

Says Emerson, "The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre. For the world is not painted, or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe. Therefore the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right." This is but another rendering of the "unacknowledged legislators" of Shelley. If, then, the opinions of two such literary sovereigns be worth anything, as surely they are, not till poetry be once more established upon a true basis, that of the beautiful, not till life be sifted of some of the sordid chaff of hypocrisy and cant, and vain strivings after an artificial and altogether unattainable originality, not till the poet be crowned anew, shall the world once more be loyal to the Divine, for the poet, as we have seen, is sovereign by divine right, or amenable to righteous law, for as legislator, the poet, by the same right, is also supreme.

All words, words, words, carps some one, not, perhaps, gifted happily in that direction himself. Yes, brother captious of the inferior soul, but not the words of the French cynic, "given to conceal our thoughts," nor yet the bitter, taunting "words, words, words" of the transfigured Hamlet, but words winged for nobler flight and a stronger purpose, words set adrift like carrier doves to bear their message home to anxious hearts waiting by thresholds that actuality and mammon would rob of their rightful dower, the fadeless beauty of the instinct of sentiment.

The poet may be transcendental, nevertheless he is spiritually true, and transcendentalism is at least better than brute materialism; for, on the one side, that may point to a consoling faith and a possible fulfilment, but this holds out the skinny finger of deri-

sion at a certain grave, and, as has only too lately been attested, a felon's rope, whereby to bridge the gulf yawning between temporal anarchy and everlasting annihilation. The one may be superstition, companioned by the shadow of hope, the other is a grosser myth, of a more debasing kind, and its attendant is a skeleton, a curse—the nightmare offspring of ignorance, greed and unlicensed, lawless fanaticism. Whatever may be thought and argued to the contrary, the decline of a high poetic standard is contemporaneous with the decline of a high, national spirit. And it must be so; for if the poet be the interpreter of Nature, when the poet dies, the voice of Nature is hushed or discordant, she must be in mourning for her darling. Grief, even individual, earthly grief, has a tendency to stultify intellect, arrest action and paralyse effort, what, therefore, must be the result of the universal mourning of Nature for her lost heir, in whom she hoped to bequeath to posterity her most charming attributes and lovable traits? A Cimmerian night of woe, in which the gruesome accents of despair will alone be heard. The Rachel of poesy weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted.

And as to this rage for the original and the singular and the new—if Chaucer, according to Lowell, began as an imitator; if, in the words of Mathews, "Gray cribbed from Pope, Pope from Dryden, Dryden from Milton, Milton from the Elizabethan classics, these from the Latin poets, the Latin from the Greek, and so on till we come to the original Prometheus who stole the fire direct from heaven;" if, to quote Lowell again, "It is not the finding of a thing, but the making something out of it after it is found that is of consequence," then by all means let us too take a lesson from the past, and be proud to be found in the company of such illus-