

To *Mercadet* then we turn for the most striking example of the playwright's powers. This first appeared as *Le Faiseur* (The Speculator), being originally written in 1838-40. Justice compels us to state, however, that another hand is present in the perfected play. In the original it was a comedy in five acts; but this was revamped and reduced to three acts by M. d'Ennery, before its presentation at the Gymnase Théâtre, August 21, 1851. It was then re-christened *Mercadet*, and took its place as a 12mo brochure in the "Theatrical Library" in the same year. The original five-act version was first published as *Mercadet*, in *Le Pays*, August 28, 1851 (probably called forth by the presentation of the play four days earlier), and then appeared in book form, as *Le Faiseur*, from the press of Cadot, in 1853. It is of interest to note that the play was not presented till over a year subsequent to Balzac's death. The presented version in three acts has generally been regarded as the more acceptable, M. de Lovenjoul, the Balzacian commentator, recognizing its superior claims. It is the form now included in current French editions, and the one followed in the present volume.

Although *Mercadet*, like the others, excited the ridicule of supercilious critics, it has proven superior to them and to time. As early as the year 1869, the Comédie Française—the standard French stage—added *Mercadet* to its repertory; and more than one company in other theatres have scored success in its representation. The play contains situations full of bubbling humor and biting satire. Its motif is not sentiment. Instead, it inveighs against that spirit of greed and lust for gain which places a money value even upon affection. But during all the arraignment, Balzac, the born speculator, cannot conceal a sympathy for the wily *Mercadet*