

**QUEEN MAB: A
PHILOSOPHICAL
POEM. WITH NOTES**

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Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem. With Notes by Percy Bysshe Shelley

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With Notes.

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

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MEMOIR
OF
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

FIELD-PLACE, in the county of Sussex, was the spot where Percy Bysshe Shelley first saw the light. He was born on the 4th of August, 1792; and was the eldest son of Sir Timothy Shelley, Bart., of Castle-Goring. His family is an ancient one, and a branch of it has become the representative of the house of the illustrious Sir Philip Sidney of Penshurst. Despising honours which only rest upon the accidental circumstances of birth, Shelley was proud of this connection with an immortal name. At the customary age, about thirteen, he was sent to Eton School; and, before he had completed his fifteenth year, he published two novels, the "Rosicrucian" and "Zasterozzi." From Eton he removed to University College, Oxford, to mature his studies, at the age of sixteen, an earlier period than is usual. At Oxford he was, according to custom, imbued with the elements of logic; and he ventured, in contempt of the fiat of the University, to apply them to the investigation of questions which it is orthodox to take for granted. His original and uncompromising spirit of inquiry could not reconcile the limited use of logical principles. He boldly tested, or attempted to test, propositions which he imagined, the more they were obscure, and the more claim they had upon his credence, the greater was the necessity for examining them. His spirit was an inquiring one, and he fearlessly sought after what he believed to be truth, before, it is probable, he had acquired all the information necessary to guide him, from collateral sources—a common error of headstrong youth. This is the more likely to be the case, as, when time had matured his knowledge, he differed much on points upon which, in callow years and without an instructor, flung upon the world to form his own principles of action, guileless and vehement, he was wont to advocate strongly. Shelley possessed the bold quality of inquiring into the reason of every thing, and of resisting what he could not reconcile to be right according to his conscience. In some persons this has been denominated a virtue, in others a sin—just as it might happen to chime in with worldly custom or received opinion. At school he formed a conspiracy for resistance to that most odious and detestable

custom of English seminaries, *fagging*, which pedagogues are bold enough to defend openly at the present hour.

At Oxford he imprudently printed a dissertation on the being of a God, which caused his expulsion in his second term, as he refused to retract any of his opinions; and thereby incurred the marked displeasure of his father. This expulsion arising, as he believed conscientiously, from his avowal of what he thought to be true, did not deeply affect him. His mind seems to have been wandering in a maze of doubt at times between truth and error, ardently desirous of finding the truth, warm in its pursuit, but without a pole-star to guide him in steering after it. In this state of things he met with the "Political Justice" of Godwin, and read it with eagerness and delight. What he had wanted he had now found; he determined that justice should be his sole guide, and justice alone. He regarded not whether what he did was after the fashion of the world; he pursued the career he had marked out with sincerity, and excited censure for some of his actions and praise for others, bordering upon wonder, in proportion as they were singular, or as their motives could not be appreciated. His notions at the University tended to atheism; and, in a work which he published entitled "Queen Mab," it is evident that this doctrine had at one time a hold upon his mind. This was printed for private circulation only, and was pirated by a knavish bookseller and given to the public, long after the writer had altered many of the opinions expressed in it, disclaimed it, and lamented its having been printed. He spoke of the commonly-received notions of God with contempt; and hence the idea that he denied the being of any superintending first cause. He was not on this head sufficiently explicit. He seemed hopeless, in moments of low spirits, of there being such a ruling power as he wished, yet he ever clung to the idea of some "great spirit of intellectual beauty" being throughout all things. His life was inflexibly moral and benevolent. He acted up to the theory of his received doctrine of justice; and, after all the censures that were cast upon him, who shall impugn the man who thus acts and lives?

Shelley married at an early age a Miss Harriet Westbrook, a very beautiful girl, much younger than himself, daughter of a coffeehouse-keeper, retired from business. By this marriage he so irritated his father, that he was entirely abandoned by him; but the lady's father allowed them £200 per annum, and they resided some time in Edinburgh and then in Ireland. The match was a Greina-green one, and did not turn out happily. By this connection he had two children, the youngest of whom, born in 1813, is since dead. Consistent with his own views of marriage and its institution, Shelley paid his addresses to another lady, Miss Godwin, with whom, in July, 1814, he fled, accompanied by Miss Jane Claremont, her sister-in-law, to Uri, in Switzerland, from whence, after a few days' residence, they

suddenly quitted, suspecting they were watched by another lodger; they departed for Paris, on foot, and there found that the person to whom they had confided a large trunk of clothes had absconded with them: this hastened their return to England. A child was the fruit of this expedition. Shortly after they again quitted England, and went to Geneva, Como, and Venice. In a few months they revisited England, and took up their abode in Bath, from whence Shelley was suddenly called by the unexpected suicide of his wife, who destroyed herself on the 10th of November, 1816. Her fate hung heavy on the mind of her husband, who felt deep self-reproach that he had not selected a female of a higher order of intellect, who could appreciate better the feelings of one constituted as he was. Both were entitled to compassion, and both were sufferers by this unfortunate alliance. Shortly after the death of his first wife, Shelley, at the solicitation of her father, married Mary Wolstonecraft Godwin, daughter of the celebrated authoress of the "Rights of Woman," and went to reside at Great Marlow, in Buckinghamshire. That this second hymen was diametrically opposed to his own sentiments will be apparent from the following letter, addressed to Sir James Lawrence, on the perusal of one of that gentleman's works:—

"Lymouth, Barnstaple, Devon, August 17, 1812.

"SIR,—I feel peculiar satisfaction in seizing the opportunity which your politeness places in my power, of expressing to you personally (as I may say) a high acknowledgment of my sense of your talents and principles, which, before I conceived it possible that I should ever know you, I sincerely entertained. Your "Empire of the Nairs," which I read this spring, succeeded in making me a perfect convert to its doctrines. I then retained no doubts of the evils of marriage; Mrs. Wolstonecraft reasons too well for that; but I had been dull enough not to perceive the greatest argument against it, until developed in the "Nairs," viz. prostitution both *legal* and *illegal*.

"I am a young man, not of age, and have been married a year to a woman younger than myself. Love seems inclined to stay in the prison, and my only reason for putting him in chains, whilst convinced of the unholiness of the act, was a knowledge that, in the present state of society, if love is not thus villainously treated, she who is most loved will be treated worse by a misjudging world. In short, seduction, which term could have no meaning in a rational society, has now a most tremendous one; the fictitious merit attached to chastity has made that a forerunner to the most terrible ruins which in Malabar would be a pledge of honour and homage. If there is any enormous and desolating crime of which I should shudder to be accused, it is seduction. I need not say how I admire "Love;" and, little as a British public seems to appreciate its merit, in not permitting it to emerge from a first edition, it is

with satisfaction I find that justice had conceded abroad what bigotry has denied at home. I shall take the liberty of sending you any little publication I may give to the world. Mrs. S. joins with myself in hoping, if we come to London this winter, we may be favoured with the personal friendship of one whose writings we have learnt to esteem.

"Yours, very truly,

"PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY."

A circumstance arose out of his first marriage which attracted a good deal of notice from the public. As we have already mentioned, there were two children left, whom the Lord Chancellor Eldon took away from their father by one of his own arbitrary decrees, because the religious sentiments of Shelley were avowedly heterodox. No immorality of life, no breach of parental duty, was attempted to be proved; it was sufficient that the father did not give credit to religion as established by act of parliament, to cause the closest ties of nature to be rent asunder, and the connection of father and child to be for ever broken. This despotism of a law-officer has since been displayed in another case, where immorality of the parent was the alleged cause. Had the same law-officer, unhappily for England, continued to preside, no doubt the political sentiments of the parent would by and by furnish an excuse for such a monstrous tyranny over the rights of nature.

Shelley for ever sought to make mankind and things around him in harmony with a better state of moral existence. He was too young and inexperienced when he first acted upon this principle to perceive the obstacles which opposed the progress of his views, arising out of the usages and customs which rule mankind, and which, from the nature of things, it takes a long time to overcome. Ardent in the pursuit of the good he sought, he was always ready to meet the consequences of his actions; and, if any condemn them for their mistaken views, they ought to feel that charity should forbid their arraigning motives, when such proofs of sincerity were before them. The vermin who, under the specious title of "reviewers," seek in England to crush every bud of genius that appears out of the pale of their own party, fell mercilessly upon the works of Shelley. The beauty and profundity which none but the furious zealots of a faction could deny—these were passed over in a sweeping torrent of vulgar vituperation by the servile and venal "Quarterly."

During his residence at great Marlow, he composed his "Revolt of Islam." In 1817 he left England, never to return to it, and directed his steps to Italy, where he resided partly at Venice, partly at Pisa near his friend Byron, and on the neighbouring coast. In the month of June, 1822, he was temporarily a resident in a house situated on the Gulf of Lerici. Being much attached to sea-excursions, he kept a boat, in which he

was in the habit of cruising along the coast. On the 7th of July, he set sail from Leghorn, where he had been to meet Mr Leigh Hunt, who had just then arrived in Italy, intending to return to Lerici. But he never reached that place; the boat in which he set sail was lost in a violent storm, and all on board perished. The following particulars of that melancholy event are extracted from the work of Mr. Leigh Hunt entitled "Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries."

"In June, 1822, I arrived in Italy, in consequence of the invitation to set up a work with my friend and Lord Byron. Mr. Shelley was passing the summer season at a house he had taken for that purpose on the Gulf of Lerici, and, on hearing of my arrival at Leghorn, came thither, accompanied by Mr. Williams, formerly of the 8th Dragoons, who was then on a visit to him. He came to welcome his friend and family, and see us comfortably settled at Pisa. He accordingly went with us to that city; and, after remaining in it a few days, took leave on the night of the 7th of July, to return with Mr. Williams to Lerici, meaning to come back to us shortly. In a day or two the voyagers were missed. The afternoon of the 8th had been stormy, with violent squalls from the south-west. A night succeeded, broken up with that tremendous thunder and lightning which appals the stoutest seaman in the Mediterranean, dropping its bolts in all directions more like melted brass, or liquid pillars of fire, than any thing we conceive of lightning in our northern climate. The suspense and anguish of their friends need not be dwelt upon. A dreadful interval took place of more than a week, during which every inquiry and every fond hope were exhausted. At the end of that period our worst fears were confirmed. The following narrative of the particulars is from the pen of Mr. Trelawney, a friend of Lord Byron's, who had not long been acquainted with Mr. Shelley, but entertained the deepest regard for him:—

"Mr. Shelley, Mr. Williams (formerly of the 8th Dragoons), and one seaman, Charles Vivian, left Villa Magni, near Lerici, a small town, situate in the bay of Spezia, on the 30th of June, at twelve o'clock, and arrived the same night at Leghorn. Their boat had been built for Mr. Shelley, at Genoa, by a captain in the navy. It was twenty-four feet long, eight in the beam, schooner-rigged, with gaff topsails, &c., and drew four feet water. On Monday the 8th of July, at the same hour, they got under weigh to return home, having on board a quantity of household articles, four hundred dollars, a small canoe, and some books and manuscripts. At half-past twelve they made all sail out of the harbour with a light and favourable breeze, steering direct for Spezia. I had likewise weighed anchor to accompany them a few miles out in Lord Byron's schooner, the *Bolivar*; but there was some demur about papers from the

guard-boat; and they, fearful of losing the breeze, sailed without me. I re-anchored, and watched my friends, till their boat became a speck on the horizon, which was growing thick and dark, with heavy clouds moving rapidly, and gathering in the south-west quarter. I then retired to the cabin, where I had not been half an hour, before a man on deck told me a heavy squall had come on. We let go another anchor. The boats and vessels in the roads were scudding past us in all directions to get into harbour; and, in a moment, it blew a hard gale from the south-west, the sea, from excessive smoothness, foaming, breaking, and getting up into a very heavy swell. The wind, having shifted, was now directly against my friends. I felt confident they would be obliged to bear off for Leghorn; and, being anxious to hear of their safety, stayed on board till a late hour, but saw nothing of them. The violence of the wind did not continue above an hour; it then gradually subsided; and at eight o'clock, when I went on shore, it was almost a calm. It, however, blew hard at intervals during the night, with rain, and thunder and lightning. The lightning struck the mast of a vessel close to us, shivering it to splinters, killing two men, and wounding others. From these circumstances, becoming greatly alarmed for the safety of the voyagers, a note was despatched to Mr. Shelley's house at Lerici, the reply to which stated that nothing had been heard of him and his friend, which augmented our fears to such a degree, that couriers were despatched on the whole line of coast from Leghorn to Nice, to ascertain if they had put in any where, or if there had been any wreck, or indication of losses by sea. I immediately started for Via Reggio, having lost sight of the boat in that direction. My worst fears were almost confirmed on my arrival there, by news that a small canoe, two empty water-barrels, and a bottle, had been found on the shore, which things I recognized as belonging to the boat. I had still, however, warm hopes that these articles had been thrown overboard to clear them from useless lumber in the storm; and it seemed a general opinion that they had missed Leghorn, and put into Elba or Corsica, as nothing more was heard for eight days. This state of suspense becoming intolerable, I returned from Spezia to Via Reggio, where my worst fears were confirmed by the information that two bodies had been washed on shore, one on that night, very near the town, which, by the dress and stature, I knew to be Mr. Shelley's. Mr. Keats's last volume of "Lamia," "Isabella," &c., being open in the jacket pocket, confirmed it beyond a doubt. The body of Mr. Williams was subsequently found, near a tower on the Tuscan shore, about four miles from his companion. Both the bodies were greatly decomposed by the sea, but identified beyond a doubt. The seaman, Charles Vivian, was not found for nearly three weeks afterwards:—his body was interred on the spot on which a wave had washed it, in the vicinity of Massa