

THE  
MESPERIAN STUDENT.

VOL. VIII.

DECEMBER, 1879.

No. 10.

Literary.

THE NOVEL.

THE human mind has ever sought to express the significance of man's life, to know and understand the hidden springs of action, to interpret the play of passion and to unravel the strange web of good and evil that envelops his existence.

Each generation seeks for a voice to express the workings and mysteries of its inner life, and this voice finds utterance through the never-changing humanity beyond which no human wisdom can reach. One age speaks to us in the divine language of the poet, while another comes in the silent voice of a Raphael, or an Angelo. The eighteenth century, with its positive tendencies, with the gradual and steady emergence into freedom and strength, must needs find expression in something that recognized the individuality of mankind, that treated of man in the concrete; so we find idealism giving way to realism, and the novel becomes the interpreter of this new phase of humanity. Its way had been kindly paved by gentle, genial Addison in his philanthropic desire to bring philosophy from heaven to man; but notwithstanding the many fortuitous circumstances that marked its

birth, it was doomed to be misrepresented and misunderstood, and, after the lapse of almost two centuries, there is still a reproach upon this exponent of man's life.

Though the first novel was welcomed by moralists as a friend and ally to virtue and religion, and so recommended from the pulpit, yet time found the moralists and the church bitterly opposing and denouncing what they considered as a corrupter of morals and good taste. In some cases they were justified, for we know, with Tacitus, that the worst is the corruption of the best, and the novel suffered shameful prostitution at one time, even as the Elizabethan drama was degraded in the time of Congreve and Wicherly. But the good in the novel has been preserved intact, and the vast progeny of a *Pamela*, a *Vicar of Wakefield*, an *Ivanhoe*, has multiplied and filled the earth, until to-day in England alone there is a new novel for every day in the year.

Among so many, the law of the survival of the fittest must determine the most worthy, and it is at such a time, when there is a peculiar bent of the national mind and an immense fruitfulness in this direction, that a Hamlet is created, and to-day the novel has its Hamlet in a *Daniel Deronda*.