

## THE DRAMA.

### CAIUS GRACCHUS.

In these days, indeed, tragedies are "plenty as blackberries," and usually are almost as mawkish, and moulder nearly as soon; but the name of Knowles gives promise of something of another and a better order than the sickly productions of romance in its dotage. He alone in our day has written a play which lives on the stage: and however opinions may differ as to its degree of merit,—no one can deny to it the praise of vivid action, of true domestic pathos, and of picturesque arrangement in the principal scenes. It is something in these days to have one dramatist, who trusts in the simple strength of the affections—who does not think it necessary to smear over the rude figures of old time with a modern varnish, or to trick out his characters in the faded flowers of sentimental pöesy. Mr. Knowles has many faults; he is often careless, now and then extravagant; but there is a spirit of truth and nature in his dramas which will redeem a thousand faults, and live in spite of them.

Caius Gracchus will scarcely take so deep root as *Virginia*, because its story is so inferior in interest; but it will add to the reputation of the author with all who admired the purest excellences of his former work. Its incidents are a portion of a noble history; but they do not stand out from it unlike all else, as those of *Virginia*, and its domestic interest is not so closely involved in its very texture. It shews us, indeed, young valour nipped in its early bloom; glorious aspirations suddenly chilled by ingratitude and death; and the vain struggle of generous sympathy for the wrongs of the people with unbending power, repaid as it has been a hundred times in the great tragedy of life! But these incidents are not of the same heart-touching kind with those which bring on the fate of the sweet *Virginia*; which concentrate the interest in a fair victim, whom the first of dramatists should draw, and Miss Foote alone should personate; which reconcile the wayward heart to care for the wrongs of a nation, when they are concentrated in the sufferings of an innocent girl. Mr. Knowles has not been tempted by the difficulty of his subject to violate the truth of history, and to destroy the simplicity of a classic scene by the introduction of barbaric ornaments or romantic episodes; which we take to be no small praise. His latest play is less tinged with the sad embroidery of poetic thought than his first, in the same proportion that its story has less of poetry in its web; an instance of noble forbearance, and a proof, to our feelings at least, of the genuineness of the author's dramatic power. The diction of Caius Gracchus is generally simple and nervous, occasionally lax and wordy, and now and then harsh and displeasing, but never turgid or lifeless. Its chief merit, however, consists in the perpetual play and interchange of passion and action, and in the individual marking of the characters.