

the shade of Byron, that fiction is stranger than truth, and that truth is inferior to fiction. They give us a plentiful supply of Lord Snoodys, of Sir Benjamin Blockheads, and of Lady Empty-pates. An amazing number of extraordinary incidents happen to these intellectual personages, most of which seem very improbable to our simple imaginations, but all of which we are enjoined to consider as both probable and natural. Two or three love couples, half a dozen disappointments, and a couple of broken hearts; a few duels, a description of two or three balls, and of an innumerable number of dinner and picnic parties; the supercilious pride of the aristocrat, and the ostentation of the parvenu; aged dowagers trying to sell their portionless daughters to wealthy bankers, and bankers trying to unite their sons with the daughters of some poverty-stricken peer; all this, with a due proportion of minor fashionable intelligence, form the substance of what is called the Modern Fashionable Novel. No moral can be drawn from them, save that of pity that so much time should be thus wasted; nor no benefit, save that of warning against wasting so much time in their perusal. They do not produce such directly injurious consequences as those which we shall advert to before concluding, but assuredly they can do but little good, directly or indirectly; though they may not make men worse than they are, we are pretty sure they do not make them better, and we are morally sure that they do not make them wiser. It is not unfrequent, that we meet in society, with those whose pretensions to historical knowledge are based upon their gleanings from so-called historical novels, and whose ideas of history, consequently, carry a greater share of fiction than of fact. We heard, not long since, an elderly lady declare,—who is a great reader of these works,—that Charles the II. was a model for man, and that Queen Bess was the *beau ideal* of every female virtue! And the fashionable sentimental novels are no less injurious in their way, upon the ignorant and inexperienced. They instil false notions into the minds of the young, and create aspirations which can never be realized. They sometimes place humanity in a higher position than it really occupies; and at other times, they represent the nature of man to be far worse than it really is. It is by reading such works, that many render themselves unfit to perform their duties to society, and unable to bear the ills and the realities of life.

We here propose to make a few observations upon the writings of Bulwer and of James. Of the two, we prefer the former, but still we cannot join in all the praises which are usually bestowed upon

his productions. His language, though polished and attractive, is not unfrequently obscure. He has an extensive acquaintance with the facts, more than, perhaps, with the philosophy of history. He is a good classical scholar, he seems to be intimately acquainted with fashionable life, and he displays much artistic skill in the construction of his works; but notwithstanding all this, we cannot help feeling, while reading his novels, a kind of *je ne sais quoi*, that an indescribable *something* is wanting; and however anxiously we may await the *dénouement*, yet we can rarely experience any great sympathy with his *dramatis personæ*: they move past us without arousing a fellow feeling, they seem to be persons of a different mould than those we have met with in every day life. Bulwer cannot draw those strokes of nature, which "make the whole world kin." His personages may be aristocratic and fashionable, his delineations of aristocratic life may be correct, but the few natural features in his portraits, are frequently so much marked by cold and artificial coloring, that they rarely awaken aught beyond that degree of interest, which usually accompanies the perusal of a brilliant but superficial novel.* We like his historical novels better. The most of them have a little more historic accuracy than have the generality of this class; and we must also admit that they are very skillfully drawn.

Mr. James is the most voluminous, and if the quality were proportional to the quantity, he would also be the greatest of novelists. But unfortunately, he seems to prefer quantity to quality—the skill of Lope de Vega to that of Shakspeare. We cannot say he has written anything immoral, his reflections are always filled with benevolent and christian-like doctrines;† but we do say he has

* We must be permitted to make one exception. His last production—"The Caxtons,"—is wholly untainted with these imperfections, and thus presents a striking contrast to all his former efforts. It is, perhaps, the best family picture in the English language,—not even excepting the *Vicar of Wakefield*,—and filled with passages which could only have come from the heart. We hope soon to see from him another similar effort.

† We regret that we are compelled to make one exception of the novel, entitled "Sir Theodore Broughton." The hero is the once celebrated highwayman, Colonel Lutwiche. The heroine is called Kate Malcolm. She is described in one place as an affectionate daughter, and represented as doating upon her dying father. In a subsequent page, this affectionate and prudential young lady accepts the gentlemanly highwayman as a suitor for her hand, after three or four days acquaintanceship only, and within two days after the death of her father! This is certainly a strange proof of her affection. Mr. James also calls her religious, yet she is not represented to express any dislike when informed of her lover's crimes, nor does it appear that she thought one whit the less of