not the case with Tennyson. Inspite of his being a Victorian poet voicing in poetry the hopes and aspirations of the people of his times, Tennyson enjoys his fame and name. It is not by what he ‘said’ but by how he said it that Tennyson has been able to win for himself a host of admirers. It is the manner, the poetic style, and the skilled craftsmanship of the poet that have earned for him a lasting place among the poets of his country. It is by virtue of his qualities as a consummate artist that he is remembered and adored to-day. R. C. Jebb writes, “The gifts by which Tennyson has and will keep his place among the great poets of England are pre-eminently those of an artist.” R. Brimley Johnson says, “Tennyson was before all things a flawless artist.”

As a metrical Artist

Tennyson’s mastery of rhythm and metre is commendable. “Here is the absolute sway of metre, compelling every rhyme and measure needful to the thought; here are sinuous alliterations, unique and varying breaks and pauses, winged flights and falls, the glory of sound and colour everywhere present.” From the beginning of his poetic career Tennyson exhibited his interest in metrical experiments. His first volume, Poems, Chiefly Lyrical published in 1830, at the age of twenty one, showed that the poet had mastered the principles of English prosody and had understood how those principles could actually be applied in poetic composition. In these early poems every variety of rhythm was dexterously employed, though the ‘rising’ foot was more common than the ‘falling’. Both dactyls and anapaestcs were freely used to give the air of rhythm, speed and lightness.

Tennyson’s second volume of poems published in 1842 indicated that the poet’s grasp of structure and rhythm was steadily increasing. The Lady of Shallot was the triumph of metrical art. The entire poem was written in a stanza of seven lines, the first four all with the same rhyme-ending, and a refrain after the third and fourth lines. It was a difficult metre but Tennyson handled it with great lightness and freedom. The Two Voices in the form of a dialogue between the tempter and the man bent upon suicide, was composed in a stanza of three short lines with a single rhyme and sledge hammer regularity which gave to the dialogue a great force. In the Lotos-Eaters the skill
of the poet matured. The introductory lines are in the Spenserian stanza. 'The choric song' is written in iambic lines which vary in length between three feet and seven feet. The rhythm is considerably manipulated by the inversion of iambics into troches. The poem forestalls the method of Maud. The rhythm is adapted successfully to the fluctuating emotions of the theme. The movement of the lines is in conformity with the thoughts of the mariners. In adjusting the thoughts with the rhythm of the lines Tennyson achieved great success.

In In Memoriam Tennyson perfected the stanza of four iambic lines of four feet each with enclosed rhymes (ab ba). Instead of being monotonous the stanza proved to be eminently successful. The quatrains of In Memoriam had earlier been used by Lord Herbert of Cherbury and by Ben Jonson, but Tennyson stole a march over them by manipulating the rhythm.

In Maud Tennyson produced a lyrical monologue of 1200 lines representing the story of love, death and madness. The metre of Maud is iambic but it is plentifully varied with anapaests. The lines vary in length from six feet to three and the rhyme schemes are exceedingly fluid and so well managed that, although the rhyme is hardly ever obtrusive, it never fails to act as an effective link in the chain of sound. By these means Tennyson evolved a form of extraordinary speed, fluency and adaptability.

Tennyson employed blank verse in The Princess, English Idyll and Idylls of the King. Blank verse had been used by the Elizabethans and by Milton. Tennyson's blank verse has a natural freedom, simplicity and tenderness. When his theme is reflective and oratorical, the blank verse becomes, 'melodious, sonorous, variously paused and felicitously drawn into paragraph. In narrative pieces like Morte D' Arthur it has strength and condensation whereas in Ulysses it has epic grandeur, sublimity and slow movement.' "Tennyson's blank verse" says Charles Tennyson in Six Tennyson's Essays "has not the majesty of Milton's, nor the rhetorical splendour and freedom of Shelley's, nor the natural eloquence and dignity of Wordsworth's; but it has striking merits of its own chief among which are, I think, its amazing flexibility, and its power of achieving, through rhythm and vowel music, a lyrical, singing quality which no other poet has attained in the
same degree.” “Tennyson’s blank verse” says Compton-Rickett, “is inexpressibly finer in quality than any attempted by the poets of the Romantic Revival, and to rival it one must go back to Milton.”

Tennyson’s great merit as a metrical artist lies in three directions. In the first place he knew the art of adapting sound to sense. The movement of his lines exactly reflects the sense. This is presented in a remarkable manner in the opening lines of the *Lotos Eaters*, where an atmosphere of sleepiness and drowsiness is being produced by the use of drowsy and soft syllables. Nicholson says, “One has only to read the painting, spasmodic interjection of *Maud* or the frenzied sweep of *Boadicea*, the rattling galliambics of which, so unlike the effeminacy of the *Atils* have all the fire of Borodin’s *Igor*, to realise what a remarkable talent Tennyson possessed for accommodating the movement of his verse to its subject, for making the gradation of his theme by the sublter changes of key and intonation.” Secondly, Tennyson was the master in the subtle and pervading employment of alliteration. This exhibits his manual dexterity, but alliteration is employed with rare skill by the poet—

*The moan of doves in immemorial elms,*  
*and murmuring of innumerable bees.*  
* (The Princess).*

Lastly, Tennyson’s mastery in vowel-music is unparalleled in Victorian poetry. “Dexterous manipulation of vowel sounds constitutes Tennyson’s most original contribution to the harmonics of English language.” He took great pains to avoid harsher guturals and sibilants from his verse. It was his perfection of vowel balance which made his poetry musical. It was by the shifting of the stress, by the interchanges of vowel sounds and by the use of alliteration, that Tennyson was able to vary the inherent monotony of *In Memoriam*, and add richness to the melody of *Lotos Eaters*. The sense of music is equally conspicuous in the melody of his diction. The mere sound of his words and phrases lingers long in the mind. This is, in the main, due to his selection of melodious vowels and liquid consonants, and also to his skilful use of alliteration. Lastly his use of onomatopoeic words—(through zig-zag paths and justs of pointed rocks) enhances the sweet harmony of his use. An example of Tennyson’s
use of vowel-music is given from *Lotos-Eaters* to show how masterly did he use this device to create music in poetry—

> And thro' the moss ivies creep,
> And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
> And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

As a musician in words Tennyson will always be loved. His is the song the sirens sing. He carries his measures like a flowing stream through the ups and downs of rhythmic scales. His melodies vibrating and quivering sweetly resound in the ears, and the high soaring flights of his rapturous chants entrance the hearts of the readers.

Summing up, we can say that Tennyson, "was one of the most skilful metrists among English poets and could turn out fascinating exercises in odd rhythms. He could write in 1868 such a poem as *Lucretious*, the most daring and complex of his dramatic monologues. And the same poet could write the rollicking narrative ballad *The Revenge* and the two lively satirical dialect monologues *Northern Farmer: Old Style* and *Northern Farmer: New Style*. If he had lacked complexity, and, at times emotional discipline, he could show himself master of the simple mood-lyric, a brilliant manipulator of language to the ear, and a conscientious craftsman who could work up a remarkably high polish to his work. He remains one of the most skilful and within the area he chose to cultivate one of the most professionally competent."*

**As A Pictorial Artist**

Tennyson was a great pictorial artist. He was gifted with unrivalled powers of picturing a scene, a landscape, a person in words marked with clarity and vividness. This art of pictorial painting was learnt by the poet quite early in his life by keeping Keats’ pictorial paintings as his models. His art was essentially picturesque and he used words as the painter employs his brush for conveying the impression of a scene in all its vivid glory and colour. Steadman’s significant remarks in *Victorian Poets* regarding Tennyson’s pictorial powers are worth quoting. He says, "Leaving the architecture of Tennyson’s poetry and coming to the sentiment which it seeks to express we are struck at once by the fact that an idyllic or picturesque mode of conveying that

* David Daiches: *A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II.*
sentiment is the one natural to his poet, if not the only one permitted by his limitations." Leaving aside Shakespeare, Spenser, Keats, no poet was able to draw such gorgeous pictures of landscapes as Tennyson did. Nearly all Tennyson's poems, even the simplest, are rich in ornate descriptions of natural and other scenes. "His method" says Albert, "is to seize upon appropriate details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus throw a glistening image before the reader's eye."

The Princess is rich in pictures of beauty and loveliness. The finest pictorial painting of landscape is seen in The Lotus-Eaters, where the poet draws the picture of the island in all the richness of nature's scenery. It was a land of streams in which the Lotus-Eaters found themselves—

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.

The Lady of Shallot is rich in splendid descriptions. The opening lines of this poem vividly catch the scene—

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the fold the road runs by
To many-towered Camelot.

His pictures of Nature in In Memorium are quite significant and reflect the calmness of grief and provide an appropriate ground to human sentiment—

Calm is the morn without a sound,
Calm as to suit a calmer grief.
And only through the faded leaf
The chestnut pattering to the ground.

Tennyson remained throughout his career as a poet the superb master of imaginative descriptions. His Eagle is a poem of six lines, but it is a fine piece of pictorial painting. It leaves a picture which cannot be forgotten;

He clasps the crag with crooked hands
Close to the sun in lonely lands
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

A Dream of Fair Women is almost wholly composed of imagina-
tive descriptions. O Enone has fine array of pictures, like that
suggested by the scenery of the Pyreness:—

The long brook falling this the c'ov'n ravin
In cataract after cataract to the sea.

As An Artist in General

Tennyson was an artist of a high order, and he cultivated the
art of poetic composition with great labour and industry. Like
Keats he was a conscious and deliberate artist spending con-
siderable time and energy in perfecting the form and the style
of poetic expression. His ideal of poetry was that it should be
simple, sensuous and pictorial. The Poet's Mind reveals his
conception of his art as a poet. In his view poetry should be
transparent, flowing, and crystal clear like the waters of a limpid
stream. In conformity with his principles he developed his
artistic qualities in a particular pattern of thought emphasising
on the necessity of cultivating the quality of simplicity, lucidity,
charity, sublimity, unity and completeness.

In Tennyson's art the first thing that strikes us is simplicity.
Nothing was ever done by the poet for effect. His style has the
stamp of simplicity, though simplicity never borders on the land
of baldness. "Vital sincerity or living correspondence between
idea and form, that absolute necessity for all fine art as for noble
life, was his, and it is contained in his simplicity."

Clarity and lucidity are other traits of Tennyson's art. He
never involved himself like Browning in the obscure and thorny
depths of metaphysics and theology. Stopford A. Brooke rightly
says, "Deliberately he did not attempt to write about that which
he could not express with lucidity of thought and form. He
determined to be clear."

A sense of beauty and adoration of the beautiful aspects
of nature and human life characterised Tennyson's art. He was
a votary of beauty. He possessed an unfailing instinct for form
in beauty. He had the power of shaping beauty and loveliness
in nature and human life. "His love of the skilfulness of art, the
careful study of words and their powers in verse, his mingled strength and dainties—all his technique was not for its own sake, but was first urged by his love of beauty.” Tennyson’s adoration of beauty was very much like that of Keats. His cult of beauty is embodied in three poems—*The Poet*, *The Poet’s Mind*, and *The Poet’s Song*. He is highly sensitive to all forms of beauty—physical as well as spiritual, and is a true artist in the adoration of beauty.

Tennyson’s art has the stamp of sublimity, stateliness and dignity about it. Nothing is written in a plebeian style. He avoids all that is commonplace, and presents ordinary ideas in a dignified way. He is a fastidious artist who believes in perfect finish. “Tennyson was one of those poets who, like Milton and Wordsworth, consider themselves as consecrated spirits. This sense of their vocation makes them reverence their work rather than themselves. It imparts stateliness to their verse, gives it a moral virtue, a spiritual strength, and emerges in a certain grandeur or splendour of style.”

One of the greatest qualities of Tennyson as an artist is that his poems, especially shorter ones, are marked with a note of unity of impression and soundness of construction. Though Tennyson’s longer poems may be wanting in this unity of impression and construction, yet the lighter pieces, like *Ulysses*, *The Two Voices*, *The Vision of Sin* owe a great deal of their charm to the unity of impression which they convey. “The best proof of the great advance which Tennyson had made in the art of construction is to be found in *The Lotos-Eaters*, a piece which can hardly be paralleled except in Spenser or in Thomson’s *Castle of Indolence.*”

Tennyson’s exquisite polish, chiselled phrases, and perfection of form are remarkable qualities of his art. “With the exception of Gray” says Grierson, “English poetry had produced nothing since Milton that is so obviously the result of strenuous and unwearyed pursuit of perfection of form.” He gave considerable thought to the art of expression, and he succeeded in coining phrases like “jewels five words long”—with the dexterity of a skilled craftsman. He spared no pains to impart the best finish and perfection to his pieces of poetic art by revising, rewriting
original gift, of Spenser in uniform excellence and grasp of a huge subject, of Shakespeare in universality, in height and depth, of Milton in grandeur and lovely sublimity; of Wordsworth in ethical weight and grip of nature behind the veil, of Shelley in unearthliness, and of Keats in voluptuous spontaneity, yet deserves to be ranked with the best of these except Shakespeare only in virtue of its astonishing display of poetic art.”

Q. 8. Write a short essay on Tennyson as a Lyric Poet.
Or
Comment on Tennyson’s Lyrical excellence.
Ans Tennyson was by temperament a lyrical poet. He had been endowed with all those qualities which would have made him the supreme lyric poet of his country, but unfortunately the poet did not strictly follow the lyric force of his genius and allowed his lyric energy to be obscured by less vital elements. Instead of remaining a singer voicing forth the subjective feelings that welled in his heart, he chose to be a dramatist, a narrative poet, an ethical teacher, and a communal bard. This association of Tennyson with other energies (ethical, theological, didactic) along with his lyrical energy certainly bedimmed the glory of his lyrical genius, and made him more of a philosophic thinker than a pure lyric poet. Had he realised that what he felt was infinitely more important than what he thought, he would have been another Shelley or Swinburne in English lyric poetry. But Tennyson was forced by circumstances into fifty years of unnatural objectivity. “He chose the easier and more prosperous course” says Harold Nicholson, “of becoming the Laureate of his age. He subordinated the lyric to the instructional. His poetry thereby has lost one half of its potential value.”

In spite of the fact that Tennyson allowed his lyric genius to be dominated by philosophic thoughts, yet his lyric flow could not be completely ebbed, and from time to time the poet composed songs and lyrics of exquisite beauty and loveliness. The restraining force of caution and philosophy could not chill the ardour of his soul, and lyrics and songs continued to flow from his pen right up from the age of seventeen to the ripe old age of
eighty. Tennyson could keep up his power for melody and song even to the age of eighty. During the long span of his poetic career he produced such fine pieces of lyricism as *Mariana*, *Oriana*, *Fatima*, *Merman* and *Mermaid*, *The Miller's Daughter*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Break-Break-Break*, *The Dream of Fair Women*, *Locksley Hall*, *The Brooke*, *The Splendour falls on castle walls*, *Tears*, *Idle Tears*, *Come into the Garden—Maud*, *O Swallow, Swallow*. These songs and lyrics attract us by their luscious melody, their tilting music, their Aeolic chiselling of phrase and their exquisite finish. These lyrics are masterpieces of his genius. Commenting on the greatness of these lyrics and songs a critic has aptly pointed out, "Tennyson's genius is lyrical. He has the great gift of song, though without the rapture that sometimes attends it. Whatever he touches, he transmutes into a sweet melody, simple and personal, or rich and sonorous."

Tennyson's lyrics are extremely melodious and musical. The poet has a trained and refined ear for music and metrical harmony, and the metrical flow of his lines is completely free from the defects of rhythm and melody. He knows the art of harmonising the sense with the sound of the words employed in his lyrics. Dunn rightly writes, "He is a great poet because he is a great artist, a master of words and metres, a maker of magical music."

This lyrical gift is nowhere so well employed as in giving expression to a sense of loss, recollected after the occasion of grief, and brooded over intellectual anguish and stoical suffering. This feeling mingles with the voices of the sea or the mists of the air or finds illustration in many pictures from Nature. In a more joyous mood the poet enables us to see the idyllic side of English life—its quite rural scenery, rich perfumes of summer or the rare tints of autumn.

Tennyson's lyrics and songs, in spite of all the eulogy that they have won from critics and admirers of his poetry, cannot be placed in the first rank of lyrics and songs. As Albert points out, "On the whole his nature was too self-conscious and perhaps his life too regular and prosperous to provide a background for the true lyrical intensity of emotion." The lyrics of Tennyson, with all their charm, hardly scale the radiance of a lyric by Sappho.
Sophocles. They fail to move us and strike a sympathetic chord in our heart. Even some of the lyrics of pathos and mourning fail to move us. Oliver Elton is of the opinion that Tennyson is more at home in classical lyrics—odellike or commemorative—carefully concerted pieces, be the short or long with full rolling lines than in the briefer spontaneous kind. Rarely his songs attain the same intensity as the songs of Burns, Scott and Shelley do. Their pathetic strains do not move us to pity and despair. Even the music of Tennyson’s loveliest songs is somewhat languorous. It is—

*Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Thun tir’d eyelids upon tir’d eyes.*

The music is a little cloying. The songs fail to appeal to our feelings. “No one can dispute the feeling of Tennyson’s lyric, but it is usually clothed in such subtle graces of fancy, in such artful cadences, in such enamelled colouring, that it strikes the imagination more than the heart.” Even the music fails to attract, for it appears the music of recitation, of memory, of thought, rather than of song. The songs of Burns as ‘My love is like a red, red rose’ or ‘The devil came fidyling through the town’ are more attractive and appealing than the songs of Tennyson. In them we feel the lack of feeling and genuine emotion which we come across in Shakespeare’s songs such as ‘Full Fathom five Thy Father lies’ or “Tell me where is Fancy bred’. Tennyson’s songs and lyrics thus fail to appeal to our heart with the same intensity and emotional force as the lyrics of Burns and Shelley appeal us. But comparisons are odious. Tennyson inspite of the shortcomings in his art is a lyrical poet and some of his lyrics and songs will continue to provide a feast of delight to the readers for they have at least the gift of melody in them.

Q. 9. Give a brief account of the Poetical and Dramatice works of Robert Browning (1812—89)

Ans. Robert Browning, the great Victorian poet, began his poetic career under the inspiring example of P. B. Shelley, the sun-treader. His earliest work in poetry is *Pauline* (1833). It was published when the poet had attained the age of twenty one. The poem is a monologue addressed to Pauline on ‘the incidents
in the development of a soul.' It is autobiographical in tone like Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Browning the artist and the thinker is here veiled in embryo. The book did not sell at all and Browning, later on, decided to withdraw it from circulation. However at the insistence of his friends it was allowed to be in circulation and later on it attracted attention. Browning's next important work in poetry was *Paracelsus* (1835). It is a drama with four characters and is, again, a story of 'incidents in the development of a soul.' It is the study of Paracelsus, a famous chemist of the Renaissance times, half mystic, half charlatan (1493—1541) who

_Determined to be_

*The greatest and most glorious man on earth._

Through the mouth of Paracelsus Browning poured forth with inexhaustible eloquence his own ideas and aspirations. "Paracelsus is the victim of his high ambition, which is to attain truth and transform the life of a man. For the sake of this ideal he commits the blunder of rejecting emotion and eschewing love. Too late he understands his mistake. His failure is glorious but he fails. This enormous poem by a young man is astonishingly spirited and deeply imbued with philosophy. As a work of art it suffers from its very richness and redundance and from its lack of controlling form and outline."*

In 1840 Browning produced *Sordello* representing the life of a little known Italian poet in a language and style that could not be comprehended even by the best of literary men of the times. Browning deals in this poem the relationship between art and life. The poem is rich in allusions and historical references, and some of them are so obscure that even modern scholars with their crusading zeal for research have not been able to find their exact source. The work failed to attract attention and was considered a derelict in the ocean of poetry. Tennyson complained that he understood only two lines of *Sordello*—the first, "Who will may hear Sordello's story told" and the last, "Who would has heard 'Sordello's story told'—and that they were both lies.

In 1842 Browning produced *Dramatic Lyrics* followed by *Dramatic Romances* and *Lyrics* in 1845. In these dramatic lyrics

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there is more of artistic pleasure than was provided by Browning in the early philosophical works of his life. Among the lyrics of this volume the most significant are *Evelyn Hope*, *In a Gondola*, *Porphyria’s Lover*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *Meeting at Night*, *Parting at Morning*, *By the Fireside*, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*.

In Dramatic Romances and Lyrics the majority of the poems are narratives or monologues including such well known poems as *My Last Duchess*, *The Italian in England*, *The Last Ride Together*, *A Grammarian’s Funeral*, *The Heptameticon’s Tragedy*, *The Statue and the Bust Holy Cross Day*.

In 1855 Browning brought out *Men and Women*. It was dedicated to Elizabeth Barret Browning. In the dedication Browning wrote:

> These they are my fifty men and women
> Naming we the fifty poems finished!
> Take them, Love, the book and me together,
> Where the heart lies let the brain lie also.

The study of human character in this volume is deep and profound. "With keen, tireless curiosity he brings the most varied personages to make their confessions to us, some drawn from history, others imaginary, some good, some bad,—all unravelling, thanks to the clear-sighted poet, the tangled skein of their emotions and actions. Browning appears to give them wide scope and let them say what they like but in fact he guides their confidences in the direction of his own philosophy of energy and freedom, and towards that faith in life, in the spiritual essence and immortality of the soul, which is the basis of his generous optimism"*

In *Dramatic Personae* (1864) Browning carried forward his study of human beings and produced a number of dramatic monologues such as *Caliban upon Setebos*, *Bishop Blanchard’s Apology*, *Abt Vogler. Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and *A Death in the Desert*. These monologues are intellectual and philosophical in character. The lyricism of the *Dramatic Lyrics* is on the wane in this volume.

In 1868–69 Browning produced *The Ring and the Book*. "Here the story of the trial of Pompilie, accused of her husband Guido of adultery with the young monk Caponsacchi, is set forth

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in ten long successive monologues by the principal actors, witnesses, and bystanders in the drama. Each section repeats the story of the same events, varying it according to the different interests or prejudices of the speaker; the poem shows, indeed, a startling defiance of moderation. The repetition justifies itself by the light it throws on the various characters and also by its psychological purpose which is to show the distortion of facts and motives as they are interpreted by a group of human beings. But it is impossible to deny either the fault of prolixity which results from such a process or the amazing virtuosity of the poet and the magnificent effects he achieved in the principal depositions."

The last twenty years of the poet's life were prolific in books varying in character from Finfie at the Fair (1872) and Red Cotton Night Cup Country (1873) to Asolando in 1889, the year of his death. "All these works" says Albert, "suffer from the writer's obsession with thought content, and the psychologizing of his characters at the expense of the poetry. In too many of them the style betrays wilful eccentricities which he had once turned to such great account, but always the reader is liable to stumble across passages, which, in striking landscape or lovely lyric show that the true poetic gift is not completely absent."

Besides composing lyrics and dramatic monologues Browning also penned a few dramas at intervals. He brought all his dramas in a collection known as Bells and Pomegranates. Browning is the author of eight plays. These are, in order, Strafford (1837), Pippa Passes (1841), King Victor and King Charles (1842), The Return of the Druses (1843), A Blot in the Scutcheon (1843), Colombe's Birthday (1844), A Soul's Tragedy (1846), Luria (1846), In a Balcony (1853).

Strafford is a tragedy in five acts, dealing with the life of Strafford who sacrificed his life for King Charles I. The devotion and faithfulness of this statesman are well represented in the tragedy. Pippa Passes is one of the finest works of Browning. It deals with the life of Pippa, a little factory girl and the joys of her life. The dramatic element in Pippa Passes is very little. It is the most unactable of Browning's plays. But its real charm lies in its lyric beauty, insight, idyllic charm and passion. The entire

play consists of four successive episodes in each of which Pippa’s song as she passes strikes into a fateful situation and precipitates the issue. One of the songs of Pippa—

*God’s in His heaven

*All’s right with the world.*

represents Browning’s attitude towards life.

Of the remaining plays the most interesting and readable is *A Blot in the Scutcheon.* The scene of this play is English and the period is eighteenth century. It is a tragedy of love and the basis of the play is family pride and honour. The play bears a close resemblance to *Romeo and Juliet.*

Browning’s dramas did not attract much attention and are a failure as drama. The two basic pillars of Drama are plot and action. Drama demands a sustained plot and a rapid action. Drama may be defined ‘as an articulate story presented in action.’ In Browning’s plays we have a story. It is articulate also, but it is not presented through action. It is given only spasmodically in action. Browning is more interested in the psychology and motives of his characters than in their action. It is this lack of action in Browning’s plays that mars their success. Browning is retrospective, reminiscent and analytical. The presence of too much analysis and thinking in his plays is responsible for the failure of his dramas. “In a play which is to be seen, and where the *doing* has to effect us, not the thinking, it is a serious drawback. Browning is not a dramatist but a dramatic philosopher. Accept this stand point and his plays are interesting enough—some intensely interesting, but it is at its best the interest of the study rather than of the theatre.”* E. Albert directs our attention to the shortcomings of Browning as a dramatist in the following words—“Browning lacks the fundamental qualities of the dramatist. His amazingly subtle analysis of character and motive is not adequate for true drama because he cannot reveal character in action. His method is to take a character at a moment of crisis and, by allowing him to talk, to reveal not only his present thoughts and feelings but his past history.”

The style of Browning is also responsible for his failure as a Dramatist. The style in his plays is terse and compact. It is

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not flexible. The simple factory girl Pippa and the magnificent Ottimo use the English language with the same ease and fluency. This appears unconvincing. His characters further bear a family likenesses. They are repetitions in different forms. Browning’s plays tend to become one-character plays. ‘It is the proverbial predominance of Hamlet repeated in play after play.’ For all these reasons Browning’s dramas are failures on the stage and are at best ‘closet plays’ to be read and enjoyed in one’s private study chamber.

Q. 10. Give your estimate of Browning as the poet of Love Ans. Browning is one of the greatest love poets in English poetry. He is not concerned with divine love or the love of God, love of country, love of family, but with only one kind of love—the love between man and woman. He has produced a host of poems dealing with love on the physical plain. “The love poems of Browning” says Stopford A. Brooke, “do not mean those poems which deal with absolute love or the love of the ideas as truth and beauty or love of mankind or country, but it means the isolating passion of one sex for the other chiefly in youth whether moral or immoral.” Browning’s poems of love give expression to all phases of physical love varying from the fierce animal passion of Ottima in Pippa Passes to the romantic love or Queen worship of The Last Ride Together and Rudel To The Lady of Tripoli.

Browning’s love poetry is intensely realistic in character. A man loves a woman not for her spiritual qualities, but for her physical charm and passion. Browning’s heroes love their beloveds because they are women with passion, having all the persuasive charms of winning ladies. In short, a man loves a woman not because she is a goddess, but because she is a real woman, “with her curls, her dented chin, her little tricks of speech, all the causeless laughers, the little private jokes and common memories that are the stuff of intimacy. That is the real thing, and in that kind of love poetry, Browning is a master.”* Realism is the central working force of Browning’s love poetry. The imagery of

his love poetry is that of suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, and fashionable furcoats. "Browning's love poetry is the finest in the world because it does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven" says G. K. Chesterton, "but about window panes and gloves and garden walls. It does not deal with abstractions. It is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had meaning beyond the power of any millionaire to compute." The realistic imagery of *A Lover's Quarrel* exhibits Browning's preoccupation with real things of the world.

Browning *intellectualises* the passion of love. The lovers of Browning provide a psychological analysis of their love, and this analysing and psychologising of love is present in *The Last Ride Together* and *Porphyria's Lover*. His lovers indulge in dissecting and discussing their love. In Browning's poetry of love there is nothing of that deep, tormented, sensual strain that at once attracts or repels in John Donne; but there is the same activity of intellect and the same rush of thought which we come across in poems like *Twickenham Garden*.

Browning mostly dwells on the power wielded by women in sex-life. He does not emphasise the physical charms of his women, nor does he introduce like Keats 'light feet and creamy breasts' but he lays stress on the power of women to transform and transfigure man's life. This aspect of Browning's women is well brought out in *By the Fire Side*, *Evelyn Hope* and *Andrea Del Sarto*.

Browning employs the dramatic method in the presentation of his love-poems. Pure lyricism in love is subdued by the dramatic force with which the reactions of his men and women are presented in his poems of love like *The Last Ride Together*. Most of the love poems of Browning are in the form of Dramatic monologues, and even the lyrics have a dramatic touch behind them.

Browning's love poetry is both complex and comprehensive dealing with cases of successful as well as unsuccessful love. Of the poems whose subject is physical love, about two third represent the feelings of man, and one third the feelings of woman. The
love poems thus deal more with man’s feelings than woman’s. The love of man is partly successful and partly unsuccessful and as such some poems are poems of successful love, while others are marked with a note of despair. Among the successful poems of love we have By the Fireside, Respectability and One Word More. Poems marked with a note of failure and despair are Love among the Ruins; In a Gondola, Porphyria’s Lover, A Lover’s Quarrel, Love in a Life, One Way of Love.

Poems dealing with the love of women can also be divided into two parts. (1) Successful love poems (2) unsuccessful love poems. The successful love poems in which women have succeeded are Parting at Morning, A woman’s Last Word, Any Wife to Any Husband, Count Gismond. Poems in which women have met buffets of fortune are The Laboratory and In a Year. Love poems dealing with woman’s passion lack that width of view and intellectual power which we notice in poems dealing with the love of men.

All love poems of Browning whether dealing with cases of successful love or failure in love end on a note of optimism and triumph. The triumphant note is nicely sounded in the concluding lines of Evelyn Hope, where the old man puts a scroll in the “sweet cold hand” of his dead beloved hoping that some day when she awakes she “will remember and understand.” The loves in Last Ride Together is optimistic and the poem ends on a note of hope—

What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,
And Heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride, together, for ever ride?

Browning lays emphasis on married love and like Donne he is the chosen poet of wedded love. This is well presented in By The Fireside. The motto of Browning’s love poetry is well put in the beautiful stanza from By The Fireside—one of the noblest and truest he ever penned—

Oh, the little more and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss
Or a breath suspended the blood’s best play
And life be a proof of this.

Compton-Rickett has beautifully summed up Browning’s position as a love poet in the following words—“Certain aspects of love have been more finely rendered by other poets; but in range of matter Browning has no superior. There are abysses of tragic horror, agonies of sense and spirit, at which he took no more than a glimpse. It was not in his nature to dwell on them. His splendid vitality and buoyant hopefulness recoiled from them. His art as a poet of love suffers limitations to that extent, but the underlying inspiration is the greater. For his outlook on love is the outlook of a man who puts it in front of any other thing in life as a force for sanctifying and strengthening the soul.”

Q 11. Write a note on Browning’s philosophy of Life with particular reference to his optimism.

Ans. Robert Browning did not belong to any school of philosophy nor was he the disciple of any philosopher. He had thought deeply and calmly on the problems of life, and had come to certain conclusions about the values of spiritual and physical life. Browning’s conclusions about life have a philosophical touch, and the thinking and intellectual element in them is of a high order. The study of his philosophic poems like Rubbi Ben Ezra and Ahl Vogler and Asolando bring out his philosophical thoughts in a clear and unmistakable manner. The general impression left on our mind after reading Browning’s poems of philosophy is one of optimism and hope. Almost all the Victorian poets had imbibed the despair and melancholy of the Romantic Movement of the early 19th century. Browning was the only Victorian poet who was not influenced by the nostalgia and despair of the Romantic poets. Browning’s optimism was thus not conditioned by his age. It was an act of faith and inner conviction with him. “His optimism was not Victorian; no other Victorian poet of any significance was optimistic. The typical Victorian literary man was either a prophet or a worrier or a doubter, and none of these are optimistic type. Browning blew away some of the lilies and
anguors that the Romantic Movement had bequeathed to England. There were, however, other Victorian poets who were determined to bring them back."* It was Browning's efforts in poetry to keep away that melancholy and gloominess which had oversha-dowed the minds and thoughts of his contemporaries. He was ever hopeful and optimistic of a better order in life and a better world to come, and it is this optimism of Browning that is the crowning glory of his poetry.

Browning took for granted the existence and supremacy of God as the creator and governor of the universe, and was not prepared to doubt the existence of God even for a moment. He considered God as an all pervading Deity, an essence always partially but never wholly revealed in the creative energy of Nature and the aspirations of man. Pauline's lover says: "I saw God everywhere—I felt presence." Paracelsus declares his faith in the Supreme Being which, in fact, is Browning's personal faith about God—

Thus He dwells in all
From life's minute beginnings, at last To man

and

God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the cloud,
Browning did not conceive of God as a cruel and tyrannical being unmindful of the lot of the created universe, or a sinister intelligence bent on punishing mankind. He conceived of God as a benignant and sympathetic power helping men in their endeavours if they reposed faith in Him and His mercy:

God made all the creatures and gave them
Our love and our fear
We and they are His Children
One family here.

The second principle that Browning took for granted is the immortality of the soul. He could never believe that death brings the end of the divine spark irradiating human life. God is the potter and the soul is the clay. Both of them endure for ever.

This faith of the poet is expressed in Rabbi Ben Ezra:

Fool! All that is at all,

* David Daiches: A Critical History of English Literature, (Volume II)
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endne.

Every thinker has to answer one significant question—what is the end and aim of life? For what objective have we been sent to the universe? Browning squarely faced this question. In *Paracelsus* he dealt with this problem. He considered that the aim of life was to acquire Power, and since the power of knowledge was the mightiest of all powers, one should pursue it with ardour and enthusiasm. But soon he realised that mere love for power, even for the power of knowledge, was not sufficient, unless it was accompanied with Love. Knowledge by itself was arid and barren unless it was joined with the force of Love. As Young puts it “Knowledge, at first (as in Paracelsus) a glorious gift, afterwards lost its glamour in his eyes: so far from conceding that knowledge could serve as a channel to the Divine Mind he came to scorn it and belittle its capacity to deal even with the primary impressions of sense; such is the drift of those polemical poems, like *La Salsiaz*, of his later years. *But love, which kindles and exalts both power and knowledge, he deems to be the quality by which man touches the infinite, the quality common to God and man.*” Love allied with knowledge and power ought to be the main quest of the human soul. This conviction is set forth in the words—

*Love preceding power,*

*And with much power, always much more love.*

At another place, the poet reiterated his faith in the same doctrine by pointing out—

*O world, as God had made it, all is beauty*

*And knowing this is Love, and Love is duty.*

Browning believed that the world with all its glories and triumphs, its joys and fears, was a fitting place for man's actions and activities. Browning was not an ascetic who shunned the world, nor a cross-grained man to regard the universe as a vale of sorrow and tears, 'where to think is to be full of sorrow; where beauty cannot hold its lustrous eyes, nor new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.' He had a genuine interest in the world and human life, which he considered to be real and good. "He thought the world good because he had found so many things
that were good in it—religion, the nation, the family, the social class.”* In *Fra Lippo Lippi* we are told that

*This world is no blot for us*

*Nor blank, it means intensely and means good.*

Again in the same poem we have another statement, recognising the goodness of the world—

*The world and life's too long too pass for a dream.*

In *Saul*, the poet says—

*How good is man's life, the mere living, how fit to employ*

*All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy.*

Having clearly defined the goal and end of man's life, Browning examined whether it was possible for man to achieve success in the attainment of his ideals. He was confronted directly with the problem of Evil, for every time man strove to realise perfection and complete success in his aspirations, he was baffled and discomfitted by the overpowering force of Evil in the world which retarded man's progress. Browning, as a philosophic poet, dealt with the problem of Evil vis-a-vis human life in which he was intensely interested. Browning was never disheartened by the presence and power of evil, but considered it necessary for the progress of man in his life. Evil checked man from attaining perfection and kept him imperfect. It was better that man struggled to achieve perfection but could not attain it, for perfection is stagnation and ‘what's come to perfection perishes.’ Hence Evil provided the necessary balancing force in life and saved man from reaching perfection. Evil was no doubt man's foe, but it was a foe without whose presence progress could not have been possible. Evil was, therefore, a condition of man's moral life, and his moral progress. Evil was as permanent as Good and it was man's duty to fight and struggle against the forces of evil believing like *Abt Vogler* that

*There shall never be one lost good,*

*What was will live as before*

*The evil is null is nought, is silence implying sound.*

*What was good shall be good, with evil so much good more.*

G. K. Chesterton: Robert Browning.
The presence of evil should not check man from aspiring for higher ideals. Man’s ideals should always be higher than his grasp. He should march steadily onwards unmindful of evil keeping his eye on his unattainable ideals. In Andrea Del Sarto Browning emphasised the necessity of keeping high ideals in one’s life—

A man’s reach must be above his grasp.
Else, what is an heaven for?

Man must struggle and strive to come as close to the attainment of his ideals as possible. Man was sent for struggle and fight against heavy odds of life rather than for weak-kneed surrender before the majesty of difficulties. The poet inspired his readers to fight and struggle rather than submit and yield:

Strive and thrive, cry speed, fight on for ever.

was Browning’s message. In Rabbi Ben Ezra he gave the advice—

Youth should strive through acts uncouth
Towards making.

Further in the same poem he gave the exhortation—

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough,
Each sting that bid’s nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three parts pain,
Strive, and hold cheap the strain
Learn nor account the pang, dare, never grudge the throe.

Browning admonished the readers of his poetry to be warriors and fighters, strong and indomitable strugglers, never allowing thoughts of cowardice and cravenness to distract them from their chosen path of heroism and bravery. In the poem The Statue and the Bust, he condemned cowardice and reproached the two lovers for their lack of courage and enthusiasm in their love.

At this stage one would like to put the relevant question concerning the utility of a life of struggle, when inspite of man’s best efforts one was likely to fail and suffer miseries in life like the heroes of Hardy’s novels. Browning had a satisfactory answer to give to those who were scared of failures in their struggle. First, a man was not judged by God by his actual attainments and successful records. Man was judged by God by his aspirations, his noble ideals, and his efforts to achieve success in his life. In
God’s view success was not the yardstick to judge a man’s earthly life. A man who had failed in a noble struggle was likely to be placed on a higher pedestal in the kingdom of God as compared to the little man who aspired to gain little and succeeded in achieving that little in his life. This faith of the poet was voiced fervently in Rabbi Ben Ezra:

Not on the vulgar mass
Called ‘work’ must sentence pass
Things done, that took the eye and had the price
But all, the world’s coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb
So passed in making up the main account,
All instincts immature
All purposes unsure
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man’s account.
Secondly, failure on the earth was not in any way an object of dismay, for what we fail to achieve in the world, we might succeed in heaven after the end of our journey on the earth:

And what is our failure here but a triumph’s evidence
For the fulness of the day?
Browning believed that on earth we have the ‘broken arc,’ but in heaven there is ‘the perfect round.’ Failure need not dishearten us. The Lover in The Last Ride Together gives a spirited defence of failure in life—

Fail I alone in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
Look at the end of work contrast
The petty done, the undone vast.
Life is a probation. Life follows life. Man’s soul is immoral. Death need not terrify us. What man has failed to achieve in this world would be attained by him in the next. That was Browning’s faith and hope in Grammarian’s Funeral where he stated:

Leave now to dogs and apes, Man has for ever.
Such is the optimistic philosophy of Browning. His optimism, as G. K. Chesterton has said, “was not founded on any arguments for optimism, nor on opinions, but on life which was the work of God.” “Unlike some spiritual voyagers in our literature, he
never hugged the shore, but sailed for the open, loving the salt sting of the buffeting waves. A courageous soul, and a vigorous and vital comrade for those suffering from spiritual anaemia.”

Q. 12. “Browning inspite of his unquenchable appentency for drama, did better work in his dramatic monologue than in his plays.”
(Herford) Discuss.

Or

Discuss Browning as a writer of Dramatic Monologue.

Ans Browning was a dramatic poet and during his lifetime he produced a number of plays which could not be successfully acted on the stage for in them the thought element was more prominent than action. Browning’s plays are closet plays and can best be enjoyed in the drawing-room. The element of action is wanting in his plays and that is the reason why they could not be successful on the stage. Another reason why Browning could not succeed on the stage was that he let loose the flood of introspection, reminiscence and analysis in his plays. His characters indulged in psychological analysis of their motives with the result that action was submerged in the pale cast of thought and nothing seemed important unless it was transmuted into a philosophical form influencing mind and character.

Though Browning could not succeed in presenting actable plays on the stage, yet it cannot be denied that he had the gifts of a dramatist in a marked degree. The dramatic skill of the poet was well represented in the dramatic monologue of which he became the supreme master. The dramatic monologue is an instrument for presenting the incidents in the development of the soul. It was the fitting instrument for the expression of the inner thoughts and motives of his characters. Browning’s end was the revelation of character, of thoughts, motives and the spirit life of man and he thought that this could best be presented directly in the dramatic poem by catching and representing the character in a sort of confessional monologue indulged at some high critical moment of life. Browning gave to the dramatic monologue a new life force which it had not attained in the hands of Tennyson. He
made it specially his own and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it. In these monologues Browning had the chance as Mrs. Browning hinted in Aurora Leigh:

To outgrow

The simulation of the pointed scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight and costume,
And take for a noble stage the soul itself,
In shifting actions and celestial lights
With all its grand orchestral silences
To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds.

Having presented Browning’s preference for the dramatic monologue, let us examine some of its salient characteristics. A dramatic monologue is a kind of comprehensive soliloquy in which the speaker gives expression to his thoughts in the presence of a second person with the object of convincing him of his beliefs and convictions. The difference between a soliloquy and a monologue is that whereas in a soliloquy the speaker delivers his own thought without being interrupted and disturbed by any other person, in the dramatic monologue there is always the presence of a second person to whom the thoughts of the speaker are presented, though the second person may not interrupt the main speaker. “Some of the dramatic monologues are in the form of soliloquy,” says Allen Brockington, “but the majority are conversational—i.e. there are listeners and the presence of the listeners affects the talk. Often, the remarks of the listeners are indirectly introduced or indicated by the speakers’ answers.” In My Last Duchess the listener is the messenger who has come to the Duke from another state to negotiate about the second marriage. The Duke’s talk is carefully calculated to impress the messenger. In Bishop Blougram’s Apology the listener is a journalist named Gigadibs, and the apology is an answer to him for his objections against the Bishop’s conduct. In Fra Lippo Lippi, the listeners are the members of the watch who brought about Lippo’s arrest while he was engaged in a nocturnal adventure.

The earlier glimpses of the Dramatic monologue are to be found in Pauline. Here the form is hinted. It is disguised in Paracelsus and developed in a still disguised form in Sordello. The real beginning of this form was made in the Dramatic Lyrics and
Dramatic Romances and Lyrics. Some of the outstanding dramatic monologues of Browning are My Last Duchess, Andrea Del Sarto, Fra Lippo Lippi, Pictor Ignoultus and The Last Ride Together.

"Browning’s dramatic monologues are not written in order to build up an atmosphere of languid sorrow or quiet determination or heavy beauty (like the monologues of Tennyson), but to project with an almost quizzical violence a certain kind of personality, a certain temperament, a way of looking at life, even a moment of history realized in the self-revelation of a type. The method is not impressionistic or symbolic, nor is it really exploratory (T. S. Eliot’s monologues, are all three): these are set pieces in which a fully known character, seen in a clear light, is set sharply before the reader.”*

In his dramatic monologues Browning portrays a wide variety of characters drawn from all classes of life, ranging from crooks, cowards, scholars to musicians, painters, Dukes, murderers, cheats etc. The souls of these characters are brought out in their fullness in these monologues. "With keen, tireless curiosity he brings the most varied personages to make their confessions to us, some drawn from history, others imaginary, some good, some bad—all unravelling, thinks to clear-sighted poet, the tangled skein of their emotions and actions. Browning appears to give them wide scope and let them say what they like but in fact he guides their confidence in the direction of his own philosophy of optimism and freedom, and towards that faith in life, in the spiritual essence and immortality of the soul, which is the basis of his generous optimism.”**

These characters of Browning reveal themselves in their monologues and bring out the inner workings of their minds. Cazamian calls these monologues, "studies in practical psychology"; for they reveal a wide variety of characters and provide a peep into their inner life.

The real poetic interest of Browning’s monologues lies in the violence and vividness with which he renders the impression of a personality caught unaware. Browning aims continually at

** Legouil-Cazamian: A Short History of English Literature
the effect of impromptu. In many of the monologues there is a mingling of the colloquial and the unusual one. The unusual produces an effect of grotesqueness that adds life and humour to the monologue.

The characters in these monologues believe in God and justify their deeds and actions by attributing them to God’s will. *Sludge the Medium* is certain that his life of lies and conjuring tricks has been conducted in a deep and subtle obedience to God’s commands. Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of compromise has been justified by God’s will. Andrea Del Sarto says to his wife:

\begin{quote}
\textit{At the end}
\textit{God, I conclude, compensates punishes;}
\textit{All is as God over-rules.}
\end{quote}

Browning’s dramatic monologues are mixtures of half-truths and falsehoods. The characters do not reveal the full truths of their life in their speeches. They half reveal and half conceal truths and falsehoods. The characters do not reveal the full truths the soul within and present their thoughts in a tricksy and subtle style.

In the opinion of some critics the dramatic monologues are satires upon their characters because Browning brings out their follies in their speeches. But this is not a just criticism. “The great sophistical monologues which Browning wrote in his later years,” says G. K. Chesterton, “are not satires upon their subjects. They are not even harsh or unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences. They say or are intended to say the best that can be said for the persons with whom they deal.” *The Last Ride Together* seeks to defend the lover and his follower and *Andrea Del Sarto* provides a defence of the character of the painter.

It is pointed out that Browning’s language in these monologues is coarse and brutal. This is only a partial truth for there are many beautiful passages scattered in the monologues.

Browning’s philosophy of life is nicely brought out in these monologues. They are also highly suggestive in character and provide enough scope for speculative thinking. To sum up, “These collections of Monologues form together one of the most precious and profoundly original contributions to the poetic
literature of the nineteenth century. The defects which prevented his complete success in the regular drama are not apparent in this cognate form. He takes just what interests him, and consequently he is nearly always inspired, nearly always at his best."*

Q. 13. Write a note on the obscurity and formlessness of Browning's poetry.

Ans. Browning is a difficult poet to understand and the difficulty is intensified by the fact that his poetry is packed with thoughts and is presented in a style that defies analysis and understanding. Browning's poetry appeared obscure, formless and bewildering to the readers of his time and the charge of obscurity is still levelled against the major work of the poet. The publication of Sordello created an impression that Browning was an obscure poet; for very few literary men could understand the skein of tangled thought presented in this long poem. The reading public found in this poem a monument of obscurity and diffuseness. Tennyson railed against the obscurity of the poem by making a statement that he only understood two lines of it, the opening line "Who will may hear Sordello's story told," and the final, "Who has heard Sordello's story told." Douglas Jarrod, who had taken Sordello just to beguile his time after recovery from a prolonged illness soon put down the book in disgust and horror with the remark, "My God! I'm an idiot, My health is restored, but my mind's gone. I can't understand two consecutive lines of an English poem." All these reactions to Sordello clearly indicate that in this work Browning was unintelligible to the majority of his readers. This characteristic of unintelligibility continued to be a feature of his later works as well and by the time the poet wrote the Ring and the Book, he became so difficult a poet as many readers left the study of his works in sheer despair.

It is a fact that Browning's poems are obscure and formless. They cannot be easily comprehended if proper attention and care is not given to understand them. Browning himself sometimes could not explain the meaning of some of his own poems after they had been composed by him. Once a student went to the

* Hugh Walker—The Victorian Age in Literature
poet to seek illumination on a certain point presented by him in one of his poems. Browning read the poem but could not clear the difficulty presented by the seeker of knowledge. Quite jocularly Browning replied to the young boy, "When I wrote this poem, two persons knew the meaning of it, God and I, now only one of them (God) knows it."

Let us now analyse and examine the causes responsible for the alleged obscurity found in Browning’s poems. Some readers attribute Browning’s obscurity to his intellectual vanity. This charge has been ably refuted by G. K. Chesterton who states that there is not an iota of evidence that he was intellectually vain. He was meek and humble, and thought that his ideas were commonplace and could be easily understood by his readers. He thought that "the whole street was humming with his ideas and that the postman and the tailor are poets like himself." To Browning his ideas were clear and he thought that his readers would be able to follow them. "He was not unintelligible because he was proud," says G. K. Chesterton, "but unintelligible because he was humble. He was unintelligible because his thoughts were vague but because to him they were obvious."* The most obvious reason that can be pointed out for Browning’s obscurity was the inability of his readers to penetrate through the subtle, deep and philosophical thoughts of the poet. They were fed on the limpid and easy-flowing poetry of Tennyson. To them Browning appeared obscure because there was a plethora of allusions and references in his writings which could not be easily understood by them. The presence of too many allusions and references in Browning’s poetry created confusion in the minds of the readers and they failed to understand him in his true spirit.

Browning wrote too much and revised too little. The time which he should have given to making one thought clear was used in expressing other thoughts that flettered through his head like a flock of swallows. His thoughts rushed more speedily through his mind than his language could possibly express them. His thoughts were so subtle that language could not give them an adequate expression. He had fancies "that broke through language

*G K Chesterton: Robert Browning.
and escaped," and could not be caught by the readers.

Browning had the peculiar habit of presenting too much in too little a space. This condensation of thought was extremely baffling to his readers and defied proper analysis and understanding. The average reader could not keep pace with the subtlety of his thoughts.

Added to this bane of condensation and quick thought, was the faulty grammar of the poet. He never bothered about grammar. He followed the policy of suppressing words with the result that many of his lines are elliptical to a fault. He frequently clipped his speech, giving us a series of ejaculations.

F. L. Lucas in the Ten Victorian Poets finds fault with Browning's language. He says, "He is indeed one of those writers who treat language not as a musical instrument, needing delicacy no less than power in its handling, but rather as an iron bar which they are to twist and tangle in an exhibition of their prowess as professional strong men."

Browning's style too poses certain difficulties. "He has something to say, something of infinite moment and solemn import but he is comparatively careless how he says it. He is the Carlyle of Poetry, the message is everything, the verbal vesture nothing."

Browning need not terrify us if we approach him in the spirit of humility and devote ourselves to his study. Behind the so-called obscurity there is richness of thought and the reader will be amply repaid if he devotes his time studiously to the study of Browning's philosophical thoughts.

Browning's language is the fitting instrument for his philosophical thoughts. His deep and profound thoughts could not have been fittingly expressed in the language of a love song. The priceless gems lie hidden behind the language that baffles the modern readers. But it cannot be denied that the language in which they have been couched is the proper and befitting vesture for them. After all as Berdoc says, "Precious stones do sometimes want digging for. Diamonds and nuggets are not always to be stumbled across on the footpath. Pickaxes and crushing mills are not unknown in mining operations; and the treasures of kings are kept in strong boxes. The bee cannot gather his honey from the simplest flower without contributing his quota to the process of
fer ilisation; [and the stimulation of our thinking faculties is no small part of the good which great teachers have to do for us. The quartz will pay for crushing, the diamond for digging.]*

Q. 14. Give your estimate of Elizabeth Barret Browning (1806—61) as a poetess of the Victorian Age.

Ans. Elizabeth Barret Browning, the life-partner of Robert Browning, occupies a place of her own among the poets of the Victorian Age. She was a few years older than her husband and had begun composing poems, which were rather old fashioned in form and showed a curious mingling of the influence of the Bible, the Greeks, Byron and Shelley. In her early works, the *S. ruplim* (1833), and *Poems* (1844) there is the presence of emotion and romance though both of them are rather over-wrought and lack the ring of genuine feeling. She later on turned with greater success to an imitation of Coleridge in her impressions of the Middle Ages and produced *Lady Geraldine’s Courtship* which appears to be the work of an artist saturated in the lore of the Middle Ages. The influence of Tennyson’s *Idylls* is clearly noticed in this work.

Mrs. Browning soon realized that she was unnecessarily wasting her time in writing about the Middle Ages when life all around her was rich enough to provide her inspiration for her poetry. She soon turned her gaze to social life and produced *The Cry of Children* which remains a poem of tender pathos and indignation, pathos at the sad and miserable plight of the tender children and indignation at the industrial system which allowed the employment of children in factories. This poem is quite in keeping with the spirit of humanitarianism prevalent during the Victorian Age.

Mrs. Browning’s best work is to be found in her *Sonnets from the Portugese*, a collection of love sonnets just before she married Browning. These sonnets bring out her love for Browning who found her ill and lonely and cured her with his tender care. The sonnets exhibit the intensity of passion and the rapture of love. In one of the sonnets she mentions the various ways in which she loves Browning—

* Berdse—Browning’s Message to Hi Time
How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breath and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the end of Being and ideal Grace;
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right.

I shall but love the better after death.

"Good as they are, these sonnets have neither massiveness and subtlety of thought on the one hand, nor melody and charm on the other, sufficient to secure a place beside the greatest poetry. But they are the genuine utterance of a woman's heart, at once humbled and exalted by love, and in this respect they are unique. The woman's passion, from the woman's point of view has seldom found expression at all in literature, and this particular aspect of it never. Hence, while it would be too much to say that these sonnets are, as pieces of poetry, equal to the sonnets of Wordsworth or of Milton, it is not so unreasonable to question whether their removal would not leave a more irreparable gap in literature."

Though Mrs. Browning's diction was far from pure and her sense of rhythm uncertain, her sonnets abound in vivid phrases, strong new images, and trenchant brevities. The narrow frame of the sonnet kept her habitual exuberance within bounds and forced her to submit to the discipline of this art form.

Mrs. Browning's next important work is Aurora Leigh. It is a fragment of spiritual autobiography and its vitality lies in its intimate revelation of the writer's nature, temperament and outlook. The whole work reads like an epic. It is in fact a kind of domestic and contemporary epic on a romantic theme. It is in blank verse, and Mrs. Browning's blank verse is very unequal. Often in its extreme looseness it comes so close to prose as clearly to be distinguishable from it. Long stretches are dry without any beauty of form, and are besides spoilt by a pedantic wordiness, a sort of inflated utterance and affectation of masculinity. But there are many pages where sentiment and style, alike, are admirable, in

* Quoted by Hugh Walker in Literature of the Victorian Era.
passages both of irony and of lyrical emotion. Then the verse
takes wings and soars with rare ease and with a nervous strength
that is characteristic of Mrs. Browning, showing her to be not
only original but an equal of the greatest. It is to be regretted
that this wide-flung and generously conceived poem could not be
sustained to the end by a firmer artistic technique."**

A few outstanding characteristics of Mrs. Browning's poetry
can be gathered from her works discussed above. She is the
poetess of humanitarianism and deep pity. Her poems evoke the
chords of sympathy in our hearts and bring tears to our eyes.
Her Cowper's Grave and The Cry of the Children are marked with
a note of deep pathos. Her love poems are rich in emotion and
exhibit the intensity of her passion and love for the poet. Her
religious poems are not successful in their efforts to fuse devotional
and aesthetic impulses, for she believes that "God Himself is the
best poet, and the Real is His Song."

Mrs. Browning's poetry suffers from numerous short-
comings and defects. She is often extravagant and at times
hysterical. Her unchecked fluency degenerates into volubility and
many of her poems suffer from prolixity and diffuseness. "Her
poetry has none of her husband's strength and verbal precision.
It is highly emotional, sometimes embarrassingly personal in tone
and draws on conventional poetic images and diction."*** But with
all her faults she is sincere in her utterance and genuine in her
feelings. Her poetry places her among the minor poets of the
Victorian age.

Q. 15. Give a brief account of the main poetical works of
Matthew Arnold (1822—1888)

Ans. Matthew Arnold belonged to the group of the reflec-
tive, thoughtful and intellectual poets of the Victorian age. His
poetical works are not very bulky. As early as 1849 he had pub-
lished, under the initial of his surname only, The Strayed Reveller
and other Poems, but this poetical building was not based on a
sound and secure foundation. Later on this volume was with-
drawn from publication. In 1852 was published Empedocles on

** David Dalches: A Critical History of English Literature.
Eina and other Poems by "A" containing besides the title piece, Tristram and Isuelt, Faded Leaves, The Youth of Nature, The Youth of Man, Morality, A Summer Night, Lines Written in Kensington Gardens, Switzerland and other poems. This volume was also withdrawn from publication. Then followed Poems in 1853 with a remarkable preface. It was a collection "which was certainly the best that had been produced by any one younger than the two masters already discussed." This volume contained famous poems of Arnold such as Sohrab and Rustum and Scholar Gipsy. In 1855 was issued Poems by Matthew Arnold, Second Series containing many old and published poems and a few new ones such as Balder Dead and Separation. In 1858 was brought out Meropen a Greek tragedy. It was in the same line as Shelley's Prometheus Unbound and Swinburne's Atlanta in Calydon. In 1867 New Poems was published. This volume contained Thyrisis, Rugby Chapel, Dover Beach, A Southern Night, Obermann Once More and others. In 1869 was printed the first edition containing all the important poems of Matthew Arnold.

The poems of Matthew Arnold can broadly be classified into narrative, dramatic, elegiac and lyrical poems, besides a few sonnets which he wrote from time to time.

Sohrab and Rustum, Tristram and Isuelt and Balder Dead are the prominent narrative poems of Matthew Arnold. The main elegiac poems are Thyrisis, Rugby Chapel, A Southern Night, Westminster Abbey and Geist's Grave. To the group of reflective poems belong Resignation, Requiescat, The Buried Life, Youth and Calm, Scholar Gipsy, Stanzas—From the Grand Chartreuse and Dover Beach. A few poems like The Strayed Reveller, Mycerinus, The Sick King of Bokhara, Empedocles at Eina, are classical in theme and treatment. Faded Leaves and Switzerland belong to the group of lyrics. Shakespeare, To a Republican Friend, Worldly Piece are Arnold Sonnets. "Next perhaps to the elegies and elegiac lyrics" says Hugh Walker, "Arnold shows best in the sonnets. The severe restraint of the form was hardly necessary to him, but it suited him, and as a sonneteer in the Italian form he ranks with the best in English Literature."
Q. 16. Show your acquaintance with the following poems by Matthew Arnold.

(1) Strayed Reveller (2) Mycerinus (3) Empedocles at Etna (4) Sohrab and Rustum (5) Thyrsis (6) Rugby Chapel (7) Scholar Gipsy (8) Dover Beach (9) Lines Written in Kensington Gardens (10) Shakespeare.

Ans. Strayed Reveller.

This long narrative poem recounts the adventures of a youth given to heady drinks in the palace of Circe, the far-famed enchantress and beguiler of youth by wine. It belongs to the group of classical poems, and is marked with a swiftness of speed. "It glimmers with a golden ray of romantic splendour, sounds like a tale told in dim Eden; appears like a fantasy king in the highest air of enchantment. It is an example of the finest flower of the classical edition on the lyric soil of English poetry."

Mycerinus.

This dramatic monologue brings out the story of king Mycerinus of Egypt, who was informed by the Oracle that he would meet his end in six years' time. Mycerinus could not reconcile himself to his fate for he had done no wrong to merit so early a death. He had been a just and good king. To defy the high handed justice of God, he relinquished the throne, and went to the open space of nature where he beguiled his time in merriment and joy. Time fleded on with its kid-foot speed, and at last came the time when the king had to go. He resigned himself to the decrees of fate, and met his end with stoic fortitude. The poem ends, not in protest, but in resignation to fate, which is a marked feature of Arnold's classical poems.

Empedocles at Etna.

This poem recounts the life of Empedocles, a learned and eloquent philosopher of Sicily about 444 B.C. and his suicide by plunging into the crater of the volcano. He muses on man's mediocre lot and speculates on the course of the soul after death before plunging into the crater. The poem lacks action. "There is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" in this poem, and that is the reason why it was withdrawn from publication.

Sohrab and Rustum.

It is an oriental tale recounting in good narrative verse the
pathetic end of Sohrab at the hands of his own father Rustum. The fatalistic note in the poem is well marked out. Its tone of melancholy and destiny is in keeping with the Greek view of life. The Homeric similes constitute the main charm of this epic-fragment. "It combines classic purity of style with romantic ardour of feeling. The truth of its oriental colour, the deep pathos of the situation, the fire and intensity of the action, the strong conception of character, and the full, solemn music of the verse, make Sohrab and Rustum unquestionably the masterpiece among Arnold’s longer poems."* Some of the well known lines of this poem are—

* But yet success sways with the breath of Heaven
  * For we are all, like swimmers in the sea.
* Pois’d on top of a huge wave of fate
  * Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.

Thyris.

This fine elegy is one of the best of its kind in English poetry. It is a pastoral elegy written on the death of Arthur Clough. It was first published in April 1866. Thyris in this poem stands for Clough, and Corydon, mentioned later on, for Arnold. The elegiac tone of the poem is well combined with a critical note, and in this respect it is well in keeping with Lycidas. A criticism of Victorian materialism can be clearly noticed in the following lines of the poem:

* A fugitive and gracious light he seeks
  * Shy to illumine, and I seek it too
* This does not come with house or with gold,
  * With place, with honour, and a flattering crew.
* ’Tis not in the world’s market bought and sold.

The poem though elegiac in tone and pastoral in its setting, ends on a note of hope—

* Why fallest thou? I wander’d till I died
  * Roam on! the light we sought is shining still
* Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill
  * Our scholar travels yet the loved hillside.

*The theme of the elegy is really Arnold himself, his doubts and problems and introspective melancholy, developed indirectly

in an organic context and in association with aspects of the English landscape which are most appropriate to the contemplative mood.” Rugby Chapel.

This well known elegy, written to the memory of his great father Dr. Thomas Arnold, was published by Arnold in 1867. It is a reverential tribute by a son to his worthy father. Besides eulogising Dr. Arnold for his many virtues of head and heart, Matthew Arnold introduces his reflection on the people of the world, who stand no a far lower level than his father. It was given to Dr. Arnold to save the struggling followers from ruin:

Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself
And, at the end of thy day,
O faithful shepherd! to come
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.

The generalisations of Arnold tend to obscure the object portrayed. The metre of the poem is uncouth. It is written in unrhymed and freely cadenced verses.

Scholar Gipsy.

This poem is rightly estimated as one of the finest poems in the English language. It was first published in 1853. The chief source of inspiration for the poem is a passage in the book—The Vanity of Dogmatizing by Joseph Glanvil, an English Divine, who lived from, 1636-1680. It recounts the adventures of an Oxford Scholar who tired of seeking preferment, joined the gipsies to learn their lore, roamed in the world with them, and still haunts the Oxford countryside. With this is woven a wonderful evocation of the landscape round about Oxford and a criticism of the materialistic life of the age. The poem represents Arnold’s general attitude towards life and is marked with a pessimistic and melancholy tone. Here are a few representative lines from the poem:

Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven: and we
Light half-believers of our casual creeds.
Who never deeply felt nor clearly will’d
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
Whose vague resolves never have been fulfilled
For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new; 
Who hesitate and falter life away 
And lose tomorrow the ground won to-day. 
Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too? &

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear, 
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames; 
Before this strange disease of modern life. 
With its sick hurry, its divided aims. 
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife.

Dover Beach.

This poem was published in 1867. It is a representative poem of Arnold and is typical of his outlook on life. In this poem Arnold gives a pointed expression to the problem of loss of faith in the Victorian age. It is marked with an elegiac note, though it has lyric touch about it. The poem is too ‘lucidly sad’ to be regarded as a pure lyric. The following are the memorable lines from this poem—

Ah, Love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain,  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night—

Lines Written in Kensington Gardens.

The poem was first published in 1852, and after certain minor revisions was reprinted in 1867. The poem represents Arnold’s love of Nature, and brings out his Wordsworthian faith in the power of nature. In this poem the poet exhibits his “power to draw from idyllic beauty and the common things of earth and sky much that can comfort and exalt man’s spirit.” The mood of Arnold in this poem is not that of a passionate and pure lover of Nature but, “that of tided man grateful for a present hour of rest and anxious lest the blessed mood depart.” The representative lines from this poem are—
Calm soul of all things! make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and cannot mar!

Shakespeare:

This memorable sonnet pays a rich tribute to Shakespeare. This sonnet deserves to be set as an epigraph and introduction to Shakespeare's own work than anything else in the libraries that have been written on him except Dryden's famous sentence. 

The memorable lines of this famous sonnet are:

Others abide our question—Thou art free!
- We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,
Out topping knowledge—
All pain the immortal spirit must endure
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,
Find their sole voice in that victorious brow.

Q. 17. What are the main characteristics of Matthew Arnold's poetry? Do you agree with the view of Mary Coleridge that, "Arnold was not a poet but a man who wrote poetry?"

Ans. In the heyday of his glory Arnold was considered more a critic than a poet. "In his verse he is a critic of life—in the abstract; in his prose a critic of life—in the concrete; but a critic always." ** A poet who is at heart a critic and whose poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty cannot certainly be placed in the group of poets for whom poetry is a joyful creation, a soul-animating strain, and a spontaneous overflow of powerful thoughts. "Naturally, one who regards poetry as a criticism will write very differently from one who regards poetry as the natural language of the soul. He will write for the head rather than for the heart, and will be cold and critical rather than enthusiastic."† Arnold is a poet who appeals more to the head than to the heart. He was not a born poet like Shelley, whom he criticised as an "ineffectual angel", but a man who wrote poetry

* George Saintsbury: Nineteenth Century Literature
**Compton-Rickett: A History of English Literature.
† W. J. Long: English Literature.
for it served as a good and helpful medium of expressing his views about life and its problems. Arnold's poetry lacks spontaneity, passion, music, rapture, qualities by which great poetry is judged. His poetry is rich in reflective vein, stoicism, severe austerity, workmanship—qualities which do not entitle a poet to be placed in the rank of poets like Keats, Shelley and Byron. Naturally opinions do not favour Arnold's inclusion in the galaxy of very great poets. "Brought up under the puritanic influence of the Bible and the hardening influence of the classics and possessing a temperament that was stoic and sedate, calm and reserved—Arnold lacked those finer sensibilities which alone are responsible for quickening to birth the rapture of great poetry."

Edith Sitwell dismisses Arnold as "an educated versifier." T. S. Eliot calls him "academic." Lafcadio Hearn speaks of Arnold's poetry as "colourless." Saintsbury is not prepared to accord him a rank higher than Gray. Arthur Quiller Couch says that "he had not the bardic, the architectonic gift." All that is said for Arnold appears to be true, for as a poet, pure and simple, without the lyrical force and fire, and without the rapture and exhilaration that poetry brings, he is to be ranked in the group of reflective and intellectual poets rather than poets for the masses and for the lovers of imagination, music, lyricism and abandon in poetry. Truly it has been said by H. W. Paul "Arnold was never popular and will never be." He will have his readers and admirers but they will belong to the classes rather than the masses. Arnold, in fact, is the poet of the intellectuals and thoughtful persons. He has a place of honour in the eyes of reflective and cultured scholars. His emphasis on lucidity, suavity, serenity, resignation, stoicism, wisdom, introspection, wistful melancholy, classicism, subdued passion, love of nature are appreciated by those, who like him, consider poetry not as a voice of the soul and a cry of the heart, but as an instrument to educate the mind in a right pattern of thought. "Deeper and deeper probes Arnold the sublime beauty of thoughts that wake never to perish." "With an intellectual integrity that tolerates no shams and silliness with a calm-confidence that quails not before the forces of fate and caprice of chance, with divided opinions that know vacillation in the face of
trial and temptations, with an analytical and introspective temperament that weighs and considers rather than subjects itself to the sway of emotions, with a chastened and chastening philosophy that is born of pain and bred up in trouble, Arnold invests his poetry with virtues and significances that appeal to the elemental and universal in man.” With these remarks let us examine the main features and characteristics of Matthew Arnold’s poetry.

Arnold’s Theory of Poetry and Poetical Ideal.

In the preface to the Poems of 1853 Arnold formulated his theory of Poetry and enunciated his poetical ideal in unmistakable words. According to Arnold, the role of the poet is not only to add to the knowledge of man but also to add to their happiness. A poet is the interpreter, the consoler and sustainer of life. To him poetry is “nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth”—To Arnold as to Wordsworth ‘poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.’

Regarding the subjects on which Poetry should be written Arnold believed that “the objects of poetry are actions which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections, to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race and which are independent of time.” Poetry should have for its treatment noble and excellent actions to be rendered in a noble and dignified language. It is not the language or the style that is of primary significance in Arnold’s view. It is the plot, the action of a poem, that is of vital importance for a poet. Arnold did not approve of Empedocles at Etna, because there was little action and much talk. He discarded the work, for here ‘everything was to be endured and nothing to be done.’ The action of a poem in Arnold’s view should have unity and an architectonic quality. It must be an organic whole in which nothing may hang loosely, but all parts may be subordinated to the organic conception of the poem. The Greeks appealed to Arnold in every way for, “they regarded the whole; we regard the parts. With them, the action predominated over the expression of it; with us, the expression predominated over the action.” It is the choice of an excellent action, its treatment as a unity,
in a sustained and dignified style that appealed to Arnold as the befitting job of a poet.

“The noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness. A great poet receives his distinctive character of superiority from his application to his subject of the ideas ‘on man, on nature, and on human life, which he has acquired for himself. Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life—to the question: How to live?”* The above extract from Arnold’s preface to the poems of Wordsworth clearly indicates that in Arnold’s conception poetry was co-related to life and the mission of the poet was to teach people how to live well. The poet was not a dreamer of idle dreams and a creature of fanciful imagination living in the ivory-tower of his aesthetic conceptions, but a living being vitally interested in the problems of life. Poetry was a criticism of life, and it was expected of the poet that instead of merely moralising upon life or escaping from it, he would penetrate into life, interpret it and colour it by his imagination. “Not merely interpretation, but the blending of objective life and the poet’s imagination is what Arnold means by criticism of life.” In Arnold’s view, “poetry is not an escape from but into life, and more of life, it is not Lady of Shallot’s mirror that cracks the moment it is brought into contact with reality but a king Arthur’s Ex Calibur that sallies forth in search of adventure.”

Arnold’s Classicism and Romanticism.

Arnold’s bent of mind was in favour of the Greeks rather than the Romantics of his own country. “It is time for us to Hellenise for we have Hebraised too much,” observed Arnold. In his sonnet To a Friend he asks the question, “who prop, in these bad days, my mind ?”, and answers by mentioning three names—Homer, Sophocles and Epictetus, the first two being the poets and the last a moralist. The Greek poets and moralists exercised a deep influence on Arnold’s mind and coloured his thoughts and style. He chose Greek subjects for poetic composition and rendered them with that sincerity, lucidity,

* Reference to Arnold’s Selections of Wordsworth’s Poem (1879)
clarity, and simplicity which the Greeks adored in their art. *Sohrab and Rustum* is both Homeric in style and manner. *Balder Dead* based on Norse Mythology is also Homeric in style. The style of *Thyrsis* is modelled on Theocritus and Bion. *Merope* is a Greek tragedy. The thought in *Empedocles* is taken from the Greek moralist Epictetus. *The Strayed Reveller* is Greek in theme and treatment. The theme of some of the poems is based on Greek mythology, though Arnold’s approach to them may be modern. We may admit with Hugh Walker that, “the whole substance of Arnold’s thought is modern,” yet it cannot be denied that the poet owed his inspiration to the Greeks, and derived the themes of some of his poems from the Greek masters. Arnold’s classicism comes out more in the execution of his poems than in their conception. The Greeks believed in cultivating the qualities of lucidity, clarity, simplicity and directness. They discarded exuberance, richness and decorative expression. They subordinated the parts to the whole. Arnold cultivated these Greek qualities in his poetry. “He is Greek in his insistence that there shall be a definite thought which shall be lucidly expressed.”* Arnold’s poems are distinguished by clarity, simplicity, and the restrained emotion of his classical models. “Arnold presents one of the best examples in English of the classical spirit. He is always measured and restrained. He detested haste, half work and disarray. Lucidity, flexibility and sanity were the qualities he specially strove to embody in his work.”** “For his ideal of form, Arnold turned usually to the literature of Greece, abjuring romantic wilfulness and vagueness in favour of classical lucidity and restraint when he worked more deliberately in the Greek spirit and manner, his style was often cold and dry. In his long poems especially, he was apt to sacrifice too much to his reverence for classical tradition.” “Reticence not rapture, economy not exuberance, harmony not hilarity, definiteness not dreaminess, formality not freedom, lucidity not lavishness are the hellenic traits of Arnold’s poetry.”

Though there is the preponderance of classical thought and style in Arnold’s poetry, yet it cannot be denied that the poet is not absolutely free from the romantic hold of the poets

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*Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.

of the Romantic Age. Keats’ influence is clearly perceptible in Arnold’s description of Nature. The presence of the romantic spirit can be felt in The Strayed Reveller, Empedocles on Etna, The Neckan, The Forsaken Merman, Marguerite poems. These poems throb with the inner spirit of Romanticism. The melancholy note in Arnold is in keeping with the romantic tradition. The pensive cast of his thought, now wistful, now bewildered is essentially romantic in origin. Cazamian notices ‘inner Romanticism’ in Arnold’s poetry and makes this observation, “The irony of fate has decreed that Arnold’s verse shall continue to be read because of its inner Romanticism which precisely was what the poet sternly tried to repress.”

Arnold’s Poetry as a criticism of Life.

Arnold believed that poetry is “a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.” His poetry holds true to this ideal. The prevailing mood of Arnold in all his poems is reflective and critical, and his poetry is “a series of variations on the many-sided contemporary conflict between spontaneity and discipline, emotion and reason, faith and scepticism, the rich youth and the dry age of individual and the race.” As he believed that what Europe in his generation principally needed was criticism, he gave this criticism in verse as well as in prose. His poetry provides a rich criticism of the poets, the people, and the conditions of his times. In all his deepest poems, in Thyr is and in the Scholar Gipsy, in Resignation, in Obermann poems, in A Southern Night, we hear the poet passing judgment on “the life of his age, the life of his country, the lives of individual men.”

** Goethe, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley are all examined with keen insight and penetrating vision. In the Memorial Verses, Arnold speaks of Goethe, as “the Physician of the Iron age.” Byron is hailed as “the thunder’s roll” and as “thefound of fiery life.” Wordsworth’s “healing power” is eulogised. In The Youth of Nature, Wordsworth is praised “as a priest to us all of the wonder and bloom of the world.” In Stanzas from the Chartreuse, Shelley is represented as a poet of pain and distress, and how, “the breeze

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1 Legouis Cazamian: A History of English Literature.
2 Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.
carried thy lovely wail away, musical; through Italian trees that fringe thy soft blue Spezzian bay.' In Obermann Once More, rich tribute is paid to Senancour, the master of Arnold's wandering youth.

Arnold's Poetry critically presents the growing craze of the age for material pelf and power, for riches and wealth. Arnold's best poetry is conceived "as a battle with worldliness, the worldliness in ourselves, and the worldliness in the world."* The growing conflict between science and religion, doubt and faith is revealed in the Scholar Gipsy:

_Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven: and we_  
_Light half believers of casual creeds,_  
_Who never deeply felt, nor clearly willed._

The same poem criticises the growing restlessness, and worldliness among the people of the age—  
_Before this strange disease of modern life,_  
_With its sick hurry, its divided aims,_  
_Its heads over taxed, its palsied hearts was rife._

The lust for wealth and disdain for truth prevalent in the age is presented in the 21st stanza of Thyris—  
_A fugitive and gracious light he seeks_  
_Shyn to illumine: and I seek it too_  
_'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold._

The Scholar Gipsy is advised to run away from the hectic life of the worldly minded people of his age—  
_But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!_  
_For strong the infection of our mental strife,_  
_Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils rest._

"The Scholar Gipsy" says Trilling, "is a passionate indictment of the new dictatorship of the never resting intellect over the soul of modern man. It is a threnody for the lives of men switched by modernity, of men who have become in the words of Empedocles, living men no more, nothing but "naked, eternally restless mind."

Being tired of the ugliness, worldliness and the sick hurry and divided aims, the poet seeks to retire to a monastery where he may find peace. In the Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse, the

poet feels attracted by the peace of the monastery:

*Oh, hide me in your gloom profound*

*Ye solemn seats of holy pain!*

*Take me, cowl’d forms, and fence me round*

*Till it passes my soul again.*

He is dissatisfied with the growth of Science. Science has conceived a soulless universe and has been the mother of doubt, distraction and scepticism:

*Most men in a brazen prison live*

*Their lives to some unmeaning task-work give*

*Dreaming of nought beyond, their prison wall.*

Democracy leaves him cold. He is critical of the growing tide of democracy and the power coming to the masses. The degrading and baneful effect of democracy is painfully presented in *Empedocles*:

*Great qualities are trodden down*

*And littleness united*

*Is becoming invincible.*

In the domain of trade and industry Arnold again finds the same tale, for they have brought in wealth, but allowed happiness and health to pass off, and hence seeks the remedy for “this strange disease of modern life” in the happy past, “when wits were fresh and clear, and life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames.” Just as the Thames symbolizes the untroubled life of the past, London “with its ungainly spread and sprawl, its lack of organisation, political or architectural, its undirected expansion, its noise, its ‘mud salad’ streets, its terrible contrasts of wealth and poverty”, epitomises the ugly life of Victorian England. Between the two worlds—one dead, the other powerless to be born—“Arnold finds a wasteland of a Nature, which is undivine, blind, dying, phantom empty, no longer capable of giving laws or direction. This land is full of man’s senseless uproar which draws his pain and confusion. Arnold feels that in such a world which is without God, fundamentally separated from Nature, there is nothing to bind him to life, and strangely enough, little even to bind him to his fellowmen.”

In short, “Blind strivings, wounded feet, confused alarms,
ignorant armies clashing by night, howling senses ebb and flow
fatigue and fever, vexed hearts, sick hurry and divided aims, casual
creeds, the city’s jar, blind uncertainty, unspeakable desires
nameless feelings are criticised, judged, condemned.” Arnold’s
letter to his mother in 1869 is the best commentary on what
he sought to do in poetry by way of criticism and judgment—
“My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of
mind of the last quarter of a century.”

Arnold as an Elegiac Poet—His Pessimism and Melancholy

Arnold is the greatest elegiac poet of the Victorian age.
“If I had to define Matthew Arnold’s place in poetry” say
Garrod, “I should be disposed to say of him, quite simply
that he is the greatest elegiac poet in our language, not in virtue
merely of Thyris but in virtue of the whole temper of his
Muse. His genius was essentially elegiac. His poetry, profoundly
melancholy, runs from the world, runs from it, as I think
hurt, hurt in some vital part. It believes itself able to sustain
life only in the shade.”* The elegiac temper of Arnold is the
ruling passion of his life and poetry. “Nothing in Arnold’s
verse” says Hugh Walker “is more arresting than its elegiac
element. It is not too much to say there is no other English
poet in whom the elegiac spirit so reigns as it does in him. He
found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the
‘Virgilian cry’ over the mournfulness of mortal destiny.”* Other poets like Milton, Gray, Shelley, Tennyson had give
expression to their sorrow in single elegies, but no one else has
used the elegiac form so frequently as Arnold.

Not only are Arnold’s elegies numerous, but they also constitute his best work in poetry. The elegies of Arnold are in the line of Gray rather than that of Milton or Shelley or Tennyson. Even the personal elegies are marked with a note of general grief. Thyris is an elegy on his friend Clough; Rug\nChapel commemorates the death of his father Dr. Arnold, the
Headmaster of Rugby; A Southern Night is for his brother, an
Westminster Abbey is written on the death of Dean Stanley.
Each one of these elegies is of a personal character, but “eve

** Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.
in these instances of keen personal sorrow the poet widens his view and treats of human destiny, almost as much as Gray does in the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.*

Arnold had thus the capacity of writing a formal or traditional elegy and of expressing his elegiac mood in a poem. While *Thyris* in the original sense and its companion poem, *The Scholar Gipsy,* in the modern one, are his true elegies, the other elegiac pieces are what Elton calls them, *Associative Poetry* wherein “the ethical and reflective element easily overpowers the elegiac, and which circles round a place, or a person, or both.” Indeed it is the sense of tears in mortal affairs round him or “the heart-break in the heart of things” that prompted Arnold to write these elegiac verses, and he could feel one with Shelley in uttering “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.”

Poets learn in suffering, whether personal or imaginative, what they teach in song. “Arnold’s most consistent achievement”, observes Middleton Murry, “was in the kind which we call elegiac. It suited best with his own persistent mood, of restrained grief for the life which he could not accept and the soul which he could not make his own. Moreover, his elegiac poetry was in keeping with a true and living literary tradition.” In *Isolation* “the unplum’d, salt, strangling sea”, in *Too Late* “the lovers meet, but meet too late”, have all elegiac ring. “He is the greatest elegiac poet”, says Garrod, “in our language; not in virtue merely of *Thyris* but in virtue of the whole temper of his Muse. His genius was essentially elegiac.” Despite the worldly strain in him, “his best poetry stands deliberately aside from the world that it should be so he conceived it to be a condition of its life. The contrast between the superficial life of every day and the buried self of the soul is dominant in his poetry to the degree of tyranny.”

Arnold’s melancholy and pessimism sprang from many causes, the chief of them being, “the contemplation of man’s destiny from the hopeless tangle of his own age, and from the course of the life of mortal men on the earth.” Disappointment in love, deaths of friends and relatives, loss of faith in the age and

* Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.
above all the melancholy cast of his mind were further responsible for his pessimistic and melancholy outlook on life. This feeling of misery and melancholy throbs practically in every poem of Arnold, and can be traced to the philosophical, religious and social changes brought about by the development of science, utilitarian philosophy in his age, that called for a fresh adjustment of values. To the poet the world was a vale of tears, a place to endure and to suffer. In *Dover Beach* the world is represented as dreary as a desert—

'Ah, love, let us be true
To one another, for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new
Hath really neither joy, nor light, nor love,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night!

Man's lot in the universe is one of helplessness, hopelessness and despair. Man is lonely and solitary even in a populous world. Again and again the mind of the poet turns to the loneliness of life—

Yes! in the sea of life enisle
With echoing strains between us thrown.
Dotting the shore-less watery wild
We mortal millions live alone.
Nature also suffers from loneliness.

*Alone the sun rises and alone spring the great streams.*

Man's helplessness in the world is emphasised in two lines representing 'the quiet stoicism of a melancholy soul':

*We cannot kindle when we will*
*The fire which in the hearts resides.*

Our destiny is to spend life.

*In beating where we must not pass*
*And seeking what we shall not find:*

In grief and despair man leads his life, without ever experiencing the glow or joy of life. In *Scholar Gipsy* the tragedy and pathos of man's lot in the universe is pathetically presented:

*For whom each year we see*
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new
Who hesitate and falter life away
And lose tomorrow the ground won to-day.
In another poem the miserable spectacle of man marching
mournfully to the grave is poignantly struck:
With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig deep, lay stone on stone
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish it were done.
In Rugby Chapel we get a peep into the general lot of humanity—
Most men eddy about
Here there—eat and drink
Are raised aloft, are hurl’d in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving Nothing
And then they die—perish.
Man is a puppet in the hand of Destiny or Fate. The overpowering force of fate in human life is represented in Sohrab and Rustum, where under the power of fate the father kills his son—
We are all like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall,
And whether it will leave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to the sea,
Back out to sea, to the waves of death,
We know not.
The futility of Love and Ambition in human life is represented in Tristram and Iseult where the life of Alexander the Great who died at the age of thirty two, the foolishness of conquering empires and extending one’s kingdom is exposed.
Arnold’s Melancholy is not altogether sickening or sad. It has a silver lining in its cloud. “His scepticism is not without sunshine; his sadness not without gladness.” He himself realised in 1853, “the year of crystallisation of great intellectual changes in Arnold” that what the complaining millions of men want is something to elevate and ennoble them—not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dream.” The poet has thrown hints of his cheering message in a number of poems, although,
as he progressed he left poetry behind.” “The aids to noble life are within”, he maintains in one of his poems. In another he says “Task in our hours of insight will'd can be through hours of gloom fulfilled”, and signals to a rising, rousing day:

Despair not thou as I despair'd,  
Nor be cold gloom thy prison:  
Forward the gracious hours have fared,  
And see! the sun is risen!

Arnold’s Stoicism

Stoicism, as cultivated by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, laid emphasis on self control, fortitude, resignation and austerity. Arnold’s poetry was considerably influenced by the ideals of stoicism. He possessed both the strength and weakness of stoicism—

All pains the immortal spirit must endure.

Arnold’s stoicism is not of the purest kind. “A wistful yearning ‘to make for some impossible shore,” an agitated “stretching out of his hands for something beyond, found nursing of ‘unconquerable hope’—these are there in Arnold’s poetry contrary to Stoic philosophy. Moreover, the stern stoic demand for indifference to pain and the fate of men is honoured by Arnold more in its breach than in the observance. “Too sensitive to the troubles and tragedies around him, Arnold broke down into sadness and burst into sobs—for himself and the world. This is not the stoic fashion. Arnold’s sadness, therefore, makes him a loss to stoicism, but he becomes a gain to poetry.”

Arnold’s Style

Arnold’s style is marked with lucidity, restraint and simple grandeur. He is the master of condensed expression. “His verse lacks movement. It is almost statuesque, because each word is deliberately selected, each phrase finely chiselled and set in its place. He is a Greek in the sense he prefers simple and limpid diction. He is classical by reason of the exquisite harmony of tone, the measured fitness, the sweet reasonableness, the Virgilian dignity, the unerring urbanity and the liquid, clearness of style.”

The poet’s fastidious workmanship attracts us. The many

rhythmic felicities, with which his work abounds, please us. A few examples of Arnold's skilled workmanship are given by way of illustration—

Still nursing the unconquerable hope—
Still clutching the inviolable shade—

... ... ... ... ...

Who saw Life steadily and saw it whole—

... ... ... ... ...

All pains the immortal spirit must endure.

Arnold's Drawbacks

There are certain drawbacks in Arnold's poetry which lower his position among English poets. He lacks spontaneity, rapture, and emotional flights of imagination. "The urge is there to fly, the desire is there to soar, and the flying and soaring too are there to some extent, but the strength of the wings slackens ere long and the pinions flap in vain endeavour. The poetic aerodrome of Arnold is littered with the ruins of broken propellers and battered planes—frustrated pilgrims of the sky of song." Arnold has an uncertain ear for rhythm. The rush and sweep, the swell and surge, the profuse strains of unpremeditated art, the race of unbridled joy, the flow of notes in crystal stream, the bursting gladness of harmonious madness, the roll, the rise, the carol—these forever dear to Apollo, are not there in Arnold's poetry. He has the poet's vision, but not the poet's voice. There is some lack of poetic flame in his poetry. His poetry has "no colour, no warmth, no leap, no passion, no rapture, and hence according to some, fit to be read only by those who have crossed the golden threshold of life and entered the courtyard where leaden-ey'd despair and pulse-less philosophical consolations sit cheek by jowl, engrossed in mutual admiration."

Arnold's Place

Arnold has certain drawbacks, but they need not detract his worth. He has certain merits and excellences of his own which give him his place of honour among English poets. His suavity, wistfulness and serenity; his intellectualism and philosophical reflections; his sober and serious preoccupation with the problems of life; his chastened stoicism; his calm and accurate descriptions of Nature are sufficient recompense for his drawbacks. We can
sately give him a pretty high and permanent place in the poetic Pantheon.


Ans. “Nature of Arnold” says Stopford A. Brooke, “is frequently the nature the modern science has revealed to us, matter in motion, always acting rigidly, according to certain way nature, which, for want of a wiser term, we call laws. For the first time this view of Nature enters into English poetry with Arnold. He sees the loveliness of her doings, but he also sees her terrors and dreadfulness and her relentlessness. But what in his poetry he chiefly sees is the peace of Nature’s obedience of law, and the everlasting youth of her unchanging life.” Though Arnold lived with his father in the Lake District under the very influence of Wordsworth, his references to Nature lack the warmth and richness that marked the romantic treatment of Nature. “This is presumably due,” as Beech says, “to his want of enthusiasm for either science or religion, the two main inspirers of Nature worship. One feels at once, in reading Arnold, that one has reached a period of distinctly more modern than that of Wordsworth; that the poet no longer makes these religious assumptions in regard to the universe which were latent in Wordsworth’s philosophy of nature. He is the least transcendental of English poets; and so no German inspiration had come in, as with Emerson and Whitman, to give a new lease of life to Nature.”

Arnold’s reactions to Nature are according to his varying moods. In his early sonnet In Harmony with Nature he says:

*Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends,*

*Nature and man can never be fast friends*  
*Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave.*

Again in his another sonnet, Religious Isolation he avers that man must learn to play alone his religious game:

*Nature’s great law, and law of all men’s minds—*  
*To its own impulse every creature stirs;*  
*Live by thy light, and earth will live by hers.*

This is the scientific view of Nature in Arnold, according
to which Nature is just moving matter, acting on certain laws, and in concept, "neither good nor evil", and thus a neutral force devoid of any morality and indifferent to human sufferings. The closing lines of *Sohrab and Rustum* wherein:

*The majestic River floated on*

*Out of the mist and hum of that low land*

*Into the frosty star light, and there moved,*

*Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste.*

as if no grim human tragedy has occurred by her bank, are a clear illustration of his scientific treatment of nature.

But at other times Arnold maintains the distinction between Nature and man in order to exalt the moral qualities felt in Nature above the restlessness of man. In the following lines the poet reads a moral meaning in Nature and describes Nature not as she actually is but what he imagines her to be. His treatment of her becomes artistic or poetical as he follows the way of Wordsworth:

*Yet Fausta, the mute turf we tread,*

*The solemn hills around us read,*

*This stream which falls incessantly*

*The strange scrawl'd rocks, the lonely sky,*

*If I might lend their life a voice,*

*Seems to hear rather than rejoice.*

*Calm soul of all things: make it mine*

*To feel amid the city's jar,*

*That there abides a peace of thine*

*Man did not make, and cannot mar,*

*Blow, ye winds; lift me with you;*

*I come to the wild;*

*Fold closely, O Nature,*

*Thine arms round thy child.*

Yet in *The Youth of Nature* Arnold's approach to and interpretation of Nature is metaphysical and cosmological. Coleridge's dictum that "we receive but what we give, and in our life alone does Nature live", is challenged by Arnold. According to Arnold, *Nature does not depend for its life upon the observation and appreciation of man; it exists independently, with a light and glory of its own, with qualities and characteristics of its own:*
Loveliness, Magic, and Grace,
They are here—they are set in the world—
They abide—and the finest of souls
Has not been thrill'd by them all,
Nor the dullest been dead to them quite.
The poet who sings them may die,
But they are immortal, and live,
For they are the life of the world.

"Indeed", says Stopford A. Brooke again, 'Arnold, was not faithful to the scientific view of Nature. His conception of her wavered with his mood. He, sometimes, in a sort of reversion to Wordsworth, speaks of her as a powerful help to him." Arnold turns to her for the moral lessons she teaches. He contrasts her calm with our turmoil, her rest after action with our hurry, our confusion, and our noise:

One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee—
One lesson that in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties served in one,
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—
Of Toil unsevered from Tranquillity
Of labour, that in still advance outgrows
For noisier schemes, accomplished in Repose.
Too great far haste, too high for rivalry.
Yes, while on earth, a thousand discords ring
Man's senseless uproar mingling with his toil,
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,
Their glorious tasks in silences perfecting;
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.

It is, thus, the one great lesson of tranquil toil, of continuous work as duty that are taught by Nature to Arnold, who in turn describes them to men. But she is very often to him an escape, a refuge from the fever and fret, weariness and waste of life, from "the infection of our mental strife." In Self Dependence he entreats the Sea and the Stars:

Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me,
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end.

Arnold is very intimate with Nature and it is this intimacy
that makes his descriptions of Nature vivid and true. He invests with poetic fancy the Oxford countryside, the Alpine Scenery, the Oxus in *Sohrab and Rustum*, and the Thames in *Thyris* and mountains and meadows, all receive the magic of poetry in such lines—"Alpine meadows, soft suffused with rain, where thick the croous blows", and in *Thyris*, "Roses that down the alleys shine afar", or "Primroses, orphans of the flower pine." The accuracy of Tennyson has been greatly and fondly praised, but Arnold does not lag him behind in the exactness of observation and at times in the vividness of description. He is accurate not only in respect of flowers, but even of mountains, roads, rivers, and lakes. They are all depicted with precision and exactitude. Here is a lovely picture of the Oxford countryside:

*Screan'd in this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,*

*And here till sun-down, Shepherd will be,*

*Though the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep*  
*And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see*  
*Pale blue convolvulus in tendrils creep;*  
*And air-swept linders yield*  
*Their scents, and rustle down their perfumed showers*  
*Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,*  
*And bower me from the August sun with shade;*  
*And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers.*

Arnold speaks affectionately of birds and flowers, and the swallow, the rook and cuckoo find favour with him. The nightingale receives so much attention that there is one complete poem on her—*Philomela*, "the tawny-throated Wanderer from a Grecian shore", with "eternal passion! eternal pain." As for flowers the blue convolvulus, the scented poppy, the chestnut flower and the gold-dusted snapdragon, the cowslip and the daffodil, the white and purple fritillaries, the sweet william and blond meadow-sweet, the May flower and the primrose, brighten and perfume Arnold’s poetry.

It is generally the quiet and subdued moods, the silences of Nature than her sounds that Arnold’s poetry treats of. *Rugby Chapel* begins with "Coldly, sadly descends the autumn evening" and *Sohrab and Rustum* with "the first grey of morning" that "fill’d the east, and the fog rose out of the Oxus stream." It is
rather “mist than brightness, moonlight more than sunlight, twilight more than daylight” that we meet in Arnold’s poetry. In *Self Dependence* the sea performs with joy its long-silvered roll. In *The Scholar Gipsy* there are strips of moon-blanch’d green, while in *Dover Beach* the poet finds “the turbid ebb and flow of human misery.” In the ebb that meets the moon-blanch’d sand, and in *Tristram and Isult* the poet speaks of:

*For beyond the sparkling trees
Of the castle park one sees
The bare heaths clear as day
Moor behind moor, far, far away.
Into the heart of Brittany.*

The rivers like the Thames, the Nile, the Rhone, the Oxus, the Moorshab, the Tejend, and the Helmud are introduced chiefly to form a back-ground to his poems, but the poet endows them at times with a symbolism. The Oxus in *Sohrab and Rustum*, “a foil’d circutous wanderer”, that flows through beds of sand and matted rushy isles, and has thus many ups and down prior to its “lang’d-for dash of waves” for “his luminous home in the star-shot Aral Sea, is symbolic of human destiny in its various stages from the cradle to the crematorium. That is why “Q” justly asks—“Who can think of Arnold’s poetry as whole without feeling that Nature is always behind it as a living background?—Whether it be the storm of wind and rain shaking Tintagel, or the sea-laden watermeadows along Thames, or the pine forests on the bank of English garden in June, or Oxus, its mists and fens and “the hushed Chorasmian waste.”

“Arnold had Wordsworth’s calm, but neither his cheerfulness, nor his detachment. Wordsworth lives and thinks with the hills for his sole companions, but Arnold never rests in Nature alone. In place of the steady optimism of Wordsworth we have in Arnold the sense that a destiny; so rarely yielding great results as life of man:

*Though bearable, seems hardly worth
This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth*.”

Arnold’s attitude towards Nature is of a great variety. He observes her neutrally, for she “sees man control the wind, the wind sweep man away.” For him she possesses a gaiety
or cheerfulness but that only intensifies the darkness and despair of man, he finds her fickle and callous, but possessing tranquil toil and persistent labour. He adopts both subjective and objective attitude towards Nature, and if he enjoys on the one hand in “the mighty world of eye and ear” and feels Nature’s calm “aimed the city’s jar”, on the other he maintains that she has her own loveliness, magic, and grace far beyond our reach. But Arnold goes directly to Nature so that he may enter her sanctuary:

Thus feeling, gazing, let me grow
Compos’d, refresh’d, ennobled, clear,
Then willing let my spirit go
To work or wait elsewhere or here.

Q. 19. In what way did Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861) James Thomson (1834-1882) and Edward Fitz-Gerald (1809-1883) carry forward the pessimistic note in Victorian poetry?

Ans. A careful study of Victorian poetry brings out several strains, the chief of them being a preoccupation with the sombre and pessimistic view of life. Matthew Arnold stood at the head of pessimistic and elegiac poetry in the Victorian age. The lead given by Arnold in this direction was followed by a number of other Victorian poets, the chief of them being Arthur Hugh Clough, James Thomson, and Edward Fitz-Gerald. They laid greater emphasis on the poetry of reason and paved the way for the intellectualisation of emotional life. “It was the endeavour to intellectualise the visions of the imaginative life that led Arnold, Clough, Fitz-Gerald, and James Thomson into that mood of wistful melancholy, that crystallised soon into a more or less pessimistic criticism of life.”*

Arthur Clough (1819-1861)

Arthur Clough, the subject of Matthew Arnold’s elegy Thyrsis, was a representative Victorian poet expressing in his narrative, descriptive, and lyrical verses, the doubts, uncertainties, questionings, and cynicism of the Victorian age. He was, “a half-hewn Matthew Arnold, left lying in the quarry.”**

* Compton Rickett: A History of English Literature
** F. L. Lucas: Ten Victorian Poets
He was the "truest expression in verse of the moral and intellectual tendencies, the doubt and struggle towards settled convictions of period in which he lived."* His entire work in poetry is intellectual in character and is marked with introspective self-analysis and self-delineation. It expresses with great sincerity the spiritual unrest corroding his spirit, and his futile attempt to restore faith and hope in an age of doubt and disillusion.

Clough's first work The Bothie of Tober-na Vuobct is a narrative poem in hexametre and deals with the problem of women in Victorian society. It is marked with a humorous fancy, and deals with the vital problem of woman's emancipation in a light flippancy tone. It suffers from a certain roughness of artistry.

Clough's second poem Amours de Voyage is a representative poem of the age, and exhibits the doubts and uncertainties of the period in which he lived. Its hero Claude is a miniature Hamlet, and his strong resolves are sickled over by the pale cast of thought. The poem stands as a landmark of the age characterised by paralysis of action through doubt, and lack of real purpose brought about by the conflicting claims of religion and science to hold the day in their power.

Clough's Dipsychus is a remarkable work in the field of pessimistic and melancholy poetry. It depicts the conflict between science and religion, and throws a flood of light on the doubts and conflicts marring the life of the people of the age. The purpose of Dipsychus is "to depict a spirit divided against itself in its battlings with good and evil, pleasure and pain, faith and doubt, and all the most complex problems of life."** The spirit of this poem is carried forward in a number of smaller poems such as The New Sinai, Qui Laborat, Orat, Easter Day and Naples. We prefer to him in his mood of frank cynicism and religious agnosticism.

 Thou shalt have one God only; who
 Would be at the expense of two?
 No graven images may be

** Hugh Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era.