SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

WITH OTHER POEMS

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD

EDITED BY

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PROFESSORS IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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PREFATORY NOTE

As "Sohrab and Rustum" is included in the list of classics that are to be read rather than to be minutely studied, the editorial apparatus of this edition has been kept within moderate compass. In order to encourage the student to read Arnold's poetry, selections from his poems have been added, with the minimum of annotation. The text of these selections is eclectic, especially with regard to punctuation. Such teachers as desire, for special purposes, to have their pupils study Arnold the poet more intensively, will probably find many uses to which this additional material may be put. Good editions of the Poetical Works, to which older students may be directed, are those published by the Macmillan Company (1895) and by Thomas Y. Crowell & Co. (1897).

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INTRODUCTION

I. THE AUTHOR

Career as Poet. Matthew Arnold was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the historian of the Roman republic and the famous headmaster of Rugby School. He was born Dec. 24, 1822, at Laleham, near Staines, where he now lies buried. In 1828 his father went to Rugby; two years later Matthew was sent back to Laleham to be the pupil of a clerical uncle. After a short period at another school he entered Rugby in 1837. He did well here and won a prize for a Byronic poem, "Alaric at Rome," printed in 1840. In 1841 he entered Balliol College, Oxford, where he had gained a classical scholarship. In 1843 he took the Newdigate prize with a poem on Cromwell. He graduated the next year and a year later, 1845, was elected to a fellowship at Oriel College. Then he taught a little at Rugby, and in 1847 he became private secretary to the Marquis of Lansdowne, who was in charge of the administration of public instruction. In 1851 he was appointed an inspector of schools, a post of drudgery which he held for many years. The salary at once enabled him to marry Miss Frances Lucy Wightman, a daughter of one of the judges of the queen's bench.

Meanwhile, in 1849, Arnold had published over the initial "A" a small volume entitled, "The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems." This he withdrew from circulation before many copies had been sold; but he was not so dissatisfied

with his work as to cease to write poetry. He also studied systematically the classics and modern European literatures, and took a keen interest in the disturbed politics of the period. In 1852 he published his second volume, "Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems," of which the title piece and the narrative, "Tristram and Iseult," were the chief features. These contained many beautiful passages and indicated a decided growth of his poetical powers. There were also some good lyrics, but the volume, though promising, was not sufficiently striking in power or quality to impress the public, and the author soon withdrew it from circulation. In 1853, however, he made a fresh attempt with "Poems by Matthew Arnold, a new edition," which included the choicest pieces of his former volumes (except the semi-dramatic "Empedocles on Etna"), and presented for the first time two of the best of all his more ambitious poems, "Sohrab and Rustum" and "The Scholar Gipsy," as well as the exquisitely pathetic lyric, "Requiescat." The public responded to this third appeal for its favor by calling for new editions in 1854 and 1857.

To this volume of 1853 he prefixed a preface which was a plea for the establishment of a more classical and severely simple taste in poetry. In the words of the late Dr. Richard Garnett, it is now to be regarded as "a literary landmark and monument of sound criticism. It is also of peculiar interest as foreshadowing the character of the literary work with which Arnold's name was hereafter to be mainly associated. The intellectual defects which the essay denounced [the 'taste for brilliant phrases and isolated felicities' and want of attention to unity, totality, and consistency] were characteristically English defects. Soon discovering himself to be at issue with the bulk of his countrymen in every region of opinion, Arnold subsequently undertook the unpopular office

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of detector-general of the intellectual failings of his own nation. The cast of his mind was critical rather than constructive, and the gradual drying up of his native spring of poetry, at no time copious, left him no choice between criticism and silence." [1]

Two years later, in 1855, Arnold published a second series of his "Poems" consisting mainly of previously issued pieces, but containing also an important new poem in "Balder Dead," another narrative in blank verse. This incursion into Scandinavian mythology, a field that had attracted Arnold's prototype, Thomas Gray, has been highly praised by some critics, but has never been so popular with the public as "Sohrab and Rustum" — partly because it has less human interest and less salient attraction of style. His poetical work had now secured enough attention, however, to warrant his election in May 1857, to the far from onerous post of Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

He seemed to be endeavoring to justify the bestowal of this academic honor when in 1858 he published his very academic "Merope," a tragedy of the Greek type, which he did not reprint until 1885.

After one term of five years he was re-elected. In 1867, — the year he laid down his rôle of lecturer, — for that is what the Professor of Poetry really is, — he published a volume of "New Poems," in which he made good his claim to rank among the best of English elegists by his beautiful pastoral elegy "Thyrsis," in honor of his dear friend, the poet Arthur Hugh Clough, and by the equally beautiful, but less elaborate, "A Southern Night," in memory of his brother, William Delafield Arnold, director of public instruction in the

[1] From the excellent sketch of Arnold in Volume I of the Supplement of the "Dictionary of National Biography," which has been much relied upon in the preparation of this section.

Punjab. Another excellent elegy was the finely meditative "Rugby Chapel" in memory of his father, written ten years before. In 1869 his poems were collected in two volumes. His work as a poet was now over save for an occasional tribute to a dead friend, like Dean Stanley, or to a pet dog or bird. He had become more and more reflective, more and more inclined to choose his subjects from moral and intellectual themes, especially such as were related to the religious unrest of the period. His creative spontaneity declined and his argumentative combativeness increased in equal measure. Prose volumes of literary, theological, even political criticism followed one another in fairly quick succession, and for about twenty-five years the public knew him mainly as a man of letters who was prone to utter his opinions on many topics besides literature. Reprints of his poetry had, however, been called for in 1877 and 1885, he had made a popular volume of selections from it in 1878, and before his death a cordial though not a wide recognition had been given to this earlier and more attractive side of his genius. Much of this recognition had been won from readers who found in his pensive poems of religious longing and unrest a reflection of their own spiritual experiences and aspirations. For such readers he gradually supplanted Clough as the poet of honest doubt and manly resignation. Some readers, however, were as much or more attracted by the classical perfection of his style. The restraint and comparative coldness that to this day have prevented him from rivalling Tennyson in popularity or Browning in the intense devotion of zealous admirers, have given him a rather unique place in the affections of some lovers of pure poetry; and since his death it has not been uncommon to hear the opinion expressed that in a few generations his fame will rest mainly upon his verse. Although this is comparatively scanty in amount, it is, on the whole, re-

markably even in quality, and should the opinion just cited prevail, there will probably be but few Victorian writers who will attain a higher final rank.

Career as Critic. Turning now to Arnold's development as a critic, we naturally find that his ten years of lecturing at Oxford did much to clarify his thought and formulate his ideas. In 1861 he published three lectures, "On Translating Homer," which have become a classic in their kind. To them he added the next year, "On Translating Homer: Last Words." These volumes exhibited well his strength and his weakness. They were couched in prose of admirable simplicity and polish, but marred by tricks of repetition and insistence upon pet ideas — defects that were to grow upon him. They were full of singularly illuminating interpretation of Homer's transcendent merits and of acute deductions with regard to the principles that should govern translators; yet they devoted far too much attention to the errors of previous translations and displayed on the part of the lecturer a too evident delight in his own cleverness and a flippant disregard for the feelings of others.

From the first of his critical writings to the last, though in varying degrees, these exceptional merits and distressing faults are present. Arnold had a singular gift for perceiving and stating the essential principles that underlie the forms of literature, especially poetry, that appeal most widely and deeply through a considerable period of time. In other words, he was born to comprehend and love and to make others comprehend and love the classics, whether ancient or modern. With authors and books of more individual quality, with many forms of romance, with mediæval literature on the one hand and much current literature on the other, with the lighter varieties of verse and prose, he was not so sure of his critical touch. He was not entirely catholic in his tastes, and

he applied his formulas and rules too rigorously. A good example of his limitations is seen somewhat later in his career in his treatment of Shelley's poetry. He undoubtedly rendered a great service by protesting against the undiscriminating laudation of their idol indulged in by many of that poet's worshippers; but he would probably not have shown such scant sympathy with the exquisite phases of Shelley's lyrical gift if he had not, unconsciously perhaps, been too much influenced by his own formula that poetry is a criticism of life — a formula which is of great utility when the work of his favorite poet Wordsworth is in question.

Then again Arnold continually forgot that over-emphasis of one's own views and sarcasm and banter of one's opponents are often fatal to one's success as an advocate, and, despite his constant praise of disinterestedness as essential to sound criticism, Arnold was a born advocate and controversialist. At bottom he was simple and modest; outwardly he seemed jaunty and cocksure. He discussed, with great charm and much insight it is true, such topics as the "Study of Celtic Literature" (1867), on which he could not speak with much authority, and he thus exposed himself to attacks by men who, although his inferiors in many respects, were able to detract from his legitimate influence upon public opinion. In 1865, however, the first series of his "Essays in Criticism," with its free, unpedantic discussion of the characters and writings of men as far apart in time and genius as Marcus Aurelius and Heinrich Heine, placed Arnold at the very head of living English critics, and his utterances, on literature at least, were received with a respect which enabled him to modify English criticism to a marked degree. Henceforward it was to be less and less possible for Englishmen to be blatantly insular and supercilious with regard to the eccentricities of much of their own literary work, and to be content-

edly ignorant of the achievements of other nations. If he had performed only this service, Matthew Arnold would have been entitled to the fame of a public benefactor, notwithstanding the fact that his plain indebtedness to such writers as Sainte-Beuve and Heine prevents our ranking him among the world's most original critics. But he did more than convince some of his countrymen that they should be careful not to foster "philistine" and "barbarian" tastes; he gave them sound critical principles, tersely and brilliantly phrased, which they could apply with good results in their own reading. He did not dazzle them with his own brilliance and leave them comparatively helpless, as Lowell was too apt to do; instead, to change the metaphor, he set their feet on the right path and put a staff in their hands.

Meanwhile in his capacity as an educational official he had been doing Englishmen a more practical service. Not only had he been making valuable reports on English schools (collected after his death), but he had been inspecting French and German systems of instruction and publishing the conclusions to which he had come. "Popular Education of France" appeared in 1861, "A French Eton," in 1864, and "Schools and Universities on the Continent," in 1868.

The next year he published "Culture and Anarchy," essays which had previously appeared in "The Cornhill Magazine." This is the most effective of all his attacks on British philistinism in the interests of culture, or, to use the phrase which was inseparably attached to his name, of "sweetness and light." In his sprightly "Friendship's Garland" (1871) he carried the war more specifically into the domain of politics, where, as his posthumous correspondence proved, he was somewhat out of his element. The year before he had made a still rasher incursion into the field of religion and theology. Although a small section of his countrymen were ready to wel-

come his attempts to popularize the results of German and French study and speculation upon Biblical history and kindred topics — matters on which he was plainly not an expert, — many of his readers were shocked by his unorthodox views, and some roundly denounced him as a dangerous foe to religion. Nevertheless "St. Paul and Protestantism" (1870), "Literature and Dogma" (1873), "God and the Bible" (1875), and "Last Essays on Church and State" (1877), were helpful in breaking down prejudices and dissipating narrow-minded suspicions, and, however ephemeral in themselves, were apparently productive of lasting good.

Later Years. Despite the drudgery of the position, Arnold continued to serve as an inspector of schools until 1883, when he was enabled to retire, because Mr. Gladstone, to his surprise, conferred upon him a pension of two hundred and fifty pounds. It was surely well deserved; but whether, if it had been given earlier, Arnold would have done more and better work in poetry and criticism is a matter no one can decide. He had lived some time in London, then near Harrow, and in 1873 had settled at Cobham. His family was a drain upon him, but his domestic life gave him much happiness, despite the deaths of three children and disappointments such as come to many parents. During his later years he published several volumes of criticism, "Mixed Essays" (1879), "Irish Essays and Others" (1882), and "Discourses in America" (1885). The last named contained the three lectures he delivered during his first visit to the United States in 1883–84. He came again in 1886, for his eldest daughter had married and made her home in New York. He was a fairly frequent contributor to the magazines and also edited several volumes of selections, which helped to spread his critical principles and the fame of favorite authors. Among these compilations were the "Six Chief Lives" (1878), from Dr. Johnson's "Lives

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of the Poets," and selections from Wordsworth (1879), Byron (1881), and Burke (1881).

When he was at the height of his fame and his influence the world was suddenly shocked by the news of his death. He had gone to Liverpool to welcome his daughter home from America, and there he died of heart disease, on April 15, 1888. He was buried at the churchyard of All Saints at Laleham, his birthplace, which gives the title to Mr. William Watson's touching poem to his memory. The same year some of his essays, including those on Gray and Keats, first published in Ward's "English Poets," [1] were gathered under the title, "Essays in Criticism, Second Series." In 1895 two volumes of his letters, somewhat disappointing to his admirers though illustrating well his geniality and his deep love of nature, were edited by Mr. G. W. E. Russell. Uniform editions of his writings have been for twenty years attainable in America, and besides numerous essays and studies,[2] three critical biographies have been devoted to him, one by Professor Saintsbury, in "Modern English Writers" (1899), one by Mr. Herbert Paul, in the new series of the "English Men of Letters" (1902), and one by Mr. G. W. E. Russell, in "Literary Lives"

Mr. Humphry Ward married Matthew Arnold's niece, the well-known authoress of "Robert Elsmere" and other novels.

[2] Among these may be named "Victorian Poets," by E. C. Stedman (1885), "The Greater Victorian Poets," by Hugh Walker (1895), and "Matthew Arnold," by W. H. Dawson (1904), and essays by George E. Woodberry (Warner's Library), John M. Robertson ("Modern Humanists"), Frederic Harrison ("Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill," etc.), Lewis E. Gates ("Three Studies in Literature"), W. C. Brownell ("Victorian Prose Masters"), George Saintsbury (Craik's "English Prose," Vol. V), T. H. Ward (Ward's "English Poets," Vol. IV, enlarged edition), Augustine Birrell ("Res Judicatæ"), J. Burroughs ("Indoor Studies"), W. N. Guthrie ("Modern Poet Prophets"), and W. E. Henley ("Views and Reviews").

(1904). A thoroughly satisfactory life is still a desideratum. There is an excellent bibliography of Arnold's writings by T. B. Smart (1892).

II. THE POEM

General Characteristics. "Sohrab and Rustum" was written in 1853, and published the same year. It speedily attained the popularity it has kept, ranking perhaps only below "Thyrsis" among its author's poems. As a brief narrative in verse it is not clearly surpassed by the work of any other modern English poet, although, as we shall see later, it seems to lie open in a slight degree to the charge of factitiousness, especially in its use or abuse of the Homeric simile. But whether or not it is somewhat academic and overwrought in tone, "Sohrab and Rustum" is a moving poem, the pathetic close of which seems to appeal to some readers even more than the simpler poignancy of Priam's interview with Achilles. It has also the advantage of succinctness; yet within its brief compass of eight hundred and ninety-two lines we find good characterization, excellent dramatic dialogue, and fine descriptive passages giving the proper atmosphere. In short, all the essentials of an effective story are present, and there is, moreover, an appeal to our noblest and most primitive emotions couched in an adequate style."[1]

The Sources and the Historical Setting. The story of "Sohrab and Rustum" is the best known and is regarded as the most moving episode in the "Shah-Namah," or Book of Kings, of the Persian poet Firdausi. This poet, who lived about the year 1000 A.D., composed the history of Persia, for a period of thirty-six centuries, in a poem of sixty thousand couplets. He is regarded as the Homer of Persia, and his poem is the

[1] "The Sick King in Bokhara" is another poem in which Arnold chose an oriental theme and setting.

great national epic. Parts have been translated into English by James Atkinson,[1] whose version of the present story will be found in Dole and Walker's "Flowers of Persian Poets."[2] The episode, called by Sir John Malcolm[3] an "extraordinary and affecting tale," may be summarized from the translation in order to show the difference between the treatment by the modern poet and his original.

Rustem, Roostem, or Rustum, as his name is variously anglicized, while hunting in the wilds of Turan, wearied of his sport and fell asleep, leaving his famous horse, Ruksh, to wander at his will. The steed was stolen by a band of marauders, whom, waking, Rustum pursued until he reached the palace of the king of Samengan. Here the chief met with royal welcome, recovered his horse, and, becoming enamored of the king's daughter, Temineh, married her. Before the birth of his son, Sohrab, Rustum, eager for new adventures, left the court, returned to Seistan, his father's home, and was seen no more in Samengan.

Sohrab, grown to manhood and renowned in arms more than all the rest of the youths of Turan, determined to seek his father. His request to lead an army against the Persians was gladly welcomed by Afrasiab, the king of Turan, because, craftily thought the latter, if Sohrab can slay Rustum and if I can then dispose of him, Persia will lie defenceless at my feet. Accordingly Sohrab set out at the head of an army, crossed the borders of Persia, defeated a host sent against him, captured its leader, Hujir, and laid siege to the frontier fortress.

Here he was encamped when the main host of the Persians, led by Rustum, Gudurz, and other famous chiefs, appeared

[1] "Sohrab, a poem," Calcutta, 1814.

[2] New York, 1901, 2 vols.

[3] "History of Persia," London, 1829, Vol. I, p. 27.

against him. Rustum had with difficulty been induced to take the field. He had been dilatory in obeying the commands of the weak and inconstant Persian monarch, Kaus, and that king had threatened him with impaling. The result of the dispute was that Rustum would not march till Kaus had conciliated him. Once in the field, however, he became the true leader of the Persian host. As a spy he penetrated the Turanian camp, saw and admired their leader, and picked him out for his special antagonist. Sohrab, meanwhile, had made inquiry about his father, sure from the mien of one chieftain and his valiant horse that the latter must be among the Persian host, but he had been deceived by the astute Hujir.

When the battle joined, Sohrab and Rustum met, and, each pausing to admire the other, Sohrab asked if his opponent were not his father. On Rustum's denial, for no apparent cause, they fell to combat and fought ferociously, until Sohrab, with a well-delivered blow from his mace, stunned his opponent. The contending armies rushed in and terminated the duel, but before darkness put an end to the fighting, the chiefs agreed to meet in single combat the next day. When the morning came they wrestled, and after a fierce encounter, Sohrab threw his father. The Persian chief, in the face of Sohrab's dagger, had recourse to a stratagem: "By the Persian law," he said, "a chief may fight till he is twice overthrown." The chivalrous Sohrab, to the dismay of the Turanian host, released his mighty enemy, and darkness closed the conflict. That night Rustum prayed for success in the conflict of the next day, and his prayer was heard.

When they met on the morrow Sohrab reproached Rustum for his deception of the day before, but the latter answered with calm and confident disdain. Again they grappled, Sohrab was thrown, and, lest he should escape, was immedi-

ately stabbed. In his death agony he bade his foe beware the wrath of his father Rustum, who would surely exact vengeance for his son. Distraught, the champion disclosed his identity and demanded proof that Sohrab was his son. Thereupon Sohrab showed the gold bracelet that Rustum had given his wife to place upon the arm of his unborn child. At the sight Rustum became frantic with grief, and long after the sun had set remained upon the ground wailing and tearing his hair. The hostile armies, rushing in to avenge their chiefs, were quieted by the dying Sohrab, and Rustum himself bade the war to cease. He would have slain Hujir, would have stabbed himself, but was prevented by his friends. He besought King Kaus for healing medicine for his son, but that mean-spirited monarch, angry with Rustum because he had been worsted in the former fights, refused all aid, and Sohrab breathed his last.

Grief-stricken and disdaining the aid of the fickle king, proffered now too late, Rustum bore home to Seistan the body of his son. Here Sohrab was publicly mourned and laid to rest. When the news reached Tamineh she was beside herself. "Nothing," says Malcolm,[1] "can be more beautiful than the picture of the distraction of the mother of Sohrab, who set fire to her palace, meaning to perish in the flames, but was prevented by her attendants. They could not, however, console her. She became quite frantic; her wild joy was to clothe herself in the bloody garment in which he had been slain; to kiss the forehead of his favorite horse; to draw his bow; wield his lance, his sword, his mace; and, at last, to use the words of the poet, 'she died, and her soul fled to that of her heroic son.'"

The episode of Sohrab and Rustum, however affecting, is

[1] "History of Persia," Vol. I, p. 28, note c. Arnold furnished "Sohrab and Rustum" with a note taken from Malcolm.

but a detail in the career of the great legendary hero of Persia. A good account of the deeds of this Persian Achilles or Hercules is to be found in chapters ii and iii of Malcolm's "History of Persia," already referred to. Even as an infant, Rustum was renowned for his strength and voracity, and for upwards of four hundred years, until his death through treachery, he was the main bulwark of Persia against foreign foes. The chief and most constant of these was Afrasiab, king of Turan or Tartary, of whose subjects Rustum is said to have destroyed eleven hundred and sixty in his maiden battle. His encounter with Sohrab, which happened rather early in his career, took place in one of the frequent encounters between the Persians and the dwellers beyond the Oxus. It occurred in the reign of Kai Kaoos, or Kaus, not, as Arnold has it, in that of his grandson, the great Kai Khoosroo, and was considerably before the time of Cyrus the Great, with whom Kai Khoosroo has sometimes been identified. In Malcolm's history most of the heroes named in Arnold's poem are spoken of, some at considerable length; Peran-Wisa, for example, the Nestor of the Tartars, had a long and honorable career.

It is, in general, interesting to compare the Persian epic with Arnold's poem. In the latter, deeds of arms are of comparatively less importance than in the "Shah-Namah," and more stress is laid on feeling, particularly the filial affection of Sohrab, which causes him to lower his guard to receive his death-wound when his father shouts his war cry. So too the fight is of shorter duration, and much greater space, comparatively, is given to the solemnity of nature.

Geographical Setting. The geographical setting of "Sohrab and Rustum" may most easily be understood by taking the Oxus as a base line. That river, which in the time of Rustum formed the northeastern boundary of Persia, rises in the high tablelands of Pamere, a district of Turkestan, almost directly north

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