

SENSATIONALISM.

SENSATIONALISM is one of the many words of the English language which has been trucked about in every common cart, pitched hither and thither by use and abuse until it certainly cannot recognize itself, even if any person else is able to detect its battered features. It originally meant the derivation of ideas by sense impressions. It is now commonly understood as the derivation of balderdash by nonsense insinuations. A sensation in high life, a sensation in society, a political sensation, she, or he created a sensation, etc. What do they all mean? Derivation of ideas by sense impressions? Not exactly, they shade off slightly. A sensation in high life usually means a nice, interesting, harmless little tidbit of scandal; a delicate and highly flavoured dish of gossip; something both edifying, and to those who "read as they run" perhaps, instructive. It originates at first as a profound secret, deep, dark and mysterious; fit only for the ears of gods and women; it is *hinted* at by Lady W. in the presence of Countess X., the Countess *whispers* it to Duchess Y. with strict injunctions that it shall go no further—at least no further than 25,000 miles round the globe, *too soon*. It is immediately carried by her Grace to near and dear friend, Mlle Blab, who *breathes* it to a few of the select at one of their social gatherings, perhaps a missionary meeting. The ladies of course look horrified; are awfully surprised, but all appear to remember it remarkably well, and, like an avalanche of mud it slides through the city, and is telegraphed across the Atlantic as a well known and undoubtedly ascertained fact from the very highest authority, that Duke Blouster's highly educated and accomplished wife has eloped or is about to seek a divorce, etc.; and so in the course of about 48 hours from a strictly private and whispered insinuation (for there is usually not a particle of truth in the whole thing) a full dressed and highly coloured *fact* is being discussed, with that keen relish, with which people will lick their chops in the most disgusting fashion, over all Christendom. Or there is a political sensation; some far-sighted prattler, who bought his way into Parliament, mentions that "he believes that bill," (he isn't seen what one), but that bill "is going to test the strength of the Government to the utmost." Thereupon some partizan, so blind and prejudiced, that he would tumble into a political abyss as broad and black as Africa, though it stared him point blank in the face, blusters it out to his "friends" in one of their cosy little retreats for rest and recreation from their arduous political labours. Along comes one of those ingenious, painstaking, and ambitious gentlemen called reporters, and after an hour's profound interview he rushes to the telegraph office and forthwith proceeds to unburden his soul, not forgetting to fully make up for any slight deficiencies on the part of the person interviewed. The next morning appears in

ominous head lines the startling intelligence: "Gov't. doomed; rotten political ship fast going to ruin on the rocks of public opinion and honest conviction," and once more the public chuckle and feast. Or this time "she created a sensation." This is misleading, it should be "she is created out of sensation," which would be far nearer the truth. The general import of the sensation however, is that the latest society belle appeared somewhere at a ball in a costume so enormously ridiculous that it eclipsed all previous records, eminent as they have been, and valuable to the country, and the result was, a sensation. The square truth of the matter, eliminating its scientific significance, is this: A sensation is anything ridiculous, and to create one it becomes necessary to do one of two things—either lie, or make a fool of yourself, your conscience, if any is left, take the choice, and the public pay their money.

And what are sensations destined to arrive at if they thus go on, becoming more vitiated and misleading every day. Why this, something worse than common lying, more degrading than making a fool of yourself—since the latter often requires very little extraordinary effort—mere morbid fabrications, whose only aim is to pander to depraved tastes and abnormal appetites, requiring for their concoction not an every day news-reporter, but a second rate blood and thunder novel tramp with a fertile imagination, a penny worth of judgment, and one grain of brain well beaten up and thoroughly mixed. Have sensations already accomplished a work? Yes indeed, you can see it in every reading room and club, by the eager eyes and bent forms of the young especially, as they scan the columns, searching after a morsel of sensation, and if disappointed by the disgust with which they too often turn away declaring that the papers are getting so unbearably dry and monotonous as to be positively unfit to read. Dry because not reeking with the poisonous dampness of scandal! Not worth reading because the froth and scum of a bar-room canard or Wall street story is wanting! You have only to look over the pages of literature as it comes to the homes of millions in the shape of newspapers, magazines and novels, and you see it glaring out on countless columns; occupying the time and thoughts of men, absorbing the attention of the young, striking with its leprous hand into the thoughts and feelings of many who would not own its seductive influence, but who are nevertheless moved by its subtle and dangerous power. It is a narcotic that steals its way along the veins of thought so quietly and yet so surely that its grasp is hardly felt till some day it betrays itself by leaping into the mind in a thousand damaging wishes and vain regrets. It teaches people to believe what they really do not believe, and thus encourages self-deception. It depraves the young, hurts the middle aged, and, alas! is not always rejected by the old who have grown up, slowly gliding down its tepid waters,