

We could forgive General Wallace for the weakness of his work; but it is hard to forgive one who has connected himself whether deservedly or undeservedly, with all that is best and purest in our religion for presenting to us such a distasteful production as *Commodus*.

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About the only place where a person can, in a philosophical way, watch the different characteristics of the students in the reading room. Students very seldom go to the University during the day without going in there, if it is only to look around in a benign way and go out again, and if one stays long enough he is pretty sure to see sufficient to amuse him. There seem to be persons who are always there, diligently pouring over a dictionary or reference book, with a studious air upon which nothing can make any impression. Even when somebody has concluded that perhaps he is an exceptional case and may talk if he wishes, only to discover that "there are others in the library besides himself"—a state of affairs which always causes a ripple of more or less suppressed merriment—this studious individual keeps right on in the even tenor of his dictionary and never cracks a smile. Then, right beside him perhaps will be another who always has, or at least takes, time to read the illustrated magazines. He is to be envied. Then a very impressive personage will come in with a whole pack of books on his arm, and a confident smile on his face, only to discover that he has forgotten the one book which the librarian wanted especially. After exchanging compliments on the subject a few moments he goes out looking as if he was willing to testify on oath that this is a "villainous world and few get out of it alive." And there is a cheerful individual who will sit in the library for an hour and let numberless people come in and out without being affected in any way, but no sooner does a certain co-ed enter or even show the top of her delicately pointed nose at the door than he is up and out in the hall with a speed and agility that would do credit to a fire company.

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All lovers of Balzac will be glad to learn that the last two of the translations "*Modeste Mignon*" and "*The Magic Skin*" have, at length, arrived and are in the University library. The latter is the first of the philosophical series which was left uncompleted at the death of Balzac. It would, almost beyond question, repel one who had never read Balzac before, and it may be questioned whether it will be beneficial, or agreeable even, to those who are familiar with his style, and his merits, as shown in *Pere Goriot* and *Eugenie Grandet*. There is something entirely unsatisfactory about the plot and it is too strongly impregnated by the failing so common to French novels—their low moral tone—to make it a general favorite with the American reading public. The novel seems to be an unhappy combination of allegory and realism, and one cannot fail but be impressed with the idea that Balzac would have done much better to have made it entirely the one or entirely the other. There are few writers who can handle a weird or superhuman story in a more charming or a more artistic manner than Balzac. So there are few artists who can even equal him in depicting, with absolute and startling correctness, the motives which govern human beings. But when he attempts to introduce a factor like the magic skin into modern Parisian life, we must all agree that the effect is strikingly inharmonious, to say the least. Of course it may be urged that the reader is freely warned that the story may be looked at in two different ways, but even that does not justify it, and the very fact that the publishers considered it necessary to have an introduction written especially

for this American edition, goes to prove that they thought it would not be acceptable as it stood. Do not understand from this that the book is without merit. Balzac could not write without giving us something of value and of beauty. The "*Alkahest*," as far as it is from the truth in its main character, gives us, nevertheless, in *Madame Clae*, one of the finest and best worked out characters in modern novel literature. And so with "*The Magic Skin*." Much as it is below what we like to think of as Balzac's, it contains passages of remarkable force and beauty. If the cause of the hero's death had been consumption instead of the magic skin we would not care to ask for anything better: as it is, the character of his wife could hardly be improved.

If, then, you belong to a class who cannot see any good in a book because it contains some things objectionable, or if you feel that your morals are firmly enough fixed not to be entirely overthrown by an allusion which is not in the best taste, you will find the book a valuable one to read.

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"*Modeste Mignon*" is a novel of an entirely different style. It contains nothing objectionable to the most delicate taste. It is indeed the most conventional book Balzac has written—not the most ordinary, for Balzac never writes anything ordinary. To those who are unacquainted with him the following quotation may give a hint of his skill in making a character stand out vividly. "She takes snuff, holds herself as stiff as a rainrod, poses for a person of consideration, and resembles nothing so much as a mummy brought momentarily to life by galvanism."

It seems to me the standard by which a realist should be judged is the impression his characters make upon one, and how nearly they are afterwards regarded as actual, living persons. Jefferson's rendition of *Rip Van Winkle* is an excellent example of the point in question, because a person of average sensibility to pathos will, for days after he has witnessed it, continually find himself saying "Poor, old, Rip!" with just as much earnestness and sympathy as if he had actually met that touching creation and listened to his pathetic tale. It is exactly so with a great novelist. Every one who reads *Anna Karenina* will, for months after he has finished it, try to find some other solution of the difficulty it presents, than the one given, and will continually wonder whether Anna could have been happy with Vronsky or with her husband. No one will ever forget *Pere Goriot* or fail to think of him as a living, breathing man, and if there is one excellence, which can be especially attributed to Balzac, it is the vividness with which he portrays his characters.

The dwarf Betscha will probably make as strong an impression upon the average reader as any character in the book. Balzac seems to have an especial fondness for introducing to us a deformed person and making us forget the deformity in admiration for the beauty of his character.

Another thing which makes "*Modeste Mignon*" of especial interest is, that it seems to contain Balzac's theory of love. Knowing that many who will probably not have time to read the novel will be interested in this feature of it, I will attempt to give a summary. Balzac seems to think that there is a certain affinity of souls which, according to the novel, may be discovered without the persons in question even seeing each other; it is essential for a perfect union, however, that this affinity be supplemented by an attraction for each other personally which may perhaps be called personal magnetism. Either one of these without the other is an insufficient excuse for persons falling in love. They may agree perfectly upon the great matters in which the soul is concerned, but be continually miserable on account of some small in-