

**ORIGINAL
POETRY**

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Original Poetry by Elizabeth Shelley

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ELIZABETH SHELLEY

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P O E T R Y**

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BY

VICTOR & CAZIRE

[PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
& ELIZABETH SHELLEY]

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INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN the completion of "Queen Mab" in 1813, and the composition of "Alastor" in 1815, Shelley underwent a silent internal revolution which transformed a vigorous writer in verse into a great original poet. Much the same transformation had previously occurred to Coleridge, but with this difference, that in the elder poet's case the metamorphosis is manifestly due in great measure to the influence of Wordsworth, but in Shelley's the impulse is wholly from within. The two poets, however, have this in common, that, unlike Wordsworth, Byron, and others who cannot claim to be enumerated among "the twice-born," from the period of their regeneration onward, their works are almost free from admixture with a prosaic element. Alone among the illustrious poetical reputa-

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tions of their age, their fame would decidedly not be promoted by the suppression of any considerable proportion of their compositions after this crisis in their intellectual history. The test is an especially severe one as regards Shelley, not only because the actual bulk of his poetical work is so much greater than Coleridge's, but because he has triumphantly borne such an ordeal from the publication of mere fragments of it as has perhaps fallen to the lot of no other poet. Few indeed are the morsels collected in "The Relics of Shelley," and subsequently incorporated in his works, which a votary of his genius would part with for any consideration. They are not chips, but diamond dust.

In proportion, however, to the habitual excellence of Shelley's and Coleridge's work after the full development of their powers, is its inferiority in "the ages of ignorance." Shelley's beginnings are far the more unpromising, and every admirer of his genius must have frequently wished that the whole of his poetical production prior to "Queen Mab" could be bestowed as "alms for oblivion." Seldom have

the beginnings of a poet been so destitute of merit as his early lyrics. Why, then, it may be asked, retrieve any more of them from obscurity? The question appears pertinent, but only to the uninitiated. The bibliographer and the book-hunter, no less than the Shelleian student, know that the recovery of the little book now republished from an unique copy is the final chapter of a romance, and a bibliographical event as rare as, according to Petrarch, the appearance of a Laura in heaven:—

*“Quod optanti divum promittere nemo
Auderet.”*

The existence of a previously, unheard-of volume of poems by Shelley and an unknown coadjutor, published in 1810 under the title of “Original Poetry, by Victor and Cazire,” was first announced by the present writer in an article entitled “Shelley in Pall Mall,” in Macmillan’s Magazine for June, 1860. The fact had been ascertained by himself when, in August or September 1859, in the exercise of what was then his ordinary duty, he placed a