

the "spells of imbecility" described by Ossian and other early Irish poets, hangs low over the English-speaking world to-day. Whatever is established is sacred with those who do not think. Thinking is not easy work, and most people do as little of it as they can; preferring to dawdle in that soulless intellectual conservation out of which mediocrity grows like a weed out of mire.

The consequence of this lassitude is only too obvious everywhere, but it is, perhaps, especially so in all the departments of intellectual life. The people who crowned Alfred Austin as their poet laureate, seem to me to deserve the title of the most fervent devotees of the great, stupid Moloch of mediocrity to be found on earth to-day, although, 'it must be confessed, Americans give them an extremely close second. Unless I am altogether mistaken in my view—no impossible contingency—the British fail in the production of first-rate writers and thinkers, and the ebb is, I venture to think, more obvious in the United States, since here no man of the first degree of literary reputation survives.

A whale among minnows is, we are given to understand by naturalists, a most important animal; and by a parity of reasoning, so is a giant among pigmies. By analogy also, a fresh and original writer in an era of mediocrity and servile imitation, is deserving of being looked after, if not up to, by every one who thinks for himself. If we are ever to rid ourselves of the dry-rot of mediocrity, which is weighing us down as an intellectual people, it must be through admiration for real genius and originality. As a humble step towards this happy consummation, we should, when an author comes among us with a distinct idea, do with it what Kant tells us to do with our vague notions—"we should," he says, "detain, examine and elaborate them." It is in this spirit that I, at least, enter upon the consideration of the volume of poems, which its author has called, from its leading effusion, "The Man With the Hoe." These poems have now been before the public for a year, within which period they have made what Shakespeare would term "a palpable hit," and no wonder, as, if ever a poet had a distinct message for humanity, that one is the author of the aforesaid volume, Mr. Edwin Markham.

He comes of an old American family. His ancestors left Connecticut for Illinois, and Illinois for the Pacific Slope, at a time