

stocking, and a later owner of the library. He must have been a rare sort of fellow to choose the book as a wedding gift for his wife; and she must have been the right kind of woman, for the volume was well thumbed. I was already very contented with the couple of them, when a small booklet in faded green put itself modestly in the way of my feet as I turned to get a better light on the pages of the Sterne. It was a Guide to Paris, with a map, dated 1800. How many cities of Paris there have been since then! I opened the map over my knees. Of course the Sterne - loving couple had taken it with them on their wedding trip. There was a big cross marking the hotel where they stayed, and they had traced in ink all the travels they had made about the town. It was possible to follow all their little expeditions, and to picture them piously inking them in together in the evenings, these two, by themselves in Paris, who were afterwards to live in the quiet old house in the north country.

And even the map had been sold with the rest of the books. The thought made my heart ache and my eyes moisten. Lying on the floor around me were the records of a century and a half of country reading. There were the books the sportsman had conned over when his horse fell sick, the classics

his sister had loved, her mother's novels, her father's magazines, and now this small keepsake that must have meant so much to that other couple who grew old here, and loved Yorick in their youth, and went a sentimental journey together. There they lay, with the worn Dickens, the tattered Thackerays, the black-bound sermons, disowned, about to be dispersed. I seemed to see first one and then another of the old owners of the

library taking down books from the full shelves; there was the lady with the steadfast eyes, holding a Tacitus; that little black-clothed gentleman must have been Mr. Vegden; there was the sportsman brother dirtying the floor with stable boots as he blundered in for a volume on farriery; there, grey-haired, was their father, a glass of port on the small table beside him, smiling at the solemn humours of *The Guardian*.

The dream cleared away and left only the desolate torn wall-paper, the gaunt nails, and the dusty volumes scattered on the floor. Outside it was growing dusk in the shadow of the huge yew trees by the window, and presently, in the silence of the empty house, I heard the voice of a child, singing lustily, to keep up his courage, as he came along the deserted passages to summon me to tea.



After the painting
by J. Opie, R.A.

Execution of Mary
Queen of Scots.

THE FLESHLY SCHOOL OF FICTION.

A PROTEST AGAINST THE DEGRADATION OF THE MODERN NOVEL.

TWELVE books are lying on my table—some by famous authors and of literary excellence, others by the current novelist, man or woman, whose leaves to-day are and to-morrow shall be cast into the oven. But all have a family resemblance; they belong to the tribe now increasing at a rate without example, of shameless and shameful fiction. They are attempts at naturalising among English readers the horrible French thing known by a name as ill-savoured, not to be printed here, but with which Parisian shop-windows blaze, and scorch the eyes of them that pass by, in photograph, sketch, and yellow book-binding. One subject, to the destruction of pure human literature and noble art, gives the key, dominates the music, dims the vision, stains the fancy, corrupts the soul; for this is the vast modern Morgue where dead creatures lie exposed, the

mire of their suicide clinging to them. Once they were clean and wholesome; now they have become portion and parcel of the putrescence on which they fed. These things are true to the letter. Dissolution has set in, provoked by the agents of death which cannot thrive except where Heaven's sweet air is shut out and darkness holds rule. Yesterday, Paris almost alone spread the plague. To-day it rages in London. Fashionable publishers keep it in stock; newspapers advertise it in spicy paragraphs; women's clubs and afternoon teas reek with its odours; is it not time to ask whether we want this tainted literature among us, and if not, how we shall get rid of it?

"Why get rid of it?" says one who affects to be a nature-student. "Is it not taken from life? What more do we seek in modern or any other print?" And