

Favorite Novel or Poem.

STUDY VI.

"The Twenty-third Psalm."
Prize Essay.

Three thousand years, years of change and evolution, of voyage and discovery, have taken their place in the background of this world's history, since first from the lips of the sweet singer of Israel,—the shepherd king—came forth the inimitable lines of "The Shepherd Psalm."

Thirty centuries! A long, long time, and in that vast abyss all material relics of him, however carefully they may have been preserved, have moldered into dust. The harp with which he was wont to cheer the heart of his moody predecessor on the throne, the sling with which he slew the giant of the Philistines, and the huge sword with which he cut off his head, all these are deep in the debris of the ages.

But this psalm, though old as any of them, and though trodden by myriads of men in every succeeding age, is as fresh to-day, as it rises in hundreds of different languages from Sabbath worshippers assembled in all quarters of the globe, as it was when first it was echoed back, in the old Hebrew tongue, by the sheep-dotted hills of Palestine, upon the ear of its immortal composer.

And fresh it must ever remain, for of all the psalms, yes, and of all the poetry, that has ever been written, these immortal verses, simple as childhood's rhyme, yet deep as the archangel's anthem, will ever, as they have in the past, retain unrivalled pre-eminence in the hearts of Christendom.

And why? Wherein consists that magic power which has preserved it through the ages, and which has retained for it such precedence over all else of its kind? Does it consist in its literary merit? It were possible, for two such perfect metaphors as those which form it, must be rare in any literature. The first, that from which the psalm derives its name, speaks of the Lord as being a Shepherd, and of man as the sheep of his care, for whom He provides at all times all that is necessary for his sustenance and comfort. The second is given to complete the first, for, although the sheep and the shepherd may be much to each other, there can be no communion between them, nor can their friendship last for ever. In it, man is spoken of as being the Lord's guest, in which capacity he may have direct communion with Him, and if he so wishes, he may enjoy the pleasures of His house forever.

But it is something more than mere literary merit which gives to this psalm such universal pre-eminence. There is an all-sufficiency about it, and, as one has said, the whole Bible may be seen in it as the morning sun is seen in a dew-drop. Read into it the meaning of the gospel of Christ, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep, and we have

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And so it has remained ever, the psalm of childhood and of age; the first that the toddling child learns to lip, and oftentimes the last word uttered upon the death-bed. And thus it will go on until the last weary pilgrim has passed through the valley, when, its work here completed, it may go itself and take its place among the grand celestial songs which shall make the House of the Lord musical forever.

T. J. RUTHERFORD.

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An Epistle.

(Browning.)

Prize Essay.

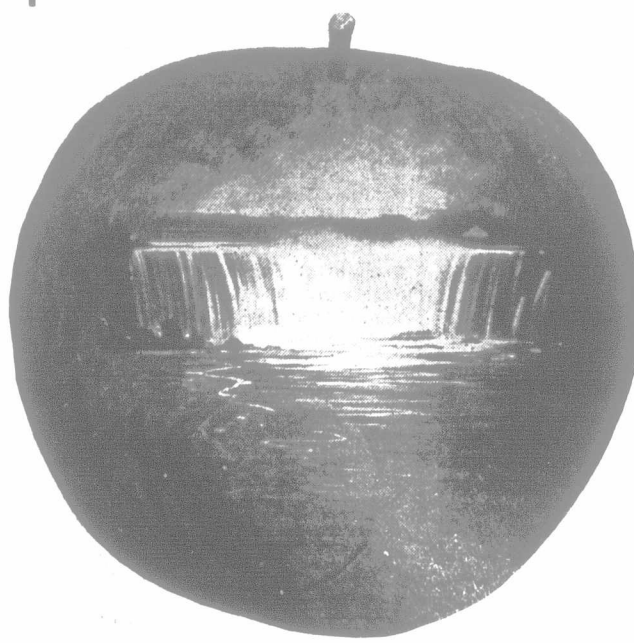
This monologue, written by Robert Browning, was first published in 1855. It contains the strange medical experiences of Karshish, the Arab physician.

Karshish is writing to his master, Abib, giving him an account of his journeyings and the things seen on the way. He goes to Bethany and there meets Lazarus. The personality of Lazarus, the man raised from the dead, has such an impression on him that, though half-ashamed, he devotes the greater part of his letter to the discussion of the subject.

Karshish is a type of the purely scientific intellect, determined to have positive, substantial proof, before he will believe, and to prove everything by the touchstone of experience and knowledge. He believes in one Supreme God, but the relationship between the spirit life and the physical life is to him a mystery. To such a man, the story told by Lazarus, would seem incredible, and for this reason, Browning has used him in order to show (as Alexander points out) "the universality of the yearning in the human heart for a God of Love." The struggle between the intellect and the heart of the physician is finely presented in the poem. The portrait of Karshish is admirably drawn: his keen interest in everything pertaining to his art; his supreme belief in himself; his impatience with and lack of tolerance for others; his skepticism concerning anything without his own experience, and yet with the heart of a man beneath it all.

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