

The Rhythm of Art is like the modern fine lady who lives for dress and social posturing. To her it is a greater concern how she appears, than what she is. Over-refinement is the first symptom of decay. She that was once Imperatrix is now a slave.

Macaulay has declared that "as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. This is a half-truth which may or may not become history. It is certain that nothing will sooner contribute to the decline of poetry than a civilization which forgets to educate those very faculties of man's nature, by the exercise of which alone, poetry can be produced or appreciated. To-day, taste, imagination, and intellectual emotion are left out in the cold by a universal preference for scientific and mechanical pursuits. Hence, when reason, logic, metaphysics, science, and the mechanical arts are exclusively cultivated, emotion is sacrificed.

The poet of to-day is unlucky enough to exist in a mechanical civilization unfavorable to his development. The artificial education, while stimulating mediocrity, only interferes with, and impedes the more original gift. The modern poet is the victim of earthly incompatibility; he sings like the captured bird in a golden cage. His verses instead of being resonant with nature are but variations of art. Like the rhetorical speaker whose pulmonary eloquence may be perfect in style and grammar, but what he says is worthless, so the cultured and literary poet with an overcritical fondness for the manner of saying what he is going to say, proves that his faculty is ingrafted and not original. He is but a manipulator of words. Take away the elaborate and excessive culture, and the poet has vanished.

There are men-dressmakers in Paris, architects in costume, whose elaborations, the result of agonized cogitation, and fitting and trying and turning this way and that. These very much resemble the literary *costumier* who clothes his muse with "samite," and puts a "cithern" in her hand, and instructs her in all the mannered mimicry of an obsolete English.

There is no doubt a dainty sort of

delight in all this. There is a quaint prettiness, an artificial simplicity, a metrical attitudinizing born of the school which mistakes a cultured eccentricity for genius. It is possible that many of these writers are inheritors of real inspiration, but misled by the millinery of poetic thought, they think their Pegasus a kind of circus horse that must be taught tricks. But no amount of masterly manipulation of the implements of the art will ever succeed in giving us the tiger-like spring of the original conception, the leap in air of the Damascus blade, the Miltonic flash of a million swords in hell.

The fine lady whose aim in life is to dress well, and look charming like a picture, may easily forget that she has a soul. All her emotions, her affections, her very life have run into drapery, like the euphonious alliteration of the juggler of words.

Yet this very music is an essential accompaniment to the highest poetry. The most perfect passages are the most musical, but to say on this account they are to dispense with meaning, or to undervalue it, would be ridiculous. We wish at times that Shakespeare was more musical, not less gigantic. We also wish that Tennyson was at times more significant in sense, but not less melodious. The best poetry, the very highest art of song, is where nature and art, sound and sense, meaning and melody, are in perfect equipoise. The best poets at times attain this excellence, but the phrase.

"The fat weed  
That rots itself on Lethe's wharf."  
will be recognized as Shakespearean,  
and the swan that  
"Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
With swarthy webs."  
is Tennysonian.

The art of good writing either in prose or poetry has been defined as "spontaneous thought and labored expression." Elaboration can hardly be overdone as long as the thought that directs and sustains it is the *vrai feu*, and not the *ignis fatuus* of a mistaken ambition.

Let the true poet grasp the fact as vividly as his faculties will allow. Let him charge the fact with all the