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Library Edition

THE LILY OF THE VALLEY

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

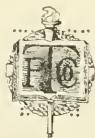
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

With Introductions by

GEORGE SAINTSBURY



THE THOMPSON PUBLISHING COMPANY

SAINT LOUIS AND PHILADELPHIA

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CONTENTS

PART I

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| <i>INTRODUCTION</i> - - - - - | ix |
| <i>THE LILY OF THE VALLEY</i> - - - - - (<i>Le Lys dans la Vallée</i>) | I |
| <i>THE FIRM OF NUCINGEN</i> - - - - - (<i>La Maison Nucingen</i>) (Translator, JAMES WARING) | 285 |

PART II

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>INTRODUCTION</i> - - - - - | ix |
| <i>THE COUNTRY DOCTOR:</i> (<i>Le Médecin de Campagne</i>) | |
| I. THE COUNTRYSIDE AND THE MAN - - - - - | I |
| II. A DOCTOR'S ROUND - - - - - | 72 |
| III. THE NAPOLEON OF THE PEOPLE - - - - - | 137 |

| | PAGE |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| IV. THE COUNTRY DOCTOR'S CONFESSION - | - 189 |
| V. ELEGIES - - - - - | - 233 |
| <i>THE VENDETTA</i> - - - - - | - 267 |
| <i>(La Vendetta)</i> | |
| <i>COLONEL CHABERT</i> - - - - - | - 339 |
| <i>(Colonel Chabert)</i> | |

(Translators, ELLEN MARRIAGE AND CLARA BELL)

ILLUSTRATIONS

PART I

| | | | |
|---|---|---------------------|-----|
| “LET US GO OUT ON THE RIVER” (p. 169) | - | <i>Frontispiece</i> | |
| | | PAGE | |
| THE LADY GAVE A PIERCING CRY - | - | - | 18 |
| MADELEINE, JACQUES, AND THE ABBÉ DE DOMINIS ALL KNEELING AT THE FOOT OF A WOODEN CROSS | - | - | 246 |

PART II

| | | | |
|--|---|---|-----|
| “M. BENASSIS WENT OVER THERE” | - | - | 18 |
| “CURSE THE MONEY! TO THINK I HAVEN'T GOT ANY!” | | | 371 |

THE LILY OF THE VALLEY

AND

THE FIRM OF NUCINGEN

INTRODUCTION

Le Lys dans la Vallée has considerable importance in the history of Balzac's books, and not a little in that of his life, independently of its intrinsic merit. It brought on a lawsuit between him and the *Revue de Paris*, in which the greater part of it was published, and in which he refused to complete it. As the actual suit was decided in his favor, his legal justification is not matter of dispute, and his adversaries put themselves hopelessly in the wrong by reviewing the termination of the book, when it appeared elsewhere, in a strain of virulent but clumsy ridicule. As to where the right or wrong lay, independent of questions of pure law on one side and poor taste on the other, it is not so easy to come to any conclusion. Balzac published an elaborate justification of his own conduct, which does not now appear with the book, but may be found, by any one who is curious, among the rejected prefaces which fill a large part of the twenty-second volume (the third of the *Œuvres Diverses*) of his *Works*. It is exceedingly long, not by any means temperate, and so confused that it is difficult to make head or tail of it. What is clear is that the parties went on the dangerous and unsatisfactory plan of neither complete performance of the work before payment nor complete payment beforehand, but of a *per contra* account, the author drawing money as he wanted it, and sending in copy as he could or chose. Balzac seems to allow that he

got into arrears, contending that if he paid those arrears the rest of the work was his own property. But there were complicating disagreements in reference to a simultaneous publication at St. Petersburg; and, on the whole, we may fairly conclude in the not very original terms of "faults on both sides." The affair, however, evidently gave him much annoyance, and seems to have brought him into some discredit.

The other point of personal interest is that Madame de Mortsauf is very generally said to represent Madame de Berny, his early friend, and his first instructress in aristocratic ways. Although there are strong expressions of affection in his letters with regard to this lady, who died early in his career, they do not definitely indicate what is commonly called love. But the whole scenery and atmosphere of *Le Lys Dans la Vallée* are those of his own early haunts. Frapesle, which is so often mentioned, was the home of another platonic friend, Madame Zulma Carraud, and there is much in the early experiences of Félix de Vandenesse which has nearly as personal a touch as that of *Louis Lambert* itself.

Dismissing this, we may come to the book itself. Balzac took so much interest in it—indeed, the personal throb may be felt throughout—that he departed (according to his own account, for the second time only) from his rule of not answering criticism. This was in regard to a very remarkable article of M. Hippolyte Castillès (to be found in M. de Lovenjoul's invaluable bibliography, as is the answering letter in the *Œuvres Diverses*), reflecting upon the rather pagan and materialist "resurrection of the flesh" in Madame de Mortsauf on her deathbed. His plea that it was the disease not the person, though possessing a good deal of physiological force, is psychologically rather weak, and might have been made much

stronger. Indeed this scene, though shocking and disconcerting to weak brethren, is not merely the strongest in the novel, but one of the strongest in Balzac's works. There is farther to be noted in the book a quaint delineation, in the personage of M. de Mortsauf, of a kind of conjugal torment which, as a rule, is rather borne by husbands at the hands of wives than *vice versa*. The behavior of the "lily's" husband, sudden rages and all, is exactly that of a shrewish and valetudinarian woman.

This, however, and some minor matters, may be left to the reader to find out and appreciate. The most interesting point, and the most debatable, is the character of the heroine with, in a lesser degree, that of the hero. Of M. Félix de Vandenesse it is not necessary to say very much, because that capital letter from Madame de Manerville (one of the very best things that Balzac ever wrote, and exhibiting a sharpness and precision of mere writing which he too frequently lacked) does fair, though not complete justice on the young man. The lady, who was not a model of excellence herself, perhaps did not perceive—for it does not seem to have been in her nature to conceal it through kindness—that he was not only, as she tells him, wanting in tact, but also wanting, and that execrably, in taste. M. de Vandenesse, I think, ranks in Balzac's list of good heroes; at any rate he saves him later from a fate which he rather richly deserved, and introduces him honorably in other places. But he was not a nice young man. His "pawing" and timid advances on Madame de Mortsauf, and his effusive "kissing and telling" in reference to Lady Dudley, both smack of the worst sides of Rousseau: they deserve not so much moral reprehension as physical kicking. It is no wonder that Madeleine de Mortsauf turned a

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