1835

Literary Notices: Book Review of Alessandro Manzoni's I Promessi Sposi, or the Betrothed Lovers

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Repository Citation
Tucker, N. Beverley, "Literary Notices: Book Review of Alessandro Manzoni's I Promessi Sposi, or the Betrothed Lovers" (1835). Faculty Publications. 1293.
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Napoleon of the realms of criticism," as to congratulate our readers on the appearance of a work, which promises to be the commencement of a new style in novel writing. Since the days of Fielding, unimitated and imitable—and of Smollett, between whose different productions there was scarce a family likeness, we have had a succession of dynasties reigning over the regions of romance. We have had the Rabelais dynasty, the Edgeworth dynasty, and the Scott dynasty; each, like the family of the Cesaress, passing from good to bad, and from bad to worse, until each has run out. Partial movements in the provinces have occasionally set up the standard of rival aspirants: but these have soon passed away. Heroes from the bogs, and heroes from the highlands of Scotland, or the Polish wilds, could not maintain their pretensions, though uniting in themselves all that is admirable both in the civilized and the savage character. Perhaps this was the reason. We like to read of things that may a little remind us of what we have seen in real life. Sir Charles Grandison in the Scottish Kilt, is a startling apparition. The younger D'Ismaili has indeed, occasionally flashed upon us the light of his capricious genius; but one of his caprices has been to disappoint the hope that he had raised. He has shown us what he could do, and that is all. Mr. Bulwer too, in a sort of freak of literary madness, has set up for himself. He seems to add to the number of those who dress themselves in the cost-of-living habiliments of Scott; and study, as at a guess, to make themselves like him, as if ambitious to display their talents. He learned the craft of plagiarism in the Spartan school, where detection was the only disgrace. He would not steal, not be, from any but "the poor man, who had nothing save one little ewe lamb, that lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." He would imitate none but himself, and draw from no other models. His novels are all echoes of each other. There is hardly a page which might not be known for his, nor a favorite character which is not an exhibition of one of the phases of his exquisite self. The variety is between what he imagines himself to be, and what he imagines that he might have been, had he been a cavalier of the seventeenth century, or had circumstances made him a highwayman or a murderer. We are aware that he denies all this, and may be unconscious of it; but his identity can no more be mistaken than that of the one-eyed companion of Hogarth's "Idle Apprentice." We are aware too, that Mr. Bulwer is a member of a certain literary cabal, who aspire to direct the public taste, and bring all the influences of wealth and fashion and political connection in aid of their pretensions. He is a sort of literary Jack Cade. "His mouth is the law." We know that the "amplification on fun dire" is always the true amplification. But we never expect to travel as enterers for a public journal. We in the south do not do that sort of thing. We are not taught so to "raise the wind." We are not up to perpetual motion, nor to the art of making our living by taking our pleasure. We feel ourselves therefore under no obligation to admire Mr. Rogers's poems, though he be a banker—or Mr. Bulwer's novels, nor himself, though he be a member of Parliament; nor though his female doahre Lady Blessington, "have the finest foot," and "the prettiest foot," and be "the finest woman in London." We do not put the names

LITERARY NOTICES.


The appearance of this work strongly reminds us of the introductory remarks with which the Edinburgh Review, thirty years ago, prefaced its announcement of Waverley. We would gladly appropriate them, were it fair to do so; but "honor among thieves!" Reviewers must not steal from Reviewers; and what is it but theft, when he who borrows, can never have anything worthy of acceptance to give in return?

We may, nevertheless, so far imitate "the grand

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of our fine women in the newspapers. The business of female education with us, is not to qualify a woman to be the head of a literary nester, nor to figure in the journal of a travelling coxcomb. We prepare her, as a wife, to make the home of a good and wise and great man, the happiest place to him on earth. We prepare her, as a mother, to form her son to walk in his father's steps, and in turn, to take his place among the good and wise and great. When we have done this, we have accomplished, if not all, at least the best that education can do. Her praise is found in the happiness of her husband, and in the virtues and honors of her sons. Her name is too sacred to be profaned by public breath. She is only seen by that dim doubtful light, which, like "the majesty of darkness," so much enhances true dignity. She finds her place by the side of the "Mother of the Graces," and of her whom an English poet, who well knew how to appreciate and how to praise female excellences, has simply designated as "SHEPHERD'S SISTER, PUSHEROK'S MOTHER."

We much fear, that after all this, the author of the work before us will have no reason to thank us for our praise. On the contrary, there may be danger of involving him in the displeasure, which we may draw upon ourselves from that same cobbal, which has its members on both sides of the Atlantic. "Ca me; Ca thee," is the order of the day. If half the praise be due, which is lavished on the works that daily issue from the press, we may live to see the writings which instructed and delighted our youth, laid on the same shelf with Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Men can no more read every thing than they can eat every thing; and the petits pois, that are huddled round hot- and-hot, leave us no room to do honor to the roast beef of old England, nor to the savory Virginia lawn. But these are the food by which thethews and sinews of mankind are best nourished. They at once exercise and help digestion. Dyspepsia was not of their day. It came in with French Gastronomy. Are we mistaken in thinking, that we see symptoms of a sort of intellectual dyspepsia, arising from the incessant exhibition of the hot buns and kickshaws of the press?

Well! here is something that will stick by the ribs; a work of which we would try to give a sort of outline, would gladly grace our pages with it. It would probably be read with more interest than anything we can think how to discharge our debts to others; but we never knew precisely what was there. The moral coercion, more cruel than bodily torture, by which a poor girl, the victim of the heartless pride of her parents, without command, without even persuasion, (for both it seems are forbidden) is driven to the cloister, that her brother may have more ample means to uphold his hereditary honors; this was a thing inscrutable and inconceivable to us. In reading such works as Mrs. Sherwood's Nun, we feel that we are dealing with conjectures. We turn to the scene exhibited in this work, and we know it to be real life. We would gladly grace our pages with it. It would probably be read with more interest than anything we can think of, but it is before the public, and we have no right to discharge our debts to our readers, by giving them what is theirs already. We will only pray their indulgence so far as to offer a short extract, as a specimen of the writer's power. It is a picture of some of the horrors of the plague, as it raged in Milan in the year 1628. It may serve to show us that the pestilence, which lately stooped upon us, was in comparison, an angel of mercy.

The ears spoken of in the following extract, are those in which the unconfined bodies of the dead were borne to a common receptacle, "nailed for the most part, some badly wrapped up in dirty rags, heaped upon and folded together like a knot of serpents." The "remains" were men who, having had the plague, were considered exempt from future danger, and were employed to bury the dead.

"A lady came from the threshold of one of the houses, whose aspect announced youth advanced, but not yet passed away. Her beauty was decayed, but
sort of beauty, at once majestic and soft, which is so
conspicuous in the Lombard race. She walked with
pain, but did not stagger; her eyes shed no tears, but
bore marks of having done so abundantly. There
was, in her grief, a something inexpressibly quiet and
deep, betokening a soul imbued and filled with it. But
it was not her own appearance alone, that in the midst
of so much wretchedness, marked her especially for
commiseration, and awakened in her favor a feeling
now deadened and worn out in all hearts. She bore in
her arms a girl about nine years old,—dead, but dresscd
in a white frock of spotless purity, with her hair di­
vided in front, as if her own hands had adorncd her for
a feast, long promised as the reward of her goodness.
She held him, bent over one of her arms, with her breast
upon the Indv's breast, and she might have been
hung heavy and lifeless on one side, like wax-work,
air of abandonment heavier than that of sleep. How
thought to be alive, but that her young white hand
mother!

A course monnli drew near the lady, and silently
offered to relieve her from her burthen, but with an air
of unwonted respect and involuntary hesitancy. But
she, with an action betolcnning neither disgust nor
offered to believe her from her bulk, but with un nil'
plainly.

The monnli placed his hand on his breast, and
tho unexpected gift, he busied himself to make room
for the little corpse. The Indv placed her
brow, spread over her a white sheet, and then spo­rc
again nt vespers, will come and talk mo too, nd not
mo alone.'

This evening we meet again, to part no more. PI'egret to say that tho trans­
lation has lllnllY faul.ts. 1Ve lament it tho more, be­
to give great praise. We regret to say that the trans­
lation has many faults. We lament it the more, be­
to express the untranslatable phrases of popular dialogue, it gives a quaint raciness which is not
acceptable. It does more. Such translations of such
works, would soon make the English ear familiar with
Italian idioms, which once naturalized, would enrich
the language. It is already thus incalculably enriched
by the poetry of Burns and the novels of Scott. A fa­
miliarity with Shakepeare, (which is not the English
of the present day,) preserves a store of wealth which
would else be lost. The strength of a language is in
the number and variety of its idiomatic phrases. These
are forms of speech which use has rendered familiar,
and emancipated from the crippling restraint of regular
grammar. They enable the speaker to be brief, with­
out being obscure. His meaning, eliptically expressed,
is distinctly and precisely understood. Should any
other work of Manzoni fall into the hands of Mr.
Featherstonhaugh, we hope he may have time to cor­
rect those inaccuracies of which he is doubtless sensible;
but we trust he will not consider his popular Italian
idioms as among his faults. Smollett, in his translation
of Don Quixotte, through extreme fastidiousness, threw
away an opportunity of doubling the force of the Eng­
lish language.

This work comes to us as the harbinger of gloal
tings to the reading world. Here is a book, equal in
matter to any two of Cooper's novels, and executed at
least as well, which we receive at the moderate price of
forty-two cents! It forms one number of the Wash­
ington Library, published monthly, at five dollars per
annum. At this rate, a literary gourmand, however
greedy, may hope to satisfy his appetite for books,
without starving his children. The author has our
praise; and the translator and publisher have our thanks.

This is a great fault. In some instances it would be
impractical. In this instance, perhaps, it is more
than compensated by a kindred excellence. In a work
like this, abounding in the untranslatable phrases of
popular dialogue, it gives a quaint raciness which is not
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