

Memoir of B. D'Israeli, Esq.
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MEMOIR OF B. D'ISRAELI, ESQ.

BY A CORRESPONDENT. (WITH A PORTRAIT.)

MR. B. D'Israeli is the eldest son of the celebrated author of the "Curiosities of Literature," a work which has called more thought out of gratification than almost any that we know. We are not however among those who believe in the influence of circumstance over mind, and are not therefore about to dwell on any probability of the father's pursuits having biassed those of the son. We hold that the writer of "Vivian Grey" would have written anywhere that he could have found pen, ink, and paper; or that if he had been native of an Indian forest, he would, with agitated face, and eloquent arms, and appeals that reach the heart, have riveted the attention of the whole dark circle gathered around the red fire-light of the pine-boughs. What are youths in general at the age when "Vivian Grey" was produced? Nonentities, as regards thought or creation. Pleasure has taught them no moral—sorrow has given no strength—and judgment is an impulse, not an impression. Now the chief characteristic of "Vivian Grey" was insight into motive; it was only the work of a boy in its freshness—a freshness that gave its own excitement to the narrative. The sarcasm was not merely amusing, it was reflective,—the mockery had a purpose, and purpose is that in which the young writer is generally most deficient. Years hence that work will be a literary curiosity,—it will be an interesting subject to investigate by what process a mere boy could look so closely into the springs of action, and paint so true a picture of the shifting sands of society. No young man, with one touch of the eager or ambitious in his career, ever read that work without strong excitement; and the effect it took was what power ever takes,—it made enemies, because it made, envy,—and also because satire, take what shape it will, is always unwelcome. Even while enjoying a laugh at others, people have a little secret fear of the laugh coming home,—their turn may be the next; and we are all cowards at the bottom. Moreover, irony is always misunderstood; and the many would disdain Vivian Grey's velvet slippers, and petted greyhound—to whom his keen sarcasm was a sealed book. There is also an odd feeling about the generality which delights in being ill-used,—complaint has a small temporary consequence, which is just equal to their calibre. When Gay in his exquisite opera said of his caricatures—

"Each cries that was levelled at me,"

he perfectly understood the general feeling. To apply a sneer to ourselves, is a distinction, particularly when there is the right to grumble at it. This was a luxury fully enjoyed on the first appearance of "Vivian Grey." In that work there were one or two characters complete moral investigations;—the Marquis, whose very existence was a ceremony—the Marchioness's, an indolent indulgence—and Cleveland's, one of those secrets which this world can never solve. On the other side of the grave, we may learn why the glorious mind, the noble purpose, the lofty eloquence, are given—and in vain. Here, we know not why the intellectual harvest should spring up—yet no season of reaping ever arrive. "Mrs. Felix Lorraine" was another sketch strange for the conception of youth. Rochefoucauld says truly, *le moindre défaut d'une femme galante est d'être galante*; and here the truth is worked out to its last severity. The succeeding series did, however, the female world full justice. Madeline Trevor is noble as a statue, instinct with spirit;—Violet Fane breathes of her name; but the Arch-

duchess is the creation as new as it is beautiful. The royal slave is brought from her courtly cloister, proud; but what a lovely pride!—ignorant, but only of the actual—with talents that need only the necessity of exertion—and, above all, a heart, feminine in all the poetry and passion of that word.

There is one of those touches in the description of the review, which marks the first-rate conceiver of character. The eye of the daughter of a high-born and martial race flashes at the warlike pageantry. The descendant of Maria Theresa is keenly alive to the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war;" and in truth there is nothing more exciting than a discharge of artillery. The physical effect is wonderful when along the air "leaps the live thunder;"—it brings with it an awe mingled with conscious power, while the spirits are completely carried away by the mighty music.

Another quality of Mr. D'Israeli's mind is his command over the grotesque. Nature has her fantasies that few know how to seize. In the material world, they are shown by strange combinations; rocks, caverns, and trees, are fashioned after the wildest caprices. In the mind of man this wayward fancy is equally evident,—out of it grows the eccentric and the humourist; and a finer sketch of the latter was never flung upon paper than Beckendorf,—the recluse yet powerful minister. After all, it is little marvel that he who has much to do among men, should turn away from them in utter disgust, and find better companionship in the painted tulip and the singing bird.

"Contarini Fleming" was the next, and one of the most remarkable works ever produced. We are not aware of any other attempt in our language to develop the formation of the poetical character—or to trace the effects of "years that bring the inevitable yoke" on that sensitive and impassioned temperament which is inseparable from the poetical. It was written at Grand Cairo, and how much is there in it that bears evidence of the glowing East, with its golden summers—golden as if they did not shine but upon decay and desolation! "The marble wastes of Tadmor" are but an allegory of what a few years inevitably produce in every gifted and ardent mind. Never does it accomplish the object of its early dreams; the lofty arch, the noble column, fall to earth one after the other, and the hopeful spirit is gone that alone could rebuild. The remains of our greatest minds, what are they but wastes?—albeit the wastes are of marble.

Mr. D'Israeli has travelled a great deal, and it is interesting to note the countries in which his various works were produced. The first part of "Vivian Grey" was written in England—the first eager launch of the youth into London society. The second was written in Germany, and there we find the deeper tone that attends on awakening reflection, and the magnificent power of description which is peculiarly Mr. D'Israeli's own. "The Young Duke" was also the result of his leisure—a brilliant collection of epigrams springing up from remembered follies and pleasures. After a brief sojourn in England, Mr. D'Israeli again commenced travelling; he went to the south of Spain, proceeded to the Ionian Isles and Greece at a time of great action; he was at Yanina, the capital of Albania, and in the camp of the Grand Vizier, during the revolt of the Beys; thence he reached Constantinople, and left it to pass through Asia Minor and Syria; he next visited Egypt, and followed the course of the Nile to the Cataracts. The "Tale of Alroy" was planned amid the sepulchres of the kings of Judah, and the

conception breathes of their lofty inspiration. It is a poem full of noble pictures; the vision of the young prince amid the tombs is as grand as the mighty and mysterious temples that yet remain to tell of the glories of architecture, when architecture was the first science of the world. It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. D'Israeli has never published his travels in a collected form. We should like to have a journal; his personal adventures as far as possible—told with his own dramatic power. His impressions fresh from the scenes, together with whatever train of thought such impressions might inspire—add to these his descriptions, which give the colours of the painter with the associations of the poet—and these would form one of the most fascinating works ever produced.

Mr. D'Israeli had expressed an intention of remaining some years in Egypt, when the disturbed state of political affairs in England hastened his return. The tumult of reform had reached even to the Pyramids. At that time the House of Commons was the arena to which every young and ambitious man turned his hopes. It may now be more than doubted whether such excitement is not among "remembered things." But, towards the end of 1832, Mr. D'Israeli stood for the borough of High Wycombe, near which town his family reside. His successful opponent was the Hon. Colonel Grey, younger son of the then Premier. He was again defeated in 1834 by his influential opponent, though each time by trifling majorities. We have heard much of Mr. D'Israeli's eloquence from those who were present during his addresses to the electors. It is fervid, flowing, and eager, with a vein of fiery sarcasm which suited to its impetuous yet penetrating character.

Since that period our author has produced his "Revolutionary Epic," a poem full of noble thoughts, a fine specimen of versification, but certainly too allegorical, and too much apart from the present day. Still, how well can we comprehend its composition! The abstract is such a relief to the actual.

Mr. D'Israeli's last work was "Henrietta Temple,"—one of the most agreeable love-stories ever written. There is nothing which people seem to know so little about as love, and yet it influences all. It matters not what may be the character on which it acts—for that character is utterly changed. Few have ventured to paint love with sufficient simplicity, and in hazarding that truth consists the great charm of "Henrietta Temple." The exquisite personification of the ancients is true. Love is a child. In what does its happiness exist?—in its eager belief,—in its sweet and simple faith in the good and the beautiful,—in narrowing the circle of its hopes, and confiding in their fulfilment. What is love but the childhood of the heart? "Heaven lies around us in our infancy," and the intellect and the affections can alone bring that time back again. It is an error—and worse, a grave fault—among the many writers, to associate love with the darker passions. "From heaven it came, to heaven returneth;" and only where it purifies and elevates, is the spiritual and enduring presence of love truly recognised. In the lighter portions of the work we distinguish the "keen artillery" of "Vivian Grey." The "cabless dandy" is a satire in a sentence. If deep observation, passionate eloquence, dramatic power of character, and the picturesque like a rich colour flashing over all; if these give—what they always give—fame, Mr. D'Israeli's place is already taken among the high and imaginative names of our literature.