

Our Prize Competition.

WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE CHARACTER IN FICTION, AND WHY?

We have pleasure in awarding the 5s. prize this week to Miss M. K. Steele, Assistant Matron, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Rochester, for her article printed below on

HANS ANDERSEN'S LITTLE MERMAID.

To remain young for ever one must be intensely human and appeal to young and old alike.

The Little Mermaid will never grow old. She holds me in her spell now even more than in the childhood days; her charm and mystery are as fresh and beautiful as ever.

To create an atmosphere is the greatest of all attainments. Hans Andersen's knowledge of women and children was immense, and of all his delightful creations the Sea Maiden stands alone.

She was a pioneer; she desired knowledge; she dreamed day dreams; she moulded ideals; her heart opened like a flower to the sun, and woman-like she gave of all her best, and in return got nothing.

One pictures her deep under the weight of the chill, restless sea, longing to be free, to see and understand the hidden mysteries of the land above, so she appeals to us with all her power. Freedom was offered her in the shape of suffering. She did not hesitate. What were the tears and forebodings of her sisters, the playfellows of her childhood? She forgot them all. Life called her and she followed. Poor little sea-maid. One almost hears her sob, in her effort to please the ideal, the Prince, and even now the sensation of sympathetic prickles for the bleeding feet is almost real. One wonders what her sensations must have been when she realised she was only a pleasant episode in the Prince's life. When she found that her sisters had been right, did she falter? Temptation hovered over her. How easy to kill and regain her immortality, and yet she did not.

Rising all glorious in her anguish, her love conquers; she prefers to float as a soulless bubble in the ether, hoping perchance to catch some fitting reflection of her master, the heartless ingrate, and keep it imprisoned for ever. Most exquisite and fragrant of fantasies, woven from a stray sunbeam and a restless sea; your story will never fade, your charm and beauty never falter.

For me you live for ever.

Miss Ména L. G. Bielby writes:—"I had just entered my second decade . . . when

from the green and white covers of three little books there came into the great loneliness of my inner life a group of friends who proved a godsend to me." These friends were the March family portrayed in Miss Alcott's "Little Women," from whom Miss Bielby gained encouragement "for my own passionate craving for a life of simplicity, truth, straightforwardness, softened by refinement, and enriched by culture. . . . Of all that merry party my favourite was Jo. . . . To-day, with the widened outlook the years have brought, my judgment is still the same. Jo March at forty would have been the 'strong, helpful, tender-hearted woman' whom her transcendentalist father foresaw in the ultra high-spirited girl of 16, whose sacrifice of her beautiful chestnut hair revealed her potentiality for unselfish service. Always enthusiastic for the right, ardent, generous, impulsive, ready to render homage to goodness in others, loyal to those who loved her, having abundant humour, and brimming over with energy, she would have been in the vanguard of every modern movement."

Miss Maria Woodward gives Arthur Wellington Moore, nicknamed "the Sky-Pilot," in Ralph Connor's well-known book of that name, as her favourite character, because he was "a hero in the fight against every kind of evil in mankind."

Miss Grace Robinson's favourite character in fiction is "Evangeline," of whom she writes: "Evangeline, tender, steadfast, unselfish, has always seemed to me the embodiment of all that is most desirable in woman. How far she influenced my adoption of nursing as a career I hardly know, but certainly her example has been an inspiration to me through a long, varied, and happy time in the service of the sick."

Miss M. Atkinson votes for "John Halifax, Gentleman," and Miss E. H. L. Dowd for Nell Trent, "Little Nell" in "The Old Curiosity Shop," "because of her noble life of devoted self-sacrifice." "Uncle Tom," the hero of Mrs. Beecher Stowe's novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin," is named by several competitors, and "Maggie" in "The Mill on the Floss," is also a favourite because, as Miss Greenwood remarks, "she is so human."

It is notable how almost invariably the favourite named is one who was the hero or heroine of the writer's childish days, to whom she has remained constant through adult life.

QUESTION FOR THIS WEEK.

"What danger attends nasal douching?"

Rules for competing for this competition will be found on page xii.

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