

pulpit. Other writers soon followed in the same track, among them Fielding, whose Tom Jones McCaulay called "the first prose poem of the age." Byron considered its author "the prose Homer of human nature." Compared with modern works of a similar kind these books would scarcely elicit such high commendation, but the fact that it was bestowed shows how phenomenal was the success of the novel even on its first appearance. One such work, however, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, still holds its place in the popular estimation as one of the finest novels written. And deservedly so, for in its quiet humor and sweet simplicity it has never been surpassed.

The effects of the introduction of the novel upon literature have been far-reaching. It has become ubiquitous; whoever has a new theory in religion to present, or a social reform to inaugurate, or, in fact, any idea that he wishes to communicate to the greatest possible number, chooses the novel as the medium best suited to his purpose. This form of literature has been, perhaps, more censured than any other, owing to the base uses to which it has been put. But here, as elsewhere, it is the abuse, not the rational use, that merits condemnation. The novel considered in itself, lends itself to a clearer delineation of character and a more perfect study of the emotions of the human heart than can be had, perhaps, by the employment of any other form of literature. The drama is in this line its only rival, but whilst the dramatic writer must trust entirely to the actions and the speeches of his characters to convey the conception of them he intends, the novelist, in addition to these, can utilize description, can himself criticize them and can shed innumerable side-lights upon them to bring out more clearly the points he wishes to emphasize. The drama, as represented on the stage has, of course, the incomparable superiority of real action and in this respect entirely out-strips the novel; but in a choice between the closet-drama and the latter as a medium to exhibit a study of character the preference would, we believe, lie with the novel. Whether this opinion be accepted or not, the novel is here to stay, and to the Johnsonian Age are we indebted for its presence.

But whilst a new lamp was thus lit upon the altar of English literature, an old one,

and one that in its time had out-shone all others, flickered and died out. This age saw the last of the legitimate stage-drama. Goldsmith's "*She Stoops to Conquer*," and Sheridan's "*School for Scandal*" brought to a close that noble series of dramatic productions which forms the brightest circlet of England's literary crown. With the single exception of Bulwer Lytton no dramatist since their times has written a play that has kept the stage. Several closet-dramas of acknowledged merit, such as Byron's *Manfred*, have been composed, and plays innumerable are being yearly manufactured, but the former are, confessedly, not for representation, whilst the latter are, on their face, ephemeral. This decline of the stage-drama is in part explained by a glance at the history of the stage. In Shakespeare's time it was the great medium for the communication of thought to the popular mind. It was the newspaper, the periodical, the novel, rolled into one. Justly, then, did the great geniuses of the day choose it to be the mould in which to cast the products of their glowing minds. But its influence waned, and that from intrinsic causes. The utter and shameless corruption it exhibited in the time immediately following the revolution first turned all right-minded men from it and gave good grounds for a prejudice against the theatre that has endured even to our own day. Again, the stage early became a mere money-making concern and to attain this primary object, art was prostituted, the dramatist was transformed into the play-wright. The drama no longer sought to read the human heart, it was content so long as by dint of low comedy and rollicking farce it drew large crowds and thus filled the coffers of avaricious managers. The masses are caught by tinsel and glare, not by skilful analytic study of the passions. They are provided with these without stint in the modern theatre. Wonderful scenic effects, exquisite costumes, handsome actors and beautiful actresses,—these are the chief elements in the plays of to day. Throw in boisterous fun flavored with a spice of immorality and you have the whole stock-in-trade of the modern theatre. After the Johnsonian Age these influences, which had been at work all along, became paramount, and consequently the legitimate stage-drama disappeared.