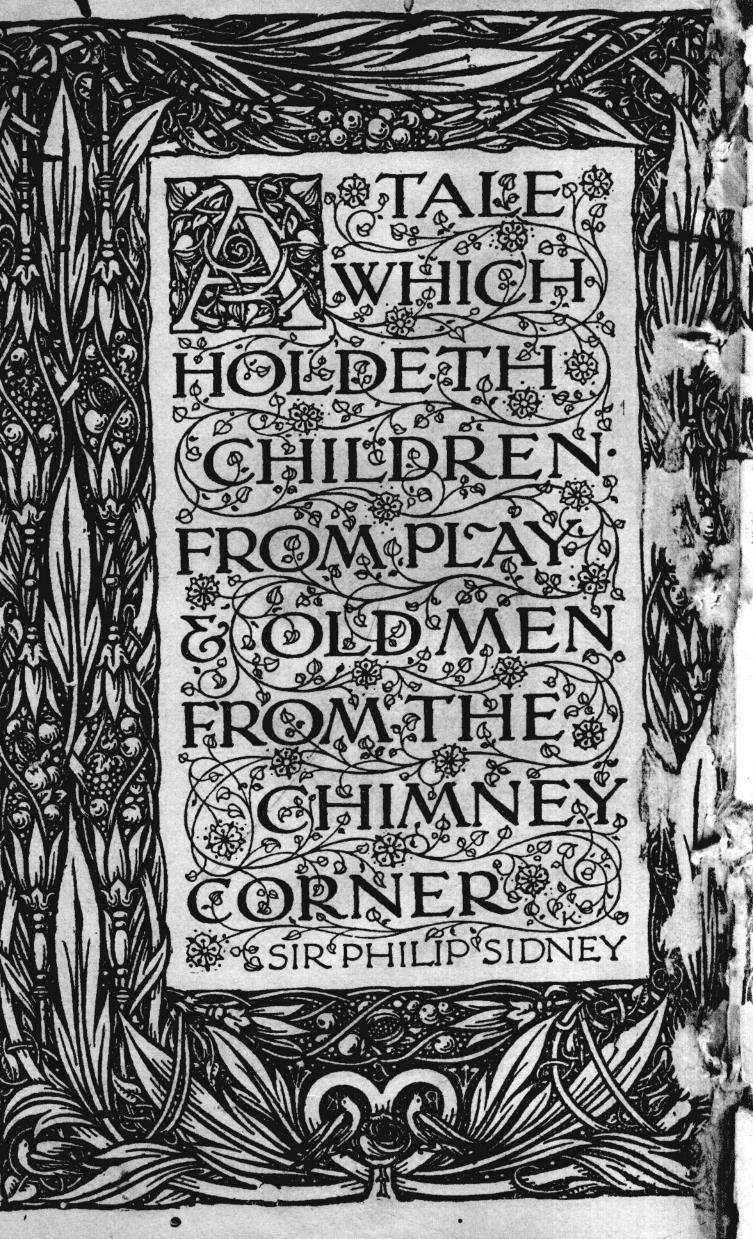


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NOTE

Honore DE Balzac was born at Tours May 16, 1799. His father had been a barrister before the Revolution, but at the time of Honore's birth held a post in the Commissariat. His mother was much younger than his father, and survived her son. The novelist was the eldest of a family of four, two sisters being born after him and then a younger brother.

At the age of seven he was sent to the Oratorian Grammar School at Vendôme, where he stayed for seven years, without making any reputation for himself in the ordinary school course.

Leaving Tours towards the end of 1814, the Balzacs removed to Paris, where Honoré was sent to private schools and tutors till he had 'finished his classes,' in 1816. Then he attended lectures at the Sorbonne, and, being destined by his father for the law, he went through the necessary lectures and examinations, attending the offices of an attorney and a notary for three years.

Then a notary, a friend of his father, offered to Honoré a place in his office, with a prospect of succeeding him in the business on very favourable terms. As against this, however, Balzac protested he would be a man of letters and nothing else. His protest was successful, but only in a qualified way, for although he was allowed to follow his own bent, it was in solitude and with meagre supplies that he did so. His family had left Paris at about this time, and he remained in a sparsely furnished garret with an old woman to look after him. For ten years this period of probation lasted, although he did not remain in the garret the whole of this time.

We know, in detail, very little of him during this period. There are a good many of his letters during the first three years (1819-22) to his elder sister, Laure, who was his first confidante, and later his only authoritative biographer. Between 1822 and 1829, when he first made his mark, there are very few of his letters. What concerns us most is, that in these ten years he wrote very numerous novels, though only ten of them were ever reprinted in the Comédia

Humaine, and these all omitted by him in his later arrangements of that stupendous series. He gained little by his writings during these years except experience, though he speaks of receiving sums of sixty, eighty, and one hundred pounds for some of them. One other thing, however, he learnt, which lasted him his life, but never did him the least good; this was the love of speculation. Amongst other businesses by which he thought to make money was that of

publishing, and afterwards printing and typefounding.

It was with Les Chouans that Balzac made his first distinct success, and in the three years following 1829, besides doing much journalistic and other literary work, he published the following: La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote, the Peau de Chagrin, most of the short Contes Philosophiques, and many other stories, chiefly included in the Scenes de la Vie Privée. It cannot be said that he ever mixed much in society; it was impossible that he should do so, considering the vast amount of work he did and the manner in which he did it. His practice was to dine lightly about five or six; next to go to bed and sleep till eleven, twelve, or one; and then get up, and with the help only of enormous quantities of very strong coffee, to work for indefinite stretches of time into the morning or afternoon of the next day, often for sixteen hours at a time. The first draft of his work never presented it in anything like fulness, sometimes not amounting to more than a quarter of its final bulk, then, upon 'slip' proof with broad margins, he would almost rewrite it, making excisions, alterations, and, most of all, additions.

There is really very little biographical detail to be stated. On the 14th March 1850 he was married at Vierzschovnia, in the Ukraine, to Madame Hanska, born Countess Rzevuska, for whom he had waited nearly, if not quite fourteen years, and returned to Paris at the end of May, dying in his house, in the Rue Fortunée, on the 18th August the same year.

The present volume is a reprint of the translation made by Miss Ellen Marriage for the edition of the Comédie Humaine, in 40 uniform volumes, edited by Professor Saintsbury. This edition contains all that is most significant of Balzac's work, and the following is a list, as arranged by the author, of its component novels and stories :-

Scènes de la Vie Privée.

AT THE SIGN OF THE CAT AND RACKET, Etc. (La Maison du Chat-quipelote. Le Bal de Sceaux. La Bourse. La Vendetta. Mme. Firmiani).

LA GRANDE BRETECHE, Etc. (La Grande Breteche. La Paix du Ménage, La Fausse Maîtresse. Étude de femme. Autre étude de femme. Albert Savarus). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

A DAUGHTER OF EVE (Une Fille d'Eve. Mémoires de deux Jeunes

Mariées). Translated by Mrs. R. S. Scott.

A Woman of Thirty, Etc. (La Femme de Trente Ans. La Femme abandonnée. La Grenadière. Le Message. Gobseck). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

A MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT (Le Contrat de Mariage. Un Début dans le

Vie. Une Double Famille).

Modeste Mignon (Modeste Mignon). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

BEATRIX (Béatrix). Translated by James Waring.

THE ATHEIST'S MASS, Etc. (La Messe de l'Athée. Honorine. Le Colonel Chabert. L'Interdiction. Pierre Grassou). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

Scènes de la Vie de Province.

URBULE MIROUET (Ursule Mirouet). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell. Eugenie Grandet (Eugenie Grandet). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage. PIERRETTE AND THE ABBE BIROTTEAU (Les Célibataires-I. Pierrette, Le Curé de Tours). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

A BACHELOR'S ESTABLISHMENT (Les Célibataires-II. Un Ménage de

garçon). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

PARISIANS IN THE COUNTRY (Les Parisiens en Province. L'Alustre Gaudissart. La Muse du département).

THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY TOWN (Les Rivalités. La Vieille Fille.

Le Cabinet des Antiques).

THE LILY OF THE VALLEY (Le Lys dans la Vallée). Translated by James Waring.

Lost Illusions (Illusions Perdues-I. Les Deux Poètes. Eve et David).

Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

A DISTINGUISHED PROVINCIAL AT PARIS (Illusions Perdues-II. Un grand Homme de province à Paris. 1 and 2). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Scènes de la Vie Parisienne.

A HARLOT'S PROGRESS. 2 vols. (Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes).

Translated by James Waring.

THE UNCONSCIOUS MUMMERS, Etc. (Les Comédiens sans le savoir.

Prince de la Bohème. Un Homme d'affaires. Gaudissart II. Maison Nucingen. Facino Cane). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

THE THIRTEEN (Histoire des Treize. Ferragus. La Duchess de Langeais).

OLD GORIOT (Le Père Goriot). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

THE RISE AND FALL OF CESAR BIROTTEAU (Grandeur et Décadence de Cesar Birotteau). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

A PRINCESS'S SECRETS (Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan. Les

Employés).

Cousin BETTY (Les Parents Pauvres-I. La Cousine Bette). Translated by James Waring.

Cousin Pons (Les Parents Pauvres-II. Le Cousin Pons). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Scènes de la Vie Politique.

A GONDREVILLE MYSTERY (Une Ténébreuse Affaire. Un Episode sous la Terreur).

THE SEAMY SIDE OF HISTORY (L'Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine. Z. Marcas). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

THE MEMBER FOR ARCIS (Le Député d'Arcis).

Scènes de la Vie Militaire.

THE CHOUANS (Les Chouans). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Scènes de la Vie de Campagne.

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR (Le Médecin de Campagne). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

THE COUNTRY PARSON (Le Curé de Village). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

THE PEASANTRY (Les Paysans). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Études Philosophiques.

THE WILD Ass's SKIN (La Peau de Chagrin). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE (La Recherche de l'Absolu). Translated by

Miss Ellen Marriage.

A FATHER'S CURSE (L'Enfant Maudit. Gambara. Massimilla Doni

Maître Cornélius).

THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE, Etc. (Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu. Jésus-Christ en Flandre. Melmoth réconcilié. Les Marana. Adieu. Le Réquisi-tionnaire. El Verdugo. Un Drame au bord de la mer. L'Auberge rouge. L'Elixir de longue vie). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

ABOUT CATHERINE DE' MÉDICI (Sur Catherine de Médicis). Translated by

Mrs. Clara Bell.

SERAPHITA (Seraphita. Louis Lambert. Les Proscrits). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

THE MIDDLE CLASSES (Les Petits Bourgeois).

PREFACE

Le Père Goriot perhaps deserves to be ranked as that one of Balzac's novels which has united the greatest number of suffrages, and which exhibits his peculiar merits, not indeed without any of his faults, but with the merits in eminent, and the faults not in glaring, degree. It was written (the preface is dated 1834) at the time when his genius was at its very height, when it had completely burst the strange shell which had so long enveloped and cramped it, when the scheme of the Comédie Humaine was not quite finally settled (it never was that), but elaborated to a very considerable extent, when the author had already acquired most of the knowledge of the actual world which he possessed, and when his physical powers were as yet unimpaired by his enormous labour and his reckless disregard of burning the candle at both ends.' Although it exhibits, like nearly all his work, the complication of interest and scheme which was almost a necessity to him, that complication is kept within reasonable bounds, and managed with wonderful address. The history of Goriot and his daughters, the fortunes of Eugène de Rastignac, and the mysterious personality and operations of Vautrin, not only all receive due and unperplexed development, but work upon each other with that correspondence and interdependence which form the rarest gift of the novelist, and which, when present, too commonly have attached to them the curse of over-minuteness and complexity. No piece of Balzac's Dutch painting is worked out with such marvellous minuteness as the Pension Vauquer, and hardly any book of his has more lifelike studies of character.

It would, however, not be difficult to find books with an almost, if not quite, equal accumulation of attractions, which have somehow failed to make the mark that has been made by Le Père Goriot. And the practised critic of novels knows perfectly well why this is. It is almost invariably, and perhaps quite invariably, because there is no sufficiently central interest, or because that interest is not of the broadly human kind. Had Goriot had no daughters, he would undoubtedly have been a happier man (or a less happy, for it is possible to take it both ways); but the history of his decadence and death never could have been such a good novel. It is because this history of the daughters-not exactly unnatural, not wholly without excuse, but as surely murderesses of their father as Goneril and Regan-at once unites and overshadows the whole, because of its intensity, its simple and suasive appeal, that Le Père Goriot holds the place it does hold. That it owes something in point of suggestion to Lear does not in the least impair its claims. The circumstances and treatment have that entire difference which, when genius is indebted to genius, pays all the score there is at once. And besides, Lear has offered its motive for three hundred years to thousands and millions of people who have been writing plays and novels, and yet there is only one Père Goriot.

It is however, a fair subject of debate for those who

like critical argument of the nicer kind, whether Balzac has or has not made a mistake in representing the exdealer in floury compounds as a sort of idiot outside his trade abilities and his love for his daughters. That in doing so he was guided by a sense of poetical justice and consistency—the same sense which made Shakespeare dwell on the ungovernable temper and the undignified haste to get rid of the cares of sovereignty that bring on and justify the woes of Lear-is undeniable. But it would perhaps not have been unnatural, and it would have been even more tragic, if the ci-devant manufacturer had been represented as more intellectually capable, and as ruining himself in spite of his better judgment. On this point, however, both sides may be held with equal ease and cogency, and I do not decide either way. Of the force and pathos of the actual representation, no two opinions are possible. There is hardly a touch of the one fault which can be urged against Balzac very often with some, and sometimes with very great, justice-the fault of exaggeration and phantasmagoric excess. Here at least the possibilities of actual life, as translatable into literature, are not one whit exceeded; and the artist has his full reward for being true to art.

Almost equally free from the abnormal and the gigantic is the portraiture of Rastignac. Even those who demur to the description of Balzac as an impeccable chronicler of society must admit the extraordinary felicity of the pictures of the young man's introduction to the drawing-rooms of Mesdames de Restaud and de Beauséant Neither Fielding nor Thackeray—that is to say, no one else in the world of letters—could have drawn with more

absolute vividness and more absolute veracity a young man, not a parvenu in point of birth, not devoid of native cleverness and 'star,' but hampered by the consciousness of poverty and by utter ignorance of the actual ways and current social fashions of the great world when he is first thrown, to sink or swim, into this great world itself. We may pass from the certain to the dubious, or at least the debateable, when we pass from Rastignac's first appearance to his later experiences. Here comes in what has been said in the general introduction as to the somewhat fantastic and imaginary, the conventional and artificial character of Balzac's world. But it must be remembered that for centuries the whole structure of Parisian society has been to a very great extent fantastic and imaginary, conventional and artificial. Men and women have always played parts there as they have played them nowhere else. And it must be confessed that some of the parts here, if planned to the stage, are played to the life-that of Madame de Beauséant especially.

It is Vautrin on whom Balzac's decriers, if they are so hardy as to attack this most unattackable book of his at all, must chiefly fasten. It was long ago noticed—indeed, sober eyes both in France and elsewhere noticed it at the time—that the criminal, more or less virtuous, more or less terrible, more or less superhuman, exercised a kind of sorcery over minds in France from the greatest to the least at this particular time, and even later. Not merely Balzac, but Victor Hugo and George Sand, succumbed to his fascinations; and after these three names it is quite unnecessary to mention any others. And Balzac's proneness to the enormous and gigantesque made the fascination

peculiarly dangerous in his case. Undoubtedly the Vautrin who talks to Rastignac in the arbour is neither quite a real man nor quite the same man who is somewhat ignominiously caught by the treachery of his boarding-house fellows; undoubtedly we feel that with him we have left Shakespeare a long way behind, and are getting rather into the society of Bouchardy or Eugène Sue. But the genius is here likewise, and, as usual, it saves everything.

How it extends to the minutest and even the least savoury details of Madame Vauquer's establishment, how it irradiates the meannesses and the sordidnesses of the inhabitants thereof, those who have read know, and those who are about to read this new presentation in English will find. Let it only be repeated, that if the rarest and strangest charms which Balzac can produce are elsewhere, nowhere else is his charm presented in a more pervading and satisfactory manner.

Le Père Goriot originally appeared as a book in 1835, published by Werdet and Spahmann in two volumes. It had, however, appeared serially in the Revue de Pariss during the previous winter. The first and some subsequent editions had seven chapter-divisions, six of them headed. These, according to Balzac's usual practice, were swept away when the book became, in 1843, part of the Scienes de la Vie Parisienne and the Comédie itself. The transference to the Vie Privée which is accomplished in the édition définitive was only executed in accordance with notes found after Balzac's death, and is far from happy, the book being essentially Parisian.

G. S

OLD GORIOT

To the great and illustrious Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, a token of admiration for his works and genius.

De Balzac.

MME. VAUQUER (née de Conflans) is an elderly person, who for the past forty years has kept a lodging-house in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, in the district that lies between the Latin Quarter and the Faubourg Saint-Marcel. Her house (known in the neighbourhood as the Maison Vauquer) receives men and women, old and young, and no word has ever been breathed against her respectable establishment; but, at the same time, it must be said that as a matter of fact no young woman has been under her roof for thirty years, and that if a young man stays there for any length of time it is a sure sign that his allowance must be of the slenderest. In 1819, however, the time when this drama opens, there was an almost penniless young girl among Mme. Vauquer's boarders.

That word drama has been somewhat discredited of late; it has been overworked and twisted to strange uses in these days of dolorous literature; but it must do service again here, not because this story is dramatic in the restricted sense of the world, but because some tears may perhaps be shed intra et extra muros before it is over.

Will any one without the walls of Paris understand it? It is open to doubt. The only audience who could appreciate the results of close observation, the careful reproduction of minute detail and local colour, are dwellers between the heights of Montrouge and Montmartre, in a vale of crumbling stucco watered by streams of black mud, a vale of sorrows which are real and of joys too often hollow; but this audience is so accustomed to terrible sensations, that only some unimaginable and well-nigh impossible woe could produce any lasting impression there. Now and again there are tragedies so awful and so grand by reason of the complication of virtues and vices that bring them about, that egoism and selfishness are forced to pause and are moved to pity; but the impression that they receive is like a luscious fruit, soon consumed. Civilisation, like the car of Juggernaut, is scarcely stayed perceptibly in its progress by a heart less easy to break than the others that lie in its course; this also is broken, and Civilisation continues on her course triumphant. And you, too, will do the like; you who with this book in your white hand will sink back among the cushions of your arm-chair, and say to yourself, 'Perhaps this may amuse me.' You will read the story of Old Goriot's secret woes, and, dining thereafter with an unspoiled appetite, will lay the blame of your insensibility upon the writer, and accuse him of exaggeration, of writing romances. Ah! once for all, this drama is neither a fiction nor a romance! All is true,—so true, that every one can discern the elements of the tragedy in his own house, perhaps in his own heart.

The lodging-house is Mme. Vauquer's own property. It is still standing at the lower end of the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, just where the road slopes so sharply down to the Rue de l'Arbalète, that wheeled traffic seldom passes that way, because it is so stony and steep. This position is sufficient to account for the silence prevalent

in the streets shut in between the dome of the Panthéon and the dome of the Val-de-Grâce, two conspicuous public buildings which give a yellowish tone to the landscape and darken the whole district that lies beneath the shadow of their leaden-hued cupolas.

In that district the pavements are clean and dry, there is neither mud nor water in the gutters, grass grows in the chinks of the walls. The most heedless passer-by feels the depressing influences of a place where the sound of wheels creates a sensation; there is a grim look about the houses, a suggestion of a jail about those high garden walls. A Parisian straying into a suburb apparently composed of lodging-houses and public institutions would see poverty and dulness, old age lying down to die, and joyous youth condemned to drudgery. It is the ugliest quarter of Paris, and, it may be added, the least known. But, before all things, the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève is like a bronze frame for a picture for which the mind cannot be too well prepared by the contemplation of sad hues and sober images. Even so, step by step the daylight decreases, and the cicerone's droning voice grows hollower as the traveller descends into the Catacombs. The comparison holds good! Who shall say which is more ghastly, the sight of the bleached skulls or of dried-up human hearts?

The front of the lodging-house is at right angles to the road, and looks out upon a little garden, so that you see the side of the house in section, as it were, from the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève. Beneath the wall of the house front there lies a channel, a fathom wide, paved with cobble-stones, and beside it runs a gravelled walk bordered by geraniums and oleanders and pomegranates set in great blue and white glazed earthenware pots. Access into the gravelled walk is afforded by a door, above which the words Maison Vauquer may be read, and

beneath, in rather smaller letters, 'Lodgings for both sexes, etc.'

During the day a glimpse into the garden is easily obtained through a wicket to which a bell is attached. On the opposite wall, at the further end of the gravelled walk, a green marble arch was painted once upon a time by a local artist, and in this semblance of a shrine a statue representing Cupid is installed; a Parisian Cupid, so blistered and disfigured that he looks like a candidate for one of the adjacent hospitals, and might suggest an allegory to lovers of symbolism. The half-obliterated inscription on the pedestal beneath determines the date of this work of art, for it bears witness to the wide-spread enthusiasm felt for Voltaire on his return to Paris in 1777—

Whoe'er thou art, thy master see; He is, or was, or ought to be.

At night the wicket gate is replaced by a solid door. The little garden is no wider than the front of the house; it is shut in between the wall of the street and the partition wall of the neighbouring house. A mantle of ive conceals the bricks and attracts the eyes of passers-by to an effect which is picturesque in Paris, for each of the walls is covered with trellised vines that yield a scanty dusty crop of fruit, and furnish besides a subject of conversation for Mme. Vauquer and her lodgers; every year the widow trembles for her vintage.

A straight path beneath the walls on either side of the garden leads to a clump of lime-trees at the further end of it; line-trees, as Mme. Vauquer persists in calling them, in spite of the fact that she was a de Conflans, and regardless of repeated corrections from her lodgers.

The central space between the walks is filled with artichokes and rows of pyramid fruit-trees, and surrounded by a border of lettuce, pot-herbs, and parsley. Under the lime-trees there are a few green-painted

garden seats and a wooden table, and hither, during the dog-days, such of the lodgers as are rich enough to indulge in a cup of coffee come to take their pleasure, though it is hot enough to roast eggs even in the shade.

The house itself is three stories high, without counting the attics under the roof. It is built of rough stone, and covered with the yellowish stucco that gives a mean appearance to almost every house in Paris. There are five windows in each story in the front of the house; all the blinds visible through the small square panes are drawn up awry, so that the lines are all at cross purposes. At the side of the house there are but two windows on each floor, and the lowest of all are adorned with a heavy iron grating.

Behind the house a yard extends for some twenty feet, a space inhabited by a happy family of pigs, poultry, and rabbits; the wood-shed is situated on the further side, and on the wall between the wood-shed and the kitchen window hangs the meat-safe, just above the place where the sink discharges its greasy streams. The cook sweeps all the refuse out through a little door into the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, and frequently cleanses the yard with copious supplies of water, under pain of

pestilence.

The house might have been built on purpose for its present uses. Access is given by a French window to the first room on the ground floor, a sitting-room which looks out upon the street through the two barred windows already mentioned. Another door opens out of it into the dining-room, which is separated from the kitchen by the well of the staircase, the steps being constructed partly of wood, partly of tiles, which are coloured and beeswaxed. Nothing can be more depressing than the sight of that sitting-room. The furniture is covered with horse hair woven in alternate dull and glossy stripes. There is a round table in the middle, with a purplish-red marble top, on which there stands, by way of orna-