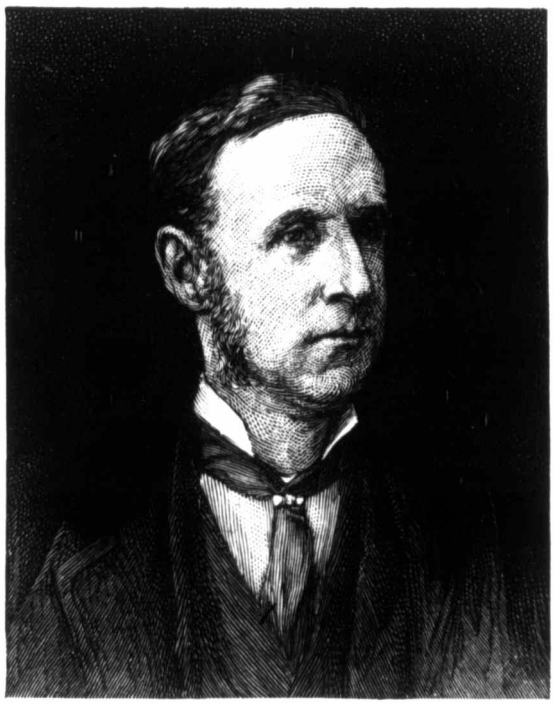

Portrait Edition

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY

JOHN MORLEY

I.

MILTON. By Mark Pattison

GIBBON. By J. Cotter Morison

SHELLEY. By John Addington Symonds

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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS.

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY.

Portrait Edition.

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XIII.

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MILTON

BY

MARK PATTISON

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MILTON.

FIRST PERIOD. 1608—1639.

CHAPTER I.

FAMILY—SCHOOL—COLLEGE.

In the seventeenth century it was not the custom to publish two volumes upon every man or woman whose name had appeared on a title-page. Nor, where lives of authors were written, were they written with the redundancy of particulars which is now allowed. Especially are the lives of the poets and dramatists obscure and meagrely recorded. Of Milton, however, we know more personal details than of any man of letters of that age. Edward Phillips, the poet's nephew, who was brought up by his uncle, and lived in habits of intercourse with him to the last, wrote a life, brief, inexact, superficial, but valuable from the nearness of the writer to the subject of his memoir. A cotemporary of Milton, John Aubrey (b. 1625), "a very honest man, and accurate in his accounts of matters of fact," as Toland says of him, made it his business to learn all he could about Milton's habits. Aubrey was himself acquainted with Milton, and diligently catechised the poet's widow, his brother,

and his nephew, scrupulously writing down each detail as it came to him, in the minutes of lives which he supplied to Antony Wood to be worked up in his *Athenæ* and *Fasti*. Aubrey was only an antiquarian collector, and was mainly dependent on what could be learned from the family. None of Milton's family, and least of all Edward Phillips, were of a capacity to apprehend moral or mental qualities, and they could only tell Aubrey of his goings out and his comings in, of the clothes he wore, the dates of events, the names of his acquaintance. In compensation for the want of observation on the part of his own kith and kin, Milton himself, with a superb and ingenuous egotism, has revealed the secret of his thoughts and feelings in numerous autobiographical passages of his prose writings. From what he directly communicates, and from what he unconsciously betrays, we obtain an internal life of the mind, more ample than that external life of the bodily machine, which we owe to Aubrey and Phillips.

In our own generation all that printed books or written documents have preserved about Milton has been laboriously brought together by Professor David Masson, in whose *Life of Milton* we have the most exhaustive biography that ever was compiled of any Englishman. It is a noble and final monument erected to the poet's memory, two centuries after his death. My excuse for attempting to write of Milton after Mr. Masson is that his life is in six volumes octavo, with a total of some four to five thousand pages. The present outline is written for a different class of readers, those, namely, who cannot afford to know more of Milton than can be told in some two hundred and fifty pages.

A family of Miltons, deriving the name in all probability from the parish of Great Milton near Thame, is found

in various branches spread over Oxfordshire and the adjoining counties in the reign of Elizabeth. The poet's grandfather was a substantial yeoman, living at Stanton St. John, about five miles from Oxford, within the forest of Shotover, of which he was also an under-ranger. The ranger's son John was at school in Oxford, possibly as a chorister, conformed to the Established Church, and was in consequence cast off by his father, who adhered to the old faith. The disinherited son went up to London, and by the assistance of a friend was set up in business as a scrivener. A scrivener discharged some of the functions which, at the present day, are undertaken for us in a solicitor's office. John Milton the father, being a man of probity and force of character, was soon on the way to acquire "a plentiful fortune." But he continued to live over his shop, which was in Bread Street, Cheapside, and which bore the sign of the Spread Eagle, the family crest.

It was at the Spread Eagle that his eldest son, John Milton, was born, 9th December, 1608, being thus exactly contemporary with Lord Clarendon, who also died in the same year as the poet. Milton must be added to the long roll of our poets who have been natives of the city which now never sees sunlight or blue sky, along with Chaucer, Spenser, Herrick, Cowley, Shirley, Ben Jonson, Pope, Gray, Keats. Besides attending as a day-scholar at St. Paul's School, which was close at hand, his father engaged for him a private tutor at home. The household of the Spread Eagle not only enjoyed civic prosperity, but some share of that liberal cultivation which, if not imbibed in the home, neither school nor college ever confers. The scrivener was not only an amateur in music, but a composer, whose tunes, songs, and airs found their way into the best collections of music. Both schoolmaster and tu-

tor were men of mark. The high master of St. Paul's at that time was Alexander Gill, an M.A. of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, who was "esteemed to have such an excellent way of training up youth, that none in his time went beyond it." The private tutor was Thomas Young, who was, or had been, curate to Mr. Gataker, of Rotherhithe, itself a certificate of merit, even if we had not the pupil's emphatic testimony of gratitude. Milton's fourth elegy is addressed to Young, when, in 1627, he was settled at Hamburg, crediting him with having first infused into his pupil a taste for classic literature and poetry. Biographers have derived Milton's Presbyterianism in 1641 from the lessons twenty years before of this Thomas Young, a Scotchman, and one of the authors of the *Smectymnuus*. This, however, is a misreading of Milton's mind—a mind which was an organic whole—"whose seed was in itself," self-determined; not one whose opinions can be accounted for by contagion or casual impact.

Of Milton's boyish exercises two have been preserved. They are English paraphrases of two of the Davidic Psalms, and were done at the age of fifteen. That they were thought by himself worth printing in the same volume with *Comus*, is the most noteworthy thing about them. No words are so commonplace but that they can be made to yield inference by a biographer. And even in these school exercises we think we can discern that the future poet was already a diligent reader of Sylvester's *Du Bartas* (1605), the patriarch of Protestant poetry, and of Fairfax's *Tasso* (1600). There are other indications that, from very early years, poetry had assumed a place in Milton's mind, not merely as a juvenile pastime, but as an occupation of serious import.

Young Gill, son of the high master, a school-fellow of

Milton, went up to Trinity, Oxford, where he got into trouble by being informed against by Chillingworth, who reported incautious Presbyterian speeches of Gill to his godfather, Laud. With Gill Milton corresponded; they exchanged their verses, Greek, Latin, and English, with a confession on Milton's part that he prefers English and Latin composition to Greek; that to write Greek verses in this age was to sing to the deaf. Gill, Milton finds "a severe critic of poetry, however disposed to be lenient to his friend's attempts."

If Milton's genius did not announce itself in his paraphrases of Psalms, it did in his impetuosity in learning, "which I seized with such eagerness that from the twelfth year of my age I scarce ever went to bed before midnight." Such is his own account. And it is worth notice that we have here an incidental test of the trustworthiness of Aubrey's reminiscences. Aubrey's words are, "When he was very young he studied very hard, and sate up very late, commonly till twelve or one o'clock at night; and his father ordered the maid to sit up for him."

He was ready for college at sixteen, not earlier than the usual age at that period. As his schoolmasters, both the Gills, were Oxford men (Young was of St. Andrew's), it might have been expected that the young scholar would have been placed at Oxford. However, it was determined that he should go to Cambridge, where he was admitted a pensioner of Christ's, 12th February, 1625, and commenced residence in the Easter term ensuing. Perhaps his father feared the growing High Church, or, as it was then called, Arminianism, of his own university. It so happened, however, that the tutor to whom the young Milton was consigned was specially noted for Arminian proclivities. This was William Chappell, then Fellow of Christ's, who so rec-

ommended himself to Laud by his party zeal that he was advanced to be Provost of Dublin and Bishop of Cork.

Milton was one of those pupils who are more likely to react against a tutor than to take a ply from him. A preaching divine — Chappell composed a treatise on the art of preaching—a narrow ecclesiastic of the type loved by Laud, was exactly the man who would drive Milton into opposition. But the tutor of the seventeenth century was not able, like the easy-going tutor of the eighteenth, to leave the young rebel to pursue the reading of his choice in his own chamber. Chappell endeavoured to drive his pupil along the scholastic highway of exercises. Milton, returning to Cambridge after his summer vacation, eager for the acquisition of wisdom, complains that he "was dragged from his studies, and compelled to employ himself in composing some frivolous declamation!" Indocile, as he confesses himself (indocilisque ætas prava magistra fuit), he kicked against either the discipline or the exercises exacted by college rules. He was punished. Aubrey had heard that he was flogged, a thing not impossible in itself, as the *Admonition Book* of Emanuel gives an instance of corporal chastisement as late as 1667. Aubrey's statement, however, is a dubitative interlineation in his MS., and Milton's age, seventeen, as well as the silence of his later detractors, who raked up everything which could be told to his disadvantage, concur to make us hesitate to accept a fact on so slender evidence. Anyhow, Milton was sent away from college for a time, in the year 1627, in consequence of something unpleasant which had occurred. That it was something of which he was not ashamed is clear, from his alluding to it himself in the lines written at the time,—

"Nec duras usque libet minas perferre magistri
Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo."

And that the tutor was not considered to have been wholly free from blame is evident from the fact that the master transferred Milton from Chappell to another tutor, a very unusual proceeding. Whatever the nature of the punishment, it was not what is known as rustication; for Milton did not lose a term, taking his two degrees of B.A. and M.A. in regular course, at the earliest date from his matriculation permitted by the statutes. The one outbreak of juvenile petulance and indiscipline over, Milton's force of character and unusual attainments acquired him the esteem of his seniors. The nickname of "the lady of Christ's," given him in derision by his fellow-students, is an attestation of virtuous conduct. Ten years later, in 1642, Milton takes an opportunity to "acknowledge publicly, with all grateful mind, that more than ordinary respect which I found, above many of my equals, at the hands of those courteous and learned men, the Fellows of that college wherein I spent some years; who, at my parting, after I had taken two degrees, as the manner is, signified many ways how much better it would content them that I would stay; as by many letters full of kindness and loving respect, both before that time and long after, I was assured of their singular good affection towards me."

The words "how much better it would content them that I would stay" have been thought to hint at the offer of a fellowship at Christ's. It is highly improbable that such an offer was ever made. There had been two vacancies in the roll of fellows since Milton had become eligible by taking his B.A. degree, and he had been passed over in favour of juniors, who were pushed by Court patrons or college favouritism. And in universities generally, it is not literature or general acquirements which recommend

a candidate for endowed posts, but technical skill in the prescribed exercises, and a pedagogic intention.

Further than this, had a fellowship in his college been attainable, it would not have had much attraction for Milton. A fellowship implied two things, residence in college, with teaching, and orders in the church. With neither of these two conditions was Milton prepared to comply. In 1632, when he proceeded to his M.A. degree, Milton was twenty-four, he had been seven years in college, and had therefore sufficient experience what college life was like. He who was so impatient of the "turba legentum prava" in the Bodleian library, could not have patiently consorted with the vulgar-minded and illiterate ecclesiastics who peopled the colleges of that day. Even Mede, though the author of *Clavis Apocalyptica* was steeped in the soulless clericalism of his age, could not support his brother-fellows without frequent retirements to Balsham, "being not willing to be joined with such company." To be dependent upon Bainbrigge's (the Master of Christ's) good pleasure for a supply of pupils; to have to live in daily intercourse with the Powers and the Chappells, such as we know them from Mede's letters, was an existence to which only the want of daily bread could have driven Milton. Happily his father's circumstances were not such as to make a fellowship pecuniarily an object to the son. If he longed for "the studious cloister's pale," he had been now for seven years near enough to college life to have dispelled the dream that it was a life of lettered leisure and philosophic retirement. It was just about Milton's time that the college tutor finally supplanted the university professor, a system which implied the substitution of exercises performed by the pupil for instruction given by the teacher. Whatever advantages this system brought with it, it brought inevi-

tably the degradation of the teacher, who was thus dispensed from knowledge, having only to attend to form. The time of the college tutor was engrossed by the details of scholastic superintendence, and the frivolous worry of académical business. Admissions, matriculations, disputations, declamations, the formalities of degrees, public reception of royal and noble visitors, filled every hour of his day, and left no time, even if he had had the taste, for private study. To teaching, as we shall see, Milton was far from averse. But then it must be teaching as he understood it, a teaching which should expand the intellect and raise the character, not dexterity in playing with the verbal formulæ of the disputations of the schools.

Such an occupation could have no attractions for one who was even now meditating *Il Penseroso* (composed 1633). At twenty he had already confided to his schoolfellow, the younger Gill, the secret of his discontent with the Cambridge tone. "Here among us," he writes from college, "are barely one or two who do not flutter off, all unfledged, into theology, having gotten of philology or of philosophy scarce so much as a smattering. And for theology they are content with just what is enough to enable them to patch up a paltry sermon." He retained the same feeling towards his Alma Mater in 1641, when he wrote (Reason of Church Government), "Cambridge, which as in the time of her better health, and mine own younger judgment, I never greatly admired, so now much less . . . ."

On a review of all these indications of feeling, I should conclude that Milton never had serious thoughts of a college fellowship, and that his antipathy arose from a sense of his own incompatibility of temper with academic life, and was not, like Phineas Fletcher's, the result of disappointed hopes, and a sense of injury for having been re-

fused a fellowship at King's. One consideration which remains to be mentioned would alone be decisive in favour of this view. A fellowship required orders. Milton had been intended for the church, and had been sent to college with that view. By the time he left Cambridge, at twenty-four, it had become clear both to himself and his family that he could never submit his understanding to the trammels of church formularies. His later mind, about 1641, is expressed by himself in his own forcible style,—"The church, to whose service by the intention of my parents and friends I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions, till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded in the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal. . . . I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." When he took leave of the university, in 1632, he had perhaps not developed this distinct antipathy to the establishment. For in a letter, preserved in Trinity College, and written in the winter of 1631–32, he does not put forward any conscientious objections to the clerical profession, but only apologises to the friend to whom the letter is addressed for delay in making choice of some profession. The delay itself sprung from an unconscious distaste. In a mind of the consistent texture of Milton's, motives are secretly influential before they emerge in consciousness. We shall not be wrong in asserting that when he left Cambridge in 1632, it was already impossible, in the nature of things, that he should have taken orders in the Church of England, or a fellowship of which orders were a condition.

CHAPTER II.

RESIDENCE AT HORTON—L'ALLEGRO—IL PENSEROSO—ARCADES—COMUS—LYCIDAS.

Milton had been sent to college to qualify for a profession. The church, the first intended, he had gradually discovered to be incompatible. Of the law, either his father's branch, or some other, he seems to have entertained a thought, but to have speedily dismissed it. So at the age of twenty-four he returns to his father's house, bringing nothing with him but his education and a silent purpose. The elder Milton had now retired from business, with sufficient means, but not with wealth. Though John was the eldest son, there were two other children, a brother, Christopher, and a sister, Anne. To have no profession, even a nominal one, to be above trade and below the status of squire or yeoman, and to come home with the avowed object of leading an idle life, was conduct which required justification. Milton felt it to be so. In a letter addressed, in 1632, to some senior friend at Cambridge, name unknown, he thanks him for being "a good watchman to admonish that the hours of the night pass on, for so I call my life, as yet obscure and unserviceable to mankind, and that the day with me is at hand, wherein Christ commands all to labour." Milton has no misgiv-

ings. He knows that what he is doing with himself is the best he can do. His aim is far above bread-winning, and therefore his probation must be long. He destines for himself no indolent tarrying in the garden of Armida. His is a "mind made and set wholly on the accomplishment of greatest things." He knows that the looker-on will hardly accept his apology for "being late," that it is in order to being "more fit." Yet it is the only apology he can offer. And he is dissatisfied with his own progress. "I am something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me."

Of this frame of mind the record is the second sonnet, lines which are an inseparable part of Milton's biography—

"How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
That I to manhood am arrived so near,
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven.
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye."

With aspirations thus vast, though unformed, with "amplitude of mind to greatest deeds," Milton retired to his father's house in the country. Five more years of self-education, added to the seven-years of academical residence, were not too much for the meditation of projects such as Milton was already conceiving. Years many more than twelve, filled with great events and distracting interests,

were to pass over before the body and shape of *Paradise Lost* was given to these imaginings.

The country retirement in which the elder Milton had fixed himself was the little village of Horton, situated in that southernmost angle of the county of Buckingham which insinuates itself between Berks and Middlesex. Though only about seventeen miles from London, it was the London of Charles I., with its population of some 300,000 only; before coaches and macadamised roads; while the Colne, which flows through the village, was still a river, and not the kennel of a paper-mill. There was no lack of water and wood, meadow and pasture, closes and open field, with the regal towers of Windsor, "bosom'd high in tufted trees," to crown the landscape. Unbroken leisure, solitude, tranquillity of mind, surrounded by the thickets and woods which Pliny thought indispensable to poetical meditation (Epist. 9. 10), no poet's career was ever commenced under more favourable auspices. The youth of Milton stands in strong contrast with the misery, turmoil, chance medley, struggle with poverty, or abandonment to dissipation, which blighted the early years of so many of our men of letters. Milton's life is a drama in three acts. The first discovers him in the calm and peaceful retirement of Horton, of which *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas* are the expression. In the second act he is breathing the foul and heated atmosphere of party passion and religious hate, generating the lurid fires which glare in the battailous canticles of his prose pamphlets. The three great poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, are the utterance of his final period of solitary and Promethean grandeur, when, blind, destitute, friendless, he testified of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, alone before a fallen world.

In this delicious retirement of Horton, in alternate communing with nature and with books, for five years of persevering study he laid in a stock, not of learning, but of what is far above learning, of wide and accurate knowledge. Of the man whose profession is learning, it is characteristic that knowledge is its own end, and research its own reward. To Milton all knowledge, all life, virtue itself, was already only a means to a further end. He will know only "that which is of use to know," and by useful, he meant that which conduced to form him for his vocation of poet.

From a very early period Milton had taken poetry to be his vocation, in the most solemn and earnest mood. The idea of this devotion was the shaping idea of his life. It was, indeed, a bent of nature, with roots drawing from deeper strata of character than any act of reasoned will, which kept him out of the professions, and now fixed him, a seeming idler, but really hard at work, in his father's house at Horton. The intimation which he had given of his purpose in the sonnet above quoted had become, in 1641, "an inward prompting which grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after times, as they should not willingly let it die."

What the ultimate form of his poetic utterance shall be, he is in no hurry to decide. He will be "long choosing," and quite content to be "beginning late." All his care at present is to qualify himself for the lofty function to which he aspires. No lawyer, physician, statesman, ever laboured to fit himself for his profession harder than Milton strove to qualify himself for his vocation of poet. Verse-making is, to the wits, a game of ingenuity; to Milton, it is a prophetic office, towards which the will of Heaven leads him.

The creation he contemplates will not flow from him as the stanzas of the *Gerusalemme* did from Tasso at twenty-one. Before he can make a poem, Milton will make himself. "I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrated of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem . . . . not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy."

Of the spontaneity, the abandon, which are supposed to be characteristic of the poetical nature, there is nothing here; all is moral purpose, precision, self-dedication. So he acquires all knowledge, not for knowledge' sake, from the instinct of learning, the necessity for completeness, but because he is to be a poet. Nor will he only have knowledge, he will have wisdom; moral development shall go hand in hand with intellectual. A poet's soul should "contain of good, wise, just, the perfect shape." He will cherish continually a pure mind in a pure body. "I argued to myself that, if unchastity in a woman, whom St. Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable." There is yet a third constituent of the poetical nature; to knowledge and to virtue must be added religion. For it is from God that the poet's thoughts come. "This is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs: till which in some

measure be compast, I refuse not to sustain this expectation." Before the piety of this vow, Dr. Johnson's morosity yields for a moment, and he is forced to exclaim, "From a promise like this, at once fervid, pious, and rational, might be expected the *Paradise Lost*."

Of these years of self-cultivation, of conscious moral architecture, such as Plato enacted in his ideal State, but none but Milton ever had the courage to practise, the biographer would gladly give a minute account. But the means of doing so are wanting. The poet kept no diary of his reading, such as some great students, e. g. Isaac Casaubon, have left. Nor could such a record, had it been attempted, have shown us the secret process by which the scholar's dead learning was transmuted in Milton's mind into living imagery. "Many studious and contemplative years, altogether spent in the search of religious and civil knowledge" is his own description of the period. "You make many inquiries as to what I am about;" he writes to Diodati—"what am I thinking of? Why, with God's help, of immortality! Forgive the word, I only whisper it in your ear! Yes, I am pluming my wings for a flight." This was in 1637, at the end of five years of the Horton probation. The poems, which, rightly read, are strewn with autobiographical hints, are not silent as to the intention of this period. In *Paradise Regained* (i. 196), Milton reveals himself. And in *Comus*, written at Horton, the lines 375 and following are charged with the same sentiment,—

> "And wisdom's self
> Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
> Where, with her best nurse, contemplation,
> She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
> That in the various bustle of resort
> Were all-to ruffled and sometimes impair'd."

That at Horton Milton "read all the Greek and Latin writers" is one of Johnson's careless versions of Milton's own words, "enjoyed a complete holiday in turning over Latin and Greek authors." Milton read, not as a professional theologian, but as a poet and scholar, and always in the light of his secret purpose. It was not in his way to sit down to read over all the Greek and Latin writers, as Casaubon or Salmasius might do. Milton read with selection, and "meditated," says Aubrey, what he read. His practice conformed to the principle he has himself laid down in the often-quoted lines (*Paradise Regained*, iv. 322)—

> "Who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself."

Some of Milton's Greek books have been traced; his *Aratus*, *Lycophron*, *Euripides* (the Stephanus of 1602), and his *Pindar* (the Benedictus of 1620), are still extant, with marginal memoranda, which should seem to evince careful and discerning reading. One critic even thought it worth while to accuse Joshua Barnes of silently appropriating conjectural emendations from Milton's *Euripides*. But Milton's own poems are the best evidence of his familiarity with all that is most choice in the remains of classic poetry. Though the commentators are accused of often seeing an imitation where there is none, no commentary can point out the ever-present infusion of classical flavour, which bespeaks intimate converse far more than direct adaptation. Milton's classical allusions, says Hartley Coleridge, are amalgamated and consubstantiated with his native thought.

A commonplace book of Milton's, after having lurked

unsuspected for 200 years in the archives of Netherby, has been disinterred in our own day (1874). It appears to belong partly to the end of the Horton period. It is not by any means an account of all that he is reading, but only an arrangement under certain heads or places of memoranda for future use. These notes are extracted from about eighty different authors, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English. Of Greek authors no less than sixteen are quoted. The notes are mostly notes of historical facts, seldom of thoughts, never of mere verbal expression. There is no trace in it of any intention to store up either the imagery or the language of poetry. It may be that such notes were made and entered in another volume; for the book thus accidentally preserved to us seems to refer to other similar volumes of collections. But it is more likely that no such poetical memoranda were ever made, and that Milton trusted entirely to memory for the wealth of classical allusion with which his verse is surcharged. He did not extract from the poets and the great writers whom he was daily turning over, but only from the inferior authors and secondary historians, which he read only once. Most of the material collected in the commonplace book is used in his prose pamphlets. But the facts are worked into the texture of his argument, rather than cited as extraneous witnesses.

In reading history it was his aim to get at a conspectus of the general current of affairs rather than to study minutely a special period. He tells Diodati in September, 1637, that he has studied Greek history continuously from the beginning to the fall of Constantinople. When he tells the same friend that he has been long involved in the obscurity of the early middle ages of Italian history down to the time of the Emperor Rudolf, we learn from the

commonplace book that he had only been reading the one volume of Sigonius's *Historia Regni Italici*. From the thirteenth century downwards he proposes to himself to study each Italian state in some separate history. Even before his journey to Italy he read Italian with as much ease as French. He tells us that it was by his father's advice that he had acquired these modern languages. But we can see that they were essential parts of his own scheme of self-education, which included, in another direction, Hebrew, both Biblical and Rabbinical, and even Syriac.

The intensity of his nature showed itself in his method of study. He read, not desultorily, a bit here and another there, but "when I take up with a thing, I never pause or break it off, nor am drawn away from it by any other interest, till I have arrived at the goal I proposed to myself." He made breaks occasionally in this routine of study by visits to London, to see friends, to buy books, to take lessons in mathematics, to go to the theatre, or to concerts. A love of music was inherited from his father.

I have called this period, 1632–39, one of preparation, and not of production. But though the first volume of poems printed by Milton did not appear till 1645, the most considerable part of its contents was written during the period included in the present chapter.

The fame of the author of *Paradise Lost* has over-shadowed that of the author of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. Yet had *Paradise Lost* never been written, these three poems, with *Comus*, would have sufficed to place their author in a class apart, and above all those who had used the English language for poetical purposes before him. It is incumbent on Milton's biographer to relate the circumstances of the composition of *Comus*, as it is an incident in the life of the poet.

Milton's musical tastes had brought him the acquaintance of Henry Lawes, at that time the most celebrated composer in England. When the Earl of Bridgewater would give an entertainment at Ludlow Castle to celebrate his entry upon his office as President of Wales and the Marches, it was to Lawes that application was made to furnish the music. Lawes, as naturally, applied to his young poetical acquaintance Milton to write the words. The entertainment was to be of that sort which was fashionable at court, and was called a Mask. In that brilliant period of court life which was inaugurated by Elizabeth and put an end to by the Civil War, a Mask was a frequent and favourite amusement. It was an exhibition in which pageantry and music predominated, but in which dialogue was introduced as accompaniment or explanation.

The dramatic Mask of the sixteenth century has been traced by the antiquaries as far back as the time of Edward III. But in its perfected shape it was a genuine offspring of the English renaissance, a cross between the vernacular mummery, or mystery-play, and the Greek drama. No great court festival was considered complete without such a public show. Many of our great dramatic writers, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, Shirley, Carew, were constrained by the fashion of the time to apply their invention to gratify this taste for decorative representation. No less an artist than Inigo Jones must occasionally stoop to construct the machinery.

The taste for grotesque pageant in the open air must have gradually died out before the general advance of refinement. The Mask by a process of evolution would have become the Opera. But it often happens that when a taste or fashion is at the point of death, it undergoes a forced and temporary revival. So it was with the Mask.

In 1633, the Puritan hatred to the theatre had blazed out in Prynne's *Histriomastix*, and, as a natural consequence, the loyal and cavalier portion of society threw themselves into dramatic amusements of every kind. It was an unreal revival of the Mask, stimulated by political passion, in the wane of genuine taste for the fantastic and semi-barbarous pageant, in which the former age had delighted. What the imagination of the spectators was no longer equal to, was to be supplied by costliness of dress and scenery. These last representations of the expiring Mask were the occasions of an extravagant outlay. The Inns of Court and Whitehall vied with each other in the splendour and solemnity with which they brought out,—the Lawyers, Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*,—the Court, Carew's *Cœlum Britannicum*.

It was a strange caprice of fortune that made the future poet of the Puritan epic the last composer of a cavalier mask. The slight plot, or story, of *Comus* was probably suggested to Milton by his recollection of George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, which he may have seen on the stage. The personage of *Comus* was borrowed from a Latin extravaganza by a Dutch professor, whose *Comus* was reprinted at Oxford in 1634, the very year in which Milton wrote his *Mask*. The so-called tradition collected by Oldys, of the young Egertons, who acted in *Comus*, having lost themselves in Haywood Forest on their way to Ludlow, obviously grew out of Milton's poem. However casual the suggestion, or unpromising the occasion, Milton worked out of it a strain of poetry such as had never been heard in England before. If any reader wishes to realise the immense step upon what had gone before him, which was now made by a young man of twenty-seven, he should turn over some of the most celebrated of the masks of the Jacobean period.

We have no information how *Comus* was received when represented at Ludlow, but it found a public of readers. For Lawes, who had the MS. in his hands, was so importuned for copies that, in 1637, he caused an edition to be printed off. Not surreptitiously; for though Lawes does not say, in the dedication to Lord Brackley, that he had the author's leave to print, we are sure that he had it, only from the motto. On the title page of this edition (1637) is a quotation from Virgil,—

> "Eheu! quid volui misero mihi! floribus austrum
> Perditus."

The words are Virgil's, but the appropriation of them, and their application in this "second intention," is too exquisite to have been made by any but Milton.

To the poems of the Horton period belong also the two pieces *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. He was probably in the early stage of acquiring the language, when he superscribed the two first poems with their Italian titles. For there is no such word as "Penseroso," the adjective formed from "Pensiero" being "pensieroso." Even had the word been written correctly, its signification is not that which Milton intended, viz. thoughtful, or contemplative, but anxious, full of cares, carking. The rapid purification of Milton's taste will be best perceived by comparing *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* of uncertain date, but written after 1632, with the *Ode on the Nativity*, written 1629. The Ode, notwithstanding its foretaste of Milton's grandeur, abounds in frigid conceits, from which the two later pieces are free. The Ode is frosty, as written in winter, within the four walls of a college chamber. The two idylls breathe the free air of spring and summer, and of the fields round Horton. They are thoroughly naturalistic; the

choicest expression our language has yet found of the fresh charm of country life, not as that life is lived by the peasant, but as it is felt by a young and lettered student, issuing at early dawn, or at sunset, into the fields from his chamber and his books. All rural sights and sounds and smells are here blended in that ineffable combination which once or twice perhaps in our lives has saluted our young senses before their perceptions were blunted by alcohol, by lust, or ambition, or diluted by the social distractions of great cities.

The fidelity to nature of the imagery of these poems has been impugned by the critics.

> "Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
> And at my window bid good-morrow."

The skylark never approaches human habitations in this way, as the redbreast does. Mr. Masson replies that the subject of the verb "to come" is, not the skylark, but L'Allegro, the joyous student. I cannot construe the lines as Mr. Masson does, even though the consequence were to convict Milton, a city-bred youth, of not knowing a skylark from a sparrow when he saw it. A close observer of things around us would not speak of the eglantine as twisted, of the cowslip as wan, of the violet as glowing, or of the reed as balmy. Lycidas' laureate hearse is to be strewn at once with primrose and woodbine, daffodil and jasmine. The pine is not "rooted deep as high" (*P. R.* 4416), but sends its roots along the surface. The elm, one of the thinnest-foliaged trees of the forest, is inappropriately named starproof (*Arc.* 89). Lightning does not singe the top of trees (*P. L.* i. 613), but either shivers them, or cuts a groove down the stem to the ground. These and other such like inaccuracies must be set down partly to conven-

tional language used without meaning, the vice of Latin versification enforced as a task, but they are partly due to real defect of natural knowledge.

Other objections of the critics on the same score, which may be met with, are easily dismissed. The objector, who can discover no reason why the oak should be styled "monumental," meets with his match in the defender who suggests that it may be rightly so called because monuments in churches are made of oak. I should tremble to have to offer an explanation to critics of Milton so acute as these two. But of less ingenious readers I would ask, if any single word can be found equal to "monumental" in its power of suggesting to the imagination the historic oak of park or chase, up to the knees in fern, which has outlasted ten generations of men; has been the mute witness of the scenes of love, treachery, or violence enacted in the baronial hall which it shadows and protects; and has been so associated with man that it is now rather a column and memorial obelisk than a tree of the forest?

These are the humours of criticism. But, apart from these, a naturalist is at once aware that Milton had neither the eye nor the ear of a naturalist. At no time, even before his loss of sight, was he an exact observer of natural objects. It may be that he knew a skylark from a redbreast, and did not confound the dog-rose with the honeysuckle. But I am sure that he had never acquired that interest in nature's things and ways which leads to close and loving watching of them. He had not that sense of outdoor nature, empirical and not scientific, which endows the *Angler* of his cotemporary Walton with his enduring charm, and which is to be acquired only by living in the open country in childhood. Milton is not a man of the fields, but of books. His life is in his study, and when he

steps abroad into the air he carries his study thoughts with him. He does look at nature, but he sees her through books. Natural impressions are received from without, but always in those forms of beautiful speech in which the poets of all ages have clothed them. His epithets are not, like the epithets of the school of Dryden and Pope, culled from the *Gradus ad Parnassum;* they are expressive of some reality, but it is of a real emotion in the spectator's soul, not of any quality detected by keen insight in the objects themselves. This emotion Milton's art stamps with an epithet which shall convey the added charm of classical reminiscence. When, e. g., he speaks of "the wand'ring moon," the original significance of the epithet comes home to the scholarly reader with the enhanced effect of its association with the "errantem lunam" of Horace. Nor because it is adopted from Horace has the epithet here the second-hand effect of a copy. If Milton sees nature through books, he still sees it.

> "To behold the wand'ring moon,
> Riding near her highest noon,
> Like one that had been led astray,
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
> And oft, as if her head she bow'd,
> Stooping through a fleecy cloud."

No allegation that "wand'ring moon" is borrowed from Horace can hide from us that Milton, though he remembered Horace, had watched the phenomenon with a feeling so intense that he projected his own soul's throb into the object before him, and named it with what Thomson calls "recollected love."

Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a scientific naturalist, nor even that of a close observer. It is that of a poet who feels its total influence too powerfully to dis-

sect it. If, as I have said, Milton reads books first and nature afterwards, it is not to test nature by his books, but to learn from both. He is learning, not books, but from books. All he reads, sees, hears, is to him but nutriment for the soul. He is making himself. Man is to him the highest object; nature is subordinate to man, not only in its more vulgar uses, but as an excitant of fine emotion. He is not concerned to register the facts and phenomena of nature, but to convey the impressions they make on a sensitive soul. The external forms of things are to be presented to us as transformed through the heart and mind of the poet. The moon is endowed with life and will, "stooping," "riding," "wand'ring," "bowing her head," not as a frigid personification, and because the ancient poets so personified her, but by communication to her of the intense agitation which the nocturnal spectacle rouses in the poet's own breast.

I have sometimes read that these two idylls are "masterpieces of description." Other critics will ask if in the scenery of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton has described the country about Horton, in Bucks, or that about Forest Hill, in Oxfordshire; and will object that the Chiltern Hills are not high enough for clouds to rest upon their top, much less upon their breast. But he has left out the pollard willows, says another censor, and the lines of pollard willow are the prominent feature in the valley of the Colne, even more so than the "hedgerow elms." Does the line "Walk the studious cloisters pale," *mean* St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey? When these things can continue to be asked, it is hardly superfluous to continue to repeat that truth of fact and poetical truth are two different things. Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a "descriptive poet," if indeed the phrase be not a self-contradiction.

In Milton, nature is not put forward as the poet's theme. His theme is man, in the two contrasted moods of joyous emotion or grave reflection. The shifting scenery ministers to the varying mood. Thomson, in the *Seasons* (1726), sets himself to render natural phenomena as they truly are. He has left us a vivid presentation in gorgeous language of the naturalistic calendar of the changing year. Milton, in these two idylls, has recorded a day of twenty-four hours. But he has not registered the phenomena; he places us at the standpoint of the man before whom they deploy. And the man, joyous or melancholy, is not a bare spectator of them; he is the student, compounded of sensibility and intelligence, of whom we are not told that he saw so and so, or that he felt so, but with whom we are made copartners of his thoughts and feeling. Description melts into emotion, and contemplation bodies itself in imagery. All the charm of rural life is there, but it is not tendered to us in the form of a landscape; the scenery is subordinated to the human figure in the centre.

These two short idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period. These two poems have the freedom and frolic, the natural grace of movement, the improvisation, of the best Elizabethan examples, while both thoughts and words are under a strict economy unknown to the diffuse exuberance of the Spenserians.

In *Lycidas* (1637) we have reached the high-water mark of English poesy and of Milton's own production. A period of a century and a half was to elapse before poetry in England seemed, in Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality*

(1807), to be rising again towards the level of inspiration which it had once attained in *Lycidas*. And in the development of the Miltonic genius this wonderful dirge marks the culminating point. As the twin idylls of 1632 show a great advance upon the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), the growth of the poetic mind during the five years which follow 1632 is registered in *Lycidas*. Like the *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* is laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction; like them it offers exquisite touches of idealised rural life. But *Lycidas* opens up a deeper vein of feeling, a patriot passion so vehement and dangerous that, like that which stirred the Hebrew prophet, it is compelled to veil itself from power, or from sympathy, in utterance made purposely enigmatical. The passage which begins "Last came and last did go" raises in us a thrill of awe-struck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Æschylus's *Agamemnon*. For the reader to feel this, he must have present in memory the circumstances of England in 1637. He must place himself as far as possible in the situation of a cotemporary. The study of Milton's poetry compels the study of his time; and Professor Masson's six volumes are not too much to enable us to understand that there were real causes for the intense passion which glows underneath the poet's words—a passion which unexplained would be thought to be intrusive.

The historical exposition must be gathered from the English history of the period, which may be read in Professor Masson's excellent summary. All I desire to point out here is, that in *Lycidas* Milton's original picturesque vein is for the first time crossed with one of quite another sort, stern, determined, obscurely indicative of suppressed passion, and the resolution to do or die. The fanaticism

of the covenanter and the sad grace of Petrarch seem to meet in Milton's monody. Yet these opposites, instead of neutralising each other, are blended into one harmonious whole by the presiding, but invisible, genius of the poet. The conflict between the old cavalier world—the years of gaiety and festivity of a splendid and pleasure-loving court, and the new Puritan world into which love and pleasure were not to enter—this conflict which was commencing in the social life of England, is also begun in Milton's own breast, and is reflected in *Lycidas*.

"For we were nurs'd upon the self-same hill."

Here is the sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian time, upon whose joys Death is the only intruder. Pass onward a little, and you are in presence of the tremendous

"Two-handed engine at the door,"

the terror of which is enhanced by its obscurity. We are very sure that the avenger is there, though we know not who he is. In these thirty lines we have the preluding mutterings of the storm which was to sweep away mask and revel and song, to inhibit the drama, and suppress poetry. In the earlier poems Milton's muse has sung in the tones of the age that is passing away; except in his austere chastity, a cavalier. Though even in *L'Allegro* Dr. Johnson truly detects "some melancholy in his mirth." In *Lycidas*, for a moment, the tones of both ages, the past and the coming, are combined, and then Milton leaves behind him forever the golden age, and one half of his poetic genius. He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes, "To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new."

CHAPTER III.

JOURNEY TO ITALY.

Before 1632 Milton had begun to learn Italian. His mind, just then open on all sides to impressions from books, was peculiarly attracted by Italian poetry. The language grew to be loved for its own sake. Saturated with Dante and Petrarch, Tasso and Ariosto, the desire arose to let the ear drink in the music of Tuscan speech.

The "unhappy gift of beauty," which has attracted the spoiler of all ages to the Italian peninsula, has ever exerted, and still exerts, a magnetic force on every cultivated mind. Manifold are the sources of this fascination now. The scholar and the artist, the antiquarian and the historian, the architect and the lover of natural scenery, alike find here the amplest gratification of their tastes. This is so still; but in the sixteenth century the Italian cities were the only homes of an ancient and decaying civilisation. Not insensible to other impressions, it was specially the desire of social converse with the living poets and men of taste—a feeble generation, but one still nourishing the traditions of the great poetic age—which drew Milton across the Alps.

In April, 1637, Milton's mother had died; but his younger brother, Christopher, had come to live, with his

wife, in the paternal home at Horton. Milton, the father, was not unwilling that his son should have his foreign tour, as a part of that elaborate education by which he was qualifying himself for his doubtful vocation. The cost was not to stand in the way, considerable as it must have been. Howell's estimate, in his *Instructions for Forreine Travel* (1642), was 300*l.* a year for the tourist himself, and 50*l.* for his man, a sum equal to about 1000*l.* at present.

Among the letters of introduction with which Milton provided himself, one was from the aged Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eton, in Milton's immediate neighborhood. Sir Henry, who had lived a long time in Italy, impressed upon his young friend the importance of discretion on the point of religion, and told him the story which he always told to travellers who asked his advice. "At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Alberto Scipioni, an old Roman courtier in dangerous times. . . . At my departure for Rome I had won confidence enough to beg his advice how I might carry myself securely there, without offence of others, or of mine own conscience. 'Signor Arrigo mio,' says he, '*pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto* (thoughts close, countenance open) will go safely over the whole world.'" Though the intensity of the Catholic reaction had somewhat relaxed in Italy, the deportment of a Protestant in the countries which were terrorised by the Inquisition was a matter which demanded much circumspection. Sir H. Wotton spoke from his own experience of far more rigorous times than those of the Barberini Pope. But he may have noticed, even in his brief acquaintance with Milton, a fearless presumption of speech which was just what was most likely to bring him into trouble. The event proved that the hint was not misplaced. For at Rome itself, in the very lion's den, nothing could content the young zealot but to

stand up for his Protestant creed. Milton would not do as Peter Heylin did, who, when asked as to his religion, replied that he was a Catholic, which, in a Laudian, was but a natural equivoque. Milton was resolute in his religion at Rome, so much so that many were deterred from showing him the civilities they were prepared to offer. His rule, he says, was "not of my own accord to introduce in those places conversation about religion, but, if interrogated respecting the faith, then, whatsoever I should suffer, to dissemble nothing. What I was, if any one asked, I concealed from no one; if any one in the very city of the Pope attacked the orthodox religion, I defended it most freely." Beyond the statement that the English Jesuits were indignant, we hear of no evil consequences of this imprudence. Perhaps the Jesuits saw that Milton was of the stuff that would welcome martyrdom, and were sick of the affair of Galileo, which had terribly damaged the pretensions of their Church.

Milton arrived in Paris April or May, 1638. He received civilities from the English ambassador, Lord Sligo, who at his request gave him an introduction to Grotius. Grotius, says Phillips, "took Milton's visit kindly, and gave him entertainment suitable to his worth and the high commendations he had heard of him." We have no other record of his stay of many days in Paris, though A. Wood supposes that "the manners and graces of that place were not agreeable to his mind." It was August before he reached Florence, by way of Nice and Genoa, and in Florence he spent the two months which we now consider the most impossible there, the months of August and September. Nor did he find, as he would find now, the city deserted by the natives. We hear nothing of Milton's impressions of the place, but of the men whom he met there

he retained always a lively and affectionate remembrance. The learned and polite Florentines had not fled to the hills from the stifling heat and blinding glare of the Lung' Arno, but seem to have carried on their literary meetings in defiance of climate. This was the age of academies—an institution, Milton says, "of most praiseworthy effect, both for the cultivation of polite letters and the keeping up of friendships." Florence had five or six such societies, the Florentine, the Della Crusca, the Svogliati, the Apotisti, &c. It is easy, and usual in our day, to speak contemptuously of the literary tone of these academies, fostering, as they did, an amiable and garrulous intercourse of reciprocal compliment, and to contrast them unfavorably with our societies for severe research. They were at least evidence of culture, and served to keep alive the traditions of the more masculine Medicean age. And that the members of these associations were not unaware of their own degeneracy and of its cause, we learn from Milton himself. For as soon as they found that they were safe with the young Briton, they disclosed their own bitter hatred of the Church's yoke which they had to bear. "I have sate among their learned men," Milton wrote in 1644, "and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought, that this was it which had dampt the glory of Italian wits that nothing had been written there now these many years but flattery and fustian." Milton was introduced at the meetings of their academies; his presence is recorded on two occasions, of which the latest is the 16th September at the Svogliati. He paid his scot by reciting from memory some of his youthful Latin verses, hexameters, "molto erudite," says the minute-book of the

sitting, and others, which "I shifted, in the scarcity of books and conveniences, to patch up." He obtained much credit by these exercises, which, indeed, deserved it by comparison. He ventured upon the perilous experiment of offering some compositions in Italian, which the fastidious Tuscan ear at least professed to include in those "encomiums which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps."

The author of *Lycidas* cannot but have been quite aware of the small poetical merit of such an ode as that which was addressed to him by Francini. In this ode Milton is the swan of Thames — "Thames, which, owing to thee, rivals Bœotian Permessus;" and so forth. But there is a genuine feeling, an ungrudging warmth of sympathetic recognition underlying the trite and tumid panegyric. And Milton may have yielded to the not unnatural impulse of showing his countrymen that though not a prophet in boorish and fanatical England, he had found recognition in the home of letters and arts. Upon us is forced, by this their different reception of Milton, the contrast between the two countries, Italy and England, in the middle of the seventeenth century. The rude North, whose civilisation was all to come, concentrating all its intelligence in a violent effort to work off the ecclesiastical poison from its system, is brought into sharp contrast with the sweet South, whose civilisation is behind it, and whose intellect, after a severe struggle, has succumbed to the material force and organisation of the Church.

As soon as the season allowed of it, Milton set forward to Rome, taking what was then the usual way by Siena. At Rome he spent two months, occupying himself partly with seeing the antiquities, and partly with cultivating the acquaintance of natives, and some of the many foreigners

resident in the eternal city. But though he received much civility, we do not find that he met with the peculiar sympathy which endeared to him his Tuscan friends. His chief ally was the German, Lucas Holstenius, a native of Hamburg, who had abjured Protestantism to become librarian of the Vatican. Holstenius had resided three years in Oxford, and considered himself bound to repay to the English scholar some of the attentions he had received himself. Through Holstenius Milton was presented to the nephew, Francesco Barberini, who was just then everything in Rome. It was at a concert at the Barberini palace that Milton heard Leonora Baroni sing. His three Latin epigrams addressed to this lady, the first singer of Italy, or of the world at that time, testify to the enthusiasm she excited in the musical soul of Milton.

Nor are these three epigrams the only homage which Milton paid to Italian beauty. The susceptible poet, who in the sunless North would fain have "sported with the tangles of Neæra's hair," could not behold Neæra herself, and the flashing splendour of her eye, unmoved. Milton proclaims (*Defensio Secunda*) that in all his foreign tour he had lived clear from all that is disgraceful. But the pudicity of his behaviour and language covers a soul tremulous with emotion, whose passion was intensified by the discipline of a chaste intention. Five Italian pieces among his poems are to the address of another lady, whose "majestic movements and love-darting dark brow" had subdued him. The charm lay in the novelty of this style of beauty to one who came from the land of the "vermeil-tinctur'd cheek" (*Comus*) and the "golden nets of hair" (*El.* i. 60). No clue has been discovered to the name of this divinity, or to the occasion on which Milton saw her.

Of Milton's impressions of Rome there is no record.

There are no traces of special observation in his poetry. The description of the city in *Paradise Regained* (iv. 32) has nothing characteristic, and could have been written by one who had never seen it, and by many as well as by Milton. We get one glimpse of him by aid of the register of the English College, as dining there at a "sumptuous entertainment" on 30th October, when he met Nicholas Carey, brother of Lord Falkland. In spite of Sir Henry Wotton's caution, his resoluteness, as A. Wood calls it, in his religion, besides making the English Jesuits indignant, caused others, not Jesuits, to withhold civilities. Milton only tells us himself that the antiquities detained him in Rome about two months.

At the end of November he went to Naples. On the road he fell in with an Eremite friar, who gave him an introduction to the one man in Naples whom it was important he should know, Giovanni Battista Manso, Marquis of Villa. The marquis, now seventy-eight, had been for two generations the Mæcenas of letters in Southern Italy. He had sheltered Tasso in the former generation, and Marini in the latter. It was the singular privilege of his old age that he should now entertain a third poet, greater than either. In spite of his years, he was able to act as cicerone to the young Englishman over the scenes which he himself, in his *Life of Tasso*, has described with the enthusiasm of a poet. But even the high-souled Manso quailed before the terrors of the Inquisition, and apologised to Milton for not having shown him greater attention, because he would not be more circumspect in the matter of religion. Milton's Italian journey brings out the two conflicting strains of feeling which were uttered together in *Lycidas*, the poet's impressibility by nature, the freeman's indignation at clerical domination.

The time was now at hand when the latter passion, the noble rage of freedom, was to suppress the more delicate flower of poetic imagination. Milton's original scheme had included Sicily and Greece. The serious aspect of affairs at home compelled him to renounce his project. "I considered it dishonourable to be enjoying myself at my ease in foreign lands, while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom." He retraced his steps leisurely enough, however, making a halt of two months in Rome, and again one of two months in Florence. We find him mentioned in the minutes of the academy of the Svogliati as having been present at three of their weekly meetings, on the 17th, 24th, and 31st March. But the most noteworthy incident of his second Florentine residence is his interview with Galileo. He had been unable to see the veteran martyr of science on his first visit. For though Galileo was at that time living within the walls, he was kept a close prisoner by the Inquisition, and not allowed either to set foot outside his own door, or to receive visits from non-Catholics. In the spring of 1639, however, he was allowed to go back to his villa at Gioiella, near Arcetri, and Milton obtained admission to him, old, frail, and blind, but in full possession of his mental faculty. There is observable in Milton, as Mr. Masson suggests, a prophetic fascination of the fancy on the subject of blindness. And the deep impression left by this sight of "the Tuscan artist" is evidenced by the feeling with which Galileo's name and achievement are imbedded in *Paradise Lost.*

From Florence, Milton crossed the Apennines by Bologna and Ferrara to Venice. From this port he shipped for England the books he had collected during his tour, books curious and rare as they seemed to Phillips, and among them a chest or two of choice music books. The

month of April was spent at Venice, and bidding farewell to the beloved land he would never visit again, Milton passed the Alps to Geneva.

No Englishman's foreign pilgrimage was complete without touching at this marvellous capital of the reformed faith, which with almost no resources had successfully braved the whole might of the Catholic reaction. The only record of Milton's stay at Geneva is the album of a Neapolitan refugee, to which Milton contributed his autograph, under date 10th June, 1639, with the following quotation :—

> "If virtue feeble were,
> Heaven itself would stoop to her."
>
> (From *Comus.*)
>
> "Cœlum non animum muto, dum trans mare curro."
>
> (From *Horace.*)

But it is probable that he was a guest in the house of one of the leading pastors, Giovanni Diodati, whose nephew Charles, a physician commencing practice in London, was Milton's bosom friend. Here Milton first heard of the death, in the previous August, of that friend. It was a heavy blow to him, for one of the chief pleasures of being at home again would have been to pour into a sympathetic Italian ear the story of his adventures. The sadness of the homeward journey from Geneva is recorded for us in the *Epitaphium Damonis.* This piece is an elegy to the memory of Charles Diodati. It unfortunately differs from the elegy on King in being written in Latin, and is thus inaccessible to uneducated readers. As to such readers the topic of Milton's Latin poetry is necessarily an ungrateful subject, I will dismiss it here with one remark. Milton's Latin verses are distinguished from most Neo-latin verse by being a vehicle of real emotion. His technical skill is

said to have been surpassed by others; but that in which he stands alone is, that in these exercises of imitative art he is able to remain himself, and to give utterance to genuine passion. Artificial Arcadianism is as much the framework of the elegy on Diodati as it is of *Lycidas*. We have Daphnis and Bion, Tityrus and Amyntas for characters, Sicilian valleys for scenery, while Pan, Pales, and the Fauns represent the supernatural. The shepherds defend their flocks from wolves and lions. But this factitious bucolicism is pervaded by a pathos which, like volcanic heat, has fused into a new compound the dilapidated débris of the Theocritean world. And in the Latin elegy there is more tenderness than in the English. Charles Diodati was much nearer to Milton than had been Edward King. The sorrow in *Lycidas* is not so much personal as it is the regret of the society of Christ's. King had only been known to Milton as one of the students of the same college; Diodati was the associate of his choice in riper manhood.

The *Epitaphium Damonis* is further memorable as Milton's last attempt in serious Latin verse. He discovered in this experiment that Latin was not an adequate vehicle of the feeling he desired to give vent to. In the concluding lines he takes a formal farewell of the Latian muse, and announces his purpose of adopting henceforth the "harsh and grating Brittonic idiom" (*Brittonicum stridens*).

SECOND PERIOD. 1640—1660.

CHAPTER IV.

EDUCATIONAL THEORY—TEACHING.

MILTON was back in England in August, 1639. He had been absent a year and three months, during which space of time the aspect of public affairs, which had been perplexed and gloomy when he left, had been growing still more ominous of a coming storm. The issues of the controversy were so pervasive that it was almost impossible for any educated man who understood them not to range himself on a side. Yet Milton, though he had broken off his projected tour in consequence, did not rush into the fray on his return. He resumed his retired and studious life, "with no small delight, cheerfully leaving," as he says, "the event of public affairs first to God, and then to those to whom the people had committed that task."

He did not return to Horton, but took lodgings in London, in the house of Russel, a tailor, in St. Bride's churchyard, at the city end of Fleet Street, on the site of what is now Farringdon Street. There is no attempt on the part of Milton to take up a profession, not even for the sake of appearances. The elder Milton was content to provide the son, of whom he was proud, with the means of prosecuting

his eccentric scheme of life, to continue, namely, to prepare himself for some great work, nature unknown.

For a young man of simple habits and studious life a little suffices. The chief want is books, and of these, for Milton's style of reading, select rather than copious, a large collection is superfluous. There were in 1640 no public libraries in London, and a scholar had to find his own store of books or to borrow from his friends. Milton never can have possessed a large library. At Horton he may have used Kederminster's bequest to Langley Church. Still, with his Italian acquisitions, added to the books that he already possessed, he soon found a lodging too narrow for his accommodation, and removed to a house of his own, "a pretty garden-house, in Aldersgate, at the end of an entry." Aldersgate was outside the city walls, on the verge of the open country of Islington, and was a genteel though not a fashionable quarter. There were few streets in London, says Phillips, more free from noise.

He had taken in hand the education of his two nephews, John and Edward Phillips, sons of his only sister Anne. Anne was a few years older than her brother John. Her first husband, Edward Phillips, had died in 1631, and the widow had given her two sons a step-father in one Thomas Agar, who was in the Clerk of the Crown's office. Milton, on settling in London in 1639, had at once taken his younger nephew John to live with him. When, in 1640, he removed to Aldersgate, the elder, Edward, also came under his roof.

If it was affection for his sister which first moved Milton to undertake the tuition of her sons, he soon developed a taste for the occupation. In 1643 he began to receive into his house other pupils, but only, says Phillips (who is solicitous that his uncle should not be thought to have

kept a school), "the sons of some gentlemen that were his intimate friends." He threw into his lessons the same energy which he carried into everything else. In his eagerness to find a place for everything that could be learnt, there could have been few hours in the day which were not invaded by teaching. He had exchanged the contemplative leisure of Horton for a busy life, in which no hour but had its calls. Even on Sundays there were lessons in the Greek Testament and dictations of a system of Divinity in Latin. His pamphlets of this period betray, in their want of measure and equilibrium, even in their heated style and passion-flushed language, the life at high pressure which their author was leading.

We have no account of Milton's method of teaching from any competent pupil. Edward Phillips was an amiable and upright man, who earned his living respectably by tuition and the compilation of books. He held his uncle's memory in great veneration. But when he comes to describe the education he received at his uncle's hands, the only characteristic on which he dwells is that of quantity. Phillips's account is, however, supplemented for us by Milton's written theory. His *Tractate of Education to Master Samuel Hartlib* is probably known even to those who have never looked at anything else of Milton's in prose.

Of all the practical arts, that of education seems the most cumbrous in its method, and to be productive of the smallest results with the most lavish expenditure of means. Hence the subject of education is one which is always luring on the innovator and the theorist. Every one, as he grows up, becomes aware of time lost, and effort misapplied, in his own case. It is not unnatural to desire to save our children from a like waste of power. And in a time such as was that of Milton's youth, when all traditions were

being questioned, and all institutions were to be remodelled, it was certain that the school would be among the earliest objects to attract an experimental reformer. Among the advanced minds of the time there had grown up a deep dissatisfaction with the received methods of our schools, and more especially of our universities. The great instaurator of all knowledge, Bacon, in preaching the necessity of altering the whole method of knowing, included as matter of course the method of teaching to know.

The man who carried over the Baconian aspiration into education was Comenius (d. 1670). A projector and enthusiast, Comenius desired, like Bacon, an entirely new intellectual era. With Bacon's intellectual ambition, but without Bacon's capacity, Comenius proposed to revolutionise all knowledge, and to make complete wisdom accessible to all, in a brief space of time, and with a minimum of labour. Language only as an instrument, not as an end in itself; many living languages, instead of the one dead language of the old school; a knowledge of things, instead of words; the free use of our eyes and ears upon the nature that surrounds us; intelligent apprehension, instead of loading the memory—all these doctrines, afterwards inherited by the party of rational reform, were first promulgated in Europe by the numerous pamphlets—some ninety have been reckoned up—of this Teuto-Slav, Comenius.

Comenius had as the champion of his views in England Samuel Hartlib, a Dantziger by origin, settled in London since 1628. Hartlib had even less of real science than Comenius, but he was equally possessed by the Baconian ideal of a new heaven and a new earth of knowledge. Not himself a discoverer in any branch, he was unceasingly occupied in communicating the discoveries and inventions of others. He had an ear for every novelty of whatever

kind, interesting himself in social, religious, philanthropic schemes, as well as in experiments in the arts. A sanguine universality of benevolence pervaded that generation of ardent souls, akin only in their common anticipation of an unknown Utopia. A secret was within the reach of human ingenuity which would make all mankind happy. But there were two directions more especially in which Hartlib's zeal without knowledge abounded. These were a grand scheme for the union of Protestant Christendom, and his propagand of Comenius's school-reform.

For the first of these projects it was not likely that Hartlib would gain a proselyte in Milton, who had at one-and-twenty judged Anglican orders a servitude, and was already chafing against the restraints of Presbytery. But on his other hobby, that of school-reform, Milton was not only sympathetic, but when Hartlib came to talk with him, he found that most or all of Comenius's ideas had already independently presented themselves to the reflection or experience of the Englishman. At Hartlib's request Milton consented to put down his thoughts on paper, and even to print them in a quarto pamphlet of eight pages, entitled, *Of Education: to Master Samuel Hartlib.*

This tract, often reproduced and regarded, along with one of Locke's, as a substantial contribution to the subject, must often have grievously disappointed those who have eagerly consulted it for practical hints or guidance of any kind. Its interest is wholly biographical. It cannot be regarded as a valuable contribution to educational theory, but it is strongly marked with the Miltonic individuality. We find in it the same lofty conception of the aim which Milton carried into everything he attempted; the same disdain of the beaten routine, and proud reliance upon his own resources. He had given vent elsewhere to his dis-

content with the system of Cambridge, "which, as in the time of her better health, and mine own younger judgment, I never greatly admired, so now (1642) much less." In the letter to Hartlib he denounces with equal fierceness the schools and "the many mistakes which have made learning generally so unpleasing and so unsuccessful." The alumni of the universities carry away with them a hatred and contempt for learning, and sink into "ignorantly zealous" clergymen, or mercenary lawyers, while the men of fortune betake themselves to feasts and jollity. These last, Milton thinks, are the best of the three classes.

All these moral shipwrecks are the consequence, according to Milton, of bad education. It is in our power to avert them by a reform of schools. But the measures of reform, when produced, are ludicrously incommensurable with the evils to be remedied. I do not trouble the reader with recounting the proposals; they are only a form of the well-known educational fallacy—the communication of useful knowledge. The doctrine as propounded in the *Tractate* is complicated by the further difficulty that the knowledge is to be gathered out of Greek and Latin books. This doctrine is advocated by Milton with the ardour of his own lofty enthusiasm. In virtue of the grandeur of zeal which inspires them, these pages, which are in substance nothing more than the now familiar omniscient examiner's programme, retain a place as one of our classics. The fine definition of education here given has never been improved upon: "I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." This is the true Milton. When he offers, in another page, as equivalent a definition of the true end of learning, "to repair the ruin of our first parents by regain-

ing to know God aright," we have the theological Milton, and what he took on from the current language of his age.

Milton saw strongly, as many have done before and since, one weak point in the practice of schools, namely, the small result of much time. He fell into the natural error of the inexperienced teacher, that of supposing that the remedy was the ingestion of much and diversified intelligible matter. It requires much observation of young minds to discover that the rapid inculcation of unassimilated information stupefies the faculties instead of training them. Is it fanciful to think that in Edward Phillips, who was always employing his superficial pen upon topics with which he snatched a fugitive acquaintance, we have a concrete example of the natural result of the Miltonic system of instruction?

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE, AND PAMPHLETS ON DIVORCE.

We have seen that Milton turned back from his unaccomplished tour because he "deemed it disgraceful to be idling away his time abroad for his own gratification, while his countrymen were contending for their liberty." From these words biographers have inferred that he hurried home with the view of taking service in the Parliamentarian army. This interpretation of his words seems to receive confirmation from what Phillips thinks he had heard, —"I am much mistaken if there were not about this time a design in agitation of making him Adjutant-General in Sir William Waller's army." Phillips very likely thought that a recruit could enlist as an Adjutant-General, but it does not appear from Milton's own words that he himself ever contemplated service in the field. The words "contending for liberty" (de libertate dimicarent) could not, as said of the winter 1638–39, mean anything more than the strife of party. And when war did break out, it must have been obvious to Milton that he could serve the cause better as a scholar than as a soldier.

That he never took service in the army is certain. If there was a time when he should have been found in the ranks, it was on the 12th November, 1642, when every

able-bodied citizen turned out to oppose the march of the king, who had advanced to Brentford. But we have the evidence of the sonnet—

"Captain, or Colonel, or Knight in arms,"

that Milton, on this occasion, stayed at home. He had, as he announced in February, 1642, "taken labour and intent study" to be his portion in this life. He did not contemplate enlisting his pen in the service of the Parliament, but the exaltation of his country's glory by the composition of some monument of the English language, as Dante or Tasso had done for Italian. But a project ambitious as this lay too far off to be put in execution as soon as thought of. The ultimate purpose had to give place to the immediate. One of these interludes, originating in Milton's personal relations, was his series of tracts on divorce.

In the early part of the summer of 1643, Milton took a sudden journey into the country, "nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was any more than a journey of recreation." He was absent about a month, and when he returned he brought back a wife with him. Nor was the bride alone. She was attended "by some few of her nearest relations," and there was feasting and celebration of the nuptials in the house in Aldersgate Street.

The bride's name was Mary, eldest daughter of Richard Powell, Esq., of Forest Hill, J. P. for the county of Oxford. Forest Hill is a village and parish about five miles from Oxford on the Thame road, where Mr. Powell had a house and a small estate of some 300*l.* a year, value of that day. Forest Hill was within the ancient royal forest of Shotover, of which Mr. Powell was lessee. The reader will remember that the poet's father was born at Stanton St.

John, the adjoining parish to Forest Hill, and that Richard Milton, the grandfather, had been under-ranger of the royal forest. There had been many transactions between the Milton and the Powell families as far back as 1627. In paying a visit to that neighbourhood, Milton was both returning to the district which had been the home of all the Miltons, and renewing an old acquaintance with the Powell family. Mr. Powell, though in receipt of a fair income for a country gentleman — 300*l.* a year of that day may be roughly valued at 1000*l.* of our day — and his wife had brought him 3000*l.*, could not live within his means. His children were numerous, and, belonging to the cavalier party, his house was conducted with the careless and easy hospitality of a royalist gentleman. Twenty years before he had begun borrowing, and among other persons had had recourse to the prosperous and saving scrivener of Bread Street. He was already mortgaged to the Miltons, father and sons, more deeply than his estate had any prospect of paying, which was perhaps the reason why he found no difficulty in promising a portion of 1000*l.* with his daughter. Milton, with a poet's want of caution, or indifference to money, and with a lofty masculine disregard of the temper and character of the girl he asked to share his life, came home with his bride in triumph, and held feasting in celebration of his hasty and ill-considered choice. It was a beginning of sorrows to him. Hitherto, up to his thirty-fifth year, independent master of leisure and the delights of literature, his years had passed without a check or a shadow. From this day forward domestic misery, the importunities of business, the clamour of controversy, crowned by the crushing calamity of blindness, were to be his portion for more than thirty years. Singular among poets in the serene fortune of the first half of life, in the

second half his piteous fate was to rank in wretchedness with that of his masters, Dante or Tasso.

The biographer, acquainted with the event, has no difficulty in predicting it, and in saying at this point in his story that Milton might have known better than, with his puritanical connections, to have taken to wife a daughter of a cavalier house, to have brought her from a roystering home, frequented by the dissolute officers of the Oxford garrison, to the spare diet and philosophical retirement of a recluse student, and to have looked for sympathy and response for his speculations from an uneducated and frivolous girl. Love has blinded, and will continue to blind, the wisest men to calculations as easy and as certain as these. And Milton, in whose soul Puritan austerity was as yet only contending with the more genial currents of humanity, had a far greater than average susceptibility to the charm of woman. Even at the later date of *Paradise Lost*, voluptuous thoughts, as Mr. Hallam has observed, are not uncongenial to him. And at an earlier age his poems, candidly pure from the lascivious innuendoes of his cotemporaries, have preserved the record of the rapid impression of the momentary passage of beauty upon his susceptible mind. Once, at twenty, he was all on flame by the casual meeting, in one of his walks in the suburbs of London, with a damsel whom he never saw again. Again, sonnets III. to V. tell how he fell before the new type of foreign beauty which crossed his path at Bologna. A similar surprise of his fancy at the expense of his judgment seems to have happened on the present occasion of his visit to Shotover. There is no evidence that Mary Powell was handsome, and we may be sure that it would have been mentioned if she had been. But she had youth and country freshness; her "unliveliness and

natural sloth unfit for conversation" passed as "the bashful muteness of a virgin;" and if a doubt intruded that he was being too hasty, Milton may have thought that a girl of seventeen could be moulded at pleasure.

He was too soon undeceived. His dream of married happiness barely lasted out the honeymoon. He found that he had mated himself to a clod of earth, who not only was not now, but had not the capacity of becoming, a helpmeet for him. With Milton, as with the whole Calvinistic and Puritan Europe, woman was a creature of an inferior and subordinate class. Man was the final cause of God's creation, and woman was there to minister to this nobler being. In his dogmatic treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton formulated this sentiment in the thesis, borrowed from the schoolmen, that the soul was communicated "in semine patris." The cavalier section of society had inherited the sentiment of chivalry, and contrasted with the roundhead not more by its loyalty to the person of the prince, than by its recognition of the superior grace and refinement of womanhood. Even in the debased and degenerate epoch of court life which followed 1660, the forms and language of homage still preserved the tradition of a nobler scheme of manners. The Puritan had thrown off chivalry as being parcel of Catholicism, and had replaced it by the Hebrew ideal of the subjection and seclusion of woman. Milton, in whose mind the rigidity of Puritan doctrine was now contending with the freer spirit of culture and romance, shows on the present occasion a like conflict of doctrine with sentiment. While he adopts the Oriental hypothesis of woman for the sake of man, he modifies it by laying more stress upon mutual affection, the charities of home, and the intercommunion of intellectual and moral life,

than upon that ministration of woman to the appetite and comforts of man which makes up the whole of her functions in the Puritan apprehension. The failure in his own case to obtain this genial companionship of soul, which he calls "the gentlest end of marriage," is what gave the keenest edge to his disappointment in his matrimonial venture.

But however keenly he felt and regretted the precipitancy which had yoked him for life to "a mute and spiritless mate," the breach did not come from his side. The girl herself conceived an equal repugnance to the husband she had thoughtlessly accepted, probably on the strength of his good looks, which was all of Milton that she was capable of appreciating. A young bride, taken suddenly from the freedom of a jovial and an undisciplined home, rendered more lax by civil confusion and easy intercourse with the officers of the royalist garrison, and committed to the sole society of a stranger, and that stranger possessing the rights of a husband, and expecting much from all who lived with him, may not unnaturally have been seized with panic terror, and wished herself home again. The young Mrs. Milton not only wished it, but incited her family to write and beg that she might be allowed to go home to stay the remainder of the summer. The request to quit her husband at the end of the first month was so unreasonable that the parents would hardly have made it if they had not suspected some profound cause of estrangement. Nor could Milton have consented, as he did, to so extreme a remedy, unless he had felt that the case required no less, and that her mother's advice and influence were the most available means of awakening his wife to a sense of her duty. Milton's consent was therefore given. He may have thought it desirable

she should go, and thus Mrs. Powell would not have been going very much beyond the truth when she pretended some years afterwards that her son-in-law had turned away his wife for a long space.

Mary Milton went to Forest Hill in July, but on the understanding that she was to come back at Michaelmas. When the appointed time came, she did not appear. Milton wrote for her to come. No answer. Several other letters met the same fate. At last he despatched a foot messenger to Forest Hill desiring her return. The messenger came back only to report that he had been "dismissed with some sort of contempt." It was evident that Mary Milton's family had espoused her cause as against her husband. Whatever may have been the secret motive of their conduct, they explained the quarrel politically, and began to repent, so Phillips thought, of having matched the eldest daughter of their house with a violent Presbyterian.

If Milton had "hasted too eagerly to light the nuptial torch," he had been equally ardent in his calculations of the domestic happiness upon which he was to enter. His poet's imagination had invested a dull and common girl with rare attributes moral and intellectual, and had pictured for him the state of matrimony as an earthly paradise, in which he was to be secure of a response of affection showing itself in a communion of intelligent interests. In proportion to the brilliancy of his ideal anticipation was the fury of despair which came upon him when he found out his mistake. A common man, in a common age, would have vented his vexation upon the individual. Milton, living at a time when controversy turned away from details, and sought to dig down to the roots of every question, instead of urging the hardships of his own case,

set to to consider the institution of marriage in itself. He published a pamphlet with the title, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, at first anonymously, but putting his name to a second edition, much enlarged. He further reinforced this argument in chief with three supplementary pamphlets, partly in answer to opponents and objectors; for there was no lack of opposition, indeed of outcry loud and fierce.

A biographer closely scans the pages of these pamphlets, not for the sake of their direct argument, but to see if he can extract from them any indirect hints of their author's personal relations. There is found in them no mention of Milton's individual case. Had we no other information, we should not be authorised to infer from them that the question of the marriage tie was more than an abstract question with the author.

But though all mention of his own case is studiously avoided by Milton, his pamphlet, when read by the light of Phillips's brief narrative, does seem to give some assistance in apprehending the circumstances of this obscure passage of the poet's life. The mystery has always been felt by the biographers, but has assumed a darker hue since the discovery by Mr. Masson of a copy of the first edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, with the written date of August 1. According to Phillips's narrative, the pamphlet was engendered by Milton's indignation at his wife's contemptuous treatment of him, in refusing to keep the engagement to return at Michaelmas, and would therefore be composed in October and November, time enough to allow for the sale of the edition, and the preparation of the enlarged edition, which came out in February, 1644. But if the date "August 1" for the first edition be correct, we have to suppose

that Milton was occupying himself with the composition of a vehement and impassioned argument in favour of divorce for incompatibility of temper during the honeymoon! Such behaviour on Milton's part, he being thirty-five, towards a girl of seventeen, to whom he was bound to show all loving tenderness, is so horrible that a suggestion has been made that there was a more adequate cause for his displeasure, a suggestion which Milton's biographer is bound to notice, even if he does not adopt it. The suggestion, which I believe was first made by a writer in the *Athenæum*, is that Milton's young wife refused him the consummation of the marriage. The supposition is founded upon a certain passage in Milton's pamphlet.

If the early date of the pamphlet be the true date; if the *Doctrine and Discipline* was in the hands of the public on August 1; if Milton was brooding over this seething agony of passion all through July, with the young bride, to whom he had been barely wedded a month, in the house where he was writing, then the only apology for this outrage upon the charities, not to say decencies, of home is that which is suggested by the passage referred to. Then the pamphlet, however imprudent, becomes pardonable. It is a passionate cry from the depths of a great despair; another evidence of the noble purity of a nature which refused to console itself as other men would have consoled themselves; a nature which, instead of an egotistical whine for its own deliverance, sets itself to plead the common cause of man and of society. He gives no intimation of any individual interest, but his argument throughout glows with a white heat of concealed emotion, such as could only be stirred by the sting of some personal and present misery.

Notwithstanding the amount of free opinion abroad in England, or at least in London, at this date, Milton's divorce pamphlets created a sensation of that sort which Gibbon is fond of calling a scandal. A scandal, in this sense, must always arise in your own party; you cannot scandalise the enemy. And so it was now. The Episcopalians were rejoiced that Milton should ruin his credit with his own side by advocating a paradox. The Presbyterians hastened to disown a man who enabled their opponents to brand their religious scheme as the parent of moral heresies. For though church government and the English constitution in all its parts had begun to be open questions, speculation had not as yet attacked either of the two bases of society, property or the family. Loud was the outcry of the Philistines. There was no doubt that the rigid bonds of Presbyterian orthodoxy would not in any case have long held Milton. They were snapped at once by the publication of his opinions on divorce, and Milton is henceforward to be ranked among the most independent of the new party which shortly after this date began to be heard of under the name of Independents.

But the men who formed the nucleus of this new mode of thinking were as yet, in 1643, not consolidated into a sect, still less was their importance as the coming political party dreamt of. At present they were units, only drawn to each other by the sympathy of opinion. The contemptuous epithets Anabaptist, Antinomian, &c., could be levelled against them with fatal effect by every Philistine, and were freely used on this occasion against Milton. He says of himself that he now lived in a world of disesteem. Nor was there wanting, to complete his discomfiture, the practical parody of the doctrine of divorce.

A Mistress Attaway, lacewoman in Bell Alley, and she-preacher in Coleman Street, had been reading Master Milton's book, and remembered that she had an unsanctified husband, who did not speak the language of Canaan. She further reflected that Mr. Attaway was not only unsanctified, but was also absent with the army, while William Jenney was on the spot, and, like herself, also a preacher. Could a "scandalised" Presbyterian help pointing the finger of triumphant scorn at such examples, the natural fruits of that mischievous book, *The Doctrine and Discipline?*

Beyond the stage of scandal and disesteem the matter did not proceed. In dedicating *The Doctrine and Discipline* to the Parliament, Milton had specially called on that assembly to legislate for the relief of men who were encumbered with unsuitable spouses. No notice was taken of this appeal, as there was far other work on hand, and no particular pressure from without in the direction of Milton's suit. Divorce for incompatibility of temper remained his private crotchet, or obtained converts only among his fellow-sufferers, who, however numerous, did not form a body important enough to enforce by clamour their demand for relief.

Milton was not very well pleased to find that the Parliament had no ear for the bitter cry of distress wrung from their ardent admirer and staunch adherent. Accordingly, in 1645, in dedicating the last of the divorce pamphlets, which he entitled *Tetrachordon*, to the Parliament, he concluded with a threat, "If the law make not a timely provision, let the law, as reason is, bear the censure of the consequences."

This threat he was prepared to put in execution, and did, in 1645, as Phillips tells us, contemplate a union,

which could not have been a marriage, with another woman. He was able at this time to find some part of that solace of conversation which his wife failed to give him, among his female acquaintance. Especially we find him at home in the house of one of the Parliamentary women, the Lady Margaret Ley, a lady "of great wit and ingenuity," the "honoured Margaret" of Sonnet x. But the Lady Margaret was a married woman, being the wife of a Captain Hobson, a "very accomplished gentleman," of the Isle of Wight. The young lady who was the object of his attentions, and who, if she were the "virtuous young lady" of Sonnet IX., was "in the prime of earliest youth," was a daughter of a Dr. Davis, of whom nothing else is now known. She is described by Phillips, who may have seen her, as a very handsome and witty gentlewoman. Though Milton was ready to brave public opinion, Miss Davis was not. And so the suit hung, when all schemes of the kind were put an end to by the unexpected submission of Mary Powell.

Since October, 1643, when Milton's messenger had been dismissed from Forest Hill, the face of the civil struggle was changed. The Presbyterian army had been replaced by that of the Independents, and the immediate consequence had been the decline of the royal cause, consummated by its total ruin on the day of Naseby, in June, 1645. Oxford was closely invested, Forest Hill occupied by the besiegers, and the Powell family compelled to take refuge within the lines of the city. Financial bankruptcy, too, had overtaken the Powells. These influences, rather than any rumours which may have reached them of Milton's designs in regard to Miss Davis, wrought a change in the views of the Powell family. By the triumph of the Independents Mr. Milton was become a man of con-

sideration, and might be useful as a protector. They concluded that the best thing they could do was to seek a reconciliation. There were not wanting friends of Milton's also, some perhaps divining his secret discontent, who thought that such reconciliation would be better for him too, than perilling his happiness upon the experiment of an illegal connexion. A conspiracy of the friends of both parties contrived to introduce Mary Powell into a house where Milton often visited in St. Martin's-le-Grand. She was secreted in an adjoining room, on an occasion when Milton was known to be coming, and he was surprised by seeing her suddenly brought in, throw herself on her knees, and ask to be forgiven. The poor young thing, now two years older and wiser, but still only nineteen, pleaded, truly or falsely, that her mother "had been all along the chief promoter of her frowardness." Milton, with a "noble leonine clemency" which became him, cared not for excuses for the past. It was enough that she was come back, and was willing to live with him as his wife. He received her at once, and not only her, but on the surrender of Oxford, in June, 1646, and the sequestration of Forest Hill, took in the whole family of Powells, including the mother-in-law, whose influence with her daughter might even again trouble his peace.

It is impossible not to see that Milton had this impressive scene, enacted in St. Martin's-le-Grand in 1645, before his mind, when he wrote, twenty years afterwards, the lines in *Paradise Lost*, x. 937:—

> "Eve, with tears that ceas'd not flowing
> And tresses all disorder'd, at his feet
> Fell humble, and embracing them, besought
> His peace . . .
> Her lowly plight

Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault
Acknowledg'd and deplor'd, in Adam wrought
Commiseration; soon his heart relented
Tow'rds her, his life so late and sole delight,
Now at his feet submissive in distress!
Creature so fair his reconcilement seeking,
* * * * *
At once disarm'd, his anger all he lost."

The garden-house in Aldersgate Street had before been found too small for the pupils who were being now pressed upon Milton. It was to a larger house in Barbican, a side street leading out of Aldersgate, that he brought the Powells and Mary Milton. Milton probably abated his exactions on the point of companionship, and learned to be content with her acquiescence in the duties of a wife. In July, 1646, she became a mother, and bore in all four children. Of these, three, all daughters, lived to grow up. Mary Milton herself died in giving birth to the fourth child in the summer of 1652. She was only twenty-six, and had been married to Milton nine years.

CHAPTER VI.

PAMPHLETS.

We have now seen Milton engaged in teaching and writing on education, involved in domestic unhappiness, and speculating on the obligations of marriage. But neither of these topics formed the principal occupation of his mind during these years. He had renounced a cherished scheme of travel, because his countrymen were engaged at home in contending for their liberties, and it could not but be that the gradually intensified stages of that struggle engrossed his interest, and claimed his participation.

So imperative did he regard this claim that he allowed it to override the purposed dedication of his life to poetry. Not indeed for ever and aye, but for a time. As he had renounced Greece, the Ægean Isles, Thebes, and the East for the fight for freedom, so now to the same cause he postponed the composition of his epic of Arthurian romance, or whatever his mind "in the spacious circuits of her musing proposed to herself of highest hope and hardest attempting." No doubt at first, in thus deferring the work of his life, he thought the delay would be for a brief space. He did not foresee that having once taken an oar, he would be chained to it for more than twenty years, and that he would finally owe his release to the ruin of the

cause he had served. But for the Restoration and the overthrow of the Puritans, we should never have had the great Puritan epic.

The period then of his political activity is to be regarded as an episode in the life of the poet Milton. It is indeed an episode which fills twenty years, and those the most vigorous years of manhood, from his thirty-second to his fifty-second year. He himself was conscious of the sacrifice he was making, and apologises to the public for thus defrauding them of the better work which he stood pledged to execute. As he puts it, there was no choice for him. He could not help himself, at this critical juncture, "when the Church of God was at the foot of her insulting enemies;" he would never have ceased to reproach himself, if he had refused to employ the fruits of his studies in her behalf. He saw also that a generation inflamed by the passions of conflict, and looking in breathless suspense for the issue of battles, was not in a mood to attend to poetry. Nor, indeed, was he ready to write, "not having yet (this is in 1642) completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies."

But though he is drawn into the strife against his will, and in defiance of his genius, when he is in it he throws into it the whole vehemence of his nature. The pamphlet period, I have said, is an episode in the life of the poet. But it is a genuine part of Milton's life. However his ambition may have been set upon an epic crown, his zeal for what he calls the church was an equal passion, nay, had, in his judgment, a paramount claim upon him. He is a zealot among the zealots; his cause is the cause of God; and the sword of the Independents is the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. He does not refute opponents, but curses enemies. Yet his rage, even when most delirious,

is always a Miltonic rage; it is grand, sublime, terrible! Mingled with the scurrilities of the theological brawl are passages of the noblest English ever written. Hartley Coleridge explains the dulness of the wit-combats in Shakspeare and Jonson, on the ground that repartee is the accomplishment of lighter thinkers and a less earnest age. So of Milton's pamphlets it must be said that he was not fencing for pastime, but fighting for all he held most worthy. He had to think only of making his blows tell. When a battle is raging, and my friends are sorely pressed, am I not to help because good manners forbid the shedding of blood?

No good man can, with impunity, addict himself to party. And the best men will suffer most, because their conviction of the goodness of their cause is deeper. But when one with the sensibility of a poet throws himself into the excitements of a struggle, he is certain to lose his balance. The endowment of feeling and imagination which qualifies him to be the ideal interpreter of life, unfits him for participation in that real life, through the manœuvres and compromises of which reason is the only guide, and where imagination is as much misplaced as it would be in a game of chess. "The ennobling difference between one man and another is that one feels more than another." Milton's capacity of emotion, when once he became champion of a cause, could not be contained within the bounds of ordinary speech. It breaks into ferocious reprobation, into terrific blasts of vituperation, beneath which the very language creaks, as the timbers of a ship in a storm. Corruptio optimi pessima. The archangel is recognisable by the energy of his malice. Were all those accomplishments, those many studious years hiving wisdom, the knowledge of all the tongues, the command of

all the thoughts of all the ages, and that wealth of English expression—were all these acquirements only of use, that their possessor might vie in defamation with an Edwards or a Du Moulin?

For it should be noted that these pamphlets, now only serving as a record of the prostitution of genius to political party, were, at the time at which they appeared, of no use to the cause in which they were written. Writers, with a professional tendency to magnify their office, have always been given to exaggerate the effect of printed words. There are examples of thought having been influenced by books. But such books have been scientific, not rhetorical. Milton's pamphlets are not works of speculation, or philosophy, or learning, or solid reasoning on facts. They are inflammatory appeals, addressed to the passions of the hour. He who was meditating the erection of an enduring monument, such as the world would not willingly let die, was content to occupy himself with the most ephemeral of all hackwork. His own polemical writings may be justly described in the words he himself uses of a book by one of his opponents, as calculated "to gain a short, contemptible, and soon-fading reward, not to stir the constancy and solid firmness of any wise man . . . but to catch the worthless approbation of an inconstant, irrational, and image-doting rabble."

It would have been not unnatural that the public school and university man, the admirer of Shakspeare and the old romances, the pet of Italian academies, the poet-scholar, himself the author of two Masks, who was nursing his wings for a new flight into the realms of verse, should have sided with the cavaliers against the Puritans, with the party of culture and the humanities against the party which shut up the theatres and despised profane learning.

But we have seen that there was another side to Milton's mind. This may be spoken of as his other self, the Puritan self, and regarded as in internal conflict with the poet's self. His twenty years' pamphlet warfare may be presented by his biographer as the expression of the Puritanic Milton, who shall have been driven back upon his suppressed instincts as a poet by the ruin of his political hopes. This chart of Milton's life is at once simple and true. But like all physiological diagrams it falls short of the subtlety and complexity of human character. A study of the pamphlets will show that the poet is all there, indeed only too openly for influence on opinion, and that the blighted hope of the patriot lends a secret pathos to *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

This other element in Milton is not accurately named Puritanism. Even the term republicanism is a coarse and conventional description of that sentiment which dominated his whole being, and which is the inspiration at once of his poetry and of his prose. To give a name to this sentiment, I must call it the love of liberty. It was an aspiration at once real and vague, after a new order of things, an order in which the old injustices and oppressions should cease; after a new Jerusalem, a millennium, a Utopia, an Oceana. Its aim was to realise in political institutions that great instauration of which Bacon dreamed in the world of intelligence. It was much more negative than affirmative, and knew better, as we all do, how good was hindered than how it should be promoted. "I did but prompt the age to *quit their clogs*." Milton embodied, more perfectly than any of his cotemporaries, this spirit of the age. It is the ardent aspiration after the pure and noble life, the aspiration which stamps every line he wrote, verse or prose, with a dignity as of an heroic age. This

gives consistency to all his utterances. The doctrinaire republican of to-day cannot understand how the man who approved the execution of the would-be despot Charles Stuart, should have been the hearty supporter of the real autocrat Oliver Cromwell. Milton was not the slave of a name. He cared not for the word republic, so as it was well with the commonwealth. Parliaments or single rulers, he knew, are but means to an end; if that end was obtained, no matter if the constitutional guarantees exist or not. Many of Milton's pamphlets are certainly party pleadings, choleric, one-sided, personal. But through them all runs the one redeeming characteristic—that they are all written on the side of liberty. He defended religious liberty against the prelates, civil liberty against the crown, the liberty of the press against the executive, liberty of conscience against the Presbyterians, and domestic liberty against the tyranny of canon law. Milton's pamphlets might have been stamped with the motto which Selden inscribed (in Greek) in all his books, "Liberty before everything."

One virtue these pamphlets possess, the virtue of style. They are monuments of our language so remarkable that Milton's prose works must always be resorted to by students, as long as English remains a medium of ideas. Yet even on the score of style, Milton's prose is subject to serious deductions. His negligence is such as to amount to an absence of construction. He who, in his verse, trained the sentence with delicate sensibility to follow his guiding hand into exquisite syntax, seems in his prose writing to abandon his meaning to shift for itself. Here Milton compares disadvantageously with Hooker. Hooker's elaborate sentence, like the sentence of Demosthenes, is composed of parts so hinged, of clauses so subordinated to the main

thought, that we foresee the end from the beginning, and close the period with a sense of perfect roundness and totality. Milton does not seem to have any notion of what a period means. He begins anywhere, and leaves off, not when the sense closes, but when he is out of breath. We might have thought this pell-mell huddle of his words was explained, if not excused, by the exigencies of the party pamphlet, which cannot wait. But the same asyntactic disorder is equally found in the *History of Britain*, which he had in hand for forty years. Nor is it only the Miltonic sentence which is incoherent; the whole arrangement of his topics is equally loose, disjointed, and desultory. His inspiration comes from impulse. Had he stayed to chastise his emotional writing by reason and the laws of logic, he would have deprived himself of the sources of his strength.

These serious faults are balanced by virtues of another kind. Putting Bacon aside, the condensed force and poignant brevity of whose aphoristic wisdom has no parallel in English, there is no other prosaist who possesses anything like Milton's command over the resources of our language. Milton cannot match the musical harmony and exactly balanced periods of his predecessor Hooker. He is without the power of varied illustration, and accumulation of ornamental circumstance, possessed by his cotemporary, Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667). But neither of these great writers impresses the reader with a sense of unlimited power such as we feel to reside in Milton. Vast as is the wealth of magnificent words which he flings with both hands carelessly upon the page, we feel that there is still much more in reserve.

The critics have observed (Collier's *Poetical Decameron*) that as Milton advanced in life he gradually disused the

compound words he had been in the habit of making for himself. However this may be, his words are the words of one who made a study of the language, as a poet studies language, searching its capacities for the expression of surging emotion. Jeremy Taylor's prose is poetical prose. Milton's prose is not poetical prose, but a different thing, the prose of a poet; not like Taylor's, loaded with imagery on the outside; but coloured by imagination from within. Milton is the first English writer who, possessing in the ancient models a standard of the effect which could be produced by choice of words, set himself to the conscious study of our native tongue with a firm faith in its as yet undeveloped powers as an instrument of thought.

The words in Milton's poems have been counted, and it appears that he employs 8000, while Shakspeare's plays and poems yield about 15,000. From this it might be inferred that the Miltonic vocabulary is only half as rich as that of Shakspeare. But no inference can be founded upon the absolute number of words used by any writer. We must know, not the total of different words, but the *proportion* of different words to the whole of any writer's words. Now to furnish a list of 100 different words the English Bible requires 531 common words, Shakspeare 164, Milton 135 only. This computation is founded on the poems; it would be curious to have the same test tried upon the prose writings, though no such test can be as trustworthy as the educated ear of a listener to a continued reading.

It is no part of a succinct biography, such as the present, to furnish an account in detail of the various controversies of the time, as Milton engaged in them. The reader will doubtless be content with the bare indication of the subjects on which he wrote. The whole number of Milton's political pamphlets is twenty-five. Of these, twenty-

one are written in English, and four in Latin. Of the *Tractate of Education* and the four divorce pamphlets something has been already said. Of the remaining twenty, nine, or nearly half, relate to church government, or ecclesiastical affairs; eight treat of the various crises of the civil strife; and two are personal vindications of himself against one of his antagonists. There remains one tract of which the subject is of a more general and permanent nature, the best known of all the series, *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England.* The whole series of twenty-five extends over a period of somewhat less than twenty years; the earliest, viz., *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it*, having been published in 1641; the latest, entitled, *A ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth*, coming out in March, 1660, after the torrent of royalism had set in, which was to sweep away the men and the cause to which Milton had devoted himself. Milton's pen thus accompanied the whole of the Puritan revolution from the modest constitutional opposition in which it commenced, through its unexpected triumph, to its crushing overthrow by the royalist and clerical reaction.

The autumn of 1641 brought with it a sensible lull in the storm of revolutionary passion. Indeed, there began to appear all the symptoms of a reaction, and of the formation of a solid conservative party, likely to be strong enough to check, or even to suppress, the movement. The impulse seemed to have spent itself, and a desire for rest from political agitation began to steal over the nation. Autumn and the harvest turn men's thoughts towards country occupations and sports. The King went off to

Scotland in August; the Houses adjourned till the 20th October. The Scottish army was paid off, and had repassed the border; the Scottish commissioners and preachers had left London.

It was a critical moment for the Puritan party. Some very considerable triumphs they had gained. The arch-enemy Strafford had been brought to the block; Laud was in the Tower; the leading members of Convocation, bishops, deans, and archdeacons, had been heavily fined; the Star Chamber and the High Commission Court had been abolished; the Stannary and Forestal jurisdictions restrained. But the Puritan movement aimed at far more than this. It was not only that the root-and-branch men were pushing for a generally more levelling policy, but the whole Puritan party were committed to a struggle with the hierarchy of the Established Church. It was not so much that they demanded more and more reform, with the growing appetite of revolution, but that as long as bishops existed, nothing that had been wrested from them was secure. The Puritans could not exist in safety side by side with a church whose principle was that there was no church without the apostolic succession. The abolition of episcopacy and the substitution of the Presbyterian platform was, so it then seemed, a bare measure of necessary precaution, and not the urgency of dissatisfied spirits. Add to this, that it was well understood by those who were near enough to the principal actors in the drama, that the concessions which had been made by the Court had been easily made, because they could be taken back, when the time should come, with equal ease. Even the most moderate men, who were satisfied with the amount of reform already obtained, must have trembled at its insecurity. The Puritan leaders must have viewed

with dismay the tendency in the nation towards a reaction in favour of things as they were.

It was upon this condition of the public mind that Milton persistently poured pamphlet after pamphlet, successive vials of apocalyptic wrath. He exhausts all the resources of rhetoric, and plays upon every note in the gamut of public feeling, that he may rouse the apathetic, confirm the wavering, dumfound the malignant; where there was zeal, to fan it into flame; where there was opposition, to cow and browbeat it by indignant scorn and terrific denunciation. The first of these manifestoes was (1) *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline*, of which I have already spoken. This was immediately followed by (2) *Of Prelaticall Episcopacy*. This tract was a reply, in form, to a publication of Archbishop Usher. It was about the end of May, 1641, that Usher had come forward on the breach with his *Judgment of Dr. Rainolds touching the Original of Episcopacy*. Rainolds, who had been President of Corpus (1598–1607), had belonged to the Puritan party in his day, had refused a bishopric, and was known, like Usher himself, to be little favourable to the exclusive claims of the high prelatists. He was thus an unexceptionable witness to adduce in favour of the apostolic origin of the distinction between bishop and presbyter. Usher, in editing Rainolds' opinions, had backed them up with all the additional citations which his vast reading could supply.

Milton could not speak with the weight that attached to Usher, the most learned Churchman of the age, who had spent eighteen years in going through a complete course of fathers and councils. But, in the first paragraph of his answer, Milton adroitly puts the controversy upon a footing by which antiquarian research is put out of court.

Episcopacy is either of human or divine origin. If of human origin, it may be either retained or abolished, as may be found expedient. If of divine appointment, it must be proved to be so out of Scripture. If this cannot be proved out of inspired Scripture, no accumulation of merely human assertion of the point can be of the least authority. Having thus shut out antiquity as evidence in the case, he proceeds nevertheless to examine his opponent's authorities, and sets them aside by a style of argument which has more of banter than of criticism.

One incident of this collision between Milton, young and unknown, and the venerable prelate, whom he was assaulting with the rude wantonness of untempered youth, deserves to be mentioned here. Usher had incautiously included the Ignatian epistles among his authorities. This laid the most learned man of the day at the mercy of an adversary of less reading than himself. Milton, who at least knew so much suspicion of the genuineness of these remains as Casaubon's *Exercitations on Baronius* and Vedelin's edition (Geneva, 1623) could tell him, pounced upon this critical flaw, and delightedly denounced in trenchant tones this "Perkin Warbeck of Ignatius," and the "suppositious offspring of some dozen epistles." This rude shock it was which set Usher upon a more careful examination of the Ignatian question. The result was his well-known edition of Ignatius, printed 1642, though not published till 1644, in which he acknowledged the total spuriousness of nine epistles, and the partial interpolation of the other six. I have not noticed in Usher's *Prolegomena* that he alludes to Milton's onslaught. Nor, indeed, was he called upon to do so in a scientific investigation, as Milton had brought no contribution to the solution of the question beyond sound and fury.

Of Milton's third pamphlet, entitled (3) *Animadversions on the Remonstrants' defence against Smectymnuus*, it need only be said that it is a violent personal onfall upon Joseph Hall, bishop, first, of Exeter and afterwards of Norwich. The bishop, by descending into the arena of controversy, had deprived himself of the privilege which his literary eminence should have secured to him. But nothing can excuse or reconcile us to the indecent scurrility with which he is assailed in Milton's pages, which reflect more discredit on him who wrote them, than on him against whom they are written.

The fifth pamphlet, called (5) *An Apology against a Pamphlet called "A Modest Confutation, &c."* (1642), is chiefly remarkable for a defence of his own Cambridge career. A man who throws dirt, as Milton did, must not be surprised if some of it comes back to him. A son of Bishop Hall, coming forward as his father's champion and avenger, had raked up a garbled version of Milton's quarrel with his tutor Chappell (see p. 6), and by a further distortion had brought it out in the shape that, "after an inordinate and violent youth spent at the university," Milton had been "vomited out thence." From the university this "alchemist of slander" follows him to the city, and declares that where Milton's morning haunts are, he wisses not, but that his afternoons are spent in playhouses and bordelloes. Milton replies to these random charges by a lengthy account of himself and his studious habits. As the reader may expect a specimen of Milton's prose style, I quote a part of this autobiographical paragraph :—

"I had my time, as others have who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places where the opinion was it might be sooner attained; and, as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended, whereof some were grave ora-

tors and historians, whom methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce; whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is there be few who know not, I was so allowed to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome. .... Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task might with such diligence as they used embolden me, and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear and best value itself by how much more wisely and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises. .... Nor blame it in those years to propose to themselves such a reward as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred. Whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast. For by the firm settling of these persuasions I became so much a proficient, that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.

"These reasonings together with a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness and self-esteem, either of what I was or what I might be, which let envy call pride, and lastly that modesty, whereof,

though not in the title-page, yet here, I may be excused to make some beseeming profession, all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself, that can agree to saleable and unlawful prostitutions.

"Next, for hear me out now, readers, that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wandered, I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown over all Christendom. There I read it in the oath of every knight, that he should defend to the expence of his best blood, or of his life if it so befel him, the honour and chastity of virgin or matron. From whence even then I learnt what a noble virtue chastity ever must be, to the defence of which so many worthies by such a dear adventure of themselves had sworn. And if I found in the story afterwards any of them by word or deed breaking that oath, I judged it the same fault of the poet as that which is attributed to Homer to have written undecent things of the gods. Only this my mind gave me, that every free and gentle spirit without that oath ought to be borne a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder, to stir him up both by his counsel and his arm to serve and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity. So that even those books which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, I cannot think how unless by divine indulgence, proved to me so many incitements to the love and steadfast observation of virtue."

This is one of the autobiographical oases in these pamphlets, which are otherwise arid deserts of sand, scorched by the fire of extinct passion. It may be asked why it is that a few men, Gibbon or Milton, are indulged without challenge in talk about themselves, which would be childish vanity or odious egotism in others. When a Frenchman writes, "Nous avons tous, nous autres Français, des séduisantes qualités" (Gaffarel), he is ridiculous. The difference is not merely that we tolerate in a man of confessed superiority what would be intolerable in an equal.

This is true; but there is a further distinction of moral quality in men's confessions. In Milton, as in Gibbon, the gratification of self-love, which attends all autobiography, is felt to be subordinated to a nobler intention. The lofty conception which Milton formed of his vocation as a poet, expands his soul and absorbs his personality. It is his office, and not himself, which he magnifies. The details of his life and nurture are important, not because they belong to him, but because he belongs, by dedication, to a high and sacred calling. He is extremely jealous, not of his own reputation, but of the credit which is due to lofty endeavour. We have only to compare Milton's magnanimous assumption of the first place with the paltry conceit with which, in the following age of Dryden and Pope, men spoke of themselves as authors, to see the wide difference between the professional vanity of successful authorship and the proud consciousness of a prophetic mission. Milton leads a dedicated life, and has laid down for himself the law that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem."

If Milton had not been the author of *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*, his political pamphlets would have been as forgotten as are the thousand civil war tracts preserved in the Thomason collection in the Museum, or have served, at most, as philological landmarks. One, however, of his prose tracts has continued to enjoy some degree of credit down to the present time, for its matter as well as for its words, *Areopágitica*. This tract belongs to the year 1644, the most fertile year in Milton's life, as in it he brought out two of his divorce tracts, the *Tractate of Education* and the *Areopagitica*. As Milton's moving principle was not any preconceived system of doctrine, but the passion for

liberty in general, it was natural that he should plead, when occasion called, for liberty of the press, among others. The occasion was one personal to himself.

It is well known that, early in the history of printing, governments became jealous of this new instrument for influencing opinion. In England, in 1556, under Mary, the Stationers' Company was invested with legal privileges, having the twofold object of protecting the book trade and controlling writers. All publications were required to be registered in the register of the company. No persons could set up a press without a license, or print anything which had not been previously approved by some official censor. The court which had come to be known as the court of Star Chamber exercised criminal jurisdiction over offenders, and even issued its own decrees for the regulation of printing. The arbitrary action of this court had no small share in bringing about the resistance to Charles I. But the fall of the royal authority did not mean the emancipation of the press. The Parliament had no intention of letting go the control which the monarchy had exercised; the incidence of the coercion was to be shifted from themselves upon their opponents. The Star Chamber was abolished, but its powers of search and seizure were transferred to the Company of Stationers. Licensing was to go on as before, but to be exercised by special commissioners, instead of by the Archbishop and the Bishop of London. Only whereas, before, contraband had consisted of Presbyterian books, henceforward it was Catholic and Anglican books which would be suppressed.

Such was not Milton's idea of the liberty of thought and speech in a free commonwealth. He had himself written for the Presbyterians four unlicensed pamphlets. It was now open to him to write any number, and to get them

licensed, provided they were written on the same side. This was not liberty, as he had learned it in his classics, "ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet." Over and above this encroachment on the liberty of the free citizen, it so happened that at this moment Milton himself was concerned to ventilate an opinion which was not Presbyterian, and had no chance of passing a Presbyterian licenser. His *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* was just ready for press when the ordinance of 1643 came into operation. He published it without license and without printer's name, in defiance of the law, and awaited the consequences. There were no consequences. He repeated the offence in a second edition in February, 1644, putting his name now (the first edition had been anonymous), and dedicating it to the very Parliament whose ordinance he was setting at nought. This time the Commons, stirred up by a petition from the Company of Stationers, referred the matter to the committee of printing. It went no further. Either it was deemed inexpedient to molest so sound a Parliamentarian as Milton, or Cromwell's "accommodation resolution" of September 13, 1644, opened the eyes of the Presbyterian zealots to the existence in the kingdom of a new, and much wider, phase of opinion, which ominously threatened the compact little edifice of Presbyterian truth that they had been erecting with a profound conviction of its exclusive orthodoxy.

The occurrence had been sufficient to give a new direction to Milton's thoughts. Regardless of the fact that his plea for liberty in marriage had fallen upon deaf ears, he would plead for liberty of speech. The *Areopagitica, for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing*, came out in November, 1644, an unlicensed, unregistered publication, without printer's or bookseller's name. It was cast in the form of a

speech addressed to the Parliament. The motto was taken from Euripides, and printed in the original Greek, which was not, when addressed to the Parliament of 1644, the absurdity which it would be now. The title is less appropriate, being borrowed from the *Areopagitic Discourse* of Isocrates, between which and Milton's *Speech* there is no resemblance either in subject or style. All that the two productions have in common is their form. They are both unspoken orations, written to the address of a representative assembly—to the Boulé or Senate of Athens, and to the Parliament of England.

Milton's *Speech* is in his own best style; a copious flood of majestic eloquence, the outpouring of a noble soul with a divine scorn of narrow dogma and paltry aims. But it is a mere pamphlet, extemporised in, at most, a month or two, without research or special knowledge, with no attempt to ascertain general principles, and more than Milton's usual disregard of method. A jurist's question is here handled by a rhetorician. He has preached a noble and heart-stirring sermon on his text, but the problem for the legislator remains where it was. The vagueness and confusion of the thoughts finds a vehicle in language which is too often overcrowded and obscure. I think the *Areopagitica* has few or no offences against taste; on the other hand, it has few or none of those grand passages which redeem the scurrility of his political pamphlets. The passage in which Milton's visit to Galileo "grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition," is mentioned, is often quoted for its biographical interest; and the terse dictum, "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book," has passed into a current axiom. A paragraph at the close, where he hints that the time may be come to suppress the suppressors, intimates, but so obscurely as to be likely to escape

notice, that Milton had already made up his mind that a struggle with the Presbyterian party was to be the sequel of the overthrow of the Royalists. He has not yet arrived at the point he will hereafter reach, of rejecting the very idea of a minister of religion, but he is already aggrieved by the implicit faith which the Puritan laity, who had cast out bishops, were beginning to bestow upon their pastor—"a factor to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs." Finally, it must be noted that Milton, though he had come to see round Presbyterianism, had not, in 1644, shaken off all dogmatic profession. His toleration of opinion was far from complete. He would call in the intervention of the executioner in the case of "mischievous and libellous books," and could not bring himself to contemplate the toleration of Popery and open superstition, "which as it extirpates all religious and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate; provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and gain the weak and misled."

The *Areopagitica*, as might be expected, produced no effect upon the legislation of the Long Parliament, of whom (says Hallam) "very few acts of political wisdom or courage are recorded." Individual licensers became more lax in the performance of the duty, but this is reasonably to be ascribed to the growing spirit of independency—a spirit which was incompatible with any embargo on the utterance of private opinion. A curious epilogue to the history of this publication is the fact, first brought to light by Mr. Masson, that the author of the *Areopagitica*, at a later time, acted himself in the capacity of licenser. It was in 1651, under the Commonwealth, Marchmont Needham being editor of the weekly paper called *Mercurius Politicus*, that Milton was associated with him as his censor or supervis-

ing editor. Mr. Masson conjectures, with some probability, that the leading articles of the *Mercurius*, during part of the year 1651, received touches from Milton's hand. But this was, after all, rather in the character of editor, whose business it is to see that nothing improper goes into the paper, than in that of press licenser in the sense in which the *Areopagitica* had denounced it.

CHAPTER VII.

BIOGRAPHICAL. 1640—1649.

In September, 1645, Milton left the garden-house in Aldersgate for a larger house in Barbican, in the same neighbourhood, but a little further from the city gate, i. e. more in the country. The larger house was, perhaps, required for the accommodation of his pupils (see above, p. 41), but it served to shelter his wife's family, when they were thrown upon the world by the surrender of Oxford in June, 1646. In this Barbican house Mr. Powell died at the end of that year. Milton had been promised with his wife a portion of 1000*l.*; but Mr. Powell's affairs had long been in a very embarrassed condition, and now by the consequences of delinquency that condition had become one of absolute ruin. Great pains have been bestowed by Mr. Masson in unravelling the entanglement of the Powell accounts. The data which remain are ample, and we cannot but feel astonished at the accuracy with which our national records, in more important matters so defective, enable us to set out a debtor and creditor balance of the estate of a private citizen who died more than 200 years ago. But the circumstances are peculiarly intricate, and we are still unable to reconcile Mr. Powell's will with the composition records, both of which are extant. As a compounding de-

linquent, his fine, assessed at the customary rate of two years' income, was fixed by the commissioners at 180*l.* The commissioners must have, therefore, been satisfied that his income did not exceed 90*l.* a year. Yet by his will of date December 30, 1646, he leaves his estate of Forest Hill, the annual value of which alone far exceeded 90*l.*, to his eldest son. This property is not mentioned in the inventory of his estate, real and personal, laid before the commissioners, sworn to by the delinquent, and by them accepted. The possible explanation is that the Forest Hill property had really passed into the possession, by foreclosure, of the mortgagee, Sir Robert Pye, who sat for Woodstock in the Long Parliament, but that Mr. Powell, making his will on his deathbed, pleased himself with the fancy of leaving his son and heir an estate which was no longer his to dispose of. Putting Forest Hill out of the account, it would appear that the sequestrators had dealt somewhat harshly with Mr. Powell; for they had included in their estimate one doubtful asset of 500*l.*, and one non-existent of 400*l.* This last item was a stock of timber stated to be at Forest Hill, but which had really been appropriated without payment by the Parliamentarians, and part of it voted by Parliament itself towards repair of the church in the staunch Puritan town of Banbury.

The upshot of the whole transaction is that, in satisfaction of his claim of 1500*l.* (1000*l.* his wife's dower, 500*l.* an old loan of 1627), Milton came into possession of some property at Wheatley. This property, consisting of the tithes of Wheatley, certain cottages, and three and a half yards of land, had in the time of the disturbances produced only 40*l.* a year. But as the value of all property improved when the civil war came to an end, Milton found the whole could now be let for 80*l.* But then out of this

he had to pay Mr. Powell's composition, reduced to 130*l.* on Milton's petition, and the widow's jointure, computed at 26*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* per annum. What of income remained after these disbursements he might apply towards repaying himself the old loan of 1627. This was all Milton ever saw of the 1000*l.* which Mr. Powell, with the high-flying magnificence of a cavalier who knew he was ruined, had promised as his daughter's portion.

Mr. Powell's death was followed in less than three months by that of John Milton, senior. He died in the house in Barbican, and the entry, "John Milton, gentleman, 15 (March)," among the burials in March, 1646, is still to be seen in the register of the parish of St. Giles's, Cripplegate. A host of eminent men have traced the first impulse of their genius to their mother. Milton always acknowledged with just gratitude that it was to his father's discerning taste and fostering care that he owed the encouragement of his studies, and the leisure which rendered them possible. He has registered this gratitude in both prose and verse. The Latin hexameters, "Ad patrem," written at Horton, are inspired by a feeling far beyond commonplace filial piety, and a warmth which is rare indeed in neo-Latin versification. And when, in his prose pamphlets, he has occasion to speak of himself, he does not omit the acknowledgment of "the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, whom God recompense." (*Reason of Church Government.*)

After the death of his father, being now more at ease in his circumstances, he gave up taking pupils, and quitted the large house in Barbican for a smaller in High Holborn, opening backwards into Lincoln's Inn Fields. This removal was about Michaelmas, 1647.

During this period, 1639–1649, while his interests were

engaged by the all-absorbing events of the civil strife, he wrote no poetry, or none deserving the name. All artists have intervals of non-productiveness, usually caused by exhaustion. This was not Milton's case. His genius was not his master, nor could it pass, like that of Leonardo da Vinci, unmoved through the most tragic scenes. He deliberately suspended it at the call of what he believed to be duty to his country. His unrivalled power of expression was placed at the service of a passionate political conviction. This prostitution of faculty avenged itself; for when he did turn to poetry, his strength was gone from him. The period is chiefly marked by sonnets, not many, one in a year, or thereabouts. That *On the religious memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson*, in 1646, is the lowest point touched by Milton in poetry, for his metrical psalms do not deserve the name.

The sonnet, or Elegy on Mrs. Catherine Thomson in the form of a sonnet, though in poetical merit not distinguishable from the average religious verse of the Caroline age, has an interest for the biographer. It breathes a holy calm that is in sharp contrast with the angry virulence of the pamphlets, which were being written at this very time by the same pen. Amid his intemperate denunciations of his political and ecclesiastical foes, it seems that Milton did not inwardly forfeit the peace which passeth all understanding. He had formerly said himself (*Doctrine and Disc.*), "nothing more than disturbance of mind suspends us from approaching to God." Now, out of all the clamour and the bitterness of the battle of the sects, he can retire and be alone with his heavenly aspirations, which have lost none of their ardour by having laid aside all their sectarianism. His genius has forsaken him, but his soul still glows with the fervour of devotion.

The sonnet (xv.) *On the Lord-General Fairfax, at the siege of Colchester*, written in 1648, is again a manifesto of the writer's political feelings, nobly uttered, and investing party with a patriotic dignity not unworthy of the man, Milton. It is a hortatory lyric, a trumpet-call to his party in the moment of victory to remember the duties which that victory imposed upon them. It is not without the splendid resonance of the Italian canzone. But it can scarcely be called poetry, expressing, as it does, facts directly, and not indirectly through their imaginative equivalents. Fairfax was, doubtless, well worthy that Milton should have commemorated him in a higher strain. Of Fairfax's eminent qualities the sonnet only dwells on two, his personal valour, which had been tried in many fights—he had been three times dangerously wounded in the Yorkshire campaign—and his superiority to sordid interests. Of his generalship, in which he was second to Cromwell only, and of his love of arts and learning, nothing is said, though the last was the passion of his life, for which at forty he renounced ambition. Perhaps in 1648 Milton, who lived a very retired life, did not know of these tastes, and had not heard that it was by Fairfax's care that the Bodleian library was saved from wreck on the surrender of Oxford in 1646. And it was not till later, years after the sonnet was written, that the same Fairfax, "whose name in arms through Europe rings," became a competitor of Milton in the attempt to paraphrase the Psalms in metre.

Milton's paraphrase of the Psalms belongs to history, but to the history of psalmody, not that of poetry. At St. Paul's School, at fifteen, the boy had turned two psalms, the 114th and the 136th, by way of exercise. That in his day of plenary inspiration, Milton, who disdained Dryden as "a rhymist but no poet," and has recorded his own impa-

tience with the "drawling versifiers," should have undertaken to grind down the noble antistrophic lyrics of the Hebrew bard into ballad rhymes for the use of Puritan worship, would have been impossible. But the idea of being useful to his country had acquired exclusive possession of his mind. Even his faculty of verse should be employed in the good cause. If Parliament had set him the task, doubtless he would have willingly undertaken it, as Corneille, in the blindness of Catholic obedience, versified the *Imitatio Christi* at the command of the Jesuits. Milton was not officially employed, but voluntarily took up the work. The Puritans were bent upon substituting a new version of the Davidic Psalms for that of Sternhold and Hopkins, for no other reason than that the latter formed part of the hated Book of Common Prayer. The Commons had pronounced in favour of a version by one of their own members, the staunch Puritan M. P. for Truro, Francis Rouse. The Lords favoured a rival book, and numerous other claimants were before the public. Dissatisfied with any of these attempts, Milton would essay himself. In 1648 he turned nine psalms, and recurring to the task in 1653, "did into verse" eight more. He thought these specimens worth preserving, and annexing to the volume of his poems which he published himself in 1673. As this doggerel continues to encumber each succeeding edition of the *Poetical Works*, it is as well that Milton did not persevere with his experiment and produce a complete Psalter. He prudently abandoned a task in which success is impossible. A metrical psalm, being a compromise between the psalm and the hymn, like other compromises, misses, rather than combines, the distinctive excellences of the things united. That Milton should ever have attempted what poetry forbids, is only another proof how entirely at this

period more absorbing motives had possession of his mind and overbore his poetical judgment. It is a coincidence worth remembering that Milton's cotemporary, Lord Clarendon, was at this very time solacing his exile at Madrid by composing, not a version, but a commentary upon the Psalms, "applying those devotions to the troubles of this time."

Yet all the while that he was thus unfaithful in practice to his art, it was poetry that possessed his real affections, and the reputation of a poet which formed his ambition. It was a temporary separation, and not a divorce which he designed. In each successive pamphlet he reiterates his undertaking to redeem his pledge of a great work, as soon as liberty shall be consolidated in the realm. Meanwhile, as an earnest of what should be hereafter, he permitted the publication of a collection of his early poems.

This little volume of some 200 pages, rude in execution as it is, ranks among the highest prizes of the book collector, very few copies being extant, and those mostly in public libraries. It appeared in 1645, and owed its appearance, not to the vanity of the author, but to the zeal of a publisher. Humphrey Moseley, at the sign of the Prince's Arms, in St. Paul's Churchyard, suggested the collection to Milton, and undertook the risk of it, though knowing, as he says in the prefixed address of The Stationer to the Reader, that "the slightest pamphlet is nowadays more vendible than the works of learnedest men." It may create some surprise that, in 1645, there should have been any public in England for a volume of verse. Naseby had been fought in June, Philiphaugh in September, Fairfax and Cromwell were continuing their victorious career in the west, and the King was reduced to the single stronghold of Oxford. It was clear that the conflict was decided in

favour of the Parliament, but men's minds must have been strung to a pitch of intense expectation as to what kind of settlement was to come. Yet, at the very crisis of the civil strife we find a London publisher able to bring out the Poems of Waller (1644), and sufficiently encouraged by their reception to follow them up, in the next year, with the Poems of Mr. John Milton. Are we warranted in inferring that a finer public was beginning to loathe the dreary theological polemic of which it had had a surfeit, and turned to a book of poetry as that which was most unlike the daily garbage, just as a later public absorbed five thousand copies of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* in the year of Austerlitz? One would like to know who were the purchasers of Milton and Waller, when the cavalier families were being ruined by confiscations and compositions, and Puritan families would turn with pious horror from the very name of a Mask.

Milton was himself editor of his own volume, and prefixed to it, again out of Virgil's Eclogues, the characteristic motto, "Baccare frontem Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua *futuro*," indicating that his poetry was all to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LATIN SECRETARYSHIP.

The Crown having fallen on January 30, 1649, and the House of Lords by the vote of February 6 following, the sovereign power in England was for the moment in the hands of that fragment of the Long Parliament which remained after the various purges and expulsions to which it had been subjected. Some of the excluded members were allowed to return, and by occasional new elections in safe boroughs the number of members was raised to one hundred and fifty, securing an average attendance of about seventy. The future government of the nation was declared to be by way of a republic, and the writs ran in the name of the Keepers of the Liberty of England, by authority of Parliament. But the real centre of power was the Council of State, a body of forty-one members, nominated for a period of twelve months, according to a plan of constitution devised by the army leaders. In the hands of this republican Council was concentrated a combination of power such as had never been wielded by any English monarch. But, though its attribution of authority was great, its exercise of the powers lodged with it was hampered by differences among its members, and the disaffection of various interests and parties. The Council of State contained

most of the notable statesmen of the Parliamentary party, and had before it a vast task in reorganizing the administration of England, in the conduct of an actual war in Ireland, a possible war in Scotland, and in the maintenance of the honour of the republic in its relations with foreign princes.

The Council of State prepared the business for its consideration through special committees for special departments of the public service. The Committee for Foreign Affairs consisted of Whitelocke, Vane, Lord Lisle, Lord Denbigh, Mr. Marten, Mr. Lisle. A secretary was required to translate despatches, both those which were sent out and those which were received. Nothing seems more natural than that the author of the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, who was at once a staunch Parliamentarian, an accomplished Latin scholar, and conversant with more than one of the spoken languages of the Continent, should be thought of for the office. Yet so little was Milton personally known, living as he did the life of a retired student, that it was the accident of his having the acquaintance of one of the new Council to which he owed the appointment.

The post was offered him, but would he accept it? He had never ceased to revolve in his mind subjects capable of poetical treatment, and to cherish his own vocation as the classical poet of the English language. Peace had come, and leisure was within his reach. He was poor, but his wants were simple, and he had enough wherewith to meet them. Already in 1649 unmistakable symptoms threatened his sight, and warned him of the necessity of the most rigid economy in the use of his eyes. The duties that he was now asked to undertake were indefinite already in amount, and would doubtless extend themselves if zealously discharged.

But the temptation was strong, and he did not resist it. The increase of income was, doubtless, to Milton the smallest among the inducements now offered him. He had thought it a sufficient and an honourable employment to serve his country with his pen as a volunteer. Here was an offer to become her official, authorised servant, and to bear a part, though a humble part, in the great work of reorganisation which was now to be attempted. Above all other allurements to a retired student, unversed in men, and ready to idealise character, was the opportunity of becoming at once personally acquainted with all the great men of the patriotic party, whom his ardent imagination had invested with heroic qualities. The very names of Fairfax, Vane, and Cromwell, called up in him emotions for which prose was an inadequate vehicle. Nor was it only that in the Council itself he would be in daily intercourse with such men as Henry Marten, Hutchinson, Whitelocke, Harrington, St. John, Ludlow, but his position would introduce him at once to all the members of the House who were worth knowing. It was not merely a new world; it was *the* world which was here opened for the first time to Milton. And we must remember that all scholar as he was, Milton was well convinced of the truth that there are other sources of knowledge besides books. He had himself spent "many studious and contemplative years in the search of religious and civil knowledge," yet he knew that, for a mind large enough to "take in a general survey of humane things," it was necessary to know—

> "The world, ... her glory,
> Empires and monarchs, and their radiant courts,
> Best school of best experience."

He had repeatedly, as if excusing his political interludes,

renewed his pledge to devote all his powers to poetry as soon as they should be fully ripe. To complete his education as a poet, he wanted initiation into affairs. Here was an opening far beyond any he had ever dreamed of. The sacrifice of time and precious eyesight which he was to make was costly, but it was not pure waste; it would be partly returned to him in a ripened experience in this

> "Insight
> In all things that to greatest actions lead."

He accepted the post at once without hesitation. On March 13, 1649, the Committee for Foreign Affairs was directed to make the offer to him; on March 15 he attended at Whitehall to be admitted to office. Well would it have been both for his genius and his fame if he had declined it. His genius might have reverted to its proper course, while he was in the flower of age, with eyesight still available, and a spirit exalted by the triumph of the good cause. His fame would have been saved from the degrading incidents of the contention with Salmasius and Morus, and from being tarnished by the obloquy of the faction which he fought, and which conquered him. No man can with impunity insult and trample upon his fellow-man, even in the best of causes. Especially if he be an artist, he makes it impossible to obtain equitable appreciation of his work.

So far as Milton reckoned upon a gain in experience from his secretaryship, he doubtless reaped it. Such a probation could not be passed without solidifying the judgment, and correcting its tendency to error. And this school of affairs, which is indispensable for the historian, may also be available for the poet. Yet it would be difficult to point in Milton's subsequent poetry to any element which the

poet can be thought to have imbibed from the foreign secretary. Where, in Milton's two epics and *Samson Agonistes*, the personages are all supernatural or heroic, there is no room for the employment of knowledge of the world. Had Milton written comedy, like Molière, he might have said with Molière after he had been introduced at court, "Je n'ai plus que faire d'étudier Plaute et Terence; je n'ai qu'à étudier le monde."

The office into which Milton was now inducted is called in the Council books that of Secretary for foreign tongues. Its duties were chiefly the translation of despatches from and to foreign governments. The degree of estimation in which the Latin secretary was held may be measured by the amount of salary assigned him. For while the English chief Secretary had a salary of 730*l.* (=2200*l.* of our day), the Latin Secretary was paid only 288*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* (=900*l.*). For this, not very liberal pay, he was told that all his time was to be at the disposal of the government. Lincoln's Inn Fields was too far off for a servant of the Council who might have to attend meetings at seven in the morning. He accordingly migrated to Charing Cross, now become again Charing without the cross, this work of art having been an early (1647) victim of religious barbarism. In November he was accommodated with chambers in Whitehall. But from these he was soon ousted by claimants more considerable or more importunate, and in 1651 he removed to "a pretty garden-house" in Petty France, in Westminster, next door to the Lord Scudamore's, and opening into St. James's Park. The house was extant till 1877, when it disappeared, the last of Milton's many London residences. It had long ceased to look into St. James's Park, more than one row of houses, encroachments upon the public park, having grown up between. The garden-house

had become a mere ordinary street house in York Street, only distinguished from the squalid houses on either side of it by a tablet affixed by Bentham, inscribed "sacred to Milton, prince of poets." Petty France lost its designation in the French Revolution, in obedience to the childish petulance which obliterates the name of any one who may displease you at the moment, and become one of the seventeen York Streets of the metropolis. Soon after the rebaptism of the street, Milton's house was occupied by William Hazlitt, who rented it of Bentham. Milton had lived in it for nine years, from 1651 till a few weeks before the Restoration. Its nearness to Whitehall where the Council sat was less a convenience than a necessity.

For Milton's life now became one of close attention and busy service. As Latin secretary and Weckherlin's successor, indeed, his proper duties were only those of a clerk or translator. But his aptitude for business of a literary kind soon drew on him a great variety of employment. The demand for a Latin translation of a despatch was not one of frequent occurrence. The Letters of the Parliament, and of Oliver and Richard, Protectors, which are, intrusively, printed among Milton's works, are but one hundred and thirty-seven in all. This number is spread over ten years, being at the rate of about fourteen per year; most of them are very short. For the purposes of a biography of Milton, it is sufficient to observe that the dignified attitude which the Commonwealth took up towards foreign powers lost none of its elevation in being conveyed in Miltonic Latin. Whether satisfaction for the murder of an envoy is to be extorted from the arrogant court of Madrid, or an apology is to be offered to a humble count of Oldenburg for delay in issuing a salvaguardia which had been promised, the same equable dignity of expression is maintained,

equally remote from crouching before the strong and hectoring the weak.

His translations were not all the duties of the new secretary. He must often serve as interpreter at audiences of foreign envoys. He must superintend the semi-official organ, the *Mercurius Politicus*. He must answer the manifesto of the Presbyterians of Ireland. The *Observations* on the peace of Kilkenny are Milton's composition, but from instructions. By the peace the Irish had obtained home rule in its widest extent, release from the oath of supremacy, and the right to tie their ploughs to the tail of the horse. The same peace also conceded to them the militia, a trust which Charles I. had said he would not devolve on the Parliament of England, "not for an hour!" Milton is indignant that these indulgences, which had been refused to their obedience, should have been extorted by their rebellion and the massacre of "200,000 Protestants." This is an exaggeration of a butchery sufficiently tragic in its real proportions, and in a later tract (*Eikonoklastes*) he reduces it to 154,000. Though the savage Irish are barbarians, uncivilised and uncivilisable, the *Observations* distinctly affirm the new principle of toleration. Though popery be a superstition, the death of all true religion, still conscience is not within the cognisance of the magistrate. The civil sword is to be employed against civil offences only. In adding that the one exception to this toleration is atheism, Milton is careful to state this limitation as the toleration professed by Parliament, and not as his private opinion.

So well satisfied were the Council with their secretary's *Observations* on the peace of Kilkenny, that they next imposed upon him a far more important labour, a reply to the *Eikon Basiliké*. The execution of Charles I. was not

an act of vengeance, but a measure of public safety. If, as Hallam affirms, there mingled in the motives of the managers any strain of personal ill-will, this was merged in the imperious necessity of securing themselves from this vengeance, and what they had gained from being taken back. They were alarmed by the reaction which had set in, and had no choice but to strengthen themselves by a daring policy. But the first effect of the removal of the King by violence was to give a powerful stimulus to the reaction already in progress. The groan which burst from the spectators before Whitehall on January 29, 1649, was only representative of the thrill of horror which ran through England and Scotland in the next ten days. This reactionary feeling found expression in a book entitled "*Eikon Basiliké*, the portraiture of his sacred majesty in his solitude and sufferings." The book was composed by Dr. Gauden, but professed to be an authentic copy of papers written by the King. It is possible that Gauden may have had in his hands some written scraps of the King's meditations. If he had such, he only used them as hints to work upon. Gauden was a churchman whom his friends might call liberal and his enemies time-serving. He was a churchman of the stamp of Archbishop Williams, and preferred bishops and the Common-prayer to presbyters and extempore sermons, but did not think the difference between the two of the essence of religion. In better times Gauden would have passed for broad, though his latitudinarianism was more the result of love of ease than of philosophy. Though a royalist, he sat in the Westminster Assembly, and took the covenant, for which compliance he nearly lost the reward which, after the Restoration, became his due. Like the university-bred men of his day, Gauden was not a man of ideas, but of style. In the present instance the idea was

supplied by events. The saint and martyr, the man of sorrows, praying for his murderers, the King, who renounced an earthly kingdom to gain a heavenly, and who in return for his benefits received from an unthankful people a crown of thorns—this was the theme supplied to the royalist advocate. Poet's imagination had never invented one more calculated to touch the popular heart. This *imitatio Christi*, to which every private Christian theoretically aspires, had been realised by a true prince upon an actual scaffold with a graceful dignity of demeanor of which it may be said that nothing in life became him like the leaving it.

This moving situation Gauden, no mean stylist, set out in the best academical language of the period. Frigid and artificial it may read now, but the passion and pity, which is not in the book, was supplied by the readers of the time. And men are now dainty as to phrase when they meet with an expression of their own sentiments. The readers of *Eikon Basiliké*—and forty-seven editions were necessary to supply the demand of a population of eight millions—attributed to the pages of the book emotions raised in themselves by the tragic catastrophe. They never doubted that the meditations were those of the royal martyr, and held the book, in the words of Sir Edward Nicholas, for "the most exquisite, pious, and princely piece ever written." The Parliament thought themselves called upon to put forth a reply. If one book could cause such a commotion of spirits, another book could allay it—the ordinary illusion of those who do not consider that the vogue of a printed appeal depends, not on the contents of the appeal, but on a predisposition of the public temper.

Selden, the most learned man, not only of his party, but of Englishmen, was first thought of, but the task was finally assigned to the Latin Secretary. Milton's ready pen

completed the answer, *Eikonoklastes*, a quarto of 242 pages, before October, 1649. It is, like all answers, worthless as a book. Eikonoklastes, the Image-breaker, takes the Image, Eikon, paragraph by paragraph, turning it round, and asserting the negative. To the Royalist view of the points in dispute Milton opposes the Independent view. A refutation, which follows each step of an adverse book, is necessarily devoid of originality. But Milton is worse than tedious; his reply is in a tone of rude railing and insolent swagger, which would have been always unbecoming, but which at this moment was grossly indecent.

Milton must, however, be acquitted of one charge which has been made against him, viz., that he taunts the King with his familiarity with Shakspeare. The charge rests on a misunderstanding. In quoting *Richard III.* in illustration of his own meaning, Milton says, "I shall not instance an abstruse author, wherein the King might be less conversant; but one whom we well know was the closet companion of these his solitudes, William Shakspeare." Though not an overt gibe, there certainly lurks an insinuation to Milton's Puritan readers, to whom stage plays were an abomination—an unworthy device of rhetoric, as appealing to a superstition in others which the writer himself does not share. In Milton's contemptuous reference to Sidney's *Arcadia* as a vain amatorious poem, we feel that the finer sense of the author of *L'Allegro* has suffered from immersion in the slough of religious and political faction.

Gauden, raking up material from all quarters, had inserted in his compilation a prayer taken from the *Arcadia*. Milton mercilessly works this topic against his adversary. It is surprising that this plagiarism from so well-known a book as the *Arcadia* should not have opened Milton's eyes to the unauthentic character of the *Eikon*. He alludes, in-

deed, to a suspicion which was abroad that one of the royal chaplains was a secret coadjutor. But he knew nothing of Gauden at the time of writing the *Eikonoklastes*, and it is probable he never came to know. The secret of the authorship of the *Eikon* was well kept, being known only to a very few persons—the two royal brothers, Bishop Morley, the Earl of Bristol, and Clarendon. These were all safe men, and Gauden was not likely to proclaim himself an impostor. He pleaded it, however, successfully as a claim to preferment at the Restoration, when the Church spoils came to be partitioned among the conquerors, and he received the bishopric of Exeter. A bishopric—because less than the highest preferment could not be offered to one whose pen had done such signal service; and Exeter—because the poorest see (then valued at 500*l.* a year) was good enough for a man who had taken the covenant and complied with the usurping government. By ceaseless importunity the author of the *Eikon Basiliké* obtained afterwards the see of Worcester, while the portion of the author of *Eikonoklastes* was poverty, infamy, and calumny. A century after Milton's death it was safe for the most popular writer of the day to say that the prayer from the *Arcadia* had been interpolated in the *Eikon* by Milton himself, and then by him charged upon the King as a plagiarism. (Johnson, *Lives of the Poets.*)

CHAPTER IX.

MILTON AND SALMASIUS—BLINDNESS.

THE mystery which long surrounded the authorship of *Eikon Basiliké* lends a literary interest to Milton's share in that controversy which does not belong to his next appearance in print. Besides, his pamphlets against Salmasius and Morus are written in Latin, and to the general reader in England and America inaccessible in consequence. In Milton's day it was otherwise; the widest circle of readers could only be reached through Latin. For this reason, when Charles II. wanted a public vindication of his father's memory, it was indispensable that it should be composed in that language. The *Eikon* was accordingly turned into Latin, by one of the royal chaplains, Earle, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury. But this was not enough; a defence in form was necessary, an *Apologia Socratis*, such as Plato composed for his master after his death. It must not only be written in Latin, but in such Latin as to ensure its being read.

In 1647 Charles II. was living at the Hague, and it so happened that the man who was in the highest repute in all Europe as a Latinist was professor at the neighboring university of Leyden. Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise) was commissioned to prepare a manifesto, which should be

at once a vindication of Charles's memory, and an indictment against the regicide government. Salmasius was a man of enormous reading and no judgment. He says of himself that he wrote Latin more easily than his mother-tongue (French). And his Latin was all the more readable because it was not classical or idiomatic. With all his reading—and Isaac Casaubon had said of him when in his teens that he had incredible erudition—he was still, at sixty, quite unacquainted with public affairs, and had neither the politician's tact necessary to draw a state paper as Clarendon would have drawn it, nor the literary tact which had enabled Erasmus to command the ear of the public. Salmasius undertook his task as a professional advocate, though without pay, and Milton accepted the duty of replying as advocate for the Parliament, also without reward; he was fighting for a cause which was not another's, but his own.

Salmasius's *Defensio regia* — that was the title of his book — reached England before the end of 1649. The Council of State, in very unnecessary alarm, issued a prohibition. On 8th January, 1650, the Council ordered "that Mr. Milton do prepare something in answer to the book of Salmasius." Early in March, 1651, Milton's answer, entitled *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, was out.

Milton was as much above Salmasius in mental power as he was inferior to him in extent of book knowledge. But the conditions of retort which he had chosen to accept neutralised this superiority. His greater power was spent in a greater force of invective. Instead of setting out the case of the Parliament in all the strength of which it was capable, Milton is intent upon tripping up Salmasius, contradicting him, and making him odious or ridiculous. He called his book a *Defence of the People of England;* but when he should have been justifying his clients

from the charges of rebellion and regicide before the bar of Europe, Milton is bending all his invention upon personalities. He exaggerates the foibles of Salmasius, his vanity, and the vanity of Madame Salmasius, her ascendancy over her husband, his narrow pedantry, his ignorance of everything but grammar and words. He exhausts the Latin vocabulary of abuse to pile up every epithet of contumely and execration on the head of his adversary. It but amounts to calling Salmasius fool and knave through a couple of hundred pages, till the exaggeration of the style defeats the orator's purpose, and we end by regarding the whole, not as a serious pleading, but as an epideictic display. Hobbes said truly that the two books were "like two declamations, for and against, made by one and the same man as a rhetorical exercise" (*Behemoth*).

Milton's *Defensio* was not calculated to advance the cause of the Parliament, and there is no evidence that it produced any effect upon the public beyond that of raising Milton's personal credit. That England, and Puritan England, where humane studies were swamped in a biblical brawl, should produce a man who could write Latin as well as Salmasius, was a great surprise to the learned world in Holland. Salmasius was unpopular at Leyden, and there was therefore a predisposition to regard Milton's book with favour. Salmasius was twenty years older than Milton, and in these literary digladiations readers are always ready to side with a new writer. The contending interests of the two great English parties, the wider issue between republic and absolutism, the speculative inquiry into the right of resistance, were lost sight of by the spectators of this literary duel. The only question was whether Salmasius could beat the new champion, or the new man beat Salmasius, at a match of vituperation.

Salmasius of course put in a rejoinder. His rapid pen found no difficulty in turning off 300 pages of fluent Latin. It was his last occupation. He died at Spa, where he was taking the waters, in September, 1653, and his reply was not published till 1660, after the Restoration, when all interest had died out of the controversy. If it be true that the work was written at Spa, without books at hand, it is certainly a miraculous effort of memory. It does no credit to Salmasius. He had raked together, after the example of Scioppius against Scaliger, all the tittle-tattle which the English exiles had to retail about Milton and his antecedents. Bramhall, who bore Milton a special grudge, was the channel of some of this scandal, and Bramhall's source was possibly Chappell, the tutor with whom Milton had had the early misunderstanding. (See above p. 6.) If any one thinks that classical studies of themselves cultivate the taste and the sentiments, let him look into Salmasius's *Responsio*. There he will see the first scholar of his age not thinking it unbecoming to taunt Milton with his blindness, in such language as this: "A puppy, once my pretty little man, now blear-eyed, or rather a blindling; having never had any mental vision, he has now lost his bodily sight; a silly coxcomb, fancying himself a beauty; an unclean beast, with nothing more human about him than his guttering eyelids: the fittest doom for him would be to hang him on the highest gallows, and set his head on the Tower of London." These are some of the incivilities, not by any means the most revolting, but such as I dare reproduce, of this literary warfare.

Salmasius's taunt about Milton's venal pen is no less false than his other gibes. The places of those who served the Commonwealth were places of "hard work and

short rations." Milton never received for his *Defensio* a sixpence beyond his official salary. It has indeed been asserted that he was paid 1000*l.* for it by order of Parliament, and this falsehood having been adopted by Johnson —himself a pensioner—has passed into all the biographies, and will no doubt continue to be repeated to the end of time. This is a just nemesis upon Milton, who on his part had twitted Salmasius with having been complimented by the exiled King with a purse of 100 Jacobuses for his performance. The one insinuation was as false as the other. Charles II. was too poor to offer more than thanks. Milton was too proud to receive for defending his country what the Parliament was willing to pay. Sir Peter Wentworth, of Lillingston Lovell, in Oxfordshire, left in his will 100*l.* to Milton for his book against Salmasius. But this was long after the Restoration, and Milton did not live to receive the legacy.

Instead of receiving an honorarium for his *Defence of the English People*, Milton had paid for it a sacrifice for which money could not compensate him. His eyesight, though quick, as he was a proficient with the rapier, had never been strong. His constant headaches, his late study, and (thinks Phillips) his perpetual tampering with physic to preserve his sight, concurred to bring the calamity upon him. It had been steadily coming on for a dozen years before, and about 1650 the sight of the left eye was gone. He was warned by his doctor that if he persisted in using the remaining eye for book-work, he would lose that too. "The choice lay before me," Milton writes in the *Second Defence*, "between dereliction of a supreme duty and loss of eyesight; in such a case I could not listen to the physician, not if Æsculapius himself had spoken from his sanctuary; I could not but obey that inward monitor, I know

not what, that spake to me from heaven. I considered with myself that many had purchased less good with worse ill, as they who give their lives to reap only glory, and I thereupon concluded to employ the little remaining eyesight I was to enjoy in doing this, the greatest service to the common weal it was in my power to render."

It was about the early part of the year 1652 that the calamity was consummated. At the age of forty-three he was in total darkness. The deprivation of sight, one of the severest afflictions of which humanity is capable, falls more heavily on the man whose occupation lies among books than upon others. He who has most to lose, loses most. To most persons books are but an amusement, an interlude between the hours of serious occupation. The scholar is he who has found the key to knowledge, and knows his way about in the world of printed books. To find this key, to learn the map of this country, requires a long apprenticeship. This is a point few men can hope to reach much before the age of forty. Milton had attained it only to find fruition snatched from him. He had barely time to spell one line in the book of wisdom, before, like the wizard's volume in romance, it was hopelessly closed against him for ever. Any human being is shut out by loss of sight from accustomed pleasures, the scholar is shut out from knowledge. Shut out at forty-three, when his great work was not even begun! He consoles himself with the fancy that in his pamphlet, the *Defensio*, he had done a great work (*quanta maxima quivi*) for his country. This poor delusion helped him doubtless to support his calamity. He could not foresee that, in less than ten years, the great work would be totally annihilated, his pamphlet would be merged in the obsolete mass of civil war tracts, and the *Defensio*, on which he had expended

his last year of eyesight, only mentioned because it had been written by the author of *Paradise Lost.*

The nature of Milton's disease is not ascertainable from the account he has given of it. In the well-known passage of *Paradise Lost*, iii. 25, he hesitates between amaurosis (drop serene) and cataract (suffusion)—

> "So thick a drop serene hath quench'd their orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veil'd."

A medical friend, referred to by Professor Alfred Stern, tells him that some of the symptoms are more like glaucoma. Milton himself has left such an account as a patient ignorant of the anatomy of the organ could give. It throws no light on the nature of the malady. But it is characteristic of Milton that even his affliction does not destroy his solicitude about his personal appearance. The taunts of his enemies about "the lack-lustre eye, guttering with prevalent rheum," did not pass unfelt. In his *Second Defence* Milton informs the world that his eyes "are externally uninjured. They shine with an unclouded light, just like the eyes of one whose vision is perfect. This is the only point in which I am, against my will, a hypocrite." The vindication appears again in Sonnet XIX. "These eyes, though clear To outward view of blemish or of spot." In later years, when the exordium of Book iii. of *Paradise Lost* was composed, in the pathetic story of his blindness this little touch of vanity fades away as incompatible with the solemn dignity of the occasion.

CHAPTER X.

MILTON AND MORUS—THE SECOND DEFENCE—THE DEFENCE FOR HIMSELF.

Civil history is largely a history of wars between states, and literary history is no less the record of quarrels in print between jealous authors. Poets and artists, more susceptible than practical men, seem to live a life of perpetual wrangle. The history of these petty feuds is not healthy intellectual food, it is at best amusing scandal. But these quarrels of authors do not degrade the authors in our eyes, they only show them to be, what we knew, as vain, irritable, and opinionative as other men. Ben Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Voltaire, Rousseau, belabour their enemies, and we see nothing incongruous in their doing so. It is not so when the awful majesty of Milton descends from the empyrean throne of contemplation to use the language of the gutter or the fish-market. The bathos is unthinkable. The universal intellect of Bacon shrank to the paltry pursuit of place. The disproportion between the intellectual capaciousness and the moral aim jars upon the sense of fitness, and the name of Bacon, wisest, meanest, has passed into a proverb. Milton's fall is far worse. It is not here a union of grasp of mind with an ignoble ambition, but the plunge of the moral nature itself from

the highest heights to that despicable region of vulgar scurrility and libel which is below the level of average gentility and education. The name of Milton is a synonym for sublimity. He has endowed our language with the loftiest and noblest poetry it possesses, and the same man is found employing speech for the most unworthy purpose to which it can be put, that of defaming and vilifying a personal enemy, and an enemy so mean that barely to have been mentioned by Milton had been an honour to him. In Salmasius, Milton had at least been measuring his Latin against the Latin of the first classicist of the age. In Alexander Morus he wreaked august periods of Roman eloquence upon a vagabond preacher, of chance fortunes and tarnished reputation, a *græculus esuriens*, who appeared against Milton by the turn of accidents, and not as the representative of the opposite principle. In crushing Morus, Milton could not beguile himself with the idea that he was serving a cause.

In 1652 our country began to reap the fruits of the costly efforts it had made to obtain good government. A central authority was at last established, stronger than any which had existed since Elizabeth, and one which extended over Scotland and Ireland, no less than over England. The ecclesiastical and dynastic aims of the Stuart monarchy had been replaced by a national policy, in which the interests of the people of Great Britain sprang to the first place. The immediate consequence of this union of vigour and patriotism, in the government, was the self-assertion of England as a commercial, and therefore as a naval power. This awakened spirit of conscious strength meant war with the Dutch, who, while England was pursuing ecclesiastical ends, had possessed themselves of the trade of the world. War accordingly broke out early in 1652. Even before it

came to real fighting, the war of pamphlets had recommenced. The prohibition of Salmasius's *Defensio regia* annulled itself as a matter of course, and Salmasius was free to prepare a second *Defensio* in answer to Milton; for the most vulnerable point of the new English Commonwealth was through the odium excited on the Continent against regicide. And the quarter from which the monarchical pamphlets were hurled against the English republic was the press of the republic of the United Provinces, the country which had set the first example of successful rebellion against its lawful prince.

Before Salmasius's reply was ready, there was launched from the Hague, in March, 1652, a virulent royalist piece in Latin, under the title of *Regii sanguinis clamor ad cœlum* (Cry of the King's blood to Heaven against the English parricides). Its 160 pages contained the usual royalist invective in a rather common style of hyperbolical declamation, such as that "in comparison of the execution of Charles I., the guilt of the Jews in crucifying Christ was as nothing." Exaggerated praises of Salmasius were followed by scurrilous and rabid abuse of Milton. In the style of the most shameless Jesuit lampoon, the *Amphitheatrum* or the *Scaliger hypobolimæus*, and with Jesuit tactics, every odious crime is imputed to the object of the satire, without regard to truth or probability. Exiles are proverbially credulous, and it is likely enough that the gossip of the English refugees at the Hague was much employed in improving or inventing stories about the man who had dared to answer the royalist champion in Latin as good as his own. Salmasius in his *Defensio* had employed these stories, distorting the events of Milton's life to discredit him. But for the author of the *Clamor* there was no such excuse, for the book was composed in England,

by an author living in Oxford and London, who had every opportunity for informing himself accurately of the facts about Milton's life and conversation. He chose rather to heap up at random the traditional vocabulary of defamation which the Catholic theologians had employed for some generations past as their best weapon against their adversaries. In these infamous productions, hatched by celibate pedants in the foul atmosphere of the Jesuit colleges, the gamut of charges always ranges from bad grammar to unnatural crime. The only circumstance which can be alleged in mitigation of the excesses of the *Regii sanguinis clamor* is that Milton had provoked the onfall by his own violence. He who throws dirt must expect that dirt will be thrown back at him; and when it comes to mud-throwing, the blackguard has, as it is right that he should have, the best of it.

The author of the *Clamor* was Peter Du Moulin, a son of the celebrated French Calvinist preacher of the same name. The author, not daring to intrust his pamphlet to an English press, had sent it over to Holland, where it was printed under the supervision of Alexander Morus. This Morus (More or Moir) was of Scottish parentage, but born (1616) at Castres, where his father was principal of the Protestant college. Morus fitted the *Clamor* with a preface, in which Milton was further reviled, and styled a "monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademtum." The secret of the authorship was strictly kept, and Morus, having been known to be concerned in the publication, was soon transformed in public belief into the author. So it was reported to Milton, and so Milton believed. He nursed his wrath, and took two years to meditate his blow. He caused inquiries to be made into Morus's antecedents. It happened that Morus's conduct had been wanting in

discretion, especially in his relations with women. He had been equally imprudent in his utterances on some of the certainties of Calvinistic divinity. It was easy to collect any amount of evidence under both these heads. The system of kirk discipline offered a ready-made machinery of espionage and delation. The standing jest of the fifteenth century on the "governante" of the curé was replaced, in Calvinistic countries, by the anxiety of every minister to detect his brother minister in any intimacy upon which a scandalous construction could be put.

Morus endeavoured, through every channel at his command, to convince Milton that he was not the author of the *Clamor*. He could have saved himself by revealing the real author, who was lurking all the while close to Milton's elbow, and whose safety depended on Morus's silence. This high-minded respect for another's secret is more to Morus's honour than any of the petty gossip about him is to his discredit. He had nothing to offer, therefore, but negative assurances, and mere denial weighed nothing with Milton, who was fully convinced that Morus lied from terror. Milton's *Defensio Secunda* came out in May, 1654. In this piece (written in Latin) Morus is throughout assumed to be the author of the *Clamor*, and as such is pursued through many pages in a strain of invective, in which banter is mingled with ferocity. The Hague tittle-tattle about Morus's love-affairs is set forth in the pomp of Milton's loftiest Latin. Sonorous periods could hardly be more disproportioned to their material content. To have kissed a girl is painted as the blackest of crimes. The sublime and the ridiculous are here blended without the step between. Milton descends even to abuse the publisher, Vlac, who had officially signed his name to Morus's preface. The mixture of fanatical choler and grotesque

jocularity, in which he rolls forth his charges of incontinence against Morus, and of petty knavery against Vlac, are only saved from being unseemly by being ridiculous. The comedy is complete when we remember that Morus had not written the *Clamor*, nor Vlac the preface. Milton's rage blinded him; he is mad Ajax castigating innocent sheep instead of Achæans.

The Latin pamphlets are indispensable to a knowledge of Milton's disposition. We see in them his grand disdain of his opponents, reproducing the concentrated intellectual scorn of the Latin Persius; his certainty of the absolute justice of his own cause, and the purity of his own motives. This lofty cast of thought is combined with an eagerness to answer the meanest taunts. The intense subjectivity of the poet breaks out in these paragraphs, and while he should be stating the case of the republic, he holds Europe listening to an account of himself, his accomplishments, his studies and travels, his stature, the colour of his eyes, his skill in fencing, etc. These egoistic utterances must have seemed to Milton's cotemporaries to be intrusive and irrelevant vanity. *Paradise Lost* was not as yet, and to the Council of State Milton was, what he was to Whitelocke, "a blind man who wrote Latin." But these paragraphs, in which he talks of himself, are to us the only living fragments out of many hundred worthless pages.

To the *Defensio Secunda* there was of course a reply by Morus. It was entitled *Fides Publica*, because it was largely composed of testimonials to character. When one priest charges another with unchastity, the world looks on and laughs. But it is no laughing matter to the defendant in such an action. He can always bring exculpatory evidence, and in spite of any evidence he is always believed to be guilty. The effect of Milton's furious denunciation

of Morus had been to damage his credit in religious circles, and to make mothers of families shy of allowing him to visit at their houses.

Milton might have been content with a victory which, as Gibbon said of his own, "over such an antagonist was a sufficient humiliation." Milton's magnanimity was no match for his irritation. He published a rejoinder to Morus's *Fides Publica*, reiterating his belief that Morus was author of the *Clamor*, but that it was no matter whether he was or not, since by publishing the book, and furnishing it with a recommendatory preface, he had made it his own. The charges against Morus's character he reiterated, and strengthened by new "facts," which Morus's enemies had hastened to contribute to the budget of calumny. These imputations on character, mixed with insinuations of unorthodoxy such as are ever rife in clerical controversy, Milton invests with the moral indignation of a prophet denouncing the enemies of Jehovah. He expends a wealth of vituperative Latin which makes us tremble, till we remember that it is put in motion to crush an insect.

This *Pro se defensio* (Defence for himself) appeared in August, 1655. Morus met it by a supplementary *Fides Publica*, and Milton, resolved to have the last word, met him by a *Supplement to the Defence*. The reader will be glad to hear that this is the end of the Morus controversy. We leave Milton's victim buried under the mountains of opprobrious Latin here heaped upon him — this "circumforaneus pharmacopola, vanissimus circulator, propudium hominis et prostibulum."

CHAPTER XI.

LATIN SECRETARYSHIP COMES TO AN END—MILTON'S FRIENDS.

It is no part of Milton's biography to relate the course of public events in these momentous years, merely because, as Latin Secretary, he formulated the despatches of the Protector or of his Council, and because these Latin letters are incorporated in Milton's works. On the course of affairs Milton's voice had no influence, as he had no part in their transaction. Milton was the last man of whom a practical politician would have sought advice. He knew nothing of the temper of the nation, and treated all that opposed his own view with supreme disdain.* On the other hand, idealist though he was, he does not move in the sphere of speculative politics, or count among those philosophic names, a few in each century, who have influenced not action, but thought. Accordingly his opinions have for us a purely personal interest. They are part of the character of the poet Milton, and do not belong to either world, of action or of thought.

The course of his political convictions up to 1654 has been traced in our narrative thus far. His breeding at home, at school, at college, was that of a member of the Established Church, but of the Puritan and Calvinistic, not

of the Laudian and Arminian, party within its pale. By 1641 we find that his Puritanism has developed into Presbyterianism; he desires, not to destroy the Church, but to reform it by abolishing government by bishops, and substituting the Scotch or Genevan discipline. When he wrote his *Reason of Church Government* (1642), he is still a royalist; not in the cavalier sense of a person attached to the reigning sovereign, or the Stuart family, but still retaining the belief of his age that monarchy in the abstract had somewhat of divine sanction. Before 1649 the divine right of monarchy, and the claim of Presbytery to be scriptural, have yielded in his mind to a wider conception of the rights of the man and the Christian. To use the party names of the time, Milton the Presbyterian has expanded into Milton the Independent. There is to be no State Church, and instead of a monarchy there is to be a commonwealth. Very soon the situation develops the important question how this commonwealth shall be administered—whether by a representative assembly, or by a picked council, or a single governor. This question was put to a practical test in the Parliament of 1654. The experiment, begun in September, 1654, broke down, as we know, in January, 1655. Before it was tried we find Milton in his *Second Defence*, in May, 1654, recommending Cromwell to govern not by a Parliament, but by a council of officers; i. e., he is a commonwealth's man. Arrived at this point, would Milton take his stand upon doctrinaire republicanism, and lose sight of liberty in the attempt to secure equality, as his friends Vane, Overton, Bradshaw would have done? Or would his idealist exaltation sweep him on into some one of the current fanaticisms, Leveller, Fifth Monarchy, or Muggletonian? Unpractical as he was, he was close enough to state affairs as Latin Secretary to

see that personal government by the Protector was, at the moment, the only solution. If the liberties that had been conquered by the sword were to be maintained, between levelling chaos on the one hand, and royalist reaction on the other, it was the Protector alone to whom those who prized liberty above party names could look. Accordingly Milton may be regarded from the year 1654 onwards as an Oliverian, though with particular reservations. He saw —it was impossible for a man in his situation not to see— the unavoidable necessity which forced Cromwell, at this moment, to undertake to govern without a representative assembly. The political necessity of the situation was absolute, and all reasonable men who were embarked in the cause felt it to be so.

Through all these stages Milton passed in the space of twenty years—Church-Puritan, Presbyterian, Royalist, Independent, Commonwealth's man, Oliverian. These political phases were not the acquiescence of a placeman, or indifferentist, in mutations for which he does not care; still less were they changes either of party or of opinion. Whatever he thought, Milton thought and felt intensely, and expressed emphatically; and even his enemies could not accuse him of a shadow of inconsistency or wavering in his principles. On the contrary, tenacity, or persistence of idea, amounted in him to a serious defect of character. A conviction once formed dominated him, so that, as in the controversy with Morus, he could not be persuaded that he had made a mistake. No mind, the history of which we have an opportunity of intimately studying, could be more of one piece and texture than was that of Milton from youth to age. The names which we are obliged to give to his successive political stages do not indicate shades of colour adopted from the prevailing po-

litical ground, but the genuine development of the public consciousness of Puritan England repeated in an individual. Milton moved forward, not because Cromwell and the rest advanced, but with Cromwell and the rest. We may perhaps describe the motive force as a passionate attachment to personal liberty, liberty of thought and action. This ideal force working in the minds of a few, "those worthies which are the soul of that enterprise" (*Tenure of Kings*), had been the mainspring of the whole revolution. The Levellers, Quakers, Fifth Monarchy men, and the wilder Anabaptist sects, only showed the workings of the same idea in men whose intellects had not been disciplined by education or experience. The idea of liberty, formulated into a doctrine, and bowed down to as a holy creed, made some of its best disciples, such as Harrison and Overton, useless at the most critical juncture. The party of anti-Oliverian republicans, the intransigentes, became one of the greatest difficulties of the Government. Milton, with his idealism, his thoroughness, and obstinate persistence, was not unlikely to have shipwrecked upon the same rock. He was saved by his constancy to the principle of religious liberty, which was found with the party that had destroyed the King because he would not be ruled by a Parliament, while in 1655 it supported the Protector in governing without a Parliament. Supreme authority in itself was not Cromwell's aim; he used it only to secure the fulfilment of those ideas of religious liberty, civil order, and Protestant ascendancy in Europe which filled his whole soul. To Milton, as to Cromwell, forms, whether of worship or government, were but means to an end, and were to be changed whenever expediency might require.

In 1655, then, Milton was an Oliverian, but with res-

ervations. The most important of these reservations regarded the relation of the state to the church. Cromwell never wholly dropped the scheme of a national church. It was, indeed, to be as comprehensive as possible; Episcopacy was pulled down, Presbytery was not set up, but individual ministers might be Episcopalian or Presbyterian in sentiment, provided they satisfied a certain standard, intelligible enough to that generation, of "godliness." Here Milton seems to have remained throughout upon the old Independent platform; he will not have the civil power step over its limits into the province of religion at all. Many matters, in which the old prelatic church had usurped upon the domain of the state, should be replaced under the secular authority. But the spiritual region was matter of conscience, and not of external regulation.

A further reservation which Milton would make related to endowments, or the maintenance of ministers. The Protectorate, and the constitution of 1657, maintained an established clergy in the enjoyment of tithes or other settled stipends. Nothing was more abhorrent to Milton's sentiment than state payment in religious things. The minister who receives such pay becomes a state pensioner, a hireling. The law of tithes is a Jewish law, repealed by the Gospel, under which the minister is only maintained by the freewill offerings of the congregation to which he ministers. This antipathy to hired preachers was one of Milton's earliest convictions. It thrusts itself, rather importunately, into *Lycidas* (1636), and reappears in the Sonnet to Cromwell (*Sonnet* XVII., 1652), before it is dogmatically expounded in the pamphlet *Considerations touching means to remove Hirelings out of the Church* (1659). Of the two corruptions of the church by the secular power, one by force, the other by pay, Milton re-

gards the last as the most dangerous. "Under force, though no thank to the forcers, true religion ofttimes best thrives and flourishes; but the corruption of teachers, most commonly the effect of hire, is the very bane of truth in them who are so corrupted." Nor can we tax this aversion to a salaried ministry, with being a monomania of sect. It is essentially involved in the conception of religion as a spiritual state, a state of grace. A soul in this state can only be ministered to by a brother in a like frame of mind. To assign a place with a salary, is to offer a pecuniary inducement to simulate this qualification. This principle may be wrong, but it is not unreasonable. It is the very principle on which the England of our day has decided against the endowment of science. The endowment of the church was to Milton the poison of religion, and in so thinking he was but true to his conception of religion. Cromwell, whatever may have been his speculative opinions, decided in favour of a state endowment, upon the reasons, or some of them, which have moved modern statesmen to maintain church establishments.

With whatever reservations, Milton was an Oliverian. Supporting the Protector's policy, he admired his conduct, and has recorded his admiration in the memorable sonnet XII. How the Protector thought of Milton, or even that he knew him at all, there remains no evidence. Napoleon said of Corneille that, if he had lived in his day, he would have made him his first minister. Milton's ideas were not such as could have value in the eyes of a practical statesman. Yet Cromwell was not always taking advice, or discussing business. He who could take a liking for the genuine inwardness of the enthusiast George Fox might have been expected to appreciate equal unworldliness joined

with culture and reading in Milton. "If," says Neal, "there was a man in England who excelled in any faculty or science, the Protector would find him out and reward him." But the excellence which the Protector prized was aptness for public employment, and this was the very quality in which Milton was deficient.

The poverty of Milton's state letters has been often remarked. Whenever weighty negotiations are going on, other pens than his are employed. We may ascribe this to his blindness. Milton could only dictate, and therefore everything intrusted to him must pass through an amanuensis, who might blab. One exception to the commonplace character of the state papers there is. The massacre of the Vaudois by their own sovereign, Charles Emanuel II., Duke of Savoy, excited a thrill of horror in England greater than the massacres of Scio or of Batak roused in our time. For in Savoy it was not humanity only that was outraged, it was a deliberate assault of the Papal half of Europe upon an outpost of the Protestant cause.

One effect of the Puritan revolution had been to alter entirely the foreign policy of England. By nature, by geographical position, by commercial occupations, and the free spirit of the natives, these islands were marked out to be members of the Northern confederacy of progressive and emancipated Europe. The foreign policy of Elizabeth had been steady adhesion to this law of nature. The two first Stuarts, coquetting with semi-catholicism at home, had leaned with all the weight of the crown and of government towards Catholic connexions. The country had always offered a vain resistance; the Parliament of 1621 had been dismissed for advising James to join the Continental Protestants against Spain. It was certain, therefore, that when the government became Puritan, its foreign pol-

icy would again become that of Elizabeth. This must have been the case even if Cromwell had not been there. He saw not only that England must be a partner in the general Protestant interest, but that it fell to England to make the combination and to lead it. He acted in this with his usual decision. He placed England in her natural antagonism to Spain; he made peace with the Dutch; he courted the friendship of the Swiss Cantons, and the alliance of the Scandinavian and German Princes; and to France, which had a divided interest, he made advantageous offers provided the Cardinal would disconnect himself from the Ultramontane party.

It was in April, 1655, that the Vaudois atrocities suddenly added the impulse of religious sympathy to the permanent gravitation of the political forces. In all Catholic countries the Jesuits had by this time made themselves masters of the councils of the princes. The aim of Jesuit policy in the seventeenth century was nothing less than the entire extirpation of Protestantism and Protestants in the countries which they ruled. The inhabitants of certain Piedmontese valleys had held from time immemorial, and long before Luther, tenets and forms of worship very like those to which the German reformers had sought to bring back the church. The Vaudois were wretchedly poor, and had been incessantly the objects of aggression and persecution. In January, 1655, a sudden determination was taken by the Turin government to make them conform to the Catholic religion by force. The whole of the inhabitants of three valleys were ordered to quit the country within three days, under pain of death and confiscation of goods, unless they would become, or undertake to become, Catholic. They sent their humble remonstrances to the court of Turin against this edict. The remonstrances were disre-

garded, and military execution was ordered. On April 17, 1655, the soldiers, recruits from all countries — the Irish are specially mentioned—were let loose upon the unarmed population. Murder and rape and burning are the ordinary incidents of military execution. These were not enough to satisfy the ferocity of the Catholic soldiery, who revelled for many days in the infliction of all that brutal lust or savage cruelty can suggest to men.

It was nearly a month before the news reached England. A cry of horror went through the country, and Cromwell said it came "as near his heart as if his own nearest and dearest had been concerned." A day of humiliation was appointed, large collections were made for the sufferers, and a special envoy was despatched to remonstrate with the Duke of Savoy. Cardinal Mazarin, however, seeing the importance which the Lord Protector would acquire by taking the lead on this occasion, stepped in, and patched up a hasty arrangement, the treaty of Pignerol, by which some sort of fallacious protection was ostensibly secured to the survivors of the massacre.

All the despatches in this business were composed by Milton. But he only found the words; especially in the letter to the Duke of Savoy, the tone of which is much more moderate than we should have expected, considering that Blake was in the Mediterranean, and master of the coasts of the Duke's dominions. It is impossible to extract from these letters any characteristic trait, unless it is from the speech which the envoy, Morland, was instructed to deliver at Turin, in which it is said that all the Neros of all ages had never contrived inhumanities so atrocious as what had taken place in the Vaudois valleys. Thus restricted in his official communications, Milton gave vent to his personal feelings on the occasion in the well-known

sonnet (XVIII.) "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold."

It has been already said that there remains no trace of any personal intercourse between Milton and Cromwell. He seems to have remained equally unknown to, or unregarded by, the other leading men in the Government or the Council. It is vain to conjecture the cause of this general neglect. Some have found it in the coldness with which Milton regarded, parts at least of, the policy of the Protectorate. Others refer it to the haughty nature of the man, who will neither ask a favour nor make the first advances towards intimacy. This last supposition is nearer the truth than the former. An expression he uses in a private letter may be cited in its support. Writing to Peter Heimbach in 1657, to excuse himself from giving him a recommendation to the English ambassador in Holland, he says: "I am sorry that I am not able to do this; I have very little acquaintance with those in power, inasmuch as I keep very much to my own house, and prefer to do so." Something may also be set down to the character of the Puritan leaders, alien to all literature, and knowing no books but the Bible.

The mental isolation in which the great poet lived his life is a remarkable feature of his biography. It was not only after the Restoration that he appears lonely and friendless; it was much the same during the previous period of the Parliament and the Protectorate. Just at one time, about 1641, we hear from our best authority, Phillips, of his cultivating the society of men of his own age, and "keeping a gawdy-day," but this only once in three weeks or a month, with "two gentlemen of Gray's Inn." He had, therefore, known what it was to be sociable. But the general tenor of his life was other: proud, reserved,

self-contained, repellent; brooding over his own ideas, not easily admitting into his mind the ideas of others. It is indeed an erroneous estimate of Milton to attribute to him a hard or austere nature. He had all the quick sensibility which belongs to the poetic temperament, and longed to be loved that he might love again. But he had to pay the penalty of all who believe in their own ideas, in that their ideas come between them and the persons that approach them, and constitute a mental barrier which can only be broken down by sympathy. And sympathy for ideas is hard to find, just in proportion as those ideas are profound, far-reaching, the fruit of long study and meditation. Hence it was that Milton did not associate readily with his cotemporaries, but was affable and instructive in conversation with young persons, and those who would approach him in the attitude of disciples. His daughter Deborah, who could tell so little about him, remembered that he was delightful company, the life of a circle, and that he was so through a flow of subjects, and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility. I would interpret this testimony, the authenticity of which is indisputable, of his demeanor with the young, and those who were modest enough to wait upon his utterances. His isolation from his coevals, and from those who offered resistance, was the necessary consequence of his force of character, and the moral tenacity which endured no encroachment on the narrow scheme of thought over which it was incessantly brooding.

Though "his literature was immense," there was no humanity in it; it was fitted immovably into a scholastic frame-work. Hence literature was not a bond of sympathy between him and other men. We find him in no intimate relation with any of the cotemporary men of learning, poets, or wits. From such of them as were of the cavalier

party he was estranged by politics. That it was Milton's interposition which saved Davenant's life in 1651, even were the story better authenticated than it is, is not an evidence of intimacy. The three men most eminent for learning (in the usually received sense of the word) in England at that day were Selden (d. 1654), Gataker (d. 1654), and Archbishop Usher (d. 1656), all of whom were to be found in London. With none of the three is there any trace of Milton ever having had intercourse.

It is probable, but not certain, that it was at Milton's intercession that the Council proposed to subsidise Brian Walton in his great enterprise—the Polyglot Bible. This, the noblest monument of the learning of the Anglican Church, was projected and executed by the silenced clergy. Fifteen years of spoliation and humiliation thus bore better fruits of learning than the two centuries of wealth and honour which have since elapsed. As Brian Walton had, at one time, been curate of Allhallows, Bread Street, Milton may have known him, and it has been inferred that by Twells's expression—"The Council of State, before whom *some*, having *relation to them*, brought this business"—Milton is meant.

Not with John Hales, Cudworth, Whichcote, Nicholas Bernard, Meric Casaubon, nor with any of the men of letters who were churchmen, do we find Milton in correspondence. The interest of religion was more powerful than the interest of knowledge; and the author of *Eikonoklastes* must have been held in special abhorrence by the loyal clergy. The general sentiment of this party is expressed in Hacket's tirade, for which the reader is referred to his Life of Archbishop Williams.

From Presbyterians, such as Theophilus Gale or Baxter, Milton was equally separated by party. Of Hobbes, Mil-

ton's widow told Aubrey "that he was not of his acquaintance; that her husband did not like him at all, but would acknowledge him to be a man of great parts."

Owing to these circumstances, the circle of Milton's intimates contains few, and those undistinguished, names. One exception there was. In Andrew Marvel Milton found one congenial spirit, incorruptible amid poverty, unbowed by defeat. Marvel was twelve years Milton's junior, and a Cambridge man (Trinity), like himself. He had had better training still, having been for two years an inmate of Nunappleton, in the capacity of instructor to Mary, only daughter of the great Lord Fairfax. In 1652, Milton had recommended Marvel for the appointment of assistant secretary to himself, now that he was partially disabled by his blindness. The recommendation was not effectual at the time, another man, Philip Meadows, obtaining the post. It was not till 1657, when Meadows was sent on a mission to Denmark, that Marvel became Milton's colleague. He remained attached to him to the last. It were to be wished that he had left some reminiscences of his intercourse with the poet in his later years, some authentic notice of him in his prose letters, instead of a copy of verses, which attest, at once, his affectionate admiration for Milton's great epic, and his own little skill in versification.

Of Marchmont Needham and Samuel Hartlib mention has been already made. During the eight years of his sojourn in the house in Petty France, "he was frequently visited by persons of quality," says Phillips. The only name he gives is Lady Ranelagh. This lady, by birth a Boyle, sister of Robert Boyle, had placed first her nephew, and then her son, under Milton's tuition. Of an excellent understanding, and liberally cultivated, she sought

Milton's society, and as he could not go to visit her, she went to him. There are no letters of Milton addressed to her, but he mentions her once as "a most superior woman," and when, in 1656, she left London for Ireland, he "grieves for the loss of the one acquaintance which was worth to him all the rest." These names, with that of Dr. Paget, exhaust the scanty list of Milton's intimates during this period.

To these older friends, however, must be added his former pupils, now become men, but remaining ever attached to their old tutor, seeing him often when in London, and when absent corresponding with him. With them he was "affable and instructive in conversation." Henry Lawrence, son of the President of Oliver's Council, and Cyriac Skinner, grandson of Chief Justice Coke, were special favourites. With these he would sometimes "by the fire help waste a sullen day;" and it was these two who called forth from him the only utterances of this time which are not solemn, serious, or sad. Sonnet XVI. is a poetical invitation to Henry Lawrence, "of virtuous father virtuous son," to a "neat repast," not without wine and song, to cheer the winter season. Besides these two, whose names are familiar to us through the *Sonnets*, there was Lady Ranelagh's son, Richard Jones, who went, in 1656, to Oxford, attended by his tutor, the German Heinrich Oldenburg. We have two letters (Latin) addressed to Jones at Oxford, which are curious as showing that Milton was as dissatisfied with that university even after the reform, with Oliver Chancellor, and Owen Vice-Chancellor, as he had been with Cambridge.

His two nephews, also his pupils, must have ceased at a very early period to be acceptable either as friends or companions. They had both—but the younger brother,

John, more decidedly than Edward—passed into the opposite camp. This is a result of the uncle's strict system of Puritan discipline, which will surprise no one who has observed that, in education, mind reacts against the pressure of will. The teacher who seeks to impose his views raises antagonists, and not disciples. The generation of young men who grew up under the Commonwealth were in intellectual revolt against the constraint of Puritanism before they proceeded to political revolution against its authority. Long before the reaction embodied itself in the political fact of the Restoration, it had manifested itself in popular literature. The theatres were still closed by the police, but Davenant found a public in London to applaud an "entertainment by declamations and music, after the manner of the ancients" (1656). The press began timidly to venture on books of amusement, in a style of humour which seemed ribald and heathenish to the staid and sober covenanter. Something of the jollity and merriment of old Elizabethan days seemed to be in the air. But with a vast difference. Instead of "dallying with the innocence of love," as in *England's Helicon* (1600), or *The Passionate Pilgrim*, the sentiment, crushed and maimed by unwise repression, found a less honest and less refined expression. The strongest and most universal of human passions when allowed freedom, light, and air, becomes poetic inspiration. The same passion coerced by police is but driven underground.

So it came to pass that, in these years, the Protector's Council of State was much exercised by attempts of the London press to supply the public, weary of sermons, with some light literature of the class now (1879) known as facetious. On April 25, 1656, the august body which had upon its hands the government of three kingdoms

and the protection of the Protestant interest militant throughout Europe, could find nothing better to do than to take into consideration a book entitled *Sportive Wit, or The Muse's Merriment.* Sad to relate, the book was found to contain "much lascivious and profane matter." And the editor?—no other than John Phillips. Milton's youngest nephew! It is as if nature, in reasserting herself, had made deliberate selection of its agent. The pure poet of *Comus*, the man who had publicly boasted his chastity, had trained up a pupil to become the editor of an immodest drollery! Another and more original production of John Phillips, the *Satyr against Hypocrites*, was an open attack, with mixed banter and serious indignation, on the established religion. "It affords," says Godwin, "unequivocal indication of the company now kept by the author with cavaliers, and *bon vivans*, and demireps, and men of ruined fortunes." Edward Phillips, the elder brother, followed suit with the *Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* (1658), a book, according to Godwin, "entitled to no insignificant rank among the multifarious productions issued from the press, to debauch the manners of the nation, and to bring back the King." Truly, a man's worst vexations come to him from his own relations. Milton had the double annoyance of the public exposure before the Council of State, and the private reflection on the failure of his own system of education.

The homage which was wanting to the prophet in his own country was more liberally tendered by foreigners. Milton, it must be remembered, was yet only known in England as the pamphleteer of strong republican, but somewhat eccentric, opinions. On the Continent he was the answerer of Salmasius, the vindicator of liberty against

despotic power. "Learned foreigners of note," Phillips tells us, "could not part out of this city without giving a visit" to his uncle. Aubrey even exaggerates this flocking of the curious, so far as to say that some came over into England only to see Oliver Protector and John Milton. That Milton had more than he liked of these sightseers, who came to look at him when he could not see them, we can easily believe. Such visitors would of course be from Protestant countries. Italians, though admiring his elegant Latin, had "disliked him on account of his too severe morals." A glimpse, and no more than a glimpse, of the impression such visitors could carry away, we obtain in a letter written, in 1651, by a Nüremberg pastor, Christolph Arnold, to a friend at home:—"The strenuous defender of the new *régime*, Milton, enters readily into conversation; his speech is pure, his written style very pregnant. He has committed himself to a harsh, not to say unjust, criticism of the old English divines, and of their Scripture commentaries, which are truly learned, be witness the genius of learning himself!" It must not be supposed from this that Milton had discoursed with Arnold on the English divines. The allusion is to that onfall upon the reformers, Cranmer, Latimer, &c., which had escaped from Milton's pen in 1642 to the great grief of his friends. If the information of a dissenting minister, one Thomas Bradbury, who professed to derive it from Jeremiah White, one of Oliver's chaplains, may be trusted, Milton "was allowed by the Parliament a weekly table for the entertainment of foreign ministers and persons of learning, such especially as came from Protestant states, which allowance was also continued by Cromwell."

Such homage, though it may be a little tiresome, may have gratified for the moment the political writer, but it

would not satisfy the poet who was dreaming of an immortality of far other fame—

> "Two equal'd with me in fate,
> So were I equal'd with them in renown."

And to one with Milton's acute sensibility, yearning for sympathy and love, dependent, through his calamity, on the eyes, as on the heart, of others, his domestic interior was of more consequence to him than outside demonstrations of respect. Four years after the death of his first wife he married again. We know nothing more of this second wife, Catharine Woodcock, than what may be gathered from the Sonnet XIX. in which he commemorated his "late espoused saint," in whose person "love, sweetness, goodness shin'd." After only fifteen months' union she died (1658), after having given birth to a daughter, who lived only a few months. Milton was again alone.

His public functions as Latin Secretary had been contracted within narrow limits by his blindness. The heavier part of the duties had been transferred to others, first to Weckherlin, then to Philip Meadows, and lastly to Andrew Marvel. The more confidential diplomacy Thurloe reserved for his own cabinet. But Milton continued up to the last to be occasionally called upon for a Latin epistle. On September 3, 1658, passed away the master-mind which had hitherto compelled the jarring elements in the nation to co-exist together, and chaos was let loose. Milton retained and exercised his secretaryship under Richard Protector, and even under the restored Parliament. His latest Latin letter is of date May 16, 1659. He is entirely outside all the combinations and complications which filled the latter half of that year, after Richard's retirement in May. It is little use writing to foreign potentates now,

for, with one man's life, England has fallen from her lead in Europe, and is gravitating towards the Catholic and reactionary powers, France and Spain. Milton, though he knows nothing more than one of the public, "only what it appears to us without doors," he says, will yet write about it. The habit of pamphleteering was on him, and he will write what no one will care to read. The stiff-necked commonwealth men, with their doctrinaire republicanism, were standing out for their constitutional ideas, blind to the fact that the royalists were all the while undermining the ground beneath the feet alike of Presbyterian and Independent, Parliament and army. The Greeks of Constantinople denouncing the Azymite, when Mahmoud II. was forming his lines round the doomed city, were not more infatuated than these pedantic commonwealth men with their parliamentarianism when Charles II. was at Calais.

Not less inopportune than the public men of the party, Milton chooses this time for inculcating his views on endowments. A fury of utterance was upon him, and he poured out, during the death-throes of the republic, pamphlet upon pamphlet, as fast as he could get them written to his dictation. These extemporised effusions betray in their style, hurry, and confusion the restlessness of a coming despair. The passionate enthusiasm of the early tracts is gone, and all the old faults, the obscurity, the inconsecutiveness, the want of arrangement, are exaggerated. In the *Ready Way* there is a monster sentence of thirty-nine lines, containing 336 words. Though his instincts were perturbed, he was unaware what turn things were taking. In February, 1660, when all persons of ordinary information saw that the restoration of monarchy was certain, Milton knew it not, and put out a tract to show his countrymen a *Ready and easy way to establish a free Common-*

wealth. With the same pertinacity with which he had adhered to his own assumption that Morus was author of the *Clamor*, he now refused to believe in the return of the Stuarts. Fast as his pen moved, events outstripped it, and he has to rewrite the *Ready and easy way* to suit their march. The second edition is overtaken by the Restoration, and it should seem was never circulated. Milton will ever "give advice to Sylla," and writes a letter of admonition to Monk, which, however, never reached either the press or Sylla.

The month of May, 1660, put a forced end to his illusion. Before the 29th of that month he had fled from the house in Petty France, and been sheltered by a friend in the city. In this friend's house, in Bartholomew Close, he lay concealed till the passing of the Act of Oblivion, 29th August. Phillips says that he owed his exemption from the vengeance which overtook so many of his friends to Andrew Marvel, "who acted vigorously in his behalf, and made a considerable party for him." But in adding that "he was so far excepted as not to bear any office in the commonwealth," Phillips is in error. Milton's name does not occur in the Act. Pope used to tell that Davenant had employed his interest to protect a brother-poet, thus returning a similar act of generosity done to himself by Milton in 1650. Pope had this story from Betterton the actor. How far Davenant exaggerated to Betterton his own influence or his exertions, we cannot tell. Another account assigns the credit of the intervention to Secretary Morris and Sir Thomas Clarges. After all, it is probable that he owed his immunity to his insignificance and his harmlessness. The formality of burning two of his books by the hands of the hangman was gone through. He was also for some time during the autumn of 1660 in

the custody of the serjeant-at-arms, for on 15th December there is an entry in the Commons journals ordering his discharge. It is characteristic of Milton that, even in this moment of peril, he stood up for his rights, and refused to pay an overcharge, which the official thought he might safely exact from a rebel and a covenanter.

THIRD PERIOD. 1660—1674.

CHAPTER XII.

BIOGRAPHICAL.—LITERARY OCCUPATION.—RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

REVOLUTIONS are of two kinds; they are either progressive or reactionary. A revolution of progress is often destructive, sweeping away much which should have been preserved. But such a revolution has a regenerating force; it renews the youth of a nation, and gives free play to its vital powers. Lost limbs are replaced by new. A revolution of reaction, on the other hand, is a benumbing influence, paralysing effort, and levelling character. In such a conservative revolution the mean, the selfish, and the corrupt come to the top; man seeks ease and enjoyment rather than duty; virtue, honour, patriotism, and disinterestedness disappear altogether from a society which has ceased to believe in them.

The Restoration of 1660 was such a revolution. Complete and instantaneous inversion of the position of the two parties in the nation, it occasioned much individual hardship. But this was only the fortune of war, the necessary consequence of party ascendancy. The Restoration was much more than a triumph of the party of the

royalists over that of the roundheads; it was the death-blow to national aspiration, to all those aims which raise man above himself. It destroyed and trampled under foot his ideal. The Restoration was a moral catastrophe. It was not that there wanted good men among the churchmen, men as pious and virtuous as the Puritans whom they displaced. But the royalists came back as the party of reaction, reaction of the spirit of the world against asceticism, of self-indulgence against duty, of materialism against idealism. For a time virtue was a public laughing-stock, and the word "saint," the highest expression in the language for moral perfection, connoted everything that was ridiculous. I do not speak of the gallantries of Whitehall, which figure so prominently in the histories of the reign. Far too much is made of these, when they are made the scapegoat of the moralist. The style of court manners was a mere incident on the surface of social life. The national life was far more profoundly tainted by the discouragement of all good men, which penetrated every shire and every parish, than by the distant reports of the loose behaviour of Charles II. Servility, meanness, venality, time-serving, and a disbelief in virtue diffused themselves over the nation like a pestilential miasma, the depressing influence of which was heavy, even upon those souls which individually resisted the poison. The heroic age of England had passed away, not by gradual decay, by imperceptible degeneration, but in a year, in a single day, like the winter's snow in Greece. It is for the historian to describe, and unfold the sources of this contagion. The biographer of Milton has to take note of the political change only as it affected the worldly circumstances of the man, the spiritual environment of the poet, and the springs of his inspiration.

The consequences of the Restoration to Milton's worldly fortunes were disastrous. As a partisan he was necessarily involved in the ruin of his party. As a matter of course, he lost his Latin secretaryship. There is a story that he was offered to be continued in it, and that when urged to accept the offer by his wife, he replied, "Thou art in the right; you, as other women, would ride in your coach; for me, my aim is to live and die an honest man." This tradition, handed on by Pope, is of doubtful authenticity. It is not probable that the man who had printed of Charles I. what Milton had printed, could have been offered office under Charles II. Even were court favour to be purchased by concessions, Milton was not the man to make them, or to belie his own antecedents, as Marchmont Needham, Dryden, and so many others did. Our wish for Milton is that he should have placed himself from the beginning above party. But he had chosen to be the champion of a party, and he loyally accepted the consequences. He escaped with life and liberty. The reaction was not bloodthirsty. Milton was already punished by the loss of his sight, and he was now mulcted in three-fourths of his small fortune. A sum of 2000*l.* which he had placed in government securities was lost, the restored monarchy refusing to recognise the obligations of the protectorate. He lost another like sum by mismanagement, and for want of good advice, says Phillips, or, according to his granddaughter's statement, by the dishonesty of a money-scrivener. He had also to give up, without compensation, some property, valued at 60*l.* a year, which he had purchased when the estates of the Chapter of Westminster were sold. In the great fire, 1666, his house in Bread Street was destroyed. Thus, from easy circumstances, he was reduced, if not to destitution, at least to

narrow means. He left at his death 1500*l.*, which Phillips calls a considerable sum. And if he sold his books, one by one, during his lifetime, this was because, knowing their value, he thought he could dispose of them to greater advantage than his wife would be able to do.

But far outweighing such considerations as pecuniary ruin and personal discomfort, was the shock which the moral nature felt from the irretrievable discomfiture of all the hopes, aims, and aspirations which had hitherto sustained and nourished his soul. In a few months the labor of twenty years was swept away without a trace of it being left. It was not merely a political defeat of his party, it was the total wreck of the principles, of the social and religious ideal, with which Milton's life was bound up. Others, whose convictions only had been engaged in the cause, could hasten to accommodate themselves to the new era, or even to transfer their services to the conqueror. But such flighty allegiance was not possible for Milton, who had embarked in the Puritan cause not only intellectual convictions, but all the generosity and ardour of his passionate nature. "I conceive myself to be," he had written in 1642, "not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded, and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker." It was now in the moment of overthrow that Milton became truly great. "Wandellos im ewigen Ruin," he stood alone, and became the party himself. He took the only course open to him, turned away his thoughts from the political disaster, and directed the fierce enthusiasm which burned within upon an absorbing poetic task. His outward hopes were blasted, and he returned with concentrated ardour to woo the muse, from whom he had so long truanted. The passion which seethes beneath the

stately march of the verse in *Paradise Lost*, is not the hopeless moan of despair, but the intensified fanaticism which defies misfortune to make it "bate one jot of heart or hope." The grand loneliness of Milton after 1668, "is reflected in his three great poems by a sublime independence of human sympathy like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us."

Late then, but not too late, Milton, at the age of fifty-two, fell back upon the rich resources of his own mind, upon poetical composition, and the study of good books, which he always asserted to be necessary to nourish and sustain a poet's imagination. Here he had to contend with the enormous difficulty of blindness. He engaged a kind of attendant to read to him. But this only sufficed for English books—imperfectly even for these—and the greater part of the choice, not extensive, library upon which Milton drew, was Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the modern languages of Europe. In a letter to Heimbach, of date 1666, he complains pathetically of the misery of having to spell out, letter by letter, the Latin words of the epistle to the attendant who was writing to his dictation. At last he fell upon the plan of engaging young friends, who occasionally visited him, to read to him and to write for him. In the precious volume of Milton MSS. preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, six different hands have been distinguished. Who they were is not always known. But Phillips tells us that "he had daily about him one or other to read to him; some persons of man's estate, who of their own accord greedily catch'd at the opportunity of being his reader, that they might as well reap the benefit of what they read to him, as oblige him by the benefit of their reading; others of younger years sent by their parents to the same end." Edward

Phillips himself, who visited his uncle to the last, may have been among the number, as much as his own engagements as tutor, first to the only son of John Evelyn, then in the family of the Earl of Pembroke, and finally to the Bennets, Lord Arlington's children, would permit him. Others of these casual readers were Samuel Barrow, body physician to Charles II., and Cyriac Skinner, of whom mention has been already made (above, p. 128).

To a blind man, left with three little girls, of whom the youngest was only eight at the Restoration, marriage seemed equally necessary for their sake as for his own. Milton consulted his judicious friend and medical adviser, Dr. Paget, who recommended to him Elizabeth Minshull, of a family of respectable position near Nantwich, in Cheshire. She was some distant relation of Paget, who must have felt the terrible responsibility of undertaking to recommend. She justified his selection. The marriage took place in February, 1663, and during the remaining eleven years of his life the poet was surrounded by the thoughtful attentions of an active and capable woman. There is but scanty evidence as to what she was like, either in person or character. Aubrey, who knew her, says she was "a gent. (? genteel) person, (of) a peaceful and agreeable humour." Newton, Bishop of Bristol, who wrote in 1749, had heard that she was "a woman of a most violent spirit, and a hard mother-in-law to his children." It is certain that she regarded her husband with great veneration, and studied his comfort. Mary Fisher, a maid-servant in the house, deposed that at the end of his life, when he was sick and infirm, his wife having provided something for dinner she thought he would like, he "spake to his said wife these or like words, as near as this deponent can remember: 'God have mercy, Betty, I see thou wilt perform according to

thy promise, in providing me such dishes as I think fit while I live, and when I die thou knowest I have left thee all.'" There is no evidence that his wife rendered him literary assistance. Perhaps, as she looked so thoroughly to his material comfort, her function was held, by tacit agreement, to end there.

As casual visitors, or volunteer readers, were not always in the way, and a hired servant who could not spell Latin was of very restricted use, it was not unnatural that Milton should look to his daughters, as they grew up, to take a share in supplying his voracious demand for intellectual food. Anne, the eldest, though she had handsome features, was deformed and had an impediment in her speech, which made her unavailable as a reader. The other two, Mary and Deborah, might now have been of inestimable service to their father, had their dispositions led them to adapt themselves to his needs, and the circumstances of the house. Unfortunate it was for Milton that his biblical views on the inferiority of women had been reduced to practice in the bringing up of his own daughters. It cannot, indeed, be said that the poet whose imagination created the Eve of *Paradise Lost* regarded woman as the household drudge, existing only to minister to man's wants. Of all that men have said of women, nothing is more loftily conceived than the well-known passage at the end of Book viii.:

> "When I approach
> Her loveliness, so absolute she seems,
> And in herself complete, so well to know
> Her own, that what she wills to do or say
> Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
> All higher knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded; wisdom in discourse with her
> Loses discountenanc'd, and like folly shows;

> Authority and reason on her wait,
> As one intended first, not after made
> Occasionally; and, to consummate all,
> Greatness of mind, and nobleness, their seat
> Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
> About her, as a guard angelic plac'd."

Bishop Newton thought that, in drawing Eve, Milton had in mind his third wife, because she had hair of the colour of Eve's "golden tresses." But Milton had never seen Elizabeth Minshull. If reality suggested any trait, physical or mental, of the Eve, it would certainly have been some woman seen in earlier years.

But wherever Milton may have met with an incarnation of female divinity such as he has drawn, it was not in his own family. We cannot but ask, how is it that one, whose type of woman is the loftiest known to English literature, should have brought up his own daughters on so different a model? Milton is not one of the false prophets, who turn round and laugh at their own enthusiasms, who say one thing in their verses, and another thing over their cups. What he writes in his poetry is what he thinks, what he means, and what he will do. But in directing the bringing up of his daughters, he put his own typical woman entirely on one side. His practice is framed on the principle that

> "Nothing lovelier can be found
> In woman, than to study household good."
> *Paradise Lost*, ix. 233.

He did not allow his daughters to learn any language, saying with a gibe that one tongue was enough for a woman. They were not sent to any school, but had some sort of teaching at home from a mistress. But in order

to make them useful in reading to him, their father was at the pains to train them to read aloud in five or six languages, of none of which they understood one word. When we think of the time and labour which must have been expended to teach them to do this, it must occur to us that a little more labour would have sufficed to teach them so much of one or two of the languages as would have made their reading a source of interest and improvement to themselves. This Milton refused to do. The consequence was, as might have been expected, the occupation became so irksome to them that they rebelled against it. In the case of one of them, Mary, who was like her mother in person, and took after her in other respects, this restiveness passed into open revolt. She first resisted, then neglected, and finally came to hate, her father. When some one spoke in her presence of her father's approaching marriage, she said, "that was no news to hear of his wedding; but if she could hear of his death, that was something." She combined with Anne, the eldest daughter, "to counsel his maid-servant to cheat him in his marketings." They sold his books without his knowledge. "They made nothing of deserting him," he was often heard to complain. They continued to live with him five or six years after his marriage. But at last the situation became intolerable to both parties, and they were sent out to learn embroidery in gold or silver, as a means of obtaining their livelihood. Deborah, the youngest, was included in the same arrangement, though she seems to have been more helpful to her father, and to have been at one time his principal reader. Aubrey says that he "taught her Latin, and that she was his amanuensis." She even spoke of him when she was old—she lived to be seventy-four—with some tenderness. She was once, in

1725, shewn Faithorne's crayon drawing of the poet, without being told for whom it was intended. She immediately exclaimed, "O Lord! that is the picture of my father!" and stroking down the hair of her forehead, added, "Just so my father wore his hair."

One of Milton's volunteer readers, and one to whom we owe the most authentic account of him in his last years, was a young Quaker, named Thomas Ellwood. Milton's Puritanism had been all his life slowly gravitating in the direction of more and more liberty, and though he would not attach himself to any sect, he must have felt in no remote sympathy with men who repudiated state interference in religious matters and disdained ordinances. Some such sympathy with the pure spirituality of the Quaker may have disposed Milton favourably towards Ellwood. The acquaintance once begun, was cemented by mutual advantage. Milton, besides securing an intelligent reader, had a pleasure in teaching; and Ellwood, though the reverse of humble, was teachable from desire to expand himself. Ellwood took a lodging near the poet, and went to him every day, except "first-day," in the afternoon, to read Latin to him.

Milton's frequent change of abode has been thought indicative of a restless temperament, seeking escape from petty miseries by change of scene. On emerging from hiding, or escaping from the serjeant-at-arms in 1660, he lived for a short time in Holborn, near Red Lion Square. From this he removed to Jewin Street, and moved again, on his marriage, in 1662, to the house of Millington, the bookseller, who was now beginning business, but who, before his death in 1704, had accumulated the largest stock of second-hand books to be found in London. His last remove was to a house in a newly-created row facing the

Artillery-ground, on the site of the west side of what is now called Bunhill Row. This was his abode from his marriage till his death, nearly twelve years, a longer stay than he had made in any other residence. This is the house which must be associated with the poet of *Paradise Lost*, as it was here that the poem was in part written, and wholly revised and finished. But the Bunhill Row house is only producible by the imagination; every trace of it has long been swept away, though the name Milton Street, bestowed upon a neighbouring street, preserves the remembrance of the poet's connexion with the locality. Here "an ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber, hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black; pale, but not cadaverous, his hands and fingers gouty and with chalk-stones." At the door of this house, sitting in the sun, looking out upon the Artillery-ground, "in a grey, coarse cloth coat," he would receive his visitors. On colder days he would walk for hours—three or four hours at a time—in his garden. A garden was a *sine qua non*, and he took care to have one to every house he lived in.

His habit in early life had been to study late into the night. After he lost his sight, he changed his hours, and retired to rest at nine. In summer he rose at four, in winter at five, and began the day with having the Hebrew Scriptures read to him. "Then he contemplated. At seven his man came to him again, and then read to him and wrote till dinner. The writing was as much as the reading" (Aubrey). Then he took exercise, either walking in the garden, or swinging in a machine. His only recreation, besides conversation, was music. He played the organ and the bass-viol, the organ most. Sometimes

he would sing himself, or get his wife to sing to him, though she had, he said, no ear, yet a good voice. Then he went up to his study to be read to till six. After six his friends were admitted to visit him, and would sit with him till eight. At eight he went down to supper, usually olives or some light thing. He was very abstemious in his diet, having to contend with a gouty diathesis. He was not fastidious in his choice of meats, but content with anything that was in season, or easy to be procured. After supping thus sparingly, he smoked a pipe of tobacco, drank a glass of water, and then retired to bed. He was sparing in his use of wine. His Samson, who in this as in other things, is Milton himself, allays his thirst "from the clear milky juice."

Bed, with its warmth and recumbent posture, he found favorable to composition. At other times he would compose or prune his verses, as he walked in the garden, and then, coming in, dictate. His verse was not at the command of his will. Sometimes he would lay awake the whole night, trying but unable to make a single line. At other times lines flowed without premeditation, "with a certain impetus and æstro." His vein, he said, flowed only from the vernal to the autumnal equinox. Phillips here transposes the seasons, though he has preserved the authentic fact of intermittent inspiration. It was the spring which restored to Milton, as it has to other poets, the buoyancy necessary to composition. What he composed at night, he dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow-chair, with his leg thrown over the arm. He would dictate forty lines, as it were in a breath, and then reduce them to half the number.

Milton's piety is admitted, even by his enemies; and it is a piety which oppresses his writings as well as his life.

The fact that a man, with a deep sense of religion, should not have attended any place of public worship, has given great trouble to Milton's biographers. And the principal biographers of this thorough-going non-conformist have been Anglican clergymen; Bishop Newton, Todd, Mitford; Dr. Johnson, more clerical than any cleric, being no exception. Mitford would give Milton a dispensation on the score of his age and infirmities. But the cause lay deeper. A profound apprehension of the spiritual world leads to a disregard of rites. To a mind so disposed externals become, first indifferent, then impediment. Ministration is officious intrusion. I do not find that Milton, though he wrote against paid ministers as hirelings, ever expressly formulated an opinion against ministers as such. But as has already been hinted, there grew up in him, in the last period of his life, a secret sympathy with the mode of thinking which came to characterise the Quaker sect. Not that Milton adopted any of their peculiar fancies. He affirms categorically the permissibility of oaths, of military service, and requires that women should keep silence in the congregation. But in negativing all means of arriving at truth except the letter of Scripture interpreted by the inner light, he stood upon the same platform as the followers of George Fox.

Milton's latest utterance on theological topics is found in a tract published by him the year before his death, 1673. The piece is entitled *Of true religion, heresy, schism, toleration;* but its meagre contents do not bear out the comprehensiveness of the title. The only matter really discussed in the pages of the tract is the limit of toleration. The stamp of age is upon the style, which is more careless and incoherent even than usual. He has here dictated his extempore thoughts, without premeditation or

revision, so that we have here a record of Milton's habitual mind. Having watched him gradually emancipating himself from the contracted Calvinistic mould of the Bread Street home, it is disappointing to find that, at sixty-five, his development has proceeded no further than we here find. He is now willing to extend toleration to all sects who make the Scriptures their sole rule of faith. Sects may misunderstand Scripture, but to err is the condition of humanity, and will be pardoned by God, if diligence, prayer, and sincerity have been used. The sects named as to be tolerated are—Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Arians, Socinians, Arminians. They are to be tolerated to the extent of being allowed, on all occasions, to give account of their faith, by arguing, preaching in their several assemblies, writing and printing.

This tract alone is sufficient refutation of an idle story that Milton died a Roman Catholic. It is not well vouched, being hearsay three times removed. Milton's younger brother, Sir Christopher, is said to have said so at a dinner entertainment. If he ever did say as much, it must be set down to that peculiar form of credulity which makes perverts think that every one is about to follow their example. In Christopher Milton, "a man of no parts or ability, and a superstitious nature" (Toland), such credulity found a congenial soil.

In this pamphlet the principle of toleration is flatly enunciated in opposition to the practice of the Restoration. But the principle is rested not on the statesman's ground of the irrelevancy of religious dispute to good government, but on the theological ground of the venial nature of religious error. And to permissible error there are very narrow limits; limits which exclude Catholics. For Milton will exclude Romanists from toleration, not on the

statesman's ground of incivism, but on the theologian's ground of idolatry. All his antagonism in this tract is reserved for the Catholics. There is not a hint of discontent with the prelatry, once intolerable to him. Yet that prelatry was now scourging the non-conformists with scorpions instead of with whips, with its Act of Uniformity, its Conventicle Act, its Five-mile Act, filling the gaols with Milton's own friends and fellow-religionists. Several times, in these thirteen pages, he appeals to the practice or belief of the Church of England, once even calling it "our church."

This tract on toleration was Milton's latest published work. But he was preparing for the press, at the time of his death, a more elaborate theological treatise. Daniel Skinner, a nephew of his old friend Cyriac, was serving as Milton's amanuensis in writing out a fair copy. Death came before a third of the work of correction had been completed, 196 pages out of 735, of which the whole rough draft consists. The whole remained in Daniel Skinner's hands in 1674. Milton, though in his preface he is aware that his pages contain not a little which will be unpalatable to the reigning opinion in religion, would have dared publication, if he could have passed the censor. But Daniel Skinner, who was a Fellow of Trinity, and had a career before him, was not equally free. What could not appear in London, however, might be printed at Amsterdam. Skinner, accordingly, put both the theological treatise, and the epistles written by the Latin Secretary, into the hands of Daniel Elzevir. The English government getting intelligence of the proposed publication of the foreign correspondence of the Parliament and the Protector, interfered, and pressure was put upon Skinner, through the Master of Trinity, Isaac Barrow. Skinner

hastened to save himself from the fate which in 1681 befel Locke, and gave up to the Secretary of State not only the Latin letters, but the MS. of the theological treatise. Nothing further was known as to the fate of the MS. till 1823, when it was disinterred from one of the presses of the old State Paper Office. The Secretary of State, Sir Joseph Williamson, when he retired from office in 1678, instead of carrying away his correspondence as had been the custom, left it behind him. Thus it was that the *Treatise of Christian Doctrine* first saw light one hundred and fifty years after the author's death.

In a work which had been written as a text-book for the use of learners, there can be little scope for originality. And Milton follows the division of the matter into heads usual in the manuals then current. But it was impossible for Milton to handle the dry bones of a divinity compendium without stirring them into life. And divinity which is made to live necessarily becomes unorthodox.

The usual method of the school text-books of the seventeenth century was to exhibit dogma in the artificial terminology of the controversies of the sixteenth century. For this procedure Milton substitutes the words of Scripture simply. The traditional terms of the text-books are retained, but they are employed only as heads under which to arrange the words of Scripture. This process, which in other hands would be little better than index making, becomes here pregnant with meaning. The originality which he voluntarily resigns, in employing only the words of the Bible, he recovers by his freedom of exposition. He shakes himself loose from the trammels of traditional exposition, and looks at the texts for himself. The truth was

"Left only in those written records pure,
Though not but by the spirit understood."
Paradise Lost, xii. 510.

Upon the points which interested him most closely, Milton knew that his understanding of the text differed from the standard of Protestant orthodoxy. That God created matter, not out of nothing, but out of Himself, and that death is, in the course of nature, total extinction of being, though not opinions received, were not singular. More startling is his assertion that polygamy is not, in itself, contrary to morality, though it may be inexpedient. More offensive to the religious sentiment of his day would have been his vigorous vindication of the free-will of man against the reigning Calvinism, and his assertion of the inferiority of the Son in opposition to the received Athanasianism. He labours this point of the nature of God with especial care, showing how greatly it occupied his thoughts. He arranges his texts so as to exhibit in Scriptural language the semi-Arian scheme, *i. e.*, a scheme which, admitting the co-essentiality, denies the eternal generation. Through all this manipulation of texts we seem to see that Milton is not the school logician erecting a consistent fabric of words, but that he is dominated by an imagination peopled with concrete personalities, and labouring to assign their places to the Father and the Son as separate agents in the mundane drama. The *De Doctrina Christiana* is the prose counterpart of *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, a caput mortuum of the poems, with every ethereal particle evaporated.

In the royal injunctions of 1614, James I. had ordered students in the universities not to insist too long upon compendiums, but to study the Scriptures, and to bestow their time upon the fathers and councils. In his attempt

to express dogmatic theology in the words of Scripture, Milton was unwittingly obeying this injunction. The other part of the royal direction as to fathers and councils it was not in Milton's plan to carry out. Neither, indeed, was it in his power. He had not the necessary learning. M. Scherer says that Milton "laid all antiquity, sacred and profane, under contribution." So far is this from being the case, that while he exhibits, in this treatise, an intimate knowledge of the text of the canonical books, Hebrew and Greek, there is an absence of that average acquaintance with Christian antiquity which formed the professional outfit of the episcopal divine. Milton's references to the fathers are perfunctory and second-hand. The only citation of Chrysostom, for instance, which I have noticed is in these words: "the same is said to be the opinion of Chrysostom, Luther, and other moderns." He did not esteem the judgment of the fathers sufficiently to deem them worth studying. In the interpretation of texts, as in other matters of opinion, Milton withdrew within the fortress of his absolute personality.

I have now to relate the external history of the composition of *Paradise Lost*. When Milton had to skulk for a time in 1660, he was already in steady work upon the poem. Though a few lines of it were composed as early as 1642, it was not till 1658 that he took up the task of composition continuously. If we may trust our only authority (Aubrey-Phillips), he had finished it in 1663, about the time of his marriage. In polishing, rewriting, and writing out fair, much might remain to be done, after the poem was, in a way, finished. It is in 1665 that we first make acquaintance with *Paradise Lost* in a complete state. This was the year of the plague, known in our annals as

the Great Plague, to distinguish its desolating ravages from former slighter visitations of the epidemic. Every one who could fled from the city of destruction. Milton applied to his young friend Ellwood to find him a shelter. Ellwood, who was then living as tutor in the house of the Penningtons, took a cottage for Milton in their neighbourhood, at Chalfont St. Giles, in the county of Bucks. Not only the Penningtons, but General Fleetwood had also his residence near this village; and a report is mentioned by Howitt that it was Fleetwood who provided the ex-secretary with a refuge. The society of neither of these friends was available for Milton. For Fleetwood was a sentenced regicide; and in July Pennington and Ellwood were hurried off to Aylesbury gaol by an indefatigable justice of the peace, who was desirous of giving evidence of his zeal for the king's government. That the Chalfont cottage "was not pleasantly situated," must have been indifferent to the blind old man, as much so as that the immediate neighbourhood, with its heaths and wooded uplands, reproduced the scenery he had loved when he wrote *L'Allegro*.

As soon as Ellwood was relieved from imprisonment, he returned to Chalfont. Then it was that Milton put into his hands the completed *Paradise Lost*, "bidding me take it home with me, and read it at my leisure, and when I had so done, return it to him with my judgment thereupon." On returning it, besides giving the author the benefit of his judgment—a judgment not preserved, and not indispensable—the Quaker made his famous speech, "Thou hast said much here of Paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?" Milton afterwards told Ellwood that to this casual question was due his writing *Paradise Regained*. The later poem was included in the original conception, if not in the scheme of the first epic.

But we do get from Ellwood's reminiscence a date for the beginning of *Paradise Regained*, which must have been at Chalfont in the autumn of 1665.

When the plague was abated, and the city had become safely habitable, Milton returned to Artillery Row. He had not been long back when London was devastated by a fresh calamity, only less terrible than the plague, because it destroyed the home, and not the life. The Great Fire succeeded the Great Plague. Two-thirds of the city, 13,000 houses, were reduced to ashes, and the whole current of life and business entirely suspended. Through these two overwhelming disasters Milton must have been supporting his solitary spirit by writing *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, and giving the final touches to *Paradise Lost*. He was now so wholly unmoved by his environment, that we look in vain in the poems for any traces of this season of suffering and disaster. The past and his own meditations were now all in all to him; the horrors of the present were as nothing to a man who had outlived his hopes. Plague and fire, what were they, after the ruin of the noblest of causes? The stoical compression of *Paradise Regained* is in perfect keeping with the fact that it was in the middle of the ruins of London that Milton placed his finished poem in the hands of the licenser.

For licenser there was now, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to wit, for religious literature. Of course, the Primate read by deputy, usually one of his chaplains. The reader into whose hands *Paradise Lost* came, though an Oxford man, and a cleric on his preferment, who had written his pamphlet against the dissenters, happened to be one whose antecedents, as Fellow of All Souls, and Proctor (in 1663), ensured his taking a less pedantic and bigoted view of his

duties. Still, though Dryden's dirty plays would have encountered no objection before such a tribunal, the same facilities were not likely to be accorded to anything which bore the name of John Milton, secretary to Oliver, and himself an austere republican. Tomkyns—that was the young chaplain's name—did stumble at a phrase in Book i. 598,

"With fear of change
Perplexes monarchs."

There had been in England, and were to be again, times when men had hanged for less than this. Tomkyns, who was sailing on the smooth sea of preferment with a fair wind, did not wish to get into trouble, but at last he let the book pass. Perhaps he thought it was only religious verse written for the sectaries, which would never be heard of at court, or among the wits, and that therefore it was of little consequence what it contained.

A publisher was found, notwithstanding that Paul's, or as it now was, St. Paul's, Churchyard had ceased to exist, in Aldersgate, which lay outside the circuit of the conflagration. The agreement, still preserved in the National Museum, between the author, "John Milton, gent. of the one parte, and Samuel Symons, printer, of the other parte," is among the curiosities of our literary history. The curiosity consists not so much in the illustrious name appended (not in autograph) to the deed, as in the contrast between the present fame of the book, and the waste-paper price at which the copyright is being valued. The author received 5*l.* down; was to receive a second 5*l.* when the first edition should be sold; a third 5*l.* when the second; and a fourth 5*l.* when the third edition should be gone. Milton lived to receive the second 5*l.*, and no more—10*l.* in all, for *Paradise Lost*. I cannot bring myself to join in the lam-

entations of the biographers over this bargain. Surely it is better so; better to know that the noblest monument of English letters had no money value, than to think of it as having been paid for at a pound the line.

The agreement with Symons is dated 27th April, the entry in the register of Stationers' Hall is 20th August. It was, therefore, in the autumn of 1667 that *Paradise Lost* was in the hands of the public. We have no data for the time occupied in the composition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. We have seen that the former poem was begun at Chalfont in 1665, and it may be conjecturally stated that *Samson* was finished before September, 1667. At any rate, both the poems were published together in the autumn of 1670.

Milton had four years more of life granted him after this publication. But he wrote no more poetry. It was as if he had exhausted his strength in a last effort, in the Promethean agony of Samson, and knew that his hour of inspiration was passed away. But, like all men who have once tasted the joys and pangs of composition, he could not now do without its excitement. The occupation, and the indispensable solace of the last ten sad years, had been his poems. He would not write more verse, when the æstrus was not on him, but he must write. He took up all the dropped threads of past years, ambitious plans formed in the fulness of vigour, and laid aside, but not abandoned. He was the very opposite of Shelley, who could never look at a piece of his own composition a second time, but when he had thrown it off at a heat, rushed into something else. Milton's adhesiveness was such that he could never give up a design once entered upon. In these four years, as if conscious that his time was now nearly out, he laboured to complete five such early undertakings.

(1.) Of his *Compendium of Theology* I have already spoken. He was overtaken by death while preparing this for the press.

(2.) His *History of Britain* must have cost him much labour, bestowed upon comparison of the conflicting authorities. It is the record of the studies he had made for his abandoned epic poem, and is evidence how much the subject occupied his mind.

The *History of Britain*, 1670, had been preceded by (3) a Latin grammar, in 1669, and was followed by (4) a Logic on the method of Ramus, 1672.

In 1673 he brought out a new edition of his early volume of *Poems*. In this volume he printed for the first time the sonnets, and other pieces, which had been written in the interval of twenty-seven years since the date of his first edition. Not, indeed, all the sonnets which we now have. Four—in which Fairfax, Vane, Cromwell, and the Commonwealth are spoken of as Milton would speak of them—were necessarily kept back, and not put into print till 1694, by Phillips, at the end of his life of his uncle.

In proportion to the trouble which Milton's words cost him, was his care in preserving them. His few Latin letters to his foreign friends are remarkably barren either of fact or sentiment. But Milton liked them well enough to have kept copies of them, and now allowed a publisher, Brabazon Aylmer, to issue them in print, adding to them, with a view to make out a volume, his college exercises, which he had also preserved.

Among the papers which he left at his death, were the beginnings of two undertakings, either of them of overwhelming magnitude, which he did not live to complete. We have seen that he taught his pupils geography out of *Davity, Description de l'Univers*. He was not satisfied

with this, or with any existing compendium. They were all dry; exact enough with their latitudes and longitudes, but omitted such uninteresting stuff as manners, government, religion, &c. Milton would essay a better system. All he had ever executed was Russia, taking the pains to turn over and extract for his purpose all the best travels in that country. This is the fragment which figures in his Works as a *Brief History of Muscovia.*

The hackneyed metaphor of Pegasus harnessed to a luggage trolley will recur to us when we think of the author of *L'Allegro* setting himself to compile a Latin lexicon. If there is any literary drudgery more mechanical than another, it is generally supposed to be that of making a dictionary. Nor had he taken to this industry as a resource in age, when the genial flow of invention had dried up, and original composition had ceased to be in his power. The three folio volumes of MS. which Milton left were the work of his youth; it was a work which the loss of eyesight of necessity put an end to. It is not Milton only, but all students who read with an alert mind, reading to grow, and not to remember, who have felt the want of an occupation which shall fill those hours when mental vigilance is impossible, and vacuity unendurable. Index-making or cataloguing has been the resource of many in such hours. But it was not, I think, as a mere shifting of mental posture that Milton undertook to rewrite Robert Stephens; it was as part of his language training. Only by diligent practice and incessant exercise of attention and care, could Milton have educated his susceptibility to the specific power of words, to the nicety which he attained beyond any other of our poets. Part of this education is recorded in the seemingly withered leaves of his Latin Thesaurus, though the larger part must have been achieved,

not by a reflective and critical collection of examples, but by a vital and impassioned reading.

Milton's complaint was what the profession of that day called gout. "He would be very cheerful even in his gout fits, and sing," says Aubrey. This gout returned again and again, and by these repeated attacks wore out his resisting power. He died of the "gout struck in," on Sunday, 8th November, 1674, and was buried, near his father, in the chancel of St. Giles's, Cripplegate. The funeral was attended, Toland says, "by all his learned and great friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the vulgar." The disgusting profanation of the leaden coffin, and dispersion of the poet's bones by the parochial authorities, during the repair of the church in August, 1790, has been denied, but it is to be feared that the fact is too true.

CHAPTER XIII.

PARADISE LOST—PARADISE REGAINED—SAMSON AGONISTES.

"MANY men of forty," it has been said, "are dead poets;" and it might seem that Milton, Latin secretary, and party pamphleteer, had died to poetry about the fatal age. In 1645, when he made a gathering of his early pieces for the volume published by Humphry Moseley, he wanted three years of forty. That volume contained, besides other things, *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso;* then, when produced, as they remain to this day, the finest flower of English poesy. But, though thus like a wary husbandman, garnering his sheaves in presence of the threatening storm, Milton had no intention of bidding farewell to poetry. On the contrary, he regarded this volume only as first-fruits, an earnest of greater things to come.

The ruling idea of Milton's life, and the key to his mental history, is his resolve to produce a great poem. Not that the aspiration in itself is singular, for it is probably shared by every young poet in his turn. As every clever school-boy is destined by himself or his friends to become Lord Chancellor, and every private in the French army carries in his haversack the baton of a marshal, so it is a necessary ingredient of the dream on Parnassus, that it should embody itself in a form of surpassing brilliance.

What distinguishes Milton from the crowd of young ambition, "audax juventa," is the constancy of resolve. He not only nourished through manhood the dream of youth, keeping under the importunate instincts which carry off most ambitions in middle life into the pursuit of place, profit, honour—the thorns which spring up and smother the wheat—but carried out his dream in its integrity in old age. He formed himself for this achievement, and for no other. Study at home, travel abroad, the arena of political controversy, the public service, the practice of the domestic virtues, were so many parts of the schooling which was to make a poet.

The reader who has traced with me thus far the course of Milton's mental development will perhaps be ready to believe that this idea had taken entire possession of his mind from a very early age. The earliest written record of it is of date 1632, in Sonnet II. This was written as early as the poet's twenty-third year; and in these lines the resolve is uttered, not as then just conceived, but as one long brooded upon, and its non-fulfilment matter of self-reproach.

If this sonnet stood alone, its relevance to a poetical, or even a literary performance, might be doubtful. But at the time of its composition it is enclosed in a letter to an unnamed friend, who seems to have been expressing his surprise that the Cambridge B.A. was not settling himself, now that his education was complete, to a profession. Milton's apologetic letter is extant, and was printed by Birch in 1738. It intimates that Milton did not consider his education, for the purposes he had in view, as anything like complete. It is not "the endless delight of speculation," but "a religious advisement how best to undergo; not taking thought of being late, so it give advantage to

be more fit." He repudiates the love of learning for its own sake; knowledge is not an end, it is only equipment for performance. There is here no specific engagement as to the nature of the performance. But what it is to be, is suggested by the enclosure of the "Petrarchian stanza" (*i. e.*, the sonnet). This notion that his life was, like Samuel's, a dedicated life, dedicated to a service which required a long probation, recurs again more than once in his writings. It is emphatically repeated, in 1641, in a passage of the pamphlet No. 4:

"None hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit none shall—that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and full license will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs. Till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation, from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them."

In 1638, at the age of nine and twenty, Milton has already determined that this lifework shall be a poem, an epic poem, and that its subject shall probably be the Arthurian legend.

"Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,
Aut dicam invictæ sociali fœdere mensæ

Magnanimos heroas, et, o modo spiritus adsit!
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub marte phalangas."

"May I find such a friend . . . . when, if ever, I shall revive in song our native princes, and among them Arthur moving to the fray even in the nether world, and when I will, if only God's Spirit aid me, break the Saxon bands before our Britons' prowess."

The same announcement is reproduced in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, 1639, and, in Pamphlet No. 4, in the often-quoted words:

"Perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty, or thereabout, met with acceptance, . . . I began to assent to them (the Italians) and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes as they should not willingly let it die."

Between the publication of the collected *Poems* in 1645, and the appearance of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, a period of twenty-seven years, Milton gave no public sign of redeeming this pledge. He seemed to his cotemporaries to have renounced the follies of his youth, the gewgaws of verse, and to have sobered down into the useful citizen. "Le bon poëte," thought Malherbe, "n'est pas plus utile à l'état qu'un bon joueur de quilles." Milton had postponed his poem, in 1641, till "the land had once enfranchished herself from this impertinent yoke of prelatry, under whose inquisitorious and tyrannical duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish." Prelatry was swept away, and he asked for further remand on account of the war. Peace was concluded, the country was settled under the strong government of a Protector, and Milton's great work did not appear. It was not even preparing.

He was writing not poetry but prose, and that most ephemeral and valueless kind of prose, pamphlets, extempore articles on the topics of the day. He poured out reams of them, in simple unconsciousness that they had no influence whatever on the current of events.

Nor was it that, during these five-and-twenty years, Milton was meditating in secret what he could not bring forward in public; that he was only holding back from publishing, because there was no public ready to listen to his song. In these years Milton was neither writing nor thinking poetry. Of the twenty-four sonnets, indeed—twenty-four, reckoning the twenty-lined piece, "The forcers of conscience," as a sonnet—eleven belong to this period. But they do not form a continuous series, such as do Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, nor do they evince a sustained mood of poetical meditation. On the contrary, their very force and beauty consist in their being the momentary and spontaneous explosion of an emotion welling up from the depths of the soul, and forcing itself into metrical expression, as it were, in spite of the writer. While the first eight sonnets, written before 1645, are sonnets of reminiscence and intention, like those of the Italians, or the ordinary English sonnet, the eleven sonnets of Milton's silent period—from 1645 to 1658—are records of present feeling kindled by actual facts. In their naked, unadorned simplicity of language, they may easily seem, to a reader fresh from Petrarch, to be homely and prosaic. Place them in relation to the circumstance on which each piece turns, and we begin to feel the superiority for poetic effect of real emotion over emotion meditated and revived. History has in it that which can touch us more abidingly than any fiction. It is this actuality which distinguishes the sonnets of Milton from any other

sonnets. Of this difference Wordsworth was conscious when he struck out the phrase, "In his hand the *thing became* a trump." Macaulay compared the sonnets in their majestic severity to the collects. They remind us of a Hebrew psalm, with its undisguised outrush of rage, revenge, exultation, or despair, where nothing is due to art or artifice, and whose poetry is the expression of the heart, and not a branch of literature. It is in the sonnets we most realise the force of Wordsworth's image—

"Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea."

We are not then to look in the sonnets for latent traces of the suspended poetic creation. They come from the other side of Milton's nature, the political, not the artistic. They are akin to the prose pamphlets, not to *Paradise Lost*. Just when the sonnets end, the composition of the epic was taken in hand. The last of the sonnets (23 in the ordinary numeration) was written in 1658; and it was to the same year that our authority, Aubrey-Phillips, refers his beginning to occupy himself with *Paradise Lost*. He had by this time settled the two points about which he had been long in doubt, the subject and the form. Long before bringing himself to the point of composition, he had decided upon the fall of man as subject, and upon the narrative, or epic, form, in preference to the dramatic. It is even possible that a few isolated passages of the poem, as it now stands, may have been written before. Of one such passage we have Aubrey's assurance that it was written fifteen or sixteen years before 1658, and while he was still contemplating a drama. The lines are Satan's speech, *P. L.* iv. 32, beginning—

"O, thou that with surpassing glory crowned."

These lines, Phillips says, his uncle recited to him, as forming the opening of his tragedy. They are modelled, as the classical reader will perceive, upon Euripides. Possibly they were not intended for the very first lines, since if Milton intended to follow the practice of his model, the lofty lyrical tone of this address should have been introduced by a prosaic matter-of-fact setting forth of the situation, as in the Euripidean prologue. There are other passages in the poem which have the air of being insitious in the place where they stand. The lines in Book iv., now in question, may reasonably be referred to 1640–42, the date of those leaves in the Trinity College MS., in which Milton has written down, with his own hand, various sketches of tragedies, which might possibly be adopted as his final choice.

A passage in *The Reason of Church Government*, written at the same period, 1641, gives us the fullest account of his hesitation. It was a hesitation caused partly by the wealth of matter which his reading suggested to him, partly by the consciousness that he ought not to begin in haste while each year was ripening his powers. Every one who has undertaken a work of any length has made the experience, that the faculty of composition will not work with ease until the reason is satisfied that the subject chosen is a congenial one. Gibbon has told us himself the many periods of history upon which he tried his pen, even after the memorable 15th October, 1764, when he "sate musing amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter." We know how many sketches of possible tragedies Racine would make before he could adopt one as the appropriate theme, on which he could work with that thorough enjoyment of the labor, which is necessary to give life

and verve to any creation, whether of the poet or the orator.

The leaves of the Trinity College MS., which are cotemporary with his confidence to the readers of his tract *Of Church Government*, exhibit a list of nearly one hundred subjects, which had occurred to him from time to time as practicable subjects. From the mode of entry we see that, already in 1641, a scriptural was likely to have the preference over a profane subject, and that among scriptural subjects *Paradise Lost* (the familiar title appears in this early note) stands out prominently above the next. The historical subjects are all taken from native history, none are foreign, and all from the time before the Roman conquest. The scriptural subjects are partly from the Old, partly from the New, Testament. Some of these subjects are named and nothing more, while others are slightly sketched out. Among these latter are *Baptistes*, on the death of John the Baptist; and *Christus Patiens*, apparently to be confined to the agony in the garden. Of *Paradise Lost* there are four drafts in greater detail than any of the others. These drafts of the plot or action, though none of them that which was finally adopted, are sufficiently near to the action of the poem as it stands, to reveal to us the fact that the author's imaginative conception of what he intended to produce was generated, cast, and moulded at a comparatively early age. The commonly received notion, therefore, with which authors, as they age, are wont to comfort themselves, that one of the greatest feats of original invention achieved by man was begun after fifty, must be thus far modified. *Paradise Lost* was *composed* after fifty, but was *conceived* at thirty-two. Hence the high degree of perfection realised in the total result. For there were combined to produce it the opposite virtues of two

distinct periods of mental development; the daring imagination and fresh emotional play of early manhood, with the exercised judgment and chastened taste of ripened years. We have regarded the twenty-five years of Milton's life between 1641 and the commencement of *Paradise Lost*, as time ill laid out upon inferior work which any one could do, and which was not worth doing by any one. Yet it may be made a question if in any other mode than by adjournment of his early design, Milton could have attained to that union of original strength with severe restraint, which distinguishes from all other poetry, except that of Virgil, the three great poems of his old age. If the fatigue of age is sometimes felt in *Paradise Regained*, we feel in *Paradise Lost* only (in the words of Chateaubriand), "la maturité de l'âge à travers les passions des légères années; une charme extraordinaire de vieillesse et de jeunesse."

A still further inference is warranted by the Trinity College jottings of 1641. Not the critics merely, but readers ready to sympathise, have been sometimes inclined to wish that Milton had devoted his power to a more human subject, in which the poet's invention could have had freer play, and for which his reader's interest could have been more ready. And it has been thought that the choice of a Biblical subject indicates the narrowing effect of age, adversity, and blindness combined. We now know that the Fall was the theme, if not determined on, at least predominant in Milton's thoughts, at the age of thirty-two. His ripened judgment only approved a selection made in earlier years, and in days full of hope. That in selecting a scriptural subject he was not in fact exercising any choice, but was determined by his circumstances, is only what must be said of all choosing. With all his originality, Mil-

ton was still a man of his age. A Puritan poet, in a Puritan environment, could not have done otherwise. But even had choice been in his power, it is doubtful if he would have had the same success with a subject taken from history.

First, looking at his public. He was to write in English. This, which had at one time been matter of doubt, had at an early stage come to be his decision. Nor had the choice of English been made for the sake of popularity, which he despised. He did not desire to write for the many, but for the few. But he was enthusiastically patriotic. He had entire contempt for the shouts of the mob, but the English nation, as embodied in the persons of the wise and good, he honoured and reverenced with all the depth of his nature. It was for the sake of his nation that he was to devote his life to a work, which was to ennoble her tongue among the languages of Europe.

He was then to write in English, for the English, not popularly, but nationally. This resolution at once limited his subject. He who aspires to be the poet of a nation is bound to adopt a hero who is already dear to that people, to choose a subject and characters which are already familiar to them. This is no rule of literary art arbitrarily enacted by the critics, it is a dictate of reason, and has been the practice of all the great national poets. The more obvious examples will occur to every reader. But it may be observed that even the Greek tragedians, who addressed a more limited audience than the epic poets, took their plots from the best known legends touching the fortunes of the royal houses of the Hellenic race. Now to the English reader of the seventeenth century — and the same holds good to this day—there were only two cycles of persons and events sufficiently known beforehand to ad-

mit of being assumed by a poet. He must go either to the Bible, or to the annals of England. Thus far Milton's choice of subject was limited by the consideration of the public for whom he wrote.

Secondly, he was still farther restricted by a condition which the nature of his own intelligence imposed upon himself. It was necessary for Milton that the events and personages, which were to arouse and detain his interests, should be real events and personages. The mere play of fancy with the pretty aspects of things could not satisfy him; he wanted to feel beneath him a substantial world of reality. He had not the dramatist's imagination which can body forth fictitious characters with such life-like reality that it can and does itself believe in their existence. Macaulay has truly said that Milton's genius is lyrical, not dramatic. His lyre will only echo real emotion, and his imagination is only stirred by real circumstances. In his youth he had been within the fascination of the romances of chivalry, as well in their original form as in the reproductions of Ariosto and Spenser. While under this influence, he had thought of seeking his subject among the heroes of these lays of old minstrelsy. And as one of his principles was that his hero must be a national hero, it was of course upon the Arthurian cycle that his aspiration fixed. When he did so, he no doubt believed at least the historical existence of Arthur. As soon, however, as he came to understand the fabulous basis of the Arthurian legend, it became unfitted for his use. In the Trinity College MS. of 1641, Arthur has already disappeared from the list of possible subjects—a list which contains thirty-eight suggestions of names from British or Saxon history, such as Vortigern, Edward the Confessor, Harold, Macbeth, &c. While he demanded the basis of reality for his per-

sonages, with a true instinct he at the same time rejected all that fell within the period of well-ascertained history. He made the Conquest the lower limit of his choice. In this negative decision against historical romance we recognise Milton's judgment, and his correct estimate of his own powers. Those who have been thought to succeed best in engrafting fiction upon history, Shakspeare or Walter Scott, have been eminently human poets, and have achieved their measure of success by investing some well-known name with the attributes of ordinary humanity such as we all know it. This was precisely what Milton could not have done. He had none of that sympathy with which Shakspeare embraced all natural and common affections of his brother men. Milton, burning as he did with a consuming fire of passion, and yearning for rapt communion with select souls, had withal an aloofness from ordinary men and women, and a proud disdain of commonplace joy and sorrow, which has led hasty biographers and critics to represent him as hard, austere—an iron man of iron mould. This want of interest in common life disqualified him for the task of revivifying historic scenes.

Milton's mental constitution, then, demanded, in the material upon which it was to work, a combination of qualities such as very few subjects could offer. The events and personages must be real and substantial, for he could not occupy himself seriously with airy nothings and creatures of pure fancy. Yet they must not be such events and personages as history had portrayed to us with well-known characters, and all their virtues, faults, foibles, and peculiarities. And, lastly, it was requisite that they should be the common property and the familiar interest of a wide circle of English readers.

These being the conditions required in the subject, it is obvious that no choice was left to the poet in the England of the seventeenth century but a biblical subject. And among the many picturesque episodes which the Hebrew Scriptures present, the narrative of the Fall stands out with a character of all-embracing comprehensiveness which belongs to no other single event in the Jewish annals. The first section of the Book of Genesis clothes in a dramatic form the dogmatic idea from which was developed in the course of the ages the whole scheme of Judaico-Christian anthropology. In this world-drama, Heaven above and Hell beneath, the powers of light and those of darkness are both brought upon the scene in conflict with each other, over the fate of the inhabitants of our globe—a minute ball of matter suspended between two infinities. This gigantic and unmanageable material is so completely mastered by the poet's imagination, that we are made to feel at one and the same time the petty dimensions of our earth in comparison with primordial space and almighty power, and the profound import to us of the issue depending on the conflict. Other poets, of inferior powers, have from time to time attempted, with different degrees of success, some of the minor Scriptural histories: Bodmer, the Noachian Deluge; Solomon Gessner, the Death of Abel, &c. And Milton himself, after he had spent his full strength upon his greater theme, recurred in *Samson Agonistes* to one such episode, which he had deliberately set aside before, as not giving verge enough for the sweep of his soaring conception.

These considerations duly weighed, it will be found that the subject of the Fall of Man was not so much Milton's choice as his necessity. Among all the traditions of the peoples of the earth, there is not extant another

story which could have been adequate to his demands. Biographers may have been somewhat misled by his speaking of himself as "long choosing and beginning late." He did not begin till 1658, when he was already fifty, and it has been somewhat hastily inferred that he did not choose till the date at which he began. But, as we have seen, he had already chosen at least as early as 1642, when the plan of a drama on the subject, and under the title of *Paradise Lost*, was fully developed. In the interval between 1642 and 1658, he changed the form from a drama to an epic, but his choice remained unaltered. And as the address to the sun (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 32) was composed at the earlier of these dates, it appears that he had already formulated even the rhythm and cadence of the poem that was to be.

I have said that this subject of the Fall was Milton's necessity, being the only subject which his mind, "in the spacious circuits of her musing," found large enough. But as it was no abrupt or arbitrary choice, so it was not forced upon him from without, in the way in which the *Deeds of the Roman People* (*Gesta Populi Romani*) were forced upon the reluctant Virgil. We must again remind ourselves that Milton had a Calvinistic bringing up. And Calvinism in pious Puritan souls of that fervent age was not the attenuated creed of the eighteenth century, the Calvinism which went not beyond the personal gratification of safety for myself, and for the rest damnation. When Milton was being reared, Calvinism was not old and effete, a mere doctrine. It was a living system of thought, and one which carried the mind upwards towards the Eternal will, rather than downwards towards my personal security. Keble has said of the old Catholic views, founded on sacramental symbolism, that they are more

poetical than any others in the church. But it must be acknowledged that a predestinarian scheme, leading the cogitation upwards to dwell upon "the heavenly things before the foundation of the world," opens a conception and poetical framework with which none other in the whole cycle of human thought can compare. Not election and reprobation as set out in the petty chicanery of Calvin's *Institutes*, but the prescience of absolute wisdom revolving all the possibilities of time, space, and matter. Poetry has been defined as "the suggestion of noble grounds for the noble emotions," and, in this respect, none of the world-epics—there are at most five such in existence—can compete with *Paradise Lost*. The melancholy pathos of Lucretius, indeed, pierces the heart with a two-edged sword more keen than Milton's, but the compass of Lucretius' horizon is much less, being limited to this earth and its inhabitants. The horizon of *Paradise Lost* is not narrower than all space, its chronology not shorter than eternity; the globe of our earth a mere spot in the physical universe, and that universe itself a drop suspended in the infinite empyrean. His aspiration had thus reached "one of the highest arcs that human contemplation circling upwards can make from the glassy sea whereon she stands" (*Doctr. and Disc.*). Like his contemporary Pascal, his mind had beaten her wings against the prison walls of human thought.

The vastness of the scheme of *Paradise Lost* may become more apparent to us if we remark that, within its embrace, there seems to be equal place for both the systems of physical astronomy which were current in the seventeenth century. In England, about the time *Paradise Lost* was being written, the Copernican theory, which placed the sun in the centre of our system, was already

the established belief of the few well-informed. The old Ptolemaic or Alphonsine system, which explained the phenomena on the hypothesis of nine (or ten) transparent hollow spheres wheeling round the stationary earth, was still the received astronomy of ordinary people. These two beliefs, the one based on science, though still wanting the calculation which Newton was to supply to make it demonstrative, the other supported by the tradition of ages, were, at the time we speak of, in presence of each other in the public mind. They are in presence of each other also in Milton's epic. And the systems confront each other in the poem, in much the same relative position which they occupy in the mind of the public. The ordinary, habitual mode of speaking of celestial phenomena is Ptolemaic (see *Paradise Lost*, vii. 339 ; iii. 481). The conscious, or doctrinal, exposition of the same phenomena is Copernican (see *Paradise Lost*, viii. 122). Sharp as is the contrast between the two systems, the one being the direct contradictory of the other, they are lodged together, not harmonised, within the vast circuit of the poet's imagination. The precise mechanism of an object so little as is our world in comparison with the immense totality may be justly disregarded. "De minimis non curat poeta." In the universe of being the difference between a heliocentric and a geocentric theory of our solar system is of as small moment as the reconcilement of fixed fate, free-will foreknowledge absolute is in the realm of absolute intelligence. The one is the frivolous pastime of devils ; the other the Great Architect

> "Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move
> His laughter at their quaint opinions wide."

As one, and the principal, inconsistency in Milton's pre-

sentment of his matter has now been mentioned, a general remark may be made upon the conceptual incongruities in *Paradise Lost*. The poem abounds in such, and the critics, from Addison downwards, have busied themselves in finding out more and more of them. Milton's geography of the world is as obscure and untenable as that of Herodotus. The notes of time cannot stand together. To give an example: Eve says (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 449)—

> "That day I oft remember, when from sleep
> I first awak'd."

But in the chronology of the poem, Adam himself, whose creation preceded that of Eve, was but three days old at the time this reminiscence is repeated to him. The mode in which the Son of God is spoken of is not either consistent Athanasianism or consistent Arianism. Above all, there is an incessant confusion of material and immaterial in the acts ascribed to the angels. Dr. Johnson, who wished for consistency, would have had it preserved "by keeping immateriality out of sight." And a general arraignment has been laid against Milton of a vagueness and looseness of imagery, which contrasts unfavourably with the vivid and precise detail of other poets—of Homer or of Dante, for example.

Now first, it must be said that Milton is not one of the poets of inaccurate imagination. He could never, like Scott, have let the precise picture of the swan on "still Saint Mary's lake" slip into the namby-pamby "sweet Saint Mary's lake." When he intends a picture, he is unmistakably distinct; his outline is firm and hard. But he is not often intending pictures. He is not, like Dante, always seeing—he is mostly thinking in a dream, or as Coleridge best expressed it, he is not a picturesque, but a

musical poet. The pictures in *Paradise Lost* are like the paintings on the walls of some noble hall—only part of the total magnificence. He did not aim at that finish of minute parts in which each bit fits into every other. For it was only in this way that the theme he had chosen could be handled at all. The impression of vastness, the sense that everything, as Bishop Butler says, "runs up into infinity," would have been impaired if he had drawn attention to the details of his figures. Had he had upon his canvas only a single human incident, with ordinary human agents, he would have known, as well as other far inferior artists, how to secure perfection of illusion by exactness of detail. But he had undertaken to present, not the world of human experience, but a supernatural world, peopled by supernatural beings, God and his Son, angels and archangels, devils; a world in which Sin and Death may be personified without palpable absurdity. Even his one human pair are exceptional beings, from whom we are prepared not to demand conformity to the laws of life which now prevail in our world. Had he presented all these spiritual personages in definite form to the eye, the result would have been degradation. We should have had the ridiculous instead of the sublime, as in the scene of the *Iliad*, where Diomede wounds Aphrodite in the hand, and sends her crying home to her father. Once or twice Milton has ventured too near the limit of material adaptation, trying to explain *how* angelic natures subsist, as in the passage (*Paradise Lost*, v. 405) where Raphael tells Adam that angels eat and digest food like man. Taste here receives a shock, because the incongruity, which before was latent, is forced upon our attention. We are threatened with being transported out of the conventional world of Heaven, Hell, Chaos, and Paradise, to which we had well adapted

ourselves, into the real world in which we know that such beings could not breathe and move.

For the world of *Paradise Lost* is an ideal, conventional world, quite as much as the world of the *Arabian Nights*, or the world of the chivalrous romance, or that of the pastoral novel. Not only dramatic, but all, poetry is founded on illusion. We must, though it be but for the moment, suppose it true. We must be transported out of the actual world into that world in which the given scene is laid. It is chiefly the business of the poet to effect this transportation, but the reader (or hearer) must aid. "Willst du Dichter ganz verstehen, musst in Dichter's Lande gehen." If the reader's imagination is not active enough to assist the poet, he must at least not resist him. When we are once inside the poet's heaven, our critical faculty may justly require that what takes place there shall be consistent with itself, with the laws of that fantastic world. But we may not begin by objecting that it is impossible that such a world should exist. If, in any age, the power of imagination is enfeebled, the reader becomes more unable to make this effort; he ceases to co-operate with the poet. Much of the criticism which we meet with on *Paradise Lost* resolves itself into a refusal on the part of the critic to make that initial abandonment to the conditions which the poet demands; a determination to insist that his heaven, peopled with deities, dominations, principalities, and powers, shall have the same material laws which govern our planetary system. It is not, as we often hear it said, that the critical faculty is unduly developed in the nineteenth century. It is that the imaginative faculty fails us; and when that is the case, criticism is powerless—it has no fundamental assumption upon which its judgments can proceed.

It is the triumph of Milton's skill to have made his ideal world actual, if not to every English mind's eye, yet to a larger number than have ever been reached by any other poetry in our language. Popular (in the common use of the word) Milton has not been, and cannot be. But the world he created has taken possession of the public mind. Huxley complains that the false cosmogony, which will not yield to the conclusions of scientific research, is derived from the seventh book of *Paradise Lost*, rather than from Genesis. This success Milton owes partly to his selection of his subject, partly to his skill in handling it. In his handling, he presents his spiritual existences with just so much relief as to endow them with life and personality, and not with that visual distinctness which would at once reveal their spectral immateriality, and so give a shock to the illusion. We might almost say of his personages that they are shapes, "if shape it might be called that shape had none." By his art of suggestion by association, he does all he can to aid us to realise his agents, and at the moment when distinctness would disturb, he withdraws the object into a mist, and so disguises the incongruities which he could not avoid. The tact that avoids difficulties inherent in the nature of things is an art which gets the least appreciation either in life or in literature. But if we would have some measure of the skill which in *Paradise Lost* has made impossible beings possible to the imagination, we may find it in contrasting them with the incarnated abstraction and spirit voices, which we encounter at every turn in Shelley, creatures who leave behind them no more distinct impression than that we have been in a dream peopled with ghosts. Shelley, too,

> "Voyag'd th' unreal, vast, unbounded deep
> Of horrible confusion."—*Paradise Lost*, x. 470,

and left it the chaos which he found it. Milton has elicited from similar elements a conception so life-like that his poetical version has inseparably grafted itself upon, if it has not taken the place of, the historical narrative of the original creation.

So much Milton has effected by his skilful treatment. But the illusion was greatly facilitated by his choice of subject. He had not to create his supernatural personages, they were already there. The Father and the Son, the Angels, Satan, Baal and Moloch, Adam and Eve, were in full possession of the popular imagination, and more familiar to it than any other set of known names. Nor was the belief accorded to them a half belief, a bare admission of their possible existence, such as prevails at other times or in some countries. In the England of Milton, the angels and devils of the Jewish Scriptures were more real beings, and better vouched than any historical personages could be. The old chronicles were full of lies, but this was Bible truth. There might very likely have been a Henry VIII., and he might have been such as he is described, but at any rate he was dead and gone, while Satan still lived and walked the earth, the identical Satan who had deceived Eve.

Nor was it only to the poetic public that his personages were real, true, and living beings. The poet himself believes as entirely in their existence as did his readers. I insist upon this point, because one of the first of living critics has declared of *Paradise Lost* that it is a poem in which every artifice of invention is consciously employed, not a single fact being, for an instant, conceived as tenable by any living faith. (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 138.) On the contrary, we shall not rightly apprehend either the poetry or the character of the poet until we feel that

throughout *Paradise Lost*, as in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, Milton felt himself to be standing on the sure ground of fact and reality. It was not in Milton's nature to be a showman, parading before an audience a phantasmagoria of spirits, which he himself knew to be puppets tricked up for the entertainment of an idle hour. We are told by Lockhart, that the old man who told the story of Gilpin Horner to Lady Dalkeith *bonâ fide* believed the existence of the elf. Lady Dalkeith repeated the tale to Walter Scott, who worked it up with consummate skill into the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. This is a case of a really believed legend of diablerie becoming the source of a literary fiction. Scott neither believed in the reality of the goblin page himself, nor expected his readers to believe it. He could not rise beyond the poetry of amusement, and no poetry with only this motive can ever be more than literary art.

Other than this was Milton's conception of his own function. Of the fashionable verse, such as was written in the Caroline age, or in any age, he disapproved, not only because it was imperfect art, but because it was untrue utterance. Poems that were raised "from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar encomiast, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite," were in his eyes treachery to the poet's high vocation.

"Poetical powers 'are the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed . . . in every nation, and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbation of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing vic-

torious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship.'"

So he had written in 1642, and this lofty faith in his calling supported him twenty years later, in the arduous labour of his attempt to realise his own ideal. In setting himself down to compose *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, he regarded himself not as an author, but as a medium, the mouth-piece of "that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and all knowledge: Urania, heavenly muse," visits him nightly,

> "And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse."—*Paradise Lost*, ix. 24.

Urania bestows the flowing words and musical sweetness; to God's Spirit he looks to

> "Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight."—*Paradise Lost*, iii. 50.

The singers with whom he would fain equal himself are not Dante, or Tasso, or, as Dryden would have it, Spenser, but

> "Blind Thamyris, and blind Mœonides,
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old."

As he is equalled with these in misfortune—loss of sight—he would emulate them in function. Orpheus and Musæus are the poets he would fain have as the companions of his midnight meditation (*Penseroso*). And the function of the poet is like those of the prophet in the old dispensation, not to invent, but to utter. It is God's truth

which passes his lips—lips hallowed by the touch of sacred fire. He is the passive instrument through whom flowed the emanation from on high; his words were not his own, but a suggestion. Even for style he was indebted to his "celestial patroness who deigns her nightly visitation unimplor'd."

Milton was not dependent upon a dubious tradition in the subject he had selected. Man's fall and recovery were recorded in the Scriptures. And the two media of truth, the internal and the external, as deriving from the same source, must needs be in harmony. That the Spirit enlightens the mind within, in this belief the Puritan saint, the poet, and the prophet, who all met in Milton, were at one. That the Old Testament Scriptures were also a revelation from God, was an article of faith which he had never questioned. Nor did he only receive these books as conveying in substance a divine view of the world's history, he regarded them as in the letter a transcript of fact.

If the poet-prophet would tell the story of creation or redemption, he is thus restrained not only by the general outline and imagery of the Bible, but by its very words. And here we must note the skill of the poet in surmounting an added or artificial difficulty, in the subject he had chosen as combined with his notion of inspiration. He must not deviate in a single syllable from the words of the Hebrew books. He must take up into his poem the whole of the sacred narrative. This he must do, not merely because his readers would expect such literal accuracy from him, but because to himself that narrative was the very truth which he was undertaking to deliver. The additions which his fancy or inspiration might supply must be restrained by this severe law, they should be such as to aid the reader's imagination to conceive how the event took

place. They must by no means be suffered to alter, disfigure, traduce the substance or the letter of the revelation. This is what Milton has done. He has told the story of creation in the very words of Scripture. The whole of the seventh book is little more than a paraphrase of a few verses of Genesis. What he has added is so little incongruous with his original, that most English men and women would probably have some difficulty in discriminating in recollection the part they derive from Moses, from that which they have added from the paraphrast. In Genesis it is the serpent who tempts Eve, in virtue of his natural wiliness. In Milton it is Satan who has entered into the body of a serpent, and supplied the intelligence. Here, indeed, Milton was only adopting a gloss, as ancient at least as the Book of Wisdom (ii. 24). But it is the gloss, and not the text of Moses, which is in possession of our minds, and who has done most to lodge it there, Milton or the commentators? Again, it is Milton and not Moses who makes the serpent pluck and eat the first apple from the tree. But Bp. Wilson comments upon the words of Genesis (iii. 6) as though they contained this purely Miltonic circumstance.

It could hardly but be that one or two of the incidents which Milton has supplied, the popular imagination has been unable to homologate. Such an incident is the placing of artillery in the wars in heaven. We reject this suggestion, and find it mars probability. But it would not seem so improbable to Milton's cotemporaries, not only because it was an article of the received poetic tradition (see *Ronsard* 6, p. 40), as because fire-arms had not quite ceased to be regarded as a devilish enginery of a new warfare, unfair in the knightly code of honour, a base substitute of mechanism for individual valour. It was gun-

powder and not *Don Quixote* which had destroyed the age of chivalry.

Another of Milton's fictions which has been found too grotesque is the change (*P. L.*, x. 508) of the demons into serpents, who hiss their Prince on his return from his embassy. Here it is not, I think, so much the unnatural character of the incident itself, as its gratuitousness which offends. It does not help us to conceive the situation. A suggestion of Chateaubriand may, therefore, go some way towards reconciling the reader even to this caprice of imagination. It indicates, he says, the degradation of Satan, who, from the superb Intelligence of the early scenes of the poem, is become at its close a hideous reptile. He has not triumphed, but has failed, and is degraded into the old dragon, who haunts among the damned. The bruising of his head has already commenced.

The bridge, again, which Sin and Death construct (*Paradise Lost*, x. 300), leading from the mouth of hell to the wall of the world, has a chilling effect upon the imagination of a modern reader. It does not assist the conception of the cosmical system which we accept in the earlier books. This clumsy fiction seems more at home in the grotesque and lawless mythology of the Turks, or in the Persian poet Sadi, who is said by Marmontel to have adopted it from the Turk. If Milton's intention were to reproduce Jacob's ladder, he should, like Dante (*Parad.* xxi. 25), have made it the means of communication between heaven and earth.

It is possible that Milton himself, after the experiment of *Paradise Lost* was fully before him, suspected that he had supplemented too much for his purpose; that his imagery, which was designed to illustrate history, might stand in its light. For in the composition of *Paradise Regained*

(published 1671) he has adopted a much severer style. In this poem he has not only curbed his imagination, but has almost suppressed it. He has amplified, but has hardly introduced any circumstance which is not in the original. *Paradise Regained* is little more than a paraphrase of the Temptation as found in the synoptical gospels. It is a marvel of ingenuity that more than two thousand lines of blank verse can have been constructed out of some twenty lines of prose, without the addition of any invented incident, or the insertion of any irrelevant digression. In the first three books of *Paradise Regained* there is not a single simile. Nor yet can it be said that the version of the gospel narrative has the fault of most paraphrases, viz., that of weakening the effect, and obliterating the chiselled features of the original. Let a reader take *Paradise Regained* not as a theme used as a canvas for poetical embroidery, an opportunity for an author to show off his powers of writing, but as a *bonâ fide* attempt to impress upon the mind the story of the Temptation, and he will acknowledge the concealed art of the genuine epic poet, bent before all things upon telling his tale. It will still be capable of being alleged that the story told does not interest; that the composition is dry, hard, barren; the style as of set purpose divested of the attributes of poetry. It is not necessary, indeed, that an epic should be in twelve books; but we do demand in an epic poem multiplicity of character and variety of incident. In *Paradise Regained* there are only two personages, both of whom are supernatural. Indeed, they can scarcely be called personages; the poet, in his fidelity to the letter, not having thought fit to open up the fertile vein of delineation which was afforded by the human character of Christ. The speakers are no more than the abstract principles of good and evil, two voices

who hold a rhetorical disputation through four books and two thousand lines.

The usual explanation of the frigidity of *Paradise Regained* is the suggestion, which is nearest at hand, viz., that it is the effect of age. Like Ben Jonson's *New Inn*, it betrays the feebleness of senility, and has one of the most certain marks of that stage of authorship, the attempt to imitate himself in those points in which he was once strong. "When glad no more, He wears a face of joy, because He has been glad of yore." Or it is an "œuvre de lassitude," a continuation, with the inevitable defect of continuations, that of preserving the forms and wanting the soul of the original, like the second parts of *Faust*, of *Don Quixote*, and so many other books.

Both these explanations of the inferiority of *Paradise Regained* have probability. Either of them may be true, or both may have concurred to the common effect. In favour of the hypothesis of senility is the fact, recorded by Phillips, that Milton "could not hear with patience any such thing when related to him." The reader will please to note that this is the original statement, which the critics have improved into the statement that he preferred *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost*. But his approval of his work, even if it did not amount to preference, looks like the old man's fondness for his youngest and weakest offspring.

Another view of the matter, however, is at least possible. Milton's theory as to the true mode of handling a biblical subject was, as I have said, to add no more dressing, or adventitious circumstance, than should assist the conception of the sacred verity. After he had executed *Paradise Lost*, the suspicion arose that he had been too indulgent to his imagination; that he had created too much.

He would make a second experiment, in which he would enforce his theory with more vigour. In the composition of *Paradise Lost* he must have experienced that the constraint he imposed upon himself had generated, as was said of Racine, "a plenitude of soul." He might infer that, were the compression carried still further, the reaction of the spirit might be still increased. Poetry, he had said long before, should be "simple, sensuous, impassioned" (*Tractate of Education*). Nothing enhances passion like simplicity. So in *Paradise Regained* Milton has carried simplicity of dress to the verge of nakedness. It is probably the most unadorned poem extant in any language. He has pushed severe abstinence to the extreme point, possibly beyond the point, where a reader's power is stimulated by the poet's parsimony.

It may elucidate the intention of the author of *Paradise Regained*, if we contrast it for a moment with a poem constructed upon the opposite principle, that, viz., of the maximum of adornment. Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine* (A.D. 400) is one of the most rich and elaborate poems ever written. It has in common with Milton the circumstance that its whole action is contained in a solitary event, viz., the carrying off of Proserpine from the vale of Henna by Pluto. All the personages, too, are superhuman; and the incident itself supernatural. Claudian's ambition was to overlay his story with the gold and jewellery of expression and invention. Nothing is named without being carved, decked, and coloured from the inexhaustible resources of the poet's treasury. This is not done with ostentatious pomp, like the hyperbolical heroes of vulgar novelists, but always with taste, which though lavish is discriminating.

Milton, like Wordsworth, urged his theory of parsimony

further in practice than he would have done had he not been possessed by a spirit of protest against prevailing error. Milton's own ideal was the chiselled austerity of Greek tragedy. But he was impelled to overdo the system of holding back, by his desire to challenge the evil spirit which was abroad. He would separate himself not only from the Clevelands, the Denhams, and the Drydens, whom he did not account as poets at all, but even from the Spenserians. Thus, instead of severe, he became rigid, and his plainness is not unfrequently jejune.

"Pomp and ostentation of reading," he had once written, "is admired among the vulgar; but, in matters of religion, he is learnedest who is plainest." As Wordsworth had attempted to regenerate poetry by recurring to nature and to common objects, Milton would revert to the pure Word of God. He would present no human adumbration of goodness, but Christ Himself. He saw that here absolute plainness was best. In the presence of this unique Being silence alone became the poet. This "higher argument" was "sufficient of itself" (*Paradise Lost*, ix. 42).

There are some painters whose work appeals only to painters, and not to the public. So the judgment of poets and critics has been more favourable to *Paradise Regained* than the opinion of the average reader. Johnson thinks that "if it had been written, not by Milton, but by some imitators, it would receive universal praise." Wordsworth thought it "the most perfect in execution of anything written by Milton." And Coleridge says of it, "in its kind it is the most perfect poem extant."

There is a school of critics which maintains that a poem is, like a statue or a picture, a work of pure art, of which beauty is the only characteristic of which the reader

should be cognisant. And beauty is wholly ideal, an absolute quality, out of relation to person, time, or circumstance. To such readers *Samson Agonistes* will seem tame, flat, meaningless, and artificial. From the point of view of the critic of the eighteenth century, it is "a tragedy which only ignorance would admire and bigotry applaud" (Dr. Johnson). If, on the other hand, it be read as a page of cotemporary history, it becomes human, pregnant with real woe, the record of an heroic soul, not baffled by temporary adversity, but totally defeated by an irreversible fate, and unflinchingly accepting the situation, in the firm conviction of the righteousness of the cause. If fiction is truer than fact, fact is more tragic than fiction. In the course of the long struggle of human liberty against the church, there had been many terrible catastrophes. But the St. Bartholomew, the Revocation of the Edict, the Spanish Inquisition, Alva in the Low Countries —these and other days of suffering and rebuke have been left to the dull pen of the annalist, who has variously diluted their story in his literary circumlocution office. The triumphant royalist reaction of 1660, when the old serpent bruised the heel of freedom by totally crushing Puritanism, is singular in this, that the agonised cry of the beaten party has been preserved in a cotemporary monument, the intensest utterance of the most intense of English poets—the *Samson Agonistes*.

In the covert representation, which we have in this drama, of the actual wreck of Milton, his party, and his cause, is supplied that real basis of truth which was necessary to inspire him to write. It is of little moment that the incidents of Samson's life do not form a strict parallel to those of Milton's life, or to the career of the Puritan cause. The resemblance lies in the sentiment and situa-

tion, not in the bare event. The glorious youth of the consecrated deliverer, his signal overthrow of the Philistine foe with means so inadequate that the hand of God was manifest in the victory; his final humiliation, which he owed to his own weakness and disobedience, and the present revelry and feasting of the uncircumcised Philistines in the temple of their idol—all these things together constitute a parable of which no reader of Milton's day could possibly mistake the interpretation. More obscurely adumbrated is the day of vengeance when virtue should return to the repentant backslider, and the idolatrous crew should be smitten with a swift destruction in the midst of their insolent revelry. Add to these the two great personal misfortunes of the poet's life, his first marriage with a Philistine woman, out of sympathy with him or his cause, and his blindness; and the basis of reality becomes so complete, that the nominal personages of the drama almost disappear behind the history which we read through them.

But while for the biographer of Milton *Samson Agonistes* is charged with a pathos, which as the expression of real suffering no fictive tragedy can equal, it must be felt that as a composition the drama is languid, nerveless, occasionally halting, never brilliant. If the date of the composition of the *Samson* be 1663, this may have been the result of weariness after the effort of *Paradise Lost*. If this drama were composed in 1667, it would be the author's last poetical effort, and the natural explanation would then be that his power over language was failing. The power of metaphor, *i. e.*, of indirect expression, is, according to Aristotle, the characteristic of genius. It springs from vividness of conception of the thing spoken of. It is evident that this intense action of the presenta-

tive faculty is no longer at the disposal of the writer of *Samson.* In *Paradise Regained* we are conscious of a purposed restraint of strength. The simplicity of its style is an experiment, an essay of a new theory of poetic words. The simplicity of *Samson Agonistes* is a flagging of the forces, a drying up of the rich sources from which had once flowed the golden stream of suggestive phrase which makes *Paradise Lost* a unique monument of the English language. I could almost fancy that the consciousness of decay utters itself in the lines (594)—

> "I feel my genial spirits droop,
> My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
> In all her functions weary of herself,
> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest."

The point of view I have insisted on is that Milton conceives a poet to be one who employs his imagination to make a revelation of truth, truth which the poet himself entirely believes. One objection to this point of view will at once occur to the reader, the habitual employment in both poems of the fictions of pagan mythology. This is an objection as old as Miltonic criticism. The objection came from those readers who had no difficulty in realising the biblical scenes, or in accepting demoniac agency, but who found their imagination repelled by the introduction of the gods of Greece or Rome. It is not that the biblical heaven and the Greek Olympus are incongruous, but it is the unreal blended with the real, in a way to destroy credibility.

To this objection the answer has been supplied by De Quincey. To Milton the personages of the heathen Pantheon were not merely familiar fictions, or established

poetical properties; they were evil spirits. This was the received creed of the early interpreters. In their demonology, the Hebrew and the Greek poets had a common ground. Up to the advent of Christ, the fallen angel had been permitted to delude mankind. To Milton, as to Jerome, Moloch was Mars, and Chemosh Priapus. Plato knew of hell as Tartarus, and the battle of the giants in Hesiod is no fiction, but an obscured tradition of the war once waged in heaven. What has been adverse to Milton's art of illusion is, that the belief that the gods of the heathen world were the rebellious angels has ceased to be part of the common creed of Christendom. Milton was nearly the last of our great writers who was fully possessed of the doctrine. His readers now no longer share it with the poet. In Addison's time (1712) some of the imaginary persons in *Paradise Lost* were beginning to make greater demands upon the faith of readers than those cool rationalistic times could meet.

There is an element of decay and death in poems which we vainly style immortal. Some of the sources of Milton's power are already in process of drying up. I do not speak of the ordinary caducity of language, in virtue of which every effusion of the human spirit is lodged in a body of death. Milton suffers little as yet from this cause. There are few lines in his poems which are less intelligible now than they were at the time they were written. This is partly to be ascribed to his limited vocabulary, Milton, in his verse, using not more than eight thousand words, or about half the number used by Shakspeare. Nay, the position of our earlier writers has been improved by the mere spread of the English language over a wider area. Addison apologised for *Paradise Lost* falling short of the *Æneid*, because of the inferiority of the

language in which it was written. "So divine a poem in English is like a stately palace built of brick." The defects of English for purposes of rhythm and harmony are as great now as they ever were, but the space that our speech fills in the world is vastly increased, and this increase of consideration is reflected back upon our older writers.

But if, as a treasury of poetic speech, *Paradise Lost* has gained by time, it has lost far more as a storehouse of divine truth. We at this day are better able than ever to appreciate its force of expression, its grace of phrase, its harmony of rhythmical movement, but it is losing its hold over our imagination. Strange to say, this failure of vital power in the constitution of the poem is due to the very selection of subject by which Milton sought to secure perpetuity. Not content with being the poet of men, and with describing human passions and ordinary events, he aspired to present the destiny of the whole race of mankind, to tell the story of creation, and to reveal the councils of heaven and hell. And he would raise this structure upon no unstable base, but upon the sure foundation of the written word. It would have been a thing incredible to Milton that the hold of the Jewish Scriptures over the imagination of English men and women could ever be weakened. This process, however, has already commenced. The demonology of the poem has already, with educated readers, passed from the region of fact into that of fiction. Not so universally, but with a large number of readers, the angelology can be no more than what the critics call machinery. And it requires a violent effort from any of our day to accommodate our conceptions to the anthropomorphic theology of *Paradise Lost*. Were the sapping process to continue at the same rate for two more centuries, the

possibility of epic illusion would be lost to the whole scheme and economy of the poem. Milton has taken a scheme of life for life itself. Had he, in the choice of subject, remembered the principle of the Aristotelean Poetic (which he otherwise highly prized), that men in action are the poet's proper theme, he would have raised his imaginative fabric on a more permanent foundation; upon the appetites, passions, and emotions of men, their vices and virtues, their aims and ambitions, which are a far more constant quantity than any theological system. This, perhaps, was what Goethe meant when he pronounced the subject of *Paradise Lost* to be "abominable, with a fair outside, but rotten inwardly."

Whatever fortune may be in store for *Paradise Lost* in the time to come, Milton's choice of subject was, at the time he wrote, the only one which offered him the guarantees of reality, authenticity, and divine truth which he required. We need not, therefore, search the annals of literature to find the poem which may have given the first suggestion of the fall of man as a subject. This, however, has been done by curious antiquaries, and a list of more than two dozen authors has been made, from one or other of whom Milton may have taken either the general idea or particular hints for single incidents. Milton, without being a very wide reader, was likely to have seen the *Adamus Exul* of Grotius (1601), and he certainly had read Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610). There are traces of verbal reminiscence of Sylvester's translation of *Du Bartas*. But out of the long catalogue of his predecessors there appear only three who can claim to have conceived the same theme with anything like the same breadth, or on the same scale as Milton has done. These are the so-called Cædmon, Andreini, and Vondel.

1. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem which passes under the name of Cædmon has this one point of resemblance to the plot of *Paradise Lost*, that in it the seduction of Eve is Satan's revenge for his expulsion from heaven. As Francis Junius was much occupied upon this poem, of which he published the text in 1655, it is likely enough that he should have talked of it with his friend Milton.

2. Voltaire related that Milton during his tour in Italy (1638) had seen performed *L'Adamo*, a sacred drama by the Florentine Giovanni Battista Andreini, and that he "took from that ridiculous trifle" the hint of the "noblest product of human imagination." Though Voltaire relates this as a matter of fact, it is doubtful if it be more than an *on dit* which he had picked up in London society. Voltaire could not have seen Andreini's drama, for it is not at all a ridiculous trifle. Though much of the dialogue is as insipid as dialogue in operattas usually is, there is great invention in the plot, and animation in the action. Andreini is incessantly offending against taste, and is infected with the vice of the Marinists, the pursuit of *concetti*, or far-fetched analogies between things unlike. His infernal personages are grotesque and disgusting, rather than terrible; his scenes in heaven childish—at once familiar and fantastic, in the style of the Mysteries of the age before the drama. With all these faults the *Adamo* is a lively and spirited representation of the Hebrew legend, and not unworthy to have been the antecedent of *Paradise Lost*. There is no question of plagiarism, for the resemblance is not even that of imitation or parentage, or adoption. The utmost that can be conceded is to concur in Hayley's opinion that, either in representation or in perusal, the *Adamo* of Andreini had made an impression on the mind of Milton; had, as Voltaire says, revealed to him

the hidden majesty of the subject. There had been at least three editions of the *Adamo* by 1641, and Milton may have brought one of these with him among the books which he had shipped from Venice, even if he had not seen the drama on the Italian stage, or had not, as Todd suggests, met Andreini in person.

So much appears to me to be certain from the internal evidence of the two compositions as they stand. But there are further some slight corroborative circumstances. (i.) The Trinity College sketch, so often referred to, of Milton's scheme, when it was intended to be dramatic, keeps much more closely, both in its personages and in its ordering, to Andreini. (ii.) In Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum*, a compilation in which he had his uncle's help, Andreini is mentioned as author "of a fantastic poem entitled Olivastro, which was printed at Bologna, 1642." If Andreini was known to Edward Phillips, the inference is that he was known to Milton.

3. Lastly, though external evidence is here wanting, it cannot be doubted that Milton was acquainted with the *Lucifer* of the Dutch poet, Joost van den Vondel, which appeared in 1654. This poem is a regular five-act drama in the Dutch language, a language which Milton was able to read. In spite of commercial rivalry and naval war there was much intercourse between the two republics, and Amsterdam books came in regular course to London. The Dutch drama turns entirely on the revolt of the angels, and their expulsion from heaven, the fall of man being but a subordinate incident. In *Paradise Lost* the relation of the two events is inverted, the fall of the angels being there an episode, not transacted, but told by one of the personages of the epic. It is, therefore, only in one book of *Paradise Lost*, the sixth, that the influence of Vondel

can be looked for. There may possibly occur in other parts of our epic single lines of which an original may be found in Vondel's drama. Notably such a one is the often-quoted—

> "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."
>
> *Paradise Lost*, i. 263;

which is Vondel's—

> "En liever d'eerste Vorst in eenigh lager hof
> Dan in't gezalight licht de tweede, of noch een minder!"

But it is in the sixth book only in which anything more than a verbal similarity is traceable. According to Mr. Gosse, who has given an analysis, with some translated extracts, of Vondel's *Lucifer*, the resemblances are too close and too numerous to be mere coincidences. Vondel is more human than Milton, just where human attributes are unnatural, so that heaven is made to seem like earth, while in *Paradise Lost* we always feel that we are in a region aloft. Miltonic presentation has a dignity and elevation, which is not only wanting but is sadly missed in the Dutch drama, even the language of which seems common and familiar.

The poems now mentioned form, taken together, the antecedents of *Paradise Lost*. In no one instance, taken singly, is the relation of Milton to a predecessor that of imitation, not even to the extent in which the Æneid, for instance, is an imitation of the Iliad and Odyssey. The originality of Milton lies not in his subject, but in his manner; not in his thoughts, but in his mode of thinking. His story and his personages, their acts and words, had been the common property of all poets since the fall of the Roman Empire. Not only the three I have specially named had boldly attempted to set forth a mythical representation of the origin of evil, but many others had flut-

tered round the same central object of poetic attraction. Many of these productions Milton had read, and they had made their due impression on his mind according to their degree of force. When he began to compose *Paradise Lost* he had the reading of a lifetime behind him. His imagination worked upon an accumulated store, to which books, observation, and reflection had contributed in equal proportions. He drew upon this store without conscious distinction of its sources. Not that this was a recollected material, to which the poet had recourse whenever invention failed him; it was identified with himself. His verse flowed from his own soul, but it was a soul which had grown up nourished with the spoil of all the ages. He created his epic, as metaphysicians have said that God created the world, by drawing it out of himself, not by building it up out of elements supplied *ab extra*.

The resemblances to earlier poets—Greek, Latin, Italian—which could be pointed out in *Paradise Lost*, were so numerous that in 1695, only twenty-one years after Milton's death, an editor, one Patrick Hume, a school-master in the neighbourhood of London, was employed by Tonson to point out the imitations in an annotated edition. From that time downwards, the diligence of our literary antiquaries has been busily employed in the same track of research, and it has been extended to the English poets, a field which was overlooked, or not known to the first collector. The result is a valuable accumulation of parallel passages, which have been swept up into our *variorum* Miltons, and make *Paradise Lost*, for English phraseology, what Virgil was for Latin in the middle ages, the centre round which the study moves. The learner who desires to cultivate his feeling for the fine shades and variations of expression has here a rich opportunity, and will ac-

knowledge with gratitude the laborious services of Newton, Pearce, the Wartons, Todd, Mitford, and other compilers. But these heaped-up citations of parallel passages somewhat tend to hide from us the secret of Miltonic language. We are apt to think that the magical effect of Milton's words has been produced by painfully inlaying tesseræ of borrowed metaphor—a mosaic of bits culled from extensive reading, carried along by a retentive memory, and pieced together so as to produce a new whole, with the exquisite art of a Japanese cabinet-maker. It is sometimes admitted that Milton was a plagiary, but it is urged in extenuation that his plagiarisms were always reproduced in finer forms.

It is not in the spirit of vindicating Milton, but as touching the mystery of metrical language, that I stay a few moments upon this misconception. It is true that Milton has a way of making his own even what he borrows. While Horace's thefts from Alcæus or Pindar are palpable, even from the care which he takes to Latinise them, Milton cannot help transfusing his own nature into the words he adopts. But this is far from all. When Milton's widow was asked "if he did not often read Homer and Virgil, she understood it as an imputation upon him for stealing from those authors, and answered, with eagerness, that he stole from nobody but the muse who inspired him." This is more true than she knew. It is true there are many phrases or images in *Paradise Lost* taken from earlier writers—taken, not stolen, for the borrowing is done openly. When Adam, for instance, begs Raphael to prolong his discourse deep into night,

> "Sleep, listening to thee, will watch;
> Or we can bid his absence, till thy song
> End, and dismiss thee ere the morning shine;"

we cannot be mistaken in saying that we have here a conscious reminiscence of the words of Alcinous to Ulysses in the eleventh book of the Odyssey. Such imitation is on the surface, and does not touch the core of that mysterious combination of traditive with original elements in diction, which Milton and Virgil, alone of poets known to us, have effected. Here and there, many times, in detached places, Milton has consciously imitated. But, beyond this obvious indebtedness, there runs through the whole texture of his verse a suggestion of secondary meaning, a meaning which has been accreted to the words, by their passage down the consecrated stream of classical poetry. Milton quotes very little for a man of much reading. He says of himself (*Judgment of Bucer*) that he "never could delight in long citations, much less in whole traductions, whether it be natural disposition or education in me, or that my mother bore me a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a translator." And the observation is as old as Bishop Newton, that "there is scarce any author who has written so much, and upon such various subjects, and yet quotes so little from his cotemporary authors." It is said that "he could repeat Homer almost all without book." But we know that common minds are apt to explain to themselves the working of mental superiority by exaggerating the power of memory. Milton's own writings remain a sufficient evidence that his was not a verbal memory. And, psychologically, the power of imagination and the power of verbal memory are almost always found in inverse proportion.

Milton's diction is the elaborated outcome of all the best words of all antecedent poetry, not by a process of recollected reading and storage, but by the same mental habit by which we learn to speak our mother-tongue. Only, in

the case of the poet, the vocabulary acquired has a new meaning superadded to the words, from the occasion on which they have been previously employed by others. Words, over and above their dictionary signification, connote all the feeling which has gathered round them by reason of their employment through a hundred generations of song. In the words of Mr. Myers, "without ceasing to be a logical step in the argument, a phrase becomes a centre of emotional force. The complex associations which it evokes, modify the associations evoked by other words in the same passage, in a way distinct from logical or grammatical connection." The poet suggests much more than he says, or, as Milton himself has phrased it, "more is meant than meets the ear."

For the purposes of poetry a thought is the representative of many feelings, and a word is the representative of many thoughts. A single word may thus set in motion in us the vibration of a feeling first consigned to letters 3000 years ago. For oratory words should be winged, that they may do their work of persuasion. For poetry words should be freighted with associations of feeling, that they may awaken sympathy. It is the suggestive power of words that the poet cares for, rather than their current denotation. How laughable are the attempts of the commentators to interpret a line in Virgil as they would a sentence in Aristotle's *Physics!* Milton's secret lies in his mastery over the rich treasure of this inherited vocabulary. He wielded it as his own, as a second mother-tongue, the native and habitual idiom of his thought and feeling, backed by a massive frame of character, and "a power which is got within me to a passion." (*Areopagitica.*)

When Wordsworth came forward at the end of the eighteenth century with his famous reform of the language

of English poetry, the Miltonic diction was the current coin paid out by every versifier. Wordsworth revolted against this dialect as unmeaning, hollow, gaudy, and inane. His reform consisted in dropping the consecrated phraseology altogether, and reverting to the common language of ordinary life. It was necessary to do this in order to reconnect poetry with the sympathies of men, and make it again a true utterance, instead of the ingenious exercise in putting together words which it had become. In projecting this abandonment of the received tradition, it may be thought that Wordsworth was condemning the Miltonic system of expression in itself. But this was not so. Milton's language had become, in the hands of the imitators of the eighteenth century, sound without sense, a husk without the kernel, a body of words without the soul of poetry. Milton had created and wielded an instrument which was beyond the control of any less than himself. He wrote it as a living language; the poetasters of the eighteenth century wrote it as a dead language, as boys make Latin verses. Their poetry is to *Paradise Lost*, as a modern Gothic restoration is to a genuine middle-age church. It was against the feeble race of imitators, and not against the master himself, that the protest of the lake poet was raised. He proposed to do away with the Miltonic vocabulary altogether, not because it was in itself vicious, but because it could now only be employed at second-hand.

One drawback there was attendant upon the style chosen by Milton, viz., that it narrowly limited the circle of his readers. All words are addressed to those who understand them. The Welsh triads are not for those who have not learnt Welsh; an English poem is only for those who understand English. But of understanding

English there are many degrees; it requires some education to understand literary style at all. A large majority of the natives of any country possess, and use, only a small fraction of their mother-tongue. These people may be left out of the discussion. Confining ourselves only to that small part of our millions which we speak of as the educated classes—that is, those whose schooling is carried on beyond fourteen years of age—it will be found that only a small fraction of the men, and a still smaller fraction of the women, fully apprehend the meaning of words. This is the case with what is written in the ordinary language of books. When we pass from a style in which words have only their simple signification, to a style of which the effect depends on the suggestion of collateral association, we leave behind the majority even of these few. This is what is meant by the standing charge against Milton that he is too learned.

It is no paradox to say that Milton was not a learned man. Such men there were in his day—Usher, Selden, Voss, in England; in Holland, Milton's adversary Salmasius, and many more. A learned man was one who could range freely and surely over the whole of classical and patristic remains in the Greek and Latin languages (at least), with the accumulated stores of philological, chronological, historical criticism necessary for the interpretation of those remains. Milton had neither made these acquisitions nor aimed at them. He even expresses himself, in his vehement way, with contempt of them. "Hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk," "marginal stuffings," "horse-loads of citations and fathers," are some of his petulant outbursts against the learning that had been played upon his position by his adversaries. He says expressly that he had "not read the Councils, save here and there"

(*Smectymnuus*). His own practice had been "industrious and select reading." He chose to make himself a scholar rather than a learned man. The aim of his studies was to improve faculty, not to acquire knowledge. "Who would be a poet must himself be a true poem;" his heart should "contain of just, wise, good, the perfect shape." He devoted himself to self-preparation with the assiduity of Petrarch or of Goethe. "In wearisome labour and studious watchings I have tired out almost a whole youth." "Labour and intense study I take to be my portion in this life." He would know, not all, but "what was of use to know," and form himself by assiduous culture. The first Englishman of whom the designation of our series, *Men of Letters*, is appropriate, Milton was also the noblest example of the type. He cultivated, not letters, but himself, and sought to enter into possession of his own mental kingdom, not that he might reign there, but that he might royally use its resources in building up a work which should bring honour to his country and his native tongue.

The style of *Paradise Lost* is then only the natural expression of a soul thus exquisitely nourished upon the best thoughts and finest words of all ages. It is the language of one who lives in the companionship of the great and the wise of past time. It is inevitable that when such a one speaks, his tones, his accent, the melodies of his rhythm, the inner harmonies of his linked thoughts, the grace of his allusive touch, should escape the common ear. To follow Milton one should at least have tasted the same training through which he put himself. "Te quoque dignum finge deo." The many cannot see it, and complain that the poet is too learned. They would have Milton talk like Bunyan or William Cobbett, whom they understand. Milton did attempt the demagogue in his pam-

phlets, only with the result of blemishing his fame and degrading his genius. The best poetry is that which calls upon us to rise to it, not that which writes down to us.

Milton knew that his was not the road to popularity. He thirsted for renown, but he did not confound renown with vogue. A poet has his choice between the many and the few; Milton chose the few. "Paucis hujusmodi lectoribus contentus," is his own inscription in a copy of his pamphlets sent by him to Patrick Young. He derived a stern satisfaction from the reprobation with which the vulgar visited him. His divorce tracts were addressed to men who dared to think, and ran the town "numbering good intellects." His poems he wished laid up in the Bodleian Library, "where the jabber of common people cannot penetrate, and whence the base throng of readers keep aloof" (*Ode to Rouse*). If Milton resembled a Roman republican in the severe and stoic elevation of his character, he also shared the aristocratic intellectualism of the classical type. He is in marked contrast to the levelling hatred of excellence, the Christian trades-unionism of the model Catholic of the mould of S. François de Sales, whose maxim of life is "marchons avec la troupe de nos frères et compagnons, doucement, paisiblement, et amiablement." To Milton the people are—

> "But a herd confus'd,
> A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
> Things vulgar."—*Paradise Regained*, iii. 49.

At times his indignation carries him past the courtesies of equal speech, to pour out the vials of prophetic rebuke, when he contemplates the hopeless struggle of those who are the salt of the earth, "amidst the throng and noises of vulgar and irrational men" (*Tenure of Kings*), and he

rates them to their face as "owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs" (*Sonnet* XII.); not because they will not listen to him, but because they "hate learning more than toad or asp" (*Sonnet* IX.).

Milton's attitude must be distinguished from patrician pride, or the *noli-me-tangere* of social exclusiveness. Nor, again, was it, like Callimachus's, the fastidious repulsion of a delicate taste for the hackneyed in literary expression; it was the lofty disdain of aspiring virtue for the sordid and ignoble.

Various ingredients, constitutional or circumstantial, concurred to produce this repellent or unsympathetic attitude in Milton. His dogmatic Calvinism, from the effects of which his mind never recovered—a system which easily disposes to a cynical abasement of our fellow-men—counted for something. Something must be set down to habitual converse with the classics—a converse which tends to impart to character, as Platner said of Godfrey Hermann, "a certain grandeur and generosity, removed from the spirit of cabal and mean cunning which prevail among men of the world." His blindness threw him out of the competition of life, and back upon himself, in a way which was sure to foster egotism. These were constitutional elements of that aloofness from men which characterised all his utterance. These disposing causes became inexorable fate, when, by the turn of the political wheel of fortune, he found himself alone amid the mindless dissipation and reckless materialism of the Restoration. He must have felt himself then, "Miltonus contra mundum," at war with human society as constituted around him, and driven to withdraw himself within a poetic world of his own creation.

In this antagonism of the poet to his age much was lost;

much energy was consumed in what was mere friction. The artist is then most powerful when he finds himself in accord with the age he lives in. The plenitude of art is only reached when it marches with the sentiments which possess a community. The defiant attitude easily slides into paradox, and the mind falls in love with its own wilfulness. The exceptional emergence of Milton's three poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Regained*, and *Samson*, deeply colours their context. The greatest achievement of art in their kinds have been the capital specimens of a large crop; as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the picked lines out of many rhapsodies, and Shakspeare the king of an army of cotemporary dramatists. Milton was a survival, felt himself such, and resented it.

> "Unchang'd,
> . . . . . Though fall'n on evil days,
> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,
> And solitude."—*Paradise Lost*, vii. 24.

Poetry thus generated, we should naturally expect to meet with more admiration than sympathy. And such, on the whole, has been Milton's reception. In 1687, twenty years after the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Prior spoke of him (*Hind Transversed*) as "a rough, unhewn fellow, that a man must sweat to read him." And in 1842, Hallam had doubts "if *Paradise Lost*, published eleven years since, would have met with a greater demand" than it did at first. It has been much disputed by historians of our literature what inference is to be drawn from the numbers sold of *Paradise Lost* at its first publication. Between 1667 and 1688, a space of twenty years, three editions had been printed, making together some 4500 copies. Was this a large or a small circulation? Opin-

ions are at variance on the point. Johnson and Hallam thought it a large sale, as books went at that time. Campbell, and the majority of our annalists of books, have considered it as evidence of neglect. Comparison with what is known of other cases of circulation leads to no more certain conclusion. On the one hand, the public could not take more than three editions—say 3000 copies—of the plays of Shakspeare in sixty years, from 1623 to 1684. If this were a fair measure of possible circulation at the time, we should have to pronounce Milton's sale a great success. On the other hand, Cleveland's poems ran through sixteen or seventeen editions in about thirty years. If this were the average output of a popular book, the inference would be that *Paradise Lost* was not such a book.

Whatever conclusion may be the true one from the amount of the public demand, we cannot be wrong in asserting that from the first, and now as then, *Paradise Lost* has been more admired than read. The poet's wish and expectation that he should find "fit audience, though few," has been fulfilled. Partly this has been due to his limitation, his unsympathetic disposition, the deficiency of the human element in his imagination, and his presentation of mythical instead of real beings. But it is also in part a tribute to his excellence, and is to be ascribed to the lofty strain, which requires more effort to accompany than an average reader is able to make, a majestic demeanour which no parodist has been able to degrade, and a wealth of allusion demanding more literature than is possessed by any but the few whose life is lived with the poets. An appreciation of Milton is the last reward of consummated scholarship; and we may apply to him what Quintilian has said of Cicero, "Ille se profecisse sciat, cui Cicero valde placebit."

Causes other than the inherent faults of the poem long continued to weigh down the reputation of *Paradise Lost*. In Great Britain the sense for art, poetry, literature, is confined to a few, while our political life has been diffused and vigorous. Hence all judgment, even upon a poet, is biassed by considerations of party. Before 1688 it was impossible that the poet, who had justified regicide, could have any public beyond the suppressed and crouching Nonconformists. The Revolution of 1688 removed this ban, and from that date forward the Liberal party in England adopted Milton as the Republican poet. William Hogg, writing in 1690, says of *Paradise Lost* that "the fame of the poem is spread through the whole of England, but being written in English, it is as yet unknown in foreign lands." This is obvious exaggeration. Lauder, about 1748, gives the date exactly, when he speaks of "that infinite tribute of veneration that has been paid to him *these sixty years past*." One distinguished exception there was. Dryden, royalist and Catholic though he was, was loyal to his art. Nothing which Dryden ever wrote is so creditable to his taste as his being able to see, and daring to confess, in the day of disesteem, that the regicide poet alone deserved the honour which his cotemporaries were for rendering to himself. Dryden's saying, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too," is not perfectly well vouched, but it would hardly have been invented, if it had not been known to express his sentiments. And Dryden's sense of Milton's greatness grew with his taste. When, in the preface to his *State of Innocence* (1674), Dryden praised *Paradise Lost*, he "knew not half the extent of its excellence," John Dennis says, "as more than twenty years afterwards he confessed to me." Had he known it, he never could have produced his vulgar parody, *The State of Innocence*, a piece

upon which he received the compliments of his cotemporaries, as "having refined the ore of Milton."

With the one exception of Dryden, a better critic than poet, Milton's repute was the work of the Whigs. The first *édition de luxe* of *Paradise Lost* (1688) was brought out by a subscription got up by the Whig leader, Lord Somers. In this edition Dryden's pinchbeck epigram, so often quoted, first appeared,—

"Three poets in three distant ages born," &c.

It was the Whig essayist, Addison, whose papers in the *Spectator* (1712) did most to make the poem popularly known. In 1737, in the height of the Whig ascendancy, the bust of Milton penetrated Westminster Abbey, though, in the generation before, the Dean of that day had refused to admit an inscription on the monument erected to John Phillips, because the name of Milton occurred in it.

The zeal of the Liberal party in the propagation of the cult of Milton was of course encountered by an equal passion on the part of the Tory opposition. They were exasperated by the lustre which was reflected upon Revolution principles by the name of Milton. About the middle of the eighteenth century, when Whig popularity was already beginning to wane, a desperate attempt was made by a rising Tory pamphleteer to crush the new Liberal idol. Dr. Johnson, the most vigorous writer of the day, conspired with one William Lauder, a native of Scotland seeking fortune in London, to stamp out Milton's credit by proving him to be a wholesale plagiarist. Milton's imitations —he had gathered pearls wherever they were to be found —were thus to be turned into an indictment against him. One of the beauties of *Paradise Lost* is, as has been already said, the scholar's flavour of literary reminiscence which

hangs about its words and images. This Virgilian art, in which Milton has surpassed his master, was represented by this pair of literary bandits as theft, and held to prove at once moral obliquity and intellectual feebleness. This line of criticism was well chosen; it was, in fact, an appeal to the many from the few. Unluckily for the plot, Lauder was not satisfied with the amount of resemblance shown by real parallel passages. He ventured upon the bold step of forging verses, closely resembling lines in *Paradise Lost*, and ascribing these verses to older poets. He even made forged verses as quotations from *Paradise Lost*, and showed them as Milton's plagiarisms from preceding writers. Even these clumsy fictions might have passed without detection at that uncritical period of our literature, and under the shelter of the name of Samuel Johnson. But Lauder's impudence grew with the success of his criticisms, which he brought out as letters, through a series of years, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. There was a translation of *Paradise Lost* into Latin hexameters, which had been made in 1690 by one William Hogg. Lauder inserted lines, taken from this translation, into passages taken from Massenius, Staphorstius, Taubmannus, neo-Latin poets, whom Milton had, or might have read, and presented these passages as thefts by Milton.

Low as learning had sunk in England in 1750, Hogg's Latin *Paradisus amissus* was just the book which tutors of colleges who could teach Latin verses had often in their hands. Mr. Bowle, a tutor of Oriel College, Oxford, immediately recognised an old acquaintance in one or two of the interpolated lines. This put him upon the scent, he submitted Lauder's passages to a closer investigation, and the whole fraud was exposed. Johnson, who was not concerned in the cheat, and was only guilty of indolence and

party spirit, saved himself by sacrificing his comrade. He afterwards took ample revenge for the mortification of this exposure in his *Lives of the Poets*, in which he employed all his vigorous powers and consummate skill to write down Milton. He undoubtedly dealt a heavy blow at the poet's reputation, and succeeded in damaging it for at least two generations of readers. He did for Milton what Aristophanes did for Socrates, effaced the real man, and replaced him by a distorted and degrading caricature.

It was again a clergyman to whom Milton owed his vindication from Lauder's onslaught. John Douglas, afterwards bishop of Salisbury, brought Bowle's materials before the public. But the high Anglican section of English life has never thoroughly accepted Milton. R. S. Hawker, vicar of Morwenstow, himself a poet of real feeling, gave expression, in rabid abuse of Milton, to the antipathy which more judicious churchmen suppress. Even the calm and gentle author of the *Christian Year*, wide heart ill-sorted with a narrow creed, deliberately framed a theory of Poetic for the express purpose, as it would seem, of excluding the author of *Paradise Lost* from the first class of poets.

But a work such as Milton has constructed, at once intense and elaborate, firmly knit and broadly laid, can afford to wait. Time is all in its favour, and against its detractors. The Church never forgives, and faction does not die out. But Milton has been, for two centuries, getting beyond the reach of party, whether as friends or as foes. In each national aggregate an instinct is always at work, an instinct not equal to exact discrimination of lesser degrees of merit, but surely finding out the chief forces which have found expression in the native tongue. This instinct is not an active faculty, and so exposed to the influences which warp the will; it is a passive deposition from unconscious

impression. Our appreciation of our poet is not to be measured by our choosing him for our favourite closet companion, or reading him often. As Voltaire wittily said of Dante, "Sa reputation s'affirmera toujours, parce qu'on ne le lit guère." We shall prefer to read the fashionable novelist of each season as it passes, but we shall choose to be represented at the international congress of world poets by Shakspeare and Milton; Shakspeare first, and next MILTON.

THE END.

GIBBON

BY

J. C. MORISON

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

GIBBON'S EARLY LIFE UP TO THE TIME OF HIS LEAVING OXFORD 1

CHAPTER II.

AT LAUSANNE 19

CHAPTER III.

IN THE MILITIA 33

CHAPTER IV.

THE ITALIAN JOURNEY 47

CHAPTER V.

LITERARY SCHEMES.—THE HISTORY OF SWITZERLAND.—DISSERTATION ON THE SIXTH ÆNEID.—FATHER'S DEATH.—SETTLEMENT IN LONDON 58

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE

LIFE IN LONDON.—PARLIAMENT.—THE BOARD OF TRADE.—THE DECLINE AND FALL.—MIGRATION TO LAUSANNE 69

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL 95

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST TEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE AT LAUSANNE . . 135

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL 144

CHAPTER X.

LAST ILLNESS.—DEATH.—CONCLUSION 169

PAGE

69

95

135

44

69

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EDW
on 27
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whom
He
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GIBBON

CHAPTER I.

GIBBON'S EARLY LIFE UP TO THE TIME OF HIS LEAVING OXFORD.

EDWARD GIBBON[1] was born at Putney, near London, on 27th April in the year 1737. After the reformation of the calendar his birthday became the 8th of May. He was the eldest of a family of seven children; but his five brothers and only sister all died in early infancy, and he could remember in after life his sister alone, whom he also regretted.

He is at some pains in his Memoirs to show the length and quality of his pedigree, which he traces back to the times of the Second and Third Edwards. Noting the fact, we pass on to a nearer ancestor, his grand-

[1] Gibbon's Memoirs and Letters are of such easy access that I have not deemed it necessary to encumber these pages with references to them. Any one who wishes to control my statements will have no difficulty in doing so with the Miscellaneous Works, edited by Lord Sheffield, in his hand. Whenever I advance anything that seems to require corroboration, I have been careful to give my authority.

father, who seems to have been a person of considerable energy of character and business talent. He made a large fortune, which he lost in the South Sea Scheme, and then made another before his death. He was one of the Commissioners of Customs, and sat at the Board with the poet Prior; Bolingbroke was heard to declare that no man knew better than Mr. Edward Gibbon the commerce and finances of England. His son, the historian's father, was a person of very inferior stamp. He was educated at Westminster and Cambridge, travelled on the Continent, sat in Parliament, lived beyond his means as a country gentleman, and here his achievements came to an end He seems to have been a kindly but a weak and impulsive man, who however had the merit of obtaining and deserving his son's affection by genial sympathy and kindly treatment.

Gibbon's childhood was passed in chronic illness, debility, and disease. All attempts to give him a regular education were frustrated by his precarious health. The longest period he ever passed at school were two years at Westminster, but he was constantly moved from one school to another. This even his delicacy can hardly explain, and it must have been fatal to all sustained study. Two facts he mentions of his school life, which paint the manners of the age. In the year 1746 such was the strength of party spirit that he, a child of nine years of age, "was reviled and buffeted for the sins of his Tory ancestors." Secondly, the worthy pedagogues of that day found no readier way of leading the most studious of boys to a love of science than corporal punishment. "At the expense of many tears and some blood I purchased the knowledge of the Latin syntax." Whether all love of study would

have been flogged out of him if he had remained at school, it is difficult to say, but it is not an improbable supposition that this would have happened. The risk was removed by his complete failure of health. "A strange nervous affection, which alternately contracted his legs and produced, without any visible symptom, the most excruciating pain," was his chief affliction, followed by intervals of languor and debility. The saving of his life during these dangerous years Gibbon unhesitatingly ascribes to the more than maternal care of his aunt, Catherine Porten, on writing whose name for the first time in his Memoirs, "he felt a tear of gratitude trickling down his cheek." "If there be any," he continues, "as I trust there are some, who rejoice that I live, to that dear and excellent woman they must hold themselves indebted. Many anxious and solitary hours and days did she consume in the patient trial of relief and amusement; many wakeful nights did she sit by my bedside in trembling expectation that every hour would be my last." Gibbon is rather anxious to get over these details, and declares he has no wish to expatiate on a "disgusting topic." This is quite in the style of the *ancien régime*. There was no blame attached to any one for being ill in those days, but people were expected to keep their infirmities to themselves. "People knew how to live and die in those days, and kept their infirmities out of sight. You might have the gout, but you must walk about all the same without making grimaces. It was a point of good breeding to hide one's sufferings."[1] Similarly Walpole was much offended by a too faithful publication of Madame de Sévigné's *Letters*. "Heaven

[1] George Sand, quoted in Taine's *Ancien Régime*, p. 181.

forbid," he says, "that I should say that the letters of Madame de Sévigné were bad. I only meant that they were full of family details and mortal distempers, to which the most immortal of us are subject." But Gibbon was above all things a veracious historian, and fortunately has not refrained from giving us a truthful picture of his childhood.

Of his studies, or rather his reading—his early and invincible love of reading, which he would not exchange for the treasures of India—he gives us a full account, and we notice at once the interesting fact that a considerable portion of the historical field afterwards occupied by his great work had been already gone over by Gibbon before he was well in his teens. "My indiscriminate appetite subsided by degrees into the historic line, and since philosophy has exploded all innate ideas and natural propensities, I must ascribe the choice to the assiduous perusal of the *Universal History* as the octavo volumes successively appeared. This unequal work referred and introduced me to the Greek and Roman historians, to as many at least as were accessible to an English reader. All that I could find were greedily devoured, from Littlebury's lame *Herodotus* to Spelman's valuable *Xenophon*, to the pompous folios of Gordon's *Tacitus*, and a ragged *Procopius* of the beginning of the last century." Referring to an accident which threw the continuation of Echard's *Roman History* in his way, he says, "To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine were absolutely new, and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube, when the summons of the dinner-bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. . . . I procured the second and

third volumes of Howell's *History of the World*, which exhibit the Byzantine period on a larger scale. Mahomet and his Saracens soon fixed my attention, and some instinct of criticism directed me to the genuine sources. Simon Ockley first opened my eyes, and I was led from one book to another till I had ranged round the circle of Oriental history. Before I was sixteen I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks, and the same ardour urged me to guess at the French of D'Herbelot and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's *Abulfaragius*." Here is in rough outline a large portion at least of the *Decline and Fall* already surveyed. The fact shows how deep was the sympathy that Gibbon had for his subject, and that there was a sort of pre-established harmony between his mind and the historical period he afterwards illustrated.

Up to the age of fourteen it seemed that Gibbon, as he says, was destined to remain through life an illiterate cripple. But as he approached his sixteenth year, a great change took place in his constitution, and his diseases, instead of growing with his growth and strengthening with his strength, wonderfully vanished. This unexpected recovery was not seized by his father in a rational spirit, as affording a welcome opportunity of repairing the defects of a hitherto imperfect education. Instead of using the occasion thus presented of recovering some of the precious time lost, of laying a sound foundation of scholarship and learning on which a superstructure at the university or elsewhere could be ultimately built, he carried the lad off in an impulse of perplexity and impatience, and entered him as a gentleman commoner at Magdalen College just before he

had completed his fifteenth year (1752, April 3). This was perhaps the most unwise step he could have taken under the circumstances. Gibbon was too young and too ignorant to profit by the advantages offered by Oxford to a more mature student, and his status as a gentleman commoner seemed intended to class him among the idle and dissipated who are only expected to waste their money and their time. A good education is generally considered as reflecting no small credit on its possessor; but in the majority of cases it reflects credit on the wise solicitude of his parents or guardians rather than on himself. If Gibbon escaped the peril of being an ignorant and frivolous lounger, the merit was his own.

At no period in their history had the English universities sunk to a lower condition as places of education than at the time when Gibbon went up to Oxford. To speak of them as seats of learning seems like irony; they were seats of nothing but coarse living and clownish manners, the centres where all the faction, party spirit, and bigotry of the country were gathered to a head. In this evil pre eminence both of the universities and all the colleges appear to have been upon a level, though Lincoln College, Oxford, is mentioned as a bright exception in John Wesley's day to the prevalent degeneracy. The strange thing is that, with all their neglect of learning and morality, the colleges were not the resorts of jovial if unseemly boon companionship; they were collections of quarrelsome and spiteful litigants, who spent their time in angry lawsuits. The indecent contentions between Bentley and the Fellows of Trinity were no isolated scandal. They are best known and remembered on account of the eminence of the chief disputants, and of the melancholy waste of Bentley's

genius which they occasioned. Hearne writes of Oxford in 1726, "There are such differences now in the University of Oxford (hardly one college but where all the members are busied in law business and quarrels not at all relating to the promotion of learning), that good letters decay every day, insomuch that this ordination on Trinity Sunday at Oxford there were no fewer (as I am informed) than fifteen denied orders for insufficiency, which is the more to be noted because our bishops, and those employed by them, are themselves illiterate men."[1] The state of things had not much improved twenty or thirty years later when Gibbon went up, but perhaps it had improved a little. He does not mention lawsuits as a favourite pastime of the Fellows. "The Fellows or monks of my time," he says, "were decent, easy men, who supinely enjoyed the gifts of the founder: their days were filled by a series of uniform employments—the chapel, the hall, the coffee-house, and the common room—till they retired weary and well satisfied to a long slumber. From the toil of reading, writing, or thinking they had absolved their consciences. Their conversation stagnated in a round of college business, Tory politics, personal anecdotes, and private scandal. Their dull and deep potations excused the brisk intemperance of youth, and their constitutional toasts were not expressive of the most lively loyalty to the House of Hanover." Some Oxonians perhaps could still partly realise the truth of this original picture by their recollections of faint and feeble copies of it drawn from their experience in youthful days. It seems to be certain that the universities, far from setting a model of

[1] *Social Life at the English Universities.* By Christopher Wordsworth. Page 57.

good living, were really below the average standard of the morals and manners of the age, and the standard was not high. Such a satire as the *Terræ Filius* of Amhurst cannot be accepted without large deductions; but the caricaturist is compelled by the conditions of his craft to aim at the *true seeming*, if he neglects the true, and with the benefit of this limitation the *Terræ Filius* reveals a deplorable and revolting picture of vulgarity, insolence, and licence. The universities are spoken of in terms of disparagement by men of all classes. Lord Chesterfield speaks of the "rust" of Cambridge as something of which a polished man should promptly rid himself. Adam Smith showed his sense of the defects of Oxford in a stern section of the *Wealth of Nations*, written twenty years after he had left the place. Even youths like Gray and West, fresh from Eton, express themselves with contempt for their respective universities. "Consider me," says the latter, writing from Christ Church, "very seriously, here is a strange country, inhabited by things that call themselves Doctors and Masters of Arts, a country flowing with syllogisms and ale; where Horace and Virgil are equally unknown." Gray, answering from Peterhouse, can only do justice to his feelings by quoting the words of the Hebrew prophet, and insists that Isaiah had Cambridge equally with Babylon in view when he spoke of the wild beasts and wild asses, of the satyrs that dance, of an inhabitation of dragons and a court for owls.

Into such untoward company was Gibbon thrust by his careless father at the age of fifteen. That he succumbed to the unwholesome atmosphere cannot surprise us. He does not conceal, perhaps he rather exaggerates,

in his Memoirs, the depth of his fall. As Bunyan in a state of grace accused himself of dreadful sins which in all likelihood he never committed so it is probable that Gibbon, in his old age, when study and learning were the only passions he knew, reflected with too much severity on the boyish freaks of his university life. Moreover there appears to have been nothing coarse or unworthy in his dissipation; he was simply idle. He justly lays much of the blame on the authorities. To say that the discipline was lax would be to pay it an unmerited compliment. There was no discipline at all. He lived in Magdalen as he might have lived at the Angel or the Mitre Tavern. He not only left his college, but he left the university, whenever he liked. In one winter he made a tour to Bath, another to Buckinghamshire, and he made four excursions to London, "without once hearing the voice of admonition, without once feeling the hand of control." Of study he had just as much and as little as he pleased.

"As soon as my tutor had sounded the insufficiency of his disciple in school learning, he proposed that we should read every morning from ten to eleven the comedies of Terence. During the first weeks I constantly attended these lessons in my tutor's room; but as they appeared equally devoid of profit and pleasure, I was once tempted to try the experiment of a formal apology. The apology was accepted with a smile. I repeated the offence with less ceremony: the excuse was admitted with the same indulgence; the slightest motive of laziness or indisposition, the most trifling avocation at home or abroad was allowed as a worthy impediment, nor did my tutor appear conscious of my absence or

neglect." No wonder he spoke with indignation of such scandalous neglect. "To the University of Oxford," he says, "I acknowledge no obligation, and she will as readily renounce me for a son, as I am willing to disclaim her for a mother. I spent fourteen months at Magdalen College; they proved the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life. The reader will pronounce between the school and the scholar." This is only just and fully merited by the abuses denounced. One appreciates the anguish of the true scholar mourning over lost time as a miser over lost gold. There was another side of the question which naturally did not occur to Gibbon, but which may properly occur to us. Did Gibbon lose as much as he thought in missing the scholastic drill of the regular public school and university man? Something he undoubtedly lost: he was never a finished scholar, up to the standard even of his own day. If he had been, is it certain that the accomplishment would have been all gain? It may be doubted. At a later period Gibbon read the classics with the free and eager curiosity of a thoughtful mind. It was a labour of love, of passionate ardour, similar to the manly zeal of the great scholars of the Renaissance. This appetite had not been blunted by enforced toil in a prescribed groove. How much of that zest for antiquity, of that keen relish for the classic writers which he afterwards acquired and retained through life, might have been quenched if he had first made their acquaintance as school-books? Above all, would he have looked on the ancient world with such freedom and originality as he afterwards gained, if he had worn through youth the harness of academical study? These questions do not suggest an answer, but they may furnish a doubt.

Oxford and Cambridge for nearly a century have been turning out crowds of thorough-paced scholars of the orthodox pattern. It is odd that the two greatest historians who have been scholars as well—Gibbon and Grote—were not university-bred men.

As if to prove by experiment where the fault lay, in "the school or the scholar," Gibbon had no sooner left Oxford for the long vacation, than his taste for study returned, and, not content with reading, he attempted original composition. The subject he selected was a curious one for a youth in his sixteenth year. It was an attempt to settle the chronology of the age of Sesostris, and shows how soon the austere side of history had attracted his attention "In my childish balance," he says, "I presumed to weigh the systems of Scaliger and Petavius, of Marsham and of Newton; and my sleep has been disturbed by the difficulty of reconciling the Septuagint with the Hebrew computation." Of course his essay had the usual value of such juvenile productions; that is, none at all, except as an indication of early bias to serious study of history. On his return to Oxford, the age of Sesostris was wisely relinquished. He indeed soon commenced a line of study which was destined to have a lasting influence on the remainder of his course through life.

He had an inborn taste for theology and the controversies which have arisen concerning religious dogma. "From my childhood," he says, "I had been fond of religious disputation: my poor aunt has often been puzzled by the mysteries which she strove to believe." How he carried the taste into mature life, his great chapters on the heresies and controversies of the Early Church are there to show. This inclination for

theology, co existing with a very different temper towards religious sentiment, recalls the similar case of the author of the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, the illustrious Pierre Bayle, whom Gibbon resembled in more ways than one. At Oxford his religous education, like everything else connected with culture, had been entirely neglected. It seems hardly credible, yet we have his word for it, that he never subscribed or studied the Articles of the Church of England, and was never confirmed. When he first went up, he was judged to be too young, but the Vice Chancellor directed him to return as soon as he had completed his fifteenth year, recommending him in the meantime to the instruction of his college. "My college forgot to instruct; I forgot to return, and was myself forgotten by the first magistrate of the university. Without a single lecture, either public or private, either Christian or Protestant, without any academical subscription, without any episcopal ordination, I was left by light of my catechism to grope my way to the chapel and communion table, where I was admitted without question how far or by what means I might be qualified to receive the sacrament. Such almost incredible neglect was productive of the worst mischiefs." What did Gibbon mean by this last sentence? Did he, when he wrote it, towards the end of his life, regret the want of early religious instruction? Nothing leads us to think so, or to suppose that his subsequent loss of faith was a heavy grief, supported, but painful to bear His mind was by nature positive, or even pagan, and he had nothing of what the Germans call *religiosität* in him. Still there is a passage in his Memoirs where he oddly enough laments not having selected the *fat*

slumbers of the Church as an eligible profession. Did he reflect that perhaps the neglect of his religious education at Oxford had deprived him of a bishopric or a good deanery, and the learned leisure which such positions at that time conferred on those who cared for it? He could not feel that he was morally, or even spiritually, unfit for an office filled in his own time by such men as Warburton and Hurd. He would not have disgraced the episcopal bench; he would have been dignified, courteous, and hospitable; a patron and promoter of learning, we may be sure. His literary labours would probably have consisted of an edition of a Greek play or two, and certainly some treatise on the Evidences of Christianity. But in that case we should not have had the *Decline and Fall.*

The "blind activity of idleness" to which he was exposed at Oxford, prevented any result of this kind. For want of anything better to do, he was led to read Middleton's *Free Enquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are Supposed to have Subsisted in the Christian Church.* Gibbon says that the effect of Middleton's "bold criticism" upon him was singular, and that instead of making him a sceptic, it made him more of a believer. He might have reflected that it is the commonest of occurrences for controversialists to produce exactly the opposite result to that which they intend, and that as many an apology for Christianity has sown the first seeds of infidelity, so an attack upon it might well intensify faith. What follows is very curious. "The elegance of style and freedom of argument were repelled by a shield of prejudice. I still revered the character, or rather the names of the saints and fathers whom Dr. Middleton exposes; nor could he

destroy my implicit belief that the gift of miraculous powers was continued in the Church during the first four or five centuries of Christianity. But I was unable to resist the weight of historical evidence, that within the same period most of the leading doctrines of Popery were already introduced in theory and practice. Nor was my conclusion absurd that miracles are the test of truth, and that the Church must be orthodox and pure which was so often approved by the visible interposition of the Deity. The marvellous tales which are boldly attested by the Basils and Chrysostoms, the Austins and Jeromes, compelled me to embrace the superior merits of celibacy, the institution of the monastic life, the use of the sign of the cross, of holy oil, and even of images, the invocation of saints, the worship of relics, the rudiments of purgatory in prayers for the dead, and the tremendous mystery of the sacrifice of the body and the blood of Christ, which insensibly swelled into the prodigy of transubstantiation." In this remarkable passage we have a distinct foreshadow of the Tractarian movement, which came seventy or eighty years afterwards. Gibbon in 1752, at the age of fifteen, took up a position practically the same as Froude and Newman took up about the year 1830. In other words, he reached the famous *via media* at a bound. But a second spring soon carried him clear of it, into the bosom of the Church of Rome.

He had come to what are now called Church principles, by the energy of his own mind working on the scanty data furnished him by Middleton. By one of those accidents which usually happen in such cases, he made the acquaintance of a young gentleman who had already embraced Catholicism, and who was well

provided with controversial tracts in favour of Romanism. Among these were the two works of Bossuet, the *Exposition of Catholic Doctrine* and the *History of the Protestant Variations*. Gibbon says: "I read, I applauded, I believed, and surely I fell by a noble hand. I have since examined the originals with a more discerning eye, and shall not hesitate to pronounce that Bossuet is indeed a master of all the weapons of controversy. In the *Exposition*, a specious apology, the orator assumes with consummate art the tone of candour and simplicity, and the ten-horned monster is transformed at his magic touch into the milk-white hind, who must be loved as soon as she is seen. In the *History*, a bold and well-aimed attack, he displays, with a happy mixture of narrative and argument, the faults and follies, the changes and contradictions of our first Reformers, whose variations, as he dexterously contends, are the mark of historical error, while the perpetual unity of the Catholic Church is the sign and test of infallible truth. To my present feelings it seems incredible that I should ever believe that I believed in transubstantiation. But my conqueror oppressed me with the sacramental words, '*Hoc est corpus meum*,' and dashed against each other the figurative half meanings of the Protestant sects; every objection was resolved into omnipotence, and, after repeating at St. Mary's the Athanasian Creed, I humbly acquiesced in the mystery of the Real Presence."

Many reflections are suggested on the respective domains of reason and faith by these words, but they cannot be enlarged on here. No one, nowadays, one may hope, would think of making Gibbon's conversion a subject of reproach to him. The danger is rather that

it should be regarded with too much honour. It unquestionably shows the early and trenchant force of his intellect: he mastered the logical position in a moment; saw the necessity of a criterion of faith; and being told that it was to be found in the practice of antiquity, boldly went there, and abided by the result. But this praise to his head does not extend to his heart. A more tender and deep moral nature would not have moved so rapidly. We must in fairness remember that it was not his fault that his religious education had been neglected at home, at school, and at college. But we have no reason to think that had it been attended to, the result would have been much otherwise. The root of spiritual life did not exist in him. It never withered, because it never shot up. Thus when he applied his acute mind to a religious problem, he contemplated it with the coolness and impartiality of a geometer or chess player, his intellect operated *in vacuo* so to speak, untrammelled by any bias of sentiment or early training. He had no profound associations to tear out of his heart. He merely altered the premisses of a syllogism. When Catholicism was presented to him in a logical form, it met with no inward bar and repugnance. The house was empty and ready for a new guest, or rather the first guest. If Gibbon anticipated the Tractarian movement intellectually, he was farther removed than the poles are asunder from the mystic reverent spirit which inspired that movement. If we read the *Apologia* of Dr. Newman, we perceive the likeness and unlikeness of the two cases. "As a matter of simple conscience," says the latter, "I felt it to be a duty to protest against the Church of Rome." At the time he refers to Dr. Newman was a Catholic to a degree Gibbon never

dreamed of. But in the one case conscience and heart-ties "strong as life, stronger almost than death," arrested the conclusions of the intellect. Ground which Gibbon dashed over in a few months or weeks, the great Tractarian took ten years to traverse. So different is the mystic from the positive mind.

Gibbon had no sooner settled his new religion than he resolved with a frankness which did him all honour to profess it publicly. He wrote to his father, announcing his conversion, a letter which he afterwards described, when his sentiments had undergone a complete change, as written with all the pomp, dignity, and self-satisfaction of a martyr. A momentary glow of enthusiasm had raised him, as he said, above all worldly considerations. He had no difficulty, in an excursion to London, in finding a priest, who perceived in the first interview that persuasion was needless. "After sounding the motives and merits of my conversion, he consented to admit me into the pale of the Church, and at his feet on the 8th of June 1753, I solemnly, though privately, abjured the errors of heresy." He was exactly fifteen years and one month old. Further details, which one would like to have, he does not give. The scene even of the solemn act is not mentioned, nor whether he was baptized again; but this may be taken for granted.

The fact of any one "going over to Rome" is too common an occurrence nowadays to attract notice. But in the eighteenth century it was a rare and startling phenomenon. Gibbon's father, who was "neither a bigot nor a philosopher," was shocked and astonished by his "son's strange departure from the religion of his

country." He divulged the secret of young Gibbon's conversion, and "the gates of Magdalen College were for ever shut" against the latter's return. They really needed no shutting at all. By the fact of his conversion to Romanism he had ceased to be a member of the University.

CHAPTER II.

AT LAUSANNE.

THE elder Gibbon showed a decision of character and prompt energy in dealing with his son's conversion to Romanism, which were by no means habitual with him. He swiftly determined to send him out of the country, far away from the influences and connections which had done such harm. Lausanne in Switzerland was the place selected for his exile, in which it was resolved he should spend some years in wholesome reflections on the error he had committed in yielding to the fascinations of Roman Catholic polemics. No time was lost: Gibbon had been received into the Church on the 8th of June, 1753, and on the 30th of the same month he had reached his destination. He was placed under the care of a M. Pavillard, a Calvinist minister, who had two duties laid upon him, a general one, to superintend the young man's studies, a particular and more urgent one, to bring him back to the Protestant faith.

It was a severe trial which Gibbon had now to undergo. He was by nature shy and retiring; he was ignorant of French; he was very young; and with these disadvantages he was thrown among entire strangers alone. After the excitement and novelty of foreign travel were

over, and he could realise his position, he felt his heart sink within him. From the luxury and freedom of Oxford he was degraded to the dependence of a schoolboy. Pavillard managed his expenses, and his supply of pocket-money was reduced to a small monthly allowance. "I had exchanged," he says, "my elegant apartment in Magdalen College for a narrow gloomy street, the most unfrequented in an unhandsome town, for an old inconvenient house, and for a small chamber ill contrived and ill furnished, which on the approach of winter, instead of a companionable fire, must be warmed by the dull and invisible heat of a stove." Under these gloomy auspices he began the most profitable, and after a time the most pleasant, period of his whole life, one on which he never ceased to look back with unmingled satisfaction as the starting-point of his studies and intellectual progress.

The first care of his preceptor was to bring about his religious conversion. Gibbon showed an honourable tenacity to his new faith, and a whole year after he had been exposed to the Protestant dialectics of Pavillard he still, as the latter observed with much regret, continued to abstain from meat on Fridays. There is something slightly incongruous in the idea of Gibbon *fasting* out of religious scruples, but the fact shows that his religion had obtained no slight hold of him, and that although he had embraced it quickly, he also accepted with intrepid frankness all its consequences. His was not an intellect that could endure half measures and half lights; he did not belong to that class of persons who do not know their own minds.

However it is not surprising that his religion, placed where he was, was slowly but steadily undermined. The

Swiss clergy, he says, were acute and learned on the topics of controversy, and Pavillard seems to have been a good specimen of his class. An adult and able man, in daily contact with a youth in his own house, urging persistently but with tact one side of a thesis, could hardly fail in the course of time to carry his point. But though Gibbon is willing to allow his tutor a handsome share in the work of his conversion, he maintains that it was chiefly effected by his own private reflections. And this is eminently probable. What logic had set up, logic could throw down. He gives us a highly characteristic example of the reflections in question. "I still remember my solitary transport at the discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation: that the text of Scripture which seems to inculcate the Real Presence is attested only by a single sense—our sight; while the real presence itself is disproved by three of our senses—the sight, the touch, and the taste." He was unaware of the distinction between the logical understanding and the higher reason, which has been made since his time to the great comfort of thinkers of a certain stamp. Having reached so far, his progress was easy and rapid. "The various articles of the Romish creed disappeared like a dream, and after a full conviction, on Christmas-day, 1754, I received the sacrament in the church of Lausanne. It was here that I suspended my religious inquiries, acquiescing with implicit belief in the tenets and mysteries which are adopted by the general consent of Catholics and Protestants." He thus had been a Catholic for about eighteen months.

Gibbon's residence at Lausanne was a memorable epoch in his life on two grounds. Firstly, it was during the five years he spent there that he laid the founda-

tions of that deep and extensive learning by which he was afterwards distinguished. Secondly, the foreign education he there received, at the critical period when the youth passes into the man, gave a permanent bent to his mind, and made him a continental European rather than an insular Englishman—two highly important factors in his intellectual growth.

He says that he went up to Oxford with a "stock of erudition which might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy might have been ashamed." Both erudition and ignorance were left pretty well undisturbed during his short and ill-starred university career. At Lausanne he found himself, for the first time, in possession of the means of successful study, good health, calm, books, and tuition, up to a certain point: that point did not reach very far. The good Pavillard, an excellent man, for whom Gibbon ever entertained a sincere regard, was quite unequal to the task of forming such a mind. There is no evidence that he was a ripe or even a fair scholar, and the plain fact is that Gibbon belongs to the honourable band of self-taught men. "My tutor," says Gibbon, "had the good sense to discern how far he could be useful, and when he felt that I advanced beyond his speed and measure, he wisely left me to my genius." Under that good guidance he formed an extensive plan of reviewing the Latin classics, in the four divisions of (1) Historians, (2) Poets, (3) Orators, and (4) Philosophers, in "chronological series from the days of Plautus and Sallust to the decline of the language and empire of Rome." In one year he read over the following authors: Virgil, Sallust, Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Valerius Maximus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Quintus Curtius, Justin, Florus, Plautus, Terence,

and Lucretius. We may take his word when he says that this review, however rapid, was neither hasty nor superficial. Gibbon had the root of all scholarship in him, the most diligent accuracy and an unlimited faculty of taking pains. But he was a great scholar, not a minutiæ one, and belonged to the robust race of the Scaligers and the Bentleys, rather than to the smaller breed of the Elmsleys and Monks, and of course he was at no time a professed philologer, occupied chiefly with the niceties of language. The point which deserves notice in this account of his studies is their wide sweep, so superior and bracing, as compared with that narrow restriction to the "authors of the best period," patronised by teachers who imperfectly comprehend their own business. Gibbon proceeded on the common-sense principle, that if you want to obtain a real grasp of the literature, history, and genius of a people, you must master that literature with more or less completeness from end to end, and that to select arbitrarily the authors of a short period on the grounds that they are models of style, is nothing short of foolish. It was the principle on which Joseph Scaliger studied Greek, and indeed occurs spontaneously to a vigorous mind eager for real knowledge.[1]

Nor did he confine himself to reading: he felt that no one is sure of knowing a language who limits his study of it to the perusal of authors. He practised diligently Latin prose composition, and this in the simplest and

[1] Vix delibatis conjugationibus Græcis, Homerum cum interpretatione arreptum uno et viginti diebus totum didici. Reliquos vero poetas Græcos omnes intra quatuor menses devoravi. Neque ullum oratorem aut historicum prius attigi quam poetas omnes tenerem.—*Scaligeri Epistolæ. Lib* 1. *Epis.* 1.

most effectual way. "I translated an epistle of Cicero into French, and after throwing it aside till the words and phrases were obliterated from my memory, I re-translated my French into such Latin as I could find, and then compared each sentence of my imperfect version with the ease, the grace, the propriety of the Roman orator" The only odd thing in connection with this excellent method is that Gibbon in his Memoirs seems to think it was a novel discovery of his own, and would recommend it to the imitation of students, whereas it is as old as the days of Ascham at least. There is no indication that he ever in the least degree attempted Latin verse, and it is improbable that he should have done so, reading alone in Lausanne, under the slight supervision of such a teacher as Pavillard. The lack of this elegant frivolity will be less thought of now than it would some years ago. But we may admit that it would have been interesting to have a copy of hexameters or elegiacs by the historian of Rome. So much for Latin. In Greek he made far less progress. He had attained his nineteenth year before he learned the alphabet, and even after so late a beginning he did not prosecute the study with much energy.

M. Pavillard seems to have taught him little more than the rudiments. "After my tutor had left me to myself I worked my way through about half the *Iliad*, and afterwards interpreted alone a large portion of Xenophon and Herodotus. But my ardour, destitute of aid and emulation, gradually cooled, and from the barren task of searching words in a lexicon I withdrew to the free and familiar conversation of Virgil and Tacitus." This statement of the Memoirs is more than confirmed by the journal of his studies, where we find him, as late as the

year 1762, when he was twenty-five years of age, painfully reading Homer, it would appear, for the first time. He read on an average about a book a week, and when he had finished the *Iliad* this is what he says: "I have so far met with the success I hoped for, that I have acquired a great facility in reading the language, and treasured up a very great stock of words. What I have rather neglected is the grammatical construction of them, and especially the many various inflections of the verbs." To repair this defect he wisely resolved to bestow some time every morning on the perusal of the Greek Grammar of Port Royal. Thus we see that at an age when many men are beginning to forget their Greek, Gibbon was beginning to learn it. Was this early deficiency ever repaired in Greek as it was in Latin? I think not. He never was at home in old Hellas as he was in old Rome. This may be inferred from the discursive notes of his great work, in which he has with admirable skill incorporated so much of his vast and miscellaneous reading. But his references to classic Greek authors are relatively few and timid compared with his grasp and mastery of the Latin. His judgments on Greek authors are also, to say the least, singular. When he had achieved the *Decline and Fall*, and was writing his Memoirs in the last years of his life, the Greek writer whom he selects for especial commendation is Xenophon. "Cicero in Latin and Xenophon in Greek are indeed the two ancients whom I would first propose to a liberal scholar, not only for the merit of their style and sentiments, but for the admirable lessons which may be applied almost to every situation of public and private life." Of the merit of Xenophon's sentiments, most people would now admit that the less said the better.

The warmth of Gibbon's language with regard to Xenophon contrasts with the coldness he shows with regard to Plato. "I involved myself," he says, "in the philosophic maze of the writings of Plato, of which perhaps the dramatic is more interesting than the argumentative part." That Gibbon knew amply sufficient Greek for his purposes as an historian no one doubts, but his honourable candour enables us to see that he was never a Greek scholar in the proper sense of the word.

It would be greatly to misknow Gibbon to suppose that his studies at Lausanne were restricted to the learned languages. He obtained something more than an elementary knowledge of mathematics, mastered De Crousaz' *Logic* and Locke's *Essay*, and filled up his spare time with that wide and discursive reading to which his boundless curiosity was always pushing him. He was thoroughly happy and contented, and never ceased throughout his life to congratulate himself on the fortunate exile which had placed him at Lausanne. In one respect he did not use his opportunities while in Switzerland. He never climbed a mountain all the time he was there, though he lived to see in his later life the first commencement of the Alpine fever. On the other hand, as became a historian and man of sense, the social and political aspects of the country engaged his attention, as well they might. He enjoyed access to the best society of the place, and the impression he made seems to have been as favourable as the one he received.

The influence of a foreign training is very marked in Gibbon, affecting as it does his general cast of thought, and even his style. It would be difficult to name any writer in our language, especially among the few who deserve to be compared with him, who is so un-English,

not in a bad sense of the word, as implying objectionable qualities, but as wanting the clear insular stamp and native flavour. If an intelligent Chinese or Persian were to read his book in a French translation, he would not readily guess that it was written by an Englishman. It really bears the imprint of no nationality, and is emphatically European. We may postpone the question whether this is a merit or a defect, but it is a characteristic. The result has certainly been that he is one of the best-known of English prose writers on the Continent, and one whom foreigners most readily comprehend. This peculiarity, of which he himself was fully aware, we may agree with him in ascribing to his residence at Lausanne. At the "flexible age of sixteen he soon learned to endure, and gradually to adopt," foreign manners. French became the language in which he spontaneously thought; "his views were enlarged, and his prejudices were corrected." In one particular he cannot be complimented on the effect of his continental education, when he congratulates himself "that his taste for the French theatre had abated his idolatry for the gigantic genius of Shakespeare, which is inculcated from our infancy as the first duty of Englishmen." Still it is well to be rid of idolatry and bigotry even with regard to Shakespeare. We must remember that the insular prejudices from which Gibbon rejoiced to be free were very different in their intensity and narrowness from anything of the kind which exists now. The mixed hatred and contempt for foreigners which prevailed in his day, were enough to excite disgust in any liberal mind.

The lucid order and admirable literary form of Gibbon's great work are qualities which can escape no

observant reader. But they are qualities which are not common in English books. The French have a saying, "Les Anglais ne savent pas faire un livre." This is unjust, taken absolutely, but as a general rule it is not without foundation. It is not a question of depth or originality of thought, nor of the various merits belonging to style properly so-called. In these respects English authors need not fear competition. But in the art of clear and logical arrangement, of building up a book in such order and method that each part contributes to the general effect of the whole, we must own that we have many lessons to learn of our neighbours. Now in this quality Gibbon is a Frenchman. Not Voltaire himself is more perspicuous than Gibbon. Everything is in its place, and disposed in such apparently natural sequence that the uninitiated are apt to think the matter could not have been managed otherwise. It is a case, if there ever was one, of consummate art concealing every trace, not only of art, but even of effort. Of course the grasp and penetrating insight which are implied here, were part of Gibbon's great endowment, which only Nature could give. But it was fortunate that his genius was educated in the best school for bringing out its innate quality.

It would be difficult to explain why, except on that principle of decimation by which Macaulay accounted for the outcry against Lord Byron, Gibbon's solitary and innocent love passage has been made the theme of a good deal of malicious comment. The parties most interested, and who, we may presume, knew the circumstances better than any one else, seem to have been quite satisfied with each other's conduct. Gibbon and Mdlle. Curchod, afterwards Madame Necker, remained on

terms of the *most* intimate friendship till the end of the former's life. This might be supposed sufficient. But it has not been so considered by evil tongues. The merits of the case, however, may be more conveniently discussed in a later chapter. At this point it will be enough to give the facts.

Mdlle. Susanne Curchod was born about the year 1740; her father was the Calvinist minister of Crassier, her mother a French Huguenot who had preferred her religion to her country. She had received a liberal and even learned education from her father, and was as attractive in person as she was accomplished in mind. "She was beautiful with that pure virginal beauty which depends on early youth" (Sainte-Beuve). In 1757 she was the talk of Lausanne, and could not appear in an assembly or at the play without being surrounded by admirers; she was called La Belle Curchod. Gibbon's curiosity was piqued to see such a prodigy, and he was smitten with love at first sight. "I found her" he says "learned without pedantry, lively in conversation, pure in sentiment, and elegant in manners." He was twenty and she seventeen years of age; no impediment was placed in the way of their meeting; and he was a frequent guest in her father's house. In fact Gibbon paid his court with an assiduity which makes an exception in his usually unromantic nature. "She listened," he says, "to the voice of truth and passion, and I might presume to hope that I had made some impression on a virtuous heart." We must remember that this and other rather glowing passages in his Memoirs were written in his old age, when he had returned to Lausanne, and when, after a long separation and many vicissitudes, he and Madame Necker were again thrown

together in an intimacy of friendship which revived old memories. Letters of hers to him which will be quoted in a later chapter show this in a striking light. He indulged, he says, his dream of felicity, but on his return to England he soon discovered that his father would not hear of this "strange alliance," and then follows the sentence which has lost him in the eyes of some persons. "After a painful struggle I yielded to my fate: I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son." What else he was to do under the circumstances does not appear. He was wholly dependent on his father, and on the Continent at least parental authority is not regarded as a trifling impediment in such cases. Gibbon could only have married Mdlle. Curchod as an exile and a pauper, if he had openly withstood his father's wishes. "All for love" is a very pretty maxim, but it is apt to entail trouble when practically applied. Jean Jacques Rousseau, who had the most beautiful sentiments on paper, but who in real life was not always a model of self-denial, found, as we shall see, grave fault with Gibbon's conduct. Gibbon, as a plain man of rather prosaic good sense, behaved neither heroically nor meanly. Time, absence, and the scenes of a new life, which he found in England, had their usual effect; his passion vanished. "My cure," he says, "was accelerated by a faithful report of the tranquillity and cheerfulness of the lady herself, and my love subsided in friendship and esteem." The probability, indeed, that he and Mdlle. Curchod would ever see each other again, must have seemed remote in the extreme. Europe and England were involved in the Seven Years War; he was fixed at home, and an officer in the militia; Switzerland was far off: when and where were they likely to meet?

They did, contrary to all expectation, meet again, and renewed terms not so much of friendship as of affection. Mdlle. Curchod, as the wife of Necker, became somewhat of a celebrity, and it is chiefly owing to these last-named circumstances that the world has ever heard of Gibbon's early love.

While he was at Lausanne Gibbon made the acquaintance of Voltaire, but it led to no intimacy or fruitful reminiscence. "He received me with civility as an English youth, but I cannot boast of any peculiar notice or distinction." Still he had "the satisfaction of hearing—an uncommon circumstance—a great poet declaim his own productions on the stage." One is often tempted, in reading Gibbon's Memoirs, to regret that he adopted the austere plan which led him "to condemn the practice of transforming a private memorial into a vehicle of satire or praise." As he truly says, "It was assuredly in his power to amuse the reader with a gallery of portraits and a collection of anecdotes." This reserve is particularly disappointing when a striking and original figure like Voltaire passes across the field, without an attempt to add one stroke to the portraiture of such a physiognomy.

Gibbon had now (1758) been nearly five years at Lausanne, when his father suddenly intimated that he was to return home immediately. The Seven Years War was at its height, and the French had denied a passage through France to English travellers. Gibbon, or more properly his Swiss friends, thought that the alternative road through Germany might be dangerous, though it might have been assumed that the Great Frederick, so far as he was concerned, would make things as pleasant as possible to British subjects, whose country had just

consented to supply him with a much-needed subsidy. The French route was preferred, perhaps as much from a motive of frolic as anything else. Two Swiss officers of his acquaintance undertook to convey Gibbon from France as one of their companions, under an assumed name, and in borrowed regimentals. His complete mastery of French removed any chance of detection on the score of language, and with a "mixture of joy and regret" on the 11th April, 1758, Gibbon left Lausanne. He had a pleasant journey, but no adventures, and returned to his native land after an absence of four years, ten months, and fifteen days.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE MILITIA.

THE only person whom, on his return, Gibbon had the least wish to see was his aunt, Catherine Porten. To her house he at once hastened, and "the evening was spent in the effusions of joy and tenderness." He looked forward to his first meeting with his father with no slight anxiety, and that for two reasons. First, his father had parted from him with anger and menace, and he had no idea how he would be received now. Secondly, his mother's place was occupied by a second wife, and an involuntary but strong prejudice possessed him against his step-mother. He was most agreeably disappointed in both respects. His father "received him as a man, as a friend, all constraint was banished at our first interview, and we ever after continued on the same terms of easy and equal politeness." So far the prospect was pleasant. But the step-mother remained a possible obstacle to all comfort at home. He seems to have regarded his father's second marriage as an act of displeasure with himself, and he was disposed to hate the rival of his mother. Gibbon soon found that the injustice was in his own fancy, and the imaginary monster was an amiable and deserving woman. "I could not be

mistaken in the first view of her understanding; her knowledge and the elegant spirit of her conversation, her polite welcome, and her assiduous care to study and gratify my wishes announced at least that the surface would be smooth; and my suspicions of art and falsehood were gradually dispelled by the full discovery of her warm and exquisite sensibility." He became indeed deeply attached to his step-mother. "After some reserve on my side, our minds associated in confidence and friendship, and as Mrs. Gibbon had neither children nor the hopes of children, we more easily adopted the tender names and genuine characters of mother and son." A most creditable testimony surely to the worth and amiability of both of them. The friendship thus begun continued without break or coolness to the end of Gibbon's life. Thirty-five years after his first interview with his step mother, and only a few months before his own death, when he was old and ailing, and the least exertion, by reason of his excessive corpulence, involved pain and trouble, he made a long journey to Bath for the sole purpose of paying Mrs. Gibbon a visit. He was very far from being the selfish Epicurean that has been sometimes represented.

He had brought with him from Lausanne the first pages of a work which, after much bashfulness and delay, he at length published in the French language, under the title of *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature*, in the year 1761, that is two years after its completion. In one respect this juvenile work of Gibbon has little merit. The style is at once poor and stilted, and the general quality of remark eminently commonplace, where it does not fall into paradox. On the other hand, it has an interesting and even original side. The main

idea of the little book, so far as it has one, was excellent, and really above the general thought of the age, namely, the vindication of classical literature and history generally from the narrow and singular prejudice which prevailed against them, especially in France. When Gibbon ascribes the design of his first work to a "refinement of vanity, the desire of justifying and praising the object of a favourite pursuit," he does himself less than justice. This first utterance of his historic genius was prompted by an unconscious but deep reaction against that contempt for the past, which was the greatest blot in the speculative movement of the eighteenth century. He resists the temper of his time rather from instinct than reason, and pleads the cause of learning with the hesitation of a man who has not fully seen round his subject, or even mastered his own thoughts upon it. Still there is his protest against the proposal of D'Alembert, who recommended that after a selection of facts had been made at the end of every century the remainder should be delivered to the flames. "Let us preserve them all," he says, "most carefully. A Montesquieu will detect in the most insignificant, relations which the vulgar overlook." He resented the haughty pretensions of the mathematical sciences to universal dominion, with sufficient vigour to have satisfied Auguste Comte. "Physics and mathematics are at present on the throne. They see their sister sciences prostrate before them, chained to their chariot, or at most occupied in adorning their triumph. Perhaps their downfall is not far off." To speak of a positive downfall of exact sciences was a mistake. But we may fairly suppose that Gibbon did not contemplate anything beyond a relative change of

position in the hierarchy of the sciences, by which history and politics would recover or attain to a dignity which was denied them in his day. In one passage Gibbon shows that he had dimly foreseen the possibility of the modern inquiries into the conditions of savage life and prehistoric man. "An Iroquois book, even were it full of absurdities, would be an invaluable treasure. It would offer a unique example of the nature of the human mind placed in circumstances which we have never known, and influenced by manners and religious opinions, the complete opposite of ours." In this sentence Gibbon seems to call in anticipation for the researches which have since been prosecuted with so much success by eminent writers among ourselves, not to mention similar inquirers on the Continent.

But in the meantime Gibbon had entered on a career which removed him for long months from books and study. Without sufficiently reflecting on what such a step involved, he had joined the militia, which was embodied in the year 1760; and for the next two and a half years led as he says, a wandering life of military servitude. At first, indeed, he was so pleased with his new mode of life that he had serious thoughts of becoming a professional soldier. But this enthusiasm speedily wore off, and our "mimic Bellona soon revealed to his eyes her naked deformity." It was indeed no mere playing at soldiering that he had undertaken. He was the practical working commander of "an independent corps of 476 officers and men." "In the absence, or even in the presence of the two field officers" (one of whom was his father, the major) "I was intrusted with the effective labour of dictating the orders and exercising the battalion." And his duty did

not consist in occasional drilling and reviews, but in serious marches, sometimes of thirty miles in a day, and camping under canvas. One encampment, on Winchester Downs, lasted four months. Gibbon does not hesitate to say that the superiority of his grenadiers to the detachments of the regular army, with which they were often mingled, was so striking that the most prejudiced regular could not have hesitated a moment to admit it. But the drilling, and manœuvring, and all that pertained to the serious side of militia business interested Gibbon, and though it took up time it gave him knowledge of a special kind, of which he quite appreciated the value. He was much struck, for instance, by the difference between the nominal and effective force of every regiment he had seen, even when supposed to be complete, and gravely doubts whether a nominal army of 100,000 men often brings *fifty* thousand into the field. What he found unendurable was the constant shifting of quarters, the utter want of privacy and leisure it often entailed, and the distasteful society in which he was forced to live. For eight months at a stretch he never took a book in his hand. "From the day we marched from Blandford, I had hardly a moment I could call my own, being almost continually in motion, or if I was fixed for a day, it was in the guardroom, a barrack, or an inn." Even worse were the drinking and late hours; sometimes in "rustic" company, sometimes in company in which joviality and wit were more abundant than decorum and common sense, which will surprise no one who hears that the famous John Wilkes, who was colonel of the Buckingham militia, was not unfrequently one of his boon companions. A few extracts from his journal will be enough

"To-day (August 28, 1762), Sir Thomas Worsley," the colonel of the battalion, "came to us to dinner. Pleased to see him, we kept bumperising till after roll-calling, Sir Thomas assuring us every fresh bottle how infinitely sober he was growing." September 23rd. "Colonel Wilkes, of the Buckingham militia, dined with us, and renewed the acquaintance Sir Thomas and myself had begun with him at Reading. I scarcely ever met with a better companion; he has inexhaustible spirits, infinite wit and humour, and a great deal of knowledge . . . This proved a very debauched day; we drank a great deal both after dinner and supper; and when at last Wilkes had retired, Sir Thomas and some others (of whom I was not one) broke into his room and made him drink a bottle of claret in bed." December 17. "We found old Captain Meard at Arlesford with the second division of the Fourteenth. He and all his officers supped with us, which made the evening rather a drunken one." Gibbon might well say that the militia was unfit for and unworthy of him.

Yet it is quite astonishing to see, as recorded in his journal, how keen an interest he still managed to retain in literature in the midst of all this dissipation, and how fertile he was of schemes and projects of future historical works to be prosecuted under more favourable auspices. Subject after subject occurred to him as eligible and attractive; he caresses the idea for a time, then lays it aside for good reasons. First, he pitched upon the expedition of Charles VIII. of France into Italy. He read and meditated upon it, and wrote a dissertation of ten folio pages, besides large notes, in which he examined the right of Charles VIII. to the crown of Naples, and the rival claims of the houses of

Anjou and Aragon. In a few weeks he gives up this idea, firstly, for the rather odd reason that the subject was too remote from us; and, secondly, for the very good reason that the expedition was rather the introduction to great events than great and important in itself. He then successively chose and rejected the Crusade of Richard the First; the Barons' War against John and Henry III.; the history of Edward the Black Prince; the lives and comparisons of Henry V. and the Emperor Titus; the life of Sir Philip Sidney, and that of the Marquis of Montrose. At length he fixed on Sir Walter Raleigh as his hero. On this he worked with all the assiduity that his militia life allowed, read a great quantity of original documents relating to it, and, after some months of labour, declared that "his subject opened upon him, and in general improved upon a nearer prospect." But half a year later he "is afraid he will have to drop his hero." And he covers half a page with reasons to persuade himself that he was right in doing so. Besides the obvious one that he would be able to add little that was not already accessible in Oldys' *Life of Raleigh*, that the topic was exhausted, and so forth, he goes on to make these remarks, which have more signification to us now than perhaps they had to him when he wrote them. "Could I even surmount these obstacles, I should shrink with terror from the modern history of England, where every character is a problem and every reader a friend or an enemy: when a writer is supposed to hoist a flag of party, and is devoted to damnation by the adverse faction. Such would be *my* reception at home; and abroad the historian of Raleigh must encounter an indifference far more bitter than censure or reproach. The events of his life are interesting; but

his character is ambiguous ; his actions are obscure ; his writings are English, and his fame is confined to the narrow limits of our language and our island. *I must embrace a safer and more extensive theme.*" Here we see the first gropings after a theme of cosmopolitan interest. He has arrived at two negative conclusions ; that it must not be English, and must not be narrow. What it is to be, does not yet appear, for he has still a series of subjects to go through, to be taken up and discarded. The history of the liberty of the Swiss, which at a later period he partially achieved, was one scheme ; the history of Florence under the Medici was another. He speaks with enthusiasm of both projects, adding that he will most probably fix upon the latter ; but he never did anything of the kind.

These were the topics which occupied Gibbon's mind during his service in the militia, escaping when he could from the uproar and vulgarity of the camp and the guardroom to the sanctuary of the historic muse, to worship in secret. But these private devotions could not remove his disgust at "the inn, the wine, and the company" he was forced to endure, and latterly the militia became downright insupportable to him. But honourable motives kept him to his post. "From a service without danger I might have retired without disgrace ; but as often as I hinted a wish of resigning, my fetters were riveted by the friendly intreaties of the colonel, the parental authority of the major, and my own regard for the welfare of the battalion." At last the long-wished-for day arrived, when the militia was disbanded. "Our two companies," he writes in his journal, "were disembodied (December 23rd, 1762), mine at Alton, my father's at

Buriton. They fired three volleys, lodged the major's colours, delivered up their arms, received their money, partook of a dinner at the major's expense, and then separated, with great cheerfulness and regularity. Thus ended the militia." The compression that his spirit had endured was shown by the rapid energy with which he sought a change of scene and oblivion of his woes. Within little more than a month after the scene just described, Gibbon was in Paris beginning the grand tour.

With that keen sense of the value of time which marked him, Gibbon with great impartiality cast up and estimated the profit and loss of his "bloodless campaigns." Both have been alluded to already. He summed up with great fairness in the entry that he made in his journal on the evening of the day on which he recovered his liberty. "I am glad that the militia has been, and glad that it is no more." This judgment he confirmed thirty years afterwards, when he composed his Memoirs. "My principal obligation to the militia was the making me an Englishman and a soldier. After my foreign education, with my reserved temper, I should long have continued a stranger in my native country, had I not been shaken in this various scene of new faces and new friends; had not experience forced me to feel the characters of our leading men, the state of parties, the forms of office, the operations of our civil and military system. In this peaceful service I imbibed the rudiments of the language and science of tactics, which opened a new field of study and observation. I diligently read and meditated the *Mémoires Militaires* of Quintus Icilius, the only writer who has united the merits of a professor and a veteran.

The discipline and evolution of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legion, and the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers (the reader may smile) has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire." No one can doubt it who compares Gibbon's numerous narratives of military operations with the ordinary performances of civil historians in those matters. The campaigns of Julian, Belisarius, and Heraclius, not to mention many others, have not only an uncommon lucidity, but also exhibit a clear appreciation of the obstacles and arduousness of war-like operations, which is rare or unknown to non-military writers. Macaulay has pointed out that Swift's party pamphlets are superior in an especial way to the ordinary productions of that class, in consequence of Swift's unavowed but very serious participation in the cabinet councils of Oxford and Bolingbroke. In the same manner Gibbon had an advantage through his military training, which gives him no small superiority to even the best historical writers who have been without it.

The course of foreign travel which Gibbon was now about to commence had been contemplated before, but the war and the militia had postponed it for nearly three years. It appears that as early as the year 1760 the elder Gibbon had conceived the project of procuring a seat in Parliament for his son, and was willing to incur the anticipated expense of £1500 for that object. Young Gibbon, who seems to have very accurately gauged his own abilities at that early age, was convinced that the money could be much better employed in another way. He wrote in consequence, under his father's roof, a letter to the latter which does such credit to his

head and to his heart, that, although it is somewhat long, it cannot with propriety be omitted here.

EDWARD GIBBON TO HIS FATHER.

"DEAR SIR,

"An address in writing from a person who has the pleasure of being with you every day may appear singular. However I have preferred this method, as upon paper I can speak without a blush and be heard without interruption. If my letter displeases you, impute it, dear sir, to yourself. You have treated me, not like a son, but like a friend. Can you be surprised that I should communicate to a friend all my thoughts and all my desires? Unless the friend approve them, let the father never know them; or at least let him know at the same time that however reasonable, however eligible, my scheme may appear to me, I would rather forget it for ever than cause him the slightest uneasiness.

"When I first returned to England, attentive to my future interests, you were so good as to give me hopes of a seat in Parliament. This seat, it was supposed, would be an expense of fifteen hundred pounds. This design flattered my vanity, as it might enable me to shine in so august an assembly. It flattered a nobler passion: I promised myself that, by the means of this seat, I might one day be the instrument of some good to my country. But I soon perceived how little mere virtuous inclination, unassisted by talents, could contribute towards that great end, and a very short examination discovered to me that those talents had not fallen to my lot. Do not, dear sir, impute this declaration to a false modesty—the meanest species of pride. Whatever else I may be ignorant of, I think I know myself, and shall always endeavour to mention my good qualities without vanity and my defects without repugnance. I shall say nothing of the most intimate acquaintance with his country and language, so absolutely necessary to every senator; since they may be acquired, to allege my deficiency in them would seem only the plea of laziness. But I shall say with

great truth that I never possessed that gift of speech, the first requisite of an orator, which use and labour may improve, but which nature can alone bestow ; that my temper, quiet, retired, somewhat reserved, could neither acquire popularity, bear up against opposition, nor mix with ease in the crowds of public life ; that even my genius (if you allow me any) is better qualified for the deliberate compositions of the closet than for the extempore discourses of Parliament. An unexpected objection would disconcert me, and as I am incapable of explaining to others what I do not understand myself, I should be meditating when I ought to be answering. I even want necessary prejudices of party and of nation. In popular assemblies it is often necessary to inspire them, and never orator inspired well a passion which he did not feel himself. Suppose me even mistaken in my own character, to set out with the repugnance such an opinion must produce offers but an indifferent prospect. But I hear you say it is not necessary that every man should enter into Parliament with such exalted hopes. It is to acquire a title the most glorious of any in a free country, and to employ the weight and consideration it gives in the service of one's friends. Such motives, though not glorious, yet are not dishonourable, and if we had a borough in our command, if you could bring me in without any great expense, or if our fortune enabled us to despise that expense, then indeed I should think them of the greatest strength. But with our private fortune, is it worth while to purchase at so high a rate a title honourable in itself, but which I must share with every fellow that can lay out 1500 pounds? Besides, dear sir, a merchandise is of little value to the owner when he is resolved not to sell it.

"I should affront your penetration did I not suppose you now see the drift of this letter. It is to appropriate to another use the sum with which you destined to bring me into Parliament ; to employ it, not in making me great, but in rendering me happy. I have often heard you say yourself that the allowance you had been so indulgent as to grant me, though very liberal in regard to your estate, was yet but small when compared with the almost necessary extravagances of the age. I have indeed

found it so, notwithstanding a good deal of economy, and an exemption from many of the common expenses of youth. This, dear sir, would be a way of supplying these deficiencies without any additional expense to you. But I forbear—if you think my proposals reasonable, you want no intreaties to engage you to comply with them, if otherwise all will be without effect.

"All that I am afraid of, dear sir, is that I should seem not so much asking a favour, as this really is, as exacting a debt. After all I can say, you will remain the best judge of my good and your own circumstances. Perhaps, like most landed gentlemen, an addition to my annuity would suit you better than a sum of money given at once; perhaps the sum itself may be too considerable. Whatever you may think proper to bestow on me, or in whatever manner, will be received with equal gratitude.

"I intended to stop here, but as I abhor the least appearance of art, I think it better to lay open my whole scheme at once. The unhappy war which now desolates Europe will oblige me to defer seeing France till a peace. But that reason can have no influence on Italy, a country which every scholar must long to see. Should you grant my request, and not disapprove of my manner of employing your bounty, I would leave England this autumn and pass the winter at Lausanne with M. de Voltaire and my old friends. In the spring I would cross the Alps, and after some stay in Italy, as the war must then be terminated, return home through France, to live happily with you and my dear mother. I am now two-and-twenty; a tour must take up a considerable time; and although I believe you have no thoughts of settling me soon (and I am sure I have not), yet so many things may intervene that the man who does not travel early runs a great risk of not travelling at all. But this part of my scheme, as well as the whole of it, I submit entirely to you.

"Permit me, dear sir, to add that I do not know whether the complete compliance with my wishes could increase my love and gratitude, but that I am very sure no refusal could diminish those sentiments with which I shall always remain, dear sir, your most dutiful and obedient son and servant.

"E. GIBBON, JUN."

Instead of going to Italy in the autumn of 1760, as he fondly hoped when he wrote this letter, Gibbon was marching about the south of England at the head of his grenadiers. But the scheme sketched in the above letter was only postponed, and ultimately realised in every particular. The question of a seat in Parliament never came up again during his father's life, and no doubt the money it would have cost was, according to his wise suggestion, devoted to defray the expenses of his foreign tour, which he is now about to begin.

CHAPTFR IV.

THE ITALIAN JOURNEY.

GIBBON reached Paris on the 28th January, 1763; thirty-six days, as he tells us, after the disbanding of the militia. He remained a little over three months in the French capital, which on the whole pleased him so well that he thinks that if he had been independent and rich, he might have been tempted to make it his permanent residence.

On the other hand he seems to have been little if at all aware of the extraordinary character of the society of which he became a spectator and for a time a member. He does not seem to have been conscious that he was witnessing one of the most singular social phases which have yet been presented in the history of man. And no blame attaches to him for this. No one of his contemporaries saw deeper in this direction than he did. It is a remarkable instance of the way in which the widest and deepest social movements are veiled to the eyes of those who see them, precisely because of their width and depth. Foreigners, especially Englishmen, visited Paris in the latter half of the eighteenth century and reported variously of their experience and impressions. Some, like Hume and Sterne, are delighted;

some, like Gibbon, are quietly, but thoroughly pleased; some, like Walpole—though he perhaps is a class by himself—are half pleased and half disgusted. They all feel that there is something peculiar in what they witness, but never seem to suspect that nothing like it was ever seen before in the world. One is tempted to wish that they could have seen with our eyes, or, much more, that we could have had the privilege of enjoying their experience, of spending a few months in that singular epoch when "society," properly so called, the assembling of men and women in drawing-rooms for the purpose of conversation, was the most serious as well as the most delightful business of life. Talk and discussion in the senate, the market-place, and the schools are cheap; even barbarians are not wholly without them. But their refinement and concentration in the *salon*—of which the president is a woman of tact and culture—this is a phenomenon which never appeared but in Paris in the eighteenth century. And yet scholars, men of the world, men of business passed through this wonderland with eyes blindfolded. They are free to enter, they go, they come, without a sign that they have realised the marvellous scene that they were permitted to traverse. One does not wonder that they did not perceive that in those graceful drawing-rooms, filled with stately company of elaborate manners, ideas and sentiments were discussed and evolved which would soon be more explosive than gunpowder. One does not wonder that they did not see ahead of them—men never do. One does rather wonder that they did not see what was before their eyes. But wonder is useless and a mistake. People who have never seen a volcano

cannot be expected to fear the burning lava, or even to see that a volcano differs from any other mountain.

Gibbon had brought good introductions from London, but he admits that they were useless, or rather superfluous. His nationality and his *Essai* were his best recommendations. It was the day of Anglomania, and, as he says, "every Englishman was supposed to be a patriot and a philosopher." "I had rather be," said Mdlle. de Lespinasse to Lord Shelburne, "the least member of the House of Commons than even the King of Prussia." Similar things must have been said to Gibbon, but he has not recorded them; and generally it may be said that he is disappointingly dull and indifferent to Paris, though he liked it well enough when there. He never caught the Paris fever as Hume did, and Sterne, or even as Walpole did, for all the hard things he says of the underbred and overbearing manners of the philosophers. Gibbon had ready access to the well-known houses of Madame Geoffrin, Madame Helvétius and the Baron d'Holbach; and his perfect mastery of the language must have removed every obstacle in the way of complete social intercourse. But no word in his Memoirs or Letters shows that he really saw with the eyes of the mind the singularities of that strange epoch. And yet he was there at an exciting and important moment. The Order of the Jesuits was tottering to its fall; the latter volumes of the *Encyclopedia* were being printed, and it was no secret; the coruscating wit and audacity of the *salons* were at their height. He is not unjust or prejudiced, but somewhat cold. He dines with Baron d'Holbach, and says his dinners were excellent, but nothing of the guests. He goes to Madame Geoffrin, and pronounces her house an excellent

one. Such faint and commonplace praise reflects on the eulogist. The only man of letters of whom he speaks with warmth is Helvétius. He does not appear in this first visit to have known Madame du Deffand, who was still keeping her *salon* with the help of the pale deep-eyed L'Espinasse, though the final rupture was imminent. Louis Racine died, and so did Marivaux, while he was in Paris. The old Opera-house in the Palais Royal was burnt down when he had been there a little over a month, and the representations were transferred to the Salle des Machines, in the Tuileries. The equestrian statue of Louis XV. was set up in the Place to which it gave its name (where the Luxor column now stands, in the Place de la Concorde) amidst the jeers and insults of the mob, who declared it would never be got to pass the hotel of Madame de Pompadour. How much or how little of all this touched Gibbon, we do not know. We do know one thing, that his English clothes were unfashionable and looked very foreign, the French being "excessively long-waisted." Doubtless his scanty purse could not afford a new outfit, such as Walpole two years afterwards, under the direction of Lady Hertford, promptly procured. On the 8th of May he hurried off to Lausanne.[1]

His ultimate object was Italy. But he wisely resolved to place a period of solid study between the lively dissipation of Paris and his classic pilgrimage. He knew the difference between seeing things he had read about and reading about things after he had seen them ; how the mind, charged with associations of famous scenes, is delicately susceptible of impressions, and how

[1] The chronicle of events which occurred during Gibbon's sojourn in Paris will be found in the interesting *Mémoires de Bachaumont.*

rapidly old musings take, form and colour, when stirred by outward realities; and contrariwise, how slow and inadequate is the effort to reverse this process, and to clothe with memories, monuments and sites over which the spirit has not sent a halo of previous meditation. So he settled down quietly at Lausanne for the space of nearly a year, and commenced a most austere and systematic course of reading on the antiquities of Italy. The list of learned works which he perused "with his pen in his hand" is formidable, and fills a quarto page. But he went further than this, and compiled an elaborate treatise on the nations, provinces, and towns of ancient Italy (which we still have) digested in alphabetical order, in which every Latin author, from Plautus to Rutilius, is laid under contribution for illustrative passages, which are all copied out in full. This laborious work was evidently Gibbon's own guide-book in his Italian travels, and one sees not only what an admirable preparation it was for the object in view, but what a promise it contained of that scrupulous thoroughness which was to be his mark as an historian. His mind was indeed rapidly maturing, and becoming conscious in what direction its strength lay.

His account of his first impressions of Rome has been often quoted, and deserves to be so again. "My temper is not very susceptible of enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm which I do not feel I have ever scorned to affect. But at the distance of twenty-five years I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the Eternal City. After a sleepless night, I trod with a lofty step the ruins of the Forum. Each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Cæsar fell, was

at once present to my eye, and several days of intoxication were lost and enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute examination." He gave eighteen weeks to the study of Rome only, and six to Naples, and we may rest assured that he made good use of his time. But what makes this visit to Rome memorable in his life and in literary history is that it was the occasion and date of the first conception of his great work. "It was at Rome, on the 15th October, 1764, as I sat musing amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind." The scene, the contrast of the old religion and the new, the priests of Christ replacing the flamens of Jupiter, the evensong of Catholic Rome swelling like a dirge over the prostrate Pagan Rome might well concentrate in one grand luminous idea the manifold but unconnected thoughts with which his mind had so long been teeming. Gibbon had found his work, which was destined to fill the remainder of his life. Henceforth there is a fixed centre around which his thoughts and musings cluster spontaneously. Difficulties and interruptions are not wanting. The plan then formed is not taken in hand at once; on the contrary, it is contemplated at "an awful distance"; but it led him on like a star guiding his steps, till he reached his appointed goal.

After crossing the Alps on his homeward journey, Gibbon had had some thoughts of visiting the southern provinces of France. But when he reached Lyons he found letters "expressive of some impatience" for his return. Though he does not exactly say as much, we may justly conclude that the elder Gibbon's pecuniary

difficulties were beginning to be oppressive. So the traveller, with the dutifulness that he ever showed to his father, at once bent his steps northward. Again he passed through Paris, and the place had a new attraction in his eyes in the person of Mdlle. Curchod, now become Madame Necker, and wife of the great financier.

This perhaps will be the most convenient place to notice and estimate a certain amount of rather spiteful gossip, of which Gibbon was the subject in Switzerland about this time. Rousseau and his friend Moultou have preserved it for us, and it is probable that it has lost none of its pungency in passing through the hands of the latter. The substance of it is this:—that in the year 1763, when Gibbon revisited Lausanne, as we have seen, Susanne Curchod was still in a pitiable state of melancholy and well nigh broken-hearted at Gibbon's manifest coldness, which we know he considered to be "friendship and esteem." Whether he even saw her on this visit cannot be considered certain, but it is at least highly probable. Be that as it may: this is the picture of her condition as drawn by Moultou in a letter to Rousseau: "How sorry I am for our poor Mdlle. Curchod! Gibbon, whom she loves, and to whom I know she has sacrificed some excellent matches, has come to Lausanne, but cold, insensible, and as entirely cured of his old passion as she is far from cure. She has written me a letter that makes my heart ache." Rousseau says in reply, "He who does not appreciate Mdlle. Curchod is not worthy of her; he who appreciates her and separates himself from her is a man to be despised. She does not know what she wants. Gibbon serves her better than her own heart. I would rather a hundred times that he left her poor and free among you than

that he should take her off to be rich and miserable in England." One does not quite see how Gibbon could have acted to the contentment of Jean-Jacques. For not taking Mdlle. Curchod to England—as we may presume he would have done if he had married her—he is contemptible. Yet if he does take her he will make her miserable, and Rousseau would rather a hundred times he left her alone—precisely what he was doing; but then he was despicable for doing it. The question is whether there is not a good deal of exaggeration in all this. Only a year after the tragic condition in which Moultou describes Mdlle. Curchod she married M. Necker, and became devoted to her husband. A few months after she married Necker she cordially invited Gibbon to her house every day of his sojourn in Paris. If Gibbon had behaved in the unworthy way asserted, if she had had her feelings so profoundly touched and lacerated as Moultou declares, would she, or even could she, have acted thus? If she was conscious of being wronged, and he was conscious—as he must have been—of having acted basely, or at least unfeelingly, is it not as good as certain that both parties would have been careful to see as little of each other as possible? A broken-off love-match, even without complication of unworthy conduct on either side, is generally an effective bar to further intercourse. But in this case the intercourse is renewed on the very first opportunity, and never dropped till the death of one of the persons concerned.

Two letters have been preserved of Gibbon and Madame Necker respectively, nearly of the same date, and both referring to this rather delicate topic of their first interviews after her marriage. Gibbon writes to

his friend Holroyd, "The Curchod (Madame Necker) I saw in Paris. She was very fond of me, and the husband particularly civil. Could they insult me more cruelly? Ask me every evening to supper, go to bed and leave me alone with his wife—what impertinent security! It is making an old lover of mighty little consequence. She is as handsome as ever, and much genteeler; seems pleased with her wealth rather than proud of it. I was exalting Nanette d'Illens's good luck and the fortune" (this evidently refers to some common acquaintance, who had changed her name to advantage). "'What fortune,' she said with an air of contempt:—'not above twenty thousand livres a year.' I smiled, and she caught herself immediately, 'What airs I give myself in despising twenty thousand livres a year, who a year ago looked upon eight hundred as the summit of my wishes.'"

Let us turn to the lady's account of the same scenes. "I do not know if I told you," she writes to a friend at Lausanne, "that I have seen Gibbon, and it has given me more pleasure than I know how to express. Not indeed that I retain any sentiment for a man who I think does not deserve much" (this little toss of pique or pride need not mislead us); "but my feminine vanity could not have had a more complete and honest triumph. He stayed two weeks in Paris, and I had him every day at my house; he has become soft, yielding, humble, decorous to a fault. He was a constant witness of my husband's kindness, wit, and gaiety, and made me remark for the first time, by his admiration for wealth, the opulence with which I am surrounded, and which up to this moment had only produced a disagreeable impression upon me." Considering the very

different points of view of the writers, these letters are remarkably in unison. The solid fact of the daily visits is recorded in both. It is easy to gather from Madame Necker's letter that she was very glad to show Mr. Gibbon that for going farther and not marrying him she had not fared worse. The rather acid allusion to "opulence" is found in both letters; but much more pronounced in hers than in his. Each hints that the other thought too much of wealth. But he does so with delicacy, and only by implication; she charges him coarsely with vulgar admiration for it. We may reasonably suspect that riches had been the subject of not altogether smooth conversation between them, in the later part of the evening, perhaps, after M. Necker had retired in triumph to bed. One might even fancy that there was a tacit allusion by Madame Necker to the dialogue recorded by Gibbon to Holroyd, when his smile checked her indirect pride in her own wealth, and that she remembered that smile with just a touch of resentment. If so, nothing was more natural and comforting than to charge him with the failing that he had detected in her. But here are the facts. Eight months after her marriage, Madame Necker admits that she had Gibbon every day to her house. He says that she was very cordial. She would have it understood that she received him only for the sake of gratifying a feminine vanity. For her own sake one might prefer his interpretation to hers. It is difficult to believe that the essentially simple-minded Madame Necker would have asked a man every day to her house merely to triumph over him; and more difficult still to believe that the man would have gone if such had been the object. A little tartness in these first interviews, following on a relation of some

ambiguity, cannot surprise one. But it was not the dominant ingredient, or the interviews must have ceased of their own accord. In any case few will admit that either of the persons concerned would have written as they did if Moultou's statement were correct. In neither epistle is there any trace of a grand passion felt or slighted. We discover the much lower level of vanity and badinage. And the subsequent relations of Gibbon and Madame Necker all tend to prove that this was the real one.

CHAPTER V.

LITERARY SCHEMES.—THE HISTORY OF SWITZERLAND.—DISSERTATION ON THE SIXTH ÆNEID.—FATHER'S DEATH.—SETTLEMENT IN LONDON.

GIBBON now (June, 1765) returned to his father's house, and remained there till the latter's death in 1770. He describes these five years as having been the least pleasant and satisfactory of his whole life. The reasons were not far to seek. The unthrifty habits of the elder Gibbon were now producing their natural result. He was saddled with debt, from which two mortgages, readily consented to by his son, and the sale of the house at Putney, only partially relieved him. Gibbon now began to fear that he had an old age of poverty before him. He had pursued knowledge with single-hearted loyalty, and now became aware that from a worldly point of view knowledge is not often a profitable investment. A more dejecting discovery cannot be made by the sincere scholar. He is conscious of labour and protracted effort, which the prosperous professional man and tradesman who pass him on their road to wealth with a smile of scornful pity have never known. He has forsaken comparatively all for knowledge, and the busy world meets him with a blank stare, and surmises shrewdly that he is but an idler, with an odd taste for

wasting his time over books. It says much for Gibbon's robustness of spirit that he did not break down in these trying years, that he did not weakly take fright at his prospect, and make hasty and violent efforts to mend it. On the contrary, he remained steadfast and true to the things of the mind. With diminished cheerfulness perhaps, but with no abatement of zeal, he pursued his course and his studies, thereby proving that he belonged to the select class of the strong and worthy who, penetrated with the loveliness of science, will not be turned away from it.

His first effort to redeem the time was a project of a history of Switzerland. His choice was decided by two circumstances: (1) his love for a country which he had made his own by adoption; (2) by the fact that he had in his friend Deyverdun, a fellow-worker who could render him most valuable assistance. Gibbon never knew German, which is not surprising when we reflect what German literature amounted to, in those days; and he soon discovered that the most valuable authorities of his projected work were in the German language. But Deyverdun was a perfect master of that tongue, and translated a mass of documents for the use of his friend. They laboured for two years in collecting materials, before Gibbon felt himself justified in entering on the "more agreeable task of composition." And even then he considered the preparation insufficient, as no doubt it was. He felt he could not do justice to his subject; uninformed as he was "by the scholars and statesmen, and remote from the archives and libraries of the Swiss republic." Such a beginning was not of good augury for the success of the undertaking. He never wrote more than about

sixty quarto pages of the projected work, and these, as they were in French, were submitted to the judgment of a literary society of foreigners in London, before whom the MS. was read. The author was unknown, and Gibbon attended the meeting, and thus listened without being observed "to the free strictures and unfavourable sentence of his judges." He admits that the momentary sensation was painful; but the condemnation was ratified by his cooler thoughts: and he declares that he did not regret the loss of a slight and superficial essay, though it "had cost some expense, much labour, and more time." He says in his Memoirs that he burnt the sheets. But this, strange to say, was a mistake on his part. They were found among his papers after his death, and though not published by Lord Sheffield in the first two volumes of his Miscellaneous Works, which the latter edited in 1796, they appeared in the supplemental third volume which came out in 1815. We thus can judge for ourselves of their value. One sees at once why and how they failed to satisfy their author's mature judgment. They belong to that style of historical writing which consists in the rhetorical transcription and adornment of the original authorities, but in which the writer never gets close enough to his subject to apply the touchstone of a clear and trenchant criticism. Such criticism indeed was not common in Switzerland in his day, and one cannot blame Gibbon for not anticipating the researches of modern investigators. But his historical sense was aroused to suspicion by the story of William Tell, which he boldly sets down as a fable. Altogether, one may pronounce the sketch to be pleasantly written in a flowing, picturesque narrative, and showing immense advance in style beyond the essay on the Study

of Literature. David Hume, to whom he submitted it, urged him to persevere, and the advice was justified under the circumstances, although one cannot now regret that it was not followed.

After the failure of this scheme Gibbon, still in connection with Deyverdun, planned a periodical work under the title of *Mémoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne.* Only two volumes ever appeared, and the speculation does not seem to have met with much success. Gibbon "presumes to say that their merit was superior to their reputation, though they produced more reputation than emolument." The first volume is executed with evident pains, and gives a fair picture of the literary and social condition of England at the time. The heavy review articles are interspersed with what is intended to be lighter matter on the fashions, foibles, and prominent characters of the day. Gibbon owns the authorship of the first article on Lord Lyttelton's history of Henry the Second, and his hand is discernible in the account of the fourth volume of Lardner's work *On the Credibility of the Gospel History.* The first has no merit beyond a faithful report. The latter is written with much more zest and vigour, and shows the interest that he already took in Christian antiquities. Other articles, evidently from the pen of Deyverdun, on the English theatre and Beau Nash of Bath, are the liveliest in the collection. The magazine was avowedly intended for Continental readers, and might have obtained success if it had been continued long enough. But it died before it had time to make itself known.[1]

[1] Two volumes appeared of the *Mémoires Littéraires.* Of these only the first is to be found in the British Museum. It is a small 12mo, containing 230 pages. Here is the Table des Matières :—(1)

When the *Mémoires Littéraires* collapsed Gibbon was again left without a definite object to concentrate his energy, and with his work still to seek. One might wonder why he did not seriously prepare for the *Decline and Fall*. It must have been chiefly at this time that it was "contemplated at an awful distance," perhaps even with numbing doubt whether the distance would ever be lessened and the work achieved, or even begun. The probability is he had too little peace of mind to undertake anything that required calm and protracted labour. "While so many of my acquaintance were married, or in Parliament, or advancing with a rapid step in the various roads of honour or fortune I stood alone, immovable, and insignificant. . . . The progress and the knowledge of our domestic disorders aggravated my anxiety, and I began to apprehend that in my old age I might be left without the fruits of either industry or inheritance." Perhaps a reasonable apprehension of poverty is more paralysing than the reality. In the latter case prompt action is so imperatively commanded that the mind has no leisure for the fatal indulgence of regrets; but when indigence seems only imminent, and has not yet arrived, a certain lethargy is apt to be produced out of which only the most practical characters can rouse themselves, and these are not, as a rule, scholars by nature. We need not be surprised that Gibbon

Histoire de Henri II., par Milord Lyttelton; (2) Le Nouveau Guide de Bath; (3) Essai sur l'Histoire de la Société Civile, par M. Ferguson; (4) Conclusions des Mémoires de Miss Sydney Bidulph; Théologie (5) Recueil des Témoignages Anciens, par Lardner; (6) Le Confessional; (7) Transactions Philosophiques; (8) Le Gouverneur, par D. L. F. Spectacles, Beaux Arts, Nouvelles Littéraires.

during these years did nothing serious, and postponed undertaking his great work. The inspiration needed to accomplish such a long and arduous course as it implied could not be kindled in a mind harassed by pecuniary cares. The fervent heat of a poet's imagination may glow as brightly in poverty as in opulence, but the gentle yet prolonged enthusiasm of the historian is likely to be quenched when the resources of life are too insecure.[1]

It is perhaps not wholly fanciful to suspect that Gibbon's next literary effort was suggested and determined by the inward discomposure he felt at this time. By nature he was not a controversialist; not that he wanted the abilities to support that character, but his mind was too full, fertile, and fond of real knowledge to take much pleasure in the generally barren occupation of gainsaying other men. But at this point in his life he made an exception, and an unprovoked exception. When he wrote his famous vindication of the first volume of the *Decline and Fall* he was acting in self-defence, and repelling savage attacks upon his historical veracity. But in his *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Æneid* he sought controversy for its own sake, and became a polemic—shall we say out of gaiety or bitterness of heart? That inward unrest easily produces an aggressive spirit is a matter of common observation, and it may well have been that in attacking Warburton he sought a diversion from the worry of domestic cares. Be that as it may, his *Obser-*

[1] Scholarship has been frequently cultivated amidst great poverty; but from the time of Thucydides, the owner of mines, to Grote, the banker, historians seem to have been in, at least, easy circumstances.

vations are the most pungent and dashing effusion he ever allowed himself. It was his first effort in English prose, and it is doubtful whether he ever managed his mother tongue better, if indeed he ever managed it so well. The little tract is written with singular spirit and rapidity of style. It is clear, trenchant, and direct to a fault. It is indeed far less critical than polemical, and shows no trace of lofty calm, either moral or intellectual. We are not repelled much by his eagerness to refute and maltreat his opponent. That was not alien from the usages of the time, and Warburton at least had no right to complain of such a style of controversy. But there is no width and elevation of view. The writer does not carry the discussion up to a higher level, and dominate his adversary from a superior standpoint. Controversy is always ephemeral and vulgar, unless it can rise to the discussion and establishment of facts and principles valuable for themselves, independently of the particular point at issue. It is this quality which has made the master-works of Chillingworth and Bentley supereminent. The particular point for which the writers contended is settled or forgotten. But in moving up to that point they touched—such was their large discourse of reason—on topics of perennial interest, did such justice, though only in passing, to certain other truths, that they are gratefully remembered ever after. Thus Bentley's dissertation on Phalaris is read, not for the main thesis—proof of the spuriousness of the letters—but for the profound knowledge and admirable logic with which subsidiary positions are maintained on the way to it. Tried by this standard, and he deserves to be tried by a high standard, Gibbon fails not much, but entirely. The *Observations* are rarely,

if ever, quoted as an authority of weight by any one engaged on classical or Virgilian literature. This arises from the attitude of the writer, who is nearly solely occupied with establishing negative conclusions that Æneas was *not* a lawgiver, that the Sixth Æneid is *not* an allegory, that Virgil had *not* been initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries when he wrote it, and so forth. Indeed the best judges now hold that he has not done full justice to the grain of truth that was to be found in Warburton's clumsy and prolix hypothesis.[1] It should be added that Gibbon very candidly admits and regrets the acrimonious style of the pamphlet, and condemns still more "in a personal attack his cowardly concealment of his name and character."

The *Observations* were the last work which Gibbon published in his father's lifetime. His account of the latter's death (November 10, 1770) is feelingly written, and shows the affectionate side of his own nature to advantage. He acknowledges his father's failings, his weakness and inconstancy, but insists that they were compensated by the virtues of the head and heart, and the warmest sentiments of honour and humanity. "His graceful person, polite address, gentle manners, and unaffected cheerfulness recommended him to the favour of every company." And Gibbon recalls with emotion "the pangs of shame, tenderness, and self-reproach"

[1] Conington, *Introduction to the Sixth Æneid.* "A reader of the present day will, I think, be induced to award the palm of learning and ingenuity to Warburton." "The language and imagery of the sixth book more than once suggest that Virgil intended to embody in his picture the poetical view of that inner side of ancient religion which the mysteries may be supposed to have presented."—*Suggestion on the Study of the Æneid*, by H. Nettleship, p. 13.

which preyed on his father's mind at the prospect, no doubt, of leaving an embarrassed estate and precarious fortune to his son and widow. He had no taste for study in the fatal summer of 1770, and declares that he would have been ashamed if he had. "I submitted to the order of nature," he says, in words which recall his resignation on losing his mistress—"I submitted to the order of nature, and my grief was soothed by the conscious satisfaction that I had discharged all the duties of filial piety." We see Gibbon very fairly in this remark. He had tenderness, steady and warm attachments, but no passion.

Nearly two years elapsed after his father's death, before he was able to secure from the wreck of his estate a sufficient competence to establish himself in London. His house was No. 7, Bentinck Street, near Manchester Square, then a remote suburb close to the country fields. His housekeeping was that of a solitary bachelor, who could afford an occasional dinner-party. Though not absolutely straitened in means, we shall presently see that he was never quite at his ease in money matters while he remained in London. But he had now freedom and no great anxieties, and he began seriously to contemplate the execution of his great work.

Gibbon, as we have seen, looked back with little satisfaction on the five years between his return from his travels and his father's death. They are also the years during which his biographer is able to follow him with the least certainty. Hardly any of his letters which refer to that period have been preserved, and he has glided rapidly over it in his Memoirs. Yet it was, in other respects besides the matter of pecuniary troubles, a momentous epoch in his life. The peculiar views

which he adopted and partly professed on religion must have been formed then. But the date, the circumstance, and the occasion are left in darkness. Up to December 18, 1763, Gibbon was evidently a believer. In an entry in his private journal under that date he speaks of a Communion Sunday at Lausanne as affording an "edifying spectacle," on the ground that there is "neither business nor parties, and they interdict even whist" on that day. How soon after this his opinions began to change, it is impossible to say. But we are conscious of a markedly different tone in the *Observations*, and a sneer at "the ancient alliance between the avarice of the priests and the credulity of the people" is in the familiar style of the Deists from Toland to Chubb. There is no evidence of his familiarity with the widely diffused works of the freethinkers, and as far as I am aware he does not quote or refer to them even once. But they could hardly have escaped his notice. Still his strong historic sense and solid erudition would be more likely to be repelled than attracted by their vague and inaccurate scholarship, and chimerical theories of the light of Nature. Still we know that he practically adopted, in the end, at least the negative portion of these views, and the question is, When did he do so? His visit to Paris, and the company that he frequented there, might suggest that as a probable date of his change of opinions. But the entry just referred to was subsequent by several months to that visit, and we may with confidence assume that no freethinker of the eighteenth century would pronounce the austerities of a Communion Sunday in a Calvinist town an edifying spectacle. It is probable that his relinquishing of dogmatic faith was gradual, and for a time unconscious. It was an age of tepid

belief, except among the Nonjurors and Methodists; and with neither of these groups could he have had the least sympathy. His acquaintance with Hume, and his partiality for the writings of Bayle, are more probable sources of a change of sentiment which was in a way predestined by natural bias and cast of mind. Any occasion would serve to precipitate the result. In any case, this result had been attained some years before the publication of the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*, in 1776. Referring to his preparatory studies for the execution of that work, he says, "As I believed, and as I still believe, that the propagation of the Gospel and the triumph of the Church are inseparably connected with the decline of the Roman monarchy, I weighed the causes and effects of the revolution, and contrasted the narratives and apologies of the Christians themselves with the glances of candour or enmity which the pagans have cast on the rising sects. The Jewish and heathen testimonies, as they are collected and illustrated by Dr. Lardner, directed without superseding my search of the originals, and in an ample dissertation on the miraculous darkness of the Passion I privately drew my conclusions from the silence of an unbelieving age." Here we have the argument which concludes the sixteenth chapter distinctly announced. But the previous travail of spirit is not indicated. Gibbon has marked with precision the stages of his conversion to Romanism. But the following chapters of the history of his religious opinions he has not written, or he has suppressed them, and we can only vaguely guess their outline.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN LONDON.—PARLIAMENT.—THE BOARD OF TRADE.—THE DECLINE AND FALL.—MIGRATION TO LAUSANNE.

GIBBON'S settlement in London as master in his own house did not come too soon. A few more years of anxiety and dependence, such as he had passed of late with his father in the country, would probably have dried up the spring of literary ambition and made him miss his career. He had no tastes to fit him for a country life. The pursuit of farming only pleased him in Virgil's *Georgics*. He seems neither to have liked nor to have needed exercise, and English rural sports had no charms for him. "I never handled a gun, I seldom mounted a horse, and my philosophic walks were soon terminated by a shady bench, where I was long detained by the sedentary amusement of reading or meditation." He was a born *citadin*. "Never," he writes to his friend Holroyd, "never pretend to allure me by painting in odious colours the dust of London. I love the dust, and whenever I move into the Weald it is to visit you, and not your trees." His ideal was to devote the morning, commencing early—at seven, say—to study, and the afternoon and evening to society and recreation, not "disdaining the innocent amusement of a

game at cards." And this plan of a happy life he very fairly realised in his little house in Bentinck Street. The letters that we have of his relating to this period are buoyant with spirits and self-congratulation at his happy lot. He writes to his stepmother that he is every day more satisfied with his present mode of life, which he always believed was most calculated to make him happy. The stable and moderate stimulus of congenial society, alternating with study, was what he liked. The excitement and dissipation of a town life, which purchase pleasure to-day at the expense of fatigue and disgust to-morrow, were as little to his taste as the amusements of the country. In 1772, when he settled in London, he was young in years, but he was old in tastes, and he enjoyed himself with the complacency often seen in healthy old men. "My library," he writes to Holroyd in 1773, "Kensington Gardens, and a few parties with new acquaintance, among whom I reckon Goldsmith and Sir Joshua Reynolds," (poor Goldsmith was to die the year following), "fill up my time, and the monster *ennui* preserves a very respectful distance. By the by, your friends Batt, Sir John Russell, and Lascelles dined with me one day before they set off: *for I sometimes give the prettiest little dinner in the world.*" One can imagine Gibbon, the picture of plumpness and content, doing the honours of his modest household. Still he was never prominent in society, even after the publication of his great work had made him famous. Lord Sheffield says that his conversation was superior to his writings, and in a circle of intimate friends it is probable that this was true. But in the free encounter of wit and argument, the same want of readiness that made him silent in parliament would

most likely restrict his conversational power. It may be doubted if there is a striking remark or saying of his on record. His name occurs in Boswell, but nearly always as a *persona muta*. Certainly the arena where Johnson and Burke encountered each other was not fitted to bring out a shy and not very quick man. Against Johnson he manifestly harboured a sort of grudge, and if he ever felt the weight of Ursa Major's paw it is not surprising.

He rather oddly preserved an instance of his conversational skill, as if aware that he would not easily get credit for it. The scene was in Paris. "At the table of my old friend M. de Foncemagne, I was involved in a dispute with the Abbé de Mably . . . As I might be partial in my own cause, I shall transcribe the words of an unknown critic. 'You were, my dear Théodon, at M. de Foncemagne's house, when the Abbé de Mably and Mr. Gibbon dined there along with a number of guests. The conversation ran almost entirely on history. The Abbé, being a profound politician, turned it while at dessert on the administration of affairs, and as by genius and temper, and the habit of admiring Livy, he values only the republican system, he began to boast of the excellence of republics, being well persuaded that the learned Englishman would approve of all he said and admire the profoundity of genius that had enabled a Frenchman to discover all these advantages. But Mr. Gibbon, knowing by experience the inconveniences of a popular government, was not at all of his opinion, and generously took up the defence of monarchy. The Abbé wished to convince him out of Livy, and by some arguments drawn from Plutarch in favour of the Spartans. Mr. Gibbon, being endowed with a most

excellent memory, and having all events present to his mind, soon got the command of the conversation. The Abbé grew angry, they lost possession of themselves, and said hard things of each other. The Englishman retaining his native coolness, watched for his advantages, and pressed the Abbé with increasing success in proportion as he was more disturbed by passion. The conversation grew warmer, and was broken off by M. de Foncemagne's rising from table and passing into the parlour, where no one was tempted to renew it."

But if not brilliant in society, he was very *répandu*, and was welcomed in the best circles. He was a member of Boodle's, White's, Brooks's, and Almack's,[1] and "there were few persons in the literary or political world to whom he was a stranger." It is to be regretted that the best sketch of him at this period borders on caricature. "The learned Gibbon," says Colman, "was a curious counterbalance to the learned (may I not say the less learned) Johnson. Their manners and tastes, both in writing and conversation, were as different as their habiliments. On the day I first sat down with Johnson in his rusty-brown suit and his black worsted stockings, Gibbon was placed opposite to me in a suit of flowered velvet, with a bag and sword. Each had his measured phraseology, and Johnson's famous parallel between Dryden and Pope might be loosely parodied in reference to himself and Gibbon. Johnson's style was grand, and Gibbon's elegant: the stateliness of the former was sometimes pedantic, and the latter was occasionally finical. Johnson marched to kettledrums and trumpets,

[1] Not the assembly-room of that name, but a gaming-club where the play was high. I find no evidence that Gibbon ever yielded to the prevalent passion for gambling.

Gibbon moved to flutes and hautboys. Johnson hewed passages through the Alps, while Gibbon levelled walks through parks and gardens. Mauled as I had been by Johnson, Gibbon poured balm upon my bruises by condescending once or twice in the course of the evening to talk with me. The great historian was light and playful, suiting his matter to the capacity of the boy: but it was done *more suo*—still his mannerism prevailed, still he tapped his snuff-box, still he smirked and smiled, and rounded his periods with the same air of good-breeding, as if he were conversing with men. His mouth, mellifluous as Plato's, was a round hole nearly in the centre of his visage." (Quoted in Croker's *Boswell*.)

Now and then he even joins in a masquerade, "the finest thing ever seen," which costs two thousand guineas. But the chief charm of it to him seems to have been the pleasure that it gave to his Aunt Porten. These little vanities are however quite superficial, and are never allowed to interfere with work.

Now indeed he was no loiterer. In three years after his settlement in London he had produced the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*: an amount of diligence which will not be underrated by those who appreciate the vast difference between commencing and continuing an undertaking of that magnitude. "At the outset," he says, "all was dark and doubtful; even the title of the work, the true æra of the decline and fall of the empire, the limits of the Introduction, the division of the chapters, and the order of the narrative,—and I was often tempted to cast away the labour of seven years;"—alternations no doubt of hope and despair familiar to every sincere and competent

student. But he had taken the best and only reliable means of securing himself from the danger of these fluctuations of spirit. He finished his reading and preparation before he began to write, and when he at last put pen to paper his course lay open before him, with no fear of sudden and disquieting stoppages arising from imperfect knowledge and need of further inquiry. It is a pity that we cannot follow the elaboration of the work in detail. That portion of his Memoirs in which he speaks of it is very short and fragmentary, and the defect is not supplied by his letters. He seems to have worked with singular ease and mastery of his subject, and never to have felt his task as a strain or a fatigue. Even his intimate friends were not aware that he was engaged on a work of such magnitude, and it is amusing to see his friend Holroyd warn him against a hasty and immature publication when he learned that the book was in the press. He had apparently heard little of it before. This alone would show with what ease and smoothness Gibbon must have worked. He had excellent health—a strange fact after his sickly childhood; society unbent his mind instead of distracting it; his stomach was perfect—perhaps too good, as about this time he began to be admonished by the gout. He never seems to have needed change. "Sufficient for the summer is the evil thereof, viz., one distant country excursion." There was an extraordinary difference in this respect between the present age and those which went before it; restlessness and change of scene have become almost a necessity of life with us, whereas our ancestors could continue healthy and happy for months and years without stirring from home. What is there to explain the change? We must not pretend that we

work harder than they did.[1] However, Gibbon was able to keep himself in good condition with his long spell of work in the morning, and his dinner parties at home or elsewhere in the afternoon, and to have kept at home as much as he could. Whenever he went away to the country, it was on invitations which he could not well refuse. The result was a leisurely, unhasting fulness of achievement, calm stretches of thorough and contented work, which have left their marks on the *Decline and Fall*. One of its charms is a constant good humour and complacency; not a sign is visible that the writer is pressed for time, or wants to get his performance out of hand; but, on the contrary, a calm lingering over details, sprightly asides in the notes, which the least hurry would have suppressed or passed by, and a general impression conveyed of thorough enjoyment in the immensity of the labour.

One would have liked to see this elaboration more clearly, to have been allowed a glimpse into his workshop while he was so engaged. Unfortunately the editor of his journals has selected the relatively unimportant records of his earlier studies, and left us in the dark as regards this far more interesting period. He was such an indefatigable diarist that it is unlikely that he neglected to keep a journal in this crisis of his studies. But it has not been published, and it may have been destroyed. All that we have is this short paragraph in his Memoirs:—

"The classics, as low as Tacitus and the younger Pliny and

[1] The most remarkable instance of all is the case of Newton, who, according to Dr. Whewell, resided in Trinity College "for thirty-five years without the interruption of a month."—*Hist. of the Inductive Sciences*, vol. ii. book vii.

Juvenal, were my old and familiar companions. I insensibly plunged into the ocean of the Augustan history, and in the descending series I investigated, with my pen almost always in my hand, the original records, both Greek and Latin, from Dion Cassius to Ammianus Marcellinus, from the reign of Trajan to the last age of the Western Cæsars. The subsidiary rays of medals and inscriptions of geography and chronology, were thrown on their proper objects, and I applied the collections of Tillemont to fix and arrange within my reach the loose and scattered atoms of historical information. Through the darkness of the middle ages I explored my way in the *Annals and Antiquities of Italy* of the learned Muratori, and diligently compared them with the parallel or transverse lines of Sigonius and Maffei, Baronius and Pagi, till I almost grasped the ruins of Rome in the fourteenth century, without suspecting that this final chapter must be attained by the labour of six quartos and twenty years."

When the time for composition arrived, he showed a fastidiousness which was full of good augury. "Three times did I compose the first chapter, and twice the second and third, before I was tolerably satisfied with their effect." His hand grew firmer as he advanced. But the two final chapters interposed a long delay, and needed "three successive revisals to reduce them from a volume to their present size." Gibbon spent more time over his first volume than over any one of the five which followed it. To these he devoted almost regularly two years apiece, more or less, whereas the first cost him three years—so disproportionately difficult is the start in matters of this kind.

While engaged in the composition of the first volume, he became a member of Parliament. One morning at half past seven, "as he was destroying an army of barbarians," he heard a double rap at his door. It was a friend who came to inquire if he was desirous of

entering the House of Commons. The answer may be imagined, and he took his seat as member for the borough of Liskeard after the general election in 1774.

Gibbon's political career is the side of his history from which a friendly biographer would most readily turn away. Not that it was exceptionally ignoble or self-seeking if tried by the standard of the time, but it was altogether commonplace and unworthy of him The fact that he never even once opened his mouth in the House is not in itself blameworthy, though disappointing in a man of his power. It was indeed laudable enough if he had nothing to say. But why had he nothing to say? His excuse is timidity and want of readiness. We may reasonably assume that the cause lay deeper. With his mental vigour he would soon have overcome such obstacles if he had really wished and tried to overcome them. The fact is that he never tried because he never wished. It is a singular thing to say of such a man, but nevertheless true, that he had no taste or capacity whatever for politics. He lived at one of the most exciting periods of our history; he assisted at debates in which constitutional and imperial questions of the highest moment were discussed by masters of eloquence and state policy, and he hardly appears to have been aware of the fact. It was not that he despised politics as Walpole affected to do, or that he regarded party struggles as "barbarous and absurd faction," as Hume did; still less did he pass by them with the supercilious indifference of a mystic whose eyes are fixed on the individual spirit of man as the one spring of good and evil. He never rose to the level of the ordinary citizen or even partisan, who takes an

exaggerated view perhaps of the importance of the politics of the day, but who at any rate thereby shows a sense of social solidarity and the claims of civic communion. He called himself a Whig, but he had no zeal for Whig principles. He voted steadily with Lord North and quite approved of taxing and coercing America into slavery; but he had no high notions of the royal prerogative, and was lukewarm in this as in everything. With such absence of passion one might have expected that he would be at least shrewd and sagacious in his judgments on politics. But he is nothing of the kind. In his familiar letters he reserves generally a few lines for parliamentary gossip, amid chat about the weather and family business. He never approaches to a broad survey of policy, or expresses serious and settled convictions on home or foreign affairs. Throughout the American war he never seems to have really made up his mind on the nature of the struggle, and the momentous issues that it involved. Favourable news puts him in high spirits, which are promptly cooled by the announcement of reverses; not that he ever shows any real anxiety or despondency about the commonwealth. His opinions on the subject are at the mercy of the last mail. It is disappointing to find an elegant trifler like Horace Walpole not only far more discerning in his appreciation of such a crisis, but also far more patriotically sensitive as to the wisdom of the means of meeting it, than the historian of Rome. Gibbon's tone often amounts to levity, and he chronicles the most serious measures with an unconcern really surprising. "In a few days we stop the ports of New England. I cannot write volumes: but I am more and more convinced that with firmness all may go well: yet I

sometimes doubt." (February 8, 1775.) "Something will be done this year; but in the spring the force of the country will be exerted to the utmost: Scotch Highlanders, Irish Papists, Hanoverians, Canadians, Indians, &c., will all in various shapes be employed." (August 1, 1775.) "What think you of the season, of Siberia is it not? A pleasant campaign in America." (January 29, 1776.) At precisely the same time the sagacious coxcomb of Strawberry Hill was writing thus: "The times are indeed very serious. Pacification with America is not the measure adopted. More regiments are ordered thither, and to-morrow a plan, I fear equivalent to a declaration of war, is to be laid before both Houses. They are bold ministers methinks who do not hesitate on civil war, in which victory may bring ruin, and disappointment endanger their heads . . . Acquisition alone can make burdens palatable, and in a war with our own colonies we must inflict instead of acquiring them, and we cannot recover them without undoing them. I am still to learn wisdom and experience, if these things are not so." (Letter to Mann, January 25, 1775.) "A war with our colonies, which is now declared, is a proof how much influence jargon has on human actions. A war on our own trade is popular." (February 15, 1775.) "The war with America goes on briskly, that is as far as voting goes. A great majority in both houses is as brave as a mob ducking a pickpocket. They flatter themselves they shall terrify the colonies into submission in three months, and are amazed to hear that there is no such probability. They might as well have excommunicated them, and left it to the devil to put the sentence into execution." (February 18, 1775.) Not only is Walpole's judgment wiser, but the

elements of a wise judgment were present to him in a way in which they were not so to Gibbon. When the latter does attempt a forecast, he shows, as might be expected, as little penetration of the future as appreciation of the present. Writing from Paris on August 11, 1777, when all French society was ablaze with enthusiasm for America, and the court just on the point of yielding to the current, he is under no immediate apprehensions of a war with France, and "would not be surprised if next summer the French were to lend their cordial assistance to England as the weaker party." The emptiness of his letters as regards home politics perhaps admits of a more favourable explanation, and may be owing to the careful suppression by their editor, Lord Sheffield, of everything of real interest. It is impossible to estimate the weight of this consideration, but it may be great. Still we have a sufficient number of his letters to be able to say that on the whole they are neither thoughtful nor graphic: they give us neither pictures of events nor insight into the times. It must be, however, remembered that Gibbon greatly disliked letter-writing, and never wrote unless he was obliged.

It was no secret that Gibbon wanted a place under government. Moderate as his establishment seems to have been, it was more expensive than he could afford. and he looked, not without warrant, to a supplement of income from one of the rich windfalls which in that time of sinecures were wont to refresh the spirits of sturdy supporters of administration. He had influential friends, and even relatives, in and near the government, and but for his parliamentary nullity he would probably have been provided with a comfortable berth at an early period. But his "sincere and silent vote" was

not valuable enough to command a high price from his patrons. Once only was he able to help them with his pen, when he drew up, at the request of Lords Thurlow and Weymouth, his *Mémoire Justificatif*, in French, in which "he vindicated against the French manifesto the justice of the British arms." It was a service worthy of a small fee, which no doubt he received. He had to wait till 1779, when he had been five years in Parliament, before his cousin Mr. Eliot, and his friend Wedderburne, the Attorney-General, were able to find him a post as one of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations. The Board of Trade, of which he became one of the eight members, survives in mortal memory only from being embalmed in the bright amber of one of Burke's great speeches. "This board, Sir, has had both its original formation and its regeneration in a job. In a job it was conceived, and in a job its mother brought it forth. . . . This board is a sort of temperate bed of influence: a sort of gently ripening hothouse, where eight members of Parliament receive salaries of a thousand a year for a certain given time, in order to mature at a proper season a claim to two thousand, granted for doing less" (*Speech on Economical Reform*). Gibbon, with entire good humour, acknowledges the justice of Burke's indictment, and says he was "heard with delight, even by those whose existence he proscribed." After all, he only enjoyed the emolument of his office for three years, and he places that emolument at a lower figure than Burke did. He could not have received more than between two and three thousand pounds of public money; and when we consider what manner of men have fattened on the national purse, it would be churlish to grudge that

small sum to the historian of the *Decline and Fall*. The misfortune is that, reasonably or otherwise, doubts were raised as to Gibbon's complete straightforwardness and honourable adhesion to party ties in accepting office. He says himself: "My acceptance of a place provoked some of the leaders of opposition with whom I had lived in habits of intimacy, and I was most unjustly accused of deserting a party in which I had never enlisted." There is certainly no evidence that those who were most qualified to speak, those who gave him the place and reckoned on his vote, ever complained of want of allegiance. On the other hand, Gibbon's own letter to Edward Elliot, accepting the place, betrays a somewhat uneasy conscience. He owns that he was far from approving all the past measures of the administration, even some of those in which he himself had silently concurred; that he saw many capital defects in the characters of some of the present ministers, and was sorry that in so alarming a situation of public affairs the country had not the assistance of several able and honest men who were now in opposition. Still, for various reasons, he did not consider himself in any way implicated, and rather suspiciously concludes with an allusion to his pecuniary difficulties and a flourish. "The addition of the salary which is now offered will make my situation perfectly easy, but I hope that you will do me the justice to believe that my mind could not be so unless I were conscious of the rectitude of my conduct."

The strongest charge against Gibbon in reference to this matter is asserted to come from his friend Fox, in this odd form. "In June 1781, Mr. Fox's library came to be sold. Amongst his other books the first volume

of Mr. Gibbon's history was brought to the hammer. In the blank leaf of this was a note in the handwriting of Mr. Fox, stating a remarkable declaration of our historian at a well-known tavern in Pall Mall, and contrasting it with Mr. Gibbon's political conduct afterwards. 'The author,' it observed, 'at Brooks's said that there was no salvation for this country until six heads of the principal persons in administration' (Lord North being then prime minister) 'were laid upon the table. Yet,' as the observation added, 'eleven days afterwards this same gentleman accepted a place of a lord of trade under these very ministers, and has acted with them ever since.'" It is impossible to tell what amount of truth there is in this story, and not very important to inquire. It rests on the authority of a strong personal enemy, and the cordial intimacy which ever subsisted between Gibbon and Fox seems to show that it was mere calumny. Perhaps the fact that Gibbon had really no opinions in politics may have led persons of opposite parties to think that he agreed with them more than he did, and when he merely followed his own interest, they may have inferred that he was deserting their principles. After losing his post on the Board of Trade he still hoped for Government employ, "either a secure seat at the Board of Customs or Excise," or in a diplomatic capacity. He was disappointed. If Lord Sheffield is to be believed, it was his friend Fox who frustrated his appointment as secretary of embassy at Paris, when he had been already named to that office.

The way in which Gibbon acted and afterwards spoke in reference to the celebrated Coalition gives perhaps the best measure of his political calibre. He voted

among the rank and file of Lord North's followers for the Coalition with meek subserviency. He speaks of a "principle of gratitude" which actuated him on this occasion. Lord North had given him his seat, and if a man's conscience allows him to think rather of his patron than of his country, there is nothing to be said, except that his code of political ethics is low. We may admit that his vote was pledged; but there is also no doubt that any gratitude that there was in the matter was stimulated by a lively sense of favours to come. The Portland ministry had not been long in office when he wrote in the following terms to his friend Deyverdun: "You have not forgotten that I went into Parliament without patriotism and without ambition, and that all my views tended to the convenient and respectable place of a lord of trade. This situation I at length obtained. I possessed it for three years, from 1779 to 1782, and the net produce, which amounted to 750*l.* sterling, augmented my income to my wants and desires. But in the spring of last year the storm burst over our heads. Lord North was overthrown, your humble servant turned out, and even the Board of Trade, of which I was a member, abolished and broken up for ever by Mr. Burke's reform. To complete my misfortunes, I still remain a member of the Lower House. At the end of the last Parliament, Mr. Eliot withdrew his nomination. But the favour of Lord North facilitated my re-election, and gratitude imposed on me the duty of making available for his service the rights which I held in part from him. That winter we fought under the allied standards of Lord North and Mr. Fox: we triumphed over Lord Shelburne and the peace, and my friend (*i.e.* Lord North) remounted his steed in the quality

of a secretary of state. Now he can easily say to me, 'It was a great deal for me, it was nothing for you;' and in spite of the strongest assurances, I have too much reason to allow me to have much faith. With great genius and very respectable talents, he has now neither the title nor the credit of prime minister; more active colleagues carry off the most savoury morsels which their voracious creatures immediately devour; our misfortunes and reforms have diminished the number of favours; either through pride or through indolence I am but a bad suitor, and if at last I obtain something, it may perhaps be on the eve of a fresh revolution, which will in an instant snatch from me that which has cost me so many cares and pains."

Such a letter speaks for itself. Gibbon might well say that he entered parliament without patriotism and without ambition. The only redeeming feature is the almost cynical frankness with which he openly regards politics from a personal point of view. However, it may be pleaded that the letter was written to a bosom friend at a moment of great depression, and when Gibbon's pecuniary difficulties were pressing him severely. The Coalition promised him a place, and that was enough; the contempt for all principle which had brought it about was not thought of. But even this minute excuse does not apply to the way in which, years after, when he was in comfort at Lausanne, he refers to the subject in his Memoirs. The light in which the Coalition deserved to be regarded was clear by that time. Yet he speaks of it, not only without blame or regret, but contrives to cast suspicion on the motives of those who were disgusted by it, and bestowed their allegiance elsewhere.

"It is not the purpose of this narrative to expatiate on the public or secret history of the times: the schism which followed the death of the Marquis of Rockingham, the appointment of the Earl of Shelbourne, the resignation of Mr. Fox and his famous coalition with Lord North. But I may assert with some degree of assurance that in their political conflict those great antagonists had never felt any personal animosity to each other, that their reconciliation was easy and sincere, and that their friendship has never been clouded by the shadow of suspicion or jealousy. The *most violent* or *venal* of their respective followers embraced this fair occasion of revolt, but their alliance still commanded a majority of the House of Commons, the peace was censured, Lord Shelbourne resigned, and the two friends knelt on the same cushion to take the oath of secretary of state. From a principle of gratitude I adhered to the Coalition; my vote was counted in the day of battle, but I was overlooked in the division of the spoil."

From this we learn that it was only the *violent* and the *venal* who disapproved of the Coalition. One would like to know how Gibbon explained the fact that at the general election of 1784 no less than one hundred and sixty of the supporters of the Coalition lost their seats, and that Fox's political reputation was all but irretrievably ruined from this time forward.

Meanwhile he had not neglected his own proper work. The first volume of his history was published in February, 1776. It derived, he says, "more credit from the name of the shop than from that of the author." In the first instance he intended to print only five hundred copies, but the number was doubled by the "prophetic taste" of his printer, Mr. Strahan. The book was received with a burst of applause—it was a *succès fou*. The first impression was exhausted in a few days, and a second and third edition were scarcely adequate to the

demand. The wiser few were as warm in their eulogies as the general public. Hume declared that if he had not been personally acquainted with the author, he should have been surprised by such a performance coming from any Englishman in that age. Dr. Robertson, Adam Ferguson, and Horace Walpole joined in the chorus. Walpole betrays an amusing mixture of admiration and pique at not having found the author out before. "I know him a little, and never suspected the extent of his talents; for he is perfectly modest, or I want penetration, which I know too; but I intend to know him a great deal more." He oddly enough says that Gibbon was the "son of a foolish alderman," which shows at least how little the author was known in the great world up to this time. Now, however, society was determined to know more of him, the surest proof, not of merit, but of success. It must have been a rather intoxicating moment, but Gibbon had a cool head not easily turned. It would be unfair not to add that he had something much better, a really warm and affectionate regard for old friends, the best preservative against the fumes of flattery and sudden fame. Holroyd, Deyverdun, Madame Necker were more to him than all the great people with whom he now became acquainted. Necker and his wife came over from Paris and paid him a long visit in Bentinck Street, when his laurels were just fresh. "I live with her" he writes, "just as I used to do twenty years ago, laugh at her Paris varnish, and oblige her to become a simple reasonable Suissesse. The man, who might read English husbands lessons of proper and dutiful behaviour, is a sensible, good-natured creature." The next year he returned the visit to Paris. His fame had preceded him, and he

received the cordial but discriminating welcome which the *ancien régime* at that time specially reserved for *gens d'esprit*. Madame du Deffand writes to Walpole, "Mr. Gibbon has the greatest success here; it is quite a struggle to get him." He did not deny himself a rather sumptuous style of living while in Paris. Perhaps the recollection of the unpleasant effect of his English clothes and the long waists of the French on his former visit dwelt in his mind, for now, like Walpole, he procured a new outfit at once. "After decking myself out with silks and silver, the ordinary establishment of coach, lodgings, servants, eating, and pocket expenses, does not exceed 60*l*. per month. Yet I have two footmen in handsome liveries behind my coach, and my apartment is hung with damask."

The remainder of his life in London has nothing important. He persevered assiduously with his history, and had two more quartos ready in 1781. They were received with less enthusiasm than the first, although they were really superior. Gibbon was rather too modestly inclined to agree with the public and "to believe that, especially in the beginning, they were more prolix and less entertaining" than the previous volume. He also wasted some weeks on his vindication of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of that volume, which had excited a host of feeble and ill-mannered attacks. His defence was complete, and in excellent temper. But the piece has no permanent value. His assailants were so ignorant and silly that they gave no scope for a great controversial reply. Neither perhaps did the subject admit of it. A literary war generally makes people think of Bentley's incomparable *Phalaris*. But that was almost a unique occasion and victory in the history

of letters. Bentley himself, the most pugnacious of men, never found such another.

And so the time glided by, till we come to the year 1783. Lord North had resigned office, the Board of Trade was abolished, and Gibbon had lost his convenient salary. The outlook was not pleasant. The seat on the Board of Customs or Excise with which his hopes had been for a time kept up, receded into a remote distance, and he came to the conclusion "that the reign of pensions and sinecures was at an end." It was clearly necessary to take some important step in the way of retrenchment. After he had lost his official income, his expenses exceeded his revenue by something like four hundred pounds. A less expensive style of living in London never seems to have presented itself as an alternative. So, like many an Englishman before and since, he resolved to go abroad to economise.

His old friend Deyverdun was now settled in a comfortable house at Lausanne, overlooking the Lake of Geneva. They had not met for eight years. But the friendship had begun a quarter of a century before, in the old days when Gibbon was a boarder in Pavillard's house, and the embers of old associations only wanted stirring to make them shoot up into flame. In a moment of expansion Gibbon wrote off a warm and eager letter to his friend, setting forth his unsatisfactory position, and his wish and even necessity to change it. He gradually and with much delicacy discloses his plan, that he and Deyverdun, both now old bachelors, should combine their solitary lives in a common household and carry out an old project, often discussed in younger days, of living together. "You live in a charming house. I see from here my apart

ment, the rooms we shall share with one another, our table, our walks. But such a marriage is worthless unless it suits both parties, and I easily feel that circumstances, new tastes, and connections may frustrate a design which appeared charming in the distance. To settle my mind and to avoid regrets, you must be as frank as I have been, and give me a true picture, external and internal, of George Deyverdun."

This letter, written in fluent and perfect French, is one of the best that we have of Gibbon. Deyverdun answered promptly, and met his friend's advances with at least equal warmth. The few letters that have been preserved of his connected with this subject give a highly favourable idea of his mind and character, and shew he was quite worthy of the long and constant attachment that Gibbon felt for him. He cannot express the delight he has felt at his friend's proposal; by the rarest piece of good fortune, it so happens that he himself is in a somewhat similar position of uncertainty and difficulty; a year ago Gibbon's letter would have given him pleasure, now it offers assistance and support. After a few details concerning the tenant who occupies a portion of his house, he proceeds to urge Gibbon to carry out the project he had suggested, to break loose from parliament and politics, for which he was not fit, and to give himself up to the charms of study and friendship. "Call to mind, my dear friend," he goes on, "that I saw you enter parliament with regret, and I think I was only too good a prophet. I am sure that career has caused you more privations than joys, more pains than pleasures. Ever since I have known you I have been convinced that your happiness lay in your study and in society, and that any path which led you

elsewhere was a departure from happiness." Through nine pages of gentle and friendly eloquence Deyverdun pursues his argument to induce his friend to clinch the bargain. "I advise you not only not to solicit a place, but to refuse one if it were offered to you. Would a thousand a year make up to you for the loss of five days a week? . . . . By making this retreat to Switzerland, besides the beauty of the country and the pleasures of its society, you will acquire two blessings which you have lost, liberty and competence. You will also be useful, your works will continue to enlighten us, and, independently of your talents, the man of honour and refinement is never useless." He then skilfully exhibits the attractions he has to offer. "You used to like my house and garden; what would you do now? On the first floor, which looks on the declivity of Ouchy, I have fitted up an apartment which is enough for me. I have a servant's room, two *salons*, two cabinets. On a level with the terrace two other *salons*, of which one serves as a dining-room in summer, and the other a drawing-room for company. I have arranged three more rooms between the house and the coachhouse, so that I can offer you all the large apartment, which consists actually of eleven rooms, great and small, looking east and south, not splendidly furnished, I allow, but with a certain elegance which I hope you will like. The terrace is but little altered . . . . it is lined from end to end with boxes of orange-trees. The vine-trellis has prospered, and extends nearly to the end. I have purchased the vineyard below the garden, and in front of the house made it into a lawn, which is watered by the water of the fountain . . . . In a word, strangers come to see the place, and in spite of my pompous description

of it I think you will like it . . . . If you come, you will find a tranquillity which you cannot have in London, and a friend who has not passed a single day without thinking of you, and who, in spite of his defects, his foibles, and his inferiority, is still one of the companions who suits you best."

More letters followed from both sides in a similar strain. Yet Gibbon quailed before a final resolution. His aunt, Mrs. Porten, his mother, Mrs. Gibbon, his friend, Lord Sheffield, all joined in deprecating his voluntary exile. "That is a nonsensical scheme," said the latter, "you have got into your head of returning to Lausanne—a pretty fancy; you remember how much you liked it in your youth, but now you have seen more of the world, and if you were to try it again you would find yourself woefully disappointed." Deyverdun, with complete sympathy, begged him not to be in too great a hurry to decide on a course which he himself desired so much. "I agree with you," he wrote to Gibbon, "that this is a sort of marriage, but I could never forgive myself if I saw you dissatisfied in the sequel, and in a position to reproach me." Gibbon felt it was a case demanding decision of character, and he came to a determination with a promptitude and energy not usual with him. He promised Deyverdun in the next letter an ultimatum, stating whether he meant to *go* or to *stay*, and a week after he wrote, "I go." He had prudently refrained from consulting Lord Sheffield during this critical period, knowing that his certain disapprobation of the scheme would only complicate matters and render decision more difficult. Then he wrote, "I have given Deyverdun my word of honour to be at Lausanne at the beginning of October, and no power of persuasion

can divert me from this *irrevocable* resolution, which I am every day proceeding to execute."

This was no exaggeration. He cancelled the lease of his house in Bentinck Street, packed the more necessary portion of his books and shipped them for Rouen, and as his postchaise moved over Westminster Bridge, "bade a long farewell to the *fumum et opes strepitumque Romæ*." The only real pang he felt in leaving arose from the "silent grief" of his Aunt Porten, whom he did not hope to see again. Nor did he. He started on September 15, 1783, slept at Dover, was flattered with the hope of making Calais harbour by the same tide in "three hours and a half, as the wind was brisk and fair," but was driven into Boulogne. He had not a symptom of sea-sickness. Then he went on by easy stages through Aire, Bethune, Douay, Cambray, St. Quentin, La Fère, Laon, Rheims, Chalons, St. Dizier, Langres, Besançon, and arrived at Lausanne on the 27th. The inns he found more agreeable to the palate than to the sight or the smell. At Langres he had an excellent bed about six feet high from the ground. He beguiled the time with Homer and Clarendon, talking with his servant, Caplin, and his dog Muff, and sometimes with the French postilions, and he found them the least rational of the animals mentioned.

He reached his journey's end, to alight amid a number of minor troubles, which to a less easy tempered man would have been real annoyances. He found that Deyverdun had reckoned without his host, or rather his tenant, and that they could not have possession of the house for several months, so he had to take lodgings. Then he sprained his ankle, and this brought on a bad attack of the gout, which laid him up completely.

However, his spirits never gave way. In time his books arrived, and the friends got installed in their own house. His satisfaction has then no bounds, with the people, the place, the way of living, and his daily companion. We must now leave him for a short space in the enjoyment of his happiness, while we briefly consider the labours of the previous ten years.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL.

THE historian who is also an artist is exposed to a particular drawback from which his brethren in other fields are exempt. The mere lapse of time destroys the value and even the fidelity of his pictures. In other arts correct colouring and outline remain correct, and if they are combined with imaginative power, age rather enhances than diminishes their worth. But the historian lives under another law. His reproduction of a past age, however full and true it may appear to his contemporaries, appears less and less true to his successors. The way in which he saw things ceases to be satisfactory; we may admit his accuracy, but we add a qualification referring to the time when he wrote, the point of view that he occupied. And we feel that what was accurate for him is no longer accurate for us. This superannuation of historical work is not similar to the superseding of scientific work which is ever going on, and is the capital test of progress. Scientific books become rapidly old-fashioned, because the science to which they refer is in constant growth, and a work on chemistry or biology is out of date by reason of incompleteness

or the discovery of unsuspected errors. The scientific side of history, if we allow it to have a scientific side, conforms to this rule, and presents no singularity. Closer inspection of our materials, the employment of the comparative method, occasionally the bringing to light of new authorities—all contribute to an increase of real knowledge, and historical studies in this respect do not differ from other branches of research. But this is not the sole or the chief cause of the renovation and transformation constantly needed in historic work. That depends on the ever moving standpoint from which the past is regarded, so that society in looking back on its previous history never sees it for long together at quite the same angle, never sees, we may say, quite the same thing. The past changes to us as we move down the stream of time, as a distant mountain changes through the windings of the road on which we travel away from it. To drop figure and use language now becoming familiar, the social organism is in constant growth, and receiving new additions, and each new addition causes us to modify our view of the whole. The historian, in fact, is engaged in the study of an unfinished organism, whose development is constantly presenting him with surprises. It is as if the biologist were suddenly to come upon new and unheard-of species and families which would upset his old classification, or as if the chemist were to find his laws of combination replaced by others which were not only unknown to him, but which were really new and recent in the world. Other inquirers have the whole of the phenomena with which their science is concerned before them, and they may explore them at their leisure. The sociologist has only an instalment, most likely a very small instalment,

of the phenomena with which his science is concerned before him. They have not yet happened, are not yet phenomena, and as they do happen and admit of investigation they necessarily lead to constant modification of his views and deductions. Not only does he acquire new knowledge like other inquirers, but he is constantly having the subject-matter from which he derives his knowledge augmented. Even in modern times society has thrown out with much suddenness rapid and unexpected developments, of such scope and volume that contemporaries have often lost self-possession at the sight of them, and wondered if social order could survive. The Reformation and the French Revolution are cases in point. And what a principal part do these two great events always play in any speculations instituted subsequent to them! How easy it is to see whether a writer lived before the Reign of Terror, or after it, from his gait and manner of approaching social inquiries! Is there any reason to suppose that such mutations are now at an end? None. The probability, well nigh a certainty, is that metamorphoses of the social organism are in store for us which will equal, if they do not vastly exceed, anything that the past has offered.

Considerations of this kind need to be kept in view if we would be just in our appreciation of historical writings which have already a certain age. It is impossible that a history composed a century ago should fully satisfy us now; but we must beware of blaming the writer for his supposed or real shortcomings, till we have ascertained how far they arose from his personal inadequacy to his task, and were not the result of his

chronological position. It need not be said that this remark does not refer to many books which are called histories, but are really contemporary memoirs and original authorities subservient to history proper. The works of Clarendon and Burnet, for instance, can never lose a certain value on this account. The immortal book which all subsequent generations have agreed to call a possession for ever, is the unapproachable ideal of this class. But neither Thucydides nor Clarendon were historians in the sense in which Gibbon was an historian, that is, engaged in the delineation of a remote epoch by the help of such materials as have escaped the ravages of time. It is historians like Gibbon who are exposed to the particular unhappiness referred to a little way back—that of growing out of date through no fault of their own, but through the changed aspect presented by the past in consequence of the movement which has brought us to the present. But if this is the field of historical disaster, it is also the opportunity of historical genius. In proportion as a writer transcends the special limitations of his time, will "age fail to wither him." That he cannot entirely shake off the fetters which fasten him to his epoch is manifest. But in proportion as his vision is clear, in proportion as he has with singleness of eye striven to draw the past with reverent loyalty, will his bondage to his own time be loosened, and his work will remain faithful work for which due gratitude will not be withheld.

The sudden and rapid expansion of historic studies in the middle of the eighteenth century constitutes one of the great epochs in literature. Up to the year 1750 no great historical work had appeared in any modern

language.[1] The instances that seem to make against this remark will be found to confirm it. They consist of memoirs, contemporary documents, in short materials for history, but not history itself. From Froissart and De Comines, or even from the earlier monastic writers to St. Simon (who was just finishing his incomparable Memoirs), history with wide outlook and the conception of social progress and interconnection of events did not exist. Yet history in its simple forms is one of the most spontaneous of human achievements. Stories of mighty deeds, of the prowess and death of heroes, are among the earliest productions of even semi civilised man—the earliest subjects of epic and lyric verse. But this rudimentary form is never more than biographical. With increasing complexity of social evolution it dies away, and history proper, as distinct from annals and chronicle, does not arise till circumstances allow of general and synthetic views, till societies can be surveyed from a sufficient distance and elevation for their movements to be discerned. Thucydides, Livy, and Tacitus do not appear till Greece and Rome have reached their highest point of homogeneous national life. The tardy dawn of history in the modern world was owing to its immense complexity. Materials also were wanting. They gradually emerged out of manuscript all over Europe, during what may be called the great pedant age (1550-1650), under the direction of meritorious antiquaries, Camden, Savile, Duchesne, Gale, and others. Still official documents and state papers were wanting, and had they been at hand would hardly have been

[1] Mézeray's great history of France is next to valueless till he reaches the sixteenth century, that was a period bordering on his own. Thuanus deals with contemporary events

used with competence. The national and religious limitations were still too marked and hostile to permit a free survey over the historic field. The eighteenth century, though it opened with a bloody war, was essentially peaceful in spirit: governments made war, but men and nations longed for rest. The increased interest in the past was shown by the publication nearly contemporary of the great historic collections of Rymer (A.D. 1704), Leibnitz (1707), and Muratori (1723). Before the middle of the century the historic muse had abundant oil to feed her lamp. Still the lamp would probably not have been lighted but for the singular pass to which French thought had come.

From the latter years of Louis XIV. till the third quarter of the eighteenth century was all but closed, France had a government at once so weak and wicked, so much below the culture of the people it oppressed, that the better minds of the nation turned away in disgust from their domestic ignominy, and sought consolation in contemplating foreign virtue wherever they thought it was to be found; in short, they became cosmopolitan. The country which has since been the birthplace of Chauvinism, put away national pride almost with passion. But this was not all. The country whose king was called the Eldest Son of the Church, and with which untold pains had been taken to keep it orthodox, had lapsed into such an abhorrence of the Church and of orthodoxy that anything seemed preferable to them in its eyes.

Thus, as if by enchantment, the old barriers disappeared, both national and religious. Man and his fortunes, in all climes and all ages, became topics of intense interest, especially when they tended to degrade

by contrast the detested condition of things at home. This was the weak side of historical speculation in France: it was essentially polemical; prompted less by genuine interest in the past than by strong hatred of the present. Of this perturbation note must be taken. But it is none the less true that the disengagement of French thought from the narrow limits of nation and creed produced, as it were in a moment, a lofty conception of history such as subsequent ages may equal, but can hardly surpass.

The influence of French thought was European, and nowhere more beneficial than in England. In other countries it was too despotic, and produced in Germany, at least, Lessing's memorable reaction. But the robust national and political life of England reduced it to a welcome flavouring of our insular temperament. The Scotch, who had a traditional connection with France, were the first importers of the new views. Hume, who had practically grown in the same soil as Voltaire, was only three years behind him in the historic field. The *Age of Louis XIV.* was published in 1751, and the first volume of the *History of England* in 1754. Hume was no disciple of Voltaire; he simply wrote under the stimulus of the same order of ideas. Robertson, who shortly followed him, no doubt drew direct inspiration from Voltaire, and his weightiest achievement, the View of the State of Europe, prefixed to his *History of Charles V.*, was largely influenced, if it was not absolutely suggested, by the *Essay on Manners.* But both Hume and Robertson surpassed their masters, if we allow, as seems right, that the French were their masters. The Scotch writers had no quarrel with their country or their age as the French had. One was a

Tory, the other a Whig; and Hume allowed himself to be unworthily affected by party bias in his historical judgment. But neither was tempted to turn history into a covert attack on the condition of things amid which they lived. Hence a calmness and dignity of tone and language, very different from the petulant brilliancy of Voltaire, who is never so happy as when he can make the past look mean and ridiculous, merely because it was the parent of the odious present. But, excellent as were the Scotch historians—Hume, in style nearly perfect; Robertson, admirable for gravity and shrewd sense—they yet left much to be desired. Hume had despatched his five quartos, containing the whole history of England from the Roman period to the Revolution, in nine years. Considering that the subject was new to him when he began, such rapidity made genuine research out of the question. Robertson had the oddest way of consulting his friends as to what subject it would be advisable for him to treat, and was open to proposals from any quarter with exemplary impartiality; this only showed how little the stern conditions of real historic inquiry were appreciated by him. In fact it is not doing them injustice to say that these eminent men were a sort of modern Livies, chiefly occupied with the rhetorical part of their work, and not over inclined to waste their time in ungrateful digging in the deep mines of historic lore. Obviously the place was open for a writer who should unite all the broad spirit of comprehensive survey, with the thorough and minute patience of a Benedictine; whose subject, mellowed by long brooding, should have sought him rather than he it; whose whole previous course of study had been an unconscious preparation for one great effort

which was to fill his life. When Gibbon sat down to write his book, the man had been found who united these difficult conditions.

The decline and fall of Rome is the greatest event in history. It occupied a larger portion of the earth's surface, it affected the lives and fortunes of a larger number of human beings, than any other revolution on record. For it was essentially one, though it took centuries to consummate, and though it had for its theatre the civilised world. Great evolutions and catastrophes happened before it, and have happened since, but nothing which can compare with it in volume and mere physical size. Nor was it less morally. The destruction of Rome was not only a destruction of an empire, it was the destruction of a phase of human thought, of a system of human beliefs, of morals, politics, civilisation, as all these had existed in the world for ages. The drama is so vast, the cataclysm so appalling, that even at this day we are hardly removed from it far enough to take it fully in. The mind is oppressed, the imagination flags under the load imposed upon it. The capture and sack of a town one can fairly conceive: the massacre, outrage, the flaming roofs, the desolation. Even the devastation of a province can be approximately reproduced in thought. But what thought can embrace the devastation and destruction of all the civilised portions of Europe, Africa, and Asia? Who can realise a Thirty Years War lasting five hundred years? a devastation of the Palatinate extending through fifteen generations? If we try to insert into the picture, as we undoubtedly should do, the founding of the new, which was going on beside this destruction of the old, the settling down of the barba-

rian hosts in the conquered provinces, the expansion of the victorious Church, driving paganism from the towns to the country and at last extinguishing it entirely, the effort becomes more difficult than ever. The legend of the Seven Sleepers testifies to the need men felt, even before the tragedy had come to an end, to symbolize in a manageable form the tremendous changes they saw going on around them. But the legend only refers to the changes in religion. The fall of Rome was much more than that. It was the death of the old pagan world and the birth of the new Christian world—the greatest transition in history.

This, and no less than this, is Gibbon's subject.

He has treated it in such a way as even now fills competent judges with something like astonishment. His accuracy, coupled with the extraordinary range of his matter, the variety of his topics, the complexity of his undertaking, the fulness and thoroughness of his knowledge, never failing at any point over the vast field, the ease and mastery with which he lifts the enormous load, are appreciated in proportion to the information and abilities of his critic. One testimonial will suffice. Mr. Freeman says: "That Gibbon should ever be displaced seems impossible. That wonderful man monopolised, so to speak, the historical genius and the historical learning of a whole generation, and left little, indeed, of either for his contemporaries. He remains the one historian of the eighteenth century whom modern research has neither set aside nor threatened to set aside. We may correct and improve from the stores which have been opened since Gibbon's time; we may write again large parts of his story from other and often truer and more wholesome points of view, but the work

of Gibbon as a whole, as the encyclopædic history of 1300 years, as the grandest of historical designs, carried out alike with wonderful power and with wonderful accuracy, must ever keep its place. Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too."

Gibbon's immense scheme did not unfold itself to him at once: he passed through at least two distinct stages in the conception of his work. The original idea had been confined to the decline and fall of the city of Rome. Before he began to write, this had been expanded to the fall of the empire of the West. The first volume, which we saw him publish in the last chapter, was only an instalment, limited to the accession of Constantine, through a doubt as to how his labours would be received. The two following volumes, published in 1781, completed his primitive plan. Then he paused exactly a year before he resolved to carry on his work to its true end, the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. The latter portion he achieved in three volumes more, which he gave to the world on his fifty-first birthday, in 1788. Thus the work naturally falls into two equal parts. It will be more convenient to disregard in our remarks the interval of five years which separated the publication of the first volume from its two immediate companions. The first three volumes constitute a whole in themselves, which we will now consider.

From the accession of Commodus, A.D. 180, to the last of the Western Cæsars, A.D. 476, three centuries elapsed. The first date is a real point of departure, the commencement of a new stage of decay in the empire. The second is a mere official record of the final disappearance of a series of phantom sovereigns, whose

vanishing was hardly noticed. Between these limits the empire passed from the autumnal calm of the Antonine period, through the dreadful century of anarchy between Pertinax and Diocletian, through the relative peace brought about by Diocletian's reforms, the civil wars of the sons of Constantine, the disastrous defeat of Julian, the calamities of the Gothic war, the short respite under Theodosius, the growing anarchy and misery under his incompetent sons, the three sieges of Rome and its sack by the Goths, the awful appearance of Attila and his Huns, the final submergence of the Western Empire under the barbarians, and the universal ruin which marked the close of the fifth century. This was the temporal side of affairs. On the spiritual, we have the silent occult growth of the early Church, the conversion of Constantine, the tremendous conflict of hostile sects, the heresy of Arius, the final triumph of Athanasius, the spread of monasticism, the extinction of paganism. Antiquity has ended, the middle ages have begun.

Over all this immense field Gibbon moves with a striking attitude of power, which arose from his consciousness of complete preparation. What there was to be known of his subject he felt sure that he knew. His method of treatment is very simple, one might say primitive, but it is very effective. He masters his materials, and then condenses and clarifies them into a broad, well-filled narrative, which is always or nearly always perfectly lucid through his skill in grouping events and characters, and his fine boldness in neglecting chronological sequence for the sake of clearness and unity of action. It is doing the book injustice to consult it only as a work of reference, or even to read it in detached portions. It should be read through, if we would appreciate the

art with which the story is told. No part can be fairly judged without regard to the remainder. In fact, Gibbon was much more an artist than perhaps be suspected, and less of a philosophic thinker on history than he would have been willing to allow. His shortcomings in this latter respect will be adverted to presently; we are now considering his merits. And among these the very high one of lofty and vigorous narrative stands pre eminent. The campaigns of Julian, Belisarius, and Heraclius are painted with a dash and clearness which few civil historians have equalled. His descriptive power is also very great. The picture of Constantinople in the seventeenth chapter is, as the writer of these pages can testify, a wonderful achievement, both for fidelity and brilliancy, coming from a man who had never seen the place.

"If we survey Byzantium in the extent which it acquired with the august name of Constantinople, the figure of the imperial city may be represented under that of an unequal triangle. The obtuse point, which advances towards the east and the shores of Asia, meets and repels the waves of the Thracian Bosphorus. The northern side of the city is bounded by the harbour; and the southern is washed by the Propontis, or Sea of Marmora. The basis of the triangle is opposed to the west, and terminates the continent of Europe. But the admirable form and division of the circumjacent land and water cannot, without a more ample explanation, be clearly or sufficiently understood.

"The winding channel through which the waters of the Euxine flow with rapid and incessant course towards the Mediterranean received the appellation of Bosphorus, a name not less celebrated in the history than in the fables of antiquity. A crowd of temples and of votive altars, profusely scattered along its steep and woody banks, attested the unskilfulness, the terrors, and the devotion of the Grecian navigators, who, after the example of the Argonauts, explored the dangers of the inhospitable

Euxine. On these banks tradition long preserved the memory of the palace of Phineus, infested by the obscene Harpies, and of the sylvan reign of Amycus, who defied the son of Leda to the combat of the cestus. The straits of the Bosphorus are terminated by the Cyanean rocks, which, according to the description of the poets, had once floated on the surface of the waters, and were destined by the gods to protect the entrance of the Euxine against the eye of profane curiosity. From the Cyanean rocks to the point and harbour of Byzantium the winding length of the Bosphorus extends about sixteen miles, and its most ordinary breadth may be computed at about one mile and a half. The *new* castles of Europe and Asia are constructed on either continent upon the foundations of two celebrated temples of Serapis and Jupiter Urius. The *old* castles, a work of the Greek emperors, command the narrowest part of the channel, in a place where the opposite banks advance within five hundred yards of each other. These fortresses were destroyed and strengthened by Mahomet the Second when he meditated the siege of Constantinople; but the Turkish conqueror was most probably ignorant that near two thousand years before his reign Darius had chosen the same situation to connect the two continents by a bridge of boats. At a small distance from the old castles we discover the little town of Chrysopolis or Scutari, which may almost be considered as the Asiatic suburb of Constantinople. The Bosphorus, as it begins to open into the Propontis, passes between Byzantium and Chalcedon. The latter of these two cities was built by the Greeks a few years before the former, and the blindness of its founders, who overlooked the superior advantages of the opposite coast, has been stigmatised by a proverbial expression of contempt.

"The harbour of Constantinople, which may be considered as an arm of the Bosphorus, obtained in a very remote period, the denomination of the *Golden Horn*. The curve which it describes might be compared to the horn of a stag, or as it should seem with more propriety, to that of an ox. The epithet of *golden* was expressive of the riches which every wind wafted from the most distant countries into the secure and capacious port of Constantinople. The river Lycus, formed by the conflux of two little streams, pours into the harbour a perpetual supply of fresh

water, which serves to cleanse the bottom and to invite the periodical shoals of fish to seek their retreat in that convenient recess. As the vicissitudes of the tides are scarcely felt in those seas, the constant depth of the harbour allows goods to be landed on the quays without the assistance of boats, and it has been observed that in many places the largest vessels may rest their prows against the houses while their sterns are floating in the water. From the mouth of the Lycus to that of the harbour, this arm of the Bosphorus is more than seven miles in length. The entrance is about five hundred yards broad, and a strong chain could be occasionally drawn across it, to guard the port and the city from the attack of an hostile navy.

"Between the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, the shores of Europe and Asia receding on either side include the Sea of Marmora, which was known to the ancients by the denomination of the Propontis. The navigation from the issue of the Bosphorus to the entrance of the Hellespont is about one hundred and twenty miles. Those who steer their westward course through the middle of the Propontis may at once descry the highlands of Thrace and Bithynia and never lose sight of the lofty summit of Mount Olympus, covered with eternal snows. They leave on the left a deep gulf, at the bottom of which Nicomedia was seated, the imperial residence of Diocletian, and they pass the small islands of Cyzicus and Proconnesus before they cast anchor at Gallipoli, where the sea which separates Asia from Europe is again contracted to a narrow channel.

"The geographers, who with the most skilful accuracy have surveyed the form and extent of the Hellespont, assign about sixty miles for the winding course and about three miles for the ordinary breadth of those celebrated straits. But the narrowest part of the channel is found to the northward of the old Turkish castles between the cities of Sestos and Abydos. It was here that the adventurous Leander braved the passage of the flood for the possession of his mistress. It was here, likewise, in a place where the distance between the opposite banks cannot exceed five hundred paces, that Xerxes imposed a stupendous bridge of boats for the purpose of transporting into Europe an hundred and seventy myriads of barbarians. A sea contracted

within such narrow limits may seem but ill to deserve the singular epithet of *broad*, which Homer, as well as Orpheus, has frequently bestowed on the Hellespont. But our ideas of greatness are of a relative nature; the traveller, and especially the poet, who sailed along the Hellespont, who pursued the windings of the stream and contemplated the rural scenery which appeared on every side to terminate the prospect, insensibly lost the remembrance of the sea, and his fancy painted those celebrated straits with all the attributes of a mighty river flowing with a swift current in the midst of a woody and inland country, and at length through a wide mouth discharging itself into the Ægean or Archipelago. Ancient Troy, seated on an eminence at the foot of Mount Ida, overlooked the mouth of the Hellespont, which scarcely received an accession of waters from the tribute of those immortal rivulets the Simois and Scamander. The Grecian camp had stretched twelve miles along the shore from the Sigæan to the Rhætian promontory, and the flanks of the army were guarded by the bravest chiefs who fought under the banners of Agamemnon. The first of these promontories was occupied by Achilles with his invincible Myrmidons, and the dauntless Ajax pitched his tents on the other. After Ajax had fallen a sacrifice to his disappointed pride and to the ingratitude of the Greeks, his sepulchre was erected on the ground where he had defended the navy against the rage of Jove and Hector, and the citizens of the rising town of Rhætium celebrated his memory with divine honours. Before Constantine gave a just preference to the situation of Byzantium he had conceived the design of erecting the seat of empire on this celebrated spot, from whence the Romans derived their fabulous origin. The extensive plain which lies below ancient Troy towards the Rhætian promontory was first chosen for his new capital; and though the undertaking was soon relinquished, the stately remains of unfinished walls and towers attracted the notice of all who sailed through the straits of the Hellespont.

"We are at present qualified to view the advantageous position of Constantinople; which appears to have been formed by nature for the centre and capital of a great monarchy.

Situated in the forty-first degree of latitude, the imperial city commanded from her seven hills the opposite shores of Europe and Asia; the climate was healthy and temperate; the soil fertile; the harbour secure and capacious; and the approach on the side of the continent was of small extent and easy defence. The Bosphorus and the Hellespont may be considered as the two gates of Constantinople, and the prince who possesses those important passages could always shut them against a naval enemy and open them to the fleets of commerce. The preservation of the eastern provinces may in some degree be ascribed to the policy of Constantine, as the barbarians of the Euxine, who in the preceding age had poured their armaments into the heart of the Mediterranean, soon desisted from the exercise of piracy, and despaired of forcing this insurmountable barrier. When the gates of the Hellespont and Bosphorus were shut, the capital still enjoyed within their spacious inclosure every production which could supply the wants or gratify the luxury of its numerous inhabitants. The sea-coasts of Thrace and Bithynia, which languish under the weight of Turkish oppression, still exhibit a rich prospect of vineyards, of gardens, and of plentiful harvests; and the Propontis has ever been renowned for an inexhaustible store of the most exquisite fish that are taken in their stated seasons without skill and almost without labour. But when the passages of the straits were thrown open for trade, they alternately admitted the natural and artificial riches of the north and south, of the Euxine and the Mediterranean. Whatever rude commodities were collected in the forests of Germany and Scythia, and as far as the sources of the Tanais and Borysthenes; whatsoever was manufactured by the skill of Europe or Asia, the corn of Egypt, the gems and spices of the furthest India, were brought by the varying winds into the port of Constantinople, which for many ages attracted the commerce of the ancient world.

"The prospect of beauty, of safety, and of wealth united in a single spot was sufficient to justify the choice of Constantine. But as some mixture of prodigy and fable has in every age been supposed to reflect a becoming majesty on the origin of great

cities, the emperor was desirous of ascribing his resolution not so much to the uncertain counsels of human policy as to the eternal and infallible decrees of divine wisdom. In one of his laws he has been careful to instruct posterity that in obedience to the commands of God he laid the everlasting foundations of Constantinople, and though he has not condescended to relate in what manner the celestial inspiration was communicated to his mind, the defect of his modest silence has been liberally supplied by the ingenuity of succeeding writers, who describe the nocturnal vision which appeared to the fancy of Constantine as he slept within the walls of Byzantium. The tutelar genius of the city, a venerable matron sinking under the weight of years and infirmities, was suddenly transformed into a blooming maid, whom his own hands adorned with all the symbols of imperial greatness. The monarch awoke, interpreted the auspicious omen, and obeyed without hesitation the will of Heaven. The day which gave birth to a city or a colony was celebrated by the Romans with such ceremonies as had been ordained by a generous superstition : and though Constantine might omit some rites which savoured too strongly of their pagan origin, yet he was anxious to leave a deep impression of hope and respect on the minds of the spectators. On foot, with a lance in his hand, the emperor himself led the solemn procession : and directed the line which was traced as the boundary of the destined capital : till the growing circumference was observed with astonishment by the assistants, who at length ventured to observe that he had already exceeded the most ample measure of a great city. 'I shall still advance,' replied Constantine, 'till HE, the invisible Guide who marches before me, thinks proper to stop.' "

Gibbon proceeds to describe the extent, limits, and edifices of Constantinople. Unfortunately the limits of our space prevent us from giving more than a portion of his brilliant picture.

"In the actual state of the city the palace and gardens of the Seraglio occupy the eastern promontory, the first of the seven hills,

and cover about one hundred and fifty acres of our own measure. The seat of Turkish jealousy and despotism is erected on the foundations of a Grecian republic: but it may be supposed that the Byzantines were tempted by the conveniency of the harbour to extend their habitations on that side beyond the modern limits of the Seraglio. The new walls of Constantine stretched from the port to the Propontis across the enlarged breadth of the triangle, at the distance of fifteen stadia from the ancient fortifications: and with the city of Byzantium they inclosed five of the seven hills, which to the eyes of those who approach Constantinople appear to rise above each other in beautiful order. About a century after the death of the founder the new buildings, extending on one side up the harbour, and on the other the Propontis, already covered the narrow ridge of the sixth and the broad summit of the seventh hill. The necessity of protecting those suburbs from the incessant inroads of the barbarians engaged the younger Theodosius to surround his capital with an adequate and permanent inclosure of walls. From the eastern promontory to the Golden Gate, the extreme length of Constantinople was above three Roman miles; the circumference measured between ten and eleven; and the surface might be computed as equal to about two thousand English acres. It is impossible to justify the vain and credulous exaggerations of modern travellers, who have sometimes stretched the limits of Constantinople over the adjacent villages of the European and even Asiatic coasts. But the suburbs of Pera and Galata, though situate beyond the harbour, may deserve to be considered as a part of the city, and this addition may perhaps authorise the measure of a Byzantine historian, who assigns sixteen Greek (about sixteen Roman) miles for the circumference of his native city. Such an extent may seem not unworthy of an imperial residence. Yet Constantinople must yield to Babylon and Thebes, to ancient Rome, to London, and even to Paris . . .

"Some estimate may be formed of the expense bestowed with imperial liberality on Constantinople, by the allowance of about two millions five hundred thousand pounds for the construction of the walls, the porticoes, and the aqueducts. The forests that overshadowed the shores of the Euxine, and the celebrated

quarries of white marble in the little island of Proconnesus, supplied an inexhaustible stock of materials ready to be conveyed by the convenience of a short water carriage to the harbour of Byzantium. A multitude of labourers and artificers urged the conclusion of the work with incessant toil, but the impatience of Constantine soon discovered that in the decline of the arts the skill as well as the number of his architects bore a very unequal proportion to the greatness of his design. . . The buildings of the new city were executed by such artificers as the age of Constantine could afford, but they were decorated by the hands of the most celebrated masters of the age of Pericles and Alexander. . . . By Constantine's command the cities of Greece and Asia were despoiled of their most valuable ornaments. The trophies of memorable wars, the objects of religious veneration, the most finished statues of the gods and heroes, of the sages and poets of ancient times, contributed to the splendid triumph of Constantinople.

". . . . The Circus, or Hippodrome, was a stately building of about four hundred paces in length and one hundred in breadth. The space between the two *metæ*, or goals, was filled with statues and obelisks, and we may still remark a very singular fragment of antiquity—the bodies of three serpents twisted into one pillar of brass. Their triple heads had once supported the golden tripod which, after the defeat of Xerxes, was consecrated in the temple of Delphi by the victorious Greeks. The beauty of the Hippodrome has been long since defaced by the rude hands of the Turkish conquerors; but, under the similar appellation of Atmeidan, it still serves as a place of exercise for their horses. From the throne whence the emperor viewed the Circensian games a winding staircase descended to the palace, a magnificent edifice, which scarcely yielded to the residence of Rome itself, and which, together with the dependent courts, gardens, and porticoes, covered a considerable extent of ground upon the banks of the Propontis between the Hippodrome and the church of St. Sophia. We might likewise celebrate the baths, which still retained the name of Zeuxippus, after they had been enriched by the magnificence of Constantine with lofty columns, various marbles, and above three score statues of bronze.

But we should deviate from the design of this history if we attempted minutely to describe the different buildings or quarters of the city. . . . A particular description, composed about a century after its foundation, enumerates a capitol or school of learning, a circus, two theatres, eight public and one hundred and fifty-three private baths, fifty-two porticoes, five granaries, eight aqueducts or reservoirs of water, four spacious halls for the meeting of the senate or courts of justice, fourteen churches, fourteen palaces, and four thousand three hundred and eighty-eight houses, which for their size or beauty deserved to be distinguished from the multitude of plebeian habitations."

Gibbon's conception of history was that of a spacious panorama, in which a series of tableaux pass in succession before the reader's eye. He adverts but little, far too little, to that side of events which does not strike the visual sense. He rarely generalises or sums up a widely-scattered mass of facts into pregnant synthetic views. But possibly he owes some of the permanence of his fame to this very defect. As soon as ever a writer begins to support a thesis, to prove a point, he runs imminent danger of one-sidedness and partiality in his presentation of events. Gibbon's faithful transcript of the past has neither the merit nor the drawback of generalisation, and he has come in consequence to be regarded as a common mine of authentic facts to which all speculators can resort.

The first volume, which was received with such warm acclamation, is inferior to those that followed. He seems to have been partly aware of this himself, and speaks of the "concise and superficial narrative from Commodus to Alexander." But the whole volume lacks the grasp and easy mastery which distinguish its successors. No doubt the subject-matter was comparatively meagre and ungrateful. The century between

Commodus and Diocletian was one long spasm of anarchy and violence, which was, as Niebuhr said, incapable of historical treatment. The obscure confusion of the age is aggravated into almost complete darkness by the wretched materials which alone have survived, and the attempt to found a dignified narrative on such scanty and imperfect authorities was hardly wise. Gibbon would have shown a greater sense of historic proportion if he had passed over this period with a few bold strokes, and summed up with brevity such general results as may be fairly deduced. We may say of the first volume that it was tentative in every way. In it the author not only sounded his public, but he was also trying his instrument, running over the keys in preparatory search for the right note. He strikes it full and clear in the two final chapters on the Early Church; these, whatever objections may be made against them on other grounds, are the real commencement of the Decline and Fall

From this point onwards he marches with the steady and measured tramp of a Roman legion. His materials improve both in number and quality. The fourth century, though a period of frightful anarchy and disaster if compared to a settled epoch, is a period of relative peace and order when compared to the third century. The fifth was calamitous beyond example; but ecclesiastical history comes to the support of secular history in a way which might have excited more gratitude in Gibbon than it did. From Constantine to Augustulus Gibbon is able to put forth all his strength. His style is less superfine, as his matter becomes more copious; and the more definite cleavage of events brought about by the separation between the Eastern

and Western Empires, enables him to display the higher qualities which marked him as an historian.

The merit of his work, it is again necessary to point out, will not be justly estimated unless the considerations suggested at the beginning of this chapter be kept in view. We have to remember that his culture was chiefly French, and that his opinions were those which prevailed in France in the latter half of the eighteenth century He was the friend of Voltaire, Helvetius, and D'Holbach; that is, of men who regarded the past as one long nightmare of crime, imposture, and folly, instigated by the selfish machinations of kings and priests. A strong infusion of the spirit which animated not only Voltaire's *Essay on Manners*, but certain parts of Hume's *History of England* might have been expected as a matter of course. It is essentially absent. Gibbon's private opinions may have been what they will, but he has approved his high title to the character of an historian by keeping them well in abeyance. When he turned his eyes to the past and viewed it with intense gaze, he was absorbed in the spectacle, his peculiar prejudices were hushed, he thought only of the object before him and of reproducing it as well as he could. This is not the common opinion, but, nevertheless, a great deal can be said to support it.

It will be as well to take two concrete tests—his treatment of two topics which of all others were most likely to betray him into deviations from historic candour. If he stands these, he may be admitted to stand any less severe. Let them be his account of Julian, and his method of dealing with Christianity.

The snare that was spread by Julian's apostasy for the philosophers of the last century, and their haste to fall

into it, are well known. The spectacle of a philosopher on the throne who proclaimed toleration, and contempt for Christianity, was too tempting and too useful controversially to allow of much circumspection in handling it. The odious comparisons it offered were so exactly what was wanted for depreciating the Most Christian king and his courtly Church, that all further inquiry into the apostate's merits seemed useless. Voltaire finds that Julian had all the qualities of Trajan without his defects; all the virtues of Cato without his ill humour; all that one admires in Julius Cæsar without his vices; he had the continency of Scipio, and was in all ways equal to Marcus Aurelius, the first of men. Nay, more. If he had only lived longer, he would have retarded the fall of the Roman Empire, if he could not arrest it entirely. We here see the length to which "polemical fury" could hurry a man of rare insight. Julian had been a subject of contention for years between the hostile factions. While one party made it a point of honour to prove that he was a monster, warring consciously against the Most High, the other was equally determined to prove that he was a paragon of all virtue, by reason of his enmity to the Christian religion. The deep interest attaching to the pagan reaction in the fourth century, and the social and moral problems it suggests, were perceived by neither side, and it is not difficult to see why they were not. The very word reaction, in its modern sense, will hardly be found in the eighteenth century, and the thing that it expresses was very imperfectly conceived. We, who have been surrounded by reactions, real or supposed, in politics, in religion, in philosophy, recognise an old acquaintance in the efforts of the limited, intense Julian to stem the tide of progress as repre-

sented in the Christian Church. It is a fine instance of the way in which the ever-unfolding present is constantly lighting up the past. Julian and his party were the Ultramontanes of their day in matters of religion, and the Romantics in matters of literature. Those radical innovators and reformers, the Christians, were marching from conquest to conquest, over the old faith, making no concealment of their revolutionary aims and intentions to wipe out the past as speedily as possible. The conservatives of those times, after long despising the reformers, passed easily to fearing them and hating them as their success became threatening. "The attachment to paganism," says Neander, "lingered especially in many of the ancient and noble families of Greece and Rome." Old families, or new rich ones who wished to be thought old, would be sure to take up the cause of ancestral wisdom as against modern innovation. Before Julian came to the throne, a pagan reaction was imminent, as Neander points out. Julian himself was a remarkable man, as men of his class usually are. In the breaking up of old modes of belief, as Mill has said, "the most strong-minded and discerning, next to those who head the movement, are generally those who bring up the rear." The energy of his mind and character was quite exceptional, and if we reflect that he only reigned sixteen months, and died in his thirty-second year, we must admit that the mark he has left in history is very surprising. He and his policy are now discussed with entire calm by inquirers of all schools, and sincere Christians like Neander and Dean Milman are as little disposed to attack him with acrimony, as those of a different way of thought are inclined to make him a subject of unlimited panegyric.

Through this difficult subject Gibbon has found his way with a prudence and true insight which extorted admiration, even in his own day. His account of Julian is essentially a modern account. The influence of his private opinions can hardly be traced in the brilliant chapters that he has devoted to the Apostate. He sees through Julian's weaknesses in a way in which Voltaire never saw or cared to see. His pitiful superstition, his huge vanity, his weak affectation are brought out with an incisive clearness and subtle penetration into character which Gibbon was not always so ready to display. At the same time he does full justice to Julian's real merits. And this is perhaps the most striking evidence of his penetration. An error on the side of injustice to Julian is very natural in a man who, having renounced allegiance to Christianity, yet fully realises the futility of attempting to arrest it in the fourth century. A certain intellectual disdain for the reactionary emperor is difficult to avoid. Gibbon surmounts it completely, and he does so, not in consequence of a general conception of the reactionary spirit, as a constantly emerging element in society, but by sheer historical insight, clear vision of the fact before him. It may be added that nowhere is Gibbon's command of vivid narrative seen to greater advantage than in the chapters that he has devoted to Julian. The daring march from Gaul to Illyricum is told with immense spirit; but the account of Julian's final campaign and death in Persia is still better, and can hardly be surpassed. It has every merit of clearness and rapidity, yet is full of dignity, which culminates in this fine passage referring to the night before the emperor received his mortal wound.

"While Julian struggled with the almost insuperable difficulties of his situation, the silent hours of the night were still devoted to study and contemplation. Whenever he closed his eyes in short and interrupted slumbers, his mind was agitated by painful anxiety; nor can it be thought surprising that the Genius of the empire should once more appear before him, covering with a funereal veil his head and his horn of abundance, and slowly retiring from the Imperial tent. The monarch started from his couch, and, stepping forth to refresh his wearied spirits with the coolness of the midnight air, he beheld a fiery meteor, which shot athwart the sky and suddenly vanished. Julian was convinced that he had seen the menacing countenance of the god of war: the council which he summoned, of Tuscan Haruspices, unanimously pronounced that he should abstain from action; but on this occasion necessity and reason were more prevalent than superstition, and the trumpets sounded at the break of day." [1]

It will not be so easy to absolve Gibbon from the

[1] It is interesting to compare Gibbon's admirable picture with the harsh original Latin of his authority, Ammianus Marcellinus. "Ipse autem ad sollicitam suspensamque quietem paullisper protractus, cum somno (ut solebat) depulso, ad æmulationem Cæsaris Julii quædam sub pellibus scribens, obscuro noctis altitudine sensus cujusdam philosophi teneretur, vidit squalidius, ut confessus est proximis, speciem illam Genii publici, quam quum ad Augustum surgeret culmen, conspexit in Galliis, velata cum capite cornucopia per aulæa tristius discedentem. Et quamquam ad momentum hæsit, stupore defixus, omni tamen superior metu, ventura decretis cælestibus commendabat; relicto humi strato cubili, adulta jam excitus nocte, et numinibus per sacra depulsoria supplicans, flagrantissimam facem cadenti similem visam, aëris parte sulcata evanuisse existimavit: horroreque perfusus est, ne ita aperte minax Martis adparuerit sidus."—*Amm. Marc.* lib. xxv. cap. 2.

charge of prejudice in reference to his treatment of the Early Church. It cannot be denied that in the two famous chapters, at least, which concluded his first volume, he adopted a tone which must be pronounced offensive, not only from the Christian point of view, but on the broad ground of historical equity. His preconceived opinions were too strong for him on this occasion, and obstructed his generally clear vision. Yet a distinction must be made. The offensive tone in question is confined to these two chapters. We need not think that it was in consequence of the clamour they raised that he adopted a different style with reference to church matters in his subsequent volumes. A more creditable explanation of his different tone, which will be presently suggested, is at least as probable. In any case, these two chapters remain the chief slur on his historical impartiality, and it is worth while to examine what his offence amounts to.

Gibbon's account of the early Christians is vitiated by his narrow and distorted conception of the emotional side of man's nature. Having no spiritual aspirations himself, he could not appreciate or understand them in others. Those emotions which have for their object the unseen world and its centre, God, had no meaning for him; and he was tempted to explain them away when he came across them, or to ascribe their origin and effects to other instincts which were more intelligible to him. The wonderland which the mystic inhabits was closed to him, he remained outside of it and reproduced in sarcastic travesty the reports he heard of its marvels. What he has called the secondary causes of the growth of Christianity, were much rather its effects. The first is "the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christians"

and their abhorrence of idolatry. With great power of language, he paints the early Christian "encompassed with infernal snares in every convivial entertainment, as often as his friends, invoking the hospitable deities, poured out libations to each other's happiness. When the bride, struggling with well affected reluctance, was forced in hymenæal pomp over the threshold of her new habitation, or when the sad procession of the dead slowly moved towards the funeral pile, the Christian on these interesting occasions was compelled to desert the persons who were dearest to him, rather than contract the guilt inherent in those impious ceremonies." It is strange that Gibbon did not ask himself what was the cause of this inflexible zeal. The zeal produced the effects alleged, but what produced the zeal? He says that it was derived from the Jewish religion, but neglects to point out what could have induced Gentiles of every diversity of origin to derive from a despised race tenets and sentiments which would make their lives one long scene of self-denial and danger. The whole vein of remark is so completely out of date, that it is not worth dwelling on, except very summarily.

The second cause is "the doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth." Again we have an effect treated as a cause. "The ancient Christians were animated by a contempt for their present existence, and by a just confidence of immortality." Very true; but the fact of their being so animated was what wanted explaining. Gibbon says it "was no wonder that so advantageous an offer" as that of immortality was accepted. Yet he had just before told us that the ablest orators at the bar and in the senate

of Rome, could expose this offer of immortality to ridicule without fear of giving offence. Whence arose, then, the sudden blaze of conviction with which the Christians embraced it?

The third cause is the miraculous powers *ascribed* to the primitive Church. Gibbon apparently had not the courage to admit that he agreed with his friend Hume in rejecting miracles altogether. He conceals his drift in a cloud of words, suggesting indirectly with innuendo and sneer his real opinion. But this does not account for the stress he lays on the *ascription* of miracles. He seems to think that the claim of supernatural gifts somehow had the same efficacy as the gifts themselves would have had, if they had existed.

The fourth cause is the virtues of the primitive Christians. The paragraphs upon it, Dean Milman considers the most uncandid in all the history, and they certainly do Gibbon no credit. With a strange ignorance of the human heart, he attributes the austere morals of the early Christians to their care for their reputation. The ascetic temper, one of the most widely manifested in history, was beyond his comprehension.

The fifth cause was the union and discipline of the Christian republic. For the last time the effect figures as the cause. Union and discipline we know are powerful, but we know also that they are the result of deep antecedent forces, and that prudence and policy alone never produced them

It can surprise no one that Gibbon has treated the early Church in a way which is highly unsatisfactory if judged by a modern standard. Not only is it a period which criticism has gone over again and again with a microscope, but the standpoint from which such periods

are observed has materially changed since his day. That dim epoch of nascent faith, full of tender and subdued tints, with a high light on the brows of the Crucified, was not one in which he could see clearly, or properly see at all. He has as little insight into the religious condition of the pagan world, as of the Christian It is singular how he passes over facts which were plain before him, which he knew quite well, as he knew nearly everything connected with his subject, but the real significance of which he missed. Thus he attributes to the scepticism of the pagan world the easy introduction of Christianity. Misled by the "eloquence of Cicero and the wit of Lucian," he supposes the second century to have been vacant of beliefs, in which a "fashion of incredulity" was widely diffused, and "many were almost disengaged from artificial prejudices." He was evidently unaware of the striking religious revival which uplifted paganism in the age of Hadrian, and grew with the sinking empire: the first stirrings of it may even be discerned in Tacitus, and go on increasing till we reach the theurgy of the Neoplatonists. A growing fear of the gods, a weariness of life and longing for death, a disposition to look for compensation for the miseries of this world to a brighter one beyond the grave—these traits are common in the literature of the second century, and show the change which had come over the minds of men. Gibbon is colour blind to these shades of the religious spirit: he can only see the banter of Lucian.[1] In reference

[1] On the religious revival of the second century, see Hausrath's *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*, vol. iii., especially the sections, "Hadrian's Mysticismus" and "Religiöse Tendenzen in Kunst und Literatur," where this interesting subject is handled with a freshness and insight quite remarkable.

to these matters he was a true son of his age, and could hardly be expected to transcend it.

He cannot be cleared of this reproach. On the other hand, we must remember that Gibbon's hard and accurate criticism set a good example in one respect The fertile fancy of the middle ages had run into wild exaggerations of the number of the primitive martyrs, and their legends had not always been submitted to impartial scrutiny even in the eighteenth century. We may admit that Gibbon was not without bias of another kind, and that his tone is often very offensive when he seeks to depreciate the evidence of the sufferings of the early confessors. His computation, which will allow of "an annual consumption of a hundred and fifty martyrs," is nothing short of cynical. Still he did good service in insisting on chapter and verse and fair historical proof of these frightful stories, before they were admitted. Dean Milman acknowledges so much, and defends him against the hot zeal of M. Guizot, justly adding that "truth must not be sacrificed even to well-grounded moral indignation," in which sentiment all now will no doubt be willing to concur.

The difference between the Church in the Catacombs, and the Church in the Palaces at Constantinople or Ravenna, measures the difference between Gibbon's treatment of early Christian history and his treatment of ecclesiastical history. Just as the simple-hearted emotions of God-fearing men were a puzzle and an irritation to him, so he was completely at home in exposing the intrigues of courtly bishops and in the metaphysics of theological controversy. His mode of dealing with Church matters from this point onward is hardly ever unfair, and has given rise to few protestations. He

has not succeeded in pleasing everybody. What Church historian ever does? But he is candid, impartial, and discerning. His account of the conversion of Constantine is remarkably just, and he is more generous to the first Christian Emperor than Niebuhr or Neander. He plunges into the Arian controversy with manifest delight, and has given in a few pages one of the clearest and most memorable *résumés* of that great struggle. But it is when he comes to the hero of that struggle, to an historic character who can be seen with clearness, that he shows his wonted tact and insight. A great man hardly ever fails to awaken Gibbon into admiration and sympathy. The "Great Athanasius," as he often calls him, caught his eye at once, and the impulse to draw a fine character, promptly silenced any prejudices which might interfere with faithful portraiture. "Athanasius stands out more grandly in Gibbon, than in the pages of the orthodox ecclesiastical historians"—Dr. Newman has said,—a judge whose competence will not be questioned. And as if to show how much insight depends on sympathy, Gibbon is immediately more just and open to the merits of the Christian community, than he had been hitherto. He now sees "that the privileges of the Church had already revived a sense of order and freedom in the Roman government." His chapter on the rise of monasticism is more fair and discriminating than the average Protestant treatment of that subject. He distinctly acknowledges the debt we owe the monks for their attention to agriculture, the useful trades, and the preservation of ancient literature. The more disgusting forms of asceticism he touches with light irony, which is quite as effective as the vehement denunciations of non-Catholic writers. It must not be forgotten that

his ecclesiastical history derives a great superiority of clearness and proportion by its interweaving with the general history of the times, and this fact of itself suffices to give Gibbon's picture a permanent value even beside the master works of German erudition which have been devoted exclusively to Church matters. If we lay down Gibbon and take up Neander, for instance, we are conscious that with all the greater fulness of detail, engaging candour, and sympathetic insight of the great Berlin Professor, the general impression of the times is less distinct and lasting. There is no specialism in Gibbon; his book is a broad sociological picture in which the whole age is portrayed.

To sum up. In two memorable chapters Gibbon has allowed his prejudices to mar his work as an historian. But two chapters out of seventy-one constitute a small proportion. In the remainder of his work he is as free from bias and unfairness as human frailty can well allow. The annotated editions of Milman and Guizot are guarantees of this. Their critical animadversions become very few and far between after the first volume is passed. If he had been animated by a polemical object in writing; if he had used the past as an arsenal from which to draw weapons to attack the present, we may depend that a swift blight would have shrivelled his labours, as it did so many famous works of the eighteenth century, when the great day of reaction set in. His mild rebuke of the Abbé Raynal should not be forgotten. He admired the *History of the Indies*. It is one of the few books that he has honoured with mention and praise in the text of his own work. But he points out that the "zeal of the philosophic historian for the rights of mankind" had led him into a blunder. It

was not only Gibbon's scholarly accuracy which saved him from such blunders. Perhaps he had less zeal for the rights of mankind than men like Raynal, whose general views he shared. But it is certain that he did not write with their settled *parti pris* of making history a vehicle of controversy. His object was to be a faithful historian, and due regard being had to his limitations, he attained to it.

If we now consider the defects of the *Decline and Fall*—which the progress of historic study, and still more the lapse of time, have gradually rendered visible, they will be found, as was to be expected, to consist in the author's limited conception of society, and of the multitudinous forces which mould and modify it. We are constantly reminded by the tone of remark that he sees chiefly the surface of events, and that the deeper causes which produce them have not been seen with the same clearness. In proportion as an age is remote, and therefore different from that in which a historian writes, does it behove him to remember that the social and general side of history is more important than the individual and particular. In reference to a period adjacent to our own the fortunes of individuals properly take a prominent place, the social conditions amid which they worked are familiar to us, and we understand them and their position without effort. But with regard to a remote age the case is different. Here our difficulty is to understand the social conditions, so unlike those with which we are acquainted, and as society is greater than man, so we feel that society, and not individual men, should occupy the chief place in the picture. Not that individuals are to be suppressed or neglected, but their subordination to the large

historic background must be well maintained. The social, religious, and philosophic conditions amid which they played their parts should dominate the scene, and dwarf by their grandeur and importance the human actors who move across it. The higher historical style now demands what may be called compound narrative, that is narrative having reference to two sets of phenomena —one the obvious surface events, the other the larger and wider, but less obvious, sociological condition. A better example could hardly be given than Grote's account of the mutilation of the Hermæ. The fact of the mutilation is told in the briefest way in a few lines, but the social condition which overarched it, and made the disfiguring of a number of half-statues "one of the most extraordinary events in Greek history," demands five pages of reflections and commentary to bring out its full significance. Grote insists on the duty "to take reasonable pains to realise in our minds the religious and political associations of the Athenians," and helps us to do it by a train of argument and illustration. The larger part of the strength of the modern historical school lies in this method, and in able hands it has produced great results.

It would be unfair to compare Gibbon to these writers. They had a training in social studies which he had not. But it is not certain that he has always acquitted himself well, even if compared to his contemporaries and predecessors, Montesquieu, Mably, and Voltaire. In any case his narrative is generally wanting in historic perspective and suggestive background. It adheres closely to the obvious surface of events with little attempt to place behind them the deeper sky of social evolution. In many of his crowded chapters one

cannot see the wood for the trees. The story is not lifted up and made lucid by general points of view, but drags or hurries along in the hollow of events, over which the author never seems to raise himself into a position of commanding survey. The thirty-sixth chapter is a marked instance of this defect. But the defect is general. The vigorous and skilful narrative, and a certain grandeur and weightiness of language, make us overlook it. It is only when we try to attain clear and succinct views, which condense into portable propositions the enormous mass of facts collected before us, that we feel that the writer has not often surveyed his subject from a height and distance sufficient to allow the great features of the epoch to be seen in bold outline. By the side of the history of concrete events, we miss the presentation of those others which are none the less events for being vague, irregular, and wide-reaching, and requiring centuries for their accomplishment. Gibbon's manner of dealing with the first is always good, and sometimes consummate, and equal to anything in historical literature. The thirty-first chapter, with its description of Rome, soon to fall a prey to the Goths and Alaric, is a masterpiece, artistic and spacious in the highest degree; though it is unnecessary to cite particular instances, as nearly every chapter contains passages of admirable historic power. But the noble flood of narrative never stops in meditative pause to review the situation, and point out with pregnant brevity what is happening in the sum total, abstraction made of all confusing details. Besides the facts of the time, we seek to have the tendencies of the age brought before us in their flow and expansion, the filiation of events over long periods deduced in clear

sequence, a synoptical view which is to the mind what a picture is to the eye. In this respect Gibbon's method leaves not a little to be desired.

Take for instance two of the most important aspects of the subject that he treated: the barbarian invasions, and the causes of the decline and fall of the Roman empire. To the concrete side of both he has done ample justice. The rational and abstract side of neither has received the attention from him which it deserved. On the interesting question of the introduction of the barbarians into the frontier provinces, and their incorporation into the legions, he never seems to have quite made up his mind. In the twelfth chapter he calls it a "great and beneficial plan." Subsequently he calls it a disgraceful and fatal expedient. He recurs frequently to the subject in isolated passages, but never collects the facts, into a focus, with a view of deducing their real meaning. Yet the point is second to none in importance. Its elucidation throws more light on the fall of Rome than any other considerations whatever. The question is, Whether Rome was conquered by the barbarians in the ordinary sense of the word, conquered. We know that it was not, and Gibbon knew that it was not. Yet perhaps most people rise from reading his book with an impression that the empire succumbed to the invasion of the barbarians, as Carthage, Gaul, and Greece had succumbed to the invasion of the Romans; that the struggle lay between classic Rome and outside uncivilised foes; and that after two centuries of hard fighting the latter were victorious. The fact that the struggle lay between barbarians, who were within and friendly to the empire, and barbarians who were without it, and hostile rather to their more fortunate

brethren, than to the empire which employed them, is implicitly involved in Gibbon's narrative, but it is not explicitly brought out. Romanised Goths, Vandals, and Franks were the defenders, nearly the only defenders, of the empire against other tribes and nations who were not Romanised, and nothing can be more plain than that Gibbon saw this as well as any one since, but he has not set it forth with prominence and clearness. With his complete mastery of the subject he would have done it admirably, if he had assumed the necessary point of view.

Similarly, with regard to the causes of the fall of the empire. It is quite evident that he was not at all unconscious of the deep economic and social vices which undermined the great fabric. Depopulation, decay of agriculture, fiscal oppression, the general prostration begotten of despotism—all these sources of the great collapse may be traced in his text, or his wonderful notes, hinted very often with a flashing insight which anticipates the most recent inquiries into the subject. But these considerations are not brought together to a luminous point, nor made to yield clear and tangible results. They lie scattered, isolated, and barren over three volumes, and are easily overlooked. One may say that generalised and synthetic views are conspicuous by their absence in Gibbon.

But what of that? These reflections, even if they be well founded, hardly dim the majesty of the *Decline and Fall*. The book is such a marvel of knowledge at once wide and minute, that even now, after numbers of labourers have gone over the same ground, with only special objects in view, small segments of the great circle which Gibbon fills alone, his word is still one of

the weightiest that can be quoted. Modern research has unquestionably opened out points of view to which he did not attain. But when it comes to close investigation of any particular question, we rarely fail to find that he has seen it, dropped some pregnant hint about it, more valuable than the dissertations of other men. As Mr. Freeman says, "Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST TEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE IN LAUSANNE.

After the preliminary troubles which met him on his arrival at Lausanne, Gibbon had four years of unbroken calm and steady work, of which there is nothing to record beyond the fact that they were filled with peaceful industry. "One day," he wrote, "glides by another in tranquil uniformity." During the whole period he never stirred ten miles out of Lausanne. He had nearly completed the fourth volume before he left England. Then came an interruption of a year—consumed in the break-up of his London establishment, his journey, the transport of his library, the delay in getting settled at Lausanne. Then he sat down in grim earnest to finish his task, and certainly the speed he used, considering the quality of the work, left nothing to be desired. He achieved the fifth volume in twenty-one months, and the sixth in little more than a year. He had hoped to finish sooner, but it is no wonder that he found his work grow under his hands when he passed from design to execution. "A long while ago, when I contemplated the distant prospect of my work," he writes to Lord Sheffield, "I gave you and myself some hopes of landing

in England last autumn; but alas! when autumn grew near, hills began to rise on hills, Alps on Alps, and I found my journey far more tedious and toilsome than I had imagined. When I look back on the length of the undertaking and the variety of materials, I cannot accuse or suffer myself to be accused of idleness; yet it appeared that unless I doubled my diligence, another year, and perhaps more, would elapse before I could embark with my complete manuscript. Under these circumstances I took, and am still executing, a bold and meritorious resolution. The mornings in winter, and in a country of early dinners, are very concise. To them, my usual period of study, I now frequently add the evenings, renounce cards and society, refuse the most agreeable evenings, or perhaps make my appearance at a late supper. By this extraordinary industry, which I never practised before, and to which I hope never to be again reduced, I see the last part of my history growing apace under my hands." He was indeed, as he said, now straining for the goal which was at last reached "on the day, or rather the night, of the 27th of June, 1787. Between the hours of eleven and twelve I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a berceau, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken an

everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatsoever might be the future fate of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious."

A faint streak of poetry occasionally shoots across Gibbon's prose. But both prose and poetry had now to yield to stern business. The printing of three quarto volumes in those days of handpresses was a formidable undertaking, and unless expedition were used the publishing season of the ensuing year would be lost. A month had barely elapsed before Gibbon with his precious cargo started for England. He went straight to his printers. The printing of the fourth volume occupied three months, and both author and publisher were warned that their common interest required a quicker pace. Then Mr. Strahan "fulfilled his engagement, which few printers could sustain, of delivering every week three thousand copies of nine sheets." On the 8th of May, 1788, the three concluding volumes were published, and Gibbon had discharged his debt for the entertainment that he had had in this world.

He returned as speedily as he could to Lausanne, to rest from his labours. But he had a painful greeting in the sadly altered look of his friend Deyverdun. Soon an apoplectic seizure confirmed his forebodings, and within a twelvemonth the friend of his youth, whom he had loved for thirty-three years, was taken away by death (July 4, 1789).[1]

[1] The letter in which Gibbon communicated the sad news to Lord Sheffield was written on the 14th July, 1789, the day of the taking of the Bastille. So "that evening sun of July" sent its beams on Gibbon mourning the dead friend, as well as on "reapers amid peaceful woods and fields, on old women spinning in cottages, on ships far out on the silent main, on balls at the Orangerie of

Gibbon never got over this loss. His staid and solid nature was not given to transports of joy or grief. But his constant references to "poor Deyverdun," and the vacancy caused by his loss, show the depth of the wound. "I want to change the scene," he writes, "and, beautiful as the garden and prospect must appear to every eye, I feel that the state of my mind casts a gloom over them: every spot, every walk, every bench recalls the memory of those hours, those conversations, which will return no more. . . . I almost hesitate whether I shall run over to England to consult with you on the spot, and to fly from poor Deyverdun's shade, which meets me at every turn." Not that he lacked attached friends, and of mere society and acquaintance he had more than abundance. He occupied at Lausanne a position of almost patriarchal dignity, "and may be said," writes Lord Sheffield, "to have almost given the law to a set of as willing subjects as any man ever presided over." Soon the troubles in France sent wave after wave of emigrants over the frontiers, and Lausanne had its full share of the exiles. After a brief approval of the reforms in France he passed rapidly to doubt, disgust, and horror at the "new birth of time" there. "You will allow me to be a tolerable historian," he wrote to his stepmother, "yet on a fair review of ancient and modern times I can find none that bear any affinity to the present." The last social evolution was beyond his power of classification. The mingled bewilderment and anger with which he looks out from Lausanne on the revolutionary welter, form an almost amusing contrast to his usual apathy on political matters.

Versailles, where high-rouged dames of the palace are even now dancing with double-jacketed Hussar officers."

He is full of alarm lest England should catch the revolutionary fever. He is delighted with Burke's *Reflections*. "I admire his eloquence, I approve his politics, I adore his chivalry, and I can forgive even his superstition." His wrath waxes hotter at every post. "Poor France! The state is dissolved! the nation is mad." At last nothing but vituperation can express his feelings, and he roundly calls the members of the Convention "devils," and discovers that "democratical principles lead by a path of flowers into the abyss of hell."

In 1790 his friends the Neckers had fled to Switzerland, and on every ground of duty and inclination he was called upon to show them the warmest welcome, and he did so in a way that excited their liveliest gratitude. Necker was cast down in utter despair, not only for the loss of place and power, but on account of the strong animosity which was shown to him by the exiled French, none of whom would set their foot in his house. The Neckers were now Gibbon's chief intimates till the end of his sojourn in Switzerland. They lived at Coppet, and constant visits were exchanged there and at Lausanne. Madame Necker wrote to him frequent letters, which prove that if she had ever had any grievance to complain of in the past, it was not only forgiven, but entirely forgotten. The letters, indeed, testify a warmth of sentiment on her part which, coming from a lady of less spotless propriety, would almost imply a revival of youthful affection for her early lover. "You have always been dear to me," she writes, "but the friendship you have shown to M. Necker adds to that which you inspire me with on so many grounds, and I love you at present with a double affection."—"Come to us when you are restored to health and to yourself; that

moment should always belong to your first and your last friend (*amie*), and I do not know which of those titles is the sweetest and dearest to my heart."—"Near you, the recollections you recalled were pleasant to me, and you connected them easily with present impressions; the chain of years seemed to link all times together with electrical rapidity; you were at once twenty and fifty years old for me. Away from you the different places, which I have inhabited are only the milestones of my life telling me of the distance I have come." With much more in the same strain. Of Madame de Staël Gibbon does not speak in very warm praise. Her mother, who was far from being contented with her, may perhaps have prejudiced him against her. In one letter to him she complains of her daughter's conduct in no measured terms. Yet Gibbon owns that Madame de Staël was a "pleasant little woman;" and in another place says that she was "wild, vain, but good-natured, with a much larger provision of wit than of beauty." One wonders if he ever knew of her childish scheme of marrying him in order that her parents might always have the pleasure of his company and conversation.

These closing years of Gibbon's life were not happy, through no fault of his. No man was less inclined by disposition to look at the dark side of things. But heavy blows fell on him in quick succession. His health was seriously impaired, and he was often laid up for months with the gout. His neglect of exercise had produced its effect, and he had become a prodigy of unwieldy corpulency. Unfortunately his digestion seems to have continued only too good, and neither his own observation nor the medical science of that day

sufficed to warn him against certain errors of regimen which were really fatal. All this time, while the gout was constantly torturing him, he drank Madeira freely. There is frequent question of a pipe of that sweet wine in his correspondence with Lord Sheffield. He cannot bear the thought of being without a sufficient supply, as "good Madeira is now become essential to his health and reputation." The last three years of his residence at Lausanne were agitated by perpetual anxiety and dread of an invasion of French democratic principles, or even of French troops. Reluctance to quit "his paradise" keeps him still, but he is always wondering how soon he will have to fly, and often regrets that he has not done so already. "For my part," he writes, "till Geneva falls, I do not think of a retreat; but at all events I am provided with two strong horses and a hundred louis in gold." Fate was hard on the kindly epicurean, who after his long toil had made his bed in the sun, on which he was preparing to lie down in genial content till the end came. But he feels he must not think of rest; and that, heavy as he is, and irksome to him as it is to move, he must, before long be a rover again. Still he is never peevish upon his fortune; he puts the best face on things as long as they will bear it.

He was not so philosophical under the bereavements that he now suffered. His aunt, Mrs. Porten, had died in 1786. He deplored her as he was bound to do, and feelingly regrets and blames himself for not having written to her as often as he might have done since their last parting. Then came the irreparable loss of Deyverdun. Shortly, an old Lausanne friend, M. de Severy, to whom he was much attached, died after a long illness.

Lastly and suddenly, came the death of Lady Sheffield, the wife of his friend Holroyd, with whom he had long lived on such intimate terms that he was in the habit of calling her his sister. The Sheffields, father and mother and two daughters, had spent the summer of 1791 with him at Lausanne. The visit was evidently an occasion of real happiness and *épanchement de cœur* to the two old friends, and supplied Gibbon for nearly two years with tender regrets and recollections. Then, without any warning, he heard of Lady Sheffield's death. In a moment his mind was made up: he would go at once to console his friend. All the fatigue and irksomeness of the journey to one so ailing and feeble, all the dangers of the road lined and perhaps barred by hostile armies, vanished on the spot. Within twelve days he had made his preparations and started on his journey. He was forced to travel through Germany, and in his ignorance of the language he required an interpreter; young de Severy, the son of his deceased friend, joyfully, and out of mere affection for him, undertook the office of courier. "His attachment to me," wrote Gibbon, "is the sole motive which prompts him to undertake this troublesome journey." It is clear that he had the art of making himself loved. He travelled through Frankfort, Cologne, Brussels, Ostend, and was by his friend's side in little more than a month after he had received the fatal tidings. Well might Lord Sheffield say, "I must ever regard it as the most enduring proof of his sensibility, and of his possessing the true spirit of friendship, that, after having relinquished the thought of his intended visit, he hastened to England, in spite of increasing impediments, to soothe me by the most generous sympathy, and to alleviate my domestic

affliction; neither his great corpulency nor his extraordinary bodily infirmities, nor any other consideration, could prevent him a moment from resolving on an undertaking that might have deterred the most active young man. He almost immediately, with an alertness by no means natural to him, undertook a great circuitous journey along the frontier of an enemy worse than savage, within the sound of their cannon, within the range of the light troops of the different armies, and through roads ruined by the enormous machinery of war."

In this public and private gloom he bade for ever farewell to Lausanne. He was himself rapidly approaching

"The dark portal,
Goal of all mortal,"

but of this he knew not as yet. While he is in the house of mourning, beside his bereaved friend, we will return for a short space to consider the conclusion of his great work.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL.

THE thousand years between the fifth and the fifteenth century comprise the middle age, a period which only recently, through utterly inadequate conceptions of social growth, was wont to be called the dark ages. That long epoch of travail and growth, during which the old field of civilisation was broken up and sown afresh with new and various seed unknown to antiquity, receives now on all hands due recognition, as being one of the most rich, fertile, and interesting in the history of man. The all-embracing despotism of Rome was replaced by the endless local divisions and subdivisions of feudal tenure. The multiform rites and beliefs of polytheism were replaced by the single faith and paramount authority of the Catholic Church. The philosophies of Greece were dethroned, and the scholastic theology reigned in their stead. The classic tongues crumbled away, and out of their *débris* arose the modern idioms of France, Italy, and Spain, to which were added in Northern Europe the new forms of Teutonic speech. The fine and useful arts took a new departure; slavery was mitigated into serfdom; industry and commerce became powers in the world as they had never been

before; the narrow municipal polity of the old world was in time succeeded by the broader national institutions based on various forms of representation. Gunpowder, America, and the art of printing were discovered, and the most civilised portion of mankind passed insensibly into the modern era.

Such was the wide expanse which spread out before Gibbon when he resolved to continue his work from the fall of the Western Empire to the capture of Constantinople. Indeed his glance took in a still wider field, as he was concerned as much with the decay of Eastern as of Western Rome, and the long retarded fall of the former demanded large attention to the Oriental populations who assaulted the city and remaining empire of Constantine. So bold an historic enterprise was never conceived as when, standing on the limit of antiquity in the fifth century, he determined to pursue in rapid but not hasty survey the great lines of events for a thousand years, to follow in detail the really great transactions while discarding the less important, thereby giving prominence and clearness to what is memorable, and reproducing on a small scale the flow of time through the ages. It is to this portion of Gibbon's work that the happy comparison has been made, that it resembles a magnificent Roman aqueduct spanning over the chasm which separates the ancient from the modern world. In these latter volumes he frees himself from the trammels of regular annalistic narrative, deals with events in broad masses according to their importance, expanding or contracting his story as occasion requires; now painting in large panoramic view the events of a few years, now compressing centuries into brief outline. Many of his massive chapters afford materials for

volumes, and are well worthy of a fuller treatment than he could give without deranging his plan. But works of greater detail and narrower compass can never compete with Gibbon's history, any more than a county map can compete with a map of England or of Europe.

The variety of the contents of these last three volumes is amazing, especially when the thoroughness and perfection of the workmanship are considered. Prolix compilations or sketchy outlines of universal history have their use and place, but they are removed by many degrees from the *Decline and Fall*, or rather they belong to another species of authorship. It is not only that Gibbon combines width and depth, that the extent of his learning is as wonderful as its accuracy, though in this respect he has hardly a full rival in literature. The quality which places him not only in the first rank of historians, but in a class by himself, and makes him greater than the greatest, lies in his supreme power of moulding into lucid and coherent unity, the manifold and rebellious mass of his multitudinous materials, of coercing his divergent topics into such order that they seem spontaneously to grow like branches out of one stem, clear and visible to the mind. There is something truly epic in these latter volumes. Tribes, nations, and empires are the characters; one after another they come forth like Homeric heroes, and do their mighty deeds before the assembled armies. The grand and lofty chapters on Justinian; on the Arabs; on the Crusades, have a rounded completeness, coupled with such artistic subordination to the main action, that they read more like cantos of a great prose poem than the ordinary staple of historical composition. It may well be questioned whether there is another instance of such

high literary form and finish, coupled with such vast erudition. And two considerations have to be borne in mind, which heighten Gibbon's merit in this respect. (1.) Almost the whole of his subject had been as yet untouched by any preceding writer of eminence, and he had no stimulus or example from his precursors. He united thus in himself the two characters of pioneer and artist. (2.) The barbarous and imperfect nature of the materials with which he chiefly had to work,—dull inferior writers, whose debased style was their least defect. A historian who has for his authorities masters of reason and language such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy, and Tacitus is borne up by their genius; apt quotation and translation alone suffice to produce considerable effects; or in the case of subjects taken from modern times, weighty state papers, eloquent debates, or finished memoirs supply ample materials for graphic narrative. But Gibbon had little but dross to deal with. Yet he has smelted and cast it into the grand shapes we see.

The fourth volume is nearly confined to the reign, or rather epoch, of Justinian,—a magnificent subject, which he has painted in his loftiest style of gorgeous narrative. The campaigns of Belisarius and Narses are related with a clearness and vigour that make us feel that Gibbon's merits as a military historian have not been quite sufficiently recognised. He had from the time of his service in the militia taken continued interest in tactics and all that was connected with the military art. It was no idle boast when he said that the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers had not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire. Military matters perhaps occupy a somewhat excessive space in his pages.

Still, if the operations of war are to be related, it is highly important that they should be treated with intelligence, and knowledge how masses of men are moved, and by a writer to whom the various incidents of the camp, the march and the bivouac, are not matters of mere hearsay, but of personal experience. The campaign of Belisarius in Africa may be quoted as an example.

"In the seventh year of the reign of Justinian, and about the time of the summer solstice, the whole fleet of six hundred ships was ranged in martial pomp before the gardens of the palace. The patriarch pronounced his benediction, the emperor signified his last commands, the general's trumpet gave the signal of departure, and every heart, according to its fears or wishes, explored with anxious curiosity the omens of misfortune or success. The first halt was made at Perintheus, or Heraclea, where Belisarius waited five days to receive some Thracian horses, a military gift of his sovereign. From thence the fleet pursued their course through the midst of the Propontis; but as they struggled to pass the straits of the Hellespont, an unfavourable wind detained them four days at Abydos, where the general exhibited a remarkable lesson of firmness and severity. Two of the Huns who, in a drunken quarrel, had slain one of their fellow-soldiers, were instantly shown to the army suspended on a lofty gibbet. The national dignity was resented by their countrymen, who disclaimed the servile laws of the empire and asserted the free privileges of Scythia, where a small fine was allowed to expiate the sallies of intemperance and anger. Their complaints were specious, their clamours were loud, and the Romans were not averse to the example of disorder and impunity. But the rising sedition was appeased by the authority and eloquence of the general, and he represented to the assembled troops the obligation of justice, the importance of discipline, the rewards of piety and virtue, and the unpardonable guilt of murder, which, in his apprehension, was aggravated rather than excused by the vice of intoxication.

In the navigation from the Hellespont to the Peloponnesus, which the Greeks after the siege of Troy had performed in four days, the fleet of Belisarius was guided in their course by his master-galley, conspicuous in the day by the redness of the sails, and in the night by torches blazing from the masthead. It was the duty of the pilots as they steered between the islands and turned the capes of Malea and Tænarium to preserve the just order and regular intervals of such a multitude. As the wind was fair and moderate, their labours were not unsuccessful, and the troops were safely disembarked at Methone, on the Messenian coast, to repose themselves for a while after the fatigues of the sea. . . . From the port of Methone the pilots steered along the western coast of Peloponnesus, as far as the island of Zacynthus, or Zante, before they undertook the voyage (in their eyes a most arduous voyage) of one hundred leagues over the Ionian sea. As the fleet was surprised by a calm, sixteen days were consumed in the slow navigation. . . At length the harbour of Caucana, on the southern side of Sicily, afforded a secure and hospitable shelter. . . Belisarius determined to hasten his operations, and his wise impatience was seconded by the winds. The fleet lost sight of Sicily, passed before the island of Malta, discovered the capes of Africa, ran along the coast with a strong gale from the north-east, and finally cast anchor at the promontory of Caput Vada, about five days journey to the south of Carthage. . . . . .

"Three months after their departure from Constantinople, the men and the horses, the arms and the military stores were safely disembarked, and five soldiers were left as a guard on each of the ships, which were disposed in the form of a semicircle. The remainder of the troops occupied a camp on the seashore, which they fortified, according to ancient discipline, with a ditch and rampart, and the discovery of a source of fresh water, while it allayed the thirst, excited the superstitious confidence of the Romans. . . The small town of Sullecte, one day's journey from the camp, had the honour of being foremost to open her gates and resume her ancient allegiance; the larger cities of Leptis and Adru-

metum imitated the example of loyalty as soon as Belisarius appeared, and he advanced without opposition as far as Grasse, a palace of the Vandal kings, at the distance of fifty miles from Carthage. The weary Romans indulged themselves in the refreshment of shady groves, cool fountains, and delicious fruits. . . In three generations prosperity and a warm climate had dissolved the hardy virtue of the Vandals, who insensibly became the most luxurious of mankind. In their villas and gardens, which might deserve the Persian name of Paradise, they enjoyed a cool and elegant repose, and after the daily use of the bath, the barbarians were seated at a table profusely spread with the delicacies of the land and sea. Their silken robes, loosely flowing after the fashion of the Medes, were embroidered with gold, love and hunting were the labours of their life, and their vacant hours were amused by pantomimes, chariot-races, and the music and dances of the theatre.

"In a march of twelve days the vigilance of Belisarius was constantly awake and active against his unseen enemies, by whom in every place and at every hour he might be suddenly attacked. An officer of confidence and merit, John the Armenian, led the vanguard of three hundred horse. Six hundred Massagetæ covered at a certain distance the left flank, and the whole fleet, steering along the coast, seldom lost sight of the army, which moved each day about twelve miles, and lodged in the evening in strong camps or in friendly towns. The near approach of the Romans to Carthage filled the mind of Gelimer with anxiety and terror. . . . . .

"Yet the authority and promises of Gelimer collected a formidable army, and his plans were concerted with some degree of military skill. An order was despatched to his brother Ammatas to collect all the forces of Carthage, and to encounter the van of the Roman army at the distance of ten miles from the city: his nephew Gibamund with two thousand horse was destined to attack their left, when the monarch himself, who silently followed, should charge their rear in a situation which excluded them from the aid and even the view of their fleet. But the rashness of Ammatas was fatal to himself and his country. He anticipated the hour of attack, outstripped his

tardy followers, and was pierced with a mortal wound, after he had slain with his own hand twelve of his boldest antagonists. His Vandals fled to Carthage: the highway, almost ten miles, was strewed with dead bodies, and it seemed incredible that such multitudes could be slaughtered by the swords of three hundred Romans. The nephew of Gelimer was defeated after a slight combat by the six hundred Massagetæ; they did not equal the third part of his numbers, but each Scythian was fired by the example of his chief, who gloriously exercised the privilege of his family by riding foremost and alone to shoot the first arrow against the enemy. In the meantime Gelimer himself, ignorant of the event, and misguided by the windings of the hills, inadvertently passed the Roman army and reached the scene of action where Ammatas had fallen. He wept the fate of his brother and of Carthage, charged with irresistible fury the advancing squadrons, and might have pursued and perhaps decided the victory, if he had not wasted those inestimable moments in the discharge of a vain though pious duty to the dead. While his spirit was broken by this mournful office, he heard the trumpet of Belisarius, who, leaving Antonina and his infantry in the camp, pressed forward with his guards and the remainder of the cavalry to rally his flying troops, and to restore the fortune of the day. Much room could not be found in this disorderly battle for the talents of a general; but the king fled before the hero, and the Vandals, accustomed only to a Moorish enemy, were incapable of withstanding the arms and the discipline of the Romans. . . . . .

"As soon as the tumult had subsided, the several parts of the army informed each other of the accidents of the day, and Belisarius pitched his camp on the field of victory, to which the tenth milestone from Carthage had applied the Latin appellation of *Decimus*. From a wise suspicion of the stratagems and resources of the Vandals, he marched the next day in the order of battle; halted in the evening before the gates of Carthage, and allowed a night of repose, that he might not, in darkness and disorder, expose the city to the licence of the soldiers, or the soldiers themselves to the secret ambush of the city. But as the fears of Belisarius were the result of calm and intrepid reason, he

was soon satisfied that he might confide without danger in the peaceful and friendly aspect of the capital. Carthage blazed with innumerable torches, the signal of the public joy; the chain was removed that guarded the entrance of the port, the gates were thrown open, and the people with acclamations of gratitude hailed and invited their Roman deliverers. The defeat of the Vandals and the freedom of Africa were announced to the city on the eve of St. Cyprian, when the churches were already adorned and illuminated for the festival of the martyr whom three centuries of superstition had almost raised to a local deity. . . One awful hour reversed the fortunes of the contending parties. The suppliant Vandals, who had so lately indulged the vices of conquerors, sought an humble refuge in the sanctuary of the church; while the merchants of the east were delivered from the deepest dungeon of the palace by their affrighted keeper, who implored the protection of his captives, and showed them through an aperture in the wall the sails of the Roman fleet. After their separation from the army, the naval commanders had proceeded with slow caution along the coast, till they reached the Hermæan promontory, and obtained the first intelligence of the victory of Belisarius. Faithful to his instructions, they would have cast anchor about twenty miles from Carthage, if the more skilful had not represented the perils of the shore and the signs of an impending tempest. Still ignorant of the revolution, they declined however the rash attempt of forcing the chain of the port, and the adjacent harbour and suburb of Mandracium were insulted only by the rapine of a private officer, who disobeyed and deserted his leaders. But the imperial fleet, advancing with a fair wind, steered through the narrow entrance of the Goletta and occupied the deep and capacious lake of Tunis, a secure station about five miles from the capital. No sooner was Belisarius informed of the arrival than he despatched orders that the greatest part of the mariners should be immediately landed to join the triumph and to swell the apparent numbers of the Romans. Before he allowed them to enter the gates of Carthage he exhorted them, in a discourse worthy of himself and the occasion, not to disgrace the glory of their arms, and to remember that

the Vandals had been the tyrants, but that *they* were the deliverers of the Africans, who must now be respected as the voluntary and affectionate subjects of their common sovereign. The Romans marched through the street in close ranks, prepared for battle if an enemy had appeared; the strict order maintained by their general imprinted on their minds the duty of obedience; and in an age in which custom and impunity almost sanctified the abuse of conquest, the genius of one man repressed the passions of a victorious army. The voice of menace and complaint was silent, the trade of Carthage was not interrupted; while Africa changed her master and her government, the shops continued open and busy; and the soldiers, after sufficient guards had been posted, modestly departed to the houses which had been allotted for their reception. Belisarius fixed his residence in the palace, seated himself on the throne of Genseric, accepted and distributed the barbaric spoil, granted their lives to the suppliant Vandals, and laboured to restore the damage which the suburb of Mandracium had sustained in the preceding night. At supper he entertained his principal officers with the form and magnificence of a royal banquet. The victor was respectfully served by the captive officers of the household, and in the moments of festivity, when the impartial spectators applauded the fortune and merit of Belisarius, his envious flatterers secretly shed their venom on every word and gesture which might alarm the suspicions of a jealous monarch. One day was given to these pompous scenes, which may not be despised as useless if they attracted the popular veneration; but the active mind of Belisarius, which in the pride of victory could suppose defeat, had already resolved that the Roman empire in Africa should not depend on the chance of arms or the favour of the people. The fortifications of Carthage had alone been excepted from the general proscription; but in the reign of ninety-five years they were suffered to decay by the thoughtless and indolent Vandals. A wiser conqueror restored with incredible despatch the walls and ditches of the city. His liberality encouraged the workmen; the soldiers, the mariners, and the citizens vied with each other in the salutary labour; and Gelimer, who had feared to trust his person in an

open town, beheld with astonishment and despair the rising strength of an impregnable fortress.

But we have hardly finished admiring the brilliant picture of the conquest of Africa and Italy, before Gibbon gives us further proofs of his many-sided culture and catholicity of mind. His famous chapter on the Roman law has been accepted by the most fastidious experts of an esoteric science as a masterpiece of knowledge, condensation, and lucidity. It has actually been received as a textbook in some of the continental universities, published separately with notes and illustrations. When we consider the neglect of Roman jurisprudence in England till quite recent times, and its severe study on the Continent, we shall better appreciate the mental grasp and vigour which enabled an unprofessional Englishman in the last century to produce such a dissertation. A little further on (chapter forty-seven) the history of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the controversies that sprang up around it, are discussed with a subtlety worthy of a scientific theologian. It is perhaps the first attempt towards a philosophical history of dogma, less patient and minute than the works of the specialists of modern Germany on the same subject, but for spirit, clearness, and breadth it is superior to those profound but somewhat barbarous writers. The flexibility of intellect which can do justice in quick succession to such diverse subjects is very extraordinary, and assuredly implies great width of sympathy and large receptivity of nature.

Having terminated the period of Justinian, Gibbon makes a halt, and surveys the varied and immense scene through which he will presently pass in many directions. He rapidly discovers *ten* main lines, along which he will

advance in succession to his final goal, the conquest of Constantinople. The two pages at the commencement of the forty-eighth chapter, in which he sketches out the remainder of his plan and indicates the topics which he means to treat, are admirable as a luminous *précis*, and for the powerful grasp which they show of his immense subject. It lay spread out all before him, visible in every part to his penetrating eye, and he seems to rejoice in his conscious strength and ability to undertake the historical conquest on which he is about to set out. "Nor will this scope of narrative," he says, "the riches and variety of these materials, be incompatible with the unity of design and composition. As in his daily prayers the Mussulman of Fez or Delhi still turns his face towards the temple of Mecca, the historian's eye will always be fixed on the city of Constantinople." Then follows the catalogue of nations and empires whose fortunes he means to sing. A grander vision, a more majestic procession, never swept before the mind's eye of poet or historian.

And the practical execution is worthy of the initial inspiration. After a rapid and condensed narrative of Byzantine history till the end of the twelfth century, he takes up the brilliant theme of Mahomet and his successors. A few pages on the climate and physical features of Arabia fittingly introduce the subject. And it may be noted in passing that Gibbon's attention to geography, and his skill and taste for geographical description, are remarkable among his many gifts. He was as diligent a student of maps and travels as of historical records, and seems to have had a rare faculty of realising in imagination scenes and countries of which he had only read. In three chapters, glowing with oriental

colour and rapid as a charge of Arab horse, he tells the story of the prophet and the Saracen empire. Then the Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Russians appear on the scene, to be soon followed by the Normans, and their short but brilliant dominion in Southern Italy. But now the Seljukian Turks are emerging from the depths of Asia, taking the place of the degenerate Saracens, invading the Eastern empire and conquering Jerusalem. The two waves of hostile fanaticism soon meet in the Crusades. The piratical seizure of Constantinople by the Latins brings in view the French and Venetians the family of Courtenay and its pleasant digression. Then comes the slow agony of the restored Greek empire. Threatened by the Moguls, it is invaded and dismembered by the Ottoman Turks. Constantinople seems ready to fall into their hands. But the timely diversion of Tamerlane produces a respite of half a century. Nothing can be more artistic than Gibbon's management of his subject as he approaches its termination. He, who is such a master of swift narrative at this point introduces artful pauses, *suspensions* of the final catastrophe, which heighten our interest in the fate which is hanging over the city of Constantine. In 1425 the victorious Turks have conquered all the Greek empire save the capital. Amurath II. besieged it for two months, and was only prevented from taking it by a domestic revolt in Asia Minor. At the end of his sixty-fifth chapter Gibbon leaves Constantinople hanging on the brink of destruction, and paints in glowing colours the military virtues of its deadly enemies, the Ottomans. Then he interposes one of his most finished chapters, of miscellaneous contents, but terminating in the grand and impressive pages on the revival of learning in Italy. There we read of the

"curiosity and emulation of the Latins," of the zeal of Petrarch and the success of Boccace in Greek studies, of Leontius, Pilatus, Bessarion, and Lascaris. A glow of sober enthusiasm warms the great scholar as he paints the early light of that happy dawn. He admits that the "arms of the Turks pressed the flight of the Muses" from Greece to Italy. But he "trembles at the thought that Greece might have been overwhelmed with her schools and libraries, before Europe had emerged from the deluge of barbarism, and that the seeds of science might have been scattered on the winds, before the Italian soil was prepared for their cultivation." In one of the most perfect sentences to be found in English prose he thus describes the Greek tongue: "'In their lowest depths of servitude and depression, the subjects of the Byzantine throne were still possessed of a golden key that could unlock the treasures of antiquity, of a musical and prolific language that gives a soul to the objects of sense and a body to the abstractions of philosophy." Meanwhile we are made to feel that the subjects of the Byzantine throne, with their musical speech, that Constantinople with her libraries and schools, will all soon fall a prey to the ravening and barbarous Turk. This brightening light of the Western sky contending with the baleful gloom which is settling down over the East, is one of the most happy contrasts in historical literature. Then comes the end, the preparations and skill of the savage invader, the futile but heroic defence, the overwhelming ruin which struck down the Cross and erected the Crescent over the city of Constantine the Great.

It is one of the many proofs of Gibbon's artistic instinct that he did not end with this great catastrophe.

On the contrary, he adds three more chapters. His fine tact warned him that the tumult and thunder of the final ruin must not be the last sounds to strike the ear. A resolution of the discord was needed; a soft chorale should follow the din and lead to a mellow *adagio* close. And this he does with supreme skill. With ill-suppressed disgust, he turns from New to Old Rome. "Constantinople no longer appertains to the Roman historian—nor shall I enumerate the civil and religious edifices that were profaned or erected by its Turkish masters." Amid the decayed temples and mutilated beauty of the Eternal City, he moves down to a melodious and pathetic conclusion—piously visits the remaining fragments of ancient splendour and art, deplores and describes the ravages wrought by time, and still more by man, and recurring once again to the scene of his first inspiration, bids farewell to the Roman empire among the ruins of the Capitol.

We have hitherto spoken in terms of warm, though perhaps not excessive eulogy of this great work. But praise would lack the force of moderation and equipoise, if allusion were not made to some of its defects. The pervading defect of it all has been already referred to in a preceding chapter—an inadequate conception of society as an organism, living and growing, like other organisms, according to special laws of its own. In these brilliant volumes on the Middle Ages, the special problems which that period suggests are not stated, far less solved; they are not even suspected. The feudal polity, the Catholic Church, the theocratic supremacy of the Popes, considered as institutions which the historian is called upon to estimate and judge; the gradual dissolution of both feudalism and Catholicism, brought

about by the spread of industry in the temporal order and of science in the spiritual order, are not even referred to. Many more topics might be added to this list of weighty omissions. It would be needless to say that no blame attaches to Gibbon for neglecting views of history which had not emerged in his time, if there were not persons who, forgetting the slow progress of knowledge, are apt to ascribe the defects of a book to incompetence in its author. If Gibbon's conception of the Middle Ages seems to us inadequate now, it is because since his time our conceptions of society in that and in all periods have been much enlarged. We may be quite certain that if Gibbon had had our experience, no one would have seen the imperfections of particular sides of his work as we now have it more clearly than he.

Laying aside, therefore, reflexions of this kind as irrelevant and unjust, we may ask whether there are any other faults which may fairly be found with him. One must admit that there are. After all, they are not very important.

(1.) Striking as is his account of Justinian's reign, it has two blemishes. First, the offensive details about the vices of Theodora. Granting them to be well authenticated, which they are not, it was quite unworthy of the author and his subject to soil his pages with such a *chronique scandaleuse*. The defence which he sets up in his Memoirs, that he is "justified in painting the manners of the times, and that the vices of Theodora form an essential feature in the reign and character of Justinian," cannot be admitted. First, we are not sure that the vices existed, and were not the impure inventions of a malignant calumniator. Secondly, Gibbon

is far from painting the manners of the time as a moralist or an historian; he paints them with a zest for pruriency worthy of Bayle or Brantome. It was an occasion for a wise scepticism to register grave doubts as to the infamous stories of Procopius. A rehabilitation of Theodora is not a theme calculated to provoke enthusiasm, and is impossible besides from the entire want of adequate evidence. But a thoughtful writer would not have lost his time, if he referred to the subject at all, in pointing out the moral improbability of the current accounts. He might have dwelt on the *unsupported* testimony of the only witness, the unscrupulous Procopius, whom Gibbon himself convicts on another subject of flagrant mendacity. But he would have been especially slow to believe that a woman who had led the life of incredible profligacy he has described, would, in consequence of "some vision either of sleep or fancy," in which future exaltation was promised to her, assume "like a skilful actress, a more decent character, relieve her poverty by the laudable industry of spinning wool, and affect a life of chastity and solitude in a small house, which she afterwards changed into a magnificent temple." Magdalens have been converted, no doubt, from immoral living, but not by considerations of astute prudence suggested by day dreams of imperial greatness. Gibbon might have thought of the case of Madame de Maintenon, and how her reputation fared in the hands of the vindictive courtiers of Versailles; how a woman, cold as ice and pure as snow, was freely charged with the most abhorrent vices without an atom of foundation. But the truth probably is that he never thought of the subject seriously

at all, and that, yielding to a regrettable inclination, he copied his licentious Greek notes with little reluctance.

(2.) The character of Belisarius, enigmatical enough in itself, is made by him more enigmatical still. He concludes the forty-first chapter, in which the great deeds of the conqueror of Italy and Africa, and the ingratitude with which Justinian rewarded his services, are set forth in strong contrast, with the inept remark that "Belisarius appears to be either below or above the character of a MAN." The grounds of the apparent meekness with which Belisarius supported his repeated disgraces cannot now be ascertained: but the motives of Justinian's conduct are not so difficult to find. As Finlay points out in his thoughtful history of Greece, Belisarius must have been a peculator on a large and dangerous scale. "Though he refused the Gothic throne and the empire of the West, he did not despise nor neglect wealth: he accumulated riches which could not have been acquired by any commander in chief amidst the wars and famines of the period, without rendering the military and civil administration subservient to his pecuniary profit. On his return from Italy he lived at Constantinople in almost regal splendour, and maintained a body of 7,000 cavalry attached to his household. In an empire where confiscation was an ordinary financial resource, and under a sovereign whose situation rendered jealousy only common prudence, it is not surprising that the wealth of Belisarius excited the imperial cupidity, and induced Justinian to seize great part of it" (*Greece under the Romans*, chap. 3). There is shrewd insight in this, and though we may regret that we cannot attain to more, it is better than leaving the subject with an unmeaning paradox.

It may be said generally that Gibbon has not done justice to the services rendered to Europe by the Byzantine empire. In his crowded forty-eighth chapter, which is devoted to the subject, he passes over events and characters with such speed that his history in this part becomes little more than a chronicle, vivid indeed, but barren of thoughtful political views. His account of the Isaurian period may be instanced among others as an example of defective treatment. If we turn to the judicious Finlay, we see what an immense but generally unacknowledged debt Europe owes to the Greek empire. The saving of Christendom from Mohammedan conquest is too easily attributed to the genius of Charles Martel and his brave Franks. The victory at Tours was important no doubt, but almost a century previously the followers of the prophet had been checked by Heraclius; and their memorable repulse before Constantinople under the Isaurian Leo was the real barrier opposed to their conquest of the West. It requires but little reflection to see that without this brave resistance to the Moslem invasion, the course of mediæval history would have been completely changed. Next in time, but hardly second in value to the services of the Greeks at Marathon and Salamis, must be reckoned the services of the Byzantine emperors in repelling the barbarians. Such an important consideration as this should hardly have escaped Gibbon.

Gibbon's account of Charlemagne is strangely inadequate. It is perhaps the only instance in his work where he has failed to appreciate a truly great man, and the failure is the more deplorable as it concerns one of the greatest men who have ever lived. He did not realise the greatness of the man, of his age, or of his

work. Properly considered, the eighth century is the most important and memorable which Europe has ever seen. During its course the geographical limits, the ecclesiastical polity, and the feudal system within and under which our western group of nations was destined to live for five or six centuries, were provisionally settled and determined. The wonderful house of the Carolings, which produced no less than five successive rulers of genius (of whom two had extraordinary genius, Charles Martel and Charlemagne, were the human instruments of this great work. The Frankish Monarchy was hastening to ruin when they saved it. Saxons in the East and Saracens in the South were on the point of extinguishing the few surviving embers of civilisation which still existed. The Bishop of Rome was ready to fall a prey to the Lombards, and the progressive papacy of Hildebrand and Innocent ran imminent risk of being extirpated at its root. Charles and his ancestors prevented these evils. Of course it is open to any one to say that there were no evils threatening, that Mohammedanism is as good as Christianity, that the Papacy was a monstrous calamity, that to have allowed Eastern Germany to remain pagan and barbarous would have done no harm. The question cannot be discussed here. But every law of historic equity compels us to admit that whether the result was good or bad, the genius of men who could leave such lasting impressions on the world as the Carolings did, must have been exceptionally great. And this is what Gibbon has not seen; he has not seen that, whether their work was good or bad in the issue, it was colossal. His tone in reference to Charlemagne is unworthy to a degree. "Without injustice to his fame, I may discern

some blemishes in the sanctity and greatness of the restorer of the Western Empire. Of his moral virtues, chastity was not the most conspicuous." This from the pen of Gibbon seems hardly serious. Again: "I touch with reverence the laws of Charlemagne, so highly applauded by a respectable judge. They compose not a system, but a series of occasional and minute edicts, for the correction of abuses, the reformation of manners, the economy of his farms, the care of his poultry, and even the sale of his eggs." And yet Gibbon had read the Capitularies. The struggle and care of the hero to master in some degree the wide welter of barbarism surging around him, he never recognised. It is a spot on Gibbon's fame.

Dean Milman considers that Gibbon's account of the Crusades is the least accurate and satisfactory chapter in his history, and "that he has here failed in that lucid arrangement which in general gives perspicuity to his most condensed and crowded narratives." This blame seems to be fully merited, if restricted to the second of the two chapters which Gibbon has devoted to the Crusades. The fifty-eighth chapter, in which he treats of the First Crusade, leaves nothing to be desired. It is not one of his best chapters, though it is quite up to his usually high level. But the fifty ninth chapter, it must be owned, is not only weak, but what is unexampled elsewhere in him, confused and badly written. It is not, as in the case of Charlemagne, a question of imperfect appreciation of a great man or epoch; it is a matter of careless and slovenly presentation of a period which he had evidently mastered with his habitual thoroughness, but, owing to the rapidity with which he composed his last volume, he did not do

full justice to it. He says significantly in his Memoirs, that "he wished that a pause, an interval, had been allowed for a serious revisal" of the last three volumes, and there can be little doubt that this chapter was one of the sources of his regrets. It is in fact a mere tangle. The Second and the Third Crusades are so jumbled together, that it is only a reader who knows the subject very well who can find his way through the labyrinth. Gibbon seems at this point, a thing very unusual with him, to have become impatient with his subject, and to have wished to hurry over it. "A brief parallel," he says, "may save the repetition of a tedious narrative." The result of this expeditious method has been far from happy. It is the only occasion where Gibbon has failed in his usual high finish and admirable literary form.

Gibbon's style was at one period somewhat of a party question. Good Christians felt a scruple in discerning any merits in the style of a writer who had treated the martyrs of the early Church with so little ceremony and generosity. On the other hand, those whose opinions approached more or less to his, expatiated on the splendour and majesty of his diction. Archbishop Whately went out of his way in a note to his *Logic* to make a keen thrust at an author whom it was well to depreciate whenever occasion served. "His way of writing," he says, "reminds one of those persons who never dare look you full in the face." Such criticisms are out of date now. The faults of Gibbon's style are obvious enough, and its compensatory merits are not far to seek. No one can overlook its frequent tumidity and constant want of terseness. It lacks suppleness, ease, variety. It is not often distinguished by happy

selection of epithet, and seems to ignore all delicacy of *nuance*. A prevailing grandiloquence, which easily slides into pomposity, is its greatest blemish. The acute Porson saw this and expressed it admirably. In the preface to his letters to Archdeacon Travis, he says of Gibbon, "Though his style is in general correct and elegant, he sometimes 'draws out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.' In endeavouring to avoid vulgar terms he too frequently dignifies trifles, and clothes common thoughts in a splendid dress that would be rich enough for the noblest ideas. In short we are too often reminded of that great man, Mr. Prig, the auctioneer, whose manner was so inimitably fine that he had as much to say on a ribbon as on a Raphael." It seems as if Gibbon had taken the stilted tone of the old French tragedy for his model, rather than the crisp and nervous prose of the best French writers. We are constantly offended by a superfine diction lavished on barbarous chiefs and rough soldiers of the Lower Empire, which almost reproduces the high flown rhetoric in which Corneille's and Racine's characters address each other. Such phrases as the "majesty of the throne," "the dignity of the purple," the "wisdom of the senate," recur with a rather jarring monotony, especially when the rest of the narrative is designed to show that there was no majesty nor dignity nor wisdom involved in the matter. We feel that the writer was thinking more of his sonorous sentence than of the real fact. On the other hand, nothing but a want of candour or taste can lead any one to overlook the rare and great excellences of Gibbon's style. First of all, it is singularly correct: a rather common merit now, but not common in his day. But its sustained vigour

and loftiness will always be uncommon; above all its rapidity and masculine length of stride are quite admirable. When he takes up his pen to describe a campaign, or any great historic scene, we feel that we shall have something worthy of the occasion, that we shall be carried swiftly and grandly through it all, without the suspicion of a breakdown of any kind being possible. An indefinable stamp of weightiness is impressed on Gibbon's writing; he has a baritone manliness which banishes everthing small, trivial, or weak. When he is eloquent (and it should be remembered to his credit that he never affects eloquence, though he occasionally affects dignity), he rises without effort into real grandeur. On the whole we may say that his manner, with certain manifest faults, is not unworthy of his matter, and the praise is great.

It is not quite easy to give expression to another feeling which is often excited in reading Gibbon. It is somewhat of this kind, that it is more fitted to inspire admiration than love or sympathy. Its merits are so great, the mass of information it contains is so stupendous, that all competent judges of such work feel bound to praise it. Whether they like it in the same degree, may be questioned. Among reading men and educated persons it is not common—such is my experience—to meet with people who know their Gibbon well. Superior women do not seem to take to him kindly, even when there is no impediment on religious grounds. Madame du Deffand, writing to Walpole, says, "I whisper it to you, but I am not pleased with Mr. Gibbon's work. It is declamatory, oratorical . . . I lay it aside without regret, and it requires an effort to take it up again." Another of Walpole's correspondents, the

Countess of Ossory, seems to have made similar strictures. If we admit that women are less capable than masculine scholars of doing justice to the strong side of Gibbon, we may also acknowledge that they are better fitted than men to appreciate and to be shocked by his defective side, which is a prevailing want of moral elevation and nobility of sentiment. His cheek rarely flushes in enthusiasm for a good cause. The tragedy of human life never seems to touch him, no glimpse of the infinite ever calms and raises the reader of his pages. Like nearly all the men of his day, he was of the earth earthy, and it is impossible to get over the fact.

CHAPTER X.

LAST ILLNESS.—DEATH.—CONCLUSION.

GIBBON had now only about six months to live. He did not seem to have suffered by his rapid journey from Lausanne to London. During the summer which he spent with his friend Lord Sheffield, he was much as usual; only his friend noticed that his habitual dislike to motion appeared to increase, and he was so incapable of exercise that he was confined to the library and dining-room. "Then he joined Mr. F. North in pleasant arguments against exercise in general. He ridiculed the unsettled and restless disposition that summer, the most uncomfortable of all seasons, as he said, generally gives to those who have the use of their limbs." The true disciples of Epicurus are not always the least stout and stoical in the presence of irreparable evils.

After spending three or four months at Sheffield Place, he went to Bath to visit his stepmother, Mrs. Gibbon. His conduct to her through life was highly honourable to him. It should be remembered that her jointure, paid out of his father's decayed estate, was a great tax on his small income. In his efforts to improve his position by selling his landed property, Mrs. Gibbon seems to have been at times somewhat difficult to satisfy as regards the security of her interests. It was only

prudent on her part. But it is easy to see what a source of alienation and quarrel was here ready prepared, if both parties had not risen superior to sordid motives. There never seems to have been the smallest cloud between them. When one of his properties was sold he writes: "Mrs. Gibbon's jointure is secured on the Buriton estate, and her legal consent is requisite for the sale. Again and again I must repeat my hope that she is perfectly satisfied, and that the close of her life may not be embittered by suspicion, fear, or discontent. What new security does she prefer—the funds, a mortgage, or your land? At all events, she must be made easy." So Gibbon left town and lay at Reading on his road to Bath: here he passed about ten days with his stepmother, who was now nearly eighty years of age. "In mind and conversation she is just the same as twenty years ago," he writes to Lord Sheffield; "she has spirits, appetite, legs, and eyes, and talks of living till ninety. I can say from my heart, Amen." And in another letter, a few days later, he says: "A *tête-à-tête* of eight or nine hours every day is rather difficult to support; yet I do assure you that our conversation flows with more ease and spirit when we are alone, than when any auxiliaries are summoned to our aid. She is indeed a wonderful woman, and I think all her faculties of the mind stronger and more active than I have ever known them. . . . . I shall therefore depart next Friday, but I may possibly reckon without my host, as I have not yet apprised Mrs. G. of the term of my visit, and will certainly not quarrel with her for a short delay." He then went to Althorpe, and it is the last evidence of his touching a book—"exhausted the morning (of the 5th November) among the first editions of Cicero." Then he came to London, and in a few days was seized with the

illness which in a little more than two months put an end to his life.

His malady was dropsy, complicated with other disorders. He had most strangely neglected a very dangerous symptom for upwards of thirty years, not only having failed to take medical advice about it, but even avoiding all allusion to it to bosom friends like Lord Sheffield. But longer concealment was now impossible. He sent for the eminent surgeon Farquhar (the same who afterwards attended William Pitt), and he, together with Cline, at once recognised the case as one of the utmost gravity, though they did not say as much to the patient. On Thursday, the 14th of November, he was tapped and greatly relieved. He said he was not appalled by the operation, and during its progress he did not lay aside his usual good-humoured pleasantry. He was soon out again, but only for a few days, and a fortnight after another tapping was necessary. Again he went out to dinners and parties, which must have been most imprudent at his age and in his state. But he does not seem to have acted contrary to medical advice. He was very anxious to meet the prime minister, William Pitt, with whom he was not acquainted, though he must have seen him in old days in the House. He saw him twice; once at Eden Farm for a whole day, and was much gratified, we are told. At last he got to what he called his home—the house of his true and devoted friend, Lord Sheffield. "But," says the latter, whose narrative of his friend's last illness is marked by a deep and reserved tenderness that does him much honour, "this last visit to Sheffield Place became far different from any he had ever made before. That ready, cheerful, various and illuminating conversation which we had before admired

in him, was not always to be found in the library or the drawing-room. He moved with difficulty, and retired from company sooner than he had been used to do. On the 23rd of December his appetite began to fail him. He observed to me that it was a very bad sign *with him* when he could not eat his breakfast, which he had done at all times very heartily; and this seems to have been the strongest expression of apprehension that he was ever observed to utter." He soon became too ill to remain beyond the reach of the highest medical advice. On the 7th of January, 1794, he left a houseful of company and friends for his lodgings in St. James's Street. On arriving he sent the following note to Lord Sheffield, the last lines he ever wrote :—

"St. James's, Four o'Clock, Tuesday.

"This date says everything. I was almost killed between Sheffield Place and East Grinstead by hard, frozen, long, and cross ruts, that would disgrace the approach of an Indian wigwam. The rest was somewhat less painful, and I reached this place half dead, but not seriously feverish or ill. I found a dinner invitation from Lord Lucan; but what are dinners to me? I wish they did not know of my departure. I catch the flying post. What an effort! Adieu till Thursday or Friday."

The end was not far off. On the 13th of January he underwent another operation, and, as usual, experienced much relief. "His spirits continued good. He talked of passing his time at houses which he had often frequented with great pleasure—the Duke of Devonshire's, Mr. Craufurd's, Lord Spencer's, Lord Lucan's, Sir Ralph Payne's, Mr. Batt's." On the 14th of January "he saw some company—Lady Lucan and Lady Spencer—

and thought himself well enough to omit the opium draught which he had been used to take for some time. He slept very indifferently; before nine the next morning he rose, but could not eat his breakfast. However, he appeared tolerably well, yet complained at times of a pain in his stomach. At one o'clock he received a visit of an hour from Madame de Sylva; and at three, his friend, Mr. Craufurd, of Auchinames (whom he always mentioned with particular regard), called, and stayed with him till past five o'clock. They talked, as usual, on various subjects; and twenty hours before his death Mr. Gibbon happened to fall into a conversation not uncommon with him, on the probable duration of his life. He said that he thought himself a good life for ten, twelve, or perhaps twenty years. About six he ate the wing of a chicken and drank three glasses of Madeira. After dinner he became very uneasy and impatient, complained a good deal, and appeared so weak that his servant was alarmed.

"During the evening he complained much of his stomach, and of a feeling of nausea. Soon after nine, he took his opium draught and went to bed. About ten he complained of much pain, and desired that warm napkins might be applied to his stomach. He almost incessantly expressed a sense of pain till about four o'clock in the morning, when he said he found his stomach much easier. About seven the servant asked whether he should send for Mr. Farquhar. He answered, No; that he was as well as the day before. At about half-past eight he got out of bed, and said he was 'plus adroit' than he had been for three months past, and got into bed again without assistance, better than usual. About nine he said he would rise. The servant, however, persuaded him to remain in bed till Mr. Farquhar, who was

expected at eleven, should come. Till about that hour he spoke with great facility. Mr. Farquhar came at the time appointed, and he was then visibly dying. When the *valet-de-chambre* returned, after attending Mr. Farquhar out of the room, Mr. Gibbon said, 'Pourquoi est ce que vous me quittez?' This was about half-past eleven. At twelve he drank some brandy and water from a teapot, and desired his favourite servant to stay with him. These were the last words he pronounced articulately. To the last he preserved his senses; and when he could no longer speak, his servant having asked a question, he made a sign to show that he understood him. He was quite tranquil, and did not stir, his eyes half shut. About a quarter before one he ceased to breathe." He wanted just eighty-three days of fifty-seven years of age.

Thus, in consequence of his own strange self-neglect and imprudence, was extinguished one of the most richly-stored minds that ever lived. Occurring when it did, so near the last summons, Gibbon's prospective hope of continued life "for ten, twelve, or twenty years" is harshly pathetic, and full of that irony which mocks the vain cares of men. But, truly, his forecast was not irrational if he had not neglected ordinary precautions. In spite of his ailments he felt full, and was full, of life, when he was cut off. We cannot be sure if lengthened days would have added much to his work already achieved. There is hardly a parallel case in literature of the great powers of a whole life being so concentrated on one supreme and magnificent effort. Yet, if he had lived to 1804, or as an extreme limit, to 1814, we should have been all gainers. In the first place, he certainly would have finished his admirable autobiography. We cannot imagine what he would have made of it, judging

from the fragment which exists. And yet that fragment is almost a masterpiece. But his fertile mind had other schemes in prospect; and what such a diligent worker would have done with a decade or two more of years it is impossible to say, except that it is certain they would not have been wasted. The extinction of a real mind is ever an irreparable loss.

As it was, he went to his rest after one of the greatest victories ever achieved in his own field of humane letters, and lived long enough to taste the fruits of his toil. He was never puffed up, but soberly and without arrogance received his laurels. His unselfish zeal and haste to console his bereaved friend showed him warm and loving to the last; and we may say that his last serious effort was consecrated to the genius of pious friendship.

In 1796, two years after Gibbon's death, Lord Sheffield published two quarto volumes of the historian's miscellaneous works. They have been republished in one thick octavo, and many persons suppose that it contains the whole of the posthumous works; not unnaturally, as a fraudulent statement on the title page, "complete in one volume," is well calculated to produce that impression. But in 1814 Lord Sheffield issued a second edition in five volumes octavo, containing much additional matter, which additional matter was again published in a quarto form, no doubt for the convenience of the purchasers of the original quarto edition.

Of the posthumous works, the Memoirs are by far the most important portion. Unfortunately, they were left in a most unfinished state, and what we now read is nothing else than a mosaic put together by Lord Sheffield from *six* different sketches. Next to the Memoirs are the journals and diaries of his studies. As a picture of Gibbon's method, zeal, and thoroughness in the

pursuit of knowledge, they are of the highest interest. But they refer to an early period of his studies, long previous to the concentration of his mind on his great work, and one would like to know whether they present the best selection that might have been made from these records. It is interesting to follow Gibbon in his perusal of Homer and Juvenal at five and-twenty. But one would much like to be admitted to his study when he was a far riper scholar, and preparing for or writing the *Decline and Fall*. Lord Sheffield positively prohibited, by a clause in his will, any further publication of the Gibbon papers, and although Dean Milman was permitted to see them, it was with the express understanding that none of their contents should be divulged. After the Memoirs and the journals, the most interesting portion of the miscellaneous works are *The Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, which in their present form are merely the preparatory sketch of a large work. It is too imperfect to allow us to judge of what Gibbon even designed to make of it. But it contains some masterly pages, and the style in many places seems more nervous and supple than that of the *Decline and Fall*. For instance, this account of Albert Azo the Second :—

"Like one of his Tuscan ancestors Azo the Second was distinguished among the princes of Italy by the epithet of the *Rich*. The particulars of his rentroll cannot now be ascertained. An occasional though authentic deed of investiture enumerates eighty-three fiefs or manors which he held of the empire in Lombardy and Tuscany, from the Marquisate of Este to the county of Luni ; but to these possessions must be added the lands which he enjoyed as the vassal of the Church, the ancient patrimony of Otbert (the terra Obertenga) in the counties of Arezzo, Pisa, and Lucca, and the marriage portion of his first wife, which, according to the various readings of the manuscripts, may be computed either at twenty or two hundred thousand

English acres. If such a mass of landed property were now accumulated on the head of an Italian nobleman, the annual revenue might satisfy the largest demands of private luxury or avarice, and the fortunate owner would be rich in the improvement of agriculture, the manufactures of industry, the refinement of taste, and the extent of commerce. But the barbarism of the eleventh century diminished the income and aggravated the expense of the Marquis of Este. In a long series of war and anarchy, man and the works of man had been swept away, and the introduction of each ferocious and idle stranger had been overbalanced by the loss of five or six perhaps of the peaceful industrious natives. The mischievous growth of vegetation, the frequent inundations of the rivers were no longer checked by the vigilance of labour; the face of the country was again covered with forests and morasses; of the vast domains which acknowledged Azo for their lord, the far greater part was abandoned to the beasts of the field, and a much smaller portion was reduced to the state of constant and productive husbandry. An adequate rent may be obtained from the skill and substance of a free tenant who fertilizes a grateful soil, and enjoys the security and benefit of a long lease. But faint is the hope and scanty is the produce of those harvests which are raised by the reluctant toil of peasants and slaves condemned to a bare subsistance and careless of the interests of a rapacious master. If his granaries are full, his purse is empty, and the want of cities or commerce, the difficulty of finding or reaching a market, obliges him to consume on the spot a part of his useless stock, which cannot be exchanged for merchandise or money. . . . The entertainment of his vassals and soldiers, their pay and rewards, their arms and horses, surpassed the measure of the most oppressive tribute, and the destruction which he inflicted on his neighbours was often retaliated on his own lands. The costly elegance of palaces and gardens was superseded by the laborious and expensive construction of strong castles on the summits of the most inaccessible rocks, and some of these, like the fortress of Canossa in the Apennine, were built and provided to sustain a three years' siege against a royal army. But his defence in this world was less burdensome to a wealthy lord than his salvation in the next; the demands of his chapel, his priests, his

alms, his offerings, his pilgrimages were incessantly renewed; the monastery chosen for his sepulchre was endowed with his fairest possessions, and the naked heir might often complain that his father's sins had been redeemed at too high a price. The Marquis Azo was not exempt from the contagion of the times; his devotion was animated and inflamed by the frequent miracles that were performed in his presence; and the monks of Vangadizza, who yielded to his request the arm of a dead saint, were not ignorant of the value of that inestimable jewel. After satisfying the demands of war and superstition he might appropriate the rest of his revenue to use and pleasure. But the Italians of the eleventh century were imperfectly skilled in the liberal and mechanical arts; the objects of foreign luxury were furnished at an exorbitant price by the merchants of Pisa and Venice; and the superfluous wealth which could not purchase the real comforts of life, were idly wasted on some rare occasions of vanity and pomp. Such were the nuptials of Boniface, Duke or Marquis of Tuscany, whose family was long after united with that of Azo by the marriage of their children. These nuptials were celebrated on the banks of the Mincius, which the fancy of Virgil has decorated with a more beautiful picture. The princes and people of Italy were invited to the feasts, which continued three months; the fertile meadows, which are intersected by the slow and winding course of the river, were covered with innumerable tents, and the bridegroom displayed and diversified the scenes of his proud and tasteless magnificence. All the utensils of the service were of silver, and his horses were shod with plates of the same metal, loosely nailed and carelessly dropped, to indicate his contempt of riches. An image of plenty and profusion was expressed in the banquet; the most delicious wines were drawn in buckets from the well; and the spices of the East were ground in water-mills like common flour. The dramatic and musical arts were in the rudest state; but the Marquis had summoned the most popular singers, harpers, and buffoons to exercise their talents in this splendid theatre. After this festival I might remark a singular gift of this same Boniface to the Emperor Henry III., a chariot and oxen of solid silver, which were designed only as a vehicle for a hogshead of vinegar. If such an example should seem

above the imitation of Azo himself, the Marquis of Este was at least superior in wealth and dignity to the vassals of his compeer. One of these vassals, the Viscount of Mantua, presented the German monarch with one hundred falcons and one hundred bay horses, a grateful contribution to the pleasures of a royal sportsman. In that age the proud distinction between the nobles and princes of Italy was guarded with jealous ceremony. The Viscount of Mantua had never been seated at the table of his immediate lord; he yielded to the invitation of the Emperor; and a stag's skin filled with pieces of gold was graciously accepted by the Marquis of Tuscany as the fine of his presumption.

"The temporal felicity of Azo was crowned by the long possession of honour and riches; he died in the year 1097, aged upwards of an hundred years; and the term of his mortal existence was almost commensurate with the lapse of the eleventh century. The character as well as the situation of the Marquis of Este rendered him an actor in the revolutions of that memorable period; but time has cast a veil over the virtues and vices of the man, and I must be content to mark some of the eras, the milestones of his which measure the extent and intervals of the vacant way. Albert Azo the Second was no more than seventeen when he first drew the sword of rebellion and patriotism, when he was involved with his grandfather, his father, and his three uncles in a common proscription. In the vigour of his manhood, about his fiftieth year, the Ligurian Marquis governed the cities of Milan and Genoa as the minister of Imperial authority. He was upwards of seventy when he passed the Alps to vindicate the inheritance of Maine for the children of his second marriage. He became the friend and servant of Gregory VII., and in one of his epistles that ambitious pontiff recommends the Marquis Azo, as the most faithful and best beloved of the Italian princes, as the proper channel through which a king of Hungary might convey his petitions to the apostolic throne. In the mighty contest between the crown and the mitre, the Marquis Azo and the Countess Matilda led the powers of Italy. And when the standard of St. Peter was displayed, neither the age of the one nor the sex of the other could detain them from the field. With these two affectionate clients the Pope maintained his station in the fortress of Canossa, while

the Emperor, barefoot on the frozen ground, fasted and prayed three days at the foot of the rock; they were witnesses to the abject ceremony of the penance and pardon of Henry IV.; and in the triumph of the Church a patriot might foresee the deliverance of Italy from the German yoke. At the time of this event the Marquis of Este was above fourscore; but in the twenty following years he was still alive and active amidst the revolutions of peace and war. The last act which he subscribed is dated above a century after his birth; and in that the venerable chief possesses the command of his faculties, his family, and his fortune. In this rare prerogative the longevity of Albert Azo the Second stands alone. Nor can I remember in the *authentic* annals of mortality a single example of a king or prince, of a statesman or general, of a philosopher or poet, whose life has been extended beyond the period of a hundred years. . . . Three approximations which will not hastily be matched have distinguished the present century, Aurungzebe, Cardinal Fleury, and Fontenelle. Had a fortnight more been given to the philosopher, he might have celebrated his secular festival; but the lives and labours of the Mogul king and the French minister were terminated before they had accomplished their ninetieth year."

Then follow several striking and graceful pages on Lucrezia Borgia and Renée of France, Duchess of Ferrara. The following description of the University of Padua and the literary tastes of the house of Este is all that we can give here:—

"An university had been founded at Padua by the house of Este, and the scholastic rust was polished away by the revival of the literature of Greece and Rome. The studies of Ferrara were directed by skilful and eloquent professors, either natives or foreigners. The ducal library was filled with a valuable collection of manuscripts and printed books, and as soon as twelve new plays of Plautus had been found in Germany, the Marquis Lionel of Este was impatient to obtain a fair and faithful copy of that ancient poet. Nor were these elegant pleasures confined to the learned world. Under the reign of

Hercules I. a wooden theatre at a moderate cost of a thousand crowns was constructed in the largest court of the palace, the scenery represented some houses, a seaport and a ship, and the *Menechmi* of Plautus, which had been translated into Italian by the Duke himself, was acted before a numerous and polite audience. In the same language and with the same success the *Amphytrion* of Plautus and the *Eunuchus* of Terence were successively exhibited. And these classic models, which formed the taste of the spectators, excited the emulation of the poets of the age. For the use of the court and theatre of Ferrara, Ariosto composed his comedies, which were often played with applause, which are still read with pleasure. And such was the enthusiasm of the new arts that one of the sons of Alphonso the First did not disdain to speak a prologue on the stage. In the legitimate forms of dramatic composition the Italians have not excelled ; but it was in the court of Ferrara that they invented and refined the *pastoral comedy*, a romantic Arcadia which violates the truth of manners and the simplicity of nature, but which commands our indulgence by the elaborate luxury of eloquence and wit. The *Aminta* of Tasso was written for the amusement and acted in the presence of Alphonso the Second, and his sister Leonora might apply to herself the language of a passion which disordered the reason without clouding the genius of her poetical lover. Of the numerous imitations, the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, which alone can vie with the fame and merit of the original, is the work of the Duke's secretary of state. It was exhibited in a private house in Ferrara. . . . . The father of the Tuscan muses, the sublime but unequal Dante, had pronounced that Ferrara was never honoured with the name of a poet ; he would have been astonished to behold the chorus of bards, of melodious swans (their own allusion), which now peopled the banks of the Po. In the court of Duke Borso and his successor, Boyardo Count Scandiano, was respected as a noble, a soldier, and a scholar : his vigorous fancy first celebrated the loves and exploits of the paladin Orlando ; and his fame has been preserved and eclipsed by the brighter glories and continuation of his work. Ferrara may boast that on classic ground Ariosto and Tasso lived and sung ; that the lines of the *Orlando Furioso*, the

Gierusalemme Liberata were inscribed in everlasting characters under the eye of the First and Second Alphonso. In a period of near three thousand years, five great epic poets have arisen in the world, and it is a singular prerogative that two of the five should be claimed as their own by a short age and a petty state."

It perhaps will be admitted that if the style of these passages is less elaborate than that of the *Decline and Fall*, the deficiency, if it is one, is compensated by greater ease and lightness of touch.

It may be interesting to give a specimen of Gibbon's French style. His command of that language was not inferior to his command of his native idiom. One might even be inclined to say that his French prose is controlled by a purer taste than his English prose. The following excerpt, describing the Battle of Morgarten, will enable the reader to judge. It is taken from his early unfinished work on the History of the Swiss Republic, to which reference has already been made (p. 59) :—

"Léopold était parti de Zug vers le milieu de la nuit. Il se flattait d'occuper sans résistance le défilé de Morgarten qui ne perçait qu'avec difficulté entre le lac Aegré et le pied d'une montagne escarpée. Il marchait à la tête de sa gendarmerie. Une colonne profond d'infanterie le suivait de près, et les uns et les autres se promettaient une victoire facile si les paysans osaient se présenter à leur rencontre. Ils étaient à peine entrés dans un chemin rude et étroit, et qui ne permettait qu'à trois ou quatre de marcher de front, qu'ils se sentirent accablés d'une grêle de pierres et de traits. Rodolphe de Reding, landamman de Schwitz et général des Confédérés, n'avait oublié aucun des avantages que lui offrit la situation des lieux. Il avait fait couper des rochers énormes, qui en s'ébranlant dès qu'on retirait les faibles appuis qui les retenaient encore, se détachaient du sommet de la montaigne et se précipitaient avec un bruit

affreux sur les bataillons serrés des Autrichiens. Déjà les chevaux s'effrayaient, les rangs se confondaient, et le désordre égarait le courage et le rendait inutile, lorsque les Suisses descendirent de la montagne en poussant de grands cris. Accoutumés à poursuivre le chamois sur les bords glissants des précipices, ils couraient d'un pas assuré au milieu des neiges. Ils étaient armés de grosses et pesantes hallebardes, auxquelles le fer le mieux trempé ne résistait point. Les soldats de Léopold chancelants et découragés cédèrent bientôt aux efforts désespérés d'une troupe qui combattait pour tout ce qu'il y a de plus cher aux hommes. L'Abbé d'Einsidlen, premier auteur de cette guerre malheureuse, et le comte Henri de Montfort, donnèrent les premiers l'example de la fuite. Le désordre devint général, le carnage fut affreux, et les Suisses se livraient au plaisir de la vengeance. A neuf heures du matin la bataille était gagnée. . . . . Un grand nombre d'Autrichiens se précipitant les uns sur les autres, cherchèrent vainement dans le lac un asyle contre la fureur de leurs ennemis. Ils y périrent presque tous. Quinze cents hommes restèrent sur le champ de bataille. Ils étaient pour la plupart de la gendarmerie, qu'une valeur malheureuse et une armure pesante arrêtaient dans un lieu où l'un et l'autre leur étaient inutiles. Longtemps après l'on s'apercevait dans toutes les provinces voisines que l'élite de la noblesse avait péri dans cette fatale journée. L'infanterie beaucoup moins engagée dans le défilé, vit en tremblant la défaite des chevaliers qui passaient pour invincibles, et dont les escadrons effrayés se renversaient sur elle. Elle s'arrêta, voulut se retirer, et dans l'instant cette retraite devint une fuite honteuse. Sa perte fut assez peu considérable, mais les historiens de la nation ont conservé la mémoire de cinquante braves Zuriquois dont on trouva les rangs couchés morts sur la place. Léopold lui-même fut entrainé par la foule qui le portait du côté de Zug. On le vit entrer dans sa ville de Winterthur. La frayeur, la honte et l'indignation étaient encore peintes sur son front. Dès que la victoire se fut déclarée en faveur des Suisses, ils s'assemblèrent sur le champ de bataille, s'embrassèrent en versant des larmes d'allégresse, et remercièrent Dieu de la grace qu'il venait de leur faire, et qui ne leur avait coûté que quatorze de leurs compagnons."

His familiar letters and a number of essays, chiefly written in youth, form the remainder of the miscellaneous works. Of the letters, some have been quoted in this volume, and the reader can form his own judgment of them. Of the small essays we may say that they augment, if it is possible, one's notion of Gibbon's laborious diligence and thoroughness in the field of historic research, and confirm his title to the character of an intrepid student.

The lives of scholars are proverbially dull, and that of Gibbon is hardly an exception to the rule. In the case of historians, the protracted silent labour of preparation, followed by the conscientious exposition of knowledge acquired, into which the intrusion of the writer's personality rarely appears to advantage, combine to give prominence to the work achieved, and to throw into the background the author who achieves it. If indeed the historian, forsaking his high function and austere reserve, succumbs to the temptations that beset his path, and turns history into political pamphlet, poetic rhapsody, moral epigram, or garish melodrama, he may become conspicuous to a fault at the expense of his work. Gibbon avoided these seductions. If the *Decline and Fall* has no superior in historical literature, it is not solely in consequence of Gibbon's profound learning, wide survey, and masterly grasp of his subject. With wise discretion, he subordinated himself to his task. The life of Gibbon is the less interesting, but his work remains monumental and supreme

SHELLEY

BY

J. A. SYMONDS

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Birth and Childhood 1

CHAPTER II.

Eton and Oxford 12

CHAPTER III.

Life in London, and First Marriage 39

CHAPTER IV.

Second Residence in London, and Separation from Harriet . 72

CHAPTER V.

Life at Marlow, and Journey to Italy 95

CHAPTER VI.

Residence at Pisa. 131

CHAPTER VII.

Last Days 169

CHAPTER VIII.

Epilogue 183

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CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD.

It is worse than useless to deplore the irremediable; yet no man, probably, has failed to mourn the fate of mighty poets, whose dawning gave the promise of a glorious day, but who passed from earth while yet the light that shone in them was crescent. That the world should know Marlowe and Giorgione, Raphael and Mozart, only by the products of their early manhood, is indeed a cause for lamentation, when we remember what the long lives of a Bach and Titian, a Michelangelo and Goethe, held in reserve for their maturity and age. It is of no use to persuade ourselves, as some have done, that we possess the best work of men untimely slain. Had Sophocles been cut off in his prime, before the composition of *Œdipus;* had Handel never merged the fame of his forgotten operas in the immortal music of his oratorios; had Milton been known only by the poems of his youth, we might with equal plausibility have laid that flattering unction to our heart. And yet how shallow would have been our optimism, how fallacious our attempt at consolation. There is no denying

the fact that when a young Marcellus is shown by fate for one brief moment, and withdrawn before his spring-time has brought forth the fruits of summer, we must bow in silence to the law of waste that rules inscrutably in nature.

Such reflections are forced upon us by the lives of three great English poets of this century. Byron died when he was thirty-six, Keats when he was twenty-five, and Shelley when he was on the point of completing his thirtieth year. Of the three, Keats enjoyed the briefest space for the development of his extraordinary powers. His achievement, perfect as it is in some poetic qualities, remains so immature and incomplete that no conjecture can be hazarded about his future. Byron lived longer, and produced more than his brother poets. Yet he was extinguished when his genius was still ascendant, when his "swift and fair creations" were issuing like worlds from an archangel's hands. In his case we have perhaps only to deplore the loss of masterpieces that might have equalled, but could scarcely have surpassed, what we possess. Shelley's early death is more to be regretted. Unlike Keats and Byron, he died by a mere accident. His faculties were far more complex, and his aims were more ambitious than theirs. He therefore needed length of years for their co-ordination; and if a fuller life had been allotted him, we have the certainty that from the discords of his youth he would have wrought a clear and lucid harmony.

These sentences form a somewhat gloomy prelude to a biography. Yet the student of Shelley's life, the sincere admirer of his genius, is almost forced to strike a solemn key-note at the outset. We are not concerned with one whose "little world of man" for good or ill was perfected, but with one whose growth was interrupted just before

the synthesis of which his powers were capable had been accomplished.

August 4, 1792, is one of the most memorable dates in the history of English literature. On this day Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place, near Horsham, in the county of Sussex. His father, named Timothy, was the eldest son of Bysshe Shelley, Esquire, of Goring Castle, in the same county. The Shelley family could boast of great antiquity and considerable wealth. Without reckoning earlier and semi-legendary honours, it may here be recorded that it is distinguished in the elder branch by one baronetcy dating from 1611, and by a second in the younger dating from 1806. In the latter year the poet's grandfather received this honour through the influence of his friend the Duke of Norfolk. Mr. Timothy Shelley was born in the year 1753, and in 1791 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Charles Pilfold, Esquire, a lady of great beauty, and endowed with fair intellectual ability, though not of a literary temperament. The first child of this marriage was the poet, named Bysshe in compliment to his grandfather, the then living head of the family, and Percy because of some remote connexion with the ducal house of Northumberland. Four daughters, Elizabeth, Mary, Hellen, and Margaret, and one son, John, who died in the year 1866, were the subsequent issue of Mr. Timothy Shelley's marriage. In the year 1815, upon the death of his father, he succeeded to the baronetcy, which passed, after his own death, to his grandson, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley, as the poet's only surviving son.

Before quitting, once and for all, the arid region of genealogy, it may be worth mentioning that Sir Bysshe Shelley by his second marriage with Miss Elizabeth Jane Sydney Perry, heiress of Penshurst, became the father of five

children, the eldest son of whom assumed the name of Shelley-Sidney, received a baronetcy, and left a son, Philip Charles Sidney, who was created Lord De l'Isle and Dudley. Such details are not without a certain value, inasmuch as they prove that the poet, who won for his ancient and honourable house a fame far more illustrious than titles can confer, was sprung from a man of no small personal force and worldly greatness. Sir Bysshe Shelley owed his position in society, the wealth he accumulated, and the honours he transmitted to two families, wholly and entirely to his own exertions. Though he bore a name already distinguished in the annals of the English landed gentry, he had to make his own fortune under conditions of some difficulty. He was born in North America, and began life, it is said, as a quack doctor. There is also a legend of his having made a first marriage with a person of obscure birth in America. Yet such was the charm of his address, the beauty of his person, the dignity of his bearing, and the vigour of his will, that he succeeded in winning the hands and fortunes of two English heiresses; and, having begun the world with nothing, he left it at the age of seventy-four, bequeathing 300,000*l.* in the English Funds, together with estates worth 20,000*l.* a year to his descendants.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was therefore born in the purple of the English squirearchy; but never assuredly did the old tale of the swan hatched with the hen's brood of ducklings receive a more emphatic illustration than in this case. Gifted with the untameable individuality of genius, and bent on piercing to the very truth beneath all shams and fictions woven by society and ancient usage, he was driven by the circumstances of his birth and his surroundings into an exaggerated warfare with the world's opinion. His too frequent tirades against—

> The Queen of Slaves,
> The hood-winked Angel of the blind and dead,
> Custom,—

owed much of their asperity to the early influences brought to bear upon him by relatives who prized their position in society, their wealth, and the observance of conventional decencies, above all other things.

Mr. Timothy Shelley was in no sense of the word a bad man; but he was everything which the poet's father ought not to have been. As member for the borough of Shoreham, he voted blindly with his party; and that party looked to nothing beyond the interests of the gentry and the pleasure of the Duke of Norfolk. His philosophy was limited to a superficial imitation of Lord Chesterfield, whose style he pretended to affect in his familiar correspondence, though his letters show that he lacked the rudiments alike of logic and of grammar. His religious opinions might be summed up in Clough's epigram:—

> At church on Sunday to attend
> Will serve to keep the world your friend.

His morality in like manner was purely conventional, as may be gathered from his telling his eldest son that he would never pardon a *mésalliance*, but would provide for as many illegitimate children as he chose to have. For the rest, he appears to have been a fairly good landlord, and a not unkind father, sociable and hospitable, somewhat vain and occasionally odd in manner, but qualified for passing muster with the country gentlemen around him. In the capacity to understand a nature which deviated from the ordinary type so remarkably as Shelley's, he was utterly deficient; and perhaps we ought to regard it as his misfortune that fate made him the father of a

man who was among the greatest portents of originality and unconventionality that this century has seen. Toward an ordinary English youth, ready to sow his wild oats at college, and willing to settle at the proper age and take his place upon the bench of magistrates, Sir Timothy Shelley would have shown himself an indulgent father; and it must be conceded by the poet's biographer that if Percy Bysshe had but displayed tact and consideration on his side, many of the misfortunes which signalized his relations to his father would have been avoided.

Shelley passed his childhood at Field Place, and when he was about six years old began to be taught, together with his sisters, by Mr. Edwards, a clergyman who lived at Warnham. What is recorded of these early years we owe to the invaluable communications of his sister Hellen. The difference of age between her and her brother Bysshe obliges us to refer her recollections to a somewhat later period — probably to the holidays he spent away from Sion House and Eton. Still, since they introduce us to the domestic life of his then loved home, it may be proper to make quotations from them in this place. Miss Shelley tells us that her brother "would frequently come to the nursery, and was full of a peculiar kind of pranks. One piece of mischief, for which he was rebuked, was running a stick through the ceiling of a low passage to find some new chamber, which could be made effective for some flights of his vivid imagination." He was very much attached to his sisters, and used to entertain them with stories, in which "an alchemist, old and grey, with a long beard," who was supposed to abide mysteriously in the garret of Field Place, played a prominent part. "Another favourite theme was the 'Great Tortoise,' that lived in Warnham Pond; and any unwonted noise was account-

ed for by the presence of this great beast, which was made into the fanciful proportions most adapted to excite awe and wonder." To his friend Hogg, in after-years, Shelley often spoke about another reptile, no mere creature of myth or fable, the "Old Snake," who had inhabited the gardens of Field Place for several generations. This venerable serpent was accidentally killed by the gardener's scythe; but he lived long in the poet's memory, and it may reasonably be conjectured that Shelley's peculiar sympathy for snakes was due to the dim recollection of his childhood's favourite. Some of the games he invented to please his sisters were grotesque, and some both perilous and terrifying. "We dressed ourselves in strange costumes to personate spirits or fiends, and Bysshe would take a fire-stove and fill it with some inflammable liquid, and carry it flaming into the kitchen and to the back door." Shelley often took his sisters for long country rambles over hedge and fence, carrying them when the difficulties of the ground or their fatigue required it. At this time "his figure was slight and beautiful,—his hands were models, and his feet are treading the earth again in one of his race; his eyes too have descended in their wild fixed beauty to the same person. As a child, I have heard that his skin was like snow, and bright ringlets covered his head." Here is a little picture which brings the boy vividly before our eyes: "Bysshe ordered clothes according to his own fancy at Eton, and the beautifully fitting silk pantaloons, as he stood as almost all men and boys do, with their coat-tails near the fire, excited my silent though excessive admiration."

When he was ten years of age, Shelley went to school at Sion House, Brentford, an academy kept by Dr. Greenlaw, and frequented by the sons of London tradesmen,

who proved but uncongenial companions to his gentle spirit. It is fortunate for posterity that one of his biographers, his second cousin Captain Medwin, was his schoolfellow at Sion House; for to his recollections we owe some details of great value. Medwin tells us that Shelley learned the classic languages almost by intuition, while he seemed to be spending his time in dreaming, now watching the clouds as they sailed across the school-room window, and now scribbling sketches of fir-trees and cedars in memory of Field Place. At this time he was subject to sleep-walking, and, if we may credit this biographer, he often lost himself in reveries not far removed from trance. His favourite amusement was novel-reading; and to the many "blue books" from the Minerva press devoured by him in his boyhood, we may ascribe the style and tone of his first compositions. For physical sports he showed no inclination. "He passed among his school-fellows as a strange and unsocial being; for when a holiday relieved us from our tasks, and the other boys were engaged in such sports as the narrow limits of our prison-court allowed, Shelley, who entered into none of them, would pace backwards and forwards—I think I see him now—along the southern wall, indulging in various vague and undefined ideas, the chaotic elements, if I may say so, of what afterwards produced so beautiful a world."

Two of Shelley's most important biographical compositions undoubtedly refer to this period of his boyhood. The first is the passage in the Prelude to *Laon and Cythna* which describes his suffering among the unsympathetic inmates of a school—

> 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-dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I knew not why; until there rose
From the near school-room, 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 clasped my hands and looked around—
—But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which poured 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 controlled
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 linkèd armour for my soul, before
It might walk forth to war among mankind.
Thus power and hope were strengthened more and more
Within me, till there came upon my mind
A sense of loneliness, a thirst with which I pined.

The second is a fragment on friendship preserved by Hogg. After defining that kind of passionate attachment which often precedes love in fervent natures, he proceeds: "I remember forming an attachment of this kind at school. I cannot recall to my memory the precise epoch at which this took place; but I imagine it must have been at the age of eleven or twelve. The object of these sentiments was a boy about my own age, of a character eminently generous, brave, and gentle; and the elements

of human feeling seemed to have been, from his birth, genially compounded within him. There was a delicacy and a simplicity in his manners, inexpressibly attractive. It has never been my fortune to meet with him since my school-boy days; but either I confound my present recollections with the delusions of past feelings, or he is now a source of honour and utility to every one around him. The tones of his voice were so soft and winning, that every word pierced into my heart; and their pathos was so deep, that in listening to him the tears have involuntarily gushed from my eyes. Such was the being for whom I first experienced the sacred sentiments of friendship." How profound was the impression made on his imagination and his feelings by this early friendship, may again be gathered from a passage in his note upon the antique group of Bacchus and Ampelus at Florence. "Look, the figures are walking with a sauntering and idle pace, and talking to each other as they walk, as you may have seen a younger and an elder boy at school, walking in some grassy spot of the play-ground with that tender friendship for each other which the age inspires."

These extracts prove beyond all question that the first contact with the outer world called into activity two of Shelley's strongest moral qualities — his hatred of tyranny and brutal force in any form, and his profound sentiment of friendship. The admiring love of women, which marked him no less strongly, and which made him second only to Shakespere in the sympathetic delineation of a noble feminine ideal, had been already developed by his deep affection for his mother and sisters. It is said that he could not receive a letter from them without manifest joy.

"Shelley," says Medwin, "was at this time tall for his

age, slightly and delicately built, and rather narrow-chested, with a complexion fair and ruddy, a face rather long than oval. His features, not regularly handsome, were set off by a profusion of silky brown hair, that curled naturally. The expression of his countenance was one of exceeding sweetness and innocence. His blue eyes were very large and prominent. They were at times, when he was abstracted, as he often was in contemplation, dull, and as it were, insensible to external objects; at others they flashed with the fire of intelligence. His voice was soft and low, but broken in its tones,—when anything much interested him, harsh and immodulated; and this peculiarity he never lost. He was naturally calm, but when he heard of or read of some flagrant act of injustice, oppression, or cruelty, then indeed the sharpest marks of horror and indignation were visible in his countenance."

Such as the child was, we shall find the man to have remained unaltered through the short space of life allowed him. Loving, innocent, sensitive, secluded from the vulgar concerns of his companions, strongly moralized after a peculiar and inborn type of excellence, drawing his inspirations from Nature and from his own soul in solitude, Shelley passed across the stage of this world, attended by a splendid vision which sustained him at a perilous height above the kindly race of men. The penalty of this isolation he suffered in many painful episodes. The reward he reaped in a measure of more authentic prophecy, and in a nobler realization of his best self, than could be claimed by any of his immediate contemporaries.

CHAPTER II.

ETON AND OXFORD.

In 1805 Shelley went from Sion House to Eton. At this time Dr. Keate was headmaster, and Shelley's tutor was a Mr. Bethel, "one of the dullest men in the establishment." At Eton Shelley was not popular either with his teachers or his elder school-fellows, although the boys of his own age are said to have adored him. "He was all passion," writes Mrs. Shelley; "passionate in his resistance to an injury, passionate in his love:" and this vehemence of temperament he displayed by organizing a rebellion against fagging, which no doubt won for him the applause of his juniors and equals. It was not to be expected that a lad intolerant of rule and disregardful of restriction, who neglected punctuality in the performance of his exercises, while he spent his leisure in translating half of Pliny's history, should win the approbation of pedagogues. At the same time the inspired opponent of the fagging system, the scorner of games and muscular amusements, could not hope to find much favour with such martinets of juvenile convention as a public school is wont to breed. At Eton, as elsewhere, Shelley's uncompromising spirit brought him into inconvenient contact with a world of vulgar usage, while his lively fancy invested the commonplaces of reality with dark hues

borrowed from his own imagination. Mrs. Shelley says of him, "Tamed by affection, but unconquered by blows, what chance was there that Shelley should be happy at a public school?" This sentence probably contains the pith of what he afterwards remembered of his own school life, and there is no doubt that a nature like his, at once loving and high-spirited, had much to suffer. It was a mistake, however, to suppose that at Eton there were any serious blows to bear, or to assume that laws of love which might have led a spirit so gentle as Shelley's, were adapted to the common stuff of which the English boy is formed. The latter mistake Shelley made continually throughout his youth; and only the advance of years tempered his passionate enthusiasm into a sober zeal for the improvement of mankind by rational methods. We may also trace at this early epoch of his life that untamed intellectual ambition — that neglect of the immediate and detailed for the transcendental and universal—which was a marked characteristic of his genius, leading him to fly at the highest while he overleaped the facts of ordinary human life. "From his earliest years," says Mrs. Shelley, "all his amusements and occupations were of a daring, and in one sense of the term, lawless nature. He delighted to exert his powers, not as a boy, but as a man; and so with manly powers and childish wit, he dared and achieved attempts that none of his comrades could even have conceived. His understanding and the early development of imagination never permitted him to mingle in childish plays; and his natural aversion to tyranny prevented him from paying due attention to his school duties. But he was always actively employed; and although his endeavours were prosecuted with puerile precipitancy, yet his aim and thoughts were constantly directed to those

great objects which have employed the thoughts of the greatest among men; and though his studies were not followed up according to school discipline, they were not the less diligently applied to." This high-soaring ambition was the source both of his weakness and his strength in art, as well as in his commerce with the world of men. The boy who despised discipline and sought to extort her secrets from nature by magic, was destined to become the philanthropist who dreamed of revolutionizing society by eloquence, and the poet who invented in *Prometheus Unbound* forms of grandeur too colossal to be animated with dramatic life.

A strong interest in experimental science had been already excited in him at Sion House by the exhibition of an orrery; and this interest grew into a passion at Eton. Experiments in chemistry and electricity, of the simpler and more striking kind, gave him intense pleasure—the more so perhaps because they were forbidden. On one occasion he set the trunk of an old tree on fire with a burning-glass: on another, while he was amusing himself with a blue flame, his tutor came into the room and received a severe shock from a highly-charged Leyden jar. During the holidays Shelley carried on the same pursuits at Field Place. "His own hands and clothes," says Miss Shelley, "were constantly stained and corroded with acids, and it only seemed too probable that some day the house would be burned down, or some serious mischief happen to himself or others from the explosion of combustibles." This taste for science Shelley long retained. If we may trust Mr. Hogg's memory, the first conversation which that friend had with him at Oxford consisted almost wholly of an impassioned monologue from Shelley on the revolution to be wrought by science in all realms of thought. His

imagination was fascinated by the boundless vistas opened to the student of chemistry. When he first discovered that the four elements were not final, it gave him the acutest pleasure: and this is highly characteristic of the genius which was always seeking to transcend and reach the life of life withdrawn from ordinary gaze. On the other hand he seems to have delighted in the toys of science, playing with a solar microscope, and mixing strangest compounds in his crucibles, without taking the trouble to study any of its branches systematically. In his later years he abandoned these pursuits. But a charming reminiscence of them occurs in that most delightful of his familiar poems, the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*.

While translating Pliny and dabbling in chemistry, Shelley was not wholly neglectful of Etonian studies. He acquired a fluent, if not a correct, knowledge of both Greek and Latin, and astonished his contemporaries by the facility with which he produced verses in the latter language. His powers of memory were extraordinary, and the rapidity with which he read a book, taking in seven or eight lines at a glance, and seizing the sense upon the hint of leading words, was no less astonishing. Impatient speed and indifference to minutiæ were indeed among the cardinal qualities of his intellect. To them we may trace not only the swiftness of his imaginative flight, but also his frequent satisfaction with the somewhat less than perfect in artistic execution.

That Shelley was not wholly friendless or unhappy at Eton may be gathered from numerous small circumstances. Hogg says that his Oxford rooms were full of handsome leaving books, and that he was frequently visited by old Etonian acquaintances. We are also told that he spent the 40*l.* gained by his first novel, *Zastrozzi*, on a farewell

supper to eight school-boy friends. A few lines, too, might be quoted from his own poem, the *Boat on the Serchio*, to prove that he did not entertain a merely disagreeable memory of his school life.[1] Yet the general experience of Eton must have been painful; and it is sad to read of this gentle and pure spirit being goaded by his coarser comrades into fury, or coaxed to curse his father and the king for their amusement. It may be worth mentioning that he was called "the Atheist" at Eton; and though Hogg explains this by saying that "the Atheist" was an official character among the boys, selected from time to time for his defiance of authority, yet it is not improbable that Shelley's avowed opinions may even then have won for him a title which he proudly claimed in after-life. To allude to his boyish incantations and nocturnal commerce with fiends and phantoms would scarcely be needful, were it not that they seem to have deeply tinged his imagination. While describing the growth of his own genius in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, he makes the following reference to circumstances which might otherwise be trivial:—

> While yet a boy, I sought for ghosts, and sped
> Thro' many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
> And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
> Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
> I call'd on poisonous names with which our youth is fed,
> I was not heard, I saw them not—
> When, musing deeply on the lot
> Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
> All vital things that wake to bring
> News of birds and blossoming,—
> Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
> I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

[1] Forman's edition, vol. iv. p. 115.

Among the Eton tutors was one whose name will always be revered by Shelley's worshippers; for he alone discerned the rare gifts of the strange and solitary boy, and Shelley loved him. Dr. Lind was an old man, a physician, and a student of chemistry. Shelley spent long hours at his house, conversing with him, and receiving such instruction in philosophy and science as the grey-haired scholar could impart. The affection which united them must have been of no common strength or quality; for when Shelley lay ill of a fever at Field Place, and had conceived the probably ill-founded notion that his father intended to place him in a mad-house, he managed to convey a message to his friend at Eton, on the receipt of which Dr. Lind travelled to Horsham, and by his sympathy and skill restored the sick boy's confidence. It may incidentally be pointed out that this story, credited as true by Lady Shelley in her Memorials, shows how early an estrangement had begun between the poet and his father. We look, moreover, vainly for that mother's influence which might have been so beneficial to the boy in whom "love and life were twins, born at one birth." From Dr. Lind Shelley not only received encouragement to pursue his chemical studies; but he also acquired the habit of corresponding with persons unknown to him, whose opinions he might be anxious to discover or dispute. This habit, as we shall see in the sequel, determined Shelley's fate on two important occasions of his life. In return for the help extended to him at Eton, Shelley conferred undying fame on Dr. Lind; the characters of Zonaras in *Prince Athanase*, and of the hermit in *Laon and Cythna*, are portraits painted by the poet of his boyhood's friend.

The months which elapsed between Eton and Oxford

were an important period in Shelley's life. At this time a boyish liking for his cousin, Harriet Grove, ripened into real attachment; and though there was perhaps no formal engagement between them, the parents on both sides looked with approval on their love. What it concerns us to know about this early passion, is given in a letter from a brother of Miss Grove. "Bysshe was at that time (just after leaving Eton) more attached to my sister Harriet than I can express, and I recollect well the moonlight walks we four had at Strode and also at St. Irving's; that, I think, was the name of the place, then the Duke of Norfolk's, at Horsham." For some time after the date mentioned in this letter, Shelley and Miss Grove kept up an active correspondence; but the views he expressed on speculative subjects soon began to alarm her. She consulted her mother and her father, and the engagement was broken off. The final separation does not seem to have taken place until the date of Shelley's expulsion from Oxford; and not the least cruel of the pangs he had to suffer at that period, was the loss of one to whom he had given his whole heart unreservedly. The memory of Miss Grove long continued to haunt his imagination, nor is there much doubt that his first unhappy marriage was contracted while the wound remained unhealed. The name of Harriet Westbrook and something in her face reminded him of Harriet Grove; it is even still uncertain to which Harriet the dedication of Queen Mab is addressed.[1]

In his childhood Shelley scribbled verses with fluency by no means unusual in the case of forward boys; and we have seen that at Sion House he greedily devoured the sentimental novels of the day. His favourite poets at the

[1] See Medwin, vol. i. p. 68.

time of which I am now writing, were Monk Lewis and Southey; his favourite books in prose were romances by Mrs. Radcliffe and Godwin. He now began to yearn for fame and publicity. Miss Shelley speaks of a play written by her brother and her sister Elizabeth, which was sent to Matthews the comedian, and courteously returned as unfit for acting. She also mentions a little volume of her own verses, which the boy had printed with the tell-tale name of "H—ll—n Sh—ll—y" on the title-page. Medwin gives a long account of a poem on the story of the Wandering Jew, composed by him in concert with Shelley during the winter of 1809—1810. They sent the manuscript to Thomas Campbell, who returned it with the observation that it contained but two good lines:—

> It seemed as if an angel's sigh
> Had breathed the plaintive symphony.

Undeterred by this adverse criticism, Shelley subsequently offered *The Wandering Jew* to two publishers, Messrs. Ballantyne and Co. of Edinburgh, and Mr. Stockdale of Pall Mall; but it remained in MS. at Edinburgh till 1831, when a portion was printed in *Fraser's Magazine*.

Just before leaving Eton he finished his novel of *Zastrozzi*, which some critics trace to its source in *Zofloya the Moor*, perused by him at Sion House. The most astonishing fact about this incoherent medley of mad sentiment is that it served to furnish forth the 40*l*. Eton supper already spoken of, that it was duly ushered into the world of letters by Messrs. Wilkie and Robinson on the 5th of June, 1810, and that it was seriously reviewed. The dates of Shelley's publications now come fast and frequent. In the late summer of 1810 he introduced himself to Mr. J. J. Stockdale, the then fashionable publisher

of poems and romances, at his house of business in Pall Mall. With characteristic impetuosity the young author implored assistance in a difficulty. He had commissioned a printer in Horsham to strike off the astounding number of 1480 copies of a volume of poems; and he had no money to pay the printer's bill. Would Stockdale help him out of this dilemma, by taking up the quires and duly ushering the book into the world? Throughout his life Shelley exercised a wonderful fascination over the people with whom he came in contact, and almost always won his way with them as much by personal charm as by determined and impassioned will. Accordingly on this occasion Stockdale proved accommodating. The Horsham printer was somehow satisfied; and on the 17th of September, 1810, the little book came out with the title of *Original Poetry, by Victor and Cazire.* This volume has disappeared; and much fruitless conjecture has been expended upon the question of Shelley's collaborator in his juvenile attempt. Cazire stands for some one; probably it is meant to represent a woman's name, and that woman may have been either Elizabeth Shelley or Harriet Grove. The *Original Poetry* had only been launched a week, when Stockdale discovered on a closer inspection of the book that it contained some verses well known to the world as the production of M. G. Lewis. He immediately communicated with Shelley, and the whole edition was suppressed—not, however, before about one hundred copies had passed into circulation. To which of the collaborators this daring act of petty larceny was due, we know not; but we may be sure that Shelley satisfied Stockdale on the point of piracy, since the publisher saw no reason to break with him. On the 14th of November in the same year he issued Shelley's second novel from his press, and entered into

negotiations with him for the publication of more poetry. The new romance was named *St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian.* This tale, no less unreadable than *Zastrozzi*, and even more chaotic in its plan, contained a good deal of poetry, which has been incorporated in the most recent editions of Shelley's works. A certain interest attaches to it as the first known link between Shelley and William Godwin, for it was composed under the influence of the latter's novel, *St. Leon.* The title, moreover, carries us back to those moonlight walks with Harriet Grove alluded to above. Shelley's earliest attempts in literature have but little value for the student of poetry, except in so far as they illustrate the psychology of genius and its wayward growth. Their intrinsic merit is almost less than nothing, and no one could predict from their perusal the course which the future poet of *The Cenci* and *Epipsychidion* was to take. It might indeed be argued that the defects of his great qualities, the over-ideality, the haste, the incoherence, and the want of grasp on narrative, are glaringly apparent in these early works. But while this is true, the qualities themselves are absent. A cautious critic will only find food in *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* for wondering how such flowers and fruits of genius could have lain concealed within a germ apparently so barren. There is even less of the real Shelley discernible in these productions, than of the real Byron in the *Hours of Idleness.*

In the Michaelmas Term of 1810 Shelley was matriculated as a Commoner of University College, Oxford; and very soon after his arrival he made the acquaintance of a man who was destined to play a prominent part in his subsequent history, and to bequeath to posterity the most brilliant, if not in all respects the most trustworthy, record of his marvellous youth. Thomas Jefferson Hogg was

unlike Shelley in temperament and tastes. His feet were always planted on the earth, while Shelley flew aloft to heaven with singing robes around him, or the mantle of the prophet on his shoulders.[1] Hogg had much of the cynic in his nature; he was a shrewd man of the world, and a caustic humorist. Positive and practical, he chose the beaten path of life, rose to eminence as a lawyer, and cherished the Church and State opinions of a staunch Tory. Yet, though he differed so essentially from the divine poet, he understood the greatness of Shelley at a glance, and preserved for us a record of his friend's early days, which is incomparable for the vividness of its portraiture. The pages which narrate Shelley's course of life at Oxford have all the charm of a romance. No novel indeed is half so delightful as that picture, at once affectionate and satirical, tender and humorous, extravagant and delicately shaded, of the student life enjoyed together for a few short months by the inseparable friends. To make extracts from a masterpiece of such consummate workmanship is almost painful. Future biographers of Shelley, writing on a scale adequate to the greatness of their subject, will be content to lay their pens down for a season at this point, and let Hogg tell the tale in his own wayward but inimitable fashion. I must confine myself to a few quotations and a barren abstract, referring my readers to the ever-memorable pages 48—286 of Hogg's first volume, for the life that cannot be transferred to these.

"At the commencement of Michaelmas term," says this

[1] He told Trelawny that he had been attracted to Shelley simply by his "rare talents as a scholar;" and Trelawny has recorded his opinion that Hogg's portrait of their friend was faithful, in spite of a total want of sympathy with his poetic genius. This testimony is extremely valuable.

biographer, "that is, at the end of October, in the year 1810, I happened one day to sit next to a freshman at dinner; it was his first appearance in hall. His figure was slight, and his aspect remarkably youthful, even at our table, where all were very young. He seemed thoughtful and absent. He ate little, and had no acquaintance with any one." The two young men began a conversation, which turned upon the respective merits of German and Italian poetry, a subject they neither of them knew anything about. After dinner it was continued in Hogg's rooms, where Shelley soon led the talk to his favourite topic of science. "As I felt, in truth, but a slight interest in the subject of his conversation, I had leisure to examine, and I may add, to admire, the appearance of my very extraordinary guest. It was a sum of many contradictions. His figure was slight and fragile, and yet his bones and joints were large and strong. He was tall, but he stooped so much, that he seemed of a low stature. His clothes were expensive, and made according to the most approved mode of the day; but they were tumbled, rumpled, unbrushed. His gestures were abrupt, and sometimes violent, occasionally even awkward, yet more frequently gentle and graceful. His complexion was delicate and almost feminine, of the purest red and white; yet he was tanned and freckled by exposure to the sun, having passed the autumn, as he said, in shooting. His features, his whole face, and particularly his head, were, in fact, unusually small; yet the last *appeared* of a remarkable bulk, for his hair was long and bushy, and in fits of absence, and in the agonies (if I may use the word) of anxious thought, he often rubbed it fiercely with his hands, or passed his fingers quickly through his locks unconsciously, so that it was singularly wild and rough. In times when it was the

mode to imitate stage-coachmen as closely as possible in costume, and when the hair was invariably cropped, like that of our soldiers, this eccentricity was very striking. His features were not symmetrical (the mouth, perhaps, excepted), yet was the effect of the whole extremely powerful. They breathed an animation, a fire, an enthusiasm, a vivid and preternatural intelligence, that I never met with in any other countenance. Nor was the moral expression less beautiful than the intellectual; for there was a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, and especially (though this will surprise many) that air of profound religious veneration, that characterizes the best works, and chiefly the frescoes (and into these they infused their whole souls), of the great masters of Florence and of Rome. I recognized the very peculiar expression in these wonderful productions long afterwards, and with a satisfaction mingled with much sorrow, for it was after the decease of him in whose countenance I had first observed it."

In another place Hogg gives some details which complete the impression of Shelley's personal appearance, and which are fully corroborated by Trelawny's recollections of a later date. "There were many striking contrasts in the character and behaviour of Shelley, and one of the most remarkable was a mixture, or alternation, of awkwardness with agility—of the clumsy with the graceful. He would stumble in stepping across the floor of a drawing-room; he would trip himself up on a smooth-shaven grass-plot, and he would tumble in the most inconceivable manner in ascending the commodious, facile, and well-carpeted staircase of an elegant mansion, so as to bruise his nose or his lip on the upper steps, or to tread upon his hands, and even occasionally to disturb the composure of a well-bred footman; on the contrary, he would often

glide without collision through a crowded assembly, thread with unerring dexterity a most intricate path, or securely and rapidly tread the most arduous and uncertain ways."

This word-portrait corresponds in its main details to the descriptions furnished by other biographers, who had the privilege of Shelley's friendship. His eyes were blue, unfathomably dark and lustrous. His hair was brown; but very early in life it became grey, while his unwrinkled face retained to the last a look of wonderful youth. It is admitted on all sides that no adequate picture was ever painted of him. Mulready is reported to have said that he was too beautiful to paint. And yet, although so singularly lovely, he owed less of his charm to regularity of feature or to grace of movement, than to an indescribable personal fascination. One further detail Hogg pointedly insists upon. Shelley's voice "was excruciating; it was intolerably shrill, harsh, and discordant." This is strongly stated; but, though the terms are certainly exaggerated, I believe that we must trust this first impression made on Shelley's friend. There is a considerable mass of convergent testimony to the fact that Shelley's voice was high pitched, and that when he became excited, he raised it to a scream. The epithets "shrill," "piercing," "penetrating," frequently recur in the descriptions given of it. At the same time its quality seems to have been less dissonant than thrilling; there is abundance of evidence to prove that he could modulate it exquisitely in the reading of poetry, and its tone proved no obstacle to the persuasive charms of his eloquence in conversation. Like all finely tempered natures, he vibrated in harmony with the subjects of his thought. Excitement made his utterance shrill and sharp. Deep feeling or the sense of beauty lowered its tone to richness; but the *timbre* was always acute, in sympathy with his in-

tense temperament. All was of one piece in Shelley's nature. This peculiar voice, varying from moment to moment, and affecting different sensibilities in divers ways, corresponds to the high-strung passion of his life, his fine-drawn and ethereal fancies, and the clear vibrations of his palpitating verse. Such a voice, far-reaching, penetrating, and unearthly, befitted one who lived in rarest ether on the topmost heights of human thought.

The acquaintance begun that October evening soon ripened into close friendship. Shelley and Hogg from this time forward spent a large part of their days and nights together in common studies, walks, and conversations. It was their habit to pass the morning, each in his own rooms, absorbed in private reading. At one o'clock they met and lunched, and then started for long rambles in the country. Shelley frequently carried pistols with him upon these occasions, and would stop to fix his father's franks upon convenient trees and shoot at them. The practice of pistol-shooting, adopted so early in his life, was afterwards one of his favourite amusements in the company of Byron. Hogg says that in his use of fire-arms he was extraordinarily careless. "How often have I lamented that Nature, which so rarely bestows upon the world a creature endowed with such marvellous talents, ungraciously rendered the gift less precious by implanting a fatal taste for perilous recreations, and a thoughtlessness in the pursuit of them, that often caused his existence from one day to another to seem in itself miraculous." On their return from these excursions the two friends, neither of whom cared for dining in the College Hall, drank tea and supped together, Shelley's rooms being generally chosen as the scene of their symposia.

These rooms are described as a perfect palace of con-

fusion — chaos on chaos heaped of chemical apparatus, books, electrical machines, unfinished manuscripts, and furniture worn into holes by acids. It was perilous to use the poet's drinking-vessels, less perchance a seven-shilling piece half dissolved in *aqua regia* should lurk at the bottom of the bowl. Handsome razors were used to cut the lids of wooden boxes, and valuable books served to support lamps or crucibles; for in his vehement precipitation Shelley always laid violent hands on what he found convenient to the purpose of the moment. Here the friends talked and read until late in the night. Their chief studies at this time were in Locke and Hume and the French essayists. Shelley's bias toward metaphysical speculation was beginning to assert itself. He read the School Logic with avidity, and practised himself without intermission in dialectical discussion. Hogg observes, what is confirmed by other testimony, that in reasoning Shelley never lost sight of the essential bearings of the topic in dispute, never condescended to personal or captious arguments, and was Socratically bent on following the dialogue wherever it might lead, without regard for consequences. Plato was another of their favourite authors; but Hogg expressly tells us that they only approached the divine philosopher through the medium of translations. It was not until a later period that Shelley studied his dialogues in the original: but the substance of them, seen through Mdme. Dacier's version, acted powerfully on the poet's sympathetic intellect. In fact, although at this time he had adopted the conclusions of materialism, he was at heart all through his life an idealist. Therefore the mixture of the poet and the sage in Plato fascinated him. The doctrine of *anamnesis*, which offers so strange a vista to speculative reverie, by its suggestion of an earlier existence in which our knowledge was

acquired, took a strong hold upon his imagination; he would stop in the streets to gaze wistfully at babies, wondering whether their newly imprisoned souls were not replete with the wisdom stored up in a previous life.

In the acquisition of knowledge he was then as ever unrelaxing. "No student ever read more assiduously. He was to be found, book in hand, at all hours; reading in season and out of season; at table, in bed, and especially during a walk; not only in the quiet country, and in retired paths; not only at Oxford, in the public walks, and High Street, but in the most crowded thoroughfares of London. Nor was he less absorbed by the volume that was open before him, in Cheapside, in Cranbourne Alley, or in Bond Street, than in a lonely lane, or a secluded library. Sometimes a vulgar fellow would attempt to insult or annoy the eccentric student in passing. Shelley always avoided the malignant interruption by stepping aside with his vast and quiet agility." And again:—"I never beheld eyes that devoured the pages more voraciously than his; I am convinced that two-thirds of the period of day and night were often employed in reading. It is no exaggeration to affirm, that out of the twenty-four hours, he frequently read sixteen. At Oxford, his diligence in this respect was exemplary, but it greatly increased afterwards, and I sometimes thought that he carried it to a pernicious excess: I am sure, at least, that I was unable to keep pace with him." With Shelley study was a passion, and the acquisition of knowledge was the entrance into a thrice-hallowed sanctuary. "The irreverent many cannot comprehend the awe—the careless apathetic worldling cannot imagine the enthusiasm—nor can the tongue that attempts only to speak of things visible to the bodily eye, express the mighty emotion that inwardly agitated him, when he

approached, for the first time, a volume which he believed to be replete with the recondite and mystic philosophy of antiquity: his cheeks glowed, his eyes became bright, his whole frame trembled, and his entire attention was immediately swallowed up in the depths of contemplation. The rapid and vigorous conversion of his soul to intellect can only be compared with the instantaneous ignition and combustion, which dazzle the sight, when a bundle of dry reeds, or other light inflammable substance, is thrown upon a fire already rich with accumulated heat."

As at Eton, so at Oxford, Shelley refused to keep the beaten track of prescribed studies, or to run in ordinary grooves of thought. The mere fact that Aristotle was a duty, seems to have disgusted him with the author of the Organon, from whom, had his works been prohibited to undergraduates, he would probably have been eager to learn much. For mathematics and jurisprudence he evinced a marked distaste. The common business of the English Parliament had no attraction for him, and he read few newspapers. While his mind was keenly interested in great political questions, he could not endure the trivial treatment of them in the daily press, and cared far more for principles than for the incidents of party warfare. Here again he showed that impatience of detail, and that audacity of self-reliant genius, which were the source of both his weakness and his strength. He used to speak with aversion of a Parliamentary career, and told Hogg that though this had been suggested to him, as befitting his position, by the Duke of Norfolk, he could never bring himself to mix with the rabble of the House. It is none the less true, however, that he entertained some vague notion of eventually succeeding to his father's seat.

Combined with his eager intellectual activity, there was

something intermittent and fitful in the working of his mental faculties. Hogg, in particular, mentions one of his habits in a famous passage, which, since it brings the two friends vividly before us, may here be quoted. "I was enabled to continue my studies afterwards in the evening, in consequence of a very remarkable peculiarity. My young and energetic friend was then overcome by extreme drowsiness, which speedily and completely vanquished him; he would sleep from two to four hours, often so soundly that his slumbers resembled a deep lethargy; he lay occasionally upon the sofa, but more commonly stretched upon the rug before a large fire, like a cat; and his little round head was exposed to such a fierce heat, that I used to wonder how he was able to bear it. Sometimes I have interposed some shelter, but rarely with any permanent effect; for the sleeper usually contrived to turn himself, and to roll again into the spot where the fire glowed the brightest. His torpor was generally profound, but he would sometimes discourse incoherently for a long while in his sleep. At six he would suddenly compose himself, even in the midst of a most animated narrative, or of earnest discussion; and he would lie buried in entire forgetfulness, in a sweet and mighty oblivion, until ten, when he would suddenly start up, and, rubbing his eyes with great violence, and passing his fingers swiftly through his long hair, would enter at once into a vehement argument, or begin to recite verses, either of his own composition or from the works of others, with a rapidity and an energy that were often quite painful."

Shelley's moral qualities are described with no less enthusiasm than his intellectual and physical beauty by the friend from whom I have already drawn so largely. Love was the root and basis of his nature: this love, first de-

veloped as domestic affection, next as friendship, then as a youth's passion, now began to shine with steady lustre as an all-embracing devotion to his fellow-men. There is something inevitably chilling in the words "benevolence" and "philanthropy." A disillusioned world is inclined to look with languid approbation on the former, and to disbelieve in the latter. Therefore I will not use them to describe that intense and glowing passion of unselfishness, which throughout his life led Shelley to find his strongest interests in the joys and sorrows of his fellow-creatures, which inflamed his imagination with visions of humanity made perfect, and which filled his days with sweet deeds of unnumbered charities. I will rather collect from the pages of his friend's biography a few passages recording the first impression of his character, the memory of which may be carried by the reader through the following brief record of his singular career:—

"His speculations were as wild as the experience of twenty-one years has shown them to be; but the zealous earnestness for the augmentation of knowledge, and the glowing philanthropy and boundless benevolence that marked them, and beamed forth in the whole deportment of that extraordinary boy, are not less astonishing than they would have been if the whole of his glorious anticipations had been prophetic; for these high qualities, at least, I have never found a parallel."

"In no individual perhaps was the moral sense ever more completely developed than in Shelley; in no being was the perception of right and of wrong more acute."

"As his love of intellectual pursuits was vehement, and the vigour of his genius almost celestial, so were the purity and sanctity of his life most conspicuous."

"I never knew any one so prone to admire as he was, in whom the principle of veneration was so strong."

"I have had the happiness to associate with some of the best specimens of gentlemen; but with all due deference for those admirable persons (may my candour and my preference be pardoned), I can affirm that Shelley was almost the only example I have yet found that was never wanting, even in the most minute particular, of the infinite and various observances of pure, entire, and perfect gentility."

"Shelley was actually offended, and indeed more indignant than would appear to be consistent with the singular mildness of his nature, at a coarse and awkward jest, especially if it were immodest, or uncleanly; in the latter case his anger was unbounded, and his uneasiness pre-eminent; he was, however, sometimes vehemently delighted by exquisite and delicate sallies, particularly with a fanciful, and perhaps somewhat fantastical facetiousness—possibly the more because he was himself utterly incapable of pleasantry."

"I never could discern in him any more than two fixed principles. The first was a strong irrepressible love of liberty; of liberty in the abstract, and somewhat after the pattern of the ancient republics, without reference to the English constitution, respecting which he knew little and cared nothing, heeding it not at all. The second was an equally ardent love of toleration of all opinions, but more especially of religious opinions; of toleration, complete, entire, universal, unlimited; and, as a deduction and corollary from which latter principle, he felt an intense abhorrence of persecution of every kind, public or private."

The testimony in the foregoing extracts as to Shelley's purity and elevation of moral character is all the stronger,

because it is given by a man not over-inclined to praise, and of a temperament as unlike the poet's as possible. If we were to look only upon this side of his portrait, we should indeed be almost forced to use the language of his most enthusiastic worshippers, and call him an archangel. But it must be admitted that, though so pure and gentle and exalted, Shelley's virtues were marred by his eccentricity, by something at times approaching madness, which paralyzed his efficiency by placing him in a glaringly false relation to some of the best men in the world around him. He possessed certain good qualities in excess; for, though it sounds paradoxical, it is none the less true that a man may be too tolerant, too fond of liberty: and it was precisely the extravagance of these virtues in Shelley which drove him into acts and utterances so antagonistic to society as to be intolerable.

Of Shelley's poetical studies we hear but little at this epoch. His genius by a stretch of fancy might be compared to one of those double stars which dart blue and red rays of light: for it was governed by two luminaries, poetry and metaphysics; and at this time the latter seems to have been in the ascendant. It is, however, interesting to learn that he read and re-read Landor's *Gebir*—stronger meat than either Southey's epics or the ghost-lyrics of Monk Lewis. Hogg found him one day busily engaged in correcting proofs of some original poems. Shelley asked his friend what he thought of them, and Hogg answered that it might be possible by a little alteration to turn them into capital burlesques. This idea took the young poet's fancy; and the friends between them soon effected a metamorphosis in Shelley's serious verses, by which they became unmistakably ridiculous. Having achieved their purpose, they now bethought them of the

proper means of publication. Upon whom should the poems, a medley of tyrannicide and revolutionary raving, be fathered? Peg Nicholson, a mad washerwoman, had recently attempted George the Third's life with a carving-knife. No more fitting author could be found. They would give their pamphlet to the world as her work, edited by an admiring nephew. The printer appreciated the joke no less than the authors of it. He provided splendid paper and magnificent type; and before long the book of nonsense was in the hands of Oxford readers. It sold for the high price of half-a-crown a copy; and, what is hardly credible, the gownsmen received it as a genuine production. "It was indeed a kind of fashion to be seen reading it in public, as a mark of nice discernment, of a delicate and fastidious taste in poetry, and the best criterion of a choice spirit." Such was the genesis of *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, edited by John Fitz Victor. The name of the supposititious nephew reminds us of *Original Poems* by Victor and Cazire, and raises the question whether the poems in that lost volume may not have partly furnished forth this Oxford travesty.

Shelley's next publication, or quasi-publication, was neither so innocent in substance nor so pleasant in its consequences. After leaving Eton, he continued the habit, learned from Dr. Lind, of corresponding with distinguished persons whom he did not personally know. Thus we find him about this time addressing Miss Felicia Browne (afterwards Mrs. Hemans) and Leigh Hunt. He plied his correspondents with all kinds of questions; and as the dialectical interest was uppermost at Oxford, he now endeavoured to engage them in discussions on philosophical and religious topics. We have seen that his favourite authors were Locke, Hume, and the French materialists.

With the impulsiveness peculiar to his nature, he adopted the negative conclusions of a shallow nominalistic philosophy. It was a fundamental point with him to regard all questions, however sifted and settled by the wise of former ages, as still open; and in his inordinate thirst for liberty, he rejoiced to be the Deicide of a pernicious theological delusion. In other words, he passed at Oxford by one leap from a state of indifferentism with regard to Christianity, into an attitude of vehement antagonism. With a view to securing answers to his missives, he printed a short abstract of Hume's and other arguments against the existence of a Deity, presented in a series of propositions, and signed with a mathematically important "Q. E. D." This document he forwarded to his proposed antagonists, expressing his inability to answer its arguments, and politely requesting them to help him. When it so happened that any incautious correspondents acceded to this appeal, Shelley fell with merciless severity upon their feeble and commonplace reasoning. The little pamphlet of two pages was entitled *The Necessity of Atheism;* and its proposed publication, beyond the limits of private circulation already described, is proved by an advertisement (Feb. 9, 1811) in the *Oxford University and City Herald.* It was not, however, actually offered for sale.

A copy of this syllabus reached a Fellow of another college, who made the Master of University acquainted with the fact. On the morning of March 25, 1811, Shelley was sent for to the Senior Common Room, and asked whether he acknowledged himself to be the author of the obnoxious pamphlet. On his refusal to answer this question, he was served with a formal sentence of expulsion duly drawn up and sealed. The college authorities have been blamed for unfair dealing in this matter

It is urged that they ought to have proceeded by the legal method of calling witnesses; and that the sentence was not only out of all proportion to the offence, but that it ought not to have been executed till persuasion had been tried. With regard to the former indictment, I do not think that a young man still *in statu pupillari*, who refused to purge himself of what he must have known to be a serious charge, had any reason to expect from his tutors the formalities of an English court of law. There is no doubt that the Fellows were satisfied of his being the real author; else they could not have ventured on so summary a measure as expulsion. Their question was probably intended to give the culprit an occasion for apology, of which they foresaw he would not avail himself. With regard to the second, it is true that Shelley was amenable to kindness, and that gentle and wise treatment from men whom he respected, might possibly have brought him to retract his syllabus. But it must be remembered that he despised the Oxford dons with all his heart; and they were probably aware of this. He was a dexterous, impassioned reasoner, whom they little cared to encounter in argument on such a topic. During his short period of residence, moreover, he had not shown himself so tractable as to secure the good wishes of superiors, who prefer conformity to incommensurable genius. It is likely that they were not averse to getting rid of him as a man dangerous to the peace of their society; and now they had a good occasion. Nor was it to be expected that the champion and apostle of Atheism—and Shelley was certainly both, in spite of Hogg's attempts to tone down the purpose of his document—should be unmolested in his propaganda by the aspirants to fat livings and ecclesiastical dignities. Real blame, however, attaches

to these men: first, for their dulness to discern Shelley's amiable qualities; and, secondly, for the prejudgment of the case implied in the immediate delivery of their sentence. Both Hogg and Shelley accused them, besides, of a gross brutality, which was, to say the least, unseemly on so serious an occasion. At the beginning of this century the learning and the manners of the Oxford dons were at a low ebb; and the Fellows of University College acted harshly but not altogether unjustly, ignorantly but after their own kind, in this matter of Shelley's expulsion. *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa.* Hogg, who stood by his friend manfully at this crisis, and dared the authorities to deal with him as they had dealt with Shelley, adding that they had just as much real proof to act upon in his case, and intimating his intention of returning the same answer as to the authorship of the pamphlet, was likewise expelled. The two friends left Oxford together by the coach on the morning of the 26th of March.

Shelley felt his expulsion acutely. At Oxford he had enjoyed the opportunities of private reading which the University afforded in those days of sleepy studies and innocuous examinations. He delighted in the security of his "oak," and above all things he found pleasure in the society of his one chosen friend. He was now obliged to exchange these good things for the tumult and discomfort of London. His father, after clumsily attempting compromises, had forbidden his return to Field Place. The whole fabric of his former life was broken up. The last hope of renewing his engagement with his cousin had to be abandoned. His pecuniary position was precarious, and in a short time he was destined to lose the one friend who had so generously shared his fate. Yet the notion of recovering his position as a student in one of our great

Universities, of softening his father's indignation, or of ameliorating his present circumstances by the least concession, never seems to have occurred to him. He had suffered in the cause of truth and liberty, and he willingly accepted his martyrdom for conscience' sake.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE IN LONDON AND FIRST MARRIAGE.

It is of some importance at this point to trace the growth and analyse the substance of Shelley's atheistical opinions. The cardinal characteristic of his nature was an implacable antagonism to shams and conventions, which passed too easily into impatient rejection of established forms as worse than useless. Born in the stronghold of squirearchical prejudices, nursed amid the trivial platitudes that then passed in England for philosophy, his keen spirit flew to the opposite pole of thought with a recoil that carried him at first to inconsiderate negation. His passionate love of liberty, his loathing for intolerance, his impatience of control for self and others, and his vivid logical sincerity, combined to make him the Quixotic champion of extreme opinions. He was too fearless to be wise, too precipitate to suspend his judgment, too convinced of the paramount importance of iconoclasm, to mature his views in silence. With the unbounded audacity of youth, he hoped to take the fortresses of "Anarch Custom" by storm at the first assault. His favourite ideal was the vision of a youth, Laon or Lionel, whose eloquence had power to break the bonds of despotism, as the sun thaws ice upon an April morning. It was enough, he thought, to hurl the glove of defiance boldly at the tyrant's face—to

sow the *Necessity of Atheism* broadcast on the bench of Bishops, and to depict incest in his poetry, not because he wished to defend it, but because society must learn to face the most abhorrent problems with impartiality. Gifted with a touch as unerring as Ithuriel's spear for the unmasking of hypocrisy, he strove to lay bare the very substance of the soul beneath the crust of dogma and the froth of traditional beliefs; nor does it seem to have occurred to him that, while he stripped the rags and patches that conceal the nakedness of ordinary human nature, he might drag away the weft and woof of nobler thought. In his poet-philosopher's imagination there bloomed a wealth of truth and love and beauty so abounding, that behind the mirage he destroyed, he saw no blank, but a new Eternal City of the Spirit. He never doubted whether his fellow-creatures were certain to be equally fortunate.

Shelley had no faculty for compromise, no perception of the blended truths and falsehoods through which the mind of man must gradually win its way from the obscurity of myths into the clearness of positive knowledge, for ever toiling and for ever foiled, and forced to content itself with the increasing consciousness of limitations. Brimming over with love for men, he was deficient in sympathy with the conditions under which they actually think and feel. Could he but dethrone the Anarch Custom, the millennium, he argued, would immediately arrive; nor did he stop to think how different was the fibre of his own soul from that of the unnumbered multitudes around him. In his adoration of what he recognized as living, he retained no reverence for the ossified experience of past ages. The principle of evolution, which forms a saving link between the obsolete and the organically vital, had no place in his logic. The spirit of the French Revolution,

uncompromising, shattering, eager to build in a day the structure which long centuries of growth must fashion, was still fresh upon him. We who have survived the enthusiasms of that epoch, who are exhausted with its passions, and who have suffered from its reactive impulses, can scarcely comprehend the vivid faith and young-eyed joy of aspiration which sustained Shelley in his flight toward the region of impossible ideals. For he had a vital faith; and this faith made the ideals he conceived seem possible—faith in the duty and desirability of overthrowing idols; faith in the gospel of liberty, fraternity, equality; faith in the divine beauty of nature; faith in a love that rules the universe; faith in the perfectibility of man; faith in the omnipresent soul, whereof our souls are atoms; faith in affection as the ruling and co-ordinating substance of morality. The man who lived by this faith was in no vulgar sense of the word an Atheist. When he proclaimed himself to be one, he pronounced his hatred of a gloomy religion, which had been the instrument of kings and priests for the enslavement of their fellow-creatures. As he told his friend Trelawny, he used the word Atheism "to express his abhorrence of superstition; he took it up as a knight took up a gauntlet, in defiance of injustice." But Shelley believed too much to be consistently agnostic. He believed so firmly and intensely in his own religion—a kind of passionate positivism, a creed which seemed to have no God because it was all God—that he felt convinced he only needed to destroy accepted figments, for the light which blazed around him to break through and flood the world with beauty. Shelley can only be called an Atheist, in so far as he maintained the inadequacy of hitherto received conceptions of the Deity, and indignantly rejected that Moloch of cruelty who is worshipped in

the debased forms of Christianity. He was an Agnostic only in so far as he proclaimed the impossibility of solving the insoluble, and knowing the unknowable. His clear and fearless utterances upon these points place him in the rank of intellectual heroes. But his own soul, compact of human faith and love, was far too religious and too sanguine to merit either epithet as vulgarly applied.

The negative side of Shelley's creed had the moral value which attaches to all earnest conviction, plain speech, defiance of convention, and enthusiasm for intellectual liberty at any cost. It was marred, however, by extravagance, crudity, and presumption. Much that he would fain have destroyed because he found it customary, was solid, true, and beneficial. Much that he thought it desirable to substitute, was visionary, hollow, and pernicious. He lacked the touchstone of mature philosophy, whereby to separate the pinchbeck from the gold of social usage; and in his intense enthusiasm he lost his hold on common sense, which might have saved him from the puerility of arrogant iconoclasm. The positive side of his creed remains precious, not because it was logical, or scientific, or coherent, but because it was an ideal, fervently felt, and penetrated with the whole life-force of an incomparable nature. Such ideals are needed for sustaining man upon his path amid the glooms and shadows of impenetrable ignorance. They form the seal and pledge of his spiritual dignity, reminding him that he was not born to live like brutes, or like the brutes to perish without effort.

> Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
> Ma per seguir virtude e conoscenza.

These criticisms apply to the speculations of Shelley's earlier life, when his crusade against accepted usage was

extravagant, and his confidence in the efficacy of mere eloquence to change the world was overweening. The experience of years, however, taught him wisdom without damping his enthusiasm, refined the crudity of his first fervent speculations, and mellowed his philosophy. Had he lived to a ripe age, there is no saying with what clear and beneficent lustre might have shone that light of aspiration which during his turbid youth burned somewhat luridly, and veiled its radiance in the smoke of mere rebelliousness and contradiction.

Hogg and Shelley settled in lodgings at No. 15, Poland Street, soon after their arrival in London. The name attracted Shelley: "it reminded him of Thaddeus of Warsaw and of freedom." He was further fascinated by a gaudy wall-paper of vine-trellises and grapes, which adorned the parlour; and vowed that he would stay there for ever. "For ever," was a word often upon Shelley's lips in the course of his checquered life; and yet few men have been subject to so many sudden changes through the buffetings of fortune from without and the inconstancy of their own purpose, than he was. His biographer has no little trouble to trace and note with accuracy his perpetual flittings and the names of his innumerable temporary residences. A month had not elapsed before Hogg left him in order to begin his own law studies at York; and Shelley abode "alone in the vine-trellised chamber, where he was to remain, a bright-eyed, restless fox amidst sour grapes, not, as his poetic imagination at first suggested, for ever, but a little while longer."

The records of this first residence in London are meagre, but not unimportant. We hear of negotiations and interviews with Mr. Timothy Shelley, all of which proved unavailing. Shelley would not recede from the

position he had taken up. Nothing would induce him to break off his intimacy with Hogg, or to place himself under the tutor selected for him by his father. For Paley's, or as Mr. Shelley called him "Palley's," Evidences he expressed unbounded contempt. The breach between them gradually widened. Mr. Shelley at last determined to try the effect of cutting off supplies; but his son only hardened his heart, and sustained himself by a proud consciousness of martyrdom. I agree with Shelley's last and best biographer, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in his condemnation of the poet's behaviour as a son. Shelley did not treat his father with the common consideration due from youth to age; and the only instances of unpardonable bad taste to be found in his correspondence or the notes of his conversation, are insulting phrases applied to a man who was really more unfortunate than criminal in his relations to this changeling from the realms of faëry. It is not too much to say that his dislike of his father amounted to derangement; and certainly some of his suspicions with regard to him were the hallucinations of a heated fancy. How so just and gentle a nature was brought into so false a moral situation, whether by some sudden break-down of confidence in childhood or by a gradually increasing mistrust, is an interesting but perhaps insoluble problem. We only know that in his early boyhood Shelley loved his father so much as to have shown unusual emotion during his illness on one occasion, but that, while at Eton, he had already become possessed by a dark suspicion concerning him. This is proved by the episode of Dr. Lind's visit during his fever. Then and ever afterwards he expected monstrous treatment at his hands, although the elder gentleman was nothing worse than a muddle-headed squire. It has more than once

occurred to me that this fever may have been a turning point in his history, and that a delusion, engendered by delirium, may have fixed itself upon his mind, owing to some imperfection in the process of recovery. But the theory is too speculative and unsupported by proof to be more than passingly alluded to.

At this time Shelley found it difficult to pay his lodgings and buy food. It is said that his sisters saved their pocket-money to support him: and we know that he paid them frequent visits at their school on Clapham Common. It was here that his characteristic hatred of tyranny displayed itself on two occasions. "One day," writes Miss Hellen Shelley, "his ire was greatly excited at a black mark hung round one of our throats, as a penalty for some small misdemeanour. He expressed great disapprobation, more of the system than that one of his sisters should be so punished. Another time he found me, I think, in an iron collar, which certainly was a dreadful instrument of torture in my opinion. It was not worn as a punishment, but because I *poked;* but Bysshe declared it would make me grow crooked, and ought to be discontinued immediately." The acquaintance which he now made with one of his sister's school friends was destined to lead to most important results.[1] Harriet Westbrook was a girl of sixteen years, remarkably good-looking, with a brilliant pink and white complexion, beautiful brown hair, a pleasant voice, and a cheerful temper. She was the daughter of a man who kept a coffee-house in Mount Street, nick-named "Jew" Westbrook, because of his appearance. She had an elder sister, called Eliza, dark of complexion, and gaunt of figure, with the abundant hair that plays so prominent a part in Hogg's relentless portrait. Eliza, being nearly

[1] It is probable that he saw her for the first time in January, 1811.

twice as old as Harriet, stood in the relation of a mother to her. Both of these young ladies, and the "Jew," their father, welcomed Shelley with distinguished kindness. Though he was penniless for the nonce, exiled from his home, and under the ban of his family's displeasure, he was still the heir to a large landed fortune and a baronetcy. It was not to be expected that the coffee-house people should look upon him with disfavour.

Shelley paid Harriet frequent visits both at Mrs. Fenning's school and at Mount Street, and soon began a correspondence with her, hoping, as he expressly stated in a letter of a later date, by converting her to his theories, to add his sister and her "to the list of the good, the disinterested, the free." At first she seems to have been horrified at the opinions he expressed; but in this case at least he did not overrate the powers of eloquence. With all the earnestness of an evangelist, he preached his gospel of freethought or atheism, and had the satisfaction of forming his young pupil to his views. He does not seem to have felt any serious inclination for Harriet; but in the absence of other friends, he gladly availed himself of her society. Gradually she became more interesting to him, when he heard mysterious accounts of suffering at home and tyranny at school. This was enough to rouse in Shelley the spirit of Quixotic championship, if not to sow the seeds of love. What Harriet's ill-treatment really was, no one has been able to discover; yet she used to affirm that her life at this time was so irksome that she contemplated suicide.

During the summer of 1811, Shelley's movements were more than usually erratic, and his mind was in a state of extraordinary restlessness. In the month of May, a kind of accommodation was come to with his father. He re-

ceived permission to revisit Field Place, and had an allowance made him of 200*l.* a year. His uncle, Captain Pilfold of Cuckfield, was instrumental in effecting this partial reconciliation. Shelley spent some time at his uncle's country house, oscillating between London, Cuckfield, and Field Place, with characteristic rapidity, and paying one flying visit to his cousin Grove at Cwm Elan, near Rhayader, in North Wales. This visit is worth mention, since he now for the first time saw the scenery of waterfalls and mountains. He was, however, too much preoccupied to take much interest in nature. He was divided between his old affection for Miss Grove, his new but somewhat languid interest in Harriet, and a dearly cherished scheme for bringing about a marriage between his sister Elizabeth and his friend Hogg. The letters written to Hogg at this period (vol. i. pp. 387—418), are exceedingly important and interesting, revealing as they do the perturbation of his feelings and the almost morbid excitement of his mind. But they are unluckily so badly edited, whether designedly or by accident, that it would be dangerous to draw minute conclusions from them. As they stand, they raise injurious suspicions, which can only be set at rest by a proper assignment of dates and explanations.

Meanwhile his destiny was shaping itself with a rapidity that plunged him suddenly into decisive and irrevocable action. It is of the greatest moment to ascertain precisely what his feelings were during this summer with regard to Harriet. Hogg has printed two letters in immediate juxtaposition: the first without date, the second with the post-mark of Rhayader. Shelley ends the first epistle thus: "Your jokes on Harriet Westbrook amuse me: it is a common error for people to fancy others in their own situation, but if I know anything about love, I am *not* in

love. I have heard from the Westbrooks, both of whom I highly esteem." He begins the second with these words: "You will perhaps see me before you can answer this; perhaps not; heaven knows! I shall certainly come to York, but *Harriet Westbrook* will decide whether now or in three weeks. Her father has persecuted her in a most horrible way, by endeavouring to compel her to go to school. She asked my advice: resistance was the answer, at the same time that I essayed to mollify Mr. W. in vain! And in consequence of my advice *she* has thrown herself upon *my* protection. I set off for London on Monday. How flattering a distinction!—I am thinking of ten million things at once. What have I said? I declare, quite *ludicrous*. I advised her to resist. She wrote to say that resistance was useless, but that she would fly with me, and threw herself upon my protection. We shall have 200*l.* a year; when we find it run short, we must live, I suppose, upon love! Gratitude and admiration, all demand that I should love her *for ever*. We shall see you at York. I will hear your arguments for matrimonialism, by which I am now almost convinced. I can get lodgings at York, I suppose. Direct to me at Graham's, 18, Sackville Street, Piccadilly." From a letter recently published by Mr. W. M. Rossetti (the University Magazine, Feb., 1878), we further learn that Harriet, having fallen violently in love with her preceptor, had avowed her passion and flung herself into his arms.

It is clear from these documents, first, that Shelley was not deeply in love with Harriet when he eloped with her; secondly, that he was not prepared for the step; thirdly, that she induced him to take it; and fourthly, that he took it under a strong impression of her having been ill-treated. She had appealed to his most powerful passion,

the hatred of tyranny. She had excited his admiration by setting conventions at defiance, and showing her readiness to be his mistress. Her confidence called forth his gratitude. Her choice of him for a protector flattered him: and, moreover, she had acted on his advice to carry resistance *à outrance*. There were many good Shelleyan reasons why he should elope with Harriet; but among them all I do not find that spontaneous and unsophisticated feeling, which is the substance of enduring love.

In the same series of letters, so incoherently jumbled together by Hogg's carelessness or caprice, Shelley more than once expresses the utmost horror of matrimony. Yet we now find him upon the verge of contracting marriage with a woman whom he did not passionately love, and who had offered herself unreservedly to him. It is worth pausing to observe that even Shelley, fearless and uncompromising as he was in conduct, could not at this crisis practise the principles he so eloquently impressed on others. Yet the point of weakness was honourable. It lay in his respect for women in general, and in his tender chivalry for the one woman who had cast herself upon his generosity.[1]

"My unfortunate friend Harriet," he writes under date Aug. 15, 1811, from London, whither he had hurried to arrange the affairs of his elopement, "is yet undecided; not with respect to me, but to herself. How much, my dear friend, have I to tell you. In my leisure moments for thought, which since I wrote have been few, I have considered the important point on which you reprobated my hasty decision. The ties of love and honour are doubtless of sufficient strength to bind congenial souls—

[1] See Shelley's third letter to Godwin (Hogg, ii. p. 63) for another defence of his conduct. "We agreed," &c.

they are doubtless indissoluble, but by the brutish force of power; they are delicate and satisfactory. Yet the arguments of impracticability, and what is even worse, the disproportionate sacrifice which the female is called upon to make—these arguments, which you have urged in a manner immediately irresistible, I cannot withstand. Not that I suppose it to be likely that *I* shall directly be called upon to evince my attachment to either theory. I am become a perfect convert to matrimony, not from temporizing, but from *your* arguments; nor, much as I wish to emulate your virtues and liken myself to you, do I regret the prejudices of anti-matrimonialism from your example or assertion. No. The *one* argument, which you have urged so often with so much energy; the sacrifice made by the woman, so disproportioned to any which the man can give—this alone may exculpate me, were it a fault, from uninquiring submission to your superior intellect."

Whether Shelley from his own peculiar point of view was morally justified in twice marrying, is a question of casuistry which has often haunted me. The reasons he alleged in extenuation of his conduct with regard to Harriet, prove the goodness of his heart, his openness to argument, and the delicacy of his unselfishness. But they do not square with his expressed code of conduct; nor is it easy to understand how, having found it needful to submit to custom, for his partner's sake, he should have gone on denouncing an institution which he recognized in his own practice. The conclusion seems to be that, though he despised accepted usage, and would fain have fashioned the world afresh to suit his heart's desire, the instincts of a loyal gentleman and his practical good sense were stronger than his theories.

A letter from Shelley's cousin, Mr. C. H. Grove, gives

the details of Harriet's elopement. "When Bysshe finally came to town to elope with Miss Westbrook, he came as usual to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and I was his companion on his visits to her, and finally accompanied them early one morning—I forget now the month, or the date, but it might have been September—in a hackney coach to the Green Dragon, in Gracechurch Street, where we remained all day, till the hour when the mail-coaches start, when they departed in the northern mail for York." From York the young couple made their way at once to Edinburgh, where they were married according to the formalities of the Scotch law.

Shelley had now committed that greatest of social crimes in his father's eyes—a *mésalliance*. Supplies and communications were at once cut off from the prodigal; and it appears that Harriet and he were mainly dependent upon the generosity of Captain Pilfold for subsistence. Even Jew Westbrook, much as he may have rejoiced at seeing his daughter wedded to the heir of several thousands a year, buttoned up his pockets, either because he thought it well to play the part of an injured parent, or because he was not certain about Shelley's expectations. He afterwards made the Shelleys an allowance of 200*l.* a year, and early in 1812 Shelley says that he is in receipt of twice that income. Whence we may conclude that both fathers before long relented to the extent of the sum above mentioned.

In spite of temporary impecuniosity, the young people lived happily enough in excellent lodgings in George Street. Hogg, who joined them early in September, has drawn a lively picture of their domesticity. Much of the day was spent in reading aloud; for Harriet, who had a fine voice and excellent lungs, was never happy unless she

was allowed to read and comment on her favourite authors. Shelley sometimes fell asleep during the performance of these rites; but when he woke refreshed with slumber, he was no less ready than at Oxford to support philosophical paradoxes with impassioned and persuasive eloquence. He began to teach Harriet Latin, set her to work upon the translation of a French story by Madame Cottin, and for his own part executed a version of one of Buffon's treatises. The sitting-room was full of books. It was one of Shelley's peculiarities to buy books wherever he went, regardless of their volume or their cost. These he was wont to leave behind, when the moment arrived for a sudden departure from his temporary abode; so that, as Hogg remarks, a fine library might have been formed from the waifs and strays of his collections scattered over the three kingdoms. This quiet course of life was diversified by short rambles in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, and by many episodes related with Hogg's caustic humour. On the whole, the impression left upon the reader's mind is that Shelley and Harriet were very happy together at this period, and that Harriet was a charming and sweet-tempered girl, somewhat too much given to the study of trite ethics, and slightly deficient in sensibility, but otherwise a fit and soothing companion for the poet.

They were not, however, content to remain in Edinburgh. Hogg was obliged to leave that city, in order to resume his law studies at York, and Shelley's programme of life at this period imperatively required the society of his chosen comrade. It was therefore decided that the three friends should settle at York, to remain "for ever" in each other's company. They started in a post-chaise, the good Harriet reading aloud novels by the now forgotten Holcroft with untiring energy, to charm the tedium

of the journey. At York more than one cloud obscured their triune felicity. In the first place they were unfortunate in their choice of lodgings. In the second Shelley found himself obliged to take an expensive journey to London, in the fruitless attempt to come to some terms with his father's lawyer, Mr. Whitton. Mr. Timothy Shelley was anxious to bind his erratic son down to a settlement of the estates, which, on his own death, would pass into the poet's absolute control. He suggested numerous arrangements; and not long after the date of Shelley's residence in York, he proposed to make him an immediate allowance of 2000*l.*, if Shelley would but consent to entail the land on his heirs male. This offer was indignantly refused. Shelley recognized the truth that property is a trust far more than a possession, and would do nothing to tie up so much command over labour, such incalculable potentialities of social good or evil, for an unborn being of whose opinions he knew nothing. This is only one among many instances of his readiness to sacrifice ease, comfort, nay, the bare necessities of life, for principle.

On his return to York, Shelley found a new inmate established in their lodgings. The incomparable Eliza, who was henceforth doomed to guide his destinies to an obscure catastrophe, had arrived from London. Harriet believed her sister to be a paragon of beauty, good sense, and propriety. She obeyed her elder sister like a mother; never questioned her wisdom; and foolishly allowed her to interpose between herself and her husband. Hogg had been told before her first appearance in the friendly circle that Eliza was "beautiful, exquisitely beautiful; an elegant figure, full of grace; her face was lovely,—dark, bright eyes; jet-black hair, glossy; a crop upon which she bestowed the care it merited,—almost all her time; and she

was so sensible, so amiable, so good!" Now let us listen to the account he has himself transmitted of this woman, whom certainly he did not love, and to whom poor Shelley had afterwards but little reason to feel gratitude. "She was older than I had expected, and she looked much older than she was. The lovely face was seamed with the small-pox, and of a dead white, as faces so much marked and scarred commonly are; as white indeed as a mass of boiled rice, but of a dingy hue, like rice boiled in dirty water. The eyes were dark, but dull, and without meaning; the hair was black and glossy, but coarse; and there was the admired crop—a long crop, much like the tail of a horse—a switch tail. The fine figure was meagre, prim, and constrained. The beauty, the grace, and the elegance existed, no doubt, in their utmost perfection, but only in the imagination of her partial young sister. Her father, as Harriet told me, was familiarly called 'Jew Westbrook,' and Eliza greatly resembled one of the dark-eyed daughters of Judah."

This portrait is drawn, no doubt, with an unfriendly hand; and, in Hogg's biography, each of its sarcastic touches is sustained with merciless reiteration, whenever the mention of Eliza's name is necessary. We hear, moreover, how she taught the blooming Harriet to fancy that she was the victim of her nerves, how she checked her favourite studies, and how she ruled the household by continual reference to a Mrs. Grundy of her earlier experience. "What would Miss Warne say?" was as often on her lips, if we may credit Hogg, as the brush and comb were in her hands.

The intrusion of Eliza disturbed the harmony of Shelley's circle; but it is possible that there were deeper reasons for the abrupt departure which he made from York

with his wife and her sister in November, 1811. One of his biographers asserts with categorical precision that Shelley had good cause to resent Hogg's undue familiarity with Harriet, and refers to a curious composition, published by Hogg as a continuation of Goethe's *Werther*, but believed by Mr. McCarthy to have been a letter from the poet to his friend, in confirmation of his opinion.[1] However this may be, the precipitation with which the Shelleys quitted York, scarcely giving Hogg notice of their resolution, is insufficiently accounted for in his biography.

The destination of the travellers was Keswick. Here they engaged lodgings for a time, and then moved into a furnished house. Probably Shelley was attracted to the lake country as much by the celebrated men who lived there, as by the beauty of its scenery, and the cheapness of its accommodation. He had long entertained an admiration for Southey's poetry, and was now beginning to study Wordsworth and Coleridge. But if he hoped for much companionship with the literary lions of the lakes, he was disappointed. Coleridge was absent, and missed making his acquaintance — a circumstance he afterwards regretted, saying that he could have been more useful to the young poet and metaphysician than Southey. De Quincey, though he writes ambiguously upon this point, does not seem to have met Shelley. Wordsworth paid him no attention; and though he saw a good deal of Southey, this intimacy changed Shelley's early liking for the man and poet into absolute contempt. It was not likely that the cold methodical student, the mechanical versifier, and the political turncoat, who had outlived all his earlier illusions, should retain the good-will of such an Ariel as Shelley, in whose brain *Queen Mab* was already

[1] McCarthy's Shelley's Early Life, p. 117.

simmering. Life at Keswick began to be monotonous. It was, however, enlivened by a visit to the Duke of Norfolk's seat, Greystoke. Shelley spent his last guinea on the trip; but though the ladies of his family enjoyed the honour of some days passed in ducal hospitalities, the visit was not fruitful of results. The Duke at this time kindly did his best, but without success, to bring about a reconciliation between his old friend, the member for Horsham, and his rebellious son.

Another important incident of the Keswick residence was Shelley's letter to William Godwin, whose work on Political Justice he had studied with unbounded admiration. He never spoke of this book without respect in after-life, affirming that the perusal of it had turned his attention from romances to questions of public utility. The earliest letter dated to Godwin from Keswick, January 3, 1812, is in many respects remarkable, and not the least so as a specimen of self-delineation. He entreats Godwin to become his guide, philosopher, and friend, urging that "if desire for universal happiness has any claim upon your preference," if persecution and injustice suffered in the cause of philanthropy and truth may commend a young man to William Godwin's regard, he is not unworthy of this honour. We who have learned to know the flawless purity of Shelley's aspirations, can refrain from smiling at the big generalities of this epistle. Words which to men made callous by long contact with the world, ring false and wake suspicion, were for Shelley but the natural expression of his most abiding mood. Yet Godwin may be pardoned if he wished to know more in detail of the youth, who sought to cast himself upon his care in all the panoply of phrases about philanthropy and universal happiness. Shelley's second letter contains an extraordinary

mixture of truth willingly communicated, and of curious romance, illustrating his tendency to colour facts with the hallucinations of an ardent fancy. Of his sincerity there is, I think, no doubt. He really meant what he wrote; and yet we have no reason to believe the statement that he was twice expelled from Eton for disseminating the doctrines of *Political Justice*, or that his father wished to drive him by poverty to accept a commission in some distant regiment, in order that he might prosecute the *Necessity of Atheism* in his absence, procure a sentence of outlawry, and so convey the family estates to his younger brother. The embroidery of bare fact with a tissue of imagination was a peculiarity of Shelley's mind; and this letter may be used as a key for the explanation of many strange occurrences in his biography. What he tells Godwin about his want of love for his father, and his inability to learn from the tutors imposed upon him at Eton and Oxford, represents the simple truth. Only from teachers chosen by himself, and recognized as his superiors by his own deliberate judgment, can he receive instruction. To Godwin he resigns himself with the implicit confidence of admiration. Godwin was greatly struck with this letter. Indeed, he must have been "or God or beast," like the insensible man in Aristotle's *Ethics*, if he could have resisted the devotion of so splendid and high-spirited a nature, poured forth in language at once so vehement and so convincingly sincere. He accepted the responsible post of Shelley's Mentor; and thus began a connexion which proved not only a source of moral support and intellectual guidance to the poet, but was also destined to end in a closer personal tie between the two illustrious men.

In his second letter Shelley told Godwin that he was

then engaged in writing "An inquiry into the causes of the failure of the French Revolution to benefit mankind," adding, "My plan is that of resolving to lose no opportunity to disseminate truth and happiness." Godwin sensibly replied that Shelley was too young to set himself up as a teacher and apostle: but his pupil did not take the hint. A third letter (Jan. 16, 1812) contains this startling announcement: "In a few days we set off to Dublin. I do not know exactly where, but a letter addressed to Keswick will find me. Our journey has been settled some time. We go principally *to forward as much as we can* the Catholic Emancipation." In a fourth letter (Jan. 28, 1812) he informs Godwin that he has already prepared an address to the Catholics of Ireland, and combats the dissuasions of his counsellor with ingenious arguments to prove that his contemplated expedition can do no harm, and may be fruitful of great good.

It appears that for some time past Shelley had devoted his attention to Irish politics. The persecution of Mr. Peter Finnerty, an Irish journalist and editor of *The Press* newspaper, who had been sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in Lincoln jail (between Feb. 7, 1811, and Aug. 7, 1812) for plain speech about Lord Castlereagh, roused his hottest indignation. He published a poem, as yet unrecovered, for his benefit; the proceeds of the sale amounting, it is said, to nearly one hundred pounds.[1] The young enthusiast, who was attempting a philosophic study of the French Revolution, whose heart was glowing with universal philanthropy, and who burned to disseminate truth and happiness, judged that Ireland would be a fitting field for making a first experiment in practical politics. Armed with the MS. of his *Address to the Irish*

[1] McCarthy, p. 255.

People,[1] he set sail with Harriet and Eliza on the 3rd of February from Whitehaven. They touched the Isle of Man; and after a very stormy passage, which drove them to the north coast of Ireland, and forced them to complete their journey by land, the party reached Dublin travel-worn, but with unabated spirit, on the 12th. Harriet shared her husband's philanthropical enthusiasm. "My wife," wrote Shelley to Godwin, "is the partner of my thoughts and feelings." Indeed, there is abundant proof in both his letters and hers, about this period, that they felt and worked together. Miss Westbrook, meantime, ruled the household; "Eliza keeps our common stock of money for safety in some nook or corner of her dress, but we are not dependent on her, although she gives it out as we want it." This master-touch of unconscious delineation tells us all we need to know about the domestic party now established in 7, Lower Sackville Street. Before a week had passed, the *Address to the Irish People* had been printed. Shelley and Harriet immediately engaged their whole energies in the task of distribution. It was advertised for sale; but that alone seemed insufficient. On the 27th of February Shelley wrote to a friend in England: "I have already sent 400 of my Irish pamphlets into the world, and they have excited a sensation of wonder in Dublin. Eleven hundred yet remain for distribution. Copies have been sent to sixty public-houses. . . . Expectation is on the tiptoe. I send a man out every day to distribute copies, with instructions where and how to give them. His account corresponds with the multitudes of people who possess them. I stand at the balcony of our window and watch till I see a man *who looks likely*. I throw a book to him."

[1] It was published in Dublin. See reprint in McCarthy, p. 179.

A postscript to this letter lets us see the propaganda from Harriet's point of view. "I am sure you would laugh were you to see us give the pamphlets. We throw them out of window, and give them to men that we pass in the streets. For myself, I am ready to die of laughter when it is done, and Percy looks so grave. Yesterday he put one into a woman's hood of a cloak."

The purpose of this address was to rouse the Irish people to a sense of their real misery, to point out that Catholic Emancipation and a Repeal of the Union Act were the only radical remedies for their wrongs, and to teach them the spirit in which they should attempt a revolution. On the last point Shelley felt intensely. The whole address aims at the inculcation of a noble moral temper, tolerant, peaceful, resolute, rational, and self-denying. Considered as a treatise on the principles which should govern patriots during a great national crisis, the document is admirable: and if the inhabitants of Dublin had been a population of Shelleys, its effect might have been permanent and overwhelming. The mistake lay in supposing that a people whom the poet himself described as "of scarcely greater elevation in the scale of intellectual being than the oyster," were qualified to take the remedy of their grievances into their own hands, or were amenable to such sound reasoning as he poured forth. He told Godwin that he had "wilfully vulgarized the language of this pamphlet, in order to reduce the remarks it contains to the taste and comprehension of the Irish peasantry." A few extracts will enable the reader to judge how far he had succeeded in this aim. I select such as seem to me most valuable for the light they throw upon his own opinions. "All religions are good which make men good; and the way that a person ought to prove that his method

of worshipping God is best, is for himself to be better than all other men." "A Protestant is my brother, and a Catholic is my brother." "Do not inquire if a man be a heretic, if he be a Quaker, a Jew, or a heathen; but if he be a virtuous man, if he loves liberty and truth, if he wish the happiness and peace of human kind. If a man be ever so much a believer and love not these things, he is a heartless hypocrite, a rascal, and a knave." "It is not a merit to tolerate, but it is a crime to be intolerant." "Anything short of unlimited toleration and complete charity with all men, on which you will recollect that Jesus Christ principally insisted, is wrong." "Be calm, mild, deliberate, patient. . . . . Think and talk and discuss. . . . . Be free and be happy, but first be wise and good." Proceeding to recommend the formation of associations, he condemns secret and violent societies; "Be fair, open, and you will be terrible to your enemies." "Habits of SOBRIETY, REGULARITY, and THOUGHT must be entered into and firmly resolved upon." Then follow precepts, which Shelley no doubt regarded as practical, for the purification of private morals, and the regulation of public discussion by the masses whom he elsewhere recognized as "thousands huddled together, one mass of animated filth."

The foregoing extracts show that Shelley was in no sense an inflammatory demagogue; however visionary may have been the hopes he indulged, he based those hopes upon the still more Utopian foundation of a sudden ethical reform, and preached a revolution without bloodshed. We find in them, moreover, the germs of *The Revolt of Islam*, where the hero plays the part successfully in fiction, which the poet had attempted without appreciable result in practice at Dublin. The same principles guided Shelley at a still later period. When he wrote his

Masque of Anarchy, he bade the people of England to assemble by thousands, strong in the truth and justice of their cause, invincible in peaceful opposition to force.

While he was sowing his Address broadcast in the streets of Dublin, Shelley was engaged in printing a second pamphlet on the subject of Catholic Emancipation. It was entitled *Proposals for an Association*, and advocated in serious and temperate phrase the formation of a vast society, binding all the Catholic patriots of Ireland together, for the recovery of their rights. In estimating Shelley's political sagacity, it must be remembered that Catholic Emancipation has since his day been brought about by the very measure he proposed and under the conditions he foresaw. Speaking of the English Government in his Address, he used these simple phrases:—"It wants altering and mending. It will be mended, and a reform of English Government will produce good to the Irish." These sentences were prophetic; and perhaps they are destined to be even more so.

With a view to presenting at one glance Shelley's position as a practical politician, I shall anticipate the course of a few years, and compare his Irish pamphlets with an essay published in 1817, under the title of *A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom*. He saw that the House of Commons did not represent the country; and acting upon his principle that government is the servant of the governed, he sought means for ascertaining the real will of the nation with regard to its Parliament, and for bringing the collective opinion of the population to bear upon its rulers. The plan proposed was that a huge network of committees should be formed, and that by their means every individual man should be canvassed. We find here the same method of advancing

reform by peaceable associations as in Ireland. How moderate were his own opinions with regard to the franchise, is proved by the following sentence:—"With respect to Universal Suffrage, I confess I consider its adoption, in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling, a measure fraught with peril. I think that none but those who register their names as paying a certain small sum in *direct taxes* ought at present to send members to Parliament." As in the case of Ireland, so in that of England, subsequent events have shown that Shelley's hopes were not exaggerated.

While the Shelleys were in Dublin, a meeting of the Irish Catholics was announced for the evening of Feb. 28. It was held in Fishamble Street Theatre; and here Shelley made his *début* as an orator. He spoke for about an hour; and his speech was, on the whole, well received, though it raised some hisses at the beginning by his remarks upon Roman Catholicism. There is no proof that Shelley, though eloquent in conversation, was a powerful public speaker. The somewhat conflicting accounts we have received of this, his maiden effort, tend to the impression that he failed to carry his audience with him. The dissemination of his pamphlets had, however, raised considerable interest in his favour; and he was welcomed by the press as an Englishman of birth and fortune, who wished well to the Irish cause. His youth told somewhat against him. It was difficult to take the strong words of the beardless boy at their real value; and as though to aggravate this drawback, his Irish servant, Daniel Hill, an efficient agent in the dissemination of the Address, affirmed that his master was fifteen—four years less than his real age.

In Dublin Shelley made acquaintance with Curran,

whose jokes and dirty stories he could not appreciate, and with a Mr. Lawless, who began a history of the Irish people in concert with the young philosopher. We also obtain, from one of Harriet's letters, a somewhat humorous peep at another of their friends, a patriotic Mrs. Nugent, who supported herself by working in a furrier's shop, and who is described as "sitting in the room now, and talking to Percy about Virtue." After less than two months' experience of his Irish propaganda, Shelley came to the conclusion that he "had done all that he could." The population of Dublin had not risen to the appeal of their Laon with the rapidity he hoped for; and accordingly upon the 7th of April he once more embarked with his family for Holyhead. In after-days he used to hint that the police had given him warning that it would be well for him to leave Dublin; but, though the danger of a prosecution was not wholly visionary, this intimation does not seem to have been made. Before he quitted Ireland, however, he despatched a box containing the remaining copies of his *Address* and *Proposals*, together with the recently printed edition of another manifesto, called a *Declaration of Rights*, to a friend in Sussex. This box was delayed at the Holyhead custom-house, and opened. Its contents gave serious anxiety to the Surveyor of Customs, who communicated the astonishing discovery through the proper official channels to the government. After some correspondence, the authorities decided to take no steps against Shelley, and the box was forwarded to its destination.

The friend in question was a Miss Eliza Hitchener, of Hurstpierpoint, who kept a sort of school, and who had attracted Shelley's favourable notice by her advanced political and religious opinions. He does not seem to have

made her personal acquaintance; but some of his most interesting letters from Ireland are addressed to her. How recklessly he entered into serious entanglements with people whom he had not learned to know, may be gathered from these extracts:—"We will meet you in Wales, and never part again. It will not do. In compliance with Harriet's earnest solicitations, I entreated you instantly to come and join our circle, resign your school, all, everything for us and the Irish cause." "I ought to count myself a favoured mortal with such a wife and such a friend." Harriet addressed this lady as "Portia;" and it is an undoubted fact that soon after their return to England, Miss Hitchener formed one of their permanent family circle. Her entrance into it and her exit from it at no very distant period are, however, both obscure. Before long she acquired another name than Portia in the Shelley household, and now she is better known to fame as the "Brown Demon." Eliza Westbrook took a strong dislike to her; Harriet followed suit; and Shelley himself found that he had liked her better at a distance than in close companionship. She had at last to be bought off or bribed to leave.

The scene now shifts with bewildering frequency; nor is it easy to trace the Shelleys in their rapid flight. About the 21st of April, they settled for a short time at Nantgwilt, near Rhayader, in North Wales. Ere long we find them at Lynmouth, on the Somersetshire coast. Here Shelley continued his political propaganda, by circulating the *Declaration of Rights*, whereof mention has already been made. It was, as Mr. W. M. Rossetti first pointed out, a manifesto concerning the ends of government and the rights of man,—framed in imitation of two similar French Revolutionary documents, issued by the Constituent Assembly in August, 1789, and by Robespierre in

April, 1793.[1] Shelley used to seal this pamphlet in bottles and set it afloat upon the sea, hoping perhaps that after this wise it would traverse St. George's Channel and reach the sacred soil of Erin. He also employed his servant, Daniel Hill, to distribute it among the Somersetshire farmers. On the 19th of August this man was arrested in the streets of Barnstaple, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for uttering a seditious pamphlet; and the remaining copies of the *Declaration of Rights* were destroyed. In strong contrast with the puerility of these proceedings, is the grave and lofty *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, composed at Lynmouth, and printed at Barnstaple.[2] A printer, named D. J. Eaton, had recently been sentenced to imprisonment by his Lordship for publishing the Third Part of Paine's *Age of Reason.* Shelley's epistle is an eloquent argument in favour of toleration and the freedom of the intellect, carrying the matter beyond the instance of legal tyranny which occasioned its composition, and treating it with philosophic, if impassioned seriousness.

An extract from this composition will serve to show his power of handling weighty English prose, while yet a youth of hardly twenty. I have chosen a passage bearing on his theological opinions:—

> Moral qualities are such as only a human being can possess. To attribute them to the Spirit of the Universe, or to suppose that it is capable of altering them, is to degrade God into man, and to annex to this incomprehensible Being qualities incompatible with any possible definition of his nature.
>
> It may be here objected: Ought not the Creator to possess the

[1] Reprinted in McCarthy, p. 324.

[2] Reprinted in Lady Shelley's Memorials, p. 29.

perfections of the creature? No. To attribute to God the moral qualities of man, is to suppose him susceptible of passions, which, arising out of corporeal organization, it is plain that a pure spirit cannot possess. . . . But even suppose, with the vulgar, that God is a venerable old man, seated on a throne of clouds, his breast the theatre of various passions, analogous to those of humanity, his will changeable and uncertain as that of an earthly king; still, goodness and justice are qualities seldom nominally denied him, and it will be admitted that he disapproves of any action incompatible with those qualities. Persecution for opinion is unjust. With what consistency, then, can the worshippers of a Deity whose benevolence they boast, embitter the existence of their fellow-being, because his ideas of that Deity are different from those which they entertain? Alas! there is no consistency in those persecutors who worship a benevolent Deity; those who worship a demon would alone act consonantly to these principles by imprisoning and torturing in his name.

Shelley had more than once urged Godwin and his family to visit him. The sage of Skinner Street thought that now was a convenient season. Accordingly he left London, and travelled by coach to Lynmouth, where he found that the Shelleys had flitted a few days previously without giving any notice. This fruitless journey of the poet's Mentor is humorously described by Hogg, as well as one undertaken by himself in the following year to Dublin with a similar result. The Shelleys were now established at Tan-yr-allt, near Tremadoc, in North Wales, on an estate belonging to Mr. W. A. Madocks, M.P. for Boston. This gentleman had reclaimed a considerable extent of marshy ground from the sea, and protected it with an embankment. Shelley, whose interest in the poor people around him was always keen and practical, lost no time in making their acquaintance at Tremadoc. The work of utility carried out by his landlord aroused his enthusiastic admiration; and when the embankment was emperilled by a heavy sea, he got up a subscription for its

preservation. Heading the list with 500*l.*, how raised, or whether paid, we know not, he endeavoured to extract similar sums from the neighbouring gentry, and even ran up with Harriet to London to use his influence for the same purpose with the Duke of Norfolk. On this occasion he made the personal acquaintance of the Godwin family.

Life at Tanyrallt was smooth and studious, except for the diversion caused by the peril to the embankment. We hear of Harriet continuing her Latin studies, reading Odes of Horace, and projecting an epistle in that language to Hogg. Shelley, as usual, collected many books around him. There are letters extant in which he writes to London for Spinoza and Kant, Plato, and the works of the chief Greek historians. It appears that at this period, under the influence of Godwin, he attempted to conquer a strong natural dislike for history. "I am determined to apply myself to a study which is hateful and disgusting to my very soul, but which is above all studies necessary for him who would be listened to as a mender of antiquated abuses,—I mean, that record of crimes and miseries—history." Although he may have made an effort to apply himself to historical reading, he was not successful. His true bias inclined him to metaphysics colored by a glowing fancy, and to poetry penetrated with speculative enthusiasm. In the historic sense he was deficient; and when he made a serious effort at a later period to compose a tragedy upon the death of Charles I., this work was taken up with reluctance, continued with effort, and finally abandoned.

In the same letters he speaks about a collection of short poems on which he was engaged, and makes frequent allusions to *Queen Mab*. It appears from his own assertion, and from Medwin's biography, that a poem on Queen

Mab had been projected and partially written by him at the early age of eighteen. But it was not taken seriously in hand until the spring of 1812; nor was it finished and printed before 1813. The first impression was a private issue of 250 copies, on fine paper, which Shelley distributed to people whom he wished to influence. It was pirated soon after its appearance, and again in 1821 it was given to the public by a bookseller named Clarke. Against the latter republication Shelley energetically protested, disclaiming in a letter addressed to *The Examiner*, from Pisa, June 22, 1821, any interest in a production which he had not even seen for several years. "I doubt not but that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature. I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression; and I regret this publication, not so much from literary vanity as because I fear it is better fitted to injure than to serve the sacred cause of freedom." This judgment is undoubtedly severe; but, though exaggerated in its condemnation, it, like all Shelley's criticisms on his own works, expresses the truth. We cannot include *Queen Mab*, in spite of its sonorous rhetoric and fervid declamation, in the canon of his masterpieces. It had a *succès de scandale* on its first appearance, and fatally injured Shelley's reputation. As a work of art it lacks maturity and permanent vitality.

The Shelleys were suddenly driven away from Tanyrallt by a mysterious occurrence, of which no satisfactory explanation has yet been given. According to letters written by himself and Harriet soon after the event, and confirmed by the testimony of Eliza, Shelley was twice

attacked upon the night of Feb. 24 by an armed ruffian, with whom he struggled in a hand-to-hand combat. Pistols were fired and windows broken, and Shelley's night-gown was shot through: but the assassin made his escape from the house without being recognized. His motive and his personality still remain matters of conjecture. Whether the whole affair was a figment of Shelly's brain, rendered more than usually susceptible by laudanum taken to assuage intense physical pain; whether it was a perilous hoax played upon him by the Irish servant, Daniel Hill; or whether, as he himself surmised, the crime was instigated by an unfriendly neighbour, it is impossible to say. Strange adventures of this kind, blending fact and fancy in a now inextricable tangle, are of no unfrequent occurrence in Shelley's biography. In estimating the relative proportions of the two factors in this case, it must be borne in mind, on the one hand, that no one but Shelley, who was alone in the parlour, and who for some unexplained reason had loaded his pistols on the evening before the alleged assault, professed to have seen the villain; and, on the other, that the details furnished by Harriet, and confirmed at a subsequent period by so hostile a witness as Eliza, are too circumstantial to be lightly set aside.

On the whole it appears most probable that Shelley on this night was the subject of a powerful hallucination. The theory of his enemies at Tanyrallt, that the story had been invented to facilitate his escape from the neighbourhood without paying his bills, may be dismissed. But no investigation on the spot could throw any clear light on the circumstance, and Shelley's friends, Hogg, Peacock, and Mr. Madocks, concurred in regarding the affair as a delusion.

There was no money in the common purse of the Shel-

leys at this moment. In their distress they applied to Mr. T. Hookham, a London publisher, who sent them enough to carry them across the Irish Channel. After a short residence in 35, Cuffe Street, Dublin, and a flying visit to Killarney, they returned to London. Eliza, for some reason as unexplained as the whole episode of this second visit to Ireland, was left behind for a short season. The flight from Tanyrallt closes the first important period of Shelley's life; and his settlement in London marks the beginning of another, fruitful of the gravest consequences and decisive of his future.

CHAPTER IV.

SECOND RESIDENCE IN LONDON, AND SEPARATION FROM HARRIET.

EARLY in May the Shelleys arrived in London, where they were soon joined by Eliza, from whose increasingly irksome companionship the poet had recently enjoyed a few weeks' respite. After living for a short while in hotels, they took lodgings in Half Moon Street. The house had a projecting window, where the poet loved to sit with book in hand, and catch, according to his custom, the maximum of sunlight granted by a chary English summer. "He wanted," said one of his female admirers, "only a pan of clear water and a fresh turf to look like some young lady's lark, hanging outside for air and song." According to Hogg, this period of London life was a pleasant and tranquil episode in Shelley's troubled career. His room was full of books, among which works of German metaphysics occupied a prominent place, though they were not deeply studied. He was now learning Italian, and made his first acquaintance with Tasso, Ariosto, and Petrarch.

The habits of the household were, to say the least, irregular; for Shelley took no thought of sublunary matters, and Harriet was an indifferent housekeeper. Dinner seems to have come to them less by forethought than by

the operation of divine chance; and when there was no meat provided for the entertainment of casual guests, the table was supplied with buns, procured by Shelley from the nearest pastry-cook. He had already abjured animal food and alcohol; and his favourite diet consisted of pulse or bread, which he ate dry with water, or made into panada. Hogg relates how, when he was walking in the streets and felt hungry, he would dive into a baker's shop and emerge with a loaf tucked under his arm. This he consumed as he went along, very often reading at the same time, and dodging the foot-passengers with the rapidity of movement which distinguished him. He could not comprehend how any man should want more than bread. "I have dropped a word, a hint," says Hogg, "about a pudding; a pudding, Bysshe said dogmatically, is a prejudice." This indifference to diet was highly characteristic of Shelley. During the last years of his life, even when he was suffering from the frequent attacks of a painful disorder, he took no heed of food; and his friend, Trelawny, attributes the derangement of his health, in a great measure, to this carelessness. Mrs. Shelley used to send him something to eat into the room where he habitually studied; but the plate frequently remained untouched for hours upon a bookshelf, and at the end of the day he might be heard asking, "Mary, have I dined?" His dress was no less simple than his diet. Hogg says that he never saw him in a great coat, and that his collar was unbuttoned to let the air play freely on his throat. "In the street or road he reluctantly wore a hat; but in fields and gardens, his little round head had no other covering than his long, wild, ragged locks." Shelley's head, as is well known, was remarkably small and round; he used to plunge it several times a day in cold water, and expose it

recklessly to the intensest heat of fire or sun. Mrs. Shelley relates that a great part of the *Cenci* was written on their house-roof near Leghorn, where Shelley lay exposed to the unmitigated ardour of Italian summer heat; and Hogg describes him reading Homer by a blazing fire-light, or roasting his skull upon the hearth-rug by the hour.

These personal details cannot be omitted by the biographer of such a man as Shelley. He was an elemental and primeval creature, as little subject to the laws of custom in his habits as in his modes of thought, living literally as the spirit moved him, with a natural nonchalance that has perhaps been never surpassed. To time and place he was equally indifferent, and could not be got to remember his engagements. "He took strange caprices, unfounded frights and dislikes, vain apprehensions and panic terrors, and therefore he absented himself from formal and sacred engagements. He was unconscious and oblivious of times, places, persons, and seasons; and falling into some poetic vision, some day-dream, he quickly and completely forgot all that he had repeatedly and solemnly promised; or he ran away after some object of imaginary urgency and importance, which suddenly came into his head, setting off in vain pursuit of it, he knew not whither. When he was caught, brought up in custody, and turned over to the ladies, with, Behold, your King! to be caressed, courted, admired, and flattered, the king of beauty and fancy would too commonly bolt; slip away, steal out, creep off; unobserved and almost magically he vanished; thus mysteriously depriving his fair subjects of his much-coveted, long looked-for company." If he had been fairly caged and found himself in congenial company, he let time pass unheeded, sitting up all night to talk, and chaining his audience by the spell of his unrivalled eloquence; for won-

derful as was his poetry, those who enjoyed the privilege of converse with him, judged it even more attractive. "He was commonly most communicative, unreserved, and eloquent, and enthusiastic, when those around him were inclining to yield to the influence of sleep, or rather at the hour when they would have been disposed to seek their chambers, but for the bewitching charms of his discourse."

From Half Moon Street the Shelleys moved into a house in Pimlico; and it was here, according to Hogg, or at Cooke's Hotel in Dover Street according to other accounts, that Shelley's first child, Ianthe Eliza, was born about the end of June, 1813. Harriet did not take much to her little girl, and gave her over to a wet-nurse, for whom Shelley conceived a great dislike. That a mother should not nurse her own baby was no doubt contrary to his principles; and the double presence of the servant and Eliza, whom he now most cordially detested, made his home uncomfortable. We have it on excellent authority, that of Mr. Peacock, that he "was extremely fond of it (the child), and would walk up and down a room with it in his arms for a long time together, singing to it a song of his own making, which ran on the repetition of a word of his own coining. His song was Yáhmani, Yáhmani, Yáhmani, Yáhmani." To the want of sympathy between the father and the mother in this matter of Ianthe, Mr. Peacock is inclined to attribute the beginning of troubles in the Shelley household. There is, indeed, no doubt that the revelation of Harriet's maternal coldness must have been extremely painful to her husband; and how far she carried her insensibility, may be gathered from a story told by Hogg about her conduct during an operation performed upon the child.

During this period of his sojourn in London, Shelley

was again in some pecuniary difficulties. Yet he indulged Harriet's vanity by setting up a carriage, in which they afterwards took a hurried journey to Edinburgh and back. He narrowly escaped a debtor's prison through this act of extravagance, and by a somewhat ludicrous mistake Hogg was arrested for the debt due to the coach-maker. His acquaintances were few and scattered, and he saw nothing of his family. Gradually, however, he seems to have become a kind of prophet in a coterie of learned ladies. The views he had propounded in *Queen Mab*, his passionate belief in the perfectibility of man, his vegetarian doctrines, and his readiness to adopt any new nostrum for the amelioration of the race, endeared him to all manners of strange people; nor was he deterred by aristocratic prejudices from frequenting society which proved extremely uncongenial to Hogg, and of which we have accordingly some caustic sketches from his pen. His chief friends were a Mrs. Boinville, for whom he conceived an enthusiastic admiration, and her daughter Cornelia, married to a vegetarian, Mr. Newton. In order to be near them he had moved to Pimlico; and his next move, from London to a cottage named High Elms, at Bracknell, in Berkshire, had the same object. With Godwin and his family he was also on terms of familiar intercourse. Under the philosopher's roof in Skinner Street there was now gathered a group of miscellaneous inmates—Fanny Imlay, the daughter of his first wife, Mary Wollstonecraft; Mary, his own daughter by the same marriage; his second wife, and her two children, Claire and Charles Clairmont, the offspring of a previous union. From this connexion with the Godwin household events of the gravest importance in the future were destined to arise, and already it appears that Fanny Imlay had begun to look with perilous approval on the fasci-

nating poet. Hogg and Mr. Peacock, the well-known novelist, described by Mrs. Newton as "a cold scholar, who, I think, has neither taste nor feeling," were his only intimates.

Mrs. Newton's unfair judgment of Mr. Peacock marks a discord between the two chief elements of Shelley's present society; and indeed it will appear to a careful student of his biography that Hogg, Peacock, and Harriet, now stood somewhat by themselves and aloof from the inner circle of his associates. If we regard the Shelleys as the centre of an extended line, we shall find the Westbrook family at one end, the Boinville family at the other, with Hogg and Peacock somewhere in the middle. Harriet was naturally drawn to the Westbrook extremity, and Shelley to the Boinville. Peacock had no affinity for either, but a sincere regard for Harriet as well as for her husband; while Hogg was in much the same position, except that he had made friends with Mrs. Newton. The Godwins, of great importance to Shelley himself, exercised their influence at a distance from the rest. Frequent change from Bracknell to London and back again, varied by the flying journey to Edinburgh, and a last visit paid in strictest secrecy to his mother and sisters, at Field Place, of which a very interesting record is left in the narrative of Mr. Kennedy, occupied the interval between July, 1813, and March, 1814. The period was not productive of literary masterpieces. We only hear of a *Refutation of Deism*, a dialogue between Eusebes and Theosophus, which attacked all forms of Theistic belief.

Since we are now approaching the gravest crisis in Shelley's life, it behoves us to be more than usually careful in considering his circumstances at this epoch. His home had become cold and dull. Harriet did not love her child.

and spent her time in a great measure with her Mount Street relations. Eliza was a source of continual irritation, and the Westbrook family did its best, by interference and suggestion, to refrigerate the poet's feelings for his wife. On the other hand he found among the Boinville set exactly that high-flown, enthusiastic, sentimental atmosphere which suited his idealizing temper. Two extracts from a letter written to Hogg upon the 16th of March, 1814, speak more eloquently than any analysis, and will place before the reader the antagonism which had sprung up in Shelley's mind between his own home and the circle of his new friends:—"I have been staying with Mrs. B—— for the last month; I have escaped, in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. They have revived in my heart the expiring flame of life. I have felt myself translated to a paradise, which has nothing of mortality but its transitoriness; my heart sickens at the view of that necessity, which will quickly divide me from the delightful tranquillity of this happy home,—for it has become my home. The trees, the bridge, the minutest objects, have already a place in my affections."

"Eliza is still with us—not here!—but will be with me when the infinite malice of destiny forces me to depart. I am now but little inclined to contest this point. I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul. It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little Ianthe, in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch. But she is no more than a blind and loathsome worm, that cannot see to sting."

While divided in this way between a home which had become distasteful to him, and a house where he found scope for his most romantic outpourings of sensibility, Shelley fell suddenly and passionately in love with Godwin's daughter, Mary. Peacock, who lived in close intimacy with him at this period, must deliver his testimony as to the overwhelming nature of the new attachment:—"Nothing that I ever read in tale or history could present a more striking image of a sudden, violent, irresistible, uncontrollable passion, than that under which I found him labouring when, at his request, I went up from the country to call on him in London. Between his old feelings towards Harriet, *from whom he was not then separated*, and his new passion for Mary, he showed in his looks, in his gestures, in his speech, the state of a mind 'suffering, like a little kingdom, the nature of an insurrection.' His eyes were bloodshot, his hair and dress disordered. He caught up a bottle of laudanum, and said, 'I never part from this.'"

We may therefore affirm, I think, with confidence that in the winter and spring of 1814, Shelley had been becoming gradually more and more estranged from Harriet, whose commonplace nature was no mate for his, and whom he had never loved with all the depth of his affection; that his intimacy with the Boinville family had brought into painful prominence whatever was jarring and repugnant to him in his home; and that in this crisis of his fate he had fallen in love for the first time seriously with Mary Godwin.[1] She was then a girl of sixteen, "fair and fair-haired, pale indeed, and with a piercing look," to quote Hogg's description of her, as she first appeared before him on the 8th or 9th of June, 1814. With her

[1] The date at which he first made Mary's acquaintance is uncertain. Peacock says that it was between April 18 and June 8.

freedom from prejudice, her tense and high-wrought sensibility, her acute intellect, enthusiasm for ideas, and vivid imagination, Mary Godwin was naturally a fitter companion for Shelley than the good Harriet, however beautiful.

That Shelley early in 1814 had no intention of leaving his wife, is probable; for he was re-married to her on the 24th of March, eight days after his impassioned letter to Hogg, in St. George's, Hanover Square. Harriet was pregnant, and this ratification of the Scotch marriage was no doubt intended to place the legitimacy of a possible heir beyond all question. Yet it seems, if we may found conjecture on "Stanzas, April, 1814," that in the very month after this new ceremony Shelley found the difficulties of his wedded life insuperable, and that he was already making up his mind to part from Harriet. About the middle of June the separation actually occurred—not by mutual consent, so far as any published documents throw light upon the matter, but rather by Shelley's sudden abandonment of his wife and child.[1] For a short while Harriet was left in ignorance of his abode, and with a very insufficient sum of money at her disposal. She placed herself under the protection of her father, retired to Bath, and about the beginning of July received a letter from Shelley, who was thenceforth solicitous for her welfare, keeping up a correspondence with her, supplying her with funds, and by no means shrinking from personal communications.

That Shelley must bear the responsibility of this separation seems to me quite clear. His justification is to be found in his avowed opinions on the subject of love

[1] Leigh Hunt, Autob. p. 236, and Medwin, however, both assert that it was by mutual consent. The whole question must be studied in Peacock and in Garnett, Relics of Shelley, p. 147.

and marriage — opinions which Harriet knew well and professed to share, and of which he had recently made ample confession in the notes to *Queen Mab*. The world will still agree with Lord Eldon in regarding those opinions as dangerous to society, and a blot upon the poet's character; but it would be unfair, while condemning them as frankly as he professed them, to blame him also because he did not conform to the opposite code of morals, for which he frequently expressed extreme abhorrence, and which he stigmatized, however wrongly, as the source of the worst social vices. It must be added that the Shelley family in their memorials of the poet, and through their friend, Mr. Richard Garnett, inform us, without casting any slur on Harriet, that documents are extant which will completely vindicate the poet's conduct in this matter. It is therefore but just to await their publication before pronouncing a decided judgment. Meanwhile there remains no doubt about the fact that forty days after leaving Harriet, Shelley departed from London with Mary Godwin, who had consented to share his fortunes. How he plighted his new troth, and won the hand of her who was destined to be his companion for life, may best be told in Lady Shelley's words:—

"His anguish, his isolation, his difference from other men, his gifts of genius and eloquent enthusiasm, made a deep impression on Godwin's daughter Mary, now a girl of sixteen, who had been accustomed to hear Shelley spoken of as something rare and strange. To her, as they met one eventful day in St. Pancras Churchyard, by her mother's grave, Bysshe, in burning words, poured forth the tale of his wild past—how he had suffered, how he had been misled, and how, if supported by her love, he hoped in future years to enrol his name with the wise and

good who had done battle for their fellow-men, and been true through all adverse storms to the cause of humanity. Unhesitatingly, she placed her hand in his, and linked her fortune with his own; and most truthfully, as the remaining portions of these Memorials will prove, was the pledge of both redeemed. The theories in which the daughter of the authors of *Political Justice*, and of the *Rights of Woman*, had been educated, spared her from any conflict between her duty and her affection. For she was the child of parents whose writings had had for their object to prove that marriage was one among the many institutions which a new era in the history of mankind was about to sweep away. By her father, whom she loved—by the writings of her mother, whom she had been taught to venerate—these doctrines had been rendered familiar to her mind. It was therefore natural that she should listen to the dictates of her own heart, and willingly unite her fate with one who was so worthy of her love."

Soon after her withdrawal to Bath, Harriet gave birth to Shelley's second child, Charles Bysshe, who died in 1826. She subsequently formed another connexion which proved unhappy; and on the 10th of November, 1816, she committed suicide by drowning herself in the Serpentine. The distance of time between June, 1814, and November, 1816, and the new ties formed by Harriet in this interval, prove that there was no immediate connexion between Shelley's abandonment of his wife and her suicide. She had always entertained the thought of self-destruction, as Hogg, who is no adverse witness in her case, has amply recorded; and it may be permitted us to suppose that, finding herself for the second time unhappy in her love, she reverted to a long-since cherished scheme, and cut the knot of life and all its troubles.

So far as this is possible, I have attempted to narrate the most painful episode in Shelley's life as it occurred, without extenuation and without condemnation. Until the papers, mentioned with such insistence by Lady Shelley and Mr. Garnett, are given to the world, it is impossible that the poet should not bear the reproach of heartlessness and inconstancy in this the gravest of all human relations. Such, however, is my belief in the essential goodness of his character, after allowing, as we must do, for the operation of his peculiar principles upon his conduct, that I for my own part am willing to suspend my judgment till the time arrives for his vindication. The language used by Lady Shelley and Mr. Garnett justify us in expecting that that vindication will be as startling as complete. If it is not, they, as pleading for him, will have overshot the mark of prudence.

On the 28th of July Shelley left London with Mary Godwin, who up to this date had remained beneath her father's roof. There was some secrecy in their departure, because they were accompanied by Miss Clairmont, whose mother disapproved of her forming a third in the party. Having made their way to Dover, they crossed the Channel in an open boat, and went at once to Paris. Here they hired a donkey for their luggage, intending to perform the journey across France on foot. Shelley, however, sprained his ancle, and a mule-carriage was provided for the party. In this conveyance they reached the Jura, and entered Switzerland at Neufchatel. Brunnen, on the Lake of Lucerne, was chosen for their residence; and here Shelley began his romantic tale of *The Assassins*, a portion of which is printed in his prose works. Want of money compelled them soon to think of turning their steps homeward; and the back journey was performed upon

the Reuss and Rhine. They reached Gravesend, after a bad passage, on the 13th of September. Mrs. Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* relates the details of this trip, which was of great importance in forming Shelley's taste, and in supplying him with the scenery of river, rock, and mountain, so splendidly utilized in *Alastor*.

The autumn was a period of more than usual money difficulty; but on the 6th of January, 1815, Sir Bysshe died, Percy became the next heir to the baronetcy and the family estates, and an arrangement was made with his father by right of which he received an allowance of 1000*l.* a year. A portion of his income was immediately set apart for Harriet. The winter was passed in London, where Shelley walked a hospital, in order, it is said, to acquire some medical knowledge that might be of service to the poor he visited. His own health at this period was very bad. A physician whom he consulted pronounced that he was rapidly sinking under pulmonary disease, and he suffered frequent attacks of acute pain. The consumptive symptoms seem to have been so marked that for the next three years he had no doubt that he was destined to an early death. In 1818, however, all danger of phthisis passed away; and during the rest of his short life he only suffered from spasms and violent pains in the side, which baffled the physicians, but, though they caused him extreme anguish, did not menace any vital organ. To the subject of his health it will be necessary to return at a later period of this biography. For the present it is enough to remember that his physical condition was such as to justify his own expectation of death at no distant time.[1]

Fond as ever of wandering, Shelley set out in the early

[1] See Letter to Godwin in Shelley's Memorials, p. 78.

summer for a tour with Mary. They visited Devonshire and Clifton, and then settled in a house on Bishopsgate Heath, near Windsor Forest. The summer was further broken by a water excursion up the Thames to its source, in the company of Mr. Peacock and Charles Clairmont. Peacock traces the poet's taste for boating, which afterwards became a passion with him, to this excursion. About this there is, however, some doubt. Medwin tells us that Shelley while a boy delighted in being on the water, and that he enjoyed the pastime at Eton. On the other hand, Mr. W. S. Halliday, a far better authority than Medwin, asserts positively that he never saw Shelley on the river at Eton, and Hogg relates nothing to prove that he practised rowing at Oxford. It is certain that, though inordinately fond of boats and every kind of water—river, sea, lake, or canal—he never learned to swim. Peacock also notices his habit of floating paper boats, and gives an amusing description of the boredom suffered by Hogg on occasions when Shelley would stop by the side of pond or mere to float a mimic navy. The not altogether apocryphal story of his having once constructed a boat out of a bank-post-bill, and launched it on the lake in Kensington Gardens, deserves to be alluded to in this connexion.

On their return from this river journey, Shelley began the poem of *Alastor*, haunting the woodland glades and oak groves of Windsor Forest, and drawing from that noble scenery his inspiration. It was printed with a few other poems in one volume the next year. Not only was *Alastor* the first serious poem published by Shelley; but it was also the first of his compositions which revealed the greatness of his genius. Rarely has blank verse been written with more majesty and music: and while the influence of Milton and Wordsworth may be traced in cer-

tain passages, the versification, tremulous with lyrical vibrations, is such as only Shelley could have produced.

"Alastor" is the Greek name for a vengeful dæmon, driving its victim into desert places; and Shelley, prompted by Peacock, chose it for the title of a poem which describes the Nemesis of solitary souls. Apart from its intrinsic merit as a work of art, *Alastor* has great autobiographical value. Mrs. Shelley affirms that it was written under the expectation of speedy death, and under the sense of disappointment, consequent upon the misfortunes of his early life. This accounts for the somewhat unhealthy vein of sentiment which threads the wilderness of its sublime descriptions. All that Shelley had observed of natural beauty — in Wales, at Lynton, in Switzerland, upon the eddies of the Reuss, beneath the oak shades of the forest — is presented to us in a series of pictures penetrated with profound emotion. But the deeper meaning of *Alastor* is to be found, not in the thought of death nor in the poet's recent communings with nature, but in the motto from St. Augustine placed upon its title-page, and in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, composed about a year later. Enamoured of ideal loveliness, the poet pursues his vision through the universe, vainly hoping to assuage the thirst which has been stimulated in his spirit, and vainly longing for some mortal realization of his love. *Alastor*, like *Epipsychidion*, reveals the mistake which Shelley made in thinking that the idea of beauty could become incarnate for him in any earthly form: while the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* recognizes the truth that such realization of the ideal is impossible. The very last letter written by Shelley sets the misconception in its proper light: "I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for

spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal." But this Shelley discovered only with "the years that bring the philosophic mind," and when he was upon the very verge of his untimely death.

The following quotation is a fair specimen of the blank verse of *Alastor*. It expresses that longing for perfect sympathy in an ideal love, which the sense of divine beauty had stirred in the poet's heart:—

> At length upon the lone Chorasmian shore
> He paused, a wide and melancholy waste
> Of putrid marshes. A strong impulse urged
> His steps to the sea-shore. A swan was there,
> Beside a sluggish stream among the reeds.
> It rose as he approached, and, with strong wings
> Scaling the upward sky, bent its bright course
> High over the immeasurable main.
> His eyes pursued its flight:—"Thou hast a home,
> Beautiful bird! thou voyagest to thine home,
> Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
> With thine, and welcome thy return with eyes
> Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.
> And what am I that I should linger here,
> With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes,
> Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
> To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
> In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heaven
> That echoes not my thoughts?" A gloomy smile
> Of desperate hope wrinkled his quivering lips.
> For Sleep, he knew, kept most relentlessly
> Its precious charge, and silent Death exposed,
> Faithless perhaps as Sleep, a shadowy lure,
> With doubtful smile mocking its own strange charms.

William, the eldest son of Shelley and Mary Godwin, was born on the 24th of Jan., 1816. In the spring of that year they went together, accompanied by Miss Clair-

mont, for a second time to Switzerland. They reached Geneva on the 17th of May and were soon after joined by Lord Byron and his travelling physician, Dr. Polidori. Shelley had not yet made Byron's acquaintance, though he had sent him a copy of *Queen Mab*, with a letter, which miscarried in the post. They were now thrown into daily intercourse, occupying the villas Diodati and Mont Alégre, at no great distance from each other, passing their days upon the lake in a boat which they purchased, and spending the nights in conversation. Miss Clairmont had known Byron in London, and their acquaintance now ripened into an intimacy, the fruit of which was the child Allegra. This fact has to be mentioned by Shelley's biographer, because Allegra afterwards became an inmate of his home; and though he and Mary were ignorant of what was passing at Geneva, they did not withdraw their sympathy from the mother of Lord Byron's daughter. The lives of Byron and Shelley during the next six years were destined to be curiously blent. Both were to seek in Italy an exile-home; while their friendship was to become one of the most interesting facts of English literary history. The influence of Byron upon Shelley, as he more than once acknowledged, and as his wife plainly perceived, was, to a great extent, depressing. For Byron's genius and its fruits in poetry he entertained the highest possible opinion. He could not help comparing his own achievement and his fame with Byron's; and the result was that in the presence of one whom he erroneously believed to be the greater poet, he became inactive. Shelley, on the contrary, stimulated Byron's productive faculty to nobler efforts, raised his moral tone, and infused into his less subtle intellect something of his own philosophical depth and earnestness. Much as he enjoyed Byron's

society and admired his writing, Shelley was not blind to the imperfections of his nature. The sketch which he has left us of Count Maddalo, the letters written to his wife from Venice and Ravenna, and his correspondence on the subject of Leigh Hunt's visit to Italy, supply the most discriminating criticism which has yet been passed upon his brother poet's character. It is clear that he never found in Byron a perfect friend, and that he had not accepted him as one with whom he sympathized upon the deeper questions of feeling and conduct. Byron, for his part, recognized in Shelley the purest nature he had ever known. "He was the most gentle, the most amiable, and least worldly-minded person I ever met; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius joined to simplicity as rare as it is admirable. He had formed to himself a *beau ideal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble, and he acted up to this ideal even to the very letter."

Toward the end of June the two poets made the tour of Lake Geneva in their boat, and were very nearly wrecked off the rocks of Meillerie. On this occasion Shelley was in imminent danger of death from drowning. His one anxiety, however, as he wrote to Peacock, was lest Byron should attempt to save him at the risk of his own life. Byron described him as "bold as a lion;" and indeed it may here be said, once and for all, that Shelley's physical courage was only equalled by his moral fearlessness. He carried both without bravado to the verge of temerity, and may justly be said to have never known what terror was. Another summer excursion was a visit to Chamouni, of which he has left memorable descriptions in his letters to Peacock, and in the somewhat Coleridgian verses on Mont Blanc. The preface to *Laon and Cythna* shows what a

powerful impression had been made upon him by the glaciers, and how he delighted in the element of peril. There is a tone of exultation in the words which record the experiences of his two journeys in Switzerland and France:—"I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests. Danger, which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. I have been a wanderer among distant fields. I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains. I have seen populous cities, and have watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change amongst assembled multitudes of men. I have seen the theatre of the more visible ravages of tyranny and war, cities and villages reduced to scattered groups of black and roofless houses, and the naked inhabitants sitting famished upon their desolated thresholds."

On their return to the lake, the Shelleys found M. G. Lewis established with Byron. This addition to the circle introduced much conversation about apparitions, and each member of the party undertook to produce a ghost story. Polidori's *Vampyre* and Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein* were the only durable results of their determination. But an incident occurred which is of some importance in the history of Shelley's psychological condition. Toward midnight on the 18th of July, Byron recited the lines in *Christabel* about the lady's breast; when Shelley suddenly started up, shrieked, and fled from the room. He had seen a vision of a woman with eyes instead of nipples. At this time he was writing notes upon the phenomena of

sleep to be inserted in his *Speculations on Metaphysics*, and Mrs. Shelley informs us that the mere effort to remember dreams of thrilling or mysterious import so disturbed his nervous system that he had to relinquish the task. At no period of his life was he wholly free from visions which had the reality of facts. Sometimes they occurred in sleep, and were prolonged with painful vividness into his waking moments. Sometimes they seemed to grow out of his intense meditation, or to present themselves before his eyes as the projection of a powerful inner impression. All his sensations were abnormally acute, and his ever-active imagination confused the border-lands of the actual and the visionary. Such a nature as Shelley's, through its far greater susceptibility than is common even with artistic temperaments, was debarred in moments of high-strung emotion from observing the ordinary distinctions of subject and object; and this peculiar quality must never be forgotten when we seek to estimate the proper proportions of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in certain episodes of his biography. The strange story, for example, told by Peacock about a supposed warning he had received in the spring of this year from Mr. Williams of Tremadoc, may possibly be explained on the hypothesis that his brooding thoughts had taken form before him, both ear and eye having been unconsciously pressed into the service of a subjective energy.[1]

On their return to England in September, Shelley took a cottage at Great Marlow on the Thames, in order to be near his friend Peacock. While it was being prepared for the reception of his family, he stayed at Bath, and there heard of Harriet's suicide. The life that once was dearest to him, had ended thus in misery, desertion, want.

[1] Fraser's Magazine, Jan., 1860, p. 98.

The mother of his two children, abandoned by both her husband and her lover, and driven from her father's home, had drowned herself after a brief struggle with circumstance. However Shelley may have felt that his conscience was free from blame, however small an element of self-reproach may have mingled with his grief and horror, there is no doubt that he suffered most acutely. His deepest ground for remorse seems to have been the conviction that he had drawn Harriet into a sphere of thought and feeling for which she was not qualified, and that had it not been for him and his opinions, she might have lived a happy woman in some common walk of life. One of his biographers asserts that "he continued to be haunted by certain recollections, partly real and partly imaginative, which pursued him like an Orestes," and even Trelawny, who knew him only in the last months of his life, said that the impression of that dreadful moment was still vivid. We may trace the echo of his feelings in some painfully pathetic verses written in 1817;[1] and though he did not often speak of Harriet, Peacock has recorded one memorable occasion on which he disclosed the anguish of his spirit to a friend.[2]

Shelley hurried at once to London, and found some consolation in the society of Leigh Hunt. The friendship extended to him by that excellent man at this season of his trouble may perhaps count for something with those who are inclined to judge him harshly. Two important events followed immediately upon the tragedy. The first was Shelley's marriage with Mary Godwin on the 30th of December, 1816. Whether Shelley would have taken this step except under strong pressure from with-

[1] Forman, iii. 148.

[2] Fraser, Jan., 1860, p. 102.

out, appears to me very doubtful. Of all men who ever lived, he was the most resolutely bent on confirming his theories by his practice; and in this instance there was no valid reason why he should not act up to principles professed in common by himself and the partner of his fortunes, no less than by her father and her mother. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that he yielded to arguments; and these arguments must have been urged by Godwin, who had never treated him with cordiality since he left England in 1816. Godwin, though overrated in his generation, and almost ludicrously idealized by Shelley, was a man whose talents verged on genius. But he was by no means consistent. His conduct in money-matters shows that he could not live the life of a self-sufficing philosopher; while the irritation he expressed when Shelley omitted to address him as Esquire, stood in comic contradiction with his published doctrines. We are therefore perhaps justified in concluding that he worried Shelley, the one enthusiastic and thorough-going follower he had, into marrying his daughter in spite of his disciple's protestations; nor shall we be far wrong if we surmise that Godwin congratulated himself on Mary's having won the right to bear the name of a future baronet.

The second event was the refusal of Mr. Westbrook to deliver up the custody of his grandchildren. A chancery suit was instituted; at the conclusion of which, in August, 1817, Lord Eldon deprived Shelley of his son and daughter on the double ground of his opinions expressed in *Queen Mab*, and of his conduct toward his first wife. The children were placed in the hands of a clergyman, to be educated in accordance with principles diametrically opposed to their parent's, while Shelley's income was mulcted in a sum of 200*l.* for their maintenance. Thus sternly did the

father learn the value of that ancient Æschylean maxim, τῷ δράσαντι παθεῖν, the doer of the deed must suffer. His own impulsiveness, his reckless assumption of the heaviest responsibilities, his overweening confidence in his own strength to move the weight of the world's opinions, had brought him to this tragic pass — to the suicide of the woman who had loved him, and to the sequestration of the offspring whom he loved.

Shelley is too great to serve as text for any sermon; and yet we may learn from him as from a hero of Hebrew or Hellenic story. His life was a tragedy; and like some protagonist of Greek drama, he was capable of erring and of suffering greatly. He had kicked against the altar of justice as established in the daily sanctities of human life; and now he had to bear the penalty. The conventions he despised and treated like the dust beneath his feet, were found in this most cruel crisis to be a rock on which his very heart was broken. From this rude trial of his moral nature he arose a stronger being; and if longer life had been granted him, he would undoubtedly have presented the ennobling spectacle of one who had been lessoned by his own audacity, and by its bitter fruits, into harmony with the immutable laws which he was ever seeking to obey. It is just this conflict between the innate rectitude of Shelley's over-daring nature and the circumstances of ordinary existence, which makes his history so tragic; and we may justly wonder whether, when he read the Sophoclean tragedies of Œdipus, he did not apply their doctrine of self-will and Nemesis to his own fortunes.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT MARLOW, AND JOURNEY TO ITALY.

Amid the torturing distractions of the Chancery suit about his children, and the still more poignant anguish of his own heart, and with the cloud of what he thought swift-coming death above his head, Shelley worked steadily, during the summer of 1817, upon his poem of *Laon and Cythna*. Six months were spent in this task. "The poem," to borrow Mrs. Shelley's words, "was written in his boat, as it floated under the beech-groves of Bisham, or during wanderings in the neighbouring country, which is distinguished for peculiar beauty." Whenever Shelley could, he composed in the open air. The terraces of the Villa Cappuccini at Este and the Baths of Caracalla were the birthplace of *Prometheus*. *The Cenci* was written on the roof of the Villa Valsovano at Leghorn. The Cascine of Florence, the pine-woods near Pisa, the lawns above San Giuliano, and the summits of the Euganean Hills, witnessed the creation of his loveliest lyrics; and his last great poem, the *Triumph of Life*, was transferred to paper in his boat upon the Bay of Spezia.

If *Alastor* had expressed one side of Shelley's nature, his devotion to Ideal Beauty, *Laon and Cythna* was in a far profounder sense representative of its author. All his previous experiences and all his aspirations—his passion-

ate belief in friendship, his principle of the equality of women with men, his demand for bloodless revolution, his confidence in eloquence and reason to move nations, his doctrine of free love, his vegetarianism, his hatred of religious intolerance and tyranny — are blent together and concentrated in the glowing cantos of this wonderful romance. The hero, Laon, is himself idealized, the self which he imagined when he undertook his Irish campaign. The heroine, Cythna, is the helpmate he had always dreamed, the woman exquisitely feminine, yet capable of being fired with male enthusiasms, and of grappling the real problems of our nature with a man's firm grasp. In the first edition of the poem he made Laon and Cythna brother and sister, not because he believed in the desirability of incest, but because he wished to throw a glove down to society, and to attack the intolerance of custom in its stronghold. In the preface, he tells us that it was his purpose to kindle in the bosoms of his readers "a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever wholly extinguish among mankind;" to illustrate "the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind;" and to celebrate Love "as the sole law which should govern the moral world." The wild romantic treatment of this didactic motive makes the poem highly characteristic of its author. It is written in Spenserian stanzas, with a rapidity of movement and a dazzling brilliance that are Shelley's own. The story relates the kindling of a nation to freedom at the cry of a young poet-prophet, the temporary triumph of the good cause, the final victory of despotic force, and the martyrdom of the hero, together with

whom the heroine falls a willing victim. It is full of thrilling incidents and lovely pictures; yet the tale is the least part of the poem; and few readers have probably been able either to sympathize with its visionary characters, or to follow the narrative without weariness. As in the case of other poems by Shelley — especially those in which he attempted to tell a story, for which kind of art his genius was not well suited—the central motive of *Laon and Cythna* is surrounded by so radiant a photosphere of imagery and eloquence that it is difficult to fix our gaze upon it, blinded as we are by the excess of splendour. Yet no one now can read the terrible tenth canto, or the lovely fifth, without feeling that a young eagle of poetry had here tried the full strength of his pinions in their flight. This truth was by no means recognized when *Laon and Cythna* first appeared before the public. Hooted down, derided, stigmatized, and howled at, it only served to intensify the prejudice with which the author of *Queen Mab* had come to be regarded.

I have spoken of this poem under its first name of *Laon and Cythna*. A certain number of copies were issued with this title;[1] but the publisher, Ollier, not without reason dreaded the effect the book would make; he therefore induced Shelley to alter the relationship between the hero and his bride, and issued the old sheets with certain cancelled pages under the title of *Revolt of Islam*. It was published in January, 1818. While still resident at Marlow, Shelley began two autobiographical poems—the one *Prince Athanase*, which he abandoned as too introspective

[1] How many copies were put in circulation is not known. There must certainly have been many more than the traditional three; for when I was a boy at Harrow, I picked up two uncut copies in boards at a Bristol bookshop, for the price of 2*s.* 6*d.* a piece.

and morbidly self-analytical, the other *Rosalind and Helen*, which he finished afterwards in Italy. Of the second of these compositions he entertained a poor opinion; nor will it bear comparison with his best work. To his biographer its chief interest consists in the character of Lionel, drawn less perhaps exactly from himself than as an ideal of the man he would have wished to be. The poet in *Alastor*, Laon in the *Revolt of Islam*, Lionel in *Rosalind and Helen*, and Prince Athanase, are in fact a remarkable row of self-portraits, varying in the tone and scale of idealistic treatment bestowed upon them. Later on in life, Shelley outgrew this preoccupation with his idealized self, and directed his genius to more objective themes. Yet the autobiographic tendency, as befitted a poet of the highest lyric type, remained to the end a powerful characteristic.

Before quitting the first period of Shelley's development, it may be well to set before the reader a specimen of that self-delineative poetry which characterized it; and since it is difficult to detach a single passage from the continuous stanzas of *Laon and Cythna*, I have chosen the lines in *Rosalind and Helen* which describe young Lionel:

> To Lionel,
> Though of great wealth and lineage high,
> Yet through those dungeon walls there came
> Thy thrilling light, O Liberty!
> And as the meteor's midnight flame
> Startles the dreamer, sun-like truth
> Flashed on his visionary youth,
> And filled him, not with love, but faith,
> And hope, and courage mute in death;
> For love and life in him were twins,
> Born at one birth: in every other
> First life, then love its course begins,
> Though they be children of one mother;

And so through this dark world they fleet
Divided, till in death they meet:
But he loved all things ever. Then
He past amid the strife of men,
And stood at the throne of arméd power
Pleading for a world of woe:
Secure as one on a rock-built tower
O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro,
'Mid the passions wild of human kind
He stood, like a spirit calming them;
For, it was said, his words could find
Like music the lulled crowd, and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream,
Which mortals truth and reason deem,
But *is* revenge and fear and pride.
Joyous he was; and hope and peace
On all who heard him did abide,
Raining like dew from his sweet talk,
As where the evening star may walk
Along the brink of the gloomy seas,
Liquid mists of splendour quiver.
His very gestures touch'd to tears
The unpersuaded tyrant, never
So moved before: his presence stung
The torturers with their victim's pain,
And none knew how; and through their ears,
The subtle witchcraft of his tongue
Unlocked the hearts of those who keep
Gold, the world's bond of slavery.
Men wondered, and some sneer'd to see
One sow what he could never reap:
For he is rich, they said, and young,
And might drink from the depths of luxury.
If he seeks Fame, Fame never crown'd
The champion of a trampled creed:
If he seeks Power, Power is enthroned
'Mid ancient rights and wrongs, to feed
Which hungry wolves with praise and spoil,
Those who would sit near Power must toil;
And such, there sitting, all may see.

During the year he spent at Marlow, Shelley was a frequent visitor at Leigh Hunt's Hampstead house, where he made acquaintance with Keats, and the brothers Smith, authors of *Rejected Addresses*. Hunt's recollections supply some interesting details, which, since Hogg and Peacock fail us at this period, may be profitably used. Describing the manner of his life at Marlow, Hunt writes as follows: "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 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." Mrs. Shelley, in her note on the *Revolt of Islam*, confirms this account of his Bible studies; and indeed the influence of the Old Testament upon his style may be traced in several of his poems. In the same paragraph from which I have just quoted, Leigh Hunt gives a just notion of his relation to Christianity, pointing out that he drew a distinction between the Pauline presentation of the Christian creeds, and the spirit of the Gospels. "His want of faith 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 chose to forget what Scripture itself observes on that point." We have only to read Shelley's *Essay on Christianity*, in order to perceive what reverent admiration he felt for Jesus, and how profoundly he understood the true character of his

teaching. That work, brief as it is, forms one of the most valuable extant contributions to a sound theology, and is morally far in advance of the opinions expressed by many who regard themselves as specially qualified to speak on the subject. It is certain that, as Christianity passes beyond its mediæval phase, and casts aside the husk of outworn dogmas, it will more and more approximate to Shelley's exposition. Here and here only is a vital faith, adapted to the conditions of modern thought, indestructible because essential, and fitted to unite instead of separating minds of divers quality. It may sound paradoxical to claim for Shelley of all men a clear insight into the enduring element of the Christian creed; but it was precisely his detachment from all its accidents which enabled him to discern its spiritual purity, and placed him in a true relation to its Founder. For those who would neither on the one hand relinquish what is permanent in religion, nor yet on the other deny the inevitable conclusions of modern thought, his teaching is indubitably valuable. His fierce tirades against historic Christianity must be taken as directed against an ecclesiastical system of spiritual tyranny, hypocrisy, and superstition, which in his opinion had retarded the growth of free institutions, and fettered the human intellect. Like Campanella, he distinguished between Christ, who sealed the gospel of charity with his blood, and those Christians, who would be the first to crucify their Lord if he returned to earth.

That Shelley lived up to his religious creed is amply proved. To help the needy and to relieve the sick, seemed to him a simple duty, which he cheerfully discharged. "His charity, though liberal, was not weak. He inquired personally into the circumstances of his petitioners, visited the sick in their beds, ... and kept a regular list of

industrious poor, whom he assisted with small sums to make up their accounts." At Marlow, the miserable condition of the lace-makers called forth all his energies; and Mrs. Shelley tells us that an acute ophthalmia, from which he twice suffered, was contracted in a visit to their cottages. A story told by Leigh Hunt about his finding a woman ill on Hampstead Heath, and carrying her from door to door in the vain hopes of meeting with a man as charitable as himself, until he had to house the poor creature with his friends the Hunts, reads like a practical illustration of Christ's parable about the Good Samaritan. Nor was it merely to the so-called poor that Shelley showed his generosity. His purse was always open to his friends. Peacock received from him an annual allowance of 100*l.* He gave Leigh Hunt, on one occasion, 1400*l.*; and he discharged debts of Godwin, amounting, it is said, to about 6000*l.* In his pamphlet on *Putting Reform to the Vote*, he offered to subscribe 100*l.* for the purpose of founding an association; and we have already seen that he headed the Tremadoc subscription with a sum of 500*l.* These instances of his generosity might be easily multiplied; and when we remember that his present income was 1000*l.*, out of which 200*l.* went to the support of his children, it will be understood not only that he could not live luxuriously, but also that he was in frequent money difficulties through the necessity of raising funds upon his expectations. His self-denial in all minor matters of expenditure was conspicuous. Without a murmur, without ostentation, this heir of the richest baronet in Sussex illustrated by his own conduct those principles of democratic simplicity and of fraternal charity which formed his political and social creed.

A glimpse into the cottage at Great Marlow is afforded

by a careless sentence of Leigh Hunt's. "He used to sit in a study adorned with casts, as large as life, of the Vatican Apollo and the celestial Venus." Fancy Shelley with his bright eyes and elf-locks in a tiny, low-roofed room, correcting proofs of *Laon and Cythna*, between the Apollo of the Belvedere and the Venus de' Medici, life-sized, and as crude as casts by Shout could make them! In this house, Miss Clairmont, with her brother and Allegra, lived as Shelley's guests; and here Clara Shelley was born on the 3rd of September, 1817. In the same autumn, Shelley suffered from a severe pulmonary attack. The critical state of his health, and the apprehension, vouched for by Mrs. Shelley, that the Chancellor might lay his vulture's talons on the children of his second marriage, were the motives which induced him to leave England for Italy in the spring of 1818.[1] He never returned. Four years only of life were left to him—years filled with music that will sound as long as English lasts.

It was on the 11th of March that the Shelleys took their departure with Miss Clairmont and the child Allegra. They went straight to Milan, and after visiting the Lake of Como, Pisa, the Bagni di Lucca, Venice, and Rome, they settled early in the following December at Naples. Shelley's letters to Peacock form the invaluable record of this period of his existence. Taken altogether, they are the most perfect specimens of descriptive prose in the English language; never over-charged with colour, vibrating with emotions excited by the stimulating scenes of Italy, frank in criticism, and exquisitely delicate in observation. Their transparent sincerity and unpremeditated grace, combined with natural finish of expression, make

[1] See Note on Poems of 1819, and compare the lyric "The billows on the beach."

them masterpieces of a style at once familiar and elevated. That Shelley's sensibility to art was not so highly cultivated as his feeling for nature, is clear enough in many passages: but there is no trace of admiring to order in his comments upon pictures or statues. Familiarity with the great works of antique and Italian art would doubtless have altered some of the opinions he at first expressed; just as longer residence among the people made him modify his views about their character. Meanwhile, the spirit of modest and unprejudiced attention in which he began his studies of sculpture and painting, might well be imitated in the present day by travellers who think that to pin their faith to some famous critic's verdict is the acme of good taste. If there were space for a long quotation from these letters, I should choose the description of Pompeii (Jan. 26, 1819, or that of the Baths of Caracalla (March 23, 1819). As it is, I must content myself with a short but eminently characteristic passage, written from Ferrara, Nov. 7, 1818:—

> The handwriting of Ariosto is a small, firm, and pointed character, expressing, as I should say, a strong and keen, but circumscribed energy of mind; that of Tasso is large, free, and flowing, except that there is a checked expression in the midst of its flow, which brings the letters into a smaller compass than one expected from the beginning of the word. It is the symbol of an intense and earnest mind, exceeding at times its own depth, and admonished to return by the chillness of the waters of oblivion striking upon its adventurous feet. You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible object; and as we do not agree in physiognomy, so we may not agree now. But my business is to relate my own sensations, and not to attempt to inspire others with them.

In the middle of August, Shelley left his wife at the Bagni di Lucca, and paid a visit to Lord Byron at Venice.

He arrived at midnight in a thunderstorm. *Julian and Maddalo* was the literary fruit of this excursion—a poem which has rightly been characterized by Mr. Rossetti as the most perfect specimen in our language of the "poetical treatment of ordinary things." The description of a Venetian sunset, touched to sadness amid all its splendour by the gloomy presence of the madhouse, ranks among Shelley's finest word-paintings; while the glimpse of Byron's life is interesting on a lower level. Here is the picture of the sunset and the island of San Lazzaro:—

> Oh!
> How beautiful is sunset, when the glow
> Of heaven descends upon a land like thee,
> Thou paradise of exiles, Italy,
> Thy mountains, seas, and vineyards, and the towers
> Of cities they encircle!—It was ours
> To stand on thee, beholding it: and then,
> Just where we had dismounted, the Count's men
> Were waiting for us with the gondola.
> As those who pause on some delightful way,
> Though bent on pleasant pilgrimage, we stood
> Looking upon the evening, and the flood
> Which lay between the city and the shore,
> Paved with the image of the sky. The hoar
> And airy Alps, towards the north, appeared,
> Thro' mist, a heaven-sustaining bulwark, reared
> Between the east and west; and half the sky
> Was roofed with clouds of rich emblazonry,
> Dark purple at the zenith, which still grew
> Down the steep west into a wondrous hue
> Brighter than burning gold, even to the rent
> Where the swift sun yet paused in his descent
> Among the many-folded hills. They were
> Those famous Euganean hills, which bear,
> As seen from Lido through the harbour piles,
> The likeness of a clump of peaked isles—

And then, as if the earth and sea had been
Dissolved into one lake of fire, were seen
Those mountains towering, as from waves of flame,
Around the vaporous sun, from which there came
The inmost purple spirit of light, and made
Their very peaks transparent. "Ere it fade,"
Said my companion, "I will show you soon
A better station." So, o'er the lagune
We glided; and from that funereal bark
I leaned, and saw the city, and could mark
How from their many isles, in evening's gleam,
Its temples and its palaces did seem
Like fabrics of enchantment piled to heaven.
I was about to speak, when—"We are even
Now at the point I meant," said Maddalo,
And bade the gondolieri cease to row.
"Look, Julian, on the west, and listen well
If you hear not a deep and heavy bell."
I looked, and saw between us and the sun
A building on an island, such a one
As age to age might add, for uses vile,—
A windowless, deformed, and dreary pile;
And on the top an open tower, where hung
A bell, which in the radiance swayed and swung,—
We could just hear its coarse and iron tongue:
The broad sun sank behind it, and it tolled
In strong and black relief—"What we behold
Shall be the madhouse and its belfry tower,"—
Said Maddalo; "and ever at this hour,
Those who may cross the water hear that bell,
Which calls the maniacs, each one from his cell,
To vespers."

It may be parenthetically observed that one of the few familiar quotations from Shelley's poems occurs in *Julian and Maddalo*:—

Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong:
They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

Byron lent the Shelleys his villa of the Cappuccini near Este, where they spent some weeks in the autumn. Here *Prometheus Unbound* was begun, and the *Lines written among Euganean Hills* were composed; and here Clara became so ill that her parents thought it necessary to rush for medical assistance to Venice. They had forgotten their passport; but Shelley's irresistible energy overcame all difficulties, and they entered Venice — only in time, however, for the child to die.

Nearly the whole of the winter was spent in Naples, where Shelley suffered from depression of more than ordinary depth. Mrs. Shelley attributed this gloom to the state of his health; but Medwin tells a strange story, which, if it is not wholly a romance, may better account for the poet's melancholy. He says that so far back as the year 1816, on the night before his departure from London, "a married lady, young, handsome, and of noble connexions," came to him, avowed the passionate love she had conceived for him, and proposed that they should fly together.[1] He explained to her that his hand and heart had both been given irrevocably to another, and, after the expression of the most exalted sentiments on both sides, they parted. She followed him, however, from place to place; and without intruding herself upon his notice, found some consolation in remaining near him. Now she arrived at Naples; and at Naples she died. The web of Shelley's life was a wide one, and included more destinies than his own. Godwin, as we have reason to believe, attributed the suicide of Fanny Imlay to her hopeless love for Shelley; and the tale of Harriet has been already told. Therefore there is nothing absolutely improbable in Med-

[1] Medwin's Life of Shelley, vol. i. 324. His date, 1814, appears from the context to be a misprint.

win's story, especially when we remember what Hogg half-humorously tells us about Shelley's attraction for women in London. At any rate, the excessive wretchedness of the lyrics written at Naples can hardly be accounted for by the "constant and poignant physical sufferings" of which Mrs. Shelley speaks, since these were habitual to him. She was herself, moreover, under the impression that he was concealing something from her, and we know from her own words in another place that his "fear to wound the feelings of others" often impelled him to keep his deepest sorrows to himself.[1]

All this while his health was steadily improving. The menace of consumption was removed; and though he suffered from severe attacks of pain in the side, the cause of this persistent malady does not seem to have been ascertained. At Naples he was under treatment for disease of the liver. Afterwards, his symptoms were ascribed to nephritis; and it is certain that his greater or less freedom from uneasiness varied with the quality of the water he drank. He was, for instance, forced to eschew the drinking water of Ravenna, because it aggravated his symptoms; while Florence, for a similar reason, proved an unsuitable residence. The final settlement of the Shelleys at Pisa seems to have been determined by the fact that the water of that place agreed with him. That the spasms which from time to time attacked him were extremely serious, is abundantly proved by the testimony of those who lived with him at this period, and by his own letters. Some relief was obtained by mesmerism, a remedy suggested by Medwin; but the obstinacy of the torment preyed upon his spirits to such an extent, that even during the last months of his life we find him begging Trelawny to pro-

[1] Note on the Revolt of Islam.

cure him prussic acid as a final and effectual remedy for all the ills that flesh is heir to. It may be added that mental application increased the mischief, for he told Leigh Hunt that the composition of *The Cenci* had cost him a fresh seizure. Yet though his sufferings were indubitably real, the eminent physician, Vaccà, could discover no organic disease; and possibly Trelawny came near the truth when he attributed Shelley's spasms to insufficient and irregular diet, and to a continual over-taxing of his nervous system.

Mrs. Shelley states that the change from England to Italy was in all respects beneficial to her husband. She was inclined to refer the depression from which he occasionally suffered, to his solitary habits; and there are several passages in his own letters which connect his melancholy with solitude. It is obvious that when he found himself in the congenial company of Trelawny, Williams, Medwin, or the Gisbornes, he was simply happy; and nothing could be further from the truth than to paint him as habitually sunk in gloom. On the contrary, we hear quite as much about his high spirits, his "Homeric laughter," his playfulness with children, his readiness to join in the amusements of his chosen circle, and his incomparable conversation, as we do about his solitary broodings, and the seasons when pain or bitter memories over-cast his heaven. Byron, who had some right to express a judgment in such a matter, described him as the most companionable man under the age of thirty he had ever met with. Shelley rode and practised pistol-shooting with his brother bard, sat up late to talk with him, enjoyed his jokes, and even betted with him on one occasion marked by questionable taste. All this is quite incompatible with that martyrdom to persecution, remorse, or physical suffering, with which it has pleased some ro-

mantic persons to invest the poet. Society of the ordinary kind he hated. The voice of a stranger, or a ring at the house-bell, heard from afar with Shelley's almost inconceivable quickness of perception, was enough to make him leave the house; and one of his prettiest poems is written on his mistaking his wife's mention of the Aziola, a little owl common enough in Tuscany, for an allusion to a tiresome visitor. This dislike for intercourse with commonplace people was the source of some disagreement between him and Mrs. Shelley, and kept him further apart from Byron than he might otherwise have been. In a valuable letter recently published by Mr. Garnett, he writes:—"I detest all society—almost all, at least—and Lord Byron is the nucleus of all that is hateful and tiresome in it." And again, speaking about his wife to Trelawny, he said:—"She can't bear solitude, nor I society—the quick coupled with the dead."

In the year 1818–19 the Shelleys had no friends at all in Italy, except Lord Byron at Venice, and Mr. and Mrs. John Gisborne at Leghorn. Mrs. Gisborne had been a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin. She was a woman of much cultivation, devoid of prejudice, and, though less enthusiastic than Shelley liked, quite capable of appreciating the inestimable privilege of his acquaintance. Her husband, to use a now almost obsolete phrase, was a scholar and a gentleman. He shared his wife's enlightened opinions, and remained stanch through good and ill report to his new friends. At Rome and Naples they knew absolutely no one. Shelley's time was therefore passed in study and composition. In the previous summer he had translated the *Symposium* of Plato, and begun an essay on the Ethics of the Greeks, which remains unluckily a fragment. Together with Mary he

read much Italian literature, and his observations on the chief Italian poets form a valuable contribution to their criticism. While he admired the splendour and invention of Ariosto, he could not tolerate his moral tone. Tasso struck him as cold and artificial, in spite of his "delicate moral sensibility." Boccaccio he preferred to both; and his remarks on this prose-poet are extremely characteristic. "How much do I admire Boccaccio! What descriptions of nature are those in his little introductions to every new day! It is the morning of life stripped of that mist of familiarity which makes it obscure to us. Boccaccio seems to me to have possessed a deep sense of the fair ideal of human life, considered in its social relations. His more serious theories of love agree especially with mine. He often expresses things lightly too, which have serious meanings of a very beautiful kind. He is a moral casuist, the opposite of the Christian, stoical, ready-made, and worldly system of morals. Do you remember one little remark, or rather maxim of his, which might do some good to the common, narrow-minded conceptions of love,—'Bocca baciata non perde ventura; anzi rinnuova, come fa la luna'?" Dante and Petrarch remained the objects of his lasting admiration, though the cruel Christianity of the *Inferno* seemed to him an ineradicable blot upon the greatest of Italian poems. Of Petrarch's "tender and solemn enthusiasm," he speaks with the sympathy of one who understood the inner mysteries of idealizing love.

It will be gathered from the foregoing quotations that Shelley, notwithstanding his profound study of style and his exquisite perception of beauty in form and rhythm, required more than merely artistic excellences in poetry. He judged poems by their content and spirit; and while

he plainly expressed his abhorrence of the didactic manner, he held that art must be moralized in order to be truly great. The distinction he drew between Theocritus and the earlier Greek singers in the *Defence of Poetry*, his severe strictures on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in a letter to Mary (Aug. 20, 1818), and his phrase about Ariosto, "who is entertaining and graceful, and *sometimes* a poet," illustrate the application of critical canons wholly at variance with the "art for art" doctrine.

While studying Italian, he continued faithful to Greek. Plato was often in his hands, and the dramatists formed his almost inseparable companions. How deeply he felt the art of the Homeric poems, may be gathered from the following extract:—"I congratulate you on your conquest of the Iliad. You must have been astonished at the perpetually increasing magnificence of the last seven books. Homer there truly begins to be himself. The battle of the Scamander, the funeral of Patroclus, and the high and solemn close of the whole bloody tale in tenderness and inexpiable sorrow, are wrought in a manner incomparable with anything of the same kind. The Odyssey is sweet, but there is nothing like this." About this time, prompted by Mrs. Gisborne, he began the study of Spanish, and conceived an ardent admiration for Calderon, whose splendid and supernatural fancy tallied with his own. "I am bathing myself in the light and odour of the starry Autos," he writes to Mr. Gisborne in the autumn of 1820. *Faust*, too, was a favourite. "I have been reading over and over again *Faust*, and always with sensations which no other composition excites. It deepens the gloom and augments the rapidity of ideas, and would therefore seem to me an unfit study for any person who is a prey to the reproaches of memory, and the delusions of an imagina-

tion not to be restrained." The profound impression made upon him by Margaret's story is expressed in two letters about Retzsch's illustrations:—"The artist makes one envy his happiness that he can sketch such things with calmness, which I only dared look upon once, and which made my brain swim round only to touch the leaf on the opposite side of which I knew that it was figured."

The fruits of this occupation with Greek, Italian, Spanish, and German were Shelley's translations from Homer and Euripides, from Dante, from Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso*, and from *Faust*, translations which have never been surpassed for beauty of form and complete transfusion of the spirit of one literature into the language of another. On translation, however, he set but little store, asserting that he only undertook it when he "could do absolutely nothing else," and writing earnestly to dissuade Leigh Hunt from devoting time which might be better spent, to work of subordinate importance.[1] The following version of a Greek epigram on Plato's spirit will illustrate his own method of translation:—

> Eagle! why soarest thou above that tomb?
> To what sublime and star-y-paven home
> Floatest thou?
> I am the image of swift Plato's spirit,
> Ascending heaven:—Athens does inherit
> His corpse below.

Some time in the year 1820–21, he composed the *Defence of Poetry*, stimulated to this undertaking by his friend Peacock's article on poetry, published in the *Literary Miscellany*.[2] This essay not only sets forth his theory of his own art, but it also contains some of his finest

[1] Letter from Florence, Nov., 1819.

[2] See Letter to Ollier, Jan. 20, 1820, Shelley Memorials, p. 135.

prose writing, of which the following passage, valuable alike for matter and style, may be cited as a specimen :—

The functions of the poetical faculty are two-fold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good. The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it.

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things; it is as the odour and the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it, as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship—what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit—what were our consolations on this side of the grave—and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins,

inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connexion of the spaces between their suggestions by the intermixture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself; for Milton conceived the "Paradise Lost" as a whole before he executed it in portions. We have his own authority also for the muse having "dictated" to him the "unpremeditated song." And let this be an answer to those who would allege the fifty-six various readings of the first line of the "Orlando Furioso." Compositions so produced are to poetry what mosaic is to painting. This instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts; a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship, is essentially linked with such emotions; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe. Poets are not only subject to these experiences as spirits of the most refined organization, but

they can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world; a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past. Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide—abide, because there is no portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

In the midst of these æsthetic studies, and while producing his own greatest works, Shelley was not satisfied that his genius ought to be devoted to poetry. "I consider poetry," he wrote to Peacock, January 26th, 1819, "very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter; for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt, and I shall be content, by exercising my fancy, to amuse myself, and perhaps some others, and cast what weight I can into the scale of that balance which the Giant of Arthegall holds." Whether he was right in the conviction that his genius was no less fitted for metaphysical speculation or for political science than for poetry, is a question that admits of much debate.[1] We have nothing but fragments whereby to form a definite opinion—the unfinished *Defence of Poetry*, the unfinished *Essay on a Future State*, the unfinished *Essay on Christianity*, the unfinished *Essay on the Punishment of Death*, and the

[1] See Mrs. Shelley's note on the Revolt of Islam, and the whole Preface to the Prose Works.

scattered *Speculations on Metaphysics.* None of these compositions justify the belief so confidently expressed by Mrs. Shelley in her Preface to the prose works, that "had not Shelley deserted metaphysics for poetry in his youth, and had he not been lost to us early, so that all his vaster projects were wrecked with him in the waves, he would have presented the world with a complete theory of mind; a theory to which Berkeley, Coleridge, and Kant would have contributed; but more simple, unimpugnable, and entire than the systems of these writers." Their incompleteness rather tends to confirm what she proceeds to state, that the strain of philosophical composition was too great for his susceptible nerves; while her further observation that "thought kindled imagination and awoke sensation, and rendered him dizzy from too great keenness of emotion," seems to indicate that his nature was primarily that of a poet deeply tinctured with philosophical speculation, rather than that of a metaphysician warmed at intervals to an imaginative fervour. Another of her remarks confirms us in this opinion. "He considered these philosophical views of mind and nature to be instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry."[1] This is the position of the poet rather than the analyst; and, on the whole, we are probably justified in concluding with Mrs. Shelley, that he followed a true instinct when he dedicated himself to poetry, and trained his powers in that direction.[2] To dogmatize upon the topic would be worse than foolish. There was something incalculable, incommensurable, and dæmonic in Shelley's genius; and what he might have achieved, had his life been spared and had his health progressively improved, it is of course impossible to say.

[1] Note on Prometheus.

[2] Note on Revolt of Islam.

In the spring of 1819 the Shelleys settled in Rome, where the poet proceeded with the composition of *Prometheus Unbound*. He used to write among the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, not then, as now, despoiled of all their natural beauty, but waving with the Paradise of flowers and shrubs described in his incomparable letter of March the 23rd to Peacock. Rome, however, was not destined to retain them long. On the 7th of June they lost their son William after a short illness. Shelley loved this child intensely, and sat by his bedside for sixty hours without taking rest. He was now practically childless; and his grief found expression in many of his poems, especially in the fragment headed "*Roma, Roma, Roma! non è più com' era prima.*" William was buried in the Protestant cemetery, of which Shelley had written a description to Peacock in the previous December. "The English burying-place is a green slope near the walls, under the pyramidal tomb of Cestius, and is, I think, the most beautiful and solemn cemetery I ever beheld. To see the sun shining on its bright grass, fresh, when we first visited it, with the autumnal dews, and hear the whispering of the wind among the leaves of the trees which have overgrown the tomb of Cestius, and the soil which is stirring in the sun-warm earth, and to mark the tombs, mostly of women and young people who were buried there, one might, if one were to die, desire the sleep they seem to sleep. Such is the human mind, and so it peoples with its wishes vacancy and oblivion."

Escaping from the scene of so much sorrow, they established themselves at the Villa Valsovano, near Leghorn. Here Shelley began and finished *The Cenci* at the instance of his wife, who rightly thought that he undervalued his own powers as a dramatic poet. The supposed portrait

of Beatrice in the Barberini Palace had powerfully affected his imagination, and he fancied that her story would form the fitting subject for a tragedy. It is fortunate for English literature that the real facts of that domestic drama, as recently published by Signor Bertolotti, were then involved in a tissue of romance and legend. During this summer he saw a great deal of the Gisborne family. Mrs. Gisborne's son by a previous marriage, Henry Reveley, was an engineer, and Shelley conceived a project of helping him to build a steamer which should ply between Leghorn and Marseilles. He was to supply the funds, and the pecuniary profit was to be shared by the Gisborne family. The scheme eventually fell through, though Shelley spent a good deal of money upon it; and its only importance is the additional light it throws upon his public and private benevolence. From Leghorn the Shelleys removed in the autumn to Florence, where, on the 12th of November, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley was born. Here Shelley wrote the last act of *Prometheus Unbound*, which, though the finest portion of that unique drama, seems to have been an afterthought. In the Cascine outside Florence he also composed the *Ode to the West Wind*, the most symmetrically perfect as well as the most impassioned of his minor lyrics. He spent much time in the galleries, made notes upon the principal antique statues, and formed a plan of systematic art-study. The climate, however, disagreed with him, and in the month of January, 1820, they took up their abode at Pisa.

1819 was the most important year in Shelley's life, so far as literary production is concerned. Besides *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound*, of which it yet remains to speak, this year saw the production of several political and satirical poems—the *Masque of Anarchy*, suggested by the

news of the Peterloo massacre, being by far the most important. Shelley attempted the composition of short popular songs which should stir the English people to a sense of what he felt to be their degradation. But he lacked the directness which alone could make such verses forcible, and the passionate apostrophe to the Men of England in his *Masque of Anarchy* marks the highest point of his achievement in this style:—

> Men of England, Heirs of Glory,
> Heroes of unwritten story,
> Nurslings of one mighty mother,
> Hopes of her, and one another!
>
> Rise, like lions after slumber,
> In unvanquishable number,
> Shake your chains to earth like dew,
> Which in sleep had fall'n on you.
> Ye are many, they are few.

Peter Bell the Third, written in this year, and *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, composed in the following autumn, are remarkable as showing with what keen interest Shelley watched public affairs in England from his exile home; but, for my own part, I cannot agree with those critics who esteem their humour at a high rate. The political poems may profitably be compared with his contemporary correspondence; with the letters, for instance, to Leigh Hunt, November 23rd, 1819; and to Mr. John Gisborne, April 10th, 1822; and with an undated fragment published by Mr. Garnett in the *Relics of Shelley*, page 84. No student of English political history before the Reform Bill can regard his apprehensions of a great catastrophe as ill-founded. His insight into the real danger to the nation was as penetrating as his suggestion of a remedy was moderate. Those who are accustomed to think of the poet as

a visionary enthusiast, will rub their eyes when they read the sober lines in which he warns his friend to be cautious about the security offered by the English Funds. Another letter, dated Lerici, June 29, 1822, illustrates the same practical temper of mind, the same logical application of political principles to questions of public economy.

That *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* should have been composed in one and the same year must be reckoned among the greatest wonders of literature, not only because of their sublime greatness, but also because of their essential difference. Æschylus, it is well known, had written a sequel to his *Prometheus Bound*, in which he showed the final reconciliation between Zeus, the oppressor, and Prometheus, the champion, of humanity. What that reconciliation was, we do not know, because the play is lost, and the fragments are too brief for supporting any probable hypothesis. But Shelley repudiated the notion of compromise. He could not conceive of the Titan "unsaying his high language, and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary." He, therefore, approached the theme of liberation from a wholly different point of view. Prometheus in his drama is the humane vindicator of love, justice, and liberty, as opposed to Jove, the tyrannical oppressor, and creator of all evil by his selfish rule. Prometheus is the mind of man idealized, the spirit of our race, as Shelley thought it made to be. Jove is the incarnation of all that thwarts its free development. Thus counterposed, the two chief actors represent the fundamental antitheses of good and evil, liberty and despotism, love and hate. They give the form of personality to Shelley's Ormuzd-Ahriman dualism already expressed in the first canto of *Laon and Cythna;* but, instead of being represented on the theatre of human life, the strife is now re-

moved into the reign of abstractions, vivified by mythopoetry. Prometheus resists Jove to the uttermost, endures all torments, physical and moral, that the tyrant plagues him with, secure in his own strength, and calmly expectant of an hour which shall hurl Jove from heaven, and leave the spirit of good triumphant. That hour arrives; Jove disappears; the burdens of the world and men are suddenly removed; a new age of peace and freedom and illimitable energy begins; the whole universe partakes in the emancipation; the spirit of the earth no longer groans in pain, but sings alternate love-songs with his sister orb, the moon; Prometheus is re-united in indissoluble bonds to his old love, Asia. Asia, withdrawn from sight during the first act, but spoken of as waiting in her exile for the fated hour, is the true mate of the human spirit. She is the fairest daughter of Earth and Ocean. Like Aphrodite, she rises in the Ægean near the land called by her name; and in the time of tribulation she dwells in a far Indian vale. She is the Idea of Beauty incarnate, the shadow of the Light of Life which sustains the world and enkindles it with love, the reality of Alastor's vision, the breathing image of the awful loveliness apostrophized in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, the reflex of the splendour of which Adonais was a part. At the moment of her triumph she grows so beautiful that Ione her sister cannot see her, only feels her influence. The essential thought of Shelley's creed was that the universe is penetrated, vitalized, made real by a spirit, which he sometimes called the spirit of Nature, but which is always conceived as more than Life, as that which gives its actuality to Life, and lastly as Love and Beauty. To adore this spirit, to clasp it with affection, and to blend with it, is, he thought, the true object of man. Therefore, the final union of Prometheus with

Asia is the consummation of human destinies. Love was the only law Shelley recognized. Unterrified by the grim realities of pain and crime revealed in nature and society, he held fast to the belief that, if we could but pierce to the core of things, if we could but be what we might be, the world and man would both attain to their perfection in eternal love. What resolution through some transcendental harmony was expected by Shelley for the palpable discords in the structure of the universe, we hardly know. He did not give his philosophy systematic form: and his new science of love remains a luminous poetic vision—nowhere more brilliantly set forth than in the "sevenfold hallelujahs and harping symphonies" of this, the final triumph of his lyrical poetry.

In *Prometheus*, Shelley conceived a colossal work of art, and sketched out the main figures on a scale of surpassing magnificence. While painting in these figures, he seems to reduce their proportions too much to the level of earthly life. He quits his god-creating, heaven-compelling throne of mythopœic inspiration, and descends to a love-story of Asia and Prometheus. In other words, he does not sustain the visionary and primeval dignity of these incarnated abstractions; nor, on the other hand, has he so elaborated their characters in detail as to give them the substantiality of persons. There is therefore something vague and hollow in both figures. Yet in the subordinate passages of the poem, the true mythopœic faculty—the faculty of finding concrete forms for thought, and of investing emotion with personality—shines forth with extraordinary force and clearness. We feel ourselves in the grasp of a primitive myth-maker while we read the description of Oceanus, and the raptures of the Earth and Moon.

A genuine liking for *Prometheus Unbound* may be reckoned the touch-stone of a man's capacity for understanding lyric poetry. The world in which the action is supposed to move, rings with spirit voices; and what these spirits sing, is melody more purged of mortal dross than any other poet's ear has caught, while listening to his own heart's song, or to the rhythms of the world. There are hymns in *Prometheus*, which seem to realize the miracle of making words, detached from meaning, the substance of a new ethereal music; and yet, although their verbal harmony is such, they are never devoid of definite significance for those who understand. Shelley scorned the æsthetics of a school which finds "sense swooning into nonsense" admirable. And if a critic is so dull as to ask what "Life of Life! thy lips enkindle" means, or to whom it is addressed, none can help him any more than one can help a man whose sense of hearing is too gross for the tenuity of a bat's cry. A voice in the air thus sings the hymn of Asia at the moment of her apotheosis:—

Life of Life! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them;
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the cold air fire; then screen them
In those looks where whoso gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

Child of Light! thy limbs are burning
Through the vest which seems to hide them,
As the radiant lines of morning
Through the clouds, ere they divide them:
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

Fair are others; none beholds thee.
But thy voice sounds low and tender,

Like the fairest, for it folds thee
From the sight, that liquid splendour,
And all feel, yet see thee never,
As I feel now, lost for ever!

Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness,
Till they fail, as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!

It has been said that Shelley, as a landscape painter, is decidedly Turneresque; and there is much in *Prometheus Unbound* to justify this opinion. The scale of colour is light and aerial, and the darker shadows are omitted. An excess of luminousness seems to be continually radiated from the objects at which he looks; and in this radiation of many-coloured lights, the outline itself is apt to be a little misty. Shelley, moreover, pierced through things to their spiritual essence. The actual world was less for him than that which lies within it and beyond it. "I seek," he says himself, "in what I see, the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible object." For him, as for the poet described by one of the spirit voices in *Prometheus*, the bees in the ivy-bloom are scarcely heeded; they become in his mind,—

Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality.

And yet who could have brought the bees, the lake, the sun, the bloom, more perfectly before us than that picture does?[1] What vignette is more exquisitely coloured and finished than the little study of a pair of halcyons in the

[1] Forman, vol. ii. p. 181.

third act?[1] Blake is perhaps the only artist who could have illustrated this drama. He might have shadowed forth the choirs of spirits, the trailing voices and their thrilling songs, phantasmal Demogorgon, and the charioted Hour. Prometheus, too, with his "flowing limbs," has just Blake's fault of impersonation—the touch of unreality in that painter's Adam.

Passing to *The Cenci*, we change at once the moral and artistic atmosphere. The lyrical element, except for one most lovely dirge, is absent. Imagery and description are alike sternly excluded. Instead of soaring to the empyrean, our feet are firmly planted on the earth. In exchange for radiant visions of future perfection, we are brought into the sphere of dreadful passions—all the agony, endurance, and half-maddened action, of which luckless human innocence is capable. To tell the legend of Beatrice Cenci here, is hardly needed. Her father, a monster of vice and cruelty, was bent upon breaking her spirit by imprisonment, torture, and nameless outrage. At last her patience ended; and finding no redress in human justice, no champion of her helplessness in living man, she wrought his death. For this she died upon the scaffold, together with her step-mother and her brothers, who had aided in the execution of the murder. The interest of *The Cenci*, and it is overwhelmingly great, centres in Beatrice and her father; from these two chief actors in the drama, all the other characters fall away into greater or less degrees of unsubstantiality. Perhaps Shelley intended this—as the maker of a bas-relief contrives two or three planes of figures for the presentation of his ruling group. Yet there appears to my mind a defect of accomplishment, rather than a deliberate intention, in the delineation of Or-

[1] Forman, vol. ii. p. 281.

sino. He seems meant to be the wily, crafty, Machiavellian reptile, whose calculating wickedness should form a contrast to the dæmonic, reckless, almost maniacal fiendishness of old Francesco Cenci. But this conception of him wavers; his love for Beatrice is too delicately tinted, and he is suffered to break down with an infirmity of conscience alien to such a nature. On the other hand the uneasy vacillations of Giacomo, and the irresolution, born of feminine weakness and want of fibre, in Lucrezia, serve to throw the firm will of Beatrice into prominent relief; while her innocence, sustained through extraordinary suffering in circumstances of exceptional horror — the innocence of a noble nature thrust by no act of its own but by its wrongs beyond the pale of ordinary womankind — is contrasted with the merely childish guiltlessness of Bernardo. Beatrice rises to her full height in the fifth act, dilates and grows with the approach of danger, and fills the whole scene with her spirit on the point of death. Her sublime confidence in the justice and essential rightness of her action, the glance of self-assured purity with which she annihilates the cut-throat brought to testify against her, her song in prison, and her tender solicitude for the frailer Lucrezia, are used with wonderful dramatic skill for the fulfilment of a feminine ideal at once delicate and powerful. Once and once only does she yield to ordinary weakness; it is when the thought crosses her mind that she may meet her father in the other world, as once he came to her on earth.

Shelley dedicated *The Cenci* to Leigh Hunt, saying that he had striven in this tragedy to cast aside the subjective manner of his earlier work, and to produce something at once more popular and more concrete, more sober in style, and with a firmer grasp on the realities of life. He was

very desirous of getting it acted, and wrote to Peacock requesting him to offer it at Covent Garden. Miss O'Neil, he thought, would play the part of Beatrice admirably. The manager, however, did not take this view; averring that the subject rendered it incapable of being even submitted to an actress like Miss O'Neil. Shelley's self-criticism is always so valuable, that it may be well here to collect what he said about the two great dramas of 1819. Concerning *The Cenci* he wrote to Peacock:—"It is written without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterize my other compositions; I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development." "*Cenci* is written for the multitude, and ought to sell well." "I believe it singularly fitted for the stage." "*The Cenci* is a work of art; it is not coloured by my feelings, nor obscured by my metaphysics. I don't think much of it. It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length." *Prometheus*, on the other hand, he tells Ollier, "is my favourite poem; I charge you, therefore, specially to pet him and feed him with fine ink and good paper"—which was duly done. Again:—"For *Prometheus*, I expect and desire no great sale; *Prometheus* was never intended for more than five or six persons; it is in my judgment of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted, and is perhaps less an imitation of anything that has gone before it; it is original, and cost me severe mental labour." Shelley was right in judging that *The Cenci* would be comparatively popular; this was proved by the fact that it went through two editions in his lifetime. The value he set upon *Prometheus* as the

higher work, will hardly be disputed. Unique in the history of literature, and displaying the specific qualities of its author at their height, the world could less easily afford to lose this drama than *The Cenci*, even though that be the greatest tragedy composed in English since the death of Shakespere. For reasons which will be appreciated by lovers of dramatic poetry, I refrain from detaching portions of these two plays. Those who desire to make themselves acquainted with the author's genius, must devote long and patient study to the originals in their entirety.

Prometheus Unbound, like the majority of Shelley's works, fell still-born from the press. It furnished punsters with a joke, however, which went the round of several papers; this poem, they cried, is well named, for who would bind it? Of criticism that deserves the name, Shelley got absolutely nothing in his lifetime. The stupid but venomous reviews which gave him occasional pain, but which he mostly laughed at, need not now be mentioned. It is not much to any purpose to abuse the authors of mere rubbish. The real lesson to be learned from such of them as may possibly have been sincere, as well as from the failure of his contemporaries to appreciate his genius—the sneers of Moore, the stupidity of Campbell, the ignorance of Wordsworth, the priggishness of Southey, or the condescending tone of Keats—is that nothing is more difficult than for lesser men or equals to pay just homage to the greatest in their lifetime. Those who may be interested in studying Shelley's attitude toward his critics, should read a letter addressed to Ollier from Florence, October 15, 1819, soon after he had seen the vile attack upon him in the *Quarterly*, comparing this with the fragments of an expostulatory letter to the Editor, and the

preface to *Adonais*.[1] It is clear that, though he bore scurrilous abuse with patience, he was prepared if needful to give blow for blow. On the 11th of June, 1821, he wrote to Ollier:—"As yet I have laughed; but woe to those scoundrels if they should once make me lose my temper!" The stanzas on the *Quarterly* in *Adonais*, and the invective against Lord Eldon, show what Shelley could have done if he had chosen to castigate the curs. Meanwhile the critics achieved what they intended. Shelley, as Trelawny emphatically tells us, was universally shunned, coldly treated by Byron's friends at Pisa, and regarded as a monster by such of the English in Italy as had not made his personal acquaintance. On one occasion he is even said to have been knocked down in a post-office by some big bully, who escaped before he could obtain his name and address; but this is one of the stories rendered doubtful by lack of precise details.

[1] Shelley Memorials, p. 121. Garnett's Relics of Shelley, pp. 49, 190. Collected Letters, p. 147, in Moxon's Edition of Works in one vol. 1840.

CHAPTER VI.

RESIDENCE AT PISA.

On the 26th of January, 1820, the Shelleys established themselves at Pisa. From this date forward to the 7th of July, 1822, Shelley's life divides itself into two periods of unequal length; the first spent at Pisa, the baths of San Giuliano, and Leghorn; the second at Lerici, on the Bay of Spezia. Without entering into minute particulars of dates or recording minor changes of residence, it is possible to treat of the first and longer period in general. The house he inhabited at Pisa was on the south side of the Arno. After a few months he became the neighbour of Lord Byron, who engaged the Palazzo Lanfranchi in order to be near him; and here many English and Italian friends gathered round them. Among these must be mentioned in the first place Captain Medwin, whose recollections of the Pisan residence are of considerable value, and next Captain Trelawny, who has left a record of Shelley's last days only equalled in vividness by Hogg's account of the Oxford period, and marked by signs of more unmistakable accuracy. Not less important members of this private circle were Mr. and Mrs. Edward Elleker Williams, with whom Shelley and his wife lived on terms of the closest friendship. Among Italians, the physician Vaccà,

the improvisatore Sgricci, and Rosini, the author of *La Monaca di Monza*, have to be recorded. It will be seen from this enumeration that Shelley was no longer solitary; and indeed it would appear that now, upon the eve of his accidental death, he had begun to enjoy an immunity from many of his previous sufferings. Life expanded before him: his letters show that he was concentrating his powers and preparing for a fresh flight; and the months, though ever productive of poetic masterpieces, promised a still more magnificent birth in the future.

In the summer and autumn of 1820, Shelley produced some of his most genial poems: the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, which might be mentioned as a pendent to *Julian and Maddalo* for its treatment of familiar things; the *Ode to a Skylark*, that most popular of all his lyrics; the *Witch of Atlas*, unrivalled as an Ariel-flight of fairy fancy; and the *Ode to Naples*, which, together with the *Ode to Liberty*, added a new lyric form to English literature. In the winter he wrote the *Sensitive Plant*, prompted thereto, we are told, by the flowers which crowded Mrs. Shelley's drawing-room, and exhaled their sweetness to the temperate Italian sunlight. Whether we consider the number of these poems or their diverse character, ranging from verse separated by an exquisitely subtle line from simple prose to the most impassioned eloquence and the most ethereal imagination, we shall be equally astonished. Every chord of the poet's lyre is touched, from the deep bass string that echoes the diurnal speech of such a man as Shelley was, to the fine vibrations of a treble merging its rarity of tone in accents super-sensible to ordinary ears. One passage from the *Letter to Maria Gisborne* may here be quoted, not for its poetry, but for the light it casts upon the circle of his English friends.

You are now
In London, that great sea, whose ebb and flow
At once is deaf and loud, and on the shore
Vomits its wrecks, and still howls on for more.
Yet in its depth what treasures! You will see
That which was Godwin,—greater none than he
Though fallen—and fallen on evil times—to stand
Among the spirits of our age and land,
Before the dread tribunal of *To come*
The foremost, while Rebuke cowers pale and dumb.
You will see Coleridge—he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lustre and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind,
Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
Flags wearily through darkness and despair—
A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
A hooded eagle among blinking owls.
You will see Hunt; one of those happy souls
Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom
This world would smell like what it is—a tomb;
Who is, what others seem. His room no doubt
Is still adorned by many a cast from Shout,
With graceful flowers tastefully placed about,
And coronals of bay from ribbons hung,
And brighter wreaths in neat disorder flung;
The gifts of the most learn'd among some dozens
Of female friends, sisters-in-law, and cousins.
And there is he with his eternal puns,
Which beat the dullest brain for smiles, like duns
Thundering for money at a poet's door;
Alas! it is no use to say, "I'm poor!"—
Or oft in graver mood, when he will look
Things wiser than were ever read in book,
Except in Shakespere's wisest tenderness.
You will see Hogg; and I cannot express
His virtues, though I know that they are great,
Because he locks, then barricades the gate
Within which they inhabit. Of his wit
And wisdom, you'll cry out when you are bit.

He is a pearl within an oyster-shell,
One of the richest of the deep. And there
Is English Peacock, with his mountain fair,—
Turn'd into a Flamingo, that shy bird
That gleams in the Indian air. Have you not heard
When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,
His best friends hear no more of him. But you
Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,
With the milk-white Snowdonian antelope
Match'd with this camelopard. His fine wit
Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it;
A strain too learnèd for a shallow age,
Too wise for selfish bigots; let his page
Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,
Fold itself up for the serener clime
Of years to come, and find its recompense
In that just expectation. Wit and sense,
Virtue and human knowledge, all that might
Make this dull world a business of delight,
Are all combined in Horace Smith. And these,
With some exceptions, which I need not tease
Your patience by descanting on, are all
You and I know in London.

Captain Medwin, who came late in the autumn of 1820, at his cousin's invitation, to stay with the Shelleys, has recorded many interesting details of their Pisan life, as well as valuable notes of Shelley's conversation. "It was nearly seven years since we had parted, but I should have immediately recognized him in a crowd. His figure was emaciated, and somewhat bent, owing to near-sightedness, and his being forced to lean over his books, with his eyes almost touching them; his hair, still profuse, and curling naturally, was partially interspersed with grey; but his appearance was youthful. There was also a freshness and purity in his complexion that he never lost." Not long after his arrival, Medwin suffered from a severe and tedi-

ous illness. "Shelley tended me like a brother. He applied my leeches, administered my medicines, and during six weeks that I was confined to my room, was assiduous and unintermitting in his affectionate care of me." The poet's solitude and melancholy at this time impressed his cousin very painfully. Though he was producing a long series of imperishable poems, he did not take much interest in his work. "I am disgusted with writing," he once said, "and were it not for an irresistible impulse, that predominates my better reason, should discontinue so doing." The brutal treatment he had lately received from the *Quarterly Review*, the calumnies which pursued him, and the coldness of all but a very few friends, checked his enthusiasm for composition. Of this there is abundant proof in his correspondence. In a letter to Leigh Hunt, dated Jan. 25, 1822, he says: "My faculties are shaken to atoms and torpid. I can write nothing; and if *Adonais* had no success, and excited no interest, what incentive can I have to write?" Again: "I write little now. It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write." Lord Byron's company proved now, as before, a check rather than an incentive to production: "I do not write; I have lived too long near Lord Byron, and the sun has extinguished the glow-worm; for I cannot hope, with St. John, that *the light came into the world and the world knew it not.*" "I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may, and there is no other with whom it is worth contending." To Ollier, in 1820, he wrote: "I doubt whether I shall write more. I could be content either with the hell or the paradise of poetry; but the torments of its purgatory vex me, without exciting my powers sufficiently to put an end to the vexation." It was not that his spirit

was cowed by the Reviews, or that he mistook the sort of audience he had to address. He more than once acknowledged that, while Byron wrote for the many, his poems were intended for the understanding few. Yet the συνετοὶ, as he called them, gave him but scanty encouragement. The cold phrases of kindly Horace Smith show that he had not comprehended *Prometheus Unbound;* and Shelley whimsically complains that even intelligent and sympathetic critics confounded the ideal passion described in *Epipsychidion* with the love affairs of "a servant-girl and her sweetheart." This almost incomprehensible obtuseness on the part of men who ought to have known better, combined with the coarse abuse of vulgar scribblers, was enough to make a man so sincerely modest as Shelley doubt his powers, or shrink from the severe labour of developing them.[1] "The decision of the cause," he wrote to Mr. Gisborne, "whether or no *I* am a poet, is removed from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble; but the court is a very severe one, and I fear that the verdict will be, guilty—death." Deep down in his own heart he had, however, less doubt: "This I know," he said to Medwin, "that whether in prosing or in versing, there is something in my writings that shall live for ever." And again he writes to Hunt: "I am full of thoughts and plans, and should do something, if the feeble and irritable frame which encloses it was willing to obey the spirit. I fancy that then I should do great things." It seems almost certain that the incompleteness of many longer works designed in the Italian period, the abandonment of the tragedy on Tasso's story, the unfinished state of *Charles I.*, and the failure to execute the

[1] See Medwin, vol. ii. p. 172, for Shelley's comment on the difficulty of the poet's art.

cherished plan of a drama suggested by the Book of Job, were due to the depressing effects of ill-health and external discouragement. Poetry with Shelley was no light matter. He composed under the pressure of intense excitement, and he elaborated his first draughts with minute care and severe self-criticism.

These words must not be taken as implying that he followed the Virgilian precedent of polishing and reducing the volume of his verses by an anxious exercise of calm reflection, or that he observed the Horatian maxim of deferring their publication till the ninth year. The contrary was notoriously the case with him. Yet it is none the less proved by the state of his manuscripts that his compositions, even as we now possess them, were no mere improvisations. The passage already quoted from his *Defence of Poetry* shows the high ideal he had conceived of the poet's duty toward his art; and it may be confidently asserted that his whole literary career was one long struggle to emerge from the incoherence of his earlier efforts, into the clearness of expression and precision of form that are the index of mastery over style. At the same time it was inconsistent with his most firmly rooted æsthetic principles to attempt composition except under an impulse approaching to inspiration. To imperil his life by the fiery taxing of all his faculties, moral, intellectual, and physical, and to undergo the discipline exacted by his own fastidious taste, with no other object in view than the frigid compliments of a few friends, was more than even Shelley's enthusiasm could endure. He, therefore, at this period required the powerful stimulus of some highly exciting cause from without to determine his activity.

Such external stimulus came to Shelley from three

quarters early in the year 1821. Among his Italian acquaintances at Pisa was a clever but disreputable Professor, of whom Medwin draws a very piquant portrait. This man one day related the sad story of a beautiful and noble lady, the Contessina Emilia Viviani, who had been confined by her father in a dismal convent of the suburbs, to await her marriage with a distasteful husband. Shelley, fired as ever by a tale of tyranny, was eager to visit the fair captive. The Professor accompanied him and Medwin to the convent-parlour, where they found her more lovely than even the most glowing descriptions had led them to expect. Nor was she only beautiful. Shelley soon discovered that she had "cultivated her mind beyond what I have ever met with in Italian women;" and a rhapsody composed by her upon the subject of Uranian Love —Il Vero Amore—justifies the belief that she possessed an intellect of more than ordinary elevation. He took Mrs. Shelley to see her, and both did all they could to make her convent-prison less irksome, by frequent visits, by letters, and by presents of flowers and books. It was not long before Shelley's sympathy for this unfortunate lady took the form of love, which, however spiritual and Platonic, was not the less passionate. The result was the composition of *Epipsychidion*, the most unintelligible of all his poems to those who have not assimilated the spirit of Plato's *Symposium* and Dante's *Vita Nuova*. In it he apostrophizes Emilia Viviani as the incarnation of ideal beauty, the universal loveliness made visible in mortal flesh:—

> Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
> Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman
> All that is insupportable in thee
> Of light, and love, and immortality!

He tells her that he loves her, and describes the troubles and deceptions of his earlier manhood, under allegories veiled in deliberate obscurity. The Pandemic and the Uranian Aphrodite have striven for his soul; for though in youth he dedicated himself to the service of ideal beauty, and seemed to find it under many earthly shapes, yet has he ever been deluded. At last Emily appears, and in her he recognizes the truth of the vision veiled from him so many years. She and Mary shall henceforth, like sun and moon, rule the world of love within him. Then he calls on her to fly. They three will escape and live together, far away from men, in an Ægean island. The description of this visionary isle, and of the life to be led there by the fugitives from a dull and undiscerning world, is the most beautiful that has been written this century in the rhymed heroic metre.

> It is an isle under Ionian skies,
> Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise;
> And, for the harbours are not safe and good,
> This land would have remained a solitude
> But for some pastoral people native there,
> Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air
> Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
> Simple and spirited, innocent and bold.
> The blue Ægean girds this chosen home,
> With ever-changing sound and light and foam
> Kissing the sifted sands and caverns hoar;
> And all the winds wandering along the shore,
> Undulate with the undulating tide.
> There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
> And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
> As clear as elemental diamond,
> Or serene morning air. And far beyond,
> The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer,
> (Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year,)

Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls
Illumining, with sound that never fails
Accompany the noonday nightingales;
And all the place is peopled with sweet airs.
The light clear element which the isle wears
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep;
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain,
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison:
Which is a soul within a soul—they seem
Like echoes of an antenatal dream.
It is an isle 'twixt heaven, air, earth, and sea,
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity;
Bright as that wandering Eden, Lucifer,
Washed by the soft blue oceans of young air.
It is a favoured place. Famine or Blight,
Pestilence, War, and Earthquake, never light
Upon its mountain-peaks; blind vultures, they
Sail onward far upon their fatal way.
The wingèd storms, chanting their thunder-psalm
To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm
Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,
From which its fields and woods ever renew
Their green and golden immortality.
And from the sea there rise, and from the sky
There fall, clear exhalations, soft and bright,
Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,
Which sun or moon or zephyr draws aside,
Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride
Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
Blushes and trembles at its own excess:
Yet, like a buried lamp, a soul no less
Burns in the heart of this delicious isle,
An atom of the Eternal, whose own smile

Unfolds itself, and may be felt not seen
O'er the grey rocks, blue waves, and forests green,
Filling their bare and void interstices.

Shelley did not publish *Epipsychidion* with his own name. He gave it to the world as the composition of a man who had "died at Florence, as he was preparing for a voyage to one of the Sporades," and he requested Ollier not to circulate it, except among a few intelligent readers. It may almost be said to have been never published, in such profound silence did it issue from the press. Very shortly after its appearance he described it to Leigh Hunt as "a portion of me already dead," and added this significant allusion to its subject matter:—"Some of us have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie." In the letter of June 18, 1822, again he says:—"The *Epipsychidion* I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the Centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace. If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal." This paragraph contains the essence of a just criticism. Brilliant as the poem is, we cannot read it with unwavering belief either in the author's sincerity at the time he wrote it, or in the permanence of the emotion it describes. The exordium has a fatal note of rhetorical exaggeration, not because the kind of passion is impossible, but because Shelley does not convince us that in this instance he had really been its subject. His

own critique, following so close upon the publication of *Epipsychidion*, confirms the impression made by it, and justifies the conclusion that he had utilized his feeling for Emilia to express a favourite doctrine in impassioned verse.

To students of Shelley's inner life *Epipsychidion* will always have high value, independently of its beauty of style, as containing his doctrine of love. It is the full expression of the esoteric principle presented to us in *Alastor*, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, and *Prince Athanase*. But the words just quoted, which may be compared with Mrs. Shelley's note to *Prince Athanase*, authorize our pointing out what he himself recognized as the defect of his theory. Instead of remaining true to the conception of Beauty expressed in the *Hymn*, Shelley "sought through the world the One whom he may love." Thus, while his doctrine in *Epipsychidion* seems Platonic, it will not square with the *Symposium*. Plato treats the love of a beautiful person as a mere initiation into divine mysteries, the first step in the ladder that ascends to heaven. When a man has formed a just conception of the universal beauty, he looks back with a smile upon those who find their soul's sphere in the love of some mere mortal object. Tested by this standard, Shelley's identification of Intellectual Beauty with so many daughters of earth, and his worshipping love of Emilia, is a spurious Platonism. Plato would have said that to seek the Idea of Beauty in Emilia Viviani was a retrogressive step. All that she could do, would be to quicken the soul's sense of beauty, to stir it from its lethargy, and to make it divine the eternal reality of beauty in the supersensual world of thought. This Shelley had already acknowledged in the *Hymn;* and this he emphasizes in

these words:—"The error consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal."

The fragments and cancelled passages published in Forman's edition do not throw much light upon *Epipsychidion*. The longest, entitled *To his Genius* by its first editor, Mr. Garnett, reads like the induction to a poem conceived and written in a different key, and at a lower level of inspiration. It has, however, this extraordinary interest, that it deals with a love which is both love and friendship, above sex, spiritual, unintelligible to the world at large. Thus the fragment enables the student better to realize the kind of worship so passionately expressed in *Epipsychidion*.

The news of Keats's death at Rome on the 27th of December, 1820, and the erroneous belief that it had been accelerated, if not caused, by a contemptible review of *Endymion* in the *Quarterly*, stirred Shelley to the composition of *Adonais*. He had it printed at Pisa, and sent copies to Ollier for circulation in London. This poem was a favourite with its author, who hoped not only that it might find acceptance with the public, but also that it would confer lustre upon the memory of a poet whom he sincerely admired. No criticisms upon Shelley's works are half so good as his own. It is, therefore, interesting to collect the passages in which he speaks of an elegy only equalled in our language by *Lycidas*, and in the point of passionate eloquence even superior to Milton's youthful lament for his friend. "The *Adonais*, in spite of its mysticism," he writes to Ollier, "is the least imperfect of my compositions." "I confess I should be surprised if that poem were born to an immortality of oblivion." "It is a highly wrought *piece of art*, and perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written." "It

is absurd in any review to criticize *Adonais*, and still more to pretend that the verses are bad." "I know what to think of *Adonais*, but what to think of those who confound it with the many bad poems of the day, I know not." Again, alluding to the stanzas hurled against the infamous *Quarterly* reviewer, he says:—"I have dipped my pen in consuming fire for his destroyers; otherwise the style is calm and solemn."

With these estimates the reader of to-day will cordially agree. Although *Adonais* is not so utterly beyond the scope of other poets as *Prometheus* or *Epipsychidion*, it presents Shelley's qualities in a form of even and sustained beauty, brought within the sphere of the dullest apprehensions. Shelley, we may notice, dwells upon the *art* of the poem; and this, perhaps, is what at first sight will strike the student most. He chose as a foundation for his work those laments of Bion for Adonis, and of Moschus for Bion, which are the most pathetic products of Greek idyllic poetry; and the transmutation of their material into the substance of highly spiritualized modern thought, reveals the potency of a Prospero's wand. It is a metamorphosis whereby the art of excellent but positive poets has been translated into the sphere of metaphysical imagination. Urania takes the place of Aphrodite; the thoughts and fancies and desires of the dead singer are substituted for Bion's cupids; and instead of mountain shepherds, the living bards of England are summoned to lament around the poet's bier. Yet it is only when Shelley frees himself from the influence of his models, that he soars aloft on mighty wing. This point, too, is the point of transition from death, sorrow, and the past to immortality, joy, and the rapture of the things that cannot pass away. The first and second portions of the poem are, at

the same time, thoroughly concordant, and the passage from the one to the other is natural. Two quotations from *Adonais* will suffice to show the power and sweetness of its verse.

The first is a description of Shelley himself following Byron and Moore—the "Pilgrim of Eternity," and Ierne's "sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong"—to the couch where Keats lies dead. There is both pathos and unconscious irony in his making these two poets the chief mourners, when we remember what Byron wrote about Keats in *Don Juan*, and what Moore afterwards recorded of Shelley; and when we think, moreover, how far both Keats and Shelley have outsoared Moore, and disputed with Byron his supreme place in the heaven of poetry.

Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
A phantom among men, companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm,
Whose thunder is its knell. He, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
Actæon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued like raging hounds their father and their prey.

A pard-like Spirit beautiful and swift—
A love in desolation masked—a Power
Girt round with weakness; it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
Is it a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow;—even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies over-blown,
And faded violets, white and pied and blue;

And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
Yet dripping with the forest's noon-day dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it. Of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer, struck by the hunter's dart.

The second passage is the peroration of the poem. Nowhere has Shelley expressed his philosophy of man's relation to the universe with more sublimity and with a more imperial command of language than in these stanzas. If it were possible to identify that philosophy with any recognized system of thought, it might be called pantheism. But it is difficult to affix a name, stereotyped by the usage of the schools, to the aerial spiritualism of its ardent and impassioned poet's creed.

The movement of the long melodious sorrow-song has just been interrupted by three stanzas, in which Shelley lashes the reviewer of Keats. He now bursts forth afresh into the music of consolation :—

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep!
He hath awakened from the dream of life.
'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings. *We* decay
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again;
From the contagion of the world's slow stain

He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air
Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

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.

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear
His part, while the One Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear;
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
And bursting in its beauty and its might
From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.

But the absorption of the human soul into primeval nature-forces, the blending of the principle of thought with the universal spirit of beauty, is not enough to sat-

isfy man's yearning after immortality. Therefore in the next three stanzas the indestructibility of the personal self is presented to us, as the soul of Adonais passes into the company of the illustrious dead who, like him, were untimely slain:—

> The splendours of the firmament of time
> May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not:
> Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
> And death is a low mist which cannot blot
> The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought
> Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
> And love and life contend in it, for what
> Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there,
> And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

> The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
> Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,
> Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton
> Rose pale, his solemn agony had not
> Yet faded from him; Sidney, as he fought
> And as he fell, and as he lived and loved,
> Sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot,
> Arose; and Lucan, by his death approved:—
> Oblivion as they rose shrank like a thing reproved.

> And many more, whose names on Earth are dark,
> But whose transmitted effluence cannot die
> So long as fire outlives the parent spark,
> Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.
> "Thou art become as one of us," they cry;
> "It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
> Swung blind in unascended majesty,
> Silent alone amid an Heaven of song.
> Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our throng!"

From the more universal and philosophical aspects of his theme, the poet once more turns to the special subject

that had stirred him. Adonais lies dead; and those who mourn him must seek his grave. He has escaped: to follow him is to die; and where should we learn to dote on death unterrified, if not in Rome? In this way the description of Keats's resting-place beneath the pyramid of Cestius, which was also destined to be Shelley's own, is introduced:—

> Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth,
> Fond wretch! and show thyself and him aright.
> Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth;
> As from a centre, dart thy spirit's light
> Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
> Satiate the void circumference: then shrink
> Even to a point within our day and night;
> And keep thy heart light, let it make thee sink
> When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink.
>
> Or go to Rome, which is the sepulchre,
> Oh, not of him, but of our joy: 'tis nought
> That ages, empires, and religions there
> Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought;
> For such as he can lend,—they borrow not
> Glory from those who made the world their prey;
> And he is gathered to the kings of thought
> Who waged contention with their time's decay,
> And of the past are all that cannot pass away.
>
> Go thou to Rome,—at once the Paradise,
> The grave, the city, and the wilderness;
> And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,
> And flowering weeds and fragrant copses dress
> The bones of Desolation's nakedness,
> Pass, till the Spirit of the spot shall lead
> Thy footsteps to a slope of green access,
> Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead
> A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread;

And grey walls moulder round, on which dull Time
Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand;
And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,
Pavilioning the dust of him who planned
This refuge for his memory, doth stand
Like flame transformed to marble; and beneath,
A field is spread, on which a newer band
Have pitched in Heaven's smile their camp of death,
Welcoming him we lose with scarce extinguished breath.

Here pause: these graves are all too young as yet
To have outgrown the sorrow which consigned
Its charge to each; and if the seal is set,
Here, on one fountain of a mourning mind,
Break if not thou! too surely shalt thou find
Thine own well full, if thou returnest home,
Of tears and gall. From the world's bitter wind
Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.
What Adonais is, why fear we to become?

Yet again the thought of Death as the deliverer, the revealer, and the mystagogue, through whom the soul of man is reunited to the spirit of the universe, returns; and on this solemn note the poem closes. The symphony of exultation which had greeted the passage of Adonais into the eternal world, is here subdued to a graver key, as befits the mood of one whom mystery and mourning still oppress on earth. Yet even in the somewhat less than jubilant conclusion we feel that highest of all Shelley's qualities—the liberation of incalculable energies, the emancipation and expansion of a force within the soul, victorious over circumstance, exhilarated and elevated by contact with such hopes as make a feebler spirit tremble:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly;

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
A light is past from the revolving year,
And man and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The soft sky smiles, the low wind whispers near:
'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither!
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

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

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given.
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

it will be seen that, whatever Shelley may from time to

time have said about the immortality of the soul, he was no materialist, and no believer in the extinction of the spiritual element by death. Yet he was too wise to dogmatize upon a problem which by its very nature admits of no solution in this world. "I hope," he said, "but my hopes are not unmixed with fear for what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die." On another occasion he told Trelawny, "I am content to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon. My mind is tranquil; I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded; when Death removes our clay coverings, the mystery will be solved." How constantly the thought of death as the revealer was present to his mind, may be gathered from an incident related by Trelawny. They were bathing in the Arno, when Shelley, who could not swim, plunged into deep water, and "lay stretched out at the bottom like a conger eel, not making the least effort or struggle to save himself." Trelawny fished him out, and when he had taken breath, he said: "I always find the bottom of the well, and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell. Death is the veil which those who live call life; they sleep, and it is lifted." Yet being pressed by his friend, he refused to acknowledge a formal and precise belief in the imperishability of the human soul. "We know nothing; we have no evidence; we cannot express our inmost thoughts. They are incomprehensible even to ourselves." The clear insight into the conditions of the question conveyed by the last sentence is very characteristic of Shelley. It makes us regret the non-completion of his essay on a *Future Life*, which would certainly have stated the problem with rare lucidity and candour, and

would have illuminated the abyss of doubt with a sense of spiritual realities not often found in combination with wise suspension of judgment. What he clung to amid all perplexities was the absolute and indestructible existence of the universal as perceived by us in love, beauty, and delight. Though the destiny of the personal self be obscure, these things cannot fail. The conclusion of the *Sensitive Plant* might be cited as conveying the quintessence of his hope upon this most intangible of riddles.

> Whether the Sensitive Plant, or that
> Which within its boughs like a spirit sat,
> Ere its outward form had known decay,
> Now felt this change, I cannot say.
>
> I dare not guess; but in this life
> Of error, ignorance, and strife,
> Where nothing is, but all things seem,
> And we the shadows of the dream:
>
> It is a modest creed, and yet
> Pleasant, if one considers it,
> To own that death itself must be,
> Like all the rest, a mockery.
>
> That garden sweet, that lady fair,
> And all sweet shapes and odours there,
> In truth have never passed away:
> 'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.
>
> For love, and beauty, and delight,
> There is no death nor change; their might
> Exceeds our organs, which endure
> No light, being themselves obscure.

But it is now time to return from this digression to the poem which suggested it, and which, more than any other.

serves to illustrate its author's mood of feeling about the life beyond the grave. The last lines of *Adonais* might be read as a prophecy of his own death by drowning. The frequent recurrence of this thought in his poetry is, to say the least, singular. In *Alastor* we read:—

> A restless impulse urged him to embark
> And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste;
> For well he knew that mighty Shadow loves
> The slimy caverns of the populous deep.

The *Ode to Liberty* closes on the same note:—

> As a far taper fades with fading night;
> As a brief insect dies with dying day,
> My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
> Drooped. O'er it closed the echoes far away
> Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
> As waves which lately paved his watery way
> Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.

The *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, echo the thought with a slight variation:—

> Yet now despair itself is mild,
> Even as the winds and waters are;
> I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care
> Which I have borne, and yet must bear,—
> Till death like sleep might steal on me,
> And I might feel in the warm air
> My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
> Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Trelawny tells a story of his friend's life at Lerici, which further illustrates his preoccupation with the thought of death at sea. He took Mrs. Williams and her children out upon the bay in his little boat one afternoon, and starting suddenly from a deep reverie, into which he had fallen,

exclaimed with a joyful and resolute voice, "Now let us together solve the great mystery!" Too much value must not be attached to what might have been a mere caprice of utterance. Yet the proposal not unreasonably frightened Mrs. Williams, for Shelley's friends were accustomed to expect the realization of his wildest fancies. It may incidentally be mentioned that before the water finally claimed its victim, he had often been in peril of life upon his fatal element—during the first voyage to Ireland, while crossing the Channel with Mary in an open boat, again at Meillerie with Byron, and once at least with Williams.

A third composition of the year 1821 was inspired by the visit of Prince Mavrocordato to Pisa. He called on Shelley in April, showed him a copy of Prince Ipsilanti's proclamation, and announced that Greece was determined to strike a blow for freedom. The news aroused all Shelley's enthusiasm, and he began the lyrical drama of *Hellas*, which he has described as "a sort of imitation of the *Persae* of Æschylus." We find him at work upon it in October; and it must have been finished by the end of that month, since the dedication bears the date of November 1st, 1821. Shelley did not set great store by it. "It was written," he says, "without much care, and in one of those few moments of enthusiasm which now seldom visit me, and which make me pay dear for their visits." The preface might, if space permitted, be cited as a specimen of his sound and weighty judgment upon one of the greatest political questions of this century. What he says about the debt of the modern world to ancient Hellas, is no less pregnant than his severe strictures upon the part played by Russia in dealing with Eastern questions. For the rest, the poem is distinguished by passages of great lyrical beauty, rising at times to the sublimest raptures, and

closing on the half-pathetic cadence of that well-known Chorus, "The world's great age begins anew." Of dramatic interest it has but little; nor is the play, as finished, equal to the promise held forth by the superb fragment of its so-called Prologue.[1] This truly magnificent torso must, I think, have been the commencement of the drama as conceived upon a different and more colossal plan, which Shelley rejected for some unknown reason. It shows the influence not only of the Book of Job, but also of the Prologue in Heaven to Faust, upon his mind.

The lyric movement of the Chorus from *Hellas*, which I propose to quote, marks the highest point of Shelley's rhythmical invention. As for the matter expressed in it, we must not forget that these stanzas are written for a Chorus of Greek captive women, whose creed does not prevent their feeling a regret for the "mightier forms of an older, austerer worship." Shelley's note reminds the reader, with characteristic caution and frankness, that "the popular notions of Christianity are represented in this Chorus as true in their relation to the worship they superseded, and that which in all probability they will supersede, without considering their merits in a relation more universal."

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth's orient portal,
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light
Gathered around their chariots as they go;

[1] Forman, iv. p. 95.

New shapes they still may weave,
New gods, new laws receive;
Bright or dim are they, as the robes they last
On Death's bare ribs had cast.

A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror came;
Like a triumphal path he trod
The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to him
Was like the vapor dim
Which the orient planet animates with light.
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
Nor preyed until their Lord had taken flight.
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep
From one whose dreams are paradise,
Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
And day peers forth with her blank eyes;
So fleet, so faint, so fair,
The Powers of earth and air
Fled from the folding star of Bethlehem:
Apollo, Pan, and Love,
And even Olympian Jove,
Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them.
Our hills, and seas, and streams,
Dispeopled of their dreams,
Their waters turned to blood, their dew to tears,
Wailed for the golden years.

In the autumn of this year Shelley paid Lord Byron a visit at Ravenna, where he made acquaintance with the Countess Guiccoli. It was then settled that Byron, who

had formed the project of starting a journal to be called *The Liberal* in concert with Leigh Hunt, should himself settle in Pisa. Leigh Hunt was to join his brother poets in the same place. The prospect gave Shelley great pleasure, for he was sincerely attached to Hunt; and though he would not promise contributions to the journal, partly lest his name should bring discredit on it, and partly because he did not choose to appear before the world as a hanger-on of Byron's, he thoroughly approved of a plan which would be profitable to his friend by bringing him into close relation with the most famous poet of the age.[1] That he was not without doubts as to Byron's working easily in harness with Leigh Hunt, may be seen in his correspondence; and how fully these doubts were destined to be confirmed, is only too well known.

At Ravenna he was tormented by the report of some more than usually infamous calumny. What it was, we do not know; but that it made profound impression on his mind, appears from a remarkable letter addressed to his wife on the 16th and 17th of August from Ravenna. In it he repeats his growing weariness, and his wish to escape from society to solitude; the weariness of a nature wounded and disappointed by commerce with the world, but neither soured nor driven to fury by cruel wrongs. It is noticeable at the same time that he clings to his present place of residence:—"our roots never struck so deeply as at Pisa, and the transplanted tree flourishes not." At Pisa he had found real rest and refreshment in the society of his two friends, the Williamses. Some of his saddest and most touching lyrics of this year are addressed to Jane—for so Mrs. Williams was called; and attentive students may perceive that the thought of Emilia was al-

[1] See the Letter to Leigh Hunt, Pisa, Aug. 26, 1821.

ready blending by subtle transitions with the new thought of Jane. One poem, almost terrible in its intensity of melancholy, is hardly explicable on the supposition that Shelley was quite happy in his home.[1] These words must be taken as implying no reflection either upon Mary's love for him, or upon his own power to bear the slighter troubles of domestic life. He was not a spoiled child of fortune, a weak egotist, or a querulous complainer. But he was always seeking and never finding the satisfaction of some deeper craving. In his own words, he had loved Antigone before he visited this earth: and no one woman could probably have made him happy, because he was for ever demanding more from love than it can give in the mixed circumstances of mortal life. Moreover, it must be remembered that his power of self-expression has bestowed permanent form on feelings which may have been but transitory; nor can we avoid the conclusion that, sincere as Shelley was, he, like all poets, made use of the emotion of the moment for purposes of art, converting an ephemeral mood into something typical and universal. This was almost certainly the case with *Epipsychidion*.

So much at any rate had to be said upon this subject; for careful readers of Shelley's minor poems are forced to the conviction that during the last year of his life he often found relief from a wretchedness, which, however real, can hardly be defined, in the sympathy of this true-hearted woman. The affection he felt for Jane was beyond question pure and honourable. All the verses he addressed to her passed through her husband's hands without the slightest interruption to their intercourse; and Mrs. Shelley, who was not unpardonably jealous of her Ariel, continued to be Mrs. Williams's warm friend. A passage from

[1] "The Serpent is shut out from Paradise."

Shelley's letter of June 18, 1822, expresses the plain prose of his relation to the Williamses:—"They are people who are very pleasing to me. But words are not the instruments of our intercourse. I like Jane more and more, and I find Williams the most amiable of companions. She has a taste for music, and an eloquence of form and motions that compensate in some degree for the lack of literary refinement."

Two lyrics of this period may here be introduced, partly for the sake of their intrinsic beauty, and partly because they illustrate the fecundity of Shelley's genius during the months of tranquil industry which he passed at Pisa. The first is an Invocation to Night:—

Swiftly walk over the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave,
Where all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear,—
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle grey,
Star-inwrought!
Blind with thine hair the eyes of day,
Kiss her until she be wearied out.
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand—
Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn,
I sighed for thee;
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
And the weary Day turned to his rest,
Lingering like an unloved guest,
I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,
"Wouldst thou me?"
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
Murmured like a noon-tide bee,
"Shall I nestle near thy side?
Wouldst thou me?"—And I replied,
"No, not thee!"

Death will come when thou art dead,
Soon, too soon—
Sleep will come when thou art fled;
Of neither would I ask the boon
I ask of thee, beloved Night—
Swift be thine approaching flight,
Come soon, soon!

The second is an Epithalamium composed for a drama which his friend Williams was writing. Students of the poetic art will find it not uninteresting to compare the three versions of this Bridal Song, given by Mr. Forman.[1] They prove that Shelley was no careless writer.

The golden gates of sleep unbar
Where strength and beauty, met together,
Kindle their image like a star
In a sea of glassy weather!

Night, with all thy stars look down—
Darkness, weep thy holiest dew!
Never smiled the inconstant moon
On a pair so true.
Let eyes not see their own delight;
Haste, swift Hour, and thy flight
Oft renew.

Fairies, sprites, and angels, keep her!
Holy stars, permit no wrong!

[1] Vol. iv. p. 89.

And return to wake the sleeper,
Dawn, ere it be long.
O joy! O fear! what will be done
In the absence of the sun!
Come along!

Lyrics like these, delicate in thought and exquisitely finished in form, were produced with a truly wonderful profusion in this season of his happiest fertility. A glance at the last section of Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* shows how large a place they occupy among the permanent jewels of our literature.

The month of January added a new and most important member to the little Pisan circle. This was Captain Edward John Trelawny, to whom more than to any one else but Hogg and Mrs. Shelley, the students of the poet's life are indebted for details at once accurate and characteristic. Trelawny had lived a free life in all quarters of the globe, far away from literary cliques and the society of cities, in contact with the sternest realities of existence, which had developed his self-reliance and his physical qualities to the utmost. The impression, therefore, made on him by Shelley has to be gravely estimated by all who still incline to treat the poet as a pathological specimen of humanity. This true child of nature recognized in his new friend far more than in Byron the stuff of a real man. "To form a just idea of his poetry, you should have witnessed his daily life; his words and actions best illustrated his writings." "The cynic Byron acknowledged him to be the best and ablest man he had ever known. The truth was, Shelley loved everything better than himself." "I have seen Shelley and Byron in society, and the contrast was as marked as their characters. The former, not thinking of himself, was as much

at ease as in his own home, omitting no occasion of obliging those whom he came in contact with, readily conversing with all or any who addressed him, irrespective of age or rank, dress or address." "All who heard him felt the charm of his simple, earnest manner: while Byron knew him to be exempt from the egotism, pedantry, coxcombry, and more than all the rivalry of authorship." "Shelley's mental activity was infectious; he kept your brain in constant action." "He was always in earnest." "He never laid aside his book and magic mantle; he waved his wand, and Byron, after a faint show of defiance, stood mute. . . . . Shelley's earnestness and just criticism held him captive." These sentences, and many others, prove that Trelawny, himself somewhat of a cynic, cruelly exposing false pretensions, and detesting affectation in any form, paid unreserved homage to the heroic qualities this "dreamy bard," — "uncommonly awkward," as he also called him—bad rider and poor seaman as he was—"oversensitive," and "eternally brooding on his own thoughts," who "had seen no more of the waking-day than a girl at a boarding-school." True to himself, gentle, tender, with the courage of a lion, "frank and outspoken, like a well-conditioned boy, well-bred and considerate for others, because he was totally devoid of selfishness and vanity," Shelley seemed to this unprejudiced companion of his last few months that very rare product for which Diogenes searched in vain—a man.

Their first meeting must be told in Trelawny's own words — words no less certain of immortality than the fame of him they celebrate. "The Williamses received me in their earnest, cordial manner; we had a great deal to communicate to each other, and were in loud and animated conversation, when I was rather put out by observ-

ing in the passage near the open door, opposite to where I sat, a pair of glittering eyes steadily fixed on mine; it was too dark to make out whom they belonged to. With the acuteness of a woman, Mrs. Williams's eyes followed the direction of mine, and going to the doorway she laughingly said, 'Come in, Shelley, it's only our friend Tre just arrived.' Swiftly gliding in, blushing like a girl, a tall, thin stripling held out both his hands; and although I could hardly believe, as I looked at his flushed, feminine, and artless face, that it could be the poet, I returned his warm pressure. After the ordinary greetings and courtesies he sat down and listened. I was silent from astonishment: was it possible this mild-looking, beardless boy, could be the veritable monster at war with all the world? —excommunicated by the Fathers of the Church, deprived of his civil rights by the fiat of a grim Lord Chancellor, discarded by every member of his family, and denounced by the rival sages of our literature as the founder of a Satanic school? I could not believe it; it must be a hoax. He was habited like a boy, in a black jacket and trousers, which he seemed to have outgrown, or his tailor, as is the custom, had most shamefully stinted him in his 'sizings.' Mrs. Williams saw my embarrassment, and to relieve me asked Shelley what book he had in his hand? His face brightened, and he answered briskly,—

"'Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso* — I am translating some passages in it.'

"'Oh, read it to us.'

"Shoved off from the shore of commonplace incidents that could not interest him, and fairly launched on a theme that did, he instantly became oblivious of everything but the book in his hand. The masterly manner in which he analysed the genius of the author, his lucid

interpretation of the story, and the ease with which he translated into our language the most subtle and imaginative passages of the Spanish poet, were marvellous, as was his command of the two languages. After this touch of his quality I no longer doubted his identity; a dead silence ensued; looking up, I asked,—

"'Where is he?'

"Mrs. Williams said, 'Who? Shelley? Oh, he comes and goes like a spirit, no one knows when or where.'"

Two little incidents which happened in the winter of 1821–2 deserve to be recorded. News reached the Pisan circle early in December that a man who had insulted the Host at Lucca was sentenced to be burned. Shelley proposed that the English — himself, Byron, Medwin, and their friend Mr. Taafe—should immediately arm and ride off to rescue him. The scheme took Byron's fancy; but they agreed to try less Quixotic measures before they had recourse to force, and their excitement was calmed by hearing that the man's sentence had been commuted to the galleys. The other affair brought them less agreeably into contact with the Tuscan police. The party were riding home one afternoon in March, when a mounted dragoon came rushing by, breaking their ranks and nearly unhorsing Mr. Taafe. Byron and Shelley rode after him to remonstrate; but the man struck Shelley from his saddle with a sabre blow. The English then pursued him into Pisa, making such a clatter that one of Byron's servants issued with a pitchfork from the Casa Lanfranchi, and wounded the fellow somewhat seriously, under the impression that it was necessary to defend his master. Shelley called the whole matter "a trifling piece of business;" but it was strictly investigated by the authorities; and though the dragoon was found to have been in the

wrong, Byron had to retire for a season to Leghorn. Another consequence was the exile of Count Gamba and his father from Tuscany, which led to Byron's final departure from Pisa.

The even current of Shelley's life was not often broken by such adventures. Trelawny gives the following account of how he passed his days: he "was up at six or seven, reading Plato, Sophocles, or Spinoza, with the accompaniment of a hunch of dry bread; then he joined Williams in a sail on the Arno, in a flat-bottomed skiff, book in hand, and from thence he went to the pine-forest, or some out-of-the-way place. When the birds went to roost he returned home, and talked and read until midnight." The great wood of stone pines on the Pisan Maremma was his favourite study. Trelawny tells us how he found him there alone one day, and in what state was the MS. of that prettiest lyric, *Ariel, to Miranda take.* "It was a frightful scrawl; words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run together in most 'admired disorder;' it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks; such a dashed-off daub as self-conceited artists mistake for a manifestation of genius. On my observing this to him, he answered, 'When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of the rude sketch as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing."

A daily visit to Byron diversified existence. Byron talked more sensibly with Shelley than with his commonplace acquaintances; and when he began to gossip, Shelley retired into his own thoughts. Then they would go pistol-shooting, Byron's trembling hand contrasting with

his friend's firmness. They had invented a "little language" for this sport: firing was called *tiring;* hitting, *colping;* missing, *mancating*, &c. It was in fact a kind of pigeon Italian. Shelley acquired two nick-names in the circle of his Pisan friends, both highly descriptive. He was Ariel and the Snake. The latter suited him because of his noiseless gliding movement, bright eyes, and ethereal diet. It was first given to him by Byron during a reading of *Faust.* When he came to the line of Mephistopheles, "Wie meine Muhme, die berühmte Schlange," and translated it, "My aunt, the renowned Snake," Byron cried, "Then you are her nephew." Shelley by no means resented the epithet. Indeed he alludes to it in his letters, and in a poem already referred to above.

Soon after Trelawny's arrival the party turned their thoughts to nautical affairs. Shelley had already done a good deal of boating with Williams on the Arno and the Serchio, and had on one occasion nearly lost his life by the capsizing of their tiny craft. They now determined to build a larger yacht for excursions on the sea; while Byron, liking the project of a summer residence upon the Bay of Spezia, made up his mind to have one too. Shelley's was to be an open boat carrying sail, Byron's a large decked schooner. The construction of both was entrusted to a Genoese builder, under the direction of Trelawny's friend, Captain Roberts. Such was the birth of the ill-fated *Don Juan*, which cost the lives of Shelley and Williams, and of the *Bolivar*, which carried Byron off to Genoa before he finally set sail for Greece. Captain Roberts was allowed to have his own way about the latter; but Shelley and Williams had set their hearts upon a model for their little yacht, which did not suit the Captain's notions of sea-worthiness. Williams overruled his objec-

tions, and the *Don Juan* was built according to his cherished fancy. "When it was finished," says Trelawny, "it took two tons of iron ballast to bring her down to her bearings, and then she was very crank in a breeze, though not deficient in beam. She was fast, strongly built, and Torbay rigged." She was christened by Lord Byron, not wholly with Shelley's approval; and one young English sailor, Charles Vivian, in addition to Williams and Shelley, formed her crew. "It was great fun," says Trelawny, "to witness Williams teaching the poet how to steer, and other points of seamanship. As usual, Shelley had a book in hand, saying he could read and steer at the same time, as one was mental, the other mechanical." "The boy was quick and handy, and used to boats. Williams was not as deficient as I anticipated, but over-anxious, and wanted practice, which alone makes a man prompt in emergency. Shelley was intent on catching images from the ever-changing sea and sky; he heeded not the boat."

CHAPTER VII.

LAST DAYS.

The advance of spring made the climate of Pisa too hot for comfort; and early in April Trelawny and Williams rode off to find a suitable lodging for themselves and the Shelleys on the Gulf of Spezia. They pitched upon a house called the Villa Magni, between Lerici and San Terenzio, which "looked more like a boat or bathing-house than a place to live in. It consisted of a terrace or ground-floor unpaved, and used for storing boat-gear and fishing-tackle, and of a single storey over it, divided into a hall or saloon and four small rooms, which had once been white-washed; there was one chimney for cooking. This place we thought the Shelleys might put up with for the summer. The only good thing about it was a verandah facing the sea, and almost over it." When it came to be inhabited, the central hall was used for the living and eating room of the whole party. The Shelleys occupied two rooms facing each other; the Williamses had one of the remaining chambers, and Trelawny another. Access to these smaller apartments could only be got through the saloon; and this circumstance once gave rise to a ludicrous incident, when Shelley, having lost his clothes out bathing, had to cross, *in puris naturalibus*, not undetected, though covered in his retreat, by the clever

Italian handmaiden, through a luncheon party assembled in the dining-room. The horror of the ladies at the poet's unexpected apparition and his innocent self-defence are well described by Trelawny. Life in the villa was of the simplest description. To get food was no easy matter; and the style of the furniture may be guessed by Trelawny's laconic remark that the sea was his only washing-basin.

They arrived at Villa Magni on the 26th of April, and began a course of life which was not interrupted till the final catastrophe of July 8. These few weeks were in many respects the happiest of Shelley's life. We seem to discern in his last letter of importance, recently edited by Mr. Garnett, that he was now conscious of having reached a platform from which he could survey his past achievement, and whence he would probably have risen to a loftier altitude, by a calmer and more equable exercise of powers which had been ripening during the last three years of life in Italy. Meanwhile, "I am content," he writes, "if the heaven above me is calm for the passing moment." And this tranquillity was perfect, with none of the oppressive sense of coming danger, which distinguishes the calm before a storm. He was far away from the distractions of the world he hated, in a scene of indescribable beauty, among a population little removed from the state of savages, who enjoyed the primitive pleasures of a race at one with nature, and toiled with hardy perseverance on the element he loved so well. His company was thoroughly congenial and well mixed. He spent his days in excursions on the water with Williams, or in solitary musings in his cranky little skiff, floating upon the shallows in shore, or putting out to sea and waiting for the landward breeze to bring him home. The

evenings were passed upon the terrace, listening to Jane's guitar, conversing with Trelawny, or reading his favourite poets aloud to the assembled party.

In this delightful solitude, this round of simple occupations, this uninterrupted communion with nature, Shelley's enthusiasms and inspirations revived with their old strength. He began a poem, which, if we may judge of its scale by the fragment we possess, would have been one of the longest, as it certainly is one of the loftiest of his masterpieces. The *Triumph of Life* is composed in no strain of compliment to the powers of this world, which quell untameable spirits, and enslave the noblest by the operation of blind passions and inordinate ambitions. It is rather a pageant of the spirit dragged in chains, led captive to the world, the flesh, and the devil. The sonorous march and sultry splendour of the terza rima stanzas, bearing on their tide of song those multitudes of forms, processionally grand, yet misty with the dust of their own tramplings, and half-shrouded in a lurid robe of light, affect the imagination so powerfully that we are fain to abandon criticism and acknowledge only the dæmonic fascinations of this solemn mystery. Some have compared the *Triumph of Life* to a Panathenaic pomp: others have found in it a reflex of the burning summer heat, and blazing sea, and onward undulations of interminable waves, which were the cradle of its maker as he wrote. The imagery of Dante plays a part, and Dante has controlled the structure. The genius of the Revolution passes by: Napoleon is there, and Rousseau serves for guide. The great of all ages are arraigned, and the spirit of the world is brought before us, while its heroes pass, unveil their faces for a moment, and are swallowed in the throng that has no ending. But how Shelley meant to solve the problems he

has raised, by what sublime philosophy he purposed to resolve the discords of this revelation more soul-shattering than Daniel's *Mene*, we cannot even guess. The poem, as we have it, breaks abruptly with these words: "Then what is Life? I cried"—a sentence of profoundest import, when we remember that the questioner was now about to seek its answer in the halls of Death.

To separate any single passage from a poem which owes so much of its splendour to the continuity of music and the succession of visionary images, does it cruel wrong. Yet this must be attempted; for Shelley is the only English poet who has successfully handled that most difficult of metres, *terza rima*. His power over complicated versification cannot be appreciated except by duly noticing the method he employed in treating a structure alien, perhaps, to the genius of our literature, and even in Italian used with perfect mastery by none but Dante. To select the introduction and part of the first paragraph will inflict less violence upon the *Triumph of Life* as a whole, than to detach one of its episodes.

> Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
> Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth
> Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask
>
> Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth.
> The smokeless altars of the mountain snows
> Flamed above crimson clouds, and at the birth
>
> Of light, the Ocean's orison arose,
> To which the birds tempered their matin lay.
> All flowers in field or forest which unclose
>
> Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day,
> Swinging their censers in the element,
> With orient incense lit by the new ray,

Burned slow and inconsumably, and sent
Their odorous sighs up to the smiling air;
And, in succession due, did continent,

Isle, ocean, and all things that in them wear
The form and character of mortal mould,
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

Their portion of the toil, which he of old
Took as his own, and then imposed on them.
But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold

Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
The cone of night, now they were laid asleep,
Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem

Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep
Of a green Apennine. Before me fled
The night; behind me rose the day; the deep

Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head,—
When a strange trance over my fancy grew
Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread

Was so transparent that the scene came through
As clear as, when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills, they glimmer; and I knew

That I had felt the freshness of that dawn
Bathe in the same cold dew my brow and hair,
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn

Under the self-same bough, and heard as there
The birds, the fountains, and the ocean, hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air.
And then a vision on my brain was rolled.

Such is the exordium of the poem. It will be noticed that at this point one series of the interwoven triplets is concluded. The *Triumph of Life* itself begins with a new

series of rhymes, describing the vision for which preparation has been made in the preceding prelude. It is not without perplexity that an ear unaccustomed to the windings of the *terza rima*, feels its way among them. Entangled and impeded by the labyrinthine sounds, the reader might be compared to one who, swimming in his dreams, is carried down the course of a swift river clogged with clinging and retarding water-weeds. He moves; but not without labour: yet after a while the very obstacles add fascination to his movement.

> As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay,
> This was the tenour of my waking dream:—
> Methought I sate beside a public way
>
> Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great stream
> Of people there was hurrying to and fro,
> Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,
>
> All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
> Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
> He made one of the multitude, and so
>
> Was borne amid the crowd, as through the sky
> One of the million leaves of summer's bier;
> Old age and youth, manhood and infancy,
>
> Mixed in one mighty torrent did appear:
> Some flying from the thing they feared, and some
> Seeking the object of another's fear;
>
> And others, as with steps towards the tomb,
> Pored on the trodden worms that crawled beneath,
> And others mournfully within the gloom
>
> Of their own shadow walked and called it death;
> And some fled from it as it were a ghost,
> Half fainting in the affliction of vain breath.

But more, with motions which each other crossed,
Pursued or spurned the shadows the clouds threw,
Or birds within the noon-day ether lost,

Upon that path where flowers never grew—
And weary with vain toil and faint for thirst,
Heard not the fountains, whose melodious dew

Out of their mossy cells for ever burst;
Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told
Of grassy paths, and wood-lawn interspersed,

With over-arching elms, and caverns cold,
And violet banks where sweet dreams brood;—but they
Pursued their serious folly as of old.

Here let us break the chain of rhymes that are unbroken in the text, to notice the extraordinary skill with which the rhythm has been woven in one paragraph, suggesting by recurrences of sound the passing of a multitude, which is presented at the same time to the eye of fancy by accumulated images. The next eleven triplets introduce the presiding genius of the pageant. Students of Petrarch's *Trionfi* will not fail to note what Shelley owes to that poet, and how he has transmuted the definite imagery of mediæval symbolism into something metaphysical and mystic.

And as I gazed, methought that in the way
The throng grew wilder, as the woods of June
When the south wind shakes the extinguished day;

And a cold glare, intenser than the noon
But icy cold, obscured with blinding light
The sun, as he the stars. Like the young moon—

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

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

So came a chariot on the silent storm
Of its own rushing splendour, and a Shape
So sate within, as one whom years deform,

Beneath a dusky hood and double cape,
Crouching within the shadow of a tomb.
And o'er what seemed the head a cloud-like crape

Was bent, a dun and faint ethereal gloom
Tempering the light. Upon the chariot beam
A Janus-visaged Shadow did assume

The guidance of that wonder-winged team;
The shapes which drew it in thick lightnings
Were lost:—I heard alone on the air's soft stream

The music of their ever-moving wings.
All the four faces of that charioteer
Had their eyes banded; little profit brings

Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the sun,
Or that with banded eyes could pierce the sphere

Of all that is, has been, or will be done.
So ill was the car guided—but it past
With solemn speed majestically on.

The intense stirring of his imagination implied by this supreme poetic effort, the solitude of Villa Magni, and the elemental fervour of Italian heat to which he recklessly exposed himself, contributed to make Shelley more than usually nervous. His somnambulism returned, and he saw visions. On one occasion he thought that the dead Allegra rose from the sea, and clapped her hands, and laughed, and beckoned to him. On another he roused the whole

house at night by his screams, and remained terror-frozen in the trance produced by an appalling vision. This mood he communicated, in some measure, to his friends. One of them saw what she afterwards believed to have been his phantom, and another dreamed that he was dead. They talked much of death, and it is noticeble that the last words written to him by Jane were these:—"Are you going to join your friend Plato?"

The Leigh Hunts at last arrived in Genoa, whence they again sailed for Leghorn. Shelley heard the news upon the 20th of June. He immediately prepared to join them; and on the 1st of July set off with Williams in the *Don Juan* for Leghorn, where he rushed into the arms of his old friend. Leigh Hunt, in his autobiography, writes, "I will not dwell upon the moment." From Leghorn he drove with the Hunts to Pisa, and established them in the ground-floor of Byron's Palazzo Lanfranchi, as comfortably as was consistent with his lordship's variable moods. The negotiations which had preceded Hunt's visit to Italy, raised forebodings in Shelley's mind as to the reception he would meet from Byron; nor were these destined to be unfulfilled. Trelawny tells us how irksome the poet found it to have "a man with a sick wife, and seven disorderly children," established in his palace. To Mrs. Hunt he was positively brutal; nor could he tolerate her self-complacent husband, who, while he had voyaged far and wide in literature, had never wholly cast the slough of Cockneyism. Hunt was himself hardly powerful enough to understand the true magnitude of Shelley, though he loved him; and the tender solicitude of the great, unselfish Shelley, for the smaller, harmlessly conceited Hunt, is pathetic. They spent a pleasant day or two together, Shelley showing the Campo Santo and other

sights of Pisa to his English friend. Hunt thought him somewhat less hopeful than he used to be, but improved in health and strength and spirits. One little touch relating to their last conversation, deserves to be recorded: —"He assented warmly to an opinion I expressed in the cathedral at Pisa, while the organ was playing, that a truly divine religion might yet be established, if charity were really made the principle of it, instead of faith."

On the night following that day of rest, Shelley took a postchaise for Leghorn; and early in the afternoon of the next day he set sail, with Williams, on his return voyage to Lerici. The sailor-boy, Charles Vivian, was their only companion. Trelawny, who was detained on board the *Bolivar*, in the Leghorn harbour, watched them start. The weather for some time had been unusually hot and dry. "Processions of priests and religiosi have been for several days past praying for rain;" so runs the last entry in Williams's diary; "but the gods are either angry or nature too powerful." Trelawny's Genoese mate observed, as the *Don Juan* stood out to sea, that they ought to have started at three a. m. instead of twelve hours later; adding "the devil is brewing mischief." Then a sea-fog withdrew the *Don Juan* from their sight. It was an oppressively sultry afternoon. Trelawny went down into his cabin, and slept; but was soon roused by the noise of the ships' crews in the harbour making all ready for a gale. In a short time the tempest was upon them, with wind, rain, and thunder. It did not last more than twenty minutes; and at its end Trelawny looked out anxiously for Shelley's boat. She was nowhere to be seen, and nothing could be heard of her. In fact, though Trelawny could not then be absolutely sure of the catastrophe, she had sunk, struck in all probability by the prow of a felucca,

but whether by accident or with the intention of running her down, is still uncertain.

On the morning of the third day after the storm, Trelawny rode to Pisa, and communicated his fears to Hunt. "I then went upstairs to Byron. When I told him, his lip quivered, and his voice faltered as he questioned me." Couriers were despatched to search the sea-coast, and to bring the *Bolivar* from Leghorn. Trelawny rode in person toward Via Reggio, and there found a punt, a water-keg, and some bottles, which had been in Shelley's boat. A week passed, Trelawny patrolling the shore with the coast-guardsmen, but hearing of no new discovery, until at last two bodies were cast upon the sand. One found near Via Reggio, on the 18th of July, was Shelley's. It had his jacket, "with the volume of Æschylus in one pocket, and Keats's poems in the other, doubled back, as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away." The other, found near the tower of Migliarino, at about four miles' distance, was that of Williams. The sailor-boy, Charles Vivian, though cast up on the same day, the 18th of July, near Massa, was not heard of by Trelawny till the 29th.

Nothing now remained but to tell the whole dreadful truth to the two widowed women, who had spent the last days in an agony of alternate despair and hope at Villa Magni. This duty Trelawny discharged faithfully and firmly. "The next day I prevailed on them," he says, "to return with me to Pisa. The misery of that night and the journey of the next day, and of many days and nights that followed, I can neither describe nor forget." It was decided that Shelley should be buried at Rome, near his friend Keats and his son William, and that Williams's remains should be taken to England. But first

the bodies had to be burned; and for permission to do this Trelawny, who all through had taken the lead, applied to the English Embassy at Florence. After some difficulty it was granted.

What remains to be said concerning the cremation of Shelley's body on the 6th of August, must be told in Trelawny's own words. Williams, it may be stated, had been burned on the preceding day.

"Three white wands had been stuck in the sand to mark the poet's grave, but as they were at some distance from each other, we had to cut a trench thirty yards in length, in the line of the sticks, to ascertain the exact spot, and it was nearly an hour before we came upon the grave.

"In the meantime Byron and Leigh Hunt arrived in the carriage, attended by soldiers, and the Health Officer, as before. The lonely and grand scenery that surrounded us, so exactly harmonized with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. The sea, with the islands of Gorgona, Capraja, and Elba, was before us; old battlemented watch-towers stretched along the coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the sun, picturesque from their diversified outlines, and not a human dwelling was in sight.

"As I thought of the delight Shelley felt in such scenes of loneliness and grandeur whilst living, I felt we were no better than a herd of wolves or a pack of wild dogs, in tearing out his battered and naked body from the pure yellow sand that lay so lightly over it, to drag him back to the light of day; but the dead have no voice, nor had I power to check the sacrilege—the work went on silently in the deep and unresisting sand, not a word was spoken, for the Italians have a touch of sentiment, and their feelings are easily excited into sympathy. Byron was silent

and thoughtful. We were startled and drawn together by a dull, hollow sound that followed the blow of a mattock; the iron had struck a skull, and the body was soon uncovered. . . . . After the fire was well kindled we repeated the ceremony of the previous day; and more wine was poured over Shelley's dead body than he had consumed during his life. This with the oil and salt made the yellow flames glisten and quiver. The heat from the sun and fire was so intense that the atmosphere was tremulous and wavy. . . . . The fire was so fierce as to produce a white heat on the iron, and to reduce its contents to grey ashes. The only portions that were not consumed were some fragments of bones, the jaw, and the skull; but what surprised us all was that the heart remained entire. In snatching this relic from the fiery furnace, my hand was severely burnt; and had any one seen me do the act, I should have been put into quarantine."

Shelley's heart was given to Hunt, who subsequently, not without reluctance and unseemly dispute, resigned it to Mrs. Shelley. It is now at Boscombe. His ashes were carried by Trelawny to Rome and buried in the Protestant cemetery, so touchingly described by him in his letter to Peacock, and afterwards so sublimely in *Adonais*. The epitaph, composed by Hunt, ran thus: "Percy Bysshe Shelley, Cor Cordium, Natus iv. Aug. MDCCXCII. Obiit VIII Jul. MDCCCXXII." To the Latin words Trelawny, faithfullest and most devoted of friends, added three lines from Ariel's song, much loved in life by Shelley:

> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.

"And so," writes Lady Shelley, "the sea and the earth

closed over one who was great as a poet, and still greater as a philanthropist; and of whom it may be said, that his wild spiritual character seems to have prepared him for being thus snatched from life under circumstances of mingled terror and beauty, while his powers were yet in their spring freshness, and age had not come to render the ethereal body decrepit, or to wither the heart which could not be consumed by fire."

CHAPTER VIII.

EPILOGUE.

After some deliberation I decided to give this little work on Shelley the narrative rather than the essay form, impelled thereto by one commanding reason. Shelley's life and his poetry are indissolubly connected. He acted what he thought and felt, with a directness rare among his brethren of the poet's craft; while his verse, with the exception of *The Cenci*, expressed little but the animating thoughts and aspirations of his life. That life, moreover, was "a miracle of thirty years," so crowded with striking incident and varied experience that, as he said himself, he had already lived longer than his father, and ought to be reckoned with the men of ninety. Through all vicissitudes he preserved his youth inviolate, and died, like one whom the gods love, or like a hero of Hellenic story, young, despite grey hairs and suffering. His life has, therefore, to be told, in order that his life-work may be rightly valued: for, great as that was, he, the man, was somehow greater; and noble as it truly is, the memory of himself is nobler.

To the world he presented the rare spectacle of a man passionate for truth, and unreservedly obedient to the right as he discerned it. The anomaly which made his practical

career a failure, lay just here. The right he followed was too often the antithesis of ordinary morality: in his desire to cast away the false and grasp the true, he overshot the mark of prudence. The blending in him of a pure and earnest purpose with moral and social theories that could not but have proved pernicious to mankind at large, produced at times an almost grotesque mixture in his actions no less than in his verse. We cannot, therefore, wonder that society, while he lived, felt the necessity of asserting itself against him. But now that he has passed into the company of the great dead, and time has softened down the asperities of popular judgment, we are able to learn the real lesson of his life and writings. That is not to be sought in any of his doctrines, but rather in his fearless bearing, his resolute loyalty to an unselfish and in the simplest sense benevolent ideal. It is this which constitutes his supreme importance for us English at the present time. Ours is an age in which ideals are rare, and we belong to a race in which men who follow them so single-heartedly are not common.

As a poet, Shelley contributed a new quality to English literature—a quality of ideality, freedom, and spiritual audacity, which severe critics of other nations think we lack. Byron's daring is in a different region: his elemental worldliness and pungent satire do not liberate our energies, or cheer us with new hopes and splendid vistas. Wordsworth, the very antithesis to Shelley in his reverent accord with institutions, suits our meditative mood, sustains us with a sound philosophy, and braces us by healthy contact with the Nature he so dearly loved. But in Wordsworth there is none of Shelley's magnetism. What remains of permanent value in Coleridge's poetry — such work as *Christabel*, the *Ancient Mariner*, or *Kubla Khan*

—is a product of pure artistic fancy, tempered by the author's mysticism. Keats, true and sacred poet as he was, loved Nature with a somewhat sensuous devotion. She was for him a mistress rather than a Diotima; nor did he share the prophetic fire which burns in Shelley's verse, quite apart from the direct enunciation of his favourite tenets. In none of Shelley's greatest contemporaries was the lyrical faculty so paramount; and whether we consider his minor songs, his odes, or his more complicated choral dramas, we acknowledge that he was the loftiest and the most spontaneous singer of our language. In range of power he was also conspicuous above the rest. Not only did he write the best lyrics, but the best tragedy, the best translations, and the best familiar poems of his century. As a satirist and humourist, I cannot place him so high as some of his admirers do; and the purely polemical portions of his poems, those in which he puts forth his antagonism to tyrants and religions and custom in all its myriad forms, seem to me to degenerate at intervals into poor rhetoric.

While his genius was so varied and its flight so unapproached in swiftness, it would be vain to deny that Shelley, as an artist, had faults from which the men with whom I have compared him were more free. The most prominent of these are haste, incoherence, verbal carelessness, incompleteness, a want of narrative force, and a weak hold on objective realities. Even his warmest admirers, if they are sincere critics, will concede that his verse, taken altogether, is marked by inequality. In his eager self-abandonment to inspiration, he produced much that is unsatisfying simply because it is not ripe. There was no defect of power in him, but a defect of patience; and the final word to be pronounced in estimating the larger bulk of

his poetry is the word immature. Not only was the poet young; but the fruit of his young mind had been plucked before it had been duly mellowed by reflection. Again, he did not care enough for common things to present them with artistic fulness. He was intolerant of detail, and thus failed to model with the roundness that we find in Goethe's work. He flew at the grand, the spacious, the sublime; and did not always succeed in realizing for his readers what he had imagined. A certain want of faith in his own powers, fostered by the extraordinary discouragement under which he had to write, prevented him from finishing what he began, or from giving that ultimate form of perfection to his longer works which we admire in shorter pieces like the *Ode to the West Wind*. When a poem was ready, he had it hastily printed, and passed on to fresh creative efforts. If anything occurred to interrupt his energy, he flung the sketch aside. Some of these defects, if we may use this word at all to indicate our sense that Shelley might by care have been made equal to his highest self, were in a great measure the correlative of his chief quality—the ideality, of which I have already spoken. He composed with all his faculties, mental, emotional, and physical, at the utmost strain, at a white heat of intense fervour, striving to attain one object, the truest and most passionate investiture for the thoughts which had inflamed his ever-quick imagination. The result is that his finest work has more the stamp of something natural and elemental—the wind, the sea, the depth of air—than of a mere artistic product. Plato would have said: the Muses filled this man with sacred madness, and, when he wrote, he was no longer in his own control. There was, moreover, ever-present in his nature an effort, an aspiration after a better than the best this world can show,

which prompted him to blend the choicest products of his thought and fancy with the fairest images borrowed from the earth on which he lived. He never willingly composed except under the impulse to body forth a vision of the love and light and life which was the spirit of the power he worshipped. This persistent upward striving, this earnestness, this passionate intensity, this piety of soul and purity of inspiration, give a quite unique spirituality to his poems. But it cannot be expected that the colder perfections of Academic art should be always found in them. They have something of the waywardness and negligence of nature, something of the *asymmetreia* we admire in the earlier creations of Greek architecture. That Shelley, acute critic and profound student as he was, could conform himself to rule and show himself an artist in the stricter sense, is, however, abundantly proved by *The Cenci* and by *Adonais*. The reason why he did not always observe this method will be understood by those who have studied his *Defence of Poetry*, and learned to sympathize with his impassioned theory of art.

Working on this small scale, it is difficult to do barest justice to Shelley's life or poetry. The materials for the former are almost overwhelmingly copious and strangely discordant. Those who ought to meet in love over his grave, have spent their time in quarrelling about him, and baffling the most eager seeker for the truth.[1] Through the turbid atmosphere of their recriminations it is impossible to discern the whole personality of the man. By careful comparison and refined manipulation of the biographical treasures at our disposal, a fair portrait of Shel-

[1] See Lady Shelley *v.* Hogg; Trelawny *v.* the Shelley family; Peacock *v.* Lady Shelley; Garnett *v.* Peacock; Garnett *v.* Trelawny; McCarthy *v.* Hogg, &c., &c.

ley might still be set before the reader with the accuracy of a finished picture. That labour of exquisite art and of devoted love still remains to be accomplished, though in the meantime Mr. W. M. Rossetti's Memoir is a most valuable instalment. Shelley in his lifetime bound those who knew him with a chain of loyal affection, impressing observers so essentially different as Hogg, Byron, Peacock, Leigh Hunt, Trelawny, Medwin, Williams, with the conviction that he was the gentlest, purest, bravest, and most spiritual being they had ever met. The same conviction is forced upon his biographer. During his four last years this most loveable of men was becoming gradually riper, wiser, truer to his highest instincts. The imperfections of his youth were being rapidly absorbed. His self-knowledge was expanding, his character mellowing, and his genius growing daily stronger. Without losing the fire that burned in him, he had been lessoned by experience into tempering its fervour; and when he reached the age of twenty-nine, he stood upon the height of his most glorious achievement, ready to unfold his wings for a yet sublimer flight. At that moment, when life at last seemed about to offer him rest, unimpeded activity, and happiness, death robbed the world of his maturity. Posterity has but the product of his cruder years, the assurance that he had already outlived them into something nobler, and the tragedy of his untimely end.

If a final word were needed to utter the unutterable sense of waste excited in us by Shelley's premature absorption into the mystery of the unknown, we might find it in the last lines of his own *Alastor* :—

> Art and eloquence,
> And all the shows o' the world, are frail and vain
> To weep a loss that turns their light to shade.

It is a woe "too deep for tears," when all
Is reft at once, when some surpassing spirit,
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
Those who remain behind nor sobs nor groans,
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

THE END.