CHAPTER - VIII
DISRAELI: HIS LAST NOVELS

Politics was Disraeli's first love, and literature his second. Till his entrance into Parliament he was mainly devoted to the second, and wrote half-a-dozen novels during twelve years of his pre-Parliamentary career but after his entrance into active political life he had little leisure to write even as much in more than three decades. After *Tancred* he took more than twelve years to get a breathing space, but as soon as he got it, he turned to literature and complete *Lothair*, one of the most popular novels of the period.

1. *Lothair* (1870):

*Lothair* was translated into almost all the European languages and it was widely read. Disraeli himself reported, "It has been extensively read both by the people of the United Kingdom and the United States than any work that now appeared for the last half century." Horses, songs and ships were named after the hero and the heroine of the novel. A scrape in Disraeli's own handwriting gives the following list: "Lothair, Mr. Stevens's Colt, Mr. Molly's song, Greenwich ship, Lothair perfume, Lothair Street." Though it considerably enhanced Disraeli's literary popularity, it doubled at the same time, doubts about his political capacity to leadership—the short span of which he had already enjoyed in 1868.

*Lothair* covers a period of about three years, from 1866 to 1868. But it does neither refer to the Reform bill of 1867, nor to any leading contemporary figure of political England. *Lothair*, a political novel in conception, differs from his mid-trilogy in outlook. It presents the spiritual conflict, with continental politics at its back. After having a political experience of more than thirty years, Disraeli presents with appreciable familiarity as aspect of English life affected by the continental politics. Since long he had been concerned and worried about the activities of secret societies and their international agencies, which, according to him, were instrumental in toppling down many of the
Continental governments in the forties. To expose their activities and to warn England against "the intrigues of ultra montane proselytisers," *Lothair* was written under matching political and local colour. Thus the novel is valuable for references concerning the political upheaval at the Continent.

Declaring the book as Disraeli's masterpiece, George Russell is of the opinion that it is a profound study of spiritual and political forces at a supremely important moment in the history of modern Europe. The theme of the story, however, was suggested by an incident which took place in 1868 when the third Marquis of Bute was received into the Church of Rome. Disraeli, as a political seer and an advocate of the Anglican Church, came out with a detailed fictionalized analysis of the incident.

The hero of the novel, an orphan peer and a prig, is brought up under the Presbytarian influences. His anxiety for political and theocratical knowledge and activities, makes him a prey to three conflicting forces represented in the novel by three beautiful ladies; Clare Arundel represents the Church of Rome, whereas Theodora Compion and Lady Corisande represent the International revolution or Free religion, and the Church of England respectively. The story of the novel takes place in England and on the Continent. Almost all the pictures presented here have been adroitly recapitulated by the author from his Macaulian memory.

Disraeli loved Rome, its traditions and ceremonials, but he was against the Roman bondage on England even in the form of religious control. With this psychological background the writer handles the story. He kills Theodora, representing the International revolution, under whose charm, the hero Lothair joins Garibaldi's army which is advancing towards Rome to fight against its French defenders. Before he is imprisoned, he is wounded at the battle of Mentana. According to Cardinal Grandison of the story, Lothair's life is saved by Virgin Mary herself. The author comments that "the appearance of the
Virgin in Rome had given a death blow to the atheism and the secret activities. Lothair must return to England and reconquer it for Rome." To save the hero from the influence of Clare, representing the Church of Rome, Disraeli makes Clare member of a Convent. The hero is left ultimately under the care of Corisande, the representative of the English Church and that obviously illustrates Disraeli's partisan outlook towards the Anglican Church.

Disraeli, as usual, prompted by his racial urge for the Eastern mysticism, introduces Virgin Mary and paraclete. The latter assertively says, "Science can no more satisfy the soul than superstition or revolt." He further preaches that "religion should be the principal occupation of man, to which all other pursuits should be subservient." Such categorical utterances of his characters compel us to hold the view that Lothair is a projection of Disraeli's own inner struggle for an urge of sacrifice for the English Church. We are further inclined to believe that Lothair is old Disraeli's mouthpiece who scatters some useful advice, "whatever you do, give up dreams." Prompted by his own past experience he further puts into the mouth of the hero-"action may not always be happiness, but there is no happiness without action." These are some practical suggestions which this seasoned politician wanted to impart to the younger generation against their belief that "true religion is the worship of the beautiful," which they believed was a source of happiness.

The tone of Lothair is dialectic and as such we may call it a 'topical romance'. The hero, a weakling, is the political and spiritual disciple of his creator. he is no buoyant crusader like Tancred, but only a receptive political apprentice. Through him (Lothair), Disraeli exposes that current of thought which agitated the great English ruling class in the preceding decades, much "under seduction of Rome." By making the hero participate in the Italian war, Disraeli avails himself of the opportunity to deal with the struggle between the
Church and the secret societies. It may be mentioned here that the failure of Garibaldi's attempts to secure the restoration of the Roman Republic must have been a matter of great satisfaction to Disraeli.

The story of this novel is aimed, in a covert way, against the worship of wealth, which the English society was madly busy with. The writer's love for the splendid and sumptuous, gaudy and glittering, finds ample expression here. He pleads for personal splendour because a man of splendour is looked upon always with favour, his appearance exhilarates the heart of man and he is always popular.

Written with a set purpose, the novel may not have that artistic maturity which readers expected from a man of Disraeli's age and political stature, but it certainly served the purpose of the Anglican Church, a cause which he wanted to uphold. Through this novel Disraeli tried to demolish the current popular religious opinion formed under the influence of Newman and his Oxford Movement. *Lothair* is often quoted by critics to illustrate Disraeli's method of satirizing men and measures, he differed with. An Oxford professor, whom he did not like for his extreme opinions and sedentary habits, was labelled as a social-parasite. A controversy, thus raised, continued till after the death of Disraeli.

Froude calls *Lothair* as a work of enduring value and asks readers to see the value of the book in its perfect representation of the patrician society in England, flourishing in its fullest bloom like a flower opening fully only to fade. Disraeli paints Lord St. Aldegonde and Lord St. Jerome, as the prototype of this patrician society, who believe that liberty depended on land and "the greater the landowner, the greater the liberty of a country."

Blake thinks *Lothair* as the "finest comedy of English political society." Here there are graphic descriptions of physical and natural beauty. A romantic admirer of woman's charm, Disraeli paints Theodora wearing her
female attire and her long hair restrained only by a fillet reaching nearly to the ground. Her Olympic brow seemed distended; a phosphoric light glittered in her Hellenic eyes; a deep pink spot burnt upon each of those cheeks usually so immaculately fair.

This woman of angelic beauty and ideal character possesses qualities of a leader. Such refinements of human nature are in consonance with the beauty of nature which Disraeli depicts with Wordsworthian touch:

When there is nobody, you know in London, the million that go about are only voiceless phantoms. Solitude in a city is a trance....It is not so in the country. The voices of Nature are abundant, and from the hum of insects to the fall of the avalanche, something is always talking to you.

As usual Lothair was also received by professional critics with a mixed feeling of admiration and condemnation. The Quarterly Review denounced it as "a sin against good taste and justice." and decried it to be "as dull as ditch-water and as flat as a flounder." The Dublin Review called its author "Titus Oates exposing the last Popish plot in three volumes." While to Fitzgerald, Lothair appeared like "a pleasant magic lantern," but the Pall Mall Gazette described it as an admirable novel, and praised the consummate ease of the writing. We think that Lothair is Disraeli’s religious thesis about catholicism in the garb of a romantic tale; and the story, though it contains much about English and Italian politics and society, art and education, does not tax the reader's patience so much as Tancred did.

2. *Endymion* (1880):

Written just a year before his death, Disraeli's last novel *Endymion* is dedicated to Lady Bradford with whom he was carrying on his romance. Though he was already more than three score years and ten, still he regarded that "the present day is the period of romantic passions." *Endymion*, a romantic memoir, may be treated as a story of a politician's life, meditated in retrospect. It was a grateful homage from a Prime Minister to all those women whose potent influence shaped his career. The auto-biographical element here is perhaps
more marked than that we find in other novels of Disraeli. In our opinion the writer has summed up the whole of his life in a pleasant and convincing manner in the form of fiction.

*Endymion* is an abridged history of Disraeli’s idealized realization. It presents a view of that political paradise which was no more a dreamland for him. It is "a curious blend of history and fiction" describing the life of one who came, who saw and who not only conquered the hearts of the angelic beauties, but made a lasting notch in the social and political history of Great Britain.

The writer has presented here certain leaves from his own biography with all its splendour and beauty pertaining to his romantic attachments. He refers to Bradenham, Ferrar’s new home, where Disraeli spent restless nights with little hope in sight to quench his thirst for fame and power. "It was there," he says, "that I passed my miserable youth ... I was devoured by ambition I did not see any means of gratifying." He highlights his own story by sketching the social and political background of England since the days of Prime Minister George Canning. Thus the novel covers a period of about three decades from 1827 to 1855, and contains references to almost all the important political events of the period. The novel fetched £ 10000, the largest sum paid to any writer of romance till that date, but could not earn the author as much popularity as it earned him money.

Looking back over his own career, Disraeli gratefully acknowledges all that he owed to his sister’s discerning sympathy, and to Mrs. Austen’s encouragement and criticism. Buckle very meticulously recapitulates what Disraeli owed in life,

to his wife’s devotion and income, to Lady Blessington’s and Lady Londonderry’s friendship, to Mrs. Brydges Willyam’s venevolence, and to the atmosphere of sympathy and appreciation which had been provided for his declining years through his intimacy with Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield, and through the gracious indulgence of his Queen.\(^5\)
The long list of these benefactresses may be completed by adding one more name, that of Mrs. Norton, the eldest of the Sheridan graces, at whose house Disraeli met Lord Melbourne with his dream of becoming 'Prime Minister' as early as 1834.

The son of a civil servant, Endymion, the Whig-hero of the novel, was born in 1819. He joins the Somerset House as a clerk at the age of sixteen. Tracing the effect of the Reform Act of 1832, Disraeli describes how his father and grandfather were wrong in attaching themselves to wrong persons and parties bringing pauperism to their family. But Endymion's devoted sister, Myra, a worldly-wise woman, marrying an elderly statesman procures for him, first, under Wilton (a Cabinet Minister) private secretaryship and then undersecretaryship under her own husband, Lord Roehampton. However, he owes his elevation to Prime Ministership at the age of forty to Lady Montfort "the genius of Whiggism," and the Queen of society. She offers him all her assets when her husband dies.

Endymion perhaps purposely avoids mentioning Disraeli's active and busy political years of life in which the reading public was more interested. They reluctantly anticipated some glimpse of those secrets, which made him such a renowned Prime Minister, in his last work. The Dublin Review lamented:

It is after all disappointing that the novel author after half a century of intimate knowledge of English politics, did not in this last work, give us some philosophy either of history or political changes, or even the secret of success in public life. (Dublin Review, Vol. 36, p. 145)

In our opinion the Dublin reviewer's criticism is only half the truth. Disraeli Endymion was intended, primarily to be a novel of an autobiographical nature, allowing full liberty to the author to reveal that portion of his life which he thought proper to portray.

Rich in autobiographical details, arranged in a chronological order, the novel contains a number of universal and immortal political truths; we
refer to one very significant of them, "A country that borrows its language, its laws and its religion cannot have its inventive powers much developed." Endymion has all the touches of earlier novels, except the mark of audacity. It contains a bigger gallery of contemporary political and social portraits, but justice has not been done to two literary stalwarts, Thackeray and Dickens. Bismarck read without offence the portrait of himself as Count Ferrol, and was moved to reminisce among friends about his former rival (Disraeli) and said, "I must say that in spite of his fantastic novel-writing, he is a capable statesman."

With its Whig hero, and Roehampton (Palmerston) as one of the important characters, Endymion created much of a mystifying suspense among its readers, including the Queen. Though the hero is very much a proto type of young Disraeli himself yet the writer admitted to have borrowed traits for Endymion from Sir Charles Dilke, who was one of the most romantic characters of the time. Disraeli met him at a dinner at the Rothschild's. "Extremely good looking," and "gifted with a precocity of element," Endymion, like his creator, starts a plebian from the Somerset house and scaling all hurdles in life with some of the ladies always at his back, earns the much coveted post of prime minister and the status of a patrician. "With most men the flower they have plucked withers," remarks Disraeli in Endymion, but till the very end of his life, he was not disillusioned either by his political supremacy or by his social superiority. As the title of this novel suggests moonlight tranquility brooded upon him even at the eve of his life because there were Selina-Bradford and the Fairy Queen Still romanticizing and softening the solitary liffe of a widower.

While assessing the literary importance of Endymion, we cannot ignore what Eric Forbes-Boyd says in the following words:

The story is something of a fairy tale, though perhaps no more so than Disraeli's actual career but it proceeds among the people in whom for the most part we have no difficulty in believing .... It is the best balanced and most disciplined of his books--the wisest, and, except Henrietta Temple, the most charming.
Commenting on the qualities of the novel, Bryce remarks:

His [Disraeli] last novel, published a few months before his death contains more human kindness, a recognition of the worth of friendship and the beauty of the sisterly and conjugal love, than do the writings of his early manhood. What it wants in intellectual power, it makes up for in a mellower and a more tender tone.†

Despite its defects *Endymion* may be regarded as one of the most charming and ‘readable’ of Disraeli’s novels; it is readable not simply because of what it tells us about the author but because of its being witty, gay and good-humoured. To us, it is all the more readable because of its enchanting ‘fantasy’. It is superior in tone as well as in presentation in comparison to his earlier novels. Like a painter, Disraeli draws his characters with models from the society he moved in. *Endymion* is a political novel with a romantic lining. It embodies Disraeli’s youthful spirit unaffected by his drooping age.
REFERENCE