CHAPTER XV.

FREE AGAIN.—SHELLEY IN ENGLAND.

Dignified neighbour and landlord.—Visits from Lord Byron and Mr. Wordsworth.—Infernal conduct of the angels in Paradise Lost.—Return of hypochondria.—Descent of liberty.—Story of Rimini.—United States.—Visits to Lord Byron.—History of Shelley while in England.

On leaving prison, I went to live in the Edgware-road, because my brother’s house was in the neighbourhood. When we met, we rushed into each other’s arms, and tears of manhood bedewed our cheeks.

Not that the idea of the Prince Regent had anything to do with such grave emotions. His Royal Highness continued to affect us with anything but solemnity, as we took care to make manifest in the Examiner. We had a hopeful and respectful word for every reigning prince, but himself; and I must say, that with the exception of the Emperor Alexander, not one of them deserved it.

The lodging which my family occupied (for the
fine, and the state of my health, delayed our re-
sumption of a house) was next door to a wealthy
old gentleman, who kept a handsome carriage, and
spoke very bad grammar. My landlord, who was
also a dignified personage after his fashion, pointed
him out to me one day, as he was getting into this
carriage; adding, in a tone amounting to the awful,
“He is the greatest plumber in London.” The
same landlord, who had a splendid turn for anti-
climax, and who had gifted his children with names
proportionate to his paternal sense of what became
him, called out to one of them from his parlour
window, “You, sir, there—Maximilian—come out
of the gutter.” He was a good-natured sort of
domineering individual; and would say to his wife,
when he went out, “Damn it, my love, I insist
on having the pudding.”

In this house, Lord Byron continued the visits
which he made me in prison. Unfortunately, I
was too ill to return them. He pressed me very
much to go to the theatre with him; but illness, and
the dread of committing my critical independence,
alike prevented me. His lordship was one of a
management that governed Drury-lane Theatre at
that time, and that were not successful. He got
nothing by it, but petty vexations and a good deal of
scandal.

Lord Byron’s appearance at that time was the
finest I ever saw it. He was fatter than before his marriage, but only just enough so to complete the elegance of his person; and the turn of his head and countenance had a spirit and elevation in it, which, though not unmixed with disquiet, gave him altogether a very noble look. His dress, which was black, with white trousers, and which he wore buttoned close over the body, completed the succinctness and gentlemanliness of his appearance. I remember one day, as he stood looking out of the window, he resembled in a lively manner the portrait of him by Phillips, by far the best that has appeared; I mean the best of him at his best time of life, and the most like him in features as well as expression. He sat one morning so long, that Lady Byron sent up twice to let him know she was waiting. Her ladyship used to go on in the carriage to Henderson's nursery-ground, to get flowers. I had not the honour of knowing her, nor ever saw her but once, when I caught a glimpse of her at the door. I thought she had a pretty, earnest look, with her "pippin" face; an epithet by which she playfully designated herself.

I had a little study overlooking the fields to Westbourne,—a sequestered spot at that time embowered in trees. The study was draperied with white and green, having furniture to match; and as the noble poet had seen me during my imprisonment in a
bower of roses, he might here be said, with no great stretch of imagination, to have found me in a box of lilies. I mention this, because he took pleasure in the look of the little apartment. Also, because my wife's fair cousin, V. K. now, alas! no more, who was as good as she was intelligent, and as resolute as gentle, extinguished me there one morning when my dressing-gown had caught fire. She was all her life, indeed, taking painful tasks on herself, to save trouble to others.

In a room at the end of the garden to this house was a magnificent rocking-horse, which a friend had given my little boy; and Lord Byron, with a childish glee becoming a poet, would ride upon it. Ah! why did he ever ride his Pegasus to less advantage? Poets should never give up their privilege of surmounting sorrow with joy.

It was here also I had the honour of a visit from Mr. Wordsworth. He came to thank me for the zeal I had shewn in advocating the cause of his genius. I had the pleasure of shewing him his book on my shelves by the side of Milton; a sight which must have been the more agreeable, inasmuch as the visit was unexpected. He favoured me, in return, with giving his opinion of some of the poets his contemporaries, who would assuredly not have paid him a visit on the same grounds on which he was pleased to honour myself. Nor do I believe, that
from that day to this, he thought it becoming in him to reciprocate the least part of any benefit which a word in good season may have done for him. Lord Byron, in resentment for my having called him the "prince of the bards of his time," would not allow him to be even the "one-eyed monarch of the blind." He said he was the "blind monarch of the one-eyed." I must still differ with his lordship on that point; but I must own, that, after all which I have seen and read, posterity, in my opinion, will differ not a little with one person respecting the amount of merit to be ascribed to Mr. Wordsworth; though who that one person is, I shall leave the reader to discover.

Mr. Wordsworth, whom Mr. Hazlitt designated as one that would have had the wide circle of his humanities made still wider, and a good deal more pleasant, by dividing a little more of his time between his lakes in Westmoreland and the hotels of the metropolis, had a dignified manner, with a deep and roughish but not unpleasing voice, and an exalted mode of speaking. He had a habit of keeping his left hand in the bosom of his waistcoat; and in this attitude, except when he turned round to take one of the subjects of his criticism from the shelves (for his contemporaries were there also), he sat dealing forth his eloquent but hardly catholic judgments. In his "father's house," there were not "many mansions."
He was as sceptical on the merits of all kinds of poetry but one, as Richardson was on those of the novels of Fielding.

Under the study in which my visitor and I were sitting was an archway, leading to a nursery-ground; a cart happened to go through it while I was inquiring whether he would take any refreshment; and he uttered, in so lofty a voice, the words, "Anything which is going forward," that I felt inclined to ask him whether he would take a piece of the cart. Lamb would certainly have done it. But this was a levity which would neither have been so proper on my part, after so short an acquaintance, nor very intelligible perhaps, in any sense of the word, to the serious poet. There are good-humoured warrants for smiling, which lie deeper even than Mr. Wordsworth's thoughts for tears.

I did not see this distinguished person again till thirty years afterwards; when, I should venture to say, his manner was greatly superior to what it was in the former instance; indeed, quite natural and noble, with a cheerful air of animal as well as spiritual confidence; a gallant bearing, curiously reminding one of a certain illustrious duke, as I have seen him walking some dozen years ago by a lady's side, with no unbecoming oblivion of his time of life. I observed, also, that he no longer committed himself in scornful criticisms, or, indeed, in any criticisms
whatever, at least as far as I knew. He had found out that he could, at least, afford to be silent. Indeed, he spoke very little of anything. The conversation turned upon Milton, and I fancied I had opened a subject that would have "brought him out," by remarking, that the most diabolical thing in all *Paradise Lost* was a feeling attributed to the angels. "Ay!" said Mr. Wordsworth, and inquired what it was. I said it was the passage in which the angels, when they observed Satan journeying through the empyrean, let down a set of steps out of heaven, on purpose to add to his misery,—to his despair of ever being able to re-ascend them; they being angels in a state of bliss, and he a fallen spirit doomed to eternal punishment. The passage is as follows:—

"Each stair was meant mysteriously, nor stood
There always, but, drawn up to heaven, sometimes
Viewless; and underneath a bright sea flow'd
Of jasper, or of liquid pearl, whercon
Who after came from earth sailing arriv'd
Wafted by angels, or flew o'er the lake
Rapt in a chariot drawn by fiery steeds.
The stairs were then let down, whether to dare
The fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate
*His sad exclusion from the doors of bliss.*"

Mr. Wordsworth pondered, and said nothing. I thought to myself, what pity for the poor devil would not good uncle Toby have expressed! Into what indignation would not Burns have exploded! What
knowledge of themselves would not have been forced upon those same coxcomical and malignant angels by Fielding or Shakspeare!

Walter Scott said, that the eyes of Burns were the finest he ever saw. I cannot say the same of Mr. Wordsworth; that is, not in the sense of the beautiful, or even of the profound. But certainly I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired or supernatural. They were like fires half burning, half smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixture of regard, and seated at the further end of two caverns. One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes.

It was for a good while after leaving prison that I was unable to return the visits of the friends who saw me there. Two years' confinement, and illness in combination, had acted so injuriously upon a sensitive temperament, that for many months I could not leave home without a morbid wish to return, and a fear of being seized with some fit or other in the streets, perhaps with sudden death; and this was one of the periods when my hypochondria came back. In company, however, or at the sight of a friend, animal spirits would struggle even with that; and few people, whatever ill-health I shewed in my face, had the slightest idea of what I suffered. When they thought I was simply jaundiced, I was puzzling myself with the cosmogony. When they fancied me wholly occupied in some conversation on a poem or a pot of
flowers, I would be haunted with the question respecting the origin of evil. What agonies, to be sure—what horrible struggles between wonder and patience—I suffered then! and into what a heaven of reliance and of gladness have I been since brought, by a little better knowledge of the tuning of the instruments of this existence, whether bodily or mental, taking right healthy spirits as the key-note, and harmonizing everything else with those! But I have treated this point already. Let me repeat my advice, however, to any one who may be suffering melancholy of the same sort, or of any sort, to take this recollection of mine to heart, and do his best to derive comfort from it. I thought I should die early, and in suffering; and here I am, thirty years afterwards, writing these words.

“For thilkè ground, that beareth the weed’s wick,
Beareth also these wholesome herbs as oft;
And next to the foul nettle, rough and thick,
The rose ywaxcth sweet, and smooth, and soft;
And next the valley is the hill aloft;
And next the darky night is the glad morrow,
And also joy is next the fine of sorrow.”

CHAUCER.

In the spring of the year 1816 I went to reside again in Hampstead, for the benefit of the air, and of my old field walks; and there I finished the Story of Rimini, which was forthwith published. I have spoken of a masque on the downfall of Napoleon,
called the *Descent of Liberty*, which I wrote while in prison. *Liberty* descends in it from heaven, to free the earth from the burthen of an evil magician. It was a compliment to the Allies, which they deserved well enough, inasmuch as it was a failure; otherwise they did not deserve it at all; for it was founded on a belief in promises which they never kept. There was a vein of something true in the *Descent of Liberty*, particularly in passages where the domestic affections were touched upon; but the poetry was too much on the surface. Fancy (encouraged by the allegorical nature of the masque) played her part too entirely in it at the expense of imagination. I had not yet got rid of the self-sufficiency caused by my editorial position, or by the credit, better deserved, which political courage had obtained for me. I had yet to learn in what the subtler spirit of poetry consisted.

Nor had I discovered it when I wrote the *Story of Rimini*. It was written in what, perhaps, at my time of life, and after the degree of poetical reputation which has been conceded me, I may be allowed, after the fashion of painters, to call my "first manner;" not the worst manner conceivable, though far from the best; as far from it (or at whatever greater distance modesty may require it to be put) as Dryden's *Flower and the Leaf*, from the story in Chaucer which Dryden imitated. I must take leave, however, to regard it as a true picture, painted after a certain
mode; and I can never forget the comfort I enjoyed in painting it, though I think I have since executed some things with a more inward perception of poetical requirement.

This poem, the greater part of which was written in prison, had been commenced a year or two before, while I was visiting the sea-coast at Hastings, with my wife and our first child. I was very happy; and looking among my books for some melancholy theme of verse, by which I could steady my felicity, I unfortunately chose the subject of Dante's famous episode. I did not consider, indeed at that time was not critically aware, that to enlarge upon a subject which had been treated with exquisite sufficiency, and to his immortal renown, by a great master, was not likely, by any merit of detail, to save a tyro in the art from the charge of presumption, especially one who had not yet even studied mastery itself, except in a subordinate shape. Dryden, at that time, in spite of my sense of Milton's superiority, and my early love of Spenser, was the most delightful name to me in English poetry. I had found in him more vigour, and music too, than in Pope, who had been my closest poetical acquaintance; and I could not rest till I had played on his instrument. I brought, however, to my task a sympathy with the tender and the pathetic, which I did not find in my master; and there was also an impulsive difference now and then in
the style, and a greater tendency to simplicity of words. My versification was not so vigorous as his. There were many weak lines in it. It succeeded best in catching the variety of his cadences; at least so far as they broke up the monotony of Pope. But I had a greater love for the beauties of external nature; I think also I partook of a more southern insight into the beauties of colour, of which I made abundant use in the procession which is described in the first canto; and if I invested my story with too many circumstances of description, especially on points not essential to its progress, and thus took leave in toto of the brevity, as well as the force of Dante, still the enjoyment which led me into the superfluity was manifest, and so far became its warrant. I had the pleasure of supplying my friendly critic, Lord Byron, with a point for his Parisina (the incident of the heroine talking in her sleep); of seeing all the reigning poets, without exception, break up their own heroic couplets into freer modulation (which they never afterwards abandoned); and of being paid for the resentment of the Tory critics in one single sentence from the lips of Mr. Rogers, who told me, when I met him for the first time at Lord Byron's house, that he had "just left a beautiful woman sitting over my poem in tears."

I was then between twenty and thirty: I am now between sixty and seventy; and I have just been
told by a friend, that he lately heard one of the most distinguished of living authoresses say she had shed "tears of vexation" on finding that I had recast the conclusion of the poem, and taken away so much of the first matter.

Let it be allowed me to boast of tears of this kind, and to say what balm they have given me for many a wound.

That recasting of the poem was not a wise thing. The improvement which it received from the invigoration of weak lines, was injudiciously purchased by the change in the heroine's character, and the diminution of the pathos. I found I had not even attained the principal object of the alteration,—the real truth of the events on which the story was founded; and nobody welcomed the pains I had taken to obviate those charges of too attractive a sympathy with error, which had surprised me when the poem first appeared, and which the "tears of vexation" in the eyes of a morality the most received would alone have sufficed to nullify. The danger of the time, indeed the danger of all times, is, not too great a sympathy with error, but ignorance of the first causes of error.

I need hardly advert, at the present time of day, to the objections of this kind, or of any kind, which were made to the poem, when it first appeared, by the wrath of the Tory critics. In fact, it would
have met with no such hostility, or indeed any hostility at all, if politics had not judged it. Critics might have differed about it, of course, and reasonably have found fault; but had it emanated from the circles, or been written by any person not obnoxious to political objection, I believe there is nobody at this time of day, who will not allow, that the criticism in all quarters would have been very goodnatured, and willing to hail whatever merit it possessed. I may therefore be warranted in having spoken of it without any greater allusion to quarrels which have long been over, and to which I have confessed that I gave the first cause of provocation.

In a new edition of the poem, which is meditated, I propose to retain the improvement in its versification, while I restore the narrative to its first course. With its historical truth, or otherwise, I shall no longer trouble myself; and I shall request the readers, if they can, to dismiss Dante from their minds, and to consider the story as a fiction having as little in common with his ferocity as with his sublimity;—a design altogether different in its pretensions;—a picture, by an immature hand, of sunny luxuriance overclouded; not of a cloud, no less brief than beautiful, crossing the gulfs of Tartarus. Those who, after having seen lightning, will tolerate no other effect of light, have a right to say so, and may have the highest critical reason on their side;
but those who will do otherwise, have perhaps more; for they can enjoy lightning, and a bask in the sunshine too.

The *Story of Rimini* had not long appeared, when I received a copy of it, which looked like witchcraft. It was the identical poem, in type and appearance, bound in calf, and sent me without any explanation; but it was a little smaller. I turned it over a dozen times, wondering what it could be, and how it could have originated. The simple solution of the puzzle I did not consider, till I had summoned other persons to partake my astonishment. At length we consulted the title-page, and there saw the names of "Wells and Lilly, Boston; and M. Carey, Philadelphia."—I thought how the sight would have pleased my father and mother. A few years ago I received a copy of another Boston edition, preceded by the like piracy of another poem, the publisher of which was so good as to say, that he had heard of a new one from my pen, which he should be very happy to print also, if I would send it him. Not a syllable did he add about the happiness of disbursing a doit for the permission. How many poems of mine, or editions of poems, or editions of prose-writings, have appeared in America, before or since, I cannot say; but I believe the booksellers there have republished everything which I have written; and I confess I cannot but be sensible even of the
shabby honour thus done me, and heartily glad of every genial hand into which my productions may be carried in consequence: but I should like to know, what an American publisher would say, if some English traveller were to help himself to the fruits of his labour out of the till, and make off with them on board ship. Being a cousin-germane of the Americans, I am very popular in their country, and receive from them every compliment imaginable, except a farthing’s payment. How came my mother to be born in such a country? I love the women there for her sake, especially the Philadelphia women; I respect, also, every American that differs with his bookseller; and I hold in due favour their Bryants, their Emersons, their Lovells, and their ambassadors. But I wish I could get rid of the impression which I have before mentioned; to wit, that one great shop-counter extends all down their coast from Massachusetts to Mexico. Why do they not get a royal court or two among them, and thus learn that there is something else in the world besides huffing and money-getting? To be slave-holding in the south, payment-shirking in the north, and arrogant everywhere, is not to “go a-head” of the nations, but to fall back into the times of colonial Dutchmen. Money-getting republics may be the millennium of the mercantile; but they are neither the desires of human nature, nor of merchants them-
selves when they come to be lords *in posse*. The world, before it be satisfied with its governmental arrangements, must settle itself into something very different, either from feudality's men of iron, or Sydney Smith's "men of drab."

I now returned the visits which Lord Byron had made me in prison. His wife's separation from him had just taken place, and he had become ill himself; his face was jaundiced with bile; he felt the attacks of the public severely; and, to crown all, he had an execution in his house. I was struck with the real trouble he manifested, compared with what the public thought of it. The adherence of his old friends was also touching. I saw Mr. Hobhouse (Sir John) and Mr. Scrope Davies (college friends of his) almost every time I called. Mr. Rogers was regular in his daily visits; and Lord Holland, he told me, was very kind.

Lord Byron, at this juncture, took the blame of the quarrel upon himself. He even enlisted the self-love of his new visitor so far on the lady's side, as to tell him "that she liked my poem, and had compared his temper to that of Giovanni, the heroine's consort."* He also showed me a letter which

* "The worst of Prince Giovanni, as his bride
Too quickly found, was an ill-temper'd pride.
Bold, handsome, able (if he chose) to please,—
Punctual and right in common offices,
she had written him after her departure from the house, and when she was on her way to the relations who persuaded her not to return. It was signed

He lost the sight of conduct's only worth,
The scattering smiles on this uneasy earth;
And, on the strength of virtues of small weight,
Claim'd towards himself the exercise of great.
He kept no reckoning with his sweets and sours;
He'd hold a sullen countenance for hours
And then, if pleas'd to cheer himself a space,
Look for the immediate rapture in your face,
And wonder that a cloud could still be there,
How small soever, when his own was fair.
Yet such is conscience,—so design'd to keep
Stern, central watch, though all things else may sleep,
And so much knowledge of one's self there lies
Cored, after all, in self-complacencies,
That no suspicion would have touch'd him more
Than that of wanting on the generous score:
He would have whelm'd you with a weight of scorn,—
Been proud at eve, inflexible at morn,—
In short, ill-temper'd for a week to come,
And all to strike that desperate error dumb.
Taste had he, in a word, for high-turn'd merit,
But not the patience, nor the genial spirit:
And so he made, 'twixt virtue and defect,
A sort of fierce demand on your respect,
Which, if assisted by his high degree,
It gave him in some eyes a dignity,
And struck a meaner deference in the many,
Left him, at last, unloveable with any.”

Giovanni, however, would not have had the candour to refer to any such description of himself as this; neither had he any of the wit and pleasantry of my noble friend.
with the epithet before mentioned; and was written in a spirit of good-humour, and even of fondness, which, though containing nothing but what a wife ought to write, and is the better for writing, was, I thought, almost too good to show. But a certain over-communicativeness was one of those qualities of his lordship, which equally became the child-like simplicity of a poet, and startled you in proportion as it led to disclosures of questionable propriety.

I thought I understood the circumstances of this separation at the time, and still better some time afterwards; but I have since been convinced, and the conviction grows stronger every day, that no domestic dispute, even if it were desirable or proper to investigate it, can ever be thoroughly understood unless you hear both parties, and know their entire relative situations, together with the interests and passions of those about them. You must also be sure of their statements; and see whether the statements on all sides themselves are prejudiced or the reverse. Indeed you cannot know individuals themselves truly, unless you have lived with them; at all events, unless you have studied them long enough to know whether appearances are realities; and although you may, and to a certain degree must, draw your own conclusions respecting people from statements which they give to the world, whether for or against themselves, yet it is safer, as
well as pleasanter, to leave that question as much as possible in the place where it ought ever to have abided, unless brought forward on the highest and noblest grounds; namely, in the silence of the heart that has most suffered under its causes.

I shall, therefore, say nothing more of a business which nobody ought to have heard of. Lord Byron soon afterwards left England, and I did not see him again, or hear from him, scarcely of him, till he proposed my joining him in Italy. I take my leave of him, therefore, till that period, and proceed to speak of the friends with whom I became intimate in the mean while—Shelley and Keats.

I first saw Shelley during the early period of the Examiner, before its indictment on account of the Regent; but it was only for a few short visits, which did not produce intimacy. He was then a youth, not come to his full growth; very gentlemanly, earnestly gazing at every object that interested him, and quoting the Greek dramatists. Not long afterwards he married his first wife; and he subsequently wrote to me while I was in prison, as I have before mentioned. I renewed the correspondence a year or two afterwards, during which period one of the earliest as well as most beautiful of his lyric poems, the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, had appeared in the Examiner. Meantime, he and his wife had parted; and now he re-appeared before me at Hampstead, in
consequence of the calamity which I am about to mention.

But this circumstance it will be proper to introduce with some remarks, and a little previous biography.

It is hardly necessary to inform the reader at this present day, that Percy Bysshe Shelley was the eldest son of Sir Timothy Shelley, Bart., of Castle-Goring, in Sussex. He was born at Field-Place, in that county, the 4th of August 1792.

It is difficult, under any circumstances, to speak with proper delicacy of the living connections of the dead; but it is no violation of decorum to observe, that the family connections of Mr. Shelley belonged to a small party in the House of Commons, itself belonging to another party. They were Whig Aristocrats, voting in the interest of the Duke of Norfolk. To a man of genius, endowed with a metaphysical acuteness to discern truth and falsehood, and a strong sensibility to give way to his sense of it, such an origin, however respectable in the ordinary point of view, was not the very luckiest that could have happened for the purpose of keeping him within ordinary bounds. With what feelings is Truth to open its eyes upon this world among the most respectable of our mere party gentry? Among licensed contradictions of all sorts? among the Christian doctrines and the worldly practices?
fox-hunters and their chaplains? among beneficed loungers, rakish old gentlemen, and more startling young ones, who are old in the folly of knowing-ness? people not, indeed, bad in themselves; not so bad as their wholesale and unthinking decriers, much less their hypocritical decriers; many excellent by nature, but spoilt by those professed demands of what is right and noble, and those inculcations, at the same time, of what is false and wrong, which have been so admirably exposed by a late philosopher (Bentham), and which he has fortunately helped some of our best living statesmen to leave out of the catalogue of their ambitions.

Shelley began to think at a very early age, and to think, too, of these anomalies. He saw that at every step in life some compromise was expected between a truth which he was told not to violate, and a colouring and double-meaning of it which forced him upon the violation.

Doubtless there are numbers of young men who discern nothing of all this; who are, comparatively, even unspoilt by it; and who become respectable tellers of truth in its despite. These are the honourable part of the orthodox; good-natured fathers and husbands, conscientious though not very inquiring clergymen, respectable men in various walks of life, who, thinking they abide by the ideas that have been set before them, really have very few ideas of anything, and
are only remarkable for affording specimens of every sort of commonplace, comfortable or unhappy. On the other hand, numbers of young men get a sense of this confusion of principles, if not with a direct and logical consciousness, yet with an instinct for turning it to account. Even some of these, by dint of a genial nature, and upon the same principle on which a heathen priest would eschew the vices of his mythology, turn out decent members of society. But how many others are spoilt for ever! How many victims to this confusion of truth and falsehood, apparently flourishing, but really callous or unhappy, are to be found in all quarters of the community; men who profess opinions which contradict their whole lives; takers of oaths, which they dispense with the very thought of; subscribers to articles which they doubt, or even despise: triffers with their hourly word for gain; statesmen of mere worldliness; ready hirelings of power; sneering disbelievers in good; teachers to their own children of what has spoilt themselves, and has rendered their existence a dull and selfish mockery.

Whenever a character like Shelley's appears in society, it must be considered with reference to these abuses. Others may consent to be spoilt by them, and to see their fellow-creatures spoilt. He was a looker-on of a different nature.

With this jumble, then, of truth and falsehood in
his head, and a genius born to detect it, though perhaps never quite able to rid itself of the injury (for if ever he deviated into an error unworthy of him, it was in occasionally condescending, though for the kindest purposes, to use a little double-dealing), Shelley was sent to Eton, and afterwards to the University of Oxford. At Eton, a Reviewer recollected him setting trees on fire with a burning-glass; a proceeding which the critic set down to his natural taste for destruction. Perhaps the same Reviewer (if we are not mistaken as to the person) would now, by the help of his own riper faculties, attribute it to the natural curiosity of genius. At the same school, the young reformer rose up in opposition to the system of fagging. Against this custom he formed a conspiracy; and for a time he made it pause, at least as far as his own person was concerned. His feelings at this period of his life are touchingly and powerfully described in the dedication of the Revolt of Islam.

"Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear friend, when first
The clouds which wrap this world from youth did pass.
I do remember well the hour which burst
My spirit's sleep: a fresh May-day it was,
When I walk'd forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I knew not why, until there rose
From the near schoolroom, voices, that, alas!
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes."
"And then I clasp'd my hands, and look'd around,—
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which pour'd their warm drops on the sunny ground:
So without shame I spake: 'I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power; for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check.' I then controll'd
My tears; my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold.

"And from that hour did I, with earnest thought,
Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore;
Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
I cared to learn; but from that secret store
Wrought linkéd armour for my soul, before
It might walk forth to war among mankind."

Shelley, I believe, was taken from Eton before
the regular period for leaving school. His unconven-
tional spirit—penetrating, sincere, and demanding
the reason and justice of things—was found to be
inconvenient. At Oxford it was worse. Logic was
there put into his hands; and he used it in the most
uncompromising manner. The more important the
proposition, the more he thought himself bound to
investigate it: the greater the demand upon his
assent, the less, upon their own principle of reason-
ing, he thought himself bound to grant it: for the
university, by its ordinances, invited scholars to ask
questions which they found themselves unable to
answer. Shelley did so; and the answer was expul-
sion. It is true, the question he asked was a very
hard one. It was upon the existence of God. But could neither Faith, Hope, nor Charity find a better answer than that? and in the teeth, too, of their own challenge to inquiry? Could not some gentle and loving nature have been found to speak to him in private, and beg him at least to consider and pause over the question, for reasons which would have had their corresponding effect? The Church of England has been a blessing to mankind, inasmuch as it has discountenanced the worst superstitions, and given sense and improvement leave to grow; but if it cannot learn still further to sacrifice letter to spirit, and see the danger of closing its lips on the greatest occasions and then proceeding to open them on the smallest, and dispute with its very self on points the most "frivolous and vexatious," it will do itself an injury it little dreams of with the new and constantly growing intelligence of the masses; who are looking forward to the noblest version of Christianity, while their teachers are thus fighting about the meanest.

Conceive a young man of Mr. Shelley's character, with no better experience of the kindness and sincerity of those whom he had perplexed, thus thrown forth into society, to form his own judgments, and pursue his own career. It was Emilius out in the World, but formed by his own tutorship. There is a novel, under that title, written by the German La Fontaine, which has often reminded me of him. The
hero of another, by the same author, called the *Reprobate*, still more resembles him. *His way of proceeding was entirely after the fashion of those guileless, but vehement hearts, which not being well replied to by their teachers, and finding them hostile to inquiry, add to a natural love of truth all the passionate ardour of a generous and devoted protection of it.* Shelley had met with Godwin’s *Political Justice*; and he seemed to breathe, for the first time, in an open and bright atmosphere. He resolved to square all his actions by what he conceived to be the strictest justice, without any consideration for the opinions of those whose little exercise of that virtue towards himself ill-fitted them, he thought, for better teachers, and as ill warranted him in deferring to the opinions of the world whom they guided. That he did some extraordinary things in consequence, is admitted: that he did many noble ones, and all with sincerity, *is well known to his friends, and will be admitted by all sincere persons.* Let those who are so fond of exposing their own natures, by attributing every departure from ordinary conduct to bad motives, ask themselves what conduct could be more extraordinary in their eyes, and at the same time less attributable to a bad motive, than the rejection of an estate for the love of a principle. Yet Shelley rejected one. He had only to become a
yea and nay man in the House of Commons, to be one of the richest men in Sussex. He declined it, and lived upon a comparative pittance. Even the fortune that he would ultimately have inherited, as secured to his person, was petty in the comparison.

I will relate another anecdote, which the uncharitable will not find it so difficult to quarrel with. It trenches upon that extraordinary privilege to indulge one sex at the expense of the other, which they guard with so jealous a care, and so many beggings of the question. The question, I grant, is weighty. Far am I from saying that it is here settled; but very far are they themselves from having settled it; as their own writings and statistics, their own morals, romances, tears, and even comedies testify. The case, I understood, was this; for I am bound to declare that I forget who told it me; and I never asked Shelley whether it was true. But it is quite in character, and not likely to have been invented. Shelley was present at a ball, where he was a person of some importance. Numerous village ladies were there, old and young; and none of the passions were absent that are accustomed to glance in the eyes, and gossip in the tongues, of similar gatherings together of talk and dress. In the front were seated the rank and fashion of the place. The virtues diminished, as the seats went backward; and at the back of all, unspoken to, but not unheeded,
sat blushing a damsel who had been seduced. It is not stated by whom; probably by some well-dressed gentleman in the room, who thought himself entitled, nevertheless, to the conversation of the most flourishing ladies present, and who naturally thought so, because he had it. That sort of thing happens every day. It was expected that the young squire would take out one of these ladies to dance. What is the consternation, when they see him making his way to the back benches, and handing forth, with an air of consolation and tenderness, the object of all the virtuous scorn of the room! the person whom that other gentleman, wrong as he had been towards her, and "wicked" as the ladies might have allowed him to be towards the fair sex in general, would have shrunk from touching!—The young reformer, it was found, was equally unfit for school tyrannies, for university inconsistencies, and for the chaste orthodoxy of squires’ tables. So he went up to town.

Had he now behaved himself pardonably in the eyes of the conventional in those days (for it is wonderful in how short a time honest discussion may be advanced by a court at once correct and unbigoted, and a succession of calmly progressing ministries; and all classes are now beginning to suffer the wisdom of every species of abuse to be doubted), Shelley would have gone to London with the resolution of sowing his wild oats, and becoming a decent.
member of society; that is to say, he would have seduced a few maid-servants, or at least haunted the lobbies, and then bestowed the remnant of his constitution upon some young lady of his own rank in life, and settled into a proper church-and-king man of the old leaven, perhaps a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. This used to be the proper routine, and gave one a right to be didactic. Alas! Shelley did not do so; and bitterly had he to repent, not that he did not do it, but that he married while yet a stripling, and that the wife whom he took was not of a nature to appreciate his understanding, or, perhaps, to come from contact with it uninjured in what she had of her own. They separated by mutual consent, after the birth of two children. To this measure his enemies would hardly have demurred; especially as the marriage was disapproved by the husband's family, and the lady was of inferior rank. It might have been regarded even as something like making amends. But to one thing they would strongly have objected. He proceeded, in the spirit of Milton's doctrines, to pay his court to another lady. I wish I could pursue the story in the same tone; but now came the greatest pang of his life. He was residing at Bath, when news came to him that his wife had destroyed herself. It was a heavy blow to him; and he never forgot it. For a time, it tore his being to pieces; nor is there a doubt, that,
however deeply he was accustomed to reason on the nature and causes of evil, and on the steps necessary to be taken for opposing it, he was not without remorse for having no better exercised his judgment with regard to the degree of intellect he had allied himself with, and for having given rise to a premature independence of conduct in one unequal to the task. The lady was greatly to be pitied; so was the survivor. Let the collegiate refusers of argument, and the conventional sowers of their wild oats, with myriads of unhappy women behind them, rise up in judgment against him! Honester men will not be hindered from doing justice to sincerity wherever they find it; nor be induced to blast the memory of a man of genius and benevolence, for one painful passage in his life, which he might have avoided, had he been no better than his calumniators.

On the death of this unfortunate lady, Shelley married the daughter of Mr. Godwin, and resided at Great Marlow in Buckinghamshire, where my family and myself paid him a visit, and where he was a blessing to the poor. His charity, though liberal, was not weak. He inquired personally into the circumstances of his petitioners; visited the sick in their beds (for he had gone the round of the hospitals on purpose to be able to practise on occasion), and kept a regular list of industrious poor, whom he assisted with small sums to make up their accounts.
Here he wrote the *Revolt of Islam*, and *A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote through the Country*. He offered to give a tenth part of his income for a year towards the advancement of the project. He used to sit in a study adorned with casts, as large as life, of the Vatican Apollo and the celestial Venus. Between whiles he would walk in the garden, or take strolls about the country, or a sail in a boat, a diversion of which he was passionately fond. Flowers, or the sight of a happy face, or the hearing of a congenial remark, would make his eyes sparkle with delight. At other times he would suddenly droop into an aspect of dejection, particularly when a wretched face passed him, or when he saw the miserable-looking children of a lace-making village near him, or when he thought of his own children, of whom he had been deprived by the Court of Chancery. He once said to me during a walk in the Strand, "Look at all these worn and miserable faces that pass us, and tell me what is to be thought of the world they appear in?" I said, "Ah, but these faces are not all worn with grief. You must take the wear and tear of pleasure into the account; of secret joys as well as sorrows; of merry-makings, and sittings-up at night." He owned that there was truth in the remark. This was the sort of consolation which I was in the habit of giving him, and for which he was thankful, because I was sincere.
As to his children, the reader perhaps is not aware, that in this country of England, so justly called free on many accounts, and so proud of its "Englishman's castle,"—of the house, which nothing can violate,—a man's offspring can be taken from him to-morrow, who holds a different opinion from the Lord Chancellor in faith and morals. Hume's, if he had any, might have been taken. Gibbon's might have been taken. The virtuous Condorcet, if he had been an Englishman and a father, would have stood no chance. Plato, for his Republic, would have stood as little; and Mademoiselle de Gournay might have been torn from the arms of her adopted father Montaigne, convicted beyond redemption of seeing farther than the walls of the Court of Chancery. That such things are not done often, I believe: that they may be done oftener than people suspect, I believe also; for they are transacted with closed doors, and the details are forbidden to transpire.

Queen Mab, Shelley's earliest poetical production, written before he was out of his teens, and regretted by him as a crude production, was published without his consent. Yet he was convicted from it of holding the opinion which his teachers at the University had not thought fit to reason him out of. He was also charged with not being of the received opinions with regard to the intercourse of the sexes; and his children,
a girl and boy, were taken from him. They were transferred to the care of a clergyman of the Church of England. The circumstance deeply affected Shelley: so much so, that he never afterwards dared to trust himself with mentioning their names in my hearing, though I had stood at his side throughout the business; probably for that reason.* Shelley’s manner of life suffered greatly in its repute from this circumstance. He was said to be keeping a seraglio at Marlow; and his friends partook of the scandal. This keeper of a seraglio, who, in fact, was extremely difficult to please in such matters, and who had no idea of love unconnected with sentiment, passed his days like a hermit. He rose early in the morning, walked and read before breakfast, took that meal sparingly, wrote and studied the greater part of the morning, walked and read again, dined on vegetables (for he took neither meat nor wine), conversed

* The boy is since dead; and Shelley’s son by his second wife, the daughter of Godwin, has succeeded to the baronetcy. It seldom falls to the lot of a son to have illustrious descent so heaped upon him; his mother a woman of talents, his father a man of genius, his grandfather, Godwin, a writer secure of immortality; his grandmother, Godwin’s wife, the celebrated Mary Wollstonecraft: and on the side of his father’s ancestors he partakes of the blood of the intellectual as well as patrician family of the Sackvilles. But, what is most of all, his own intelligent and liberal nature makes him worthy of all this lustre.
with his friends (to whom his house was ever open),
again walked out, and usually finished with reading
to his wife till ten o'clock, when he went to bed.
This was his daily existence. His book was generally
Plato, or Homer, or one of the Greek tragedians, or
the Bible, in which last he took a great, though
peculiar, and often admiring interest. One of his
favourite parts was the book of Job. The writings
attributed to Solomon he thought too Epicurean, in
the modern sense of the word; and in his notions
of St. Paul, he agreed with the writer of the work
entitled Not Paul but Jesus. For his Christianity, in
the proper sense of the word, he went to the gospel
of St. James, and to the Sermon on the Mount by
Christ himself, for whose truly divine spirit he enten-
tained the greatest reverence. There was nothing
which embittered his enemies against him more than
the knowledge of this fact. His want of faith, indeed,
in the letter, and his exceeding faith in the
spirit, of Christianity, formed a comment, the one on
the other, very formidable to those who choose to
forget what scripture itself observes on that point.*

As an instance of Shelley's extraordinary gene-
rosity, a friend of his, a man of letters, enjoyed from
him at that period a pension of a hundred a year,
though he had but a thousand of his own; and he

* "For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."
continued to enjoy it till fortune rendered it superfluous. But the princeliness of his disposition was seen most in his behaviour to another friend, the writer of this memoir, who is proud to relate, that with money raised by an effort, Shelley once made him a present of fourteen hundred pounds, to extricate him from debt. I was not extricated, for I had not yet learned to be careful: but the shame of not being so, after such generosity, and the pain which my friend afterwards underwent when I was in trouble and he was helpless, were the first causes of my thinking of money-matters to any purpose. His last sixpence was ever at my service, had I chosen to share it. In a poetical epistle written some years afterwards, and published in the volume of Posthumous Poems, Shelley, in alluding to his friend's circumstances, which for the second time were then straitened, only made an affectionate lamentation that he himself was poor; never once hinting that he had already drained his purse for his friend.

To return to Hampstead.—Shelley often came there to see me, sometimes to stop for several days. He delighted in the natural broken ground, and in the fresh air of the place, especially when the wind set in from the north-west, which used to give him an intoxication of animal spirits. Here also he swam his paper boats on the ponds, and delighted to play with my children, particularly with my eldest boy,
the seriousness of whose imagination, and his susceptibility of a "grim" impression (a favourite epithet of Shelley's), highly interested him. He would play at "frightful creatures" with him, from which the other would snatch "a fearful joy," only begging him occasionally "not to do the horn," which was a way that Shelley had of screwing up his hair in front, to imitate a weapon of that sort. This was the boy (now a man of forty, and himself a fine writer) to whom Lamb took such a liking on similar accounts, and addressed some charming verses as his "favourite child." I have already mentioned him during my imprisonment.

As an instance of Shelley's playfulness when he was in good spirits, he was once going to town with me in the Hampstead stage, when our only companion was an old lady, who sat silent and still after the English fashion. Shelley was fond of quoting a passage from Richard the Second, in the commencement of which the king, in the indulgence of his misery, exclaims—

"For Heaven's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

Shelley, who had been moved into the ebullition by something objectionable which he thought he saw in the face of our companion, startled her into a look of the most ludicrous astonishment, by suddenly calling this passage to mind, and in his enthusiastic
tone of voice, addressing me by name with the first two lines. "Hunt!" he exclaimed,—

"For Heaven's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings."

The old lady looked on the coach-floor, as if expecting to see us take our seats accordingly.

But here follows a graver and more characteristic anecdote. Shelley was not only anxious for the good of mankind in general. We have seen what he proposed on the subject of Reform in Parliament, and he was always very desirous of the national welfare. It was a moot point when he entered your room, whether he would begin with some half-pleasant, half-pensive joke, or quote something Greek, or ask some question about public affairs. He once came upon me at Hampstead, when I had not seen him for some time; and after grasping my hands into both his, in his usual fervent manner, he sat down, and looked at me very earnestly, with a deep, though not melancholy, interest in his face. We were sitting with our knees to the fire, to which we had been getting nearer and nearer, in the comfort of finding ourselves together. The pleasure of seeing him was my only feeling at the moment; and the air of domesticity about us was so complete, that I thought he was going to speak of some family matter, either his or my own, when he asked me, at the close of an
intensity of pause, what was "the amount of the National Debt."

I used to rally him on the apparent inconsequentiality of his manner upon those occasions, and he was always ready to carry on the jest, because he said that my laughter did not hinder my being in earnest.

But here follows a crowning anecdote, into which I shall close my recollections of him at this period. We shall meet him again in Italy, and there, alas! I shall have to relate events graver still.

I was returning home one night to Hampstead after the opera. As I approached the door, I heard strange and alarming shrieks, mixed with the voice of a man. The next day, it was reported by the gossips that Mr. Shelley, no Christian (for it was he who was there), had brought some "very strange female" into the house, no better, of course, than she ought to be. The real Christian had puzzled them. Shelley, in coming to our house that night, had found a woman lying near the top of the hill, in fits. It was a fierce winter night, with snow upon the ground; and winter loses nothing of its fierceness at Hampstead. My friend, always the promptest as well as most pitying on these occasions, knocked at the first houses he could reach, in order to have the woman taken in. The invariable answer was, that they could not do it. He asked for an outhouse to put
her in, while he went for a doctor. Impossible! In vain he assured them she was no impostor. They would not dispute the point with him; but doors were closed, and windows were shut down. Had he lit upon worthy Mr. Park, the philologist, he would assuredly have come, in spite of his Calvinism. But he lived too far off. Had he lit upon my friend, Armitage Brown, who lived on another side of the heath; or on his friend and neighbour, Dilke; they would, either of them, have jumped up from amidst their books or their bed-clothes, and have gone out with him. But the paucity of Christians is astonishing, considering the number of them. Time flies; the poor woman is in convulsions; her son, a young man, lamenting over her. At last my friend sees a carriage driving up to a house at a little distance. The knock is given; the warm door opens; servants and lights pour forth. Now, thought he, is the time. He puts on his best address, which anybody might recognise for that of the highest gentleman as well as of an interesting individual, and plants himself in the way of an elderly person, who is stepping out of the carriage with his family. He tells his story. They only press on the faster. "Will you go and see her?" "No, sir; there's no necessity for that sort of thing, depend on it. Impostors swarm everywhere: the thing cannot be done; sir, your conduct is extraordinary." "Sir,"
cried Shelley, assuming a very different manner, and forcing the flourishing householder to stop out of astonishment, “I am sorry to say that your conduct is not extraordinary; and if my own seems to amaze you, I will tell you something which may amaze you a little more, and I hope will frighten you. It is such men as you who madden the spirits and the patience of the poor and wretched; and if ever a convulsion comes in this country (which is very probable), recollect what I tell you:—you will have your house, that you refuse to put the miserable woman into, burnt over your head.” “God bless me, sir! Dear me, sir!” exclaimed the poor frightened man, and fluttered into his mansion. The woman was then brought to our house, which was at some distance, and down a bleak path; and Shelley and her son were obliged to hold her till the doctor could arrive. It appeared that she had been attending this son in London, on a criminal charge made against him, the agitation of which had thrown her into the fits on her return. The doctor said that she would have perished, had she lain there a short time longer. The next day my friend sent mother and son comfortably home to Hendon, where they were known, and whence they returned him thanks full of gratitude.