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W. J. Mitchell.

SHELLEY:

BY

JAMES THOMSON.

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No. 135

B. D.

X

SHELLEY, a Poem: with other
Writings relating to Shelley, by
the late JAMES THOMSON ('B.V.):
to which is added an Essay on
The Poems of WILLIAM BLAKE,
by the same Author.



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PREFATORY NOTE.

OF all our poets none has inspired a deeper personal love, or has had more earnest students than SHELLEY; and, it may be added, none has more deserved the love, and none will better repay the study bestowed upon him. His was no double nature; he did not give utterance to fine sentiments and act meanly; but was no less to be admired as a man than as a poet.

Not one of SHELLEY'S admirers, I am convinced, ever surpassed JAMES THOMSON in affectionate devotion to his memory, or ever studied his writings with more minute and loving care. His poetry inspired THOMSON in his youth, at a time when SHELLEY'S reputation had not yet risen above the fogs and clouds that so long obscured its radiance: it was a resource and a consolation to him under the misfortunes of his manhood: and to the last he never ceased to regard with gratitude and love "the poet of poets and purest of men." Let me here observe, parenthetically, that no stronger proof of the essentially original and individual character of THOMSON'S own genius can be given than the fact that loving so much and studying so closely the works of SHELLEY, he yet preserved himself entirely from becoming an imitator of his style or a plagiarist of his ideas.

That THOMSON never found an opportunity of ex-

pressing adequately and at length the results of his mature meditations upon his favourite poet is much to be regretted. A great and perfect picture might have been painted by his hand : what I have gathered together here are the few sketches—not perfect indeed, yet showing the touch of the master—which alone fate (unkind to him in this as in much else) allowed him to accomplish.

The Poem with which this volume begins, and which has not hitherto been printed, was written in 1861. It was thus a comparatively early work, and therefore the reader will hardly expect to find displayed in it the wonderful power and finished execution which characterise "The City of Dreadful Night," written ten or twelve years later, when the author's intellect was in its fullest vigour and maturity. Nevertheless it is a very interesting production, with many fine and eloquent passages. It is high praise to say of it that it is not unworthy of its subject, for the best poem that could be written on SHELLEY could be no more than worthy of its theme. Excluding SWINBURNE'S "Cor Cordium" because of its brevity, I know of no other poem on SHELLEY which can compare with that here given.

The Essay which follows the Poem was also an early work. It was published in 1860, but it is likely enough that it was written a year or two earlier. It would perhaps be a mistake to assert that this Essay was the first in which the genius of SHELLEY was fully and unreservedly acknowledged ; but it is certain that few critics before 1860 ever ventured to praise him, without making large abatements and qualifications. Of SHELLEY it may be said that he suffered in his person in his lifetime, and in his fame after his death, for the benefit of the Poets who have succeeded him. How much louder

would the cry against the heterodox outpourings of SWINBURNE have been, if the vials of holy wrath had not been almost entirely emptied on SHELLEY'S devoted head? Even "The City of Dreadful Night," that quintessence of all that respectability and conventionalism most abhor, only excited here and there a few low murmurs of disapproval, in place of the discordant and deafening shrieks which greeted "The Revolt of Islam" and "Prometheus Unbound."

Thus, as I have said, even those who were well-affected towards SHELLEY, were unable or unwilling, in face of the clamour against him, to praise him, without throwing in an allusion to those detestable opinions of his, which the critic would not, on any account, allow his readers to think that he himself approved of. Their praise was consequently deprived of almost all value, for SHELLEY'S opinions were of the very essence of his writings, and it is impossible, except in a very few of his shorter pieces, to think of the poems apart from the sentiments which animate and inspire them. This then is, as I conceive, the peculiar merit of THOMSON'S Essay—that he recognises fully the nobility of SHELLEY'S aims and ideas, and does not, as almost all writers had done before him, append a *per contra* of disparagement.

Let me add a few words more as to this Essay, although I have some hesitation in penning them. If the author had lived to republish it, he would, I think, have omitted or modified some few passages. I refer chiefly to the sentences in which EMERSON and CARLYLE are mentioned. Both of these authors retained to the last a portion of the great admiration with which in early life he regarded them: but I can hardly think that in 1880 he would have allowed the passages relating to them

which he wrote in 1860 to remain altogether unaltered.

The Essay on the "Prometheus Unbound" is perhaps open to the charge (as the author himself seems to have felt) of dwelling too much on points almost too minute to be worth subjecting to such a rigorous examination. But perhaps this only seems so because SHELLEY has not yet taken his rightful place in our literature. The same minute study of SHAKESPEARE'S text is common, and Shakespearean editors and students would be much surprised if they were reproached with too searching an analysis of their master's text.

It is perhaps rather cruel to reprint the article called "An Inspired Critic on Shelley," but really MR. WYKE BAYLISS (notice the reiteration of this gentleman's name in the article, and how it grows more comical at each repetition!) affords so much amusement whilst he is being dissected that he must suffer in order to promote "the greatest good of the greatest number."

With regard to the portion of this volume which the kindness of MR. W. M. ROSSETTI has enabled me to print, I can hardly doubt that it will be highly valued. When I originally planned this volume I did not know of the existence of these letters. A fortunate inspiration led me to apply to Mr. ROSSETTI, and that gentleman, with a generosity for which I cannot be too grateful, at once entrusted me with THOMSON'S correspondence with him, and gave me permission to use such portions of it as might suit my purpose. As most of the letters related more or less to SHELLEY, my only difficulty has lain in selecting those which seemed of most interest. One letter here printed may indeed seem rather out of place in this volume: yet I do not think any reader will find

fault with me for inserting it. The one I allude to is that written from Central City, Colorado. To me this seems to be a masterpiece of epistolary writing. Reading it, the whole aspect of the district from which it was written, its scenery and its inhabitants, are, with the lightest and easiest touches, pictured before us. The style, whether the author relates some homely or humorous incident, or paints with bold and graphic pencil the scenery around him, is perfect; it is in complete harmony with the ideas it expresses; in its eloquence there is not a trace of turgidity, and in its humour there is nothing forced. A study of it may be confidently recommended to those who have taken their opinion of THOMSON'S abilities solely from "The City of Dreadful Night"; for it can hardly fail to leave on the mind of any reader worthy to judge an enlarged idea both of his actual achievements, and of the powers which he held in reserve. I look indeed upon the whole correspondence as an important addition to our knowledge of one who in the course of time will come to be looked upon as a typical writer and thinker of the present century.

It gives me much pleasure to include the Essay on WILLIAM BLAKE in the present volume. I intended at first only to extract the passages from it relating to SHELLEY, but I was not long in coming to the conclusion that I ought not to neglect the present opportunity of reproducing it in its integrity. It is quite unnecessary for me to praise it; and I will merely note that it was written and published before MR. SWINBURNE'S Essay on BLAKE appeared in print.

Let me add in conclusion that it would, I am sure, have been gratifying to THOMSON could he have thought

that his name in the future would be linked in any way with that of *SHELLEY*: and I feel equally sure that *SHELLEY*, could he have known *THOMSON*, would not have disapproved of the association of their names. Let it not be thought that I am placing *THOMSON* on an equality with *SHELLEY*: neither am I asserting that their characters did not differ in many essential points. But I do not hesitate to affirm that the unworldliness, the deep affections, the generous self-sacrificing spirit, the fervent poetical temperament, which characterised *SHELLEY*, were in a not much smaller degree characteristic of *JAMES THOMSON*, however those qualities were obscured in him by his more reserved disposition, his poverty, and the unfortunate events of his life. Apply what measure we may to him, it is hardly possible to deny that the author of "The City of Dreadful Night," "Weddah and Om-el-Bonain," and "Vane's Story," was a man of genius; and future times are perhaps no more likely to produce another *THOMSON* than another *SHELLEY*.

BERTRAM DOBELL.

Nov. 13, 1884.

SHELLEY.

UPON a grassy slope of shore I lay
Hour after hour, from sunset into night,
Outgazing tranquil o'er the tranquil bay,
And dreaming in a mood of rare delight.
Yes, for some hours, sky-pure sea-calm star-bright
My spirit was in tune with heaven and earth,
Nor felt the discords of its mortal birth.

The round moon floated half-way up the sky,
Beneath an arch of clouds serenely fair
As if upfurled where never breeze could fly :
So that it seemed a lamp suspended there
To light the sea-floored theatre of air ;
Whose curtain raised, whose hush of expectation
Foretold a solemn drama's celebration.

My dream grew deeper, deeper evermore ;
A sleepless dream, a seeing trance, no swoon.
I floated with the throb of sea and shore,
And felt the earth swift-wheeling with the moon,
And saw the worlds as they indeed are,—strewn
Above, below, as fish through ocean roam,
Not gliding round an even-surfaced dome.

Until the Drama which that hush foretold
 Did come indeed as at a monarch's call ;
 Although its pregnant scenes were not unrolled
 Upon that sea-stage, nor within that wall
 Of circling crystal, nor were lamped at all
 By that serenest moon,—they claimed a stage
 Of ampler scope and grander equipage.

The stars are speeding in their companies ;
 God's chariots in divine array, they roll
 Circling the sphere of three infinities,
 Our symbol of His thought-confounding Whole
 As Plato saw them with his clear-eyed soul,*
 He saw, we saw ; and each one tries to tell
 The Vision each one knows ineffable.

And every silver-burning chariot-sphere
 Whose wheels churn Æther to the foam of Light
 Is guided by its seraph-charioteer,
 Serenely regnant o'er its fulgent flight,
 Sceptred and crowned and clothed with awful might :
 The infinite armies of the Lord, whose pinions
 Flash fire throughout His infinite dominions.

And yet, as every dreamer seems to be
 The centre of the action of his dream,
 Our speck of this poor earth-speck was to me
 The single central fountain whence did stream
 The growing river of that drama's theme ;
 Which rolled so far and broadened out so wide
 That all the worlds were floated on its tide.

* See the *Phædrus*.

A voice fell past me like a plummet cast
 To fathom that unfathomable sea,
 A voice austere sad,—“ At last, at last
 The measure of the earth’s iniquity
 Brims God’s great urn ; at last it all must be
 Poured out upon the earth in blood and tears
 And raging fire, for years and years and years.

“ The Churches are polluted,—let them fall
 And crush old errors underneath their weight ;
 The royal purples are a bloody pall
 To stifle Freedom,—rend them ere too late ;
 The laws are silken meshes for the great
 But iron nets to hold the poor and mean,—
 Let them too perish But what next is seen ?

“ Because the priests were false, the shrines impure,
 Mankind in God Himself all faith have lost ;
 Because blood dyed old purples, they endure
 To walk all naked in the sun and frost ;
 Because old laws the law of justice crost,
 They would live henceforth without any law :
 No loyal service, no revering awe !

“ Who will go down amidst these desolations
 Of fire and blood and lunacies and woe,
 To chant aloud to all the wildered nations
 Those heavenly truths no earth can overthrow,
 The changeless truths Eternal ? Who will go
 To preach the Gospel of our Lord above,
 Chanting perpetually the law of Love ? ”

Throughout the whole sphere-throbbing vastitude
 Deep silence followed when that great voice ended ;
 Even the music of the multitude
 Of all their rhythmic revolutions blended,
 The ever-rolling music, seemed suspended :
 And I then dared to lift my awe-shut eyes
 And search for him who spoke throughout the skies.

Search for the moon of night, the sun of day!—
 In centre of the universal round
 A broad and steadfast disc of splendour lay ;
 Fit field for him who stood upon its ground,
 The solemn angel with pure glory crowned,—
 His right hand raised, his countenance divine
 Intently listening through the hyaline.

From far, far, far, far even in that vast,
 A voice came trembling ravishingly sweet—
 “O Raphael beloved of God! the last
 And meanest of the spirits who repeat
 Eternal praises round the Judgment-Seat
 Implores that he, if none of greater worth,
 May sing the self-same praises on that earth.”

A pure joy lighted up great Raphael's face
 As then he gestured “Hither!” ; and there came
 A star-like speck from out the bounds of space
 With swift and swerveless flight to reach its aim ;
 Developing into a tongue of flame,
 Until it stood upon that field of light
 A fervent Seraph beautiful and bright.

Most beautiful in the eternal youth
Of those who ever breathe the heavenly air
Of perfect holiness and love and truth ;
Most bright in full-flusht fervour, standing there
With half-spread wings and backward-streaming hair,
As if alit for but a moment's rest
While speeding forward on his single quest.

Then Raphael laid a benedictive hand
On that pure brow, and spake in gentle tone—
“Thou dear, dear Child of God, than whom doth stand
No purer humbler spirit near His throne,
And none more ardent to speed forth alone
On any errand from the bliss above
In single-hearted and unbounded love ;

“Thy service is accepted : thou shalt pall
In mortal flesh thy seraphood sublime ;
A witness of the one true Lord of all
Amidst a world gone mad with sin and crime,
A prophet of the glorious Future time
And of Eternity when Time is past
Amidst the Present of a world aghast.

“I see the storm's commencing clouds of gloom,
I see the storm's first lightnings fiercely flash,
I hear the storm's first thunders roll and boom,
I hear the storm's first ruins quake and crash,—
O Man, thy judgment-wrath is wild and rash !
...Go down, dear Child ; and may God give thee power
To serve Him loyally thro' this stern hour.”

Then most elastic Time, as oft in dream,
 Stretched out until five lustrums came and went,
 Swaying my soul upon their stormy stream.
 The earth was shaken, the great deeps were rent ;
 From all the quarters of the firmament
 A desolating deluge seemed to pour
 Of fire and blood and tears and frantic war.

Amidst whose terrors one stern human form,
 Above the mad crowds throned in haughty state,
 Appeared to wield the thunders of the storm
 And hurl its dreadful lightnings, and dilate—
 The Captain-Executioner of Fate ;
 Until dragged down, and with a galling chain
 Bound to a lonely rock amidst the main.

And then another lustrum came and went,
 Of peaceful years compared with those before ;
 Wherein I heard that Voice whose ravishment
 I had not heard amid the crash and roar
 And shriekings of the earth-confusing war.
 Through all the lustrum till the chained Chief died
 That glorious Voice the air beatified.

A voice of right amidst a world gone wrong,
 A voice of hope amidst a world's despair,
 A voice instinct with such melodious song
 As hardly until then had thrilled the air
 Of this gross underworld wherein we fare
 With heavenly inspirations, too divine
 For souls besotted with earth's sensual wine.

All powers and virtues that ennoble men—
The hero's courage and the martyr's truth,
The saint's white purity, the prophet's ken,
The high unworldliness of ardent youth,
The poet's rapture, the apostle's ruth,
Informed the Song ; whose theme all themes above
Was still the sole supremacy of Love.

The peals of thunder echoing through the sky,
The moaning and the surging roar of seas,
The rushing of the storm's stern harmony,
The subtlest whispers of the summer breeze,
The notes of singing birds, the hum of bees,
All sounds of nature, sweet and wild and strong
Commingled in the flowing of the song ;

Which flowing mirrored all the Universe,—
With sunsets flushing down the golden lines,
And mountains towering in the lofty verse,
And landscapes with their olives and their vines
Spread out beneath a sun which ever shines,
With moonlit seas and pure star-spangled skies,
The World a Poem, and Earth Paradise.

But ever and anon in its swift sweetness
The voice was heard to lisp and hesitate,
Or quiver absently from its completeness,
As one in foreign realms who must translate
Old thoughts into new language—Ah, how great
The difference between our rugged tongue
And that in which its hymns before were sung !

A glorious voice of glorious inspiration ;
 A voice of rapid rapture so intense
 That in its musical intoxication
 The Truth arrayed with such an affluence
 Of Beauty half-escaped the ravished sense,—
 A sun scarce visible in its own shine,
 A god forgotten in his gorgeous shrine.

A voice divinely sweet, a voice no less
 Divinely sad ; for all the maddening jar
 Of all the wide world's sin and wretchedness
 Swelled round its music, as when round a star
 Black storm-clouds gather and its white light mar :
 Pure music is pure bliss in heaven alone ;
 Earth's air transmutes it to melodious moan.

The lustrum passed. The vultures of despair
 And fierce ambition ceased not to consume
 The heart of him rock-bound, who failed to bear
 With Titan-patience his Promethean doom—
 Lacking the Titan's conscience. When the tomb
 Had held him but a little while in peace,
 I heard the singing voice for ever cease.

And then once more the Vision filled my soul
 Of universal Æther, and the spheres
 Whose marshalled myriads through its silence roll
 With life and light and music ; while the years,
 Heavy with anguish, blind with blood and tears,
 Pant after them, exhausted one by one
 Till the last heir of Time shall sink foredone.

Upon his central field of burning gold
Great Raphael stood ; and there with meek head bowed
And drooping wings and suppliant hands, behold,
The Seraph knelt, whom still the sullen cloud
Of mortal life enveloped like a shroud,
Through which his native glorious beauty shone
Star-sad, star-pure, star-tremulous, star-wan.

And Raphael said " How faint and sad and pale
You now return to us, Belovèd One,
From that far Earth of stormy guilt and bale
Wherein thy errand now is wholly done !
Hath ever God deserted a dear Son ?"
While bending down, his princely hand carest
The saintly brow so pallid and deprest.

What voice of quivering anguish made reply !—
" I am unworthy of thy ruthless love,
Thou pure Archangel ! Never more may I
Rejoin in bliss the stainless quires above,
Who singing in their circles ever move
Around the footstool of the Throne of Grace ;
Ah, never, nevermore behold His face !

" I dared—weak worm unconscious of my weakness !—
To claim a service to our Lord and King ;
And I have failed ;—in hope and faith and meekness,
In wisdom, knowledge, patient suffering,
In prudence, calmness, power, in everything !
The awful eyes of all Thy stars, O Lord,
Transfix me with rebukes, each glance a sword !

" Breathing for ever Heaven's inviolate calm,
 I knew not how on Earth the wild winds blow ;
 Singing for ever Heaven's ecstatic psalm,
 I knew not how on earth the wails of woe
 And shrieks of rage to maddening discord grow ;
 Circling for ever in the Sun's full light,
 I knew not Earth's black clouds and sphereless night.

" I could not understand men ; all their hearts
 Had secrets which I could not even guess.
 Their greed for dross upon the daily marts,
 Their pride and fawning in the palaces,
 Their solemn church-attending worldliness,
 Their servile fear of Custom's lawless law,
 Filled me with sad perplexity and awe.

" Their gods seemed hideous monsters only great
 In power and malice, or such phantoms vain
 As self-bewildered thought might evocate
 To mock the yearning heart and weary brain.
 I strove to teach them the true God, Whose reign
 Is infinite love for all things that exist ;
 And I was branded as an Atheist.

" I pitied both the tyrant and the slave ;
 The one so cursed with pride and heartless mood,
 The other from the cradle to the grave
 With soul and body famishing for food.
 I charged them by their common brotherhood
 To fling their mutual bonds off and be free :
 They paused in their old strife to spurn at me.

"I who was sent to charm their souls to love,
 Could only vex them to worse hate and scorn ;
 And yet I swear, O Raphael, that I strove
 With all my power to mend their state forlorn :
 By every pang *they* felt *my* heart was torn,*
 And wounded worse by their unkindly spurning :
 I love them with a love of infinite yearning.

"Lo, I have failed : but God, *He* cannot fail.
 He speeds a shaft against Hell's Dragon-King,
 And it falls shivered from the iron mail ;—
 There let it rot, the weak and worthless thing !
 I dare to triumph in my perishing :
 His quiver lacks not many a nobler dart
 Equal to pierce the Monster to the heart !"

But Raphael raised the Seraph from his kneeling,
 And prest him heart to heart in long embrace ;
 Then stood erect, to all the heights revealing
 The fulgent beauty of his solemn face ;
 And flung abroad his voice to swell through space
 And thrill on all the ever-rolling spheres
 Triumphant music for celestial ears.

"I call to witness all the angel-quires
 Sphering the heavens with their eternal hymn,
 I call to witness all the orbèd fires
 Bearing the light of life through Æther dim ;
 The Saints, the Cherubim, the Seraphim,
 All armies of the Servants of our Lord,
 I call to witness to my just award.

* "Me, who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
 The else-unfelt oppressions of the earth."

"Julian and Maddalo."

"Thou hast *not* failed ; where holy love and truth
 Contend with Evil failure cannot be :
 Their sorest scars claim reverence not ruth,
 Their worst repulse is still a victory.
 Thou, well-belovèd, who didst bend the knee
 In pure self-sacrifice to meet God's frown,
 Kneeling wert circled with the martyr's crown.

"Music is sweet, whatever madmen's ears
 Be startled and tormented by the strain ;
 Sunshine is glorious, whatever spheres
 Cloud themselves from it in dark storm and rain :
 Your spirit is as pure from worldly stain
 As is a moonbeam on a shore of slime ;
 You sank not your Eternity in Time.

"O wretched Earth ! God sends thee age by age,
 In pity of thy wild perpetual moan,
 The saint, the bard, the hero, and the sage :
 But still the lofty life is led alone,
 The singer sings as in a tongue unknown,
 The sage's wisdom lamps his single urn ;
 Thou wilt not heed or imitate or learn.

"The blood of prophets thou hast loved to shed
 Still keepeth green thy fields, whose costly soil
 Is of the dust of nameless heroes dead ; *
 The only music in the vast turmoil
 Of all thy complicated strife and toil
 Was breathed from poets whom you starved with scorn : †
 O ever-unregenerate world forlorn ! "

* Carlyle.

† "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."—
 Shelley, "Defence of Poetry."

Lo, while the great Archangel's voice rang on,
The spirit by that tearful earth-cloud shaded
In ever clear and clearer beauty shone
To full transfiguration ; for it faded
As mists of night whose meshes are unbraided
By the swift beams of morning, so that they
Evanish wholly in the perfect day.

And there, amidst the wheeling constellations,
Upon the central disc of burning gold
That throbbed harmonious with their palpitations,
He stood with Raphael glorious to behold. . . .
Then all the Vision from my brain was rolled ;
For that broad disc of palpitating fire,
Consuming far through heaven the dead night's pyre,

And bridging the deep bay with golden splendour,
Was our own Sun . . . The sky was clear and calm,
The morning air most fragrant, fresh and tender ;
The green earth glittered with its dewy balm :
The flashing waters sang a joyous psalm,
All was as beautiful and pure that morn
As if a sinless world had just been born.

JERSEY, 1861.

*Read 29
27.5.90*

SHELLEY.

“**W**HEREFORE I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men : but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him ; but whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him ; neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” Which glorious scripture we may surely understand to mean, that a man may believe or disbelieve in any book, any historical or legendary personage, any dogmatic formula, and yet be in a state of salvation ; that only he who rejects and violates the holy spirit of love and truth, the Conscience of the World, he cannot (because he will not) be saved. Jesus, though absorbed in his personal mission, could speak this truth of sublime toleration ; but eighteen centuries have not taught his disciples the wisdom of believing it and acting upon it. Whom he absolved, they dare condemn.

Probably no man of this century has suffered more and more severely, both in person and reputation, from this rash convictive bigotry than Percy Bysshe Shelley. Florence to the living Dante was not more cruelly unjust than England to the living Shelley. Only now, nearly

forty years after his death, do we begin to discern his true glory. It is well that this glory is such as can afford to wait for recognition ; that it is one of the permanent stars of heaven, not a rocket to be ruined by a night of storm and rain. I confess that I have long been filled with astonishment and indignation at the manner in which he is treated by the majority of our best living writers. Emerson is serenely throned above hearing him at all ; Carlyle only hears him "shriek hysterically ;" Mrs. Browning discovers him "blind with his white ideal ;" Messrs. Ruskin and Kingsley treat him much as senior schoolboys treat the youngster who easily "walks over their heads" in class,—with reluctant tribute of admiration copiously qualified with sneers, pinches, and kicks. Even Bulwer (who, intellectually worthless as he is, now and then serves well as a straw to show how the wind blows among the higher and more educated classes), even Bulwer can venture to look down upon him with pity, to pat him patronisingly on the back, to sneer at him—in "Ernest Maltravers"—with a sneer founded upon a maimed quotation. It was only the other day that a person thought it worth while to send to the *Times* the discovery that Shelley, in his mock-heroic preface to "Peter Bell," had anticipated Macaulay's famous New Zealander! Now, I do not expect that Shelley—any more than piety and lofty thought and heroic action—will ever be extensively popular ; I admit that to himself more than to most poets are his own grand words applicable,—“the jury that sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers : it must be impanneled by time from the selectest of the wise of many generations.” Yet it was to be expected that men

so noble as Kingsley and Ruskin could surrender themselves to generous sympathy with a most noble and generous life, could love and reverence a most loving and reverent spirit; although that life developed itself without the pale of their sanctuary and that spirit dispensed with the theological primer which they conceive necessary to education.

here poetry

A poet, in our restricted sense of the term, may be defined, an inspired singer; the singing, the spontaneous musical utterance being essential to the poetical character. Great learning, profound thought, and keen moral insight may all enrich a volume, which shall yet, lacking this instinctive harmony, be no poem—Verse equally with prose may be unpoetic through this fatal want. Through it George Herbert is almost unread, and the “Heaven and Hell” of Swedenborg is a dull map instead of a transcendent picture; through it—tainting both, but in a less degree—the works of the Brownings are less popular than those of Tennyson, though they in all other noble qualities are so far his superiors.

In musicalness, in free and, as it were, living melody, the poems of Shelley are unsurpassed, and on the whole, I think, unequalled by any others in our literature. Compared with that of most others his language is as a river to a canal,—a river ever flowing “at its own sweet will,” and whose music is the unpurposed result of its flowing. So subtly sweet and rich are the tones, so wonderfully are developed the perfect cadences, that the meaning of the words of the singing is lost and dissolved in the overwhelming rapture of the impression. I have often fancied, while reading them, that his words were really transparent, or that they throbbed with living

lustres. Meaning is therein, firm and distinct, but "scarce visible through extreme loveliness;" so that the mind is often dazzled from perception of the surpassing grandeur and power of his creations. I doubt not that Apollo was mightier than Hercules, though his divine strength was veiled in the splendour of his symmetry and beauty more divine.

But when we have allowed that a man is pre-eminently a singer, the question naturally follows, what is the matter of his song? Does his royal robe of verse envelop a real king of men, or one who is intrinsically a slave? And here may fitly be adduced Wordsworth's remark, that the style is less the *dress* than the *incarnation* of the thought. Noble features have been informed by ignoble natures, and beautiful language has expressed thoughts impure and passions hateful; great hearts have pulsed in unsightly bodies, and grand ideas have found but crabbed utterance: yet still it is true that generally the countenance is a legible index to the spirit, and the style to the thought.

With this presumption in his favour, we enter upon four inquiries. (I.) What are the favourite subjects of Shelley's song—great or small? (II.) Is his treatment of these great-minded? (III.) Is it great-hearted? And, rising to the climax. (IV.) Is it such as to entitle him to the epithet *inspired*?

(I.) The favourite subjects of Shelley's song, the speculations to which his intellect continually gravitates from the petty interests of the hour, are certainly great and important above all others. (I omit one theme, whose treatment is common to all poets, so that we conceive it as inseparable from the poetic character,—the beauty and harmony of the visible universe:} in the cele-

bration of which, however, Shelley displays an intense fervour of admiration and love which almost isolates him above his compeers.) The questions concerning the existence of God, the moral law of the universe, the immortality of the soul, the independent being of what is called the material world, the perfectibility of man; these and their kindred perpetually fascinate his mind to their investigation. It may be considered by many—and not without some show of reason—that mere addictedness to discourse on great subjects is no proof of a great mind: crude painters always daub “high art,” adolescent journalists stoop to nothing below Epics; nay, Macaulay long since told us that the very speculations of which we speak are distinctive of immaturity both in nations and in men. Nevertheless, believing that the essence of poetry and philosophy is communication with the Infinite and the Eternal, I venture to conclude that to be strongly inclined to such communication is to be gifted with the first requisite for a poet and a philosopher. The valiant heart may prove victorious without the strong arm, but the strong arm without the valiant heart must be beaten ignominiously for ever.

(II.) But have his thoughts and his conceptions a magnanimity befitting these subjects? He upholds strenuously the Manichean doctrine, that the world is the battle-field of a good and an evil spirit, each aboriginal; of whom the evil has been and still is the more powerful, but the good shall ultimately triumph. Let those who scoff so liberally at this, account for the existence of evil and a devil created by an omnipotent all-holy God. How magnificent is his conception of these hostile powers, symbolised in the eagle and serpent,

in the opening of "The Revolt of Islam;" how sublime is it in the "Prometheus Unbound," where they are represented by Jupiter and Prometheus!

He proclaims enthusiastically the Idealism of Plato, of Spinoza, of Berkeley, of Kant. Let those who so stolidly sneer at this, expound by what possibility spirit and matter can influence each other without one attribute in common; or let them demonstrate the existence of matter apart from our perception; or let them show, if there be but one existing substance, that it is such as we should call matter rather than spirit. How glorious are his expositions of this philosophy in the "Ode to Heaven" and the speeches of Ahasuerus in "Hellas!"

He devoted himself heart and mind to the doctrine of the perfectibility of human nature; an intrinsic perfectibility to eventuate in a heaven on earth realised by the noble endeavours of man himself; not that which is complacently patronised by many so-called Christians, who are agreed to die and accept a perfect nature as a free gift, when they can no longer live imperfect. As if the severe laws of the universe permitted partial gifts, any more than they permit gainful robberies! Though I must consider Shelley mistaken in this belief, I yet honour and not blame him for it. For his nature must have been most pure and noble, since it could persuade his peculiarly introspective mind of its truth. Right or wrong, it is the very mainspring of his philosophic system. In "Queen Mab," in "The Revolt of Islam," in the "Prometheus Unbound," its expression glows with the solemn inspiration of prophecy. As Scott was the poet of the past, and Goethe of the present, so was Shelley of the future; the thought of whose developed triumphs always kindles him into rapture. However

dissident, we cannot but reverence so sublime and unselfish an enthusiasm: perchance, were we more like him in goodness, we would be more like him in faith. Expand the stage from our earth to the universe, the time from one life to an infinite succession of lives, let the *dramatis personæ* be not men only but all living souls; and this catastrophe, if catastrophe there must be, is the most righteous and lofty conclusion ever suggested for the great drama.

Of his opinions concerning the right relations of the sexes, I can only say that they appear to me radically correct. And of his infidelity, that he attacked not so much Christianity as Priestianity—that blind unspiritual orthodoxy which freezes the soul and fetters the mind, vilifying the holiest essence of all religion. Space being restricted, suffice it to say that, in all his thoughts one is struck by a certain loftiness and breadth characteristic of the best minds. It is as if they looked around from the crest of a mountain, with vision unbaffled by the crowd and the chimney-tops. Now, exactly as the height at which a person stands may be calculated from any one object on his horizon as well as from a hundred, so one of these superior thoughts is in itself proof sufficient of an elevated mind. For quantity is the measure of low things, but quality of high. Ten small apples may be worth more than one large; but not any number of small thoughts can equal one great: ten weak arms may be stronger than one stalwart; but what number of weak minds can equal one that is powerful?

(III.) What moral emotion, pure or impure, noble or mean, generous or selfish, does Shelley effuse through his works? The question has been partly answered already; for in a poet, whose theme is concrete with man and

abstract with destiny, the spirit refuses to be analysed into thought and passion, being the identity of the two. Morally, he is indeed sainted. Never yet did man thrill and glow with more love of his fellows, more self-sacrificing sympathy with all life, more hatred of fraud and cruelty—yet hatred interfused with the tenderest pity, more noble independence, candour, and intrepidity, more devoted reverence for goodness and truth. In what is understood by the present age as a truly Christian spirit, he bears comparison with the holiest of Christians. The creeds, the rituals, the ceremonies,—those media which common men require to temper the else intolerable splendour of divine truth,—he did not need: his eagle eye could gaze unblenching upon the cloudless sun. And his life incarnated his poetry. He was his own Prometheus. That fatal *per contra* with which Emerson is obliged to conclude his magnificent summary of Shakespeare, cannot be urged against Shelley. He perceived—who better?—the symbolism of the visible world; he appreciated—who more rapturously?—its divine beauty; but he did not rest here: he lived higher to the beauty of that which is symbolised, to the beauty of that which is called “of holiness,” to the laws of that realm which is eternal. He was not “master of the revels to mankind,” but prophet and preacher. His music was as the harping of David to charm away the evil spirit from Saul.

And thus we have crossed the threshold of our last inquiry,—is he entitled, in a high sense, to be called *inspired*? That he was a singer who sang songs beautiful, wise, and pure, may be affirmed of many a poet, though of no two with the same emphasis. What is it then which differentiates him from the second-class

poets, and exalts him to sit with Isaiah and Dante as one of that small choir of chief singers who are called transcendent? It is that of which I but now spoke; it is that of which he is so often accused under the name of mysticism. I dare affirm that no great writer is less obscure in manner, in expression, than he: obscure in matter he is, and ever must be, to those in whom is not developed the faculty correlative to those ideas in whose expression he supremely delights. Were the most of us born deaf, we should reprobate as obscure and mystical those gifted men who dilated upon the ravishment of music. And to the ideal or spiritual harmonies, perfect and eternal, to whose rhythm and melody the universe is attuned, so that it is fitly named Cosmos,—to these we *are* most of us deaf; and whoever with reverence and love and rapture is devoted to their celebration—be it Plato or Swedenborg, Emerson or Shelley—shall for ever to the great mass be as one who is speaking in an unknown tongue, or who is raving of phantasies which have no foundation in reality.

Therefore the accusations of mysticism but ignorantly affirm that he was most intensely and purely a poet. Plato in the "Ion" (Shelley's translation), says:—"For the authors of those great poems which we admire, do not attain to excellence through the rules of any art; but they utter their beautiful melodies of verse in a state of inspiration, and, as it were, *possessed* by a spirit not their own." And again, "For a poet is indeed a thing ethereally light, winged and sacred; nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired, and, as it were, mad. . . For whilst a man retains any portion of the thing called reason, he is utterly incompetent to produce poetry or to vaticinate." This great

truth has been enounced or implied by all true philosophers; though sadly abused by uninspired poetasters, and as obviously obnoxious as the Berkeleyan Idealism to stupid and unavailing sneers. Shelley himself, in that "Defence of Poetry" which is one of the most beautiful prose-pieces in the language, and which in serene elevation of tone, and expanse and subtlety of thought is worthy of Plato or Emerson, repeatedly and throughout insists upon it as the essential law of poetic creation.

The only true, or inspired poetry, is always from within, not from without. The experience contained in it has been spiritually transmuted from lead into gold. It is severely logical, the most trivial of its adornments being subservient to, and suggested by, the dominant idea; any departure from whose dictates would be the "falsifying of a revelation." It is unadulterated with worldly wisdom, deference to prevailing opinions, mere talent or cleverness. Its anguish is untainted by the gall of bitterness, its joy is never selfish, its grossness is never obscene. It perceives always the profound identity underlying all surface differences. It is a living organism, not a dead aggregate, and its music is the expression of the law of its growth; so that it could no more be set to a different melody than could a rose-tree be consummated with lilies or violets. It is most philosophic when most enthusiastic; the clearest light of its wisdom being shed from the keenest fire of its love. It is a synthesis not arithmetical, but algebraical; that is to say, its particular subjects are universal symbols, its predicates universal laws: hence it is infinitely suggestive. It is ever-fresh wonder at the infinite mystery, ever-young faith in the eternal Soul. Whatever be its mood, we feel that it is not self-possessed but God-possessed;

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whether the God come down serene and stately as Jove, when a swan he wooed Leda; or with overwhelming might insupportably burning, as when he consumed Semele.

These distinctive marks of the highest poetry I find displayed in the works of Shelley more gloriously than in those of any other poet in our language. As we must study Shakespeare for knowledge of idealised human nature, and Fielding for knowledge of human nature unidealised, and Carlyle's "French Revolution" as the unapproached model of history, and Currer Bell's "Villette" to learn the highest capabilities of the novel, and Ruskin for the true philosophy of art, and Emerson for quintessential philosophy; so must we study, and so will future men more and more study, Shelley for quintessential poetry. It was a good nomenclator who first called him the poet of poets.

He was not thirty when he died. Had he but lived for another thirty years—? In the purity of our fervent youth I think we all consecrate ourselves to an early death; but the gods cannot love us all with a partial love, and most of us must dwindle down through age and decrepitude into the grave. But Shelley, while singing of the Millennial Future, and chanting the beatitudes of our free and pure and love-united posterity, knew with undeceiving prescience that he could not live to see even the first straight steps taken towards the glorious goal. The tomb which he selected and described with almost passionate tenderness in 1821, received his ashes in 1822. And so may we trust that the prophecy of 1821 was fulfilled in 1822:—

"The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven

Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given ;
 The massy earth and sphered skies are riven !
 I am borne darkly, fearfully afar :
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
 The soul of Adonais like a star
 Beacons from the abodes where the eternal are."

If this meagre essay attracts any worthy student to Shelley, it will fulfil the purpose of its publication;—miserably as it fails to fulfil my desire to render honourable tribute of love and gratitude to this poet of poets and purest of men, whose works and life have been to me from my youth up a perennial source of delight and inspiration.

1860.

H. Readings
 27.6.80

Ames
 25.7.85

SHELLEY'S RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

MY dear Eikonoklastes,—In the *National Reformer* of August the 4th, you quote a few words from one G. T. in support of your own opinion that Shelley was an Atheist. Can you spare me space for a few remarks on the subject?

I have none of Shelley's letters by me, save those which are included in Mrs. Shelley's edition of his prose writings. But a man's letters do not always afford the best evidence concerning his opinions upon the most important questions put to us by life. In friendly letters one permits himself to give the reins to his mood, to throw off rough and ready sketches with little care as to the accurate shading, to be capricious and paradoxical,—in short, to speak *not* as one who is delivering testimony on oath. Of course I do not speak of serious and solemn epistles, but of the general run of correspondence. On the other hand, you may be sure that the public works of a man so brave, so honest, so enthusiastic as Shelley, record his profoundest convictions on the most momentous subjects. I wish, therefore, to bring to your notice some passages of these works which tend to elucidate the question as to his creed.

Let us begin by putting the "Queen Mab" out of court. It was written when he was a mere youth, and

its doctrines are shortly condemned in a couple of sentences by himself, written in some after year. "This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking." These words are from his fragment "On Life," and allude to his own early materialism.

"Alastor," written in 1815, is pervaded with an indefinite Nature-worship, which you would probably call Cosmism. This reappears, much modified or developed, sometimes seemingly contradicted, in all the more important of his subsequent poems. Such physiolatry is not uncommon in young minds; being the result, not of comprehensive analytical thought, but of enthusiastic love for nature, and vague yearning awe in the contemplation of the mystery of her processes and the immutability of her laws. Nor is it wholly without moral palliation. For though nature is no saint, but systematically sets most of her children to live by devouring one another; massacres good and bad, wise and foolish indiscriminately with storms and earthquakes, plagues and murrains; is fond of planting incipient scoundrels in royal wombs, and excellent brains in crazy bodies, etc.; yet the good lady has some barbaric virtues of her own; is thoroughly just and independent in her own way; and never yet, in the course of her long existence, cheated the sower of wheat seed by paying him with a rye harvest. Poor man, on the contrary, with soul, and reason, and virtue, and all sorts of fine pretences, is very weak and much given to roguery; with all the cardinal virtues to help him, he is quite overruled in the conclave by the more numerous and strong-willed and cardinal vices. Our palace is so grand and we are such pigmies: let us fall down and worship this brave palace, though merely

built for us to dwell in as kings! We are like the parvenu leading Aristippus through his sumptuous mansion, on whom the philosopher spat, finding no other object in the place mean enough to be fouled with expectoration.

In the preface to the "Revolt of Islam," written in 1817, Shelley speaks of Supreme Being and Deity, not, as heretofore, of *Power*. He declares that he does not speak against the Supreme Being itself, but against the erroneous and degrading idea which men have conceived of a Supreme Being. In the first half of the first canto he distinctly and magnificently develops a sort of Manicheism. Two Spirits, the Good and the Evil, are struggling for the supreme sway. The Evil spirit is still predominant; but each successive combat finds him weaker and the Good stronger than heretofore. The final issue shall be the perfect triumph of the Good and destruction of the Evil. This philosophy is yet further expounded in the "Prometheus Unbound," written in 1819. Herein Jupiter, the representative of the Evil spirit, is cast down, and "the tyranny of heaven shall never be reassumed." Herein also Shelley (like Plato, among others, before him) declares that "Almighty God," "Merciful God," made the living world and all that it contains of good; and the Evil spirit, now ruling, all the evil—"madness, crime, remorse, . . . hell, or the sharp fear of hell." Scene iii., Act 2, shows the Nature-worship fading away. But the most prominent and pervading idea of the poem is Pantheistic. The Good spirit which at last triumphs is, indeed, typified in the Titan Prometheus, and not in a man; but no faith in or worship of this Deliverer is required from men who would be saved. The Universal Mind is freed and purified; the earth and the moon grow more glorious, and fertile,

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and beautiful, inspired by the renewed health of the informing spirit. The poem is an apotheosis of the One Infinite Soul, self-subsisting, informing all things, one and the same in all masks of man, and beast, and worm, and plant, and slime. The conclusion of the "Sensitive Plant," written in 1820, puts forth somewhat hesitatingly a species of transcendental idealism, which there is no space here for considering.

We now come to the poems written in 1821, the year before his death.

"Hellas" (in the wonderful chorus commencing, "Worlds on worlds are rolling ever, from creation to decay,") contains a noble recognition of the character of Jesus Christ; a recognition much more decided than that in the first Act of the Prometheus. It also contains, in the speeches of Ahasuerus to Mahmud, one of the two grandest assertions of Idealism with which I am acquainted: the other is developed in his "Ode to Heaven," written in 1819. It is pure Berkeleyan philosophy, with the Kantian extension—that space and time are merely necessary forms of human thought, and have no existence separate from the human mind. Having no room for these passages *in extenso*, I refrain from injuring them by fragmentary citation.

From the "Adonais" I must quote a little, in order to show what Pantheism pervades it. He asserts of the dead Keats—

"He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear;
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;

And bursting, in its beauty and its might,
From trees, and beasts, and men, into the Heaven's light."

And, again—

"The One remains, the many change and pass ;
Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly ;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek !"

And, finally—

"That Light, whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty, in which all things work and move,
That Benediction, which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love,
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man, and beast, and earth, and air, and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality."

Such doctrine as is expressed and implied in these lines differs little from what is called pure Theism. It simply dwells so continually on the Infinity of God as to overlook, or slightly regard, His Personality: it is Spiritualism and Theism, but of the Greeks rather than the Hebrews. The fact is that Shelley, like every other brave Recusant, is credited with much more infidelity than he really had. Finding a vast State-Church, based upon politico-theology, everywhere in the ascendant, he was naturally more occupied in negating dominant assumptions than in affirming his own positive convictions. If a man asserts his right to crush me under his feet, it is not probable that my reply will contain an exact recognition of whatever wisdom and goodness he may really have.

So much for formulas: but, of course, we are agreed that Shelley's real religious character consisted in his unquenchable love and reverence for all holiness, truth, and beauty. He believed so much more than the generality of us, he strove with so unusual an ardour to realise his belief in his life, that he is necessarily accounted an infidel and semi-maniac by the great majority. — ?

"I never knew that time in England, when men of truest religion were not counted sectaries. . . . Certainly if ignorance and perverseness will needs be national and universal, then they who adhere to wisdom and to truth are not therefore to be blamed for being so few as to seem a sect or faction." Which are two sentences of (John Milton's) "Eikonoklastes." ✓

Your sincere Friend,

B. V.

1860.

MOXON'S CHEAP EDITION OF
SHELLEY'S POEMS.*

IN this gilt-edged and prettily bound octavo volume, comprising xxiv. and 616 pages of small but very clear print on a slightly toned paper, and published at 3s. 6d. we have, so far as I am aware, the first really good and fairly complete cheap edition of the original poems of Shelley. It contains a few short pieces and fragments not in the edition of Mrs. Shelley, including additional fragments of "Charles I.," and portions of a prologue to "Hellas;" and on the other hand, it omits a few of the shortest fragments which Mrs. Shelley gave; but both the additions and omissions are of very slight importance in relation to the main body of Shelley's works. The names of several persons, some mentioned in poems, and some to whom poems were addressed, which were left out in the previous editions, are in this one restored. The memoir is good as to the facts, but rather too off-hand in tone and style, as if written when the editor was outwearied with his task, or done hurriedly for an ephemeral periodical instead of gravely

* The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. (Unannotated Edition.) Edited with a Critical Memoir by William Michael Rossetti. Illustrated by the Society of Decorative Art. (London: E. Moxon, Son, and Co., Dover Street.)

and slowly for a book which will endure. I think so highly of Mr. Rossetti's powers as a writer and critic, and believe that his sympathy with the noblest spirit of Shelley is so genuine and profound, that I cannot feel satisfied with less than his well-considered and well-wrought treatment of this subject, even when he is limited to a dozen pages.

When so much of the very best quality is offered at so low a price, one feels somewhat ashamed of asking for more, yet I cannot but express my wish that the "Defence of Poetry" (which, although in prose, should always accompany the other poems in verse), and the translation of the "Hymn to Mercury" had been included. This latter, indeed, may have been omitted through some misunderstanding, for the subject of the first of the full-page illustrations is taken from it.

Having seen that this edition is complete (as regards the original poems, and with the exception of the minute fragments above mentioned, and some quite boyish pieces without value to the general reader), the important point remaining to consider is the quality of its text. About a year since Messrs. Moxon published in two volumes the poetical works of Shelley, the text carefully revised, with notes and a memoir by W. M. Rossetti; and in the present popular edition the text, I presume, is a reprint from that larger work. In previous editions both copyright and pirated, expensive and cheap, the text was very faulty. Mrs. Shelley, in her note written in 1839, on the poems of 1822, says, "I at one time feared that the correction of the press might be less exact through my illness; but I believe it is nearly free from error." In fact, however, the errors were very numerous, and what she states further on in the same


note may help to explain why: "Did any one see the papers from which I drew that volume [the Posthumous Poems], the wonder would be how any eyes or patience were capable of extracting it from so confused a mass, interlined and broken into fragments, so that the sense could only be deciphered and joined by guesses, which might seem rather intuitive than founded on reasoning. Yet I believe no mistake was made." Mr. Garnett, in the "Relics of Shelley," writes: "Numerous errors have crept into the text of Shelley's poems, especially such as were published when, from his absence on the Continent, he was unable to attend to the correction of the press, and those posthumous pieces which were prepared for publication from almost illegible MSS." And as to this last point, Shelley's friend, Captain Trelawny, says somewhere, if I remember rightly, that the original MS. of the lovely poem, "To a Lady, with a Guitar," resembled a rude sketch of a reedy marsh, with blots and smears for the wild ducks. Mr. Garnett gave a chapter to the suggestion of emendations, and the suggestions were usually good; but they were very few in proportion to the number of errors, and they scarcely touched any of the countless cases of bad punctuation which were as apt to cause misunderstanding as were the verbal errors themselves.

Having looked up in this cheap edition numerous passages which I had marked in my own copy of Shelley as manifestly erroneous, I can bear witness that Mr. Rossetti has done his editing with great care and skill. A large number of mistakes he has definitely corrected, in other instances he has improved if he has not certainly rectified; and he seems to have paid particular attention to the punctuation, to the great benefit of the text.

There are still faults, but most of these may be incorrigible without taking liberties which no reverent editor would take with the text of a classical writer. As for the cases in which correction seems still necessary and allowable, and those in which the new reading seems not better or even less good than the old, their enumeration and discussion are not suited to these columns. I will here note but one instance, in which Mr. Rossetti may have been misled. His version of the graceful and charming "Good-night" is very different from that to which we have been accustomed; and I cannot but think that he has followed an earlier and inferior draft instead of a later and superior one. The last stanza which differs most seems to me the most inferior. On the whole, and in so far as I have hitherto had the opportunity of judging, I am clearly of opinion that Mr. Rossetti has done his Editorial work so thoroughly and well, that no other editions than his should now be recommended to those who wish really to study and understand the poems of Shelley.

1871.

[Mr. Rossetti afterwards explained, 1. That the limitation of size necessary in the cheap edition prevented the addition to it, both of the "Defence of Poetry," and of the "Hymn to Mercury." 2. That the text of the cheap edition, while substantially the same as that of the 2 vol. edition, published in 1870, is in some cases superior to it. 3. That in the text of the song "Good Night," he has implicitly followed Shelley's own MS.—a copy of the song carefully written by him in a pocket-book which he presented to a lady. This may or may not be the better version [Mr. Rossetti thinks it is] but at all events it is the most authentic.]



AN INSPIRED CRITIC ON SHELLEY.

SHELLEY and Mr. Wyke Bayliss are truly strange names to couple together, but thus it comes about. The latter gentleman has written a book entitled *The Witness of Art*, in noticing which the *Daily News* mentioned that it eulogises Shelley. This Mr. Wyke Bayliss indignantly denied. The reviewer in answer quoted a passage wherein Shelley is classed with Chaucer, Spenser, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare, as having that insight into "the Invisible" which Mr. Wyke Bayliss observes, "is to the poet what light is to the painter; what ideal beauty is to the sculptor." As if this were not enough, another passage is given, wherein, after a quotation from *Adonais*, Mr. Wyke Bayliss observes: "Who shall say that Shelley wrote this in mockery, or not rather that it is the language of one who had seen—dimly it may be—but had seen the Invisible?" Whence it would appear the poet has not only insight into, but sight of the Invisible with a capital I; and indeed this is a distinction, for we have all insight into the common air, whereas poets (and it is said pigs) see it. Mr. Wyke Bayliss furiously returned to the charge or countercharge: "I refer to Shelley only three times—First, as one who had written a blasphemous libel upon Christ. Second, I name him simply as an Idealist.

Third, I say that he is an instance of the power of the verities of our Faith, in that they overmastered even his atrocious sentiments." That blasphemous libel is terribly strong, and at first sight rather incongruous; but Mr. Wyke Bayliss may refer the libel to the man Jesus, and the blasphemy to the God Christ. Next, we learn that to say one has insight into, and sight of, the Invisible with a capital I, is simply to say that he is an Idealist, so that our pig who sees the wind is simply an Idealist. We knew before how atrocious were the sentiments of Shelley, but knew not that they had been overmastered by the verities of "our Faith," with a capital F. Yet doubtless Mr. Wyke Bayliss is right, for lo! he is divinely inspired. He answereth us: "It is enough for me to deliver the one message with which I am charged—the message of Art—believing it to be from the King to His children, and about the beautiful." Now this King with a capital K, whose very pronoun itself has a capital H, can be none other than the Most High God; and we may be sure that Mr. Wyke Bayliss is indeed His special messenger as he affirmeth, for otherwise would the said Wyke Bayliss be guilty of something quite as bad as the blasphemous libel written by Shelley of the atrocious sentiments. By-the-by we strongly suspect that "the beautiful,"—which really ought to have a capital B, "the Beautiful," of Mr. Wyke Bayliss—is the same as the Invisible whereof he hath told us. Were any further proof needed that he is really divinely inspired, it would be found in his astonishing and quite supernatural revelation that the message of art is about the beautiful! Poor Shelley! thou art damned beyond hope for ever, being condemned of such a prophet.

NOTICE OF ROSSETTI'S EDITION OF SHELLEY'S POETICAL WORKS.*

THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS OF PERCY BYSSHE
SHELLEY. In three volumes. London: E. Moxon,
Son, and Co., 1878.

ENGLAND is at length beginning to do something like justice to its supreme Poet of this century. Quite recently, besides the cheap popular Editions of the Poems, of which the best we have examined is by Mr. Rossetti, there have been issued the reprint of the original Editions of the complete Works (so far as obtainable) under the care of Mr. R. Herne Shepherd, and the library edition, in four vols., of the Poetical Works by Mr. H. Buxton Forman; and now Mr. Rossetti has been encouraged to issue, with improvements up to date, a second edition of that which appeared in 1870. Those who, like ourselves, have had occasion to examine minutely the 1870 edition, know in how many and what important cases it rectified and tended to rectify the very inaccurate text of Mrs. Shelley; and both in the Memoir and the text this second issue is a marked improvement on the first. In Mr. Rossetti's own words:

* This and the following article are reprinted by permission from *Cope's Tobacco Plant*.

"I can say that the editorial work has been to me a true labour of love, and has been gone through diligently and deliberately. Indeed, the pleasure of having anything to do with Shelley's poems is to myself so great that I should have been my own tormentor had I stinted or slurred work in any particular. I took very great pains with the edition of 1870, and have taken equal or still greater pains with this of 1878. I have now cancelled, I suppose, a full third of the notes to the former edition, and have introduced a rather larger bulk of new notes; and the same, in minor proportion, has been done with the Memoir." This Memoir, we may add, occupies a hundred and fifty pages, and is a full record and discussion of all that has hitherto come to light concerning the career of the poet. Now that his eldest daughter is dead, we think his family owe, both to his memory and to the considerable public for whom it is really sacred, a prompt revelation of the documents regarding his separation from his first wife and the causes that impelled her to suicide. We elders, whose love and reverence for the Poet of Poets were nurtured on a text abounding with mistakes, and in a society which mainly regarded him with horror when it regarded him at all, can heartily congratulate the younger generation who have been brought up to appreciate and revere him, and who have such an Edition as the present to assist their study.

1878.

REVIEW OF THE LIFE OF SHELLEY,

BY JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

(ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS SERIES, 1878.)

WE have departed from the order in which we at first intended to notice these books,* having held back Scott that he might follow Burns, and Shelley that he might follow Spenser. The author of the "Prometheus Unbound," like the author of the "Faërie Queene," has been acclaimed the Poet of Poets. Spenser was immediately accepted and rated at his true worth by all the noblest of his time, whose memories live amongst the noblest of all time; Shelley was despised and rejected by his own generation and even by that which followed it, but his cyclic day was bound to come, and rapid and splendid has been its development since the first faint flush of its dawning. Men and women who in their youth, thirty, or perhaps even twenty years past, cherished a lonely enthusiasm for him—lonely so far as converse and reading could make them aware, though, doubtless, there are always seven thousand in Israel who have never bowed the knee to the dominant Baal—discover, not without astonishment, that

* This article was one of a series of notices of the biographies of English Men of Letters, published under Mr. Morley's editorship.

he whom they worshipped in secret is no longer execrated or contemned by their people, but is actually advanced to a lofty place in the national Pantheon; that it is no longer a distinction good or bad to burn incense at his shrine.

The simple facts that he has been chosen as one of the earliest subjects in a Series whose avowed chief end is popularity, and that already, as we write, the Monograph on him is advertised as in its sixth thousand, prove how enormously he has risen in public interest and estimation during this second half of our century. We have ample corroboration of this in the two critical editions of his Poems, with elaborate Memoir, by Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in that of Mr. H. B. Forman, in the cheap reprint of Poems and Prose Works by Mr. R. H. Shepherd, in the various recent popular editions and selections of his Poems; in the numerous articles on him, biographical and critical, among which we may specify those by Mr. R. Garnett, the late T. L. Peacock (to whom so many of Shelley's best letters from Italy were addressed), Miss Mathilde Blind, Prof. T. Spencer Bayne, and Mr. Swinburne; and in such works as Trelawny's "Records" (the new enlarged edition of the "Recollections"), Robert Browning's Introduction to the Pseudo-Letters (and his superb "Memorabilia" in "Men and Women"), Mr. Garnett's "Relics," Lady Shelley's "Memorials," and the late Mr. D. F. M'Carthy's "Early Life."

Yet, notwithstanding all the Shelley literature thus glanced at, a clear place was left, and a distinct need existed, for such a popular booklet as the present, treating comprehensively, though succinctly, the life and work of the poet. Rossetti's "Memoir," as yet the

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richest collection of biographical materials from all sources, is bound up with his critical edition of the poems; Hogg's "Life" is but a fragment, and, unfortunately, far less trustworthy than brilliant, if not in the general impression, at any rate in many of the details it gives of Shelley at Oxford, and after his expulsion; Medwin's "Life" (1847) is sketchy and inaccurate, and not easily accessible; Lady Shelley's "Memorials" are distinctly ancillary; M'Carthy's "Early Life" is mainly concerned with the Dublin episode; the articles by Peacock and Garnett only discuss particular points of interest; and brave Trelawny's graphic "Recollections" relate to no more than the last half-year of Shelley's life; while the poems are rarely accompanied by the prose works, including the magnificent "Defence of Poetry," the translations, and the letters from Italy to Peacock, of which last Mr. Symonds says: "Taken altogether, they are the most perfect specimens of descriptive prose in the English language," with which verdict we shall scarcely disagree, remembering that they are real letters, and not elaborate compositions like those whereby Ruskin has added glory to our glorious mother-tongue.

Matters being in this state, it is evident that a cheap and handy volume, drawing from all these dispersed and fragmentary and comparatively dear contributions a clear and truthful outline of the whole life and work of Shelley, was really much wanted; and we, therefore, give hearty welcome to the present volume, which undertakes, and, in our opinion, very successfully, to satisfy this want. Mr. Symonds is well known as an accomplished scholar and writer, of liberal sympathies with all that is beautiful in nature and art; and he reveals himself as an old lover of Shelley in noting that

when he was a Harrow boy he picked up two uncut copies of "Laon and Cythna" (unperverted original of the "Revolt of Islam") at a Bristol bookshop. As for the spirit in which Mr. Symonds writes of Shelley, we can scarcely better praise it than by saying that it is as nearly as possible directly opposed to the spirit in which Professor Shairp writes of Burns.

In the limits of our space we could not, even were it desirable, accompany Mr. S. through his narrative and criticisms. We may, however, say a (very) few words on a (very) few of the still-vexed questions concerning Shelley. And here it must be remarked that while, in discussing such questions, Mr. S. usually starts with a deferential, though by no means very ardent, support of authority or the world's opinion, his natural clear-sightedness and rectitude and love of liberty generally constrain him before he is done into a virtual though unavowed vindication of Shelley.

I. The expulsion from Oxford for the (then unproved) authorship of the two-paged tract, "The Necessity of Atheism;" Shelley then in his nineteenth year. Mr. S. begins by defending the authorities against the charges of unfair dealing in this matter. But what does he say for and of them in the course of his palliation? he himself being not only an *unexpelled* University man, like many others who have argued this business against Shelley, but an Oxford man and the author of a prize poem. Read, pp. 36-7: "But it must be remembered that he despised the Oxford dons with all his heart; and they were probably aware of this. *He was a dexterous impassioned reasoner, whom they little cared to encounter in argument on such a topic.* . . . Nor was it to be expected that the champion and apostle of Atheism should

be unmolested in his propaganda by the aspirants to fat livings and ecclesiastical dignities. . . . At the beginning of this century the learning and the manners of the Oxford dons were at a low ebb ; and the Fellows of University College acted harshly but not altogether unjustly, ignorantly, but after their kind, in this matter of Shelley's expulsion. *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa.*" "They are not worth speaking about ; look at them and pass on ;" the most contemptuous line in all Dante ; for the miserables in limbo who have never really lived, the neutrals rejected by Hell as by Heaven, who envy even the positive tortures of the deeper-damned, who are hateful to God and to the enemies of God ! Call you that backing of your friends ? A plague on such backing : they might well exclaim. We are not concerned here with Shelley's opinions ; but as mere outsiders who have no *Alma Mater* to look back upon either with gratitude or contempt, we may remark that a University which has no other discipline at command for sceptical or heretical pupils than expulsion, proclaims its own utter incapacity for the duties it undertakes to fulfil in the guidance and education of youth. Try to fancy one of the old teachers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, or any other, driving away a pupil who propounded doubts and difficulties, instead of attempting to clear up and solve them ! *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa !*

2. The relations between Shelley and his father. Mr. S. writes, p. 44 : "I agree with Shelley's last and best biographer, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in his condemnation of the poet's behaviour as a son." But read some of his other sentences bearing on this subject : "We only know that in his early boyhood Shelley loved his father so much as to have shown unusual emotion during his illness on one

occasion, but that, while at Eton, he [Shelley] had already become possessed by a dark suspicion concerning him [his father]. This is proved by the episode of Dr. Lind's visit during his fever. Then and afterwards he expected monstrous treatment at his [father's] hands, although the elder gentleman was nothing worse than a muddle-headed squire." In fact, Shelley believed that his father intended to put him in a madhouse (p. 17). Again, p. 5: "Mr. Timothy Shelley was in no sense of the word a bad man; but he was everything which the poet's father ought not to have been. . . . His morality in like manner was purely conventional, as may be gathered from his telling his eldest son [Shelley] that he would never pardon a *mésalliance*, but that he would provide for as many illegitimate children as he chose to have." Yet young Oxford accounts Mr. Timothy in no sense of the word a bad man; but Shelley must have felt as outraged and disgusted as was Marius in "Les Misérables" at a similar hint from his well-to-do relative of *l'ancien régime*. After the expulsion from Oxford, the father forbade his return home and cut off supplies, and after the *mésalliance* with Harriet Westbrook (a sort of compromise having been patched up in the meantime) he did the same. Afterwards (p. 53), "Mr. Timothy Shelley was anxious to bind his erratic son down to a settlement of the estates, which, on his own death, would pass into the poet's absolute control . . . he proposed to make him an immediate allowance of £2,000 [per annum] if Shelley would but consent to entail the land on his heirs male. This offer was indignantly refused. Shelley recognised the truth that property is a trust far more than a possession, and would do nothing to tie up so much command over labour, such incalculable potentialities of social good

* or evil, for an unborn being of whose opinions he knew nothing." Finally, we learn from Lady Shelley's "Memorials," that Sir Timothy proposed to relieve Shelley's widow from her poverty if she would resign her infant son, the heir to the title and estates, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley, into his absolute charge; which offer also was indignantly refused, she preferring to earn a hard livelihood with her pen.

3. The separation from Harriet his first wife. Mr. S. says, p. 81: "That Shelley must bear the responsibility of this separation seems to me quite clear." Yet in the Note, previous page, he states: "Leigh Hunt, 'Autob.,' p. 236, and Medwin, however, both assert that it was by mutual assent." And on this same p. 81: "It must be added that the Shelley family in their memorials of the poet, and through their friend, Mr. Richard Garnett, inform us, without casting any slur on Harriet, that documents are extant which will completely vindicate the poet's conduct in this matter. It is, therefore, but just to await their publication before pronouncing a decided judgment." To which we may add that we are at a loss to divine why their publication is delayed so long after the death of Harriet's daughter.

We wished to say something on two or three other points; as on the judgment of Lord Eldon depriving Shelley of the custody of his children by Harriet after her suicide (pp. 93-4); and on the assumption (pp. 182-3) that his practical career was a failure, an assumption, as we understand it, which we certainly cannot concede; but space fails us. In conclusion, we have but to state that, in our judgment, Mr. Symonds' book fairly reaches the high-water mark of cultivated and liberal appreciation of Shelley, as poet and as man, in the present time. The

*Have they
done so
now (1890)
that they have
been done?*

ultimate appreciation cannot be yet: for Shelley's fame and influence are still crescent, his cyclic day is still far from its noon; the Poet of the distant Future must culminate in the epoch to which he properly belongs. His own lofty words in the "Defence of Poetry" are decidedly applicable to himself, if not to all his illustrious predecessors and contemporaries: "Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fulness of his fame; the jury which sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers; it must be impanneled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations."

We may note, by way of postscript, that there are a few slight slips of the pen, which Mr. Symonds might as well correct on revision. Thus, in some of the sentences quoted our readers will have marked the ambiguities of *he*, *his*, and *him*. On p. 77, there is confusion in the comparison of *inner circle*, *centre*, and *middle*; p. 83, "the language used by Lady Shelley and Mr. Garnett *justify* us," should, of course, be *justifies*; 95, two spots are named as *the birthplace* of the "Prometheus Unbound;" 143, "*No* criticisms upon Shelley's works are half so good as his own," should be *No other*.

NOTES ON THE STRUCTURE OF
SHELLEY'S "PROMETHEUS
UNBOUND." *

A FEW notes on certain peculiarities of structure of this greatest work of our supreme lyrical poet—peculiarities to which, so far as I am aware, attention has not hitherto been publicly called, save in one specified instance—may prove interesting to some of your readers. The substance of these notes was communicated several years ago to Mr. W. M. Rossetti on the occasion of his two-volume edition of Shelley's poems (1870).

I. Is there not some confusion in the dialogue between the Earth and Prometheus leading up to the fine "effect" of Jupiter's own Phantasm being evoked to recite the tremendous curse against Jupiter? Prometheus calls upon the Mountains, the Springs, the Air, the Whirlwinds for the curse which he would now recall. They respond one after another, giving voice to the convulsion of terror wherewith it agonized them, and the Earth, closing the responses, tells how the Caverns, the hollow Heaven, and the waves of Ocean resounded "Misery!" The convulsion of terror is obviously natural; but where-

* Reprinted from the *Athenæum*, by permission of the proprietors.

fore the cry of "Misery!" when the curse smote the fell Tyrant of Earth and Heaven, and predicted his fall? When the curse has been recited to Prometheus, and he avows that he repents and recalls it, the Earth cries, naturally enough,

Misery, oh misery to me,
That Jove at length should vanquish thee ;

and the naturalness of this misery at the revocation makes more startling the apparent unnaturalness of the misery at the imprecation.

To this first speech of the Earth and those of the elements preceding, the Titan answers,

I hear a sound of voices : not the voice
Which I gave forth ;

and he goes on urging his Mother and his Brethren to comply with his appeal. The Earth answers, "They dare not" ; and this he understands, for he asks, "Who dares?" Then an awful whisper rises up, tingling as lightning tingles, an "inorganic voice," which he feels, but cannot comprehend, and the Earth says :—

How canst thou hear
Who knowest not the language of the dead?

This is in her living, intelligible voice, for he responds :—

Thou art a living spirit : speak as they.

And the Earth answers :—

I dare not speak like life, lest Heaven's fell King
Should hear, and link me to some wheel of pain
More torturing than the one whereon I roll.

And this is in her inarticulate voice ; for she calls upon him to earnestly hearken, with but a faint struggling

hope that so he may apprehend. And he does not apprehend ; only awful thoughts sweep obscurely through his brain, and he feels faint with vague emotion ; and the Earth, still inarticulately, murmurs in despair,

No, thou canst not hear :

Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
Only to those who die,

just as afterwards (Act III. sc. iii. v. 110) she says to Asia, who questions her about death :—

It would avail not to reply ;

Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
But to the uncommunicating dead.

Prometheus demands, "And what art thou, O melancholy Voice?" and she answers in a long speech beginning, "I am the Earth, thy mother," and this speech is in her natural living voice, for he clearly comprehends it, replying, "Venerable mother!" and she continues the same voice in a second speech, which also by his reply he clearly comprehends; yet in these two great speeches, uttered in the voice that is heard of the Gods (since the other, vv. 140-1, is distinguished as the voice the Gods hear not), she seems to have quite forgotten her fear of "Heaven's fell King"; extolling Prometheus, bewailing his martyrdom, denouncing with the utmost freedom "our almighty Tyrant," avowing "a mother's hate breathed on her child's destroyer," branding the Gods as the offspring of "all-prolific Evil." By this fearless outspokening in the very spirit of the Titan's curse, whose subsequent revocation, as already noticed, she vehemently laments, the Earth, to my understanding, sharply contradicts herself, and altogether stultifies the evocation of the

Phantasm of Jupiter, by destroying all the reasons alleged for recourse to it.

II. There appears considerable confusion as to the time occupied by the action of the drama—what may be termed the interior time of the poem. As for its date or exterior time, this is, of course, in an ideal æon beyond the range of chronology, unimpeached by anachronism; so that, notwithstanding the antiquity of the *dramatis personæ* and fable, the catastrophe points to a far apocalyptic future, and the allusions to the most recent discoveries of science are just as much in place as those to prehistoric traditions. In the beginning we are told that Panthea and Ione are seated at the feet of Prometheus: "Time, Night. During the Scene, Morning slowly breaks." And this single scene occupies the whole of Act I., throughout which the two Oceanides are awake watching ("Ever thus we watch and wake," v. 230); witnessing and chorally commenting the apparition of the Phantasm of Jupiter, the arrival and departure of Mercury, the assaults of the Furies, the vision of Christ, the ministrations of the Spirits. At the end of this act Panthea bids farewell to Prometheus (note likewise her precedent speech and his answer), giving reason for her going:—

But the eastern star looks white,
And Asia waits in that far Indian vale,
The scene of her sad exile.

In the opening of Act II. Asia is awaiting Panthea:—

This is the season, this the day, the hour;
At sunrise thou shouldst come, sweet Sister mine;
* * * * *
The point of one white star is quivering still
Deep in the orange light of widening morn
Beyond the purple mountains.

When Panthea arrives, and is told "How late thou art!" she replies,

Pardon, great Sister ! but my wings were faint
With the delight of a remembered dream ;

and in her next speech,

As I have said,
With our Sea-Sister at his feet I slept.
* * * * *
Then two dreams came. One I remember not.
But in the other ;

and she goes on to relate it, ending :—

I listened through the night when sound was none.
Ione wakened then, and said to me :
* * * * *
I answered not, for the eastern star grew pale,
But fled to thee.

The identity of time is marked in the three leading passages by the same closing signal, the paling or whitening of the eastern star.

We have thus, as it appears to me, the manifest contradiction that in Act I. Panthea and Ione are watching the action and bearing part in the dialogue throughout the dawning of this first day up to the moment of Panthea's departure to visit Asia ; while in the opening of Act II. they are both sleeping, Panthea dreaming, throughout the same period, save the last moments, in which Panthea gathers her thoughts and listens, and Ione wakens and speaks.

Following on with this first scene of Act II., we find that almost immediately Panthea's other dream appears (and this Dream, as a Shape that speaks, ought to be in the list of *dramatis personæ* along with the Phantasm,

the Spirits, and the Echoes), and Asia, picturing it, concludes :—

Yet 'tis a thing of air,
For through its grey robe gleams the golden dew
Whose stars the *noon* has quenched not.

The Echoes also which come after the Dream with the same summons, "Follow! Follow!" sing of "the noontide darkness deep" of the caverns, and "the woodland noontide dew"; and Asia and Panthea "follow ere the voices fade away." Yet at the end of scene ii., when they have thus passed into the forest, the second Faun says,

But should we stay to speak, noontide would come,
And thwart Silenus find his goats undrawn,

leaving us still in the forenoon.

Still Act II. : sc. iii., we are again in dawn, with the mist breaking,

And far on high the keen sky-cleaving mountains
From icy spires of sun-like radiance fling
The dawn.

The opening words, "Hither the sound has borne us," as well as the second chant of semichorus i. in the preceding scene, suggest a rapture-swift journey, although the last song of the Echoes in sc. i. enumerates immense tracts to be traversed; but, as we can scarcely be still in the dawning of the first day, we must, it appears, conceive that Asia and Panthea have been borne on the "plume-uplifting wind" and the billows of the "storm of sound,"

By the forests, lakes, and fountains,
Through the many-folded mountains;
To the rents, and gulphs, and chasms,

and at length to this "Pinnacle of Rock among Mountains," from midday to night and all through the night. This apparently long stretch of hours for the buoyant flight of these immortals may have been intentional on the part of the poet, as expounding an awful remoteness in the Cave of Demogorgon; and, if the vulgar relations of geographical horology were in his mind, the vaster the interval of space the less the sun-marked interval of time, whether the flight swept eastward to encounter a second dawn or westward to overtake the first. On the other hand, we seem to be still in the regions of the Indian Caucasus; nor is it easy to imagine those enchanted eddies of echoes, which draw all spirits on that secret way (sc. ii. vv. 41-5) to the cave, circling with potent attraction at an enormous distance from their centre. On the whole, it seems to me impossible to decide from the text whether this dawn is of the first or of the second day; though probably it was the latter in the mind of the poet, who, we must remember, did not write, as we may read, his lyrical drama at a sitting, but with intervals of nights and days.

From this dawn, at the invocation of the spirits, Asia and Panthea descend "Down, down!" to their interview with Demogorgon; and this interview, though not long, leads us into night, sc. iv. v. 129, *et seq.* :—

The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds.

* * * * *

And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars.

At first we might think "night" here a general term, expressing the gloom of the cave even when the roofing rocks were cloven, and think of the stars as visible by day because of the awful profundity; but when (vv. 150-5) the

terrible Shadow floats up from its throne and ascends the dark chariot of the destined Hour, the exclamation of Panthea is too definite for mistake :—

—watch its path among the stars,
Blackening the night !

So that when, just before, the Spirit of the Hour announces,

Ere yon planet
Has set, the Darkness which ascends with me
Shall wrap in lasting night Heaven's kingless throne,

the "yon planet" must be some particular star or the unmentioned moon ; and the fall of Jupiter is fixed for this very night, whether of the first or the second day.

Asia and Panthea ascend the car of another Spirit (whose invitation, by-the-bye, is to the daughter, not daughters, of Ocean), who chants of her speed,

Ere the cloud piled on Atlas can dwindle
We encircle the earth and the moon :
We shall rest from long labours at noon :

and in sc. v. we are "On the brink of the night and the morning." Panthea asks, "Whence is the light? the sun is yet unrisen"; the Spirit answers, "The sun will rise not until noon." We are thus entering on a new day, whether the second or the third, and appear to have already advanced beyond the time of the opening of Act III., which precedes the fall of Jupiter, whose fall was to occur before the setting of "yon planet" of the previous night.

And, indeed, the strife with Demogorgon and the fall of Jupiter did occur, as predicted, that same night ; for in Act III. sc. ii., having related the catastrophe to

Ocean, apparently immediately after its fulfilment, Apollo says :—

But list ! I hear

The small clear silver lute of the young Spirit
That sits i' the Morning Star.

Ocean.

Thou must away :

Thy steeds will pause at even, till when farewell.

So that it is now about sunrise, not a hint being given by Apollo that he is rising at a later hour than usual ; he is summoned by the Morning Star. What, then, becomes of “ The sun will rise not until noon ” already cited ? True, in commencing his relation, Apollo says that the strife “ made dim the orb I rule, and shook the solid stars ” ; this, however, is not apposite to earthly time, whether of night or day, but to the universal convulsion produced by the celestial catastrophe. The other words of the Spirit of the Hour, “ We shall rest from long labours at noon,” may be understood as pointing to the time of Act III. sc. iii., the release and triumph of Prometheus, at which this Spirit with Asia and Panthea is present. What, we may venture to ask, is the reason for this aërial excursion ? which does not even appear to be required as a motive for the divine poetry of Act II. sc. v., with the exception of a very few lines ; for it is to be remarked that the ecstatic voyage so gloriously chanted by Asia, past Age, Manhood, Youth, Infancy, “ Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day,” is not and cannot be proper to the chariot of the Hour, but is “ In music’s most serene dominions,” floating “ upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing,” inward beatitude expressed and responded to by outward radiance of beauty and rapture of swift far flight and intoxication of spiritual harmony. The real reason, I think, is twofold, a double stem rooted in one

artistic instinct : first, the impulse to balance and contrast the masculine Spirit of a dreadful countenance in his dark chariot, the exponent of the agony and terror of the Doom dethroning Jupiter, with the feminine Spirit of the dovelike eyes of hope in her ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire, the exponent of the glory and bliss of the triumph of the Titan ; and, secondly, to balance and complement this triumph with one of equal splendour of ostentation for his Bride rejoining him ; and here Shelley's artistic instinct was at one with his fervid faith in the high equality of the sexes.

In Act III. sc. iii. Prometheus sends this feminine spirit to announce throughout the universe the final victory of Good over Evil : "Once again outspeed the sun around the orbèd world" ; and she on her return (sc. iv.) describes the effects of this announcement ; yet before her return from this rapid mission the Spirit of the Earth, the guide of Prometheus and his companions almost immediately after the departure of the other, tells Asia that he is grown wiser "within this day," and relates the great musical announcement and the like effects of beatific transformation following it, as witnessed by himself "lately," when his path lay through a great city, first in the night and then when the dawn came ; which night and dawn, with the "lately," throw back the restoration certainly before the Spirit of the Hour could have proclaimed it, strictly even before the noon-triumph of Prometheus. Nor does this Spirit's delay after the proclamation, "I wandering went among the haunts and dwellings of mankind," affect the anachronism. Finally, at the end of the drama, as we read in Demogorgon's concluding speech, we are still in the very day of the catastrophe :—

This is the day which down the void abysm
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism.

It is assuredly no very high work, thus extorting from a great poem an exact account of its employment of every hour, as if it were a prisoner at the bar whose defence rested on an *alibi*; but zealous and accurate students will not disdain it in its own lower sphere any more than such students disdain precise measurements of proportion in great works of painting and sculpture. And, not to speak of similar investigations concerning other dramas, men no less justly eminent than Jean Paul Richter and De Quincey have applied such criticism to the period of the action of "Paradise Lost."*

III. Is there any possible conciliation of the two caves in Act III. sc. iii.? Prometheus is no sooner released than he describes elaborately to Asia and her fair sister nymphs a certain forest cave, with fountain and stalactites, "A simple dwelling, which shall be our own," and yet more elaborately the mode of life he and they

* In Mure's "Critical History of the Language and Literature of Ancient Greece" (Vol. I., Appendix F: "On the 'Self-contradictions' of Virgil, Milton, Cervantes, Walter Scott, and other popular Authors, as compared with those of Homer") some of Milton's anachronisms in a single book of the "Paradise Lost" are thus summarized:—"Milton informs us that when the Messiah came down from heaven [near sunset, x. 92] to judge our first parents after the Fall, Satan, shunning his presence, returned to hell by night (x. 341). On his way he meets Sin and Death on their road to Paradise in the morning (x. 329). After Sin and Death had arrived in Paradise, Adam is represented as lamenting aloud to himself 'through the still night' (x. 846). The ensuing day (assuming day to have now at last really dawned) is afterwards described by the same Adam as the day of the Fall (x. 962); in another place it is described as a day several days subsequent to that of the Fall (x. 1050)."

shall lead there. Then he sends the Spirit of the Hour on her swift errand of proclamation, which done, "Return; and thou shalt dwell beside our cave," *i.e.*, the cave which he has just described. Then immediately he invokes the Earth, "O, Mother Earth!" who exults in the warmth of immortal youth already circling through her marble nerves, and the blessedness which shall henceforth be the dower of all her children, and then describes elaborately a certain cavern where her spirit was panted forth in anguish under the evil domination of Jupiter—an oracular Delphic cavern, also in a forest, but distinguished by a noble temple, whose image ever lies in a windless and crystalline pool; and she tells Prometheus, "This cave is thine," and calls the child Spirit of the Earth to guide him and his company to it,

beyond the peak
Of Bacchic Nysa, Mænad-haunted mountain,
And beyond Indus and its tribute rivers.

Again, is there any possible conciliation of the two temples (apparently meant for one and the same), as characterized in this single speech of the Earth before and after the Spirit has been called? Here is the first in the poet's own words, surely a temple of Evil:—

There is a cavern where my spirit
Was panted forth in anguish whilst thy pain
Made my heart mad, and those that did inhale it
Became mad too, and built a temple there,
And spoke, and were oracular, and lured
The erring nations round to mutual war,
And faithless faith, such as Jove kept with thee.

Here is the second from the same speech, surely a temple of Good:—

Beside the windless and crystalline pool,
Where ever lies, on unerasing waves,

The image of a temple, built above,
 Distinct with column, arch, and architrave,
 And palm-like capital, and over wrought,
 And populous most with living imagery,
 Praxitelean shapes, whose marble smiles
 Fill the hushed air with everlasting love.
 It is deserted now, but once it bore
 Thy name, Prometheus ; there the emulous youths
 Bore to thy honour thro' the divine gloom
 The lamp which was thine emblem. . . .
 Beside that temple is the destined cave.

So astonishing, indeed, to my apprehension, is the irreconcilable duality pervading these last two scenes of Act III. (which originally concluded the drama)—the two records of the effects of the proclamation of the triumph of Prometheus, the two caves, and the two temples—that remote commentators may be pardoned if they divine and affirm a double authorship or redaction, such as scholars of our own day distinguish in the Elohist and Jehovistic legends, not fused but confused, in the book of Genesis.

IV. It may be worth while to note the passages which mark the sex and the immortality or mortality of the Hours, or Spirits of the Hours as they are termed in the *Dramatis Personæ*, although Demogorgon at their first apparition (II. iv.) simply says, "These are the immortal Hours." They are here spoken of collectively as masculine ; Asia, addressing the one with whom Demogorgon ascends, cries :—

Unlike thy brethren, ghastly charioteer,
 Who art thou ?

The young Spirit with whom Asia and Panthea ascend is first spoken of in the neuter, as we often speak of a child, "How its soft smiles attract the soul !" but after-

wards (III. iii.) as feminine, "Ione, give her that curvèd shell," and only one of many such :—

Thou most desired Hour, more loved and lovely
Than all thy sisters.

But in Act IV. the Chorus of Hours (not Spirits of the Hours)—the living Hours as distinguished from the foregoing dark Forms and Shadows who chant,

Spectres we
Of the dead Hours be,
We bear Time to his tomb in Eternity—

are again masculine, singing of themselves,

And each one who waked as his brother slept
Found the truth worse than his visions were,

it being observable that both Semichorous I. and II. have part in these lines. And it will be noted that we have dead Hours, although Demogorgon himself termed them immortal.

V. And on this one point I see that Mr. Forman has a supplementary note of the same general purport as mine; there appears to be some confusion of the Earth and the Spirit of the Earth (both in the *Dramatis Personæ*), and of the Moon and the Spirit of the Moon (only the latter in the *Dramatis Personæ*, and placed there by Mrs. Shelley). Throughout the first three acts the Earth is the great Mother, and is clearly distinguished from "the delicate Spirit that guides the earth through heaven" (III. iv.), the male child, yet ancient, for "before Jove reigned it loved Asia" and came to call her Mother, as it calls her now, meeting again, in the drama. In the same scene Asia says to it :—

And never will we part, till thy chaste Sister,
Who guides the frozen and inconstant moon,

Will look on thy more warm and equal light
Till her heart thaw like flakes of April snow,
And love thee.

Sp. of the Earth. What ! as Asia loves Prometheus ?

Asia. Peace, wanton ! thou art not yet old enough.

In Act IV., that glorious afterthought, composed several months subsequently, Ione and Panthea describe at length the wonderful vision of these Spirits triumphant : that of the Moon a winged infant in a chariot like the crescent ; that of the Earth laid asleep " Like to a child o'erwearied with sweet toil," within the rushing sphere which is as many thousand spheres. Immediately after these descriptions comes the sublime rapturous and enamoured antiphonal chanting, not of the Spirits, but simply of the Earth and the Moon, according to the headings of the alternate strophes. Yet not the Moon but only her Spirit is in the *Dramatis Personæ* ; and she addresses the Earth not as the great Mother, but as " Brother mine " and " Orb most beautiful " ; and when their chanting is over, Panthea says :—

The bright visions,
Wherein the singing Spirits rode and shone,
Gleam like pale meteors through a watery night.

On the other hand, the chaste Sister of the Moon expresses to her Brother of the Earth, still a winged child, that very love Asia predicted, but for which she said to him, " Thou art not yet old enough." Passing over the distinction between the Moon and her Spirit, which to me is as subtile and inappreciable as that between the Hours and the Spirits of the Hours, either used indifferently, I conceive that though we have here the Spirit of the Earth in the description and the Earth named in the lyrical duologue, the chanting Earth of

this fourth act is, in truth, neither the mythological Mother nor the simple Child-Spirit of the preceding acts, but, as was imperative for the full development of the poet's thought, our own natural Earth, the living, enduring root of these and all other conceptions, mythologic, imaginative, rational; the animate World-sphere instinct with Spirit, personified as masculine in relation to the feminine Moon, as it would be no less rightly personified as feminine in relation to the masculine Sun: the inspired Singer, soaring impetuously into a far ideal future, casting off from him all in his first conceptions that could limit or impede his flight, retaining and expanding and including all that could forward it, in this great cosmic conception, most real and most ideal, perfect, all-pregnant and all-comprehensive, for us her little children.

VI. There are one or two apparent inadvertencies in what may be called the "argument," similar in kind, though inferior in degree, to what has been touched upon under I. in the dialogue between the Earth and Prometheus.

(a) In Act II. iv., when Asia asks Demogorgon, "What canst thou tell?" he replies, "All that thou dar'st demand." Yet when she persistently presses him to reveal the supreme Author of Evil, the master to whom Jupiter is but the slave, he has to avow his impotence:—

If the abysm
 Could vomit forth its secrets.....But a voice
 Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless.

Asia. So much I asked before, and my heart gave
 The response thou hast given; and of such truths
 Each to itself must be the oracle.

(b) In the opening of Act III. Jupiter exultantly

announces to the congregated Powers of Heaven the coming of the incarnation of

That fatal Child, the terror of the earth,
Who waits but till the destined Hour arrive,
Bearing from Demogorgon's vacant throne
The dreadful might of ever-living limbs
Which clothed that awful Spirit unbeheld,

to redescend and trample out the insurrectionary Soul of Man; the Child of himself and Thetis,

Two mighty Spirits, mingling, made a third
Mightier than either.

He hears the approach of the awaited Incarnation, the thunder of the fiery wheels griding the winds; he shouts:—

Feelest thou not, O World!
The earthquake of his chariot thundering up
Olympus?

Yet on the arrival of Demogorgon he cries, "Awful Shape, what art thou? Speak!" It is barely possible to conceive that Demogorgon in his actual Apparition was more tremendous and awful than the Incarnation which Jupiter expected. Why, then, this question? Dramatically it may be justified by either of two contrary reasons: Jupiter, still exultant, still assured of complete triumph, calls for glorious (or *éclatante*) confirmation of his boasts to the assembled Deities; or Jupiter, thrilled suddenly with fateful presentiments of catastrophe, divining inexplicable hostility where he looked for irresistible reinforcement, cries in real astonishment underheaved by vague terror: the student must decide which by his own dramatic instinct.

(c) In the opening of Act IV. Ione questions, "What

dark forms were they?" and "Whither have they fled?" and Panthea tells her. Yet these dark forms have just sung who they are, and whither they go; and the introduction says that both Panthea and Ione awaken gradually during the first song, strictly the Voice of Unseen Spirits which precedes the chant of these dark forms and shadows.

VII. Lastly, I may mention here one or two apparent inadvertences which scarcely affect the structure, but seem beyond any now possible textual emendation.

(a) In Act III, sc. iii. we read:—

Asia. Oh, Mother! wherefore speak the name of death?
Cease they to love and move and breathe and speak
Who die?

The Earth. It would avail not to reply:
Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
But to the uncommunicating dead.
Death is the veil which those who live call life:
They sleep, and it is lifted.

Here, to my understanding, the word "tongue" does not express, though it suggests, the real meaning. The Earth is speaking in her natural living voice and language, and, I suppose, intends to say, "This *theme* is intelligible," or something equivalent. In the parallel passages already quoted from her dialogue with Prometheus,—

How canst thou hear
Who knowest not the language of the dead?

and

No, thou canst not hear:
Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
Only to those who die,—

the words "language" and "tongue" are correctly used, as the Earth is speaking in a strange language, with an "inorganic voice." I may be permitted to suggest that Shelley probably wrote this line "Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known," a second time in consequence of having written it before, while forgetting that he had indeed written it before, unconsciously accepting the dictation of reminiscence—a dictation to which he, one of the most original of poets, was remarkably subject, as all his real students must be aware, whether the reminiscence was of his own or another's language. Thus the close of the citation from the Earth's speech has its parallel in the opening of a sonnet written the year before:—

Lift not the painted veil which those who live
Call Life.

(b) In Act IV. Ione, describing the vision of the Spirit of the Moon, begins:—

I see a chariot like that thinnest boat
In which the Mother of the Months is borne
By ebbing night into her western cave,
When she upsprings from interlunar dreams ;
O'er which is curved an orblike canopy
Of gentle darkness.

Surely the crescent moon is borne into her western cave not by *ebbing* night, but by flowing, advancing night, or by the ebbing day; and surely no one ever knew this better than did that marvellous elemental genius, more at home in the heavens than most men are on earth. Mark, however, the parallel passage from this same poem, in which the *ebbing* here repeated so inopportunately is the very right word to use. Act III. sc. ii. Ocean says:—

As mortals see
The floating bark of the light-laden moon
With that white star, its sightless pilot's crest,
Borne down the rapid sunset's ebbing sea.

May it be suggested in this case also that the inadvertent second use of the word *ebbing* was in unconscious reminiscence of the first right use? For another description of the crescent moon, see *The Triumph of Life*, vv. 78-84 :—

Like the young moon,

When on the sunlit limits of the night
Her white shell trembles amid crystal air,
And whilst the sleeping tempest gathers might

Doth, as the herald of its coming, bear
The ghost of her dead mother, whose dim form
Bends in dark ether from her infant's chair ;

the same omen of tempest having been marked by Coleridge, with a reference to what he terms "the grand *old* ballad of Sir Patrick Spens"; the antiquity since much disputed.

(c) Near the end of Act IV. Demogorgon summons

Ye happy Dead ! whom beams of brightest verse
Are clouds to hide, not colours to portray,
Whether your nature is that universe
Which once ye saw and suffered—
A Voice from Beneath. Or as they
Whom we have left, we change and pass away.

Is there any real meaning in this response? They whom the dead have left are their living fellows, who only change and pass away in becoming also of the dead. Nor can I discern any real disjunctive opposition

between the changing and passing away and the being re-absorbed into the universe.

There are other questions of far finer subtlety and far broader scope suggested by this sublime lyrical drama, as well as some interesting points of textual criticism, whose discussion I must here forego. But as these notes may appear of a depreciatory tendency, I may be permitted to remark that the peculiarities of structure I have pointed out, the unessential self-contradictions and inadvertences, are not only pardonable as instances of the "*brave* neglect" which Pope here and there discovered in Homer, but have a certain wild charm of their own as characteristics proving that in Shelley the poet and the man were one. We all know how conspicuous in his life was a sort of quasi-freedom from the usual limitations of time and space, a disregard of men's common hours and seasons, a restless flying hither and thither and anywhither from men's common settled domesticity; and we know, moreover, in what a confusion of dreams or visions or hallucinations with worldly realities he was often involved. Jefferson Hogg has told us delightfully of his most uncustomary customs, his irregular hours and modes of eating and sleeping and so forth, his sudden mysterious flittings and reappearances; Trelawny has noted how he would glide into the home circle and vanish from it, as if the very Ariel whose name he assumed; Leigh Hunt has left on record how he gave the impression of a spirit that had wandered from its proper sphere; and these eerie, lawless ways and traits only intensified the fascination wrought by his ardent purity and goodness and genius upon all who knew him well, being worthy to know him.

I may also observe that no great artist as a great artist can resent the most microscopic criticism of his work, however much he may contemn the microscopic critics, who give themselves altogether to the examination of minute points because they are incapable of large views of the grandeur of the whole. No doubt that laziest and haziest of human animals, the "general reader,"—so termed we may suppose because he studies nothing in particular and rests content with the vaguest views of things in general,—is simply wearied and disgusted by any detailed analysis ; but

Grandeur of the perfect sphere
Thanks the atoms that cohere ;

and the said "general reader" has, in truth, no definite perception or conception either of the atoms or the sphere. The genuine artist welcomes from others that scrupulous criticism both of the parts and the whole which is but the exterior continuation of his own interior self-criticism ; and no multiplicity of minutest details can be wearisome or insignificant in any realm of art to such as are native to that realm, whether active producers or only passive inheritors of its priceless treasures.

And finally I urge for myself in this case the plea whose efficacy I willingly allow when urged by or for any other in like case, the plea indicated by Mr. Swinburne in his valuable "Notes on the Text of Shelley" :—"Were it for me to pass sentence, I would say of the very rashest of possible commentators that his errors, though they were many, should be forgiven, if he loved much." Whatever my rashness and errors, certainly I love and have loved much, from the earliest study of my youth

through thirty long years; I yield to no one living in the fulness of my tribute of gratitude and love and reverence, as no one in the measure of his or her capacity can be indebted for fuller delight and inspiration to this glorious poet of the glorious possible future of Humanity, "in one word, and that the only proper word, Divine."

1881.

A NOTE ON SHELLEY.*

FORTUNATELY it is no longer needful to introduce the name of our noblest lyrical poet—perhaps in life and song the very noblest of all lands and ages—with some apology, meek or daring, for the enormous altitude of his flight, and the dauntless sincerity of his faith and its expressions. Although he has been dead little more than fifty years, his loving mother country, forced as she was to chasten him somewhat severely alive, already pities and almost condones his startling aberrations—a rare generosity which we cannot sufficiently admire. Yea, she is already, despite his outrageous refulgence, beginning to recognise that he is no will-o'-the-wisp or passing meteor; that he was not even a baleful irregular comet; that he is in truth a burning sphere of heaven, at least as stable and during as her own rock-ribbed, dense-clodded earth. She is perhaps ready

* When the preceding article, "Notes on the Structure of 'Prometheus Unbound,'" was first written it was entitled "A Note on Shelley." Under this title it was sent to the Editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, who declined it on the ground that it presumed too intimate a knowledge of Shelley's writings on the part of the general reader. Before sending the essay to the Editor of the *Athenæum*, Thomson revised it, and amongst other alterations omitted the introductory portion. This introduction, however, seems to me well worth preserving, and I have accordingly printed it.—EDITOR.

to allot him a station in her starry firmament of the illustrious dead, though scarcely yet among the greater lights—

“This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire :”

and perchance, ere the century be fulfilled, she will open her soul to the truth that this star-created leader of the infernal spirits is in very deed Lucifer, Son of the Morning ; Lucifer regnant, unfallen from heaven, the supreme celestial glory of her second great day-spring following the glooms and gloaming of a night of two hundred years. O, *Alma Mater*, clear-eyed and large-hearted ! who hast so soon forgiven and forgotten in him thine own stupidity, cowardice, and cruel injustice toward him : the hardest of all things to forgive and forget in their victim !

It is no longer needful to excuse or vindicate this poet of poets. It is now fashionable and facile to laud him, with or without understanding. Even church-going *belles* are now free to admire “that poor dear Shelley ;” even pious pastors may now sleek him with praise soft and pitiful, as an erring lamb which, had it lived to mature sheephood, would certainly have found its way back to the one secure fold. For genuine students the time to simply praise is past, the time to fitly appraise not yet come ; for the morning he so fulgently heralded is still far from its noon, and the most prescient are still all-unsure what shall be the character of the evolution and completion of its day. In the meantime, those who from their youth up, when he was despised and rejected of men, have loved and revered him with a rapture of enthusiasm such as no other singer of these latter days has excited, to whom he, far beyond any other, has been

a glorious light of truth, a burning fire of love, a breath of divine inspiration, can perhaps render him no better public service, in addition to that intimate service of devout following on his pathway so far as their strength will permit, than the very humble one of endeavouring, while it is yet time, to make his text as clear, accurate, genuine, and complete as possible, removing chance blemishes, restoring right readings, gathering stray pieces and fragments, marking, and to the best of their power obviating, difficulties, for the benefit of those who shall come after them. Truly a very humble service, open to much contemptuous misrepresentation by the clever, careless world, as well as unpoetical misrepresentations on their own part, yet valuable and even invaluable to themselves and to others when performed with patient zeal and reverence. No matter how poor the vessel, it is beyond price when filled with the consecration of the *Elixir*.

“A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.”

It cannot, however, be denied that commentators in general are regarded not only with easy scorn by the careless common reader, but with sharp hostile distrust by the most advanced students of the great works commented. Nor by any means without cause; so many of the tribe having been mainly intent on showing their own learning and acuteness in contrast with the ignorant obtuseness of their predecessors, rather than on piously elucidating what might be obscure in their text. They have swept in the room to raise a dust, not swept it to make clean and neat for the master and his guests;

whence their drudgery has been the opposite of divine, and a great poet shouts with infinite contempt to these "critics as sweep out his chimbley" and complain of the quantity of soot in his flue:—

"Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you—
Is confident oft she detects you
In bringing more filth into my house
Than ever you found there! I'm pious,
However: 'twas God made you dingy."

While of those more humble and earnest and piously diligent, many have been so intolerably dull, have been instinct with such a fatal prosaic or inverse alchemy, turning gold into lead, that we can only picture them following their liege lords as Heine pictures poor Franz Horn plodding painfully for ever on his donkey after Shakespere flying at ease on his noble charger.

But our recent editors and scholiasts have been usually of a higher type—more modest and courteous and fair one to another, more loyal and reverent to their common master, more intelligent and sympathetic; while the great general progress in absolute, and especially in comparative, criticism has put at their command an apparatus much more powerful and precise than was ever constructed before. It would indeed be well could we dispense with their services altogether—and they themselves are the first to acknowledge this; but in many cases such service is simply indispensable, and in none among our modern poets more conspicuously than in that of Shelley. All who take any interest in the subject know in what untoward circumstances the mass of his mature compositions were first printed, during his residence in Italy or after his sudden death. The pirated editions were very corrupt; those of Mrs. Shelley very

incorrect, and not quite complete. Hence serious students were naturally led into many more and much greater liberties of conjectural emendation than they would have dreamed of taking had the texts been fairly accurate—the certainty of numerous errors made the text seem uncertain throughout. Thus it is safe to say that old students' copies of Shelley show far more textual notes and queries than those of any of his contemporaries—even, for instance, than those of Byron, though Byron was a much laxer writer than Shelley. On the other hand, such serious students have naturally, by long usage and cherished association, come to love those readings in which they divined or suspected no error, and are thus very unwilling to discard them for others, even when these are more authoritative, and would have been recognised as distinctly superior had the opportunity offered at first of comparing or contrasting them with those in possession; and the conservative prejudice is exceedingly stubborn where revolutions of rhythm or cadence are in question. But such prejudices, however powerful now, will not affect the ever-new generations of readers.

The case being thus, we may well congratulate ourselves that, while it is yet time, two such painstaking and excellent critical editions of the poetical works have been published as those of Mr. W. M. Rossetti and Mr. H. B. Forman, both embodying the results of Mr. Garnett's researches, as revealed in "The Relics of Shelley" and elsewhere, and both profiting by the discussions and suggestions of such adepts as Miss Blind, Mr. Swinburne, Professor J. T. Baynes. I repeat, while it is yet time, because time is a very important factor in such work; so important, that it can scarcely be rash to assert that, other conditions equal, the force of textual criticism

varies inversely as the square of the distance from the period of the text. Year by year even now some person may die, some document perish, from whom or which a precious ray of light might have been cast on some obscure point in the life or works of our Poet ; and moreover, year by year the literary atmosphere is becoming in many important respects more and more unlike that which he inhaled and exhaled. Think how inestimable would have been critical editions of Shakespere within a couple of generations of his death !

Mr. Rossetti was first in the field, in 1870, with what may be termed his tentative edition in two volumes, a laborious and daring work, sweeping away many obstructions, unearthing and replacing various fragments, checking current texts by original editions or MSS., challenging incongruities real or apparent, testing the soundness of materials, correcting lapses, hazarding many alterations : in brief, attempting to restore, on paper (for "restorations" in books are fortunately not irreversible, like those in buildings and pictures), the manifold completed compositions as designed, if not in every point wrought out, by the artist ; and succeeding, at any rate, by clear exposition and keen discussion, in putting many of the most difficult problems in a fair way for ultimate settlement, and pointing out the insolubility of the insoluble. Seven years later Mr. Forman completed his edition in four volumes, taking full advantage of various fresh discoveries and collations, profiting by the labours while rigorously checking the conclusions of his predecessor ; and generally, though not quite consistently throughout, showing himself more conservative in staunch adherence to what are termed authorities, even when their claims to our allegiance are not beyond dispute. And now in this

present year (1878) Mr. Rossetti issued in three volumes a great and decided improvement upon his previous edition, cancelling erroneous and rash conjectures and variations, confirming others by authority, opening up new questions of importance; and, it may be added, correcting and enriching the Memoir by the light of the most recent information. And here one is constrained to interject that now that Shelley's eldest child is dead, his family, in justice to his memory and to those who revere it, should surely publish without further delay the facts known only by themselves "and a few private friends," concerning his separation from his first wife and the causes that impelled her suicide.

While it is pretty certain that no single student with valid claims to sit in judgment will sanction all that either Mr. Rossetti or Mr. Forman has done or suggested, or even all that they agree upon amidst their differences, it is, I think, almost certain that any such student, whose intellectual claims are not impaired by prejudice, will gladly admit that together, and perhaps in about equal measure, each supplementing and checking the other, they have succeeded in gathering nearly all the data, documentary, critical, and conjectural, required for working out an approximately perfect text of the Poems. I do not propose to attempt here any comparative appraisal of these two editions, or to discuss the numerous details wherein they differ from previous editions and from each other; I would merely note a few interesting points on which neither of them has touched, and say a word on a very few only of the points which they have touched. If I venture on suggestion, it will assuredly not be for unauthorized alteration of the text, but simply for discussion and, if possible, further scrutiny.

Confining myself in the present article to the transcendent work by which Shelley is supremely differentiated from all his contemporaries, the "Prometheus Unbound," it may be well to indicate certain peculiarities in the structure, before hazarding two or three remarks on the text.

* * * * *

1878.

*MS. B. 1. 49
27/2/78*

CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN JAMES THOMSON AND WILLIAM
MICHAEL ROSSETTI.

8th Feby. 1872.

DEAR SIR,

MR. BRADLAUGH has forwarded me your letter of the 4th inst., and I know not how to thank you for your very generous expression of approval of the *Weddah and Om-el-Bonain*. In sending you this piece I had indeed some slight hope of obtaining the verdict of so distinguished and competent a judge; but I chiefly intended it as a sort of apology for my very inadequate notice in the *National Reformer* last March of your popular edition of Shelley, written at the request of my friend Mr. Bradlaugh when I had no leisure for anything like a fair attempt to examine and discuss that work properly. Feeling not at all contented with such treatment of Shelley and yourself, I was anxious to show that your too off-hand critic was nevertheless a genuine lover of the poet to whom you have devoted so much worthy labour, and a serious student of poetry.

To clear up your doubt permit me to state that no living writer can have much less reputation than myself, who am simply known to some readers of the *National*

Reformer as B. V. the author of many pieces and scraps in prose and verse which have appeared in that periodical during the last seven years or so. And I am bound in honesty to confess that some of those pieces were among the most wicked and blasphemous which even Mr. Bradlaugh ever published. The only production in reputable society which I can cite in my favour is "Sunday up the River: an Idyll of Cockaigne," which Mr. Froude inserted in *Fraser's Magazine* for October '69, and which he and Mr. Kingsley thought very good. The *Weddah and Om-el-Bonain* Mr. Froude rejected, finding the story beautiful, and the treatment excellent in arrangement and conception, but deficient in melody of versification, in smoothness and sweetness, much less finished in style than the Idyll. Both pieces have been refused by four or five of our chief magazines to which they were sent.

I hope that you will pardon me for saying so much about myself, as I have only done so because your letter seemed to indicate a desire to know something on the subject.

The praise of two such men as yourself and your brother, however much kindness may have tempered your judgment, is very valuable to me, and I am truly grateful for the generous promptitude and cordiality with which you have rendered it to an obscure stranger.

While to the public I wish to remain anonymous as a writer, I have no wish to shroud myself from persons I esteem, and am happy to sign myself your obliged and faithful servant

JAMES THOMSON.

2nd March, 1872.

DEAR SIR,

I have to thank you for your very kind letter of the 25th ult., and for your too-liberal offer of a copy of your complete edition of Shelley. While I do not like to refuse the honour of this gift from you, I must really protest against your attacking me suddenly with so valuable a present on such insignificant and unintentional provocation. It is one among the works of our higher literature which during the last three or four years I have put off reading, waiting for more settled leisure to study them as they ought to be studied. I will do my best to profit by it, and should any notes occur to me which I can think worth your attention will submit them to you frankly.

I regret that you have been put to the trouble of procuring the number of *Fraser*, which I could not offer to send you, having no copy left. Your judgment on the relative merits of the *Idyll* and *Weddah* confirms my own. I was aware that the former as a piece of pure pleasantness was more smooth and easy in style than the latter, but I knew also that the latter in its style as dictated by the nature of the story was honestly wrought out to the best of my ability and was comparatively a serious bit of work. By the bye, the *Idyll* as I wrote it had two more joints to its tail, ending thus after some points to mark the transition:—

What time is it, dear, now?
 We are in the year now
 Of the New Creation One million, two or three.
 But where are we now, love?
 We are as I trow, love,
 In the Heaven of Heavens upon the Crystal Sea.

And may mortal sinners
 Care for carnal dinners
 In your Heaven of Heavens, New Era millions three?
 Oh, if their boat gets stranding
 Upon some Richmond landing
 They're thirsty as the desert and hungry as the sea!

These two stanzas, though of little worth in themselves, had the merit in my eyes of bringing back the piece at last to the sober realities of pleasant Cockaigne; but Mr. Froude and (as he informed me) Mr. Kingsley were so strongly in favour of its evanishing in the sentimental infinite that I submitted to them, not without reluctance. Whether you will agree with those gentlemen or with myself on this point, I of course cannot divine.

I have a parcel of leaves of the *National Reformer* containing most of my contributions to that paper, kept by me for the purpose of reference, which I shall of course be happy to send you if you care to turn them over, glancing into any that may seem not without interest. They would give you a much more ample and accurate knowledge of me than you can have gathered from two select poems, and would probably enough considerably lower me in your opinion, but I have not the slightest wish to seem to you at all better than I am, and would indeed (if I know myself) rather be under than over estimated. You will also I trust understand that I have not the least desire to abuse your kindness by asking you or expecting you to read a single line of my writing or express any opinion thereon, except as your own good pleasure may move you. Your criticism whether favourable or adverse would be very highly valued by me, but I cannot doubt that you have literary matters much more important than anything of mine to occupy your leisure.

Hoping that you will find in the nature of our correspondence an excuse for my again writing to you so much about myself,

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours very Respectfully

JAMES THOMSON.

10th April, '72.

DEAR SIR,

I have to thank you for the copy of your complete edition of Shelley's Poetical Works, which I found on reaching home last evening, and especially for the inscription therein with which you have honoured me. Turning over the leaves, I find so many places where your hand has been at work improving on improvement that I cannot but regret so much trouble taken on my account, while rejoicing in your persistent passion for accuracy and perfection thus evidenced. That your name (which may well live in its own right) must be linked enduringly in our literature with that of Shelley, by virtue of the standard text of his Poems, is already my conviction.

I will do my poor best towards reading these noble volumes worthily; and welcome so fair an occasion for studying once more, and with such excellent assistance, the Poet who fascinated me in my youth, and of whom my reverence remains undiminished and my estimate scarcely altered after twenty long years. x

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours truly

JAMES THOMSON.

*of mine
after 240*

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2/11/72*

21. 4. 72.

DEAR SIR,

I have had two or three glances into your Shelley before, but this dull Sunday have made *Alastor* my even-song, and venture to send you a few notes thereanent while it is fresh in my mind. I think you have definitely settled text and punctuation save in two or three slight instances.

p. 97. I incline for the *Herself* a poet; *his* poetical character having been so emphasised from the beginning of the poem.

pp. 106-7. Here are gnarled *roots* clenching the soil with grasping *roots*. Should it not be gnarled *trunks* in the first instance?

p. 107. The precipice &c. still remain somewhat obscure to me, but your pencilled version seems the least dark of all.

p. 107. I think you may safely adopt the *tracts* for *tracks*, tho' the latter is just possible as you remark in your note. Shelley is rapidly enumerating vast objects, islanded seas, &c., &c., and would hardly pause to give a descriptive line to the streams.

p. 109. "Of the wide world her mighty *horn* suspended"—Should not this be *horns*? Just below we have the *divided* frame; and then with peculiar insistence (p. 110) the *two* lessening points of light, as if in reminiscence of the "two eyes, Two starry eyes" bottom of p. 105.

p. 109. "With whose *dun* beams"—Should not this be *dim*, which seems quite lustreless enough?

p. 110 and note on p. 476. Here I prefer the old reading. The adjectives of the last line, it seems to me,

refer distributively to the accumulated imagery of the whole sentence: *Still* to the lute; *dark* and *dry* to the stream (and the former also probably to the vapour, still floating in the poet's mind); *unremembered* to the dream.

For very minute points:—

p. 100. Would it not be worth while to print "*Sang dirges in the wind*"; and similarly p. 105 "the grass that sprang"?

Lastly, as a pure mathematical point or position without magnitude, should not *nought* be *naught* as the negation of aught?

Pray excuse the abrupt brevity of these remarks, which could only be got written now by being written rapidly.

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours very Respectfully

JAMES THOMSON.

P. S. From a conversation yesterday I gather that I may be very probably called to start at two or three days' notice in search of the Heathen Chinees among the Rocky Mountains, on business of the Company of which I am the unworthy Secretary *pro tem.* (The Champion Gold and Silver Mines Compy. of Colorado).

The trip, including sojourn of two or three months, would keep me absent four or five months. If therefore you have no further reports from me for some time, pray do not account me neglectful of Shelley and yourself, but blame the said Heathen Chinees—if not grateful to him as the cause of the reprieve.

[From W. M. Rossetti, Esq., in answer to the foregoing.]

28 April [1872].

MY DEAR SIR,

Many thanks to you for your notes on Shelley, which I have considered attentively, and find really serviceable. Also for the *National Reformer*, containing a little lyric of yours characterized by sweetness and feeling.

Alastor, p. 97. "Herself a poet." As I have said in my note, I think this *may* be right: yet I don't think it *is* right. There would I conceive be a certain incongruity and bathos in saying, in this direct and matter-of-fact way, that this phantasmal unactual personage was "a poet," and tho' (as you truly point out) there is no occasion, at this stage of the poem, to inform the reader that the wanderer was "himself a poet," still I think the phrase has a logical position where it comes—the statement being that the visionary personage charmed the wanderer by her utterances regarding knowledge, truth, virtue and liberty, *because* these were "thoughts the most dear to him"—and regarding poetry *because* he was "himself a poet."

106, 7. Roots (twice over). I am sure you are right in the important correction "trunks": should probably not hesitate to introduce that word into the text if opportunity offers, or would at any rate point it out in a note as a true correction, and due to you.

107. The precipice, &c. It seems to me *now* that there is no grave difficulty in this passage, according to its ordinary punctuation. I used to understand the word "disclosed" as meaning "which was disclosed or revealed"; but I now understand it to mean "did unclose, was cleft."

109. "Horns." I think you are in all probability right. Also "dim" instead of "dun": but this latter (at any rate) I would not venture to *substitute*.

110. "Still dark and dry" &c. Here again you convince me: at any rate, convince me so far as that I think my altered punctuation and note unsafe and undesirable, and would cancel them in any new edition.

100-5. Sang and sprang. I wholly agree with you in thinking these the right and agreeable forms of the past tense—but think it clear that Shelley wrote sung and sprung, so would not presume to make any change. "Naught" also is obviously, as you suggest, more correct than "nought." The latter however seems to have got the upper hand in modern spelling, and I fancy, when one substitutes "naught" now-a-days, it rather suggests that the notion of "naughty" is somehow implied—so I would not make the alteration.

If ever you have the chance and inclination to send me other revisals, I should be truly obliged to you—certain beforehand that they will be to the point.

I hope, if you do start off after Chinamen, you will find some satisfaction in the work: it sounds indeed full of adventurous and pleasurable excitement. I have myself a great respect for the Chinese—and still more for the Japanese—as a nation of very fine endowments, more especially in matters of fine art. To contemn them seems to me a symptom of crass ignorance or despicable self-conceit, or both.

With best wishes for your travel, should it take place, I remain

Very truly yours,

W. M. ROSSETTI.

CENTRAL CITY, COLORADO, U.S.A.

5th Augt. 1872. //

DEAR SIR,

Your letter of the 28th April reached me here about a fortnight since, having been forwarded by a friend. I cannot say anything about the Shelley notes now, as the only books I could find room for in my portmanteau were the Globe Shakespeare and Pickering's diamond Dante (with Cary's version squeezed in for the notes and general assistance). But I hope on my return to resume the attentive reading of your Shelley, and to send you any remarks upon it which may occur to me and seem worth sending. Your liberal reception of the few already sent would encourage me to proceed, even were I not impelled by so strong an interest in the subject.

Mr. Bradlaugh promised to forward you a copy of the *National Reformer* containing a piece of verse called *In the Room* which I left behind me. I learn that it appeared in the issue for May 19th, but don't know whether you received a copy or not.

From the close of your letter I gather that you somewhat misapprehended what I said about my business trip. When I wrote to the effect that I was going in search of the Heathen Chinees in the Rocky Mountains, I did not mean to convey that I was about to start for China. I believed that John Chinaman had already swarmed thus far east from California, and was alluding to the popular poem by Bret Harte, a writer who seems to me capable of doing really excellent work, and some of whose poems and sketches I am very fond of. As to the Chinese they have not got here yet, with the exception of four or five

who are male laundresses (the proper masculine for this feminine noun I am quite ignorant of) and whom I never see.

I have been out here since the 15th May, having left London on the 27th April, but have seen very little of the country as yet, business confining me to this place. I am hoping to have some trips around shortly. Every village out here is termed a City: this Central with Blackhawk and Nevada, the three virtually forming one straggling town, numbers between four and five thousand people. Of these the great majority are miners, perhaps one thousand being Cornishmen, who earn from \$3 to \$4 a day wages, and much more when they take leases, or work by contract. The stores are well-stocked, but nearly everything is very dear. The working miner can get most of the mere necessaries of life almost as cheap as at home; the comforts and little luxuries are so priced that I find living here twice or three times as expensive. A small glass of English beer costs twenty-five cents, or say a shilling currency. To get your boots blacked (I always clean my own) you pay 25 cents, but then they get a "Dolly Varden shine," and are wrought upon by a "Boot Artist." A "tonorialist" very naturally charges 75 cents or three shillings for cutting your hair; etc, etc, etc. We have churches, chapels, schools, and a new large hotel in which a very polite dancing party assembled the other evening. This week we are to have a concert, and also a lecture on the Darwinian Theory, admission one dollar. We have a theatre, in which we now and then have actors. The old rough days with their perils and excitement are quite over; the "City" is civilised enough to be dull and commonplace, while not yet civilised enough to be sociable and pleasant.

There are no beggars, and petty larceny is almost unknown; storekeepers extort your money blandly and quietly, and the large larceny of selling mines at preposterous prices makes the people despise all larceny that is petty. You might as well carry a revolver between Euston Square and Somerset House as here. I brought one under persuasion, and have never taken it out of the bag.

This Central City is the headquarters of gold mining in Colorado Territory, but it has been very dull for some time past, the working of most of the large mines having been suspended, in some cases through want of capital, in others through litigation (mines are wonderful breeders of lawsuits), and in others because the ores are not rich enough to pay the enormous charges for haulage and reduction and smelting out here, tho' they would be of immense value in an old country. However a Railroad connecting with the whole East is now within ten miles of us, and is being pushed on rapidly, so things are likely to improve ere long.

The houses, chiefly of wood, and some of them pretty enough in themselves though spoiled by their surroundings, are huddled and scattered along the bottom and slopes of a winding ravine, intermingled with prospect-holes, primitive loghuts, millsheds, of which many are idle, fragments of machinery that proved useless from the first, heaps of stones and poor ores, and all sorts of rubbish. No one has ever cleared up anything here: the streets and roads are usually many inches deep in dust, which the rare heavy rains and the more frequent turning on of some foul sluice make mud which is verily abominable unto one who cleaneth his own boots. Men dig a shaft shallow or deep, and leave it gaping for any-

one to tumble into. Trees are cut down and the stumps all left to make night-wandering safe and agreeable. The hills surrounding us have been flayed of their grass, and scalped of their timber; and they are scarred and gashed and ulcerated all over from past mining operations; so ferociously does little man scratch at the breasts of his great calm mother when he thinks that jewels are there hidden. The streams running down the ravines, or as they say here, the creeks running down the gulches, are thick with pollution from the washing of dirt and ores. We are 8,300 feet above the level of the sea, and 3,000 feet above Denver, which lies about forty miles eastward. The highest peaks of the Rocky Mountains hereabout are over 14,000 feet; we are among the foothills. To get out of the City in any direction one must climb for a considerable distance. These foothills are distributed remarkably amongst the snowy ranges of the mountains, curtain beyond curtain, fold within fold, twisting and heaving inextricably. Those immediately around the City are of flat tame curves, as if crouching to their abject mercenary doom; but beyond there are keen crests and daring serrated contours, green with firs and cottonwood-aspens or nobly dark with pines; and one massy range ends in a promontory whose scarped precipitous upper flank gleams grand and savage in its stony nakedness, like the gleaming of set white teeth in some swart Titanic barbarian. Some of the loftier hillsides are as smooth meadows; but their grass at this season can scarcely be distinguished through the multitudinous flames and broad blaze of countless species of wild-flowers, nearly all of the most positive intense colours, scarlet, crimson, purple, azure, yellow, white. Few of them remind me of English flowers, and

the people here (if I may judge by the few I have asked) don't seem to know their names. From these higher hills one gets magnificent views : vast billowy land seas, with dense woods and deep ravines and exquisite emerald dells, whereon and wherever sleep and sweep immense shadows, and of all shades even at noonday from bright green to solid black ; beyond, a crescent of the mountains, some with broad fields or deep furrows of snow, some sheathed wholly with this white splendour ; eastward toward the plains, what the keenest eye cannot distinguish from a distant sealine, faint or dark blue level to the horizon, with pale streaks like the shadows of clouds and long shoals and the haze of evaporation. The sky is wonderfully pure, azure or deep burning blue ; the clouds are large and white ; however hot the sun there are cool fresh breezes on these hills. There are few birds, and they scarcely sing. Butterflies abound, some of them almost as brilliant as the flowers. Crickets keep up a continual song like the whistling of the wind through reeds ; and one species take long jumps and short rapid flights, making such a rattle with some bodily machinery that one can scarcely believe it comes from so small a creature.

The nights are always cool, and mosquitoes there are none. Snakes or any other vermin I have not heard of. One would have to go some distance now to find any wild animals such as bears or cougars.

I don't think that I have been out a single night, however cool and clear with moon and stars, without seeing frequent lightnings play up from behind the surrounding hills. Almost every day we have a slight shower. On the day of my arrival we had a hail-storm with thunder as we drove up the cañon, the largest stones being quite as big

as goodsized walnuts. Our horses were so nervous that we had to unhitch and hold them. A few days after they had snow, thunder and lightning all together among the same hills. Occasional waterspouts sweep away bridges and destroy roads for miles. I have seen from here a terrible storm raging over the plains, dead-silent through remoteness: white lightnings momentarily surging up, veiling the stars, making the lower clouds ghostly, striking pale reflections from clouds at the zenith; and these broad sheets of white light were seamed and riven by intense darting lines of forked lightning, zigzag, vertical, transverse, oblique.

We have no dew here at night; one can lie out in a blanket between earth and sky with perfect safety and comfort.

Six miles from us is Idaho, the pleasantest place I have yet seen in the mountains. Going to it you ascend about a thousand feet in three miles to the divide (and climbing on foot tests your wind in this thin pure air); and then descend about eighteen hundred feet in three miles, winding down Virginia Cañon, whose hill-walls range from six to twelve hundred feet in height, and are still well-wooded with firs and pines. The roadway is good, wild flowers abound, and a clear rill runs down with you all the way.

Idaho, which its boldly prophetic inhabitants call the Saratoga of the West, and which is just now full of visitors, lies comfortably at large on the level floor of a broad and long valley. The houses are of wood, shingle-roofed, most of them neat, many of them pretty. The hills around rise to the height of a thousand feet; and as little mining has been attempted on them, they are delightfully green, and their timber has not been felled.

Between them southwards you see the scalped heads of two mountains (until lately covered with snow) reckoned about 11,000 feet high, with a lower rounded height between; these are the Old Chief, the Squaw, and the Pappoose. Westwards also you glimpse snowy mountains. A stream, rapid and broad in summer after the rains and melting of the snows, runs from west to east through the midst of the village the whole length of the valley. Excellent trout have been caught in it. Two creeks join it from the south in this valley. There is a hot water spring impregnated with soda and sulphur, which feeds private and swimming baths. There is a cold spring chemically allied to it, which people drink with faith or hope, and which to me tastes like seltzer-water bewitched. There are beautiful walks and rides in all directions. I reckon that this village of Idaho or Idaho Springs will indeed ere long be one of the fashionable holiday resorts of America. Gray's Peak, over 14,000 feet, is within 24 miles of it. A good horse-trail goes right up to the scalped crest of Old Chief, a distance of about eight miles.

I have chatted with the man who first struck Virginia Cañon and found the Idaho Creek (South Clear Creek) through the dense woods which filled the valley, and caught fine trout for himself and fellow-prospectors. This was in '59. Men used to make marvellous sums by mining and gold-washing then, and pay marvellous prices for the necessaries of life. For some years existence was pretty rough, tho' never perhaps half so wild as in California during the early days of its gold fever.

I was told in Idaho (by a Justice of the Peace too) of a couple of men who were on terms of shoot at sight, of

whom one tried to avoid and the other sought a meeting. At length the latter attained his desire, and in the "difficulty" which ensued was shot by the other, who was tried but got off clear as the evidence was not considered perfect. The dead man had \$64 odd in his pockets, so it was resolved to give him a decent burial. They stopped the funeral procession at a store, drank to his salvation out of his own money, and also took a bottle of whisky with them to the burial place, that they might be not altogether without comfort when they had finally deposited him in the earth. Both deserved shooting, said the Justice of the Peace philosophically; and himself was one of the funeral party.

In a tobacconist's here among specimens of ore is an object labelled "Burr from the pinetree on which Pennsylvtuck was hanged." Pennsylvtuck was so called because Pennsylvania and Kentucky somehow shared the honour of raising him. He was a bad lot, so bad that the citizens at length determined to promptly relieve him and themselves of his noxious existence. Accordingly, without any tedious legal preliminaries, they took him forth and hanged him on a pine tree, and there left him. As the night was very cold, some one suggested that it was doubtful whether Pennsylvtuck met his death by strangulation or freezing. As the citizens on cool reflection thought it wise to discourage Lynch law, they generally agreed to consider that he had been frozen to death.

As to the drinking, one anecdote (true or not) will suffice. An officer sent out to cater for some division of the army in the West returned with six wagonloads of whisky and one of provisions. The commanding

officer, having overhauled the stock, cried out "What the hell shall we do with all these provisions?"

I did not intend to inflict all this nonsense upon you, but having begun to write, it seemed queer to send a mere note 5 or 6000 miles, and not say something about this country; so, having leisure, I let my pen run away with me. Fortunately you are not in any way called upon to read what I was not called upon to write.

I may be here for two or three months yet for all I know.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours truly,

JAMES THOMSON.

2nd April, 1873.

To W. M. Rossetti, Esq.

DEAR SIR,

Although I returned from my American trip about two months since, I have been so unsettled and occupied with a thousand nothings that I have scarcely looked at a book since my return.

I have at length managed to go pretty carefully through *The Witch of Atlas* and *Epipsychidion*, and herewith I send you a few notes thereon, which you must take for what they are worth. Although they are naturally very much like the notes of a reader for the press, whose special business it is to hunt out faults and ignore merits, you may be assured that I duly appreciate the great improvements you have made in the text.

While agreeing with you in ranking *The Witch of Atlas* very high, I cannot agree with you in preferring it

to the *Epipsychidion*. It has always seemed to me that Shelley never soared higher than in this poem, which I find full of supreme inspiration. It is his *Vita Nuova*, tender and fervid and noble as Dante's; and his premature death has deprived us of the befitting *Divina Commedia* which should have followed.

I am considerably ashamed to speak of anything of my own in this connexion; but, as I believe my little piece *In the Room* was sent to you, I take the liberty of forwarding a corrected copy, that, having it at all, you may have it as I wrote it.

Yours very Respectfully,

JAMES THOMSON.

Friday. 18. 4. 73.

DEAR SIR,

I have to thank you for your letter of the 9th inst., and also for the series of remarks on my notes on your text of Shelley. On some passages these remarks have given me new light; as to a few others I may trouble you with further comments another time.

Having gone pretty carefully through the *Prometheus Unbound*, I herewith enclose some preliminary notes, concerning rather the structure than the mere text. I have not been afraid of going into minutiae, because nothing, however minute, which affects the perfection of a master-piece, can be quite insignificant. As to the question of the time occupied by the action, I have certainly felt it rather mean work making a great poem account for its employment of every hour, as if it were a prisoner at the bar whose defence rested on an *alibi*. Nor do I lay much stress upon this time question, excepting in the first instance investigated, which involves

the apparent contradiction between Act I. and Act II.
Sc. I.

Yours truly,
JAMES THOMSON.

[From W. M. Rossetti, Esq., in answer to the foregoing.]

21 April [1873].

MY DEAR SIR,

Here are one or two further replies, written without referring at the moment to Shelley's text. But there are still several points regarding *Adonais* and *Hellas* that I must answer about with the book before me, and all that you say concerning the *Prometheus* remains to be followed out. I expect to come to the same conclusion with yourself on most or all of these *Prometheus* matters; nor do I think that the literal verification of the time of action, &c. (conducted in such a spirit as yours) is at all out of place—the only proviso being that, whether or not Shelley proves to be wrong in these matters, the rank of the poem remains exactly where it stood before.

* I am truly indebted to you in all these Shelley matters, and should feel it a great pleasure to make the personal acquaintance of so keen a critic, and (what is much better) so true a poet. Would you give me a call some evening? I am here at Euston Sq. almost all evenings from (say) 7½, hardly ever going out (expect however to be away on 3 and 4 May). On one evening of each week I am at a different house; 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea: this is *Tuesday* evening from about same hour. Cheyne Walk would be more convenient to you in point of situation: but anything I

could show you about Shelley is at Euston Square— I have for instance a piece of his blackened skull, given me by Trelawney, who picked it out of the furnace, and the regard in which I hold this relic makes me understand the feelings of a Roman Catholic in parallel cases. Possibly you would be at the opposite pole of feeling in this matter. Also I am doing with much diligence another Shelley job I have long contemplated—collection (with elucidatory notes, &c.) of every scrap of his poetry or prose *personal to himself*—principally letters, so far as prose is concerned.

I like the *Witch of Atlas* better than *Epipsychidion*, and in a limited sense I think it the more satisfactory poem of the two. I am far however from considering it the *greater* poem, or the one which sustains Shelley's general position as a poet at the loftier level. As regards considerations of this class, I think *Epipsychidion* hardly yields to *Prometheus*.

I have sometimes felt inclined—if you would at all like it—to forward to Notes and Queries the most important of your Shelley emendations: of course confessing whose they are: not that I could *pledge* myself to obtaining insertion by the Editor, but I think it probable my object would partly be to express my high opinion of your capacities as a poet—which really ought not to be bottled up for the sole benefit of readers of the *National Reformer*. I would do this at leisure, if at all—being greatly occupied. Perhaps you would let me know whether you like the notion at all, and how far.

Believe me,

Very truly yours,

W. M. ROSSETTI.

12. 11. 73.

DEAR SIR,

Towards the end of July last I sent you rough notes on the Minor Poems and Fragments, excepting the *Triumph of Life*. On this I herewith enclose some remarks. It is a Poem which has always been a particular favourite of mine, and suggests questions which nothing less than an essay could indicate. Here I touch only on the text. It has been pure pleasure to follow again the unique *terza rima*; liquid, sinuous, continuous, a full-flowing river of music and light.

I think with a piece left unfinished like this you might venture upon obvious metrical rectifications, which do not affect the sense, just as you have ventured upon obvious grammatical ditto.

I hope you enjoyed your Italian holiday. I thoroughly enjoyed Navarre; but was recalled too soon because Republicans and Monarchists wouldn't kill each other wholesale, the unfeeling wretches!

Yours truly,

JAMES THOMSON.

THE POEMS OF WILLIAM BLAKE.*

“I assert for myself that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it is hindrance, and not action. . . . I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it.”

“The angel who presided at my birth
Said: Little creature, formed of joy and mirth,
Go, love without the help of anything on earth.”

BEFORE the publication of these volumes I knew but one of Blake's poems, that on the *Human Form*, or *Divine Image*, quoted by James John Garth Wilkinson in his great work. The wisdom and the celestial simplicity of this little piece prepared one to

* *Life of William Blake*, “*Pictor Ignotus*,” with selections from his poems and other writings. By the late Alexander Gilchrist, author of the “*Life of William Etty*.” Illustrated from Blake's own works, in *fac-simile*, by W. J. Linton, and in photolithography, with a few of Blake's original plates. In 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., 1863.

I give the full title, in recommending the work to all good readers. The first volume contains the *Life* and a noble supplementary chapter by Mr. D. G. Rossetti; the second volume contains the *Selections*, admirably edited by Mr. D. G. Rossetti, with the assistance of Mr. W. M. Rossetti. There is magnificent prose as well as poetry in the selections, and the engravings in themselves are worth more than most books.

love the author and all that he had done ; yet the selections from his poems and other writings were a revelation far richer than my hopes. Not only are these selections most beautiful in themselves ; they are also of great national interest as filling up a void in the cycle of our poetic literature. I had long felt, and probably many others had felt, that much of the poetry of the present and the last age *must* have had an antecedent less remote in time than the Elizabethan works, and less remote in resemblance than the works of Cowper and Burns. Yet, since Macaulay's essay on Byron appeared, Cowper and Burns—and in general these two only—had been continually named as the heralds of that resurrection of her poetry which makes glorious for England the crescent quarter of the nineteenth century. A third herald of that resurrection was undoubtedly William Blake ; and although he was scarcely listened to at all, while his colleagues held in attention the whole kingdom, the fact may at length be recognised that by him, even more clearly than by them, was anticipated and announced both the event now already past and the event still in process of evolution.

If it be objected that one who was scarcely listened to at all could not exercise much influence, the reply is that we are concerned not with the influence, but with the accuracy and period of the presage. It is written that mankind did not heed Noah, or heeded only to mock, during the six-score years in which he foretold the Flood and built the Ark ready for it ; if the Flood really came as he foretold, it attested the truth of his inspiration ; but no one now would think that his prophecies were instrumental in accomplishing their own fulfilment, although this opinion must have been general

among those who were being submerged. Or we may answer, applying a metaphor which has been with good reason much used, that the mountain-peaks which in any district first reflect the rays of the dawn exercise little or no influence on the dawn's development, even in relation to the country around them ; they cast some glimmer of light into obscure valleys below (whose obscurity, on the other hand, their shadows make trebly deep when the sun is sinking), they prophesy very early of the coming noontide, we may judge as to their positions and altitudes by the periods of their reflection ; but the dawn would grow and become noon, and the noon would sink and become night just the same if they were not there. So the Spirit of the Ages, the *Zeitgeist*, is developed universally and independently by its own mysterious laws throughout mankind ; and the eminent men from whom it first radiates the expression of what we call a new aspect (the continuous imperceptible increments of change having accumulated to an amount of change which we can clearly perceive, and which even our gross standards are fine enough to measure), the illustrious prototypes of an age, really cast but a faint reflex upon those beneath them ; and while pre-eminently interesting in biography, are of small account in history except as prominent indices of growth and progress and decay, as early effects not efficient causes. They help us to read clearly the advance of time ; but this advance they do not cause any more than the gnomon of a sundial causes the procession of the hours which it indicates, or a tidal-rock the swelling of the seas whose oncoming is signalled in white foam around it and in shadowed waters over it.

The message of Cowper has been heard (it was not a

very great announcement, and he uttered it neatly and distinctly and honestly), has been laid to heart by the many for whom it was sufficient, and is now in due season passing out of mind with the fulfilment of its purpose. Very little of his poetry can be expected to survive our century. Burns will live with the language; but it must be remembered that his poetry is not blossom and promise; it is consummate fruition, it points to the past more than to the future; it is the genial life, the heroism, the history, the song of his whole people for ages, gathered up and sublimated in and by one supreme man. This King of Scotland happened to come in the guise of a herald to England, but none the less was he a king, the last and greatest of a glorious line; and no other majesty than his own was behind the messenger. Shakespeare made perfect the English drama, and there has arisen no English drama since; Burns made perfect Scottish song, and there has arisen no Scottish song since; when the genius of a nation has attained (human) perfection in any one form and mode, it leaves to ambitious mediocrity all future rivalry with that monumental perfection, itself seeking to become perfect in some new form or mode.

Blake's first volume of poetry was printed (one cannot add *published*) in 1783, about the same time as the first volume of Cowper and a little before that of Burns; Crabbe's first popular poem, *The Village*, was printed in the same year. Seventeen years afterwards Hayley was in high repute, and Blake went to live near him to engrave illustrations for some of his works. The *Lyrical Ballads* of Coleridge and Wordsworth did not appear until 1798, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* until 1805. Byron was born in 1788, Shelley in 1792, Keats in 1796.

Shesidan?
 Massinger?
 Knowles?
 Talfourd?
 Jerrald?
 Author of
 P. Van der Meer?

The poems in this first volume had been written by Blake in the interval, 1768-1777, between the ages of eleven and twenty years.

Never, perhaps, was a book of verse printed more strange to the literature of its period; and one scarcely knows whether to account the novelty more or less wonderful because relative and not absolute, because the novelty of the long dead past come back to life rather than of a new future just born. The spirit of the great Elizabethan age was incarnate once more, speaking through the lips of a pure and modest youth. *My silks and fine array* might have been written by Shakespeare, by Beaumont and Fletcher, or by Sir Walter Raleigh. Its sweet irregular artless cadences are not more different from the sharp measured metallic ring of the rhymes of the scholars of Pope, than is its natural sentiment from the affected sentimentalities then in the mode. Of all the other eighteenth century writers, I think Chatterton alone (as in the Dirge in *Ella*) has anything kindred to it; and Chatterton was archaic consciously and with intent. The *Mad Song* immediately reminds us of the character assumed by Edgar in *Lear* (a common character in Shakespeare's time, else Edgar would not have assumed it), and of the old Tom o' Bedlam songs. In the fine specimen of these, preserved by the elder Disraeli in his *Curiosities of Literature*, three main elements can easily be distinguished; the grotesque but horrible cry of misery wrung from the heart of the poor half-witted, cruelly-treated vagabond; the intentional fooling of the beggar and mountebank, baiting for the charity that is caught with a laugh in its mouth, maddening for his bread; the genuine lunacy of a wild and over-excited imagination,

ungoverned so long that it is now quite ungovernable.
The first gives us such lines as these—

In the lovely lofts of Bedlam,
In stubble soft and dainty ;
 Brave bracelets strong,
 Sweet whips ding-dong,
And a wholesome hunger plenty.

The second such as these—

Of thirty bare years have I
Twice twenty been enragéd ;
 And of forty been
 Three times fifteen
In durance soundly cagéd.

The third such as these, which Edgar Allan Poe (a fine artist even in the choice of his mottoes) prefixed to his *Unparalleled Adventure of one Hans Pfaall*—

With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander ;
 With a burning spear,
 And a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander.

Or these—

I know more than Apollo ;
For oft when he lies sleeping,
 I behold the stars
 At mutual wars,
And the rounded welkin weeping.

As Tom o' Bedlams did not wander the country when Blake wrote, the elements of vagabondage and mountebankism are not in his piece. But as an expression of lunacy—the government of reason overthrown, and wild imagination making the anarchy more anarchic by its reign of terror—it is thoroughly of the old Elizabethan

strain. Here is a stanza which Edgar might have sung in the storm by the hovel on the heath—

Like a fiend in a cloud,
 With howling woe
 After night I do crowd,
 And with night will go ;
 I turn my back to the East
 Whence comforts have increased ;
 For light doth seize my brain
 With frantic pain.

Mark the appalling power of the verb *crowd*, revealing as by a lightning-flash the ruins of sane personality, haunted and multitudinous, literally *beside itself*. Not one poet in twenty would have dared to use the word thus, and yet (although a careless reader might think it brought in merely for the sake of the rhyme) it was the very word to use. The address *To the Muses*, sweet, calm, and masterly, as if the matured utterance of a conviction well pondered and of no recent date, yet written by a mere boy, embodies the essence of all that Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley many years afterwards taught and sang in vindication of Pre-Drydenism.

The poems in blank verse, *To the Evening Star*, *To Spring*, and *To Summer*, are perhaps even more wonderful than those in rhyme, considering the age of the writer and the epoch of our literature in which they were produced. With the exception of the *Ode to Evening*, I do not remember any blank verse of the century at all similar to them in tone. And the Ode of Collins, fine as it is, suffers greatly in the comparison with them ; for it does not reach their noble breadth of conception and execution, and it is not quite free from then current affectations. These pieces are not perfect in art, but

they are perfect in the spirit of their art ; they have certain laxities and redundancies of rhythm, and are here and there awkward in diction, but such youthful sweet errors rather grace than spoil "that large utterance of the early gods." They have the grandeur of lofty simplicity, not of laboured pomp ; a grandeur like that which invests our imaginations of the patriarchs ; by a well, beneath a palm tree, stands one who wears but a linen turban and a simple flowing robe, and who but watches browsing sheep and camels drinking, yet no modern monarch, however gorgeously arrayed and brilliantly surrounded, can compare with him in majesty.

The Selections from the first volume printed by Blake include extracts from a dramatic work, *Edward the Third*. It was an attempt to revive the great English Historical Drama ; an attempt which failed, and of which all repetitions are pretty sure to fail : the English Historical Drama flourished in a period whose history was itself dramatic, and such a period is not likely to revolve again on our England. But one piece from this drama I must quote at length, and it is hardly rash to prophesy that this same piece will be quoted at length for many generations to come in all worthy books of specimens of the choicest British poetry. The time is the eve of Cressy, the scene is the camp of Edward : a Minstrel sings :—

O Sons of Trojan Brutus, clothed in war,
 Whose voices are the thunder of the field,
 * * * * *
 Your ancestors came from the fires of Troy
 (Like lions roused by lightning from their dens,
 Whose eyes do glare against the stormy fires),
 Heated with war, filled with the blood of Greeks,
 With helmets hewn, and shields covered with gore ;
 In navies black, broken with wind and tide.
 * * * * *

They landed in firm array upon the rocks
 Of Albion ; they kissed the rocky shore :
 " Be thou our mother and our nurse," they said,
 " Our children's mother ; and thou shalt be our grave,
 The sepulchre of ancient Troy, from whence
 Shall rise cities, and thrones, and awful powers."

* * * * *
 Our fathers swarm from the ships. Giant voices
 Are heard from out the hills ; the enormous sons
 Of Ocean run from rocks and caves ; wild men,
 Naked, and roaring like lions, hurling rocks,
 And wielding knotty clubs, like oaks entangled,
 Thick as a forest ready for the axe.

* * * * *
 Our fathers move in firm array to battle ;
 The savage monsters rush like roaring fire,
 Like as a forest roars with crackling flames
 When the red lightning borne by furious storm
 Lights on some woody shore, and the parched heavens
 Rain fire into the molten raging sea.

* * * * *
 Our fathers, sweating, lean on their spears and view
 The mighty dead : giant bodies streaming blood,
 Dread visages frowning in silent death.
 Then Brutus speaks, inspired ; our fathers sit
 Attentive on the melancholy shore.
 Hear ye the voice of Brutus : " The flowing waves
 Of Time come rolling o'er my breast," he said,
 " And my heart labours with futurity.
 Our sons shall rule the empire of the sea,
 Their mighty wings shall stretch from East to West ;
 Their nest is in the sea, but they shall roam
 Like eagles for their prey. * *

* * * * *
 " Our sons shall rise from thrones in joy, each one
 Buckling his armour on ; Morning shall be
 *Prevented by the gleaming of their swords,
 And Evening hear their songs of victory.

* * * * *
 " Freedom shall stand upon the cliffs of Albion,

* *Prevented*, I need hardly say, is used here in the old sense of
anticipated.

Casting her blue eyes over the green ocean ;
Or, towering, stand upon the roaring waves,
Stretching her mighty spear o'er distant lands,
While with her eagle wings she covereth
Fair Albion's shore and all her families."

This is the song of the Minstrel as given in the Selections. I have the highest esteem for the taste and judgment of Mr. Dante G. Rossetti, and the whole reading public owes him no common debt of gratitude for his work in the second volume as well as for the Supplementary Chapter in the first. It is probable, it is almost certain, that he has published quite as much of Blake's poetry and prose as it was prudent to publish experimentally after the neglect of eighty years. But if the above interlineal points mark omissions, the omitted passages should be re-instated in the next edition ; the whole of this Song, as it stands in Blake's earliest volume or in manuscript, should be given at any rate in an Appendix if not in the body of the work. For this Chant belongs to the whole British people ; it is one of the most precious among the most precious heirlooms bequeathed to us by our forefathers ; it is a national jewel of such magnificence that no one man, however honest and skilful, can be trusted to cut it and set it in accordance with his private opinion.

We English are surely a strange people. Pictures beyond price are bequeathed to us, and our first step towards disposing of them satisfactorily is to bury them away where they cannot be seen. A Song is chanted for us which should thrill and swell every native heart with patriotic pride, a Song great with the grandeur of our national life and history for three millenniums of legends and annals and journals, a Song heroic as Cressy,

sublime as Trafalgar ; and for fourscore years we leave it to that oblivion of oblivions which has never had any remembrance. The poet lives forty years after giving this glorious Song to his people, devotedly loyal to his highest inspirations, pure, poor, obscure ; and when he dies, it is here and there casually remarked that a clever madman has at length reached the sanity of the grave. Again forty years come and go ere a few admirers worthy of him they admire can venture with much diffidence (surely but too well-founded !) to bespeak the favour of his people for this Song, in which he has added a great and burning light to their illustrations the most splendid, and for other songs in which he has given them the seed whose harvest is likely to be the wealth and spiritual subsistence of generations yet unborn.

When Blake wrote this, however young in years, he was undoubtedly mature ; as Keats when he wrote *Hyperion*, as Shelley when he wrote *Adonais* or *The Triumph of Life*. We shall all soon know it by heart, and cherish it in our hearts, with the speeches of Henry at Agincourt and the *Scots wha hae* of Burns, with *Campbell's Mariners of England* and Robert Browning's *Home Thoughts from the Sea* ; and then we shall feel and know that for us, it is perfect beyond criticism, except the criticism of reverent interpretation. It is Titanic, and it cleaves to its Mother Earth like a Titan, like a mountain, like a broad oak-tree ; and the grandeur of its strength is the grandeur of a gnarled oak whose vigorous life bursts through all conventional symmetries, the grandeur of a mountain which the central fires have heaved into lines enormous and savagely irregular.

Many years afterwards, in 1789, when Blake was thirty-two, the *Songs of Innocence* appeared ; and we

learn from them the strange fact that he who was mature in his childhood and youth became in his manhood a little child. A little child, pure in soul as the serenest light of the morning, happy and innocent as a lamb leaping in the meadows, singing all its joy in the sweetest voice with that exquisite infantine lisp which thrills the adult heart with yearning tenderness.* The

* "Let the reader try to breathe like a child, and let the auditors of the breath decide whether he succeeds or no. There is indeed in adult breath such a peopling of multitudinous thoughts, such a tramp of hardness and troubles, as does not cede to the attempt to act the infantine even for a moment." (Dr. J. J. Garth Wilkinson : *The Human Body and its Connexion with Man*, p. 98, note.) What is true of common breathing, is true more conspicuously of breathing idealised and harmonised, of the breathing of song in which psychical have superseded the physical rhythms. The adult cannot sing like a child ; but Blake in these Songs does so : he did not *act* the infantine, for he *was* infantine, by a regeneration as real while as mysterious as ever purest saint experienced in the religious life. And this regeneration, so far as we can learn, was effected without the throes of agony and doubt and despair which the saints all pass through in being born again.

I am merely writing a few remarks on the poet, not sketching the life and character of the man ; but I may be allowed to call the attention of readers to this wonderful life and character. Blake was always poor in world's wealth, always rich in spiritual wealth, happy and contented and assured, living with God. As to his soul's salvation, I do not believe that he ever gave it a thought ; any more than a child thinks of the question whether its loving parents will continue to feed and clothe and cherish it. He had none of the feverish raptures and hypochondriac remorse which even in the best of those who are commonly called saints excite a certain contemptuous pity in the midst of our love and admiration : he was a thoroughly healthy and happy religious soul, whose happiness was thoroughly unselfish and noble. As to the "Christian Evidences," as they are termed, of which the mass of good people are so enamoured, in trying to argue themselves and others into a sort of belief in a sort (and such a sort !) of deity ; he would have no more dreamed of appealing to them than he would have

Introduction, The Lamb, The Chimney Sweeper, the Laughing Song, A Cradle Song, Holy Thursday, Infant Joy, The Divine Image; what holy and tender, and beautiful babe-lullabies, babe joy-songs, are these! The ideal Virgin Mother might have sung them to her infant; lambs, and doves, and flowers might comprehend

tried elaborately to argue himself into belief in the existence of the sun. "I feel the warmth, I see the light and see by the light: what do you want to argue about? You may call it sun, moon, comet, star, or Will-o'-the-wisp, if so it pleases you; all I know and care for is this, that day by day it warms and lights me." Such would have been the sum of his reply to any questioner; for he was emphatically a seer, and had the disdain of all seers for the pretensions of the gropers and guessers who are blind. Like Swedenborg, he always relates things heard and seen; more purely a mystic than Swedenborg, he does not condescend to dialectics and scholastic divinity. Those who fancy that a dozen stony syllogisms seal up the perennial fountain of our deepest questionings, will affirm that Blake's belief was an illusion. But an illusion constant and self-consistent and harmonious with the world throughout the whole of man's life, wherein does this differ from a reality? Metaphysically we are absolutely unable to prove any existence: we believe that those things really exist which we find pretty constant and consistent in their relations to us,—a very sound practical but very unsound philosophical belief. Blake and Swedenborg and other true mystics (Jesus among them) undoubtedly had senses other than ours; it is as futile for us to argue against the reality of their perceptions as it would be false in us to pretend that our perceptions are the same. As, however, Blake was supremely a mystic, it is but fair to add that he (and the same may be affirmed of Jesus) was unlike common Christians as thoroughly as he was unlike common Atheists; he lived in a sphere far removed from both. In the clash of the creeds, it is always a comfort to remember that sects with their sectaries, orthodox and heterodox, could not intersect at all if they were not in the same plane. Blake's esteem for argumentation may be read in one couplet:

If the sun and moon should doubt,
They'd immediately go out.

them; they are alone in our language, which they glorify by revealing its unsuspected treasures of heavenly innocence and purity. I transcribe one of the shortest of them, *Infant Joy*; a sudden throb of maternal rapture which we should have thought inarticulate—expressible only by kisses and caresses and wordless cradle-crooning—marvellously caught up and rendered into Song.

“ I have no name,
 I am but two days old.”
 What shall I call thee ?
 “ I happy am,
 Joy is my name.”
 Sweet joy befall thee.

Pretty joy !
 Sweet joy, but two days old,
 Sweet joy I call thee :
 Thou dost smile,
 I sing the while,
 Sweet joy befall thee.

Five years later come the *Songs of Experience*, and the singer is an older child, and even a youth, but not yet a man. The experience is that of a sensitive and thoughtful boy, troubled by the first perceptions of evil where he has believed all good, thinking the whole world cruel and false since some playmate-friend has turned unkind, seeing life all desolate and blank since some coveted object has disappointed in the possession; in short, through very lack of experience, generalising one untoward event into a theory of life that seems more bitterly hopeless than grey-haired cynical pessimism. Even the *Garden of Love*, *The Human Abstract*, *The Two Songs*, *To Tirzah*, and *Christian Forbearance* (one of the keenest arrows of Beelzebub shot straight back with wounding scorn at the evil archer), are not in thought and experi-

ence beyond the capacity of meditative boyhood. *The Tiger* is a magnificent expression of boyish wonder and admiring terror. *The Crystal Cabinet* is a fairy dream of early youth; *The Golden Net* is a fine dream of adolescence. Perhaps in only three more of his briefer poems do we find Blake mature (it must be borne in mind that his second maturity unfolded itself in pictures rather than songs); *Broken Love*, *Auguries of Innocence*, and the Letter in verse, dated from Felpham, to his friend, Mr. Butts. These are mature as to their conception, as to the amount and quality of experience and thought involved in them, but occasionally very immature in execution. There is, indeed, one piece of twenty lines mature in every respect, although written so late as 1807: I mean the verses to Queen Charlotte with his illustrations of Blair's *Grave*:—

The door of death is made of gold,
That mortal eyes cannot behold;
But when the mortal eyes are closed,
And cold and pale the limbs reposed,
The soul awakes, and wondering sees
In her mild hand the golden keys.
The grave is Heaven's golden gate,
And rich and poor around it wait:
O Shepherdess of England's Fold,
Behold this gate of pearl and gold!

To dedicate to England's Queen
The visions that my soul hath seen,
And by her kind permission bring
What I have borne on solemn wing
From the vast regions of the grave,
Before her throne my wings I wave,
Bowing before my sovereign's feet;
The Grave produced these blossoms sweet,
In mild repose from earthly strife,
The blossoms of eternal life!

And here are a few more lines almost as majestically mature as one of his Inventions for the *Books of Job* :—

Jesus sat in Moses' chair ;
 They brought the trembling woman there :
 Moses commands she be stoned to death ;
 What was the sound of Jesus' breath ?
 He laid his hands on Moses' law :
 The ancient heavens in silent awe,
 Writ with curses from pole to pole,
 All away began to roll :
 " To be good only, is to be
 A God, or else a Pharisee."

The man who wrote this might well proclaim : " I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord."

Broken Love needs no comment here : Mr. W. M. Rossetti has done the best that could be done by the most subtle and patient sympathy to interpret it. I subjoin half-a-dozen lines from the *Auguries of Innocence* :

A Robin red-breast in a cage
 Puts all Heaven in a rage ;
 A dove-house full of doves and pigeons
 Shudders Hell through all its regions ;
 A skylark wounded on the wing
 Doth make a cherub cease to sing.

It has been objected (strangely enough, in *Macmillan's Magazine*) to such couplets as these, that they express a truth with such exaggerated emphasis as wholly to distort it, as to make it virtually an untruth. No objection could be more unwise, for it is the result of reading the author's intention precisely *backwards*. His object was not to expand a small fact into a universal truth, but to concentrate the full essence of a universal truth into a small fact. He was intent on making great laws port-

able, not little events insupportable.—“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”—“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”—“For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”—“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”—These texts from the mouth of one of the sublimest of mystics realise the very same object in the very same manner. The sharply cut symbol leaves a distinct and enduring impression, where the abstract dogma would have perhaps made no impression at all. Briefly, in almost every couplet of this poem, Blake has attempted what all profound poets and thinkers have ever most earnestly attempted; to seize a rude but striking image of some sovereign truth, and to stamp it with roughest vigour on the commonest metal for universal circulation. To such attempts we owe all the best proverbs in the world; the abounding small currency of our intellectual commerce, more invaluable essential to our ordinary daily business than nuggets of gold, than rubies, and pearls, and diamonds.

As to the longer poems produced after the *Songs of Experience—Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Europe, Jerusalem, Ahania, Urizen, etc.*—the Selections given by Mr. Gilchrist are not sufficient to enable one to form a settled opinion. This may be said; that a careful

study of the whole of them, in the order of the years in which they were written, would probably reveal that they are much less wild and incoherent than even Mr. Gilchrist supposed. Every man living in seclusion and developing an intense interior life gradually comes to give a quite peculiar significance to certain words, and phrases, and emblems. Metaphors which to the common bookwrights and journalists are mere handy counters, symbols almost as abstract and unrelated in thought to the things they represent as are the x and y and z used in solving an algebraic problem, are for *him* burdened with rich and various freights of spiritual experience; they are ships in which he has sailed over uncharted seas to unmapped shores, with which he has struggled through wild tempests and been tranced in divine calms, in which he has returned with treasures from all the zones; and he loves them as the sailor loves his ship. His writings must thus appear, to any one reading them for the first time, very obscure, and often very ludicrous: the strange reader sees a battered old hull, where the writer sees a marvellous circumnavigation. But we ought not to be kept from studying these writings by any apparent obscurity and ludicrousness, if we have found in the easily comprehended vernacular writings of the same man (as in Blake's we certainly *have* found) sincerity and wisdom and beauty. Nor is it probable that even the most mysterious works of Blake would prove more difficult to genuine lovers of poetry than many works of the highest renown prove to nine-tenths of the reading public.

Sie haben dich, heiliger Hafis,
 Die mystische Zunge genannt;
 Und haben, die Wortgelehrten,
 Den Werth des Worts nicht erkannt.

For many intelligent persons Carlyle at his best is almost or quite as unintelligible as if he were using an unknown language; and the same may be asserted of Shelley and Robert Browning. (I do not select lofty *old* names, because in their cases the decisions of authoritative judges accumulating throughout centuries overawe our common jurymen into verdicts wise without understanding; so that a dullard can speak securely of the sublimity of Milton, for example, although we are pretty certain that he never got through the first book of the *Paradise Lost*, and that he would find himself in a Slough of Despond when twenty lines deep in the opening passage of *Samson Agonistes*.) Indeed, I doubt whether it would be an exaggeration to assert that, for a very large majority of those who are accounted educated and intelligent people, poetry in itself is essentially an unknown tongue. They admire and remember a verse or a passage for its wit, its cleverness, its wisdom, its clear and brief statement of some fact, its sentiment, its applicability to some circumstance of their own life, its mention of some classic name, its allusion to some historical event; in short, for its associations and not for its poetry *per se*. Yet assuredly there are still men in England with an infallible sense for poetry, however disguised and however far removed from ordinary associations; men who know Shakespeare in despite of the commentators, and understand Browning in contempt of the critics, and laugh quietly at the current censures and raptures of the Reviews: and these men would scarcely consider it a waste of time to search into the meaning of the darkest oracles of William Blake.

I wish to add a few words on the relations subsisting between our author and succeeding English poets. In

his early maturity, as a re-incarnation of the mighty Elizabethan spirit, the first fruit of a constructive after a destructive period, his affinity to the great poets who flourished a few years before his death (he died in 1827) will be readily understood. Thus in the Minstrel's Song, before quoted, we at once discern that the rhythm is of the same strain as the largest utterance of Marlowe and Webster and Shakespeare precedent, and as the noblest modern exemplar the blank verse of *Hyperion* subsequent.* It is not, however, in this early maturity, but in his second childhood and boyhood and youth, when he was withdrawn from common life into mysticism, when moonlight was his sunlight, and water was his wine, and the roses red as blood were become all white as snow, in the *Songs of Innocence*, the *Songs of Experience*, and the *Auguries of Innocence* (always *Innocence*, mark, not *Virtue*) that the seeds may be traced of much which is now half consciously struggling towards organic perfection, and which in two or three generations may be crowned with foliage and blossoms and fruit as the Tree of Life for one epoch.

The essence of this poetry is mysticism, and the essence of this mysticism is simplicity. The two meanings in which this last word is commonly used—the one reverential, the other kindly contemptuous—are severally appropriate to the most wise and the least wise mani-

* Keats avowed imitation of Milton in the structure of his rhythm. Similarity to the Council in Pandemonium there of course could not but be in the Council of the overthrown Titans; but the verse of Keats (if I have any ear and intelligence for verse) is as different from the verse of Milton as with the same language and the same metrical standard it possibly could be. It is in my judgment even more beautiful and more essentially powerful and sublime than Milton's.

festations of this spirit of mysticism. It sees, and is continually rapturous with seeing, everywhere correspondence, kindred, identity, not only in the things and creatures of earth, but in all things and creatures and beings of hell and earth and heaven, up to the one father (or interiorly to the one soul) of all. It thus ignores or pays little heed to the countless complexities and distinctions of our modern civilisation and science, a knowledge of which is generally esteemed the most useful information and most valuable learning. For it "there is no great and no small;" in the large type of planets and nations, in the minute letters of dewdrops and worms, the same eternal laws are written, and merely as a matter of convenience to the reader is this or that print preferable to the other. And the whole universe being the volume of the Scriptures of the living word of God, this above all is to be heeded that man should not dwell contented on the lovely language and illustrations, but should live beyond these in the sphere of the realities which they signify. It is passionately and profoundly religious, contemplating and treating every subject religiously, in all its excursions and discursions issuing from the soul to return to the soul, alone, from the alone, to the alone; and thus it is by no means strict in its theology, being Swedenborgian in one man and Pantheistic in another, while in the East it has readily assimilated Buddhism and Brahminism and Mohammedanism. Its supreme tendency is to remain or to become again childlike, its supreme aspiration is not virtue, but innocence or guilelessness: so that we may say with truth of those whom it possesses, that the longer they live the younger they grow, as if "passing out to God by the gate of birth, not death."

These few hints may serve as points of departure for some slender lines of relation between William Blake the Second and the principal subsequent poets. It must be borne in mind that the object here is not a survey of the full circle of the powers of any of these poets; they may be very great or very small in various other respects, while very small or very great in respect of this mystical simplicity. The heads of Da Vinci and Titian and Rembrandt, the bodies of Correggio and Rubens, would all count for nothing were we instituting a comparison between the old masters simply as painters of the *sky*.

Wordsworth ever aspired towards this simplicity, but the ponderous pedantry of his nature soon dragged him down again when he had managed to reach it. He was a good, conscientious, awkward pedagogue, who, charmed by the charms of childhood, endeavoured himself to play the child. Were it not rather too wicked, I could draw from Æsop another excellent illustration. He was not wrong when he proclaimed himself eminently a teacher; 'tis a pity that six days of the seven his teaching was of the Sunday-school sort.

Coleridge had much of this simplicity. In the *Ancient Mariner* it is supreme; in *Christabel* it does not lack, but already shows signs of getting maudlin; afterwards, *Lay Sermons* with Schelling and the Noetic Pentad almost or quite extinguished it. He was conscious of the loss, as witness the lines in his great Ode—

And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man.

Scott, a thoroughly objective genius, lived and wrote altogether out of the sphere of this simplicity. He had a simplicity of his own, the simplicity of truthfulness

and power in his "magnificent and masculine grasp of men and things." Expansive not intensive, he developed no interior life but diffused himself over the exterior life. His poetry is of action, not of thought; he is as a mighty and valiant soldier, whom we seek on the field of battle, not in the school of the prophets.

Byron had it not at all. He is great, exceedingly great; but great as the expression of intense life and of such thought only as is the mere tool and weapon of life, never great as the expression of thought above and beneath life commanding and sustaining it. He had just ideality enough to shed a poetic glow upon powers and passions all essentially commonplace but very uncommonly vigorous, overflowing with the energy of dæmonic possession—an energy most mysterious, but in itself most impatient of mysticism.

24 Keats, who shall dare to judge? I doubt not that everything pure and beautiful would have had its season in him who, dying at twenty-four, wrote *Hyperion* a few years after *Endymion*. But this plastic genius would have proceeded in triumphant transmigrations through all fairest forms ere it could have found eternal tranquillity in the soul of all form. Had he been spared, all analogies, I think, point to this end.

Shelley possessed, or rather was possessed by, this simplicity to the uttermost. Although he and Keats were twin-brothers, Greeks of the race of the gods, their works do not resemble but complement each other. The very childlike lisp which we remarked in Blake is often observable in the voice of Shelley, consummate singer as he was. The lisp is, however, not always that of a child; it is on several occasions that of a missionary seeking to translate old thoughts from his rich and exact

native tongue into the dialect poor and barbarous of his hearers. He (while doing also very different work of his own) carries on the work begun by Blake, sinking its foundations into a deeper past, and uplifting its towers into a loftier future. Both Shelley and Keats are still so far beyond the range of our English criticism that they would not have been mentioned thus cursorily here had it been possible to omit them.*

Tennyson has no more of this simplicity than had

* Perhaps the astonishing difference in kind between these glorious poets and their contemporaries can best be put in clear light by thus considering them young Greeks of the race of the Gods, born three thousand years after their time, in Christian England. Shelley has been called *The Eternal Child*, and Keats, *The Real Adonis*; and Novalis says well, "Children are ancients, and youth is antique" (*Die Kinder sind Antiken, Auch die Jugend ist antik*: Vol. 3, p. 190). The ideas and sentiments of the race among whom they were reared were naturally strange and in many respects repugnant to them both. Keats simply ignoring the Bumbleism and Christianity, except in so far as the Bumbleism obstructed his poetic career, unperturbed save by the first throes of creative art, developed himself in the regions from which he sprang; Pagan and Hellenic in his themes, his ideas, his perceptions, his objects. Shelley, on the other hand, started from the time and place of his birth to reach the old dominions of his ancestry. In this enterprise he had to conquer and destroy the terrible armies of fanaticism, asceticism, cant, hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness, lording it over England; and at the same time, the spirituality of the new religion, the liberty and equality and fraternity of the new political systems, all things lovely and true and holy of the modern life he would bear with him for the re-inspiration of the antique. He aspired not to a new Jerusalem in the heavens, but to a new Hellenic Metropolis on Earth: he looked for redemption and victory, not to Christ on Calvary, but to Prometheus on Caucasus.

These young Greeks could not live to old age. The gloom and chill of our English clime, physical and moral and intellectual, could not but be fatal to these children of the sun. England and France are so proudly in the van of civilisation that it is impossible for a great poet to live greatly to old age in either of them.

? Hugo
Tennyson
Brown

Byron : his chief youthful fault was such a young ladyish affectation as could not exist together with it. But he is fully aware of its value, and woos it like a lover, in vain, as Byron wooed it in the latter parts of *Childe Harold* and in *Manfred*. Perhaps each of them should be credited with one great exception, in addition to a few short lyrics ; Tennyson with the *Lotus Eaters*, Byron with the *Dream*. Scarcely any other artist in verse of the same rank has ever lived on such scanty revenues of thought (both pure, and applied or mixed) as Tennyson. While it cannot be pretended that he is a great sculptor, he is certainly an exquisite carver of luxuries in ivory ; but we must be content to admire the caskets, for there are no jewels inside. His meditation at the best is that of a good leading-article ; he is a pensioner on the thought of his age. He is continually petty with that littleness of the second degree which makes a man brag aloud in avoiding some well-known littleness of the first degree. His nerves are so weak that any largish event—a Crimean War, or a Volunteer Movement—sets him off in hysterics. Nothing gives one a keener insight into the want of robustness in the educated English intellect of the age, than the fact that nine-tenths of our best known literary men look upon him as a profound philosopher. When wax-flowers are oracular oaks, Dodona may be discovered in the Isle of Wight, but hardly until then. Mr. Matthew Arnold's definition of "distilled thought in distilled words" was surely suggested by the processes and productions of a fashionable perfumer ? A great school of the poets is dying out : it will die decently, elegantly, in the full odour of respectability, with our Laureate.

Robert Browning, a really great thinker, a true and

splendid genius, though his vigorous and restless talents often overpower and run away with his genius so that some of his creations are left but half redeemed from Chaos, has this simplicity in abundant measure. In the best poems of his last two works, *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ*, its light burns so clear and steadfast through the hurrying clouds of his language (Tennyson's style is the polished reflector of a lamp) that one can only wonder that people in general have not yet recognised it. I cannot recommend a finer study of a man possessed by the spirit of which I am writing than the sketch of Lazarus in Browning's *Epistle of Karshish, an Arab Physician*.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, also, had much of it, yet never succeeded in giving it fair expression. The long study of her sick-bed (and her constant chafing against the common estimate of the talents and genius of her sex) overcharged her works with allusions and thoughts relating to books, and made her style rugged with pedantry. She was often intoxicated, too, with her own vehemence. *Aurora Leigh* sets out determined to walk the world with the great Shakespearean stride, whence desperate entanglement of feminine draperies and blinding swirls of dust. The sonnets entitled *From the Portuguese*, reveal better her inmost simple nature.

Emerson stands closest of all in relation to Blake, his verse as well as his essays and lectures being little else than the expression of this mystical simplicity. Were he gifted with the singing voice we should not have to look to the future for its supreme bard. But whenever he has sung a few clear sweet notes, his voice breaks, and he has to recite and speak what he would fain chant.

His studies, also, have somewhat injured his style with technicology, making him in his own despite look at Nature through the old church and school windows, often when he should be with her in the rustic air. In some of his shorter poems, however, and in the snatches of Orphic Song prefixed to some of his essays (as *Compensation, Art, History, Heroism*), any one with ears to hear may catch pregnant hints of what poetry possessed by this inspiration can accomplish, and therefore *will* accomplish; for no pure inspiration having once come down among men ever withdraws its influence until it has attained (humanly) perfect embodiment.

In eighty years the influence of this spirit has swelled from the *Songs of Innocence* to the poems of Emerson—a rapid increase of the tide in literature. Other signs of its increase meet us everywhere in the best books of verse published during the last few years. And perchance the increase has been even more rapid than the most of us have opportunity to learn, for we are informed by Mr. Rossetti that James John Garth Wilkinson has not only edited a collection of Blake's Poems, but has himself produced a volume of poems entitled *Improvisations of the Spirit*, bearing a strong family likeness to those of Blake; and it may be that Wilkinson has the singing voice which Emerson has not. It would be a boon to the public, at any rate, to make these two volumes easily accessible.

Emerson and Garth Wilkinson, the former undoubtedly the supreme thinker of America, the latter as undoubtedly second to none in England, are surely in themselves sufficient attestation to the truth and depth of the genius of their forerunner, William Blake.

He came to the desert of London town,
 Grey miles long ;
 He wandered up and he wandered down,
 Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,
 Mirk miles broad ;
 He wandered up and he wandered down,
 Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind
 In this desert of brick and stone :
 But some were deaf and some were blind,
 And he was there alone.

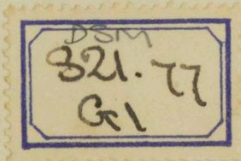
At length the good hour came ; he died,
 As he had lived, alone :
 He was not missed from the desert wide,
 Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

1865.

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