

The Roundabout Club

Our Literary Department.

Rabi Ben Ezra.

STUDY NO. 3.

(Announced in our issue of March 11.)

Question 1. Explanation of lines 4 to 6, St. XI. So many interpretations of these lines were received that we decided to submit those judged of most merit, whatever the interpretation given, to the most eminent student of Browning whom we could find. Accordingly, we forwarded the set to Rev. W. J. Clark, of Montreal, well-known as a Browning enthusiast, who has kindly given his opinion and judged the answers, three of which are given below, in order of merit:

(1) "Would that our spiritual rewards and consolations were as much realized at the time of action as the pleasures of the flesh."

(2) "Would that we could, in our spiritual life, have some prize or possession that could be, in this life, set over against, and serve to counterbalance the pleasures and allurements that pertain exclusively to the flesh."

(3) "Would that we had some spiritual prize ever before us as alluring as the joys of physical life, that would spur us on to continuous effort toward our ideals."

Commenting on the question, Mr. Clark says:

"I think Stanzas 11 and 12 must be taken together. There is the thought of conflict between the soul and the body, and the freedom from any such conflict on the part of the lower animals. Their content seems enviable from the standpoint of the man. The desire is expressed that we may have such an outlook upon life that we shall see both soul and body have their place in man's preparation for a higher sphere. When such an outlook is ours, we shall have a satisfaction untroubled even as the beast's seems to be, but of a higher sort. We shall 'gain most as we did best.'"

"This thought is developed in Stanza 12, and when he comes to 13, he dreams of the time when this work, having been successfully accomplished, and the end of the present existence having been served, the man will pass on to a higher stage of existence. He is a man now in the highest sense of the term, the beast is blotted out, yea, he is a god, but in the germ, so that there is hope of still farther progress. Whether he makes special reference to Darwin's teaching, I don't know, but I would certainly find in his words an acceptance of the idea that as man may hope to progress in the future, so has he progressed in the past."

Question 2. Among many quotations from other poets (Tennyson, Wordsworth, Whitman, Arnold, Crabbe, Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton, etc.), setting forth that the body should not be despised, but should be given its own place in the great scheme of things, we have space for the following:

2. "Let me not cast in endless shade
What is so wonderfully made."

—Tennyson.

"And who Absal? The sense-adoring
Body,
Slave to the Blood and Sense—through
whom the Soul,
Although the Body's very life it be,
Doth yet imbibe the knowledge and
delight
Of things of Sense; and these in such a
bond
United as God only can divide."
Salaman and Absal of Jamil.
—Fitzgerald.

"There is nothing better . . . should
eat and drink, and that he should make
his soul enjoy good in his labor." Eccl.
2: 24.

"No longer half akin to brute,
For all we thought, and loved, and did,
And hoped, and suffered, is but seed
Of what in them is flower and fruit."
—Tennyson.

Question 3. In all probability, Brown-

ing was here thinking of the Darwinian theory of evolution, which, as one of our students remarked, "was young in the world when this poem was written," and attracting no small degree of attention.

Question 4. The best answer to this question reads as follows: "The natural phenomenon used as a simile in St. XVI., is that of sunset, particularly of the last beams of the afterglow, when the luminary itself has disappeared; as Browning beautifully describes it, 'a certain moment . . . calls the glory from the grey.'"

Question 5. It has been very difficult to judge which were the best papers submitted on this question, one part of one being best, another part of another, etc. However, the following have been selected as interpreting most succinctly, and quite as fully as some others, the meaning of the Stanzas XI. — XVI.:

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Q.—5. Browning has all the Englishman's love for physical wholesomeness. "The soul in its rose-mesh" to me suggests the poet himself blessed with a fine physique and perfect health—which he took pride in keeping. He does not consider the body always a clog to the spirit, but that both—at their best—may work in harmony.

When old age comes, with its rest and quiet, he will look back at his youth and see that what has vanished was only the dross—the best remains. He will view all his past life—his strivings, his successes, his failures, and judge truly of their worth in the upbuilding of his character.

Having rested from life's struggles, and proved the past, he looks forward with joy to a new and strange existence—on which he will enter, equipped with strange new powers and capabilities.

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Q.—5. The poet brings us in the present study to a contemplation of the conflict which is ever going on in man, between the soul and body, a contest of opposite tendencies, the flesh warring against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. The soul ever reaches out after supreme goodness and perfection; the body is content with material comforts and satisfactions.

St. XII. Instead of this continual conflict, how much better that soul and body be in perfect harmony and co-operation; then gladly, naturally, "as the bird sings and wings," we would choose the right, and long only for those things which are the result of right-doing. All the impulses of the soul make for our greatest good, and its claims should be paramount, but we must not ignore the offices of the body, for without it the soul cannot be perfected. Life's duties well and faithfully performed, minister grace to the soul.

St. XIII. In St. 11, the poet shows us that youth has boundless and undefined ambition, and this he would now crave for age; since his desires are chastened and purified, soul and body are in perfect harmony, and his ambitions are only for "all good things." He has reached the standard of God's perfect man in kind, but not in degree. He must still strive on to greater perfection, but he realizes that he can meet the issues of the days to come with courage and confidence.

St. XV. When youth's bright days are done, he reviews his past life with reference to their effect on his present existence. His moral perceptions have been made clear and keen by the choice of right, and he is able now to discern the things that were of real worth, and those that were mere dross.

XVII. As one might look back over a day that is done, he hopes to be able to determine, after careful examination of the results of his striving, that God's plan of development, through striving, was good and right, and that he has so learned life that he can now go out into the Great Beyond to go on in larger, fuller perfection and development, without fear.

Medical Student—"What did you operate on that man for?"

Eminent Surgeon—"Two hundred dollars."

Medical Student—"I mean what did he have?"

Eminent Surgeon—"Two hundred dollars."—The Christian Register.

The Necklace.

By Guy De Maupassant.

She was one of those pretty, charming girls, such as are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born into a bourgeois family. She had no dowry, or expectations, or means of being known, understood, loved, married, by any rich or distinguished man; and she allowed herself to be married to a young clerk at the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was as unhappy as if she had really fallen from her proper station; for with women there is no caste or rank; and beauty, grace and charm have the same action as family and birth. Natural delicacy, the instinct for what is elegant, flexibility of wit, are the only hierarchy, and make women from the people the equals of the very greatest ladies.

She ceaselessly suffered, feeling herself born for all delicacies and all luxuries. She suffered from the meanness of her dwelling, from the wretched appearance of the walls, from the worn-out chairs, from the ugly curtains. All the things of which any other woman of her rank would never have been even conscious tortured her and made her cross. The sight of the little Breton peasant girl who did her humble housework stirred in her regrets that were full of despair and distracted dreams.

She thought of silent antechambers hung with oriental tapestry, lighted by high bronze candelabra, and of the two tall footmen in knee breeches sleeping in the big easy chairs, made drowsy by the heavy warmth of the air-tight stove. She thought of the long salons decorated with ancient silk, of the dainty furniture carrying priceless curiosities, and of the coquettish perfumed boudoirs made for five-o'clock talks with intimate friends, with famous and popular men, whom all women envy and whose attention they all desire.

When she sat down to dinner, at the round table covered with a tablecloth three days old, opposite her husband, who uncovered the soup tureen and declared, with an enchanted air, "Ah, the nice pot-au-feu! I don't know anything better than that," she thought of dainty dinners, of glittering silverware, of tapestry peopling the walls with personages of ancient days, and with strange birds flying through a fairy forest; and she thought of delicious dishes served on marvellous plate, and of the whispered gallantries to which you listen with a sphinxlike smile, while you are eating the pink flesh of a trout or the breast of a quail.

She had no dresses, no jewels, nothing. And that was all she loved; she felt made for that. She would have so liked to please, to be envied, to be charming, to be desired.

She had a friend, a former school-mate at the convent, who was rich, and whom she did not like to visit any more, because she suffered so much when she came back.

But, one evening her husband returned home with an air of triumph, and holding a large envelope.

"There," said he, "here is something for you."

She swiftly tore the paper, and drew out a printed card bearing these words:

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Mme. Georges Ramponneau request the honour of M. and Mme. Loisel's company at the palace of the Ministry on Monday evening, January 18."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she scornfully threw the invitation on the table, murmuring:

"What do you want me to do with this?"

"Why, my dear, I thought you would be glad. You never go out, and this is a fine opportunity. I had awful trouble to get it. Everyone is anxious to go; it is very select, and not many clerks are getting invitations. The whole official society will be there."

She looked at him with an angry eye, and said impatiently:

"And what do you want me to wear?"

He had not thought of that; he stammered:

"Why, the dress you wear to the theatre. To me it looks very well."

He stopped, in despair, seeing his wife crying. Two great tears were descending slowly from the corners of her eyes

toward the corners of her mouth. He stammered:

"What is the matter? What is the matter?"

But, by a violent effort, she had conquered her grief, and she replied, in a calm voice, as she wiped her wet cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I have no dress, and so I can't go to this ball. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better off than I am."

He was in despair. He went on:

"Come, Mathilde, let us see. How much would a suitable dress cost, such as you could use on other occasions—something very simple?"

She reflected several seconds, making her calculations and wondering also what sum she could ask without bringing an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

At last she replied hesitatingly:

"I don't exactly know, but I think I could manage it with four hundred francs."

He had grown a trifle pale, because he was hoarding up just that sum with which to buy a gun and treat himself to a little shooting the following summer on the plain of Nanterre, with several friends who went to shoot larks down there, Sundays.

But he said:

"All right. I will give you four hundred francs. And try to have a pretty dress."

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The day of the ball drew near, and Mme. Loisel seemed melancholy, uneasy, and anxious. But her dress was ready. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What is the matter? Come, you have been so queer these last three days."

And she answered:

"It annoys me not to have a single jewel, not a single stone, nothing to wear. I shall look like poverty. I should almost rather not go at all."

He replied:

"You might wear natural flowers. It is very stylish at this time of the year. For ten francs you can get two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced.

"No; there's nothing more humiliating than to look poor among other women who are rich."

But her husband cried:

"How stupid you are! Go find your friend Mme. Forestier, and ask her to lend you some jewels. You are quite intimate enough with her to do that."

She uttered a cry of joy:

"That is true. I never thought of that."

The next day she went to her friend and told her of her distress.

Mme. Forestier went to a wardrobe with a glass door, took out a large jewel casket, brought it back, opened it, and said to Mme. Loisel:

"Choose, my dear."

First of all she saw some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross, gold and other precious stones of admirable workmanship. She tried the ornaments on before the glass, hesitated, could not make up her mind to part with them, to give them back. She kept asking:

"Haven't you any more?"

"Why, yes. Look. I don't know what you like."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb diamond necklace, and her heart began to beat with immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it. She fastened it around her throat, outside her high-necked dress, and remained lost in ecstasy at the sight of herself.

Then she asked, hesitating, filled with anguish:

"Can you lend me this, just this?"

"Why, yes, certainly."

She fell on her friend's neck, kissed her passionately, then fled with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Mme. Loisel made a great success. She was prettiest of them all, elegant, graceful, smiling, and crazy with joy. All the men looked at her, asked her name, wanted to be introduced. All the attaches of the Cabinet wanted to waltz with her. She was remarked by the minister himself.

She danced with intoxication, with passion, made drunk by pleasure, forgetting everything, in the triumph of her