

SHELLEY.*

IT is now well nigh a score of years since Shelley sailed from Leghorn, for Lerici, in that treacherous boat which sank, with all on board, to the bottom of the Mediterranean. Long since, have partisan critics ceased their attempts to cut off from all sympathy, and chance of fame, one, whose life of scarce thirty years was yet too long for the success of their unworthy endeavors. No longer is the name of Shelley cast out from English society, or mentioned but with the expression of bitter and undisguised contempt. A late number of one of the leading British journals has, at length, acknowledged the preëminence of his genius: and hardly an Englishman now gazes at the pyramid of Caius Cestius, beneath the walls of Rome, who does not also turn a subdued eye towards the spot, that "might make one in love of death, to think one should be buried in so sweet a place," where, by the side of his friend Keats, lies the ashes of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

And now that the prejudice, which Shelley's career so naturally excited, has in a great measure died away; and now that, with the publication of these Poems and Essays, the evidence has closed, which, at least the present generation is to have, in making up its judgment upon the merits and demerits of their author, we propose to lay before our readers a brief sketch of, particularly, his character and opinions. It is generally acknowledged at present, that during Shelley's lifetime his poetical productions were most wrongfully cried down by critics, who possessed not a tittle of the genius they so designedly ignored; that great as were his youthful follies, the manner in which he was commonly treated was as unkind and ungenerous, as it was injurious; and that damnable as were his errors, some of those, who were the first to throw their stone at him, would have derived benefit from but touching the border of his garment. We do not wish

*1. The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. London. 1840.

2. Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments, by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard. 1840.

to palliate the poet's unpardonable offences; nor do we design to prove the unbeliever to have been a Christian; but we think it merely an act of justice and charity, to attempt to disinter his excellencies from the obscurity to which they have too long been consigned. And, surely, there should be no office more grateful than that of enlarging the sphere of human charity, by recalling to memory the smallest degree of virtue in those great men who have delighted us in song, instructed us in wisdom, or benefited us by action.

The complete works of Shelley have been presented to the public by his widow, unaccompanied by a full account of his life. The Editor has not only not given us the biographical information necessary for the formation of a sure judgment concerning the entire character and conduct of her late husband; but has even cut off all our expectation of ever receiving such a desirable bequest. Those actions therefore of Shelley, performed during his minority, which have left in public estimation a stain upon his name, have not been cleared up. What palliating circumstances might have existed; what extraordinary temptations may, in any slight degree, have extenuated his failings; what, after all, were the true motives from which alone his acts derived their moral character; of all this, quite the kernel of the whole matter, we still remain in ignorance. From all the evidence there is in the case, we are permitted to believe that the great practical mistakes which marred the daily beauty of Shelley's life, owed their origin, in a very remarkable degree, to antecedent theoretical mistakes. Touching this point, Moore has given us the following interesting testimony.

"Though never personally acquainted with Mr. Shelley, I can join freely with those who most loved him in admiring the various excellencies of his heart and genius; and lamenting the too early doom that robbed us of the mature fruits of both. His short life had been like his poetry, a sort of bright erroneous dream, false in the general principles upon which it proceeded, though beautiful and attaching in most of its details. Had full time been allowed for the over-light of his imagination to have been tempered down by the judgment which, in him, was still in reserve, the world at large would have been taught to

pay that high homage to his genius which those only who saw what he was capable of can now be expected to accord to it.*

It seems to have been from lack of that judgment which was "still in reserve," together with excess of imagination, quick impulses, and an extraordinary love of intellectual freedom—not from gross passions and a vicious temper, that proceeded the numerous practical errors which impaired both the happiness and usefulness of his life. Lord Byron, who lived on terms of intimacy with him, in Italy, and who, amid his career of vulgar and desperate dissipation in that country, was more restrained, perhaps, by the purity of Shelley's counsels and example than by any other influences, said of him, "you were all mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the best and least selfish man I ever knew." Those who knew him best, were won by his estimable qualities, to speak of him in terms of highest praise: and the tender, constant, and passionate devotion he exhibited for the amiable and intelligent partner of his life, seems to have been most generously returned. Mr. Trelawney, a friend of his, pronounced him to be "a man absolutely without selfishness." Leigh Hunt, who was long and most familiarly acquainted with him, and has borne testimony to the excellence of his private character, in his "Recollections of Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries," among other things, said, "he was pious towards nature, towards his friends, towards the whole human race, towards the meanest insect of the forest."

Though frugal in his personal habits, he was disinterestedly generous to his friends, to the poor, and the stranger. His temper, though naturally irritable, became sweet. While cherishing a cosmopolitan benevolence for the oppressed nations, unlike most world-reformers, he was kindly and affectionate to his immediate associates; his boldness of purpose and action was tempered by an almost feminine gentleness. The ardor, with which he maintained and carried out in action his peculiar views, was relieved by mild forbearance towards those from whom he differed. Though subject to hot and tumultuous impulses, his tastes

* Moore's Life of Byron, vol. ii. p. 424.

were pure, and his sensibilities delicate. However pertinacious in his attachment to personal liberty, bordering upon license, he was still not a trespasser upon the freedom and rights of others. He was refined without being unmanly; trembling from nervous excitability, yet resolute almost to stoicism; chaste by nature, and not by restraint; simple, firm, free, unsophisticated.

So much are we bound to say in Shelley's favor; while we most deeply regret that a misguided understanding, rather than a corrupt disposition, should have led him to embrace many principles as fatal to his own peace, as deleterious in their influences on society. To his principles, false or true, he was inviolably faithful. Having formed, when a schoolboy at Eton, an unfavorable opinion of the English system of *fagging*, he at once set on foot a conspiracy among his mates for resisting it. Sent to Oxford at the early age of sixteen, and being there taught the elements of logic, he proceeded to apply these principles to the investigation of theological subjects; and when conducted to skeptical results, immediately printed a dissertation on the being of a God, in which he advocated sentiments that the authorities required him to retract; and upon his refusal, expelled him from the university in his second term. At the age of seventeen or eighteen, he married the pretty daughter of a retired coffee-house keeper; and this Gretna-Green match not turning out happily, from the very great dissimilarity in the characters and dispositions of the parties, they soon separated by mutual consent. Meanwhile, Shelley, having embraced the views of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, respecting the institution of marriage, not long afterward, and before the suicide of his first wife, paid his addresses to and finally married Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Acting in these and other instances on false principles, he notwithstanding acted on those which had already obtained, and through life continued to preserve, full possession of his faith.

Engaging in philosophical speculations with a fearlessness which no consequences could intimidate, and a singleness of mind that no considerations of personal interest could seduce, Shelley committed the great mistake, frequent among young inquirers, but unfortunately by no means confined to them, of putting a too implicit trust in

the conclusions of his individual understanding. This stripling in his teens has his doubts about the infallibility of his teachers, notwithstanding the solemn authoritativeness of their decisions. This tyro in logic rejects, and rejects forever, the faith of his fathers, the belief of his countrymen, the dogmas current for centuries in the cloisters of Oxford, the creed supported by the sanctity, learning, wealth, and power of almost universal Christendom. This freshman at the university rejects it, and accepts, in exchange, the convictions of his untaught, unripe understanding. We are amazed at this precocious self-confidence. Since the world began, men of the highest capacity have espoused different sides of the same great questions. The various races, nations, centuries, have entertained views more or less peculiar, on matters of gravest concernment. Individuals of different temperaments, ages, sexes — individuals placed in dissimilar circumstances, dissimilarly educated, dissimilarly endowed, looking at truth from diverse points of view, have never agreed in their opinions, but, at most, and at best, have been able only to agree to differ. And yet in the face of this important fact, we find Shelley, and the great majority of men besides, doggedly and uncharitably attached to the conclusions of their individual understandings. Many think they do well, if they only look down with self-complacent contempt, more or less disguised, on all who have the infirmity, or fault, of looking out of their own eyes; while some have not been able to stop short of blackening the names, or burning the bodies, or even damning the souls, of the poor wretches, who did not please to be of their way of thinking. This opiniativeness, in men who have never had the means of learning any better, is, perhaps, not to be blamed; but in men, who are or aspire to be philosophers, it is pitiful.

Nowhere, perhaps, has this folly of wise minds been more conspicuous, than among the metaphysicians of Germany. Every system of philosophy, from that of Kant to that which Schelling still keeps in reserve, has constructed its foundations out of the ruins of its predecessors; and has claimed for itself to be the only true, orthodox system, without the pale of which there can be no saving knowledge. Doubtless every one — at least every one who knows anything about the matter — will acknowledge that

there has been a regular and necessary advancement in philosophical science, as from Thales to Kant, so from the latter to Hegel, and the Schelling that is to be. But what we condemn is, not that every new German metaphysician has claimed to have carried forward his science, but that he has authoritatively set up his system as that in which alone all the facts of human nature have been observed, and their relations harmoniously explained, and confidently looked on himself as the last of God's prophets, after whose day there would be an end of all signs, visions, and revelations. It would seem almost like a fantastic trick in nature, to have endowed those persons, who have showed the most incredulous skepticism towards other men's faiths, with the most superstitious credulity for their own; or rather, it would seem as though God bestowed upon the men of most original and powerful genius, at the same time, the sincerest and intensest self-trust.

Shelley shared largely in this infirmity of noble minds. The firmness with which he grasped the conclusions of his intellect, was not more remarkable, however, than the singleness of purpose and boldness of spirit with which he acted from them. But for the irresistible attachment, that was born with him, to freedom of faith, speech, and action, the boy of thirteen might have gained more prizes for writing Latin verses at Eton, than he actually did. At the university he was an apt scholar, and later in life showed himself to be such, by his acquisition of the German, Italian, French, Latin, and Greek languages, in the last of which he attained a high degree of proficiency, as well as by his acquaintance with metaphysics and natural philosophy, and he might have borne off blushing honors from Oxford. He was the eldest son of a Baronet, and instead of having been abandoned by him, after his expulsion from college, and his marriage, might at least have enjoyed the advantages of a support befitting the consequence of a young lord. He was offered a seat in parliament, and might have been one of the richest men in Sussex, could he only so far have compromised his principles, as to become the tool of a party. He had been endowed by nature with a graceful figure, with a face small, but beautifully turned, and full of sensibility, with a fair complexion, curl-

ing locks, and large, beaming eyes, and might possibly have won smiles from ladies of gentle blood and dazzling fortunes. He was a poet of highest song, and might have been flattered in newspapers and reviews, caressed in selectest circles, asked to dine at my lord's table, and walked daintily on flowers strewed in his way by beauty, wit, rank, and fashion. Thus would he have escaped the host of persecutors, who drove him from his country; he would have escaped the loss of his children by the first marriage, taken from him by the Court of Chancery on the alleged ground of his being an atheist; he would have escaped that sacrilegious blow, dealt by an Englishman personally unacquainted with him, who chanced to hear him mention his name for letters at a continental post-office; he would have escaped the paid and personal malice with which the London Quarterly so zealously supported the altars of Christ, the throne of England, and the critical chair of Mr. Gifford; he would have escaped the cut direct of Christian friends too fastidiously afraid of contamination, to have even their feet washed with the tears and wiped with the hair of such a sinner.

So much did Shelley sacrifice for principles — principles, alas, in too many instances, unsound and injurious. Still though disapproving these, and deprecating their influence on society, may we not commend the simplicity of heart, and heroism of character, with which he followed to their consequence the principles his judgment approved as just and fit? That the conclusions of a man's intellect should be erroneous, is indeed unfortunate; and generally a matter of blame; but that his heart be single, that his speech be sincere, that his acting be the full expression of his belief, that his force of passion support the unchangeableness of his will, so that its decrees come not short of the certainty of fate, that no soft whisper about forbidden fruit be permitted to foul the ear of his integrity, nor any selfish desire, covertly nestling in his bosom, to steal away the virginal purity of his disinterestedness — this is a matter of approval among all men, and enough to cover no small multitude of metaphysical sins. We may learn from Shelley other lessons, besides those of warning. And we wish that many a lazy advocate of orthodoxy would take of this unbeliever lessons in impetuosity. We wish

that those who in order to be virtuous lack but the courage to be natural, who in order to become saints and heroes even need but to be themselves, who from their youth up have kept all the commandments, save that of not truckling to public opinion, when false and tyrannical, would set themselves free and public opinion right, by imitating the intrepidity of this "sickly sentimentalist." One may learn from Hercules, to beard the lion; from Napoleon, at Lodi, to charge at the cannon's mouth; from Martin Luther, to throw his inkstand at the Devil; but from Shelley — he may learn, when armed with principles — still more when they are not false ones, to fear not even *public opinion*.

What the opinions were, which Shelley so boldly formed, and independently expressed, we have now more adequate means of ascertaining since the publication of his Essays and Letters. These disclose to us very fully the sentiments and convictions that made the man, and controlled his conduct.

In *Queen Mab*, which he wrote and printed at the age of eighteen — though he never published it — he denied the existence of a God, who created the world, and was clothed with the attributes usually assigned to him by Christians.

"Infinity within,
Infinity without, belie creation;
The exterminable spirit it contains
Is nature's only God."

In commenting on this passage, in his *Notes* to this Poem, he says, "this negation must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit, coeternal with the universe, remains unshaken."

This and other irreligious views expressed in *Queen Mab*, though modified, doubtless, with the enlargement of his experience and the development of his intellect, were, however, notwithstanding the representations sometimes made to the contrary, never essentially changed. For when in 1821 this poem was surreptitiously published by a London bookseller, Shelley wrote to the Editor of the *Examiner* as follows. "I doubt not but that the poem is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical

and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature. I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression; and I regret this publication not so much from literary vanity, as because I fear it is better fitted to injure than to serve the sacred cause of freedom." Here is nothing like a distinct disavowal of his early opinions. And in a private letter to John Gisborne, Esq., he wrote about the same time as follows; "for the sake of a dignified appearance, and because I wish to protest against all the bad poetry in *Queen Mab*, I have given orders to say that it is all done against my desire." From this, it appears, that his regret on account of the publication of the poem proceeded from other causes, than a fundamental change of belief.

The views of his later years respecting the Deity, not materially different from those of his youth, are quite distinctly expressed in his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, written in 1816. His belief in an all-pervading Spirit appears from the following lines.

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats, tho' unseen, among us."

From this spirit of Beauty which "to human thought is nourishment;" from this awful Loveliness to which he looked "to set this world free from its dark slavery," he invokes a blessing on himself in the concluding lines of the hymn.

"Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm, to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all human kind."

In his short essay on *Life*, Shelley takes a pantheistic view of things. The words *I*, and *you*, and *they* are, according to him, merely convenient grammatical devices, totally destitute of the exclusive meaning usually attached to them, and no more than marks to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Moreover he is an Idealist, receiving the Intellectual system as stated by Sir William Drummond, in his *Academical Questions*. He confesses that he is unable to refuse his assent to the con-

clusions of those philosophers, who assert that nothing exists, but as it is perceived. He declares that the difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought, vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas, and of external objects. Putting these two views together, the God of Shelley turns out to be none other than Shelley himself. For though he modestly denies that his mind is anything more than a portion of the one universal intelligence, yet as he maintains that nothing exists save in the mind's perception, it follows, of course, not only that no material body, but also no spiritual being, can be proved to exist beyond the limits of his own mind. The latter is as much an hypothesis as the former; both fictions of the mind, for which no satisfactory proof can be given. There would remain accordingly, though Shelley himself disallowed the inference, in the dread immensity of space, nought save this one solitary mind, nought else would remain during the ages of a lonely eternity. "Nothing exists but as it is perceived." The forms of friendship, the eyes of love, the shapes of dear familiar things, are all but in the mind's eye. Our beloved homes, the temples of God, the noble ruins of antiquity, our mother earth, with all her fair array of cities, and streams, and vales, and mountains, and overspreading sky, the very Deity himself, have not the substance of thinnest air, and mock the dearest hopes of the soul of man.

Though professing the greatest admiration of the moral principles of Jesus Christ, and being in the habit of reading with great delight many, particularly the poetical, parts of the Bible, Shelley entertained a decided repugnance to the doctrines of the New Testament, and to the doctrinal teachings of the Christian clergy. He considered the Christian Church as pledged for the maintenance of bigotry, and the suppression of free inquiry. By requiring unquestioning belief in an irrational scheme of theology, by inculcating implicit reliance on the superior sanctity and wisdom of those supernaturally called to be other men's counsellors, and by condemning to loss of reputation, or employment, or life even, with eternal punishment in the world to come, whomsoever embraced and acted upon principles at variance with the Pulpit and the Word, Shelley thought that the Church had been the nurse of pride,

intolerance and fanaticism. He affirmed the despotism of Christianity, which was eternal, to be worse even than the pernicious French and Material philosophy, that was but temporary. The only true religion, according to his view, was true love. Walking one day in the cathedral at Pisa, while the organ was playing, he said to Leigh Hunt, "What a divine religion might be found out, if charity were really made the principle of it instead of faith." So prejudiced was this unbeliever against Christianity, that he seems to have made little account of the salutary restraint it has imposed on the madness of human passion, the formal respect it has secured for virtue, even where failing to create a genuine devotion, the elevation of men from the dominion of sense to that of power unseen, and supernatural; moreover the consolations it has ministered to bereavement, the patience it has supported in sickness, the contentment it has cherished under poverty, and the hopes it has made to bloom upon the grave. Also did he leave quite out of view the inspiration which poetry has drawn, the themes painting has borrowed, the forms architecture has learned, and the sublime melodies that music has caught from Christianity. He had even lived in Italy, and still expressly asserted that the influence of Christianity upon the fine arts had been unfavorable; he had travelled in France and Germany, and asserted that its influence had been unfavorable to philosophy; born and bred an Englishman, he asserted that it had been unfavorable to civilization. He sighed over the fate of the Grecian republics, displaced by the prevalence of Roman and Christian institutions; and amid all the blessings of modern science, law, and religion, vainly wished back again the unreturning Past.

Among the Essays of Shelley, is a fragment of a treatise on Morals, by which we are particularly informed, respecting his views of the nature of virtue. The fragment has little worth, besides that of making us acquainted with the sentiments which Shelley himself entertained on this subject; and that also of proving that he possessed an insight into the springs of human character, which, when years had brought experience, and his understanding had more fully unfolded its resources, might perhaps have made a moralist out of the poet. He appears to have

taken a strong interest in speculations on morals, as we infer from the following passage in one of his letters. "I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter, for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled."

A virtuous action, according to his definition, is one designed and fitted to produce to the greatest number of persons the highest pleasure. The two constituent parts of virtue are benevolence, and justice; the former, the desire of being the disinterested author of good; and the latter, the desire of distributing this good among men, according to their claims and needs. By good, is meant that which produces pleasure; and by evil, that which produces pain. Shelley believed that the main aim of life should be the production and diffusion of the greatest amount of happiness. He did not, like Epicurus, make happiness to consist in sensual gratification; but in that enjoyment which accompanies the harmonious action of all the powers of man. Disallowing the gratification of no natural instinct, nor censuring the indulgence of passion and the senses, he still would subject the action of these baser parts of our nature to the control of enlightened reason and the most scrupulous conscientiousness. Every one of the faculties bestowed by God upon man should be allowed its just play and proportionate scope, the lower being subordinate to the higher, the sensual to the spiritual, and reason being enthroned sovereign of them all. Reason he placed on the summit of man, not conscience; because conscience is a feeling that is blind, and dependent for its action upon the understanding and reason, the decision, of which it follows, not guides. Other ends, which have been pointed out as the chief ones of life, were thought by him not to be ultimate. But when the greatest amount of the highest and truest happiness of which human nature is capable is aimed at, the mind is perfectly satisfied, asks no further questions, and is struck at once with the absurdity of still demanding a reason, why we ought to promote universal happiness.

In *Queen Mab*, Shelley calls necessity the mother of the world; and in the *Notes*, denies the self-determining

power of the human will. He held that as well in the spiritual as the natural world, every effect must have its antecedent cause; that motives are the causes of volitions, and that, according to the formula of President Edwards, the will is always as the strongest motive. We have no reason to believe that Shelley ever changed his sentiments on this point. On the contrary, in his *Speculations on Morals* he represents the absurdity of refusing to admit that human actions are necessarily determined by motives, as similar to that of denying the equal length of all the radii of a circle. The charge of fatalism has frequently been made against these views of the necessarians, who agree in denying the self-determining power of the will, but without discussing the soundness or unsoundness of either system we may take the liberty of stating our reasons for believing that they are not the same.

Fatalism is the belief, that the events which fill up our lives are determined by a will above us; necessity, that all these events take place according to the fixed laws of our nature. Fatalism teaches that let a man think, speak, or act, as he please, or not think, speak, or act at all, the issues of his life will be the same. Necessity teaches that our fate depends on our dispositions, judgments, and actions, modified by the natural influences of surrounding circumstances. Fatalism encourages a man to violate all laws human and divine, because in either case, he is sure of God's approval and his own. Necessity warns him that every transgression of a law of his being will, sooner or later, receive its punishment, and no observance ever lose its reward; that the man who neglects the cultivation of the higher parts of his nature will fail in spiritual power and true happiness, and that he who exercises the meaner parts, condemns himself to low pleasures and a base lot; it admonishes him that, by the improper indulgence of vulgar passions, he will become their degraded bondman, until they shall have run their course, or, perchance, some dormant spiritual energy have awaked from its slumber to disenthral their dominion; it cautions him against relying upon the interposition of a self-determining will, to rescue him from the temptations with which he has tampered, and to trammel up the consequence of his failings, or his crimes; in a word, it enjoins

the greatest care of one's intellectual and moral nature, by showing him, that he, and he only, is sure of his fortunes, who is sure of his capacity and his honor. The two systems have this point of union, that they both teach that God hath foreordained whatsoever things come to pass; but they differ fundamentally respecting the mode, in which the divine decrees are realized. The believers in the one system surrender their fates to chance; those in the other perceive their well-being to lie in the fulfilment of established law. The one doctrine dishonors all human agencies; the other acknowledges them to be the only means, by which are secured, or forfeited, the wisdom, virtue, and happiness of mankind.

We can conceive how Shelley, receiving the doctrines of those who deny the self-determination of the will, could still hold to a law of moral obligation. He, as well as the advocates of the opposite theory, could experience a pleasing satisfaction in acting according to the instructions of reason and the admonitions of conscience, and a feeling of painful degradation, in yielding to the suggestions of selfishness, or giving reins to the impulses of grovelling and destructive passions. This sense of pleasure and pain is the execution of a moral law, by which man's happiness is increased by acting in accordance with what in him is noblest, and diminished by sacrificing this high joy for the sake of selfish or sensual indulgence. The necessarian sees that he must take the consequences of his actions, and therein finds one of the strongest possible motives for giving good heed to them. The pains of life and the pangs of conscience, he does not indeed consider so much punishment, as admonitions; nor the delights of the mind, so much rewards, as encouragements. Remorse becomes, to him, regret, yet not the less painful, for his having acted from the lower, instead of the higher motives. The feeling of desert of praise is self-congratulation; of desert of blame, self-abhorrence. He does not hold himself accountable for what he has not the power to hinder, or help; but he does take the responsibility of whatever lies within the circumference of his utmost possibility.

In his *Essay on a Future State*, Shelley, arguing from reason and analogy, expresses views unfavorable to the future personal existence of the human soul. But the

essay is unfinished, and from several passages in his works, we are led to hope and believe that this fragment does not give his entire views on this subject. In one of his letters he writes, "the destiny of man can scarcely be so degraded, that he was born only to die." And in a journal are recorded the following thoughts, suggested by a dangerous exposure of himself and Mrs. Shelley at sea; "Death was rather a thing of discomfort and disappointment than terror to me. We should never be separated; but in death we might not know and feel our union as now. I hope — but my hopes are not unmixed with fear for what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die." Mrs. Shelley, in speaking of the fragment on a future state, says; "I cannot pretend to supply the deficiency, nor say what Shelley's views were — they were vague, certainly; yet as certainly regarded the country beyond the grave as by no means foreign to our interests and hopes. Considering his individual mind as a unit divided from a mighty whole, to which it was united by restless sympathies and an eager desire for knowledge, he assuredly believed that hereafter, as now, he would form a portion of that whole — and a portion less imperfect, less suffering, than the shackles inseparable from humanity impose on all who live beneath the moon." It appears therefore that, with respect to the question of immortality, Shelley's mind was in a state of doubt, though often cheered by earnest hopes, at the time when death unexpectedly settled the question which had puzzled his brief span of life.

Shelley left also some speculations on Metaphysics, more fragmentary, and of less value even than those on Morals. His nature contained not the stuff which metaphysicians are made of. Imagination indeed he had enough of, and no power is more necessary than this in philosophical studies. It is the pioneer of the philosophical faculties. It opens the way for observation and experiment, which left to themselves know not in what direction to proceed, and find their way, if at all, but slowly, and by accident. Truly, indeed, must observation and experiment closely follow, though they cannot well precede, the steps of the conceptive faculty; for it is they who are to test its guesses, and authoritatively decide upon their correctness or incorrectness. In this way have been made the greatest discove-

ries. But the trouble with Shelley would have been, that his imagination not being supported by a sound judgment, and its modes of action not being in harmony with the spirit and constitution of things, he would have stood a fair chance of guessing wrong. He would have displayed extraordinary fecundity in the production of erroneous hypotheses, with no gift of patience to subject them to the scrutiny of experiment. Besides, he would have been entirely wanting in the close and subtle logic, that makes the dialectician. He would have shared, with the great majority of his countrymen, their want of strict logical method, the surprising nonchalance with which they take for granted the premises of their arguments, the exceedingly tender examination through which popular axioms are made to pass in order to be admitted into the inexpugnable fortress of first truths. To the dialecticians of the broad land which lies between the Oder, the Danube, and the Rhine, have been bequeathed, it would seem, the pens of Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle.

But Shelley is better known as a disciple of social and moral Reform, than of metaphysics. He was offered a seat in Parliament; and at one time, had some thoughts of becoming a politician; but fortunately, did not. He possessed hardly judgment enough for the well-ordering of his own life, much less for the judicious management of public affairs. He would, indeed, have been superior to most politicians, by the circumstance of having principles of some sort, by which to direct his movements; but, unfortunately, they would very likely have been false principles. In the senate, he would have displayed more zeal for the interests of men, than knowledge of them; more hatred of the short-sighted and corrupt selfishness in the midst of which he would have found himself, than of skill to bring it into subserviency to his purposes; more eloquence in advocating schemes for the speedy reform of the wide world, than insight into the real pressing wants of society, and the practicable means of relief. He would have succeeded no better than young men have since in demonstrating the superiority, in the guidance of national councils, of youthful inexperience, presumption, and impetuosity, over the prudence, sobriety, and wisdom of age; and he would have distinguished himself, like other world-

reformers, in the art of diluting the substantial consistency of his benevolence, for the sake of doling out the more distant and remediless necessities, as well as by his aptness in overlooking home duties in his anxiety to extend the jurisdiction of his responsibility into the precincts of other men's concerns. Living at a time when the career of Napoleon was destroying many of the social and political forms in which society had existed since the middle ages, and inhaling freely the spirit of modern times, then first universally diffused, Shelley placed himself in the van of the revolutionary movement, and struck most passionately his lyre to celebrate the uprising of liberty in Spain, Greece, and Italy. Shelley was a radical of the school which seems not yet to have become quite extinct. He could not see that thrones and altars subserved any other than the purposes of tyranny; and he wished to have all men kings and priests for themselves. Having experienced, by his first marriage, the evils of ill sorted matches, and being possessed with the spirit of Milton's doctrines on divorce, together with the more extravagant notions of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, he openly advocated the substitution of the vow of love for the band of matrimony. Destitute of a true insight into the uses subserved by both poverty and riches in the system of economy, which God has established for the education and redemption of man, Shelley believed, with Sir Thomas More, in the desirableness of a community of property. What after the annihilation of these institutions, he expected to have remaining, we will not undertake to inform our readers. Certain, however, it is, that by these changes he expected men would be great gainers in the power of self-government, in genuine piety, in chastity, and in happiness. Believing evil not to be inherent in the system of things, but to be an accident which might be expelled by the force of the will of man, he eagerly maintained that, by the prevalence of the disinterested love which would everywhere spring up under the shelter of freer institutions, would be realized the renovation of nature, the perfection of man, and the defecation of human life of all its miseries.

The first mistake of this reformer was his over-estimate of the evils of the existing state of society. An invalid, he turned his mind too much from the consideration of the

happiness which smiled around the fireside of the poorest peasantry, from the comfortable degree of freedom enjoyed even beneath the eye of the most despotic princes of Europe, from the amount of genuine virtue, bred in retirement, and of fair character, then adorning the households of all classes and conditions. His melancholy eye was keenest to detect everywhere the evidences of oppression, misery, and vice; and to the man, whose eye has not light in itself, all things indeed are darkness. It is true, that society had outgrown some parts of the framework, which for centuries had encased it; but yet, not so as to occasion any very important hindrances to the liberal enjoyment of life, and the cultivation of enlightened character. The great and free soul is, indeed, always too large for the narrow rules of his times. But he does not so much need the support which factitious forms must minister to the immaturity of virtue, and to the imbecility of vice. He can walk alone, without help from stool, or staff. Yet while the few spirits who have travelled on in advance of their age, may find the old conventional regulations less suited to themselves than to their contemporaries generally, the great majority of men find their highest welfare in diverging but cautiously from the beaten paths of past custom, and are generally farthest both from harm and mischief, while content to graze within their accustomed length of tether. Besides, most of the forms of society which Shelley enumerated among inherited evils, have descended to us from remote centuries, only because they grew naturally out of the instinctive depths of humanity, and are destined alike for eternal duration and universal diffusion. For example, Shelley might have spared himself the pain he experienced in view of the unequal distribution of property. That poverty, for which no place can be found in the resplendent visions of a certain school of reformers, occupies a pretty important one in the great economy of God, would seem to be obvious enough from the simple fact, that the world over, from the beginning of time up to the present hour, men have been born, bred, and buried, in a condition not so far removed from starvation as from affluence. Our divine Maker seems hitherto to have thought that adversity had uses for man; that the soul might be rightly tempered by the ministry of sorrows;

that fortitude might be hardened by self-denial; health promoted by temperance; learning pricked on by indigence; invention quickened by necessity; virtue purified by suffering; and, in fine, the best interests of the world secured by obedience to that first great law, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." Besides, we are all poor. He feels his poverty, whose treasures are unequal to his desires. And when are they equal? Our plans outstrip our means; our wants increase with supply; by the cultivation of benevolence, is enlarged the sphere of our charities; by the refinement of our taste, are multiplied the objects demanded for its gratification; with the growth of industrial enterprise, the demand is heightened for larger and still larger capital; by the improvement of our intellect, are, an hundred fold, augmented the resources it would purchase from the costly labors of learning. There is little of much worth to man, but what he gets by his own labor, and little that he keeps, save by care; there is no situation in life walled in from the invasion of anxieties, sorrows, temptations, and toils as fatal—or rather as beneficial—as those which beset the door of poverty; and, in fact, the only satisfactory wealth to which man can attain, lies in resignation, in self-denial, in contentment, and in the joyous consciousness of physical and mental ability. Finally, neither the plan of Shelley, nor any that we have heard advocated, much less any one that has been reduced to practice, is adequate to feed indolence from the earnings of industry, to supply heedlessness with the resources of forecast, and lavish upon prodigality the treasures which the laws of nature promise to virtue.

The second mistake of Shelley lay in his proposed means of reformation. He proposed to change institutions, not men. He attributed to the oppressive weight imposed upon society by barbarous laws and customs, its grovelling tastes and degraded passions; and believed that with the bestowment of freer social, civil, and religious institutions would be given the virtue which overspreads life with blessings. That the only safe and the most important reform that can be effected in a nation, is a reform of the individuals who compose it, he did not perceive. Accordingly, we see him most interested in hailing the

outbreak of foreign revolutions, in cheating his hope with visions of Platonic republics, and in watching the progress of all the measures in parliament, which promised to change whatever was established in the social and political relations of his countrymen. Instead of endeavoring to improve men by cultivating their acquaintance, he courted the irresponsibility of cloistered seclusion, as appears from the following extract from one of his letters to his wife. "My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the floodgates of the world; I would read no reviews, and talk with no authors. If I dared trust my imagination, it would tell me that there are one or two chosen companions beside yourself, whom I should desire. But to this I would not listen." In the place of discharging the duties of a citizen of England, he travelled from place to place, and lived much upon the continent. His plans for reforming Eton, and Oxford, resulted only in his early removal from the former, and his expulsion from the latter. About all he did to improve the homes of England was, to make himself an outcast from his own. Instead of illustrating by his example the benefits of domestic virtue, he caused the children of his early marriage to be taken from him by the Court of Chancery, and broke, as we are left to suppose, the heart of his first wife, however much devotion he may have felt for the second. Instead of conforming so far to the requirements of public opinion, as to enable himself to hold a place in society, from which he might have exerted a reforming influence by his conduct, and have gained an unprejudiced hearing for his opinions, he fulminated, by the bold avowal of doctrines shocking to the moral sense of the community, a declaration of war against the very society he aimed to reform.

But notwithstanding the unsoundness of most of the views Shelley entertained respecting the advancement of society, and the mistakes in his mode of procedure, we must still acknowledge that views, similar to some entertained by him, have been adopted in modern legislation. Capital punishments, the abolition of which he advocated, have become less frequent; the rights of the people have since received a more full acknowledgment in the English

reform bill; the action of law has become more favorable to divorce, though the institution of marriage, it is hoped, will not be immediately dispensed with; the progress of civilization seems to have settled the maxim, that it is not so much the business of legislation to take care of the people, as to secure to them the opportunity of taking care of themselves, and that self-government, so far as it can be attained, is preferable to that of laws and constitutions. All the ameliorations of society seem to contribute to the independence of the individual. The modern applications of machinery tend to make him less dependent upon the labor of his fellow men; the diffusion of the means of education makes him rely less on the authority of the learned; the freedom of all trades and professions gives him a fair chance of securing a competency by his own exertions; the abolition of social caste opens his way to a station of gentility; the increase of intelligence throughout all classes, furnishes his mind with ampler means of happiness and of power; and thus, the general advancement in wealth, power, knowledge, and virtue, produces in the individual more self-control, self-reliance, and self-respect. We see this tendency towards individual independence strikingly illustrated in Goethe, who having laid under contribution all the improvements of the age in building up his lofty genius, at last reposed on the summit of modern civilization in all the sufficiency of Jupiter on Olympus.

To Shelley must also be awarded the praise of having entertained a generous confidence in the perfectibility of man. His opinions on this subject, though, as we have already observed, by no means free from extravagance, were still conformable, in many respects, to the conclusions of reason, and the prophecies of scripture. They bespeak also a generous soul,—one whose consciousness of greatness was capable of high hopes of the humanity he shared in,—one which, having set its own aim high above the aspiration of vulgar ambition, seemed to discern that of the race shining at a height of still more inaccessible perfection.

These opinions of Shelley we have gathered, mainly, from his Letters and Essays. The latter are all fragments, except the Defence of Poetry. This is written in

a style, brilliant, graceful, and harmonious. The thoughts unite the beauty of poetry with the profundity of philosophy; and indicate an impassioned and enlightened devotion to his art. His letters are beautiful specimens of easy, familiar, epistolary writing. He appears in them, as he was, simple, free, and earnest. Those addressed to his wife, combine, in a remarkable degree, tenderness with manliness. Those written from Italy are exceedingly interesting, on account of the beautiful and discriminating criticisms they contain on the treasures of Italian art. In one of them, he thus finely and philosophically expresses his aim in these pleasing studies: "One of my chief objects in Italy is the observing in statuary and painting the degree in which, and the rules according to which, that ideal beauty, of which we have so intense, yet so obscure an apprehension, is realized in external forms."

As a poet, Shelley is not so popular as some others who have less merit. His immoderate love of allegory has rendered his style in many places obscure and cold; the metaphysical cast of thought does not supply to sensibility the excitement it craves from poetry; the long and lofty flights of his imagination tire the wings of duller fancies; while the occasional morbidness of his muse, together with his frequent attacks upon the established order of things in church and state, have sometimes repelled from his page the subjects of delicate feelings, and the friends of ancient observance.

In the power of his conceptive faculty, few will deny that he was unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries. His poetry is chiefly "the expression of the imagination." His mind was not also endowed, like Shakspeare's, with that large wisdom, that soundness of judgment, that wonderful tact in observation, which directed to the real world would have enabled him to see things as they are; but his unaided imagination filled immensity with the shapes of things that are not. But while he possessed, in such superabundance the creative power of genius to form new combinations from the materials of real existence, it must be confessed that these combinations were oftener striking and beautiful, than analogous to reality, and illustrative of truth.

The fire of the impassioned poet burns most intensely and purely in his lyrics and smaller pieces, as in the Ode to the West Wind, Lines written in dejection near Naples, the Cloud, and the Stanzas to a Sky-lark. Into these he breathed his entire soul. In the last-mentioned piece, suggested while listening to the lark carolling in the Italian heavens, he cannot find words enough to exhaust his passionate admiration; he cannot collect together images enough with which to compare the glad melodies of this spirit in the sky; nothing is to him so tender or ardent, nothing so sweet and joyous, nothing in sound that so fills the ear and the soul, as the spontaneous song of this bird, that singing soars, and soaring sings.

Love of the beautiful was another characteristic of Shelley's genius. No eye was quicker to detect, or slower to turn from, the beauty, wherein, according to his belief, consisted the divinity of things. The beautiful in the forms, colors, motions, and sounds of the external creation; the beautiful expression in the human face divine, and in the face of nature; the beautiful in language, thought, character, and life, was his constant study and supreme delight. For the cultivation of this native delicacy of taste, he devoted himself, as all poets should, to the study of the poetry of Greece. Sensibility to beauty was the characteristic trait of Grecian genius. It was beauty that the Greeks sung of in verse, beauty they sought in architecture, beauty they cut out from marble. Nor were their orators, historians, or even philosophers, wanting in this means of gaining the ear of their countrymen. Native to the soul of Greece, beauty overspread all her art, literature, and even life, as it did her vales, and isles, and seas, and skies.

Shelley was a complete master of all poetic measures, and had at his sovereign disposal all the treasures of the English language. His numbers are smooth, various, and musical; his language rich, tasteful, and expressive. Still, so thick-coming were his fancies, so subjective often the theme of his song, so ethereal the substance of his imaginings, so subtle, abstract, idealized, were many of his conceptions, that not unfrequently he seems to labor in the pains of utterance. The main characteristic of his style has been thus pointed out by his Editor: "More popular

poets clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery; Shelley loved to idealize the real; to gift the mechanism of the material universe with a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind."

During his short and youthful life, Shelley made but infrequent excursions into the real world; and his experience in these was such, as to make him still more attached to his home in the ideal. From this fact, resulted not only this peculiarity of style; but also most of the faults, which are usually noticed in his poetry. Hence his cold allegories, his metaphysical splendors, the lack of human interest in his subjects, the meagreness of his cantos in incidents, the occasional subtlety, vagueness, and fantastic extravagancies of his, sometimes, too intellectual muse. Yet with all their deficiencies, whether in expression or thought, do these sons of genius, who, like Shelley, love too well to wander in the realms of fairy fancy, subserve no unimportant purposes in human life. To these imaginative minds, so unfit for the business of life, so disdainful of its drudgery, so unfamiliar with all the processes of the practical understanding, so destitute of common sense as to provoke the mirth and contempt of the vulgar, do we owe most of the miracles of art, and many of the greatest discoveries in science. They execute a divine behest in portraying with fascinating pencil the exceeding excellence of the ideal man, and the beauty of a perfect life; in deciphering the prophecies of coming greatness hid in the hieroglyphics, which cover the monuments of the past; in tracing the mystic analogies that so closely ally the worlds of matter and spirit; in pointing out in the spiritual expression of all terrestrial things the fulness and overflowing of the Divinity, and in uttering from the depth of their divinely moved souls the sublime truths often revealed to those who are poorest in the wisdom of the world, and the most unfit for the marshalling of its affairs.

M. M.