



## 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.]

The following are the essays on Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break," which were omitted last week.

### ESSAY I.

The poem is purely emotional, and for this reason it is as difficult for us to grasp its elusive charm for the purpose of defining it as it was for Tennyson in his first grief to analyze that emotion. Later he wrote a longer poem on the same subject, in which he held up each phase of his emotion and analyzed it as minutely as a botanist does a rare plant. But that was after the calmness of "mild-minded melancholy" had succeeded the first outburst of grief and despair.

Because it was written under stress of great grief, it appeals to us all as the expression of our own experience. Many of us have yearned for the "touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still," and have felt the lack of sympathy between ourselves and those unacquainted with the deeper sorrows of life.

The arrangement of ideas is so in harmony with the mood depicted that it brings the experience very closely home to us. Our minds may be diverted for a time by outward and visible things, just as the writer notes the children and sailor folk; but they are noted with a feeling of aloofness that we all understand. After noting the passing of the ships, again comes the dirge-like "Break, break, break," of the opening of the poem. The mind has returned to its absorption in its grief. The sea stands for nothing specific, but by its perpetual murmur on the shore attunes the soul to the keynote of sorrow, and preaches the relation of suffering to the infinite. Observe the subtle change introduced in the refrain. The first stanza gives us the appropriate atmosphere of grief, with the waves breaking upon the "cold, gray stones"; in the last stanza, as if with the fruitlessness of despair, the sea breaks at the base of its inaccessible crags.

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### ESSAY II.

The poem, as a whole, is a masterpiece of composition. The thoughts of the poet are so vividly brought out in it that you would naturally suppose that Tennyson was living in a place near to the sea at the time of its composition; but instead of this he was far inland. No doubt he had often stood on the seashore and watched the waves break on the rocky crags. Doubtless, too, he had often watched the fisherman's boy, the sailor lad and the stately ships. These images proved to be the living pictures of memory best suited to immortalize the remembrance of his departed friend.

Arthur Hallam, from boyhood, was a young man of such a singularly sweet disposition that his impression on Tennyson was lasting. That they were boon companions, of like dispositions, temperaments and tastes, goes without saying. This being the case, it was only natural that they should be drawn together as friends that sticketh closer than a brother.

Hallam was travelling abroad when he died. Tennyson, on hearing the sudden news, was thrown into a deep grief that seemed to find a partial expression and relief in the beautiful poem, "Break, Break, Break."

The charm of the poem consists (1) in its brevity. Much is contained in little. So full is it of meaning, and so natural is the train of thought contained therein, that scarcely a single word could be omitted without marring the whole.

(2) In its simplicity. It is free from newly-coined words. It contains not a single expression that the ordinary intellect cannot grasp the meaning of, and yet so perfectly do they fit that you almost feel the sorrow that was stirring him within.

(3) In its purity. Purity of thought calls for purity of expression. We have it here as it is seldom found in the works of poets. Tennyson, the man of Christian virtues, was the poet of the heart and affections, the poet of purity, simplicity and brevity. These are the characteristics that charm in all his works, especially this poem.

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### ESSAY III.

In style, "Break, Break, Break," is essentially a mood poem; that is, one which gives expression to some aspect of feeling, such as hatred or love of action, happiness, regret, longing or remorse. The object of such a poem is, therefore, not to tell a story, and yet in it some story may be incidentally told and scenes depicted, not for their own sakes, however, but only to heighten the desired impression. Thus, in this particular poem we have a vivid picture of the wide expanse of sea dotted with the ships—the same sea which had brought "up from the underworld" the last remains of the poet's friend; and perhaps the same ship, laden with "its dark freight, a vanished life." And while describing the little harbor, nestling away beneath the overhanging chalk cliffs of England, Tennyson must have been thinking of the last resting-place of Arthur Hallam, the lonely little church of St. Andrew.

Geo. Stewart calls this poem "The loveliest lyric ever written;" and there are three prominent characteristics which constitute its loveliness and charm. First, Nature is intermingled with its passion and emotion. The picturesque "haven under the hill," the sea breaking at the foot of its crags, "the stately ships," all go to make up one perfect picture and a fit setting for the poem itself. Secondly, by the harmony of sound and sense, and the quick changes of meter, we can almost hear the dirge-like sounds of the sea as it echoes and sobs on its "cold, gray stones."

and in among the caverns of the low-lying cliffs.

Leaving the external beauty, and turning our attention to the deeper meaning of the poem, we find its real charm to lie in the innermost thoughts of the poet's own heart. This little lyric is especially characteristic of Tennyson, for of all the poets he alone gives expression to that seemingly inexpressible longing for the past, "the pathos of inevitable change," as:

"What vague world-whisper, mystic pain  
or joy,  
Through those three words would haunt  
him when a boy.

Far, far away!"

and:

"So sad, so strange the days that are  
no more."

In "Tears, Idle Tears," Tennyson gives expression to the "wild regret" for unrequited love, but in "Break, Break, Break" we have the deep, unutterable longing "for the touch of the vanished hand," "for the sound of the voice that is still." And in these few words lies the charm of the poem, for they always have and always will touch a responsive chord in the hearts of all mankind.

R. H.

Haldimand Co., Ont.

The above is a very excellent essay. In one or two points, however, it may be found wanting. (1) Hallam was not drowned, as this essay would imply. He died at Vienna, but was, of course, brought home by ship. This mistake, however, does not impair the value of the essay from a literary standpoint. It is due merely to lack of historic knowledge of the circumstances under which the poem was written, and by no means affects the interpretation of the poem itself. (2) R. H. says: "Of all the poets, Tennyson 'alone' gives expression, etc., etc." This may be open to challenge. R. H. has surely forgotten Wordsworth and many minor poets who have expressed longing for the past.

### ESSAY IV.

To Tennyson belongs peculiarly the power to describe the dumb, aching pain of the human heart, and to express the utter loneliness and deep longing of human nature. In this poem that power is displayed in a remarkable degree. He voices that passionate longing for those we have lost as only one could who has had the experience. Yet the grief is not loud and wailing; it is rather the almost inarticulate cry of an overburdened heart. It is in this wistfulness of feeling and in the revelation of its depth that a large part of the charm of the poem lies.

Another attraction lies in the keen sympathy of nature. The mood of the sea harmonizes exactly with the poet's own mood. The emotion is brought out almost as much in the dull, gray scenery of the coast as in the more direct expression. What a picture of dreariness is presented by the monotonous breaking of the waves on the "cold, gray stones." The picture is not all dreary, however. The children shouting and singing form a pleasing contrast and

give a lighter touch to the poem. Nor does the majesty of the scene escape notice. The stately passage of the ships seems to illustrate so well his friend's peaceful voyage over the Sea of Life.

Then, again, the form and rhythm of the poem deserve attention. The very movement of the stanzas expresses so completely the dumb grief and pain, while the "Break, break, break" of the waves emphasizes greatly the loneliness. The arrangement of the stanzas is also very happy. First we see only the sea beating on the rocks, then the scene widens out till we see the whole bay, with the lad singing in his boat, and in the distance the ships passing quietly on to their haven. Then we are brought back again to the crags, and the realization that:

"The tender grace of a day that is dead  
Will never come back to me."

The poem, as a whole, shows Tennyson's wonderful attention to detail and effect. Everything is brought into harmony, and every line and stanza is polished until it expresses perfectly each image and thought.

L. Hamer.

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This essay, also an excellent one, revealing very fully the writer's keen sense of the emotion of the poem, is somewhat open to adverse criticism. The children playing, the sailor lad singing, are not brought in to give a lighter vein to the poem, but are spoken of simply because the poet, in noticing them, feels the contrast between their light-heartedness and his sorrow so keenly. Again, we scarcely think the use of the word "polished" here is advisable. Although Tennyson often did polish his work, so that the reader may feel his conscious effort in doing so, this little poem seems a spontaneous outburst of the heart. One cannot think of anyone deliberately "polishing" such a poem as "Break, Break, Break."

### FROM "IN MEMORIAM."

Mr. R. H., Haldimand Co., asks for the publication of some of the stanzas from "In Memoriam" showing the depth of Tennyson's grief at the death of Hallam. He asks for section XIX. We reproduce this section, also XXVIII. and XXX., which were written about the first Christmas after Hallam's death. The reference to the Danube will be understood when it is remembered that Hallam died at Vienna. He was buried near the Severn, of which the Wye is a tributary:

### XIX.

The Danube to the Severn gave  
The darkened heart that beat no more,  
They laid him by the pleasant shore,  
And in the hearing of the wave.

There twice a day the Severn fills;  
The salt sea-water passes by,  
And hushes half the babbling Wye,  
And makes a silence in the hills.

The Wye is hushed nor moved along,  
And hushes my deepest grief of all,  
When still with tears that cannot fall,  
I bend with sorrow drowning song.