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Original Poetry.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT.

"Oh for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!"
—Tennyson.

At home in the silent even,
I commune with my soul alone;
And the oldtime music comes floating by,
With its sweet, familiar tone.

And my spirit burns within me,
And my eyes are filled with tears,
As mem'ry glances adown the aisles
Of the misty slumbering years.

Dim shadows rise from the buried past,
The loved of the long-ago.
Not dead are they but lying
With the nations that sleep below.

How oft in youth aspiring,
We dreamt of a life sublime,
From the skies the lamps of seraphim,
Illumined their path and mine.

The river of life was spangled,
With pearls from an opaline sea.
Sweet singers of earth and heaven,
Seemed choiring to them and me.

We threaded the beaming Future
To the gates of the Evermore,
And strewed the amethysts of hope,
On the sands of the star-lit shore.

And over death's darkened portals,
Above all earthly desires,
Our souls leapt up to a Saviour's love,
Like quenchless altar fires.

But the sun of the earth was darkened,
The stars veiled their tear dim eyes;
And the pearls were pebbles on the shore,
Under the midnight skies.

Alas for the harp Æolian,
That harp of a thousand strings,
If the winds of memory clashing,
But wilder discord brings.

As on the spirit's threshold,
Exposed to the winds of the years,
It weeps o'er its own heart's sorrows,
And moans o'er its heart's own tears.

From the shadows of that cloudland,
I have merged to a brighter day,
And the chastening hand of a higher love
Has purged the dross away.

Moonbeams are lingering round me;
A holier spell is mine,
With a soul imbathed in a sea of light,
A radiance divine.

The shadows fade in the distance,
But I see them over the sea,
Waving their palms triumphant,
And beckoning to me,

Lifting my life forever,
Above Time's restless strife,
And filling my soul with longing
For that deathless, perfect life.

TALK ABOUT OUR LITERATURE.

THE only standard of a nation's mental character is its literature, an absence of which indicates a race to be in the most degraded state of uncivilized existence. If we go back to man in his primitive state we are sure to find—wherever he has learned to communicate ideas by means of language—the germs of a literature however rude and wild, the faint promise of what progression and knowledge are sure to develop and perfect. Perhaps we may, have to except—so far as our knowledge at present extends—the lowest and most degraded of our race, representatives of which are to be found in remote parts of Africa, and which according to accounts received from travellers, bear a vast resemblance to the more intelligent species of the genus monkey. Taking man at his lowest and most undeveloped mental condition we see this principle, so general as to be nearly universal, proving its existence in wild traditionary legends and uncouth tales, handed down verbally from father to son. In this way MacPherson collected the different fragments of his "Ossian," if his own story be true; and that it is, there seems to be good proof.

One would hardly think that the spirit of poesy ever found its way to the bleak shores of Iceland. Yet if we would learn their national peculiarities, their dispositions, the mould of their mind, we can find it all in the classics of the Scandinavian people. We have fabulous stories of heroes—half-human, half-god; mythical personages fill up the pages of their ponderous epics. A grotesque but powerful imagination which expatiated in the air of a Valhalla, which directed superstition itself to centre a belief on Odin the Arch-Deity of the Universe, whose voice resounded in the brazen clang of battle, and the shriek of the ocean-storm. These runic measures of Edda and Saga lead us into the inner sanctuary of that strong Teutonic bosom, which throbbed for a time pent up in dark Northern snows and forests until it burst from its confinement to form the great world democracy on the ruins of the old forms of tyranny. Not more conspicuous does the polished Athenian stand out in the

tragedies of his great dramatists than does the great representative Teuton in the grandly imaginative Epic of Scandinavia. Perhaps it would not be irrelevant to our subject, nor uninteresting to the reader who traces his ancestral line back to dim Germanic forest or marshes of Sleswick, whence came Saxon and Jute, to subjoin a specimen taken from the oldest of Eddaic Epics called Voluspa—Song of the Prophetess—having for its subject the Scandinavian mythology and origin of the world:

Hym from the east comes, floods swell around him;
*Jormungund rolls with giant rage and ocean smiteth.
With lurid beak screams the corpse-pecking eagle.
Surtur from the South wends. With seething fire
The falchion of the mighty one a sunlight flameth.
Mountains together dash, giants headlong rush,
Men tread the paths to †Hel and heaven is rent in twain.
Dimmed's now the Sun,
In ocean earth sinks;
From the skies are lost
The sparkling stars;
The fire-reek rageth
Around time's nurse,
And flickering flames
With heaven itself play.

Who does not see even in such an imperfect and disconnected fragment as this the promise and potency of that rugged grandeur which we see in Goethe, Milton and Shakespeare. The Muse whose most familiar walks were amid the warring elements, the fearful and sublime of nature, and who naturally made Metaphor, Simile, and Hyperbole, the expression of her weird and stormy conceptions.

Let us carry this principle down through the Spartan and Athenian literature. Compare the barren and frigid productions of the soldier—the moral machine—with the copious children of the poetic, philosophic Athenian mind. The same is still seen in the bolder outlines of modern literature. In each several one the great distinctive features of national intellect are bodied forth. The flash and sparkle of the French, the metaphysical subtlety of the German, the grandeur and universal power of the English, are all displayed in the national libraries.

We see, then, that the literary element of the mind is what we would conclude from its nature, unconfined, diffusive, universal. We have seen that it is the world's intellectual mirror. But we come to a second proposition: the diffusion of literature marks the condition of the

*A great serpent. † Not the hell of popular theology is here meant.