

Although it was written at a period when, according to many critics, Balzac was not doing his best work, it may be doubted whether the opening pages of "Béatrix" have been surpassed in their kind anywhere in the "Comedy." How superbly Brittany, and the primitive town of Guérande, and the still more primitive family of du Guénie are set before us! The author of the "Chouans" and "Un Drame au Bord de la Mer" has surpassed his former efforts. The grandeur of the desolate scenery vies with the grandeur of the simple, loyal people who go about their daily tasks unmindful of the fact that there is a busy world beyond the confines of their province. Yet the world comes to them, and we have a drama instead of an idyll. If Calyste had married Charlotte de Kergarouët, the aged Baron would doubtless have lived longer, and the fair Baroness, old Mlle. du Guénie and her friend Mlle. de Pen-Hoël, the Curé, and the Chevalier du Halga would have gone on playing "mouche" indefinitely, and the world would have possessed an almost unsurpassed idyll.

But it was not to be. Calyste, child of nature though he is, has in him a strain of blood that rebels against the primitive life marked out for him. The snake in his Eden is that most modern of women Félicité des Touches, alias Camille Maupin, the celebrated writer. The poor boy is dazzled by the glimpse he gets of Parisian culture and luxury, and falls in love with a woman old enough to be his mother and strong enough to hold him off although she loves him. Then sensuality in the person of Béatrix makes a prey of him, and the Guénie paradise is wrecked. Surely we have here a most striking conception. It is the combat of the new with the old, of the present with the past, set in a unique frame. It is the eternal drama of innocent youth struggling in the coils of fate.

Yet have we profited by obtaining a drama when we might have had an idyll? The reader must answer this question