

tant to observe that they came from a man who for years at least had had little opportunity for close study of domestic life. Yet his imagination was sufficiently strong to enable him to see into a mother's heart as well as into the passionate bosom of a young girl just released from her cloister.

Balzac wrote to Mme. Hanska that the "Mémoires" would be "a work in filigree" that would suit marvelously well those small-minded women (*petites femmes*) whom the wings of *Séraphita* could not bear aloft. He also wrote of it as a "delicious composition." Whether or not the minds of some men and women have grown larger of late, it is at least certain that many of them do not find the "Mémoires" delicious to-day. Persons have been known to be turned from Balzac entirely, merely because it was the first book of his that happened to fall in their way. Distinguished critics have handled very roughly each of the chief characters, and many readers have resented the fact that the novel is written in letters. We have already intimated that it carries sentiment to the verge of sentimentality, and that it is far from being a masterpiece.

On the other hand it is quite possible to do the story injustice. As a study of the disastrous effects of passion in excess it teaches a valuable lesson and shows not a little skill on Balzac's part, even if it offends English notions by favoring too openly marriages for convenience. It contains some good touches, some excellent descriptions, and some strong pages. Family pride is well brought out in the Duke de Chaulieu, and the two husbands of Louise have at least some excuse for their folly. That young woman herself is probably overdrawn, although it was quite true to life to make her dominate one husband and become the slave of her love for the other; but we must remember that a sudden withdrawal from a convent and a plunge into the world are by no means steady influences for a young life. We may readily grant that our two heroines write letters that smack less of their boudoirs than of Balzac's