

SHELLEY

“PETERLOO” & “THE MASK OF ANARCHY”

BY

H BUXTON FORMAN



London

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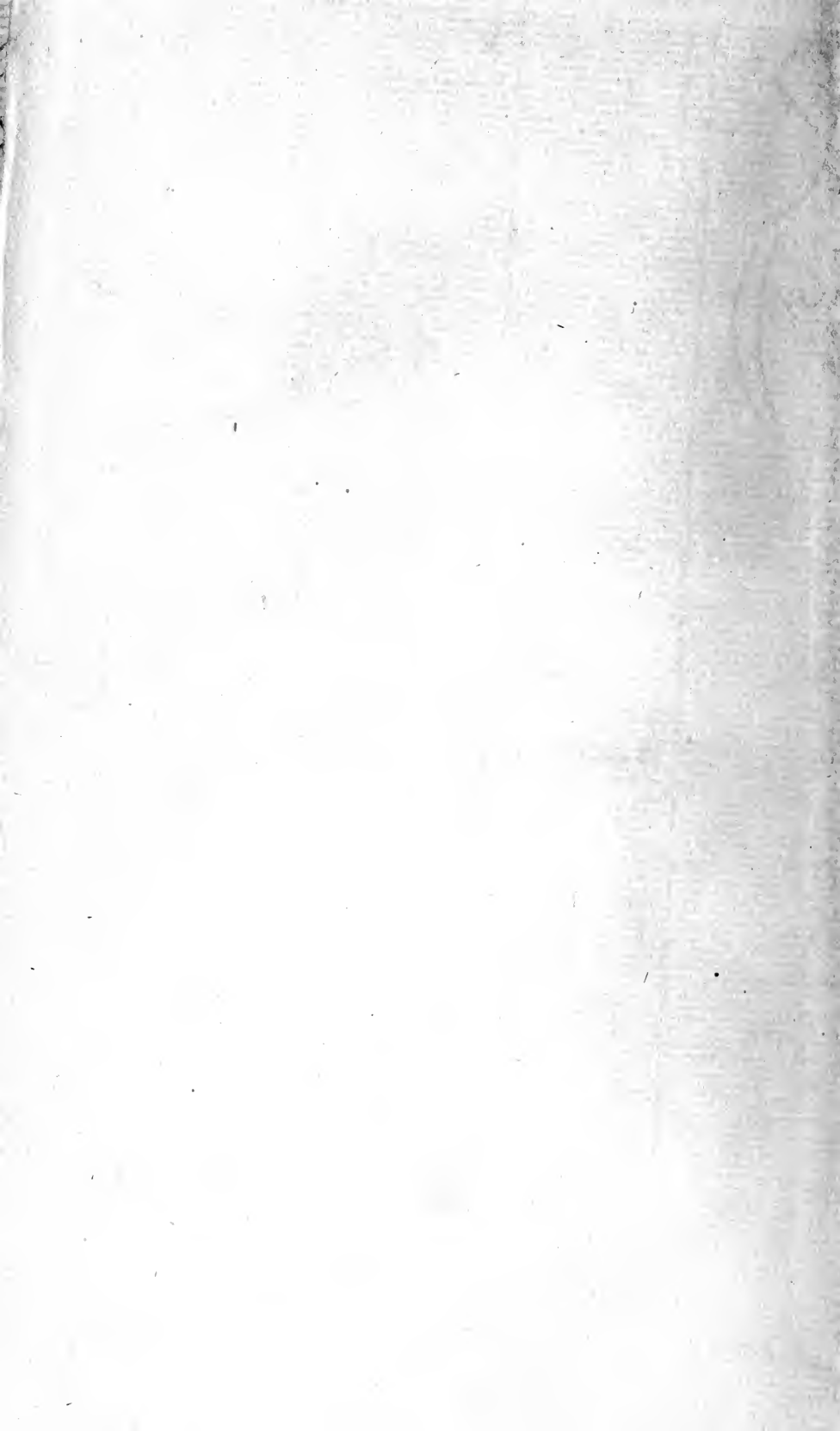
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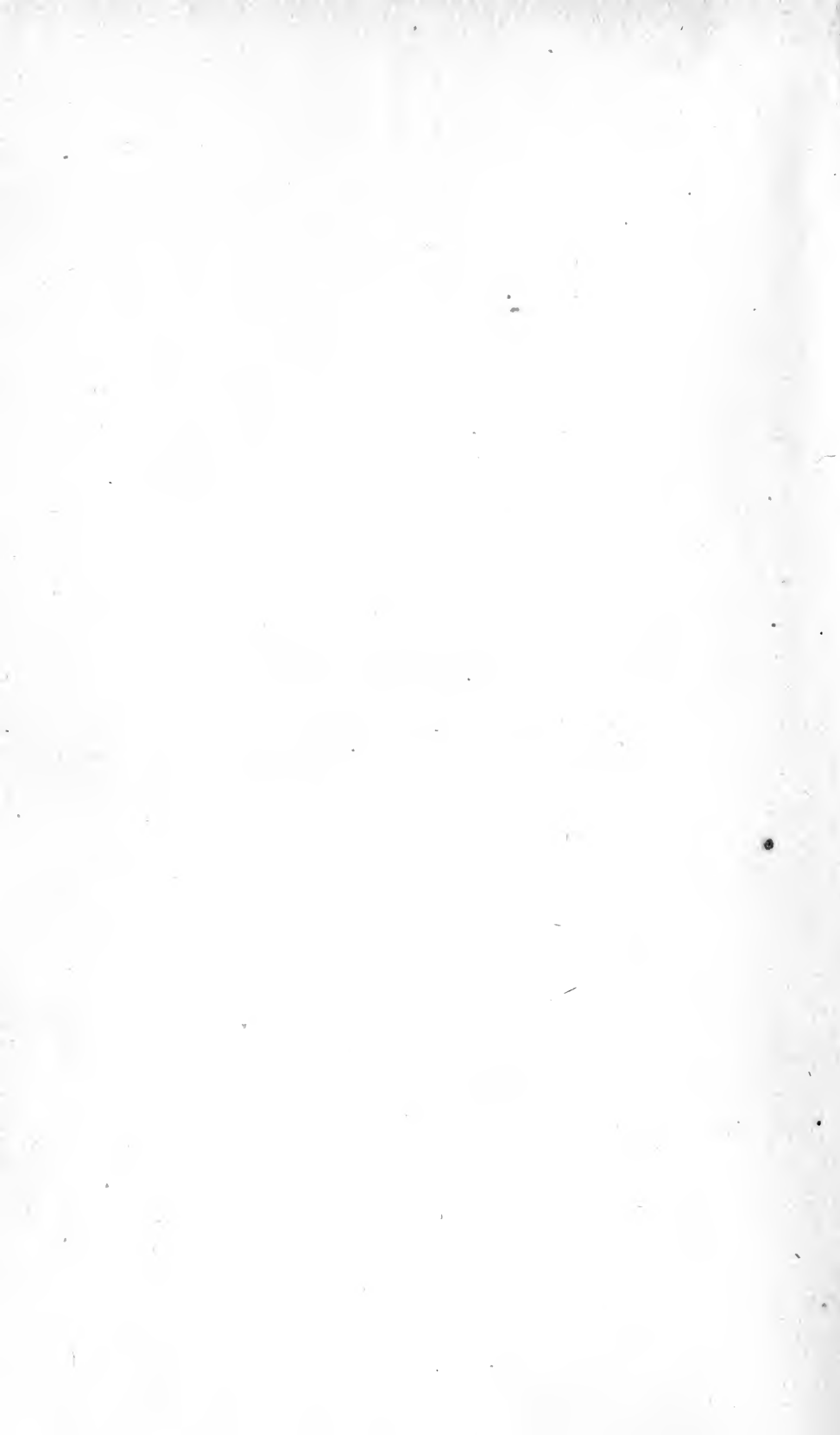
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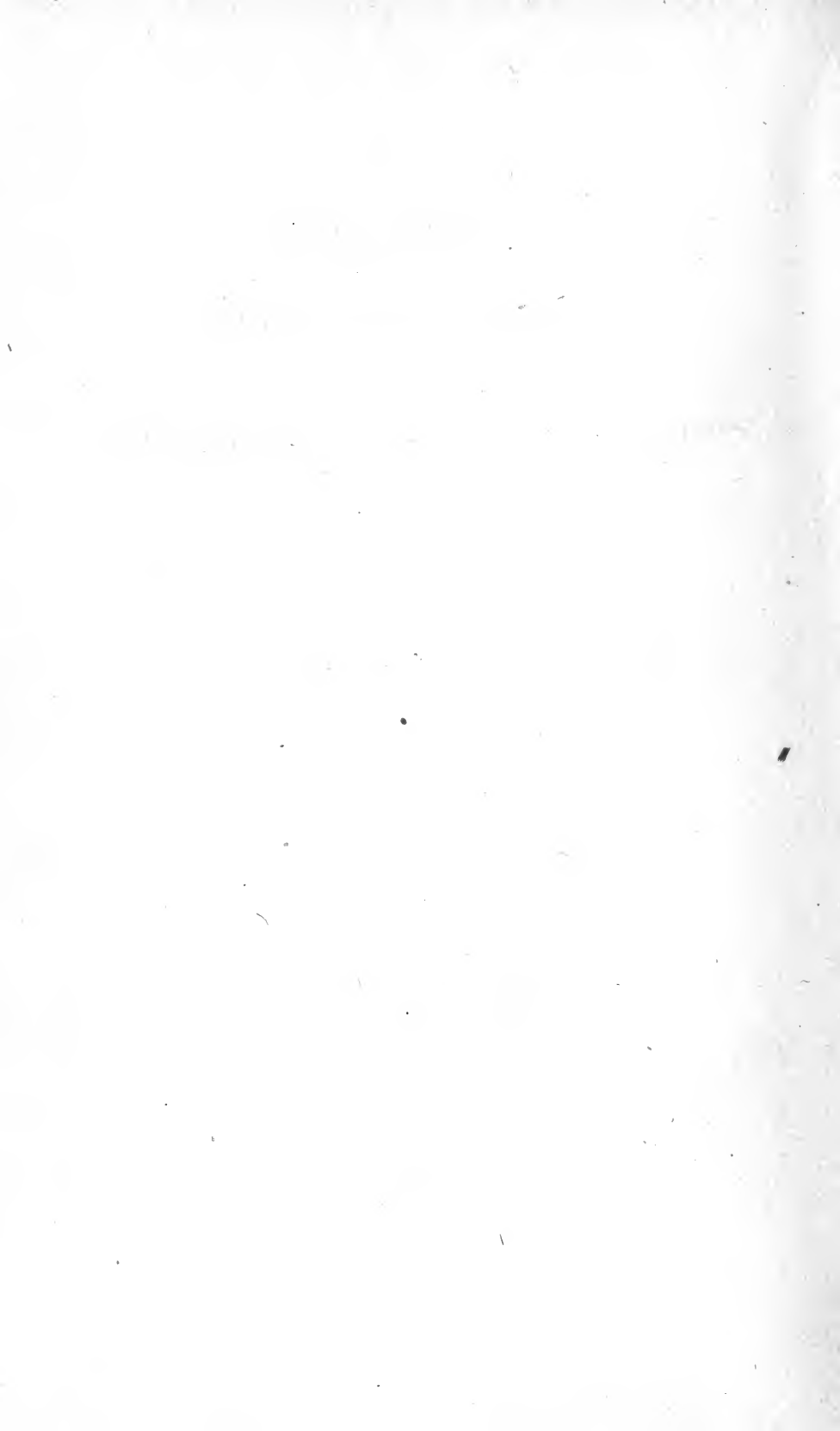


SHELLEY
"PETERLOO" AND
"THE MASK OF ANARCHY."



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SHELLEY, "PETERLOO," AND THE MASK OF ANARCHY,

*A Lecture delivered to the SHELLEY SOCIETY on the 9th of
February 1887,*

BY H. BUXTON FORMAN.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—In preparing for the press the fac-simile of the holograph *Mask of Anarchy*, which was the subject of some talk at our last meeting, I have been led to consider the circumstances that induced Shelley to write the poem, and the conditions in which it was produced; and I propose this evening to read to you what I have written on the subject.

The year 1819 was a critical one in the history of reform. Democratic agitation had been rife among the British working classes for some years; monster public gatherings were becoming more and more frequent; and in the summer of 1819 the movement culminated in a huge concourse at Manchester. On the 31st of July an advertizement in *The Manchester Observer* set forth that a meeting would be held on the 9th of August in a large open space called St. Peter's Field, with the view of urging forward parliamentary reform. The magistrates declared that such a meeting would be illegal; and its promoters postponed it while endeavouring to compass their end in a more formal manner, but eventually held their meeting on the 16th of August 1819, in St. Peter's Field. The people poured into Manchester by thousands from all the surrounding towns, coming peaceably and in order, though for a purpose pronounced to be illegal. It was arranged that the chair should be taken by the noisy demagogue Henry Hunt, best known as Orator Hunt, and not connected in any way with Leigh Hunt.

The authorities at Manchester had made extensive but muddlesome preparations for what they termed the preservation of peace. They had ready for action a large number of special constables, some yeomanry cavalry, and some three hundred hussars; but, although the authorities had ample knowledge and warning of the meeting, they failed to arrange beforehand any definite plan of action. They made no effort to arrest the ring-leaders on their way to St. Peter's Field; and it was not till Hunt was on the platform, surrounded by a densely-packed and enormous crowd of peaceable and orderly men, women, and children, that an absurd attempt to take him into custody was made. When the warrant for the apprehension of the reform leaders was handed to the chief constable for execution, he averred that he should need military aid. To this end some forty of the yeomanry cavalry were despatched to make their way through the crowd—an obvious impossibility—and were speedily hemmed in on all hands and stuck fast. They do not appear at first to have done or received serious harm; but, when their mission was found to have failed, a hasty order¹ was given to the three hundred hussars, who were in attendance hard by, to disperse the crowd. They made a vigorous charge, resulting in a terrific scene of confusion and indiscriminate slashing and overturning; and in the end about six people were killed outright, while twenty or thirty were wounded by the sabres of the cavalry, and some fifty or more injured by being trodden under foot and otherwise maltreated.

Such, in a few words, was the Manchester massacre, as Shelley called it, or, as it is often called, the Peterloo massacre. When the news of this ugly business reached Shelley at Leghorn, he was beyond measure transported by resentment against the local authorities and the Government. The affair took place during the administration of the Earl of Liverpool, when Lord Eldon was

¹ "“Good God, sir! Do you not see how they are attacking the yeomanry? Disperse the crowd!” On this, the word ‘Forward’ was instantly given, the trumpet sounded, and the cavalry dashed among the multitude.” See *A History of the Thirty Years’ Peace*, by Harriet Martineau, four volumes, 1877, vol. i. pp. 283-314, for a full account of the whole episode.

Lord High Chancellor, Viscount Sidmouth Home Secretary, and Lord Castlereagh Foreign Secretary. Lord Sidmouth publicly expressed the satisfaction of the Prince Regent with the "prompt, decisive, and efficient measures for the preservation of the public tranquillity" adopted by the local authorities. Lord Eldon, equally, supported the magistrates; and for the rest, the cup of iniquity both of Castlereagh and of Eldon had long, in Shelley's eyes, been full to overflowing; so that he might well give to Murder a mask like the one, and to Fraud an ermined gown like that of the other.

It is thus that Mrs. Shelley, in her note on the poems of 1819, describes her husband's feelings on this occasion:—

"Though Shelley's first eager desire to excite his countrymen to resist openly the oppressions existent during 'the good old times' had faded with early youth, still his warmest sympathies were for the people. He was a republican, and loved a democracy. He looked on all human beings as inheriting an equal right to possess the dearest privileges of our nature, the necessaries of life, when fairly earned by labour and intellectual instruction. His hatred of any despotism, that looked upon the people as not to be consulted or protected from want and ignorance, was intense. He was residing near Leghorn, at Villa Valsovano, writing *The Cenci*, when the news of the Manchester Massacre reached us: it roused in him violent emotions of indignation and compassion. The great truth that the many, if accordant and resolute, could control the few, as was shown some years after, made him long to teach his injured countrymen how to resist. Inspired by these feelings he wrote the *Masque of Anarchy*. . . ."

It may be questioned whether the words "writing *The Cenci*" were meant to be taken literally. Professor Dowden tells us (*Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 279) that, on Sunday the 8th of August, Shelley "brought the first rough draft [of *The Cenci*] to an end," and that during some later days of the same month he was "engaged in copying and correcting the poem."

I have reason to know that the words "first rough draft" are not quoted from any contemporary record, but are of the nature of an interpretation, there being no precise knowledge at present as to the degree of finish which characterized the tragedy as completed by Shelley on the 8th of August. It seems certain, however, that, a week later than that, it was not absolutely finished: on the 11th of August he was re-copying some portion of it; and on the 15th of August he wrote to

Leigh Hunt—¹ "My Prometheus is finished, and I am also on the eve of completing another work, totally different from any thing you might conjecture that I should write; of a more popular kind; and, if any thing of mine could deserve attention, of higher claims."

The work referred to is *The Cenci*; and, as the middle of August is generally accepted as the time of completion, it is not improbable that the 15th was actually the *eve* of the tragedy's birthday. Mrs. Shelley appears to have assisted later in copying; but even of this there seems to be no record after the 20th of August. Now if the 16th was actually the day on which Shelley put the last finishing touch to his tragedy, as I think we may reasonably assume it to have been, in the absence of further evidence, the coincidence was sufficiently remarkable; for that was the very day on which the Manchester magistrates, in the plenitude of their wisdom and forethought for the "public tranquillity," took order for the enactment of the tragedy in St. Peter's Field, which was to provide him with the subject of his next considerable poem. But these, we must recollect, were not the days of Reuter's telegrams, nor did news reach Leghorn from England by post in two or three days. The chances are that Shelley remained ignorant of the massacre till August had given place to September. By the 9th of September he was sending a printed copy of *The Cenci* to Peacock; and there is a letter to Mr. Ollier in which he mentions the indescribable trouble he had with the Italian printer in getting the work through the press at Leghorn. Now this indescribable trouble must certainly have occupied a plurality of weeks, as any one who is familiar with printing processes at their best must be convinced: I do not doubt, therefore, that the business on which the poet was occupied, when he heard first of the meeting in St. Peter's Field and its sanguinary results, must have been the printing and not the writing of *The Cenci*.

How the indescribable trouble inflicted on him by Signor Masi² and his compositors must have shrunk into

¹ *Prose Works*, vol. iv., p. 115.

² Professor Dowden (*Life of Shelley*, vol. ii., p. 279) says that the book was printed at Masi's, adding, however, in a foot-note, "I have no positive

insignificance when he opened the English newspapers and read of the hideous and sanguinary bungle, it is not difficult to picture to one's thought. Let us look in imagination into that glazed-in loggia at the top of Villa Valsovano,¹ where the summer had seen Shelley at work upon the greatest tragedy produced since Shakespeare's hand left working in that kind: do we not see the same Shelley dividing his time between attention to the indescribable proof-sheets of the said tragedy, damp from printer Masi's office, and boiling over the news contained in the papers from his abandoned country, where a less remote if less poetic tragedy had just been enacted? Whether Masi's mangling of the majestic lines of *The Cenci*, or thoughts of that ghastly rush of cavalry to mangle the limbs of his unarmed countrymen, drove him the oftener to the glazed front of his "airy cell,"² who shall say? Whether, when driven from his high retreat, to rush into Leghorn and make personal representations to the bewildered and bewildering printers, the completed tragedy of medieval Italy or the poem already getting forward on the new tragedy of modern England, was uppermost in his thoughts, who shall guess? But we cannot put aside the recurring picture of the poet, starting up once and again with impulsive fingers thrust through his wild locks, stung now by some blunder of the printer's in transferring from manuscript to print the unfamiliar language of his fresh great "summer-task,"³ now by some detail, or imagined detail, of the massacre, to find a momentary relief in gazing down from the study "half way between the town [of Leghorn] and Monte Nero:"⁴ from that study he could drink in through the eyes the benign influence of the "near sea" which he loved, and could for a moment calm his vexed spirit with the "wide prospect of fertile country"⁵ of the land of his choice.

evidence that Masi was Shelley's printer, but it seems morally certain that to Masi he would go."

¹ See Mrs. Shelley's note on *The Cenci*.

² *Ibid.*

³ "So now my summer-task is ended, Mary."—(*Laon and Cythna—Dedication.*)

⁴ Mrs. Shelley's note on *The Cenci*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

But we have not to depend on sheer imagination in order to realize the vivid series of impressions kept up in Shelley's mind: not only have we in our hands the admirable poem which he wrote on the impulse of this ugly episode in the history of reform in England, but letters and memoranda are preserved for our guidance. On the 6th of September, when well through his troubles with the Leghorn printers, he wrote a letter¹ to his publisher, Mr. Ollier, announcing his intention to send *The Cenci* for publication, and commenting thus on the Manchester massacre:—

"The same day that your letter came, came the news of the Manchester work, and the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously to hear how the country will express its sense of this bloody, murderous oppression of its destroyers. Something must be done. What, yet, I know not."²

Three days later he wrote to his good friend Peacock,³ sending him a copy of *The Cenci* and exhibiting an unabated interest in the Peterloo business:—

"Many thanks for your attention in sending the papers which contain the terrible and important news of Manchester. These are, as it were, the distant thunders of the terrible storm which is approaching. The tyrants here, as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood. May their execrable lessons not be learnt with equal docility! I still think there will be no coming to close quarters until financial affairs bring the oppressors and the oppressed together. Pray let me have the *earliest* political news which you consider of importance at this crisis."

After the lapse of twelve days more, he again addressed Peacock, further concerning *The Cenci* and (*inter alia*) concerning the massacre:—⁴

"I have received all the papers you sent me, and the *Examiners* regularly, perfumed with muriatic acid.⁵ What an infernal business—this of Man-

¹ *Shelley Memorials*, pp. 118-19.

² This quotation from *The Cenci* (act iii., scene i., lines 86-7) gives us a glimpse of the way in which the real and literary tragedies were dividing his mind. The "torrent" of his indignation did not, it seems, even give him time to reflect whether Mr. Ollier would understand the words "oppression of its destroyers" as meaning oppression exercised by the persons so characterized.

³ *Prose Works*, vol. iv., pp. 123-4.

⁴ *Prose Works*, vol. iv., pp. 124-6.

⁵ The result of quarantine operations.

chester! What is to be done? Something assuredly.¹ H. Hunt has behaved, I think, with great spirit and coolness in the whole affair."

That the poem seethed in his mind for a continuance of time is also evident from another passage in Mrs. Shelley's note on the poems of 1819:—

"The poem was written for the people, and is therefore in a more popular tone than usual; portions strike as abrupt and unpolished, but many stanzas are all his own. I heard him repeat (and admired) those beginning,—

" 'My Father Time is old and grey,'

before I knew to what poem they were to belong. But the most touching passage is that which describes the blessed effects of liberty; they might make a patriot of any man, whose heart was not wholly closed against his humbler fellow-creatures."

In what form the poem was first put into black and white perhaps we may never know; but the chances are that it was jotted down in note-books or on scraps of paper, in pencil or in ink as occasion ruled, before being reduced to its finished form. However that may be, it was copied out by Mrs. Shelley, finally revised by Shelley, and despatched to Leigh Hunt for publication in *The Examiner*, before November 1819. It never saw the light till 1832; for Hunt, prudent for once, thought that, if given to the public in 1819, it would have a very different effect from that for which the poet designed it. When Mrs. Shelley reprinted the poem in her collected editions, dating from 1839 onwards, she included a stanza not given by Hunt; but, so far as the public knew, from that time till 1876, there were no means of verifying by consultation of manuscripts the readings of either the one version or the other.

In 1876, some Shelley papers preserved by Leigh Hunt came to the surface of the stream of time which had swamped them; and in the following year, when the third volume of my library edition of Shelley's Poetical Works was issued, *The Mask of Anarchy* was given from the very copy which Mrs. Shelley had written and Shelley had revised with minute and

¹ Note the curious way in which the words from *The Cenci* quoted to Ollier are put in plain prose for the unsympathizing Peacock, the "nursling of the exact and superficial school in poetry."

scrupulous care, for Hunt to publish in *The Examiner*. Certain peculiarities in that manuscript, notably gaps left by Mrs. Shelley and afterwards filled in by Shelley, led me to surmise that the poet had dictated the poem to his wife from rough notes, such as we know he made, in ample measure, of his poetic thoughts. Until the present year (1887) the Hunt manuscript remained the sole known written authority for the text of *The Mask*, and it did not seem very probable that another authority would be discovered. Nevertheless, Shelley's own manuscript of the whole poem, less a few omitted lines, has at length been found, and has blown to the winds my theory of dictation,—the peculiarities being the result, not of hesitant instructions to an amanuensis, but of copying out, as literally as might be, a poem which was practically completed, but required just a few finishing touches.

The recovery of the holograph is a direct result of the Shelley Society's activity. Mr. Frederic S. Ellis, while carrying on the work of editing and supervising the Shelley Concordance, had to appeal through the columns of *The Athenæum* for additions to his phalanx of workers. From communications made to Mr. Ellis in this connexion it transpired that Mrs. Shelley, in 1826, gave the holograph *Mask of Anarchy* to the late Sir John (then Mr.) Bowring, whose son, Mr. Lewin Bowring, C.S.I., placed it temporarily in Mr. Ellis's hands, together with a most interesting letter sent by Mrs. Shelley with her precious gift. This letter, with some particulars of the manuscript, was at once communicated by Mr. Ellis to *The Athenæum*,¹ and arrangements were shortly made for the transfer of the manuscript and letter to their present owner, Mr. Thomas J. Wise.

In a small way, the recovery of this manuscript, and its bestowal in the hands of one who will not hide it under a bushel, have made quite a stir. To Shelley specialists the knowledge that the holograph of another of Shelley's poems is extant and accessible is necessarily gratifying; and the production of that fac-simile of it which the Shelley Society is about to issue in its

¹ January 22, 1887.

"Extra Series" is a real boon,—a fac-simile being serviceable both for the purposes of students who desire to know more of Shelley's way of work, and for such collectors as cannot hope to possess the original. But it may be well to note the particular reasons, independent of Shelleyolatry and autograph-hunting, for which the recovery of this manuscript was to be desired.

The spelling of the word *Mask* in the title was already settled; for Shelley himself wrote the heading of the Hunt manuscript, and put *Mask*, not *Masque*. He also added the important and significant words, "written on the occasion of the massacre at Manchester." But a few textual points remained on which the evidence of the holograph was desirable. For instance, stanza ix. stands thus in the Hunt manuscript:—

"And he wore a kingly crown;
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;
On his brow this mark I saw—
'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW.'"

Hunt altered the third line to—

"And on his brow this mark I saw—"

and Mrs. Shelley gave the second line thus—

"In his hand a sceptre shone;"

which turns out to be the reading of the holograph, though a reading which Shelley rejected in favour of that of the Hunt manuscript, where the line stands revised by his own hand.

Mrs. Shelley, in the passage from stanza xiv.,

"Hearing the tempestuous cry
Of the triumph of Anarchy"

changed *tempestuous* to *tremendous*; and in stanza xviii. she altered

"Thou art King, and God, and Lord;"

to

"Thou art King, and Law, and Lord,"

while for the expressive line

"Fumbling with his palsied hands!"

in stanza xxiii. she substituted—

"Trembling with his palsied hands!"

Of none of these variations is there any trace in the holograph.

Again, the lovely line in stanza xxxi.—

"As flowers beneath May's footstep waken"

has appeared variously with the words *the footstep* (Hunt), and *May's footsteps* (Mrs. Shelley); but the reading of the Hunt manuscript, *May's footstep*, receives such confirmation as it may be thought to have needed from the holograph.

Perhaps the point of most consequence for consultation of the holograph was the status of the stanza—

"Horses, oxen, have a home,
When from daily toil they come;
Household dogs, when the wind roars,
Find a home within warm doors."

This stanza is in the holograph, but is omitted from the elaborate Hunt manuscript. Mrs. Shelley replaced it between stanzas xlix. and l.; but I relegated it to the foot-notes, as having been in all probability rejected by Shelley. With the holograph before me, I see no reason for a change of opinion, though I find no evidence at all to speak of. The two stanzas between which Mrs. Shelley replaced it read thus:—

"Birds find rest, in narrow nest
When weary of their winged quest;
Beasts find fare, in woody lair
When snow and storm are in the air.

"Asses, swine, have litter spread
And with fitting food are fed;
All things have a home but one—
Thou, Oh, Englishman, hast none!"

My reason for thinking Shelley's rejection of this stanza likely and wise is that it carries on the comparison a little too long, and tends to use up or discount the sacred word *home* before it occurs in its real and full significance in juxtaposition with the mention of the homeless Englishman. As the verses now stand the thought passes

over the *rest* of birds, the *lair* of beasts, the *litter* of asses and swine, and the *home* that the Englishman lacks. But, with the other stanza inserted, the sequence is mingled—*rest, lair, home, home, litter, home*. The change effected by the omission is one which I should venture to call magical. The bearing of the holograph on the question is not strong, however. Although the stanzas are numbered in the manuscript revised for press, they are not numbered in the holograph. Had both copies been numbered, I should have thought it most improbable that Shelley, who was very curious about the numbering of his verses and stanzas, would have revised with such remarkable pains the copy for the press, and yet not found out the omission by the want of correspondence in the numbers. As it is, he seems to have made one of his usual counts at this very point, for at the end of the fifty-first stanza in his copy he has written in the margin the figure 51, whereas that stanza becomes the fiftieth in the final manuscript. I do not lay much stress on this, but note it for what it is worth. For the rest, I am confident that, had he wanted the stanza, he would have missed it, numbers or no numbers; and I can see no ground whatever for restoring it to a place in the text.

In stanza lviii. there was something that looked like editorial watering-down:—

“Thou art Wisdom—Freemen never
Dream that God will damn for ever”

said the Hunt manuscript; but Hunt printed

“Freedom never
Dreams that God will damn for ever,”

and Mrs. Shelley, while restoring *Freemen* for *Freedom*, put *doom* for *damn*. The holograph corresponds precisely with the Hunt manuscript, and leaves both editors answerable for their readings.

Stanza lxiii., as revised by Shelley for the press, is:—

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

The rhythm of the first line was altered by the insertion of *and* between *Science* and *Poetry* in all editions published before 1877; and Mrs. Shelley gave the fourth line as

"Such they curse their Maker not."

The holograph does not contain the *and*; but it does contain both readings of the fourth line; the first written boldly, like the rest of the poem, the second written very small and faintly with a different pen, the words *so serene* and *it* being cancelled lightly, as though the matter were yet to be further considered.

In stanza lxxv., Hunt printed the second line as

"Of the fearless, of the free,"

though the manuscript from which he published reads,

"Of the fearless and the free."

This preference for a more staccato reading must, I fear, be set down to lax views of an editor's duties. At all events Shelley's manuscript does nothing to release his friend from that imputation; and it was not to be expected that it would.

Such are the principal points upon which a consultation of the holograph manuscript was to be desired; and the result, though not absolutely negative, is not very positive or copious.

Over and above what we gather on these points, there are some few fresh readings, the most important of which is the cancelled stanza:—

"From the cities where from caves
Like the dead from putrid graves
Troops of starvelings gliding come
Living tenants of a tomb."

This stanza is found between what are the 67th and 68th in the printed version (original and Library Editions—68th and 69th in Mrs. Shelley's and Mr. Rossetti's editions). It gives place to the two fine stanzas:—

"From the workhouse and the prison
Where pale as corpses newly risen
Women, children, young and old
Groan for pain, and weep for cold—

“From the haunts of daily life
Where is waged the daily strife
With common wants and common cares
Which sows the human heart with tares—”

No one will regret the removal of the old stanza from the text; but it has great interest as a cancelled reading.

On the other hand, the holograph yields some variations of a more positive value. Stanza xxx. in the manuscript prepared by Shelley for the press reads thus:—

“With step as soft as wind it past
O'er the heads of men—so fast
That they knew the presence there
And looked,—and all was empty air.”

The holograph reads *but* for *and* in the last line; and I am disposed to prefer that reading, although we cannot be certain that the other was a mistake of transcription which Shelley failed to discover.

In stanza lvii. the holograph gives the fourth line as—

“Shield'st alike both high and low”

but Mrs. Shelley's transcript gives—

“Shield'st alike *the* high and low.”

It is possible to contend for *both* as stronger and more emphatic; but it is certainly less accurate. We do not say, “Both the cat and the kitten are alike,” because there can be no question of one being alike and the other not alike. Mrs. Shelley may very well have had Shelley by her to be appealed to while she copied the poem; and I should not consider the evidence of the carefully-revised manuscript, prepared for press, as set aside by the holograph save in case of obvious error or indisputable inferiority.

Such a case—not of obvious error, but of indisputable inferiority—is to be found in stanza lxxix. Mrs. Shelley's copy reads:—

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

and that *an* in the fourth line certainly looks as if it had no legitimate business there. Sense and rhythm alike would be the better for its absence; and when we find that the holograph reads

"Weapons of unvanquished war,"

what can we do but gladly accept the amendment, and assume an undiscovered error of transcription? It may be mentioned that this stanza in the Hunt manuscript is one of four consecutive stanzas, conspicuous for the absence of a single trace of Shelley's pen, employed so liberally in retouching the transcript throughout.

Whatever the importance or the reverse of the results obtained by examining Shelley's manuscript, there can be no dispute as to the grave interest of the letter which Mrs. Shelley wrote to Sir John Bowring when she sent him this valuable relic. The letter contains the following paragraph:—

"Do not be afraid of losing the impression you have concerning my lost Shelley by conversing with anyone who knew him about him.¹ The mysterious feeling you experience was participated by all his friends, even by me, who was ever with him—or why say *even*;—I felt it more than any other, because by sharing his fortune, I was more aware than any other of his wondrous excellencies and the strange fate which attended him on all occasions—Romance is tame in comparison with all that we experienced together and the last fatal scene was accompanied by circumstances so strange so inexplicable so full of terrific interest (words are weak when one speaks of events so near the heart) that you would deem me very superstitious if I were only to narrate simple and incontestible facts to you—I do not in any degree believe that his being was regulated by the same laws that govern the existence of us common mortals—nor did anyone think so who ever knew him. I have endeavoured, but how inadequately, to give some idea of him in my last published book—the sketch has pleased some of those who best loved him—I might have made more of it but there are feelings which one recoils from unveiling to the public eye—I have the greatest pleasure in sending you the writing for which you ask."

I have already had occasion to remark elsewhere² upon the foregoing confession of that mysterious feeling as to Shelley's personality resulting from the most intimate proximity to him; and I cannot but think that a confession of this kind, on the part of a person of such strong intelligence and enlightened views as characterized

¹ *Sic*, but probably we should read, *knew about him*.

² *Athenæum*, January 29, 1887.

the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, will prove a valuable memorandum for the Shelley biographer of the future in examining several of those curious episodes in the poet's history which have given rise to controversy and to grave doubts. But the important point here is the positive record that, in one of Mrs. Shelley's novels, she had liberated her heart in sketching a portrait of her husband. The letter is dated the 25th of February 1826; and the latest book published by Shelley's widow at that time was the weird and terrible romance of *The Last Man*. It has long been a familiar thought to me that Adrian Earl of Windsor in *The Last Man* was meant to represent Shelley in point of character: but a confession of that intention was needed to give the literary portrait solid value. Whether my friend Professor Dowden would have made use of the sketch in any way, had this evidence turned up in time, I cannot say; but I confess that, if I were engaged on a study of Shelley's character, I should regard as a document of real value this study of the same which his widow wove into the fabric of *The Last Man*, though I might not have ventured to appeal to it without the absolute certainty that the author's deliberate intention was to depict Shelley.

The statement that the sketch "pleased some of those who best loved him" is one which we can readily accept as based upon genuine expressions of satisfaction. We might expect to find, if the materials for search existed, statements to that effect from Leigh Hunt and Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Claire Clairmont and Jane Williams; but we must be content for the present to let one alone of these four devoted friends of Shelley speak for himself. Professor Dowden tells me that Hogg, in that same year 1826, pronounced the character which Mrs. Shelley had drawn in *The Last Man* to be "most happy and most just."

Beside this portrait of Shelley, *The Last Man* contains other studies after nature. Lord Raymond is certainly intended to represent Byron in an idealized form; and the character of Perdita is drawn in so intimate and analytical a manner that one cannot doubt there is much in the material for that character that was derived from

experience. Any future biographer of Shelley would certainly do well to make a scrupulous examination of the inner life of Perdita as recorded in *The Last Man*, and collate with direct records the various passages that seem to bear upon the life of Shelley and Mary.

Curiously enough, there is one point that links Perdita with the holograph *Mask of Anarchy*. At the back of one of the leaves are a few lines of Italian, which turn out, on examination, to be a translation from the opening of *Epipsychidion*, that poem which Trelawney declared to have been first composed in Italian, and which embodies a philosophy of divided love, such as cannot in the nature of things have been satisfactory to Shelley's wife. Indeed, I think her inclusion of this wondrous poem (issued anonymously) among the acknowledged works of Shelley was an act of some heroism—an act of stoical justice to his poetic reputation, but characterized by reserve that is unusual in Mrs. Shelley's treatment of her husband's works. *Epipsychidion* is the one poem of importance which Mrs. Shelley was not at the pains to comment on, or in any way elucidate; and it is at least remarkable that we should find expressions of Perdita in *The Last Man* combating the philosophy of divided love.

When Perdita finds out that her husband's allegiance to her is divided, her life is, so to speak, wrecked. She writes him a letter containing the following passage:—

"I loved you—I love you—neither anger nor pride dictates these lines: but a feeling beyond, deeper, and more unutterable than either. My affections are wounded; it is impossible to heal them:—cease then the vain endeavour, if indeed that way your endeavours tend. Forgiveness! Return! Idle words are these! I forgive the pain I endure; but the trodden path cannot be retraced.

"Common affection might have been satisfied with common usages. I believed that you read my heart, and knew its devotion, its unalienable fidelity towards you. I never loved any but you. You came the embodied image of my fondest dreams. The praise of men, power and high aspirations attended your career. Love for you invested the world for me in enchanted light; it was no longer the earth I trod—the earth common mother, yielding only trite and stale repetition of objects and circumstances old and worn out. I lived in a temple glorified by intensest sense of devotion and rapture; I walked, a consecrated being, contemplating only your power, your excellence;

For O, you stood beside me, like my youth,
Transformed for me the real to a dream,

Cloathing the palpable and familiar
With golden exhalations of the dawn.

“ ‘The bloom has vanished from my life’—there is no morning to this all investing night ; no rising to the set-sun of love. In those days the rest of the world was nothing to me : all other men—I never considered nor felt what they were : nor did I look on you as one of them. Separated from them ; exalted in my heart ; sole possessor of my affections ; single object of my hopes, the best half of myself.

“ Ah, Raymond, were we not happy ? Did the sun shine on any, who could enjoy its light with purer and more intense bliss ? It was not—it is not a common infidelity at which I repine. It is the disunion of an whole which may not have parts ; it is the carelessness with which you have shaken off the mantle of election with which to me you were invested, and have become one among the many. Dream not to alter this. Is not love a divinity, because it is immortal ? Did not I appear sanctified, even to myself, because this love had for its temple my heart ? I have gazed on you as you slept, melted even to tears, as the idea filled my mind, that all I possessed lay cradled in those idolized, but mortal lineaments before me. Yet, even then, I have checked thick-coming fears with one thought : I would not fear death, for the emotions that linked us must be immortal.

“ And now I do not fear death. I should be well pleased to close my eyes, never more to open them again. And yet I fear it ; even as I fear all things ; for in any state of being linked by the chain of memory with this, happiness would not return—even in Paradise, I must feel that your love was less enduring than the mortal beatings of my fragile heart, every pulse of which knells audibly,

The funeral note
Of love, deep buried, without resurrection.

No—no—me miserable ; for love extinct there is no resurrection !”

The whole letter from which this is taken is a very noble one—at once impassioned and dignified, and on a higher level than I should expect to find maintained in the utterance of one of Mrs. Shelley’s characters drawn from simple imagination. After the letter there is a conversation between Perdita and her brother, in which she says :—

“ Do you think that any of your arguments are new to me ? or that my own burning wishes and intense anguish have not suggested them all a thousand times, with far more eagerness and subtlety than you can put into them ? Lionel, you cannot understand what woman’s love is. In days of happiness I have often repeated to myself, with a grateful heart and exulting spirit, all that Raymond sacrificed for me. I was a poor, uneducated, unbefriended, mountain girl, raised from nothingness by him. All that I possessed of the luxuries of life came from him. He gave me an illustrious name and noble station ; the world’s respect reflected from his own glory : all [t]his joined to his own undying love, inspired me with sensations

towards him, akin to those with which we regard the Giver of life. I gave him love only. I devoted myself to him: imperfect creature that I was, I took myself to task, that I might become worthy of him. I watched over my hasty temper, subdued my burning impatience of character, schooled my self-engrossing thoughts, educating myself to the best perfection I might attain, that the fruit of my exertions might be his happiness. I took no merit to myself for this. He deserved it all—all labour, all devotion, all sacrifice; I would have toiled up a scaleless Alp, to pluck a flower that would please him. I was ready to quit you all, my beloved and gifted companions, and to live only with him, for him. I could not do otherwise, even if I had wished; for if we are said to have two souls, he was my better soul, to which the other was a perpetual slave. One only return did he owe me, even fidelity. I earned that; I deserved it. Because I was mountain-bred, unallied to the noble and wealthy, shall he think to repay me by an empty name and station? Let him take them back; without his love they are nothing to me. Their only merit in my eyes was that they were his."

Without looking beyond the mere significance of the words, I should like to accept that utterance as coming direct from Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley; and I for one should certainly cherish her memory the more warmly for it.

While preparing my notes on the circumstances in which *The Mask of Anarchy* was produced, I have received from a member of the Shelley Society, who was travelling through Italy by the special train service provided for the Indian mails, a most interesting letter, bearing upon Shelley's influence in a manner more appropriate, perhaps, to this particular poem than any other. In the bed below my correspondent in the sleeping-car was Mr. H. M. Stanley, on his way to Emin Bey, very quiet and thoughtful, talking little. He picked up my friend's copy of the Shelley Society's Report upon its first year's work, just issued, and asked for information about the Society.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Stanley, "I am a poorly-educated man; but Shelley, I take it, wrote for such, not (begging your pardon) for the literary *connoisseurs* who now take him up, patronize, puff, and dissect him."

"Not patronize," said my correspondent, "though perhaps puff. Yet, after all, is not the puff delicate a fair means of spreading good doctrines among good men?"

Mr. Stanley rejoined: "Some lines of Shelley live

with me, as some of Leopardi's do with most Italians. He was for freedom, so am I. He had go, he had enthusiasm." Then, after a pause, "You are a funny people, you Shelleyites: you are playing—at a safe distance yourselves, may be—with fire. In spreading Shelley you are indirectly helping to stir up the great Socialist question—the great question of the needs, and wants, and wishes of unhappy men; the one question which bids fair to swamp you all for a bit."

Stanley bade farewell to his car-companion at Brindisi, leaving the impression that he well knew the question of his ever getting back to be a hazardous one; and taking with him by way of solace my friend's copy of the Shelley Society's reprint of *Alastor*.

Such a glimpse as this of the impression produced by Shelley on a man of vigorous mind and strong practical proclivities is more interesting, because far more difficult to obtain, than many pages of accomplished literary judgments. Still, if it be true that the spread of Shelley's influence tends to stir up the Socialist question, it is true only in the sense in which the spread of the gospel may be similarly considered. The Nazarene carpenter was far more a typical Socialist than Shelley was; and yet we do not throw it in the teeth of the clergy that the doctrines of him whom they profess tend to stir up and force forward the Socialist question.

But if this verdict on Shelley's influence be true in any serious and immediate sense, it should be peculiarly applicable to the poem with which we are now particularly concerned—to *The Mask of Anarchy*—and to that group of poems written in 1819, with the view to awakening Englishmen to a sense of their degradation, their rights, and their powers.

Now let us take one passage from *The Mask of Anarchy*. We might fearlessly take the whole poem, with its ardent advocacy of a bloodless resistance to force and fraud; but one passage will suffice:—

“ Let the laws of your own land,
Good or ill, between ye stand
Hand to hand, and foot to foot,
Arbiters of the dispute,

" The old laws of England—they
Whose reverend heads with age are grey,
Children of a wiser day ;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo—Liberty !

" On those who first should violate
Such sacred heralds in their state
Rest the blood that must ensue,
And it will not rest on you."

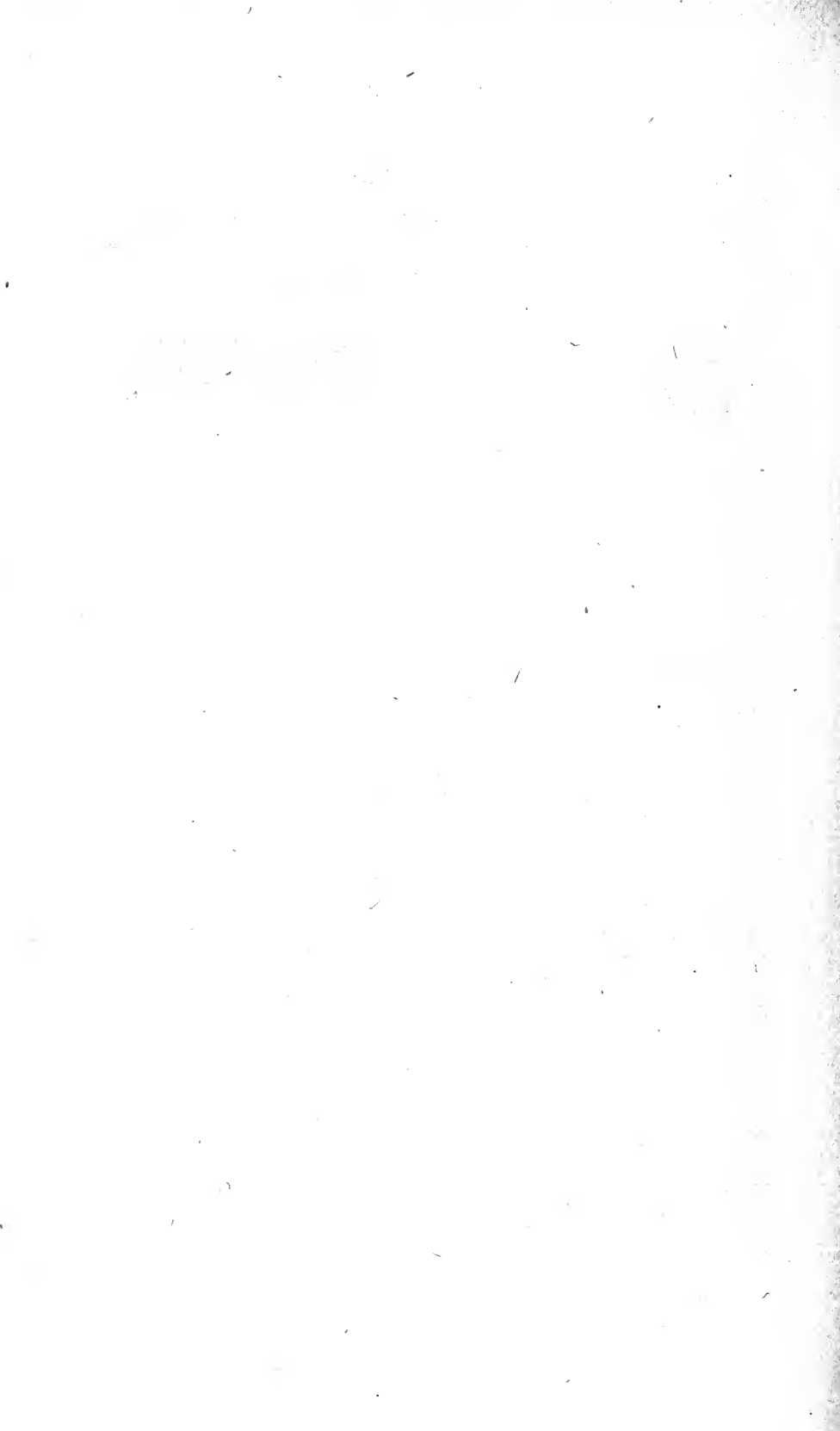
This appeal to the wisdom of English law is not much like the "bed-rock" nonsense of the professional Socialist, is it? Well, that is Shelley's way of stirring up the Socialist question; and I think we may rest satisfied that Mr. Stanley has carried off the impression of some part of the trappings of Shelley's poetry without going to the root of what he really meant. Nevertheless it is, as I said before, extremely interesting to learn what impression there is in the mind of such a man concerning Shelley and his teachings.

Again, as to Shelley's poems being written for the half-educated—if that be true of anything besides *Queen Mab*, it is of *The Mask of Anarchy* and the small political group of 1819. That group is by no means representative; it is a distinctly poor group compared with other work of the period from the same hand; and even *The Mask*, splendid as it is in impulse and imaginative treatment, does not gain, and could not gain, from the violence done to Shelley's native manner and style in the earnest desire to reach the hearts and minds of the struggling proletariat of his own day. Of course in a certain sense the most enlightened of Shelley's readers are only half-educated; and the more enlightened a man is the less will he be likely to lay claim to more than half an education in the widest sense of the word. But here the question is one of comparison; and setting Shelley beside his contemporaries—say beside Byron, Scott, and Wordsworth—I should say that about three times as much education would be required to read Shelley's works with comfort as would be wanted for the like perusal of Byron's, Scott's, and Wordsworth's works together. This admission would probably be taken by

the world at large as counting against Shelley and in favour of Byron, Scott, and Wordsworth.

“ Well, if it be so, so it is, you know ;
And if it be so—so be it ! ”

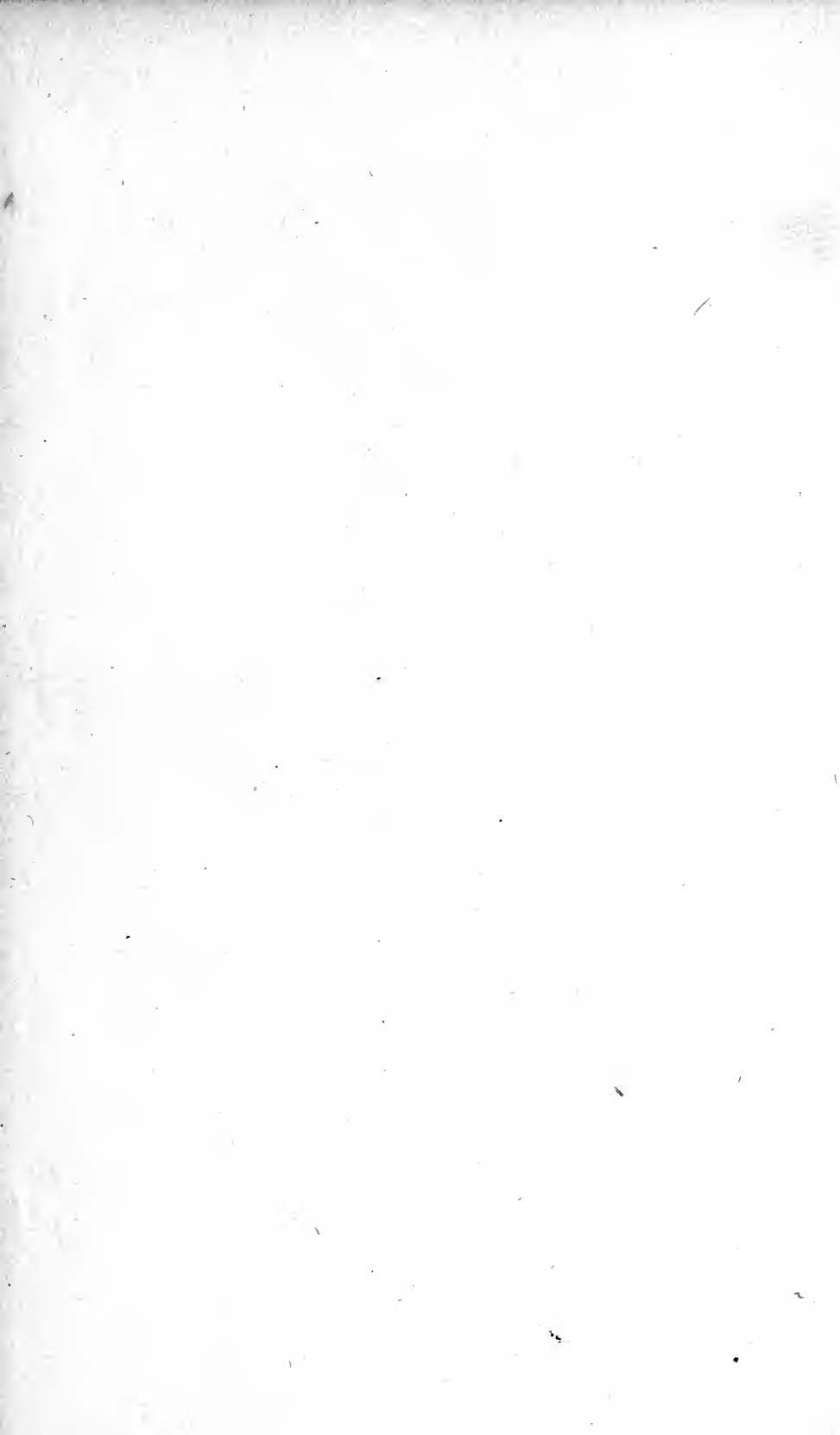
We who love Shelley and his poetry can afford to take him as he is, and do our best to educate ourselves up to the necessary standard for a full and fruitful intelligence of all he meant and all he was.



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