

mental laboratories of the race. If we press back along this way, we see at every turn the monuments of imagination; we find the marks of her fingers on every broken, fantastic arch of the ancient hieroglyphics, and as we push farther and farther on the indications thicken. All along, the way is crowded with her creations.

For imagination is older than literature, older than language. The power existed, while yet it could give very little manifestation.

When language sprang out of the needs of man, imagination came forth from the prison-house of silence into a field of action, which widened with the scope of language. But it is a field beyond our ken. The paths which takes us the farthest back, brings us but to its border, and, looking out, we can see only clouded forms, of legend and song. The night wind that steals across it brings us odors of blossoms, and whispers of voices, but they come faint and indistinct. It is not till the dawn of literature that we can mark with any certainty the traces of the imagination, and catch vivid outlines of her handiworks. It is not till the early authors step forth out of the obscurity of their time, as the exponents of this power in the human mind, that we can measure to any degree its possibilities; nor was it till that time that its true influence could be exerted. Then, loosed from the narrow sphere to which it had been limited, it entered upon the new field with all the concentrated energy of the past. Then came the golden age of imagination. There it shines most plainly. The world was young then, the blood of the race was warm, the passions were quick, the mind was rude. Reason, philosophy, science, had not yet become powerful factors of mental life. There was less understanding of the laws and phenomena of nature, less insight into the connection between causes and effects; and, consequently, conjecture took the place of knowledge, fancy the place of fact. This peopled the natural with the supernatural, laid the foundations of the ancient mythologies, and gave birth to all those airy creations which teem in the ancient literature. The language and substance of the earliest productions are almost purely imaginative. We have tales of imaginary heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses. We have imaginary scenes depicted,

imaginary characters drawn. These pictures were at first rude; natural, rather than artistic, vivid rather than graceful. The hand that painted them was awkward, but strong, and the genius of imagination speaks in them all.

The modes of living, the condition of society, the mental and moral status of the race were such as to nourish a bold, rich fancy. Accordingly, if we go back to the earliest days of letters and study the works of the old masters, we find them replete with imagery—imagery bold and striking, and imagery, too, of a more delicate and tender stamp. They are perfect picture-galleries, displaying a wealth of beauty which no later writings can surpass. Nor is this true only of the nations which are called classic. If we trace the early history of any of the nations, we shall find imagination potent in them all, and abounding in all their earliest productions. The Asiatic nations discover this in their fanciful creeds and traditions, and the western peoples, whose minds ran in bolder, ruder channels, display the same power, modified by their national characters.

The Norsemen have their legends of grim sea-robbers, the Germans their tales of goblin and spectral huntsman, the Franks their songs in honor of fancied heroes. All these are but facts moulded and adorned by the hand of imagination. And, as the light which increased knowledge and culture casts upon the early peoples brightens, we can note with surer vision the workings of that same hand. The writings, however, of most of these early races are broken and scattered. If we would mark the progress of the mind more exactly we must turn to those nations whose works have come down to us in more complete form. In them we find that as literature passed from infancy to youth, and from youth to manhood, new elements entered to modify the influence of imagination. Knowledge increased; philosophy claimed the attention of many of the most original minds; fact disputed the field with fancy. The directive powers of the mind waxed stronger, the creative were more curbed and restrained. If not less graceful and strong, imagination was, at least, less aggressive and obtrusive. The powers of reason and fancy were more equalized.