

Literary Notices.

CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD : SALEM CHAPEL; by Mrs. Oliphant. New York : Harper. Toronto : W. C. Chewett & Co.

"Let me write the ballads of a nation," said a clever man, some time ago, "and I don't care who makes the laws." Ballads, however, are out of fashion now, but their place is filled by works of fiction, which in these days are generally written with what is called a "purpose." Sometimes it is to expose the iniquitous working of a poor-law, sometimes to drag to light the atrocities of Yorkshire boarding schools; now it is to extol the virtues of Christmas, and again to expose cant in general, and the cant of society in particular. We may be sure that this new use of works of fiction would not be lost sight of by leaders of religious parties, and accordingly, during the last twenty years, there have been plenty of novels whose particular 'purpose' was to exalt some theological or ecclesiastical notion. The bulk of these have been either High Church and Tractarian, or Roman Catholic; and we remember reading one many years ago, which left a strong impression on the mind, that the marriage of the clergy was a terrible hindrance to usefulness, and that the Church of England was a very humdrum affair, compared with her grand and showy parent, the 'old original' Catholic Church.

"Salem Chapel" first appeared in Blackwood's Magazine, which, as everybody knows, is High Church and High Tory to the backbone. Its conductors have always had the character of being uncommonly wise in their generation, and the appearance of this tale is a notable instance of their sagacity. Last year was the bicentenary of British Nonconformity, and our churches celebrated the event with vast *eclat*. Now to give Dissent a stab under the fifth rib in the very hour of its triumph, and cover it with ridicule while singing pœans of self-glorification, would be a feat worthy of the redoubtable Christopher North himself. The thought was too good to be lost; the thing should be done; and, casting about for an instrument to effect their purpose, the conductors of Blackwood lighted on that versatile and clever writer, Mrs. Oliphant. This lady was then contributing a story called "Chronicles of Carlingford," and as she had been familiar in early life with dissenting circles, nothing could be easier than to turn a rambling tale like the "Chronicles" into the required channel. The result was "Salem Chapel," which, as a means of effecting the desired object, must be pronounced a splendid success.

Its purpose is to make Dissent, and particularly Independency, appear in so odious and contemptible a light, that no man of sense or spirit will think of associating himself with it. Nobody can deny that it is a very clever tale; and every one that understands the workings of the voluntary principle in communities like that of Carlingford, must in spite of himself, admire the wonderful skill with which the light-feathered shafts of ridicule are directed to the loose joints of our harness. Not more surely were the arrows of Locksley directed to the unguarded windows of Front de Beauf's castle (our readers will excuse the reference, as we are reviewing a novel), than are Mrs. Oliphant's innuendoes and delineations against what are, or are supposed to be, those parts of the working of our system which are open to criticism.