

Thackeray caused his personages to perform in fiction; the habit grows apace, and ten to one a bright and a happy nature is finally changed into a sneering, cynical and very undesirable and detestable disposition. We don't say that this is necessarily the result of reading those well arranged fictions; but it is a risk that the students run—and we do not believe in risks.

Bulwer Lytton's works surpass those of any other writer of romance in beauty of diction, in splendor of illustration, in charm of comparison. His historical novels are decidedly the best. One might divide his works into three categories—the social, mystical and historical. The last are far and away the most perfect and the most reliable. His social—or society descriptive—romances were penned in his earlier years, when the world first dawned upon him, or rather when he first dawned upon the social and literary world of England. He had not yet collected his rich stores of information in travel, nor had his thoughts become matured in careful study. "Pelham" is a fair sample of that category, and its stories are more amusing than instructive. His style was somewhat overloaded with flowers of rhetoric and the reader can easily detect the young man, bounding, in all the thoughtless vigor of his age, up the mountain-side to where Fame's temple is built upon a dizzy height.

In his queer conceptions flung upon the canvas of the "Strange Story," "Zanoni," "The Coming Race," and other similar mystical productions, there is a fund of danger lurking beneath the dazzle of magnificent language and the foliage of a luxuriant sophistry. Such books are charming, but for the Catholic student, the serious minded man, the devout Christian, or the youth who has loftier and more practical aims in life than mere dreams of an elixir of rejuvenation, or a Rosicrucian's incantations, they are not to be taken "without a grain of salt." They are not to be pondered over and analyzed in all their minuteness of details. But when we come to Bulwer's historical novels, we have a magnificent field for study, speculation, and intellectual enjoyment. In these did he rise to the sublimest heights, and by these alone has he immortalized himself. "My Novel," with old "Rickeybockey," and the village scenes, the stocks and country curate; "What Will He Do With It?" and the itinerant pedler, the rambling musician and the wonderful dog; "Paul Clifford," in his Jessie James adventures, the London slang, the *blue ruin* and the *crib cracking*; "The Disowned," and all the morbid fancies created by the mind in despair; "Luctetia," and the fiendish conceptions of the Borgias renewed; all these are very interesting, amusing, entertaining or horrifying—as the case may be—but they come not from the same serious and lofty student of history, who ransacked the past in order to make it line with the end of time, or until the English language is no more.

We do not agree with all that Bulwer has written in historical novels, nor are they free from certain religious prejudices; but apart from a few pages here and there, these works are master-pieces, and should be read by every student of history or of English literature. "The Last Days of Pompeii" is not surpassed in any language as an archæological romance—if we might so call it—one that raises the curtain of the past upon a scene long buried beneath the fiery lava of Vesuvius. It is a wonderful piece of work; as varied as the disinterred mosaics, as perfect as the shattered columns of the lost city. Then we have "Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes," which

brings us down centuries in the history of that mighty power. In English history we have "Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings," and again that very minute story "The Last of the Barons." In fact one would imagine that Bulwer had marched down the avenue of the Christian era selecting the last tribune, last monarch, last leader in each land and in each age, to hold them up as illustrations of their time and associates. But we have not space to dwell any longer on this author. We merely desire to point out that while Bulwer's novels are, as a rule, above reproach, and are certainly models of lofty English, still they cannot be read from first to last without the aid of a careful guide. While gazing at the stars of brilliancy with which he bespangles his literary sky, a person is apt to overlook the chasm that he sometimes digs at your feet.

We will turn for a moment to the "Great Unknown," that "Wizard of the North," the immortal author of "Waverley," Sir Walter Scott. It is not as a poet we would now speak of him, but as that extraordinary novelist, whose magic pen has peopled the hills, the valleys, the streams and castles of Scotland with a thousand glorious creations of his imagination. Our space is now so limited that we find it almost impossible to do justice to Scott at the tale end of an editorial. We will consecrate a whole article to the Laird of Abbotsford's novels in one of our coming issues. Still we might state that with the exception of a couple of works, in which the author allows some of his latent prejudices to get the better of his historical exactness, to read the "Waverley" series is an education in itself. Scott has done more to cast a halo of interest around Scotland than could or did all the dry historians put together. And yet his works are almost entirely based upon history. Even "Guy Mannering," with Merriles on Ellengowan's Hill cursing the Bertrams, is the fruit of historical research. "The Heart of Midlothian," "Rob Roy," and "Ivanhoe" are decidedly founded upon most positive historical evidence. And in "Old Mortality," "The Antiquary," and all his works of a similar class and epoch, we have the stories of the dead ages revived,—the manners, customs, language and characteristics of the people most graphically portrayed. In "The Abbot" and "The Monastery," the author does, at times, allow his Protestant feelings to get the better of his knowledge and research, thus blotting with prejudice some of the finest pages he has penned. Still we must say that whosoever wishes to know aught authentic of Scotland's past, of her clans, her warriors, her feudal laws, her manners, and her people, must read carefully the novels left by Scott as a literary legacy to the country and to the world. At another time we will return to this subject.

#### OYSTER SUPPER TO-NIGHT.

Last evening the first oyster supper of the season under the auspices of the Ladies of Charity of St. Patrick's parish was given in the Victoria Armory.

The supper was a great success and every effort had been made to make the evening as enjoyable as possible. The suppers will be continued to-night and to-morrow. The attractions on the three nights will be orchestral and vocal music, stage tableaux, the haunted swing, magic lantern views and refreshments at city prices. These annual reunions of the members of St. Patrick's parish and their numerous friends have always in the past proved very enjoyable, and there is each year some novelty or other prepared to make the entertainment particularly attractive. A small sum of money goes a great way with the patrons, as 5 cents and 10 cents are the ruling prices in the hall. The Ladies of Charity devote the proceeds to securing material with which to clothe the poor.

#### THE CZAR'S DEATH.

At last, after weeks of expectancy, alternate hope and despair, on November the first, at half-past one in the afternoon, Alexander III., Czar of all the Russias, passed off the stage of mortal existence. In that most perfect of palaces—Livadia—breathing to the last the sweet, mild atmosphere of the Crimea, the ruler of over 100,000,000 of people fell beneath the merciless blow of the all-conquering Reaper. He was born in 1845, and was comparatively a young man. In 1866 he married the Princess Marie, daughter of King Christian of Denmark and sister of the Princess of Wales and the King of Greece.

In 1881, when Alexander II. was assassinated by the Nihilists, the late Czar ascended the throne. Ever since he has lived in a species of retirement, either at the palace of Gatschina, or in some other of his country residences. He has been called the "peasant Czar" on account of his dislike to regal display or court ceremonies. While the expression was used in a sense of ridicule still he considered it an honor. He has also been styled the "Peace-preserver of Europe," simply because he had it in his power to precipitate many a conflict, but he refrained from so doing through his hatred for war.

Considering all the shocks that his iron framework of nerves received, it is not wonderful that, without being a coward, he should have spent a miserable existence of dread and uncertainty. In his younger days he was a powerfully constituted man, but the eternal fear that was upon him, the many terrible blows he received, from the day of his predecessor's assassination down to his wonderful experience and narrow escape on the Transcaucasian railway in 1888 sufficed to render him much weaker, from a nervous standpoint, than he might have ever been under other circumstances. The chief feature of his reign was his love of peace, and this he carried to the verge of fanaticism. In fact, he was a religious monomaniac on many questions. He imagined that the Almighty had given him a mission, and as part thereof it was necessary to persecute, exterminate if possible, the Jews, Roman Catholics and Baptists. No matter what remonstrances were made to him by members of his own family and of other royal houses, he clung to the idea that no person had a right to believe otherwise than he did.

Alexander III. leaves five children, Grand Duke Nicholas, who succeeds to the throne, born May 18, 1868; Grand Duke George, born May 9, 1871; Grand Duchess Xenia, born April 6, 1875; Grand Duke Michael, born December 4, 1878, and Grand Duchess Olga, born June 13, 1882.

What the result of the Czar's death upon European affairs is yet a matter of conjecture. Perhaps the Emperor may deem it advisable—even if through other motives—to continue the policy of peace that his father sought so hard to preserve. Or he may feel inclined to give his millions of subjects an opportunity of killing others and being killed themselves—if Nihilism demands killing of any kind. The country most immediately affected by the recent death is certainly France. It is only the other day, apparently, that the French and the Russians were weeping tears of fraternal affection upon each other's shoulders. Whether or not the youthful Czar believes in the continuation of this international love is a question that very few months will solve. His is now in his twenty-seventh year. There was nothing very bright about him when a

boy; so dull was he that a medical expert pronounced him a fool, and for his pains got a box in the ear from the Czar. But during the past five years he has presided at all Councils of State and did so in a manner that proved he was the possessor of considerable ability, judgment and determination. He may probably desire to introduce some liberal institutions, and to imitate what he has seen abroad, but he must always reckon on a host of interested and clever courtiers, who will not neglect to look after their own interests. It is always so with rulers of the despotic stamp who are constantly in danger from the revolutionary section of their subjects, who feel that while they are all-powerful they are obliged to depend to a great extent upon men who hold that other power, behind the throne. Yet Nicolas II. may yet astonish the world; he may disappoint many and take a stand that even the most sanguine do not anticipate.

There is no doubt that Russia is to-day a wonderful nation, and one that holds to a great extent the balance of European power. But with all the civilization of our century the Russians are still semi-barbaric. Old Napoleon's saying is as true to-day as upon the occasion of Moscow's catastrophe; "scratch a Russian and you will find a Tartar." There is a certain amount of Casseck and Tartar barbarism and cruelty that all the world's polish cannot rub off the Russian. Born to rule, and having been rulers for so many generations, the Romanoffs very naturally imagine—like the late Czar—that they have special missions from on high, that they are not of the common clay from which ordinary mortals spring, and that the millions who acknowledge their authority are merely the instruments of their ambitions and eccentric desires. It is only when the phantom of Nihilism arises in their path that they realize for a moment that they are mortal. Not unlike a certain character in an Italian romance, who feared neither God, man, nor devil, who was ready to fling down or pick up a gauntlet of war at any moment, but who invariably crouched in corners, trembled like a child, and almost lost control of his nerves whenever he heard the thunder.

Be it under the new Czar, or under some of his immediate successors, the sun must certainly rise that will look down upon a terrific social outburst in that land. Politically speaking, Russia is simply a sleeping volcano. It may be years before it belches forth its lava; but whenever the day of its activity comes, the monuments and institutions of the present may prepare for a fate like that which befell Herculanium and Pompeii. Meanwhile the nation will bury Alexander Alexandrovitch, and the cannon from Livadia to Cronstadt will proclaim at once the death of the "peace-preserver," and the succession of the enigma Nicholas Alexandrovitch. It is to be fervently hoped that this two-fold event of greatest importance will pass off peacefully and that the demonstrations of sorrow on the one side, and of congratulations on the other, will not be marred by any violent actions on the part of the avowed enemies of autocratic power.

Apart from his public career, we learn that Alexander III. was a model husband and father; that his domestic life was perfect. He was unassuming, and was idolized by all his immediate relatives. His greatest delight was to play with the little soions of royalty and to make them happy in his presence. Mr. Stead says "there was no romps greater as he." He will be missed and mourned in that family circle as few prominent rulers have ever been. And the world can at least say of him, that he died at his post, working till the very last.