

JOHN CORDY JEAFFRESON



**THE REAL
SHELLEY**

NEW VIEWS OF THE POET'S LIFE

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The Real Shelley: New Views of the Poet's Life

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CHAPTER I.

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THE SHELLEY OF ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHY.

Creators of The Romantic Shelley—Clint's Fanciful Composition—The Poet's Personal Appearance—His Little Turn-up Nose—His Ancestral Quality—Sussexisms of his Speech and Poetry—His Phenomenal Untruthfulness—His Temperance and Intemperance—A Victim of Domestic Persecution—Was *The Necessity of Atheism* a mere Squib?—Lord Eldon's Decree—The Slaughter of Reputations—The Poet's Character—His Treatment of his familiar Friend—Biographic Fictions—Extravagances of Shelleyan Enthusiasm.

From a time considerably anterior to the day on which Hogg undertook to write the *Life* of his college friend, three separate forces,

- (a) Field Place,
- (b) The Shelleyan Enthusiasts,
- (c) The Shelleyan Socialists,

have been steadily working to withdraw the Real Shelley from the world's view, and to replace him with a Shelley, altogether unlike the poet, who carried Mary Godwin off to the Continent, and wrote *Laon and Cythna*.

By 'Field Place,' I mean those members of the poet's family (living or dead), who in their pious devotion to his

memory, and laudable concern for the honour of their house, have busied themselves in creating this fanciful and romantic Shelley, and substituting him for the Real Shelley. By designating these members of the Shelley family by the name of the house that is Shelley's shrine, even as the Stratford birthplace is Shakespeare's shrine, and Newstead Abbey is Byron's shrine, I shall be able to refer with the least possible offensiveness to excellent individuals, from whom I am constrained to differ on a large number of Shelleyan questions.

By 'The Shelleyan Enthusiasts,' I mean vehement admirers of Shelley's poetry, who, without ever thinking about his social views, delight in imagining that the poet's character and career resembled his genius in its grandeur, and his song in its loftiness and beauty.

By 'The Shelleyan Socialists' I mean those conscientious though misguided persons, who, valuing Shelley for his mischievous social philosophy, and thinking of Marriage somewhat as the pious John Milton thought of it in the seventeenth century, and somewhat as the devout Martin Bucer thought of it in the sixteenth century, regard with various degrees of approval or tolerance Shelley's daring, though by no means original, proposal for abolishing lawful marriage, and replacing it with the Free Contract, from which each of the contracting parties is free to retire on the death of their mutual affection, and who, in accordance with their various degrees of approval or tolerance of the proposal, have contributed or are contributing, by written words or by spoken words, either to the opinion that society should adopt the proposal, or to the opinion that, without

abolishing lawful marriage, society should recognize the Free Contract as a kind of marriage, to the extent of holding persons who live under it conscientiously, as blameless or not greatly blameworthy for doing so.

The work of creating the romantic Shelley, and endowing him with personal and moral graces, never conspicuous in the real Shelley, was begun not long after the poet's death, when Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Williams induced Clint to compose the fancy picture, to which the world is, through the engraver's art, indebted for its very erroneous conception of Shelley's personal aspect. Who has not, through the engraver's art, gazed on the face of that charming portraiture: a face so remarkable for gentle delicacy and symmetrical loveliness? Gazing on the beauteous face, who has not observed the rather large, straight, delicately-modelled, finely-pointed nose?—The original of the lovely picture had a notably unsymmetrical face, and a little turn-up nose.

Having replaced his unsymmetrical visage with a face of exquisite symmetry, the cunning idolaters have introduced the poet as a gentleman of high ancestral dignity, to a world ever too quick to honour men of ancient gentility. His remote forefathers have been proclaimed persons of knightly rank and virtue. His house (founded though it was by a comparatively self-made man, who won his baronetcy years after the poet's birth) has been declared a branch of the Michelgrove Shelleys. Cynics and humourists may well smile to recall all that has been written of the poet's mediæval ancestors and his shield of twenty-one quarterings, whilst they remember at the same time that his

grandfather was the younger son of a Yankee apothecary, that his earlier people of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries were undistinguished though gentle persons, the squireens and farmers, of whose claim to be rated with the great families of Sussex more will be said in a subsequent chapter.

Endowing him with aristocratic descent, the Shelleyan idolaters have discovered indications of nobility in the Sussex provincialisms that qualified the utterances of the poet's singularly disagreeable voice, and may be now and then detected in his outpourings of song: provincialisms to remind the reader of Byron's scarcely perceptible Scotch accent, and the Scotticisms of expression that are occasionally discoverable in his poems. The Sussex peasantry seldom sound the final *g* of words ending with that letter, and Sussex gentlemen are sometimes heard to say 'Good mornin' to one another.' Shelley was sometimes guilty of this provincialism. For instance, in *Laon and Cythna* (1817), and again in *Arethusa* (1820), he makes *ruin* rhyme to *pursuing*. Mr. Buxton Forman regards the provincialism as an indication of the poet's aristocratic quality. 'I need not,' says the enthusiastic editor, 'tell the reader that, to this day, it is an affectation current among persons who are, or pretend to be, of the aristocratic caste, not only to drop the final *g* in these cases themselves, but to stigmatize its pronunciation by other people as "pedantic."'

Englishmen like people to be truthful, and in the long-run never fail to honour the man, who, having the courage of his opinions, proclaims them fearlessly, even though they may quarrel with him for a season, because he tells the truth too

pugnaciously, or persists in telling them truths they don't wish to think about. To commend him to lovers of truth, the Shelleyan idolaters declare the poet to have been, from his boyhood till his death, daringly, unfalteringly, unwaveringly, invariably truthful. Lady Shelley insists that at Eton he was more truth-loving than other boys—was, indeed, chiefly remarkable for unswerving and audacious veracity. In half-a-dozen different biographies he is extolled for his intolerance of falsehood. Most of the misfortunes that befel him are attributed to his habit of telling the truth in season and out of season. It is, indeed, admitted even by some of his panegyrists that he now and then made statements at variance with fact. But on these occasions he is declared to have spoken erroneously through the delusive influence of a too powerful imagination. The inordinately vigorous fancy, that enabled him to write *Queen Mab*, caused him sometimes to imagine things to have taken place, when they had not taken place. His mis-statements resulted altogether from misconception, and should not be regarded as in any way affecting the overwhelming evidence that he loved truth more than life; that he made great sacrifices for the truth's sake, that he was, in fact, a martyr for the truth. It is, however, all too certain that he uttered mis-statements, for which the force of his imagination cannot in any degree whatever have been accountable; and that, instead of being more truth-loving than most men, he was phenomenally untruthful. Telling fibs in order to escape momentary annoyance or gain a trivial advantage, he could instruct other persons to tell fibs in his interest. He was singular amongst men of his degree for being able to

declare his intention of practising deceit, and forthwith being as bad as his word. Instances of this candour in falsehood are given in the ensuing pages. When he tells a fib, a gentleman is usually too much ashamed of the matter to take any one into his confidence on the subject. There were times, when no such sense of shame troubled Shelley.

Much has been written to Shelley's honour about his habitual temperance and general disregard for the pleasures of the table. It has been accounted to him for righteousness that he seldom drank wine, and for months together ate nothing but vegetable food. As Shelley at one period of his career found, or fancied, that his health was better, his mind lighter and more vigorous, his whole soul in higher contentment, when he lived wholly on vegetable food, than when he ate flesh, I cannot see why it was eminently virtuous in him to take the food that seemed to suit him best. As he drank fresh water and strong tea, because he liked them better than mild ale and stiff toddy, it remains to be shown why he should be so much commended for drinking what he liked best. Still temperance in diet is one of the minor virtues. But was Shelley a temperate man in his drinks? If he never drank wine immoderately, and in some periods of his career was a total abstainer from all the usual alcoholic drinks, it is certain that he was at times a heavy laudanum-drinker; and it is not obvious why it is less intemperate to be sottish with spirits of wine, in which opium has been macerated; than to be sottish with gin, in which gentian has been macerated.

Misrepresenting the poet's story in the smaller matters, the Shelleyan apologists have misrepresented it even more

daringly in the larger matters. Endeavouring to explain away his gravest academic offence, they maintain that *The Necessity of Atheism* was a trivial essay, a little argumentative syllabus, a humorous *brochure*, that did not exhibit his real opinions on matters pertaining to religion; that it was printed only for private circulation amongst the learned; that it was never offered for sale to the general public. Yet it is certain that he reproduced some of its argument in the *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*; that more than two years after its first publication, he revised, amended, and reprinted it in the notes to *Queen Mab*; that later still he reproduced some of its reasoning in the *Refutation of Deism*, and that it was offered for sale to anyone who cared to buy it at Oxford. Mr. Garnett declares the essay to have been nothing more than 'a squib,' and gives Hogg as his authority for the staggering statement. Yet it is certain that Hogg makes no such statement; but is, on the contrary, most careful and precise in declaring how completely earnest and sincere Shelley was in the matter. Declaring that the essay was no expression of the author's genuine opinions, the Shelleyan apologists almost in the same breath declare it to have been an utterance of his real convictions, and applaud him for his courage in putting forth clearly what he believed to be true.

One of the prime biographic fictions about Shelley is, that he endured persecution for publishing this equally sincere and insincere profession of no faith, not only at Oxford but in his domestic circle. It is asserted that he was treated cruelly by his father, excluded from Field Place, driven from his boyhood's home, and even disinherited, for this and

other bold declarations of what he believed to be true. Sympathy and admiration are demanded for him as a martyr for the truth's sake. 'On the sensitively affectionate feelings of the young controversialist and poet,' Lady Shelley says, 'this sentence of exclusion from his boyhood's home inflicted a bitter pang, yet he was determined to bear it for the sake of what he believed to be right and true.' With the perplexing perversity that characterised so many of his utterances about his private affairs, Shelley himself, after surrendering by his own act, and of his own will, the position assigned to him in respect to his grandfather's property by his grandfather's will, used to speak of himself as having made great sacrifices of his material interests for the truth, and to offer himself to the sympathy and admiration of his friends as a martyr for conscience's sake. Yet it is certain that he was treated kindly by his father in respect to the causes and immediate consequences of his academic disgrace; that he was excluded from Field Place in the first instance, not on account of his religious opinions, but on account of his outrageous disregard for his father's wishes in respect to other matters; that he was excluded from Field Place in 1811 only for a few weeks, during which time so far from 'being determined to bear it for the sake of what he believed to be right and true,' he never for a moment designed to respect the sentence of banishment, but intended to return to his boyhood's home as soon as it should please him to do so; and that, the few weeks of discord having passed, he was received at Field Place by his father and endowed with a handsome yearly allowance of pocket-money. No less certain is it that he was never driven

from his boyhood's home; that on eventually withdrawing from the old domestic circle, he left it of his own accord, to make a runaway match with a licensed victualler's daughter; and that, instead of resulting from differences of opinion on questions of religion and politics (differences which at most only aggravated and embittered a quarrel due to other causes), his estrangement from and rupture with his family resulted from (1) their reasonable displeasure at his *mésalliance*, and (2) the reasonable displeasure of his grandfather, and father, at his refusal to concur with them in effecting a particular settlement of certain real estate.

To give yet another example of the audacious way in which Shelley's story has been mistold in respect to its principal incidents. Every one has heard how Shelley was deprived of the custody of his children by Lord Eldon; how, on account of his religious opinions, and for no other cause, he was robbed of his dear babes by the cruel and fanatical Lord Chancellor. Lady Shelley speaks furiously of 'the monstrous injustice of this decree.' In an article, written to the lively gratification of the Shelleyan Enthusiasts and the Shelleyan Socialists, the *Edinburgh Review* not long since (October, 1882) declared that the judgment was formed and the decree delivered, 'on the ground, not of Shelley's misconduct to his wife, but of the opinions expressed in his writings.' The words of the Edinburgh Reviewer are absolutely erroneous. The judgment was formed in steady consideration of the poet's misconduct to his first wife; and in its delivery the Chancellor was careful to say, not once, but repeatedly, that he decreed against the poet's petition,

not on account of any opinions expressed in his writings (considered apart from conduct), *but* on account of his *conduct* (the word conduct, conduct, conduct, being reiterated by the Chancellor, till the reader of the decree grows weary of it)—on account of his *conduct* in respect to his wife; *conduct* showing his resolve to act on the Free Contract principles, set forth in the anti-matrimonial note to *Queen Mab*; *conduct* justifying the opinion that if Harriett Westbrook's children were delivered to him, he would rear them to hold his own anti-matrimonial views. That so respectable an organ of public opinion should make this statement is significant. It indicates how great is the force with which I venture to contend, not without hope that my weak hands may be strengthened by all who reverence marriage.

A matter to be noticed, in connection with the efforts to substitute the romantic for the Real Shelley, is that their success will involve the discredit, if not the absolute infamy, of nearly all the principal persons, whom the poet encountered in friendship or enmity, on his way from birth to death. To accept the extravagant stories told by Shelley or his idolaters is to believe, that the poet's father was a prodigy of parental wickedness; that his mother was hatefully deficient in maternal affection; that Dr. Greenlaw was a malicious, base-natured pedagogue; that the Eton masters (from Dr. Keate to Mr. Bethell) delighted in persecuting their famous pupil; that the Master and Fellows of University College were actuated by the basest motives (including sycophancy to a powerful minister) in requiring the poet to leave Oxford; that Hogg was a nauseous villain,

who attempted to seduce his friend's wife within a few weeks of her wedding-day; that the first Mrs. Shelley broke her marriage-vow; that William Godwin, instead of feeling like the honest man he affected to be at his daughter's flight, chuckled in his sleeve at his girl's good fortune in winning a rich baronet's son for her paramour and eventual husband; that Lord Chancellor Eldon was an unjust judge, who delivered a monstrous decree at the instigation of religious bigotry and political resentment; that Peacock was either a simpleton or traitor in bearing testimony to the first Mrs. Shelley's conjugal goodness; that William Jerdan was a virulent slanderer; that Sir John Taylor Coleridge was a malignant calumniator; that Byron, whom Shelley throughout successive years honoured as a supremely great man, and for a while worshipt as a god, was the meanest, paltriest, dirtiest knave that ever broke a sacred trust, and stole a letter. It is thus that the creators of the romantic Shelley deal with the persons most influential on the poet's career and reputation. It is true they have good words for the hard-swearing Windsor apothecary, who gave the Etonian Shelley lessons in commination and chemistry; and for Leigh Hunt, the equally insatiable and charming parasite, who took all he could get from his young friend's pocket. The Squire of Field Place, Dr. Greenlaw, Dr. Keate, Mr. Bethell, the Master and Tutors of University College, Hogg, William Godwin, Lord Eldon, Peacock, William Jerdan, Sir John Taylor Coleridge, Byron, were all odious in different ways. The only good and true men, of all the many notable men, Shelley encountered on his way through life, were Dr. Lind and Leigh Hunt. Surely there must be something

wrong in the story, that slays so many reputations, whilst it selects Dr. Lind and Leigh Hunt for approval.

Were there not another and very different side to the story, this book would not have been written. Unless I read it amiss (and I am sure I read it aright, for I have studied it carefully, and in doing so have found it to have been perused only in parts, and in some parts with strange carelessness, by all previous biographers), it stands out clear upon the record, that from his boyhood Shelley was disposed to rise in rebellion against all persons placed in authority over him; that instead of having the gentle nature attributed to him by fanciful historians, he was quick-tempered and resentful; that without being desperately wicked, his heart was strangely deceitful towards himself; that he was a bad and disloyal son to a kind-hearted and well-intentioned father, and by no means a good son to a gentle-natured and conscientious mother; that he was a bad husband to his first wife, and far from a faultless husband to his second wife; that, together with several agreeable characteristics, he possessed several dangerous qualities; and that he was, at least towards one person, a bad friend.

So strangely has Shelley's story been mistold, that this last assertion is likely to make readers start with surprise and revolt against the author. Let it, therefore, be justified at once. The poet had a familiar friend, from whom he had received much kindness, for whom he professed cordial veneration, and with whom he lived in close intimacy. This friend had an only daughter, a bright, lively, romantic, lovely girl, still only sixteen years old. Reared within the lines of religious orthodoxy, this young girl had been educated to

think of marriage just as other young English girls are usually taught to think of it. Though he had in former time been an advocate of the Free Contract, her father had changed his views about marriage before her birth, and had abandoned his Free Contract views when she was still a nursling. Soon after making this girl's acquaintance, Shelley passed into discord with his wife; and soon after ceasing to love his wife, he fixed his affections on his friend's daughter. Without speaking to his friend on the subject, or giving him occasion to suspect what he was about, Shelley paid his addresses to this child, and had won her heart, ere ever it occurred to her father that they might be living too intimately and affectionately with one another. It was with great difficulty Shelley overcame the child's notions of right in which she had been educated; but, eventually, he accomplished his purpose. A few days later, leaving his wife in England, Shelley stole this young child from her home, and, carrying her off to the Continent, lived with her as though she were his wife. He did this, though she was his most intimate friend's only daughter, though she was only sixteen years old, and though he had no prospect of ever being able to marry her. The creators of the romantic Shelley deal with this episode of Shelley's story as though it were a pleasant and unusually interesting love-passage. Some of them are unable to see that Shelley was at all to blame in the business. Those of them, who admit it was not altogether right of him to act thus towards so young a girl, maintain that the author of such superlatively fine poetry as *Adonais* and *The Cenci* cannot have been very wrong in the affair, and should not be judged in respect to the matter, as

though he were a young man incapable of writing fine poetry. No one of them has a word of compassion for the girl's father. Mr. Froude is of opinion that in this matter Shelley was guilty of nothing worse than 'the sin of acting on emotional theories of liberty,' and should be judged tenderly, because he was young and enthusiastic! Differing from Mr. Froude, I venture to say that, in acting thus ill towards the girl, Shelley was guilty of very hateful treason towards his friend. I ask English fathers with young children about them, and English brothers with young sisters for playmates, to judge between me and my adversary.

Since it dismissed Hogg with scant courtesy for being too realistic and communicative, Field Place has done much to gratify the Shelleyan enthusiasts and socialists. Soon after publishing the uniformly erroneous *Shelley Memorials*, Field Place promised to produce, in due season, evidence that Shelley was not seriously to blame in his treatment of his first wife. For years Field Place has gathered evidences for the poet's vindication. Field Place aided Mr. Buxton Forman in producing his stately and careful edition of the poet's works. In comparatively recent time the Field Place muniments have enabled a well-known writer to produce the memoir of the poet's father-in-law (William Godwin), and a memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft, in which she is styled Gilbert Imlay's wife, and is said to have thought herself his wife before God and man, though they were never married. And now Field Place is enabling another writer to produce another authoritative history of Shelley and Mary, that shall raise Mary Godwin yet nearer to the angels, and bring her

husband's story into more perfect harmony with the straight nose and symmetrical lineaments of Clint's composition.

It is not surprising that Field Place should wish to produce some more adequate memoir of its poet than Lady Shelley's *Shelley Memorials; from Authentic Sources*. But however cleverly it may be executed, only the most hopeful can hope that the promised biography will afford satisfaction to the general public. It is simply impossible for it to satisfy those who want the truth about Shelley, and at the same time to satisfy the enthusiasts who would be pained by the truth, and the Shelleyan Socialists who are chiefly desirous that the truth should not be told. To satisfy those who want the truth and the whole of it: to produce a memoir that shall be worth the paper on which it is printed, it will be necessary for the official biographer to show that Lady Shelley's work is from first to last a book of mistakes—that it is wrong in every page; wrong in its views of the poet's character; wrong in its general outline of his career; wrong in its incidents; wrong in its names and dates; wrong, even in its particulars of domestic affairs, legal matters, and pecuniary arrangements—particulars in respect to which a biographer, with access to authentic sources of information, has no excuse for blundering. Can such candour be looked for from the source which gave us the *Shelley Memorials*? Is it conceivable that the new official scribe will be permitted to deal thus honestly with Lady Shelley's book from authentic sources? If he is required to make his book agree with this thing from authentic sources, he must dismiss the hope of pleasing the general public.

On the other hand, to please the enthusiasts and the more fervid Shelleyan Socialists he must tell that Shelley was sinless, stainless, divine; that Mary Wollstonecraft was married, in the sight of God and man, to the American adventurer, who never married her; and that Mary Godwin showed a justifiable disregard of social prejudices, when she went off to Switzerland with another woman's husband. He must produce a work more or less calculated to illuminate the English people out of their reverence for marriage, and educate them into a philosophical tolerance of the Free Contract. Nothing less thorough will appear to the more fervid of the Shelleyan Socialists a sufficient vindication of the poet's superhuman excellence.

For in these days, to please both sets of zealots, it is not enough for a biographer to delight in Shelley's verse; to render homage to his genius; to think him—as all men of culture and poetical sensibility concur in thinking him—the brightest, most strenuous, and most musical of lyric poets; and at the same time, taking a charitable view of his failings and indiscretions, to palliate them in all honest ways, or look away from them, when they admit of no honest palliation. This is not enough for the enthusiasts, who insist that the poet's character and career were altogether in harmony with his art. It only exasperates the most strenuous of the social innovators, who honouring him for his social philosophy even more than for his poetry, have no word of cordial censure, and scarcely a word of regret, for the way in which he acted on 'his emotional theories of liberty.' Readers must not blink the fact, that the more able and resolute of the Shelleyan enthusiasts recognize in Shelley a

great social teacher and regenerator, as well as a great poet. To Mr. Buxton Forman, the author of *Laon and Cyntha* is 'that Shelley who, in some circumstances, might have been the Saviour of the World.' It is needless for me to express my opinion of the comparison instituted by these words. It is enough for me to say that the words are Mr. Buxton Forman's words, and that he represents favourably the learning and sentiment of a body of gentlemen, whose generous fervour appears to me more commendable than their discretion.

When it is possible for such words to be written by an eminent Shelleyan specialist, and to be read with approval by men of high culture, it must surely be admitted that Shelleyan enthusiasm has gone quite far enough; and that it is well for a writer to produce a truthful account of the poet, who is thus offered to universal homage.

I have not discovered the Real Shelley. The poet of these volumes is the same Real Shelley, who appears in his most agreeable aspects in Hogg's biography, the delightful book that was stopped midway, because its realism offended the Hunts and Field Place. I mean to show that Shelley was judged fairly, though severely, by those of his contemporaries who, whilst recognizing his genius, condemned his principles, conduct, and social theories. In respect to the Real Shelley, I shall merely bring to light what has been hurtfully withdrawn, or hurtfully withheld from view. As for the fictitious Shelley, with which the Real Shelley has been replaced, I mean to demolish it. In destroying it, I shall be animated by a desire to do something before I go away, to counteract the strong

stream of literature—a literature of books, pamphlets, magazine-articles, and articles in powerful journals—which for more than a quarter of a century has been educating people to approve or tolerate the pernicious social philosophy, that requires sound-hearted England to abolish marriage and replace it with the Free Contract.

CHAPTER II.

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THE SHELLEYS OF SUSSEX.

Medwin's Blunders—Lady Shelley's Statement of The Case—The Michelgrove Shelleys—Sir William Shelley, Justice of The Common Pleas—The Castle Goring Shelleys—Their Pedigree at the Heralds' College—Evidences of the Connexion of the Two Families—John Shelley, 'Esquire and Lunatic'—Timothy Shelley, the Yankee Apothecary—Bysshe Shelley's Career—His Runaway Match with Catherine Michell—His Marriage with the Heiress of Penshurst—His Great Wealth—The Poet's Alleged Pride in his Connexion with the Sidneys—His Gentle, but not Aristocratic, Lineage.

So much has been written in the ways of sycophancy or vaingloriousness about Shelley's Norman descent and aristocratic quality, it is necessary to glance at some of the facts of his ancestral story.

The poet's friend, from the time when they were schoolfellows at Brentford, Thomas Medwin the Younger, was also the poet's kinsman—his third cousin, through Sir Bysshe Shelley's marriage with Mary Catherine Michell, and his second cousin, through Sir Timothy Shelley's marriage with Elizabeth Pilford. It might have been supposed that a biographer, thus related to Shelley by blood and friendship, would know the prime facts of his friend's pedigree, and

state them without egregious error. But poor Tom Medwin was not remarkable for accuracy.

To rely in this affair on the whilom *littérateur* and cavalry officer, is to believe that the poet was a lineal descendant of Sir John Shelley of Maresfield Park, who was created a baronet in 1611; to believe that this Sir John Shelley's son (William) was a Justice of the Common Pleas; and to believe that the poet's great-grandfather (Timothy Shelley, of Fen Place, Co. Sussex) was a lineal descendant, in the ninth descent, of the aforesaid baronet of James the First's time. 'I will only say,' Medwin remarks lightly, 'that Sir John Shelley, of Maresfield Park, who dated his Baronetage from the earliest creation of that title in 1611, had besides other issue, two sons, Sir William, a Judge of the Common Pleas, and Edward; from the latter of whom, in the seventh descent, sprung Timothy, who also had two sons, and settled—having married an American lady—at Christ's Church, Newark, in North America.'

Medwin is wrong in all the really important allegations of the brief statement. Sir John Shelley of Michelgrove (the baronet referred to) had two sons; but neither of them was named Edward; neither of them became a Justice of the Common Pleas; neither of them was in any way or degree accountable for Percy Bysshe Shelley's appearance on the earth's surface. The poet was no more descended from Sir John Shelley, the first of the Michelgrove baronets, than he was descended from the man in the moon. How could the poet's great-grandfather (Timothy, born in 1700 A.D.) be the eighth in descent from the first Michelgrove baronet, the seventh in descent from either of the baronet's sons?

Human generations do not come and go at the rate of seven to a century.

To pass for a moment from Tom Medwin (of whose egregious mis-statements something more must be said) to the present Lady Shelley, the poet's daughter-in-law. 'At the close of the last century,' says this lady in her *Shelley Memorials: from Authentic Sources*, 'the family of the Shelleys had long held a high position among the large landholders of Sussex. Fortunate marriages in two generations preceding the birth of the poet considerably increased the wealth and influence of the house, the head of which was a staunch Whig.' Lady Shelley's book from authentic sources contains several statements of no authenticity. For each of the principal statements of the above-quoted words, she had, however, good authority. But instead of coming to her from a single authentic source, the facts embodied in the quotation were drawn from two different authentic sources, the archives of the Michelgrove Shelleys, and the archives of the Castle Goring Shelleys; and by cleverly combining the two sets of facts, Lady Shelley conveys to her readers a very erroneous impression respecting the condition of the poet's seventeenth-century ancestors. Unquestionably, the Sussex Shelleys, at the close of the eighteenth century, had long held a high position among the large landowners of the county. But these fortunate Shelleys were not the family of which the poet was the brightest ornament. They were the Michelgrove Shelleys; whereas the poet came of people, differing greatly from the Michelgrove people in social quality. He was of the Castle Goring Shelleys—a family that, instead of being

merely enriched, was created and established by the fortunate marriages to which Lady Shelley refers. Before the first of those marriages, wedlock had done much for the advantage of these inferior Shelleys. For instance, the marriage, in 1692, of John Shelley, of Fen Place, *jure uxoris*, with Helen, co-heir of Roger Bysshe, of Fen Place, Co. Sussex, had reclaimed the poet's direct male ancestors from a state of territorial vagrancy, and given them a permanent, though modest, abiding-place. But for a considerable period after that marriage, the direct ancestral precursors of the Castle Goring Shelleys were no such house as the readers of Lady Shelley's book are likely to imagine. The Michelgrove Shelleys were one 'house,' the Castle Goring Shelleys were quite another house; though it has for some time been the fashion of biographers to mix the two houses, and speak of them by turns as one house, or as branches of the same house. The Michelgrove Shelleys were an ancient house. The Castle Goring Shelleys were a mushroom family, disdainfully regarded by the Michelgrove people, at the opening of the nineteenth century.

Something more must be said of the older of these houses. The Michelgrove Shelleys are said, for reasons no longer discoverable, to have entered the country with the Conqueror. They may have done so. There is better evidence that they had lands in Kent in the times of Edward I. and Edward II., before they established themselves in Sussex; and still better testimony, that one of the clan (John Shelley) was Member of Parliament for Rye from 1415 to 1428. With this parliamentary personage, the house, or rather the family from which the house proceeded, comes

into the clear light of history. Two long generations later (generations so lengthy that one has reason to suspect a failure of the record) the house acquired a dignity, which gave it an enduring place amongst the historic families of the realm.

Bred to the law, William Shelley (the grandson, or maybe the great-grandson, of the afore-mentioned Member for Rye) became Reader of the Inner Temple in 1517, and after holding successively the office of a Judge of the Sheriff's Court and the office of Recorder of the City of London, rose to be a Judge of the Common Pleas somewhere about the beginning of 1527. Before mounting to this eminence he had represented the City in Parliament, and practised for six years as a Serjeant-at-law in Westminster Hall. Those who know Cavendish's *Wolsey* do not need to be reminded of the part taken by this fortunate lawyer in the negotiations that closed with the Cardinal's surrender of York House to Henry the Eighth. 'Tell his Highness,' said the fallen Cardinal to the Judge of the Common Pleas, 'that I am his most faithful subject and obedient beadsman, whose command I will in no wise disobey; but will in all things fulfil his pleasure, as you the father of the law say I may. I therefore charge your conscience to discharge me, and show His Highness from me that I must desire His Majesty to remember there is both heaven and hell;' a message which the judge probably forgot to deliver, as he lived to entertain the King at Michelgrove, and was continued in his office till Henry's death. Surviving the sovereign, whom he served on the bench of the Common Pleas for twenty years, Sir William Shelley served Edward the Sixth in the same capacity, to

the day of his own death, which occurred between November 3, 1548 (the date of his last fine), and May 10, 1549, the date of his successor's appointment.

Fortunate in his professional career, Sir William Shelley was no less fortunate in his domestic affairs. Marrying an heiress, he had, with other children, John, the grandfather of the first Michelgrove baronet, and Sir Richard Shelley, the last English Prior of St. John of Jerusalem.

Not much less than a century wrong in assigning the legal eminence of Henry the Eighth's judge to the eldest son of James the First's baronet, Medwin wrote under a general impression that the Shelleys to whom he was related, had somehow or other descended from the Michelgrove house, an impression which the poet seems also to have cherished, and imparted to his college-friend and biographer, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who writes in serio-comic vein of Sir Guyon de Shelley and Sir Richard Shelley (the Knight of Malta), as though the Grand Prior of the sixteenth century and the Paladin with the three conchs were veritable forefathers of the Castle Goring Shelleys.

That these Shelleys of the junior house were no family of singular antiquity or overpowering dignity, is shown by the pedigree of Percy Bysshe Shelley, published in the first volume of Mr. Forman's edition of the poet's prose works. A pedigree of only nine generations, beginning with mention of Henry Shelley, of Worminghurst, Co. Sussex, who died in 1623, this evidential writing puts it beyond question that the poet, of whose ancestral grandeur so much has been written, was no man of noble or otherwise splendid lineage; puts it beyond question, that whether regard be had to the

number of its generations, the antiquity of the earliest dates, or the importance of the persons commemorated in its entries, it is (from the date of Henry Shelley's death *temp.* James I. to Percy Bysshe Shelley's birth in 1792) nothing more than such a pedigree as could be displayed by the majority of the gentle families of the middle way of English life, who never for a moment think of rating themselves as families of patrician worth.

One or two rather awkward matters excepted, this pedigree is a fair and honest record of the births, marriages, and deaths, of nine successive generations of gentle people; but as an exhibition of familiar grandeur, it is no more impressive than any pedigree one would regard as a matter of course in the muniment room of a country gentleman, tracing his descent from a gentle yeoman of the Elizabethan period. It mentions eight of the poet's forefathers in the direct right line. Describing some of these eight individuals as 'esquires,' and some of them as 'gentlemen,' the record shows that no one of them bore any hereditary honour, or even the dignity of knighthood before the poet's birth. It shows that no one of them married a woman of higher quality than the degree of a simple gentlewoman. Doubtless they were (with a single exception) gentlewomen in the heraldic sense of the term—daughters of gentlemen bearing arms—but to use an old-world phrase, no one of them was 'a woman of quality.' The record shows, that at the time of the poet's birth, no one of his eight male ancestors in the direct right line had served the State with distinction, won a foremost place in one of the learned professions, or attained

to any social eminence higher than a place in a Commission of the Peace.

Such is the evidence of the document of which Mr. Forman justly remarks, 'the pedigree speaks for itself to any careful reader.' And this evidence is the more impressive, because the carefully elaborated record is the pedigree deposited at the Heralds' College on 6th March, 1816, by Mr. John Shelley Sidney (the poet's uncle by the half-blood), at a moment when he was especially desirous of figuring to the best possible advantage in the esteem of heralds and their employers. Regard being had to this gentleman's character and social ambition, and his pride in his descent from the Sidneys, it cannot be questioned that he made his genealogical record showy and impressive to the utmost of his ability—that he would fain have driven it back another generation—that could he have demonstrated a connection between the Castle Goring and Michelgrove Shelleys, he would not have omitted to prove them two branches of the same tree.

Mr. John Shelley Sidney's forbearance from pushing the genealogical record a single stage backwards beyond the certain evidences, is the more noteworthy and creditable, because he can scarcely have been ignorant of the inconclusive, though by no means inconsiderable, testimony that the Henry Shelley, who died at Worminghurst in 1623, was the grandson of Edward Shelley of the said parish, and that this Edward Shelley was the younger brother of the Judge of the Common Pleas, who was the actual founder of the Michelgrove family.