

## THE DECLINE OF POETRY.

[A SEQUEL.]

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[FOR THE MONTHLY.]

"I PUT the poetic and emotional side of literature as the most needed for daily use. I take the books that seem to rouse the imagination, to stir up feeling, touch the heart—the books of art, of fancy, of ideals, such as reflect the delight and aroma of life." These are among the opening words of Frederic Harrison in his chapter on the Poets of the Old World, *vide* "Choice of Books," Chap. II. It is almost needless to add that, in common with many sayings of the renowned English positivist, the passage enshrines a truth that may serve as a text for universal modern, but especially western, civilization, so-called; for it is because poetry is perishing and the art gradually becoming a lost one, that we find so much of the commonplace in every day life, so much of the trivial in every day intercourse, and so much that is unworthy in every day literature. We are losing our ideality. Our old-time ideals are forsaking us, and already the skirts of their departing garments are trailing across the thresholds of our unappreciative portals. The golden age past. Astrœa renounces a less worthy generation to resume her place in heaven.

Alas! that it should be so. That the solemn dream members of the Eastern seer, the trumpet clang of old Homer, and the hoarse alliterative measures of the Viking should be fading out, like echoes, thrown back ever faintly and more faintly from the repellent steepes of opposing decades. When a people's poetry perishes, when the poet is unhonoured, and his wares unsought, when a meretricious sembl-

ance is foisted on the public for the genuine article, and the pretender is arrayed in the garb of the heir to receive the bays, that people, we unhesitatingly affirm, whatever its present political and commercial status, must be treading on descending steps. Parnassus is above, but behind, and the yawning Avernus of literary stultifications is threatening from below.

We are living in a prosaic and sceptical age. Gold and the idols of political caprice are our gods. The polls and the stock exchange are our altars. Our priests and propagandists of the press are only too often corrupt and ignorant partisans, who scribble for the crumbs that fall from the table of party; and our worship is becoming confined to a meaningless *faller* of words, a jargon of quasi scientific-political technicalities and far-fetched polemical dissertations, sure premonitions of dotage and decay. The world is being transformed into a calculating machine and life into an equation, the members of which may not inaptly be represented by the formula

*self = infinity,*

of course the result must be cipher or a minus quantity.

A levelling and iconoclastic age, fitly denominated dark, which leaves nothing to posterity but a dream of wreck and spoliation, to brood for evermore like a horrible nightmare over the fair æons of Being, can contain no positive principle of good in itself, it must convey either a negative lesson or be *nil*,—witness the era of the Inquisition, the French Revolu-