



The Seven Deadly Sins

Frederick Rogers

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THIS book is not, as some might think from its title, a collection of sermons directed against the wickedness of modern society. The Seven Deadly Sins were, so Mr. Rogers contends, "for more than six centuries a living and vitalizing force in the intellect of our nation, stirring the imagination and arousing the conscience of poet, preacher and playwright alike"; and he proves his contention by abundant evidence taken from English literature down to the seventeenth century. He begins by discussing shortly the mystical excellence of the number seven, which figures so prominently in the religions and cosmogonies of the East, and passed thence into the doctrines of the early Christian Church. "Of the perfection of seven," gravely wrote S. Augustine, "I could say much, but ... let this be sufficient admonition, that three is the first number wholly odd, and four wholly even, and these two make seven, which is therefore oftentimes put for all." So there were recognized also by Catholics seven chief virtues, seven spiritual and seven corporal works of mercy, seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and seven Penitential Psalms. When the Puritan movement came, the doctrine of the Seven Deadly Sins was denounced as Popery; "for these are nowhere commonly called the Seven Deadly Sins, but among Turks and Papists, not among Protestants" wrote Prynne in 1628; and thereafter we find them no more in literature. Mr. Rogers' treatise is full, but not ostentatiously full, of erudite learning; he is serious but pleasant to read, and indeed sometimes unexpectedly racy, as where he says that "Wycliffe had all the qualities and literary methods of a successful journalist", and again that "Prynne's power of making a mountain out of a molehill would have made him an invaluable critic of political ideas had he lived in our own time." It remains to say that, like all which comes from the Shakespeare Head Press at Stratford-on-Avon, this book is a beautiful specimen of printing; if only all publishers would try to appreciate the difference that good type and paper make in the pleasure of reading!

—*The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Volume 103

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