

SHELLEY'S ELOPEMENT. By ALEXANDER HARVEY. Alfred A. Knopf.

THIS book is one of the most glorious blasphemies ever printed. I have long recognized in Alexander Harvey one of those extremely rare types of genius, of which, curiously enough, America seems to have a monopoly. The United States have not produced any all-round men of the first class, but they have produced quite a number of what I may call, without any intent of disparagement, monsters.

Morphy's games of chess are entirely *sui generis*. He was different not only in kind, but in degree, from all other masters, and this, owing to the peculiar nature of the game of chess, resulted in the complete over-turning of the theory of the game. In chess problems, Sam Loyd and W. A. Shinkman displayed a precisely similar quality. Their problems are not well rounded and balanced, like those of other masters of the art. They are comparable with nothing else. One feels the emotion of a naturalist familiar with all other fauna who should suddenly be introduced to Australian zoology. In art, America has George Grey Barnard, whose Lincoln is like no other type of statue ever moulded. In vaudeville, we have Eva Tanguay, of whom I have already written in terms of no little enthusiasm. While other variety artists are like different vintages of Burgundy, Claret, Port, Champagne, and other wines, she breaks the entire series by producing cocaine. In literature, there are Poe and Whitman. Neither of these great men had the broad base of education. They have shot up by the mutation of a spiritual De Vries. Alexander Harvey reminds me constantly of Poe, but he is a Poe without the element of tragedy or morbidity; while his comic spirit is more ineffably delightful than that of any other human being, past or present, with whom I am familiar. Poe's comedy was labored, clumsy, hard-working foolery. Alexander Harvey's is perfectly spontaneous, and of such exquisite delicacy

and acuteness, that he reminds one of the bistoury of a crazy surgeon.

In *Shelley's Elopement*, he has taken Bernard Shaw's formula for creating absurdity. It is a very simple formula. One reflects that Caesar was not a hero to his valet, and that sometimes his toga set awry. The joke consists in making the heroic figure ridiculous by making him real. Shaw's method is mere clowning. Alexander Harvey's is perfect artistic perception of the realities of life. In this book he shows you the characters concerned with the absolute fidelity of a Balzac.

One understands instantly that one is actually present at these scenes of Shelley's life. The atmosphere of the first four lustres of the 19th century, with its affectations and prejudices, is the breath of our lungs as we read. Shelley is screamingly ridiculous, Principal Harlequin in a mad domestic pantomime: and here is the miracle, that Alexander Harvey can show us this insane revel of dolts, and bums, and prigs, and dowdies, and with a single touch he can "life's leaden metal into gold transmute." The sublime appears phantastically shapen out of nothing, literally without effort. And this is the secret of life. This is the sublime and sacred jest of the Gods, to take the gross, the stupid, the banal, and suddenly to manifest a flower.

For this reason I wish to put it upon record, that I think that Alexander Harvey is the greatest realist alive to-day. The dull rationalist dribbles of cause and effect, neither perceiving the one, nor understanding the other. Alexander Harvey has the mystery of Pan.

ALEXANDER TABASCO.