

Literature and Science.

THE GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY realism hastened the disappearance of ideal romances, fostered the growth, and determined the character of contemporary fiction. Nothing was read which was obviously imaginative; the very name of romance died out till the time of Horace Walpole. In one important respect the true province and scope of light literature was better understood by writers of the first half of the century than by their successors. Early novels were playthings, designed for mental recreation; the writers had no moral or social thesis to maintain. In the hands of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, or Godwin, they became party manifestos written to inculcate particular views of life or to create sympathy with some special course of action. When once the use of the novel as a polemical weapon was demonstrated, its character was changed. Instead of reflecting the face of nature, novelists looked on the world through tinted glasses. Artistically this use of the novel was a retrogression; but it obviously imparted a powerful stimulus to its growth. Every subsequent social change has tended to render the novel not so much a luxury as a necessity of life. Aschan denounced the follies of the old romances as unworthy the attention of wise or good men. In his boyhood Montaigne knew nothing of the "Lancelot of the Lake," "Huon of Bordeaux," "Amadis of Gaul," or any other of the "worthless books," which, in his maturer age, amused degenerate youth. Major Bellenden would have had "the fellows that write such nonsense brought to the picquet for leasing-making." Though Olivia Primrose confessed to the study of logic from the arguments of Thwackum and Square, and Robinson Crusoe and Friday, it was not the Quakers only who forbade the reading of novels, or Sir Anthony Absolute alone who regarded "a circulating library as an ever-green tree of diabolical knowledge." The rural aristocracy discarded works of fiction. In their moments of enforced leisure Gwillim lulled to slumber the Sir Hildebrand Osbaldistones of the day; their wives and daughters were busied among the linen and the preserves. Novel-reading was treated as something between a moral frailty and a waste of time. For many years it was a stolen pleasure, bread eaten in secret. It was not only in the boudoir of Lydia Languish or the hymnal of Thomas Trumbull, that "Peregrine Pickle," or books of looser character, were ambushed behind works of graver import. Acting on Olivia's hint, writers at first combined instruction with amusement, lured readers on false pretences from the chair to the sofa, offered the didactic powder

in the sweetment of a love-tale. Such shifts and disguises are now antiquated and unnecessary. A novel is a novel, as a play is a play. Its use in life is recognized. Everybody reads; women have more leisure and fewer occupations than formerly; men cannot always, as was said of Sir Roger de Coverley, have their roast-beef stomachs exhausted in brain, nerve, and muscle by the struggle for existence, and crowded together in cities, they cannot, if they would, live the out-door lives of their ancestors. Plays, operas, concerts, require money or an effort. Novels supply the easiest and cheapest form of relaxation.

The modern novel, though not necessarily "a smooth tale," is "generally of love." In the hands of Fielding and Smollett its sphere was not so limited; it presented a more miscellaneous and diversified picture of human life. At the present day the romance element predominates. Novels deal almost exclusively with the passions of love; the sentimental aspect of life is throughout prominent. Other interests and aims may be used to heighten or diminish the colouring; but the principal object is to narrate the feelings and fortunes of the hero and heroine. With Sir Walter Scott love is not necessarily the chief topic of interest; yet even he is compelled by the taste of his readers to interweave a thread of love-making. Dickens' genius inclined to the wider range which Fielding and Smollett occupied; but his novels are marred by the necessity, fancied or real, which compelled him to hang his disjointed and detached episodes on the thread of a romantic plot. The eighteenth-century novel, in its first stage of development, may be defined as a continuous prose narrative, intentionally fictitious but consistent with nature, designed to develop character by means of a series of incidents in the life of an imaginary hero or heroine.

The growth of the English novel in the eighteenth century epitomizes the characteristics of the period. It follows the change from the prose of its commencement to the poetry of its conclusion. In the realism of Defoe is represented the extreme of its reaction against the enthusiasm of religion, literature, politics, whether chivalrous or republican. From the fatal effects of that sentimental disease which infected Richardson, England was saved by the sturdy common sense of men like Fielding, and the domestic virtues that are painted by Goldsmith. As the century drew to its close, the pent-up imagination, which here and there had trickled off in Della Cruscan dilettanteism, finally burst its bonds, and flowed into new channels of historical romance, or moral, social, and political idealisms. If in its general outlines the novel represented the age, with still closer fidelity did it reflect its minute details. Life is pre-

sented in every aspect; vivid side-lights fall upon manners and morals; from the thieves' quarter to Almacks no class is omitted. Never before was society so dramatically presented; of no previous age do we possess a knowledge at once so detailed and so general; in none exists so rich a gallery of contemporary portraits.

What an influence for good and evil have novelists become! Keen, sarcastic critics of life, genial partakers of its interests, observant students of its hopes and failures, they have imagined stories that strike a chord which vibrates for a life-time, painted pictures of life-struggles and their issues which indelibly brand themselves on the memory, or, with an insight that is born of intuition or experience, laid bare the inmost secrets of the human heart. They have formed conceptions so lofty as to be everlasting possessions, and created characters that are compliments to human nature. As the keen scimitar and nervous arm of Saladin accomplished a feat which the giant strength and ponderous blade of Richard could not perform, so novelists have enforced moral lessons more powerful than a wilderness of homilists, and taught effectively by parables where other teaching has produced only slumber.—*Quarterly Review*.

THE eyes can properly be used only when the body is in an erect position. When we stoop the face is flushed and the eye blood-shot. Thus reading in a recumbent posture is ruinous to the eyesight.

It is stated (*Lancet*) that Mr. Cresswell Hewett has succeeded in the manufacture of quinine by synthesis, and that its cost will be about five cents an ounce. This will interest not only patients and physicians, but chemists and pharmacists.

THE advantage of country life to physical development is shown by Galton, who had found that English country boys of fourteen years average an inch and a quarter more in height, and seven pounds more in weight, than city boys of the same age.

HER VON RITTER has left \$15,000 to the University of Jena, the interest of which is to go to the teaching of the doctrines of Darwin. Prof. Häckel proposes to establish, with part of this sum, a professorship of zoology, to be called the Paul Ritter professorship.

PROBABLY the largest literary prize ever offered is one of \$1,000,000, to be given in 1925, by the Russian National Academy for the best work on the life and reign of Alexander I. In 1825, shortly after the death of Alexander I., the sum of 50,000 roubles was offered by one of his favourite Ministers to be given as a prize a century after his death, and it is this sum at compound interest which will amount in 1925 to \$1,000,000.