2.3 The Twins

In form and feature, face and limb,
I grew so like my brother,
That folks got taking me for him,
And each for one another.
It puzzled all our kith and kin,
It reached a fearful pitch;
For one of us was born a twin,
Yet not soul knew which.

One day, to make the matter worse,
Before our names were fixed,
As we were being washed by nurse,
We got completely mixed;
And thus, you see, by fate’s decree,
Or rather nurse’s whim,
My brother john got christened me,
And I got christened him.

This fatal likeness even dogged
My footsteps, when at school,
And I was always getting flogged,
For John tuned out a fool.
I put this question, fruitlessly,
To everyone I knew,
‘What would you do, if you were me,
To prove that you were you?

Our close resemblance turned the tide
Of my domestic life,
For somehow my intended bride
Became my brother’s wife.
In fact, year after year the same
Absurd mistakes went on,
And when I died, the neighbours came
And buried brother John.

-Henry Sambrooke Leigh
Meanings:

twins - brothers/sisters born of the same mother and at the same time
form and feature - structure and appearance
taking - (here) mistaking
kith and kin – relatives
pitch - limit, height
decree – order
Whim – a freak, a sudden change of mind
Christened – name given to a baby at the naming ceremony
fatal – harmful, leading to disaster or death.
likeness –
dogged – continued to follow
flogged – beaten up
fruitlessly - without producing any useful result
resemblance – likeness
turned the tide – changed the course or direction
Intended – planned for
Absurd – foolish

form and feature: structure and appearance, taking: (here) mistaking, kith and kin: relatives, pitch: limit, height, decree : order, whim: a sudden change of mind, christened: name given to a baby at the naming ceremony, fatal: leading to disaster or death, dogged: continued to follow, flogged: beaten up, turned the tide: changed the situation

Language study:

(1) Write the rhyming pairs from the extract:

(Answer are directly given.)

(1) limb – him          (2) brother - another
(3) kin – twin  (4) pitch – which
(5) worse – nurse  (6) fixed – mixed
(7) decree – me  (8) whim – him
(9) dogged – flogged  (10) school – fool
(11) knew – you  (12) fruitlessly – me
(13) tide – bride  (14) life – wife
(15) same – came  (16) on – john.

(2) What do the following words/expressions refer to?
(Answers are directly given.)

1) Kith and kin – friends and relatives
2) Folks – people
3) Soul – a person
4) My brother – one of the twins.

(3) Complete the following with the information from the poem:

(1) The twins were similar to each other in form and feature and face and limb.
(2) The people mistook the twins, one for the another.
(3) No one knew who was a twin.
(4) Kith and Kin were puzzled by the brother’s similarity.
(5) The narrator should have been christened John.
(6) The narrator’s brother was named as John.
(7) The twins got mixed up when they were being washed by nurse.
(8) The twins were mixed up before their names were fixed.
(9) The narrator got flogged when John turned out a fool.
(10) The narrator got punishment with a flogging.
(11) His likeness with his brother dogged poet’s footsteps at school.
(12) The narrator asked the question fruitlessly.

(4) Write the Collocations (words that generally go together) from the extract:
(Answers are directly given.)

(1) form and features
(2) face and limb
(3) take for
(4) kith and kin
(5) fearful pitch.
(6) fate’s decree
(7) get flogged
(8) Close resemblance
(9) turn the tide
(10) domestic life
(11) intended bride

(5) Choose the correct meaning of the given words:

(1) bride -
(a) wife (b) girl to be married (c) any girl
Ans. Bride - girl to be married

(2) resemblance -
(a) remembrance (b) likeness (c) dissimilarity
Ans. Resemblance – likeness

(3) absurd -
(a) wicked (b) foolish (c) unnecessary
Ans. Absurd – foolish

(4) mistakes -
(a) defeats (b) blames (c) errors
Ans. mistakes – errors

(6) Write the meaning of ‘turned the tide’.
Ans. Change the course of direction.

(7) Find the words from the extract that tell the narrator was like his brother.
Ans. Our close resemblance.

(8) Appreciation of the poem

(1) Title: The title of the poem is ‘The Twins’.
(2) Poet: The name of the poet is Henry S. Leigh.
(3) Theme/Central Idea: The central idea of the poem is the problems faced by one of the identical twins and his suffering because of the resemblance with his twin. This poem is humorous in nature and talks about the brothers in a light hearted vein.
(4) Rhyme scheme: The rhyme scheme of the poem is “abab”.
(5) Figure of speech: Alliteration
(6) Special features: The poem is written in a light hearted vein and uses humour to emphasize its main point.
(7) Favourite lines: My favourite lines are
“And when I died, the neighbours came
And buried my brother John.”
(8) Why I like the poem: I like the poem for its sense of humour and wit. The lives of the twins is very interesting and exciting and so I find the poem appealing.
(9) Complete the web diagram.

(10) Write any two lines from the poem, that you find most humorous.

    Ans. (1) For somehow, my intended bride
            Became my brother’s wife.
            (2) When I died, the neighbours came
                And buried brother John.

(11) Answer the Following:

    (I) Who became the wife of narrator’s brother?
    (II) What is impossible in the last two lines?
    (III) In what aspects were the brothers alike each other?
    (IV) What was the puzzling thing about the twins?
    (V) Write any two lines from the extract that you find humorous.
    (VI) How did the speaker suffer at school?
    (VII) Pick out four situations in the lives of the twins, which are too absurd and senseless to believe.

(10) Your Response

    Read the questions given below and give your personal response to them:

    Q 1. Write a summary of this poem in about 15 to 20 lines in your own words. Suggest another title for the poem and describe what lines you like best.