J.R.R. Tolkien Essay, Research Paper

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was the first son and first child of Arthur Reuel Tolkien and Mabel Suffield Tolkien. Arthur Tolkien was a banker by profession, first with Lloyds Bank, and then, when promotions and advancement came too slowly for a man who wanted to raise a family, with the Bank of Africa in Bloemfontein, South Africa. His family was German by descent and had been piano manufacturers in Bloemfontein until Arthur’s father went bankrupt. The Tolkiens had always been solid members of the middle class in earlier years, but by the time that young J.R.R. Tolkien was born they were well in debt.

J.R.R. Tolkien was born on January 3, 1892 and his brother, Hillary Arthur Reuel Tolkien, was born on February 17, 1894. All four of them, living as one happy family in South Africa, soon became separated. Mabel, not liking the heat and the lack of society, decided to take the children and move back to Birmingham where Arthur planned to join them later. In November of 1895, not a year after his family’s departure, Arthur Tolkien was stricken with rheumatic fever, a disease usually suffered by children and accompanied by a high fever, swelling of the joints, and inflammation of the heart. When her husband had not recovered by January, Mabel decided that she and her sons must return to Africa to care for him. However, before they could get there news came that Arthur had suffered a severe hemorrhage, and by February 15, 1896, he was dead.

After the death of her husband, Mabel Tolkien decided that her children would have to come first in her life. She would make sure they would have a roof over their heads and a good education. Though they did not have a lot of money, Mabel Tolkien moved them to Sarehole, a small village just outside Birmingham. J.R.R. Tolkien loved Sarehole. It had everything a small energetic boy could want: fields, trees, a river and a mill, countryside to explore, and dells in which to picnic. As for education, Mabel Tolkien decided to help him get smart enough to pass the entrance examinations for the King Edward VI school in Birmingham, an excellent grammar school and, nearly as important, Arthur Tolkien’s old school.

For the first few years after his father’s death, life was kind to Tolkien and to his brother. But in 1900 two important changes intruded into the lives of these two people. First, in June of that year, Mabel Tolkien converted to Catholicism and began to instruct her sons in its beliefs and practices. Second, Tolkien passed the entrance examination and entered the King Edward VI School.

There were two reasons that entering school were important for Tolkien: it was his father’s school, and it was the best school in Birmingham. Mabel Tolkien knew her son was bright but she also knew that he was lazy. She knew that his only chance for a university education was if he got a scholarship. Therefore, he had to have the best grammar school education available. Because Birmingham was about four miles away, Tolkien had no way of getting there every morning. So, the family took a house in the town of Birmingham which meant that Tolkien would have to leave his beloved Sarehole. Even though he never returned, the memory of it is seen in the rural scenes of nearly all his works.

In the fall of 1904, when Tolkien was twelve, his mother, who had suffered for several years with diabetes, died. At her death bed, she left her sons eight hundred pounds invested in securities and the guardianship of Father Francis Morgan, their parish priest and faithful friend. While living in a home provided by Father Francis, Tolkien was introduced to a young girl by the name of Edith Bratt who was also staying in the same house. Because they were around each other so much they began to have feelings for one another. The Father picked up on this and realizing that Tolkien needed to concentrate on his studies and not girls, sent her away to keep distance between them. When Edith turned twenty-one, age of majority, she was reunited with Tolkien just as he was finishing up his undergraduate education and earning his First Class degree in English Languages and Literature. Soon there after Edith Bratt and J.R.R. Tolkien were married on March 22, 1916.

Tolkien was able to enter Oxford University because he won, on his second attempt, a scholarship. Although the award alone would not have provided enough for his university education, a school-leaving grant from the King Edward School and a little help from Father Francis Morgan made an Oxford education a real possibility. Now all he had to do was earn a decent degree. While at school Tolkien joined every possible club and group that he thought had any interest to him. Soon he was attending meetings all day long and engaging himself in writing stories and poems for these groups. He had soon made a name for himself at the Oxford University, successfully gaining a First-class degree in June of 1915.

Soon after his graduation, Tolkien joined the army and fought for his country. Upon returning home he returned to Oxford. In 1925 Tolkien was named Bosworth and Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. To be named to a professorship at any British university is a great honor, for there is usually only one professor in each subject. After only four years away, Tolkien returned to Oxford where he completed, over a long life, his best known works of fantasy and of scholarship, The Hobbit (1937) and The Lord of the Rings (1954).

Tolkien died in 1973. Even though he was dead, his fans made him come alive in his books. J.R.R. Tolkien was ahead of his time with his writing. Although some did not understand his work, those who did admired him for it. His work at Oxford University will be admired forever. he truly was a maker of another world.