

Balzac had shown great fondness for clerical characters and marked skill in drawing them.*

But readers who care for plots, while not likely to be far astray in their conjectures as to the identity of Tascheron's accomplice, will hardly pardon the long division entitled "Mme. Graslin at Montégnaç," which, it will be remembered, was not included in the first draft of the story. It is good in itself as a sort of reduced variation of the "Médecin de Campagne," but it adds very little to Balzac's reputation as a philosopher, and it destroys the unity of his book. The last division, "Véronique at the Tomb," brings out the power of repentance, which, as we have seen, had been a basal idea with Balzac, but it does very little to satisfy the curiosity of the reader as to the way in which such a woman as Mme. Graslin became involved with Tascheron and such an exemplary pupil of Abbé Bonnet developed into an adulterer and murderer. The facts are given us, but an explanation of them would have been a better contribution to fiction than the inserted chapter is to rural economy and political philosophy, especially as Balzac repeats himself in his strictures on the code and his diatribes against the egoism of democracy.

Still these chapters are full of merit. The sketch of Farra-besche prepares us for the still finer work of the same sort to be given us in "Les Paysans." Gérard is a good character and serves to introduce a profession not much in evidence in the "Comedy"—that of the engineer. His letter is more of a disquisition than of an epistle, but it contains reflections on the defects of technical schools that are still worthy of attention.† It may be remarked that the grouping of such excellent subordinates about both Mme. Graslin and Benassis is a clear proof that Balzac's fiction is often more optimistic in character than many critics have supposed. It

* Cf. also Abbé Bonnet's talks with Mme. Graslin with those of the Curé de St. Lange and Mme. d'Alglemont in "La Femme de Trente Ans."

† See also on this topic a few pages at the beginning of "Cousin Pons."