

**ORIGINAL POETRY
BY VICTOR
& CAZIRE**

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Original Poetry by Victor & Cazire by 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-

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 premittere 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

newly purchased periodical entitled Stockdale's Budget, and published in 1826-7, on the shelves of the Library of the British Museum. This Budget was a scandalous periodical, in which the publisher Stockdale, who had been ruined by his publication of the still more scandalous "Memoirs of Harriet Wilson," sought to avenge himself upon society by raking together all the misdemeanours of the upper classes he could collect from the newspapers. Shelley was then commonly regarded as a social pariah, and fair game for a professional lampooner of the grade to which the once respectable publisher had sunk. Stockdale, remembering that he had letters from Shelley in his possession, began in the very first number of his Budget to utilise them for "copy," and make them the basis of a history of the acquaintance which had existed between the ill-matched pair in 1810, without, it must be said, any trace of unkindness to the poet, whom he seems to have appreciated as fully as possible for one who, although accidentally an Ishmaelite, was congenitally a Philistine. Thus the story of "Victor and Cazire"

came to light. It shall be related in Stockdale's own words, with the retrenchment of some immaterial particulars.

"The unfortunate subject of these very slight recollections introduced himself to me early in the autumn of 1810. With anxiety in his countenance, he requested me to extricate him from a pecuniary difficulty in which he was involved with a printer, whose name I cannot call to mind, but who resided at Horsham. [Stockdale should have said Worthing.] I am not quite certain how the difference between the poet and the printer was arranged; but, after I had looked over the account I know that it was paid, though whether I assisted in the payment, by money or acceptance, I cannot remember.*

"Be that as it may, on the 17th September, 1810, I received fourteen hundred and eighty copies of a thin royal octavo volume in sheets. It was entitled, 'Original Poetry,' by Alonzo and Cazire, or two names something like them. The author told me that these poems were the joint production of himself and a friend, whose name was forgotten by me as soon as I heard it. I advertised the

* It is remarkable that Stockdale speaks of himself as the sole agent in the negotiation with Shelley, and ignores the existence of a senior partner in his father, who lived until 1814. It appears, from the memoir of the elder Stockdale in the "Dictionary of National Biography," that his business consisted largely in the purchase of "remainders," which may have facilitated the arrangement with the Worthing printer.