



**THE NOVELS OF BENJAMIN DISRAELI:  
A CRITICAL STUDY**

Thesis

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By

SAKINA A. HASAN

Department of English  
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY,  
ALIGARH

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## INTRODUCTION

In all the annals of literature, there never has been a Prime Minister who began and ended his career by writing novels. This is not the only unique quality about Disraeli. He lived in nineteenth century England (1804-1881) when the government of the country was exclusively monopolised by an aristocracy of birth and riches. By the standards of that age, he possessed neither. He had no roots in the country, and his Jewish origin was the greatest handicap with which he had to contend almost till the end of his career. Yet he managed to break "his birth's invidious bar"<sup>1</sup>, and he rose to fame by sheer genius, will power and good fortune.

There have been innumerable biographical studies of Disraeli, but his literary achievements have inevitably been overshadowed by his political eminence. The two roles are so inextricably intertwined that it is not possible to understand one without relating it to the other. According to Walter Allen, Disraeli had to become a politician before he could become a novelist, while Sir Leslie Stephen is of opinion that the merit of the novels is limited because the writer subordinated his literary to his political career.

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1. Tennyson's "In Memoriam".

There were other contemporaries of Disraeli, who were politicians as well as men of letters, for example, Macaulay and Bulwer Lytton. But their political careers were obviously of secondary importance. So much prestige was attached to politics and administration in this period that even Trollope and Bagehot made unsuccessful attempts to enter the House of Commons. In the case of Disraeli "there is a singular intimacy of relation between the literary phase and the political phase of his work - - - the remarkable blending of the two phases, the shading of one into the other, the sense he imparts that the man of letters is a statesman, and that the statesman never ceases to be a man of letters"<sup>1</sup>. This is something which places Disraeli in a category all by himself.

While presiding over the anniversary of the Royal Literary Fund in 1853, Disraeli said in a speech - - - "literature and politics were like night and morning, each had its alluring charm and dazzling attributes', and he declined to give a decision in favour of either"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli's father had commented in 1836, when informed that his son was writing another novel, "How will the fictionist assort with the politician"?<sup>3</sup>

It should be remembered that the literary world was by no

1. Hugh Walker - The Literature of the Victorian era - p. 653.
2. M & B, Vol. I, p. 1325.
3. ,, ,, p. 342.

means remote from the social and political world in the early nineteenth century. "Literature was more socially honoured in those days than in ours"<sup>1</sup>. There was also a close connection between the social and the political world, which continued throughout Disraeli's life time. Ministries were made and unmade in the dazzling salons of the great society hostesses in London, or amidst the sylvan surroundings of their luxurious country houses. Zenobia, a character in Endymion, modelled on the celebrated Tory hostess, Lady Jersey, remarks in the novel, "Tell me the names of the Radical members who want to turn out the government, and I will invite them directly"<sup>2</sup>. "Lady Palmerston contributed considerably to the size of her husband's majorities in the House of Commons by a judicious distribution of her visiting cards"<sup>3</sup>. Disraeli's talents, temperament and the circumstances of his career, placed him in a better position to tell us about high society and politics than any other novelist of the age.

"Genius is rare, anyhow: the combination of political with literary genius necessarily rarer. - - - Not one man of letters in ten thousand can match Disraeli's close inner acquaintance with his subject"<sup>4</sup>.

Thus it was that he became the father of a new "genre" in literature - the political novel. His novels are "the first essays in our fiction in which politics and public affairs are

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1. T.P.O'Connor - Benjamin Disraeli, p. 33.

2. Endymion, p. 240.

3. Asa Briggs, Victorian People, p. 13.

4. Quiller-Couch - Charles Dickens and other Victorians, p. 197.

made to play an important and dramatic part"<sup>1</sup>.

They offer a brilliant commentary on the politics of the age by an active and important politician who had intimate knowledge and personal experience of political life throughout this period.

"Politics is history in the making"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli's novels are significant because they are a part of English history.

"The real, central theme of history is not what happened, but what people felt about it when it was happening: - - - the conversation of people who counted"<sup>3</sup>. Most of Disraeli's characters are drawn from life and his novels are a veritable portrait gallery of the numerous types that crowded the political and social world of the time. They reveal the inner mysteries of higher political circles, their conversation and the splendours of aristocratic living, when the aristocrats were in the heyday of their glory. Virginia Woolf has expressed a fear in her essay 'The Niece of an Earl', "that the English aristocracy will pass out of existence or be merged with the common people, without leaving any true picture of themselves behind"<sup>4</sup>. In the novels of Disraeli, we come the nearest to this true picture. J.A. Froude wrote that "the students of English history, in time to come, who would know what the nobles of England were like in the days of Queen Victoria, will read Lothair with the same

1. R.C. Church - Growth of the English Novel, p. 114.

2. J.A.R. Marriott - English History in English Fiction, p. vii.

3. G.M. Young - Portrait of an age, p. vi.

4. Virginia Woolf - The Common Reader, 2nd series, p. 217.

interest with which they read Horace and Juvenal"<sup>1</sup>.

The characters in Disraeli's novels belong almost entirely to high society, though in Sybil he does venture to portray the life of the working classes - the peasantry, the factory hands, the artisans, and the Trade Union leaders. This is not surprising, because Disraeli was positively allergic to the rising middle class, with its Utilitarian Creed, and its obsession with the Cult of Progress. He believed in a natural alliance between the aristocracy and the 'people', hence he "took a leap over the middle classes whom he left to the care of Gladstone"<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike some of his other contemporaries, for example, Mrs. Gaskell, Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, Reade, and Kingsley, Disraeli remained curiously impervious to the Victorian spirit. "Disraeli was the only original thinker among them: the other novelists assimilated ideas but tended not to devise new ones"<sup>3</sup>. After 1832 the age which followed is described as the age of the triumph of the middle class and "in the main, the literature of the period is literature about the middle class, for the middle class, by the middle class"<sup>4</sup>. It is also significant that in the two decades following 1848, when the middle class was enjoying an unparalleled prosperity and almost wallowing in optimism and complacency - notwithstanding a few dissident

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1. J.A. Froude - Lord Beacons field, p. 217-218.

2. R.C. Church - Growth of the English Novel, p. 115.

3. P. Cazamian - The Social Novel in England, p. 7.

4. E. Batho Bonamy Dobree - The Victorians and after, p. 22.

voices like those of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Mathew Arnold - Disraeli did not write a single novel. Disraeli stood apart from his contemporaries in yet another aspect. His women characters are very different from the usual Victorian prototypes that we find in the novels of the period. They have minds and wills of their own and are capable of independent thinking.

However, in spite of these discordant notes, the novels of Disraeli have two fundamental archetypal themes - man's search for his own identity, and for meaning in life. In the early novels, Disraeli draws largely upon his own experiences, and is not quite sure whether he will make his career in literature or in politics. When he wrote the political trilogy, he had been a member of Parliament for six years, and his heroes are crusaders after truth. They think about their social rights and responsibilities.

An unusual feature which imparts a peculiar flavour to the novels of Disraeli is their Oriental quality, both in style and content. This was mainly due to his obsession with the Hebrew race to which he belonged.

An attempt has been made in this thesis to study the novels of Disraeli in their personal, social and political aspects and their relevance today. In some ways, the social and political conditions prevailing in England in the 1840's

and 50's have a remarkable similarity to the present situation. Disraeli was very much perturbed by the growth of slums due to rapid industrialisation and the decline of the agricultural interest. Today, environmental pollution as a result of uncontrolled industrial growth has become a subject of widespread concern. There is the same questioning of moral and material values. In Tancred, the hero asks, "Progress to what, and from whence"<sup>1</sup>? In an age which was more typically represented by Macaulay and Tennyson, this scepticism makes Disraeli less dated and more relevant to the modern age. Party politics is as sterile as it was in the 1840's, and Britain's new generation is uneasily in search of a role, like the Young England group in Coningsby.

The novels are very decidedly autobiographical, in the sense that they give expression in diverse ways to Disraeli's innermost feeling, his dreams and aspirations, failures and his philosophy of life. They also reflect the social conditions and the political history of the nineteenth century. They may be regarded as historical documents providing ample material for a reconstruction of the social and political life of the Victorian age upto 1870.

The first chapter deals with the socio-economic and political background of the novels. "Without a study of his

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1. Tancred, p. 233.

books, it is impossible to understand his life", wrote Monypenny - - - - we can transpose Monypenny and say: without a study of his life, it is impossible to understand his books"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore the outstanding facts and the formative influences of his life are discussed in the next chapter. For a critical appraisal, the novels have been divided into four categories.

- (a) The Introspective Novels
- (b) The Novels of High Society and the Shorter Tales
- (c) The Political Trilogy
- (d) The Later Novels

There are only passing references to Disraeli's vast correspondence, his political writings and speeches, his poem, "The Revolutionary Epick", and a tragedy, Alarcos, as these fall outside the scope of this thesis.

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1. Paul Bloomfield - Disraeli, p. 5.

## CHAPTER - I

### (a) The Socio-Economic Scene

England witnessed a vast social transformation in the first half of the 19th century. The age was one of transition from a semi-mediaeval agricultural society to a democratic and semi-urban industrial society.

Upto 1815 the vast majority of Englishmen worked on the land or in trades connected with agriculture, but within the next fifteen years there was a tremendous shift in the population and the country became almost exactly half-agricultural and half-industrial. Cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds became more than double their size in population.

The industrial heart of the country was beginning to throb, first in the great cotton mills of Lancashire and then in her coal mines and blast furnaces.

As a result of this industrial development, a new middle class came into being, guided by self interest, materialism and the pursuit of profit. It pinned its faith on Ricardo, Bentham and Mill and their utilitarian philosophy. Their doctrine of 'Laissez faire' served very well the interests of the traders and manufacturers but unwittingly discouraged the improvement of the lot of the working classes.

A whole generation acquired an arithmetical outlook due to their preoccupation with profits and accounts, a class of people admirably satirised by Dickens in his portrayal of Thomas Gradgrind - "a man of facts and calculations - - - with a rule and a pair of scales and the multiplication tables always in his pocket, Sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to"<sup>1</sup>.

Between 1830 and 1850 there was a nation-wide reaction against individualism, "laissez faire", and the Utilitarian philosophy. Cazamian calls it the idealist and interventionist reaction<sup>2</sup>. Interventionism as opposed to "Laissez faire" demanded positive action from the State to improve social conditions. It found eloquent expression in the writings of Carlyle, the Oxford Movement, the Young England group in Parliament, in the novels of Dickens and Disraeli, and in the works of several other contemporary writers. Faced with the horrors of the Industrial Revolution and believing that the price paid for mechanisation and industrial progress was too high, some thinkers went back for inspiration to the Middle Ages and longed for a return to feudal life. The Eglinton tournament of 1839, in which all the pageantry of the Middle Ages was revived, was a product of this reaction. It is vividly described in Endymion.

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1. Dickens - Hard Times, p. 2.

2. The Social Novel in England.

The leaders of the Oxford Movement were Newman, Keble and Pusey. They wanted to revive the ancient ceremonies of the Church and to bring back dignity and colour into its services. They attached great weight to the Church as an institution of God and wanted to lead the people to old times and old paths, and ended up by leading Newman to Rome. Disraeli and his Young England followers were very much in sympathy with this movement in spite of its Roman Catholic overtones (Cf. Coningsby, 1844) but by the time he wrote Lothair (1870) his views towards Roman Catholicism had undergone considerable change.

The age also witnessed the rise of a new irresponsible and profit-making class of landed gentry which had drawn its wealth from trade and finance. These were the 'Nabobs' of the East India Company, the bankers and manufacturers whom William Cobbett had decried in "Rural Rides". This class frequently figures in the novels of Disraeli.

The old and the new gentry were wealthy, happy and engrossed in the life of their pleasant and beautiful country houses, hunting, shooting, eating and drinking. They spent "the season" in London, which had become the centre of fashion and gay living during the Regency. They met at the famous London clubs, Brooks or Crockfords to talk, eat and smoke. Some would gamble also and run into heavy debts, which was an accepted feature of the dandy. It was the age of the dandies, with their foppish costumes and extravagant habits.

"In manners and style, the 1830's constitute a period of extravagance, affectation, frivolity, and artifice"<sup>1</sup>, reminiscent of the 'naughty nineties' rather than the sedate Victorian era of the mid-nineteenth century. It was as a dandy that Disraeli first became known in fashionable London circles. The dandy of the day was Alfred, Count D'Orsay, whom Disraeli met in the salon of Lady Blessington. He has been immortalised in Henrietta Temple as Count Alcibiades de Mirabel. Lady Blessington also wrote society novels, a popular form of fiction at this time. Disraeli's early novels also belonged to this "Silver-fork" school. According to Bulwer Lytton, "the novels of fashionable life illustrated feelings very deeply rooted and productive of no common revolution. Few writers ever produced so great an effect on the political spirit of their generation as those novelists, who, without any other merit, unconsciously exposed the falsehood, the hypocrisy, the arrogant and vulgar insolence of patrician life"<sup>2</sup>.

In spite of their wealth and gay living, the upper classes lived in mortal fear of mob-violence and suffered from a sense of insecurity. Memories of the French revolution were still fresh in the minds of the people.

The American and the French Revolution had set in motion a whole tide of new forces and radical ideas in politics, which gradually seeped into English life and began to express themselves

1. Robert Blake - Disraeli, p. 77.

2. Quoted from Bulwer Lytton's England and the English by W.L. Burn, The Age of Equipoise, p. 60.

openly once the threat of Napoleon had vanished and peace was finally established after Waterloo.

There was widespread economic distress in the years that followed. The poorer classes, both in the urban and rural areas, were ill housed, ill-paid and seethed with discontent. There were bread riots in the big cities, accompanied by machine smashing, while in the rural areas there was rick-burning and looting of food stocks. The Government authorities retaliated by savage repression, but there was a persistent and growing demand for parliamentary reform as the only cure for the nation's ills. The evils were basically economic and social, but the people had been convinced that they were political, and hence the demand for reform. Besides, the rising new middle class was also clamouring for reform because it wanted to share political power with the landed aristocracy, which had monopolised it so far.

The Reform Bill of 1832 ushered in the middle class into the halls of power, but the condition of the working class continued to deteriorate. Competition from big manufacturers ruined the weavers and their cottage industry. Their plight was tragic. "Among all the hordes in the poorest areas of the great cities the handloom weavers fought the most desperate battle against starvation"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli has painted a grim picture of the handloom weaver in Sybil. The factory worker and the agricultural labourer:

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1. Cazamian - The Social Novel in England, p. 64.

fared no better. Poverty, drink and crime steadily increased and reached their peak by 1842.

The new Poor Law of 1834 engendered great bitterness. It was a characteristic Benthamite measure, passed with more regard for order, and consistency than for human feelings. Whatever may have been the laudable motives behind it, the result was that poverty came to be regarded as a crime. It was bitterly criticised in the Tory press, while Dickens ridiculed it in Oliver Twist. A series of bad harvests in 1837 and 1838 further aggravated the situation and the people became thoroughly disillusioned with the Reform Bill and with the ruling party.

Carlyle put the disquieting but suggestive phrase, "the Condition-of-England Question" into general use, when he published Chartism in 1839. In Past and Present (1843), he wrote, "The Condition-of-England Question on which many pamphlets are now in the course of publication, and many thoughts unpublished are going on in every reflective head, is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest, ever seen in this world. England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition".

It was a time of riots, bloody strikes, and violent clashes between capital and labour. Poverty and industrial

troubles reached an unbearable pitch and revolution seemed imminent. Disraeli in Sybil introduced the famous phrase, "two nations" - the rich and the poor. The two nations stood face to face and it looked as though nothing could prevent their collision.

Sidonia says in Coningsby, "I am inclined to believe that the social system of England is in infinitely greater danger than that of France"<sup>1</sup>.

Dickens, writing to Layard, while at work on Little Dorrit, described the mood of the English poor as "extremely like the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution, and is in danger of being turned - - - into such a devil of a conflagration as never has been beheld since"<sup>2</sup>.

There was a sudden awareness at this time of the grim social situation, largely as a result of the publication of various official Reports.

In May 1842, came the Report of the Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in the Mines. "The nation was appalled by the moral outrages which had been concealed in the darkness of the mines"<sup>3</sup>.

In 1846, Engels published The Condition of the Working Class in England, "the most terrible indictment of society in

1. Coningsby, p. 318.

2. John Lucas (Ed.) - Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century, p. 94.

3. Cazamian - The Social Novel in England, p. 101.

our history, and to read which even today, a century later, is to experience the deepest feelings of shame and horror"<sup>1</sup>. This picture is fully substantiated by Chadwick's Report of the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns.

However, it was largely through the novels of this period that the public became aware of the deplorable state of affairs in the "hungry forties".

"Literature is much more revealing than economic data for the understanding of the attitudes of contemporaries to the social gulfs of the 1840's. These gulfs were beginning to fascinate novelists in a decade when society novels were giving way to novels about society"<sup>2</sup>.

A large number of propaganda novels appeared to open the eyes of the rich to the sufferings of the poor, for example, Sybil, Yeast, Alton Locke, Mary Barton, along with the novels of Dickens, which carried this propaganda into practically every literate home. The novel was in the process of becoming the dominant form - - - and it was the form of expression most suited to the age"<sup>3</sup>.

Two extra parliamentary pressure groups emerged from the economic crisis of 1838-39. The desire of the working class for social justice assumed the form of the Chartist movement which began to rally the factory workers and the farm labourers to

1. R.J. Evans - The Victorian Age, p. 73.

2. Asa Briggs - The Age of Improvement, p. 298.

3. Kathleen Tillotson - Novels of the 1840's, p. 13.

demand its famous six points for the reform of Parliament. In the words of the Morning Chronicle, it was "the cry of millions suffering under a diseased condition of society"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli was very much in sympathy with the Chartists - (cf. Sybil) but not with their demands.

The other was the Anti-Corn Law League, which was essentially a middle class movement, directed against the landed aristocracy. Its leaders were Cobden and Bright and it generated much bitterness. While the cotton Kings pressed for the repeal of the Corn Laws to procure cheap bread, so that they could lower the wages of the factory worker, a section of the aristocracy out of sheer vengeance supported Lord Ashley for the Factory Acts and the 10-hour bill, to prevent the exploitation of labour in industry. Disraeli also supported Lord Ashley in his campaign for improving the lot of the factory worker because he firmly believed in an alliance between the aristocracy and the working class to overthrow the Whigs and he expressed this view in Coningsby and Sybil. The idea of an alliance between the aristocracy and the working class was not so very strange at the time. In the election of 1841, the Chartists and some of the Radicals preferred the Tories to the Whigs, although during the struggle for the Reform Bill, the working and the middle classes had combined against the aristocracy. But once the middle class

1. Asa Briggs - The Age of Improvement, p. 304.

was installed in power, it fell out with the working class, since their interests clashed. Such were the social cleavages of the age. Henry Mayhew, in London Labour and the London Poor, published in 1851, had remarked that there was a very close resemblance between many of the characteristics of a very high class, socially, and a very low class, for example, card playing and drinking. Their moral code was based on the sanctity of the instincts of the blood. Thus a fight was regarded as a good thing. The upper classes fought duels and there are many instances of duels being fought between high personages, like Canning and Castlereagh, Duke of Wellington and Lord Winchelsea. Disraeli himself had been challenged by O'Connell to a duel, but narrowly escaped fighting it. Around 1840, middle class opinion set its face against duelling and officers were legally forbidden to duel after 1844.

The coming of the railways was a great social and economic event of this period. During the early 30's, the railways aroused distrust and suspicion among the landed aristocracy. The iron lines running through woodlands and parklands frightened away the deer. In Endymion, Zenobia "still mourned over the concession of the Manchester and Liverpool Railway (1830) in a moment of Liberal infatuation, but flattered herself that any extension of the railway system might certainly be arrested, and

on this head the majority of society, perhaps even of the country, was certainly on her side"<sup>1</sup>.

The great Railway mania began in 1843. By this time everyone had become most enthusiastic. George Hudson, the railway king, was a lion of London society. "The House of Commons did nothing but pass railway Bills, measures which were welcomed with unanimity by the House of Lords whose estates were in consequence daily increasing in value"<sup>2</sup>. And then came the financial crash. Hudson was ruined and fled to the Continent, while the share holders lost over 80 million pounds. However, in spite of all this, the construction of a wide network of railway helped to stabilise the economy by making possible a widening of markets and lowering of transport costs, apart from breaking down the social barriers.

A great intellectual event of the century was Darwin's theory of Evolution. Robert Chambers' Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation appeared in 1844, Tennyson translated the book into verse in "In Memoriam", and Disraeli was "enchanted with it", but his attitude changed when he realised that it would result in dethroning the spiritual. He ridiculed the book in Tancred (1847). In 1864, Disraeli made the famous "Ape or angel" speech in the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, in which he again sided

1. Endymion, p. 23.

2. Ibid., p. 355.

with the Anti-evolutionists. In Lothair he attacked the claim of science to a monopoly of the truth, but the Church had by now decided to come to terms with Evolution, which had become almost a national creed, and some Churchmen even began to support Darwin. Disraeli, who saw life constantly in terms of a fervid and romantic imagination, persisted in his views. "When he declared himself on the side of the angels, one is tempted to believe that it was chiefly because angels are more romantic beings than monkeys, and hence to him much more credible factors in any philosophy seeking to explain the universe"<sup>1</sup>.

(b) The Political Scene.

The power and prestige of the monarchy had suffered a great set-back after the loss of the American Colonies and it continued to decline during the Regency and the reigns of George IV and William IV. When Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, there was a wave of enthusiasm among the people "The nasty old men, debauched and selfish, pig-headed and ridiculous with their perpetual burden of debts, confusions and disreputabilities they had vanished like the snows of winter, and here at last, crowned and radiant, was the spring"<sup>2</sup>. But the young Queen was only seventeen and it would be a long time before the shadowy

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1. E. Forbes-Boyd, 'Disraeli, The Novelist' Essays and Studies (1950), p. 101.

2. Lytton Strachey - Queen Victoria, p. 42-43.

ideas concerning the power and prestige of the monarchy, set forth by Disraeli in Coningsby, could reach fulfilment.

"A free monarchy, established on fundamental laws, itself the apex of a vast pile of municipal and local Govt. ruling an educated people, represented by a free and intellectual press"<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, for the first three decades of the nineteenth century, it was an aristocracy of birth, riches and leisure that ruled the country and controlled power in both the Lords and the Commons. It was Pitt who gave the first blow to the privileged aristocracy of birth when he "created a plebeian aristocracy and blended it with patrician oligarchy"<sup>2</sup>. He packed the Upper House with newly created peers drawn mainly from the minor gentry, the mercantile and the professional classes. The first desire, however, of a newly enriched Englishman was to possess a landed estate to acquire the stamp of gentry, with the result that the House of Lords still remained a compact body, representing the "landed interest". In the Cabinet, the majority consisted of members from the House of Lords, and the Prime Minister often sat in the Upper House.

In the House of Commons also, there was just a very mild sprinkling of the rising business, commercial and manufacturing interests. It was uncommon for many seats to be contested but the trend was gradually changing. The electoral system on which

1. Coningsby, p. 375.

2. Sybil, p. 22.

Parliament rested was thoroughly antiquated and had become more out of date by the movement and growth of population. However, the eighteenth century theory still held ground both among the Whigs and Tories that it was property and not people that ought to be represented in Parliament.

Only a small group of Radicals propagated the view that men should have votes as citizens, and not as owners of a specified quantity of landed property. But the Radicals were associated with the Jacobins - the French revolutionaries, and at this time even the mildly liberal Whigs were described as "men who would have made us the slaves of Bonaparte"<sup>1</sup>.

With the Ultras (the followers of the Duke of Wellington) at one end and the Radicals on the other, the dividing line in the 30's and 40's between the Whigs and the Tories was rather imperceptible. Canning, Peel, Huskisson and Robinson, although belonging to the Tory Party, were associated with mild economic and social reforms. Lord Melbourne, a Whig by birth and association, but "by temperament an aristocrat, by conviction a conservative"<sup>2</sup>, was quite out of place in an age of rapid change. Although there was deep division of opinion and widespread social distress, the shades of English politics were subtle and gentle and merged easily into one another. A passage from Disraeli's novel "The Young Duke, which he pruned from the later editions, admirably

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1. Endymion, p. 6.

2. Lytton Strachey - Queen Victoria, p. 51.

sums up the general attitude of the upper classes towards political parties . "Am I a Whig or a Tory? I forget - - - and yet - I feel like Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy. I think I will be a Whig and Tory alternate nights, and then both will be pleased":

The Reform Bill, after much struggle, was ultimately passed in 1832, and it ushered the Whigs and the middle class into the corridors of power. The Tories referred to it as the Revolution. Disraeli was away in Egypt when the Bill was passed, and he wrote in a letter to Austen in the spirit of an old Tory.

"The times are damnable. I take the gloomiest view of affairs, but we must not lose our property without a struggle"<sup>1</sup>. "Among those people who did not look forward with eagerness to the new age of reform was William Wordsworth, who remarked that if the Bill passed he would retire to a 'safe and conservative Government like Austria'. He had no reason to be so despondent. Conservatism was not crushed in 1832"<sup>2</sup> - - As a matter of fact, the country was sick of the Whigs within the next seven years.

"There is nothing more remarkable in political history than the sudden break-up of the Whig party after their successful revolution of 1832"<sup>3</sup>. Sir Robert Peel was asked to form the ministry in 1839, but he failed to do so because of the Bed-

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1. M & B, Vol. I, p. 207.

2. Asa Briggs - The Age of Improvement, p. 261.

3. Endymion, p. 52.

Chamber crisis, and the Whigs, under Lord Melbourne, returned to power for another two years. A Conservative ministry was formed by Peel in 1841, and Disraeli expected an invitation to join it, but he was sorely disappointed.

"Small incidents have far-reaching effects in history, for example, Louis XVI wasted two hours dining with a relation and hence did not get across the frontier. Sir Robert Peel little thought that his refusal in 1841 to find a place for one whom he deemed a minor and highly eccentric young politician, would exercise a decisive influence not only on his own career, but also on the future of the Conservative party and therefore on the domestic history of England"<sup>1</sup>. From henceforth, Disraeli became "the Peel - Smasher", though outwardly he remained loyal to his chief, until the great split came in 1846 over the issue of the Corn Laws.

In August 1845, the potato disease appeared in Ireland, and that over-populated island was faced with a catastrophe. By October, it was clear that the Irish peasantry would have to be fed on wheat, but the English harvest had failed and Peel decided that the Corn Laws would have to go. There was a hopeless split in the Tory party over this issue. The Duke of Wellington is said to have remarked, "Rotten potatoes have done it all, they put Peel in his damned fright". The Protectionists were led by

1. Earl of Cromer - Political and Literary Essays (2nd series), p. 64..

Lord George Bentinck, but the brain behind them was Disraeli. When the Bill was introduced in Parliament he attacked Peel with the most bitter and wounding invective. Disraeli was anxious to preserve the agricultural interest, but the Manchester school believed that England could prosper without any agriculture at all, provided it became 'the workshop of the world'. According to Disraeli, the repeal of the Corn Laws was the first decisive step in that policy of sacrificing the rural life of England to a one-sided and exaggerated industrial development. The battle over the Corn Laws was one of the greatest of nineteenth century political struggles, and generated much bitterness between the agriculturists and the manufacturers.

Peel was successful in repealing the Corn Laws with the help of the Whigs, but he was defeated some months later by a combination of the Whigs and the Protectionists, led by Lord Bentinck. After the death of Lord Bentinck in 1848, Disraeli assumed the formal leadership of the party.

The perennial topic of Protection was overshadowed in the autumn of 1850 by what was known as the Papal aggression.

"At the end of the autumn, his Holiness the Pope had made half a dozen new cardinals and there appeared among them the name of an Englishman - - - Shortly after this, a Papal bull - - - was issued, establishing a Romish hierarchy in England"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Endymion, p. 450.

It was an age of violent sectarian animosities and public meetings were held all over the country, condemning the action of the Pope. Although Disraeli did not share the alarm and indignation of the people in general, he was impressed by the agitation and convinced of the essential Protestantism of the British character, and he no longer felt as sympathetic towards Roman Catholicism as he had felt when he wrote Coningsby (1844). Lothair, which was published in 1870, paints a very different picture of the Roman Catholic Church and its cunning and devious methods of conversion.

After Tancred (1847), Disraeli did not write any more novels for the next twenty three years. He was too deeply and actively involved in politics throughout this period. When he did publish Lothair in 1870, he observed some reticence with regard to the leading figures in the political arena and the immediate subjects of political dissension. He drew a picture of aristocratic society and of the ideas animating it, together with the currents of thought and action which were moulding the history of Europe. The political intrigues of the Catholic Church, Secret Societies, the struggle for Italian unification, the terrorist activities of the Fenians and the bitter controversy raised by the theories of Evolution, provide the setting for this novel, instead of contemporary Parliamentary affairs.

His last novel, Endymion (1880) is an evocation of the past, a panoramic view of English political history from 1827 to 1855. The unfinished novel Falconet, shows that he meant to deal with the politics of the sixties and the seventies. Its hero is unmistakably modelled after Gladstone, but Disraeli was able to write only nine chapters before he died.

Although Disraeli expressed so much admiration for the institution of monarchy in his political novels, it is a curious fact that there is no mention anywhere of Prince Albert and very casual references to the Queen. The reasons are obvious. The Queen had not approved of Disraeli's conduct towards Peel during the Corn Law crisis, while the Prince detested him and is reported to have said that Disraeli "had not one single element of the gentleman in his composition"<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, there is not even a passing reference to the Great Exhibition of 1851, the crowning achievement of the Prince, and a mighty symbol of the Utilitarian, commercial, middle-class age, a temple of Free Trade, whereas a whole chapter was devoted to the Eglinton Tournament of 1839 in Endymion.

Apart from these omissions, one gets a fairly comprehensive view of the social and political background of the age from the novels of Disraeli. It should also be remembered that Disraeli's debut in Parliament coincided with a period when the ordinary

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1. Quoted from The Life Clarendon, by L. Strachey, Queen Victoria, p, 197.

British public took far greater interest in Parliamentary procedures than it does today. There were no film or T.V. stars, football champions, tennis players, and disc jockeys to distract attention and people followed the debates in Parliament with rapt attention. The only possible rivals were the weekly sermons in church and the turf. When Disraeli wrote about the inner scenes of parliamentary life from first-hand knowledge, it naturally aroused curiosity and accounted for the popularity of his political novels.

## CHAPTER - II

### The outstanding facts and major formative influences of Disraeli's life.

Benjamin Disraeli's father, Isaac D'Israeli was of Italian Sephardi Jewish origin. His influence on the son was profound and Disraeli has portrayed him in two of his novels, Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming. He was an intellectual after the eighteenth century pattern, with literary tastes, and on friendly terms with many of the literary personalities of the time such as Scott, Byron, Southey and Samuel Rogers. He was the author of several publications, and his "Essay on the Literary Character" was specially praised by Byron. Thus from his very childhood, Disraeli was familiar with the name of Byron, for whom he developed a most passionate admiration. Byron's works and his personality exercised a powerful influence in shaping Disraeli's mind and attitudes, especially in the 30's. "Byron was the symbol of adventure, liberation, romance and mystery. His extraordinary combination of literary genius, worldly cynicism, theatrical melancholy, aristocratic disdain and political liberalism, together with the rumour not only of a multitude of sexual triumphs but also of what used to be called 'nameless' vices, had made him even in his lifetime the

object of perennial fascination which he has remained ever since"<sup>1</sup>  
Disraeli paid his final homage to Byron by writing Venetia in  
1836.

At the age of six, Disraeli was sent to school at Islington  
It was here that he first became conscious of being a Jew, and  
different from the other boys, because he had to stand along with  
another Jewish boy at the back of the Hall during prayers.

In 1817, when he was about twelve years old, his father  
was advised by a friend to get his children baptised. This was  
a crucial decision, since it enabled Disraeli to contest for  
Parliament. As a Jew he would not have taken the oath of  
allegiance until 1858. After he became a Christian, he was sent  
to another school in Epping Forest which was meant for the sons  
of prosperous but unaristocratic parents. Probably Eton would  
not have welcomed a recently converted Jew. He studied Latin  
and Greek but his knowledge of the classics was regarded as  
deficient, though he did acquire some mastery over Latin. He  
read Lucian with relish and his influence is manifest in the  
two short tales, Ixion in Heaven and the Infernal Marriage.

His desire to lead, to assert his power and to influence  
others, led him to organise theatrical performances in the school.  
This was against the rules. The school monitor complained, there  
was a fight and Disraeli, though smaller and less strong, came

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 51.

out victorious. However, the headmaster requested his father to take away his son from the school. The school experiences that Disraeli has ascribed to his heroes, especially Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, are to a large extent drawn from Disraeli's own childhood memories. "Like both his heroes, we may surmise, he was daring and impetuous, some times perhaps mutinous and pugnacious, keenly sensitive and warmly affectionate, a leader when he chose to lead, but somewhat isolated, and much given to reverie and castle building"<sup>1</sup>.

He spent the next few years in his father's library, reading voraciously, but did not go to Oxford or Cambridge. In the Preface to the HUGHENDEN edition of his novels in 1870, Disraeli wrote:

"Born in a library and trained from early childhood by learned men who did not share the passions and the prejudices of our political and social life, I had imbibed on some subjects conclusion different from those which generally prevail, and especially with reference to the history of our country". He is referring here to the Utilitarian philosophy and the Whig interpretation of history which were the accepted orthodoxy of the day. He was also not interested in contemporary literature. His favourite reading consisted of the classics of Latin and Italian Renaissance and English literature of the eighteenth century.

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1. M & B, Vol. I, p. 24-25.

A note in Sir Stafford Northcote's Diary dated July 11, 1880, throws an interesting light on Disraeli's literary tastes:

"After dinner we chiefly talked books; the Chief is always at his best in his library, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy a good ramble over literature. He was contemptuous over Browning (of whom, however, he had read very little) and the other poetasters of the day, none of whom he thought would live except Tennyson, who he said was a poet though not of a high order - - - - He was very laudatory of Theocritus. He used to be fond of Sophocles, and to carry him about, but did not much care for Aeschylus. Euripides had a good deal of fun in him. Lucian was a great favourite - - - - - He was very fond of Quintilian - - - Horace, of course, he delighted in, and Virgil grew on one"<sup>1</sup>; - - -

It was perhaps the absence of a University education that made Disraeli deficient in scientific understanding. Hence the famous 'Ape and Angel' speech in the Sheldonian Theatre in 1860 and his general opposition to Darwin and his theory of Evolution.

His father persuaded him to become an apprentice to a firm of solicitors. He remained there for a while, but soon gave up the attempt. The story is told that "he was found reading Chaucer during business hours in the solicitor's office

1. Quoted in M & B, Vol. II, p. 1455.

and his business partners concluded that nature had not intended him to be a lawyer"<sup>1</sup>, and that he should be allowed to devote himself to literature. Soon after in 1826, he published his first novel, Vivian Grey. The book created a storm, and Disraeli acquired a reputation for cynicism, double-dealing and insincerity which dogged him for the rest of his life.

In 1828, Disraeli published a novelette, 'Popanilla', a satire on contemporary society. He had also been seriously ill, suffering from some kind of nervous affliction, which the doctors were unable to diagnose properly. He has referred to this ailment in Contarini Fleming.

In 1830, he went on a grand tour of the Mediterranean countries and the Middle East. This journey was one of the formative experiences of his life and was directly responsible for shaping many of his later attitudes on critical issues of foreign and imperial policy, for example, the purchase of the Suez Canal shares in 1875, his consistent support of Turkey, and his admiration for the Turks. He was "enraptured with the Turks, took to wearing a turban, smoked a pipe six feet long, and spent his days outstretched on the divan"<sup>2</sup>. He would go about with his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his gaudy waistcoat, prefacing each remark with a drawling "Allah-o-Akbar" (God is great) to remind every one of his Oriental experiences.

1. M & B, Vol. I, p. 44.

2. A. Maurois, Disraeli, p. 48.

His intoxication with the glamour of the East is manifest in many of his novels also. The oriental atmosphere of Contarini Fleming, Alroy, Tancred and Lothair was the direct outcome of this tour. The finest picturesque and romantic descriptions in these novels were also the recollection of these wanderings and musings. "His mystical belief in the mysterious heritage of his race, his romantic love of high-sounding historic names, his exotic imagination, all were heightened by the week which he passed in Jerusalem"<sup>1</sup>.

By 1832, Disraeli had launched himself in London society as a dandy. He shone in feminine society and became popular because of his novels, his good looks, his exotic style of dress and amusing conversation. "He dressed with extravagant refinement, a coat of black velvet, ruffles, and black silk stockings, with red clocks"<sup>2</sup>. In the summer of 1833, he became involved in an illicit love-affair with Henrietta, the wife of Sir Francis Sykes. He has immortalised his emotions and feelings in Henrietta Temple which he published in 1837. He met the influential Lord Lyndhurst a former Tory Lord Chancellor, at Henrietta's and "feminine machinery was set into motion to get him into Parliament"<sup>3</sup>. Throughout his life, as in the case of so many of his heroes, it was women who helped and encouraged him in all

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 67.

2. A. Maurois, Disraeli, p. 28.

3. B.R. Jarman, The Young Disraeli, p. 233.

the crucial moments of his career. An uneasy relationship with his mother led to a craving for a mother-substitute. At first, it was his sister, Sarah, who gave him all the love and understanding that he so desperately needed. After the death of her fiance in 1831, she decided to devote her life entirely to her brother. In two of his novels Alroy and Endymion, Disraeli has painted the picture of a very devoted sister. Henrietta Sykes, his mistress, used to sign herself as 'your mother' in her love-letters. Disraeli's wife, Mary Anne, was twelve years older than him. She was a widow with a modest fortune and a house in London. He married her in 1838. It was whispered that Disraeli married her for money because during this period of his life he was perpetually in debt and harrassed by creditors. However, he was singularly happy in his married life. Mary Anne gave him all the love, devotion and idolatory that he craved for, and Disraeli dedicated Sybil to "one whose sweet voice has often encouraged, and whose taste and judgement have ever guided, its pages; the most severe of critics but - a perfect wife!"

Another devoted friend was Mrs. Brydges Williams, whom he met in 1851. She behaved like a fairy god-mother and bequeathed all her property to him when she died in 1863. There were other women also whose sympathetic appreciation had cheered and sustained him in the course of his early life, such as Mrs. Benjamin Austen, who copied out the manuscript of Vivian Grey in order to maintain the secrecy of the author, Mrs. Norton, Lady Blessington and Lady Londonderry.

After the death of his wife in 1872, Disraeli lavished his affection on Lady Bradford who was fifty-five, and her sister, Lady Chesterfield, who was seventy-one. He wrote eleven hundred letters to Lady Bradford between 1873 and 1881. "Disraeli's love of Lady Bradford, although essentially romantic, was wholly of the heart and sensibility, and devoid of passion"<sup>1</sup>. And strangest of all and in a sense the most important of these friendships was that with the Queen. He called her 'The Faery', and "she expanded to the rays of Disraeli's devotion like a flower in the sun"<sup>2</sup>. His success in the political arena was to a great extent due to the fact that a woman occupied the throne of England. "He made use of this susceptible woman as he could not have used a man, to boost his imperial policies, but no King-Emperor could have fired his oriental imagination like a Queen-Empress"<sup>3</sup>.

Disraeli's political career began in 1832. He fought five elections between 1832 and 1837 and was successful only in the fifth attempt. Apart from fighting elections, Disraeli also continued with his literary activities during this period. Alroy, though begun earlier, was published in 1833. Venetia and Henrietta Temple came out in 1836 and 1837. He also contributed some short stories to Lady Blessington's 'Book of Beauty'.

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1. Sir George Stapledon, Disraeli and the New Age, p. 152.
  2. L. Strachey, Queen Victoria, p. 211.
  3. E. Longford, Victoria R.I., p. 401.

There was one significant piece of political writing, A Vindication of the British Constitution (1837). It is worthy of notice because it had a literary outcome some seven years later. The political Trilogy is a fictional recast and a dramatic presentation of the political ideas contained in this essay. Two light satires, Ixion in Heaven and The Infernal Marriage were written between 1832 and 1834.

It was characteristic of Disraeli that all his successes in life were founded on previous failures. Peel's refusal to offer him a place in the Cabinet in 1841 was responsible for the formation of the Young England group and, with the publication of Coningsby (1844), for the birth of the political novel in England. "By a glorious fluke, Peel gave this chance, and Disraeli took it"<sup>1</sup>. Sybil and Tancred followed in 1845 and 1847, and then there were no more novels for the next twenty three years. He wrote a remarkable political biography, Lord George Bentinck in 1851, and he contributed regularly to a political journal called the Press between 1853 and 1855; but after this he became immersed in political activity until 1870, when he again enjoyed some leisure and produced Lothair.

One quality in Disraeli stands above everything else - an obsessive, irrepressible desire to succeed, the determination to reach the top. He had written in a letter to Sharon Turner,

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1. A. Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and other Victorians, p. 197.

a family friend, in 1828. "I am one of those to whom moderate reputation can give no pleasure - - - the scorn for a 'moderate reputation' is the quintessence of Disraeli, indeed the key to his character and career"<sup>1</sup>. He first tried to acquire wealth and power by speculating in shares of mining companies of South America, but failed and found himself heavily in debt at the age of twenty. He then thought that he would acquire fame as a writer. He entertained high hopes when he published Contarini Fleming (1832) which he regarded as his masterpiece, but it was not well received. He wrote an epic poem on the subject of the French Revolution "The Revolutionary Epick" (1834) and imagined that he would rival Byron, if not Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton but the poem was a failure. He then tried his hand at tragedy and set to work on Alarcos. In a letter to Mrs. Wyndham Lewis he wrote, "I have lost all heart for my tragedy. I always aim in all I do at the highest. I see no use in writing tragedies unless they be as fine as Shakespeare's"<sup>2</sup>. He did try to imitate Shakespeare, but he failed to get it accepted for production on the stage. There is the story of the famous encounter with Melbourne at Mrs. Norton's in 1834. Melbourne met Disraeli for the first time and casually, asked him: 'Well now, tell me what do you want to be!' 'I want to be Prime Minister', replied Disraeli. Melbourne was somewhat taken aback by this answer but he coolly tried to put the young man in his place. 'No

1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 54.

2. M & B, Vol. I, p. 439.

chance of that in our time. It is all arranged and settled - - - Nobody can compete with Stanley - - - But you must put all these foolish notions out of your head; they won't do at all. Stanley will be the next Prime Minister, you will see'<sup>1</sup>.

However, soon after getting elected into Parliament, Disraeli began to establish a reputation in the political field through sheer brilliance. He had courage and originality, unbounded cleverness, and that most dangerous though effective weapon - the power of sarcasm. The potato famine in Ireland compelled Sir Robert Peel to repeal the Corn Laws in 1846, leading to his resignation and to a split in the ranks of the Tories. Disraeli became the leader of the Opposition and his career in Parliament became a quick succession of honours after 1847. He bade farewell to fiction for almost 25 years and was plunged in active politics. He became the leader of the Protectionist party in the House of Commons, and in the next four years, he reconstructed the Conservative party with infinite tact and patience. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1852 and again in 1858 and 1866. The Reform Bill of 1867 was one of his greatest triumphs. At last in 1868, he became the Prime Minister of England in spite of Lord Melbourne's gloomy warning. He had climbed to the "top of the greasy pole"<sup>2</sup>. His industry, talent and surpassing ability had been ultimately recognised by the

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1. Quoted from W.M. Torrens, Memoirs of Viscount Melbourne by R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 114.

2. Fraser, Disraeli and His Day, p. 52.

country at large, though he continued to face the bitterest opposition from his enemies both on personal and political grounds. Shaftesbury made this comment when he learnt that Disraeli had become Premier: "Disraeli, Prime Minister! He is a Hebrew; this is a good thing. He is a man sprung from an inferior station, another good thing in these days, as showing the liberality of our institutions, but he is a leper, without principle, without feeling, without regard to anything, human or Divine, beyond his personal ambition"<sup>1</sup>. Gladstone disliked him intensely, while Disraeli referred to him as 'A.V.' (arch-Villain) in his letters to Lady Bradford. But the Queen had become one of his most ardent supporters and admirers.

In the General Election of 1874, the Tory party was returned with an overwhelming majority, and it was all due to the skill with which Disraeli had laboured to organise it. "He returned to office no longer the dubious commander of an insufficient host, but with drums beating and flags flying, a conquering hero, and as a conquering hero, Victoria welcomed her new Prime Minister"<sup>2</sup>. During his period in Office Disraeli's government undertook several measures of social reform. Thus some of the aspirations of Sybil and Young England were translated into legislative action. Gorst expounding Disraeli's policy, wrote: "The principle of Tory Democracy is that all government exists

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1. Quoted from G.W.E. Russell, Prime Ministers and Some Others by E.J. Feuchtwanger, Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party, p. 22.

2. Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria, p. 207.

solely for the good of the governed: that Church and King, Lords and Commons and all other public institutions are to be maintained so far only as they promote the welfare and happiness of the common people"<sup>1</sup>. In 1876, he was elevated to the House of Lords with the title of the Earl of Beaconsfield, and he continued to lead the Conservative party with his usual brilliance and ability.

His success was indeed phenomenal, considering the impediments that he had to face at every stage of his career. Like so many of his heroes, it was a triumph of the will. Yet Disraeli always remained an outsider because of his Jewish origin. He also held rather unorthodox and startling views on the subject of race, which he elaborated in his novels, specially in Coningsby and Tancred. "All is race, there is no other truth"<sup>2</sup>, says Sidonia. Disraeli put forward the theory that the Semitic race is superior to all other races and Christianity is completed Judaism. He evolved a creed which was acceptable neither to the orthodox Jews nor the orthodox Christians but he believed in it with all sincerity. It suited him to blur as far as possible the differences between the Jewish and Christian faiths because he wanted to vindicate his own Jewish descent, and to proclaim that the Hebrews instead of being treated with contempt, ought to be specially favoured. He expressed his belief in race on other

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1. Letter to The Times quoted by M and B, Vol. II, p. 709.

2. Tancred, p. 153.

occasions also. In an incident in China, in which Canton had been bombarded by the British, Palmerston had justified it and said, "An insolent barbarian wielding authority at Canton, had violated the British flag"<sup>1</sup>. But Disraeli thought that China had a very ancient civilisation and the British should deal with it in a courteous manner and not treat the Chinese as barbarians. Similarly, during the Indian Mutiny in 1857, Disraeli insisted that it was a national revolt. He refused to join in the cries for vengeance on the mutineers and believed that most of the details of horrors were manufactured. To the Englishman, "the slaughter or rape of white women by black men was not merely savagery but sacrilege"<sup>2</sup>. But Disraeli's reactions were very different. He made a particular study of India and her problems. "To one persuaded of the vital importance of race, this land of ancient races made a special appeal"<sup>3</sup>. In a letter to Lord Salisbury (Dec. 13, 1875), Disraeli wrote, "Nothing is more disgusting than the habit of our officers speaking always of the inhabitants of India - many of them descended from the great races - as 'niggers'. It is ignorant and brutal - and surely most mischievous. We ought to do something"<sup>4</sup>.

Disraeli's interest in religion was more political than personal. He believed in the union between the Church and the State, but unlike Gladstone and Peel he was not a stalwart

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 1474.

2. Raymond - The Alien Patriot, p. 208.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 1484.

4. M and B, Vol. II, p. 772.

churchman. The Church held a fascination for him as a grand historical tradition and as a bulwark against the growing materialism of the age. Upto the 40's he was sympathetic towards the Oxford Movement and the Roman Catholics. In several of his novels, the leading characters are Roman Catholics. Their pageantry and their mysticism appealed to his romantic nature, but his views underwent a change when they began to develop Romeward tendencies. In Tancred he had intended to enlighten the church upon its "duties - - - as a main remedial agency in our present state", but this purpose seems to have fizzled out, and instead, he concentrated upon the close connection between Christianity and Judaism. The Papal aggression of 1850 convinced Disraeli of the essential Protestantism of the British character and alienated his sympathies with the Roman Catholics. Endymion and Lothair illustrate these feelings at great length. In spite of his deep concern for the sufferings of the poor Disraeli did not display any interest in the Evangelical Movement. The aristocratic families in his novels also do not have any Evangelical leanings, though Disraeli supported Lord Shaftesbury's factory legislation and his philanthropic activities and Shaftesbury was very sympathetic towards the Evangelicals. The most likely reason could be Disraeli's antipathy towards the middle class, for the strength of the Evangelical Party in the Victorian Age lay in the well-to-do middle classes. In his

unfinished novel Falconet, there is an obvious touch of satire in the description of an Evangelical household, supposed to have been modelled after Gladstone's family.

As a staunch Christian, Gladstone reacted very strongly to the Bulgarian atrocities, while Disraeli remained somewhat skeptical about them, and continued to support Turkey. "The more Turcophobe Gladstone became, the more Russophobe was Disraeli"<sup>1</sup>. The Queen further complicated the situation, by displaying openly her partiality for Disraeli and her dislike for his rival, Gladstone. It was not only in their attitude towards religion that Disraeli and Gladstone differed from one another. During Disraeli's last term of office, their relations were characterised by a bitterness and animosity, rarely exhibited so openly in public life, and the antagonism was even more pronounced amongst their respective supporters.

In Endymion, Disraeli had covered the political background upto 1855, while Lothair is set between the years 1866 and 1868. He started yet another novel Falconet, of which he had written only nine chapters when he died in 1881. The hero of this novel was modelled after Gladstone, and Disraeli would have given us another brilliant political novel which would have taken us right up to the eighties.

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 607.

His death in April 1881, was deeply mourned by the nation. The Queen sent a wreath of primroses, with the inscription, "His favourite flower", and in subsequent years, a Conservative League was founded with the title of the Primrose League. Glowing tributes were paid to him, even by his enemies. He was compared to Chatham and to Dr. Johnson.

"Unlike as Disraeli was in most respects to the great Tory of a hundred years before him, Dr. Johnson, he resembled him in being a unique figure of extraordinary - - - and perennial human interest; one of those men about whose personality and performance the curiosity of the world remains ever active"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. M & B, Vol. II, p. 340.

## CHAPTER - III

### The Introspective Novels

In the fragmentary diary which Disraeli kept between 1833 and 1836, he wrote: "My works are the embodiment of my feelings. In Vivian Grey I have portrayed my active and real ambition. In Alroy my ideal ambition. The P.R. [Psychological Romance, the alternative title of Contarini Fleming] is a development of my poetic character. This Trilogy is the secret history of my feelings - I shall write no more about myself"<sup>1</sup>.

Although Popanilla and The Young Duke were published before Alroy and Contarini Fleming, their discussion has been taken up along with Vivian Grey for thematic convenience.

### Vivian Grey

Philip Guedalla, in the preface to the Bradenham edition of Vivian Grey, says that the motive for writing Vivian Grey was not wholly literary. Disraeli had incurred a debt of £150, which he owed to the publishers of three pamphlets he had written on American Mining Companies. He then persuaded John Murray to

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1. Quoted in M & B, Vol. I, p. 185-186.

publish a daily paper "The Representative" to support Mr. Canning, and undertook a journey to Scotland to persuade Lockhart to become the editor. A few weeks of hectic activity followed, engaging reporters and appointing foreign correspondents, but the paper resulted in heavy financial losses to Mr. Murray and ceased publication after six months. Thus Disraeli found himself out of work and in debt. He was very young and possessed resilience and energy, hence he thought he might yet acquire fame and some much needed cash by the use of his pen. "What else remained for him but to write a novel. So he transferred the theme of the still-born paper into the key of politics - - - became the cool and cynical Vivian, portrayed his learned father, the city magnates, and the world of 1825 and produced a novel in four books. Such novels of real life were modish"<sup>1</sup> - - -

In 1825, Robert Plumer Ward published a novel Tremaine anonymously. This was the model on which Disraeli based Vivian Grey. Tremaine was perhaps the first 'society novel' to be published in England and it inspired not only Disraeli, but also Bulwer Lytton and Theodore Hook, Mrs. Gore and a host of other minor novelists. It set a tone, which dominated English novel writing for the next twenty years. It was called the 'Silver fork' fiction. The characters were drawn from high society and the purpose was to describe correctly the world of

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1. P. Guedalla - Preface to the Bradenham Ed., p. vii.

wealth and fashion, its clothes, mansions, furniture and its conversation. Such novels were popular both among the nouveau riche and the old aristocracy.

The publisher who cashed in on this fashion was Henry Colburn, a clever businessman and an adept in the art of 'puffery'. He would publish a book anonymously, hint that the author moved in the highest circles of society, suggest a 'key' for the characters, and then, if convenient, let the name of the author leak out at a later stage, after the novel had been successfully launched. This technique made Tremaine the novel of the year. It was natural that, when Disraeli decided to try his luck at literature, he should write a 'silver-fork' novel modelled on Tremaine.

Benjamin Austen, a solicitor, who had acted as Plumer Ward's agent in getting Tremaine published by Colburn, was also a family friend of Disraeli. His wife, Sarah, a clever and attractive woman was so enamoured with Vivian Grey, that she offered to copy the manuscript in her own handwriting, so as to maintain strict secrecy about its authorship. Even Colburn did not know the name of the author, but he accepted the novel for publication. Through his influence, many organs of literary opinion, daily journals, weekly and monthly periodicals began to hint about the approaching appearance of a new society novel by an author who, for obvious reasons, desired to remain

anonymous, and in whose pages all the leading people of the day were to appear under thin disguise. The book was to be extremely satirical and was to contain "portraits of living characters, sufficient to constitute a National Gallery"<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, after all this advance publicity, when Vivian Grey appeared in April 1826 its success was already assured. Long reviews of the book were published in many of the leading newspapers and periodicals; readers began to identify the originals of the characters and speculation began to unveil the anonymity of the writer. The book became the talk of London society, and won for Disraeli "a celebrity and notoriety in a measure that few secure when they have barely crossed the threshold of manhood"<sup>2</sup>.

Early in May, Plumer Ward wrote to Mrs. Austen - "All are talking of Vivian Grey. Its wit, raciness and boldness are admired; and you would have been not ill-pleased with the remarks upon particular passages and characters - the dinner at Chateau Désir particularly, Mrs. Million, all the women, the two toadies, and universally Stapylton. From the Nugent's account it is much spreading in London, excites curiosity and also resentment - - - It certainly frightens a great many people who expect to be shown up; you must really be careful of discovering the author"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 86.

2. Ibid., p. 83.

3 .From Memoir of Plumer Ward quoted by Blake, Disraeli, p. 40.

However, the secret of the author's identity leaked out. Jerdan, the editor of the Literary Gazette knew Murray well, and also the story of "The Representative". He guessed that the author was a literary man and not a man of fashion. He observed that "the class of the author is a little betrayed by his frequent recurrence to topics about which the mere man of fashion knows nothing and cares less"<sup>1</sup>.

Once the secret was out, the fury of the reviewers knew no bounds. Christopher North in Blackwood's Magazine denounced "the shameful and shameless puffery by which the sale of the book had been secured and dismissed it as a paltry catchpenny by an obscure person for whom nobody cares a straw"<sup>2</sup>. The Monthly Magazine wrote of the author, "we shall probably never have to mention his name again - - - he is evidently incapable of anything better and his only chance of escaping perpetual burlesque is to content himself with 'wearing his violet-coloured slippers', 'slobbering his Italian greyhound', and sinking suddenly and finally into total oblivion"<sup>3</sup>.

Most of the critics dwelt on "his most ludicrous affectation of good breeding"<sup>4</sup>, and this was particularly mortifying for a highly ambitious young man like Disraeli. This aspect of Vivian Grey can only be appreciated by readers of the 1826

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 87.

2. Ibid., p. 87.

3. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 41.

4. Ibid., p. 41.

edition. The revised edition was published in 1853. By then Disraeli was well established in high society, and he cut out most of the solecisms when he revised the novel.

"Reviewers in those days were not the urbane and courteous figures which they have become today. Their lives were conducted in a whirlwind of splenetic fury and ceaseless vendettas"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli was so deeply hurt by this slashing criticism that he gave expression to his feelings five years later in Contarini Fleming. "With what horror, with what blank despair, with what supreme, appalling astonishment, did I find myself for the first time in my life, a subject of the most reckless, the most malignant, and the most adroit ridicule. I was sacrificed, I was scalped - - - The criticism fell from my hand. A film floated over my vision; my knees trembled. I felt that sickness of heart, that we experience in our first scrape. I was ridiculous. It was time to die"<sup>2</sup>.

Despite its severe criticism by the press, Vivian Grey survived. "There was indeed, little art in my creation", says Contarini of an early composition, but "there was much vitality"<sup>3</sup>, and the description exactly fits the first part of Vivian Grey.

Vivian Grey is a precocious youth, of intelligence, charm and ambition, who thinks he can achieve success by his wits and audacity. He gains great influence over the Marquess of Carabas,

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 41.

2. Contarini Fleming, p. 182.

3. Ibid., p. 145.

a vain and ambitious nobleman whom he meets at his father's table. Vivian plays upon his vanity and fascinates him by his impudent charm. He is invited to the Marquess' country house where he meets a faction of discontented peers and M.P's and he attempts to organise a political party. He undertakes a journey to Wales to persuade Cleveland, a young and promising politician to become the leader of the party in the House of Commons. His scheme is foiled by the machinations of Mrs. Lorraine. Vivian is challenged by Cleveland to a duel in which Cleveland is killed, and Vivian flees to Germany in a mood of bitter remorse and frustration.

Thus ends the story in Book IV (Part I) of the novel. The success of the first part induced Disraeli to write a sequel, which he completed in the autumn of 1826, and for which Colburn paid him £500 in advance. Most of it deals with the travels of Vivian through different countries in Europe and his adventures in love and in politics. Scenes and characters, from a Grand Duke to a conjuror, crowd upon one another while Vivian "becomes little more than a peg upon which to hang description and adventure"<sup>1</sup>. The life at Reisenburg has been cleverly painted, and the character of Beckendorf is interesting. The sparkling and audacious hero of the first part becomes tame and lifeless. "Alas! my father, you know not what I feel. The springiness of my mind has gone,"<sup>2</sup> says Vivian at the end of part one of the novel. He becomes a Byronic exile, making a luxury of his sorrows which he considers incurable.

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1. Muriel Masfield, Peacocks and Primroses, p. 44.

2. Vivian Grey, p. 172.

In the earlier chapters, Disraeli wrote from a genuine artistic impulse, and the live and powerful character of the hero gives a certain coherence to the story. In the second part, there are whole chapters of irrelevant conversations, descriptions, melodramatic scenes and lengthy digressions. The story drags on until it is brought to an abrupt end. The conclusion of the book is quite sudden. Vivian is left abandoned when his horse falls dead under him in a fierce storm. One gets the impression that the author had become tired of the story and just wished to end it.

Vivian Grey is not a great novel from the artistic point of view. It is in reality a political satire and in effect "the first political novel in the language"<sup>1</sup>. In the scenes at Chateau Désir, the magnificent country house of the Marquess of Carabas, Vivian Grey sets out to organise a new political party, consisting of the aristocratic friends of the Marquess. "He developed the new political principles, demonstrated the mistake under the baneful influence of which they had so long suffered, promised them place, and power and patronage and personal consideration, if they would only act on the principles which he recommended, in the most flowing language and the most melodious voice in which the glories of ambition were ever yet chaunted"<sup>2</sup>. The party was to be based on self-interest but in the name of

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1. Holbrook Jackson, Great English Novelists, p. 197.

2. Vivian Grey, p. 91.

"the common good, and - - - for the success of the common cause"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli is satirising the Tories of the old school. The aristocrats are presented as self-indulgent, extravagant and idle, thinking only of wealth, rank and fashion, with little sense of their feudal responsibilities. They intrigue for power without the necessary ability. There is a hit at party politics when Cleveland tells Vivian: "There is no act of treachery or meanness of which a political party is not capable; for in politics there is no honour"<sup>2</sup>.

There is a very satirical chapter on the different varieties of Toadeys, and the very names of the characters denote their types. There is Mrs Million, before whom "gartered peers and starred ambassadors, and baronets with blood older than the creation - - - all retreated"<sup>3</sup>. There is Partenopex Puff, "a small author and smaller wit"<sup>4</sup>, who is a writer of slashing articles, and a host of others, for example, Liberal Snake, the celebrated political economist, Dr. Sly, Mrs. Million's physician, Mr. Boreall, Miss Graves, Mr. Stapylton Toad, and Foaming Fudge.

Apart from these satirical sketches Disraeli has attempted to portray the character of an ideal statesman in Beckendorff, the Prime Minister of Reisenburg. He is the forerunner of

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1. Vivian Grey, p. 92.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Sidonia, Winter and Paraclete, who are all philosophers and full of practical wisdom. Beckendorff gives expression to the idea underlying Disraeli's life, that the really strong man and unique individual is the man who controls his destiny. "A man's fate is his own temper - - - Man is not the creature of circumstances. Circumstances are the creatures of men. We are free agents and man is more powerful than matter"<sup>1</sup>.

When Vivian Grey was first published, it was regarded as a gallery of portraits from living originals and elaborate keys appeared to identify the characters. Lord Past Century was supposed to be Lord Eldon, Lord Alhambra was Byron, Foaming Fudge was Lord Brougham, Hoax was Theodore Hook and Mrs. Felix Lorraine was Lady Caroline Lamb, the Marquess of Carabas was John Murray and Cleveland was Lockhart. However, it was all conjecture and in a letter to William Jerdan, Disraeli clarified the whole position. "Let it be taken for granted that the characters are purely ideal, and the whole affair is settled - - - Possibly in some instances, I may have very accurately depicted existing characters. But Vivian Grey is not given to the public as a gallery of portraits, nor have I any wish that it should be considered as such"<sup>2</sup>. Most of the characters are merely conventional types, specially because of the fact that Disraeli's knowledge of the world of politics and high society was very

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1. Vivian Grey, p. 393.

2. Quoted by M and B, Vol. I, p. 96.

slight when he wrote this novel.

The real interest of the novel lies in its biographical value and the light it throws on the developing mind and character of the author. There is a considerable similarity in the events and incidents in the life of Vivian and Disraeli in the early chapters. Horace Grey, the father of Vivian is modelled on Isaac D'Israeli. Like Vivian, Disraeli left school at an early age, and continued his studies in his father's library and was greatly influenced by the father. Their school experiences have many similarities. Both were conspicuously well-dressed, and both organised theatrical performances in violation of school regulations. Neither of them went up for a University education, but they were extremely ambitious and longed to enter Parliament and become successful politicians through the sheer force of their wit. Disraeli's mission to Lockhart, to secure his services as editor of a newspaper, supplied many touches for Vivian's mission to Cleveland. It was quite natural that Disraeli should draw freely from his life's experiences because "Few people at 21 can be expected to write anything but an autobiography - - - there can be no doubt that Vivian with his recklessness, lack of scruple, devouring ambition and impudent effrontery is a self-portrait"<sup>1</sup>.

The friends of Disraeli have tried to explain and apologise, while his enemies have exultantly pointed to the moral obliquity

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 37-38.

of the hero, and the consequences of ambition uncontrolled by moral principles. Lucien Wolf in his edition of Vivian Grey has argued that the story is not an anticipation, but a retrospect, a confession and a warning, while O'Connor sees a strong likeness between Disraeli and his hero. He writes, "Vivian Grey is probably the worst expression ever printed of selfish and cynical precocity"<sup>1</sup>.

Disraeli can be quoted in support of either theory. After reading Vivian Grey, one feels that the author's sympathies are with the hero. There are no signs of moral reprobation. Moreover, in his diary, Disraeli wrote, "In Vivian Grey I have portrayed my active and real ambition"<sup>2</sup>. But in the advertisement to the edition of Vivian Grey published in 1853, Disraeli wrote:

"Books written by boys, (1825-26), which pretend to give a picture of manners, and to deal in knowledge of human nature, must necessarily be founded on affectation. - - - Nor is it necessary to remark that a total want of art must be observed in their pages - - - such productions should be exempt from criticism and should be looked upon as a kind of literary lusus"<sup>3</sup>.

Although Disraeli tried to explain away his first novel as a 'juvenile indiscretion', he could never live it down. "It seemed to possess the same inextinguishable vitality as its hero"<sup>4</sup>. Fifty years later it was used by his enemies to point

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1. T.P. O'Connor, Benjamin Disraeli, p. 62.

2. Quoted by R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 38.

3. Advertisement to the 1853 edition of Vivian Grey.

4. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 49.

out deficiencies in Disraeli's political beliefs and in his moral character. Yet, it continued to be read and enjoyed, and its vitality and vigour makes it enjoyable reading even today. An entry in Gladstone's diary for March 20, 1874, says, "Finished Vivian Grey. The first quarter extremely clever, the rest trash"<sup>1</sup>.

Goethe was one of the warmest admirers of Vivian Grey. He spoke enthusiastically about it, as "being after Scott, the first of his English favourites"<sup>2</sup>.

### Alroy

This novel was published in March 1833, though Disraeli had started on the manuscript as early as 1829. The period of the novel is the 12th century when the Caliphate was in a state of rapid decay and the empire of West Asia was divided among the Seljuks. The real David Alroy was a Jewish imposter, whom Disraeli turned into a second Judas Maccabaeus and a martyr for his faith. After his tour of the Middle East, Disraeli was deeply fascinated by Jerusalem, the past glory of Israel, and the distinctive character of the race from which he had sprung.

The historical background of the novel is briefly sketched by Disraeli in the preface. The Princes of Captivity exercised a shadowy authority over the Hebrew people, while acknowledging

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1. Morley, Life of Gladstone, Vol. II, p. 79 .

2. M and B, Vol. I, p. 180.

the supremacy of the Muslim conquerors. When the Caliphate became weak the power of the Hebrew princes increased. In the 12th century, the Prince of Captivity was David Alroy. The scene opens in Hamadan. The first chapter describes sentiments similar to those expressed by Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming. The Prince of Captivity is very conscious of great mental and spiritual powers within himself. He broods, frets and fumes over his helpless situation: "Oh! my heart is full of care, and my soul is dark with sorrow! What am I? What is all this? - - - I know not what I feel, yet what I feel is madness - - - Lord of Hosts, let me conquer or die!"<sup>1</sup> His sister, Miriam comes to charm the dark spirit away. He tells her, "Thou art the charm and consolation of my life".

Alroy conceives the idea of winning back the independence of Israel and restoring her departed glory. He slays a Seljuk Chief, Alschiroch, who had attempted to carry away his sister, Miriam. He flees from his home to escape the wrath of the rulers, reaches a cavern where he meets the Cabalist priest, Jabaster. The priest tells Alroy that he must gain the sceptre of Soloman before he can free his people from slavery.

After many sufferings and adventures, a miraculous journey brings Alroy to the great cavern of Genthema. He beholds the city of Jerusalem and finds himself in the presence

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1. Alroy, p. 8.

of his great ancestor, king Solomon, in the mighty Temple. "Fifty steps of ivory, and each step guarded by golden lions, led to a throne of jasper. A dazzling light blazed forth from the glittering diadem and radiant countenance of him who sat upon the throne, one beautiful as a woman, but with the majesty of a god. And in one hand he held a seal, and in the other a sceptre"<sup>1</sup>.

Having received the sceptre from the hands of the great ancestor himself, amidst dazzling scenes of magnificence and grandeur, he feels assured of his mission and raising the standard of revolt, he sweeps through West Asia on a tide of victory and conquest. He now becomes over-confident and forgets Jabaster's lofty aims. He makes Baghdad the centre of his kingdom, and allows himself to be ensnared by Schirene, the daughter of the Caliph.

Jabaster tries to warn Alroy - "The lure that ensnared thy fathers, may trap thee, this Delilah may shear thy mystic locks"<sup>2</sup>. He requests him to leave Baghdad and march to Judah. Jabaster feels that it is not possible for the religious aspirations of the Jews to be fulfilled in this way. He is anxious to establish a Theocracy, and he tells Alroy, "Sire, the Lord hath blessed Judah: it is His land. He would have it filled by his peculiar people, so that His worship might

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1. Alroy, p. 96.

2. Ibid., p. 163.

ever flourish - - - we must exist alone - - - what have we to do with Baghdad or its people - - - Sire, you may be king of Baghdad, but you cannot at the same time be a Jew"<sup>1</sup>. Alroy pays no heed to Jabaster's advice. He has fallen in love with Schirene and he proceeds with his marriage preparations with true oriental pomp and splendour. Besides, he is not willing to yield his glorious empire for a mean province.

Jabaster, the High Priest, is overcome with grief and utterly bewildered. "His mighty heart was convulsed with passion. There did he lie, that great and Solemn man, prostrate and woebegone"<sup>2</sup>. He decides to revolt and the preparations for the conspiracy remind one of Julius Caesar. The revolt is crushed and Jabaster is taken prisoner. Schirene is very bitter and insists that he should be put to death at once. Alroy still loves and respects him and is not willing to kill him. However, it is officially reported that Jabaster strangled himself to death, but in actual fact he has been murdered with Schirene's secret connivance. From this moment, the fortunes of Alroy begin to decline. His kingdom is invaded by "the dreaded monarch of Karasmé"<sup>3</sup>. News of rebellion and revolt pour in from all parts of his vast empire. Alroy makes preparations to go into battle the next morning. He bids farewell to Schirene and repairs to his cabinet for the night. In a scene,

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1. Alroy, p. 164.

2. Ibid., p. 186.

3. Ibid., p. 208.

again reminiscent of Julius Caesar, he is visited by the ghost of Jabaster. He feels that his courage is broken. He is soon captured and taken as a prisoner to Baghdad.

In the dungeon, he is visited by Schirene and Honain. They try to persuade him to renounce his faith for form's sake, otherwise he would be subjected to inhuman torture. Alroy refuses to accede to this request. During the trial, he is again tempted, but he remains firm as a rock. This infuriates the king of the Karasmé, who cuts off his head with his sword. Alroy thus becomes a hero and a martyr.

The novel reads like a fascinating story from the Arabian Nights. The whole book is permeated with oriental feeling and imagery. The author revels in painting the exotic splendour of the courts and palaces. The marriage procession of Schirene and Alroy is described thus: "A magnificent and lofty car, formed of blue enamel with golden wheels, and axle trees of turquoises and brilliants and drawn by twelve snow-white and sacred horses, four abreast - - - amid the exclamations of the people, this gorgeous procession crossed the plain - - - The Conqueror and his bride ascended their throne"<sup>1</sup>.

When the Caliph went hunting, he was accompanied by four hundred men, each leading a white bloodhound with a collar of gold and rubies; the Nubian eunuchs in attendance were dressed in scarlet and carried ivory battle axes. Alroy is offered coffee in a cup of transparent pink porcelain studded with pearls.

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1. Alroy, p. 174.

Disraeli has appended elaborate notes to this novel in order to support his descriptions of oriental customs and traditions, and also the prevalence of Cabalistic lore among the ancient Jews. He has quoted from different authorities to prove the accuracy of his statements. The notes are most interesting and a treasury of information throwing much light on Disraeli's own travels.

However, the remoteness and unreality of the surroundings destroyed the interest for most Western readers, specially since it emanated from Disraeli and was so very different from his other works. The introduction of the crude supernatural machinery, in spite of the author's assertion that it is "Cabalistical and correct", does not enhance its acceptability. The mysticism, which was such a marked feature of his character, and which, on its higher and imaginative side, was a source of power and insight, in this case degenerates into a taste for black magic and hocus-pocus. To the Indian reader, familiar with the splendours of life in the princely states, and steeped in the history of Moghul kings, the novel does not appear to be so very remote or unreal.

This novel has been criticised most of all for the style in which it has been written. It is a sort of prose poetry, which the author adopted "after long meditation and a severe examination of its qualities"<sup>1</sup>. His tale is essentially

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1. From the Preface to the original edition quoted by M and B, Vol. I, p. 201.

dramatic and therefore he introduced "occasional bursts of lyric melody for that illustrative music without which all dramatic representations are imperfect"<sup>1</sup>. Here are some examples:

"Never a beast or bird is there, in that hoary desert bare"<sup>2</sup>

"A moment since and it was there, glancing in the sunny air"<sup>3</sup>.

"Now our dreary way is over, now the desert's toil is past. Soon the river broadly flowing, through its green and palmy banks, to our wearied limbs shall offer baths which Caliphs cannot buy"<sup>4</sup>. But there are some passages which are almost grotesque, for example, "Pallid and mad, he swift upsprang, and he tore up a tree by its lusty roots, and down the declivity, dashing with rapid leaps, panting and wild, he struck the ravisher on the temple with the mighty pine"<sup>5</sup>.

Maginn published an amusing parody of Disraeli's style. "Oh reader dear! Do pray look here, and you will spy, the curly hair and forehead fair, and nose so high and gleaming eye of Benjamin Dis-ra-e-li, the wondrous boy who wrote Alroy in rhyme and prose". The style appeared to be so strange and queer that it aroused a great deal of adverse comment, and yet it is an imitation of a style of writing that was common in Persian and Urdu in the nineteenth century.

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1. From the Preface to the original edition quoted by M and B, Vol. I, p. 202.

2. Alroy, p. 21.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

4. Ibid., p. 47.

5. Ibid., p. 16.

"The fancy in Alroy vents itself in a half-versified and half-rhymed prose which today effectually screens it from the curiosity of anyone in the least fastidious, and yet the sincerity is unimpeacheable"<sup>1</sup>.

There are echoes of Byron and Scott, but most of all, of the Authorised Version of the Bible. The style is permeated by the language and spirit of the Old Testament.

Disraeli had said in his diary that Alroy represented his "ideal ambition". Perhaps he indulged in visions of himself as the hero of an epic drama. Guedalla calls it "an epic rather than a novel, and the facts, as became an epic, were gorgeously transfigured"<sup>2</sup>. It is also possible that Disraeli wanted to write about a Jewish hero, blessed with a devoted sister like himself. He has even dedicated this novel to Sarah. Monypenny is inclined to believe that Disraeli may have thought of winning back the Holy Land for the chosen people, though other critics rule out the possibility of his wanting to lead a Zionist movement. The birth of modern Jewish nationalism is identified with the organisation of the "Lovers of Zion" movement in 1882 in Russia, just a year after Disraeli's death, but the idea and the sentiment must have been present in the minds of many European Jews. In their manifesto they had asked for "a home

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1. E.A. Baker - The History of the English Novel, p. 151.

2. P. Guedalla - Preface to the Bradenham Edition, p. vi.

in our country. It was given to us by the mercy of God. It is ours as registered in the archives of history". So it is likely that, in the innermost recesses of his mind, young Disraeli felt that the legacy of Alroy had descended on him.

In spite of its defects of style and the general effect of unreality, the novel was read and admired by many people. William Beckford, author of the famous oriental tale Vathek, was enchanted with it and wished "the truly wondrous tale had been extended to twenty volumes"<sup>1</sup>, while in a letter to his sister, written soon after the publication of the novel, Disraeli wrote, "Of Alroy I hear golden opinions, and I doubt not of its success - - - I hear no complaints of its style, except from the critics. The common readers seem to like the poetry and the excitement. Miss Jameson told Otley that 'reading it was like riding an Arab'. Slade, the traveller said it was the most thoroughly Oriental book he had ever read"<sup>2</sup>.

#### Contarini Fleming

Disraeli returned from his grand tour of the East towards the end of 1831. It had a profound influence on his attitude and outlook and both Contarini Fleming and Alroy are a direct result of this tour. Both display the Oriental atmosphere

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 203.

2. Ibid., p. 203, letter dated March 26, 1833.

which he had absorbed during the tour. He was also in a more confident frame of mind. He felt that he had never really exhibited his talents in his earlier novels, and he would now show the world his real capacities. His new novel would be, "an original, sincere, unvarnished portrait of the artist as a young man, and he had both confidence in and feeling for his subject, since he drew it from the depths of his own wretched soul"<sup>1</sup>.

Contarini Fleming was published in 1832 by John Murray, but unfortunately, from the financial point of view, it was a complete failure, though Disraeli regarded it as his best and supreme effort so far, and expected the world to recognise his creative genius once and for all.

The theme of the novel is the development and formation of the poetic character and it is written in the form of an autobiography.

Contarini declares his purpose in the first chapter -

"I am desirous of writing a book which shall be all truth: a work of which the passion, the thought, the action, and even the style, should spring from my own experience of feeling"<sup>2</sup> - - - He then proceeds with the story of his life and the reader can immediately detect the innumerable similarities between the reactions and feeling of Contarini and Disraeli, and also in the experiences in their life.

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1. B.R. Jarman, The Young Disraeli, p. 134-135.

2. Contarini Fleming, p. 3.

Contarini's father is a Saxon nobleman in the service of a Northern Court; his mother, who had died in child-birth, was the daughter of a great Venetian house. Contarini resembles his mother both in temperament and appearance. The father married a lady from the North. She was cold and conventional, and utterly insensitive to the feelings of Contarini. There were two sons by the second marriage. "They were called my brothers, but Nature gave the lie to the repeated assertion. Their blue eyes, their flaxen hair and their white visages claimed no kindred with my Venetian countenance"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli also experienced similar feelings when he first went to school. His "black curls, hooked nose, dark eyes and pale complexion must have contrasted oddly with the pink cheeks and fair hair of his companions"<sup>2</sup>.

The first few chapters describe Contarini's childhood and his school experiences, which resemble in many respects Disraeli's own school days. He was a brooding, melancholy child and very conscious that he was different from his fellow creatures and "the feeling was not triumph, but horror"<sup>3</sup>. While still in school, he formed two passionate friendships, one with Christiana and the other with a boy, Musaeus.

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 5.

2. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 17.

3. Contarini Fleming, p. 6.

He found his education unbearable after sometime. He sought relief in the Catholic religion and one day, while wandering around a Gothic Abbey, he met a stranger who gave him plenty of philosophic advice and a book on the history of Venice which caught his fancy. Contarini felt that he must leave school, break off all ties of blood and affection and leave for Venice immediately. Being young and inexperienced, he was soon cheated of all the money he possessed by a fellow traveller. He took shelter in a forest hut and to his great surprise he met there the stranger of the Abbey, whose name was Peter Winter. Winter advised Contarini to return home. The interview between the father and the truant son in the Baron's office is very graphically described, with a real appreciation of character and psychology.

Contarini now continued his education at home and also began to participate in the social life of his parents. The Baron would frequently proffer advice to his son, in the tone of Polonius. He tells him to learn dancing, fencing and French. "Do not talk too much at present, do not 'try' to talk. But whenever you speak, speak with self-possession - - - Never argue - - - In society, never think - - - - Talk to women as much as you can. This is the best school. This is the way to gain fluency, because you need not care what you say, and had better not be sensible"<sup>1</sup>. He met Winter at one of the

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 109-110.

receptions in his father's house and discovered to his surprise that he was a renowned painter.

The Baron advised Contarini to go to a University for a couple of years. There he won a gold medal for a treatise upon the Dorian people, and became the idol of the University.

The Baron also casually introduced Contarini to Voltaire, and he picked up Zadig. He was instantly charmed by it. "This strange mixture of brilliant fantasy and poignant truth, this unrivalled blending of ideal creation and worldly wisdom, it all seemed to speak to my two natures - - - I devoured them all, volume after volume"<sup>1</sup>. These lines are clearly autobiographical, and the influence of Voltaire is evident in many of Disraeli's novels and stories.

While at the University, Contarini and his friends decided to fly from the feudal system and form a society "founded upon the eternal principles of truth and justice"<sup>2</sup>. At first the plan was to go to America, but then they decided to be more practical and collected in an old castle in the forest of Jonsterna, about 60 miles away, and set up their 'Secret Union for the Amelioration of Society'. They soon forgot all their noble ideals and turned into a band of robbers, since they needed money for survival. They led this exciting life under the leadership of Contarini for sometime,

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 121.

2. Ibid., p. 124.

but immediately dispersed when a police force arrived on the scene. Perhaps this was an early manifestation of the Young England ideology which was to play a prominent role in the political trilogy ten years later but was then handled with much greater maturity.

A chance meeting with Christiana, his old flame, revived in Contarini his earlier longing for love, beauty and art. He composed a tragedy about which he himself says, "there was, indeed, little art in my creation, but there was much vitality"<sup>1</sup>. The Baron again takes Contarini in hand, and persuades him to control his power of imagination. Contarini consigned his tragedy to the flames. He became a private secretary to his father and was soon absorbed in his new job. At the end of two years, he had become a seasoned politician, and even succeeded by skilful management in getting his father appointed as the Prime Minister. When he was almost at the zenith of his popularity, Christiana and her husband returned to the Capital. Her appearance once more called forth the latent poetry and creative instincts within him. He began to experience a sense of disgust with his present mode of life, and he started writing a novel.

"My thoughts, my passion, the rush of my invention, were too quick for my pen. Page followed page; - - - My book was a

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 145.

rapid sketch of the development of the poetic character - - - his reveries, his loneliness, his doubts, his moody misery, his ignorance of his art, his failures, his despair - - - In depicting the scenes of society in which my hero was forced to move, I suddenly dashed, not only into slashing satire, but even into malignant personality. - - - For the work itself, it was altogether a most crude performance, teeming with innumerable faults - - - yet the vigour was remarkable"<sup>1</sup>.

This is the background of the novel Manstein, and it was also that of Vivian Grey. Soon after giving his novel for publication, Contarini scored a big diplomatic victory for his adopted country and King. The Baron was delighted and very proud of him. "My son, you will be Prime Minister of - - - perhaps something greater"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli is expressing here his secret dream and ambition. Two years later, the famous conversation took place at Mrs. Norton's. Melbourne asked him in a patronising tone, 'well now, tell me, what do you want to be'?

'I want to be Prime Minister', replied Disraeli<sup>3</sup>.

Manstein appeared anonymously, and became the talk of the town, but a storm burst when the author's identity was revealed. The intensity of the feelings described could only have emanated from someone who had himself experienced them. As this furore

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 164-166 .

2. Ibid., p. 173.

3. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 114.

began to subside, an unfavourable review of the novel appeared in a critical journal, and gave a severe jolt to Contarini. "With what horror, with what blank despair, with what supreme, appalling astonishment, did I find myself, for the first time in my life, a subject of the most reckless, the most malignant, and the most adroit ridicule. I was sacrificed, I was scalped - - - a film floated over my vision; my knees trembled. I felt that sickness of heart, that we experience in our first serious scrape. I was ridiculous. It was time to die"<sup>1</sup>.

Both father and son were of opinion that Contarini should go abroad for a while, and the Baron secured an appointment for him in London. But Contarini decided to go to Venice, which had been his secret longing for many years. From here onwards, the story becomes somewhat unrealistic. As with several other novels of Disraeli, the creative impulse had been exhausted, and the story drags on to a forced conclusion.

There are many beautiful passages describing the charms of Venice. The city held a kind of magnetic attraction for him, since his mother belonged to an ancient Venetian family. He succeeds in tracing his cousin, Alceste, and straightaway falls desperately in love with her. "There was a mystical fulfilment in our meeting - - - and rendered it quite supernatural"<sup>2</sup>. Serious family complications follow, but Contarini manages to

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 182.

2. Ibid., p. 220.

elope with her and enter into a secret marriage. They sail away to Candia, where they live in a state of idyllic happiness until the death of Alceste in child-birth. Contarini was maddened by grief. He jumped into the ocean from the top of a mountain, but was miraculously saved. After recovering from his injuries, he travelled about aimlessly in Italian cities. He realised after a while that life must have an object, and he turned once more to poetic creation, but after a frenzy of creative writing, he had a complete nervous breakdown. Disraeli gives a satirical account of the way Contarini was handled by the physicians, again because he had also had a nervous breakdown a little earlier and he was writing from personal experience. "They all held different opinions; - - - I was bled, blistered, boiled, starved, poisoned, electrified, galvanised; and at the end of a year found myself with exactly the same oppression on my brain"<sup>1</sup> - - - Winter appears on the scene and he talks Contarini out of his ailment, advising him to travel to new countries and new climes for a complete recovery.

Contarini decides to go to Spain, and from there, on a tour to Albania, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Along with descriptions of natural scenery and architectural beauty, Contarini indulges in philosophic reflections about the different cultures that he comes across in his travels. In

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 271.

Jerusalem, he was shocked to find himself the only pilgrim, "The Europeans have ceased to visit the Holy Sepulchre"<sup>1</sup>.

He is so impressed with Cairo that he planned to settle there permanently, but he received rather disturbing and melancholy letters from his father complaining of his ill health and requesting him to return. On reaching Italy, he received the news that his father had died leaving him his entire property. In this sad and lonely frame of mind, he again met Winter amidst the ruins in Rome. The philosopher advises him to renounce meditation and act by creating something. Tired of wandering, Contarini decides to settle in the vicinity of Naples "determined to find in the creations of art some consolation"<sup>2</sup>. He would henceforth spend his life studying and creating beauty, but the influence of Winter has also aroused in him something more, and he ends the book with these words: "Yet if I am to be remembered, let me be remembered - - - as one who deeply sympathised with his fellow-men, and felt a proud and profound conviction of their perfectibility; as one who devoted himself to the amelioration of his kind, by the destruction of error and the propagation of truth"<sup>3</sup>.

There is only one central character in this novel and everything revolves around him. Three chief influences work

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 344.

2. Ibid., p. 362.

3. Ibid., p. 364.

on Contarini in the course of his life. There is the Baron, his father, a practical man of the world, who warns Contarini against his fatal gift of imagination. Under his influence, Contarini's personality becomes cold, hard and arrogant. "I recognised self-interest as the spring of all action. I received it as a truth that no man was to be trusted and no woman to be loved"<sup>1</sup>.

Christiana arouses in him the longing for love, art and beauty. She tells him, 'I have always believed that you were intended for a poet'<sup>2</sup>. She appreciated and encouraged his creative efforts.

It is the artist philosopher Winter, who suddenly turns up whenever Contarini is faced with a crisis. He invariably gives him sound advice and inculcates in him a right sense of values. He tells Contarini to act, to create and to renounce meditation; then alone will he find fulfilment in life. He is an embodiment of serene wisdom and belongs to the same type as Sidonia and Paraclete.

These influences are symbolic of the fundamental conflict in Disraeli's soul, a conflict which persisted till the very end of his life. He had always entertained the ambition to enter politics and, like Contarini, wished to lead and influence men. On the other hand, he also fondly imagined that he would

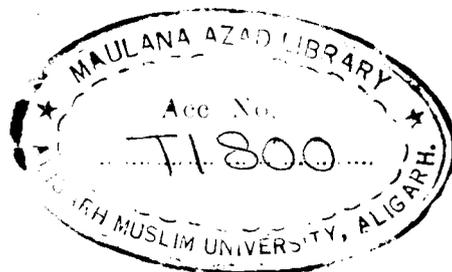
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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 154.

2. Ibid., p. 147.

rival Milton in epic poetry and Shakespeare in drama. He had already written two or three novels, and planned to write more.

The main interest of the novel is autobiographical. Although the major circumstances and the events of Contarini's life are very different from those of Disraeli's, the similarities are obvious in many of the small episodes, and particularly in their reactions and feelings. Like Contarini, Disraeli's relations with his mother were not too happy. Their school experiences have many points of resemblance. The passages dealing with the art and technique of literary composition are indicative of Disraeli's own style and method of writing. He also drew from his own experiences the details of Contarini's travels from Italy to Spain, and thence to the Middle East. Passages from Disraeli's correspondence, journals and diaries testify to the fact that whatever Contarini saw and felt was very similar to what Disraeli experienced during his grand tour of these countries. The greatest similarity is in the underlying theme of the novel. Contarini, with his half-Venetian ancestry, in Scandinavia, is like Disraeli, a Jew, in England, feeling misunderstood and isolated and unable to communicate his real thoughts and feelings to the world. Both have the qualities associated with a true poet, high imagination, a brooding, melancholy temperament, the wild ecstasy and the creative faculty. Both also possess a vaulting ambition and a thirst



for power and greatness. "Fame is - - - necessary to my felicity,"<sup>1</sup> Contarini tells his father.

Blake regards it as the most autobiographical of all his novels, even though he thinks it is "curiously stilted and lifeless"<sup>2</sup>.

Jarman has remarked that "the novel is poignant if read as Disraeli's fictionalised autobiography, which it no doubt is, for it reflects his own reveries, doubts, miseries, failures, and despair, dredged up out of the past and only slightly disguised - - - This novel is indeed emotion recollected in tranquility"<sup>3</sup>. Sometimes the novel even anticipates his actions reminding one of Oscar Wilde's comment, "Life realises in fact what has been dreamed in fiction".

Although the contemporary public found Contarini Fleming as obscure as Alroy, it was praised by the critics. Milman, the poet and historian, said it was "very wild, very extravagant, very German, very powerful, very poetical"<sup>4</sup>. He described the latter part as a Childe Harold in prose. Disraeli, in a letter to Sarah, wrote that Tom Campbell was "delighted with it"<sup>5</sup>, and wished to review it and, in another letter, he said that "Contarini seems universally liked but moves slowly"<sup>6</sup>.

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 153.

2. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 86.

3. B.R. Jarman, The Young Disraeli, p. 136.

4. M and B, Vol. I, p. 194.

5. Ibid., p. 195, letter dated May 28, 1832.

6. Ibid., p. 195, letter dated July 15, 1832.

Heine lavished the most extravagant praise on it. "Modern English letters have given us no offspring equal to Contarini Fleming. Cast in our Teutonic mould, it is nevertheless one of the most original works ever written: profound, poignant, pathetic; its subject the most interesting, if not the noblest imaginable - the development of a poet, truly psychological; passion and mockery; gothic richness, the fantasy of Saracens, and yet over all, a classic even a death-like repose"<sup>1</sup>.

Leslie Stephen regarded Contarini Fleming along with Henrietta Temple as Disraeli's "most satisfactory performances. He has worked without any secondary political purpose, and has, therefore, produced more harmonious results"<sup>2</sup>. The high poetic theme gave a certain sparkle and vitality to Disraeli's style, and hence minimised his usual defects. D.L. Murray pronounced Contarini Fleming as "certainly the richest, and perhaps the greatest of Disraeli's books"<sup>3</sup>. Holbrook Jackson finds Contarini Fleming imbued with a fine Byronic frenzy. He also believes that it expresses a deep philosophic thought, when Contarini, wandering among the ruins of Greece, remarks that "Destiny is our will and our will is nature"<sup>4</sup>. The idea is repeated in the last page of the novel, "Circumstances are beyond the control

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1. Quoted by M and B, Vol. I, p. 196-97 from F.C. Brewster - Disraeli in Outline.

2. L. Stephen, Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 120.

3. D.L. Murray, Disraeli, p. 48.

4. Contarini Fleming, p. 318.

of man; but his conduct is in his own power"<sup>1</sup>. "Disraeli was the first novelist and one of the first English writers to realise the coming of an era of the will"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 364.

2. Holbrook Jackson, Great English Novelists, p. 204.

## CHAPTER - IV

### Novels of High Society, Venetia, Popanilla and other Stories

All these novels and stories also belong to the early period, before Disraeli entered Parliament and achieved success in the political field. The Young Duke was deliberately written about fashionable aristocratic life, while Henrietta Temple, though based on an actual experience, is essentially a novel about high society. Venetia stands in a class by itself, since it is a fictionalised biography of Byron and Shelley. The autobiographical element is inevitably present, even in the shorter pieces, in spite of Disraeli's assertion that he would write no more about himself.

#### The Young Duke

After completing Part II of Vivian Grey, Disraeli had a serious nervous breakdown and was incapacitated for the next three years. This period of his life is almost a blank, except for the publication of a short novel Popanilla in 1828. When he recovered his health by the end of 1829, he began to entertain plans for a grand tour of the Mediterranean and the

Near East. The main obstacle was money, and he confided in a letter to his friend, Benjamin Austen - - - "go I must, tho' I fear I must hack for it. A literary prostitute I have never yet been, tho' born in an age of general prostitution - - - My mind however is still a virgin, but the mystical flower, I fear, must even be plucked. Colburn I suppose will be the bawd"<sup>1</sup> - - -

He spent a "roystering winter" in London, and "is believed to have lost more money in the stock market and to have landed in a sponging house"<sup>2</sup>. He had also been working on two novels, Contarini Fleming and Alroy, both like Vivian Grey, dealing with his own character and ambition, but he put them aside and decided to write a fashionable novel, The Young Duke, which he told his friend, Meredith, was a "series of scenes, everyone of which would make the fortune of a fashionable novel: I am confident of its success, and that it will complete the corruption of public taste"<sup>3</sup>. He gave the manuscript to his friend Bulwer Lytton, who commented that the tone of the novel was too flippant, but Colburn accepted it and immediately offered him £ 500, thus enabling Disraeli to proceed on his grand tour.

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1. B.R. Jerman, The Young Disraeli, p. 91.

2. Ibid., p. 92.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 127.

Like Vivian Grey, this novel was drastically altered in the 1853 edition. "The flippancies, and asides, and general irrelevancies"<sup>1</sup> in the novel, to which Bulwer had objected, make the 1831 edition the most autobiographical of all Disraeli's novels. The sub-title from "Don Juan", "a moral Tale, though gay" - expresses the nature of the novel and closely resembles Byron's poems. Critics saw The Young Duke as a sanction, rather than an exposure, of fashionable folly. "Disraeli's tone and manner are Byron's. He, no doubt, also saw himself as a misunderstood and abused little darling to be sure and one, like Byron, who had sinned and was sorry, but not very sorry"<sup>2</sup>.

There is one passage in The Young Duke which throws interesting light on the political ideology of Disraeli's early years, which, of course he later removed from the first edition.

"I must be consistent and not compromise my principles which will never do in England - more than once a year. Let me see what are they? Am I a Whig or a Tory? I forget. As for the Tories, I admire antiquity, particularly a ruin, even the relics of the Temple of Intolerance have a charm. I think I am a Tory. But then the Whigs give such good dinners, and are the most amusing. I think I am a Whig; but then the Tories are so moral, and morality is my forte: I must be a Tory. But the Whigs dress

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1. B.R. Jerman, The Young Disraeli, p. 95.

2. Ibid., p. 96.

so much better; and an ill-dressed party, like an ill-dressed man, must be wrong. Yes! I am a decided Whig. And yet - I feel like Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy. I think I will be a Whig and Tory alternate nights, and then both will be pleased: Or I have no objection, according to the fashion of the day, to take a place under a Tory ministry, provided I may vote against them"<sup>1</sup>. Although Disraeli sounds rather flippant, the last sentence is prophetic, in the light of his subsequent political career. This is precisely what he did in 1846, when there was a crisis over the repeal of the Corn Laws. By 1853, both England and Disraeli had settled down and become respectable. Hence such passages were drastically cut from The Young Duke. Byron was no longer in fashion. In the advertisement to The Young Duke in October 1853, Disraeli wrote, "The reader will be kind enough to recollect that The Young Duke was written when George the Fourth was king (1829), nearly a quarter of a century ago, and that, therefore, it is entitled to the indulgence which is the privilege of juvenile productions. Though its pages attempt to portray the fleeting manners of a somewhat frivolous age, it is hoped that they convey a moral of a deeper and a more permanent character. Young authors are apt to fall into affectation and conceit, and the writer of this work sinned, very much in these respects; but the affectations of youth should be viewed leniently, and every man has a right to be conceited until he is successful"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Quoted by B.R. Jerman, The Young Disraeli, p. 153.

2. Advertisement to The Young Duke, p. vii.

"The novel was a slightly fevered picture of the great world in 1829 - - - For his fancy, well in advance of himself, visited with tremendous verve the most exalted quarters"<sup>1</sup>. Even Disraeli's father asked, when told about the publication of the novel, "what does Ben know of dukes"? Disraeli had not yet entered the fashionable life of London, but he has succeeded in painting a vivid and realistic picture of the beau-monde.

The opening sentence cynically sums up the aristocratic sense of values and its way of life. "George Augustus, Frederick, Duke of St. James, completed his twenty first year, an event which created almost as great a sensation among the aristocracy of England as the Norman conquest"<sup>2</sup>. The Duke was a "sublime coxcomb", but one enjoys reading about him. The plot, though improbable, is better constructed than that of Vivian Grey, and there is an attempt at a dénouement.

According to his father's will, the Duke of St. James was left under the legal guardianship of a wealthy neighbour, a Roman Catholic gentleman, Mr. Dacre, but his uncle, the Earl of Fitzpompey, and his family manoevered things in such a way that the young Duke was completely estranged from his legal guardian. The Earl and Lady Fitzpompey had three beautiful daughters. The two elder ones, the Lady Isabella, and the Lady Augusta were both married - "Each had knocked down her Earl"<sup>3</sup>, but the younges

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1. Philip Guedalla - Preface to the Bradenham Edition, p. 1.

2. The Young Duke, p. 1.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

the Lady Caroline remained. Being of the same age as her cousin, the Duke of St. James, her parents had determined that she must marry him.

After spending three years in Europe, the young Duke returned to England, his own master. "He had gamed a little in Paris, he ate a good deal in Vienna; and he studied the fine arts in Italy. In all places his homage to the fair sex was renowned"<sup>1</sup>.

The Duke was offered a set of apartments in Fitzpompey House, but he decided to live in an independent establishment. However, he frequently called at Fitzpompey house and his relations with the family were most cordial. "He shook his uncle by the hand with a fervour with which few noblemen had communicated for a considerable period, and he saluted his aunt on the cheek with a delicacy which did not disturb the rouge"<sup>2</sup>. He was staggered by the charm and beauty of his cousin, Lady Caroline, but in spite of all the subtle efforts of her parents, he refused to commit himself.

Lady Fitzpompey took it upon herself to launch her nephew into society. Thus a major portion of the novel consists of a series of brilliantly depicted social scenes - banquets, bazaars, water parties, racing weeks and fêtes. They provide a suitable setting to the main incidents of the novel.

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1. The Young Duke, p. 9.

2. Ibid., p. 12.

The Duke first falls in love with a married woman, Lady Aphrodite Grafton. He is already half in love with his cousin, the Lady Caroline, and he falls madly in love with May Dacre, the daughter of his legal guardian. He wishes earnestly that if he had been "a pacha instead of a peer, he might have married all three"<sup>1</sup>. He spends recklessly and also loses colossal sums of money on the turf and in gambling. He fights a duel in which he is injured, though not seriously. He suffers from moods of gloomy despair. Ultimately his salvation comes through love. He champions the cause of Catholic Emancipation in Parliament, and only then he is accepted by the heroine, May Dacre.

She is one of the most charming of Disraeli's women characters. "There was a quiet dignity lurking even under her easiest words and actions - - - there was a fascination in her calm smile and in her sunlit eye - - - "<sup>2</sup> She firmly believed that the Catholic gentry should mix more with the world, to be known and recognised. "All the young members were her disciples, and were decidedly of opinion that if the House of Lords would but listen to May Dacre, emancipation would be a settled thing. Her logic would have destroyed Lord Liverpool's arguments; her wit extinguished Lord Eldon's jokes"<sup>3</sup>.

There are a host of minor characters, convincingly portrayed. There is the villain, Sir Lucius Grafton, ready

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1. The Young Duke, p. 215.

2. Ibid., p. 100.

3. Ibid., p. 68.

to become a Catholic, so that he can separate from his wife. He is a roué, and he conducts his nefarious business in a cold and calculated manner. Another typical character is Mrs. Dallington Vere - "a most successful woman, lucky in everything, lucky even in her husband; for he died. He did not only die, he left his whole fortune to his wife"<sup>1</sup>.

Although there is nothing in common between the life of the young Duke and that of Disraeli, there are several passages of autobiographical reflection in the true Byronic tradition.

"I do feel more like a doomed man - - - I am a lost man - - - Now see what a farce life is - - - I cannot live long - - - I shall die like a dog as I have lived like a fool"<sup>2</sup>.

Again, a little later, he soliloquises - "There certainly is a dark delight in being miserable, a sort of strange satisfaction in being savage, which is uncommonly fascinating - - - asked why he had been born, why he did not die, why he should live" - - -

The passages reflect Disraeli's mood at the time he wrote this novel. He had been very ill, he was heavily in debt, the reviewers of Vivian Grey had been most nasty and unkind, and so he found himself in a state of lofty despair. Besides, it was also the fashion of the day for a clever youth to pose as the victim of despair.

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1. The Young Duke, p. 69-70.

2. Ibid., p. 244-246.

Although the greater part of the novel consists of vivid pictures of high society, there are some scenes of political interest also. An account of a debate in the House of Lords is both witty and ironic.

"Lord Ex-Chamberlain thought the nation going on wrong, and he made a speech full of currency and constitution - - - The Earl of Quarterday answered these, full of confidence in the nation and in himself. When the debate was getting heavy, Lord Snap jumped up to give them something light. The Lords do not encourage wit, and so are obliged to put up with pertness - - - Then there was a maiden speech, so inaudible that it was doubted whether, after all, the young orator really did lose his virginity. In the end, up started the Premier, who, having nothing to say, was manly and candid, and liberal, gave credit to his adversaries, and took credit to himself, and then the motion was withdrawn"<sup>1</sup>.

The political commentary on the quality of the speakers in the House of Commons and the House of Lords is most remarkable since Disraeli had not entered politics yet. He may have been visualising his own style when he describes Arundel Dacre's speech, "He rose the first night that he took his seat, and for an hour and a half he addressed the fullest House that had long been assembled, with the self-possession of an habitual

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1. The Young Duke, p. 20.

debater - - - what was more surprising was, the withering sarcasm that blasted like the simoom, the brilliant sallies of wit that flashed like a sabre, the gushing eddies of humour that drowned all opposition and overwhelmed those ponderous and unwieldy arguments which the producers announced as rocks, but which he proved to be porpoises"<sup>1</sup>.

The remarks on the speeches of Mr. Brougham, Mr. Canning, Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Peel are interesting, but the final verdict on the relative styles in the House of Commons and the House of Lords is an amazing piece of prescience and effrontery. "One thing is clear, that a man may speak very well in the House of Commons, and fail very completely in the House of Lords. There are two distinct styles requisite. I intend, in the course of my career, if I have time, to give a specimen of both. In the Lower House, 'Don Juan' may perhaps be our model; in the Upper House, 'Paradise Lost'"<sup>2</sup>.

The novel is full of absurdities of style and diction, but like Vivian Grey, it has freshness and vitality. Sarah wrote to her brother on April 4, 1831, "For The Young Duke, it is excellent - most excellent. There is not a dull half page - not a dull half line. Your story is unparalleled - - - your heroine is fit to be worshipped"<sup>3</sup> - - - Again, in another

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1. The Young Duke, p. 306.

2. Ibid., p. 310.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 138.

letter, she says, "Jerdan has at last discovered that its author is gifted with every quality that constitutes a man of splendid genius - - - The book is reviewed in all weekly and Sunday papers - all with excessive praise"<sup>1</sup>. Sarah reports on "some Americans who have just come to England that The Young Duke is the text book of the United States, from which they preach and read and learn that important requisite, manners"<sup>2</sup>.

However, in one quarter the book was not well received. The Westminister Review, the official organ of the Benthamites, pronounced this verdict - "To parasites, sycophants, toad eaters, tuft hunters, and humble companions, it will be a book full of comfort and instruction in their calling"<sup>3</sup>. This was not surprising, since Disraeli had satirised them in Popanilla, and again in The Young Duke. On his coach trip to London, which he specifically undertakes to participate in the debate on Catholic Emancipation, the young Duke meets a Utilitarian, who refers to an article by Duncan Macmorrogh in The Screw and Lever Review<sup>4</sup> on the uselessness of the aristocracy. The Utilitarian then refers to other brilliant articles by the same writer, in which he had subjected "the Universe piecemeal to his critical analysis - - - His attack upon mountains was most violent - - - Rivers he rather patronised, but flowers he quite pulled to

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 138, letter dated May 1, 1831.

2. Ibid., p. 138.

3. R. Blake - Disraeli, p. 58.

4. Name given to 'The Westminister Review' in The Young Duke.

pieces and proved them to be the most useless of existence - - - he avowed that already there were various pieces of machinery of far more importance than man, and he had no doubt, in time, that a superior race would arise, got by a steam-engine on a spinning jenny"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli was never able to understand or appreciate the philosophy of the Utilitarians and invariably held them up to scorn.

In later life, Disraeli regretted having written The Young Duke, and felt rather ashamed of it. He made drastic cuts in the 1853 edition, but "posterity can treat The Young Duke in the spirit in which it was originally written, and enjoy the impudence, freshness and vitality of a book which was never meant to be taken seriously"<sup>2</sup>.

### Henrietta Temple

In the summer of 1833, Disraeli became deeply involved in an illicit love affair with Henrietta Sykes. The affair lasted for three years. In the autumn of 1836, there is an entry in Disraeli's Mutilated Diary - "Parted for ever from Henrietta". Disraeli's love affair left one legacy for posterity, and this was the novel, Henrietta Temple. It was written during these three years and published by Colburn in

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1. The Young Duke, p. 321.

2. R. Blake - Disraeli, p. 58.

December 1836. The novel is in two parts and, like Vivian Grey, the two sections are inspired by very different sentiments. The first part is the result of a vivid personal experience. "The account of love at first sight has an authentic ring of personal passion, seldom found elsewhere among the novels"<sup>1</sup>. "There is no love but love at first sight - - - Magnificent, sublime, divine sentiment! An immortal flame burns in the breast of that man who adores and is adored. He is an ethereal being"<sup>2</sup>. A little later, there is another panegyric upon Love. "What a mystery is Love! All the necessities and habits of our life sink before it - - - the lover is a spiritualised being, fit only to live upon ambrosia, and slumber in an imaginary paradise - - - A man in love wanders in the world as a somnambulis with eyes that seem open to those that watch him, yet in fact view nothing but their own inward fancies"<sup>3</sup>.

In the second half of the novel, passion has vanished, and the novel is a comedy of manners, somewhat affected and unreal, in which, as in Vivian Grey, the original creative impulse had lost its force. The author writes in a more matter of fact tone: "A female friend, amiable, clever and devoted is a possession more valuable than parks or places; and without such a muse few men can succeed in life, none be content"<sup>4</sup>.

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1. R. Blake - Disraeli, p. 143.
  2. Henrietta Temple, p. 76.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

The hero of the novel is Ferdinand Armine, but the novel is named after the heroine, Henrietta Temple, since she has a far more interesting personality. Ferdinand is the impoverished heir of an ancient Roman Catholic family. He is posted with his regiment at Malta, where he leads an extravagant life and gets heavily into debt but he expects to inherit a large estate from his mother's side. He is sorely disappointed and shocked when he learns that the large estate has been left, instead, to his cousin, Katherine Grandison. Family expectations, and financial embarrassments persuade him to make a proposal of marriage to his cousin. She accepts him readily and they are engaged. "Her cousin in four and twenty hours found it quite impossible to fall in love with her; so he determined to make her fall in love with him. He quite succeeded"<sup>1</sup>. The marriage cannot take place for a year, because of their grand-father's death, and Ferdinand returns to Armine, outwardly very satisfied and happy, but there is an uneasiness of feeling which he cannot explain. "My spirit has had no play. Something whispers me that, with all its flush prosperity, this is neither wise nor well - - - if life can afford me no deeper sympathy than I have yet experienced, I cannot but hold it - - - as little better than a dull delusion"<sup>2</sup>. He continues to analyse his feelings and realises that "life without love is worse than death"<sup>3</sup>. Just then a young lady in

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1. Henrietta Temple, p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 71.

3. Ibid., p. 75.

a riding habit with a countenance more radiant than the sunshine, stood before him, and Ferdinand fell desperately in love with her. "There is no love but love at first sight - - - Yes! it was this mighty passion that now raged in the heart of Ferdinand Armine"<sup>1</sup>. He invited her to Armine Castle, the acquaintance gradually ripened into friendship. The lady was Henrietta Temple, belonging to a good family but with very limited means. Ferdinand swore eternal love to her and she accepted him. He did not have the courage to tell her that he was already engaged to his cousin, Katherine. While Ferdinand is trying to sort out the tangle of his debts and thinking of some means by which he could break off his engagement with Katherine, Lady Bellair unwittingly mentions about the engagement to Henrietta. She gets a terrible shock, falls seriously ill and decides to leave England, along with her father, for an indefinite period, to settle in Italy. Her sudden departure produces an equally disastrous effect on Ferdinand, and he almost succumbs to brain fever.

In Italy, Henrietta meets Lord Montfort and, under pressure from her father, she agrees to marry him. They all decide to return to England for the celebration of the wedding. Henrietta happens to meet Ferdinand. She is touched by his sufferings and also learns that he still loves her. At this juncture, Ferdinand's friend, Count Mirabel, intervenes and arranges to put things

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1. Henrietta Temple, p. 76-77.

right. First of all he rescues Ferdinand from the Spunging house, where he is imprisoned for debt. He then helps to clear up the misunderstandings that have arisen, with the result that Katherine forgives and releases Ferdinand, while Lord Montfort renounces Henrietta and agrees to marry Katherine. The lovers are at last united and, what is more, Henrietta unexpectedly becomes a rich heiress.

Although the love story is based on a personal experience, there is no resemblance between the hero and Disraeli, nor between the heroine and Henrietta Sykes, except for the fact that some of the love letters of the real Henrietta to Disraeli have been reproduced almost verbatim in the novel. A few more experiences from Disraeli's life have been incorporated in the story. "Vague recollections of the garrison at Malta helped to compose his hero's life, an apostrophe of debt owed much to his own financial history, his bailiff was sketched from life, and perhaps a gleam of autobiography lingered on his whole study of the tender passion"<sup>1</sup>.

The spunging house scene has been drawn from real life. Disraeli was often in the grip of money lenders and harassed by the Sheriff's officers. In the winter of 1829, he lost a lot of money in the Stock market and is said to have landed in a spunging house. According to B.R. Jarman, Henry Layard is the

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1. Phillip Guedalla, Introduction, p. viii.

only authority for the spunging house story<sup>1</sup>. It was not until 1869 that the Debtors Act abolished imprisonment for debt.

Some of the minor characters are also drawn from real life. Lady Bellair is an amusing portrait of Disraeli's eccentric friend, Lady Cork, "The prettiest, loveliest, smallest, best dressed and, stranger than all, oldest little lady in the world"<sup>2</sup>. She is ninety years old, with an autocratic temperament and a passion for match-making. She was the last remaining link between the two centuries. In her youth, she had been "the favourite subject of Sir Joshua; had flirted with Lord Carlisle, and chatted with Dr. Johnson"<sup>3</sup>. She was remarkably well preserved for her age, and active in mind and body. Then there is Mr. Bond Sharpe, who is modelled on Crockford, proprietor of a famous gambling den in London. He was a prize fighter, then took to the turf, then he set up a hell, which he subsequently turned into a subscription house. He is very rich and anxious to get into society by cultivating the company of aristocrate. He lends a large sum of money to Ferdinand, just to have the pleasure of his company at dinners .

However, the most fascinating sketch is that of Count Alcibiades de Mirabel, close portrait of the famous dandy, Count Alfred D'Orsay, to whom this novel is affectionately dedicated. "The most attractive character that Disraeli ever

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1. B.R. Jarman - The Young Disraeli, p. 341.

2. Henrietta Temple, p. 209.

3. Ibid., p. 212.

created or drew is De Mirabel, in whom the wit, the gaiety, the charm, the generosity, and the insouciance of D'Orsay are enshrined for the benefit of future generations"<sup>1</sup>.

Mirabel was a brilliant conversationalist, "gay, careless, generous"<sup>2</sup>, but with a soul of great sensibility. His philosophy in life was, "Feel slightly, think little, never plan, never brood - - - Take the world as you find it; enjoy everything." When Sharpe comments that Count Mirabel remains in good humour even when he loses in gambling, the Count replies, "Fancy a man ever being in low spirits - - - Life is too short for such bêtises - - - Existence is a pleasure, and the greatest. The world cannot rob us of that; and if it is better to live than to die, it is better to live in a good humour than a bad one"<sup>3</sup>.

The main characters of the novel do not possess any unusual qualities. Ferdinand is described as "the handsomest, cleverest, the most accomplished and the most kind-hearted and virtuous of his sex"<sup>4</sup>. He gives expression to a feeling that Disraeli must also have experienced sometimes, when he says, "Debt is the prolific mother of folly and crime; it taints the course of life in all its dreams. Hence so many unhappy marriages so many prostituted pens, and venal politicians"<sup>5</sup>. He is rather

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 347.

2. Henrietta Temple, p. 363.

3. Ibid., p. 369.

4. Ibid., p. 64-65.

5. Ibid., p. 61.

impetuous, selfish and self-indulgent, and a somewhat colourless personality. Henrietta is a typical Disraelian heroine. She has a mind "at once thoughtful and energetic to form her own judgements - - - that rare and extraordinary combination of intellectual strength and physical softness which marks out the woman capable of exercising an irresistible influence over mankind. In the good old days she might have occasioned a siege of Troy or a battle of Actium. She was one of those women who make nations mad, and for whom a man of genius would willingly peril the empire of the world"<sup>1</sup>. She also has the qualities of a typical Victorian lady, visiting the cottages of the poor, solacing the aged and the sick, listening to their grievances, and promising them "arrowroot and gruel, port wine and flannel petticoats"<sup>2</sup>, and faints and languishes when she is emotionally distressed.

Katherine Grandison, likewise, is a combination of great understanding and magnanimity, mild, elegant and pretty, but also hysterical on occasions.

The calm and placid Lord Montfort is the philosopher of society. With him "life was the romance of reason"<sup>3</sup>. He is amiable, generous and interesting, and devoted to the arts. He belongs to the same category as Beckendorff, Winter and Sidonia

Like the Young Duke, this novel also belongs to the 'silver

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1. Henrietta Temple, p. 93.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

fork' school. Disraeli has painted a picture of fashionable society, a world where people want to get on and to be amused, where birth, and money, beauty and wit, all have their place as commodities and where no one behaves or is expected to behave with disregard for material values. "Money is power"<sup>1</sup>, says Bond Sharpe. Mr. Temple had the most profound respect for property, and Ferdinand's parents are anxious that their son should marry a rich heiress because they have limited means. Henrietta Temple becomes, as the result of a legacy, the richest heiress in England. Lord Montfort tells Ferdinand, "How do you know you may not marry a woman of large fortune? - - - Now you seem to me exactly the sort of man who would marry an heiress"<sup>2</sup>.

The novel is also a satire on aristocratic society. He gives amusing names to the characters, e.g., Lord Catchimwhocan and Lady Womandeville. He describes the gorgeous interiors of their palaces and the natural beauty surrounding their country mansions. They have eccentric tastes and habits, and their life is a round of pleasure. Guedalla comments that "Henrietta Temple is a novel of fashionable life, of high society, where the rustle of real petticoats is more audible than in any other part of Disraeli's work"<sup>3</sup>.

The novel disappointed those critics who regarded Disraeli as primarily a politician and a political novelist, as there is

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1. Henrietta Temple, p. 372.

2. Ibid., p. 431.

3. Introduction, p. viii.

no direct political interest in it. The only reference is at the end, when both Lord Montfort and Ferdinand take a seat in the House of Commons, after the removal of the ban on Roman Catholics by the Act of 1828. Disraeli said that, "Bulwer Lytton thinks my speech the finest in the world and my novel the worst"<sup>1</sup>. J.A. Froude commented that "it is a clever story but without merit or interest, which would have given it a permanent place in English Literature"<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, one critic thinks that "Henrietta Temple is perhaps the best 'story' he ever wrote. It is rich in entertaining characters, as witty as always, excellent in its style, and moves briskly without interruption - - - it has more charm than any of his books, except possibly Endymion, and passages that are among his most brilliant"<sup>3</sup>.

Tennyson told Disraeli that the "silly sooth of love was given perfectly there"<sup>4</sup>, and, in a letter to Disraeli, written in 1868, Tennyson referred to it as "that charming love story"<sup>5</sup>.

From the artistic point of view, this novel has greater literary value and is an improvement on the earlier ones, because Disraeli had gained in experience but the style is flowery and artificial and marred by too many sentimental reflections.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 348.

2. J.A. Froude, Lord Beaconsfield, p. 215.

3. Eric Forbes - Boyd, "Disraeli the Novelist", Essays and Studies (1950), p. 109.

4. M and B, Vol. I, p. 349.

5. Ibid., p. 349.

### Venetia

In 1836, Disraeli's financial condition became very precarious again. He was in danger of arrest for his debts, and he was avoiding appearance in public. He remained in seclusion at Bradenham, published Henrietta Temple which brought him some much needed cash, and he promptly started another novel, Venetia or The Poet's Daughter.

It is an idealisation of the lives of Byron and Shelley, both of whom appear under fictitious names, while the chief events of their careers are ingeniously pooled and redistributed. The novel is dedicated to Lord Lyndhurst, and in it Disraeli stated that he "had attempted to shadow forth, though as 'in a glass darkly' two of the most renowned and refined spirits that have adorned these our latter days". The novel was written under strain and in a hurry. It bears all the marks of hasty and imperfect workmanship. Disraeli was fully conscious of this, as he wrote in a letter to Pyne, "I fear my book bears marks of the turbulence of the last two months"<sup>1</sup>, yet it has been lavishly praised by some critics for its exquisite picture of child life and its freshness of feeling.

In a letter to his friend Lady Blessington, in March 1837, Disraeli wrote, "In spite of every obstacle in the shape of

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 369.

harassed feelings and other disagreeable accidents of life, I have not forgotten the fair Venetia who has grown under my paternal care and as much in grace, I hope, as in stature - - - she is truly like her prototype.

"The child of love, though born in bitterness  
And nurtured in convulsion". ("Childe Harold" III Canto) but I hope she will prove a source of consolation to her parent, and also to her godmother, for I consider you to stand in that relation to her"<sup>1</sup>.

The chief distinction of the novel is the life-like portrait of Byron as the hero, under the name of Lord Cadurcis. Disraeli had grown up to manhood in a household where the name of Byron was held in great reverence. "All his life Disraeli - - - dwelt in the long shadow of the Byronic myth. He was fascinated by every detail of Byron's career"<sup>2</sup>. He had learnt a lot about him from Byron's boatman Maurice, whom he met in Geneva. Then in 1830, he met Tita, who had been Byron's gondolier in Venice. Tita accompanied Byron as his personal valet to Missolonghi, and Byron died in his arms. Subsequently, Tita was brought to England and he was employed in the Disraeli household until his death in 1874. Tita had also known Shelley and Disraeli had made the acquaintance of Trelawney, a friend of Shelley's. Through all these people, Disraeli was able to collect a number

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 364.

2. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 52.

of personal details about the two poets. He had also studied their poetry with great diligence. B.R. Jerman regards Venetia as Disraeli's last tribute to the Byronic myth and a final protest against the respectable world with which he now had come to terms. He deliberately chose as his heroes two of the most revolutionary characters the age had produced.

Venetia is the daughter of Marmion Herbert and Lady Annabel. The parents have separated, and Venetia is brought up by her mother in complete ignorance of her father, even the mention of whose name was taboo in the house. Yet as she grows older, she develops an instinctive devotion for him until one day she discovers his portrait and the manuscript of his poems. She becomes obsessed with the desire to learn more about him, but does not have the courage to mention the subject to her mother.

Lady Annabel had separated from her husband because of his subversive views on morality, politics and religion. In her view, he was "an infidel, a profligate, a deserter from his home, an apostate from his God - - - a traitor to his king"<sup>1</sup>. He had gone to America where he became a general in the Republican Army, and fought in the War of American Independence. Subsequently, he went to Italy and was living there with an Italian mistress.

Venetia and her mother lived in complete seclusion in their country mansion in Cherbury. After a while, Mrs. Cadurcis

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1. Venetia, p. 233.

and her son also moved into the neighbourhood, and the two families became very friendly. In describing the relationship between Mrs. Cadurcis and her son, Disraeli has drawn from Byron's own experiences. Mrs. Cadurcis perpetually nagged and quarrelled with her son. Her moods used to alternate between excessive fondness and excessive violence, thus making him sullen and resentful. Once, in a fit of anger, he left his home and joined a band of gipsies. When he returned, he learnt that his mother had died.

Cadurcis was then sent to a public school. He visited Cherbury after five years, when he was eighteen. He fell in love with Venetia and made a proposal of marriage to her, but she gently refused him, saying that her heart belonged to her father. Cadurcis stamped with rage, calling her father "the most abandoned profligate of his age - - - a man whose name is synonymous with infamy, and which no one dares to breathe in civilised life"<sup>1</sup>. He left Cherbury in utter disgust and sorely disappointed. "He hurled upon the earth all the tender emotions of his soul. 'Woman! henceforth you shall be my sport! I have now no feeling but for myself - - - the world shall ring with my name, I will be a man, and a great man'"<sup>2</sup>.

Lord Cadurcis began to write poetry and he also joined the University of Cambridge for a while. There he was much

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1. Venetia, p. 209.

2. Ibid., p. 210.

influenced by the liberal opinions which had come into vogue during the American War of Independence. He even found himself drawn towards the views of Herbert, which he had condemned earlier. "The courage, the boldness, the eloquence, the imagination, the strange and romantic career of Herbert carried the spirit of Cadurcis captive"<sup>1</sup>. He resolved to emulate him and began to neglect his studies. "His irregular habits procured him constant reprimands in which he gloried; he revenged himself on the authorities by writing epigrams, and by keeping a bear which he declared, should stand for a fellowship"<sup>2</sup>. As a result of all this, he was expelled from the University. He went to London, where his poems had already gained popularity and he was received with open arms by the Whigs. "Society sympathised with a young and noble poet - - - he became the fashion"<sup>3</sup>. To use his own expression, "one morning he awoke and found himself famous". His life was a perpetual triumph. "He had risen and still flamed like a comet as wild as it was beautiful, and strange as it was brilliant"<sup>4</sup>.

Although this novel does not have any direct political interest, yet when the scene shifts to London the reader is introduced to the highest social and political circles of the metropolis. Disraeli is at his best when he is describing the fashionable social life of London society. Lady Monteagle,

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1. Venetia, p. 239.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

said to be a portrait of Lady Caroline Lamb, is "the Muse of the Whig party, at whose shrine every man of wit and fashion was proud to offer his flattering incense; and her house became not merely the favourite scene of their social pleasure, but the sacred temple of their political rites"<sup>1</sup>. Cadurcis is a regular diner at Lady Monteagle's and his poems have made him the idol of London society. He even complains that so many women are in love with him.

It so happens that Venetia and her mother, Lady Annabel also take up their abode in London. Cadurcis meets Venetia, is again drawn towards her and proposes marriage. But Lady Annabel takes a strong dislike to him. "Your mother hates me"<sup>2</sup>, he had told Venetia, much to Venetia's bewilderment and sorrow. Lady Annabel tells Venetia that Cadurcis is "the most lawless of the wild, casting to the winds every salutary principle of restraint and social discipline, and glorying only in the abandoned energy of self. Three years ago - - - he reproached you with your father's conduct; now he emulates it"<sup>3</sup>. The mother extracts a promise from Venetia that she will not accept Lord Cadurcis without first obtaining **her** permission.

In the meanwhile, Lady Monteagle became violently jealous of Venetia when she learnt about Lord Cadurcis' feelings for her, and began creating scenes. On finding Lord Cadurcis indifferent

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1. Venetia, p. 328.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 336-37.

towards her, she threatened to expose him. "The world shall at length discover the nature of the idol they have worshipped. All your meanness, all your falsehood, all your selfishness, all your baseness, shall be revealed. I may be spurned, but at any rate I will be revenged"<sup>1</sup>. She manipulated things in such a way that Lord Monteagle was forced to challenge Cadurcis to a duel, and was seriously injured.

Then follows the famous plagiarism from Macaulay. Though Disraeli does not mention the name, he does say that these are the observations of a celebrated writer. "It has been well observed that no spectacle is so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality"<sup>2</sup>. Barely twenty four hours had passed since his duel with Lord Monteagle and Cadurcis "found himself branded by every journal in London as an unprincipled and unparalled reprobate"<sup>3</sup>. When he appeared in public after sometime, he was ostracised by society, hooted by the multitude, and nearly lynched by a mob. He decided to quit England never to return.

Faced with an acute mental conflict, Venetia fell seriously ill and the doctors advised her mother to take her to Italy. A chance encounter there with Marmion Herbert leads ultimately to a reconciliation between the husband and wife. He gets rid of his mistress. Venetia recovers her health and

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1. Venetia, p. 328.

2. Ibid., p. 335.

3. Ibid., p. 336-37.

the united family spends a few months of idyllic happiness in a marine villa about a mile from Spezzia. One day, Lord Cadurcis and his cousin George land there from a boat. Cadurcis meets Herbert for the first time, and both are instantly fascinated by one another. Lady Annabel succeeds in getting rid of her prejudice against Cadurcis. She invites them to stay in the Villa, and is even willing now to accept him as her son-in-law. Lord Cadurcis and Herbert hold long conversations on philosophical subjects, and everything seems set for a happy ending, when a terrible tragedy befalls them. Herbert and Cadurcis set out in a small boat for Lavenza. There is a sudden storm and both are drowned. Lady Annabel and Venetia return to England. Lord Cadurcis' cousin George inherits his title and property and ultimately marries Venetia.

Disraeli has taken great liberties with the story. He has mixed up and transposed outstanding events from the lives of Byron and Shelley in total disregard of facts. Yet many of the small details are truthfully portrayed. The accuracy of the personal touches is attested by Dr. Garnett who thinks that "Herbert is drawn in conformity with the most orthodox Shelleyan tradition"<sup>1</sup>. The conversations between Herbert and Cadurcis, when they meet in the marine villa, are derived almost verbatim from Shelley's "Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients".

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1. From 'Essays of an Ex-Librarian', quoted by M and B, Vol. I, p. 365.

The charm of the novel lies in the opening chapters which paint an exquisite picture of Venetia's childhood, and the beautiful natural scenery of the surroundings. "The story of the subsequent awakening in spite of the mother's precautions, of love and admiration for the unknown and banished father, and the development of these sentiments into an intense and over-mastering passion, is told with power and pathos"<sup>1</sup>. When she grows up, Venetia is serene and studious, "she had a fine ear for music, a ready tongue for languages"<sup>2</sup>, but is altogether too ethereal to belong to this world.

Lady Annabel is a stately figure, and like other women in Disraeli's novels, she has a distinctive personality. "She had been brought up with the consciousness of other objects of female attainment and accomplishment than embroidery, 'the complete art of making pastry', and reading 'The whole Duty of Man' - - - she was a good linguist, a fine musician, was well read in our elder poets and their Italian originals, was no unskilful artist, and had acquired some knowledge of botany when wandering as a girl, in her native woods"<sup>3</sup>. However, her reconciliation with Herbert and acceptance of Cadurcis does not somehow harmonise with the severity of character that she displays in the beginning.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 368.

2. Venetia, p. 108.

3. Ibid., p. 10.

The genius and the personality of Byron and Shelley have been faithfully represented in Lord Cadurcis and Herbert but the external circumstances of Byron's life are divided between the two. Byron's childhood, his relations with his eccentric mother, the sudden poetic success, his University career, the scandal with Lady Caroline Lamb, the outburst of popular hostility, are all assigned to Byron. Byron's unhappy marriage, his subsequent relations with his wife and his daughter, Ada, are transferred to Shelley. Finally, Disraeli drowns the two poets together off the coast of Spezzia.

The setting of the novel is placed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, for the avoidance of scandal, but contemporary critics were rather harsh, specially over the unflattering portrait of Lady Caroline Lamb as Lady Monteagle. She was dead, when the novel appeared in 1837, but her husband Lord Melbourne was very much alive, and what is more, he was the Whig Prime Minister. The Edinburgh Review upbraided Disraeli for "intruding into the domestic life of a poet and his relations and extracting the materials of fiction out of events so recent and so melancholy"<sup>1</sup>. The introduction of Herbert's Italian mistress was also considered to be in bad taste. Throwing the story back by a whole generation only made it more awkward and artificial. "It is as if someone had produced in recent times a book about T.E. Lawrence or Rupert Brooke in the setting of the Crimean War"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 369-370.

2. R. Blake - Disraeli, p. 146.

Venetia is regarded as the only novel of Disraeli in which there is neither a direct political interest nor any overt autobiographical element. Perhaps he unconsciously identified himself with the two poets. Byron had always been an inspiration and a model to Disraeli. "His hero was the hero of all European youth from 1820 to 1848 - the moody Childe, the fascinating Don, Lara, the Corsair, all the varied incarnations which had died at Missolonghi with Lord Byron"<sup>1</sup>.

"There is something in both of the same daemonic force, the same devouring ambition, the same self-idolatry, the same disposition to coxcombry and affectation"<sup>2</sup>. With Shelley, Disraeli shared the visionary gleam, and his passion for reform in politics, society and government though their recipes for salvation were radically different. Like Shelley, Disraeli was also not acceptable to the orthodox and narrow-minded English society of the day.

There are a few satirical remarks on the Whigs, but the most significant political comment is Disraeli's frank and undiplomatic opinion about America. Herbert is standing by the Mediterranean coast, and talking about the greatness of all the past civilisations that have existed along its shores, Egypt Palestine, Greece, Rome, Carthage, Spain and Italy. He then asks, "Will the Atlantic ever be so memorable? Its civilisation will be more rapid but will it be as refined? and - - - will it

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1. P. Guedalla, Introduction, p. viii.

2. M and B, Vol. I, p. 366.

be as permanent? - - - what America is deficient in is creative intellect. It has no nationality. Its intelligence has been imported, like its manufactured goods. Its inhabitants are a people, but are they a nation? - - - I wish that the republic of the Puritans had blended with the tribes of the wilderness"<sup>1</sup>. Although he makes Herbert fight on the side of the Republicans, Disraeli was against that great experiment, politically as well as aesthetically.

Venetia did not enjoy the popular success of Henrietta Temple, but it was better appreciated by the critics. The Athenaeum hailed it as exhibiting "much less of affectation and disordered ardour than that 'incoherent love-story'"<sup>2</sup>. Dr. Georg Brandes said that "a waft of liberty flutters through its pages", and described it as a "masterpiece of tact"<sup>3</sup>, while D.L. Murray regards Venetia as "the most perfect of Disraeli's novels in literary form"<sup>4</sup>.

Henrietta Temple and Venetia mark the close of one stage in the career of Disraeli as a novelist. The characters in these two novels have emerged from the puppet stage and have become authentic human beings. He had also acquired maturity and experience, and was not yet immersed in politics. This accounts for the lavish praise bestowed on them by many critics.

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1. Venetia, p. 422-423.

2. Quoted by M and B, Vol. I, p. 369.

3. Ibid., p. 365 and p. 370.

4. D.L. Murray - Disraeli, p. 71.

Popanilla and other tales

In 1828, Disraeli published a satirical novelette, Popanilla. Otherwise this period is almost a blank, because it was a critical phase of his life. He had been suffering from some kind of a psychosomatic illness, and recovered only after his grand tour of the Near East.

Popanilla is a satire on contemporary society and shows the influence of Voltaire's Candide and Swift's Gulliver's Travels. The first scene is laid in the Isle of Fantaisie, which is a remote island, somewhere in the Pacific. It is rich in natural resources and inhabited by a race of happy, unsophisticated savages. One day, there is a shipwreck and a box of books, containing useful knowledge and Benthamite literature, is washed ashore. It is discovered by Popanilla, who acquires all the knowledge contained therein, and he sets about the reformation of his countrymen. As a result, he is driven into exile, and he arrives on the island of Vraibleusia, which is another name for England, the home of true blue Toryism. The rest of the story is a parody on the English social and political system and on the Utilitarian doctrines, which were becoming popular at the time. The chapter on 'Fruit' which stands for religion, is a humorous sketch of the Anglican Church. It opens with the

remark "that a taste for fruit is inherent in man is an opinion which is sanctioned by the conduct of man in all ages and in all countries"<sup>1</sup>.

At first the Vraibleusians acquired a taste for pine-apple, which they imported from Rome; in the course of time they grew their own fruit, even their own pine-apple; but they tried also a variety of other fruit, and acquired a partial liking for the Presbyterian crab. After some time, they began consuming every fruit, oranges, pumpkins, grapes, mulberries and thousands began to die due to this irrational excess. The story continues in this amusing vein, tracing the history of the religious feuds in England until we come to the revival of the Catholic faith and the Oxford Movement.

The Aboriginal Inhabitant of the story obviously represents the landed interest. "His countenance was jolly, but consequential; and his costume a curious mixture of a hunting dress and a court suit"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli even makes fun of the Corn Laws, because his political opinions had not quite crystallised in 1828, but his allergy to the materialistic philosophy of the Benthamites is very clearly displayed.

The fashionable novel is also ridiculed, although it was just the kind of fiction that was very popular at the time,

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1. Popanilla and other tales, p. 79.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

and even Disraeli produced one within the next three years. The Young Duke, since he was badly in need of money at the time. Ireland figures under the name of Blunderland, and there is a sarcastic reference to Scotland.

The story bubbles with wit and humour and could have been taken for another adventure of Mr. Gulliver, if it was malicious also, because Swift's satire was inspired by scorn, while Disraeli's mood is pleasant and good-humoured. John Bright is said to have greatly admired Popanilla. It was dedicated to Plumer Ward, who said:

"Since the days of Swift and Voltaire I have not read anything so witty - - - In my opinion it is equal to the Tale of a Tub and Candide, and superior to Zadig and Babouk"<sup>1</sup>.

Between 1832 and 1837, a few more tales appeared. Disraeli contributed some short stories to Lady Blessington's Annual Book of Beauty. These were "The Carrier Pigeon" and "The Consul's Daughter". "The Rise of Iskander" also belongs to this period. It was published along with Contarini Fleming. It is a melodramatic Eastern tale belonging to the same category as Alroy, and tells the story of a Christian prince of Albania who leads a revolt against the Turkish rulers. Disraeli had spent some enjoyable weeks in Albania during his grand tour, so he has given a convincing setting to the story.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 123-124.

"The Carrier Pigeon" (1835) is a tragic and sentimental love story set in mediaeval times, with the Romeo-Juliet theme. The hero is named Lothair and that is about the only connection it has with the other novels of Disraeli. In "The Consul's Daughter" (1836) the heroine is named Henrietta, and the story is reminiscent of Disraeli's sojourn in Malta. The portrayal of a father and daughter deeply devoted to one another is further elaborated in Henrietta Temple, which appeared in the following year.

Among his short pieces are two brilliant burlesques which appeared in Bulwer's New Monthly Magazine, Ixion in Heaven (1832) and The Infernal Marriage (1834). Ixion in Heaven is based upon a story about Ixion, king of Thessaly, who had quarrelled with his wife and father-in-law. Ixion was shunned and despised by all mankind, so Jupiter took pity on him and carried him to Heaven. His experiences there are described in a most amusing vein. He is introduced to all the Olympians by Mercury, who tells him on the quiet that "Venus is a flirt, Minerva a prude, who fancies she has a correct taste and a strong mind; and Juno, a politician"<sup>1</sup>. Ixion soon becomes a favourite of Jupiter, and thoroughly enjoys his abode in Heaven. Complications arise when he falls in love with Juno, the Queen of Heaven. Mercury poisons the mind of Jupiter, others also whisper, and Ixion is condemned by Jupiter to eternal toil. He is bound to a wheel and hurled into Hades.

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1. Popanilla and other tales, p. 116.

Some of the Olympian Gods can be recognised, for example, Jupiter is George IV, while Byron figures as Apollo, and complains that "Immortality is a bore". The other Olympian divinities represent the high bred lords and ladies of Mayfair. We find the celestial deities relaxing, gossiping and behaving like ordinary human beings with common human failings. Perhaps Disraeli identified himself with Ixion, the ordinary mortal, amongst the Olympians of Mayfair, and he writes an inscription in Minerva's Album. "I have seen the world, and more than the world: I have studied the heart of man, and now I consort with Immortals. The fruit of my tree of knowledge is plucked, and it is this, "Adventures are to the Adventurous" . It is a summing up of Disraeli's philosophy of life.

The Infernal Marriage describes Proserpine's experiences after her marriage with Pluto. She arrives in Hades, and finds everything most frightening. Her first act is to banish Cerberus, the celebrated watch-dog of Hell, in spite of the fact that he is Pluto's pet and very devoted to him. She then clashes violently with the Fates and the Furies, but Pluto is so much in love with her that he allows himself to be influenced by her in everything. The ancient administration of Hell is shaken up when she persuades Pluto to allow Eurydice to return to earth with Orpheus. Her reforming zeal only comes to an end when she is unwell and is

advised a change of scene by the doctors. Very reluctantly, Pluto allows her to go to her mother, Ceres, and she is escorted by Tiresias the sage on her journey to the Elysian fields.

The second part of the story describes Proserpine in Elysium. She finds there about a thousand families living in a state of splendid luxury and absolute idleness, but perishing of boredom. However, she finds the company very congenial, and the thought of returning to Hades is like a bad dream.

Like Ixion in Heaven, the mythical story is a satirical fling on the life of the aristocracy in England. Disraeli has also made some shrewd political comments, which throw an interesting light on his own character. When Proserpine is leaving Hades for a change of climate, she is afraid that there may be intrigues against her in her absence. Pluto reassures her that everything will be all right. "I will keep each faction in awe by the bugbear of the other's supremacy. Trust me, I am a profound politician"<sup>1</sup>.

Again, during the return journey, Proserpine and Tiresias are playing cards and the sage gives some sound practical advice. Proserpine plays out of turn, and Tiresias politely rebukes her. 'Will your Majesty be pleased to draw your card?' - - - - - 'If I might venture to offer your majesty a hint, I would dare to recommend your Majesty not to play before your turn'. - - - - -

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1. Popanilla and other tales, p. 172.

'he who plays before his turn at whist, commits as great a blunder as he who speaks before his turn during a negotiation'"<sup>1</sup>. He gives another piece of advice to the Captain of the Yacht. "Next to knowing when to seize an opportunity - - - - the most important thing in life is to know when to forego an advantage"<sup>2</sup>.

A little later, Proserpine asks, 'Pray, my dear Tiresias, you who are such a fine player, how came you to trump my best card'?

'Because I wanted the lead and those who want to lead, please your majesty, must never hesitate about sacrificing their friends'<sup>3</sup>. The closing lines of this chapter are the most significant of all.

"'I was so glad to see you turn up the queen, Tiresias'. 'I also, Madam. Without doubt there are few cards better than her royal consort, or, still more, the imperial ace. Nevertheless, I must confess, I am perfectly satisfied whenever, I remember that I have the Queen on my side'.

Proserpine bowed"<sup>4</sup>.

Both these legendary stories are told in the modern idiom, and they have a freshness, wit and daring which make them delightful reading. The form and tone of these two satires in very much like Lucian, but the influence of Peacock is also evident.

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1. Popanilla and other tales, p. 184.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 184-185.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 185-186.

Disraeli has attained in them "a measure of light-hearted objectivity - - - they did for the gods what Bernard Shaw was later to do for the Romans: brought them up to date"<sup>1</sup>.

J.A. Froude regarded these light satires as the most brilliant of all Disraeli's productions, while Isaac D'Israeli considered these two short pieces to be his son's most original contribution to literature.

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1. H. Pearson, Dizzy, p. 40.

C H A P T E R - V  
The Political Trilogy

In the Preface to the Hughenden edition of 1870, Disraeli had clearly stated the purpose of the three political novels written between 1844 and 1847. "Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred form a real Trilogy, that is to say, they treat of the same subject and endeavour to complete that treatment. The origin and character of our political parties, their influence on the condition of the people of this country, some picture of the moral and physical condition of that people, and some intimation of the means by which it might be elevated and improved, were themes which had long engaged my meditation"<sup>1</sup>.

Coningsby

"English literature owes a debt of gratitude to Peel or to Stanley, if to Stanley it is more appropriately due; their exclusion of Disraeli from office in 1841 led to Coningsby and Sybil and the creation of the political novel"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli had become a member of the House of Commons in 1837 and had not published any more novels since that date. He now conceived the idea of applying the methods of fiction to his new world of experience, and began to write again. "It was not

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1. Preface to the Hughenden Edition (1870), p. x.

2. M and B, Vol. I, p. 595.

originally the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to scatter his suggestions, but after reflection, he resolved to avail himself of a method which, in the temper of the times, offered the best chance of influencing opinion"<sup>1</sup>.

Coningsby or The New Generation is dedicated to Henry Hope because it was "conceived and partly executed amid the glades and galleries of the Deepdene"<sup>2</sup>, and also because it was a frequent subject of discussion with him. Henry Hope was a sympathiser of the Young England group, and he suggested to Disraeli the idea of embodying the ideals of that group in a literary form. All the members of the group figure in Coningsby under different names. George Smythe appears as Coningsby, Manners as Henry Sydney, Cochrane as Buckhurst, and the novel was meant to present the manifesto of Young England in an artistic medium.

The background of Coningsby is the political scene in England from the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 to the fall of Lord Melbourne's Whig Government in 1841. The events of this period provided Disraeli with the opportunity for expounding his political creed, expressing his contempt for Peel's brand of conservative government, and expressing his hostility towards the Whigs and the Utilitarians.

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1. Preface to the Fifth edition, p. xvii.

2. From the Dedication to Henry Hope, p. v.

The central character in the novel is Harry Coningsby, an intelligent, imaginative and generous young boy, the orphan grandson of the wealthy Marquess of Monmouth. Young Coningsby, whose parents had displeased the Marquess by marrying against his wishes, is now restored to the grandfather's favour and sent to Eton. During his stay at Eton, he saved the life of a boy, Oswald Millbank. He happened to be the son of a rich and enlightened Lancashire manufacturer, but a bitter enemy of Lord Monmouth. The story traces Coningsby's career at Cambridge where, along with some friends, he forms political views opposed to those of his grandfather's, and also falls in love with Edith, the sister of Oswald Millbank. Lord Monmouth is furious when he is informed about this, and the result is that he disinherits his grandson and leaves all his property to Flora, his illegitimate daughter by a French actress. Coningsby suddenly finds that he has to stand on his own feet, and decides to become a barrister. Millbank, the manufacturer is also opposed to the marriage of his daughter with Coningsby, but he relents in the end. He agrees to let Coningsby seek election from Darlford, and Coningsby is elected to Parliament. He marries Edith, and after a short while, Flora dies, leaving all her property to Coningsby.

Into this bare outline, Disraeli has woven the politics and history of the period, introduced a procession of social

and political figures, and painted a vivid picture of the social life of the times. The political ideas are conveyed through discussions that take place in the grand mansions of the aristocratic families, in the political clubs, at Eton, Cambridge and Oxford. While the active politicians and their underlings were busy in the game of power politics, blissfully unmidful of the storm that was brewing, intelligent young men in the aristocratic houses or at the two great universities were becoming uneasily aware that a party without principles, carrying on a policy of political expediency, would ultimately spell ruin for the country.

In this novel, Disraeli is chiefly concerned with the two great political parties, the Whigs and the Tories, their historical origin and their present role. According to Disraeli, the Whigs were a factitious aristocracy who had obtained their wealth by plundering the Church and the monasteries at the time of the Reformation. "They pulled down thrones and churches, changed dynasties, abrogated and remodelled parliaments - - - introduced sectarian religion"<sup>1</sup>. They believed in excluding all other interests from sharing power - the Crown, the Church, and 'the people'. Their object was "to establish in England a high aristocratic republic on the model of the Venetian"<sup>2</sup> and a Venetian Constitution did govern England until 1832. He calls

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1. Coningsby, p. 79.

2. Ibid., p. 278.

them a destructive party, but "a party with distinct and intelligible principle. They seek a specific for the evils of our social system in the general suffrage of the population"<sup>1</sup>.

Disraeli also traced the origin of the Tory party. Its ancestors were Bolingbroke, Shellburne and the younger Pitt. They tried to preserve 'the English system' as against the 'Venetian', but now his chief complaint about the Tories was that they wished "to keep things as they find them as long as they can, and then will manage them as they find them as well as they can"<sup>2</sup>. They are not bothered with any principles whatsoever. In actual fact, both the political parties have become only factions, and they are not interested in national welfare. Disraeli was depicted in 'Punch' as "the infant Hercules, strangling the twin serpents, Whig and Tory, and certainly Whigs and Tories are alike made to suffer under the lash of his satire"<sup>3</sup>.

The Tory rule under Lord Liverpool and the Duke of Wellington lasted from 1812 to 1832, but according to Disraeli they were pseudo-Tories and not the standard bearers of true Toryism. "The Tory party, according to those perverted views of Toryism unhappily too long prevalent in this country, was held to be literally defunct, except by a few old battered

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1. Coningsby, p. 371.

2. Ibid., p. 371.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 618.

crones of office, crouched round the embers of faction which they were fanning, and muttering 'reaction' in mystic whispers"<sup>1</sup>.

With authentic and inside knowledge, Disraeli has traced the political history of England of this period and has commented on the part played by the leading politicians. Lord Liverpool is described as "The Arch Mediocrity". The blunders of the Duke of Wellington allowed the Whigs to capture power in 1832, and they hoped to remain in power for at least a generation, since the Tory opposition had been totally routed. "But no government can be long secure without a formidable opposition"<sup>2</sup>. Two years later, the king dismissed the Whig ministry, which was apparently supported by an overwhelming majority in the Parliament and the nation, and called upon the Tories to form the government. Sir Robert Peel was away in Rome, and he was hastily summoned. Disraeli writes, "Sir Robert Peel, who had escaped from Lord Liverpool, escaped from Mr. Canning, escaped even from the Duke of Wellington in 1832 was at length caught in 1834; the victim of ceaseless intriguers, who neither comprehended his position, nor that of their country"<sup>3</sup>. The Conservatives, reduced to a 'factitious league', had no idea of any principles on which they should run a government. They were busy with political intrigues, and Disraeli's satirical pen is at its best when he is describing such scenes.

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1. Coningsby, p. 69.

2. Ibid., p. 68.

3. Ibid., p. 86.

"It was a lively season, that winter of 1834! what hopes, what fears and what bets - - - People sprang up like mushrooms! towns suddenly became full. Everybody who had been in office, and everybody who had ever had anything, and everybody who ever expected to have anything, were alike visible. All of course by mere accident; one might meet the same men regularly everyday for a month, who were only 'passing through town'.

"Now was the time for men to come forward who had never despaired of their country. True, they had voted for the Reform Bill, but that was to prevent a revolution. And now they were quite ready to vote against the Reform Bill, but this was to prevent a dissolution. These are the true patriots, whose confidence in the good sense of their countrymen and in their own selfishness is about equal"<sup>1</sup>.

In another passage, he describes a typical sycophant common everywhere in politics, "the true political adventurer who with dull desperation had stuck at nothing, had never neglected a treasury note, had been present at every division, never spoke when he was asked to be silent, and was always ready on any subject when they wanted him to open his month, who had not only discountenanced discontent in the party, but had regularly reported in strict confidence every instance of

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1. Coningsby, p. 97-98.

insubordination which came to his knowledge; - - - just beginning to feel the dread misgiving, whether being a slave and a sneak were sufficient qualifications for office, without family or connection"<sup>1</sup>.

When names are being discussed for inclusion in the new Tory ministry, Rambrooke is mentioned. "What sacrifices has he made"? asks Mr. Earwig. "Past sacrifices are nothing", said Lord Eskdale. "Present sacrifices are the thing we want; men who will sacrifice their principles and join us"<sup>2</sup>.

In the meantime, Peel issued the Tamworth Manifesto, in which he accepted the Reform Bill of 1832 as 'a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question'. Disraeli was never able to understand Peel's attitude in this matter. In his view, "The Tamworth Manifesto of 1834 was an attempt to construct a party without principles; its basis therefore was necessarily Latitudinarianism; and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity"<sup>3</sup>. The result was that Peel failed to win a majority at the general election of December, 1834. He continued in office till April, 1835, and then resigned. Lord Melbourne was asked to form the new ministry, which lasted until 1841. The confused behaviour of the Tories after the passage of the Reform Bill aroused a great

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1. Coningsby, p. 99-100.

2. Ibid., p. 101.

3. Ibid., p. 104.

deal of controversy regarding certain fundamental issues, and these are discussed at great length in Coningsby. When Coningsby visited Mr. Eustace Lyle at Genevieve, Mr. Lyle said, "The Duke (Of Beau/manoir) talks to me of conservative principles, he does not inform me what they are. I observe indeed a party in the state whose rule it is to consent to no change, until it is clamorously called for and then instantly to yield, but those are Concessionary and not Conservative principles. This party treats institutions as we do our pheasants, they preserve only to destroy them. But is there a statesman among these Conservatives who offers us a dogma for a guide, or defines any great political truth which we should aspire to establish? It seems to me a barren thing, this Conservatism, an unhappy cross-breed; the mule of politics that engenders nothing"<sup>1</sup>.

Coningsby and his friends are for ever discussing the current political scene. They expose and demolish everything, political parties, representative institutions, Democracy, but the solution that they offer is somewhat vague and shadowy.

Coningsby suggests - - - "Nevertheless, if we are forced to revolutions, let us propose to our consideration the idea of a free monarchy, established on fundamental laws, itself the apex of a vast pile of municipal and local government, ruling an educated people, represented by a free and intellectual

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1. Coningsby, p. 155.

press"<sup>1</sup>. In the end, when Coningsby and all his friends have been elected to Parliament in the general Elections of 1841, and the Tories have been returned in a majority, Disraeli concludes the novel with a series of questions "What will be their fate? Will they maintain in august assemblies and high places the great truths which, in study and in solitude, they have embraced? - - - Will their skilled intelligence subside into being the adroit tool of a corrupt party? - - - Or will they remain brave, single, and true"<sup>2</sup>.

'Young England' was more of a romantic ideal than a practical party programme, and hence this vagueness. The idea of the revival of a benevolent feudal system was completely out dated even in Disraeli's own times, and as a practical politician, he must have been fully aware of this fact. But it was the dream "that haunts the youth of every generation, of a party truly national rising above factious aims and limitations"<sup>3</sup>.

The scenes in the novel present a variety of pictures, covering practically every aspect of contemporary social and political life, painted with skill and rich humour. The dazzling pageantry of the life of the aristocracy passes before our eyes, when Coningsby visits his school friends, Lord Henry Sydney, at Beaumanoir, "one of those Palladian palaces, vast

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1. Coningsby, p. 375.

2. Ibid., p. 503.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 618.

and ornate" - - - surrounded by parks and gardens, and a "wilderness abounding in ferny coverts and green and stately trees"<sup>1</sup>, in which wandered the hart and the hind, the ladies in their well-fashioned muslin dresses, "bending over their embroidery frames, consulting over the arrangement of a group, or the colour of a flower"<sup>2</sup>, the gentlemen discussing politics and the New Poor Law, in "that little half hour that separates after dinner, the dark from the fair sex"<sup>3</sup>.

The friends from Beaumanoir pay a visit to the residence of Mr. Eustace Lyle, St. Geneviève, built of "a white and glittering stone, it sparkled with its pinnacles in the sunshine"<sup>4</sup> and "the peacocks, who were sunning themselves on the turrets, expanded their plumage to welcome them"<sup>5</sup>. They see the ancestral portraits, visit the exquisite chapel, and witness the alms-giving ceremony.

The ladies, apart from their pleasures of the drawing room, also went on their "pilgrimages of charity and kindness - - Lady Everingham superintended schools, organised societies of relief"<sup>6</sup>.

The picture painted of high life is here given at its best. There is grace, beauty, and refinement, dignity and

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1. Coningsby, p. 86.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 148-149.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

repose, charity and a strong sense of social and public duty. However, Disraeli is fully conscious of the other side also. Descriptions of life in Coningsby castle illustrate the unpleasant and ugly aspects of aristocratic living, the ostentatious luxury, the debauchery, the self-indulgence, the vices and the follies, which made people revolt against the entire feudal order.

Disraeli takes the reader to Manchester where we get a glimpse of life in the great industrial centres, and in the model factory of Millbank, and then to the gay life of Paris, with its brilliant society, the absence of snobbery and its graceful ease. There is a picture of life at Eton. Disraeli took the assistance of Reverend W.G. Cookesley, a tutor, in order to make it authentic. We are shown the election scene at Darlford, with all its thrills and excitement, the applause and hooting of the mob, the corruption and the gangsterism. There is just an occasional hint about the condition of the people. "Theresa brings me terrible accounts of the sufferings of the poor about us", said the Duke (of Beaumanoir), shaking his head, 'Women think everything to be suffering'. said Lord Everingham"<sup>1</sup>. This theme was fully elaborated in his next novel, Sybil.

The characters in Coningsby have been more skilfully drawn than the scenes. Edmund Gosse regards this novel as one

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1. Coningsby, p. 142.

of the "most brilliant studies of political character"<sup>1</sup>.

The hero, Coningsby, is handsome, graceful, endowed with sensitive idealism, youthful enthusiasm and a noble though unassertive ambition. He has an intelligent, enquiring and receptive mind, with the capacity to analyse the ideas and impressions that he receives. Quiller-Couch considers him to be a 'nincompoop'<sup>2</sup>, while Mompenny thinks he is "hardly a living, moving figure and smacks of the prig and the bore"<sup>3</sup>. In the opinion of Walter Allen, he is "so ardent, so high minded, and so handsome, almost a servant-girl's hero"<sup>4</sup>. In spite of these harsh judgements, he remains a likeable character, tender hearted, and quite worthy to be the leader of 'the new generation'.

Coningsby receives much of his political education through Sidonia, the sage and philosopher who appears again and again in Disraeli's novels. In presenting Sidonia, Disraeli was carrying out a well-known literary tradition, of portraying an idealised version of himself, as Byron did in Childe Harold and Don Juan. Cazamian calls Sidonia "the fantasy self of his novels"<sup>5</sup>. He is a fabulously rich Jew, proud of his race, a man of profound knowledge and wisdom and penetrating

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1. Edmund Gosse, 'The Novels of Benjamin Disraeli' in Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature", Vol. XXXVI, p. 15.

2. Arthur Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and Other Victorians, p. 194.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 620.

4. Walter Allen, The English Novel, p. 148.

5. L. Cazamian, The Social Novel in England, p. 72.

intellect. He is in a position to influence the financial policies of all the countries of Europe and Asia Minor.

"No Minister of State had such communication with secret agents and political spies as Sidonia - - - The secret history of the world was his pastime"<sup>1</sup>. "He was a man without affections - - - he was susceptible of deep emotions, but not for individuals - - - woman was to him a toy, man a machine"<sup>2</sup>.

He is too much above ordinary humanity to appear as a figure of flesh and blood. He is perhaps an idealised combination of Disraeli and Rothschild - A 'Disrothschild' according to Guedalla. His main role in the novel is to provide an opportunity to Disraeli to voice his views on various subjects. For example, Sidonia gives expression to a deep-rooted Jewish conviction, faith in character, individual or national, as the supreme force in human affairs. "There is no influence at the same time so powerful and so singular as that of individual character"<sup>4</sup>. He tells Coningsby why the Utilitarian philosophy has failed in England. It attempted to reconstruct society on a purely rational basis, but human reason has its limitations. "Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions; never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination"<sup>5</sup>.

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1. Coningsby, p. 230-231.

2. Ibid., p. 229.

3. Philip Guedalla, Introduction to the Bradenham Edition, p. xii.

4. Coningsby, p. 80.

5. Ibid., p. 253.

Through Sidonia, Disraeli also makes a desperate effort to obliterate the popular image of the Jew - as a Shylock or a Fagin. In Trollope's novels, the stockpusher, often a Jew, was the conventional villain.

The most life-like portraits in the novel are those of Lord Monmouth and his confidential adviser, Mr. Rigby. Lord Monmouth was drawn after the third Marquess of Hertford, whom Thackeray had also portrayed as Lord Steyne in Vanity Fair. But Lord Monmouth is finely conceived and skilfully drawn. He is a far more interesting and attractive figure than Lord Steyne. "He is no aristocratic villain of melodrama, nothing like the caricature Thackeray drew from the same model"<sup>1</sup>.

Lord Monmouth is a profligate, utterly selfish, domineering, arrogant, a die-hard aristocrat of the old school. He "detested popular tumults as much as he despised public opinion"<sup>2</sup> and decided to remain in Italy during the agitation for the Reform Bill, but returned in 1832, in order to keep his political influence alive. For him politics did not mean any principles or ideals but to further his own interests and to gain his object. Before the Reform Bill, he had owned ten boroughs and Mr. Rigby had represented one of those boroughs. Now those boroughs were gone, but he was determined to maintain the Monmouth influence by contesting the elections. He wants

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1. Walter Allen - The English novel, p. 149.

2. Coningsby, p. 14.

his grandson, Coningsby, to stand from Darlford when the next election takes place. The scene in which the two generations confront one another is one of the most dramatic in the novel.

" 'I feel that I am not yet sufficiently prepared for so great a responsibility as a seat in the House of Commons', said Coningsby. 'Responsibility'! said Lord Monmouth, smiling, 'what responsibility is there'? - - - 'All you have got to do is to vote with your party' - - -

'I am sorry', said Coningsby, rather pale, but speaking with firmness, 'I am sorry that I could not support the Conservative Party'.

'By — !' exclaimed Lord Monmouth starting in his seat, 'some woman has got hold of him and made him a Whig!'.

'No, my dear grandfather', - - - 'nothing of the kind, I don't know what you are driving at, sir', said Lord Monmouth, in a hard, dry tone<sup>1</sup>".

Coningsby tries to explain the views and the philosophy of the Young England group, but it is of no avail. The grandfather tells him quite plainly that he has no business to hold opinions.

" 'I tell you what it is, Harry', said Lord Monmouth very drily, 'members of my family may think as they like, but they must act as I please. You must go down on Friday to

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1. Coningsby, p. 430.

2. Ibid., p. 435.

Darlford and declare yourself a candidate for the town'"<sup>1</sup>.

Coningsby defies the old man and is disinherited for daring to do so. However, with all his arrogance and egoism, Lord Monmouth retains a certain dignity and grandeur.

The character of Rigby is said to have been modelled on John Wilson Croker, a writer and a politician, and a confidential adviser of Lord Hertford. Rigby is obsequious to his superiors and tyrannical to his inferiors. As a sychophant his picture may be overdrawn, especially as a portrait of Croker, but he stands for a life-portrait of a type of man common in political circles of all times - men who attach themselves to some powerful and influential nobleman by making themselves useful to him and doing all his dirty work and thus getting on in society and politics. "Rigby is the embodiment of an eternal type, the cold-blooded underling, a yes-man, but a particularly formidable yes-man. Disraeli scorns him, but scarcely under-rates him"<sup>2</sup>.

Murray, Croker and Lockhart were all influential persons in the literary and journalistic establishment of the respectable Tory world, and Disraeli had incurred their enmity ever since the publication of Vivian Grey in 1826. Disraeli particularly disliked Croker and had a personal grudge against him. He therefore held him up to immortal ridicule in the character of Rigby.

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1. Coningsby, p. 435.

2. Walter Allen - The English Novel, p. 149.

The two other immortal characters in this novel are Tadpole and Taper, typical of the petty political intriguers and wire-pullers that thrive in all political parties. They haunt political clubs and are consulted by political leaders on the details of party management. Tadpole is said to have been modelled on F.R. Bonham, the able election manager of the Tory party in 1832, though it was denied at the time that this novel was published. He reorganised the Tory party from his desk at Carlton Club, and his work was "brilliantly but unreasonably caricatured by Disraeli in his account of Mr. Tadpole in Coningsby"<sup>1</sup>.

Tadpole is always ready with his note-book containing calculations of majorities and minorities, chances of winning a particular constituency and the patronage to be promised. They are discussing the strategy for winning the next election:

" 'And now for our cry', said Mr. Taper. - - - 'Ancient institutions and modern improvements, I suppose, Mr. Tadpole?'

'Ameliorations is the better word; ameliorations. Nobody knows exactly what it means'"<sup>2</sup>.

Their sole concern is to advance their personal interests and they will stoop to any level in order to achieve it. "All we have to do is to get into Parliament, work well

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1. Asa Briggs - The Age of Improvement, p. 325.

2. Coningsby, p. 108.

together, and keep other men down - - - I tell you what, Taper, the lists must prove a dissolution inevitable - - - If the present Parliament goes on where shall we be? - - - -

'True, terribly true', said Mr. Taper. 'That we should ever live to see a Tory government again! We have reason to be very thankful'.

'Hush' said Mr. Tadpole. 'The time has gone by for Tory Governments; what the country requires is a sound Conservative Government'.

'A sound Conservative government', said Taper, musingly. I understand: Tory men and Whig measures'<sup>1</sup>.

Trollope's Roby and Ratler in his political novels were perhaps borrowed from Disraeli's Taper and Tadpole, but they do not come to life like Disraeli's figures. T.P. O'Connor has commented: "In Coningsby are introduced the famous pair, Taper and Tadpole. These are intended to typify the small ideas, the mean, insincere tricks of small electioneering agents, and Disraeli is supposed to be very successful in his delineation of those objects of his dislike"<sup>2</sup>. He is of opinion that they are self-portraits and that is why Disraeli has portrayed them so convincingly.

The other characters belong to certain types, or they are drawn straight from life, for example, Mr. Millbank is a

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1. Coningsby, p. 108.

2. T.P. O'Connor - Lord Beaconsfield, p. 382.

fine specimen of the 'Captains of Industry'. He is a model employer, a man of action and singleness of purpose. The Duke and the Duchess of Beaumanoir represent the benevolent feudal aristocracy. The Duke is a cultured and kind-hearted man, tolerant of others' opinion and averse to violent controversies. Lord Everingham was a Whig, "a clear-headed, cold-blooded man who looked upon the New Poor Law as another Magna Charta"<sup>1</sup>.

Henry Sydney and Buckhurst were both drawn very obviously from life, and represent Lord John Manners and Alexander Baillie Cochrane. Oswald Millbank was at first identified with Gladstone, but actually he was John Walter, heir apparent of the ruling dynasty of The Times. Eustace Lyle was a portrait of Ambrose Lisle Phillips, a young and wealthy Roman Catholic.

Amongst the women characters, Edith Millbank is a conventional heroine, beautiful, quiet and devoted. She is not altogether a success. Lady Everingham is one of those charming women of society, light, airy, ultra-feminine, bubbling with wit and delicious mockery. She is interested in politics and a woman with ideas. Mrs. Guy Flouncey is an anticipation of Becky Sharp, and a clever sketch of a social climber. According to one critic<sup>2</sup>, Thackeray has taken Becky Sharp and Lord Steyne directly from Coningsby where they first appeared as Mrs. Guy Glouncey and Lord Monmouth and presented them in Vanity Fair.

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1. Coningsby, p. 140.

2. D.J. Greene, Notes and Reviews - Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol. 16, (1961-62).

The novel is full of a host of minor characters from the social and political world in whose portrayal Disraeli has displayed his lively satire and wit.

Coningsby was an instant success. The first edition of one thousand copies was sold out in a fortnight, and three editions were sold in three months. America asked for fifty thousand copies. Its success was largely due to the fact that it was regarded as the manifesto of Young England, and because it contained so many references to living statesmen, but its enduring value lies in the new form of art that Disraeli had invented, the political novel. "The view of life taken by Young England is put forward with wonderful success and the picture of English political society which is presented, is the most perfect and unsparing ever given"<sup>1</sup>.

A week after the publication, Disraeli wrote in a letter to his wife:

"I have seen Hope, he only says he is enchanted - - - Cochrane raving: Manners full of wild rapture"<sup>2</sup>. Smythe wrote to Disraeli: "I am so dazzled, bewildered, tipsy with admiration, the most passionate and wild"<sup>3</sup>. Moncton Milnes was in Berlin, and he wrote about the reaction in Europe: "Everybody here, from the Princess of Prussia downwards is

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1. D.F. Hitchman - The Public Life of The Earl of Beaconsfield, K.G., p. 128.
  2. M and B, Vol. I, p. 598.
  3. Ibid., p. 598.

reading and talking Coningsby"<sup>1</sup>. The novel was translated into French, German, Dutch, Italian and Polish, and was one of the English novels to be seen most frequently on Continental bookstalls.

Lord Henry Lennox wrote in a letter to Disraeli about Coningsby. "How true! how painfully true! a picture of human nature! and what language! - - - It strikes me - - - that our position as a party is or has been for the last six months nearly identical with the Conservative party in 1834"<sup>2</sup>.

Disraeli wrote to Lord Henry Lennox. "Sir Robert Peel said he was charmed with the descriptions - - - Lord John Russell read Coningsby every evening to his wife - - - He liked 'the love scenes' and was often moved to tears by them"<sup>3</sup>. The reviews were generally favourable, though there was hostile criticism also.

The Athenæum commented that "it was cleverly timed and cleverly managed, though unsatisfactory as a novel". Thackeray wrote a comical burlesque in Punch in 1847 'Coddingsby, by B. De Shrewsbury Esq. It is said that Disraeli was very angry with him for having ridiculed him, and some critics believe that Disraeli later took his revenge by portraying Thackeray as St. Barbe in Endymion. Orthodox Tory opinion continued to be critical of Disraeli. Lockhart's attitude of hatred was

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 598.

2. Ibid., p. 1203.

3. Ibid., p. 1204.

displayed in his comment on Coningsby: "That Jew scamp has published a very blackguard novel"<sup>1</sup>.

The novel has many of the defects of Disraeli's style but it has been lavishly praised by many critics. Quiller-Couch writes - "Coningsby is the masterpiece - - - I defy you to find a more vivacious more scintillating book - scintillating with joyful and irresistible malice"<sup>2</sup>. Raymond regards it as "a manual of political wisdom"<sup>3</sup>. The long speeches by Coningsby and Sidonia, and the other passages analysing the political situation, would normally have been dull reading, but they are enlivened with sparkling wit and irony and show great political insight. Besides, they have been skilfully woven into the texture of the story. Sir Leslie Stephen was of opinion that "Coningsby wants little but a greater absence of purpose to be a first rate novel. If Mr. Disraeli had confined himself to the merely artistic point of view, he might have drawn a picture of political society worthy of comparison with Vanity Fair"<sup>4</sup>.

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1. Quoted by R. Blake Disraeli, p. 48 from Andrew Lang's Life and Letters of J.G. Lockhart.
  2. Arthur, Quiller-Couch - Charles Dickens and Other Victorians, p. 196.
  3. C.T. Raymond, Disraeli: The Alien Patriot, p. 114.
  4. Leslie Stephen - Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 107.

### Sybil

Sybil followed Coningsby in 1845. In this novel, Disraeli shifts the emphasis from characters to scenes. The characters are not as elaborately drawn as in Coningsby, but he took great pains to picture as faithfully as possible the life of the 'Two Nations', the rich and the poor.

During the 1840's, the 'Condition of England' was a favourite theme with most of the contemporary writers and thinkers. Carlyle had expressed the idea of the 'Two Nations', twelve years before Disraeli, in Sartor Resartus. He called them the Dandiacal Body and the Poor Slaves.

"Such are the two sects which at this moment divide the more unsettled portion of the British People, and agitate that ever-vexed country - - - Striving to separate and isolate it into two contradictory, uncommunicating masses"<sup>1</sup>.

There is no evidence to suggest that Disraeli had studied Carlyle, but he must have been aware of Carlyle's ideas. Sartor Resartus was republished in 1838, Chartism was published in 1840, and Past and Present in 1843. All these works are highly relevant to the theme of Sybil. Mrs. Tillotson has written about the influence of Carlyle on the novels of this period. "Carlyle was generally felt as a dominant force in

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1. Carlyle - Sartor Resartus, Book III, Chap. X, p. 255.

the 40's"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli's relations with Carlyle were never cordial and yet they thought alike on many of the current problems. Both had a curious yet characteristic blend of radicalism and conservatism, both denounced 'laissez-faire', and tended to idealise the past. Like Carlyle, Disraeli believed in 'great men' and 'the Hero'. Sidonia tells Coningsby that "the Spirit of the Age is the very thing that a great man changes"<sup>2</sup>, and a great man is one who affects the mind of his generation.

Like Carlyle, Disraeli was opposed to the Utilitarian philosophy which was the accepted orthodoxy of the day, and yet both recognised the force of the new industrialism. To Carlyle, "Manchester, with its Cotton fuzz, its smoke and dust - - - with its ten thousand times ten thousand spools and spindles all set humming"<sup>3</sup>, represented power, energy and enterprise which could be used for the regeneration of England. Coningsby goes to Manchester and sees the tremendous power of the machine, "a spectacle that fills the mind with curious and even awful speculation"<sup>4</sup>. Both Carlyle and Disraeli sympathised with the Chartists, but both saw the inherent dangers of the movement. Disraeli brings this out very forcefully in Sybil. Both lamented the degradation of the English Church.

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1. K. Tillotson - Novels of the 1840's, p. 150.

2. Coningsby, p. 124.

3. Chartism, Chap. VIII, p. 50-51.

4. Coningsby, p. 164.

Apart from the writings of Carlyle, the reports of the Children's Employment Commission, the Chartist riots, the Parliamentary debates on the Factory Bill in 1844, all these had focussed great attention at this time on the miseries of the lives of the working class. Disraeli was already familiar with the condition of the rural poor during his long struggle over the New Poor law. He personally visited the industrial towns in the North in 1844, and he tells us that the descriptions of the misery of the poor in Sybil were written from his own observations.

The 'Condition-of-England' question was the most absorbing problem of the day, hence the immense popularity of Sybil. Though the political situation from 1837 to 1844 still forms the background of the novel, the emphasis has shifted to social distress, "to the state of the People whom those parties for two centuries have governed"<sup>1</sup>. This theme is of more universal interest and the reading public was moved and thrilled by the scenes of misery so tellingly and powerfully described. Disraeli's main purpose was to contrast the extravagant luxury and frivolities of the rich with the heart-rending misery, squalor and degradation of the poor. He also wanted to expose the supreme indifference of the political parties that were far more interested in their game

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1. Sybil, p. 491.

of factious power politics to be bothered about the suffering around them. He also wanted to show to the working classes that their attempts at forming combinations and secret unions will only end in causing more suffering and confusion. He wished to prove that only the new generation of aristocrats, the 'natural leaders of the people' could save the situation.

The hero of the novel is a young aristocrat, Charles Egremont, though the novel is named after the heroine, Sybil. Egremont is the younger brother of Lord Marney. He has been returned in the General Election following the death of King William IV in 1837. He goes to visit his elder brother in order to ask him for some money for defraying his election expenses. Lord Marney is a specimen of a thoroughly stupid and selfish aristocrat, and he refuses to help his brother. He only suggests that Egremont should marry a rich heiress, Lady Joan Fitz-Warene, daughter of the Earl of Mowbray, and makes arrangements for a visit to Mowbray Castle.

Egremont went out for a stroll towards the Marney Abbey. He was in a rather depressed and thoughtful frame of mind, when he met two strangers there. Then followed the famous conversation which has given the novel its subtitle. Egremont said, - - - 'our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed'. 'Which nation?' asked the younger stranger, 'for she reigns over two' - - - 'Yes', resumed the younger

stranger after a moment's interval. 'Two nations; b  
whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as  
ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings,  
as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants  
of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding,  
are fed by a different food, and ordered by different manners,  
and are not governed by the same laws'.

'You speak of - 'said Egremont, hesitatingly.

'The Rich and The Poor'<sup>1</sup>.

A divine melody was heard from the chapel and, after it had  
ceased, Egremont beheld Sybil, and was completely overwhelmed  
by her exquisite beauty. The rest of the story is chiefly  
concerned with the efforts of Egremont to woo Sybil and his  
ultimate success after many vicissitudes and failures.

In order to cultivate her friendship and that of her  
father, Gerard, a leader of the people, Egremont poses as a  
commoner, and introduces himself to them as one Mr. Franklin,  
a newspaper reporter. Later in the novel, when Sybil comes to  
know of his true identity, she breaks off her friendship with  
the remark that an impassable gulf existed between the rich  
and the poor and no communication was possible between them.  
Meanwhile, Egremont continues to prove his sincerity by  
championing the cause of the poor in Parliament during the  
debate on the Charter. The novel ends in a true melodramatic

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1. Sybil, p. 77.

style. Mowbray Castle is burnt down by an angry mob of Hell Cats during the labour riots of 1842. In the mêlée that ensued, certain title - deeds were rescued from its strong room, which subsequently established the fact that Walter Gerard was the true owner of Mowbray. He had been deprived of his heritage by a fraud and Lord Mowbray had no legal claim to the estate. Thus Sybil, the daughter of the People, has the purest of blue blood running through her veins. But Gerard is shot dead by Lord Marney, and Lord Marney is stoned to death by a frenzied mob. Sybil helped the members of the Mowbray family to escape through a secret passage while she herself is rescued by Egremont from a band of drunken ruffians. "'We will never part again', said Egremont. 'Never', murmured Sybil"<sup>1</sup>.

The intercaste union of Egremont and Sybil is an appropriate compromise between romance and sociology, and is the symbolic creation of 'One Nation'. But it transpires that she is not really 'the daughter of the People', as proved by those documents rescued from Mowbray Castle. After the death of the Earl of Marney and Walter Gerard, it is really a union of the properties of Marney and Mowbray, one agricultural and the other industrial, and this is the real symbolic event.

The plot is only a slender thread to hold together a succession of vivid scenes from the world of the rich and the

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1. Sybil, p. 486.

poor. The novel opens in the gay saloon of a sumptuous London club, obviously Crockford's, on the eve of the Derby of 1837. We are introduced to the idle and gilded youth of the type of Alfred Mountchesney, suffering from boredom and ennui, and others like Charles Egremont, eager for action, but aimless. Mountchesney's attitude to life is summed up in just one remark, which could very well have come from one of the plays of Oscar Wilde. Mr. Berners says, " 'I do not like your suburban dinners. You always get something you can't eat, and cursed bad wine'.

'I rather like bad wine', said Mr. Mountchesney, 'one gets so bored with good wine'"<sup>1</sup>.

The third chapter is a long digression, in which Disraeli repeats his pet theories about the origins of the two political parties which he had enunciated in Coningsby. In an attempt to trace the origins of the Earl of Marney, whose ancestors had spoliated the Church and betrayed their king, Disraeli goes on to describe the roles of some great though forgotten characters like Lord Shellburne and the younger Pitt, and then dwells upon the political history of the period upto the death of King William IV. He elaborates on the role of the Duke of Wellington. "His grace precipitated a revolution which might have been delayed for half a century"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Sybil, p. 3.

2. Ibid., p. 29.

Thus he places the blame for the Reform Bill on the muddle-headed policies of the Duke. The digression is a brilliant piece of political writing, but not necessary for our understanding of the plot or the characters.

The novel is a study in contrast. We are shown, on the one hand, the way of life of the aristocracy, their luxurious palaces, their sports and pastimes, their artificial and unrealistic topics of conversation and, on the other, the grinding poverty of the people, their daily struggles for existence and the seething discontent.

At Crockford's, "the gleaming lustres poured a flood of soft yet brilliant light over a plateau glittering with gold plate, and fragrant with exotics embedded in vases of rare porcelain"<sup>1</sup>. Marney Abbey, the residence of Lord Marney, was "placed on a noble elevation in the centre of an extensive and well-wooded park - - - the portal opened to a hall - - - with the dais, the screen, the gallery, and the buttery-hatch all perfect, and all of carved black oak"<sup>2</sup>. At Mowbray Castle, "the side tables were laden with silver vases, and golden shields arranged on shelves of crimson velvet"<sup>3</sup>.

In the rural town of Marney, the writer takes us behind the "laughing landscape" where we find "cottages built of rubble, or unhewn stones without cement - - - looking as if

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1. Sybil, p. 2.

2. Ibid., p. 49.

3. Ibid., p. 117.

they could scarcely hold together. The gaping chinks admitted every blast; - - - the rotten rafters were evidently misplaced; while in many instances the thatch, yawning in some parts to admit the wind and wet, and in all utterly unfit for its original purpose of giving protection from the weather - - - Before the doors of these dwellings, and often surrounding them, ran open drains full of animal and vegetables refuse - - - These wretched tenements seldom consisted of more than two rooms - - - These swarming walls had neither windows or doors - - - The dwelling rooms were neither boarded nor paved; - - - contiguous to every door might be observed the dung-heap on which every kind of filth was accumulated"<sup>1</sup> - - - Dickens has given very similar descriptions of Saffron Hill and Jacob's Island in Oliver Twist.

The aristocrats spend their time racing, hunting, playing chess, and entertaining one another in regal splendour. Egremont is shown a news-item in the paper:

"Extraordinary Sport at the Earl of Marney's. On Wednesday, in a small cover called the Horns, near Marney Abbey, his grace the Duke of Fitz - Aquitaine, the Earl of Marney, - - - - with only four hours' shooting, bagged the extraordinary number of seven hundred and thirty head of game, namely, hares three hundred and thirty nine; pheasants two hundred and twentyone; - - - - and the following day upwards of fifty hares, pheasants, etc. (wounded the previous day), were picked up"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Sybil, p. 61.

2. Ibid., p. 229.

On the next page there was another paragraph: "At a Petty Sessions holden at the Green Dragon Inn, Marney - - - Information against Thomas Hind for a trespass in pursuit of game - - - The case was distinctly proved; several wires being found in the pocket of the defendant. Defendant was fined in the full penalty of forty shillings and costs twenty-seven; the Bench being of opinion there was no excuse for him, Hind being in regular employ as a farm-labourer and gaining his seven shillings a week. Defendant, being unable to pay penalty, was sent for two months to Marnham gaol"<sup>1</sup>.

Men like the Earl of Marney were of opinion "that the poor are well off, at least the agricultural poor, very well off indeed. Their incomes are certain - - - and they have no cares, no anxieties"<sup>2</sup> - - He cannot understand why there should be instances of rick-burning. His solution for the problem is a proper rural police to control this incendiarism.

We are taken to a mining village where we get a glimpse into the life of the miners. "They come forth: the mine delivers its gang and the pit its bondsmen - - - bands of stalwart men - - - wet with toil, and black as the children of the tropics; troops of youth, alas! of both sexes, though neither their raiment nor their language indicates the difference; all are clad in male attire; - - - - Naked to the

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1. Sybil, p. 230.

2. Ibid., p. 176.

waist, an iron chain fastened to a belt of leather runs between their legs clad in canvas trousers, while on hands and feet an English girl, for twelve, sometimes for sixteen hours a day, hauls and hurries tubs of coals up subterranean roads, dark, precipitous, and plashy; - - - - See, too, these emerge from the bowels of the earth! Infants of four and five years of age, many of them girls, pretty, and still soft and timid; - - - they open the air-doors of the galleries"<sup>1</sup>, to allow the coal-waggons to pass through. In return for this hard labour, they are all "tommied to death"<sup>2</sup>. Their employers pay them in kind, instead of cash, and they are cheated in every possible way. We are shown a scene of grim humour in a tommy-shop. "The door of Mr. Diggs' tommy-shop opened. The rush was like the advance into the pit of a theatre when the drama existed; pushing, squeezing, fighting, tearing, shrieking - - - For the first five minutes Master Joseph Diggs did nothing but blaspheme and swear at his customers - - - - 'what did you say, woman? - - - how much best tea do you want?' 'I don't want any, Sir'. 'You never want best tea; you must take three ounces of best tea, or you shan't have nothing'"<sup>3</sup>. Thus Mr. Diggs forces the poor women to buy what they do not want, at arbitrary prices fixed by him, along with curses and abuses hurled left and right. They suffer all this exploitation but later on, the mob, led by the Hell Cats, attacks the shop and sets fire to it, killing Master Joseph Diggs.

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1. Sybil, p. 162.

2. Ibid., p. 164.

3. Ibid., p. 184.

We are shown the factory town of Mowbray, 'the city of smoke and toil'<sup>1</sup>, and the effect of industrialisation on the life of the people. There is Warner, an artisan who puts in "twelve hours of daily labour, at the rate of one penny each hour, and even this labour is mortgaged"<sup>2</sup>. He, and six hundred thousand artisans like him have been reduced to penury, as a result of mechanisation. He complains that "the Capitalist has found a slave, that has supplanted the labour and ingenuity of man. Once he was an artisan: at the best, he now only watches machines; and even that occupation slips from his grasp to the woman and the child"<sup>3</sup>. His daughter, Harriet, was employed in the factory, but she found the drudgery beyond her powers of endurance, and she has become a prostitute. Mick Radley, a youth of about sixteen, is living with a girl, "a wife and family or as good, as he says"<sup>4</sup>, while his mother is dying in a back cellar due to excessive drinking. She toiled from five o'clock in the morning till seven o'clock at night in the factory, and drink offered her the only escape. Mick has no sympathy for her, because he feels that all she did for him was to give him treacle and laudanum when he was a baby to stop him from crying, and stunted his growth.

Devilsdust is another such product. His mother put him out to nurse when he was fifteen days old, and he survived

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1. Sybil, p. 98.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

starvation, neglect and poison. "At two years of age, his mother being lost sight of, - - - - he was sent out in the street to 'play', in order to be run over"<sup>1</sup>. At the age of five he found employment in a factory which utilised waste cotton for making counterpanes and coverlets. It is not surprising that Devilsdust and Mick Radley became embittered and cold blooded Trade Unionists, while Chartism had its rise out of the suffering and despair of the poor. The novel traces the rise and progress of this movement. The presentation of the National Petition, with its million and a half signatures, in the Parliament is described. "The hopes of all, the vanity of many, were frustrated and shocked by finding that the exertions and expenditure of long months were not only fruitless, but had not even attracted as numerous an assembly, or excited as much interest, as an ordinary party struggle on some petty point of factitious interest, forgotten as soon as fought"<sup>2</sup>. After the fiasco of the petition, "the party of violence, a small minority - - - triumphed; and the outbreak at Birmingham was the first consequence of those reckless counsels that were destined in the course of the ensuing years to inflict on the working classes of this country so much suffering and disaster"<sup>3</sup>. The storming of Mowbray Castle becomes a part of the mob violence that swept through the country after the failure of the Chartist Petition. In this way, Disraeli makes the events in the lives of his characters merge with historical events.

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1. Sybil, p. 113.

2. Ibid., p. 330.

3. Ibid., p. 331.

There is a curious blend of realism and romanticism in describing the life of the working classes, especially in his treatment of Sybil, the working class heroine. Disraeli took great trouble to describe the lives of the poor as accurately as possible, yet the scenes remain a little stilted, artificial, and lacking in warmth of feeling. It is quite clear that he is not feeling at home in his setting, he is not able to understand the psychology of the working classes, and he is writing outside his creative range. However, he is full of wit, brilliance and originality when he is describing the contemporary political world, the ministers, Members of Parliament, and the conversation in the salons of the society ladies. These scenes are among the best that he ever wrote.

The main characters in this novel have not been drawn from life as in Coningsby. There are two sets of characters, belonging to the two different 'nations', the rich and the poor. The hero, Charles Egremont, unlike Coningsby, is a member of Parliament from the very beginning of the novel. His love for Sybil enables him to discover and understand the world of the poor. He is full of idealism and human sympathy and anxious to ameliorate the lot of the working classes. "He is in fact that rather rare phenomenon in nineteenth century fiction, a hero who is neither a prig nor an anaemic personification of all the virtues, but a sound, intelligent

and likeable human being, whose head and heart are both apparent, and who wins not only our sympathy but our respect"<sup>1</sup>. His brother, Lord Marney, is even more life-like. He is 'cynical, devoid of sentiment, arrogant, literal, hard"<sup>2</sup>, but very shrewd wherever his own interests are involved. He thinks that the agricultural labourer is very well off on eight shillings a week. "I have generally found, the higher the wages, the worse the workmen. They only spend their money in the beer-shops. They are the curse of this country"<sup>3</sup>. He violently opposed the construction of a railway at Marnham, but immediately gave in when they agreed to his terms. He bullies his gentle wife, and constantly needs flatterers and hangers-on, like Captain Grouse and Reverend Felix Flimsy, the Vicar, to pander to his vanity. There is Sir Vavasour Firebrace, rather a comic figure, obsessed with the idea of raising the status of baronets. He was copied from life, as there really was a character, Sir Richard Broun, who pursued their cause, and even wrote two books on the subject. Taper and Tadpole reappear in this novel, and follow their usual vocation of petty political intrigue.

Disraeli takes a sly delight in proving that many of the aristocrats of England had rather obscure origins. Lord Mowbray was descended from a waiter, while the Duke of

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1. Eric Forbes-Boyd, 'Disraeli, The Novelist', Essays and Studies (1950), p. 115.

2. Sybil, p. 50.

3. Ibid., p. 127.

Fitz-Aquitaine was the progeny of a French actress and a king. He gives satirical names to some of the members of Parliament, for example, Lord Muddlebrains, Mr. Thorough Base, Bombastes Rip and Floatwell, and exposes their ignorance and their hypocrisy. Aubrey St. Lys is Disraeli's ideal of what a clergyman should be. He is a Tractarian vicar, intelligent, educated and conscientious, and a believer in Disraeli's theory that 'Christianity is completed Judaism'.

Sybil, the working class heroine is saved from vulgarity because she has been brought up in a convent. "She is refined and ennobled by her devotion to the old faith with its long historical memories, its poetry and romance, its spiritual mystery, its world-wide charity and its soul-subduing power"<sup>1</sup>. She reminds people of a saint. " 'I could believe in saints when I am with thee", murmured Stephen"<sup>2</sup>. She moves around like an Angel of mercy, and is altogether too ethereal to be human. At times she behaves like the heroine of an Indian film, bursting into devotional songs at the slightest provocation. Egremont hears her singing and straight away falls in love with her. She is more the symbol of an idea than a real woman of flesh and blood. The other two important working class characters are Walter Gerard and Stephen Morley. Walter Gerard, a Roman Catholic, is the father of Sybil. He is an honest and idealistic leader of the people, who realises in

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 654.

2. Sybil, p. 99.

the end that "the People" are divided by fierce jealousies and passions. It is easy to incite them but difficult to control, once incited. He expresses a wistful longing for the past, and helps Egremont to understand the problems of the poor. Stephen Morley is the socialist editor of "Mowbray Phalanx". In the early part of the novel he is portrayed as an eager scholar and a great friend of Gerard and Sybil, a Votary of Moral Power and the Apostle of Community, but in the end he plays the role of a melodramatic villain.

Disraeli has sketched the society ladies and the tittle tattle of their salons with a surer touch. There is Lady St. Julians who is supposed to be modelled on Sarah, the Countess of Jersey, and Lady Deloraine, who is Disraeli's friend, Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry. Both are clever and scheming and anxious to exercise maximum influence in the social and the political world. There is Lady Joan Fitz-Warene who knows Arabic and Hebrew, she talks of Aztec cities, historical theories and learned books, and has an observatory from where she beholds a comet. Lady Firebrace is keenly interested in politics and regarded as a great stateswoman among the Tories. The Bedchamber crisis is described with ironic humour. "Was conservatism, that mighty mystery of the nineteenth century, was it after all to be brained by a fan?"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Sybil, p. 315.

According to some critics, Sybil was not as popular as Coningsby because it is more of a novel with a purpose, even though the purpose is so high and inspiring. Others regard it better than Coningsby because social distress presents more interesting features for treatment in a novel. There were too many characters in Coningsby, and even the main characters were drawn from living originals. In Sybil only some minor characters are drawn from life. The disquisitions upon politics and propaganda interludes have been reduced, and there is only one long digression in the beginning. The novel is full of highly dramatic and moving scenes, though the construction is imperfect, and the ending is altogether implausible, and melodramatic. In spite of its shortcomings, it is regarded by many good judges as the sincerest and best of Disraeli's novels. "Compassion for the wretched and oppressed, and anger against the indifferent and cruel, were the emotions which inspired Disraeli to write Sybil, and, where compassion and anger influence the minds of men, there will Sybil be read"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. B.N. Langdon Davies - Introduction to Sybil (p. xvi).

Tancred

Tancred or The New Crusade, the last novel of the trilogy was published in the year 1847. Its professed aim was to enlighten the Church upon its "duties - - - as a main remedial agency in our present State"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli dealt at length not only with the Church of Christ as the perpetual regenerator of man, but also attempted to do justice to the race which had founded Christianity. He expresses his views regarding the great House of Israel, its "contributions to the existing sum of human welfare, and the general influence of race on human action"<sup>2</sup>.

Although he had touched on the subject of race in Coningsby and some of the characters from that novel and from Sybil reappear in Tancred, yet "the reader is soon conscious of a breach of continuity with the previous novels, of being in a different atmosphere and a different world of ideas. 'Young England' had disappeared and the political purpose underlying Coningsby had disappeared with it - - - Tancred strikes the reader, less as the accomplishment of a political purpose, than as a sudden revolt of the author against the routine and hollowness of politics, against its prejudice and narrowness, and as an assertion of his detachment and superiority to it all by the glorification of his race and by the proclamation of the

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1. General Preface to the Collected edition of 1870, p. xiii.

2. Ibid., p. xiv-xv.

mystic ideas, inherited from the Jews, which marked him out from the commonplace mediocrities around him"<sup>1</sup>.

Some significant events had taken place between 1845 and 1847 which brought about this change of attitude. In the first place, the Young England group had disintegrated though the dream may have lingered for a while. George Smythe and Cochrane had deserted Disraeli and joined hands with Peel. Lord John Manners had supported the Government on the Maynooth Bill while Disraeli had spoken against it. Then the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 split the Tories. Peel committed his party to Free Trade, against the wishes of all the most vital elements in the party. "Disraeli leapt to the attack - - - Peel was abused in every tone at his command, and delighted landowners roared their approval as the strange, dishevelled figure expended treasuries of scorn on the Prime Minister's apostasy"<sup>2</sup>. As a result, Disraeli attained a very prominent position in Parliament but he also became more conscious of a deep-rooted prejudice against his Jewish origin. Tancred reflects the bitterness that he must have felt as a Jew and he boldly proceeds with his scathing satire on British society, and the glorification of the Jewish race. He has also ridiculed Parliamentary democracy, which is rather strange for a man who was himself aspiring for Parliamentary leadership and whose political ambitions were on the verge of being fulfilled.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 850.

2. P. Guedalla - Preface to the Bradenham edition, P. v.

In this novel, Disraeli explores fresh avenues. The scene shifts from British Parliamentary politics to political intrigues in the Middle East. It is also interesting from the biographical point of view, because the author reveals various facets of his personality and expresses his views on politics, religion, sociology and foreign affairs.

Disraeli introduces a new type of hero, a young religious enthusiast, who is disgusted with the stifling atmosphere of politics at home and he turns towards the East, in quest of "the great Asian Mystery"<sup>1</sup> which takes him to the Holy Land. This is 'the new Crusade', the subtitle of the novel. According to Baker, Peacock served as an inspiration for Tancred, and Disraeli borrowed from him "the idea of weaving a thread of exotic fancy into the ordinary fabric of realistic fiction"<sup>2</sup>.

The novel is in two distinct parts. The first two books describe the life of the aristocracy in London, with Disraeli's usual wit and satire, while in the last three books the scene shifts to the East, where the author gives full play to his flamboyant imagination and love of the Orient, with all its mystery, intrigue and exotic settings, and reads almost like a tale from the Arabian Nights though the illusion of reality is never wholly lost.

The first scene opens on a low key. We are introduced to a famous French chef, Leander. He has been asked to

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1. Tancred, p. 128.

2. E.A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, Vol. VII, p. 166.

supervise a grand affair. "The son of the Duke of Bellamont comes of age at Easter; it is to be a business of the thousand and one nights; the whole county to be feasted"<sup>1</sup>. There is not a man in Europe who is his equal, he is the "Chef of the age"<sup>2</sup>.

We then meet the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont. The Duke regarded fashionable life "a compound of frivolity and fraud, of folly and vice"<sup>3</sup>, while the Duchess "shrank with a feeling of haughty terror from that world of fashion which would have so willingly greeted her"<sup>4</sup>. Hence they had led rather a secluded life, occasionally entertaining very exclusive company and rarely accepting any invitations themselves. It is only natural that their only son, Lord Montacute, should grow up into a thoughtful and serious-minded young gentleman. His proud parents take it for granted that he must enter Parliament, and also marry his cousin, soon after he comes of age. He astounds everyone by announcing his intention to go to the Holy Land, because he wants to find the answers to certain fundamental questions that have been troubling him. "What is Duty, and what is Faith? What ought I to Do, and what ought I to Believe?"<sup>5</sup>.

Both the parents are shocked and bewildered by his decision. The first two books relate the various methods

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1. Tancred, p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. Ibid., p. 14.

4. Ibid., p. 14.

5. Ibid., p. 56.

employed by the Duke and the Duchess to dissuade their son from undertaking this pilgrimage. The mother sends for the Bishop, in the hope that he would help to remove the doubts from her son's mind. He has been drawn from a living model, Bishop Blomfield, the Bishop of London, and Disraeli has his satirical fling at him - - - "He combined a great talent for action with very limited powers of thought - - - Placed in a high post in an age of political analysis, the bustling inter-meddler was unable to supply society with a single solution - - - All his quandaries terminated in the same catastrophe; a compromise"<sup>1</sup>. Such a man could hardly be expected to convince Tancred. "The eminent prelate did not realise Tancred's ideal of a bishop, while his lordship did not hesitate to declare that Lord Montacute was a visionary"<sup>2</sup>.

The parents, having failed with a bishop, now try a man of the world, Lord Eskdale, to persuade their son from going on this hazardous journey. Lord Eskdale points out to them that, in order to go to the Holy Land, Tancred must have a strong and heavy yacht built to order. In the meantime, he should enter society and, in a very subtle way, he introduces Tancred to the social world of London, in the hope that he will forget Jerusalem, once he is immersed in the pleasures of society. In this manner, we are introduced into high society, with all its sparkle, magnificence, and frivolous living. At

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1. Tancred, p. 73-74.

2. Ibid., p. 77.

Deloraine House, Tancred meets Lady Constance Rawleigh, "a distinguished beauty of two seasons: fresh but adroit - - - she had the reputation of being very clever, and of being able, if it pleased her to breathe scorpions as well as brilliants and roses"<sup>1</sup>. Tancred succumbs to her charms and soon realises that "there is nothing so remarkable as feminine influence"<sup>2</sup>.

"After making herself very agreeable, Lady Constance took up a book which was at hand, and said, 'Do you know this?' and Tancred, opening a volume - - - - found it was 'The Revelations of Chaos', a startling work, just published - - - "<sup>3</sup>. Lady Constance is very much impressed by this work. "It explains everything - - - It is all science - - - everything is proved - - - we are a link in the chain - - - we had fins, we may have wings"<sup>4</sup>. The reference here is to Robert Chambers' Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, published in 1844. According to his wife, Disraeli was enchanted with this book, but his opinion seems to have changed by the time he wrote Tancred. The material progress of the mid-Victorian era had become too closely identified with the progress of Science. The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the effort to make England the workshop of the world produced a strong reaction and we find Disraeli, like Tancred, shocked and disillusioned by the attempt to destroy the spiritual, the religious and the imaginative faculties of man.

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1. Tancred, p. 89-90.

2. Ibid., p. 91.

3. Ibid., p. 112.

4. Ibid., p. 113.

'I was a fish, and I shall be a crow', said Tancred to himself, when the hall door closed on him. 'What a spiritual mistress!'<sup>1</sup>. In utter disgust, he resolved to quit London as quickly as possible. Lord Eskdale fixes an appointment for Tancred with Sidonia for some letters of credit for his journey to the East. Tancred finds in Sidonia, a man of deep and sympathetic understanding.

" 'It appears to me, Lord Montacute, that what you want is to penetrate the great Asian Mystery'. 'You have touched my inmost thoughts', said Tancred eagerly"<sup>2</sup>.

While preparations are being made for the journey, Tancred discovers another sympathetic soul in Lady Bertie and Bellair. " 'Our lot is cast in a material age', said Tancred 'The spiritual can alone satisfy me', said Lady Bertie and Bellair.

'Because you have a soul', continued Tancred with animation, 'still of a celestial hue. They are rare in the nineteenth century. Nobody now thinks about heaven. They never dream of angels. All their existence is concentrated in steam boats and railways'"<sup>3</sup>.

She sympathised with his adventure and even suggested that she might accompany him to Jerusalem. "There was something about this lady, very interesting, besides her beauty,

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1. Tancred, p. 113.

2. Ibid., p. 128.

3. Ibid., p. 135.

her bright intelligence and her seraphic thoughts"<sup>1</sup>.

She imparted invaluable information to Tancred, "how he was to avoid being poisoned and assassinated, escape fatal fevers, regularly attend the service of the Church of England in countries where there were no Churches, and converse in languages of which he had no knowledge"<sup>2</sup>.

"Lady Bertie was a heroine worthy of ancient Christendom rather than of enlightened Europe"<sup>3</sup>. One day, Tancred found her in a very miserable condition. Some one brought her a note from outside. She read it, gave a shriek and fell into a swoon. Tancred went straight to Sidonia, for a solution of the mystery. Sidonia informed him that Lady Bertie is "the most inveterate female gambler in Europe"<sup>4</sup>. He took his letters of introduction and credit from Sidonia and set sail the next day.

On an earlier occasion, Sidonia had invited Tancred to a sumptuous dinner where he met the Young England group. He is introduced to Lord Henry Sidney, Lord Marney and Coningsby. All of them are members of one or other of the two Houses of Parliament and entirely devoted to public affairs. Disraeli writes glowingly about their noble ideals and the political achievements of this group, yet he expresses a sense of disillusionment with a Parliamentary career, which was strange, since he was himself aspiring for political leadership in 1847.

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1. Tancred, p. 157.

2. Ibid., p. 158-159.

3. Ibid., p. 163.

4. Ibid., p. 170.

When Tancred asks Lord Henry Sidney why he also does not undertake a journey to the Holy Land, Lord Henry replies, "It is too late. I have begun my work and I cannot leave it"<sup>1</sup>. Tancred is of opinion that a man of action should avoid Parliament, because it has become a defunct institution. He tells Lord Henry, 'I go to a land - - - that has never been blessed by that fatal drollery called a representative government'<sup>2</sup> - - - These are strange thoughts in an age which regarded belief in democracy with almost a kind of sanctity, and a seat in Parliament was the highest object and ambition of every educated Englishman.

Perhaps Disraeli wished to express his disillusionment with those whom he had previously idealised, or perhaps he wanted to sneer at the petty intrigues of those engaged in Parliamentary activity. It is also possible that the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 changed Disraeli's entire outlook regarding Parliamentary democracy and the future development of England, and produced in him an utterly cynical attitude.

In the remaining four Books, the scene shifts from London to the East. Tancred's experiences here transport us into a sort of dreamland, the magnificent and awe-inspiring view of Jerusalem by moonlight, "the view of Jerusalem is the history of the world, it is more, it is the history of earth

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1. Tancred, p. 140.

2. Ibid., p. 140.

and heaven"<sup>1</sup>. Tancred finds himself in a state of pious ecstasy as he pours forth "his perplexities and sorrows on the tomb of his Redeemer"<sup>2</sup>. He falls asleep in a garden near Bethany. On waking up he sees the beautiful Eva. In appearance and dress she seems to have stepped straight out of the Arabian Nights. She is the Rose of Sharon, the genius of Judaism and the daughter of the banker, Besso. She talks like a theological divine, and proves with a very queer logic that the Jews have saved the human race. Through her, Disraeli again repeats his pet theory that Christianity is completed Judaism.

Her exquisite beauty and her irrefutable logic combine to make Tancred fall desperately in love with her. From here onwards, the novel is a riot of thrills and adventures, and an account of the political intrigues of Fakredeen, who is anxious to become the Emir of Lebanon.

Eva tells him, 'Intrigue will be your ruin, Fakredeen', to which he replies, 'intrigue! It is life! It is the only thing!<sup>3</sup> - - - He needs a large sum of money to buy arms as he is engineering a revolt in Lebanon, and he plans to obtain it by getting Tancred kidnapped and then demanding a huge ransom for his release. He puts his plan into action when Tancred begins his desert journey in order to reach Mount Sinai.

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1. Tancred, p. 190.

2. Ibid., p. 177.

3. Ibid., p. 210.

He had gone a short distance when suddenly Sheikh Amalek's followers attack him and his companions. They are captured and imprisoned. During the imprisonment, Fakredeem holds long discussions with Tancred about the purpose of his mission to the Holy Land, and finds himself rather fascinated by him. Sheikh Amalek treats his prisoner, Tancred, with great courtesy and consideration and even allows him to go on a pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. On reaching this "sublimest scene of Arabian glory"<sup>1</sup> Tancred offers a prayer and then sees a vision in which the Angel of Arabia appears before him and makes a very pompous speech.

"Child of Christendom - - - - I am the angel of Arabia, the guardian spirit of that land which governs the world, for power is neither the sword nor the shield, for these pass away, but ideas, which are divine - - - - In the increased distance between God and man have grown up all those developments that have made life mournful. Cease, then, to seek in a vain philosophy, the solution of the social problem that vexes you. Announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of theocratic equality. Fear not, faint not, falter not"<sup>2</sup> - - - -.

Instead of being solemn and impressive, the scene becomes grotesque and one fails to see how the message of the Angel could offer a solution to any of the questions that were

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1. Tancred, p. 297.

2. Ibid., p. 299-300.

troubling the mind of Tancred, nor is one any the wiser as regards the great 'Asian Mystery'.

After returning from Sinai, Tancred falls seriously ill. In the meantime, Besso, the banker, for whom Tancred carried letters of credit from Sidonia, has been exceedingly perturbed since the news of his capture by Sheikh Amalek. A sum of two million piastres has been demanded from him for Tancred's release. Besso sends Eva to Sheikh Amalek, who happens to be her maternal grandfather, to negotiate for Tancred's release. She finds Tancred in a state of delirium, suffering from brain fever. She is also a renowned Hakim, and she cures him with some herbal medicine. Tancred is a changed character after the visit to Mount Sinai. He joins hands with Fakredeem, and both are ready for action to launch the Asian movement that is to send forth Divine Truth "to breathe a new spirit" into Europe. The two plan to conquer the world with the help of good soldiers and by "being animated by some sovereign principle that nothing can resist"<sup>1</sup>. It will then be possible "to establish a theocratic equality by the aid of the feudal system"<sup>2</sup>.

Fakredeem is now entirely under the spell of Tancred and ready "to assist in establishing, by his voice and his sabre, a new social system, which was to substitute the

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1. Tancred, p. 378.

2. Ibid., p. 378.

principle of association for that of dependence as the foundation of the Commonwealth, under the sanction and superintendence of the God of Sinai and of Calvary"<sup>1</sup>. In all this welter of religion, Oriental mysticism and spiritualism, the intrigues and combinations, Disraeli is being amazingly prescient when he speaks through Fakredeem, visualising a Commonwealth of nations as the future set-up for the survival of England.

There remains yet one more strange adventure for Tancred. He and Fakredeem embark upon their movement by going to the land of the Ansareys, who are ruled by a woman, who worship all the gods of the Greeks, and live in seclusion among the mountains of the North. We again witness scenes of magnificent splendour and the petty intrigues of an Oriental court. The Queen of the Ansareys, Astarte falls in love with Tancred, while Fakredeem is again at his old game, whispering malicious lies to advance his own interests and intriguing for power. After a series of wild adventures in which Eva is captured and released, Tancred manages to return to Jerusalem. This time, when he meets Eva, he declares his love for her in a most rhetorical style, addressing her as 'The Angel of Arabia, and of my life and spirit'.

She tells him to fly from her, as he is the son of Europe and of Christ, to which Tancred replies, "I am a Christian in the land of Christ, - - - and I kneel to a daughter

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1. Tancred, p. 380.

of my Redeemer's race"<sup>1</sup>. Eva fainted upon his shoulders, and the novel ends very abruptly with the announcement that Tancred's parents had arrived in Jerusalem.

In a letter to Lady Londonderry, Disraeli complained that Tancred had turned out to be much more troublesome and unmanageable personage than he had anticipated"<sup>2</sup>. From the point of view of art, the second part is rather long drawn out, and tends to become incoherent in parts. Incidents appear to be forced and there is no artistic harmony. It is small wonder that Disraeli found it difficult to bring the story to a satisfactory conclusion.

There are only two important characters in this novel, Tancred and Fakredeen. Tancred belongs to the same category as Coningsby and Egremont, an earnest and serious minded young man anxious to find a solution for the ills of mankind.

Fakredeen's character is cleverly drawn. Disraeli has portrayed in him a typical Oriental politician, an ambitious, unscrupulous intriguer and a bold man of action. Yet he is extremely sentimental, and suffers from occasional fits of melancholy. "Fakredeen possessed all the qualities of the genuine Syrian character in excess; vain, susceptible, endowed with a brilliant though frothy imagination - - - Stratagems came to him as naturally as fruit comes to a tree - - -

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1. Tancred, p. 500.

2. M and B, Vol. I, p. 862.

Fakredeen had no principle of any kind"<sup>1</sup>. He was ready to declare himself a Muslim, a Hebrew or a Christian, if it could help him to become the ruler of Lebanon. He had no moral courage either and "was capable of any action, however base and humiliating, to extricate himself from the impending disaster"<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, he could be kind and compassionate, was a lover of beauty with a tendency to idealise everything.

Charles Whibley says that Fakredeen was modelled after George Smythe<sup>3</sup>, but more often it is Disraeli expressing his own views on life and the political situation in England through Fakredeen. Several passages have a distinct autobiographical flavour in them.

"Men certainly must be governed, whatever the principle of the social system, and Fakredeen felt born with a predisposition to rule"<sup>4</sup>.

In order to carry out his ambitious plans, Fakredeen was perpetually in need of money. "He sauntered away a good deal of his time - - - - looking after his creditors; but this was not the annoyance to him which it would be to most men. Fakredeen was fond of his debts; they were the source indeed of his only real excitement, and he was grateful to them for their stirring

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1. Tancred, p. 219-220.

2. Ibid., p. 221.

3. Charles Whibley, Lord John Manners and his Friends, Vol. II, p. 88.

4. Tancred, p. 381.

powers - - - 'what should I be without my debts? - - - -  
dear companions of my life that never desert me!'"<sup>1</sup> We are  
told that Disraeli was often in the grip of money-lenders,  
"but he pursued his pleasures with absolute serenity"<sup>2</sup>.

Fakredeem, speaking to Tancred, is again Disraeli talking  
about the future. " - - - - it is finished with England"<sup>3</sup>.

Disraeli felt that, after the Repeal of the Corn Laws, England  
could not develop along national lines, since she would be  
dependent upon food imports and would require an ever-expanding  
market for her cottons. He realised that England must now  
become an Imperial power for survival:

"Let the Queen of the English collect a great fleet - - - and  
transfer the seat of her empire from London to Delhi. There  
she will find an immense empire ready-made, a first rate army  
and a large revenue"<sup>4</sup>.

There are several references to the Eastern Question  
and to the recent history of Syria, its conquest by Ibrahim  
Pasha in 1831, the subsequent unrest instigated by the Sultan  
of Turkey, the intervention by Palmerston, and the restoration  
of Syria to the Sultan in 1841. Disraeli is full of praise  
for Palmerston's foreign policy, even though he was a Whig.

The role of Fakredeem is woven into these historical  
events and, along with him, Tancred also becomes involved in

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1. Tancred, p. 381-383.

2. M and B, Vol. I, p. 351.

3. Tancred, p. 270.

4. Ibid., p. 271.

promoting the interests of Fakredeem to become the ruler of Lebanon. Fakredeem "lived in the centre of intrigues, which were to shake thrones, and perhaps to form them"<sup>1</sup>. He possessed all the skill and dexterity for carrying out his plans, and could simulate and dissemble with perfection. Disraeli's understanding and his portrayal of an oriental character is remarkable. Hitti has commented that "centuries of tight-rope walking made Lebanese politicians adept in the practice of dissimulation"<sup>2</sup>.

Eva, like Sybil, is more the symbol of a great idea than a real human being. She is kind-hearted, quick-witted and intelligent, yet she had accepted her betrothal to her cousin without question, as naturally as birth or death. She is only eighteen, but talks and argues like a seasoned woman of the world. She proves to be an able physician and cures Tancred when he was dying of brain fever. It is through her that Disraeli expresses his views about the superiority of the Jews.

The characters of Coningsby and Sybil reappear in this novel, but they play minor roles. They are now well established in the social and political hierarchy. Mrs. Guy Flouncey has become a great society hostess. Disraeli traces her career in these words:

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1. Tancred, p. 220.

2. Philip K. Hitti - History of Syria, p. 686.

"In 1837, Mrs. Guy Flouney was nobody, in 1845 Mrs. Flouney was somebody, and somebody of great importance. Mrs. Guy Flouney had invaded society, and had conquered it, gradually, but completely, like the English in India"<sup>1</sup>.

Moncton Milnes, a Young England sympathiser, had complained to Disraeli that he had not been included in Coningsby. He is introduced in Tancred as Mr. Vavasour, but it is a satirical sketch and could hardly have pleased him:

"Mr. Vavasour was a social favourite; a poet - - - as well as a member of Parliament; travelled, sweet-tempered, and good hearted; amusing and clever - - - Mr. Vavasour's breakfasts were renowned. Whatever your creed, class or country - - - you were a welcome guest, - - - provided you were celebrated. That qualification, however, was rigidly enforced - - - Vavasour liked to know everybody who was known, and to see everything which ought to be seen - - - He was everywhere, and at everything; - - - he dined with Louis Philippe, and gave dinners to Louis Blanc"<sup>2</sup>. In a few witty sentences, Disraeli has poured ridicule on the vanity and social ambition of Mr. Vavasour

The ruling sentiment of Tancred is intense pride of race, and Sidonia is one of the characters through whom it is expressed. Sidonia defines what he understands by the progressive development of nations, and says that "All is race;

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1. Tancred, p. 93.

2. Ibid., p. 145-147.

there is no other truth"<sup>1</sup>. In Coningsby Sidonia had helped to shape the hero's mind, in Tancred, the hero finds in him a sympathetic soul, who instantly penetrates into his inmost thoughts and extends all help to him in his journey to the Holy Land. He appreciates Tancred's desire to understand Christianity by going to its fountain-head. He thinks the English bishops know nothing: "How can they? a few centuries back they were tattooed savages - - - and theology requires an apprenticeship of some thousand years at least"<sup>2</sup>. Underlying everything is Disraeli's conception of Christianity as completed Judaism.

Tancred went entirely above the heads of the reading public, although the reviewers were friendly on the whole. The book gave Disraeli the reputation of being a mystery man. Many years later, a clergyman wrote to Disraeli to ask him the meaning of 'The great Asian Mystery'. Disraeli instructed his Private Secretary to inform this gentleman that, "as I have written three volumes to answer the question he asks, and so far as he is concerned, have failed, it would be presumption to suppose I could be more fortunate in a letter. Recommend repeated and frequent study of the work as the most efficient means for this purpose"<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, Lady Blessington wrote to Disraeli to say that "you have made me comprehend the

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1. Tancred, p. 153.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

3. M and B, Vol. I, p. 857 (Footnote).

East better than all the books I have read on it"<sup>1</sup>. Disraeli's father also expressed his admiration in glowing terms. "A work for its originality and execution without a rival, faultless in composition, profound in philosophy, and magical in the loveliness of its descriptions"<sup>2</sup>.

Disraeli told his friends in later life that he liked it the best of his novels and, whenever he wanted to refresh his knowledge of the East, he read Tancred. It is difficult to decide to what extent Disraeli was being serious in this novel. Was he really carried away by romantic sentiments and a genuine mystical experience or was he "merely blowing bubbles for our infantile amusement"<sup>3</sup>. In the opinion of Leslie Stephen, the answer can be found "by accepting the theory of a double consciousness and resolving to pray with the mystic, and sneer with the politician, as the fit takes us"<sup>4</sup>.

To the modern reader the book is remarkable for its fierce protest against Western material civilisation and for its astounding prophetic vision. Tancred, musing amidst the ruins of the reservoirs built by Solomon, says:

"And yet some flat-nosed Frank, full of bustle and puffed up with self-conceit (a race spawned perhaps in the morasses of some Northern forest hardly yet cleared) talks of

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 864.

2. Ibid., p. 864.

3. Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 118.

4. Ibid., p. 119.

Progress! Progress to what, and from whence? Amid empires shrivelled into deserts, amid the wrecks of great cities - - - amid arts forgotton - - - the European talks of progress, because, by an ingenious application of some scientific acquirements, he has established a society which has mistaken comfort for "civilisation"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Tancred, p. 233.

## C H A P T E R - VI

### The Last Phase

After Tancred, Disraeli did not publish any more novels until 1870. During this intervening period, Disraeli's personality had undergone a change. He stopped dressing extravagantly in gorgeous colours, and became sober, mature and mellowed. He had held high office on several occasions, and had even become the Prime Minister for about a year, in 1868. It was no longer necessary for him to expound any political creeds or fight for new ideas. He could now sit back and relax, and watch the passing show with the eye of a seasoned politician. He wrote for the first time for the pleasure of writing in order to mirror and satirise the society around him. There is an element of repose and retrospect in the last two novels, Lothair and Endymion. It is difficult to say anything about Falconet, since he wrote only nine chapters. Glimpses of his wit, humour and sharp satire are there, and it is a great pity that the novel was left incomplete.

### Lothair

When Lothair appeared in 1870 it created a sensation because a novel by an ex-Prime Minister was enough in itself

to dazzle every one. "All the world read the book; every journal reviewed it. It was the principal topic of polite conversation during the London season"<sup>1</sup>. Guedalla writes that, "Success was prompt and thorough. Editions poured from the press. A colt, a ship, a perfume, and a galop were named Lothair"<sup>2</sup>. Lothair is a political novel, though there may be no overt political purpose in it. It deals with the events of the day, but there is a certain reticence regarding the leading political figures. The immediate problems of political dissension in England and Parliamentary politics have also been avoided. Thus, there is no reference to Lord Derby, to the Reform Bill of 1867 or to the Irish Church. Instead, the range of this novel is further extended to include the revolutionary and political movements in Europe, the intrigues of the Catholic Church, the Fenians and other currents of action and ideas that were shaping the course of history.

The background of the novel is the period between 1866 and 1868. The struggle for Italian Unification, with the prominent part played by Garibaldi's Red Shirts, is interwoven into the story, and specially the defeat by the combined French and Papal armies at Mentana in 1867. The rebellion in Ireland, along with the terrorist activities of the Fenian Societies,

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1. M and B, Vol. II, p. 505.

2. P. Guedalla, Preface to the Bradenham Edition, p. viii.

is also mentioned. There are several references to the secret revolutionary societies, Mary Anne and Madre Natura, that had spread their network all over Europe, and the British aristocracy was uncomfortably aware of their activities, even though it was at the height of its magnificence, wealth and splendour. The memories of 1848 were still fresh in their minds, when many thrones were shaken and many crowns had toppled in Europe. The new theories of Science and Evolution were undermining faith and tradition, and it is a favourite topic of discussion in the drawing rooms and across the dinner tables.

The theme of the novel was suggested by the conversion of the young Marquis of Bute to Roman Catholicism. This seemed to be quite a frequent occurrence in high society and was creating a sensation in England at the time. The Marquis had come into his inheritance after a long minority and Monsignore Capel was the chief agent in his conversion. These are the only two points of resemblance between the Marquis and Disraeli's hero, Lothair,

Lothair, a posthumous child has been brought up under the strict guardianship of an uncle, a Scotch noble, a Presbyterian and a Whig. The deceased father had, however, named another guardian, Cardinal Grandison, who subsequently seceded from the Anglican Church and joined the Church of Rome. When Lothair grew up, a tussle began between the two guardians

whether Lothair should join Edinburgh University or Oxford University. Ultimately, the views of Gardinal Grandison prevailed and Lothair was sent to Oxford.

In Oxford, Lothair made friends with the heir of Brentham, and the reader is introduced to that famous aristocratic family which was modelled on the family of Disraeli's friend, the Duke of Abercorn. Both the husband and wife are talented and distinguished. Their daughters "all met the same fate. After seventeen years of a delicious home, they were presented and immediately married; and all to personages of high consideration"<sup>1</sup>. There was only one daughter left, the youngest, Lady Corisande.

The basic conflict in the novel consists of the efforts of the Church of Rome, the Church of England and the secret revolutionary societies representing free religion, to gain control over Lothair's soul and his enormous fortune. They all exercise their influence mainly through three women. The Church of Rome is represented by Cardinal Grandison, Monsignore Catesby and the St. Jerome family, with a beautiful niece, Miss Arundel. The Church of England has, on her side, the Duke, who is too grand to be named, his lovely daughter, Lady Corisande, and 'The Bishop', who is supposed to be Bishop Wilberforce. For the revolutionary cause, there is the mysterious and romantic Theodora.

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1. Lothair, p. 2.

A large portion of the novel is devoted to the intrigues to win over Lothair, especially between the Catholic Church and the Revolutionary societies, who are pitted against each other all over Europe. The web is woven round him with exquisite skill, and Lothair is first drawn into Catholic society. The lovely and angelic Miss Arundel intends to become a nun, but she drops a hint that she may change her mind if she can find a husband with a kindred soul. She persuades Lothair to build a cathedral in London, and Lothair escapes from her spell only after his meeting with Theodora, the incarnation of the revolutionary forces in Europe. She is living in England, with her American husband, and surrounded by a circle of artistic and intellectual friends.

All these three sets of influence that are at work on Lothair assemble in Muriel Towers during the magnificent celebration of Lothair's coming of age. There are gorgeous banquets and glittering balls, illuminations and presentation of addresses, sports, speeches and processions. Disraeli's object is to show that the nobility can still command deference and respect, if only they would utilise it in the proper manner. But he also shows that there is an element of artificiality and unreality in all this external splendour.

While the Cardinal and the Bishop continue their struggle for Lothair's soul, it is Theodora who is victorious, because Lothair falls deeply in love with her, even though it is a purely platonic passion. Lothair abandons the Cathedral scheme and gives away the money to the secret societies. He follows Theodora to Rome, and throws in his lot with Garibaldi and his revolutionary army. Then follows the famous battle of Mentana, in which the Papal armies, helped by the French, inflict a heavy defeat on the revolutionary forces. Theodora is killed, and Lothair is seriously wounded on the battle field. He is saved by an Italian peasant woman, who takes him to a hospital, where Miss Arundel recognises him and nurses him back to health. Cardinal Grandison is also in Rome. In a very ingenious manner, he tries to convince Lothair that he has been saved by the Virgin Mary by a miracle, and he was actually fighting not for the revolutionary but for the Papal forces. He must, therefore, enter the Church of Rome as a matter of duty. Lothair is too weak and too ill to resist and is about to succumb; then he sees Theodora in a vision, in which she makes him promise that he will not become a Roman Catholic. He is finally rescued by an English doctor who despatches him to Sicily to recover his health. He is still surrounded by priests, who have even made an announcement to the press about his conversion to the Catholic faith. Lothair

slips out quietly in a fishing boat, reaches Malta, where he publishes a denial. He then visits Greece and Jerusalem, finally returning to London, where, he finds everything the same as before. The Cardinal goes about as if nothing had happened, while Miss Arundel has entered a convent. Lothair proposes to lady Corisande and is accepted by her. Thus it is the Anglican church that is victorious in the end.

The characters in this novel present a wide variety and Disraeli has shown great skill and maturity in delineating them, specially the hero, Lothair. When he first appears on the scene, he is priggish, fatuous and mentally confused, though he announces that his opinions are already formed on every subject and they will never change. Actually, he is weak and most impressionable. Leslie Stephen complains that "Lothair reduces himself so completely to a mere 'passive bucket', to be pumped into by every variety of teacher, that he is unpleasantly like a fool"<sup>1</sup>. However, he remains open, frank, courteous, and high-minded. He has vague notions of feudal responsibility and wishes to devote his life to the extinction of pauperism. He plans to build two thousand cottages on his estate. He sincerely believes that "life must be religion"<sup>2</sup>, but is not sure how he can best serve its cause. At one stage he thought he would devote all his fortune to a

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1. Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 103.

2. Lothair, p. 70.

reconciliation between Rome and England, in order to fight Atheism. He also finds himself attracted towards the Catholic faith because of its solemn pageantry and the subtle influence of the Cardinal. His meeting with Theodora and her circle of friends puts him in a state of utter confusion, specially when he finds the Catholics deadly opposed to political liberty. He frankly confesses, "Every day I feel, more and more, I am extremely ignorant"<sup>1</sup>. A little later, he again remarks, "I perceive that life is not so simple an affair as I once supposed". Lothair's character develops as he grows older. He shows resourcefulness and courage on the battle field, and enterprise in his escape from the Catholic priests. He has acquired considerable maturity and wisdom by the time the novel comes to an end. He himself admits that, "I have gained experience - - - and paid for it with my life's blood,"<sup>3</sup> Disraeli has displayed a real psychological insight in delineating the character of Lothair.

The rest of the characters could conveniently be divided into three sets. There is the Catholic group represented by Cardinal Grandison, Monsignore Catesby and the St. Jerome family. The Cardinal is a combination of Cardinal Manning and Wiseman. The appearance and manner were copied from Manning,

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1. Lothair, p. 132.

2. Ibid., p. 157.

3. Ibid., p. 399.

the mental and moral qualities from Wiseman. He is described as "a man of shining talents"<sup>1</sup>, of ascetic habits, who refuses dinner invitations, but is fond of high society, which he held spellbound by his suave and polished conversation. He was "an entire believer in female influence and a considerable believer in his influence over females"<sup>2</sup>. His energies were mainly directed towards securing converts among the aristocracy, since he was convinced that their social influence would carry the nation with them. He prayed morning and evening for the conversion of England. He could even be unscrupulous if necessary, for achieving this aim. He is drawn with good humour, though with an occasional touch of satire. His assistant, Monsignore Catesby, was modelled after Monsignore Capel, who was the chief agent in the conversion of the Marquis of Bute. He is clever, well-read, intelligent and polished, but capable of indulging in the lowest form of intrigue for the success of his plans. He argues with such perfect conviction that poor Lothair exclaims in despair, "I wish I had been born in the Middle Ages - - - or in some other planet: anywhere, or at any time, but in this country and in this age"<sup>3</sup>.

Lord and Lady St. Jerome represent an aristocratic Catholic family. Lady St. Jerome is "a woman to inspire crusaders"<sup>4</sup>, while her niece is the beautiful Clare Arundel,

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1. Lothair, p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 211.

3. Ibid., p. 145.

4. Ibid., p. 50.

who captivates Lothair for a while. She is too saintly to be human, but clever enough to ensnare Lothair in the cause of religion.

Disraeli has depicted here his own conflicting attitude towards the Catholic faith. He was at once attracted and repelled by it. He had always admired their historical traditions and their ceremonial worship, but he had also become aware of their underhand methods of conversion and their skillful intrigues. In his earlier novels, he tended to be very sympathetic towards them, but his views changed after the Papal Aggression in 1850, and still more, after "the stab in the back" over the establishment of a Roman Catholic University in Ireland, when he was the Prime Minister in 1868.

The second set of characters is the revolutionary group centred around Theodora. She belongs to the same family as Sybil and Eva, the embodiment of an idea rather than a woman of flesh and blood. She is first introduced as the wife of a friend of Garibaldi, and the model for the face for "La République Française" of 1850. "She speaks every language, is ultra cosmopolitan and has invented a new religion"<sup>1</sup>. When we meet her we find that she has an Olympian countenance. Her beauty is heavenly, her temperament serene. She is passionately adored by men and women, inspiring people with a spiritual

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1. Lothair, p. 33.

devotion. She hates priests, priestcraft and orthodoxy, and preaches a new religion that God dwells within and speaks through the conscience. It is her powerful influence over Lothair which enables him to escape from the clutches of the Catholic church. Dr. Richard Garnett thought her to be one of the noblest creations of a modern novelist. She "impersonates all the traits which Shelley especially valued in woman"<sup>1</sup>.

It is in Theodora's mansion that we are introduced to Mr. Phoebus, the most eminent and successful painter of the age. He is a nature-worshipper and a free thinker, always talking of Aryan principles, and holding the most unconventional opinions about art and books and education:

"Books are fatal; they are the curse of the human race"<sup>2</sup>.

"The essence of education is the education of the body"<sup>3</sup>.

He believes that the first duty of a State is to maintain the health and beauty of a first rate race, and the Aryan races should be extricated from Semitism.

"In Mr. Phoebus, Disraeli forecast with startling accuracy the Nazi outlook"<sup>4</sup>.

We also meet an Oxford Professor, "a young man of advanced opinions on all subjects, religious, social and

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1. Quoted from Dr. Richard Garnett in M and B, Vol. II, p.495.

2. Lothair, p. 132.

3. Ibid., p. 132.

4. Eric Forbes-Boyd, 'Disraeli the Novelist', p. 116 in Essays and Studies (1950).

political. He was clever, extremely well-informed - - - but with a restless vanity and over-flowing conceit which prevented him from ever observing or thinking of anything but himself"<sup>1</sup> The Professor was planning to migrate to the States, where he thought his brilliance would be better appreciated and, with that end in view, he had become very friendly with Theodora and her American husband. We are further told that, on seeing Lothair in the company of Theodora and her husband, the Oxford Professor felt somewhat embarrassed. "Like sedentary men of extreme opinions, he was a social parasite and, instead of indulging in his usual invectives against peers and princes, finding himself unexpectedly about to dine with one of that class, he was content only to dazzle and amuse him"<sup>2</sup>.

These remarks had an interesting sequel. Soon after the publication of Lothair, an abusive letter came from Professor Goldwin Smith of Cornell University, Ithaca, State of New York, stating that he was the original of the Oxford Professor portrayed in Lothair, and that it was a most cowardly act on the part of Disraeli to say nasty things about him in the garb of fiction. Disraeli did not reply to Professor Goldwin Smith, but he wrote to an American friend that, more than twenty years ago, his political opponents had employed Mr. Goldwin Smith to write a series of articles against him

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1. Lothair, p. 95.

2. Ibid., p. 96.

in the Morning Chronicle, but "I have sometimes brushed him aside, as I would a mosquito, but am always too much occupied to bear him, or any other insect, any ill-will"<sup>1</sup>.

The third group of characters are the aristocrats and their hangers-on. Several of them are drawn from living models since Disraeli was personally familiar with them in his social life. The most attractive character in this group is St. Aldegonde, the heir-apparent of the wealthiest dukedom in the United Kingdom. He is thoroughly spoilt, eccentric and sentimental, and perpetually afraid of being bored. He outrages conventionalism by his frank contempt for humbug. He flaunts radical views, and describes himself as "a republican of the reddest dye"<sup>2</sup>. He is opposed to all privileges and all orders except dukes, who were a necessity, and he believed in the equal division of all property except land. His wife was intelligent enough to understand one thing, and that was, "never to cross her husband on any conceivable topic - - - when he cried for the moon, it was promised him immediately"<sup>3</sup>.

Then there is the Duke, who is so great that he has not been given a name. His greatest problem is that he has no home, because he owns too many palaces, and duty compels him to spend a few months in the year in each of them. He

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1. M and B, Vol. II, p. 506.

2. Lothair, p. 87.

3. Ibid., p. 87.

came from "a family with a charm that always attracted and absorbed heiresses,"<sup>1</sup> hence the abundance of halls and bright castles and broad manors. His youngest daughter, Lady Corisande, marries Lothair in the end. She does not possess any individual characteristics. Like all Disraeli's women, she is accomplished, intelligent and beautiful. Her mother thinks she has a deeper and more complicated mind than her sisters. Her only source of anxiety is the nobility joining the Church of Rome. She regards it as "the greatest calamity that has ever happened in England"<sup>2</sup>.

The novel introduces us to a host of minor characters, who are described in a few apt sentences, but they do not play any role in promoting the action of the story. They help in the creation of an atmosphere of the aristocratic way of life. There is Mr. Pinto, "one of the marvels of English society"<sup>3</sup>. He was a rich Portugese, but no one knew exactly how he happened to settle in England. An English noble had found him during one of his travels, but "instead of being a hanger-on of society, society hung on Pinto"<sup>4</sup>. The names of some of the other characters are Mr. Brancepeth and Mr. Hugo Bohun, the Duke of Brecon, and Lord Montairy. They talk of horses, tobacco, hunting, wine and women, make a few witty remarks and leave the stage. Mr. Pinto has a witty and satirical comment to make on

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1. Lothair, p. 87.

2. Ibid., p. 226.

3. Ibid., p. 118.

4. Ibid., p. 118.

the English language. "English is an expressive language - - - but not difficult to master. Its range is limited. It consists, as far as I can observe, of four words; 'nice', 'jolly', 'charming' and 'bore'; and some grammarians add 'fond'<sup>1</sup>.

There is Mr. Ruby, the Bond Street jeweller. Lothair went to him to purchase a rope of pearls for Theodora, and Mr. Ruby held forth on the subject of pearls:

"They require great care; they want both air and exercise, they must be worn frequently; you cannot lock them up. The Duchess of Havant has the finest pearls in this country - - - - I go down to Havant Castle every year to see her Grace's pearls, and I wipe every one of them myself, and let them lie on a sunny bank in the garden, in a westerly wind, for hours and days together. Their complexion would have been ruined had it not been for this treatment. Pearls are like girls, my Lord, they require quite as much attention"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli is writing from personal experience because his wife's pearls used to be regularly placed in air and sunshine for preserving their lustre.

Last of all, there is the Syrian sage, Paraclete, whom Lothair meets in Jerusalem. He stands apart, in a class by himself, and through him, Disraeli voices his philosophical opinions.

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1. Lothair, p. 122.

2. Ibid., p. 167.

"Science may prove the insignificance of this globe in the scale of creation - - - but it cannot prove the insignificance of man"<sup>1</sup>.

The novel abounds in such pithy remarks, "Every page glitters with wit or shines with humour"<sup>2</sup>. Here are a few examples:

'My idea of an agreeable person', said Hugo Bohun, 'is a person who agrees with me'<sup>3</sup>.

'You know who the critics are? The men who have failed in literature and art'<sup>4</sup>.

'I have always thought that every woman should marry, and no man'<sup>5</sup>.

The tall Lady Flora Falkirk and Lady Grizell are described, when dancing in a quadrille:

"They moved about like young giraffes in an African forest, but looked bright and happy"<sup>6</sup>.

Lady Clanmore is described as a "pure free-trader in gossip"<sup>7</sup>. There are some interesting autobiographical comments

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1. Lothair, p. 394.

2. J.A. Froude, Lord Beaconsfield, p. 230.

3. Lothair, p. 203.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 430.

also:

"Three score and ten, at the present day is the period of romantic passions"<sup>1</sup>. This is a direct reference to Disraeli's romantic friendship with Lady Bradford, which began when he was almost seventy.

There are shrewd political observations scattered throughout the novel regarding the Secret Societies in Europe and Irish-American Fenianism. Lothair accidentally lands himself in a secret Fenian meeting in London, in which he is nearly lynched by the crowd. He is saved by Captain Bruges, who embodies the practical side of the revolutionary movement, while Theodora represents its idealistic aspect. Captain Bruges, who has just come from Ireland, says about the Irish movement, "Their treason is a fairy tale and their sedition a child talking in its sleep"<sup>2</sup>.

The charm of the novel lies in its vivid portrayal of aristocratic life. "The true value of the book is the perfect representation of patrician society in England in the year which was then passing over; the full appreciation of all that was good and noble in it; yet the recognition also, that it was a society without a purpose and with no claim to endurance. It was then in its most brilliant period, like the full bloom of a flower which opens only to fade"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Lothair, p. 176.

2. Ibid., p. 112.

3. J.A.Froude, Lord Beaconsfield, p. 231.

We read about magnificent palaces with their graceful chambers filled with treasures of art, chandeliers of crystal and gold plate, where life was a succession of pleasing pleasure. The ladies spend the mornings, writing letters, painting or embroidering, while the men stroll to the stables, admire the stud farms or hunt. The evening would be spent in playing games, dancing or listening to music. The ordinary people appear as an orderly and joyous multitude, lustily cheering Lothair, who seemed to them to be "the natural leader of the county"<sup>1</sup>. There is a passing reference to the house-steward, the head-keeper, the chief butler, the head forester, the footmen, as they welcome Lothair respectfully to Muriel Towers. There is a casual mention of pauperism and its cure by providing decent cottages for the poor, and one more remark by Lothair, "Among the lower orders, if we may judge from the newspapers, they are always killing their wives, and in our class, we get rid of them in a more polished way, or they get rid of us"<sup>2</sup>. The focus of attention has definitely shifted from the two nations to the rumblings of a European revolution which may sweep all this grandeur away.

The novel had a mixed reception from contemporary critical journals, and opinion has been divided amongst the critics of Disraeli's novels in subsequent years.

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1. Lothair, p. 184.

2. Ibid., p. 430.

The Times appreciated the novel, while the Pall Mall Gazette called it "an admirable novel, which must have cost the author, we cannot help fancying, no effort whatever; it was as easy and delightful for him to write as for us to read"<sup>1</sup>.

The Athenaeum remarked that the book would not have been noticed if it had been written by anyone else.

The Blackwood Quarterly had always been critical of Disraeli, and it condemned the novel in very strong language: "an outrage - a sin against good taste and justice - - - a vast mass of verbiage which can seldom be called English"<sup>2</sup>.

Trollope, in his Autobiography, referred to Lothair as Disraeli's worst work.

On the other hand, Mr. George Russell declared it to be his masterpiece, "a profound study of spiritual and political forces at a supremely important moment in the history of modern Europe"<sup>3</sup>.

Leslie Stephen, a great admirer of Disraeli as a novelist, did not think highly of Lothair. He regarded it as "a practical joke on a large scale, or a prolonged burlesque upon Disraeli's own youthful performances"<sup>4</sup>.

E.T. Raymond also felt that the novel "gives no sign of the political sagacity and historical insight which redeem the

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1. Quoted by M and B, Vol. II, p. 507.

2. Ibid., 507-508.

3. Ibid., 508.

4. Leslie Stephen - Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 130.

literary defects of Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred - - - it is today an out-of-date topicality, a thing mainly of antiquarian interest"<sup>1</sup>. He, however, concedes that it contains epigrams of great brilliance, and there is excellent satire.

Holbrook Jackson regards Lothair as Disraeli's "most polished work, and perhaps the finest description we have of the English aristocracy"<sup>2</sup>.

Count Vitzthum and Professor John Stuart Blackie found in Lothair a resemblance to the theme of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, how certain intellectual agencies act upon a hero.

The greatest praise was lavished by Froude. "The students of English history, in time to come, who would know what the nobles of England were like in the days of Queen Victoria, will read Lothair with the same interest with which they read Horace and Juvenal"<sup>3</sup>. He also regards it of supreme biographical interest. "Lothair opens a window into Disraeli's mind revealing the inner working of it more completely than anything else which he wrote or said"<sup>4</sup>.

Blake thinks it is the best of all Disraeli's novels. It has no avowed purpose, and its satire is so light that it was hardly noticed. "It would be quite wrong to treat Lothair as a gaudy romance of the peerage"<sup>5</sup>. Although Disraeli had by

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1. E.T. Raymond, Disraeli, The Alien Patriot, p. 277.

2. Holbrook Jackson - Great English Novelists, p. 208.

3. J.A. Froude Lord Beaconsfield, p. 217-218.

4. Ibid., p. 227.

5. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 518.

now shed many of the illusions about a regenerated aristocracy that he had entertained earlier, he still hoped that a sense of duty will prevail amongst them that would prevent them from lapsing into total degeneracy.

In the political circles, the novel did not enhance Disraeli's reputation. "How could Parliamentarians be expected to trust an ex-Premier who, when half-way between sixty and seventy, instead of occupying his leisure, in accordance with the British convention, in classical, historical or constitutional studies, produced a gaudy romance of the peerage, so written as to make it almost impossible to say how much was ironical or satirical and how much soberly intended"<sup>1</sup>. Moncton Milnes summed up the opinion of the political world when he wrote in an article that "his wisest friends think it must be a mistake and his enemies hope that it will be his ruin."<sup>2</sup>

Disraeli was pleased and encouraged by his financial success and was so little concerned with the expression of adverse criticism that he promptly started a new novel, Endymion.

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1. M and B, Vol. II, p. 509-510.

2. R. Blake - Disraeli, p. 520.

Endymion

Endymion is the only novel by Disraeli which has raised some controversy about its date of composition. The financial success of Lothair prompted him to start it in 1870, but Blake is of opinion that the book was completed in three stages. "The first, covering the first sixty chapters, i.e. over half the book was written between the early summer of 1870 and the end of 1872. The second, covering chapters 61-78 inclusive, was written while he was Prime Minister, i.e. in the years 1874-80, and most probably in 1878. The third section, which comprises the remainder was written in May, June, and July, 1880, after his fall from power"<sup>1</sup>.

The title is also controversial. Lord Rowton (Disraeli's Private Secretary) thought that the novel was named after Endymion Porter, a Royalist in the reign of Charles I, supposed to be an ancestor of Lady Beaconsfield. Buckle believed that that the reference is to Endymion, the human lover of Selene, the moon Goddess, and Disraeli had Selina Bradford in mind. This is not likely, because his grand romance with Selina started in 1873, while the novel had been given the title in 1870. The title is most appropriate because Disraeli is describing here "a landscape by the light of the moon, the

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1. R. Blake, The Dating of Endymion, p. 182, The Review of English Studies, New Series, Vol. XVII (1966).

full harvest moon on a warm night, softening and romanticizing all that is harsh and familiar, lending magic to the ordinary, poetry to the humdrum"!. .

Longman paid £ 10,000 for the novel, a very large sum indeed for a work of fiction. The book sold well, but it seemed at first that the publishers would incur a loss. However, a subsequent cheap edition enabled them to make a profit. The book was better received by the critics than Lothair, in spite of Archbishop Tait's complaint that he read it "with a painful feeling that the writer considers all political life as mere play and gambling"<sup>2</sup>.

The period covered by the novel is from 1827 to 1855. The story begins in the midst of all the excitement and tension of the years preceding the passing of the Reform Bill. A rising Tory M.P., Mr. William Pitt Ferrars, who had been living in a grand style, quite beyond his means, suddenly finds a total reversal in his fortunes in the disturbed year, 1830, when the king died, Parliament was dissolved and the clamour for reform became more and more persistent. He is forced to retire to a remote country house, Hurstley, with his wife and two children. However, with the sudden and unexpected break up of the Whigs in 1834, Mr. Ferrars went up to London in the hope that his fortunes might revive with the return of the Tories under Sir Robert Peel.

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 738.

2. Ibid., p. 735.

He was sadly disappointed, and all he succeeded in securing was a Clerkship for his son in a second rate Government office. The shock was too much for Mrs. Ferrars, and she died shortly after. The husband, unable to bear for long the loss of his beloved wife, ended up by committing suicide. The daughter, Myra, took up a job as a companion to Adriana, the daughter of a very rich banker, Mr. Neuchatel, in London, while her twin brother, Endymion, struggled on in Somerset House as a clerk. From this point, the fortunes of the brother and sister rise steadily. They find themselves in the midst of high society in the Neuchatel establishment. The elderly Lord Roehampton, the foreign minister, falls in love with Myra, and she marries him. Her sole aim in life is to help her brother to rise to the top, and she uses all her influence in furtherance of this object. Mr. Sidney Wilton, a cabinet minister agrees to take on Endymion as his private secretary. Endymion is also introduced to Lady Montfort, "the genius of Whiggism," and she is as determined as his sister to push him forward. When Parliament is dissolved in 1841, Lady Montfort decides that Endymion must fight an election and get into the next Parliament, but Endymion is too prudent to agree. He is not willing to take the risk of resigning his job with the government. At this juncture, an anonymous friend presents him with a receipt for £ 20,000 consols purchased in his name, and thus his hesitation

is removed. Now there is the problem of securing a safe seat. Another friend, the great Tory hostess Lady Beaumaris, surrenders a safe Tory seat, much to the annoyance of Tadpole, and presents it to Endymion, thus enabling him to get elected unopposed. But the Tories are returned with a large majority and they form the government under Sir Robert Peel. Endymion sits with the Opposition, and impresses the House with his performance. In 1846, the Tories split over the Repeal of the Corn Laws, and they are defeated a little later. The Whigs come back to power in 1847. with Lord Roehampton as Foreign Minister. Myra now gets Endymion appointed as Under Secretary of State in her husband's ministry. She also persuades him to marry Adriana, but this remains the one subject of disagreement between the brother and sister.

In that year of revolutions, 1848, Lord Roehampton suddenly collapsed and died due to overstrain. Myra went into deep mourning for him, but after some time Prince Florestan proposed to her and she left England to become the Queen-consort of a foreign ruler. A little later, Lord Montfort also died, leaving all his vast possessions to his wife, and Lady Montfort married Endymion.

In 1853, Sidney Wilton assumed office as the Whig Prime Minister, and he appointed Endymion as Secretary of State for

Foreign Affairs. But Mr. Sidney Wilton, like all Prime Ministers, suffered too much from gout and soon became incapacitated. At last, Endymion received the summons from the Court. He had been made Prime Minister<sup>1</sup>.

Thus the novel is the history of two generations of a family in politics. The story of the father is a moving human drama. It is the tragedy of a political career, brought about by the Reform Bill, and the social and political upheaval which followed in consequence. The story of the son's rise to fame is absurd and improbable, and reads like a fairy story, though critics seem to think that Disraeli's rise to fame was no less fantastic.

The underlying idea in the novel is the decisive importance of woman in moulding the life of a man aspiring for a political career. Disraeli had once confessed in a letter to Lady Bradford that he owed everything to women, and perhaps he wanted to pay homage in this novel to all the women who had helped him in his career. However, Disraeli's phenomenal rise was largely due to his own inherent genius and his indomitable will power, but Endymion would have remained a nonentity if he had not been helped by women at every crucial turn in his life. The sister, Myra, is a personification of indomitable will. She is determined to restore the family prestige by promoting her brother's career. Lady Montfort could not rest content

until she had made Endymion a Prime Minister. It is Adriana who makes the anonymous gift of £ 20,000, which enables Endymion to agree to get into Parliament and, finally, Lady Beaumaris uses her influence to procure a safe Tory seat for him in spite of the fact that he is a Whig.

The novel is permeated with the influence of women. It is to be seen in the case of other characters as well. Zenobia is the chief adviser of the elder Ferrars and is responsible for his downfall, for she prevailed upon him to throw in his lot with the Duke of Wellington instead of Lord Canning. We are told that fascinating and fashionable prelates were being invited to social functions because "the influence of women in the spread and sustenance of religious feeling has again been recognised"<sup>1</sup>. Nigel Penruddock was very popular amongst women, and he depended much on female aid to help the Catholic poor in his district. Waldershare tells Tadpole that Lord Beaumaris consults no one except Lady Beaumaris.

In this novel, more perhaps than in any other, the characters have been drawn from life. "The book was a 'bal masqué' of the great world from Navarino to the Crimea"<sup>2</sup>. Disraeli is reported to have told Sir Charles Dilke that he was the model for Endymion, though it is difficult to see any resemblance. In fact, he seems to have identified himself

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1. Endymion, p. 27.

2. Philip Guedalla, Preface to the Bradenham edition, p. ix.

more with his hero, and he is indulging here in a kind of substitute living, because it is just the kind of career that he had always visualised for himself. Although the main incidents of their lives are very different, Disraeli has endowed Endymion with many qualities, feelings and habits which he had observed in himself. "A love of power, a passion for distinction, a noble pride - - - now again stirred their dim and mighty forms in his inspired consciousness"<sup>1</sup>. When Endymion addressed Parliament, people noticed the power and melody of his voice, his power of keen sarcasm held in severe check and his complete control of his temper. There are several more points of resemblance, apart from the innumerable autobiographical touches. Endymion, like Disraeli, married a rich widow, and both had a very devoted sister.

When Endymion was about ten years old, he was asked by Zenobia's husband when he was going to school. The boy coolly replied that he would go to Eton, then to Christ Church and then into Parliament. Disraeli must have indulged in similar dreams.

A reversal of fortune forced Endymion to become a clerk at the age of sixteen. He develops into a hard working, well informed and intelligent young man, with tenacity of purpose. He is very sensible, but otherwise singularly colourless and

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1. Endymion, p. 325.

insipid, and very different from the usual Disraelian hero. However, he is more human than his sister Myra.

The Queen was rather puzzled as to why Disraeli had made his hero a Whig. Since the novel is semi-historical and it shows the hero's gradual rise to power, he had to be a Whig because during the period of the novel, the Tories were mostly in opposition. But Endymion does not expound any political creeds, neither is the reader informed as to why he was a Whig.

Myra is one of Disraeli's weakest creations and never really comes to life. As a child she is proud and sullen. Endymion tells her that he cried very much one day, when he found that the family had suddenly become poor. She replies, "I never cried in my life except once with rage"<sup>1</sup>. When the father committed suicide, Endymion broke down, but Myra remained grave and collected. To a proposal of marriage from Nigel Penruddock, she replied that her aim in life would be to work for her brother, 'thinking only of him - - - moulding events and circumstances in his favour'<sup>2</sup>. Adriana's first comment about her is that she is wonderful but has no heart. After she has accepted the proposal of marriage from Lord Roehampton, she tells Endymion, "our degradation is over - - - I see a career for you - - - we have now got a lever to move the world"<sup>3</sup>. She is too cynical and calculating for an eighteen year old

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1. Endymion, p. 47.

2. Ibid., p. 113.

3. Ibid., p. 194-195.

girl. She talks to Endymion about his marriage in a similar tone. "Marriage is a mighty instrument in your hands. It must not be lightly used"<sup>1</sup>. Froude thinks that Disraeli resembles Myra, who with her impatience, restlessness, ambition and resolution to rise above the injuries of fortune, is perhaps "a likeness of himself in a woman's dress"<sup>2</sup>.

Lady Montfort is a more lively and interesting creation. She is supposed to be a blend of Lady Palmerston, Lady Bradford, and Lady Normanby, who had refused to resign during the Bed-chamber crisis, with some echoes of Mrs. Norton. She is the "Queen of Society" and the "genius of Whiggism". Disraeli delights in portraying women who drive men to great action. Nigel thinks she is a woman who could inspire crusades and create churches, while Mr. Cassilis says that "she is a woman who will set the Thames on fire"<sup>3</sup>. She is the friend and adviser of powerful politicians, and she has a keen grasp of politics. Her refusal to resign during the Bed Chamber crisis in 1839 enabled the Whig Ministry to continue for another two years. She organised the famous Eglinton tournament in 1839, in order to sustain the Whig Government, and "to sweep away all discontents and gratify every class"<sup>4</sup>. When the position of the Ministry became shaky in 1840, due to

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1. Endymion, p. 249.

2. J.A. Froude, Lord Beaconsfield, p. 258.

3. Endymion, p. 440.

4. Ibid., p. 251.

the bad harvests, she made a very intelligent comment. "Nobody thanks a ministry for a good harvest. What makes a ministry popular is some great coup in foreign affairs"<sup>1</sup>. She advises Endymion to give his mind to foreign affairs. She is not happy in her marriage with Lord Montfort, but he dies, leaving her all his vast possessions. She marries Endymion, and thus gives him a 'root in the country' also.

Lord Montfort is supposed to be sketched after Lord Hertford, who had figured in Coningsby as Monmouth. But there is hardly any resemblance between Lord Montfort and Monmouth. Montfort had merely acquired the reputation of being a profligate because he had settled in Paris. He is cynical and eccentric, but he is fond of intellectual company and likes to meet artists, engineers, writers and thinkers. He finds society intolerable, and is bored by men who talk only about horses and women. "No one could say Lord Montfort was a bad hearted man, for he had no heart"<sup>2</sup>. He had spent the greater part of his life wandering about the world, trying to overcome the boredom of existence.

Zenobia is a straightforward portrait of Lady Jersey, the famous Tory hostess. She is as domineering in the social and political world as Lady Montfort. During the Bedchamber crisis, she wanted Lady Montfort to be sent to the Tower for

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1. Endymion, p. 285.

2. Ibid., p. 225.

refusing to resign, and thus preventing Sir Robert Peel from assuming office. She was the Queen of Fashion in the 30's, a staunch supporter of the Duke of Wellington and violently opposed to liberalism in any shape or form. She even objected to gas light and to any further extension of the Railways.

The Neuchatels are the Rothschilds, and Hainault House is almost a replica of Gunnersbury where Disraeli had often spent enjoyable week-ends. The husband is a typical banker, but his wife and daughter have distinct personalities. Mrs. Neuchatel is a linguist and a fine musician. She displays an utter contempt for money and shows so much concern for the poor that her husband calls her a Communist. She believes in simple living. The daughter, Adriana is obsessed with the thought that her suitors wish to marry her for her money. She entertains a secret love for Endymion and makes an anonymous gift of £ 20,000 to him. Myra is very keen that Endymion should marry her, but she marries Lord Waldershare in the end.

Lord Waldershare is George Smythe, who had appeared earlier as Coningsby. His portrait is more faithful in Endymion than the one in Coningsby. The ideas of Young England are presented here from the Whig standpoint, and they are made to appear rather ridiculous. When Waldershare talks about the heroic quality of the Tory party, his friends whisper, "He is a wonderful man - - - but I fear, not practical"<sup>1</sup>. When Peel's

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1. Endymion, p. 169.

government began to contemplate the Repeal of the Corn Laws, Waldershare's reaction was that "he foresaw in all these changes, that most providential consummation, the end of the middle class"<sup>1</sup>.

Lord Roehampton is modelled on Palmerston, so far as his personal traits and official career are concerned. The marriage with Myra is pure fiction. Palmerston's dandyism, his popularity with women, his grasp of foreign affairs, his style of working late into the night, the fear and awe that he inspired both at home and abroad, all these qualities have been reflected in Lord Roehampton.

One of Endymion's fellow clerks in Somerset House was St. Barbe, who has consistently been identified with Thackeray, and is the only unkind portrait in the novel. Disraeli has emphasised his insane jealousy, his obnoxious snobbery, his sycophancy, his habit of slander, the absurdity of his political articles, and his ingratitude. It has been assumed that Disraeli was taking his revenge on Thackeray, for having published a burlesque, Codlingsby, in Punch in 1847, in which he had ridiculed Disraeli's style and his Jewish heritage. However, there is evidence to show that relations between Disraeli and Thackeray had become quite cordial in subsequent years. At the dinner of the Royal Literary Fund in 1852, Thackeray hailed the success of Disraeli as a brother novelist,

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1. Endymion, p. 375.

"in a speech which was half banter half appreciation"<sup>1</sup>, but very flattering. Thackeray had been dead seven years when Endymion appeared, and it does not seem likely that Disraeli would wait so long for his revenge.

Moreover, Endymion procures a pension for St. Barbe, for which St. Barbe is grateful in the beginning, but after a while, he again started maligning him. There is no record of Disraeli obtaining a pension for Thackeray, but he did obtain one for Carlyle, in spite of the fact that Carlyle had referred to Disraeli as a "conscious juggler" and "a superlative Hebrew conjuror". Disraeli had offered to give Carlyle a G.C.B. and a pension, because Carlyle had been most vehement against Gladstone, but he refused both at first. Subsequently he did accept the pension, but not the title. In a letter to Derby, dated January 1, 1875, Disraeli wrote, "Alas, the Philosopher of Chelsea, though evidently delighted with the proposal and grateful in wondrous sentences, will accept of nothing"<sup>2</sup>. For a short while, Carlyle felt that he had misjudged Disraeli, but a few years later the old animosity returned, and he referred to Disraeli "as a cursed old Jew, not worth his weight in cold bacon"<sup>3</sup>. Thus it was Carlyle who was guilty of gross ingratitude and not Thackeray. It seems, in St. Barbe, Disraeli has combined the portraiture of Thackeray and Carlyle, and incidentally taken his revenge against both.

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 1163.

2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 698.

3. Ibid., p. 698.

The other characters play minor roles, but they are all based on contemporary figures. Mr. Sidney Wilton represents Sidney Herbert, a close friend of Peel's. Nigel Penruddock is a more sympathetic representation of Cardinal Manning than in Lothair, where he had figured as Cardinal Grandison. He is a popular social figure, of ascetic habits, and a great favourite with the Whig ladies, especially Lady Montfort. He is described as the "new preacher who electrified the world"<sup>1</sup>.

Mr. Vigo is a blend of Mr. Poole, the tailor, and Hudson, the railway king, though the subsequent career of Mr. Vigo does not correspond with that of Mr. Hudson, who died bankrupt as a result of the Railway mania. Mr. Vigo is a tailor with very original ideas. He tells Endymion, "You must dress according to your age, your pursuits, your object in life - - - - No man gives me the trouble which Lord. Eglantine does; he has not made up his mind whether he will be a great poet or Prime Minister - - - you must choose, my lord, I tell him. I cannot send you out looking like Lord Byron if you mean to be a Canning or a Pitt"<sup>2</sup>. He showed even greater originality and enterprise as the promoter of Railway companies, and soon became an oracle and an idol of society. He bought estates, hired moors, spent money lavishly. He could command anything, and it was there.

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1. Endymion, p. 247.

2. Ibid., p. 98-99.

Job Thornberry has a touch in him of Cobden and Bright. He is a Radical, portrayed with a satirical touch. Like many youthful revolutionaries, he ends up by becoming a big landed proprietor and, ironically enough, his son believes in game preserving, while his wife gets converted to the Roman Catholic faith.

There are the two brothers, Mr. Bertie Tremaine and Tremaine Bertie who represent the Bulwer brothers. They form a group in Parliament which they call "The Mountain", consisting of those members who sit on the fence.

Three Continental characters also figure in the novel. There is Prince Florestan who stands for Louis Napoleon. Many little details of his career as narrated in Endymion are historically correct, for example, his residence in England during the early 40's, his participation in the Eglinton Tournament, his banishment to America, his imprisonment in a fortress, his intrigues with Secret Societies and his ultimate return to France in 1848. His marriage to Myra is, of course, entirely fictitious.

The Count of Ferrol is obviously Bismarck and Baron Sergius is supposed to be Baron Brunnow, with some faint echoes of Metternich. Baron Brunnow was attached to the Russian Legation in London in 1842. He is a wise and shrewed politician.

He acts as the sage and seer, a type that Disraeli has introduced in almost every novel, primarily with the intention of voicing his own views on various matters.

Regarding the presentation of living people in his novels, Disraeli's correspondence with Queen Victoria throws interesting light on the subject. Writing on the 7th February, the Queen said, "I wish to tell you that I have just finished Endymion, and have been much interested by it. I trace several characters. Were you not thinking of the Duchess of Manchester in Lady Montfort, and Mr. Bright in Job Thornbury. But who is Endymion taken after? How is it that your hero should be a Whig? Did you know Carlyle?" Disraeli's reply was, "I think there are features of Lady Palmerston in her youth in that representation, and some traits of devotion drawn from someone else (presumably Lady Bradford). Endymion was not intended for a hero - - I did not wish him to be an interesting character; he has no imagination and very controlled passion: but he has great patience, perseverance, judgement, and tact, which qualities, with good looks, have, before this, elevated men in Your Majesty's Councils. He is in fact rather a plodder, and I thought quite good enough to be a Whig". He then goes on to say, "I had no intention or desire to draw any living characters. They are types not photographs; trusting in my pictures to the various features furnished by

a somewhat large and copious experience of life, and also perhaps, to some intuitive power which calls forms into existence, imparts vitality to shadows and invests them with appropriate expression"<sup>1</sup>. But the fact remains that Disraeli did draw his characters from living models, and also meant them to be recognised as such. Sometimes he borrowed features from several originals to portray one character. It is this quality which makes this background of contemporary political history so convincing.

The chief interest of this novel lies neither in its plot, nor in its characters and scenes. It lies in the portrayal of the drama behind the political scene and in its "evocation of forgotten elegances"<sup>2</sup>. Endymion reveals life in the innermost circles of politics, the social influences, the gossip of cabinet ministers, their policies, and manipulations, the day to day proceedings of Parliament. It provided an excellent opportunity to Disraeli to look back in retrospect upon that entire period of political history, which formed a background to his own rise to power. We are shown the gradual and imperceptible changes that came in social and political manners during this period, specially with the entry of a new class of people in politics.

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1. Letters of Queen Victoria, 2nd series, p. 194-195.

2. P. Guedella, Introduction to the Bradenham Edition, p. ix.

The social life of the 30's has been wistfully re-captured in the early chapters: "The great world then - - - was limited in its proportions - - - It consisted mainly of the great landed aristocracy, who had quite absorbed the nabobs of India, and had nearly appropriated the huge West Indian fortunes. - - - The manufacturers, the railway kings, the colossal contractors - - - had not yet found their place in society and the senate - - - The sympathies of society were more contracted than they are at present - - - The world attended to its poor in its country parishes, and subscribed and danced for the Spitalfield weavers - - - their knowledge of the people did not exceed these bounds, and the people knew very little more about themselves. They were only half born"<sup>1</sup>. The magnificent salons of Zenobia buzz with political gossip. She is convinced herself, and convinces everyone around her, that the Government formed by the Duke of Wellington will last for ever, that the Reform Bill can never be passed, because "the court would save the country" - - - and the Lords will do their duty"<sup>2</sup>. Much to her horror and chagrin the Duke was out very soon, and the Bill was passed. It was referred to as 'the revolution', and Zenobia went away to Vienna "that she might breathe the atmosphere of law and order"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Endymion, p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 33.

3. Ibid., p. 52.

The major political and social events of the period have been skilfully woven into the structure of the novel. We follow the rise and fall of each Ministry during this period, and its effect on the fortunes of the principal characters, along with Disraeli's penetrating comments regarding the reasons for the success or decline of each Ministry. Mr. Ferrars loses his influential position and his seat in Parliament due to the Reform Bill, and he retires to a remote country house. We witness the Bedchamber crisis due to Lady Montfort's refusal to resign, the Eglinton Tournament, the economic depression of the 40's, the railway mania, the potato famine, caused by "the mysterious but universal sickness of a single root which - - - changed the history of the whole world"<sup>1</sup>.

"There is no gambling like politics, said Lord Roehampton, as he glanced at the Times - - - four Cabinets in one week; the government must be more sick than the potatoes"<sup>2</sup>. There are the discussions on the philosophy of Free Trade and Cooperation. There is a vivid account of the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Papal aggression, and its reactions in England.

Foreign events are also intertwined in the plot. Prince Florestan returns to France after the upheaval of 1848, and there is a reference to Palmerston's intervention in the expulsion of Mehemet Ali from Syria in 1840. There are two

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1. Endymion, p. 374.

2. Ibid., p. 374.

conspicuous omissions, the Chartist movement and the Great Exhibition of 1851. Since Disraeli had written almost an entire novel (Sybil) on Chartism he may not have wanted to give it a place here. But the great Exhibition was perhaps regarded by him as the symbol of the utilitarian, commercial, middle-class age, hence he refused to take any notice of it.

There are amusing comments on Parliamentary procedures and etiquette, and the importance of a Parliamentary career those days. "Upto Easter we rarely had a regular debate, never a party division - - - After Easter there was always at least one great party fight - - - after this party fight, the House for the rest of the session was a mere club - - - In the last Parliament we often had Latin quotations, but never from a member with a new constituency - - - Charles Fox used to say as to quotation - - 'No Greek, as much Latin as you like, and never French under any circumstances. No English poet unless he had completed his century'. These were - - - the unwritten orders of the House of Commons<sup>1</sup>. When Endymion refuses in the beginning to contest for Parliament, because he could not afford to resign his job in the Government, Lady Montfort is shocked; and exclaims, "Not go into Parliament! Why, what are men made for except to go into Parliament?"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Endymion, p. 345-346.

2. Ibid., p. 296.

The novel abounds in sententious phrases and aphorisms, full of irony and satire in the typical Disraelian style. Mr. Bertie Tremaine, referring to Peel's solemnity, remarks, "an insular country subject to fogs, and with a powerful middle class, requires grave statesmen"<sup>1</sup>.

Mr. Waldershare and Prince Florestan are discussing Roman Catholicism. "'As for that', said Waldershare, 'sensible men are all of the same religion'. 'And pray what is that?' inquired the prince. 'Sensible men never tell'"<sup>2</sup>

While talking of the anxieties that befall men, Lord Roehampton tells Myra that the most unfortunate situation in life is "to have the feelings of youth and the frame of age"<sup>3</sup>.

Sidney Wilton advises Endymion to cultivate tact. "Tact teaches you when to be silent. Inquirers who are always inquiring never learn anything"<sup>4</sup>.

There are some general comments made by the author, for example,

"A dinner of wits is proverbially a palace of silence"<sup>5</sup>.

There are innumerable autobiographical touches in the novel, but the best passages occur when Disraeli is describing

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1. Endymion, p. 157.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

Hurstley, "The woods were beginning to assume the first fair livery of autumn, when it is beautiful without decay. The lime and the larch had not yet dropped a golden leaf, and the burnished beeches flamed in the sun. Every now and then an occasional oak or elm rose, still as full of deep green foliage as if it were midsummer; while the dark verdure of the pines sprang up with effective contrast amid the gleaming and resplendent chestnuts"<sup>1</sup>. It is an exact description of Bradenham.

Opinions of critics vary about Endymion as is the case with all his other novels. Froude felt there was nothing remarkable about it since it has no serious thought as in Sybil and Lothair. Blake thinks that Endymion's style has a certain languor and tiredness about it, yet he finds it "an enchanting fantasy, witty, gay and good humoured"<sup>2</sup>. One modern critic finds it "the most satisfying of all the novels; the one in which the intellectual, the romantic, and the man of vast experience, combine most harmoniously under the dominion of the novelist - - - It is the best balanced and most disciplined of his books — the wisest, and except Henrietta Temple, the most charming"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Endymion, p. 111.

2. R. Blake - Disraeli, p. 738.

3. Eric Forbes-Boyd, 'Disraeli the Novelist', p. 117 in Essays and Studies (1950).

Falconet

The unfinished novel, Falconet meant to deal with the politics of the sixties and the seventies, and its central figure, Joseph Toplady Falconet is modelled after Gladstone. "There can be little doubt that Falconet was to have been a delightfully malicious study of his triumphant rival"<sup>1</sup>. He is described as a child of singular precocity. "He was a grave boy, and scarcely ever known to smile; and this not so much from a want of sympathy for those among whom he was born and bred - - - but rather from a complete deficiency in the sense of humour, of which he seemed quite debarred. Firm in his faith in an age of dissolving creeds, he wished to believe that he was the man ordained to vindicate the sublime cause of religious truth"<sup>2</sup>. His family background was also deeply religious and leaning towards the Evangelicals. When they entertained company, "the family banquets generally led to some religious ceremony and were always accompanied by Psalmody"<sup>3</sup>. He enters Parliament through the patronage of Lord Bertram, who had influence over a borough.

The novel intended to touch upon some new ideas current at the time. There are three mysterious characters, one is Kusinara, a Buddhist missionary from Ceylon, the other is

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1. P. Guedella - Preface to the Bradenham Edition of Endymion and Falconet, p. xiii.

2. Endymion, p. 474-75.

3. Ibid., p. 477.

Mr. Hartmann, a German philosopher, and the third has no name and is referred to as the Unknown. The Buddhist missionary is visiting England because he has heard about "the decay of faith in England, and the evil consequences which may ensue from this"<sup>1</sup>. His companion, the Unknown says, "'I am myself in favour of a Sabbath of seven days' - - - of a real Nirvana, but my perpetual Sabbath can only be celebrated in a city of the dead', to which the Buddhist replies, 'Death is only happiness, if understood'"<sup>2</sup>.

Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" was published in 1879, and it "came upon England like a revelation"<sup>3</sup>. It is just possible that Disraeli may have been influenced by it when he introduced a Buddhist in the novel. Disraeli was also deeply impressed by the Nihilist conspiracy in Russia, hence the prominence given in this novel to a philosophy of despair, destruction and anarchism. The Unknown openly asserts that destruction in every form is welcome and the future must be secured by destroying the present. A little later, the Unknown calls on Mr. Hartmann the philosopher, and they talk about the destruction of society. The Unknown says, "You and I know that in attempting to terminate the misery of man, there is only one principle to recognise, and that is the destruction of the species"<sup>4</sup>. It appears that a conspiracy is

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1. Endymion, p. 481.

2. Ibid., p. 481.

3. H. Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era, p. 604.

4. Endymion, p. 496.

brewing and the Unknown wants to enlist the sympathies of the Buddhist in order to utilise the religious principle, and also some influential women, like Lady Bertram. He appears in an assembly at Lady Clanmore's, and manages to talk in secret to Lady Bertram. He tells her, "Everything is changing, and changing rapidly. Creeds disappear in a night. As for political institutions, they are all challenged, and statesmen, conscious of what is at hand, are changing nations into armies"<sup>1</sup>.

Guedalla has suggested that the Christian names of the central character are symbolic. Joseph is intended to remind us of Joseph Surface, the famous hypocrite in Sheridan's School for Scandal', while Toplady was the name of a Calvinist Divine who wrote the hymn, "Rock of Ages". Blake has further pointed out that Gladstone had translated 'Rock of Ages' into Latin in 1839. Disraeli's relations with Gladstone were exceedingly bitter, much more so than with Thackeray or Carlyle, whom he had caricatured as St. Barbe in Endymion. One shudders to think what he planned to do with Joseph Toplady Falconet. Kusinara is supposed to have been drawn after Sir Kumara Swami of Ceylon, a Buddhist scholar of repute, who came to England in the sixties' and was knighted on Disraeli's recommendation<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Endymion, p. 500.

2. P. Arunachalam, "The Unfinished Novel of Disraeli", Times Literary Supplement, July 15, 1920.

Some of the characters are familiar. They had figured in Lothair, for example Hugo Bohun and Lady Clanmore. Lord Gaston belongs to the category of eccentric aristocrats like St. Aldegonde (Lothair). He has been suddenly despatched home from a diplomatic assignment because he was found corresponding with a revolutionary. He is intelligent, cynical bored, and believes that Parliaments are worn out and the human race is exhausted. Lady Bertram has the makings of a typical Disraelian heroine - one of those women whose mission in life is "to guide and inspire"<sup>1</sup>.

The characteristic Disraelian wit is also there. The Falconet family is going to entertain Lord Bertram to a grand banquet to celebrate Joseph's election to Parliament, but do not know how to avoid the Psalmody, since the noble lord was "scarcely accustomed to such pious practices"<sup>2</sup>. They find refuge "in a compromise, by a grace, both before and after the meal, of unusual length"<sup>3</sup>, while the young ladies were such skilful musicians, that "they did sing some psalms, but his lordship did not find it out"<sup>4</sup>.

One cannot say how the story would have developed but the beginning is very promising and there is no sign of failing talent. If the novel had been completed we would have had another brilliant and entertaining picture of political life during the last fifteen or twenty years of Disraeli's life.

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1. Endymion, p. 504.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 477.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 477.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

C H A P T E R - VII

Disraeli's Art of Characterization

The world of Disraeli's novels consists almost entirely of the aristocracy and its hangers-on. Occasionally he introduces a millowner, like Millbank in Coningsby or Trafford in Sybil, sometimes a banker like Sidonia and Neuchatel. There are some bishops and cardinals, but scarcely any other professional class. A few servants are introduced in Contarini Fleming, Tancred, and Venetia, but there is only one of them with a distinct personality, and he is Leander, the French Chef in Tancred. The others are wooden creations and do not come to life. In Sybil, Disraeli has attempted to portray some characters from the working class, but without much success, while the middle class is conspicuous by its absence.

Disraeli is better than any other Victorian novelist in portraying the aristocracy. Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope have all given us very convincing and excellent sketches of the aristocracy, but they could never quite get rid of a middle-class uneasiness, and a sense of awe along with a touch of moral disapprobation, towards this class. Disraeli had far greater inside knowledge of their style of life and their

modes of thought. Besides, as a Jew, he claimed to belong to an ancient aristocratic race, and he was determined to adopt an attitude of condescension and superiority towards them. At the same time he admired the feudal order and he sincerely believed that the future of England depended upon an enlightened and duty-conscious aristocracy, like the heroes of his political Trilogy. He was also fully aware of the selfish and pleasure-loving members of this class, like Lord Monmouth and Lord Marney, and he holds them up to scorn.

In the world created by Disraeli, everyone is rich, with vast estates and unlimited wealth. The lovers meet in gilded palaces, the heroine is ravishingly beautiful, and dressed in gorgeous clothes, while in the background, there are terraced gardens with fountains playing, and peacocks strutting. Critics complain that he has created a very artificial world, but the world of high society has always been an artificial world, and Trollope was not quite justified in commenting about Disraeli's novels, that "the glory has been the glory of pasteboard, and the wealth has been the wealth of tinsel"<sup>1</sup>. Their conversation may be rhetorical at times and the settings extravagant, but on the whole the picture is authentic.

One of the distinctive characteristics of Disraeli's novels is that most of his characters are drawn from living

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1. A Trollope, An Autobiography, p. 216.

models. When Vivian Grey appeared in 1826, elaborate keys were published to identify the characters. There was so much controversy on the subject that Disraeli had to clarify the whole position in a letter to Willian Jerdan<sup>1</sup>. At that time Disraeli's knowledge of the world of politics and society was very slight, hence most of the characters were merely conventional types, and sometimes little more than just names.

After the publication of Endymion (1880) Disraeli again denied in a letter to the Queen that his characters were drawn from life. However, in spite of his denials, there is no gainsaying the fact that Disraeli did draw most of his characters from existing models and, what is more, he meant them to be recognised as such.

Moncton Milnes, a Young England sympathiser, had even complained to Disraeli for not having been included either in Coningsby or Sybil. He was subsequently portrayed in Tancred, but it was not a flattering picture. Hence, in a review of Tancred for the Edinburgh, Milnes made a scathing criticism of Disraeli's art of characterisation. He writes: "the moment a character is known to represent Lord - - - or Mr. - - - - , it loses all power as a work of art - - - the fidelity of the likeness is the only object of attention, not the moral fitness, the entireness, the beauty or the grandeur of the character. The great poet or novelist should

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1. Supra, p.55.

mould his men and women out of the large masses of humanity"<sup>1</sup>  
- - - This criticism may have been partially valid at the time of the publication of his novels, and it is true that some people were greatly offended but, on the whole, readers enjoyed identifying the characters with living people, and it contributed very much to the immense popularity of the later novels. To the modern reader, these considerations are irrelevant, as long as the characters are alive and full of wit.

Disraeli generally avoided reproducing the characteristics and habits of his original in every detail. 'The Duke' in Lothair was very particular about his appearance and dress, while the Duke of Abercorn, on whom he was modelled, was well known to be careless about the fit of his clothes. Even when he attempted an exact portraiture as for example, in the case of Byron and Shelley in Venetia, or Palmerston in Endymion, he altered many of the events in their lives. Disraeli's usual practice was to blend fact and fiction to produce an original character.

After Coningsby, Disraeli recognised the law laid down by Scott for the historical novel: that the portraiture of living people must be confined to the minor characters of the novel. Thus in Sybil, Tancred, Lothair and Endymion the main characters are almost entirely fictitious. However, he would have again deviated from this practice if he had lived to

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 206-207.

complete his last novel, Falconet, because the central figure was unmistakably drawn after his great rival, Gladstone.

Disraeli's early heroes are modelled on Byron. They are defiant, lonely, proud, embittered, and they have confrontations with themselves. Vivian is full of ambition and wants to get on in life. Contarini is torn between an artistic career and the desire to lead men by entering into politics, while Alroy broods over his fate and is goaded into religious leadership. They are all in search for their own identity, and they express the conflict in Disraeli's mind at this stage of his life. Mrs. Tillotson has written that introspection, 'the dialogue of the mind with itself', was a characteristic feature in the thirties and forties but it exhibited itself in poetry and in some published journals only. "It is slower to establish itself in the novel, partly because it was obstructed in different ways by the dominance of Scott, of the 'Silver fork' novels and of Dickens"<sup>1</sup>. It can be found, however, in a large measure in Vivian Grey, Contarini Fleming, and Alroy. The later heroes, Coningsby, Egremont, Tancred and Lothair, are full of idealism and wish to find a solution for the problems confronting the country. They are in search for meaning in life and are crusaders after truth. They all come from very rich aristocratic families, but they are dissatisfied with a life of indolence and luxury and assailed

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1. K. Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen Forties, p. 132.

by doubts. "Coningsby, Egremont, Tancred - - - - all think - perhaps ineffectually, ignorantly, fitfully, but in their puzzled or impulsive way they do think, and about their social rights and responsibilities"<sup>1</sup>.

There are no conventional villains in Disraeli's novels. There are a few characters with evil traits such as Sir Lucius Grafton in The Young Duke, the Duke of Monmouth and Rigby in Coningsby, St. Barbe in Endymion, Lord Marney in Sybil, but their wickedness does not result in tragedy. Perhaps the only character who comes closest to a melodramatic villain is Stephen Morley in Sybil. There is only one bad woman, Mrs. Felix Lorraine, in Disraeli's first and most immature novel, Vivian Grey. Otherwise, his women characters have minor weaknesses such as indulging in gossip, like Lady Clanmore in Lothair, social climbing like Mrs. Guy Flouncey in Tancred, intriguing for power behind the scene, like Zenobia and Lady Montfort in Endymion, or at worst, she may be an inveterate gambler like Lady Bertie and Bellair in Tancred.

Disraeli's women belong more to the feminist tradition of the late eighteenth century rather than to the Victorian age. "The Victorians are guilty of having diminished woman to the lowest level she had reached for centuries"<sup>2</sup>. Even the women writers of the age, such as Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot, would not commit themselves to any women's

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1. K. Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen Forties, p. 122-123.

2. Batho and Dobrée, The Victorians And After, p. 81.

cause because they were afraid that women would lose their essential gentleness and tenderness by trying to make themselves like men. They shared this feeling with Queen Victoria, who declared that "The Queen is most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Woman's Rights', with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex, is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety - - - woman would become the most hateful, heartless, and disgusting of human beings were she allowed to unsex herself, and where would be the protection which man was intended to give the weaker sex?"<sup>1</sup>.

The typical Victorian heroine was gentle, unintellectual, domesticated, retiring, and unobtrusive, like Agnes in David Copperfield, or Laura in Pendennis. "Laura's life is always passed in making other lives happy. She is the friend of the young and the old"<sup>2</sup>. Virginia Woolf has summed up the concept of woman in Victorian England as the 'Angel in the House':

"She was intensely sympathetic, she was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily - - - in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all - - - she was pure"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Martin, Queen Victoria, quoted by L. Strachey, Queen Victoria, p. 246.

2. Pendennis, p. 912.

3. Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women', Death of the Moth and other Essays, p. 202.

Disraeli's women do have minds and wills of their own. The concept of the accomplished woman and the ornamental ideal is there, but it is accompanied by intellectual excellence as demanded by Mary Wollstonecraft. Like the Victorian ladies, Disraeli's women have the usual accomplishments. They paint screens, knit purses, arrange flowers, sing and dance and play musical instruments, they go out on missions of charity, but they also have intellectual pursuits. Eva (Tancred), talks like a theological divine, Theodora (Lothair) is an exponent of liberty, Sybil is active in the Chartist movement. Lady Constance Rawleigh (Tancred) is reputed to be very clever and holds forth on the subject of Evolution. Venetia's mother, Lady Annabel, had studied Botany, while Lady Joan Fitzwarene (Sybil) is a learned lady who knows Arabic, Hebrew, and all about Aztec cities. She corresponds with renowned scholars.

Before the advent of capitalism, and the rise of the new middle class in England, the educated woman spoke several foreign languages, had a grounding in the classics and some music, and she could meet a man at least socially and conversationally on equal terms. Disraeli's women belong to this category. In Endymion, when Myra is left penniless, she says, "I can draw, I can sing, I can speak many tongues,"<sup>1</sup> and she feels sufficiently confident to venture out into the world, unlike Jane Eyre who, in a similar situation was shy and retiring, and completely lacking in self-confidence.

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1. Endymion, p. 125.

Disraeli's heroines are exquisitely beautiful and intelligent beings, and their identity is not based entirely on their sexual role. Love and marriage occupy a subordinate position, except in Henrietta Temple, and women do not spend all their time in asking men in a refined and subtle way to marry them. In the other novels of this period, "the complaint was often expressed that novels made love and marriage seem the main business of life; it was Harriet Martineau's complaint against Charlotte Bronte, Carlyle's against novels in general"<sup>1</sup>. In most of the novels by Disraeli's contemporaries, women compete with one another for the favours of the male. Two or more women would be keen on marrying one man, and ultimately the heroine is triumphant. In Disraeli's novels, the situation is reversed. It happens very often that more than one man is keen on marrying the heroine, and the hero is successful in the end. Eva is betrothed to her cousin since childhood, then Fakhredeen is also in love with her, but she ultimately surrenders to Tancred. Similarly, both Stephen Morley and Baptist Hatton are in love with Sybil, but she marries Charles Egremont. Lady Corisande is supposed to marry the Duke of Brecon but she marries Lothair. Even though the novels do end in the conventional way, with the marriage of the hero and the heroine, there is "a curious air of sexlessness"<sup>2</sup> even in his love-tales.

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1. K. Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p. 122.

2. E. Baker, History of the English Novel, Vol. VII, p. 177.

Disraeli differed from his age in yet another respect. He did not share the typical middle class attitudes towards marriage and the purity of women. Hence he does not regard marriage as necessarily sacrosanct. No moral disapprobation is expressed when his heroes fall in love with married women. The Duke of St. James (The Young Duke) falls in love with Lady Aphrodite Grafton, Lord Cadurcis with Lady Monteagle (Venetia), Contarini with Christiana, Lothair with Theodora, and Endymion with Lady Montfort. He is far more natural and at ease when dealing with mature women. He delights in portraying women who drive men to great actions. Three of his women characters are described as women who would inspire the Crusades, Lady Jerome in Lothair, Lady Montfort in Endymion, and Lady Bertie and Bellair in Tancred. The descriptions of his young heroines tend to become awkward and strained, but nowhere does he dwell on their purity and innocence. In real life also, all Disraeli's closest friends were mature women, and he "was nearer the truth about women than Thackeray and Dickens"<sup>1</sup>.

In Sybil we also get a little glimpse into the life of the working class women. Gerard, talking to Charles Egremont, says that he wouldn't really mind very much if Sybil entered a convent, "for the married life of a woman of our class, in the present condition of our country, is a lease of woe - - - slaves, and the slaves of slaves"<sup>2</sup>. Devilsdust's mother had gone back to

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1. W. Allen, The English Novel, p. 151.

2. Sybil, p. 157.

work in her factory, when he was fifteen days old. She used to leave him in charge of a woman during the day, and this woman would ply the infants in her care with laudanum and treacle to keep them quiet. Mick Radley's mother toiled from five o'clock in the morning to seven o'clock at night and was drinking herself to death. His portrayals are realistic and based on first hand knowledge but they rarely come to life.

Most of the characters in the early novels of Disraeli are puppets, but in the later ones, they become authentic human beings. It cannot be said that Disraeli created characters which would entitle them to a place in the national mythology like Dickens, but he has created some unforgettable portraits like Lord Monmouth, Rigby, the famous pair, Tadpole and Taper, Count Mirabel, and a host of very charming women. His "characters bear witness, at any rate, to his profound intellectual knowledge of mankind, and his vast worldly wisdom, even if he has not imparted to many of them the gift of imaginative life"<sup>1</sup>.

### Structure and Style

Disraeli has not followed any fixed artistic rule in the structure of his novels. He has generally been criticised for being a careless craftsman. The novels lack organic unity. Sometimes they are a series of scenes rather than a well-knit

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1. E. Baker, History of the English Novel, Vol. VII, p. 179.

story. His plot construction is clumsy and the narrative tends to be involved and incoherent. It often happens that the original creative impulse exhausts itself, and the story drags to an unsatisfactory ending. There are far too many loose ends which the writer fails to tie up into a conclusion that may appear to be the logical and inevitable outcome of events that led up to it. These structural defects are at least partly due to the fact that Disraeli did not read any contemporary literature. He wrote in a letter (January 12, 1837) to Lady Blessington "I am sorry about B's play (Bulwer Lytton's The Lady of Lyons) - - - because he is the only literary man whom I do not abominate and despise"<sup>1</sup>. According to one version it was Little Dorrit, but another version says that it was about Daniel Deronda, that he was asked his opinion by a lady friend. Disraeli's reply was, "When I want to read a novel, I write one".

In Endymion, he refers rather disparagingly to Dickens as Gushy, while his satirical and vicious portrayal of Thackeray as St. Barbe has already been discussed earlier in the chapter on that novel.

In a letter to Lady Londonderry written in September 1857, Disraeli wrote: "I wish, like you, I could console myself with reading novels, or even writing them; but I have lost all

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1. M and B, Vol. I, p. 358.

zest for fiction, and have for many years. I have never read anything of Dickens, and therefore I cannot help to decide on the merits of Little Dorrit" - - - - - Perhaps he could have developed his critical sense by a closer acquaintance with the great writers of the period and with the literary and critical trends of his own time.

However, in spite of all these shortcomings, Disraeli displays considerable narrative skill by getting the reader interested in the fortunes of the characters. He can build up suspense and surprise the reader with an unexpected twist, and the novels have "a gaiety, a sparkle, a cheerful vivacity which carries one over their improbabilities and occasional absurdities"<sup>1</sup>.

Disraeli wrote epigrammatic eighteenth century prose, <sup>as</sup> which was regarded/rather old fashioned and out of date in the middle of the nineteenth century. Besides, two other influences dominate Disraeli's style, his parliamentary practice and his oriental leanings.

Leslie Stephen thinks that in the earlier novels and tales, "the style is generally excellent till it becomes too ambitious. It has a kind of metallic glitter, brilliant, sparkling with numerous flashes of wit and fancy and never wanting in sharpness of effect, though it may be deficient in delicacy"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 220.

2. L. Stephen, Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 128.

Disraeli himself considered Contarini Fleming as the perfection of English prose, and Elton<sup>1</sup> is inclined to agree with this opinion. Elton also regards Ixion in Heaven perfect in its way, and The Infernal Marriage as excellent in style.

Quiller-Couch says that most of Disraeli's early writings have a neat and controlled literary finish. Vivian Grey is an exception, because he allowed himself to be occasionally enticed away from "the stern discipline of letters, to the easier success of rhetoric"<sup>2</sup>. In the later novels, this rhetorical tendency was intensified by his parliamentary practice and proved rather detrimental to his style. Hence in Lothair we find plenty of "slipshod verbiage"<sup>3</sup>. There are occasions when his prose is ungrammatical and careless, but there are passages of real eloquence also, reminiscent of Burke. It would be interesting to mention here that this influence was mutual. Disraeli's parliamentary practice was also affected by his literary tendencies. When Disraeli became the Chancellor of Exchequer in 1852, Queen Victoria wrote to her uncle that "Mr Disraeli writes very curious reports to me of the House of Commons proceedings - much in the style of his books". Again, when he became the Prime Minister in 1868, the Queen was most friendly towards him now, and "his official letters, in which the personal element had always been perceptible,

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1. O. Elton, Survey of English Literature Vol.II.p.177.

2. A.Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and other Victorians, p. 182-183.

3. L. Stephen, Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 128.

developed into racy records of political news and social gossip, written, as Lord Clarendon said, 'in his best novel style'<sup>1</sup>.

The West has always associated the Orient with bright, flashy colours, a degree of affectation, a love of display and a certain flamboyancy in manner. All these qualities were an intrinsic part of Disraeli's personality, and hence they are reflected in his style, which has repeatedly been described as tawdry and ornate.

"Of all practitioners in English writing, a man of Oriental mind and upbringing has to beware of this - that no Occidental literature - - - will suffer ornament as an addition superinduced upon style"<sup>2</sup>. Quiller-Couch quotes the example of a young Persian lover who goes to a professional letter writer "who dips the pen of desire into the ink of devotion and proceeds to spread it over the page of desolation. Then the nightingale of affection is heard to warble to the rose of loveliness, while the breeze of anxiety plays around the brow of expectation,"<sup>3</sup> and this is considered to be fine writing in the East. Disraeli, yielding to this Oriental susceptibility, gives us the most lavish and extravagant descriptions of the ducal palaces and estates, which seem to belong more to the Arabian Nights than to any English tradition. Critical taste in England, already prejudiced against Disraeli because of his Jewish background, was loud in deprecating the style of the novels.

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1. L. Strachey, Queen Victoria, p. 199.

2. A. Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and other Victorians, p.184.

3. Ibid., p. 185.

Quiller-Couch is a great admirer of Disraeli's genius as a political novelist, but about his prose he says, "I can never dispel the smatch of burnt sandal-wood, the smell of camels and the bazaar - - - - we admire the oracle, but its tongue is foreign"<sup>1</sup>.

Hugh Walker writes about the early novels that these are "melodramatic, bombastic, turgid in style, the characters and the sentiments are exaggerated and unnatural, the tone of thought is Eastern rather than English"<sup>2</sup>.

Another critic has commented that Disraeli had a curiously oriental sense of style. "He loved the grandeur and the glitter of riches either in Jerusalem or in the ducal home"<sup>3</sup>. Trollope found Disraeli's style to be all glitter and flash, reminding him of tinsel and paste diamonds.

Eric Forbes-Boyd also complains that Disraeli's mind was too much influenced by the East, and "it was an unfortunate influence so far as the novelist was concerned"<sup>4</sup>. The Indian reader would not agree with this view, because this is what gives to the novels their unique oriental flavour. Besides, the gorgeous descriptions of oriental splendour in Alroy or Tancred do not appear so very remote and unrealistic to us because the remnants of feudal glory are still around us. Many

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1. A Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and other Victorians, p. 198
  2. H. Walker, Literature of the Victorian Era, p. 656.
  3. Batho and Dobrée, The Victorians and after, p. 86.
  4. Eric Forbes-Boyd, 'Disraeli the Novelist', Essays and Studies (1950), p. 107.

of the ideas and sentiments, which appeared grotesque and absurd to a society that preferred precise and scientific observation of the human drama, are not uncommon in our experience even today. In Tancred, the hero describes his exalted and soul-stirring feelings as he prays by the tomb of his Redeemer. It is a common experience of people in India who go on a pilgrimage to Mecca or to other holy places. Lothair presents Miss Arundel with a crucifix containing the earth of the Holy Places. In India, the water of the holy Ganges is available in small containers, or pilgrims bring the earth and the rosary from Mecca and other such sanctified spots for distribution to their relations and friends as holy relics. Even the appearance of the 'Angel of Arabia' to Tancred would not be considered altogether improbable: whether it is purely imaginary and subjective or real is not the point, but one does hear of such occurrences.

Disraeli's style is at its best when he is giving a satirical account of the actual and sordid day-to-day intrigues of politics.

"That formal epigrammatic eighteenth - century prose, which is hollow with rhetoric and which falsifies whenever he attempts natural description or the rendering of high ideals or psychological states, has, when he is dealing with the actual world of politics and intrigue, what one may call an historian's

quality. It affects us as Gibbon's does, or Macaulay's; it admits of no hesitations, no half-lights; it is completely sure, completely dogmatic. Above all, it is witty. The very structure of his sentences is witty, and his epigrams invite the reader into his confidence: 'Although the best of wives and mothers, she had some charity for her neighbours'. Again: 'England is unrivalled for two things, sporting and politics. They were combined at Beaumanoir; for the guests came not merely to slaughter the Duke's pheasants, but to hold council on the prospects of the party, which, it was supposed by the initiated, began at this time to indicate some symptoms of brightening'"<sup>1</sup>. These quotations are from Coningsby, but they abound in the other novels as well. "No satirist has ever struck off happier portraits of the ordinary British legislator"<sup>2</sup>.

Along with the satire, there is Disraeli's incomparable wit.

Forbes-Boyd thinks that "he is certainly among the wittiest, possibly he is the wittiest of English novelists. From his first to his last novel his wit is continuously in evidence, lightening the duller parts of the narrative, enlivening his dialogue with flashing repartee - - - - It is naturally in his dialogue that it shows to the best advantage; and his conversation pieces - his dinner tables, his ball rooms his political salons - constitute some of his best scenes"<sup>3</sup>.

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1. W. Allen, The English Novel, p. 151.

2. L. Stephen, Hours in a Library, Vol. II, p. 99.

3. E. Forbes-Boyd, "Disraeli the Novelist", Essays and Studies (1950), p. 102.

Most of Disraeli's contemporaries would not have agreed with the opinion because he often irritated them with his oscillation between the ironic and the serious. They could never understand whether he was making fun of the aristocracy or expressing his admiration for that order. Furthermore, politics is regarded as a matter of principle and conviction in England, and Disraeli's flippant attitude was scarcely likely to gratify his colleagues. The modern reader however, can enjoy his wit and satire with undiluted pleasure.

#### Disraeli's political philosophy and his relevance today

The political philosophy of Disraeli has been expounded in his political novels and this makes them rather different from the novels of the nineteenth century. Even the form of publication was not the same. The trend of the age was the publication of the novel in serials, but not one of Disraeli's novels appeared in that form. Perhaps he had no desire to cater for the middle class reading public which doted on Dickens.

Lord David Cecil says that "Disraeli's novels for all their brilliance, are not strictly speaking novels. They are not, that is, meant to be realistic pictures of life, but discussions on political and religious questions put into fictional form"<sup>1</sup>. The serious treatment of these problems puts

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1. Lord David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists, p. 290.

Disraeli's novels in the category of the 'roman à thèse'.

Guedalla has also said that "the real heroes and villains of Coningsby are political ideas. Perhaps the villain was the Tamworth Manifesto"<sup>1</sup>, and the hero, the ideology of Young England.

Disraeli's political philosophy which he enunciated at great length in the political trilogy cannot be taken too seriously. He seems to be arguing against equality, liberalism and progress, while his racialist and religious doctrines were regarded as even more absurd and unacceptable. Moncton Milnes has criticised his political philosophy in very strong terms.

"It is superfluous to blame Mr. D'Israeli for not working out into the practical reality of these days a political philosophy which is in fact nothing less than an abandonment of all principles of individuality, responsibility, and self-government; and a return to the narrowest principles of loyal dependence and local patriotism - - - - -

Such principles, or something like them, have been the basis of all the fanaticism and charlatanism that in their manifold expressions have arrested the advance of the human mind"<sup>2</sup>. Milnes is being rather harsh in his criticism, but it is true that the recipes for solution offered by Disraeli are vague and unpractical. It would have been difficult in England, in the middle of the nineteenth century, to remove the evils of government and society by giving more power to the monarch,

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1. P. Guedalla, Introduction to the Bradenham edition, p. xiii-xiv.  
2. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 208.

by restoring a benevolent feudal order and by strengthening the position of the Church. The Young England ideology stood for a popular and socially responsible Toryism, which would appeal to the masses through paternalistic reform, but the group disintegrated within a short period. Probably Disraeli himself did not subscribe to this ideology too seriously, and though his ideas have little precision, coherence, or literal truth, their value lies in his insights and not in his conclusions. In a recent review of Maurice Edelman's Disraeli Rising Jonathan Keates writes: "Thackeray, concluding a tart review of Sybil for the Morning Chronicle, belaboured the Tory party as 'this wretched, tottering, mouldy, clumsy old idol". Disraeli's achievement in gilding the idol with a gloss of smart romance, by what seems to have been a mixture of graft, duplicity and bombast, has made him an imperishable cult-figure for each succeeding Conservative generation. Young England, one feels, listening to the orotundities of candidates at rural bye-elections, is not dead, and the Two Nations are positively alive and kicking"<sup>1</sup>

As a critic of the English political scene, Disraeli is unrivalled. He was able to visualise the failure of parliamentary democracy in an age when a belief in representative institutions was almost akin to religion. He also punctured the complacency of the Victorian age regarding its faith in progress and industrial development. It is true that he was not the only one to

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1. New Statesman, March 14, 1975.

raise a dissident voice. Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, Mathew Arnold, among others, were also pointing their fingers at the prevailing evils of society. The difference lay in the fact that they were detached observers of the situation, while Disraeli was in Parliament and fully involved in power politics, yet he could be so discerning, prescient, and objective.

In Popanilla, Disraeli has "ridiculed the industrial civilisation of England, its politics, economics, religion, trade, agriculture, colonial expansion, literature, science and pretty well everything else; and a good deal of the satire is as timely today as it was a century ago - - - The present age has known many politicians like Popanilla"<sup>1</sup>.

The social stress and political bewilderment that Disraeli has portrayed in his novels is as topical today as it was when the novels were published. It is this quality which gives them a perennial interest and makes them relevant today.

In the recent search for leadership before the election of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, an article in the press<sup>2</sup> suggested that "the Conservative Party must first discern and then state a coherent set of Conservative principles from which a set of consistent Conservative policies could flow - - - Without a set of principles, a Conservative Party would be nothing but a collection of people desirous of power" - - -

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1. Hesketh Pearson, Dizzy, p. 25.

2. George Gale, 'The Tory Predicament', New Statesman, January 17, 1975.

Disraeli had written in 1844 "The Tamworth Manifesto of 1834 was an attempt to construct a party without principles - - - The leaders indeed might profit by their eminent position to obtain power for their individual gratification, but it was impossible to secure their followers that which, after all, must be the great recompense of a political party, the putting in practice of their opinions; for they had none"<sup>1</sup>.

Disraeli writes about the total bankruptcy of the two political parties, the Whigs and the Tories, and in Tancred, he goes so far as to refer to Parliamentary democracy as "a fatal drollery".

In a recent article in the press it is claimed that, "the public has no belief in the solutions put forward by the political parties, still less confidence in the ability of either to execute them; and precious little in the democratic process itself"<sup>2</sup>.

The 'two nations' of Sybil may not be the rich and the poor, but they could easily be the white and the coloured, and they are "as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws"<sup>3</sup>. Lord Marney's

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1. Coningsby, p. 104.

2. New Statesman, December 27, 1974.

3. Sybil, p. 77.

(Sybil) solution for the 'condition of England' problem was large scale emigration of the poor. Enoch Powell would like to send the Asian immigrants away to the lands from whence they came, in an effort to solve the crisis that England faces today.

The novels of Disraeli have considerable contemporary relevance for another reason. They are a part of a continuous cultural debate about the place of human values in a society given over to materialism. He condemned the craze for material development at the cost of moral values, and he wanted to stem the tide of industrial individualism which was destroying rural England and turning the country into one vast slum.

"Children were being dragged up in misery or left to die, and life was turned into a flaring workshop in which the higher purposes of humanity were obliterated or forgotten"<sup>1</sup>.

Disraeli protested fiercely against Benthamite Utilitarianism, which had become the new religion in place of true Christianity. Many thinkers today are protesting against the decline of England into Benthamite technological horrors, which has resulted, according to Dr. Leavis, in "incessant industrial strife; drugs for kicks; riots and increasing crime; tolerance and glorification of crime thru the media; sordid or lethal pollution by oil and chemicals"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. J.A. Froude, Lord Beaconsfield, p. 129.

2. Times Literary Supplement, June 21, 1974.

Disraeli wrote in Sybil:

"If a spirit of rapacious covetousness, desecrating all the humanities of life, has been the besetting sin of England for the last century and a half, since the passing of the Reform Act, the altar of Mammon has blazed with triple worship. To acquire, to accumulate, to plunder each other by virtue of philosophic phrases, to propose a Utopia to consist only of Wealth and Toil, this has been the breathless business of enfranchised England for the last twelve years, until we are startled from our voracious strife by the wail of intolerable serfage"<sup>1</sup>.

Dr. Leavis writes about the destruction of the spiritual identity of England. He further states that, "a humanity whose conscious, effective and unchallenged criteria, reduce to money and what money can buy, must inevitably destroy itself - and this in more than one way"<sup>2</sup>.

The questions asked in Tancred are being asked today also.  
"Progress to what, and from where?"<sup>3</sup>

Ivan Illich in a recent book Tools for Conviviality, has pointed out the evils of modern industrial society and made a plea for the use of creative imagination in future planning and for a revival of tradition. Robert Waller in Be Human or Die complains about the dehumanisation in industrial society, its obsession with growth, and its utilitarian morality.

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1. Sybil, p. 36.

2. Times Literary Supplement, May 31, 1974.

3. Tancred, p. 233.

Disraeli also is aware of the importance of traditional continuity as a guide in life, and his characters attach a lot of importance to the various traditional activities and virtues. He sees life as an essential aspect of long-rooted tradition, as it is in the East.

In Contarini Fleming, which is Disraeli's fictionalised autobiography, Disraeli had expressed his deep admiration for the oriental way of life:

"There is a charm in oriental life, and it is Repose - - The memory of the wearing cares, and corroding anxieties, and vaunted excitement of European life, filled me with pain. Keenly I felt the vanity and littleness of all human plans and aspirations - - - The calm enjoyment of existence appeared to me, as it now does, the highest attainable felicity"<sup>1</sup>.

In mid-twentieth century, we find thousands of young people in England and America being attracted by Yoga, Transcendental Meditation and the Science of Creative Imagination. Many of them have actually renounced all the material comforts of an industrial civilisation and have followed a Maharishi or a Balyogi for spiritual salvation and mental calm.

Edward Goldsmith, editor of the British journal, Ecologist, is firmly of opinion that industrial society is well on its way to destruction. Like Tancred, he feels that

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1. Contarini Fleming, p. 335.

a religious movement suffused with an altogether different set of values may perhaps save the situation, and he finds in Gandhi's teachings the only answer to the dilemma of the Western world.

Amongst his contemporaries, Disraeli was undoubtedly the most intelligent and the most far-sighted of men. He visualised the need for social reform in an age which believed in the philosophy of 'laissez-faire', and he could also foresee the dangers inherent in sacrificing the agricultural interest of England and turning the country into "the workshop of the world".

### CONCLUSION

The novels of Disraeli present a wide variety of form and content, which in itself is an unusual phenomenon in the history of the English novel.

Taking them up in strictly chronological order, his first novel, Vivian Grey (1826) is a social picaresque with political overtones. He then wrote a novelette, Popanilla (1828), which is a satirical tale modelled on Swift. The Young Duke (1831) belongs to the "silver-fork" school, while Alroy, begun earlier but completed in 1833, is a historical romance in magnificent technicolour, almost in the line of Scott. Contarini Fleming (1832) is Disraeli's fictionalised autobiography. It is the story of the artist as a young man, but ends up as a travelogue. Henrietta Temple (1836-37) is a love romance, based on an actual experience and also a novel of high society. Venetia (1837) is a fictionalised version of the lives of Byron and Shelley. The novel was a daring attempt to rehabilitate the two poets, when British society was still inclined to be rather antagonistic towards them. Between 1834 and 1837 also belong a few short stories and two brilliant satirical pieces, Ixion in Heaven and The Infernal Marriage.

These are classical legends told in the modern idiom. By this time, Disraeli had improved considerably in the art of characterization and the structure of the novels showed greater maturity.

The political trilogy, on which Disraeli's fame is said to rest in the popular mind, followed seven years later. They may be classified in the category of "the novel with a purpose". Coningsby or The New Generation (1844) deals predominantly with political ideas and presents a portrait gallery of contemporary characters. Sybil: or The Two Nations (1845) stresses the acute social problems of the 'Hungry Forties', while Tancred or The New Crusade (1847), which was originally meant to probe the role of the Church, actually begins as a satire on high society, and ends up as a novel of adventure and romance in the gorgeous East.

Disraeli was almost a different personality when he wrote Lothair (1870), twenty three years later. The novel depicts the gilded life of the aristocracy, and is at the same time a story of adventure and intrigue in a continental setting. His last complete novel Endymion (1880) is a pageant of the past, in which he delves into his memory and paints a delightful picture of the social and political world from 1827 to 1855.

Through all this variety of form and content, the autobiographical element runs like a thread. Disraeli had

noted in his diary that, after the publication of Vivian Grey Alroy and Contarini Fleming, he would write no more about himself. But every novel contains something about himself. He talks through a Sidonia, or he weaves his own experiences of life and politics into the fabric of the story. Thus all the novels and stories reveal the various facets of Disraeli's character, ideology and personality.

With the exception of Alroy, all his novels are set in nineteenth century England. In the case of Venetia, he deliberately pushed the story into the late eighteenth century, out of some delicacy of feeling, since the novel was based on the lives of Byron and Shelley, who had just recently died.

Disraeli's novels acquire a special significance because they depict the social and political life of England in the nineteenth century, even though it was a limited aspect of that life. We get a fascinating picture of the evolution of the House of Commons in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and interesting sidelights on some of the outstanding political figures of the age, such as Lord Liverpool, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel and Palmerston. He tells us more about high society and politics than any other novelist of the period. According to G.W.E. Russell, "by far the acutest observer of our national life in the nineteenth century was Lord B, who combined the shrewdness of his race with unique opportunities of observation"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Quoted by Paul Bloomfield Disraeli, p. 5.

Professor Richard Pares has described the nineteenth century as "the great terra incognita of British history"<sup>1</sup>. The novels of Disraeli help us to explore a part of this territory. V.S. Pritchett thinks that "the novels of Disraeli tell us everything. He not only plants the main spectacle, the house party of history; but he tells us the club gossip and the boudoir gossip - - - No one describes a ball, or a house party, or a dinner as well as Disraeli for no one so quickly and neatly gives one the foibles and background of the guests"<sup>2</sup>. Muriel Masfield writes that, "Disraeli's novels have embalmed the fine finish which art gave to luxury in living pictures which no array of museum pieces or suites of disused State apartments can call up for us"<sup>3</sup>. Other critics have expressed similar opinions. "He grasped and expressed the essential situation of his times with a boldness beyond that of much greater novelists"<sup>4</sup>. "He was the first to provide fiction with the background, the swarming shouting scene of our public life, reported faithfully; he was the first to give a true picture of the ruling caste engrossed in the great game which it takes even more seriously than it takes its other sport"<sup>5</sup>.

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a revival of interest in the nineteenth century because of the

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1. Paul Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform, p. 1.
  2. V.S. Pritchett, The Living Novel, p. 78.
  3. M. Masfield, Peacocks and Primroses, p. 313.
  4. D. Elton, A Survey of English Literature, Vol. II, p. 187.
  5. W. Allen, The English Novel, p. 152.

growing complexity and insecurity of the contemporary world.

"In our own unpleasant century we are almost displaced persons, and many feel tempted to take flight into the nineteenth as into a promised land, and settle there like illegal immigrants for the rest of their lives"<sup>1</sup>.

F.R. Leavis refers to this revival in The Great Tradition "I am thinking of the present vogue of the Victorian Age. Trollope, Yonge, Gaskell, Collins, Reade, Kingsley, Marryat and Shorthouse - have been described as living classics - The novelist who has not been revived is Disraeli - Yet, though he is not one of the great novelists, he is so alive and intelligent as to deserve permanent currency, at any rate in the trilogy, Coningsby, Sybil, and Tancred: his own interests as expressed in these books - the interests of a supremely intelligent politician who has a sociologist's understanding of civilisation and its movement in his time - are so mature"<sup>2</sup>.

Holbrook Jackson, however, includes Disraeli in his book on Great English novelists, because he regards Disraeli as one of those writers who have contributed something essential towards making the English novel what it is. "They are not, like the novels of the earlier masters, portrayals of character or analyses of feeling; nor yet like the novels of Scott, impersonal romances; but more allied to the poems of Byron,

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1. Quoted from Basil Willey by Asa Briggs, Victorian People, p. 7.

2. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 1n.

they are the expression of an intensely personal view of life revealed through types and customs rather than characters and feelings; the brilliant interpretations of human ambition in terms of imagination"<sup>1</sup>.

Quiller-Couch also accords him a high place.

"He stands in politics admittedly a champion; in literature, too, a figure certainly not among the greatest, yet as certainly one of the great"<sup>2</sup>.

Forbes-Boyd does not regard Disraeli among the greatest writers of English fiction, but he points out that if the writer of fiction is to be judged on his powers as a creator and on his ability to transport us to a world of his imagining, then "Disraeli at his best is able to bear comparison with anyone. He takes us into his political world as surely as Scott carries us among his Jacobites, Dickens to his slums, or Thackeray into fast society at the outset of the nineteenth century"<sup>3</sup>.

Blake thinks that Disraeli is neither a great novelist like Dickens and Thackeray nor even a good novelist like Trollope, but one would not put him in the second class either. "At one time examiners in the Oxford Final Schools, when puzzled by a candidate, who had touches of brilliance mixed with incongruous errors and follies, used to award him the mark of alpha/gamma.

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1. H. Jackson, Great English Novelists, p. 214.

2. A. Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and Other Victorians, p. 198.

3. E. Forbes-Boyd, "Disraeli The Novelist", Essays and Studies (1950), p. 117.

Disraeli is the alpha/gamma novelist of the Victorian age, but his alpha element is not to be derided. In Coningsby he produced the first and most brilliant of English political novels, a genre which he may be said to have invented, and in Sybil he produced one of the first and one of the most famous social novels. He would be remembered for these if he had written nothing else and never become a minister"<sup>1</sup>.

While most critics have given a high place to Disraeli as a novelist, very few have been able to agree about the respective merits of the individual novels. He has something of the interest of an unsolved enigma, and whatever he has written deserves to be placed apart in a class by itself. With the exception of Alroy, which has been generally condemned, apart from the praise lavished on it by some contemporary readers, opinions differ very widely about the others. Thus today, although Disraeli's reputation rests almost entirely on the political trilogy, his earlier novels and the two last one also possess intrinsic merits and all of them are well worth a critical study.

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1. R. Blake, Disraeli, p. 190-191.

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