



Life, Literature and Education.

[Contributions on all subjects of popular interest, whether relating to the Literary Society discussions or not, are always welcome in this Department.]

Our Literary Society.

Quite as much enthusiasm has been shown in the study of "Break, Break, Break," as in our former most successful test on the "Three Fishers." To-day we have only one regret, that within the space allotted to the L. L. & E. we cannot make extended comments on the work of many whose efforts merit especial commendation. We trust our members will understand the reason for this. Our Society is growing very rapidly, and although every paper sent in is carefully examined, it is impossible to find space for the publication of more than two or three "best"—or, it may be, most representative—"best"—answers to each question. However, since our students are continually writing us that they have been already amply repaid for their trouble by the pleasure and profit derived from the study itself, we trust this will deter no one from entering upon the work of the Society.

We trust, too, that those busy folk who have no time, and, perhaps, no inclination to write out the answers to the questions, will, nevertheless, "think" them out, and when the results of the tests are published compare their preconceived ideas with those given by our active members. So may the Literary Society become what we wish it to be, a pleasure and a mental stimulus to every reader of "The Farmer's Advocate."

Study III.

BREAK, BREAK, BREAK!

Break, break, break,
On thy cold, gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is
Dead
Will never come back to me.

—Tennyson.

1. State in a single sentence the central idea in this poem.
2. Describe what the poet's mood likely was when he wrote it.
3. What effect is produced by the bringing in of the boy "shouting," and the sailor lad "singing" in his boat on the bay?
4. What connection of thought is there between lines 3-4, 11-12, 15-16, and those immediately preceding?
5. Does the poet's language seem to you to express his feelings? If

so, explain how he has accomplished this harmony between the emotion and the language used to express it.

6. Can you quote lines from any other poet embodying thoughts in any way similar to those contained in lines 3-4, 15-16?

7. Why is the word "Sea" written throughout with a capital letter?

8. Comment on the form, rhyme, rhythm, etc., of this poem.

9. Write a critical essay on the poem as a whole, explaining, especially, wherein its charm consists.

Selected Answers to Questions

1. Answered correctly by the majority of our students. The following answers, though worded differently, are representative of those submitted by a great many:

"The central idea in the poem is deep grief for the death of a friend."—Margaret.

"The central thought in this poem is one which many of us have realized in all its bitterness; one which Lowell had expressed when he says, 'All round us is an overplus of life, And yet the one dear heart is cold and still.'"—Miss A. McDiarmid.

2. The following, taken collectively, perhaps, describe very accurately the probable state of feeling of the poet when he wrote these stanzas:

"The poet's mood was one of mournful reminiscence."—D. Patton.

"The poet's mood was sad and lonely. He was feeling keenly the loss of his friend, and life without that friend seemed as dreary as the beating of the sea on the cold, gray stones."—L. E. Hamer.

"A mood of quiet, reminiscent sadness. The longing he feels for his friend is intensified by the perfect natural surroundings, until it shadows his spirit like a great wave of homesickness."—Marie Agnean.

"He appears to be in a pensive yet meditative mood, and attracted, as in deep sorrow we often are, by trivial objects."—Mrs. Banks.

Mrs. W. E. Hopkins observes that his mood was "very sombre and fatalistic." That "Break, Break, Break," seems fatalistic is true. There is in it no triumphant ring, no serene hopefulness, as in the latter part of "In Memoriam," or in the closing of "Crossing the Bar":

"For though from out our bourne of
Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have cross'd the bar."

The whole poem, rather, reads like a low moan of sorrow.

3. Nearly all observed how the effect of the main idea in the poem, the poet's aching sorrow, is heightened by the contrast brought in here. As "Son of Erin" notes, the poet thus causes us to contrast, "unconsciously," the exuberant mirth of the young people with his own deep sadness. Yet Tennyson evidently did not plan the comparison for any effect that it might have. He wrote the words, we may surmise, because that comparison was also suggested to him "unconsciously"—perhaps "subconsciously"—would be a better word. When we are sad, after the first great blow has passed, we look on half-enviously, half-wonderingly at the happiness of others. Just one

more quotation: "The shouting and singing of the boys shows the contrast between their light-hearted gayety and the enforced silence of the poet's great sorrow. Tennyson envied the children their power to give vent so naturally to their feelings."—M. E. W.

4. Reading the different opinions expressed on this question has been most interesting. In regard to lines 3-4, M. McMartin, Eula, Mrs. Parlow and "A Friend" all have the same thought. We quote Mrs. Parlow: "The sea beating on the shore, like some great thought struggling for expression, is connected with the impotent desire of the poet to express the thoughts that surge in his own breast."

S. W. Switzer and S. E. Oill get the idea that the sea seems to be actually giving expression to its mood; the poet, who cannot express what he feels, therefore envying it. "The sea apparently gives vent to itself by breaking over the stones. This the poet would gladly do, could he express in words his thoughts."—S. W. Switzer.

"Topsy's" attention is directed rather to the stones: "As the stones are of no avail in keeping back the sea, so words are of no avail to express his intense sadness."

J. D. Taylor is impressed by the "freedom" of the sea in contrast with the care-bound soul. "The poet draws a picture of the free, rolling sea, utterly free from care and human emotion, and the ships going on their way in absolute indifference; and then, in comparison, gives us a glimpse into his own troubled soul."

Mrs. Earle thinks "The sad thoughts that arise, unexpressed, in his mind, are like the waves breaking over the 'cold, gray stones,' accomplishing nothing."

Yet a different interpretation of the connection has been reached by the following, who agree in thinking that the poet feels, in the monotonous, dreary beating of the waves on the rocks, a sort of resemblance to his own dreary, monotonous musings.

"The water breaking on the cold, gray stones seems to respond to his deep, unutterable emotion."—G. B. Augustine.

"The sound of the waves breaking ineffectually on the stones seems to be a sympathetic response to his own deep, unutterable emotion."—Carol.

"The poet is likening his own thoughts to the mournful sound of the waves breaking on the cold, gray stones."—J. H. Burns.

"This very cheerlessness of Nature seems to Tennyson to be in keeping with the dull ache at his heart."—Margaret.

"The water dashing on the stones seems to him to express sorrow, but his tongue is not able to express so well the thoughts within him."—Marion.

In all literary questions of this nature each is, of course, entitled to his own opinion. What one "feels" most must, of necessity, be right to him. Personally, we sympathize with the opinion of this last group in regard to Question 4 (a).

(b) Lines 11-12 with preceding. In answering this, L. Hamer, A Friend, S. W. Switzer, G. B. August-

tine, Topsy, Carol and J. H. Burns agree in thinking that the ships passing to their haven reminded the poet of the "vanished hand," of the friend who had gone to his haven of rest. Katharine McMurich, D. Patton, Mrs. Banks, M. McMartin, Eula, Mrs. Parlow, J. Savage, Mrs. Earle and Margaret interpret the connection in this way: "The poet sees the ships passing on to their desired haven, and feels the bitter contrast, that his desire—the desire to see his friend—cannot be satisfied. Marion, W. J. Way and S. E. Oill think, rather, that the connection lies in the fact that it seems almost strange to the poet that things should go on just as usual, while to him things have changed so sadly. "The world goes on just the same, but we miss the voice of the departed and alone bear the sorrow."—S. E. Oill. Probably a combination of the last two ideas would come very near expressing the poet's own association of thought in writing these lines.

(c) Lines 15-16 with preceding. There were many opinions in regard to this. Katharine McMurich writes: "The sea has the rocks; it is not alone, but the poet is utterly alone in the world." S. E. Oill says: "The sea seems to care for its wind-blown waves, but Tennyson never was the same after the blow of Arthur Hallam's death." Marion, D. Patton and Mrs. Parlow incline to the idea as expressed by the last-named. "The sea keeps on breaking at the foot of the crags, and life goes on as before, but for him life can never again be what it once was." M. E. W. thinks the emphasis lies on the monotony of the breakers dashing on the rocks, and its similarity to the cheerless, daily routine of his now empty life. James Savage says: "Lines 15-16 show that the things of the past can never be recalled while the sea beats at the foot of the crags." Marie Agnean, Farmer John, Miss Jessie Lynes, A Friend, Topsy, L. Hamer, G. B. Augustine, Carol, Mrs. Earle, Eula, M. McMartin and Margaret agree in thinking that the lines indicate how utterly futile is the passionate wish of the poet that the old days might return.

A close study of the stanza will show that all of these opinions are right. To express much thought in few words is often an especial quality of the best poetry.

5. This question was well answered by James Savage, Miss Lynes, J. H. Burns, Topsy, L. Hamer, Mrs. Earle, D. Lock, Mrs. Banks, Mrs. Hopkins, Margaret, G. B. Augustine, D. Patton, R. Harris, Mrs. Parlow, M. McMartin, W. J. Way, A Friend and Carol. Probably the following answers (only a part of each answer is given) are the most representative, and must be taken collectively to fully answer the question: "The opening words, 'Break, break, break,' are dirgelike. The repetition of this long monosyllable (break) conveys a despairing moan that can be better felt than described."—A Friend.

"The repetition of the word 'O' is very expressive of his unsatisfied longings. He was not in the mood to speak dispassionately of his loss, and thus use the assertive mood; but he makes use of the exclamative, which