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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF
THE POET SHELLEY



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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE POET SHELLEY

BY

EDWARD CARPENTER

AND

GEORGE BARNEFIELD

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*THE PSYCHOLOGT OF THE
POET SHELLET*

BY

EDWARD CARPENTER

LATE studies in the Psychology of Sex have led to some interesting speculations with regard to the poet Shelley ; and it is with pleasure that I write a few lines by way of introduction to the following paper by my friend, George Barnefield, which puts very clearly, as I think, some points in Shelley's temperament which have hitherto been neglected or misunderstood, and which call for renewed consideration.

Not having myself made a special study of the Modern Psychology, I do not pretend to certify to the absolute truth of the theories put forward by Mr. Barnefield, but I do certainly think, after due consideration, that they are worthy of *very* careful study. The profound divergence of Shelley's ideals from the accepted forms of our modern life is a subject which, though it has always attracted attention, has never, I think, been adequately explained or even *presented* for

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intelligent comprehension ; and it is only perhaps in late years that it has become possible, through the great advances that have been made in psychological Science, to arrive at a valid understanding of the inner nature of our greatest modern poet

It has been a sort of commonplace of literary criticism to talk somewhat vaguely of Shelley's feminine appearance and disposition, or to quote (in passing) Matthew Arnold's remarks about his "ineffectual wings," or again to dwell on the poet's more or less proved liability to delusions ; but there has (quite naturally) been no attempt to relate these peculiarities to each other or to see their real bearing on the subject under discussion. And this attitude has made it easy for hostile critics to spread exaggerated and unfounded ideas.¹

¹ I remember very well that my own father (who was born in 1793, that is, one year later than Shelley)—though of active and original mind and quite advanced views—did strongly disapprove of the poet's ideas, as generally represented and reported, especially on the subject of Marriage. Knowing my father so well, and through him having obtained glimpses of the current public opinion of that period, I appreciate all the more the mental ckrity and boldness of the growing boy (for

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The points which I wish to bring to notice in the present Introduction are (1) the degree to which the love-element and interest saturate all Shelley's poetry; (2) how, while showing the utmost boldness in facing out certain problems connected with sex (incest, polygamy, etc.), he does at the same time treat with marked reserve and a kind of childlike innocence any direct reference to physical sex-acts; and (3) the modern or Freudian view that the origin of mental delusions can frequently be traced to some intimate disturbance or repression of a love-passion.

With regard to (I) it has to be noted of course that while the love-interest occupies such a large part of the general field of Shelley's poetry, it occurs almost always in a very diffused and abstract form. I need only refer in this connexion to three of his main poems, namely, to *Prometheus*

such Shelley was at that time) who so decisively cast aside the conventions that surrounded him at Eton and in his highly respectable home, and walked forth single-minded and unafraid into the great world, and to "dare the unpastured dragon in his den,"

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Unbound, in which the love-invocations are strangely ethereal, extending directly and confessedly to all of Nature and Humanity, but never dwelling for a moment on the concrete corporeal charm of a single human being ; or to *Epipsychidion*, in which there is a like diffusion and abstractness, though the confessed inspiration of the love is a known and acknowledged Woman (Emilia Viviani) ; or again to *Adonais*, in which the definitely portrayed and glorified object of the poem is a *Man*. In all these cases (I need hardly say) sex and the sex-contacts which play so conspicuous a part in quite modern literature, are kept well in the background. Whatever Shelley's real sentiments may have been, these matters are certainly treated by him as quite subordinate and hardly demanding consideration.

This idealising habit was rooted in the very grain and texture of Shelley's mind ; and though it may be open to a Mechanical Age to scoff at the same, yet there remains a seed of prophecy in it and a promise of

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deliverance from that double nightmare which continually oppresses us, and from which we so hardly discern the means of escape. I mean the Nightmare of Gold and the Nightmare of Blood.¹ For to-day the delusion of monetary gain is indeed a nightmare; it clouds all free and spontaneous activity of the human spirit, and its paralysing influence derives from the false though ingrained belief that only by sacrificing our lives in the pursuit of riches shall we be able (each one of us) to escape into *freedom*; while the delusion of Redemption by the spilling of Blood (which from the beginning of the world has been accepted

¹ See Shelley's *Witch of Atlas*, stanza xviii (quoted below, p. 18). There are several other references to "Gold and Blood," which show what importance he ascribed to the association; as for instance:

Queen Mab, section 4, line 195 :

"when his doom is scaled in gold and blood"

Triumph of Life, line 287 :

"and spread the plague of gold and blood abroad"

Charles the First, line 61 :

"he looks elite, drunken with blood and gold"

Hellas, line 246:

"blood is the seed of gold."

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as the orthodox means of Salvation) is now confirmed by our failure to perceive that whoever seeks to gain advantage for himself by sacrificing others is really tightening the chains of his *own* captivity. Shelley, being free from either of these delusions, may be counted the prophet of a new era for mankind.

Yet, at the time in question, Shelley himself was constantly "in love"; and either on the one hand exalting the objects of his adorations into an ideal sphere, or on the other hand claiming perfect liberty and license of action and expression for them. How are we to reconcile these varying attitudes and moods—or is it not necessary to reconcile them? . . . Perhaps this last suggestion is the best. Like most predominantly emotional people, though liable to kaleidoscopic variations of outlook, any sustained effort to harmonise these and render them *consistent* with each other was painful and irksome to him. Yet it is this very variability (but with nucleus of iron

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determination and persistence) which is largely the key and explanation of Shelley's character. It gave him his wide sympathy with and understanding of different and almost opposing types of humanity, and gave him at the same time his strong determination to get at the root of things—with the result that he ultimately combined in himself a great range of qualities, both masculine and feminine. If he had had a longer and more effective experience of the actual world (so we sometimes think) it might have been possible for him to bring into line or give even more definite form and expression to these two sides of his nature. Familiarity with the work-a-day world of practical life would, we think, have made it difficult for him to linger much longer among the abstract beauties of Nature—the "mountains and fountains" of his youthful dreams; and would have compelled him into another region where he would have found an abundance of quite solid building material ready to his hand.

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Prometheus Unbound carries the love of Nature into the realm of the Ideal ; and *Epipsychidion* does the same for the love of Woman ; but *Adonais* to most English ears sounds strange in its loving and highly imaginative glorification of a *Man* ; yet it is a long and elaborately wrought poem, and perhaps in some ways the most carefully written and direct and concrete of Shelley's greater works. " To that high Capital where kingly death Keeps his pale Court in beauty and decay. . . ." It seems impossible for anyone to be insensible to the charm and distinction of the language—its warmth, its intensity, its glorious movement. Yet how are the love-expressions in it to be taken ? Are they to be put aside as amiable but rather meaningless enthusiasms, or are they to be interpreted directly and candidly, as *meaning what they say* ? A foreigner once said to me, " You English have a strange and sinister gift for pretending that you do not see things which are straight before your eyes." . . . Shelley

The Psychology of the Poet Shelley was not like that. His lovely candour, his crystalline purity of mind, would not brook disguise, or countenance any harlotry with deceit, and a great part of his precious life was consumed in tearing from his own eyes the bandages which the feeble conventions of that age had bound around them. For a boy at school to adore and idealise one of the masters, *and to say so*, must have seemed at that time a thing outrageously contrary to all the traditions of British respectability ; yet the young Percy's devotion to Dr. Lind (see the first stanzas of *Prince Athanase*) has a touch of more than romance about it, and it is well-known that the growing boy always kept a sacred place in his heart for the memory of this his former teacher. There are two fragments of *Prince Athanase* preserved to us, and in the second of these the boy seems to recall the very words of " that divine old man " when he says :

Dost thou remember yet
When the curved moon, then lingering in the west,
Paused in yon waves her mighty horns to wet,

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How in those beams we walked, half resting on the sea ?
'Tis just one year—sure thou dost not forget.
Then Plato's words of light in thee and me
Lingered like moonlight in the moonless east,
For we had just then read—thy memory
Is faithful now—the story of the feast;¹
And Agathon and Diotima seemed
From death and dark forgetfulness released.

I quote this passage almost complete, not only on account of its great intrinsic beauty, but because it holds for us something that was evidently very dear to the young poet—the memory of how he and his old friend had on one occasion walked on the shore together reciting in intimate converse the words of Agathon and Diotima as recorded in that most precious of the Platonic dialogues, the *Symposium*—a memory evidently very precious to Shelley, just because of his love for the one old man who in the desert of those Eton days had gone out of his way to encourage and assist him.

I say that this devotion to Dr. Lind—the devotion of a schoolboy to one many years

¹ Plato's *Banquet*.

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his senior—throws great light on the inner nature of the youth and exposes for us how the latter's affections might well, at that time, have had an ideal cast and character, and not have been entirely swayed by the ordinary pandemic love of the male for the female.

Among the fragments of Shelley's poems preserved to us, there is one short piece of only a few lines from *Epipsychidion*, written apparently in allusion to (or suggested by) a well-known statue in the Louvre, the Hermaphrodite.

And others swear you're a Hermaphrodite,
Like that sweet marble monster of both sexes,
Which looks so sweet and gentle that it vexes
The very soul that ¹ the soul is gone,
Which lifted from her limbs the veil of stone.

I quote this, not because the allusion *to an hermaphrodite* positively proves anything, but because it certainly *illustrates* the poet's wide-ranging interest in whatever might possibly fall within the domain of human experience. And, indeed, there are quite a

¹ I.e. To think.

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few other references among the Poems to this subject of Hermaphrodites. A careful reading, for instance, of *The Witch of Atlas* shows that the creation of a strange Being of double sex is the central theme of that weirdly beautiful poem. The supposed mother of this Being was "a lovely lady garmented in light" and around her birth (a thing, indeed, most interesting to us) floats the age-long prophecy of the ultimate redemption of mankind.¹

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device
Which taught the expiations at whose price
Men from the gods might win that happy age,
Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;
And which might quench the earth-consuming rage
Of gold and blood—till men should live and move
Harmonious as the sacred stars above.

Here one can hardly do otherwise than pause a moment over the vision indicated—the epitome and exposure of the mortal sins and consequent disasters which afflict

¹ See for reference to this general prophecy, ch. ix of *Pagan and Christian Creeds*, by E. Carpenter. (George Allen & Unwin, 1921.)

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our modern world—"the earth-consuming rage of Gold and Blood." When we contemplate the frantic scramble of to-day (insanely and murderously furious as it is) in pursuit of Gold, and the rivers, the oceans of Blood poured out in the horrible process, when we think of the regiments and regiments of soldiers and mercenaries mangled and torn (and each one having wife or daughter or friend or lover to give his or her life in exchange), when we realise *what* all this horrible scramble means, including the endless slaughter of the innocent and beautiful animals, and the fear, the terror, the agony in which the latter exist—we can but pay homage to the clear-eyed youth who, with lightning swiftness, leapt to the understanding of the whole sordid situation, and saw that only a new type of human being combining the male and the female, could ultimately save the world—a being having the feminine insight and imagination to perceive the evil, and the manly strength and courage to oppose and finally annihilate it.

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And so (returning to *The Witch of Atlas*) we find that the double-natured one, the Hermaphrodite, was bidden extend his storm-outsweeping wings,¹ till the vision of the coming redemption should at last descend upon the earth, while at the same time with regard to the lady witch herself it is said :

With motion like the spirit of that wind
Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet
Past through the peopled haunts of human kind,
Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet
Through fane and palace-court, and labyrinth mined
With many a dark and subterranean street . . .

Finally, even the soldiers have visions, they dream that they are beating their swords into plough-shares !

Thus it will be perceived that this poem, *The Witch of Atlas*, if closely looked into, discloses itself as a description, and, indeed, as a prophecy, of the coming of a being who was to combine the characteristics of the two sexes, and whose arrival on the Earth, and acknowledged sway there, was to be the

¹ Stanza xlvi.

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signal of the coming of a new age. Perhaps, indeed, Shelley saw (in the radiance of the inner light) that in the process of the world-evolution such a being would inevitably arise. But the poem, as might be expected, is somewhat carefully wrapt up in its expression, and disguised in its general content by digressions, so that the casual and hasty reader (and likely enough this was its author's desire and contrivance) is partly lost and does not always attain to catch the real purport and intention of the whole.

Perhaps it is this—this careful wrapping up and concealment of the main purport—which explains the curious neglect on the part of critics and others, from which the poem has suffered this long time—all the more curious because one might certainly have been inclined to suppose beforehand that the air of mystery would have had the opposite effect, namely of directing attention to the poem. Professor Dowden, for example, who is usually very scrupulous about such matters, gives hardly any space

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to *The Witch of Atlas* ; and Mrs. Campbell
(*Shelley and the Unromantics*), who is gener-
ally a keen and active-minded observer,
ignores the work altogether ! one is left
to conclude (as the omissions could hardly
be accidental) that these and other critics
have deliberately passed the poem by on
account of its fanciful and Utopian character,
yet this in itself is hardly an adequate
reason, since in reality the importance of
the poem consists in the veritable glimpse
it affords of the working of Shelley's mind
and of the ideals which he entertained, rather
than in the actual practicability of the
latter.

The third point that I wish to emphasise
is the conclusion, derived from modern
psycho-sexual studies, that delusions and
mental aberrations can frequently be traced
to some disturbance or repression of an inti-
mate love-passion.

Apart from Freud and all his works, we can
easily see the great probability of this con-
clusion. The love-instinct roots so deep

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and dates so far back—even to the very beginnings of human life in the earth—that necessarily any displacement of it affects the human being most profoundly. It would not do to say at once and without collateral evidence that Shelley's mental disturbances were due to repressed or disappointed love, but we have to hold that clue in mind, remembering at the same time his *extremely* emotional and imaginative nature. Shelley's later love-affairs are pretty well known, but there does not seem to be one among them which quite answers the requirements of the case. Harriet Grove and Harriet Westbrook may soon be dismissed. Mary Godwin had more hold on the poet's affection, but her nature was cold and argumentative—too like her father's—and there is little indication of an attachment between her and the poet sufficiently passionate to cause by its rupture any actual dislocation of the latter's mind. Trelawny, with whom on one occasion I had a longish conversation, was somewhat contemptuous of Mary as a

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rather shallow person much attracted by society considerations; and though I think Trelawny himself was often swayed by prejudice and personal bias, yet it must be allowed that he knew Mary pretty well. Then there is Emilia Viviani (alluded to above) to whom Shelley wrote the long and enthusiastic poem *Epipsychidion*; but here again, though the poem is full of rarely beautiful passages, one cannot help feeling that it is "up in the air" all the time—a charming piece of work, but wanting in actuality and grip on life.

There remain Shelley's attachments to men friends, but these again are somewhat disappointing. Hogg, whose name is often associated with that of the poet, was, one would say, a rather uninspiring creature, but who has this claim to our respect—that he certainly was genuinely attached to Shelley. Though rather commonplace in character, it yet may be said of him that he was virile and of quite keen intellect. He was also very susceptible to feminine attractions. He

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obviously liked Shelley much ; but Shelley may fairly be said to have loved *him*, and in quite romantic manner. Then, at a later time, there appeared that other devoted friend, Trelawny, who, after reading Shelley's Poems could not rest till he had made the poet's acquaintance, and who after that returned again and again to the poet's side, and to be with him. He was a very different type from Hogg, somewhat bombastic, but spirited and adventurous.

One concludes that Shelley certainly attracted the devotion of his men friends ; and on the other hand, that he was capable of warm and faithful attachment to them, some of them.¹

This is, I think, clearly indicated not

¹ " The charge of fickleness in friendship, so often brought against Shelley, is disproved by the simple fact that to the last day of his life he remained true to those who called him friend Leigh Hunt, Peacock, Hogg, Medwin, Williams, Trelawny" (*Percy Shelley, Poet and Pioneer*, by H. S. Salt, p. 62, footnote).

After the quantity of somewhat trashy stuff that has been poured out concerning Shelley, it is, indeed, a joy to come upon a book so keen and clear, and withal so well-based on the fundamental facts and principles of social life, as Mr. Salt's *Shelley as Poet and Pioneer* (George Allen & Unwin).

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only by his relations with Hogg and by numerous passages in *Adonais* and other poems, but by the fact of his giving so much time and thought to the translation of Plato's *Symposium* (whose chief subject, of course, is love between men) as well as to the study (see his letters) of the Greek statuary. Modern psychoanalysis has forced on people recognition of the fact that avoidance of certain words or of allusions to certain subjects does not by any means justify one in concluding that such words or subjects were not present to the speaker's or writer's mind. Rather the contrary. In many cases (as Barnefield reminds us) such avoidance indicates an *over-self-consciousness* which leads the speaker or writer to suppress the very things which interest him *most*, or the words which would betray his interest.

Shelley was by his very nature greatly in advance of his age. And *The Witch of Atlas* shows this. All through that strange poem there peep in and out suggestions of sex-variation and of variations in sex-

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attractions That poem was written a hundred years ago, but to-day the same subjects have become almost an obsession, and situations are freely handled and discussed which would (as the saying goes) cause our grandfathers and grandmothers to turn in their graves ! What there may be preparing we do not know ; but we can see that civilisation has arrived at a cusp or turning-point in its progress, where further movement is likely to be in a quite unexpected direction. Love between two persons of like sex is nowadays widely accepted, as being an attachment resting on a sympathy and soul-union very deep and sincere—even though it may elude the physical ties or take little account of them.

The modern Woman's movement—so concrete and world-wide in its character—seems destined to impress this more feminine conception of love on the present age. That movement began with Mary Wolstonecra^t,
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¹ See also in this connexion the writings of the great Goethe—his *Wilhelm Meister*, his references to Griechische Liebe in his Diaries, etc.

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whose *Rights of Women* is even to this day one of the very best books on the subject with which it deals ; and one can trace her influence extending down into the mind and philosophic outlook of Shelley, and colouring many passages in his poems. I do not, of course, mean that this last variety of affection (*comradeship* it might be called) was the only or even chief variety in Shelley's mind. But there it was, and quite possibly it was kept out of sight just on account of the strange spell or attraction the subject exercised upon him.

Without having myself any prejudice against those people whose *predominant* love-attraction is towards their own sex, and believing, as I do, that many of that type belong to the highest ranges of humanity, I still do not think that Shelley quite shared their temperament. What temperamental changes he might have *developed* in the further course of his unfinished life, of course we do not know ; but his fervent and unceasing idealisation of his female

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friends does, to my mind, make any contention of the above kind seem decidedly difficult. Shelley was quite normal, I should say, in the majority of his love affairs ; but his rapid and fertile imagination may have rendered it possible for him (as in *The Witch of Atlas*) to leap to the understanding of things which to the majority of human beings still remain occult and unintelligible.

It will be remembered that in the last-mentioned poem, when the Wizard-lady steps into the boat which is destined to bear her through all the Kingdoms of the Earth, she brings to birth there (or creates) :

A living Image which did far surpass
In beauty that bright shape of vital stone
Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.
A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
It seemed to have developed no defect
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both.
* * * * *

And ever as she went the Image lay
With folded wings and unawakened eyes
And o'er its gentle countenance did play
The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies.

The word that will necessarily attract

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attention here is the word "sexless." When one recalls what was said at the very outset of this paper, namely, that the love-element and love-interests *saturate* all Shelley's poems, and recalls also the degree to which in modern life the word "love" is wedded and welded with the thought of *sex*, one cannot help wondering whether he intentionally inserted this word "sexless" in order to indicate a change which was taking place in his mind, or whether he felt such a change to be impending. One need not press the point, but the passage suggests that he was thinking of a new type of human being (at present folded in sleep, but whose coming he perhaps foresaw)—a being having the grace of both sexes, and full of such dreams as would one day become the inspiration of a new world-order, yet of such a nature that its love would *not* be dependent (as, indeed, most loves now are) on mere sexual urge and corporeal desire, but would be a vivid manifestation of the universal creative Life, in the body even as in the soul. This word

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"sexless" occurs again—so that it does not appear to be quite accidental—in stanza Ixviii of the same poem, where the author in truly Shelleyan fashion describes the lady of the boat as "like a sexless bee tasting all blossoms and confined to none"—a wizard-maiden floating down the torrent of this life "with eye serene and heart unladen."

Whether Shelley believed in this Vision of a new type—in the sense of thinking it would ever become an actual and realisable thing—may be left undecided, but as an indication of the kind of dream that was at that time occupying his mind, it seems to me of the greatest interest. I think somehow that his instinctive feelings *were* pointing out the actual direction of our future evolution. There is no doubt that in the present day Sex is ceasing to wield the glamour which once surrounded it. We know too much about it! Its queer vagaries and anomalies, its variations and fluctuations (dating from past ages of the world) have been almost *too* well and exhaustively studied.

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Sex in its ordinary procedure seems to belong to a somewhat ancient and pre-human order of things, clumsy and elephantine and, like many ancient institutions, oppressive in the last degree to *women*. And the question which now remains for us to ask will be as follows : Is it not very probable that those human types of the future which have *both* elements, the masculine *and* the feminine, present in their natures, will *not* be so sexually excitable as those other types (with whom we have been more familiar in the past) who being built, like Plato's divided sections of humanity, on a lop-sided plan, are always rushing about to find their lost counterparts, and rather madly and incontinently plunging into new relationships, which again they dissolve almost as soon as contracted ? And may we not reasonably expect that those people whose natures contain both elements will be more stable and reliable than the others, while at the same time—since they share the great driving-force of the universe—they

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will by no means be wanting in life and energy ?

On all sides to-day we hear of the existence of such double-natured folk, and though it *may be* that at certain periods they become more than usually numerous, yet the evidence shows that in *all* ages and places they have been frequent. Jacobus Le Moyne, who travelled as an artist with a French expedition to Florida in 1564, left some very interesting drawings representing the Indians of that region and their customs; and among them one representing the " Hermaphrodites," as they were at that time called, apparently tall and powerful men, beardless, but with long and abundant hair, and naked except for a loin cloth, who were represented as engaged in carrying wounded or dying fellow-Indians on their backs or on litters to places of safety. He says of them that, " in Florida such folk of double nature are frequent . . . and, indeed, those who are stricken with any infectious disease are borne by the Hermaphrodites to certain

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appointed places, and nursed and cared for by them, until they may be restored to full health." Quite similar stories are told by Charleroix, de Pauw, and others ; and one seems to get a glimpse in them of an intermediate class of human beings who made themselves useful to the community, not only by their muscular strength but by their ability and willingness to act as nurses and attendants on the sick and dying. Similar types exist in abundance to-day as we know; but it is needless to say that they are *not* Hermaphrodites in the strict sense of the term—i.e. human beings uniting in one person the complete functions both male and female—since there is no evidence that such beings do in actual fact exist ! But it is evident that they *were* what we call intermediate types, in the sense of being men with much of the psychologic character of women, or in some cases women with the mentality of men ; and the early travellers, who had less concrete and reliable information than we have, and who were already

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prepossessed by a belief in the possibility of complete Hermaphroditism, leapt easily to the conclusion that these strange beings were indeed of that double nature.¹

It is quite possible, and, indeed, probable, that Shelley, who was an omnivorous reader, had already come across suggestions in this direction. Plato alone would have given him much food for thought. The god Dionysus, one of the very finest figures in the Greek mythology, and one whose features have often been compared with those of Christ, is frequently represented as Androgyne (double-sexed). Apollo is portrayed in the sculptures with a feminine—sometimes extremely feminine—figure. The great hero Achilles passed his youth among women, and in feminine disguise. And so on, and so on.

A big school such as Eton usually provides for a boy of genius like young Percy a really terrible experience, soul-destroying

¹ For these and many other similar references see *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk* (George Allen & Unwin, 1919) ; also *The Intermediate Sex*, pp. 24, 25, 46, 47, 58, 59, etc.

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and calculated to crush out all originality; yet there are occasions when even such a place may become the nurse of heroic inspirations, and may kindle in a young soul the redeeming flame of splendid ambition. For such a school is a miniature of the great world, and may bring the boy into closest contact, friendly or hostile, with every variety of character and temperament, and so may rouse and develop faculties which under ordinary circumstances would have remained dormant. We see in Mr. Barnefield's paper how a vivid and absorbing attachment sprang up between Percy and a young school-friend, which the elder folk, as we gather (and quite as usual), did *not* encourage. We now see—and late psychological studies have made this abundantly clear—that love, even a quite unregulated though ardent love, may become in boyhood one of the best guides and tutors of the growing soul. And we know, too, that such an attachment between persons of like sex (whether in school-life or apart from it) as between two

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youths or two young women, or between a grown man and a boy, or an elder woman and a girl—though deprived of some of love's recognised and obvious satisfactions—may contain, and often does contain, the elements of a deep and lasting devotion.

In large schools all sorts of soul-shattering experiences occur and recur—violent enthusiasms, insane jealousy, bitter hatreds, rivalries, sexual outrages, and so forth. There are two very common results: one attraction, the other repulsion.

Imagine for a moment a boy of Shelley's high idealism of mind suddenly transported into such a Babel ! It is difficult for outsiders to quite realise or face the situation, at any rate as it was at that time—the filthy talk, the gross and insolent habits, the fagging and bullying, the hideous dullness of the lessons, the beguilement of the time by sex-indulgences, the rather brutal floggings (carried out by idiotic masters under the impressions that they were suppressing lust,

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when they were really rousing and redoubling the same), etc.

That the boy of whom we are speaking, finding himself in such a situation, should have suffered a kind of agony and that consequently his mental balance should at times have been upset, seems a very moderate assumption, and one which quite possibly would account for his "hallucinations"—as far as the existence of these may be satisfactorily established.

With reference to the duplication of the elements just mentioned in Shelley's nature, it may be suggested that the blending of the masculine and feminine temperaments does undoubtedly in some cases produce persons whose perceptions are so subtle and complex and rapid as to come under the head of genius. "It may possibly point to a further grade of evolution than that usually attained, and a higher order of consciousness, imperfectly realised, of course, but indicated. This interaction, in fact, between the masculine and feminine, this mutual illumination

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of logic and intuition, this combination of action and meditation may not only raise and increase the power of each of these faculties, but it may give the mind a new quality and a new power of perception corresponding to the blending of subject and object in consciousness. It may possibly lead to the development of that third order of perception which has been called the *Cosmic consciousness*', and which may also be termed *divination*. ("He who knows the masculine," says the great Lao-tsze, "and at the same time keeps to the feminine will be the whole world's channel; Eternal virtue will not depart from him, and he will return again to the state of an infant." To the state of an infant! That is, he will become undifferentiated from Nature, who is his Mother and who will lend him all her faculties.)¹ There is a certain danger—as doubtless many writers have discovered—in talking about visions, or about Second Sight, or, indeed, about any subject

¹ See *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk*, p. 63.

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which lies near the margin of definite and measurable perception—the danger I mean for the inquirer of being set down or passed by as a mere romancer or as a foolish and credulous person whose opinion carries no weight. However, this danger occurs in many fields of human thought and inquiry, and naturally cannot be entirely guarded against. It is largely due to the paltry character of our ordinary life. A noble and active mind must surely carry with it ever-expanding powers and interests, and at each stage the new powers may well be perceived and classed as "visionary"; but that forms no reason why the vision should be immediately *rejected* ! It only forms a reason for the more careful testing of new experiences.

With regard to the fusing or blending of the two temperaments, the masculine and the feminine, it has been observed that this double evolution is often accompanied by a considerable development of higher powers, more or less occult and difficult to explain.

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Certainly this development was marked in the case of Shelley. His swift intuitions, his quite extraordinary facility in the acquirement of Greek and Latin, and in the composition of verse (not to mention other attainments) *compelled* attention. It may be that in such cases the two natures, male and female, react upon each other, stimulating to higher efforts and even fertilising each other. It has often been noticed that mediums (spiritualistic) have a like double temperament ; and it might be contended (from his frequent visions and illuminations) that Shelley was to some degree mediumistic. There is a passage in Elie Reclus' account of the Western Inuits¹ of Alaska, in which the author describes the privations and ordeals through which, in the Arctic regions, the *Angakok* has to pass in preparation for the role of prophet and diviner. " At an early age the novice courts solitude. He wanders in the long nights across silent

¹ See *Primitive Folk*, by Elie Reclus (Contemporary Science Series), p. 72.

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plains filled with the chilly whiteness of the moon ; he listens to the wind moaning over the desolate floes. And then the *Aurora borealis*' that ardently sought occasion for 'drinking in the light'—the *Angakok* mournful and rapt must absorb all its splendours ! . . . And now the future sorcerer is no longer a child. Many a time he has felt himself in the presence of Sidnd, the Esquimaux Demeter ; he has divined it by the shiver which ran through his veins, by the tingling of his flesh and the bristling of his hair. He passes through a series of initiations, knowing well that his spirit will not be loosed from the burden of dense matter until the moon has looked him in the face, and darted a certain ray into his eyes. At last, his own Genius, evoked from the bottomless depths of existence, appears to him, having scaled the immensity of the heavens and climbed across the abysses of the ocean. Uniting himself with the Double from beyond the grave, the soul of the *Angakok* flies upon the wings of the wind,

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and quitting the body at will sails swift and light through the universe."

There is much in this passage remindful of Shelley and his frequent absorption in Nature, and no one who has studied the Eastern initiations in the present day will fail to recognise what I mean. Reclus, continuing the above passage, passes in review the numerous sects of primitive religion which may be found on the surface of the globe, and then says, "I think the object of their ambition is ecstasy, union with God, absorption into the infinite spirit, into the soul of the universe." Personally, I believe somehow that Reclus is right, and that even beneath Shelley's revolt in early days against conventional religion, there is discernible this same yearning and need for identification with the universal life.

That a marked gift in the direction of ecstasy and *divination* should be associated with a certain fusion between the masculine and the feminine temperaments, might seem at first sight an unlikely proposition ; but

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as far back in history as Herodotus we find the curious remark that certain classes of Scythians, suffering from a tendency to effeminacy¹ were called Enarees or Androgynes and were *endowed by Venus with the power of Divination.*

This idea of a double sex clearly haunted the minds of early peoples, and I have suggested (*Intermediate Types*, p. 82) that this idea may date not only from the fact that the sex-temperament in its earliest form *is* undifferentiated, but also from the fact that the great leaders of mankind have so often shown this fusion in themselves. "The feminine traits in genius (as in a Shelley or a Byron) are well marked in the present day. We have only to go back to the Persian Bab of the last century, or to a St. Francis or even to a Jesus of Nazareth, to find the same traits present in founders and leaders of religious movements in historical times. And it becomes easy to suppose the same again of those early figures—

¹ See *Intermediate Types*, p. 24.

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who once probably were men—those Apollos, Buddhas, Dionysus, Osiris, and so forth—to suppose that they, too, were somewhat bi-sexual in temperament, and that it was really largely owing to that fact that they were endowed with far-reaching powers and became leaders of mankind."

Finally, and apart from any question of mental strain and want of balance, there remain certain other general points (with regard to our poet's Psychology) which we should do well to consider here. We have noted the great predominance of the love-interest in his life, and at the same time the marked idealism with which he invested matters of sex, and we are fain to see now that both these peculiarities are, in general, more markedly feminine than masculine. If we add to them the somewhat hysterical tendency indicated by Shelley's behaviour at various times, we arrive at *three* undeniable marks of the feminine temperament, and are impelled to conclude that

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the poet's nature was really intermediate (or double) in character—*intermediate* as between the masculine and feminine or *double* as having that twofold outlook upon the world.

The time has gone by when a remark of this kind could be interpreted as derogatory. On the contrary, it is quite open to anyone nowadays to take the positive line and maintain that the combination of the masculine and the feminine in this case does really indicate that the Poet had reached a *higher* level of evolution than usual. That is a conclusion at least as probable and arguable as the opposite. No one can contemplate Shelley's portrait, or read the descriptions of his personality left by his contemporaries without feeling that therein a double nature (at once both masculine and feminine) is implied and portrayed. I may mention the gazelle-like eyes, the shy yet excitable manner, the high-pitched voice, the tenderness and courage combined, the genius for passionate friendship (as shown, for in-

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stance, in early days towards that other boy at school).¹

Or again I may mention his extreme generosity, as to Emilia Viviani or to Tom Medwin, often when he himself was "on the rocks"; or his interest in, and care for, Claire Clairmont's and Byron's child, Allegra; or yet again his abiding love of the open air, his strange strength and resolution of character, united to a softness of expression and a mildness of bearing which (Trelawny says) were "deceptive"—and all these things combining to produce a weird impression as of one who hardly belonged to the ordinary world with which mortals are familiar.

In conclusion, and with regard to the somewhat pessimist tendency observable in Shelley's latest work, it is not necessary to suppose, as some do, a particular "disappointment in love" so much as to perceive that at the time of his death he had arrived at a rather penetrating perception of the

¹ See *Life of Shelley*, by Dowden, vol. i. p. 19.

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inadequacy of the existing world to meet and satisfy the inner needs of his spirit, and consequently at a certain attitude of resignation. Some of the latest events of his life rather favour this reading. There is a story told by Trelawny of how, on one occasion when he and Shelley were bathing in a deep pool in the Arno, and he was urging Shelley to lie on his back on the surface of the water, and learn to float in that way, Shelley did, indeed, remain motionless, but rapidly began to sink (as may well have really happened owing to his little corpulence of body) and Trelawny explained with his usual self-insistence how if *he* had not instantly fished Shelley out, the latter would certainly have been drowned ! It throws some light on the situation when we realise that during those few last years the poet was living almost recklessly in the presence of death. His little yacht was so cranky that there was (as he himself well knew) considerable danger in sailing it. Ballasted with lumps of pig iron, as it was on that

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last voyage, it had already become a mark for the jokes of its occupants ; and there is a story that when some observer asked him in warning tones as to what might happen if the boat were upset, Shelley gaily replied, " Why, of course, I should go to the bottom with the other pigs ! " If not strictly accurate, this story perhaps gives an effective impression, and contributes some elements of dramatic truth.

The Witch of Atlas was not approved of by Mary Shelley, because (she said), " It had no human interest," yet the author himself defends the poem vigorously, saying, " If you unveil my Witch no priest nor primate can shrive you of that sin "—from which one may conclude that the poem was in reality, and in its author's opinion, *full* of human interest, though the same might be somewhat hidden and not very obvious for Mary to discover.

Shelley's poems were by no means deficient in inner meaning, and to suppose that many of them were written merely as skits and

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freaks of fancy is to betray a non-appreciation of the almost over-intense earnestness of the Poet's mind. Women's Rights and the emancipation of Women—a subject now to the last degree approved and popular—became the main theme of *Laon and Cythna* (now entitled *The Revolt of Islam*). The praise of Marriage "warm and kind" and the beauty of a tender and permanent love constituted one of the "Many thousand" gracious schemes for the benefit of mankind, which the Witch was supposed to have invented :

Friends who by practice of some envious skill
Were torn apart—a wide wound, mind from mind,
She did unite again with visions clear
Of deep affection and of truth sincere!

And besides all this, as already indicated, there was to be a new era of universal peace for mankind :

The soldiers dreamed that they were blacksmiths, and
Walked out of quarters in somnambulism,
Round the red anvils you might see them stand
Like Cyclopes in Vulcan's sooty abysm
Beating their swords to Plough-shares.

¹ See *The Witch of Atlas*, stanza lxxvii.

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In the face of these and many other points in the poems, we can only regard it as a kind of perversity, and a last relic of ancient prejudice, to refuse to recognise Shelley's whole-hearted efforts in the great cause of human emancipation, and not to see how sincerely and at what a cost to himself these efforts were undertaken—not to see, indeed, that in his love-nature (the very kernel of his life) he was pushing his way forward to a new conception of the world, far more intimate and important than any at present generally attained to. We have alluded to Goethe already, and it is clear that the English poet, like his great German contemporary, possessed in his own nature an extraordinary sympathy with, and understanding of, every variety and phase of human temperament.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SHELLEY

BY

GEORGE BARNEFIELD

I

THE multitude of books about Shelley, and the partisan spirit which the majority of them breathe, are evidence of the force, complexity, and attractiveness of the poet's personality. The biographers, however, have all been too confused by the inherent contradictions of his character to analyse it satisfactorily. Indeed, most of them have been too much put to it justifying, or explaining away, his peculiarities ever to ask themselves calmly how and why their hero differed from the average of poetic geniuses. They paint him for us as a young, graceful, rather feminine aristocrat, of revolutionary opinions, and somewhat unstable mind. They credit him with all the Christian virtues, and especially with purity of mind ; yet they must record that

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his contemporaries saw in him a Satanist, who not only preached moral anarchy, but actually committed adultery and abandoned his faithful wife. Of explanation they are totally barren.

We may, however, explain and resolve these contradictions by the light of modern psychology. That this should give us the key to his character will seem the less astonishing if we reflect that Shelley was pre-eminently the poet of unsatisfied love, through whose every poem there sounds the note of vague, often formless, erotic longing.

Let us first repeat some of the descriptions of his appearance. In Trelawny's *Records* we find the author's first impression noted thus : "Swiftly gliding in, blushing like a girl, a tall thin stripling held out both his hands ; and although I could hardly believe, as I looked at his flushed feminine and artless face that it could be the poet, I returned his warm pressure. After the ordinary greetings and courtesies he sat down and listened.

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I was silent from astonishment: was it possible that this mild-looking, beardless boy could be the veritable monster at war with all the world ? "

In Dowden's *Life* there is a description by one of Shelley's Sion House schoolmates, Mr. Gellibrand : " Like a girl in boy's clothes, fighting with open hands, and rolling on the floor when flogged, not from pain, but from a sense of indignity."

The portraits of Shelley are not very reliable guides to his physical appearance, but they all depict him as remarkably feminine in feature. The writer remembers with amusement how an inquisitive landlady asked about a print of Clint's portrait of Shelley, which graced the walls, if it was her young lodger's sister ! Doubtless the amiable dragon suspected that it was his fiancée.

This femininity extended beyond the facial features to the poet's voice, which was shrill. If I am not mistaken one of his biographers also mentions that Shelley could not whistle

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like a man ; and his gait was peculiar and mincing.

We shall find, on closer study, that these physical traits were but the external indications of a deeper psychic femininity. Shelley, in fact, belonged to the class of double-natured, or intermediate, types—a class which embraces many artists of very diverse qualities : for example, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Wilde, and Tchaikowsky. We must, however, make clear at the outset of this paper that the poet himself was never fully aware of his inversion ; although, towards the last few years of his troubled life, there are indications that the repressed impulses were breaking through the barriers, and were forcing themselves up into con-

¹ The Vaertings, in their book, *The Dominant Sex*, (George Allen & Unwin), question how far these and other secondary sexual characteristics are in reality fundamental to, and inherent in either sex. They suggest that in any society the dominant sex acquires certain traits, while the subordinate sex acquires others. But this view does not affect the present argument. Shelley lived in our modern male-dominant civilisation, and yet was born with, or else acquired, traits which, in that society, are characteristic of women, and not of men. He therefore approximated to the current feminine type.

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sciousness. It is interesting to notice that during the period 1811 to 1814 he gave these impulses almost no expression at all, and at the same time suffered much from his delusions. But from 1817 to the end of his life, while he was expressing these impulses in a sublimated but quite recognisable form, he only had one persecutory delusion. Had he lived a few more years he would have been driven either into some final and serious neurosis, or else to some form of conscious recognition and expression of the repressed homosexual component of his nature. Perhaps fortunately for Shelley, his early death cut short the conflict.

From his early youth Shelley felt himself to be in some way radically unlike his fellows. At school he was shy, lonely, and introspective, avoiding games and seeking solitude. According to one of his contemporaries, he was disliked by his masters and hated by the elder boys, though adored by his equals in age. Certainly he suffered much at Eton where, under Dr. Keate, a

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pandemonium of indiscipline, bullying, and ferocious punishment seems to have flourished. In his manhood he was still "the companionless sensitive plant," and could portray himself as "the herd-abandoned deer, struck by the hunter's dart." He was always fundamentally out of harmony with himself and with his fellows, a prey to the melancholy of Prince Athanase :

What was this grief which ne'er in other minds
A mirror found ? He knew not. None could know.

It is sufficiently obvious that poems like *Athanase*, *Alastor*, and *The Question*, with their burden of tender melancholy and solitude were inspired by vague unsatisfied sexual emotion. Francis Thompson, in his beautiful essay on Shelley, maintained that the poet never grew beyond childhood. But, though there is much that is true in this view, it would be truer to say that in some respects Shelley remained always in the adolescent stage. For this tender sadness and vague self-pitying emotion are typical of a certain stage of adolescence,

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when the onset of puberty heightens and disturbs those impulses which, as modern psychologists are now on all sides admitting, are normal during the middle teens.

Shelley remained in some degree fixed at this phase. He was by nature liable to the warmest impulses of affection—often towards others of his own sex, and he felt Love as a woman feels it: it was "his whole existence." But it was the tragedy of his life that he lived in a society, whose whole influence, acting on him by suggestion from his earliest infancy, forced his conscious mind to seek love in the form of an idealised woman. Hence he never could achieve success, nor even peace of mind, in this quest. It was this deep-rooted, though unconscious, disparity between the sanctions of society and his own peculiar impulses, we feel, that lay at the root of his enthusiasm for Free Love. Godwin might deduce a theory of Free Love from his general philosophical premises, but with a sage of Godwin's type it remained pure theory, and did not

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become an enthusiasm. With Shelley it was different; he began with an instinctive reaction against social laws and restrictions in the sphere of sex, and his general philosophic anarchism was a later addition which served as a rationalised justification of his instinctive tendencies. The fundamental article of his revolutionary creed is given in these lines from *The Revolt of Islam* :

Man and woman,
Their common bondage burst, may freely borrow
From lawless love a solace for their sorrow.

Shelley's insistence on the idea of lawless love differs somewhat from Blake's enthusiasm for Free Love. Blake worshipped spontaneous energy and passion, which he believed to be purely masculine qualities ; and his imagination, when it dwelt on this theme, could only conjure up an entirely masculine dream of unrestricted enjoyment. In *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, the girl Oothoon woos her lover by disclaiming all jealous restrictions and offering to bring him other girls to minister to his enjoyment:

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But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon
spread,
And catch for thee girls of mild silver or of furious
gold.
I'll lie beside thee on a bank, and view their wanton
play.

In Shelley's poetry there is no such excessive and entirely masculine picture of unrestricted indulgence, nor is there any expression of the male efferent desires. When Shelley speaks on this subject he speaks as a woman might.

Then that sweet bondage which is Freedom's self
And rivets with sensation's softest tie
The kindred sympathies of human souls,
Needed no fetters of tyrannic law :
Those delicate and timid impulses
In Nature's primal modesty arose,
And with undoubted confidence disclosed
The growing longings of its dawning love.

(Queen Mab.)

Love, in Shelley's mind (as in a woman's mind) meant sympathy and the passive experience of emotions and sensations. That is why he could understand the woman's demand for freedom, and cry

Can Man be free if Woman be a slave ?

II

IT will doubtless seem, to many readers, that the question of Shelley's inversion is at once answered in the negative by the simple fact of his marriage. This, however, is a superficial view. Many quite inverted men have married, either without themselves realising the nature of their own abnormality, or for purely conventional and social reasons, or even with the hope of thus curing themselves of their inversion. We have to remember that Shelley was not conscious of having homosexual impulses ; he had never admitted them to himself. He married twice, and all through his life women influenced him. Yet his relations with them were strangely troubled, and his most intimate " affairs " were erotic failures. His calf-love for Miss Grove had no concrete basis

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of physical attraction, and it soon died out. Then came his marriage with Harriet Westbrook. He was not in love with her, however. It is certain, though not always recognised, that he married her from quixotic motives, and that the element of erotic attraction was almost entirely absent. Harriet appealed to him to save her from petty tyranny and misery at home and at school, and Shelley, feeling himself called upon to play the hero, rescued her. Doubtless he imagined that he would soon love her in the proper romantic way, but Dowden makes it clear that Harriet never at any time held the first place in his affections.

This place was held, as a matter of fact, by a young man, Thomas Hogg, to whom Shelley, a supposedly joyful groom on the eve of his romantic marriage, writes thus : " Your noble and exalted friendship, the prosecution of your happiness, can alone engage my impassioned interest. This (i.e. his approaching marriage) more resembles exerted action than inspired passion."

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In another letter he says: "The late perplexing occurrence which called me to Town occupies my time, engrosses my thoughts. I shall tell you more of it when we meet, which I hope will be soon. It does not, however, so wholly occupy my thoughts, but that you and your interests still are predominant,"

This letter is quoted in Hogg's *Life of Shelley*, with the date of August 16, 1811, *the same month in which Shelley married.*

The story of the failure of this absurd and tragic marriage is well enough known. Mary Godwin, who, like her mother, had a noticeable strain of the masculine in her, roused Shelley to a genuine romantic passion, which supplanted the remnants of his spurious chivalry for Harriet. He saw that his union with the latter was a mere mockery, founded on self-deception, and he did not hesitate to break it up. He had never been in love with Harriet; always he was in love with Love. His subsequent marriage with Mary was in many ways happy, and on the surface

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it seemed successful, for she had more than the ordinary intellect and was devoted to him. Yet it was not truly successful from the erotic point of view, as is obvious from the tone of sadness and melancholy in his later poetry. To the last he was the victim of melancholy, and in conflict with himself, for his love-impulses remained unsatisfied. As long as he did not acknowledge the inverted component in these impulses, he was forced to seek ideal love in the guise of a woman ; and the same force which kept up this repression also made him idealise Woman so extravagantly. All through his poetry we find the same quest for an unreal ideal woman, who is at once a sister, a friend, a leader of men, and a sexual mate. It is the theme of *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam* ; and in *Epipsychidion* he relates how his whole life has been spent in seeking :

The shadow of that idol of my thought.

It would seem that at last he had found the ideal, for *Epipsychidion* is a rhapsody of

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love for Emilia Viviani. But scarcely had the ink dried on the paper than he realised that Emilia, like Harriet, Mary, and Jane, was no Cythna, but a quite ordinary woman.

In spite of the views of romantic persons, the truth is that Shelley was not very susceptible to the *physical* charms of real women. He was wholly influenced by his own conception of the ideal Heroine ; and this conception was a curious mixture of sexual qualities. It is worth while contrasting Blake again with Shelley, in order to illustrate this point. Blake was unusually masculine. All his characters and his figures are strongly polarised—that is to say, he emphasised and exaggerated their typical sexual characteristics. His men all represent energy, passion, intellect, and muscular strength ; his women are sweetness and tenderness incarnate. Women attracted him by reason of their specifically feminine qualities ; but he did not idealise them, either collectively as a sex, or individually. Indeed, he thought they were entirely negative and passive in

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character : " In Heaven, there is no such thing as a female will." Yet his married life was placid and very happy.

Now Shelley, on the other hand, loved to create androgynous types. He loved the feminine qualities when they were in men, and the masculine qualities in women, It would seem as if he were continually striving to create an ideal *bisexual* character. For example, consider the sensitive, graceful Prince Athanase or Laon ; or, by contrast, the rebel Cythna, whose chief qualities are her vigorous intellect, her will-power, and her Amazonian heroism. And Shelley idealised women, both collectively and individually, in spite of the fact that his experience always contradicted him. His married life, to say the least, was not conspicuously successful. In this connexion it is interesting to note how constantly Shelley introduced a third party into his household, as if he were quite without the ordinary domestic jealousy of those who are " attached to that great sect whose

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doctrine is, that each one should select out of the crowd a mistress or a friend, and all the rest, though fair and wise, commend to cold oblivion,"

When he married Harriet he quickly took her to York, to live there with Hogg. After this plan had broken down he induced Miss Hitchener to share his home ; and when she departed, Elizabeth, Harriet's sister, came in. Even when he eloped with Mary Godwin, Claire Clairmont accompanied the pair to the continent. Finally at Pisa, and at Casa Magni, he shared his house with Edward and Jane Williams.

III

THE second unusual feature in Shelley's life of the heart was that his many friendships with men were no less romantic, and on the whole much more permanent and successful, than his affairs with women. Certainly they showed some of the same ideal character, but they also seemed real and concrete, in a way that his heterosexual affairs did not. We know little of his early affections, except for two instances. While he was at Eton, probably at the age of thirteen or fourteen, he had a remarkable affection for the Windsor physician, Dr. Lind. It is well known, of course, that at this period of puberty boys do quite normally tend to fall in love with men or older boys,¹ and to worship them as heroes. But Shelley's love for Dr. Lind was un-

¹ See Crichton Miller : *New Psychology and the Teacher*.

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usually strong and tender, as is shown by the fact that it did not fade from his memory, as such boyish enthusiasms normally do, but persisted as one of his most precious recollections. In *Prince Athanase* we find the good Doctor described as :

An old, old man with hair of silver-white
And lips where heavenly smiles would hang and blend
With his wise words.

And the third and fourth cantos of *The Revolt of Islam* contain a description of Dr. Lind, and record Shelley's worship of him. It was not only on account of his anarchist teachings that Shelley loved this old man ; nor merely because of his evident genius for soothing the troubled mind of the poet. There was also a certain tender physical attraction, which Shelley reveals by his description of the Hermit in *The Revolt of Islam*.

The old man is "stately and beautiful." His very looks are sufficient to heal: "And to my inmost soul his soothing looks he sent." Shelley recalled, or imagined, the

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joy of being embraced by this "divine old man" when he wrote of the Hermit's care for the sick Laon.

He did enfold
His giant arms around me to uphold
My wretched frame.
* * * * *

And two stanzas later :

the pillow
For my light head was hollowed in his lap
And my bare limbs his mantle did enwrap . .

Then again in the second stanza of the fourth canto :

When the old man his boat had anchored
He wound me in his arms with tender care,
And very few but kindly words he said,
And bore me through the tower adown a stair

There is evident in these quotations a certain desire to be caressed by this grand old rebel, and when we remember that Shelley had very little sympathy from either his Father or his Mother, this desire seems not unnatural ; he demanded of Dr. Lind some of the physical love and tenderness which his parents had withheld. It would be a great mistake to imagine that, because the

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poet, with his unrivalled command over language and his tendency to express abstract emotion, normally seems to dwell in ethereal regions, Shelley the man was not often acutely susceptible to the cravings for contact with the beloved. On the contrary, numerous passages express this yearning ; only, as they are written with consummate art, and not put in narrative but in lyric form, most people seem to fail to realise their meaning.

What are kisses, whose fire clasps
The failing heart in languishment, or limb
Twined within limb ? or the quick dying gasps
Of the life meeting, when the faint eyes swim
Through tears of a wide mist boundless and dim,
In one caress ? ·

The other romance of Shelley's early boyhood concerned a schoolboy friend at Sion House. Apparently the two boys were both of about the same age, eleven or twelve years. The episode is recorded in a fragmentary essay on the subject of Friendship, written shortly before Shelley's death, and given in Hogg's *Life*.

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" The object of these sentiments was a boy about my own age, of a character eminently generous, brave, and gentle ; and the elements of human feeling seemed to have been from his birth genially compounded within him. There was a delicacy and a simplicity in his manner inexpressibly attractive. . . . The tones of his voice were so soft and winning that every word pierced into my heart ; and their pathos was so deep that in listening to him the tears have involuntarily gushed from my eyes. Such was the being for whom I first experienced the sacred sentiments of friendship. I remember in my simplicity writing to my mother a long account of his admirable qualities and my own devoted attachment. I suppose she thought me out of my wits, for she returned no answer to my letter. I remember we used to walk the whole play-hours up and down by some moss-covered palings, pouring out our hearts in youthful talk. . . . I recollect thinking my friend exquisitely beautiful. Every night, when

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we parted to go to bed, we kissed each other like children—as we still were ! "

There is a passion and intensity of emotion in all this which raises it above the level of the ordinary schoolboy friendship, even when we have allowed for the fact that this passage was written during the poet's last years, and is therefore perhaps idealised. Still, in spite of the warmth of emotion, this idyll would not of itself, and taken apart from all corroborative evidence, show the poet's fundamental inversion if it were not for the fact that Shelley cherished the memory of it in manhood. Many boys have a similar romance at that age, or a little later, but it is hardly remembered with emotion except by those who are in some degree inverted.

The bosom friend of Shelley's early manhood was Thomas Hogg, for whom he had an extraordinary affection. During their short career at Oxford, the two inseparables spent almost all their time together. Every day they either breakfasted or lunched

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together, went for a country ramble, or sat in Shelley's room, reading, or re-modelling the universe. When Shelley was expelled, Hogg voluntarily put himself in the same position, and the pair went to live together in London. Their parents separated them, but they maintained an intimate correspondence.

After Shelley's marriage with Harriet, Hogg joined the couple at Edinburgh, and then took them to his house at York. Here he apparently began to pay unwelcome attentions to Harriet, who informed her husband. Shelley appears not to have expressed the normal feelings of jealousy, and freely forgave Hogg ; but he was disappointed to find that his idol, Hogg, had feet of clay. Shelley took Harriet away from York, and went to Keswick. From here he wrote several letters to his friend, in which we find such passages as these :
" But pray write often ; your last letter I have read as I would read your soul."
" If I thought we were to be long parted I should be wretchedly miserable—half-mad ! "

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" I never doubted you—you, the brother of my soul." " I do not know that absence will certainly cure love ; but this I know, that it fearfully augments the intensity of friendship."

Later on Shelley renewed his intimacy with Hogg, though never on the old terms of ardent affection. It has been suggested that he was mistaken in his suspicions, and that Hogg was really quite innocent. This view is quite tenable, since the evidence is very slender, and delusions of jealousy often accompany delusions of persecution ; which latter Shelley certainly suffered from.

While at Keswick he wrote several long letters to Miss Elizabeth Kitchener, whom for a few months he regarded as his dearest friend. In these letters he tells her of Hogg's crime, of his confession, and of his demands to be allowed again to live with the couple. In one letter Shelley states : " I do not love him " (dated November 26, 1811). In December, however, he writes to Hogg : " Think not that I am otherwise

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than your friend, a friend to you now more fervent, more devoted than ever, for misery endears us to those whom we love. You are, you shall be my bosom friend." ¹

Altogether this episode is complicated and confusing. The evidence against Hogg is confined to statements made by Shelley, in letters to Miss Hitchener, and these statements do not harmonise with Shelley's extravagant expressions of affection for Hogg. The fact is that he both loved Hogg intensely and suspected him. For my own part, I think that Hogg was probably quite innocent of any great indiscretion, and that Shelley simply magnified some mild familiarity out of all proportion. That Shelley was subject to such mental exaggerations is well known, and the words which he imputed to the imaginary assassin at Tanyrallt: "By God, I will be revenged. I will murder your wife and ravish your sister," sound very much like a stronger development of the

¹ I follow Dowden, in assigning this passage to a letter written in December 1812 to Hogg. Hogg prints it without date, as a fragment of a novel.

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idea that someone was making overtures to Harriet. As to his definite statements on the subject, they cannot weigh very heavily, as his statements were often only subjectively true. In addition, there are two stanzas in *The Revolt of Islam* which may refer to Hogg, and which, in that case, would indicate that Shelley did finally admit that he was mistaken.

In canto 2, stanza xviii :

And that this friend was false, may now be said
Calmly—that he, like other men, could weep
Tears which are lies, and could betray and spread
Snares for that guileless heart which for his own had
bled.

But in canto 5, stanza v, the friends are reconciled again :

Then suddenly I knew it was the youth,
In whom its earliest hopes my spirit found ;
But envious tongues had stained his spotless truth,
And thoughtless pride his love in silence bound,
And shame and sorrow mine in toils had wound,
While he was innocent and I deluded.

This last line probably represents the real truth of the whole matter ; although, indeed,

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we have now no means of being certain about the affair.

Shelley's short-lived enthusiasm for Miss Hitchener, whose name was mentioned above, is also instructive. It was based on the very slightest practical acquaintance with her, though their correspondence was lengthy and intimate ; for Shelley always needed some recipient for his emotional or philosophical outpourings. After many letters had been exchanged, Shelley thought that at last his ideal being, the intellectual heroine, had been found ; and Miss Hitchener came to live with him and Harriet as their " Spiritual Sister." Unfortunately, they soon came to detest her. In December 1812 Shelley wrote to Hogg, telling him of the good lady's departure, in these terms : " She is an artful, superficial, ugly, hermaphroditical beast of a woman, and my astonishment at my fatuity, inconsistency, and bad taste was never so great as after living four months with her as an inmate." Surely there would have

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to be something extraordinarily repulsive in this lady to justify such an outburst. Yet she would seem to have been quite a reasonable woman. This apparently unreasonable outburst is paralleled in another letter from Shelley to Hogg. After living with Harriet's sister (Elizabeth) in his house, he wrote : " I certainly hate her with all my soul. It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little lanthe, in whom I hereafter may find the consolation of sympathy."

In thus idealising women before making their acquaintance, and yet in some cases being strongly repelled by them directly he lived at close quarters with them, Shelley behaved unreasonably, but it was a purely instinctive, and even unconscious, reaction.

Shelley was also strongly attached to two older and rather virile men, Trelawny and Peacock, to both of whom he appealed apparently as much by reason of his feminine charm as by his intellectual and poetic gifts.

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I have already quoted Trelawny's description of his first meeting with the "beardless boy, with a feminine, artless face." To Peacock, Shelley seemed a wayward and innocent child, totally incapable of guiding himself safely through the hard world of practical affairs. Peacock was a practical man, and enjoyed playing the role of father and worldly guide ; Shelley, moreover, liked to be allowed to be a child, and to let Peacock manage things for him. In the company of these two men he seemed instinctively to have become more naive and feminine than he normally was ; in other words, like all bisexual people, he automatically altered his polarity in accordance with his company.

Later on in his life he was much attracted by "Kind Hunt," and a letter referring to *The Cenci* reveals his sentiment rather artlessly and charmingly : " I have written something different from anything else, and mean to dedicate it to you. I should not have done so without approval, but I asked

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your picture last night, and it smiled assent."

Several writers have sneered at Leigh Hunt's friendship for Shelley because of the amount of money he received from the generous poet. Hunt has been called a parasite in consequence. I am not concerned with the genuineness of Hunt's affection for Shelley, though I do not doubt it myself. What is certain is that Shelley had a very keen affection for Hunt, whom he addresses as "My dearest Friend," and on whom he lavished money which he could ill afford to spend. It is noteworthy that an extravagant generosity towards friends is such a frequent characteristic of Uranians. One has only to think of the cases of Edward II, or of Michelangelo,¹ both of whom were shamelessly sponged on by their favourites, to realise that such men are an easy prey for parasites. Perhaps this is due to the fact that such generosity forms a channel along which some of the

¹ See *Life of Michelangelo*, by J. A. Symonds.

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repressed sexual impulses may obtain an indirect expression.

Even if we call Shelley a fool for allowing men like Hunt and Godwin to drain his purse, we cannot but admire him for many of his other benefactions. Trelawny relates a touching instance, when Shelley divided a bag of Scudi between the Housekeeping expenses, Mary, and himself. Then, says Trelawny, he whispered to Mary: "I will give this to poor Tom Medwin, who wants to go to Naples and has no money." "Why, Shelley has nothing left for himself," said Trelawny, who had overheard. In his friendship for his cousin Medwin he revealed another typically Uranian characteristic, namely a gift for nursing. Medwin fell ill at Pisa, and a letter of his describes Shelley's care for him.

"Shelley tended me like a brother. He applied my leeches, administered my medicines, and, during six weeks that I was confined to my room, was assiduous and unremitting in his affectionate care of me."

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When we thus survey the whole range of Shelley's affections, and compare his love-affairs with his friendships, can we readily distinguish any great difference between them? Surely the erotic nature of his feelings towards his young school-friend, and towards Dr. Lind, Hogg, Hunt and the rest, is obvious enough, and were it not that these were balanced by obviously erotic relationships with women, we should be led to class him as a pure Uranian. Indeed, we must always remember that, since the whole weight of herd-suggestion actively fosters and encourages the expression of all feelings of love towards the opposite sex and actively represses any patently homosexual expression, one clear indication of the latter is worth more as evidence than a dozen conventional signs of the former. It is because this herd-suggestion is so strong and so persistent that many naturally inverted people are artificially induced to appear as lovers of women, and to behave in a manner that is for them unnatural.

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This appears to have been the grand tragedy of Shelley's life, and the source of all his melancholy, his mental troubles, and his inconsistencies. As has been pointed out by Stopford Brooke, in his edition of Shelley's Lyrics, "Love was felt by Shelley not quite naturally ; not as Burns, or even Byron, felt it. Love, in his poetry, sometimes dies into dreams, sometimes likes its imagery better than itself. It is troubled with a philosophy." And Stopford Brooke adds, "Of course, he was therefore fickle." This is typical of all those who suffer from repressed (and hence unconscious) homosexual impulses of comrade-love ; for with their *conscious* mind they seek love in the form of a woman. The quest is for them necessarily hopeless, and they are tormented and baffled by finding an inner falsity in each new object of their affections. One after another the dreams, the hopes, the ideals, are shattered, because the conscious mind is seeking a goal which is the polar opposite of that desired by the whole unconscious, *but purposive*, self.

IV

SCATTERED throughout Shelley's writings we find many indications of his bisexual disposition. For example, his heroes, Laon, Athanase, and his heroines, Laone, Beatrice, etc., each combine masculine energy and intellect with a feminine grace and gentleness. His ideal of human beauty as of character, was bisexual, as can be seen from his comments on the Greek sculpture in Italy.¹ His highest praise is given to the statues of adolescent boys—a Ganymede, an Apollo: "It was difficult to conceive anything more delicately beautiful than the Ganymede; but the spirit-like lightness, the softness, the flowing perfection of these forms, surpass it. The countenance, though exquisite, lovely, and gentle, is not divine. There is a womanish vivacity of winning yet passive

¹ See *Shelley's Prose Works*, ed. Buxton Forman.

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happiness, and yet a boyish inexperience exceedingly delightful." On an Olinthus, he remarks :

" Another of those sweet and gentle figures of adolescent youth, in which the Greeks delighted,"

His description of the " Bacchus and Ampelus " is worth quoting at some length. " The figures are walking as it were with a sauntering and idle pace and talking to each other as they walk, and this is expressed in the motions of their delicate and flowing forms. One arm of Bacchus rests on the shoulder of Ampelus, and the other . . . is gracefully thrown forward corresponding with the advance of the opposite leg. . . . Ampelus, with a beast skin over his shoulder, holds a cup in his right hand, and with his left half-embraces the waist of Bacchus. Just as you may have seen (yet how seldom from their dissevering and tyrannical institutions do you see) a younger and an elder boy at school walking in some remote grassy spot of their playground, with that

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tender friendship towards each other which has so much of love."

In a letter from Naples (December 22, 1818) he tells Peacock of one statue : " A Satyr, making love to a youth : in which the expressed life of the Sculpture and the inconceivable beauty of the form of the youth, overcome one's repugnance to the subject."

Personally I have never visited the Naples gallery, but I have been credibly informed that this statue is one of the very few indecently homosexual pieces. If so, it is curious that Shelley should have singled it out for mention, for he had a horror of everything crude or obscene.

Another statue that evidently fascinated him was the Louvre " Hermaphrodite," for he refers to it in a fragment for *Epipsy-chidion* as :

That sweet marble monster of both sexes,
That looks so sweet and gentle, that it vexes
The very soul that the soul is gone
Which lifted from her limbs the veil of stone.

¹ Compare this with his reminiscence of his Sion House friend.

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His delight in bisexual forms is also evident in his description of the angelic being, called "Hermaphroditus," which was created by the Witch of Atlas.

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
It seemed to have developed no defect
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both,
In gentleness and strength its limbs were decked,
The bosom swelled lightly with its full youth,
The countenance was such as might select
Some artist, that his skill should never die,
Imaging forth such perfect purity.

One of the most peculiar traits in Shelley's psychology was his interest in the theme of incest between a brother and sister. To most of his readers this pre-occupation with such a subject appears repulsive and inexplicable, for there is nothing attractive, or even interesting, in incest *per se*. Nevertheless, for some obscure reason, the subject fascinated Shelley; and I think we shall be able to explain this fact by connecting it with his general bisexual tendency. We have seen that his heroines and heroes were dual types, in whom the masculine and

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feminine traits were blended, and that, in *The Witch of Atlas*, he went a step further, and created an ideal Hermaphrodite, to symbolise his conception of perfect being. Surely it was in the same mood that he originally created Laon and Cythna to be brother and sister ; thus emphasising their absolute similarity, and, by their incestuous union, achieving a more complete fusion of the two sexual natures. Swedenborg went a step further in this direction, when he said that two true lovers became, in Heaven, one angel.

It is important to remember that love, in Shelley's mind, depended upon the perception of the similarity of two lovers ; not upon any polar, or complementary attraction. Thus Alastor's mind " thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself " ; while Laon refers to :

" That *likeness* of the features which endears the thoughts expressed by them." It was for this reason that Shelley made the Spirit of the Earth fall in love with his sister, the moon.

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In real life, too, Shelley always sought for a similar soul to mate with. Thus, he calls Hogg : " The Brother of my soul " ; and Miss Hitchener, before he knew her intimately, was his " spiritual sister." And in the same key he cries to Emilia :

" Would we two had been twins of the same mother ! " From all these considerations, I think we may suggest that Shelley's pre-occupation with the theme of incest between brother and sister (for other forms of incest did not occupy his mind at all, except in the one instance of *The Cenci*, where the interest is purely dramatic) was in reality nothing but a disguised expression of his own bisexual nature ; and that Hermaphroditus represents the logical development of this expression.

There can be little doubt that if Shelley had survived a few more years his true nature would have forced itself into his conscious recognition. He seems to have had a predilection for such classical authors as Theocritus, Moschus, and Plato, in all of whom

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there is an atmosphere of "ideal homo-sexuality/" He translated a sonnet of Dante's to Guido Cavalcanti, and another by the latter to Dante, and he had obviously appreciated the significance of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

If any should be curious to discover
Whether towards you I am Friend or Lover,
Let them read Shakespeare's Sonnets

During the years 1817-18 he occupied himself much with Plato's *Symposium*. He apparently only read this dialogue in Latin, but its thought fascinated him, and he set himself to translate it, and also to write a commentary on its subject. The manner in which he achieved this is significant. In spite of the fact that homosexual love is the theme of the dialogue, and in spite of the fact that this dialogue so fascinated him that its lore became an integral part of his philosophy, his translation omits all the definitely homosexual passages that can possibly be omitted. For example, he omits an entire passage in Alcibiades' speech, where

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the drunken youth relates his unsuccessful siege of Socrates, and praises the philosopher for his (to the speaker) superhuman chastity.

The most important omission, however, occurs in the speech of Aristophanes. Plato imagines that Hephæstus appears to two lovers, as they lie inarmed, and offers to grant them their dearest wish, namely, to melt them permanently together into one being. The point of the passage is that the lovers are both male, for Plato wishes to maintain that such lovers are purer, nobler, and less selfishly sensual than the lovers of women. These latter, he says, are sections of the original androgyne, and are for the most part lascivious and adulterous. But the sections of the original double-male, those who seek the love of men, "are the best and most manly of youths."

We might conclude from these omissions that Shelley, like many a prudish and normal translator, wished to gloss over passages which offended him. But this view is really quite untenable. Shelley was remarkably

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courageous and frank, and all the evidence shows that he was attracted, and not repelled, by what has been called "ideal homosexuality." Moreover, he had no need to translate the *Symposium* at all, and only did so because it fascinated him. In a letter to Peacock dated August 16, 1818, the following instructive passage occurs: "I have translated, and Mary has transcribed, the *Symposium*, as well as my poem ; and I am proceeding to employ myself on a discourse upon the subject of which the *Symposium* treats, considering the subject with reference to the difference of sentiments respecting it, existing between the Greeks and Modern Nations: a subject to be handled with that delicate caution which either I cannot or I will not practise in other matters, but which here I acknowledge to be necessary. Not that I have any thought of publishing either this discourse or the *Symposium*, at least till I return to England, when we may discuss the propriety of it"

The discourse referred to was begun but

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never completed. It is given in his prose works, usually under the title *On the Arts and Manners of the Athenians*. In reading through this discourse we are forcibly struck by a marked timidity and caution, quite foreign to Shelley's nature. Here is an author who frankly advocated "lawless love" and defended incest; and yet he was quite unable to face the question of Greek Pαιderastia. He set out to write an essay on that one theme, for that is the subject of the *Symposium*, if one differentiates between Greek Love and Love in Modern Nations. Yet when his essay, after a general introduction, demands a statement and description of this custom he at once hedges, and digresses into vague general statements, and finally breaks off.

It is obvious that mere respect for the prejudices of publishers or readers would not have deterred Shelley had he wished to describe or even to defend Pαιderastia; moreover, he wrote in Italy, and states that he had no particular intention of publishing

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the discourse, nor even the *Symposium*. It is possible that he deferred somewhat to the feelings of his wife, for one can hardly suppose that Mary would enthuse over certain passages of Plato. On the whole, however, his timidity and weakness in handling this theme sprang from internal subjective causes. Instinctively he shrank from a definite conscious revelation of his own half-repressed impulses, even if that revelation were only made to himself. And yet Shelley was vaguely aware, in a quite general way, of a conflict within himself, even although he could not specify precisely the sources of the trouble. He rightly attributed his constant melancholy to this cause, as his self-analysis in *Prince Athanase* shows :

For all who knew and loved him then perceived
That there was drawn an adamantine veil
Between his heart and mind—both unrelieved
Wrought in his brain and bosom separate strife.

The fact that he was thus dimly aware of a conflict proves that the repressed impulses were somewhat near the surface, and were not entirely subjugated.

V

IF, as is here maintained, Shelley suffered from a repression of homosexual impulses, an experienced psychoanalyst should be able to trace the effects of this on his life and behaviour. The writer is not such an expert, but he would nevertheless indicate in a general way how psychoanalytic theories may confirm his views as to Shelley's nature.

Shelley suffered from Paranoia, in a distinct, though not acute, degree. Paranoia is a mental disease characterised by delusions of persecutions, jealousy, or grandeur. These delusions are usually intermittent, and often change in their content. For example, the persecutor may first be one person and later another, or several others, or a whole class (e.g. the "Kings, Priests, and Statesmen" of *Queen Mab*).

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Sometimes a delusion of persecution is replaced by one of jealousy, or vice versa.

Shelley's delusions have been described, but only very inadequately discussed, by his biographers, and I can only summarise them here. The earliest of them is the most important, for it probably reveals the cause of them all.¹ It concerned his father, who was a bluff Country Squire, rather boorish, and totally incapable of understanding Shelley's nature. What the relations between Shelley and his father were before this delusion, we do not know; but for

¹ Shelley's other delusions, which may have been variations on the original one, are as follows:

At York (1811). That Hogg had made overtures to Harriet? If this was a delusion, then the content of jealousy, as often happens, has replaced that of persecution, and the father has been replaced by the older friend.

At Keswick (1812). That he was attacked by a robber outside his lodgings.

At Tanyrallt (February 1813). The attempted assassination in his house, with threats of rape of his sister by the imaginary intruder.

In 1813 that he had contracted Elephantiasis.

At Pisa (1820). That he was attacked by a stranger in the Post Office. There is also recorded a nightmare of his, in which he dreamed that he was strangling his own wife, but this might be interpreted in many ways.

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the rest of his life the poet was hostile and antagonistic to Mr. Timothy, and, moreover, suspicious of him.

At one time in his boyhood Shelley contracted a fever, and, presumably during his convalescence, he became convinced that his Father was secretly plotting to have the boy (who was indubitably erratic) locked up in a mad-house. Shelley appealed to Dr. Lind who, so the story goes, came over and spoke strongly to Mr. Timothy, and thus rescued Shelley. The date of this delusion is not known, but it occurred while the boy was at school, probably in the earlier Eton days. Peacock, after quoting Hogg's account of Shelley's description of this scheme, adds : " However this may have been, the idea that his father was continually on the watch for a pretext to lock him up haunted him through life, and a mysterious intimation of his father's intention to effect such a purpose was frequently received by him, and communicated to his friends as a demonstration of the necessity under which

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he was placed of changing his residence and going abroad."

In canto 3 of *The Revolt of Islam* we have a record of this fever and of Shelley's delirium. Laon is imprisoned, and suffers the horrors of temporary madness.

With chains which eat into the flesh alas !
With brazen links my naked limbs they bound :

After lying in chains for three days, madness overcomes him:

My brain began to fail when the fourth morn
Burst o'er the golden isles—a fearful sleep,
Which through the caverns dreary and forlorn
Of the riven soul, sent its foul dreams to sweep
With whirlwind swiftness—a fall far and deep—
A gulf, a void, a sense of senselessness—
These things dwelt in me, even as shadows keep
Their watch in some dim charnels loneliness,
A shoreless sea, a sky sunless and planetless !

The forms which peopled this terrific trance
I well remember—like a choir of devils,
Around me they involved a giddy dance ;

And then comes the old Hermit (or, in real life. Dr. Lind) whose mere presence heals the disordered brain.

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In the deep,
The shape of an old man did then appear,
Stately and beautiful; that dreadful sleep
His heavenly smiles dispersed, and I could wake to
weep.

* « * * *

He struck my chains and gently spake and smiled :
As they were loosened by that Hermit old,
Mine eyes were of their madness half beguiled,
To answer those kind looks.

The significance of all this lies in the fact that the authorities on psychoanalysis mostly seem to agree in attributing Paranoia, with its delusions of persecution and of jealousy, to a repression of homosexuality.¹ Dr. E. Jones

¹ Dr. Paul Bousfield (*Elements of Practical Psychoanalysis*), states : "In all the cases of paranoid hysteria which I have seen, repressed homosexuality seems to be the most striking feature; homosexuality is always very strongly developed in these subjects, although the patient may be totally unaware of it."

Similarly Ferenczi, in his *Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, says: "The observation of several cases, presently to be related, seems to justify the surmise that in the pathogenesis of paranoia, homosexuality plays not a chance part, but the most important one; and that paranoia is perhaps nothing else at all than disguised homosexuality."

Finally we may quote Freud (*Introductory Lectures*) :

Lecture 20: "One particular mental disorder, paranoia . . . invariably arises from the attempt to subdue unduly powerful homosexual tendencies."

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(*Papers on Psychoanalysis*) states: "In Paranoia, for instance, it is now known that such delusions always arise to begin with in connexion with persons whom the patient has tried to love, but for internal reasons (repression of homosexuality) has been unable to."

In Shelley's case, we have seen that the original delusion concerned his father, which is conclusive evidence of his inversion.

After this it will not seem too rash to say that Shelley's various persecutory delusions sprang, in all probability, from a like cause. We have, indeed, brought forward considerable positive evidence, from Shelley's

Lecture 26: "In the case of delusions of persecution, however, we observed things which led us to follow up a certain clue. In the first place we noticed that in the great majority of cases the persecuting person was of the same sex as the persecuted one; this was capable of a harmless explanation, it is true, but in certain cases, which were closely studied, it appeared that the person of the same sex who had been most beloved while the patient was normal became the persecutor after the disease broke out. . . .

From these observations, which were continually corroborated, we drew the conclusion that persecutory paranoia is the means by which a person defends himself against a homosexual impulse which has become too powerful."

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life and writings, to show that in him was a strangely double nature, and that diore. ~~was certainly a homosexual component in~~ his make-up.. His character was complex, and full of contradictions, and he showed an unusual number of physical and mental traits which are common in women rather than in men. More than any other English poet, he was the minstrel of Love ; and his own erotic nature was surely the most important thing about him. Yet on this hardly a significant word has been written by his biographers. Until we understand the inner tragedy of his life, we can hardly understand the poet or his song.

VI

THE foregoing discussion of Shelley's psychology, and especially of what was abnormal in it, would hardly be complete without some reference to the possibility of his having possessed what may be termed higher psychic powers. The whole subject is, of course, difficult, and this is not the place to embark on a long analysis of the general evidence for the existence of super-normal faculties. But, in view of the considerable researches that have been of late undertaken in this field, and of the general results that have been achieved, some mention of this aspect of Shelley's genius is not inappropriate. We have noted in his private life the recurrence of certain ideas of persecution and of certain hallucinations. These things, like all other mental aberrations,

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require, as their necessary condition, some degree of dissociation of the various components of the mind. Just as the growth of a tumour indicates a certain autonomy of one portion of the body, so such phenomena as hallucination, double-personality, mediumistic trances, hysteria, and obsessions, indicate the autonomy of certain constituents of the mind or personality. But this capacity for decentralisation is not merely pathological in its effects ; the same partial suspension of the control normally exercised by the conscious mind may liberate either the repressed impulses of the hysterical patient or the latent divinations and intuitions which mark the genius or the mystic.

The practical difference between the genius and the humble artist is that the former reaches heights of truth and beauty unattainable by the latter ; heights which seem to require, for their attainment, the operation of obscure and even occult faculties. Inspiration, divination, direct intuitive perception of the nature both of things and

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of men—these, when they are clarified and crystallised by a competent artist, constitute genius. But these are the operations of psychic powers such as reach their fullest development in the state of ecstasy described by the mystics or in the phenomena of mediumship which, in all ages, have given rise to the popular belief in spirits. It is difficult for completely sane and normal men to realise that the familiar faculties and senses are, in reality, but stereotyped and canalised outlets for the living personality ; that they may hinder the free expression of the latter, even while they help it along their own lines. Yet the inner person, or spirit, though it may have created sense-organs to facilitate its perceptions, can, as the observations of psychiatrists fully attest, yet perceive without their aid, and may even require, for its subtlest operations, a temporary suspension of their functions.

" If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is—infinite.

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" For man has closed himself up till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern."

These lines of Blake's express the same thought, which, indeed, is one common to all the mystics. The vital power which perceives through " this life's five windows of the soul," can also transcend the limitations which they impose on it; but, to so transcend the senses, it must usually obliterate them for the time being ; and with them go most of the ordinary conscious factors of personality.

So with Shelley we find, not merely the pathological results of mental dissociation, nor even only the signs of genius—swift and subtle intuitions scattered through his works—but also, at times, we see indications of powers which, for want of a better term, may be called occult.¹ His poems give indications, stronger than mere hints, that he constantly verged on a state of ecstasy.

¹ Shelley appears to have been easily hypnotised, since both Tom Medwin and Jane Williams succeeded in mesmerising him (see Dowden, vol. 2, ch. ix).

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His frequent reference to the ideas of infinity, eternity, and the like ; his use of epithets implying the absence of some defining and limiting attribute; his reiterated employment of such words as chasm and abysm; and his direct references to states of ecstatic rapture, mental vertigo, sudden sinkings, faintings and swoons, all show that he lived on the edge of that state of ecstasy in which the limits of normal personality are passed and a region of more extended consciousness is reached. He felt " the awful shadow of some unseen Power," not as an abstract philosophical idea, but as a real presence.

Sudden, thy shadow fell on me ;

I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy.

I do not think that anyone who has studied the writings of some of the greater mystics will fail to see much that is similar in Shelley's poetry ; although, on the other hand, it is not likely that Shelley ever attained the full state of complete ecstasy.

In comparing the lives and records of

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different mystics we find, according to Dr. Bucke,¹ a certain substratum of common features, which seem to be essential characteristics of the mystical disposition. Before reaching the state of cosmic consciousness, the subject must be of an earnest, truth-seeking nature ; he must perceive the evils of this life, and suffer acutely in spirit; he must be moved by compassion for the fate of mankind, and by an ardent yearning after a more spiritual existence. Usually more passionate than the average man, he yet has to renounce much of the so-called pleasures of the world, and, in solitude, to wring from his own heart the meaning and purpose of life.

There is so much in Shelley's poetry which shows him in these typical preliminary stages which precede illumination, that I will only refer to the *Ode to the West Wind*—a poem in which the intensity of passion, the despair with this life, and the overwhelming yearning for identification with nature,

¹ Dr. R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*.

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which are typical of the mystic, find such poignant expression.

I fall upon the thorns of life ! I bleed !

* * * * *

Be thou, spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one !

At the age of twenty-three Shelley wrote the poem *Alastor*. This poem is important to us, in that it forms a record of the early spiritual adventures of the poet, at a time when he pursued the half-revealed images of Truth and Beauty, which tempted him, and yet eluded his grasp. The "argument" of the poem is, in fact, the essence of Shelley's own inner history. *Alastor*, a young poet, having seen, in half-revealing visions, glimpses of the Ideal, sets out on his quest for a mortal "prototype of his conception."

"His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself." Now I have previously shown that Shelley set out on a similar quest, and have explained how inevitable

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development of these states. There is, in *Alastor*, a considerable admixture of erotic emotion which, we may suppose, inhibited the higher state of calm ecstasy. For some years after this poem was written Shelley's life seems to have been too crowded with incident, too occupied with intellectual activities, and too much dominated by the effort to repress the homogenic tendencies, of his nature, to allow any further development of mystical experiences; although, scattered throughout his poems, there are still indications of such experience.

In 1822, however, it would seem that a definite development in this direction was taking place, and being recorded in that remarkable and intricate poem *The Triumph of Life*.

In this poem Shelley apparently attempted to describe a mystical vision, in which he saw the pageant of life pass before him, and in which he was about to penetrate into the heart of the mystery of creation. I do not, however, intend to attempt an analysis of

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this poem, but only to point out some of the features in it which throw light on Shelley's spiritual adventures. The poem begins with a description of a "strange trance" into which the poet fell ; a trance

Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread
Was so transparent, that the scene came through
As clear as when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills they glimmer.

In this preliminary "trance of wondrous thought," the poet sees, as in a waking dream, the human multitudes thronging a public way ; a chariot, driven by a four-faced shape, rushes by, passing heedlessly over the crowd. The poet converses with the shade of Rousseau, who describes one of his own visions, in which a shape ("all light") gave him to drink from a crystal glass.

I rose ; and bending at her sweet command
Touched with faint lips the cup she raised,
And suddenly *my brain became as sand*
Where the first wave had more than half erased
The track of deer on desert Labrador ;
Whilst the wolf, from which they fled amazed,
Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore,
Until the second bursts,

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In this phrase " my brain became as sand," Shelley describes one of the crucial points in mystical experience, namely, the blotting-out of intellect, and the suspension of the functioning of the senses. It is well known, of course, that the Eastern mystics deliberately practise this effacement of thought in order to penetrate into the abyss of their inner souls and attain the cosmic state. For Shelley's two waves of mystical sensation, which obliterate first the more superficial, and then the deeper elements of consciousness, leaving the mind as blank as a clean sheet of wet sand, are only the precursors of a new vision.

So on my sight
Burst a new vision, never seen before,
And the fair shape waned *in the coming light,*

* * * * *

So knew I, *in that light's severe excess,*
The presence of that shape which on the stream
Moved, as I moved along the wilderness.

This sense of subjective light is a constant feature of mystical experience, from which in fact, the word " Illumination" derives

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its significance. It is shown, for example, in the instance of Moses, who saw the bush wrapt in flames, and yet it was not consumed. William Blake's visions were full of bright angels and of flames of fire ; and his letter to Thomas Butts describes his "*first vision of light*"

In particles bright
The jewels of light
Distinct shone and clear.

In their essence these experiences of ecstasy are condensed into one phrase by St. John of the Cross :

" On this road, to have our faculties in darkness is to see the light"

It would seem, then, that Shelley had, at the end of his life, arrived very near to the final stage of mystical illumination, in which the soul seems united to the infinite spirit of the universe, and whereby the mystery of life is solved. Yet he never actually achieved this final state ; for his untimely death occurred before *The Triumph of Life* was completed. What he had

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achieved, however, was sufficiently remarkable for so young a man ; and it may well explain his extraordinary indifference as to whether he lived or died.

The *Triumph of Life* ends with the query " Then what is Life ?" and the reader guesses that Shelley's vision broke off even as suddenly as the poem breaks, and that no answer was vouchsafed him. But the poet had himself already attempted to answer the same question.

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

It always appears to the mystic as if the Eternal Spirit limited and hindered Itself by dwelling in this world of form and substance ; and Shelley expresses this idea rather strikingly by his image of many-coloured glass, filtering and delimiting the various partial aspects of the pure spirit

The Triumph of Life, and to some extent also *Prometheus Unbound*, point in the direction of mystical prophecy rather than of pure poetry, and I am entirely of Professor

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Dowden's opinion " that *The Triumph of Life* may have been but the starting-point for a new and higher development of the writer's genius." ¹ The incompleteness of the poem, and its lack of any final and comprehensive solution of the mystery of existence, signify little. Nor should we expect that Shelley, at the age of twenty-nine, could have experienced anything more than a partial fore-taste of illumination. We have to bear in mind the fact that as a general rule such illumination usually occurs when the subject is past thirty ; whereas Shelley never reached that age. William Blake was thirty-three when he commenced his series of Prophetic Books with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; previous to this turning-point in his career his mystical utterances and experiences had hardly been more pronounced than those of Shelley.

I have previously contrasted Blake with Shelley in respect of the polarity of their sexual natures. But, apart from this im-

¹ Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. 2, ch. xii.

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portant difference, the two poets had much in common. Both were highly sensitive and passionate natures, revolutionary pioneers of freedom, and champions of a new morality—especially in sex matters. In both men there was a strong desire for solitude and for companionship with nature, and also an ardent yearning for communion with some more spiritual universe. Both had, even in boyhood, a marked tendency to experience visions, which are commonly described as hallucinations. Blake studied the Bible, Swedenborg, and Boehme intensively ; while Shelley, with all his varied reading and rationalistic proclivities, yet showed a strong predilection for mystical and occult writers.

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.

In later years he grew out of the more childish fancies of occultism, and turned to a more subtle mysticism. Yet, curiously

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enough, during the very last year of his life he seems, for the first time, to have actually undergone experiences which were occult rather than mystical. I refer to the strange apparitions which he saw shortly before his death. One of these is thus recorded in Mrs. Shelley's *Memorials* (Chapter 12).

" One night loud cries were heard issuing from the saloon. The Williamses rushed out of their room in alarm ; Mrs. Shelley fainted at the door. Entering the saloon, the Williamses found Shelley staring horribly into the air, and evidently in a state of trance. They waked him, and he related that a figure wrapped in a mantle came to his bedside and beckoned him. He must then have risen in his sleep, for he followed the imaginary figure into the saloon, when it lifted the hood of its mantle, ejaculated ' siete sodisfatto,' and vanished."

A little later (May 6, 1822), he was one day walking with Edward Williams when he suddenly caught hold of Williams' arm,

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stared at the sea, and exclaimed, " There it is again ! There !" Afterwards he explained to his friend that he had seen the child Allegra, naked, rising from the sea and smiling at him.

At another time he dreamed that Edward Williams appeared like a corpse, and warned him that the sea was flooding the house.

Now, although it is possible, and to most people will appear probable, that these strange visions were mere subjective figments of the poet's overheated brain, yet they were curiously prophetic. Shelley and Edward Williams were drowned together in July 1822—within a few weeks of these apparitions. There is, indeed, much evidence in favour of the objective reality of such apparitions. Myers, Gurney, Flammarion, and several other well-known investigators have shown that before, or shortly after death such phantasms have frequently been seen ; sometimes by the person whose death is impending, sometimes by near friends. It would seem that they are even

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perceived by animals in some instances. In the particular case which we are discussing, scientific evidence is, of course, not available, and we have to rely on quite ordinary witnesses. But it would seem that the phenomena affected at least one person besides Shelley. When relating these events, Mary says that :

" Shelley had often seen these figures when ill; but the strangest thing is that Mrs. Williams saw *him*. Now Jane, though a woman of sensibility, has not much imagination, and is not in the slightest degree nervous, neither in dreams or otherwise."

Mary then narrates that Jane, while standing at a window with Trelawny, saw Shelley twice pass in front of the window, although he was, as a matter of fact, nowhere near the place at the time; and, of course, Trelawny could not see the phantom.

I have said enough, perhaps, to indicate that Shelley may have possessed the germs of powers and faculties that are at once

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vaster and subtler than those familiar to us all. It is true that he never attained that more extended consciousness which characterises the great mystics, and that he died before his latent faculties were fully established ; but he gave many indications of these faculties. That those indications were to some extent pathological is but natural, and redounds more to the discredit of society than of the poet. Given a nature fundamentally disposed to experience Love as an ardent and exalted comradeship towards those of his own sex, and given an environment in which that disposition is persecuted mercilessly; granted also a considerable liability to mental decentralisation to begin with ; and one sees that a strong repression was bound to follow, and that some degree of paranoia would be the probable result of that repression.

But there were other things in Shelley's nature, psychic faculties of tremendous significance which, having first been revealed by the intuitions which inspired his poetry and

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his thought, were gradually growing in power, and but for his death would doubtless have established themselves. Shelley, had he lived, would have taken his place beside the great mystics.

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