

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

when our spirits are less sensitive to subtle and subconscious stress. Mr. Augustine Birrell remarks that Browning in later life lost his enthusiasm for this "strange and unaccountable being." We are not all, fortunately, so middle-class and middle-aged as either of these gentlemen; but, even so, it is hard to read Shelley with enjoyment after one has turned forty. The reason, however, is this: one either has or has not assimilated the Unconscious of the poet in one's youth; in the one case the verse seems a mere husk, while in the other it screams the doom of spiritual death. The damned detest him, therefore, and the redeemed can only find pleasure in remembering the raptures which wrought the white-hot steel of their youth into the shapes of royalty and righteousness.

It is in the nature of things that even the greatest intellectual attempts to grapple with any given problem appear ill-adjusted in after years; for the thought has been frozen into crystalline beauty, while the problem has changed with the succession of suns. It is always an error for an artist to abdicate his throne in eternity in order to enter the lists of temporal things: *ne sutor ultra crepidam*. Few people, even among philosophers, seem to understand that eternity differs in quality from time. It is commonly supposed to be a mere unlimited extension thereof. Yet the consideration that time is but one of the conditions of dualistic consciousness ought to make the true aspect of the matter immediately apparent. It is the prerogative of men like Shelley to think in terms of the absolute, which is out of all relation with the measurable, and not to be obtained therefrom by removing the landmarks, any more than one can make Beauty by effacing the marks on a steelyard, or prolonging the lever indefinitely. When, therefore, Shelley says

"Next came Fraud, and he had on,
Like Eldon, an ermined gown"

he risks his intelligibility only in a slightly less degree than Mr. Frankau in *One of Us*, or the ephemeral leader-writer of this *Ile des Diurnales*. Eldon is already for us merely a judge who happened to annoy Shelley. *One of Us* is a very valuable historical document, of its kind, but the more it is history the less it is literature. It has already become difficult to identify the mourners for *Adonais*, immortals