

The Elysian Fields

A Lucianic Fragment

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1880

I am not forgetful in this dreary scene of the country which whilst I lived in the upper air, it was my whole aim to illustrate and render happy. Indeed, although immortal, we are not exempted from the enjoyments and the sufferings of mortality. We sympathize in all the proceedings of mankind, and we experience joy or grief in all intelligence from them, according to our various opinions and views. Nor do we resign those opinions, even those which the grave¹ has utterly refuted. Frederic of Prussia has lately arrived amongst us, and persists in maintaining that "death is an eternal sleep," to the great discomfiture of Philip the Second of Spain; who on the furies refusing to apply the torture, expects the roof of Tartarus to fall upon his head, and laments that at least in his particular instance the doctrine should be false.—Religion is more frequently the subject of discussion among the departed dead, than any other topic, for we know as little which mode of faith is true as you do. Every one maintains the doctrine he maintained on Earth, and accommodates the appearances which surround us to his peculiar tenets.—

I am one of those who esteeming political science capable of certain conclusions, have ever preferred it to these airy speculations, which when they assume an empire over the passions of mankind render them so mischievous and unextinguishable, that they subsist even among the dead. The art of employing the power entrusted to you for the benefit of those who entrust it, is something more definite, and subject as all its details must ever be to innumerable limitations and exceptions arising out of the change in the habits, opinions of mankind, is the noblest, and the greatest, and the most universal of all. It is not as a queen, but as a human being that this science must be learned; the same discipline which contributes to domestic happiness and individual distinction secures true welfare and genuine glory to a nation.—

You will start, I do not doubt, to hear the language of philosophy. You will have been informed that those who approach sovereigns with warnings that they have duties to perform, that they are elevated above the rest of mankind simply to prevent their tearing one another to pieces, and for the purpose of putting into effect all practical equality and justice, are insidious traitors who devise their ruin. But if the character which I bore on earth should not reassure you,² it would be well to recollect the circumstances under which you will ascend the throne of England, and

¹ Cancelled reading, *even when the grave.*

² After *reassure* you there is a cancelled reading in the MS.—*you recollect yourself, & if the prejudices of the age*

what is the spirit of the times. There are better examples to emulate than those who have only refrained from depraving or tyrannizing over their subjects, because they remembered the fates of Pisistratus³ and Tarquin. If⁴ generosity and virtue should have dominion over your actions, my lessons can hardly be needed; but if the discipline⁵ of a narrow education may have extinguished all thirst of genuine excellence, all desire of becoming illustrious for the sake of the illustriousness of the actions which I would incite you to perform. Should you be thus—and no pains have been spared to make you so—make your account with holding your crown on this condition: of deserving it alone. And that this may be evident⁶ I will expose to you the state in which the nation will be found at your accession, for the very dead know more than the counsellors by whom you will be surrounded.

The English nation does not, as has been imagined, inherit freedom from its ancestors. Public opinion rather than positive institution maintains it⁷ in whatever portion it may now possess, which is⁸ in truth the acquirement of their own incessant struggles. As yet the gradations by which this freedom has advanced have been contested step by step.

have not deprived you of all that learning...

³ *Pisistratus* is probably a slip for *the sons of Pisistratus*.

⁴ Cancelled reading, *But if these motives*.

⁵ Cancelled readings, *lessons* for *discipline*; and *is to prevent* for *may have extinguished* in the next line.

⁶ Cancelled reading, *evident to you*.

⁷ In the MS. *them* is struck out in favour of *it*

⁸ Cancelled readings, *and this has been*, and in the same line *conquest* for *acquirement*.

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