

**SHELLEY
AT OXFORD**

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Shelley at Oxford by Thomas Jefferson Hogg

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BY
THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
R. A. STREATFIELD

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INTRODUCTION

THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG'S account of Shelley's career at Oxford first appeared in the form of a series of articles contributed to the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1832 and 1833. It was afterwards incorporated into his *Life of Shelley*, which was published in 1858. It is by common consent the most life-like portrait of the poet left by any of his contemporaries. "Hogg," said Trelawny, "has painted Shelley exactly as I knew him," and Mary Shelley, referring to Hogg's articles in her edition of Shelley's poems, bore witness to the fidelity with which her husband's character had been delineated. In later times everyone who has written about Shelley has drawn upon Hogg more or less freely, for he is practically the only authority upon Shelley's six months at Oxford. Yet, save in the extracts that appear in various biographies of the poet, this remarkable work is little known. Hogg's

fragmentary *Life of Shelley* was discredited by the plainly-expressed disapproval of the Shelley family and has never been reprinted. But the inaccuracies, to call them by no harsher term, that disfigure Hogg's later production do not affect the value of his earlier narrative, the substantial truth of which has never been impugned.

In 1832 the *New Monthly Magazine* was edited by the first Lord Lytton (at that time Edward Lytton Bulwer), to whom Hogg was introduced by Mrs Shelley. Hogg complained bitterly of the way in which his manuscript was treated. "To write articles in a magazine or a review," he observed in the Preface to his *Life of Shelley*, "is to walk in leading-strings. However, I submitted to the requirements and restraints of bibliopolar discipline, being content to speak of my young fellow-collegian, not exactly as I would, but as I might. I struggled at first, and feebly, for full liberty of speech, for a larger license of commendation and admiration, for entire freedom of the press without censorship." Bulwer, however, was inexorable, and it is owing, no doubt, to his salutary influence that the style of Hogg's account of Shelley's Oxford days is

INTRODUCTION vii

so far superior to that of his later compilation. Hogg, in fact, tacitly admitted the value of Bulwer's emendations by reprinting the articles in question in his biography of Shelley word for word as they appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, not in the form in which they originally left his pen.

Hogg himself was unquestionably a man of remarkable powers, though his present fame depends almost entirely upon his connection with Shelley. He was born in 1792, being the eldest son of John Hogg, a gentleman of old family and strong Tory opinions, who lived at Norton in the county of Durham. He was educated at Durham Grammar School, and entered University College, Oxford, in January 1810, a short time before Shelley. The account of his meeting with Shelley and of their intimacy down to the day of their expulsion is told in these pages.

On the strength of a remark of Trelawny's it has often been repeated that Hogg was a hard-headed man of the world who despised literature, "he thought it all nonsense and barely tolerated Shakespeare." Such is not the impression that a reader of these pages will retain, nor, I think, will he be inclined to echo

the opinion pronounced by another critic that Hogg regarded Shelley with a kind of amused disdain. On the contrary, it is plain that Hogg entertained for Shelley a sincere regard and admiration, and although himself a man of temperament directly opposed to that usually described as poetical, he was fully capable of appreciating the transcendent qualities of his friend's genius. There is little to add to the tale of Hogg's and Shelley's Oxford life as told in the following narrative, but further details as to their expulsion and the causes that led to it may be read in Professor Dowden's biography of the poet. After leaving Oxford, Hogg established himself at York, where he was articled to a conveyancer. There he was visited by Shelley and his young wife, Harriet Westbrook, in the course of their wanderings. For the latter Hogg conceived a violent passion, and during a brief absence of Shelley's assailed her with the most unworthy proposals, which she communicated to her husband on his return. After a painful interview Shelley forgave his friend, but left York with his wife abruptly for Keswick. Letters passed between Hogg and Shelley, Hogg at first demanding

INTRODUCTION ix

Harriet's forgiveness under a threat of suicide and subsequently challenging Shelley to a duel. One of Shelley's replies, characteristically noble in sentiment, was printed by Hogg with cynical effrontery in his biography of the poet many years later as a "Fragment of a Novel." After these incidents there was no intercourse between the two until, in October 1812, the Shelleys arrived in London, whither Hogg had moved. From that time until Shelley's final departure from England in 1818 his connection with Hogg was resumed with much of its old intimacy.

In the year 1813 Hogg produced a work of fiction, *The Memoirs of Prince Alexy Haimatoff*, said to be translated from the original Latin MSS. under the immediate inspection of the Prince, by John Brown, Esq. The tale, which is for the most part told in stilted and extravagant language, can hardly be called amusing, but the discussions upon liberty which are a feature of it appear to be an echo of Shelley's conversation, and the hero himself may possibly be intended as a portrait of the poet. Certainly there are points in the Prince's description of himself which seem to be borrowed from