

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

immutable Essence indeed, perhaps, in some ultimate spiritual sense, but his manifestation is mutable; his sensible form is a vehicle of Energy surging in infinite variety against the shores of experience. Shelley speaks of an immanent Spirit of the Universe, and is sufficiently a Pantheist to have identified himself, or any other existing thing, with that Spirit, had he been challenged directly on the point by, let us say, Mr. Eddington or Mr. Bertrand Russell. If Shelley is not always explicitly in line with the latest mathematico-mystical thinkers, it is because the world was so far behind his intuitive perception of truth that there was no intellectual instrument capable of registering his vibrations, except possibly the ambiguous jargon of the school of Fludd. But he everywhere implies, more by the sheer form and tone of his verses than by their rational meaning, that existence is an unconditioned Unity (or Nihil), which has invented infinite modes of phantasmal and illusory duality for the purpose of becoming conscious of itself. It is not necessary for an animal to use our arbitrary language to express its feelings intelligibly; and, in point of fact, poets who have made the attempt to explain their spiritual consciousness in terms of philosophy have obscured their light rather than made it manifest. Blake is a notable example of this circumstance. We learn more of the essence of his soul-structure from *Tiger, Tiger, The Crystal Cabinet*, or *The Mental Traveller* than we do from his professedly "prophetic" books. The English language, as understood by scholars and developed by them, is an instrument of doubtful value to the poet. The soul of man lurks rather in the lilt of a lyric than in the most imposing *lavallière* that glitters on the velvet of the shop-window of literary effort.

Now Shelley was saturated with the spirit of the planet in its subtlest and strongest distillation: and that spirit overflowed into song. He possessed the utter simplicity and self-confidence of an immortal; if our ears are attuned to his thought, we can catch the choral rapture as it swings with the stars through the centuries. But his conscious efforts to express his essential idea are relatively lame.

Identical phenomena occur in every connection; and this is the ultimate reason for the apparent failure of the poet to maintain his hold on our hearts as we reach an age