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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Schiller Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schilling Kralik
Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Lafontaine Schilling Kralik Iffland Sokrates
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Vulpus
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Gleim Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Mörike Musil
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Ringelnatz
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Leibniz Irving
Petalozzi Platon Pückler Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka
Sachs Poe Liebermann Kock Kafka
de Sade Praetorius Mistral Zetkin Korolenko



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Georges Ohnet

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SERGE PANINE

By
GEORGES OHNET

With a General Introduction to the Series by GASTON BOISSIER,
Secrétaire Perpetuel de l'Académie Française.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1905

BY ROBERT ARNOT

The editor-in-chief of the *Maison Mazarin*—a man of letters who cherishes an enthusiastic yet discriminating love for the literary and artistic glories of France—formed within the last two years the great project of collecting and presenting to the vast numbers of intelligent readers of whom *New World* boasts a series of those great and undying romances which, since 1784, have received the crown of merit awarded by the French Academy—that coveted assurance of immortality in letters and in art.

In the presentation of this serious enterprise for the criticism and official sanction of The Academy, 'en seance', was included a request that, if possible, the task of writing a preface to the series should be undertaken by me. Official sanction having been bestowed upon the plan, I, as the accredited officer of the French Academy, convey to you its hearty appreciation, endorsement, and sympathy with a project so nobly artistic. It is also my duty, privilege, and pleasure to point out, at the request of my brethren, the peculiar importance and lasting value of this series to all who would know the inner life of a people whose greatness no turns of fortune have been able to diminish.

In the last hundred years France has experienced the most terrible vicissitudes, but, vanquished or victorious, triumphant or abased, never has she lost her peculiar gift of attracting the curiosity of the world. She interests every living being, and even those who do not love her desire to know her. To this peculiar attraction which radiates from her, artists and men of letters can well bear witness, since it is to literature and to the arts, before all, that France owes such living and lasting power. In every quarter of the civilized world there are distinguished writers, painters, and eminent musicians, but in France they exist in greater numbers than elsewhere. Moreo-

ver, it is universally conceded that French writers and artists have this particular and praiseworthy quality: they are most accessible to people of other countries. Without losing their national characteristics, they possess the happy gift of universality. To speak of letters alone: the books that Frenchmen write are read, translated, dramatized, and imitated everywhere; so it is not strange that these books give to foreigners a desire for a nearer and more intimate acquaintance with France.

Men preserve an almost innate habit of resorting to Paris from almost every quarter of the globe. For many years American visitors have been more numerous than others, although the journey from the United States is long and costly. But I am sure that when for the first time they see Paris—its palaces, its churches, its museums—and visit Versailles, Fontainebleau, and Chantilly, they do not regret the travail they have undergone. Meanwhile, however, I ask myself whether such sightseeing is all that, in coming hither, they wish to accomplish. Intelligent travellers—and, as a rule, it is the intelligent class that feels the need of the educative influence of travel—look at our beautiful monuments, wander through the streets and squares among the crowds that fill them, and, observing them, I ask myself again: Do not such people desire to study at closer range these persons who elbow them as they pass; do they not wish to enter the houses of which they see but the facades; do they not wish to know how Parisians live and speak and act by their firesides? But time, alas! is lacking for the formation of those intimate friendships which would bring this knowledge within their grasp. French homes are rarely open to birds of passage, and visitors leave us with regret that they have not been able to see more than the surface of our civilization or to recognize by experience the note of our inner home life.

How, then, shall this void be filled? Speaking in the first person, the simplest means appears to be to study those whose profession it is to describe the society of the time, and primarily, therefore, the works of dramatic writers, who are supposed to draw a faithful picture of it. So we go to the theatre, and usually derive keen pleasure therefrom. But is pleasure all that we expect to find? What we should look for above everything in a comedy or a drama is a representation, exact as possible, of the manners and characters of the

dramatis persona of the play; and perhaps the conditions under which the play was written do not allow such representation. The exact and studied portrayal of a character demands from the author long preparation, and cannot be accomplished in a few hours. From the first scene to the last, each tale must be posed in the author's mind exactly as it will be proved to be at the end. It is the author's aim and mission to place completely before his audience the souls of the "agonists" laying bare the complications of motive, and throwing into relief the delicate shades of motive that sway them. Often, too, the play is produced before a numerous audience—an audience often distraught, always pressed for time, and impatient of the least delay. Again, the public in general require that they shall be able to understand without difficulty, and at first thought, the characters the author seeks to present, making it necessary that these characters be depicted from their most salient sides—which are too often vulgar and unattractive.

In our comedies and dramas it is not the individual that is drawn, but the type. Where the individual alone is real, the type is a myth of the imagination—a pure invention. And invention is the main-spring of the theatre, which rests purely upon illusion, and does not please us unless it begins by deceiving us.

I believe, then, that if one seeks to know the world exactly as it is, the theatre does not furnish the means whereby one can pursue the study. A far better opportunity for knowing the private life of a people is available through the medium of its great novels. The novelist deals with each person as an individual. He speaks to his reader at an hour when the mind is disengaged from worldly affairs, and he can add without restraint every detail that seems needful to him to complete the rounding of his story. He can return at will, should he choose, to the source of the plot he is unfolding, in order that his reader may better understand him; he can emphasize and dwell upon those details which an audience in a theatre will not allow.

The reader, being at leisure, feels no impatience, for he knows that he can at any time lay down or take up the book. It is the consciousness of this privilege that gives him patience, should he encounter a dull page here or there. He may hasten or delay his read-

ing, according to the interest he takes in his romance-nay, more, he can return to the earlier pages, should he need to do so, for a better comprehension of some obscure point. In proportion as he is attracted and interested by the romance, and also in the degree of concentration with which he reads it, does he grasp better the subtleties of the narrative. No shade of character drawing escapes him. He realizes, with keener appreciation, the most delicate of human moods, and the novelist is not compelled to introduce the characters to him, one by one, distinguishing them only by the most general characteristics, but can describe each of those little individual idiosyncrasies that contribute to the sum total of a living personality.

When I add that the dramatic author is always to a certain extent a slave to the public, and must ever seek to please the passing taste of his time, it will be recognized that he is often, alas! compelled to sacrifice his artistic leanings to popular caprice—that is, if he has the natural desire that his generation should applaud him.

As a rule, with the theatre-going masses, one person follows the fads or fancies of others, and individual judgments are too apt to be irresistibly swayed by current opinion. But the novelist, entirely independent of his reader, is not compelled to conform himself to the opinion of any person, or to submit to his caprices. He is absolutely free to picture society as he sees it, and we therefore can have more confidence in his descriptions of the customs and characters of the day.

It is precisely this view of the case that the editor of the series has taken, and herein is the *raison d'être* of this collection of great French romances. The choice was not easy to make. That form of literature called the romance abounds with us. France has always loved it, for French writers exhibit a curiosity—and I may say an indiscretion—that is almost charming in the study of customs and morals at large; a quality that induces them to talk freely of themselves and of their neighbors, and to set forth fearlessly both the good and the bad in human nature. In this fascinating phase of literature, France never has produced greater examples than of late years.

In the collection here presented to American readers will be found those works especially which reveal the intimate side of

French social life- works in which are discussed the moral problems that affect most potently the life of the world at large. If inquiring spirits seek to learn the customs and manners of the France of any age, they must look for it among her crowned romances. They need go back no farther than Ludovic Halevy, who may be said to open the modern epoch. In the romantic school, on its historic side, Alfred de Vigny must be looked upon as supreme. De Musset and Anatole France may be taken as revealing authoritatively the moral philosophy of nineteenth-century thought. I must not omit to mention the Jacqueline of Th. Bentzon, and the "Attic " Philosopher of Emile Souvestre, nor the, great names of Loti, Claretie, Coppe, Bazin, Bourget, Malot, Droz, De Massa, and last, but not least, our French Dickens, Alphonse Daudet. I need not add more; the very names of these "Immortals" suffice to commend the series to readers in all countries.

One word in conclusion: America may rest assured that her students of international literature will find in this series of 'ouvrages couronnées' all that they may wish to know of France at her own fireside—a knowledge that too often escapes them, knowledge that embraces not only a faithful picture of contemporary life in the French provinces, but a living and exact description of French society in modern times. They may feel certain that when they have read these romances, they will have sounded the depths and penetrated into the hidden intimacies of France, not only as she is, but as she would be known.

GASTON BOISSIER

SECRETAIRE PERPETUEL DE L'ACADEMIE FRANCAISE

GEORGES OHNET

The only French novelist whose books have a circulation approaching the works of Daudet and of Zola is Georges Ohnet, a writer whose popularity is as interesting as his stories, because it explains, though it does not excuse, the contempt the Goncourts had for the favor of the great French public, and also because it shows how the highest form of Romanticism still ferments beneath the varnish of Naturalism in what is called genius among the great masses of readers.

Georges Ohnet was born in Paris, April 3, 1848, the son of an architect. He was destined for the Bar, but was early attracted by journalism and literature. Being a lawyer it was not difficult for him to join the editorial staff of *Le Pays*, and later *Le Constitutionnel*. This was soon after the Franco-German War. His romances, since collected under the title 'Batailles de la Vie', appeared first in '*Le Figaro*, *L'Illustration*, and *Revue des Deux Mondes*', and have been exceedingly well received by the public. This relates also to his dramas, some of his works meeting with a popular success rarely extended to any author. For some time Georges Ohnet did not find the same favor with the critics, who often attacked him with a passionate violence and unusual severity. True, a high philosophical flow of thoughts cannot be detected in his writings, but nevertheless it is certain that the characters and the subjects of which he treats are brilliantly sketched and clearly developed. They are likewise of perfect morality and honesty.

There was expected of him, however, an idea which was not quite realized. Appearing upon the literary stage at a period when Naturalism was triumphant, it was for a moment believed that he would restore Idealism in the manner of George Sand.

In any case the hostile critics have lost. For years public opinion has exalted him, and the reaction is the more significant when compared with the tremendous criticism launched against his early romances and novels.

A list of his works follows:

Serge Panine (1881), crowned by the French Academy, has since gone through one hundred and fifty French editions; *Le Maître des Forges* (1882), a prodigious success, two hundred and fifty editions being printed (1900); *La Comtesse Sarah* (1882); *Lise Fleuyon* (1884); *La Grande Maynieye* (1886); *Les Dames de Croix-Mort* (1886); *Volonte* (1888); *Le Docteur Rameau* (1889); *Deynier Amour* (1889); *Le Cure de Favieyes* (1890); *Dette de Haine* (1891); *Nemsod et Cie.* (1892); *Le Lendemain des Amours* (1893); *Le Droit de l'Enfant* (1894.); *Les Vieilles Rancunes* (1894); *La Dame en Gris* (1895); *La Fille du Depute* (1896); *Le Roi de Paris* (1898); *Au Fond du Gouffre* (1899); *Gens de la Noce* (1900); *La Tenibreuse* (1900); *Le Cyasseur d'Affaires* (1901); *Le Crepuscule* (1901); *Le Marche a l'Amour* (1902).

Ohnet's novels are collected under the titles, *Noir et Rose* (1887) and *L'Ame de Pierre* (1890).

The dramatic writings of Georges Ohnet, mostly taken from his novels, have greatly contributed to his reputation. *Le Maître des Forges* was played for a full year (Gymnase, 1883); it was followed by *Serge Panine* (1884); *La Comtesse Sarah* (1887). *La Grande Mayniere* (1888), met also with a decided and prolonged success; *Dernier Amour* (Gymnase, 1890); *Colonel Roquebrune* (Porte St. Martin, 1897). Before that he had already written the plays *Regina Sarpi* (1875) and *Marthe* (1877), which yet hold a prominent place upon the French stage.

I have shown in this rapid sketch that a man of the stamp of Georges Ohnet must have immortal qualities in himself, even though flayed and roasted alive by the critics. He is most assuredly an artist in form, is endowed with a brilliant style, and has been named "L'Historiographe de la bourgeoisie contemporaine." Indeed, antagonism to plutocracy and hatred of aristocracy are the fundamental theses in almost every one of his books.

His exposition, I repeat, is startlingly neat, the development of his plots absolutely logical, and the world has acclaimed his ingenuity in dramatic construction. He is truly, and in all senses, of the Ages.

VICTOR CHERBOULIEZ de l'Academie Francaise

SERGE PANINE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF DESVARENNES

The firm of Desvarennés has been in an ancient mansion in the Rue Saint Dominique since 1875; it is one of the best known and most important in French industry. The counting-houses are in the wings of the building looking upon the courtyard, which were occupied by the servants when the family whose coat-of-arms has been effaced from above the gate-way were still owners of the estate.

Madame Desvarennés inhabits the mansion which she has had magnificently renovated. A formidable rival of the Darblays, the great millers of France, the firm of Desvarennés is a commercial and political power. Inquire in Paris about its solvency, and you will be told that you may safely advance twenty millions of francs on the signature of the head of the firm. And this head is a woman.

This woman is remarkable. Gifted with keen understanding and a firm will, she had in former times vowed to make a large fortune, and she has kept her word.

She was the daughter of a humble packer of the Rue Neuve-Coquenard. Toward 1848 she married Michel Desvarennés, who was then a journeyman baker in a large shop in the Chaussee d'Antin. With the thousand francs which the packer managed to give his daughter by way of dowry, the young couple boldly took a shop and started a little bakery business. The husband kneaded and baked the bread, and the young wife, seated at the counter, kept watch over the till. Neither on Sundays nor on holidays was the shop shut.

Through the window, between two pyramids of pink and blue packets of biscuits, one could always catch sight of the serious-

looking Madame Desvarences, knitting woollen stockings for her husband while waiting for customers. With her prominent forehead, and her eyes always bent on her work, this woman appeared the living image of perseverance.

At the end of five years of incessant work, and possessing twenty thousand francs, saved sou by sou, the Desvarences left the slopes of Montmartre, and moved to the centre of Paris. They were ambitious and full of confidence. They set up in the Rue Vivienne, in a shop resplendent with gilding and ornamented with looking-glasses. The ceiling was painted in panels with bright hued pictures that caught the eyes of the passers-by. The window-shelves were of white marble, and the counter, where Madame Desvarences was still enthroned, was of a width worthy of the receipts that were taken every day. Business increased daily; the Desvarences continued to be hard and systematic workers. The class of customers alone had changed; they were more numerous and richer. The house had a specialty for making small rolls for the restaurants. Michel had learned from the Viennese bakers how to make those golden balls which tempt the most rebellious appetite, and which, when in an artistically folded damask napkin, set off a dinner-table.

About this time Madame Desvarences, while calculating how much the millers must gain on the flour they sell to the bakers, resolved, in order to lessen expenses, to do without middlemen and grind her own corn. Michel, naturally timid, was frightened when his wife disclosed to him the simple project which she had formed. Accustomed to submit to the will of her whom he respectfully called "the mistress," and of whom he was but the head clerk, he dared not oppose her. But, a red-tapist by nature, and hating innovations, owing to weakness of mind, he trembled inwardly and cried in agony:

"Wife, you'll ruin us."

The mistress calmed the poor man's alarm; she tried to impart to him some of her confidence, to animate him with her hope, but without success, so she went on without him. A mill was for sale at Jouy, on the banks of the Oise; she paid ready money for it, and a few weeks later the bakery in the Rue Vivienne was independent of every one. She ground her own flour, and from that time business

increased considerably. Feeling capable of carrying out large undertakings, and, moreover, desirous of giving up the meannesses of retail trade, Madame Desvarences, one fine day, sent in a tender for supplying bread to the military hospitals. It was accepted, and from that time the house ranked among the most important. On seeing the Desvarences take their daring flight, the leading men in the trade had said:

"They have system and activity, and if they do not upset on the way, they will attain a high position."

But the mistress seemed to have the gift of divination. She worked surely — if she struck out one way you might be certain that success was there. In all her enterprises, "good luck" stood close by her; she scented failures from afar, and the firm never made a bad debt. Still Michel continued to tremble. The first mill had been followed by many more; then the old system appeared insufficient to Madame Desvarences. As she wished to keep up with the increase of business she had steam-mills built, — which are now grinding three hundred million francs' worth of corn every year.

Fortune had favored the house immensely, but Michel continued to tremble. From time to time when the mistress launched out a new business, he timidly ventured on his usual saying:

"Wife, you're going to ruin us."

But one felt it was only for form's sake, and that he himself no longer meant what he said. Madame Desvarences received this plaintive remonstrance with a calm smile, and answered, maternally, as to a child:

"There, there, don't be frightened."

Then she would set to work again, and direct with irresistible vigor the army of clerks who peopled her counting-houses.

In fifteen years' time, by prodigious efforts of will and energy, Madame Desvarences had made her way from the lonely and muddy Rue Neuve-Coquenard to the mansion in the Rue Saint-Dominique. Of the bakery there was no longer question. It was some time since the business in the Rue Vivienne had been transferred to the foreman of the shop. The flour trade alone occupied

Madame Desvarenes's attention. She ruled the prices in the market; and great bankers came to her office and did business with her on a footing of equality. She did not become any prouder for it, she knew too well the strength and weakness of life to have pride; her former plain dealing had not stiffened into self-sufficiency. Such as one had known her when beginning business, such one found her in the zenith of her fortune. Instead of a woollen gown she wore a silk one, but the color was still black; her language had not become refined; she retained the same blunt familiar accent, and at the end of five minutes' conversation with any one of importance she could not resist calling him "my dear," to come morally near him. Her commands had more fulness. In giving her orders, she had the manner of a commander-in-chief, and it was useless to haggle when she had spoken. The best thing to do was to obey, as well and as promptly as possible.

Placed in a political sphere, this marvellously gifted woman would have been a Madame Roland; born to the throne, she would have been a Catherine II.; there was genius in her. Sprung from the lower ranks, her superiority had given her wealth; had she come from the higher, the great mind might have governed the world.

Still she was not happy; she had been married fifteen years, and her fireside was devoid of a cradle. During the first years she had rejoiced at not having a child. Where could she have found time to occupy herself with a baby? Business engrossed her attention; she had no leisure to amuse herself with trifles. Maternity seemed to her a luxury for rich women; she had her fortune to make. In the struggle against the difficulties attending the enterprise she had begun, she had not had time to look around her and perceive that her home was lonely. She worked from morning till night. Her whole life was absorbed in this work, and when night came, overcome with fatigue, she fell asleep, her head filled with cares which stifled all tricks of the imagination.

Michel grieved, but in silence; his feeble and dependent nature missed a child. He, whose mind lacked occupation, thought of the future. He said to himself that the day when the dreamt-of fortune came would be more welcome if there were an heir to whom to leave it. What was the good of being rich, if the money went to col-