

Percy Bysshe Shelley

By Prometheus

"O! like a rose-wing'd pelican
She hath bred blessed babes to Pan!"
—*The Wizard Way.*

IN a story by Lord Dunsany, Fame says to the poet, "I will meet you in the graveyard at the back of the Workhouse in a hundred years." If Shelley has been more fortunate—though it hardly matters to him!—it is not on account of his poetry, which passed as readable even among his contemporary detractors, but of his prophetic gift and the moral wizardry which gave its spirit a body, in face of those qualities which made serious people consider seriously that in him *Diabolus incarnatus est, et homo factus est.*

It seems at first sight astounding that Shelley was sent down from Oxford for theological views which are accepted to-day by the youngest average undergraduate with scarce a mumbled protest from the oldest average don; that he should have been robbed of his children on account of a moral attitude which modern children themselves find reactionary rather than advanced; and that he should have been practically exiled from England because of political notions which the most case-hardened Tory of to-day would hardly dare to whisper in the gloom of his club.

The truth is that the "Sun-treader" (as Browning calls him in *Pauline*) happened to be on the crest of a true dawn. The world, save for sporadic outbreaks of Bourbon *folie des grandeurs*, has rolled steadily towards that slight, shrill angel figure in the East. The poetry of Shelley hardly matters, in a sense, by comparison with his ethical ideals. He was the voice of the *Zeitgeist*; and it is relatively unimportant that it should have been, to English ears, so matchlessly musical.

Many of the best judges of poetry prefer Keats to Shelley; but the verdict implies purism. A poet is one