

Books of Special Interest

Unpublished Letters

BALZAC AND SOUVERAIN. Edited by WALTER SCOTT HASTINGS. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927. \$15.

Reviewed by E. PRESTON DARGAN
University of Chicago

AMONG the most revealing pages in Balzac's life-history are those concerning his relations with publishers. These figures emerge as definitely as if they belonged to the "Comédie Humaine" itself. We come to know the "odious" Madame Béchet, Edmond Werdet, gossip and "vulture," and the crafty Chlendorowski. We learn afresh how closely Balzac commingled his financial affairs and his literary ambitions.

Such are the interests of the present volume, consisting mainly of fifty-six hitherto unpublished letters from Balzac to Hippolyte Souverain. This *éditeur* stood sponsor for numerous novels during the author's grand climacteric (1833-1844). The original holographs are the property of Mr. Gabriel Wells, who in various ways has appeared as the "twentieth century godfather of Balzac." The volume republishes also certain complementary letters from Souverain to the novelist. The editing has been carefully done by Professor W. S. Hastings, already known for his work on Balzac's plays. The commentary or running text, if not always explicit, is thoroughly reliable and readable. Professor Hastings has had to surmount great difficulties in transcribing, grouping, and dating the letters. The result is a well-knit and complete chapter from Balzac's professional life.

At best, the author maintained an armed truce with his publishers; at worst, it was a guerilla warfare of recriminations. "M. de Balzac est un homme à ne jamais imprimer," declared a printer to Souverain. We need not dwell on the familiar tale of how this "Manslayer" rewrote large portions of his novels on proof-sheets. Such revisions meant infinite delays; and Souverain complains mainly of overdue proof-sheets, unfurnished copy, and carelessness as

to contracts. On the other hand, the letters are constantly referring to money matters; here it is Balzac who accuses *le superbe Hippolyte* of sharp dealing and wants more liberality including frequent advances. In short, an atmosphere of mutual distrust long prevailed. The editor of the volume seems too good-natured in endeavoring to clear this atmosphere. It is hardly true that the "first signs of coldness" date from 1843. All along there are too many signs of irritation, threats of legal proceedings, and clearly expressed suspicion.

As for literary matters, the chief lesson I learn is that one cannot understand the composition of the "Comédie Humaine" without due regard to Balzac's correspondence and his mutable contracts with publishers. A dozen masterpieces were brought out by Souverain in these years. Concerning them we glean much information. It is noteworthy that sometimes a volume is to be filled out by writing, rather hastily, an additional tale or two. To set up part of one volume required of the compositors three hundred hours of proof-corrections. The cost of polishing "Pierrette" exceeded what the author was paid for that story. Sweeping revisions were made for "Le Curé de Village" as for "Un Grand Homme de Province à Paris." Occasionally the publisher is allowed to make the necessary corrections, but Balzac vehemently protests against Souverain's passing a "revise" without the author's consent. Frequently we hear of obligations unfulfilled, because the novelist has undertaken fresh enterprises to the prejudice of a previous contract. We can understand Souverain's constant lament that Balzac is "always promising," but seldom performing.

Yet the Titan's productivity during this period was enormous. The volume shows that he wrote incessantly, as one hag-ridden. It is what killed him ultimately. Even in 1843 his printers nearly drove him to death. The break with Souverain, as publisher came at this time. But later, while Balzac was ill in Russia, the tone of the correspondence reveals that cordial relations were for the first time established. Not only

did Souverain help the suffering author financially (he had done this before), but he came forward with various friendly services, which included the purveying of the latest Parisian gossip and books to the Ukraine!

Professor Hastings is likely to be credited with a notable discovery about this Russian sojourn. It is indicated from a monogram on one of the letters that Balzac was in a State hospital during the autumn of 1849, instead of at his fiancée's home. If this be fully proven, it would count as another instance of Madame Hanska's neglect.

Altogether, this is a volume which for external beauty and intrinsic value should appeal to every Balzac amateur.

Historical Criticism

LINCOLN OR LEE. By WILLIAM E. DODD. New York: The Century Co. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by L. E. ROBINSON

IN three chapters Mr. Dodd has essayed a very difficult task even for a historian of his attainments. He attempts in brief compass a "comparison and contrast" of Lincoln and Lee through a *résumé* of their conduct and fortune as leaders of their respective sides in what he somewhat naively calls "the war between the states." The swiftly-moving and well-written parallel of the two leaders sketches the opening of the Civil War and the events of the epic duel that followed; it indicates Lincoln's successful management of Palmerston's attitude and English public opinion, and stresses the hostility the President encountered in Congress, in the cabinet, and elsewhere. Up to Gettysburg, Lincoln loses and Lee wins. After Gettysburg, which Lee lost because "his greatness was his ruin," the Confederate leader declined before the superior force of Grant, who, in spite of excessive losses, persisted in fighting Lee's army.

Lee is called "the greatest of American, if not English-speaking, commanders." He was the best representative of his time of the "aristocratic principle." He was great and knew he was great. He represented the section that had abandoned the social philosophy of Jefferson, its greatest thinker, for the "harder doctrine of Hamilton and John Marshall, the doctrine of inequality among men." Lincoln, politically sympathetic with Jefferson's doctrine of equality among men, was gentle and submissive to the will of the majority. It is perplexing to find a good American historian referring to Lincoln as "unreligious"; to his assassination as having hurried him "into an earlier and a greater immortality than life itself could have given." It is an open question whether Lee's last five years "completed" or redeemed his "immortality."

Mr. Dodd's little book is an interesting if journalistic essay in historical criticism. He has selected the two greatest and most interesting Civil War leaders for parallel study. In his estimate he has been influenced obviously by his own observation that "Americans love success" and by the idea of "the narrow and accidental margin of success." The President and the General are regarded too exclusively from the same level of responsibility and action. There is some reason, however, for this point of view, since Lincoln was primarily a statesman with major military problems forced upon his unwarlike temper, and Lee was a trained soldier whose life affords no data for study in the service or ideals of democratic government. Mr. Dodd keeps before his reader Lincoln's hope of "lifting the weights from the shoulders of all men"; little is made of his major objective of the Union as the means of achieving that hope; little is made of his military vision and judgment, so clearly summarized two years ago by the English General Ballard; little or nothing is made of his philosophy of individualism as the ideal of republican government set out in his permanent contribution to American political literature, far and away superior to any contributed by others on either side of the struggle. Lincoln was the thinker and spokesman of his era on its political side. Lee was the finest flower of manhood and of generalship furnished by his side of the controversy, and the last five years of his life were, from all we know, beautiful. In their private lives and character both leaders were irreproachable. As protagonists of their period, Lincoln stood for the humanity and development of all men; Lee stood for an aristocratic ideal of great antiquity, doomed to pass away before the newer world tendencies of popular education and economic opportunity. As a historian, Mr. Dodd declines to interpret his facts; perhaps he is right. Possibly he does not care to have these three chapters looked upon as the estimate of a critical historical essay.

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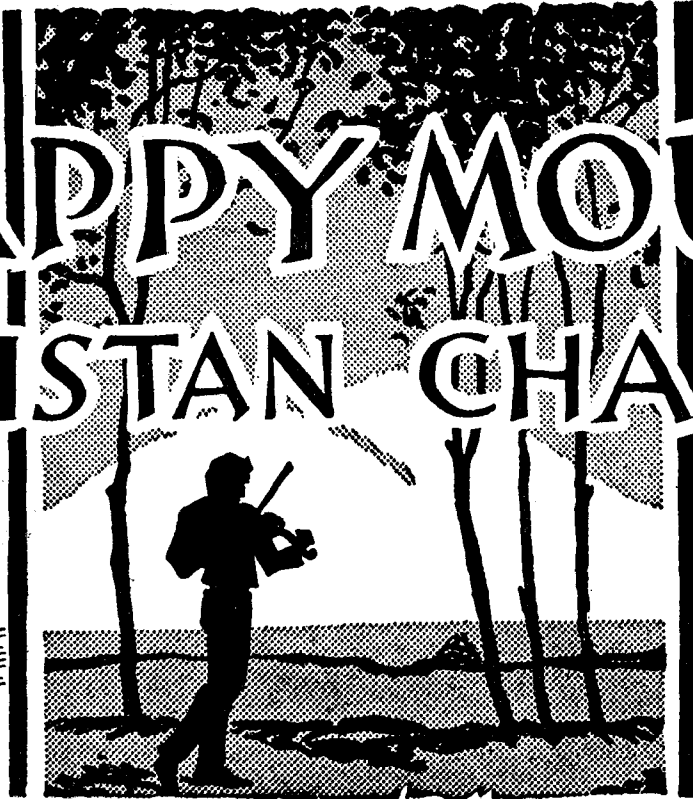
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