

secondary importance. The author intended them to be mere pictures of certain phases of life. We can recognize in these the object aimed at, and value the workmanship accordingly. "Les Employés," for example, is little else than a representation of executive intrigue and idleness, in which the fortunes of M. Lupeaulx are not meant to do more than give point to the realistic conversations of the clerks in the office. These dialogues, given in dramatic form, in bulk are fully half the story, and are constructed out of the most common-place material, just the ordinary gossip of the office, stupid jokes, vulgar chaff, *banalités*. Such work is nevertheless artistic, and Bixiou deserves a place in novel-literature no less than Thackeray's *Jeames de la Pluche*. Observation and representation of low life is not derogatory to a novelist's dignity. But what are we to say for Balzac's high life? In treating of this section of society Balzac shows himself detestably vulgar. He has the snobbish desire to mingle with the aristocracy, and consequently his books are crowded with Viscounts, Barons, Marquises, Duchesses and Princesses. Titled folk abound, but there is not one real gentleman or lady among them. They are all *nouveaux riches*; ostentatious of their wealth and titles. And this is not because Balzac wishes to represent only the vulgar aristocracy created by Louis Philippe. On the contrary, most of his titled gentlemen boast of their ancient lineage and adherence to the legitimist party. They are, it is to be feared, the offspring of Balzac's imagination, and their characteristics are inherited. This is a very unfortunate feature in a novelist. Those of us who are not naturally refined like to read about people that are, and those of us that are naturally refined dislike reading about people who are not. In Balzac's books we can find many worthy people, honest *bourgeois*, virtuous and amiable country folk, devoted servants and heroic peasants; but ladies and gentlemen, never!

A grave fault in Balzac, closely akin to the last, is his want of delicacy. He is perpetually striking a false note. That he should be theatrically sentimental is natural, in view of his nationality. But there are degrees of evil in this as in other vices, and it might be expected that Balzac would, in this respect, not sink much lower than the Victor Hugo grade, for instance. As a matter of fact, he not infrequently touches the zero of Eugène Sue. The "gush" of the third-rate English lady-novelist is an amiable weakness in comparison with the monstrous bad taste Balzac sometimes displays.

Mr. Henry James has remarked upon the utter absence of the moral sense in Balzac. He appears to perceive no radical difference between right and wrong. Remorse in his view would be unintelligible, except as a mental disease; and, as far as my reading has extended, there is no attempt to depict it. Another peculiarity which may tell against him with some readers, is his fondness for unhappy conclusions. Looking at the subject-matter of the great mass of his novels, we must pronounce Balzac to be right in this respect on artistic principles. But in some instances our sense of poetic justice cries out against the inhumanity of such dénouements. When I recall the dreary progress of that miserable story, "Eugénie Grandet," and remember how I was buoyed up to struggle on in the hope of a happy termination, I cannot but regret that Balzac's artistic instinct would not permit him to wind up in the old-fashioned way with a marriage, instead of bringing the melancholy tale to a consistent and dismal conclusion. There is only one other novel in my experience that can rival Eugénie Grandet for uniform depression and gloom. The name of this competitor is "Washington Square," and its author is Mr. Henry James.

On looking back upon what I have already given as my impression of Balzac, there appears to be a strong case made out against him. Dullness, dreariness, vulgarity and bad taste are not commendable qualities. The fact cannot be disguised, that Balzac is uncommonly hard reading. But we are also bound to admit that he possesses a charm greater than many authors more agreeable to our taste. Balzac is like a bad habit, such as smoking or opium-eating. The first taste is anything but pleasant, and many people have contented themselves with a first taste. But should curiosity or the example of others induce a more extensive trial, the spell begins to work and the habit is formed. Smoking may be given up, will never willingly be renounced. The fascination which he exercises is due to a certain extent, no doubt, to his just

delineation of character, and even to his very accuracy of detail. There is in human nature a thirst for truth that will bear with many obstacles. Even the details that seem unworthy of a noble theme are not altogether unnecessary. It is the small matters of life that test the character. The patience of Père Goriot under the sneers of his fellow-boarders is more unselfish than his impoverishment for the sake of his daughter's gambling lover.

But Balzac's great power of fixing one's interest does not depend solely upon his accuracy and truth. For on this supposition, how explain the effect of such a fantastical study as "Louis Lambert?" There his subject is mysticism and his facts are as extravagant as his fancies. Balzac has a childish love of the marvellous for its own sake, which refuses to be tied down to possibilities. And yet whatever irrational nonsense he writes, the fascination is the same. The key to his power seems to be his intensity of meaning. What he thinks or imagines, he feels strongly; and what he feels he is determined to make others feel also. A strong personality outweighs a multitude of literary sins, and none who read Balzac can fail to recognize the strength that lies behind his works. His published letters confirm this instinct of a powerful nature, working out its own purposes with the merciless egotism of genius. This is the chain that binds together all the parts, even of a dull novel, and makes it interesting. Read any portion of it apart from the rest and you will find it tedious and inconclusive. Read the whole story and the effect is excitement. You are subjugated, not by the story, not by the characters, by nothing in the work itself, but by the mind revealed through the work, by the personality of Balzac.

H. H. L.

AT THE CHAPEAU ROUGE.

It was in the quieter time that came with the restored Bourbon House. France had not as yet recovered its old-time gaiety. Nations, like men, become thoughtful after seeing death face to face. A wintry rain stayed some few travellers at the Chapeau Rouge in the goodly town of Dijon. Not so much as servant as humble companion did Icilius share the fortunes of M. Charles, at present on his way to visit at a neighboring chateau. Moved thereto by the prevailing dullness of street and market-place, Icilius had made the acquaintance of the plump host. But him he had dismissed with scant courtesy for a tiresome chatterer when he would describe to his unwilling guest the marvels of the Cathedral of St. Benigne, whose great spire loomed gray through the cloud mantle that lay heavily on Dijon. So now, Icilius sat in the old tavern with his own well-worn thoughts for company.

It occurred to Icilius quite naturally, in the course of time, that there were better ways of spending the long morning. He shouted to the landlord, whose burly voice he heard within scolding the maids, to bring some drink. But to little purpose; muttering at the fat rogue as dense of hearing, he pounded on the wainscoting, and called, "House! house!" This attempt was more successful; for the jolly figure of the landlord in answer filled the low doorway to be saluted by "Well, I suppose one might get a fairly good cup of wine here?"

Something in the question excited great merriment, and his loud laughter subsided to a faint chuckle only on observing the deep displeasure of Icilius. "My friend, you must, indeed, be a stranger to the red wines of Burgundy to ask such a question in Dijon! Come here," leading him to the window, "See, where yonder the mist seems to hang in thicker draperies—ask what the wines of the Côte-d'Or are like? ha! ha!"

"So, that's the Côte-d'Or? not much to look at."

"Nay, you wouldn't say that if you were to stand at this casement some drowsy summer day. Me it makes feel as if at mass to follow the track of the plow as it heaves the deep red soil in ridges, until the eye is led to the hill-slopes where the dark clusters in the vineyards borrow a richer bloom from the purple haze. It's a lovely sight from Dijon. . . ."

"Piff! What about the wine?"

"Were it clear your eye might sweep with ease the whole slope that grows the right Chambertin and that needs no praise! But the hammer men of Notre Dame are chiming noon; and both man and beast begin now to feel appetite. I must be bustling."