

A small library is often a great evil, being a costly yet insufficient accompaniment. The keeping of books for reference, unless there are a great many of them, is little better than an expensive fallacy: and not to be able to obtain the best authors in sufficient numbers, and keep pace with the rapid progress of our literature, is a manifest disadvantage. We would therefore recommend every aspirant after general knowledge to get attached to a Public Library where he may luxuriate at pleasure among a multiplicity of good authors, and for the cost of one. Yet, even amid this abundance, I would recommend a strict selection and adherence to the principle of reading each work throughout.

Reading aloud should be practised whenever convenient, as a greater help to knowledge, than a more ocular perusal. Besides, we shall interest two persons rather than one, and give some of the charms and advantages of a conversation to the exercise.

(To be concluded next week.)

CRITICISM.

THOMAS A BECKET.

A Dramatic Chronicle. In Five Acts. By George Darley.

If we were asked to describe this book in very few words, we should call it the mistake of a man of genius.

It is neither an easy nor an agreeable matter to quarrel with a writer of this order. In other circumstances we should have spoken of his genius only. We will say why we cannot do so here. Where mistakes not only originate in a wholly erroneous theory, but have a direct tendency to produce wide individual discouragements in the same walk of literature, and do consequent injury to public interests and tastes, it seems a duty to bring them into prominent discussion.

The false theory on which, as we shall endeavour to show, all Mr. Darley's mistakes in the present work are grounded, is thus blazoned forth in the first five lines of his preface.

"Being impressed with an idea that the age of legitimate acting drama has long gone by,—that means to reproduce such a species of literature do not exist in our present cast of mind, manners, and language,—I have under this persuasion spent no vain time upon attempts to fit 'Thomas a Becket' for the public scene."

Mind, manners, language—this is truly a grave and sweeping position. Let us examine it a little. For by what possible means these elements of the human intellect can have become so utterly bereft of power to produce a fine acting drama, we really cannot imagine.

And first for "our present cast of mind." We know that we have suffered a change from the past, but it is even here in habit rather than soul. We moderns analyse, pause, reflect, investigate, pursue elaborate theories, weigh the consequences and the law, and speculate on the various modes of action; the men of an earlier time, heedless of such refinements, acted at once. While we do not hesitate to admit, therefore, that the primitive vigour of all the faculties, untroubled and undistressed by such distracting influences, would naturally manifest itself more frequently than now; we cannot for the life of us perceive how such circumstances should strike at the very root of the existence of our faculties, or even destroy a portion of their capacity. It is still the human heart by which we live, capable of artless feeling, of delirious passion. Pity and terror will last as long as the world lasts, and how can tragedy die as long as the elements of tragic interest live? Why, to admire the writings of the age of Elizabeth, to be stirred and affected by them, as Mr. Darley is, shows us the sharp vitality of the thing whose epitaph he would write.

But we are to look to "our present cast of manners." We do so, and cannot in the least discover how that is possibly to prevent the reproduction of genuine dramatic literature. Here, we presume, Mr. Darley does not refer to tragedy, since he would be answered at once by the fact, that a genuine tragedy depends on its development of the passions, and that manners have as little to do with the matter as possible. Assuming that he refers to comedy, pray why may not our present manners themselves (as well as those of any former times) be made the subject of new dramas of the first class? What on earth should prevent our present manners from being well dramatised, unless indeed the individual deficiency of dramatist or actor? On that it is not necessary now to touch. It is enough that we do not recognise any loss of means in the general fundamental principles of modern mind and manners.

Mr. Darley has one argument still. Our present "cast of language," he thinks, is a stumbling block in the way of any reproduction of legitimate acting drama; and that in this he is at least as earnest as we are, he has shown by most extraordinary personal sacrifices, in the present work. He has willfully set up language as the stumbling block in his own way. The defect of "Thomas a Becket" is its antiquated phraseology. We have thus the two zealous engineer hoist with his own petard. The secret of his error is laid bare by himself. With the light so placed in our hands we fire his whole train of false argument, and blow the superstructure into air.

The power of the acting drama depends on the appeal it makes to the passions, the imagination, the fancy. To accomplish this successfully, language must be used; but in our entire nature it

is limited to one particular phase of our native tongue, in order to receive strong impressions? Can the present "cast of our language" render a lover comparatively insensible to success or discomfiture in his love; a jealous man indifferent to what appeals to his jealousy? If a truth of any kind has a strong effect in actual life, are we to believe that its ideal representation shall produce no effect at all, because some of the words employed differ from those which of old only expressed the same thing? If this were the case, we might soon expect to find the existence of our human passions depending upon the progressive horn-books; our hearts pinned upon terminology. The mistake originates in a confusion of the permanent substance with the mutable form; the essence with the sound; passion and imagination with the variable modes in which they make themselves manifest.

Let us ask Mr. Darley if he thinks that Shakspeare wrote in the language of Chaucer, that Dryden adopted the phraseology of Shakspeare, or that either of them would write in the peculiar style which characterises their works, if living now. We think that he would answer no to this, if he admitted the possibility of such men living at all in these days. How then justify the course he has taken himself? The rule equally applies to all grades of the art, to all its modifications, to its qualities and achievements, large or little. This is a question he will find more difficult to answer. He has spent no vain time, he says, upon attempts to fit *Thomas a Becket* for the public scene. How much time has he spent in attempts to unfit it for that scene? Also for the most part, vain—since the greater part of his work, if still in form unfitted, upsets the whole theory in its essence by going straight to the heart of the reader. They are strange—these confused mistakes of a man of indisputable genius. They are at least decisive against the truth of his theory.

Shakspeare wrote dramatic chronicles, with the avowed purpose of public representation. It is by his aid—the greatest authority on all these matters—that the high acting drama becomes reducible to two classes—the concise dramas of consecutive action, and the elaborate dramas of mental development. The first are chiefly built upon peculiar emotions, the last upon the general character. The first develop the passions, the last the fortunes chiefly. The first belong to the unwritten history of the human race; the last to the chronicles handed down to us. An author of genius may succeed in the one, and fail, or feel himself unsuited to succeed, in the other; but he should not therefore imagine that what he can do is the only thing to be done, and that what he is unable or indisposed to do, no man can. After all, perhaps, the qualities essential to success in both these departments of dramatic art are nearly allied. It would certainly be difficult to disunite them altogether. —*Examiner.*

WOMAN AND HER MASTER.

The real purpose of this publication is to display the reading and rhetoric of Lady Morgan. Its avowed object, so far as we can discover any definite meaning in a plan imperfectly fulfilled, is to portray the subordinate condition of women in every stage of society; to expound the oppression and injustice to which that subordination has given rise; to show the effect of their reaction upon the unjust oppressor, "Master Man;" and finally, how the exquisite sensibility, and all that sort of thing, of "Woman," has frequently triumphed over the circumstances which surrounded her. What the book really is, may be soon told. It commences with a well-sounding but flashy and common place introduction, that takes a view of the miseries of mankind in past ages; the extent to which they have been alleviated by throwing open "the monopoly of knowledge" in modern times; and concludes with the very just conclusion that there are still a great many evils to be remedied before social wrongs will be extinct and happiness attainable by all. Lady Morgan then plunges into her subject. Taking a survey of women in savage life, first among the aborigines of Australia, then among the Red Indians, and lastly among the Negroes, she paints a dark enough picture of their condition. She next proceeds to the women of the East; instancing the small feet and confined lives of the Chinese, and the occasional suttee of the Hindoo females: after which, she surveys a subject, of which we know very little—the women of Oriental antiquity, including Semiramis. She then goes to Scripture; beginning with Adam and Eve, and arguing the mental superiority of woman from the Devil's having succeeded in tempting her by the promise of "knowledge," and from Adam being doomed to the coarse labour of earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. The character of woman in the world before the Flood is of course conjectural; and Lady Morgan passes on to her condition under the Hebrews, from Sarah the wife of Abraham down to the deaths of Marianne and her mother under Herod. This branch of the subject is handled at great length, forming, in fact, a series of female biographies, and embracing with their accessories a sort of memoir of Jewish history. Woman in classical antiquity is treated in a similar way—more briefly and generally in Greece, Aspasia being the lady who is considered most elaborately—more fully, in Rome, than even amongst the Jews; the subject beginning with Cornelia and the matrons of the republic, and closing with Helena the mother of Constantine. Here the present work closes; the completion of the subject being reserved for another publication.

Throughout all this long period, the mode of Lady Morgan is

the same: the merits of women are attributed to themselves, their faults to the men. Nor is she much more even-handed with respect to records, making little scruple to set aside authorities when they militate against her views. Lady Morgan adduces as part of the "debris of the history of undated times, through which fragments of a legislation favourable to woman's rights are most apparent," a statement of Herodotus, that in certain African nations, the descent was traced through the female line,—a practice still extant in that continent, and in India too, we believe; but not exactly furnishing a sure proof of the estimation of her sex. In Oriental learning she seems equally at fault. She asserts that "the Emperors of Persia, like those of modern Turkey, are prohibited by Mahometan dispensation from having legitimate wives." The Turkish Sultans had wives till the time of Bajazet, but after his capture by Tamerlane the custom was discontinued, on account of the indignities his wife was exposed to. It was, however, merely a rule of expediency, or rather of pride.

The position of woman is a matter of vast importance, and deserves a much more searching and philosophical inquiry than it is in Lady Morgan's power to give; nor would there be a better subject for an acute and impartial mind than to investigate the respective nature and relation of the sexes; to narrate fairly and calmly the condition and influence of women in various stages of society, so far as it can be traced in the descriptions of foreign travellers, and in the laws and literature of the peoples themselves; and to estimate the reaction of woman's degradation in the general effects upon society. But nothing of this kind has Lady Morgan attempted: what she has done is to produce a dashing and striking piece of one-sided declamation—extending over a wide field of human history, always fluent, but often false.

Sometimes this declamation is very effective: exaggerated, it is true, and so far unreal that only those striking points are taken which answer her purpose.

We take the following as one of the few approaches to a philosophical remark we have met with, or as indicating any idea that women as a race can have a moral influence for good, and that, as soon as man ceases to exercise mere brute force, his own character very greatly depends upon woman's.

(*Plotina.*) "Remarkable for the dignity of her deportment, and for that moral decency which respects all the exterior forms of life, (the bienséance of positive virtues,) she introduced by her example a censorship of taste, which extended its influence even to the lowest public amusements of the people. The most scandalous licence had been permitted during former reigns, in the theatres and pantomimes; and Titus had endeavoured to suppress this indecency by an edict; but the corrupted people, seconded by the libertine aristocracy, had forced the Emperor Nerva to repeal the edict; and to restore the scandal. It was not until the improving influence of Trajan and Plotina was felt in the circles of Rome, that the people themselves becoming disgusted with their own licence, or, as a modern historian observes, "recevut au sentiment de la pudeur," called upon the government to renew the decree of Titus, and to annul the indulgence of the often too facile Nerva.

"The power of woman over the moral tastes of the public was never more strongly illustrated: and the example should not be lost upon posterity. The women of modern time, who boast the possession of a moral code of purer observance and of a more imposing sanction, have too generally abdicated this power from deficiency in that moral courage, so necessary to resist the tyranny of fashion, and to withhold protection from practices or from persons in vogue, when they are at war with public decency. Society, as at present constituted, is, in this respect, a perpetual compromise between principles and conventions—an attempted reconciliation of the dignity of virtue with the conveniences of sycophancy: and as the fault lies principally with the women, so does the penalty. The condition of public morals has in all ages been decisive of the place and consideration of the sex."

BURNING OF RICHMOND THEATRE.

IN THE YEAR 1811.

The house was fuller than on any night of the season. The play was over and the first act of the pantomime had passed. The second and last had begun. All was yet gaiety; all so far had been pleasure; curiosity was yet alive, and further gratification anticipated; the orchestra sent forth its sounds of harmony and joy; when the audience perceived some confusion on the stage, and presently a shower of sparks falling from above. Some were startled; others thought it was a part of the scenic exhibition. A performer on the stage received a portion of the burning materials, and it was perceived that some others were tearing down the scenery. Some one cried out from the stage that there was no danger. Immediately after, Hopkins Robinson ran forward, and cried out, "The house is on fire!" pointing to the ceiling, where the flames were progressing like wildfire. In a moment all was appalling horror and distress. Robinson handed several persons from the boxes to the stage, as a ready way for their escape. The cry of "Fire! Fire!" mingled with the wailings of females and children. The general rush was to gain the lobbies. It appears from the following description of the house, and the scene that ensued, that this was the cause of the great loss of life.

The general entrance, to the pit and boxes, was through a door not more than large enough, to admit three persons abreast. This