

The Human Comedy: Introductions and Appendix eBook

The Human Comedy: Introductions and Appendix by Honoré de Balzac

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APPENDIX

THE BALZAC PLAN OF THE COMEDIE HUMAINE

The form in which the Comedie Humaine was left by its author, with the exceptions of *Le Depute d'Arcis (incomplete)* and *Les Petits Bourgeois*_, both of which were added, some years later, by the Edition Definitive.

The original French titles are followed by their English equivalents. Literal translations have been followed, excepting a few instances where preference is shown for a clearer or more comprehensive English title.

[Note from Team Balzac, the Etext preparers: In some cases more than one English translation is commonly used for various translations/ editions. In such cases the first translation is from the Saintsbury edition copyrighted in 1901 and that is the title referred to in the personages following most of the stories. We have added other title translations of which we are currently aware for the readers' convenience.]

COMEDIE HUMAINE

SCENES DE LA VIE PRIVEE SCENES FROM PRIVATE LIFE

La Maison du Chat-qui Pelote
At the Sign of the Cat and Racket

Le Bal de Sceaux
The Ball at Sceaux

La Bourse
The Purse

La Vendetta
The Vendetta

Mme. Firmiani
Madame Firmiani

Une Double Famille
A Second Home

La Paix du Menage
Domestic Peace



La Fausse Maitresse
The Imaginary Mistress
Paz

Etude de femme
A Study of Woman

Autre etude de femme
Another Study of Woman

La Grande Breteche
La Grand Breteche

Albert Savarus
Albert Savarus

Memoires de deux Jeunes Mariees
Letters of Two Brides

Une Fille d'Eve
A Daughter of Eve

La Femme de Trente Ans
A Woman of Thirty

La Femme abandonnee
The Deserted Woman

La Grenadiere
La Grenadiere

Le Message
The Message

Gobseck
Gobseck

Le Contrat de Mariage
A Marriage Settlement
A Marriage Contract

Un Debut dans la vie
A Start in Life

Modeste Mignon
Modeste Mignon



Beatrix
Beatrix

Honorine
Honorine

Le Colonel Chabert
Colonel Chabert

La Messe de l'Athee
The Atheist's Mass

L'Interdiction
The Commission in Lunacy

Pierre Grassou
Pierre Grassou

SCENES DE LA VIE PROVINCE SCENES FROM PROVINCIAL LIFE

Ursule Mirouet
Ursule Mirouet

Eugenie Grandet
Eugenie Grandet

Les Celibataires:
The Celibates:
Pierrette
Pierrette

Le Cure de Tours
The Vicar of Tours

Un Menage de Garcon
A Bachelor's Establishment
The Two Brothers
The Black Sheep
La Rabouilleuse



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Les Parisiens en Province:

Parisians in the Country:

L'illustre Gaudissart

Gaudissart the Great

The Illustrious Gaudissart

La Muse du departement

The Muse of the Department

Les Rivalites:

The Jealousies of a Country Town:

La Vieille Fille

The Old Maid

Le Cabinet des antiques

The Collection of Antiquities

Le Lys dans la Vallee

The Lily of the Valley

Illusions Perdues:—I.

Lost Illusions:—I.

Les Deux Poetes

The Two Poets

Un Grand homme de province a Paris, 1re partie

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris, Part 1

Illusions Perdues:—II.

Lost Illusions:—II.

Un Grand homme de province, 2e p.

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris, Part 2

Eve et David

Eve and David

SCENES DE LA VIE PARISIENNE SCENES FROM PARISIAN LIFE

Splendeurs et Miseres des Courtisanes:

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life:

Esther heureuse

Esther Happy

A combien l'amour revient aux vieillards

What Love Costs an Old Man



Ou menent les mauvais Chemins
The End of Evil Ways

La derniere Incarnation de Vautrin
Vautrin's Last Avatar

Un Prince de la Boheme
A Prince of Bohemia

Un Homme d'affaires
A Man of Business

Gaudissart II.
Gaudissart II.

Les Comediens sans le savoir
The Unconscious Humorists
The Unconscious Comedians

Histoire des Treize:
The Thirteen:
Ferragus
Ferragus

La Duchesse de Langeais
The Duchesse de Langeais

La Fille aux yeux d'or
The Girl with the Golden Eyes

Le Pere Goriot
Father Goriot
Old Goriot

Grandeur et Decadence de Cesar Birotteau
The Rise and Fall of Cesar Birotteau

La Maison Nucingen
The Firm of Nucingen

Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan
The Secrets of a Princess
The Secrets of the Princess Cadignan

Les Employes
The Government Clerks
Bureaucracy



Sarrasine
Sarrasine

Facino Cane
Facine Cane

Les Parents Pauvres:—I.
Poor Relations:—I.
La Cousine Bette
Cousin Betty

Les Parents Pauvres:—II.
Poor Relations:—II.
Le Cousin Pons
Cousin Pons

Les Petits Bourgeois
The Middle Classes
The Lesser Bourgeoise

SCENES DE LA VIE POLITIQUE SCENES FROM POLITICAL LIFE

Une Tenebreuse Affaire
The Gondreville Mystery
An Historical Mystery

Un Episode sous la Terreur
An Episode Under the Terror

L'Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine:
The Seamy Side of History:
The Brotherhood of Consolation:
Mme. de la Chanterie
Madame de la Chanterie

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L'Initie
Initiated
The Initiate

Z. Marcas
Z. Marcas

Le Depute d'Arcis
The Member for Arcis
The Deputy for Arcis

SCENES DE LA VIE MILITAIRE SCENES FROM MILITARY LIFE

Les Chouans
The Chouans

Une Passion dans le desert
A Passion in the Desert

SCENES DE LA VIE DE CAMPAGNE SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE

Le Medecin de Campagne
The Country Doctor

Le Cure de Village
The Country Parson
The Village Rector

Les Paysans
The Peasantry
Sons of the Soil

ETUDES PHILOSOPHIQUES PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES

La Peau de Chagrin
The Magic Skin

La Recherche de l'Absolu
The Quest of the Absolute
The Alkahest

Jesus-Christ en Flandre
Christ in Flanders



Melmoth reconcilie
Melmoth Reconciled

Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu
The Unknown Masterpiece
The Hidden Masterpiece

L'Enfant Maudit
The Hated Son

Gambara
Gambara

Massimilla Doni
Massimilla Doni

Les Marana
The Maranas
Juana

Adieu
Farewell

Le Requisitionnaire
The Conscript
The Recruit

El Verdugo
El Verdugo

Un Drame au bord de la mer
A Seaside Tragedy
A Drama on the Seashore

L'Auberge rouge
The Red Inn

L'Elixir de longue vie
The Elixir of Life

Maitre Cornelius
Maitre Cornelius

Sur Catherine de Medicis:
About Catherine de' Medici
Le Martyr calviniste
The Calvinist Martyr



La Confidence des Ruggieri
The Ruggieri's Secret

Les Deux Reves
The Two Dreams

Louis Lambert
Louis Lambert

Les Proscrits
The Exiles

Seraphita
Seraphita

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In giving the general title of "The Human Comedy" to a work begun nearly thirteen years since, it is necessary to explain its motive, to relate its origin, and briefly sketch its plan, while endeavoring to speak of these matters as though I had no personal interest in them. This is not so difficult as the public might imagine. Few works conduce to much vanity; much labor conduces to great diffidence. This observation accounts for the study of their own works made by Corneille, Moliere, and other great writers; if it is impossible to equal them in their fine conceptions, we may try to imitate them in this feeling.

The idea of *The Human Comedy* was at first as a dream to me, one of those impossible projects which we caress and then let fly; a chimera that gives us a glimpse of its smiling woman's face, and forthwith spreads its wings and returns to a heavenly realm of phantasy. But this chimera, like many another, has become a reality; has its behests, its tyranny, which must be obeyed.

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The idea originated in a comparison between Humanity and Animality.

It is a mistake to suppose that the great dispute which has lately made a stir, between Cuvier and Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire, arose from a scientific innovation. Unity of structure, under other names, had occupied the greatest minds during the two previous centuries. As we read the extraordinary writings of the mystics who studied the sciences in their relation to infinity, such as Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, and others, and the works of the greatest authors on Natural History—Leibnitz, Buffon, Charles Bonnet, *etc.*, we detect in the *monads* of Leibnitz, in the *organic molecules* of Buffon, in the *vegetative force* of Needham, in the correlation of similar organs of Charles Bonnet—who in 1760 was so bold as to write, “Animals vegetate as plants do”—we detect, I say, the rudiments of the great law of Self for Self, which lies at the root of *Unity of Plan*. There is but one Animal. The Creator works on a single model for every organized being. “The Animal” is elementary, and takes its external form, or, to be accurate, the differences in its form, from the environment in which it is obliged to develop. Zoological species are the result of these differences. The announcement and defence of this system, which is indeed in harmony with our preconceived ideas of Divine Power, will be the eternal glory of Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire, Cuvier’s victorious opponent on this point of higher science, whose triumph was hailed by Goethe in the last article he wrote.

I, for my part, convinced of this scheme of nature long before the discussion to which it has given rise, perceived that in this respect society resembled nature. For does not society modify Man, according to the conditions in which he lives and acts, into men as manifold as the species in Zoology? The differences between a soldier, an artisan, a man of business, a lawyer, an idler, a student, a statesman, a merchant, a sailor, a poet, a beggar, a priest, are as great, though not so easy to define, as those between the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the seal, the sheep, *etc.* Thus social species have always existed, and will always exist, just as there are zoological species. If Buffon could produce a magnificent work by attempting to represent in a book the whole realm of zoology, was there not room for a work of the same kind on society? But the limits set by nature to the variations of animals have no existence in society. When Buffon describes the lion, he dismisses the lioness with a few phrases; but in society a wife is not always the female of the male. There may be two perfectly dissimilar beings in one household. The wife of a shopkeeper is sometimes worthy of a prince, and the wife of a prince is often worthless compared with the wife of an artisan. The social state has freaks which Nature does not allow herself; it is nature *plus* society. The

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description of social species would thus be at least double that of animal species, merely in view of the two sexes. Then, among animals the drama is limited; there is scarcely any confusion; they turn and rend each other—that is all. Men, too, rend each other; but their greater or less intelligence makes the struggle far more complicated. Though some savants do not yet admit that the animal nature flows into human nature through an immense tide of life, the grocer certainly becomes a peer, and the noble sometimes sinks to the lowest social grade. Again, Buffon found that life was extremely simple among animals. Animals have little property, and neither arts nor sciences; while man, by a law that has yet to be sought, has a tendency to express his culture, his thoughts, and his life in everything he appropriates to his use. Though Leuwenhoek, Swammerdam, Spallanzani, Reaumur, Charles Bonnet, Muller, Haller and other patient investigators have shown us how interesting are the habits of animals, those of each kind, are, at least to our eyes, always and in every age alike; whereas the dress, the manners, the speech, the dwelling of a prince, a banker, an artist, a citizen, a priest, and a pauper are absolutely unlike, and change with every phase of civilization.

Hence the work to be written needed a threefold form—men, women, and things; that is to say, persons and the material expression of their minds; man, in short, and life.

As we read the dry and discouraging list of events called History, who can have failed to note that the writers of all periods, in Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, have forgotten to give us a history of manners? The fragment of Petronius on the private life of the Romans excites rather than satisfies our curiosity. It was from observing this great void in the field of history that the Abbe Barthelemy devoted his life to a reconstruction of Greek manners in *Le Jeune Anacharsis*.

But how could such a drama, with the four or five thousand persons which society offers, be made interesting? How, at the same time, please the poet, the philosopher, and the masses who want both poetry and philosophy under striking imagery? Though I could conceive of the importance and of the poetry of such a history of the human heart, I saw no way of writing it; for hitherto the most famous story-tellers had spent their talent in creating two or three typical actors, in depicting one aspect of life. It was with this idea that I read the works of Walter Scott. Walter Scott, the modern troubadour, or finder (*trouvere=trouveur*), had just then given an aspect of grandeur to a class of composition unjustly regarded as of the second rank. Is it not really more difficult to compete with personal and parochial interests by writing of Daphnis and Chloe, Roland, Amadis, Panurge, Don Quixote, Manon Lescaut, Clarissa, Lovelace, Robinson Crusoe, Gil Blas, Ossian, Julie d'Etanges, My Uncle Toby, Werther, Corinne, Adolphe, Paul and Virginia, Jeanie

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Deans, Claverhouse, Ivanhoe, Manfred, Mignon, than to set forth in order facts more or less similar in every country, to investigate the spirit of laws that have fallen into desuetude, to review the theories which mislead nations, or, like some metaphysicians, to explain what *is*? In the first place, these actors, whose existence becomes more prolonged and more authentic than that of the generations which saw their birth, almost always live solely on condition of their being a vast reflection of the present. Conceived in the womb of their own period, the whole heart of humanity stirs within their frame, which often covers a complete system of philosophy. Thus Walter Scott raised to the dignity of the philosophy of History the literature which, from age to age, sets perennial gems in the poetic crown of every nation where letters are cultivated. He vivified it with the spirit of the past; he combined drama, dialogue, portrait, scenery, and description; he fused the marvelous with truth —the two elements of the times; and he brought poetry into close contact with the familiarity of the humblest speech. But as he had not so much devised a system as hit upon a manner in the ardor of his work, or as its logical outcome, he never thought of connecting his compositions in such a way as to form a complete history of which each chapter was a novel, and each novel the picture of a period.

It was by discerning this lack of unity, which in no way detracts from the Scottish writer's greatness, that I perceived at once the scheme which would favor the execution of my purpose, and the possibility of executing it. Though dazzled, so to speak, by Walter Scott's amazing fertility, always himself and always original, I did not despair, for I found the source of his genius in the infinite variety of human nature. Chance is the greatest romancer in the world; we have only to study it. French society would be the real author; I should only be the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by collecting the chief facts of the passions, by depicting characters, by choosing the principal incidents of social life, by composing types out of a combination of homogeneous characteristics, I might perhaps succeed in writing the history which so many historians have neglected: that of Manners. By patience and perseverance I might produce for France in the nineteenth century the book which we must all regret that Rome, Athens, Tyre, Memphis, Persia, and India have not bequeathed to us; that history of their social life which, prompted by the Abbe Barthelemy, Monteil patiently and steadily tried to write for the Middle Ages, but in an unattractive form.

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This work, so far, was nothing. By adhering to the strict lines of a reproduction a writer might be a more or less faithful, and more or less successful, painter of types of humanity, a narrator of the dramas of private life, an archaeologist of social furniture, a cataloguer of professions, a registrar of good and evil; but to deserve the praise of which every artist must be ambitious, must I not also investigate the reasons or the cause of these social effects, detect the hidden sense of this vast assembly of figures, passions, and incidents? And finally, having sought—I will not say having found—this reason, this motive power, must I not reflect on first principles, and discover in what particulars societies approach or deviate from the eternal law of truth and beauty? In spite of the wide scope of the preliminaries, which might of themselves constitute a book, the work, to be complete, would need a conclusion. Thus depicted, society ought to bear in itself the reason of its working.

The law of the writer, in virtue of which he is a writer, and which I do not hesitate to say makes him the equal, or perhaps the superior, of the statesman, is his judgment, whatever it may be, on human affairs, and his absolute devotion to certain principles. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bossuet, Leibnitz, Kant, Montesquieu, *are* the science which statesmen apply. “A writer ought to have settled opinions on morals and politics; he should regard himself as a tutor of men; for men need no masters to teach them to doubt,” says Bonald. I took these noble words as my guide long ago; they are the written law of the monarchical writer. And those who would confute me by my own words will find that they have misinterpreted some ironical phrase, or that they have turned against me a speech given to one of my actors—a trick peculiar to calumniators.

As to the intimate purpose, the soul of this work, these are the principles on which it is based.

Man is neither good nor bad; he is born with instincts and capabilities; society, far from depraving him, as Rousseau asserts, improves him, makes him better; but self-interest also develops his evil tendencies. Christianity, above all, Catholicism, being—as I have pointed out in the *Country Doctor (le Medecin de Campagne)*—a complete system for the repression of the depraved tendencies of man, is the most powerful element of social order.

In reading attentively the presentment of society cast, as it were, from the life, with all that is good and all that is bad in it, we learn this lesson—if thought, or if passion, which combines thought and feeling, is the vital social element, it is also its destructive element. In this respect social life is like the life of man. Nations live long only by moderating their vital energy. Teaching, or rather education, by religious bodies is the grand principle of life for nations, the only means of diminishing the sum of evil and increasing the sum of good in

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all society. Thought, the living principle of good and ill, can only be trained, quelled, and guided by religion. The only possible religion is Christianity (see the letter from Paris in “Louis Lambert,” in which the young mystic explains, *a propos* to Swedenborg’s doctrines, how there has never been but one religion since the world began). Christianity created modern nationalities, and it will preserve them. Hence, no doubt, the necessity for the monarchical principle. Catholicism and Royalty are twin principles.

As to the limits within which these two principles should be confined by various institutions, so that they may not become absolute, every one will feel that a brief preface ought not to be a political treatise. I cannot, therefore, enter on religious discussions, nor on the political discussions of the day. I write under the light of two eternal truths—Religion and Monarchy; two necessities, as they are shown to be by contemporary events, towards which every writer of sound sense ought to try to guide the country back. Without being an enemy to election, which is an excellent principle as a basis of legislation, I reject election regarded as *the only social instrument*, especially so badly organized as it now is (1842); for it fails to represent imposing minorities, whose ideas and interests would occupy the attention of a monarchical government. Elective power extended to all gives us government by the masses, the only irresponsible form of government, under which tyranny is unlimited, for it calls itself law. Besides, I regard the family and not the individual as the true social unit. In this respect, at the risk of being thought retrograde, I side with Bossuet and Bonald instead of going with modern innovators. Since election has become the only social instrument, if I myself were to exercise it no contradiction between my acts and my words should be inferred. An engineer points out that a bridge is about to fall, that it is dangerous for any one to cross it; but he crosses it himself when it is the only road to the town. Napoleon adapted election to the spirit of the French nation with wonderful skill. The least important members of his Legislative Body became the most famous orators of the Chamber after the Restoration. No Chamber has ever been the equal of the *Corps Legislatif*, comparing them man for man. The elective system of the Empire was, then, indisputably the best.

Some persons may, perhaps, think that this declaration is somewhat autocratic and self-assertive. They will quarrel with the novelist for wanting to be an historian, and will call him to account for writing politics. I am simply fulfilling an obligation—that is my reply. The work I have undertaken will be as long as a history; I was compelled to explain the logic of it, hitherto unrevealed, and its principles and moral purpose.

Having been obliged to withdraw the prefaces formerly published, in response to essentially ephemeral criticisms, I will retain only one remark.

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Writers who have a purpose in view, were it only a reversion to principles familiar in the past because they are eternal, should always clear the ground. Now every one who, in the domain of ideas, brings his stone by pointing out an abuse, or setting a mark on some evil that it may be removed—every such man is stigmatized as immoral. The accusation of immorality, which has never failed to be cast at the courageous writer, is, after all, the last that can be brought when nothing else remains to be said to a romancer. If you are truthful in your pictures; if by dint of daily and nightly toil you succeed in writing the most difficult language in the world, the word *immoral* is flung in your teeth. Socrates was immoral; Jesus Christ was immoral; they both were persecuted in the name of the society they overset or reformed. When a man is to be killed he is taxed with immorality. These tactics, familiar in party warfare, are a disgrace to those who use them. Luther and Calvin knew well what they were about when they shielded themselves behind damaged worldly interests! And they lived all the days of their life.

When depicting all society, sketching it in the immensity of its turmoil, it happened—it could not but happen—that the picture displayed more of evil than of good; that some part of the fresco represented a guilty couple; and the critics at once raised a cry of immorality, without pointing out the morality of another position intended to be a perfect contrast. As the critic knew nothing of the general plan I could forgive him, all the more because one can no more hinder criticism than the use of eyes, tongues, and judgment. Also the time for an impartial verdict is not yet come for me. And, after all, the author who cannot make up his mind to face the fire of criticism should no more think of writing than a traveler should start on his journey counting on a perpetually clear sky. On this point it remains to be said that the most conscientious moralists doubt greatly whether society can show as many good actions as bad ones; and in the picture I have painted of it there are more virtuous figures than reprehensible ones. Blameworthy actions, faults and crimes, from the lightest to the most atrocious, always meet with punishment, human or divine, signal or secret. I have done better than the historian, for I am free. Cromwell here on earth escaped all punishment but that inflicted by thoughtful men. And on this point there have been divided schools. Bossuet even showed some consideration for great regicide. William of Orange, the usurper, Hugues Capet, another usurper, lived to old age with no more qualms or fears than Henri IV. or Charles I. The lives of Catherine II. and of Frederick of Prussia would be conclusive against any kind of moral law, if they were judged by the twofold aspect of the morality which guides ordinary mortals, and that which is in use by crowned heads; for, as Napoleon said, for kings and statesmen there are the lesser and the higher morality. My scenes of political life are founded on this profound observation. It is not a law to history, as it is to romance, to make for a beautiful ideal. History is, or ought to be, what it was; while romance ought to be “the better world,” as was said by *Mme. Necker*, one of the most distinguished thinkers of the last century.

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Still, with this noble falsity, romance would be nothing if it were not true in detail. Walter Scott, obliged as he was to conform to the ideas of an essentially hypocritical nation, was false to humanity in his picture of woman, because his models were schismatics. The Protestant woman has no ideal. She may be chaste, pure, virtuous; but her unexpansive love will always be as calm and methodical as the fulfilment of a duty. It might seem as though the Virgin Mary had chilled the hearts of those sophists who have banished her from heaven with her treasures of loving kindness. In Protestantism there is no possible future for the woman who has sinned; while, in the Catholic Church, the hope of forgiveness makes her sublime. Hence, for the Protestant writer there is but one Woman, while the Catholic writer finds a new woman in each new situation. If Walter Scott had been a Catholic, if he had set himself the task of describing truly the various phases of society which have successively existed in Scotland, perhaps the painter of Effie and Alice—the two figures for which he blamed himself in his later years—might have admitted passion with its sins and punishments, and the virtues revealed by repentance. Passion is the sum-total of humanity. Without passion, religion, history, romance, art, would all be useless.

Some persons, seeing me collect such a mass of facts and paint them as they are, with passion for their motive power, have supposed, but wrongly, that I must belong to the school of Sensualism and Materialism—two aspects of the same thing—Pantheism. But their misapprehension was perhaps justified—or inevitable. I do not share the belief in indefinite progress for society as a whole; I believe in man's improvement in himself. Those who insist on reading in me the intention to consider man as a finished creation are strangely mistaken. *Seraphita*, the doctrine in action of the Christian Buddha, seems to me an ample answer to this rather heedless accusation.

In certain fragments of this long work I have tried to popularize the amazing facts, I may say the marvels, of electricity, which in man is metamorphosed into an incalculable force; but in what way do the phenomena of brain and nerves, which prove the existence of an undiscovered world of psychology, modify the necessary and undoubted relations of the worlds to God? In what way can they shake the Catholic dogma? Though irrefutable facts should some day place thought in the class of fluids which are discerned only by their effects while their substance evades our senses, even when aided by so many mechanical means, the result will be the same as when Christopher Columbus detected that the earth is a sphere, and Galileo demonstrated its rotation. Our future will be unchanged. The wonders of animal magnetism, with which I have been familiar since 1820; the beautiful experiments of Gall, Lavater's successor; all the men who have studied mind as opticians have studied light—two not dissimilar things—point to a conclusion in favor of the mystics, the disciples of St. John, and of those great thinkers who have established the spiritual world—the sphere in which are revealed the relations of God and man.

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A sure grasp of the purport of this work will make it clear that I attach to common, daily facts, hidden or patent to the eye, to the acts of individual lives, and to their causes and principles, the importance which historians have hitherto ascribed to the events of public national life. The unknown struggle which goes on in a valley of the Indre between *Mme. de Mortsau* and her passion is perhaps as great as the most famous of battles (*Le Lys dans la Vallee*). In one the glory of the victor is at stake; in the other it is heaven. The misfortunes of the two *Birotteaus*, the priest and the perfumer, to me are those of mankind. *La Fosseuse* (*Medecin de Campagne*) and *Mme. Graslin* (*Cure de Village*) are almost the sum-total of woman. We all suffer thus every day. I have had to do a hundred times what Richardson did but once. *Lovelace* has a thousand forms, for social corruption takes the hues of the medium in which it lives. *Clarissa*, on the contrary, the lovely image of impassioned virtue, is drawn in lines of distracting purity. To create a variety of Virgins it needs a Raphael. In this respect, perhaps literature must yield to painting.

Still, I may be allowed to point out how many irreproachable figures—as regards their virtue—are to be found in the portions of this work already published: *Pierrette Lorrain*, *Ursule Mirouet*, *Constance Birotteau*, *La Fosseuse*, *Eugenie Grandet*, *Marguerite Claes*, *Pauline de Villenoix*, *Madame Jules*, *Madame de la Chanterie*, *Eve Chardon*, *Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon*, *Madame Firmiani*, *Agathe Rouget*, *Renee de Maucombe*; besides several figures in the middle-distance, who, though less conspicuous than these, nevertheless, offer the reader an example of domestic virtue: *Joseph Lebas*, *Genestas*, *Benassis*, *Bonnet the cure*, *Minoret the doctor*, *Pillerault*, *David Sechard*, the two *Birotteaus*, *Chaperon the priest*, *Judge Popinot*, *Bourgeat*, the *Sauviats*, the *Tascherons*, and many more. Do not all these solve the difficult literary problem which consists in making a virtuous person interesting?

It was no small task to depict the two or three thousand conspicuous types of a period; for this is, in fact, the number presented to us by each generation, and which the *Human Comedy* will require. This crowd of actors, of characters, this multitude of lives, needed a setting—if I may be pardoned the expression, a gallery. Hence the very natural division, as already known, into the *Scenes of Private Life*, of *Provincial Life*, of *Parisian*, *Political*, *Military*, and *Country Life*. Under these six heads are classified all the studies of manners which form the history of society at large, of all its *faits et gestes*, as our ancestors would have said. These six classes correspond, indeed, to familiar conceptions. Each has its own sense and meaning, and answers to an epoch in the life of man. I may repeat here, but very briefly, what was written by *Felix Davin*—a young genius snatched from

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literature by an early death. After being informed of my plan, he said that the Scenes of Private Life represented childhood and youth and their errors, as the Scenes of Provincial Life represented the age of passion, scheming, self-interest, and ambition. Then the Scenes of Parisian Life give a picture of the tastes and vice and unbridled powers which conduce to the habits peculiar to great cities, where the extremes of good and evil meet. Each of these divisions has its local color—Paris and the Provinces—a great social antithesis which held for me immense resources.

And not man alone, but the principal events of life, fall into classes by types. There are situations which occur in every life, typical phases, and this is one of the details I most sought after. I have tried to give an idea of the different districts of our fine country. My work has its geography, as it has its genealogy and its families, its places and things, its persons and their deeds; as it has its heraldry, its nobles and commonalty, its artisans and peasants, its politicians and dandies, its army—in short, a whole world of its own.

After describing social life in these three portions, I had to delineate certain exceptional lives, which comprehend the interests of many people, or of everybody, and are in a degree outside the general law. Hence we have Scenes of Political Life. This vast picture of society being finished and complete, was it not needful to display it in its most violent phase, beside itself, as it were, either in self-defence or for the sake of conquest? Hence the Scenes of Military Life, as yet the most incomplete portion of my work, but for which room will be allowed in this edition, that it may form part of it when done. Finally, the Scenes of Country Life are, in a way, the evening of this long day, if I may so call the social drama. In that part are to be found the purest natures, and the application of the great principles of order, politics, and morality.

Such is the foundation, full of actors, full of comedies and tragedies, on which are raised the Philosophical Studies—the second part of my work, in which the social instrument of all these effects is displayed, and the ravages of the mind are painted, feeling after feeling; the first of the series, *The Magic Skin*, to some extent forms a link between the Philosophical Studies and Studies of Manners, by a work of almost Oriental fancy, in which life itself is shown in a mortal struggle with the very element of all passion.

Besides these, there will be a series of Analytical Studies, of which I will say nothing, for one only is published as yet—The Physiology of Marriage.

In the course of time I purpose writing two more works of this class. First the Pathology of Social Life, then an Anatomy of Educational Bodies, and a Monograph on Virtue.

In looking forward to what remains to be done, my readers will perhaps echo what my publishers say, "Please God to spare you!" I only ask to be less tormented by men and things than I have hitherto been since I began this terrific labor. I have had this in my

favor, and I thank God for it, that the talents of the time, the finest characters and the truest friends, as noble in their private lives as the former are in public life, have wrung my hand and said, Courage!

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And why should I not confess that this friendship, and the testimony here and there of persons unknown to me, have upheld me in my career, both against myself and against unjust attacks; against the calumny which has often persecuted me, against discouragement, and against the too eager hopefulness whose utterances are misinterpreted as those of overwhelming conceit? I had resolved to display stolid stoicism in the face of abuse and insults; but on two occasions base slanders have necessitated a reply. Though the advocates of forgiveness of injuries may regret that I should have displayed my skill in literary fence, there are many Christians who are of opinion that we live in times when it is as well to show sometimes that silence springs from generosity.

The vastness of a plan which includes both a history and a criticism of society, an analysis of its evils, and a discussion of its principles, authorizes me, I think, in giving to my work the title under which it now appears—*The Human Comedy*. Is this too ambitious? Is it not exact? That, when it is complete, the public must pronounce.

PARIS, July 1842