

**AN ESSAY ON
PERCY
BYSSHE SHELLEY**

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An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley by Robert Browning & W . Tyas Harden

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ROBERT BROWNING & W. TYAS HARDEN

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ROBERT BROWNING

Being a Reprint of the *Introductory Essay* prefixed to the Volume of
[25 spurious] *Letters of Shelley* published by
Edward Moxon in 1852.

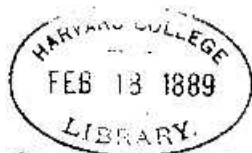
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By W. TYAS HARDEN

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INTRODUCTION.

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THE circumstances under which the following "Essay" was first published in 1852 were so far unfortunate as that a speedy limit was put to its circulation by the discovery that the letters which it ushered into the world were a literary fraud. But if ever the doing of evil is to be excused because of some resultant good, here is a case which is eminently entitled to such consideration, for we may fairly conclude, and not without a touch of humour, if not also without a tremor of anxiety, that if the fraud had not been perpetrated the essay might never have been penned. Equally fortunate was the fact that some few copies escaped the control and the recall of the publisher, which however were so few that the book is now one of those *optima spolia* that collectors covet and dealers delight in.

For if the letters were spurious and worthless the essay was genuine and most valuable. It was surely by some occult and happy inspiration that the writer treated his subject both broadly and deeply, not toying with the handful of letters, but passing to their supposed author and taking the opportunity to analyse his genius and to vindicate his character. So ably was this done, with such keen appreciation of intellectual qualities and such generous discernment of moral probabilities, that the essay must always remain essential alike to the students of Browning and of Shelley, and deserves to stand both as a prologue to the writings and as an epilogue to the life of Shelley.

The monograph should at least be in the hands of every member of the Shelley Society, constituting as it does a practical defence of Shelley, and concentrating in itself the spirit of those various testimonies of admiration which

occur elsewhere in Mr. Browning's writings. Without in the least disparaging the well-known passages in *Pauline* which refer to Shelley it is obvious that the essay has a much higher value; it was, when published, the well-ripened fruit of Mr. Browning's mature judgment, and it remains the acknowledged expression of his final conclusion.

It is more than fortunate that in issuing this re-print the Shelley Society is able to offer to its distinguished author the cordial expression of its admiration and regard, together with its hearty thanks for his consent to the re-appearance of the essay and to the use of the ardent little poem—*Memorabilia*.

W. T. HARDEN.

FEBRUARY, 1888.