

BENJAMIN DISRAELI.

OUR first portrait is that of the distinguished author and statesman, whose name heads this article. His present appearance is so well known to the public, that we have selected a likeness which represents him when he was a much younger man; when politics had hardly yet laid hands upon him; when he was the chief wit of the most select drawing-rooms of London.

Benjamin Disraeli is descended from a Spanish family of Jews, who, in the 15th century, fled from the religious persecutions in the Peninsula, and settled in Venice. He is the son of Isaac Disraeli, himself an author of repute, whose father came to England in the middle of the 18th century, and made a fortune by commerce. Benjamin early evinced much literary talent, but as his father had always intended him for the legal profession, he placed him in a lawyer's office. The musty forms of law not being congenial to his tastes, he soon abandoned them for the more attractive field of literature. As early as 1826, at the age of 21, he became a contributor to a newspaper called the *Representative*. Although the paper had but a short existence, young Disraeli's connection with it seems to have given his mind a political bias, which, to a great extent, determined his future career. He was thenceforth, by choice and character, the child of literature and politics.

At the age of 18, he visited Germany, and shortly afterwards, about the same time that he commenced to write for the newspaper press, gave to the world his first novel, "Vivian Grey." It created an immediate and intense sensation in society, proving that its author was a master of his art. "Vivian Grey" abounds in passages not surpassed for beauty in our literature. Delicacy and sweetness are mingled with impressive eloquence

and energetic truth. In nearly the twenty years succeeding, Mr. Disraeli wrote almost without interruption, producing in succession, the "Voyage of Capt. Popanilla;" "The Young Duke;" "England and France;" "Contarini Fleming;" "Alroy, the Wondrous Tale;" and the "Rise of Iskander;" "The Revolutionary Epic, a Poem;" "The Crisis Examined;" "Vindication of the English Constitution;" "Letters of Runymede;" "Henrietta Temple;" "Venetia;" "Alarcos, a Tragedy;" "Coningsby, or the New Generation;" "Sybil, or the New Nation;" "Ixion in Heaven;" "Tancred, or the New Crusade;" "Lothair;" besides some works of lesser note. There runs throughout all of Mr. Disraeli's novels a remarkably imaginative vein, occasionally, as in "Contarini Fleming," running into riotous excess; and the greater number of them are occupied with wonderfully clever disquisitions on political theories.

Mr. Disraeli's first attempt to obtain a seat in Parliament was in 1831, when he became a candidate, on the Radical side, for the borough of Wycombe. Then, and again on a subsequent occasion, he was defeated, but his spirit was undaunted, and finally came in for Maidstone, in the Conservative interest, in 1837. His first speech in the House was so elaborately conceived and expressed, that it was the subject of universal laughter, in fact such a failure that he was compelled to sit down before it was finished; but he did not take his seat until he had uttered a few words which, in the light of his later triumphs in the Parliamentary arena, ought to give encouragement to many a youthful orator. "I have begun several times," said he, "many things, and have often succeeded at last. I shall sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me." The prediction has been