

by the Russian. But with what a noble calm he bears the shock. "And himself," he says, "that excellent Slav, who obliged him to assume so cordial a manner with me? I can see him in my house, at my table, gentle, affectionate, kissing my children. I have in my possession many exquisite warm-hearted letters from him. And this was what lay concealed behind that kindly smile! Good heavens, how strange life is, and how true that charming word of the Greek language, *Eironeia*!

"Robert Helmont, the *Diary of a Recluse*," is a leaf out of Daudet's own life, written while in forced retirement (he had broken his leg) in the country in '70 and '71, when the Prussians were thundering at the gates of Paris. It is a book of contrasts. He is in the country, rural sights and sounds are about him, but the incessant booming of cannon rolls through the air; and while he remains inactive, Paris, his loved Paris, is being stormed by the Prussian vandals. A sensitive poet with a nature as refined as a woman's, he is in constant expectation of being ruthlessly murdered, and he can scarcely step across his door without seeing destruction or death. To intensify the situation he is compelled to accept the companionship of a half-crazed murderer, Goudeloup. It is not often that a diary is readable, but the "*Diary of Robert Helmont*" is not only entertaining but also gives a full and excellent picture of the horrors of war. And with what exquisite finish the book ends! "From the distant quiet plains rises a misty vapour like the smoke of an inhabited village; and if anything can impart consolation after a cruel war, it is this repose of all nature and mankind, this universal calm which rests upon a shattered country—a country recruiting itself by sleep, forgetful of the lost harvest in preparing for that of the future."

Turning to Balzac, what a difference! Here there is no calm, no repose. Sainte-Beuve in one of his inevitable critical strokes, hits off Balzac's genius perfectly. "Balzac," he says, "desired the artist to precipitate himself headlong into his work, like Curtius into the gulf. A genius of that sort affords much animation and passion, but also danger and a great deal of smoke." But despite this defect of his quality, Balzac is the first French novelist, and almost the first novelist. He has as many characters on his stage as Dickens, as fine an

eye for the familiar life of France, and as intimate an acquaintance with the lives he depicts, as Scott has for the Scotch peasants. No phase of life is unknown to him; he enters every rank of society, and if at times he exaggerates, and if at times he is weak and unsteady, there are purple patches in every book by him that place him head and shoulders over every other French prose writer; and as we read him carefully and thoughtfully we are compelled to compare him with but one genius, our own Shakespeare. He has Shakespeare's breadth of sympathy, Shakespeare's wonderful intuitive eye that makes him see at a glance all round and through the subject he is treating, he has Shakespeare's force and extravagance of language, and he has, to an almost equal extent, Shakespeare's power of at times packing his sentences with living, burning thought.

His "*The Country Parson*" is a most uneven book, but such characters as Farrabesche, Veronique, Abbe Bonnet, and Sauviat are drawn in his best manner. However, to get Balzac at his best it is needful to study a book like "*Eugenie Grandet*." The hard, sordid peasant, greedy of money, unloving, utterly selfish, often appears on pages dealing with French life, but no finer study of the kind was ever done than *Grandet*. But it is a book of excellent characters. Madame Grandet, meek, submissive, serves as a contrast to her self-willed, tyrannical husband; Nanon, with dog-like faithfulness watching over her master's interests, gains our sympathy as do but few menials in literature. Poor Nanon! What penetration Balzac had when his pen framed you, when his imagination sent the blood coursing through your veins! But Eugenie stands pre-eminent among Balzac's women. Not that she is the most striking, the loftiest, or the tenderest; but that she is the most perfectly done, the most true to life. At forty "she has simple manners, all the dignity of one who has passed through great sorrows, and the saintliness of a soul unspotted by the world; and, no less, the rigidity of an old maid, the little penurious ways and narrow ideas of a dull country town." She is not idealized; there is no high coloring; she is simply a woman, and as we read her words and her deeds we forget her creator, and his art, and think only of herself.

Herein lies the difference between the art of Daudet and the art of Balzac; from Daudet the man we never free ourselves, and he is a delightful personality to be with; from Balzac we are always freed, we live with his characters and they with us, while their creator stands apart with his magic wand enjoying our enthrallment.

T. G. M.

**The Country Parson*, by Balzac. London: McMillan & Co. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.

Eugenie Grandet, by Balzac. London: McMillan & Co. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.

La Grande Breteche, by Balzac. London: McMillan & Co. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.

Beatrice, by Balzac. London: McMillan & Co. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.