

GEORGE LIPPARD.

A brilliant meteor, during its brief continuance, attracts more attention than the largest planet. Human Nature, although reared amid the harmony of the spheres, abhors monotony. The ordinary routine of pursuits, like the heaven-sent manna, excites a dissatisfaction which displays itself in the construction of novelties and in the investigation of matters, "not dreamed of in our philosophy." We do not agree with that class of political economists who assert that this is the peculiarity of our age. It is the characteristic of human nature. Heraclitus wept over it; Democritus laughed at it; Juvenal satirized it, and Paul preached against it. The unparalleled success of a certain class of writings must be referred to this weakness of our nature. The erroneous notion alluded to above, has its origin, partly at least, in the fact that we are conversant with a literature which is stamped with the word "ephemeral." The merest novice does not fail to notice its bewitching influence on the reading community, and hence he concludes that our age is preëminently dazzled by the charm of novelty. But could we untomb the thousands of books that, like the short lived butterfly, at one time reflected to an admiring world a few rays of the sunshine of popularity and then died and were forgotten, we could, with equal justice, come to the same conclusion with regard to our ancestors.

The subject of this article is closely identified with a portion of the current literature. Ten years ago the public knew little or nothing of **George Lippard**. He is now before the world as an author, and in common with other public men, is the subject of its smiles and its frowns. He is encircled by a host of admirers, who laud his productions to the skies. His magical pen has entranced them and they regard him as one of "the constellated lamps of learning." There is another class who look upon Lippard as a "brilliant satellite of sin," and would scorn to touch one of his works. There is still another class who form an outer circle, composed of persons who have not enlisted as friends or

enemies; these like Pallas in the battle of the Frogs and Mice, stand aloof and say:

"O ye gods, move not
Nor interfere, favouring either side,
Lest ye be wounded; for both hosts alike
Are valiant, nor would scruple to assail
Even ourselves. Suffice it, therefore, hence
To view the battle, safe, and at our ease."

Public opinion has claims upon our respect. We are not often justifiable in disregarding it entirely. Its dictates are seldom founded on nothing. There must be some "substratum." Now when men differ so widely in regard to one individual we must conclude that true "substrata" exist. In other words there must be cause for praise and blame. Let us enumerate a few of the virtues and vices that cluster around the name, **George Lippard**.

He has the proud consciousness of being able to say that he is a *self-made man*. He was the child of adversity and at an early age was subjected to its cruel fires. It is sometimes necessary for a man to undergo this test in order that he may understand the nature of the materials of which he is composed. The base metal will turn to dross and the pure gold will shine more brightly. The trials through which he passed would have disheartened other men, but he wended his way through gloom and sorrow and has won for himself a name which is exciting the jealousy of weaker minds.

The great popularity of Louis the Fourteenth has been attributed to his knowledge of "King craft." We may with equal justice ascribe a portion of Lippard's popularity to his knowledge of *author craft*. It is owing to a lack of this knowledge that

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Hundreds of authors whose intellectual qualifications were doubtless far superior to those of Mr. L. have had their productions committed to untimely graves, merely because they did not understand the method of captivating the popular ear. The first productions of Lippard arrested the attention of the reading public by reason of their peculiar style. He took advantage of this approval, has closely adhered to the style of his early writings and has thus individualized it as his own. The reader may consult

a thousand authors, he will find some who write better, and some who write worse, but no one who writes *like* Lippard, unless it be one of that class of literary chameleons who are constantly endeavouring to fasten themselves upon the garments of a successful author, and attempt to look and act like him. In reading his works we do not enjoy that feeling which is inspired by the perusal of Lamb or Dickens. The interest which he excites bears a striking analogy to that which a pyrotechnist produces by the display of brilliant designs. He enlists the attention and not the affections. In his descriptions he has aimed rather at the terrible than at the pathetic. His mind resembles the old Moorish Castle of Aikinside; and he who faithfully follows his descriptions will have just such scenes presented as those through which Sir Bertrand passed in exploring that mysterious building.

He possesses a splendid imagination, and in this consists his chief power. If he had confined himself to the descriptions of realities his works would have been endowed with immortality. His writings founded on Revolutionary events, although "abundant dulcibus vitiiis," are his best and they will live when all his other works are dead and forgotten. But his exuberant imagination could not linger on such topics long. Monks, ghosts and demons seemed to be his idols. To these he has devoted hundreds of pages, which have gained a popularity among a certain class of readers. This, however, is founded on the fact that these works pander to the lowest passions of our nature. Their imposing and startling titles are only miserable subterfuges to conceal their poison.

There is much in the writings of this author that is worthy of admiration, and the American public have given evidence of their appreciation of it; but unfortunately he has done violence to his own reputation by sending abroad works which must exert a demoralizing influence. Now we do not wish to charge him with an attempt to imitate, for we believe that nature has placed him above such an humiliating necessity; but we cannot avoid the belief that he has made a man, who has proved himself a curse to mankind, his *idola specûs*. The most inglorious appellation that can attach itself to a man in this land is "the American Sue,"

and yet **George Lippard** apparently exults in this unenviable title, for he suffers it to be heralded abroad in the "Quaker City," a weekly newspaper which he has lately established in Philadelphia. Eugene Sue has had his day. The lover of purity and virtue shudders at the name and trembles for the result of a repetition of experiments here, similar to those practised in France, founded on the principle that human nature must be reformed, by an exhibition of its lowest degradations and by the delineation of its vilest passions. This is a ruinous doctrine. In what estimation would we hold a physician who would order his patient, exhibiting slight symptoms of a contagious disease, to a place where the malady rages in its most malignant forms? Now the situation of an author is not much unlike that of a physician. It is the province of the one to take care of the body; of the other to preserve and expand the powers of the mind. A high authority has pronounced the mind to be diseased. Must we seek a cure by making it familiar with all kinds of crime and corruption, or must we lead it into an atmosphere of innocence and purity?

But the advocates of this principle tell us that they exhibit virtue as well as vice. To this we reply: It is not necessary for us to instil the language of the voluptuous harlot into the ear of the pure and arid spotless virgin in order *to teach her virtue*. We do not believe in that "wonder working alchymy which draineth elixer out of poisons." We would erect a barrier between virtue and vice, and consider it an act of mercy in an author, if he would proclaim the principles and practices of virtue to the vicious—but it is an unhallowed work to reveal the principles and practices of vice to the virtuous.

It is a lamentable truth that of all the writings of Lippard, the work calculated to exert the most corrupting influence has gained the greatest popularity. In this he has most graphically portrayed the vices of city life. He has not hesitated to describe Philadelphia scenes *as they are*. We find no fault with his pictures as to their correctness, but we do object to their exhibition on the plea that they exert a wholesome influence. Let an artist paint just such scenes on canvass and expose them to the public gaze; the laws of the land would soon be enforced against him, and he

would be compelled to exchange his studio for the cell of a penitentiary. *Pen* pictures have a more powerful influence over the mind than *pencil* pictures. The latter are restricted by law, the former are not. The only precaution required in the former is a little drapery, the thinner the better.

Few writers of the present day exhibit as much industry as Lippard. Every one must be surprised on looking over his catalogue of books and other writings when he is told that Mr. Lippard is yet a young man. Five of his works contain two thousand four hundred and forty pages of reading matter. "Paul Ardenheim, the Monk of Wissahikon," is one of his latest, and said to be his best. In writing this work he has evidently been prompted by the sentiment of an old Roman "*Omne ignotum pro mirifico.*" But like many other authors who have been too much enraptured by this phrase, he has signally failed. There is a limit to human patience beyond which it is unsafe for an author to go. The public are willing to let him linger in the regions of fiction, but he must not people it with beings that have not their likeness in Heaven, on the Earth, or under the Earth. There is a charm in fiction, and one of the infirmities of our nature consists in our being dazzled by it. But it is well for us that fiction is charming only so long as it conforms to reason. When it no longer reflects the image of reason, its power over us is gone. Our limits will not allow us to give an extended notice of this work. We will simply enumerate a few of the many impressions received in reading it. 1. It contains some beautiful descriptions. 2. The author has not *created* a single character. 3. The plot is defective. 4. The conduct of the characters is unnatural. 5. The conclusion is unhappy. 6. Whatever be the excellence of Mr. Lippard's other writings, this work has not sufficient merit to entitle him to a seat among the "Magnates" of Literature. Doubtless if he would follow the noble example of the Sibyl, by burning about two-thirds of his books, a grateful public would display as much liberality as did Tarquin, by paying for the remainder a sum equal the *worth* of the whole.