

Modern English Poets.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

For the last half-century there has been prominent in the domain of English letters what may be called the school of culture. Of this school Matthew Arnold was the founder and the high priest. He is the apostle of ideas and culture, spiritual freedom and classicism. The mention of his name calls up certain words and phrases which his critical genius coined (in their new sense), and his knack of persistent repetition made current. Such are: "barbarian," applied to the members of the English aristocracy, whom he was inclined to regard as coarse, stupid, frivolous, proof against ideas; "Philistine," applied to the members of the English middle class, and signifying that they were narrow in their views, vulgar in their manners, and ignorant in their artistic tastes; "the children of light," his own party, the friends of culture who make for the Promised Land; "sweetness and light"; "lucidity" and "distinction" in literature. Some of these, although used in the best of good humor, sufficiently indicate the fearlessness of his criticism, which serves as a salutary antidote to John Bullism. Characterized by gravity of mind and comprehensiveness of view—unimpassioned, cool, deliberate, judicious—he will have nothing to do with what is provincial, partial, or untrue. He does not believe that the nineteenth century is perfect, and he tries it by the ages that have gone. In the preface to his poems published in 1854, he tells us: "In the sincere endeavor to learn and practice, amid the bewildering confusion of our times, what is sound and true in poetical art, I seemed to myself to find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing, among the ancients. They, at any rate, knew what they wanted in art, and we do not." His prose is written in the Attic style,