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## CHAPTER XII

June 1819-September 1820

It was not fifteen months since they had all left England; Shelley and Mary with the sweet, blue-eyed "Willmouse," and the pretty baby, Clara, so like her father; Clare and the "bluff, bright-eyed little Commodore," Allegra; the Swiss nurse and English nursemaid; a large and lively party, in spite of cares and anxieties and sorrows to come. In one short, spiritless paragraph Mary, on the 4th of August, summed up such history as there was of the sad two months following on the blow which had left her childless.

*Journal, Wednesday, August 4, 1819, Leghorn (Mary).*—I begin my journal on Shelley's birthday. We have now lived five years together; and if all the events of the five years were blotted out, I might be happy; but to have won and then cruelly to have lost, the associations of four years, is not an accident to which the human mind can bend without much suffering.

Since I left home I have read several books of Livy, *Clarissa Harlowe*, the *Spectator*, a few novels, and am now reading the Bible, and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and Dante. Shelley is to-day twenty-seven years of age. Write; read Lucan [Pg 245] and the Bible. Shelley writes the *Cenci*, and reads Plutarch's *Lives*. The Gisbornes call in the evening. Shelley reads *Paradise Lost* to me. Read two cantos of the *Purgatorio*.

Three days after William's death, Shelley, Mary, and Clare had left Rome for Leghorn. Once more they were alone together—how different now from the three heedless young things who, just five years before, had set out to walk through France with a donkey!

Shelley, then, a creature of feelings and theories, full of unbalanced impulses, vague aspirations and undeveloped powers; inexperienced in everything but uncomprehended pain and the dim consciousness of half-realised mistakes. Mary, the fair, quiet, thoughtful girl, earnest and impassioned, calm and resolute, as ignorant of practical life as precocious in intellect; with all her mind worshipping the same high ideals as Shelley's, and with all her heart worshipping him as the incarnation of them. Clare her very opposite; excitable and enthusiastic, demonstrative and capricious, clever, but silly; with a mind in which a smattering of speculative philosophy, picked up in Godwin's house, contended for the mastery with

such social wisdom as she had picked up in a boarding school. Both of them mere children in years. Now poor Clare was older without being much wiser, saddened yet not sobered; suffering bitterly from her ambiguous position, yet unable[Pg 246] or unwilling to put an end to it; the worse by her one great error, which had brought her to dire grief; the better by one great affection—for her child,—the source of much sorrow, it is true, but also of truest joy of self-devotion, and the only instrument of such discipline that ever she had.

Shelley had found what he wanted, the faithful heart which to his own afforded peace and stability and the balance which, then, he so much needed; a kindred mind, worthy of the best his had to give; knowing and expecting that best, too, and satisfied with nothing short of it. And his best had responded. In these few years he had realised powers the extent of which could not have been foretold, and which might, without that steady sympathy and support, have remained unfulfilled possibilities for ever. In spite of the far-reaching consequences of his errors, in spite of torturing memories, in spite of ill-health, anxiety, poverty, vexation, and strife, the Shelley of *Queen Mab* had become the Shelley of *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Cenci*.

Of this development he himself was conscious enough. In so far as he was known to his contemporaries, it was only by his so-called atheistic opinions, and his departures theoretical and actual, from conventional social morality; and even these owed their notoriety, not to his genius, but to the fact that they were such strange vagaries in the[Pg 247] heir to a baronetcy. In his new life he had, indeed, known the deepest grief as well as the purest love, but those griefs which are memorial shrines of love did not paralyse him. They were rather among the influences which elicited the utmost possibilities of his nature; his lost children, as lovely ideals, were only half lost to him.

But with Mary it was otherwise. Her occupation was gone. When after the death of her first poor little baby, she wrote: “Whenever I am left alone to my own thoughts, and do not read to divert them, they always come back to the same point—that I was a mother, and am so no longer;” a new sense was dawning in her which never had waned, and which, since William’s birth, had asserted itself as the key to her nature.

She had known very little of the realities of life when she left her father’s house with Shelley, and he, her first reality, belonged in many ways more to the ideal than to the real world. But for her children, her association with him, while immeasurably expanding her mental powers, might have tended to develop these at the expense of her emotional nature, and to starve or to stifle her human sympathies. In her children she found the link which united her ideal love with the universal heart of mankind, and it was as a mother that she learned the sweet charities of human nature. This

maternal love deepened her feelings [Pg 248] towards her own father, it gave her sympathy with Clare and helped towards patience with her, it saved her from overmuch literary abstraction, and prevented her from pining when Shelley was buried in dreams or engrossed in work, and she loved these children with the unconscious passionate gratitude of a reserved nature towards anything that constrains from it the natural expression of that fund of tenderness and devotion so often hidden away under a perversely undemonstrative manner. Now, in one short year, all this was gone, and she sank under the blow of William's loss. She could not even find comfort in the thought of the baby to be born in autumn, for, after the repeated rending asunder of beloved ties, she looked forward to new ones with fear and trembling, rather than with hope. The physical reaction after the strain of long suspense and watching had told seriously on her health, never strong at these times; the efforts she had made at Naples were no longer possible to her. Even Clare with all her misery was, in one sense, better off than she, for Allegra *lived*. She tried to rise above her affliction, but her care for everything was gone; the whole world seemed dull and indifferent. Poor Shelley, only too liable to depression at all times, and suffering bitterly himself from the loss of his beloved child, tried to keep up his spirits for Mary's sake.

[Pg 249]Thou sittest on the hearth of pale Despair,  
Where,  
For thine own sake, I cannot follow thee.

Perhaps the effort he thus made for her sake had a bracing effect on himself, but the old Mary seemed gone,—lost,—and even he was powerless to bring her back; she could not follow him; any approach of seeming forgetfulness in others increased her depression and gloom.

The letter to Miss Curran, which follows, was written within three weeks of William's death.

Leghorn, 27th June 1819.

My dear Miss Curran—I wrote to you twice on our journey, and again from this place, but I found the other day that Shelley had forgotten to send the letter; and I have been so unwell with a cold these last two or three days that I have not been able to write. We have taken an airy house here, in the vicinity of Leghorn, for three months, and we have not found it yet too hot. The country around us is pretty, so that I daresay we shall do very well. I am going to write another stupid letter to you, yet what can I do? I no sooner take up my pen than my thoughts run away with me, and I cannot guide it except about *one* subject, and that I must avoid. So I entreat you to join this to your many other kindnesses, and to excuse me. I have received the two letters forwarded

from Rome. My father's lawsuit is put off until July. It will never be terminated. I hear that you have quitted the pestilential air of Rome, and have gained a little health in the country. Pray let us hear from you, for both Shelley and I are very anxious—more than I can express—to know how you are. Let us hear also, if you please, anything you may have done about the tomb, near which I shall lie one day, and care not, for my own sake, how soon. I never shall recover that blow; I feel it more than at Rome; the thought never leaves me for a [Pg 250] single moment; everything on earth has lost its interest to me. You see I told you that I could only write to you on one subject; how can I, since, do all I can (and I endeavour very sincerely) I can think of no other, so I will leave off. Shelley is tolerably well, and desires his kindest remembrances.—Most affectionately yours,

Mary W. Shelley.

Their sympathetic friend, Leigh Hunt, grieved at the tone of her letters and at Shelley's account of her, tried to convey to her a little kindly advice and encouragement.

8 York Buildings, New Road.

*July 1819.*

My dear Mary—I was just about to write to you, as you will see by my letter to Shelley, when I received yours. I need not say how it grieves me to see you so dispirited. Not that I wonder at it under such sufferings; but I know, at least I have often suspected, that you have a tendency, partly constitutional perhaps, and partly owing to the turn of your philosophy, to look over-intensely at the dark side of human things; and they must present double dreariness through such tears as you are now shedding. Pray consent to take care of your health, as the ground of comfort; and cultivate your laurels on the strength of it. I wish you would strike your pen into some more genial subject (more obviously so than your last), and bring up a fountain of gentle tears for us. That exquisite passage about the cottagers shows what you could do. [\[36\]](#)

Mary received his counsels submissively, and would have carried them out if she could. But her nervous prostration was beyond her own power to cure or remove, and it was hard for others and impossible for herself to know how far her dejected state was due to mental and how far to physical causes.

[Pg 251] Shelley was not, and dared not be, idle. He worked at his Tragedy and finished it; many of the Fragments, too, belong to this time. They are the speech of pain, but those who can teach in song what they learn in suffering have much, very much to be thankful for. Mary persisted in study; she even tried to write. But the spring of invention was low.

She exerted herself to send to Mrs. Hunt an account of their present life and surroundings.

Leghorn, 28th August 1819.

My dear Marianne—We are very dull at Leghorn, and I can therefore write nothing to amuse you. We live in a little country house at the end of a green lane, surrounded by a *podere*. These *poderi* are just the things Hunt would like. They are like our kitchen-gardens, with the difference only that the beautiful fertility of the country gives them. A large bed of cabbages is very unpicturesque in England, but here the furrows are alternated with rows of grapes festooned on their supporters, and the hedges are of myrtle, which have just ceased to flower; their flower has the sweetest faint smell in the world, like some delicious spice. Green grassy walks lead you through the vines. The people are always busy, and it is pleasant to see three or four of them transform in one day a bed of Indian corn to one of celery. They work this hot weather in their shirts, or smock-frocks (but their breasts are bare), their brown legs nearly the colour, only with a rich tinge of red in it, of the earth they turn up. They sing, not very melodiously, but very loud, Rossini's music, "Mi rivedrai, ti rivedrò," and they are accompanied by the *cicala*, a kind of little beetle, that makes a noise with its tail as loud as Johnny can sing; they live on trees; and three or four together are enough to deafen you. It is to the *cicala* that [Pg 252] Anacreon has addressed an ode which they call "To a Grasshopper" in the English translations.

Well, here we live. I never am in good spirits—often in very bad; and Hunt's portrait has already seen me shed so many tears that, if it had his heart as well as his eyes, he would weep too in pity. But no more of this, or a tear will come now, and there is no use for that.

By the bye, a hint Hunt gave about portraits. The Italian painters are very bad; they might make a nose like Shelley's, and perhaps a mouth, but I doubt it; but there would be no expression about it. They have no notion of anything except copying again and again their Old Masters; and somehow mere copying, however divine the original, does a great deal more harm than good.

Shelley has written a good deal, and I have done very little since I have been in Italy. I have had so much to see, and so many vexations, independently of those which God has kindly sent to wean me from the world if I were too fond of it. Shelley has not had good health by any means, and, when getting better, fate has ever contrived something to pull him back. He never was better than the last month of his stay in Rome, except the last week—then he watched sixty miserable death-like hours without closing his eyes; and you may think what good that did him.

We see the *Examiners* regularly now, four together, just two months after the publication of the last. These are very delightful to us. I have a word to say to Hunt of what he says concerning Italian dancing. The Italians dance very badly. They dress for their dances in the ugliest manner; the men in little doublets, with a hat and feather; they are very stiff; nothing but their legs move; and they twirl and jump with as little grace as may be. It is not for their dancing, but their pantomime, that the Italians are famous. You remember what we told you of the ballet of *Othello*. They tell a story by action, so that words appear perfectly superfluous things for them. In that they are graceful, agile, impressive, and very affecting; so that I delight in nothing [Pg 253] so much as a deep tragic ballet. But the dancing, unless, as they sometimes do, they dance as common people (for instance, the dance of joy of the Venetian citizens on the return of Othello), is very bad indeed.

I am very much obliged to you for all your kind offers and wishes. Hunt would do Shelley a great deal of good, but that we may not think of; his spirits are tolerably good. But you do not tell me how you get on; how Bessy is, and where she is. Remember me to her. Clare is learning thorough bass and singing. We pay four crowns a month for her master, lessons three times a week; cheap work this, is it not? At Rome we paid three shillings a lesson and the master stayed two hours. The one we have now is the best in Leghorn.

I write in the morning, read Latin till 2, when we dine; then I read some English book, and two cantos of Dante with Shelley. In the evening our friends the Gisbornes come, so we are not perfectly alone. I like Mrs. Gisborne very much indeed, but her husband is most dreadfully dull; and as he is always with her, we have not so much pleasure in her company as we otherwise should....

The neighbourhood of Mrs. Gisborne, "charming from her frank and affectionate nature," and full of intellectual sympathy with the Shelleys, was a boon indeed at this melancholy time. Through her Shelley was led to the study of Spanish, and the appearance on the scene of Charles Clairmont, who had just passed a year in Spain, was an additional stimulus in this direction. Together they read several of Calderon's plays, from which Shelley derived the greatest delight, and which enabled him for a time to forget everyday life and its troubles. Another [Pg 254] diversion to his thoughts was the scheme of a steamboat which should ply between Leghorn and Marseilles, to be constructed by Henry Reveley, mainly at Shelley's expense. He was elated at promoting a project which he conceived to be of great public usefulness and importance, and happy at being able to do a friend a good turn. He followed every stage of the steamer's construction with keen interest, and was much disappointed

when the idea was given up, as, after some months, it was; not, however, until much time, labour, and money had been expended on it.

Mary, though she endeavoured to fill the blanks in her existence by assiduous reading, could not escape care. Clare was in perpetual thirst for news of her Allegra, and Godwin spared them none of his usual complaints. He, too, was much concerned at the depressed tone of Mary's letters, which seemed to him quite disproportionate to the occasion, and thought it his duty to convince her, by reasoning, that she was not so unhappy as she thought herself to be.

Skinner Street, *9th September 1819*.

My dear Mary—Your letter of 19th August is very grievous to me, inasmuch as you represent me as increasing the degree of your uneasiness and depression.

You must, however, allow me the privilege of a father and a philosopher in expostulating with you on this depression. I [Pg 255] cannot but consider it as lowering your character in a memorable degree, and putting you quite among the commonalty and mob of your sex, when I had thought I saw in you symptoms entitling you to be ranked among those noble spirits that do honour to our nature. What a falling off is here! How bitterly is so inglorious a change to be deplored!

What is it you want that you have not? You have the husband of your choice, to whom you seem to be unalterably attached, a man of high intellectual attainments, whatever I and some other persons may think of his morality, and the defects under this last head, if they be not (as you seem to think) imaginary, at least do not operate as towards you. You have all the goods of fortune, all the means of being useful to others, and shining in your proper sphere. But you have lost a child: and all the rest of the world, all that is beautiful, and all that has a claim upon your kindness, is nothing, because a child of two years old is dead.

The human species may be divided into two great classes: those who lean on others for support, and those who are qualified to support. Of these last, some have one, some five, and some ten talents. Some can support a husband, a child, a small but respectable circle of friends and dependents, and some can support a world, contributing by their energies to advance their whole species one or more degrees in the scale of perfectibility. The former class sit with their arms crossed, a prey to apathy and languor, of no use to any earthly creature, and ready to fall from their stools if some kind soul, who might compassionate, but who cannot respect them, did not come from moment to moment and endeavour to set them up again. You were

formed by nature to belong to the best of these classes, but you seem to be shrinking away, and voluntarily enrolling yourself among the worst.

Above all things, I entreat you, do not put the miserable delusion on yourself, to think there is something fine, and beautiful, and delicate, in giving yourself up, and agreeing to be nothing. Remember too, though at first your nearest connections may pity you in this state, yet that when they see you [Pg 256] fixed in selfishness and ill humour, and regardless of the happiness of every one else, they will finally cease to love you, and scarcely learn to endure you.

The other parts of your letter afford me much satisfaction. Depend upon it, there is no maxim more true or more important than this; Frankness of communication takes off bitterness. True philosophy invites all communication, and withholds none.

Such a letter tended rather to check frankness of communication than to bind up a broken heart. Poor Mary's feelings appear in her letter to Miss Curran, with whom she was in correspondence about a monumental stone for the tomb in Rome.

The most pressing entreaties on my part, as well as Clare's, cannot draw a single line from Venice. It is now six months since we have heard, even in an indirect manner, from there. God knows what has happened, or what has not! I suppose Shelley must go to see what has become of the little thing; yet how or when I know not, for he has never recovered from his fatigue at Rome, and continually frightens me by the approaches of a dysentery. Besides, we must remove. My lying-in and winter are coming on, so we are wound up in an inextricable dilemma. This is very hard upon us; and I have no consolation in any quarter, for my misfortune has not altered the tone of my Father's letters, so that I gain care every day. And can you wonder that my spirits suffer terribly? that time is a weight to me? And I see no end to this. Well, to talk of something more interesting, Shelley has finished his tragedy, and it is sent to London to be presented to the managers. It is still a *deep secret*, and only one person, Peacock (who presents it), knows anything about it in England. With Shelley's public and private enemies, it would certainly fall if known to be his; his sister-in-law alone would hire [Pg 257] enough people to damn it. It is written with great care, and we are in hopes that its story is sufficiently polished not to shock the audience. We shall see. Continue to direct to us at Leghorn, for if we should be gone, they will be faithfully forwarded to us. And when you return to Rome just have the kindness to inquire if there should be any stray letter for us at the post-office. I hope the country air will do you real good. You must take care of yourself. Remember that one day you will return to England, and that you may be happier there.—Affectionately yours,

M. W. S.

At the end of September they removed to Florence, where they had engaged pleasant lodgings for six months. The time of Mary's confinement was now approaching, an event, in Shelley's words, "more likely than any other to retrieve her from some part of her present melancholy depression."

They travelled by short, easy stages; stopping for a day at Pisa to pay a visit to a lady with whom from this time their intercourse was frequent and familiar. This was Lady Mountcashel, who had, when a young girl, been Mary Wollstonecraft's pupil, and between whom and her teacher so warm an attachment had existed as to arouse the jealousy and dislike of her mother, Lady Kingsborough. She had long since been separated from Lord Mountcashel, and lived in Italy with a Mr. Tighe and their two daughters, Laura and Nerina. As Lady Mountcashel she had entertained Godwin at her house during his visit to Ireland after his first wife's death. She [Pg 258] is described by him as a remarkable person, "a republican and a democrat in all their sternness, yet with no ordinary portion either of understanding or good nature." In dress and appearance she was somewhat singular, and had that disregard for public opinion on such matters which is habitually implied in the much abused term "strong-minded." In this respect she had now considerably toned down. Her views on the relations of the sexes were those of William Godwin, and she had put them into practice. But she and the gentleman with whom she lived in permanent, though irregular, union had succeeded in constraining, by their otherwise exemplary life, the general respect and esteem. They were known as "Mr. and Mrs. Mason," and had so far lived down criticism that their actual position had come to be ignored or forgotten by those around them. Mr. Tighe, or "Tatty," as he was familiarly called by his few intimates, was of a retiring disposition, a lover of books and of solitude. Mrs. Mason was as remarkable for her strong practical common sense as for her talents and cultivation and the liberality of her views. She had a considerable knowledge of the world, and was looked up to as a model of good breeding, and an oracle on matters of deportment and propriety.

She had kept up correspondence with Godwin, [Pg 259] and her acquaintance with the Shelleys was half made before she saw them. She conceived an immediate affection for Mary, as well for her own as for her mother's sake, and was to prove a constant and valuable friend, not to her only, but to Shelley, and most especially to Clare.

After a week in Florence, Mary's journal was resumed.

*Saturday, October 9.*—Arrive at Florence. Read Massinger. Shelley begins Clarendon; reads Massinger, and Plato's *Republic*. Clare has her first singing lesson on Saturday. Go to the opera and see a beautiful ballet

*Monday, October 11.*—Read Horace; work. Go to the Gallery. Shelley finishes the first volume of Clarendon. Read the *Little Thief*.

*Wednesday, October 20.*—Finish the First Book of Horace's Odes. Work, walk, read, etc. On Saturday letters are sent to England. On Tuesday one to Venice. Shelley visits the Galleries. Reads Spenser and Clarendon aloud.

*Thursday, October 28.*—Work; read; copy *Peter Bell*. Monday night a great fright with Charles Clairmont. Shelley reads Clarendon aloud and *Plato's Republic*. Walk. On Thursday the protest from the Bankers. Shelley writes to them, and to Peacock, Longdill, and H. Smith.

*Tuesday, November 9.*—Read Madame de Sevigné. Bad news from London. Shelley reads Clarendon aloud, and Plato. He writes to Papa.

On the 12th of November a son was born to the Shelleys, and brought the first true balm of consolation to his poor mother's heart.

"You may imagine," wrote Shelley to Leigh Hunt, "that this is a great relief and a great comfort to me amongst all[Pg 260] my misfortunes.... Poor Mary begins (for the first time) to look a little consoled; for we have spent, as you may imagine, a miserable five months."

The child was healthy and pretty, and very like William. Neither Mary's strength nor her spirits were altogether re-established for some time, but the birth of "Percy Florence" was, none the less, the beginning of a new life for her. She turned, with the renewed energy of hope, to her literary work and studies. One of her first tasks was to transcribe the just written fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*. She had work of her own on hand too; a historical novel, *Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (afterwards published as *Valperga*), a laborious but very congenial task, which occupied her for many months.

And indeed all the solace of new and tender ties, all the animating interest of intellectual pursuits, was sorely needed to counteract the wearing effect of harassing cares and threatening calamities. Godwin was now being pressed for the accumulated unpaid house-rent of many years; so many that, when the call came, it was unexpected by him, and he challenged its justice. He had engaged in a law-suit on the matter, which he eventually lost. The only point which appeared to admit of no reasonable doubt was that Shelley would shortly be called upon to find a large sum of money for him, and this at a time when he was[Pg 261] himself in unexpected pecuniary straits, owing to the non-arrival of his own remittances from England—a circumstance rendered doubly vexatious by the fact that a large portion of the money

was pledged to Henry Reveley for the furtherance of his steamboat. A draft for £200, destined for this purpose, was returned, protested by Shelley's bankers. And though the money was ultimately recovered, its temporary loss caused no small alarm. Meanwhile every mail brought letters from Godwin of the most harrowing nature; the philosophy which he inculcated in a case of bereavement was null and void where impending bankruptcy was concerned. He well knew how to work on his daughter's feelings, and he did not spare her. Poor Shelley was at his wits' end.

"Mary is well," he wrote (in December) to the Gisbornes; "but for this affair in London I think her spirits would be good. What shall I, what can I, what ought I to do? You cannot picture to yourself my perplexity."

It appeared not unlikely that he might even have to go to England, a journey for which his present state of health quite unfitted him, and which he could not but be conscious would be no permanent remedy, but only a temporary alleviation, of Godwin's thoroughly unsound circumstances. Mary, in her grief for her father, began to think that the best thing for him might be to [Pg 262] leave England altogether and settle abroad; an idea from which Mrs. Mason, with her strong sagacity, earnestly dissuaded her.

Her views on the point were expressed in a letter to Shelley Mary had written asking her if she could give Charles Clairmont any introductions at Vienna, where he had now gone to seek his fortune as a teacher of languages; and also begging for such assistance as she might be able to lend in the matter of obtaining access to historical documents or other MS. bearing on the subjects of Mary's projected novel.

Mrs. Mason to Shelley.

My dear Sir—I deferred answering your letter till this post in hopes of being able to send some recommendations for your friend at Vienna, in which I have been disappointed; and I have now also a letter from my dear Mary; so I will answer both together. It gives me great pleasure to hear such a good account of the little boy and his mother.... I am sorry to perceive that your visit to Pisa will be so much retarded; but I admire Mary's courage and industry. I sincerely regret that it is not in my power to be of service to her in this undertaking.... All I can say is, that when you have got all you can there (where I suppose the manuscript documents are chiefly to be found) and that you come to this place, I have scarcely any doubt of being able to obtain for you many books on the subject which interests you. Probably everything in print which relates to it is as easy to be had here as at Florence.... I am very sorry indeed to think that Mr. Godwin's affairs are in such a bad way, and think he would be much happier if he had nothing to do with trade; but I am afraid he would not be comfortable out of

England.[Pg 263] You who are young do not mind the thousand little wants that men of his age are not habituated to; and I, who have been so many years a vagabond on the face of the earth, have long since forgotten them; but I have seen people of my age much discomposed at the absence of long-accustomed trifles; and though philosophy supports in great matters, it seldom vanquishes the small everydayisms of life. I say this that Mary may not urge her father too much to leave England. It may sound odd, but I can't help thinking that Mrs. Godwin would enjoy a tour in foreign countries more than he would. The physical inferiority of women sometimes teaches them to support or overlook little inconveniences better than men.

"I am very sorry," she writes to Mary in another letter, "to find you still suffer from low spirits. I was in hopes the little boy would have been the best remedy for that. Words of consolation are but empty sounds, for to time alone it belongs to wear out the tears of affliction. However, a woman who gives milk should make every exertion to be cheerful on account of the child she nourishes."

Whether the plan for Godwin's expatriation was ever seriously proposed to him or not, it was, at any rate, never carried out. But none the less for this did the Shelleys live in the shadow of his gloom, which co-operated with their own pecuniary strait, previously alluded to, and with the nipping effects of an unwontedly severe winter, to make life still difficult and dreary for them.

"Shelley Calderonised on the late weather," wrote Mary to Mrs. Gisborne; "he called it an epic of rain with an episode of frost, and a few similes concerning fine weather. We have heard from England, although not from the Bankers; but Peacock's letter renders the affair darker than ever. Ah! my dear friend, you, in your slow and sure way of proceeding,[Pg 264] ought hardly to have united yourself to our eccentric star. I am afraid that you will repent it, and it grieves us both more than you can imagine that all should have gone so ill; but I think we may rest assured that this is delay, and not loss; it can be nothing else. I write in haste—a carriage at the door to take me out, and *Percy* asleep on my knee. Adieu. Charles is at Vienna by this time."...

They had intended remaining six months at Florence, but the place suited Shelley so ill that they took advantage of the first favourable change in the weather, at the end of January, to remove to Pisa, where the climate was milder, and where they now had pleasant friends in the Masons at "Casa Silva." They wished, too, to consult the celebrated Italian surgeon, Vaccà, on the subject of Shelley's health. Vaccà's advice took the shape of an earnest exhortation to him to abstain from drugs and remedies, to live a healthy life, and to leave his complaint, as far as possible, to nature. And,

though he continued liable to attacks of pain and illness, and on one occasion had a severe nervous attack, the climate of Pisa proved in the end more suitable to him than any other, and for more than two years he remained there or in the immediate neighbourhood. He and Mary were never more industrious than at this time; reading extensively, and working together on a translation of Spinoza they had begun at Florence, and which occupied them, at intervals, for many months. Little Percy, a most healthy[Pg 265] and satisfactory infant, had in March an attack of measles, but so slight as to cause no anxiety. Once, however, during the summer they had a fright about him, when an unusually alarming letter from her father upset Mary so much as to cause in her nursling, through her, symptoms of an illness similar to that which had destroyed little Clara. On this occasion she authorised Shelley, at his earnest request, to intercept future letters of the kind, an authority of which he had to avail himself at no distant date, telling Godwin that his domestic peace, Mary's health and happiness, and his child's life, could no longer be entirely at his mercy.

No wonder that his own nervous ailments kept their hold of him. And to make matters better for him and for Mary, Paolo, the rascally Italian servant whom they had dismissed at Naples, now concocted a plot for extorting money from Shelley by accusing him of frightful crimes. Legal aid had to be called in to silence him. To this end they employed an attorney of Leghorn, named Del Rosso, and, for convenience of communication, they occupied for a few weeks Casa Ricci, the Gisbornes' house there, the owners being absent in England. Shelley made Henry Reveley's workshop his study. Hence he addressed his poetical "Letter to Maria Gisborne," and here too it was that "on a beautiful summer evening[Pg 266] while wandering among the lanes, whose myrtle hedges were the bowers of the fireflies (they) heard the carolling of the skylark, which inspired one of the most beautiful of his poems." [37]

If external surroundings could have made them happy they might have been so now, but Shelley, though in better health, was very nervous. Paolo's scandal and the legal affair embittered his life, to an extent difficult indeed to estimate, for it is certain that for some one else's sake, though *whose* sake has never transpired, he had accepted when at Naples responsibilities at once delicate and compromising. Paolo had knowledge of the matter, and used this knowledge partly to revenge himself on Shelley for dismissing him from his service, partly to try and extort money from him by intimidation. The Shelleys hoped they had "crushed him" with Del Rosso's help, but they could not be certain, because, as Mary wrote to Miss Curran, they "could only guess at his accomplices." With Shelley in a state of extreme nervous irritability, with Mary deprived of repose by her anguish on her father's account and her feverish anxiety to help him, with Clare unsettled and miserable about Allegra, venting her

misery by writing to Byron letters unreasonable and provoking, though excusable, and then regretting[Pg 267] having sent them, they were not likely to be the most cheerful or harmonious of trios.

The weather became intolerably hot by the end of August, and they migrated to Casa Prinni, at the Baths of S. Giuliano di Pisa. The beauty of this place, and the delightful climate, refreshed and invigorated them all. They spent two or three days in seeing Lucca and the country around, when Shelley wrote the *Witch of Atlas*. Exquisite poem as it is, it was, in Mary's mood of the moment, a disappointment to her. Ever since the *Cenci* she had been strongly impressed with the conviction that if he could but write on subjects of universal *human* interest, instead of indulging in those airy creations of fancy which demand in the reader a sympathetic, but rare, quality of imagination, he would put himself more in touch with his contemporaries, who so greatly misunderstood him, and that, once he had elicited a responsive feeling in other men, this would be a source of profound happiness and of fresh and healthy inspiration to himself. "I still think I was right," she says, woman-like, in the *Notes to the Poems of 1820*, written long after Shelley's death. So from one point of view she undoubtedly was, but there are some things which cannot be constrained. Shelley was Shelley, and at the moment when he was moved to write a poem like the *Witch of Atlas*,[Pg 268] it was useless to wish that it had been something quite different.

His next poem was to be inspired by a human subject, and perhaps then poor Mary would have preferred a second *Witch of Atlas*.

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[Pg 269]

### **CHAPTER XIII**

September 1820-August 1821

The baths were of great use to Shelley in allaying his nervous irritability. Such an improvement in him could not be without a corresponding beneficial effect on Mary. In the study of Greek, which she had begun with him at Leghorn, she found a new and wellnigh inexhaustible fund of intellectual pleasure. Their life, though very quiet, was somewhat more varied than it had been at Leghorn, partly owing to their being within easy reach of Pisa and of their friends at Casa Silva.

The Gisbornes had returned from England, and, during a short absence of Clare's, Mary tried, but ineffectually, to persuade Mrs. Gisborne to come and occupy her room for a time. Some circumstance had arisen which led shortly after to a misunderstanding between the two families, soon over, but painful while it lasted. It was probably connected with the abandonment of the projected steamboat; Henry Reveley, while in [Pg 270] England, having changed his mind and reconsidered his future plans.

In October a curiously wet season set in.

*Journal, Wednesday, October 18.*—Rain till 1 o'clock. At sunset the arch of cloud over the west clears away; a few black islands float in the serene; the moon rises; the clouds spot the sky, but the depth of heaven is clear. The nights are uncommonly warm. Write. Shelley reads *Hyperion* aloud. Read Greek.

My thoughts arise and fade in solitude;  
The verse that would invest them melts away  
Like moonlight in the heaven of spreading day.  
How beautiful they were, how firm they stood,  
Flecking the starry sky like woven pearl.

*Friday, October 20.*—Shelley goes to Florence. Write. Read Greek. Wind N.W., but more cloudy than yesterday, yet sometimes the sun shines out; the wind high. Read Villani.

*Saturday, October 21.*—Rain in the night and morning; very cloudy; not an air stirring; the leaves of the trees quite still. After a showery morning it clears up somewhat, and the sun shines. Read Villani, and ride to Pisa.

*Sunday, October 22.*—Rainy night and rainy morning; as bad weather as is possible in Italy. A little patience and we shall have St. Martin's summer. At sunset the arch of clear sky appears where it sets, becoming larger and larger, until at 7 o'clock the dark clouds are alone over Monte Nero; Venus shines bright in the clear azure, and the trunks of the trees are tinged with the silvery light of the rising moon. Write, and read Villani. Shelley returns with Medwin. Read *Sismondi*.

Of Tom Medwin, Shelley's cousin and great admirer, who now for the first time appeared on the scene, they were to see, if anything, more than they wished.

He was a lieutenant on half-pay, late of the 8th [Pg 271] Dragoons; much addicted to literature, and with no mean opinion of his own powers in that line.

*Journal, Tuesday, October 24.*—Rainy night and morning; it does not rain in the afternoon. Shelley and Medwin go to Pisa. Walk; write.

*Wednesday, October 25.*—Rain all night. The banks of the Serchio break, and by dark all the baths are overflowed. Water four feet deep in our house. “The weather fine.”

This flood brought their stay at the Baths to a sudden end. As soon as they could get lodgings they returned to Pisa. Here, not long after, Medwin fell ill, and was six weeks invalided in their house. They showed him the greatest kindness; Shelley nursing him like a brother. His society was, for a time, a tolerably pleasant change; he knew Spanish, and read with Shelley a great deal in that language, but he had no depth or breadth of mind, and his literary vanity and egotism made him at last what Mary Shelley described as a *seccatura*, for which the nearest English equivalent is, a bore.

*Journal, Sunday, November 12.*—Percy’s birthday. A divine day; sunny and cloudless; somewhat cold in the evening. It would be pleasant enough living in Pisa if one had a carriage and could escape from one’s house to the country without mingling with the inhabitants, but the Pisans and the Scolari, in short, the whole population, are such that it would sound strange to an English person if I attempted to express what I feel concerning them—crawling and crab-like through their sapping streets. Read *Corinne*. Write.

*Monday, November 13.*—Finish *Corinne*. Write. My eyes keep me from all study; this is very provoking.

[Pg 272]*Tuesday, November 14.*—Write. Read Homer, Targione, and Spanish. A rainy day. Shelley reads Calderon.

*Thursday, November 23.*—Write. Read Greek and Spanish. Medwin ill. Play at chess.

*Friday, November 24.*—Read Greek, Villani, and Spanish with M.... Pacchiani in the evening. A rainy and cloudy day.

*Friday, December 1.*—Read Greek, *Don Quixote*, Calderon, and Villani. Pacchiani comes in the evening. Visit La Viviani. Walk. Sgricci is introduced. Go to a *funzione* on the death of a student.

*Saturday, December 2.*—Write an Italian letter to Hunt. Read *Ædipus*, *Don Quixote*, and Calderon. Pacchiani and a Greek prince call—Prince Mavrocordato.

In these few entries occur four new and remarkable names. Pacchiani, who had been, if he was not still, a university professor, but who was none the less an adventurer and an impostor; in orders, moreover, which only served as a cloak for his hypocrisy;

clever withal, and eloquent; well knowing where, and how, to ingratiate himself. He amused, but did not please the Shelleys. He was, however, one of those people who know everybody, and through him they made several acquaintances; among them the celebrated Improvisatore, Sgricci, and the young Greek statesman and patriot, Prince Alexander Mavrocordato. With the improvisations of Sgricci, his eloquence, his *entrain*, both Mary and Clare were fairly carried away with excitement. Older, experienced folk looked with a more critical eye on his performances, but to these English girls the [Pg 273] exhibition was an absolute novelty, and seemed inspired. Sgricci was during this winter a frequent visitor at "Casa Galetti."

Prince Mavrocordato proved deeply interesting, both to Mary and Shelley. He "was warmed by those aspirations for the independence of his country which filled the hearts of many of his countrymen," and in the revolution which, shortly afterwards, broke out there, he was to play an important part, as one of the foremost of modern Greek statesmen. To him, at a somewhat later date, was dedicated Shelley's lyrical drama of *Hellas*; "as an imperfect token of admiration, sympathy, and friendship."

This new acquaintance came to Mary just when her interest in the Greek language and literature was most keen. Before long the prince had volunteered to help her in her studies, and came often to give her Greek lessons, receiving instruction in English in return.

"Do you not envy my luck," she wrote to Mrs. Gisborne, "that having begun Greek, an amiable, young, agreeable, and learned Greek prince comes every morning to give me a lesson of an hour and a half. This is the result of an acquaintance with Pacchiani. So you see, even the Devil has his use."

The acquaintance with Pacchiani had already had another and a yet more memorable result, which affected Mary none the less that it did so indirectly. Through him they had come to know [Pg 274] Emilia Viviani, the noble and beautiful Italian girl, immured by her father in a convent at Pisa until such time as a husband could be found for her who would take a wife without a dowry. Shelley's acquaintance with Emilia was an episode, which at one time looked like an era, in his existence. An era in his poetry it undoubtedly was, since it is to her that the *Epipsychidion* is addressed.

Mary and Clare were the first to see the lovely captive, and were struck with astonishment and admiration. But on Shelley the impression she made was overwhelming, and took possession of his whole nature. Her extraordinary beauty and grace, her powers of mind and conversation, warmed by that glow of genius so exclusively southern, another variety of which had captivated them all in Sgricci, and which to northern minds seems something phenomenal and inspired,—these were

enough to subdue any man, and, when added to the halo of interest shed around her by her misfortunes and her misery, made her, to Shelley, irresistible.

All his sentiments, when aroused, were passions; he pitied, he sympathised, he admired and venerated passionately; he scorned, hated, and condemned passionately too. But he never was swayed by any love that did not excite his imagination: his attachments were ever in [Pg 275]proportion to the power of idealisation evoked in him by their objects. And never, surely, was there a subject for idealisation like Emilia; the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty in the form of a goddess; the captive maiden waiting for her Deliverer; the perfect embodiment of immortal Truth and Loveliness, held in chains by the powers of cruelty, tyranny, and hypocrisy.

She was no goddess, poor Emilia, as indeed he soon found out; only a lovely young creature of vivid intelligence and a temperament in which Italian ardour was mingled with Italian subtlety; every germ of sentiment magnified and intensified in outward effect by fervour of manner and natural eloquence; the very reverse of human nature in the north, where depth of feeling is apt to be in proportion to its inveterate dislike of discovery, where warmth can rarely shake off self-consciousness, and where many of the best men and women are so much afraid of seeming a whit better than they really are, that they take pains to appear worse. Rightly balanced, the whole sum of Emilia's gifts and graces would have weighed little against Mary's nobleness of heart and unselfish devotion; her talents might not even have borne serious comparison with Clare's vivacious intellect. But to Shelley, haunted by a vision of perfection, and ever apt to recognise in a mortal image "the likeness of [Pg 276] that which is, perhaps, eternal," [38] she seemed a revelation, and, like all revelations, supreme, unique, superseding for the time every other possibility. It was a brief madness, a trance of inspiration, and its duration was counted only by days. They met for the first time early in December. By the 10th she was corresponding with him as her *diletto fratello*. Before the month was over *Epipsychidion* had been written.

Before the middle of January he could write of her—

My conception of Emilia's talents augments every day. Her moral nature is fine, but not above circumstances; yet I think her tender and true, which is always something. How many are only one of these things at a time!...

There is no reason that you should fear any admixture of that which you call *love*....

This was written to Clare. She had very quickly become intimate and confidential with Emilia, and estimated her to a nicety at her real worth, admiring her without idealising her or caring to do so. She knew Shelley pretty intimately too, and, being personally

unconcerned in the matter, could afford at once to be sympathetic and to speak her mind fearlessly; the consequence being that Shelley was unconstrained in communication with her.

That *Mary* should be his most sympathetic confidant at this juncture was not in the nature[Pg 277] of things. She, too, had begun by idealising Emilia, but her affection and enthusiastic admiration were soon outdone and might well have been quenched by Shelley's rapt devotion. She did not misunderstand him, she knew him too well for that, but the better she understood him the less it was possible for her to feel with him; nor could it have been otherwise unless she had been really as cold as she sometimes appeared. Loyal herself, she never doubted Shelley's loyalty, but she suffered, though she did not choose to show it: her love, like a woman's,—perhaps even more than most women's—was exclusive; Shelley's, like a man's,—like many of the best of men's,—inclusive.

She did not allow her feelings to interfere with her actions. She continued to show all possible sympathy and kindness to Emilia, who in return would style her her dearest, loveliest friend and sister. No wonder, however, if at times Mary could not quite overcome a slight constraint of manner, or if this was increased when her dearest sister, with sweet unconsciousness, would openly probe the wound her pride would fain have hidden from herself; when Emilia, for instance, wrote to Shelley—

Mary does not write to me. Is it possible that she loves me less than the others do? I should indeed be inconsolable at that.

[Pg 278]Or to be informed in a letter to herself that this constraint of manner had been talked over by Emilia with Shelley, who had assured her that Mary's apparent coldness was only “the ash which covered an affectionate heart.”

He was right, indeed, and his words were the faithful echo of his own true heart. He might have added, of himself, that his transient enthusiasms resembled the soaring blaze of sparks struck by a hammer from a glowing mass of molten metal.

But, in everyday prose, the situation was a trying one for Mary, and surely no wife of two and twenty could have met it more bravely and simply than she did.

“It is grievous,” she wrote to Leigh Hunt, “to see this beautiful girl wearing out the best years of her life in an odious convent, where both mind and body are sick from want of the appropriate exercise for each. I think she has great talent, if not genius; or if not an internal fountain, how could she have acquired the mastery she has of her own language, which she writes so beautifully, or those ideas which lift her so far above the rest of the Italians? She has not studied much, and now, hopeless from a five years’

confinement, everything disgusts her, and she looks with hatred and distaste even on the alleviations of her situation. Her only hope is in a marriage which her parents tell her is concluded, although she has never seen the person intended for her. Nor do I think the change of situation will be much for the better, for he is a younger brother, and will live in the house with his mother, who they say is *molto seccante*. Yet she may then have the free use of her limbs; she may then be able to walk out among the fields,[Pg 279] vineyards, and woods of her country, and see the mountains and the sky, and not as now, a dozen steps to the right, and then back to the left another dozen, which is the longest walk her convent garden affords, and that, you may be sure, she is very seldom tempted to take.”

By the middle of February Shelley was sending his poem for publication, speaking of it as the production of “a part of himself already dead.” He continued, however, to take an almost painful interest in Emilia’s fate; she, poor girl, though not the sublime creature he had thought her, was infinitely to be pitied. Before their acquaintance ended, she was turning it to practical account, after the fashion of most of Shelley’s friends, by begging for and obtaining considerable sums of money.

If Mary then indulged in a little retrospective sarcasm to her friend, Mrs. Gisborne, it is hardly wonderful. Indeed, later allusions are not wanting to show that this time was felt by her to be one of annoyance and bitterness.

Two circumstances were in her favour. She was well, and, therefore, physically able to look at things in their true light; and, during a great part of the time, Clare was away. In the previous October, during their stay at the Baths, she had at last resolved on trying to make out some sort of life for herself, and had taken a situation as governess in a Florentine family. She had come back to the Shelleys for the month of December[Pg 280] (when it was that she became acquainted with Emilia Vivani), but had returned to Florence at Christmas.

She had been persuaded to this step by the judicious Mrs. Mason, who had soon perceived the strained relations existing between Mary and Clare, and had seen, too, that the disunion was only the natural and inevitable result of circumstances. It was not only that the two girls were of opposite and jarring temperament; there was also the fact that half the suspicious mistrust with Shelley was regarded by those who did not personally know him, and the shadow of which rested on Mary too, was caused by Clare’s continued presence among them. As things were now, it might have passed without remark, but for the scandalous reports which dated back to the Marlow days, and which had recently been revived by the slanders of Paolo, although the extent of these slanders had not yet transpired. Shelley had been alive enough to the danger at

one time, but had now got accustomed and indifferent to it. He had a great affection and a great compassion for Clare; her vivacity enlivened him; he said himself that he liked her although she teased him, and he certainly missed her teasing when she was away. But Mary, to whom Clare's perpetual society was neither a solace nor a change, and who, as the mother of [Pg 281] children, could no longer look at things from a purely egotistic point of view, must have felt it positively unjust and wrong to allow their father's reputation to be sacrificed—to say nothing of her own—to what was in no wise a necessity. Shelley loved solitude—a mitigated solitude that is;—he certainly did not pine for general society. Yet many of his letters bear unmistakable evidence to the pain and resentment he felt at being universally shunned by his own countrymen, as if he were an enemy of the human race. But Mary, a woman, and only twenty-two, must have been self-sufficient indeed if, with all her mental resources, she had not required the renovation of change and contrast and varied intercourse, to keep her mind and spirit fresh and bright, and to fit her for being a companion and a resource to Shelley. That she and he were condemned to protracted isolation was partly due to Clare, and when Mary was weak and dejected, her consciousness of this became painful, and her feeling towards the sprightly, restless Miss Clairmont was touched with positive antipathy. Shelley, considering Clare the weaker party, supported her, in the main, and certainly showed no desire to have her away. He might have seen that to impose her presence on Mary in such circumstances was, in fact, as great a piece of tyranny as he had suffered from when Eliza [Pg 282] Westbrook was imposed on him. But of this he was, and he remained, perfectly unconscious. Clare ought to have retired from the field, but her dependent condition, and her wretched anxiety about Allegra, were her excuse for clinging to the only friends she had.

All this was evident to Mrs. Mason, and it was soon shown that she had judged rightly, as the relations between Mary and Clare became cordial and natural once they were relieved from the intolerable friction of daily companionship.

During this time of excitement and unrest one new acquaintance had, however, begun, which circumstances were to develop into a close and intimate companionship.

In January there had arrived at Pisa a young couple of the name of Williams; mainly attracted by the desire to see and to know Shelley, of whose gifts and virtues and sufferings they had heard much from Tom Medwin, their neighbour in Switzerland the year before. Lieutenant Edward Elliker Williams had been, first, in the Navy, then in the Army; had met his wife in India, and, returning with her to England, had sold his commission and retired on half-pay. He was young, of a frank straightforward disposition and most amiable temper, modest and unpretentious, with some literary

taste, and no strong prejudices. Jane Williams was young and pretty, gentle and graceful, neither [Pg 283] very cultivated nor particularly clever, but with a comfortable absence of angles in her disposition, and an abundance of that feminine tact which prevents intellectual shortcomings from being painfully felt, and which is, in its way, a manifestation of genius. Not an uncommon type of woman, but quite new in the Shelleys' experience. At first they thought her rather wanting in animation, and Shelley was conscious of her lack of literary refinement, but these were more and more compensated for, as time went on, by her natural grace and her taste for music. "Ned" was something of an artist, and Mary Shelley sat more than once to him for her portrait. There was, in short, no lack of subjects in common, and the two young couples found a mutual pleasure in each other's society which increased in measure as they became better acquainted.

In March poor Clare received with bitter grief the intelligence that her child had been placed by Byron in a convent, at Bagnacavallo, not far from Ravenna, where he now lived. Under the sway of the Countess Guiccioli, whose father and brother were domesticated in his house, he was leading what, in comparison with his Venetian existence, was a life of respectability and virtue. His action with regard to Allegra was considered by the Shelleys as, probably, inevitable in the circumstances, but to Clare it was a terrible blow. She [Pg 284] felt more hopelessly separated from her child than ever, and she had seen enough of Italian convent education and its results to convince her that it meant moral and intellectual degradation and death. Her despairing representations to this effect were, of course, unanswered by Byron, who contented himself with a Mephistophelian sneer in showing her letter to the Hoppners.

With the true "malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison, transforming all they touch to the malignity of their own natures," [39] he had no hesitation in giving credit to the reports about Clare's life in the Shelleys' family, nor in openly implying his own belief in their probable truth.

But for this, and for one great alarm caused by the sudden and unaccountable stoppage of Shelley's income (through a mistake which happily was discovered and speedily rectified by his good friend, Horace Smith), the spring was, for Mary, peaceful and bright. She was assiduous in her Greek studies, and keenly interested in the contemporary European politics of that stirring time; as full of sympathy as Shelley himself could be with the numerous insurrectionary outbreaks in favour of liberty. And when the revolution in Greece broke out, and one bright April morning Prince Mavrocordato rushed in to announce to her [Pg 285] the proclamation of Prince Hysilantes, her elation and joy almost equalled his own.

In companionship with the Williams', aided and abetted by Henry Reveley, Shelley's old passion for boating revived. In the little ten-foot long boat procured for him for a few pauls, and then fitted up by Mr. Reveley, they performed many a voyage, on the Arno, on the canal between Pisa and Leghorn, and even on the sea. Their first trip was marked by an accident—Williams contriving to overturn the boat. Nothing daunted, Shelley declared next day that his ducking had added fire to, instead of quenching, the nautical ardour which produced it, and that he considered it a good omen to any enterprise that it began in evil, as making it more likely that it would end in good.

All these events are touched on in the few specimen extracts from Mary's journal and letters which follow—

*Wednesday, January 31.*—Read Greek. Call on Emilia Viviani. Shelley reads the *Vita Nuova* aloud to me in the evening.

*Friday, February 2.*—Read Greek. Write. Emilia Viviani walks out with Shelley. The Opera, with the Williams' (*Il Matrimonio Segreto*).

*Tuesday, February 6.*—Read Greek. Sit to Williams. Call on Emilia Viviani. Prince Mavrocordato in the evening. A long metaphysical argument.

*Wednesday, February 7.*—Read Greek. Sit to Williams. In the evening the Williams', Prince Mavrocordato, and Mr. Taafe.

[Pg 286]*Monday, February 12.*—Read Greek (no lesson). Finish the *Vita Nuova*. In the afternoon call on Emilia Viviani. Walk. Mr. Taafe calls.

*Thursday, February 27.*—Read Greek. The Williams to dine with us. Walk with them. Il Diavolo Pacchiani calls. Shelley reads "The Ancient Mariner" aloud.

*Saturday, March 4.*—Read Greek (no lesson). Walk with the Williams'. Read Horace with Shelley in the evening. A delightful day.

*Sunday, March 5.*—Read Greek. Write letters. The Williams' to dine with us. Walk with them. Williams relates his history. They spend the evening with us, with Prince Mavrocordato and Mr. Taafe.

*Thursday, March 8.*—Read Greek (no lesson). Call on Emilia Viviani. E. Williams calls. Shelley reads *The Case is Altered* of Ben Jonson aloud in the evening. A mizzling day and rainy night.... March winds and rains are begun, the last puff of winter's breath,—the eldest tears of a coming spring; she ever comes in weeping and goes out smiling.

*Monday, March 12.*—Read Greek (no lesson). Finish the *Defence of Poetry*. Copy for Shelley; he reads to me the *Tale of a Tub*. A delightful day after a misty morning.

*Wednesday, March 14.*—Read Greek (no lesson). Copy for Shelley. Walk with Williams. Prince Mavrocordato in the evening. I have an interesting conversation with him concerning Greece. The second bulletin of the Austrians published. A sirocco, but a pleasant evening,

*Friday, March 16.*—Read Greek. Copy for Shelley. Walk with Williams. Mrs. Williams confined. News of the Revolution of Piedmont, and the taking of the citadel of Candia by the Greeks. A beautiful day, but not hot.

*Sunday, March 18.*—Read Greek. Copy for Shelley. A sirocco and mizzle. Bad news from Naples. Walk with Williams. Prince Mavrocordato in the evening.

*Monday, March 26.*—Read Greek. Alex. Mavrocordato. Finish the *Antigone*. A mizzling day. Spend the evening at the Williams'.

[Pg 287]*Wednesday, March 28.*—Read Greek. Alex. Mavrocordato. Call on Emilia Viviani. Walk with Williams. Mr. Taafe in the evening. A fine day, though changeful as to clouds and wind. The State of Massa declares the Constitution. The Piedmontese troops are at Sarzana.

*Sunday, April 1.*—Read Greek. Alex. Mavrocordato calls with news about Greece. He is as gay as a caged eagle just free. Call on Emilia Viviani. Walk with Williams; he spends the evening with us.

*Monday, April 2.*—Read Greek. Alex. Mavrocordato calls with the proclamation of Ipsilanti. Write to him. Ride with Shelley into the Cascini. A divine day, with a north-west wind. The theatre in the evening. Tachinardi.

*Wednesday, April 11.*—Read Greek, and *Osservatore Fiorentino*. A letter that overturns us. [40] Walk with Shelley. In the evening Williams and Alex. Mavrocordato.

*Friday, April 13.*—Read Greek. Alex. Mavrocordato calls. *Osservatore Fiorentino*. Walk with the Williams'. Shelley at Casa Silva in the evening. An explanation of our difficulty.

*Monday, April 16.*—Write. Targioni. Read Greek. Mrs. Williams to dinner. In the evening Mr. Taafe. A wet morning: in the afternoon a fierce maestrone. Shelley, Williams, and Henry Reveley try to come up the canal to Pisa; miss their way, are capsized, and sleep at a contadino's.

*Tuesday, April 24.*—Read Greek. Alex. Mavrocordato. Hume. Villani. Walk with the Williams'. Alex. M. calls in the evening, with good news from Greece. The Morea free.

They now migrated once more to the beautiful neighbourhood of the Baths of San Giuliano di Pisa; the Williams' established themselves at Pugnano, only four miles off:

the canal fed by the Serchio ran between the two places, and the little boat was in constant requisition.

[Pg 288]Our boat is asleep on Serchio's stream,  
Its sails are folded like thoughts in a dream,  
The helm sways idly, hither and thither;  
Dominic, the boatman, has brought the mast,  
And the oars, and the sails; but 'tis sleeping fast,  
Like a beast, unconscious of its tether. [\[41\]](#)

The canal which, fed by the Serchio, was, though an artificial, a full and picturesque stream, making its way under verdant banks, sheltered by trees that dipped their boughs into the murmuring waters. By day, multitudes of ephemera darted to and fro on the surface; at night, the fireflies came out among the shrubs on the banks; the *cicale*, at noonday, kept up their hum; the *aziola* cooed in the quiet evening. It was a pleasant summer, bright in all but Shelley's health and inconstant spirits; yet he enjoyed himself greatly, and became more and more attached to the part of the country where chance appeared to cast us. Sometimes he projected taking a farm, situated on the height of one of the near hills, surrounded by chestnut and pine woods and overlooking a wide extent of country; or of settling still further in the maritime Apennines, at Massa. Several of his slighter and unfinished poems were inspired by these scenes, and by the companions around us. It is the nature of that poetry, however, which overflows from the soul, oftener to express sorrow and regret than joy; for it is when oppressed by the weight of life and away from those he loves, that the poet has recourse to the solace of expression in verse. [\[42\]](#)

*Journal, Thursday, May 3.*—Read Villani. Go out in boat; call on Emilia Viviani. Walk with Shelley. In the evening Alex. Mavrocordato, Henry Reveley, Dancelli, and Mr. Taafe.

*Friday, May 4.*—Read Greek. (Alex. M.) Read Villani. Shelley goes to Leghorn by sea with Henry Reveley.

[Pg 289]*Tuesday, May 8.*—Packing. Read Greek (Alex. Mavrocordato). Shelley goes to Leghorn. In the evening walk with Alex. M. to Pugnano. See the Williams; return to the Baths. Shelley and Henry Reveley come. The weather quite April; rain and sunshine, and by no means warm.

*Saturday, June 23.*—Abominably cold weather—rain, wind, and cloud—quite an Italian November or a Scotch May. Shelley and Williams go to Leghorn. Write. Read and finish

Malthus. Begin the answer. [\[43\]](#) Jane (Williams) spends the day here, and Edward returns in the evening. Read Greek.

*Sunday, June 24.*—Write. Read the *Answer to Malthus*. Finish it. Shelley at Leghorn.

*Monday, June 25.*—Little babe not well. Shelley returns. The Williams call. Read old plays. Vaccà calls.

*Tuesday, June 26.*—Babe well. Write. Read Greek. Shelley not well. Mr. Taafe and Granger dine with us. Walk with Shelley. Vaccà calls. Alex. Mavrocordato sails.

*Thursday, June 28.*—Write. Read Greek. Read Mackenzie's works. Go to Pugnano in the boat. The warmest day this month. Fireflies in the evening.

They were near enough to Pisa to go over there from time to time to see Emilia and other friends, and for Prince Mavrocordato to come frequently and give them the latest political news: the Greek lessons had been voluntarily abjured by Mary when it seemed probable that the Prince might be summoned at any moment to play an active part in the affairs of his country, as actually happened in June. Shelley was still tormented by the pain in his side, but his health and spirits were insensibly improving, as he himself [Pg 290] afterwards admitted. He was occupied in writing *Hellas*; his elegy on Keats's death, *Adonais* also belongs to this time. Ned Williams, infected by the surrounding atmosphere of literature, had tried his 'prentice hand on a drama. In the words of his own journal—

Went in the summer to Pugnano—passed the first three months in writing a play entitled *The Promise, or a year, a month, and a day*. S. tells me if they accept it he has great hopes of its success before an audience, and his hopes always enliven mine.

Mary was straining every nerve to finish *Valperga*, in the hope of being able to send it to England by the Gisbornes, who were preparing to leave Italy,—a hope, however, which was not fulfilled.

Mary to Mrs. Gisborne.

Baths of S. Giuliano,  
*30th June 1821.*

My dear Mrs. Gisborne—Well, how do you get on? Mr. Gisborne says nothing of that in the note which he wrote yesterday, and it is that in which I am most interested.

I pity you exceedingly in all the disagreeable details to which you are obliged to sacrifice your time and attention. I can conceive no employment more tedious; but now I hope it is nearly over, and that as the fruit of its conclusion you will soon come to

see us. Shelley is far from well; he suffers from his side and nervous irritation. The day on which he returned from Leghorn he found little Percy ill of a fever produced by teething. He got well the next day, but it was so strong while it lasted that it frightened us greatly. You know how much reason we have to fear the deceitful appearance of [Pg 291] perfect health. You see that this, your last summer in Italy, is manufactured on purpose to accustom you to the English seasons.

It is warmer now, but we still enjoy the delight of cloudy skies. The "Creator" has not yet made himself heard. I get on with my occupation, and hope to finish the rough transcript this month. I shall then give about a month to corrections, and then I shall transcribe it. It has indeed been a child of mighty slow growth since I first thought of it in our library at Marlow. I then wanted the body in which I might embody my spirit. The materials for this I found at Naples, but I wanted other books. Nor did I begin it till a year afterwards at Pisa; it was again suspended during our stay at your house, and continued again at the Baths. All the winter I did not touch it, but now it is in a state of great forwardness, since I am at page 71 of the third volume. It has indeed been a work of some labour, since I have read and consulted a great many books. I shall be very glad to read the first volume to you, that you may give me your opinion as to the conduct and interest of the story. June is now at its last gasp. You talked of going in August, I hope therefore that we may soon expect you. Have you heard anything concerning the inhabitants of Skinner Street? It is now many months since I received a letter, and I begin to grow alarmed. Adieu.—Ever sincerely yours,

Mary W. S.

On the 26th of July the Gisbornes came to pay their friends a short farewell visit; on the 29th they started for England; Shelley going with them as far as Florence, where he and Mary thought again of settling for the winter, and where he wished to make inquiries about houses. During his few days' absence the Williams' were almost constantly with Mary. Edward Williams was busy painting a portrait of her in miniature, [Pg 292]intended by her as a surprise for Shelley on his birthday, the 4th of August. But when that day arrived Shelley was unavoidably absent. On his return to the Baths he had found a letter from Lord Byron, with a pressing invitation to visit him at Ravenna, whence Byron was on the point of departing to join Countess Guiccioli and her family, who had been exiled from the Roman States for Carbonarism, and who, for the present, had taken refuge at Florence.

Shelley's thoughts turned at once, as they could not but do, to poor little Allegra, in her convent of Bagnacavallo. What was to become of her? Where would or could she be sent? or was she to be conveniently forgotten and left behind? He was off next day,

the 3d; paid a flying visit to Clare, who was staying for her health at Leghorn, and arrived at Ravenna on the 6th.

The miniature was finished and ready for him on his birthday. Mary, alone on that anniversary, was fain to look back over the past eventful seven years,—their joys, their sorrows, their many changes. Not long before, she had said, in a letter to Clare, “One is not gay, at least I am not, but peaceful, and at peace with all the world.” The same tone characterises the entry in her journal for 4th August.

Shelley’s birthday. Seven years are now gone; what changes! what a life! We now appear tranquil, yet who [Pg 293] knows what wind—but I will not prognosticate evil; we have had enough of it. When Shelley came to Italy I said, all is well, if it were permanent; it was more passing than an Italian twilight. I now say the same. May it be a Polar day, yet that, too, has an end.

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[Pg 294]

## CHAPTER XIV

August-November 1821

From Bologna Shelley wrote to Mary an amusing account of his journey, so far. But this letter was speedily followed by another, written within a few hours of his arrival at Ravenna; a letter, this second one, to make Mary’s blood run cold, although it is expressed with all the calmness and temperance that Shelley could command.

Ravenna, *7th August 1821*.

My dearest Mary—I arrived last night at 10 o’clock, and sate up talking with Lord Byron until 5 this morning. I then went to sleep, and now awake at 11, and having despatched my breakfast as quick as possible, mean to devote the interval until 12, when the post departs, to you.

Lord Byron is very well, and was delighted to see me. He has, in fact, completely recovered his health, and lives a life totally the reverse of that which he led at Venice. He has a permanent sort of *liaison* with Contessa Guiccioli, who is now at Florence, and seems from her letters to be a very amiable woman. She is waiting there until something shall be decided as to their emigration to Switzerland or stay in Italy, which

is yet undetermined on either side. She was compelled to escape from the Papal territory in great haste, as measures had already been taken to place her in a convent, where she [Pg 295] would have been unrelentingly confined for life. The oppression of the marriage contract, as existing in the laws and opinions of Italy, though less frequently exercised, is far severer than that of England. I tremble to think of what poor Emilia is destined to.

Lord Byron had almost destroyed himself in Venice; his state of debility was such that he was unable to digest any food; he was consumed by hectic fever, and would speedily have perished, but for this attachment, which has reclaimed him from the excesses into which he threw himself, from carelessness rather than taste. Poor fellow! he is now quite well, and immersed in politics and literature. He has given me a number of the most interesting details on the former subject, but we will not speak of them in a letter. Fletcher is here, and as if, like a shadow, he waxed and waned with the substance of his master, Fletcher also has recovered his good looks, and from amidst the unseasonable gray hairs a fresh harvest of flaxen locks has put forth.

We talked a great deal of poetry and such matters last night, and, as usual, differed, and I think more than ever. He affects to patronise a system of criticism fit for the production of mediocrity, and, although all his fine poems and passages have been produced in defiance of this system, yet I recognise the pernicious effects of it in the *Doge of Venice*, and it will cramp and limit his future efforts, however great they may be, unless he gets rid of it. I have read only parts of it, or rather, he himself read them to me, and gave me the plan of the whole.

Allegra, he says, is grown very beautiful, but he complains that her temper is violent and imperious. He has no intention of leaving her in Italy; indeed, the thing is too improper in itself not to carry condemnation along with it. Contessa Guiccioli, he says, is very fond of her; indeed, I cannot see why she should not take care of it, if she is to live as his ostensible mistress. All this I shall know more of soon.

Lord Byron has also told me of a circumstance that shocks me exceedingly, because it exhibits a degree of desperate and wicked malice, for which I am at a loss to account. When [Pg 296] I hear such things my patience and my philosophy are put to a severe proof, whilst I refrain from seeking out some obscure hiding-place, where the countenance of man may never meet me more. It seems that *Elise*, actuated either by some inconceivable malice for our dismissing her, or bribed by my enemies, has persuaded the Hoppners of a story so monstrous and incredible that they must have been prone to believe any evil to have believed such assertions upon such evidence. Mr. Hoppner wrote to Lord Byron to state this story as the reason why he declined any

further communications with us, and why he advised him to do the same. Elise says that Claire was my mistress; that is very well, and so far there is nothing new; all the world has heard so much, and people may believe or not believe as they think good. She then proceeds further to say that Claire was with child by me; that I gave her the most violent medicine to procure abortion; that this not succeeding she was brought to bed, and that I immediately tore the child from her and sent it to the Foundling Hospital,—I quote Mr. Hoppner's words,—and this is stated to have taken place in the winter after we left Este. In addition, she says that both Claire and I treated you in the most shameful manner; that I neglected and beat you, and that Claire never let a day pass without offering you insults of the most violent kind, in which she was abetted by me.

As to what Reviews and the world say, I do not care a jot, but when persons who have known me are capable of conceiving of me—not that I have fallen into a great error, as would have been the living with Claire as my mistress—but that I have committed such unutterable crimes as destroying or abandoning a child, and that my own! Imagine my despair of good! Imagine how it is possible that one of so weak and sensitive a nature as mine can run further the gauntlet through this hellish society of men! *You* should write to the Hoppners a letter refuting the charge, in case you believe and know, and can prove that it is false, stating the grounds and proof of your belief. I need not dictate what you should say, nor, I hope, inspire you with warmth to rebut a charge which you [Pg 297] only can effectually rebut. If you will send the letter to me here, I will forward it to the Hoppners. Lord Byron is not up. I do not know the Hoppners' address, and I am anxious not to lose a post.

P. B. S.

Mary's feelings on the perusal of this letter may be faintly imagined by those who read it now, and who know what manner of woman she actually was. They are expressed, as far as they could be expressed, in the letter which, in accordance with Shelley's desire, and while still smarting under the first shock of grief and profound indignation, she wrote off to Mrs. Hoppner, and enclosed in a note to Shelley himself.

Mary to Shelley.

My dear Shelley—Shocked beyond all measure as I was, I instantly wrote the enclosed. If the task be not too dreadful, pray copy it for me; I cannot.

Read that part of your letter that contains the accusation. I tried, but I could not write it. I think I could as soon have died. I send also Elise's last letter: enclose it or not, as you think best.

I wrote to you with far different feelings last night, beloved friend, our barque is indeed “tempest tost,” but love me as you have ever done, and God preserve my child to me, and our enemies shall not be too much for us. Consider well if Florence be a fit residence for us. I love, I own, to face danger, but I would not be imprudent.

Pray get my letter to Mrs. Hoppner copied for a thousand reasons. Adieu, dearest! Take care of yourself—all yet is well. The shock for me is over, and I now despise the slander; but it must not pass uncontradicted. I sincerely thank Lord Byron for his kind unbelief.—Affectionately yours,

M. W. S.

[Pg 298]Do not think me imprudent in mentioning E.’s [\[44\]](#) illness at Naples. It is well to meet facts. They are as cunning as wicked. I have read over my letter; it is written in haste, but it were as well that the first burst of feeling should be expressed.

*Pisa, 10th August 1821.*

My dear Mrs. Hoppner—After a silence of nearly two years I address you again, and most bitterly do I regret the occasion on which I now write. Pardon me that I do not write in French; you understand English well, and I am too much impressed to shackle myself in a foreign language; even in my own my thoughts far outrun my pen, so that I can hardly form the letters. I write to defend him to whom I have the happiness to be united, whom I love and esteem beyond all living creatures, from the foulest calumnies; and to you I write this, who were so kind, and to Mr. Hoppner, to both of whom I indulged the pleasing idea that I have every reason to feel gratitude. This is indeed a painful task. Shelley is at present on a visit to Lord Byron at Ravenna, and I received a letter from him to-day, containing accounts that make my hand tremble so much that I can hardly hold the pen. It tells me that Elise wrote to you, relating the most hideous stories against him, and that you have believed them. Before I speak of these falsehoods, permit me to say a few words concerning this miserable girl. You well know that she formed an attachment with Paolo when we proceeded to Rome, and at Naples their marriage was talked of. We all tried to dissuade her; we knew Paolo to be a rascal, and we thought so well of her. An accident led me to the knowledge that without marrying they had formed a connection. She was ill; we sent for a doctor, who said there was danger of a miscarriage, I would not throw the girl on the world without in some degree binding her to this man. We had them married at Sir R. A. Court’s. She left us, turned Catholic at Rome, married him, and then went to Florence. After the disastrous death of my [\[Pg 299\]](#) child we came to Tuscany. We have

seen little of them, but we have had knowledge that Paolo has formed a scheme of extorting money from Shelley by false accusations. He has written him threatening letters, saying that he would be the ruin of him, etc. We placed them in the hands of a celebrated lawyer here, who has done what he can to silence him. Elise has never interfered in this, and indeed the other day I received a letter from her, entreating, with great professions of love, that I would send her money. I took no notice of this, but although I know her to be in evil hands, I would not believe that she was wicked enough to join in his plans without proof. And now I come to her accusations, and I must indeed summon all my courage whilst I transcribe them, for tears will force their way, and how can it be otherwise?

You know Shelley, you saw his face, and could you believe them? Believe them only on the testimony of a girl whom you despised? I had hoped that such a thing was impossible, and that although strangers might believe the calumnies that this man propagated, none who had ever seen my husband could for a moment credit them.

He says Claire was Shelley's mistress, that—upon my word I solemnly assure you that I cannot write the words. I send you a part of Shelley's letter that you may see what I am now about to refute, but I had rather die than copy anything so vilely, so wickedly false, so beyond all imagination fiendish.

But that you should believe it! That my beloved Shelley should stand thus slandered in your minds—he, the gentlest and most humane of creatures—is more painful to me, oh! far more painful than words can express. Need I say that the union between my husband and myself has ever been undisturbed? Love caused our first imprudence—love, which, improved by esteem, a perfect trust one in the other, a confidence and affection which, visited as we have been by severe calamities (have we not lost two children?), has increased daily and knows no bounds. I will add that Claire has been separated from us for about a year. She lives with a respectable German family at Florence. The reasons for this[Pg 300] were obvious: her connection with us made her manifest as the Miss Clairmont, the mother of Allegra; besides we live much alone, she enters much into society there, and, solely occupied with the idea of the welfare of her child, she wished to appear such that she may not be thought in after times to be unworthy of fulfilling the maternal duties. You ought to have paused before you tried to convince the father of her child of such unheard-of atrocities on her part. If his generosity and knowledge of the world had not made him reject the slander with the ridicule it deserved, what irretrievable mischief you would have occasioned her. Those who know me well believe my simple word—it is not long ago that my father said in a letter to me that he had never known me utter a falsehood,—but you, easy as you have been to credit evil, who may be more deaf to truth—to you I swear by all that I hold

sacred upon heaven and earth, by a vow which I should die to write if I affirmed a falsehood,—I swear by the life of my child, by my blessed, beloved child, that I know the accusations to be false. But I have said enough to convince you, and are you not convinced? Are not my words the words of truth? Repair, I conjure you, the evil you have done by retracting your confidence in one so vile as Elise, and by writing to me that you now reject as false every circumstance of her infamous tale.

You were kind to us, and I will never forget it; now I require justice. You must believe me, and do me, I solemnly entreat you, the justice to confess you do so.

Mary W. Shelley.

I send this letter to Shelley at Ravenna, that he may see it, for although I ought, the subject is too odious to me to copy it. I wish also that Lord Byron should see it; he gave no credit to the tale, but it is as well that he should see how entirely fabulous it is.

Shelley, meanwhile, never far from her in thought, and knowing only too well how acutely she would suffer from all this, was writing to her again.

[Pg 301]Shelley to Mary.

My dearest Mary—I wrote to you yesterday, and I begin another letter to-day without knowing exactly when I can send it, as I am told the post only goes once a week. I daresay the subject of the latter half of my letter gave you pain, but it was necessary to look the affair in the face, and the only satisfactory answer to the calumny must be given by you, and could be given by you alone. This is evidently the source of the violent denunciations of the *Literary Gazette*, in themselves contemptible enough, and only to be regarded as effects which show us their cause, which, until we put off our mortal nature, we never despise—that is, the belief of persons who have known and seen you that you are guilty of crimes. A certain degree and a certain kind of infamy is to be borne, and, in fact, is the best compliment which an exalted nature can receive from a filthy world, of which it is its hell to be a part, but this sort of thing exceeds the measure, and even if it were only for the sake of our dear Percy, I would take some pains to suppress it. In fact it shall be suppressed, even if I am driven to the disagreeable necessity of prosecuting him before the Tuscan tribunals....

.....

Write to me at Florence, where I shall remain a day at least, and send me letters, or news of letters. How is my little darling? and how are you, and how do you get on with your book? Be severe in your corrections, and expect severity from me, your sincere admirer. I flatter myself you have composed something unequalled in its kind, and

that, not content with the honours of your birth and your hereditary aristocracy, you will add still higher renown to your name. Expect me at the end of my appointed time. I do not think I shall be detained. Is Claire with you? or is she coming? Have you heard anything of my poor Emilia, from whom I got a letter the day of my departure, saying that her marriage was deferred for a very short time, on account of the illness [Pg 302] of her Sposo? How are the Williams', and Williams especially? Give my very kindest love to them.

Lord Byron has here splendid apartments in the house of his mistress's husband, who is one of the richest men in Italy. *She* is divorced, with an allowance of 1200 crowns a year—a miserable pittance from a man who has 120,000 a year. Here are two monkeys, five cats, eight dogs, and ten horses, all of whom (except the horses) walk about the house like the masters of it. Tita, the Venetian, is here, and operates as my valet; a fine fellow, with a prodigious black beard, and who has stabbed two or three people, and is one of the most good-natured-looking fellows I ever saw.

We have good rumours of the Greeks here, and a Russian war. I hardly wish the Russians to take any part in it. My maxim is with Æschylus: τὸ δυσσεβές—μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει, σφετέρῃ δ' εἰκότα γέννῃ.

.....

There is a Greek exercise for you. How should slaves produce anything but tyranny, even as the seed produces the plant? Adieu, dear Mary.—Yours affectionately,

S.

At Ravenna there was only a weekly post. Shelley had to wait a long time for Mary's answer, and before it could reach him he was writing to her yet a third time. His mind was now full of Allegra. She was not to be left alone in Italy. Shelley, enlightened by Emilia Viviani, had been able to give Byron, on the subject of convents, such information as to “shake his faith in the purity of these receptacles.” But no conclusions of any sort had been arrived at as to her future; and Shelley entreated Mary to rack her brains, to inquire of all her friends, to leave no stone unturned, if by any possibility she could find some [Pg 303] fitting asylum, some safe home for the lovely child. He had been to see the little girl at her convent, and all readers of his letters know the description of the fairy creature, who, with her “contemplative seriousness, mixed with excessive vivacity, seemed a thing of a higher and a finer order” than the children around her; happy and well cared for, as far as he could judge; pale, but lovelier and livelier than ever, and full of childish glee and fun.

At this point of his letter Mary's budget arrived, and Shelley continued as follows—

Ravenna, *Thursday*.

I have received your letter with that to Mrs. Hoppner. I do not wonder, my dearest friend, that you should have been moved. I was at first, but speedily regained the indifference which the opinion of anything or anybody, except our own consciousness, amply merits, and day by day shall more receive from me. I have not recopied your letter, such a measure would destroy its authenticity, but have given it to Lord Byron, who has engaged to send it with his own comments to the Hoppners. People do not hesitate, it seems, to make themselves panders and accomplices to slander, for the Hoppners had exacted from Lord Byron that these accusations should be concealed from *me*: Lord Byron is not a man to keep a secret, good or bad, but in openly confessing that he has not done so he must observe a certain delicacy, and therefore wished to send the letter himself, and, indeed, this adds weight to your representations. Have you seen the article in the *Literary Gazette* on me? They evidently allude to some story of this kind. However cautious the Hoppners have been in preventing the calumniated person from asserting his justification, you know too much of the world not to be certain that this was the utmost limit of their caution. So much for nothing.

[Pg 304] Lord Byron is immediately coming to Pisa. He will set off the moment I can get him a house. Who would have imagined this?... What think you of remaining at Pisa? The Williams' would probably be induced to stay there if we did; Hunt would certainly stay, at least this winter, near us, should he emigrate at all; Lord Byron and his Italian friends would remain quietly there; and Lord Byron has certainly a very great regard for us. The regard of such a man is worth some of the tribute we must pay to the base passions of humanity in any intercourse with those within their circle; he is better worth it than those on whom we bestow it from mere custom.

The Masons are there, and, as far as solid affairs are concerned, are my friends. I allow this is an argument for Florence. Mrs. Mason's perversity is very annoying to me, especially as Mr. Tighe is seriously my friend. This circumstance makes me averse from that intimate continuation of intercourse which, once having begun, I can no longer avoid.

At Pisa I need not distil my water, if I *can* distil it anywhere. Last winter I suffered less from my painful disorder than the winter I spent in Florence. The arguments for Florence you know, and they are very weighty; judge (*I know you like the job*) which scale is overbalanced. My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the flood-gates of the world. I would read no reviews

and talk with no authors. If I dared trust my imagination, it would tell me that there are one or two chosen companions besides yourself whom I should desire. But to this I would not listen. Where two or three are gathered together the devil is among them, and good far more than evil impulses, love far more than hatred, has been to me, except as you have been its object, the source of all sorts of mischief. So on this plan I would be *alone*, and would devote either to oblivion or to future generations the overflowings of a mind which, timely withdrawn from the contagion, should be kept fit for no baser[Pg 305] object. But this it does not appear that we shall do. The other side of the alternative (for a medium ought not to be adopted) is to form for ourselves a society of our own class, as much as possible, in intellect or in feelings, and to connect ourselves with the interests of that society. Our roots never struck so deeply as at Pisa, and the transplanted tree flourishes not. People who lead the lives which we led until last winter are like a family of Wahabee Arabs pitching their tent in the midst of London. We must do one thing or the other,—for yourself, for our child, for our existence. The calumnies, the sources of which are probably deeper than we perceive, have ultimately for object the depriving us of the means of security and subsistence. You will easily perceive the gradations by which calumny proceeds to pretext, pretext to persecution, and persecution to the ban of fire and water. It is for this, and not because this or that fool, or the whole court of fools, curse and rail, that calumny is worth refuting or chastising.

P. B. S.

“So much for nothing,” indeed. When Byron made himself responsible for Mary’s letter, it was, probably, without any definite intention of withholding it from those to whom it was addressed. He may well have wished to add to this glowing denial of his own insinuations some palliating personal explanation. When, in the previous March, Clare had protested against an Italian convent education for Allegra, he had sent her letter to the Hoppners with a sneer at the “excellent grace” with which these representations came from a woman of the writer’s character and present way of life. And yet he knew Shelley,—knew him as the Hoppners could not do; he[Pg 306] knew what Shelley had done for him, for Clare, and Allegra; and to how much slander and misrepresentation he had voluntarily submitted that they might go scot-free. Byron was,—and he knew it,—the last person who should have accepted or allowed others to accept this fresh scandal without proof and without inquiry. He was ashamed of the part he had played, and reluctant to confess to the Hoppners that he had been wrong, and that his words, as often happened, had been far in advance of his knowledge or his solid convictions; but his intentions were to do the best he could. And, satisfying himself with good intentions, he put off the unwelcome day until the occasion was

past, and till, finally, the friend whose honour had been entrusted to his keeping was beyond his power to help or to harm. Shelley was dead; and how then explain to the Hoppners why the letter had not been sent before? It was “not worth while,” probably, to revive the subject in order to vindicate a mere memory, nor yet to remove an unjust and cruel stigma from the character of those who survived. However it may have been, one thing is undoubted. Mary Shelley never received any answer to her letter of protest, which, after Byron’s death, was found safe among his papers.

One more note Shelley sent to Mary from Ravenna on the subject of the promised portrait. It would not seem that the miniature was actually [Pg 307] despatched now, but as his return was so long delayed, the birthday plot had to be divulged.

*Ravenna, Tuesday, 15th August 1821.*

My dearest Love—I accept your kind present of your picture, and wish you would get it prettily framed for me. I will wear, for your sake, upon my heart this image which is ever present to my mind.

I have only two minutes to write; the post is just setting off. I shall leave the place on Thursday or Friday morning. You would forgive me for my longer stay if you knew the fighting I have had to make it so short. I need not say where my own feelings impel me.

It still remains fixed that Lord Byron should come to Tuscany, and, if possible, Pisa; but more of that to-morrow.—Your faithful and affectionate

S.

The foregoing painful episode was enough to fill Mary’s mind during the fortnight she was alone. It was well for her that she was within easy reach of cheerful friends, yet, even as it was, she could not altogether escape from bitter thoughts. Clare was at Leghorn, and had to be told of everything. Mary could not but think of the relief it would be to them all if she were to marry; a remote possibility to which she probably alludes in the following letter, written at this time to Miss Curran—

Mary Shelley to Miss Curran.

*San Giuliano, 17th August.*

My dear Miss Curran—It gives me great pain to hear of your ill-health. Will this hot summer conduce to a better state or not? I hope anxiously, when I hear from you again, [Pg 308] to learn that you are better, having recovered from your weakness, and that you have no return of your disorder. I should have answered your letter before, but we have been in the confusion of moving. We are now settled in an agreeable house at

the Baths of San Giuliano, about four miles from Pisa, under the shadow of mountains, and with delightful scenery within a walk. We go on in our old manner, with no change. I have had many changes for the worse; one might be for the better, but that is nearly impossible. Our child is well and thriving, which is a great comfort, and the Italian sky gives Shelley health, which is to him a rare and substantial enjoyment. I did [not] receive the letter you mention to have written in March, and you also have missed one of our letters in which Shelley acknowledged the receipt of the drawings you mention, and requested that the largest pyramid might be erected if they could case it with white marble for £25. However, the whole had better stand as I mentioned in my last; for, without the most rigorous inspection, great cheating would take place, and no female could detect them. When we visit Rome, we can do that which we wish. Many thanks for your kindness, which has been very great. I would send you on the books I mentioned, but we live out of the world, and I know of no conveyance. Mr. Purniance says that he sent the life of your father by sea to Rome, directed to you; so, doubtless, it is in the custom-house there.

How enraged all our mighty rulers are at the quiet revolutions which have taken place; it is said that some one said to the Grand Duke here: “Ma richiedono una costituzione qui?” “Ebene, la darò subito” was the reply; but he is not his own master, and Austria would take care that that should not be the case; they say Austrian troops are coming here, and the Tuscan ones will be sent to Germany. We take in *Galignani*, and would send them to you if you liked. I do not know what the expense would be, but I should think slight. If you recommence painting, do not forget Beatrice. I wish very much for a copy of that; you would oblige us greatly by making one. Pray let me hear of your health.[Pg 309] God knows when we shall be in Rome; circumstances must direct, and they dance about like will-o'-the-wisps, enticing and then deserting us. We must take care not to be left in a bog. Adieu, take care of yourself. Believe in Shelley's sincere wishes for your health, and in kind remembrances, and in my being ever sincerely yours,

M. W. Shelley.

Clare desires (not remembrances, if they are not pleasant), however she sends a proper message, and says she would be obliged to you, if you let her have her picture, if you could find a mode of conveying it....

Do you know we lose many letters, having spies (not Government ones) about us in plenty; they made a desperate push to do us a desperate mischief lately, but succeeded no further than to blacken us among the English; so if you receive a fresh batch (or green bag) of scandal against us, I assure you it is all a *lie*. Poor souls! we live

innocently, as you well know; if we did not, ten to one God would take pity on us, and we should not be so unfortunate.

Shelley's absence, though eventful, was, after all, a short one. In about a fortnight he was back again at the Bagni, and for a few weeks life was quiet.

On the 18th of September Mary records—

Picnic on the Pugnano Mountains; music in the evening. Sleep there.

On another occasion, wishing to find some tolerably cool seaside place where they might spend the next summer, they went,—the Shelleys and Clare,—on a two or three days' expedition of discovery to Spezzia, and were enchanted with the beauty of the bay. Clare had, shortly after, to return to her situation at Florence, but the Shelleys decided to winter at Pisa. They took a top flat in the "Tre[Pg 310] Palazzi di Chiesa," on the Lung' Arno, and spent part of October in furnishing it. They took possession about the 25th; the Williams' coming, not many days later, to occupy a lower flat in the same house. At Lord Byron's request, the Shelleys had taken for him Casa Lanfranchi, the finest palace in the Lung' Arno, just opposite the house where they themselves were established. This close juxtaposition of abodes was likely to prove somewhat inconvenient, in case of Clare's occasional presence at Tre Palazzi. Her first visit, however, to which the following characteristic letter refers, was to the Masons at Casa Silva, and it came to an end just before Byron's arrival in Pisa. Clare had been staying with the Williams' at Pugnano.

Clare to Mary.

My dear Mary—I arrived last night—won't you come and see me to-day? The Williams' wish you to forward them Mr. Webb's answer, if possible, to reach them by 2 o'clock afternoon to-day. If Mr. Webb says yes (you will open his note), send Dominico with it to them, and he passing by the Baths must order Pancani to be at Pugnano by 5 o'clock in the afternoon. If there comes no letter from Mr. Webb, they will equally come to you, and I wish you could also in that case contrive to get Pancani ordered for them, for we forgot to arrange how that could be done; if not, they will be there expecting, and perhaps get involved for the next month. I wish you to be so good as to send me immediately my large box and the clothes from the Busati, indeed all that you have of mine, for I must arrange my boxes to get them *bollate* immediately. Don't delay, and my band-box too. If you[Pg 311] could of your great bounty give me a sponge, I should be infinitely obliged to you. Then, when it is dark, and the Williams' arrived, will you ask Mr. Williams to be so good as to come and knock at Casa Silva, and I will return to spend the evening with you? Shelley won't do to fetch me, because

he looks singular in the streets. But I wish he would come now to give me some money, as I want to write to Livorno and arrange everything. Later will be inconvenient for me. Kiss the chick for me, and believe me, yours affectionately,

Clare.

*Journal.*—All October is left out, it seems.—We are at the Baths, occupied with furnishing our house, copying my novel, etc. etc.

Mary's intention was to devote any profits which might proceed from this work to the relief of her father's necessities, and the hope of being able to help him had stimulated her industry and energy while it eased her heart. She aimed at selling the copyright for £400, and Shelley opened negotiations to this effect with Ollier the publisher. His letter on the subject bears such striking testimony to the estimate he had formed of Mary's powers, and gives, besides, so complete a sketch of the novel itself, that it cannot be omitted here.

Shelley to Mr. Ollier.

Pisa, 25th September 1822.

Dear Sir—It will give me great pleasure if I can arrange the affair of Mrs. Shelley's novel with you to her and your satisfaction. She has a specific purpose in the sum which she instructed me to require, and, although this purpose could not be answered without ready money, yet I should find means to answer her wishes in that point if you could make it [Pg 312]convenient to pay one-third at Christmas, and give bills for the other two-thirds at twelve and eighteen months. It would give me peculiar satisfaction that you, rather than any other person, should be the publisher of this work; it is the product of no slight labour, and I flatter myself, of no common talent, I doubt not it will give no less credit than it will receive from your names. I trust you know me too well to believe that my judgment deliberately given in testimony of the value of any production is influenced by motives of interest or partiality.

The romance is called *Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, and is founded, not upon the novel of Machiavelli under that name, which substitutes a childish fiction for the far more romantic truth of history, but upon the actual story of his life. He was a person who, from an exile and an adventurer, after having served in the wars of England and Flanders in the reign of our Edward the Second, returned to his native city, and liberating it from its tyrants, became himself its tyrant, and died in the full splendour of his dominion, which he had extended over the half of Tuscany. He was a little

Napoleon, and with a dukedom instead of an empire for his theatre, brought upon the same all the passions and errors of his antitype. The chief interest of the romance rests upon Euthanasia, his betrothed bride, whose love for him is only equalled by her enthusiasm for the liberty of the Republic of Florence, which is in some sort her country, and for that of Italy, to which Castruccio is a devoted enemy, being an ally of the party of the Emperor. This character is a masterpiece; and the keystone of the drama, which is built up with admirable art, is the conflict between these passions and these principles. Euthanasia, the last survivor of a noble house, is a feudal countess, and her castle is the scene of the exhibition of the knightly manners of the time. The character of Beatrice, the prophetess, can only be done justice to in the very language of the author. I know nothing in Walter Scott's novels which at all approaches to the beauty and the sublimity of this—creation, I may say, for it is perfectly original; and, although founded upon the ideas and manners of the age which is represented, is wholly without [Pg 313] a similitude in any fiction I ever read. Beatrice is in love with Castruccio, and dies; for the romance, although interspersed with much lighter matter, is deeply tragic, and the shades darken and gather as the catastrophe approaches. All the manners, customs of the age, are introduced; the superstitions, the heresies, and the religious persecutions are displayed; the minutest circumstance of Italian manners in that age is not omitted; and the whole seems to me to constitute a living and moving picture of an age almost forgotten. The author visited the scenery which she describes in person; and one or two of the inferior characters are drawn from her own observation of the Italians, for the national character shows itself still in certain instances under the same forms as it wore in the time of Dante. The novel consists, as I told you before, of three volumes, each at least equal to one of the *Tales of my Landlord*, and they will be very soon ready to be sent.

No arrangement, however, was come to at this time, and early in January Mary wrote to her father, offering the work to him, and asking him, if he accepted it, to make a bargain concerning it with a publisher.

Godwin accepted the offer, and undertook the responsibility, in a letter from which the following is an extract—

*31st January 1822.*

I am much gratified by your letter of the 11th, which reached me on Saturday last; it is truly generous of you to desire that I would make use of the produce of your novel. But what can I say to it? It is against the course of nature, unless, indeed, you were actually in possession of a fortune.

.....

I said in the preface to *Mandeville* there were two or three works further that I should be glad to finish before I died. If I make use of the money from you in the way you suggest, that may enable me to complete my present work.

[Pg 314]The MS. was, accordingly, despatched to England, but was not published till many months later.

*Valperga* (as it was afterwards called) was a book of much power and more promise; very remarkable when the author's age is taken into consideration. Apart from local colouring, the interest of the tale turns on the development of the character—naturally powerful and disposed to good, but spoilt by popularity and success, and unguided by principle—of Castruccio himself; and on the contrast between him and Euthanasia, the noble and beautiful woman who sacrifices her possessions, her hopes, and her affections to the cause of fidelity and patriotism.

Beatrice, the prophetess, is one of those gifted but fated souls, who, under the persuasion that they are supernaturally inspired, mistake the ordinary impulses of human nature for Divine commands, and, finding their mistake, yet encourage themselves in what they know to be delusion till the end,—a tragic end.

There are some remarkable descriptive passages, especially one where the wandering Beatrice comes suddenly upon a house in a dreary landscape which she knows, although she has never seen it before except in a haunting dream; every detail of it is horribly familiar, and she is paralysed by the sense of imminent calamity, which, in fact, bursts upon her directly afterwards.

Euthanasia dies at sea, and the account of the[Pg 315] running down and wreck of her ship is a curious, almost prophetic, foreshadowing of the calamity by which, all too soon, Shelley was to lose his life.

The wind changed to a more northerly direction during the night, and the land-breeze of the morning filled their sails, so that, although slowly, they dropt down southward. About noon they met a Pisan vessel, who bade them beware of a Genoese squadron, which was cruising off Corsica; so they bore in nearer to the shore. At sunset that day a fierce sirocco arose, accompanied by thunder and lightning, such as is seldom seen during the winter season. Presently they saw huge dark columns descending from heaven, and meeting the sea, which boiled beneath; they were borne on by the storm, and scattered by the wind. The rain came down in sheets, and the hail clattered, as it fell to its grave in the ocean; the ocean was lashed into such waves that, many miles inland, during the pauses of the wind, the hoarse and constant murmurs of the far-off

sea made the well-housed landsman mutter one more prayer for those exposed to its fury.

Such was the storm, as it was seen from shore. Nothing more was ever known of the Sicilian vessel which bore Euthanasia. It never reached its destined port, nor were any of those on board ever after seen. The sentinels who watched near Vado, a town on the sea-beach of the Maremma, found on the following day that the waves had washed on shore some of the wrecks of a vessel; they picked up a few planks and a broken mast, round which, tangled with some of its cordage, was a white silk handkerchief, such a one as had bound the tresses of Euthanasia the night that she had embarked; and in its knot were a few golden hairs.

.....

To follow the fate of Mary's novel, it has been necessary somewhat to anticipate the history, which is resumed in the next chapter, with the journal and letters of the latter part of 1821.

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[Pg 316]

## **CHAPTER XV**

November 1821-April 1822

*Journal, Thursday, November 1.*—Go to Florence. Copy. Ride with the Guiccioli. Albé arrives.

*Sunday, November 4.*—The Williams' arrive. Copy. Call on the Guiccioli.

*Thursday, November 15.*—Copy. Read *Caleb Williams* to Jane. Ride with the Guiccioli. Shelley goes on translating Spinoza with Edward. Medwin arrives. Taafe calls. Argyropulo calls. Good news from the Greeks.

*Tuesday, November 28.*—Ride with the Guiccioli. Suffer much with rheumatism in my head.

*Wednesday, November 29.*—I mark this day because I begin my Greek again, and that is a study that ever delights me. I do not feel the bore of it, as in learning another language, although it be so difficult, it so richly repays one; yet I read little, for I am not

well. Shelley and the Williams go to Leghorn; they dine with us afterwards with Medwin. Write to Clare.

*Thursday, November 30.*—Correct the novel. Read a little Greek. Not well. Ride with the Guiccioli. The Count Pietro (Gamba) in the evening.

Mrs. Shelley to Mrs. Gisborne.

*Pisa, 30th November 1821.*

My dear Mrs. Gisborne—Although having much to do be a bad excuse for not writing to you, yet you must in some[Pg 317] sort admit this plea on my part. Here we are in Pisa, having furnished very nice apartments for ourselves, and what is more, paid for the furniture out of the fruits of two years' economy, we are at the top of the Tre Palazzi di Chiesa. I daresay you know the house, next door to La Scoto's house on the north side of Lung' Arno; but the rooms we inhabit are south, and look over the whole country towards the sea, so that we are entirely out of the bustle and disagreeable *puzzi*, etc., of the town, and hardly know that we are so enveloped until we descend into the street. The Williams' have been less lucky, though they have followed our example in furnishing their own house, but, renting it of Mr. Webb, they have been treated scurvily. So here we live, Lord Byron just opposite to us in Casa Lanfranchi (the late Signora Felichi's house). So Pisa, you see, has become a little nest of singing birds. You will be both surprised and delighted at the work just about to be published by him; his *Cain*, which is in the highest style of imaginative poetry. It made a great impression upon me, and appears almost a revelation, from its power and beauty. Shelley rides with him; I, of course, see little of him. The lady *whom he serves* is a nice pretty girl without pretensions, good hearted and amiable; her relations were banished Romagna for Carbonarism.

What do you know of Hunt? About two months ago he wrote to say that on 21st October he should quit England, and we have heard nothing more of him in any way; I expect some day he and six children will drop in from the clouds, trusting that God will temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Pray when you write, tell us everything you know concerning him. Do you get any intelligence of the Greeks? Our worthy countrymen take part against them in every possible way, yet such is the spirit of freedom, and such the hatred of these poor people for their oppressors, that I have the warmest hopes—μάντις εἶμ' ἔσθλων ἀγωνών. Mavrocordato is there, justly revered for the sacrifice he has made of his whole fortune to the cause, and besides for his firmness and talents. If Greece be free, Shelley and I have vowed to go, perhaps to settle[Pg

318] there, in one of those beautiful islands where earth, ocean, and sky form the paradise. You will, I hope, tell us all the news of our friends when you write. I see no one that you know. We live in our usual retired way, with few friends and no acquaintances. Clare is returned to her usual residence, and our tranquillity is unbroken in upon, except by those winds, sirocco or tramontana, which now and then will sweep over the ocean of one's mind and disturb or cloud its surface. Since this must be a double letter, I save myself the trouble of copying the enclosed, which was a part of a letter written to you a month ago, but which I did not send. Will you attend to my requests? Every day increases my anxiety concerning the desk. Do have the goodness to pack it off as soon as you can.

Shelley was at your hive yesterday; it is as dirty and busy as ever, so people live in the same narrow circle of space and thought, while time goes on, not as a racehorse, but a "six inside dilly," and puts them down softly at their journey's end; while they have slept and ate, and ecco *tutto*. With this piece of morality, dear Mrs. Gisborne, I end. Shelley begs every remembrance of his to be joined with mine to Mr. Gisborne and Henry.—Ever yours,

Mary W. S.

And now, my dear Mrs. Gisborne, I have a great favour to ask of you. Ollier writes to say that he has placed our two desks in the hands of a merchant of the city, and that they are to come—God knows when! Now, as we sent for them two years ago, and are tired of waiting, will you do us the favour to get them out of his hands, and to send them without delay? If they can be sent without being opened, send them *in statu quo*; if they must be opened, do not send the smallest but get a key (being a patent lock a key will cost half a guinea) made for the largest and send it, and return the other to Peacock. If you send the desk, will you send with it the following things?—A few copies of all Shelley's works, particularly of the second edition of the *Cenci*, my mother's posthumous works, and *Letters from Norway* from Peacock, if you can, but do not delay the box for them.

[Pg 319] *Journal, Sunday, December 2.*—Read the *History of Shipwrecks*. Read Herodotus with Shelley. Ride with La Guiccioli. Pietro and her in the evening.

*Monday, December 3.*—Write letters. Read Herodotus with Shelley. Finish *Caleb Williams* to Jane. Taafe calls. He says that his Turk is a very moral man, for that when he began a scandalous story he interrupted him immediately, saying, "Ah! we must never speak thus of our neighbours!" Taafe would do well to take the hint.

*Thursday, December 6.*—Read Homer. Walk with Williams. Spend the evening with them. Call on T. Guiccioli with Jane, while Taafe amuses Shelley and Edward. Read Tacitus. A dismal day.

*Friday, December 7.*—Letter from Hunt and Bessy. Walk with Shelley. Buy furniture for them, etc. Walk with Edward and Jane to the garden, and return with T. Guiccioli in the carriage. Edward reads the *Shipwreck of the Wager* to us in the evening.

*Saturday, December 8.*—Get up late and talk with Shelley. The Williams and Medwin to dinner. Walk with Edward and Jane in the garden. Return with T. Guiccioli. T. G. and Pietro in the evening. Write to Clare. Read Tacitus.

*Sunday, December 9.*—Go to church at Dr. Nott's. Walk with Edward and Jane in the garden. In the evening first Pietro and Teresa, afterwards go to the Williams'.

*Monday, December 10.*—Out shopping. Walk with the Williams and T. Guiccioli to the garden. Medwin at tea. Afterwards we are alone, and after reading a little Herodotus, Shelley reads Chaucer's *Flower and the Leaf*, and then Chaucer's *Dream* to me. A divine, cold, tramontana day.

*Monday, January 14.*—Read *Emile*. Call on T. Guiccioli and see Lord Byron. Trelawny arrives.

Edward John Trelawny, whose subsequent history was to be closely bound up with that of Shelley and of Mrs. Shelley, was of good Cornish[Pg 320] family, and had led a wandering life, full of romantic adventure. He had become acquainted with Williams and Medwin in Switzerland a year before, since which he had been in Paris and London. Tired of a town life and of society, and in order to "maintain the just equilibrium between the body and the brain," he had determined to pass the next winter hunting and shooting in the wilds of the Maremma, with a Captain Roberts and Lieutenant Williams. For the exercise of his brain, he proposed passing the summer with Shelley and Byron, boating in the Mediterranean, as he had heard that they proposed doing. Neither of the poets were as yet personally known to him, but he had lost no time in seeking their acquaintance. On the very evening of his arrival in Pisa he repaired to the Tre Palazzi, where, in the Williams' room, he first saw Shelley, and was struck speechless with astonishment.

Was it possible this mild-looking beardless boy could be the veritable monster at war with all the world? Excommunicated by the Fathers of the Church, deprived of his civil rights by the fiat of a grim Lord Chancellor, discarded by every member of his family, and denounced by the rival sages of our literature as the founder of a Satanic school? I could not believe it; it must be a hoax.

But presently, when Shelley was led to talk on a theme that interested him—the works of Calderon,—his marvellous powers of mind and command of language held Trelawny spell-bound: “After this[Pg 321] touch of his quality,” he says, “I no longer doubted his identity.”

Mrs. Shelley appeared soon after, and the visitor looked with lively curiosity at the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Such a rare pedigree of genius was enough to interest me in her, irrespective of her own merits as an authoress. The most striking feature in her face was her calm, gray eyes; she was rather under the English standard of woman’s height, very fair and light-haired; witty, social, and animated in the society of friends, though mournful in solitude; like Shelley, though in a minor degree, she had the power of expressing her thoughts in varied and appropriate words, derived from familiarity with the works of our vigorous old writers. Neither of them used obsolete or foreign words. This command of our language struck me the more as contrasted with the scanty vocabulary used by ladies in society, in which a score of poor hackneyed phrases suffice to express all that is felt or considered proper to reveal. [\[45\]](#)

Mary’s impressions of the new-comer may be gathered from her journal and her subsequent letter to Mrs. Gisborne.

*Journal, Saturday, January 19.*—Copy. Walk with Jane. The Opera in the evening. Trelawny is extravagant—*un giovane stravagante*,—partly natural, and partly, perhaps, put on, but it suits him well, and if his abrupt but not unpolished manners be assumed, they are nevertheless in unison with his Moorish face (for he looks Oriental yet not Asiatic), his dark hair, his Herculean form; and then there is an air of extreme good nature which pervades his whole countenance, especially when he smiles, which assures me that his heart is good. He tells strange stories of himself, horrific ones, so that they harrow one up, while with his emphatic but unmodulated voice, his simple[Pg 322] yet strong language, he portrays the most frightful situations; then all these adventures took place between the ages of thirteen and twenty.

I believe them now I see the man, and, tired with the everyday sleepiness of human intercourse, I am glad to meet with one who, among other valuable qualities, has the rare merit of interesting my imagination. The *crew* and Medwin dine with us.

*Sunday, January 27.*—Read Homer. Walk. Dine at the Williams’. The Opera in the evening. Ride with T. Guiccioli.

*Monday, January 28.*—The Williams breakfast with us. Go down Bocca d'Arno in the boat with Shelley and Jane. Edward and E. Trelawny meet us there; return in the gig; they dine with us; very tired.

*Tuesday, January 29.*—Read Homer and Tacitus. Ride with T. Guiccioli. E. Trelawny and Medwin to dinner. The Baron Lutzerode in the evening.

But as the torrent widens towards the ocean,  
We ponder deeply on each past emotion.

Read the first volume of the *Pirate*.

*Sunday, February 3.*—Read Homer. Walk to the garden with Jane. Return with Medwin to dinner. Trelawny in the evening. A wild day and night, some clouds in the sky in the morning, but they clear away. A north wind.

*Monday, February 4.*—Breakfast with the Williams'. Edward, Jane, and Trelawny go to Leghorn. Walk with Jane. Southey's letter concerning Lord Byron. Write to Clare. In the evening the Gambas and Taafe.

*Thursday, February 7.*—Read Homer, Tacitus, and *Emile*. Shelley and Edward depart for La Spezzia. Walk with Jane, and to the Opera with her in the evening. With E. Trelawny afterwards to Mrs. Beauclerc's ball. During a long, long evening in mixed society how often do one's sensations change, and, swiftly as the west wind drives the shadows of clouds across the sunny hill or the waving corn, so swift do sensations pass, painting—yet, oh! not disfiguring—the[Pg 323] serenity of the mind. It is then that life seems to weigh itself, and hosts of memories and imaginations, thrown into one scale, make the other kick the beam. You remember what you have felt, what you have dreamt; yet you dwell on the shadowy side, and lost hopes and death, such as you have seen it, seem to cover all things with a funeral pall.

The time that was, is, and will be, presses upon you, and, standing the centre of a moving circle, you "slide giddily as the world reels." You look to heaven, and would demand of the everlasting stars that the thoughts and passions which are your life may be as ever-living as they. You would demand of the blue empyrean that your mind might be as clear as it, and that the tears which gather in your eyes might be the shower that would drain from its profoundest depths the springs of weakness and sorrow. But where are the stars? Where the blue empyrean? A ceiling clouds that, and a thousand swift consuming lights supply the place of the eternal ones of heaven. The enthusiast suppresses her tears, crushes her opening thoughts, and.... But all is changed; some word, some look excite the lagging blood, laughter dances in the eyes, and the spirits rise proportionably high.

The Queen is all for revels, her light heart,  
Unladen from the heaviness of state,  
Bestows itself upon delightfulness.

*Friday, February 8.*—Sometimes I awaken from my visionary monotony, and my thoughts flow until, as it is exquisite pain to stop the flowing of the blood, so is it painful to check expression and make the overflowing mind return to its usual channel. I feel a kind of tenderness to those, whoever they may be (even though strangers), who awaken the train and touch a chord so full of harmony and thrilling music, when I would tear the veil from this strange world, and pierce with eagle eyes beyond the sun; when every idea, strange and changeful, is another step in the ladder by which I would climb....

Read *Emile*. Jane dines with me, walk with her. E. Trelawny and Jane in the evening. Trelawny tells us a [Pg 324] number of amusing stories of his early life. Read third canto of *L'Inferno*.

They say that Providence is shown by the extraction that may be ever made of good from evil, that we draw our virtues from our faults. So I am to thank God for making me weak. I might say, "Thy will be done," but I cannot applaud the permitter of self-degradation, though dignity and superior wisdom arise from its bitter and burning ashes.

*Saturday, February 9.*—Read *Emile*. Walk with Jane, and ride with T. Guiccioli. Dine with Jane. Taafe and T. Medwin call. I retire with E. Trelawny, who amuses me as usual by the endless variety of his adventures and conversation.

Mary to Mrs. Gisborne.

*Pisa, 9th February 1822.*

My dear Mrs. Gisborne—Not having heard from you, I am anxious about my desk. It would have been a great convenience to me if I could have received it at the beginning of the winter, but now I should like it as soon as possible. I hope that it is out of Ollier's hands. I have before said what I would have done with it. If both desks can be sent without being opened, let them be sent; if not, give the small one back to Peacock. Get a key made for the larger, and send it, I entreat you, by the very next vessel. This key will cost half a guinea, and Ollier will not give you the money, but give me credit for it, I entreat you. I pray now let me have the desk as soon as possible. Shelley is now gone to Spezzia to get houses for our colony for the summer.

It will be a large one, too large, I am afraid, for unity; yet I hope not. There will be Lord Byron, who will have a large and beautiful boat built on purpose by some English navy officers at Genoa. There will be the Countess Guiccioli and her brother; the Williams', whom you know; Trelawny, a kind of half-Arab Englishman, whose life has been as changeful as that of Anastasius, and who recounts the adventures as [Pg 325] eloquently and as well as the imagined Greek. He is clever; for his moral qualities I am yet in the dark; he is a strange web which I am endeavouring to unravel. I would fain learn if generosity is united to impetuosity, probity of spirit to his assumption of singularity and independence. He is 6 feet high, raven black hair, which curls thickly and shortly, like a Moor's, dark gray expressive eyes, overhanging brows, upturned lips, and a smile which expresses good nature and kindheartedness. His shoulders are high, like an Oriental's, his voice is monotonous, yet emphatic, and his language, as he relates the events of his life, energetic and simple, whether the tale be one of blood and horror, or of irresistible comedy. His company is delightful, for he excites me to think, and if any evil shade the intercourse, that time will unveil—the sun will rise or night darken all. There will be, besides, a Captain Roberts, whom I do not know, a very rough subject, I fancy,—a famous angler, etc. We are to have a small boat, and now that those first divine spring days are come (you know them well), the sky clear, the sun hot, the hedges budding, we sitting without a fire and the windows open, I begin to long for the sparkling waves, the olive-coloured hills and vine-shaded pergolas of Spezzia. However, it would be madness to go yet. Yet as *ceppo* was bad, we hope for a good *pasqua*, and if April prove fine, we shall fly with the swallows. The Opera here has been detestable. The English Sinclair is the *primo tenore*, and acquits himself excellently, but the Italians, after the first, have enviously selected such operas as give him little or nothing to do. We have English here, and some English balls and parties, to which I (*mirabile dictu*) go sometimes. We have Taafe, who bores us out of our senses when he comes, telling a young lady that her eyes shed flowers—why therefore should he send her any? I have sent my novel to Papa. I long to hear some news of it, as, with an author's vanity, I want to see it in print, and hear the praises of my friends. I should like, as I said when you went away, a copy of *Matilda*. It might come out with the desk. I hope as the town fills to hear better news of your plans, we long to [Pg 326] hear from you. What does Henry do? How many times has he been in love?—Ever yours,

M. W. S.

Shelley would like to see the review of the *Prometheus* in the *Quarterly*.

*Thursday, February 14.*—Read Homer and *Anastasius*. Walk with the Williams' in the evening.... "Nothing of us but what must suffer a sea-change."

This entry marks the day to which Mary referred in a letter written more than a year later, where she says—

A year ago Trelawny came one afternoon in high spirits with news concerning the building of the boat, saying, "Oh! we must all embark, all live aboard; we will all 'suffer a sea-change.'" And dearest Shelley was delighted with the quotation, saying that he would have it for the motto for his boat.

Little did they think, in their lightness of spirit, that in another year the motto of the boat would serve for the inscription on Shelley's tomb.

*Journal, Monday, February 18.*—Read Homer. Walk with the Williams'. Jane, Trelawny, and Medwin in the evening. [\[46\]](#)

*Monday, February 25.*—What a mart this world is? Feelings, sentiments,—more invaluable than gold or precious stones is the coin, and what is bought? Contempt, discontent, and disappointment, unless, indeed, the mind be loaded with drearier memories. And what say the worldly to this? Use Spartan coin, pay away iron and lead alone, and store up your[Pg 327] precious metal. But alas! from nothing, nothing comes, or, as all things seem to degenerate, give lead and you will receive clay,—the most contemptible of all lives is where you live in the world, and none of your passions or affections are brought into action. I am convinced I could not live thus, and as Sterne says that in solitude he would worship a tree, so in the world I should attach myself to those who bore the semblance of those qualities which I admire. But it is not this that I want; let me love the trees, the skies, and the ocean, and that all-encompassing spirit of which I may soon become a part,—let me in my fellow-creature love that which is, and not fix my affection on a fair form endued with imaginary attributes; where goodness, kindness, and talent are, let me love and admire them at their just rate, neither adorning nor diminishing, and above all, let me fearlessly descend into the remotest caverns of my own mind; carry the torch of self-knowledge into its dimmest recesses; but too happy if I dislodge any evil spirit, or enshrine a new deity in some hitherto uninhabited nook.

Read *Wrongs of Women* and Homer. Clare departs. Walk with Jane and ride with T. Guiccioli. T. G. dines with us.

*Thursday, February 28.*—Take leave of the Argyropolis. Walk with Shelley. Ride with T. Guiccioli. Read letters. Spend the evening at the Williams'. Trelawny there.

*Friday, March 1.*—An embassy. Walk. My first Greek lesson. Walk with Edward. In the evening work.

*Sunday, March 3.*—A note to, and a visit from, Dr. Nott. Go to church. Walk. The Williams' and Trelawny to dinner.

Mary's experiments in the way of church-going, so new a thing in her experience, and so little in accordance with Shelley's habits of thought and action, excited some surprise and comment. Hogg, Shelley's early friend, who heard of it from Mrs. [Pg 328] Gisborne, now in England, was especially shocked. In a letter to Mary, Mrs. Gisborne remarked, "Your friend Hogg is *molto scandalizzato* to hear of your weekly visits to the *piano di sotto*" (the services were held on the ground floor of the Tre Palazzi).

The same letter asks for news of Emilia Viviani. Mrs. Gisborne had heard that she was married, and feared she had been sacrificed to a man whom she describes as "that insipid, sickening Italian mortal, Danieli the lawyer." She proceeds to say—

We invited Varley one evening to meet Hogg, who was curious to see a man really believing in astrology in the nineteenth century. Varley, as usual, was not sparing of his predictions. We talked of Shelley without mentioning his name; Varley was curious, and being informed by Hogg of his exact age, but describing his person as short and corpulent, and himself as a *bon vivant*, Varley amused us with the following remarks: "Your friend suffered from ill-fortune in May or June 1815. Vexatious affairs on the 2d and 14th of June, or perhaps latter end of May 1820. The following year, disturbance about a lady. Again, last April, at 10 at night, or at noon, disturbance about a bouncing stout lady, and others. At six years of age, noticed by ladies and gentlemen for learning. In July 1799, beginning of charges made against him. In September 1800, at noon, or dusk, very violent charges. Scrape at fourteen years of age. Eternal warfare against parents and public opinion, and a great blow-up every seven years till death," etc. etc. *Is all this true?*

Not a little amused, Mary answered her friend as follows—

[Pg 329]Pisa, *7th March 1822.*

My dear Mrs. Gisborne—I am very sorry that you have so much trouble with my commissions, and vainly, too! *ma che vuole?* Ollier will not give you the money, and we are, to tell you the truth, too poor at present to send you a cheque upon our banker; two or three circumstances having caused

That climax of all human ills,  
The inflammation of our weekly bills.

But far more than that, we have not touched a quattrino of our Christmas quarter, since debts in England and other calls swallowed it entirely up. For the present, therefore, we must dispense with those things I asked you for. As for the desk, we received last post from Ollier (without a line) the bill of lading that he talks of, and, *si Dio vuole*, we shall receive it safe; the vessel in which they were shipped is not yet arrived. The worst of keeping on with Ollier (though it is the best, I believe, after all) is that you will never be able to make anything of his accounts, until you can compare the number of copies in hand with his account of their sale. As for my novel, I shipped it off long ago to my father, telling him to make the best of it; and by the way in which he answered my letter, I fancy he thinks he can make something of it. This is much better than Ollier, for I should never have got a penny from him; and, moreover, he is a very bad bookseller to publish with—*ma basta poi*, with all these *seccaturas*.

Poor dear Hunt, you will have heard by this time of the disastrous conclusion of his third embarkment; he is to try a third time in April, and if he does not succeed then, we must say that the sea is *un vero precipizio*, and let him try land. By the bye, why not consult Varley on the result? I have tried the *Sors Homeri* and the *Sors Virgilii*; the first says (I will write this Greek better, but I thought that Mr. Gisborne could read the Romaic writing, and I now quite forget what it was)—

Ἡλώμην, τείως μοι ἀδελφεὸν ἄλλος ἔπεφεν.  
ὡς δ' ὀπὸτ' Ἰασίῳ ἐϋπλόκαμος Δημήτηρ.  
Δουράτεον μέγαν ἵππον, ὅθ' ἔιατο πάντες ἄριστοι.

[Pg 330]Which first seems to say that he will come, though his brother may be prosecuted for a libel. Of the second, I can make neither head nor tail; and the third is as oracularly obscure as one could wish, for who these great people are who sat in a wooden horse, *chi lo sa?* Virgil, except the first line, which is unfavourable, is as enigmatical as Homer—

Fulgores nunc horridicos, sonitumque, metumque  
Tum leves calamos, et rasæ hastilia virgæ  
Connexosque angues, ipsamque in pectore divæ.

But to speak of predictions or anteductions, some of Varley's are curious enough: "Ill-fortune in May or June 1815." No; it was then that he arranged his income; there was no ill except health, *al solito*, at that time. The particular days of the 2d and 14th of June 1820 were not ill, but the whole time was disastrous. It was then we were

alarmed by Paolo's attack and disturbance. About a lady in the winter of last year, enough, God knows! Nothing particular about a fat bouncing lady at 10 at night: and indeed things got more quiet in April. In July 1799 Shelley was only seven years of age. "A great blow-up every seven years." Shelley is not at home; when he returns I will ask him what happened when he was fourteen. In his twenty-second year we made our *scappatura*; at twenty-eight and twenty-nine, a good deal of discomfort on a certain point, but it hardly amounted to a blow-up. Pray ask Varley also about me.

So Hogg is shocked that, for good neighbourhood's sake, I visited the *piano di sotto*; let him reassure himself, since instead of a weekly, it was only a monthly visit; in fact, after going three times I stayed away until I heard he was going away. He preached against atheism, and, they said, against Shelley. As he invited me himself to come, this appeared to me very impertinent; so I wrote to him, to ask him whether he intended any personal allusion, but he denied the charge most entirely. This affair, as you may guess, among the English at Pisa made a great noise; the gossip here is of course out of all bounds, and some people have given them something to talk about. I have seen little of it all; but that [Pg 331] which I have seen makes me long most eagerly for some sea-girt isle, where with Shelley, my babe, and books and horses, we may give the rest to the winds; this we shall not have for the present. Shelley is entangled with Lord Byron, who is in a terrible fright lest he should desert him. We shall have boats, and go somewhere on the sea-coast, where, I daresay, we shall spend our time agreeably enough, for I like the Williams' exceedingly, though there my list begins and ends.

Emilia married Biondi; we hear that she leads him and his mother (to use a vulgarism) a devil of a life. The conclusion of our friendship (*a la Italiana*) puts me in mind of a nursery rhyme, which runs thus—

As I was going down Cranbourne lane,  
Cranbourne lane was dirty,  
And there I met a pretty maid,  
Who dropt to me a curtsy;

I gave her cakes, I gave her wine,  
I gave her sugar-candy,  
But oh! the little naughty girl,  
She asked me for some brandy.

Now turn "Cranbourne Lane" into Pisan acquaintances, which I am sure are dirty enough, and "brandy" into that wherewithal to buy brandy (and that no small

sum *però*), and you have the whole story of Shelley's Italian Platonics. We now know, indeed, few of those whom we knew last year. Pacchiani is at Prato; Mavrocordato in Greece; the Argyropolis in Florence; and so the world slides. Taafe is still here—the butt of Lord Byron's quizzing, and the poet laureate of Pisa. On the occasion of a young lady's birthday he wrote—

Eyes that shed a thousand flowers!  
Why should flowers be sent to you?  
Sweetest flowers of heavenly bowers,  
Love and friendship, are what are due.

.....

After some divine *Italian* weather, we are now enjoying some fine English weather; *cioè*, it does not rain, but not a ray can pierce the web aloft.—Most truly yours,

Mary W. S.

[Pg 332]

Mary Shelley to Mrs. Hunt.

*5th March 1822.*

My dearest Marianne—I hope that this letter will find you quite well, recovering from your severe attack, and looking towards your haven Italy with best hopes. I do indeed believe that you will find a relief here from your many English cares, and that the winds which waft you will sing the requiem to all your ills. It was indeed unfortunate that you encountered such weather on the very threshold of your journey, and as the wind howled through the long night, how often did I think of you! At length it seemed as if we should never, never meet; but I will not give way to such a presentiment. We enjoy here divine weather. The sun hot, too hot, with a freshness and clearness in the breeze that bears with it all the delights of spring. The hedges are budding, and you should see me and my friend Mrs. Williams poking about for violets by the sides of dry ditches; she being herself—

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye.

Yesterday a countryman seeing our dilemma, since the ditch was not quite dry, insisted on gathering them for us, and when we resisted, saying that we had no *quattrini* (*i.e.* farthings, being the generic name for all money), he indignantly

exclaimed, *Oh! se lo faccio per interesse!* How I wish you were with us in our rambles! Our good cavaliers flock together, and as they do not like *fetching a walk with the absurd womankind*, Jane (*i.e.* Mrs. Williams) and I are off together, and talk morality and pluck violets by the way. I look forward to many duets with this lady and Hunt. She has a very pretty voice, and a taste and ear for music which is almost miraculous. The harp is her favourite instrument; but we have none, and a very bad piano; however, as it is, we pass very pleasant evenings, though I can hardly bear to hear her sing “*Donne l’amore*”; it transports me so entirely back to your little parlour at Hampstead—and I see the[Pg 333] piano, the bookcase, the prints, the casts—and hear Mary’s *far-ha-ha-a!*

We are in great uncertainty as to where we shall spend the summer. There is a beautiful bay about fifty miles off, and as we have resolved on the sea, Shelley bought a boat. We wished very much to go there; perhaps we shall still, but as yet we can find but one house; but as we are a colony “which moves altogether or not at all,” we have not yet made up our minds. The apartments which we have prepared for you in Lord Byron’s house will be very warm for the summer; and indeed for the two hottest months I should think that you had better go into the country. Villas about here are tolerably cheap, and they are perfect paradises. Perhaps, as it was with me, Italy will not strike you as so divine at first; but each day it becomes dearer and more delightful; the sun, the flowers, the air, all is more sweet and more balmy than in the *Ultima Thule* that you inhabit.

M. W. S.

The journal for the next few weeks has nothing eventful to record. The preceding letter to Mrs. Hunt gives a simple and pleasing picture of their daily life. Perhaps Mary had never been quite so happy before; she wrote to the Hunts that she thought she grew younger. Both she and Shelley were occasionally ailing, and Shelley’s letters show that his spirits suffered depression at times, still, in this respect as well as in health, he was better than he had been in any former spring. The proximity of Byron and his circle was not, however, favourable to inspiration or to literary composition. Byron’s temperament acted as a damper to enthusiasm in others, and Shelley, though his estimate of Byron’s genius was very high, was perpetually[Pg 334] jarred and crossed by his worldliness and his moral shallowness and vulgarity. He invariably, acted, however, as Byron’s true and disinterested friend; and Byron was fully aware of the value of his friendship and of his literary help and criticism.

Trelawny, to whom Byron had taken kindly enough, estimated the difference in the moral worth of the two poets with singular justice.

“I believed in many things then, and believe in some now,” he wrote, more than five and thirty years afterwards: “I could not sympathise with Byron, who believed in nothing.”

His friendship for Byron, nevertheless, was to be loyal and lasting. But his favourite resort in these Pisan days was the “hospitable and cheerful abode of the Shelleys.”

“There,” he says, “I found those sympathies and sentiments which the Pilgrim denounced as illusions, believed in as the only realities.”

At Byron’s social gatherings—riding-parties or dinner-parties—he made a point of getting Shelley if he could; and Shelley was very compliant, although the society of which Byron was the nucleus was neither congenial nor interesting to him, and he always took the first good opportunity of escaping. Daily intercourse of this kind tended gradually to estrange rather than unite the two poets: by accentuating differences it brought into evidence that gulf between their[Pg 335] natures which, in spite of the one touch of kinship that certainly existed, was equally impassable by one and by the other. Besides, the subject of Clare and Allegra, never far below the surface, would occasionally come up, and this was a sore point on both sides. As has already been said, Byron appreciated Shelley, though he did not sympathise with him. In after days he bore public testimony to the purity and unselfishness of Shelley’s character and to the upright and disinterested motives which actuated him in all he did. But his respect for Shelley was not so strong as his antipathy to Clare, and Shelley’s feeling towards her was regarded by him with a cynical sneer which he had no care to hide, and of which its object could not always be unconscious. It is not wonderful that at times there swept across Shelley’s mind, like a black cloud, the conviction that neither a sense of honour nor justice restrained Byron from the basest insinuations. And then again this suspicion would pass away as too dreadful to be entertained.

Meanwhile Clare, in the pursuit of her newly-adopted profession, was thinking of going to Vienna, and she longed for a sight of her child first. She had been unusually long, or she fancied so, without news of Allegra, and she was growing desperately anxious,—with only too good cause, as the event showed. She wrote to Byron, [Pg 336]entreating him to arrange for a visit or an interview. Byron took no notice of her letters. The Shelleys dared not annoy him unnecessarily on the subject, as he had been heard to threaten if they did so to immure Allegra in some secret convent where no one could get at her or even hear of her. Clare, working herself up into a state of half-frenzied excitement, sent them letter after letter, suggesting and urging wild plans (which Shelley was to realise) for carrying off the child by armed force; indeed, one of her

schemes seems to have been to take advantage of the projected interview, if granted, for putting this design into execution. Some such proposed breach of faith must have been the occasion of Shelley's answering her—

I know not what to think of the state of your mind, or what to fear for you. Your late plan about Allegra seems to me in its present form pregnant with irremediable infamy to all the actors in it except yourself.

He did not think that in her present excited mental condition she was fit to go to Vienna, and he entreated her to postpone the idea. His advice, often repeated in different words, was, that she should not lose herself in distant and uncertain plans, but “systematise and simplify” her motions, at least for the present, and, if she felt in the least disposed, that she should come and stay with them—

If you like, come and look for houses with me in our boat; it might distract your mind.

[Pg 337]He and Mary had resolved to quit Pisa as soon as the weather made it desirable to do so; but their plans and their anxieties were alike suspended by a temporary excitement of which Mary's account is given in the following letter—

Mrs. Shelley to Mrs. Gisborne.

Pisa, 6th April 1822.

My dear Mrs. Gisborne—Not many days after I had written to you concerning the fate which ever pursues us at spring-tide, a circumstance happened which showed that we were not forgotten this year. Although, indeed, now that it is all over, I begin to fear that the King of Gods and men will not consider it a sufficiently heavy visitation, although for a time it threatened to be frightful enough. Two Sundays ago, Lord Byron, Shelley, Trelawny, Captain Hay, Count Gamba, and Taafe were returning from their usual evening ride, when, near the Porta della Piazza, they were passed by a soldier who galloped through the midst of them knocking up against Taafe. This nice little gentleman exclaimed, “Shall we endure this man's insolence?” Lord Byron replied, “No! we will bring him to an account,” and Shelley (whose blood always boils at any insolence offered by a soldier) added, “As you please!” so they put spurs to their horses (*i.e.* all but Taafe, who remained quietly behind), followed and stopped the man, and, fancying that he was an officer, demanded his name and address, and gave their cards. The man who, I believe, was half drunk, replied only by all the oaths and abuse in which the Italian language is so rich. He ended by saying, “If I liked I could draw my sabre and cut you all to pieces, but as it is, I only arrest you,” and he called out to the guards at the gate *arrestategli*. Lord Byron laughed at this, and saying *arrestateci pure*, gave spurs to his horse and rode towards the gate, followed by

the rest. Lord Byron and Gamba passed, but before the others could, the soldier got under the gateway, called on [Pg 338] the guard to stop them, and drawing his sabre, began to cut at them. It happened that I and the Countess Guiccioli were in a carriage close behind and saw it all, and you may guess how frightened we were when we saw our cavaliers cut at, they being totally unarmed. Their only safety was, that the field of battle being so confined, they got close under the man, and were able to arrest his arm. Captain Hay was, however, wounded in his face, and Shelley thrown from his horse. I cannot tell you how it all ended, but after cutting and slashing a little, the man sheathed his sword and rode on, while the others got from their horses to assist poor Hay, who was faint from loss of blood. Lord Byron, when he had passed the gate, rode to his own house, got a sword-stick from one of his servants, and was returning to the gate, Lung' Arno, when he met this man, who held out his hand saying, *Siete contento?* Lord Byron replied, "No! I must know your name, that I may require satisfaction of you." The soldier said, *Il mio nome è Masi, sono sargente maggiore, etc. etc.* While they were talking, a servant of Lord Byron's came and took hold of the bridle of the sergeant's horse. Lord Byron ordered him to let it go, and immediately the man put his horse to a gallop, but, passing Casa Lanfranchi, one of Lord Byron's servants thought that he had killed his master and was running away; determining that he should not go scot-free, he ran at him with a pitchfork and wounded him. The man rode on a few paces, cried out, *Sono ammazzato*, and fell, was carried to the hospital, the Misericordia bell ringing. We were all assembled at Casa Lanfranchi, nursing our wounded man, and poor Teresa, from the excess of her fright, was worse than any, when what was our consternation when we heard that the man's wound was considered mortal! Luckily none but ourselves knew who had given the wound; it was said by the wise Pisani, to have been one of Lord Byron's servants, set on by his padrone, and they pitched upon a poor fellow merely because *aveva lo sguardo fiero, quanto un assassino*. For some days Masi continued in great danger, but he is now recovering. As long as it was thought he would die, the Government did nothing; but now [Pg 339] that he is nearly well, they have imprisoned two men, one of Lord Byron's servants (the one with the *sguardo fiero*), and the other a servant of Teresa's, who was behind our carriage, both perfectly innocent, but they have been kept *in segreto* these ten days, and God knows when they will be let out. What think you of this? Will it serve for our spring adventure? It is blown over now, it is true, but our fate has, in general, been in common with Dame Nature, and March winds and April showers have brought forth May flowers.

You have no notion what a ridiculous figure Taafe cut in all this—he kept far behind during the danger, but the next day he wished to take all the honour to himself, vowed

that all Pisa talked of him alone, and coming to Lord Byron said, "My Lord, if you do not dare ride out to-day, I will alone." But the next day he again changed, he was afraid of being turned out of Tuscany, or of being obliged to fight with one of the officers of the sergeant's regiment, of neither of which things there was the slightest danger, so he wrote a declaration to the Governor to say that he had nothing to do with it; so embroiling himself with Lord Byron, he got between Scylla and Charybdis, from which he has not yet extricated himself; for ourselves, we do not fear any ulterior consequences.

*10th April.*

We received *Hellas* to-day, and the bill of lading. Shelley is well pleased with the former, though there are some mistakes. The only danger would arise from the vengeance of Masi, but the moment he is able to move, he is to be removed to another town; he is a *pessimo soggetto*, being the crony of Soldaini, Rosselmini, and Augustini, Pisan names of evil fame, which, perhaps, you may remember. There is only one consolation in all this, that if it be our fate to suffer, it is more agreeable, and more safe to suffer in company with five or six than alone. Well! after telling you this long story, I must relate our other news. And first, the Greek Ali Pashaw is dead, and his head sent to Constantinople; the reception of it was celebrated there by the massacre of four thousand Greeks. [Pg 340] The latter, however, get on. The Turkish fleet of 25 sail of the line-of-war vessels, and 40 transports, endeavoured to surprise the Greek fleet in its winter quarters; finding them prepared, they bore away for Lante, and pursued by the Greeks, took refuge in the bay of Naupacto. Here they first blockaded them, and obtained a complete victory. All the soldiers on board the transports, in endeavouring to land, were cut to pieces, and the fleet taken or destroyed. I heard something about Hellenists which greatly pleased me. When any one asks of the peasants of the Morea what news there is, and if they have had any victory, they reply: "I do not know, but for us it is η ταν, η επι τας," being their Doric pronunciation of η ταν, η επι της, the speech of the Spartan mother, on presenting his shield to her son; "With this or on this."

I wish, my dear Mrs. Gisborne, that you would send the first part of this letter, addressed to Mr. W. Godwin at Nash's, Esq., Dover Street. I wish him to have an account of the fray, and you will thus save me the trouble of writing it over again, for what with writing and talking about it, I am quite tired. In a late letter of mine to my father, I requested him to send you *Matilda*. I hope that he has complied with my desire, and, in that case, that you will get it copied and send it to me by the first

opportunity, perhaps by Hunt, if he comes at all. I do not mention commissions to you, for although wishing much for the things about which I wrote [we have], for the present, no money to spare. We wish very much to hear from you again, and to hear if there are any hopes of your getting on in your plans, what Henry is doing, and how you continue to like England. The months of February and March were with us as hot as an English June. In the first days of April we have had some very cold weather; so that we are obliged to light fires again. Shelley has been much better in health this winter than any other since I have known him, Pisa certainly agrees with him exceedingly well, which is its only merit, in my eyes. I wish fate had bound us to Naples instead. Percy is quite well; he begins to talk, Italian only now, and to call things *bello* and *buono*, but the droll thing is, [Pg 341] that he is right about the genders. A silk *vestito* is *bello*, but a new *frusta* is *bella*. He is a fine boy, full of life, and very pretty. Williams is very well, and they are getting on very well. Mrs. Williams is a miracle of economy, and, as Mrs. Godwin used to call it, makes both ends meet with great comfort to herself and others. Medwin is gone to Rome; we have heaps of the gossip of a petty town this winter, being just in the *coterie* where it was all carried on; but now *Grazie a Messer Domenedio*, the English are almost all gone, and we, being left alone, all subjects of discord and clacking cease. You may conceive what a *bisbiglio* our adventure made. The Pisans were all enraged because the *maledetti inglesi* were not punished; yet when the gentlemen returned from their ride the following day (busy fate) an immense crowd was assembled before Casa Lanfranchi, and they all took off their hats to them. Adieu. *State bene e felice*. Best remembrances to Mr. Gisborne, and compliments to Henry, who will remember Hay as one of the Maremma hunters; he is a friend of Lord Byron's.—Yours ever truly,

Mary W. S.

This affair, and the consequent inquiry and examination of witnesses in connection with it took up several days, on one of which Mary and Countess Guiccioli were under examination for five hours.

In the meantime Byron decided to go to Leghorn for his summer boating; whereupon Shelley wrote and definitively proposed to Clare that she should accompany his party to Spezzia, promising her quiet and privacy, and immunity from annoyance, while she bided her time with regard to Allegra. Clare accepted the offer, and joined them at Pisa on the 15th of April in the expectation of starting very shortly. It turned out, [Pg 342] however, that no suitable houses were, after all, to be had on the coast. This was an unexpected disappointment, and on the 23d she and the Williams' went off to Spezzia for another search. They were hardly on their way when letters were received

by Shelley and Mary with the grievous news that Allegra had died of typhus fever in the convent of Bagnacavallo.

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## **CHAPTER XVI**

April-July 1882

“Evil news. Not well.”

These few words are Mary’s record of this frightful blow. She was again in delicate health, suffering from the same depressing symptoms as before Percy’s birth, and for a like reason.

No wonder she was made downright ill by the shock, and by the sickening apprehension of the scene to follow when Clare should hear the news.

On the next day but one—the 25th of April—the travellers returned.

Williams says, in his diary for that day—

Meet S., his face bespoke his feelings. C.’s child was dead, and he had the office to break it to her, or rather not to do so; but, fearful of the news reaching her ears, to remove her instantly from this place.

Shelley could not tell Clare at once. Not while they were in Pisa, and with Byron close by. One, unfurnished, house was to be had, the Casa Magni, in the Bay of Lerici. Thither, on the chance of getting it, they must go, and instantly. Mary’s [Pg 344] indisposition must be ignored; she must undertake the negotiations for the house. Within twenty-four hours she was off to Spezzia, with Clare and little Percy, escorted by Trelawny; poor Clare quite unconscious of the burden on her friends’ minds. Shelley remained behind another day, to pack up the necessary furniture; but, on the 27th, he with the whole Williams family left Pisa for Lerici. Thence, while waiting for the furniture to arrive by sea, he wrote to Mary at Spezzia.

Shelley to Mary.

Lerici, *Sunday, 28th April 1822.*

Dearest Mary—I am this moment arrived at Lerici, where I am necessarily detained, waiting the furniture, which left Pisa last night at midnight, and as the sea has been calm and the wind fair, I may expect them every moment. It would not do to leave affairs here in an *impiccio*, great as is my anxiety to see you. How are you, my best love? How have you sustained the trials of the journey? Answer me this question, and how my little babe and Clare are. Now to business—

Is the Magni House taken? if not, pray occupy yourself instantly in finishing the affair, even if you are obliged to go to Sarzana, and send a messenger to me to tell me of your success. I, of course, cannot leave Lerici, to which port the boats (for we were obliged to take two) are directed. But *you* can come over in the same boat that brings you this letter, and return in the evening. I hear that Trelawny is still with you. Tell Clare that, as I must probably in a few days return to Pisa for the affair of the lawsuit, I have brought her box with me, thinking she might be in want of some of its contents.

I ought to say that I do not think there is accommodation for you all at this inn; and that, even if there were, you would be better off at Spezzia; but if the Magni House is taken, then[Pg 345] there is no possible reason why you should not take a row over in the boat that will bring this; but do not keep the men long. I am anxious to hear from you on every account.—Ever yours,

S.

Mary's answer was that she had concluded for Casa Magni, but that no other house was to be had in all that neighbourhood. It was in a neglected condition, and not very roomy or convenient; but, such as it was, it had to accommodate the Williams', as well as the Shelleys, and Clare. Considerable difficulty was experienced by Shelley in obtaining leave for the landing of the furniture; this obstacle got over, they at last took possession.

Edward Williams' Journal.

*Wednesday, May 1.*—Cloudy, with rain. Came to Casa Magni after breakfast, the Shelleys having contrived to give us rooms. Without them, heaven knows what we should have done. Employed all day putting the things away. All comfortably settled by 4. Passed the evening in talking over our folly and our troubles.

The worst trouble, however, was still impending. Finding how crowded and uncomfortable they were likely to be, Clare, after a day or two, decided that it was best for herself and for every one that she should return to Florence, and announced her intention accordingly. Compelled by the circumstances, Shelley then disclosed to her the true state of the case. Her grief was excessive, but was, after the first,

succeeded by a calmness unusual in her and surprising to her friends;[Pg 346] a reaction from the fever of suspense and torment in which she had lived for weeks past, and which were even a harder strain on her powers of endurance than the truth, grievous though that was, putting an end to all hope as well as to all fear. For the present she remained at the Villa Magni.

The ground floor of this habitation was appropriated, as is often done in Italy, for stowing the implements and produce of the land, as rent is paid in kind there. In the autumn you find casks of wine, jars of oil, tools, wood, occasionally carts, and, near the sea, boats and fishing-nets. Over this floor were a large saloon and four bedrooms (which had once been whitewashed), and nothing more; there was an out-building for cooking, and a place for the servants to eat and sleep in. The Williams had one room, and Shelley and his wife occupied two more, facing each other. [47]

Facing the sea, and almost over it, a verandah or open terrace ran the whole length of the building; it was over the projecting ground floor, and level with the inhabited story.

The surrounding scenery was magnificent, but wild to the last degree, and there was something unearthly in the perpetual moaning and howling of winds and waves. Poor Mary now began to feel the ill effects of her enforced over-exertions. She became very unwell, suffering from utter prostration of strength and from hysterical affections. Rest, quiet, and freedom from worry were essential to her condition, but none of these could she have, nor even sleep at night. The absence[Pg 347] of comfort and privacy, added to the great difficulty of housekeeping, and the melancholy with which Clare's misfortune had infected the whole party, were all very unfavourable to her.

After staying for three weeks, Clare returned for a short visit to Florence. Shelley's letters to her during her absence afford occasional glimpses, from which it is easy to infer more, into the state of affairs at Casa Magni. Mrs. Williams was "by no means acquiescent in the present system of things." The plan of having all possessions in common does not work well in the kitchen; the respective servants of the two families were always quarrelling and taking each other's things. Jane, who was a good housekeeper, had the defects of her qualities, and "pined for her own house and saucepans." "It is a pity," remarks Shelley, "that any one so pretty and amiable should be so selfish." Not that these matters troubled him much. Such little "squalls" gave way to calm, "in accustomed vicissitude" (to use his own words); and Mrs. Williams had far too much tact to dwell on domestic worries to him. His own nerves were for a time shaken and unstrung, but he recovered, and, after the first, was unusually well. He was in love with the wild, beautiful place, and with the life at sea; for to his boat he escaped whenever any little breezes ruffled the surface of domestic life so that its

mirror no longer reflected his own [Pg 348]unwontedly bright spirits. At first he and Williams had only the small flat-bottomed boat in which they had navigated the Arno and Serchio, but in a fortnight there arrived the little schooner which Captain Roberts had built for Shelley at Genoa, and then their content was perfect.

For Mary no such escape from care and discomfort was open; she was too weak to go about much, and it is no wonder that, after the Williams' installation, she merely chronicles, "The rest of May a blank."

Williams' diary partly fills this blank; and it is so graphic in its exceeding simplicity that, though it has been printed before, portions may well be included here.

Extracts from Williams' Diary.

*Thursday, May 2.*—Cloudy, with intervals of rain. Went out with Shelley in the boat—fish on the rocks—bad sport. Went in the evening after some wild ducks—saw nothing but sublime scenery, to which the grandeur of a storm greatly contributed.

*Friday, May 3.*—Fine. The captain of the port despatched a vessel for Shelley's boat. Went to Lerici with S., being obliged to market there; the servant having returned from Sarzana without being able to procure anything.

*Sunday, May 5.*—Fine. Kept awake the whole night by a heavy swell, which made a noise on the beach like the discharge of heavy artillery. Tried with Shelley to launch the small flat-bottomed boat through the surf; we succeeded in pushing it through, but shipped a sea on attempting to land. Walk to Lerici along the beach, by a winding path on the mountain's side. Delightful evening,—the scenery most sublime.

[Pg 349]*Monday, May 6.*—Fine. Some heavy drops of rain fell to-day, without a cloud being visible. Made a sketch of the western side of the bay. Read a little. Walked with Jane up the mountain.

After tea walking with Shelley on the terrace, and observing the effect of moonshine on the waters, he complained of being unusually nervous, and stopping short, he grasped me violently by the arm, and stared steadfastly on the white surf that broke upon the beach under our feet. Observing him sensibly affected, I demanded of him if he were in pain. But he only answered by saying, "There it is again—there"! He recovered after some time, and declared that he saw, as plainly as he then saw me, a naked child (*Allegra*) rise from the sea, and clap its hands as in joy, smiling at him. This was a trance that it required some reasoning and philosophy entirely to awaken him from, so forcibly had the vision operated on his mind. Our conversation, which had been at first rather melancholy, led to this; and my confirming his sensations, by

confessing that I had felt the same, gave greater activity to his ever-wandering and lively imagination.

*Sunday, May 12.*—Cloudy and threatening weather. Wrote during the morning. Mr. Maglian called after dinner, and, while walking with him on the terrace, we discovered a strange sail coming round the point of Porto Venere, which proved at length to be Shelley's boat. She had left Genoa on Thursday, but had been driven back by prevailing bad winds, a Mr. Heslop and two English seamen brought her round, and they speak most highly of her performances. She does, indeed, excite my surprise and admiration. Shelley and I walked to Lerici, and made a stretch off the land to try her, and I find she fetches whatever she looks at. In short, we have now a perfect plaything for the summer.

*Monday, May 13.*—Rain during night in torrents—a heavy gale of wind from S.W., and a surf running heavier than ever; at 4 gale unabated, violent squalls....

... In the evening an electric arch forming in the clouds announces a heavy thunderstorm, if the wind lulls. Distant[Pg 350] thunder—gale increases—a circle of foam surrounds the bay—dark, evening, and tempestuous, with flashes of lightning at intervals, which give us no hope of better weather. The learned in these things say, that it generally lasts three days when once it commences as this has done. We all feel as if we were on board ship—and the roaring of the sea brings this idea to us even in our beds.

*Wednesday, May 15.*—Fine and fresh breeze in puffs from the land. Jane and Mary consent to take a sail. Run down to Porto Venere and beat back at 1 o'clock. The boat sailed like a witch. After the late gale, the water is covered with purple nautili, or as the sailors call them, Portuguese men-of-war. After dinner Jane accompanied us to the point of the Magra; and the boat beat back in wonderful style.

*Wednesday, May 22.*—Fine, after a threatening night. After breakfast Shelley and I amused ourselves with trying to make a boat of canvas and reeds, as light and as small as possible. She is to be 8½ feet long, and 4½ broad....

*Wednesday, June 12.*—Launched the little boat, which answered our wishes and expectations. She is 86 lbs. English weight, and stows easily on board. Sailed in the evening, but were becalmed in the offing, and left there with a long ground swell, which made Jane little better than dead. Hoisted out our little boat and brought her on shore. Her landing attended by the whole village.

*Thursday, June 13.*—Fine. At 9 saw a vessel between the straits of Porto Venere, like a man-of-war brig. She proved to be the *Bolivar*, with Roberts and Trelawny on board,

who are taking her round to Livorno. On meeting them we were saluted by six guns. Sailed together to try the vessels—in speed no chance with her, but I think we keep as good a wind. She is the most beautiful craft I ever saw, and will do more for her size. She costs Lord Byron £750 clear off and ready for sea, with provisions and conveniences of every kind.

In the midst of this happy life one anxiety there[Pg 351] was, however, which pursued Shelley everywhere; and neither on shore nor at sea could he escape from it,—that of Godwin's imminent ruin.

The first of the letters which follow had reached Mary while still at Pisa. The next letter, and that of Mrs. Godwin were, at Shelley's request, intercepted by Mrs. Mason and sent to him. He could not and would not show them to Mary, and wrote at last to Mrs. Godwin, to try and put a stop to them.

Godwin to Mary.

Skinner Street, *19th April 1822.*

My dearest Mary—The die, so far as I am concerned, seems now to be cast, and all that remains is that I should entreat you to forget that you have a father in existence. Why should your prime of youthful vigour be tarnished and made wretched by what relates to me? I have lived to the full age of man in as much comfort as can reasonably be expected to fall to the lot of a human being. What signifies what becomes of the few wretched years that remain?

For the same reason, I think I ought for the future to drop writing to you. It is impossible that my letters can give you anything but unmingled pain. A few weeks more, and the formalities which still restrain the successful claimant will be over, and my prospects of tranquillity must, as I believe, be eternally closed.—Farewell,

William Godwin.

Godwin to Mary.

Skinner Street, *3d May 1822.*

Dear Mary—I wrote to you a fortnight ago, and professed my intention of not writing again. I certainly will not write when the result shall be to give pure, unmitigated pain. It is the questionable shape of what I have to communicate that still thrusts the pen into my hand. This day we are[Pg 352] compelled, by summary process, to leave the house we live in, and to hide our heads in whatever alley will receive us. If we can

compound with our creditor, and he seems not unwilling to accept £400 (I have talked with him on the subject), we may emerge again. Our business, if freed from this intolerable burthen, is more than ever worth keeping.

But all this would, perhaps, have failed in inducing me to resume the pen, but for *one extraordinary accident*. Wednesday, 1st May, was the day when the last legal step was taken against me; and Wednesday morning, a few hours before this catastrophe, Willats, the man who, three or four years before, lent Shelley £2000 at two for one, called on me to ask whether Shelley wanted any more money on the same terms. What does this mean? In the contemplation of such a coincidence, I could almost grow superstitious. But, alas! I fear—I fear—I am a drowning man, catching at a straw.—Ever most affectionately, your father,

William Godwin.

Please to direct your letters, till you hear further, to the care of Mr. Monroe, No. 60 Skinner Street.

Mrs. Mason to Shelley.

*May 1822.*

I send you in return for Godwin's letter one still worse, because I think it has more the appearance of truth. I was desired to convey it to Mary, but that I should not think right. At the same time, I don't well know how you can conceal all this affair from her; they really seem to want assistance at present, for their being turned out of the house is a serious evil. I rejoice in your good health, to which I have no doubt the boat and the Williams' much contribute, and wish there may be no prospect of its being disturbed.

Mary ought to know what is said of the novel, and how can she know that without all the rest? You will contrive what is best. In the part of the letter which I do send, she (Mrs. Godwin) adds, that at this moment Mr. Godwin does not offer the novel to any bookseller, lest his actual situation might make it be supposed that it would be sold cheap.[Pg 353] Mrs. Godwin also wishes to correspond directly with Mrs. Shelley, but this I shall not permit; she says Godwin's health is much the worse for all this affair.

I was astonished at seeing Clare walk in on Tuesday evening, and I have not a spare bed now in the house, the children having outgrown theirs, and been obliged to occupy that which I had formerly; she proposed going to an inn, but preferred sleeping on a sofa, where I made her as comfortable as I could, which is but little so; however,

she is satisfied. I rejoice to see that she has not suffered so much as you expected, and understand now her former feelings better than at first. When there is nothing to hope or fear, it is natural to be calm. I wish she had some determined project, but her plans seem as unsettled as ever, and she does not see half the reasons for separating herself from your society that really exist. I regret to perceive her great repugnance to Paris, which I believe to be the place best adapted to her. If she had but the temptation of good letters of introduction!—but I have no means of obtaining them for her—she intends, I believe, to go to Florence to-morrow, and to return to your habitation in a week, but talks of not staying the whole summer. I regret the loss of Mary's good health and spirits, but hope it is only the consequence of her present situation, and, therefore, merely temporary, but I dread Clare's being in the same house for a month or two, and wish the Williams' were half a mile from you. I must write a few lines to Mary, but will say nothing of having heard from Mrs. Godwin; you will tell her what you think right, but you know my opinion, that things which cannot be concealed are better told at once. I should suppose a bankruptcy would be best, but the Godwins do not seem to think so. If all the world valued obscure tranquillity as much as I do, it would be a happier, though possibly much duller, world than it is, but the loss of wealth is quite an epidemic disease in England, and it disturbs their rest more than the [\[48\]](#) ... I should have a thousand things to [\[Pg 354\]](#) say, but that I have a thousand other things to do, and you give me hope of conversing with you before long.—Ever yours very sincerely,

M. M.

Shelley to Mrs. Godwin.

Lerici, 29th May 1882.

Dear Madam—Mrs. Mason has sent me an extract from your last letter to show to Mary, and I have received that of Mr. Godwin, in which he mentions your having left Skinner Street.

In Mary's present state of health and spirits, much caution is requisite with regard to communications which must agitate her in the highest degree, and the object of my present letter is simply to inform you that I thought it right to exercise this caution on the present occasion. Mary is at present about three months advanced in pregnancy, and the irritability and languor which accompany this state are always distressing, and sometimes alarming. I do not know even how soon I can permit her to receive such communications, or even how soon you or Mr. Godwin would wish they should

be conveyed to her, if you could have any idea of the effect. Do not, however, let me be misunderstood. It is not my intention or my wish that the circumstances in which your family is involved should be concealed from her; but that the detail of them should be suspended until they assume a more prosperous character, or at least till letters addressed to her or intended for her perusal on that subject should not convey a supposition that she could do more than she does, thus exasperating the sympathy which she already feels too intensely for her Father's distress, which she would sacrifice all she possesses to remedy, but the remedy of which is beyond her power. She imagined that her novel might be turned to immediate advantage for him. I am greatly interested in the fate of this production, which appears to me to possess a high degree of merit, and I regret that it is not Mr. Godwin's intention to publish it immediately. I am sure that Mary would be delighted to amend anything that her Father thought imperfect in it, though I confess that if his objection relates to the [Pg 355]character of Beatrice, I shall lament the deference which would be shown by the sacrifice of any portion of it to feelings and ideas which are but for a day. I wish Mr. Godwin would write to her on that subject; he might advert to the letter (for it is only the last one) which I have suppressed, or not, as he thought proper.

I have written to Mr. Smith to solicit the loan of £400, which, if I can obtain in that manner, is very much at Mr. Godwin's service. The views which I now entertain of my affairs forbid me to enter into any further reversionary transactions; nor do I think Mr. Godwin would be a gainer by the contrary determination; as it would be next to impossible to effectuate any such bargain at this distance, nor could I burthen my income, which is only sufficient to meet its various claims, and the system of life in which it seems necessary I should live.

We hear you hear Jane's (Clare's) news from Mrs. Mason. Since the late melancholy event she has become far more tranquil; nor should I have anything to desire with regard to her, did not the uncertainty of my own life and prospects render it prudent for her to attempt to establish some sort of independence as a security against an event which would deprive her of that which she at present enjoys. She is well in health, and usually resides at Florence, where she has formed a little society for herself among the Italians, with whom she is a great favourite. She was here for a week or two; and although she has at present returned to Florence, we expect her on a visit to us for the summer months. In the winter, unless some of her various plans succeed, for she may be called *la fille aux mille projets*, she will return to Florence. Mr. Godwin may depend upon receiving immediate notice of the result of my application to Mr. Smith. I hope soon to have an account of your situation and prospects, and remain, dear Madam, yours very sincerely,

P. B. Shelley.

Mrs. Godwin.

We will speak another time, of what is deeply interesting both to Mary and to myself, of my dear William.

[Pg 356]The knowledge of all this on Shelley's mind,—the consciousness that he was hiding it from Mary, and that she was probably more than half aware of his doing so, gave him a feeling of constraint in his daily intercourse with her. To talk with her, even about her father, was difficult, for he could neither help nor hide his feeling of irritation and indignation at the way in which Godwin persecuted his daughter after the efforts she had made in his behalf, and for which he had hardly thanked her.

It would have to come, the explanation; but for the present, as Shelley wrote to Clare, he was content to put off the evil day. Towards the end of the month Mary's health had somewhat improved, and the letter she then wrote to Mrs. Gisborne gives a connected account of all the past incidents.

Mary Shelley to Mrs. Gisborne.

Casa Magni, Presso a Lerici,  
2d June 1822.

My dear Mrs. Gisborne—We received a letter from Mr. Gisborne the other day, which promised one from you. It is not yet come, and although I think that you are two or three in my debt, yet I am good enough to write to you again, and thus to increase your debt. Nor will I allow you, with one letter, to take advantage of the Insolvent Act, and thus to free yourself from all claims at once. When I last wrote, I said that I hoped our spring visitation had come and was gone, but this year we were not quit so easily. However, before I mention anything else, I will finish the story of the *zuffa* as far as it is yet gone. I think that in my last I left the sergeant recovering; one of Lord Byron's and one of the [Pg 357] Guiccioli's servants in prison on suspicion, though both were innocent. The judge or advocate, called a Cancelliere, sent from Florence to determine the affair, dislikes the Pisans, and, having *poca paga*, expected a present from Milordo, and so favoured our part of the affair, was very civil, and came to our houses to take depositions against the law. For the sake of the lesson, Hogg should have been there to learn to cross-question. The Cancelliere, a talkative buffoon of a Florentine, with "mille scuse per l'incomodo," asked, "Dove fu lei la sera del 24 marzo? Andai a spasso in carrozza, fuori della Porta della Piaggia." A little clerk, seated beside him, with a great pile of papers before him, now dipped his pen in his ink-horn, and looked expectant, while the Cancelliere, turning his eyes up to the ceiling,

repeated, “Io fui a spasso,” etc. This scene lasted two, four, six, hours, as it happened. In the space of two months the depositions of fifteen people were taken, and finding Tita (Lord Byron’s servant) perfectly innocent, the Cancelliere ordered him to be liberated, but the Pisan police took fright at his beard. They called him “il barbone,” and, although it was declared that on his exit from prison he should be shaved, they could not tranquillise their mighty minds, but banished him. We, in the meantime, were come to this place, so he has taken refuge with us. He is an excellent fellow, faithful, courageous, and daring. How could it happen that the Pisans should be frightened at such a *mirabile mostro* of an Italian, especially as the day he was let out of *segreto*, and was a *largee* in prison, he gave a feast to all his fellow-prisoners, hiring chandeliers and plate! But poor Antonio, the Guiccioli’s servant, the meekest-hearted fellow in the world, is kept in *segreto*; not found guilty, but punished as such,—*e chi sa* when he will be let out?—so rests the affair.

About a month ago Clare came to visit us at Pisa, and went with the Williams’ to find a house in the Gulf of Spezzia, when, during her absence, the disastrous news came of the death of Allegra. She died of a typhus fever, which had been raging in the Romagna; but no one wrote to [Pg 358] say it was there. She had no friends except the nuns of the Convent, who were kind to her, I believe; but you know Italians. If half of the Convent had died of the plague, they would never have written to have had her removed, and so the poor child fell a sacrifice. Lord Byron felt the loss at first bitterly; he also felt remorse, for he felt that he had acted against everybody’s counsels and wishes, and death had stamped with truth the many and often-urged prophecies of Clare, that the air of the Romagna, joined to the ignorance of the Italians, would prove fatal to her. Shelley wished to conceal the fatal news from her as long as possible, so when she returned from Spezzia he resolved to remove thither without delay, with so little delay that he packed me off with Clare and Percy the very next day. She wished to return to Florence, but he persuaded her to accompany me; the next day he packed up our goods and chattels, for a furnished house was not to be found in this part of the world, and, like a torrent hurrying everything in its course, he persuaded the Williams’ to do the same. They came here; but one house was to be found for us all; it is beautifully situated on the sea-shore, under the woody hills,—but such a place as this is! The poverty of the people is beyond anything, yet they do not appear unhappy, but go on in dirty content, or contented dirt, while we find it hard work to purvey miles around for a few eatables. We were in wretched discomfort at first, but now are in a kind of disorderly order, living from day to day as we can. After the first day or two Clare insisted on returning to Florence, so Shelley was obliged to disclose the truth. You may judge of what was her first burst of grief and despair; however she reconciled

herself to her fate sooner than we expected; and although, of course, until she form new ties, she will always grieve, yet she is now tranquil—more tranquil than when prophesying her disaster; she was for ever forming plans for getting her child from a place she judged but too truly would be fatal to her. She has now returned to Florence, and I do not know whether she will join us again. Our colony is much smaller than we expected, which we consider a benefit.[Pg 359] Lord Byron remains with his train at Montenero. Trelawny is to be the commander of his vessel, and of course will be at Leghorn. He is at present at Genoa, awaiting the finishing of this boat. Shelley's boat is a beautiful creature; Henry would admire her greatly; though only 24 feet by 8 feet she is a perfect little ship, and looks twice her size. She had one fault, she was to have been built in partnership with Williams and Trelawny. Trelawny chose the name of the *Don Juan*, and we acceded; but when Shelley took her entirely on himself we changed the name to the *Ariel*. Lord Byron chose to take fire at this, and determined that she should be called after the Poem; wrote to Roberts to have the name painted on the mainsail, and she arrived thus disfigured. For days and nights, full twenty-one, did Shelley and Edward ponder on her anabaptism, and the washing out the primeval stain. Turpentine, spirits of wine, buccata, all were tried, and it became dappled and no more. At length the piece had to be taken out and reefs put, so that the sail does not look worse. I do not know what Lord Byron will say, but Lord and Poet as he is, he could not be allowed to make a coal barge of our boat. As only one house was to be found habitable in this gulf, the Williams' have taken up their abode with us, and their servants and mine quarrel like cats and dogs; and besides, you may imagine how ill a large family agrees with my laziness, when accounts and domestic concerns come to be talked of. *Ma pazienza*. After all the place does not suit me; the people are *rozzi*, and speak a detestable dialect, and yet it is better than any other Italian sea-shore north of Naples. The air is excellent, and you may guess how much better we like it than Leghorn, when, besides, we should have been involved in English society—a thing we longed to get rid of at Pisa. Mr. Gisborne talks of your going to a distant country; pray write to me in time before this takes place, as I want a box from England first, but cannot now exactly name its contents. I am sorry to hear you do not get on, but perhaps Henry will, and make up for all. Percy is well, and Shelley singularly so; this incessant boating does him a great deal of [Pg 360] good. I have been very unwell for some time past, but am better now. I have not even heard of the arrival of my novel; but I suppose for his own sake, Papa will dispose of it to the best advantage. If you see it advertised, pray tell me, also its publisher, etc.

We have heard from Hunt the day he was to sail, and anxiously and daily now await his arrival. Shelley will go over to Leghorn to him, and I also, if I can so manage it. We shall

be at Pisa next winter, I believe, fate so decrees. Of course you have heard that the lawsuit went against my Father. This was the summit and crown of our spring misfortunes, but he writes in so few words, and in such a manner, that any information that I could get, through any one, would be a great benefit to me. Adieu. Pray write now, and at length. Remember both Shelley and me to Hogg. Did you get *Matilda* from Papa?—Yours ever,

Mary W. Shelley.

Continue to direct to Pisa.

Clare returned to the Casa Magni on the 6th of July. The weather had now become intensely hot, and Mary was again prostrated by it. Alarming symptoms appeared, and after a wretched week of ill health, these came to a crisis in a dangerous miscarriage. She was destitute of medical aid or appliances, and, weakened as she already was, they feared for her life. She had lain ill for several hours before some ice could be procured, and Shelley then took upon himself the responsibility of its immediate use; the event proved him right; and when at last a doctor came, he found her doing well. Her strength, however, was reduced to the lowest ebb; her spirits also; and within a [Pg 361] week of this misfortune her recovery was retarded by a dreadful nervous shock she received through Shelley's walking in his sleep. [\[49\]](#)

While Mary was enduring a time of physical and mental suffering beyond what can be told, and such as no man can wholly understand, Shelley, for his part, was enjoying unwonted health and good spirits. And such creatures are we all that unwonted health in ourself is even a stronger power for happiness than is the sickness of another for depression.

He was sorry for Mary's gloom, but he could not lighten it, and he was persistently content in spite of it. This has led to the supposition that there was, at this time, a serious want of sympathy between Shelley and Mary. His only want, he said in an often-quoted letter, was the presence of those who could feel, and understand him, and he added, "Whether from proximity, and the continuity of domestic intercourse, Mary does not."

It would have been almost miraculous had it been otherwise. Perhaps nothing in the world is harder than for a person suffering from exhausting illness, and from the extreme of nervous and mental depression, to enter into the mood of temporary elation of another person whose spirits, as a rule, are uneven, and in need of constant [Pg 362] support from others. But the context of this very letter of Shelley's shows clearly enough that he meant nothing desperate, no shipwreck of the heart; for,

as the people who could “feel, and understand him,” he instances his correspondents, Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne, saying that his satisfaction would be complete if only *they* were of the party; although, were his wishes not limited by his hopes, Hogg would also be included. He would have liked a little intellectual stimulus and comradeship. As it was, he was well satisfied with an intercourse of which “words were not the instruments.”

I like Jane more and more, and I find Williams the most amiable of companions.

Jane’s guitar and her sweet singing were a new and perpetual delight to him, and she herself supplied him with just as much suggestion of an unrealised ideal as was necessary to keep his imagination alive. She, on her side, understood him and knew how to manage him perfectly; as a great man may be understood by a clever woman who is so far from having an intellectual comprehension of him that she is not distressed by the consciousness of its imperfection or its absence, but succeeds by dint of delicate social intuition, guided by just so much sense of humour as saves her from exaggeration, or from blunders; and who understands her great man on his human[Pg 363] side so much better than the poor creature understands himself, as to wind him at will, easily, gracefully, and insensibly, round her little finger. And so, without sacrificing a moment’s peace of mind, Jane Williams won over Shelley an ascendancy which was pleasing to both and convenient to every one. No better instance could be given of her method than the well-known episode of his sudden proposal to her to overturn the boat, and, together, to “solve the great mystery”; inimitably told by Trelawny. And so the month of June sped away.

“I have a boat here,” wrote Shelley to John Gisborne, ... “it cost me £80, and reduced me to some difficulty in point of money. However, it is swift and beautiful, and appears quite a vessel. Williams is captain, and we glide along this delightful bay, in the evening wind, under the summer moon, until earth appears another world. Jane brings her guitar, and if the past and the future could be obliterated, the present would content me so well that I could say with Faust to the present moment, ‘Remain; thou art so beautiful.’”

And now, like Faust, having said this, like Faust’s, his hour had come.

He heard from Genoa of the Leigh Hunts’ arrival, so far, on their journey, and wrote at once to Hunt a letter of warmest welcome to Italy, promising to start for Leghorn the instant he should hear of the Hunts’ vessel having sailed for that port.

[Pg 364]Poor Mary, who sends you a thousand loves, has been seriously ill, having suffered a most debilitating miscarriage. She is still too unwell to rise from the sofa,

and must take great care of herself for some time, or she would come with us to Leghorn. Lord Byron is in *villeggiatura* near Leghorn, and you will meet besides with a Mr. Trelawny, a wild, but kind-hearted seaman.

The Hunts sailed; and, on the 1st of July, Shelley and Williams, with Charles Vivian, the sailor-lad who looked after their boat, started in the *Ariel* for Leghorn, where they arrived safely. Thence Shelley, with Leigh Hunt, proceeded to Pisa. It had not been their intention to stay long, but Shelley found much to detain him. Matters with respect to Byron and the projected magazine wore a most unsatisfactory appearance; Byron's eagerness had cooled, and his reception of the Hunts was chilling in the extreme. Poor Mrs. Hunt was very seriously ill, and the letter which Mary received from her husband was mainly to explain his prolonged absence. She had let him go from her side with the greatest unwillingness; she was haunted by the gloomiest forebodings and a sense of unexplained misery which they all ascribed to her illness, and her letters were written in a tone of depression which made Shelley anxious on her account, and Edward Williams on that of his wife, who, he feared, might be unhappy during his absence from her.

[Pg 365]But Jane wrote brightly, and gave an improved account of Mary.

Shelley to Mary.

Pisa, 4th July 1822.

My dearest Mary—I have received both your letters, and shall attend to the instructions they convey. I did not think of buying the *Bolivar*; Lord Byron wishes to sell her, but I imagine would prefer ready money. I have as yet made no inquiries about houses near Pugnano—I have had no moment of time to spare from Hunt's affairs. I am detained unwillingly here, and you will probably see Williams in the boat before me, but that will be decided to-morrow.

Things are in the worst possible situation with respect to poor Hunt. I find Marianne in a desperate state of health, and on our arrival at Pisa sent for Vaccà. He decides that her case is hopeless, and, although it will be lingering, must end fatally. This decision he thought proper to communicate to Hunt, indicating at the same time with great judgment and precision the treatment necessary to be observed for availing himself of the chance of his being deceived. This intelligence has extinguished the last spark of poor Hunt's spirits, low enough before. The children are well and much improved. Lord Byron is at this moment on the point of leaving Tuscany. The Gambas have been exiled, and he declares his intention of following their fortunes. His first idea was to sail to America, which was changed to Switzerland, then to Genoa, and last to Lucca.

Everybody is in despair, and everything in confusion. Trelawny was on the point of sailing to Genoa for the purpose of transporting the *Bolivar* overland to the Lake of Geneva, and had already whispered in my ear his desire that I should not influence Lord Byron against this terrestrial navigation. He next received orders to weigh anchor and set sail for Lerici. He is now without instructions, moody and disappointed. But it is the worse for poor Hunt, unless the present storm should blow over. He places his[Pg 366] whole dependence upon the scheme of the journal, for which every arrangement has been made. Lord Byron must, of course, furnish the requisite funds at present, as I cannot; but he seems inclined to depart without the necessary explanations and arrangements due to such a situation as Hunt's. These, in spite of delicacy, I must procure; he offers him the copyright of the *Vision of Judgment* for the first number. This offer, if sincere, is *more* than enough to set up the journal, and, if sincere, will set everything right.

How are you, my best Mary? Write especially how is your health, and how your spirits are, and whether you are not more reconciled to staying at Lerici, at least during the summer. You have no idea how I am hurried and occupied; I have not a moment's leisure, but will write by next post. Ever, dearest Mary, yours affectionately,

S.

I have found the translation of the *Symposium*.

Shelley to Jane Williams.

Pisa, 4th July 1822.

You will probably see Williams before I can disentangle myself from the affairs with which I am now surrounded. I return to Leghorn to-night, and shall urge him to sail with the first fair wind without expecting me. I have thus the pleasure of contributing to your happiness when deprived of every other, and of leaving you no other subject of regret but the absence of one scarcely worth regretting. I fear you are solitary and melancholy at the Villa Magni, and, in the intervals of the greater and more serious distress in which I am compelled to sympathise here, I figure to myself the countenance which has been the source of such consolation to me, shadowed by a veil of sorrow.

How soon those hours passed, and how slowly they return, to pass so soon again, and perhaps for ever, in which we have lived together so intimately, so happily! Adieu, my

dearest friend. I only write these lines for the pleasure of tracing what will meet your eyes. Mary will tell you all the news.

S.

[Pg 367]

From Jane Williams to Shelley.

*6th July.*

My dearest Friend—Your few melancholy lines have indeed cast your own visionary veil over a countenance that was animated with the hope of seeing you return with far different tidings. We heard yesterday that you had left Leghorn in company with the *Bolivar*, and would assuredly be here in the morning at 5 o'clock; therefore I got up, and from the terrace saw (or I dreamt it) the *Bolivar* opposite in the offing. She hoisted more sail, and went through the Straits. What can this mean? Hope and uncertainty have made such a chaos in my mind that I know not what to think. My own Neddino does not deign to lighten my darkness by a single word. Surely I shall see him to-night. Perhaps, too, you are with him. Well, *pazienza!*

Mary, I am happy to tell you, goes on well; she talks of going to Pisa, and indeed your poor friends seem to require all her assistance. For me, alas! I can only offer sympathy, and my fervent wishes that a brighter cloud may soon dispel the present gloom. I hope much from the air of Pisa for Mrs. Hunt.

Lord B.'s departure gives me pleasure, for whatever may be the present difficulties and disappointments, they are small to what you would have suffered had he remained with you. This I say in the spirit of prophecy, so gather consolation from it.

I have only time left to scrawl you a hasty adieu, and am affectionately yours,

J. W.

Why do you talk of never enjoying moments like the past? Are you going to join your friend Plato, or do you expect I shall do so soon? *Buona notte.*

Mary was slowly getting better, and hoping to feel brighter by the time Shelley came back. On the 7th of July she wrote a few lines in her [Pg 368] journal, summing up the month during which she had left it untouched.

*Sunday, July 7.*—I am ill most of this time. Ill, and then convalescent. Roberts and Trelawny arrive with the *Bolivar*. On Monday, 16th June, Trelawny goes on to Leghorn with her. Roberts remains here until 1st July, when the Hunts being arrived, Shelley

goes in the boat with him and Edward to Leghorn. They are still there. Read *Jacopo Ortis*, second volume of *Geographica Fisica*, etc. etc.

Next day, Monday the 8th, when the voyagers were expected to return, it was so stormy all day at Lerici that their having sailed was considered out of the question, and their non-arrival excited no surprise in Mary or Jane. So many possibilities and probabilities might detain them at Leghorn or Pisa, that their wives did not get anxious for three or four days; and even then what the two women dreaded was not calamity at sea, but illness or disagreeable business on shore. On Thursday, however, getting no letters, they did become uneasy, and, but for the rough weather, Jane Williams would have started in a row-boat for Leghorn. On Friday they watched with feverish anxiety for the post; there was but one letter, and it turned them to stone. It was to Shelley, from Leigh Hunt, begging him to write and say how he had got home in the bad weather of the previous Monday. And then it dawned upon them—a dawn of darkness. There was no news; there would be no news any more.

[Pg 369]One minute had untied the knot, and solved the great mystery. The *Ariel* had gone down in the storm, with all hands on board.

And for four days past, though they had not known it, Mary Shelley and Jane Williams had been widows.

END OF VOL. I

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**Footnotes:**

[1] "Address to the Irish People."

[2] Possibly this may refer to Count Schlaberndorf, an expatriated Prussian subject, who was imprisoned in Paris during the Reign of Terror, and escaped, but subsequently returned, and lived there in retirement, almost in concealment. He was a cynic, an eccentric, yet a patriot withal. He was divorced from his wife, and Shelley had probably got hold of a wrong version of his story.

[3] Byron.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5]

Thy dewy looks sink in my breast;  
Thy gentle words stir poison there;  
Thou hast disturbed the only rest  
That was the portion of despair!  
Subdued to Duty's hard control,  
I could have borne my wayward lot:  
The chains that bind this ruined soul  
Had cankered then, but crushed it not.

[6] See his letter to Baxter, quoted before.

[7] *Journal of a Six Weeks' Tour.*

[8] *Journal of a Six Weeks' Tour.*

[9] *Journal of a Six Weeks' Tour.*

[10] The bailiffs.

[11] She was staying temporarily at Skinner Street.

[12] Referring to Fanny's letter, enclosed.

[13] Peacock's mother.

[14] A friend of Harriet Shelley's.

[15] It is presumed that these were for Clara, in answer to an advertisement for a situation as companion.

[16] Godwin's friend and amanuensis.

[17] Which, unfortunately, may not be published.

[18] From this time Miss Clairmont is always mentioned as Clare, or Claire, except by the Godwins, who adhered to the original “Jane.”

[19] Byron.

[20] Word obliterated.

[21] Matthew Gregory Lewis, known as “Monk” Lewis.

[22] Hogg.

[23] *Revolt of Islam*, Dedication.

[24] *Revolt of Islam*, Dedication.

[25] The work referred to would seem to be Shelley’s Oxford pamphlet.

[26] Baxter’s son.

[27] Mr. Booth.

[28] What this accusation was does not appear.

[29] Alba.

[30] Shelley’s solicitor.

[31] The nursemaid.

[32] Mrs. Hunt.

[33] See Godwin’s letter to Baxter, chap. iii.

[34] Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*.

[35] Page 205.

[36] In *Frankenstein*.

[37] *Notes to Shelley’s Poems*, by Mrs. Shelley.

[38] Letter to Mr. Gisborne, of June 18, 1822.

[39] Letter of Shelley’s to Mr. Gisborne. (The passage, in the original, has no personal reference to Byron.)

[40] Announcing the stoppage of Shelley’s income.

[41] “The Boat on the Serchio.”

[42] *Notes to Shelley’s Poems*, by Mary Shelley.

[43] Godwin's *Answer to Malthus*.

[44] This initial has been printed C. Mrs. Shelley's letter leaves no doubt that Elise's is the illness referred to.

[45] Trelawny's "Recollections."

[46] Williams' journal for this last day runs—

*February 18.*—Jane unwell. S. turns physician. Called on Lord B., who talks of getting up *Othello*. Laid a wager with S. that Lord B. quits Italy before six months. Jane put on a Hindostanee dress and passed the evening with Mary, who had also the Turkish costume.

[47] Trelawny's "Recollections."

[48] Word illegible.

[49] Recounted at length in a subsequent letter, to be quoted later on.

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