

BALZAC'S

Le Curé de Tours

SUPER



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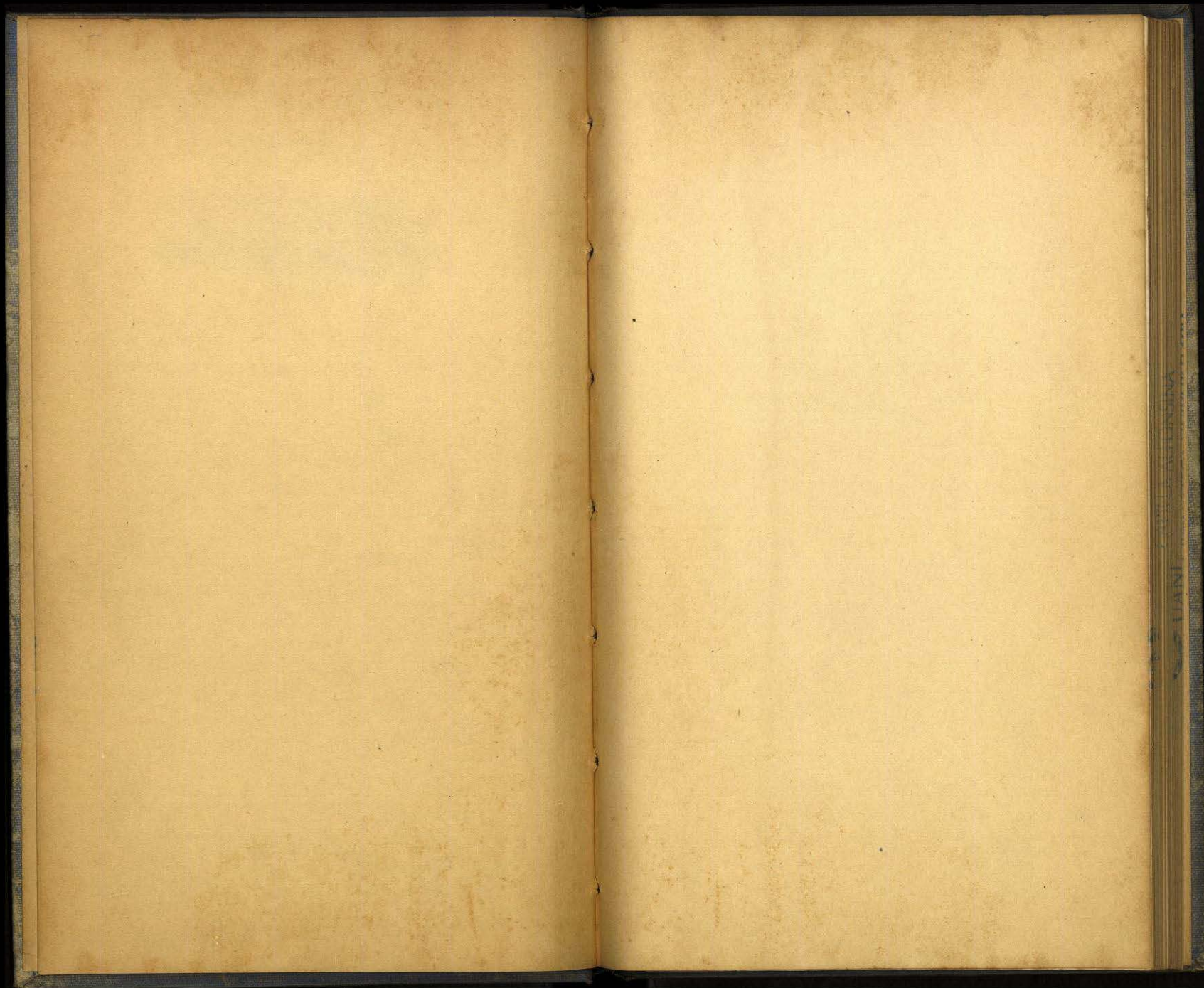
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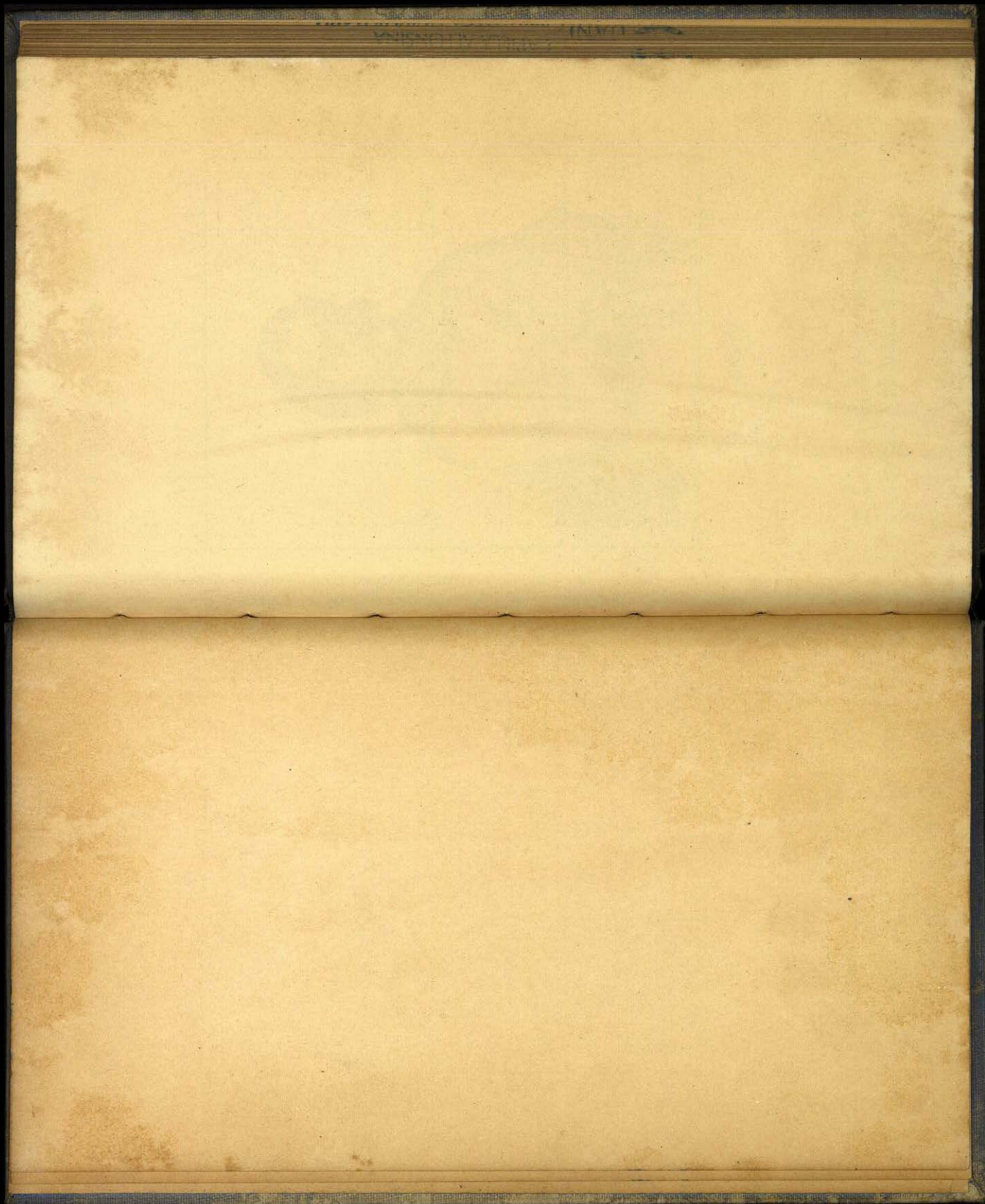
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Olivia González Sánchez
Rice Institute
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Heath's Modern Language Series

LE CURÉ DE TOURS

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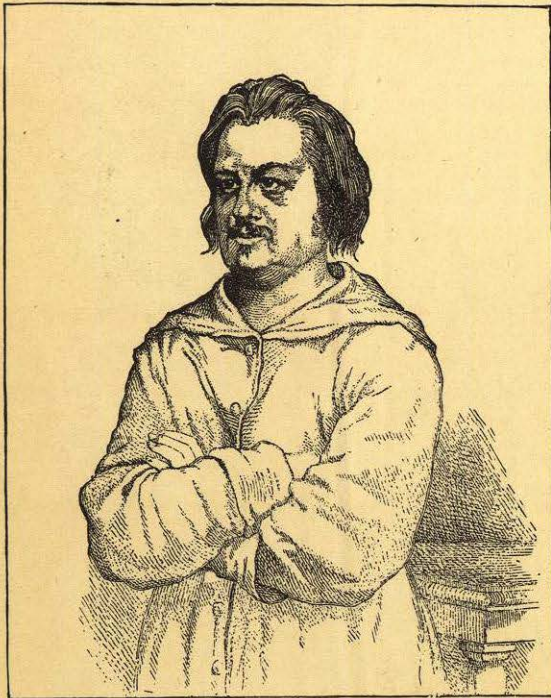
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

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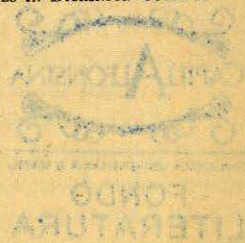
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WHEN PROFESSOR OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES IN DICKINSON COLLEGE



BALZAC.



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INTRODUCTION

Honoré de Balzac, the greatest novelist of France and perhaps of the world, was born in Tours, in 1799, and died in Paris, in 1850. He was trained as a lawyer but early devoted himself to literature, yet at first without much success. He lived for years in a garret, subsisting with difficulty, but with a profound faith in himself he continued to write. From 1822 to 1827 he published several stories, all under an assumed name, but with *Les Chouans*, published in 1827, begins the long list of works signed with his own name. In 1830 appeared *La Peau de chagrin*, which placed its author in the front rank of French novelists.

In addition to numerous short stories, mostly included in his *Contes drolatiques*, his novels number more than fifty titles, of which the following are some of the most important, given in the order of their publication: *La Peau de chagrin*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Le Curé de Tours*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Séraphita*, *La Recherche de l'absolu*, *Le Père Goriot*, *César Birotteau*, *Les Parents pauvres* (*Le Cousin Pons*, *La Cousine Bette*).

All of these are included in the vast scheme called *La Comédie humaine* which is "like a tower of Babel that the hand of the architect had not, and never could have had time to finish. Some walls seem ready to fall with age. The builder has taken whatever material fell to his hand, plaster, cement, stone, marble, even sand and mud from the ditch, and has built his gigantic tower, not always heeding harmony of lines or balanced proportions, mingling with the careless power of genius the grandiose and the vulgar, the exquisite and the barbarous, the good and the bad. And so it remains today one of those cyclopean monuments, full of splendid halls and wretched corners, divided by

broad corridors and narrow passages, with superpiled stories in varied architecture. You may lose your way in it twenty times, and always feel that there are still undiscovered miseries and splendors. It is a world, a human creation, built by a marvelous mason who, at times, was an artist. Time has worn holes in it. A cornice has fallen here and there, but the marble stands whitened by time. The workman has built his tower with such an instinct of the great and eternal that, when the mud and sand have been washed away, the monument will still appear on the horizon like the silhouette of a city."*

Balzac undertook, with infinite industry, to compose for nineteenth century France a history of its morals, to "draw up the inventory of its vices and virtues" and lay bare the greed and social ambition that seemed to him the mainspring of its activities. In doing this, it must be confessed that he saw more vices than virtues, so that he can hardly be successfully defended from the charge of immorality and the reading of his works is likely to leave a disagreeable impression on the mind of the reader.

O. B. S.

DICKINSON COLLEGE, November, 1909.

* Wells's *Modern French Literature*.

LE CURÉ DE TOURS¹

Au commencement de l'automne de l'année 1826, l'abbé² Birotteau, principal personnage de cette histoire, fut surpris par une averse en revenant de la maison où il était allé passer la soirée. Il traversait donc, aussi promptement que son embonpoint pouvait le lui permettre, la 5 petite place déserte nommée *le Cloître*, qui se trouve derrière le chevet³ de Saint-Gatien,⁴ à Tours.

L'abbé Birotteau, petit homme court, de constitution apoplectique, âgé d'environ soixante ans, avait déjà subi plusieurs attaques de goutte. Or, entre toutes les petites 10 misères de la vie humaine, celle pour laquelle le bon prêtre éprouvait le plus d'aversion, était le subit arrosement de ses souliers à larges agrafes d'argent et l'immersion de leurs semelles. En effet, malgré les chaussons de flanelle dans lesquels il empaquetait en tout temps ses pieds avec 15 le soin que les ecclésiastiques prennent d'eux-mêmes, il y gagnait toujours un peu d'humidité; puis, le lendemain, la goutte lui donnait infailliblement quelques preuves de sa constance. Néanmoins, comme le pavé du Cloître est toujours sec, que⁵ l'abbé Birotteau avait gagné trois livres 20 dix sous au whist chez madame de Listomère, il endura la pluie avec résignation depuis le milieu de la place de l'Archevêché,⁶ où elle avait commencé à tomber en abon-