

THE DECAY OF IDEALITY.

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WE have been assured over and over again that the age of romance is past and the era of actuality begun. If this be true, then so much the worse for the young of generations to be, for whom no time-honoured Robin Goodfellow shall play his "mad, merrye pranks;" no funny elves dance upon the moonlit sward under the spreading limbs of "God's first temples;" no Jack the Dauntless, with ready brand and cloak of invisibility stand at the dungeon gates to defy the two-headed ogre, to perform prodigies of valour, to liberate the captive ladies, and of course to marry the handsomest as the well-merited guerdon of his prowess. These are all things of the past. So much the worse, we repeat, for the present and the future and the youth of the future, the men and women to be. Of whatever enormities the age of romance may be accused, it had at least one redeeming feature—it was the school of a rude chivalry, supplemented by the intuitions of an ever-present and strongly-marked ideality and poetic sense. With whatever virtues the age of actuality may be credited, it must be patent to every thinking individual that it lacks true chivalry, and that ideality has become either non-existent, or has dwindled into a veritable "airy nothingness," with perhaps "a name" for the few, but certainly no "local habitations" for the many.

The mind of man is a complex agent, fitted for the performance of complex duties. Like the finger-board of a piano, its keys are very varied, and capable of many tunes, now high, now low, now neither high

nor low, according to the chord struck and the vibrations engendered. Let every string in the piano represent the same note, the result is a monotone and no air is producible. We may thump the keys "from morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve," we extract nought but a monotone, and in disgust we leave the instrument, wearied with sameness and despairing of change. The potentiality of variety may be there, but it is a latent force, for the instrument has been wrested from its normal functions, and is incapable of tuneful expression. Now the intellect, which is the mind, like the musical instrument, is as capable of being warped from its proper sphere of action. Its chords can be altered to a monotone by the bigotry of stereotyped training and the perversity of modern egotism as to educational methods, which are the direct results of what a writer in the *Saturday Review* has well denominated "The Burden of Actuality."

The natural food for the intellect, especially the young intellect, is the wonderful; such it demands imperatively, and if it cannot get healthy pabulum it assimilates an unwholesome substitute. How can it be otherwise? Is not life a fairy tale? How wonderful is our being! We come, we know not whence; we exist; we know not how; we go, we know not where. What a web of mystery surrounds us! What longings and aspirations inspire us! What enigmas are self and external entities; life actual, life potential; the problems of pre-existence and the future; the vast universe with its myriads of sparkling suns and revolving worlds;