

loss of men, however, and the action was very hot. I hope to hear to-day that these gun-boats have not escaped us after all."

In 1804 Mr. D'Israeli was engaged upon a work which is now all but forgotten, and of which Lord Beaconsfield does not seem to have been aware, as he makes no mention of it in the Memoir of his father prefixed to the 'Curiosities of Literature' in 1865.

The author, however, as is evident from his constant allusions to it, and his anxiety about its success, attached great importance to this book, which was entitled 'Flim-Flams! or the Life and Errors of my Uncle, and the Amours of my Aunt, with Illustrations and Obscurities, by Messrs. Tag, Rag, and Bobtail.' The work is rather ridiculous, and it is difficult now to discern its purpose, or even the humour on which the author would appear to have prided himself. It is slightly in imitation of Sterne; but without his sentiment, wit or humour.

In April 1804, D'Israeli writes:—

*Mr. D'Israeli to John Murray.*

DEAR MURRAY,

The last letter you wrote, was received at a moment that I could not properly attend to it. I am extremely obliged by the real solicitude you have shown on the occasion—nor has it been entirely useless. I have had that proof returned and made two or three additional touches, besides retaining the rejected note of the *Edinburgh Review* which I like well. You are probably too *deeply* engaged in *serious business* at the present moment, to attend to such *Nugæ* and flim-flams as the world are on the point of being *illuminated* by.

However, I write this, to give you some *hopes*. I confided the three sheets printed to two friends, and I have every reason to believe I succeed to the best of my wishes. One writes me, that it will "provoke *perpetual laughter* and

at the same time preserve a great deal of *curious information*." I have observed how it worked upon a *grave mind* (the friend who read carefully the sheets before me). He acknowledges the *satire* to be very just and *much wanted*; and is of opinion that a *volume annually* of the same kind, would be a pleasant companion to the *Literati*. What I liked better than his opinion—he laughed most seriously! However every year cannot produce such a heap of *extravaganzas* as I have registered, nor so merry a crew of lunatics, as I shall have the honour of putting into a procession.

As I have written an account of the *death* of the author—who *dies with laughter*—whom nothing can revive but the *galvanic science* of *Professor Murray*, I must consult you on this before it is printed. I mention that I prefer you to *Professor Davy*, because by many *patient experiments* you, to my knowledge, have more than once restored a *dead author to life*!

There was no avoiding Clarke's\* knowing I was the author, nor the printer. In the present case we must trust to their *honour*, for, as Mark Antony says—"They are all honourable men!"

Mrs. D'I. is most sensible to your enquiries and has taken it into her profound views that you have gone off † to be *married*! and though I speak so much in favour of your wisdom, still she thinks it will so end.

Again he writes on the eve of publication: "I think the third volume abounds with that kind of story or incident which will be found entertaining."

The work appeared in due course in the early part of 1805, but it was never appreciated by the public; it was severely criticised in the *Critical Review*, and the author's exaggerated expectations gave place to the deepest disappointment. "An idea has spread abroad," he writes, "that the F. F. is a libel. Longman and Rees will not suffer the book to lie on their table. I wrote to know if

\* Mr. Murray's head clerk.

† Mr. Murray was then residing at Hartley Row in Hampshire.

the *Edinburgh Review* really considers it a libel whether we ought not to retain Erskine."

No libel action, however, was brought, and in due course a second edition, "with an apology for the author and the work" was prepared, but here again D'Israeli's nervous anxiety is displayed in the following letters:—

*Mr. D'Israeli to John Murray.*

"It is absolutely necessary to stop going on with our second edition.

"Your personal interest is more deeply involved in this, than mine. You will incur a great risk, which I have very strong doubts will never be repaid.

"Secondly, my own ease of mind is as much as possible at risk. The work certainly gives great offence to many; the execution is at times most bunglingly performed, and I am convinced the curiosity of a certain part of the public was stirred, which occasioned the demand. Whatever real merits may be in the work are entirely outnumbered by the errors of its author.

"The printer has only done three sheets, perhaps a fourth. These sheets may at present be deposited in your warehouse. The expense of the printer may be divided between us, or I will repay you. Dagley\* I will undertake myself to satisfy.

"I have maturely considered this affair. To prevent a serious loss to you, and deep vexation for myself, I have immediately hit on this plan. What has just passed cannot be recalled, and I will bear the consequences.

"Pray then return the MS. ; stop the printer.

"If it were really necessary, the work might be resumed a year hence. If there's no second edition, no other reason need be given than that the authors would not give any.

"When it is out of print, if ever the few on hand are sold, it may be more talked of; at present the current runs all against it."

\* The engraver.