

**SHELBURNE  
ESSAYS. SEVENTH  
SERIES, PP. 1-268**

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Shelburne Essays. Seventh Series, pp. 1-268 by Paul Elmer More

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**PAUL ELMER MORE**

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# Shelburne Essays

By  
Paul Elmer More

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*Seventh Series*

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"Only by valuing is there value."—NITSCHKE.

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## ADVERTISEMENT

The essay on *The Socialism of G. Lowes Dickinson* was written for the *Atlantic Monthly*; that on *Criticism* has not before been printed. The other essays, in more or less abridged form, appeared first in the *Nation*, some of them being reprinted in the *New York Evening Post*.

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# SHELBURNE ESSAYS

SEVENTH SERIES

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## SHELLEY

IN confessing that he wrote his life of Shelley<sup>1</sup> as a middle-aged man for others of his class, Mr. Clutton-Brock forgot to reckon with the wit of his youthful reviewers; and yet, if by middle-age he means the experience of life, what right, after all, has Shelley or any other darling of the Muses to be exempt from that censure? The biographer's real fault is rather an amazing ingenuousness in trying to ride at once the horses of both youth and maturity. On one page he analyses *Prometheus Unbound* as a drama of a single event, and that causeless, acted by characters who drift about aimlessly and know not who they are or what relation they bear to one another: that is the critical attitude

<sup>1</sup> *Shelley: The Man and the Poet*. By A. Clutton-Brock. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909.

of mature common-sense. It is the audacious enthusiasm of youth when in a later passage he insists that the author of this drama proves himself an "intellectual poet." The same double-dealing appears when in one place he asserts that Shelley's ideas and emotions underwent little change; and then, a few pages after, with a covert allusion to Matthew Arnold, declares that the poet "was not a vapid angel singing silly hymns; but a man who only learnt to live well and write well by sharp experience." Now, Shelley is "a being prophetic of some higher state to which mankind shall attain, and unfit for this life only because he was fit for a better"; elsewhere, his Paradise is pronounced "a mere impossibility, an incongruous mixture of present pleasure of the flesh with imagined delights of the spirit."

I do not quote these acrobatic feats of criticism because I wish to ridicule Mr. Clutton-Brock's book, which is as a whole a fairly illuminating piece of work; but because they are so characteristic of our modern way of dealing with facts and tendencies. Look, for instance, into Miss Vida Scudder's school edition of the *Prometheus*, with its long Introduction—not a very wise production, perhaps, but significant as a woman's conception of a peculiarly feminine genius and as a specimen of what commonly, no doubt, passes in courses of literature. You will there

find that the drama "has a noble and organic unity," although, while the second act is the most wonderful thing "in the whole cycle of English song," the third "drops into bathos" and is "weak, sentimental, empty." The poem as a whole is "a work of resplendent insight," yet its interpretation of evil—that is, the very heart of its theme—is "hopelessly superficial," and man is depicted in it as "a creature of no personality, scarcely higher, except for his æsthetic instincts, than an amiable brute."

After all, these knights and ladies of the romantic pen seem to discover in Shelley traits pretty much like those which they so magnificently disdain Matthew Arnold for dilating upon. Nor is Arnold's criticism the only field of their inconsistent attack. Mr. Clutton-Brock cites for reprobation a long passage from Hazlitt's *Table Talk*; yet most of what the old bludgeoner says can, with some change of emphasis, be matched in the modern biographer's own pages. In like manner Miss Scudder puts the ancient reviewers in the stocks to show by comparison how wise we since have grown. She quotes from *Blackwood's* of September, 1820, and from the *Quarterly Review* of October, 1821:

In short, it is quite impossible that there should exist a more pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition, and sensuality, than is visible in the whole structure and strain