

**PESSIMUS: A
RHAPSODY
AND A PARADOX**

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Pessimus: a rhapsody and a paradox by Frederick William Orde Ward

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FREDERICK WILLIAM ORDE WARD

**PESSIMUS: A
RHAPSODY
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PESSIMUS:
A RHAPSODY,
AND
A PARADOX.

BY
YOUNG ENGLAND.

"Sic omnia fatis
In pejus ruere, ac retro ubi lapsa referri."—VIRGIL.
"I pass, like Night, from land to land."—COLERIDGE.
"I change, but I cannot die."—SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
WILLIAMS AND NORWICH,
HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.
1865.

265. j. 14.



NOTICE.

The University, as the University, has neither censured nor condemned my book. But the University, through certain of its representative members, has both censured and condemned my book. And this, as it seems to me, is a distinction without a difference. The tyrannous censorship of the press, exercised by religious bigots, (menacing Academic thunders and Jovian lightnings !) rendered it impossible for my book to continue any longer in circulation. For myself, I entertained no regrets or fears ; for my publishers I did, as their reputation was at stake. Therefore my book was called in, before proceedings against it (which indeed seemed inevitable) were instituted. The storm had not yet burst, but its electric forces were mustering and playing in secret ; the atmosphere was dense and surcharged with hostile elements, and the sky was dark and lurid. Hence the University, if it be responsible for the acts of its leaders, has effectually suppressed my book in Oxford. But there its triumph, if it is a triumph, ends. And now my turn begins. And from the labyrinthine depths of London, I proclaim that there is war without any compromise between myself and the University ; and here I sound the first certain note of defiance to liberticides.

Proud City, domed and towered and spired,
With half a hundred crests—
Which by the rising sun are fired,
Where its last radiance rests ;
Even brutes may find repose when tired,
Foxes have holes and birds have nests.

But there's no peace for public wrong :
Dost thou in Charters trust ?
Are thy old halls and bulwarks strong,
Have they not gathered rust ?
For know the day will not be long,
To strangely stir thy cloistered dust.

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DEDICATION.

I DESIRE, with all respect and modesty, to dedicate this poem to the memory of the divine, the adorable Shelley; as a slender tribute of the ardent affection I feel for him, through his poems and his life, that greatest of poems. Oh, what spectacle can there be more sublime, than that of a brave man battling single-handed with the world? In approaching him, I do so with an upright veneration and a manly fear, with feelings of purest sorrow and deepest sympathy. The splendid work of Shelley and Byron, and all the effluent good, are inappreciable, cannot be over-rated. They were Promethean sufferers, benefactors, and liberators; living and dying for the welfare of humanity; and thereby greater than conquerors. But to the rapt, devoted Shelley, is due by far the larger portion of our praises and admiration; before that fine seraphic spirit every knee should bow. To him each poet and historian, each chronicler of what is good, and fair, and imitable, should tender unalloyed homage; and humbly, according to their respective abilities, bring offerings of balm and myrrh, and immortal flowers and tears to shed upon his grave. Since the cycle of Socrates, no gentler soul has walked in wisdom and love upon this barren planet. Since the martyred Athenian, no purer mind in universal care ever looked abroad so deeply, into the unlovely stupendous night of ignorance, bigotry, and tyranny. He fearlessly tore the mask from society, and exposed the nameless sin and wrong, the heartless heart: and rising to colossal and God-like proportions, he pointed, as he sang, to the distant dawn, as it were a man's finger, smiling on its golden mountain tops. Rare, across the silence, in holy intervals is the true voice, warning and encouraging, calling the wanderers home. Shelley spoke; then the superstitious sea washed him away, adown its gulfs; and, again, the eternal silence lay upon the lands. Yet still in vicarious beauty, a sacrifice perpetually renew-

ing itself, a presence and a piercing influence, he moves among us ; but we hear him not. Therefore, with reason, do I erect this monument (may it stand!) to the shade of Shelley, the bloom of his age : being also myself a pilgrim, isolated, nameless, traversing the worlds of imagination, and the dim recesses of thought. Seeking for Truth as he, perhaps I hold it even now in my hand. Shall we know it, when we see it ? Now I leave this votive tablet, inscribed with faintest characters ; suspended over the marble urn, which contains the ashes of "the heart of hearts."

PREFACE.

THIS the first offspring of my pen, my eldest essay in letters, just as it is, I offer to the literary republic. Neither apology nor excuse, for any hardihood in the attempt, do I bring with it. If I must petition for grace at all, it is this: that my poem may be subjected to a searching, scorching criticism. Let it stand or fall on its own merits or demerits. By showing himself pitiless and severe, the critic will be proved also and thereby my truest friend. Why should one who has read much, and thought more, who is conscious of a mission and prophetic burthen, and is prepared to abide the worst, cringe and fawn like a slave, or step diffidently like a girl, on entering the poetic circle? Without expecting an introduction, without bow given, or pardon demanded, but simply *sui juris*, he invades this magic world. Like a young gladiator, impatient for the battle, as armed at all points—well equipped and trained, my harness on my back, and sword in hand, I descend, I leap boldly into the arena. In so doing and daring, I am not proud or presumptuous, but justly self-reliant, and as a man who feels and acts upon a proper *calling*. The voice of the spirit does not whisper false, it does not deceive and tempt with an alien ambition. I recognise and obey the present God. I have paused and worshipped; I have taken off my shoes, as standing on holy ground. With reverence I have written, believing and trembling. Then