

only of nations but of peoples,—of nations and peoples who are first in progress and civilization at the present day, and who promise to be the leaders into the unknown future. Each of these nations and peoples has a key to this library, but which will be the first to use it for destruction? Now, what will be the quality of the English literature of the future?

Poetry, in all probability, will deteriorate—has deteriorated. A standard authority says:—

"In the last ages of the Georges, taking a period of thirty or forty years, and confining ourselves to writers of established reputation whose names are more or less universally familiar, we shall find about forty or fifty, ten of whom belong to the first rank and about ten to the second rank, leaving twenty or twenty-five for the third rank. In the succeeding thirty or forty years of the Victorian era we have about the same number of poets of established reputation, out of which we cannot count more than three or at most four (even including American poets in this enumeration), of first rank, and the remainder of the third rank." This shows a great falling off in poets of the first rank.

Coming nearer still to the present day, to Tennyson and his contemporaries at the close of his career, only two other names were wont to be mentioned beside the Laureate's; whilst after Tennyson's death it seemed impossible to worthily fill his place.

The same authority goes on to say:—

"In prose literature this order is reversed. The literary greatness of the present age has manifested itself mostly in the works of writers in prose. Probably in no other period, moreover, has there been seen so much activity of female genius and talent."

It may be added that this "activity of female genius and talent" has in the later years of Victoria's reign been ever on the increase. How can this decline in the excellence of verse, and on the other hand the prose greatness of the present age be accounted for?

The present age is an eminently practical age; not a poetical age. Immense movements are afoot; questions not merely of a national but of an international character are before the world; problems, social, political and religious vex the multitudes. Time was when poets led the van even in these respects; but that time is past, and prose has usurped the place of poetry. It informs through the press, rouses from the platform and thunders from the pulpit.

The age we live in is the most scientific age in the world's history. New discoveries and explorations of territory in art and science demand the use of prose; and so minutely, simply, clearly are results in every branch of learning and investigation put before the public that with the readers they replace the fascinations of the best poets.

The education of the masses does not tend to improve the position either of poets or poetry; for, whilst it raises the multitude to the plane of common prose, it does not at all proportionately increase the number of the votaries of poetry. The average reader prefers to take his literary food in the plainer and more digestible form of prose; whilst, for dessert, the all-ruling novel has taken the place of the poem.

Man likes an incentive to work. The greatest incentives to work are money and fame, and both are more easily attainable in the present