'A Good Shelleyan': II

PHILIP MARSTON

From Charles Churchill Osborne, *Philip Bourke Marston* (London: The Times Book Club, 1926) pp. 26–7. Marston (1850–87) was a poet blinded by an accident in childhood. Osborne came to know him late in his life, and compiled a brief memoir. Marston's account of the Shelley Society meeting is contained in a letter to Osborne on 17 April 1886.

On Tuesday, we all went to the Shelley Society and heard Buxton Forman¹ expound *Queen Mab*, and tell us how it was written, and that kind of thing. I do think these societies are such nonsense. As for paying a guinea to belong to one, No thank you. By-the-bye Buxton Forman cannot speak at all, and that made it difficult for one to keep one's eyes open; and as for *Queen Mab*, I wonder if you agree with me in thinking that the less people talk about it the better. I shall never forget the wave of overwhelming disappointment which came against me when I first read it, and took it to be representative of the Shelley of whom I had heard so much. But I went on and need hardly say was rewarded. Then, a man called Bernard Shaw, who frankly declared himself at the start an atheist and a socialist, a man who I know slightly and much hate, an Irishman who speaks with a strong accent, arose in his glory and said that he regarded *Queen Mab* as a much greater work than the *Cenci*.² I wanted to get up and murder him, and could not even hiss. I think I am not wrong in saying that a man who asserts that is either a fool or a buffoon. Then, Aveling³ addressed us, and we were all very glad when it was over. If the other people who were present at the Shelley Society were as well content afterwards as I and a friend were eating tripe and onions I am glad. It needed something pretty strong to take the taste of Shaw out of one's mouth.

NOTES

1. Harry Buxton Forman (1842–1917), civil servant, editor and biographer of Shelley and author of several other works on nineteenth-century poets and poetry.

2. The Shelley Society gave the first stage performance of *The Cenci* privately the following month (7 May) at the Grand Theatre, Islington. Shaw acted as press agent.

3. Edward Bibbins Aveling (1851–98), translator of *Das Kapital* and common-law husband of Marx's daughter, Eleanor.