

**ECLECTIC ENGLISH CLASSICS.
MATTHEW ARNOLD'S SOHRAB
AND RUSTUM; WITH QUESTIONS
AND SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY**

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MATTHEW ARNOLD'S
SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

WITH QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY BY

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INTRODUCTION.

MATTHEW ARNOLD was born at Laleham, England, Dec. 24, 1822. He was the son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, who, as head master of the Rugby School, was accounted one of the greatest educational reformers of England.

Matthew Arnold entered Rugby in 1837, and a few years later went to Balliol College, Oxford, where in 1840 he won a scholarship for proficiency in Latin. In 1843 he won the Newdigate prize for English verse, the subject of his poem being "Cromwell."

While Arnold was a student at Oxford, he associated with such men as Thomas Hughes, the Froudes, Bishop Fraser, Dean Church, John Henry Newman, and Arthur Hugh Clough. With Clough he formed a deep friendship, and mourned his death in the exquisite elegiac poem "Thyrsis." In 1844 he was graduated with honors, and in 1845 was elected a fellow of Oriel College. Two years later he became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, which position he held until 1851.

Up to this date Arnold's life had been preëminently that of a student, although in 1848 he had published his first volume of song, "The Strayed Reveler, and other Poems," and later the narrative poem, "The Sick King in Bokhara." But in 1851, after a short term as assistant teacher at Rugby, he was appointed lay inspector of schools, under the Committee of Coun-

cil on Education, and began his valuable and efficient work in educational matters which formed the regular occupation of his life. The same year he married the daughter of Justice Wightman.

In 1859 he visited France, Germany, and Holland, to inquire into the methods of primary education in those countries; and he published his observations on this subject in 1868, in an essay entitled "Schools and Universities on the Continent." In 1865 he again went abroad, this time with the view of reporting on the schools for the middle and upper classes in France and Germany; and shortly before retiring from the office of inspector, he made a third journey to the Continent, and examined particularly the elementary schools of the different nations.

It was only a few years before his death that he resigned (1886) his position under the Committee of Council on Education. He was at all times an ardent advocate of soundness and excellence in elementary education; and his observation soon led him to attribute to the lack of organized middle-class education the dullness, sordid instincts, blind prejudices, and moral obtuseness that characterize the middle classes of English society. Grouping these faults under the name "Philistinism," he held them up for reprobation, and labored to prove that they could be remedied only by better and broader education.

In 1853 Arnold published "Empedocles, and other Poems;" but he soon became dissatisfied with much in the volume, and suppressed the whole work. Yet this book, in addition to the former volumes of verse, established his reputation as a poet in England; and in 1857 he was elected professor of poetry at Oxford, a chair which he held for ten years. "Merope," a tragedy, with a volume entitled "New Poems," published in 1869, finishes the list of his poetical works.

A series of essays on translating Homer was published in 1861, and was followed in 1868 by another on the study of Celtic literature. His great and enduring work, however, appeared in 1865, and consisted of two series of prose discourses, "Essays in Criticism." The treatises "Culture and Anarchy," and "Irish Essays and others," followed.

The modern tendency to drift away from the old established religious faith was a source of serious grief, and matter for deep thought, to Arnold. He gave his mind to the consideration of what was best and most lasting in religion, and tried to give to the world a rational creed that would satisfy the skeptics and attract the indifferent. The volumes "St. Paul and Protestantism" (1871), "Literature and Dogma" (1873), "God and the Bible" (1875), and "Last Essays on Church and State" (1877), embody the fruit of his thought in this direction.

Arnold delivered the Cambridge Annual Rede Lecture in June, 1882, choosing for his subject "Literature and Science." He received the degree of LL.D. from Edinburgh in 1869, and from his own college, Oxford, in 1870.

He visited the United States twice. The first time he delivered a lecture on Emerson, and one on the principle and value of numbers. During his second visit, in 1886, made for the Committee of Council on Education, he delivered a lecture on the subject of education on the European continent. Arnold was struck by the relative lack of ideality, absence of great institutions, and predominance of the money-getting mania in America. His criticism of our nation, though perhaps just, was severe; but it was no more severe than were many of his criticisms of English traits and of the institutions of his native land.

He died suddenly and quietly of heart disease, at the house of

a friend in Liverpool, England, on April 15, 1888. He was buried at his birthplace, Laleham. By his death England lost a learned scholar, a polished writer, an earnest educational reformer, a good man, and, above all, one of her most acute and cultured critics.

Matthew Arnold was deeply imbued with the spirit of Greek culture, and in this culture he found his ideal standards, to which he brought for comparison all questions that engrossed his thoughts. He is perhaps the purest classic writer that England ever produced; classic not merely in the repose of his style, but in the unity and simplicity of his habit of thought.

Mr. Jacobs, in the "Athenæum," gives a very just criticism of Arnold, from which the substance of the following is taken.

Although it is quite usual to speak of Arnold as having revolutionized English book criticism, when we come to examine the facts, we realize that his judgments of books were few, and were not always trustworthy. He criticised authors and their work in a general way, rather than any of their books in particular.

But why, then, we ask, was Matthew Arnold such a force in criticism, and where did he gain his reputation as a critic?

"What he did in criticism was to introduce the *causerie* (or chat), and with it the personal element. The personality of Matthew Arnold was, with all its affectations and mannerisms, so attractive, that a chat with him charmed not so much by adding to our information about the author or his books, as because it added to our knowledge of Matthew Arnold."

His was a criticism of life, and dealt with the deepest issues of his time: he discussed problems social, theological, and literary. His exposition was rather peculiar. He recognized the fact that

iteration and reiteration of certain formulæ would impress on the mind the particular view which they were designed to express. This repetition may have been exasperating, but it effected its purpose, as we cannot fail to see when we recall some of these phrases, as "sweetness and light," "criticism of life," "barbarians, Philistines, and populace," "the need of expression, the need of manners, the need of intellect, the need of beauty, the need of conduct." While the effect of these formulæ may have been chiefly mechanical, the discussions which they summarized were examples of the most logical inductive or deductive reasoning.

His powers of analysis were great, and his summary of "needs" given above is a remarkable description of man as a social being. He gave the vogue to the cultus of culture, which was in his hands something precise. Although civilization is a difficult problem to analyze, yet, when he spoke of it, it seemed to be something real and definite, and not the vague abstractions of the sophist.

His power of analysis showed itself clearly in his theological studies. As regards his own solution of the religious problem, little need here be said. His very formula, which is purposely vague and indefinite, is its own condemnation; but it must not be forgotten that his literary tone, and the gentle irony with which he treated all extremes, helped to prevent an explosion of theological or anti-theological polemics. Although his particular way of putting his solution of theological difficulties is not likely to gain many disciples, he has certainly greatly influenced English opinion; and we may feel that he was right in laying stress upon his theological activity and its results, as the most influential and abiding part of his work.

Arnold began life as a poet, and, if we can divorce the poet

from the technique of his art, he remained one to the end. His was a poetic force, a uniform recognition of the permanent power and reality of the ideal element in the human character. He himself has defined his ideas of poetry, and they are seen to be distinctly Greek. He says, "The radical difference between the poetic theory of the Greeks and our own is this: that with them the poetical character of the action in itself, and the conduct of it, was the first consideration; with us, attention is fixed mainly on the value of the separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action. They regarded the whole: we regard the parts. We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages, and not for the sake of producing any total impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not to the action itself. I verily believe that the majority of them do not believe that there is such a thing as a total impression to be derived from a poem at all, or to be demanded from a poet. They will permit the poet to select any action he pleases, and to suffer that action to go as it will, provided he gratifies them with occasional bursts of fine writing, and with a shower of isolated thoughts and images; that is, they permit him to leave their poetical sense ungratified, provided that he gratifies their rhetorical sense and their curiosity."

He has illustrated with remarkable success his ideas of that unity which gratifies the poetical sense, and has approached very close to his Greek models in his epic or narrative poem of "Sohrab and Rostum." Here we have a theme which is intensely tragic, and which challenges our sympathy at once. A young hero in search of his warrior father, whom he has never seen, meets him in deadly single combat between the lines of