

"Faery Queen" took its place at once. Of "Tristram Shandy" probably no one doubted the ultimate verdict. "Pickwick's" fame was born with its publication. Undoubtedly, also, during Goethe's life-time, and Victor Hugo's life-time, and Carlyle's life-time, and certainly also during Tennyson's life-time, a verdict was reached and their works were admitted within the pale of that body of writings known as literature. But even in these instances it could be shown without much difficulty that peculiar circumstances attended their production, and that their contemporary appreciation, though it affected, was not tantamount to, the *imprimatur* of posterity: posterity has merely upheld the judgment of the inferior court, that is all. In the case of the latter four also, it must be remembered that there was a sufficiently long lapse of time for an opinion free from synchronous prejudices: a clinching proof of which, in the case of the present Laureate, is seen in the fact that it is upon his earlier, and not at all upon his later, works that there is any unanimity of opinion. Often perhaps, contemporary criticism is but a small factor in the ultimate appreciation. It has been wrong far oftener than right, and therefore is not to be relied upon. Indeed Shelley, admittedly one of the best critics of his own productions, went so far as to assert that "contemporary criticism only represented the amount of ignorance genius had to contend with," and if in ignorance we include passing fashions, temporary and local likes and dislikes, we can wholly and heartily endorse the assertion.

To what rank would Mr. Whistler have been relegated had contemporary criticism, in the form of Mr. Ruskin's strictures, been the last word on his paintings? Do we yet know his proper position? Do we even yet know Turner's just place in art? Is he the greatest of all painters, according to Mr. Ruskin, or not even the

greatest of landscape painters, according to Mr. Hamerton? Rogers's poems were once the rage, so were Hayley's: but who reads Rogers or Hayley now? Instances might be culled by the score. Who is to decide whether a man's works shall be stamped with the hall mark until opinion has been filtered by time?

The *dictum*, then, remains true: to claim an indefeasible title to the name of "literature," imaginative writings must exhibit the crown grant of posterity.

If so, what folly to go up and down the country shouting for the production of a national literature, begging for a proper preparation for literature. As if preparation could be made for literature as fields are ploughed for beet-roots and mangel-wurzels. (Yet there are those who regard such preparation as possible, nay necessary. Witness the character of a large part of our high school education. There is literary preparation for you! We plough to the depth of six inches and expect a crop of oaks. What we get is weeds.) To me, I confess, this cry, "Let us make literature," appears as sane as if one were to lift up one's voice and cry, "Let us make history." The one is as much beyond the deliberate effort of the individual, as the other is beyond the deliberate effort of the nation. Literature is not a sonorous or even a sensible collocation of words. Literature, to be literature, must be a thing of the hidden life, of the inner and spiritual portion of man. "Literature," says Carlyle, "is but a branch of Religion." It is in very truth something sacred: and thus wantonly to bruit its mysteries abroad is sacrilege.

But suppose we descend for a moment from this high plane and admit the possibility of a contemporary literature. There is one fixed and insuperable obstacle to the consummation of the desires of these importunate seekers after a national literature. Spontaneity is the first