

great success, and that even lawyers were surprised at the truthfulness of his descriptions of criminal procedure, but he contented himself with quoting the opinions of others. He cannot, however, have failed to perceive that, under the stress caused by ill health and debts, he was composing a book which would be considered by many readers the most interesting portion of the "Comedy," and would be placed by some critics at the head of all his masterpieces.

Whether or not the "Splendeurs et Misères" is superior to "Père Goriot" or "Eugénie Grandet" or "La Cousine Bette" is a question that admits of considerable discussion. It has not the dramatic concision of the last novel, nor does it display such terrible power. It is not so nobly moving as the first two. On the other hand it has the most complex and wonderfully managed plot of any story in the "Comedy"; it introduces more characters than any other book, and manages them with consummate success; it displays in an almost unrivaled way Balzac's knowledge of Paris; of its aristocrats and parvenus, its thieves and courtesans, its lawyers and policemen; it is full of passages of subtle analysis; and finally, it is dominated by a general conception or a central idea that may be grandiose rather than great, but is without doubt tremendously impressive. In other words, while higher phases of Balzac's genius may be exhibited elsewhere, this novel exhibits that genius in its totality more completely, perhaps, than any other. It labors under the disadvantage, of course, that with the exception of the "Histoire des Treize," it is the most sensational of all Balzac's mature works; yet the very fact that he made it so much more than a sensational romance goes to prove that it is the supreme effort of his genius. With such characters and such an intrigue, who else could have made such a great novel?—for the critics are agreed that the "Splendeurs et Misères" is a great novel.

We cannot, however, feel sure that our praise is justified

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