

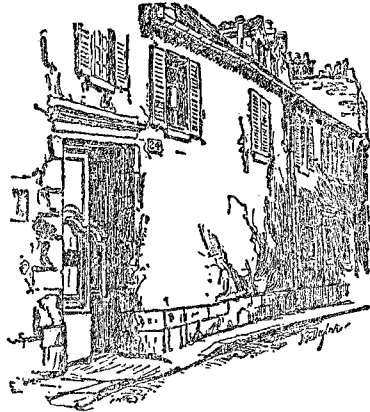
who carries his own authority. By reason of the daily intimacy and the swift work and the high pressure and the risk for everybody, it is true that irony or arbitrary authority or lack of sympathy could make of play producing about as uncomfortable an association as—any other association dominated by “nerves”. Perhaps, as Dr. Joseph Jastrow once suggested, all these things are not alone in the domain of art and of ethics but of manners. Or perhaps it is merely that theatrical producers, in common with all other business men, are eliminating waste—waste nerves along with the rest. The roots of art are fed and watered by undivined agencies. In this case I believe that the work ran smoothly because the producer was more intent on getting out of every creative worker his creative bit than in remembering that he was the director and that his way was best. He was not only directing a play—he was dealing with people. The final art.

## A LANDMARK PASSES

By Arthur Bartlett Maurice

THE Pension Vauquer is no more! Till yesterday, the structure which Henry James felicitously described as “the most portentous setting of the scene in all the literature of fiction” had, for a full hundred years, remained substantially true to the picture that Honoré de Balzac drew in the pages of “Père Goriot”. The house and the garden with its well and graveled walk were there for the contemplation of the literary pilgrim. Over all there was the brooding silence of ten decades. But that was yesterday. There is little silence there today. For where Trompe-la-Mort whis-

pered his cunning temptations in the ear of Eugène de Rastignac; where Goriot, the Lear of French fiction, wept over the ingratitude of his daughters; where, of an eventful eve-



*The Pension Vauquer*

ning, there came the tramping of feet, the clang of muskets against the pavement, and the ominous command: “In the name of the King and the Law!”, now honks, not the horn of regal Renault or pompous Panhard, but the horn of the ubiquitous Ford, or of its French equivalent, the Citroën. The “most portentous setting of the scene in all the literature of fiction” has become an auto-service station.

“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 Genevieve in the district that lies between the Latin Quarter and the Faubourg Saint-Marcel.” These are the opening words of the novel that posterity seems to have accepted as Balzac’s masterpiece, the most glorious stone of that vast edifice which is the *Comédie Humaine*. The house stood at the lower end of the Rue Neuve Sainte-Genevieve, just where the street begins to slope down to the Rue de l’Arbalète. Balzac, in

his day, found the quarter the ugliest and the least known of all the quarters of Paris. Ugly and unknown it remained all through the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. To find it today is like finding one's way to the heart of a maze. That remoteness had the virtue of preserving it till the last from the invasion of the modern Hun, the apartment constructing architect. Ugly as it is, it possesses an amazing fascination. With the dirt and squalor and gloom the glamour of the dark old world is there. Here is no Haussmannized Paris, but a vestige of the ancient Lutetia that knew the Valois. The shades of the Villon of history and of the Quasimodo of Hugo's fantastic imagination, lurk in

such streets as the Rue Saint-Médard and the Rue Mouffetard.

Balzac identified the Pension Vauquer as being in the Rue Sainte-Genevieve. But the names of Paris streets are subject to frequent changes, and long ago the Rue Sainte-Genevieve became the Rue Tournefort. The actual number of what was till yesterday, by reason of its unchanged state, its romantic appearance, and its vivid associations, the show place among all the shrines of French fiction, was 24. From that doorway Eugène de Rastignac went forth in the night to make his way to the heights of the cemetery of Père Lachaise, and from its eminence to shake his fist at the city spread out beneath him with the ringing cry of defiance: "A nous deux maintenant!"

## THE PRAIRIE TOWN

By Helen Santmyer

LOVERS of beauty laugh at this grey town,  
Where dust lies thick on ragged curb-side trees,  
And compass-needle streets lead up and down  
And lose themselves in empty prairie seas.

Here is no winding scented lane, no hill  
Crowned with a steepled church, no garden wall  
Of old grey stone where lilacs bloom, and fill  
The air with fragrance when the May rains fall.

But here is the unsoftened majesty  
Of the wide earth where all the wide streets end,  
And from the dusty corner one may see  
The full moon rise, and flaming sun descend.

The long main street, whence farmers' teams go forth,  
Lies like an old sea road, star-pointed north.