

OUR TABLE.

RICHELIEU, OR THE CONSPIRACY.

UNDER this title, a new play has recently been published by the author of the *Lady of Lyons*, and the extracts furnished by the London Reviews, seem to promise that the fame already won by Sir E. L. Bulwer, will gather another leaf from this new production of his pen, although the drama does not possess the innate completeness which distinguishes the works of the father of the English drama—a completeness, often necessary, and always desirable in a historical play, a portion of every audience being generally unable to supply all the parts of the story which the author may deem it expedient to pass lightly over, or altogether to omit.

In the language of an English review, to which we are indebted for many extracts from the play, Richelieu is described as being first discovered in his palace, in confidential discourse with the *Capuchin Joseph*; the plots that surround him, like a mesh of nets, form the subject of their conversation. This mode of introducing *Richelieu* in his privacy—unveiling him, on the sudden, and exhibiting the crafty minister in his closet—is a skilful stroke of art, and infinitely more impressive than the most gorgeous scenic display of his greatness, with all court accessories and ministerial agencies drawn round him. But it does not render such display unnecessary; it is to be regarded rather as a prelude to it; and we naturally look to see him at the height of that power from which, in the revolutions of the play, he is deposed, to rise again triumphantly upon the ruin of his enemies. Here we have him in his own palace, planning how to defeat the projects of conspirators, and we expect next to see him wielding that mighty influence at the Louvre, from which the conspiracy is organized to pluck him down. The drama, however, from this point takes a domestic descent, flows through the lower channels of private personal fortunes—the loves of *De Mauprut* and *Julie*—the interplay of stratagems—and the vicissitudes of a fluctuating and well sustained but minor plot—to which the loftier interest of the great struggle is, for a time, rendered subservient. It is not until the fourth act that we see *Richelieu* in the presence of the King and the court, and then it is only to witness his influence destroyed, and the magnificent fabric of his supremacy shattered and overthrown by the insidious courtiers who have, in the mean while, obtained the ear of the Monarch. We no where witness his ascendancy in the councils of France; we hear of it, and we know that it is the spring of the confederacy—but we do not see it in operation, we desiderate the visible pageant of the minister's sovereignty which is necessary to impress the audience sufficiently with his position to enable them to understand thoroughly the depth of his fall and the grandeur of his restoration.

Darkly as history has painted the character of Richelieu, it may not be denied that in it there was much which commanded esteem as well as admiration. The desperate character of the times which called into action his commanding genius, will excuse much of the sternness, which has often been called cruelty. He found his country distracted with every ill—the theatre of every vice, and felt that only an indomitable vigour could wrest it from the dominion of crime. The author gives the following splendid summary of the views and feelings of *Richelieu*:

———“Men have called me cruel;—
I am not;—I am just!—I found France rent asunder,—
The rich men despots, and the poor banditti;—
Sloth in the mart, and schism within the temple;
Brawls festering to Rebellion; and weak Laws
Rotting away with rust in antique sheaths.
I have re-created France; and, from the ashes
Of the old feudal and decrepit carcase,
Civilization on her luminous wings
Soars, phoenix-like, to Jove!—What was my art?
Genius, some say,—some, Fortune,—Witchcraft
some,
Not so;—my art was JUSTICE!

The following is a glorious burst of eloquence. *Richelieu* having thrown aside a heavy sword which his arm is too feeble to wield, is reminded by a page that other weapons are now at his command, and, lifting a pen, he exclaims:—

True,—THIS!
Beneath the rule of men entirely great
The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold
The arch-enchanter's wand!—itself a nothing!
But taking sorcery from the master-hand
To paralyse the Cæsars—and to strike
The loud earth breathless!—Take away the sword—
States can be saved without it!

The unhappiness of the ambitious spirit is well wondered by the soliloquy of *Richelieu* on the night pictured for the attempt upon his life. He says—

I am not happy!—with the Titan's lust
I woo'd a goddess, and I clasp a cloud.
When I am dust, my name shall, like a star,
Shine through wan space, a glory—and a prophet
Whereby pale seers shall from their ære towers
Con all the ominous signs, benign or evil,
That make the potent astrologue of kings,
But shall the Future judge me by the ends
That I have wrought—or by the dubious means
Through which the stream of my renown hath run
Into the many-voiced unfathomed Time?
Foul in its bed lie weeds—and heaps of slime,
And with its waves—when sparkling in the sun,
Oft times the secret rivulets that swell
Its might of waters—blend the hues of blood.

Ye safe and formal men,
Who write the deeds, and with unfeverish hand
Weigh in nice scales the motives of the Great,
Ye cannot know what ye have never tried!
History preserves only the fleshless bones
Of what we are—and by the mocking skull
The would-be wise pretend to guess the features!
Without the roundness and the glow of life
How hideous is the skeleton! Without
The colourings and humanities that clothe