

**HEATH'S MODERN LANGUAGE  
SERIES. CINQ SCÈNES DE LA  
COMÉDIE HUMAINE: SELECTED  
AND EDITED WITH  
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES**

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**H. DE BALZAC & BENJAMIN W. WELLS**

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BALZAC.

Heath's Modern Language Series

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CINQ SCÈNES  
DE  
LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

PAR  
H. DE BALZAC

*SELECTED AND EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION  
AND NOTES*

BY  
BENJAMIN W. WELLS, PH. D.

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BOSTON, U.S.A.  
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1903

## INTRODUCTION

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC (1799-1850) is by general consent the greatest novelist of France and in the opinion of many the greatest of the world, a just judgment if scope of vision and depth of insight into human character be preferred to polished diction and æsthetic sense. Balzac has grown almost steadily in the regard of critics in France, and his place among English readers is attested by the recent and almost simultaneous appearance of four translations of his very extensive works. Studies of his life and of his fiction are numerous and accessible. Among the best may be mentioned Professor Trent's introductions to an English edition of the novels, his article in the Library of the World's Best Literature, and Miss Wormley's *Memoirs of Balzac*. I have myself written of Balzac in some detail in *A Century of French Fiction* (pages 88-186), and more briefly in *Modern French Literature* (pages 414-427).

Balzac grouped his fiction under the general title of *The Human Comedy*, the usual edition of which counts forty-seven volumes and nearly 16,000 pages. There are about two thousand characters, of whom two French admirers, Cerfbeer and Christophe, have published a biographical dictionary. He divides his stories into

Scenes of Private Life, of Parisian, Provincial, Political, Military, and Country Life, and adds to these collections groups of Analytical and Philosophical Studies; but in the various editions of his Works these were often re-arranged, and there is little to be gained by insisting on any classification.

Without exception the stories contained in this collection were written between 1830 and 1832. *Adieu* appeared in the former year, as did *An Episode in the Reign of Terror*, though the latter was not acknowledged till 1845. *A Legend of Christ in Flanders* and *The Red Inn* belong to 1831, *The Purse* to 1832. But though the stories are thus to be placed in the earlier period of Balzac's maturity, they are as representative of the best aspects of his many-sided genius as the limits of a volume like this will allow. In *Adieu* we have his power of vivid description and tragic pathos at its height. *The Red Inn* discloses the secret workings of conscience with the steady hand of a dissector of morals. *The Purse* carries us from these heights and depths of the human tragi-comedy to the serenely radiant air of an idyll of true love, charming in itself and remarkable in its contrast to all the other pieces in our selection. *An Episode in the Reign of Terror* shows his imagination reconstructing the psychology of the Revolution and suggests a deep religious under-current in his thought, which furnishes the key to Balzac's social and moral philosophy in the wonderful *Legend of Christ in Flanders*. So these five stories supplement one another, and together afford in my opinion a better and completer view of Balzac's powers than any single novel of like length could possibly do.



What has been said will suggest that these stories will repay thoughtful reading. There is nothing here that a grammar-school boy or girl may not read, but the book will be better appreciated in the later high-school years or by college students, and it is for them that the brief notes have been designed. What can be found in the ordinary French dictionary or in the usual school text-books need not be sought here.

My thanks are due to Mr. François of the University of Michigan for valuable suggestions and for a careful reading of the proof-sheets that has contributed essentially to the textual correctness of the volume.

BENJAMIN W. WELLS.

NEW YORK.



## CINQ SCÈNES DE LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

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### ADIEU

— ALLONS, député du centre,<sup>1</sup> en avant ! Il s'agit d'aller au pas accéléré, si nous voulons être à table en même temps que les autres. Haut le pied ! Saute, marquis ! là, donc ! bien. Vous franchissez les sillons comme un véritable cerf !

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Ces paroles étaient prononcées par un chasseur paisiblement assis sur une lisière de la forêt de l'Isle-Adam,<sup>2</sup> et qui achevait de fumer un cigare de la Havane en attendant son compagnon, sans doute égaré depuis longtemps dans les halliers de la forêt. A ses 10 côtés, quatre chiens haletants regardaient comme lui le personnage auquel il s'adressait. Pour comprendre combien étaient railleuses ces allocutions répétées par intervalles, il faut dire que le chasseur était un gros homme court dont le ventre proéminent accusait 15 un embonpoint véritablement ministériel. Aussi arpentait-il avec peine les sillons d'un vaste champ récemment moissonné, dont les chaumes gênaient considérablement sa marche ; puis, pour surcroît de douleur, les rayons du soleil qui frappaient obliquement sa 20 figure y amassaient de grosses gouttes de sueur. Pré-