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Treasure-trove.

The Meaning of Browning's 'Saul.'

'A Poem about the Lesson!' 'About David and Saul!' 'Can we read it?' 'Will you read it to us?' 'Please do!'

Who could resist such pleading? Out we go under the trees, and if the littlest ones get from the reading only thoughts of white sheep and starry skies and grow sleepy with the music of the words, the boy's wandering attention is caught and held by the 'cool silver shock' and the wonderful pictures. The older ones follow more thoughtfully, and again and again the reader turns back to repeat a few lines that some one did not quite get or explain where one picture merged into another.

A great poem by a great poet is this 'Saul,' and one that will, if you give it a chance, sing its way into the heart of every one of you. At first to the little ones it will be only music with pictures; to the older ones the music of the rhythm will ring more triumphantly, the pictures be clearer, but to everyone whose heart is open to receive, it will sing its wonderful song of human life and human failures; of human love that is so powerless; of the greater love that saves and gives new life; and will show clear and beautiful its vision of the Christ.

If you have read it, read it over again. If you can, learn it by heart, and if you cannot do that, cut it out and keep it to read over and over until you have gathered from it all the beauty and wisdom it contains. As the years go by you will find it has become one of your treasures.

The Meaning of 'Saul.'

'Saul' is not an obscure poem, when once you have grasped the poet's plan in the development of his theme, which is fairly obvious. The theme is David playing before Saul to cure him of his mental affliction. (I. Samuel xv., 14-23). Depression of mind was anciently attributed to evil spirits, who could be driven away by music. 'And it came to pass, when the evil spirit was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.' In the poem David himself describes what happened. He is received by Abner, the captain of Saul's host, and after 'kneeling to the God of his fathers,' hurries at once to Saul's tent, which he finds in darkness, the gigantic figure of Saul standing motionless against the main-prop of the tent, with arms outstretched. David untwines from his harp the lilies twisted about the strings to protect them from the fierce heat, tunes his harp, and begins to play. The music at first is simple, tunes of which the motives would, perhaps, recall to the king his boyhood days in the country. He first plays the tune the sheep know as they come home at evening to the fold, then the tune which the quails love, the one which elates the crickets, and then the one which affects the jerboa,—seeking to put his hearer in sympathy with God's creatures, 'we and they are his children, one family here.' Then he goes on to the human race, the friendship and fellowship of the

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—From 'Peloubet's Notes.'

Saul.

(By Robert Browning.)

Said Abner, 'At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!' Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he: 'Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.
'Yet how my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue
Just broken to twine round the harp-strings, as if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!'
Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered and was not afraid,
But spoke, 'Here is David, thy servant!' And no voice replied.
At the first I saw nought but the blackness; but soon I desiered
A something more black than the blackness—the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion; and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-roof, showed Saul.
He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.
Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so far!
—Then the tune for which quails on the cornland will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another; and then, what has weight