Shelley as a Critic of Society and Politics

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Shelley as a Critic of Society and Politics

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the Loyola University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of
English

Chicago, 1940
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Shelley's greatest concern was the misery of mankind and its remedy. His contribution toward furthering the humanitarian spirit of his Romantic predecessors has been treated by many modern writers. In these works great emphasis has been placed either on his development as a thinker, a philosopher or a poet, or upon the sources of his religious, moral, social and political thought.

In *The Radicalism of Shelley and its Sources*, Daniel J. Mac-Donald traces the development of Shelley's religious and political thought, showing how many of his social and political views have their origin in William Godwin's *Political Justice*. Bennett Weaver in his *Towards an Understanding of Shelley* maintains that Shelley's chief source of inspiration was the Bible. From the Old Testament he acquired the art of concentrating his indignation on one particular evil, to his own mind, tyranny; from the New Testament he learned the dream of universal brotherhood and the conviction that some kind of divine spirit encircles and passes the earth. These books, Weaver contends, meant more to Shelley than did Rousseau or Godwin.

Floyd Stovall, in *Desire and Restraint in Shelley*, argues that Shelley was by nature a romantic, a visionary, a lover of all weird, mysterious, and even horrible things. His violent loves, his antipathies, and his maladjustments to the straitening commonplaces of
society were due either to unrestrained expressions of his desires and predispositions or to his repressions during his childhood and youth.

The monograph, Mad Shelley by James Ullman, is a warm-hearted plea against the "ineffectual angel" theory. Shelley in England by Roger Ingpen and Shelley: His Life and Work by Walter Peck, both biographies in two volumes, add to the findings of Edward Dowden in his Life of Shelley. Ingpen's volumes include letters printed for the first time, as well as unpublished legal documents: some establishing Shelley's marriage to Harriet Westbrook in Edinburgh; others concerning her suicide. Peck's is a kind but not condescending treatment of Shelley's life as is actually reflected in his works.

The Unextinguished Hearth by Newman I. White is a complete chronological summary of Shelley's reception by his reviewers. Mr. White's purpose was to collect contemporary notices of Shelley from the journals published before his death. The conclusion of the work is that Shelley's contemporary critics were not blind to his genius but merely afraid of it.

Professor Carl Grabo has in recent years published three monographs: Prometheus Unbound, The Witch of Atlas, and A Newton Among Poets. In his latest work, The Magic Plant, he follows the maturing of Shelley's mind, giving in the process a kind and sympathetic picture of his life from youth to his early death. By the collation of
Shelley's letters, his poetry, and prose fragments, Professor Grabo brings out the development of Shelley's thought and the ultimate philosophy at which he arrived. A perusal of the table of contents of the present discussion will indicate that this problem will be dealt with in a less comprehensive manner than that of Professor Grabo. This work will consider Shelley only in his interests in society and politics. It shall be the purpose of the following chapters to ascertain as far as possible Shelley's canons of social criticism, to trace his application of these principles to society and politics, and finally to draw some conclusions regarding his qualities and limitations as a critic of society and politics.

This study will exclude the tracing of the sources of the social and political ideas of Shelley, for this subject has been treated somewhat exhaustively. However, to understand fully his work as a critic, it is necessary to perceive him in proper perspective against the background of his age. His social and political attitude will be explained by an exposition of his conception of an ideal society and the methods for its attainment, as revealed in his poetry and prose works. Next will be traced the application of these principles in his criticisms of contemporary society. Last of all will be shown how his critical theories and their application determine his position as a critic of society and politics.

The new Julian Edition of Shelley's works, which contains many letters not before published, was used for the text of the letters.
But for the rest, poetry and prose, it seemed best to adhere to the text of Shelley's complete work by H. B. Forman. Professor Dowden's Life of Shelley was found useful as a biographical guide, but it was depended upon for that information only which was not available in earlier authorities.

The work was facilitated by ready access to primary and secondary source material in the following libraries: Chicago Public, Chicago University, Loyola University, the Milwaukee Public, the Newberry, and Notre Dame University.
CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF SHELLEY'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

To understand fully the work of Shelley, romantic poet and humanitarian critic, it is necessary to see him in his proper perspective against the background of his own age. The period in which he lived was indeed a complex one, yet out of the manifold activities of the last half of the eighteenth century certain definite trends may be observed that left impress on the work of nearly every writer. Shelley was second to none of the poets, either in the fervor of his belief in mankind, or in the persistency of his efforts to make that belief prevail in the world. Laura J. Wylie says:

He \( \text{Shelley} \) occupied a peculiar place in their succession. With Godwin and Landor he accepted in its fullness the democratic tradition of the eighteenth century, but, as a child of the post-Revolutionary England, he was forced by odds against which he struggled to a depth of understanding possible neither to thinkers from whom he inherited his beliefs, nor to the poets, who like Wordsworth, had endured the first shocks of the Revolution.\(^1\)

He was thus a link between two generations, reasserting the principles that had moved the eighteenth century in a world cut off from its past and apprehending those principles in the more universal, vital, and spiritual sense, giving them their value for the future.

Shelley's social creed, however influenced by the peculiar qualities of his own mind and the social conditions of England during his youth, was drawn chiefly from the French philosophers of the

eighteenth century. Bennett Weaver contends:

We must glance at two other matters, the place of the king in this multiplex social order and the functioning Church of England. We are under the greater necessity to do this because a certain kind of Shelley criticism would have us believe that the poet read French authors in his youth and Godwin, and then passed into an illimitable inane, there to fashion stars out of the somewhat chill dust he had gathered. Shelley did read certain French authors in his youth and he did read Godwin. But he also lived during the time of George IV and during the shamed decay of the Church.

Indeed, in the early years of The Necessity of Atheism, The Declaration of Rights, and other immature political outbursts, Shelley was little more than a self-appointed mouthpiece of William Godwin, perhaps the greatest and certainly in post-Revolutionary days, the most influential spokesman of radical ideas in England. As the eighteenth century progressed, the humanitarianism of the age, which in the beginning had found expression chiefly in satire and invective, tended even more and more toward downright radical propaganda against current times and customs. Everywhere, and especially in France, that most social-minded of all nations, these men were inveighing against the existing order of things and sowing seeds of revolution. The French materialists--Helvetius, Holbach, Condorcet, and the great Rousseau wrote with impassioned zeal of prophecy and kept out of prison as best they could; in England their doctrines were promulgated by Godwin, Paine, and such lesser lights as Volney.

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2 Ibid., p. 176.
3 Bennett Weaver, Towards an Understanding of Shelley, (Ann Arbor, 1932), p. 52.
and Holcroft. These men, with the definite exception of Paine, had broken with the old "literary form." They were the "Reds" of their day; with them the "Cause" came first, last, and all the time. And their cause was freedom.

It was in this school of radical-humanitarianism that Shelley's social thinking was developed. Before he was twenty-one, he had read—and need one add—absorbed the writings of the "Encyclopedists." He knew Helvetius' *Essais sur L'Esprit*, Holbach's *Systeme de Nature*, and *Nouvelle Heloise*, and *Contrat Social* of Rousseau. As early as his Eton days, Dowden says, he dreamed with Condorcet of the endless progress of the race and perfectibility. Superimposed upon all these was the famous Political Justice of Godwin, in the pages of which Shelley found well-nigh perfect expression of those ideals with which his soul was already aflame. Shelley later wrote that Godwin had been to the age in moral philosophy what Wordsworth had been in poetry, and his own appropriation, repetition, and development of Godwin's ideas are an even more significant acknowledgment.

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of his debt than the admiration which outlived the disillusion of intimate personal intercourse with the hero of his early years.\(^9\)

James Ullman holds:

The influence of this \(\text{Godwin's}\) treatise on Shelley has doubtless been overemphasized, for he, above all men, was the last to accept the hand-me-down theories of others; but that it did affect him deeply is undeniable, especially in his early uncritical days, when the immediate questions of social revolution were the almost exclusive vortex of his thought. As he matured he outgrew all the thinkers who had contributed to his novitiate . . . . But in his affiliations as well as in his militant individualism, he was a true child of the revolution and of the earnest, rationalistic thinking of the earlier generation who had given it its premises and its direction. He shared not only their emotional enthusiasm, but he was also in intellectual accord with their basic dogmas and beliefs; and even in the later riper days of golden song, when as a spirit pure and free and disembodied he soared as far above the toiling world of transient men and transient things, he retained that credo of social reform and that unwavering belief in the perfectibility of man which had been born of the reasoning humanitarianism of the eighteenth century.\(^10\)

Herbert Read writes that others of Shelley's precursors who aided him in his intellectual development are

Plato and other classical writers such as Lucretius; the philosophers of Enlightenment, Locke and Hume, and their more platonic counterparts, Berkeley and Spinoza; and finally that school of philosophical radicalism which begins with Rousseau, includes Helvetius and Condorcet, and ends for Shelley with Godwin . . . . But we are not to imagine that Shelley accepted all these philosophers in equal measure. Plato was his touchstone and to Plato he could assimilate all that was most sympathetic in others. But he was guided by his own intuition of truth.\(^11\)


\(^11\)In Defence of Shelley and Other Essays, (London, 1936), p. 64.
But though Shelley drew his political and social ideas indirectly from the French philosophers through the channels of Godwin’s *Political Justice*, the particular form which he gave them was determined by the condition of England through his boyhood and youth. Life moved fast in those years of catastrophe and counter-catastrophe, and Shelley, born at the very height of the Revolution, on August 4, 1792, grew up in a world that at every point challenged his belief in freedom and progress—a world in which the average Englishman, conservative to the point of bigotry, was buried in a self-content that allowed no play of thought and dreamed of no need for social change. His relations with his father, apparently a thoroughly conventional man, well stocked with worldly wisdom, and his experiences at school, where he suffered deeply from the unrestrained tyranny of the selfish and strong among his fellows, early sharpened his sense of the heartless brutality of a society with which his fine-wrought nature was ill-fitted to cope. His ranging and independent spirit had been fostered rather than restricted at home, and such authority as was exercised by his parents was obviously not felt as a hardship. There is no doubt that Shelley enthusiasts decried the father too much in their efforts to canonize the son. Daniel MacDonald believes:

It would indeed be strange to find any father at that time who would be capable of giving our poet that guidance and training which his nature demanded. It was a time when might was right, when the rod held a place in the formation of a boy's character. We must not be too severe, then, on the father if he was unacquainted with the proper way of dealing with his erratic son.\(^{13}\)

No one who has read Joseph C. Jeafferson's *The Real Shelley* will say that the elder Shelley treated his son too harshly. It was his judgment rather than his heart that was at fault.

Thomas Verner Moore has proposed the theory that the unkindness of Shelley's father caused him to develop a "father complex," in which his father represented tyrannical authority in every form.\(^{14}\)

Shelley's very few references in his poetry to the home of his boyhood leads one to believe that neither his father nor his mother played a part in shaping his ideas.

At Eton, to which Shelley went in 1804, he became acquainted with Dr. Lind, whom he immortalized as a hermit in "The Revolt of Islam" and as Zonoras in "Prince Athanase." It was Dr. Lind, according to Hogg, who gave Shelley his first lessons in French Philosophism. Jeafferson says that Dr. Lind taught Shelley to curse his superiors and to write letters to unsuspecting persons to trip them up with catch questions and then laugh at them.\(^{15}\)


Shelley's antagonism to the materialistic code of the people in the midst of whom he grew up was further strengthened by the suffering inhumanity and governmental tyranny everywhere evident to the intelligent observer. The luxury of the few and the degrading poverty of the masses of the people; the tyranny of public opinion barely beginning to consider Catholic Emancipation and Irish representation possible; the rigor with which censorship of all publications was enforced and the free expression of unpopular truths effectively hindered; the prevalent immorality, hypocritical and cynical, due to a lack of any deep, social enthusiasm even more than the life of the court and the flaunting arrogance of wealth—all these united to convince an ardent believer in progress of the need of radical changes in the whole social fabric.16

Associated with the establishing of a board of agriculture in 1793, an event important in the culmination of those scientific developments, the forming of which had been going on for the last half century, were two phenomena of great social significance.17

Weaver says:

Small farms were consolidated into large farms and the wasteful common field system was changed in favor of a system of enclosure. The first of these great phenomena was influential in giving rise to a rich landed aristocracy of the kind from which Shelley came. The second, by redeeming 3,675,000

acres to production was basic, not only to the increase of population, but to the feeding and clothing of the added millions.\(^\text{18}\)

In fact there was a vital interaction between the changes in industry and affairs in general. As monopolist took over the land which once was the common possession of the people, the country laborer found himself in a new relationship of dependence and wealth. Weaver observes:

As enclosures grew, his \textit{the laborer's} freedom diminished; his earnings formerly assured by initiative and hard labor were made precarious. This meant that his children went to swell the hordes of some Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds. As a result of the growing population at industrial centers, new systems of farming became more and more necessary. Machinery displaced men upon the soil.\(^\text{19}\)

Wordsworth writes:

It \textit{machinery} destroyed the old domestic industries of spinning and weaving, and many were consequently deprived of their most important source of subsistence. Children took up the places of master craftsmen; and the amount of misery that this substitution entailed to both children and craftsmen is almost incredible.\(^\text{20}\)

Weaver goes on to say: "The vicious circle was beginning to include all working people of England. Life in the rural districts became steadily more difficult."\(^\text{21}\)

In addition to the influence of French philosophers and the

\(^{18}\) Bennett Weaver, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 34.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 34.


\(^{21}\) Bennett Weaver, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 34.
ideas of Godwin, these things bore on Shelley's social thinking. The cultivation of crops and the perfection of the science of animal husbandry affected not only the conditions of the family in which he lived, but also the status of men and women about him. With the increase in population grew poverty and pauperism. The result of these things was that in the place where Shelley was born discontent and poverty increased to an alarming extent, breaking out at last into riots. Men like Timothy Shelley, his father, either owned large tracts of land or secured them at low rents. The poor became dependent on them for labor but, as soon as the crops were harvested, the farmers turned laborers back on the parish. Poverty was exchanged for pauperism. 22

It is, however, when one turns from the country to the city, from agriculture to industry that one comes close to those things which moved Shelley. Bennett Weaver says: "When, in England, men substituted steam for muscle, bands of iron for hands of flesh and bone, and organized both systems of productions and markets to absorb produces, then men entered further into that slavery to power and to wealth from which Shelley would expressly free them." 23

In a very real way the Hermit of Marlow dealt with facts concerning the textile trades when he wrote "The Revolt of Islam." For the people of Marlow were lacemakers. With their naked hands

22 George M. Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century, (New York, 1922), pp. 147-149.
they might win in part the battle against the flying shuttle and the power loom, but in the end they were defeated by economic organization and driven from the marketplace. Though they worked for eighteen hours, their wares lay valueless before them when they had finished. Each week, Shelley, out of limited means, "put by a certain sum" for them. He brought blankets and sheets for their beds and bandages for their eyes. He visited the sick and shared their diseases.

"During the year, 1817," writes Mary Shelley, we were established at Marlow. With all the wealth of nature which, either in the form of gentlemen's parks or soil dedicated to agriculture, flourishes around, Marlow was inhabited by a very poor population. The women are lacemakers and lose their health by sedentary labor, for which they are all ill paid. The Poor laws ground to the dust not only the paupers, but those who had risen just above that state, and were obliged to pay poor-rates. The changes produced by the peace following a long war, and a bad harvest, brought with them the most heart-rending evils to the poor. Shelley afforded what alleviation he could. In winter, while bringing out his poem Revolt of Islam, he had a severe attack of ophtalmia caught while visiting the cottages. I mention these things— for this minute and active sympathy with his fellow-creatures gives a thousand-fold interest to his speculations, and stamps with reality his pleading for the human race.24

The rapidity of growth in this industry made especially difficult the right adjustment of men to the social situations which that growth entailed. The application of machinery to the arts of spinning and weaving revolutionized English industrial life. And the revolution came at such speed that human beings were swept into

cruel relationships with the machines which they served.

Moral, political, and social conditions during the latter half of the eighteenth century were appalling. In his inimitable sketches in the *Four Georges*, Thackeray says the dissoluteness of the four Georges was shocking. He depicts the lives of its princes, courtiers, men of rank and fashion as idle, profligate, and criminal. "Around a young king of the most exemplary life and undoubted piety," he declares, "lived a court society as dissolute as our country ever knew. Education was sadly neglected." In Ireland, the colonies, and even in England itself, oppression was well-nigh intolerable. Byron's "Age of Bronze" contains a good description of the way in which the landlords treated their tenants:

The landed interest--(you may understand
The phrase much better leaving out the land)
The loud self-interest groans from shore to shore,
For fear that plenty should attain the poor.
Up, up again, ye rents! exalt your notes,
Or else the ministry will lose their votes,
And patriotism, so delicately nice,
Her loaves will lower to the market price;
For oh! "the loaves and fishes," once so high,
Are gone--their oven closed, their ocean dry,
And nought remains of all the millions spent,
Excepting to grow moderate and content,
They who are not so, had their turn--and turn
About still flows from Fortune's equal win;
Now let their virtue be its own reward,
And share the blessings which themselves prepared
See these inglorious Cincinnatti swarm,
Farmers of war, dictators of the farm;
Their ploughshare was the sword in hirelings hands
Their fields manured by gore of other lands;
Safe in their barns, these Sabine tillers sent
Their brethren out to battle--why? for rent!

Year after year they voted cent per cent,
Blood, sweat, and tear-wrung millions—why? for rent!
They roar'd, they dined, they drank, they swore
To die for England—why then live?—for rent!
The peace has made one general malcontent
Of these high-market patriots; war was rent!
Their love of country, millions all mis-spent.
How reconcile? by reconciling rent!
And will they not repay the treasures lent?
No: down with everything, and up with rent!
Their good, ill, health, wealth, joy, or discontent
Being, end, aim, religion—rent, rent, rent! 26

Politics were corrupt to the core. Even the great commoner,
William Pitt, had been convicted by Macaulay of sacrificing his
principles without any scruple whatsoever. The political corrup-
tion started by Walpole was organized into a system. Every man had
his price. MacDonald writes: "Politicians [sic] were mere jobbers;
officers were gamblers and bullies; the clergy were contemned and
were contemptible; low spirits and nervous disorders were notoriously
increased until the people were no longer capable of self-defense." 27
In their struggle with the Stuarts, the people were completely vic-
torious; but it soon became apparent that they simply substituted
one evil for another. The despotism exercised by the Stuarts was
now practiced by the Dodingtons and the Winningtons. 28

The House of Commons was responsible to no one; and its members
showed little consideration of their constituents. Persons who were

28 Ibid., p. 27.
not acceptable to the ruling party were often fined and imprisoned without due process of the law. It is little wonder, then, that Godwin, Shelley, and others declaimed against the forms of government. They were acquainted only with the Parliament of the Georges and the oligarchy of the Stuarts, and the one was as bad as the other.

The national debt was trebled in the space of twenty years, thus imposing heavy sacrifices on all. There was an income of two shillings on a pound of sterling; but the taxes which caused the most suffering to the poor were the indirect taxes on wheat, shoes, salt, etc. In 1815 a law was passed prohibiting the importation of wheat for less than eighteen shillings the quarter.29 No doubt, the wealth of the country became very great through the development of new resources, but it was distributed among the few and gave no relief to the common people.

The "poor laws" were working astounding evils. With wheat at a given price, the minimum on which a man and wife and one child could live was settled and whenever the family earnings fell below the estimated minimum, the deficiency was to be made up on rates. In this way the path to pauperism was made so easy and agreeable that a large portion of the laboring classes drifted into it. The system set a premium on improvidence if not on vice. The inevitable

effect was that wages fell as doles increased, that paupers so pensioned were preferred by the farmers to the independent laborers, because their labor was cheaper; and independent laborers, failing to secure employment except at wages forced down to a minimum, were constantly falling into the ranks of pauperism. It was not until 1834 that there was enacted a "new" poor law which eliminated these evils. 30

From one end of the kingdom to the other prisons were a standing disgrace to civilization. Imprisonment from whatever cause it might be imposed meant consignment to a living tomb, an existence of acute suffering. "Jails were pesthouses; a fell peculiar to them, but akin to our modern typhus, was bred within their foul limits, and flourished constantly often in epidemic form. The jail fever slew more than the hangman, and its ravages extended to the courts, to judges, to barristers, witnesses and all who approached the poisonously affected assize . . ." 31 These jails were chiefly private institutions leased out to ruthless, rapacious keepers who used every menace and extortion to wring money out of the wretched beings committed to their care. Prisons were dark because their


managers objected to pay the window tax. Pauper prisoners were nearly starved, for there was no regular allowance of food. 32

Howard's crusade against prison mismanagement produced tangible results, but after his death, the cause of prison reform soon dropped, the old evils revived, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century were everywhere visible. 33

The Church of England, it appears, had become an object of contempt. No doubt, Selwyn's Dr. Warner is a distorted picture of the clergyman of the time; yet there is reason to believe that Anglican parsons were not very much concerned with the salvation of souls. "The Church had become a vast machine of the promotion of her own officers. How admirable an achievement is Religion! Such is the burden of their pleading!" 34

Some of the conventionalties of the age were so absurd as to engender sooner or later a spirit of revolt. Servants said "your honor" and "your worship" at every moment; tradesmen stood hat in hand as the gentlemen passed by; chaplains said grace and retired before the pudding. Thackeray wrote:

In the days when there were fine gentlemen, Mr. Secretary Pitt's undersecretaries did not dare to sit down before him; but Mr. Pitt, in his turn, went down on his gouty knees to George II; and when George III spoke a few kind

32 Ibid., p. 484.
33 Ibid., p. 484.
words to him, Lord Chatham burst into tears of reverential joy and gratitude; so awful was the idea of monarch, and so great the distinction of rank.

Not to use hair powder was an unpardonable offence. Southey and Savage Landor were among the first to appear with their hair in statu naturali and this action of theirs produced an extraordinary sensation.

Shelley's social and political ideas, then, are the natural outgrowth of his individualism, of the teachings of the French radical school as expressed by William Godwin and Thomas Paine, and the conditions of society in which he lived.

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CHAPTER II

SHELLEY IN THE LIGHT OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Among his contemporaries, Shelley stood alone. He was a truer child of the age than anyone except the inevitable Goethe and the inevitable Napoleon, and like them his position is at the pinnacle of a long development. The other great romantic poets fit less perfectly into the scheme of the times; they were not, like Shelley, comprehensive in their interests or fundamentally expressive of their age in its totality. They were poets—great poets—and each of them, according to his lights, was a true representative of his time; they are not, however, so tremendously significant historically as he was. They lacked his universality. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats were the supreme "poets of escape." The first two, in their youth, had hailed the coming of the French Revolution with joy and anticipation; they, too, had dreamed dreams of a happy "Erewhon" and had planned their promised land on the banks of the Susquehanna. But the brutal reality of bloody gutters and the whining guillotine and the carnage of Napoleon proved too much for them. George Richardson says: "In Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, the radical impulses were checked by natural conservatism which brought in politics an almost complete facing about in religion, nothing more revolutionary than a kind of ecstatic pantheism.
springing up with a passionate love of nature."

There can be no doubt but contemporary literature had some influence on Shelley's sensitive nature. "The writings of the future laureate [Southery] as likewise of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Landor's Gebir were among those for which Shelley in early youth had a predilection." Since the influence of Southey soon began to decline on account of his fulsome praise of George III, it seems propitious to confine attention to Wordsworth and Coleridge.

One word in candor writes Shelley on the manner in which the study of contemporary writing may have modified my composition. I am intimately persuaded that the peculiar style of intensive and comprehensive imagery in poetry which distinguishes modern writers had not been as a general power the product of imitation of any particular one. It is impossible that any one contemporary with such writers [Wordsworth and Coleridge were specified first] as stand in the front ranks of literature of the present day can conscientiously assure themselves or others that their language and tone of thought may not have been modified by the study of the productions of these extraordinary intellects.

Coleridge and Wordsworth moved the sphere of poetry from social action to philosophical reflection; they exchanged the ancient method, consisting in the ideal imitation of external objects,

for an introspective analysis of the impressions of the individual
mind. Many of Wordsworth's poems are records of the moods of his
own soul and of phases of his life; so also are Shelley's. A brief
examination of some of Wordsworth's works will serve to make this
clear.

Wordsworth planned an epic poem, "The Recluse," of which The
Prelude, or introduction, and "The Excursion" are the only parts
extant. In these two poems can be traced the history of his rad-
cicalism. "The Excursion" supplements what is lacking to a thorough
revelation of the workings of his mind as revealed in The Prelude,
his autobiography. In the opening of The Prelude he relates ex-
periences of his childhood and school time, his residence at Cam-
bridge, his vacation, and his love for books. He then discusses
his first trip to the Continent and his residence in London. Book
IX is concerned with his second visit to France in 1791. While
there, he mingled with all classes.

"... and thus ere long

Became a patriot; and my heart was all

Given to the people, and my love was theirs."  

It was natural for Wordsworth to do so, because he lived from boy-

5William Courthope, History of Poetry, Vol. VI, (New York, 1895-

6William Wordsworth, The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind,
hood among those whose claims on one's respect did not rest on accidents of wealth or blood. He describes his friend, General Beaupis, who inoculated him with enthusiasm for the cause of the Revolution. An analogy can be drawn between this and Shelley's mode of thought. In "The Revolt of Islam" Shelley describes Dr. Lind, who taught him to curse the King. A kindred hatred of absolute rule, where the will of one is law for all, was strong in Wordsworth. In 1792, after the September massacres and the imprisonment of the King, he returned to Paris.

"Cheered with this hope, to Paris I returned,
And ranged, with ardor heretofore unfelt,
The spacious city."

He was about to cast in his lot with the Revolutionists when he was forced to return to England. The excesses of the Revolution, however, deprived him of some of the hopes that he had placed in it. At this time his "day thoughts" were most melancholy. When news came of the fall of Robespierre, his hopes began to revive. The earth would now march firmly towards righteousness and peace.

Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, us who were strong in love;

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very Heaven.

Similarly, in Canto V. of "The Revolt of Islam" Shelley describes how oppressors and the oppressed are persuaded to forego revenge. Love has conquered and a new era of peace and happiness are about to begin.

"To hear, to see, to live, was on that morn
Lethean joy."10

Although Shelley does not dwell on details as Wordsworth does, still the analogy in tone of thought between the spirit of parts of "The Excursion" and that of many of Shelley's poems cannot escape notice.

An extract from "The revolt of Islam" emphasizes this:

Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear friend, when first
The clouds that wrapt me from this world did pass.
I do remember well the hour which burst
My spirit's sleep. A fresh May-dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
From the near school room voices that, alas!
Were but one echo from a world of woes,
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

And then I clasped my hands and looked around--
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
While poured their drops upon the sunny ground--
So without shame I spoke: I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies

9 Ibid., Book XI, ll. 105-109.

10 "The Revolt of Islam," Poetical Works, I. Canto V, Stanza XLII, ll. 370-371, p. 188.
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check. 11

Shelley seems indirectly to have followed Godwin in tone of thought through Wordsworth. Wordsworth's joy in a prospective new era was short-lived. In 1796 Napoleon started on a campaign of conquest and this completely shattered Wordsworth's faith in the Revolution. When he beheld that the French were changing a war of self-defense into one of subjugation, losing sight of all for which they themselves had struggled, he became vexed with anger and sore with disappointment. 12 About the year 1793 he fell under the influence of Godwin, and it is to his doctrines he now turned for solace. Godwin made reason the sole guide and rule of conduct. 13 Custom, law, and every kind of authority are inimical to the well-being of humanity. At this time, then, Wordsworth began dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, and creeds "like culprits to the bar of reason, now believing, now disbelieving."

... till demanding formal proof
And seeking in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,

Sick, wearied out of contrarities,  
Yielded up all moral questions in despair.\textsuperscript{14}

Here it would seem that Wordsworth sounded radicalism to its depths and found it wanting.

"I drooped  
Deeming our blessed reason of the least use  
Where wanted most."\textsuperscript{15}

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth records how he had in youth moments of supreme inspiration, and had taken vows binding himself to the service of the spirit he felt in nature.

To the brim  
My heart was full; I made no vows but vows  
Were made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly  
A dedicated spirit.\textsuperscript{16}

Shelley, too, has been devoted to Nature as the poem, "Alastor," reveals.

"My other of this unfathomable world!  
Favor my solemn song, for I have loved  
Thee ever, and thee only."\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} *The Prelude*, Book XI, ll. 301-305, p. 411.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., Book XI, ll. 307-309, p. 411.
\textsuperscript{16} *The Prelude*, Book IV, ll. 333-335, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{17}"Alastor," *Poetical Works*, ll. 18-20, p. 22.
The sense of life and the sense of mystery are seen in "Alastor" and these are due, no doubt, to the influence of Wordsworth.

Between 1791-1796 Wordsworth wrote very little poetry embodying his radical sentiments. One important work of this kind is his drama, "The Borderers." Even this cannot be called a radical work as it marks his rejection of Godwinism. Marmaduke loves Idonea, Herbert's daughter, and is told that she is about to be sacrificed by her father to the lust of a neighboring noble. Oswald, the Godwinian, persuades Marmaduke, by dint of reasoning to disregard the musty commands of tyrants, to obey the only law, "that sense submits to recognize," and to kill blind Herbert. This Marmaduke does, but later he discovers his mistake and tells Idonea towards the end that

"Proof after proof was pressed upon me; guilt
Made evident, as seemed, by blacker guilt
Whose impious folds enwrapped even thee."  

He realizes that he had committed a crime; that it is the height of folly to ignore instinct and tradition, and so he wanders over waste

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19 Ibid., Act V, Scene 3, p. 68.
"... till anger is appeased
In heaven, and mercy gives me leave to die."\textsuperscript{20}

Although the radicalism of Wordsworth's early years does not reveal itself to any great extent in his early poetry, still it is responsible for his largest work "The Excursion." This poem is an attempt to reconstruct a new theory of life out of the ruins of the French Revolution. According to Wordsworth, the poet is a teacher. "I wish," he says, "to be considered as a teacher or as nothing."\textsuperscript{21} Shelley had a like thought in that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."\textsuperscript{22} His "Revolt of Islam" and other poems attempt to inculcate "a liberal and comprehensive morality."\textsuperscript{23} What particularly distinguishes Wordsworth and Shelley from preceding poets is that they moralize and draw lessons from their own experiences. The two principal characters in "The Excursion"--the Solitary and the Wanderer--represent Wordsworth the conservative. The Wanderer, who had had long experience of men and things derives from nature moral reflections of various kinds. In his walks he meets the Solitary, a gloomy, morose skeptic. This man tells his desire to find peace and contentment, his

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 70.
\textsuperscript{21}Introduction to Wordsworth's Complete Poetical Works, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{22}"A Defence of Poetry," Prose Works, III, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{23}Preface to "The Revolt of Islam," Poetical Works, I, p. 85.
delight in nature, and the happiness of his wedded life. The death of his wife and children fill him with despair. He then begins to question the ways of God to men and exclaims:

Then my soul
Turned inward—to examine of what stuff
Times fetters are composed; and life was put
To inquisition, long and profitless.24

He is aroused from these abstractions by the report that the dread Bastille has fallen; and from the wreck he sees a golden palace rise.

The appointed seat of equitable law
The mild paternal sway
. . . from the blind mist issuing I beheld
Glory, beyond all glory ever seen.25

In "Queen Mab" Shelley has a somewhat similar phrase: "Hope was seen beaming through the mists of fear." The Solitary thus becomes interested once more in life, and joins in the chorus of Liberty singing in every grove.

War shall cease
Did ye not hear that conquest is abjured?
Bring garlands, bring forth choicest flowers to deck
The tree of Liberty.26

26 "Queen Mab," Canto VIII, l. 13, Poetical Works, IV, p. 446.
Society then becomes his bride and "airy hopes" his children. He is in entire sympathy with the plans and aspirations of the revolutionists, and he feels that a progeny of golden years is about to descend and bless mankind. All the hopes of the Solitary, though, are blasted. He is disgusted with the way in which the revolution is progressing and sets sail for America, where he expects to find freedom from the restraints of tyranny. 28 Shelley writes about America as follows:

There is a people mighty in its youth,  
A land beyond the oceans of the west  
Where, though with rudest rites, Freedom and Truth  
Are worshipped. 29

The Solitary's expeditions are not fulfilled, and so he returns despondent to his own country. In this frame of mind he meets the Wanderer, who tells him that the only adequate support for the calamities of life is belief in Providence. Victory, the Wanderer says, is sure if man strives to yield entire submission to the law of conscience. He compares the force of gravity, which constrains the stars in their motions, to the principle of duty in the life of man. Where Wordsworth despairs of social man, Shelley trusts. In

28 Ibid., ll. 776-797, p. 445.

Act IV of "Prometheus Unbound" Shelley compares the force of gravity to the impulse of love. He believes there is no cause for despair and "the loss of confidence in social man." The beginning of the revolution had raised man's hopes unwarrantably high. As there was no cause, then, for such exalted confidence, so there is none now for fixed despair.

"The two extremes are equally disowned
By reason."

One should have patience and courage. It is folly to expect the accomplishment in one day of "what all the slowly moving years of time have left undone." In the preface to "The Revolt of Islam" Shelley writes:

But such a degree of unmingled good was expected (from the revolution) as it was impossible to realize . . . Could they listen to the plea of reason who had groaned under the calamities of a social state according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury whilst another famishes for want of bread? Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded? This is the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long-suffering and long-believing courage, and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue.

Wordsworth's trust abides again as he fashions a Pantheistic deity. The Wanderer exhorts the Solitary to engage in bodily exercise and to study nature. He contrasts the dignity of the imagination with the presumptions of certain modern philosophers. At this point the Solitary remarks that it is impossible to rise again; that the mind is not free. It is as vain to ask a man to resolve as bid a creature fly, "whose very sorrow is that time hath shorn his natural wings."[33]

The Wanderer replies that the wings of restoration are manifold.

• • • fashioned to the steps
Of all infirmity, and tending all
To the same point, attainable by all
Peace in ourselves and union with our God.[34]

The Wanderer calls upon the skies and hills to testify to the existence of God. Wordsworth the Wanderer finds for Wordsworth the Solitary an answer in Nature. He sees that there is a Living Spirit in Nature; a spirit which animates all things, from "the meanest flower that blows" to the glorious birth of sunshine; a spirit which pervades matter and gives to each its distinctive life and being.

He sees God in everything.

To every form of being is assigned
An active principle . . .
• • • from link to link
It circulates the soul of all the worlds.[35]

[34] Ibid., ll. 1119-1122, p. 461.
Shelley, too, finds God. In a letter to Hogg, January 3, 1812, he speaks about "The soul of the Universe, the intelligent and necessarily beneficent actuating principle."\(^{36}\)

With Wordsworth, Coleridge seems to have played a part in shaping Shelley's tone of thought. At least a parallelism exists. In "Ode on the Destruction of the Bastille," written in 1789, Coleridge rejoices at the overthrow of tyranny and the success of Freedom.

Liberty, with all her attendant virtues, he says, will now be the portion of all.

"Yes Liberty the soul of life shall reign

Shall throb in every pulse, shall flow thro' every vein!"\(^{37}\)

He hopes that she will extend her influence wider and wider until every land shall boast "one independent soul." In his "Ode to France" he writes:

"With what deep worship I have still adored

The spirit of divinest Liberty."\(^{38}\)

Shelley may have had this in mind when he wrote in "Alastor"


\(^{38}\)Ibid., ll. 19-20, p. 124.
"And lofty hopes of divine liberty
Thoughts the most dear to him ..."39

coleridge's "Religious Musings," which charles lamb considered to
be more worthy of milton, has been called his "Queen Mab" because
of its strong resemblance. in the first part he lashes his country-
men for joining the coalition against france under the pretense of
defending religion. Further on he gives his views on society,
its origin and progress. it is to private property that all sore ills which desolate our mortal life must be attributed. But cole-
ridge, unlike shelley, can see the good as well as the evil in
institutions. He holds that the rivalry resulting from economic
conditions has stimulated thought and action.

"From avarice thus, from luxury and war,
Sprang heavenly science; and from science freedom."40

The innumerable multitude of wrongs, coleridge continues, by man on
man inflicted, cry to heaven for vengeance. Even now (1796) the
storm begins which will cast to earth the rich, the great, and the
mighty men of the world. This, he believes, will be followed by a
period of sunshine, when love will return and peace and happiness
be the portion of all.41

39 "Alastor: Or The Spirit of Solitude," Poetical Works, I,


41 Ibid., ll. 64-87 and 340-350, pp. 55-59.
As when a shepherd on a vernal morn
Through some thick fog creeps timorous with slow foot,
Darkling with earnest eyes he traces out
The immediate road, all else of fairest kind
Hid or deformed. But lo! the bursting Sun!
Touched by the enchantment of that sudden beam
Straight the black vapor melteth, and in globes
Of dewey glitter gems each plant and tree;
On every leaf, on every blade it hands;
And wide around the landscape streams with glory. 42

So man will fly into the sun of love, impartially view creation,
and love it all. He will then see that God diffused through
society makes it whole; that every victorious murder is blind
suicide; that no one who injures is not uninjured. This change will
be brought about by a return to pure Faith and Piety. He differs
from Shelley in this, that he does not look for reformation through
the overturning of thrones and churches. The existing framework
of society is all right, Coleridge believes; it needs only to be freed
from some of its barnacles. 43

The first stanza of Coleridge's "Love" reminds one of the fol-
lowing passages from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound":

His will, with all mean passions, had delights,
And selfish cares, its trembling satellites,
A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey,
Is as a tempest-winged ship, whose helm
Love rules . . . 44

42 Ibid., ll. 94-104, p. 55.
43 Ibid., ll. 276-342, p. 59.
Coleridge's stanza runs thus:

All thoughts, all passions, all delights
Whatever stirs this mortal frame
All are but ministers of Love
And feed his sacred flame.45

Coleridge and Shelley made a universal application of a few metaphysical principles acquired in their early years, and on them ground their political and religious views. Poetry, metaphysics, morals and politics mixed themselves forever in their imagination.

To Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey--the Lake School poets--freedom was a perfectly definite thing, a right which England had and the other had not. G. Brandes writes:

It was the right of a country to govern itself, untyrannized over by an autocratic ruler of foreign extraction ... By liberty, then, the conservative poets understood freedom from foreign political tyranny; there is no thought of liberty of action in their conception at all.47

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey failed to appreciate domestic problems. All showed interest in the question of foreign politics and--even in later years--unusual individuality to Tories. In their prose and poetry, Wordsworth and Coleridge had much to say about liberty in the abstract and were ever ready to direct the

attention of Englishmen away from political abuses at home to affairs outside of the British Isles. But on domestic matters they showed a common obstinacy and blindness even if this attitude was modified by the personal feeling of each.

Freedom was not realized in a nation or a constitution, Shelley and Byron believed.

It was no accomplished, finished thing; neither was their idea of struggle for liberty realized in a highly egotistic war against a revolutionary conqueror. They felt strongly what an absence of liberty, political as well as intellectual, religious as well as social, there might be under a so-called free constitution. They had no inclination to write poems in honor of the glorious attainments of the human race, and more especially of their own countrymen; for in the so-called land of freedom they felt a terrible, oppressive want of freedom--of liberty to think without paying homage to public opinion, to act as it was natural to men of their character to act, without injury from the verdict of those who, because they had no particular character of their own, were the most clamorous and unmerciful condemners of the faults which accompanied independence, originality, and genius. They saw that in this free country the ruling cast canted and lied, extorted and plundered, curbed and constrained quite as much as did the one great autocrat with his absolute power--and without his excuse, the authority of the intellect and of genius.

To the Lake Poets coercion was not coercion when it was English; "tyranny was not tyranny when it was practiced under a constitutional monarchy; hostility to enlightenment was not hostility to enlightenment when it was displayed to enlightenment was not by the Protestant Church."

50 Ibid., p. 87.
51 Ibid., p. 88.
which held this group together was their loyalty to the landed aristocracy and the Church. In fact, it may be said with a large measure of certainty that their apparent or real change of political face and the obstinate convictions of their more mature years are traceable to a religious bias—derived partly from Burke. Conscience should be the basis of policy, Southey declared in 1829. "All evils arise from a lack of faith in God," he affirms in another place. Again he said, "The religion of England is the great charter of her intellectual freedom; the principle of non-conformity in religion is the basis on which Civil Government rests." Wordsworth, like Southey and Coleridge, wished to have all nations governed by the laws of individual conscience. This is the most consistent theory of Coleridge. Another trait common to these poets was a certain romantic individualism in politics; and the influence each exerted on the other was often far from partisan. Walter Scott liked to believe that he took an independent stand in politics, but he may be, with justice, regarded as a competent leader in the most reactionary camp of the Tories—

53 Ibid., p. 67.
54 Ibid., p. 67.
55 Ibid., p. 67.
56 Ibid., p. 68.
the group about the Quarterly Review. 57

Byron and Shelley called coercion coercion

even when it proceeded to action with the English flag flying and the arms of England as its policeman's badge; they cherished towards monarchs in general the objection of the Lake School to absolute monarchs; they desired to free the world not only from the dominion of the Roman Catholic priesthood, but from the priestly tutelage of every description. 58

When they heard the poets of the Lake School, who in the ardor of youth had been progressives as themselves, extol the Tory Government of England with the same fervor which distinguished the renegades, they regarded them as enemies of liberty. 59 Therefore, it is that Shelley, in his sonnet, "To Wordsworth," writes:

In honored poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,—
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be. 60

The blindness of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and Scott to most of the abuses in domestic politics may be contrasted with the keener interest shown by Byron and Shelley, who from the detachment of Italy could view their native land with less prejudiced eyes.

57 Ibid., p. 69. A study of the origin of the Quarterly Review shows him to have been the one person chiefly responsible for the founding of this most important Tory organ.
58 Ibid., p. 87ff.
59 Ibid., p. 88.
60 Poetical Works, I, 11. 11-14, p. 55.
Byron's partisan contacts were shadowy and indefinite. On taking his seat in the House of Lord in March, 1809, he refused to shake hands with Lord Eldon, because he did not wish to commit himself to party. Scott believed Byron's occasional democratic expressions were insincere and for effect; he regarded him as a patrician on principles. It seems true that Byron cared little for positive, constructive, and social tendencies of the revolutionary movement in his days. Graham says:

He liked to pose as a democrat among aristocrats; an aristocrat among democrats. In many poems are evidences of a superficial and passing interest in the domestic problems of England. But this interest seldom led to earnest expression or effective protest.

Of all the greater Romantic poets except Keats, Byron exerted, perhaps, the least influence in politics. An interesting expression of his liberalism is his "Ode to Venice," in which he hails America as the home of true freedom. This links him with the outspoken Shelley, who, in "The Revolt of Islam," apostrophizes this "Eagle" among nations, the home of freedom, and goes on to

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62 Ibid., p. 74.
63 Ibid., p. 75.
64 Canto XI, Stanza XXIII, l. 199, Poetical Works, I, p. 283.
prophesy the remarkable growth and power of the United States in the world. Shelley saw no hope of a more general representative government in England, until the public mind, through many gradations of improvement, should have arrived at maturity and put away the childish symbols of monarchy.

One important effect of politics on Shelley and Keats is seen in the assaults of Tory reviewers, both in The Quarterly and in Blackwood's. The organs of criticism were in the hands of politicians. Graham declares:

Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge were favorably reviewed by the Tories because of their conservatism and their relation with party periodicals. Shelley and Keats, because of their friendship with Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt, were condemned unread and their characters as well as their poetry reviled.

The greater poets of the Romantic School, then, held this conviction in common—they felt that all politics should be regulated by the expediency of humaneness and justice. Politics and the social order, they held, should be moralized. With the exception of Keats and Scott, each poet of the group believed this, and in his own way gave the faith expression. In Wordsworth and Coleridge this became a profoundly religious conviction. They gradually

connected it with the established Church. Southey agreed with them, and went further than either in making loyalty to the Anglican Church the panacea for all the evils of society.\textsuperscript{68} Out of his love for abstract justice and human right, Shelley made a religion of his own, having found in Godwin's teaching an obstacle to faith in the Church.\textsuperscript{69}

It may be concluded, therefore, that Shelley, though directly influenced by William Godwin, the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, and the conditions of society in which he lived is indirectly indebted for his ideas also to Wordsworth and Coleridge. But it is to his own works that one must go for a complete understanding of Shelley's conception of an ideal society and its attainment.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 77.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 77.
CHAPTER III

SHELLEY'S THEORIES OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CRITICISM

Shelley's interest in social matters developed early, and because of the peculiar intensity of his temperament was deeply colored by the circumstances of his life. Professor Dowden believes the most momentous events of Shelley's boyhood were the two dedications of himself recorded in his poetry: the dedication of his imagination to the service of beauty and the dedication of "his moral being to justice, gentleness, and freedom." It was while "musing deeply on the lot of life" that he was led to the service of beauty; and the resolve that he would be henceforth "wise and just and free and mild" was inspired by the misery in the world as expressed in "To Mary" in "The Revolt of Islam":

"... one echo from a world of woes--

The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes" which, "following on his ears as he walked over the grass outside Sion House Academy, burst in spirit's sleep and called him to take arms against expressing it in every form."

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Shelley longed above all things to find on earth a state of complete happiness; and to be completely happy meant to his sensitive body freedom from all contact with suffering. He desired to be free and happy; but he could not be unless every one around him was also free and happy. Crane Brinton remarks:

He possessed to an extraordinary degree those aspirations toward unrestrained personal expansion, toward infinite enjoyment, common to all human beings. But he could take no joy in expansion at the cost of a fellow human being, because his fellow's sufferings would mar his victory, disturb the peace he was seeking. But from checks of common sense, habit, inertia, cowardice, and perhaps, intelligence, which normally restrain men in this world from taking their desires as measures of their deeds, Shelley was strangely free. He saw nothing between himself and his dream. He hungered after the golden age of his desires; and all the powers of his intellect were at the service of this hunger.  

The world as it now exists is wholly bad, Shelley believed, but it may be made altogether good.

I have been long convinced, he wrote to Miss Elizabeth Hitchener on October 18, 1811, of the eventual omnipotence of mind over matter; adequacy of motive is sufficient to anything and my golden age is established when the present potency will become omnipotence: this will be the millennium of Christians 'when the lion shall lay down with the lamb,' though neither will it be accomplished to complete a prophecy, or by the intervention of a miracle. Every heart contains perfection's germ.

7 "Queen Mab," Canto V, l. 147, Poetical Works, IV, p. 424.
and it was in this sense that he understood the theory of equality. Perfection is to be attained through education, but until that shall be accomplished, democracy must remain with Shelley purely theoretical.

Reasons for Shelley's belief in perfectibility were sometimes wanting, yet he believed more or less strongly for that. He admitted that "equality in politics like perfection in morality appears far removed from even the visionary anticipations of what is called the wildest theorist." "But, he immediately added, "I, then, am wilder than the wildest." Accepting Locke's theory that no ideas are innate, he argues that the intellect varies with the individual only as the received impressions—that is, the methods of education—may vary. Shelley compares life to an infinite chain along which man has climbed from the lowest conceivable link and will continue to mount until he has reached the highest point imaginable. As the chain is infinite, he can never reach its termination.

But Shelley employs another figure according to which man's

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11 Ibid., p. 131.
12 Ibid., August 19, 1811, p. 144.
13 Ibid., January 2, 1812, p. 227.
progress moves in a circle, passing first through a happy stage and returning to it again at last. This figure was used many years later in "Hellas," though he did not then believe it literally:

The world's great age begins anew,
   The golden years return
The earth doth like a snake renew
   Her winter weeds outworn. 14

In "Queen Mab," ancient Greece and the lost continent of Atlantis are represented as having been the guardians of peace and freedom, until increasing wealth blighted and destroyed them.

Virtue and wisdom, truth and liberty,
   Fled, to return not, until man shall know
   That they alone can give bliss
   Worthy of a soul that claims
   Its kindred with eternity. 15

The world, Shelley declares, was once blessed with peace and happiness, and in the course of time these blessings must inevitably return.

Nature is good; evil arose through man's violation of her just laws.

Evil is, therefore, temporary—a habit which man can put aside if he so will; and having laid aside this evil habit, he may partake of the peace and happiness of uncorrupted nature. He says:

The universe,
   In nature's silent eloquence, declares

15 "Queen Mab", Canto II, ll. 206-210, Poetical Works, IV, p. 401.
16 Ibid., Canto V, l. 147, p. 424
That all fulfill the works of joy and love
All but the outcast man. He fabricates
The sword which stabs his peace.\textsuperscript{17}

Man's unhappiness, Shelley declares, is caused by the complementary evils, power and obedience, which deprive him of his natural rights of freedom and equality. Authority in the realm of politics and religion, corresponding to the dual nature of man, has, in the past, been wrongfully assumed by two classes of tyrants--kings and priests; and people, contrary to nature's promptings, have abjectly submitted to usurpation, thereby confirming the act which enslaved them. Thus, evil, a thing not imposed but permitted from within, became coextensive with human society. The king is to be condemned not as an individual wrongdoer, but as the instrument of power, which is evil; and the subject, because of his obedience, is to be judged equally reprehensible. In "Queen Mab" Shelley writes:

Nature rejects the monarch not the man;
The subject, not the citizen; for kings
And subjects, mutual foes, forever play
A losing game into each other's hands,
Whose stakes are vice and misery. The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys
Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches; and obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of man, and of the human frame,
A mechanized automation.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., Canto III, 11. 196-200, p. 409.
\textsuperscript{18} Floyd Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley, p. 50.
But time, Shelley declares, will bring a correction of this error, for man is unconsciously fulfilling the will of nature; and that "blindly working will" must bring him at last to Elysium, which as yet he cannot see and mistakenly strives to prevent.

Spirit of Nature! thou
Life of interminable multitudes;
Soul of those mighty spheres
Whose changeless paths through
Heaven's deep silence lie;
Soul of that smallest being,
The dwelling of whose life
Is one of faint April sun-gleam;--
Man, like these passive things,
Thy will unconsciously fulfilleth;
Like theirs, his age of endless peace,
Which time is fast maturing,
Will swiftly, surely come;
And the unbounded frame, which thou pervadest,
Will be without a flaw 21
Marring its perfect symmetry.

Again he says:

"Thou glorious prize of blindly-working will."

As an additional proof that perfection is attainable, Shelley reminds his readers that

Nature, impartial in munificence
Has gifted man with all-subduing will.
Matter, with all its transitory shapes, 23
Lies subjected and plastic at his feet . . .

21  Ibid., p. 410.
22  Ibid., Canto IX, I. 5, p. 454.
This "blindly working will" is, of course Necessity, which he learned from William Godwin; but his faith in the all-subduing will of man had its origin elsewhere. In order that man may fulfill his destiny both these forces must work in unison. Shelley believed in nature as a harmonious system and man as a legitimate member of that system yet free to choose whether he will or will not live in accordance with that system. In "Queen Mab" Shelley is found believing in the doctrine of necessity. There he denies freedom of the will. Later he maintained that the will is unrestrainedly free and that man is his own master. In "The Revolt of Islam" he speaks thus: "Man whose will has power when all beside is gone." (VIII, 16). "Such intent as renovates the world a will omnipotent," (Ibid., II, 41) "Who if ye dared might not aspire less than ye conceive of power." (Ibid., XI 16). Reason, he says, which is nothing less than the "voice of nature," must determine when he is living so. Reason is the instrument which the virtuous man uses to realize his desire for universal happiness which results from universal harmony.

The consciousness of good, which neither gold
Nor sordid fame, nor hope of heavenly bliss
Can purchase; but a life of resolute good,
Unalterable will, quenchless desire


"Queen Mab," Canto V, ll. 132-135, Poetical Works, IV, p. 424
Of universal happiness, the heart
That beats with it in unison, the brain
Whose ever-wakeful wisdom toils to change
Reason's rich stores for its eternal weal.

It is, consequently, the means by which man is able to adjust himself to that harmony and so to become virtuous. Passion distorted by constraint now produces dissonance. In the regenerated world, after reason and passion are reconciled, discord will disappear. "Reason and passion cease to combat there."

Since, in Shelley's doctrine, virtue is the desire for universal happiness, which is a form of benevolence and love, and since happiness may be interpreted as a harmonious adjustment of part to part, the harmony of nature is evidence of the active presence of love. Love is, therefore, the principle which actuates the life of the universe and determines its inevitable progress to perfection. "In the regenerated world all things shall rule by the law of love."

As Shelley imagined, there would be a transformation in the physical world corresponding to the change in man. Arctic snow and ice would give way to mild, "heaven-breathing" groves; desert solitudes would become a paradise of cornfields, shady woods, and white cottages filled with happy families; and the grey ocean wastes would

26 Ibid., Canto V, 11. 223-230.
27 Ibid., Canto VIII, 231.
28 Floyd Stovall, "The Doctrine of Love," PMLA, p. 287.
be dotted with "bright green isles," where neither storm nor monsters of the deep should trouble the peace of human happiness. The lion should lie down with the lamb, all disease and ugliness would vanish, and the earth, in every respect, would become one harmonious whole, ideally provided with all that could minister to the happiness of the inhabitants.

Shelley's ideas of this ideal society are nowhere more clearly stated than in the magnificent lyric in "The Revolt of Islam" in which Cythna chants the triumph of the people's cause. Cythna, addressing the nations victorious over evil, was herself the embodiment of the good for which she hoped, as she

"Stood 'mid the thongs which ever ebbed and
Like light and the shadows of the sea flowed
Cast from one cloudless star."

Her song is a threefold triumph. First it sings the enfranchisement of mankind from

"Faith and Folly
Custom and Hell and mortal Melancholy,"

30 "Queen Mab," Canto VIII, Poetical Works, IV, p. 446-453.
33 Ibid., Stanze 51, 2, p. 192.
and calls upon the "Irresistible children" of Wisdom to live a life where

"Scorn and Hate
Revenge and selfishness are desolate";,

where

"a hundred nations swear that there shall be
Pity and Peace and Love among the good and free!"

Then it celebrates the reign of that "eldest of things, divine Equality" in whose long-desired coming the heart of nature and of man rejoices, and under whose rule love becomes the single law of life. And, finally, it declares the new power that has at last come to rule the earth:

Thoughts have gone forth whose powers can sleep no more!
Victory! Victory! Earth's remotest shore,
Regions which groan beneath the Anarctic stars,
The green lands cradled in the road
Of western waves, and wildernesses
Peopled and vast which skirt the oceans
Where morning dyes her golden tresses,
Shall soon partake our high emotions;
Kings shall turn pale! Almighty Fear,
The Fiend-God when our charmed name he hear,
Shall fade like shadow from his thousand fanes,
While Truth and Joy enthroned o'er his lost empire reigns!

34 Ibid., Stanza 51, 2, p. 192.
35 Ibid., Stanza 51, 2, p. 192.
37 Ibid., Canto V, Stanza 51, 6, p. 194.
Cythna, however, does not pause with this lyric apotheosis of the great principles controlling social and individual life—freedom, equality, and the power of the mind to make the world a fit place to live in: She insists on applying these principles to definite conditions and problems.

Equality is the basis of social fact; freedom is the one condition of human happiness. The political corollary is inevitable: the only government that has a right to exist is that which Shelley describes elsewhere as "the perfect genuine republic" comprehending every living being. In a moral society goodness becomes possible only through voluntary allegiance to ends set itself by a free personality, Shelley believed. In proportion, therefore, as men become good, institutions—whether of Marriage—tie or binding promise, priestly office of church organization—are recognized as the shackles of slavery. Shelley looked on marriage as a human institution, and consequently thought it might be modified or abolished entirely. He considered happiness man's highest good, and unhappiness man's only evil. He declares: "Vows and promises are immoral because the things promised may prove at any time detrimental to one's happiness. For this reason husband and wife should not bind themselves to live always together." Faith is to be elevated from prescription, domestic life

enfranchised from the power of man no less than from the dependence of
woman; children are to be freed from the tyranny of arbitrary control;
love is to be "lawless" in the sense that it follows the law of its
own nature. The new declaration of equality extends even to the
animal world. "Never again," says Cythna, in the hour when right seems
to have triumphed--

"may blood of beast or bird
Stain with its venomous stream a human feast,
. . . . . . . . . . .
The dwellers of the earth and air
Shall throng around our steps in gladness
Seeking their food or refuge there.

This inclusive democracy does not benefit man alone; according to
Shelley, men gain from the abolition of flesh-eating and its attendant
brutalities greater freedom from disease and a widened sympathy with
living things. By eating the flesh of animals in violation of the
law of nature man contracted the diseases of the mind and body and
kindled all evil passions."

In this picture of the world ruled by justice, Cythna, though she
briefly suggested the power of thought to beautify life through art
and science and to free men's minds from "fear and superstition,"
emphasized the practical results of the reign of freedom rather than
the methods by which the cause of right might triumph. Later, when her

39 "The Revolt of Islam," Canto V, Stanza 51, 5, Poetical Works,
I, p. 193.
faith in the "dawn of the mind" which was to illumine the world had been betrayed to slavery, Cythna developed far more fully the grounds on which it rested and how it might be brought about.

"The passion for reforming the world," says Mr. Burton Forman, "was with Shelley not only a passion for attaining somehow to the supremacy of good and the abolition of evil, but also of reforming the means of reform." Laura J. Wylie says: "For resisting evil and emancipating mankind from its material and spiritual slavery, Shelley trusted entirely to the spread of knowledge, the growth of sympathy, and the convincing power of truth." Even in the hour of defeat Shelley could trust to the ultimate triumph of the good. To this mood of resolute confidence in the power of the mind to vanquish evil, Cythna gave perfect expression when she was forced to recognize the failure of her dearest hopes. When doomed to die by a world that had belied its promise, and finding the earnest desires of her early faith only in the hearts of herself and her lover, she still relied on moral and intellectual means for the diffusion of truth. She believes that the "story of their love will be a source of inspiration to mankind."

Our many thoughts and deeds, our life and love,
Our happiness, and all that we have been,
Immortally must live, and burn and move,
When we shall be no more ... 44

This belief in the power of thought rests ultimately on necessity which
links cause and effect together, and, compelling like to bring forth
like at all times, assumes the final triumph of the good. There is a
Godwinian echo in her words:

One comes behind,
Who aye the future to the past will bind--
Necessity, whose sightless strength for ever
Evil with evil, good with good must wind
In bands of union, which no power can sever;
They must bring forth their kind, and be divided never!

Faith in the transforming power of noble character was indeed a
chief article in Shelley's creed, supporting his courage when he was
forced to turn from what he considered the more practical field of
moral and political society to indirect teaching through poetry, and
supplying him with those "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" in
which he trusted to prepare men's minds for the reception of the
"reasoned principles of moral conduct" that would ultimately bring
about the establishment of a new society. His confidence in the power
of thought to redeem the world, like his faith in the social value of

44 "The Revolt of Islam," Canto IX, ll. 262-265, Stanza 30,
Poetical Works, I, p. 255.
45 "The Revolt of Islam," Canto IX, Stanza 27, ll. 238-243,
Poetical Works, I, p. 254.
the individual, is essentially moral in nature, and government, in so far as it is more than a necessary evil, is a moral institution. The virtue of the state and the virtue of the private person were identical in Shelley's eyes, "since both alike propose as their end the production of the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of sensitive beings, find their sanction in the perfection with which they fulfill this end, and attain perfection only as the happiness they produce is of the highest spiritual order."

Shelley believes that the moral qualities which any government should aim to develop are neither more nor less than the elementary virtues on which individual goodness depends: the benevolence which is "the desire to be the author of good," and the justice which is "an apprehension of the manner in which that good is to be done."

Shelley not only asked of the individual larger social virtues but he demanded of society the tenderness and refinement of the noblest individual character. The enlargement of every man's experience by the appropriation of new ideas and ideals, the exaltation of it by the contemplation of beauty, he saw to be as important to the well being of the community as to that of the individual. The basis of political and social as well as of private morality he found in breaking down,

48 Ibid., p. 303.
through imaginative sympathy, the barriers between self and non-self. Sympathy and social justice became to him synonymous, extending beyond the realms of personal daily intercourse, on the one hand into the more artificial and formal organization of mankind, and on the other into man's relation with the animal world. Because of the essential humanity that binds men together, he held political, social, and religious distinctions to be without significance, or in so far as they hindered anyone from every possible good to every creature, positively harmful. Even domestic affection was of value only as it might draw those outside its immediate circle into the circumference of sympathy and so generalize or socialize a narrower emotion. He says in his "Essay on Christianity," "You ought to love all mankind, nay every individual of mankind. You ought not to love the individuals of your domestic circle less, but to love those who exist beyond it more."

The conception of man as an essentially moral being and of mankind as fundamentally united in moral nature, lay at the heart of Shelley's idea of happiness. Happiness he made depend on the satisfaction of the soul and mind far more than on the gratification of bodily wants. "Your physical wants," he wrote, "are few, whilst those of your mind and heart cannot be numbered or described from their multitude and complication." On the supremacy of these higher wants
his chief hope for the progress as well as the happiness of mankind ultimately rested. In his prose works and in his poems he repeated again and again the idea inspiring Cythna's picture of the future:

Our toil from thought all glorious forms shall cull,  
To make this Earth, our home, more beautiful,  
And Science, and her sister Poesy,  
Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free.\(^{52}\)

Shelley believed that the world toward which the race was moving—a world which would be made rich by science and beautiful by art—is marked by simplicity and moderation of physical desires. He condemned the morality of his day because men were content to remain under the tyranny of physical wants, "meaner" than the high desires of which they were capable, and because they forgot the end of their passions in indulgence of the passions themselves. The evils in his day Shelley regarded as in great part the result of the mechanized organization of a society that in perfecting the art of living had ceased to live. His sense of the futility of modern civilization paints his description of Hell, "a city much like London," where, in an atmosphere of "thick, infected, joy-dispelling," ministers, lawyers, women, rich and poor, pursue their common purpose.

\(^{53}\) "Peter Bell," Part III, Stanza 1, Poetical Works, III, p. 194.
Mining like moles, through mind, and there
Scoop palace-caverns vast, where Care
In throned state is ever dwelling.

Shelley also depicts conditions that would inevitably produce
beings "good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free." Foremost among
these conditions are leisure and liberty—human rights as inalienable
as food and shelter, the knowledge and beauty, the competence and
health, which are the results of natural living. More important in
this world of Shelley's vision than its physical, intellectual, and
aesthetic opportunities, was the justice that prevailed in it—a justice
that echoes Godwin. It was in the best sense no respecter of person:
"to consider," he says, "under all circumstances and consequences of a
particular case how the greatest quantity of happiness will ensure from
any action; [this] is to be just; and there is no other justice." One of the best rules for determining whether an act is just or not is
to put oneself into the place of another. "A man to be greatly good,
Shelley writes, "must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must

54 Ibid., Stanza 23, p. 199.
263.
put himself in the place of another and many others; the pains and
pleasures of his species must become his own." The selfish child
knows nothing of pain outside itself; when it learns imaginatively to
put itself in place of another, it is then capable of sympathy. Thus
Shelley is led to assert:

The only distinction between the selfish and the virtuous man is,
that the imagination of the former is confined within a narrow
limit, whilst that of the latter embraces a comprehensive cir-
cumference. In this sense, wisdom and virtue may be inseparable
and criteria of each other. Selfishness is the offspring of
ignorance and mistake; it is the product of unreflecting infancy,
and savage solitude, or those of whom toil or evil occupations have
blunted or rendered torpid; disinterested benevolence is the
product of a cultivated imagination, and has an intimate connexion
with all the arts which add ornament, or dignity, or power, or
stability to the social life of man.60

Such justice concerned with the particular rather than the general, and
valuing understanding rather than judgment, was naturally considered
by Shelley the supreme law of society, the cornerstone of which was
faith in individuality and in knowledge. This conception of justice
Shelley applied to the material as to the spiritual conditions of men
in the actual world. Freedom, he insisted, was not only an abstract
and political right, but it also involved possession of a means of
livelihood and full opportunity to develop the mind and the soul. In
the Mask of Anarchy, he defines the meaning and scope of freedom:

For the labourer thou art bread,
And a comely table spread
From his daily labour come
In a neat and happy home.

Thou art clothes, and fire and food
For the trampled multitude--
No--in countries that are free
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see.

To the rich thou art a check,
When his foot is in the neck
Of his victim, thou dost make
That he treads upon a snake.

Thou art Justice--ne'er for gold
May thy righteous laws be sold
As laws are in England--thou
Shield'st alike the high and low.

Thou art Wisdom--Freemen never
Dream that God will damn for ever
All who think those things untrue
Of which priests make such ado.

Thou are peace--never by thee
Would blood and treasure wasted be
As tyrants wasted them, when all
Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul.

What if English toil and blood
Was poured forth, even as a flood?
It availed, Oh, Liberty,
To dim, but not extinguish thee.

Thou art Love--the rich have kissed
Thy feet, and like him following Christ,
Give their substance to the free
And through the rough world follow thee.

Or turn their wealth to arms, and
War for thy beloved sake make
On wealth, and war, and fraud--whence they
Drew the power which is their prey.
Science, Poetry, and Thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene, they curse it not.

Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art thou—let deeds, not words, express
Thine exceeding loveliness.\(^{61}\)

These lines, inspired by the horrors of the Peterloo massacre, give literal expression to Shelley's conviction that if society is to fulfill its proper function, the share of every man in the products of his labor must be large enough to insure normal development.

Living in an age when luxury of the few was offset by the want of many, Shelley gave much thought to practical questions as moneyearning and the distribution of means and rewards of labor as a condition of the higher human well-being. "The rights of man," he declared in his youth, "are liberty and an equal participation in the commonage of nature." The object of the government and the measure of its success, he said later,

is not merely the quantity of happiness enjoyed by individual as sensitive beings, but the mode in which it should be distributed among them as social beings. It is necessary that the happiness produced by the common efforts and preserved by the common cares should be distributed according to the just claims


of each individual; if not, although the quantity produced should be the same, the end of society would remain unfulfilled. Since Shelley believed in the moral construction of society, he insisted on moral and intellectual means of reform. Liberty and happiness he repeatedly declared impossible till every chain of "habit and superstitious have been broken." But these chains, forged by institutional tyranny, he thought, cannot be cast off until men themselves become good; he had learned "to contemplate actions as they really are" and to establish the reign of justice by themselves becoming just. The individual and society can therefore advance no faster than moral and intellectual culture; reforms can be effected only as the character is ready for them. "The consequences of the immediate extension of the elective franchise to every male adult, would be," he said in 1817, "to place power in the hands of men who have been rendered brutal and torpid and ferocious by the ages of slavery," and so to give to the demagogue what should belong to the legislator. "A pure republic," Shelley wrote, "may be shown, by inferences the most obvious and irresistible, to be that system of social order best fitted to produce the happiness and promote the genuine eminence of man."

64 Ibid., p. 302-3.
66 Ibid., p. 347.
67 "A proposal for Putting Reform to Vote," Prose Works, II, p. 95.
68 Ibid., p. 96.
No plan, he thought, could be more reasonable and less likely to bring about good results than the abolition "of the regal and aristocratical branches of our constitution, before the public mind, through many gradations of improvement, shall have arrived at the maturity which can disregard the symbols of its childhood."

Shelley maintains that the state should make as little use as possible of coercion and violence. In his essay on "The Punishment of Death" he argues against the punishment of death of criminals. He claims that the punishment defeats its own end. It is a triumphant exhibition of suffering virtue, which may inspire some with pity, admiration, and sympathy. As a consequence it may incite them to emulate their works, especially the words of political agitators. Punishment by death, again, excites those emotions which are inimical to social order; it strengthens all the inhuman and unsocial impulses of man. The contempt of human life breeds ferocity of manners and contempt of social ties. Hence it is, Shelley believes, that those nations in which the penal code has been mild have been distinguished from all others by the rarity of crime.

Violence Shelley again and again deprecated as not only wrong in itself but the very means to produce wretchedness and slavery. The

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69 Ibid., p. 96.
70 Prose Works, II, p. 254.
French Revolution gave him constant illustrations of the evils that come from the use of violence. In his "Address to the Irish," he says that violence and folly serve only to delay emancipation. He urged them to endure their wrongs until times were ripe for change; to remember that they were not fit for higher things so long as they were willing to employ force in any cause whatsoever. He reminded them to lay the only sure foundation of a better order of society by forming habits of sobriety, regularity, and thought. "Sobriety, regularity, and thought," he said, "are the effectual methods of forwarding the ends of liberty and happiness." Shelley believed violence corrupts the man that employs it and the man upon whom it is employed. In "The Revolt of Islam," he says:

Oh, wherefore should ill ever flow from ill,
And pain still keener pain forever breed?
We are all brethren—even the slaves who kill
For hire are men; and to avenge misdeed
On the misdoer doth but misery feed
With her own broken heart!"74

In order that the habits of sobriety, regularity, and thought might be established and strengthened, Shelley insisted that the work of every one should be exerted in its accustomed manner, and that the public

71 Prose Works, I, p. 331.
72 Ibid., p. 339.
73 Ibid., p. 339.
communication of truth for which the nation was struggling should in no way impede the established uses of society, though it was fitted in the end to do them away.

The history of Christianity afforded Shelley even clearer proof than the French Revolution or the condition of Ireland that the greatest and most spiritual of reforms must fail when men have not been prepared by moral and intellectual training to understand and act on the truth which they have nominally accepted. The "mighty hopes of Jesus" for "the abolition of artificial distinctions among mankind" were, he thought, in the nature of things doomed to disappointment because the system which He and His immediate followers tried to establish was one which "must result from, rather than precede, the moral improvement of human kind." Floyd Stovall believes: "It is a remarkable fact that he, the avowed enemy of Christianity, was, in his ideals and in his devotion to them, one of the most consistent followers of Christ."

His desire to be like Christ is best exemplified in his greatest hero, Prometheus, the type of perfect man and the regeneration of humanity. In "Adonais" he compares his own "branded and ensanguined brow" to Cain's or Christ's. The growth of equality in his own day Shelley

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76 Ibid., p. 369-71.
78 Stanza XXXIV, Poetical Works, III, p. 22.
believed to result from the increase in it of justice, coming from the spread of knowledge. Since reform seemed to him possible only when minds of men were prepared for the change, he considered it folly to act on any belief till it was supported by intelligent public opinion. "Nothing," he said in "The Address to the Irish People," "can be more rash and thoughtless, than to show in ourselves singular instances of any particular doctrine, before the general mass of the people are so convinced by the reasons of the doctrine, that it will be no longer singular." In a letter he earlier exclaimed:

How useless to attempt by singular examples to renovate the face of society, until reasoning has made so comprehensive a change as to emancipate the experimentalist from the resulting evils, and the prejudice of his opinion (which ought to have weight, for the sake of virtue) would be heard by the immense majority.80

His belief that "force must rule till right is ready" is illustrated in its various aspects by the great struggles between good and evil that he pictures in his poetry. Laura J. Wylie says:

The tyrant was restored to power in "The Revolt of Islam" because the world was not ready for Freedom; Prometheus triumphed over Jupiter only when he shuddered to hear repeated the curse that he himself uttered; Beatrice Cenci became a tragic character because she failed in the forgiveness that would make her most truly human.81

Though Shelley staunchly upheld the necessity of moral preparation

80 Roger Ingpen, to Miss Hitchener, October 8, 1811, Letters VIII, p. 152.
before reform is possible, he was a tireless foe of oppression, and an impassioned propagandist of ideas on which he believed the fundamental changes in social conditions of his time should depend. For the improvement of the world he relied on truth; "but on truth, active and militant, the foe of intellectual acquiescence in wrong as it is to every form of tyranny and prejudice." He believed that if mankind is to attain any measure of happiness, society as it exists at the present must be overthrown from all its superstructure of maxims and of forms. Man's first duty, then, was to resist evil.

Expression of opinion and open discussion of all subjects seemed to Shelley the essential conditions of progress, because only by their means could ideas be generally brought home to the minds of men. His speeches in Ireland and his comments on affairs in England were a continuous plea for the free discussion of questions at stake; the association he formed for effecting Catholic Emancipation was prepared primarily as an association for the discussion of the subject and the dissemination of knowledge about it; he ceaselessly upheld the right of the press.

Shelley's position as to the nature and to the methods of reform are clearly expressed in "A Proposal for Putting Reform to Vote."
Here he insisted that the advocates of change must learn the will of the majority and if that majority was against them, they must abide by the

82 Ibid., p. 203.
decision till such time as the nation was prepared to accept their policies. The minority thus lives under a double law; it must submit to the rule of force until it can make right prevail, and it must make every effort, even to the sacrifice of goods and life, to bring, what it believes to be right, home to the minds and consciences of its opponents. The work of the minority is complete only when right has been transformed into will and an enlightened society desires what its clear-sighted leaders have long seen to be good.

There were then, Shelley believed, only two means whereby man might hope to achieve a perfect society: one was governmental reform; the other individual reform. Government is evil and must eventually be abolished, but it cannot be dispensed with until men are good and wise. In pursuance of this belief, Shelley set out to be good and wise himself and to persuade everybody to follow his example. The immediate difficulty was to decide what was good and wise, a difficulty all the more soluble because he left no sort of authority to fall back upon as a last resort.

However much Shelley desired it, he did not believe the world could be transformed into his ideal state even within the life time of persons then living. "Although we may see many things put in train

during our life time," he says in his 'Address to the Irish People,' "we cannot hope to see the work of virtue and reason finished now; we can only lay the foundation for our posterity." Again, in the same work he says, he "cannot expect a rapid change," but even if he could he would not wish it; for it could not be accomplished without violence, and as long as violence is necessary, man is not fit for a change, however good. Even in "Queen Mab," when his mind was under the spell of imaginative fervor, he thought of changes as certain but gradual and very slow in coming.

"Yet slow and gradual dawmed the morn of love;
Long lay the clouds of darkness o'er the scene,
Till from its native Heaven they rolled away."

Thus, Shelley believed in the possibility of his dream of man being perfected and living in a world regenerated for his reception, but he recognized the folly of expecting the realization of his dream until after a long process of evolution, the result of man's own powers working harmoniously with the law of nature, he should have become wise and good and free. Shelley's reason told him to begin by securing the minor reforms for which the minds of the people were prepared and

86 Ibid., p. 339.
87 Ibid., p. 341.
88 Canto IX, l. 38-40, Poetical Works, IV, p. 455.
through the spread of knowledge, popular suffrage, and parliamentary action, to work patiently towards an ultimate revolutionary change which he had visioned.

As was seen, the important words of Shelley's moral creed are wisdom, justice, and benevolence; therefore he held that in his

"sublime human character, Jesus Christ, the Promethean Conqueror," 89
"the most just, wise, and benevolent of men," was the highest historical example as Prometheus was the ideal type of man perfected through Love. Socrates, likewise, was the champion of Love:

"And Socrates, the Jesus Christ of Greece,
And Jesus Christ himself did never cease
To urge all living things to love each other." 91

Floyd Stovall believes that if, by losing his life like Jesus and Socrates, or like Prometheus, by extreme suffering he could have brought great benefits to men, Shelley would have accomplished the deepest desire of his nature.

In the following chapter shall be shown how Shelley, in his criticisms of contemporary social and political conditions, exemplified his own ideal of a society ruled by wisdom, justice, benevolence and love.

89 "Hellas," l. 212, Poetical Works, III, p. 56.
90 Notes on "Hellas," No. 8., Poetical Works, III, p. 98.
92 "The Doctrine of Love," PMLA, p. 298.
CHAPTER IV

SHELLEY'S CRITICISMS OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Some one has said that if Shelley had not been a poet he would have been a politician. It is certain that he gave to politics a great deal of thought and study. On January 24, 1819, Shelley wrote to Peacock: "I consider poetry very subordinate to political science, and, if I were well, certainly, I would aspire to the latter, for I can conceive a great work embodying the discoveries of all ages and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind has been ruled."

C. Sotheran says: "Shelley was not one who

'beheld the woe

In which mankind was bound, and deem'd that fate

Which made them abject, would preserve them so.'"

On the contrary, he was aware of the progressive character of the race; "he threw himself with heart and soul into the cause of Republicanism and never slackened in his efforts till death took him from his work." His tuneful lyre was ever at the service of the Goddess of Freedom, to whom, in the "Ode to Liberty," he offers chapters of glorious verse to arouse nations from their apathy.

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1 Roger Ingpen, Letters, I, p. 21.
3 Ibid., p. 27.
4 Ibid., p. 27.
Lovers of freedom in England in the years following the Revolution saw dangers threatening the future liberty as grave as those that confronted their forefathers, when Cromwell crushed royalty under his feet in the person of the tyrant Charles Stuart, and which arose again to befoul in the profanity and debauchery of the second Carolinian period. Deeply moved by the issues at stake in his own day, Shelley interpreted the seventeenth century with the sympathy and understanding of a fellow-worker in a great cause.

Laura J. Wylie Says: "The words in which the citizens, watching the mask of Inns Court, contrasted the misery of the poor with the luxury of the rich, smack of the bitterness of class feeling in England in the time of George the Fourth."

Here is the surfeit which to them who earn
The niggard wages of the earth, scarce leaves
The tithe that will support them till they crawl
Back to her cold, hard bosom. Here is health
Followed by grim disease, glory by shame,
Waste by lame famine, wealth by squalid want
And England's sin by England's punishment.

The irony of the nineteenth century rings through the biting scorn of Archy, the Court Fool, as he explains to the Queen the nature of the Commonwealth to be founded in the Plantations by the departing Hampden, Pym, and their friends:

6 Ibid., p. 190.
"New devil's politics.

Hell is the pattern of all commonwealths: 8
Lucifer was the first republican."

The grief of an England who betrayed herself alike in betraying the cause of liberty in France and the traditions of her own people finds expression in Hampden's words:

England, farewell! Thou, who hast been my cradle,
Shalt never be my dungeon or my grave!
I held what I inherited in thee
As pawn for that inheritance of freedom
Which thou hast sold for thy despoiler's smile
How can I call thee England, or my country.9

And again, when despairing of his country, he traces his far-off hope in other lands, Hampden speaks the language of Shelley, hardly more in his hatred of tyranny than in his love for humanity which makes the simplicity of living the condition of happiness and freedom. In the spirit of the later century he socializes the romantic return to nature by seeking community-righteousness no less than personal satisfaction in those

... lone regions
Where power's poor dupes and victims yet have never Propitiated the savage fear of Kings
With purest blood of noblest hearts; whose dew Is yet unstained with tears of those who wake To weep each day the wrongs on which it dawns;
Whose sacred silent air owns yet no echo Of formal blasphemies; nor impious rites

8 Ibid., Scene II, ll. 374-376, p. 313.
9 Ibid., Scene IV, ll. 1-6, Poetical Works, III, p. 323.
Wrest man's free worship, from the God who loves,
To the poor worm who envies us his love. 10

Shelley also gives his reflections on the French Revolution.

Sotheran describes it as a time "when an intelligent people
drove a brood of vampires who had drained the blood of France too
long, to be replaced by the atrocious demagogues, hateful Bourbons,
and a Napoleon Bonaparte on whose death Shelley wrote lines pregnant
11
with republican feelings."

I hate thee, fallen tyrant! I did groan
To think that a most unambitious slave,
Like thou, shouldst dance and revel on the grave
Of Liberty. Thou mightst have built they throne
Where it had stood even now: thou didst prefer
A frail and bloody pomp which time has swept
In fragments towards oblivion. Massacre,
For this I prayed, would on the sleep have crept,
Treason and Slavery, Rapine, Fear, and Lust,
And stifled thee, their minister. I know
Too late, since thou and France are in the dust,
That Virtue owns a more eternal foe
Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, Legal Crime
And bloody Faith, the foulest birth of time. 12

Again, in a letter to Hogg of December 27, 1812, Shelley says of

Napoleon, then in retreat from Moscow:

Bonaparte is a person to whom I have great objection:
he is to me a hateful and despicable being. He is
seduced by the grossest and most vulgar ambition into actions
which only differ from those of the pirates by virtue of the
number of men and the variety of resources under his command.

12 "Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte," Poetical
   Works, I, p. 56.
His talents seem to me altogether contemptible and commonplace; incapable as he is of comparing connectedly the most obvious propositions, or of relishing any pleasure truly enrapturing. Excepting Lord Castlereagh, you could not have mentioned a character whom I contemn and abhor more vehemently.  

Again and again Shelley exclaims against Kings and autocracy. In "England in 1819" he castigates the abominable Hanoverians to whom he was called upon to give allegiance:

An old, mad, blind, despised and dying King;  
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow  
Through public scorn--mud from a muddy spring;  
Rulers, who neither see, nor feel, nor know,  
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,  
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow;  
A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field;  
An army which liberticide and prey  
Makes as a two edged sword to all who wield;  
Gold and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;  
Religion Christless, Godless--a book sealed;  
A senate--Time's worst statute unrepealed,  
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may  
Burst to illumine our tempestuous day.

As long as Shelley made England his home, he worked actively for the cause of freedom. The most familiar instance was his campaign to Ireland, in 1812, when the question of Catholic Emancipation in Ireland had, by virtue of Canning's labors in its behalf, assumed in British politics a position of considerable importance. In this situation Shelley saw his opportunity of being of service in the liberation of the Irish and, at the same time, of inaugurating his great campaign for universal reform, using Ireland as a base of

14 Poetical Works, IV, p. 6.
operations. "I shall devote myself with unremitting zeal," he wrote to Godwin on January 28, 1812, just before embarking to Ireland, as far as an uncertain state of health will permit, towards forwarding the great ends of virtue and happiness in Ireland, regarding as I do the present state of that country's affairs as an opportunity which if I, being thus disengaged, permit to pass unoccupied, I am unworthy of the character which I have assumed.  

The avowed purpose of this Irish venture was, as the "Advertisement" prefixed to the "Address of the Irish People" declares, to aid them in their fight for Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the Union Act. The "Address" itself, however, reveals that the parliamentary struggle was but incidental to Shelley's purpose, which was to commence in Ireland his long dreamed-of crusade to arouse the people of the world from their apathy and to educate them in high principles, which, when universally practiced, shall restore the perfect happiness of the Golden Age.

In a letter to his friend, Elizabeth Hitchener, on January 26, 1812, he confided:

It is intended to familiarize to uneducated apprehensions ideas of liberty, benevolence, peace, and toleration. It is secretly intended also as a preliminary to other pamphlets to shake Catholicism on its basis, and to induce Quakerish and Socinian principles of politics, without objecting to the Christian religion, which would

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16 Prose Works, I, p. 313.
be no good to the vulgar just now, and cast an odium over the other principles which are advanced.\textsuperscript{18}

Shelley expected to finish his work by April, when, having established his Philanthropic Association, he meant to extend his operation to Wales, where he hoped Miss Hitchener should join him. "Whilst you are with us in Wales," he said, "I shall attempt to organize one there, which shall correspond with the Dublin one. Might I not extend them all over England, and quietly revolutionize the country."

"The Address to the Irish People," written before Shelley went to Dublin, is a long and tautological but a clear and sometimes forceful argument for religious tolerance, personal virtue, and the assertion of the power of man to create a happier world. Catholic Emancipation, he said, was certain. The Prince of Wales had promised it, and he would, no doubt, soon become King through the death of George III, who was then old and mad; the people also, Shelley contended, and the members of Parliament favored the Irish cause. Shelley offered no special program whereby the Irish might hasten the action of Parliament except an admonition to be sober, charitable, and independent, and to think, read, and talk. He was

\textsuperscript{18} Roger Ingpen, \textit{Letters}, VIII, p. 254.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{20} "Address to the Irish People," \textit{Prose Works}, I, p. 337.
\textsuperscript{21} The House of Commons in 1812 voted a provision for Catholic Emancipation but the Lord rejected it.
particularly insistent upon the evil effects of violence of all kinds and advised the resistance of the mind. If they will follow his instructions, he assured them, they may lay a foundation of marvelous advantages of freedom and happiness to accrue to their posterity. Shelley exhorted the Irish that for the present they must patiently endure injustice and persecution, and comforted them with the thought that they will reap a harvest of happiness, because they suffered hardship and calumny to accomplish the sowing.

For the benefit of the uneducated Irish people Shelley reduced his exalted ideas in the "Address" to simplest language, but shortly afterwards he wrote another pamphlet in a more elevated style—the "Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists," which, he hoped, would win for him the support of philosophers and philanthropists in Ireland. His immediate object was, as in his "Address to the Irish People," Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the Union Act but here he openly declared his ultimate aim to be the "annihilation or palliation of whatever moral or political evil it may be within the compass of human powers to assuage and eradicate."

To improve the existing imperfect state of morals and politics, the safest method he declared would be the corroborating and the propa-

22 Ibid., pp. 332-334.
gating of generous and philanthropic feeling and the keeping continually alive a love of the human race. Since, however, this cannot be accomplished by the individuals acting singly, he proposes to all those who love mankind and are willing to endure persecution that they join themselves in an association to decide upon and to carry out a plan of action. Shelley recommends that the proceedings of this association should not be secret, but "open as the beam of day." He repeats his customary argument that government is an evil, though, at present, a necessary one; that man has a right to feel, think and speak what he thinks, and that no legislature can deprive him of that right; that man is by nature good and that by an appeal to reason he may overcome the errors which constitute his depravity. In a letter to Godwin, March 18, 1812, he says: "My association scheme undoubtedly grew out of my notions of political justice first generated by your book on that subject." The principles which moved him to undertake the work in Ireland, he admits, had their origin from the discoveries in the sciences of politics and the morals which preceded and occasioned the revolutions of America and France; and though he condemns the violence of the French

24 Ibid., p. 372.
25 Ibid., p. 380.
26 Ibid., p. 380
27 Roger Ingpen, Letters, VIII, p. 301.
Revolution, he blames not the discoveries or the discoverers, but the ignorance and misery which made the people unfit to profit by them.

Shelley's mission to Ireland turned out to be a fiasco. Godwin wrote several letters to him, striving to convince him that his pamphlets and the association would stir up strife and rebellion. Shelley, not wholly convinced by prudential counsels, accepted them with humility. He says:

"...when you reprove me, reason speaks; I acquiesce in her decisions. I know that I am vain, that I assume a character which is unadapted to the limitedness of my experience, that I am without modesty which is generally considered an indispensable ornament to the ingenuousness of youth... That I have erred in pursuance of this line of conduct I am well aware: in the opposite case, I think my errors would have been more momentous and overwhelming... I certainly believe that the line of conduct which I am now pursuing will produce a preponderance of good; when I get rid of this conviction, my conduct shall be changed."

Later the poet withdrew his pamphlets from circulation and quitted Ireland. "The failure of this adventure," says Floyd Stovall, "deflected Shelley's purpose from the accomplishment of immediate special reforms to the work of preparing the cultivated public for a..."
more sweeping social revolution of the future."

When Shelley returned to England in September, 1816, after his visit with Byron in Switzerland, the distress of the people, great numbers of whom were out of employment, was so extreme that riots broke out all over the country and there was fear of a Revolution. "Most earnestly do I hope," he wrote to Byron, September 11, 1816, "that despair will not drive the people to premature and useless struggles." Again, on November 20, 1816, he wrote to Byron:

What is most ominous of an approaching change is the strength which the popular party have suddenly acquired, and the importance which the violence of demagogues have assumed. But the people appear calm and steady even under situations of great excitement; and the reform may come without a revolution. . . . The taxes, it is said, cannot be collected—if so, the national debt cannot be paid—and are not the landed proprietors virtually pledged to payment? I earnestly hope that without such an utter overthrow as should leave us the prey of anarchy, and give us illiterate demagogues for masters, a most radical reform of institutions of England may result from the approaching contest.

From this letter it may be concluded that Shelley was a liberal. He wanted reform, but he was strongly opposed to anything like a democracy for the time being. "He was also decidedly class-conscious." In February, 1817, the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended

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34 Roger Ingpen, Letters, IX, p. 197.
35 Ibid., p. 204.
36 Floyd Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley, p. 128.
and other repressive measures were hurried through Parliament by the Tory Ministry. Between the radical leaders on the one hand and the reactionary government on the other, the nation seemed to be moving rapidly towards a Civil War. Realizing that the time was propitious for the initiation of a mild reform, and encouraged by association with Leigh Hunt, Shelley determined to take an active part in the movement to secure parliamentary reform without endangering the stability of the general system of government.

On February 22, 1817, as it appears from a letter to Charles Ollier, of that date, Shelley was at work on his "Proposals for Putting Reform to Vote Throughout the Kingdom." Its main object was to propose a plan for ascertaining by popular vote whether the majority of the people in England really desired reform to lay aside their differences until this primary question should be decided. It suggested that the population of Great Britain and Ireland be divided into three hundred equal portions and that three hundred persons be selected for the canvas, each to visit personally every individual in one of the districts and to ask him if he would add his signature to a declaration that it was the duty of the signers, if a minority, to petition, and if a majority, to require that the House of Commons should originate such measures of reform as would make its members

38 Roger Ingpen, Letters, IX, p. 221.
actual representatives of the nation. Declaring it was wholly foreign to the main object of his pamphlets, he offered a brief summary of his plan of reform. He was in favor of annual parliaments as an immediate measure and one which would tend to preserve the liberty and the happiness of the nation by familiarizing and disciplining the citizens in the duties and forms of the free government: Political institutions, he thought, were capable of almost infinite improvement, but first the quality of citizenry must be improved.

He says:

The securest method of arriving at such beneficial innovations, is to proceed gradually and with caution; or in the place of that order and freedom which the Friends of Reform assert to be violated now, anarchy and despotism will follow. Until the mass of people have received additional instruction in the privileges and responsibilities of self-government, they should not be allowed to vote.40

Shelley continues:

With respect to Universal Suffrage, I confess I consider its adoption, in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling, in 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. The consequences of the immediate extension of the elective franchise to every male adult would be to place power in the hands of men who have been rendered brutal and ferocious by ages of slavery. It is supposed that the qualities that belong to a demagogue are such as are sufficient to endow a legislator.41

39 "Proposals for Putting Reform to Vote Throughout the Kingdom," Prose Works, II, pp. 90-91.
40 Ibid., p. 95.
41 Ibid., pp. 95-96.
Consequently, Shelley would not admit the practicality of a pure democracy and though he confessed that a republic, under suitable conditions, was best calculated to promote the happiness of a nation, he believed it would be damaging to the welfare of Britain to abolish the regal and aristocratical branches of our constitution, before the public mind, through many gradations of improvement, shall have arrived at the maturity which can disregard these symbols of childhood.

This pamphlet may be accepted as a mature and well-considered expression of Shelley's real opinions with respect to reform in England. His dislike of Kings was strong as ever, but he realized that in a popular appeal it must be modified for the sake of expediency. In the "Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte," he speaks frankly of this dislike. "Kings and their ministers have in every age been distinguished from other men by a thirst for expenditure and bloodshed." Though he would, no doubt, make an exception with Great Britain where the monarchy was less absolute than in other European countries, he was, when free to express his opinion, thoroughly outspoken in the conviction that monarchies were, of all forms of government, most destructive to national prosperity and happiness.

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42 Ibid., p. 96.
43 Ibid., p. 130.
Shelley grieved with all England over the death of Princess Charlotte, who, if she contributed little in service to the nation, had at least been innocent of harm; but "the accident of her birth neither made her life more virtuous nor her death more worthy of grief." It seemed to him that the legal execution, about the same time of the three rioters--Brandeth, Ludlam, and Turner--was a more grievous calamity because it signified to him that Liberty, a princess more to be cherished than Princess Charlotte, had been murdered. He did not deny that there was guilt attached to the conduct of these men; but he charged that the Tory government was responsible for their actions on two accounts: first, because its failure to reduce the national debt had produced such hardships among the poor that they were driven to desperation; secondly: because, as he asserted, it had sent spies among the men of manufacturing districts to incite to violence, in order that by the execution of a few from insurrection, it might check the movement of reform throughout the nation which threatened its own existence. Shelley believed that the government, kept within the power of and used for the advantage of a few aristocrats, made wars and contracted loans largely for the purpose of increasing the national


47 Ibid., II, p. 111-114. The rioting practically ceased for the time with the execution of Brandreth, Ludlam and Turner, but it was Chiefly because riots had ceased to exist, not because of the executions. Spence Walpole, History of England, I, p. 148.
debt and levying more taxes, thereby making the richer and the poorer. In this pamphlet and in "A Proposal for Putting Reform to Vote" Shelley used the same methods of practical reform.

Shelley's entire life gave proof of his vital interest in public matters, especially when the welfare or liberty of any class of persons was affected; and when ill health and enforced absence from England compelled him to give up his beliefs and to limit himself to what he considered less immediately effective teaching through poetry, he lost not a whit, either of his interest in the events of the days or of his desire to use them in service of reform. "Hellas," the poem which contains, perhaps, the greatest hymn of freedom, was inspired in the year of his death by the struggle of the Greeks for independence.

Alas! for liberty!
If numbers, wealth, or unfulfilling years,
Or fate, can quell the free!
Alas for Virtue; when
Torments, or contumely, or the sneers
Of erring judging men
Can break the heart where it abides.
Alas! if Love, whose smile makes this obscure world splendid,
Can change with its false times and tides,
Like hope and terror;--
Alas for Love!
And Truth, who wanderest lone and unbefriended

If thou canst veil thy lie-consuming mirror
   Before the dazzled eyes of Error.
Alas for thee! Image of the Above.49

"Common fame," he says in the preface,

is the only authority which I can allege for the details
of this poem, and I must trespass upon the forgiveness of
my readers for the display of newspaper erudition to which
I have been reduced.50

"Newspaper erudition" is said to have been one of Shelley's strong
assets. Deeply interested, even in his long absence, in the poli-
tical situation in England, he found in the events reported in letters
and papers the subject of much of his poetry. The mingling of current
politics with chance circumstance and literary reminiscence in his
occasional improvisations is amusingly illustrated by Mrs. Shelley's
account of the writing of Swellfoot the Tyrant. The fortunes of
Caroline of Brunswick and the conduct of Castlereag, in 1820, a sub-
ject of constant discussion among Englishmen at home and abroad,
form the ground-work of this semi-playful satire. Mrs. Shelley
writes:

Shelley read to us his "Ode to Liberty"; and was riotously
accompanied by the grunting of a quantity of pigs brought for
sale to the [San Giuliano] fair. He compared it to the 'chorus
of frogs' in the satiric drama of Aristophanes; and it being
an hour of merriment, and one ludicrous association suggesting
another, he imagined a political satirical drama on the
circumstances of the day, to which the pigs would serve as
chorus—and Swellfoot was begun.51

50  Ibid., Preface to "Hellas," p. 42.
51  Mrs. Shelley, "Biographical and Critical Notes," Poetical Works,
(London, 1839), I, p. LXXI.
The theme of the play was, of course, especially fitted to arouse his indignation; but indignation alone, if Mrs. Shelley's account may be trusted, did not prompt the poem.

When Queen Caroline, travelling peacefully and somewhat unconventionally over the earth, tired of the petty persecutions of her royal consort and decided to embarrass him by returning to England to assert her rights, she started a furore, the like of which had never been seen in English politics since the time of the Popish Plot. The ministers in trying her before Parliament for infidelity, were attacking not only the honor of the Queen, such as it was, but the influence of her supporters, the Whigs. The Whigs, on the other hand, in lampooning George IV as Nero, not only defended the Queen but also assailed the Tory Government as well. Ministers were mobbed, processions were formed, houses were stoned, and foreign witnesses were assaulted on landing. Brougham was moved to suggest that certain days be set apart for transacting the business of the country. Wherever English newspapers and travelers went, it was incumbent upon all good Englishmen to pronounce upon the question of the Queen's private virtue. Shelley believed her guilty only of grave indiscretions and of being 'a vulgar cock-maid.' In the play, Shelley

52 George Trevelyan, British History of the Nineteenth Century, pp. 191-193.
attacks the spy evil, the paper money evil, the callousness of the
government to people's suffering, the corruption of Justice, the
repressive measures of the government and the characters of the King
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and the ministers. The chief characters of the play represent the
Prince Regent, Lord Castlereagh, Lord Eldon, and the Duke of Wellington,
the statesmen most execrated by the liberals of the time.

Swellfoot (George IV) is surrounded by his subjects, hungry swine,
and over the altar of the temple in which the scene is laid, is the
statue of Famine, veiled. The swine demand food and Swellfoot, out-
raged at such treason, demands that they be gelded. The passage,
Carl Grabo believes, is an evident hit at Malthus, for

"Moral restraint I see has no effect,
Nor prostitution, nor our own example,
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Starvation, typhus-fever, war nor prison."

Shelley, from the evidence of his letters, and from the "Philosophical
View of Reform" believed that Malthus suggested sterilization as a
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means of preventing over-population.

This light treatment of current history was, however, far less
characteristic of Shelley than the direct and serious consideration

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Ibid., p. 339.
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which marks the bulk of his poetic utterances on public matters.

The events of 1819, for example, gave material for many political and didactic poems. "The Masque of Anarchy" was inspired by the news of the Peterloo Massacre. In 1819, meetings were conducted throughout the country by the laboring classes to consider ways and means of bettering their condition. On August 16, 1819, a huge one was held at St. Peter's Field, Manchester, with the view of urging Parliamentary reform. The magistrates had previously declared that such an assembly would be illegal and the city authorities had made extensive preparations for the preservation of peace. After an enormous crowd had gathered around the speakers, forty of the yeomanry cavalry attempted to make their way through the multitude to arrest the ringleaders. When it was discovered that they could not reach the platform, a hasty order was given to three hundred hussars to disperse the crowd. They made a terrific charge, which resulted in the killing of six people and in wounding fifty or sixty others. "This incident, known as the Peterloo Massacre, fairly opened the floodgates of Shelley's violent emotions of indignation, wrath and disgust at the government."

Shelley's first response to the Peterloo Massacre is expressed briefly in a letter of September 6, to his publishers, the Olliers:

The same day that your letter came, came the news of the Manchester work, and the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously to hear how the country will express its sense of this bloody, murderous opposition to its destroyers. 'Something must be done. What, yet I know not.'

Writing to Thomas Love Peacock later in the month, he exclaimed:

What an infernal business this of Manchester! What is to be done? Something assuredly. Mr. Hunt has behaved, I think, with great spirit and coolness in the whole affair.

Nor did the matter soon cease to agitate Shelley. On November 3, 1819, he wrote to Leigh Hunt:

Post succeeds post and fresh horrors are ever detailed. First we hear a troop of the enraged master-manufacturers let loose with sharpened swords upon their starving dependents; and in spite of the remonstrances of the regular troops that they ride over them and massacre without distinction of sex or age, and cut off women's breasts and dash the heads of infants against the stones. Then comes information that a man had been found guilty of some inexplicable crime, which his prosecutors call blasphemy, one of the features of which, they inform us, is the denying that the massacring of children was by the immediate command of the author and the preserver of all things.

The prosecution mentioned in this letter was that of Richard Carlile,

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60 Roger Ingpen, Letters, X, p. 80.
61 Ibid., p. 83. [Leigh Hunt has been asked to print the "Mask of Anarchy" in The Examiner, but he refused, believing "the public at large had not become sufficiently discerning to do justice to the Sincerity and kindheartedness of the spirit that walked in the flaming robe of verse."/]
62 Ibid., p. 105.
the famous radical publisher. The conviction of Carlile was to Shelley an evidence of the evil days on which England had fallen, the last bulwarks of her liberty fast melting beneath the tide of despotism. In his letter to Hunt on November 13, 1819, which is one of the fullest expressions of opinion upon a question of public moment and illustrates his concern for that political principle for which he cared most—free speech—he contends, with justice, says Grabo, that the jury was illegally constituted, for it was not composed of "peers" of the accused; for Carlile was a Deist and the jury were Christians.

This, Shelley argues, is to constitute a jury out of the men who are parties to the prosecution . . . to make those who are offended, judges of the cause of him, by whom they profess themselves to have been offended . . . No honest Christian would sit in a jury except he felt himself thoroughly imbued with the universal toleration preached by the alleged founder of his religion.

Shelley elaborates on the impossibility of a fair trial before a jury incapable of rendering any impartial judgment and then asks why Carlile is singled out as a victim of the government's attack when it is notorious that many eminent men have been and are deists.

Justice should be impartial, but Mr. Carlile, a bookseller of small means, is prosecuted whereas Gibbons and Jeremy Bentham and Hume, famous personages, were never tried for heresies . . . "Why crush a starving bookseller and anathematize a work which, though, perhaps

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perfect enough for its purpose, must from the very circumstances of its composition be imperfect?" But tyrants, Shelley observes, "after all are only a kind of demagogue." They prefer not to risk defeat by attacking aristocratical Deists. "And the prosecutors care little for religion or care for it only as a mask and the garment by which they are invested with the symbols of worldly power. In prosecuting Carlile, they have used the superstition of the jury as their instrument in crushing a political enemy, or rather they strike in his person all their political enemies.

The general attitude, in fact, of the Shelleys to their native land, may perhaps, be grasped from the letter of Mary, dated November 24, 1819:

Not that I much which to be in England, if I could but import a cargo of friends and books from that island there. I am too much depressed by its enslaved state, my inutility; the little chance there is for freedom, and the great chance there is for tyranny, to wish to be witness of its defradation step by step, and to feel all the sensations of indignation and horror which I know I should experience were I to hear the talk of the subjects, or rather the slaves, of King Cant whose dominion I fear is of wider extent in England than anywhere else ... No, since I have seen Rome, that City is my Country, and I do not wish to own any other until England is free and true; that is until the throne Cant, the God, or if you will, the abominable idol, before whom at present the English are offering up a sacrifice of blood and liberty to be overthrown ... that nook of ci-devant free land, so sweetly surrounded by the sea is no longer England, but Castlereaghlend, or New Land Castlereagh ... All those who wish to become subject of the

new Kingdom ought to be obliged to take an oath of citizenship not as Irish, English, or Scotch, but as Castlereaghish ... A man would only have to enter himself a slave, a fool, a bigot and a tyrant where he can, to become a Castlereaghishman. The form of oath should be,--The King shall have my breath, Castlereagh my obedience, his Parliament my love, the Courier my trust, the Quarterly my belief, Murray my custom--down with the Whigs and the Radicals--So God help me. I really think I will write to Castlereagh on the Subject; it would be a Godsend to him, such a kingdom, and save him of a world of trouble in grinding and pounding and hanging and taxing the English that remain into Castlereaghish, for all that would not accede to the terms of his agreement would be aliens, so an end to them.67

For Castlereagh, Shelley's hatred was intense. In the following words he attacks the Prime Minister:

Then trample and dance, thou Oppressor!
For thy victim is no redresser--
Thou art sole lord and possessor
Of her corpses, and clods, and abortions--they pave
Thy path to the grave.68

Shelley came into collision with the party in power after the death of Harriet. Her father had filed a petition in Chancery to determine who was the fit person to educate her children--he their grandfather, the hired hotel-keeper, or their father Shelley, who was accused of atheism, and would, in all probability, bring up his children as atheists. Brandes says:

Lord Eldon's judgment was to the effect, that seeing Shelley's conduct had hitherto been highly immoral, and that far from being ashamed of this, he was proved of his immoral principles and tried to impress them upon others, the law was in its right

67 Letters of Mary Shelley, edited by Henry Harper, for the Bibliophile Society, (Boston, 1918), Excerpts from pp. 87-92,
68 "Lines Written During the Castlereagh Administration," Poetical Works, IV, p. 3.
in depriving him entirely of the custody of his children, and at the same time decreeing that he should be deprived of a fifth of his income for their maintenance. The children were placed in charge of a clergyman of the Church of England. Shelley felt this blow so terribly that even his intimate friends never dared speak of children to him.

In his poem, "To the Lord Chancellor," Shelley says:

I curse thee! By a parent's outraged love,
By hopes long cherished and too lately lost—
By gentle feelings thou couldst never prove
By griefs which thy stern nature never crossed.

S. A. Walker says: "On the post himself one result of the Manchester affair was to coalesce his mind for use in the near future of certain principles upon which reform might eventually be obtained."

Shelley Writes:

Economy, retrenchment, the gradual abolition of the National Debt by some just yet speedy and effectual system, and such a reform in the representative system, and such a reform in the representation as by admitting the constitutional presence of the people in the State may prevent the recurrence of evil which now presents us with the alternative of despotism or revolution, are the objects at which the jury unceremoniously struck when from a sentiment of religious intolerance, they delivered the verdict of guilty against Mr. Carlile.

The immediate result, however, of the receipt of the Peterloo Massacre, was the penning of "The Mask of Anarchy". The first nine

70 *Poetical Works*, III, p. 395.
stanzas show Shelley's indignation blazing forth fiercely in personal-

I met murder on the way--
He had a mask like Castlereagh:
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven bloodhounds followed him

Next came Fraud, and he had on
Like Eldon, and ermined gown;
His big tears, for he wept well
Turned to mill-stones as they fell;

Like Sidmou~ next Hypocrisy
On a crocodile rode by. 75

Later, the old revolutionary flashes out in the lines:

Men of England, heirs of glory,
Heroes of unwritten story,
Nurslings of one mighty Mother,
Hopes of her, and one another:

Rise like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number;
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you--
Ye are many, they are few. 74

Shelley, then, defines freedom, which he says, is bread for

the worker "in a neat and happy home." It is "clothes and fire and
food." It is a check upon the tyranny practiced by the rich. It is
justice and wisdom and peace. It is love, and its lamps are science,
poetry, and thought. Freedom to Shelley, then, was the right and the

74 Ibid., Stanzas XXXVII, XXXVIII, pp. 164-165.
opportunity for all to live a good life. Evil and selfishness in power and the law unjustly administered, Shelley contends that if the poor are not protected and the oppressed meet to declare their right to freedom, then there is nothing to do but passively to resist:

Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are Weapons of unvanquished war.

And if then the tyrants dare,
Let them ride among you there,
Slash and slab, and maim, and hew;
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay, 76 Till their rage had died away.

Distrusting violence and bloodshed, and yet believing in reform, in peaceful or bloodless revolution, Shelley sees but one weapon for its attainment—passive resistance.

The chief interest of the "Mask of Anarchy," says S. A. Walker, lies in the fact that though it was written on the spur of the moment, and on the impulse of deep feeling, it, nevertheless, contains much of the body of thought immediately afterwards incorporated into The recently published A Philosophical View of Reform.

The keynote of this prose essay is moderation combined with toler-

76 Ibid., p. 167.
ance and human sympathy. When dealing with the theory underlying government, Shelley still recognizes the right of the individual to rebel. He says that in case the government should call out the militia to disband public assemblies or mass meetings, people should passively resist their authority submitting to insult, imprisonment, and even death if necessary. If the government persistently refused to take action of a reform, the people might justifiably resort to insurrection to which they would have a right after the employment of armed force by the government to counteract the will of the nation. He says:

Right government being an institution for the purpose of securing such a moderate degree of happiness to men as has been experimentally practicable, the sure character of misgovernment is misery, and first discontent, and, if that be despised, then insurrection, as the legitimate expression of that misery.

In legitimizing armed resistance to government, Shelley was expressing revulsion to such onslaughts as that of the Manchester riot at which he was so incensed.

The last resort of resistance is undoubtedly insurrection. The right of insurrection is driven from the employment of armed force to counteract the will of the nation. Let the government disband the standing army, and the purpose of resistance would be sufficiently fulfilled by the incessant agitation of

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78 Ibid., p. 162.
80 A Philosophical View of Reform, p. 88-89.
the points of dispute before the court of common law, and by an unwarlike display of the irresistible number and union of people.

To Shelley, good government meant the achievement by fair means of the happiness of all people. It was when such reasonable happiness was refused the masses by deliberate machination that Shelley foresaw revolution and bloodshed, not as a result of the malice of the mob but as the inevitable result of wrong aims and the employment of vicious means.

Whenever this public happiness is attained in a nation not from external force but from internal arrangement and the divisions of the common burthens of defence and maintenance then there is oppression. And then arises an alternative between Reform, or institution of a military Despotism, or a Revolution in which parties, one striving after illdigested systems of democracy, and the other clinging to the outworn abuses of power, leave the few who aspire to more than the former and who would overthrow the latter at whatever expense, to wait for that modified advantage which the temperance and toleration which both regard as a crime, might have resulted from the occasion which they both let pass in a far more signal manner.

This happiness Shelley conceived would depend on popular representation.

The advocates of universal suffrage have reasoned correctly that no individual can be denied a direct share in the government without supreme injustice.

All men, Shelley believed, when they are prepared for it, ought to

81 A Philosophical View of Reform, p. 88-89.
82 Ibid., p. 49-50.
83 Ibid., p. 66.
have a right to vote for their public agents; but all men were not ready
in 1819 to exercise it. He believes:

Any sudden attempt at universal suffrage would produce an immature
Republic. It is better that an object so inexpressibly great and
sacred should never have been attempted than that it should be
attempted and failed. 84

It seems that to Shelley's mind all possibility of a moderate and gradual
reform by consent had been unhappily and miserably dissipated by the
events of the last two years, 1817-1819.

Two years ago [i.e., in 1817] it might still have been possible to
have commenced a system of gradual reform. The people were then in-
 insulted, tempted, and betrayed, and the petitions of a million of
men were rejected with disdain. Now they are more miserable, more
hopeless, more impatient of their misery, above all, they have
become universally aware of the true sources of their misery. 85

Shelley again voices the opinion he expressed earlier in "The
Mask of Anarchy"--that patience and long-suffering are the only efficient
weapons remaining to the people, but that through them they will
eventually gain their ends and at the same time their self-respect.

Shelley makes it clear that he desired as soon as it could be
established in England a republican form of government, which would be
perfectly responsive to the will of the people. But he realized that
an attempt to set up such a government under the conditions existing in
1819 would result in more harm than good. He was willing, therefore, to
begin with minor reforms within the government itself by disfranchise-
ment of the rotten burroughs and the establishment of proportionate

84 Ibid., p. 72.
85 Ibid., p. 75.
representation in the power house of Parliament. The qualification for the right to vote should be the possession of a small amount of property. Parliament should meet regularly every three years. It would be better, he thought, to begin with these minor reforms and gradually to increase them and extend them as the nation was prepared to receive them with benefits. Such a plan did not completely satisfy him. "But nothing," he declared, "is more idle than to reject a limited benefit because we cannot without great sacrifice obtain an unlimited one." To accept a limited benefit is not to abandon the ideal, and the amount of benefit will be great because of the ideal. In "A Philosophical View of Reform" Shelley eulogizes the philosophers of the eighteenth century and sees in the Government of the United States the first fruits of their teaching. Two conditions are necessary, he contends, to a perfect government: first "that that will should be as wise and just as possible." The former of these exists in the United States; and in so far as the people are represented, "America fulfills imperfectly and indirectly the last and most important condition of perfect government."

Having decided definitely that conventions and institutions of society are evil, he immediately set out to remedy them. His most pretentious undertaking was his plan for a reformation of Ireland, which

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86 Ibid., p. 73-77.
87 Ibid., p. 77.
88 Shelley's footnote, p. 15.
89 Ibid., p. 15.
he announced early in 1812 by the publication of two Dublin pamphlets. One, "An Address to the Irish People," was intended to foment discontent and zeal for reform among the lower strata of Irish society; the other called "Proposals for an Association" was submitted to the more cultivated Irish leaders and recommended the organization of associated clubs for the purpose of directing the work of reform. The failure of this ambitious adventure deflected Shelley's purpose from the accomplishment of immediate special reform to the work of preparing the cultivated public for a more sweeping social revolution of the future.

In his writings, then, Shelley never fails to enforce what he regarded as the central fact of the situation—that it is social and not political reform that is needed to avert a revolution; wealth on the one hand and want on the other being the two causes of discord and misery.

In "The Mask of Anarchy" Shelley asserts that real liberty cannot exist in a country where there is penury and starvation; while in the stirring lines "To Men of England," are found the true democratic doctrine tersely expressed:

The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.
Sow sees,--but let no tyrant reap;
Find wealth,--let no imposter heap;
Weave robes,--let not the idle wear. 91
Forge Arms,--in your defence to bear.

But this defence was to be according to Shelley's teaching, as far as possible, a passive and constitutional protest. He had a strong

91 Poetical Works, IV, p. 5.
aborrence to any violent outbreak, and believed it would be better
and wiser to postpone even the attainment of reforms which are other-
wise desirable, such as universal suffrage and the abolition of the
aristocracy, than to risk the stability of a righteous cause by an
immature attempt at establishing a republic."
CHAPTER V

SHELLEY'S QUALITIES AND LIMITATIONS AS A CRITIC
OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS

The position one will give Shelley as a critic of society and politics depends on what one believes a true social order is, on what principles it must be established, and how Shelley's ideal society conforms to it. In his Liberty--Its Use and Abuse, Reverend Ignatius Cox, S.J., defines society thus: "Society in general is the permanent moral union of two or more for a common good to be attained by their cooperative activity."¹ This moral union, which is necessary for society, is the ground for an obligation that simultaneously binds human wills to seek a common good by cooperative activity. The common good does not signify solely that which is the common object of all the wills and the obligation, but it signifies also that the common good is to be obtained for all in common. St. Thomas Aquinas holds that it is contrary to charity and to right reason that a man should seek exclusively his own individual good and have no regard to the common good, for the latter is better than the good of a single man.² A fortiori St. Thomas would hold that a good cannot be attained by having individuals look only to their

² Summa Theologica, ii, ii, 47, 10, p. 17.
own interests. 3

A true social order can be built only on the basis of fraternity, namely one inspired not by profit motive, which is Capitalism; not by the political motive, which is Fascism; not by the violence motive, which is Communism; but by the love motive, which is Christianity. One must begin with fraternity, which means that all men are brothers under the Fatherhood of God, that all must function for the common good of society and for the peace of the world, and then liberty and equality will follow. Liberty will follow, for the masses will be free from economic want, which will leave their souls free to seek that higher destiny to which they are called as heirs of the glorious liberty of children of God. Equality will follow, for all men will be equal in the possession of inalienable and sacred rights of human personality, which no one can take away; equal also in their right to share the common heritages of civilization. 4 Equality, then, is not a political concept, in the sense that all individuals have the same racial characteristics; it is not an economic concept, in the sense that all who share the same article are equal. It is rather a spiritual concept in the sense that all men are members of a common humanity and that they are therefore entitled to the common heritage of civilization without


the arbitrary penalties of a power which would make man exist for
the state instead of the state for man. Man has a spiritual
nature—a soul whence his freedom is derived. Equality then
demands not that he have as much as any other worker in a country
or state, but that he have the same rights as any other man in
the world. Accordingly, he has the right to dissent with dicta-
torship and tyranny because he is rational; the right to protect
his freedom of conscience against state religions and state atheism
because he is moral; the right to protect his personality in
ownership of productive property because he is economic; and the
right to form associations—political and religious—because he is
a social being. 5

Obviously, the first requisite of society is authority. With-
out it there can be no sure coordination of effort, no permanency
of cooperation. Under no circumstances does freedom mean exemption
from law. On the contrary, man enjoys liberty only on condition
that he subjects himself to a law. He is free to assert his per-
sonality, to own property, to earn profits only on condition that
he recognizes he is also a member of society and is therefore
subject to the law of common good.

Shelley, too, would build his society on the basis of frater-
nity, namely, one inspired by the love principle which is the

5 Ibid., p. 35.
great motive power in his scheme of social and moral regeneration. His doctrine may be described as faith in man's natural and original goodness which was capable of realizing perfectibility through liberty and love—the latter two being envisaged both as a means and, in their fullness, as a goal. 'All men would become wise and virtuous and happy if they would but set aside the tyranny of custom and allow their scope for the intuitive excellence of their true nature, for original goodness, and not original sin, is the inalienable birth right of mankind. The foundation of true morality is therefore, according to Shelley, that innate benevolence which, together with a sense of justice, is the parent of virtue.

Shelley saw himself and his fellowmen perfectly free and happy in his dream-world, for freedom was essential if his expansive energy was to have full play; but he also saw himself and his fellowmen undergoing no change, no struggles, no suffering. He would be free not only in the positive sense of untrammeled self-expression but in a negative sense free from all the vicissitudes of life. Like Rousseau, he would be free and submissive to authority; but that authority must be identical with his will. Necessity as Godwin and his French teachers understood it was such an authority. Necessity left to Shelley his essential freedom, since it bound him to no law, but to the law of its own being. Kings and priests he outlawed and anathematized, not by any
foolish supposition of their personal wickedness, but as being the representatives of civil and religious oppression, and according to Shelley's doctrine, perfect liberty is absolutely indispensable to the existence of virtue. He hated Christianity, not because it was actually in alliance with every kind of reaction, but because it was a discipline, because it held back the flow of human sensation and prevented that complete projection of self into all things which was to him happiness. Society, too, he warred against because it imposed on men the most unreasonable of disciplines—that of conventions.

Even though Shelley was allied with Necessity, he did not surrender to fatalism; at the expense of logic he believed that man can direct his own actions by his own choice. Reason, which is the voice of Necessity, has not at present free access to men's minds, because customs, institutions, and laws block its way. It would seem that Necessity has dictated something unnecessary. Reason, according to Shelley, dictates actions that must result in perfect happiness. Once heard, no man disobeys the voice. The sole problem of politics is to insure that every human being shall hear it; everyone would hear it were he free to do so. The institutions that suppress man's natural desire for expansion also suppress his natural ability to use the faculty of reason to guide the expansion. This dead weight of institutions cannot be overcome by any mere political struggle; it is of no use to oppose
institution to institution. He believed revelation is needed, for in the cause of progress to fight restraint with restraint, discipline with discipline is to destroy the very thing for which one fights.

Shelley never quite ceased to look forward to his effortless victory of light within the human spirit. He is willing enough to admit the necessity for a long and hard struggle to improve the physical surroundings and the education of the masses. But whenever the mood of the prophet comes upon him, he expects immediate perfection through a mysterious moral cataclysm. In "The Revolt of Islam" Laon and Cythna achieve the regeneration of their decadent nation simply by showing themselves to the multitudes. Demogrogon, the most powerful and unsubstantial of shades, conquers the vicious God of "Prometheus Unbound" with an ease which makes the reader wonder why it was not done much earlier. In "Hellas" the rebellion of Greece seems created and upheld by magic. Tyranny has no chance; it always falls without a struggle. It exists only because men are wicked and foolish. Men cease to be wicked and foolish with the return to their natural purity and intelligence when they catch the spark flung off from the mind of their saviour. This is salvation by sentiment. Shelley did not always limit himself to the abstract theories of Necessity and Revelation. But at all times he was willing to admit the necessity of making contingent reforms.
Prior to a discussion of Shelley's political program, a word should be said concerning his views regarding individual human responsibility. A good deal of controversial floundering has been occasioned by a lack of understanding of this term, some critics maintaining, as Sister Mary Eunice Mousel says, with too little qualification, that Shelley, in effect, merely grafted "Platonic forms" on the Godwinian doctrine of Necessity; others rising in wrath and declaring on the contrary that the poet believed in free will.

One might well keep in mind, in the interests of clarity, the traditional distinction between voluntary and free action, which a recent writer presents thus:

A voluntary act is one done by the will with a knowledge of the end. As we say, 'You knew what you were doing; you knew that those words were offensive to X, and you uttered them.' Wish or will and thought have gone together to produce the act. Nevertheless, they are not sufficient by themselves to make it necessarily a free act. A father on seeing his child drowning might leap into the water and save it, and all the same not be free. A lover may sing the praises of his beloved, drawn irresistibly by what he conceives to be her beauty; he knows what he is doing; he wants to do what he is doing, but he also cannot help himself. For an act to be free the agent must be conscious, at the very moment of willing, that he could act otherwise. This means that the object does not attract him irresistibly ...Whenever he finds himself faced with alternatives, drawn one way and another ...he can stand off and judge the insuf-

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ficiency of both alternatives as they appear to him, and by this judgment he declares that his choice will be a rational act, whichever side he chooses and that his choice is free.9

The freedom to choose between two alternatives, whether by will of omission or commission, is what constitutes free will in the sense in which it is used in this discussion; and thus considered, it operates, of course, within a restricted compass. Many disdain such limited freedom altogether or reduce it even though they may preserve the term, to what is properly called, as in the above passage, voluntary action. Though purposive, this is not responsible action in any sense. Sister Mary Eunice points out that Shelley unmistakably viewed the will in this light.10 If, what he early awaited from the extermination of priests and kings, he came later to hope for from individual reform working outward, the responsibility was not that of a genuinely free action.

Shelley believed that man's unhappiness is caused by the complementary evils, power and obedience, which deprived him of his natural rights of freedom and equality. The two classes of tyrants—priests and kings—had, according to Shelley, wrongfully assumed authority in the realms of politics and religion; and people, contrary to nature's promptings, have abjectly submitted to usurpation, thereby confirming the act that enslaved them. The king as an

instrument of power, which is evil, was to be condemned; the subject, too, because of his obedience, was equally culpable. At this time, believing in the Doctrine of Necessity, Shelley held that man's blindly working will will bring him at last to Elysium.¹¹

In his "Essay on Christianity," Shelley speaks of a "Power by which we are surrounded like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will"—to which Power men are "passive slaves."¹² This view he repeats in the "Defence of Poetry": "Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to an ever-changing melody;" but he qualifies it by adding: "There is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than the lyre and produces not melodies alone, but harmony by an internal adjustment of sound or motions thus excited to the passions which excite them."¹³ Shelley presumed that man naturally responds to good and that this response is to a large extent "from decay the visitations of the divinity in man." The "imagination" functioning in morals as in poetry he thus came to

¹¹ Floyd Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley, p. 50-51.
¹² Prose Works, II, pp. 343-344.
¹³ Ibid., III, pp. 100-101.
consider not merely passive but creative in the sense that man is capable of an "internal adjustment" to the "divine visitations." But the adjustment which he is willing to concede to all sentient beings he nowhere conceives otherwise than volitional. 14 Sister Eunice says: "The heroes in Shelley's poems are men whose principles of action are purely a 'divine visitation,' calling forth an irresistible, even though purposive, obedience. This suggests what Shelley means in his work in which he bears witness to the faith that 'mankind had only to will there should be no evil, and there would be none.'" 15

Shelley believed that the day of political regeneration may be afar off, and that it may be well to prepare the way for it by beneficial changes in political detail. Shelley, like any political saviour, must have a definite program. He would have annual parliaments because these serve to educate the electorate by keeping politics constantly before the minds of the people. But both in the "Proposals for an Association" of his youth and in the "Philosophical View of Reform" of his later years, Shelley would not at first have universal suffrage. Only by gradual extensions of the franchise can the great mass of the ignorant be properly prepared for it. He declared the abolition of the rotten boroughs should

14 Sister Eunice Mousel, "Falsetto in Shelley," p. 594

15 Mrs. Shelley, "Note to Prometheus," The Poetical Works, I, (Boston, 1855), p. 134
come first and then the enfranchisement of the large unrepresented towns. A small property qualification could be admitted. He makes a proposal that the opinion of the whole English people be taken in a rather complicated sort of plebiscite to see whether the country really wishes parliament to reform itself—a proceeding which in itself would mean the concession of just that principle of popular sovereignty which the opponents of reform were denying.

Of course, Shelley would have universal education at public expense as a necessary adjunct to a wider suffrage. He would have other changes follow: disbanding of standing army; abolition of sinecures; disestablishment of the Church of England; complete Religious toleration. 16

Along with all these changes Shelley advocated a radical reform in the English legal system. He believed it is unjust for a rule made in the past to apply to the present, for the circumstances of the present are different from those of the past. Therefore, the common law should be abolished, and judges should decide each case on its own merits, and apply common sense instead of law.

But by the time "A Philosophical View of Reform" was written, however, Shelley had so far yielded to the world as to demand merely that justice be made "cheap, certain, and speedy"; and that the institutions of juries be extended "to every possible occasion of

16 "A Philosophical View of Reform" (1920), p. 72.
Shelley's policy on public debt was equally definite. The emission of paper money and the extension of credit, he writes, have created a leisure class which must be supported by the laboring classes. The bondholders and shareholders have done nothing to earn their incomes; they are a new aristocracy of commerce who have managed to secure a set of serfs in English working men. The national debt, which they hold, is, as it were, the character of these wickedly acquired rights over their fellows. Let us, says Shelley, simply repudiate the debt and we have destroyed this new feudalism. \(^\text{18}\) Rolleston contends that Shelley had no understanding of the nature of National Credit and Finances and that he offered a drastic and quite impracticable scheme for dealing with the national debt. \(^\text{19}\) Even as regards the national debt, Shelley seems to have modified his views. In writing to "C. T." on June 29, 1822, he argues not for

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\ldots \text{repudiation but for reduction of interest. England appears to be in a desperate condition, Ireland still worse; and no class of those who subsist on public labor will be persuaded that their claims on it must be diminished. But the government must content itself with less in taxes, the landowners must submit to receive less rent, and the fundholder a diminished interest, or they will get nothing. I once thought to study these affairs and write or act in them. I am glad my good genius said, refrain. I see little virtue,}
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\(^{18}\)Ibid., pp. 56-57.

\(^{19}\)Introduction to "A Philosophical View of Reform," p. vii.
and I foresee that the contest will be one of blood and gold.\textsuperscript{20}

Brinton declares that "Shelley's economic proposals are not at the mercy of any consistent economic theory. If orthodox economics exist, then it is clear to him that orthodox economics are hopelessly wrong. He will have nothing to do with them. Malthus he dismisses as immoral and hard hearted, without trying to disprove his theories."\textsuperscript{21} Shelley will not admit that mere paper evidences like stocks and bonds can be considered legitimate wealth. They clearly fail to represent any social good, any contribution to the holder to the sum of human enjoyments.\textsuperscript{22}

Shelley's ideas are largely socialistic. His opinion as to what could be rightly enjoyed as a person's own property and what could be wrongly enjoyed will be in part gathered from the following quotation:

\begin{quote}
Labor, industry, economy, skill, genius, and any similar power honorably or innocently exerted are the foundations of one description of property. All true political institutions ought to defend every man in the exercise of his discretion with respect to the property so acquired ... But there is another species of property which has its foundation in usurpation or imposture of violence, without which, by the nature of things, immense aggregations of property could never
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., Footnote, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{22}"A Philosophical View of Reform," pp. 56-57.
\end{flushright}
have been accumulated. Edward Aveling thinks the meaning of this quotation is not strained if it is paraphrased in the more precise language of Scientific Socialism, thus:

A man has a right to anything that his labor has produced and that he does not intend to employ for the purpose of injuring his fellows. But no man can himself acquire a considerable aggregation of property except at the expense of his fellows. He must either cheat a certain number out of the value of it, or take it by force.

Salt declares Shelley’s works are distinctly revolutionary and socialistic, not only in "Queen Mab" and Its Notes, but in the whole body of his writings. The 28th "Declaration of Rights" reads as follows: "No man has a right to monopolize more than he can enjoy; what the rich give to the poor, whilst millions are starving, is not a perfect favor, but an imperfect right."

He repeatedly insists that there is no wealth but the labor of man. As for that for which the working class labor, he quotes Godwin in his fifth note to "Queen Mab:"

"There is no real wealth but the labor of man . . . The poor are set to labor,--for what? . . . for the pride of powers, for the miserable isolation of pride, for the false pleasures of the hun-

23 Ibid., p. 61.
26 Prose Works, I, p. 397.
dreadth part of society." 27 This alone is enough to make him what was called a Socialist.

Aveling also reads socialism into the lines in "Song of Men of England:" "The wealth ye find another keeps." 28 Again: The source of wealth is human labor and that not the labor of the possessors of that wealth. He quotes "To the People of England":

People of England, ye who toil and groan  
Who reap the harvests which are not your own,  
Who weave the clothes which your oppressors wear,  
And for your own take the inclement air;  
Who build warm houses . . .  
And are like gods who give them all they have  
And nurse them from the cradle to the grave. 29

The rich, Shelley says, are directly indebted to the poor for the comforts they possess: "the labourer, he that tills the ground and manufactures the cloth, is the man who has to provide, out of what he would bring home to his wife and children, for the luxuries and the comforts" of the rich. 30 He "shuddered to think" that even the roof that covered him and the bed on which he lay were provided from the same source. Under these conditions, he thought, the boasted freedom of Englishmen was little better than a delusion;

27 Notes to Queen Mab, Poetical Works, IV, p. 473.
28 Ibid., IV, p. 5.
29 Ibid., IV, pp. 7-8.
there can be no freedom where there is penury and want. 31

Although Shelley admits the rights of small property-holders, he considers that large property, by the very fact that it is large, was obtained by fraud and ought to be confiscated, presumably by the state.

What men gain fairly, that they should possess;
And children may inherit idleness,
For him who earns it—this is understood;
Private injustice may be general good. 32
But he who gains by base and armed wrong,
Or guilty fraud, or base compliances,
May be despoiled; even as a stolen dress
Is stripped from a convicted thief, and the
Left in nakedness of infamy. 32

Brinton says:

One could scarcely expect so difficult a bit of construction from Shelley as even the least dogmatic of socialisms must be; but his sympathy for the poor, expressed in a hundred passages, his contempt for the commercial classes, and his conviction that labor alone makes wealth, justify his later adoption by the leaders of the Socialist Movement. 33

Salt claims it is no wonder that Owen should have spoken admiringly of the holder of these opinions, 34 or that "Queen Mab" became, as Medwin contends, the Gospel of the Owenites. 35

In Shelley's day the cure for social ills was legislative and

the establishment of a more democratic form of government. Here again, Shelley does not insist on an immediate revolution; he will tolerate kings for a while. But there is left no doubt as to his final purpose. Miserable Europe already has before her eyes a concrete refutation of the charge that republican governments are impractical in the modern world. He writes:

There is a People mighty in its youth,
A land beyond the Oceans of the West,
Where, though the rudest rites, Freedom and Truth
Are worshipped; from a glorious Mother's breast,
Who, since high Athens fell, among the rest
Sate like the Queen of Nations, but in woe,
By inbred monsters outraged and oppressed,
Turns to her chainless child for succor now,
It draws the milk of Power in Wisdom's fullest flow.

That land is like an Eagle, whose young gaze
Feeds on the noontide beam, whose golden plume
Floats moveless on the storm, and in the blaze
Of sunrise gleams when earth is wrapped in gloom;
An epitaph of glory for the tomb
Of murdered Europe may thy fame be made,
Great People! as the sands shalt thou become;
Thy growth is swift as moon when night must fade;
The multitudinous Earth shall sleep beneath thy shade. 36

For Shelley, then, the United States are the fullest vindication of the dignity of man, the unanswerable reproach to kings and lords and priests. While they endure, no one need lack the courage to believe in the ultimate salvation of mankind.

As to the methods of achieving these reforms, Shelley is not explicit. But in certain passages he has indicated methods

of political action. There is first of all passive resistance - which he never ceased to believe a practical weapon in the hands of the people. Passive resistance, Brinton believes, is hardly more than an extension of such useful political methods as boycott.\footnote{Op. cit., p. 172.}

In his work of regeneration Shelley expects a great deal from the aid of woman. Cythna is indispensable to Laon in his great work of reformation. And Cythna is the new woman to whom the divine impulses of love necessary for the regeneration of the world have been given in a purer form than to man. Woman, at present, is a hindrance to man in his struggle for liberty, for she is bound by stronger chains of convention than he. But once she is free, she becomes the most precious of allies. Emancipated woman will help to rebuild the new world.

Then, according to Shelley, there is education, prison reform, and vegetarianism. Vegetarianism, he believes, is necessary, for the consumption of animal food renders man cruel and depraved. All these methods will help prepare society for political revolution.

In "A Philosophical View of Reform" Shelley has outlined a plan of action if Parliament should refuse to reform itself. There must be a revolution, he declares, first through opinion; failing that, through violence. The majority must be convinced that these measures are necessary. They will enforce these demands by the
methods that led to the Peterloo Massacre. Their leaders will agitate their grievances ceaselessly, defy the law of libel, and thus attract persecution of the government, which is the surest way of furthering their own purposes. Taxes will be refused; public meetings will be held everywhere; petitions will load the tables of the House of Commons. Poets, philosophers, and artists, Shelley says, will join in this petitioning. If all this fails, Shelley is willing to countenance insurrection, though most reluctantly. He writes in "A Philosophical View of Reform":

I imagine, however, that before the English nation shall arrive at that point of moral and political degradation now occupied by the Chinese, it will be necessary to appeal to an exertion of physical strength. If the madness of parties admits no other mode of determining the question at issue . . .

Here the manuscript, which was never finished, breaks off.

Shelley's is certainly a radical program--one that would hardly adjust itself to a world as complex and unyielding as this world is to everyone. His prose, especially that of his later years, has far less of the youth who threw Utopian pamphlets from a Dublin balcony than has his poetry. His "A Philosophical View of Reform," if not profound speculation, is not the work of a political "miracle monger."

Of the political situation in England in 1819, he writes:

The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to inculcate with

fervor both the right of resistance and the duty of forbearance. You know my principles incite me to take all the good I can get in politics, forever aspiring for something more. I am one of those whom nothing will fully satisfy but who are ready to be partially satisfied with all that is practicable.39

Shelley gives a positive, if rather Utopian, content to his notion of liberty. Freedom, he insisted, was not only an abstract and political right, but it also involved possession of a means of livelihood and full opportunity to develop the mind and the soul. In the "Mask of Anarchy" he says:

For the labourer thou art bread,
And a comely table spread
From his daily labour come
In a neat and happy home.

Thou are clothes and fire and food
For the trampled multitude--
No--in countries that are free
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see.

To the rich thou art a check,
When his foot is in the neck
Of his victim, thou dost make
That he treads upon a snake.

Thou are Justice--ne'er for gold
May thy righteous laws be sold
As laws are in England--thou
Shield'st alike the high and low.

Thou are Wisdom--Freemen never
Dream that God will damn for ever
All who think those things untrue
Of which priests make such ado.

Thou art peace--never by thee
Would blood and treasure wasted be
As tyrants wasted them, when all
Leaged to quench thy flame in Gaul.

What if English toil and blood
Was poured forth, even as a flood?
It availed, Oh, Liberty,
To dim, but not extinguish thee.

Thou art Love--the rich have kissed
Thy feet, and like him following Christ,
Give their substance to the free
And through the rough world follow thee,

Or turn their wealth to arms, and
War for thy beloved sake make
On wealth, and war, and fraud--whence they
Drew the power which is their prey.

Science, Poetry, and Thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene, they curse it not.

Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art thou--let deeds, not words, express
Thine exceeding loveliness.40

These lines give literal expression to Shelley’s conviction that if society is to fulfill its proper function, the share of every man in the products of his labor must be large enough to insure normal development.

Shelley, the young revolutionary, retained much of his revolutionary spirit throughout the thirty years of his life. The language of "A Philosophical View of Reform" is somewhat reminiscent of the intemperate youth who wrote "Queen Mab." Individualism, insistence upon the dignity of man as man, government as the cause of all evil, the nation as sovereign, and the majority of the people counted by

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heads as the nation--these ideas are there. There is also that
haunting sense of crisis--that belief in a wonder-working catas-
trophe to follow in the generous contagion of his ideals that fill
so much of his poetry. Beckoning on to the weary toilers in the
cause of humanity is the vision of perfect peace to be attained at
last, of "such absolute perfection as Plato and Rousseau and other
reasoners have asserted, and as Godwin has with irresistible eloquence
systmatized and developed." 41

It is thus not entirely true that Shelley's views on politics
and religion became more conservative as he grew older. In his
works there is no suggestion that he ever wavered in his devotion
to Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. It would seem that in the
unfinished "Triumph of Life" Shelley had really begun to doubt his
romantic belief that feeling is everything. But this fragment is
not sufficient to change the impression produced alike by "Queen
Mab" and "Hellas," that he was ever awaiting a moral and political
miracle, seeking the blue flower of personal, yet vicarious, happi-
ness striving to live at once in heaven and on earth.

In social as in moral regeneration, love is to be the great
motive power, Shelley contended. If there is no love among men,
whatever institutions they may frame must be subservient to the
same purpose--to the continuance of inequality. Starting from

41 "A Philosophical View of Reform," p. 73.
this principle, Shelley strongly condemns the present system of society, which, he says, "must be overthrown from its foundations with all its superstructure of maxims and forms. Moral and physical evil Shelley refers to faults of those civil and religious creeds which are designed to regulate man here and his hopes hereafter. Newman White quotes John T. Coleridge as saying: "In these civil and religious creeds he seems to make no distinctions; he considers them all as bottomed upon the principles pernicious to man and unworthy of God, carried into details the most cruel, and upheld by the stupidity of many on the one hand and of selfish conspiracy on the other." Shawcross declares:

As a poet and artist, Shelley was a lover of order; in order he sees the principle of beauty whether expressed in sensuous form or in civic institutions. It is against defective institutions that his attack on society is aimed--defective because they fail to reflect outwardly the inner moral law.44

Shelley laid too much stress on the influence of institutions, ascribing to them all the evils of society. He was confident that a remodeling of institutions would bring about a complete reformation of society. Social wrongs are caused by men, and men alone can cure

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them. The individual man must do violence to himself and not to his neighbor; violence to his envy and not to the home of his neighbor; violence to his avarice and not to the family of this neighbor; violence to his sin, and not to the shop of his neighbor. Then the regeneration of his lower self will make more glorious the life that he seems to have destroyed.

It cannot be said that Shelley had a clear conception of the social forces at work in society or the good accomplished by the institutions of his time. He himself admitted that he detested history, and one cannot form a just estimate of institutions without knowing something of their history. Had he been familiar with the real history of Christianity or the development of the constitutional government of England, he would probably not have been so radical.

Salt says:

He repudiated and condemned in the strongest manner the dogmas of the Christian faith, and thought it a duty to utter his opinions plainly on the subject of existing religion. He felt that the spirit of established Christianity was wholly out of harmony with that of its Founder, and that a similarity on Christ was one of the qualities most detested by Modern Christians. 45

Stopford Brooke declares:

... in striking at Christianity, he does not mean to strike at Christ. His blow is directed against the popular and orthodox form of Christianity as corrupted by the Churches into despotism and not against the

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doctrine and the practice of Christ himself . . . And looking at Christ and his life, he finds that the true drift of his teaching is in direct opposition to the greater number of the doctrines taught in his name.\footnote{46} \footnote{47} \footnote{48}
Stopford Brooke and Robert Browning maintain there are indications in Shelley's works to show that he might have become a Christian. Spira and H. S. Salt express a disagreement with these surmises. Salt says:

His [Shelley's] objections to Christianity were far too deeply rooted and rested on too real a foundation to admit of any such mental transition unless one would suppose a total change in his nature, character and habits of thought. This has been very clearly put by De Quincey in his essay on Shelley.\footnote{50}

Shelley, in theorizing man, considered him in the abstract. He forget about actual conditions--man with his inequalities. In his mind the only thing necessary for the reformation of society was to lay before mankind some logical plan of action. He lost sight of the fact that other influences, besides logic, play a part in the moulding of man's conduct. So sure was he of his own goodness, so natural was it with him to love and to be loved, that he unhesitat-

\footnote{48} Essay on Shelley, (London, 1903), p. 64.
\footnote{50} Op. cit., p. 31.
ingly ascribed all the evil of the world to the working of a force which was unnatural, accidental, and anti-human. If he had grown up a medieval Christian, he would have found no difficulty in blaming the devil. Shelley was not satisfied with refusing to obey all laws; he sought to persuade others to refuse to obey them. All the happiness of his social life—and he had plenty of it—is attributable the lack of what might be called the "human touch." He had sympathy immeasurable for the miseries of mankind, but he had none for their limitations and their weaknesses. He demanded too much of people and when they were unable to meet the demands both he and they suffered. He asked Harriet to understand—Harriet, a sixteen-year old girl of orthodox training and of moderate intelligence, to cast off the whole complex code of the world she knew, to trample under her feet those things which she had been taught were good and worthy and desirable, to heed and to flaunt in the face of an outraged England animal which she could not conceive. In his zeal for a regenerate society, he expected everyone to consecrate himself to the Cause which made him unique among men. He discovered, however, that none could stand the rapid pace. Mary Godwin, alone of all those with whom he came in contact, was able in a degree to meet his superhuman requisites. Mary was able to take him as he was. With others it was different. With Harriet, who after he had left her, went to pieces and ended the Serpentine; with English society that tolerated him just so long and then ostracized him; with his father and mother and Miss Hone...
with all people, individually and collectively, with whom he came in contact. He asked too much of men and they could not oblige.

If Shelley had not been ignorant of and without political experience and the knowledge of public affairs, his "Address to the Irish People" and his "Proposals for an Association" would not have failed. He made a tactless and unpardonable error in pointing out to pious Irish Catholics the horrors formerly perpetrated by the Catholic Church, in warning them to beware of priests and refuse to practice auricular confession, in scolding them for spending their money for drink, and in prescribing that they should refrain from all violence and employ resistance of the Mind. The Irish had too long been harassed by the English government to have any faith in the efficacy of political and religious discrimination. They did not look for an ideal state; they sought a state of their own making, however faulty. The philosophers and philanthropists to whom Shelley addressed his "Proposals for an Association" were as unwilling as the less intelligent to accept the words of the self-appointed English prophet. Ireland was not so poor in intellectual and patriotic talent that she had to import her political champions from England.

Shelley once said of himself with perfect truth that in all his life he had never committed an act which he did not in his heart believe was right. Right as he saw it; that was the beginning and the end of his morality. The morality of the act, in his mind, was
to be measured by the utilitarian standard, "the greatest good of the greatest number." But how can one measure the pleasure and the pain that flows from an action? In many cases the judgment of the race must be taken; man must also be guided by prejudice. Any one who would solve all the problems of life without falling back on tradition would be obliged, in each of the decisions that he would make, to follow a line of thought or argumentation that would impose upon him an intolerable burden.

During the whole of his life as may be gleaned from his works and from his biographies, Shelley made exactly two concessions to what he believed the Anti-Christ of custom; those were his marriages with Harriet and Mary, in consent of which he waived his dearest principles for the sake of the women he loved. He believed that justice is virtue. If justice be virtue, then constancy is virtue. Even though a man should sacrifice his happiness by his constancy, he has sworn that he will be constant. One is led to agree with Herbert Read who says: "If Shelley had not so defiantly deserted Harriet, if he had not so defiantly committed adultery with Mary Godwin, if the consequences of his action had not been so tragic, one would not have had so much righteous indignation about his character and conduct. Shelley's morals would have been confined to an essay and readers would have been free to reject or accept his work at will. But Shelley sinned against the most sacred clause in

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the social code of his time and as a result has been vilified as a person and depreciated as a poet. Shelley's case should be a convincing argument that Christianity is necessary for the happiness and well-being of mankind.

The charge that Shelley was libertine has been refuted by Hogg, his most intimate friend at Oxford, who says that the purity and sanctity of Shelley's life were most conspicuous. "He was offended, and indeed more indignant than would appear to be consistent with the singular mildness of his nature at a coarse and awkward jest, especially if it were immodest and uncleanly; in the latter case his anger was unbounded, and his uneasiness preeminent. With the exception of his elopement with Mary Godwin there is nothing in his life to indicate that he was licentious. Otto Maurer says:

Die Ruhe, Klarheit, Sicherheit and Starke seines geschlechtlichen Empfindens, das frei ist von aller Lusternheit oder Unnaturliehtheit, ist bei seiner feinfuhlligen, nervosen kographeranlage besonders bemerkenswert.56

Apart from his two marriages, Shelley "played the game" according to the rules of his own heart and nothing that either men or the gods would do was sufficient ever to make him change or falter or repent. His nature was singularly simple--one piece--in that he never permitted his integrity of personality, his "sanctity of soul"

54 Ibid., p. 74.
56 "Shelley und die frauen," Literarhistorische Forschungen. (Berline, 1906), Heft, XXXIII, p. 74.
to be changed or modified by things outside of himself. Except in cases of his two marriages there is no record of there ever having been the slightest discrepancy between what he believed wrote, and did.

His life was a sustained attempt to maintain his individuality and to force the world to adjust itself to his own ways, because he knew that they were the right ways; and in the effort he forfeited his happiness. He would make no concessions, nor surrender the essential entity of himself to the arbitrary entity of society. His one rule of life was to be "himself." It is unfortunate, William P. Trent observes, that Shelley never came into close personal contact with Burke, who could have taken him out of the region of the imagination and made him appreciate the beauty of order and institutions. Had Shelley met such an individual, he might have been influenced in the way that the Greek St. Augustine was benefited by the Roman Ambrose.

The objection might be raised that although Shelley's imagination was very strong, still he was guilty of great wrong to Harriet. But the imagination is only one-half the mould which forms the perfect man; the other half is composed of reason and revealed religion. Where imagination, reason, and revealed religion are bound together,

one may expect great men. Shelley possessed the motive power of imagination and the guiding force of reason, but he lacked revealed religion. Trelawny says that Shelley stinted himself to the bare necessities, and then often lavished money saved by unprecedented self-denial on selfish individuals, who denied themselves nothing.

Shelley's society, then, like the Christian social order is built on the basis of fraternity, namely, one inspired by the love motive. In Shelley this motive is sentiment, feeling, with its authority residing in the hearth; in the Christian order it is Christianity, with Christ as its authority. The love which Shelley inculcates is represented by him as resulting from innate goodness, the natural benevolence of mankind, and not from any sense of religious obligation. Liberty for Shelley means the right to do, to think, or to say whatever he pleased without any regard for society, tradition, objective standards or authority. For him liberty was a means to an end, for only the free can become just and wise. His contention was that virtue results from intuitive desire to promote the happiness of others, and that morality must languish in proportion as freedom of thought and action is withdrawn. This code of morals can certainly not be held to be compatible with the doctrines of Christianity. Liberty for the Christian means the right to choose between good things in order to develop the highest reaches of personality. Shelley would produce

equality in society by overthrowing it from its foundations with all its superstructure of maxims and forms. He was alive to the inequalities of wealth and to the unequal tax burdens imposed on the poor, but his solution for these was political rather than economic. The noble has too much; therefore, he is wretched and wicked; the peasant, too little; therefore he is unhappy. Shelley's ideal anarchism is a state of equality founded not on the competitive or baser element of human nature, but on the higher and ultimately more powerful element which is love. Christians believe equality will follow when all men as Christian individuals realize that they are brothers under the Fatherhood of God and that they must function for the common, not the individual, good of society.

Shelley was born in an age which had a definite task to perform. He confronted it as a critic, and offered it his remedy; but he wished to solve the problems by educating the sensibilities of mankind until all oppressors should be too tenderhearted to oppress.

With respect to Shelley's doctrine of universal benevolence, Professor Morton Zabel says:

Here is one of the most explicit anticipations of the theory of esthetic benevolence which Ruskin spent his life popularizing; it is a fragmentary evidence of the wider and more practical popularity which Shelley's ideas might have enjoyed had he lived to carry out the 'necessitarian' program in which Godwin had early schooled him, and which might thus have made him in the eyes of
the British public not an anarchist but the 'saviour of men' he had desperately aspired to be.60

He was a sentimental or sympathetic rather than a philosophical critic inasmuch as he inflamed wills rather than enlightened minds; he aroused men to action instead of solving difficult problems. His enthusiasm and expansiveness are reflected in a type of criticism in which judgment is totally subordinated to emotion.

CONCLUSION

Shelley's social and political ideas are the natural outgrowth of his individualism, of the teachings of the French radical school as expressed by Thomas Paine and William Godwin, and of the conditions of society in which he lived. His precursors might be arranged as follows: first, Plato and other classical writers such as Lucretious; then the philosophers of the Enlightenment like Locke and Hume and their platonic counterparts, Berkeley and Spinoza; and finally the school of philosophical radicalism which begins with Rousseau, includes Helvetius and Concorcoet, and ends with Godwin. It must not be supposed that Shelley accepted all these philosophers in equal measure. Plato was his touchstone and to Plato he could ascribe what was most sympathetic in others. But he was guided, of course, by his own intuition of truth.

Among his contemporaries in England Shelley stood alone. The other great romantic poets fit less perfectly in the scheme of the times; they were not, like Shelley, comprehensive in their interests or fundamentally expressive of their age in its totality. They were poets--great poets--and each of them, according to his lights, was a true representative of his time; they were not, however, so tremendously significant historically as he. They lacked his universality. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats were the supreme "poets of escape." The first two, in their youth, had hailed the coming of
the Revolution with joy and anticipation; they, too, had their bright gaudy dream about an ideal society and had planned their promised land on the banks of the euphonious Susquehanna. But the brutalities of the French Revolution proved too much for them. So Wordsworth and Coleridge devoted their time toward the creation of poetry of surpassing beauty. Their descent is not from the main stream of the eighteenth century rationalism as was Shelley's, but from the early romantic poets of the unromantic age— from Thomson, Gray, Cowper, Blake, and Burns.

Having definitely decided that the world as it exists is wholly evil but that it may be altogether good, Shelley immediately set about remedying it. There were, he believed, two means whereby man might hope to achieve perfection: one was governmental reform; the other individual reform. Government is an evil and must eventually be abolished. But Shelley realized that it cannot be dispensed with until all men have become true and wise and good.

Love was to be the great motive power in Shelley's social as well as moral regeneration. He held that if love were lacking in men, whatever institutions they may frame must produce inequality. Convinced that social evils are due to this inequality, Shelley condemned the present system of society and urged that it be overthrown from the foundation with all its superstructure of maxims and forms. He contended that if the properties of aristocrats were resolved into their original stock, and if each would earn his own
living, each would be happy and contented, and crime and the temptation to crime would scarcely exist.

For a remedy of social ills Shelley looked to a growing sense of disinterestedness and justice in men. He had little faith in political economy. Gentleness, virtue, wisdom, and endurance were the four great moral virtues on which Shelley insisted, while of the opposing vices, tyranny, custom, and revenge were those he deprecated. He deprecated cruelty and insolence of all kinds; and his vegetarianism was not mere fastidious crochet, but was directly connected with his belief in universal love. He was too large-minded and clear-minded to be able to restrict his benevolence to mankind alone or to view with equanimity the sufferings of lower animals.

One may doubt whether a saint has ever lived more selfless, more devoted to the beauty of virtue; but Shelley lacked one quality, which is commonly counted a virtue. He had none of the imaginative sympathy of other men. Self-interest, tolerance, and greed he understood as little as common men understand heroism and devotion. He had no mean powers of observation; he saw the world as it was, and, perhaps, he rather exaggerated than minimized its ugliness. But it never occurred to him that its follies and crimes were human failings and the outcome of anything that is natural in the species. The doctrine of perfectibility and universal benevolence clothed
themselves for him in Godwinian phraseology, but they were the instinctive beliefs of his own temperament.

It must not be understood that Shelley merely expected the perfection of man because he believed it possible. The one condition he postulated for human perfection was the abolition of political and religious restraints; the other, that universal love should become the supreme guide of human conduct.

Shelley's two most fatal errors were, first, his postulating that man is naturally good and that all that is necessary to make him perfect is to relieve him of the encumbering laws of religion, government, and customs; and secondly, the attempt to prove the truth of his supposition by refusing to obey these laws himself and by seeking to persuade others to refuse them.

Shelley is, then, the prophet of a pure faith in nature and in reason; Rousseau and Godwin unite in him. Some of Shelley's most desired measures have been realized—universal education and universal suffrage. He is today honored as one of the founders of the great political movement. Surely his political ideas are not in themselves less visionary than they were a century ago. His Utopian faith is in itself as unmixed with the lessons of experience as ever. His principle is simply revolution by miracle, the conquest of the promised land by a mere sounding of the trumpets of desire. He wants to achieve earthly happiness without earthly suffering. Even those who wish well to socialism may suspect it of entertaining an analogous desire.
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for

SHELLEY AS A CRITIC OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS

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The thesis, "Shelley as a Critic of Society and Politics", written by Sister Mary Ursula Vogel, O.S.F., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Morton D. Zabel, Ph.D.  
November 20, 1939

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