Leghorn, to meet Leigh Hunt, whose arrival in Italy had just been notified. After doing his best to set things going comfortably between Byron and Hunt, Shelley returned on board with Williams on 8th July. It was a day of dark, louring, stifling heat. Trelawny took leave of his two friends, and about half-past six in the evening found him­self startled from a doze by a frightful turmoil of storm. The “Don Juan” had by this time made Via Reggio; she was not to be seen, though other vessels which had sailed about the same time were still discernible. Shelley, Williams, and their only companion, a sailor-boy, perished in the squall. The exact nature of the catastrophe was from the first regarded as somewhat disputable, but it is only of late years (1875) that it has been keenly debated. The condition of the “Don Juan” when recovered did not favour any assumption that she had capsized in a heavy sea—rather that she had been run down by some other vessel, a felucca or fishing-smack. In the absence of any counter-evidence this would be supposed to have occurred by accident ; but a rumour, not strictly verified and certainly not refuted, exists that an aged Italian seaman on his deathbed confessed that he had been one of the crew of the fatal felucca, and that the collision was intentional, as the men had plotted to steal a sum of money supposed to be on the “ Don Juan,” in charge of Lord Byron. In fact there was a moderate sum there, but Byron had neither embarked nor intended to embark. This may perhaps be the true account of the tragedy ; at any rate Trelawny, the best possible authority on the subject, accepted it as true. He it was who laboriously tracked out the shore-washed corpses of Shelley and Williams, and who undertook the burning of them, after the ancient Greek fashion, on the shore near Via Reggio, on the 15th and 16th of August. The great poet’s ashes were then collected, and buried in the new Protestant cemetery in Rome. He was, at the time of his untimely death, within a month of completing the thirtieth year of his age—a surprising example of rich poetic achievement for so young a man.

The character of Shelley can be considered according to two different standards of estimation. We can estimate the original motive forces in his character ; or we can form an opinion of his actions, and thence put a certain construction upon his personal qualities. We will first try the latter method. It cannot be denied by his admirers and eulogists, and is abundantly clear to his censors, that his actions were in some considerable degree abnormal, dangerous to the settled basis of society, and marked by headstrong and undutiful presumption. But it is remarkable that, even among the censors of his conduct, many persons are none the less impressed by the beauty of his character; and this leads us back to our first point—the original motive forces in that. Here we find enthusiasm, fervour, courage (moral and physical), an unbounded readiness to act upon what he considered right principle, however inconvenient or disastrous the consequences to himself, sweetness and indulgence towards others, extreme gener­osity, and the principle of love for humankind in abundance and superabundance. He respected the truth, such as he conceived it to be, in spiritual or speculative matters, and respected no con­struction of the truth which came to him recommended by human authority. No man had more hatred or contempt of custom and prescription ; no one had a more authentic or vivid sense of uni­versal charity. The same radiant enthusiasm which appeared in his poetry as idealism stamped his speculation with the conception of perfectibility and his character with loving emotion.

In person Shelley was attractive, winning, and almost beautiful, but not to be called handsome. His height was nearly 5 feet 11 ; he was slim, agile, and strong, with something of a stoop ; his complexion brilliant, his hair abundant and wavy, dark-brown but early beginning to grizzle ; the eyes, deep-blue in tint, have been termed “ stag-eyes ”—large, fixed, and beaming. His voice was wanting in richness and suavity—high-pitched, and tending to the screechy ; his general aspect, though extremely variable according as his mood of mind and his expression shifted, was on the whole uncommonly juvenile.

From this necessarily very slight account of the life of Shelley we pass to a consideration—and this too must be equally slender —of his works in poetry. If we except Goethe (and for convenience’ sake leaving out of count any living writers, whose ultimate value

cannot at present be assessed), we consider Shelley to be the supreme poet of the new era which, beginning with the French Revolution, remains continuous into our own day. Lord Byron and Victor Hugo come the nearest to Shelley in poetic stature, and each of them might for certain reasons be even preferred to him ; Wordsworth also has his numerous champions. The grounds on which we set Shelley highest of all are mainly three. He excels all his competitors in ideality, he excels them in music, and he excels them in importance. By importance we here mean the direct import of the work performed, its controlling power over the reader’s thought and feeling, the contagious fire of its white-hot intellectual passion, and the long reverberation of its appeal. Shelley is emphatically the poet of the future. In his own day an alien in the world of mind and invention, and in our day scarcely yet a denizen of it, he appears destined to become, in the long vista of years, an informing presence in the innermost shrine of human thought. Shelley appeared at the time when the sublime frenzies of the French revolutionary movement had exhausted the elas­ticity of men’s thought—at least in England—and had left them flaccid and stolid ; but that movement prepared another in which revolution was to assume the milder guise of reform, conquering and to conquer. Shelley was its prophet. As an iconoclast and an idealist he took the only position in which a poet could advantageously work as a reformer. To outrage his contemporaries was the condition of leading his successors to triumph and of personally triumphing in their victories. Shelley had the temper of an innovator and a martyr ; and in an intellect wondrously poetical he united speculative keenness and humanitarian zeal in a degree for which we might vainly seek his precursor. We have already named ideality as one of his leading excellences. This Shelleian quality combines, as its constituents, sublimity, beauty, and the abstract passion for good. It should be acknowledged that, while this great quality forms the chief and most admirable factor in Shelley’s poetry, the defects which go along with it mar his work too often—producing at times vagueness, unreality, and a pomp of glittering indistinctness, in which excess of sentiment welters amid excess of words. This blemish affects the long poems much more than the pure lyrics ; in the latter the rapture, the music, and the emotion are in exquisite balance, and the work has often as much of delicate simplicity as of fragile and flower-like perfection.

In the course of our biographical narrative we have men­tioned a few, but only a few, of Shelley’s writings ; we must now give some curt account of others. Of his early work prior to *Queen Mab—*such romances as *Zastrozzi* and *St lrvyne,* such verse as the *Fragments of Margaret Nicholson—*we can only here say that they are rubbish. *Alastor* was succeeded (1817) by *The Revolt of Islam,* a poem of no common length in the Spenserian stanza, preaching bloodless revolution ; it is amazingly fine in parts, but as a whole somewhat long-drawn and exhaust­ing. This transcendental epic (for such it may be termed) was at first named *Laon and Cythna, or the Revolution of the Golden City,* and the lovers of the story were then brother and sister as well as lovers—an experiment upon British endurance which the publishers would not connive at. The year 1818 produced *Rosalind and Helen,* a comparatively weak poem, and *Julian and Maddalo,* a very strong one—demonstrating in Shelley a singular power of seeing ordinary things with directness, and at once figuring them as reality and transfiguring them into poetry. The next year, 1819, was his culmination, producing as it did the grand tragedy of *The Cenci* and the sublime ideal drama *Prometheus Unbound,* which we have no hesitation in calling his masterpiece. It embodies, in forms of surpassing imagination and beauty, Shelley’s deepest and most daring conceptions. Prometheus, the human mind, has invested with the powers proper to himself Jupiter the god of heaven, who thereupon chains and torments Prometheus and oppresses mankind ; in other words, the anthropo­morphic god of religion is a creation of the human mind, and both the mind of man and man himself are enslaved as long as this god exercises his delegated but now absolute power. Prometheus, who is from of old wedded to Asia, or Nature, protests against and anathematizes the usurper enthroned by himself. At last the anathema takes effect. Eternity, Demogorgon, dismisses Jupiter to unending nothingness. Prometheus is at once unbound, the human mind is free ; he is reunited to his spouse Nature, and the world of man passes from thraldom and its degradation into limitless progression, or (as the phrase goes) perfectibility, moral and material. This we regard as in brief the argument of *Prometheus Unbound.* It is closely analogous to the argument of the juvenile poem *Queen Mab,* but so raised in form and creative touch that, whereas to write *Queen Mab* was only to be an ambitious and ebullient tyro, to invent *Prometheus Unbound* was to be the poet of the future. *The Witch of Atlas* (1820) appears to us the most perfect work among all Shelley’s longer poems, though it is neither the deepest nor the most interesting. It may be rated as a pure exercise of roving imagination—guided, however, by an intense sense of beauty, and by its author’s exceeding fineness of nature.