

Mary were once more together, and alone. To one who had been an Eton boy, and at a later time a resident at Bracknell, the ground was doubtless familiar. Its umbrageous solitudes were dear to him for meditation and repose; and at no great distance was the river, to which during his entire life in England—at Eton, at Oxford, at Marlow—his flights reverted and clung like the rapid wheelings of a swallow. Nor were he and Mary quite without companionship, for Peacock, then residing at Marlow, would often walk over, and become for a while their guest. The August days that year were golden, a favourable season for pasture-land and corn-crop; and when a shower had fallen, clear breezy hours bore away the moisture, and the sky again was blue. The river-navigation of the Reuss and Rhine, just twelve months since, had delighted Shelley, and the memory of it now quickened in his imagination, making him long for a new experience of like enjoyment. Since his return from the Continent he had read aloud to Mary his favourite "Thalaba," and in fancy had been companion of the young Arabian wanderer in his voyage. Why should not some days of this delightful season be spent in rowing towards the source of the Thames? Peacock would take an oar; so, in his turn, would Charles Clairmont; Mary should sit at the wherry's end, presiding over her chief boatman's toil. The project happily conceived was executed as happily. The excursion occupied about ten days, terminating only because the boat had reached shallows near the river-head, where, says Peacock, "the cattle stood entirely across the stream, with the water scarcely covering their hoofs." Shelley's fancy had now taken wing, and it would have pleased him to explore, by river and canal and lake, wild Wales and northern England, and the regions of Forth and Tweed. Perhaps it was fortunate that money barred the way, or

the force which, that autumn, created "Alastor" might have been transmuted into the tugging of an oar.

Peacock's testimony and that of Charles Clairmont tell of the surprising improvement effected in Shelley's health by the few days of life upon the water. Part of this change Peacock was inclined to ascribe less to his open-air existence than to the fact that Shelley on this occasion fell from his height of vegetarianism and tasted flesh again. "He had been living chiefly on tea and bread and butter, drinking occasionally a sort of spurious lemonade, made of some powder in a box, which, as he was reading at the time the 'Tale of a Tub,' he called the *powder of pimperlimpimp*." Peacock's prescription of peppered mutton-chops wrought kindly on him, bringing back the wholesome heat to his blood. "He lived in my way," writes his amateur physician, "for the rest of our expedition, rowed vigorously, was cheerful, merry, overflowing with animal spirits, and had certainly one week of thorough enjoyment of his life."

With calm and health and freedom from disintegrating cares, Shelley's higher and truer self expanded. The poet within him awakened from the oppression and the trance, and his stature was that of manhood. The voice in which his spirit uttered itself was no longer a boyish treble or the broken voice of a youth; it had the fulness and purity of early adult years, with some of the violin's lyric intensity. The happiness and calm had, however, followed hard upon a season of pain, and disappointment, and melancholy foreboding. Already at twenty-three Shelley was disillusioned of some eager and exorbitant hopes; the first great experiment of his heart had proved a failure; his boyish ardour for the enfranchisement of a people had been without result; his literary efforts had met with little sympathy or recognition; and, during the early

months of the year, he had felt how frail was his hold on life, and had almost confronted that mystery which lies behind the veil of mortal existence. Therefore if now he sang, there must needs be something of pain and melancholy wisdom mingled with the rapture of his song. In the midst of his vigorous rowing-enjoyment and the abounding animal spirits, of which Peacock tells us, he had mused on death, while the stars came out above the graves of Lechlade Churchyard. And later, as he wandered alone in the glades of Windsor Great Park, now when in still autumnal mornings the foliage was brightening to decay, or when the autumnal winds drove to east or west the leaves of chestnut and elm and oak, his thoughts had in them some of the breadth and solemnity of the season of the year. "Alastor" is an imaginative rendering of the mood which came upon him on his return to Bishopsgate, an interpretation of his past experiences and of the lore that he had gathered from life, and a record, marvellously exalted and enhanced, of all the impressions derived from external nature during the past year—from snowy mountain and valley of Switzerland, from the arrowy Reuss and rock-guarded passes of the Rhine, from the gentler loveliness of our English river, and the woodland glories of Windsor. In its inmost sense the poem is a pleading on behalf of human love. This, which had now been found by Shelley, he might have sought for ever and in vain, and then his fate would have been that of the solitary dreamer in "Alastor;" but when he returned from lonely musings under the Windsor oaks to his home, it was to find a place of rest in Mary's heart. Three years after "Alastor" was conceived, Shelley, when in Italy, wrote of his wife as the "dear friend with whom added years of intercourse only add to my apprehension of its value, and who would have had more right than any other one to

complain that she has not been able to extinguish in me the very power of delineating sadness." In 1815 her nearness quickened his conception of the pain of one who, having long neglected or scorned the natural sympathies of the heart, is suddenly overmastered by a tyrannous need of love, and at the same time is disqualified for ever finding satisfaction for his ideal aspiration and desire. Shelley in "Alastor" would rebuke the seeker for beauty and seeker for truth, however high-minded, who attempts to exist without human sympathy, and he would rebuke the ever-unsatisfied idealist in his own heart. Yet, at the same time, he would exhibit the advantage possessed by such an one over the worldling, blind and torpid; for the very fact that he is punished by an avenging fate, and thirsts for love, becomes his purification. Better this, Shelley would say, than to fatten in a loveless lethargy, "deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on the earth and cherishing no hopes beyond." Such are, indeed, already morally dead. "They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country. Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt. All else, selfish, blind, and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes, who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world." * "Alastor" has been described as hectic and unhealthy in sentiment; in truth, it was the product of calm and happy hours, and the mood which it expresses is one of sanity. Its influencings upon us are like those of the autumnal wind,

* Preface to "Alastor."

not joyous but pure and spiritual, enlarging the horizons and revealing to us the boundaries of hope and joy.

"I have been engaged lately," wrote Shelley to Hogg, "in the commencement of several literary plans, which, if my present temper of mind endures, I shall probably complete in the winter. I have consequently deserted Cicero, or proceed but slowly with his philosophic dialogues. I have read the Oration for the poet Archias, and am only disappointed with its brevity.

"I have been induced by one of the subjects which I am now pursuing to consult Bayle. I think he betrays great obliquity of understanding and coarseness of feeling. I have also read the four first books of Lucan's 'Pharsalia,' a poem, as it appears to me, of wonderful genius, and transcending Virgil. Mary has finished the fifth book of the 'Æneid,' and her progress in Latin is such as to satisfy my best expectations.

"The east wind—the wind of autumn—is abroad, and even now the leaves of the forest are shattered at every gust. When may we expect you? September is almost passed, and October, the month of your promised return, is at hand, when we shall be happy to welcome you again to our fireside.

"No events, as you know, disturb our tranquillity."

Among the literary plans to which Shelley in this letter alludes, were a series of speculations on metaphysics, of which some fragments were written and remain to us, and a little treatise—also represented by a few fragments—on the elementary principles of morals. These, with the reflections "On Love," embodying some of the same thought and sentiment which found expression in "Alastor," and the reflections, still more remarkable, "On Life," show how far Shelley had moved from the position which he once occupied as a disciple of the materialistic philosophers

of the French Illumination.* But of more worth than any philosophical reasonings of Shelley, is the poet's religious awe with which he contemplates the mysteries of human life and death, renewing for us the sense of that unrealized world in which we move. True and vivid is also his apprehension of the community and harmony which subsist between mind and the spiritual Presence in nature. It is as a poet, no less than as a moralist, that Shelley, writing of ethics, urges that man is "not a moral, and an intellectual, but also, and pre-eminently, an imaginative being." And it is as a poet that he conceives and images forth the difficulty which attends the analysis of our own mind. "Thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards; like one in dread who speeds through the recesses of some haunted pile, and dares not look behind." If such writing as this adds little to our knowledge, it does what is more important, awakening us to feel anew the wonder and the freshness of the universe.

The months at Bishopsgate went by calmly and quietly. During the winter Peacock often came from Marlow, and Hogg often walked down from London. These were Shelley's only visitors. "One or two persons called on him," writes Peacock, "but they were not to his mind, and were not encouraged to reappear." The only exception was the Quaker, Dr. Pope, of Staines. This worthy old gentleman "liked to discuss theology with Shelley. Shelley at first avoided the discussion, saying his opinions

* It may be, however, that the fragments on Life and on Love are of later date. That "On Life" I should be inclined to assign to the year 1819. A copy of it in Shelley's handwriting occupies part of the note-book—evidently an Italian note-book—which contains his "Philosophical View of Reform." Mr. Rossetti assigns it to the year 1815.

would not be to the doctor's taste ; but the doctor answered, 'I like to hear thee talk, friend Shelley ; I see thou art very deep.'" Perhaps it was to confute the friendly doctor that Shelley plunged into the "History of Arianism." For the rest, his studies were exclusively, or almost exclusively, Greek—Theocritus, Moschus, Homer, the "Prometheus" of Æschylus, Lucian, Herodotus, Thucydides. The winter, as Hogg expressed it, was a mere Atticism.

The opening months of 1816 were not uneventful. On January 24 Mary gave birth to a boy—beloved of his parents, and a centre of hope and joy during a few years—to whom the name of William, that of Mary's father, was given. In March the little volume containing "Alastor" was published, and evidence that a great poet had arisen in England (evidence slow indeed to produce its true effect) was before the world. To Southey, his former friend and kind entertainer at Keswick, Shelley was moved to send a copy of the slender octavo which contained his first published verse since their meeting. "Regarding you," he wrote, "with admiration as a poet and with respect as a man, I send you, as an intimation of those sentiments, my first serious attempt to interest the best feelings of the human heart, believing that you have so much general charity as to forget, like me, how widely in moral and political opinions we disagree, and to attribute that difference to better motives than the multitude are disposed to allege as the cause of dissent from their institutions."

While Shelley was thus occupied with study and authorship and domestic joys, the negotiations with his father for the sale of his reversion and a division of the family property dragged on their weary length. These proceedings were probably watched by Shelley with less anxiety than that which Godwin felt in their issue, for the sum of one thousand pounds which he had received from Shelley in April of the

preceding year was soon devoured by the pack of hungry creditors, and they were again in full pursuit. Still Godwin, an indignant moralist, refused to see Shelley's face or to take his hand, and still he petitioned for Shelley's money. While the settlement with his father was pending, to obtain money on *post-obits* or by the sale of reversions was impossible; it must, therefore, be raised by loans, with greater difficulty and on harder terms. To Shelley, who had taken Mary Godwin to himself, for better for worse, till death should part him and her; to whom, as he afterwards wrote, "it was matter of the deepest grief" that he was by the law rendered incapable "of exhibiting to the world, according to those formalities which the world requires," that his preference for Mary "arose from no light or frivolous attachment;" who was now living regularly and quietly in his country home;—to Shelley it seemed strange that Godwin, whose earlier views on marriage had helped to determine his own, should treat him as if he were a common seducer; and it strained his feeling of respect for his former guide and master to perceive that, while Godwin refused to enter into any relations with him of kindness or of common benevolence, he was ready enough to enter into relations tending to his own personal advantage at Shelley's risk and loss. Kindness without approbation, Godwin replied, would not be accepted by Shelley, and torture could not wring from him approbation of the act which had separated them. Therefore their communications must be of a merely business nature. "I return your cheque," Godwin wrote, preserving a point of honour with something like the pedantry of virtue, "because no consideration can induce me to utter a cheque drawn by you and containing my name. To what purpose make a disclosure of this kind to your banker? I hope you will send a duplicate of it by

the post which will reach me on Saturday morning. You may make it payable to Joseph Hume or James Martin, or any other name in the whole directory. I should prefer its being payable to Mr. Hume." We can hardly wonder that Shelley, who was composed of human, not angelic, elements, and had the passions of a man, should once or twice have allowed his indignation to have its way. "I knew," Godwin wrote to his wife three years later, "that Shelley's temper was occasionally fiery, resentful, and indignant." This is true; yet his desire to benefit Godwin was constant, and was shown by the sacrifice, not alone of his money, but of time and repose of mind; and if, now and again, wrathful words broke forth, he quickly recovered his natural gentleness of temper, and sought by expressions of regret and goodwill to undo the ill—if ill it was—which he had wrought.

During the early months of 1816 frequent letters were exchanged between Godwin and Shelley. The strict limits imposed on the communications, and the constraint under which Shelley wrote, deprive his letters of a great part of the interest which they would otherwise have possessed. Yet they are valuable as exhibiting his business faculty and his mastery of practical details; they contain passages of importance, revealing how keenly he suffered from the alienation, or contempt and hatred of his fellows, among whom were some former friends or acquaintances. They exhibit in part the motives which induced him to seek a home on the Continent, and they render sufficiently clear the progress of the weary negotiations with his father, which were finally brought to a fruitless close by the advice of high legal authorities, confirmed by the decision of the Court of Chancery.

Before February, 1816, had passed, Shelley had thoughts of bidding farewell to England, and settling in Italy. The

prospect of his departure from England struck alarm into Godwin; though he could not take Shelley's hand in friendship, it was desirable that hands which held the vile trash of gold should not be wholly out of reach. Shelley hastened to set his mind at rest, and at the same time took occasion to explain some of the motives which induced him to seek residence in a foreign land:—

[February 21, 1816.]—I shall certainly not leave this country, or even remove to a greater distance from the neighbourhood of London, until the unfavourable aspect assumed by my affairs shall appear to be unalterable, or until all has been done by me which it is possible for me to do for the relief of yours. This was my intention from the moment that I first received an intimation of the change. I wrote to you for the purpose of giving you an opportunity of making my assistance as available to you as possible before I departed.

When I wrote to you from London I certainly was more firmly persuaded than now of the inefficacy of any further attempt for the settlement of my affairs. You have suggested a view of the question that makes me pause. At all events I shall remain here, or in this neighbourhood, for the present, and hold myself in readiness to do my utmost towards advancing you the money.

You are perhaps aware that one of the chief motives which strongly urges me either to desert my native country, dear to me from many considerations, or resort to its most distant and solitary regions, is the perpetual experience of neglect or enmity from almost every one but those who are supported by my resources. I shall cling, perhaps, during the infancy of my children to all the prepossessions attached to the country of my birth, hiding myself and Mary from that contempt which we so unjustly endure. I think, therefore, at present only of settling in Cumberland or Scotland. In the event the evils which will flow to my children from our desolate and solitary situation here point out an exile as the only resource to them against that injustice which we can easily despise.

“ I am too generally hated not to feel that the smallest

kindness from an old acquaintance is valuable." These words, which closed a letter of February 26, were an indirect appeal to Godwin's good feeling, and his response (March 5) would seem to have been that the very fact of his receiving from Shelley pecuniary obligations now forbade any show of friendliness, lest it should seem that he were bribed into acquiescence with wrong-doing. Shelley's reply overflows with bitterness and indignation.

[March 6, 1816.]—The first part of your letter alludes to a subject in which my feelings are most deeply interested, and on which I could wish to receive an entire explanation. I confess that I do not understand how the pecuniary engagements subsisting between us in any degree impose restrictions on your conduct towards me. They did not, at least to your knowledge or with your consent, exist at the period of my return from France, and yet your conduct towards me and your daughter was then precisely such as it is at present. Perhaps I ought to except the tone which you assumed in conversation with Turner respecting me, which, for anything that I learn from you, I know not how favourably he may not have perverted. In my judgment neither I, nor your daughter, nor her offspring, ought to receive the treatment which we encounter on every side. It has perpetually appeared to me to have been your especial duty to see that, so far as mankind value your good opinion, we were dealt justly by, and that a young family, innocent and benevolent and united, should not be confounded with prostitutes and seducers. My astonishment, and I will confess when I have been treated with most harshness and cruelty by you, my indignation has been extreme, that, knowing as you do my nature, any considerations should have prevailed on you to have been thus harsh and cruel. I lamented also over my ruined hopes, of all that your genius once taught me to expect from your virtue, when I found that for yourself, your family, and your creditors, you would submit to that communication with me which you once rejected and abhorred, and which no pity for my poverty or sufferings, assumed willingly for you, could avail to extort. Do not talk of *forgiveness* again to me, for my

blood boils in my veins, and my gall rises against all that bears the human form, when I think of what I, their benefactor and ardent lover, have endured of enmity and contempt from you and from all mankind.

To which outbreak Godwin replied immediately with the equanimity which he cultivated and in which he had a pride. "I am sorry to say," he wrote, "that your letter this moment received is written in a style the very opposite of conciliation, so that if I were to answer it in the same style we should be involved in a controversy of inextinguishable bitterness. As long as understanding and sentiment shall exist in this frame, I shall never cease from my disapprobation of that act of yours which I regard as the great calamity of my life. But the deed being past and incapable of being recalled, it may become a reasonable man to consider how far he can mitigate that anguish which he has felt towards the actor in the affair under which he suffers. The sense of the first paragraph of my letter is to be found in every book of sound morality and the principles of moral conduct that ever was written." On the following day Shelley replied:—

The hopes which I had conceived of receiving from you the treatment and consideration which I esteem to be justly due to me were destroyed by your letter dated the 5th. The feelings occasioned by this discovery were so bitter and so excruciating that I am resolved for the future to stifle all those expectations which my sanguine temper too readily erects on the slightest relaxation of the contempt and the neglect in the midst of which I live. I must appear the reverse of what I really am, haughty and hard, if I am not to see myself and all that I love trampled upon and outraged. Pardon me, I do intreat you, if, pursued by the conviction that where my true character is most entirely known, I there meet with the most systematic injustice, I have expressed myself with violence. Overlook a fault caused by your own equivocal

politeness, and I will offend no more. We will confine our communications to business. . . .

I plainly see how necessary immediate advances are to your concerns, and will take care that I shall fail in nothing which I can do to procure them.

I shall remain in town at least another week, that I may give every possible attention to this subject. My own concerns are decided, I fear, already.

Shelley's mind was now set upon a residence abroad, but he waited for the final decision of the Court of Chancery on the question in doubt between himself and his father, and bargained meanwhile with attorneys and money-lenders—Hayward, Bryant, Dawe—on Godwin's behalf, not without a sense that such bargaining was a task for which he was ill qualified by his character and temper of mind.

Shelley repeatedly called at the house in Skinner Street; we may surmise that Godwin was absent, or that his absence was professed as an excuse for not admitting Shelley. Our authentic information is, however, limited to what we learn from the brief entry in Godwin's diary: "P. B. S. calls three times; C[harles] C[lairmont] twice; Jane [Clairmont] sleeps." Early in April Godwin started for Scotland, where he desired to confer with Constable on the subject of his novel "Mandeville," on which he was now engaged, and the correspondence with Shelley ceased for a time. Before it was resumed a decision had been given in the Court of Chancery against the projected purchase of the reversion by his father, and Shelley, who would seem to have waited for this decision before leaving the neighbourhood of London, was now on his way to the Continent.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN SWITZERLAND WITH BYRON (MAY TO SEPTEMBER,
1816).

THE motives which determined Shelley to withdraw from his native country are apparent, at least in part, to one who has read the letters addressed to Godwin. It is evident that, on receiving the first intimation that the agreement with his father for the sale of the reversion could not legally be completed, he perceived that he was far from wealthy, and that he deemed it expedient to contract his expenses. On the Continent he could live more economically than at home. It is also evident that, suffering acutely (more, perhaps, on Mary's account than his own) from the social odium and stigma consequent upon his unwedded union with one whom he regarded as, in the truest sense, his wife, he now proposed to make the experiment of a residence among strangers. In the early summer of 1816, says Peacock, "the spirit of restlessness again came over Shelley, and resulted in a second visit to the Continent." And to the spirit of restlessness, driving him forth in search of a repose never quite attained, something may have been due. But Peacock, it would seem, was not aware that Shelley's resolve to leave England, or at least to withdraw to some remote district, was of no sudden or hasty formation, and that he had delayed to

carry that resolve into act because the negotiation with his father was awaiting an issue—an issue which, if favourable, might at once alter Shelley's position and way of life in important respects. The issue, as it proved, was not favourable to Shelley; some few hundred pounds would be allowed to him by his father to cancel obligations incurred during the progress of the affair and in expectation of the result which both father and son desired. For the rest his wealth was in a distant future; but a moderate sufficiency was his, and on this he could live respectably in Italy or Switzerland.

A strange incident is said to have occurred on the eve of Shelley's departure for the Continent. Here Medwin is our informant, and the story related to him by Shelley was received by him in all good faith, was apparently credited by Byron, and was to some extent confirmed by the testimony of Miss Clairmont. The night before Shelley set forth for Dover he received a visit in London, says Medwin, from a married lady, "young, handsome, and of noble connections," whose name, known to Medwin, was withheld by him from publication, but "whose disappearance," he observes, "from the world of fashion, in which she moved, may furnish to those curious in such inquiries a clue to her identity." She had long known Shelley, she declared, as the creator of "Queen Mab;" she had entered enthusiastically into his ideas and aspirations; she had dreamed of him by night and by day; and now, after vain struggles with herself, she had come to renounce her name, her fame, her family and friends, to lay her fortunes at his feet and follow him throughout the world. It was Shelley's task, according to the reporter of the strange story, to explain to this rash admirer that another already possessed his heart, and to do this in words which should carry in them as little pain as might be to a woman's pride and

love and shame. We hear once more of this lady, when she reappears, veiled and nameless as now, during Shelley's days at Naples, where she was seen by Miss Clairmont—if we may credit Miss Clairmont's statement—and where, to close the romantic tale, she died.

In the opening days of May, 1816, Shelley, accompanied by Mary and Clara Clairmont, started for Paris *en route* to Geneva. Of Miss Clairmont's history, during the interval between the summer of 1815, when she resided at Lynmouth, and her departure with Shelley and Mary for the Continent, few traces can be recovered. That she again became an inmate of Shelley's home seems probable, for in Godwin's diary we find an entry of New Year's Day, 1816: "Write to P. B. S. inviting Jane" (Godwin and her mother had not adopted the romantic name Clara or Claire, which Jane preferred). In compliance with that invitation Clara came and slept for three nights in Skinner Street; and from later entries in the same diary it is certain that now and again during the early months of the year she visited London, and dined or slept at home. It was the time when Byron's brief union with his wife, its brighter hours gone by, was darkening to its close. A little after the second statement made by Lady Byron to Dr. Lushington had determined her adviser to pronounce reconciliation with her husband impossible, Clara Clairmont was tasting an intoxicating excitement, which was to fill all her future life with wormwood and gall—a bitterness growing ever more bitter to the last days of her existence. She called on Byron, we are told, knowing him to be of influence at Drury Lane, and hoping by his assistance to secure a theatrical engagement. Clara Clairmont was unhappy and unknown; of little experience—a girl in her eighteenth year. Byron, already the most famous poet of England, was a man of twenty-eight, who had learnt the

havoc wrought by intemperate passion, and was skilled in the dangers which beset a woman's heart. But Clara had a beauty and brilliance of her own; and why should a man of genius set bounds to his triumphs? To Clara the rapture was a blinding one—to know herself beloved of the most extraordinary genius, the highest singer, the most romantic and most famous person of the time; one whom the world had misunderstood, who had wrongs and griefs and a lacerated heart, to which she might bring healing. What was the marriage-tie to one who had of late been a student in the school of "Political Justice" and "Queen Mab"? It is not strange that a girl of excitable temperament, unbalanced judgment, and intellect imbued with the social doctrines of revolutionary thinkers, should have been lightly whirled out of her regular orbit by such a force as that of Byron.

That her own friends and kinsfolk would view with disapproval her connection with Byron was at once perceived by Clara; and she eagerly desired to keep the great event of her life a secret. A letter in her handwriting, written, one would surmise from certain expressions in it, just before Byron's departure from England, warns her lover that Mary was profoundly ignorant of the nature of their intimacy; she did not so much as know that Byron was acquainted with Miss Clairmont's name. On April 25 of that year, Byron, for the last time in his life, gazed at the cliffs of England, as he sailed away from Dover towards Ostend. In his coach, unwieldy through its luxury, attended by three men-servants and his young companion and physician Polidori, he travelled through Flanders and by the Rhine towards Geneva. For English poetry the journey was made memorable by its splendid, imaginative record in the third canto of "Childe Harold." Towards Geneva also, by the Paris route and with greater

celerity, were advancing Shelley and Mary, with their little blue-eyed boy. Clara Clairmont accompanied them, and took credit to herself for having determined Shelley to travel abroad, now that business did not keep him in England. The company of her fellow-travellers was indeed irksome to her, but it was inevitable. If Byron should communicate with her through the Geneva *poste restante* he must address his letters to her under a feigned name. That Shelley had decided to leave England, independently of Clara's solicitations, we know for certain; it is not improbable, however, that her desire to visit Geneva may have hastened his departure, and may have helped to determine his destination.

On May 8, Shelley, Mary, and Clara were in Paris for the second time, more desolate than on the former occasion, without a friend in the wide city, and vexatiously delayed by the necessity of obtaining signatures to passports. From Paris, as far as Troyes, their road was that which they had traversed two years since on foot and mule-back. Thence onwards through Dijon and Dôle they advanced towards the Jura range, arriving, by the light of a stormy moon, on the fourth night after leaving Paris, at the little mountain village of Champagnolle. Next day, winding in chill air among ravines overhung by pine-forests, or climbing amid the snows which still gathered in the tardy spring, they passed the village of Les Rousses, and, with the aid of a team of four horses and ten men to support the carriage, pushed on through pelting snowflakes to the neighbourhood of Geneva. Huge pines, rising in clumps from the white wilderness, looked weird in the twilight, and the wide silence of the desert was broken only by the calls and clamour of their labouring mountaineers.

With the new morning the world was changed for them. From the windows of their hotel—Dejean's Hôtel de

l'Angleterre—at Sécheron, a small suburb of Geneva, on the northern side of the lake, they looked out upon the blue waters sparkling in the sunshine. All was warmth and animation and the beauty of cultured landscape, save in the distance the black mountain ridges and the remoter gleaming of Mont Blanc. A glow of pleasure ran along their veins, and animated their thoughts and words. "We have not yet found out any agreeable walks," wrote Mary on May 17; "but you know our attachment to water-excursions. We have hired a boat, and every evening at about six o'clock we sail on the lake, which is delightful, whether we glide over a glassy surface or are speeded along by a strong wind. The waves of this lake never afflict me with that sickness that deprives me of all enjoyment in a sea-voyage; on the contrary, the tossing of our boat raises my spirits and inspires me with unusual hilarity. Twilight here is of short duration, but we at present enjoy the benefit of an increasing moon, and seldom return until ten o'clock, when, as we approach the shore, we are saluted by the delightful scent of flowers and new-mown grass, and the chirp of the grasshoppers, and the song of the evening birds."

On Saturday, May 25, about ten days after Shelley's arrival, there was bustle at Dejean's, and Clara's heart must have moved quick, for Byron had entered the hotel. Byron's writings were well known to Shelley, but he had not as yet made the personal acquaintance of his great contemporary. To Byron he had sent, long since, a copy of "Queen Mab," with a letter setting forth in detail the accusations brought against himself, and adding that, if Byron discredited these accusations, it would make him happy to be honoured with his lordship's acquaintance. The poem reached Byron, and its opening lines won his admiration; the singular letter miscarried. At the

Sécheron hotel they were naturally and inevitably drawn together. Both were poets; both were children of the Revolution—the one, representing its temper of indignant revolt; the other, its doctrinal evangel and its wild-eyed hopes—both had warred against the laws of society, and were rebels under the ban. The mass and momentum of Byron's genius in its impact with the mind of Shelley had an effect like that of a planet sheering its way through the luminous mist of a comet in flight. At times an overpowering sense of his own slightness and impotence subdued Shelley; and having a gift for admiration, he effaced himself in homage to the power exerted by Byron with so much ease and with so vast an effect. Yet from the first he was sensible of the coarser elements in Byron's composition. "Lord Byron," he wrote from Geneva, "is an exceedingly interesting person; and as such, is it not to be regretted that he is a slave to the vilest and most vulgar prejudices, and as mad as the winds?"

To be near water was with Shelley to long for a boat, and a boat, keeled and clinker-built, was found, which became the joint property of himself and Byron. Evening after evening of late May and early June, they embarked, with Mary and Clara in their company, and Polidori, the young Anglo-Italian, with his handsome southern outline of face and his melancholy air; and before they would again touch shore the dew was falling and the moon had come forth in the heavens. One evening, while their rowers struggled against tide and wind, Byron, animated by the contest of man with nature, mingled his voice with that of the wild north-east. "'I will sing you an Albanian song,' he cried; 'now, be sentimental and give me all your attention.' It was a strange, wild howl that he gave forth; but such as, he declared, was an exact imitation of the savage Albanian mode—laughing the while," writes Mrs.

Shelley, "at our disappointment, who had expected a wild Eastern melody." Perhaps it was after this evening that Byron was re-named, by Shelley and his companions, the "Albaneser," or oftener in a more familiar form as Albè.

Finding, probably, the cost of living at a hotel excessive, and looking forward to a residence of some months in the neighbourhood of Geneva, Shelley, with Mary and Clara and little William, moved by the end of May from Sécheron to a cottage, known as Campagne Chapuis or Campagne Mont Alègre, about two miles from the city, near Coligny, on the opposite side of the lake. The cottage, separated from the water's edge only by a small garden overgrown by trees, stood some five or eight minutes' walk below the Villa Diodati, where Milton, returning from Italy in 1639, had visited his friend Dr. John Diodati, the Genevan professor of theology. A vineyard lay between the villa and Shelley's cottage, with a narrow winding lane leading from the upper house to the terrace and little harbour where lay the boat at her moorings. "The spot," writes Medwin, who visited it in 1818, "was one of the most sequestered on the lake, and almost hidden by a grove of umbrageous forest trees, as is a bird's nest among leaves." From this southern shore of the lake Mont Blanc and his snowy *aiguilles* were invisible; but Jura, northwards, made amends, behind whose range the sun sank, while darkness winged onward along the valley, from the Alps still glowing and roseate in the sunset glamour. Haunted and hunted by the British tourist and gossip-monger, Byron took refuge on June 10 at the Villa Diodati; but still the pursuers strove to win some wretched consolation by way-laying him in his evening drives, or directing the telescope upon his balcony, which overlooked the lake, or upon the hillside, with its vineyard, where he lurked obscure.

When the evenings were fine, the boat was never allowed

to rock idly in its bay. Before Byron's migration from Sécheron, he would cross the lake to visit his friends at Mont Alègre, and as he returned over the darkened waters, says Mrs. Shelley, "the wind from far across bore us his voice," singing a Tyrolean song of liberty by Moore. On his arrival at Diodati, Shelley was his constant companion upon the water. To feel the lapping of the waves about him, and to gaze into the sky above—to live between two wonderful worlds, the waters beneath, the heavens overhead—was for Shelley an emancipation from all cramping anxieties and memories of pain. He was in the habit, said Maurice, the boatman, "of lying down at the bottom of the vessel, and gazing at heaven, where he would never enter." As June went by, the voyagers conceived the happy project of circumnavigating the lake, and on the afternoon of the 23rd, in windless weather, their boat drew off from the little port of Mont Alègre, bound on this ambitious voyage. Luckily Polidori, having sprained his ankle, was left behind, though he grumbled at the wrong that was done him. Byron's young physician was not pre-eminent for good temper or good sense; in his vanity he would be a tragic poet, and earned his patron's sarcasms or ironical applause by his attempt. "After all," said Polidori to Byron, "what is there you can do that I cannot?" "Three things," replied Byron. "I can swim across that river, I can snuff out that candle with a pistol shot at the distance of twenty paces, and I have written a poem of which fourteen thousand copies were sold in one day." Towards Shelley the doctor's feeling was a constantly self-vexing jealousy, and on one occasion, suffering from the cruel wrong of having been loser in a sailing-match, he went so far as to send Shelley a challenge, which was received with a fit of becoming laughter. "Recollect," said Byron, "that though Shelley has some

scruples about duelling, *I* have none ; and shall be, at all times, ready to take his place." Polidori, who afterwards put an end to his life, on such occasions would retire in mortification to his room, there to pestle his poisons, pursuing "conclusions infinite of easy ways to die."

Coasting the southern margin of the lake, the voyagers reached at sunset the little village of Nernier, and gazed forth from the shore upon "purple and misty waters broken by the craggy islets." Next day, as their boat advanced eastwards, the snowy summits of the mountains of Savoy, with pine forest, and groves of walnut and oak and lawny fields, ennobled the prospect. The weather was changeful, with fits of wilfulness and fine caprice—now with thunder-showers and baffling breezes, now with a warm southern gust, the summer clouds upon the peaks and deep chasms of blue between. At midday, on June 25, blown by a rising gale, they reached enchanted ground, where Rousseau was the magician, and Julie and Saint-Preux spirits which his art evoked. Having dined at Meillerie, and tasted its honey, "the very essence of the mountain flowers and as fragrant," they re-embarked, and scudded in a south-easterly direction under a single sail, amid breaking waves and a chaos of whirling foam. "One of our boatmen," writes Shelley, "who was a dreadfully stupid fellow, persisted in holding the sail at a time when the boat was on the point of being driven under water by the hurricane. On discovering his error, he let it entirely go, and the boat for a moment refused to obey the helm ; in addition, the rudder was so broken as to render the management of it very difficult ; one wave fell in and then another. My companion [Byron], an excellent swimmer, took off his coat ; I did the same, and we sat with our arms crossed, every instant expecting to be swamped. The sail was, however, again held, the boat obeyed the

helm, and, still in imminent peril from the immensity of the waves, we arrived in a few minutes at a sheltered port, in the village of St. Gingoux. I felt in this near prospect of death a mixture of sensations, among which terror entered, though but subordinately. My feelings would have been less painful had I been alone; but I knew that my companion would have attempted to save me, and I was overcome with humiliation when I thought that his life might have been risked to preserve mine."

With early morning of June 26, while his companion still lay drowsing, Shelley was up and abroad among slant meadows and caverned rocks, "to hunt the waterfalls." "I gathered in these meadows," he writes, "a nosegay of such flowers as I never saw in England, and which I thought more beautiful for that rarity." A few hours later they were inspecting the dungeons of Chillon, a most terrible monument—as they appeared to Shelley—of that cold and inhuman tyranny which man delights to exercise over man. Thence, through a heavy swell, they advanced to Clarens—a visit commemorated in stanzas of "Childe Harold," which condense into a few ardent verses the very spirit of Rousseau. "I read 'Julie' all day," says Shelley, "an overflowing, as it now seems, surrounded by the scenes which it has so wonderfully peopled, of sublimest genius and more than human sensibility." From Clarens to Vevai, beautiful in its simplicity, from Vevai to Ouchy, completed the tour of the most interesting portion of the lake. During two days at Ouchy the rain fell; but the travellers found opportunity to visit Lausanne and see the house where Gibbon, in view of Mont Blanc, brought his great history to a close. "My companion gathered some acacia leaves to preserve in remembrance of him. I refrained from doing so, fearing to outrage the greater and more sacred name of Rousseau." The heart-beats of

Julie seemed of more import at this moment to Shelley than the giant death-throes of the Roman empire. "On Saturday, the 30th of June," so closes Shelley's record of the lake-voyage, "we quitted Ouchy, and after two days of pleasant sailing arrived on Sunday evening at Montalegre."

On resuming residence at Mont Alègre and Diodati, Shelley and Byron resumed the ways of life which had been interrupted by their excursion round the lake. To read, to write, to go abroad in the boat together or alone, to meet at Diodati in the evening for talk prolonged far into the night—such was the constantly repeated round. While Shelley and Byron maintained the nightly debate, Mary, with her clear hazel eyes and great placid brow, would look on and listen, penetrated to the heart by their words and the sound of the alternate voices. Afterwards, when Shelley's voice was for ever silent, the voice of Byron would fill her with melancholy by the demand which it seemed to make for that other which her heart must listen for henceforth in vain. "I do not think that any person's voice," she wrote in her journal for October 19, 1822, "has the same power of awakening melancholy in me as Albè's. I have been accustomed, when hearing it, to listen and speak little; another's voice, not mine, ever replied—a voice whose strings are broken. When Albè ceases to speak, I expect to hear *that other* voice, and when I hear another instead it jars strangely with every association. I have seen so little of Albè since our residence in Switzerland, and, having seen him there every day, his voice—a peculiar one—is engraved on my memory with other sounds and objects from which it can never disunite itself. . . . Since my incapacity and timidity always prevented my mingling in the nightly conversations of Diodati, they were, as it were, entirely *tête-à-tête* between my Shelley and Albè; and thus, as I have said, when Albè speaks and

Shelley does not answer, it is as thunder without rain—the form of the sun without heat or light—as any familiar object might be, shorn of its best attributes; and I listen with an unspeakable melancholy that yet is not all pain.”

Yet, amid the delights of lake and mountain, and the strenuous pleasure of intercourse with such a mind as that of Byron, Shelley thought lovingly of England, its greyer skies, its fields, its green lanes, its hills and streams, and the peace of a settled home. He was, indeed, out of sympathy with many English institutions, but he did not scorn or spurn his native land; rather his heart reverted towards it like the heart of a child towards a mother. He wrote accordingly (July 17) to Peacock—his tenancy of the house at Bishopsgate ceasing on August 3—to look out for a home for him and Mary and little William and the kitten now *en pension*. “I wish you to get an unfurnished house, with as good a garden as may be, near Windsor Forest, and take a lease of it for fourteen or twenty-one years. I wish the situation to resemble as nearly as possible that of Bishopsgate, and should think that Sunning Hill, or Winkfield Plain, or the neighbourhood of Virginia Water, would afford some possibilities. . . . My present intention is to return to England, and to make that most excellent of nations my perpetual resting-place. I think it is extremely probable that we shall return next spring—perhaps before, perhaps after, but certainly we shall return.” It is remarkable with what a warm glow of domestic feeling Shelley, one of those

“Wanderers o’er Eternity

Whose bark drives on and on, and anchor’d ne’er shall be,”

anticipates the fireside joys. Not Southey himself could have sung a more devout hymn to the household gods.

“The shrines of the Penates are good wood fires, or window-

frames intertwined with creeping plants ; their hymns are the purring of kittens, the hissing of kettles ; the long talks over the past and dead ; the laugh of children ; the warm wind of summer filling the quiet house, and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance." Beautiful surroundings Shelley desired as an added charm to a fixed abode. Windsor Forest pleased him much "because of the sylvan nature of the place and the beasts with which it was filled ;" but he was not insensible to the beauties of the Thames, and if Peacock dwelt at Marlow, it would be a pleasure to reside near his friend. "Recollect, however," he added, in conclusion, "we are now choosing a fixed, settled, eternal home, and as such its internal qualities will affect us more constantly than those which consist in the surrounding scenery, which, whatever it may be at first, will shortly be no more than the colours with which our own habits shall invest it."

The spirit of motion was now in Shelley's veins ; and before July had closed, he and Mary and Clara were off and away from the lake-side dwelling, on the road to Chamouni. The impressions which this excursion left with him were widely different from those produced by his sail along the shores of Lake Lemman—all was more savage, solitary, and colossal. The Arve, untamable, swollen by rains and raving among its boulders, the eternal forests, the waterfalls dashing from rock to rock, or assuming shapes like an exhalation, and overhung by a multitude of sun-bows, the wild ravines, the pinnacles of snow intolerably bright, which shot into the bright blue sky, the smoke and smothered thunder of the avalanche, the dizzying wonder of the sea of ice—these raised Shelley's spirit to rarer heights of wonder and of joy than it had touched among the flowery meadows of St. Gingoux or in the love-laden atmosphere of Clarens. A morning was spent in a visit to

the source of the Arveiron; on the next, in spite of rain, the tourists pushed on towards Montanvert, but were at length compelled to return, wet through, with their object unattained. The mule on which Shelley rode falling in a *mauvais pas*, he narrowly escaped being precipitated down the mountain; in his descent on foot he tripped, and, falling upon his knee, fainted, and was for a time incapable of continuing his course.

Not to be defeated, they renewed the attempt to view the Mer de Glace from Montanvert on the following day (July 25), and this time their effort was rewarded with success. For some distance Shelley walked upon the ice, wondering at the horror and beauty and mystery of its blue-green chasms; then the three travellers dined on the grass, in the clear, cold air. Before they left Montanvert, the Travellers' Album had received in unusual form, but one not to be mistaken, the sign-manual of P. B. Shelley. His predecessor had exhaled his orthodox sentiment in some devout platitude. The golden opportunity of demonstrating that his heterodoxy stood unsubdued in presence of Mont Blanc was too tempting to be lost by Shelley, and taking the pen, he subscribed his name to Greek words as incorrect in form as in sentiment—

Εἰμι φιλόανθρωπος δημοκράτικος τ' ἄθεος τε.

A third comer, it is said, added the word *μωρός*, and Byron, —so declares Lord Broughton—on visiting Montanvert, defaced Shelley's *atheist* and his successor's *fool*.

Deeper feelings than he would expose in a Travellers' Album Shelley put on record in his poem "Mont Blanc," the inspiration of which came to him as he lingered on the bridge of Arve on his way through the Valley of Chamouni; —in this, and in the noble "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," which was also an overflow of thought and emotion in

presence of the landscape of Switzerland. Vast and wonderful as the material universe is, so Shelley writes in his verse, it borrows its greatness and glory from what is spiritual; it is but like a river flowing through a world of Thought, the hues and forms of which it mirrors. Nor is it merely in and through humanity that this spiritual Power lives and moves and has its being. A Presence, or its radiant yet awful shadow, haunts and startles and waylays us in all that is beautiful, sublime, or heroic in the world without us or in the world within; to this we dedicate our powers in all high moments of joy or aspiration; and when the ecstasy has sunk and the joy has faded, still in a calmer, purer temper, it may become the habit of our soul to follow upon the track of this ideal Loveliness, until in a measure we partake of its image. Such is the idea of his poem.

Bringing with them some specimens of minerals and dried flowers, the travellers, daunted by a renewed fall of rain, turned their faces from Chamouni on the fourth day after their arrival. To Mary there was compensation for loss of the Col de Balme, with its view of Mont Blanc, eminent above his giant wardens of the plain, in the growing nearness to her small blue-eyed boy. She writes thus in her journal of the second day of the return journey: "*Saturday, July 27.*—It is a most beautiful day, without a cloud. We set off at twelve. The day is hot, yet there is a fine breeze. We pass by the Great Waterfall, which presents an aspect of singular beauty. The wind carries it away from the rock, and on towards the north, and the fine spray into which it is entirely dissolved passes before the mountain like a mist. The other cascade has very little water, and is consequently not so beautiful as before. The evening of the day is calm and beautiful. Evening is the only time that I enjoy travelling. The horses went

fast and the plain opened before us. We saw Jura and the Lake like old friends. I longed to see my pretty babe. At nine, after much inquiring and stupidity, we find the road and alight at Diodati. We converse with Lord Byron till twelve, and then go down to Chapuis, kiss our babe, and go to bed."

For some time past Mary's thoughts had been much occupied with an imaginative invention of her own. During a few days of ungenial weather, which confined them to the house, some volumes of ghost stories, "*Fantasmagoriana, ou Recueil d'histoires d'apparitions, de spectres, revenans, etc.*"—a collection translated into French from the German—fell into their hands, and its perusal probably excited and overstrained Shelley's imagination. On the night of June 18, over a blazing wood fire, there was ghostly talk at Diodati, and when midnight was past, and the tales of spectres had been told, Byron lifted the theme of their talk—the supernatural and its manifestations—to the higher region of poetry. Coleridge's "*Christabel*" had just been published by Murray, to whom Byron had introduced its author. A copy of the poem had not yet reached Geneva, but its verses lived in the memory of Byron, who had read it in manuscript, and perhaps had heard it recited by Coleridge himself. He now repeated the lines descriptive of the mysterious horror of the witch's bosom. "When silence ensued," wrote Polidori in his diary, "Shelley, suddenly shrieking and putting his hands to his head, ran out of the room with a candle." "Threw water on his face," the physician continues, "and gave him ether. He was looking at Mrs. Shelley, and suddenly thought of a woman he had heard of, who had eyes instead of nipples; which, taking hold of his mind, horrified him." When the horror passed away and calm was restored, "We will each write a ghost story," said Byron, and, with

an agreement to carry his proposal into effect, they parted for the night. A story, founded on the experiences of his early life, was begun by Shelley and was soon abandoned. Morning after morning he inquired of Mary, "Have you thought of a story?" and morning after morning came the disappointing answer, "No." One night she sat listening to a conversation between the two poets at Diodati; what was the nature—they questioned—of the principle of life? would it ever be discovered, and the power of communicating life be acquired?—"perhaps a corpse would be reanimated; galvanism had given token of such things." That night Mary lay sleepless, while moonlight struggled through the closed shutters of her bedroom, and she seemed to be aware of the lake and high white Alps beyond. But nearer than Alps or lake was the persecuting phantom of a pale student of the unhallowed arts engaged in creating a man-monster, at last endowed with life, and the shame and terror of the artist who had brought him into being. Such was the origin of the tale of "Frankenstein," so much of the scenery of which is that of Geneva, its lake, the high banks of Belrive, Sécheron, the mountains of Jura, and the Alps of Savoy.

Before Shelley left Geneva for England he had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Byron's guest, Matthew Gregory Lewis, long known to him through his "Tales of Wonder," "The Monk," and other writings in prose and verse. The inventor of spectral horrors, which had held his readers in a trance of awed illusion, was himself curiously incredulous of the mysteries of the spirit-world. He was no better than a kindly English gentleman, with the narrow-mindedness of his class—a "jewel of a man had he been better set," as Byron found him, but decidedly "a bore." "We talk of ghosts," Shelley notes in the journal on August 18, four days after Lewis's arrival

at Diodati; "neither Lord Byron nor Monk G. Lewis seem to believe in them; and they both agree, in the very face of reason, that none could believe in ghosts without also believing in God." Lewis now had thoughts for the living whose interests concerned him more deeply than the affairs of the dead. He had just returned from his West Indian property, and was much moved by the thought of the uncertain tenure, at a master's will or caprice, of their rights and comforts by his negroes. Shelley, who in 1814 had read with horror of the cruelties of the slave-traffic, doubtless entered with sympathetic zeal into Lewis's views; and on August 20 was signed a remarkable codicil to Lewis's will, requiring the heir of his Jamaica estates to pass three months once at least in every three years upon the property, and forbidding the sale of any negro, or the diminution of any of the comforts or indulgences which their kindly master had himself allowed to his slaves. The codicil, which is written with a vehement ardour of humanity, unlike the colourless manner of a legal instrument, was witnessed by Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Polidori.

A few days later, on August 28, for the last time they were floating upon the sapphire waters of the lake, and next morning at nine they had started on their journey to England. As far as Dijon, the route by which they had come in May was followed; thence by Rouvray and Auxerre they proceeded to Fontainebleau and Versailles. "Could a Grecian architect," Shelley writes, "have commanded all the labour and money which are expended on Versailles, he would have produced a fabric which the whole world has never equalled." As it was, in the arrangement of the costly materials Shelley perceived "something effeminate and royal." The librarian displayed for the inspection of visitors a book containing coloured

illustrations of a tournament of the court of Louis XIV.; to Shelley it seemed that "the present desolation of France, the fury of the injured people, and all the horrors to which they abandoned themselves, stung by their long sufferings, flowed, naturally enough, from expenditures so immense as must have been demanded by the magnificence of this tournament." "The vacant rooms of this palace," he adds, "imaged well the hollow show of monarchy." The Imperial House in the fifth canto of "The Revolt of Islam"—a "gorgeous grave," its storied walls answering vacantly to the footfalls of Laon, while the twilight gathers "like a charnel's mist within the radiant dome"—may be a reminiscence of the solitude and desolation of Versailles.

CHAPTER XIV.

AUTUMN AND WINTER IN BATH (SEPTEMBER TO
DECEMBER, 1816).

HAVING travelled to Havre, Shelley and his party sailed for Portsmouth in a baffling wind on September 7, and after a voyage of twenty-seven hours reached England. When free to proceed, a day having been lost by detention at the Custom House, Shelley and Mary parted—he to transact business in London and seek a house in the country with Peacock's aid, she to remain in Bath with little William and Clara, and the Swiss nurse, Elise. At what precise date Shelley and Mary became aware of the fact that Clara in reckless passion had given herself to Byron, we cannot tell. Medwin, speaking of the residence at Geneva, states that he had reason to believe that the intrigue was carried on with the greatest secrecy, and that "neither the Shelleys nor Polidori were for a long time privy to it." In fact it may have been for Byron, during his sojourn at Diodati, a thing of the past, though he did not yet openly break with the woman who was to be mother of his child. The occasional references to Clara in Mary's journal rather favour Medwin's statement. But the anticipated birth of Byron's child could hardly have been unknown to Mary and Shelley when they landed in England. Clara was most anxious to conceal what had taken place from Godwin and her mother, and Shelley and

Mary had no desire to betray her secret. It would seem to have been arranged that she was to remain in Bath under the name of Mrs. Clairmont, and that Mary was to be her companion there until Shelley should have found a suitable house. The moral indignation which Byron's act might justly arouse seems to have been felt by neither Shelley nor Mary. Shelley's conception of the social and moral obligations between man and woman in organized societies was radically unsound; all offences against order were in his eyes sanctified by love, if love were deep and true, and Byron had not yet given evidence that he could be false and cruel to Clara.

From Marlow, where Shelley was the guest of Peacock, he conveyed Peacock's invitation to Mary to join them there. It was little more than a twelvemonth since they had voyaged together up the Thames, and now they were once again close to its loveliest reaches, in the delightful autumn days. With Rousseau and Richardson for indoor recreation, and outdoor walks to the Fisherman's Cliff and Medmenham Abbey, nestling beneath its woody uplands, the time from September 20 to September 24 went sunnily by, and no ill news from Bath came to disturb the pleasure of the autumnal calm.

On September 25 they were back at 5, Abbey Churchyard, Bath, with Clara and their eight-months-old boy. The hope which Shelley entertained of receiving a considerable sum of money from his father, in part to clear off debts contracted on the faith of a successful issue to their negotiations of the spring, had been dashed, and to his grief he found himself unable to pay Godwin the three hundred pounds which he had promised. To Godwin, who had given an exacting creditor a bill on demand for that sum, the disappointment was cruel. His novel of "Mandeville" was progressing well; but everything depended on

his tranquillity of mind. "I have already written more than half a volume," he told Shelley in August. "I am satisfied with my plan; I think it will be better than 'St. Leon,' and will take place next after 'Caleb Williams.' I am in good tone, and anxious to proceed. The tone, however, I must confess, is kept up with considerable effort, and is only preserved by a faith that relates to you, and a confident hope that the relief so long expected from your quarter will at length be fully realized. If I am disappointed in this, if my affairs in the mean time go to a wreck that can no longer be resisted, then the novel will never be finished." Such an appeal as this was peculiarly moving to Shelley, who prized inordinately Godwin's imaginative work; but to fulfil his engagements was not in his power. Such money as he had, however, he sent without delay.

Great and sudden calamities, pain, and sorrow, were to bring Godwin and Shelley once more together before the year had closed, and anxieties connected with money were for a time to seem trivial in comparison with griefs more cruel and overwhelming. During the spring and summer Fanny Godwin had suffered from deep dejection of spirits. In July she wrote to Mary of "the dreadful state of mind" under which she generally laboured, and of which she endeavoured in vain to rid herself; "my mind," she added, "always keeps my body in a fever; but never mind me." "My Aunt Everina," she wrote, "will be in London next week, when my future fate will be decided. I shall then give you a full and clear account of what my unhappy life is to be spent in." How Fanny's fate was decided we do not know; but we know that Everina Wollstonecraft had withdrawn her confidence and affection from Fanny in the spring, and that, although friendly relations had been restored, she was capable of a harsh decision. With

Godwin's affairs so painfully entangled, with Mary and Clara in great measure lost to her, and the house in Skinner Street saddened, with Mrs. Godwin's violence and suspicion of temper, with the sense of her own uselessness and dependence—she, a burden to every one—it needed but a slight cause to transform Fanny's wretched dejection to despair. Mary Wollstonecraft, her mother, who had written to Imlay so gladly, so exquisitely, about Fanny's baby ways, in her own anguish of spirit had sought for peace in the waters below Putney Bridge, and had barely been rescued from untimely death. Godwin, whose cool temper preserved him from any temptation to self-destruction, had argued in "Political Justice" that suicide is not necessarily criminal—"the difficulty is to decide in any instance whether the recourse to a voluntary death can overbalance the usefulness I may exert in twenty or thirty years of additional life." As to Fanny, she might well conclude that the death of a feeble and unhappy being was a thing to be desired, and that it was no ill deed to remove from the world one who, she believed, had been nothing but a cause of pain and injury to those connected with her. It was a theory satisfactory to Mrs. Godwin, and one which Godwin adopted, that the unhappy girl perished because she was consumed by a hopeless passion for Shelley. Miss Clairmont, at least in later years, when she thought more piously of her mother than in the days when she fled from home and refused to return under her mother's guardianship, accepted this explanation of the cause of Fanny's death. But assuredly Fanny would not have made Godwin and his wife her confidants in such a case. And Clara Clairmont had been absent from home not only since July, 1814, setting aside a few short visits, but for the two years immediately preceding that date, a fact which may account for her having less affection for Fanny, as she confessed

after Fanny's death, than might have been expected. Were even slender evidence discoverable which should confirm the opinion of Godwin, we might contentedly accept that opinion as true. But no vestige of evidence lends it confirmation. On the other hand, it is clear that for a considerable time before her death Fanny's depression of spirits, caused by a number of circumstances, was extreme, and from her dying declaration, made in writing, it appears that she looked upon herself as worse than useless, as a source of unhappiness to those most closely connected with her; they might grieve for her loss during a few days, but her departure from life—so she had come to believe—would soon bring them relief and positive benefit. The tone of her letters lends no colour to the notion that she was pining through love for Shelley or for any one; there is in them an affectionate frankness when Shelley is mentioned, and she can even take him to task, in a sisterly manner, for a supposed lack of just and open dealing with Godwin in his financial embarrassments. Gentle, fair-minded, and considerate towards every one except herself, Fanny desired that even Mrs. Godwin, who had made home unhappy for her, should suffer no injustice in the thoughts of others; it is touching to observe, in her letter to Mary, written a few days before her death, how sincere is her solicitude that Mrs. Godwin, though to herself far from amiable, should be valued for the good qualities which she undoubtedly possessed. Fanny withdrew from life as one defeated, for whom the struggle had been too hard, and who lacked the toughness of fibre which can endure a long-continued strain; she withdrew from life because, in her weakness and her melancholy, she looked upon herself as a sad encumbrance to the world; she withdrew, not in violence or passion, but stealing away with hopeless eye and rapid step to darkness and oblivion.

Everina Wollstonecraft, I am assured by a lady who still remembers her, was an overbearing, disagreeable, ill-tempered woman, very sarcastic and very clever—a great contrast to her sister, Mrs. Bishop, who had beautiful brown eyes, most winning gentle manners, and whose whole bearing gave the idea of a perfectly lady-like and refined person. On questioning my informant as to the cause of Fanny's suicide, the answer came without doubt or hesitation, "Because Everina would not have Fanny with her. It was just like Everina; she was a hard woman." From Godwin's letter, written to Mary after her sister's death, we learn that it had been in contemplation that Fanny should go to her aunts in Ireland; but that she was not on her way to Ireland when she died; rather that she had left home seeking a place wherein to die, and had written from Bristol announcing, though in veiled words, her fatal resolution. A harsh missive from Everina Wollstonecraft might well have sufficed, with one in Fanny's mood of deep dejection, to reduce her to despair. To her sister Mary the cause of Fanny's death seemed evident—that she was without a home in which it was possible for her to be happy or at rest; had she but lived a few weeks longer, thought Mary, had she but lived until her sister was Shelley's wedded wife, then Fanny's death would never have taken place, for a fit home and happy resting-place would have been open to her. As it was, she seems to have been a cause of disturbance to Mrs. Godwin in the Skinner Street house; Aunt Everina in Dublin "would not have her;" and she did not possess, as she tells Mary, a *son* of her own.

Mirth and anguish are in odd juxtaposition in Mary's journal for the opening days of October. On the 6th Shelley makes a playful entry: "On this day Mary put her head through the door, and said, 'Come and look;

here's a cat eating roses ; she'll turn into a woman ; when beasts eat these roses they turn into men and women.' ” Three days later came a very alarming letter from Fanny, who suddenly had left Godwin's home, and having passed through Bath without calling on her sister, now wrote from Bristol. “ Shelley goes immediately to Bristol,” the journal records. “ We sit up for him till two in the morning, when he returns, but brings no particular news.” On that night Fanny, having arrived at the Mackworth Arms Inn, Swansea, by the Cambrian coach from Bristol, retired to rest, telling the chambermaid that she was exceedingly fatigued, and would herself take care of the candle. When she did not appear next morning they forced her chamber door, and found her lying dead ; her long brown hair about her face ; a bottle of laudanum upon the table, and a note which ran thus : “ I have long determined that the best thing I could do was to put an end to the existence of a being whose birth was unfortunate, and whose life has only been a series of pain to those persons who have hurt their health in endeavouring to promote her welfare. Perhaps to hear of my death will give you pain, but you will soon have the blessing of forgetting that such a creature ever existed as . . . ” She had with her the little Genevan watch, a gift of travel from Mary and Shelley ; and in her purse were a few shillings. She had stated to a fellow-passenger on the coach that she was on her way to Ireland, but the sum of money in her possession would not nearly have sufficed for such a journey. In 1814 she had visited Wales, and possibly may have known Swansea, where now she chose to set up her everlasting rest. On Thursday, October 10, Godwin, informed from Bristol of her resolve, set out from London in pursuit, and on the same morning Shelley again visited Bristol and obtained more certain traces. Godwin's stay at the scene of the disaster was as

brief as possible; on his return journey he slept at Bath, but did not visit his daughter. Next day, October 12, Shelley brought the lamentable tidings to Mary. "He returns," the journal tells us, "with the worst account. A miserable day. Two letters from Papa. Buy mourning and work in the evening."

The shock of excitement and grief caused by so terrible an event was for a time disastrous to Shelley's health. He remained at Bath with shattered nerves, writing a little, correcting proofs of Byron's new canto of "Childe Harold" (the manuscript of which he had brought from Switzerland), and gleaning what pleasure was possible at such a time from Montaigne, Plutarch, Cervantes, and Milton. Mary, with characteristic firmness of will, set herself steadily to work; pushed forward with "Frankenstein;" studied Latin; read Locke with Shelley; dipped into chemistry; took lessons in drawing. Clara, anxieties of her own being added to the recent misery, passed wretched hours brooding over all that could afflict her, and often wishing herself in possession of that everlasting repose to which Fanny had attained.

In this season of sorrow one happiness came unexpectedly to Shelley—the gain of a friend who had himself known care and sorrow, but whose bright temper, buoyant fancy, and generous heart leaped resurgent from the strokes of fortune. On December 1, 1816, arrived at Bath a letter from Leigh Hunt, and on the same day appeared in the *Examiner*, Leigh Hunt's journal, an article entitled "Young Poets," noticing three writers who, according to the critic's judgment, promised to bring a considerable addition of strength to the new school of English poetry. One, John Hamilton Reynolds, had published a slender volume or two of verse. Another had not yet published anything except in a newspaper; "but a set of his

manuscripts was handed us the other day," said the reviewer, whose signature—a hand pointing—identifies him with Leigh Hunt, "and fairly surprised us with the truth of their ambition and ardent grappling with nature." This second writer was John Keats. The work of the third was little known to the critic, for he had mislaid the one or two specimens he had had before him; "but we shall procure what he has published," the article went on, "and if the rest answer to what we have seen, we shall have no hesitation in announcing him for a very striking and original thinker. His name is Percy Bysshe Shelley, and he is the author of a poetical work entitled 'Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude.'" "A very striking and original thinker"—no characterization of his powers could have been more gratifying to Shelley. Leigh Hunt had been long known to him, as the most prominent champion of liberal ideas among journalists, and as one who had suffered for the cause. From Oxford Shelley had addressed a letter to the *Examiner*, proposing an Association of the friends of liberty for mutual encouragement and defence, but the letter had not been inserted by the editor. Later Shelley had called on Hunt to seek advice about a poem which he desired to publish, but the slight acquaintance had not ripened into intimacy. Shelley was then "a youth not come to his full growth; very gentlemanly, gazing earnestly at every object that interested him, and quoting the Greek dramatists." Yet again at a later date, when the editor of the *Examiner* was undergoing imprisonment for his libel on the Prince Regent, Shelley wrote to him, making a "princely offer," of which, however, at that time Hunt did not stand in need. Thus communications favourable to the growth of friendship had already taken place between Shelley and Hunt, but neither as yet could be said to possess a real, personal knowledge of the other.

Now, when Shelley most needed a sympathizing friend, such a friend he was to have. Early in December he left Bath to visit Peacock at Marlow and inquire for a house, and from Marlow he turned townwards, to be the guest of Hunt in the old-world suburb of Hampstead.

The visit to Leigh Hunt was brief, but delightful. "Letter from Shelley," Mary writes in her journal (December 13); "he is pleased with Hunt." On the day after his return to Bath—December 15—came a note from Hookham, which brought appalling tidings. For a short time past Shelley had lost sight of Harriet. In March of the present year, while the arguments with respect to the sale of the reversion to Sir Timothy were proceeding, her infant son, Charles Bysshe, had been produced on Shelley's behalf in the Court of Chancery. "Whitton,"* Shelley writes, in a letter to Godwin of March 9, "said that the production of the infant had already procrastinated the proceedings, much to the displeasure of Sir Timothy." It is probable that Shelley was not present on that occasion, for in the later Chancery action he declared that he had never seen his son; but it seems likely that he would have communicated with Harriet on the subject. Unhappily the journal for the early months of 1816 has been lost, and no positive evidence is procurable. In June Harriet was in communication with Peacock, and through him with Sir Timothy Shelley's solicitor. She had received, on March 1, her half-yearly instalment of one hundred pounds, paid in advance, and she was assured that future instalments would be as punctually paid in September and March of each year. She applied to Sir Timothy for an additional sum, and it was pointed out to her by Whitton, communicating through Peacock, that in addition to the two hundred a year allowed to her by her husband, she

* Sir Timothy Shelley's solicitor.

had also two hundred a year allowed by Mr. Westbrook. Whitton further expressed his opinion that it was in her power to purchase an annuity of £200 or £400, with a portion of her reversionary interest; but he forbore advising such a step. "He cannot do anything in the matter himself," Peacock wrote to Harriet on June 24, "further than this, that he will state the case for the opinion of an insurance office as the equivalent value of an annuity and a portion of your reversion, and he will send me the result." In September Shelley returned to England, and in the midmost days of that month he was Peacock's guest at Marlow. At what precise date Harriet disappeared from the cognizance of Shelley we cannot say. But we know that in November he was seeking for her, and seeking in vain. That she lived with or under the protection of her father until a short time before her death was affirmed on oath by her sister. Immediately before her death she resided in a house in Queen Street, Brompton, at no great distance from Hyde Park and the Serpentine river. To this house she did not return on the night of November 9. A month later, on December 10—a day on which Shelley's visit to Leigh Hunt had just begun—her body was found in the Serpentine river. She had been far advanced in pregnancy; on her finger was a valuable ring.*

Harriet Shelley's life, apart from that of Shelley, forms no portion of the story told in this volume. There is no doubt that she wandered from the ways of upright living;

* The entries in Godwin's journal are as follows: "November 9, H. S. dies." "December 10, H. S. found; disappeared three weeks." The entry of November 9 was probably inserted after the facts had been more exactly ascertained than they were when Godwin wrote on December 10. It should be noted, however, that in the Westbrooks' Chancery declarations Harriet is said to have died in December. Those who wish to look further into the matter may see the *Times* for December 12, 1816.

how far she wandered we need not inquire. If she sinned, she also sorrowed; we would think of her, not as a desperate fugitive from life, but as the fair, bright, innocent, kind-hearted Harriet of her early wedded days. That no act of Shelley's during the two years which immediately preceded her death tended to cause the rash act which brought her life to its close, seems certain. He had written to her kindly, undertaking to watch over her interests; he had seen that she was safe in the protection of her nearest relatives; at her urgent entreaty, much against his own desire, he had left his children in her care; he had, according to his means, guarded her against want or poverty; when for a time she disappeared from his ken, he had instituted inquiries to discover her whereabouts. By his teaching, indeed, he had led her to think lightly of the established rule and order of society; but this he had done conscientiously, believing that the revolutionary creed which he had accepted from Godwin's writings was favourable to virtue. He had been the cause to her of suffering which she was unable to endure. His example had not been an example of the patience, endurance, and self-denial which, when old ties are broken, should be practised before the formation of new ties. Had such self-denying fortitude been his, not only would his life have been saved from much misrepresentation and some pain, not only would he have left a nobler precedent for other lives entangled in like difficulties with his own, but a strenuous virtue might have passed from his life into his art, which would have strengthened its nerve and fibre, and enriched and sobered its enthusiasm. At twenty-two neither was his judgment mature nor his moral temper fully formed.

According to the story which reached Shelley, and which he accepted as true—a story which we have no

means of verifying or disproving—Harriet, through her sister's influence, had been driven from her father's house, and being subsequently deserted by one on whom she had a claim for kindness and consideration, she sought in death a speedy and desperate issue from her perplexities and griefs. Frequently, from the days of early girlhood, she had spoken of suicide with a composure which led those acquainted with her to assume that no serious meaning underlay her words. To live for her children was indeed a duty with Harriet after the parting between her and her husband had taken place; but how if she were conscious that she had disqualified herself for rendering to her children a mother's highest services? * Nothing would then remain to bind her to the wretchedness of an unhappy life, in a world where all seemed to have abandoned her. Yet Shelley at this moment, or but a few days later, was seeking her in vain through the vast labyrinth of London.

It was three days after Harriet Shelley's body had been found that Hookham wrote, informing Shelley of the event.

T. Hookham to Shelley.

MY DEAR SIR,

It is nearly a month since I had the pleasure of receiving a letter from you, and you have no doubt felt surprised that I did not reply to it sooner. It was my intention to do so; but, on inquiry, I found the utmost difficulty in obtaining the information you desire relative to Mrs. Shelley and your children.

While I was yet endeavouring to discover Mrs. Shelley's address, information was brought me that she was dead—that she had destroyed herself. You will believe that I did not credit the report. I called at the house of a friend of Mr. Westbrook; my

* As a fact, the infant children had been sent away to Warwick, to the care of a schoolmaster named Kendall.

doubt led to conviction. I was informed that she was taken from the Serpentine river on Tuesday last, apparently in an advanced state of pregnancy.* Little or no information was laid before the jury which sat on the body. She was called Harriet Smith, and the verdict was *found drowned*.

Your children are well, and are both, I believe, in London.

This shocking communication must stand single and alone in the letter which I now address to you: I have no inclination to fill it with subjects comparatively trifling: you will judge of my feelings and excuse the brevity of this communication.

Yours very truly,

T. HOOKHAM, JUN.

Old Bond Street, December 13, 1816.

On the afternoon of the day on which this letter reached him at Bath—a Sunday—Shelley hastened to London to claim his children, and on the following day his letter, making Mary a sharer in his sufferings, his fears, and hopes, was on its way.

Shelley to Mary.

London, December 15, 1816.

I have spent a day, my beloved, of somewhat agonizing sensations, such as the contemplation of vice and folly and hard-heartedness, exceeding all conception, must produce. Leigh Hunt has been with me all day, and his delicate and tender attentions to me, his kind speeches of you, have sustained me against the weight of the horror of this event.

The children I have not got. I have seen Longdill, who recommends proceeding with the utmost caution and resoluteness; he seems interested. I told him I was under contract of marriage to you, and he said that, in such an event, all pretence to detain the children would cease. Hunt said very delicately that this would be soothing intelligence to you. Yes, my only hope, my darling love, this will be one among the innumerable benefits which you will have bestowed upon me, and which will still be

* As shown at the inquest. See *The Times*, Dec. 12, 1816.

inferior in value to the greatest of benefits—yourself. It is through you that I can entertain without despair the recollection of the horrors of unutterable villany that led to this dark, dreadful death. I am to hear to-morrow from Desse [Mr. Westbrook's attorney] whether or no I am to engage in a contest for the children. At least it is consoling to know that its termination in your nominal union with me—that after having blessed me with a life, a world of real happiness—a mere form appertaining to you will not be barren of good. . . .

Everything tends to prove, however, that beyond the shock of so hideous a catastrophe having fallen on a human being once so nearly connected with me, there would in any case have been little to regret. Hookham, Longdill, every one, does me full justice; bears testimony to the upright spirit and liberality of my conduct to her. There is but one voice in condemnation of the detestable Westbrooks. If they should dare to bring it before Chancery, a scene of such fearful horror would be unfolded as would cover them with scorn and shame.

How is Claire? I do not tell her, but I may tell you, how deeply I am interested in her safety. I need not recommend her to your care. Give her any kind message from me, and calm her spirits as well as you can. I do not ask you to calm your own.

I am well in health, though somewhat faint and agitated; but the affectionate attentions shown me by Hunt have been sustainers and restoratives more than I can tell. Do you, dearest and best, seek happiness—where it ought to reside—in your own pure and perfect bosom; in the thoughts of how dear and how good you are to me; how wise and how extensively beneficial you are perhaps now destined to become.

Remember my poor babes, Ianthe and Charles. How tender and dear a mother they will find in you—darling William, too! My eyes overflow with tears. To-morrow I will write again.

Your own affectionate

SHELLEY.

The death of Harriet Shelley, following hard upon that of Fanny Godwin, shook Shelley to the centre; but of the two calamitous events, the death of Fanny brought

with it, as Shelley declared, far the crueller anguish. How he should have survived shock following on shock was a thing, as he himself wrote, not to be understood. Two duties, however, were clear: he must place Mary, with as little delay as possible, in her right position as his wife; and he must obtain possession of his children, Ianthe and Charles. For himself, nothing would be changed by the ecclesiastical ceremony of marriage; but Mary desired it, especially because her new position would restore her to her father, who naturally was importunate on the subject. Leaving Claire, with Elise and little William, in Bath, Shelley and Mary came to town. On December 27, Godwin saw his future son-in-law at Skinner Street, and next day called with him at Doctors' Commons, and proceeded thence to visit his daughter. On the morning of December 30, at St. Mildred's Church, in the city, in the presence of Godwin and his wife, the marriage was celebrated. "Call at Mildred w[ith] P. B. S., M. W. G., and M. J.," writes Godwin in his diary, with curious secretiveness; "they dine and sup. . . . See No. xviii. *infra pag. ult.*" And turning to the blank page at the end of the eighteenth fasciculus of his journal (that which chronicles events of the year 1814), we find, safe for reference, but removed from its correct chronological place, the record of the ceremony of the morning, with its date truly and faithfully given. During these days Mary neglected her journal, and the incidents of this eventful fortnight are recorded in a few lines: "I have omitted writing my journal for some time. Shelley goes to London and returns; I go with him; spend the time between Leigh Hunt's and Godwin's. A marriage takes place on the 30th December, 1816. Draw; read Lord Chesterfield and Locke."

On the afternoon of his marriage-day, Shelley wrote

to Claire Clairmont in Bath, a letter to which it was intended that Mary should add her part. He smiles at the magic ceremony which had been undergone; but the smile appears upon a dark background of melancholy pain.

. . . . The ceremony, so magical in its effects, was undergone this morning at St. Mildred's Church, in the City. Mrs. G. and G. were both present, and appeared to feel no little satisfaction. Indeed Godwin throughout has shown the most polished and cautious attentions to me and Mary. He seems to think no kindness too great in compensation for what has past. I confess I am not entirely deceived by this, though I cannot make my vanity wholly insensible to certain attentions paid in a manner studiously flattering. Mrs. G. presents herself to me in her real attributes of affectation, prejudice, and heartless pride. Towards her, I confess, I never feel an emotion of anything but antipathy. Her sweet daughter is very dear to me.

We left the Hunts yesterday morning and spent the evening at Skinner Street, not unpleasantly. We had a bed in the neighbourhood, and breakfasted with them before the marriage. Very few inquiries have been made of you, and those not of a nature to show that their suspicions have been alarmed.* Indeed, all is safe there. . . .

I will not tell you how dreadfully melancholy Skinner Street appears with all its associations. The most horrid thought is how people can be merry there! But I am resolved to overcome such sensations—if I do not destroy them I may be myself destroyed.

Thus closed the year 1816—a year eventful in Shelley's life. The negotiation with Sir Timothy and its collapse; the publication of "Alastor;" the visit to Switzerland; the acquaintance with Byron; the death of Harriet; the death, if possible more lamentable, of Fanny Godwin; the issue of Byron's intrigue with Claire Clairmont, which

* *I.e.* as to Miss Clairmont's connection with Byron.

threw her upon Shelley for human sympathy, and in great measure for material support; the friendship of Leigh Hunt; the marriage which brought the year to a close;—these filled the twelve months with incident and passions, and helped to mature the character of Shelley by experiences of pain and joy.

CHAPTER XV.

IN CHANCERY.

TWO duties had been clear to Shelley. One of these was now fulfilled by the performance in St. Mildred's Church, on the morning of December 30, of the ceremony "so magical in its effects." The other—to obtain possession of his children—was of more difficult accomplishment. Miss Westbrook and her father were determined to dispute the claim of Shelley to hold and rear and educate his son and daughter. When, together with Leigh Hunt, he demanded and re-demanded his children, the demand was refused, and no information would be vouchsafed as to their whereabouts. As a fact, when Harriet died, her daughter, aged three, and her infant boy of two years old were away in Warwick, under the care of the Rev. John Kendall, master of the Earl of Leicester's Hospital, and vicar of Budbrooke.

The Chancery proceedings, although the main question was decided in March, 1817, did not come to a close until midsummer of the following year, when Shelley and his wife had been for some months residents in Italy; but it will be convenient to follow the course of these affairs from first to last, at a single view. On January 8, 1817, the infants Eliza Ianthe Shelley and Charles Bysshe Shelley, their maternal grandfather and next friend John Westbrook acting on their behalf, filed their Bill of Complaint

to Lord Eldon as High Chancellor of Great Britain. Their father, they declare, deserted his wife three years since, to cohabit unlawfully with Mary Godwin, daughter of the author of "Political Justice," ever since which desertion they have remained in the custody and under the protection of Mr. Westbrook and his daughter Elizabeth. The father, who now claims possession of them, "avows himself to be an Atheist," and "has written and published a certain work called 'Queen Mab,' with notes, and other works," wherein he has "blasphemously derided the truth of the Christian revelation and denied the existence of God as the Creator of the universe." Having recited the provisions made with reference to the money placed on their behalf by Mr. Westbrook in the hands of trustees, the infant orators pray that their persons and fortunes may not be placed in the custody of their father, but under the protection of the Court of Chancery, in whose power it lies to appoint, after due inquiry, proper persons to act as their guardians, and to issue directions for their maintenance and education. For their immediate relief they further pray that their father may be restrained by the injunction of the Court from taking possession of their persons.

On January 18, Shelley filed his answer to this Bill of Complaint. The alleged desertion of his first wife is clearly and positively denied. "This Defendant saith that the said Complainants are the only issue of the said marriage, and that after the birth of the said Complainant Eliza Ianthe Shelley, this Defendant and his said late wife agreed, in consequence of certain differences between them, to live separate and apart from each other, but this Defendant denies that he deserted his said wife, otherwise than by separating from her as aforesaid." What follows is of importance:—

“And this Defendant says that at the urgent entreaty of his said late wife he permitted his said children to reside with her under her management and protection, after her separation from this Defendant, although this Defendant saith he was very anxious, from his affection for his said children, to have had them with him under his own care and management during his said wife’s life, but that he forbore so to do in compliance with the wishes of his wife and on account of their tender age, intending nevertheless to have them under his own care, and to provide for their education himself, as soon as they should be of a proper age, or in case of the death of his said wife, and never having in any manner abandoned or deserted them, or had any intention of so doing.”

For the Westbrooks the most distinguished leader of the Chancery bar, Sir Samuel Romilly, a man as eminent by his character as by his talents, was engaged. Shelley was not so fortunate. His chief counsel, Mr. Wetherell, who a little later became conspicuous by his volunteered defence of Thistlewood, Watson, and others, charged with high treason, was a speaker of more volubility than argumentative power.

Mr. Wetherell’s brief, prepared by Longdill, is still in existence, and some of the “Observations” on the Bill of Complaint indicate the line of argument which it was intended to take. “Little,” it is admitted, “can be said in defence of ‘Queen Mab.’” It was, however, written and printed by Mr. Shelley when he was only nineteen, and as to the publication of it, it was merely distributed to some few of his personal friends; not twenty ever got abroad. The copy referred to by Miss Westbrooke appears to be one which Mr. Shelley confidentially gave to his late wife. Mr. Shelley has not been able to get a copy of his ‘Letter to Lord Ellenborough.’ A very few copies of that were printed, and none ever publicly circulated.

“Notwithstanding Mr. Shelley’s violent philippics against the ‘despotism of marriage’ as a contract ‘against delicacy and reason,’ and as a system ‘hostile to human happiness,’ and notwithstanding his anticipated delights of the free enjoyment of ‘choice and change,’ which would result from the ‘abolition of marriage’ (see page 147 *et seq.* of ‘Queen Mab’), Mr. Shelley marries twice before he is twenty-five! He is no sooner liberated from the despotic chains, which he speaks of with so much horror and contempt, than he forges a new set, and becomes again a willing victim of this horrid despotism! It is hoped that a consideration of this marked difference between his speculative opinions and his actions will induce the Lord Chancellor not to think very seriously of this boyish and silly, but certainly unjustifiable, publication of ‘Queen Mab.’ . . .

“Part of the prayer of the petition is that Mr. and Miss Westbrooke should be appointed guardians. That part of the prayer, it is presumed, cannot, in the present state of the affair, be granted, but it is thought right to say that Mr. Westbrooke formerly kept a coffee-house, and is certainly in no respect qualified to be the guardian of Mr. Shelley’s children. To Miss Westbrooke there are more decided objections: she is illiterate and vulgar, and what is perhaps a still greater objection, it was by her advice, and with her active concurrence, and it may be said by her *management*, that Mr. Shelley, when of the age of nineteen, ran away with Miss Harriet Westbrooke, then of the age of seventeen, and married her in Scotland. Miss Westbrooke, the proposed guardian, was then nearly thirty, and if she had acted as she ought to have done as the guardian and friend of her younger sister, all this misery and disgrace to both families would have been avoided.”

On Friday, January 24, 1817, the case was heard before Lord Eldon. Before a more cautious, deliberate, and painstaking judge the case of Shelley's children could not have come. In the first hearing of the case stress was laid by Sir Samuel Romilly upon Shelley's religious or irreligious opinions, as set forth in "Queen Mab," on which it was afterwards found expedient to insist less strongly. The defence lay chiefly with Mr. Montagu, and was made in a most impressive and spirited manner. "Queen Mab," he contended, had never been published; it was one of those works of the brain that a man creates for his own amusement, without intending to send them out to the world. A man for his amusement might write many things which he intended that his children should never see. Why, then, should the outcome of his mind, although in caricature, bereave him of his paternal rights? Moved by such considerations as these, his lordship, he had no doubt, would dismiss the petition with costs. Lord Eldon's Chancery rule of *festina lente* was not violated on the present occasion. He would take home the petition and affidavits, he said, and give his decision on a future day. Further hearings of the case should be held, not in the public court, but in the Lord Chancellor's private room.

Although the Lord Chancellor would pronounce no decision, the result of the day's proceedings was held to be unfavourable to Shelley. While he in London watched the progress of the affair, Mary waited anxiously at Bath for tidings. "My William's birthday," she writes in her journal on January 24 (the day on which the case was heard). "How many chances have occurred during this little year! May the ensuing one be more peaceful, and my William's star be a fortunate one to rule the decision of this day! Alas! I fear it will be put off, and the influence of the star pass away. Read the 'Arcadia'

and 'Amadis;' walk with my sweet babe." And on the following day: "Saturday, January 25.—An unhappy day. I receive bad news, and determine to go up to London"—a determination carried into effect without delay.

As the case proceeded, the stress of the argument shifted from a consideration of Shelley's theological or anti-theological creed to that of his avowed opinions respecting the institution of marriage, and his conduct taken in connection with those opinions. It was probably soon after the first day of hearing that Shelley himself drew up a statement to be laid before the Court—a statement which received the advantage of Godwin's criticism. A rough draft of a fragment of this document in Shelley's handwriting still exists, with many erasures and alterations, and with comments curt, decisive, and by no means flattering in the writing of Godwin. "I understand," wrote Shelley, "the opinions which I hold on religious matters to be abandoned as a ground of depriving me of the guardianship of my children; the allegations from which this unfitness is argued to proceed are reduced to a simple statement of my holding doctrines inimical to the institution of marriage as established in this country, and my having contravened in practice, as well as speculation, that institution. If I have attacked religion, it is agreed that I am punishable, but not by the loss of my children; if I have imagined a system of social life inconsistent with the constitution of England, I am punishable, but not by the loss of my children.

"I understand that I am to be declared incapable of the most sacred of human duties and the most inestimable of human rights, because I have reasoned against the institution of marriage in its present state; because I have in my own person violated that institution, and because I have justified that violation by my reasoning. The argument of my adversaries, then, as it presents itself to the Lord

Chancellor's mind, reduces itself, I imagine, to this plain consideration — not whether I shall teach my children religious infidelity, not whether I shall teach them political heterodoxy, but whether I shall educate them in immodest and loose sentiments of sexual connexion. I feel that on this particular point I ought to be heard in explanation.

“The institutions and opinions of all ages and countries have admitted in various degrees the principle of divorce. They have admitted that the sexual connexion once having taken place may be dissolved by some cause, which, according to their respective maxims, are to be considered destructive of the design of its institution—adultery, incompatibility of temper, difference of religion, madness, have all been established by different codes as conditions under which the parties to this union might be free to amend their choice. [Milton's name is here written, and a pen drawn through it.] Selden, perhaps the most learned man and the greatest lawyer this country has produced, and other illustrious writers have already vindicated these doctrines with impunity. My reasonings, I solemnly affirm, amount to as much and no more than I here state. I consider the institution of marriage, as it exists precisely in the laws and opinions of this country, a mischievous and tyrannical institution, and shall express publicly the reasonings on which that persuasion is founded. If I am judged to be an improper guardian for my children on this account, no men of a liberal and inquiring spirit will remain in the community, who, if they are not more free from human feelings or more fortunate in their development and growth than most men can sincerely state their own to be, must not for some protest against the opinions of the multitude, equivalent to my tenets, live in the daily terror lest a court of justice should be converted into an instrument of private vengeance, and its edicts be directed, under

some remote allegement of public good, against the most deep and sacred interests of his heart.

“I am aware of the nature of the institution of marriage in this country, and that the opinions exist which give its vitality to that institution. [Godwin comments, ‘This is sadly expressed. It is about as significant as if you said, “I am aware the sun rises every Monday.”’] So far as my own practice has been concerned, I have done my utmost in my peculiar situation to accommodate myself to the feelings of the community, as expressed in these opinions and laws. It was matter of the deepest grief to me, to instance my particular case, that, at the commencement of my union with the present Mrs. Shelley, I was legally married to a woman of whom delicacy forbids me to say more than that we were disunited by incurable dissensions, and rendered incapable, by that marriage contracted at eighteen years of age [from the word ‘and’ to ‘age’ has a pen-stroke drawn through it], of exhibiting to the world, according to those formalities which the world requires, that my motives of preference towards my present wife arose from no light or frivolous attachment, but such as in their sense of the word, as well as in mine, I wish to express by the word wife [from ‘but such’ to ‘word wife’ is struck out]; and that these feelings were sincere, and that I gave weight to public opinion, there can be no better proof than that immediately on the death of my late wife, I married the lady whose previous connexion with me, alleged to be the consequence, not of the common affections of human nature, but of my peculiar tenets, is now to be made the ground of depriving me of my children [from ‘alleged’ to end of sentence is struck out, and the following inserted and again struck out: ‘I protest against my previous connexion with her being interpreted into a consequence of my peculiar tenets.’]”

“My notions of the education of my children, with respect——” [*Fragment ends.*]

It is noticeable that while Shelley's counsel argued that the views set forth in the notes to “Queen Mab” were or might have been no more than the idle speculations of a boy, Shelley himself, with greater candour, admits that his opinions on marriage, as at present instituted, differ from those accepted in English society, adding, however, that he had in his practice accommodated himself to the feelings of the community.

On March 27 Lord Eldon gave his judgment. He would not pronounce that the father should be deprived of his children, and that they should be handed over to the Westbrooks. It might be that Shelley would name fit and proper persons by whom the children should be educated. All that the Chancellor at present could see his way to decide was that the children must not be placed in the exclusive care of their father, and that until a proper plan for their maintenance and education should be proposed and should be approved by the Court, Shelley must be restrained from taking possession of their persons. It was not because Shelley held atheistical opinions that the Chancellor so decided; it was not because he held opinions opposed to the institution of marriage. Nor was it Shelley's conduct in leaving his wife, and during her life entering into an irregular union with Mary Godwin, on which Lord Eldon based his judgment. It was neither opinions nor conduct taken alone that determined the Chancellor to place the children under the protection of the Court. It was these two taken together—opinions leading to conduct; opinions avowed, or at least not disavowed, leading directly to conduct which the law of the land pronounced to be immoral.

Lord Eldon's judgment was accompanied by an

injunction restraining Shelley from intermeddling with the children until the further order of the Court. Meanwhile Mr. Alexander, one of the Masters in Chancery, was to inquire as to a proper plan for the children's maintenance and education, and as to the selection of proper persons in whose care they should be placed during their minority.

The main battle was fought, and Shelley had suffered a defeat; but it still remained to be determined whether the nominees of the Westbrooks should be entrusted with the education of little Ianthe and Charles, or whether the persons proposed on Shelley's behalf might not be preferred. Mr. Westbrook and his daughter did not themselves desire to undertake the arduous duty of rearing and educating a boy of two years old and a girl of three. The children being in the hands of the Rev. John Kendall, a schoolmaster of Warwick, in his hands the Westbrooks were content to leave them. On Shelley's part it was proposed (June 21) that the children should be entrusted to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Longdill (in the present case Longdill had acted as Shelley's solicitor); whatever sum was needful for their maintenance and education, over and above the eighty pounds a year provided by Mr. Westbrook, Shelley undertook to supply.

When, on August 1, Mr. Alexander gave in his report to the Lord Chancellor, it seemed as if Shelley were about to suffer a second and final defeat, for the report expressed an opinion in favour of the Westbrooks' proposal. No objection against Mr. Longdill was raised, except that his position as Shelley's solicitor disqualified him for the duty of loyally carrying out the directions of the Court. Mr. Kendall was to Shelley a complete stranger; the effect of placing the children with him *in loco parentis* would be to dissolve all ties between them and their father. He

had proposed no plan for their education, as intended by the order of the Court. It seemed to Shelley that although his right to the personal care of his children and to the direction of their education had been suspended, he had not lost the right of nominating or appointing the person to whom they should be entrusted, provided that person were free from all reasonable objections. These considerations having been set forth in a petition from Shelley, the Chancellor perceived their justice, and ordered, on November 10, that the matter should be referred back to the Master to receive further proposals as to a proper person under whose care the infants should remain during their minority, or until further order of the Court.

Other proposals, accordingly, were made on Shelley's part, and on the part of the Westbrooks. The Rev. Jacob Cheesborough, of Ulcomb, in Kent, who also held a vicarage in Cheshire, now displaces the Warwick schoolmaster; and instead of Longdill, Dr. and Mrs. Hume, persons of unexceptionable orthodoxy, were proposed by Shelley. Dr. Hume resided at Brent End Lodge, Hanwell, and was physician to his Majesty's forces, and to his Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge. He would place the boy, when seven years of age, at a good private school, whence he should pass to a public school and one of the universities. In the choice of a school Dr. Hume would prefer one under the superintendence of an orthodox clergyman of the Church of England. The girl should be educated at home by Mrs. Hume, with the assistance, when needful, of suitable masters. To such a proposal Mr. Alexander could offer no objection. On April 28, 1818, when Shelley and Mary were in Milan, the Master reported in favour of Dr. and Mrs. Hume; and in spite of a petition from the Westbrooks, praying that Mr. Alexander should review his report, that report was confirmed by the Chancellor on

July 25. As to the interference with Shelley's parental authority, the Court acted with as much consideration for his feelings as was consistent with a determination to allow him no opportunity of inculcating on the children his peculiar opinions. He might visit them once in each month, the interview to take place in the presence of Dr. and Mrs. Hume, or, if more convenient to him, since he might desire to travel abroad, his visits might be when he pleased, provided that their number did not exceed twelve in a year. Should he desire further intercourse with his children, it was open to him to apply to the Court. As to the Westbrooks, the number of their visits to the children was also limited to twelve, but the presence of Dr. and Mrs. Hume was not required on those occasions. Finally, as to Sir Timothy Shelley and his family, perfect freedom of intercourse with either or both of the children was granted.

From Lord Eldon's point of view the decision was not unjust. Shelley had put forth extravagant opinions on the subject of marriage; he had not disavowed them; his conduct seemed to have proceeded from them; and he might be expected to inculcate on his children those opinions, leading, in great relations of life, to conduct which the law pronounced immoral. It was not to be expected that the Chancellor should discover, by inspiration or some intuition of genius, all that was gentle, beautiful, and elevated in Shelley's character or Shelley's creed; or that he should be able to estimate, as we are able, all the gains to be derived by little Charles and Ianthe from the communities of such a father's love. Nor could he be aware how in Mary Shelley they would have found a mother tender, wise, and faithful. Lord Eldon acted sternly indeed, but, according to the evidence laid before him, not unjustly, the justice being such as may be expected from

a tribunal incapable of dealing with the finer issues of human life.*

* *Shelley's will.* Shelley's will was executed on February 18, 1817. Byron and Peacock were appointed executors. A sum of £6000 was assigned as a provision for his son Charles Bysshe; a like sum as that for his daughter Ianthe; a like sum as that for his son William; these sums being bequeathed in trust to Byron and Peacock for the children's benefit. The sum of £6000 was bequeathed to Miss Clairmont; a second sum of £6000 was bequeathed to the executors in trust, to be invested in the purchase of an annuity for the term of Miss Clairmont's life, and the life of such other person as she may name. (Allegra was perhaps meant.) The sum of £2000 was bequeathed to Hogg, and £2000 to Byron; £500 to Peacock; the executors, besides, to invest £2000 in purchase of an annuity, payable quarterly, for the term of Peacock's life, and the life of such other person as he may name. To his wife Shelley bequeathed all his "manors, messuages, lands, tenements, hereditaments, and real estate, both freehold and copyhold, whether in possession, reversion, remainder, or expectancy," and also all his "monies, stocks, funds, and securities for money, mortgages in fee, and for years, and the lands, tenements, and hereditaments therein comprised for all his interest and estate therein," and all his goods, chattels, and personal estates whatsoever. It has been said that the second sum of £6000 was left to Miss Clairmont by an error in drawing up the document; but this statement seems to be unproved. I have to thank Mr. Forman for allowing me to examine his copy of the will.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHELLEY AT MARLOW.

WHILE the Westbrooks were at work preparing their case for hearing in the Court of Chancery, in the early days of January, 1817, Shelley left his wife with Claire at Bath, and was in consultation with his legal advisers in London. During his absence, on January 12, was born the daughter of Byron and Claire Clairmont—an infant of unusual beauty, with eyes of deep blue, baby-mouth exquisitely shaped, and form of perfect symmetry. Until some one with a better right to bestow a Christian designation should rename the babe, they would call her by a name that resembled Albè's, and at the same time expressed the brightness of her opening beauty and sensibility—Alba, or the Dawn. The good news of Claire's safety and that of her child was needed to cast a gleam on the gloom that encompassed Shelley. The last autumn had left dread memories to haunt his spirit. To the circumstances of Harriet's death, so full of appalling horror, he dared hardly, he says, advert in thought. "For a time," says Leigh Hunt, that event "tore his being to pieces." And this had followed hard upon the death of Fanny Godwin, which affected him, he declares, far more deeply. Now his children, more than ever dear, were to be objects of contention, perhaps to be won after long struggle, perhaps

to be wholly lost to him. And might it not happen that he should himself be imprisoned as a revolutionist and an atheist? Might not his fortune, as author of "Queen Mab," be to stand, as Eaton had stood, from day to day in the pillory? Such were Shelley's apprehensions in January, and though he understood that he might purchase victory by recantation, he would choose any penalty rather than such a triumph. These, indeed, were overheated apprehensions; yet they were natural to a time of terror and reaction. A little later Cobbett fled for safety to America. Nor could Shelley know that there lived in Englishmen the spirit which, before the year was out, rose against the prosecution of Hone for blasphemous libel, and procured the acquittal of Watson, Thistlewood, and Hooper from the charge of treason.

Moved by the thought of Shelley's solitude, and by the ill news of the first morning's proceedings in Chancery, Mary, not without a pang in parting from little William ("I wish Blue Eyes was with me," she exclaims in the diary), started for town on January 26. The days which followed, though full of anxiety, were cheered by the pleasures of social intercourse with Godwin, Hunt, and Hunt's circle of literary acquaintances.

That was a memorable evening (February 5) when the three "Young Poets" of his *Examiner* article of two months since—Reynolds, Keats, and Shelley—supped together at Hampstead with their generous critic. Keats, we are told by Leigh Hunt, "did not take to Shelley as kindly as Shelley did to him. . . . Keats, being a little too sensitive on the score of his origin, felt inclined to see in every man of birth a sort of natural enemy." The enthusiasm for abstract ideas by which Shelley was affected was unknown to Keats, who, with power of broad thinking and feeling as yet undeveloped, could lose himself in rich

sensation and brooding pleasures in a way never experienced by Shelley. To Keats there appeared to be a thinness in Shelley's poetical work; why could he not pause in his too rapid race, and amass around him the materials of substantial delight? Nor did Hazlitt, whose acquaintance Shelley also made at one of Hunt's supper-parties, feel much drawn towards the eager boyish disputant with whom he discussed the subjects of monarchy and republicanism until three in the morning. Himself oppressed by the passion of ideas, and mingling with these ideas his passionate prejudices, Hazlitt at thirty-eight, a pale anatomy of a man, worn and wan with study, craved in youth more of health and calm and sober certainty of happiness than Shelley, ailing in body and dejected in spirits, seemed to possess. His eye was too preternaturally bright; his voice, in moments of excitement, too keenly vibrating; his cheek lacked the hue of health; his figure drooped or bent forward too much, "like a plant that has been deprived of its vital air." These physical characteristics, thought Hazlitt, were the symbols of an unwholesome craving after unnatural excitement, a morbid tendency towards interdicted topics, an unwise quest after the hidden secrets of human destiny. He did not know how Shelley, a little more than a year since, had been the robust and joyous oarsman on the Thames; how he had of late endured blow upon blow of almost shattering force; how his health and spirits had suffered; how even now his dearest hopes as a father seemed to him to be desperately at stake. One true friend beside Leigh Hunt these days brought to Shelley—a friend whose sound head, generous heart, and manly hand were henceforth, according to his ability, at Shelley's service. The enthusiastic recognition of his genius by one twelve years his senior, and well skilled in forms and fashions of literature, was

naturally.

but one of many good offices rendered to Shelley by Horace Smith. With the ardour of a poet and the zeal of a political reformer, there mingled in Horace Smith some of the solid judgment and prudence of a city man of business.

As a companion in his country rambles in the neighbourhood of Hampstead, Shelley had often by his side his friend's eldest child, little Thornton Hunt. He delighted in the broken ground and fresh air of Hampstead, especially when the north-west wind blew a gale of intoxicating health and freedom. "I went with him rather than with my father," writes Thornton Hunt, "because he walked faster, and talked with me while he walked, instead of being lost in his own thoughts and conversing only at intervals. A love of wandering seemed to possess him in the most literal sense ; his rambles appeared to be without design, or any limit but my fatigue ; and when I was 'done up' he carried me home in his arms, on his shoulder, or pickback." In Shelley's delight at this time in the companionship of a child there was, perhaps, some of that feeling which he afterwards described in the words—

"The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow."

He was himself suffering in body and in mind. Sudden seizures of agonizing pain left him at times shaken in nerve and exhausted ; and his thoughts turned ever anxiously to anticipate the issue of the Chancery struggle. But in the mirth and gladness of children he found a consolation for his private pain. "I can remember one day at Hampstead," writes his former playfellow ; "it was soon after breakfast, and Shelley sat reading, when he suddenly threw up his book and hands, and fell back, the chair sliding sharply from under him, and he poured forth shrieks, loud and continuous, stamping his feet madly on the ground.

My father rushed to him, and while the women looked out for the usual remedies of cold water and hand-rubbing, applied a strong pressure to his side [the seat of Shelley's pain], kneading it with his hands; and the patient seemed to be gradually relieved by that process. This happened about the time when he was most anxious for the result of the trial which was to deprive him of his children. In the intervals he sought relief in reading, in conversation—which especially turned upon classic literature—in freedom of thought and action, and in play with the children of the house." To play at "frightful creatures," with rampant paws and terrifying gestures, was a favourite diversion of Shelley's, when, to make his aspect more dreadful, he would screw his long and curling hair in front, until the little ones, snatching a fearful joy, grew alarmed at the realistic monster, and begged him "not to do the horn." Sometimes he would tease little Thornton with provoking banter, while the small boy sat with an arm around him; and once in revenge the boy, looking up in Shelley's face, cried out that he hoped his persecutor would be beaten in the Chancery suit, and have his children taken from him. "I was sitting on his knee," Thornton Hunt relates, "and as I spoke, he let himself fall listlessly back in the chair, without attempting to conceal the shock I had given him. But presently he folded his arms round me and kissed me; and I perfectly understood that he saw how sorry I was, and was as anxious as I was to be friends again." In the background of Shelley's mirth with his pretty comrades lay melancholy thoughts. Once, while watching his paper boats speed across the pond in the Vale of Health, or caught and swamped by its tiny billows, "How much," said Shelley, smiling, "I should like that we could get into one of these boats and be shipwrecked—it would be a death more to be desired than any other."

But, in the midst of his anxiety and suffering, the old love of freakish jest would sometimes break forth. "Does Shelley go on telling strange stories of the deaths of kings?" asked Keats of Leigh Hunt, in a letter written in May, 1817. Shelley was fond, Hunt tells us, of quoting a passage from "Richard the Second," in which the king gives fantastic expression to his misery.

"He was once going to town with me in the Hampstead stage, when our only companion was an old lady, who sat silent and still, after the English fashion. . . . Shelley, who had been moved into the ebullition by something objectionable which he thought he saw in the face of our companion, startled her into a look of the most ludicrous astonishment by suddenly calling to mind, and, in his enthusiastic tone of voice, addressing me by name with the first two lines. 'Hunt,' he exclaimed—

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

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

Shelley's sympathetic delight in the innocent joy of children and all happy creatures went hand in hand with a passion of charity for those who were sufferers, brethren of his own in sorrow, sickness, need. Returning from the opera one fierce winter night, when snow lay white upon heath and hill, Leigh Hunt heard, near his own door, strange and alarming shrieks, mingled with the voice of a man. It was Shelley, who was bearing down the Vale a woman whom he had found near the top of the hill in fits. She had been attending her son, who accompanied her, on a criminal charge made against him, and excitement and fatigue had overpowered her in the bleak and windy night. Seeking shelter for her, Shelley had knocked at door after

door, and had found none. It was impossible to admit a stranger—perhaps an impostor. “At last,” Leigh Hunt writes, “my friend sees a carriage driving up to a house at a little distance. The knock is given; the warm door flies open; servants and lights pour forth. Now, thought he, is the time. He puts on his best address . . . and plants himself in the way of an elderly person, who is stepping out of the carriage with his family. He tells his story. They only press on the faster. ‘Will you go and see her?’ ‘No, sir; there’s no necessity for that sort of thing, depend on it. Impostors swarm everywhere; the thing cannot be done. Sir, your conduct is extraordinary.’ ‘Sir,’ cried Shelley, assuming a very different manner, and forcing the astonished householder to stop out of his astonishment, ‘I am sorry to say that *your* conduct is *not* extraordinary; and if my own seems to amaze you, I will tell you something which may amaze you a little more, and I hope will frighten you. It is such men as you who madden the spirits and the patience of the poor and wretched; and if ever a convulsion comes in this country (which is very probable), recollect what I tell you. You will have your house, that you refuse to put this miserable woman into, burnt over your head.’ ‘God bless me, sir! Dear me, sir!’ exclaimed the poor frightened man, and fluttered into his mansion.” Sheltered and warmed and fed by Hunt and Shelley, and cared for by a doctor whom they procured, the woman recovered. “The next day,” says Hunt, “my friend sent mother and son comfortably home to Hendon, where they were known, and whence they returned him thanks full of gratitude.”

Shelley’s concern for his fellows was not confined to individual and private cases of want and suffering. England, in 1817, was full of misery and feverish agitation. Loyal and patriotic writers like Southey pleaded that

England, having achieved her great deliverance, and the deliverance of Europe from the tyranny of Napoleon, needed before all else to maintain her strength by internal union, by the suppression of factious disturbance, and by a wise but gradual reform. Men of a different temper declaimed against the war of European liberation as a profligate and purposeless attack upon the French people, and urged that England, now at last awakened to her internal misery and servitude, should on the instant reform root and branch. The editor of the *Examiner* was a conspicuous opponent of the government of the Regent, Sidmouth, and Castlereagh; and Shelley applauded his friend for the part he took in public affairs. But, with all Shelley's ardent hopes and visions, there was in him a certain moderation of temper and opinion which preserved him from the extreme views of the Hampden Clubs and of Major Cartwright. As to universal suffrage, it was at present rather to be dreaded than desired. "I confess," Shelley wrote, "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." An extension of the franchise, within due limits and annual parliaments, might reasonably be demanded at once by the voice of the nation. But how to make that voice audible? How, save by a plebiscite, the votes of the people for or against reform to be collected by a system of visitation from door to door throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain and Ireland. To defray the expenses which must attend such a method of obtaining a plebiscite on the question of reform, Shelley was himself prepared to lay down one hundred pounds, the tenth part of his annual income. His convictions and

practical suggestions, together with this offer of aid to carry them into effect, were set forth in the pamphlet, "A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom," issued in March, 1817, by the brothers James and Charles Ollier, young publishers to whom Shelley had probably been introduced by their common friend, Leigh Hunt.

Shelley did not place his name on the title-page of his pamphlet ; its author was "the Hermit of Marlow." A few days before its appearance he, with his household, had migrated to that pleasant little town by the Thames side, well known to him already by his visits to Peacock. In the river flowing between rich meadows, whose grass and flowers dip to the water, or mirroring cliff and wooded slope, the beech-groves of Bisham, the ozier aits of Cookham, Shelley was to find inexhaustible delight. The town of Great Marlow had an air of old-world peace about it. Shelley's house—Albion House—which had been taken some time since on a lease of twenty-one years, stood in West Street—half a country road—at some distance from the river. It had some feeble pretensions to an ornamental front, with a gabled roof broken by dormer windows, which suggested the once vaguely complimentary term "Gothic ;" at least it was spacious, including among its rooms one large enough for a village ball-room, which Shelley fitted up as a library ; but it had no view Thamesward, and was damp and cold. To make amends for the lack of view in front was a considerable garden to the rear, including a shady orchard plot, a kitchen garden, evergreen shrubs, and a mound surrounded by cypresses and yews, with a cedar tree among them ; still further was the prospect of open meadows, leading towards undulating wooded slopes.

Here Shelley hoped that he had found a lifelong resting-place, or, if not this, that at least it should be his home

while Sir Timothy Shelley held the family estates. Here, in his study, were the books in which he took delight, while the youthful Apollo and Venus, in casts of ample size, made the room, as it were, a temple of beauty and radiant force. Here, with her husband, her books, and her blue-eyed boy, Mary was happy; no longer, as last year, for ever haunted by the thought of the certainty of death, and now saddened only by the sense of the flight of time, and the irreparable loss of these serenest hours. And here was Claire, with little Alba, whose baby-face seemed daily to grow more bright in its glad intelligence. Claire, who at Bath had been "Mrs. Clairmont," now resumed her maiden style; and Alba passed for the child of a friend in London, sent into the country for her health. The Swiss nurse, Elise, attended to the children; a cook was duly instructed in the master's vegetarian rule; and Harry, the man-servant, did indoor and outdoor jobs, and kept the garden from running to wildness. Mary studied, sketched, and had the happiness to see the manuscript of "Frankenstein" growing towards completion. Claire also dreamed of authorship and wrote; but her especial delight was in the piano, procured for her by Mary and Shelley, to which she sang in a voice compared by her former music-master, Corri, to "a string of pearls."

New friends, except a few among humble folk unknown to fame, Shelley did not seek or find. But of Peacock he saw something; and he rejoiced to be able to invite Godwin and the Hunts, and afterwards Hogg, and Mary's old friend of Dundee, William Baxter, and Horace Smith, to his house at Marlow. "I am not wretch enough," he said to Peacock, "to tolerate an acquaintance;" but in truth he was not wretch enough to live without true friends. To escape from one alien to his mind or mood, Shelley would resort to comical devices, if

he did not choose rather to avoid the calamity by precipitate flight; yet the Marlow house was never for any long period untenanted by one or more of his little band of linked companions. Hunt was to come as soon as possible after they had settled in their new abode. "You shall never be serious when you wish to be merry," wrote Mary, "and have as many nuts to crack as there are words in the Petitions to Parliament for Reform—a tremendous promise." And to Godwin, whom he had failed to see in a recent visit to town, Shelley wrote, expecting that the pleasure of a meeting was but for a short time deferred.

On April 2 Godwin became the guest of his son-in-law at Marlow. In company with Peacock they visited Bisham Wood, and went by water to Medmenham Abbey. But the early April days were drearily cold, and Godwin chose to return soon to his familiar quarters in Skinner Street, where all seemed to him rich in such comfort and quiet as a student loves. If only he were free from the weight of debts which still hung upon him! Five hundred pounds owing, in spite of his constant struggle—a struggle sometimes almost "beyond human strength." "Once every three months," he wrote to Shelley, "I throw myself prostrate beneath the feet of Taylor, of Norwich, and my other discounting friends, protesting that this is absolutely for the last time. Shall this ever have an end? Shall I ever be my own man again?" While Godwin thus pleaded for help in his distress, Peacock also must be placed above want—an annuity of one hundred pounds was conferred on him by Shelley; the Hunts were never far from pecuniary straits; and Charles Clairmont, away among the Pyrenees, had been charmed by Miss Jeanne Morel, and he and she would be exquisitely happy in being devoted to each other, if only Shelley gave consent. She had the advantage of him in age by about five years, was not ugly, though no

one would dare to say she was handsome, and had passed her life among the delicious solitudes near Bagnères; an annual sufficiency to support a little *ménage* would be desirable. It can scarcely be wondered at that there were moments when Shelley resembled, as Godwin declared to him, a blood-horse, starting away in furious mood, and losing a thousand steps ere he drew in. The gadflies were so many, so incessant, and so keen.

On the evening of his father-in-law's departure arrived the Hunts—Mrs. Hunt ailing, and requiring care and attendance from Mary. Still, notwithstanding interruptions, walks by the river-side, boating excursions, and classical studies, "Frankenstein" drew towards completion. On May 14 the last page was corrected, and the preface was written. Her task at last achieved, Mary decided to place her manuscript in the hands of Murray, the publisher, and proposed to her father that she should occupy a room in his house while she stayed in town.

The hot June of 1817 was favourable to Shelley's health and spirits. He was often on the water in his boat, which was made for both oars and sail, or he would join Hunt, Hunt's wife and sister-in-law, and the children, in their woodland rambles. Thornton Hunt, calling back to mind his appearance at this time, remembered his sunken chest and rounded shoulders, more apparent from an habitual eagerness of mood, which, thrusting forward his face, made him stoop; yet he seemed to abound in vitality, physical as well as intellectual. "In his countenance there was life instead of weariness; melancholy more often yielded to alternations of bright thoughts; and paleness had given way to a certain freshness of colour, with something like roses in the cheeks." Though after violent exercise he panted, and sometimes suffered from acute pain in the side, he could undergo, without injury, long and steady

toil. He often walked with Peacock to London, over fields, lanes, woods, and heath, a distance of more than thirty miles; with rope on shoulder he could tow the boat a considerable distance; and though he often chose to steer, he would, if necessary, take an oar, and "could stick to his seat," says Thornton Hunt, "for any time, against any force of current or of wind, not only without complaining, but without being compelled to give in until the set task was accomplished, though it should involve some miles of hard pulling." It was, indeed, a point of honour with Shelley to prove that some grit lay under his outward appearance of weakness and excitable nerves; for he was an apostle of the vegetarian faith, and a water-drinker, and must not discredit the doctrine which he preached and practised. His habit was to rise early, and to walk or read before breakfast; during the forenoon he studied and wrote; then he would go forth again, book in hand, sometimes with uncovered head under the glowing summer sun, strolling or striding along, sometimes stopping to pluck a flower; or he would row up or down the river to some favourite spot, and there let the boat drift while, as often on Lake Lemman, he lay in the bottom gazing upward; or, leaving the boat, he would strike alone into the woodlands, and be invisible for many hours. He had christened his wandering pinnace "The Vaga;" "bond," added a witty neighbour in letters on the stern. "I have often met him," writes a correspondent of Lady Shelley's, "going or coming from his island retreat near Medmenham Abbey. . . . He was the most interesting figure I ever saw; his eyes like a deer's, bright but rather wild; his white throat unfettered; his slender, but to me almost faultless, shape; his brown long coat with curling lambs' wool collar and cuffs—in fact his whole appearance—are as fresh in my recollection as an occurrence of yesterday. . . . On his return his steps