

NOVELS, AND NOVEL READERS.

'Tis strange—but true; for truth, is always strange,
Stranger than fiction; if it could be told,
How much would Novels gain by the exchange:
How differently the world—would man behold!
How oft would vice and virtue places change!"

BRON.

This is assuredly a reading, as much as it is a money-seeking age. In no period since the discovery of the printing press, have books been poured forth in such abundance, as at the present. If the wisdom of a period, should be measured by the number of its books, then the present might be considered as the introduction to the millenium. But, we regret to say, this is not the case—and a mere superficial view of society will create the conviction, that if a large portion of our literature was better, though less; if the quality were looked for more than the quantity; and that if three-fifths of our novels were destroyed, and the remainder made the vehicles of practical reforms only; that then, society would be a considerable gainer; that then, authorship would ascend to its proper position, and talent receive a more adequate appreciation.

Let us not be misunderstood. It is not the quantity we object to, but the quality. We do not want to stem the stream, but we would strive to remove its impurities. We detest quack literature, as much as we do quack medicine;—and while we hail with joy every addition to pure thought, we sadly grieve to see so many works alike destitute of originality and common sense, and sometimes of morality, so eagerly bought and sold in the market place. The majority of such works are presented in the garb of fiction, and it is chiefly upon the fictitious writings of the present day, that the following observations will be made.

Our novels may be divided into three classes—the practical, the romantic, and the tragic.* In the first of these will be found the names of Dickens, Thackeray, Douglas Jerrold, Mrs. Ellis, and Frederika Bremer, &c.*

*There is another class of novels, headed by Charles O'Malley and Handy Andy, whose chief characteristic is humorous delineation of character. These we do not intend to advert to.

A want of space will prevent us from making mention of Mrs. Trollope, of Albert Smith, and of Mrs. Gore; of the author of the Bachelor of the Albany, and the authoress of Mary Barton and Jane Eyre, &c.

Although all of these eminent novelists differ in their style and manner, yet the aims of each are alike. The playful satire of Dickens, the caustic thrusts of Jerrold, and the irony of Thackeray; the truthful delineations of Mrs. Ellis, and Frederika Bremer's sweet pictures of domestic life,—all point to human improvement, all strive to benefit society. And basing our argument on the ground that merit is due to a person, in proportion to the benefit he produces, we are thus constrained to place the writers of this class, in the front rank of novelists. It is indeed cheering to perceive, amid much that is bad and superficial, works issuing from their pens, conveying pleasing and useful truths; and it bespeaks for them, minds of pure benevolence, sympathies with the sufferings of sufferers, and proper ideas of those claims which society has upon talent. If men will write novels, let them be directed to some good purpose;—has the human mind reached to such perfection, as not to require either warning or advice? If persons will read novels, let them read those which may be in some measure beneficial;—for is time so valueless, that hours and days can be spent in perusing the bombast, the extravagance, and the disgusting descriptions, which accompany so large a portion of modern fiction? Let the reader, if he must have novels, open the volumes of Dickens, and there sympathise with the sufferings of little Nell, let him contemplate the privations of young Nickleby, and strive to emulate the affectionate and patient disposition of Florence Dombey; let him learn, if he has not already learned, the moral which is conveyed by the cruelty and selfishness of Dombey, senr., and by the cunning and hypocrisy of Pecksniff; let him also reflect upon the lessons which are sought to be taught in all Dickens' productions, and he will rise from the examination with more sympathy for suffering, and with more love for his species. No writer in the present day, pleads for the destitute with so much pathos;