

ershadowed. That Goriot was weak, lamentably weak, with regard to his daughters, no one can deny; but that they were at all justified in taking advantage of this weakness, is absurd to the last degree. I say this because I know that some people are ready to take this stand and to assert that if Goriot was foolish enough to allow his affection to overcome all prudential conditions, he deserved some degree of indifference in return.

I regret that space will not permit me to speak of the other characters in this wonderfully powerful book; but after all, they would not excite much interest in comparison with the two most important ones, Goriot and Vautrin. This book, it appears to me, is by far the most powerfully written of any of Balzac's books which have as yet come under my notice, with the possible exception of *Cousin Pons*. It is somewhat surprising that Balzac's first novel, the *Comedie Humaine* should be his best, and perhaps it is unfortunate that such is the case, because the reader will be led to wade through some of his later ones which can hold no comparison with the first of his productions. This is the case with *Caesar Balthazar*, a novel which, I doubt very much, will inspire any interest in the general reader. It is too much a record of financial transactions and other matters of a similar nature, which can interest no one except those well acquainted with the subject.

INDIVIDUAL OBLIGATION.

Underlying every permanent institution and determining its permanence, is a principle of truth. Whatsoever is in harmony with the constitution of the universe has a patent of immortality, for it is truth, and truth is immortal. Though ceremony and hypocrisy and unreasonable conservatism may cumulate their empty shells above the principle till the entire structure seems hollow, nevertheless the element that sustains the whole is not dead, but will come forth sooner or later undefiled as the mountain stream gushes forth pure and sparkling from underneath its burden of damp and mouldy leaves.

Class distinction is co-extensive with the history of the human race. Beginning in the earliest communities, social boundaries have gradually become more and more clearly defined until nice discriminations, threading their way between this man and that, have built up impenetrable barriers, on the sunny side of which, live the nobles. They assume for themselves certain privileges; they demand for themselves certain honors. They are permitted to take the one; they receive the other.

In what lies the explanation of this? How does it happen that a whole nation, as proud and independent as the English, call one woman Sovereign, and a few men Lords? It is not because this form of government is forced upon them, for often enough has it been demonstrated that no government is sufficiently strong to maintain itself when once the united voice of the people has said "Thus far and no farther." In the very opposite direction lies the explanation: hear it in the cry, "Long live the Queen!" "Long live our gracious sovereign!" Add to this the fact that at other times when the moral sense of the nation was thoroughly aroused, from the same lips has come the death knell, "Down with the tyrant," and we have the explanation of the existence of that order of the nobility in the feeling of the people that there are positions which in virtue of the duties attaching to them, merit honor and reverence, and that the individuals who fill them should be worthy of this homage.

Thus we see why the order is permitted to exist; but what is the element within which preserves it? It is this sentiment,—

"*Noblesse oblige*." In a paradox we have the declaration that the class which claims the highest privileges, the greatest freedom of action, which dominates over all below it, is the one that is bound: "*on the nobility rest obligations*."

In the appreciation of this thought and the fulfilment of its requirements, lies the real strength of the titled aristocracy of Europe. As often as they have forgotten it, bloodshed and revolution have taught them that the two words which by a false application, forbid the blue blooded lord to wed the gardener's daughter, have in them an immortal truth which they set aside at their peril. When Charles I failed to comprehend that even a Stuart may exceed his rights, that the title of king carries with it obligations as well as authority, these words were gradually transformed at the forge of English independence into a sword that fell with fatal purpose on the neck of that proud monarch. When the French kings and courtiers mistook "*Noblesse oblige*" for a fancy doll which they might deck out in the baubles of their impious extravagance and carry around for a pleasure ride in their gilded carriages, suddenly it became the giant horse of Trojan story, out of which issued forth armed men who set their heels on the despotism of the French nobility.

The power of these words, however, is not confined to the old world or to monarchical governments. In the promulgation and the development of this principle, that on the office-holder as well as on the noble, rest obligations, lies the true foundation and "open sesame" to the successful perpetuity of all democracies. In our own government many a man in a position of honor has learned, when it was too late, that the people who fought for the principle that there are no duties without rights, hold also the converse of that proposition, that there are no rights without duties.

Andrew Johnson was permitted to discover in private life that the chief magistracy of our government was not created for the dispensing of favors to his friends. Another name, once honored and revered, was quickly changed to Ichabod, the fallen, when, with pain and regret, the North was constrained to believe that Daniel Webster had forgotten the obligations of his position in his desire to win the approval of the South. And today, the demand for a better method of appointment to our civil service is partly a recognition of the same truth: that no person should be raised to a position of public trust who has not been proved fit to meet its responsibilities.

Does "*Noblesse oblige*" cease at the foot of the throne or in the sphere of the office-holder? Note the significance of its origin. It comes from a class of persons who were, of all the inhabitants of their kingdom, the freemen. They ruled over those below them, and were on terms approaching equality with the king himself. They were not only the nominal lords, but for the most part, in virtue of the privileges which they and their ancestors had enjoyed, the real lords. They were the most highly cultivated, the most fully developed men of their time. And they were bound. Herein lies the power of "*Noblesse oblige*." Though a man may free himself from the artificial servitude in which human selfishness has placed him, he cannot free himself from the real obligations to the world of which he forms a part. The farther he departs from unnatural slavery, the faster will the natural bonds multiply; the more completely will they encircle every faculty of his being, till in the new bondage he finds a new and nobler freedom.

"No man liveth to himself" was not the effusion of a moral enthusiast. It marks the consciousness of man's true relations to the world of men. Feudalism and clientage, unjust though they were, nevertheless typify the true organization of