

The CHOUANS
By HONORÉ
de BALZAC.



LONDON: PUBLISHED
by J. M. DENT & SONS, LTD.
AND IN NEW YORK
BY E. P. DUTTON & CO.

FIRST ISSUE OF THIS EDITION . 1908
REPRINTED 1912

NOTE

HONORÉ DE BALZAC was born at Tours May 16, 1799. His father had been a barrister before the Revolution, but at the time of Honoré'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 *Comédie*

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 *Scènes 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, with a general introduction, 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-qui-pelote. Le Bal de Sceaux. La Bourse. La Vendetta. Mme. Firmiani).
 LA GRANDE BRETÊCHE, Etc. (La Grande Bretèche. 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'Ève. 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 la Vie. Une Double Famille).
 MODESTE MIGNON (Modeste Mignon). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 BÉATRIX (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.

- URSULE MIROUËT (Ursule Mirouët). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 EUGÉNIE GRANDET (Eugénie Grandet). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
 PIERRETTE AND THE ABBÉ 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'illustre 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. Ève 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. Un Prince de la Bohème. Un Homme d'affaires. Gaudissart II. La 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 CÉSAR BIROTTEAU (Grandeur et Décadence de César 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 Réquisitionnaire. 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' MÉDICIS (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).

THE CHOUANS

(*Les Chouans*)

PREFACE

WHEN, many years after its original publication, Balzac reprinted *Les Chouans* as a part of the *Comédie Humaine*, he spoke of it in the dedication to his old friend M. Théodore Dablin as 'perhaps better than its reputation.' He probably referred to the long time which had passed without a fresh demand for it; for, as has been pointed out in the General Introduction to this Series of translations, it first made his fame, and with it he first emerged from the purgatory of anonymous hack-writing. It would therefore have argued a little ingratitude in him had he shown himself dissatisfied with the original reception. The book, however, has, it may be allowed, never ranked among the special favourites of Balzacians; and though it was considerably altered and improved from its first form, it has certain defects which are not likely to escape any reader. In it Balzac was still trying the adventure-novel, the novel of incident; and though he here substitutes a nobler model—Scott, for whom he always had a reverence as intelligent as it was generous—for the Radcliffian or Lewisian ideals of his nonage, he was still not quite at home. Some direct personal knowledge or

experience of the matters he wrote about was always more or less necessary to him ; and the enthusiasm with which he afterwards acknowledged, in a letter to Beyle, the presence of such knowledge in that writer's military passages, confesses his own sense of inferiority.

It is not, however, in the actual fighting scenes, though they are not of the first class, that the drawbacks of *Les Chouans* lie. Though the present version is not my work, I translated the book some years ago, a process which brings out much more vividly than mere reading the want of art which distinguishes the management of the story. There are in it the materials of a really first-rate romance. The opening skirmish, the hair-breadth escape of Montauran at Alençon, the scenes at the Vivetière, not a few of the incidents of the attack on Fougères, and, above all, the finale, are, or at least might have been made, of the most thrilling interest. Nor are they by any means ill supported by the characters. Hulot is one of the best of Balzac's *grognard* heroes ; Montauran may be admitted by the most faithful and jealous devotee of Scott to be a *jeune premier* who unites all the qualifications of his part with a freedom from the flatness which not unfrequently characterises Sir Walter's own good young men, and which drew from Mr. Thackeray the equivocal encomium that he should like to be mother-in-law to several of them. Marche-à-Terre is very nearly a masterpiece ; and many of the minor personages are excellent for their work. Only Corentin (who, by the way, appears frequently in other books later) is perhaps below what he ought to be. But the women make up for him. Mademoiselle de Verneuil has admirable piquancy and charm ; Madame du Gua is a good bad heroine ; and Francine is

not a mere soubrette of the machine-made pattern by any means.

How is it, then, that the effect of the book is, as many readers unquestionably feel it to be, 'heavy'? The answer is not very difficult; it is simply that Balzac had not yet learned his trade, and that this particular trade was not exactly his. He had a certain precedent in some—not in all, nor in the best—of Scott's books, and in many of his other models, for setting slowly to work; and he abused that precedent here in the most merciless manner. If two-thirds of the first chapter had been cut away, and the early part of the second had been not less courageously thinned, the book would probably have twice the hold that it at present has on the imagination. As it is, I have known some readers (and I have no doubt that they are fairly representative) who honestly avowed themselves to be 'choked off' by the endless vacillations and conversations of Hulot at the 'Pilgrim,' by the superabundant talk at the inn, and generally by the very fault which, as I have elsewhere noticed, Balzac reprehends in a brother novelist, the fault of giving the reader no definite grasp of story. Balzac could not deny himself the luxury of long conversations; but he never had, and at this time had less than at any other, the art which Dumas possessed in perfection—the art of making the conversation tell the story. Until, therefore, the talk between the two lovers on the way to the Vivetière, the action is so obscure, so broken by description and chat, and so little relieved, except in the actual skirmish and wherever Marche-à-Terre appears, by real *business*, that it cannot but be felt as fatiguing. It can only be promised that if the reader will bear up or skip intelligently till this

point he will not be likely to find any fault with the book afterwards. The *jour sans lendemain* is admirable almost throughout.

This unfortunate effect is considerably assisted by the working of one of Balzac's numerous and curious crotchets. Those who have only a slight acquaintance with the *Comédie Humaine* must have noticed that chapter-divisions are for the most part wanting in it, or are so few and of such enormous length, that they are rather parts than chapters. It must not, however, be supposed that this was an original peculiarity of the author's, or one founded on any principle. Usually, though not invariably, the original editions of his longer novels, and even of his shorter tales, are divided into chapters, with or without headings, like those of other and ordinary mortals. But when he came to codify and arrange the *Comédie*, he, for some reason which I do not remember to have seen explained anywhere in his letters, struck out these divisions, or most of them, and left the books solid, or merely broken up into a few parts. Thus *Le Dernier Chouan* (the original book) had thirty-two chapters, though it had no chapter-headings, while the remodelled work as here given has only three, the first containing nearly a fifth, the second nearly two-fifths, and the third not much less than a half of the whole work.

Now, everybody who has attended to the matter must see that this absence of chapters is a great addition of heaviness in the case where a book is exposed to the charge of being heavy. The named chapters of Dumas supply something like an argument of the whole book; and even the unnamed ones of Scot lighten, punctuate,

and relieve the course of the story. It may well be that Balzac's sense that 'the story' with him was not the first, or anything like the first consideration, had something to do with his innovation. But I do not think it improved his books at any time, and in the more romantic class of them it is a distinct disadvantage.

Le Dernier Chouan ou La Bretagne en 1800 first appeared in March 1829, published in four volumes by Canel, with a preface (afterwards suppressed) bearing date the 15th January of the same year. Its subsequent form, with the actual title, threw the composition back to August 1827, and gave Fougères itself as the place of composition. This revised form, or second edition, appeared in 1834 in two volumes, published by Vimont. When, twelve years later, it took rank in the *Comédie Humaine* as part of the *Scènes de la vie Militaire*, a second preface was inserted, which in its turn was cancelled by the author.

G. S.

THE CHOUANS

OR BRITTANY IN 1799

*To M. Théodore Dablin, Merchant,
My first book to my earliest friend.*

De Balzac.

I

THE AMBUSCADE

IN the early days of the year VIII. at the beginning of Vendémiaire, or towards the end of the month of September 1799, reckoning by the present calendar, some hundred peasants and a fair number of townspeople who had set out from Fougères in the morning to go to Mayenne, were climbing the mountain of the Pèlerine, which lies about half-way between Fougères and Ernée, a little place where travellers are wont to break their journey. The detachment, divided up into larger and smaller groups, presented as a whole such an outlandish collection of costumes, and brought together individuals belonging to such widely different neighbourhoods and callings, that it may be worth while to describe their various characteristics, and in this way impart to the narrative the lifelike colouring that is so highly valued in our day, although, according to certain critics, this is a hindrance to the portrayal of sentiments.

Some of the peasants—most of them in fact—went barefoot. Their whole clothing consisted in a large goat-

skin, which covered them from shoulder to knee, and breeches of very coarse white cloth, woven of uneven threads, that bore witness to the neglected state of local industries. Their long matted locks mingled so habitually with the hairs of their goat-skin cloaks, and so completely hid the faces that they bent upon the earth, that the goat's skin might have been readily taken for a natural growth, and at first sight the miserable wearers could hardly be distinguished from the animals whose hide now served them for a garment. But very shortly a pair of bright eyes peering through the hair, like drops of dew shining in thick grass, spoke of a human intelligence within, though the expression of the eyes certainly inspired more fear than pleasure. Their heads were covered with dirty red woollen bonnets, very like the Phrygian caps that the Republic in those days had adopted as a symbol of liberty. Each carried a long wallet made of sacking over his shoulder at the end of a thick knotty oak cudgel. There was not much in the wallets.

Others wore above their caps a great broad-brimmed felt hat, with a band of woollen chenille of various colours about the crown, and these were clad altogether in the same coarse linen cloth that furnished the wallets and breeches of the first group; there was scarcely a trace of the new civilisation in their dress. Their long hair straggled over the collar of a round jacket which reached barely to the hips, a garment peculiar to the Western peasantry, with little square side pockets in it. Beneath this open-fronted jacket was a waistcoat, fastened with big buttons and made of the same cloth. Some wore sabots on the march, others thriftily carried them in their hands. Soiled with long wear, blackened with dust and sweat, this costume had one distinct merit of its own; for if it was less original than the one first described, it represented a period of historical transition, that ended in the almost magnificent apparel of a few men who shone out like flowers in the midst of the company.

Their red or yellow waistcoats, decorated with two parallel rows of copper buttons, like a sort of oblong cuirass, and their blue linen breeches, stood out in vivid contrast to the white clothing and skin cloaks of their comrades ; they looked like poppies and cornflowers in a field of wheat. Some few of them were shod with the wooden sabots that the Breton peasants make for themselves, but most of them wore great iron-bound shoes and coats of very coarse material, shaped after the old French fashion, to which our peasants still cling religiously. Their shirt collars were fastened by silver studs with designs of an anchor or a heart upon them ; and, finally, their wallets seemed better stocked than those of their comrades. Some of them even included a flask, filled with brandy no doubt, in their traveller's outfit, hanging it round their necks by a string.

A few townspeople among these semi-barbarous folk looked as if they marked the extreme limits of civilisation in those regions. Like the peasants, they exhibited conspicuous differences of costume, some wearing round bonnets, and some flat or peaked caps ; some had high boots with the tops turned down, some wore shoes surmounted by gaiters. Ten or so of them had put themselves into the jacket known to the Republicans as a *carmagnole* ; others again, well-to-do artisans doubtless, were dressed from head to foot in materials of uniform colour ; and the most elegantly arrayed of them all wore swallow-tailed coats or riding-coats of blue or green cloth in more or less threadbare condition. These last, moreover, wore boots of various patterns, as became people of consequence, and flourished large canes, like fellows who face their luck with a stout heart. A head carefully powdered here and there, or decently plaited queues, showed the desire to make the most of ourselves which is inspired in us by a new turn taken in our fortunes or our education.

Any one seeing these men brought together as if by

chance, and astonished at finding themselves assembled, might have thought that a conflagration had driven the population of a little town from their homes. But the times and the place made this body of men interesting for very different reasons. A spectator initiated into the secrets of the civil discords which then were rending France would have readily picked out the small number of citizens in that company upon whose loyalty the Republic could depend, for almost every one who composed it had taken part against the Government in the war of four years ago. One last distinguishing characteristic left no doubt whatever as to the divided opinions of the body of men. The Republicans alone were in spirits as they marched. As for the rest of the individuals that made up the band, obviously as they might differ in their dress, one uniform expression was visible on all faces and in the attitude of each—the expression which misfortune gives.

The faces of both townspeople and peasants bore the stamp of deep dejection; there was something sullen about the silence they kept. All of them were bowed apparently beneath the yoke of the same thought—a terrible thought, no doubt, but carefully hidden away. Every face was inscrutable; the unwonted lagging of their steps alone could betray a secret understanding. A few of them were marked out by a rosary that hung round about their necks, although they ran some risks by keeping about them this sign of a faith that had been suppressed rather than uprooted: and one of these from time to time would shake back his hair and defiantly raise his head. Then they would furtively scan the woods, the footpaths, and the crags that shut in the road on either side, much as a dog sniffs the wind as he tries to scent the game; but as they only heard the monotonous sound of the steps of their mute comrades, they hung their heads again with the forlorn faces of convicts on their way to the galleys, where they are now to live and die.

The advance of this column upon Mayenne, composed as it was of such heterogeneous elements, and representing such widely different opinions, was explained very readily by the presence of another body of troops which headed the detachment. About a hundred and fifty soldiers were marching at the head of the column under the command of the *chief of a demi-brigade*. It may not be unprofitable to explain, for those who have not witnessed the drama of the Revolution, that this appellation was substituted for the title of colonel, then rejected by patriots as too aristocratic. The soldiers belonged to a demi-brigade of infantry stationed in the dépôt at Mayenne. In those disturbed times the soldiers of the Republic were all dubbed Blues by the population of the West. The blue and red uniforms of the early days of the Republic, which are too well remembered even yet to require description, had given rise to this nickname. So the detachment of Blues was serving as an escort to this assemblage, consisting of men who were nearly all ill satisfied at being thus directed upon Mayenne, there to be submitted to a military discipline which must shortly clothe them all alike, and drill a uniformity into their march and ways of thinking which was at present entirely lacking among them.

This column was the contingent of Fougères, obtained thence with great difficulty; and representing its share of the levy which the Directory of the French Republic had required by a law passed on the tenth day of the previous Messidor. The Government had asked for a subsidy of a hundred millions, and for a hundred thousand men, so as to send reinforcements at once to their armies, then defeated by the Austrians in Italy and by the Prussians in Germany; while Suwarroff, who had aroused Russia's hopes of making a conquest of France, menaced them from Switzerland. Then it was that the departments of the West known as la Vendée, Brittany, and part of Lower Normandy, which had been

pacified three years ago by the efforts of General Hoche after four years of hard fighting, appeared to think that the moment had come to renew the struggle.

Attacked thus in so many directions, the Republic seemed to be visited with a return of her early vigour. At first the defence of the departments thus threatened had been intrusted to the patriotic residents by one of the provisions of that same law of Messidor. The Government, as a matter of fact, had neither troops nor money available for the prosecution of civil warfare, so the difficulty was evaded by a bit of bombast on the part of the Legislature. They could do nothing for the revolted districts, so they reposed complete confidence in them. Perhaps also they expected that this measure, by setting the citizens at odds among themselves, would extinguish the rebellion at its source. '*Free companies will be organised in the departments of the West*'—so ran the proviso which brought about such dreadful retaliation.

This impolitic ordinance drove the West into so hostile an attitude, that the Directory had no hope left of subduing it all at once. In a few days, therefore, the Assemblies were asked for particular enactments with regard to the slight reinforcements due by virtue of the proviso that had authorised the formation of the free companies. So a new law had been proclaimed a few days before this story begins, and came into effect on the third complementary day of the calendar in the year VII., ordaining that these scanty levies of men should be organised into regiments. The regiments were to bear the names of the departments of the Sarthe, Ourthe, Mayenne, Ille-et-Vilaine, Morbihan, Loire-Inférieure, and Maine-et-Loire. *These regiments—so the law provided—are specially enrolled to oppose the Chouans, and can never be drafted over the frontiers on any pretext whatsoever.* These tedious but little known particulars explain at once the march of the body of men under escort by the Blues, and the weakness of the position in which the Directory