

The Owl.



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TWO great movements have impressed themselves upon modern literature, both having their origin in the last century.

The first which is called the revolutionary movement, aimed at the overthrow of the old form of government and the establishment of society upon a freer basis, expecting therefrom the regeneration of man. The second great movement is the scientific one, arising from the great diffusion of knowledge in general, but more particularly from the rapid advances made in all the physical sciences, the results of which were misconstrued and misinterpreted by the materialistic thinkers of the age. The scientific movement, in its turn produced a wide-spread falling-off from the old established faith, and gave birth to the false systems of modern philosophy with their erroneous interpretations of human life and the origin and destiny of man.

In opposition to these movements, a reaction made itself felt, which, in the sphere of thought took the shape of a revival of religious feeling, known in England and America as the transcendental movement. In art it expressed itself as a revival of mediæval ideals, in the so-called school of Romanticism. These four currents of thought and feeling mark the main features of modern English literature. The period has been one of almost univalled activity. Science and art, urged

as it were, by an impetus from which they had long been estranged, suddenly entered upon a new and, in many respects, brilliant career.

The revolutionary tendency made itself felt in English literary productions, chiefly during the fifty years immediately following the French revolution. Among the warmest upholders of its principles, we find Coleridge and Wordsworth, who however, in their later writings, especially the latter, embraced the doctrine of transcendentalism. Lord Byron stands out as the very incarnation of the revolutionary spirit in his defiance of all law, human and divine. A genius vast and comprehensive, his works tend only to destroy all faith in the reality of virtue. Pride and stubbornness of will form the only support which he affords to his heroes in their movements of anguish and despair. Himself a man whose heart had been withered and whose capacity for happiness had been exhausted by unbridled self-indulgence, it is not surprising that the passionate side of the revolutionary movement is so strikingly expressed in his writings.

Shelley, of a less impulsive nature than Lord Byron, appears as the apostle of this movement in the sphere of thought, supporting his enthusiastic advocacy of the new gospel by the false theories of the new science. On the other hand, Walter Scott, became the most distinguished expounder of the revived Romanticism. He failed, however, to give expression to the most characteristic feature of the