merchant, perceiving after forty years' reflection that money is everything."

At this date, the relationship between him and Madame de Berny was one of ordinary friendship, yet with indications of warmer feelings on either side that his parents noticed and disapproved. With a view to discouraging the intimacy, they induced him to pay visits that took him from home for some time; but the object they aimed at was not attained. The intimacy ripened. Madame de Berny was his only confidante. His few male friends were too old or too young for his unbosomings. There was the Abbe de Villers whom he stayed with at Nogent, and there was Theodore Dablin, the retired ironmonger, whom he used to call his "*cher petit pere*." Besides these two elders, there was the young de Berny, who was considerably his junior. But to none of them could he talk unreservedly of his ambitions literary and political. For a man between twenty and thirty years of age, whose mind is seething with evolving thought, there is no more sympathetic and appreciative adviser than a woman some years his senior. Madame de

Berny listened to his expression of Imperialistic opinions tinged with Liberalism, as she listened to his confession of hopes and disappointments; and, in turn, talked with persuasive accents of those pre-Revolution days which she had known as a child. She was able also to draw the curtain aside and show him something of the history of the revolution itself and of the Terror, during which she and her parents' family had been imprisoned. It was his first mingling with the grandeurs that were his delight. Through her narration, he was able to enter the old Court society and watch the intrigues of the personages who had been famous in it. Madame de Berny's mother was still living, and added her own reminiscences to those of her daughter. Later, by their agency he was introduced to some of the aristocratic partisans of the fallen dynasty—the Duke de Fitz-James and the Duchess de Castries. Under Madame de Berny's education, his Imperialism was transformed into Legitimism.

How a matron of her age should have allowed the friendship of the commencement to develop into a liaison is one of those problems of sexual psychology easier to describe in Balzac's own language than to explain rationally. We know that she was not happy with her husband, and can surmise that she entered upon the role she played without clearly foreseeing its dangers. No doubt, her desire to form this genius in the rough carried her away from her moorings, which, indeed, had never been very strong, since she had already once before in her married life had a lover. Besides there was her temperament, sensual and sentimental; and with it the tradition of the eighteenth-century morals, indulgent to illicit amours.

Most likely, the second phase of her relations with Balzac coincided with his temporary abandonment of authorship for business. It was in 1825 that he resolved to embark on publishing,[*] partly urged by the mute reproaches of his parents and partly allured by the prospect of rapidly growing rich. He had likewise some intention of bringing out his own books, both those previously written and those in preparation. Of these latter there were a goodly number sketched out in a sort of note-book or album, which his sister Laure called his *garde-manger* or pantry. It was full of jottings anent people, places, and things that he had come across in the preceding lustrum.

[*] The initiator of this project was not Balzac, although his early biographers, Madame Surville included, gave him the credit for it.

The idea of taking up business was mooted to him first by a Monsieur d'Assonvillez, an acquaintance of Madame de Berny, whom he used to see and talk with when staying, as he occasionally did, at the small apartment rented by his father in Paris. Just then Urbain Canel, the celebrated publisher of Romantic books, was thinking of putting on the market compact editions of the old French classics, beginning with Moliere and La Fontaine; and Balzac, either already knowing him or being introduced to him by a mutual friend, was admitted to join in the undertaking. The money necessary for the partnership was lent to him by Monsieur d'Assonvillez, who, as a sharp business man, imposed conditions on the loan which secured him from loss in case of failure. The editions were to be library ones, illustrated by the artist Deveria (who about this time painted Balzac's portrait), and were to be published in parts. The price was high, twenty francs for each work; and additional drawbacks were the smallness of the type and the poorness of the engravings. No success attended the experiment; at the end of a twelvemonth not a score of copies had been sold. By common consent the firm, which had been increased to four partners, broke up their association, and Balzac was left sole proprietor of the concern, the assets of which consisted of a large quantity of wastepaper, and the liabilities amounted to a respectable number of thousand francs.

Madame Surville attributes the fiasco to the professional jealousy of competitors, who discouraged the public from buying; but the cause of the discomfiture lay rather in the faulty manner in which the partners carried out their plan. Monsieur d'Assonvillez being still an interested adviser, Balzac now submitted to him a project for retrieving his losses by adding a printing to his publishing business. The stock and goodwill of a printer were to be bought, and a working type-setter, named Barbier, was to be associated as a second principal in the affair, on account of his practical experience. The project was approved, and the elder Balzac was persuaded to come forward with a capital of about thirty thousand francs, this sum being required to pay out the retiring printer, Monsieur Laurens, and obtain the new firm's patent. Madame de Berny had already lent Honore money to help him in the publishing scheme. At present, she induced her husband to intervene with the Government so that the printing licence might be granted without delay.

The printing premises were situated at No. 17, Rue des Marais, Faubourg Saint-Germain, to-day Rue Visconti, near the Quai Malaquais. The street, which is a narrow one, subsists nearly the same as it was a century ago. Older associations, indeed, are attached to it. At No. 19 died Jean Racine in 1699, and Adrienne Lecouvreur in 1730. No. 17 was a new construction when Balzac went to it, having probably been built on the site where Nicolas Vauquelin des Yveteaux used to receive the far-famed Ninon in his gardens. On the impost, where formerly appeared the names Balzac and Barbier, now may be read "A. Herment, successeur de Garnier." The place is still devoted to like uses.

In the *Lost Illusions*, whose part-sequel *David Sechard* reproduces Balzac's life as a printer, there is a description of the ground floor: "a huge room, lighted on the street-side by an old stained-glass window and on the inner yard-side by a casement." The passage in Gothic style led to the office; and on the floor above were the living rooms, one of which was hung with blue calico, was furnished with taste, and was adorned with the owner's first novels, bound by

Thouvenin. In this "den," during the two years that he was engaged in the printing trade, were received the daily visits of her he called his *Dilecta*.

She could not give him the practical business qualities in which he was utterly lacking and for which his wonderful intuitions of commercial possibilities were no compensation; but she could smile at his enthusiasms and sympathize with his disappointments, which had their see-saw pretty regularly in the interval from the 1st of June 1826 to the 3rd of February 1828. A very fair trade was done; and, in fact, some of the books he printed were important: Villemain's *Miscellanies*, Merimee's *Jacquerie*, Madame Roland's *Memoirs*, not to speak of his own small *Critical and Anecdotal Dictionary of Paris Signboards*, published under a pseudonym, or rather anonymously, since it was signed *Le Batteur de Pave*, the "Man in the Street." But the senior partner, he who should have financed the concern with all the more wariness as d'Assonvillez, the principal supplier of capital, had a mortgage upon the whole estate, allowed himself to be paid for his printing, more often than not, in bills for which no provision was forthcoming and in securities that were rotten. One debt of twenty-eight thousand francs was settled by the transfer of a lot of old unsaleable literature, which would have been dear at a halfpenny a volume. And then, when everything was in confusion—debtors recalcitrant and creditors pressing—what must he do but launch on another venture, buy the bankrupt stock of a type-founder, and start manufacturing. A fresh partner, Laurent, was admitted into the firm in December 1827, with a view to his exploiting the presumably auxiliary branch; and a prospectus was issued vaunting a process of type-founding, which Balzac was wrongly credited with having invented. Within two months after this spurt, and while a fine album was in preparation, which was to illustrate the firm's improved method, Barbier withdrew from the partnership. His desertion would have at once spelt disaster, if Madame de Berny had not boldly stepped into the vacant place, with a power of attorney conferred on her by her husband, and pledged her credit for nine thousand francs. During three months longer, the tottering house continued to hold up; and then, under the avalanche of writs and claims, it fell. A petition in bankruptcy was filed in April, and the estate was placed in the hands of an official receiver.

On reaching this crisis so big with consequences, Balzac had recourse to his mother, who, though little disposed in the past to humour his bent, consented now to every sacrifice in order to save his credit. Her first step was to get her cousin Monsieur Sedillot to occupy himself with the liquidation, she authorizing him at the same time to make whatever arrangement he should judge best, and promising to accept it. She was most anxious to spare her husband, at present eighty-three years of age, the grief he must feel if informed of the full extent of the disaster. Alas! notwithstanding her precautions, the old man did learn the truth; and the shock hastened his end. Within twelve months after the bankruptcy he met with a slight accident, which, acting on his enfeebled constitution, was fatal to him.

Balzac's liabilities, at the moment of the failure, were one hundred and thirteen thousand francs. The effect of the liquidation was to reduce the number of creditors, so that his indebtedness was restricted to members of his own family and to Madame de Berny. The latter's claims were partly met by her son's taking over the business with Laurent, the other partner. Being thus reconstituted, the firm subsequently prospered. To-day it still carries on its affairs under the control of a Monsieur Charles Tuleu, who succeeded Monsieur de Berny. Madame Surville would have us believe that, if her parents had only supported Honore more unreservedly at the commencement, he could have realized a fortune; but all the facts of her brother's life go to prove the contrary.

Referring, a decade later, to these dark days, which loaded him with a burden of debt that he never shook off but increased by his natural inability to balance receipts and expenditure, he spoke of Madame de Berny's kindness, and declared that he had repaid the *Dilecta* in 1836 the last six thousand francs he owed her, together with their five per cent interest. As on many other occasions, Balzac imagined something which had not been done, though he apparently believed what he asserted. The following anecdote re-establishes the facts of the case.

Monsieur Arthur Rhone, a friend of the de Berny family, who used to visit the son Alexander in the office of the Rue des Marais, often admired on the mantelpiece a fine bust of Flora, modelled by Marin. One day the printer said to him: "Do you know how much that bust cost me? . . . Fifteen thousand francs. I got it from Balzac, who owed me a great deal of money. Once when I was at his house in Passy, he exclaimed: 'Since I can't pay you, take what you like from here to reimburse yourself.'" This work of art, a Louis XVI. gilt-bronze time piece, with its two candelabra, once also in Balzac's possession, was part payment of the balance due to the de Berny family, and was surrendered only in the forties.

The novelist, whose memory was so short in money matters, had a longer recollection of his moral obligations. In the letter above referred to, he confessed: "Without her (Madame de Berny) I should have died. She often divined that I had not eaten for several days (here he was probably piling on the agony). She provided for everything with angelic kindness. Her devotion was absolute." It ended only with the *Dilecta's* life.

In the *Shagreen Skin*, which embodies some of Balzac's youthful experiences, Raphael, the hero, was saved from committing suicide, after ruining himself, by an accident which forms the thread of the story. Possibly, during the bankruptcy proceedings, there may have been a fit of despair which urged the insolvent printer to end his own troubles in the Seine. If so, it was of short duration. A fortnight after he had quitted the Rue des Marais, the letter he wrote to General de Pommereul showed him planning out a fresh future.

"At last has happened," he said in it, "what many persons were able to foresee, and what I myself feared in beginning and courageously supporting an establishment the magnitude of which was colossal (!!!). I have been precipitated, not without the previsions of my conscious mind, from my modest prosperity. . . . For the last month I have been engaged on an historical work of the highest interest; and I hope that, in default of a talent altogether problematic with me, my sketch of national customs will bring me luck. My first thought was for you; and I resolved to write and ask you to shelter me for two or three weeks. A camp-bed, a single mattress, a table, if only it is quadrupedal and not rickety, a chair and a roof are all that I require."

The General replied: "Your room awaits you. Come quick." And he went. It was his definite entrance into literature, and his resumption of the search for wealth withal.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST SUCCESSES AND FAME

The historical novel that Balzac had set himself to write was the *Chouans*, this name being given to the Vendee Royalists who, under the leadership of the Chevalier de Nougarede, combated the Revolution and Napoleon. The scene being laid in Brittany, it was natural that, apart from health reasons, the author should wish to inspire his pen by a visit to the places he intended to describe.

His hostess at Fougeres has left us a description of her guest: "He was a little, burly man, clad in ill-fitting garments that increased his bulk. His hands were magnificent. He wore a most ugly hat; but, as soon as he took it off, one remarked nothing else besides his head. . . . Beneath his ample forehead, on which seemed to shine the reflection of a lamp, there were brown, gold-spangled eyes which expressed their owner's meaning as clearly as his speech. He had a big, square nose, and a huge mouth, which was perpetually smiling in spite of his ugly teeth. He wore a moustache, and his long hair was brushed back. At the time he came to us he was rather thin, and appeared to be half-starved. He devoured his food, poor fellow! For the rest, there was so much confidence, so much benevolence, so much *naivete*, so much frankness in his demeanour, his gestures, his ways of speaking and behaving that it was impossible to know him and not love him. . . . His good humour was so exuberant as to be contagious. Notwithstanding the misfortunes he had just passed through, he had not been with us a quarter of an hour before he made the General and me laugh till tears came into our eyes."

The *Chouans*, which his two or three months' sojourn at Fougeres enabled him to get on with rapidly, was completed after his return to Paris, and was published under his own name in 1829. Charles Vimont, who accepted and brought it out, paid him no more than a thousand francs. The book, although it was not badly written, and contained plenty of incident, very fair characterization, of the minor personages especially, and local colouring imitated from Walter Scott, made no great impression. For the ordinary reader it differed too little from the Romanticism with which he was familiar. Moreover, the action savoured too much of the melodramatic; and the character of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and that of the Chouan chief, whom she had promised to deliver up to the emissaries of Fouche, were too nebulous to gain general sympathy, even with the heroine's tragic devotion. There is, however, a fine sketch of Brittany and of its spirit of revolt; the numerous figures of the background are vigorously executed, and nearly all the episodes of the drama are skilfully presented. A perusal of the *Chouans* makes us regret that there was hardly any return to this kind of composition in the author's after-work.

When embarking on his publishing enterprise, Balzac went to live in an apartment of the Rue Tournon, No. 2[*] close to the Luxembourg. He abandoned it for the Rue des Marais in 1826; and, this latter abode being given up in 1828, he removed on his return from Brittany to No. 4, Rue Cassini, where he remained for some years. A friend of his, Latouche—soon to become an enemy—helped him to liven up the walls of his study with the famous blue calico that had adorned his room over the printing office. Certain busybodies spread the report that he was furnishing his new apartment extravagantly; and Laure, to whose ear the tattle had come, ventured to allude to it in a letter reproaching him with remissness in writing home and to her. The accusation of extravagance, which later he really merited, was at this moment a trifle previous, money being scarce and credit also. "Stamps and omnibus fares are expenses I cannot afford," he assured his sister; "and I abstain from going out in order to save my clothes."

[*] Some early biographers state that the novelist went to the Rue Tournon after his bankruptcy. This is a mistake.

However, he was now on the point of scoring a literary success. In the same year as his *Chouans* appeared his *Physiology of Marriage*, a book of satire and caricature having a distinct stamp of his maturer manner. Werdet, for a number of years his publisher and friend, relates in his *Portrait Intime* that Balzac, while still in the Lesdiguieres Street garret, had gone one day to Alphonse Levavasseur and offered, in return for a royalty and a cash installment of two hundred

francs, to supply him with a book to be entitled: *Manual of the Business Man, by a former Notary's Clerk*. It was agreed that the manuscript should be handed in at the end of the month; and the two hundred francs were paid down. In vain the publisher waited for his Manual. Ultimately he hunted out his debtor; and the latter had to confess that the long-promised manuscript had never been written. In order to calm the creditor's indignation, Balzac read to him some fragments of another book which he was really engaged upon. After listening for a while, Levavasseur's countenance grew serene: "I will pay you two thousand francs for this production when finished, Monsieur," he said; "and we will cancel the old transaction. Come with me. I will give you the first thousand francs now. The rest you shall have as soon as I get the last corrected proofs." "Dear publisher, your speech is golden," cried Balzac; "I accept." Nevertheless, the proofs were not delivered until 1829. The book immediately became popular. "From the day of its appearance," comments Werdet, "literature counted another master and France another Moliere."

The verdict is exact only if the *Physiology* is regarded in conjunction with the novelist's after achievement in the domain of realistic fiction. Alone it would not rank so high. Flippant, cynical, immoral—these epithets, which were freely applied to it, all have their justification when one looks at the work from any other standpoint than that of its being a very amusing and clever exposition of sex relations governed by interest and passion. Both facts and philosophy are confined within an exceedingly narrow horizon, one in which the writer was most thoroughly at home, which explains why they bear the imprint of a mind already *blase*.

From a letter Balzac sent to Levavasseur, while finishing the last pages of the manuscript, it appears that he commenced his task as a jest and completed it with more serious purpose: "I intended to dash off a pleasantry," he told him, "and you came one morning and asked me to do in three months what Brillat-Savarin took ten years to do. I haven't an idea which is not the *Physiology*. I dream of it, I am absorbed by it."

The sale of the book was in a measure due to the sort of scandal it provoked. Ladies especially bought the volume to find out for themselves how far they had been maligned; and Levavasseur, who was pleased with his profits, introduced Balzac to Emile de Girardin, then chief editor of the *Mode*, to which paper he now began to contribute light articles, not to speak of other journals, which were only too glad to receive something from his pen. The extent to which the fair sex read the *Physiology* and were affected by it is illustrated by a story that Werdet tells of a hoax perpetrated at Balzac's expense by a number of his society friends, who had cause to complain of his uppishness towards them, a treatment based not merely on the belief he entertained in his literary superiority, but on his pretensions to aristocratic descent. The story belongs more properly to the middle thirties, when he had been using the prefix "de" before his name already for some years, justifying himself on the ground that his father claimed issue from an old family that had resisted the Auvergne invasion and had begotten the d'Entragues stock. His father, moreover, so he said, had discovered documents in the Charter House establishing a concession of lands made by a de Balzac in the fifth century; and a copy of the transaction had been registered by the Paris Parliament.

Between 1833 and 1836 one of the most celebrated Paris "sets" was that of the Opera "lions," seven young aristocratic sparks composing it, or, to be precise, six, together with the Chevalier d'Entragues de Balzac, as his friends jokingly dubbed him—he being an elder. It was the period of his first flush of prosperity, when he drove about in a hired carriage resplendent with the d'Entragues coat of arms, which cost him five hundred francs a month; had a majestic coachman in fine livery and a Tom Thumb groom; sported himself in gorgeous garments and strutted about in the Opera *foyer*, amidst the real or feigned admiration of his fellows.

To revenge themselves for their mentor's superciliousness towards them, the six other *lions* induced a dancer at the Opera to play the part of a supposed Duke's daughter smitten with the great man's writings and person, a role she undertook the more willingly as, being well acquainted with the former, she was anxious to prove to him that he was not so perspicacious as he deemed himself. An Opera ball was chosen for the adventure; and Balzac was duly baited and taken in tow by the lady, whose mask only half concealed her beauty. Thus began a flirtation, with subsequent clandestine meetings, allowing the fair unknown to fool him to the top of her bent. The author wanted to propose for her hand to the Duke her father; but, cleverly using her knowledge of his books, the sly jade showed him that he would have no chance of being accepted. At last she hinted she would like to visit him in his author's sanctum; and the delighted novelist went to most lavish expense in fitting up a boudoir to receive her. The visit was presumably a secret one. Protected by a young man employed at the Opera, to whom she was engaged, and who accompanied her in the disguise of a negro, she went to the Rue des Batailles one evening and graciously listened to the enraptured conversation of her victim till towards midnight, when her mother, who was in the plot, came to fetch her. The novelist's fury and humiliation were extreme on his learning how neatly he had been tricked, and it was some time before he ventured to reappear in his accustomed haunts. As narrated by Werdet, the story is a good deal embellished, and some of the details that he gives were probably invented; but the main outline he vouches to be true.

Among the editors of journals who sought Balzac's collaboration after the publication of the *Physiology* were Buloz of the *Revue de Paris* and Victor Ratier of the *Silhouette*. To the latter of them, in 1831, he wrote from La Grenadiere, where he had gone to recruit, a letter revealing a curiously mixed state of mind in this dawning period of fame. He would seem to have been under a presentiment of the long years of struggle and incessant toil he was about to be

involved in, and to have felt a shrinking of his physical nature from them.

"Oh! if you knew what Touraine is like," he exclaimed. "Here one forgets everything else. I forgive the inhabitants for being stupid. They are so happy. Now, you know that people who enjoy much are naturally stupid. Touraine admirably explains the lazzarone. I have come to regard glory, the Chamber, politics, the future, literature, as veritable poison-balls to kill wandering, homeless dogs, and I say to myself: 'Virtue, happiness, life, are summed up in six hundred francs income on the bank of the Loire. . . .' My house is situated half-way up the hill, near a delightful river bordered with flowers, whence I behold landscapes a thousand times more beautiful than all those with which rascally travellers bore their readers. Touraine appears to me like a *pate de foie gras*, in which one plunges up to the chin; and its wine is delicious. Instead of intoxicating, it makes you piggy and happy. . . . Just fancy, I have been on the most poetic trip possible in France—from here to the heart of Brittany by water, passing between the most ravishing scenery in the world. I felt my thoughts go with the stream, which, near the sea, becomes immense. Oh, to lead the life of a Mohican, to run about the rocks, to swim in the sea, to breathe in the fresh air and sun! Oh, I have realized the savage! Oh, I have excellently understood the corsair, the adventurer —their lives of opposition; and I reflected: 'Life is courage, good rifles, the art of steering in the open ocean, and the hatred of man —of the Englishman, for example.' (Here Balzac is of his time.) Coming back hither, the ex-corsair has turned dealer in ideas. Just imagine, now, a man so vagabond beginning on an article entitled, *Treatise of Fashionable Life*, and making an octavo volume of it, which the *Mode* is going to print, and some publisher reprint. . . . Egad! At the present moment literature is a vile trade. It leads to nothing, and I itch to go a-wandering and risk my existence in some living drama. . . . Since I have seen the real splendours of this spot, I have grown very philosophic, and, putting my foot on an ant-hill, I exclaim, like the immortal Bonaparte: 'That, or men, what is it all in presence of Saturn or Venus, or the Pole Star?' And methinks that the ocean, a brig, and an English vessel to engulf, is better than a writing-desk, a pen, and the Rue Saint-Denis."

About the events of the 1830 Revolution the novelist was apparently but little concerned. True, the change was one of dynasty only, not of *regime*, albeit Louis-Philippe posed rather as a plebiscitary monarch. Balzac's clericalism and royalism, which ultimately became so crystallized, were at this date in a position of unstable equilibrium. At one moment his criticisms have an air of condemning the monarchic principle, at another they point to his being a pillar of the ancient system of things. On this occasion he was twitted by Madame Zulma Carraud, his sister's friend, with whom his relations grew more intimate as his celebrity augmented; and he defended himself by a confession of faith which forecast his endeavours—less persistent than his desires—to add the statesman's laurels to those of the *litterateur*. His doctrine, following the Machiavellian tradition, was that the genius of government consists in operating the fusion of men and things—a method which demonstrated Napoleon and Louis XVIII. alike to be men of talent. Both of them restrained all the various parties in France—the one by force, the other by ruse, because the one rode horseback, the other in a carriage. . . . France, he continued, ought to be a constitutional monarchy, with an hereditary Royal Family, a House of Lords extraordinarily powerful and representing property, etc., with all possible guarantees of heredity and privilege; then she should have a second, elective assembly to represent every interest of the intermediary mass separating high social positions from what was called the people. The bulk of the laws and their spirit should tend to enlighten the people as much as possible—the people that had nothing—workmen, proletaries, etc.—so as to bring the greatest number of men to that condition of well-being which distinguished the intermediary mass; but the people should be left under the most puissant yoke, in such a way that the individual units might find light, aid, and protection, and that no idea, no form, no transaction might render them turbulent. The richer classes must enjoy the widest liberty practicable, since they had a stake in the country. To the Government he wished the utmost force possible, its interests being the same as those of the rich and the bourgeois, viz. to render the lowest class happy and to aggrandize the middle class, in which resided the veritable puissance of States. If rich people and the hereditary fortunes of the Upper Chamber, corrupted by their manners and customs, engendered certain abuses, these were inseparable from all society, and must be accepted with the advantages they yielded.

This conception of the classes and the masses which he afterwards set forth more fully in his *Country Doctor* and *Village Cure*, partly explains why all his best work, besides being impregnated with fatalism, has such a constant outlook on the past. It was a dogma with him rather than a philosophy, and was clung to more from taste than from reasonable conviction. He believed in aristocratic prerogative, because he believed in himself, and ranked himself as high as, or rather higher than, the noble. This was at the bottom of his doctrine; but he was glad all the same to have his claim supported by such outward signs of the inward grace as were afforded by vague genealogy and the homage of the great. Duchesses were his predilection when they were forthcoming; failing them, countesses were esteemed.

The Duchess d'Abrantes—one of his early admirers—to whom he dedicated his *Forsaken Woman*, was herself a colleague in letters; and he was able to render her some service through his relations with publishers. Their correspondence shows them to have been on very friendly terms. In one of his letters to her, he insisted on his inability to submit to any yoke, and rebutted her insinuation that he permitted himself to be led—possibly the Duchess's hint referred to Madame de Berny. "My character," he said, "is the most singular one I have ever come across. I study myself as I might another person. I comprise in my five feet two every incoherence, every contrast possible; and those who think me vain, prodigal, headstrong,

frivolous, inconsistent, foppish, careless, idle, unstable, giddy, wavering, talkative, tactless, ill-bred, impolite, crotchety, humoursome, will be just as right as those who might affirm me to be thrifty, modest, plucky, tenacious, energetic, hardworking, constant, taciturn, cute, polite, merry. Nothing astonishes me more than myself. I am inclined to conclude I am the plaything of circumstances. Does this kaleidoscope result from the fact that, into the soul of those who claim to paint all the affections and the human heart, chance casts each and every of these same affections in order that by the strength of their imagination they may feel what they depict? And can it be that observation is only a sort of memory proper to aid this mobile imagination? I begin to be of this opinion."

Balzac appears to have been introduced to the Duchess d'Abrantes about the year 1830, when he was engaged in writing his *Shagreen Skin*, which, out of the numerous pieces of fiction produced within this and the next twelve months, added most to his notoriety, though inferior to such stories as the *House of the Tennis-playing Cat*, and even to the *Sceaux Ball* in the more proper qualities of the novel.

The *Shagreen Skin* is the adventure of a young man who, after sowing his wild oats and losing his last crown at the gaming table, goes to end his troubles in the river, but is prevented from carrying out his intention by being fortuitously presented with a piece of shagreen skin, which has the marvellous property of gratifying its possessor's every wish, yet, meanwhile, shrinks with each gratification, and in the same proportion curtails its possessor's life. On this warp of fairy tale, the author weaves a woof of romance and reality most oddly blended. The imitations of predecessors are numerous. The style is turgid, the thought is shallow, the sentiment is exaggerated. But very little of the sober characterization soon to be manifested in other books is displayed in this one. The best that can be said is that the thing has the same cleverness as the *Physiology*, with here and there indications—and clear ones—of the novelist's later power. He himself grossly overestimated it, as, indeed, he overestimated not a few of his poorer productions—maybe because they cost him greater toil than his masterpieces, which generally, after long, unconscious gestation, issued rapidly and painless from him.

An amusing expression of this self-praise has come down to us in the puff he composed on the occasion of a reprint of the *Shagreen Skin* by Gosselin in 1832. "The *Philosophic Tales* of Monsieur de Balzac," it announced, "have appeared this week. The *Shagreen Skin* is judged as the admirable novels of Anne Radcliffe were judged. Such things escape annalists and commentators. The eager reader lays hold of these books. They bring sleeplessness into the mansions of the rich and into the garret of the poet; they animate the village. In winter they give a livelier reflection to the sparkling log, great privileges to the story-teller. It is nature, in sooth, who creates story-tellers. Vainly are you a learned, grave writer, if you have not been born a story-teller, and you will never obtain the popularity of the *Mysteries of Udolpho* and the *Shagreen Skin*, the *Arabian Nights*, and Monsieur de Balzac. I have somewhere read that God created Adam, the nomenclator, saying to him: You are the story-teller. And what a story-teller! What verve and wit! What indefatigable perseverance in painting everything, daring everything, branding everything! How the world is dissected by this man! What an annalist! What passion and what coolness!

"The *Philosophic Tales* are the red-hot interpretation of a civilization ruined by debauch and well-being, which Monsieur de Balzac exposes in the pillory. The *Arabian Nights* are the complete history of the luxurious East in its days of happiness and perfumed dreams. *Candide* is the epitome of an epoch in which there were bastilles, a stag-park, and an absolute king. By thus taking at the first bound a place beside these formidable or graceful tale-tellers, Monsieur de Balzac proves one thing that remained to be proved; to wit, that the drama, which was no longer possible to-day on the stage, was still possible in the story—that our society, so dangerously sceptical, *blase*, and scornful, could yet be moved by the galvanic shocks of this poetry of the senses—full of life and colour, in flesh and blood, drunk with wine and lust—in which Monsieur de Balzac revels with such delight. Thus, the surprise was great, when, thanks to this story-teller, we still found among us something resembling poetry—feasts, intoxication, the light o' love giving her caresses amidst an orgie, the brimming punch-bowl crowned with blue flames, the yellow-gloved politician, scented adultery, the girl indulging in pleasure and love and dreaming aloud, poverty clean and neat, surrounded with respectability and happy hazard—we have seen all this in Balzac. The Opera with its lemans, the pink boudoir and its flossy hangings, the feast and its surfeits; we have even seen Moliere's doctor reappear, such need has this man of sarcasm and grotesqueness. The further you advance in the *Shagreen Skin* —vices, lost virtues, poverties, boredom, deep silence, dry-as-dust science, angular, witless scepticism, laughable egotism, puerile vanities, venal loves, Jewish second-hand dealers, etc.—the more astonished and pained you will be to recognize that the nineteenth century in which you live is so made up. The *Shagreen Skin* is *Candide* with Beranger's notes; it is poverty, luxury, faith, mockery; it is the heartless breast, the brainless cranium of the nineteenth century—the century so bedizened and scented, so revolutionary, so ill-read, so little worth, the century of brilliant phantasmagorias, of which in fifty years' time nothing will be seizable except Monsieur de Balzac's *Shagreen Skin*."

On account of its sensationalism, the *Shagreen Skin* had a success of curiosity equal, and, if anything, superior to that of the *Physiology*. The author, however, had to defend himself against the charge of copying foreign literature—Hoffman's tales in particular. One of his correspondents, the Duchess de Castries, who subsequently flattered him and flirted with him, wrote to him incognito, taking exception to certain statements he had made in each of his two

popular works. Replying to her, he for the first time spoke of his desire to develop his fiction into a vast series of volumes destined to make known to posterity the life of his century.

Great schemes were always to be Balzac's day-dreaming, one chasing the other in his fancy. They filled his thoughts, and in his heart were his constant aim, far more than to be loved, for all he asserted of this last desire. If literature was the one means he resorted to in his efforts to attain them, this was because every other means deceived his expectation, and not because he deliberately preferred it to all others. He owned the fact without reservation. In the case of a man whose literary achievement was so high, such slighting of letters has its significance, and is curious. Taken in conjunction with other evidence furnished by his letters, it proves that genius, though sometimes clearly the pure, simple moving of a spirit that cannot be resisted, is also—and perhaps as often—a calculating partnership, and that the work of art is a compromise. Would Balzac have written better if his motive had been single? It is not certain.

During these early days of his popularity, a seat in the Chamber of Deputies was his will o' the wisp. Aided by the *Dilecta's* friends, he offered himself as a candidate in two constituencies, Angouleme and Cambrai, after publishing his pamphlet: *An Inquiry into the Policy of Two Ministries*. With a view to shining in the future Parliament, he sharpened his witticisms, rounded his periods, polished his style, exercised himself in opposing short phrases to others of Ciceronian length, endeavouring the while to put poetry and observation into a new subject. At least these things were in his mind, as his communication to Berthoud of the Cambrai *Gazette* testified. His intention was to become an orator, he said. Had he been elected, he might have become the rival of Thiers. They were about the same age. Then France might have had two "little bourgeois" instead of one, unless one of the two had knocked the other out. But whether conquering or conquered, Balzac the politician would have swallowed up Balzac the novelist, and *Eugenie Grandet* would never have been written. Why he failed at the polls is not clear. Probably he did not possess enough suppleness to please his party. To tell the truth, we do not learn definitely to which party he belonged. He was quite capable of constituting one by himself.

These preoccupations hindered him somewhat in carrying out his engagements with publishers and editors, so that he did not always get the money he counted on. Yet he worked hard. His habit, at this time, was to go to bed at six in the evening and sleep till twelve, and after, to rise and write for nearly twelve hours at a stretch, imbibing coffee as a stimulant through these spells of composition. What recreation he took in Paris was at the theatre or at the houses of his noble acquaintances, where he went to gossip of an afternoon. It was exhausting to lead such an existence; and even the transient fillips given by the coffee were paid for in attacks of indigestion and in abscesses which threw him into fits of discouragement. When suffering from these, he poured out his soul to his sister or Madame Carraud, complaining in his epistles that his destiny compelled him to run after fame and deprived him of his chance to meet with the ideal woman. Madame de Berny, with all her devotion, did not satisfy him now. "Despairing of ever being loved and understood by the woman of my dreams," he tragically cried, "having met with her only in my heart, I am plunging again into the tempestuous sphere of political passions and the stormy, withering atmosphere of literary glory." But the "she" of his dreams, he added, must be wealthy. He could not conceive of marriage and love in a cottage. It must be admitted that from his sources of affection as from his sources of ambition there was a gush which was rather muddy.

Altogether, the year of 1832 was an irritating one for Balzac. A rich match he had hoped to make fell through. A second attempt of his to enter the Chamber of Deputies ended in defeat. His books, after their first season or two of favour, were selling but poorly in France, although pirated editions were issued and had a large circulation abroad. Impatiently he meditated plans for doubling and tripling his revenue. He would emigrate—he would recommence publishing—he would turn playwright. Amid these three solicitations he moved in a circle without reaching a conclusion. And fortune, while he was hesitating, did not come to his door. In default of her visit, not all the flattering epistles he received from ladies in Russia and Germany —three and four a day, he asserted—were an adequate compensation. A journey undertaken for the benefit of his health to Sache, Angouleme, and Aix forced him to borrow from his mother again, instead of paying back the capital he owed her. His unfinished manuscripts he had taken with him, but he found it difficult to get on with them: "I was going to start work this morning with courage," he wrote to her, "when your letter came to upset me completely. Do you think it possible for me to have artistic thoughts when I see all at once the tableau of my miseries displayed before me as you display them? Do you think I should toil thus, if I did not feel it?"

The novelist's relations with his mother force the attention of any one that studies his life. Their two natures were contrary; there were often conflicts between them. As a child, he seems not to have comprehended the affection underlying the maternal severity, and to have entertained a dread of the latter which never entirely left him. According to his friend Fessart, he used to confess he always experienced a nervous trembling whenever he heard his mother speak; and the effect was in some sort the numbing of his faculties when he was in her presence. Her generous abnegation at the time of his bankruptcy was a revelation to him; his gratitude for it was sincere; and from that date onwards, during a number of years, his letters to her evinced it, yet not consistently; the old distrust recurs, and also a growing tendency to utilize her as a servant in his concerns. Having once dipped in her purse, he did not hesitate to hold out his hand, on each occasion that his needs, real or fancied, prompted him, being confident of requiting her in the future. His refrain was ever the same: "Sooner or later,

politics, journalism, a marriage, or a big piece of business luck will make me a Croesus. We must suffer a little longer." And he finished by exhausting her last penny of capital, and reduced her to depend on an allowance he gave her, irregularly—an allowance which, when he died, had to be continued to her from the purse of another. Madame Balzac was sacrificed to his improvidence and stupendous egotism; nor can the tenderness of his language—more frequently than not called forth by some fresh immolation of her comfort to his interests—disguise this unpleasing side of his character and action. While he was recouping his strength and spirits, on the 1832 holiday, she was in Paris negotiating with Pichot of the *Revue de Paris*, with Gosselin and other publishers, arranging for proofs, and also for an advance of cash. Even his epistolary good-byes were odd mixtures of business with sentiment. After casting himself — through the post—on her bosom and embracing her with effusion, he terminated by: "Pay everything as you say. On my side, I will gain money by force, and we will balance the expenses by the receipts."

The book that cost him the greatest efforts during the year of 1832 was his *Louis Lambert*, already mentioned in the second chapter. Writing about it to his family from Angouleme he explained that he was attempting in it to vie with Goethe and Byron, with *Faust* and *Manfred*. It was to be a conclusive reply to his enemies, and would make his superiority manifest. Some day or other it would lead science into new paths. Meantime it would produce a deep impression and astonish the Swedenborgians. Whether the members of this sect were astonished, history does not record. Those who were most so were the novelist's friends, and Madame de Berny among the number. But their wonder was not a eulogium. First of all, the hero—his *alter ego*—is a very poor replica of Pascal; and the exalting of Lambert's intelligence, which was mere self-praise, jarred on them the more, as they truly loved him. The *Dilecta*, whom he had asked to pass her frank opinion on it, did not hesitate to tell him some hard truths: "Goethe and Byron," she said, "have admirably painted the desires of a superior mind; when reading them, one aggrandizes them by all the space they have perceived; one admires the scope of their view; one would fain give them one's soul to help theirs to cover the distance that separates them from the goal they aspire to reach. But, if an author comes and tells me he has attained this goal, I no longer see in him, however great he may be, more than a presumptuous man; his vanity shocks me, and I diminish him by all the height to which he has tried to raise himself. . . . I would therefore beg you, dearest, to cut out of your *Lambert* everything that might suggest these singular ideas; for instance: 'The admirable combat of thought arrived at its greatest force, at its vastest expression' . . . 'The moral world, whose limits he had thrown back for himself,' cannot be tolerated. Write, dearest, in such a manner that the whole crowd may perceive you from everywhere, by the height at which you will have placed yourself; but do not cry out for people to admire you; for, on all sides, the largest magnifying-glasses would be directed towards you; and what becomes of the most delicious object seen by the microscope!"

The lesson was a severe one. Though it did not cure Balzac of his author's vanity—nothing could cure him of that—it did, for a while at least, direct his endeavours towards fiction of a more objective kind.

What he was now capable of in characterization treated objectively he showed in his *Colonel Chabert* and the *Cure of Tours*, both of which were published in the same twelvemonth as *Louis Lambert*. These stories are exceedingly simple in construction. The Cure is a priest whose joys and ambitions are modest and innocent. Having reached the age when indulgence in ease and comfort is excusable, he finds himself suddenly deprived of them through unwittingly offending his landlady. She, an old maid, as inwardly shrewish as outwardly pious, utilizes the Abbe Birotteau and another clergyman, who both lodge with her, to attract the good society folk of Tours to her evening receptions. After due experience of these gatherings, the Abbe plays truant, finding it more agreeable to spend his leisure with friends elsewhere. His absence causes the landlady's guests to grow remiss and finally to desert her; so, to revenge herself, the slighted dame, proceeding by petty pin-pricks, makes the Abbe's life a burden to him, and, ultimately enlisting the brother clergyman in her schemes of annoyance, works on his jealousy with such cleverness that their victim's career is blasted and blighted. Dependent on the development of the characters, the plot is adroitly and naturally elaborated. Nowhere is there any forcing of the note; and, in alternate flow, humour and pathos, of a saner sort than in some of the author's previous work, run and ripple throughout. With deeper pathos the novelist tells in *Colonel Chabert* the virtues of a man of obscure origin, whose nobleness meets with but scanty recognition, since it conducts him to the almshouse in his old age. So vivid is the sober realism of this fine story that the public believed the relation to be plain, unvarnished facts, and were astonished at the writer's daring to reveal them in all their detail.

Balzac's autumn trip was prolonged as far as Annecy and Geneva. He had intended going on to Italy in company with the Duke de Fitz-James. The latter journey, however, was ultimately abandoned, as he did not succeed in raising the thousand crowns it required. Travelling on the top of a coach, he had rather a serious accident when going to Aix. He was climbing up to the front seat just as the horses set off, and, having missed his footing, fell with all his weight against the iron step. The strap, which he clutched in his fall, saved him from coming to the ground; but the impact of his eighty-four kilograms caused the sharp iron to enter the flesh of his leg pretty deeply. This wound took some time to heal, and the annoyance it cause him was aggravated by an additional malady in his stomach which he tried to deal with by consulting a mysterious quack in Paris, sending him through his mother, two pieces of flannel that he had been wearing next his skin. The doctor was to examine No. 1 flannel, and by it to determine the seat and the cause of the affection, as well as the treatment to be followed; then he was to

examine No. 2, and to give certain instructions as to its further use. Balzac asked his mother to touch the flannels only with paper, so as not to interfere with their effluvia. This belief of his in magnetism of an occult kind was an inheritance. His mother, it has already been said, was a mystic. Her books of this doctrine comprised more than a hundred volumes of Saint-Martin, Swedenborg, Madame Guyon, Jacob Boehm, and others. All these writers he was familiar with. Throughout his life, the influence of their teaching and his mother's firm belief remained with him. On his conduct and practice their effect was harmless; but in his literary work they were a disturbance, and, wherever they intruded, detracted from its quality.

Happily, he was beginning to be tempted more and more by the artistic side of things in his daily experience. Of the lesser novels composed before the end of 1832, several were directly inspired by incidents brought to his knowledge. The *Red Inn* was related to him by a former army surgeon, a friend of the man that was unjustly condemned and executed. An *Episode under the Terror* was narrated by the hero himself. *A Desert Attachment* was the outcome of a conversation with Martin, the celebrated tamer of wild beasts. On the other hand, *Master Cornelius* was written to correct the false impression of Louis XI. which he considered Walter Scott had given to his readers in *Quentin Durward*, this making him very angry. His curiosity concerning facts and realities of every description led him to seek an interview with Samson the executioner. Calling one day to see the Director of Prisons, he found himself in presence of a pale, melancholy-looking man of noble countenance, whose manners, language, and apparent education were those of one polished and cultured. It was Samson. Entering into conversation with this strange personage, the novelist listened to the particulars of his life. Samson was a royalist. On the morrow of Louis XVI.'s execution he had suffered the utmost remorse, and had paid for what was probably the only expiatory mass said on that day for the repose of the King's soul.

Like other *litterateurs*, Balzac took up many subjects which he did not go on with. He had this peculiarity besides, that he often asserted some book to be completed which was either not begun at all or was in a most unfinished condition. While on the Angouleme and Aix excursion, he spoke especially of *The Three Cardinals*, *The Battle of Austerlitz* (afterwards often alluded to simply as the *Battle*), and *The Marquis of Carrabas*. Not one of these was ever written. They were abandoned perhaps on account of other work, or else because the execution was less easy than the conception. Napoleon, who would have been a central figure in the *Battle*, is incidentally introduced in the *Country Doctor*, which was begun in 1832.

Probably, also, to this same date should be assigned the bizarre and even comical expression of hopes and fears for the future which Balzac confided to his sister Laure. In order to force himself to take exercise, he used to correct his proofs either at the printer's or at her house. Sometimes the weather, to the influence of which he was very susceptible, sometimes his money-tightness, or his fatigue from protracted work would cause him to arrive with lack-lustre eyes, sallow complexion, glum expression and irritable temper. Laure essayed to console and brighten him.

"Now don't try to comfort me," he answered on one occasion. "I'm a dead man."

And the dead man began to drawl out his tale of woe, gradually rousing up as he talked, and, at last, speaking excitedly. But the dolent accents returned as he opened his proofs and read them.

"I shall never make a name, sis."

"Nonsense! with such books, any one could make a name."

He raised his head; his features relaxed; the sombre tints vanished from his face.

"You are right, by Jove! . . . these books must live. . . . Besides, there is Chance. It can protect a Balzac as well as it can a fool. Indeed, one has only to invent this chance. Let some one of my millionaire friends (and I have a few), or a banker not knowing what to do with his money, come and say to me: 'I am aware of your immense talent and your anxieties; you need such and such a sum to be free; accept it without scruple; you will pay it back some day or other; your pen is worth my millions!' That's all I require, my dear sister."

Laure, being accustomed to the appearance of these illusions which brought back his cheerfulness, never exhibited any surprise at such soaring notes. Having created the fable, her imaginative brother continued:

"Those people spend such sums on whims. . . . A handsome deed is a whim, like any other, and gives joy perpetually. It is something to say: 'I have saved a Balzac.' Humanity has good impulses of the sort; and there are people who, without being English, are capable of like eccentricities. 'Either a millionaire or a banker,' he cried, thumping on his chest, 'one of them I will have.'"

By dint of talking he had come to accredit the thing, and gleefully strode about the room, lifting and waving his arms.

"Ah! Balzac is free! You shall see, my dear friends, and my dear enemies, what his progress is."

In fancy, he entered the Academy! From there it was only a step to the House of Peers. He beheld himself admitted thither. Why shouldn't he be a member of the Upper Chamber? This

and that person had been created a peer. Then he was appointed a minister. There was nothing extraordinary about it. Presidents existed. Were not people who had boxed the compass of ideas the fittest to govern their fellows? A programme, a policy was evolved and carried out; and, as everything was going on smoothly, he had time to think of the millionaire friend or banker who had assisted him. The generous Maecenas should be rewarded. He understood the novelist, had lent him money on the security of his talent, had enabled him to obtain his well-deserved honours. The benefactor should now have his share in the honour, a share in the immortality.

After a peregrination of this magnitude and dreams to match, he alighted from his Pegasus, and spoke as an ordinary mortal—he had enjoyed himself, and his fit of the dumps was exorcised. Putting the last touch to his proof-correcting, he left the house with his face wreathed in smiles.

"Good-bye," he said to his sister, at the door; "I am off home to see if the banker is there, waiting for me. If he isn't, I shall find some work to do all the same; and work is my real money-lender."

CHAPTER V

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1831, 1832

One has little doubt in deciding that, of the two spurs which goaded Balzac's labours, his desire for wealth acted more persistently and energetically than his desire for glory. In his conversations, in his correspondence, money was the eternal theme; in his novels it is almost always the hinge on which the interest, whether of character, plot, or passion, depends. Money was his obsession, day and night; and, in his dormant visions, it must have loomed largely.

Henry Monnier, the caricaturist, used to relate that, meeting him once on the Boulevard, the novelist tapped him on the shoulder and said:

"I have a sublime idea. In a month I shall have gained five hundred thousand francs."

"The deuce, you will," replied Monnier; "let's hear how."

"Listen, then," returned his interlocutor. "I will rent a shop on the Boulevard des Italiens. All Paris is bound to pass by. That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes. Well, what next?"

"Next, I will establish a store for colonial produce; and, over the window, I will have printed, in letters of gold: 'Honore de Balzac, Grocer.' This will create a scandal; everybody will want to see me serving the customers, with the classical counter-skipper's smock on. I shall gain my five hundred thousand francs; it's certain. Just follow my argument. Every day these many people pass along the Boulevard, and will not fail to enter the shop. Suppose that each person spends only a sou, since half of it will be profit to me I shall gain so much a day; consequently, so much a week; so much a month."

And thereupon, the novelist, launched into transcendental calculations, soaring with his enthusiasm into the clouds.

It was the same Henry Monnier who, meeting him another time on the Place de la Bourse, and having had to listen to another of such mirific demonstrations about a scheme from which both were to derive millions, answered drily:

"Then lend me five francs on strength of the affair."

Noticing this sort of monomania, in an article which he wrote in the short-lived *Diogenes*, during the month of August 1856, Amedee Roland said of Balzac:

"His ambition was to vie in luxury with Alexandre Dumas and Lamartine, who, before the Revolution of 1848, were the most prodigal and extravagant authors in the five continents. For anything like a chance of finding his elusive millions, he would have gone to China. Indeed, on one occasion, he took it into his head he would start, together with his friend, Laurent Jan, and go to see the great Mogul, maintaining that the latter would give him tons of gold in exchange for a ring he possessed, which came, so he asserted, right down from Mahomet. It was three o'clock in the morning when he knocked at Laurent Jan's door to inform his sleeping friend of his project; and the latter had the greatest difficulty in dissuading him from setting off forthwith in a post-chaise for India, of course, at the expense of the monarch in question."

In justice, however, to Balzac, it should be stated that not a few of his suggestions were sensible enough, and contained ideas which, if properly put into execution, could have yielded profitable results. As a matter of fact, some were subsequently exploited by people who listened to them, or heard of them. A scheme of his for making paper by an improved process, which he tried to realize in 1833, and which he induced his mother, his sister's husband, and other friends to support with their capital, anticipated the employment of esparto grass and wood,

which since has been adopted successfully by others and has yielded large fortunes to them. The scheme was perhaps premature in Balzac's day, not to speak of his small business capacity, which was in an inverse ration to his inventiveness.

From one of his conceptions, at least, there issued an important benefit to the entire literary profession. Already, in the previous century, Beaumarchais had attempted to establish a society of authors, whose aim should be to protect the rights of men of letters. His efforts then met with no response. Balzac revived the proposal, and coupled with it others tending to improve the material and style of printing of books. He had to contend with the hostility of certain publishers and the indifference of many authors. But his endeavours were ultimately understood and appreciated; and, not long afterwards, in 1838, the Societe des Gens de Lettres was founded.

In connection with this campaign, which he waged for a while alone, there was also his elaboration of the arrangement, first accepted by Charpentier, which consisted in fixing the percentage of the author's royalty on the octavo, three-franc-fifty volume at one-tenth of the published price. One of his discussions with Charpentier on the subject was overheard in the Cafe of the Palais Royal by Jules Sandeau's cousin, who happened to be playing a game of billiards there. After the departure of Balzac and the publisher, the cousin remarked that a paper had been forgotten; and, on reading it through, with his partner in the game, saw a crowd of figures that were so many hieroglyphics to them. When the paper was restored to the novelist by Jules Sandeau, who lived in the same set of flats as Balzac, it transpired that the figures were the calculation of the sum that the writer might obtain on the decimal basis, if a hundred thousand copies of any one of his works were sold.

Two of the novelist's most important books appeared in 1833, his *Country Doctor* and *Eugenie Grandet*. The former he disposed of to a new publisher, Mame, who was to print it, at first, unsigned, his old publisher Gosselin having pre-emption rights, that had not been redeemed. Referring to it in a letter to Mame, towards the end of 1832, he said: "I have long been desirous of the popular glory which consists in selling numerous thousands of a small volume like *Atala*, *Paul and Virginia*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Manon Lescaut*, etc. The book should go into all hands, those of the child, the girl, the old man, and even the devotee. Then once, when the book is known, it will have a large sale, like the *Meditations* of Lamartine, for instance, sixty thousand copies. My book is conceived in this spirit; it is something which the porter and the grand lady can both read. I have taken the Gospel and the Catechism, two books that sell well, and so I have made mine. I have laid the scene in a village, and the whole of the story will be readable, which is rare with me." How high his hopes of its quality and saleableness were (the two things were oddly mixed up in his mind), he imparted to Zulma Carraud. "The *Country Doctor* has cost me ten times more labour than *Louis Lambert*," he informed her. "There is not a sentence or an idea in it that has not been revised, re-read, corrected again and again. It's terrible. But when one wishes to attain the simple beauty of the Gospel, surpass the *Vicar of Wakefield* and put the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* into action, one must spare no effort. Emile de Girardin and our good Borget (his co-tenant at the time) wager the sale will be four hundred thousand copies. Emile intends to bring out a franc edition, so that it may be sold like a Prayer Book."

What with his writing for the *Revue de Paris*, to which he was contributing *Ferragus*, and the pains he gave himself with the *Country Doctor*, he was unable to deliver the latter work to Mame at the date stipulated, and the publisher brought a lawsuit against him, the first of a series of legal disputes he was destined to wage with publishing firms and magazine editors during his agitated life.

Notwithstanding the advertisement produced him by the lawsuit, the *Country Doctor* fell flat in the market. Most of the newspapers spoke contemptuously of it. One reason given was its loose construction, there being no plot, and the two love stories being thrust in towards the end to explain the doctor's altruism and the vicarious paternity of the Commandant Genestas.

This officer, who is stationed not far from the village close to the Grande-Chartreuse, pays a few days' visit to a Doctor Benassis there, under pretext of consulting him professionally. While on the visit he is initiated into the transformation that has been wrought by the doctor in the habits of the people and their homes and surroundings—a regeneration accomplished quietly and gradually, vanquishing hostility and lethargy and converting the peasant's distrust into love. The placing of the Commandant's adopted child under the doctor's care, and Benassis' death, which occurs shortly after, form rather a lame conclusion to the love stories, which are mysteriously withheld to tempt the reader to go on with his perusal. For all its dogmatism in religion and politics, its long arguments in defence of the author's favourite opinions, and its defective construction, the novel, if one can call it a novel, is one of Balzac's best creations. The pictures of country scenes are presented with close fidelity to nature and also with real artistic arrangement. There are, moreover, delineations of rustic character that are truer to life than many of the more celebrated ones in the rest of the novelist's fiction; and, in the episode entitled the Napoleon of the people,—the narration of an old soldier of the First Empire,—there is a topical realism that makes one regret the never-achieved *Battle*. Add to these excellences the writer's having put into his work, for the nonce, a sincere aspiration towards the idea; and, despite flaws, the whole can be pronounced admirable.

It was just about the time the *Country Doctor* was published that he began to dwell upon the advantages he might secure by connecting the characters in his novels and forming them into a

representative society. Excited by the perspective this plan offered if all its possibilities were realized, he hurried to his sister's house in the Faubourg Poissonniere.

"Salute me," he exclaimed joyfully: "I'm on the point of becoming a genius!"

And he commenced to explain his thought, which seemed to him so vast and pregnant with consequence as to inspire him with awe.

"How fine it will be if I can manage the thing," he continued, striding up and down the drawing-room, too restless to stay in one place. "I shan't mind now being treated as a mere teller of tales, and can go on hewing the stones of my edifice, enjoying, beforehand, the amazement of my short-sighted critics, when they contemplate the structure complete."

At length, Honore sat down and more tranquilly discussed the fortunes of the individuals already born from his brain, or, as yet in process of birth. He judged them and determined their fate.

"Such a one," he said, "is a rascal, and will never do any good. Such another is industrious, and a good fellow; he will get rich, and his character will make him happy. These have been guilty of many peccadilloes; but they are so intelligent and have such a thorough knowledge of their fellows that they are sure to raise themselves to the highest ranks of society."

"Peccadilloes!" replied his sister. "You are indulgent."

"They can't change, my dear. They are fathomers of abysses; but they will be able to guide others. The wisest persons are not always the best pilots. It's not my fault. I haven't invented human nature. I observe it, in past and present; and I try to depict it as it is. Impostures in this kind persuade no one."

To the members of his family he announced news from his world of fiction just as if he were speaking of actual events.

"Do you know who Felix de Vandenesse is marrying?" he asked. "A Mademoiselle de Grandville. The match is an excellent one. The Grandvilles are rich, in spite of what Mademoiselle de Belleville has cost the family."

If, now and again, he was begged to save some wild young man or unhappy woman among his creations, the answer was:

"Don't bother me. Truth above all. Those people have no backbone. What happens to them is inevitable. So much the worse for them."

This absorption in the domain of fancy was so complete at times as to cause him to confuse it with the outside world. It is related that Jules Sandeau, returning once from a journey, spoke to him of his sister's illness. Balzac listened to him abstractedly for a while, and then interrupted him: "All that, my friend, is very well," he said to the astonished Jules, "but let us come back to reality; let us speak of *Eugenie Grandet*."

It was the second great book of 1833; and, on the whole, exhibits the novelist at his best. Eulogiums came from friends and enemies alike. The critics were unanimous, too unanimous, indeed, for the author, who detected in their chorus of praise a reiterated condemnation of much of his previous production. At last, it even annoyed him to hear his name invariably mentioned in connection with this single novel. "Those who call me the father of Eugenie Grandet seek to belittle me," he cried. "I grant it is a masterpiece, but a small one. They forbear to cite the great ones."

His ill-humor was, of course, of later growth. While *Eugenie Grandet* was being written, between July and November of 1833, Balzac was quite content to estimate it at its higher value. During the period of its composition, he had fallen, perhaps for the first time in his life, sincerely in love with the woman he ultimately married; and it is appropriate to notice here the synchronism of the event with his high-water mark in fiction. As he confessed to Zulma Carraud, love was his life, his essence; he wrote best when under its influence. There were, be it granted, other contributory causes to make this rapidly written story what we find it to be. The place, the date, the people, the incidents were all close to his own life. Saumur and Tours are neighbouring towns; and 'tis affirmed that the original of the goodman Grandet, a certain Jean Niveleau, had a daughter, whom he refused to give in marriage to Honore. Maybe tradition has embroidered a little on the facts, but there would seem to be much in the narration that belongs to the writer's personal experience. His sister found fault with his attributing so many millions to the miser. "But, stupid, the thing is true," he replied. "Do you want me to improve on truth? If you only knew what it is to knead ideas, and to give them form and colour, you wouldn't be so quick to criticize."

As is usual, when the interest is chiefly characterization, Balzac does not give us a complicated plot. We have in Grandet a self-made man, who has amassed riches by trade and speculation, and lives with his wife and daughter in a gloomy old house, with only one servant as miserly as the master. Eugenie's hand is sought by several suitors, and in particular by the son of the banker des Grassins and the son of the notary Cruchot, these two families waging a diplomatic warfare on behalf of their respective candidates. Into this midst suddenly comes the fashionable nephew Charles Grandet, whose father has, unknown to him, just committed suicide to escape bankruptcy. Eugenie falls in love with her cousin, and he, apparently, with

her; but the old man, unsoftened by his brother's death, using it even as a further means of speculation, gets rid of the unfortunate lover by gingerly helping him to go abroad. Years pass, and Eugenie's mother dies, while she herself withers, under the miser's avaricious tyranny. At length, old Grandet pays his debt to nature, and Eugenie is left with the millions. Until now she had waited for the wandering lover's return; but he, engaging in the slave-trade, has lost all the generous impulses of his youth, and comes back only to deny his early affection and marry the ill-favoured daughter of a Marquis. Eugenie takes a noble revenge for this desertion by paying her dead uncle's debts, which Charles had repudiated, and she marries the notary's son, who leaves her a widow soon after.

Everything in the tale is absolutely natural, extraordinary in its naturalness; and the reactions of its various persons upon each other are traced with fine perception. There is not much of the outward expression of love—in this Balzac did not excel—but there is a good deal of its hidden tragedy. Moreover, the miser's ruling passion is exhibited in traits that suggest still more than they openly display; and all the action and circumstance are in the subdued tone proper to provincial existence. The introductory words prepare the reader's mind for what follows:—

"In certain country towns there are houses whose aspect inspires a melancholy equal to that evoked by the gloomiest cloisters, the most monotonous moorland, or the saddest ruins. . . . Perhaps, in these houses there are at once the silence of the cloister, the barrenness of the moorland, and the bones of ruins. Life and movement are so tranquil in them that a stranger might believe them uninhabited if he did not suddenly see the pale, cold gaze of a motionless person whose half-monastic face leans over the casement at the noise of an unknown step. . . ."

And the shadow persists even in the love-scene.

"Charles said to Eugenie, drawing her to the old bench, where they sat down under the walnut trees: 'In five days, Eugenie, we must bid each other adieu, for ever perhaps; but, at least, for a long while. My stock and ten thousand francs sent me by two of my friends are a very small beginning. I cannot think of my return for several years. My dear cousin, don't place my life and yours in the balance. I may perish. Perhaps you may make a rich marriage.'—'You love me,' she said.—'Oh yes, dearly,' he replied, with a depth of accent revealing a corresponding depth of sentiment.—'I will wait, Charles. Heavens! my father is at his window,' she said, pushing away her cousin, who was approaching to kiss her. She escaped beneath the archway; Charles followed her there. On seeing him, she withdrew to the foot of the staircase and opened the self-closing door; then hardly knowing where she was going, Eugenie found herself near Nanon's den, in the darkest part of the passage. There, Charles, who had accompanied her, took her hand, drew her to his heart, seized her round the waist, and pressed her to himself. Eugenie no longer protested. She received and gave the purest, sweetest, but also the entirest of all kisses."

The foregoing and others, equally well drawn, are figures in the background. Standing out in front of them, and in lurid relief, is the central figure of the miser, represented with the same mobility of temperament noticeable in George Eliot's creations—a thing exceptional in Balzac's work. Grandet, as long as his wife lives is reclaimable—just reclaimable. Subsequently, he is an automaton responsive only to the sight and touch of his gold.

The dedication of *Eugenie Grandet* is to Maria; and Maria, portrayed under the features and character of the heroine, was, we learn, an agreeable girl, of middle-class origins, who, in the year of 1833, attached herself to Balzac and bore him a child.

This liaison was running its ephemeral course just at the time when accident made him acquainted with his future wife. On the 28th of February 1832, his publisher Gosselin handed him a letter with a foreign postmark. His correspondent, a lady, who had read, she said, and admired his *Scenes of Private Life*, reproached him with losing, in the *Shagreen Skin*, the delicacy of sentiment contained in these earlier novels, and begged him to forsake his ironic, sceptical manner and revert to the higher manifestations of his talent. There was no signature to this communication; and the writer, who subscribed herself "The Stranger," begged him to abstain from any attempt to discover who she was, as there were paramount reasons why she should remain anonymous. Balzac's curiosity was keenly aroused by so much mystery, and he tried, but in vain, to get hold of some clue that might conduct him to the retreat of the *incognita*. After a lapse of seven months, a second epistle arrived, more romantic in tone than the first; and containing, among obscure allusions to the lady's surroundings and personality, the following declaration: "You no doubt love and are loved; the union of angels must be your lot. Your souls must have unknown felicities. The Stranger loves you both, and desires to be your friend. . . . She likewise knows how to love, but that is all. . . . Ah! you understand me."

A third letter followed this one shortly afterwards, asking the novelist to acknowledge its receipt in the *Quotidienne* journal, which he did, expressing in the advertisement his regret at not being able to address a direct reply. At last, in the spring of 1833, the fair correspondent made herself known. She was a Countess Evelina Hanska, wife of a Polish nobleman living at Wierzchownia in the Ukraine. She further allowed it to be understood that she was young, handsome, immensely rich, and not over happy with her husband. This information sufficed to set Balzac's imagination agog. At once, he enshrined the dame in the temple of his ideal, poured out his heart to her, and told her of his struggles and ambitions, meanwhile fashioning a realm of the future in which he and she were to be the two reigning monarchs.

Madame Hanska was also a Pole. She belonged to the noble Rzewuska stock and was born in

the castle of Pohrebyszcze between 1804 and 1806. Owing to family reverses, her parents, who had several other children to provide for, were glad to meet with a husband for her in the Count Hanski, who was twenty-five years her senior. The marriage took place between 1818 and 1822, and four children, three boys and a girl, were its issue; but, the boys all dying in infancy, the young mother was left with her little daughter Anna to bring up, and with the desires of a rich, cultured woman, who did not find in her home-circle the wherewithal to satisfy them.

Of her own charms she had spoken truly. Daffinger's miniature of her, painted when she was thirty, represents her as abundantly endowed by nature; and Gigoux' pastel of 1852, which is less faithful and shows her considerably older, still gives substantially the portrait that Barbey d'Aurevilly sketched of her after Balzac's death: "She was of imposing and noble beauty, somewhat massive," says this writer. "But she knew how to maintain, despite her embonpoint, a very great charm, which was enhanced by her delightful foreign accent. She had splendid shoulders, the finest arms in the world, and a complexion of radiant brilliancy. Her soft black eyes, her full red lips, her framing mass of curled hair, her finely chiselled forehead, and the sinuous grace of her gait gave her an air of abandon and dignity together, a haughty yet sensuous expression which was very captivating."

Fascinated by Balzac's masterly delineation of her sex, and longing to learn more about the man who had appealed to her so powerfully, she contrived a journey to Switzerland in 1833, in which her husband and child accompanied her. Switzerland was a land easier for a noble Russian subject to obtain permission to visit. Neufchatel was the place of sojourn chosen, since there was the home of Anna's Swiss governess, Mademoiselle Henriette Borel, who had played an intermediary's role in the beginning of the adventure.

As soon as he had news of the party's arrival, Balzac posted off, concealing from every one the reason for his sudden departure. It had been agreed that the meeting should be on the chief promenade; and there, on a bench, with one of the novelist's books on her lap, Madame Hanska sat with her husband, when he came up and accosted her. One account states that the Countess having, in her excitement, allowed a scarf to drop and hide the book, he passed her by more than once, not daring to speak till she took up the scarf. The same account adds that the lady, remarking the little, stout man staring at her, prayed he might not be the one she was expecting. But no written confession of the Countess's exists to prove that such a thought damped her enthusiasm.

Balzac's impression was recorded in a letter to his sister. "I am happy, very happy," he wrote. "She is twenty-seven, possesses most beautiful black hair, the smooth and deliciously fine skin of brunettes, a lovely little hand, is naive and imprudent to the point of embracing me before every one. I say nothing about her colossal wealth. What is it in comparison with beauty. I am intoxicated with love." The one drawback to the meeting was Monsieur Hanski. "Alas!" adds the writer, "he did not quit us during five days for a single second. He went from his wife's skirt to my waistcoat. And Neufchatel is a small town, where a woman, an illustrious foreigner, cannot take a step without being seen. Constraint doesn't suit me."

Evidently, during the Neufchatel intercourse, some sort of understanding must have been reached, based on the rather unkind anticipation of the Count Hanski's death. At that time, the gentleman's health was precarious. He survived, however until 1841, meanwhile more or less cognizant of his wife's attachment and offering no opposition. He even deemed himself honoured by Balzac's friendship. How rapid the progress of the novelist's passion was for the new idol may be judged by the letter he despatched to Geneva, two or three months later, in December, whilst he was correcting the proofs of *Eugenie Grandet*. "I think I shall be at Geneva on the 13th," he wrote. "The desire to see you makes me invent things that ordinarily don't come into my head. I correct more quickly. It's not only courage you give me to support the difficulties of life; you give me also talent, at any rate, facility. . . . My Eve, my darling, my kind, divine Eve! What a grief it is to me not to have been able to tell you every evening all that I have done, said, and thought."

The visit to Geneva was paid, and lasted six weeks, the novelist quitting Switzerland only on the 8th of February 1834. From this date onward, a regular correspondence was kept up between them, compensating for their seeing each other rarely. The project of marriage, more tenaciously pursued by Balzac than by his Eve, was yet no hindrance to his fleeting fancies for other women. These interim amours have a good deal preoccupied his various biographers, partly because of the undoubted use he made of them in his novels, and partly also because of the trouble he gave himself to establish among circles outside his own immediate entourage the legend of his being a sort of Sir Galahad, leading a perfectly chaste life and caring only for his literary labours. Says Theophile Gautier:—

"He used to preach to us a strange literary hygiene. We ought to shut ourselves up for two or three years, drink water, eat soaked lupines like Protogenes, go to bed at six o'clock in the evening, and work till morning . . . and especially to live in the most absolute chastity. He insisted much on this last recommendation, very rigorous for a young man of twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. According to him, real chastity developed the powers of the mind to the highest degree, and gave to those that practised it unknown faculties. We timidly objected that the greatest geniuses had indulged in the love passion, and we quoted illustrious names. Balzac shook his head and replied: 'They would have done much more but for the women.' The only concession he would make us, regretfully, was to see the loved one for half-an-hour a year. Love letters he allowed. They formed a writer's style."

George Sand speaks much to the same effect in her reminiscences. She believed in the legend.

"Moderate in every other respect," she says, "he had the purest of morals, having always dreaded wildness as the enemy of talent; and he nearly always cherished women solely in his heart and in his head, even in his youth. He pursued chastity on principle; and his relations with the fair sex were those merely of curiosity. When he found a curiosity equal to his own, he exploited this mine with the cynicism of a father-confessor. But, when he met with health of mind and body, he was as happy as a child to speak of real love and to rise into the lofty regions of sentiment."

Unfortunately for the preceding testimony, a flat contradiction is given to it not only by the recorded facts of the novelist's life, but by his sister, who knew better than George Sand and Gautier that Balzac's profession of sublimer sentiments did not exclude a more mundane feeling and practice. Commenting on George Sand's generous panegyric of her brother, she adds: "It is an error to speak of his extreme moderation. He does not deserve this praise. Outside of his work, which was first and foremost, he loved and tasted all the pleasures of this world. I think he would have been the most conceited of all men, if he had not been the most discreet. Confident in himself, he never committed the least indiscretion in his relations with others, and kept their secrets, though unable to keep his own."

The Viscount Spoelberch de Lovenjoul is still more explicit in his short book on Balzac and Madame Hanska, entitled *Roman d'Amour*. Speaking of the novelist's various liaisons and love escapades, which were covered up with such solicitude from the eyes of the world, he remarks that Balzac, while vaunting himself, in argument, of having remained chaste for a number of years, owned to his sister that the truth was quite different. The novelist did his utmost, continues Monsieur de Lovenjoul, to foster the tradition of his hermit-like conduct; and to all the jealous women with whom he entertained friendly relations he asserted that his morals were as spotless as those of a cenobite. Ever and everywhere he abused the credulity of those who flattered themselves they were his only love.

Madame de Berny was not among the credulous ones, nor yet so resigned as the simple *bourgeoise* Maria, who, to quote Balzac's own words, "fell like a flower from heaven, exacted neither correspondence nor attentions, and said: 'Love me a year and I will love you all my life.'" Though forced to accept the transformation of her relations with her young lover into a purely platonic friendship, she made occasional protests against being supplanted by younger rivals—the imperious Madame de Castries among the number. The birth and growth of his affection for Madame Hanska she appears to have felt and resented to a greater degree than his previous infidelities to her. Not even its maintenance, for the time being, on the plane of pure sentiment, dispelled her jealous thoughts. Being apprized of Balzac's dedication of a portion of the *Woman of Thirty Years Old* to his Eve, she insisted on his expunging the offending name, while the sheets were in the press. Whether her fretting over his transferred allegiance hastened her end it is impossible to say with any certainty; yet one cannot help being struck by the fact that the serious phase of the malady that killed her almost coincided with the beginning of their separation.

Madame Hanska, although she started with a supposition of his loving another, became exacting also, in proportion as her admirer's professions of loyalty conferred the right upon her. Rumours reached her now and again, and sometimes precise information, of her place being usurped by another. And, later, as will be again mentioned, a breach occurred between them which was nearly final. By his various mistresses, Balzac had four children, including *Maria's* little daughter, two of whom survived him.

All this notwithstanding, it would be a mistake to assume that he was a deliberate woman-hunter, and wasted his energies in licentiousness. His immense industry and productiveness are enough to prove that such lapses were more the natural outcome of his having so constant a bevy of lady worshippers about him, and occurred as opportunity offered only. On the other hand, it must be admitted that woman's counsels, woman's encouragements, woman's caresses and help were very necessary to him; and he drew largely on the capacities, material and moral, of the Marthas and Maries that crossed his orbit, attracting him or themselves attracted.

The twelvemonth which was marked by the achievement of his most perfect novel also brought him into regular business relations with Werdet, destined to be one of his biographers, who now became his chief publisher and remained so during several years. Incorrect in many details which lay outside his own ken, and which he had gleaned from hearsay or books hastily written, Werdet's own book, a familiar portrait of Balzac, is nevertheless a valuable document. If the author was unable to fathom the whole of the genius and character of the man he described, he yet sincerely appreciated them; and not even the soreness he could not help feeling when ultimately thrown aside, destroyed his deep-rooted worship of him whom he regarded as one of the highest glories of French literature.

Werdet, when he was introduced to the writer of the *Physiology of Marriage*, had already tried his luck at publishing, but had been compelled to abandon the master's position and to enter as an employee into the house of a Madame Bechet, who was engaged in the same line of business. Having read and liked some of Balzac's earlier works, he persuaded the firm to entrust him with the task of negotiating a purchase of the exclusive rights of the novelist's *Studies of Manners and Morals in the Nineteenth Century*. The negotiation was carried through in 1832, and a sum of thirty-six thousand francs was paid to Balzac. This was the writer's real

beginning of money-making. Twelve months after, Werdet resolved to start once more on his own account. He had only a few thousand francs capital. His idea was to risk them in buying one of Balzac's books; and then, if successful, gradually to acquire a publishing monopoly in the great man's productions. Distrusting his own powers of persuasion, he enlisted the good offices of Barbier, the late partner of the Rue des Marais printing-house, who was a *persona grata* with the novelist. Together, they went to the Rue Cassini; and Barbier set forth Werdet's desire.

"Very good," replied the great man. "But you are aware, Monsieur, that those who now publish my works require large capital, since I often need considerable advances."

Proudly, young Werdet brought out his six notes of five hundred francs each, and spread them on the table.

"There is all my fortune," he said. "You can have it for any book you please to write for me."

At the sight of them Balzac burst out laughing.

"How can you imagine, Monsieur, that I—I—de Balzac! who sold my *Studies of Manners and Morals* not long ago to Madame Bechet for thirty-six thousand francs—I, whose collaboration to the *Revue de Paris* is ordinarily remunerated by Buloz at five hundred francs per sheet, should forget myself to the point of handing you a novel from my pen for a thousand crowns? You cannot have reflected on your offer, Monsieur; and I should be entitled to look upon your step as unbecoming in the highest degree, were it not that your frankness in a measure justifies you."

Barbier tried to plead for his friend, and mentioned that, in consideration of Werdet's share in the transaction with Madame Bechet, a second edition of the *Country Doctor* might be granted him for the three thousand francs. But Balzac, retorting that whatever service had been rendered was not to himself but by himself, dismissed his visitors with the words:

"We have spent an hour, gentlemen, in useless talk. You have made me lose two hundred francs. For me, time is money. I must work. Good-day."

They left, and Barbier, to comfort his friend, prophesied that, in spite of this reception, Balzac would enter into *pourparlers* with him, and that Werdet had only to wait, and news would be received from the Rue Cassini shortly. He was not mistaken. Three days elapsed and then Werdet had the following note sent him:—

"SIR,—You called upon me the other day when my head was preoccupied with some writing that I wanted to finish, and I consequently did not very well comprehend what was your drift. To-day, my head is freer. Do me the pleasure to call on me at four o'clock, and we can talk the matter over."

Werdet waited nearly a week before he paid the requested visit. In quite another tone, the novelist discussed the proposed scheme, promised to use his influence on the young publisher's behalf, and gave him the *Country Doctor* for the price offered.

Thenceforward, a familiar guest in the dwelling of the Rue Cassini, Werdet described it in detail, when composing his *Portrait Intime*. It was part of a two-storied *pavilion* (as the French call a moderate-sized house) standing to the left in a courtyard and garden, with another similar building on the right. From the ground-floor a flight of steps led up to a glass-covered gallery joining the two buildings and serving as an antechamber to each. Its sides were hung in white and blue-striped glazed calico; and a long, blue-upholstered divan, a blue and brown carpet, and some fine china vases filled with flowers, adorned it. From the gallery the visitor proceeded into a pretty drawing-room, fifteen feet square, lighted on the east by a small casement that looked over the yard of a neighbouring house. Opposite the drawing-room door was a black marble mantelpiece.

The *salon* gave access to the bedroom and the dining-room, the latter being connected with the kitchen underneath by a narrow staircase. A secret door in the *salon* opened into the bathroom with its walls of white stucco, its bath of white marble, and its red, opaque window-panes diffusing a rose-coloured tint through the air. Two easy-chairs in red morocco stood near the bath.

The bedroom, having two windows, one towards the south and the observatory, the other overlooking a garden of flowers and trees, was very bright and cheery. The furniture, with its shades of white, pink, and gold, was rich and handsome. A secret door existed also in this chamber, hidden behind muslin hangings; it led down the same narrow staircase already mentioned to the kitchen, and thence out into the yard. Nanon, Balzac's cook, less discreet than Auguste, the valet-de-chambre, had tales to tell Werdet about certain lady visitors who arrived by means of this private staircase into the daintily arranged bedroom.

The study, of oblong shape, about eighteen feet by twelve, had likewise two windows affording a view only over the yard of the next house, which, being lofty, made the room dark, even in the sunniest weather. Here the furniture was simple, the principal piece being an exceedingly fine ebony bookcase, with mirrored panels. It contained a large collection of rare books, all bound in red morocco and set off with the escutcheon of the d'Entragues family. Among them were nearly all the authors who had written on mysticism, occult science, and religion. Opposite the bookcase, between the windows, was a carved ebony cabinet filled with red morocco box-cases, and on the top of the cabinet stood a plaster statuette representing

Napoleon I. Across the sword-sheath was stuck a tiny paper with these words written by the novelist: "What he could not achieve with the sword I will accomplish with the pen. Honore de Balzac."

On the mantelpiece decorated with a mirror, there was an alarum in unpolished bronze, together with two vases in brown porcelain. And on either side of the mirror hung all sorts of woman's trifles; here, a crumpled glove, there a small satin shoe; and, further, a little rusty iron key. Questioned as to the significance of this last article, the owner called it his talisman. There was also a diminutive framed picture exhibiting beneath the glass a fragment of brown silk, with an arrow-pierced heart embroidered on it, and the English words: *An Unknown Friend*. In front of a modest writing-table covered with green baize was a large Voltaire arm-chair upholstered in red morocco; and about the room were a few other ebony chairs covered in brown cloth.

Within his sanctum Balzac worked clad in a white Dominican gown with hood, the summer material being dimity and cashmere; he was shod with embroidered slippers, and his waist was girt with a rich Venetian-gold chain, on which were suspended a paper-knife, a pair of scissors, and a gold penknife, all of them beautifully carved. Whatever the season, thick window-curtains shut out the rays of light that might have penetrated into the study, which was illuminated only by two moderate-sized candelabra of unpolished bronze, each holding a couple of continually burning candles.

The installation of these various household necessaries and luxuries was progressive and was associated closely with the heyday period of his celebrity. It was during 1833 that the metamorphosis was mainly effected, for Werdet relates that, in the month of November, he found Balzac, one afternoon, superintending the laying down of some rich Aubusson carpets in his house. Money must have been plentiful just then. Learning accidentally on this occasion that his publisher had no carpet in his drawing-room, the novelist surprised him the same evening by sending some men with one that he had bought for him. This present Werdet suitably acknowledged a short time after; and, throughout the period of their intimacy, there were a good few compliments of the kind exchanged, which appear to have cost the man of business dearer than the man of letters.

To tell the truth, Balzac had a knack of presuming that something he intended doing was already done. One notorious example was the white horse he asserted, in presence of a number of guests assembled in Madame de Girardin's drawing-room, had been given by him to Jules Sandeau. The animal in question, he said, he had bought from a well-known dealer; the celebrated trainer Baucher had tested it and declared it to be the most perfect animal ever ridden. For nearly half-an-hour the speaker expatiated on the points of this wonderful steed, and thoroughly convinced his audience of the gift having been already bestowed. A few evenings later, Jules Sandeau met Balzac at the same house, and the subject was of course reverted to by their mutual friends. As the novelist asked him whether he liked the horse, Jules, not to be outvied, answered with an enumeration of its qualities. But he never saw the animal for all that.

Another instance equally amusing was furnished at a dinner given in honour of Balzac by Henri de Latouche, who had not then broken with him. At dessert, the host sketched the plan of a novel he intended to write, and Balzac, who had been drinking champagne, warmly applauded; "The thing," he said, "is capital. Even summarily related, it is charming. What will it be when the talent, style, and wit of the author have enhanced it!" Next evening, at Madame de Girardin's, he reproduced, with his native fire and power of description, the narration he had heard the night before—reproduced it as his own —persuaded it was his own. Every one was enthusiastic, and complimented him. But the matter was bruited abroad. Latouche recognized in Balzac's proposed new novel the creation he had himself unfolded; and wrote a sharp protest which, for once, forced its recipient to distinguish fact from fiction, and what was his share, what another's, in the output of ideas. Yet he might be excused for some of his frequent fits of forgetfulness, since he sowed his own conceptions and discoveries broadcast, and often encountered them again in the possession of lesser minds who had utilized them before he could put them into execution.

In the year of 1833, the novelist's correspondence alludes to several books which, like others previously spoken of, were never published, and probably never written. Among these are *The Privilege*, *The History of a Fortunate Idea*, and the *Catholic Priest*. Meanwhile, he did add considerably to his *Droll Tales*, the first series of which appeared in the same twelve months as *Eugenie Grandet*. These stories —in the style of Boccaccio, and of some of Chaucer's writing— broad, racy, and somewhat licentious, albeit containing nothing radically obscene, were meant to illustrate the history of the French language and French manners from olden to modern days. Only part of the project was realized. They are told with wit and humour that are nowhere present to the same degree in the rest of the novelist's work, and in their colouring, as Taine justly remarks, recall Jordaens' painting with its vivid carnation tints. At this time the author was occupied with *Bertha Repentant* and the *Succubus*, which, however, were published only three years subsequently.

CHAPTER VI

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1833, 1834

If Balzac's intimates, careful of his future, had besought him to jot down in a diary the detailed doings of his every-day life, with a confession of his thoughts, feelings, and opinions, in fine an unmasking of himself, he would surely have urged the material impossibility of his fulfilling such a task, over and above the labours of Hercules to which his ambition and his necessities bound him. And yet he performed the miracle unsolicited.

From the day when he quitted Neufchatel to the day when he arrived at Wierzchownia, on his crowning visit in 1848, he never ceased chronicling, in a virtually uninterrupted series of letters to Madame Hanska, closely following each other during most of this long period, a faithful account of his existence—exception made for its love episodes—which, having fortunately been preserved, constitutes an almost complete autobiography of his mature years. When the end of the correspondence shall have been given to the public, three volumes, at least, will have been taken up with the record—a record which taxed his time and strength, indeed overtaxed them, causing him to encroach unduly on his already too short hours of sleep. The motive must have been a powerful one that could induce him to make so large a sacrifice. Whether it was love alone, as he protested again and again, or love mixed with gratified pride, or both joined to the hope of enjoying the vast fortune that loomed through the mists of the far-off Ukraine, the phenomenon remains the same. Certainly some great force was behind the pen that untiringly wrote in every vein and mood these astonishing *Letters to the Stranger*.

In those up to the year 1834 that were, properly speaking, private, the tone rises to a pitch of lover-passion that could hardly fail to alarm, even whilst they flattered the one to whom his devotion was addressed. Although Balzac's brief sojourns in Madame Hanska's vicinity had resulted in no breach of the marriage law, there was too much implied in his assumption of their betrothal to please the husband, if any of these lover's oaths should fall under his notice. And this was what just did happen before many months had gone by. In consequence of some accident which is not explained, the Count had cognizance of two epistles that reached his wife while both were staying at Vienna; and, for some time, it seemed as though the intercourse would be definitely severed. A humble apology was sent to the Count, the letters being passed off as a joke; and the interpretation was, fortunately for Balzac, accepted. Madame Hanska was offended as well as her husband, or, at any rate, she affected to be. It appears some negligence had been committed by the novelist in forwarding the incriminating epistles. However, being cleared in her husband's eyes, she yielded her forgiveness.

Balzac's policy, after this mishap, was to keep on the best terms possible with Monsieur Hanski, who, to use the Frenchman's English expression, suffered from chronic blue devils. After leaving his new friends at Geneva, the novelist procured the Count an autograph letter from Rossini, this great composer being a favourite at Wierzchownia. To his new lady-love he sent an effusion of his own in verse, having small poetic merit, but pretty sentiment.

During the Geneva intercourse, he did his best to familiarize Eve with all the names and characters of the people he knew, since his interests were to be hers, or, at any rate, so he flattered himself. She learnt to distinguish the people who were for him from those who were against him. Of these latter there were a goodly number, some made enemies by his own fault, through over-susceptibility or unconscious arrogance. Both causes were responsible for the quarrel occurring about this time between him and Emile de Girardin, which was never entirely healed, in spite of the persevering efforts of Emile's wife, better known as Madame Delphine Gay. "I have bidden good-bye to the Gays' molehill," he informed Madame Hanska. It was pretty much the same with his estrangement from the Duke de Fitz-James, which, however, was followed by a speedy reconciliation, for the Duke was offering, a few months later, to support him again in a political election. The unsatisfactory state of his health, and some family troubles, decided him to defer his candidature to the end of the decade, by which date he hoped to have written two works—*The Tragedy of Philippe II.* and *The History of the Succession of the Marquis of Carrabas*—which should implant his conception of absolute monarchic power so strongly in the minds of his fellow-citizens that they would be glad to send him to Parliament as their representative. Other political articles and pamphlets of his, he asserted, would enable him by 1839 to dominate European questions.

Werdet has a great deal to say about his idol's over-weening exaction of homage, leading him to be himself guilty of acts of rudeness towards others, thus alienating their sympathies. The publisher relates one scene that he witnessed at the offices of William Duckett, proprietor of the *Dictionary of Conversation and Reading*. The office door was suddenly opened and Balzac stalked in with his hat on his head. "Is Duckett in?" he curtly asked, addressing in common the chief editor, his sub, and an attendant. There was a conspiracy of silence. Evidently, this was not the novelist's first visit, and his style was known. Again the question was put in the same language and manner, and again no one replied. Advancing now a step, and speaking to the chief editor, he repeated his question for a third time. Monglave, who was an irritable gentleman, being accosted personally, answered briefly: "Put your question to the sub-editor." There was a wheel-about, and another peremptory inquiry, to which the sub, imitating his chief, replied with "Ask the attendant." At present boiling with rage, Balzac turned to the porter and thundered: "Is Duckett in?" "Monsieur Balzac," returned the attendant, "these gentlemen have forbidden me to tell you." Threatening to report the affair to Duckett, the novelist withdrew,

pursued by the mocking laughter of the chief editor and the sub; but, on second thoughts, he deemed it more prudent to let the matter drop.

Another example of this peculiar assumption of superiority occurred not long after at a dinner given by Werdet in honour of a young author, Jules Bergounioux, whose novels were being much read. Among the guests were Gustave Planche, Jules Sandeau, and Balzac. During the meal the conversation, after many assaults of wit and mirth, fell on the necessity of defending writers against the piracy and mutilation of their books in foreign countries, more especially in Belgium. All expressed their opinion energetically, young Bergounioux like the rest, he happening to class himself with his fellows in the words—*we men of letters*. At the conclusion of his little speech, Balzac uttered a guffaw: "You, sir, a man of letters! What pretension! What presumption! You! compare yourself to us! Really, sir, you forget that you have the honour to be sitting here with the marshals of modern literature."

This exhibition and others similar were natural to the man. He could not help them. It was impossible for him not to be continually proclaiming his own greatness. "Don't tax me with littleness," he said in one of his letters to Delphine Gay, in which he justified his breaking with her husband. "I think myself too great to be offended by any one."

The domestic troubles alluded to above, which were worrying Balzac in 1834, had partly to do with his brother Henry, a sort of ne'er-do-well, who had been out to the Indies and had returned with an undesirable wife, and prospects—or rather the lack of them—that made him a burden to the other members of the family. Madame Balzac, too, was unwell at Chantilly; and her illnesses always affected Honore, who, at such moments, reproached himself for not being able to do more on her behalf. Not that his year's budget was a poor one. The seventy thousand francs at which he estimated his probable earnings for the twelvemonth were not on this occasion so very much beyond the truth, if his author's percentages were included. Werdet—the illustrious Werdet, who, he said, somewhat resembled the *Illustrious Gaudissart* —bought an edition of his philosophic novels for fifteen thousand francs; and, besides two principal books to be mentioned further on, both of which appeared before the close of the year, there were parts of *Seraphita* and *The Cabinet of Antiques* which the *Revue de Paris* was publishing as serials. His notorious quarrel and lawsuit with this Review was yet to come. But there was storm in the air even now. *Seraphita*, the subject inspired by Madame Hanska and dedicated to her, was but little to the taste of Buloz the editor; and he declared to Balzac, who was making him wait for copy, that it was hardly worth while taking so long and making so much fuss over a novel which neither the public nor he, the editor, could understand. Happily the dear Werdet was at hand to arrange the difficulty. Though in the same case as Buloz, and failing altogether to comprehend the subject or its treatment, he took over *Seraphita* in 1835 and published it.

Next to politics, as a means of gaining name and fame more quickly, Balzac esteemed play-writing. The esteem was purely commercial. In his heart of hearts he rather despised this species of composition, entertaining the notion that it was something to be done quickly, if at all, and utilizable to please the groundlings. Yet, because he saw that there was money in it, he turned his hand to it, time after time, and, for long, had to abandon it as constantly. In 1834 he formed a partnership with Jules Sandeau and Emmanuel Arago, with the idea of risking less in case of failure. In addition to the tragedy already spoken of, he tried two others—*The Courtiers* and *Don Philip and Don Charles*, the latter modelled on Schiller's *Don Carlos*. The *Grande Mademoiselle* was a comic history of Lauzun; and his *Prudhomme, Bigamist*, was a farce, in which a dummy placed in a bed seemed to him capable, with a night's working on it, of bringing down the house. Vaguely he felt, and vaguely he confessed to his sister, what he had seen and confessed thirteen years earlier, that the drama was not his forte. But, anchored in the conviction that he ought finally to succeed in everything he undertook, he returned to the attempt with magnificent pluck and perseverance.

His colleague for the nonce, Sandeau, he considered to be a protege of his; and used him a while as a kind of secretary. In this year especially he showed much solicitude about him. There was nothing to excite his jealousy in the author of *Sacs et Parchemins*, who was not elected to the Academy until nearly the end of the decade in which Balzac died. On the contrary, his pity was aroused by Sandeau's precarious position and by the recent separation between Madame Dudevant and this first of her lovers, who did his best to commit suicide by swallowing a dose of acetate of morphia. Luckily the dose was so large that Sandeau's stomach refused to digest it. George Sand herself Balzac admired but did not care for at this time. He would talk to her amiably when he met her at the Opera; but, if she invited him to dinner, he invented an excuse, if possible, for not going. "Don't speak to me," he would say, "of this writer of the neuter gender. Nature ought to have given her more breeches and less style."

His opinion, however, did not prevent him, in 1842, from accepting her help. An article had come out in her *Revue Independante*, without her knowledge, attacking him violently. She wrote to apologize; and Balzac called on her, to explain, as he informed Madame Hanska, how injustice serves the cause of talent. She told him then that she should like to write a thorough study of him and his books; and he made as though he would dissuade her, saying that she would only get herself in bad odour with his critics. Still she persisted, and he accordingly asked her to compose a preface for an ensuing publication of his whole works, the preface to be a defence of him against those who were his enemies. Whether this notice was written before the novelist's death is uncertain. At any rate, it was not printed until 1875, when it appeared in her volume *Autour de la Table*.

It was difficult for Balzac to be fair towards those men of letters among his contemporaries who excelled in his own domain; yet his judgment, when unwarped, was fine, keen, and, in many instances, endowed with prophetic sight. For instance, in placing Alfred de Musset as a poet above Victor Hugo or Lamartine, he daringly contradicted the opinions of his own day, and anticipated a criticism which is at present becoming respectable if not fashionable. On the other hand, his estimate of *Volupte*, Sainte-Beuve's just then published novel, which he was soon to imitate and recreate in his *Lily in the Valley*, was manifestly prejudiced. He called it a book badly written in most of its parts, weak, loosely constructed, diffuse, in which there were some good things, in short a puritanical book, the chief character of it, Madame Couaen not being woman enough. His opinion, which he imparted to Madame Hanska, he apparently took no trouble to conceal, for Sainte-Beuve was evidently aware of it when he treated Balzac very sharply in an article of this same year of 1834. From that date, the celebrated lecturer looked with coldness and disfavour on the novelist, and even in his final pronouncement of the *Causeries du Lundi*, shortly after Balzac's death, he meted out but faint praise.

Something has been said in a previous chapter of the novelist's belief in certain occult powers of the mind, with which the newly discovered action of magnetism seemed to him to be connected. At first, his ideas on the subject were a good deal mixed. When, in 1832, a terrible epidemic of cholera was spreading its ravages, he wrote to Doctor Chapelain, suggesting that somnambulism—he would have called it hypnotism to-day—should be employed to seek out the causes of the malady, and a test applied to prove whether its virtues were real or chimerical. In 1834, he had come to pin his faith to the healing powers of magnetism. "When you or Monsieur Hanski or Anna are ill," he wrote to Eve, "let me know. Don't laugh at me. At Issoudun, facts recently demonstrated to me that I possess very large magnetic potency, and that, either through a somnambulist" (he meant a hypnotist) "or through myself, I can cure persons dear to me." To all his friends he reiterated the same advice—magnetic treatment, which he declared his mother capable of exercising as well as himself. Madame Balzac's initiation into the science was due to the Prince of Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Schillingfurst, Bishop of Sardica, who, in his several visits to Paris between 1821 and 1829, wrought wonderful cures by the simple imposition of hands. As the lady used to suffer from a swelling in the bowels whenever she ate raw fruit, the Bishop, hearing of it, came one day to see her, and applied his method, which cured her. Balzac, being a witness of the miracle, became an ardent investigator in this new branch—or rather old branch revived—of therapeutics. Thenceforward, his predilection for theories of the occult went hand in hand with his equally strong taste for the analytic observation of visible phenomena; and not infrequently he indulged in their simultaneous literary expression. The composing of *Seraphita* was carried on at the same time as his *Search for the Absolute* and *Pere Goriot*.

Both of these two novels were finished and published in 1834. In the *Search for the Absolute*, we have Balthazar Claes, a man of wealth and leisure, living in the ancient town of Douai, and married to a wife who adores him and who has borne him children. Claes' hobby is scientific research; his aim, the discovery of the origin of things which he believes can be given him by his crucible. In his family mansion, of antique Flemish style, which is admirably described by the novelist at great length, he pursues his tireless experiments; and, with less justification than Bernard Palissy, encroaches by degrees on the capital of his fortune, which melts away in his furnace and alembics. During the first period of his essays, his wife tries to have confidence in his final success, herself studies all sorts of learned treatises, in order to be able to converse with him suitably and to encourage him in his work; but, at last, unable to delude her own mind any longer, she weeps with her children over the approaching destruction of their home, and the grief wears her out and kills her. Luckily the daughter, Marguerite, is made of sterner stuff than her mother. And, with her brother, she toils to pay her father's debts and to keep the home together. At the end, Claes himself dies, still absorbed in his chimera, and his last words are an endeavour to formulate the marvellous revelation which his disordered brain persuades him he has now received.

"'Eureka!' he cried with a shrill voice, and fell back on his bed with a thud. In passing away, he uttered a frightful groan, and his convulsed eyes, until the doctors closed them, spoke his regret not to have been able to bequeath to science the key of a mystery whose veil had been tardily torn aside under the gaunt fingers of Death."

The *Search for the Absolute* may be classed with *Eugenie Grandet* in the category of the novelist's best creations. Though Claes is, as much as Grandet, and perhaps more, an abnormal being, his sacrifice of every duty of life to the pursuit of the irrealizable is common enough in humanity. By reason of the novelist's intense delineation, his figure shows out in monstrous proportions; but these are skilfully relieved by the happier fates of the children. The lengthy descriptions of the opening chapter he defended against his sister Laure's strictures, asserting that they had ramifications with the subject which escaped her. His presentment, too, of Marguerite he said was not forced, as she thought. Marguerite was a Flemish woman, and Flemish women followed one idea out and, with phlegm, went unswervingly towards their goal. The labour the book had cost him he owned to Madame Hanska. Two members of the Academy of Sciences taught him chemistry, so that he might be exact in his representation of Claes' experiments; and he read Berzelius into the bargain. Moreover, he had revised and modified the proofs of the novel no fewer than a dozen times.

As Werdet tells, the real work of composition, with Balzac, hardly commenced until he had a set of galley proofs. What he sent first to the printer, scribbled with his crow's-quill, was a mere

sketch; and the sketch itself was a sort of Chinese puzzle, largely composed of scratched-out and interpolated sentences; passages and chapters being moved about in a curious *chasse-croise*, which the type-setters deciphered and arranged as they best could. Margins and inter-columnal spaces they found covered with interpolations; a long trailing line indicated the way here and the way there to the destination of the inserted passages. A cobweb was regular in comparison to the task which the printers had to tackle in the hope of finding beginning, middle, and end. In the various presses where his books were set up, the employees would never work longer than an hour on end at his manuscript. And the indemnity he had to pay for corrections reached sometimes the figure of forty francs per sixteen pages. Numerous were the difficulties caused on this score with publishers, editors, and printers. Balzac justified himself by quoting the examples of Chateaubriand, Ingres, and Meyerbeer in their various arts. To Buloz, of the *Revue de Paris*, who expostulated, he impatiently replied: "I will give up fifty francs per sheet to have my hands free. So say no more about the matter." It is true that Buloz paid him 250 francs per sheet for his contributions.

Indeed, the novelist's own method of work was a reversal of the natural alternation of regular periods of activity and repose. He not only, as he told all his correspondents with wearisome iteration, burned the midnight oil, but would keep up these eighteen or twenty hours' daily labour for weeks altogether, until some novel that he was engaged on was finished. During these spells of composing he would see no one, read no letters, but write on and on, eating sparingly, sipping his coffee, and refreshing his jaded anatomy by taking a bath, in which he would lie for a whole hour, plunged in meditation. After his voluntary seclusions, he suddenly reappeared in his usual haunts, active and feverish as ever, note-book ready to hand, in which he jotted down his thoughts, discoveries, and observations for future use. On its pages were primitively outlined the features of most of the women of his fiction.

One of these prolonged *claustrations*, in October 1834—the day was Sunday—he interrupted by a call, most unexpected, on Werdet. His face was sallow and gaunt with vigil. He had been stopped in the description of a spot, he explained, by the uncertainty of his recollections, and must go into the city in order to refresh them. So he invited Werdet to accompany him in playing truant for the day. The morning was spent in the slums, where he gathered the information required; and the afternoon they whiled away in listening to a concert at the *Conservatoire*. Here he was welcomed by the fashionables of both sexes, notwithstanding his shabby costume, which he had donned in view of his morning's occupation. On quitting the concert room, he carried Werdet off to dine with him at Very's, the most expensive and aristocratic restaurant in Paris. The place was full of guests; and those who were in proximity to the table where the two newcomers sat down were astounded to see the following menu ordered and practically consumed by one man, since Werdet, being on diet, took only a soup and a little chicken: A hundred oysters; twelve chops; a young duck; a pair of roast partridges; a sole; hors d'oeuvre; sweets; fruit (more than a dozen pears being swallowed); choice wines; coffee; liqueurs. Never since Rabelais' or perhaps Louis XIV.'s time, had such a Gargantuan appetite been witnessed. Balzac was recouping himself for his fasting.

When the repast, lengthened out by a flow of humorous conversation, was at length terminated, the nineteenth-century Johnson asked his Boswell if he had any available cash, as he himself had none. Werdet confessing only to forty francs, the novelist borrowed a five-franc piece from him and thundered out his request for the bill. To the waiter who presented it he handed the coin, at the same time returning the bill with a few words scribbled at the foot. "Tell the cashier," he cried, "that I am Monsieur Honore de Balzac." And he stalked out with Werdet, whilst all the diners present stared admiringly after the great man.

But the evening was not yet finished. In the garden of the Palais-Royal, then more frequented by society than to-day, they met Jules Sandeau and Emile Regnault. And, as they were near a gambling-saloon, Balzac, who had an infallible system for breaking the bank, proposed to Jules that he should go and try his luck. A twenty-franc piece was wheedled out of Werdet for the experiment, which proved a fiasco. Next, the novelist, to convince his companions of the accuracy of his theory, which he further detailed, went and borrowed forty francs from his heraldic engraver, and sent Sandeau and Regnault into the saloon again. Alas! fate was once more unkind. They returned minus their money. To console themselves, they went to the Funambules Theatre, to see Debureau act in the *Boeuf Enrage*, and Balzac laughed so loud that he and his party had to leave the theatre. On the morrow Werdet was called upon to pay the restaurant-keeper sixty-two francs, and to reimburse the engraver the forty francs loan, which sums, together with what he had himself advanced, ran Balzac's debit for the day up to one hundred and twenty-seven francs.

In *Pere Goriot*, the publication of which came close at the heels of the *Search for the Absolute*, Balzac traces the gradual impoverishment of a fond father by his two daughters, married, the one to a nobleman, the other to a banker, and whose husbands, when they have received the marriage dowry, give their father-in-law, who is a plebeian, the cold shoulder, and forbid their wives to see him unless in secret. Goriot's daughters, losing in their grand surroundings the little filial affection they ever had, exploit the old man's worship of them shamelessly. If they visit him in the boarding-house to which he has retired, after selling his home to endow them more richly, it is solely to get from him for their pleasures the portion of his wealth he has retained for his own wants. And he never refuses them, but sells and sells, until, at last, he is reduced to lodge in the garret of the boarding-house and eat almost the refuse of the table. Around this tragic central figure are grouped the commensals of the

Vauquer *pension*, Rastignac, the young law-student, with shallow purse and aristocratic connections; Bianchon, the future great-gun in medicine, at present walking the hospitals and attending lectures and practising dissections; Victorine Taillefer, the rejected daughter of a guilty millionaire; Mademoiselle Michonneau, the soured spinster, who ferrets out the identity of her fellow-boarder Vautrin, and betrays to justice this cynical outlaw installed so quietly, and, to all appearance, safely, in the *pension*, where Madame Vauquer, the traipsing widow, lords it serenely, attentive only to her profits.

Of these subsidiary characters, two, Vautrin and Rastignac, furnish a second interest in the story parallel to that of Goriot and his daughters, and constituting a foil. Under the influence of Paris surroundings and experience, Rastignac passes from his naive illusions to a state of worldly wisdom, which he reaches all the more speedily as Vautrin is at his elbow, commenting with Mephistophelian shrewdness on his fellow-men and the society they form. Himself a man of education, who has sunk from high to low and is branded with the convict's mark, Vautrin is yet capable of affection of a certain kind; but, in the mind and heart of the youth he would fain advantage, he is capable only of inculcating the law of tooth and claw. "A rapid fortune is the problem that fifty thousand young men are at present trying to solve who find themselves in your position," he says to Rastignac. "You are a single one among this number. Judge of the efforts you have to make and of the desperateness of the struggle. You must devour each other like spiders in a pot, seeing there are not fifty thousand good places. Do you know how one gets on here? By the brilliance of genius or the adroitness of corruption one must enter the mass of men like a cannon-ball, or slip into it like the plague. Honesty is of no use." Having a tempter about him of Vautrin's calibre, strong, undauntable, as humorous as Dickens' Jingle, but infinitely more unscrupulous and dangerous, Rastignac is gained over, in spite of his first repulsion. The nursing and burying of Pere Goriot are his last acts of charity accorded to the claims of his higher nature, and even these are sullied by his relations with one of Goriot's daughters. Standing on the cemetery heights, and looking down towards the Seine and the Vendome column, he flings a defiance to the society spread beneath him, the society he despises but still wishes to conquer.

In this novel many social grades are gathered together, and the reciprocal actions of their representative members are rendered with effective contrast and a good deal of dramatic quickness. The chief theme, though so painful, is developed with less strain and monotony than in some other of the novelist's works by reason of a larger application, conscious or unconscious, of Shakespeare's practice of intermingling the humorous with the tragic. Even the comic is not entirely absent, Madame Vauquer especially supplying interludes. The novelist himself chuckled as he put into her mouth a mispronunciation of the word *tilleul*,[*] and explained to Madame Hanska, whose foreign accent in speaking French suggested it, that he chose the fat landlady so that Eve should not be jealous.

[*] English linden, or lime-tree.

Balzac's too great absorption in his writing forced him more than once in this year to go into the country and recuperate his health. During the earlier months he spent a short time with the Carrauds at Frapesle, which was a favourite sojourn of his, and, later on, at Sache, a pleasant retreat in his native Touraine. His iron constitution was not able always to resist the demands continually made upon it; and his abuse of coffee only aggravated the evil. To Laure he acknowledged, while at Sache, that this beverage refused to excite his brain for any time longer than a fortnight; and even the fortnight was paid for by horrible cramps in the stomach, followed by fits of depression, which he suffered when suddenly deprived of his beloved drink. In his *Treatise of Modern Stimulants* he describes its peculiar operation upon himself. "This coffee," he says, "falls into your stomach, and straightway there is a general commotion. Ideas begin to move like the battalions of the Grand Army on the battlefield, and the battle takes place. Things remembered arrive full gallop, ensign to the wind. The light cavalry of comparisons deliver a magnificent, deploying charge; the artillery of logic hurry up with their train and ammunition; the shafts of wit start up like sharp-shooters. Similes arise; the paper is covered with ink; for the struggle commences and is concluded with torrents of black water, just as a battle with powder."

When he tells us how Doctor Minoret, Ursule Mirouet's guardian, used to regale his friends with a cup of Moka mixed with Bourbon coffee, and roasted Martinique, which the Doctor insisted on personally preparing in a silver coffee-pot, it is his own custom that he is detailing. His Bourbon he bought only in the Rue Mont Blanc (now the Chaussee d'Antin), the Martinique, in the Rue des Vieilles Audriettes, the Moka at a grocer's in the Rue de l'Universite. It was half a day's journey to fetch them.

The *Tigers* or *Lions*, of the Loge Infernale at the Opera, have already been spoken of. It was in this year that Balzac, as belonging to the Club, gave a dinner to its members, the chief guest being Rossini. Nodier, Sandeau, Bohain, and the witty Lautour-Mezeray were also present. He doubtless wore on the occasion his coat of broadcloth blue, made by his tailor-friend Buisson, with its gold buttons engraved by Gosselin, his jeweller and goldsmith. On his waistcoat of white English *pique* twined and glittered the thousand links of the slender chain of Venice gold. Black trousers, with footstraps, showing his calves to advantage, patent-leather boots, and his wonderful stick, which inspired Madame Delphine Gay to write a book, completed the equipment.

This stick was certainly in existence in 1834, being mentioned in the correspondence with

Madame Hanska during that year. Werdet, however, connects its origin with the novelist's imprisonment, two years later, in the Hotel de Bazancourt, popularly known as the Hotel des Haricots, which was used for confining those citizens who did not comply with Louis-Philippe's law enrolling them in the National Guard and ordering them to take their turn in night-patrol of the city. Balzac was incurably recalcitrant. Nothing would induce him to encase himself in the uniform and serve; and, whenever the soldiers came for him, he bribed them to let him alone. Finally, these bribes failed of their effect, and an arrest-warrant was issued against him. In his ordinary correspondence two experiences of his being in durance vile at the Hotel des Haricots are mentioned, one in March 1835, another in August 1836. The latter of these is differently dated in the *Letters to the Stranger*, the end of April being given, unless, indeed, there were two confinements close together, which is hardly probable. What is most likely is, that Werdet has confused two things, the story of the lock of hair, properly belonging to 1836, and the making of the stick, which belongs to 1834. Here is his narration:—

The publisher one day received a note requesting him to go at once to the prison and to take with him some money. He went with two hundred francs, and found Balzac, in his Dominican's dress, installed in a small cell on the third story, busily engaged in arranging papers. Part of the money brought was utilized to order a succulent dinner, which Werdet stayed and shared in the smoky refectory below. Both prisoner and visitor were very merry until the door opened and Eugene Sue, the popular novelist, entered, himself also a victim of the conscription law. Invited to join in the meal, Sue declined, saying that his valet and his servant were shortly to bring him his dinner. This repulse damped Balzac's spirits until the arrival of a third victim, the Count de Lostange, chief editor of the *Quotidienne*, who sat down willingly to table. Then Balzac forgot Sue's rudeness, and the mirth was resumed. Notwithstanding the efforts of the novelist's influential friends, the Count de Lobau, who was responsible for the arrest, showed himself inexorable, and a second day was spent in captivity, which Werdet came again towards evening to enliven. A whole pile of perfumed epistles sent by feminine sympathizers was lying on the table, and the publisher had to open them and read them aloud to his companion. When a third day's confinement was decided on by the authorities, Werdet arranged to celebrate it by a dinner that should merit being put on record. He therefore secured the presence of some intimates of the novelist, among them being Gustave Planche and Alphonse Karr; and at 5 P.M., eight people were assembled in the cell, with Auguste, Balzac's valet, to serve them. The restaurant-keeper Chevet's menu of exquisite dishes was suitably moistened with excellent champagne sent by a Countess, and, when the feast was in full progress, Balzac took a scented parcel from among his presents and asked permission to open it. The authorization being granted, he undid the parcel, and disclosed a mass of long, fair, silky hair threaded into a gold ring that was set with an emerald. On the gift was an inscription in English: *From an unknown friend*. A great discussion ensued. One irreverent speaker opined that the thing was a hoax, and that the hair had come from a wig-maker's; but his blasphemy was shouted down. Another proposed that Balzac should cut off his own long, flat locks (it was in 1834 that he began to let them grow) and should send them addressed to the Unknown Fair One. Poste Restante. But this suggestion, too, was not approved. The locks were proclaimed to be national property, and to be cut off only by the passing of a special law. Next, the ring was discussed; and here it was that Balzac, struck with a brilliant idea, announced his intention of ordering Gosselin, the goldsmith, to manufacture a marvellous hollow stick-knob in which a lock of the blond hair should be inserted, and all over the top of the knob were to be fixed diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, topazes, rubies, chosen out of the many he had had given him by his rich lady-enthusiasts. On the morrow, he was released, after spending, during the few days he had been locked up, five hundred and seventy francs in refreshment for himself and visitors.

CHAPTER VII

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1835, 1836

The Rue des Batailles, whither Balzac removed his household goods in 1834, was one of those old landmarks of Paris which have disappeared in the opening up and beautifying of the city. Commencing at the fortifications, it penetrated inwards along the waste ground of the Trocadero, and crossed the Rue Chaillot at a point which has since become the Place d'Iena. Its direction from there was very nearly the same as that of the present Avenue d'Iena. No. 12, where Balzac had his flat, probably occupied the site whereon now stands the mansion of Prince Roland Bonaparte. From its windows a good view was obtained of the Seine, the Champ de Mars, the Ecole Militaire, and the Dome of the Invalides.

As a matter of fact, the house of the Rue des Batailles was for a time a supplementary dwelling rented by the novelist, so Werdet says, as a hiding-place from the myrmidons of the law. The flat in the Rue Cassini was retained, and its furniture also; and an arrangement was made with the landlord by which a notice-board hung continually on the door, with the words: "This apartment to let." In reality the tenant often sojourned there still, and his cook stayed on the premises to look after them, and serve her master with meals, whenever he wished to work in his old study without being disturbed. At the Rue des Batailles he lived under the pseudonym

of Widow Brunet, so that temporarily the sergeant-major of the National Guard was outwitted.

The second flat, when he took it, was composed of five small rooms; but an army of workmen was summoned; and what with the pulling down of partitions and their reconstruction on a more commodious plan, the place was metamorphosed into four luxuriously furnished chambers, the study being fitted up as a sort of boudoir. One of its walls was a graceful curve against which rested a large, real Turkish divan in white cashmere, its drapery being caught and held with lozenge-shaped bows of black and flame-coloured silk. The opposite wall formed a straight line broken only by a white marble chimney-piece pinked out in gold. The entire room was hung in red stuff as a background, and this was covered with fluted Indian muslin, having a top and bottom beading of flame-coloured stuff ornamented with elegant black arabesques. Under the muslin the red assumed a rose tint, which later was repeated in the window curtains of muslin lined with taffety, and fringed in black and red. Six silver sconces, each supporting two candles, projected from the wall above the divan, to light those sitting or lying there. From the dazzlingly white ceiling was suspended an unpolished silver-gilt lustre; and the cornice round it was in gold. The carpets of curious designs were like Eastern shawls; the furniture was lavishly upholstered. The time-piece and candelabra were of white marble incrusted with gold; and cashmere covered the single table, while several flower-stands filled up the corners, with their roses and other blooms. This study, which Balzac himself has left us a description of in his novel *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*, was soon abandoned as a workroom for another more simple and austere, up under the roof. The latter, however, he likewise began, being tormented by the desire of change, to adorn almost as fantastically.

Throughout the time that Werdet continued to be Balzac's publisher, and up to the end of 1836, when their active business relations ceased, it is difficult to be quite accurate in speaking of their relations and the things spoken of by both in which they were mutually concerned. There is frequent discordance in their narration of the same event, and one is often embarrassed in trying to reconcile them. On the one hand, it is certain that Balzac was not always exact in his statements; on the other, Werdet's memory, in the seventies, when he wrote his *Portrait Intime* of the novelist, was as certainly now and again treacherous. An example of such discrepancy is furnished by the information given concerning *Seraphita*, which Werdet says he bought from Buloz at the end of 1834, and for which he had to wait till December 1835. He even makes it a reproach that the novelist, after being extracted from a dilemma, should have dealt with him so cavalierly. Now, from documents published by the Viscount de Lovenjoul, there must be a mistake in Werdet's dates. During the year of 1835, the *Revue de Paris* published, after long delay, some further chapters of *Seraphita*; and not until the end of November in this same twelvemonth was the treaty signed which rendered Werdet possessor of the book.

Seraphita, or *Seraphitus*—the name is designedly spelt both ways in different parts of the book—is an attempt on the novelist's part to represent in fiction the dual sex of the soul. The scene is laid in the fiords of Norway. There, in a village, we meet with a person of mysterious nature who is loved simultaneously by a man and a woman, and who is regarded by each as being of the opposite sex. By whiles this hermaphrodite seems to respond to the affection of each admirer, and by whiles to withdraw on to a higher plane of existence whither their mortality hinders them from following. To the old pastor of the village, *Seraphita-Seraphitus* talks with assurance of the essence of phenomena and the invisible world, but, forsooth, only to initiate the shades that visit spiritualistic *seances*, and to say what is either obscure verbiage, or a hash-up of philosophies often digested without much sustenance derived from them. In the end, this dual personage vanishes from our mundane atmosphere, translated bodily to heaven; and leaves his or her lovers to repair their loss—just like a forlorn widow or widower—by making a match based on rules of conduct laid down by the departed one.

Seraphita was Balzac's pocket Catholicism. He had another Catholicism, entirely orthodox, for the use of the public at large. Esoterically understood, his novel teaches a doctrine of mysticism, intuitionalism, and materialism combined. Plotinus, the Manicheans, and Swendenborg are borrowed from without reserve. Ordinary reason is despised. He believes himself for the nonce inspired, like the Pope when launching bulls. "The pleasure," he writes, "of swimming in a lake of pure water, amidst rocks, woods, and flowers, alone and fanned by the warm zephyr, would give the ignorant but a weak image of the happiness I felt when my soul was flooded with the rays of I know not what light, when I listened to the terrible and confused voices of inspiration, when from a secret source the images streamed into my palpitating brain." On the contrary, he holds—and this does not square well with the preceding—that the soul is an ethereal fluid similar to electricity; that the brain is the matrass or bottle into which the animal transports, according to the strength of the apparatus, as much as the various organisms can absorb of this fluid, which issues thence transformed into will; that our sentiments are movements of the fluid, which proceeds from us by jerks when we are angry, and which weighs on our nerves when we are in expectation; that the current of this king of liquids, according to the pressure of thought and feeling, spreads in waves or diminishes and thins, then collects again, to gush forth in flashes. He believes also that our ideas are complete, organized beings (the theosophic notion) which live in the invisible world and influence our destinies; that, concentrated in a powerful brain, they can master the brains of other people, and traverse immense distances in the twinkling of an eye. In short, he anticipates not a little of the science of the present day, yet mixing up the true and false in his guesses by the very exuberance of his fancy. At the close, he gives us his vision of the universe: "They heard the divers parts of the Infinite forming a living melody; and, at each pause, when the accord made

itself felt like a huge respiration, the worlds, drawn by this unanimous movement, inclined themselves towards the immense being who, from his impenetrable centre, sent everything forth and brought it back to himself. The light engendered melody, the melody engendered light; the colours were light and melody, the movement was number endowed with speech; in fine, all was at once sonorous, diaphanous, mobile; so that, all things interpenetrating each other, distance was without obstacles, and might be traversed by the angels throughout the depths of the infinite. There was the fete. Myriads of angels all hastened in like flight, without confusion, all similar, yet all dissimilar, simple as the field-rose, vast as worlds. They were neither seen to come nor go. On a sudden, they studded the infinite with their presence, just as the stars shine in the indiscernible ether."

The fundamental error of *Seraphita* is its hybridity, not to speak of its pretentious psychology. It is neither flesh nor fowl; and, exception made for some fine passages, more at the beginning than in the rest of the book, it jars and irks, and amazes, but does not captivate or persuade.

It had a great success when it came out in book form. People were inquisitive to know the end of the story, which the *Revue de Paris* had not given; and their eagerness had been further whetted by a cleverly graduated series of puffs put into the newspapers. In the first day of sale, the whole edition was cleared out of Werdet's warehouse, a thing that had never happened before with any of the same author's works. Balzac, who had been duly informed of the good news, hastened to the office, and led the publisher off proudly to dine with him at Very's, and to finish up the evening at the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre, with ices afterwards at Tortoni's. The whole affair was carried out in grand style. The novelist had on his war-paint, and was accompanied by a lady, young, pretty, whose name is not revealed to us. Werdet's *vis-a-vis* was Madame Louise Lemercier, a benevolent blue-stocking of that day, who was a Providence to needy men of letters. When dinner was over, Balzac's elegant equipage, with its mighty coachman and its diminutive groom, yclept Millet-seed, who unfortunately died soon after in the hospital, conveyed them to the play, in which Frederick Lemaitre and Serres held chief roles. Balzac was the hero of the evening. His jewelled stick, and his pretty companion monopolized the attention of the spectators, who somewhat neglected the amusement offered by the *Auberge des Adrets* on the stage. At the conclusion of the piece, the four passed out of the theatre through a double line of people eager to pay the homage that notoriety can always command.

In the year 1835 the novelist's restlessness and inability to remain long in one spot were evinced in a very marked manner. Only by repeated changes of scene was he able to carry on his work at all. After wearing himself out in a fruitless attempt to complete *Seraphita* in April, he fled to Madame Carraud's at Frapesle. In October he was at La Boulonniere, where he put the last touches to *Pea-Blossom*, better known as the *Marriage Contract*, which came out before the end of December. His fits of depression alternated with spurts of cheerfulness nearly every week, according as he had some loss or gain to register; here, a fire at the printer's, where some of his *Contes Drolatiques* were burned; there, the sale of an article to the *Conservateur* for three thousand francs. In September the barometer rose, and he exclaimed joyfully in a letter to Laure:

"The Reviews are at my feet and pay me more for my sheets. He! He!

"The reading public have changed their opinion about the *Country Doctor*, so that Werdet is certain of selling his editions directly. Ha! Ha!

"In short, I can meet my liabilities in November and December. Ho! Ho!"

This tone changed in October. To his sister now he lamented:

"I am drinking the cup to the dregs. In vain I work fourteen hours a day. I cannot suffice."

He had held practically the same language to Werdet in May,[*] when he announced to him his intention of starting for Austria, where Madame Hanska was staying. His brain, he said, was empty; his imagination dried up; cup after cup of coffee produced no effect, nor yet baths — these last being the supreme remedy.

[*] In Werdet's account this journey is placed between September and November; but the *Letters to the Stranger* prove that the date he gives is incorrect.

Werdet did his best to thwart the trip; but Balzac would not be gainsaid. He affirmed he should return with rejuvenated faculties, after seeing his *carissima*; and ultimately he persuaded his publisher to advance him two thousand francs for his travelling expenses. Profuse in his gratitude, he wrote from his hotel in Vienna —the Hotel de la Poire, situated in the Langstrasse—that, in the society of the cherished one, he had regained his imagination and verve. Werdet, he continued, was his Archibald Constable (*vide* Walter Scott); their fortunes were thenceforward indissoluble; and the day was approaching when they would meet in their carriages in the Bois de Boulogne and turn their detractors green with envy. This flattery was the jam enveloping the information that he had drawn on his publisher for another fifteen hundred francs; there was also a promise made that he would come back with his pockets full of manuscripts. Instead of the manuscripts, he brought back some Viennese curiosities. He had done no work while with Madame Hanska, but he had seen Munich, and had enjoyed himself immensely, being idolized by the aristocracy of the Austrian capital. "And what an aristocracy!" he remarked to Werdet; "quite different from ours, my dear fellow; quite another world. There the nobility are a real nobility. They are all old families, not an adulterated nobility like in

France."

The Vienna visit, which cost him, in total, some five thousand francs —a foolish expense in his involved circumstances—was the cause of his silver plate having to be pawned while he was away, in order that certain payments of interest that he owed might be made at the end of the month. Since he was always plunging into fresh extravagance of one kind or another, his liabilities had a fatal tendency to grow; and at present even more than before, since he was puffed up by the lionizing he had enjoyed abroad. It was hardly to be expected that a man should study economy who saw himself already appointed to the Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs. "This is the only department which would suit me," he said to Werdet. "I have now my free entry to the house of the Count d'Appony, Ambassador of Austria, and to that of Rothschild, Consul of the same Power. What glory for you, Master Werdet, to have been my publisher. I will make your fortune then."

His display and luxury manifested themselves in greater sumptuousness of furniture, more servants in livery, a box at the Opera for himself, and another at the *Italiens*. And the two secretaries must not be forgotten—one was not sufficient—the Count de Belloy and the Count de Grammont. Sandeau was not grand enough for the post. The reason given by Balzac to Madame Hanska was Jules' idleness, nonchalance, and sentimentality. As a matter of fact, Sandeau did not care to play always second fiddle, and to write tragedies or comedies for which Balzac wished to get all the credit. Moreover, he was not a Legitimist. The novelist had tried to convert him to his own doctrine of autocratic government and had signally failed. These sprigs of nobility he felt himself more in sympathy with.

About this time his epistles to "The Stranger" were full of himself and his Herculean labours, and Madame Hanska hinted pretty plainly that the quantity of the latter did not necessarily imply their quality. Such expression of opinion notwithstanding, he boasted of conceiving, composing, and printing the *Atheist's Mass*, a short novel, it is true, in one night only. His portrait by Louis Boulanger, which was painted during the year of 1835, had been ordered rather with a view to advertizing him at the ensuing Salon, although he asserted it was because he wanted to correct a false impression given of him by Danton's caricature in the earlier months of the year. The likeness produced by Boulanger he esteemed a good one, rendering his Coligny, Peter the Great persistence, which, together with an intrepid faith in the future, he said was the basis of his character. The future hovered as a perpetual mirage in all his introspections, sometimes with tints of dawn, at other times half-threatening. "I am the Wandering Jew of thought," was his cry to Eve from the Hotel des Haricots, "always up and walking without repose, without the joys of the heart, without anything besides what is yielded me by a remembrance at once rich and poor, without anything that I can snatch from the future. I hold out my hand to it. It casts me not a mite, but a smile which means to say: to-morrow."

When he embarked on the hazardous venture of starting a newspaper of his own, the motive was chiefly a desire to exercise a larger political influence. Yet he had additional incentives. The Reviews to which he had contributed in the past had yielded him almost as much annoyance as profit; and, since the two most important ones, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Revue de Paris*, both under the same editorship, were closed against him, he believed he needed an organ in which to defend himself from the rising virulence of hostile criticism. A press campaign in his favour could be better and more cheaply waged in a paper under his entire control. His plan was not to create a journal, but to revive one. In 1835 the *Chronique de Paris*, formerly called the *Globe*, was on its last legs, albeit it had been ably edited by William Duckett; and the proprietor, Bethune the publisher, was only too glad to listen to Balzac's overtures. By dint of puffing the new enterprise, a company was formed with a nominal capital of a hundred thousand francs; Duckett was paid out in bills drawn on the receipts to accrue, since the novelist had no ready money of his own; and a start was made under the new management. The staff was a strong one. Jules Sandeau was dramatic critic; Emile Regnault supplied the light literature; Gustave Planche was art critic; Alphonse Karr wrote satirical articles; Theophile Gautier, Charles de Bernard, and Raymond Brucker contributed fiction; and Balzac, together with his functions of chief editor, gave the leading article.

In its reorganized form, the Review came out Sundays and Thursdays and once a week Saturdays. The collaborators met at Werdet's house to discuss and compare notes. Generally, they brought with them more conversation than copy, and Balzac would begin to scold.

"How can I make up to-morrow's issue," he asked, "if each of you arrives empty-handed?"

"Oh! being a great man and a genius," was the reply, "you have merely to say: 'Let there be a Chronicle,' and there will be a Chronicle."

"But you know that I reserve to myself nothing except the article on foreign policy."

"Yes, we all know," answered Karr, punning on the French word *etrangere*, "that your policy is strange."

(Not finishing the word *etrangere*, he said only *etrange*.)

"*Ere*," shouted Balzac, adding the termination.

"*Ere*," Alphonse yelled back. "You reserve to yourself a policy which is foreign to all governments present and past and future. And, as you scold me, Mr. Editor, is your own article

ready?"

"No, but it is here"—tapping his forehead—"I have only to write it. In an hour it will be done."

"With the corrections?" queried Karr slily.

"Yes, with the corrections."

"Ah! well, prove that to us; and we'll all go on dry bread and water until a statue is raised to you. I am hungry."

Although Balzac's colleagues had a real respect and admiration for his talent, they chaffed him unmercifully for his vanity. One Saturday, Alphonse Karr, as a joke, crowned him with flowers; and Balzac, in all good faith, complacently accepted the honour. Around him, the laughter broke out fast and furious; and, at length, he joined in with volleys that shook the room, while his face waxed purple beneath his explosions. In his *Guepes*, Alphonse Karr subsequently recalled this improvized coronation of the novelist.

Edited and composed in such desultory fashion, the *Chronicle's* prosperity was short-lived, in spite of the lustre it temporarily acquired from Balzac's name, and the publication in it of some of his fiction. Before long its financial position was so bad that the chief editor, as a forlorn hope, tried to induce a young Russian nobleman, who was an eager reader of his books, to enter the concern with a large amount of fresh capital. To bait him, a magnificent dinner was given in the Rue Cassini flat, amidst a display of all its tenant's gold and silver plate, liberated from the pawnbroker's for the occasion by a timely advance of two thousand francs from Werdet. The feast was an entire success, and an appointment was fixed for the next day at the Russian's hotel. Alas! when the envoy went, he received, sandwiched in the guest's thanks for the royal entertainment of the preceding evening, an announcement of the said guest's immediate departure for Russia and the intimation that, as the nobleman was not returning to Paris for some time, it would be impossible for him to accept the offer of a sleeping-partnership in the Review. Three months later the *Chronicle* was resold to Bethune for a small sum; and the publisher disposed of it to a third person, who, however, did not succeed in keeping it alive. Balzac's loss by his experiment was about twenty thousand francs.

And this loss was not the only disagreeable part of the business. There were the bills signed to Duckett. They being protested in 1837, Duckett sued the novelist and obtained judgment against him. At this moment, Balzac, tracked by his creditors, had taken temporary refuge with some friends, the Count Visconti and his English wife, who lived in the Champs Elysees. Here he remained incognito. One day a man, wearing the uniform of a transport company, called at the mansion and informed the servant that he had brought six thousand francs for Monsieur de Balzac. Suiting the action to his words, he dumped down on to the floor a heavy bag that chinked as it struck the hall tiles. "Monsieur de Balzac does not live here," was the servant's reply. "Then is the master of the house in?" asked the man. "No, but the mistress is." "Then tell her I have six thousand francs for Monsieur de Balzac." The servant vanished and soon the lady of the mansion appeared and offered to sign the receipt herself. To this the man demurred. He must either see Monsieur de Balzac or must take the money away again. There was a hurried confabulation between hostess and guest, the upshot of which was that Balzac, falling into the snare, came to the man, thinking that some generous friend had sent him the money; and he was immediately served with an arrest-warrant for debt. "I am caught," he cried; "but I will pillory Duckett for this. He shall go down to posterity with infamy attached to his name." To get the novelist out of the mess, Madame Visconti paid the debt for which the warrant had been made out; and thus spared him, for the nonce, a sojourn in the debtors' prison at Clichy.

Balzac's lawsuit with the *Revue de Paris*, the details of which are given in the Viscount de Lovenjoul's *Last Chapter of the History of Balzac's Works*, was brought about by the novelist's quarrel, in 1835, with Buloz, the editor, because the latter, while the *Lily in the Valley* was being printed, communicated proofs of it to the *Revue Francaise* of Saint Petersburg. Balzac at once severed his connection with the *Revue de Paris*, and took away his novel, on the ground that the editor was not justified in selling it abroad without his—the author's—permission, and especially was not justified in communicating premature proofs, which, owing to his practice of modifying the text while correcting it, could in no way represent his finished work. After an attempt made by mutual friends to settle the matter amicably, Buloz entered an action against Balzac to compel him to continue the publication of the *Lily in the Valley* in the *Revue de Paris*. Three parts had been given. It was the end which the Review demanded, and ten thousand francs damages for the delay. The case was heard in May 1836, after months of bitter controversy, in which both sides had their ardent supporters. The most was made by the plaintiff's barrister of Balzac's previous disputes with other editors, who had had to complain of his tardiness in completing articles or stories. A letter was also put in, signed by Alexandre Dumas, Eugene Sue, Frederic Soulie, and others, stating that it was usual for authors to allow the communication of their productions to the *Revue Francaise* of Saint Petersburg, with a view to combating Belgian and German piracies. And Jules Janin, who during the Thirties was a zealous opponent of Balzac, cast his weight of evidence in favour of the Review. The *Seraphita* episode was dragged in, too, with testimony to show that, even after Werdet had bought the right to publish the novel in book form, Balzac again negotiated for its continuation as a serial in the Review, and had, moreover, supplied some other chapters, yet without coming to the end. In fact, the suit was a complicated one to decide. Ultimately, the Court gave its verdict against Balzac on the chief point at issue. He lost the conclusion of the *Lily in the Valley*, and recovered only a small sum of money that had been advanced to the novelist for copy not supplied, and

besides had to pay all the expenses of his action.

What galled Balzac particularly during the speeches of the plaintiff's barrister, was to hear the style of his novel pulled to pieces in language of mingled sarcasm and clever criticism that delighted the audience and the papers. After the termination of the affair, he thoroughly overhauled the parts of the book which had been so severely handled, made large alterations, and, since fun had also been poked at his pretensions to noble ancestry, he prefixed a curious introduction to the edition that Werdet was about to publish. In the course of it he declared: "If some persons, deceived by caricatures, false portraits, penny-a-liners, and lies, credit me with a colossal fortune, palaces, and above all, with frequent favours from women . . . I here declare to them that I am a poor artist, absorbed in art, working at a long history of society, which will be either good or bad, but at which I work by necessity, without shame, just as Rossini has made operas or Du Ryer translations and volumes; that I live very much alone, that I have a few firm friends; that my name is on my birth-certificate, etc., just as that of Monsieur de Fitz-James is on his; that, if it is of old Gaulish stock, this is not my fault; but that de Balzac is my patronymic, an advantage which many aristocratic families have not who called themselves Odet before they were called Chatillon, Duplessis, and who are, none the less, great families."

To the foregoing he joined a long account of his birth and his presumed title to ancient lineage, and inserted into the bargain a panegyric of Werdet as a man of activity, intelligence, and probity, with whom his relations would be unbroken, since by this same declaration he constituted him henceforward his sole publisher. That was in July 1836. Scarcely six months after, when Werdet was threatened with a bankruptcy which was likely to involve him—a repetition in minor degree of Scott's entanglement with Constable—he veered completely round, called Werdet a rotten plank, an empty head, an obstinate mule, and other names more expressive than polite, affirmed that he had always considered him a bit of a fool, and dropped all further connection with him. Werdet, it is true, was no business genius, but he was really attached to Balzac, and had yielded to the great man's importunities as long as his purse would support the strain.

The *Lily in the Valley* was published by Werdet in the week after the lawsuit was finished, and was well received by the public. Its success, however, was more considerable abroad than in France. The author complained of the smallness of the numbers sold in France compared with those of foreign editions; but Werdet's figures indicate a very fair sale, and are larger than those given by Balzac, who in this instance at least was not so accurate as his publisher.

The novel deals with the struggle in the heart of a Madame de Mortsauf, torn between her affection for Felix de Vandenesse and her determination to remain outwardly faithful in conduct towards her husband. With his invariable enthusiasm for subjects that pleased him in his own work, Balzac believed and affirmed that this secret combat waged in a valley of the Indre was as important as the most famous military battle ever fought. Possibly the amount of early personal biography in the book—yet a good deal romanced—led him to this conviction. Possibly, too, the richness with which he adorned its style helped to foster the opinion he held, which critics have not ratified. Not even Lamartine, his eulogist, found much to say in favour of the story. To the first part alone he gave his approval, likening it to the Song of Solomon. The rest he thought vulgar, and hinted that the heroine degenerates into a sort of hermaphrodite character. Brunetiere's estimate, given in a parenthesis, is not much more favourable. And Taine, when dipping into the book for examples of Balzac's style, neutralizes his praise of one portion by his depreciation of another.

Apart from the question of the novel's style, which is turgid because the lyric note intrudes, the most legitimate objection to the book is the sentimentalism which pervades it throughout, and palls on the reader before he reaches the conclusion. Like Richardson in his *Pamela*, but far to a greater extent than Richardson, Balzac has placed the struggle on the physical plane. Madame de Mortsauf permits de Vandenesse to make love to her, to caress her, and she accords him everything with the single exception of that which would confer on her husband the right to divorce her. The interest of the book therefore is largely a material one. The moral issue is thrown into the background. And de Vandenesse, moreover, is not a person that inspires us with respect or even pity. He consoles himself with Lady Dudley, while swearing high allegiance to his Henriette.

In sooth, the swain's position resembled the novelist's own. Honore was also inditing oaths of fidelity to his "dear star," his "earth-angel" in far-away Russia, while worshipping at shrines more accessible. Lady Dudley may well have been, for all his denial, the Countess Visconti, of whom Madame Hanska was jealous and on good grounds, or else the Duchess de Castries, to whom he said that, in writing the book, he had caught himself shedding tears. His reminiscences of Madame de Berny aided him in composing the figure of the heroine, whose death-bed scene was soon to become sober reality. Madame de Berny died in July, having had a last pleasure in perusing the story that immortalized her affection for the novelist. Balzac had been intending to pay her a farewell visit; but he was then in the midst of embarrassments of all kinds, and the journey was postponed until it was too late.

At this moment, the affair of the *Chronique* was being liquidated; and then Madame Bechet, his late publisher, was dunning him for some arrears of copy that he owed her. His brother Henry, too, going from bad to worse, was in a position that necessitated Madame de Balzac's giving up the remnants of her capital; and, to crown all, a son of Laurence, the dead sister, quitting an unhappy home, was living as a vagabond on the streets of Paris, whence he had to

be rescued. Since, to these worries and griefs, there was added certain disquieting news from Eve, whose aunt, from reading some of his books, supposed him to be a gambler and debauchee and was trying to turn her niece against him, it was not astonishing that he should have been completely unnerved. While at Sache, where he had come to stay with some friends, the de Margonnes, in order to terminate the work he was obliged to do for Madame Bechet, he had an attack of apoplexy; and, on recovering from it, was glad to seize an opportunity offered him of a journey to Italy to escape for a while from the scene of his toiling and moiling and to have a radical change. His good genius on this occasion was the Count Visconti, who, having some legal business of a litigious nature to settle at Turin and not being able to attend to it personally, asked him to go instead. On this trip he was accompanied by Madame Marbouty, a woman of letters, better known under her pseudonym, Claire Brunne, whose acquaintance he had made some years back at Angouleme. Madame Marbouty's exterior had much in common with that of George Sand, and the resemblance between the two women gave rise to the report that it was the authoress of *Indiana* who accompanied Balzac to Italy at this date.

The journey back to Paris was effected through Switzerland, which enabled him to see Geneva again, though under less agreeable auspices than those of 1833. His prospects on returning to France were no better than when he left. Indeed, they were worse, for Werdet's bad circumstances forced him to pledge himself in several quarters in order to raise some ready money for his immediate wants; and, being pledged, he was bound to produce at high pressure. His *Old Maid*, which he sold to the *Presse* for eight thousand francs, was written in three nights, *Facino Cane*, in one night, and the *Secret of the Ruggieri*, in one night also. Rossini, happening to meet him during this spell of drudgery, condoled with him and remarked that he himself had gone through the mill.

"But when I did it," he added, "I was dead after a fortnight, and it took me another fifteen days to revive."

"Well!" replied Balzac, "I have only the coffin in view as a rest; yet work is a fine shroud."

Casting round for a means to free himself from a position that had grown intolerable, he was induced to lend himself to a scheme suggested by Chateaubriand's example. Chateaubriand, having fallen into financial straits, sold his pen to a syndicate, in return for an annual stipend. Balzac did something of the same kind. Victor Bohain, who played an intermediary role in the affair, discovered Chateaubriand's capitalist; and a company was formed which paid the novelist fifty thousand francs down to relieve his most pressing needs; and further engaged to allow him fifteen hundred francs a month for the first year, three thousand francs a month for the second year, and, afterwards, four thousand francs a month up to the fifteenth year, when the agreement was to come to an end. In return for these sums, Balzac promised to furnish a fixed number of volumes per year, half profits in which were to be his, after all publishing expenses were paid. The arrangement was signed on the 19th of November 1836; and this date, in so far as the general quality of his writing is concerned, marks a beginning of decadence. Thenceforward his fiction, published mostly in political dailies first of all—the *Presse*, the *Constitutionnel*, the *Siecle*, the *Debats*, the *Messager*—had to be composed hurriedly and without the corrections which were the *sine qua non* of Balzac's excellence; and consequently it contained many imperfections inherent in such kinds of literary work. There was irony in the situation. Hitherto, he had despised the daily press and the journalists that supplied it with matter, chiefly, it must be confessed, because of the slatings he had received through these organs of information; and he had revenged himself for the attacks by pillorying the journalistic profession in his novels. Lousteau, Finot, Blondet, and other members of the press appear in his pages as unprincipled men, only too willing to sell themselves to the highest bidder. Of course, such retaliation carried with it injustice; and men of high principle, like Jules Janin, resented this prejudiced condemnation of a class for no better reason than its having black sheep, which existed in every circle, trade and profession. Now, Janin had an easy task in convicting of inconsistency an accuser who, since it suited his purpose, was fain to belong to the press brotherhood. The real derogation, however, was not in Balzac's turning *feuilletoniste*, but in his slipping into the manner and his adopting the artifices that he blamed so unsparingly in Eugene Sue and Alexandre Dumas. Not to speak of his falling off in accurate observation, he inserted more and more padding in his fiction; the aridly didactic encroached upon the artist's creation; and, to make the arid portions go down with his readers, he spiced them with exciting episodes and all the stage tricks common in the serial story. To tell the truth, he had never quite shaken off his juvenile manner of the *Heiress of Birague*, which reasserted itself so much the more easily as his essentially vulgar temperament was ready to crop out on the slightest encouragement afforded to it. During his best period he had a mentor at his elbow in Charles Lemesle, who always read what he wrote before it went to the printer; and Balzac, though vain, was too intelligent not to avail himself of this friend's pruning. Under the new *regime* the revising was impossible, and, as a result, that difficult perfection which he had so perseveringly sought was destined to be attained but rarely in the rest of his achievement.

CHAPTER VIII

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1837, 1838

By the agreement which farmed out Balzac's future production, Werdet was implicitly sacrificed. The final breach did not occur until the middle of 1837, but no fresh book was given him after the November of 1836. There was one unpublished manuscript that he then had in his possession—the first part of *Lost Illusions*, and this appeared in the following spring. The novelist was intending at the time to bring out a new edition of the *Country Doctor*, of which Werdet held the rights. His idea was to present it for the Montyon prize of the Academy, and, if successful, to devote the money to raising a statue at Chinon in memory of Rabelais. Lemesle was one Sunday at Werdet's place, engaged in revising the book, when Balzac arrived in an excited state of mind, and sprang on the astonished publisher the demand that their respective positions should be legally specified in writing, and a clean sweep made which should leave him perfectly free. Previously their business relations had been carried on by verbal understandings, which, as a matter of fact, did not bind the novelist overmuch, since he never sold either a first or a subsequent edition of any of his novels for more than a comparatively short period—usually a year—at the end of which he recovered his entire liberty, whether the edition were exhausted or not. Werdet acquiesced, though grievously offended and disappointed; but asked that certain accounts outstanding from the year before should be settled on the same occasion. The promise was given, and everything was put straight, except the reimbursement of the money Werdet had advanced. Instead of acquitting this debt, the ingenious author endeavoured to squeeze a little more cash out of his long-suffering publisher. For once, Werdet lost his temper, and sent the great man off with a flea in his ear. It would almost look as if Balzac had provoked the quarrel, since, on the very evening after the tiff, he returned to Werdet's and offered to redeem all existing copyrights that the publisher held for the price of sixty-three thousand francs. His proposal was accepted, and Bethune, who was acting on behalf of the novelist's syndicate, paid over the amount.

The transaction was the best possible for Werdet, who was too poor to continue playing Maecenas to his Horace. Against such incurable improvidence, and such little regard for strict equity in money dealings, nothing but the impersonality of a syndicate could stand. Nevertheless, one cannot help regretting that the intercourse of the two men should have ceased. Having so great a personal regard for his hero, and having besides his share of the observant faculty, Werdet, could have supplied us with biographical details of the last twelve years of the novelist's life much more interesting than those of Gozlan, Gautier, and Lemer. His naive narrations, which are well composed and have humour, carry with them a conviction of their sincerity, whatever the errors of chronology.

Werdet's prosperity finished with Balzac as it had commenced with him. He was ultimately compelled to file his petition in bankruptcy, and, abandoning business on his own account, to take up travelling for other firms. His creditors were not tender towards the novelist, and used to the utmost the lien they had upon the few unterminated engagements that involved him in the liquidation. A letter addressed by Balzac to the Marquis de Belloy, his former secretary, testifies to the annoyance the creditors caused him:—

"MY DEAR CARDINAL" (he wrote, calling the Marquis by a nickname), —"Your old Mar" (a familiar appellation applied to Balzac by his friends) "would like to know if you are at Poissy, as it is possible he may come and request you to hide him. There is a warrant out against him on Werdet's account, and his counsellors recommend him to take flight, seeing that the conflict between him and the officers of the Commercial Tribunal is begun. If you are still at Poissy, a room, concealment, bread and water, together with salad, and a pound of mutton, a bottle of ink, and a bed, such are the needs of him who is condemned to the hardest of hard literary labour, and who is yours.

"LE MAR."

The last occasion on which Werdet forgathered with his favourite author was at his house in the Rue de Seine, where, in February 1837, he gave a dinner. Some young members of the fair sex were present; and Balzac, whether to produce a greater impression upon these or because he had been making some society calls, arrived nearly an hour late. Nothing very special occurred during the evening, but the *soiree* had its conclusion disturbed by a thunderbolt. On rising to depart, Balzac sought his wonderful stick—an inseparable companion—which was nowhere to be found. Every nook was explored without result. The great man yielded to a veritable fit of despair. A suspicion crossed his mind: "Enough of this trick, gentlemen," he cried to the male guests. "For Heaven's sake, restore me my stick. I implore you!" and he tore at his long hair in vexation. But the guests assured him they were as ignorant as himself of the stick's whereabouts. Werdet then said he would take a cab and inquire at all the places the novelist had visited in the course of the afternoon. Two hours later he came back, announcing that his jaunt had been useless. At this news, Balzac fainted outright. The loss of his talisman was overwhelming. When he was brought round again, Werdet suggested what ought to have been suggested in the first instance, namely, that they should proceed to the livery stables and see whether the stick had been left in the carriage which the novelist had used while on his peregrinations. The proposal was jumped at. He went thither, accompanied by Werdet, and had the ineffable joy of discovering the missing bauble quietly reposing in a corner of the vehicle.

During the year of 1836, he had had the unique experience of corresponding for some months continuously with an unknown lady, who called herself Louise, and to whom, in remembrance of their epistolary intercourse, he dedicated his short tale *Facino Cane*. Whether he really had the

opportunity of learning who she was—as he asserted —and refrained from availing himself of it through deference to her wishes, is doubtful. Some, if not all, of the letters he received from "Louise" were written in English; and at least one water-colour painting was sent him which had been executed by the lady's own hand. From the tone of his own epistles, which grew warmer onwards till the end, one may conjecture that the dame was a second Madame Hanska, smitten with the novelist's person through reading his works; and Balzac, whose heart was made of inflammable stuff and whose brain was always castle-building, indulged for a time the hope of meeting with another ideal princess to espouse. Like the Orientals, he was quite capable of nourishing sentiments of devotion towards as many beautiful and fortuned women as showed themselves amenable. The sudden cessation of Louise's letters, towards the end of 1836, freed him from the risk of Eve's learning of these divided attentions; and it may be presumed that the latter divinity was kept in ignorance of his worshipping elsewhere.

Facino Cane was a blind old violinist who encountered Balzac, if there is any truth in the story, one evening at a restaurant where he was playing for the members of a wedding-party. Something in the old man's dignified aspect moved the novelist deeply, and, accosting him, Balzac drew forth gradually the narration of his life. Facino was, in reality, a Venetian nobleman, at present reduced to dire poverty and obliged to dwell in the Hospice of the Quinze-Vingts.[*] In his youth he had been imprisoned within the Doge's Palace, and, while there, had accidentally come upon the secret treasures it contained. After his escape from confinement, his dream had been to meet with some one who would help him to gain possession of this wealth, without taking advantage of his blindness. And now he confided his plan to Balzac with undiminished faith in the possibility of its accomplishment. The pathos of the old man's situation is created with sober touches. Among the novelist's minor tales, this is one of the simplest and best.

[*] Hospital founded by Saint Louis for three hundred noblemen whose sight had been destroyed by the Saracens.

In his reminiscences, Theophile Gautier mentions, apropos of *Facino Cane*, that Balzac himself was persuaded he knew the exact spot, near the Pointe-a-Pitre, where Toussaint Louverture, the black dictator of Santo Domingo, had his booty buried by negroes of that island, whom he then shot. To Sandeau and Gautier the novelist explained, with such eloquence and precision, his scheme for obtaining the interred wealth that they were wrought up to the point of declaring themselves ready to set out, armed with pick-axe and spade, and to put into action Edgar Allen Poe's yarn of the *Gold Bug*. When money was the theme, Balzac's tongue was infinitely persuasive.

One is tempted to wonder whether his returning to Italy in the spring of 1837, and his visit to Venice, after Florence and Milan, were not an indirect consequence of his *Facino Cane* story. It is certain that he regarded the ancient land of the Caesars as a possible El Dorado; and, curiously enough, he came back this time, if not with Sindbad's diamonds, yet with some prospect of becoming a Silver King. Throughout the remainder of the twelvemonth, a plan, connected with this prospect, was simmering in his head, a plan which, we shall see, was less chimerical than most of those that he concocted.

While he was at Milan, the Italian sculptor Puttinati modelled his bust, which pleased him so much that he gave him a order for a group representing *Seraphita* showing the path heavenward to Wilfrid and Minna. At Venice, he began *Massimilla Doni*, one of his philosophic novels, in which the love episode is interwoven with mysticism and music, and Rossini's *Mose* is analysed with skill. His best production of the year was *Cesar Birotteau*. The subject he had borne in his mind for a long while, but had feared to start on it on account of the difficulty of treating it imaginatively. At last, tempted by an offer of twenty thousand francs if he would complete it by a fixed date, he sat down to the task and wrote the novel in three weeks.

The *Grandeur* (or *Rise*) *and Fall of Cesar Birotteau*, to give the book its fuller title, has neither plot nor progress of love-passion. Its value—which is great—is almost entirely dependent on a number of little things that make up an imposing whole. The subject is a commonplace one. Birotteau, who is a dealer in perfumes, and has invented a Sultana cosmetic and a Carminative Water, has reached a position of influence and substance. Urged by his wife's desire to shine in society, he allows himself to be inveigled into an expenditure that compromises his fortune and reduces him to insolvency. Although retaining the esteem of his fellow-citizens, who are convinced of his integrity, Cesar is stricken to the heart, less by the loss of his money than by his failure to meet his engagements. In vain, his wife and daughter hire themselves out in order to aid in remedying the disaster for which they are largely responsible. In vain, friends rally round him, until, little by little, the debts are paid, the perfumer is rehabilitated, and is honoured even by the King. On the very evening when, in the society of his family and friends and his daughter's betrothed, he regains the feeling of independence and freedom, death overtakes him. Joy succeeding to the strain is too much for him.

In the background of the novel is a tableau of the Restoration epoch which is admirable; and the intricacies of finance and law, which form so considerable a part of the story, are handled with an ease and fancy that no other writer of fiction has quite equalled. We have a romance of ledgers and day-books, in a business atmosphere that amazingly well reveals the bent and moral worth of the various characters. Cesarine, Villerault, Popinot have traits which one smiles to recognize. And Birotteau's development both of qualities and foibles is free from caricature, yet pleases much.

As was the case with *Eugenie Grandet*, Balzac does not seem to have cared for this masterpiece. The rapidity with which he composed it, and the fatigue he had undergone, caused him to regard it with some irritation. He did not realize that it was all elaborated in his brain before he put in on paper. Probably also he spoke of it under the disappointment he experienced from his continued failures in play-writing. Twice, during the twelvemonth, he tackled pieces which he described to Madame Hanska. One of them, the *Premiere Demoiselle*, refashioned as the *School for Husbands and Wives*, treated the unsavoury theme of an adulterous husband who keeps his mistress in his own house; and the other, *Joseph Prudhomme*, much better in conception, dealt with the not uncommon incident of a girl's making a respectable marriage after a first betrayal, and her bringing up in secret the child born out of wedlock. Certain situations arising from the plot were both original and affecting. But in neither undertaking did he manage to go on to the end. Heine, whom he consulted in his difficulties, advised him to abandon further efforts in writing for the stage. "You had better remain in your galleys," he said. "Those who are used to Brest cannot accustom themselves to Toulon."

The advice was not palatable to a man of his temperament. He wanted all domains to open before him; and poured out his soul in lamentations, even while exhausting himself in fresh attempts. Now that Madame de Berny was dead, his Eve was the chief recipient of these jeremiads. "Are you not tired of hearing me vary my song in all moods?" he asked her. "Does not this unceasing egotism of a man struggling in a narrow circle bore you? Tell me, for, by your letter, you appear to me inclined to throw me over as a sorry pauper that knows only his *paternoster*, and always says the same thing."

To him, as to ambitious men in every century, reflection came now and again, whispering what folly it was to spend life in the sole pursuit of glory. Just now the whisperings must have been more insistent, for he had thoughts of going to live in some sylvan retreat on the banks of the Cher or the Loire, right away from Paris. A visit to Sache, after an illness, afforded him the excuse for searching; and, as he still proposed to write—for his pleasure,—it was congruent he should meditate a sort of Heloise and Abelard idyll—two lovers drawn to the cloister, and telling in epistles to each other the history of their vocation.[*]

[*] This novel was never written, or at least completed. The *Sister Marie des Anges*, so often spoken of in the novelist's correspondence, may have been the one here alluded to.

As a preliminary step towards carrying his determination into execution, he dismissed his servants, with the exception of Auguste, finally got rid of his lease in the Rue Cassini, whence he had removed his furniture in the preceding year; and then, feeling still a sneaking kindness for the city in which he had triumphed, he compromised by retreating to Sevres, there to study the ways and means of dwelling secure from pestering military summonses addressed to Monsieur de Balzac, *alias* Madame Widow Brunet, Man of Letters, Chasseur in the First Legion, and also, if not secure from, at least not so accessible to the calls of dunning creditors. The flat in the Rue de Chaillot, however, was retained till the year 1839; and, from time to time, he made short stays in it. But, in case any of his friends wished to see him during these sojourns, they needed to know the pass-words, which were not infrequently changed. On arriving at the outside door, the visitor must announce, for instance, that the seasons of plums had arrived. Then, if he could further announce that he was bringing lace from Belgium, he would be permitted to enter. But, before it was lawful for him to cross the threshold of the novelist's sanctum, he must be prepared to state that Madame Bertrand was in good health.

At Sevres, Balzac soon hit upon a site that pleased his fancy. It was a plot of land on a steep slope, about forty perches in area.[*] This he bought by using his credit, and forthwith busied himself with builder's estimates, since he intended to have his hermitage inhabitable some time in the following spring.

[*] More land was subsequently bought.

Meanwhile his project of retiring—to a distance of twenty minutes —from Paris society did not hinder him from occasionally putting in an appearance at one or another of the aristocratic houses where he had his entries, among them that of Madame de Castries, whom he continued to see, although she confined her worship to his talent, and merely patronized the man. Either from sheer mischievousness, or to revenge herself for some real or fancied slight—perhaps, indeed, to mock at his talk of refinement—she perpetrated upon him the practical joke of getting her Irish governess, a Miss Patrickson, to send him notes in English, signed Lady Neville, in one of which an appointment was made to meet him at the Opera. He went to the rendezvous; but no one was there waiting for him. This drew from him a sharp letter of reproach; and Miss Patrickson, who was, in her private life, a humble admirer of the great man, and had on one or two occasions translated some of his fiction, was so smitten with remorse for her trick that she revealed to him the name of the one who had invented it.

Les Jardies, where Balzac had decided to take up his residence, was built on the further side of the hill of Saint Cloud, facing the south, and with Ville d'Avray to the west. In front, there was the rising ground of the forest of Versailles; to the east, the outlook was down on Sevres and, beyond it, on Paris, with the city's smoky atmosphere fringing the uplands of Meudon and Bellevue. In the direction of these last places, a glimpse was obtainable of the plains of Montrouge and the road leading away to Tours. In summer weather especially, the landscape here presented charming contrasts, being a wealth of woodland and verdure in a miniature Switzerland.

The architecture of the would-be hermit's house was rather primitive. Three rooms, one over another, composed the main building. The ground floor served as drawing-room; above it was the anchoret's bedroom; and the top story was used as a study. Sixty feet away, rose a second building containing kitchens, stables, and servants' rooms. The whole stood in its own grounds, fenced in with walls, half of which, being situated on the steepest portion of the declivity, persisted in tumbling. One curious feature of the house was its outside staircase. Wags pretended that the owner had forgotten it in his plans, and been obliged to add it as an after-thought. The truth was that an inside staircase would have compelled him to build with less simplicity. "Since the staircase wants to be master in my dwelling, I will turn it out of doors," he said. And this was done, the said staircase being a sort of broad ladder.

Had the novelist stayed long enough in this rural retreat, he would have beautified the interior in accordance with his fanciful tastes. Friends who were invited out there were astonished to see scrawled in chalk on the walls:

"Here, a covering of Paros marble; here, a ceiling painted by Eugene Delacroix; here, a mosaic flooring formed of rare wood from the isles; here, a chimney-piece in cipolin marble."

Jokingly, Leon Gozlan one day himself inscribed on a convenient space:

"Here, a picture by Raphael, of priceless value, such as was never yet seen."

Of course, in the early days of his rusticating, he was enthusiastic about his Italian-looking brick cottage, with its covered platform or gallery running round the first floor and supported on slender pillars, Its value, he was sure, would double when he had created the garden of Eden round about it, planted with poplars, birches, vines, evergreens, magnolias and sweet peas. His humour-barometer went up to "set fair." For the moment, no pessimism clouded his sky. Here he would abide, here he would work or muse until the long-expected and at last approaching fortune should deign to enter beneath his roof; and then—well then, he believed he should have had enough of ambition's spoils, and should be content under the shadow of his vine, and watch from afar—just twenty minutes or half-an-hour at most—the march of events without seeking to mingle in them.

The original cost of the homestead was about forty thousand francs. Other expenses were incurred before the whole of the building and installation was completed, which made the total cost very considerably larger; and, as hardly any of the amount had been paid cash down, Balzac's liabilities, which were heavy enough without this extra charge, very soon introduced a disturbing element into his Arcadian existence. Within the twelvemonth, a distraint was levied upon him for non-payment of moneys that were owing. Lemer, one of his biographers, narrates that, paying a visit to Les Jardies at this date, for the purpose of soliciting the novelist's collaboration in an international album, he not only received a promise of help but an invitation for himself and a companion to remain and dine off a leg of mutton. As the two visitors declined, Balzac said: "Ah! you think, perhaps, I am an ordinary host who invites his guests gratis. On the contrary, I intend to make you pay for your meal. Aha! You shall aid me afterwards to flit. To-morrow, the bailiffs are coming to seize my furniture; and I don't mean them to find anything to carry away. So, to-night, I am going to put everything in my gardener's cottage. The gardener will transport all the bigger articles of furniture; but, for the books, manuscripts, and valuables, I shall be glad to have the co-operation of men of letters like you."

And the owner of Les Jardies was inconsolable when his visitors again expressed their inability to comply with his request.

Himself a guest once more of the Carrauds at Frapesle in February 1838, he took advantage of his proximity to Nohant to go and see George Sand; and spent two or three days with her. On his arrival, he surprised her clad in her dressing-gown, and smoking a cigar after dinner, beside the fire, in a huge, solitary room. Beneath the gown, she had on some red trousers, which allowed her smart stockings and yellow slippers to be seen. Since he used to meet her in the house of the Rue Cassini, she had grown stout, and now had a double chin; but her hair was still unbleached, and her bistre complexion preserved its tinge as of old. Working hard, she went to bed at six in the morning, and got up at noon. During the time he was at Nohant, Balzac adopted her habits. They talked from five in the evening all through the night and till five o'clock in the morning; and he learnt to know her more truly in these hours of familiar converse than in the four years of her liaison with Jules Sandeau. He summed her up as a tomboy, an artist, a mind great, generous, devoted and chaste (this last term would need explanation); her characteristic traits were those of a man, not a woman. She had, so he opined, neither force of conception, nor gift of constructing plots, nor faculty of reaching the true, nor the art of the pathetic. The French language she used she did not thoroughly know, but she had style. Of her glory she made little account, and despised the public. Her fate was to be duped—and duped she had been by Bocage, by de Lamennais, by Liszt, by Madame d'Agoult. Together they discussed the future revolution in manners and morals, and the influence their books might have in bringing it about. She suggested to him some subjects that he might develop, and taught him —up to then opposed to the weed—how to smoke latakia tobacco in a hookah pipe. Imagining the hookah to be something Russian, he asked Madame Hanska, to whom he related all this, to purchase him one, telling her that he would have his wonderful stick-knob, with its jewels, adapted to it, since he no longer bore the stick about with him as a fetish.

From Frapesle he returned with the plan matured which he had been preparing since his

excursion to Italy. When at Genoa, in the previous year, a merchant had talked to him of the existence of huge hills of refuse metal left in the island of Sardinia by the Romans, who had worked silver mines there. Aware how defective the Roman methods of extraction were, Balzac thought there might be profit in treating this slag by some process that would cause it to yield whatever precious metal it contained; and he requested the merchant to procure him some specimens of the slag, and to forward them to Paris for examination, promising, if the tests were satisfactory, to include the Genoese in the company which he was sure of being able to float for the exploitation of the concern. Although the merchant did not forward the specimens, Balzac consulted some specialists in Paris, Monsieur Carraud amongst others, who all concurred in pronouncing the enterprise feasible. Finally, the novelist decided to proceed to the spot and investigate the matter personally. If success awaited him, he would gain enough to pay off all his debts; and these he estimated to be about two hundred thousand francs—a Falstaffian exaggeration, of course, but the real figures were large. At present, he had no ready money at all; and had to borrow from his mother, a cousin, and other friends, in order to get his travelling expenses.

Experience proved that he was correct in his theory. The slag yielded ten per cent of lead by a first treatment, and the lead ten per cent of pure silver. Unfortunately, the Genoese merchant had availed himself of Balzac's hint, and had sold the scheme to a Marseilles firm, who were already applying for the monopoly to the rulers of the island, when, in the spring if 1838,[*] he started on his journey thither; and, before he could do anything, they had obtained the concession. Once more, he had imprudently thrown out an idea, and lost his claim on it.

[*] Madame Surville wrongly places the date of the journey in 1833.

On his way south he saw much that was new and novel to him. Passing through Corsica, he went over the house where the Emperor Napoleon was born; and, according to his habit of seeking information, he ferreted out several things that contradicted received history. The *Petit Caporal's* father he discovered to have been a fairly rich landowner, not a sheriff's officer, as tradition said. Moreover, when the Emperor arrived at Ajaccio from Egypt, instead of being acclaimed and having a triumphal reception from his countrymen, he was outlawed, a price put upon his head, and he escaped only through the devotion of a peasant who hid him in the mountains.

Corsica he considered one of the finest places in the world, with mountains like those of Switzerland, and needing only the latter country's lakes. Completely undeveloped, and practically unexplored, it was inhabited by people that cultivated the *dolce far niente* to the utmost. Its population of eight thousand vegetated rather than lived, ignorant of everything beyond the simplest necessities of existence. The women disliked strangers, and the men did nothing but walk about all day, clad in their threadbare velvet coats, smoking to beguile the hours.

His account of Sardinia is equally curious. It was a wilderness, he says, with savannas of palm-trees, inhabited by savages. On horseback, he traversed a virgin forest, obliged to bend over his horse's neck to avoid the huge branches of holm-oaks and cork-trees, and laurels and heather that were thirty feet high. In one canton he found people naked, except for a waist-cloth, and living on coarse bread made from acorns mixed with clay. Their mud hovels had no chimney, the fire being lighted on the ground in the middle. There was no agriculture in the island, and the only work done by the men was tending their flocks of goats and other animals.

A tour through Genoa, Florence, and Milan made up the rest of this interesting trip, which lasted from March till June. Disappointed in the object for which he left home, it furnished him with leisure to gather fresh subjects for his pen, and even to begin one—the *Diaries of Two Young Wives*. What he wished to describe in this book was stated in the following remarks to Madame Hanska: "I have never seen a novel in which happy love, satisfied love, is depicted. Rousseau puts too much rhetoric in his attempt, and Richardson too much preaching. The poets have too many flourishes; the novelists are too much the slaves of facts. Petrarch is too exclusively occupied with his images of speech and his *concetti*; he sees the poetry more than the woman. Pope has given perhaps too many regrets to Heloise; he wanted her to be better than nature; and the better is an enemy to the good. In fine, God, who created love with humanity, has alone understood it; for none of his creatures has described, so as to please me, the elegies, fantasies, and poems of this divine passion of which each speaks and which so few have really known."

Did Balzac himself ever know it? By his own confession, never in his youth. In the years of his adolescence there is no sign of such a feeling having agitated his breast, where ambition reigned to the exclusion of everything else. If, then, he thought of marriage, its prosaic, advantageous side only appears to have entered into count; and the liaison, which stood him in lieu of it, stirred, beyond sense, nothing but sentiments of common gratitude. In riper age, his attachment to Madame Hanska was a bizarre medley of flattered vanity, artistic appreciation of beauty, and cold calculation. His epistles reek with each and all of these; and his eternal complaints of financial embarrassment not infrequently read like the expressions of a pauper's whining.

That they ultimately wearied out the recipient of them is evident from the remonstrances he drew upon himself. Eve blamed his lightness of character, the facility with which he let himself be tempted, his tendency to waste in travelling the funds he would have done more wisely to employ in reducing his obligations or avoiding them. At such moments he defended himself

sharply, his tone savouring less of the boudoir than the forum. Any and every excuse was pressed into service; everything and everybody were responsible but himself. Even his mother he accused of causing his indebtedness—his mother who had ruined herself for him, and from whose remaining pittance he took in this self-same year the wherewithal to go to Sardinia, although earning many thousands of francs annually. The truth is that Balzac exploited all the women that loved him, himself incapable of loving any one of them with that entire devotion which, if roused, is unique in a man's life; and, as he was ignorant of it, so he has never described it adequately, faithfully. In one or two instances, he obtains a glimpse of it—as Moses obtained a vision of the promised land—from afar; when he tries to get nearer, he presents us with mere sensualism.

What Madame Hanska probably enjoyed most in his letters were the *obiter dicta* which he was never tired of pronouncing on his contemporaries. Scribe, whose *Camaraderie* he had been to see, he summed up as a man who was conversant in his trade but had no veritable art, who possessed talent but not the higher dramatic genius, and who, moreover, was altogether lacking in style. Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas* was to him an infamy in verse, and the rest of this author's pieces miserable melodramas. Theophile Gautier's poetry was decadent, his style sparkling with great wit; yet the man was wanting in force of ideas. When, however, he added that Gautier would do nothing that would last because he was engaged in journalism, he spoke with all his hatred of a profession that refused him the honour he deemed his due. Eugene Sue, also, he looked upon with jaundiced eyes, as being a rival whose material success amazed him—a rival, indeed, whom no less a critic than Sainte-Beuve erroneously declared to be his equal. Sue, he informed Madame Hanska, was a man of narrow bourgeois mind, perceiving merely certain insignificant details of the vulgar evils of French contemporary society. To Balzac, besides, it was blasphemy in Sue that he spoke slightingly of the century which to this Legitimist was the grandest epoch in French history, slightingly of Louis XIV., who, in the said Legitimist's opinion, was France's premier king.

The latter half of 1838 was spent at Les Jardies, where the novelist was busy either with his pen or in improving the interior and exterior of the property. A scheme for cultivating a pine-apple orchard in his grounds kept him from fretting over the sorry termination of his Sardinian dream. He intended to set five thousand plants, and sell the fruit at five francs a piece, instead of twenty which was the ordinary price. After deducting the expenses of the undertaking, he reckoned he could gain twenty thousand francs a year out of his pine-apples. If they had been willing to grow in the open air, he would undoubtedly have gone from theory into practice. But, as this difficulty presented itself in the initial stage, he threw up incontinently his market-gardening; and, since he was in urgent want of cash, he bethought himself that, lying by him, he had a collection of Napoleon's sayings, which he had been making for the past seven years, cutting them out of books that dealt with the Emperor's life. The number was just then five hundred. For a sum of five thousand francs he disposed of the fruits of his industry to a retired hosier named Gandy, who published them subsequently under the title *Maxims and Thoughts of Napoleon*, the preface being also supplied by the novelist.

Besides *Gambara*, a second study of the musical art, containing a lyrically expressed analysis of *Robert le Diable*, Balzac produced in 1837 and 1838 two longer works, the *Employees* or the *Superior Woman* and the *Firm of Nucingen*. The former, with its criticism of the bureaucratic system, depicted a state of things which has survived several changes of *regime* in France, in spite of much in it that contradicts common sense. Rabourdin, the head clerk in a government department, seeks to simplify the useless machinery that clogs rather than advances the administration of the country. Having a practical mind, he believes that a hundred functionaries at twelve thousand francs a year would do the same work better than a thousand employees at twelve hundred francs, and cost no more. As in other of the novelist's books that preached reform, there are parts in this one where the main thread of the story disappears like a river in a canyon; and readers of the *Presse*, in which it came out as a serial, railed at the author, called his contribution stupid, and threatened to cease subscribing if it were not withdrawn. Yet, perused in volume form, it reveals comedy in abundance. The portraits are limned with master hand; and Celestine Rabourdin, the wife of the head clerk, has, together with her grace and taste, the gift of amusing by the skill with which she bamboozles the dissolute des Lupeaulx.

The *Firm of Nucingen* is a scathing satire of the world of stock-jobbing, where the money of the small investor is robbed with impunity under cover of legality. Balzac's Jewish banker, who thrives on others' ruin is a type that exists to-day, as then, without any adequate effort made by law to suppress him. Less happy in indicating a remedy than in branding an evil, the novelist naively held that France had only to adopt his doctrine of absolute rule for the suppression to become a fact. An unprejudiced reading of history should have informed him that *regimes* have always so far existed for the benefit of their creators, and that, although constitutional monarchies and republics have not yet found out a system capable of defending the interests of all individual citizens, and perhaps never will, absolute monarchy has shown to satiety its inability to defend the interests of more than a few.

In perusing such a book as the foregoing, one is led to ask why it was so inoperative on the life of the country. One reason perhaps is that Balzac wrote from his head rather than from his heart. Whatever may be, in other respects, the superiority of the Realistic over the Romantic school of fiction, it is inferior in this, viz., that its emotiveness tends to the negation, not to the affirmation, of action. One cannot but recollect to the novelist's disadvantage, as applying to this reference, the following statement he made to Madame Hanska for another purpose: "I

have never in my life confused the thoughts of my heart with those of my head, and, excepting a few lines written only for you to read (for instance, Madame de Chaulieu's jealous letter), I have never expressed in my books anything of my heart. It would have been the most infamous sacrilege." Unconsciously insincere, like the majority of people in their justificative confessions, Balzac often allowed his heart to intrude where it had no business to be present. Nevertheless in his realist pictures he exercised himself with all the cold delight of the anatomist, and with none of the warm emotion that might have become communicative. This Brunetiere implicitly admits when he says that most of Balzac's novels are, so to speak, inquiries,—collections of documents.

The year 1838 closed questioningly for the hermit at Les Jardies. The yoke of his treaty with the publishing syndicate was hardly twelve moons old; and, however, it galled his neck to the extent of his cogitating how he might pay off the earnest money he had received, and be his own man again. And how was he to do it unless by increasing his earnings? All his actual revenue was swallowed up by his debts and habits of living. Ah! if only he could become a successful dramatic author! Alone, he did not for the moment feel equal to trying. But there was the possibility of collaboration. His late secretary, the Marquis de Belloy, had recently seemed disposed to come and help him again. But de Belloy desired some acknowledgment in coin; and Balzac, on the contrary, judged that the honour of collaborating with a novelist of his celebrity ought to be sufficient wage.

"My dear de Belloy," (he wrote back)—"Not a halfpenny; much work, your six hours a day, in three shifts, that's what awaits you at Sevres, if you are in the mind to come and realize things which are not vague plans but definite arrangements, and the relative result of which will depend on the brilliant wit that you have had the fatal imprudence to cast to the winds. I am at the grindstone, and forswear any one that will not tackle it. I have put my neck in the big collar because the other one was irksome. Your devoted Mar *tyr* "ine " *ried man* "about"

he concluded, punning on his nickname. Like his fellow mortals, he was often most merry when he was most sad.

CHAPTER IX

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1839, 1840

Sometimes, notwithstanding his affected indifference, Balzac was provoked by the pleasantries, the fleerings and floutings of satirists and caricaturists, who, finding so many weak points in his armour—so much that was ridiculous in his exaggerations, might be excused for choosing him as a quarry for their wit, if not for the wit's grossness. In 1839, the *Gazette des Ecoles* inserted in one of its numbers a lithograph exhibiting the novelist in the debtors' prison at Clichy, clad in his monk's gown, and sitting at a table on which there were bottles of wine and a champagne glass. In his left hand he grasped a pipe that he was smoking, and his right arm was round a young woman's waist. Beneath the lithograph was the inscription: "The Reverend Father Dom Seraphitus, Mysticus Goriot, of the Regular Order of Clichy Friars, taken in by all those he has himself taken in, receives amidst his forced solitude the consolations of Sancta Seraphita (*Scenes of the Hidden Life*, sequel to those of *Private Life*)."

The last sentence being open to the interpretation that the subject of the caricature was a dishonest man, a complaint was lodged with the Procureur-General against the proprietor of the paper, and was supported by the newly-constituted Men of Letters Society.

This Society, of which Balzac may be considered almost the founder, came into existence during his journey to Italy in the preceding year. On his return, he at once became a member; and, for a while, took a prominent part in all its deliberations, being elected on the committee, as also Victor Hugo, with whom thenceforward his relations were, at least outwardly, most cordial. In the first lawsuit engaged by the Society against the *Memorial de Rouen* for the purpose of defending the principle of literary property, he pleaded with all the force of his talent, and composed a *Literary Code* and some *Notes on Literary Ownership* containing not a few excellent suggestions. His, too, was the initiative for the drawing up of a petition to the King, with a view to the establishment of literary prizes to be bestowed on well-deserving authors every ten years. The King, or rather his advisers, rewarded this zeal but ill. At one of the committee meetings Balzac was prevented from attending by a three days' confinement in a dirty lock-up at Sevres, the cause being the old one which had partly driven him from Paris—his unwillingness to go, as he humorously put it, into the vineyards of his village, and, dressed in uniform, to see that truants from Paris were not eating the grapes.

His rural retreat, indeed, was scarcely the safe asylum he had fondly hoped it would be. Allusion has already been made to one defect—that of the walls which, unlike those of Jericho, did not wait for the trumpeters' blast before they fell down. They had an incurable preference for tumbling down of themselves. Constructed on a subsoil of sandy nature, their foundations yielded at every spell of rain. In vain, architect after architect was applied to, and one mode or another was recommended of relaying and buttressing. At the next downpour, the servant

would disturb his master with the news: "The walls have toppled over again, sir, into the neighbours' gardens." And the neighbours' gardens were planted with all kinds of edible vegetables, which were crushed and pounded out of shape and succulence, so that the owner of Les Jardies had claims for damage continually sent in, until, in sheer despair, pledging his credit more deeply, he purchased the land beyond, content, at length, that his walls should be able to carry on their freaks in his own demesne, without let or hindrance or objection from any one. It is said that the land on which Les Jardies stood was so much on the incline that Frederick Lemaitre, who once ventured over there, was compelled to take a couple of stones and place them at each step under his feet in order to approach the house. This was, no doubt, one of the actor's jokes. It is probable that, in selecting the site, Balzac had in his thought the facility the place would afford for reconnoitering when any one came to his doors. The domestics were directed to keep a sharp look-out; and, as soon as a figure was seen approaching that appeared to be a creditor or of the State functionary tribe, the blinds of the abode were lowered, the dog Turk was dungeoned, and every trace of there being inhabitants vanished. After ringing uselessly, the unwelcome visitor generally retreated under the impression that the place was deserted. Then, when the last echo of his steps had died away in the distance, the blinds were drawn up again, Turk, barking with joy, was released from his captivity, and, like the castle of the Sleeping Beauty, Les Jardies re-awoke to its normal activity. How ever the tiers of planted beds perched one above the other—a modern example of the hanging gardens of Babylon—were made to resist the solicitations of the walls was a puzzle to Balzac's familiars. As for trees, only one, a walnut, managed, by dint of perpetual acrobatism, to conserve a stable equilibrium.

Most of the fiction published by Balzac in 1839—*A Provincial Great Man in Paris*, the *Secrets of the Princess de Cadignan*, and the *Village Cure*—was written with great verve, and may be classed in the list of his important work. The second of the three just mentioned, which is the shortest, gives us the story of a woman who, after losing her fourteenth lover, succeeds in getting a fifteenth, d'Arthez, to believe her virtuous and a sort of saint maligned by envy. There is cleverness and to spare in the way the wiles of this sly jade are related, and falsehood shown as a fine art in the service of passional love. Balzac was thoroughly at home in treating such a theme. Both d'Arthez and the Princess are prominent characters in certain others of his books. The former appears in the *Provincial Great Man in Paris*, which the author calls an audacious and frightfully exact painting of the inner morals of the French capital.

It formed a sequel to a previously published short novel, the *Two Poets*, and made part of a still larger series united under the title *Lost Illusions*, the entire work being completed in the Forties with *Splendour and Wretchedness of Courtezans*, this last portion having also more than one section. The first two volumes of the *Lost Illusions* narrate the early experiences of Lucien de Rubempre, a young poet of Angouleme, whose family, with some claims to gentility, has fallen into narrow circumstances, the widowed mother being obliged to earn money as a midwife, and the daughter as a laundry-woman. The latter's marriage with David Sechard, a printer, alters the situation of the family for the better; and Lucien is enabled to occupy himself in the printing-house, while pursuing his poetical efforts. Though his literary talent, for the time being, has no value in cash, it procures him the friendship of Madame de Bargeton, a grand dame of Angouleme; or, more properly speaking, it is the pretext and justification; for Lucien really owes the lady's favour to his Apollo-like beauty. Subsequently the poet, desirous of shining in Paris, quits his native place with a sum of money scraped together by his sister and brother-in-law, and goes to the capital, accompanied by Madame de Bargeton. His liaison there with the lady is but of short duration. In compensation, however, he becomes acquainted with a new literary world, into which he enters with his meagre stock of poems, plus a novel; and, after a number of adventures, turns journalist, a metamorphosis that supplies the author with an opportunity to rage furiously against all those of that ilk. The rest of the first part of the *Lost Illusions* is taken up with the amours of Lucien and an actress named Coralie, who gives the poet her heart and person, yet he sharing the second with the rich Camuzot. Coralie really loves Lucien, even though playing afresh the role of Manon to his des Grieux; but Lucien, less constant in affection, and finding how difficult it is to secure wealth and position, abases his pen to vile uses, and would gladly abandon his mistress for a profitable marriage. At length a duel, in which he is dangerously wounded, lays him on a sick-bed, and Coralie, who has sacrificed her situation on the stage to her love for him, and is herself ill, rises to nurse him back to health, and dies under the strain.

The further history of Lucien de Rubempre belongs to the *Splendour and Wretchedness of Courtezans*. Both the beginning and the middle and the end exhibit the strong and the weak points of the novelist. The defects were dwelt upon in the *Revue de Paris*, soon after the book's first part came out, in probably the longest critical article devoted to any single one of Balzac's writings. By the irony of events, Jules Janin, who was the author of it, praised, some dozen years later, where now he cursed. There was exaggeration in his panegyric, pronounced in 1850 under the impulse dictating generosity to the memory of a dead foe; and there was exaggeration also in his polemic indited under the smart of Balzac's gibes against the press. However, the closing words of the article, save for the tone, can hardly be gainsaid: "Never," asserted Janin, "has Monsieur de Balzac's talent been more diffuse, never has his invention been more languishing, never has his style been more incorrect, even if we include the days when the illustrious novelist had nothing to fear from serious criticism, days when he was too unknown to be noticed by the small newspapers, days when Monsieur Honore de Balzac was as yet only Monsieur Horace de Saint-Aubin."[*]

[*] A *nom de guerre* of Balzac in his apprenticeship days.

The preceding remarks might be applied in substance to the *Village Cure*, which is one of the most incoherent of the novelist's productions. "I have no time to finish the book; just the part that concerns the Cure will be wanting," he explained to a correspondent. A good deal else was lacking when it was published, the whole resembling a patchwork of odds and ends of the crudest and least harmonious design. Its central figure is Veronique, the wife of a Limoges banker named Grasselin, and greatly her senior, to whom she has been married by her parents before she has had the time to know anything of love and its behests. Led by her goodness of heart to patronize a youth in her husband's employ, she falls in love with him, as he with her, and, through weakness, becomes his mistress. A murder, of which the young Tascheron is accused, and, as the issue proves, quite justly, interrupts this culpable idyll; and the assassin is condemned and executed, without revealing the secret of his liaison, and without Madame Grasselin's interfering to save him, otherwise than vaguely, through the Cure of the district. None the less, she is aware that the act has been committed indirectly through the young man's love for her. Smitten with remorse, after the execution, she quits Limoges, and, removing into the country, endeavours there by a life of charity and devotion to religion to redeem her lapse from her wifely duty. Then, finally, she dies in presence of the Archbishop, of Bianchon the great doctor, and of the Procureur-General and other witnesses, whom she has sent for to listen to her confession of moral complicity, the death scene being narrated with much theatrical emphasis. On to this melodramatic subject, wilfully rendered obscure, and really incomprehensible, the novelist did his best to tack various illustrations of Catholic repentance. He intended the book to be the glorification of Catholicism, the refutation of Protestantism, the embodiment of virtues private and social in people who bowed themselves to his ideal of faith; the story he used simply as a thread to connect these things together. Consequently, the action is intermittent, being checked by irrelevant episodes, and by long tirades on agriculture, sociology, and on other theories set forth by the writer with much zeal but also with much acrimony. Catholicism is asserted to be the only Church which has shown humanity its way of safety; Tascheron's sister, who returns from America, is made to relate that in a certain place where Catholic influence prevailed, the Protestants were very soon chased away. To this religion of such charming mansuetude whenever it has the upper hand, a Protestant engineer named Gerard is converted by puerile arguments which in any other domain than the theological would seem to be the divagations of a lunatic; and the Cure Bonnet proclaims the necessity of passive obedience by the masses to the Church's rule in matters civil as well as ecclesiastic. To add spice to this farrago of absurdity, Balzac spits out his hatred of the English, albeit he is compelled to acknowledge their common sense. As he confessed to the Marquis de Custine, it was his delight to abuse England, and its inhabitants, whether men or women.

From what we know of his relations with Madame Visconti, we may, however, suppose that his prejudice against the *perfide Albion* was not very deep-rooted. Indeed in his sentiments, as in his conduct, consistency was conspicuous by its absence. We find this would-be Legitimist, absolutist, ultra-orthodox worshipper of every old-time privilege and doctrine, yet continually saying and doing things that savour more of the democratic than the aristocratic. Towards the disintegration of monarchic attachments, his fiction contributed at least as much as that of George Sand; and even his comic resistance to the compulsory service required of him in the National Guard showed how little he was inclined to accept for himself those doctrines of authority which he would fain impose on others.

Such incongruity between his theory and practice may have struck the members of the Academie Francaise, who manifested their disapproval of his candidature so unmistakably in 1839 that he withdrew in favour of Victor Hugo. This forced concession perhaps tinged the portrait he sketched of Hugo for Madame Hanska about the same time. "Victor Hugo," he said, "is an exceedingly witty man; he has as much wit as poetry in him. His conversation is most delightful, with some resemblance to that of Humboldt, but superior and allowing more dialogue. He is full of bourgeois ideas. He execrates Racine, and treats him as a sorry sort of man. On this point he is quite mad. His wife he has thrown over for J——; and gives for such conduct reasons of signal meanness (she bore him too many children; notice that J—— has borne him none). In fine, there is more good than bad in him. Although the good traits are an outcome of pride, and although in everything he is a deeply calculating man, he is amiable on the whole, and, besides, is a great poet. Much of his force, value, and quality he has lost by the life he leads, having overdone his devotion to Venus."

Calling Hugo a great poet meant little in Balzac's mouth. Of poetry he made but small account, probably because he succeeded so ill in it himself. When poets appear in his stories, they are rarely estimable characters. For Lucien de Rubempre he has only little sympathy. The three specimens of Lucien's verse given in the novel he procured from his acquaintances. The sonnet to Marguerite was composed by Madame de Girardin; the one to Camellia, by Lassailly, and that to Tulipe, by Theophile Gautier.

A movement of disinterested generosity displayed by him in the same year was his fight, in conjunction with the artist Gavarni, on behalf of Sebastien Benoit Peytel. Peytel was a notary living at Belley, who, on the 20th of August 1839, was condemned to death by the Ain Assizes on a charge of murdering his wife and man-servant. Balzac had known him some time before in Paris, when both were on the staff of the theatrical journal *Le Voleur*. The Court of Cassation was appealed to in vain and the sentence was carried out at Bourg on the 28th of October. As long as there seemed the slightest chance of preventing the execution, Balzac continued his

efforts to save the notary, though blamed by his family and friends for his interference, which they set down as quixotic. Presumably Peytel had committed the crime in a fit of jealous passion, to punish his wife's adultery. A curious drawing by Balzac exists in the first volume of his general correspondence, in which Gavarni is represented mocking the headsman; and, accompanying the design, is an autograph letter to Dutacq, managing director of the *Siecle*, referring to an article on the question published by the novelist in that paper.

The time and money he gave to this lost cause were all the more meritorious as his own concerns demanded greater attention than ever. A new departure had occurred in journalism. The appearance of certain cheaper newspapers necessitated a change in the *roman feuilleton*; and the *Presse* and *Siecle*, which had inaugurated the reform, and to both of which Balzac contributed fiction, laid down the principle that they would print only short tales complete in three or four numbers. This was hard on the novelist. For him to compress a story within artificial limits determined by an editor was a task even more difficult than to write a play.

It must have been the desire to escape from such servitude which induced him to launch into another adventure with a journal of his own. The *Revue Parisienne*, which he founded in July 1840, was not a newspaper but a magazine, intended to supply the public, at a reasonable price, with tales, novels, poetry, and articles of criticism both literary and political, and to give the same public for their money more than three times as much matter as they would get in other reviews. The success of Alphonse Karr's monthly *Guepes*, which was reported to be selling extraordinarily, encouraged him to believe that his own fame, wider spread in 1839 than in 1836, and greater, would suffice to assure a similar result. Author and editor combined, he made the three numbers of his review, which were all he was able to bring out, at any rate the equal of the older established monthlies. In the three appeared his *Z. Marcas*, and *A Prince of Bohemia*, the former a resuscitation of the *Louis Lambert* species of hero transformed into a politician. The *Russian Letters*, likewise political, furnish a very exact and comprehensive sketch of the general state of mind in Europe at the commencement of the Forties. One article of criticism praised to the skies Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* published in the previous year. A letter he had addressed to Stendhal in April 1839 was more moderate in its tone, though eulogistic with its well-turned compliment: "I make a fresco, and you have made Italian statues." He blamed the writer in his letter for situating the plot of the *Chartreuse* in Parma. "Neither state or town," he told him, "should have been named. It should have been left to the imagination to discover the Prince of Modena and his minister. Hoffman never failed to obey this law without exception in the rules of the novel. If everything be left undefined as regards reality, then everything becomes real." In short, notwithstanding parts that were too long drawn out, he found the whole a fine piece of work; and, if a modern Machiavelli were to write a novel, it would be, he said, the *Chartreuse de Parme*.

Between the judicious language employed in the letter and the article of the *Revue Parisienne*, the difference was so enormous that Beyle himself remarked: "This astonishing notice, such as never one writer had from another, I read, let me own it, amid bursts of laughter. Whenever I came to fresh flights of eulogy—and I met with them in every paragraph—I could not help thinking how my friends would look when they saw them." "The reason for this augmented enthusiasm must be sought," says Sainte-Beuve, "in the fact that Stendhal lent or gave Balzac a sum of five thousand francs in the interval, and thus received back a service of *amour propre* for the service rendered in cash. Since the proof of this gift or loan was found in Beyle's papers, at his death, Sainte-Beuve's explanation seems well grounded; and yet, for Balzac's credit, one could have wished his praise more spontaneous."

The cessation of the *Revue Parisienne* forced its founder again to enter the ranks of paid contributors to the daily press, and to comply with its exigencies. Yet not entirely. His qualities and his defects alike led him frequently to break from restraint and to follow his own bent, maugre the complaints of readers, maugre editors' entreaties; and, even in the final phase of his production, there were some masterpieces supporting comparison with those of his best period.

At the end of the Thirties, he was again, like Bruce's spider, renewing his efforts to climb on to the stage. He had three pieces in hand, *La Gina*, *Richard the Sponge-Heart*, and his *School for Husbands and Wives*, already mentioned. The last he had now managed to carry through to its conclusion; and, in February 1839 there seemed to be some prospect of his getting it played. Pereme, an influential acquaintance of his in the theatrical world, had persuaded the Renaissance theatre to accept it on approval, but was less fortunate with regard to the fifteen thousand francs which Balzac had asked for on account. The roles were discussed and partially distributed. Henry Monnier and Frederick Lemaitre were to be chief actors on the men's side, Mesdames Theodore and Albert on the women's. On the 25th of the month, the author presented himself with his manuscript before the reading committee; and, to his intense annoyance and dismay, was compelled to put it back into his pocket. Either the committee feared the expense which the representation would have entailed, or else the elder Dumas, who was one of their most successful suppliers of dramas, and had recently fallen out with them, must have made up the quarrel just before Balzac's comedy was read. Whatever the reason was, the rejection of the piece grievously affected the novelist, who, besides losing a great deal of valuable time, had spent money to no purpose in having his comedy printed.

It must be acknowledged that, in dramatic composition, whatever Balzac had so far done by himself was done grudgingly, and, when possible, shifted on to other shoulders. Gozlan relates that Lassailly, who went to Les Jardies and lived there for some little time as a paid secretary,

would be rung up at night, when his employer usually worked—rung up not once nor twice, but several times, to hear himself asked whether, in his waking or his dreaming, he had hatched any good plan; and poor Lassailly would have sorrowfully to avow that his brain had conceived nothing of any importance in the way of drama.

How Harel, the managing director of the Porte-Saint-Martin, was brought to give in the same twelve-month to the rejected of the Renaissance a firm promise that anything he liked to do for that theatre should be acted is an impenetrable mystery. But then Harel himself was an oddity, and he may have felt bowels of compassion for a *confrere* so original. The story goes that once he tried to borrow thirty thousand francs from King Louis-Philippe. "Ah! Monsieur Harel," replied the monarch, smiling, "I was thinking of applying to you for a similar sum."

The subject that, after much cogitation, Balzac chose for Harel's stage was *Vautrin*—the Vautrin of *Pere Goriot* and the *Lost Illusions*—back at his old trade of acting Providence to a presumably fatherless and friendless young man, whose fortunes he sought to advance by means similar to those that had brought Lucien de Rubempre (we are anticipating a little) to so miserable an end. In the concluding act of the play, the young man discovers that he has a family, and a father who is a noble; and he marries the girl he loves. But Vautrin is arrested, and, although he has been the instrument of his protege's happiness, he is led off to prison once more. The theme, as treated, was a somewhat hackneyed one, and was further spoiled by ill-managed contrasts of the serious and comic, of which in any form the French stage was not tolerant. Objection has been made on the same score to the *School for Husbands and Wives* at the Theatre Francais, where it had been offered after its rejection by the Renaissance.

Balzac himself had no great opinion of his dramatic arrangement of *Vautrin*. He had done wrong, he said, to put a romantic character on the stage. After the play was finished, he re-wrote nearly the whole of it; and, from what Theophile Gautier relates about the way in which it was primitively composed, we can well believe that the revision was necessary. When the treaty with Harel was signed, Balzac installed himself in the small apartment which he rented at his tailor's, No. 104 Rue de Richelieu, and sent for Gautier. "I am going to read to Harel to-morrow," he announced, "a grand five-act drama." "Ah!" replied Gautier; "so I suppose you want us to hear it and to give you our opinion." "The play is not yet written," answered Balzac coolly. "You shall do one act; Ourliac, a second; Laurent Jan, a third; de Belloy, a fourth; and I, the fifth. There are not so many lines in one act. With all of us working together, we shall be able to complete it by to-morrow." Objections were timidly put forward as to the hotch-potch that was likely to result from so improvized a method of work; but the hasty playwright overruled them all. It need hardly be said that the five acts were not ready on the morrow, nor for some time after. In fact, Laurent Jan was the only collaborator who gave any considerable help. To him, in acknowledgment, Balzac dedicated the piece, which was performed on the 14th of March 1840.

Knowing what a number of enemies he had among the Parisian journalists and critics, whom he had satirized with increased causticity in his latest fiction, the author endeavoured to pack the theatre with his friends, but there was a large leakage in the sale of tickets; and, on the eventful evening, the seats were occupied by a majority of persons hostile to him. He must have had an inkling of this; for, when sending a ticket to Lamartine, he said to him: "You will see a memorable failure. I have done wrong, I believe, to appeal to the public. *Morituri te salutant Caesar*." The first portion of the performance was received, on the whole, favourably, though there was no enthusiasm; but, when Frederick Lemaitre, who was entrusted with the role of Vautrin, came on to the stage, in the fourth act, dressed as a Mexican general, and wearing his forelock of hair in a way that appeared to imitate a like peculiarity in the King, there was an outcry among the audience; and Louis-Philippe's son, who was present, was informed by complaisant courtiers that the travesty was intended as an insult to his father. The next day, Harel was advertized that the authorities forbade any other presentation of the piece; and, on the 16th, the Press, following the Government's lead, were practically unanimous in anathematizing the unhappy dramatist, the *Debats* being particularly acrimonious, and asserting that *Vautrin* was a thoroughly immoral play.

Balzac's friends, Victor Hugo included, did what they could to get the interdiction raised; but the Minister was inflexible. All that he would consent to was an indemnity of five thousand francs offered through Cave, the Under-Secretary for Fine Arts. This, Balzac indignantly refused. One might have expected such continued ill-luck to prostrate its victim, at least momentarily. Gozlan went out to Les Jardies for the purpose of cheering the hermit up. He found him calm and collected. "You see that strip of land bordering the garden over there?" the latter said, looking out of the window. "Yes." "I am about to establish there a dairy, with an installation of the best kind, the cows of which will bring me in three thousand francs a year." Gozlan stared. "And you see the other strip down yonder farther than the wall?" "Yes." "Well, I intend to plant that with rare vegetables of the sort that used to be supplied to the King's table. That will bring me in another three thousand francs a year." Gozlan waited for what would come next. "And you see the plot right facing the southern sun?" "Yes." "Ah! there I shall plant a vineyard, which will furnish exquisite grapes that I can sell for wine-making in quantities sufficient to bring me in twelve thousand francs a year. This means a revenue of eighteen thousand francs annually. And then, the walnut-tree you see there—I can utilize it to the tune of two thousand francs a year." "How?" "Ah! that is my secret. So we get a total of twenty thousand francs a year, which I shall gain by the refusal of my *Vautrin*."

This was brave talk on the part of the obstacle-breaker, as he loved to call himself. 'Twas also the bravest temper he could assume in face of the outside world. To Madame Hanska he

revealed more the cankering disappointment, just as he had a twelvemonth previously, after the mishap of the *School for Husbands and Wives*. He had fresh thoughts of leaving France, which being, for the nonce, a bear-garden, he said, he detested, and of going away to America, perhaps to Brazil, where he should soon grow rich. He even told her she might next hear from him at Havre or Marseilles, just as he was on the point of embarking for the other side of the Atlantic. He had been reading Fenimore Cooper again; and the descriptions given by this painter of Nature always aroused his roaming instincts. He envied especially Cooper's power and skill in reproducing the details of a landscape. Once, in a pastry-cook's shop that he had entered with Gozlan to devour a plate of macaroni, he brandished a book of Cooper's, which he had been carrying under his arm, while he recounted his fruitless efforts to get experts in botany to tell him how to describe the differences between certain grasses that he wanted to distinguish appropriately in his fiction. An English girl who had served him in the shop listened open-mouthed to the great man, whose name had been uttered by Gozlan; and, when the moment came for settling, marked her appreciation of what she had heard and seen by charging him nothing for the macaroni. Balzac, not to be outdone in generosity, made her a gift of his copy of Cooper, expressing his regret that he had not one of his own novels with him that he might have offered her instead.

No account of this macaroni feast figures in his almost daily letters at this time despatched to Madame Hanska. To her, if he mentioned his diet, its meagreness was emphasized rather. Being in one of his chronic hard-up crises, he excused himself for the intervals that had occurred between some of his previous epistles on the ground of having no ready money for the postage—the rates for Russia, it is true, were high; and he spoke of buying a bit of dry bread on the boulevards, or of intending to beg from Rothschild; then flourished his big debt at the end, quoting fantastic sums, variable as the barometer, which would oblige him sooner or later, notwithstanding his constant devotion to the Countess, whom he loved more than he loved God, to barter himself away to some agreeable young woman who should be willing to bestow her person upon him, plus a couple of hundred thousand francs. Once or twice there was really a question of his making a match through the good offices of his mother, of whom he none the less said fretfully that she did not think much about him. But, on each occasion, the negotiations fell through—why we do not learn. Such information, maybe, he reserved for the various dames in Paris whose houses he still frequented. Madame de Girardin had managed to get him back; and some sort of relations had been re-established between him and her husband, mostly business, since Monsieur de Girardin continued to be editor of the *Presse*.

One day, Gozlan met him in the Champs Elysees, just as he had left Delphine's *salon*. He looked chilly and anxious. The chill he attributed to the unheated drawing-room that he had quitted; but it was due mostly to his condition of mind, then much exercised by something of prime importance to him, the finding of a name for a story which he had written but could not christen, in spite of protracted meditation. It was a man's name he wanted—a name unusual, striking, suggestive of the extraordinary nature of the person he had created. "Why not try the names you see in the street?" said Gozlan incautiously. "The very thing," answered Balzac, whose face grew radiant. "Come along with me. We will seek together." Realizing too late into what an adventure he had allowed himself to be entangled, Gozlan tried in vain to escape. Protests were of no use. Balzac dragged him off; and, with noses in the air and absorbed gaze, the two men promenaded along the Rue Saint-Honore and a number of other streets, knocking up against the people they met and provoking a good deal of profane language from these latter, who regarded them as a couple of imbeciles. At length, Gozlan, like Columbus' sailors, having more than enough of the tramp, refused to play follow-my-leader any longer; and only after a long palaver was he dragged up one last narrow street dubbed variously the Rue du Bouloi, du Coq Heron, and de la Jussienne throughout its course. Here, suddenly, Balzac stopped dead, and pointed to the word *Marcas*, inscribed over a door. "That's what I've been looking for," he cried. "It exactly suits my man. The person that owns the name ought to be some one out of the common,—an artist, a worker in gold, or something of the kind." Inquiry proved that the real Marcas was a modest tailor. However, his name was selected, and the initial Z was tacked on to it for the book, Z being by the novelist's interpretation a letter of mystic import.

Another rather longer tale than this, belonging to the year 1840, was *Pierrette*, which the author dedicated to Madame Hanska's daughter Anna, characterizing it as a pearl "sweated through suffering," and telling her that there was nothing in it improper—he used the English word. The story is a painful one, and is scarcely suitable for a young girl's perusal, the heroine, a simple Breton maid, being the victim of an avaricious Provins family, the Rogrons, who under cover of the law, inflict on her such terrible ill-treatment that she ultimately dies from it. *Pierrette* first appeared as a serial in the *Siecle*. In the final edition of the novelist's works it is classed under the *Celibates*; and, apropos of this heading, may be mentioned the fact that Balzac reproved celibacy as a state injurious to society, and held the opinion, dear to the hearts of certain Parliamentarians of to-day, that the unmarried should be taxed for the benefit of those having large families.

Of course, the agricultural projects entertained for a moment after the interdiction of *Vautrin* soon faded from Balzac's mind, which was still harping on the necessity of his conquering the suffrages of the public in his character of dramatist. He now set himself to write a play called *Mercadet* or the *Faiseur*,[*] the latter word implying by its meaning the tragi-comedy of a penniless financier—the novelist's own experience was there to guide him—who invents a thousand and one stratagems for keeping his creditors at bay, and for creating the illusion of a

wealth which he had not; who deceives himself as well as others; who is neither entirely a rogue nor entirely honest; but who, after all, reaches relative tranquillity and competency more through accident than purpose. The piece was not performed in its author's life-time; but friends were acquainted with it already in 1840, when Gautier and the rest of the inner circle were summoned to Les Jardies to hear the hermit read it, differing considerably then from the arrangement that was ultimately played. Balzac read it well, with all the inflections peculiar to each character and suitable to every change of circumstance. He had in him, says Gautier, the stuff of a great actor, possessing a full, sonorous, metallic voice of rich, powerful timbre, and kept his audience under the spell from the beginning to the end of the recitation. If Vedel and Desmousseaux, the administrators of the Comedie Francais heard him interpret his own pieces, they might be excused for having, as he asserted they had, a high opinion of his dramatic talent.

[*] English, *Jobber*.

The greatest honour done to Les Jardies during the hermit's residence there was a visit of Victor Hugo, who came to talk over the affairs of the Men of Letters Society. During lunch, the conversation naturally turned on literature, and the host waxed bitter against the stupidity of kings that neglected letters, and against Louis-Philippe in particular, who had recently put a stop to the evening gatherings —chimney-gatherings they were called—held by the Duke of Orleans for the purpose of honouring the arts. In the afternoon the guests were shown round the domain, and expected to admire its beauties. Hugo was extremely sober in his praises until they came to the famous walnut-tree. Encouraged by the notice accorded to his favourite, the master of Les Jardies repeated to Hugo what he had already affirmed to Gozlan, to wit, that the tree was worth fifteen hundred francs to him (to Gozlan he had said two thousand). "In walnuts, I suppose?" retorted the chief guest quizzingly. "No," replied Balzac, chuckling, "not in walnuts." And he proceeded to explain that, by an old custom, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood had been accustomed to make the shadow of the walnut-tree a "temple of all the gods," and that he had only to exploit the offerings, in the same way as a guano island is exploited to-day, for the fifteen hundred francs to be added to his revenues.

A few months later, in December, Les Jardies, with its walnut-tree and other advantages, was abandoned in hasty flight; and the hermit took refuge in the Passy quarter of Paris. On the house and property a distraint had been levied for moneys due which had not been paid. In total, his desire to abide under his own vine and under his own fig-tree had cost him a sum that he estimated between one hundred thousand and one hundred and twenty thousand francs. Deduction made for his Falstaffian speech, the amount was probably about eighty thousand. This might have been gradually saved and the interest meantime given regularly, if he had been willing to live well within his income. With his system of spending not only what he earned but hoped to earn each year, perpetual insolvency was inevitable.

At Les Jardies he had small creditors as well as great, fear of whom haunted him to the extent of curtailing his walks abroad. Leon Gozlan relates that, going over to Ville d'Avray early one morning, he found Balzac taking a constitutional round the asphalt of his house. "Come and have a stroll in the woods," said the visitor. "I am afraid," answered Balzac. "Of what or whom?" "Of the keeper." Not understanding why the novelist, who would not explain, should be in dread of this humble functionary, and imagining that much study and labour had made his friend a little mad, Gozlan took no denial, and, button-holing Balzac, lugged him off into the leafy avenues. And there, sure enough, after a while, they saw the bugbear, who, as soon as he perceived the two pedestrians, bore down on them with plodding but vigorous step. The shorter of the two turned pale, but tried to put on an air of dignified indifference. Soon the official ran in under their lee, passed alongside with slackened pace, and clarioned into the novelist's ear: "Monsieur de Balzac, this is beginning to get musical." The owner of Les Jardies quailed in his shoes. He owed the man thirty francs.

CHAPTER X

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1841, 1842

The abode that Balzac chose, on coming back to live within the city walls, was not far from the Rue de Chaillot which had been his address before he removed to Sevres. It was situated in what is now called the Rue Raynouard, but then bore the name of the Rue Basse. In reality, the street is low only at one end, to which it descends from some high land that forms the Passy and Trocadero quarter, and, for some distance, overhangs the Seine. The whole of the street is narrow and winding, and still has an old-time provincial aspect, though the modern building has begun to make its appearance in it, replacing the ancient mansions surrounded by gardens with ever-encroaching blocks of flats.

Balzac's new house was at Number 19 (at present Number 47). It stood —and the house still stands—in a back garden, on a lower level than the road, from which it was masked by houses fronting the causeway. Any one approaching it from the side of the Rue Basse would enter the common vestibule of one of these houses, go down some stone steps, and would then find himself in a courtyard, opposite a fairly good-sized, apparently one-storied cottage, with the

tree adorned garden to the right of him. Once inside the cottage, however, he would notice that it was built on the extreme upper edge of a precipitous slope, and that on the farther side the structure had lower stories, with an issue through them into a lane at the rear leading to the Seine banks and the lower portion of the Rue Basse. Whoever, therefore, inhabited the cottage could quit it fore or aft, an advantage which must have weighed with the incoming tenant, tracked as he was by creditors, and hiding himself here under the name of Madame de Brugnol.

The insistence of these claimants on his purse was such that, acting on the advice of his solicitor, Gavault, in the course of the year 1841, he executed a fictitious sale of Les Jardies for the sum of seventeen thousand five hundred francs, his hope being to preserve his hermitage for the days of wealth and ease to come. Meanwhile, he took his mother to live with him. After giving him and her other son, Henry, all she possessed, and the latter being now in the colonies, where he ultimately died in poverty, she was dependent on what Honore could pay her each month. The living-together arrangement was not very successful. Madame Balzac's nervous, fretful temperament had not been improved by age and trouble; and her elder son found it hard to bear with her complainings, excusable and even justifiable though they might be. It is not pleasant to read the passages in his letters to Madame Hanska, in which he reiterates the old charge of his misfortunes being all due to his mother. In some of them he goes so far as to say that she was a monster and a monstrosity, that she was hastening the death of his sister Laure —Laure outlived them both —after hastening those of his sister Laurence and his grandmother, that she hated him before he was born, that she had a dreadful countenance, that the doctor affirmed her to be not mad but malicious, that his father had stated in 1822 he—Honore—would never have a worse enemy than his mother. Had his mother been all this and more, it would have been ungenerous and unfilial to blacken her reputation to a stranger. And, being false, it was odious. Madame Balzac's partiality towards the second son—heavily enough punished—did not prevent her from loving the elder, though their characters (hers and his) were not made to comprehend each other; and her lack of enthusiasm in the days of his literary apprenticeship was natural enough in a parent who understood only too well the impractical, improvident mind he possessed, and feared its consequences. The fact was that Balzac ill supported remonstrances from his own family, and especially from his mother, and, when irritated by them, forgot every benefit he had received from her.

This peculiarity of temperament rendered his feelings toward many of his friends exceedingly variable. One day he was lauding them to the skies, another depreciating them to a cipher. Even his sister, Laure, in spite of her loyalty to him, did not escape attacks from his fickle humour. Like her mother, she never thoroughly penetrated the nature of this wayward, excitable, compass-boxing brother of hers, whose gaze was so much in the clouds and whose feet so often in the mire. But she defended him to others; and, as far as her purse and her husband's could possibly afford, she gave him money when he was hard up—and when he was not!—money which he was never in a hurry to pay back. Yet her, too, he maligned to "The Stranger," because she now and again ventured on expostulations.

Madame Balzac made two stays in the Passy cottage, neither of them very long. After leaving the first time, she asked her son to pay her a somewhat larger sum per month, which would allow her to live decently elsewhere. Considering that he had borrowed from her a couple of thousand pounds—over fifty thousand francs—and that the sum he had paid her irregularly was not five per cent interest on the money, this request was not unreasonable. Yet he refused to accede to it on the ground of being in financial straits; and offered her a home with him once more, but in language that spoke of strained relations between them, as well as of a personal discouragement that was real.

"The life I lead," he wrote, "suits no one; it wearies relatives and friends alike. All leave my melancholy home. . . . It is impossible for me to work amidst the petty tiffs aroused by surroundings of discord; and my activity has waned during the past year. . . . You were in a tolerable situation. I had a trustworthy person who spared you all household worries. You were not obliged to trouble about domestic matters; you were in peace and silence. You insisted on interfering with me when you should have forgotten I existed, and should have let me have my entire liberty, without which I can do nothing. This is not your fault; it is in the nature of women. To-day, everything is changed. If you like to come back, you will have a little of the weight that will fall on me and that hitherto affected you only because you wished it."

The conclusion of the letter, in which he assured her of his love, could not counterbalance the harshness of its contents. Madame Balzac, be it granted, was cantankerous; but how many sons who have never sponged on their mothers have supported them cheerfully, gladly, for long years out of meagre resources, and have borne with a smile the natural peevishness of old age, not to say its egoisms!

At this period, Balzac's acquaintance with the grand dames of Paris was considerably diminished. Madame de Castries he seems to have broken with altogether. Madame Visconti, who lived a good deal at Versailles, he saw but seldom. In lieu of these, he regularly visited George Sand, who was at present settled in a small flat of the Rue Pigalle in Paris, and was there enjoying the society of Chopin. With a connoisseur's envy, the novelist describes to Eve the interior, the elegantly furnished dining-room in carved oak, the *cafe-au-lait* upholstered drawing-room, with its superb Chinese vases of fragrant flowers, its cabinet of curiosities, its Delacroix pictures, its rosewood piano, and the portrait of the authoress by Calamatta. What struck him as much as anything was the bedroom in brown, with the bed on the floor in Turkish fashion. He was careful to assure his correspondent that, Chopin being the *maitre de ceans*, she

had no need to be jealous. But jealous she was, though not of George Sand. As Paris was a resort for rich Russians, Madame Hanska's cousins among the number, she had frequent reports of Balzac's doings, distorted by society gossip, the true and the untrue being fantastically mixed; and it was no small task to disabuse her mind and persuade her that his conduct was blameless. Indeed, at bottom she remained sceptical.

In 1841, three books were published which merit attention on the part of a student of his works. The first, *A Shady Affair*, has the right to be styled an historical novel. Dealing with the Napoleonic epoch, its interest gathers chiefly round the person of the brave peasant Michu, whose devotion to the Legitimist house of Cinq-Cygne brings him, an innocent victim, to the scaffold. The character of Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, a girl of the Flora MacDonald type, and the characters also of the two cousins de Simeuse, who both loved her and conspired with her, and whose pardon she gained only to lose these faithful knights dying on a field of battle, are drawn with great power and naturalness. And the plot, in which, together with other police spies, the same Corentin reappears that was the evil genius of the *Chouans*, is more rapid and less cumbered than in the earlier work. When the *Shady Affair* came out in the *Commerce* journal, Balzac was accused of having identified a certain Monsieur Clement de Ris with his Malin de Gondreville, who plays an evil role in the story—that of an unscrupulous, political turncoat, Revolutionary to begin with, Senator under the Empire, and Peer under the Restoration. The novelist defended himself against the imputation; but the resemblances between the fictitious and the real personage were, all the same, too close to be quite accidental.

Something, however, more important than the question of likeness or portraiture in the book, is that it gives us Balzac's conception of what the historical novel should be. His contemporary Dumas, and his predecessor Walter Scott—the latter in a less degree than Dumas—did not weave a romance on to a warp of history, but romanced the history itself. What he tried to do was to keep the historical action exact and accurate, and to throw its romantic elements into relief without dislocating them. His opinion was that history might so be written as to be a sort of novel, which, perhaps, will account for his answer to Lamartine, who, in 1847, asked him if he could explain how it was that the *History of the Girondins* had obtained a greater success than the most popular novels of the same date. "Gad!" he replied, "the reason is that you wrote this fine book as a novelist, not as an historian." The *Shady Affair* recreates for us the Napoleonic atmosphere, silent and heavy, yet electrically charged with grudge, hatred, and ambition, all ready to burst out at one or another point. Underhand plotting was the order of the day; there was a language of the eye rather than of the tongue, since no one was sure that in his own family there might not be eavesdroppers listening to betray him.

Ursule Mirouet is a very different kind of story. We have here the old Doctor Minoret, who after making a fortune in Paris, returns to spend the last few years of his life in Nemours, his native town. Having lost wife and child by death, he brings back with him a baby niece, who is an orphan, and to whom he devotes himself with tender care. In Nemours there are other less estimable branches of the Minoret stock, cousins of the Doctor's, whose hopes of inheriting his fortune are damped by the presence of little Ursule. Chief of these relatives is the burly postmaster, Minoret Levrault, whose son Desire is destined to the law and is sent by his parents to study in Paris. Although a disciple of Voltaire, and scouting all religious practice for himself, the Doctor is friendly with the Cure, and allows his niece to be brought up to Church. At the time the story opens an unexpected event astonishes the town. The Doctor has become converted, and goes to Mass. The cause of the change is a wonderful experience of clairvoyance he meets with in the capital, whither he has been summoned by a colleague with whom he had quarrelled years before over the new-fangled doctrines of Mesmerism. What necessary connection there is between clairvoyance and Catholicism, or indeed any particular form of religion, the novelist does not attempt to prove. It suffices for the sceptical old Doctor to be told by a hypnotized woman in Paris what Ursule is doing at Nemours, and the conversion is wrought. Soon after, Doctor Minoret dies, bequeathing his fortune in just and appropriated shares to his various relatives, Ursule included. She is at the time a fine young woman, beloved by a young gentleman of the place. The rest of the novel tells how the big postmaster contrives to destroy the part of the will favourable to Ursule and to steal certain moneys that belong to her; how Minoret's ghost appears in dreams and signs to confound the guilty man and his guilty wife, who are at last induced to confess their ill deeds, the repentance being hastened by the death of their son Desire; and, in fine, how Ursule marries Monsieur de Portenduere and is happy.

In its general construction, the book holds well together, and the characters in the main are depicted without exaggeration, while the traits of individuality are ingeniously marked. The Doctor and Ursule are less firmly and informingly delineated. As usual, when Balzac shows us the figure of a virtuous girl in an ordinary domestic circle, he represents her with passive rather than active qualities. She has no strong likes or dislikes, no particular mental bias, and possesses but small attractiveness. In fact, the novelist seems at a loss to imagine. In the case of Ursule, we see that she cultivates flowers, but we do not feel that she is fond of them. As for the Doctor, he would have or might have been less a puppet, had the author himself judged with wiser reserve the mysterious forces that exist in the world of sub-consciousness.

His belief in these forces being alloyed with much superstition, he was always consulting fortune-tellers, even those that divined by cards. One of them, a certain Balthazar, who was subsequently convicted and imprisoned for dishonesty, told him that his past life had been one series of struggles and victories, a reading too agreeable to be doubted; and that he would soon

have tranquillity, a prophecy which unhappily was not fulfilled. Concerning the prospects of a union with Madame Hanska, the cartomancer was mute, though he described the lady in language sufficiently clever for his client to acknowledge the likeness. His clairvoyance was exceedingly limited; otherwise he would have warned his client of the approaching death of Count Hanski, this event taking place towards the close of the year.

Occupied with her own affairs, which were complicated by her husband's illness, and perhaps also resenting the falling off in the number of her distant worshipper's epistles, caused by an indisposition in the spring and a visit to Brittany to recuperate, she wrote only once or twice during 1841; and, as chance would have it, these letters were lost, so that, for nearly twelve months, he had no news from her. Pathetically he announced that his sister was planning to marry him to a Mademoiselle Bonnard, god-daughter to King Louis-Philippe; but still no answer came. On the 1st of November, as he related to his Eve afterwards, he lost one of the two shirt-studs which Madame de Berny had given him, and which he wore alternately with another pair presented to him by Madame Hanska. Beginning on the morrow, he put on thenceforth only the pair that Eve had given him; and this trifling occurrence affected him so much that all his familiars noticed it. He looked upon the loss as a sign from Heaven. Poor Madame de Berny! Now that the stud from her had disappeared, he had no further tenderness for her memory. Instead of recalling her kindness to him, he preferred to speak, in connection with what he styled his horrible youth, of the years which she—the *Dilecta*—had tarnished. Too opportune to be sincere, this condemnation of his first liaison cannot but be regarded as an incense of flattery offered to the coy goddess of his later vows.

The third of the three principal books of 1841 was the *Diaries of Two Young Wives*, written, like the *Country Doctor* and the *Village Cure*, in a decidedly didactic tone. We have two girl friends, Renee de Maucombe and Louise de Chaulieu, reared in a convent school, who marry, each with an ideal of wedlock that differs. The former, a doctor in stays, as her school companion calls her, seeks in marriage a calm domestic happiness, the duties and joy of motherhood, and has a husband worthy but commonplace, to whom she gives herself at first without much positive attachment on her side. The latter makes of love a passion, and marries a Spanish exile, plain-looking but virile, whom she bends to her will. The two wives exchange their impressions during their early years of matrimony, and we see the happiness of the one develop while that of the other diminishes. The Spaniard dies and Louise de Chaulieu takes a second husband, a poor poet, whom she adores as much as her Spaniard had adored her. Carrying him off to Ville-d'Avray, she creates there a snug Paradise, where she fondles him as if he were a toy, until at length her feverish jealousy brings on her own illness and death.

The novel in its earlier phases was being worked at together with the *Sister Marie des Anges*, which was promised to Werdet but never completed, and seems to have had some connection with it. Possibly, in his primitive plan, the author intended to set in contrast the spouse and the nun: and certainly, in the original draft, there was only one bride.

In 1842, at the Odeon Theatre, was performed a dramatic piece from the novelist's pen, which by some critics has been considered his best play. There are even critics who hold that Balzac was a born dramatist, as he was a born novelist, basing their opinion on his possession of qualities common to dramatist and novelist. His force of characterization, his handling of plot, his sense of passion were all sufficient to procure him success on the stage, which explains why pieces adapted from his novels by other playwrights invariably caught the public fancy. But, in order to develop character, plot, and passion in his fiction, he employed interminable detail and slow action; and his effects were obtained rather by constant pressure throughout than by sudden impact. The brevity and condensation required by the drama were foreign to his genius; he could not help trying to put too much into his stage pieces, and the unity of subject was compromised.

The *School of Great Men*,[*] as he preferred to call his play at the Odeon, carries the spectator back to the Spain of Philippe II. Fontanares, a clever man of science but poor, and without influence, has discovered the means of navigating by steam. His valet Quinola, a genius in his way, resolves to aid his master, who, being in love, has all the greater claim on his pity; and he contrives to present the King with a petition in favour of Fontanares, and to obtain a ship for an experiment to be made. But now professional jealousies combine with love rivalries to thwart the inventor; and when, at last, the ship is made to move by its own machinery, the honour of the success is attributed to another. To avenge his wrongs, and the loss of his betrothed, who is given to his rival and dies, he blows up the steamer in presence of an assembled multitude, and quits his native land with a courtezan who has conceived a liking for him and will provide him with money to recommence his enterprise elsewhere.

[*] More usually called: *The Resources of Quinola*.

Before the first performance, Balzac was just as sanguine about the result as he had been with *Vautrin*. It followed several pieces, Felix Pyat's *Cedric the Norwegian*, Dumas' *Lorenzino*, and Scribe's *Chaine*, which had been coldly received. What if his *Quinola* should be the great attraction of the season! And his mind was filled visions of overflowing houses and showers of gold. Alas! if the representations went beyond the single one of *Vautrin*, they did not exceed twenty; and his share of profits was insignificant. The play is not dull to read, with its flavour of Moliere's comedies, and the keenness of Balzac's observation. But its colour and poesy do not compensate for the diffuseness of the plot and the undramatic conclusion.

Instead of acknowledging the defects of his composition, the unlucky dramatist was wroth

with his public. For a while he caressed the thought of going to St. Petersburg, taking out letters of naturalization, and opening a theatre in the Russian capital with a view to establishing the pre-eminence of French literature—embodied in his own writings. It must be owned that he was beginning to imagine himself persecuted. Victor Hugo, he said, had changed towards him and was creating a conspiracy of silence round about him, so that no one should speak any more of his works. And he liked better being attacked than ignored. Later, he asserted that Hugo, after accepting the dedication of the *Lost Illusions* to himself, had induced Edouard Thierry to write an abusive article against him. "He is a great writer," said the novelist in telling this, "but he is a mean trickster."

By the death of Count Hanski, the one insuperable obstacle to his union with Eve had been removed; and now, in his letters to her, there was a sudden outburst of love protestations. He wanted the widow to marry him at once, or, at the outside limit, as soon as propriety would permit. Madame Hanska replied that there was her daughter Anna, only just in her teens, who would require her mother's entire attention and care for some years to come; and there were, besides, matters concerning the inheritance, which would hardly be settled within any shorter period. Balzac was dismayed. He could not understand the delay, the prudence, the hesitation. Not to speak of his affection, his pride was offended. He overwhelmed his Eve with reproaches. Women, he informed her, loved fools, as a rule, because fools were ever ready to sit at their feet. Recurring in subsequent letters to a quieter manner, he strove to shake her resolution by hints at his exhausted strength, his difficulty of composition,—this was nothing new—his lessened alertness of thought and his weaker invention. Cleverly he juxtaposed with these a description of his study, in the little Passy house, hung with red velvet, on which black silk cords stood out in agreeable contrast; on one wall was Eve's portrait, and opposite it was a painting of the Wierzchownia mansion. Here he toiled unceasingly, creating, always creating. God only created during six days, he added, while he—the inference was left to be drawn. Feeling how requisite it was he should put himself right, in every respect, with the lady of his choice, he made a fresh confession of his religious faith. His Catholicism, he told her, was outwardly of the Bossuet and Bonald type, but was esoterically mystical, Saint-Johnian, which form alone preserved the real Christian tradition. Somewhat encouraged by vague inquiries from Madame Hanska as to the income required by a household for living in Paris, he entered into particulars with gusto; and, stating that he had eighty thousand francs worth of furniture, he discussed the best manner of arranging an existence with eight hundred thousand francs capital. With three hundred thousand francs, a country residence and small estate might be bought and the means of inhabiting there provided. Another hundred thousand would buy a house in Paris to spend each winter; and the residue of four hundred thousand, if invested in French Rentes, would purchase an additional income of fifteen thousand francs for town expenses. These latter he subdivided into three thousand francs for carriage hire; five thousand for cooking; two thousand five hundred for dress and amusement; and two thousand five hundred for general charges; the remaining two thousand would go in sundries. Madame de Berny, he said, spent only eight hundred francs on her wardrobe, and kept her household with nine hundred francs. Once launched into detail, he went far. The Countess learnt that he had still the same carpets, covering seven rooms, that he had bought for fifteen hundred francs in the Rue Cassini. They had worn well and were economical. The red velvet in his study had cost him two francs fifty a yard; but then he would take it away to another house, instead of giving it to the landlord. Living was slightly dearer in Passy, he concluded. A mutton chop cost seven sous there, instead of the five charged in the city. These last details were thrown in by a habit he had grown into of defending himself against the strictures passed by Madame Hanska on his expenditure.

They were frequent—such strictures—because Balzac was always repeating to her that he was penniless; and she, comparing this talk with other statements about his gaining large sums yearly, argued that the penury must be his own fault. True, there was the debt. But the debt grew instead of diminishing. So, apparently, he was not starving himself to pay it back. The fact was that Balzac did not tell the truth either about his assets or his liabilities. He neither earned as much as he affirmed, nor owed as much. According to some of his early biographers, his average income was not more than twelve thousand francs a year. But these figures cannot include lump sums he received at irregular intervals, nor yet all the royalties due to him on continued sales of his books. Taking one year with another, he probably made, throughout the greater portion of his literary career, between twenty and twenty-five thousand francs annually. What must have increased his embarrassments, in the later Thirties and early Forties, was his hobby for buying pictures and articles of vertu; this, with his knack of dropping money in speculations and imprudent ventures, rendered it impossible for him to live within his means.

It is curious to notice how his impecuniosity reduced him to regard every goal of his ambition as having merely a cash value. Speaking of his election to the Academie Francaise, which he reckoned to be near, he explained to Eve that it would mean six thousand francs a year to him, since he would be a member of the Dictionary committee; and then there was the Perpetual Secretaryship, which, falling to him naturally, would raise his emoluments to more than double that amount. Emboldened by these calculations—a trifle previous—he confided to Eve his desire to start on a trip to Naples, Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria, unless she should veto the proposal. In that case, his desire would be hers. Four thousand francs was what the journey would cost. Would she authorize him to spend so much? At present she was the arbitress of his actions. As the trip was abandoned, we are obliged to suppose that Eve was not favourable to it.

Mention has already been made of the novelist's initiative in the beginnings of the Men of

Letters Society, and of his scheme for a petition to the King. In its details, what he wished to see adopted was on the same lines as those followed now by the Nobel Prize distribution—at any rate as regards literature. His idea was to secure a small independence for prize-takers in tragedy, comedy, opera, fiction, Christian philosophy, linguistic or archaeological research, and epic poetry, by awarding them a capital of a hundred thousand francs, and even two hundred thousand to poets, and to open thus an easier way to position and fame. Finding that his programme was not acceptable to the more influential members of the Society, he resigned his seat on the committee, and ceased his active connection with the Society itself, continuing, however, to interest himself in is prosperity.

Later, his bust by David was placed in the Society's Committee Room, where it may be seen at present presiding silently over the meetings. Both the bust and the famous daguerreotype of him belong to the commencement of the Forties. The sculptor Etex had asked him to sit for a bust; but David had the preference, being a friend. His profile of the novelist, sketched in view of a medallion, an engraving of which appeared in 1843 in the *Loire Illustree* for August, was deemed by Madame Surville to be the only real likeness of her brother. Not until 1889 did the Men of Letters Society decide to honour Balzac by a statue to be erected amidst the life of the capital which he had so well described. And even then they allowed certain elements of prejudice and passion to dominate their counsels, with the result that a magnificent full-length figure of the novelist executed by the first sculptor in France was rejected; the committee's plighted word was violated; and in lieu was accepted and placed in one of the streets of Paris a sorry likeness hastily modelled by a man who, though a good sculptor, had one foot in the grave, and who had not, besides, the conception of what was required.[*]

[*] See my *Life of Rodin* (Fisher Unwin, 1906) or my later and smaller edition of the same sculptor's life (Grant Richards, 1907).

Of the novels that appeared in 1842, *Albert Savarus*, the first published, is worthy of attention chiefly as being a continuation of its author's personal experiences. The hero is the same ideal personification already seen in *Louis Lambert* and *Z. Marcas*. A barrister, he suddenly settles in a provincial town, bringing with him a past history that no one can penetrate and every one would like to know. When interviewed in his private consulting-room, he presents himself in a black merino dressing-gown girt about with a red cord, in red slippers, a red flannel waistcoat, a red skull-cap. The likeness is once again Balzac's own—adorned by fancy: a superb head, black hair sparsely sprinkled with white, hair like that of Saint Peter and Saint Paul as shown in our pictures, with thick glossy curls, hair of bristly stiffness; a white round neck, as that of a woman; a splendid forehead with the puissant furrow in the middle that great plans and thoughts and deep meditations engrave on the brow of genius; an olive complexion streaked with red; a square nose; eyes of fire; gaunt cheeks with two long wrinkles, full of suffering; a mouth with sardonic smile, and a small, thin, abnormally short chin; crow's feet at the temples; sunken eyes (he repeats himself a little) rolling beneath their beetling arches and resembling two burning globes; but, despite all these signs of violent passions, a calm, profoundly resigned mien; a voice of thrilling softness, . . . the true voice of the orator, now pure and cunning, now insinuating, but thunderous when required, lending itself to sarcasm and then waxing incisive. Monsieur Albert Savarus (*alias* Balzac) is of medium height, neither fat nor slim; to conclude, he has prelate's hands.

The mystery of Savarus' earlier life, revealed as the story goes on, is his meeting in Switzerland with Francesca, the wife of a rich Italian, whom he eventually wins to love him and to promise marriage when she is free and he has acquired wealth and fame. All the details of the prologue are those of Balzac's first relations with Madame Hanska. The development of the novel, in which Philomene de Watteville falls in love with Savarus, surprises his secret attachment to Francesca, intercepts his letters to her, and ruins his hopes, is less cleverly told. Savarus' retirement to a Carthusian monastery and fate's punishment of Philomene, who is mutilated and disfigured in a railway accident, form the denouement, which is strained to the improbable. The background of the story, with its glimpses of the manners and foibles of provincial society, is the most valuable portion of the book.

Between this relapse into lyricism and a much stronger work came the amusing *Beginning in Life*, suggested by his sister Laure's tale, *Un Voyage en Coucou*, and giving the adventures of the young Oscar Husson, a sort of Verdant Green, whose pretentious foolishness leads him into scrapes of every kind, until, having made himself the laughing-stock of all around him, and compromised many, he enlists and goes to the wars, whence he returns maimed for life. A comic character in the sketch is the bohemian artist Leon de Lora, nicknamed Mistigris, with his puns and proverbs that were the rage in the early Forties. A character of more serious calibre is Joseph Bridau, the talented painter. He and his scamp of a brother, Philippe, are the twin prominent figures in the novel above alluded to: *La Rabouilleuse*.

Originally called the *Two Brothers*, and subsequently *A Bachelor's Household*, this slice of intensely realistic fiction exhibits the art of the author at its highest vigour. Philippe Bridau, the mother's favourite of the two boys, enters the army, sees Waterloo, and, after, leads the life of an adventurer, with its ups and downs of fortune. His widowed mother's indulgence, his own innate selfishness, and the hardening influence of war combine to render him a villain of the Richard III type, absolutely heartless and conscienceless. He robs his own family, fixes himself leech-like on that of an uncle, marries the latter's widow for her money, when he has killed her lover in a duel, drives his wife into vice, lets her die on a pallet, and refuses to pay a visit to the deathbed of his mother, whose grey hairs he had brought down with sorrow to the grave. Like

Shakespeare's ideal villain, he has the philosophy, the humour of his egotism. "I am an old camel, familiar with genuflections," he exclaims. "What harm have I done?" he asks, speaking of his robbery of his relative, the old Madame Descoings. "I have merely cleaned the old lady's mattress." And he is equally indifferent to what destiny reserves for him. "I am a *parvenu*, my dear fellow; I don't intend to let my swaddling-clothes be seen. My son will be luckier than I; he will be a *grand seigneur*. The rascal will be glad to see me dead. I quite reckon on it; otherwise he would not be my son."

Most of the other figures are of equal truth to life, and are presented so as to increase the effect of the complete picture: Jean-Jacques Rouget, the stupid infatuated uncle, who espouses the intriguing Flore Brazier; and Flore herself, whose petty vices are crushed by those of her second husband; Maxime Gilet, the bully of Issoudun, whose surface bravado is checked and mated by the cooler scoundrelism of Philippe; Agathe, the foolish mother, whose eyes are blind to the devotion of her son Joseph; and Girondeau, the old dragoon, companion to Philippe who casts him off as soon as prosperity smiles and he has no further need for him. And the narrow-horizoned, curiously interlaced existences of the county-town add the mass of their colour-value, sombre but rich. One could have wished in the book a little more counterbalancing brightness, and less trivial detail; but neither the defect of the one nor the excess of the other takes from the novel the right to be considered a masterpiece.

CHAPTER XI

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1843, 1844

The great event of the year 1843 was Balzac's visit in the summer to Saint Petersburg, where Madame Hanska had been staying since the preceding autumn. He had hoped to go there in the January, commissioned to exploit an important invention for cheaper shipbuilding, in which his brother-in-law, Monsieur Surville, was concerned. Like each of his previous schemes for quickly becoming rich, this invention turned out to be a soap-bubble, bursting as soon as trial was made of it. What was left intact, however, was his determination to go to the banks of the Neva; and, throughout the spring, successive letters announced preparations for departure. The real motive of his journey was to try to persuade his lady-love to fix the date of their marriage. Her period of mourning was over, and no objection could be made now on the ground of propriety. Such sentimental arguments as Madame Hanska might still put forward, he trusted to be able to overcome by his presence.

In order that she might be the more anxious to see him, he talked again of abandoning literature, and sailing for America. This time the West Indies were his El Dorado. He did not say how the shy millions were to be coaxed into his purse there, unless he wished her to understand he intended to export spices, since he added: "If I had been a grocer for the last ten years, I should have become a millionaire." Forsooth, these details were mere bluff. His inmost thought was that Eve would prevent his going across the Atlantic now, as Madame de Berny had prevented him—so he said—in 1829. Moreover, there was Balthazar's prediction that he was to be happy with her for long years. The fortune-teller's sanctum he attended more frequently than church. Going one day to the house of a magnetizer, a Monsieur Dupotet, living in the Rue du Bac, he gave his hand to a hypnotized woman, who placed it on her stomach and immediately loosed it again with a scared look: "What is that head?" she cried. "It is a world; it frightens me." "She had not looked at my heart," commented Balzac proudly. "She has been dazzled by the head. Yet since I was born, my life has been dominated by my heart—a secret which I conceal with care." All this he related quite seriously to Eve. Probably, Madame de Girardin, who accompanied him on this pilgrimage, could have told Madame Hanska more.

Writing on his birthday, he inserted the prayer he had offered up to his patron-saint for the accomplishment of his desires, its burden indicating how near he believed himself to the longed-for goal: "O great Saint Honore, thou to whom is dedicated a street in Paris at once so beautiful and so ugly, ordain that the ship may not blow up; ordain that I may be no more a bachelor, by decree of the Mayor or the Counsul of France; for thou knowest that I have been spiritually married for nigh on eleven years. These last fifteen years, I have lived a martyr's life. God sent me an angel in 1833. May this angel never quit me again till death! I have lived by my writing. Let me live a little by love! Take care of her rather than of me; for I would fain give her all, even my portion in heaven; and especially let us soon be happy. Ave, Eva."

The love fervour of this prayer was a dominant note throughout the twelvemonth; we notice after the visit that the familiar *thou* prevails over the colder *you*; and the letters, both in number and length, very largely exceed those he had written up to the end of 1842. Funnily, he expresses admiration of himself for this work of supererogation, informing Eve, on one occasion, that the sixteen leaves he had recently sent her were worth sixteen hundred francs, even two thousand, counting extra leaves enclosed to Mademoiselle Henriette Borel, the governess, for whom he was negotiating an entrance into a nunnery. Love-letters estimated at five francs a page!!!

Let us grant that the epistles at present contained more gossip than ever, so that the

recipient of them had her share of amusement. She was wonderfully well kept up in Paris happenings in society, including the stage and art galleries. She learnt that Madame d'Agoult—Daniel Stern[*]—had become Emile de Girardin's mistress, on losing Liszt, who had fallen into the toils of the Princess de Belgiojoso, the latter lady achieving her conquest after luring in succession Lord Normanby from his wife, Mignet from Madame Aubernon, and Alfred de Musset from George Sand. Going to see Victor Hugo's *Burgraves*, he reported that it was nothing to speak of as history, altogether poor as invention, but nevertheless poetic, with a poetry that carried away the spectator. It was Titian painting on a mud wall. He chiefly remarked the absence of feeling, which, in Victor Hugo, was more and more noticeable. The author of the *Burgraves* lacked the true. As he did not publish these opinions, he was able to go on dining with the poet and to praise the beauty of his fourteen-year-old daughter. On George Sand's *Consuelo* he pronounced a severer judgment still, calling it the emptiest, most improbable, most childish thing conceivable—boredom in sixteen parts. And yet he had conceived certain improbable plots himself.

[*] Her literary pseudonym

Like Charles Lamb, who left his office earlier in the afternoon to make up for arriving late in the morning, he counterbalanced these heavy-handed slatings of his friends by extolling his own performance past and present. Being engaged in revising the *Chouans* for a fresh edition, he was struck by qualities in it that he had hitherto held too lightly. It was all Scott and all Fenimore Cooper, he said, with a fire and wit, into the bargain, that neither of these writers ever possessed. The passion in it was sublime! Its landscapes and scenes of war were depicted with a perfection and happiness that surprised him. As a piece of self-praise there is probably nothing surpassing this in the annals of literature. In a competition, Balzac's blasts of vanity would beat the Archangel Michael's last trump for loudness.

Horace Vernet, he asserted, would never be a great painter. He was a colourist; he knew how to design and compose, had technical skill, and, now and again, found sentiment, but did not understand how to combine these talents in his pictures. He was clever, but had no genius. His *alter ego* was Delaroche, to whom he gave his daughter in marriage. Of the other painters, Boulanger, Delacroix, Ingres, Decamps, Jules Dupre were his favourites—true artists, he deemed them. At the *Salon* he saw hardly anything to please him besides a canvas by Meissonier and Cogniet's *Tintoretto painting his Dead Daughter*. He would have liked to see Boulanger's *Death of Messalina*, but the *Salon* Committee had refused it.

In music his preferences were as eclectic as in pictures. Liszt, whom he thought ridiculous as a man, he considered superb as a musician —the Paganini of the piano, yet inferior to Chopin, since he had not the genius of composition. And, in singing, Rubini was his idol —Rubini who triumphed in the role of Othello, giving the suspicion *air* in a manner no one could equal. It intoxicated him to hear this tenor with Tamburini, Lablache, and Madame Grisi; while Nourrit's song, *Ce Rameau qui donne la Puissance et l'Immortalite* in *Robert le Diable* made his flesh creep. It yielded a glimpse of life with all its dreams satisfied.

Originally intending to start for St. Petersburg early in June, Balzac was not able to leave Paris until a month later. As usual, filthy lucre had to do with his tarrying. In spite of a loan of 11,500 francs from lawyer Gavault—his guardian, the novelist called him—who for the privilege of the great man's friendship had been endeavouring during the two years past to introduce a little order into his affairs, he had not available cash enough for a trip so far, and stayed on, hoping to finish his *David Sechard*,* which was running as a serial in the *Etat*, and his *Esther*,[*] appearing similarly in the *Parisien*. June he spent at Lagny, where his manuscripts were being printed, in order to correct the proofs and get his money. But the *Etat* ceased issue while he was there; and the *Parisien*, being in parlous condition, refused likewise to pay up, so that he had to go off with a thinner-lined pocket than he had expected. Otherwise, he was in a fitting state of grace to meet his fair tyrant, whose envelope lectures had brought him into fear of her and at least outward obedience.

[*] Part of the *Lost Illusions*.

The torrents of coffee by the aid of which he had forced his last pen-work through, had been reduced to minimum doses; the occasional mustard foot-baths that cured his cerebral inflammations were replaced by entire ablutions every other day; he liked hot baths well enough; but, in the spells of composition, they were often indefinitely adjourned, so that this season of purification had its *raison d'etre*. And now, with his gaze turned to the east, he wondered how long he was going to remain there. His reply to a person who asked him to pledge himself for some novels on his return reads much as though he were counting on an offer to fix his residence in the empire of the czars. "I don't know whether I shall come back," he said. "France bores me. I am infatuated with Russia. I am in love with absolute power. I am going to see if it is as fine as I believe it to be. De Maistre stayed a long time at St. Petersburg. Perhaps I shall stay also." This he naturally repeated to Madame Hanska. Not that it was new to her. A similar hint had been given in January, when he capped his declaration, "I abhor the English; I execrate the Austrians; the Italians are nothing," with "I would sooner be a Russian than any other subject." The comic side of this fury is that Madame Hanska was a Pole, her late husband too; and neither she nor her family were reconciled to the Russian yoke. To make his renunciation more complete, he humbly spoke his dread she might turn from him with the "get away" said to a dog. No! She had no intention of dismissing him. His outpourings of devotion caressed her woman's pride, even if she did not accept them as gospel truth. And however

tedious she found his vamping song of sixpence, his sittings in the parlour counting out his mirage-money, she put up with them in consideration of her privilege.

Sailing from Havre in the *Devonshire*, an English boat, Balzac arrived at St. Petersburg towards the end of July. He lodged in a private house not far from Eve's Koutaizoff mansion; but passed the three months of his sojourn almost entirely in her society. It was the first opportunity he had had of getting to know her intimately, their previous meetings being surrounded with too many restrictions to allow of familiar intercourse. No detailed record has come down to us of these days of *tete-a-tete* existence. All we learn from subsequent allusions is that, together with a good deal of billing and cooing, more sustained on the novelist's side, there were some lovers' tiffs, followed by reconciliations. Apparently the friction was mainly caused by Eve's evasiveness on the subject of their marriage.

It would seem as though there were an attack on her aloofness in the long criticism he sent her from his lodgings on Madame d'Arnim's *Bellina*, a French translation of which had been published not long before he left Paris. After some general remarks on the circumstance of a girl's fancying herself in love with a great man living at a distance, he waxed wroth over what he styled Bellina's head-love, and over head-love in general. To this monster, Merimee, in his *Double Mistake*, had given a thrust but a thrust that made it bleed only. The cleverer Madame d'Arnim had poisoned it with opium. "In order for the literary expression of love to become a work of art and to be sublime," he continued, "the love that depicts should itself be complete; it should occur in its triple form, head, heart, and body; should be a love at once sensual and divine, manifested with wit and poetry. Who says love says suffering; suffering from separation; suffering from disagreement. Love in itself is a sublime and pathetic drama. When happy, it is silent. Now, the cause of the tedium of Madame d'Arnim's book," he added, "is easily discoverable by a soul that loves. Goethe did not love Bellina. Put a big stone in Goethe's place —the Sphinx no power has ever been able to wrest from its desert sand—and Bellina's letters are understandable. Unlike Pygmalion's fable, the more Bellina writes, the more petrified Goethe becomes, the more glacial his letters. True, if Bellina had perceived that her sheets were falling upon granite, and if she had abandoned herself to rage or despair, she would have composed a poem. But, as she did not love Goethe, as Goethe was a pretext for her letters, she went on with her girl's journal; and we have read some (not intended for print) much more charming, not in units, but in tens."

In the rest of the criticism, Balzac swirls round his guns and directs his fire on Goethe's replies to Bellina. The latter's epistles were accompanied with presents of braces and slippers and flannel waistcoats, which were much more appreciated by the poet than her theories on music. Not so did he, Balzac, treat his Lina, his Louloup —such was the inference suggested. Every one of her, i.e. Eve's sayings was treasured up, after being duly pondered upon. Such adulation must have been delicious to Madame Hanska; and yet she sent her sighing swain back into his loneliness, with his bonds riveted tighter, his promises to break with all rivals more solemn, and a disappointment, over his deferred hopes, that brought on an illness after his return.

The journey back was made by land through Riga, Taurogen, and Berlin. In the Prussian capital, Von Humboldt came to see him with a message from the King and Queen; and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* was seen on the stage, without pleasure being derived from it. To its poesy the novelist was little open. Instead of pushing on straight to France, he bent his course southwards to Dresden, where he visited the Pinakothek. The Saxon town pleased him more than Berlin, both by its structural picturesqueness and surroundings. The palace, begun by Augustus, he esteemed the most curious masterpiece of rococo architecture. The Gallery he thought over-rated; but he none the less admired Correggio's *Night*, his *Magdalene* and two *Virgins*, as also Raphael's *Virgins*, and the Dutch pictures. His highest enthusiasm was aroused by the theatre, decorated by the three French artists Desplechin, Sechan, and Dieterle. He reached Passy on the 3rd of November, having crowded into the preceding week visits to Maintz, Cologne, Aix-la-Chapelle, and several places in Belgium.

The form assumed by his malady was arachnitis, an inflammation of the network of nerves enveloping the brain. For the time being, Nacquart, his doctor, conjured it away, as he had done in the case of other seizures from which the patient had suffered. He had known Balzac since boyhood and was well acquainted with his constitution. Unfortunately he could not change the novelist's abnormal manner of living and working. And the mischief was in them.

Balzac's three months' absence from Paris had caused profane tongues to wag considerably. Notwithstanding his reticence concerning Countess Hanska, a legend had gathered round about their relations to each other. More than one paper reported that he had been off on an expedition, wife, and fortune-hunting—which was true; and one daily, at least, spoke of his having been engaged by the Czar as a kind of court *litterateur*. The *Presse* especially annoyed him by copying from the *Independance Belge* a story of his having been surprised by the Belgian police dining in an hotel with an Italian forger, whose grand behaviour and abundance of false bank-notes had completely captivated him. The forger was certainly arrested in the hotel where he had put up, but the dinner and the chumming were inventions; at any rate, Balzac affirmed they were, uttering furious anathemas against the scorpion Girardin, who had allowed so illustrious a name to be taken in vain.

On the 26th of September, during the St. Petersburg visit, his third finished theatrical piece,

Pamela Giraud, was produced at the Gaite Theatre. Differing essentially from his previous efforts, this play is an ordinary melodramatic comedy. Pamela, like Richardson's heroine, is an honest girl, who, occupied in the humble trade of flower-selling, loves a young man, Jules Rousseau, that she believes to belong to her own modest rank, whereas, in reality, he is the son of a big financier. Involved in a Bonapartist conspiracy, which has just been discovered, Jules comes one night to her room and tries to persuade her to fly with him. She refuses; and, while he is with her, the police enter and arrest him. To save him she consents, though opposed by her parents, to say in Court that her lover had spent the night of the conspiracy with her; and Jules is acquitted through this false confession of her being his mistress. Once the happy result obtained, Jules and his family forget her. The lawyer, however, smitten by her beauty and virtue, proposes to marry her, and is about to carry his intention into effect when, remarking that she is pining for the ungrateful Jules, he contrives to bring him to Pamela's feet again, and the marriage is celebrated.

Pamela Giraud was written in 1838, but no theatre had been willing to stage it in its original form. Ultimately two professional playwrights, Bayard and Jaime, who had already dramatized, the one, *Eugenie Grandet* and the *Search for the Absolute*, the other, *Pere Goriot*, pruned the over-plentifulness of its matter and strengthened the relief of various parts; and, in the amended guise, it was performed. Balzac resented the modifications, which explains his equanimity on hearing, as he travelled homewards, that the piece had fallen flat. He considered that, presented as he wrote it, the chances of success would have been greater. He was wrong, and those critics as well who attributed the failure to enmities arising out of a recent publication of his, entitled the *Monography of the Press*. Neither of the two chief *dramatis personae* was capable of properly interesting a theatrical audience. The character of Jules is contemptible from beginning to end, and that of Pamela ceases to attract after the trial. The conclusion of this play, as that of *Vautrin*, is an anticlimax and leaves an unsatisfactory impression.

Why did Balzac write his *Monography of the Parisian Press*? Not altogether from a pure motive, one must own. There is too much gall in his language, too much satire in the thought. He was sufficiently acquainted with the inner ring of journalistic life to be able to say truly what were its blemishes; and, without doubt, at the time when he composed the chief of his novels, these had a prejudicial effect on literature as on other phases of activity. But his pamphlet, besides its indiscriminate condemnations, erred in adopting a style which rendered the turning of the tables only too easy. And Jules Janin, whom he had already indisposed by sketching a seeming portrait of him in the *Provincial Great Man in Paris*, came down heavily on the daring satirist in the *Debats* of the 20th of February 1843. The retort, so he informed Madame Hanska, made him laugh immoderately. Perhaps; but the laugh must have been somewhat forced—what the French call "yellow."

In the *Monography*, men of letters, baptized by the novelist *gendelettres*—one of the few words coined by Balzac which have become naturalized—may be divided into several categories. First, there are the *publicistes*, occupied in scratching the pimples of the body politic. From these pimples they extract a book which is a mystification. Not far removed from the *publicistes* are the chief managing editors and proprietors general, big wigs who sometimes become prefects, receivers general, or theatrical directors. The type of this class is glory's porter, speculation's trumpeter, the electorate's *Bonneau*. He is set in motion by a ballet-dancer, a cantatrice, an actress; in short, he is a brigand-captain, with other brigands under him. And of the latter:—There are the *Premiers Paris*, alias, first tenors. In writing *Premiers Paris*, it is impossible for a man to avoid mental warp and rapid deterioration. In such writing, style would be a misfortune. One must know how to speak jesuitically; and, in order to advance, one must be clever in getting one's ideas to walk on crutches. Those who engage in the trade confess themselves corrupt; like diplomatists, they have as a pension the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres, a few librarianships, even archiveships.

Next to the *Premiers Paris* come the *Faits Paris*; then the *Camarillists*, other banditti commissioned to distort Parliamentary speeches; then the newspaper Politicians, who have not two ideas in their heads. If appointed under-officials, they would be unable to administer the sweeping of the streets. Consequently, the more incapable a man is, the better he is qualified to become the Grand Lama of a newspaper. Indeed, nothing is more explicable than politics. It is a game at ninepins.

In addition to its Politicians, the newspaper has its *Attaches*. The *Attaches* of the Republican party are watched very closely. One day two Republicans meet, and the first says to the second: "You have sold yourself; people find you are getting fatter." Whence it follows that any paper knowing its trade will have only exceedingly thin *Attaches*; otherwise your *Attache* will be a mere detached *Attache*, that is to say, a sort of paid spy, who is mostly a professor of rhetoric or philosophy. He will dine at all tables, with mission to attack political leaders; he runs in and out of newspaper offices, like a dog seeking his master; and, when he has bitten sharply, he becomes the professor of a fantastic science, the private secretary of some cabinet, or else consul-general.

Afterwards come the *gendelettre* pamphleteers. According to the author of the *Monography*, the pamphlet is the brochure masterpiece; and he himself is its most illustrious exponent. The Abbe de Lamennais does not know how to speak to the proletariat. He is not Spartacus enough, not Marat enough, not Calvin enough; he does not understand how to storm the positions of the ignoble bourgeoisie at present in power.

Following on are the *gendelettre-vulgarisateurs*, who have invented Germany. The type of this class is appointed professor in the College de France. He marches at the head of the Nothingologues; he is the almighty king of the Sorbonne. Such people are the skin parasites of France. The Nothingologue is ordinarily *monobible*;[*] and, as the bourgeoisie are essentially lacking in intelligence, they are infatuated with him. The *Monobible* becomes a director of canals, railways, the defender of negroes, or else the advocate of slavery; in a word, the Nothingologue is an important man, quite as the convinced *gendelettre*, who reserves to himself the Council of State, and as the sceptic *gendelettre*, who becomes Master of Requests or Governor of the Marquisas Isles.

[*] In Balzac's use of the word: A man who has written only one book and boasts of it always.

Replying to this diatribe, with its medley of shrewdness and exaggeration, Janin pointed out that it insulted Quinet, professor at the College de France; Sainte-Beuve, the poet, novelist, and critic, the historian of Port-Royal; Philarete Chasles, professor of Foreign Literature; Loeve Weimars, Consul at Bagdad; not to speak of Planche, Berlioz, Michel and Chevalier; and that it came amiss from a man who had lived and still lived on newspapers; who himself had been the chief managing editor, tenor, Jack-of-all-trades, canard-seller, camarillist, politician, premier-Paris, fait-Paris, *detache-attache*, pamphleteer, translator, critic, euphuist, bravo, incense-bearer, guerillero, angler, humbug, and even, what was more serious, the banker of a paper of which he was the only, unique, and perpetual *gendelettre*, and which, so admirably written, cleverly conducted, and signed with so great a name, did not live six months.

Within a very few years, Janin was to bury the hatchet of polemics beside Balzac's grave, and, forgetting the soreness generated in him by the *Monography of the Press* to constitute himself the dead author's apologist.

Besides his continuation of Lucien de Rubempre's story in the *Splendour and Wretchedness of Courtezans*, Balzac published, in the year 1843, two complete novels, viz. *Honorine*, and *The Muse of the County*, and a portion of an historical study on Catherine de Medici. This last work, to which the *Calvinist Martyr* belongs, was undertaken with the idea of composing, as he said, a retrospective history of France treated clairvoyantly, and, as the fragment shows, with his peculiar bias towards despotism. In the experiment made with *Catherine de Medici*, he started out thinking to justify and rehabilitate her memory. Instead, he found himself obliged to exhibit her committing the worst actions imaginable; and, his conclusions not concording with his premises, he abandoned further incursions into the past. History is a dangerous ground for a doctrinaire to investigate.

The former of the two novels is mainly psychological. The wife of a Count Octave, having quitted her husband for another, has repented of her fault and separated from her lover, but, through shamefastness, will not return to her husband. She seeks to gain a livelihood by flower-making; and her husband, who still loves her and is full of forgiveness, helps her secretly to obtain orders. At length, by the good offices of a secretary and the latter's uncle, a priest, he pleads with his wife more efficaciously, and induces her to return to him, yet without her pardoning herself; and she dies in giving birth to a child, dies because she wishes, rather from wounded pride, it would appear, than on account of her husband, to whose affection she is strangely insensible. The heroine is not particularly interesting with her morbidness and hysterical posing; she probably stands for one of Balzac's principles, and his principles are the most tedious thing about him.

With the *Muse of the County*, which the author declared to be Constant's *Adolphe* treated realistically, we are back in the truer Balzacian manner. Dinah de la Baudraye—a Sancerre Catherine de Vivonne—married to an apology for a man, is human flesh and blood; and her love for the journalist Etienne Lousteau is natural, though culpable. Indeed, her subsequent devotion to this shallow egotist is not without greatness. Here the novelist, as much by his wit as by his denouement, gives perhaps the best practical condemnation of adultery.

"Bah!" says the little de la Baudraye, "do you call it vengeance, because the Duke of Bracciano will kill his wife for putting him into a cage and showing herself to him in her lover's arms. Our tribunals and society are much more cruel."

"In what?" asked Lousteau.

"In letting the woman live with a slender allowance. Every one turns away from her. She has neither dress nor consideration, two things which are everything to a woman."

"But she has happiness," replied Madame de la Baudraye grandly.

"No!" replied the husband, lighting his candle to go to bed; "for she has a lover."

Dinah's punishment is of this kind. Persuaded at length to go back to the house of her husband, who had been made a peer of France and accepts Lousteau's children with her, she lives to see her former lover and father of her children sink so low that she must despise him, while still occasionally tempted to yield to his caresses.

When Alexandre Dumas, the younger, was received into the French Academy in 1875, the Count d'Haussonville, who welcomed him, asserted that the elder Dumas, like Balzac, Beranger, de Lamennais and others, had preferred to remain an outsider. In the case of Balzac, the Count was mistaken. The so-called preference was Hobson's choice. He stayed outside only because

he could not get in. Between 1839 and 1849, he made several attempts to secure the promise of a number of votes sufficient to elect him. Having stood aside at the earlier date in favour of Victor Hugo, who was admitted in 1841, he thought he might count on a reciprocal service from the poet. And, on Bonald's death in the same year, he asked him, during the visit to Les Jardies, to use his influence with his colleagues in the Academy. "Hugo promised but little," says Gozlan; and Balzac had to wait for a better opportunity. This happened at the end of 1843, when Campenon died, and a vacancy occurred which he might reasonably claim to fill. Encouraged at present by Hugo and Charles Nodier, he began the round of visits required by Academy etiquette; but soon discovered that the members whose votes he solicited did not consider him rich enough. He therefore withdrew from the list of candidates, writing to Nodier that, if he could not succeed in entering the Academy while in honourable poverty, he would never present himself at the moment when prosperity should have bestowed her favours on him.

And, so far as personal solicitation was concerned, he never did. Though not abandoning his desire of belonging to the Forty, and esteeming rightly that the value of his work entitled him to a place among them, he felt after this rebuff that, if a fresh proposal were made, it should come from the other side. He might have done more to provoke it had not Madame Hanska been against his taking any further action in the matter, however indirect. Maybe she realized better than he did the uselessness of his candidature. The enemies he had in the Academy and its entourage were too powerful for his claims to be considered. Many years afterwards, Victor Hugo related that the novelist put himself forward for the vacancy left by Ballanche's death at the end of 1847, and apropos added the following anecdote.

"I was driving," he said, "down the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore, when in front of the Church I perceived Monsieur de Balzac, who beckoned to me to stop. I was going to get out of the carriage, but he prevented me, and said: 'I was just coming to see you. You know I am on the list for the Academy.' 'Really!' 'Yes. What do you think of my chances?' 'You are too late, I fear. You will get only my vote.' 'It is your vote especially I want.' 'Are you quite in earnest?' 'Quite.' Balzac quitted me. The election was virtually decided. For political motives. The candidature of Monsieur Vatout had a majority of supporters. I tried to canvass for Balzac, but met with no success. It vexed me to think that a man of Balzac's calibre should have only one vote, and I reflected that if I could obtain a second one, I might create some change of opinion. How was I to gain it? On the election day I was sitting beside the excellent Pongerville, one of the best of men. I asked him point blank, 'For whom are you voting?' 'For Vatout, as you know.' 'I know it so little that I ask you to vote for Balzac.' 'Impossible!' 'Why?' 'Because my bulletin is ready. See.' 'Oh! that makes no matter.' And on two bits of paper I wrote in my best hand: 'Balzac.' 'Well!' quoth Pongerville; 'well! you will see.' The apparitor who was collecting the votes approached us. I handed him one of the bulletins I had prepared. Pongerville, in his turn, stretched out his hand to put Vatout's name in the urn; but, with a friendly tap on his fingers, I caused his paper to flutter to the floor. He looked, appeared irresolute for a moment; and, as I presented him with the second bulletin, on which Balzac's name was inscribed, he smiled, took it, and gave it with good grace. And that is how Honore de Balzac had two votes in his favour at the Academy."

This story is inexact chronologically. Balzac was not a candidate in 1847-48, when Monsieur Vatout was chosen, but at two later elections, those of the 11th and 18th of January 1849. In each of these he obtained two votes; and since the second election was to fill the chair of Monsieur Vatout, who died after occupying it during a twelvemonth, it would seem that Victor Hugo, deceived by his memory, confused the two events. As for the conversation with Balzac, it probably refers to the candidature which the novelist did begin in 1844; and either Hugo's age in 1877, when he told the story, or his capacity for embellishing was responsible for the interview being tacked on to the election incident of 1849.

The Pongerville mentioned by Hugo was the same in whose album, in 1844, Balzac wrote a couple of complimentary verses. He happened to come across the album at his sister's, and, after inserting his poetry, took the book to Pongerville's house without finding him at home. He had certainly reckoned, at the close of the preceding year, on having this Academician's vote, as well as Dupaty's, Hugo's, and Nodier's. Pongerville may have deemed his own tardy support a sufficient reward for the verses.

Although Balzac's monetary embarrassments were fated to persist as long as he lived, the causes being so much in the man, their burden was somewhat less felt in and from the year 1844. This better state of things was proved by his looking round for a more commodious residence. The Passy cottage, picturesque as it was, accorded but ill with his designs of marrying so grand a dame; and even for his work was not very suitable, being close to the flats of the Rue Basse, where families lived with children that disturbed his meditations. He would have liked to free Les Jardies from its mortgage and keep the place as a summer resort, while renting a snug mansion in the city during the winter; but the two abodes were hardly within his means, unless Eve would loosen her purse-strings. "I will not sell it," he informed her, referring to his "Folly"; "it was built with my blood and brains. I will stick to it—if I cannot dispose of it advantageously," he finished up with, inconsequently. And still she made no sign; or, rather she proffered no cash. Business advice she gave in plenty. About each of the Paris houses suggested she had some objections to make, so that, after fixing successively on a residence belonging to Madame Delannoy (one of his creditor friends) in the Rue Neuve-des Mathurins, on the old mansion opposite his Passy abode once possessed by the Princesse de Lamballe, on the property in the Rue Ponthieu, and on a plot of land in the Allee des Veuves where he thought

they could build, the end of the year arrived without any definite solution being reached. The two "louloups," as he called himself and Eve, filled their correspondence with calculations and figures, the Paris "louloup" expressing his conviction that figures were the foundation of their happiness.

If he did not die too soon, she might consider she would marry a million in giving him her hand, he said. Slily, he now and again quoted his worth in the estimation of a rival feminine authority. For example, Madame de Girardin was about to write an article on the great conversationalists of the day, and had mentioned that she held him to be one of the most charming. However, when he raised his rate of exchange in this way, he was always prudent enough to follow up with concessions. His intimacy with the Englishwoman, Madame Visconti, who was Eve's bugbear, he broke off completely—at least he swore he had done so and offered to send his beloved tyrant the cold letter in which his whilom friend and benefactress bade him good-bye. To let Eve see it would not be gallant on his part, he confessed; but what could he deny her, if she persisted. He was her Paris agent, even her Paris errand-boy, at one time negotiating the entrance of the governess, Mademoiselle Borel, into the Saint-Thomas-de-Velleneuve nunnery; at another, purchasing gloves, millinery, and other articles of dress. Yet she never considered him submissive enough, notwithstanding his pretty flattery.

"Why shouldn't you have a poet?" he asked, thinking of himself, "as other people have a dog, a monkey, a parrot—the more so as I have in me something of these three creatures: I always repeat the same phrase, I imitate society, I am faithful." And again in a burst of lyricism, he exclaimed: "Adieu, loved friend, to whom I belong like the sound to the bell, the dog to his master, the artist to his ideal, prayer to God, pleasure to cause, colour to the painter, life to the sun. Love me, for I need your affection, so vivifying, so coloured, so agreeable, so celestial, so ideally good, of such sweet dominance, and so constantly vibrating." With comparisons of this sort he was lavish. "I am like Monsieur de Talleyrand," he told her in another letter. "Either I show a stolid, tin face and do not speak a word, or else I chatter like a magpie." Adopting the expression first invented by Guizot, he characterized their mutual relations as an *entente cordiale*, impatient, none the less, for the realization of his fancy, which was to see his idol enter a tabernacle prepared to receive her on the return from a delightful honeymoon. Meanwhile, he was amassing furniture and bric-a-brac, just as the bird bits of straw; and he implored her not to scold him. In the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, he had ferreted out two Dresden vases, which he bought, resolving to deprive himself for a time of his grapes at forty sous a pound, in order to retrieve the money.

The retrieval indeed was not easy, since his passion for collecting curios led him far, and he generally succumbed to the temptation of something ancient and rare. In the previous autumn he had bought, for thirteen hundred and fifty francs, a *secretaire* and *commode* in ebony, with inlaid pearl, that had apparently been manufactured at Florence in the seventeenth century; these *objets d'art* he estimated at values ranging up to forty or fifty thousand francs. A description of them appeared in the press, and rich amateurs inquired whether he were willing to sell; but, either because he asked too much or really did not want to part with them, they were kept, as also his *Christ* by Bouchardon or Girardon, which he obtained for two hundred francs and valued at several thousands. If he had no cash for his purchases —and this frequently happened—he placed one of his already acquired treasures (possibly unpaid for, too) in the establishment of his "respectable relative," as he styled the pawnbroker, and thus secured the coveted object.

In his intercourse with his own family, Madame Hanska was a continuously troubling factor. The prospect of his alliance with this foreign aristocrat had less charm for Madame Balzac and Laure than for Honore. They probably perceived the chimera he was pursuing, and could not be expected to show enthusiasm. This attitude on their side and a certain hauteur on his, partly caused by offended dignity, widened the breach between him and them. "I have now no family," he told "The Stranger," "and am glad that the coldness should be established before I am completely happy; for later the reason of it would have been attributed to you, or to what would have been termed my uppishness. The isolation, which you wish, will be likewise my dearest desire. My sister," he proceeded, "has suppressed for ever the literary question betwixt us, with her blue-stocking whims. I cannot talk to her of my affairs, nor yet of my mother's. She asserts that her husband is a greater man than I am." Madame de Berny, he added, had foreseen his mother's and sister's transformation when she told him he was a flower that had sprung up on a dunghill! If Madame de Berny told him this, it was no doubt in a fit of anger against them for endeavouring to sever the liaison, an endeavour they were perfectly justified in. These portions of Balzac's confidences, which reflect upon his character seriously, and besmirch him more than those against whom they were spoken, cannot be overlooked in a biography. They have to be included in our judgment of him, and, in a measure, concern the tragic close of his love romance.

We are fonder of him in the expansive moods when his naive wonder at his own performances carries him into self-panegyric, which, not infrequently, we can endorse, though with some discount. Thus, for instance, the *Bourgeois of Paris* he declared to be one of those masterpieces that leave everything else behind. "It is grand, it is terrifying in verve, in philosophy, in novelty, in painting, in style." And yet there was Eugene Sue selling the *Wandering Jew* to a newspaper for a hundred thousand francs, while the *Philosophy of Conjugal Life*, a publication of his own in Hetzel's *Diable a Paris*, fetched only eight hundred; and the *Peasants* was paid for only at the rate of sixty centimes a line. His *Modeste Mignon* which appeared in the *Debats*, sold rather

dearer, six thousand francs being given, and for the *Bourgeois*, nine thousand. The explanation of Sue's getting more than he he imagined to be because Sue lived in grander style than himself with flunkeys to open the door and overawe the publishers who flocked to the successful writer, whereas he, living in a cottage, had to cool his heels in an office ante-chamber, and was exploited on account of his neediness. There was some truth in what he said; but he did not sufficiently realize that Sue wrote, for the market, exciting tales that everybody rushed to read. His own books were, of course, most of them infinitely superior; but they appealed to a much smaller public. All the same, he was loth to resign himself to the depreciation Sue's bargains effected in his own. Feverishly he strove to demonstrate by his painfully gained successes that they were masterpieces, as he said, by the side of Sue's chimney-fronts, and as far above them as Raphael was above Dubufe. Moliere, Lesage, Voltaire, Walter Scott—these were the only names he acknowledged as rivals to his own. Sue was nothing but a spangled and satined Paul de Kock.

We can grant him that, in fiction, his proper manner was as far in advance of his epoch as, in politics, his doctrine was behind it. George Sand was a medium in both, although she dwelt always a little too much in the clouds. At a dinner with her towards the end of January, the antagonism of their principles manifested itself over his recent visit to Russia.

"If you were to see the Czar," Balzac said to her, "you would fall in love with him and jump from your *bousingotism*[*] to autocracy."

[*] A word used to characterise the dress and manners of the Romanticists, who were fond of Robespierre waistcoats, long hair, and other peculiarities intended to distinguish them from ordinary mortals.

Madame Dudevant waxed angry. It was not kind in a man who had resisted her blandishments to make merry over her foibles.

The Russians, he gravely told her, were extremely amiable, easy to get on with, exceedingly literary, since everything was done on paper, and Russia was the only country in which people knew how to obey.

The mention of obedience in a people irritated the hostess; but on her seething he poured a drop of cold water by asking jestingly:

"Would you, in a great danger, wish your servants to deliberate about what you had ordered them to do?"

The Sandist-Philosophico-Republico-Communico-Pierre-Lerouxico-Geranico-Deisto train (the epithets are Balzac's) stopped dead at the question. Then Marliani, one of the guests, remarked that argument was impossible with poets. Balzac bowed, and added:

"You hear what he says?"

"You are a dreadful satirist," retorted George Sand. "Go on with your *Comedie Humaine*."

It was not necessary to give the recommendation. He was for ever going on; and the further he went, the further his horizons receded. The embracing lines were rather indiscriminate. He came to think himself capable of reducing every domain to his scale. Men's ambitions, however, are part of their motive power; and, had his been less sweeping, the qualities of his work might have diminished with the defects. "Four men," he cried in one of his vauntings, "have had an immense life, Napoleon, Cuvier, O'Connell, and—I mean to be the fourth! The first lived with the life of Europe; he inoculated himself with armies! The second espoused the globe! The third incarnated in himself a people! As for me! I shall have borne a whole society in my head! It is just as well to live thus as every evening to say, 'Spades, hearts, trumps;' or to wonder why Madame such a one has done such and such a thing."

Modeste Mignon, which was published in 1844 with the extra attraction of some of Auber's music in it is one of Balzac's brighter and lighter books, and reproduces part of his own last love-story more objectively treated than in *Albert Savarus*. Its plot was suggested to him by a short tale which Madame Hanska composed, intending to submit it for his approval, but which she threw in the fire, afterwards sending him, in one of her epistles, an outline of what she had done. Since he utilized her invention, he paid her back by selecting as his point of departure the adventure of a well-educated girl of literary tastes, who, through reading the verses of the celebrated Canalis, at once a poet and a statesman, fell in love with him and expressed her (literary) admiration in a letter, though she had never seen him. There were other such cases in the first half of the nineteenth century besides that of the Polish Countess and the author of *Eugenie Grandet*. Disdaining to reply to a correspondent who did not appear to be a person with whom he could take liberties, Canalis delegated the task to his friend and secretary, La Briere, who answered under cover of the great man's name and ultimately found out and, incognito, beheld the lady. She was beautiful and he lost his heart to her. When later the subterfuge was discovered, Canalis, interested now, wanted to marry the lady, she being presumably rich. Through pique, Modeste, for a while, listened to his suit and smiled on him, albeit, in verity, she was touched by La Briere's sincere affection. The circumstances leading to the unmasking of Canalis' selfish character and to Modeste's marriage with La Briere are handled in a less Balzacian way than the introductory chapters, which, however, are more than usually tortuous. But the whole story is pleasing; and, in the discursive paragraphs, there is less dogmatism and a more delicate sense of contrasts than the novelist is wont to exhibit when

astride a hobby-horse. The following passage has an aroma of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* in it, which merits our attention. The divine in man says:

"In order to live, thou shalt bend thyself towards earth; in order to think thou shalt raise thyself heavenwards. We want the life of the soul as much as that of the body; whence there are two utilities. Thus it is certain that a book will not serve as foot-gear; an epic, from the utilitarian point of view, is not worth an economical soup from the kitchen of a Benevolent Society; and a self-acting boiler, rising a couple of inches on itself, procures calico a few pence a yard cheaper; but this machine and the improvements of industry do not breathe life into a nation, and will not tell the future that it has existed; whereas Egyptian art, Mexican art, Grecian art, Roman art, with their masterpieces accused of uselessness, have attested the existence of these peoples in the vast expanse of time, there where huge intermediary nations, destitute of great men, have disappeared without leaving their visiting cards on the globe. All works of genius are the epitome of a civilization, and presuppose an immense utility. Forsooth, a pair of boots will not outvie a stage-play in your eyes, and you will not prefer a windmill to the Church of Saint Ouen. So, a people is animated with the same sentiment as a man; and man's favourite idea is to survive himself mentally as he reproduces himself physically. The survival of a people is the work of its men of genius."

Beatrix, the other completed novel of the year, is a drawn-out, ill-composed work, which is not redeemed sufficiently by its minute description of Breton manners and its portrait of George Sand in Felicite des Touches. Six years separated the publication of the first part of the book from that of the conclusion, and, in the interval, the unity of plan suffered. Balzac devoted a good deal of labour to its execution. In all the conjugal ruses employed by Sabine de Grandlieu to detach Calyste, her husband, from Beatrix, he displays his peculiar talent, but the ultimate effect is poor.

CHAPTER XII

LETTERS TO "THE STRANGER," 1845, 1846

Though fertile in incidents, the year of 1845 was, from a literary point of view, more barren than any in Balzac's past career, exception, of course, made for the time lost during his printing-house adventure. Beyond his short, witty sketch, *A Man of Business*, relating the tricks employed by the princes of bohemianism to pay their debts and indulge their caprices gratis, no finished work was published. The *Peasants*, which the author never entirely got through, was taken up repeatedly, and as often put aside from sheer inability to proceed.

The deadlock in which he found himself had been preparing since his visit to Saint Petersburg. Whether the intimacy created there between Madame Hanska and himself was that of two lovers in the chaster sense, or, as Monsieur Gabriel Ferry assets, in his *Balzac et ses Amies*, that of a closer union, it had haunted him during his subsequent twelvemonth's loneliness. And when Eve, who had come to spend the winter at Dresden, discouraged, from fear of her society friends' backbiting, the idea of his going there to see her, he grew incapable of concentrating his mind on his books; and, even in his letters to her, chafed and was irritable, scolding her for not stamping her envelopes, and recommending her to acquire habits of order and economy! confessing the while that, to escape from his melancholy, he had been playing lansquenet, dining out, going to the theatres, and leading a nonchalant life.

The tone was a bold one to assume, but clever. His tyrant, already repenting the pledges given, had been hinting it would be better not to carry them out. Her own relatives were quite as much against the match as Balzac's, she reminded him, while narrating all the malicious tittle-tattle that mutual acquaintances were constantly telling her. She defended him, she said. "A mistake!" retorted Balzac. "When, in your presence, any one attacks me, your best plan is to mock the slanderers by outdoing them. When some one sneeringly remarked to Dumas that his father was a nigger, he answered: 'My grandfather was a monkey.'"

His scolding for once did good. Eve did not like his "wounding prose," but she talked no more of breaking with him. On the contrary, she relented as far as to remove the embargo on his going to Dresden; so in May he went. And, what was more, she came in August to Paris; incognito, since the visit was without the Czar's permission, she and her daughter Anna travelling from the frontier under the names of Balzac's sister and niece.

In the novelist's correspondence, there is a curious letter written on the 2nd of August to Madame Emile de Girardin. In it the writer excuses himself for not calling on her, being obliged to remain at home on account of the disquieting condition of a lady friend of his who had hurt herself and was under medical treatment. The inference is that the lady in question was staying in his house; and a note written to Madame Hanska, on the 4th of September, with its allusion to the Passy garden in which they had walked so much together, makes it sufficiently plain that she was the August guest. Although no proofs have yet come to light which we can accept as irrefutable, there seems to be ground for the supposition put forward that a premature confinement was the illness, carefully concealed from every one.

If the supposition be correct, it explains the convalescent's being joined by Balzac again in September at Baden-Baden, where the arrangements were made for Eve and himself to meet in October at Chalon-sur-Saone and to travel together to Italy. It was during this second stay in Germany that the play of the *Saltimbanques* they had seen suggested to the novelist the amusing nicknames which he henceforth adopted when writing to Madame Hanska's family. Anna was dubbed *Zephirine*; her betrothed, *Gringalet*; Eve, *Atala*; and himself, *Bilboquet*. Georges, the betrothed, who was a Pole bearing the title of Count Mniszech, was a young man of scientific tastes and considerable learning, for whom Balzac conceived a great liking, and whom he helped in his entomological researches.

The ramble southwards was probably the most pleasurable experience in the novelist's life, being an anticipated honeymoon. From Chalon they journeyed along the banks of the Rhone, visiting no fewer than twenty-three towns on the way. At Naples they parted, and the prospective bridegroom turned Paris-wards, going via Pisa, Civita Vecchia, and Marseilles; in this last city he comforted himself for the separation by hunting out further adornments for the home he was still busily striving to find in the capital.

At Marseilles lived a poet-friend of his named Mery, whom he had enlisted as a collaborator in his teeming dramatic schemes. Him he commissioned to bargain for certain articles of vertu which Lazard, the famous dealer in antiquities, quoted too dear—eight hundred francs for a mirror, and five hundred for a statuette. "Let Lazard see that you will give a thousand francs for the two things," he advised Mery; "but don't offer more than nine. Glance stoically at the articles when passing by, and joke the dealer. Then send acquaintances to offer a little less than you. After a fortnight's haggling, Lazard will let you have them one fine morning." For getting the better of these sly shopkeepers, Balzac had a good many devices up his sleeve.

Back in Passy, he was seized again by the same restlessness as in the spring, thwarting his efforts to settle down to his desk. The utmost he could accomplish was to wander about, note-book in hand, collecting material for later use. Happening in December to be near the Assize Courts, he went in to listen to the trial of Madame Colomes, a niece of Marshal Sebastiani, who was accused of forging bills. He was struck by her strong resemblance to the dead *Dilecta*, and also by her attachment, herself being forty-five years of age, to a young man of twenty. The latter, after wasting in riotous living the money she had procured him by her forgeries, fled and left her to bear the brunt of her shame. The most repugnant detail of this unfortunate woman's case Balzac utilized not long afterwards in his *Cousin Bette*.

Perhaps it was less his ennui than the curiosity for new sensations which caused him to accept Gautier's invitation to pass an evening with Baudelaire and one or two others, at the Hotel Pimodan, for the purpose of eating hashish. He experienced none of the extraordinary phenomena usually attributed to the consumption of this drug, his explanation being that the dose was too weak, or his brain too strong. However, he owned to having heard celestial voices and to having seen divine paintings while he descended Lauzun's staircase, in a promenade that seemed to have lasted twenty years. He does not appear to have repeated the intoxication. Yet, on receiving another unkind epistle from Eve, shortly afterwards, he mentioned the possibility of arming himself against his sea of troubles through the drug's lethal properties.

In anything that had to do with the function of the brain, he was as interested as if medicine had been his profession. A book of Dr. Moreau's on madness, which he read during these months of mental relaxation, drew from him an acknowledgment wherein he foreshadowed his intention of studying anatomy and myology. "I believe," he said, "we shall do no good until we have determined the action exercised by the physical organs of thought in the production of madness. The organs are the containing sheaths of some fluid or other as yet inappreciable. I hold this for proved. Well! there are a certain number of organs which are vitiated by their lack, by their constitution, others which are vitiated by an excess of afflux. People, who, like Cuvier and Voltaire, have exercised their organs early, have rendered them so powerful that no excess can affect them; whereas those who keep to certain portions of the ideal encephalos, which we represent as the laboratory of thought—the poets, who leave deduction and analysis inactive and exploit the heart and imagination exclusively—may become mad. In short, there would be a fine experiment to make. I have thought of it for twenty years. This would be to reconstitute the brain of an idiot, to demonstrate whether a thinking apparatus can be created by developing its rudiments. Only by building up a brain shall we know how one is demolished."

The beginning of the new year did not bring back his former zeal for labour. Much of his time he frittered away in adding to his collections. Here he picked up a portrait of Queen Marie Leczinska by a pupil of Coypel, there, a Flemish lustre for which he paid four hundred and fifty francs. Eve reproached him with his idleness, presumably because he was too frequently at the house of Madame de Girardin. To calm her he penned a few remarks anent that lady not exactly complimentary. "Madame de Girardin," he said, "who is charming among a few friends, is a less agreeable hostess when she holds a large reception. She belies her origin only by her talent; but, when she is outside her talent, she becomes once more her mother's daughter, that is to say 'bourgeoise' and 'Gay' thoroughbred." To the soiree which drew from him this jibe, he had been invited to meet Sheridan's granddaughter—an English bore, he styled her—who looked him up and down through an eye-glass as if he were an actor. His relations with Emile, Delphine's husband, continued to be marked by breezes. Before starting for Rome on the 17th of March, he sent him a few sharp lines complaining of the *Presse's* delay in printing the *Peasants*. As a matter of fact, the readers of the *Presse* were not pleased with the story; and the editor had been obliged to request the author to modify the unpublished part. Balzac complied,

but felt sore.

The earlier chapters of this novel appeared in 1844; the last ones did not come out until five years after the novelist's death. The plot of the book turns on the struggle waged by the peasants and petty bourgeois of Soulanges against a new but estimable landlord, General Montcornet, whose estate they are determined to have by hook or by crook in their own hands, not hesitating, at least some of them, to assassinate the honest agent who strives to protect his employer's property against their depredations. All these country folk Balzac has portrayed with effects depending on the painter's and sculptor's art as much nearly as on the writer's; and the inmates and visitors of the village-inn and coffee-house are individualized with an anatomical intensity fringing on the brutal. Like the *Village Cure* and the *Country Doctor*, the *Peasants* is a novel with a purpose and a warning. The author preaches against the dividing up of the land; and advocates agriculture on a large scale by a reversion to the old estates with their castles and forests. As adjuvants to these he pleads for the development of Catholicism, a wider influence of the clergy both in education and private life. His picture of peasant avarice has been repeated by later writers, Guy de Maupassant and Zola. True in many particulars, it is traced by a prejudiced mind, and cannot be accepted as thoroughly representative.

At Rome he found Madame Hanska, and stayed with her there till May. Instead of describing the Eternal City to his sister, he referred her to de Lamennais' accounts, himself being fully occupied with his companion and sight-seeing. He was duly received by the Pope, and obtained a small crown chaplet for his mother, together with His Holiness' blessing. Saint Peter's surpassed his expectations, and the choir's *Miserere* so delighted him that he went to hear it a second time in lieu of that of the Sixtine Chapel. The journey back through Genoa, the Grisons, and Bale was a pretext for continuing his bric-a-brac purchases, Holbein's *Saint Peter* being added to his treasures.

Reaching Paris at last, he now took up his pen with his old ardour. Fresh pledges for the future had been given him by Eve. These served to lure him onward; and behind him were the creditors who had lent him money for his trip, and were wanting some of it restored. At this period Madame Hanska's funds and his own were partly associated. Some of her capital and some of his own, probably the sum accruing from the sale of Les Jardies, at present definitive, had been invested in North Railway Shares. Besides, not a few of his paintings and antique pieces of furniture had been paid for with advances from her strong-box.

The two works that issued from his new effort of creation were *Cousin Bette* and *Cousin Pons*. These, with *Pierrette*, made up his series of the *Poor Relations*.

The *Old Musician*, as he originally called *Pons*, was meant to give us the case of a man overwhelmed with humiliations and insults, yet preserving his generosity and pardoning everybody and everything, avenging himself only through kindness. Composed, like *Cesar Birotteau*, very rapidly, it bears evidence of the author's haste. There is no proper love interest in the book, the lack being supplied by the friendship between Pons and the old German musician, Schmucke. A number of subordinate biographies are interwoven with the principal story—those of the banker Brunner, the Auvergnat Remonencq, the Cibots, who were Pons' porters and caterers, Doctor Poulain and Lawyer Fraisier. We have plots within plots, wheels within wheels, in this strange, pathetic life of the musician, whose collecting hobby and expert's skill in finding out rarities Balzac dwells on with all the greater detail as he was indulging at that time his own bent in this direction with peculiar zest and success. But the complexity and crowding are foils one is glad to have against the sordid treachery of the Cibot household, as, too, against the woes of Pons and Schmucke. Perhaps nowhere in his achievement has the novelist got deeper down to the rockbed of genuine humanity than in this work. *Cousin Pons* was published in 1847. *Cousin Bette* came a year earlier.

Besides the two novels just mentioned, Balzac finished, during this same period, the long series in which *Vautrin* is a chief, if not the chief, character; and also a book variously named the *Brothers of Consolation* and the *Reverse Side of Contemporary History*. In the *Vautrin* sequels he took up again the fortunes of Lucien de Rubempre, who, after returning in disgrace to his family, loses courage and is on the point of drowning himself when he meets with an Abbe Carlos Herrera; the latter changes the young man's suicidal intentions by promising to procure him wealth, rank, and honours. Herrera is no other than Vautrin, who, having escaped from prison, is at the head of a formidable association of convicts. Carefully hiding his identity from Lucien, he persuades him to accept monetary help; and gradually Lucien contrives to enter aristocratic society, becomes the favourite of the Duchess of Serizy, and will be received as the betrothed of the nobly born Clotilde de Grandlieu, provided he can show that he possesses sufficient landed property. It so happens that his mistress Esther, a Jewess of great beauty, who is as fond of him as Coralie was, kills herself on learning that she must give him up. And Esther being in reality an heiress whose father, Gobseck, has just died, Vautrin forges a will by which the fortune is bequeathed to Lucien. Unluckily for the ex-convict's plans, some police spies have been on the track of his proceedings, and an untimely arrest of him and his protege casts them into prison. These adventures are told in *Whither Bad Ways Lead* and two other volumes. A concluding book, entitled *Vautrin's Last Incarnation*, relates the outlaw's duel with justice in his confinement, the suicide of his disciple, and his own pardon at the price of entering into the Government's secret police. The later portions of this drawn-out piece of fiction are written in the melodramatic style, and the characterization is distinctly inferior. The author loses himself in the various imbroglios, and the actors degenerate into creatures of romance, lacking consistency.

The *Reverse Side of Contemporary History* has similar defects. It was commenced in the *Musee des Familles* in 1842, was continued in 1844, and was completed only in 1848 in the *Spectateur Republicain*. We meet at first with a certain Godefroi who reaches middle age without obtaining any permanent satisfaction out of his life, and who thinks of burying himself in some quiet quarter of Paris where he can dwell unknowing and unknown. An accident introduces him to a kind of lay community whose presiding spirit is a Madame de la Chanterie, and whose members are a priest and three old gentlemen. These people are devoting what remains to them of their existence to alleviating pain and distress. Godefroi is admitted into the association, and, during his novice expedition, has a curious experience which leads to the disclosure of Madame de la Chanterie's past. This is narrated in the second half of the book. We get the whole of that lady's tragic history, an unjust trial of which she was the victim, the Nemesis which punished the bad judge in his daughter's frightful malady and his poverty, and the heaping of coals of fire on his head by the woman who had suffered so direly through him. On arriving at the end of the story we cannot recognize it as the one we were made acquainted with at the outset. The tangle of episode and explanation—the latter confusing more than it explains—which intervenes in the middle, issues in a coarser thread that persists till the close. And yet the start was a fair one.

With *Cousin Bette*, we are back among the monstrosities. Bette is the poor relation who, unlike Pons, revenges herself for her humiliations and the insults bestowed on her. She aids in the pecuniary and moral ruin of the Hulot family, acts in cold blood, and attains her object before she dies. She is not the only perverted nature delineated. There is the Baron Hulot, whose odious licentiousness brings him to a veritable cretinism. There is Crevel, a grotesque, contemptible dupe; there are the Marneffes, sinks of corruption; and, with these, other minor characters—the vindictive Brazilian who wreaks his wrath on Madame Marneffe and on Crevel by his mysterious death-causing gift. The ideally virtuous Adeline Hulot also the novelist belittles, making her offer herself to Crevel to save her husband from the consequences of his degrading passions. Nearly all the book is harrowing, and even the atmosphere of the bohemian circles, where conversation is one sparkle of satire, is heavily tainted with vice.

George Sand protested against Madame Hulot's portrait as unnatural; and, herself being the contrary of prudish in sexual relations, the opinion cannot be called prejudiced. Balzac defended his treatment, while admitting there was force in what she said. Arguing with her on their respective methods, he replied: "You seek to paint man as he ought to be. I take him as he is. Believe me, we are both right. Both ways lead to the same goal. I am fond of exceptional beings. I am one myself. Moreover, I need them to give relief to my common characters; and I never sacrifice them without necessity. But these common characters interest me more than they interest you. I aggrandize them; I idealize them in an inverse direction, in their ugliness or their stupidity. I give to their deformity terrifying or grotesque proportions. You could not do this. You are wise not to look at people and things that would cause you nightmare. Idealize in that which is pretty and beautiful. This is woman's task."

In spite of sheriff's summonses and stormy discussions with those to whom he still had indebtedness, and in spite, too, of a tropical summer, the would-be bride-groom toiled cheerfully on through 1846. His Passy cottage was becoming, with the continually augmented collection, quite a museum, and Bertall, the artist-caricaturist, was in ecstasies over a china service estimated by its owner at some thousands of francs. His good humour rendered him his former conversational brilliancy, which had been somewhat damped during the past twelvemonth, and, at one of Delphine Gay's dinners, where he met Hugo and Lamartine, he replied to Jove's heavy artillery with a raking fire from his own quick-firing guns. Lamartine was enchanted. Balzac must go to the Chamber was his verdict. But Balzac, at present, was content to correspond with his Eve and to occupy himself with the restoration of the pictures she was helping him to buy. One of these, the *Chevalier of Malta*, he had acquired on Gringalet's recommendation when in Rome. It had been bistered over by the dealer with a view to hiding a scratch, and there was also the dirt of age upon it. Requisitioning a clever craftsman in picture-restoring, he submitted the treasure to him. "It's a masterpiece," pronounced the expert: "but what will it be worth when the dirt is off?" Three days later the restorer came back with his drugs and implements. And, first, he rubbed a corner with some cotton dipped in one of his mixtures, which frothed the painting white. Then for an hour he scrubbed the surface progressively until he had a lot of little cotton balls all black. Afterwards, he began again, for the dirt was in layers, and, at the conclusion of the scrubbing and brushing, the chevalier emerged as life-like and fresh as when painted by the pupil of Raphael—Albert Durer or another—three hundred years before. The scratch was easily repaired, and Balzac was beside himself with joy. Relating to Georges Mniszech this happy result, which enriched his gallery containing already more than half-a-dozen old masters of great value, he said: "When connoisseurs and dilletanti come to visit my collection I shall say to them, 'I owe this head to a young professor of entomology; he is a charming young man, full of wit and feeling, who, for the moment, is buried in bliss, science, and the steppes of the Ukraine. He is so versed in paintings that he is a boon to his friends. Oh! I assure you he out-experts all the experts of Paris put together. What is his name?—Gringalet!—No, really!—As truly as I am called Bilboquet.'"

The bliss referred to was Georges' approaching marriage with Eve's daughter Anna, which was celebrated very unostentatiously at Wiesbaden in October, owing to the recent death of the Count's father. Balzac went to the wedding, and stayed with the family for four days. He had already spent a short time with them in August, on the occasion of the old Count Mniszech's death, and, on his return journey, had been accompanied by Madame Hanska as far as

Strasburg, where she made him such a definite statement regarding their marriage as amounted to an official engagement. It was between the two visits that he commissioned Georges to buy Atala a Voltaire-armchair for her greater ease and comfort.

While at the wedding, he was able to tell Eve that he had at last come upon a house which was everything that could be desired for them two selves. It was the smaller remaining portion of the splendid mansion and grounds built for the famous financier, Beaujon, by the architect Girardin in the eighteenth century. The original property, situated near the Arc de Triomphe, was nicknamed by contemporaries Beaujon's Folly. At the owner's death, the mansion and grounds were sold, and subsequently the Rues Chateaubriand, Lord Byron, and Fortunee were cut through the place. The abode chosen by the novelist bordered on the Rue Fortunee. From its staircase there was an entrance into a private chapel, which the financier had had constructed in his old age for his soul's edification, and in which he was finally buried. The outside of the house in Balzac's time was modest in appearance. Alone, a cupola, seen above the containing walls, suggested memories of bygone glory. Inside, there were still very substantial pieces of luxury and artistic decoration that needed only touching up to be practically what they had been of yore. Balzac detailed all this to his betrothed, and his selection was approved. No sooner was he in Paris again than the bargain was settled, and orders were given for the necessary repairs and renovation to be executed.

The end of 1846 seemed to smile on these projects of a speedy installation in conformity with his desires. Though the North Railway Shares had declined considerably, he was earning a good deal of money. *Cousin Bette* yielded him thirteen thousand francs, and *Cousin Pons* was sold for nine—modest prices indeed; but the total, with other sources of revenue, gave him for the twelvemonth an income of about fifty thousand francs. In the Beaujon mansion the workmen soon accomplished prodigies, transforming its dilapidated rooms into ship-shape and elegance. Bilboquet issued special instructions for apartments to be fitted up for Gringalet and Zephirine —a bedchamber and small *salon*, both circular and sculptured, with paintings on the arches, worthy of the destined aristocratic occupants.

Urged on by the sight of these preparations, he threw himself with almost frenzy into fresh literary labour. Dr. Nacquart warned him against the consequences of such brain debauch, as he termed it, prophesying that harm would ensue. And the doctor was right. Balzac was soon to pay for his excesses. Just now there was much in the political firmament that caused the novelist anxiously to wish that his own fortunes and those of Eve were indissolubly united. "Make haste!" was his constant cry to her.

"I see," he said, "Italy and Germany ready to move. Peace hangs only by a thread—the life of Louis-Philippe, who is growing old; and, if war comes, Heaven knows what would happen to us. . . . For a young and ambitious sovereign who would not want, like Louis-Philippe, above all to die quietly in his bed, how favourable the moment would be to regain the left bank of the Rhine. The populations are harassed by petty, imbecile royalties. England is at loggerheads with Ireland, who seeks to ruin her or separate from her. All Italy is preparing to shake off the yoke of Austria. Germany desires her unity, or perhaps more liberty merely. Anyway, we are on the eve of great catastrophes. In France, it is our interest to wait, our cavalry and navy not being strong enough to enable us to triumph on land and sea; but, when these two are improved and our defence-works completed, France will be redoubtable. One must admit, that, by the manner Louis-Philippe is administering and governing, he is making her the first Power in the world. Just think! Nothing is factitious with us. Our army is a fine one; we have money; everything is strong and real at present. When the port of Algiers is terminated, we shall have a second Toulon in front of Gibraltar; we are advancing in the domination of the Mediterranean. Spain and Belgium are with us. This man has made progress. If he were ambitious and wished to chant the Marseillaise, he would demolish three empires to his advantage."

The foregoing outlook on the future neglected certain signs of the times equally necessary to be taken into account with others that were perceived. In politics especially, the humourist's detachment is essential to correct perspective, and of humour Balzac had but small share. As compensation, pleasantry was not wanting in this Duc de Bilboquet, peer of France and other places—as he subscribed himself to his dear Gringalet.

In February 1847, for the second time, Madame Hanska came to Paris incognito. The Beaujon house was nearly ready, and as mistress of it that was to be, her instructions were required for the garnishing. The happy Bilboquet conducted her to the Opera, the Italiens, the Conservatoire, and also to the Varietes where they saw Bouffe and Hyacinthe play in the laughable *Filleul de tout le Monde*. It was intended that she should stay till April, and that then he should take her back to Germany, leaving her there to pursue her journey to Wierzchownia, whither he was to proceed later. The novelist's so far published correspondence has large gaps in the year 1847, with an entire lack of letters to Eve—yet such exist—so that we do not learn whether the intermediate programme was executed. Until the third volume of the *Letters to the Stranger* is published, it will be impossible to fill in accurately the history of the months between February and October, in which, however, events of importance occurred. One of these was Balzac's burning all Madame Hanska's epistles to him. Why? Apparently on account of a quarrel. And the quarrel? Was it caused by her finding out that, in 1846, he had a liaison with a lady resulting in the birth of a six months' child, which did not survive? Monsieur de Lovenjoul, who is the authority for this last information, mentions that the harassment Balzac suffered from the affair was largely responsible for the rapid progress of the heart-disease that finally killed him.

During the month of April[*] he was occupied in removing his furniture from the Passy cottage to his new residence. Theophile Gautier, who paid him a visit there not long after the installation, gave a sketch of what he saw in an article that appeared in the *Artiste*. He says:

[*] On the house in Passy; the dates indicating the period of the novelist's residence there are incorrect. It is to be hoped that the error, which has been pointed out to the Curator, will be rectified.

"When one entered this dwelling, which, indeed, was not easy, since the occupant kept himself close there, a thousand tokens of luxury and comfort were noticeable which were but little in agreement with the poverty that he pleaded. One day, however, he received us, and we saw a dining-room wainscoted in old oak, with table, chimney-piece, sideboards, dressers, and chairs, all in wood so carved as to have caused envy to Cornejo Duque and Verbruggen, if they had been present; a drawing-room upholstered in buttercup damask, and with doors, cornices, skirting-board, and embrasures in ebony; a library arranged in bookcases inlaid with tortoise-shell and brass in Boule style; a bathroom in yellow and black marble, with stucco bass-reliefs; a dome boudoir, whose ancient paintings had been restored by Edmond Hedouin; a gallery lighted from above, which we recognized later in the collection of *Cousin Pons*. There were what-nots laden with all sorts of curiosities, Dresden and Sevres china, cornet-shaped vases of frosted celadon, and, on the carpeted staircase, large porcelain bowls, and a magnificent lantern suspended by a red silk cord. 'Why! you have emptied one of Aboulcasem's siloes,' we laughingly remarked to Balzac, as we gazed at all these splendours. 'We were quite right in asserting that you were a millionaire.' 'I am poorer than ever I was,' he replied, with a humble, sly air. 'Nothing of this is mine. I have furnished the house for a friend that I am expecting. I am only the keeper and porter.'"

Within three short years from this date, the charge fell on her—the friend. She became the porteress of the abode which the other had prepared with such lavish attention and expenditure, to serve him only as a pall.

In 1875, the widow and her son-in-law, Count Mniszech, resolved to modify the Hotel Beaujon and the adjoining buildings, with the intention of perpetuating the novelist's memory. The rotunda of the private chapel they planned to convert into a kind of circular atrium, with a fountain in the middle and a trellised gallery running round it, decorated with busts, statues, and other works of art. Changes likewise were to be effected in the courtyard, to which the pillars of the chapel nave had been removed; and a statue of the late owner was to be erected there, close to a tree, the seed of which had been planted on the occasion of his marriage. The facade of the house on the Rue Fortunee, now the Rue Balzac, was also to be embellished, and the central pavilion made to represent the novelist's apotheosis, with a monumental bass-relief and a niche. Only a small portion of these alterations was completed. On Madame de Balzac's death, in 1882, the property was bought by the Baroness Salomon de Rothschild; and, before the end of the century, it was demolished and the ground it covered was incorporated into the Baroness's own gardens. All that now marks the site is the small dome forming the corner of the Rue Balzac and the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honore.

Whatever menaces of rupture between the lovers may have darkened their horizon in the spring and summer of 1847 had vanished before the autumn. At the end of September, Balzac went by invitation to Wierzchownia, and remained its guest for over four months. The sight of Russia's huge oak forests, of which the Mniszech family possessed some twenty thousand acres, suggested to him another of the grandiose schemes for gaining a large fortune that he was for ever elaborating in his brain. His project was to establish an exportation to France of oak timber, either by sea or rail; which, with every expense figured out, might yield, so he calculated, a profit of a million two hundred thousand francs for a part area, and would still leave the estate well wooded after thinning out the trees. The thing was a gold-mine for him and his family if a banker could be induced to take it up. Alas! his brother-in-law was obliged to pour cold water on the project, proving to him that the expenses, contrary to what he had estimated, would far exceed the receipts. The weak point in the affair, however, was one that cheaper transport following on increased railway communication could remedy. Balzac's only mistake was in imagining that this could be provided immediately. The visitor to Wierzchownia was not wrong in thinking that Russia's natural productions must sooner or later be one of the chief supplies of the European market. A better knowledge of the country, acquired during his stay, enabled him to perceive that internal reorganization was needed before the country's immense wealth could be exploited to the same degree as was possible in a country like France. In the Forties, Russia presented curious contrasts—great magnificence, and yet entire want of the commonest conveniences. Madame Hanska's estate was the only one boasting of a Carcel lamp and a hospital. There were ten-foot mirrors, and no paper on the walls. Still, he had not to complain of his apartments in pink stucco, with fine carpets on the floor, and furniture that was comfortable. It astonished him to find that the whole of the Wierzchownia castle—as big as the Louvre—was heated by means of straw, which was burnt in stoves, the weekly consumption being as much as could be seen in the Saint-Laurent market at Paris. But, then, everything was huge. One of the Mniszech estates extended over a surface as large as the Seine and Marne Department, and was watered by no fewer than three rivers, the Dnieper being one of them. And the cholera was colossal also—a conscientious cholera, carrying off its forty to fifty victims a day in Kiew alone, and a total of nine thousand at Savataf. To reassure his relatives, Balzac added that this plague paid most of its calls at the houses of rich uncles, to which category he did not belong, and passed by people who had debts. *Ergo*, he was inoculated against its

attacks.

CHAPTER XIII

LAST YEARS: MARRIAGE AND DEATH

It is time something was said now about Balzac's last dramatic compositions. Since the Gaite fiasco, in 1843, no other theatre had been brought up to the point of producing a further piece from his pen, although several negotiations were opened respecting plays supposed to be well in hand. In 1844, there was his comedy *Prudhomme en Bonne Fortune*, which the Gymnase had some thoughts of staging. Poirson, the manager, whom the author met one day in an omnibus, was enchanted with the idea, and proposed help even on most advantageous terms. The rehearsals were fixed for March, and the first performance for May; but, for some reason that we do not learn, the execution of the project was abandoned. Probably it was the burden of unfinished novels and a lurking desire to go on with *Mercadet*, which was lying still in its unachieved state.

Twelve months later, *Mercadet* appears to have received the last touches, and to be awaiting only an opportunity for its representation. But Frederick Lemaitre, who was to assume the chief role, had previous engagements that monopolized him; so Balzac, meanwhile, turned again to a subject he had often toyed with, *Richard the Sponge-Heart*, the name recalling that of Richard the Lion-Heart, without there being the least analogy between the Norman king and the hero of the play. In each preceding attempt, the author had stopped short at the end of the first act, and, on recommencing, had produced a different version. The hero was a joiner, living in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, whose habitual drunkenness had procured him his nickname. Had it been developed, the piece would no doubt have been a popular drama, on the lines subsequently followed by Zola's *Assommoir*. There was talk of performing it at the Varietes in 1845; the year, however, slipped away, and it was not forthcoming. Dining with Gautier in December, at the house of Madame de Girardin, Balzac agreed with Theophile to go on with the drama in collaboration as soon as the theatres should have worked off some of their stock. Evidently, this was not done. However, Monsieur Henri Lecomte, in his *Life of Frederick Lemaitre*, affirms that Balzac did terminate *Richard the Sponge-Heart*, and that it was handed to Frederick to study. Then, some months afterwards, being in want of money, he asked the actor to take it to the publisher, Paulin, and obtain an advance of a thousand francs on it. If Paulin had it, he must either have mislaid or destroyed it, for, from this date, all traces of it were lost; and, to-day, a few fragments alone remain in Monsieur de Lovenjoul's collection.

In 1846, vague mention was made in the correspondence with Madame Hanska of a military farce called the *Trainards* or *Laggards*. However, nothing came of it. But in August 1847, after the publication of *Cousin Pons*, the novelist paid a visit to Monsieur Hostein, manager of the Theatre Historique, which had been inaugurated in the preceding February. On this stage, which was subsequently transformed into the Theatre Lyrique, and later demolished to make room for the Boulevard of the Prince Eugene, several pieces of Alexandre Dumas had just been played in succession; and Balzac said to himself that he would have a better chance of meeting with appreciative audiences in these new premises. Monsieur Hostein relates in his *Reminiscences* that the novelist, calling on him one day at his Bougival country-residence, went out and sat with him by the river-side, and there explained that he wished to write a great historic drama entitled *Peter and Catherine (of Russia)*. Asked for an outline of it, Balzac tapped his forehead and said: "It is all there. I have only to write. The first tableau can be rehearsed the day after to-morrow."

"We are," he continued, "in a Russian inn, with many people running in and out, since troops are passing through the place.

"One of the servants is a lively girl. Pay attention to her. She is not beautiful, but attractive! And the visitors notice her, and joke with her. She smiles at every one; but those who go too far in gesture or language soon discover they have made a mistake.

"All at once, a soldier enters, bolder than the rest. He gets the girl to sit down with him, and wants to clink glasses with her. On the innkeeper's objecting, he rises in a rage, thumps the table with his fist, and cries: 'Let no one oppose my will, or I will set fire to the inn.'

"The innkeeper orders the girl to obey, for the troops are everywhere, and the peasant is alarmed. Sitting down again, the soldier drinks with the girl, tells her she shall be happy with him, and promises her a finer home than she has.

"But while they are talking, a door opens at the back, and an officer appears. Those present rise with respect, except the girl and her companion. Approaching them, the officer lays his hand heavily on the soldier's arm, and says: 'Stand up, fellow. Go to the counter, and write your name and that of your regiment, and hold yourself at my orders.'

"The soldier stands up automatically, obeys, and, having presented the paper, retires.

"Then the officer sits down and flirts with the girl, who accepts his compliments.

"But now a stranger shows himself at the door. He is clad in a big cloak. At the sight of him, men and women fall on their knees, except the officer, who is too agreeably occupied to notice the new arrival. In a moment of enthusiasm, he says to the girl: 'You are divine. I will take you with me. You shall have a fine house, where it is warm.'

"Just then, the man in the cloak draws near. The officer recognizes him, turns pale, and bows down, uttering: 'Oh, pardon, sire!'

"'Stand up,' orders the master, meantime examining the servant, who, on her side, looks without trembling at the all-powerful Czar.

"'You may withdraw,' the latter tells the officer. 'I will keep this woman, and give her a palace.'

"Thus met for the first time Peter I and she who became Catherine of Russia."

Having given this prologue, Balzac went on to speak of the staging of his play, which he promised to arrange in accordance with what he knew of the country's scenery and customs, Russia being, from an artistic point of view, admirable to exhibit theatrically. Monsieur Hostein was quite gained over by the prospect of something so novel; and Balzac, paying him a second call, some few days later, pledged himself to start for Kiew and Moscow very shortly, and, from there, to go to Wierzchownia and finish his drama. The journey to Russia was made; and Balzac, in due course, returned, but he did not bring with him the denouement of *Peter and Catherine*.

Not that his mind was less preoccupied with the drama. On the contrary, Champfleury, who went to see him in the Rue Fortunee, soon after his arrival in Paris, found him more bent on writing for the stage than ever. One idea of his now was to create a *feerie*, or sort of pantomime, sparkling throughout with wit. Another was to form an association for dramatic authors of standing (himself naturally included), not to defend their interests, but to get them to work in common, and to keep thus the various Paris theatres provided with their work. It was a *trust* scheme before the era of trusts. If the thing were managed, they might renew the miracles of those indefatigable and marvellous Spanish playwrights—Calderon, who composed between twelve and fifteen hundred pieces, Lope de Vega, who composed more than two thousand. However, he feared that many of his colleagues might not care to fall in with his suggestions. "They are idlers, donkeys," he added. "There is only one worker among them, and that is Scribe. But what a piece of literature his *Memoirs of a Hussar Colonel* is!"

Another visitor to the Rue Fortunee in February 1848 was Monsieur Hostein, to whom the novelist had offered for the spring a piece that should replace *Peter and Catherine*. This time the manuscript was ready. It lay on the table, bearing on its first page the title, *Gertrude, a Bourgeois Tragedy*. The piece was a five-act one, in prose. A couple of days later, actors and actresses were assembled in Balzac's drawing-room. Madame Dorval pursed her lips at the words, *Gertrude, tragedy*. "Don't interrupt," cried the author, laughing. However, after the reading of the second act they had to interrupt. The play was overloaded with detail. A good deal of pruning was effected, together with a change in title, before the first performance on the 25th of May; and more excisions might have been made with advantage. Alterations less beneficial were those introduced into the cast, Madame Dorval being eliminated in favour of Madame Lacressonniere. This lady was a much poorer actress, but was a *persona grata* with Monsieur Hostein. Both public and critics accorded Balzac's new effort a very fair reception, notwithstanding the mediocrity of the acting and the peculiar circumstances under which it was produced, just as the Revolution storm was breaking out.

The *Maratre*, or *Stepmother*, as the piece was called when staged, presents the home of a Count de Grandchamp, who, after being a general under the First Empire, has turned manufacturer under the restoration. He has a grown-up daughter, Pauline, and a second wife named Gertrude, the latter still a young, handsome woman, with a ten-year-old son, the little Napoleon. Though they are outwardly on good terms, the stepmother and stepdaughter nevertheless hate each other. They are in love with the same man, Ferdinand, the manager of the general's works. On this hatred the entire interest of the play turns. Ferdinand really loves Pauline; but he has formerly been engaged to Gertrude, who jilted him to marry the general, and this fact somewhat embarrasses him in his wooing. Moreover, his father was an officer under the Revolution Government, and, if the general should learn that, it would ruin his chances of obtaining the old gentleman's consent. The plot arising out of these relations is, at first, cleverly dealt with by the author, who involves matters further by a second suitor for Pauline, to whom Gertrude tries to marry her, in order that she herself may regain Ferdinand's affection. In the second act, a word-duel is fought between the two women, during a whist-party, each seeking to surprise the opponent's true sentiments towards Ferdinand. This scene is exceedingly original; and, subsequently, a bold employment is made by the author of the *enfant terrible*—the young Napoleon—for the purpose of helping on the unravelling of the plot. The concluding portion of the piece and its sombre tragedy—the deaths of Pauline and Ferdinand—is heavier in dialogue and cumbrous in construction, with its officers of justice who supply a useless episode. One might sum up the *Stepmother* as a weak ending to a strong beginning. None the less it shows progress on *Vautrin* and *Pamela Giraud*.

A few days after the Revolution, Theodore Cogniard, manager of the Porte-Saint-Martin Theater, wrote to Balzac and proposed to reproduce *Vautrin*. Balzac, in replying, referred to

Lemaitre's *toupet*, and explained that, when disguising Vautrin as a Mexican general, he had in his mind General Murat. He told Cogniard he was willing to allow the revival, if care were taken against there being any caricature of the now disposed monarch. The manager agreed, but the performances did not come off, apparently on account of the disturbed state of the city. In 1850, an unauthorized revival was put on the stage of the Gaite, while Balzac was at Dresden. Being informed of it, the novelist protested in a letter to the *Journal des Debats*, and the piece was at once withdrawn.

The *Stepmother* was Balzac's last dramatic composition played during his lifetime. This was partly his own fault. In the short epoch of the Second Republic, when neither the Comedie Francaise nor the Odeon, the two national homes of the drama, were thriving, it was to the directors' interest to seek out men of talent; and he had overtures from both theatres. Mauzin of the Odeon even promised him, as he had promised Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo, a premium of six thousand francs and a percentage of receipts on any sum over a thousand francs. Balzac consented to write a tragedy entitled *Richard Sauvage*, and got as far as—a monologue. With Lockroy of the Theatre Francais also he made an arrangement for a comedy. There had been talk at first, both inside and outside the Francais, of a satirical piece called the *Petty Bourgeois*, but having nothing except the name in common with his unfinished novel similarly yclept. His motive for not proceeding with it he set forth to the journalist Hippolyte Rolle, in a letter published in his correspondence. "Is it on the morrow of a battle," he wrote, "when the bourgeoisie have so generously shed their blood on behalf of threatened civilization, and when they are in mourning, that one can drag them before the footlights?"

The manager, he said, had been pleased to accept in exchange another comedy which would be soon performed. This comedy was the resuscitated *Mercadet*, the title of which had been altered to the *Speculator* in 1847, and the *Jobber* in 1848. Under the last appellation, it was read by the Comedie Committee in August, and unanimously approved. However, between this date and December, Balzac had taken his departure to Wierzchownia, where he seemed likely to remain for a while; and, in his absence, the members of the Committee repented of their bargain. Another solemn sitting was held in December, and an amended resolution was passed, accepting the *Jobber* on condition that certain corrections were made in it. On being apprized of the proviso, Balzac immediately cancelled his treaty with Lockroy, and entered into negotiations with Hostein, who professed himself only too happy to place the Theatre Historique at the author's disposal. Alas! the same difficulties and worse cropped up here. Hostein wrote that his public was a boulevard one, much fonder of melodrama than comedy, and that, if the *Jobber* were to succeed, it must be completely modified. Naturally, Balzac refused. He had not withdrawn it from the first theatre in Paris, which demanded only trifling alterations, to permit it to be cut up by a theatre of less importance.

Content to wait till a more complaisant director should make overtures to him, he filled in his leisure at Wierzchownia by inventing the *King of Beggars*, which he announced to his friend Laurent Jan as an up-to-date play flattering the all-powerful plebs; and he likewise sketched a tragedy in which Madame Dorval was to have the chief role. This was in April, 1849, and, a few weeks later, Madame Dorval was dead. Only on the 23rd of August 1851, a year after his own death, did his executors meet with a director, Monsieur Montigny of the Gymnase, who undertook to stage *Mercadet the Jobber*. Less intransigent than Balzac, the executors allowed its five acts to be reduced to three, and a considerable amount of suppression and remodelling to be operated by a professional playwright, Adolphe Dennery. Performed with these concessions to theatrical requirements and popular taste, and with Geoffroy in the chief role, failing Lemaitre and Regnier, *Mercadet* pleased the public greatly, too greatly for some bull and bear habitues of the Bourse, who feared that their pockets might suffer. Owing to their complaints, the Minister for the Interior temporarily suspended the representations, basing his interdiction on the ground that expressions struck out by the Censor had been inserted again by the actors. Prudently, Monsieur Montigny ordered a few more excisions, and the prohibition was raised. Seventeen years elapsed before the Comedie Francaise at last placed *Mercadet* on its repertory and inaugurated the event by a special performance with Got as the *Jobber*.

The hero of the piece is a financier who has very little cash, but innumerable projects for gaining money. These involve methods which are not always straight-forward; yet, since he believes in the success of what he advocates, he is not absolutely unprincipled, though he does not mind to some extent gulling the gullible. His chief aim is to trick his creditors—themselves, as it happens, not worthy of much pity; and, himself kind-hearted, loving his wife and daughter, and not a libertine, he appeals to the sympathies of the reader or the audience. Most of the amusement of the play—and it is very amusing —is derived from the metamorphoses adopted by the *Jobber* in dealing with each sort of creditor. Moreover, the love-passages between Julie, the daughter, and a poor clerk who thinks her an heiress, are so managed as to strengthen the comic side of certain situations. The unexpected arrival of a rich uncle from America releases the *Jobber* ultimately from the tangle into which he has twisted himself. It is the least original part of the comedy; but was suggested, like the rest of the play, by Balzac's own circumstances. Was he not always expecting a windfall; and was not Eve a kind of rich—relative? To add one more detail concerning *Mercadet*, it was revived at the Comedie Francaise in 1879, and again in 1890, there being as many as 107 performances. Its indisputable qualities have caused some writers to conclude that, if Balzac had lived longer, he would have become as great a dramatist as he was a novelist. This is very doubtful. Notwithstanding its long incubation of nearly a decade, and the advantage it possessed in embodying so much personal experience, *Mercadet* was still weak in construction and was largely wanting in dramatic compression. And, at fifty

years of age, with failing powers, Balzac would have found the task increasingly hard to acquire an art for which, by his own confession, he had no born aptitude.

The temporary government which was set up, in consequence of the February Revolution of 1848, conceived the curious idea of summoning the members of the Men of Letters Society to a meeting in the Palais Mazarin, for the purpose of eliciting from them an expression of opinion on the situation of literature and the best way to protect it. Balzac, who had newly arrived from Wierzchownia, went to the meeting and was chosen chairman. But no sooner was the discussion opened than it degenerated into dispute and tumult; the place became a bear-garden, and, after vainly endeavouring to restore order, he took up his hat and left the room.

When the general elections were held, for the forming of a Constituent Assembly, he stood as a candidate, and published a long declaration of his opinions in the *Constitutionnel*, in which had appeared his *Poor Relations*. The candidature had no success; it could scarcely be expected to have any. His political style was not one to catch the popular vote; and his sympathies were too visibly autocratic to commend themselves at such a moment. What deceived him was that, at first, there appeared to be a chance for the establishment of a strong central power well disposed towards sage reforms of a social, administrative, and financial character, with men like Lamartine to elaborate them; and to a government of this kind he could have given his support. When he realized that the trend of events was towards a Republic of Utopian experiment which he regarded as doomed to failure and disaster, he quietly dropped out of the struggle, and, leaving Paris once more in September, retraced his steps to Wierzchownia.

The political disturbances of the previous six months had been prejudicial both to his invested capital and to his income accruing from work. It was difficult to sell fiction advantageously when people were more interested in facts; nor did he care much to continue his efforts under a *regime* that he looked upon as a usurpation. Until the speedy overthrow which he confidently reckoned upon, he said to himself that he would do better to occupy himself with the question of his marriage. The hope was at present a forlorn one, but it was worth risking. He started with the intention of coming back, like the Spartan, either on his shield or under it.

Short of available cash, as always, he borrowed five thousand francs from his publisher, Souverain, for the expenses of his journey and pocket-money, and placed his mother in charge of his Beaujon mansion, with procuration to buy the complement of his domestic articles.

The warm welcome he received on reaching Madame Hanska's residence made him so sanguine that he wrote to Froment-Meurice, his jeweller in Paris, asking that the cornaline cup might be sent him which had been on order for the past two years. The jeweller was evidently not anxious to oblige such a bad payer. This cup, the novelist said, was to be flanked by two figures, Faith and Hope, the former holding a scroll, with Neuchatel and the date 1833 on it, the latter, another scroll, with a kneeling Cupid—the whole resting on a ground covered with cacti and various thorny plants besides, in silver gilt.

The blasts of winter in a rigorous climate laid him by with bronchitis in November. He suffered at the same time great difficulty in breathing; and the doctors diagnosed certain symptoms of heart trouble that caused them to consider his case a grave one. This malady relegated all matrimonial projects for the moment into the background. Madame Hanska did not hide that she regretted having put so much of her money into the purchase and furnishing of a house that they hardly seemed likely to inhabit together. Adding up what it had cost them both, they estimated the total at three hundred and fifty thousand francs. Into these figures the price of pictures entered for a large amount. The most recent were Greuze's *Jeune Fille Effrayee*, from the last King of Poland's Gallery; two Canalettis, once the property of Pope Clement XIII; *James II of England's Wife*, by Netscher; the same king's portrait, by Lely, in addition to a Van Dyck, two Van Huysums, and three canvases by Rotari, a Venetian painter of the eighteenth century.

The winter was not propitious to Madame Hanska either. Two fires on her estate did enormous damage, and her money losses were important. Balzac, though tenacious of his plan, talked constantly of going back to his loneliness, yet stayed on still; and Eve, who either would not or could not screw up her courage, invented fresh reasons for procrastinating. One of these was the Emperor's refusal to sanction the marriage unless Madame Hanska's landed property were transferred to her daughter's husband. A scolding letter from the novelist's mother, accusing Honore of remissness towards his nieces and family, was by chance read to the Wierzchownia hostess, and this further complicated a situation already sufficiently involved. Balzac's bile was stirred. He relived his feelings in a long reply to Laure. It seemed after all he would return to Paris under his shield. "I had a marriage which made my fortune," he told her. "Everything is now upset for a bagatelle. Know that it is with marriages as with cream; a changed atmosphere, a bad odour, spoils them both. Bad marriages are easily arranged; good ones only with infinite precaution. . . . I can tell you, Laure," he continued, "it is something, when one wishes, to be able in Paris to open one's drawing-room and gather in it an *elite* of society who will find there a woman as polished and imposing as a queen, illustrious by her birth, allied to the greatest families, witty, educated, and beautiful. One has thus a fine means of domination. With a household thus established, people are compelled to reckon; and many persons of high position will envy it, especially since your dear brother will bring to it only glory and a clever conduct."

Here we have the secret of Balzac's persistence, and ample proof also of what has already been asserted, to wit, that his affection for the *Stranger* was a fancy born and bred rather in the

head than in the heart.

It was perhaps to take the edge off this quip quarrelsome that the following amusing lines were addressed in the next month to his nieces, giving them particulars about animal and vegetables foods in Russia. "The country," he said, "has no veal—I mean eatable veal, for cows produce calves here as well as elsewhere; but these calves are of Republican leanness. Beef, such as one gets in Paris, is a myth; one remembers it only in dreams. In reality, one has meat twenty years old, which is stringy and which serves to bulk out the packets of hemp intended for exportation. One consoles one's self with excellent tea and exquisite milk. As for the vegetables, they are execrable. Carrots are like turnips, and turnips are like nothing. On the other hand, there are gruels galore. You make them with millet, buckwheat, oats, barley; you can make them even with tree-bark. So, my nieces, take pity on this country, so rich in corn, but so poor in vegetables. Oh! how Valentine would laugh to see the apples, pears, and plums! She wouldn't give over at the end of a year. Good-bye, my dear girls, and accept the Republic patiently; for you have real beef, veal, and vegetables, and a kind uncle happy and fed on gruel."

Ill again with his heart in the April of 1849, Balzac had the good luck to be attended by a pupil of the famous Doctor Franck, the latter being the original of his *Country Doctor*. This disciple, and his son to a less extent, were men of a newer and more enlightened school; and the elder man, by bold experiments, reduced his patient's arterio-sclerosis to the point of what seemed to be convalescence. But the treatment was tedious and lasted on into the summer, so that the novelist was left weak and delicate at the end. In such a condition he was less than ever fit to carry on his wooing.

To give himself a countenance, he spoke again of departure, fixing the date for the month of October. Madame Hanska was apparently willing to let him go. She had played the hostess generously during nearly a twelvemonth to this invalid, and it seemed to her enough. Not that she intended to sever the engagement. She wished merely to wait and see how matters turned out. Meantime, he could watch over their common property, now augmented by the acquisition of an extra plot of land at the side, which could be resold later at a large profit. But a resumption of the old burden was more than Balzac could face. In September he was prostrated by what Dr. Knothe called an intermittent brain fever, which continued for more than a month. His constitution pulled him through, with the aid of good nursing; and then, realizing that her tergiversations had been partly responsible for the attack, Eve, at last, in conversations between them that followed his recovery, let him understand that she relented and was willing to accompany him back to Paris as his wife, if the Emperor would permit of such a transfer of the estate to Count Mniszech as might enable her to receive a share of its revenues.

The victory was won, yet at a heavy cost. For a man so worn down by illness Russia was not the place to recruit in. Its biting winds throughout the winter of 1849 and 1850 withered what little vitality Balzac had still remaining, and at Kiew, where he had gone with Madame Hanska on business, he was again laid up with fever.

All the different formalities required by Russian law having been finally complied with, the wedding was celebrated on the 14th of March, in the Church of Saint Barbara at Beriditchef, some few hours distant from Wierzchownia. At once the bridegroom despatched the news to his family and friends. His joy was such that he fancied he had never known happiness before. "I have had no flowery spring," said his letter to Madame Carraud. "But I shall have the most brilliant of summers, the mildest of autumns. . . . I am almost crazy with delight."

More than a month elapsed ere the newly married couple were able to set out on their journey to the French capital, and, even then, they had to travel along roads studded with quagmires into which their carriage frequently sank up to the axle. Sometimes fifteen or sixteen men and a crick were necessary to extricate them. Though on their honeymoon, they found the repetition of these incidents monotonous, and were so tired when they reached Dresden that they stayed there to recover themselves. From this town Balzac sent a few lines to his mother and sister mentioning the approximate date of their reaching home; and instructions were given that everything should be in order, flowers on the table, and a meal prepared. He did not want his mother to be at the house to receive them, deeming it more proper that his wife should call on her first, either at Laure's, or at Suresnes where she was living. They got into Paris on the 22nd or 23rd of May.

Monsieur de Lovenjoul relates that the two travellers drove up to the Beaujon mansion a little before midnight. Weary with the journey, they stepped out of the cab and rang the bell, rang more than once, for no one came to open the door. Through the windows they could see the lamps lighted and signs of their being expected. But where was the valet, Francois Munck, who had been left in charge by the novelist's mother? Apparently, he had deserted his post. Balzac kept on ringing, shouting at intervals, and thumping the gate. Still there was silence inside. The one or two people passing at this late hour stopped out of curiosity, and began in their turn to call and knock; while the cabman, tired of waiting, put down the luggage on the footpath.

Madame de Balzac grew impatient. It was cold standing in the night-air. Her husband, nonplussed and exceedingly annoyed, did not know what to say to the bystanders. One of the latter offered to fetch a locksmith, named Grimault, who lived in a street close by. The suggestion was gladly agreed to, since there seemed nothing else to be done. However, until such time as the locksmith should come, they continued battering at the gate and throwing tiny pebbles at the windows; and the master, thus shut out from his own dwelling, hallooed to the

invisible valet: "I am Monsieur de Balzac." It was useless. The door refused to open. Around Madame de Balzac, now seated on one of the trunks, other passers-by had gathered and listened to the novelist's excited comments on his predicament. The occurrence was certainly extraordinary.

At length, the locksmith was brought and the gate was forced. The whole party, hosts and impromptu guests, hurried through the narrow courtyard, entered the house without further hindrance, and were met by a strange spectacle. The valet had been seized with a sudden fit of madness and had smashed the crockery, scattered the food about, spilt a bottle of wine on the carpet, upset the furniture, and ruined the flowers. Having performed these exploits, he was wandering aimlessly to and fro with demented gestures, and in this state they discovered him. After securing and fastening him up in a small room, the visitors helped to place the luggage in the yard and then retired, with profuse thanks from the novelist, who being thoroughly unnerved by this untoward incident, was obliged to go straight to bed. The next day, Francois was taken to an asylum at his master's expense, as is proved by a receipt still existing in which Balzac is dubbed a Count. Perhaps the title was a piece of flattery on the doctor's part, or the novelist may have imagined that his marrying a Countess conferred on him letters of nobility.

Anyway, this assumed lordship was poor compensation for the immense disappointment of his marriage in every other respect. From the moment he and his wife took possession of their fine Beaujon residence, whatever bonds of friendship and tenderness had previously existed between them were irremediably snapped asunder. Peculiarities of character and temperament in each, which, as long as they were lovers, had been but slightly felt, now came into close contact, clashed, and were proved to be incompatible. Moreover, there were disagreeable revelations on either side. The husband learnt that his wife's available income was very much inferior to what he had supposed or been led to believe, and the wife learnt that her husband's debts, far from being paid, as he had asserted, subsisted and were more numerous and larger than he had ever in sober truth admitted. So, instead of coming to Paris to be the queen of a literary circle, the *Stranger* saw herself involved in liabilities that threatened to swallow up her own fortune, if she lent her succour.

Reproaches and disputes began in the week following their instalment. The disillusioned Eve withdrew to her own apartments in anger; and Balzac, whose bronchitis and congestion of the liver had grown worse, remained an invalid in his. They had intended spending only a fortnight or so in Paris, and then travelling south to the Pyrenees and Biarritz; but this programme was perforce abandoned. All through the month of June the patient was under medical treatment, able to go out only in a carriage, and, even so, in disobedience to the doctor's orders. One of these visits was to the door of the Comedie Francaise, where Arsene Houssaye, the Director, came to speak to him about *Mercadet*, and indulgently promised him, it should be staged soon, the *Resources of Quinola* also.

On the 20th of June, he wrote, through his wife, to Theophile Gautier, telling him that his bronchitis was better and that the doctor was proceeding to treat him for his heart-hypertrophy, which was now the chief obstacle to his recovery. At the end of the letter he signed his name, adding: "I can neither read nor write." They were the last words of his correspondence. From that date his heart-disease undermined him rapidly; and the few friends whom he received augured ill from what they remarked. Not that he lost hope himself. Although suffering acutely at intervals from difficulty in breathing, and from the oedema of his lower limbs, which slowly crept upwards, he spoke with the same confidence as always of his future creations that he meditated. His brain was the one organ unattacked. From Dr. Nacquart he inquired every day how soon he might get to work again.

The month of July and the first half of August passed thus, the dropsy gaining still on him in spite of all that Nacquart and other medical men could do to combat it. To every one but the patient himself, it was evident that he was dying. Houssaye, who came to see him on the 16th of August, found Dr. Nacquart in the room. He relates that Balzac, addressing the latter, said: "Doctor, I want you to tell me the truth. . . . I see I am worse than I believed. . . . I am growing weaker. In vain I force myself to eat. Everything disgusts me. How long do you think I can live?"—The doctor did not reply.—"Come, doctor," continued the sick man, "do you take me for a child? I can't die as if I were nobody. . . . A man like me owes a will and testament to the public."—"My dear patient, how much time do you require for what you have to do?" asked Nacquart.—"Six months," replied Balzac; and he gazed anxiously at his interlocutor.—"Six months, six months," repeated the doctor, shaking his head.—"Ah!" cried Balzac dolorously; "I see you don't allow me six months. . . . You will give me six weeks at least. . . . Six weeks with the fever, is an eternity. Hours are days; and then the nights are not lost."—The doctor shook his head again. Balzac raised himself, almost indignant.—"What, doctor! Am I, then, a dead man? Thank God! I still feel strength to fight. But I feel also courage to submit. I am ready for the sacrifice. If your science does not deceive you, don't deceive me. What can I hope for yet? . . . Six days? . . . I can in that time indicate in broad outlines what remains to be done. My friends will see to details. I shall be able to cast a glance at my fifty volumes, tearing out the bad pages, accentuating the best ones. Human will can do miracles. I can give immortal life to the world I have created. I will rest on the seventh day."—Since beginning to speak, Balzac had aged ten years, and finally his voice failed him.—"My dear patient," said the doctor, trying to smile, "who can answer for an hour in this life? There are persons now in good health who will die before you. But you have asked me for the truth; you spoke of your will and testament to the public."—"Well?"—"Well! this testament must be made to-day. Indeed, you have another

testament to make. You mustn't wait till to-morrow." —Balzac looked up.—"I have, then, no more than six hours," he exclaimed with dread.

The details of this narration given to the *Figaro* many years after the event[*] do not read much like history. A more probable account tells that Balzac, after one of his fits of gasping, asked Nacquart to say whether he would get better or not. The doctor hesitated, then answered: "You are courageous. I will not hide the truth from you. There is no hope." The sick man's face contracted and his fingers clutched the sheet. "How long have I to live?" he questioned after a pause. "You will hardly last the night," replied Nacquart. There was a fresh silence, broken only by the novelist's murmuring as if to himself: "If only I had Bianchon, he would save me." Bianchon, one of his fictitious personages, had become for the nonce a living reality. It was Balzac who had taken the place of his medical hero in the kingdom of shadows. Anxious to soften the effect of his sentence, Nacquart inquired if his patient had a message or recommendation to give. "No, I have none," was the answer. However, just before the doctor's departure, he asked for a pencil, and tried to trace a few lines, but was too week; and, letting the pencil drop from his fingers, he fell into a slumber.

[*] 20th of August 1883.

In his *Choses Vues*, Victor Hugo informs us that, on the afternoon of the 18th, his wife had been to the Hotel Beaujon and heard from the servants that the master of the house was dying. After dinner he went himself, and reached the Hotel about nine. Received at first in the drawing-room, lighted dimly by a candle placed on a richly carved oval table that stood in the centre of the room, he saw there an old woman, but not, as he asserts, the brother-in-law, Monsieur Surville. No member of Balzac's own family was present in the house that evening. Even the wife remained in her apartments. The old woman told Hugo that gangrene had set in, and that tapping now produced no effect on the dropsy. As the visitor ascended the splendid, red-carpeted staircase, cumbered with statues, vases, and paintings, he was incommoded by a pestilential odour that assailed his nostrils. Death had begun the decomposition of the sick man's body even before it was a corpse. At the door of the chamber Hugo caught the sound of hoarse, stertorous breathing. He entered, and saw on the mahogany bed an almost unrecognizable form bolstered up on a mass of cushions. Balzac's unshaven face was of blackish-violet hue; his grey hair had been cut short; his open eyes were glazed; the profile resembled that of the first Napoleon. It was useless to speak to him unconscious of any one's presence.

Hugo turned and hastened from the spot thinking sadly of his previous visit a month before, when, in the same room, the invalid had joked with him on his opinions, reproaching him for his demagogy. "How could you renounce, with such serenity, your title as a peer of France?" he had asked. He had spoken also of the Beaujon residence, the gallery over the little chapel in the corner of the street, the key that permitted access to the chapel from the staircase; and, when the poet left him, he had accompanied him to the head of the stairs, calling out to Madame de Balzac to show Hugo his pictures.

Death took him the same evening.[*] During the last hours of his life Giraud had sketched his portrait for a pastel;[+] and, on the morning of the 19th, a man named Marminia was sent to secure a mould of his features. This latter design had to be abandoned. An impression of the hands alone was obtainable. Decomposition had set in so rapidly that the face was distorted beyond recognition. A lead coffin was hastily brought to cover up the ghastly spectacle of nature in a hurry.

[*] De Lovenjoul says that Balzac died on the 17th, not the 18th. This discrepancy is most curious, the latter date figuring as the official one, as well as being given by Hugo and others.

[+] De Lovenjoul says that the sketch was made after death. But, if the mask was not possible, it is difficult to understand how a pencil likeness could have been drawn.

Two days later, on the 21st of August, the interment took place at Pere Lachaise cemetery. The procession started from the Church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule, to which the coffin had been transported beforehand. There was no pomp in either service or ceremony. A two-horse hearse and four bearers—Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Francis Wey, and Baroche, the Minister for the Interior made up the funeral accessories. But an immense concourse of people followed the body to the grave. The Institute, the University, the various learned societies were all represented by eminent men, and a certain number of foreigners, English, German, and Russian, were present also. Baroche attended rather from duty than appreciation. On the way to the cemetery, he hummed and hawed, and remarked to Hugo: "Monsieur Balzac was a somewhat distinguished man, I believe?" Scandalized, Hugo looked at the politician and answered shortly: "He was a genius, sir." It is said that Baroche revenged himself for the rebuff by whispering to an acquaintance near him: "This Monsieur Hugo is madder still than is supposed."

Over the coffin, as it was laid under the ground near the ashes of Charles Nodier and Casimir Delavigne, the author of *Les Miserables* and *Les Feuilles d'Automne* pronounced an oration which was a generous tribute to the talent of his great rival. On such an occasion there was no room for the reservations of criticism. It was the moment to apply the maxim, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. "The name of Balzac," he said, "will mingle with the luminous track projected by our epoch into the future. . . . Monsieur de Balzac was the first among the great, one of the highest among the best. All his volumes form but a single book, wherein our contemporary

civilization is seen to move with a certain terrible weirdness and reality—a marvellous book which the maker of it entitled a comedy and which he might have entitled a history. It assumes all forms and all styles; it goes beyond Tacitus and reaches Suetonius; it traverses Beaumarchais and attains even Rabelais; it is both observation and imagination, it lavishes the true, the intimate, the bourgeois, the trivial, the material, and, through every reality suddenly rent asunder, it allows the most sombre, tragic ideal to be seen. Unconsciously, and willy nilly, the author of this strange work belongs to the race of revolutionary writers. Balzac goes straight to the point. He grapples with modern society; and from everywhere he wrests something—here, illusion; there, hopes; a cry; a mask. He investigates vice, he dissects passion, he fathoms man—the soul, the heart, the entrails, the brain, the abyss each has within him. And by right of his free, vigorous nature—a privilege of the intellects of our time, who see the end of humanity better and understand Providence—Balzac smilingly and serenely issues from such studies, which produced melancholy in Moliere and misanthropy in Rousseau. The work he has bequeathed us is built with granite strength. Great men forge their own pedestal; the future charges itself with the statue. . . . His life was short but full, fuller of works than of days. Alas! this puissant, untired labourer, this philosopher, this thinker, this poet, this genius lived among us the life of all great men. To-day, he is at rest. He has entered simultaneously into glory and the tomb. Henceforth, he will shine above the clouds that surround us, among the stars of the fatherland."

To the credit of Balzac's widow it should be said that, although not legally obliged, she accepted her late husband's succession, heavy as it was with liabilities, the full extent of which was communicated to her only after the funeral. The novelist's mother, having renounced her claim on the capital lent by her at various times to her son, received an annuity of three thousand francs, which was punctually paid until the old lady's demise in 1854. Buisson the tailor, Dablin, Madame Delannoy, and the rest of the creditors, one after the other, were reimbursed the sums they had also advanced, the profits on unexhausted copyright aiding largely in the liberation of the estate. Before Eve's own death, every centime of debt was cleared off.

In the romance of Balzac's life it will be always arduous, if not infeasible, to estimate exactly Madame Hanska's role, unless, by some miracle, her own letters to the novelist could arise phoenix-like from their ashes. The liaison that she is said to have formed soon after her husband's death with Jean Gigoux, the artist, who painted her portrait in 1852, may be regarded either as a retaliation for Honore's infidelities, which she was undoubtedly cognizant of, or else as the rebound of a sensual nature after the years spent in the too idealistic realm of sentiment. And, whichever of these explanations is correct, the irony of the conclusion is the same.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMEDIE HUMAINE

The idea of joining his separate books together and forming them into a coherent whole was one that matured slowly in Balzac's mind. Its genesis is to be found in his first collection of short novels published in 1830 under the titles: *Scenes of Private Life*, and containing *The Vendetta*, *Gobseck*, *The Sceaux Ball*, *The House of the Tennis-playing Cat*, *A Double Family*, and *Peace in the Household*. Between these stories there was no real connexion except that certain characters in one casually reappeared or were alluded to in another. By 1832, the *Scenes of Private Life* had been augmented, and, in a second edition, filled four volumes. The additions comprised *The Message*, *The Bourse*, *The Adieu*, *The Cure of Tours*, and several chapters of *The Woman of Thirty Years Old*, some of which had previously come out as serials in the *Revue de Paris* or the *Mode*.

It has already been related how the novelist all at once realized what a gain his literary production might have in adopting a plan and building up a social history of his epoch. And, in fact, this conception did stimulate his activity for some time, serving too, as long as it was uncrystallized, to concentrate his visions upon objective realities.

Needing, between 1834 and 1837, a more comprehensive title for the rapidly increasing list of his works, he called them *Studies of Manners and Morals in the Nineteenth Century*, subdividing them into *Scenes of Private Life*, *Scenes of Parisian Life*, and *Scenes of Provincial Life*. However, some things he had written were classible conveniently neither under the specific names nor under the generic one. These outsiders he called *Tales and Philosophic Novels*, subsequently shortening the title, between 1835 and 1840, to *Philosophic Studies*. The question was what wider description could be chosen which might embrace also this last category. Writing to Madame Hanska in 1837, he used the expression *Social Studies*, telling her that there would be nearly fifty volumes of them. Either she, or he himself, must, on reflection, have judged the title unsatisfactory, for no edition of his works ever bore this name. Most likely the thought occurred to him that such an appellation was more suitable to a strictly scientific treatise than to fiction.

The expression *Comedie Humaine*, which he ultimately adopted, is said to have been suggested to him by his whilom secretary, the Count Auguste de Belloy, after the latter's visit to Italy, during which Dante's *Divine Comedy* had been read and appreciated. But already, some years prior to this journey, the novelist would seem to have had the Italian poet's masterpiece before his mind. In his *Girl with the Golden Eyes*, he had spoken of Paris as a hell which, perhaps, one day would have its Dante. De Belloy's share in the matter was probably an extra persuasion added to Balzac's own leaning, or the Count may have been the one to substitute the word *human*.[*]

[*] A communication has been made to me, while writing this book, by Monsieur Hetzel, the publisher, tending to show that his father, who was also known in the literary world, had a large share in the choice of the *Comedie Humaine* as a title.

Madame Hanska was at once informed of the choice. "The *Comedie Humaine*, such is the title of my history of society depicted in action," he told her in September 1841. And when, between 1841 and 1842, Hetzel, together with Dubochet and Turne, brought out sixteen octavo volumes of his works illustrated, they each carried his name, while a preface set forth the reasons which had led the author to choose it. Thereafter, every succeeding edition was similarly styled, including Houssiaux' series in 1855, and the series of Calmann-Levy, known as the definitive one, between 1869 and 1876.

Against the appellation itself no objection can reasonably be made. Balzac's fiction takes in a world—an underworld might appropriately be said—of Dantesque proportions. As soon as it was fully fledged, it started with a large ambition. "My work," he said to Zulma Carraud in 1834, "is to represent all social effects without anything being omitted from it, whether situation of life, physiognomy, character of man or woman, manner of living, profession, zone of social existence, region of French idiosyncrasy, childhood, maturity, old age, politics, jurisdiction, war." And in the Forties the same intention was stated as clearly. "I have undertaken the history of the whole of society. Often have I summed up my plan in this simple sentence: A generation is a drama in which four or five thousand people are the chief actors. This drama is my book."

When Hetzel decided to publish a so-far complete edition of the *Comedie*, he induced the novelist to insert a preface composed for the occasion. Balzac wished at first to use an old preface that he had written in conjunction with Felix Davin, and placed, under the latter's signature, at the beginning of the *Study of Manners and Morals in the Nineteenth Century*. Hetzel objected to this, and urged that so important an undertaking ought to be preceded by an author's apology. His advice was accepted, and the preface was developed into a veritable doctrine and defence. Here are some of its essential passages:—

"The *Comedie Humaine*," says Balzac, "first dawned on my brain like a dream—one of those impossible projects, it seemed, that are caressed and allowed to fly away; a chimera which smiles, shows its woman's face, and forthwith unfolds its wings, mounting again into a fancied heaven. But the chimera, as many chimeras do, changed into reality. It had its commands and its tyranny to which I was obliged to yield.

"It was born from a comparison between humanity and animality. It would be an error to believe that the great quarrel which in recent times has arisen between Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire is concerned with a scientific innovation. The *unity of composition* involved in it had already, under other terms, occupied the greatest minds of the two preceding centuries. On reading over again the extraordinary works of such mystic writers as Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, etc., who have studied the relations of science with the infinite, and the writings of the finest geniuses in natural history, such as Leibnitz, Buffon, Charles Bonnet, etc., one finds in the monads of Leibnitz, in the organic molecules of Buffon, in the vegetative force of Needham, in the *jointing* of similar parts of Charles Bonnet—who was bold enough to write in 1760: 'The animal vegetates like the plant;' one finds, I say, the rudiments of the beautiful law of *self for self* on which the unity of composition reposes. There is only one animal. The Creator has made use only of one and the same pattern for all organized beings. The animal is a principle which acquires its exterior form, or, to speak more exactly, the differences of its form, in the surroundings in which it is called upon to develop. The various zoologic species result from these differences. The proclamation and upholding of this system, in harmony, moreover, with the ideas we have of the Divine power, will be the eternal honour of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who was the vanquisher of Cuvier on this point of high science, and whose triumph was acknowledged in the last article written by the great Goethe."

Continuing his exposition, the novelist says all men resemble each other, but in the same manner as a horse resembles a bird. They are also divided into species. These species differ according to social surroundings. A peasant, a tradesman, an artist, a great lord are as distinct from each other as a wolf is from a sheep. Besides, there is another thing peculiar to man, viz. that male and female are not alike, whereas among the rest of the animals, the female is similar to the male. The wife of a shopkeeper is sometimes worthy to be the spouse of a prince, and often a prince's wife is not worth an artist's. Then, again, there is this difference. The lower animals are strictly dependent on circumstances, each species feeding and housing itself in a uniform manner. Man has not such uniformity. In Paris, he is not the same as in a provincial town; in the provinces, not the same as in rural surroundings. When studying him, there are many things to be considered—habitat, furniture, food, clothes, language. In fine, the subject taken up by a novelist who wishes to treat it properly, comprises man as an integral portion of a social species, woman as not peculiarly belonging to any, and *entourage* from its widest

circumference of country down to the narrowest one of home.

"But," he goes on, "how is it possible to render the drama of life interesting, with the three or four thousand varying characters presented by a society? How please at the same time the philosopher, and the masses who demand poetry and philosophy under striking images? If I conceived the importance and poetry of this history of the human heart, I saw no means of execution; for, down to our epoch, the most celebrated narrators had spent their talent in creating one or two typical characters, in depicting one phase of life. With this thought, I read the works of Walter Scott. Walter Scott, the modern *trouvere*, was then giving a gigantic vogue to a kind of composition unjustly called secondary. Is it not really harder to compete with the registry of births, marriages, and deaths by means of Daphnis and Chloe, Roland, Amadis, Panurge, Don Quixote, Manon Lescaut, Clarissa, Lovelace, Robinson Crusoe, Ossian, Julie d'Etanges, My Uncle Toby, Werther, Rene, Corinne, Adolphe, Gil Blas, Paul and Virginia, Jeanie Deans, Claverhouse, Ivanhoe, Manfred, Mignon, than to arrange facts almost similar among all nations, to seek for the spirit of laws fallen into decay, to draw up theories which lead people astray, or, as certain metaphysicians, to explain what exists? First of all, nearly all these characters, whose existence becomes longer, more genuine than that of the generations amid which they are made to be born, live only on condition of being a vast image of the present. Conceived in the womb of the century, the whole human heart moves beneath their outward covering; it often conceals a whole philosophy. Walter Scott, therefore, raised to the philosophic value of history the novel—that literature which from century to century adorns with immortal diamonds the poetic crown of the countries where letters are cultivated. He put into it the spirit of ancient times; he blended in it at once drama, dialogue, portraiture, landscape, description; he brought into it the marvellous and the true, those elements of the epopee; he made poetry mingle in it with the humblest sorts of language. But having less invented a system than found out his manner in the ardour of work, or by the logic of this work, he had not thought of linking his compositions to each other so as to co-ordinate a complete history, each chapter of which would have been a novel and each novel an epoch. Perceiving this want of connection, which, indeed does not render the Scotchman less great, I saw both the system that was favourable to the execution of my work, and the possibility of carrying it out. Although, so to speak, dazzled by the surprising fecundity of Walter Scott, always equal to himself and always original, I did not despair, for I found the reason of such talent in the variety of human nature. *Chance is the greatest novelist in the world.* To be fertile, one has only to study it. French society was to be the historian. I was to be only the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of virtues and vices, by assembling the principal facts of passions, by painting characters, by choosing the principal events of society, by composing types through the union of several homogeneous characters, perhaps I should succeed in writing the history forgotten by so many historians, that of *manners and morals*. With much patience and courage, I should realize, with regard to France in the nineteenth century, the book we all regret which Rome, Athens, Tyre, Memphis, Persia, India have not unfortunately left about their civilizations, and which like the Abbe Barthelemy, the courageous and patient Monteil had essayed for the Middle Ages, but in a form not very attractive."

One may well believe the novelist when he explains that "it was no small task to depict the two or three thousand prominent figures of an epoch," representing typical phases in all existences, which, says he, "is one of the accuracies I have most sought for. I have tried to give a notion also of the different parts of our beautiful land. My work has its geography, as it has its genealogy and its families, its places and things, its persons and its facts, as it has its blazonry, its nobles and its commoners, its artisans and its peasants, its politicians and its dandies, its army, in fine, its epitome of life —all this in its settings and galleries."

The Human Comedy, as finally arranged and classified in 1845, had three chief divisions: *Studies of Manners and Morals*, *Philosophic Studies*, *Analytic Studies*; and the first of these was subdivided into *Scenes of Private Life*, *Scenes of Provincial Life*, *Scenes of Parisian Life*, *Scenes of Military Life*, *Scenes of Political Life*, *Scenes of Country Life*.

Even if we include the unwritten books, the diminution from first to second and from second to third is considerable. In the novelist's mind, this difference was intentional. According to his conception, the first large series represented the broad base of effects, upon which was superposed the second plane of causes, less numerous and more concentrated. In the latter, he strove to answer the why and wherefore of sentiments; in the former, to exhibit their action in varying modes. In the former, therefore, he represented individuals; in the latter, his individuals became types. All this he detailed to Madame Hanska, insisting on the statement that everywhere he gave life to the type by individualizing it, and significance to the individuals by rendering them typical. At the top of the cone he treated, in his analytical studies, of the principles whence causes and effects proceed. The manners and morals at the base, he said, were the spectacle; the causes above were the side-scenes; and the principles at the top were the author.

Coming to the subdivisions, he explains that his *Scenes of Private Life* deal with humanity's childhood and adolescence, and the errors of these, in short, with the period of budding passions; the *Scenes of Provincial Life*, with passions in full development—calculation, interest, ambition, etc.; the *Scenes of Parisian Life*, with the peculiar tastes, vices and temptations of capitals, that is to say, with passion unbridled. The interpretation assigned to these categories is a fanciful one. Passions are born and bred and produce their full effect in every place and phase of life. They may assume varying forms in divers surroundings, but such variation has no

analogy with change of age. Only by forcing the moral of his stories was the author able to give them these secondary significations. Indeed, he was often in straits to decide in which category he ought to class one and another novel. *Pere Goriot* was originally in the *Scenes of Parisian Life*, where it has a certain *raison d'etre*. Ultimately, it found its way into the *Scenes of Private Life*. And a greater alteration was made by removing *Madame Firmiani* and the *Woman-Study* from the *Philosophic Studies*, and placing them also in the *Private Life* series.

Be it granted that the plan of the *Comedy* was grandiose in its scope; it was none the less doomed in its execution to suffer for its ambitiousness, since an attempt was made to subordinate imagination to science in a domain where the rights of imagination were paramount.

That which Balzac has best rendered in it is the struggle for life on the social plane; and that which forms its most legitimate claim to be deemed in some measure a whole is the general reference to this in all the so-called parts. Before the Revolution, the action of the law was narrower, being chiefly limited to members of one class. With the fall of ancient privilege the sphere of competition was opened to the entire nation; and, instead of nobles contending with nobles, churchmen with churchmen, tradesmen with tradesmen, there was an interpenetration of combatants over all the field of battle, or rather, the several smaller fields of battle became one large one. Balzac's fiction reproduces the later phase in minute detail, and, mostly, with a treatment suited to the subject.

Brunetiere, whose chapter on the *Comedy* is written more gropingly than the rest of his study of the novelist, makes use of an ingenious comparison with intent to persuade that the stories had from the very first a predestined organic union, with ramifications which the author saw but obscurely and which were joined together more closely—as also more consciously—during the lapse of years. "Thus," he says, "brothers and sisters, in the time of their infancy or childhood, have nothing in common except a certain family resemblance—and this not always. But, as they advance in age, the features that individualized them become attenuated, they return to the type of their progenitors, and one perceives that they are children of the same father and mother. Balzac's novels," he concludes, "have a connection of this kind. In his head, they were, so to speak, contemporary."

The simile is not a happy one. It does not help to reconcile us to an artificial approximation of books that are heterogeneous, unequal in value, and, frequently, composed under influences far removed from the after-thought that was given to them by a putative father. Balzac was not well inspired in relating his novels to each other logically. Such natural relationship as they possess is that of issuing from the same brain, though acting under varying conditions and in different states of development; and it is true that, if the story of this brain is known, and its experiences understood, a certain classification might be made—perhaps more than one—of its creations, on account of common traits, resemblances of subject or treatment, which could serve to link them together loosely. But, between this arrangement and the artificial hierarchy of the *Comedy*, it is impossible to find a bridge to pass over.

One of the real links betwixt the novels is the reappearance of the same people in many of them, which thing is not in itself displeasing. It has the advantage of allowing the author to display his men and women in changed circumstances, to cast side-lights upon them, and to reveal them more completely. However, here and there, we pay for the privilege in meeting with bores whose further acquaintance we would fain have been spared. And then, also, we are likely enough to come across a hero or heroine as a child, after learning all about his or her maturer life; to accompany people to the grave and see them buried, and yet, in a later book, to be introduced to them as alive as ever they were. This is disconcerting. Usually, Balzac remembers his characters well enough to be consistent in other respects when he makes them speak and act, or lets us into his confidence about them. Still, he is guilty of a few lapses of memory. In *The Woman of Thirty Years Old*, Madame d'Aiglemont has two children in the early chapters; subsequently, one is drowned, and, instead of one remaining, we learn there are three —a new reading of Wordsworth's *We are seven*. Again, in the *Lost Illusions*, Esther Gobseck has blond hair in one description of her, and black in another. We are reduced to supposing she had dyed it. Mistakes of the kind have been made by others writers of fiction who have worked quickly. In the *Comedy*, the number of *dramatis personae* is exceedingly large. Balzac laughingly remarked one day that they needed a biographical dictionary to render their identity clear; and he added that perhaps somebody would be tempted to do the work at a later date. He guessed rightly. In 1893, Messrs. Cerfbeer and Cristophe undertook the task and carried it through in a book that they call the *Repertory of the Comedie Humaine*.[*] All the fictitious personages or petty folk that live in the novelist's pages are duly docketed, and their births, marriages, deaths, and stage appearances recorded in this *Who's Who*, a big volume of five hundred and sixty-three pages, constituting a veritable curiosity of literature.

[*] This work has been made available at Project Gutenberg by Team Balzac. It is in two volumes.—Preparer's Note.

Much has been said in the preceding chapters of the large use Balzac made of his own life, his adventures, his experiences, in composing the integral portions of his *Comedy*, so that its contents, for any one who can interpret, becomes a valuable autobiography. And the lesser as well as the greater novels supply facts. In the *Forsaken Woman*, Madame de Beauseant, who has been jilted by the Marquis of Ajuda-Pinto, permits herself to be wooed by Gaston de Nueil, a man far younger than herself. After ten years, he, in turn, quits her to marry the person his

mother has chosen for him; but, unable to bear the combined burden of his remorse and yearning regret, he commits suicide. This tale, like the *Lily in the Valley*, is a adaptation of Balzac's liaison with Madame de Berny. It was written in the very year he severed the material ties that bound them. The only distinction between his case and that of Gaston de Nueil was that he had no desire to kill himself, and was content to be no more than a friend, since he was the freer to flirt with Madame de Castries. And when the latter lady kept him on tenter-hooks, tormenting him, tempting him, but never yielding to him, he revenged himself by writing the *Duchess de Langeais*, attributing to the foolish old general his own hopes, fears, and disappointments at the hands of the coquettish, capricious duchess. "I alone," he said in a letter, "know the horrible that is in this narrative." And, if, in *Albert Savarus*, we have a confession of his political ambitions and campaigns, we get in *Cesar Birotteau* and the *Petty Bourgeois* his financial projects, which never brought him anything; in *A Man of Business*—as well as elsewhere—his continual money embarrassments. How deeply he felt them, he often lets us gather from his fiction. "I have been to a capitalist," he wrote in one of his epistles to Madame Hanska, "a capitalist to whom are due indemnities agreed on between us for works promised and not executed; and I offered him a certain number of copies of the *Studies of Manners and Morals*. I proposed five thousand francs with deferred payment, instead of three thousand francs cash. He refused everything, even my signature and a bill, telling me my fortune was in my talent and that I might die any time. This scene is one of the most infamous I have known. Some day I will reproduce it."

And he did, with many things else that happened to him in his dealings with his fellows. There is biography too, as well as autobiography in the *Comedy*—this notwithstanding his disclaimers. Exact portraiture he avoided for obvious reasons, but intentional portraiture he indulged in largely; and life and character were sufficiently near the truth for shrewd contemporaries to recognize the originals. To add one or two examples to the number already given. Claire Brunne (Madame Marbouty) seems to have suggested his *Muse of the County*, a Berrichon blue-stocking; Madame d'Agoult and Liszt became Madame de Rochfide and the musician Conti in *Beatrix*; a cousin of Madame Hanska, Thaddeus Wylezinski, who worshipped her discreetly, is depicted under the traits of Thaddeus Paz, a Polish exile in the *False Mistress*, who assumes a feigned name to conceal his love; Lamartine furnished the conception of the poet Canalis in *Modeste Mignon*, the resemblance being at first so striking that the novelist afterwards toned it away a little; and Monnier, the caricaturist, certainly supplied the essential elements in Bixiou, who is so well drawn in *Cousin Bette* and the *Firm of Nucingen*. The Baron Nucingen himself has some of the features of the James de Rothschild whom Balzac knew; and Rastignac embodied the author's impression of Thiers in the statesman's earlier years. One might go further and couple Delacroix the painter's name with that of Joseph Bridau in *A Bachelor's Household*, Frederick Lemaitre, the actor's, with Medal's in *Cousin Pons*, Emile de Girardin's with du Tillet's in *Cesar Birotteau*. At last, however, owing to the mingling of one personality with another, identification is increasingly difficult, unless the novelist comes to our assistance, as in the story *Cousin Bette*, where he confesses Lisbeth the old maid, to be made up out of three persons, Madame Valmore, Madame Hanska's aunt, and his own mother.

Summing up Balzac's entire literary production, which in Monsieur de Lovenjoul's catalogue occupies no fewer than fourteen pages, we find that it comprises, besides the ninety-six different works of the *Comedie Humaine* properly so called, ten volumes of his early novels; six complete dramatic pieces—one, the *School for Husbands and Wives* recently published;[*] thirty *Contes Drolatiques*; and three hundred and fourteen articles and opuscles, some of them fairly long, since the *Reminiscences of a Pariah* has a hundred and eighty-four pages octavo, the *Theory of Walking* fifty, the *Code of Honest People* a hundred and twelve, the *Impartial History of the Jesuits* eighty; these exclusive of the *Revue Parisienne* with its two hundred and twenty pages, which, as we have seen, was written entirely by himself. When we remember that the whole of this, with the exception of the early novels and six of the opuscles, was produced in twenty years, we can better appreciate the man's industry, which, as Monsieur Le Breton calculates, yielded an average of some two thousand pages, or four to five volumes a year.

[*] Played for the first time March 13, 1910, at the Odeon Theatre.

In the miscellanies one meets with much that is curious, amusing, and instructive, quite worthy to figure in the *Comedy*—witty dialogues, light stories containing deductions *a la* Sherlock Holmes or Edgar Allan Poe, plenty of satire, sometimes acidulated as in his *Troubles and Trials of an English Cat*, and theories about everything, indicative of extensive reading, large assimilation and quick reasoning. The miscellanies really stand to the novels in the relation of a sort of prolegomenon. They serve for its better understanding, and are agreeable even for independent study.

CHAPTER XV

VALUE OF THE WORK

The aim of an author whose writings are intended to please must be ethical as well as

aesthetic, if he respects himself and his readers. He wishes the pleasure he can give to do good, not harm. The good he feels capable of producing may be limited to the physical or may extend beyond to the moral; but it will be found in his work in so far as the latter is truly artistic.

Balzac's prefaces and correspondence are so many proofs that he rejected the pretensions of literature or any other art to absolute independence. The doctrine of art for art's sake alone would have had no meaning to him. However much his striving to confer on his novels organic unity, and however much the writing against time deteriorated his practice, they did not prevent him from recognizing the ethical claim. What he realized less was the necessity of submitting treatment to the same government of law.

Even if we grant that the plan of the *Comedie Humaine* existed in the novelist's mind from the commencement, obscurely at first, more clearly afterwards, the plan itself was not artistic in the sense that an image in the architect's mind is artistic when he designs on paper the edifice he purposes to construct, or in the painter's mind when he chooses the subject and details of his picture, or in the sculptor's mind when he arranges his group of statuary, or in the musician's mind when he conjures up his opera or oratorio. Balzac's plan was one of numbers or logic merely. The block of his *Comedy* was composed on the dictionary principle of leaving nothing out which could be put in; and his genius, great as it was, wrestled achingly and in vain with a task from which selection was practically banished and which was a piling of Pelion on Ossa.

For this reason it is that, regarded as an aggregate, the *Comedie Humaine* can be admired only as one may admire a forceful mass of things, when it is looked at from afar, through an atmosphere that softens outlines, hides or transforms detail, adds irreality. In such an ambience certain novels that by themselves would shock, gain a sort of appropriateness, and others that are trivial or dull serve as foils. But, at the same time, we know that the effect is partly illusion.

In a writer's entire production the constant factor is usually his style, while subject and treatment vary. Balzac, however, is an exception in this respect as in most others. He attains terse vigour in not a few of his books, but in not a few also he disfigures page after page with loose, sprawling ruggedness, not to say pretentious obscurity. His opinion of himself as a stylist was high, higher no doubt than that he held of George Sand, to whom he accorded eminence mainly on this ground. Of the French language he said that he had enriched it by his alms. Finding it poor but proud, he had made it a millionaire. And the assertion was put forward with the same seriousness that he displayed when declaring that there were three men only of his time who really knew their mother-tongue—Victor Hugo, Theophile Gautier, and himself. That his conversancy with French extended from Froissart downwards, through Rabelais' succulent jargon as well as Moliere's racy idiom, is patent in nearly all he wrote; and that he was capable of using this vocabulary aptly is sufficiently shown in the best and simplest of his works. But it is not so clear that he added anything to the original stock. Such words as he coined under the impetus of his exuberance are mostly found in his letters and have not been taken into favour.

A demur must likewise be entered against his style's possessing the qualities that constitute a charm apart from the matter expressed. Too many tendencies wrought in him uncurbed for his ideas to clothe themselves constantly in a suitable and harmonious dress. Generally when his personality intruded itself in the narrative, it was quite impossible for him to speak unless affectedly, with a mixture of odd figures of speech and similes that hurtled in phrases of heavy construction. Taine has collected a few of these. In the *Cure of Tours* we read:—

"No creature of the feminine gender was more capable than Mademoiselle Sophie Gamard of formulating the elegiac nature of an old maid."

Elsewhere, he speaks of the "fluid projections of looks that serve to touch the suave skin of a woman;" of the "atmosphere of Paris in which seethes a simoon that swells the heart;" of the "coefficient reason of events;" of "pecuniary mnemonics;" of "sentences flung out through the capillary tubes of the great female confabulation;" of "devouring ideas distilled through a bald forehead;" of a "lover's enwrapping his mistress in the wadding of his attentions;" of "abortions in which the spawn of genius cumbers an arid strand;" of the "philosophic moors of incredulity;" of a "town troubled in its public and private intestines."

In one of the chapters of *Seraphita*, he says: "Wilfred arrived at Seraphita's house to relate his life, to paint the grandeur of his soul by the greatness of his faults; but, when he found himself in the zone embraced by those eyes whose azure scintillations met with no horizon in front, and offered none behind, he became calm again and submissive as the lion who, bounding on his prey in an African plain, receives, on the wing of the winds, a message of love, and stops. An abyss opened into which fell the words of his delirium!"

And the same Wilfred "trusted to his perspicacity to discover the parcels of truth rolled by the old servant in the torrent of his divagations."

During the years of Balzac's greatest literary activity, which were also those of his bitterest polemics, his opponents made much capital out of the caprices of his pen. In the lawsuit against the *Revue de Paris*, Monsieur Chaix d'Est-Ange, the defendant's counsel, provoked roars of laughter by quoting passages from the *Lily in the Valley*; and Jules Janin, in his criticism of *A Provincial Great Man in Paris*, grew equally merry over the verbal conceits abounding in the portraits of persons. And yet the very volumes that furnish the largest number of ill-begotten sentences contain many passages of sustained dignity, sober strength, and proportioned beauty.

Normally, Balzac's style, in spite of its mannerisms, its use and abuse of metaphor, its laboured evolution and expression of the idea, and its length and heaviness of period, adapts itself to the matter, and alters with kaleidoscopic celerity, according as there is description, analysis, or dramatization. Thus blending with the subject, it loses a good deal of its proper virtue, which explains why it does not afford the pleasure of form enjoyed in such writers as George Sand, Flaubert, Renan, and Anatole France. The pleasure his word-conjuring can yield is chiefly of the sensuous order. The following passage is, as Taine says, botany turned into imagination and passion:—

"Have you felt in the meadows, in the month of May, the perfume which communicates to every living being the thrill of fecundation, which, when you are in a boat, makes you dip your hands in the rippling water and let your hair fly in the wind, while your thoughts grow green like the boughs of the forest? A tiny herb, the sweet-smelling anthoxanthum is the principal of this veiled harmony. Thus, no one can stay in its proximity unaffected by it. Put into a nosegay its glittering blades streaked like a green-and-white netted dress; inexhaustible effluvia will stir in the bottom of your heart the budding roses that modesty crushes there. Within the depths of the scooped-out neck of porcelain, suppose a wide margin composed of the white tufts peculiar to the sedum of vines in Touraine; a vague image of desirable forms turned like those of a submissive slave. From this setting issue spirals of white-belled convolvulus, twigs of pink rest-harrow mingled with a few ferns, and a few young oak-shoots having magnificently coloured leaves; all advance bowing themselves, humble as weeping willows, timid and suppliant as prayers. Above, see the slender-flowered fibrils, unceasingly swayed, of the purply amourette, which sheds in profusion its yellowy anthers; the snowy pyramids of the field and water glyceria; the green locks of the barren bromus; the tapered plumes of the agrosits, called wind-ears; violet-hued hopes with which first dreams are crowned, and which stand out on the grey ground of flax where the light radiates round these blossoming herbs. But already, higher up, a few Bengal roses scattered among the airy lace of the daucus, the feathers of the marsh-flax, the marabouts of the meadow-sweet, the umbellae of the white chervil, the blond hair of the seeding clematis, the neat saltiers of the milk-white cross-wort, the corymbs of the yarrow, the spreading stems of the pink-and-black flowered fumitory, the tendrils of the vine, the sinuous sprays of honeysuckle; in fine, all that is most dishevelled and ragged in these naive creatures; flames and triple darts, lanceolated, denticulated leaves, stems tormented like vague desires twisted at the bottom of the soul; from the womb of this prolix torrent of love that overflows, shoots up a magnificent red double-poppy with its glands ready to open, displaying the spikes of its fire above the starred jasmine and dominating the incessant rain of pollen, a fair cloud that sparkles in the air, reflecting the light in its myriad glistening atoms. What woman, thrilled by the love-scent lurking in the anthoxanthum, will not understand this wealth of submissive ideas, this white tenderness troubled by untamed stirrings and this red desire of love demanding a happiness refused in those struggles a hundred times recommenced, of restrained, eternal passion. Was not all that is offered to God offered to love in this poesy of luminous flowers incessantly humming its melodies to the heart, caressing hidden pleasures there, unavowed hopes, illusions that blaze and vanish like gossamer threads on a sultry night?"

This last quotation was probably in Sainte-Beuve's mind when he spoke of the efflorescence by which Balzac gave to everything the sentiment of life and made the page itself thrill. Elsewhere he found the efflorescence degenerate into something exciting and dissolvent, enervating, rose-tinted, and veined with every hue, deliciously corruptive, Byzantine, suggestive of debauch, abandoning itself to the fluidity of each movement. Sainte-Beuve was not an altogether unprejudiced critic of the novelist; but his impeachment can hardly be refuted, although Brunetiere would fain persuade us that the only thing which may be reasonably inveighed against in Balzac's style is its indelicacy or rather native non-delicacy. If the *Contes Drolatiques* alone had been in question, this lesser accusation might suffice. But there are the *Lost Illusions*, the *Bachelor's Household*, and *Cousin Bette*, not to mention other novels, in which the scenes of vice are dwelt upon with visible complacency and a glamour is created and thrown over them by the writer's imagination, in such a way that the effect is nauseous in proportion as it is pleasurable. The artistic representation of vice and crime is justifiable only in so far as the mind contemplating it is carried out and beyond into the sphere of sane emotion. True, by considerable portions of the *Comedie Humaine* only sane emotions are roused; but these portions are, more often than not, those wherefrom the author's peculiar genius is absent. It is in less conspicuous works, or those like the *Cure of Tours*, the *Country Doctor*, *Cesar Birotteau*, *Cousin Pons*, the *Reverse Side of Contemporary History* that the eternal conflict of good and evil is so exhibited as to evoke healthy pity, sympathy, admiration, and their equally healthy contraries, and also a wider comprehension of life.

It is difficult to separate the subject-matter of a novel from its treatment. Yet a word should be said of Balzac's widening the limits of admission. His widening was two-fold. It boldly took the naked reality of latest date, the men and women of his time in the full glare of passion and action, unsoftened by the veil that hides and in some measure transforms when they have passed into history; and it included in this reality the little, the commonplace, the trivial. This innovator in fiction aimed, as Crabbe and Wordsworth had aimed in poetry, at interesting the reader in themes which were ordinarily deemed to be void of interest. The thing deserved trying. His predecessors, and even his contemporaries, had neglected it. An experimenter in this direction, he now and then forgot that the proper subject-matter of the novel is man—man either individual or collective—and spent himself in fruitless endeavours to endow the abstract with reality.

When he opined, somewhat rashly, that George Sand had no force of conception, no power of constructing a plot, no faculty of attaining the true, no art of the pathetic, he doubtless wished the influence to be drawn that he was not lacking in them himself.

As regards the first, his claim can be admitted without reserve. Force of conception is dominant throughout his fiction. It is that which gained his novels their earliest acceptance. Whether they were approved or disapproved in other respects, their strong originality imposed itself on the attention of friends and enemies alike. One felt then, and one feels now, though more than half a century has elapsed since they were produced, that, whatever factitious accretions clung to them, they came into the world with substance and form new-fashioned; no mere servile perpetuation of an effete type, but a fresh departure in the annals of art.

Especially is this seen in his characterization. His men and women are most of them put on foot with the energy of movement in them and an idiosyncrasy of speech and action that has not been surpassed. As already stated, they generally are not portraits, although his memory was of that peculiar concave visuality which allowed him to cast its images forth solidly into space. What he did was to remodel these images with proportions differing from those of the reality, magnifying or diminishing them pretty much as Swift with his Brobdingnagians and Lilliputians; and, having got the body of his personage recomposed, with mental and moral qualities and defects corresponding to every one of its details—for Balzac was a firm believer in the corporal being an exact reflection of the spiritual —he set his mechanisms in motion.[*]

[*] "A round waist," he says, "is a sign of force; but women so built are imperious, self-willed, more voluptuous than tender. On the contrary, flat-waisted women are devoted, full of finesse, inclined to melancholy." Elsewhere, he informs us that "most women who ride horseback well are not tender." "Hands like those of a Greek statue announce a mind of illogical domination; eyebrows that meet indicate a jealous tendency. In all great men the neck is short, and it is rare that a tall man possesses eminent faculties."

To call his men and women mechanisms, while yet acknowledging their intense vitality, may seem a contradiction; but nothing less than this antinomy is adequate to indicate the fatality of Balzac's creatures. None of them ever appear to be free agents. Planet-like they revolve in an orbit, or meteor-like they rush headlong, and their course in the one or the other case is guessable from the beginning. Not that change or development is precluded. The conjuror provides for large transformation; but the law of such transformation is one of iron necessity, and, when he brings in at the end his interferences of Providence, they shock us as an inconsequence. However, though bound by their weird, his people are extraordinarily various in their aspect and doings. It is rare that he repeats his characters, albeit many of them touch each other at certain points. The exceptions are caused by his sometimes altering his manner of characterization and proceeding from the inside first. This variation goes to the extent of distinguishing influences of the soil as well as of social grade and temperament. His northerners speak and act otherwise than those of the south or west, and, in the main, are true to life, despite the author's perceptible satire when depicting provincials.

Parallel to his vigorous creation of character is the force with which he builds up their environment. Here his realism is intense. Indeed, occasionally one is tempted to credit Balzac with a greater love of things than of men, yet not the things of nature as much as things made by men. His portrayal of landscape may be fine prose, but contains no pure feeling of poetry in it, while, in the town, in the house, in the street, wherever the human mind and hand have left their imprints, his language grows warm, his fancy swoops and grasps the significance of detail; these dumb survivals of the past become eloquent to his ears; his eyes discover in them a reflecting retina which, obedient to his command, resuscitates former contacts, a world buried and now found again. When attempting the historical novel, in which his persons are typical rather than individual, he still preserves this exactitude of local colouring. His descriptions of places, in fact, in all his books are almost photographs, and, where change has been slow, still serve to guide the curious traveller.

In his preface to the *Cabinet of Antiques*, he explains how he dealt with his raw material. A young man has been prosecuted before the Assize Court, and had been condemned and branded. This case he connected with the story of an ancient family fallen from its high estate and dwelling in provincial surroundings. The story had dramatic elements in it, but less intensely dramatic than those of the young man's case. "This way of proceeding," he says, "should be that of an historian of manners and morals. His task consists in blending analogous facts in a single picture. Is he not rather bound to give the spirit than the letter of the happenings? He synthesizes them. Often it is necessary to pick out several similar characters in order to succeed in making up one, just as odd people are met with who are so ridiculous that two distinct persons may be created out of them. . . . . Literature uses a means employed in painting, which, to obtain a fine figure, adapts the hands of one model, the foot of another, the chest of a third, the shoulders of a fourth."

The foregoing quotation raises the question of the significance of the term truth as applied to fiction. Evidently, it cannot have the same meaning as when applied to history or biography. In the latter, the writer invents neither circumstances nor actions, nor the persons engaged in them, but seeks to know the whole of the first two exactly as they occurred, and to interpret, as nearly to life as may be, the third. However, if he be a philosopher, he will perhaps try to show the intimate relations existing between these same persons and the events in which they were concerned; and, in doing so, he will step out of his proper role and assume one which is less

easy for him than for the novelist to play, since the writer of fiction composes both his *dramatis personae* and their story; and the concordance between them is more a matter of art than of science.

Still it is possible that neither a novelist's characters nor their environment shall be in entire agreement with all observable facts. There may be arrangements, eliminations, additions, which, though pleasing to the reader, may remove the mimic world to a plane above that of the so-called real one. Thus removed, Balzac judged George Sand's production to be. And we must confess that, even in *Little Fadette*, *The Devil's Pool*, and *Francois le Champi*, it deals with human experience in a mode differing widely from that which the author of *Eugenie Grandet* considered conform to truth.

As regards the methods of these two rivals, the claim to superior truth cannot be settled in Balzac's favour by merely pointing to his realism. Realism tried by the norm of truth is relative. What it represents of the accidental in life may be much less than what it omits of the essential or potential, for these two words are often interchangeable. In the same object, different people usually see different aspects, qualities, attributes. Is one spectacle necessarily true and another false? It is certain that George Sand, in her stories of peasant life, largely uses the artist's liberty of leaving out a great deal that Balzac would have put in when treating a like subject. It is certain that from some themes and details that Balzac delighted in describing she deliberately turned away, and it is certain also that she introduced into her fiction not a little of the Utopian world that has haunted man in his later development without there being actuality or the least chance of realization to lend it substance. But Balzac's fiction has, too, its pocket Utopias, less attractive and less invigorating than Madame Dudevant's, and in his most realistic portrayals there are not infrequently dream-scapes of the fancy. The truth that we can most readily perceive in his work is one which, after all, embraces the ideally potential in man as well as his most material manifestations. It is small compared with the mass of what he wrote; but, where found, it is supreme.

In constructing plot Balzac is unequal and often inferior. Here it is that his romanticist origins reappear rankly like weeds, giving us factitious melodrama that accords ill with his sober harvest of actuality. And his melodrama has not the merit of being various. It nearly always contains the same band of rogues, disguised under different names, conspiring to ruin innocent victims by the old tricks of their trade.

Then, again, many of his novels have no understandable progression from the commencement, through the middle, to the conclusion. This is not because he was incapable of involving his characters in the consequences of their actions, but because things that he esteemed of greater importance interfered with the story's logical development. We have episodes encroaching on the main design, or what was originally intended to be the main design, which is disaggregated before the end is arrived at. As a matter of fact, quite a number of his plots are swamped by what he forces into them with the zeal of an encyclopaedist. Philosophy, history, geography, law, medicine, trade, industry, agriculture enter by their own right. The novelist yields up his wand, and the pedagogue or *vulgarisateur* comes forward with his chalk and blackboard. Canalization is explained at length in the *Village Cure*; will-making is discoursed upon in *Ursule Mirouet*; promissory notes, bills of exchange, and protests, not to speak of business accounts, cover pages in the *Lost Illusions*; therapeutics takes the place of narrative in the *Reverse Side of Contemporary History*; physiology is lectured upon in the *Lily in the Valley*; *Louis Lambert* aims at becoming a second and better edition of the *Thoughts of Pascal*; and in *Seraphita* we have sermons as long and tedious as those of an Elizabethan divine. The result is that even novels containing the presentment of love in its most passional phases lose their right to the name. At best they can be called only disparate chapters of fiction; at worst, they are merely raw material.

As for his achievement in the pathetic, it is almost nil. At least, if by pathos we mean that which touches the heart's tenderest strings. Harrow us, he can; play upon many of our emotions, he is able to at will. But, at bottom, he had too little sympathy with his fellows to find in their mistakes, or sins, or sufferings, the wherewithal to bring out of us our most generous tears. Those he wept once or twice himself when writing were drawn from him by a reflex self-pity that is easily evoked. In genuine pathos, Hugo is vastly his superior.

Women occupy so preponderant a position in the *Comedy* that one is forced to ask one's self whether these numerous heroines are reproduced with the same fidelity to nature as are his men. At any rate, they are not all treated in the same manner. In his descriptions of grand ladies the satiric intention is rarely absent. Why, it is difficult to say, unless it was that he was unable to avoid the error of introducing the pique of the plebeian suitor, and that the satire was an effort to establish the balance in his favour. "When I used to go into high society," he told Madame Hanska, "I suffered in every part of me through which suffering could enter. It is only misunderstood souls and those that are poor who know how to observe, because everything jars on them, and observation results from suffering." In his inmost thought he had no high opinion of women. Notwithstanding his flattery of Madame Hanska, he was a firm upholder of the old doctrine of male supremacy; and, at certain moments, he slipped his opinion out, content afterwards to let Eve or another suppose that his hard words were not spoken in earnest. One of his would-be witticisms at the expense of the fair sex was: "The most Jesuitical Jesuit among the Jesuits is a thousand times less Jesuitical than the least Jesuitical woman." The form only of the accusation was new. How often before and since the misogynist has asserted that women have no conscience. Be it granted that Balzac's grand dames often have very little, and some of

his other women also. They are creatures of instinct and passion susceptible only of being influenced through their feelings. Yet, as regards the former, Sainte-Beuve assures us that their portraits in the *Comedy* resemble the originals. He says: "Who especially has more delightfully hit off the duchesses and viscountesses of the Restoration period!" Brunetiere accepts this testimony of a contemporary who himself frequented the *salons* of the great. Some later critics, on the contrary, hold that the novelist has given us stage-dames with heavy graces and a bizarre free-and-easiness as being the nearest equivalent to aristocratic nonchalance. One thing is certain, namely, that Balzac was personally acquainted rather with that side of aristocratic society which was not the better. It was the side bordering on licentiousness, where manners as well as morals are easily tainted and vulgarity can creep in. Again, he creates his women with a theory, and, in art, theories are apt to become prejudices. According to his appreciation Walter Scott's heroines are monotonous; they lack relief, he said, and they lack it because they are Protestants. The Catholic woman has repentance, the Protestant woman, virtue only. Many of Balzac's women repent, and many of those that repent either backslide or come very near to it. His altogether virtuous women are childish without being children, and some are bold into the bargain. In fine, his gamut of feminine psychology seems to be limited, very limited. Women of the finest mind he neither comprehended nor cared to understand. They were outside his range.

But what he missed in the whole representation of the fair sex he made up for by what he invented, as indeed, too, in his representation of the sterner sex; and Jules Janin's account of the matter is not far from the truth:—

"He is at once the inventor, the architect, the upholsterer, the milliner, the professor of languages, the chambermaid, the perfumer, the barber, the music-teacher, and the usurer. He renders his society all that it is. He it is who lulls it to sleep on a bed expressly arranged for sleep and adultery; he, who bows all women beneath the same misfortune; he, who buys on credit the horses, jewels, and clothes of all these handsome sons without stomach, without money, without heart. He is the first who has found the livid veneer, the pale complexion of distinguished company which causes all his heroes to be recognized. He has arranged in his fertile brain all the adorable crimes, the masked treasons, the ingenious rapes mental and physical which are the ordinary warp of his plots. The jargon spoken by this peculiar world, and which he alone can interpret, is none the less a mother-tongue rediscovered by Monsieur de Balzac, which partly explains the ephemeral success of this novelist, who still reigns in London and Saint Petersburg as the most faithful reproduction of the manners and actions of our century."

Janin's animus blinded him to the rest, and it is just the rest of the qualities which converted the ephemeral success into the permanent. Taine's estimate is more discursive. He is further removed from polemics. He says:—

"Monsieur de Balzac has of private life a very deep and fine sentiment which goes even to minuteness of detail and of superstition. He knows how to move you and make you palpitate from the first, simply in depicting a garden-walk, a dining-room, a piece of furniture. He divines the mysteries of provincial life; sometimes he makes them. Most often he does not recognize and therefore isolates the pudic and hidden side of life, together with the poetry it contains. He has a multitude of rapid remarks about old maids and old women, ugly girls, sickly women, sacrificed and devoted mistresses, old bachelors, misers. One wonders where, with his petulant imagination, he can have picked it all up. It is true that Monsieur de Balzac does not proceed with sureness, and that in his numerous productions, some of which appear to us almost admirable, at any rate touching and delicious or piquant and finely comic in observation, there is a dreadful pell-mell. What a throng of volumes, what a flight of tales, novels of all sorts, droll, philosophic, and theosophic. There is something to be enjoyed in each, no doubt, but what prolixity! In the elaboration of a subject, as in the detail of style, Monsieur de Balzac has a facile, unequal, risky pen. He starts off quickly, sets himself in a gallop, and then, all at once, he stumbles to the ground, rising only to fall again. Most of his openings are delightful; but his conclusions degenerate or become excessive. At a certain moment, he loses self-control. His observing coolness escapes; something in his brain explodes, and carries everything far, far away. Hazard and accident have a good share in Monsieur de Balzac's best production. He has his own manner, but vacillating, fidgety, often seeking to regain self-possession."

How much one could wish that, instead of producing more, Balzac should have produced less. With a man of his native power and perseverance, what greater perfection there might have been! Certainly, no defect is more patent in the *Comedie Humaine* than the trail of hasty workmanship, the mark of being at so much a line. Strangely, the speed with which he wrote furnished him with a cause for boasting. More properly, it ought to have filled him with humiliation. Many *litterateurs* are compelled to drive and overdrive their pens. But, if they have the love of letters innate in them, it will go against the grain to send into the world their sentences without having had leisure to polish each and all. Examples have already been given of the short time spent over several books of the *Comedy*. There is no need to repeat these or to add to their names. Occasionally, the result was not bad, when, as with *Cesar Birotteau*, the subject had been long in the novelist's head. This, however, was the exception. The fifty-five sheets once composed in a single week, and the six thousand lines once reeled off in ten days, were probably invented as well as set on paper within the periods stated. No doubt, much was altered in the galley proofs; but the alterations would be made with the same celerity, so that they risked being no improvement either in style or matter. Balzac, indeed, was aware of the

imperfections arising from such a method; and he not infrequently strove to correct them in subsequent editions. The task might perhaps have been carried out fully, if the bulk of his new novels had not been continually growing faster than he could follow it with his revision.

The commercial compromises that he consented to were still more injurious to the artistic finish of some of his later pieces of fiction. For instance, when the *Employees* was about to come out in a volume, after its publication as a serial the length was judged to be insufficient by the man of business. He wanted more for his money. What did Balzac do? He searched through his drawers, pitched upon a manuscript entitled *Physiology of the Employee*, and drilled it into the other story. Of these patchwork novels *The Woman of Thirty Years Old* is the worst. Originally, it was six distinct short tales which had appeared at divers dates. The first was entitled *Early Mistakes*; the second, *Hidden Sufferings*; the third, *At Thirty Years Old*; the fourth, *God's Finger*; the fifth, *Two Meetings*; and the sixth and last, *The Old Age of a Guilty Mother*. In 1835, the author took it into his head to join them together under one title, *The Same Story*, although the names of the characters differed in each chapter, so that the chief heroine had no fewer than six appellations. Not till 1842 did he remedy this primary incoherence, yet without the removal of the *aliases* doing anything towards bestowing consistency on the several personages thus connected in Siamese-twin fashion. To-day, any one who endeavors to read the novel through will proceed from astonishment to bewilderment, and thence to amazement. Nowhere else does Balzac come nearer to that peculiar vanity which fancies that every licence is permissible to talent.

In his chapter on the social importance of the *Comedie Humaine*, Brunetiere tries to persuade us that, before Balzac's time, novelists in general gave a false presentation of the heroes by making love the unique preoccupation of life. And he seems to include dramatists in his accusation, declaring that love as a passion, the love which Shakespeare and Racine speak of, is a thing exceeding rare, and that humanity is more usually preoccupied with everything and anything besides love; love, he says, has never been the great affair of life except with a few idle people. Monsieur Brunetiere's erudition was immense, and the nights as well as the days he spent in acquiring his formidable knowledge may in his case have prevented more than a passing thought being given to the solicitation of love. If the eminent critic had been as skilled in psychology as he was in literature, he would have been more disposed to recognize that, amidst all the toils and cares of life, love, in some phase, is after all the mainspring, and that, if it were eliminated from man's nature, the most puissant factor of his activity would disappear. Love is part of the huge sub-conscious in man; and the novelist, in making the events of his fiction turn upon it, does no more than follow nature.

However, it is not exact that all novelists and dramatists, or even the majority of them, before Balzac's time made love the sole preoccupation of their heroes. What they did rather—in so far as their writing was true—was to give a visible relief to it which in real life is impossible, since it belongs to the invisible, inner experience. Nor is it exact that Balzac consistently assigns a secondary place in his novels to love. He does so in his best novels, but not in some that he thought his best—*The Lily in the Valley* and *Seraphita* for example. The relegation of love to the background in these novels which happen to be his masterpieces was caused by something mentioned in a preceding chapter, to wit, that Balzac never thoroughly felt or understood love as a great and noble passion. And love, with him, being so oddly mixed up with calculation, it was to be expected he should succeed best in books in which the dominant interest was some other passion—an exceptional one. If money plays, on the contrary, such an intrusive role in his novels, its introduction was less from voluntary, reasoned choice than from obsession. He deals with this subject sometimes splendidly, but, at other times, he wearies. Had money filled a smaller part of his work, the work would not have been lost.

In fine, with its beauties and its ugliness, its perfections and its shortcomings, the *Comedy* is the illumination cast by a master-mind upon the goings-out and comings-in of his contemporaries, the creation of a more universal and representative history of social life than had been previously written. Having considerable ethical value, it is worth still more on account of the ways it opens towards the fiction of the future.

CHAPTER XVI

THE INFLUENCE

Balzac's influence during his lifetime was, with but few exceptions, exercised outside his own, novelist's profession. The sphere in which it made itself chiefly felt was that of the cultured reading public, and the public was, first and foremost, a foreign one. History repeated itself. To Honore d'Urfe, the author of the *Astree*, in the sixteenth century, while living in Piedmont, a letter came announcing that twenty-nine princesses and nineteen lords of Germany had

adopted the names and characters of his heroes and heroines in the *Astree*, and had founded an academy of true lovers. Almost the same thing occurred to the nineteenth-century Honore de Balzac. For a while, certain people in Venetian society assumed the titles and roles of his chief personages, playing the parts, in some instances, out to their utmost conclusion.

Sainte-Beuve, who, in 1850, drew attention to this curious historical analogy, went on to mention that, in Hungary, Poland, and Russia, Balzac's novels created a fashion. The strange, rich furniture that was assembled and arranged, according to the novelist's fancy, out of the artistic productions of many countries and epochs, became an after-reality. Numerous wealthy persons prided themselves on possessing what the author had merely imagined. The interior of their houses was adorned *a la Balzac*.

One evening at Vienna, says his sister, he entered a concert-room, where, as soon as his presence was perceived and bruited about, all the audience rose in his honour; and, at the end of the entertainment, a student seized his hand and kissed it, exclaiming: "I bless the hand that wrote *Seraphita*." Balzac himself relates that, once travelling in Russia, he and his friends, as night was coming on, went and asked for hospitality at a castle. On their entrance, the lady of the house and some other members of the fair sex vied with each other in eagerness to serve the guests. One of the younger ladies hurried to the kitchen for refreshment. In the meantime, the novelist's identity was revealed to the *chatelaine*. A lively conversation was immediately engaged in, and, when the impromptu Abigail returned with the refreshment, the first words she heard were: "Well, Monsieur Balzac, so you think—" Full of surprise and joy she started, dropped the tray she had in her hands, and everything was broken. "Glory I have known and seen," adds the narrator; "wasn't that glory?"

It was more. It was power wielded for good or evil, like that of every other great man, be he statesman, or priest, or artist. The conviction of possessing this power caused Balzac to complain with sincere indignation of those who charged him with being an immoral writer. "The reproach of immorality," he said in his preface to the second edition of *Pere Goriot*, "which has ever been launched at the courageous author, is the last that remains to be made, when nothing else can be urged against a poet. If you are true in your portrayal, if, by dint of working night and day you succeed in writing the most difficult language in the world, the epithet immoral is cast in your face. Socrates was immoral, Jesus Christ was immoral. Both were persecuted in the name of the societies they overthrew or reformed. When the world wishes to destroy any one, it taxes him with immorality."

This argument is beside the question. It does not settle whether the apologist's influence upon the men and women of his generation and beyond—an influence which, in his lifetime, was incontestable, and may be deemed potent still, to judge by the extent to which his books are read—was and is good or bad. Balzac's personality is here only indirectly involved. His individual character might have been better or worse without the conclusion to be drawn being affected. Good men's influence is not always good, nor bad men's influence always bad. Intention may be inoperative, and effect may be involuntary.

Balzac claimed the right to speak of all conduct, to represent all conduct in his fiction; and we shall see, farther on, that he imposed his claim upon those who followed him in literature. But, if he anticipated reality—and this is acknowledged—if he led society to imitate his fiction, if his exceptional representations tended, with him and after him, to become general or more frequent in one or another class of society, he must be considered morally responsible for the result. It has already been remarked, in the preceding chapter, that there are two ways of reproducing reality in literature and art, one of them favouring, not through didacticism but through emotion, the creation in the mind of a state of healthy feeling, thought, and effort; the other, that sort of fascination with which the serpent attracts its victims. It is certain that Balzac did not adequately take this into account, certain also that in parts of his *Comedy*, the secret, unconscious sympathy of the author with some of his sicklier heroes and heroines could not and did not have that dynamic moral action which he vainly desired.

Of the chief French novelists or *litterateurs* who were his contemporaries, critics are inclined to esteem his influence most evident on George Sand and Victor Hugo. Brunetiere, indeed, begins with Sainte-Beuve. But the similarities discoverable between the author of *Volupte* and the author of the *Comedie Humaine* were present in Sainte-Beuve's work at a period when Balzac was only just issuing from obscurity, and appear, moreover, to be due to temperament. In the case of George Sand, the inference is based partly on the praise she meted out to Balzac in her reminiscences. Brunetiere specifies the *Marquis de Villemer* as the one proved example of imitation. But this novel was written in 1861, eleven years after Balzac's death; and, in so far as it differs from *Mauprat* and the earlier books, whether *La Petite Fadette* or *Consuelo*, can be shown to be the result of a natural and independent evolution.

As regards Victor Hugo, on the contrary, there is plenty of *prima facie* evidence that he largely utilized Balzac's material and method; and there is evidence also that Balzac utilized, though in a less degree, the subjects developed by Hugo. The reciprocal borrowing is easy to explain, both men, in spite of their fundamental peculiarities, having much in them that was common—imagination difficult to control, fondness for exaggeration, language prone to be verbose and turgid, research of devices to astonish the reader. Hugo's *Miserables* is a monument of his fiction that owes much to Balzacian architecture. The realism of the latter author is converted without difficulty into the former's romanticism, or, rather, the alloy of romanticism is so considerable in Balzac's work that there is little conversion to make. Ferragus

and Vautrin are prototypes of Valjean, just as Valjean's Cosette exploited by Madame Thenardier is an adaptation of Ferragus' daughter or Doctor Minoret's Ursula. The prison manners and slang of the *Miserables* inevitably recall those of *Vautrin's Last Incarnation*, while, on the other hand, Hugo's salon *ultra* reappears in the *Cabinet of Antiques*. And the analogies present themselves continually. One might almost say that the whole of the *Comedie Humaine* suggested things to its future panegyrist, who wrote his greatest novel in the years consecutive to Balzac's death. Of course, Hugo's borrowings, being those of a man of genius, were not made use of servilely. Like Shakespeare and Moliere, the author of the *Miserables* metamorphosed and enhanced what he took.

Balzac's major influence on literature began as soon as he was dead. And the men he reacted on soonest were the dramatists; not through his own plays, which figured so small in his achievement, or, if through them at all, then only as they applied the same principles as his novels. The stage, being ever *en vedette*, is best situated to interpret the signs of the times, and is likewise more open to the solicitations of novelty, more ready to try new methods. A noticeable defect of the French drama, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was the pronounced artificiality of its characters and plots. Whatever the kind of play exhibited, the same stereotyped noble fathers, ingenuous maidens, coquettes, and Lotharios strutted on the boards. Whatever else changed, these did not. Only their costumes differed. Moreover, the adventures in which the *dramatis personae* displayed themselves contained always the same sort of tricks for bringing about the denouement. Even the language had its own style, outside which nothing was appropriate. All this was classicism in its most degenerate form, an art from which original inspiration was banished to the profit of a much inferior species of skill. Be it granted that the drama, more than any other kind of literature, is liable to the encroachment and dominance of such artificiality on account of its foreshortening in perspective. Be it granted, also, that sometimes a new movement will intensify an old habit. The Romanticists, though reformers in other respects, did little or nothing to render the stage more real. Their lyricism, in front of the footlights, needed buskins and frippery, or, at any rate, fostered them, as the pieces of Hugo and de Vigny proved.

The younger Dumas, Emile Augier, Halevy and Becque—with a crescendo that in the last of the four is somewhat harsh—diverged from the traditional path, and in their plays put men and women whose motives and conduct were nearer to the humanity of their audience. The departure from old lines in these dramatists is patent; and, after discounting the part that may have been temperamental or contingent on some other cause, there remains the larger share to attribute to Balzac's influence. Dumas' *Dame aux Camelias* originally staged in 1852, was a timid start in the new direction. The theme, that of the courtezan in love, was a favourite one with the classical school, and much of the ancient style and tone pervades it; yet its atmosphere is a modern one, the expression of its sentiment is modern too, and the accessories are supplied with an eye to material and moral exactitude. The same author's *Question d'Argent*, composed a few years later, was a more direct tribute to the modifying power of the *Comedie Humaine*. It was Balzac's *Mercadet the Jobber* remodelled with a larger stage science. Hypnotized subsequently by the *piece a these* (and not to his advantage) Dumas went off at a tangent whereas Augier, once engaged in the newer manner with his *Gendre de Monsieur Poirier*, persisted in it with each of his succeeding pieces, flattering his model by resurrection after resurrection of the *Comedy's* principal actors, Bixiou and Lousteau in Giboyer and Vernouillet, Balthazar Claes in the Desronceretz of *Maitre Guerin*. Ludovic Halevy apparently wished every one to perceive what he owed to the father of French realism. Finding in the *Petty Bourgeois* a Madame Cardinal whose comic personality and peculiar moral squint suited one of his plays, he adopted her entirely, name and all, altering only what her more recent surroundings required. Henri Becque digested Balzac rather than imitated him. One feels in reading his *Corbeaux* that it is a disciple's own work. The master's virtues and some of the disciple's faults are everywhere present, both in the subject and in the treatment. We have the same world of money and business that shows so big throughout the *Comedy*, an unfaithful partner and lawyer introducing ruin into the house of the widow and orphan. The practice of legal ruse and robbery —in these things Balzac had rung the changes again and again. What Becque added were sharpness of contrast, dramatic concentration, bitterer satire, and likewise greater art.

If one may hazard a guess at the reasons that convinced the older school of playwrights of their error, there are two by which they must have been struck—the artistic possibilities of the real suggested by the *Comedie Humaine*, and the prescience—one might say the intuition —it exhibited of things that were destined to reveal themselves more prominently in the latter half of the nineteenth century. And in this respect Balzac in no wise contributed to what he foresaw and, so to speak, prophesied—the growing stress of the struggle for life in domains political, social, financial, industrial, the coming of uncrowned kings greater in puissance than monarchs of yore, the reign of not one despot but many, the generalization of intrigue, the replacement of ancient disorders by others of equal or increased virulence and harder to remedy, hundred-headed hydras to combat, most difficult of herculean tasks. The reflection of all this in the *Comedy* was calculated to impress at its hour, and the hour arrived. Men looked at the counterfeit presentment and wondered why no one had recognized these things sooner. From that moment, the reputation of the *Comedie Humaine* was made. Perhaps, after all, in such connection, the one or two of Balzac's plays that went so resolutely off the old lines—the *Resources of Quinola* and *Mercadet*,—may have served, in remembrance, despite their insignificance beside the novels, which were the true drama, to awaken the attention of professional dramatists, especially as one after another story of the *Comedy* was dramatized. But it was the fund of observation and the leaven of satire which startled, aroused, and

ultimately set the stage agog. Not even the lighter forms of composition were left unaffected. Labiche, in the vaudeville style, with his *Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon* and *La Cagnotte*, gave his audience, behind his puppets, the touch of present reality, the sensation of existent follies.

The relative slowness with which the novels of Balzac's younger contemporaries and his successors were penetrated with realism was partly due to the lasting effect of George Sand's idealistic fiction. As we have seen, Balzac himself was reacted upon by it to some extent; but he yielded against his will, and the result in his case was a bastard one. She whom he called his brother George survived him for more than twenty years, and continued to the last to add to her reputation, so that naturally the impetus she lent to the idealistic movement was long before it was spent, if indeed one may say that the impetus has altogether been lost. Adepts like Octave Feuillet, with his *Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*, and Victor Cherbuliez, with his *Comte Kostia*, endeavoured to perpetuate idealism or at least to recreate it in other forms. And then there were independents, like Flaubert who, with *Madame Bovary*, passed realism by on his way to naturalism. Yet it is worth remarking that Flaubert made a sort of *volte face* in 1869, and wrote his *Education Sentimentale*, in which, under the pressure of simple circumstance, the hero descends gradually from the soaring of youth's hopes and ambitions to the dull, dun monotony of mature life, with nothing left him save the iron circle of his environment. Here the disillusionment is that of all Balzac's chief *dramatis personae*. Moreover, the minor characters of *Madame Bovary* may well owe something to the *Comedy*. These doctors, chemists, cures, prefectoral councillors and country squires would possibly never have been depicted but for their having already existed for twenty years in the predecessor's gallery of portraits.

There is no need to call the de Goncourts and Guy de Maupassant imitators because they bear a strong stamp of Balzac's influence. They have greater art, a finer style, and, above all, more pathos than the earlier master was capable of. But they are true disciples, as likewise Feuillet in his later manner with *Monsieur de Camors*. De Maupassant's short stories, exemplifying his severely objective treatment at his best, are Balzac's purified of their lingering romanticism, and his *Bel Ami* is a modernized Lucien de Rubempre. And, if the resemblances are closer between works of the de Goncourts less known, such as *Charles Demailly*, or *Manette Salomon* and the *Lost Illusions*, *Peter Grassou*, the *Muse of the County*, yet the means employed by the two brothers to endow with life and form *Renee Mauperin* and *Germinie Lacerteux*, fixing a background, stamping the outlines, filling in details, adding particularities, all this was Balzacian method, insufficient forsooth, in the domain of psychology, but furnishing idiosyncrasy in plentiful variations.

When we come to Alphonse Daudet, time enough has elapsed for realism to evolve into naturalism so-called. Naturalism is realism stark-naked —the dissecting-room, and a good deal besides, which Monsieur Zola illustrated well but not wisely. Daudet, fortunately for his reputation, was a naturalist *sui generis*, with a delicate artistic perception altogether lacking to the author of the Rougon-Macquart series. He was also an independent, but willing to take lessons in his trade. And how much he learnt from *Cousin Bette* may be judged by his *Numa Roumestan* and *Froment Jeune et Rissler aine*. There are close analogies also between the best of Balzac's fiction and the sombre realism of the *Evangeliste*, based on tragic facts that had come under Daudet's personal notice. Of the two realisms Daudet's is certainly the more genuine, with its lambent humour that glints on even the saddest of his pictures.

In neither the naturalistic school of fiction, nor the psychological, in so far as the latter is represented by Bourget, has Balzac's influence been a gain. Bourget has borrowed Balzac's furniture, his pompous didacticism, his occasional indecency—in fine, all that is least essential in the elder's assets, without learning how to breathe objective life into one of his characters. Zola borrowed more, but mainly the unwholesome parts, truncating these further to suit his theory of the novel as a slice of life seen through a temperament, and travestying in the Rougon-Macquart scheme, with its burden of heredity and physiological blemish, Balzac's cumbrous and plausible doctrine of the *Comedy*. Both novelists made a mistake in arrogating to themselves the role of the *savant*. Neither of them seemed to understand that there are limits imposed on each profession by the mode of its operation. For Zola the novel was not only an observation working upon the voluntary acts of life, it was an experiment—like that of the astrologers whom Moses met in Egypt—producing phenomena artificially, and allowing a law of necessity to be deduced from the result. And for Balzac the novel was something of the same kind—a synthesis of every human activity framed by one who, as he proudly claimed, had observed and analysed society in all its phases from top to bottom, legislations, religions, histories, and present time. What Balzac did in fiction and what he thought he did are separated by a gulf which could only have been bridged over by the long and painful study of a man surviving for centuries. His scientific knowledge was superficial in nearly every branch. It was his divination which was great. And divination is not omniscience.

An offshoot from the naturalistic school apparently, but derived more truly from the *Comedie Humaine*, is that decadent, pornographic art, of which Balzac would have been ashamed, had he lived to see the vegetation that grew up from the seeds he had sown without knowing what they would bring forth. In Zola's novels the plant was already full grown; its earlier appearance as the slender blade was Champfleury's vulgar satire, the *Bourgeois de Molinchart*. More recently the blossom has revealed its pestilential rankness so plainly that no one can be deceived as to its noxious effect.

Where Balzac's influence is likeliest to remain potent for good is in the domain of history. He was not altogether an initiator here, having learnt from Walter Scott in the one as in the other

capacity; but he developed and focussed what he had received; he added to it, and made it a factor in the historical science. After him historians began to assign a more important place in their narrations and chronicles to the manners and interests of the people, patiently seeking to assemble and situate everything that could relate them exactly to the great political and other public events which would be nothing but names without them. The de Goncourts, in their *History of French Society during the Revolution and under the Directoire*, applied this method with all the zeal of fresh disciples, and with hardly enough discretion. Taine's *Origins of Contemporary France* abdicates none of the older historian's role, but its background is Balzacian. Among the later writers who have taken up the historian's pen, Masson, Lenotre, and Anatole France, illustrate the newer principles, each with a difference, but all excellently, the first in his *Napoleon*, the second in his *Old Houses, Old Papers*, the third in his *Joan of Arc*.

It can scarcely be disputed that an entrance of realism into French literature would have occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, had there been no Balzac. Some other novelists or writers, themselves reacted upon by the scientific spirit, would have set the example in their own way, if not with the achievement of the author of the *Comedy*. On the other hand, it is certain that Balzac, had he put his hand to another treatment of fiction, would nevertheless have created a school. His tremendous force would have channelled into the future, whatever the nature of its current. As Sainte-Beuve well says, he wrote what he wrote with his blood and muscles, not merely with his thought, and such work backed by genius was sure to tell, notwithstanding its defects, the latter even to some extent aiding.

Having partly a bibliographic value, and partly confirming the statements above as to Balzac's influence, the following details concerning theatrical adaptations of some of his novels may serve as a supplement to this chapter.

The first made was produced at the Vaudeville in 1832, and was based on the story of *Colonel Chabert*, which under another title, *The Compromise*, had finished as a serial in the March *Artiste* of the same year. In Balzac's tale—the one of the novels that contains most real pathos—the Colonel, who is a Count of the Empire, is left for dead on the battlefield of Eylau, with wounds that disfigure him dreadfully. Rescued, and sojourning for a long while in German hospitals, he ultimately returns to France, but only to find his wife, who believes him dead, married to another nobleman. Treated as an imposter by everybody save a former non-commissioned officer of his regiment, he falls into poverty and wretchedness, and dies in a hospice, whilst his wife continues to live rich and honoured. Jacques Arago and Louis Lurine, who composed the play, altered the denouement. The husband is pensioned off by his wife, who, however, suffers for her hard-heartedness, being afterwards deserted by her second husband. A second version of the same subject was produced twenty years later at the Beaumarchais Theatre by Faulquemont, and, in 1888, a third at Brussels.

Eugenie Grandet was staged as a comedy, at the Gymnase in 1835, by Bayard and Paulin, who dealt with the plot very freely. Eugenie, happening to lay hold of the letter telling of her uncle's intention to commit suicide, begs her father to send money enough to Paris to prevent the catastrophe. On her father's refusing, she steals one of the old man's strong-boxes and gives it to the son of a local notary, who hurries to the capital with it and reaches there in time to save Charles' father from ruin and death. As Charles has also fled with his uncle's mare on the same errand, the miser thinks he is the thief, and obtains a warrant for his arrest. But Eugenie avows everything except the name of her accomplice. Explanations occur, now that Guillaume Grandet is saved; Charles comes out of prison and marries Eugenie, whose dowry is the money that has served so good a purpose. With Bouffe in the chief role, the *Miser's Daughter*, as the piece was called, had a great popularity, and was several times revived.

In 1835 also, was produced *Pere Goriot* at the Varietes, there being three collaborators in the dramatizing, Theaulon, de Comberousse, and Jaime. Their adaptation possessed the same characters as the novel, but the roles are considerably modified. Victorine Taillefer becomes Goriot's illegitimate daughter, who is provided for by her father, yet brought up without ever seeing him and without the least inkling of her relationship to him. But Vautrin has discovered that a sum of five hundred thousand francs is deposited on her behalf with a notary; and he goes to Grenoble, where she is living, brings her back with him to Paris, and presents her to Goriot as a poor girl, his intention being to ask her in marriage at the proper moment. The retired tradesman takes her in, and she remains with him when his other daughters marry, and during the time they pass in ungratefully stripping him of his fortune. At last his sons-in-law, to salve their consciences, offer to place him in an almshouse. Goriot indignantly refuses, and tells them he has another daughter whom he has made rich, and that he will go and live with her. Now is Vautrin's opportunity. He informs Goriot who Victorine is, and, since she had given her affections to the young Rastignac, he, like a good fellow, renounces his own matrimonial project and assists the old father in marrying the lovers happily. The part of Goriot was acted by Vernet, who did entire justice to Balzac's great creation. Simultaneously at the Vaudeville, another and poorer version of the novel was given; and, in 1891, at the Theatre Libre, Tabarand experimented a third piece, this last being a faithful reproduction of the novel. Antoine scored a big success in the part of Goriot, rendering the death-bed scene with remarkable power and skill.

In 1836, *La Grande Breteche*, with its vengeful husband who walls up his wife's lover alive, tempted Scribe and another playwright, Melesville. In their arrangement, there is a virtuous wife whose husband is a bigamist. On learning the truth, she consents to receive the visit of

Lara, an admirer of hers, whom she loves; and, when the Bluebeard, Valdini, surprises his victim and proceeds to the immurement, his first wife slips in most conveniently and whisks him off, leaving Valentine free to marry Lara.

It is curious to notice how, in almost every instance, the first adapting dramatists transformed Balzac's tragedies into comedies, softening the stern facts of life and its injustices, and meting out the juster rewards and punishments which the novelist's realism forbade.

In Antony Beraud's *Gars*, a play drawn from the *Chouans* and performed at the Ambigu-Comique in 1837, the hero and heroine, instead of dying, are saved by a political amnesty decreed by Napoleon; and the curtain falls to the cry of *Vive l'Empereur*. More than fifty years later, in 1894, the same theatre gave a close rendering of the dramatic portions of the *Chouans*, due to the collaboration of Berton and Blavet, the tragic ending being preserved, with all the effects properly belonging to it.

Commonplace, like the *Gars*, were the arrangements of the *Search for the Absolute*, in 1837, and *Cesar Birotteau* in 1838. The former was staged under the bizarre title, *A+Mx=O+X, or the Dream of a Savant*. The authors, Bayard and Bieville, concealed their identity under an algebraic X as well; and their piece, which made Balthazar Claes a Parisian chemist and a candidate to a vacant chair in the College de France, failed to attract at the Gymnase, in spite of Bouffe's talent and the redemption of Balthazar.

Cesar Birotteau was performed at the Pantheon Theatre, which was demolished in 1846. The love-story of Popinot and Cesarine, which is so briefly sketched in the novel, assumed chief importance in Cormon's adaptation, and, of course, Cesar does not die.

Scribe borrowed largely from the *Comedie Humaine*. His *Sheriff* libretto for Halevy's music at the Opera Comique in 1839 was a transmogrification of *Master Cornelius*. Balzac's Cornelius is Louis XI's money-lender, who lives with his sister in an old mansion, next to a house with the King's natural daughter, Marie de Sassenage, occupies with her husband, the Comte de Sainte-Vallier. The old money-lender, perceiving that his gold is disappearing, has had four of his apprentices hanged on suspicion. The like fate now threatens Marie's lover, Georges d'Estouteville, who in order to see her more safely, has persuaded Cornelius to let him stay in his dwelling one night. Marie appeals to the King to spare her lover's life, and Louis, on investigating the matter, discovers that Cornelius is a somnambulist, and has been robbing himself and burying his gold. On being told of this, the old money-lender has no peace of mind, fearing the King will take all his treasure, and ultimately cuts his own throat. In Scribe's parody, for a parody the piece virtually is, the scene is laid in England. John Turnel, the Sheriff of London, is the somnambulist, and he suspects his own daughter and his cook of stealing his money. But, differing from Cornelius, he accepts the situation when the truth is revealed to him under circumstances that make him as ridiculous as the spectre of Tappington in the *Ingoldsby Legends*; and, as a comic opera generally ends happily, he consents to the marriage of his daughter, Camilla, and of Keat, the cook, with their respective swains.

An English setting was likewise given by Scribe to his play of *Helene*, suggested by Balzac's *Honorine*, which was staged at the Gymnase in 1846. Helene is a young orphan who draws and paints for her living, and has the good fortune to have all her canvases bought at advantageous prices by a rich dealer named Crosby. But suddenly she learns that the dealer is acting in behalf of a certain Lord Clavering, and, fearing some underhand designs, she refuses to keep the money that has been paid her. Smitten by her disinterestedness as well as by her beauty, Lord Clavering would gladly marry her, but is bound by his word plighted to Lord Dunbar's daughter. However, the latter elopes with another nobleman, and Clavering marries Helene. This pretty theme, developed by the actress Rose Cheri, made a huge hit.

Nearly as great was the actress's success at the same theatre in 1849, when she played the principal role in Clairville's *Madame Marneffe* a version of *Cousin Bette*, but very much modified, since Bette is eliminated altogether, and Valerie Marneffe, instead of being a depraved creature, is merely a clever woman of the world, who avenges her father's ruin on the Baron Hulot and Crevel, they being mainly responsible for it. When Balzac was at Wierzchownia, on his last visit, he wrote to his mother asking her to go to the theatrical agent's in order to receive his third of the receipts produced by the piece. These author's royalties must have helped his purse considerably.

In the year after the novelist's death, the applauded representation of *Mercadet*, at the Gymnase, stimulated other managers of theatres to go on exploiting his *Comedy*. In September, the *Shagreen Skin*, arranged by Judicis, was played at the Ambigu-Comique, with *tableaux* of almost literal imitation, yet bringing to life again, in the denouement, the chief *dramatis personae*, and making the whole drama a dream.

At the Comedie Francaise, in 1853, Barriere and de Beauplan produced a five-act prose play drawn from the *Lily in the Valley*. The novel was an awkward one to dramatize, there being very few elements in it capable of yielding situations for the stage. So the result was poor. A better thing was made in 1859 by de Keraniou out of the *Sceaux Ball*. On it he based an agreeable piece entitled *Noblesse Oblige*, with a delicately interpreted love scene in it which met with appreciative audiences at the Odeon.

One more example, that of *Cousin Pons*, may be given to close the list of these adaptation, which are fully treated in Edmond Bire's interesting book dealing with certain aspects of

Balzac's life and work. *Cousin Pons* was staged at the Cluny Theatre in 1873. Alphonse de Launay, the author of the play, keeps to his text fairly well; but he adds a love episode which thrusts the friendship of the two musicians into the second place. Moreover, after the death of Pons, Schmucke lives to inherit his fortune and the Camusots are checkmated.

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSION: THE MAN AND HIS PORTRAITS

It may be affirmed, without thereby disparaging the *Comedie Humaine*, that Balzac's personality is even more interesting than his work; and this is a sufficient excuse for returning to it in a last chapter and trying, at the risk of repetition, to make its presentment completer by way of supplement and summary.

The interest does not arise alone from the contrasts of his foibles, which, forsooth, are nearly always comic—when they are not tragic. We are just as much attracted by the contrasts of his qualities, and by the interplay of the former with the latter—the victories and defeats, the glimpses of immense possibility, the struggles between temperament and environment, all these having a fullness of display rarely found in human nature.

Besides the portraits in painting or sculpture executed of the novelist by Deveria, Boulanger, David d'Angers, and others, some mention of which has already been made, there was one begun by Meissonier, who unfortunately did not finish it. Monsieur Jules Claretie states that the canvas on which it was drawn was subsequently covered by the artist's *Man choosing a Sword*, to-day in the Van Prael collection at Brussels. About Boulanger's picture Theophile Gautier has a good deal to tell us in his article of 1837, published in the *Beaux Arts de la Presse*; and it scarcely agrees with Balzac's condemnation of the portrait as a daub, when he saw the canvas some years later in Russia. Remarking on the difficulty of rendering the novelist's physiognomy, on account of its mobility and strange aspect, Gautier gives it as his opinion that Boulanger succeeded perfectly in seizing the complex expression which seemed to escape all efforts of the brush. The description is a long one; and any one desirous of comparing with each other the impressions received by Balzac's contemporaries who came into close contact with him would do well to read it after this description by Lamartine. In the tenth of his lectures on Literature during the year 1856, the author of *Jocelyn*, speaking of what he had observed, said:—

"His exterior was as uncultivated as his genius. It was the shape of an element: big head, hair scattered over his collar and cheeks like a mane that scissors never trimmed, lips thick, eyes soft but of flame; costume clashing with every elegance; clothes too small for his colossal body; waistcoat unbuttoned; linen coarse; blue stockings; shoes that made holes in the carpet; an appearance as of a schoolboy on holiday, who has grown during the year and whose stature has burst his garments. Such was the man that by himself wrote a whole library about his century, the Walter Scott of France, not the Walter Scott of landscape and adventure, but what is much more prodigious, the Walter Scott of characters, the Dante of the infinite circles of human life, the Moliere of read comedy, less perfect but more fertile than the Moliere of played comedy. Why does not his style equal his conception? France would then have two Molieres, and the greater would not be he who lived first."

Returning to the same subject in his hundred and sixth lecture, eight years later, Lamartine continued:—

"He bore his genius so simply that he did not feel it. He was not tall, and, however, the lighting up of his face and the mobility of his body prevented his small stature from being noticed; but this height swayed like his thought. Between the ground and him there appeared to be a certain margin; now, he stooped down to pick up a sheaf of ideas; now, he stood on tiptoe to follow the soaring of his thought into the infinite. He was big, thick-set, square-shouldered-and-hipped. His neck, chest, body, thighs, and limbs were mighty. There was much of the ampleness of Mirabeau, but no heaviness; there was so much soul that this carried that lightly. The weight seemed to give him force and not to take it from him. His short arms gesticulated with ease; he talked as an orator speaks. His voice resounded with the somewhat savage energy of his lungs, but it had neither roughness nor irony nor anger. His legs, on which he waddled a little, carried his bust smartly; his hands, plump and broad, expressed his whole thought by their waving movements. Such was the man in his stalwart frame. But, in front of the face, one forgot the framework. The speaking countenance, from which it was impossible to detach one's gaze, both charmed and fascinated the beholder. His hair floated over the forehead in large locks; his black eyes pierced like arrows blunted by benevolence; they entered yours confidently as if they were friends; his cheeks were full, rosy, and strongly coloured; the nose was well modelled, yet a trifle long; his lips, gracefully limned, ample and raised at the corners; his teeth,

unequal, broken, and blackened by cigar-smoke; his head often inclining towards the neck, then proudly raised during speech. But the dominating trait of his face, even more than intelligence, was communicative kindness. He charmed your mind when he spoke, and, when not speaking, he charmed your heart. No passion of hatred or envy could have been expressed by this physiognomy; it would have been impossible for him not to be kind. Yet it was not a kindness of indifference or nonchalance, as in the epicurean face of a La Fontaine; it was a loving kindness, intelligent with regard to itself and others, which inspired gratitude and the outpouring of the heart, and defied a person not to love him. A gay childishness was the characteristic of this figure, a soul on holiday when he laid down his pen to forget himself with his friends. . . . But, when I saw him some years later, what gravity did that which was serious not inspire in him? what repulsion did his conscience not evince towards evil? What difficult virtues did his apparent joviality not conceal?"

This tribute of an intimate, as generous as that of Hugo and perhaps more sincere, may pass without comment in so far as it concerns the outer man. On the moral side its exactitude may be questioned, both for what it omits and what it asserts. The omissions are considerable. The assertions deal too exclusively with that conduct which people generally exhibit in their most amicable relations with each other. Balzac's kindness of heart came out in not a few experiences of his life; but deeper than these ephemeral bursts of generosity were selfishnesses that were enormous and persistent. The impulsive energy, the huge boyishness, the appetites physical and mental that age never trained nor chastened were phenomena that all his friends noted, though the manifestations differed.

Some lines of Gozlan's in his *Balzac in Slippers*, form a good sequel to Werdet's account of the Gargantuan dinner. "Balzac drank nothing but water," says Gozlan, but this must have been on Fridays; "and ate but little meat. On the other hand, he consumed great quantities of fruit. . . . His lips palpitated, his eyes lit up with happiness, at the sight of a pyramid of pears or fine peaches. Not one remained to go and relate the rout of the others. He devoured them all. He was superb in vegetable Pantagruelism, with his cravat taken off, his shirt unbuttoned at the neck, his fruit-knife in hand, laughing, drinking water, carving into the pulp of a doyenne pear. I should like to add—and talking. But Balzac talked only little. He let others talk, laughed at intervals, silently, in the savage manner of Leather-stocking, or else, he burst out like a bomb, if the sentence pleased him. It needed to be pretty broad, and was never too broad. He melted with pleasure, especially at a silly pun inspired by his wines, which were delicious."

Another portrait drawn of the novelist by a contemporary, interpreting the inner man, but less flattering to the great delineator of character, is not free from satire and narrowness; but some of the traits it outlines are closely and accurately observed. In his *Histoire du Quarante et Unieme (Academy) Fauteuil*, Arsene Houssaye wrote: "Monsieur de Balzac—that haughty rebel who would fain have been a founder, that refined Rabelais who discovered a woman where Rabelais had discovered only a bottle—Monsieur de Balzac dreamed of the gigantic, yet without being an architect of Cyclopean times. Consequently, when he tried to build his temple of Solomon, he had neither marble nor gold enough to his hand. For his *human comedy* he often lacked actors, and had to resign himself frequently to making the understudies play. It is the fashion to-day to raise Balzac to the level of the dominating geniuses of the world, such as Homer, Saint Augustine, Shakespeare and Moliere; but for the mind that has accurate vision, how many rocks are overturned on this Enceladus, what staircases are forgotten in his Tower of Babel, as in his Jardies house! Balzac was half a woman, as George Sand was half a man. He had a woman's curiosities, he had also her contradictions. Balzac believed himself religious; but his church was the witches' sabbath, and his priest was not Saint Paul but Swedenborg, if not Mesmer; his Gospel was the conjuror's book, perhaps that of Pope Honorius—Honorius de Balzac. He believed himself a politician, and endeavoured to continue de Maistre; he fancied he was glorifying authority, whereas he realized the perpetual apotheosis of force; his heroes were named indifferently Moses or Attila, Charlemagne or Tamerlane, Ricci, the General of the Jesuits, or Robespierre, the profaner of the sanctuary, Napoleon or Vautrin. The *History of the Thirteen* will remain as the grandiose and monstrous defence of personal force defying the social. But will it not remain also, by the side of Hegel's philosophy, as an eloquent codicil to those testaments of individual sovereignty signed by Aristophanes, Montaigne, and Voltaire? He believed himself a spiritualist, and, sublime sawbones, he studied only in the medical amphitheatre. He entered a drawing-room only through the kitchen and the dressing-room. He was always ignorant of that fine saying of Hemsterhuys: 'This world is not a machine but a poem.' He believed himself a painter of manners, and he invented the manners. His women who are so vividly alive, Madame de Langeais or La Torpille, have never been intimate with any other company than that of Monsieur de Balzac. As other great artists, he created his world, a strange world which has consoled and welcomed all the outcasts of the real world, an impossible world which has more than once painted the actual one in its likeness. What charming women of the provinces have since developed into a Eugenie Grandet, a Madame de Mortsauf, a Madame Claes! . . . What was wanting to Balzac in the hell of life, whose every spiral he descended, was virginity in love and ingenuousness in poetry. He always lost himself in the difficult places of style; and himself wept over the lack. When he wrote the *Search for the Absolute*, he was in quest of the ideal; but the ideal is that which one had inside one's self, just as love is. The studies of the chemist and alchemist, of the doctor and jurist, do not light the flame of Prometheus."

The quotations do not exhaust the list of portraits emanating from Balzac's fellows, but they adequately illustrate the varying views, which were many. Indeed, like the sculptor who

produces several studies of the same model and shows a different interpretation each time, critics have presented us, in more than one instance, with descriptions of the novelist, at an earlier and a later date, that contain important discrepancies.

Balzac was an enigma because he was not always the same personality to himself. Both his energies and his desires carried him outside the limits in which a man's individuality is usually manifested. Despite Monsieur Houssaye, one may even sympathize, though incredulous, with admirers that would have him to be a universal genius, unfortunately thwarted by fate—one who else might have opened up all the avenues of knowledge that humanity can ever penetrate. This persuasion was undoubtedly his own; and it partly explains his Faustus curiosities leading him now and again into illegitimate and unwholesome experiments, of which we get some glimpse in his books and correspondence.

That he could have succeeded in other careers, the medical one, for example, the painter's or sculptor's perhaps, or the mechanical inventor's, seems likely; but his impulsiveness, his exuberance, and his poor financial ability would have been hindrances in directions where success depends largely on exact calculation, method, and detail. In political life, his brilliance would assuredly have sufficed to procure him prominence in opposition. As a minister he would have inevitably fallen a victim to the inconsistencies of his own attitude—inconsistencies due to the fact that his judgments were intuitional and instinctive, with prejudices reacting on them, too numerous and too strong to allow him to weigh things fairly and deliberately. Moreover, his mind was too much engrossed by the sole picturesqueness of phenomena to delve deep enough beneath them for their essential relations. This is why it happens that his arguments are often worse than his convictions, the latter being inherited, in general, and at least having the residuary wisdom of tradition together with the additional force of his common sense. Thus, on the eve of giving the ignorant man a power equal to that of the intelligent one, and of handing over the supreme decision in the vital concerns of a country to unsafeguarded majorities less qualified for the task than ancient oligarchy or autocracy. But he had nothing of worth to suggest, no alternative save the return to abuses of the grossest kind which experience had proved to lead to revolution.

His ponderous declaration: "I write by the light of two eternal truths, religion and the monarchy," was a sort of cheap-jack recommendation of the so-called philosophy in his *Comedie Humaine*. His Catholic orthodoxy, if orthodoxy it were, savoured more of politics than religion. He did not wish the old ecclesiastical organization and faith of France to be changed, because he saw in it a useful police agency for restraining the masses. As for his Royalism, which had a smack of Frondism in it, he stuck to it because it accorded with his conservative, eclectic tastes, and not because he had worked it out as the best theory of government. Such dissertations as appear in his writings, on either the one or the other subject, have nothing more original about them than can be found in the most ordinary election speech or pulpit discourse.

And in the realm of pure speculative thought he was not great. Beyond the limits of the visible, his intuition failed him; so that he floundered helplessly when not upheld by the doctrines of others, which, since he did not understand them, he adapted to his purpose but awkwardly. Whether there were latent faculties in him that might have developed with training, it is impossible to affirm or deny; however, we may be forgiven the doubt. From a mind so forceful, the native perception, though uncultured, should have issued in something better than *Lambert* or *Seraphita*. Still, there is this to be said, that a man whose eyes were so constantly bent on facts, whose gaze was always spying out details which escaped the common observation, was embracing a plane parallel, if inferior to that which was covered by a Plato.

The title of the author of the *Comedy* to be called a philosopher can be defended only on the ground of his adding a new domain to the rule of science. He was not the discoverer of the law of cause and effect. Nor was he the one in his own country who did the most towards demonstrating the interdependence of the various branches of knowledge, this honour being reserved to Comte. But the transference of the minute causalities of life into fiction was systematized by him. He made the thing an artistic method, using it with the same power, though not the same chasteness, as George Eliot after him. His employment was not very logical—how could it be when the guiding mind was in chronic fermentation? He gives us this contradiction that human thought is at once the grandeur and destruction of life—an opinion imbued with ecclesiasticism, confusing thought with passion. It is passion alone which disintegrates; and, in the *Comedie Humaine*, such monomaniacs as Grandet, Claes, and Hulot are destroyed not by their thought but their desire.

Balzac's pessimism is not philosophic. In him it was not the despair of an intellect that had worn itself out in vainly seeking for the solution of the riddle of the universe, vainly striving after a theory that should reconcile nature's brute law with the human demand for justice and immanent goodness. By original temperament an optimist, he changed and grew pessimistic with the untoward happenings of his agitated career, and under the fostering of his native self-esteem. Possibly too, as Le Breton asserts, a secondary cause was his having imbibed the pretentious doctrines of the Romantic school, the disdains of the young artistic bloods of 1830, who held their clan composed the loftier, super-human race, the only one that counted. Berlioz carried this folly of pride to its highest pitch. In his *Memoirs*, he declared that the public (of course excluding himself) were an infamous tag-rag-and-bob-tail. The people of Paris, he protested, were more stupid and a hundred times more ferocious, in their caperings and revolutionary grimaces, than the baboons and orang-outangs of Borneo. Balzac at times adopted and expressed similar opinions. Gozlan relates that one day the owner of Les Jardies

said to him in the attic of his hermitage: "Come, let us spit upon Paris." The novelist imagined that talents of the kind he possessed ought to be admitted to every honour; and his hatred of the Revolution and Republicanism was more because he believed they were inimical to art—and his art—than because they had cast down a throne. His bitterness was to some extent excusable, for he was exploited much during his lifetime, and had, even to the end, to bend his neck to the yoke. But he also belonged to the class of exploiters by his mental constitution. Could he have had his way, all the men of letters around him would have been in his pay, writing for their bare living and contributing to his fame. In this connection there is an anecdote narrated by Baudelaire, in the *Echo des Theatres* of the 25th of August 1846, and referable to the year 1839.

The Jardies hermit had a bill of twelve hundred francs to meet; and for this reason he was sad as he walked up and down the double passage of the Opera—he, the hardest commercial and literary head of the nineteenth century; he, the poetic brain upholstered with figures like a financier's office; he, the man of mythologic failures, of hyperbolic and phantasmagoric enterprises, the lanterns of which he always forgot to light; he, the great pursuer of dreams for ever in quest of the absolute; he, the funniest, most attractive as well as the vainest character of the *Comedie Humaine*; he, the original, as unbearable in private life as he was delightful in his writings; the big baby swollen with genius and conceit, who had so many qualities and so many failings that one feared to attack the latter for fear of injuring the former, and thus spoiling this incorrigible and fatal monstrosity.

At length, however, his forehead grew serene and he went towards the Rue de Richelieu with sublime and cadenced step. There he entered the den of a rich man (Curmer), who received him with due honour.

"Would you like," quoth he, "the day after to-morrow to have in the *Siecle* and the *Debats* two smart articles on the French depicted by themselves, the articles to be signed by me? I must have fifteen hundred francs. The affair is a grand one for you."

The editor, unlike his *confreres*, found the proposal reasonable, and the bargain was concluded on the spot, with the stipulation that the money should be paid on the delivery of the first article. Leaving the office, the visitor returned to the passage of the Opera; and there he met a diminutive young man of shrewish, witty countenance (Edouard Ourliac), known among the journalists for his clownish verve.

"Edouard, will you earn a hundred and fifty francs to-morrow?"

"Won't I, if I get the chance!" answered the latter.

"Then come and drink a cup of coffee."

"To-morrow," explained his principal, "I must have three big columns on the French depicted by themselves, and I must have them early, for I have to copy and sign them."

Edouard hastened away to his task, while the novelist went and ordered a second article in the rue de Navarin.

The first article appeared two days later in the *Siecle*, and was signed, strangely enough, neither by the little man nor by the great man, but by a third person known in Bohemia for his tom-cat and opera-comique amours (Gerard de Nerval). The second friend was big, idle, and lymphatic. Moreover, he had no ideas; he knew only how to thread words together like pearls; and, as it takes longer to heap up three long columns of words than to make a volume of ideas, his article appeared only several days later in the *Presse*.

The twelve-hundred-francs debt was paid. Each one was perfectly satisfied, except the editor, who was not quite. And this was how a man of genius discharged his liabilities.

Balzac's individuality is one of those that inevitably raise the question as to how far genius and creative imagination are made up of will-power, how far what is produced by great talent is sub-conscious inspiration virtually independent of effort. Although Shelley confines his assertions on the subject to poetry, he nevertheless seems to imply that creation of any kind has little to do with the will. "The mind in creation," he says, "is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the ocnsciuso portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but, when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline." The case of Balzac suggests that the sort of genius Shelley had in his thought is the exception rather than the rule. The author of the *Comedy* himself asserts that great talents do not exist without great will. "You have ideas in your brain?" he says. "Just so. I also. . . . What is the use of that which one has in one's soul if no use is made of it?" . . . "To conceive is to enjoy; it is to smoke enchanted cigarettes; but, without the execution, everything goes away in dream and smoke." . . . "Constant work is the law of art as it is that of life; for art is creation idealized. Consequently, great artists and poets do not wait for orders or customers; they bring forth to-day, to-morrow, continually."

It may be, after all, that the difference is one of those verbal ones to which Locke draws attention in his *Essay on the Human Understanding*. Will-power is partly an inheritance and

partly an acquisition. And acquired qualities are always less puissantly exercised, less effective in the results obtained. Even in poetry it would appear that, without will to unlock the door, fine faculties that are dormant may never make their existence known. Balzac gives us an example of a native will that was for ever rushing through his being and arousing to activity first one and then another of his native powers. And, if the total accomplishment was not conform to the tremendous liberation of force, it was because there was circumstance harder than will and the intershock of energies that ran counter to each other.

In fine, alas! there is something absent from the man which would have both beautified himself and added a saner beauty to his work—the pursuit of those finer ideals which mean consistent devotion to duty and broad sympathy with human nature, irrespective of nation, colour, and position, in its yearnings and in its fate. Fascinated by material aims, worshipping the Napoleonic epopee to the extent of framing his conduct by it, measuring the happiness of existence rather by its honours and furniture than by its moral attainments, he missed the first poetry of love as he missed the last wisdom of age. This limitation of the man makes itself sorely felt in his writings, where we, more often than not, tread a Dane's *Inferno*, unrelieved by the brighter glimpses and kindlier impulses that still are found in our world of self-seeking and suffering. world of self-seeking and suffering.

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