

High School Poetry Book

PART II

THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS¹

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL — *Admetus*

There came a youth upon the earth,
Some thousand years ago,
Whose slender hands were nothing worth,
Whether to plough, or reap, or sow.

Upon an empty tortoise-shell
He stretched some chords, and drew
Music that made men's bosoms swell
Fearless, or brimmed their eyes with dew.

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Then King Admetus, one who had
Pure taste by right divine,
Decreed his singing not too bad
To hear between the cups of wine:

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1. The shepherd of King Admetus was Apollo, god of music and poetry. An old myth relates that Zeus, becoming angry at Apollo, banished him from heaven. For nine years the exiled deity served Admetus, king of Thessaly, as shepherd. What general ideas does Lowell express in his version of this myth?