

O. W. F. M. T. 2.

horse, have we not stood by the road at dusk and ordered a passing chum to deliver or die! The principle here in its geriz developes with our life. The sublime ideal of human character is to live perfectly a book—the Book of God, and the God of Books. Hence the close relation, sympathy and similarity, between the books habitually read, and the line and level of action daily pursued. A volume of sound vigorous thought tends to inspire a life embodying the loftiest elements; whilst a vicious book can point only to a debasing, body-killing, soul-damning course. Not to mention the worthless disgusting trash, ground out by detestable know-nothings, even Sterne, Fielding, and Dickens are chargeable with gross exaggeration. Nicholas Nicholby, is a fine conception; but is it true to nature? Does not the haze of improbability darken around more than one scene? True Nicholas, Ralph, Nobbs and Squeers, wear a human garb, but do not always act and speak like men. In our opinion Mr. and Mrs. Mantinalli, form a mixture of the absurd and ridiculous rarely met with outside of Lunatic Asylums. We contend that a course of such reading unhinges and distorts our views of actual life. Fancy is a subtle and powerful faculty. It paints in delicate hues the cloudland, the mountain, and moor of our life. It invests the sensible with a purple light. It drapes every day occurrences with the charm of a sweet smile. It awakens songs of sentiment and affection, sweet as the rippling laughter of a mountain stream born on the high hills as it rushes away to gladden the plains of mental being. Like an aurora it brightens up the dark cold sky of sense and fact. On the other hand it is equally true that fancy like the sullen wings of night darkens the window of our prospects. It peoples thought with grim forebodings and paralyzing horrors. It whispers even in the ear of a beauteous morn, the sad dirge of coming disaster. Does the gorgeous light sweep from horizon to zenith, it reminds that “the golden beams of glory the summer sky that fleck, shine where dead stars are sleeping in their azure mantled grave.” Do we think of the softly rolling steamlet, it points to the shadows resting upon its ripply tide. Does the balmy breath of joy fan our spirit, it points to the passing cloud, and whispers the warning—“hopes bright robes are broidered with the sable fringe of fear.” Beautiful is the smile of fancy, terrible its frown. This wonderful mental power so delicate so mighty in its strange working, so sensitive to every impression from the brain, receives an unnatural and unhealthy stimulus, from the unreal in action and in word. Hence Novels of the type under consideration injure this faculty

on the right exercise of which depends to no small extent, our happiness and usefulness.

HONORÉ BALZAC.

In this brief sketch we propose to give a few facts with respect to the life of an eminent French writer of the present century, which may be new to some of our readers, and prove not altogether uninteresting.

Honoré Balzac formed one of that brilliant group of French writers comprising Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Dumas, Lamertine, Béranger and others. His early life seemed singularly wanting in any bright omen of future eminence. While a lad of ten at school he passed for a dullard, took no share in the sports of his companions, and spent the greater part of the time in gorging himself upon the literature at his command. He seems to have early cherished desires for a literary life, but met with not the slightest encouragement from any quarter. The other members of the family with that overwisdom, which so frequently proves a sorry blunderer, assured him that he need never hope for success in that line; and on reading his first literary venture, a five-act tragedy entitled “Cromwell,” he was greeted with the sweeping criticism from one of those eminent individuals who are supposed to know, that the production displayed not the slightest germ of talent. But the youthful Balzac had more faith in himself, than others had in him, and resolutely cutting away the bridges in his rear, became devoted to a literary life. And now behold him, ye aspirants for the laurels of literary fame, the poor Balzac, and take courage as you see him struggling on through eight poverty-stricken years, sending out twelve successive volumes which fall from the press, like autumn leaves, to be trodden beneath the feet of an indifferent public. But these dark days, he has told us, were the times in which he learned to write French. They are brought to a close by the appearance of a novel, which advanced him somewhat beyond the position of mediocrity to which he had been assigned, and then the dawn breaks more clear and several works follow at once placing him in the front ranks of the most brilliant writers of the time.

Balzac deserves the title of a literary adventurer, as he pushed his way into fields hitherto unexplored. He forms a massive plot, and lo! two or three scores of volumes are required to fulfil it—each forming an essential link in the chain of development. In place of the conventional heroine, the charming mademoiselle, he substitutes the mature madame of thirty, and his genius makes her popular.

Naturally he did not possess fluency or ease of expression. His style was the result of intensest labour. He would in the first instance write off a hasty sketch and dispatch it to the printer. The proof would be returned with very wide margins for the author's corrections. But this was by no means the end of the matter. On one occasion the proof was returned fourteen times before the reluctant Balzac would present it to the impatient public.

Balzac was very conscientious in his method of treating a subject. We do not see the writer in his work. He stood without the scene as an attentive observer. The story does not invariably terminate amid that happy collocation of favoring circumstances which is to be looked for, almost inevitably, in the conventional novel, but presents with unerring faithfulness the ways of real life—lead they to issues fair or ill.

A ruling passion is most frequently his theme, and its influence upon the life and character of the individual are presented with the strong lights and shadows of a master's art. His method of labor was somewhat unique. The plan of a story seizes upon him. “To work!” he cries, and buries himself from the world in the recesses of his study. Eighteen hours out of the twenty-four are spent in intensest labour. He gets sleepy; strong coffee is at hand to brace him to his work. By and by the finishing stroke is given; he disappeared, fat as a monk, he re-appears lean and lank, with leaden eyes, yet cheerful withal, and presents to the world the offspring of this desperate travail.

Balzac was a jovial soul. At the literary gatherings where he figured, his hoarse laugh completely drowned the feebler cachinnations of his companions. He was possessed of a most sanguine temperament, which led him to dream of the good time coming, when his talents should yield him boundless riches. Six ciphers were invariably added to the initial figure in all these calculations of future wealth. Each work as it went to the press he fondly hoped would prove the *open sesame*. He possessed such unbounded faith in his plans, united with such remarkable persuasive powers, that cooler heads than his own by far, would be turned by his absurd schemes for suddenly acquiring wealth. One of these of a literary character may be mentioned here. A secret society is formed, composed of thirteen men of talent. They are not to recognize one another when they meet in public; each one will write something in his particular vein, be it a novel, a newspaper article, a poem, or what not. As soon as a piece appears from the pen of the thirteen, the remaining twelve, by voice and pen, are to unite loudly in its praise. This would be sure,