

Poems of Knightly Adventure

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STANDARD LITERATURE SERIES

POEMS OF
KNIGHTLY ADVENTURE

SELECTED AND EDITED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY
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PREFATORY NOTE.

IN this volume have been brought together four poems of knightly adventure. In *Gareth and Lynette* we have Tennyson's idealization of the knight of chivalry; in *Sohrab and Rustum* we have the Persian hero; *Horatius* is the type of the old Roman of the Republic; in *The Vision of Sir Launfal* Lowell has expressed a modern conception of knightliness. The poems are worth reading together.

They are also worth comparing in the matter of poetic style. The particular point of style here discussed is Figurative Language. Other volumes in this series deal with Poetic Diction and Metre, but short notes on those topics are given here. These discussions of style may, in parts, perhaps be thought too difficult for pupils; but there is nothing that the teacher cannot understand and explain. It is generally better to make the pupil use his intelligence to the uttermost than to simplify a matter for easy comprehension, and in so doing drain all the real sense out of it.

EDWARD E. HALE, JR.

UNION COLLEGE.

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INTRODUCTION.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

Tennyson.—The life of Tennyson, like that of many poets, was in the ordinary sense of the word uneventful. To one who knows the poet's work a recital of his books and their times of publishing would indicate the growth of the poet's mind and artistic power, but the ordinary reader will not see their significance. Still, a record of names and dates will be convenient for reference, if nothing more.

Alfred Tennyson was born August 6, 1809, at Somerby Rectory, Lincolnshire. His father, himself something of a poet and an artist, was the village rector. Of his brothers, Frederick and Charles had also the poetic gift. Alfred received his university preparation from his father, and in 1828 went to Trinity College, Cambridge. He had already, with his brother Charles, published a volume entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*, and in the university he won the Chancellor's Medal for the best English poem.

His first volume was published in 1830 : it was called *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. In it we can now recognize Tennyson's qualities; but it was not till his second collection, *Poems* (1832), that we have any of his well-known work. His poems were rather sharply criticised in some quarters as being effeminate and sentimental, but he had made a name for himself as a poet of exquisite workmanship and remarkable power of melodious effect. In 1842 came another volume, containing many well-known poems, and in 1847 *The Princess : a Medley*. In 1850, on the death of Wordsworth, he was already so highly esteemed as to be appointed Poet Laureate. In the same year he published *In Memoriam*, in 1855 *Maud*, and in 1864 *Enoch Arden*.

In 1859 he published four poems entitled *Idylls of the King*. They were independent poems, and yet each dealt with the same group of characters, the knights and ladies of the court of King

Arthur. To these four poems, Tennyson in the next twenty-five years added others (see p. 10), intended each to take a definite place in the completed poem which constitutes his greatest work. *Gareth and Lynette* stands first of the poems after the introduction, but it was published in 1872, next to the last.¹

The chief works of the poet's later years were dramas. In these he was not so successful as in his earlier poems; but some of his later lyric poetry, in *Tiresias* (1886), *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* (1886), and *Demeter and Other Poems* (1889), has been thought to show his old mastery.

Matthew Arnold.—Thomas Arnold was the famous head master of Rugby, one of the great English public schools. Matthew Arnold, born at Laleham, December 24, 1822, some few years before his father was called to Rugby, was therefore educated under the most favorable circumstances of his time. He passed a year at Winchester, and then four at Rugby, and took his degree at Oxford in 1844. He was a distinguished student, and before going up to the university he gained a Balliol scholarship; at Oxford he became distinguished for his literature, and gained the Newdigate Prize for the best poem, as Tennyson had gained the Chancellor's Medal at Cambridge some years before. To Education in its broader sense and to Literature, Matthew Arnold's life was devoted. In 1851 he was appointed one of the Inspectors of Schools, an office which he held for the rest of his life, working to improve the schools of England directly, and also examining the educational systems of other countries. But he also devoted himself to what we may call Education in its broader sense, for his books and essays had always the aim of arousing and stimulating a higher and finer intellectual tone in England.

His first devotion, however, was poetry. His first volume, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, was published in 1848, a few years after his leaving the university; the second, *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*, in 1852. *Sohrab and Rustum* appeared first in *Poems: a New Edition*, 1853. Matthew Arnold was a poet of very exquisite and distinguished character: we shall see later some of the fine qualities of his work. His poetry is appreciated and cared for by such as know the best; but he exerts his widest influence in his prose.

¹ Balin and Balan, the last (1885), is not found in earlier editions of the *Idylls*.

It was not for ten years and more after he had become known as a poet that Matthew Arnold found what we may call his true or his chief vocation, that of the critic of literature. In 1857 he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and in 1861 and 1862 he published his lectures *On Translating Homer*. From that time on he constantly wrote and published books and essays on a considerable range of subjects, but all tending toward the arousing a better intellectual feeling in the life of England, literary, religious and political. Matthew Arnold has been a great influence in the latter half of the nineteenth century : besides Carlyle and Ruskin, no contemporary man of letters has exerted such a power on men's thoughts.

Macaulay.—Thomas Babington Macaulay is probably more often thought of as a brilliant essayist than as a poet. Yet we must remember that he was also a historian, an orator, a politician, an administrator—in fact a man of immense intellectual power, whose energy took various forms. His poems have excellences of which we shall learn later, but they are not his chief work.

He was born November 26, 1800, and died December 28, 1859. He was a precocious child, remarkable for inordinate love of reading and for his immense memory. These characteristics remained with him through life, and serve to explain much about his work. He was educated at a private school and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he made much the same sort of reputation that came to him afterward in the larger world. On leaving the university, he read law and was called to the bar. But it does not appear that he ever meant to make the law his serious profession. In 1825 his article on Milton appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, the chief periodical of the time, and from then on he was a man of letters. He became at once well known : his writings aroused so much interest that in 1830 he was elected to Parliament.

Macaulay was always a prominent man in Parliament, although he is not to be thought of as a great statesman. He took a vigorous part in the Reform Law debates of 1831; he was named member of the Supreme Council for India, and passed five years in Calcutta, busy with the administration of that great country ; he was even Secretary of War in the Melbourne Cabinet of 1840,

and Postmaster General in 1846. But his real importance is as a man of letters. His *Essays* were published in the *Edinburgh Review* from 1825 to 1844 and in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; his *History of England* appeared in 1849 and 1855; *The Lays of Ancient Rome* in 1842. In 1857 he was created a peer, with the title Baron Macaulay of Rothsay.

Macaulay's work is chiefly historical. Even when writing on literary subjects he is better at history than at criticism. The historic imagination which has made the *History of England* as entertaining a book as was ever published is easily seen in the *Lays*.

Lowell.—James Russell Lowell was one of our most distinguished men of letters; whether most noted as a poet or an essayist, it would be hard to say. He was also a scholar, and he represented the United States as Minister to Spain and afterwards to England.

He was born of a well-known New England family at Cambridge, February 22, 1819, and was educated at a Cambridge school and at Harvard. He was not especially distinguished as a student, but was already known to his fellow-students at least for his literary taste and his poetic gifts. Having no Chancellor's Medal or Newdigate Prize to contest for, Lowell had to be content with the position of Class Poet. He began the study of the law, went through the law school, and opened an office in Boston, but he never practised the profession. In 1841 appeared his first volume of poems, some of them rather youthful productions, but others having promise of his future eminence.

He became intensely interested in the generous movements of his time, especially the efforts looking toward the abolition of slavery. He lived in Cambridge, and wrote much in the anti-slavery journals. In 1848 he gathered a number of vigorous satires under the title of *The Biglow Papers*. We read the book now as literature, and find it amusing; but the poems were written for a purpose, and they did their work. In the same year he published also *A Fable for Critics*, a satire of another sort—a good-humored review of American literature. It was in this same year, too, that he published *Sir Launfal*.

In 1855 Longfellow resigned his position of Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard. The chair was offered to Lowell and

accepted by him. As Longfellow had done, he went abroad to study, and in 1857 began his work. In the same year was founded the *Atlantic Monthly*, and of this magazine Lowell was the editor for four years.

As the Civil War went on, Lowell expressed himself again in satire, and in 1867 appeared the second volume of the *Biglow Papers*. Two years after, in *Under the Willows*, appeared his more serious poetry of the exciting years just passed.

Lowell now began to gather together his essays and other writings in prose. In 1870 was published *Among My Books*; in 1871, *My Study Windows*; in 1876, the second series of *Among My Books*. In 1877 he was named Minister to Spain; in 1880, Minister to England. His last publications were *Democracy* in 1886, *Political Essays* (1888), and *Heartsease and Rue*, in the same year—a collection of his last poems. He died August 12, 1891.

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE POEMS.

Gareth and Lynette.—*The Idylls of the King* is the longest and, in some respects, the chief of Tennyson's poems. The poem as a whole presents the career of King Arthur, the famous legendary King of England in the very, very old days. It would take too much time to discuss whether there ever was any such king as Arthur; it seems probable that there was a Keltic chief of similar name, from whose deeds arose afterward the famous legends. More important is it to know that throughout the Middle Ages King Arthur was one of the great heroes of romance. Many were the tales of him and his knights. He was fabled to have been ruler over all England, to have subdued the heathen Saxons and even the Romans, and to have brought the whole land to order under his rule. The adventures of Arthur and his knights were favorite subjects for the poets of the Middle Ages, both in England and in France. The last and best known of our English romances is *Le Morte d'Arthur* of Thomas Malory (1485), in which are gathered into one book the tales of many an old romance and poem. Here it is that Tennyson generally finds the legends which give the foundation to *The Idylls of the King*. The story of Gareth is told in Book VII of *Le Morte d'Arthur*—

"the tale of Syr Gareth of Orkney, that was called Beaumains," that is, Fair-hands.

Tennyson takes King Arthur as the type of true manhood : he takes him as representative of the soul within us, striving with the evil of the world. He even gives the poem an allegoric turn, although this is something we need not study just now. *The Coming of Arthur*¹ tells us how he came to his throne and of his marriage. Then come ten poems telling of the deeds, good and evil, of his knights. *The Passing of Arthur*¹ tells us of his last great battle, and how he was borne away from earth to be cured of his grievous wounds.

Of the tales of Arthur's Knights, the story of Gareth comes first : it is a story of the fresh, youthful nobility of Arthur's knighthood when at their best. Gareth is the very flower of young, honorable manhood. No work is too low and vulgar if commanded by his mother; no duty too great and too trying if commanded by his king. Disgrace lies only in drawing back from honor, for disgraceful deeds never come to his mind. His temper is strong, honest, self-reliant, and full of good-humor and hearty helpfulness. He pushes through every difficulty and surmounts every obstacle.

His adventure is the type of knight errantry : he meets the oppressive ruffians and delivers the innocent lady. In his adventure the poet has suggested, in allegoric fashion ; the struggle of every one in this world. The glittering and brilliant Knight of the Morning Star represents the temptations of youth ; the fierce and blazing Noonday Sun stands for the less alluring but stronger passions of middle age ; the Evening Star stands for the evil habits fixed by the weakness of a lifetime. At the end is Death, made more terrible by everything that can work on the imagination ; but, when courageously met, he is found less awful than one could believe. Such is the significance, more or less obvious, of the adventure ; and it may be a pleasure to us afterward to remember the symbolism. Still the story is the story without it, and the poem has its own spirit and beauty.

The Idylls of the King, and *Gareth and Lynette*, as much as any of them, are examples of Tennyson's best workmanship in poems of a narrative character. The name "Idyll" would seem

¹ See "Enoch Arden and Other Poems," No. 6 of this series.

to have been chosen by the poet as meaning a picture-poem, carefully and elaborately finished. The separate poems are certainly examples of the richest and fullest art.

Sohrab and Rustum.—As it appears in Arnold's works the poem is called "an episode." That is, it is given to us as though it were part of a longer poem—as, for instance, Scott might have published only the story of the meeting and combat between Fitz-James and Roderick Dhu, which as it now stands is a part of *The Lady of the Lake*. We are not to think, however, that Arnold ever had in mind the complete poem, of which this should have been a part. Tennyson, in writing *Morte d'Arthur* in 1842, spoke of it half seriously as part of an unpublished poem. *The Idylls of the King* was not completed till forty years and more afterward; but as it stands now, that earlier fragment has its place in it.¹ Matthew Arnold never contemplated a sustained epic of this character; his desire was to write a shorter poem in epic fashion.

Hence, although called an episode, *Sohrab and Rustum* is practically complete in itself, like *Gareth and Lynette*, for instance. It is true that we can imagine it part of a longer poem, but on the other hand the poem tells us practically all we want to know. A word or two may, perhaps, be needful before beginning, about the story and the characters.

The story is not original with the poet. It is a Persian story, a part of the great *Epic of Kings*—a long poem by Firdausi, relating the deeds of the great heroes of Persia, of whom Rustum was the chief. If Matthew Arnold had translated this part of the poem, it would have been a little more accurately called an episode. As it was, he took the story and told it in English verse.

As is gradually unfolded in the poem as we have it, Rustum, the son of Zal, had, in earlier adventurous journeys, married a beautiful maiden, but had shortly been separated from her by some knightly exploit. His wife had remained with her father, and a child was born to her. Fearing that the adventurous hero, if he knew he had a son, would come and take him from her, the mother sent word that a daughter had been born to them. With not unnatural barbaric brutality, Rustum, in chagrin at not having a son who might be brought up to knightly deeds,

¹ *Passing of Arthur*, ll. 170-440, in "Enoch Arden and Other Poems" in this series.

abandoned his wife and heard no more of her. She, however, brought up her son, who was strong and noble, and became one of the great warriors of Afrasiab, the Tartar king. The young champion, knowing himself the son of Rustum, ever seeks his father. The poem begins on the occasion of a great invasion of Persia by the Tartars—Sohrab among them, not their leader, but their most brilliant champion. Rustum, according to common report, is not with the Persian army : disgusted at the ungrateful Kai Khosroo, he is thought to have retired to his home, where he lived with his father, Zal.

Horatius.—As Gareth is the type of the medieval knight errant, so we may consider Horatius the type of the old Roman knight and gentleman.

In the ancient histories of Rome are many stories which we know cannot be entirely true. Romulus and Remus, for instance, twins born of a maiden and a god, were exposed in the Tiber and brought up by a she-wolf. Of course, whatever fact may be at the bottom of the story has been exaggerated and changed. In the oldest days of Rome, the great deeds of the Romans were preserved in many a popular legend and story and in songs and ballads—known to all, and sung at festivals and on great occasions. To tell the truth, the real historic records of the earliest days were destroyed in the wars and violence of the time. But ballads and popular songs never trouble to be accurate ; they give a striking account of the fact, and are content even if they are not strictly correct in their details. So the early history of Rome lived in a ballad-literature, which, as it existed only in the mouths of the poets, was gradually forgotten on the appearance of the more formal written literature that we know—the literature of Terence and Plautus, of Horace and Vergil, of Livy and Tacitus.

Macaulay was greatly interested in this idea of a popular poetry, preserved in the memory of popular poets and preserving the fame of the great deeds of great Romans. His imagination, here as always (p. 18), worked to make the idea real to him : he imagined for himself what such old poetry might have been, and wrote the *Lays of Ancient Rome*. It is not necessary for us to have much historical knowledge of the matter : it is probable that the only historic fact in the whole was the invasion by Porsena, which Tacitus says was entirely successful, and not repulsed at

all. But that need not trouble us ; the point is that we have here, that Macaulay had in mind, a piece of simple and stirring ballad-poetry, such as we may read in our own tongue.

Of course Macaulay was not a simple old balladist, however ; and so his poem is not precisely a ballad. Just as Sir Walter Scott, in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, or in *Marmion*, wrote a poem full of the life and spirit of the old ballad-poetry which he knew so well, so Macaulay produced a longer, more polished poem, which should give us later readers some sort of an idea of what the old Roman ballad-poetry was. In his preface to the poem he shows that there probably had been a ballad on Horatius and his defense of the bridge among the old poems which were sung in ancient Rome.

The Vision of Sir Launfal was one of Lowell's early poems. His first poems were published in 1843 ; the *Vision* only five years later. The two things that have made it so widely known as it is are both more characteristic of the poet in his youth than of his later years. The love of nature never left him ; but there is a fresh exuberance of youth to the feeling which created the atmosphere of full, warm summer and of hard, piercing winter. So also is the moral and allegoric character of the poem due to the feeling, strong with Lowell at this time, that his poems must not only please but teach.

On this last matter there is much to say on either side. For my own part, I feel that so plain-spoken a moral will not be very useful to us in the long run ; although it will, at the time of reading, appeal to our moral sense, and very possibly make clear to us something that we have already realized but dimly. On the other hand it will be said, Here is a true, a guiding principle of life which can never fail to be of service to us, put in the form of a beautiful poem, which will never be forgotten by one who has once read it with care. Certainly, taking the poem as a strengthener of our moral nature, it ranges other things on the right side ; the full, fresh summer is for us henceforward a sign of open-heartedness ; and even the hard cold of winter will be to us better than the hardness of a cold heart.

This obvious moral element is often thought of as unpoetic : Lowell himself sometimes thought so. Practically, we need not bother ourselves much about the names. If we get pleasure, and

lasting good besides, from the poem, we are so much the richer. But, however we may feel about the moral element, there can be no doubt about the other element of which we spoke—the feeling for the beauty of nature. Not to mention the constant allusions, nor the artistic care with which the feeling of the poem is echoed or contrasted in the descriptions of nature, we may think especially of the two famous passages, the appreciation of summer (ll. 33–70), and the ice-working of the brook (ll. 174–210). These passages unite the keen observation of the lover of nature with the living imagination of the poet.

FIGURES OF SPEECH.

It is not an easy matter to give a good definition of Figure of Speech. The reason for this is that very many kinds of expression have been called “figures of speech” which are really not alike except in the fact that they are not plain, straightforward ways of speaking. But it is not enough to say that a figure of speech is a departure from the ordinary direct mode of expression; for that definition would include many forms of sentence-structure, many variations of diction, which we do not commonly think of as figures. The fact is that the older writers called almost any mode of expression which could not be readily classified otherwise a “figure of speech.” The result is that, in the old books on poetry or rhetoric, there sometimes are more than a hundred figures mentioned, each with a long name, and all together making a very confusing collection.

For us it will be enough to understand some of the commoner figures—to know what they are, how they come to be used, and what sort of effect they have. And in doing this we shall not have much difficulty; for, if it be hard to find any common likeness between all the modes of expression that rhetoricians have at one time or another chosen to call “figures of speech,” it is not especially hard to learn the chief things about the commoner figures.

A. Figures Based upon Resemblance.

One of our commonest habits is to compare one thing with another. Indeed, it is not only the commonest habit, but the