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A STUDY OF DICKENS. *By A*

THE present is an age of diffusion of knowledge, of busy enquiry, of sharp and destructive criticism, of enlargement of thought; consequently the two departments of literature of widest influence and most characteristic of the age are the novel and the periodical. Of the latter, the Quarterlies and the Dailies stand at the extreme as regards time and matter, while perhaps the Monthlies have the greatest influence, being equally renowned from the ponderous thought of the Quarterlies and the rapid execution of the Dailies.

A literary or æsthetic production consists of two parts: substance and form, these mutually depend on each other; but the mind in its creative act can bend its attention to the spiritual substance, *i. e.* the thought and feeling; or to the form the product is to assume. Hence there are two kinds of writers noticed in literature: the first thoroughly creative, the second carefully critical. In the first the impulse is from within, and the idea modifies the form; in the second the impulse is from without, and the form of the expression modifies the idea. The one has substantial merit; the other artistic merit. The former is great in every sense; the latter has only cold security, a monotonous neatness of movement. The first includes Shakspere, Spenser, Milton, Addison, Rich-

ardson and Irving; the second such as Pope, Dryden, Fielding, Waller and Denham. Dickens resembles and belongs to the first, Thackeray imitates the second.

Thus we see in a comparison between Dickens and his great rival, Thackeray, that the latter belongs to the critical class, a class that, unable to rival greater writers, either imitate or become pupils and enquire into methods, investigate rules, criticize, and if actuated by dislike, satirize; if by like, wildly panegyricize; if possessing culture and acquainted with the gaiety of polite society, they may show considerable brilliancy and wit; but they will not produce anything that will be handed down to posterity. A writer is often judged by the model he sets before himself and we may form an idea of Thackeray's ideal by the estimation he formed of Pope, in whom the critical function was uppermost, correctness the test of superiority. Thackeray attracted by artificial neatness, was apt to be led to overlook the genuine spirit. He says of Pope, "He is the greatest artist England ever saw," and again about a passage in the Dunciad, "In these astonishing lines, Pope has reached the very greatest height which his sublime art has attained." The passage does not support this criticism which places him above Milton

Regulation