

hails to us from a revolutionary era. Born in 1792, he was practically cradled in the revolution that convulsed almost all Europe in its throes. He lived at a time when the air was full of lurid contrast, when man's imaginations were inflamed and distorted by the huge interval between their ideal conceptions and the actual social and political conditions they saw before their eyes. What wonder, then, that Shelley, essentially sensitive and romantic as he was, having run counter at the very outset of his career to some of the grosser anomalies of his time, should pass thence to a blind and unreasoning prejudice against existent institutions in general?

The next poem that calls for treatment is "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude." I pass to this naturally, since it comes next in the chronological order, and because, in an important sense it presents Shelley's powers in transition from the excess that marked them in "Queen Mab" to the self-contained symmetry that characterises the later poems.

As will be seen from the alternate title of the piece, and, of course, from a reading of it, "Alastor" is a description of the soul in the interesting, though unhappy, condition that ensues upon unwise self-seclusion and isolation. It will likewise be seen that Shelley's theme here is practically identical with that of Tennyson in his "Palace of Art," and I venture to say also, with that of Coleridge in his "Ancient Mariner." You will remember that Tennyson, in the introduction to his allegory, says:—

"And he that shuts Love out, in turn
shall be
Shut out from Love, and on her threshold
lie,
Howling in outer darkness."

Tennyson's soul builds for itself a lordly pleasure-house, in which it purports to dwell in imperial isolation:—

"I take possession of man's mind and deed,
I care not what the sects may brawl,
I sit as God, holding up no form of creed,
But contemplating all."

It will be noticed that there is an identical point in all three poems, that is to say, there comes a time when the hero in each case realizes acutely the horror of

his loneliness. This Tennyson expresses in his own way:—

"And so she throve and prosper'd: so
three years

She prosper'd: on the fourth she fell,
Like Herod, when the shout was in his
ears,

Struck thro' with pangs of hell."

and Coleridge, if my suspicion be correct, in his in the well-known lines beginning,

"Alone, alone, all, all alone," etc.

But the fact is that from this on there is more likeness between Tennyson's poem and Coleridge's than between either and "Alastor." In both of the former the principal figure having repented, is absolved from quiet and restored to the wholesome exercise of his faculties in community with his fellows. No such happy fate awaits Alastor. Of this we get an anticipatory touch in the very opening lines, where Shelley says,

"He lived, and died, and sung in solitude."

All this is but to say that the tendency of Tennyson's "Palace of Art," and Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" is decidedly Christian, whereas the bearing of "Alastor" is somewhat pagan. The close, and consequently the main teaching of "Alastor" is, in spite of identity of theme, as far removed from that of the other two poems mentioned as the poles are asunder.

There are many remarkable passages scattered through this poem. For example, the description of the scene in the Vale of Cashmir, where, for the first time, the vision of Sweet Human Love dawned upon the poet, is eminently picturesque in the sense that it would lend itself admirably to the pencil of an artist worthy of the theme. Let me note, in passing, that there are throughout this extract signs of sensuous emotion that show Shelley to have been, on occasion, no mean rival of Byron—himself the arch-apostle of intensity and passion.

Limits already too far transcended forbid me to dilate upon the relations of Shelley with Byron, as known to us by external evidence, and as revealed by the admirably idolized account to be found in "Julian and Maddalo." Had I had an