

## English.

All articles and communications intended for this department should be addressed to the ENGLISH EDITOR, EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL, Room 5, 11½ Richmond Street West, Toronto.

### LITERATURE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATIONS.

LXXXII.—HERVÉ RIEL.\*

ROBERT BROWNING.

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, London, England, in 1812. His education was obtained in a somewhat irregular fashion, partly at school and partly from private tutors. He was for a short time at the University of London, but he completed no regular university course. His poetical talents manifested themselves at a very early age. He is said to have been as a boy very fond of Byron's works, but as he grew older he conceived a fondness for the writings of Shelley and Keats, and others of that school of writers, and there can be no doubt that their influence left its impress upon most of his later productions, though it is very likely that the subtlety and consequent obscurity that are so marked in many of his poems are characteristics of his mind and its modes of working, rather than the results of either conscious or unconscious imitation. It is possible, too, that in many cases the obscurity may inhere in the very nature of the thought he wishes to present. The poet, himself, seemed surprised that his writings should be deemed obscure, and evidently thought, though of course too polite to say so, that the criticism might reflect quite as severely upon the critic as upon the poet. We can fancy him as observing in all sincerity, had he been less modest, "The real question in regard to this, that, and the other passage deemed obscure, is not whether some other thought somewhat resembling the one in question could have been put into a form more easily understood, but whether the very thought I wished to convey could have been expressed in plainer fashion." There can be no doubt that his extreme fondness for psychological analysis, and his almost unrivalled skill in laying bare the subtler workings of the human mind in its ever-varying manifestations, has much to do with the characteristic so much complained of. Browning certainly gave ample proof that he could be simple and clear enough upon occasion. Some of his shorter pieces are models of clearness and simplicity. But whatever the cause, it is nevertheless beyond controversy that much of what he has written, though rich in poetic thought and imagery, is so expressed that its meaning can be ascertained only by dint of closest study and thought, and not always even thus. Though it is yet too soon to assign him his proper and permanent place in the ranks of British bards, it is pretty certain that his poetry will always occupy a very high place in the estimation of the few, while a few of his productions will always, by their wit, brevity, and charm of language and expression, be very popular with the many. Among the latter are: *Pippa Passes, How they Brought the Good News from Ghent, Hervé Riel, The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, etc. Browning died in December, 1889, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

This stirring narrative poem tells its own tale, based on an incident connected with the defeat of the French fleet by the combined English and Dutch fleets in 1692. Little is left for the annotator, save to help in the elucidation of any obscurities arising from the form of expression, and to aid the student in noting how graphically, and with what wonderful mastery of the powers of the language, the tale is told; especially how admirably the choice of words, their arrangement, and even the length and rhythm, or purposed want of rhythm, of the successive lines, are all made to contribute to the effect of the narrative.

*On the sea.*—The first thing that will strike the thoughtful reader is the effect produced by this abrupt beginning. Like Homer, and Virgil, and Milton, and all the great epic writers—and this is a short epic—the poet delays us with no introduction, but plunges at once *in medias res*.

*The Hogue.*—Cape La Hogue is the eastern-most

point of the peninsula of Cotentin, which juts out into the English Channel in the department of Manche, in France. It was opposite this Cape that the naval battle referred to was fought. Look it up in the map and do not confuse it, as is often done, with Cape La Hague, at the northwest extremity of the same peninsula.

*Woe to France.*—Note how much is conveyed in these three words. At the same time that they tell us the issue of the battle, they contain a tribute to the prowess of the British navy, implying that no other result could have been expected.

*Heller-skeller.*—A species of *onomatopoe*, expressive of confusion.

*Like a crowd, etc.*—Study this effective simile. Note the antithesis in *sharks* and *porpoises*, arising from the strongly contrasted nature, habits, and movements of the two species. Justify the omission of the relative.

*St. Malo*, at the mouth of the river Rance, in the department of Ille-et-Vilaine (see map), is a fortified town standing on a small island less than three miles in circumference, which lies near the shore and is connected with it by a causeway 650 feet long. The harbor is spacious and safe when once entered, but its entrance is narrow, and thickly studded with rocks and shallows. It is perfectly dry at low tide, but, as the tide here rises forty-five to fifty feet, there is sufficient depth of water for ships at high tide.

*Help the winners, etc.*—Note the keen sarcasms in this and following lines. Are they out of place in the mouth of the fleeing commander? Give reasons for your answer. Read this stanza aloud, and observe the adaptation of rhythm and metre to sentiment.

*Rocks to starboard, rocks to port.*—Compare Tennyson's "Cannon to right of them; cannon to left of them." Which was written first? In nautical language the *starboard* (A.S. *steorbord*, i.e., *steer-board*, a large oar which was used on the right side of the vessel) is the right side of the ship as one stands facing the prow. *Larboard* (etymol. of *lar* unknown) was formerly used to denote the left side, but has now been superseded by *port* (etymol. in this sense also unknown), probably as shorter and better contrasted in sound.

*Think to enter.*—That is, Shall she think, etc. The omission of every unnecessary word is in keeping with the excitement of the occasion. It is also characteristic of Browning.

*Now, 'tis slackest ebb.*—If this means it is now low tide, the description which follows is inconsistent with the geographical fact that the channel is empty at low tide. Probably the meaning of the words put into the pilots' mouths is that even a craft of twenty tons must take advantage of the inflowing tide in order to enter, whereas now the ebbing or outflowing current would be sure to sheer the vessels on the rocks or shoals.

*Not a ship will leave.*—Every one will be wrecked.

*Brief and bitter.*—What figure?

*Breton.*—A native of Brittany, or Bretagne.

*Tourville.*—The celebrated French admiral who was commander-in-chief of the great French fleet which had set out to invade England on behalf of James II., and was thus completely defeated. Two years before, in 1690, Tourville had entered the English Channel at the head of a powerful fleet, and inflicted an ignominious and disastrous defeat on the united English and Dutch fleets near Beachy Head.

In order to get a good idea of the power of condensation shown in this stanza, which condensation is the chief cause of its peculiarities in form of expression and order of words, it will be a good exercise for the student to write out in prose, in as brief a form as he may be able, a clear statement of all the facts here compressed into eight lines.

*Croisichese.*—A native of Croisic.

*Mockery, malice, mad, Malouins.*—Note the alliteration again. Is it in keeping with Hervé's indignation?

*Malouins.*—Natives of St. Malo. See map.

*Greve.*—A fortified town at the mouth of the Rance.

*Are you bought? Is it love? etc.*—Does the poet mean us to infer that Hervé really thought that the pilots whom he thus addresses were actuated by traitorous motives? It is more reasonable to suppose his words ironical in the first question, as they evidently are in the second. The French pilots could hardly be suspected of love for the English.

*Solidor.*—A fortified height a little way up the river.

*Worse than fifty Hogues.*—Explain.

*Most and least.*—*Most* is used in the sense of greatest.

*He is admiral, in brief.*—*In brief*, i.e., for a short time. Or it may mean *in a word, to be brief*.

*Still the north wind.*—"Blows" or "holds" understood. Who says this, Damfreville, or the poet? We prefer the latter.

*Holla.*—*Holla, holla, halloo*, and *halloo*, are different forms of the same word.

*Hearts that bled.*—Whose hearts? The poet would hardly represent the hearts of the brave soldiers as bleeding in view of their own danger, though they might do so at the prospect of the loss of their proud ships. Probably the reference is to the towns-people looking on, some of them, perhaps, the wives or mothers of some of the seamen.

*Rapture to enhance.*—Explain.

*Rampired.*—Equivalent to *ramparted*.

*Paradise for Hell.*—Note the antithesis. In brevity and strength the resources of the language could supply nothing to surpass it.

*Let France's king.*—Who was he?

*The speaking hard.*—Why hard? Explain.

*The duty's done.*—The brave seaman has but done his duty, and makes light of the exploit. It was nothing but a "run" before a fair wind to one who knew the channel as he did.

*Leave to go.*—In which, to your mind, does the poet intend the climax to be found, or which does he deem most impressive, the contrast between the largeness of the merit and the reward proffered, and the triviality of the reward asked; or, the intensity of Hervé's love for his wife, which made a day's visit with her the greatest boon his heart could crave?

*Not a head, etc.*—Not only did his compatriots raise no pillar or statue in honor of the hero, they did not even make a figure-head of a fishing-smack in his likeness. It is stated as a historical fact, seemingly on good authority, that the reward which Hervé really asked and obtained was exemption from further marine service, and permission to remain permanently with his Belle Aurore.

*Bore the bell.*—The reference is probably to the custom of placing a bell on the neck of the leader in the flock or drove. This is, perhaps, better than to understand the expression as an allusion to the practice of giving a bell as a prize in some athletic contest.

*Flung pell-mell.*—Hung without special order or system.

*Lowre.*—The national picture gallery in Paris. The poet evidently thinks it a shame that France has no picture or statue to commemorate Hervé Riel's noble deed. Hence he offers this poem to supply the lack, so far as he can. No doubt it will prove a more lasting memorial.

### ENTRANCE LITERATURE.

XI.—TOM BROWN.

#### SUGGESTIVE NOTES AND QUESTIONS.

"The schoolhouse prayers." The schoolhouse was the boarding house under the care of the head-master.

"Were the same on the first night." Same in what respect? On first night of what?

"Save for the gaps." Parse *save*.

"Who came late." Explain.

"Line of new boys." Parse *line*.

"Like young bears." In what respect?

"Tom Brown thought of it." Of what?

"Poor, slight little Arthur." Any mistake in punctuation? Distinguish these adjectives. Give another example from this piece of three adjectives qualifying one noun.

"To No. 4." What is meant? Give examples of other abbreviations.

"On the school close." Meaning? Pronunciation? See note in Reader.

"The discipline of the room." What is meant?

"All fags, for the fifth form." Meaning of *fags*? Effect of removing the comma?

"Up and in bed." Explain what is meant.

"By ten." Parse *ten*.

"Old verger." What in the extract shows that he was old?

"The oldest of them." Why not *eldest*?

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