

With the development of the ages, the individual has developed, at least mentally. The nation has developed, at least nationally. The bark canoe of savagery has given place to the stately three-decker. The infant tongue that babbled of gnomes and monstrosities has broken from the shackles of superstition, and reveals itself as the oracle of truth; rational, self-contained, critical, unprejudiced, no longer a poet, it is true, but therefore less of the rhapsodist, and more of the faithful recorder of fact, though not yet from the very nature of the case, infallible.

History, then, owes much to the Epic poem, and therefore much to the evolvers and conservers of the Epic poem. I use the plural advisedly; for it is doubtful whether any one individual was of himself the constructor of any single epic poem. To instance but a few: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata of the Sanskrit, the former containing 48,000 sixteen-syllable lines, the latter 200,000 long lines; the Iliad and the Odyssey of the Greeks together about 26,000 lines; and the Kalevala of the Finns, consisting of 50 runes or 23,000 octosyllabic lines. The Shahnameh, with its 60,000 couplets, twelve times the length of "Paradise Lost," is perhaps the work of one man, the Persian poet Firdousi, who in the eleventh century, at the command of an Asiatic magnate, set about the mythical work with which his name is associated. But this is the solitary exception, and the exception, they say, proves the rule.

Another singular fact here forces itself upon the notice of the observant student, that whereas no prose is to-day considered too plain or too prosy to be the fitting and only garb of historical incident, yet historical narration was originally dressed in poetry. First, verses; crude, uneven, rough and rugged as the nature and habits of the constructors; next, possibly

more evenly devised versification marked by cadence or accent, and alliterations; then metrical blank construction, properly so-called; and lastly, prose narration. It seems strange that the infant of history, now so staid and matter-of-fact, in its august maturity should have been dandled through the first stages of progressive being to a lullaby; such, nevertheless is the fact.

In connection with this part of the subject, it is almost needless to state that spoken literature, and therefore spoken history is older than written literature and written history. The comparatively late use of alphabetic characters, by some western nations, and their still later discovery of the art of printing, has been to them a gain instead of a loss. The Chinese language, which is essentially the same to-day that it was before the Christian era, is deservedly admitted by those who know anything about it to be one of the clumsiest vehicles of thought existing on the face of the globe; of necessity it must be so from its isolating, monosyllabic nature. It owes this distinguished position to the fact of the petrification of the imperfect language in letters, so being rendered fixed. Our own glorious tongue owes much of its adaptability and flexion to the circumstance of there having been no fixed conservative standard, at least till the age of Chaucer.

I cannot close this paper, short and incomplete as it necessarily is, without referring to the lately restored, or rather translated, epic of Finland—the Kalevala—pronounced by Professor Max Müller to be the fifth great national epic of the world. Says Prof. T. C. Porter, speaking of this wonderful poem: "One of the most remarkable literary discoveries of modern times is the existence of a grand epic poem, unique and thoroughly national in its character, among the people of Finland. After float-