The Best Models of Victorian Prose Literature.

THEIR LEADING CHARACTERISTICS COMPARED WITH THOSE OF THEIR MOST NOTED CONTEMPORARIES AND PREDECESSORS.

THE Victorian Age is a convenient term in English Literature to describe the period extending from the year 1837 to the death of our beloved Queen in the present year, 1901. The central note of Victorian Literature is the dominant influence of Sociology—enthusiasm for social truths as an instrument of social reform: the literature is very personal and defiant of all law and standards; it is laborious and exact, but indifferent to grace and symmetry. It has a character of its own at once brilliant, diverse, and complex, although without a supreme master in either poetry, philosophy, or romance. There is now no standard or model to follow; we have presented to us a dozen different styles.

In the first place, we might ask ourselves the question, what constitutes literature? It is certainly not good thought alone; i. is great thought expressed in artistic form. The would-be writer must model and fashion his thought till it takes on the garb and dress of beauty. A great writer is one who has something to say and knows hcw to say it; and as soon as his facts are colored by his own opinions and feelings their expression becomes literary. Looking at the subject in this light, the scientific works of Darwin and Huxley and some of the histories—although they may hold a permanent place in libraries and literary circles—are, strictly speaking, not literature.

Again, we must consider the question. what makes an author great? It is answered thus: do his chief works belong to that class of books which attain an enduring or increasing power, or to that class which are popular for one or two generations and then become practically obsolete? To illustrate the difference between the transient and the enduring a few examples may be noted. The works of Dickens contain much humor and pathos, but both are greatly exaggerated and grotesque. Now, although the grotesque amuses us greatly, we do not cherish it; any lasting impressions that may be con-