

part in the pages assigned to her in the narrative; manifesting interest and attachment to the family with whom her destinies are associated, but evincing whim, and even a species of malevolence, towards other mortals, as the Sacristan and the Border robber, whose incorrect life subjected them to receive petty mortifications at her hand. The White Lady is scarcely supposed, however, to have possessed either the power or the inclination to do more than inflict terror or create embarrassment, and is always subjected by those mortals, who, by virtuous resolution, and mental energy, could assert superiority over her. In these particulars she seems to constitute a being of a middle class, between the *esprit follet* who places its pleasure in misleading and tormenting mortals, and the benevolent Fairy of the East, who uniformly guides, aids, and supports them.

Either, however, the author executed his purpose indifferently, or the public did not approve of it; for the White Lady of Avenel was far from being popular. He does not now make the present statement, in the view of arguing readers into a more favourable opinion on the subject, but merely with the purpose of exculpating himself from the charge of having wantonly intruded into the narrative a being of inconsistent powers and propensities.

In the delineation of another character, the author of the Monastery failed, where he hoped for some success. As nothing is so successful a subject of ridicule as the fashionable follies of the time, it occurred to him that the more serious scenes of his narrative might be relieved by the humour of a cavaliero of the age of Queen Elizabeth. In every period, the attempt to gain and maintain the highest rank of society, has depended on the power of assuming and supporting a certain fashionable kind of affectation, usually connected with some vivacity of talent and energy of character, but distinguished at the same time by a transcendent flight, beyond sound reason and common sense; both faculties too vulgar to be admitted into the estimate of one who claims to be esteemed "a choice spirit of the age." These, in their different phases, con-

stitute the gallants of the day, whose boast it is to drive the whims of fashion to extremity.

On all occasions, the manners of the sovereign, the court, and the time, must give the tone to the peculiar description of qualities by which those who would attain the height of fashion must seek to distinguish themselves. The reign of Elizabeth, being that of a maiden queen, was distinguished by the decorum of the courtiers, and especially the affectation of the deepest deference to the sovereign. After the acknowledgment of the Queen's matchless perfections, the same devotion was extended to beauty as it existed among the lesser stars in her court, who sparkled, as it was the mode to say, by her reflected lustre. It is true, that gallant knights no longer vowed to Heaven, the peacock, and the ladies, to perform some feat of extravagant chivalry, in which they endangered the lives of others as well as their own; but although their chivalrous displays of personal gallantry seldom went further in Elizabeth's days than the tiltyard, where barricades, called barriers, prevented the shock of the horses, and limited the display of the cavaliers' skill to the comparatively safe encounter of their lances, the language of the lovers to their ladies were still in the exalted terms which Amadis would have addressed to Oriana, before encountering a dragon for her sake. This tone of romantic gallantry found a clever but conceited author, to reduce it to a species of constitution and form, and lay down the courtly manner of conversation, in a pedantic book, called *Euphues and his England*. Of this, a brief account is given in the text, to which it may now be proper to make some additions.

The extravagance of Euphuism, or a symbolical jargon of the same class, predominates in the romances of Calprenade and Scuderi, which were read for the amusement of the fair sex of France during the long reign of Louis XIV., and were supposed to contain the only legitimate language of love and gallantry. In this reign they encountered the satire of Molière and Boileau. A simi-

lar disorder, spreading into private society, formed the ground of the affected dialogue of the *Précieuses*, as they were styled, who formed the coterie of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and afforded Molière matter for his admirable comedy, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. In England, the humour does not seem to have long survived the accession of James I.

The Author had the vanity to think that a character, whose peculiarities should turn on extravagances which were once universally fashionable, might be read in a fictitious story with a good chance of affording amusement to the existing generation, who, fond as they are of looking back on the actions and manners of their ancestors, might be also supposed to be sensible of their absurdities. He must fairly acknowledge that he was disappointed, and that the Euphuist, far from being accounted a well drawn and humorous character of the period, was condemned as unnatural and absurd.

It would be easy to account for this failure, by supposing the defect to arise from the author's want of skill, and, probably, many readers may not be inclined to look further. But, as the author himself can scarcely be supposed willing to acquiesce in this final cause, if any other can be alleged, he has been led to suspect, that, contrary to what he originally supposed, his subject was injudiciously chosen, in which, and not in his mode of treating it, lay the source of the want of success.

The manners of a rude people are always founded on nature, and therefore the feelings of a more polished generation immediately sympathize with them. We need no numerous notes, no antiquarian dissertations, to enable the most ignorant to recognise the sentiments and diction of the characters of Homer; we have but, as Lear says, to strip off our lendings—to set aside the factitious principles and adornments which we have received from our comparatively artificial system of society, and our natural feelings are in unison with those of the bard of Chios and the heroes who live in his verses. It is the same with a great part of the narratives of my friend Mr. Cooper.

We sympathize with his Indian chiefs and back-woodsmen, and acknowledge, in the characters which he presents to us, the same truth of human nature by which we should feel ourselves influenced if placed in the same condition. So much is this the case, that though it is difficult, or almost impossible, to reclaim a savage, bred from his youth to war and the chase, to the restraints and the duties of civilized life, nothing is more easy or common, than to find men who have been educated in all the habits and comforts of improved society, willing to exchange them for the wild labours of the hunter and the fisher. The very amusements most pursued and relished by men of all ranks, whose constitutions permit active exercise, are hunting, fishing, and in some instances, war, the natural and necessary business of the savage of Dryden, where his hero talks of being

—“As free as nature first made man,  
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.”

But although the occupations, and even the sentiments, of human beings in a primitive state, find access and interest in the minds of the more civilized part of the species, it does not therefore follow, that the national tastes, opinions, and follies, of one civilized period, should afford either the same interest or the same amusement to those of another. These generally, when driven to extravagance, are founded not upon any natural taste proper to the species, but upon the growth of some peculiar cast of affectation, with which mankind in general, and succeeding generations in particular, feel no common interest or sympathy. The extravagances of coxcomby in manners and apparel are indeed the legitimate, and often the successful objects of satire, during the time when they exist. In evidence of this, theatrical critics may observe how many dramatic *jeux d'esprit* are well received every season, because the satirist levels at some well-known or fashionable absurdity; or, in the dramatic phrase, “shoots folly as it flies.” But when the peculiar kind of folly keeps the wing no longer, it is reckoned but waste of

powder to pour a discharge of ridicule on what has ceased to exist; and the pieces in which such forgotten absurdities are made the subject of ridicule, fall quietly into oblivion with the follies which gave them fashion, or only continue to exist on the scene, because they contain some other permanent interest than that which connects them with manners and follies of a temporary character.

This, perhaps, affords a reason why the comedies of Ben Jonson, founded upon system, or what the age termed humours,—by which was meant factitious and affected characters, superinduced on that which was common to the rest of their race,—in spite of acute satire, deep scholarship, and strong sense, do not now afford general pleasure, but are confined to the closet of the antiquary, whose studies have assured him that the personages of the dramatist were once, though they are now no longer, portraits of existing nature.

Let us take another example of our hypothesis from Shakspeare himself, who, of all authors, drew his portraits for all ages. With the whole sum of the idolatry which affects us at his name, the mass of readers peruse, without amusement, the characters formed on the extravagances of temporary fashion; and the Euphuist Don Armado, the pedant Holofernes, even Nym and Pistol, are read with little pleasure by the mass of the public, being portraits of which we cannot recognise the humour, because the originals no longer exist. In like manner, while the distresses of Romeo and Juliet continue to interest every bosom, Mercutio, drawn as an accurate representation of the finished fine gentleman of the period, and as such received by the unanimous approbation of contemporaries, has so little to interest the present age, that, stripped of all his puns and quirks of verbal wit, he only retains his place in the scene, in virtue of his fine and fanciful speech upon dreaming, which belongs to no particular age, and because he is a personage whose presence is indispensable to the plot.

We have already prosecuted perhaps too far an argument, the tendency of which is to prove, that the intro-

duction of an humorist, acting, like Sir Piercie Shafton, upon some forgotten and obsolete model of folly, once fashionable, is rather likely to awaken the disgust of the reader, as unnatural, than find him food for laughter. Whether owing to this theory, or whether to the more simple and probable cause of the author's failure in the delineation of the subject he had proposed to himself, the formidable objection of *incredulus odi* was applied to the Euphuist, as well as to the White Lady of Avenel; and the one was denounced as unnatural, while the other was rejected as impossible.

There was little in the story to atone for these failures in two principal points. The incidents were inartificially huddled together. There was no part of the intrigue to which deep interest was found to apply; and the conclusion was brought about, not by incidents arising out of the story itself, but in consequence of public transactions, with which the narrative has little connexion, and which the reader had little opportunity to become acquainted with.

This, if not a positive fault, was yet a great defect in the Romance. It is true, that not only the practice of some great authors in this department, but even the general course of human life itself, may be quoted in favour of this more obvious, and less artificial practice, of arranging a narrative. It is seldom that the same circle of personages who have surrounded an individual at his first outset in life, continue to have an interest in his career till his fate comes to a crisis. On the contrary, and more especially if the events of his life be of a varied character, and worth communicating to others, or to the world, the hero's later connexions are usually totally separated from those with whom he began the voyage, but whom the individual has outsailed, or who have drifted astray, or foundered on the passage. This hackneyed comparison holds good in another point. The numerous vessels of so many different sorts, and destined for such different purposes, which are launched in the same mighty ocean.

although each endeavours to pursue its own course, are in every case more influenced by the winds and tides, which are common to the element which they all navigate, than by their own separate exertions. And it is thus in the world, that, when human prudence has done its best, some general, perhaps national event, destroys the schemes of the individual, as the casual touch of a more powerful being sweeps away the web of the spider.

Many excellent romances have been composed in this view of human life, where the hero is conducted through a variety of detached scenes, in which various agents appear and disappear, without, perhaps, having any permanent influence on the progress of the story. Such is the structure of *Gil Blas*, *Roderick Random*, and the lives and adventures of many other heroes, who are described as running through different stations of life, and encountering various adventures, which are only connected with each other by having happened to be witnessed by the same individual, whose identity unites them together, as the string of a necklace links the beads, which are otherwise detached.

But though such an unconnected course of adventures is what most frequently occurs in nature, yet the province of the romance writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality,—just as we demand from the scientific gardener, that he shall arrange, in curious knots and artificial parterres, the flowers which “nature boon” distributes freely on hill and dale. Fielding, accordingly, in most of his novels, but especially in *Tom Jones*, his *chef-d'œuvre*, has set the distinguished example of a story regularly built and consistent in all its parts, in which nothing occurs, and scarce a personage is introduced, that has not some share in tending to advance the catastrophe.

To demand equal correctness and felicity in those who may follow in the track of that illustrious novelist, would be to fetter too much the power of giving pleasure, by surrounding it with penal rules; since of this sort of light literature it may be especially said—*tout genre est permis*,

*hors le genre ennuyeux*. Still, however, the more closely and happily the story is combined, and the more natural and felicitous the catastrophe, the nearer such a composition will approach the perfection of the novelist's art; nor can an author neglect this branch of his profession, without incurring proportional censure.

For such censure the Monastery gave but too much occasion. The intrigue of the Romance, neither very interesting in itself, nor very happily detailed, is at length finally disentangled by the breaking out of national hostilities between England and Scotland, and the as sudden renewal of the truce. Instances of this kind, it is true, cannot in reality have been uncommon, but the resorting to such, in order to accomplish the catastrophe, as by a *tour de force*, was objected to as inartificial, and not perfectly intelligible to the general reader.

Still the Monastery, though exposed to severe and just criticism, did not fail, judging from the extent of its circulation, to have some interest for the public. And this, too, was according to the ordinary course of such matters; for it very seldom happens that literary reputation is gained by a single effort, and still more rarely is it lost by a solitary miscarriage.

The author, therefore, had his days of grace allowed him, and time if he pleased, to comfort himself with the burden of the old Scots song,

“If it isna weel bobbit,  
We'll bob it again.”

ABBOTSFORD, }  
1st November, 1830. }

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**THE MONASTERY**

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