

ART. V.—SHELLEY.

The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. A revised Text, with Notes and a Memoir. By W. M. ROSSETTI. 2 vols. Moxon and Co. 1870.

THE connexion of Mr. W. M. Rossetti's name with a Memoir of Shelley and an edition of his works, is a sufficient guarantee of the impartiality and thoroughness with which these tasks have been respectively accomplished. There was ample scope for Mr. Rossetti's labours in both departments; indeed, it is not too much to say that it has been reserved for him to make the first serious attempt either at a complete biography or a correct text. This is in itself no slight distinction; the intelligence, ingenuity, and industry he has displayed in it are more commendable still; but the spirit of affectionate enthusiasm in which he has wrought is best of all, and will insure him the sincere sympathy of all admirers of Shelley, independently of any estimate which may be formed of the actual value of his work.

All biographies of Shelley have hitherto been of a fragmentary character, either from their partial and limited scope, as those of Trelawny, Hogg, and Peacock; or from their desultoriness, as the Shelley Memorials; or from imperfect information, as the narratives of Medwin and Middleton. Of the latter it is not necessary to say much. Medwin's incredible heedlessness and blundering have destroyed the authenticity, and consequently the value of excellent materials. Mr. Middleton's work is written in an admirable spirit; but in all other respects what Medwin's is to a good book it is to Medwin's. The Shelley Memorials contain many documents of the highest interest and much intelligent literary criticism. They answered their purpose, more could not be required. Mr. Peacock's notes also, we suppose, answered their purpose, together with another not contemplated by the writer—that of demonstrating his entire incapacity to understand the man in whose intimacy he had spent so many years. Notwithstanding, however, the cold and uninviting character of Mr. Peacock's reminiscences, and the serious misrepresentations which they have been shown to contain, he deserves our thanks for having preserved some interesting particulars which would otherwise have been forgotten, and the precision of his style offers some amends for his singular deficiency in graphic power. We may dwell somewhat more fully on the works of Mr. Jefferson Hogg and Captain Trelawny, as it is to these that we at least are indebted for our most vivid impres-

sions of the poet's personality. Mr. Hogg, besides his unquestionable power as a *raconteur*, was well fitted for his task from his college friendship with Shelley, and the intimacy he continued to maintain with him until his final departure from England. We therefore carry away from the perusal of his book, in which he dwells with infinite gusto on the minute traits of his immortal friend, a lively picture of the wild yet gracious figure of the poet in his youth. Yet whatever our enjoyment of the sparkle of anecdote and humour, whose quaint brilliancy imparts such a charm to these pages, we cannot help thinking that Mr. Hogg mistook one matter of essential importance—the style and manner in which it became him to write of such a man as Shelley. His keen appreciation of the ludicrous was evidently too strong a temptation to be resisted, and has thrown an air of grotesqueness over his entire work. Another point on which the world has found it difficult to sympathize with him, is his palpably honest conviction that the life of Thomas Jefferson Hogg was only second, if second, in importance to that of Percy Bysshe Shelley himself. It is almost ungracious to quarrel with irrelevancies which have afforded us such hearty amusement; but we must repeat that amusement, although a good thing in itself, is, when intruded into a biography of Shelley, a good thing out of its proper place. We believe, however, that his fault was not a want of love but a lack of imaginative power and keen insight, which misled him to fasten on the momentary and accidental, instead of penetrating into the deep and eternal parts of the poet's nature.

The other work, which is indeed a mere sketch, but to which we are most truly indebted for fresh and graphic delineations of Shelley, is Captain Trelawny's "Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron," which, unfortunately for all lovers of Shelley, scarcely extends over more than the last six months of the poet's life. But it bears on every page the impress of love and sincerity, and possesses at the same time the rare power of conveying in the simplest language pictures that bear stamped on them the seal of the most unmistakable reality. The description, for example, of his first meeting with Shelley is inimitable in its way; but as Mr. Rossetti has wisely incorporated it in Trelawny's own words into his Memoir, we refrain from quoting it here. But, indeed, the book is full of passages where one catches no less delightful glimpses of the poet's ways, while everywhere, even in the most trifling anecdote, we are kept aware of the fact that we are brought into closer contact with a higher, a truly godlike nature. One cause of Captain Trelawny's superiority as a biographer to Shelley's other friends may probably be found in the more favourable circumstances under which he

approached him in the first instance. Mr. Hogg and Mr. Peacock made Shelley's acquaintance when he was young and undistinguished; they associated with him on a footing of entire equality, had obviously no conception of his superiority, and spent the rest of their lives in finding it out, if indeed they ever attained to this knowledge at all. Captain Trelawny tells us that he was led to seek Shelley's acquaintance by the report of his genius, his adventurous history, and his unlikeness to the mass of men.

Availing himself of all these scattered materials, as well as of a number of new and interesting particulars obtained from independent sources of information, Mr. Rossetti has for the first time combined them into a symmetrical whole. And great praise indeed is due to him for the clear and methodical arrangement and the straightforward manly tone of his Memoir, which, far from being a mere compilation, is a substantial and independent work, bearing the clear impress of the writer's powerful individuality. In order, however, to form a correct estimate of Mr. Rossetti's Memoir, we should make it clear to ourselves what task it was he really aimed at accomplishing, and whether he has accomplished this. He states so plainly that the end he had in view was to sift and authenticate the extant mass of material as a *contribution* towards the systematizing of a "Life of Shelley," that it would be a wilful misrepresentation of the whole scope of his work to measure it by a standard at which it never aimed. The condensed scheme on which Mr. Rossetti's Life had necessarily to be written has probably made it impossible for him to enter more deeply into the poet's character; this drawback, however, is partly compensated by the resulting compression of matter and nervousness of style. We confess that in our judgment a more vivid picture of the poet's individuality might have been obtained if the illustrative anecdotes, instead of being all massed together in one section, had been distributed over the whole extent of the Life in the natural order of their occurrence. We think that by these means a certain local colour would have been obtained, and greater life and motion imparted to the flow of the narrative. We question also the desirability, taking of course the necessary brevity of the Memoir into consideration, of devoting so large a portion of the allotted space to Shelley's views on Art, while rather hurrying over his opinions on religion and philosophy, and also perhaps thereby curtailing the writer's own criticism on Shelley's poems.

Our account of Mr. Rossetti's edition would be very incomplete without some notice of what forms, after all, its distinguishing feature, and will always render its appearance an era in the history of Shelley's writings. We allude to its character as the first *critical* edition of the poet's works. Respecting the

need of such a revision there has been but one opinion among the students of Shelley, whose impatience at the frequently marred and mangled condition of the text has borne a tolerably fair proportion to their capacity for the apprehension of its beauties. It will suffice to cite the testimony of the late Professor Craik, of Mr. F. T. Palgrave, and of Mr. Swinburne.

Several partial attempts—among which special recognition is due to the ingenious emendations of Mr. F. G. Fleay—had previously been made to remedy the defects unmistakably indicated; but to Mr. Rossetti belongs the honour of having first grappled with the task as a whole. His task has in the main been exceedingly well performed. His edition is a monument of unwearied assiduity, of vigilant attention to the minutest detail. Such labour is the indispensable condition of correctness; but it needed an interest in his author passing the ordinary love of editors to enable Mr. Rossetti to spare so much time from the brilliant but precarious feats of conjectural emendation for the humbler, but not less essential scrutiny of punctuation and orthography, and the rectification of annoying grammatical negligences. His services in the former department are inestimable, and it is only to be regretted that they must necessarily elude the recognition of all but the most critical readers. The amendment of Shelley's careless grammar is a more delicate matter; but we are disposed to think that Mr. Rossetti has not exceeded the latitude which may be fairly claimed by an editor of clear judgment, and fully exempt from the taint of hypercriticism. As regards the several arrangement of the volumes, we are only disposed to regret (and we cannot help regretting strongly) the dislocation occasioned by the removal of several of the most important poems to the appendix of fragments. Not only is their effectiveness greatly impaired by their juxtaposition with fugitive and imperfect snatches of verse, but the parts of the collection from which they have been removed appear impoverished by their absence. The more we are enabled to regard Shelley's pieces as so many passages of one grand poem—the poetical interpretation of a life—the more we must regret such interruptions of the sequence of his thought.

As an emendator, Mr. Rossetti has two main resources—collation with the original editions and conjecture. The first has assisted him to some admirable corrections; as, for instance, the restoration of the vivid and Shelleian word *ruining*, in a passage of "Alastor," which since the first edition has always been printed "Wave *running* on wave." As a conjectural corrector Mr. Rossetti has not always been equally successful, and we shall be able to show that many of his most plausible suggestions are unfounded; but fortunately these have usually

remained in the state of suggestions, and have not been incorporated with the text. To no man was ever less applicable, indeed, Dryden's shrewd criticism on critics, that they study rather to display themselves than to explain their authors. Mr. Rossetti seldom scruples without some reasonable ground; and if in many instances his scruples are needless, there are many others where they have been called forth by a real corruption, which he has instinctively felt without seeing how to remove it. In other instances his corrections are brilliant and indisputable, as in stanza vi. of the dedication of the "Revolt of Islam," where the lines—

"Which crushed and withered mine, that could not be
Aught but a lifeless *clog*, until revived by thee,"

are themselves marvellously "revived" by the simple substitution of *clod*.

We would gladly have dwelt longer on Mr. Rossetti's characteristics as an editor, but we must pass on to the contribution which we are ourselves enabled to offer to the improvement of Shelley's text, a contribution which we can bring forward without misgiving, inasmuch as it is derived from the only infallible source of information, the original MSS. themselves. These documents, as students of Shelley are aware, were examined by Mr. Garnett in 1862, with the result of the discovery of ninety pages of previously unknown matter printed in that gentleman's valuable "Relics of Shelley," as well as not a little more, which now appears for the first time in Mr. Rossetti's edition. From various circumstances, however, the examination was in some respects cursory, and more was done for the enrichment than for the correction of the text, although some very interesting emendations were made, such as "might" and "earth," for "light" and "air" in the first stanza of the lines written at Naples. We must here express how deeply we are indebted to Mr. Garnett, and to the liberality of Shelley's representatives, in now being able to offer the results of a more minute examination made since the publication of the recent edition. A few words must suffice to explain why this examination has proved less productive than might have been hoped. Shelley's MSS. may, from our present point of view, be divided into two classes—those of poems published during his lifetime, and of poems published after his death. The former, although a great part of the "Prometheus" is fortunately an exception, have in general shared the usual fate of MSS. sent to the printer—they have been disregarded, as chrysalis cases for which no man concerns himself after the emergence of their Psyche. The rough drafts of these poems, indeed, are extant in many instances, but except where the printed

text is evidently faulty, it would manifestly be unsafe to unsettle it on their authority. On the other hand, the second class of MSS., with a few exceptions, such as the "Witch of Atlas," exists solely in the form of rough drafts, usually written three or four times over, and in these instances perpetually at variance with each other. It would be easy to fill pages with such variations, but in all such cases, as it appears to us, the presumption is in favour of the received reading, which probably was not adopted without good authority, perhaps that of some more perfect copy now lost. Thus for example, we should hesitate to substitute "innocent heaven" for "serene heaven," in the "Ode to Naples," although the variation is entitled to great respect from the beautiful condition of the copy, and from this being the only one which contains the two "introductory epodes" as Shelley unclassically styles them—a circumstance of great interest, as it shows that these exquisitely beautiful stanzas were an afterthought. The inspection of two pieces, however, has been fruitful of results, though on opposite accounts—that of the "Letter to Maria Gisborne" from the perfect, that of the "Triumph of Life" from the chaotic character of the original MS. The examination of the "Prometheus" has also led to the correction of several errors which had insinuated themselves from the necessity of entrusting the correction of the proofs to others. Several alterations in the minor poems, generally of much interest, may also be regarded as indisputable, and as such entitled to a place here. Finally, we shall enumerate the instances in which emendations proposed by Mr. Rossetti, or mentioned in his notes, have not been confirmed upon an appeal to the original. Our references are in all cases made to his edition.

VOL. I.

Prometheus Unbound, p. 317, l. 21.—"And gnash beside the streams of fire, and wail Your foodless teeth." The punctuation is faulty. In the original, which is always carefully punctuated, there is a comma after *gnash* and *wail* respectively, but not after *fire*, showing that *wail* is here not a verb but a substantive. The allusion is to the two infernal streams, Phlegethon and Cocytus. P. 327, at bottom, for *silent* footsteps read *killing*. P. 330, stage direction at the beginning of act ii., for *lonely* read *lovely*. P. 333, l. 29, for *morn* read *moon*. P. 337, l. 6, the much queried *lake-surrounded* is correct, though not very intelligible. P. 337, l. 18, "And wakes the destined soft emotion." The sense has hitherto been obscured by the erroneous punctuation. *Destined* ought to be followed by a full stop. L. 21, for *streams* read *steams*. P. 338, l. 15, for *on* read *in*. P. 372, l. 25, "Radiance and light," read *life*, avoiding the tautology.

VOL. II.

Letter to Maria Gisborne, p. 245, l. 9, for *philosophic* read *philanthropic*, as already acutely conjectured by Mr. Rossetti. L. 18, "Which fishes found under the utmost crag," read *fishers*, one of the most striking examples conceivable of the wonderful way in which the most trifling modification will sometimes convert nonsense into sense. An almost equally remarkable instance is afforded by the first line on the following page, "Reply to them in lava-cry, halloo," where the sense has been utterly perverted by placing a hyphen instead of a comma between *lava* and *cry*. The earthquake demons do not reply to the gnomes' toast in lava-cries, but in lava itself, a more congenial beverage. Same page, l. 24, for *green* read *queer*. P. 247, four lines from bottom, for *know* read *knew*. P. 248, at top, for *acting* read *citing*. P. 249, l. 12, the celebrated passage on Godwin has been tampered with. It originally read—

"That which was Godwin, greater none than he
Though fallen and fallen on evil times, to stand."

Consideration for Godwin evidently dictated an alteration which in justice to Shelley should now be revoked. Same page, three lines from bottom, for *said* read *read*. The blanks on p. 251, l. 30, should be filled with the names of Hogg, Peacock, and Smith. That on p. 252, l. 10, is unfortunately irretrievable.

Triumph of Life, p. 397, eight lines from the bottom, pursued or *spurned* the shadows, read *shunned*. Last line, for *wood-lawn-interspersed*, read *wood-lawns interspersed*. P. 399, l. 3, for *thunder's* read *thunder*. L. 6, for *meet* read *greet*. P. 400, l. 16, supply *while* before "the shock." P. 401, l. 24, for *sentiment* read *nutriment*. P. 403, eight lines from bottom, fill up the chasm thus:—

"Even as the deeds of others, not as theirs,
And then——"

P. 404, l. 8, for *comest* read *camest*. L. 23, for *year's dawn* read *season*. Same page, three lines from bottom, for *her* read *the*. P. 406, first line, "out of the deep cavern, with palms so tender, omit *out*, and insert *and* before *with*. L. 3, omit *the*. L. 17, for *to* read *in*. P. 409, l. 7, "The words of hate and care," for *care* read *awe*, thus negating the ingenious correction of *words* into *world*, proposed by Mr. Rossetti, which we had regarded as nearly certain, and which still appears to us more beautiful both in sense and music. Same page, l. 18, for *vale* read *isle*. The correction is significant from the fact that these countless swarms of bats are found in the Indian Archipelago, not upon the continent. The idea was probably suggested to

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Shelley by Trelawny's narratives of his adventures in these regions. L. 29, for *rode like demons* read *sate like vultures*. P. 410, seven lines from the bottom, for *wrapped* read *wrought*. Mr. Rossetti had divined an error, which he proposed to amend by reading *shaped* or *warped*.

How wonderfully Shelley usually improved on his first drafts is again shown by the commencement of the "Triumph of Life," which originally stood as follows:—

" Out of the eastern shadow of the earth
Amid the clouds upon its margin grey,
Scattered by night to swathe in its bright birth
In gold and fleecy snow the infant Day,
The glorious Sun arose, beneath his light
The earth and all."

As it now stands the Introduction to the "Triumph of Life" is one of the most highly wrought and perfect passages we know in poetry.

Translation from Faust, p. 494, stage direction, Faust dances and sings with a girl. The song is as follows:—

FAUST.

" I had once a lovely dream
In which I saw an apple tree,
Where two fair apples with their gleam
To climb and taste attracted me."

THE GIRL.

" She with apples you desired
From Paradise came long ago:
With you I feel that if required,
Such still within my garden grow."

Same page, three lines from the bottom, "Are we so wise, and *is the pond* still haunted?" This is an absurd mistranslation of the original, "Wir sind so klug, und dennoch spukt's *in Tegel*," the allusion being to the recent apparition of a spectre in the hamlet of Tegel, to the scandal of enlightened persons. The blunder is not, however, attributable to Shelley, who, not knowing what Tegel meant, left a blank in consequence, but to the person who published his MS. in the *Liberal*.

Miscellaneous corrections. *Julian and Maddalo*, vol. i. p. 290, l. 14. For *dales* read *vales*, the word employed by Milton in the passage referred to—*Lines to Misery*, st. x. l. 2. The rough draft has *lovers* instead of *shadows*, which having been also in Medwin's copy, and being, as Mr. Rossetti justly observes, more uncommon and poetical, should we think be adopted. *Lines to an Indian Air*, vol. ii. p. 210, l. 9, in what is to all appearance the last written of the many drafts of this

divine song, the words "champak odours" are distinctly altered into "odours of my chaplet." The alteration is startling, and we confess our preference for the poem as it stood in the older edition. Although it makes the line agree more formally in metre with the corresponding verses of the other two stanzas, yet it loses that subtle musical charm which it previously possessed.

The Question, p. 225. The line hitherto missing from the second stanza of that exquisite poem is, "Like a child, half in tenderness and mirth." *Mutability*, p. 272, l. 9, for *too* read *how*. *Prince Athanase*, last line, p. 307, for *frame* read *flame*. *Otho*, p. 309, l. 20, for *buy* read *bring*, instead of *wring*, as ingeniously surmised by Mr. Rossetti. *On Keats*, p. 351, l. 2, for *monthless* read *printless*, omitting *and*. *Evening*, p. 358, l. 8, for *enormous* read *cinereous*. Fragment of an unfinished Drama, p. 358, l. 27, for *spring* read *spray*. *Cyclops*, p. 447, l. 23, insert "to be" after "not," as suggested by Mr. Rossetti. *Epigram from Plato*, p. 457, l. 5, for *does* read *doth*. *Pan and Echo*, p. 458, l. 14, omit *the*.

Besides those already mentioned, the following emendations, proposed by Mr. Rossetti, or adverted to in his notes, are negated by the evidence of the MS., vol. i. p. 257, l. 10, *there* for *thee*. P. 314, eight lines from bottom, *ghostly* for *ghastly*. P. 327, l. 10, *bestrewn* for *between*. P. 365, l. 3, *obscure* for *obscene*. Vol. ii. p. 210, l. 9, *pine* for *fail*. P. 247, l. 25, *age* for *eye*. P. 449, l. 20, *manœuvre* for *measure*. Dr. Dobbin's ingenious suggestion of "stony" for "strong" in the "Hymn to Mercury," st. viii. l. 1, is confirmed by the MS.

Notwithstanding all that has been effected, the imperfections of Shelley's MSS. still leave a not inconsiderable field open for conjectural emendation, and the following suggestions may perhaps help to elucidate a few obscure readings:—

A well-known passage in "Alastor" (vol. i. p. 107) has occasioned infinite perplexity to Mr. Rossetti and Mr. Swinburne. The latter abandons it as hopeless; the former endeavours to render it intelligible by a change in the punctuation, according to which it reads as follows:—

"On every side now rose
Rocks which in unimaginable forms
Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
In the light of evening, and (its precipice
Obscuring) the ravine disclosed above."

"According to my punctuation," says Mr. Rossetti, "the statement is, that there were certain rock-pinnacles which, while they obscured the precipice (or precipitous descent) of the ravine, left the ravine itself visible higher up." If, however, these spires of

rock were less elevated than the walls of the ravine, we cannot understand how they should be "lifted in the light of evening," or how they could with any propriety be termed pinnacles at all. A pinnacle is surely the highest and not the lowest point of the rock. But if for *disclosed* we read *inclosed*, all is plain, and we get a beautiful picture with scarcely any disturbance of the text.

In the "Revolt of Islam" (canto iii. st. 15) is a passage absolutely preposterous as it stands:—

"The moon was calm and bright,—around that column
The overhanging sky and circling sea
Spread forth in silentness profound and solemn,
The darkness of brief frenzy *cast* on me,
So that I knew not mine own misery."

This is evidently nonsense; darkness could not be spread forth by the calm brightness of sky and sea. *Cast* should be altered into *past*, and a colon substituted for the comma at the end of the third line.

In *Prometheus Unbound* (vol. i. p. 351), Ocean says—

"My streams will flow
Round many peopled continents."

Read many-peopled as a compound epithet. The meaning is not that there will be more continents than heretofore after the liberation of Prometheus; but that, in consequence of their exemption from war and other calamities, these continents will henceforth be more populous.

With these few remarks we must take leave of the biography and textual criticism, and we are indeed sorry that within our limits it is simply impossible to render justice to the thoroughness, the impartiality, the indefatigable labour and genuine love which are Mr. Rossetti's most eminent characteristics as biographer and editor. We cannot, however, refrain from expressing our extreme surprise and disappointment when, on looking over "Queen Mab" in the new edition, we saw the deforming transformation which that poem had undergone. It is true the alterations which Mr. Rossetti has introduced into the text are taken from the "Dæmon of the World," which Shelley purposed to be a modified extract of "Queen Mab," and published in the same volume with "Alastor and other Poems." But we can only infer from this fact that when once the inspiration which went to the shaping of any work of art has totally passed away, a poet may easily mar his own creation by trying to make it better. Though "Queen Mab" may in some respects be a crude production, yet it is so full of the sap and ferment of genius, and bears so unmistakably the stamp of Shelley's peculiar characteristics, that besides the value it possesses for us

as poetry, it has the additional interest of being the earliest production in which we can trace the true workings of the poet's mind. And it appears to us that for this reason, if for no other, the text ought to have been allowed to remain as it originally stood; for with regard to those really juvenile effusions such as the "Wandering Jew" and the "Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson," which Mr. Rossetti has seen fit to print in the appendix to this edition, it is a pity he has thus rescued them from the oblivion they so richly deserve. But indeed the new readings of "Queen Mab," so far from possessing any greater poetic beauty whether of idea or expression, seem to us invariably a diluted version of the original.

But let the reader judge for himself. We will first quote the lines as they stand in the original "Queen Mab," and place underneath them the alterations in the present edition.

"The Fairy's frame was slight; yon fibrous cloud
That catches but the palest tinge of even,
And which the straining eye can hardly seize
When melting into eastern twilight's shadow
Were scarce so thin, so slight, but the fair star
That gems the glittering coronet of morn,
Sheds not a light so mild, so powerful,
As that which bursting from the Fairy's form
Spread a purpureal halo round the scene,
Yet with an undulating motion
Swayed to her outline gracefully."

"The Fairy's frame was slight; slight as some cloud
That catches but the palest tinge of day
When evening yields to night—
Bright as that fibrous woof when stars indue
Its transitory robe,
Her thin and misty form
Moved with the moving air;
Such sounds as breathed around like odorous winds
Of wakening Spring arose,
Filling the chamber and the midnight sky."

Mark here those changes which, although apparently often trifling, yet alter the whole delicate texture of this exquisite passage: instead of the original and *most* apt epithet applied to the cloud, "fibrous," we get nothing at all in the later version, and we are indeed at an utter loss to account for the alteration. Thus, for the simple expression "palest tinge of even," we find this awkward way of saying the identical thing, "palest tinge of day, when evening yields to night," &c.; but far worse, the truly lovely line, "the fair star that gems the glittering coronet of morn," is omitted altogether, swallowed up, annihilated.

The limits of our essay will not allow us to give any further

examples, but we could cite passage after passage where the original beautiful text has been equally marred. And we must be allowed here to express the earnest hope, which we can hardly doubt will be echoed by all lovers of Shelley, that in any future edition "Queen Mab" may be restored to its original form.

Let us now, however, turn our attention to the criticism of the works themselves; and as it is Mr. Rossetti's evident disposition to lay the chief stress on the technical execution of Shelley's poems, touching but slightly on their subject-matter and general design, we may perhaps be justified in dwelling somewhat more fully on the latter point, thus endeavouring to supplement a deficiency highly characteristic of certain tendencies predominant in contemporary art and poetry. For while on the one hand there is in our age a propensity to depreciate the important functions of the Beautiful, thus robbing the speculative faculties of an ally that would impart form and colour to their abstractions, we have on the other hand the no less mischievous error of giving an undue prominence to workmanship and execution, and looking on form and colour, not as the temple where the image of the god stands enshrined, but as the very deity itself. By these fatal demarcations and barriers erected in the mental territories, where one realm is assigned to the Beautiful, another to the True, and a third to the Good, we impoverish each one of these three great forces, and in the mistaken conviction of thereby strengthening their respective activities we obstruct that interchange of influences which should vivify the *Æsthetics*, *Ethics*, and *Science* of a nation. Let us for one moment stay to consider what would become of the Beautiful, if, securely dammed up against the influx of moral convictions and the speculations and discoveries of the reasoning faculties, it were subsisting in proud isolation only on and through itself. Assuredly epics such as the "*Divina Commedia*" and "*Paradise Lost*," revolving the mighty problems "concerning God, free will, and destiny," struck and wound their roots inextricably round the deepest philosophic and religious thought of their time, while the very structure of tragedy, consisting as it does, not in the blind and insensate conflict of passion hurtling on passion (else the commotion of waves and winds would be an equally tragic spectacle), but of passion lashing in mutinous revolt the iron front of the moral law, has its foundations laid in the ethical convictions of mankind.

What then, we may well inquire, is to become of poetry if cut off from influences of such vital importance to its two great divisions—the Epos and the Drama. It is evident that the form and manner, from the imperative necessity of which, however, we would be the last to detract, would thus truly comprise the

Alpha and Omega of a work of Art. And thus the same care would be lavished on the polishing of a pebble or a diamond, the polishing and setting being considered the chief things needful. This total misapprehension of its divine mission necessarily produces that blight of all true poetry—namely, mannerism. Far otherwise indeed was Shelley's conception of poetry. Both in theory and practice he would have extended its limits to an almost incredible extent, enclosing both science and philosophy within its domain. In his "Defence of Poetry," he goes even so far as to say that the distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error, and that not only Plato and Bacon, but "all the authors of revolution in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, nor even as their words unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth, but as their periods are rounded and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse, being the echo of the eternal music."

Considering how marked was Shelley's bias towards this view, we think Mr. Rossetti somewhat apt to undervalue what constitutes the true centre of gravity of all the poet's divine creations, when, as for example, in speaking of "Alastor" with reference to "Queen Mab" (of which, in our judgment, he speaks too irreverently when he thinks it necessary to state that it is not *unmitigated* rubbish), he remarks that in the former we have at last "the genuine, the immortal Shelley." With all due deference to Mr. Rossetti's opinion, we must yet dissent from this assertion; and while admitting the wonderful advance in the perfection of form, in the exquisiteness of the language, and greater musical subtlety in the rhythm of the blank verse, still we think that in many respects "the genuine, the immortal Shelley" can more truly be traced in "Queen Mab" than even in "Alastor," as it palpitates with that intense faith in progress, that fiery love of liberty, that impetuous passion for reforming the world, which are, after all, the distinguishing features of Shelley, and which were brought out in their full glory in his "Revolt of Islam," and "Prometheus Unbound." Shelley indeed, when he launched that *enfant terrible* of a poem into the world, fully believed in his power of making a breach in the solid rampart of custom, so as to take by storm and overnight, as it were, that great stronghold in which theology, monarchy, and matrimony have hitherto braved even the sap of Time and Change. It is with an emotion wavering between a smile and a tear that we think of this frail, gentle, pure, and lofty being who, with "weak hands though mighty heart," dared that triple-headed power which rules the world. It is doubtless by the violent recoil of hopes forced back upon his own mind, and debarred

their natural fiery action on the nation at large, that we must interpret the sad and solemn harmonies of "Alastor." These spring from the revulsion of those impassioned aspirations to which "Queen Mab" owed its being, and the despair that broods over them is but the shadow cast by the sun of hope itself. It is therefore a total misapprehension of the dominant quality of Shelley's mind, if, as is so often the case, those poems which express, in however beautiful and inimitable a manner, his melancholy or despondent moods, are considered as his most representative poems; on the contrary, *they* are but the expressions of that dominion which the momentary and the casual must exercise over every mind still subject to the varying influences of life; but that which indeed constitutes "the intense, the deep, the imperishable" Shelley, which will exercise a constraining influence over the centuries, is the aspiration after goodness no dejection could quench—the faith in humanity which doubts might assail, but never shake; the love which year after year of the short life in which he met with so much persecution and bitter hate, rounded to a fuller and more resplendent orb.

Let us, however, now turn our attention to the poem next in chronological sequence, "The Revolt of Islam," which Mr. Rossetti has despatched in a few words, and which appears to us to be a mine of inexhausted thought. The vast scope, gorgeous imagination, and enchantment of rhythm and language which mark this work are so widely known, that we proceed at once to point out what appears to us to constitute its fundamental idea, and one which hitherto has been overlooked. This is the completely changed aspect in which the relation of the sexes is regarded. Hitherto all poets creating ideals of woman, however pure or lofty these might be, had depicted her invariably in her relation as either wife or mistress, mother or daughter—that is, as a supplement to man's nature, or, as Milton plainly expresses it—

"He for God only, she for God in him;"

or, in other words, he raised to the contemplation of an infinite; she condemned to that of his finite nature.

To Shelley belongs the honour of being the first poet who has embodied, in a shape of the loftiest loveliness, the most momentous of all our modern ideas—that of the emancipation of women from this subjection to men. He is thus the poetic forerunner of John Stuart Mill, and has achieved in the world of the ideal that which is now being realized practically by the man of science. For by making his verse the receptacle of his bold and lofty speculations on that subject, and by impregnating with them the highest and most sensitive minds of the generation that

succeeded his own, he has doubtless opened one of the paths which have led to the present widespread movement regarding this question.

In *Cythna* we hail a new female type, and one indeed which hitherto has been repugnant to poets, who, if they approached at all that side of woman's character which she represents, approached it either to distort its features or to soften them down to the more accepted standard. But Shelley, with his usual fearlessness, bates not one jot of the idea. He holds that woman, just as man, is or should be a being whose sympathies are too vast—whose thoughts too multiform to converge to the one focus of personal love, and that in the self-same way it is at once her right and her duty to take an active share in the general concerns of humanity, and to influence them, not only indirectly through others, but directly by her own thoughts and actions. Thus *Cythna*, prophet, reformer, and martyr—invested with all the glow and glory which the poet's imagination could bestow on her—is a creation unique in the whole range of fiction.

The poet, with deep insight, indicates in *canto ii.* that the task of the regeneration of woman can only be brought about by woman herself; that it is she who must rouse man's interest, and kindle his enthusiasm in her cause, for, as *Laon* says—

“ This misery was but coldly felt, till she
Became my only friend, who had indued
My purpose with a wider sympathy;
Thus, *Cythna* mourned with me the servitude
In which the half of humankind were mewed,
Victims of lust and hate, the slave of slaves;
She mourned that grace and power were thrown as food
To the hyæna lust, who, among graves
Over his loathed meal, laughing in agony, raves.

And I still gazing on that glorious child,
Even as these thoughts flushed o'er her :—‘ *Cythna*, sweet,
Well with the world art thou unreconciled;
Never will peace and human nature meet,
Till free and equal man and woman greet
Domestic peace; and ere this power can make
In human hearts its calm and holy seat,
This slavery must be broken.’ ”

Such an exalted ideal of woman necessarily produced a conception and expression of love which is simply supreme. The sensuous and susceptible temperament which usually underlies poetic genius has almost inevitably the tendency of stimulating the passions too strongly in one direction, and from this point of view *Plato* had doubtless a fair excuse for his verdict against the poets as elements of disturbance and fiery insurrection in

the serene atmosphere of his model state. Shelley, however, forms in this respect a marvellous exception. His love, indeed, would almost require the baptism of some new name to distinguish it from the lower and lesser passion which currently goes by that appellation, for it "transcends the senses infinitely as heaven does earth." Unrivalled in this respect is the sixth canto of the "Revolt of Islam," where the poet, secure in the "golden purity" of his nature, has fearlessly penetrated into the fiery depths of human passion, blending it in strains of labyrinthine music with the subtlest ecstasy which emanates from the spirit. Between such a conception, embracing the whole circumference of love, and that of Keats, for example, who describes it much in the same spirit of childlike sensuousness with which he descants on "lucent syrops" and other "spiced dainties," or of Byron, to whom in some of his most powerful flights it revealed no deeper aspect than that of being "youth's madness," what an immeasurable distance! These remarks naturally lead us to *Epipsychidion*, where Shelley, apparently bursting the last link of "dull mortality," has not only sustained the inspiration of his subject at a dizzy height, but, soaring ever higher in miraculous ascent, lands us ultimately in the Emyrean of love itself. We indeed cannot comprehend how Mr. Rossetti, after some just remarks descriptive of the beauty of its poetry, could actually bring himself to say of this most exquisitely lovely production, "I may confess, however, to doubting whether it is quite a justifiable poem to write. Its very mood tends towards the intangible, and its framework of imagery and symbol remains to this day an enigma to students of the poetry and the life of Shelley;" to which our only answer is that, to put such a question with regard to *such* a poem is in our opinion equivalent to asking whether the "Symposium" or the "Vita Nuova," or any work, in short, where that most delicate bloom of the emotions, necessarily the rare attribute of a "sacred few," finds its peculiar expression, was a justifiable production. If Mr. Rossetti had not shown in his criticism on Walt Whitman a remarkable power of appreciating qualities of genius the most opposite to what constitutes the sculpturesque or the pictorial in poetry, we might probably have inferred that his intimate appreciation of the sister art of painting had had an influence in diminishing his appreciation of works whose subject-matter belonging essentially to the inward and incommensurable life of thought, necessitated a mode of treatment which, adapting itself to this quality, occasionally verges on the border-land of mysticism; but this would evidently have been a wrong inference, and we are therefore at a loss to account for Mr. Rossetti's estimate of *Epipsychidion*.

Of the "Prometheus Unbound," that greatest production of

Shelley, Mr. Rossetti has given us such a powerful and correct estimate, that nothing further remains to be said of it in a narrow compass; it is, indeed, such a noble specimen both of his style and criticism that we cannot abstain from quoting it as it stands—

“There is, I suppose, no poem comparable in the fair sense of that word to ‘Prometheus Unbound.’ The immense scale and boundless scope of the conception; the marble majesty and extra-mundane passion of the personages; the sublimity of ethical aspiration; the radiance of ideal and poetic beauty, which saturates every phase of the subject, and almost (as it were) wraps it from sight, as it were, and transforms it out of sense into spirit; the rolling river of great sound and lyrical rapture, form a combination not to be matched elsewhere, and scarcely to encounter competition. There is another source of greatness in this poem neither to be foolishly lauded nor (still less) undervalued. It is this—that *Prometheus Unbound*, however remote the foundation of its subject-matter and unactual its executive treatment, does in reality express the most modern of conceptions, the utmost reach of speculation of a mind which burst up all crusts of custom and prescription like a volcano, and imaged forth a future wherein man should be indeed the autocrat and renovated renovator of his planet. This it is, I apprehend, which places *Prometheus* clearly, instead of disputably, at the summit of all latter poetry; the fact that it embodies in forms of truly ecstatic beauty, the dominant passion of the dominant intellects of the age, and especially of one of the extremest and highest among them all, the author himself. It is the ideal poem of perpetual and triumphant progression—the Atlantis of Man Emancipated.”

Owing to the necessary limits of our essay, we must pass over the “Cenci,” that drama which is the most magnificent refutation of the charge often brought against the poet, that he was unable to conceive and embody any character out of himself, or portray the dark and malignant passions of human nature, and content ourselves with a few remarks on “Adonais” and “Hellas,” the poet’s last complete compositions, and which doubtless contain the best and maturest expression of his philosophical thought. Indeed, we think Mr. Rossetti’s section on the religion and philosophy of Shelley necessarily defective from his scanty recognition of these two poems, and from his not rendering sufficient justice to the intense earnestness on these matters, which so essentially characterizes Shelley, as, for example, when he says, “The general tenor of ‘Adonais’ may seem to amount to the expression of a positive belief in the immortality of Keats, as a separate individual soul; but we must be on our guard against poetic abstractions and (not to use the word disrespectfully) poetic machinery.” One of the stanzas from which Mr. Rossetti would draw such an inference, where it is said—

“ He is made one with Nature : there is heard
 His voice in all her music, from the moan
 Of thunder to the song of night’s sweet bird ;
 He is a presence to be felt and known
 In darkness and in light, from herb and stone
 Spreading itself where’er that Power may move
 Which has withdrawn his being to its own ;
 Which wields the world with never wearied love,
 Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above—”

justifies, in our opinion, the direct opposite of this conclusion—namely, that Shelley appears, first, to have held that death was the cessation of the separate insulated consciousness of the individual, and the redistribution of the atoms that build up his existence into the general universe of things ; secondly, that whatever form of ultimate development this separate entity had attained, during its transit through life, reacted again on passing thence on the general universe—

“ Compelling there
 All new successions to the forms they wear.”

Any attempt, however, to range the swift and subtle spirit of Shelley into a distinct school of philosophy, would, in our opinion, be an undertaking as ill judged as assuredly futile : for, as he primarily looks at the world with the eyes of the poet, he arrives at his deepest convictions concerning it less through any sustained chain of systematic reasoning, than through flashes of intuitive perception, born of his intense absorption into, and passionate worship of, the great Cosmos. As it is fabled that Pygmalion was consumed by so potent a passion for the marble image that, clasping it, he mastered the cold repose of the stone itself, and won a response from its locked lips, even thus every true poet stands in his relation to Nature, and besieges her with prayers, tears, and entreaties, weary watches, and devouring aspirations, till he feels at last the throb in the stony veins, hears the murmur of the muffled voice, till, from the sun and the sea, the trees and beasts, yea, the very stones, there burst awful manifestations, opening glimpses, strange and sudden, into the vast dumb mystery. To have cast the brilliant net of his language over these divine but too fugitive moments of spiritual experience, and thus for ever to have retained them in song, is one of the highest of the many achievements of this transcendent genius. But although we are thus convinced that Shelley’s philosophy cannot, in the strict sense of that word, be classed under any existing system of metaphysics, yet we think it evident that the bent of his mind impelled him strongly towards an idealistic conception of the universe ; and it is curious to note that, even

in his days of rampant materialism, when saturated with the study of Hume and the French encyclopædists, he sought a vehicle for those views in "Queen Mab," he ever and anon, when wrought up to a pitch of high lyrical exaltation, bursts into expressions that are the direct contrary of his professed opinions, as when he says, for example, "Soul is the only element." This of course by no means implies that Shelley's thought was stationary, but merely that his mind possessed an original bias towards transcendentalism; and there can be little doubt that his positive assertions of atheism spring in great part, as is well illustrated by an anecdote told in Mr. Rossetti's Memoir, from the deep conviction that every advance towards truth must be painfully impeded, till the obstacles which an intolerant faith opposed to it had been fairly demolished. Many of his assertions therefore should be considered relatively rather as missiles used by a fearless combatant, than statements of an actual conviction. It is evident however that, although there are passages in "Queen Mab" which certainly seem very much in harmony with "Hellas" and "Adonais," yet the main philosophical conception is in fact widely different, and we recognise the clearest expression of this difference in the address to the "Spirit of Nature" ("Queen Mab," p. 39). In this fine piece of declamation, the Spirit of Nature is represented as insensible to all moral distinctions, and by a necessary consequence, as devoid of moral beauty. It is therefore no object of adoration, love, or even admiration: it is a mere machine, and what is still worse, the human beings produced and controlled by it must be as little the objects of affection or admiration. The spirit so gloriously described in "Adonais" is something widely different. "Its smile kindles the universe;" "it wields the world with never-wearied love." It is compared to a fire, reflected with an infinite variety of intensity by an infinite multitude of mirrors; if the reflection is imperfect, the fault is in the mirror, not in the fire. In a word, the spirit of "Queen Mab" is Necessity, and is addressed as such; the spirit of "Adonais" is Love, and is addressed as such. By so much higher as the idea of love is than the idea of necessity, by so much better as the poetry of "Adonais" is than the poetry of "Queen Mab," by so much higher and better are Shelley's last thoughts than his first. There is another noteworthy distinction. In "Queen Mab" the operation of the spirit is limited to the visible universe; it is expressly said to be "contained" by Nature. In "Adonais," on the other hand, it *contains* Nature; it not merely *pervades* but invests the universe—"Sustains it from beneath and kindles it above." The same idea is still more forcibly expressed in the prologue to "Hellas"—

“Deem not thy worlds
Are more than furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops
Before the Power that wields and kindles them.”

Briefly, the spirit in “Queen Mab” is contemplated as merely immanent in the universe. In “Adonais” and “Hellas” it is immanent still, but also transcendent. In this latter poem, indeed, we find that the immaterialism of Shelley had reached its culminating point, and it is a significant fact that he was studying Kant in September, 1821, and actually translating Spinoza in November of the same year, at the time when “Hellas” was completed. How intently his mind must have been engaged on these metaphysical speculations is evident from the fact that he represents the Sultan in the midst of insurrection, whilst his throne totters on the verge of ruin, as actually listening during an interview with Ahasuerus to the most profound exposition on the non-existence of matter. This is certainly carrying the love of philosophizing to an incredible extent. But the passage itself soars to such sublime heights of thought, and is moreover such a complete *résumé* of Shelley’s last convictions on these subjects, that we are fain to crown these few inadequate remarks with its surpassing splendour—

“Sultan! talk no more
Of thee and me, the future and the past;
But look on that which cannot change—the One,
The Unborn, and the undying. Earth and ocean,
Space, and the isles of life or light that gem
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire,
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds—this whole
Of suns and worlds, and men and beasts and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision;—all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
The future and the past are idle shadows
Of thought’s eternal flight—they have no being;
Nought is but that it feels itself to be.”

Is there not a strange significance in this fact, that the last work of importance on which this restless inquirer was engaged should have been cut off abruptly at this point of interrogation, “Then what is Life?” Bewildered cry cast into space whose mournful reverberations were straightway muffled in death! Evidently projected on a colossal scale, and wrapped in an

atmosphere of supernatural mystery, where dream is superimposed on dream, there is in the "Triumph of Life" a weird labyrinth of gloom and glare, and amid the cloudy whirl of grey, half-ghastly phantoms, gleams of a celestial radiance which almost recal to us the visions of the Apocalypse. Its allegory is still indeed, and we fear must in part probably remain, a magnificent riddle; we nevertheless entertain the hope that a minute comparison with passages both in the poetry and prose might help us to discover coincidences of symbol and imagery which should throw a ray of light on the dark intricacy. There can be no doubt that "the shape all light" which is described as appearing to Rousseau gliding out of the deep cavern along the river—

"With palms so tender
Their tread broke not the mirror of its billow,"

is the Urania of which it is said in "Adonais"—

"Out of her secret paradise she sped
Through camp and cities rough with stone and steel,
And human hearts which to her aery tread
Yielding, not wounded, the invisible
Palms of her tender feet where'er they fell."

On the other hand, the New Vision of the Car, wherein sits a hooded figure crouching in the shadow of the tomb, represents Life, and the Janus-visaged shadow who guides it with bandaged eyes may be identified with

"The world's eyeless charioteer—
Destiny,"

spoken of in "Hellas." The excessive glare which is described as proceeding from that chariot dims the fair shape, as hurrying on with solemn speed it whirls the loud million triumphantly along with it. This probably means that all but a chosen few are seized and preyed upon by the multitudinous passions of the world, whose fiercer fires extinguish the celestial flame or aspiration after perfection. Rousseau himself is a type of those men of genius who, having allowed the impure breath of earth to alloy the spark with which their spirit had been kindled, have thus in part subjected themselves to corruption. It also appears probable that "The Fable," printed in the "Relics of Shelley," and itself a remarkable fragment, written about the same time as "Epipsychidion," affords a clue to that perplexing allegory of the phantoms near the end of the poem. It is there said that by the counsel of Life, Love left man in a savage place with only the company of shrouded figures, of whom it is said, "None can expound whether these figures were the spectres of

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