

franc piece is anywhere a hero in the "Comedy," it is here. It is not easy, too, for readers who do not care for analysis to take an interest in such a mediocre personage as Paul de Manerville. Yet Balzac has scarcely made a better study of a character, and in Mme. Évangélista he has created not merely a horrible mother-in-law—he had done that in the juvenile "Wann-Chlore"—but one of the most horrible women in fiction. Her daughter Natalie is not so dreadful, but is hardly more lovable; nor does the selfish, ambitious Solonet add an element of nobility to the story. For this element we must turn to the old notary Mathias, who, like Chesnel in "La Cabinet des Antiques," is the devoted adherent of a great family. Mathias saves the book from sordidness even if he cannot save Paul from the clutches of a she-demon. But this is doing injustice to de Marsay, who shows here finer qualities as a man than he is accustomed to display. He is still cynical and worldly, but he is a true friend.

As to the scene between the notaries, Balzac is right in regarding it as great, although it is almost too serious to be comic. There are other good scenes, such as that in which Mme. Évangélista gets the better of her gossiping visitor, and that in which she poisons her daughter's mind against Paul. Everywhere profound knowledge of life is displayed, especially in de Marsay's letter. If vice triumphs in Mme. Évangélista and Natalie, folly is punished in Paul, who is not likely to make his fortune in the East as Charles Grandet did. It is pathetic to see folly punished, but the sight carries with it a lesson for an over-sympathetic age; and even if no lesson were taught by this story, it would still be noteworthy as a masterly report by the great Secretary of Society.

"Un Début dans la Vie" has a considerable amount of that comic element which Balzac found in "Le Contrat de Mariage." He wrote Mme. Surville that it was one of the pearls of his crown, and as he certainly knew that he had diamonds