

grim, leering chuckle with which he exposes meanness, or fathoms the shallow depth of motive and principle in his personages.

The theme is, this time, certainly well chosen to display the great actor to the best advantage. Mr. Thackeray riots through the inexhaustible field of mean, purposeless baseness which lies on the surface of the literature and history of the eighteenth century. He delights in the filthy garbage which his subjects constantly furnish, and is never so happy as when citing some new instance of grossness or folly, or making a renewed forcible application of his disdainful wit to what may have received sufficient castigation by previous efforts. With all the skillfulness of a practitioner he probes directly for the diseased part, and most successfully lays bare the cankering plague-spots which, after all, are only the impresses which sin has made on the hearts (we suppose) of all of us. In reading him we are irresistibly reminded of the laughing medicus of Juvenal as he successively exposes to our observation now Swift, Congreve, Prior, or analyses the character of Major Pendennis or passes in review only to censure them, the motley group of "Vanity Fair."

We doubt very much whether morals are really improved by such unrelenting sarcasm as Thackeray's; we very much prefer the hearty genial laughter of Dickens or Cervantes. Poor, perverse mortals are restive under scolding but oftener yield to well intentioned mirth. Of course we do not accuse our great humourist of any sympathy with the vices which he portrays, far from it, no life was ever more pure and blameless, and the real deep tenderness of his nature occasionally breaks forth, especially in his lecture on "charity and humour"—the best of them all.

What we do not like is his hideous way of so presenting his characters as to make their vices show more largely than their virtues. He seems to us to see the dark side of human nature so strongly as to blind himself to the good.

Under his dissection, man appears as not "gone very far from original righteousness," but as utterly and hopelessly steeped to the lips in all manner of corruption and diabolism. That Mr. Thackeray may be heard in his own defence, we will quote from the lecture just referred to.

"I cannot help telling the truth as I view it, and describing what I see and goes on to say that to do otherwise would be treason to conscience, to truth, pardon, and love.

Under the manipulation of our writer's pen, Swift becomes an inhuman monster, something fearfully incomprehensible. Congreve and Prior are triflers, Addison and Steele are lauded, not so much for what is good or great, but for an even want of it, and for their companionable, gossiping qualities. In fact the Spectator and its club of writers appear to have filled the place in Queen Anne's days, which tea and unmarried ladies do in our own.

The lectures on the Four Georges should never have been written. Those dull Germans whom the supposed interests of the "reformation," substituted in the place of the hereditary monarchs of England, were no doubt, a stupid set,

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