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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

GODWINIAN AND PLATONIC DOCTRINES

IN THE

POETRY OF SHELLEY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

by

Elizabeth Wagner

Year

1934

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

INTRODUCTION

In the field of literary criticism there has been waged for some years a bitter controversy regarding the permanence of Godwin's influence upon Shelley's idealistic philosophy. Some critics have contended that Shelley never wavered in his allegiance to the doctrines of Godwin; while others have argued that after the poet became interested in Platonism, he completely emancipated his philosophy from every trace of Godwinism. It shall be my purpose, therefore, in this dissertation to examine the nature of Shelley's idealism as it was affected by the influence first of Godwin and then of Plato in order to determine, if possible, whether or not Shelley ever discarded completely Godwin's philosophic principles.

Before beginning such an investigation, it will first be necessary to define as clearly as possible the terms: idealism, Godwinism, and Platonism, with which we are to deal throughout this essay. The aspects of idealism which will concern us in a study of Shelley's philosophy are threefold. First, there is the popular interpretation of idealism which we may identify as an enthusiasm for a cause. It is this type of idealism which is commonly associated with the philosophy of the Romantic School of poets. Then there is what may be termed the psychological aspect of idealism, which we shall define as the exaltation of imagination and emotion above reason

and calculation. This conception holds that the purest form of truth can be reached through the feelings rather than through the senses. And finally there is the philosophical aspect of idealism, which, according to Royce, "consists merely in a pointing out, by various devices, that the world of your knowledge, whatever it contains, is through and through such stuff as ideas are made of, that you never in your life believed in anything definable but ideas, that, as Berkeley put it, 'this whole choir of heaven and furniture of earth' is nothing for any of us but a system of ideas which govern our belief and our conduct."¹ Contained also in this philosophical interpretation of idealism is an assertion that man, through the exercise of his will, can shape his own ideal world, and that he is endowed with the privilege of directing his actions therein. Thus the thorough-going idealist takes his stand on the side of the theory of free-will as opposed to the theory of determinism.

These, then, are the aspects of idealism which we shall seek to trace in the reaction of Shelley to the philosophy of Godwin and of Plato. It remains now to attempt to point out the basic principles included in the terms, Godwinism and Platonism. In the first of these terms the doctrines in which we are interested primarily are those that we find expressed in Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice,

¹ Royce, Josiah, The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, New York, 1892, pp. 350-351.

which Shelley read while at Eton. In this work the chief philosophic tenets professed by the author are: materialism, determinism or necessitarianism, rationalism, and a contempt for all established institutions and for custom in general. According to Godwin's materialistic views, the visible world is the real world. There is no ideal reality underlying it. Nothing exists except that which can be perceived by the senses. In this material world everything is fixed and pre-determined. The idea of free-will is a delusion. The guiding force that controls the universe is a blind, relentless power which Godwin terms "necessity." It is this force by which the world was created, and it is through its immutable laws that "we live, and move, and have our being." Necessity is the only god that this philosopher will recognize. In order to understand necessity and thus to arrive at a realization of truth, we must rely entirely upon human reason. Imagination and the emotions have no place in such a philosophy. And finally, according to Godwin, the application of reason to social problems will convince us of the fact that all institutions established by custom are hopelessly tyrannical and hypocritical and, as such, should be overthrown. These, then, are the teachings of Godwin as set forth in Political Justice.

Coming now to Platonism as we find it revealed in Shelley's philosophy, we note immediately a striking contrast to the doctrines of Godwinism. According to Plato, who has often been termed the father of idealism, the material world of sense-experience is only a shadow world. "Everything that

we in this world can perceive is a mere copy or image of a perfect original, which exists in a world above us It is this perfect archetype which really exists; the earthly copy only seems to exist."¹ This is the celebrated theory of ideas which forms the basis of Plato's philosophy. The supreme form or idea in this whole system of perfect archetypes is the idea of good, which is arbitrarily associated in Plato's thinking with truth and beauty. In order to arrive at a knowledge of the good, we must consecrate ourselves unreservedly to the ideal of love, which is the desire for immortality in beauty. In the Symposium, which sets forth the Platonic doctrine of love, the author tells us that "the vision of true beauty is the last stage of a progress from particular sensible beauty to universal intellectual beauty, which includes in its higher stages the beauty of the sciences, and 'many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love and wisdom.'"²

Unlike Godwin, Plato takes a poetic view of knowledge. Although he has the highest regard for reason, he makes it depend, not upon calculation, but upon intellectual insight, aided by the emotions. In harmony with this conception of knowledge is Plato's doctrine of recollection which asserts that in a previous existence before coming into the body, the soul has had unforgotten glimpses of the perfect archetypes which are the

¹ Jebb, R.C., Greek Literature, New York, 1889, p. 126.

² Rhys, Ernest, ed., Five Dialogues of Plato, London, 1913, p.X.

originals of everything in the sense world. The most celebrated expression of this doctrine in the writings of the romantic poets is Wordsworth's Ode on Intimations of Immortality. In order to reach again that sublime state before its earthy existence, the soul must be freed by death from the contaminating encumbrance of the body. Therefore, according to Plato's theory of immortality, the body will die, but the soul will live on eternally in a pure and divine atmosphere.

In Plato's philosophy the cosmos or order of the universe is the "one only begotten image of God," its father and creator. The Creator, being good, wished to make the world as nearly like Himself as possible, but no created or visible thing is perfect. The material out of which the world was formed introduced evil into it. Thus Plato accounts for the existence of evil in a world created by a good and perfect God.

These then are the basic principles of Plato that were to influence Shelley. That Shelley should have become interested in Platonism is not surprising when we remember that during the Romantic period there was a keen interest in the works of the eighteenth century idealist, Berkeley, who was in philosophy the child of Plato. Then too there is evidence that while Shelley was at Oxford, he read an English version of Dacier's French text of the Platonic Dialogues and also Thomas Taylor's translation of the Dialogues of Plato. And indeed so great did Shelley's interest in the Grecian philosopher become that in 1818 he translated Plato's Symposium.

The fact that there exists between the materialism of Godwin and the idealism of Plato a seemingly irreconcilable conflict became apparent to Shelley in the last few years of his career. In his early poem, Queen Mab, he professed himself to be an uncompromising advocate of Godwinian doctrines. The following lines are but one of the numerous examples in the poem of Shelley's acceptance of the cardinal tenets of Godwinism:

Throughout these infinite orbs of mingling light,
Of which yon earth is one, is wide diffused
A spirit of activity and life,
That knows no term, cessation, or decay;

.....

But active, steadfast, and eternal, still
Guides the fierce whirlwind, in the tempest roars,
Cheers in the day, breathes in the balmy groves,
Strengthens in health, and poisons in disease;
And in the storm of change, that ceaselessly
Rolls round the eternal universe, and shakes
Its undecaying battlements, presides,
Apportioning with irresistible law
The place each spring of its machine shall fill.

But in Prometheus Unbound, written six years later, Shelley seems to voice the beliefs of Plato when he conceives of a land where

lovely apparitions, dim at first,
 Then radiant as the mind, arising bright
 From the embrace of beauty, whence the forms
 Of which these are the phantoms, cast on them
 The gathered rays which are reality,
 Shall visit us, the progeny immortal
 Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy,
 And arts, tho' unimagined, yet to be.
 The wandering voices, and the shadows these
 Of all that man becomes, the mediators
 Of that best worship, love, by him and us
 Given and returned.

However, two years later Shelley presented for the first time in his famous prose work, A Defence of Poetry, his recognition of a conflict between Godwinism and Platonism. The best known instance of such a recognition in this essay of Shelley is the refutation by the author of the charge that poetry has no practical value. "Poets", writes Shelley, "have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists on another plea. It is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful." And so Shelley, himself, had seemingly believed at the time when he wrote Queen Mab. But now that he had become immersed in the doctrines of Plato, he did not profess so high a regard for the "promoters of utility;" and in looking upon the results of their labor, he concludes thus: "The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of

the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty."

Thus Shelley came to perceive that there were apparently irreconcilable points of difference between Godwinism and Platonism which it seemed impossible to combine harmoniously in his own philosophy. Hence, it will be our problem to attempt to discover whether Shelley entirely discarded the doctrines of Godwin when he came to espouse Platonism, or whether he retained them in their original form throughout his career. But before endeavoring to find our own solution to this problem, let us examine the conflicting opinions of Shelley's critics regarding its explanation.

The critics of Shelley who attempt to solve this problem range themselves in two opposing groups. On the one hand we have the group that asserts that Shelley never renounced his adherence to Godwinism. The chief exponents of this viewpoint are Brailsford and Dowden. The former of these critics holds that Godwin's influence upon Shelley was permanent, and he even goes so far as to state: "It would be no exaggeration to say that Godwin formed Shelley's mind, and that Prometheus Unbound and Hellas were the greatest of Godwin's works."¹ Along this same line of argument, Brailsford elaborates further and tells us that "Godwin in short explains Shelley, and it is equally true that Shelley is the indispensable commentary on Godwin. For all that was living and human in the philosopher he finds

¹ Brailsford, H.N., Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle, New York, 1913, p. 174.

imaginative expression Shelley is Godwin's fertile garden. From another standpoint, he is the desert which Godwin laid waste."¹ This critic reconciles the seeming conflict between Shelley's philosophical idealism and his acceptance of Godwin's materialistic and utilitarian doctrine thus: "For him an idea or a passion was incomparably more real and more comprehensible than the things of flesh and earth, of whose existence the senses persuaded us. To such a mind philosophy was not a distant world to be entered with diffident and halting feet, ever ready to retreat at the first alarm of common-sense. It was his daily habitation This ardent, sensitive emotional nature, with all its gift of lyrical speech and passionate feeling, was in fact the ideal man of the Godwinian conception, who lives by reason and obeys principles The erratic, fanciful Shelley was the enthusiastic slave of reason and he seemed erratic only because to be perfectly rational is in this world the wildest form of eccentricity."²

Dowden, the other of these critics who believed in the permanency of Godwin's influence upon Shelley, states in his discussion of Prometheus Unbound: "Shelley, now as always, wrote as the disciple of William Godwin. All the glittering fallacies of Political Justice -- now sufficiently tarnished -- together with all its encouraging and stimulating truths, may

¹ Ibid., p. 214.

² Ibid., pp. 215-216.

be found in the caput mortuum left when the critic has reduced the poetry of the Prometheus to a series of doctrinaire statements."¹ According to Dowden, then, all the theories characteristic of Godwinism remained unmodified in the greatest of Shelley's works and were retained by the poet as the basis for his philosophy.

The opposing viewpoint taken by the other group of critics is that Shelley finally emancipated himself almost completely from the Godwinian influence after he had accepted the doctrine of Platonism, and that his greatest idealistic poems are expressions of this emancipation. The outstanding representatives of this group are Peck, Strong, Shawcross, and Rhys.

Peck thinks that Shelley had become wholly transformed by his contact with Platonism, and in proof of this theory the critic quotes the following lines from Prometheus in which Asia tells of

Realms where the air we breathe is love,
Which in the winds and on the waves doth move,
Harmonizing this earth with what we feel above.

After quoting these lines Peck says: "Note the verb 'feel' in the last line. The sometime apostle of Reason here trusts to another guide to Truth. It is his feelings, his emotions, which give him apprehensions of an ideal state, not his

¹ Dowden, Edward, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, London, 1920, pp. 421-422.

reason. And here, I think we have the key to Shelley's view of the universe. He felt, rather than reasoned his way toward the millenium; and his greatest poems, their strength and their weakness, spring from his absolute surrender to his emotions.¹"

Strong professes the belief that Godwin's "influence on Shelley was definite and obvious, though it has lately been exaggerated."² According to this critic: "It is hardly necessary to draw attention to the fallacies of Godwin's philosophy, except in so far as Shelley's realization of them may have determined him in the subsequent reaction which succeeded his youthful devotion to Godwinism."³ That Shelley experienced such a reaction Strong never doubts.

Shawcross, another member of this group of critics, in expressing the view that Shelley renounced Godwinism, asserts: "In philosophy Shelley was in early days a materialist, and in materialistic writings he meets the doctrine of necessity, his attachment to which seems to have survived his materialism. This latter doctrine, though at first sight it appears to associate itself with an undue respect for the concrete, is in reality highly idealistic and abstract, inasmuch

¹ Peck, W.E., Shelley: His Life and Work, New York, 1927, Vol.II, p. 132.

² Strong, Archibald, Three Studies in Shelley, London, 1921, p.41.

³ Ibid. p. 43.

as, though it professes to start from nature, it ignores the fundamental character of natural things -- that is, their complexity. No doubt it was the apparent simplicity of the doctrine which first attracted Shelley to it; but in later years he saw its fallacies, and was 'discontented with such a view of things as it afforded.'¹"

Rhys, the last critic that we have mentioned in this group, names Plato rather than Godwin as the author of Shelley's philosophy. "The immense stimulus that Plato gave to Shelley we are reminded of again and again in the Essays and Letters," writes Rhys in an introduction to a volume of Shelley's prose works, "and it must be kept in mind constantly in estimating either prose or verse. Shelley's devotion to Plato was unwavering from the day when he first began to read the Dialogues Corroborated by Berkeley and other idealists, Plato taught him how to reconcile beauty and goodness, the aesthetic and the moral sides of life, and so in great part formed the basis for the Shelleyan religion. This is, therefore, in many ways, the most considerable influence in all Shelley's history, accounting for much that would else be very perplexing."²

Such then are the two conflicting sets of opinions regarding the permanency of Godwinism in Shelley's philosophy expressed by the leading authorities in this field. However,

¹ Shawcross, John, Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism, London, 1909, pp.x -xi.

² Rhys, Ernest, ed., Essays and Letters, London, 1887, pp.xxi-xxii.

between these opposing viewpoints there is the possibility of an intermediate theory which would suggest that Shelley never really discarded the Godwinian principles, but that in the period of his maturity he modified and transformed them so as to make them conform as nearly as possible with his Platonic idealism. The outlines of such a theory we can discern in some of the statements of Shawcross and of Peck, although on the whole these critics incline toward the view that Shelley eventually eliminated from his philosophy almost all of the important teachings of Godwin. However, Shawcross seems to propose that perhaps Godwinism and Platonism are not so antagonistic and incompatible as is commonly thought when he says: "At first sight nothing would appear more repellent to a being of his keen sensibility and vivid imagination than this grim and mournful doctrine (of necessity) which seems to sound the knell of all individual faith and endeavor. But we must not be at the mercy of terms; necessity to the psychologist may stand for one thing, and to the poet for something widely different. To Shelley it revealed itself as an aspect of that permanent and changeless reality, fixed far above the flux of time, which was the object of his lifelong aspiration. His necessitarianism is thus the earliest form of his so-called Platonism."¹

Likewise Peck suggests in the following statement the possibility of a reconciliation between the doctrines of Godwin and those of Plato: "Thought has indeed come to occupy a more prominent place in Shelley's philosophy than Godwinian necessity;

¹

Shawcross, John, Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism, London, 1909, p. xiii.

yet even in Hellas, the 'eyeless charioteer,' Destiny, appears to remind us of that force; and the hour of Mahmud's overthrow, like that of Prometheus' liberation, in Prometheus Unbound, seems to be under the control of Fate, or Necessity, for Mahmud promises the appearance of Ahasuerus

When the omnipotent hour to which are yoked,
He, I, and all things shall compel."

Thus Peck concludes that thought and necessity "are essentially harmonious in Shelley's philosophy, who reasoned that when the minds of men have been sufficiently set free, after, perhaps, centuries of education, the hour of tyranny's doom would strike. The cumulative force behind the operation of Necessity would, however, be men's thought. This is certainly a great philosophical advance over a faith in a pagan Fate, or Necessity. It takes the burden of men's emancipation from the shoulders of that Demigod, Demogorgon, and puts it, where it belongs, on the shoulders of man." ¹ According to this conception, therefore, Shelley did not completely renounce Godwinism, but he refined it of all the baser elements that would conflict with his Platonism.

Therefore, in the following investigation we shall endeavor to examine this theory, and to decide, if possible, whether it is a reliable one or whether either of the conflicting opinions regarding the permanency of Godwin's influence

¹
Peck, W.E., Shelley: His Life and Work, London, 1927, Vol. II, p. 248.

upon Shelley held by the two major groups of Shelley's critics is more plausible. We shall investigate first the nature of Shelley's youthful philosophy as revealed in his juvenile poems; next we shall consider his poetry during the period when it was dominated by the influence of Godwin; and finally we shall examine Shelley's philosophical acceptance of Platonism as it was expressed in the final stage of his poetic career.

CHAPTER I
THE PRE-GODWIN PERIOD

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Shelley's psychological idealism manifested itself early in his life. In fact it is difficult to find a time in his youth which was not colored by his vivid imagination, roaming unmolested wherever it listed and transforming the world of reality into a romantic and ideal realm. Shelley was never like other children. This imaginative, shy, sensitive boy, with his head always in the clouds, lived completely in an ideal world of dreams. At school he seldom mingled with his classmates or joined in their games, preferring to keep, for the most part, to himself, "secluded by his vivid imaginings from the riot and the din."¹ It is no wonder then that Medwin tells us that his school-mates considered him strange and unsocial. And, just as all normal, mischief-loving boys try to bully any lad whom they consider "queer," just so Shelley's youthful associates endeavored to persecute and tantalize him, until they finally succeeded in making his life at school "a perfect Hell."

As a result of this persecution, Shelley became pre-occupied early in his boyhood with the contemplation of the miseries of suffering humanity. To better the lot of down-trodden mortals became, therefore, almost from his infancy, the

¹
Dowden, Edward, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, London, 1920, p.7.

mission which was to dominate his life and work. This mission was one of the more sublime expressions of Shelley's idealism, as interpreted in the popular sense of the term.

Shelley's sympathy with suffering humanity had its first literary expression in some stanzas written as early as 1800 on a tabby-cat, "which was probably his earliest composition in verse."¹ In this poem we find the poet somewhat dejected on contemplating

All the modes of distress
Which torture the tenants of earth;
And the various evils,
Which like so many devils,
Attend the poor souls from their birth.

However, Shelley's idealism as expressed in his philosophy by this quality of human sympathy was turned aside in a sinister direction and was obscured for a time by the very intensity of his imagination, which in its more wholesome aspect could create for the poet an ideal world of beauty and perfection. As we have already stated, "Shelley from the very² beginning delighted in giving free scope to his imagination." And the realms where Shelley's imagination chose most frequently to roam were those of the marvellous, the fantastic, and the

¹ Peck, Walter E., Shelley, New York, 1927, Vol. I, p. 8.

² Mac Donald, Daniel J., The Radicalism of Shelley and Its Sources, Washington, D.C., 1912, p.15.

mysterious. He would spend hours at a time weaving weird, extravagant tales and relating them eagerly to whosoever would listen. "In the garret of the house at Field Place he imagined there was an alchemist old and grey pondering over magic tomes. The 'Great Old Snake' and 'The Great Tortoise' were other wondrous creatures of his imagination that lived out of doors. He used to entertain his sisters with weird stories about hobgoblins and ghosts; and even got them to dress themselves so as to represent fiends, and spirits."¹

This intense interest in the occult sciences resulted in solitary walks which the poet took, ever on the lookout for ghosts and other manifestations of the supernatural. The lengths to which he was driven by this fantastic phase of his imagination, Shelley describes in his Hymn to Intellectual Beauty:

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Thro' many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
And starlight-wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed.

The psychological effect upon Shelley's mind of this preoccupation with the bizarre and mysterious caused the poet's imagination to leave "the strand of make-believe, and play

¹
Ibid., p. 15.

strange tricks with the facts of common life."¹ His cousin, Medwin, relates how, when Shelley had "supped full with horrors" he would often suffer from "strange and sometimes frightful dreams," and from "apparitions which bore all the semblance of reality." According to Dowden, "what occupied Shelley's imagination became for him a reality; his waking dreams were of frequent recurrence, and were followed by much nervous excitement."² Many instances are recounted by his biographers of the experiences which Shelley, under the influence of this self-delusion, fabricated. Helen Shelley tells us that on one occasion, "he gave the minutest details of a visit he had paid to some ladies with whom he was acquainted at our village." This story was later proved to be entirely fictitious. Similar incidents when Shelley was the victim of hallucination were so frequent as to cause his friends often "to reject genuine truths from his lips as fiction."³

This aspect of Shelley's nature has been fully discussed by Hogg,⁴ who explains and justifies such instances of

¹ Strong, Archibald I., Three Studies in Shelley, London, 1921, p. 114.

² Dowden, E., The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, London, 1920, pp. 7-8.

³ Peck, W.E., Op.cit., pp. 18-19.

⁴ Hogg, Thomas, J., Life of Shelley, London, 1906, Vol. I, Chap. X.

what Peacock calls "self-delusion" by the following statement: "He was altogether incapable of rendering an account of any transaction whatsoever according to the strict and precise truth, and the bare naked realities of actual life; not through an addiction to falsehood, which he cordially detested, but because he was the creature, the unsuspecting and unresisting victim, of his irresistible imagination."

Shelley's first literary attempts, as well as the incidents of his early life, reveal how completely this "sinister" aspect in his imagination had taken hold of him. When very young, Shelley began his career as a writer. The influences upon his early work were the "ghostly wonders" furnished by the fantastic and weird romances of Anne Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis, which the poet's restless imagination led him to read omnivorously. "For tales of marvel and mystery his appetite was unappeasable; six-penny volumes, bound in blue wrappers, telling of haunted castles, necromancers, bandits, murderers, were largely purchased and devoured."¹ Shelley's youthful literary efforts, therefore, were imitations of the highly-exaggerated and lurid tales of the Gothic romancers and contained most of the defects of these inferior models.

Occasionally the morbid melancholy of Shelley's juvenile poems manifests itself in complaints against the wrongs of the existing social order rather than in horror-tales in verse. A good example of such poems is A Tale of Society as

¹
Dowden, E., The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, London, 1920, p. 7.

It Is: From Facts, 1811, which relates the injustice wrought upon the poet by

The law's stern slavery and the insolent stare
With which law loves to rend the poor man's soul.

In such lines as these we find expressed again that sympathy with downtrodden humanity which was the most sublime phase of Shelley's youthful idealism and which had appeared earlier in his writings in his Verses on a Cat. And it was this aspect of Shelley's idealistic philosophy which made the poet an easy victim of the materialistic influences which for a time seemingly retarded his poetic growth. For Shelley, in his role of reformer, was ready to seize eagerly upon any scheme whereby he might attain his ideal of social regeneration. And the doctrine of perfectionism embraced in the philosophy of many of the materialists of Shelley's day would, therefore, be particularly appealing to the young poet, although the means that they suggested for reaching their goal would seem to us, at first glance, to be repellent to one who was by nature endowed with an imaginative temper, which sought to escape from all that was concrete or earthly. Yet Shelley's youthful imagination had become so distorted as a result of his excessive preoccupation with the supernatural that a philosophy of materialism and rationalism would perhaps now be welcomed by him. Some biographers have been prone to deplore Shelley's complete submission, for a time at least, to the influence of such philosophic doctrines. And yet it is probably fortunate

that Shelley yielded himself at this stage of his poetic career to the dominance of concrete materialism in order that his imagination might be purged of its more horrible and sinister aspects so that his philosophical idealism might be given a chance to develop. "It may be that the logical gymnastic of his studies in eighteenth century thinkers -- and those especially of France -- saved him in some degree from the dangers of an excessive tendency towards the visionary. 'Had it not been for this sharp brushing away of intellectual cobwebs' writes Mr. Salt, 'his genius, always prone to mysticism and metaphysical subtleties, might have lost itself in a labyrinth of dreams and fantasies, and thus have wasted its store of moral enthusiasm.'¹

¹ Dowden, E., Introduction to The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, New York, n.d., p. 4.

CHAPTER II
THE PERIOD OF GODWINIAN
INFLUENCE

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Of the materialistic influences which served for a time to check the lurid wanderings of Shelley's imagination, the most important is that exerted upon the young poet by William Godwin. From Dr. Lind, a master of Eton, Shelley borrowed a set of Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. The influence which this philosophical treatise was destined to have on Shelley's life and work is attested to in the poet's letter to Godwin written in 1812. "It is now a period of more than two years since first I saw your inestimable book," wrote Shelley. "It opened to my mind fresh and more extensive views; it materially influenced my character, and I rose from its perusal a wiser and better man. I was no longer the votary of romance; till then I had existed in an ideal world -- now I found that in this universe of ours was enough to excite the interest of the heart, enough to employ the discussions of reason; I beheld, in short, that I had duties to perform. Conceive the effect which the Political Justice would have upon a mind before jealous of its independence, participating somewhat in a peculiar susceptibility."¹

Thus from Shelley's own statement, we perceive how overwhelming was the influence which Godwin's treatise exerted upon him, and to what a great extent this book transformed

¹

Shelley's Letter to Godwin from Keswick, Jan. 10, 1812.

the young poet into an ardent advocate of a materialistic and utilitarian system of philosophy, which at first glance seems entirely foreign to his earlier idealism. But on closer inspection we find that perhaps Godwin, himself, was something of an idealist. For in the introduction to this dissertation, we defined one phase of idealism as the enthusiasm for a cause. And certainly Godwin fits very nicely into this category, for he was bent on reforming the world to almost as great a degree as was Shelley. The attainment for society of human perfectionism was his goal, and an ideal of this nature could be readily understood and adopted by the youthful poet. However, though their ends were fundamentally the same and though they may be interpreted as idealistic, the means of gaining them suggested by Godwin was apparently incompatible with a poetic philosophy such as Shelley must eventually have developed before he could write his greatest works. Therefore, let us trace the influence of Godwin as revealed in Shelley's poetry, in an attempt to discover, if possible, the exact nature of the poet's adaption of Godwinian principles.

Shelley's first important poetical work, and the one which is most completely dominated by Godwin's materialistic and necessitarian doctrines is Queen Mab, written in 1813. In this poem "we find developed the mechanical conception of perfectibility, through which a man, by taking thought, may add cubit on cubit to his spiritual stature till it is stretched¹ to gigantic proportions." Shelley looks forward to the time

¹

Strong, Archibald, Three Studies in Shelley, London, 1921, p.44.

when reason will prevail throughout the world. Reason, thinks the poet, following in the footsteps of his mentor, Godwin, will wipe out poverty and injustice and will usher in an era of goodness and plenty. Men and women will live together in love and harmony, since

birth and life and death, and that strange state
Before the naked soul has found its home,
All tend to perfect happiness, and urge
The restless wheels of being on their way,
Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,
Bicker and burn to gain their destined goal.

(Queen Mab, Canto IX)

In lines such as these Shelley is but echoing Godwin's mechanical conception of perfectibility. But a mystical note in Shelley's theory of regeneration which he did not borrow from the author of Political Justice may be discerned in the following quotation:

All things are recreated, and the flame
Of constantaneous love inspires all life.

(Queen Mab, Canto VIII)

However, it is only rarely that Queen Mab affords us such glimpses of Shelley's creed of love, which was to reach its full expression during the period when Platonism was the dominating influence upon the poet's philosophy. And, therefore, in this poem Shelley is almost unreservedly the

disciple of Godwin. In true Godwinian style the poet inveighs against institutions of all kinds and finally attacks Christianity. According to Shelley, there is a spirit which pervades the world, but, contrary to common opinion, it is not God. It is instead the universal spirit of necessity, aloof, indifferent, and blind, whom Shelley addresses thus:

Spirit of Nature! All-sufficing Power,
Necessity! thou mother of the world.

(Queen Mab, Canto VI)

And to promulgate this doctrine of necessity, Shelley writes:

Even the minutest molecule of light
That in an April sunbeam's fleeting glow
Fulfills its destined though invisible work,
The universal spirit guides.

(Queen Mab, Canto VI)

And again:

the minutest throb
That through their frames diffuses
The slightest, faintest motion,
Is fixed and indispensable
As the majestic laws
That rules yon rolling orbs.

(Queen Mab, Canto II)

Thus Queen Mab is, with the exception of only a few

lines, a poetic paraphrase of Godwin's perfectionist and necessitarian doctrines. But Shelley was not to remain in a state of such complete subjection to the theories promulgated in Political Justice. And it is perhaps safe to say that never again was the poet to be so completely the uncompromising disciple of Godwin as in Queen Mab.

Shelley's next important poem, Alastor; or the Spirit of Solitude, (1815) is described by Mrs. Shelley in her note on the poem thus: "None of Shelley's poems is more characteristic than this. The solemn spirit that reigns throughout, the worship of the majesty of nature, the broodings of a poet's heart in solitude -- the mingling of the exulting joy which the various aspects of the visible universe inspire, with the sad struggling pangs which human passion imparts give a touching interest to the whole." And it is in this poem that we discover the earliest expression of the Platonic quest for ideal beauty which was to become so characteristic a theme of Shelley's poetry. However, in Alastor Shelley embodies this ideal beauty in a woman, while in many of his later poems he conceives of the highest type of beauty as that which lacks all physical attributes.

The poet's conception of love in Alastor reflects also the influence of Plato, who taught that the intellectual quality of love was superior to the sensual quality. The following quotation is typical of this attitude:

He dreamed a veiled maid
 Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.
 Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
 Heard in the calm of thought; its music long,
 Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held
 His inmost senses suspended in its web
 Of many-colored woof and shifting hues.
 Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,
 And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
 Thoughts the most dear to him, and poesy,
 Herself a poet.

These lines reveal Shelley's glorification of love,
 which is the most sublime aspect of his idealism. The supreme
 law of life to Shelley was a pure, unselfish love for all
 humanity. "To Shelley, virtue in its highest form of self-
 sacrifice was neither a habit nor an effort, but a passion, an
 instinctive and ecstatic affirmation of the universal principle
 of Love, in which all beauty, thought, ¹prudence, virtue, and
 poetry were combined and transfigured." Without recognizing
 this phase of Shelley's philosophy it is impossible to appre-
 ciate his finest poetry.

Alastor, then, to quote from Mrs. Shelley's note,
 "was the outpouring of his own emotions, embodied in the
 purest form he could conceive, (and) painted in the ideal hues

¹
 Strong, Archibald, Three Studies in Shelley, London, 1921, p.32.

which his brilliant imagination inspired. The poem marks a significant stage in the development of Shelley's idealistic philosophy in the fact that, although it was written during a period in his career which was dominated largely by the influence of Godwin, it reveals certain elements in the poet's nature that were to prepare the way for an acceptance of the doctrines of Plato.

Two months after the publication of Alastor, Shelley, accompanied by Mary and Claire Clairmont, set out for Switzerland. At Secheron, a small suburb of Geneva, they were joined by Byron, who became during the summer of 1816 Shelley's constant companion. And it was on the shores of Lake Geneva, amid the snow-capped splendor of the Swiss Alps that Shelley conceived the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty and Mont Blanc. The former of these poems marks an important epoch in the development of the poet's art, for it is here that we find expressed for the first time Shelley's self-dedication to the spirit of Intellectual Beauty and to her hand-maiden, Poetry. He renounces his preoccupation with the sinister which had so fascinated him in his youth and recalls the glorious moment:

When musing on the lot
Of life, at the sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming, --
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shriekt, and claspt my hands in ecstasy!

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine -- have I not kept the vow?

The significance of this dedication can be perceived only when we realize that the worship of Intellectual Beauty became for Shelley the creed of his life and the inspiration of all his best poetry. This Spirit, this "unseen Power" was to the mind of Shelley synonymous with his conception of an omnipotent and immortal love which he regarded "as the supreme spirit and sole productive source of good in the life of the world. With this fundamental conception we have the means to apprehend all that is most significant in his life and work. The one word 'Love' sums up not only his philosophy, but his¹ theology and his ethics as well."

This doctrine of love, which is presented in this poem in the garb of Intellectual Beauty, is the only religion that Shelley will recognize, and it is to this Power that he looks for the salvation of mankind. It is love alone that makes this world endurable, thinks Shelley, and that

Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

Again the poet says:

That never joy illumined my brow
Unlinkt with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery
That thou -- O awful Loveliness,
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.

¹ Stovall, Floyd, "Shelley's Doctrine of Love", Publications of the Modern Language Association, Mar. XLV, p. 283.

Thus for the first time we find Shelley dedicating himself to the worship of intellectual love and to the promulgation of this sacred doctrine through the channels of poetry. Therefore, it is in this poem that we catch our first glimpse of Platonism in Shelley's poetry. And with the dawn of Platonic influence upon his philosophy, the poet, himself, began to question his earlier uncompromising acceptance of Godwinism. He had certainly undergone a great change in his philosophic views when a few years after the publication of Queen Mab he could write: "The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals, and their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things, had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk and dispenses them from thinking. But I was discontented with such a view of things as it afforded; man is a being of high aspirations, 'looking before and after,' whose 'thoughts wander through eternity,' disclaiming alliance with transience and decay; incapable of imagining to himself annihilation; existing but in the future and the past; being, not what he is, but what he has been and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness -- dissolution.¹ This is the character of all life and being."

In this manner Shelley refutes his early materialistic theories and proclaims the existence of "a spirit within"

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Shelley, P.B., On Life.

which he soon comes to identify as love. And it is this spirit to which he dedicates his powers in his Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.

In September of 1816 Shelley returned to England and spent the autumn and winter of that year in Bath. These months were for Shelley among the most sorrowful and trying of his life for it was during this period that news reached him of the tragic end of Fanny Godwin and also the suicide of his wife, Harriet. These events threw the poet into a state of melancholy and led him to reflect more than was his wont on the hapless lot of humanity. How deeply Shelley was moved by the death of Harriet we can only conjecture, but even if we should take the extreme view and say that his personal feelings were little affected by the violent end of a woman whom he had ceased to love and subsequently deserted, we are forced to admit that his deep-reaching sympathy for all the woes of mankind could not let him escape entirely unscathed from so agonizing an experience.

Thus, out of the furnace of suffering, the flames of which were intensified by his unsuccessful suit for the possession of the children borne to him by Harriet, he emerged more keenly sensitive than ever before to the manifold sorrows that beset the unfortunate and downtrodden victims of society. In order to voice his sentiments against the existing social order he produced in March, 1817, a pamphlet entitled A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom. This political tract was a plea for extending the suffrage and thereby

enabling those not at present entitled to the franchise to better their condition by gaining their just share in the government. To further this scheme Shelley offered to contribute one hundred pounds, the tenth part of his annual income. Though this pamphlet failed to bring about the desired reform, it is significant in that it marks an accrued interest in the cause of mankind and paves the way for the poetic expression of the plan of world reformation which we are to find in The Revolt of Islam.

According to Mrs. Shelley, The Revolt of Islam was written while Shelley was at Marlow in Buckinghamshire during the year 1817. This was Shelley's longest poem and was a complete expression of the philosophy of life which he had developed thus far. The poem, which was originally entitled Leon and Cyntha, was based, at least to some degree, upon certain ethical and political principles which Shelley had acquired from Godwin. And yet it showed very clearly that Shelley was beginning to modify many of those principles so as to give them a less materialistic coloring. More and more was the poet dedicating himself to the pursuit of an ideal which could be attained only by the exaltation of love. And in The Revolt of Islam, the principle of love is given the pre-eminence which Shelley had accorded hitherto to necessity, although this doctrine was not completely discarded. In Shelley's own words, found in the Preface to the poem: "Love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the world."

In this poem Shelley chose as his poetical form the Spenserian stanza, and thus, in a measure, he links

himself with that splendid idealist who was his predecessor by several hundred years, and this alliance is further strengthened by the romantic and imaginary background which Shelley gives to The Revolt of Islam. Against this background of gorgeous and exotic imagery he unfolds a fantastic tale which serves as a medium for the expression of his doctrines regarding social reform. This purpose Shelley states thus: "I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle combinations of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality; and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind."¹ These are but the doctrines of Godwin that we found expressed in a slightly different manner in Queen Mab.

Shelley's ethical and philosophic principles, he, himself, still attributes to Godwin, although it is true that a few new elements are entering into his philosophy that find no place in the materialist's beliefs. Thus, in the Preface to The Revolt of Islam we perceive an implied tribute to Godwin when Shelley states his motive in writing the poem: "I would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue, and be incited to those inquiries which

¹

Shelley, P.B. Preface to The Revolt of Islam.

have led to my moral and political creed, and that of some of the sublimest intellects in the world." Shelley still worshipped Godwin as one of the world's greatest thinkers. And yet it is significant that in these very lines, in which he eulogizes Godwin, he says that he has designed his poem to appeal to the feelings of men. Certainly his philosophic teacher would never have taught him to consider emotions, for Godwin's emphasis had always been on the intellect alone.

A few lines farther on in the Preface Shelley asserts that his poem "is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind; its influence in refining and making pure the most daring and uncommon impulses of the imagination, the understanding and the senses." The desire for excellence expressed in these words is indeed but a restatement of the perfectionistic theory of Godwin, but the poet is introducing a new and foreign element into Godwin's creed when he places the imagination on an equal plane with the understanding and the senses.

In the "Dedication to Mary" at the beginning of The Revolt of Islam Shelley again pays tribute to Godwin and his Political Justice in the following lines:

One voice came forth from many a mighty spirit
Which was the echo of three-thousand years;
And the tumultuous world stood mute to hear it.

(Stanza XIII)

Shelley was still listening to Godwin's voice, although now other notes had begun to fall upon his ear.

In the Dedication to the poem also we find an account similar to that contained in the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty regarding the poet's consecration of himself to the pursuit of an ideal. In The Revolt of Islam this ideal is the salvation of mankind -- a goal toward which he had striven even from his early youth. Shelley tells us of the moment he first became acutely conscious of tyranny and oppression that society thrusts upon the common man. And it was then, says Shelley, that

I clasped my hands, and looked around,
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground--
So, without shame, I spake: -- "I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check."

(Stanza IV)

This then was Shelley's life mission. His gift for poetry, his vast "knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,"¹ and all the powers with which nature had endowed him

Wrought linked armor for (his) soul, before
It might walk forth to war among mankind.

(Dedication to Revolt of Islam, Stanza V)

¹ Shelley, P.B., The Revolt of Islam, Dedication, Stanza V.

The first canto of The Revolt of Islam is an account of the conflict between the principles of Good and Evil. Shelley's radicalism and his revolt against the commonly accepted opinions of society is revealed by the fact that he presents to us the Spirit of Good in the form of "a dire Snake, with man and beast unreconciled,"¹ while the Spirit of Evil is symbolized by a mighty Eagle who was destined to "revel in victory, reigning over a world of woe."² It was for Shelley one of the hateful mysteries of this paradoxical world of ours that evil should be allowed

To soar aloft with overshadowing wings:
And the great Spirit of Good did creep among
The nations of mankind, and every tongue
Curst and blasphemed him as he past.

(Canto I, Stanza, XXVII)

To reverse this tragic condition of society became then for Shelley his supreme ideal, and to teach men to recognize the Good, even though it appeared to them in a loathsome guise, was one of his chief tasks as a poet. Such, however, was Godwin's purpose also.

In stanza twelve of the second canto Shelley expresses a feeling which looks at first like a renunciation of necessitarianism. The poet here seemingly breaks away from the

¹
The Revolt of Islam, Canto I, Stanza XXVII.

²
Ibid., Canto I, Stanza XXVII.

determinist's philosophy and proclaims his hope in the final regeneration of mankind, not through the Spirit of Necessity, but through the Spirit of Truth. Yet "truth's steady beams" were always exalted by Godwin, who devoted his efforts to their pursuit.

How man is to achieve this sublime state of regeneration Shelley tells us in the next two stanzas:

It shall be thus no more! too long, .
 Sons of the glorious dead, have ye lain bound
 In darkness and in ruin! -- Hope is strong,
 Justice and Truth their winged child have found! --
 Awake! arise! until the mighty sound
 Of your career shall scatter in its gust
 The thrones of the oppressor, and the ground
 Hide the last altar's unregarded dust,
 Whose Idol has so long betrayed your impious trust!

It must be so -- I will arise and waken
 The multitude, and, like a sulphurous hill
 Which on a sudden from its snows has shaken
 The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill
 The world with cleansing fire; it must, it will --
 It may not be restrained!

(Canto II, Stanzas XIII-XIV)

In these lines Shelley attributes to man a freedom of will which is wholly incompatible with Godwin's theories. Man must find his salvation within himself; he and he alone can tear

asunder the oppressive bonds of society and thus secure the triumph of the Spirit of Good. Far different is the picture painted in Political Justice when the author presents man as a helpless cog in the great Wheel of Necessity -- the "Mother of the World." Strikingly also do these lines from The Revolt of Islam contrast with Shelley's own words in a note on Necessity, attached to Queen Mab: "Every human being is irresistibly impelled to act precisely as he does act: in the eternity which preceded his birth a chain of causes was generated, which, operating under the name of motives, make it impossible that any thought of his mind, or any action of his life, should be otherwise than it is." In 1813 the poet had voiced this sentiment; yet just four years later he was urging men to arise and by their own power shake off the cloak of tyranny and oppression. Such a faith in the freedom of the will reveals one point of difference between the philosophy of Godwin and that of Shelley which the poet never seemed able successfully to reconcile.

The renovation of society, according to Shelley, depended upon liberty for man and woman alike.

Never will peace and human nature meet
 Till free and equal man and woman greet
 Domestic peace; and, ere this power can make
 In human hearts its calm and holy seat,
 This slavery must be broken.

(Canto II, Stanza XXXVII)

And a few stanzas farther on Shelley asks:

Can man be free if woman be a slave?

(Canto II, Stanza XLIII)

Although in the early eighteenth century this idea of woman's equality with man was quite a revolutionary one, it had been held by Godwin, and thus it was to be expected that Shelley would profess this belief also. Moreover, Shelley believed with the reactionaries that salvation would not come through the old and sage nor through the mighty and powerful, but that it will be accorded to some "glorious child" to lead men to see the truth.

New lore was this -- old age, with its gray hair,
And wrinkled legends of unworthy things,
And icy sneers, is naught: it cannot dare
To burst the chains which life forever flings
On the entangled soul's aspiring wings.

(Canto II, Stanza XXXIII)

Nor are the strong and the severe to keep
The empire of the world.

(Canto II, Stanza XXXIV)

These are but two of the many instances throughout his works when Shelley follows in Godwin's footsteps in revealing himself as a rebel against a social order which, in his opinion, was founded on distorted sense of values, where evil was praised and virtue condemned.

In the third canto of The Revolt of Islam Shelley pays tribute to a man who had early influenced his mental growth.

"The character of the old man who liberates Laon from his tower-prison, and tends on him in sickness, is founded," according to the statement of Mrs. Shelley in her note on the poem, "on that of Doctor Lind, who, when Shelley was at Eton, had often stood by to befriend and support him, and whose name he never mentioned without love and veneration." It was from this professor that Shelley had first secured a copy of Political Justice, and it was Dr. Lind also who had encouraged him in his scientific experiments, performed during his school days. The poet was never to forget, therefore, the man who had loved and sympathized with him when almost all others had scorned and reviled him. One may not be far wrong in feeling perhaps that one of the reasons for the vast influence exerted upon Shelley by Godwin's Political Justice may have been that this book came to him from the hand of his trusted friend.

The evils of the existing social order were never far from Shelley's thoughts, and in the ninth stanza of the fourth canto of The Revolt of Islam he attacks what he conceives to be one of the most flagrant of these evils -- custom. The commonly accepted and the conventional were constantly rebelled against by Shelley, who felt that

"Custom maketh blind and obdurate
The loftiest hearts."

And in this same stanza the poet again gives us a hint of his faith in man's ability to control his destiny, when he says that

He had beheld the woe
In which mankind was bound, but deemed that fate
Which had made them abject would preserve them so.

In these lines he implies that he was deluded in such a belief in the unalterable character of fate. This doctrine he had received from Godwin, but now more and more Shelley was coming to find it incompatible with his own philosophical idealism.

Shelley felt sure that some day the world would be released from the iron grip of custom and that the Golden Age of freedom would be ushered in when

Kind thoughts, and mighty hopes, and gentle deeds
Abound, for fearless love, and the pure law
Of mild equality and peace, succeeds
To faiths which long have held the world in awe,
Bloody and false and cold.

(Canto IV, Stanza XV)

This is the essence of Shelley's creed. Whatever else he believed, Love was the cardinal principle in his philosophy. It was for him the only door through which happiness and peace could enter into a degenerate society. Love was the magic wand which could transform an evil world into a place of beauty and purity.

In the fifth canto of The Revolt of Islam we catch a glimpse of the religious element in Shelley's poetry. In the eleventh stanza he teaches that

To avenge misdeed
On the misdoer doth but Misery feed
With her own broken heart! O Earth, O Heaven!
And thou, dread Nature, which to every deed
And all that lives or is, to be hath given,
Even as to thee have these done ill, and are forgiven!

The question of Shelley's attitude toward religion has always been a subject for much dispute. In a letter to Godwin, written when the poet was nineteen, Shelley says that while at Oxford he "became in the popular sense of the word 'God', an Atheist." And this atheism was of so radical a nature as to cause his expulsion from college. A few weeks after being expelled Shelley wrote: "I once was an enthusiastic Deist but never a Christian." And yet in his Essay on Christianity, written in 1815, Shelley professes the deepest respect and reverence for the personal character of Jesus, although he never throughout his life admits His divinity. Shelley's essay contains many passages such as the following which reveal how great was his admiration for the author of the Christian faith: "We discover that he is the enemy of oppression and of falsehood; that he is the advocate of equal justice; that he is neither disposed to sanction bloodshed nor deceit; under whatsoever pretences their practice may be vindicated. We discover that he was a man of meek and majestic demeanour, calm in danger; of natural and simple thought and habits; beloved to adoration by his adherents; unmoved, solemn, and severe."

And not only did Shelley come to revere the character of Christ, but he also came to adopt as his own many of Christ's doctrines. We can scarcely find a better analysis of Shelley's philosophic principles than those he ascribes to Jesus: "Before man can be free, and equal, and truly wise, he must cast aside the chains of habit and superstition; he must strip sensuality of its pomp, and selfishness of its excuses, and contemplate actions and objects as they really are. He will discover the

wisdom of universal love; he will feel the meanness and the injustice of sacrificing the reason and the liberty of his fellow-men to the indulgence of his physical appetites, and becoming a party to their degradation by the consummation of his own." ¹ And again we see Shelley in his picture of Christ in the following passage from the Essay on Christianity: "He tramples upon all received opinions, on all the cherished luxuries and superstitions of mankind. He bids them cast aside the chains of custom and blind faith by which they have been encompassed from the very cradle of their being."

This similarity between Shelley and his own conception of Christ is even more strikingly illustrated in the lines which we have quoted from the fifth canto of The Revolt of Islam. In this stanza the poet is but echoing that teaching of Jesus which Shelley had discussed in his Essay on Christianity thus: "My neighbour, or my servant, or my child, has done me an injury, and it is just that he should suffer an injury in return." Such is the doctrine which Jesus Christ summoned his whole resources of persuasion to oppose. "'Love your enemy, bless those who curse you:'" such, he says, is the practice of God, and such must ye imitate if ye would be the children of God." In the same essay Shelley says: "The emptiness and folly of retaliation are apparent from every example which can be brought forward. Not only Jesus Christ, but the most eminent professors of every sect of philosophy, have reasoned against this futile superstition." And Shelley, himself, reasons against this superstition also in The Revolt
1

Shelley, P.B. Essay on Christianity.

of Islam and in the other of his poems. This is but one of the many points of likeness between the doctrines of Jesus and those of Shelley.

And in the closing lines of this eleventh stanza of the fifth canto we find another religious allusion in Shelley's reference to "dread Nature", which is the name that the poet here ascribes to the Universal God. Such a conception does not seem radically different from Necessity, the only god in which Godwin believes. That Shelley did believe in an omnipotent deity, however, is evidenced by the following passage from his Essay on Christianity: "There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will." "This Power is God; and those who have seen God have, in the period of their purer and more perfect nature, been harmonized by their own will to so exquisite (a) consentaneity of power as to give forth divinest melody, when the breath of universal being sweeps over their frame." Surely the man who penned these words was far from being an Atheist, even though he never became a convert to Christianity in the traditional sense. The key, then, to the solution of the dispute regarding Shelley's religious principles can be found, it seems to me, in the Preface to The Revolt of Islam, when the author says that in this poem: "The erroneous and degrading idea which men have conceived of a Supreme Being, for instance, is spoken against, but not the Supreme Being itself. The belief which some superstitious persons whom I have brought upon the stage entertain of the Deity, as injurious to the character

of his benevolence, is widely different from my own." Shelley was not an opponent of God but of the distorted conception of God, upon which the fanatical religious beliefs of a bigoted and hypocritical world are founded. Such a world had even tried deliberately to misconstrue the teachings of the Christ whom it professed to worship and to fit them to its own narrow and artificial code. If Shelley never declared that Jesus was the Son of God, he at least showed himself to be in sympathy with Him when he wrote: "'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, that ye may be the sons of your Heavenly Father, who makes the sun to shine on the good and on the evil, and the rain to fall on the just and on the unjust.'" How monstrous a calumny have not imposters dared to advance against the mild and gentle author of this just sentiment, and against the whole tenor of his doctrines and his life, overflowing with benevolence and forbearance and compassion!"¹ Shelley's religion was not of the traditional sort, but its radicalism lies, not in any attack upon the God of the universe nor in any word of condemnation upon the character or teachings of Jesus Christ, but in its revolt against the false and hypocritical garbs with which society disguised its religion. And of somewhat the same nature was Godwin's so-called atheism, for this philosopher reserved the greater measure of his scorn for traditional theology as established by custom.

In the fourteenth stanza of the fifth canto of The Revolt of Islam we are given a glimpse of the ideal to which

¹

Shelley, P.B., Essay on Christianity.

Shelley had consecrated all his powers, All the genius with which he was endowed he had dedicated to the realization of his dream of

a nation
Made free by love, a mighty brotherhood
Linkt by a jealous interchange of good.

These lines contain the keynote to his hopes and visions and to the driving motive in almost all of his finest poetry.

A little farther on in the same canto there is another echo of the doctrines of Christ:

What call ye justice? Is there one who ne'er
In secret thought has wisht another's ill? --
Are ye all pure? Let those stand forth who hear
And tremble not.

How like are these lines to the words of Jesus uttered when the Pharisees brought before him a woman taken in sin: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." A divine tolerance was but one of the many points of contact between the teachings of Jesus and those of Shelley, who both taught that

the chastened will
Of virtue sees that justice is the light
Of love, and not revenge and terror and despite.

(Canto V, Stanza XXXIV)

Also in the fifth canto Shelley eulogizes wisdom, which is but a refined synonym for the Godwinian term, reason:

Wisdom! thy irresistible children rise
 To hail thee; and the elements they chain,
 And their own will, to swell the glory of thy train.

(Stanza 1)

The powers of the intellect Shelley still proclaims as Godwin had done, and in the following lines he is but voicing Godwin's sentiments when he addresses wisdom thus:

Spirit vast and deep as Night and Heaven!
 Mother and soul of all to which is given
 The light of life, the loveliness of being.

(Canto V, Stanza 2)

Some lines farther on in Canto V Shelley professes his belief in the important role that poetry has to play as the handmaiden of wisdom and of love. In the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty the poet seems to have realized how high and holy was his calling, and this impression is still upon him when he writes:

And Science, and her sister Poesy,
 Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free.

(Stanza 5)

In these lines Shelley couples the intellect with the imagination. And thus the poet seems already to have begun his endeavor to reconcile the Godwinian emphasis with the Platonic exaltation of the imagination.

Just as all forms of human suffering were abhorrent to Shelley, even so was war, in his opinion, one of the most

flagrant evils of a perverted society. There was never any justification for war even though good might ultimately result, thought Shelley, who realized

how ugly and how fell,
O Hate! thou art, even when thy life thou shedd'st
For Love!

(Canto VI, Stanza XVI)

Thus Shelley was at all times a pacifist who, like Godwin, constantly endeavored to rid society of so cruel an evil as

War! of hate and pain
Thou loathed slave.

(Canto VI, Stanza XVII)

The seventh canto of The Revolt of Islam contains in its thirty-first stanza the essence of Shelley's religious and philosophic views which formed his creed at this time. As we have seen, he did not profess to be a Christian; however, he did believe in

One mind, the type of all, the moveless wave
Whose calm reflects all moving things that are,
Necessity and love and life, the grave
And sympathy, fountains of hope and fear,
Justice and truth and time and the world's natural sphere.

In these lines Godwin's influence is quite apparent, although Shelley is beginning to modify some of the teachings of the materialist philosopher. The poet is still preaching the

doctrine of necessity, but he now links it with love and other emotions which were not accorded so important a place in his master's philosophy. And thus Shelley is endeavoring to refine the principle of necessity into an element of his philosophy which will be more compatible with the Platonic ideal of love.

Shelley continues to expound his religious views in Canto VIII when he pictures the evils to which the traditional type of religion has always led:

Men say that they themselves have heard and seen,
Or known from others who have known such things,
A Shade, a Form, which Earth and Heaven between,
Wields an invisible rod -- that Priests and Kings,
Custom, domestic sway, ay all that brings
Man's freeborn soul beneath the oppressor's heel,
Are strong ministers, and that the stings
Of Death will make the wise his vengeance feel,
Though truth and virtue arm their hearts with tenfold steel.

(Stanza VII)

Against such a conception of the Universal Power Shelley rebels and finds that the only cure for the world's ills lies in

Love, who to the heart of wandering man
Art as the calm to ocean's weary waves!
Justice, or truth, or joy! those only can
From slavery and religion's labyrinth caves
Guide us, as one clear star the sea-man saves.

(Stanza XI)

In Shelley's mind, religion had grossly failed. It was therefore left to the redeeming power of Love to regenerate the world.

Shelley again asserts his faith in the freedom of man's will in the sixteenth stanza of Canto VIII when he states that the wrongs that men suffer are unnecessary since human beings have within themselves the ability to

arise, and will

That gold should lose its power, and thrones their glory;
That love, which none may bind, be free to fill
The world, like light; and evil faith, grown hoary
With crime, be quencht and die.

And in the same stanza he further proves himself an advocate of the theory of free will when he proclaims that

Man alone

Remains, whose will has power when all beside is gone.

Such a statement would never have been made by Godwin, who thought that man was but the powerless tool of a blind and all-pervading force.

So staunch a believer in man's ability to control his destiny is Shelley, that he bases all his hopes for the salvation of the world upon the freedom of man's will. If, thinks the poet, man will but know himself, he will realize that

The past is Death's, the future is (his) own;
And love and joy can make the foulest breast

A paradise of flowers where peace might build her nest.

(Canto VIII, Stanza XXII)

If Shelley had not had such faith in the power of man to fashion the future, his whole scheme of social regeneration would have had no foundation and would hence have collapsed. Therefore, it is upon a principle with which Godwin would have had no sympathy that the dominant purpose of Shelley's life and work is founded.

Shelley trusted implicitly in the ultimate regeneration of the world through the agency of man, and like Tennyson he confidently asserts that

good shall fall

At last -- far off -- at last, to all,
¹
 And every winter change to spring.

These lines, penned by one who was to come after Shelley, could easily have been modeled after passages such as the following from The Revolt of Islam:

This is the winter of the world; -- and here
 We die, even as the winds of Autumn fade,
 Expiring in the frore and foggy air. --
 Behold Spring comes, though we must pass who made
 The promise of its birth, even as the shade
 Which from our death, as from an mountain flings
 The future, a broad sunrise.

(Canto IX, Stanza XXV)

¹

Tennyson, Alfred Lord, In Memoriam.

Shelley never for one moment doubted that the spring would come, although it might be far distant and he might never live to see its approach. However, it was enough for him to feel within his own heart the promise of such a spring and to be allowed to hasten its coming. And this faith in the coming of an age of perfection Shelley had received from the author of Political Justice.

After this burst of hope and optimism, Shelley expresses again his belief in the Godwinian doctrine of necessity when he says:

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

Shelley is clinging here to an unmodified conception of necessitarianism which his philosophy embraces.

However, Shelley soon reveals a tendency to question Godwin's faith in pure reason when he states that the intellect would allow us no hope in a future existence, but that this faculty is not to be depended upon entirely as it does not hold the key to the mystery of the unknown. Shelley tells us that

Sense and Reason, those enchanters fair
 Whose wand of power is hope, would bid the heart
 That gazed beyond the wormy grave despair.

(Canto IX, Stanza XXXIII)

But says the poet:

These are blind fancies -- reason cannot know
 What sense can neither feel nor thought conceive;
 There is delusion in the world and woe,
 And fear, and pain -- we know not whence we live,
 Or why, or how, or what mute Power may give
 Their being to each plant and star and beast,
 Or even these thoughts.

(Canto IX, Stanza XXXIII)

Shelley here professes himself to be an agnostic who does not find the solution to the problem of man's state after death in reason or in sense; while Godwin quite confidently asserts that the world is bounded by the intellect and that since reason does not assure us of a future life, it does not, therefore, exist. A reliance upon reason in its original Godwinian form could not be accepted unquestionably for long by one who was essentially an idealist and a poet.

At the close of the thirty-third stanza of Canto IX Shelley gives expression to a feeling which was singularly characteristic of his role as a social reformer through the medium of poetry when he exclaims:

I do weave
 A chain I cannot break -- I am possest
 With thoughts too swift and strong for one lone
 human breast.

Throughout his life Shelley was beset by such perplexing and soul-stirring thoughts which it was his mission to voice. Often these thoughts harbored inconsistencies and were in direct opposition to each other. To reconcile them then became his difficult task. Thus it was that his philosophy was often so deep and unfathomable and at times seemingly so inconsistent that we find it extremely hard to understand. However, it is highly questionable whether Shelley would ever have achieved such great heights as a poet had he not often "possest" and then uttered

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.¹

In Canto XI Shelley again expresses his agnosticism as regards the future life. And he now states that if aught continues to exist after this mortal world has passed away, it will be love and joy which he feels are eternal. Here there is no mention of necessity, the only force to which Godwin would have allowed an immortal destiny.

But Shelley is really not vitally concerned about the unknown. His basic interest lies in the present world, and he thinks that to live nobly therein is far better than to prepare by sacrifice and fasting for a life hereafter:

1

Wordsworth, William, Ode on Intimations of Immortality.

Fear not the future, weep not for the past.

Oh could I win your ears to dare be now

Glorious and great and calm!

(Canto XI, Stanza XVIII)

Thus the poet teaches; and only when men live thus richly in the present can there be any hope for the regeneration of society, thinks Shelley.

The final canto of The Revolt of Islam is a romantic fantasy which reveals the heights which Shelley's imagination was rapidly approaching. And although Shelley professed to be an agnostic, and although he was primarily interested in the present world, we find him speculating upon the possibility of an immortal life after death. He felt rather sure at least

That virtue, though obscured on Earth, not less

Survives all mortal change in loveliness.

In these lines in which the poet writes of an imperfect earthly copy of the archetype, virtue, we find an expression of the Platonic theory of ideas which was soon to influence Shelley's idealistic philosophy.

Contained in The Revolt of Islam, then, are all Shelley's philosophic principles which he held at the time of its composition. He was still largely a disciple of Godwin, but there are sufficient stanzas in this poem to show us that he was beginning to question and to modify some of the doctrines characteristic of Godwinism. The chief tenet of

the poet's philosophy, as expressed in The Revolt of Islam, is his exaltation of love, and the poem is, in the final reckoning, an idealized panegyric on love triumphant. Shelley still professed a belief in the doctrines of Necessity and of Pure Reason, although many lines in this poem seem to belie these doctrines. But his true allegiance he now bestowed upon Love, and this allegiance was a flame which was to grow ever brighter and which Shelley was never to quench.

Thus in that period when Shelley's philosophy was predominantly Godwinian, the poet produced Queen Mab, Alastor, and The Revolt of Islam. But even in the last two of these poems there is a modification of the wholly materialistic and necessitarian doctrines that are characteristic of Queen Mab. We shall examine next, therefore, what effect the influence of Plato was to exert upon Shelley's Godwinism, which was even now somewhat modified.

CHAPTER III
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The Revolt of Islam was the only undertaking of any great importance that was completed by Shelley during 1817. The year had been a trying one for the poet. His health was impaired by his stay at Marlow, and his heart was overwhelmed with grief at the outcome of the Chancery suit. As a result of these trials, Shelley had lost some of his youthful faith in his power to render material aid to the cause of social regeneration, although this was still his most cherished mission. "His life was now spent more in thought than action", Mrs. Shelley writes in a note attached to her husband's shorter poems of 1817; he had lost the eager spirit which believed it could achieve what it projected for the benefit of mankind In youth he had believed that he possessed the power of operating an immediate change in the minds of men and the state of society. These wild dreams had faded; sorrow and adversity had struck home; but he struggled with despondency as he did with physical pain." And he never let his despondency completely overpower him, for, although he often doubts his own ability to reach his goal, he never loses faith in the cause in which he is enlisted.

Shelley still has great respect for Godwin and his theories, although he no longer adheres strictly to some of his views. On December 28, 1817, there appeared in the

Examiner Shelley's review of Godwin's Mandeville. "The author of Mandeville," wrote Shelley, "is one of the most illustrious examples of intellectual power of the present age. He has exhibited that variety and universality of talent which distinguishes him who is destined to inherit lasting renown, from the possessors of temporary celebrity Political Justice is the first moral system explicitly founded upon the doctrines of the negativeness of rights and the positiveness of duties, -- an obscure feeling of which has been the basis of all the political liberty and private virtue in the world."

No terms of praise were, in Shelley's estimation, too extravagant for him to bestow upon Godwin, and it is to this philosopher that most of the poet's biographers think that Shelley addressed a brief poem entitled Mighty Eagle and written in 1817. It is rather singular that in The Revolt of Islam Shelley should have used the eagle as a symbol for the Spirit of Evil while in this six-line stanza he employs the eagle to characterize Godwin. However, there is undoubtedly no connection in Shelley's mind between these two symbols.

But although Shelley is still eulogizing Godwin, he is, in the year 1817, coming more and more under the spell of the teachings of another philosopher. This new teacher at whose feet Shelley has begun to sit is Plato. Mrs. Shelley tells us that the poet's "readings this year were chiefly Greek. Besides the Hymns of Homer and the Iliad, he read the Dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the Symposium of Plato,

and Arrian's Historia Indica." Through these works, and particularly through those of Plato, Shelley began to catch a vision of much that he was soon to embody in his philosophy.

This Platonic influence Shelley was beginning to feel when he wrote regarding Mandeville, in a letter dated December 7, 1817: "Clifford's character, as mere beauty, is a divine and soothing contrast; and I do not think -- if, perhaps, I except (and I know not if I ought to do so) the speech of Agathon in the Symposium of Plato -- that there ever was produced a moral discourse more characteristic of all that is admirable and lovely in human nature -- more lovely and admirable in itself -- than that of Henrietta to Mandeville, as he is recovering from madness." Shelley had herein dared to imply that Plato might surpass Godwin, even though he doubted the wisdom of such a statement. But at least this admission betrays to some degree the emancipation from an unquestioning submission to Godwinian influence which had already begun to take place in Shelley's philosophy.

And perhaps Godwin's doctrine of necessity may even have paved the way for Shelley's later worship at the shrine of Plato. For the conception of necessity as an omnipotent power is in some respects similar to the Platonic theory of the all-powerful nature of love, the difference between these two conceptions being, however, that Plato clothes love with emotional qualities while necessity, as represented by Godwin, is an entirely impersonal power.

Plato's influence upon Shelley shows itself in Prince Athanase, a fragment written in 1817, in a more striking manner even than in this poem's predecessor, Alastor. The fragment shows little advance over Shelley's earlier poem and is noteworthy chiefly because it reveals Shelley's adoption of many of the principles of Plato. Like Alastor, Athanase is an ideal character "who seeks through the world¹ One whom he may love." This quest the Grecian philosopher had urged upon men as among the noblest of pursuits. And in the eulogy on love in Fragment IV of Prince Athanase we hear at times the voice of Plato in strains such as the following;

Thou art the wine whose drunkenness is all
We can desire, O Love!

Thou art the radiance which where ocean rolls
Investest it.

thou ever soarest

Among the towers of men, and as soft air
In Spring, which moves the unawakened forest,
Clothing with leaves its branches bare and bleak,
Thou floatest among men.

Shelley himself is so conscious of Plato's influence and holds his teacher in such high esteem that he pays tribute to him in

¹
Mrs. Shelley's Note on Prince Athanase.

those lines in which he has Zonoras, in a dialogue with Athanase, recall the time when

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;
 And Agathon and Diotima seemed
 From death and dark forgetfulness releast.

In July, 1818, after Shelley had taken his residence in Italy, he set to work upon a task which had attracted him for some time. This was the translation of Plato's Symposium, which he completed in eight or nine mornings. In a letter to John and Maria Gisborne, dated July 16, Shelley speaks of his occupation thus: "I am employed just now, having little better to do, in translating into my faint and inefficient periods the divine eloquence of Plato's Symposium." The importance of this translation lies, not only in the excellence of the work itself, but in the influence it was later to exert upon Shelley's Defence of Poetry.

During July also Shelley began, but never completed, A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients, Relative to the Subject of Love. This essay was intended to be a commentary on Plato's Symposium, but it breaks off at the moment when the main subject is about to be discussed. However, the definition which it contains of love is worth noting. Shelley, under the influence of Plato, defines love as "that profound

and complicated sentiment which is rather the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative, and sensitive; and which, when individualized, becomes an imperious necessity, only to be satisfied by the complete or partial, actual or supposed, fulfilment of its claims." Shelley, as this statement reveals, is quickly becoming a devout disciple of the Grecian philosopher, Plato.

Shelley's intense admiration for his master is quite glowingly reflected in a brief unfinished essay, written at this time and entitled On the Symposium, Or Preface to the Banquet of Plato. In this fragment Shelley unhesitatingly proclaims Plato to be "eminently the greatest among the Greek philosophers." Continuing his eulogy, Shelley says: "Plato exhibits the rare union of close and subtle logic, with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, melted by the splendour and harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions, which hurry the persuasions onward, as in a breathless career. His language is that of an immortal spirit, rather than a man His excellence consists especially in intuition, and it is this faculty which raises him far above Aristotle, whose genius, though vivid and various, is obscure in comparison with that of Plato." Never had Shelley laid a more enthusiastic tribute at the altar even of Godwin.

In August, 1818, Shelley left Lucca to go to Venice to interview Byron regarding the child, Allegra. And it was

here that there occurred Shelley's memorable horse-back rides with Byron which form the basis of the story of Julian and Maddalo that Shelley wrote at Este a month or so later. Like Rosalind and Helen, this poem contains an atmosphere of reality because it is an outgrowth of Shelley's own experience. Julian, who is actually Shelley, is a rebel against the existing social order and is a believer in the freedom of the will. In a dialogue with Maddalo, Julian exclaims:

"It is our will
Which thus enchains us to permitted ill --
We might be otherwise -- we might be all
We dream of, happy, high, majestic.
Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek
But in our mind?

We know
That we have power over ourselves to do
And suffer -- what, we know not till we try;
But something nobler than to live and die --
So taught those kings of old philosophy."

But thus Godwin did not teach in his doctrine of necessity.

Another reflection of Shelley's own life is found in the words of Maddalo, alias Byron, when he says:

"Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

Shelley had experienced personally many of the world's evils, and so ill had society used him that he had turned to poetry to give expression to his own sufferings, and, thus, if possible to eradicate many of these evils from the social system.

In October, 1818, Shelley planned for the most part the Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills which he concluded afterwards at Naples. This lovely poem illustrates quite clearly the poet's deep love for nature and his tendency to idealize all that he saw in the natural world about him. Few more beautiful pictures of the sunrise can be found in English poetry than the following:

Lo, the sun floats up in the sky,
Like thought-winged Liberty,
Till the universal light
Seems to level plain and height,

From the sea a mist has spread,
And the beams of morn lie dead
On the towers of Venice now,
Like its glory long ago.

Typical of Shelley's idealistic attitude toward nature is his habit of finding revealed therein the archetypes of the finer emotions that underlie all human life. For example, in describing "a calm and blooming cave," Shelley tells us of

The love which heals all strife,
 Circling, like the breath of life,
 All things in that sweet abode
 With its own mild brotherhood.

(Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills)

Nature, for Shelley, always contained within it a human quality which represented all that was best in mankind.

Also in these Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills there is a reflection of the conflict which Shelley was undergoing in his attempt to reconcile his Platonic theories with the necessitarian and materialistic views of Godwin. The poet felt that

Men must reap the things they sow,
 Force from force must ever flow,
 Or worse; but 't is a bitter woe
 That love or reason cannot change
 The despot's rage, the slave's revenge.

Plato had asserted that intellectual love would regenerate the world, while Godwin had asserted that necessity is the only supreme power and that all else must submit to its sway. To which of these forces then was Shelley to give his allegiance?

In seeking for a solution to this problem it will now be necessary to examine Prometheus Unbound. This lyrical drama was begun in September, 1818, but was not finished until

nearly a year later in August, 1819. The poem was written amid the beautiful surroundings of Southern Italy, which were aptly fitted to sustain Shelley's imagination in its highest endeavors. According to George Barnett Smith, one of the poet's earlier biographers, Prometheus Unbound is "the highest achievement of Shelley in ideal poetry.

The subject of the poem is the martyrdom of a heroic lover and saviour of mankind. Interwoven with the idealistic theme is a reflection of the conflict between the doctrines of Godwin and those of Plato which was occurring in Shelley's philosophy, and it is in this poem that the issue, whose outcome was to decide the trend of the future development of Shelley's art, was to come to a head.

Prometheus Unbound is based upon a drama entitled Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus, a Grecian idealist for whom Shelley had the greatest respect. Thus Shelly is coming more and more to ally himself with the Greeks and with their philosophy. "The Greek tragedians were now his most familiar companions in his wanderings, and the sublime majesty of Aeschylus filled him with wonder and delight."¹ In professing this allegiance, Shelley says in his Preface to the poem: "For my part I had rather be damned with Plato than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus." And again in the Preface he gives expression to his admiration for the Greek poets when he describes them "as writers to whom no resource of awakening the imagination was unknown."

¹

Mrs. Shelley's Note on Prometheus Unbound.

But although Shelley had high regard for all the classical authors, and although he modeled Prometheus Unbound after Aeschylus, the greatest share of his admiration went to Plato, who is the author of many of the loftiest ideals expressed in the poem. It is quite natural that so many of Plato's doctrines should be contained within Prometheus Unbound when we remember that Shelley was at work on the translation of the Symposium during a period of time in which he was meditating quite seriously upon the subject of his drama. Plato's teachings were, therefore, fresh in his mind when he began the writing of Prometheus Unbound.

Shelley's purpose in writing Prometheus Unbound was, as in many of his greatest works, a moral one. He acknowledges in the Preface that he has "a passion for reforming the world," and this passion both Godwin and Plato had helped to inspire within him. However, the manner in which he hopes to bring about the reformation of the world he has borrowed, according to the testimony of his own statement, almost exclusively from Plato. "My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love; and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. Should I live to accomplish what

I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Aeschylus rather than Plato as my model.¹ However, many of the "reasoned principles of moral conduct" embraced in Shelley's philosophy he still attributes to Godwin, and these he combines with Plato's doctrines of love and hope in an endeavor to build what the poet considered to be the only secure foundation upon which men must build a regenerated social order. Like Godwin, Shelley believes that reason can fashion a program of reform, but it is the function of the Platonic conception of love to persuade people to adopt such a program.

Shelley further demonstrates his philosophical idealism in his choice of a hero for his drama. "Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends."² Also Prometheus typifies Shelley's radicalism which is constantly expressed in the poet's tendency to reverse the commonly-accepted forms of good and evil. In direct opposition to society's standards, Prometheus represents perfection, and Jupiter represents the direst form of villainy. According to Shelley's manner of judging then, Satan as the hero of Paradise Lost, and it is from this character, therefore, that Shelley received a certain measure of his inspiration in creating

¹ Shelley, P.B., Preface to Prometheus Unbound.

² Ibid.

Prometheus. However, "Prometheus is", in Shelley's judgment, "a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandizement, which, in the hero of Paradise Lost,¹ interfere with the interest. Thus Prometheus is a more highly idealized character than is the hero (?) of Milton's epic.

Act I of Prometheus Unbound presents the hero, who represents humanity, chained to a cliff by the merciless tyrant, Jupiter, who serves as a symbol for the organic structure of society and whose cruelty and ingratitude Prometheus describes thus:

I gave all
He has; and in return he chains me here
Years, ages, night and day.

Whilst my beloved race is trampled down
By his thought -- executing ministers.

Mercury comes to inflict new torments prepared by the Almighty unless Prometheus will throw himself in supplication at Jupiter's feet, but this, he, who is destined to be the savior of mankind, will not do, exclaiming:

Let others flatter crime, where it sits throned
In brief Omnipotence.

I wait

Enduring thus, the retributive hour.

That this hour will come Shelley never doubts, and at its arrival men will throw off the shackles imposed by society and usher in an age of perfection. This is a restatement of the perfectionistic ideal that Shelley had received originally from Godwin, and it fits in with Shelley's adaptation of Platonism, for both Godwin and Plato strove to attain the realization of this ideal.

Also in the first act of Prometheus Unbound, we find another instance when Shelley combines the teachings of Godwin with those of Plato. Shelley, in this poem as in Queen Mab, still attacks

Hypocrisy and custom (that) make their minds
The fanes of many a worship now outworn.

But now the poet proclaims, as he had not done in his earlier poem, that the only hope for the overthrow of these evils lies in love.

From the dust of creeds outworn,
From the tyrant's banner torn,
Gathering round me, onward borne,
There was mingled many a cry --
Freedom! Hope!, Death! Victory!
Till they faded thro' the sky;
And one sound, above, around,

One sound beneath, around, above,
 Was moving; 't was the soul of love;
 'T was the hope, the prophecy,
 Which begins and ends in thee.

Thus Shelley has come to feel with Plato that "we should celebrate Love who, in our present condition, brings good assistance in our necessity, and affords great hopes that he will restore us to our original state, and confer on us the complete happiness alone suited to our nature."¹

In Act II we are introduced to Asia, who represents nature. But not only does she serve as a symbol, but also she, like Prometheus, is a personality. Asia is in love with Prometheus, and in a dream a voice promises to lead her to him if she will "Follow, Follow." In obedience to the bidding of this voice, Asia and Panthea are led to the realm of Demogorgon; and it is here that Shelley has Asia utter the words that reveal quite clearly the influence of Plato:

Fit throne for such a Power! Magnificent!
 How glorious art thou, Earth! and if thou be
 The shadow of some spirit lovelier still,
 Though evil stain its work, and it should be
 Like its creation, weak yet beautiful,
 I could fall down and worship that and thee.

(Scene III)

1

Plato, The Banquet.

In these lines we find expressed the Platonic doctrine that the phenomena of the visible world are but copies of the real objects that lie back of them in a realm of the spirit.

In Scene IV of Act II Demogorgon appears. In him we find a reflection of Godwinian philosophy in that he is the personification of necessity. Panthea describes him thus:

I see a mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb,
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living Spirit.

This Spirit, Demogorgon, tells Asia, in answer to her queries, that Almighty God made the living world and all that it contains. Like Godwin, Shelley believed that at the time of the creation of the human species the world contained no evil.

There was the Heaven and Earth at first,
And Light and Love; then Saturn from whose throne
Time fell, an envious shadow; such the state
Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway,
As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves
Before the wind or sun has withered them.

But this perfection could not last because, when the scepter passed to Jupiter, he instituted a reign of tyranny and evil. Jove then was the author of all the sin and grief that

existed on earth.

Prometheus, seeing the sorry plight to which mankind had been reduced by the selfish cruelty of Jupiter, realized that salvation could come in only one manner, and thus

Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the human heart.

(Act II, Scene IV)

But as a recompense for all his ministrations unto humanity, Prometheus was chained by Jove to a rock to suffer pain and agony.

But Jove too is enslaved, says Demogoron, and there is a power higher even than he. And it is at this point that Shelley expresses a theory which again conflicts with those promulgated by Godwin. For says the poet, in the character of Demogorgon:

a voice
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
On the revolving world? What to bid speak
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these
All things are subject but eternal Love.

(Act II, Scene IV)

In these lines Shelley "dissociates Love, and Love alone, from determinism, from the sway of 'Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and

Change."¹ Thus, in Shelley's estimation, Love has come to transcend even Godwinian Necessity, which Shelley earlier in his career had extolled as all-powerful. And the author of this change in the poet's philosophy was Plato, who had said so many centuries before: "At the origin of things many fearful deeds are reported to have been done among the Gods, on account of the dominion of Necessity. But so soon as this deity (Love) sprang forth from the desire which forever tends in the universe towards that which is lovely, then all blessings descended upon all living things, human and divine."²

In the fifth scene of the second act of Prometheus Unbound Shelley has Asia profess her faith in the transforming power of love when she says:

Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.
Like the wide heaven, the all-sustaining air,
It makes the reptile equal to the God.

This theory that love has the ability to remake man's character Shelley adopted from Plato, who had said in his Symposium: "There is none so worthless whom Love cannot impel, as it were by a divine inspiration, towards virtue, even so that he may through this inspiration become equal to one who might naturally be more

¹ Strong, Archibald T., Three Studies in Shelley, London, 1921, p. 26.

² Plato, The Banquet.

excellent."¹

After Asia has expressed this belief, she hears a voice in the air singing the matchless lyric beginning

Life of life! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them.

(Act II, Scene V)

This is one of the loveliest things that Shelley ever wrote, and it reveals how completely he had surrendered himself to the doctrine of love. Had the sublime music of this lyric fallen on Plato's ear, he would not have said in the Symposium that "there are innumerable hymns and paeans composed for the other gods, butnot one of the many poets who spring up in the world have ever composed a verse in honour of Love, who is such and so great a god." And when Shelley penned this lyric, was he not but acting in obedience to the command of his master, who had said: Every one ought, according to my plan, to praise Love with² as much eloquence as he can."

Act II of Prometheus Unbound is brought to a close by a glimpse of immortality which Asia affords us:

Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee
Of shadow-peopled Infancy,
Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day.

¹ Plato, The Banquet.

² Ibid.

In Act III of Prometheus Unbound Jupiter weds Thetis, and from this union comes as offspring the formless Demogorgon who is now transformed into a personality. And it is he who deposes Jupiter and falls with him into an abyss. And in their downward flight we are reminded of the struggle between Good and Evil in The Revolt of Islam, for Shelley has them

sink on the wide waves of ruin
Even as a vulture and a snake outspent
Drop, twisted in inextricable fight,
Into a shoreless sea.

(Scene I)

After Jupiter's overthrow, there shall be no more individualized power or arbitrary authority of the type that Godwin had taught Shelley to hate, and love shall reign supreme. In this blissful state man shall be

Equal, unclast, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise: but man
Passionless; no, yet free from guilt or pain,
Which were, for his will made or suffered them,
Nor yet exempt, tho' ruling them like slaves,
From chance, and death, and mutability,
The clogs of that which else might over-soar
The loftiest of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

(Act III, Scene IV)

In these lines Shelley attempts to reconcile the conflict between determinism and free-will by making man superior to the control of chance, or, as Godwin would have termed it, necessity, and yet not entirely exempt from its sway. A purely deterministic conception of the universe could not for long remain acceptable to Shelley's idealistic temperament.

The concluding act of Prometheus Unbound is an inspired rhapsody and, in the words of the Moon,

'Tis love, all love!

For a time at least the characteristic doctrines of Godwinism seem to be forgotten and triumphant love alone remains as the sum and substance of Shelley's philosophy as expressed in the closing lyrics of Prometheus Unbound.

Love, from its awful throne of patient power,
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance from the slippery steep,
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.

Shelley seems now completely wedded to the doctrines of Plato, and it is as his disciple that the poet receives the inspiration to utter in a final burst of soul-stirring ecstasy that immortal expression of his idealistic philosophy with which he brings Prometheus Unbound to a close:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;

To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
 To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
 Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
 This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Thus in Prometheus Shelley's philosophic views are dominated, to a large extent at least, by the teachings of Plato. However, throughout the poem reflections of Godwinism frequently occur, as we have noted. But the literary technique employed now by Shelley is drawn entirely from Plato. For instead of attempting to fulfill his mission of world reformation through the medium of poetic propaganda, as he had done in Queen Mab, Shelley endeavored in Prometheus to follow in the footsteps of Plato and "conduct his pupil to science, so that he might look upon the loveliness of wisdom; and that contemplating thus the universal beauty, no longer would he unworthily and meanly enslave himself to the attractions of one form in love, nor one subject of discipline or science, but would turn towards the wide ocean of intellectual beauty, and from the sight of the lovely and majestic forms which it contains, would abundantly bring forth his conceptions in philosophy; until, strengthened and confirmed, he should at length steadily contemplate one¹ science, which is the science of this universal beauty."

¹
 Plato, The Banquet.

In the Preface to Prometheus Shelley, himself, bears testimony to the change in the style of his art when he now states: "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse." His aim then in Prometheus Unbound and in much of his later poetry was to present to the imagination of his readers lofty idealisms of moral conduct and by such a presentation to produce a more acute sensitiveness among the minds of men to social problems which were in need of solution before the regeneration of society could be effected.

Thus Prometheus Unbound is an expression of Shelley's Platonic philosophy in its purest form, while also it reveals the peak of the development of Shelley's poetic art. He had now allied himself with Plato, and had become the most complete idealist of his day. "An exile, and strongly impressed with the feeling that the majority of his countrymen regarded him with sentiments of aversion such as his own heart could experience towards none, he sheltered himself from such disgusting and painful thoughts in the calm retreats of poetry, and build up a world of his own -- with the more pleasure, since he hoped to induce one or two to believe that the earth might become such, did mankind themselves consent."¹

The nature of the idealism that is characteristic of Prometheus Unbound and of all that is finest in Shelley's poetry is distinctive and is different from that employed by other writers. "More popular poets", Mrs. Shelley tells us in her

¹
Mrs. Shelley's Note on Prometheus Unbound.

Note on Prometheus, clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery. Shelley loved to idealize the real -- to gift the mechanism of the material universe with a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind." But the theories of technique which underlie Shelley's writings are best presented by the poet himself in his Defense of Poetry, which Shelley wrote in the early part of the year 1821. And it is in this treatise also that we find Shelley's complete acceptance of Platonic doctrines. That such is the case is quite natural since, "at the time when he wrote the Defence, Shelley was deeply immersed in the study of Plato, and had but lately translated his Symposium, that dialogue which exhibits Plato's idealism in its most characteristic, if not in its final form."¹

In the very first paragraph of the Defence, Shelley demonstrates his psychological idealism when he accords to the imagination supremacy over a purely mechanical conception of reason, such as he had received from Godwin. "Reason", says Shelley, "is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance." Such an admission Godwin, the rationalist, could never have made.

Continuing the same line of argument, Shelley defines poetry as "the expression of the imagination"; and since he desires to be a poet, the superiority of imagination to reason has come to occupy the central position in his poetic philosophy.

¹

Shawcross, J., Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism, London, 1909, p. xxvii.

And that Shelley is indeed a poet, according to the Platonic ideal, is evidenced by his own definition. For to Shelley "to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful." And Plato tells us that, in his opinion, the beautiful can be identified with Love, for, says he: "Love seems to me a divinity the most beautiful and the best of all, and the author to all others of the excellencies with which his nature is endowed.¹ Thus Shelley is most certainly a poet, for his greatest poems are dedicated to the ideal of love.

Following the definition of poetry and of a poet, Shelley writes: "But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion." This idea Shelley owes to Plato, who had said in the Symposium: "The exercise of every inventive art is poetry, and all such artists poets."

And just as Plato circumscribes this broad conception by saying "one portion or species of poetry, that which has relation to music and rhythm, is divided from all others, and known by the name belonging to all," so Shelley also restricts his original definition and states that "all the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, nor even as their words unveil the permanent analogy

¹

Plato, The Banquet.

of things by images which participate in the life of truth; but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse; being the echo of the eternal music." And in this category Shelley places Plato who, he says, "was essentially a poet -- the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive." Such was Shelley's estimate of Plato whom he had taken as his model.

The divinity of poetry, of which Shelley so often writes in the Defense, was proclaimed by Plato in the Symposium in words such as the following: "And who will deny that the divine poetry, by which all living things are produced upon the earth, is not harmonized by the wisdom of Love." Thus, writing on the same theme, Shelley tells us that poetry "acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above all consciousness."

In Shelley's refutation of the objection, raised by some that poetry is immoral, Shelley again gives to the Platonic conception of the imagination the pre-eminence over Godwinian rationalism. For Shelley writes: "Ethical science" -- and it was to this field that Godwin had devoted his endeavors -- "arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought." Thus poetry can do more toward leading men on to higher things than can the propaganda of ethical science.

"Poetry", says Shelley, "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thence forward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists." Such was the poetry of Shelley when he had reached the heights of idealism, for, as Mrs. Shelley had said, he "loved to idealize the real."

Continuing his argument regarding the ethical function of poetry, Shelley states, as Plato had done, that "the great secret of morals is love." This idea was the keynote to Shelley's philosophy, and it owed its origin to the words of the Greek philosopher in the Symposium which proclaimed love as "the cherisher of all that is good, the abolisher of all that is evil."

Since love, therefore, is the secret of morals, according to Shelley, "the great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause." Thus poetry, through the faculty of the imagination, exalted love and by so doing taught to aspire ever to the beautiful and the good. Such was the doctrine that Plato had preached and that Shelley had now so completely adopted. "Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients, had been celebrated by a chorus of the greatest writers of the renovated world;"¹ and it is with such writers that Shelley had come to

¹ Shelley, P.B., A Defense of Poetry.

to ally himself.

Shelley's attempt to refute the charge that poetry has no practical value, we have already noted in the introduction to this paper. In the passage in which Shelley condemns materialism and rationalism, there seems to be a reaction against Godwinism. Following this condemnation, Shelley arrives at the conclusion that reason has failed to bring happiness to humanity, and that, therefore, it should give place to the inventive and creative faculty which provides joy and pleasure for all mankind. And "the production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers." Shelley will admit that certain of the more eminent rationalists "are entitled to the gratitude of mankind," but he feels that in the present state of society their exertions will avail little. Through an excess of analytical reasoning man has "enslaved the elements, (but) remains himself a slave." The only way out of such a dilemma lies through the medium of poetry. "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know", says the ardent disciple of Plato; "we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life."

But such poetry, according to Shelley, comes only through inspiration. "Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will For the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower

which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure." This passage is but a brilliant reflection of the words of Plato in the Ion when he states: "For the authors of those great poems which we admire, do not attain to excellence through the rules of any art, but they utter their beautiful melodies of verse in a state of inspiration, and, as it were, possessed by a spirit not their own For a Poet is indeed a thing ethereally light, winged, and sacred, nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired, and, as it were, mad, or whilst any reason remains in him. For whilst a man retains any portion of the thing called reason, he is utterly incompetent to produce poetry." Thus, since Shelley has come to adopt this Platonic conception of poetry, he seems to modify his belief in the Godwinian doctrine of pure reason.

A final passage which we consider significant in A Defence of Poetry is that in which Shelley defines the nature of his idealistic philosophy at its zenith. "Poetry", he says, "defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It make us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our

being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration." This then is the type of poetry in which Shelley excelled during the last four years of his life. It was a style of art which was inherent in his own idealistic nature, and it is characterized by a strict adherence to Platonic doctrine.

The philosophy expounded by Shelley in a Defence of Poetry had reached the final stage in its development. During 1821 and the first half of 1822, which were all that was left of life to Shelley, his writings gave full expression to the idealism that had been developing since he first began to pen the fantastically imaginative poems of his youth.

Among his longer poetic works written during this period, the three best loved and most characteristic of his idealistic nature are Epipsychidion, Adonais, and Hellas. The date of the first of these poems immediately precedes that of A Defence of Poetry, and Epipsychidion, therefore, is saturated with many of the Platonic ideas with which he was occupied when writing his prose essay. The poem was addressed to Emilia Viviani, who represents the other half of the two-fold soul that we find in Plato's Symposium.

As was his custom with all that was mortal, Shelley idealized Emilia until she became a

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman

All that is unsupportable in thee
 Of light, and love, and immortality!
 Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!
 Veiled glory of this lampless Universe!
 Thou Moon beyond the clouds! thou living Form
 Among the Dead! thou Star above the Storm!
 Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror!
 Thou Harmony of Nature's art! thou Mirror
 In whom, as in the splendor of the Sun,
 All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on!

A few months after the poem was completed, the veil was to be rudely torn from Shelley's eyes. But so long as he was under Emilia's spell, he could not but idealize reality and see her as a creature divine.

In Epipsychidion, as in Prometheus Unbound, Shelley expresses his belief in the Platonic doctrine of the transforming and regenerating power of love:

I know that Love makes all things equal.

Some lines farther on Shelley asks:

We -- are not formed, as notes of music are,
 For one another, though dissimilar;
 Such difference without discord as can make
 Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake
 As trembling leaves in a continuous air?

And this thought also is in harmony with that of Plato expressed

in the Symposium: "Mutual love has naturally existed between human beings; seeks to make two one, and to heal the divided nature of man."

When Shelley defends his love for Emilia by his famous plea in favor of free love, he is again following the authority of Plato, who had said that he who contemplated "the universal beauty, no longer would unworthily and meanly enslave himself to the attractions of one form of love."¹ Thus in accordance with this idea Shelley writes:

Narrow

The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

Toward the close of the poem Shelley reiterates his belief in the two-fold soul of lovers.

We shall become the same, we shall be one
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
One passion in twin-breasts, which grows and grew,
Till like the meteors of expanding flame,
Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
Touch, mingle and transfigured.

One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,

¹
Plato, The Banquet.

One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation.

Just such a sentiment Plato had voiced in the following passage from the Symposium: "Do you not desire the closest union and singleness to exist between you, so that you may never be divided night or day? If so, I will melt you together, and make you grow into one, so that both in life and death ye may be undivided." This, says Plato, is what everyone craves -- "intimately to mix and melt and to be melted together with his beloved, so that one should be made but of two."

Thus Epipsychidion contains throughout a highly idealized conception of love such as Plato had advocated in the Symposium.

The theme of love has been further immortalized by Shelley in his Adonais, An Elegy on the death of Keats. In this poem Shelley has raised his philosophic idealism to such a point that he is able to assuage the world's grief over the death of Keats by his insistence that, in the final analysis, it is not the material things of life that matter. The departed Keats has at last been released from the hollow shame of this world and has found the true realities.

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep --
He hath awakened from the dream of life --
'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep,
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night.

From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure.

Also in these lines we find a reflection of the Platonic doctrine of pre-existence which had found expression in Wordsworth's Ode on Intimations of Immortality.

A few lines further on Shelley says of Keats:

He is made one with Nature! there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird.

And here also the Platonic influence is revealed, for this passage is but a poetic paraphrase of Plato's conception of immortality. According to the Greek philosopher, the soul of man was released by death to return to the realm of nature whence it had come. Of necessity, therefore, Shelley's idealism under the dominion of Platonism must also be the desire for immortality.

Continuing the theme of immortality Shelley writes:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

Thus Plato has taught when he had professed his belief in an eternal spirit which was the perfect archetype of all that was noble and best in the material world.

In the stanza in Adonais, just preceding the final

one, Shelley defines his Platonic philosophy in terms of

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
 That Beauty in which all things work and move,
 That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
 Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
 Which thro' the web of being blindly wove
 By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
 Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
 The fire for which all thirst.

Such lines as these reveal the nature of Shelley's idealism as influenced by Plato and is characteristic of the philosophy expressed throughout Adonais.

In Hellas, written in the autumn of 1821, we find Shelley still, as in his earliest days, an ardent social reformer, with the difference, however, that now he realizes he can best serve mankind in the role of an idealistic poet rather than in that of a rationalistic propagandist. "I have, therefore", says Shelley, "contented myself with exhibiting a series of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene, such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggests the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement."¹

In this poem Shelley pays a lofty tribute to Christ whom he never publicly accepted but whose doctrines so singularly resemble his own:

¹ Shelley, P.B., Preface to Hellas.

A power from the unknown God
 A Promethean conqueror came;
 Like a triumphal path he trod
 The thorns of death and shame.

And the following words we find at least a profound respect for Christianity:

The moon of Mahomet
 Arose, and it shall set;
 While blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon
 The cross leads generations on.

Thus the atheism of Shelley had been somewhat modified since the time when he wrote Queen Mab. His conception of religion as it now came to be expressed in Hellas follows quite closely the Platonic ideal of God as the supreme spirit of the universe.

The Greeks expect a Saviour from the west,
 Who shall not come, men say, in clouds and glory,
 But in the omnipresence of that spirit
 In which all live and are.

In this poem we still find a trace of Godwinism in the "eyeless charioteer." However, this character is endowed with an intellectual quality which makes him somewhat different from the Godwinian conception of an impersonal fate.

Thus in Hellas, the last of Shelley's poems which we have examined, we perceive the influence of both Godwin and Plato.

And in the following quotation there is a reflection of the doctrines of each of these philosophers:

Thought

Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination cannot die;
They are, what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er, worlds, worms,
Empires, and superstition. What has thought
To do with time, or place, or circumstance?

Shelley now, in the final stage of his poetic career, places reason and imagination on an equal footing as complementary elements of the inclusive term, thought; and he still retains the Godwinian doctrine of necessity, although he emancipates thought from its sway. Such then is the status of Shelley's philosophy as expressed in his last long poem of great merit.

C O N C L U S I O N

CONCLUSION

And now we come to the conclusion of this dissertation in which we have endeavored to trace and examine the Godwinian and Platonic doctrines expressed in Shelley's poetry, with the purpose of deciding, if possible, which of these doctrines was predominant in the final stage of the development of Shelley's philosophy. In this study we have found that Shelley's youthful idealistic enthusiasm for the cause of social regeneration induced him to embrace eagerly the first ready-made plan that he encountered whereby he might attain his altruistic goal. Thus Shelley accepted immediately, upon reading Political Justice, the philosophical system based upon the eighteenth century program of world betterment and adopted by Godwin, who was also a social reformer. Queen Mab, therefore, is saturated throughout with the doctrines of determinism, rationalism, rebellion against the existing state of society, and perfectionism.

However, the precepts of Godwin, in the form in which the poet had expressed them in Queen Mab could not satisfy for long Shelley's idealistic temperament. Hence these doctrines began to undergo a transformation in his philosophy, and never again was he to be so completely under the dominance of Godwin as when he wrote his first long poem.

In Prometheus Unbound, a new influence seems to have gained the ascendancy in Shelley's philosophical system. This, as we have noted, was the influence of Platonism, which would

be apparently more congenial to Shelley's romantic nature than would a thorough-going materialism. And we are prone to conclude, after a cursory perusal of this poem, that its author had entirely emancipated himself from every trace of Godwinism. But after a closer inspection, we discover that the tenets of Godwin have not been discarded but have been modified so as to harmonize more readily with the doctrines of Plato. Shelley still believed in necessity. However, now he emancipated love from its sway. He retains his faith in the Godwinian ideal of perfection, although he has come to feel, with Plato, that it can best be attained when man has thrown off the shackles of mortality and has been made over with nature, wherein are contained all the perfect archetypes of which the phenomena of the physical world are but faint and imperfect copies. Such a belief would naturally be more attractive to the idealistic Shelley than would Godwin's theory that man can arrive at perfection in the material world of sense-perception.

In the poems written during the last years of Shelley's life and in his Defence of Poetry, the Godwinian doctrine of rationalism still remains, but it has now been purged of its coldly calculating and materialistic qualities and, linked with imagination, becomes an integral part of Shelley's conception of thought. However, Shelley does not place reason on an equal footing with its partner, for, in accordance with the demands made by his poetic temperament, he must needs grant to the imagination the ascendancy. Yet reason is never discarded, and,

provided now with an emotional coloring, it serves as an element in the noblest of all virtues -- intellectual love.

Transformed also is the nature of Shelley's religious beliefs. Like Godwin, he never publicly renounces his atheism. However, he does come to profess a high admiration for Christ, and his modified views regarding perfectionism seem to imply a growing faith in the existence of God. But Shelley is true to Godwin in rebelling unto the end against the hypocritical garbs with which custom and established institutions have always sought to clothe religion.

Therefore, all the chief Godwinian doctrines seem to persist throughout Shelley's poetry, but they have been modified by the influence of the teachings of Plato. In fact much of Shelley's poetry during the period of his greatest poetic achievements seems to attempt to reconcile the tenets of Godwin with those of Plato in order to harmonize these two philosophical systems into a symmetrical pattern. Shelley, then, in my opinion, never discarded entirely the Godwinian elements in his philosophy, but he modified them and subordinated them to the more idealistic doctrines of Platonism.

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