

**HONORÉ DE BALZAC IN TWENTY-FIVE
VOLUMES. THE FIRST COMPLETE
TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH.
VOL. VLL. THE JEALOUSIES OF A
COUNTY TOWN; THE OLD MAID; THE
COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES**

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Honoré de Balzac in Twenty-Five Volumes. The First Complete Translation into English. Vol. VII. The Jealousies of a County Town; The Old Maid; The Collection of Antiquities by Honoré de Balzac

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THE DUCHESS LISTENED INTENTLY

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IN TWENTY-FIVE VOLUMES

The First Complete Translation into English

THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY TOWN

The Old Maid
The Collection of Antiquities

Volume Seven

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS ON THE WOOD
BY FAMOUS FRENCH ARTISTS



New York

PETER FENELON COLLIER & SON

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*THE JEALOUSIES OF A
COUNTRY TOWN*

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PREFACE

THE TWO STORIES of "Les Rivalités" are more closely connected than it was always Balzac's habit to connect the tales which he united under a common heading. Not only are both devoted to the society of Alençon—a town and neighborhood to which he had evidently strong, though it is not clearly known what, attractions—not only is the Chevalier de Valois a notable figure in each; but the community, imparted by the elaborate study of the old *noblesse* in each case, is even greater than either of these ties could give. Indeed, if instead of "Les Rivalités" the author had chosen some label indicating the study of the *noblesse qui s'en va* it might almost have been preferable. He did not, however; and though in a man who so constantly changed his titles and his arrangements the actual ones are not excessively authoritative, they have authority.

"La Vieille Fille," despite a certain tone of levity—which, to do Balzac justice, is not common with him, and which is rather hard upon the poor heroine—is one of the best and liveliest things he ever did. The opening picture of the Chevalier, though, like other things of its author's, especially in his overtures, liable to the charge of being elaborated a little too much, is one of the very best things of its kind, and is a sort of *locus classicus* for its subject. The whole picture of country town society is about as good as it can be; and the only blot that I know is to be found

in the sentimental Athanase, who was not quite within Balzac's province, extensive as that province is. If we compare Mr. Augustus Moddle, we shall see one of the not too numerous instances in which Dickens has a clear advantage over Balzac; and if it be retorted that Balzac's object was not to present a merely ridiculous object, the rejoinder is not very far to seek. Such a character, with such a fate as Balzac has assigned to him, must be either humorously grotesque or unfeignedly pathetic, and Balzac has not quite made Athanase either.

He is, however, if he is a failure, about the only failure in the book, and he is atoned for by a whole bundle of successes. Of the Chevalier, little more need be said. Balzac, it must be remembered, was the oldest novelist of distinct genius who had the opportunity of delineating the survivors of the *ancien régime* from the life, and directly. It is certain—even if we hesitate at believing him quite so familiar with all the classes of higher society, from the *Faubourg* downward, as he would have us believe him—that he saw something of most of them, and his genius was unquestionably of the kind to which a mere thumbnail study, a mere passing view, suffices for the acquisition of a thorough working knowledge of the object. In this case the Chevalier has served, and not improperly served, as the original of a thousand after-studies. His rival, less carefully projected, is also perhaps a little less alive. Again, Balzac was old enough to have forgathered with many men of the Revolution. But the most characteristic of them were not long lived, the "little window" and other things having had a bad effect on them; and most of those who survived had, by the time he was old enough to take much notice, gone through metamorphoses of Bonapartism, Constitu-

tional Liberalism, and what not. But still du Bousquier is alive, as well as all the minor assistants and spectators in the battle for the old maid's hand. Suzanne, that tactful and graceless Suzanne to whom we are introduced first of all, is very much alive; and, for all her gracelessness, not at all disagreeable. I am only sorry that she sold the counterfeit presentment of the Princess Goritza after all.

"Le Cabinet des Antiques," in its Alençon scenes, is a worthy pendant to "La Vieille Fille." The old-world honor of the Marquis d'Esgrignon, the thankless sacrifices of Armande, the *prisca fides* of Maître Chesnel, present pictures for which, out of Balzac, we can look only in Jules Sandeau, and which in Sandeau, though they are presented with a more poetical touch, have less masterly outline than here. One takes—or, at least, I take—less interest in the ignoble intrigues of the other side, except in so far as they menace the fortunes of a worthy house unworthily represented. Victurnien d'Esgrignon, like his companion, Savinien de Portenduère (who, however, is, in every respect, a very much better fellow), does not argue in Balzac any high opinion of the *filz de famille*. He is, in fact, an extremely feeble youth, who does not seem to have got much real satisfaction out of the escapades, for which he risked not merely his family's fortune, but his own honor, and who would seem to have been a rake, not from natural taste and spirit and relish, but because it seemed to him to be the proper thing to be. But the beginnings of the fortune of the aspiring and intriguing Camusots are admirably painted; and Madame de Maufrigneuse, that rather doubtful divinity, who appears so frequently in Balzac, here acts the *dea ex machina* with considerable effect. And we end well (as we generally do when Blondet,