Shelley

Sydney Waterlow

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Chapter I Shelley and His Age

In the case of most great writers our interest in them as persons is derived from out interest in them as writers; we are not very curious about them except for reasons that have something to do with their art. With Shelley it is different. During his life he aroused fears and hatreds, loves and adorations, that were quite irrelevant to literature; and even now, when he has become a classic, he still causes excitement as a man. His lovers are as vehement as ever. For them he is the "banner of freedom," which,

> "Torn but flying,
>
> Streams like a thunder−cloud against the wind."

He has suffered that worst indignity of canonisation as a being saintly and superhuman, not subject to the morality of ordinary mortals. He has been bedaubed with pathos. Nevertheless it is possible still to recognise in him one of the most engaging personalities that ever lived. What is the secret of this charm? He had many characteristics that belong to the most tiresome natures; he even had the qualities of the man as to whom one wonders whether partial insanity may not be his best excuse−−inconstancy expressing itself in hysterical revulsions of feeling, complete lack of balance, proneness to act recklessly to the hurt of others. Yet he was loved and respected by contemporaries of tastes very different from his own, who were good judges and intolerant of bores−−by Byron, who was apt to care little for any one, least of all for poets, except himself; by Peacock, who poured laughter on all enthusiasms; and by Hogg, who, though slightly eccentric, was a Tory eccentric. The fact is that, with all his defects, he had two qualities which, combined, are so attractive that there is scarcely anything they will not redeem−− perfect sincerity without a thought of self, and vivid emotional force. All his faults as well as his virtues were, moreover, derived from a certain strong feeling, coloured in a peculiar way which will be explained in what follows−−a sort of ardour of universal benevolence. One of his letters ends with these words: "Affectionate love to and from all. This ought to be not only the vale of a letter, but a superscription over the gate of life"−−words which, expressing not merely Shelley's opinion of what ought to be, but what he actually felt, reveal the ultimate reason why he is still loved, and the reason, too, why he has so often been idealised. For this universal benevolence is a thing which appeals to men almost with the force of divinity, still carrying, even when mutilated and obscured by frailties, some suggestion of St. Francis or of Christ.

The object of these pages is not to idealise either his life, his characte, or his works. The three are inseparably connected, and to understand one we must understand all. The reason is that Shelley is one of the most subjective of writers. It would be hard to name a poet who has kept his art more free from all taint of representation of the real, making it nor an instrument for creating something life−like, but a more and more intimate echo or emanation of his own spirit. In studying his writings we shall see how they flow from his dominating emotion of love for his fellow−men; and the drama of his life, displayed against the background of the time, will in turn

throw light on that emotion. His benevolence took many forms−−none perfect, some admirable, some ridiculous. It was too universal. He never had a clear enough perception of the real qualities of real men and women; hence his loves for individuals, as capricious as they were violent, always seem to lack something which is perhaps the most valuable element in human affection. If in this way we can analyse his temperament successfully, the process should help us to a more critical understanding, and so to a fuller enjoyment, of the poems.

This greatest of our lyric poets, the culmination of the Romantic Movement in English literature, appeared in an age which, following on the series of successful wars that had established British power all over the world, was one of the gloomiest in our history. If in some ways the England of 1800−20 was ahead of the rest of Europe, in others it lagged far behind. The Industrial Revolution, which was to turn us from a nation of peasants and traders into a nation of manufacturers, had begun; but its chief fruits as yet were increased materialism and greed, and politically the period was one of blackest reaction. Alone of European peoples we had been untouched by the tide of Napoleon's conquests, which, when it receded from the Continent, at least left behind a framework of enlightened institutions, while our success in the Napoleonic wars only confirmed the ruling aristocratic families in their grip of the nation which they had governed since the reign of Anne. This despotism crushed the humble and stimulated the high−spirited to violence, and is the reason why three such poets as Byron, Landor, and Shelley, though by birth and fortune members of the ruling class, were pioneers as much of political as of spiritual rebellion. Unable to breathe the atmosphere of England, they were driven to live in exile.

It requires some effort to reconstruct that atmosphere to−day. A foreign critic [Dr. George Brandes, in vol. iv. of his 'Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature'] has summed it up by saying that England was then pre−eminently the home of cant; while in politics her native energy was diverted to oppression, in morals and religion it took the form of hypocrisy and persecution. Abroad she was supporting the Holy Alliance, throwing her weight into the scale against all movements for freedom. At home there was exhaustion after war; workmen were thrown out of employment, and taxation pressed heavily on high rents and the high price of corn, was made cruel by fear; for the French Revolution had sent a wave of panic through the country, not to ebb until about 1830. Suspicion of republican principles−−which, it seemed, led straight to the Terror−−frightened many good men, who would otherwise have been reformers, into supporting the triumph of coercion and Toryism. The elder generation of poets had been republicans in their youth. Wordsworth had said of the Revolution that it was "bliss to be alive" in that dawn; Southey and Coleridge had even planned to found a communistic society in the New World. Now all three were rallied to the defence of order and property, to Church and Throne and Constitution. From their seclusion in the Lakes, Southey and Wordsworth praised the royal family and celebrated England as the home of freedom; while Thomson wrote "Rule, Britannia," as if Britons, though they never, never would be slaves to a foreigner, were to a home−grown tyranny more blighting, because more stupid, than that of Napoleon. England had stamped out the Irish rebellion of 1798 in blood, had forced Ireland by fraud into the Union of 1800, and was strangling her industry and commerce. Catholics could neither vote nor hold office. At a time when the population of the United Kingdom was some thirty millions, the Parliamentary franchise was possessed by no more than a million persons, and most of the seats in the House of Commons were the private property of rich men. Representative government did not exist; whoever agitated for some measure of it was deported to Australia or forced to fly to America. Glasgow and Manchester weavers starved and rioted. The press was gagged and the Habeas Corpus Act constantly suspended. A second rebellion in Ireland, when Castlereagh "dabbled his sleek young hands in Erin's gore," was suppressed with unusual ferocity. In England in 1812 famine drove bands of poor people to wander and pillage. Under the criminal law, still of medieval cruelty, death was the punishment for the theft of a loaf or a sheep. The social organism had come to a deadlock−−on the one hand a starved and angry populace, on the other a vast Church−and−King party, impregnably powerful, made up of all who had "a stake in the country." The strain was not to be relieved until the Reform Act of 1832 set the wheels in motion again; they then moved painfully indeed, but still they moved. Meanwhile Parliament was the stronghold of selfish interests; the Church was the jackal of the gentry; George III, who lost the American colonies and maintained negro slavery, was on the throne, until he went mad and was succeeded by his profligate son.

Shelley said of himself that he was

"A nerve o'er which do creep The else unfelt oppressions of this earth,"

and all the shades of this dark picture are reflected in his life and in his verse. He was the eldest son of a Sussex family that was loyally Whig and moved in the orbit of the Catholic Dukes of Norfolk, and the talk about emancipation which he would hear at home may partly explain his amazing invasion of Ireland in 1811−12, when he was nineteen years old, with the object of procuring Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Union Act−−subjects on which he was quite ignorant. He addressed meetings, wasted money, and distributed two pamphlets "consisting of the benevolent and tolerant deductions of philosophy reduced into the simplest language." Later on, when he had left England for ever, he still followed eagerly the details of the struggle for freedom at home, and in 1819 composed a group of poems designed to stir the masses from their lethargy. Lord Liverpool's administration was in office, with Sidmouth as Home Secretary and Castlereagh as Foreign Secretary, a pair whom he thus pillories:

"As a shark and dog−fish wait
Under an Atlantic Isle,
For the negro ship, whose freight
Is the theme of their debate,
Wrinkling their red gills the while−−

Are ye, two vultures sick for battle,
Two scorpions under one wet stone,
Two bloodless wolves whose dry throats rattle,
Two crows perched on the murrained cattle,
Two vipers tangled into one."

The most effective of these bitter poems is 'The Masque of Anarchy', called forth by the "Peterloo Massacre" at Manchester on August 16, 1819, when hussars had charged a peaceable meeting held in support of Parliamentary reform, killing six people and wounding some seventy others. Shelley's frenzy of indignation poured itself out in the terrific stanzas, written in simplest language so as to be understood by the people, which tell how

"I met a murder on the way−−
He had a mask like Castlereagh−−
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven blood−hounds followed him."

The same year and mood produced the great sonnet, 'England in 1819'−−

"An old, mad, blind, despised and dying king,
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow

Through public scorn,−−mud from a muddy spring."

and to the same group belongs that not quite successful essay in sinister humour, 'Swellfoot the Tyrant' (1820), suggested by the grunting of pigs at an Italian fair, and burlesquing the quarrel between the Prince Regent and his wife. When the Princess of Wales (Caroline of Brunswick−Wolfenbuttel), after having left her husband and perambulated Europe with a paramour, returned, soon after the Prince's accession as George IV, to claim her position as Queen, the royal differences became an affair of high national importance. The divorce case which followed was like a gangrenous eruption symptomatic of the distempers of the age. Shelley felt that sort of disgust which makes a man rave and curse under the attacks of some loathsome disease; if he laughs, it is the laugh of frenzy. In the slight Aristophanic drama of 'Swellfoot', which was sent home, published, and at once suppressed, he represents the men of England as starving pigs content to lap up such diluted hog's−wash as their tyrant, the priests, and the soldiers will allow them. At the end, when the pigs, rollicking after the triumphant Princess, hunt down their oppressors, we cannot help feeling a little sorry that he does not glide from the insistent note of piggishness into some gentler mood: their is a rasping quality in his humour, even though it is always on the side of right. He wrote one good satire though. This is 'Peter Bell the Third' (1819), an attack on Wordsworth, partly literary for the dulness of his writing since he had been sunk in clerical respectability, partly political for his renegade flunkyism.

In 1820 the pall which still hung over northern Europe began to lift in the south. After Napoleon's downfall the Congress of Vienna (1814−16) had parcelled Europe out on the principle of disregarding national aspirations and restoring the legitimate rulers. This system, which could not last, was first shaken by revolutions that set up constitutional governments in Spain and Naples. Shelley hailed these streaks of dawn with joy, and uttered his enthusiasm in two odes−−the 'Ode to Liberty' and the 'Ode to Naples'−−the most splendid of those cries of hope and prophecy with which a long line of English poets has encouraged the insurrection of the nations. Such cries, however, have no visible effect on the course of events. Byron's jingles could change the face of the world, while all Shelley's pure and lofty aspirations left no mark on history. And so it was, not with his republican ardours alone, but with all he undertook. Nothing he did influenced his contemporaries outside his immediate circle; the public only noticed him to execrate the atheist, the fiend, and the monster. He felt that "his name was writ on water," and languished for want of recognition. His life, a lightning−flash across the storm−cloud of the age, was a brief but crowded record of mistakes and disasters, the classical example of the rule that genius is an infinite capacity for getting into trouble.

Though poets must "learn in suffering what they teach in song," there is often a vein of comedy in their lives. If we could transport ourselves to Miller's Hotel, Westminster Bridge, on a certain afternoon in the early spring of 1811, we should behold a scene apparently swayed entirely by the Comic Muse. The member for Shoreham, Mr. Timothy Shelley, a handsome, consequential gentleman of middle age, who piques himself on his enlightened opinions, is expecting two guests to dinner−−his eldest son, and his son's friend, T. J. Hogg, who have just been sent down from Oxford for a scandalous affair of an aesthetical squib. When the young men arrive at five o'clock, Mr. Shelley receives Hogg, an observant and cool−headed person, with graciousness, and an hour is spent in conversation. Mr. Shelley runs on strangely, "in an odd, unconnected manner, scolding, crying, swearing, and then weeping again." After dinner, his son being out of the room, he expresses his surprise to Hogg at finding him such a sensible fellow, and asks him what is to be done with the scapegoat. "Let him be married to a girl who will sober him." The wine moves briskly round, and Mr. Shelley becomes maudlin and tearful again. He is a model magistrate, the terror and the idol of poachers; he is highly respected in the House of Commons, and the Speaker could not get through the session without him. Then he drifts to religion. God exists, no one can deny it; in fact, he has the proof in his pocket. Out comes a piece of paper, and arguments are read aloud, which his son recognises as Palley's. "Yes, they are Palley's arguments, but he had them from me; almost everything in Palley's book he had taken from me." The boy of nineteen, who listens fuming to this folly, takes it all with fatal seriousness. In appearance he is no ordinary being. A shock of dark brown hair makes his small round head look larger than it really is; from beneath a pale, freckled forehead, deep blue eyes, large and mild as a stag's, beam an earnestness which easily flashes into enthusiasm; the nose is small and turn−up, the beardless lips girlish and

sensitive. He is tall, but stoops, and has an air of feminine fragility, though his bones and joints are large. Hands and feet, exquisitely shaped, are expressive of high breeding. His expensive, handsome clothes are disordered and dusty, and bulging with books. When he speaks, it is in a strident peacock voice, and there is an abrupt clumsiness in his gestures, especially in drawing−rooms, where he is ill at ease, liable to trip in the carpet and upset furniture. Complete absence of self−consciousness, perfect disinterestedness, are evident in every tone; it is clear that he is an aristocrat, but it is also clear that he is a saint.

The catastrophe of expulsion from Oxford would have been impossible in a well−regulated university, but Percy Bysshe Shelley could not have fitted easily into any system. Born at Field Place, Horsham, Sussex, on August 4, 1792, simultaneously with the French Revolution, he had more than a drop of wildness in his blood. The long pedigree of the Shelley family is full of turbulent ancestors, and the poet's grandfather, Sir Bysshe, an eccentric old miser who lived until 1815, had been married twice, on both occasions eloping with an heiress. Already at Eton Shelley was a rebel and a pariah. Contemptuous of authority, he had gone his own way, spending pocket−money on revolutionary literature, trying to raise ghosts, and dabbling in chemical experiments. As often happens to queer boys, his school−fellows herded against him, pursuing him with blows and cries of "Mad Shelley." But the holidays were happy. There must have been plenty of fun at Field Place when he told his sisters stories about the alchemist in the attic or "the Great Tortoise that lived in Warnham Pond," frightened them with electric shocks, and taught his baby brother to say devil. There is something of high−spirited fun even in the raptures and despairs of his first love for his cousin, Harriet Grove. He tried to convert her to republican atheism, until the family, becoming alarmed, interfered, and Harriet was disposed of otherwise. "Married to a clod of earth!" exclaims Shelley. He spent nights "pacing the churchyard," and slept with a loaded pistol and poison beside him.

He went in to residence at University College, Oxford, in the Michaelmas term of 1810. The world must always bless the chance which sent Thomas Jefferson Hogg a freshman to the same college at the same time, and made him Shelley's friend. The chapters in which Hogg describes their live at Oxford are the best part of his biography. In these lively pages we see, with all the force of reality, Shelley working by fits in a litter of books and retorts and "galvanic troughs," and discoursing on the vast possibilities of science for making mankind happy; how chemistry will turn deserts into cornfields, and even the air and water will year fire and food; how Africa will be explored by balloons, of which the shadows, passing over the jungles, will emancipate the slaves. In the midst he would rush out to a lecture on mineralogy, and come back sighing that it was all about "stones, stones, stones"! The friends read Plato together, and held endless talk of metaphysics, pre−existence, and the sceptical philosophy, on winter walks across country, and all night beside the fire, until Shelley would curl up on the hearthrug and go to sleep. He was happy because he was left to himself. With all his thoughts and impulses, ill−controlled indeed, but directed to the acquisition of knowledge for the benefit of the world, such a student would nowadays be a marked man, applauded and restrained. But the Oxford of that day was a home of "chartered laziness." An academic circle absorbed in intrigues for preferment, and enlivened only by drunkenness and immorality, could offer nothing but what was repugnant to Shelley. He remained a solitary until the hand of authority fell and expelled him.

He had always had a habit of writing to strangers on the subjects next his heart. Once he approached Miss Felicia Dorothea Browne (afterwards Mrs. Hemans), who had not been encouraging. Now half in earnest, and half with an impish desire for dialectical scores, he printed a pamphlet on 'The Necessity of Atheism', a single foolscap sheet concisely proving that no reason for the existence of God can be valid, and sent it to various personages, including bishops, asking for a refutation. It fell into the hands of the college authorities. Summoned before the council to say whether he was the author, Shelley very properly refused to answer, and was peremptorily expelled, together with Hogg, who had intervened in his behalf.

The pair went to London, and took lodgings in a house where a wall−paper with a vine−trellis pattern caught Shelley's fancy. Mr. Timothy Shelley appeared on the scene, and, his feelings as a Christian and a father deeply outraged, did the worst thing he could possibly have done−−he made forgiveness conditional on his son's giving

up his friend. The next step was to cut off supplies and to forbid Field Place to him, lest he should corrupt his sisters' minds. Soon Hogg had to go to York to work in a conveyancer's office, and Shelley was left alone in London, depressed, a martyr, and determined to save others from similar persecution. In this mood he formed a connection destined to end in tragedy. His sisters were at a school at Clapham, where among the girls was one Harriet Westbrook, the sixteen−year−old daughter of a coffee−house keeper. Shelley became intimate with the Westbrooks, and set about saving the soul of Harriet, who had a pretty rosy face, a neat figure, and a glib school−girl mind quick to catch up and reproduce his doctrines. The child seems to have been innocent enough, but her elder sister, Eliza, a vulgar woman of thirty, used her as a bait to entangle the future baronet; she played on Shelley's feelings by encouraging Harriet to believe herself the victim of tyranny at school. Still, it was six months before he took the final step. How he could save Harriet from scholastic and domestic bigotry was a grave question. In the first place, hatred of "matrimonialism" was one of his principles, yet it seemed unfair to drag a helpless woman into the risks of illicit union; in the second place, he was at this time passionately interested in another woman, a certain Miss Hitchener, a Sussex school mistress of republican and deistic principles, whom he idealised as an angel, only to discover soon, with equal falsity, that she was a demon. At last Harriet was worked up to throw herself on his protection. They fled by the northern mail, dropping at York a summons to Hogg to join them, and contracted a Scottish marriage at Edinburgh on August 28, 1811.

The story of the two years and nine months during which Shelley lived with Harriet must seem insane to a rational mind. Life was one comfortless picnic. When Shelley wanted food, he would dart into a shop and buy a loaf or a handful of raisins. Always accompanied by Eliza, they changed their dwelling−place more than twelve times. Edinburgh, York, Keswick, Dublin, Nantgwillt, Lynmouth, Tremadoc, Tanyrallt, Killarney, London (Half Moon Street and Pimlico), Bracknell, Edinburgh again, and Windsor, successively received this fantastic household. Each fresh house was the one where they were to abide for ever, and each formed the base of operations for some new scheme of comprehensive beneficence. Thus at Tremadoc, on the Welsh coast, Shelley embarked on the construction of an embankment to reclaim a drowned tract of land; 'Queen Mab' was written partly in Devonshire and partly in Wales; and from Ireland, where he had gone to regenerate the country, he opened correspondence with William Godwin, the philosopher and author of 'Political Justice'. His energy in entering upon ecstatic personal relations was as great as that which he threw into philanthropic schemes; but the relations, like the schemes, were formed with no notion of adapting means to ends, and were often dropped as hurriedly. Eliza Westbrook, at first a woman of estimable qualities, quickly became "a blind and loathsome worm that cannot see to sting", Miss Hitchener, who had been induced to give up her school and come to live with them "for ever," was discovered to be a "brown demon," and had to be pensioned off. He loved his wife for a time, but they drifted apart, and he found consolation in a sentimental attachment to a Mrs. Boinville and her daughter, Cornelia Turner, ladies who read Italian poetry with him and sang to guitars. Harriet had borne him a daughter, Ianthe, but she herself was a child, who soon wearied of philosophy and of being taught Latin; naturally she wanted fine clothes, fashion, a settlement. Egged on by her sister, she spent on plate and a carriage the money that Shelley would have squandered on humanity at large. Money difficulties and negotiations with his father were the background of all this period. On March 24, 1814, he married Harriet in church, to settle any possible question as to the legitimacy of his children; but they parted soon after. Attempts were made at reconciliation, which might have. succeeded had not Shelley during this summer drifted into a serious and relatively permanent passion. He made financial provision for his wife, who gave birth to a second child, a boy, on November 30, 1814; but, as the months passed, and Shelley was irrevocably bound to another, she lost heart for life in the dreariness of her father's house. An Irish officer took her for his mistress, and on December 10, 1816, she was found drowned in the Serpentine. Twenty days later Shelley married his second wife.

This marriage was the result of his correspondence with William Godwin, which had ripened into intimacy, based on community of principles, with the Godwin household. The philosopher, a short, stout old man, presided, with his big bald head, his leaden complexion, and his air of a dissenting minister, over a heterogeneous family at 41 Skinner Street, Holborn, supported in scrambling poverty by the energy of the second Mrs. Godwin, who carried on a business of publishing children's books. In letters of the time we see Mrs. Godwin as a fat little woman in a black velvet dress, bad−tempered and untruthful. "She is a very disgusting woman, and wears green spectacles,"

said Charles Lamb. Besides a small son of the Godwins, the family contained four other members−−Clara Mary Jane Clairmont and Charles Clairmont (Mrs. Godwin's children by a previous marriage), Fanny Godwin (as she was called), and Mary Godwin. These last two were the daughters of Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of 'The Rights of Women', the great feminist, who had been Godwin's first wife. Fanny's father was a scamp called Imlay, and Mary was Godwin's child.

Mary disliked her stepmother, and would wander on fine days to read beside her mother's grave in Old St. Pancras Churchyard. This girl of seventeen had a strong if rather narrow mind; she was imperious, ardent, and firm−willed. She is said to have been very pale, with golden hair and a large forehead, redeemed from commonplace by hazel eyes which had a piercing look. When sitting, she appeared to be of more than average height; when she stood, you saw that she had her father's stumpy legs. Intellectually, and by the solidity of her character, she was better fitted to be Shelley's mate than any other woman he ever came across. It was natural that she should be interested in this bright creature, fallen as from another world into their dingy, squabbling family. If it was inevitable that her interest, touched with pity (for he was in despair over the collapse of his life with Harriet), should quickly warm to love, we must insist that the rapture with which he leaped to meet her had some foundation in reality. That she was gifted is manifest in her writings−− chiefly, no doubt, in 'Frankenstein', composed when she had Shelley to fire her imagination; but her other novels are competent, and her letters are the work of a vigorous intellect. She had her limitations. She was not quite so free from conventionality as either he or she believed; but on the whole they were neither deceiving themselves nor one another when they plighted faith by Mary Wollstonecraft's grave. With their principles, it was nothing that marriage was impossible. Without the knowledge of the elder Godwins, they made arrangements to elope, and on July 28, 1814, crossed from Dover to Calais in an open boat, taking Jane Clairmont with them on the spur of the moment. Jane also had been unhappy in Skinner Street. She was about Mary's age, a pert, olive−complexioned girl, with a strong taste for life. She changed her name to Claire because it sounded more romantic.

Mrs. Godwin pursued the fugitives to Calais, but in vain. Shelley was now launched on a new life with a new bride, and−−a freakish touch−−accompanied as before by his bride's sister. The more his life changed, the more it was the same thing−−the same plunging without forethought, the same disregard for all that is conventionally deemed necessary. His courage is often praised, and rightly, though we ought not to forget that ignorance, and even obtuseness, were large ingredients in it. As far as they had any plan, it was to reach Switzerland and settle on the banks of some lake, amid sublime mountain scenery, "for ever." In fact, the tour lasted but six weeks. Their difficulties began in Paris, where only an accident enabled Shelley to raise funds. Then they moved slowly across war−wasted France, Mary and Claire, in black silk dresses, riding by turns on a mule, and Shelley walking. Childish happiness glows in their journals. From Troyes Shelley wrote to the abandoned Harriet, in perfect good faith, pressing her to join them in Switzerland. There were sprained ankles, dirty inns, perfidious and disobliging drivers−−the ordinary misadventures of the road, magnified a thousand times by their helplessness, and all transfigured in the purple light of youth and the intoxication of literature. At last they reached the Lake of Lucerne, settled at Brunnen, and began feverishly to read and write. Shelley worked at a novel called 'The Assassins', and we hear of him "sitting on a rude pier by the lake" and reading aloud the siege of Jerusalem from Tacitus. Soon they discovered that they had only just enough money left to take them home. Camp was struck in haste, and they travelled down the Rhine. When their boat was detained at Marsluys, all three sat writing in the cabin−−Shelley his novel, Mary a story called 'Hate', and Claire a story called 'The Idiot'−−until they were tossed across to England, and reached London after borrowing passage−money from the captain.

The winter was spent in poverty, dodging creditors through the labyrinthine gloom of the town. Chronic embarrassment was caused by Shelley's extravagant credulity. His love of the astonishing, his readiness to believe merely because a thing was impossible, made him the prey of every impostor. Knowing that he was heir to a large fortune, he would subsidise any project or any grievance, only provided it were wild enough. Godwin especially was a running sore both now and later on; the philosopher was at the beginning of that shabby 'degringolade' which was to end in the ruin of his self−respect. In spite of his anti−matrimonial principles, he was indignant at his disciple's elopement with his daughter, and, in spite of his philosophy, he was not above abusing and sponging

in the same breath. The worst of these difficulties, however, came to an end when Shelley's grandfather died on January 6, 1815, and he was able, after long negotiations, to make an arrangement with his father, by which his debts were paid and he received an income of 1000 pounds a year in consideration of his abandoning his interest in part of the estate.

And now, the financial muddle partly smoothed out, his genius began to bloom in the congenial air of Mary's companionship. The summer of 1815 spent in rambles in various parts of the country, saw the creation of Alastor. Early in 1816 Mary gave birth to her first child, a boy, William, and in the spring, accompanied by the baby and Claire, they made a second expedition to Switzerland. A little in advance another poet left England for ever. George Gordon, Lord Byron, loaded with fame and lacerated by chagrin, was beginning to bear through Europe that 'pageant of his bleeding heart" of which the first steps are celebrated in 'Childe Harold'. Unknown to Shelley and Mary, there was already a link between them and the luxurious "pilgrim of eternity' rolling towards Geneva in his travelling−carriage, with physician and suite: Claire had visited Byron in the hope that he might help her to employment at Drury Lane Theatre, and, instead of going on the stage, had become his mistress. Thus united, but strangely dissimilar, the two parties converged on the Lake of Geneva, where the poets met for the first time. Shelley, though jarred by Byron's worldliness and pride, was impressed by his creative power, and the days they spent sailing on the lake, and wandering in a region haunted by the spirit of Rousseau, were fruitful. The 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and the 'Lines on Mont Blanc' were conceived this summer. In September the Shelleys were back in England.

But England, though he had good friends like Peacock and the Leigh Hunts, was full of private and public troubles, and was not to hold him long. The country was agitated by riots due to unemployment. The Government, frightened and vindictive, was multiplying trials for treason and blasphemous libel, and Shelley feared he might be put in the pillory himself. Mary's sister Fanny, to whom he was attached, killed herself in October; Harriet's suicide followed in December; and in the same winter the Westbrooks began to prepare their case for the Chancery suit, which ended in the permanent removal of Harriet's children from his custody, on the grounds that his immoral conduct and opinions unfitted him to be their guardian. His health, too, seems to have been bad, though it is hard to know precisely how bad. He was liable to hallucinations of all kinds; the line between imagination and reality, which ordinary people draw quite definitely, seems scarcely to have existed for him. There are many stories as to which it is disputed how far, if at all, reality is mixed with dream, as in the case of the murderous assault he believed to have been made on him one night of wind and rain in Wales; of the veiled lady who offered to join her life to his; of the Englishman who, hearing him ask for letters in the post−office at Pisa or Florence, exclaimed, "What, are you that damned atheist Shelley?" and felled him to the ground. Often he would go half frantic with delusions−−as that his father and uncle were plotting to shut him up in a madhouse, and that his boy William would be snatched from him by the law. Ghosts were more familiar to him than flesh and blood. Convinced that he was wasting with a fatal disease, he would often make his certainty of early death the pretext for abandoning some ill−considered scheme; but there is probably much exaggeration in the spasms and the consumptive symptoms which figure so excitedly in his letters. Hogg relates how he once plagued himself and his friends by believing that he had elephantiasis, and says that he was really very healthy The truth seems to be that his constitution was naturally strong, though weakened from time to time by neurotic conditions, in which mental pain brought on much physical pain, and by irregular infrequent, and scanty meals.

In February 1817 he settled at Marlow with Mary and Claire. Claire, as a result of her intrigue with Byron−−of which the fruit was a daughter, Allegra, born in January−−was now a permanent charge on his affectionate generosity. It seemed that their wanderings were at last over. At Marlow he busied himself with politics and philanthropy, and wrote 'The Revolt of Islam'. But, partly because the climate was unsuitable, partly from overwork in visiting and helping the poor, his health was thought to be seriously endangered. In March 1818, together with the five souls dependent on him−− Claire and her baby, Mary and her two babies (a second, Clara, had been born about six months before)−−he left England, never to return.

Mary disliked hot weather, but it always put Shelley in spirits, and his best work was done beneath the sultry blue of Italian skies, floating in a boat on the Serchio or the Arno, baking in a glazed cage on the roof of a Tuscan villa, or lying among the ruins of the Coliseum or in the pine−woods near Pisa. Their Italian wanderings are too intricate to be traced in detail here. It was a chequered time, darkened by disaster and cheered by friendships. Both their children died, Clara at Venice in 1818, and William at home in 1819. It is impossible not to be amazed at the heedlessness−−the long journeys in a rough foreign land, the absence of ordinary provision against ailments−−which seems to have caused the death of these beloved little beings. The birth in 1819 of another son, Percy (who survived to become Sir Percy Shelley), brought some comfort. Claire's troubles, again, were a constant anxiety. Shelley worked hard to persuade Byron either to let her have Allegra or to look after his daughter properly himself; but he was obdurate, and the child died in a convent near Venice in 1822. Shelley's association with Byron, of whom, in 'Julian and Maddalo' (1818), he has drawn a picture with the darker features left out, brought as much pain as pleasure to all concerned. No doubt Byron's splenetic cynicism, even his parade of debauchery, was largely an assumption for the benefit of the world; but beneath the frankness, the cheerfulness, the wit of his intimate conversation, beneath his careful cultivation of the graces of a Regency buck, he was fundamentally selfish and treacherous. Provided no serious demands were made upon him, he enjoyed the society of Shelley and his circle, and the two were much together, both at Venice and in the Palazzo Lanfranchi at Pisa, where, with a menagerie of animals and retainers, Byron had installed himself in those surroundings of Oriental ostentation which it amused him to affect.

A more unalloyed friendship was that with the amiable Gisborne family, settled at Leghorn; its serene cheerfulness is reflected in Shelley's charming rhymed 'Letter to Maria Gisborne'. And early in 1821 they were joined by a young couple who proved very congenial. Ned Williams was a half−pay lieutenant of dragoons, with literary and artistic tastes, and his wife, Jane, had a sweet, engaging manner, and a good singing voice. Then there was the e'citing discovery of the Countess Emilia Viviani, imprisoned in a convent by a jealous step−mother. All three of them−−Mary, Claire, and Shelley−−at once fell in love with the dusky beauty. Impassioned letters passed between her and Shelley, in which he was her "dear brother" and she his "dearest sister"; but she was soon found to be a very ordinary creature, and is only remembered as the instrument chosen by chance to inspire 'Epipsychidion'. Finally there appeared, in January 1822, the truest−hearted and the most lovable of all Shelley's friends. Edward John Trelawny, a cadet of a Cornish family, "with his knight−errant aspect, dark, handsome, and moustachioed," was the true buccaneer of romance, but of honest English grain, and without a trace of pose. The devotion with which, though he only knew Shelley for a few months, he fed in memory on their friendship to the last day of his life, brings home to us, as nothing else can, the force of Shelley's personal attraction; for this man lived until 1881, an almost solitary survivor from the Byronic age, and his life contained matter enough to swamp recollection of half−a−dozen poets. It seems that, after serving in the navy and deserting from an East Indiaman at Bombay, he passed, in the Eastern Archipelago, through the incredible experiences narrated in his 'Adventures of a Younger Son'; and all this before he was twenty−one, for in 1813 he was in England and married. Then he disappeared, bored by civilisation; nothing is known of him until 1820, when he turns up in Switzerland in pursuit of sport and adventure. After Shelley's death he went to Greece with Byron, joined the rebel chief Odysseus, married his sister Tersitza, and was nearly killed in defending a cave on Mount Parnassus. Through the subsequent years, which included wanderings in America, and a narrow escape from drowning in trying to swim Niagara, he kept pressing Shelley's widow to marry him. Perhaps because he was piqued by Mary's refusal, he has left a rather unflattering portrait of her. He was indignant at her desire to suppress parts of 'Queen Mab'; but he might have admired the honesty with which she retained 'Epipsychidion', although that poem describes her as a "cold chaste moon." The old sea−captain in Sir John Millais' picture, "The North−West Passage," now in the Tate Gallery in London, is a portrait of Trelawny in old age.

To return to the Shelleys. It was decided that the summer of 1822 should be spent with the Williamses, and after some search a house just capable of holding both families was found near Lerici, on the east side of the Bay of Spezzia. It was a lonely, wind−swept place, with its feet in the waves. The natives were half−savage; there was no furniture, and no facility for getting provisions. The omens opened badly. At the moment of moving in, news of Allegra's death came; Shelley was shaken and saw visions, and Mary disliked the place at first sight. Still, there

was the sea washing their terrace, and Shelley loved the sea (there is scarcely one of his poems in which a boat does not figure, though it is usually made of moonstone); and, while Williams fancied himself as a navigator, Trelawny was really at home on the water. A certain Captain Roberts was commissioned to get a boat built at Genoa, where Byron also was fitting out a yacht, the 'Bolivar'. When the 'Ariel'−−for so they called her−−arrived, the friends were delighted with her speed and handiness. She was a thirty−footer, without a deck, ketch−rigged.[1] Shelley's health was good, and this June, passed in bathing, sailing, reading, and hearing Jane sing simple melodies to her guitar in the moonlight, was a gleam of happiness before the end. It was not so happy for Mary, who was ill and oppressed with housekeeping for two families, and over whose relations with Shelley a film of querulous jealousy had crept.

[1 Professor Dowden, 'Life of Shelley', vol. ii., p. 501, says "schooner−rigged." This is a landsman's mistake.]

Leigh Hunt, that amiable, shiftless, Radical man of letters, was coming out from England with his wife; on July 1st Shelley and Williams sailed in the 'Ariel' to Leghorn to meet them, and settle them into the ground−floor of Byron's palace at Pisa. His business despatched, Shelley returned from Pisa to Leghorn, with Hunt's copy of Keats's 'Hyperion' in his pocket to read on the voyage home. Though the weather looked threatening, he put to sea again on July 8th, with Williams and an English sailor−boy. Trelawny wanted to convoy them in Byron's yacht, but was turned back by the authorities because he had no port−clearance. The air was sultry and still, with a storm brewing, and he went down to his cabin and slept. When he awoke, it was to see fishing−boats running into harbour under bare poles amid the hubbub of a thunder−squall. In that squall the 'Ariel' disappeared. It is doubtful whether the unseaworthy craft was merely swamped, or whether, as there is some reason to suppose, an Italian felucca ran her down with intent to rob the Englishmen. In any case, the calamity is the crowning example of that combination of bad management and bad luck which dogged Shelley all his life. It was madness to trust an open boat, manned only by the inexperienced Williams and a boy (for Shelley was worse than useless), to the chances of a Mediterranean storm. And destiny turns on trifles; if the 'Bolivar' had been allowed to sail, Trelawny might have saved them.

He sent out search−parties, and on July 19th sealed the despairing women's certainty of disaster by the news that the bodies had been washed ashore. Shelley's was identified by a copy of Sophocles in one coat−pocket and the Keats in another. What Trelawny then did was an action of that perfect fitness to which only the rarest natures are prompted: he charged himself with the business of burning the bodies. This required some organisation. There were official formalities to fulfil, and the materials had to be assembled−−the fuel, the improvised furnace, the iron bars, salt and wine and oil to pour upon the pyre. In his artless 'Records' he describes the last scene on the seashore. Shelley's body was given to the flames on a day of intense heat, when the islands lay hazy along the horizon, and in the background the marble−flecked Apennines gleamed. Byron looked on until he could stand it no longer, and swam off to his yacht. The heart was the last part to be consumed. By Trelawny's care the ashes were buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome.

It is often sought to deepen our sense of this tragedy by speculating on what Shelley would have done if he had lived. But, if such a question must be asked, there are reasons for thinking that he might not have added much to his reputation. It may indeed be an accident that his last two years were less fertile in first−rate work than the years 1819 and 1820, and that his last unfinished poem, 'The Triumph of Life', is even more incoherent than its predecessors; yet, when we consider the nature of his talent, the fact is perhaps significant. His song was entirely an affair of uncontrolled afflatus, and this is a force which dwindles in middle life, leaving stranded the poet who has no other resource. Some men suffer spiritual upheavals and eclipses, in which they lose their old selves and emerge with new and different powers; but we may be fairly sure that this would not have happened to Shelley, that as he grew older he would always have returned to much the same impressions; for his mind, of one piece through and through, had that peculiar rigidity which can sometimes be observed in violently unstable characters. The colour of his emotion would have fluctuated−−it took on, as it was, a deepening shade of melancholy; but there is no indication that the material on which it worked would have changed.

Chapter II Principal Writings

The true visionary is often a man of action, and Shelley was a very peculiar combination of the two. He was a dreamer, but he never dreamed merely for the sake of dreaming; he always rushed to translate his dreams into acts. The practical side of him was so strong that he might have been a great statesman or reformer, had not his imagination, stimulated by a torrential fluency of language, overborne his will. He was like a boat (the comparison would have pleased him) built for strength and speed, but immensely oversparred. His life was a scene of incessant bustle. Glancing through his poems, letters, diaries, and pamphlets, his translations from Greek, Spanish, German, and Italian, and remembering that he died at thirty, and was, besides, feverishly active in a multitude of affairs, we fancy that his pen can scarcely ever have been out of his hand. And not only was he perpetually writing; he read gluttonously. He would thread the London traffic, nourishing his unworldly mind from an open book held in one hand, and his ascetic body from a hunch of bread held in the other. This fury for literature seized him early. But the quality of his early work was astonishingly bad. An author while still a schoolboy, he published in 1810 a novel, written for the most part when he was seventeen years old, called 'Zastrozzi', the mere title of which, with its romantic profusion of sibilants, is eloquent of its nature. This was soon followed by another like it, 'St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian'. Whether they are adaptations from the German [2] or not, these books are merely bad imitations of the bad school then in vogue, the flesh−creeping school of skeletons and clanking chains, of convulsions and ecstasies, which Miss Austen, though no one knew it, had killed with laughter years before.[3] "Verezzi scarcely now shuddered when the slimy lizard crossed his naked and motionless limbs. The large earthworms, which twined themselves in his long and matted hair, almost ceased to excite sensations of horror"−−that is the kind of stuff in which the imagination of the young Shelley rioted. And evidently it is not consciously imagined; life really presented itself to him as a romance of this kind, with himself as hero−−a hero who is a hopeless lover, blighted by premature decay, or a wanderer doomed to share the sins and sorrows of mankind to all eternity. This attitude found vent in a mass of sentimental verse and prose, much of it more or less surreptitiously published, which the researches of specialists have brought to light, and which need not be dwelt upon here.

[2 So Mr. H. B. Forman suggests in the introduction to his edition of Shelley's Prose Works. But Hogg says that he did not begin learning German until 1815.]

[3 'Northanger Abbey', satirising Mrs. Radcliffe's novels, was written before 1798, but was not published until 1818.]

But very soon another influence began to mingle with this feebly extravagant vein, an influence which purified and strengthened, though it never quite obliterated it. At school he absorbed, along with the official tincture of classical education, a violent private dose of the philosophy of the French Revolution; he discovered that all that was needed to abolish all the evil done under the sun was to destroy bigotry, intolerance, and persecution as represented by religious and monarchical institutions. At first this influence combined with his misguided literary passions only to heighten the whole absurdity, as when he exclaims, in a letter about his first disappointed love, "I swear, and as I break my oaths, may Infinity, Eternity, blast me−−never will I forgive Intolerance!" The character of the romance is changed indeed; it has become an epic of human regeneration, and its emotions are dedicated to the service of mankind; but still it is a romance. The results, however, are momentous; for the hero, being a man of action, is no longer content to write and pay for the printing: in his capacity of liberator he has to step into the arena, and, above all, he has to think out a philosophy.

An early manifestation of this impulse was the Irish enterprise already mentioned. Public affairs always stirred him, but, as time went on, it was more and more to verse and less to practical intervention, and after 1817 he abandoned argument altogether for song. But one pamphlet, 'A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote' (1817), is characteristic of the way in which he was always labouring to do something, not merely to ventilate existing evils, but to promote some practical scheme for abolishing them. Let a national referendum, he says, be held on the

question of reform, and let it be agreed that the result shall be binding on Parliament; he himself will contribute 100 pounds a year (one−tenth of his income) to the expenses of organisation. He is in favour of annual Parliaments. Though a believer in universal suffrage, he prefers to advance by degrees; it would not do to abolish aristocracy and monarchy at one stroke, and to put power into the hands of men rendered brutal and torpid by ages of slavery; and he proposes that the payment of a small sum in direct taxes should be the qualification for the parliamentary franchise. The idea, of course, was not in the sphere of practical politics at the time, but its sobriety shows how far Shelley was from being a vulgar theory−ridden crank to whom the years bring no wisdom.

Meanwhile it had been revealed to him that "intolerance" was the cause of all evil, and, in the same flash, that it could be destroyed by clear and simple reasoning. Apply the acid of enlightened argument, and religious beliefs will melt away, and with them the whole rotten fabric which they support−−crowns and churches, lust and cruelty, war and crime, the inequality of women to men, and the inequality of one man to another. With Shelley, to embrace the dazzling vision was to act upon it at once. The first thing, since religion is at the bottom of all force and fraud, was to proclaim that there is no reason for believing in Christianity. This was easy enough, and a number of impatient argumentative pamphlets were dashed off. One of these, 'The Necessity of Atheism', caused, as we saw, a revolution in his life. But, while Christian dogma was the heart of the enemy's position, there were out−works which might also be usefully attacked:−−there were alcohol and meat, the causes of all disease and devastating passion; there were despotism and plutocracy, based on commercial greed; and there was marriage, which irrationally tyrannising over sexual relations, produces unnatural celibacy and prostitution. These threads, and many others, were all taken up in his first serious poem, 'Queen Mab' (1812−13), an over−long rhapsody, partly in blank verse, partly in loose metres. The spirit of Ianthe is rapt by the Fairy Mab in her pellucid car to the confines of the universe, where the past, present, and future of the earth are unfolded to the spirit's gaze. We see tyrants writhing upon their thrones; Ahasuerus, "the wandering Jew," is introduced; the consummation on earth of the age of reason is described. In the end the fairy's car brings the spirit back to its body, and Ianthe wakes to find

> "Henry, who kneeled in silence by her couch,
>
> Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love,
>
> And the bright beaming stars
>
> That through the casement shone."

Though many poets have begun their careers with something better than this, 'Queen Mab' will always be read, because it gives us, in embryo, the whole of Shelley at a stroke. The melody of the verse is thin and loose, but it soars from the ground and spins itself into a series of etherial visions. And these visions, though they look utterly disconnected from reality, are in fact only an aspect of his passionate interest in science. In this respect the sole difference between 'Queen Mab' and such poems as 'The West Wind' and 'The Cloud' is that, in the prose of the notes appended to 'Queen Mab', with their disquisitions on physiology and astronomy, determinism and utilitarianism, the scientific skeleton is explicit. These notes are a queer medley. We may laugh at their crudity−−their certainty that, once orthodoxy has been destroyed by argument, the millennium will begin; what is more to the purpose is to recognise that here is something more than the ordinary dogmatism of youthful ignorance. There is a flow of vigorous language, vividness of imagination, and, above all, much conscientious reasoning and a passion for hard facts. His wife was not far wrong when she praised him for a 'logical exactness of reason." The arguments he uses are, indeed, all second−hand, and mostly fallacious; but he knew instinctively something which is for ever hidden from the mass of mankind−−the difference between an argument and a confused stirring of prejudices. Then, again, he was not content with abstract generalities: he was always trying to enforce his views by facts industriously collected from such books of medicine, anatomy, geology, astronomy, chemistry, and history as he could get hold of. For instance, he does not preach abstinence from flesh on pure a priori grounds, but because "the orang−outang perfectly resembles man both in the order and number of his teeth." We catch here what is perhaps the fundamental paradox of his character−−the combination of a curious

rational hardness with the wildest and most romantic idealism. For all its airiness, his verse was thrown off by a mind no stranger to thought and research.

We are now on the threshold of Shelley's poetic achievement, and it will be well before going further to underline the connection, which persists all through his work and is already so striking in 'Queen Mab', between his poetry and his philosophical and religious ideas.

Like Coleridge, he was a philosophical poet. But his philosophy was much more definite than Coleridge's; it gave substance to his character and edge to his intellect, and, in the end, can scarcely be distinguished from the emotion generating his verse. There is, however, no trace of originality in his speculative writing, and we need not regret that, after hesitating whether to be a metaphysician or a poet, he decided against philosophy. Before finally settling to poetry, he at one time projected a complete and systematic account of the operations of the human mind. It was to be divided into sections−−childhood, youth, and so on. One of the first things to be done was to ascertain the real nature of dreams, and accordingly, with characteristic passion for a foundation of fact, he turned to the only facts accessible to him, and tried to describe exactly his own experiences in dreaming. The result showed that, along with the scientific impulse, there was working in him a more powerful antagonistic force. He got no further than telling how once, when walking with Hogg near Oxford, he suddenly turned the corner of a lane, and a scene presented itself which, though commonplace, was yet mysteriously connected with the obscurer parts of his nature. A windmill stood in a plashy meadow; behind it was a long low hill, and "a grey covering of uniform cloud spread over the evening sky. It was the season of the year when the last leaf had just fallen from the scant and stunted ash." The manuscript concludes: "I suddenly remembered to have seen that exact scene in some dream of long−−Here I was obliged to leave off, overcome with thrilling horror." And, apart from such overwhelming surges of emotion from the depths of sub−consciousness, he does not seem ever to have taken that sort of interest in the problems of the universe which is distinctive of the philosopher; in so far as he speculated on the nature and destiny of the world or the soul, it was not from curiosity about the truth, but rather because correct views on these matters seemed to him especially in early years, an infallible method of regenerating society. As his expectation of heaven on earth became less confident, so the speculative impulse waned. Not long before his death he told Trelawny that he was not inquisitive about the system of the universe, that his mind was tranquil on these high questions. He seems, for instance, to have oscillated vaguely between belief and disbelief in personal life after death, and on the whole to have concluded that there was no evidence for it.

At the same time, it is essential to a just appreciation of him, either as man or poet, to see how all his opinions and feelings were shaped by philosophy, and by the influence of one particular doctrine. This doctrine was Platonism. He first went through a stage of devotion to what he calls "the sceptical philosophy," when his writings were full of schoolboy echoes of Locke and Hume. At this time he avowed himself a materialist. Then he succumbed to Bishop Berkeley, who convinced him that the nature of everything that exists is spiritual. We find him saying, with charming pompousness, "I confess that I am one of those who are unable to refuse their assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived." This "intellectual system," he rightly sees, leads to the view that nothing whatever exists except a single mind; and that is the view which he found, or thought that he found, in the dialogues of Plato, and which gave to his whole being a bent it was never to lose. He liked to call himself an atheist; and, if pantheism is atheism, an atheist no doubt he was. But, whatever the correct label, he was eminently religious. In the notes to 'Queen Mab' he announces his belief in "a pervading Spirit co−eternal with the universe," and religion meant for him a "perception of the relation in which we stand to the principle of the universe"−−a perception which, in his case, was accompanied by intense emotion. Having thus grasped the notion that the whole universe is one spirit, he absorbed from Plato a theory which accorded perfectly with his predisposition−−the theory that all the good and beautiful things that we love on earth are partial manifestations of an absolute beauty or goodness, which exists eternal and unchanging, and from which everything that becomes and perishes in time derives such reality as it has. Hence our human life is good only in so far as we participate in the eternal reality; and the communion is effected whenever we adore beauty, whether in nature, or in passionate love, or in the inspiration of poetry. We shall have to say something presently about the effects of this Platonic idealism on Shelley's conception of love; here we need only notice that it inspired him to

translate Plato's 'Symposium', a dialogue occupied almost entirely with theories about love. He was not, however, well equipped for this task. His version, or rather adaptation (for much is omitted and much is paraphrased), is fluent, but he had not enough Greek to reproduce the finer shades of the original, or, indeed, to avoid gross mistakes.

A poet who is also a Platonist is likely to exalt his office; it is his not merely to amuse or to please, but to lead mankind nearer to the eternal ideal−−Shelley called it Intellectual Beauty−−which is the only abiding reality. This is the real theme of his 'Defence of Poetry' (1821), the best piece of prose he ever wrote. Thomas Love Peacock, scholar, novelist, and poet, and, in spite of his mellow worldliness, one of Shelley's most admired friends, had published a wittily perverse and paradoxical article, not without much good sense, on 'The Four Ages of Poetry'. Peacock maintained that genuine poetry is only possible in half−civilised times, such as the Homeric or Elizabethan ages, which, after the interval of a learned period, like that of Pope in England, are inevitably succeeded by a sham return to nature. What he had in mind was, of course, the movement represented by Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, the romantic poets of the Lake School, whom he describes as a "modern−antique compound of frippery and barbarism." He must have greatly enjoyed writing such a paragraph as this: "A poet in our times is a semi−barbarian in a civilised community. . . . The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward. The brighter the light diffused around him by the progress of reason, the thicker is the darkness of antiquated barbarism in which he buries himself like a mole, to throw up the barren hillocks of his Cimmerian labours." These gay shafts had at any rate the merit of stinging Shelley to action. 'The Defence of Poetry' was his reply. People like Peacock treat poetry, and art generally, as an adventitious seasoning of life−−ornamental perhaps, but rather out of place in a progressive and practical age. Shelley undermines the whole position by asserting that poetry−−a name which includes for him all serious art−−is the very stuff out of which all that is valuable and real in life is made. "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." "The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful that exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination." And it is on the imagination that poetry works, strengthening it as exercises strengthen a limb. Historically, he argues, good poetry always coexists with good morals; for instance, when social life decays, drama decays. Peacock had said that reasoners and mechanical inventors are more useful than poets. The reply is that, left to themselves, they simply make the world worse, while it is poets and "poetical philosophers" who produce "true utility," or pleasure in the highest sense. Without poetry, the progress of science and of the mechanical arts results in mental and moral indigestion, merely exasperating the inequality of mankind. "Poetry and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and mammon of the world." While the emotions penetrated by poetry last, "Self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe." Poetry's "secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life." It makes the familiar strange, and creates the universe anew. "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Other poets besides Shelley have seen

"Through all that earthly dress

Bright shoots of everlastingness,"

and others have felt that the freedom from self, which is attained in the vision, is supremely good. What is peculiar to him, and distinguishes him from the poets of religious mysticism, is that he reflected rationally on his vision, brought it more or less into harmony with a philosophical system, and, in embracing it, always had in view

the improvement of mankind. Not for a moment, though, must it be imagined that he was a didactic poet. It was the theory of the eighteenth century, and for a brief period, when the first impulse of the Romantic Movement was spent, it was again to become the theory of the nineteenth century, that the obJect of poetry is to inculcate correct principles of morals and religion. Poetry, with its power of pleasing, was the jam which should make us swallow the powder unawares. This conception was abhorrent to Shelley, both because poetry ought not to do what can be done better by prose, and also because, for him, the pleasure and the lesson were indistinguishably one. The poet is to improve us, not by insinuating a moral, but by communicating to others something of that ecstasy with which he himself burns in contemplating eternal truth and beauty and goodness.

Hitherto all the writings mentioned have been, except 'The Defence of Poetry', those of a young and enthusiastic revolutionary, which might have some interest in their proper historical and biographical setting, but otherwise would only be read as curiosities. We have seen that beneath Shelley's twofold drift towards practical politics and speculative philosophy a deeper force was working. Yet it is characteristic of him that he always tended to regard the writing of verse as a 'pis aller'. In 1819, when he was actually working on 'Prometheus', he wrote to Peacock, "I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science," adding that he only wrote it because his feeble health made it hopeless to attempt anything more useful. We need not take this too seriously; he was often wrong about the reasons for his own actions. From whatever motive, write poetry he did. We will now consider some of the more voluminous, if not the most valuable, results.

'Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude,' [4] is a long poem, written in 1815, which seems to shadow forth the emotional history of a young and beautiful poet. As a child he drank deep of the beauties of nature and the sublimest creations of the intellect, until,

"When early youth had past, he left

His cold fireside and alienated home,

To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands."

He wandered through many wildernesses, and visited the ruins of Egypt and the East, where an Arab maiden fell in love with him and tended him. But he passes on, "through Arabie, and Persia, and the wild Carmanian waste," and, arrived at the vale of Cashmire, lies down to sleep in a dell. Here he has a vision. A "veiled maid" sits by him, and, after singing first of knowledge and truth and virtue, then of love, embraces him. When he awakes, all the beauty of the world that enchanted and satisfied him before has faded:

"The Spirit of Sweet Human Love has sent

A vision to the sleep of him who spurned

Her choicest gifts,"

and he rushes on, wildly pursuing the beautiful shape, like an eagle enfolded by a serpent and feeling the poison in his breast. His limbs grow lean, his hair thin and pale. Does death contain the secret of his happiness? At last he pauses "on the lone Chorasmian shore," and sees a frail shallop in which he trusts himself to the waves. Day and night the boat fiies before the storm to the base of the cliffs of Caucasus, where it is engulfed in a cavern. Following the twists of the cavern, after a narrow escape from a maelstrom, he floats into a calm pool, and lands. Elaborate descriptions of forest and mountain scenery bring us, as the moon sets, to the death of the worn−out poet−−

"The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful,

The child of grace and genius! Heartless things

Are done and said i' the world, and many worms

And beasts and men live on . . . but thou art fled."

[4 "Alastor" is a Greek word meaning "the victim of an Avenging Spirit."]

In 'Alastor' he melted with pity over what he felt to be his own destiny; in 'The Revolt of Islam' (1817) he was "a trumpet that sings to battle." This, the longest of Shelley's poems (there are 4176 lines of it, exclusive of certain lyrical passages), is a versified novel with a more or less coherent plot, though the mechanism is cumbrous, and any one who expects from the title a story of some actual rebellion against the Turks will be disappointed. Its theme, typified by an introductory vision of an eagle and serpent battling in mid−sky, is the cosmic struggle between evil and good, or, what for Shelley is the same thing, between the forces of established authority and of man's aspiration for liberty, the eagle standing for the powerful oppressor, and the snake for the oppressed.

"When round pure hearts a host of hopes assemble

The Snake and Eagle meet−−the world's foundations tremble."

This piece of symbolism became a sort of fixed language with him; "the Snake" was a name by which it amused him to be known among his friends. The clash of the two opposites is crudely and narrowly conceived, with no suggestion yet of some more tremendous force behind both, such as later on was to give depth to his view of the world conflict. The loves and the virtues of Laon and Cythna, the gifted beings who overthrow the tyrant and perish tragically in a counter−revolution, are too bright against a background that is too black; but even so they were a good opportunity for displaying the various phases through which humanitarian passion may run−−the first whispers of hope, the devotion of the pioneer, the joy of freedom and love, in triumph exultation tempered by clemency, in defeat despair ennobled by firmness. And although in this extraordinary production Shelley has still not quite found himself, the technical power displayed is great. The poem is in Spenserian stanzas, and he manages the long breaking wave of that measure with sureness and ease, imparting to it a rapidity of onset that is all his own. But there are small blemishes such as, even when allowance is made for haste of composition (it was written in a single summer), a naturally delicate ear would never have passed; he apologises in the preface for one alexandrine (the long last line which should exceed the rest by a foot) left in the middle of a stanza, whereas in fact there are some eight places where obviously redundant syllables have crept in. A more serious defect is the persistence, still unassimilated, of the element of the romantic−horrible. When Laon, chained to the top of a column, gnaws corpses, we feel that the author of Zastrozzi is still slightly ridiculous, magnificent though his writing has become. It is hard, again, not to smile at this world in which the melodious voices of young eleutherarchs have only to sound for the crouching slave to recover his manhood and for tyrants to tremble and turn pale. The poet knows, as he wrote in answer to a criticism, that his mission is "to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling," and "to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole." He does not see that he has failed of both aims, partly because 'The Revolt' is too abstract, partly because it is too definite. It is neither one thing nor the other. The feelings apprehended are, indeed, remote enough; in many descriptions where land, sea, and mountain shimmer through a gorgeous mist that never was of this earth, the "material universe" may perhaps be admitted to be grasped as a whole; and he has embodied his conception of the "moral universe" in a picture of all the good impulses of the human heart, that should be so fruitful, poisoned by the pressure of religious and political authority. It was natural that the method which he chose should be that of the romantic narrative−−we have noticed how he began by trying to write novels−−nor is that method essentially unfitted to represent the conflict between good and evil, with the whole universe for a stage; instances of great novels that are epics in this sense will occur to every one. But realism is required, and Shelley was constitutionally incapable of realism The personages of the story, Laon and the Hermit, the Tyrant and Cythna, are pale projections of Shelley himself; of Dr. Lind, an enlightened old

gentleman with whom he made friends at Eton; of His Majesty's Government; and of Mary Wollstonecraft, his wife's illustrious mother. They are neither of the world nor out of it, and consequently, in so far as they are localised and incarnate and their actions woven into a tale, 'The Revolt of Islam' is a failure. In his next great poem he was to pursue precisely the same aims, but with more success, because he had now hit upon a figure of more appropriate vagueness and sublimity. The scheme of 'Prometheus Unbound' (1819) is drawn from the immortal creations of Greek tragedy.

He had experimented with Tasso and had thought of Job; but the rebellious Titan, Prometheus, the benefactor of mankind whom Aeschylus had represented as chained by Zeus to Caucasus, with a vulture gnawing his liver, offered a perfect embodiment of Shelley's favourite subject, "the image," to borrow the words of his wife, "of one warring with the Evil Principle, oppressed not only by it, but by all−−even the good, who are deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity; a victim full of fortitude and hope and the Spirit of triumph, emanating from a reliance in the ultimate omnipotence of Good." In the Greek play, Zeus is an usurper in heaven who has supplanted an older and milder dynasty of gods, and Prometheus, visited in his punishment by the nymphs of ocean, knows a secret on which the rule of Zeus depends. Shelley took over these features, and grafted on them his own peculiar confidence in the ultimate perfection of mankind. His Prometheus knows that Jupiter (the Evil Principle) will some day be overthrown, though he does not know when, and that he himself will then be released; and this event is shown as actually taking place. It may be doubted whether this treatment, while it allows the poet to describe what the world will be like when freed from evil, does not diminish the impressiveness of the suffering Titan; for if Prometheus knows that a term is set to his punishment, his defiance of the oppressor is easier, and, so far, less sublime. However that may be, his opening cries of pain have much romantic beauty:

"The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears

of their moon−freezing crystals, the bright chains

Eat with their burning cold into my bones."

Mercury, Jupiter's messenger, is sent to offer him freedom if he will repent and submit to the tyrant. On his refusal, the Furies are let loose to torture him, and his agony takes the form of a vision of all the suffering of the world. The agony passes, and Mother Earth calls up spirits to soothe him with images of delight; but he declares "most vain all hope but love," and thinks of Asia, his wife in happier days. The second act is full of the dreams of Asia. With Panthea, one of the ocean nymphs that watch over Prometheus, she makes her way to the cave of Demogorgon, "that terrific gloom," who seems meant to typify the Primal Power of the World. Hence they are snatched away by the Spirit of the Hour at which Jove will fall, and the coming of change pulsates through the excitement of those matchless songs that begin:

"Life of life! thy lips enkindle

With their love the breath between them."

In the third act the tyrant is triumphing in heaven, when the car of the Hour arrives; Demogorgon descends from it, and hurls him to the abyss. Prometheus, set free by Hercules, is united again to Asia. And now, with the tyranny of wrongful power,

'The loathsome mark has fallen, the mall remains

Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man

Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,

Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king

Over himself; just, gentle, wise."

The fourth act is an epilogue in which, to quote Mrs. Shelley again, "the poet gives further scope to his imagination . . . . Maternal Earth, the mighty parent, is superseded by the Spirit of the Earth, the guide of our planet through the realms of sky; while his fair and weaker companion and attendant, the Spirit of the Moon, receives bliss from the annihilation of evil in the superior sphere." We are in a strange metaphysical region, an interstellar space of incredibly rarefied fire and light, the true home of Shelley's spirit, where the circling spheres sing to one another in wave upon wave of lyrical rapture, as inexpressible in prose as music, and culminating in the cry:

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;

To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;

To defy Power which seems omnipotent;

To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates

From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;

Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;

This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be

Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;

This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory."

On the whole, Prometheus has been over−praised, perhaps because the beauty of the interspersed songs has dazzled the critics. Not only are the personages too transparently allegorical, but the allegory is insipid; especially tactless is the treatment of the marriage between Prometheus, the Spirit of Humanity, and Asia, the Spirit of Nature, as a romantic love affair. When, in the last of his more important poems, Shelley returned to the struggle between the good and evil principles, it was in a different Spirit. The short drama of 'Hellas' (1821) was "a mere improvise," the boiling over of his sympathy with the Greeks, who were in revolt against the Turks. He wove into it, with all possible heightening of poetic imagery, the chief events of the period of revolution through which southern Europe was then passing, so that it differs from the Prometheus in having historical facts as ostensible subject. Through it reverberates the dissolution of kingdoms in feats of arms by land and sea from Persia to Morocco, and these cataclysms, though suggestive of something that transcends any human warfare, are yet not completely pinnacled in "the intense inane." But this is not the only merit of "Hellas;' its poetry is purer than that of the earlier work, because Shelley no longer takes sides so violently. He has lost the cruder optimism of the 'Prometheus', and is thrown back for consolation upon something that moves us more than any prospect of a heaven realised on earth by abolishing kings and priests. When the chorus of captive Greek women, who provide the lyrical setting, sing round the couch of the sleeping sultan, we are aware of an ineffable hope at the heart of their strain of melancholy pity; and so again when their burthen becomes the transience of all things human. The sultan, too, feels that Islam is doomed, and, as messenger after messenger announces the success of the rebels, his fatalism expresses itself as the growing perception that all this blood and all these tears are but phantoms that come and go, bubbles on the sea of eternity. This again is the purport of the talk of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, who evokes for him a vision of Mahmud II capturing Constantinople. The sultan is puzzled:

"What meanest thou? Thy words stream like a tempest

Of dazzling mist within my brain";

but 'we' know that the substance behind the mist is Shelley's "immaterial philosophy," the doctrine that nothing is real except the one eternal Mind. Ever louder and more confident sounds this note, until it drowns even the cries of victory when the tide of battle turns in favour of the Turks. The chorus, lamenting antiphonally the destruction of liberty, are interrupted by repeated howls of savage triumph: "Kill! crush! despoil! Let not a Greek escape"' But these discords are gradually resolved, through exquisitely complicated cadences, into the golden and equable flow of the concluding song:

"The world's great age begins anew,

The golden years return,

The earth doth like a snake renew

Her winter weeds outworn:

Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,

Like wrecks of a dissolving dream."

Breezy confidence has given place to a poignant mood of disillusionment.

"Oh, cease! must hate and death return?

Cease! must men kill and die?

Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn

Of bitter prophecy.

The world is weary of the past,

Oh, might it die or rest at last!"

Perhaps the perfect beauty of Greek civilisation shall never be restored; but the wisdom of its thinkers and the creations of its artists are immortal, while the fabric of the world

"Is but a vision;−−all that it inherits

Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams."

It is curious that for three of his more considerable works Shelley should have chosen the form of drama, since the last thing one would say of him is that he had the dramatic talent. 'Prometheus' and 'Hellas', however, are dramas only in name; there is no thought in them of scenic representation. 'The Cenci' (1819), on the other hand, is a real play; in writing it he had the stage in view, and even a particular actress, Miss O'Neil. It thus stands alone among his works, unless we put beside it the fragment of a projected play about Charles I (1822), a theme which, with its crowd of historical figures, was ill−suited to his powers. And not only is 'The Cenci' a play; it is the most successful attempt since the seventeenth century at a kind of writing, tragedy in the grand style, over which all our poets, from Addison to Swinburne, have more or less come to grief. Its subject is the fate of Beatrice Cenci, the daughter of a noble Roman house, who in 1599 was executed with her stepmother and brother for the murder of her father. The wicked father, more intensely wicked for his grey hairs and his immense ability, whose wealth had purchased from the Pope impunity for a long succession of crimes, hated his children, and drove them to frenzy

by his relentless cruelty. When to insults and oppression he added the horrors of an incestuous passion for his daughter, the cup overflowed, and Beatrice, faced with shame more intolerable than death, preferred parricide. Here was a subject made to Shelley's hand−−a naturally pure and gentle soul soiled, driven to violence, and finally extinguished, by unnameable wrong, while all authority, both human and divine, is on the side of the persecutor. Haunted by the grave, sad eyes of Guido Reni's picture of Beatrice, so that the very streets of Rome seemed to echo her name−−though it was only old women calling out "rags" ('cenci')−−he was tempted from his airy flights to throw himself for once into the portrayal of reality. There was no need now to dip "his pen in earthquake and eclipse"; clothed in plain and natural language, the action unfolded itself in a crescendo of horror; but from the ease with which he wrote−−it cost him relatively the least time and pains of all his works−−it would be rash to infer that he could have constructed an equally good tragedy on any other subject than the injured Beatrice and the combination, which Count Francesco Cenci is, of paternal power with the extreme limit of human iniquity.

With the exception of 'The Cenci', everything Shelley published was almost entirely unnoticed at the time. This play, being more intelligible than the rest, attracted both notice and praise, though it was also much blamed for what would now be called its unpleasantness. Many people, among them his wife, regretted that, having proved his ability to handle the concrete, he still should devote himself to ideal and unpopular abstractions, such as 'The Witch of Atlas' (1821), a fantastical piece in rime royal, which seems particularly to have provoked Mrs. Shelley. A "lady Witch" lived in a cave on Mount Atlas, and her games in a magic boat, her dances in the upper regions of space, and the pranks which she played among men, are described in verse of a richness that bewilders because it leads to nothing. The poet juggles with flowers and gems, stars and spirits, lovers and meteors; we are constantly expecting him to break into some design, and are as constantly disappointed. Our bewilderment is of a peculiar kind; it is not the same, for instance, as that produced by Blake's prophetic books, where we are conscious of a great spirit fumbling after the inexpressible. Shelley is not a true mystic. He is seldom puzzled, and he never seems to have any difficulty in expressing exactly what he feels; his images are perfectly definite. Our uneasiness arises from the fact that, with so much clear definition, such great activity in reproducing the subtlest impressions which Nature makes upon him, his work should have so little artistic purpose or form. Stroke is accumulated on stroke, each a triumph of imaginative beauty; but as they do not cohere to any discoverable end, the total impression is apt to be one of effort running to waste.

This formlessness, this monotony of splendour, is felt even in 'Adonais' (1821), his elegy on the death of Keats. John Keats was a very different person from Shelley. The son of a livery−stable keeper, he had been an apothecary's apprentice, and for a short time had walked the hospitals. He was driven into literature by sheer artistic passion, and not at all from any craving to ameliorate the world. His odes are among the chief glories of the English language. His life, unlike Shelley's, was devoted entirely to art, and was uneventful, its only incidents an unhappy love−affair, and the growth, hastened by disappointed passion and the 'Quarterly Review's' contemptuous attack on his work, of the consumption which killed him at the age of twenty−six. He was sent to Italy as a last chance. Shelley, who was then at Pisa, proposed to nurse him back to health, and offered him shelter. Keats refused the invitation, and died at Rome on February 23, 1821. Shelley was not intimate with Keats, and had been slow to recognise his genius; but it was enough that he was a poet, in sympathy with the Radicals, an exile, and the victim of the Tory reviewers. There is not ill Adonais that note of personal bereavement which wails through Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' or Cowley's 'Ode on the Death of Mr. Hervey'. Much, especially in the earlier stanzas, is common form. The Muse Urania is summoned to lament, and a host of personified abstractions flit before us, "like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream"−−

"Desires and Adorations,

Winged Persuasions, and veiled Destinies,

Splendours and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations

Of Hopes and Fears, and twilight Fantasies."

At first he scarcely seems to know what it is that he wants to say, but as he proceeds he warms to his work. The poets gather round Adonais' bier, and in four admirable stanzas Shelley describes himself as "a phantom among men," who

"Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,

Actaeon−like; and now he fled astray

With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,

And his own thoughts along that rugged way

Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey."

The Quarterly Reviewer is next chastised, and at last Shelley has found his cue. The strain rises from thoughts of mortality to the consolations of the eternal:

'Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep!

He hath awakened from the dream of life.

'Tis we, who, lost in stormy visions, keep

With phantoms an unprofitable strife."

Keats is made "one with Nature"; he is a parce of that power

"Which wields the world with never wearied love,

Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above."

It is once more the same conviction, the offspring of his philosophy and of his suffering, that we noticed in Hellas, only here the pathos is more acute. So strong is the sense of his own misery, the premonition of his own death, that we scarcely know, nor does it matter, whether it is in the person of Keats or of himself that he is lamenting the impermanence of earthly good. His spirit was hastening to escape from "the last clouds of cold mortality"; his bark is driven

"Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng

Whose sails were never to the tempest given."

A year later he was drowned.

While the beauty of Adonais is easily appreciated, 'Epipsychidion', written in the same year, must strike many readers as mere moonshine and madness. In 'Alastor', the poet, at the opening of his career, had pursued in vain through the wilderness of the world a vision of ideal loveliness; it would now seem that this vision is at last embodied in "the noble and unfortunate Lady Emilia Viviani," to whom 'Epipsychidion' is addressed. Shelley begins by exhausting, in the effort to express her perfection, all the metaphors that rapture can suggest. He calls her his adored nightingale, a spirit−winged heart, a seraph of heaven, sweet benediction in the eternal curse, moon beyond the clouds, star above the storm, "thou Wonder and thou Beauty and thou Terror! Thou Harmony of

Nature's art!" She is a sweet lamp, a "well of sealed and secret happiness," a star, a tone, a light, a solitude, a refuge, a delight, a lute, a buried treasure, a cradle, a violet−shaded grave, an antelope, a moon shining through a mist of dew. But all his "world of fancies" is unequal to express her; he breaks off in despair. A calmer passage of great interest then explains his philosophy of love:

"That best philosophy, whose taste

Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom

As glorious as a fiery martyrdom,"

and tells how he "never was attached to that great sect," which requires that everyone should bind himself for life to one mistress or friend; for the secret of true love is that it is increased, not diminished, by division; like imagination, it fills the universe; the parts exceed the whole, and this is the great characteristic distinguishing all things good from all things evil. We then have a shadowy record of love's dealings with him. In childhood he clasped the vision in every natural sight and sound, in verse, and in philosophy. Then it fled, this "soul out of my soul." He goes into the wintry forest of life, where "one whose voice was venomed melody" entraps and poisons his youth. The ideal is sought in vain in many mortal shapes, until the moon rises on him, "the cold chaste Moon," smiling on his soul, which lies in a death−like trance, a frozen ocean. At last the long−sought vision comes into the wintry forest; it is Emily, like the sun, bringing light and odour and new life. Henceforth he is a world ruled by and rejoicing in these twin spheres. "As to real flesh and blood," he said in a letter to Leigh Hunt, "you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a gin−shop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me." Yet it is certain that the figures behind the shifting web of metaphors are partly real−−that the poisonous enchantress is his first wife, and the moon that saved him from despair his second wife. The last part of the poem hymns the bliss of union with the ideal. Emily must fly with him; "a ship is floating in the harbour now," and there is "an isle under Ionian skies," the fairest of all Shelley's imaginary landscapes, where their two souls may become one. Then, at the supreme moment, the song trembles and stops:

"Woe is me!

The winged words on which my soul would pierce

Into the heights of love's rare universe,

Are chains of lead around its flight of fire−−

I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire."

We have now taken some view of the chief of Shelley's longer poems. Most of these were published during his life. They brought him little applause and much execration, but if he had written nothing else his fame would still be secure. They are, however, less than half of the verse that he actually wrote. Besides many completed poems, it remained for his wife to decipher, from scraps of paper, scribbled over, interlined, and erased, a host of fragments, all valuable, and many of them gems of purest ray. We must now attempt a general estimate of this whole output.

Chapter III The Poet of Rebellion, of Nature, and of Love

It may seem strange that so much space has been occupied in the last two chapters by philosophical and political topics, and this although Shelley is the most purely lyrical of English poets. The fact is that in nearly all English poets there is a strong moral and philosophical strain, particularly in those of the period 1770−1830. They are deeply interested in political, scientific, and religious speculations in aesthetic questions only superficially, if at all Shelley, with the tap−roots of his emotions striking deep into politics and philosophy, is only an extreme

instance of a national trait, which was unusually prominent in the early part of the nineteenth century owing to the state of our insular politics at the time though it must be admitted that English artists of all periods have an inherent tendency to moralise which has sometimes been a weakness, and sometimes has given them surprising strength.

Like the other poets of the Romantic Movement Shelley expended his emotion on three main objects−−politics, nature, and love. In each of these subjects he struck a note peculiar to himself, but his singularity is perhaps greatest in the sphere of politics. It may be summed up in the observation that no English imaginative writer of the first rank has been equally inspired by those doctrines that helped to produce the French Revolution. That all men are born free and equal; that by a contract entered into in primitive times they surrendered as much of their rights as was necessary to the well−being of the community, that despotic governments and established religions, being violations of the original contract, are encroachments on those rights and the causes of all evil; that inequalities of rank and power can be abolished by reasoning, and that then, since men are naturally good, the golden age will return−−these are positions which the English mind, with its dislike of the 'a priori', will not readily accept. The English Utilitarians, who exerted a great influence on the course of affairs, and the classical school of economists that derived from them, did indeed hold that men were naturally good, in a sense. Their theory was that, if people were left to themselves, and if the restraints imposed by authority on thought and commerce were removed, the operation of ordinary human motives would produce the most beneficent results. But their theory was quite empirical; worked out in various ways by Adam Smith, Bentham, and Mill, it admirably suited the native independence of the English character, and was justified by the fact that, at the end of the eighteenth century, governments were so bad that an immense increase of wealth, intelligence, and happiness was bound to come merely from making a clean sweep of obsolete institutions. Shelley's Radicalism was not of this drab hue. He was incapable of soberly studying the connections between causes and effects an incapacity which comes out in the distaste he felt for history−−and his conception of the ideal at which the reformer should aim was vague and fantastic. In both these respects his shortcomings were due to ignorance of human nature proceeding from ignorance of himself.

And first as to the nature of his ideals. While all good men must sympathise with the sincerity of his passion to remould this sorry scheme of things "nearer to the heart's desire," few will find the model, as it appears in his poems, very exhilarating. It is chiefly expressed in negatives: there will be no priests, no kings, no marriage, no war, no cruelty−−man will be "tribeless and nationless." Though the earth will teem with plenty beyond our wildest imagination, the general effect is insipid; or, if there are colours in the scene, they are hectic, unnatural colours. His couples of lovers, isolated in bowers of bliss, reading Plato and eating vegetables, are poor substitutes for the rich variety of human emotions which the real world, with all its admixture of evil, actually admits. Hence Shelley's tone irritates when he shrilly summons us to adore his New Jerusalem. Reflecting on the narrowness of his ideals we are apt to see him as an ignorant and fanatical sectary, and to detect an unpleasant flavour in his verse. And we perceive that, as with all honest fanatics, his narrowness comes from ignorance of himself. The story of Mrs. Southey's buns is typical. When he visited Southey there were hot buttered buns for tea, and he so much offended Mrs. Southey by calling them coarse, disgusting food that she determined to make him try them. He ate first one, then another, and ended by clearing off two plates of the unclean thing. Actively conscious of nothing in himself but aspirations towards perfection, he never saw that, like everyone else, he was a cockpit of ordinary conflicting instincts; or, if this tumult of lower movements did emerge into consciousness, he would judge it to be wholly evil, since it had no connection, except as a hindrance, with his activities as a reformer. Similarly the world at large, full as it was of nightmare oppressions of wrong, fell for him into two sharply opposed spheres of light and darkness on one side the radiant armies of right, on the other the perverse opposition of devils.

With this hysterically over−simplified view of life, fostered by lack of self−knowledge, was connected a corresponding mistake as to the means by which his ends could be reached. One of the first observations which generous spirits often make is that the unsatisfactory state of society is due to some very small kink or flaw in the dispositions of the majority of people. This perception, which it does not need much experience to reach, is the

source of the common error of youth that everything can be put right by some simple remedy. If only some tiny change could be made in men's attitude towards one another and towards the universe, what a flood of evil could be dammed; the slightness of the cause is as striking as the immensity of the effect. Those who ridicule the young do not, perhaps, always see that this is perfectly true, though of course they are right in denouncing the inference so often drawn−−and here lay Shelley's fundamental fallacy−−that the required tiny change depends on an effort of the will, and that the will only does not make the effort because feeling is perverted and intelligence dimmed by convention traditions, prejudices, and superstitions. It is certain, for one thing, that will only plays a small part in our nature, and that by themselves acts of will cannot make the world perfect. Most men are helped to this lesson by observation of themselves; they see that their high resolves are ineffective because their characters are mixed. Shelley never learnt this. He saw, indeed, that his efforts were futile even mischievous; but, being certain, and rightly, of the nobility of his aims, he could never see that he had acted wrongly, that he ought to have calculated the results of his actions more reasonably. Ever thwarted, and never nearer the happiness he desired for himself and others, he did not, like ordinary men attain a juster notion of the relation between good and ill in himself and in the world; he lapsed into a plaintive bewildered melancholy, translating the inexplicable conflict of right and wrong into the transcendental view that

"Life, like a dome of many−coloured glass,

Stains the white radiance of Eternity."

But his failure is the world's gain, for all that is best in his poetry is this expression of frustrated hope. He has indeed, when he is moved simply by public passion, some wonderful trumpet−notes; what hate and indignation can do, he sometimes does. And his rapturous dreams of freedom can stir the intellect, if not the blood. But it must be remarked that poetry inspired solely by revolutionary enthusiasm is liable to one fatal weakness: it degenerates too easily into rhetoric. To avoid being a didactic treatise it has to deal in high−flown abstractions, and in Shelley fear, famine, tyranny, and the rest, sometimes have all the emptiness of the classical manner. They appear now as brothers, now as parents, now as sisters of one another; the task of unravelling their genealogy would be as difficult as it is pointless. If Shelley had been merely the singer of revolution, the intensity and sincerity of his feeling would still have made him a better poet than Byron; but he would not have been a great poet, partly because of the inherent drawbacks of the subject, partly because of his strained and false view of "the moral universe" and of himself. His song, in treating of men as citizens, as governors and governed, could never have touched such a height as Burns' "A man's a man for a' that."

Fortunately for our literature, Shelley did more than arraign tyrants. The Romantic Movement was not merely a new way of considering human beings in their public capacity; it meant also a new kind of sensitiveness to their environment. If we turn, say, from Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock' to Wordsworth's 'The Prelude', it is as if we have passed from a saloon crowded with a bewigged and painted company, wittily conversing in an atmosphere that has become rather stuffy, into the freshness of a starlit night. And just as, on stepping into the open air, the splendours of mountain, sky, and sea may enlarge our feelings with wonder and delight, so a corresponding change may occur in our emotions towards one another; in this setting of a universe with which we feel ourselves now rapturously, now calmly, united, we love with less artifice, with greater impetuosity and self−abandonment. "Thomson and Cowper," says Peacock, "looked at the trees and hills which so many ingenious gentlemen had rhymed about so long without looking at them, and the effect of the operation on poetry was like the discovery of a new world." The Romantic poets tended to be absorbed in their trees and hills, but when they also looked in the same spirit on their own hearts, that operation added yet another world to poetry. In Shelley the absorption of the self in nature is carried to its furthest point. If the passion to which nature moved him is less deeply meditated than in Wordsworth and Coleridge, its exuberance is wilder; and in his best lyrics it is inseparably mingled with the passion which puts him among the world's two or three greatest writers of love−poems.

Of all his verse, it is these songs about nature and love that every one knows and likes best. And, in fact, many of

them seem to satisfy what is perhaps the ultimate test of true poetry: they sometimes have the power, which makes poetry akin to music, of suggesting by means of words something which cannot possibly be expressed in words. Obviously the test is impossible to use with any objective certainty, but, for a reason which will appear, it seems capable of a fairly straightforward application to Shelley's work.

First we may observe that, just as the sight of some real scene−− not necessarily a sunset or a glacier, but a ploughed field or a street−corner−−may call up emotions which "lie too deep for tears" and cannot be put into words, this same effect can be produced by unstudied descriptions. Wordsworth often produces it:

"I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils."

Now, in the description of natural scenes that kind of effect is beyond Shelley's reach, though he has many pictures which are both detailed and emotional. Consider, for instance, these lines from 'The Invitation' (1822). He calls to Jane Williams to come away "to the wild woods and the plains,"

"Where the lawns and pastures be,
And the sandhills of the sea;−−
Where the melting hoar−frost wets
The daisy−star that never sets,
And wind−flowers, and violets,
Which yet join not scent to hue,
Crown the pale year weak and new;
When the night is left behind
In the deep east, dun and blind,
And the blue moon is over us,
And the multitudinous
Billows murmur at our feet,
Where the earth and ocean meet,
And all things seem only one
In the universal sun."

This has a wonderful lightness and radiance. And here is a passage of careful description from 'Evening: Ponte a Mare, Pisa':

"The sun is set; the swallows are asleep;

The bats are flitting fast in the gray air;

The slow soft toads out of damp corners creep,

And evening's breath, wandering here and there

Over the quivering surface of the stream,

Walkes not one ripple from its summer dream.

There is no dew on the dry grass to−night,

Nor damp within the shadow of the trees;

The wind is intermitting, dry and light;

And in the inconstant motion of the breeze

The dust and straws are driven up and down,

And whirled about the pavement of the town."

Evidently he was a good observer, in the sense that he saw details clearly−−unlike Byron, who had for nature but a vague and a preoccupied eye−−and evidently, too, his observation is steeped in strong feeling, and is expressed in most melodious language. Yet we get the impression that he neither saw nor felt anything beyond exactly what he has expressed; there is no suggestion, as there should be in great poetry, of something beyond all expression. And, curiously enough, this seems to be true even of those fanciful poems so especially characteristic of him, such as 'The Cloud' and 'Arethusa', where he has dashed together on his palette the most startling colours in nature, and composed out of them an extravagantly imaginative whole:

"The sanguine sunrise, with his meteor eyes,

And his burning plumes outspread,

Leaps on the back of my sailing rack,

When the morning star shines dead,

As on the jag of a mountain crag

Which an earthquake rocks and swings,

An eagle alit one moment may sit

In the light of its golden wings.

And, when sunset may breathe, from the lit sea beneath,

Its ardours of rest and of love,

And the crimson pall of eve may fall

From the depths of heaven above,

With wings folded I rest, on my airy nest,

As still as a brooding dove."

Can he keep it up, we wonder, this manipulation of eagles and rainbows, of sunset and moonshine, of spray and thunder and lightning? We hold our breath; it is superhuman, miraculous; but he never falters, so vehement is the impulse of his delight. It is only afterwards that we ask ourselves whether there is anything beyond the mere delight; and realising that, though we have been rapt far above the earth, we have had no disturbing glimpses of infinity, we are left with a slight flatness of disappointment.

But disappointment vanishes when we turn to the poems in which ecstasy is shot through with that strain of melancholy which we have already noticed. He invokes the wild West Wind, not so much to exult impersonally in the force that chariots the decaying leaves, spreads the seeds abroad, wakes the Mediterranean from its slumber, and cleaves the Atlantic, as to cry out in the pain of his own helplessness and failure:

"Oh life me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed

One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud."

Or an autumn day in the Euganean hills, growing from misty morning through blue noon to twilight, brings, as he looks over "the waveless plain of Lombardy," a short respite:

"Many a green isle needs must be

In the deep wide sea of misery;

Or the Mariner, worn and wan,

Ne'er thus could voyage on."

The contrast between the peaceful loveliness of nature and his own misery is a piteous puzzle. On the beach near Naples

"The sun is warm, the sky is clear,

The waves are dancing fast and bright,

Blue isles and snowy mountains wear

The purple noon's transparent might."

But

"Alas! I have nor hope nor health,

Nor peace within nor calm around,

Nor that content surpassing wealth

The sage in meditation found,

And walked with inward glory crowned−−

Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.

Others I see whom these surround−−

Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;−−

To me that cup has been dealt in another measure";

so that

"I could lie down like a tired child,

And weep away the life of care."

The aching weariness that throbs in the music of these verses is not mere sentimental self−pity; it is the cry of a soul that has known moments of bliss when it has been absorbed in the sea of beauty that surrounds it, only the moments pass, and the reunion, ever sought, seems ever more hopeless. Over and over again Shelley's song gives us both the fugitive glimpses and the mystery of frustration.

"I sang of the dancing stars,

I sang of the daedal Earth,

And of Heaven−−and the giant wars,

And Love, and Death, and Birth,−−

And then I changed my pipings,−−

Singing how down the vale of Menalus

I pursued a maiden and clasp'd a reed:

Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!

It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:

All wept, as I think both ye now would,

If envy or age had not frozen your blood,

At the sorrow of my sweet pipings."

Why is it that he is equal to the highest office of poetry in these sad 'cris de coeur' rather than anywhere else? There is one poem−− perhaps his greatest poem−−which may suggest the answer. In the 'Sensitive Plant' (1820) a garden is first described on which are lavished all his powers of weaving an imaginary landscape out of flowers and light and odour. All the flowers rejoice in one another's love and beauty except the Sensitive Plant,

"For the Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;

Radiance and odour are not its dower;

It loves, even like Love, its deep heart is full,

It desires what it has not, the beautiful."

Now there was "a power in this sweet place, an Eve in this Eden." "A Lady, the wonder of her kind," tended the flowers from earliest spring, through the summer, "and, ere the first leaf looked brown, she died!" The last part of the poem, a pendant to the first, is full of the horrors of corruption and decay when the power of good has vanished and the power of evil is triumphant. Cruel frost comes, and snow,

"And a northern whirlwind, wandering about
Like a wolf that had smelt a dead child out,
Shook the boughs thus laden, and heavy and stiff,
And snapped them off with his rigid griff.

When winter had gone and spring came back
The Sensitive Plant was a leafless wreck;
But the mandrakes, and toadstools, and docks, and darnels,
Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels."

Then there is an epilogue saying quite baldly that perhaps we may console ourselves by believing that

"In this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
And we the shadows of the dream,
It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
And all sweet shapes and odours there,
In truth have never passed away:
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
There is no death nor change: their might

Exceeds our organs which endure

No light, being themselves obscure."

The fact is that Shelley's melancholy is intimately connected with his philosophical ideas. It is the creed of the student of Berkeley, of Plato, of Spinoza. What is real and unchanging is the one spirit which interpenetrates and upholds the world with "love and beauty and delight," and this spirit−−the vision which Alastor pursued in vain, the "Unseen Power" of the 'Ode to Intellectual Beauty'−−is what is always suggested by his poetry at its highest moments. The suggestion, in its fulness, is of course ineffable; only in the case of Shelley some approach can be made to naming it, because he happened to be steeped in philosophical ways of thinking. The forms in which he gave it expression are predominantly melancholy, because this kind of idealism, with its insistence on the unreality of evil, is the recoil from life of an unsatisfied and disappointed soul.

His philosophy of love is but a special case of this all−embracing doctrine. We saw how in 'Epipsychidion' he rejected monogamic principles on the ground that true love is increased, not diminished, by division, and we can now understand why he calls this theory an "eternal law." For, in this life of illusion, it is in passionate love that we most nearly attain to communion with the eternal reality. Hence the more of it the better. The more we divide and spread our love, the more nearly will the fragments of goodness and beauty that are in each of us find their true fruition. This doctrine may be inconvenient in practice, but it is far removed from vulgar sensualism, of which Shelley had not a trace. Hogg says that he was "pre−eminently a ladies' man," meaning that he had that childlike helplessness and sincerity which go straight to the hearts of women. To this youth, preaching sublime mysteries, and needing to be mothered into the bargain, they were as iron to the magnet. There was always an Eve in his Eden, and each was the "wonder of her kind"; but whoever she was−−Harriet Grove, Harriet Westbrook, Elizabeth Hitchener, Cornelia Turner, Mary Godwin, Emilia Viviani, or Jane Williams−−she was never a Don Juan's mistress; she was an incarnation of the soul of the world, a momentary mirror of the eternal. Such an attitude towards the least controllable of passions has several drawbacks: it involves a certain inhumanity, and it is only possible for long to one who remains ignorant of himself and cannot see that part of the force impelling him is blind attraction towards a pretty face. It also has the result that, if the lover is a poet, his love−songs will be sad. Obsessed by the idea of communion with some divine perfection, he must needs be often cast down, not only by finding that, Ixion−like, he has embraced a cloud (as Shelley said of himself and Emilia), but because, even when the object of his affection is worthy, complete communion is easier to desire than to attain. Thus Shelley's love−songs are just what might be expected. If he does strain to the moment of ingress into the divine being, it is to swoon with excess of bliss, as at the end of 'Epipsychidion', or as in the 'Indian Serenade':

"Oh lift me from the grass!

I die! I faint! I fail!"

More often he exhales pure melancholy:

"See the mountains kiss high heaven

  And the waves clasp one another;

No sister−flower would be forgiven

  If it disdained its brother.

And the sunlight clasps the earth,

  And the moonbeams kiss the sea:

What is all this sweet work worth

If thou kiss not me?"

Here the failure is foreseen; he knows she will not kiss him. Sometimes his sadness is faint and restrained:

"I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden,

Thou needest not fear mine;

My spirit is too deeply laden

Ever to burthen thine."

At other times it flows with the fulness of despair, as in

"I can give not what men call love,

But wilt thou accept not

The worship the heart lifts above

And the Heavens reject not,

The desire of the moth for the star,

Of the night for the morrow,

The devotion to something afar

From the sphere of our sorrow?"

or in

"When the lamp is shattered

The light in the dust lies dead−−

When the cloud is scattered

The rainbow's glory is shed.

When the lute is broken,

Sweet tones are remembered not;

When the lips have spoken,

Loved accents are soon forgot."

The very rapture of the skylark opens, as he listens, the wound at his heart:

"We look before and after,

And pine for what is not:

Our sincerest laughter

With some pain is fraught

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

Is the assertion contained in this last line universally true? Perhaps. At any rate it is true of Shelley. His saddest songs are the sweetest, and the reason is that in them, rather than in those verses where he merely utters ecstatic delight, or calm pleasure, or bitter indignation, he conveys ineffable suggestions beyond what the bare words express.

It remains to point out that there is one means of conveying such suggestions which was outside the scope of his genius. One of the methods which poetry most often uses to suggest the ineffable is by the artful choice and arrangement of words. A word, simply by being cunningly placed and given a certain colour, can, in the hands of a good craftsman, open up indescribable vistas. But Keats, when, in reply to a letter of criticism, he wrote to him, "You might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore," was giving him advice which, though admirable, it was impossible that he should follow. Shelley was not merely not a craftsman by nature, he was not the least interested in those matters which are covered by the clumsy name of "technique." It is characteristic of him that, while most great poets have been fertile coiners of new words, his only addition to the language is the ugly "idealism" in the sense of "ideal object." He seems to have strayed from the current vocabulary only in two other cases, both infelicitous−−"glode" for "glided," and "blosmy" for "blossomy." He did not, like Keats, look on fine phrases with the eye of a lover. His taste was the conventional taste of the time. Thus he said of Byron's 'Cain', "It is apocalyptic, it is a revelation not before communicated to man"; and he thought Byron and Tom Moore better poets than himself. As regards art, he cheapened Michael Angelo, and the only things about which he was enthusiastic in Italy, except the fragments of antiquity which he loved for their associations, were the paintings of Raphael and Guido Reni. Nor do we find in him any of those new metrical effects, those sublime inventions in prosody, with which the great masters astonish us. Blank verse is a test of poets in this respect, and Shelley's blank verse is limp and characterless. Those triumphs, again, which consist in the beauty of complicated wholes, were never his. He is supreme, indeed, in simple outbursts where there is no question of form, but in efforts of longer breath, where architecture is required, he too often sprawls and fumbles before the inspiration comes.

Yet his verse has merits which seem to make such criticisms vain. We may trace in it all kinds of 'arrieres pensees', philosophical and sociological, that an artist ought not to have, and we may even dislike its dominating conception of a vague spirit that pervades the universe; but we must admit that when he wrote it was as if seized and swept away by some "unseen power" that fell upon him unpremeditated. His emotions were of that fatal violence which distinguishes so many illustrious but unhappy souls from the mass of peaceable mankind. In the early part of last century a set of illustrations to Faust by Retzch used to be greatly admired; about one of them, a picture of Faust and Margaret in the arbour, Shelley says in a letter to a friend: "The artist makes one envy his happiness that he can sketch such things with calmness, which I only dared look upon once, and which made my brain swim round only to touch the leaf on the opposite side of which I knew that it was figured." So slight were the occasions that could affect him even to vertigo. When, from whatever cause, the frenzy took him, he would write hastily, leaving gaps, not caring about the sense. Afterwards he would work conscientiously over what he had written, but there was nothing left for him to do but to correct in cold blood, make plain the meaning, and reduce all to such order as he could. One result of this method was that his verse preserved an unparallelled rush and spontaneity, which is perhaps as great a quality as anything attained by the more bee−like toil of better artists.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The literature dealing with Shelley's work and life is immense, and no attempt will be made even to summarise it here. A convenient one−volume edition of the poems is that edited by Professor Edward Dowden for Messrs. Macmillan (1896); it includes Mary Shelley's valuable notes. There is a good selection of the poems in the

"Golden Treasury Series," compiled by A. Stopford Brooke. The Prose Works have been collected and edited by Mr. H. Buxton Forman in four volumes (1876−1880). Of the letters there is an edition by Mr. Roger Ingpen (2 vols., 1909). A number of letters to Elizabeth Hitchener were published by Mr. Bertram Dobell in 1909.

For a first−hand knowledge of a poet's life and character the student must always go to the accounts of contemporaries. In Shelley's case these are copious. There are T. L. Peacock,s 'Memoirs' (edited by E. F. B. Brett−Smith, 1909); Peacock's 'Nightmare Abbey' contains an amusing caricature of Shelley in the person of Scythrops; and in at least two of her novels Mary Shelley has left descriptions of her husband: Adrian Earl of Windsor, in 'The Last Man', is a portrait of Shelley, and 'Lodore' contains an account of his estrangement from Harriet. His cousin Tom Medwin's 'Life' (1847) is a bad book, full of inaccuracies. But Shelley had one unique piece of good fortune: two friends wrote books about him that are masterpieces. T. J. Hogg's 'Life' is especially valuable for the earlier period, and E. J. Trelawny's 'Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author', describes him in the last year before his death. Hogg's 'Life' has been republished in a cheap edition by Messrs. Routledge, and there is a cheap edition of Trelawny's 'Records' in Messrs. Routledge's "New Universal Library." But both these books, while they give incomparably vivid pictures of the poet, are rambling and unconventional, and should be supplemented by Professor Dowden's 'Life of Shelley' (2 vols., 1886), which will always remain the standard biography. Of other recent lives, Mr. A. Clutton−Brock's 'Shelley: the Man and the Poet' (1910) may be recommended.

Of the innumerable critical estimates of Shelley and his place in literature, the most noteworthy are perhaps Matthew Arnold's Essay in his 'Essays in Criticism', and Francis Thompson's 'Shelley' (1909). Vol. iv. "Naturalism in England," of Dr. George Brandes' 'Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature' (1905), may be read with interest, though it is not very reliable; and Prof. Oliver Elton's 'A Survey of English Literature', 1780−1830 (1912), should be consulted.

Whoever wishes to follow the fortunes, after the fire of their lives was extinguished by Shelley's death, of Mary Shelley, Claire Clairmont, and the rest, should read, besides Trelawny's 'Records' already mentioned, 'The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley', by Mrs. Julian Marshall (2 vols., 1889), and 'The Letters of E. J. Trelawny_, edited by Mr. H. Buxton Forman (1910).