

in many instances is calculated to weary his readers and to cause them to accuse the author of tediousness and unnecessary prolixity.

It is of course useless to discuss this point. As it appears to me, it is merely a matter of individual taste, and whether or no there can be applied any rule of right or wrong does not enter into the question. I have no doubt but that if we had been able to get a personal insight into the scenes which he describes, and would view his characters and events from his standpoint, and with his knowledge of the subject, we would not be ready to censure his minute and exhaustive analyses; but would, on the contrary, be able to see what a wonderful genius it was, which was able to take the common and uninteresting facts of life and to make of them such vivid pictures of humanity.

Balzac was essentially a novelist of the present. With that which had transpired before his time he had nothing to do. The past was not real enough for him and it therefore failed to arouse in him any interest. But what was going on under his eyes, the bustle of the streets, the courts of justice, the political intrigues, and the schemes of crafty speculators,—all these had for him a living interest, inasmuch as he could take part in these stirring scenes and actions and make himself personally interested in what was going on around him. He had far too much to hear, to see, to do, in his own life and in the life around him to busy himself with what had passed and was forgotten. The picture had no charm for him; he must have the original before his eyes. Hence it is that Balzac's characters are so intensely life like and animated. One finds himself feeling surprise that Balzac should have selected so many apparently unimportant features in the lives of his characters as material for treatment but that he has succeeded in investing these features with such wonderful charm and interest is one of the most convincing proofs of his power as a realistic painter of manners.

In *Pere Goriot*, Balzac has presented about as curious a combination of characters as could be imagined. Can it be possible that such misery, poverty and utter depravity as are here depicted can really exist? One would fain believe that such were not the case, and indeed, it requires a considerable exercise of faith to believe that Balzac, letting his imagination have full scope in order to present the most grotesque picture which could possibly be conceived of, has not been guilty of wilful exaggeration. Yet in his admirable preface to the *Comedie Humaine*, Balzac has expressly stated that he has described from personal observation and that all his characters have their prototypes in actual life. If such is the case what a monster of depravity must Monsieur Vautrin have been! What a marvel of unselfish affection and parental love do we find in Goriot himself! Madame Vauquer's boarding house is certainly an awful picture of sordid squalor and unloveliness. Balzac seems to have taken a fiendish delight in describing this unhappy place and in dwelling at length upon each disgusting detail. Probably he had good reason to exercise his caustic pen against such institutions, and no doubt many of his readers will be able to heartily sympathize with him in this antipathy.

As to the character of Monsieur Vautrin, I confess that my faith was put to a very severe test. Here we have a man who is represented as a jovial, light hearted fellow, always laughing, joking, singing about the house, taking everything as it comes, and seeming to think of nothing but his present enjoyment. He is on good terms with his landlady (a significant fact, by the way), is pleasant and agreeable to all and is apparently always ready to perform a kindness or to do a favor for his neighbor. Yet Balzac calls upon us to see in this man

a nature capable of the lowest vices, of the blackest villainy, of the most relentless treachery, a man who, it would not be too much to say, could almost have served as a model for Goethe's Faust. Balzac tells us that he is a man capable of adapting himself to any circumstance, of assuming at a moment's notice, almost any aspect of character, and yet preserve when he so wishes, an almost impenetrable mask of care less good humor and thoughtless gaiety.

Now the question is, are we to regard this conception as a type of a certain class of characters as possible to be met with in actual life, or must we regard it as an anomaly. Something that, under ordinary conditions could not possibly exist? That question is an extremely difficult one to answer, because most people have never met with a type similar to this and therefore cannot draw on their own knowledge to verify their opinions. In Vautrin we find traits of disposition, shades of character so entirely antithetical in their nature that it would seem that if one were present the other could not possibly exist in connection with it. Yet after all, it is well known, that the southern character presents phases of human nature which we, who live in the colder latitudes are at a loss to explain. A man may seem to be all frankness, sociability, and kindness and yet at the same time may be meditating the blackest treachery toward his unsuspecting friend, without letting him suspect for an instance the existence of such base treachery. Instances of such a nature have been known to exist, but for the sake of humanity it is to be hoped that they are rather anomalous productions than natural conceptions. In a case like this nothing can be laid down as positive because our knowledge is limited, and at the most all that we can say is partly speculative.

In the character of Pere Goriot one is almost as much non-plussed as in the case of Vautrin. Here, however it is possible to arrive at more accurate conclusions than in the former case, because the matter is brought home to us in a manner in which we are able to see in how far the existence of such a character may correspond to our actual experience. But it is hard to believe that a man's love, even the love of a father for his children, could remain so perfect and unselfish when put to such a terrible test as was Goriot's. Nay, it would seem as though a man were almost justified in withdrawing his affection when the objects of it are so utterly insensible to the claims of filial love and respect as was displayed by Mesdames Restaud and Nucingen. I cannot conceive of a case where such wonderful devotion on the one hand could possibly be repaid by such indifference on the other. One would imagine that a person not utterly depraved would in common pity, simulate an affection, even though he felt it not, for the sake of so easily conferring happiness upon a fellow human being. But the failure to do this in the present instance, shows too clearly the awful effects of the passion for wealth and social distinction, in the attainment of which so many lives are wrecked, and so many natural impulses of affection obliterated. More than this, it can be traced to that wholly absurd notion that one is belittled by connection with the less fortunate. Had Goriot occupied an elevated position in society it is probable that his daughters would have entertained for him some degree of affection. Indeed this is abundantly evident from the fact that they repaid his services to them with marks of affection; but that as soon as Goriot came down in the world, their regard (or seeming regard, if you will) decreased in proportion. I believe that Goriot's daughters did possess some affection for him; but that as the other influences to which their gay and frivolous life subjected them drew them farther and farther from him, their feelings were swallowed up by other desires, and were eventually ov-