

A Philosophical View of Reform

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1820

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INTRODUCTION

The work by Shelley which is here printed for the first time is contained in about 200 pages of a small vellum-covered note-book, which includes also a few jottings for poems, and casual scribbings. It was in the possession of Lady Shelley, the poet's daughter-in-law. By her it was presented to her friend the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, on whose death, in March 1916, it came to his daughter, the wife of the present writer, with the wish that I should examine it, and if it seemed desirable give it to the world. This was a labour of love, but also, owing to the character of the MS., one of considerable difficulty, and it could not be thought of until the claims of work in connexion with the war were at an end. The present edition is the answer to the question which I had to decide, and I trust I shall be held justified in believing that so important a work of Shelley's prime should no longer be left unpublished.

Besides its literary contents, the little volume has an interesting feature in the shape of a drawing made by Shelley on the cover. This is the most elaborate and careful drawing which we have from his hand, and I think it may be said to prove that Shelley had remarkable natural talent as an artist. His great contemporary, Goethe, at a certain time of his life, longed to be a painter, and strove with all his might to qualify himself for that calling rather than for literature, but he has left nothing which in mastery or poetic vision can compare with this. Unfortunately the drawing has been a good deal defaced and has suffered from a dint or scrape made by some heavy and sharp object. The size and shape of the little book suggest that it was meant to be carried in the pocket, and it probably accompanied its owner in many roamings by sea and land. A facsimile of the drawing is prefixed to the present volume.

The work which, just a hundred years ago, was committed to these pages, is unfinished and in the condition of a first draft. In places the difficulty of transcription has been great. Shelley's handwriting when he wrote his final copy for the printer was both beautiful and clear, but his first drafts were blotted, scrawled, and interlined to a degree which once made Trelawney—or so he tells us—mistake a famous lyric of Shelley's for a sketch of a duck-pond. There is nothing quite so bad as this in the present MS., and some of it is as clear as one could wish, but there are many passages which it took much time and pains to decipher with certainty.

The MS. presented other difficulties too. Sometimes Shelley would remodel the latter part of a sentence and substitute a different form of expression without making the consequential changes in the grammar of the first part. In these cases I have silently made such grammatical changes as are called for. I have also corrected a few errors in spelling (where these are not a form of the period, like 'antient') and have inserted words obviously omitted in the writer's haste. Such additions are printed in italics. In some cases Shelley has enclosed a passage in square brackets, indicating apparently that he had not quite made up his mind whether it should appear in that particular place or elsewhere. These brackets have been retained in the printed text. The division of chapters is Shelley's own, but the marginal guides to various subsections of the work have been added by me.

The first mention which we have of this Essay is contained in a letter of Shelley to Leigh Hunt, dated May 26th, 1820:

‘Do you know’, he writes, ‘any publisher or bookseller who would publish for me an octavo volume, entitled “A Philosophical View of Reform”? It is boldly but temperately written, and, I think, readable. It is intended for a kind of standard book for the philosophical reformers, politically considered like Jeremy Bentham’s, something, and perhaps more systematic. I will send it sheet by sheet. Will you ask and think for me?’

Nothing further seems to have come of this proposal.

The MS. opens with a scheme of four heads under which the subject of political reform was to be treated:

- 1. Sentiment of the Necessity of Change.
- 2. Practicability and Utility of such Change.
- 3. State of Parties as regards it.
- 4. Probable Mode—Desirable Mode.

This was repeated at the close of the introductory chapter, but in a slightly different form, the first head being expanded into two. The work as we actually have it consists of an introductory chapter of the nature of a rapid historical review, not mentioned in the scheme—and of two further chapters corresponding respectively to the first and the fourth heads of the scheme. The second and third heads are not treated in this draft.

It was doubtless the unfinished condition of the MS., coupled with the feeling that all Shelley’s prose work is of subordinate interest as compared with his poetry, that led to the suppression for a hundred years of a work on which he himself set considerable store. The century has brought us round again to an hour which is singularly opportune for a consideration of his ideas, for, in some particulars, the situation of public affairs at present reproduces very closely that amidst which, and to act on which, Shelley composed his treatise. England had in 1820 just emerged from a long period of warfare. She had emerged victoriously, but the country was full of distress and unrest. The National Debt had risen to what was then considered an appalling figure. Prices of all the necessities of life had soared up just as they have done at present. The vast development of mechanical industry, which in the economic sense saved the situation—even if it laid what Shelley calls ‘mines of mischief’ to the endangerment of future civilization—had not yet appeared on the horizon. England was facing a very threatening future under the rule, broadly speaking, of the country gentlemen and the Church of England, with some admixture of what Shelley calls the ‘new aristocracy’, the profiteers and speculators to whom the war had brought much wealth and a growing power. The working-classes on whom the system of taxation weighed with intolerable oppression had practically no voice in the still unreformed Parliament. In a situation like this it needed little argument to establish the necessity for reform of some kind, and it is of interest to see what kind of reform Shelley thought applicable to the case and by what means he hoped to bring it into being. Here I think we shall be struck with the moderation of his views. He certainly had extreme political opinions. He was still entirely under the dominion of the ideas of the French Revolution—ideas of the natural equality and goodness of man and of the inherent viciousness of power when centred in a few individuals, with its beneficence and virtue, if only it were equally

distributed to everybody. But he realized quite clearly that these ideas could not be applied at one stroke to the existing situation in England. The first thing to be done was to gain for the people at large a real share in the Government. In this he was in accord with all the serious political thought of his time, and if he had lived a dozen years longer he would have seen it done. In his views on the question of property he was certainly no Communist. What a man had honestly earned was rightfully his, to hold and to bequeath. But there were dishonest and wrongful ways of procuring or of using property, and for property so acquired or used he had no respect. He believed, however, that these means would not flourish in any State where property and political rights were reasonably well distributed among the whole population.

Of the nature of National Credit and Finance he had no understanding, and he offers a drastic and quite impracticable scheme for dealing with the National Debt, but in most other respects his ideas on the reforms to be taken in hand were neither impossible, nor unreasonable, nor unjust. Even as regards the National Debt he appears to have modified his views. In writing to 'C. T.' on June 29th, 1822, he argues not for repudiation, but for reduction of interest:

'England appears to be in a desperate condition, Ireland still worse; and no class of those who subsist on the public labour will be persuaded that their claims on it must be diminished. But the government must content itself with less in taxes, the landholder must submit to receive less rent, and the fundholder a diminished interest, or they will all get nothing. I once thought to study these affairs, and write or act in them.¹ I am glad that my good genius said, refrain. I see little public virtue, and I foresee that the contest will be one of blood and gold.'

But Shelley's impulses, in their violent reaction against wrong and tyranny, sometimes led him into extravagance and self-contradiction. He was writing immediately under the influence of the 'Peterloo Massacre', when a large Reform Meeting, assembled, it is true, in defiance of a Government prohibition, but entirely peaceful and well-behaved, was charged without notice by cavalry, and several persons killed. This event, which had deeply stirred English opinion, was in Shelley's mind when he wrote his wild attack on the soldier's profession (p. 68). How much this attack was mere passionate impulse and how little it was reasoned opinion is clear from the fact that for Shelley the profession of arms lost all its vice when it was exercised at sea! Sailors were not usually employed to ride down peaceful reformers or to drive starving crowds back to their dens, and therefore he found no difficulty (p. 56) in demanding a well-paid and well-equipped Navy to keep envious Continental Powers from descending on the happy shores of the England of his dreams.

As Professor Dowden has said, in discussing the 'Philosophical View of Reform' in his 'Life of Shelley', we have no other document which tells us so much of that side of Shelley's mind which was directed to politics. Every side of the mind of a great poet is worth knowing, and on the side of Shelley's mind which is revealed to us in these pages, there is nothing that does him dishonour. It is true that the work is unfinished. Not only does it end in the midst of a sentence, but there are passages in it here and there which, if they had been written in their final form, we may be sure would have been written otherwise. In one case a long passage (pp. 29, 30) actually was rewritten, in order to be incorporated in another work, the 'Defence of Poetry'; and to compare the two versions is to get an interesting glimpse into the workshop of a master of language. But as we see

¹ Perhaps an allusion to this work, among other matters. The whisper of the good genius was directed, it would appear, rather as a warning to Shelley not to entangle himself in a hopeless struggle in a field for which he was ill equipped, than to instil any misgivings about the fundamental soundness of his ideas.

by the many corrections and cancellations, a great deal of care and thought were certainly spent on the MS. as we have it now; we can trace Shelley's spirit in every line of it, and for the many things which it alone tells us of his outlook on the world of a hundred years ago, his country to-day may be inclined to welcome this last addition that yet remains to be made to the published work of her greatest lyric poet.

T. W. ROLLESTON.

April, 1920.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Rise of Modern Despotism.

Those who imagine that their personal interest is directly or indirectly concerned in maintaining the power in which they are clothed by the existing institutions of English Government do not acknowledge the necessity of a material change in those institutions. With this exception, there is no inhabitant of the British Empire of mature age and perfect understanding not fully persuaded of the necessity of Reform.

From the dissolution of the Roman Empire, that vast and successful scheme for the enslaving of the most civilised portion of mankind, to the epoch of the French Revolution, have succeeded a series of schemes, on a smaller scale, operating to the same effect. Names borrowed from the life and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture; and a system of liberty and equality—for such was the system planted by that great Reformer—was perverted to support oppression. Not his doctrines, for they are too simple and direct to be susceptible of such perversion, but the mere names. Such was the origin of the Catholic Church, which, together with the several dynasties then beginning to consolidate themselves in Europe, means, being interpreted, a plan according to which the cunning and selfish few have employed the fears and hopes of the ignorant many to the establishment of their own power and the destruction of the real interests of all.

The Resistance of Italy.

The Republics and municipal Governments of Italy opposed for some time a systematic and effectual resistance to the all-surrounding tyranny. The Lombard League defeated the armies of the despot in open field, and until Florence was betrayed to those polished tyrants, the Medici, Freedom had one citadel wherein it could find refuge from a world which was its enemy. Florence, long balanced, divided and weakened the strength of the Empire and the Popedom. To this cause, if to anything, was due the undisputed superiority of Italy in literature and the arts over all its contemporary nations, that union of energy and of beauty which distinguishes from all other poets the writings of Dante, that restlessness of fervid power which expressed itself in painting and sculpture, and in daring architectural forms, and from which, and conjointly from the creations of Athens, its predecessor and its image, Raphael and Michael Angelo drew the inspiration which created those forms and colours now the astonishment of the world. The father of our own literature, Chaucer, wrought from the simple and powerful language of a nursling of this Republic the basis of our own literature. And thus we owe, among other causes, the exact condition belonging to intellectual existence to the generous disdain of submission which burned in the bosoms of men who filled a distant generation and inhabited other lands.

The Reformation.

When this resistance was overpowered, as what resistance to fraud and tyranny has not been overpowered? another was even then maturing. The progress of philosophy and civilization which ended in that imperfect emancipation of mankind from the yoke of priests and kings called the Reformation, had already commenced. Exasperated by their long sufferings, inflamed by the sparks of that superstition from the flames of which they were emerging, the poor rose against their natural enemies, the rich, and repaid with bloody interest the tyranny of ages. One of the signs of the times was that the oppressed peasantry rose like the negro slaves of West Indian plantations, and murdered their tyrants when they were unaware. So dear is power that the tyrants themselves neither then, nor now, nor ever, left or leave a path to freedom but through their own blood. The contest then waged under the names of religion which have seldom been any more than popular and visible symbols which express power in some shape or other, asserted by one party and disclaimed by the other, ended; and the result, though partial and imperfect, is perhaps the most animating that the philanthropist can contemplate in the history of man. The Republic of Holland, which has been so long an armoury of the arrows of learning by which superstition has been wounded even to death, was established by this contest. What though the name of Republic—and by whom but by conscience-stricken tyrants would it be extinguished—is no more? The Republics of Switzerland derived from this event their consolidation and their union.

The English Renaissance.

From England then first began to pass away the stain of conquest. The exposure of a certain portion of religious imposture drew with it an enquiry into political imposture, and was attended with an extraordinary exertion of the energies of intellectual power. Shakespeare and Lord Bacon and the great writers of the age of Elizabeth and James I were at once the effects of the new spirit in men's minds, and the causes of its more complete development. By rapid gradations the nation was conducted to the temporary abolition of aristocracy and episcopacy, and to the mighty example which, 'in teaching nations how to live', England afforded to the world—of bringing to public justice one of those chiefs of a conspiracy of privileged murderers and robbers whose impunity had been the consecration of crime. [The maxim that criminals should be pitied and reformed, not detested and punished, alone affords a source of . . .]

The Revolution of 1688.

After the selfish passions and temporizing interests of men had enlisted themselves to produce and establish the Restoration of Charles II the unequal combat was renewed under the reign of his successor, and that compromise between the unextinguishable spirit of Liberty, and the ever watchful spirit of fraud and tyranny, called the Revolution had place. On this occasion monarchy and aristocracy and episcopacy were at once established and limited by law. Unfortunately they lost no more in extent of power than they gained in security of possession. Meanwhile those by whom they were established acknowledged and declared that the Will of the People was the source from which those powers, in this instance, derived the right to subsist. A man has no right

to be a King or a Lord or a Bishop but so long as it is for the benefit of the People and so long as the People judge that it is for their benefit that he should impersonate that character. The solemn establishment of this maxim as the basis of our constitutional law, more than any beneficial and energetic application of it to the circumstances of the era of its promulgation, was the fruit of that vaunted event. Correlative with this series of events in England was the commencement of a new epoch in the history of the progress of civilization and society.¹

That superstition which has disguised itself under the name of the system of Jesus subsisted under all its forms, even where it had been separated from those things especially considered as abuses by the multitude, in the shape of an intolerant and oppressive hierarchy. Catholics massacred Protestants and Protestants proscribed Catholics, and extermination was the sanction of each faith within the limits of the power of its professors. The New Testament is in everyone's hand, and the few who ever read it with the simple sincerity of an unbiassed judgement may perceive how distinct from the opinions of any of those professing themselves orthodox were the doctrines and the actions of Jesus Christ. At the period of the Reformation this test was applied, this judgement formed of the then existing hierarchy, and the same compromise was then made between the spirit of truth and the spirit of imposture after the struggle which ploughed up the area of the human mind, as was made in the particular instance of England between the spirit of freedom and the spirit of tyranny at that event called the Revolution. In both instances the maxims so solemnly recorded remain as trophies of our difficult and incomplete victory, planted on the enemies' soil. The will of the People to change their government is an acknowledged right in the Constitution of England. The protesting against religious dogmas which present themselves to his mind as false is the inalienable prerogative of every human being.

Religious and Philosophical Inquiry.

The new epoch was marked by the commencement of deeper enquiries into the point of human nature than are compatible with an unreserved belief in any of those popular mistakes upon which popular systems of faith with respect to the cause and agencies of the universe, with all their superstructure of political and religious tyranny,² are built. Lord Bacon, Spinoza, Hobbes, Boyle, Montaigne, regulated the reasoning powers, criticized the history, exposed the past errors by illustrating their causes and their connexion, and anatomized the in most nature of social man. Then, with a less interval of time than of genius, followed Locke and the philosophers of his exact and intelligible but superficial school. Their illustrations of some of the minor consequences of the doctrines established by the sublime genius of their predecessors were correct, popular, simple and energetic. Above all, they indicated inferences the most incompatible with the popular religions and the established governments of Europe. [Philosophy went now into the enchanted forest of the demons of worldly power, as the pioneer of the overgrowth of ages.] Berkeley and Hume, and Hartley at a later age, following the traces of these inductions, [c] [d] have clearly established the certainty of our ignorance with respect to those obscure questions which under the name of religious truths have been the watchwords of contention and symbols

¹ Vol. ii, p. 291 et seq.

² Here follows a passage which Shelley has scored out: 'I am unwilling to attribute any great share in the improvement of a being so intellectual as man to a circumstance so entirely accidental and mechanical as the invention of printing. This was one among a multitude of causes radiating to a single centre.'—(Ed.)

of unjust power ever since they were distorted by the narrow passions of the immediate followers of Jesus from that meaning to which philosophers are even now restoring them. A crowd of writers in France seized upon the most popular topics of these doctrines, and developing those particular portions of the new philosophy which conducted to inferences at war with the dreadful oppressions under which that country groaned, made familiar to mankind the falsehood of the mediaeval pretences of their religious and political oppressors. Considered as philosophers their error seems to have consisted chiefly in a limitation of view; they told the truth, but not the whole truth. This might have arisen from the terrible sufferings of their countrymen inviting them rather to apply a portion of what had already been discovered to their immediate relief, than to pursue one interest, the abstractions of thought, as the great philosophers who preceded them had done, for the sake of a future and more universal advantage. Whilst that philosophy which, burying itself in the obscure part of our nature, regards the truth and falsehood of dogmas relating to the cause of the universe, and the nature and manner of man's relation with it, was thus stripping Power of its darkest mask, Political Philosophy, or that which considers the relations of man as a social being, was assuming a precise form. That philosophy indeed sprang from and maintained a connexion with that other as its parent. What would Swift and Bolingbroke and Sidney and Locke and Montesquieu, or even Rousseau, not to speak of political philosophers of our own age, Godwin and Bentham, have been but for Lord Bacon, Montaigne and Spinoza, and the other great luminaries of the preceding epoch? Something excellent and eminent, no doubt, the least of these would have been, but something different from and inferior to what they are. A series of these writers illustrated with more or less success the principles of human nature as applied to man in political society. A thirst for accommodating the existing forms according to which mankind are found divided to those rules of freedom and equality which have been discovered as being the elementary principles according to which the happiness resulting from the social union ought to be produced and distributed, was kindled by these enquiries. Contemporary with this condition of the intellect all the powers of mankind, though in most cases under forms highly inauspicious began to develop themselves with uncommon energy. The mechanical sciences attained to a degree of perfection which, though obscurely foreseen by Lord Bacon, it had been accounted madness to have prophesied in a preceding age. Commerce was pursued with a perpetually increasing vigour, and the same area of the Earth was perpetually compelled to furnish more and more subsistence. The means and sources of knowledge were thus increased together with knowledge itself, and the instruments of knowledge. The benefit of this increase of the powers of man became, in consequence of the inartificial³ forms into which mankind was distributed, an instrument of his additional evil. The capabilities of happiness were increased, and applied to the augmentation of misery. Modern society is thus an engine assumed to be for useful purposes, whose force is by a system of subtle mechanism augmented to the highest pitch, but which, instead of grinding corn or raising water acts against itself and is perpetually wearing away or breaking to pieces the wheels of which it is composed. The result of the labours of the political philosophers has been the establishment of the principle of Utility as the substance, and liberty and equality as the forms according to which the concerns of human life ought to be administered. By this test the various institutions regulating political society have been tried,

³ Here, in a footnote, comes an unfinished sentence apparently intended to be worked into the above passage: 'Regular and graduated systems of alternate slavery and tyranny, by which all except the lowest and the largest class were to be gainers in the materials of subsistence and ostentation at the expense of that class, the means being fraud and force, were established in the shape of feudal monarchies upon the ruins of the . . .'

and as the undigested growth of the private passions, errors, and interests of barbarians and oppressors have been condemned. And many new theories, more or less perfect, but all superior to the mass of evil which they would supplant, have been given to the world.

The United States.

The system of government in the United States of America was the first practical illustration of the new philosophy. Sufficiently remote, it will be confessed, from the accuracy of ideal excellence is that representative system which will soon cover the extent of that vast Continent. But it is scarcely less remote from the insolent and contaminating tyrannies under which, with some limitation of the terms as regards England, Europe groaned at the period of the successful rebellion of America. America holds forth the victorious example of an immensely populous, and as far as the external arts of life are concerned, a highly civilized community administered according to republican forms. It has no king, that is it has no officer to whom wealth and from whom corruption flow. It has no hereditary oligarchy, that is it acknowledges no order of men privileged to cheat and insult the rest of the members of the State, and who inherit the right of legislating and judging which the principles of human nature compel them to exercise to their own profit and to the detriment of those not included within their peculiar class. It has no established Church, that is no system of opinions respecting the abstrusest questions which can be the topics of human thought, founded in an age of error and fanaticism, and opposed by law to all other opinions, defended by prosecutions, and sanctioned by enormous grants given to idle priests and forced from the unwilling hands of those who have an interest in the cultivation and improvement of the soil. It has no false representation, whose consequences are captivity, confiscation, infamy and ruin, but a true representation. The will of the many is represented in the assemblies and by the officers entrusted with the administration of the executive power almost as directly as the will of one person can be represented by the will of another. [This is not the place for dilating upon the inexpressible advantages (if such advantages require any manifestation) of a self-governing Society, or one which approaches it in the degree of the Republic of the United States.] Lastly, it has an institution by which it is honourably distinguished from all other governments which ever existed. It constitutionally acknowledges the progress of human improvement, and is framed under the limitation of the probability of more simple views of political science being rendered applicable to human life. There is a law by which the constitution is reserved for revision every ten years. Every other set of men who have assumed the office of legislation, and framing institutions for future ages, with far less right to such an assumption than the founders of the American Republic, regarded their work as the wisest and the best that could possibly have been produced: these illustrious men looked upon the past history of their species and saw that it was the history of his mistakes, and his sufferings arising from his mistakes; they observed the superiority of their own work to all the works which had preceded it, and they judged it possible that other political institutions would be discovered having the same relation to those which they had established which they bear to those which have preceded them. They provided therefore for the application of these contingent discoveries to the social state without the violence and misery attendant upon such change in less modest and more imperfect gov-

⁴ Sic in the MS. The intention must have been to write 'artificial', unless by 'inartificial' Shelley meant badly designed.—(Ed.)

ernments. The United States, as we would have expected from theoretical deduction, affords an example, compared with the old governments of Europe and Asia, of a free, happy, and strong people.⁴ Nor let it be said that they owe their superiority rather to the situation than to their government. Give them a king, and let that king waste in luxury, riot and bribery the same sum which now serves for the entire expenses of their government. Give them an aristocracy, and let that aristocracy legislate for the people. Give them a priesthood, and let them bribe with a tenth of the produce of the soil a certain set of men to say a certain set of words. Pledge the larger portion of them by financial subterfuges to pay the half of their property or earnings to another portion, and let the proportion of those who enjoy the fruits of the toil of others without toiling themselves be three instead of one. Give them a Court of Chancery and let the property, the liberty and the interest in the dearest concerns, the exercise of the sacred rights of a social being depend upon the will of one of the most servile creations of that kingly and oligarchical and priestly power to which every man, in proportion as he is of an enquiring and philosophic mind and of a sincere and honourable disposition is a natural and necessary enemy. Give then, as you must if you give them these things, a great standing army to cut down the people if they murmur. If any American should see these words, his blood would run cold at the imagination of such a change. He well knows that the prosperity and happiness of the United States if subjected to such institutions would be no more.

The French Revolution.

The just and successful Revolt of America corresponded with a state of public opinion in Europe of which it was the first result. The French Revolution was the second. The oppressors of mankind had enjoyed (O that we could say suffered) a long and undisturbed reign in France, and to the pining famine, the shelterless destitution of the inhabitants of that country had been added and heaped up insult harder to bear than misery. For the feudal system (the immediate causes and conditions of its institution having become obliterated) had degenerated into an instrument not only of oppression but of contumely, and both were unsparingly inflicted. Blind in the possession of strength, drunken as with the intoxication of ancestral greatness, the rulers perceived not that increase of knowledge in the subject which made its exercise insecure. They called soldiers to hew down the people when their power was already past. The tyrants were, as usual, the aggressors. The oppressed, having been rendered brutal, ignorant, servile and bloody by slavery, having had the intellectual thirst, excited in them by the progress of civilization, satiated from fountains of literature poisoned by the spirit and the form of monarchy, arose to take a dreadful revenge on their oppressors. Their desire to wreak revenge, to this extent, in itself a mistake, a crime, a calamity, arose from the same source as their other miseries and errors, and affords an additional proof of the necessity of that long-delayed change which it accompanied and disgraced. If a just and necessary revolution could have been accomplished with as little expense of happiness and order in a country governed by despotic as in one governed by free laws, equal liberty and justice would lose their chief recommendations and tyranny be divested of its most revolting attributes. Tyranny entrenches itself within the existing interests of the best and most refined citizens of a nation and says 'If you dare trample upon these, be free'. Though these terrible conditions shall not be evaded, the world is no longer in a temper to decline the challenge.

The French were what their literature is (excepting Montaigne and Rousseau, and some few of the . . .) weak, superficial, vain, with little imagination, and with passions as well as judgements cleaving to the external forms of things. Not that they are organically different from the inhabitants of the nations who have become . . . or rather not that their organical differences, whatever they may amount to, incapacitate them from arriving at the exercise of the highest powers to be attained by man. Their institutions made them what they were. Slavery and superstition, contumely and the tame endurance of contumely, and the habits engendered from generation to generation out of this transmitted inheritance of wrong, created the thing which has extinguished what has been called the likeness of God in man. The Revolution in France overthrew the hierarchy, the aristocracy and the monarchy, and the whole of that peculiarly insolent and oppressive system on which they were based. But as it only partially extinguished those passions which are the spirit of these forms a reaction took place which has restored in a certain limited degree the old system. In a degree, indeed, exceedingly limited, and stript of all its antient terrors, the hope of the Monarchy of France, with his teeth drawn and his claws pared, may succeed in maintaining the formal witness of most imperfect and insecure dominion.⁵ The usurpation of Bonaparte and then the Restoration of the Bourbons were the shapes in which this reaction clothed itself, and the heart of every lover of liberty was struck as with palsy on the succession of these events. But reversing the proverbial expression of Shakespeare, it may be the good which the Revolutionists did lives after them, their ills are interred with their bones. But the military project of government of the great tyrant having failed, and there being even no attempt—and, if there were any attempt, there being not the remotest possibility of re-establishing the enormous system of tyranny abolished by the Revolution, France is, as it were, regenerated. Its legislative assemblies are in a certain limited degree representations of the popular will, and the executive power is hemmed in by jealous laws. France occupies in this respect the same situation as was occupied by England at the restoration of Charles II. It has undergone a revolution (unlike in the violence and calamities which attended it, because unlike in the abuses which it was excited to put down) which may be paralleled with that in our own country which ended in the death of Charles I. The authors of both Revolutions proposed a greater and more glorious object than the degraded passions of their countrymen permitted them to attain. But in both cases abuses were abolished which never since have dared to show their face. There remains in the natural order of human things that the tyranny and perfidy of the reigns of Charles II and James II (for these were less the result of the disposition of particular men than the vices which would have been engendered in any but an extraordinary man by the natural necessities of their situation) perhaps under a milder form and within a shorter period should produce the institution of a Government in France which may bear the same relation to the state of political knowledge existing at the present day, as the Revolution under William III bore to the state of political knowledge existing at that period.

The Liberation of Germany.

Germany, which is, among the great nations of Europe, one of the latest civilized, with the exception of Russia, is rising with the fervour of a vigorous youth to the assertion of those rights

⁵ Its error consists not in the not representing the will of the people as it is, but in not providing for the full development and the most salutary condition of that will. For two conditions are necessary to a theoretically perfect

for which it has that desire arising from knowledge, the surest pledge of victory. The deep passion and the bold and Aeschylean vigour of the imagery of their poetry, the enthusiasm, however distorted, the purity, truth and comprehensiveness of their religious sentiments, their language which is the many-sided mirror of every changing thought, their sincere, bold and liberal spirit of criticism, their subtle and deep philosophy mingling fervid intuitions into truth with obscure error (for the period of just distinction is yet to come) and their taste and power in the plastic arts, prove that they are a great People. And every great nation either has been or is or will be free. The panic-stricken tyrants of that country promised to their subjects that their governments should be administered according to republican forms, they retaining merely the right of hereditary chief magistracy in their families. This promise, made in danger, the oppressors dream that they can break in security. And everything in consequence wears in Germany the aspect of rapidly maturing revolution.

Despotism in Spain.

In Spain and in the dependencies of Spain good and evil in the forms of Despair and Tyranny are struggling face to face. That great people have been delivered bound hand and foot to be trampled upon and insulted by a traitorous and sanguinary tyrant, a monster who makes credible all that might have been doubted in the history of Nero, Christiern, Muley Ismael or Ezzelin⁶—the persons who have thus delivered them were that hypocritical knot of conspiring tyrants, who proceeded upon the credit they gained by putting down the only tyrant among them who was not a hypocrite, to undertake the administration of those arrondissements⁷ of consecrated injustice and violence which they deliver to those who the nearest resemble them under the name of the 'kingdoms of the earth'. This action signed a sentence of death, confiscation, exile or captivity against every philosopher and patriot in Spain. The tyrant Ferdinand, he whose name is held a proverb of execration, found natural allies in all the priests and military chiefs and a few of the most dishonourable of that devoted country. And the consequences of military despotism and the black, stagnant, venomous hatred which priests in common with eunuchs seek every opportunity to wreak upon the portion of mankind exempt from their own unmanly disqualifications is slavery. And what is slavery—in its mildest form hideous, and, so long as one amiable or great attribute survives in its victims, rankling and intolerable, but in its darkest shape as it now exhibits itself in Spain it is the essence of all and more than all the evil for the sake of an exemption from which mankind submit to the mighty calamity of government. It is a system of insecurity of property, and of person, of prostration of conscience and understanding, it is famine heaped upon the greater number and contumely heaped upon all, defended by unspeakable tortures employed

government, and one of them alone is adequately fulfilled by the most perfect of practical governments, the Republic of the United States: to represent the will of the people as it is. To provide that that will should be as wise and just as possible. In a certain extent the mere representation of public will produces in itself a wholesome condition of it, and in this extent America fulfils imperfectly and indirectly the last and most important condition of perfect government.—(Author's Note.)

⁶ The foregoing sentence was left by Shelley in a chaotic and indecipherable condition. The restoration I have attempted gives the sense intended, but is conjectural in some particulars.

⁷ 'Christiern' is the king now commonly known as Christian II, perpetrator of the Massacre of Stockholm, 1520, and many other atrocities. Muley Ismael, who tortured one of his sons to death, was emperor of Morocco 1673-1727. Ezzelin or Eccelin de Romano, Lord of Padua in the thirteenth century, left a name which has become a byword for cruelty which struck even his own age with horror.—(Ed.)

not merely as punishments but as precautions, by want, death and captivity, and the application to political purposes of the execrated and enormous instruments of religious cruelty. Those men of understanding, integrity, and courage who rescued their country from one tyrant are exiled from it by his successor and his enemy and their legitimate king. Tyrants, however they may squabble among themselves, have common friends and foes. The taxes are levied at the point of the sword. Armed insurgents occupy all the defensible mountains of the country. The dungeons are peopled thickly, and persons of every sex and age have the fibres of their frame torn by subtle torments. Boiling water (such is an article in the last news from Spain) is poured upon the legs of a noble Spanish lady newly delivered, slowly and cautiously, that she may confess what she knows of a conspiracy against the tyrant, and she dies, as constant as the slave Epicharis,⁸ imprecating curses upon her torturers and passionately calling upon her children. These events, in the present condition of the understanding and sentiment of mankind, are the rapidly passing shadows, which forerun successful insurrection,⁹ the ominous comets of our republican poet perplexing great monarchs with fear of change. Spain, having passed through an ordeal severe in proportion to the wrongs and errors which it is kindled to erase must of necessity be renovated. Spain produced Calderon and Cervantes, what else did it but breathe, thro the tumult of the despotism and superstition which invested them, the prophecy of a glorious consummation?

South America.

The independents of South America are as it were already free. Great Republics are about to consolidate themselves in a portion of the globe sufficiently vast and fertile to nourish more human beings than at present occupy, with the exception perhaps of China, the remainder of the inhabited earth. Some indefinite arrears of misery and blood remain to be paid to the Moloch of oppression. These, to the last drop and groan it will inflict by its ministers. But not the less are they inevitably enfranchised. The Great Monarchies of Asia cannot, let us confidently hope, remain unshaken by the earthquake which is shaking to dust the 'mountainous strongholds' of the tyrants of the Western world.

India.

Revolutions in the political and religious state of the Indian peninsula seem to be accomplishing, and it cannot be doubted but the zeal of the missionaries of what is called the Christian faith will produce beneficial innovation there, even by the application of dogmas and forms of what is here an outworn incumbrance. The Indians have been enslaved and cramped in the most severe and paralysing forms which were ever devised by man; some of this new enthusiasm ought to be kindled among them to consume it and leave them free, and even if the doctrines of Jesus do not penetrate through the darkness of that which those who profess to be his followers call Christianity, there will yet be a number of social forms modelled upon those European feelings from which it has taken its colour substituted to those according to which they are at present cramped,

⁸ Italics indicated in MS.—(Ed.)

⁹ Tacitus tells her story (Ann. xv. 57). She slew herself, fearing to reveal under renewed torture the names of her accomplices in a conspiracy against Nero: More nobly dead, tho' but a freedwoman Than many a Roman swoln with pedigree. —(Ed.)

and from which, when the time for complete emancipation shall arrive, their disengagement may be less difficult, and under which their progress to it may be the less imperceptibly slow. Many native Indians have acquired, it is said, a competent knowledge in the arts and philosophy of Europe, and Locke and Hume and Rousseau are familiarly talked of in Brahminical society. But the thing to be sought is that they should, as they would if they were free, attain to a system of arts and literature of their own.—Of Persia we know little, but that it has been the theatre of sanguinary contests for power, and that it is now at peace. The Persians appear to be from organization¹ a beautiful refined and impassioned people and would probably soon be infected by the contagion of good.

The Turkish Empire.

The Turkish Empire is in its last stage of ruin, and it cannot be doubted but that the time is approaching when the deserts of Asia Minor and of Greece will be colonized by the overflowing population of countries less enslaved and debased, and that the climate and the scenery which was the birthplace of all that is wise and beautiful will not remain for ever the spoil of wild beasts and unlettered Tartars.—In Syria and Arabia the spirit of human intellect has roused a sect of people called Wahabees, who maintain the Unity of God, and the equality of man, and their enthusiasm must go on ‘conquering and to conquer’ even if it must be repressed in its present shape.—Egypt having but a nominal dependence upon Constantinople is under the government of Ottoman Bey,¹⁰ a person of enlightened views who is introducing European literature and art, and is thus beginning that change which Time, the great innovator, will accomplish in that degraded country; and by the same means its sublime and enduring monuments may excite lofty emotions in the hearts of the posterity of those who now contemplate them without admiration.—The Jews, that wonderful people which has preserved so long the symbols of their union may reassume their ancestral seats and . . .¹¹

The West Indies.

Lastly, in the West Indian islands, first from the disinterested yet necessarily cautious measures of the English Nation, and then from the infection of the spirit of Liberty in France, the deepest stain upon civilized man is fading away. Two nations of free negroes are already established; one, in pernicious mockery of the usurpation over France, an empire, the other a republic;¹² both animating yet terrific spectacles to those who inherit around them the degradation of slavery and the spirit of dominion.

¹⁰ After ‘insurrection’ in the MS. come the words, ‘the lean-looking prophets whispering fearful change’. The metaphor of the ‘ominous comets’ was evidently intended to be substituted for the lean prophets, but as the latter phrase was not struck out I record it here.—(Ed.)

¹¹ ‘On the other side, Incensed with indignation, Satan stood Unterrified, and like a comet burn’d, That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge In the arctic sky, and from his horrid hair Shakes pestilence and war.’ *Paradise Lost*, Bk. II. Shelley has mingled, in his recollection, the above passage with another from *Paradise Lost*, Bk. I, where Milton speaks of the sun which ‘in dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds On half the nations, and with fear of change Perplexes monarchs’. —(Ed.)

¹² Across this passage is written the word caret, indicating that something was to be supplied later.—(Ed.)

Such is a slight sketch of the general condition of the hopes and aspirations of the human race to which they have been conducted after the obliteration of the Greek republics by the successful tyranny of Rome,—its internal liberty having been first abolished,—and by those miseries and superstitions consequent upon them, which compelled the human race to begin anew its difficult and obscure career of producing, according to the forms of society, the greatest portion of good.

The Crisis in England.

Meanwhile England, the particular object for the sake of which these general considerations have been stated on the present occasion, has arrived, like the nations which surround it, at a crisis in its destiny.¹³ The literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever followed or preceded a great and free development of the national will, has arisen, as it were, from a new birth. In spite of that low-thoughted envy which would underrate, thro a fear of comparison with its own insignificance, the eminence of contemporary merit, it is felt by the British that this is in intellectual achievements a memorable age, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared in our nation since its last struggle for liberty. For the most unfailing herald, or companion, or follower, of an universal employment of the sentiments of a nation to the production of a beneficial change is poetry, meaning by poetry an intense and impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power takes its abode may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little correspondence with the spirit of good of which it is the minister. But although they may deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve that which is seated on the throne of their own soul.¹⁴ And whatever systems they may have professed by support, they actually advance the interests of Liberty.¹⁵ It is impossible to read the productions of our most celebrated writers, whatever may be their system relating to thought or expression, without being startled by the electric life which there is in their words. They measure the circumference or sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit at which they are themselves perhaps most sincerely astonished, for it is less their own spirit than the spirit of their age. They are the priests of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they conceive not; the trumpet which sings to battle and feels not what it inspires; the influence which is moved not but moves. Poets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

But, omitting these more abstracted considerations, has there not been and is there not in England a desire of change arising from the profound sentiment of the exceeding inefficiency of the existing institutions to provide for the physical and intellectual happiness of the people? It is proposed in this work¹⁶ (1) to state and examine the present condition of this desire, (2) to

¹³ This person sent his nephew to Lucca to study European learning, when his nephew asked with reference to some branch of study at enmity with Mahometanism whether he was permitted to engage in it, he replied, 'You are at liberty to do anything which will not injure another'.—(Author's Note.)

¹⁴ The rest of this passage about the Jews is missing.—(Ed.)

¹⁵ The negro Republic of Liberia was founded by manumitted American slaves in 1820. In Haiti the negro Dessalines proclaimed himself 'emperor' in 1804, and in Shelley's day the monarchy was contested by several negro chiefs.—(Ed.)

¹⁶ The passage on contemporary English literature from this point to the end of the paragraph was used by Shelley with some verbal alterations in the conclusion of his essay, *A Defence of Poetry*.—(Ed.)

elucidate its causes and its object, (3) to show the practicability and utility, nay the necessity of change, (4) to examine the state of parties as regards it, and (5)¹⁷ to state the probable, the possible, and the desirable mode in which it should be accomplished.

¹⁷ Across the page Shelley has here written the words, 'In this sense Religion may be called Poetry; though distorted from the beautiful simplicity of its truth—Coleridge has said that every poet was religious, the converse, that every religious man must be a poet was more true'.—(Ed.)

CHAPTER II: ON THE SENTIMENT OF THE NECESSITY OF CHANGE

Movements of English opinion.

Two circumstances arrest the attention of those who turn their regard to the present political condition of the English nation—first, that there is an almost universal sentiment of the approach of some change to be wrought in the institutions of the government, and secondly, the necessity and the desirableness of such a change. From the first of these propositions, it being matter of fact, no person addressing the public can dissent. The latter, from a general belief in which the former flows and on which it depends, is matter of opinion, but one which to the mind of all, excepting those interested in maintaining the contrary is a doctrine so clearly established that even they, admitting that great abuses exist, are compelled to impugn it by insisting upon the specious topic, that popular violence, by which they alone could be remedied, would be more injurious than the continuance of those abuses. But as those who argue thus derive for the most part great advantage and convenience from the continuance of these abuses, their estimation of the mischiefs of popular violence as compared with the mischiefs of tyrannical and fraudulent forms of government are likely, from the known principles of human nature, to be exaggerated. Such an estimate comes too with a worse grace from them, who if they would, in opposition to their own unjust advantage, take the lead in reform, might spare the nation from the inconveniences of the temporary dominion of the poor, who by means of that degraded condition which their insurrection would be designed to ameliorate, are sufficiently incapable of discerning their own glorious and permanent advantage, tho' surely less incapable than those whose interests consist in proposing to themselves an object perfectly opposite to and utterly incompatible with that advantage.¹ These persons propose to us the dilemma of submitting to a despotism which is notoriously gathering like an avalanche year by year, or taking the risk of something which it must be confessed bears the aspect of revolution. To this alternative we are reduced by the selfishness of those who taunt us with it. And the history of the world teaches us not to hesitate an instant in the decision, if indeed the power of decision be not already past.

The establishment of King William III on the throne of England has already been referred to as a compromise between liberty and despotism. Political Forces in Modern England. The Parliament of which that event was the act had ceased to be in an emphatic sense a representation of the people. The Long Parliament was the organ of the will of all classes of people in England since it effected the complete revolution in a tyranny consecrated by time. But since its meeting and since its dissolution a great change had taken place in England. Feudal manners and institutions having become obliterated, monopolies and patents having been abolished, property and

¹ At this point come the words, 'Poets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Shelley afterwards closed the paragraph with this fine sentence, forgetting, however, to strike it out here.—(Ed.)

personal liberty having been rendered secure, the nation advanced rapidly towards the acquirement of the elements of national prosperity.² Population increased, a greater number of hands were employed in the labours of agriculture and commerce, towns arose where villages had been, and the proportion borne by those whose labour produced the materials of subsistence and enjoyment to those who claim for themselves a superfluity of these materials began to increase indefinitely. A fourth class therefore made its appearance in the nation, the unrepresented multitude. Nor was it so much that villages which sent no members to Parliament became great cities, and that towns which had been considerable enough to send members dwindled from local circumstances into villages. This cause no doubt contributed to the general effect of rendering the Commons' House a less complete representation of the people. Yet had this been all, though it had ceased to be a legal and actual it might still have been a virtual Representation of the People. But universally the nation became multiplied into a denomination which had no constitutional presence in the State. This denomination had not existed before, or had existed only to a degree in which its interests were sensibly interwoven with that of those who enjoyed a constitutional presence. Thus the proportion borne by the Englishmen who possessed the faculty of suffrage to those who were excluded from that faculty at the several periods of 1641 and 1688 had changed by the operation of these causes from 1 to 8 to 1 to 20. The rapid and effectual progress by which it changed from 1 to 20 to one to many hundreds in the interval between 1688 and 1819 is a process, to those familiar with the history of the political economy of that period, which is rendered by these principles sufficiently intelligible. The number therefore of those who have influence on the government, even if numerically the same as at the former period, was relatively different. And a sufficiently just measure is afforded of the degree in which a country is enslaved or free, by the consideration of the relative number of individuals who are admitted to the exercise of political rights. Meanwhile another cause was operating of a deeper and more extensive nature. The class who compose the Lords must, by the advantages of their situation as the great landed proprietors, possess a considerable influence over nomination to the Commons. This influence, from an original imperfection in the equal distribution of suffrage, was always enormous, but it is only since it has been combined with the cause before stated that it has appeared to be fraught with consequences incompatible with public liberty. In 1641 this influence was almost wholly inoperative to pervert the counsels of the nation from its own advantage. But at that epoch the enormous tyranny of the agents of the royal power weighed equally upon all denominations of men, and united all counsels to extinguish it; add to which, the nation, as stated before, was in a very considerable degree fairly represented in Parliament. The common danger which was the bond of union between the aristocracy and the people having been destroyed, the former systematized their influence through the permanence of hereditary right, whilst the latter were losing power by the inflexibility of the institutions which forbade a just accommodation to their numerical increase. After the operations of these causes had commenced, the accession of William III placed a seal upon forty years of Revolution.

Monarchy and Aristocracy.

The government of this country at the period of 1688 was regal, tempered by aristocracy, for what conditions of democracy attach to an assembly one portion of which was imperfectly nomi-

² We have here an intercalation of a few jottings on themes to be expanded later: 'Before the F. R. a bitter state

nated by less than a twentieth part of the people, and another perfectly nominated by the nobles? For the nobility, having by the assistance of the people imposed close limitations upon the royal power, finding that power to be its natural ally and the people (for the people from the increase of their numbers acquired greater and more important rights whilst the organ through which those rights might be asserted grew feebler in proportion to the increase of the cause of those rights and of their importance) its natural enemy, made the Crown the mask and pretence of their own authority. At this period began that despotism of the oligarchy of party, which under colour of administering the executive power lodged in the king, represented in truth the interest of the rich. When it is said by political reasoners, speaking of the interval between 1688 and the present time, that the royal power progressively increased, they use an expression which suggests a very imperfect and partial idea. The power which has increased is that entrusted with the administration of affairs, composed of men responsible to the aristocratical assemblies, or to the reigning party in those assemblies, which represents those orders of the nation which are privileged, and will retain power as long as it pleases them and must be divested of power as soon as it ceases to please them. The power which has increased therefore is the power of the rich. The name and office of king is merely the mask of this power, and is a kind of stalking-horse used to conceal these 'catchers of men', whilst they lay their nets. Monarchy is only the string which ties the robber's bundle. Though less contumelious and abhorrent from the dignity of human nature than an absolute monarchy, an oligarchy of this nature exacts more of suffering from the people because it reigns both by the opinion generated by imposture, and the force which that opinion places within its grasp.

The National Debt.

At the epoch adverted to, the device of public credit was first systematically applied as an instrument of government. It was employed at the accession of William III less as a resource for meeting the financial exigencies of the state than as a bond to connect those in the possession of property with those who had, by taking advantage of an accident of party, acceded to power. In the interval elapsed since that period it has accurately fulfilled the intention of its establishment, and has continued to add strength to the government even until the present crisis. Now this device is one of those execrable contrivances of misrule which overbalance the materials of common advantage produced by the progress of civilization and increase the number of those who are idle in proportion to those who work, whilst it increases, through the factitious wants of those indolent, privileged persons, the quantity of work to be done. The rich, no longer being able to rule by force, have invented this scheme that they may rule by fraud. The most despotic governments of antiquity were strangers to this invention, which is a compendious method of extorting from the people far more than praetorian guards, and arbitrary tribunals, and excise officers created judges in the last resort, would ever wring. Neither the Persian monarchy nor the Roman empire, where the will of one person was acknowledged as unappealable law, ever extorted a twentieth part the proportion now extorted from the property and labour of the inhabitants of Great Britain. Metallic Currency. The precious metals have been from the earliest records of civilization employed as the signs of labour and the titles to an unequal distribution of

of public mind—The panic-giving arrows—All the great writers full of hope—Not necessary to debate here on the grounds of Reform—that to come in next chap.'—(Ed.)

its produce. The Government of a country is necessarily entrusted with the affixing to certain portions of these metals a stamp, by which to mark their genuineness; no other is considered as current coin, nor can be a legal tender. The reason of this is that no alloyed coin should pass current, and thereby depreciate the genuine, and by augmenting the price of the articles which are the produce of labour defraud the holders of that which is genuine of the advantages legally belonging to them. If the Government itself abuses the trust reposed in it to debase the coin, in order that it may derive advantage from the unlimited multiplication of the mark entitling the holder to command the labour and property of others, the gradations by which it sinks, as labour rises, to the level of their comparative values, produces public confusion and misery. The foreign exchange meanwhile instructs the Government how temporary was its resource. This mode of making the distribution of the sign of labour a source of private aggrandisement at the expense of public confusion and loss was not wholly unknown to the nations of antiquity.

Mischiefs of Paper Currency.

But the modern scheme of public credit is a far subtler and more complicated contrivance of misrule. All great transactions of personal property in England are managed by signs and that is by the authority of the possessor expressed upon paper, thus representing in a compendious form his right to so much gold, which represents his right to so much labour. A man may write on a piece of paper what he pleases; he may say he is worth a thousand when he is not worth a hundred pounds. If he can make others believe this, he has credit for the sum to which his name is attached. And so long as this credit lasts, he can enjoy all the advantages which would arise out of the actual possession of that sum he is believed to possess. He can lend two hundred to this man and three to that other, and his bills, among those who believe that he possesses this sum, pass like money. Of course in the same proportion as bills of this sort, beyond the actual goods or gold and silver possessed by the drawer, pass current, they defraud those who have gold and silver and goods of the advantages legally attached to the possession of them, and they defraud the labourer and artisan of the advantages attached to increasing the nominal price of labour, and such a participation in them as their industry might command, whilst they render wages fluctuating and add to the toil of the cultivator and manufacturer.¹

The existing government of England in substituting a currency of paper for one of gold has had no need to depreciate the currency by alloying the coin of the country; they have merely fabricated pieces of paper on which they promise to pay a certain sum. The holders of these papers came for payment in some representation of property universally exchangeable. They then declared that the persons who held the office for that payment could not be forced by law to pay. They declared subsequently that these pieces of paper were the current coin of the country. Of this nature are all such transactions of companies and banks as consist in the circulation of promissory notes to a greater amount than the actual property possessed by those whose names they bear. They have the effect of augmenting the prices of provision, and of benefiting at the expense of the community the speculators in this traffic. One of the vaunted effects of this system is to increase the national industry, that is, to increase the labours of the poor and those luxuries of the rich which they supply. To make a manufacturer work 16 hours when he only worked 8. To turn children into lifeless and bloodless machines at an age when otherwise they would be at play before the cottage doors of their parents. To augment indefinitely the proportion of those

who enjoy the profit of the labour of others, as compared with those who exercise this labour. To screw up . . . 1

The New Aristocracy.

The consequences of this transaction have been the establishment of a new aristocracy, which has its basis in funds as the old one has its basis in force. The hereditary landowners in England derived their title from royal grants—they are fiefs bestowed by conquerors, or church-lands. Long usage has consecrated the abstraction of the word aristocracy from its primitive meaning to that ordinary sense which signifies that class of persons who possess a right to the produce of the labour of others, without dedicating to the common service any labour in return. This class of persons, whose existence is a prodigious anomaly in the social system, has ever constituted an inseparable portion of it, and there has never been an approach in practice towards any plan of political society modelled on equal justice, at least in the complicated mechanism of modern life. Mankind seem to acquiesce, as in a necessary condition of the imbecility of their own will and reason, in the existence of an aristocracy. With reference to this imbecility, it has doubtless been the instrument of great social advantage, although that advantage would have been greater which might have been produced according to the forms of a just distribution of the goods and evils of life. The object therefore of all enlightened legislation, and administration, is to enclose within the narrowest practicable limits this order of drones. The effect of the financial impostures of the modern rulers of England has been to increase the number of the drones. Instead of one aristocracy, the condition to which, in the present state of human affairs, the friends of virtue and liberty are willing to subscribe as to an inevitable evil, they have supplied us with two aristocracies. The one, consisting in great land proprietors, and wealthy merchants who receive and interchange the produce of this country with the produce of other countries: in this, because all other great communities have as yet acquiesced in it, we acquiesce. Connected with the members of it is a certain generosity and refinement of manners and opinion which, although neither philosophy nor virtue, has been that acknowledged substitute for them which at least is a religion which makes respected those venerable names. The other aristocracy is one of attornies and excisemen and directors and government pensioners, usurers, stockjobbers, country bankers, with their dependents and descendants. These are a set of pelting wretches in whose employment there is nothing to exercise even to their distortion the more majestic faculties of the soul. Though at the bottom it is all trick, there is something frank and magnificent in the chivalrous disdain of infamy connected with a gentleman. There is something to which—until you see through the base falsehood upon which all inequality is founded—it is difficult for the imagination to refuse its respect, in the faithful and direct dealings of the substantial merchant. But in the habits and lives of this new aristocracy created out of an increase in public calamities, and whose existence must be determined by their termination, there is nothing to qualify our disapprobation. They eat and drink and sleep, and in the intervals of these things performed with most vexatious ceremony and accompaniments they cringe and lie.¹ They poison the literature of the age in which they live by requiring either the antitype of their own mediocrity in books, or such stupid and distorted and inharmonious idealisms as alone have the power to stir their torpid imaginations. Their hopes and fears are of the narrowest description. Their domestic affections are feeble, and

they have no others. They think of any commerce with their species but as a means, never as an end, and as a means to the basest forms of personal advantage.

Labour, under the double aristocracy.

If this aristocracy had arisen from a false and depreciated currency to the exclusion of the other, its existence would have been a moral calamity and disgrace, but it would not have constituted an oppression. But the hereditary aristocracy who had the political administration of affairs took the measures which created this other for purposes peculiarly its own. Those measures were so contrived as in no manner to diminish the wealth and power of the contrivers. The lord does not spare himself one luxury, but the peasant and artizan are assured of many necessary¹ things. To support the system of social order according to its supposed unavoidable constitution, those from whose labour all those external accommodations which distinguish a civilized being from a savage arise, worked, before the institution of this double aristocracy, light hours. And of these only the healthy were compelled to labour, the efforts of the old, the sick and the immature being dispensed with, and they maintained by the labour of the sane, for such is the plain English of the poor-rates. That labour procured a competent share of the decencies of life, and society seemed to extend the benefits of its institution even to its most unvalued instrument. Although deprived of those resources of sentiment and knowledge which might have been their lot could the wisdom of the institutions of social forms have established a system of strict justice, yet they earned by their labour a competency in those external materials of life which, and not the loss of moral and intellectual excellence, is supposed to be the legitimate object of the desires and murmurs of the poor. Since the institution of this double aristocracy, however, they have often worked not ten but twenty hours a day. Not that the poor have rigidly worked twenty hours, but that the worth of the labour of twenty hours now, in food and clothing, is equivalent to the worth of ten hours then. And because twenty hours cannot, from the nature of the human frame, be exacted from those who before performed ten, the aged and the sickly are compelled either to work or starve. Children who were exempted from labour are put in requisition, and the vigorous promise of the coming generation blighted by premature exertion. For fourteen hours' labour, which they do perforce, they receive—no matter in what nominal amount—the price of seven. They eat less bread, wear worse clothes, are more ignorant, immoral, miserable and desperate. This then is the condition of the lowest and largest class, from whose labour the whole materials of life are wrought, of which the others are only the receivers or the consumers. They are more superstitious, for misery on earth begets a diseased expectation and panic-stricken faith in miseries beyond the grave. 'God', they argue, 'rules this world as well as that; and assuredly since his nature is immutable, and his powerful will unchangeable, he rules them by the same laws.' The gleams of hope which speak of Paradise seem like the flames in Milton's hell only to make darkness visible, and all things take their colour from what surrounds them. They become revengeful—

But the condition of all classes of society, excepting those within the privileged pale, The Urgency of Reform. is singularly unprosperous, and even they experience the reaction of their own short-sighted tyranny in all those sufferings and deprivations which are not of a distinctly physical nature, in the loss of dignity, simplicity and energy, and in the possession of all those qualities which distinguish a slave-driver from a proprietor. Right government being an institution for the purpose of securing such a moderate degree of happiness to men as has been experi-

mentally practicable, the sure character of misgovernment is misery, and first discontent and, if that be despised, then insurrection, as the legitimate expression of that misery. The public right to demand happiness is a principle of nature; the labouring classes, when they cannot get food for their labour, are impelled to take it by force. Laws and assemblies and courts of justice and delegated powers placed in balance and in opposition are the means and the form, but public happiness is the substance and the end of political institutions. Whenever this is attained in a nation, not from external force, but from the internal arrangement and divisions of the common burthens of defence and maintenance, then there is oppression. And then arises an alternative between Reform, or the institution of a military Despotism, or a Revolution in which parties, one striving after ill-digested systems of democracy, and the other clinging to the outworn abuses of power, leave the few who aspire to more than the former and who would overthrow the latter at whatever expense, to wait for¹ that modified advantage which, with the temperance and the toleration which both regard as a crime, might have resulted from the occasion which they let pass in a far more signal manner.

The condition of England.

The propositions which are the consequences or the corollaries of the preceding reasoning, and to which it seems to have conducted us are:—

- —That the majority of the people of England are destitute and miserable, ill-clothed, ill-fed, ill-educated.
- —That they know this, and that they are impatient to procure a reform of the cause of this abject and wretched state.
- —That the cause of this misery is the unequal distribution which, under the form of the national debt, has been surreptitiously made of the products of their labour and the products of the labour of their ancestors; for all property is the produce of labour.
- —That the cause of that cause is a defect in the government.
- —That if they knew nothing of their condition, but believed that all they endured and all they were deprived of arose from the unavoidable conditions of human life, this belief being an error, and one the endurance of which enforces an injustice, every enlightened and honourable person, whatever may be the imagined interest of his peculiar class, ought to excite them to the discovery of the true state of the case, and to the temperate but irresistible vindication of their rights.

The Malthusian Fallacy.

A Reform in England is most just and necessary. What ought to be that reform?

A writer of the present day (a priest of course, for his doctrines are those of a eunuch and of a tyrant) has stated that the evils of the poor arise from an excess of population, and after they have been stript naked by the tax-gatherer and reduced to bread and tea and fourteen hours of hard labour by their masters, and after the frost has bitten their defenceless limbs, and the cramp has

wrung like a disease within their bones, and hunger and the suppressed revenge of hunger has stamped the ferocity of want like the mark of Cain upon their countenance, that the last tie by which Nature holds them to the benignant earth whose plenty is garnered up in the strongholds of their tyrants, is to be divided; that the single alleviation of their sufferings and their scorns, the one thing which made it impossible to degrade them below the beasts, which amid all their crimes and miseries yet separated a cynical and unmanly contamination, an anti-social cruelty, from all the soothing, elevating and harmonious gentleness of the sexual intercourse and the humanizing charities of domestic life which are its appendages—that this is to be obliterated. They are required to abstain from marrying under penalty of starvation. And it is threatened to deprive them of that property which is as strictly their birthright as a gentleman's land is his birthright, without giving them any compensation but the insulting advice to conquer, with minds undisciplined in the habits of higher gratification, a propensity which persons of the most consummate wisdom have been unable to resist, and which it is difficult to admire a person for having resisted. The doctrine of this writer is that the principle of population, when under no dominion of moral restraint, is outstripping the sustenance produced by the labour of man, and that not in proportion to the number of inhabitants, but operating equally in a thinly peopled community as in one where the population is enormous, being not a prevention but a check. So far a man might have been conducted by a train of reasoning which, though it may be shown to be defective, would argue in the reasoner no selfish or slavish feelings. But he has the hardened insolence to propose as a remedy that the poor should be compelled (for what except compulsion is a threat of the confiscation of those funds which by the institutions of their country had been set apart for their sustenance in sickness or destitution?) to abstain from sexual intercourse, while the rich are to be permitted to add as many mouths to consume the products of the labours of the poor as they please. [The rights of all men are intrinsically and originally equal and they forgo the assertion of all of them only that they may the more securely enjoy a portion.] If any new disadvantages are found to attach to the condition of social existence, those disadvantages ought not to be borne exclusively by one class of men, nor especially by that class whose ignorance leads them to exaggerate the advantages of sensual enjoyment, whose callous habits render domestic endearments more important to dispose them to resist the suggestion to violence and cruelty by which their situation ever exposes them to be tempted, and all whose other enjoyments are limited and few, whilst their sufferings are various and many. In this sense I cannot imagine how the advocates of equality could so readily have conceded that the unlimited operation of the principle of population affects the truth of these theories. On the contrary, the more heavy and certain are the evils of life, the more injustice is there in casting the burden of them exclusively on one order in the community. They seem to have conceded it merely because their opponents have insolently assumed it. Surely it is enough that the rich should possess to the exclusion of the poor all other luxuries and comforts, and wisdom and refinement, the least envied but the most deserving of envy among all their privileges!

Preliminaries to Reform.

What is the Reform that we desire? Before we aspire after theoretical perfection in the amelioration of our political state, it is necessary that we possess those advantages which we have been cheated of, and of which the experience of modern times has proved that nations even under

the present conditions are susceptible. We would regain these. We would establish some form of government which might secure us against such a series of events as have conducted us to a persuasion that the forms according to which it is now administered are inadequate to that purpose.

We would abolish the national debt.

We would disband the standing army.

We would, with every possible regard to the existing rights of the holders, abolish sinecures.

We would, with every possible regard to the existing interests of the holders, abolish tithes, and make all religions, all forms of opinion respecting the origin and government of the Universe, equal in the eye of the law.¹

We would make justice cheap, certain and speedy, and extend the institution of juries to every possible occasion of jurisprudence.

Liquidation of the National Debt.

The national debt was contracted chiefly in two liberticide wars, undertaken by the privileged classes of the country—the first for the ineffectual purpose of tyrannizing over one portion of their subjects, the second, in order to extinguish the resolute spirit of obtaining their rights in another. The labour which this money represents, and that which is represented by the money wrung for purposes of the same detestable character out of the people since the commencement of the American war would, if properly employed, have covered our land with monuments of architecture exceeding the sumptuousness and the beauty of Egypt and Athens; it might have made every peasant's cottage, surrounded with its garden, a little paradise of comfort, with every convenience desirable in civilized life; neat tables and chairs, good beds, and a collection of useful books; and our ships manned by sailors well-paid and well-clothed, might have kept watch round this glorious island against the less enlightened nations which assuredly would have envied, until they could have imitated, its prosperity.¹ But the labour which is expressed by these sums has been diverted from these purposes of human happiness to the promotion of slavery, and that attempt at dominion, and a great portion of the sum in question is debt and must be paid. Is it to remain unpaid for ever, an eternal rent-charge upon the land from which the inhabitants of these islands draw their subsistence? This were to pronounce the perpetual institution of two orders of aristocracy, and men are in a temper to endure one with some reluctance. Is it to be paid now? If so what are the funds, or when and how is it to be paid? The fact is that the national debt is a debt not contracted by the whole nation towards a portion of it, but a debt contracted by the whole mass of the privileged classes towards one particular portion of those classes. If the principal were paid, the whole property of those who possess property must be valued and the public creditor, whose property would have been included in this estimate, satisfied out of the proceeds. It has been said that all the land in the nation is mortgaged for the amount of the national debt. This is a partial statement. Not only all the land in the nation, but all the property of whatever denomination, all the houses and the furniture and the goods and every article of merchandise, and the property which is represented by the very money lent by the fund-holder, who is bound to pay a certain portion as debtor whilst he is entitled to receive another certain portion as creditor. The property of the rich is mortgaged: to use the language of the law, let the mortgagee foreclose.

If the principal of this debt were paid,¹ it would be the rich who alone could, and justly they ought to pay it. It would be a mere transfer among persons of property. Such a gentleman must lose a third of his estate, such a citizen a fourth of his money in the funds; the persons who borrowed would have paid, and the juggling and complicated system of paper finance be suddenly at an end. As it is, the interest is chiefly paid by those who had no hand in the borrowing, and who are sufferers in other respects from the consequences of those transactions in which the money was spent.

The payment of the principal of what is called the national debt, which it is pretended is so difficult a problem, is only difficult to those who do not see who is the debtor, and who the creditor, and who the wretched sufferers from whom they both wring the taxes which under the form of interest is given by the former and accepted by the latter.¹ It is from the labour of those who have no property that all the persons who possess property think to extort the perpetual interest of a debt, the whole of which the latter know they could not persuade the former to pay, but by conspiring with them in an imposture which makes the third class pay what the first neither received by their sanction nor spent for their benefit and what the second never lent to them. They would both shift from themselves and their posterity to the labour of the present and of all succeeding generations the payment of the interest of their own debt, because the payment of the principal would be no more than a compromise and transfer of property between each other, by which the nation would be spared 44 millions a year, which now is paid to maintain in luxury and indolence the public debtors and to protect them from the demand of their creditors upon them, who, being part of the same body, and owing as debtors whilst they possess a claim as creditors, agree to abstain from demanding the principal which they must all unite to pay, for the sake of receiving an enormous interest which is principally wrung out of those who had no concern whatever in the transaction. One of the first acts of a reformed government would undoubtedly be an effectual scheme for compelling these to compromise their debt between themselves.

When I speak of persons of property I mean not every man who possesses any right of property; I mean the rich. Every man whose scope in society has a plebeian and intelligible utility, whose personal exertions are more valuable to him than his capital; every tradesman who is not a monopolist, all surgeons and physicians, and artists, and farmers, all those persons whose profits spring from honourably and honestly exerting their own skill and wisdom or strength in greater abundance than from the employment of money to take advantage of their fellow-citizens' starvation for their profit, are those who pay, as well as those more obviously understood by the labouring classes, the interest of the national debt. It is the interest of all these persons as well as that of the poor to insist upon the payment of the principal.

For this purpose the form ought to be as simple and succinct as possible. The operations deciding who was to pay, at what time, and how much, and to whom, divested of financial chicanery, are problems readily to be determined. The common tribunals may be invested with legal jurisdiction to award the proportion due upon the several claim of each.

Property Just and Unjust.

Labour and skill and the immediate wages of labour and skill is a property of the most sacred and indisputable right, and the foundation of all other property. And the right of a man¹ to property in the exertion of his own bodily and mental faculties, or on the produce and free reward

from and for that exertion is the most inalienable of rights.¹ If however he takes by violence and appropriates to himself through fraudulent cunning, or receives from another property so acquired, his claim to that property is of a far inferior force. We may acquiesce, if we evidently perceive an overbalance of public advantage in submission under this claim; but if any public emergency should arise, at which it might be necessary to satisfy, by a tax on capital, the claims of a part of the nation by a contribution from such national resources as may with the least injustice be appropriated to that purpose, assuredly it would not be on labour and skill, the foundation of all property, nor on the profits and savings of labour and skill, which are property itself, but on such possessions which can only be called property in a modified sense, as have from their magnitude and their nature an evident origin in violence or imposture.

Thus there are two descriptions of property which, without entering into the subtleties of a more refined moral theory as applicable to the existing forms of society, are entitled to two very different measures of forbearance and regard. And this forbearance and regard have by political institutions usually been accorded by an inverse reason from what is just and natural. Labour, industry, economy, skill, genius, or any similar powers honourably and innocently exerted are the foundations of one description of property, and all true political institutions ought to defend every man in the exercise of his discretion with respect to property so acquired. Of this kind is the principal part of the property enjoyed by those who are but one degree removed from the class which subsists by daily labour. [Yet there are instances of persons in this class who have procured their property by fraudulent and violent means, as there are instances in the other of persons who have acquired their property by innocent or honourable exertion. All political science abounds with limitations and exceptions.]—Property thus acquired men leave to their children. Absolute right becomes weakened by descent, just because it is only to avoid the greater evil of arbitrarily interfering with the discretion of every man in matters of property that the great evil of acknowledging any person to have an exclusive right to property who has not created it by his skill or labour is admitted, and secondly because the mode of its having been originally acquired is forgotten, and it is confounded with property acquired in a very different manner; and the principle upon which all property justly exists, after the great principle of the general advantage, becomes thus disregarded and misunderstood. Yet the privilege of disposing of property by will is one necessarily connected with the existing forms of domestic life; and exerted merely by those who having acquired property by industry or who preserve it by economy, would never produce any great and invidious inequality of fortune. A thousand accidents would perpetually tend to level the accidental elevation, and the signs of property would perpetually recur to those whose deserving skill might attract or whose labour might create it.

But there is another species of property which has its foundation in usurpation, or imposture, or violence, without which, by the nature of things, immense possessions of gold or land could never have been accumulated. Of this nature is the principal part of the property enjoyed by the aristocracy and by the great fundholders, the majority of whose ancestors never either deserved it by their skill and talents or acquired and created it by their personal labour. It could not be that they deserved it, for if the honourable exertion of the most glorious and imperial faculties of our nature had been the criterion of the possession of property the posterity of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Hampden, would be the wealthiest proprietors in England. It could not be that they acquired it by legitimate industry, for, besides that the real mode of acquisition is matter of history, no honourable profession or honest trade, nor the hereditary exercise of it, ever in such numerous instances accumulated so much as the masses of property enjoyed by the ruling orders

in England. They were either grants from the feudal sovereigns whose right to what they granted was founded upon conquest or oppression, both a denial of all right; or they were lands of the ancient Catholic clergy which according to the most acknowledged principles of public justice reverted to the nation at their suppression, or they were the products of patents and monopolies, an exercise of sovereignty which it is astonishing that political theorists have not branded as the most pernicious and odious to the interests of a commercial nation;¹ or in later times such property has been accumulated by dishonourable cunning and the taking advantage of a fictitious paper currency to obtain an unfair power over labour and the fruits of labour.

Property thus accumulated, being transmitted from father to son, acquires, as property of the more legitimate kind loses, force and sanction, but in a very limited manner. For not only on an examination and recurrence to first principles is it seen to have been founded on a violation of all that to which the latter owes its sacredness, but it is felt in its existence and perpetuation as a public burthen, and known as a rallying point to the ministers of tyranny, having the property of a snowball, gathering as it rolls, and rolling until it bursts.

The Heritage of Debt.

The national debt, as has been stated, is a debt contracted by a particular class in the nation towards a portion of that class. It is sufficiently clear that this debt was not contracted for the purpose of the public advantage. Besides there was no authority in the nation competent to a measure of this nature. The usual vindication of national debts is that they are in an overwhelming measure contracted for the purpose of defence against a common danger, for the vindication of the rights and liberties of posterity, and that it is just that posterity should bear the burthen of payment. This reasoning is most fallacious. The history of nations presents us with a succession of extraordinary emergencies, and thro their present imperfect organization their existence is perpetually threatened by new and unexpected combinations and developments of foreign or internal force. Imagine a situation of equal emergency to occur to England as that which the ruling party assume to have occurred as their excuse for burthening the nation with the perpetual payment of £45,000,000 annually. Suppose France, Russia, and Germany were to enter into a league against Britain, the one to avenge its injuries, the second to satisfy its ambition, the third to soothe its jealousy. Could the nation bear £90,000,000 of yearly interest? must there be twice as many luxurious and idle persons? must the labourer receive for 28 hours' work what he now receives for 14, what he once received for seven? But this argument³ . . .

Reform or Revolution?

What is meant by a Reform of Parliament? If England were a Republic governed by one assembly; if there were no chamber of hereditary aristocracy which is at once an actual and a virtual representation of all who attain through rank or wealth superiority over their countrymen; if there were no king who is as the rallying point of those whose tendency is at once to gather⁴ and to confer that power which is consolidated at the expense of the nation, then . . .

³ Shelley has here inadvertently written '4th'.—(Ed.)

⁴ The words 'I meant the government party' are here intercalated.—(Ed.)

The advocates of universal suffrage have reasoned correctly that no individual who is governed can be denied a direct share in the government of his country without supreme injustice. If one pursues the train of reasonings which have conducted to this conclusion, we discover that systems of social order still more incompatible than universal suffrage with any reasonable hope of instant accomplishment appear to be that which should result from a just combination of the elements of social life. I do not understand why those reasoners who propose at any price an immediate appeal to universal suffrage, because it is that which it is injustice to withhold, do not insist, on the same ground, on the immediate abolition, for instance, of monarchy and aristocracy, and the levelling of inordinate wealth, and an agrarian distribution, including the parks and chases of the rich, of the uncultivated districts of the country. No doubt the institution of universal suffrage would by necessary consequence immediately tend to the temporary abolition of these forms; because it is impossible that the people, having attained the power, should fail to see, what the demagogues now conceal from them, the legitimate consequence of the doctrines through which they had attained it. A Republic, however just in its principle and glorious in its object, would through the violence and sudden change which must attend it, incur a great risk of being as rapid in its decline as in its growth. It is better that they should be instructed in the whole truth; that they should see the clear grounds of their rights, the objects to which they ought to tend; and be impressed with the just persuasion that patience and reason and endurance are the means of a calm yet irresistible progress. A civil war, which might be engendered by the passions attending on this mode of reform, would confirm in the mass of the nation those military habits which have been already introduced by our tyrants, and with which liberty is incompatible. From the moment that a man is a soldier, he becomes a slave. He is taught obedience; his will is no longer, which is the most sacred prerogative of men, guided by his own judgement. He is taught to despise human life and human suffering; this is the universal distinction of slaves. He is more degraded than a murderer; he is like the bloody knife which has stabbed and feels not: a murderer we may abhor and despise; a soldier, is by profession, beyond abhorrence and below contempt.

CHAPTER III: PROBABLE MEANS

The House of Commons and Reform. That the House of Commons should reform itself, uninfluenced by any fear that the people would, on their refusal, assume to itself that office, seems a contradiction. What need of Reform if it expresses the will and watches over the interests of the public? And if, as is sufficiently evident, it despises that will and neglects that interest, what motives would incite it to institute a reform which the aspect of the times renders indeed sufficiently perilous, but without which there will speedily be no longer anything in England to distinguish it from the basest and most abject community of slaves that ever existed.

One motive¹. . .

Theory of Popular Government.

The great principle of Reform consists in every individual giving his consent to the institution and the continuous existence of the social system which is instituted for his advantage and for the advantage of others in his situation.² As in a great nation this is practically impossible, masses of individuals consent to qualify other individuals, whom they delegate to superintend their concerns. These delegates have constitutional authority to exercise the functions of sovereignty; they unite in the highest degree the legislative and executive functions. A government that is founded on any other basis is a government of fraud or force and ought on the first convenient occasion to be overthrown. The first principle of political reform is the natural equality of men, not with relation to their property but to their rights. That equality in possessions which Jesus Christ so passionately taught is a moral rather than a political truth and is such as social institutions cannot without mischief inflexibly secure. Morals and politics can only be considered as portions of the same science, with relation to a system of such absolute perfection as Plato and Rousseau and other reasoners have asserted, and as Godwin has with irresistible eloquence systematised and developed. Equality in possessions must be the last result of the utmost refinements of civilization; it is one of the conditions of that system of society towards which, with whatever hope of ultimate success, it is our duty to tend. We may and ought to advert to it as to the elementary principle, as to the goal, unattainable, perhaps, by us but which, as it were, we revive in our posterity to pursue. We derive tranquillity and courage and grandeur of soul from contemplating an object which is, because we will it, and may be, because we hope and desire it, and must be if succeeding generations of the enlightened sincerely and earnestly seek it.

But our present business is with the difficult and unbending realities of actual life, and when we have drawn inspiration from the great object of our hopes it becomes us with patience and resolution to apply ourselves to accommodating our theories to immediate practice.

¹ A blank page follows here.—(Ed.)

² This is impossible in great nations and the most enlightened theorists have therefore proposed dividing them into a great multiplicity of federated republics.—(Pencilled note by the author.)

The First Step to Reform.

That Representative Assembly called the House of Commons ought unquestionless to be immediately nominated by the great mass of the people. The aristocracy and those who unite in their own persons the vast privileges conferred by the possession of inordinate wealth are sufficiently represented by the House of Peers and by the King. Those theorists who admire and would put into action the mechanism of what is called the British Constitution would acquiesce in this view of the question. For if the House of Peers be a permanent representation of the privileged classes, if the regal power be no more than another form, and a form still more advisedly to be so regarded, of the same representation, whilst the House of Commons is not chosen by the mass of the population, what becomes of that democratic element upon the presence of which it has been supposed that the waning superiority of England over the surrounding nations has depended?

Universal Suffrage.

Any sudden attempt at universal suffrage would produce an immature attempt at a Republic. It is better that an object so inexpressibly great and sacred should never have been attempted than that it should be attempted and fail. It is no prejudice to the ultimate establishment of the boldest political innovations that we temporize so that when they shall be accomplished they may be rendered permanent.

Considering the population of Great Britain and Ireland as twenty millions and the representative assembly as five hundred, each member ought to be the expression of the will of 40,000 persons; of these two-thirds would consist of women and children and persons under age; the actual number of voters therefore for each member would be 13,333. The whole extent of the empire might be divided into five hundred electoral departments or parishes, and the inhabitants assemble on a certain day to exercise their rights of suffrage.

Female Suffrage.

Mr. Bentham and other writers have urged the admission of females to the right of suffrage; this attempt seems somewhat immature. Should my opinion be the result of despondency, the writer of these pages would be the last to withhold his vote from any system which might tend to an equal and full development of the capacities of all living beings.

Objections to the Ballot.

The system of voting by ballot which some reasoners have recommended is attended with obvious inconveniences. It withdraws the elector from the eye of his country, and his neighbours, and permits him to conceal the motives of his vote, which, if concealed, cannot but be dishonourable; when, if he had known that he had to render a public account of his conduct, he would never have permitted them to guide him. There is in this system of voting by ballot and of electing a member of the Representative Assembly as a churchwarden is elected something too mechanical. The elector and the elected ought to meet one another face to face, and interchange the meanings of actual presence and share some common impulses, and, in a degree, understand each other.

There ought to be the common sympathy of the excitements of a popular assembly among the electors themselves. The imagination would thus be strongly excited and a mass of generous and enlarged and popular sentiments be awakened, which would give the vitality of . . .

That republican boldness of censuring and judging one another which has indeed existed in England under the title of 'public opinion', though perverted from its true uses into an instrument of prejudice and calumny, would then be applied to its genuine purpose. Year by year the people would become more susceptible of assuming forms of government more simple and beneficial.

It is in this publicity of the exercise of sovereignty that the difference between the republics of Greece and the monarchies of Asia consisted.

The crisis of Monarchy.

If the existing government shall compel the nation to take the task of reform into its own hands, one of the most obvious consequences of such a circumstance would be the abolition of monarchy and aristocracy. Why, it will then be argued, if the subsisting condition of social forms is to be thrown into confusion, should these things be endured? Is it because we think that an hereditary king is cheaper and wiser than an elected President, or a House of Lords and a Bench of Bishops an institution modelled by the wisdom of the most refined and civilized periods, beyond which the wit of mortal man can furnish nothing more perfect? In case the subsisting Government should compel the people to revolt to establish a representative assembly in defiance of them, and to assume in that assembly an attitude of resistance and defence, this question would probably be answered in a very summary manner. No friend of mankind and of his country can desire that such a crisis should suddenly arrive; but still less, once having arrived, can he hesitate under what banner to array his person and his power. At the peace, Europe would have been contented with strict economy and severe retrenchment, and some direct and intelligible plan for producing that equilibrium between the capitalists and the landholders which is derisively styled the payment of the national debt: had this system been adopted, they probably would have refrained from exacting Parliamentary Reform, the only secure guarantee that it would have been pursued. Two years ago it might still have been possible to have commenced a system of gradual reform. The people were then insulted, tempted and betrayed, and the petitions of a million of men rejected with disdain. Now they are more miserable, more hopeless, more impatient of their misery. Above all, they have become more universally aware of the true sources of their misery. It is possible that the period of conciliation is past, and that after having played with the confidence and cheated the expectations of the people, their passions will be too little under discipline to allow them to wait the slow, gradual and certain operation of such a Reform as we can imagine the constituted authorities to concede.

Gradual Reform.

Upon the issue of this question depends the species of reform which a philosophical mind should regard with approbation. If Reform shall be begun by this existing government, let us be contented with a limited beginning, with any whatsoever opening; let the rotten boroughs be disfranchised and their rights transferred to the unenfranchised cities and districts of the nation; it is no matter how slow, gradual and cautious be the change; we shall demand more and more

with firmness and moderation, never anticipating but never deferring the moment of successful opposition, so that the people may become habituated to exercising the functions of sovereignty, in proportion as they acquire the possession of it. If this reform could begin from within the Houses of Parliament, as constituted at present, it appears to me that what is called moderate reform, that is a suffrage whose qualification should be the possession of a certain small property, and triennial parliaments, would be a system in which for the sake of obtaining without bloodshed or confusion ulterior improvements of a more important character, all reformers ought to acquiesce. Not that such are first principles, or that they would produce a system of perfect social institutions or one approaching to such. But nothing is more idle than to reject a limited benefit because we cannot without great sacrifices obtain an unlimited one. We might thus reject a Representative Republic, if it were obtainable, on the plea that the imagination of man can conceive of something more absolutely perfect. Towards whatever we regard as perfect, undoubtedly it is no less our duty than it is our nature to press forward; this is the generous enthusiasm which accomplishes not indeed the consummation after which it aspires, but one which approaches it in a degree far nearer than if the whole powers had not been developed by a delusion.—It is in politics rather than in religion that faith is meritorious.

If Reform be denied . . . ?

If the Houses of Parliament obstinately and perpetually refuse to concede any reform to the people, my vote is for universal suffrage and equal representation. But, it is asked, how shall this be accomplished in defiance of and in opposition to the constituted authorities of the nation, they who possess whether with or without its consent the command of a standing army and of a legion of spies and police officers, and hold the strings of that complicated mechanism with which the hopes and fears of men are moved like puppets? They would disperse any assembly really chosen by the people, they would shoot and hew down any multitude, without regard to sex or age, as the Jews did the Canaanites, which might be collected in its defence, they would calumniate, imprison, starve, ruin and expatriate every person who wrote or acted or thought or might be suspected to think against them; misery and extermination would fill the country from one end to another.

This question I would answer by another.

Will you endure to pay the half of your earnings to maintain in luxury and idleness the confederation of your tyrants as the reward of a successful conspiracy to defraud and oppress you? Will you make your tame cowardice and the branding record of it the everlasting inheritance of your posterity? Not only this, but will you render by your torpid endurance this condition of things as permanent as the system of caste in India, by which the same horrible injustice is perpetrated under another form?

Assuredly no Englishmen by whom these propositions are understood will answer in the affirmative; and the opposite side of the alternative remains.

When the majority in any nation arrive at a conviction that it is their duty and their interest to divest the minority of a power employed to their disadvantage, and the minority are sufficiently mistaken as to believe that their superiority is tenable, a struggle must ensue.

If the majority are enlightened, united, impelled by a uniform enthusiasm and animated by a distinct and powerful appreciation of their object, and feel confidence in their undoubted power—

the struggle is merely nominal. The minority perceive the approaches of the development of an irresistible force, by the influence of the public opinion of their weakness, on those political forms of which no government but an absolute despotism is devoid. They divest themselves of their usurped distinctions; the public tranquillity is not disturbed by the revolution.

The Organization of Reform.

But these conditions may only be imperfectly fulfilled by the state of a people grossly oppressed and impotent to cast off the load. Their enthusiasm may have been subdued by the killing weight of toil and suffering; they may be panic-stricken and disunited by their oppressors, and the demagogues, the influence of fraud may have been sufficient to weaken the union of classes which compose them by suggesting jealousies, and the position of the conspirators, although it is to be forced by repeated assaults, may be tenable until the siege can be vigorously urged. The true patriot will endeavour to enlighten and to unite the nation and animate it with enthusiasm and confidence. For this purpose he will be indefatigable in promulgating political truth. He will endeavour to rally round one standard the divided friends of liberty, and make them forget the subordinate objects with regard to which they differ by appealing to that respecting which they are all agreed. He will promote such open confederation among men of principle and spirit as may tend to make their intentions and their efforts converge to a common centre. He will discourage all secret associations, which have a tendency, by making the nation's will develop itself in a partial and premature manner, to cause tumult and confusion. He will urge the necessity of exciting the people frequently to exercise their right of assembling, in such limited numbers as that all present may be actual parties to the proceedings of the day. Lastly, if circumstances had collected a considerable number as at Manchester³ on the memorable 16th of August, if the tyrants command the troops to fire upon them or cut them down unless they disperse, he will exhort them peaceably to defy the danger, and to expect without resistance the onset of the cavalry, and wait with folded arms the event of the fire of the artillery and receive with unshrinking bosoms the bayonets of the charging battalions. Men are every day persuaded to incur greater perils for a less manifest advantage. And this, not because active resistance is not justifiable when all other means shall have failed, but because in this instance temperance and courage would produce greater advantages than the most decisive victory. In the first place, the soldiers are men and Englishmen, and it is not to be believed that they would massacre an unresisting multitude of their countrymen drawn up in unarmed array before them, and bearing in their looks the calm, deliberate resolution to perish rather than abandon the assertion of their rights. In the confusion of flight the ideas of the soldier become confused, and he massacres those who fly from him by the instinct of his trade. In the struggles of conflict and resistance he is irritated by a sense of his own danger, he is flattered by an apprehension of his own magnanimity in incurring it, he considers the blood of his countrymen at once the price of his valour, the pledge of his security. He applauds himself by reflecting that these base and dishonourable motives will gain him credit among his comrades and his officers who are animated by the same. But if he should observe neither resistance nor flight he would be reduced to confusion and indecision. Thus far, his ideas were governed by the same law as those of a dog who chases a flock of sheep to the corner of a field, and keeps aloof when they make a parade of resistance. But the soldier is a man and an

³ Referring to the 'Peterloo' massacre of 1819.—(Ed.)

Englishman. This unexpected reception would probably throw him back upon a recollection of the true nature of the measures of which he was made the instrument, and the enemy might be converted into the ally.

The patriot will be foremost to publish the boldest truths in the most fearless manner, yet without the slightest tincture of personal malignity. He would encourage all others to the same efforts and assist them to the utmost of his power with the resources both of his intellect and fortune. He would call upon them to despise imprisonment and persecution and lose no opportunity of bringing public opinion and the power of the tyrants into circumstances of perpetual contest and opposition.

The Danger of Quietism.

All might however be ineffectual to produce so uniform an impulse of the national will as to preclude a further struggle. The strongest argument, perhaps, for the necessity of Reform, is the inoperative and unconscious abjectness to which the purposes of a considerable mass of the people are reduced. They neither know nor care—They are sinking into a resemblance with the Hindoos and the Chinese, who were once men as they are. Unless the cause which renders them passive subjects instead of active citizens be removed, they will sink with accelerated gradations into that barbaric and unnatural civilization which destroys all the differences among men. It is in vain to exhort us to wait until all men shall desire Freedom whose real interest will consist in its establishment. It is in vain to hope to enlighten them whilst their tyrants employ the utmost artifices of all their complicated engine to perpetuate the infection of every species of fanaticism and error from generation to generation. The advocates of Reform ought indeed to leave no effort unexerted, and they ought to be indefatigable in exciting all men to examine.

But if they wait until those neutral politicians whose opinions represent the actions of this class are persuaded that some effectual reform is necessary, the occasion will have passed or will never arrive, and the people will have exhausted their strength in ineffectual expectation and will have sunk into incurable supineness. It was principally the effect of a similar quietism that the populous and extensive nations of Asia have fallen into their existing decrepitude; and that anarchy, insecurity, ignorance and barbarism, the symptoms of the confirmed disease of monarchy, have reduced nations of the most delicate physical and intellectual organization and under the most fortunate climates of the globe to a blank in the history of man.⁴

The Spectre of Anarchy.

The reasoners who incline to⁵ the opinion that it is not sufficient that the innovators should produce a majority in the nation, but that we ought to expect such an unanimity as would preclude anything amounting to a serious dispute, are prompted to this view of the question by the dread of anarchy and massacre. Infinite and inestimable calamities belong to oppression, but the

⁴ Shelley was not better informed about the East than most Europeans of his day. The philosophy and the art of India, China, and Japan have, in spite of their despotisms, contributed a wonderful chapter to the spiritual history of mankind.—(Ed.)

⁵ Crossed out in the MS. but no substitute provided.—(Ed.)

most fatal of them all is that mine of unexploded mischief⁶ which it has practiced⁷ beneath the foundations of society, and with which, 'pernicious to one touch'⁸ it threatens to involve the ruin of the entire building together with its own. But delay merely renders this mischief more tremendous, not the less inevitable. For the utmost may now be the crisis of the social disease which is rendered thus periodical, chronic and incurable.⁹

The savage brutality of the populace is proportioned to the arbitrary character of their government, and tumults and insurrections soon, as in Constantinople, become consistent with the permanence of the causing evil, of which they might have been the critical determination.

Methods of Agitation.

The public opinion in England ought first to be excited to action, and the durability of those forms within which the oppressors entrench themselves brought perpetually to the test of its operation. No law or institution can last if this opinion be decisively pronounced against it. For this purpose government ought to be defied, in cases of questionable result, to prosecute for political libel. All questions relating to the jurisdiction of magistrates and courts of law respecting which any doubt could be raised ought to be agitated with indefatigable pertinacity. Some two or three of the popular leaders have shown the best spirit in this respect; they only want system and co-operation. The taxgatherer ought to be compelled in every practicable instance to distrain, whilst the right to impose taxes, as was the case in the beginning of the resistance to the tyranny of Charles I is formally contested by an overwhelming multitude of defendants before the courts of common law. Confound the subtlety of lawyers with the subtlety of the law. The nation would thus be excited to develop itself, and to declare whether it acquiesced in the existing forms of government. The manner in which all questions of this nature might be decided would develop the occasions, and afford a prognostic as to the success, of more decisive measures. Simultaneously with this active and vigilant system of opposition, means ought to be taken of solemnly conveying the sense of large bodies and various denominations of the people in a manner the most explicit to the existing depositaries of power. Petitions, couched in the actual language of the petitioners, and emanating from distinct assemblies, ought to load the tables of the House of Commons. The poets, philosophers and artists ought to remonstrate, and the memorials entitled their petitions might shew the universal conviction they entertain of the inevitable connection between national prosperity and freedom, and the cultivation of the imagination and the cultivation of scientific truth, and the profound development of moral and metaphysical enquiry. Suppose the memorials to be severally written by Godwin, Hazlitt and Bentham and Hunt, they would be worthy of the age and of the cause; radiant and irresistible like the meridian sun they would strike all but the eagles who dared to gaze upon its beams with blindness and confusion.

⁶ Crossed out, and 'calamity' substituted, but the latter was also crossed out, and the intention was apparently to revert to 'mischief'.—(Ed.)

⁷ 'Practiced' is an odd word. We should have expected 'planted'; but Shelley perhaps had in his mind the Elizabethan sense of the verb to 'practice', meaning to do something treacherous and malignant.—(Ed.)

⁸ 'Pernicious to one touch' is a reminiscence of Milton's lines in *Paradise Lost*, Book VI: . . . Part incentive reed Provide, pernicious with one touch to fire referring to the artillery of the rebel angels.—(Ed.)

⁹ This sentence, which is interlined in the text, seems obscure in form, but the intention is clearly to represent the 'crisis', i.e. the explosion of the mischief, as better than a disease made chronic by delay in treatment. For the word 'utmost' Shelley first wrote 'worst'.—(Ed.)

These appeals of solemn and emphatic argument from those who have already a predestined existence among posterity, would appal the enemies of mankind by their echoes from every corner of the world in which the majestic literature of England is cultivated; it would be like a voice from beyond the dead of those who will live in the memories of men, when they must be forgotten; it would be Eternity warning Time.

Let us hope that at this stage of the progress of Reform, the oppressors would feel their impotence and reluctantly and imperfectly concede some limited portion of the rights of the people, and disgorge some morsels of their undigested prey. In this case, the people ought to be exhorted by everything ultimately dear to them to pause until by the exercise of those rights which they have regained they become fitted to demand more. It is better that we gain what we demand by a process of negotiation which should occupy twenty years than that by communicating a sudden shock to the interests of those who are the depositaries and dependents of power we should incur the calamity which their revenge might inflict upon us by giving the signal of civil war. If, after all, they consider the chance of personal ruin, and the infamy of figuring on the page of history as the promoters of civil war preferable to resigning any portion how small soever of their usurped authority, we are to recollect that we possess a right beyond remonstrance. It has been acknowledged by the most approved writers on the English constitution, which has in this instance been merely a declaration of the superior decisions of eternal justice, that we possess a right of resistance. The claim of the reigning family is founded upon a memorable exertion of this solemnly recorded right.

Insurrection.

The last resort of resistance is undoubtedly insurrection. The right of insurrection is derived from the employment of armed force to counteract the will of the nation. Let the government disband the standing army, and the purpose of resistance would be sufficiently fulfilled by the incessant agitation of the points of dispute before the courts of common law, and by an unwarlike display of the irresistible number and union of the people.

Before we enter into a consideration of the measures which might terminate in civil war, let us for a moment consider the nature and the consequences of war. This is the alternative which the unprincipled cunning of the tyrants has presented to us, and which we must not shun. There is secret sympathy between Destruction and Power, between Monarchy and War; and the long experience of all the history of all recorded time teaches us with what success they have played into each other's hands. War is a kind of superstition; the pageantry of arms and badges corrupts the imagination of men. How far more appropriate would be the symbols of an inconsolable grief—muffled drums, and melancholy music, and arms reversed, and the livery of sorrow rather than of blood. When men mourn at funerals for what do they mourn in comparison with the calamities which they hasten with every circumstance of festivity to suffer and to inflict! Visit in imagination the scene of a field of battle or a city taken by assault, collect into one group the groans and the distortions of the innumerable dying, the inconsolable grief and horror of their surviving friends, the hellish exultation and unnatural drunkenness of destruction of the conquerors, the burning of the harvests and the obliteration of the traces of cultivation—to this, in a civil war, is to be added the sudden disruption of the bonds of social life, and 'father against son'.

If there had never been war, there could never have been tyranny in the world; tyrants take advantage of the mechanical organization of armies to establish and defend their encroachments. It is thus that the mighty advantages of the French Revolution have been almost compensated by a succession of tyrants (for demagogues, oligarchies, usurpers and legitimate kings are merely varieties of the same class) from Robespierre to Louis XVIII. War, waged from whatever motive, extinguishes the sentiment of reason and justice in the mind. The motive is forgotten, or only adverted to in a mechanical and habitual manner. A sentiment of confidence in brute force and in a contempt of death and danger is considered the highest virtue, when in truth, and however indispensable, they are merely the means and the instrument, highly capable of being perverted to destroy the cause they were assumed to promote. It is a foppery the most intolerable to an amiable and philosophical mind. It is like what some reasoners have observed of religious faith; no fallacious and indirect motive to action can subsist in the mind without weakening the effect of those which are genuine and true. The person who thinks it virtuous to believe, will think a less degree of virtue attaches to good actions than if he had considered it as indifferent. The person who has been accustomed to subdue men by force will be less inclined to the trouble of convincing or persuading them.

These brief considerations suffice to show that the true friend of mankind and of his country would hesitate before he recommended measures which tend to bring down so heavy a calamity as war.

I imagine however that before the English Nation shall arrive at that point of moral and political degradation now occupied by the Chinese, it will be necessary to appeal to an exertion of physical strength. If the madness of parties admits no other mode of determining the question at issue,¹⁰ . . .

After the Victory.

When the people shall have obtained, by whatever means, the victory over their oppressors and when persons appointed by them shall have taken their seats in the Representative Assembly of the nation, and assumed the control of public affairs according to constitutional rules, there will remain the great task of accommodating all that can be preserved of antient forms with the improvements of the knowledge of a more enlightened age, in legislation, jurisprudence, government and religious and academical institutions. The settlement of the national debt is on the principles before elucidated merely an arrangement of form, and however necessary and important is an affair of mere arithmetical proportions readily determined; nor can I see how those who, being deprived of their unjust advantages, will probably inwardly murmur, can oppose one word of open expostulation to a measure of such irrefragable justice.

Revenge condemned.

There is one thing which certain vulgar agitators endeavour to flatter the most uneducated part of the people by assiduously proposing, which they ought not to do nor to require; and that is Retribution. Men having been injured, desire to injure in return. This is falsely called an

¹⁰ Two blank pages follow this unfinished sentence.—(Ed.)

universal law of human nature; it is a law from which many are exempt, and all in proportion to their virtue and cultivation. The savage is more revengeful than the civilized man, the ignorant and uneducated than the person of a refined and cultivated intellect; the generous and . . .

END OF MS.

APPENDIX

Besides the 'Philosophical View of Reform' this MS. contains some other matter of interest to students of Shelley. On one page, otherwise blank, appear the words

On the punishment of Death

showing that Shelley contemplated an essay on that subject.

There are also three scraps of poetry, which are identifiable as jottings for passages in 'Prometheus Unbound', Act iv, viz.

O & The joy, the triumph, the delight and madness Boundless and gladness,
Glory and transport not to be contained. Ha! ha! 'tis life, 'tis [The joy, the triumph,
the delight, the madness! The boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness, The
vaporous exultation not to be confined! Ha! ha! the animation of delight. . . .

P. U.]

And like a wind bursting its rocky prison With earthquake and with lightning it
has risen. [And like a storm bursting its cloudy prison With thunder and with
whirlwind has arisen Out of the lampless caves. . . .

P. U.]

The unquiet Republic of the spheres Of ever wandering planets, whom The great
Sun rules as with a tyrant gaze [As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze, The
unquiet republic of the maze Of planets struggling fierce towards heaven's free
wilderness.

P. U.]

Another page contains the interesting Note on the composition of the Ode to the West Wind which is attached to that poem in Mrs. Shelley's edition. The text is the same as the printed version, except that the MS. reads 'attended with that magnificent thunder . . .' instead of 'attended by . . .'

There are also a few rough sketches, including several of boats, and one of a group of buildings of oriental character embowered in foliage.

On pp. 60-65 of the 'Philosophical View' Shelley strongly urges a measure which has also been strongly urged, though not yet found practicable, in the present day—the confiscation for the needs of the State of fortunes acquired by unworthy or extortionate methods. It is interesting to note that he treated the same subject in a fragment gleaned by Mrs. Shelley from his relics of unpublished verse:

What men gain fairly—that they should possess, And children may inherit
idleness, From him who earns it—This is understood; Private injustice may
be general good. But he who gains by base and armed wrong, Or guilty
fraud, or base compliances, May be despoiled; even as a stolen dress
Is stript from a convicted thief, and he Left in the nakedness of infamy. Frag.
xviii.

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Percy Bysshe Shelley
A Philosophical View of Reform
1820

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