JOHN VARLEY
of the
"OLD SOCIETY"
by
ADRIAN BURY

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ALL artists must be seers of a kind. In looking into the mysteries of form and colour, light and shade, studying the miracle of nature, their minds are drawn toward things occult. The best of our landscape painters, in the poetic sense of a Turner or a Constable, develop and encourage a perception beyond average normal experience. Nor does this experience necessarily depend on any religious belief. In some cases, as with Blake and Linnell, a profoundly Christian attitude helps to stimulate their faculties in a certain direction. Though Varley had those virtues that make for Christian conduct, he was an agnostic. He had no beliefs, but a great reverence in the presence of nature as a manifestation of some inscrutable power. Varley, developing a taste for science and invention, adopted the view that everything could be explained ultimately by energetic and sincere enquiry. It will be recalled that a genius for science was pronounced in the Varley family. His father and uncle, Richard and Samuel Varley, were scientifically minded. His brother Cornelius, was a distinguished scientist, and this talent has persisted throughout later generations of the Varleys.

John Varley believed that astrology was a vehicle of acquiring greater knowledge, and he studied it with as much enthusiasm as he devoted to water-colour painting. He was quite convinced about the influence of the stars on human beings, and wherever he went, at whatever table he sat as guest, it was not long before he began to talk about astrology. His pockets were always crammed with old almanacs that he might work out a horoscope for a friend or pupil, having ascertained the precise hour, date and place of birth. Fortune-telling by so fascinating a character must have been irresistible to the ladies, and though the statement by Gilchrist that Varley was in the habit of taking fees as a professional soothsayer has been contradicted by later authorities, we can well imagine that his passion for gazing into the future was no disadvantage to him as a drawing master. The Messrs. Redgrave state that "Varley was shrewd enough to see, and candid enough to own that his astrology was one of the causes of his popularity." "Ladies came to him to take drawing lessons," he said, "that they might get their nativities cast."

This interest in things occult as well as in art brought him an abiding friendship with William Blake. It was about the year 1818 that John Linnell introduced Varley to Blake, and this friendship lasted until Blake's death in 1827.

Such a companionship should dispose once and for all of any suggestion that Varley was merely an opportunist in matters occult. In 1818 the poet-painter was living in South Molton Street, not far from Varley, in Great Titchfield Street. It was at the latter house in 1820 that Blake drew the Visionary Heads of famous and infamous characters. Listening to Blake's stories of apparitions, Varley urged him to make sketches of them.
Gilchrist relates that

"Blake's visionary faculty was so much under control that, at the wish of a friend, he could summon before his abstracted gaze any of the familiar forms and faces he was asked for. This was during the favourable and befitting hours of the night; from nine to ten in the evening until one or two, or perhaps three or four o'clock in the morning; Varley sitting by, sometimes slumbering, sometimes waking. Varley would say, 'Draw me Moses,' or David; or would call for a likeness of Julius Caesar, or Cassibellaunus or Edward the Third, or some other great historical personage. Blake would answer, 'There he is!' and paper and pencil being at hand, he would begin drawing with the utmost alacrity, as though he had a real sitter before him."

John Linnell was also greatly interested in these strange affairs, and could one have been present at those séances one would have been impressed by three differently inspired personalities, united, however, in their love of art, nature and truth, and earnestly trying to probe the mystery of life and death. Blake with his massive forehead and brilliant eyes; Varley, cumber-some in form, an excited and eloquent talker; Linnell, very intelligent, original and deferential, adding here and there a fine point to the discussion, "forbearing to contradict Blake's stories of his visions, etc., but trying to make reason out of them."

The Visions came at Blake's call. If the phantom disappeared before the sketch was finished, Blake would say, "I can't go on—it is gone"; "I must wait till it returns," or "it has moved—the mouth is gone"; or "he frowns; he is displeased with my portrait of him."

When Linnell moved to Collins's Farm, Hampstead, the three artists frequently met there, and a fourth was admitted to their friendship during the last year of Blake's life. He was the young Samuel Palmer, and A. H. Palmer, his son, has left this charming record of his father's visits with Blake to Collins's Farm. Samuel Palmer was living in Broad Street, Bloomsbury, at the time.

"Fortunately for my father," writes A. H. Palmer, "Broad Street lay in Blake's way to Hampstead, and they often walked up to the village together. The aged composer of the Songs of Innocence was a great favourite with the children, who revelled in those poems of the lovely spiritual things and beings that seemed to him so real and so near. Therefore as the two friends reached the farm, a merry troop turned out to meet them led by a little fair-haired girl of some six years old. To this day she remembers cold winter nights when Blake was wrapped up in an old shawl by Mrs. Linnell, and sent on his homeward way, with the servant, lantern in hand, lighting him across the heath to the main road."

What are we to make of those Visionary Heads? They certainly have a sense of character, individually and collectively. Truly, as contemporary critics said, they are typical of Blake's hand and mind as seen in his other work. But to the sceptics Blake merely answered, "It must be right: I saw it so." Suffice it to say that in Linnell and Varley, Blake had a sympathetic and encouraging audience. Blake's explanation of his visionary powers was that they were only a degree stronger than those possessed by all men. He had exercised and retained his, whereas other men had lost theirs in a

"love of sordid pursuits, pride, vanity and the unrighteous Mammon."

Varley, ready to believe anything commonly thought to be impossible, followed Blake's mood. He could not see the visions himself, but would look wistfully into space, and make notes of persons delineated and the times of their appearance as Blake dictated. For instance, *Wat Tyler by Blake, from his spectre, as in the act of striking the tax gatherer, drawn October 30, 1819, 1 h. a.m.* On another drawing he inscribed, *The Man who Built the Pyramids, Oct. 18, 1819, fifteen degrees of 1. Cancer ascending.*

There is a Visionary Head of Richard Coeur de Lion, *drawn from his spectre—W. Blake fecit, Oct. 14, 1819, at a quarter past twelve, midnight.* Some of the portraits are straightforward presentations of the natural face, others have a symbolical attribute. That of *Edward the Third* shows the monarch's cranium swollen to immense proportions though the rest of the features are naturalistic. This exaggeration was to suggest the tyrannical attitude of the king. Most curious of all the visions is the well-known *Ghost of a Flea*, or personified flea. Blake's idea in regard to this fantastic drawing is as follows:

"The spirit visited his (Blake's) imagination in such a figure as he never anticipated in an insect. As I was anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power, of the truth of these visions, on hearing of this spiritual apparition of a flea, I asked him if he could draw for me the resemblance of what he saw: he instantly said, 'I see him now before me.' I therefore gave him paper and a pencil, with which he drew the portrait. I felt convinced, by his mode of proceeding, that he had a real image before him; for he left off, and began on another part of the paper, to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the flea, which the spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch till he had closed it. During the time occupied in completing the drawing, the flea told him that all fleas were inhabited by the souls of such men as were by nature blood-thirsty to excess, and were therefore providentially confined to the size and form of insects; otherwise were he himself, for instance, the size of a horse, he would depopulate a great portion of the country. He added that, if in attempting to leap from one island to another, he should fall into the sea, he could swim, and should not be lost. This spirit afterwards appeared to Blake, and afforded him a view of his whole figure."

*These drawings deeply impressed Varley. The two men, though differing vastly in their art, had much in common. But Varley could not convince Blake about astrology. Nor did the poet-painter show any liking for it. "Your fortunate nativities," he would say, "I count the worst. You reckon to be born in August, and to have notice and patronage of kings, to be the best of all; whereas the lives of the apostles and martyrs, of whom it is said the world was not worthy, would be counted by you as the worst, and their nativities those of men to be hanged." Here science has obviously come into conflict with religion. The Visionary Heads, however, must have stimulated Varley's researches into the occult, and he proceeded to write that strange book, *A Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy*, which was published in 1828, and which contained, with certain physiognomical drawings by Linnell, Blake's sketch of the *Ghost of a Flea*. Varley also induced*

*"A Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy." By John Varley."
Linnell, a much better figure artist than he was, to make coloured copies of it, and similar copies of the Wallace and Edward I.

Before considering Varley's Treatise, it is not without interest to recall that the sciences of astrology and physiognomy are related. As everybody knows, the custom of prophecy by the stars dates from remote antiquity. Apart from the use of it for royal personages and great occasions in ancient times, the story of the Star of Bethlehem is, of course, the most moving one in Holy Writ. Varley believed emphatically that astrology could be used as a key to the future, and that every individual’s career and even his appearance could be accounted for in a combination of planets with the Signs of the Zodiac at the time of the person’s birth. Famous as a drawing master he thus became equally famous for casting horoscopes. Since the celestial bodies, in Varley's view, had such an influence on human action, it was only logical to assume that physical appearance was likewise affected by stellar powers. These two departments of enquiry have indeed gone hand in hand down the ages. Classical writers refer to the physiognomical method of the divination of character. We find that Aristotle was the first writer to publish a treatise in which several chapters are devoted to this theory.

Such speculative ideas, in so far as they are used to gain money by exploiting the incurable credulity of men and women, give rise to abuses, and it is perhaps for this reason that physiognomy and astrology fell into disrepute in the Middle Ages and later times. It was too frequently employed as a means of fortune-telling, and for creating political and dynastic trouble, and laws were passed to punish the soothsayer, notably the Act of Elizabeth c.4. (1597-1598), which “declared”

"all persons fayning to have knowledge of phisognomie or like Fantasticall Ymaginations" liable to "be stripped naked from the middle upwards and openly whipped until his body be bloudye." This was modified by 13 Anne c. 26 (1713), still further by 17 George II c. 5, which was re-enacted by the Vagrancy Act 1824. This last Act only specifies palmistry.

Varley was not deterred by any possible legal intervention or the ridicule of the unbeliever. He would argue, demonstrate, prove by nativities and try to convince anybody and everybody who would listen to him. We have it on the authority of Linnell that he was “a terrible assertor, bearing down all before him by mere force of loquacity.”

It was Varley’s fixed habit every morning of his life, after rising from his bed, to work out transits and positions for the day, known to astrological experts as “secondary directions and transits.” In this way he discovered what was going to happen to him day by day.

The obvious question to ask is how far did Varley’s prophecies come true, and here we have to admit that the artist was not infrequently successful.

All the early authorities on Varley give examples of prophecies that were verified by events, but the fullest account of the best stories was published in the Occult Review, for under the title of Some Astrological
Predictions of the late John Varley, by his grandson, John Varley, introduced by A. P. Sinnett, we read that the narrator collected these stories from his father, Albert Fleetwood Varley (1804-1876), son of the original John Varley.

As will be remembered from the biographical chapter, the Varleys and Mulreadys were associated by the marriage of Elizabeth Varley with William Mulready.

John Varley, Junior, writes:

"My father, Albert Varley, had been appointed executor to Paul Mulready, the eldest son of William Mulready, R.A., and who died about the year 1864. He was looking over papers and correspondence when he came upon the following letter.—I happened to be present and it was handed me to read. It consisted of only a few lines and was written to Paul Mulready by his mother. I think these were the exact words: 'My dear Paul, you are now sixty years old, remember what your uncle John Varley said of this year: 'Do not box or play cricket, as you may receive an injury to the knee, which would be fatal. Should you survive this year you will probably live several years longer in comfortable circumstances.'

'Paul Mulready did not box or play cricket, but one afternoon he went with a friend to Kennington Oval to watch some cricket practice. While conversing with this friend, and at a moment when his attention was diverted from the play, a ball, driven from a considerable distance, struck him on the knee. The injury was, I believe, not very serious, but I heard it said that the medical treatment was quite wrong. I remember him being wheeled about in a bathchair by his manservant, and paid several visits to him at his house in South Kensington. He was cheerful and I think at that time did not suffer much pain. He was, however, unable to walk or stand. Later on white swelling set in and an operation was necessary—his leg was amputated by the well-known surgeon, Holmes Coote. Two or three days later he died—I believe from shock to the system; but for this accident it is very probable that he would have lived for many years, as he was a man of great bodily strength and a wonderful constitution. His father, the Royal Academician, had died some time previously, and had left him a considerable sum of money, so that in this particular the prediction seemed likely of fulfilment."

I have discovered the actual letter which is in possession of Mrs. Guy Wyndham, one of Mulready's descendants, and quote it here with the owner's kind permission:

11 Fitzroy Street,
Fitzroy Square.

With my foot in the grave and my eye on a better world, I now address you to remind you of what your uncle said concerning your future, in your sixtieth year you would suffer from medical men and their ruffianly assistants. That I think is past. You had a brain fever from intense heat and vexatious circumstances and it was mistaken for insanity. At this period he said you must beware of rascally lawyers who would fleece you and then turn round and declare you insane and above all you must avoid playing at Cricket or Boxing as you were likely to receive a Ball or a blow that might prove fatal and that from the hand of a friend or one nearly allied to you. Now I entreat you to avoid Boxing even in sport. If you get over the next six months you may have twenty happy years. It would be a cruel thing after a life of trouble to die when a prospect of comfort is before you.

God bless and prosper you, my dear boy.
April 19, 1864.
Albert Varley always said that Paul Mulready was born in John Varley's house, and that the horoscope was cast at the time of the child's birth.

Not the least remarkable fact about John Varley's strange life is that on several occasions he was menaced by fire, and on three occasions he was tossed by bulls.

He had purchased or taken a lease of an hotel, which he used partly as a dwelling house for his large family, and partly as a studio and gallery for his pictures.

He was ... in the habit of consulting his own horoscope each morning, and bringing up directions, etc., to date. On one particular morning, my father related, he was evidently ill at ease and disturbed in his mind, and though he had an appointment he did not go out, and about eleven in the forenoon he gave his watch to my father telling him to take it to a watchmaker in Regent Street and have it set by Greenwich time. When he returned with the watch my grandfather was still walking up and down the studio, a proceeding that impressed my father as most unusual, for my grandfather grudged actually every minute that he was away from his easel. At last he remarked, "What is it to be?" and explained that there were some evil aspects in his horoscope which would come into operation a few minutes to twelve on that day. He was so certain as to the evil effects that he would not go out, fearing some street accident. He said, "I might be run over, or a slate might fall on my head"; that he was uncertain whether his life or his property was menaced, but he saw in the future that it would be sudden. The difficulty arose from the fact that the effects of the planet Uranus were not yet understood by astrologers, and his agitation increased as the time approached ... Sitting down, he said two or three times, "I feel quite well—there is nothing the matter with me. I am not going to have a fit or anything of the sort." Then rising from his seat he came towards my father, saying: "What is it to be? The time is past. Could I have made some mistake in my calculations?" He took some paper and a pencil to go through the figures again—just then there was a cry of fire from the street. He rapidly made a note in his astrological book as to the effects of Uranus. The house was burned down, all his property was destroyed.

Alfred T. Story places this accident at Bayswater Hill, but it is more likely to have been at Titchfield Street where, according to Elmes's Annals of the Fine Arts (1817) Varley built a gallery for the display of his works. The date of the fire, as given by Roget, was June 25th, 1825, and it originated at Stoddart's pianoforte factory nearby. Varley was unperturbed by the calamity although he lost everything, and was not insured. Indeed, he was rather pleased that he had proved the evil potentialities of the new planet. To Fielding, who consoled him on hearing the news, and asked if the matter was serious, Varley replied: "No, only the house burnt down; I knew something would happen." Five years afterwards, in May, 1830, a fire at a framemaker's shop involved Titchfield Street in another disaster, and Varley moved first to a house in Porcherster Terrace, where Linnell had resided, and thence to 3 Elkin's Row, Bayswater.

Whoever might be inclined to doubt John Varley's powers of forecasting the future, his son Albert had several reasons to be convinced of their certainty.

A purchaser had selected in his studio two important drawings. Next day, having packed them carefully, he placed them in a portfolio. The drawings were to
be handed by Albert to the purchaser, who apparently lived in the neighbourhood. On arriving at the house, Albert, in the presence of the purchaser of the drawings, opened the portfolio, and to his dismay found that the drawings had disappeared. There was nothing mysterious about this. The portfolio was probably fastened at the top, and not at the sides: anyone carrying it under the arm might easily fail to notice the parcel slipping out behind. Albert was terrified, and not at all anxious to return home, knowing that his want of care might have exceedingly unpleasant consequences. Later in life, he said, he often looked back to that time of anxiety and apprehension as a most uncomfortable experience. At last the plunge had to be taken, and going to the studio he was asked if he had delivered the drawings. He commenced staring at something, when he was cut short. "No, you did not deliver them. I was looking at my figure for the day, after you left, and saw that I should lose them. I shall never see them again"—nor did he. "It was not your fault," he said, "but mine"—and the incident closed to Albert's intense relief.

Though Varley states in his book that, in spite of the influence of the stars, free will remained, he does not appear to have been able to exercise that free will himself, although he tried to do so.

He was on a visit at a well-known country mansion, and noting in his horoscope that on a certain day he might receive an injury to his leg, he remained in his room until the evening. As dusk came on, he decided that he would dress for dinner. Hearing as he thought a servant outside, he was about to ask that some hot water might be brought, and on opening the door he stumbled over a water can and rather seriously injured his shin.

A strange accident which might have been fatal befell Albert Varley himself. He was dining with a well-known physician. As he was leaving the house, the doctor remarked: "You have a bad cold; I will give you something which will relieve it."

On his way home he passed a chemist's shop. The man was just closing, but said he would make up the prescription. As there was some little difficulty about finding and writing a label, Albert Varley said: "I know what it is, a remedy for a cold. Never mind the label!" On going to bed he poured the contents of the bottle into a glass and drank it off. He remembered staggering to bed, and only became conscious about noon the next day, and finding himself quite helpless. He was at the time a bachelor living in rooms... he had not seen his father for some little time. Great therefore was his astonishment when he suddenly made his appearance with evident signs of having made a hurried journey. On enquiring about his health he said, "I was looking over your horoscope and found directions pointing to your death, or very great danger to-day and came at once to see what had happened!" When he heard what had taken place, he at once sent for food and administered stimulants, and got medical advice as soon as possible.

The doctor on reading the prescription said: "You ought to have been dead hours ago—you have taken about twenty doses in one." A naturally excellent constitution and his strength and youth pulled him through, though he had a severe illness... It was only through the arrival of my grandfather (John Varley) at the critical moment that his life had been saved.

Here is another example of John Varley's clairvoyance. Going for an excursion on the river with a party of friends, the artist remarked:

"We shall not separate before we have witnessed something terrible!" Shortly after, when near a bridge where some repairs were going on, the weight of a pile-
driving machine became detached, and falling on one of the men, he was killed in the sight of them all, in a very terrible manner.

The foregoing revelations are specially authenticated as reaching us from Albert Varley, via his son. But there are others.

In the Burlington Fine Arts Catalogue, 1871, we read the following anecdote:

Calling one day on a well-known picture dealer, he (Varley) sought to dispose of some of his drawings, which he had brought in a portfolio. The dealer declined, but only to be again and again urged: at length Varley exclaimed, "I shall sell before I leave the house," mentioning as the ground for his assertion some particular relation which existed between the planet under which he was born, and another of the celestial luminaries. The dealer invited him to tea, still refusing to purchase; but as Varley was on the point of leaving the house a friend of the dealer's came in, and on being introduced to the artist, then and there bought his pictures. "Ah," said Varley, "I told you that I should sell before I left your house."

So true were some of the artist's prophecies that they caused Varley to be feared at times. There is a story told that when James Ward, the painter of animals, discovered that the nativities of his own children were proving to be right, he had Varley's horoscopes destroyed as a wicked forestalling of God's will, and as such essentially evil in themselves.

Another friend on whom Varley used his skill was William Collins, R.A. A sensation was caused when it was divulged that Varley had long previously prophesied the very day when Collins would die. The engraver, Scriven, admitted that certain facts, known only to himself, were "divined" by Varley.

An astounding revelation concerned a girl of sixteen. Drawing up her horoscope, he informed her that she would be married in the course of a few years, and would have one child. Proceeding with her future, Varley was surprised to read in the stars that there would be a second marriage before the death of the first husband. "Hallo! What is this?" he exclaimed. "There is something wrong here," but he did not tell the girl what it was. Her life ran according to the horoscope. She married first a clergyman. He deserted her, and she heard nothing from him for about twelve years. A letter then arrived from Australia containing a draft of money with which the wife was instructed to furnish a house. The clergyman had turned gold prospector, had made a fortune and would be coming home shortly. He did not return, and after a further lapse of time, and hearing that her husband was dead, the "widow" married again. News, however, was received that the first husband had not died, and was still living in Australia.

Another of these queer "verities" is that told by William Vokins, the dealer, who was frequently in touch with Varley, and who sheltered the artist during his last days. Varley was present in Vokins' house when Mrs. Vokins gave birth to a daughter. The artist-soothsayer immediately drew up the child's horoscope, and handing it to Vokins said, "Be careful of the child when she is four years of age. At that time she will be in danger of a severe accident from fire." Whether or not the parents could have saved the child from this accident had they remembered Varley's
prediction who can tell, but they forgot the warning. It happened that the little girl, at about the time indicated, was so severely scalded that she nearly lost her life. As a result of this fatality she was blind and deaf for several years, but eventually recovered her sight and partial hearing.

There is an amusing and true prophecy about John Sell Cotman. On July 10th, 1822, Cotman wrote to Dawson Turner as follows:

"'I have had a violent relapse with every symptom carried to its highest pitch. Clarence's dream was not more wretched than my night of delirium.' His severe breakdown had lasted for several months when it happened that John Varley came to Yarmouth to stay with the Dawson Turners. He called upon Cotman and was at first refused admittance to his sick room by the maid, who said that her master had been given up by the doctors. However, Varley insisted, and on entering the room he saw at a glance that his old friend was suffering from mental depression and not from any bodily ill. He said to him, 'Why, Cotman, you are not such a fool as to think that you are going to die! Impossible! No such thing! I tell you there are yet twenty years for you yet to come.' Varley's prophecy, based, as he claimed, on his astrological lore, came very near the truth, for Cotman lived for nineteen years and nine months after the prediction was made!"

Not everybody, of course, was convinced of Varley's astrological gift. The Duke of Sussex, President of the Royal Society, was in the habit of ridiculing the artist's predictions. "Could the stars account," he asked, "for some corns on his toes?" And the Reverend William Harness declared that as far as he was concerned, Varley's predictions were entirely wrong.

Elizabeth Turner, afterwards Lady Palgrave, refers to the artist-astrologer's beliefs in the second part of her letter dated October 5th, 1822.

"... I have not, however, yet mentioned the strangest part of Mr. Varley's character, and that which makes mere casual observers esteem him mad. With all his nobility of mind he unites a more than childish simplicity, and he entirely believes in astrology, palmistry, the raising of ghosts and seeing of visions... and this part of his character lies open at first sight, for he dashes at once into astrology, and was not happy until he had cast all our nativities, yet he is quite sane in mind even on this insane topic... Mr. Varley loves and excels in conversation, which he illustrates by practical and beautiful similes. Though very rapid he is always intelligible; and however harassed, always unruffled in temper and unbroken in spirits..."

Gilchrist, in his Life of Blake, states that "Varley was not learned or deeply grounded or even very original in his astrology, which he had caught up at second hand," but was Gilchrist competent to judge? The late Stanley Redgrove, B.Sc., F.C.S., an expert in these matters, wrote in the Occult Review: "Whether astrology be a true science or not may, of course, be disputed; but beyond dispute Varley was a master of it."

Since the prediction about Paul Mulready is said to have been cast in 1803, Varley at that date being twenty-five, it indicates that he had begun his astrological studies early in life. Thirty-five years afterwards we find him calling on John Linnell with a timely horoscope. There is a letter from Linnell to his son-in-law, Samuel Palmer, dated November 23rd, 1838.

*The Life of John Sell Cotman. By Sydney D. Kitson.*
I have seen Mr. Varley this morning, who brought me Hannah's horoscope, all drawn out very curiously. He seems much interested in your welfare, and brought the nativity to show me, as Hannah is in her twenty-first year and he considers it an important period. I have asked him at what period she was ill during your present journey, but he would not tell. Perhaps someone will tell him before he consults his books, and then he will know... If anything is the matter it is Mars and Saturn's fault, he says. I say, if it should proceed from a cold room and carbonnel, it will be your fault, Mr. P., so mind your P's and Q's, or I shall tickle your toby and comb your head with a knobstick, as Mrs. Francis used to say to her husband. To be serious; do not, my dear fellow, run any risks now for the sake of saving.

Palmer and his young wife, who was Hannah Linnell, were then in Rome.

There is a vivid impression of John Varley about this time fascinating the company at Gore House, Kensington, where Lady Blessington entertained a circle of celebrities. She had known Varley many years before as a visitor to Lord Blessington's house in St. James's Square. He discoursed on astrology and magic in the library at Gore House and everybody was infected with his beliefs, Bulwer and Disraeli plunging "into discussion and experiment." Varley led them in debates on witchcraft and spiritualism. They tried crystal gazing "with the help of a famous crystal given to their hostess by Nazim Pasha."*

Varley is also said to have helped Lord Lytton, Bulwer's younger brother, in occult studies for his book Zanoni. Another celebrity who came under his spell was Sir Richard Burton, but not seriously, if we can judge by Burton's comments in Lady Burton's life of her husband.

Varley tried his astrological gifts on Ruskin, who writes:

"... chancing to call with Dr. Acland on John Varley, the conversation falling on his favourite science of astrology, and we both laughing at it, he challenged either of us to give him the place and hour of our nativity, saying that, if either could, he could prove the truth of the science in ten minutes. I happened to be able to give mine, and in certainly not more than ten minutes, occupied in drawing the diagram of its sky, he fastened upon the three years of my past life when I was fourteen, eighteen and twenty-one, as having been especially fatal to me.

"These were the years in which I first saw at Paris, secondly in London, staying with us in our Herne Hill house, and, thirdly, lost by her marriage, the French girl to whom certain very foolish love-poems were written, which my least wise friends plague me now to reprint. But the three periods of crisis were only foci in the general mistake, mismanagement and misfortune of all my education, precisely between those years from the age of fourteen to twenty-one... The girl being once fairly married, and which was of more importance—I beginning to feel a little how foolish and wicked I had been, I took myself up in returning from Italy over the Cenis in 1841, and finding breath and spirit suddenly stronger in a scorching morning at Lans-le-bourg, I date from that hour and place the beginning of my vital work and education."†

Writing to Mrs. Gisborne on March 7th, 1822, Mary Shelley appears to have been interested in Varley's powers. "But to speak of predictions and antedictions, some of Varley's are curious. 'Ill fortune in May or June,

†Ruskin's Works, ed. Cook and Wedderburn. Praeterita I, Ch. iv, p. 81.
1815.' No, it was then that he (Shelley) arranged his income; there was no ill except health al solo, at that time. The particular days of the 2nd and 14th June, 1820, were not ill, but the whole period was disastrous."*

Varley persisted in his recondite beliefs till the end of his life. Albert Varley has left a record of a visit to his father's death-bed. "In reply to hopes for his early recovery, he pointed to his horoscope and the directions which he had calculated. With such aspects approaching, he said: 'There could be little hope.' His death took place shortly after this conversation."

Let us look at Varley's curious book. Its full title is *Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy, illustrated with engravings of heads and features, accompanied by tables of the time of the rising of the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac, and containing also new and astrological explanations of some remarkable portions of ancient mythological history*. The book, which consists of sixty-four octavo pages of letterpress and five plates, four of which were engraved by Linnell, was one of a series to be completed in four parts, and was printed for the author at 10½ Great Titchfield Street, Oxford Street. It was published in 1828 and sold by Messrs. Longman & Co. at five shillings. The other three parts did not materialise.

Opening his preface, Varley writes, "The apparent power of the various signs of the Zodiac in creating a great diversity in the features and complexions of the human race has long been as well established among enquiring people as the operation of the moon on the tides, and may properly be termed a branch of natural philosophy which I propose to denominate Zodiacal Physiognomy."

Though physiognomy and astrology are associated, Varley states that the former is independent of "judicial prediction," and can be studied on its own merits as a branch of natural philosophy. He divides mankind into four temperaments "answering to the four trigons, trinities or triplicities," which confer these different triplicities. There is the fiery trigon—Aries, Leo, Sagittarius, under whose auspices are born spirited, generous, magnanimous and princely natures. The Earthy Trigon: Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn, which contains the careful, sordid and penurious qualities. The Aerial Trigon: Gemini, Libra and Aquarius, symbolising the humane, harmonious and courteous principles. The Watery Trigon: Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces, cold, prolific, cautious and severe qualities.

The influence of these signs is modified by the position of the planets at the time of a person's birth. For instance, one born "under a watery or earthy trigon may be of a more elevated and generous disposition if at birth several of his planets were in the fiery or aerial signs, and especially if these and his ascendant are in good aspect."

Varley works out his theory with no little ingenuity, a theory derived and simplified from the innumerable books that the artist must have studied—and he gives tables and charts whereby one can follow and possibly prove his argument. An interesting statement is that "Sagittarius, the

*Ernest Dowden: Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley.*
house of Jupiter, being the only sign (as I have found by my own experience) under which no persons are born having black or dark hair, eyes and eyebrows, with the very rare exception of an occasional appearance of reflection of the sign of Gemini, which gives a mild hazel brown eye and hair, and sometimes a deficiency in the clearness of the complexion.” Persons born under Capricorn are generally very dark in the very first degree of that sign, while the Sagittarians retain their light complexion “to the very last degree, minutes and second of the Archer.”

It is obvious from a study of his book that Varley gave a great deal of thought, plus his observation as an artist, to this abstruse subject. Nor do we need to be expert astrologer-physiognomists to agree with him that “by far the less numerous portion of society is born in the fiery and aerial signs; the world being, in its disposition and habits, governed chiefly by the earthy, melancholic, saturnine, and the watery phlegmatic signs, while superior princes and nobles of the world, and the sublime and heroic poetical writers, painters and composers, emanate from the fiery and regal trigon: while under the humane and courteous aerial signs (Gemini, Libra and Aquarius) are mostly produced the professors and instructors of music, the fine arts, and the ceremonies and embellishments of life and civilization.”

The book was probably too difficult, too serious and scientific to be popular, for since the three parts announced to follow the first were never published we can only assume that it was not a success. The public then, as now, preferred to have their fortunes told rather than go to the trouble of learning how to work out their own nativities, which requires considerable concentration and study.

Varley had devoted many years to the “science,” and one gathers from his book that he regarded prediction less as a supernatural cult than as a question of logic and mathematics. In fact, he writes that astrology “does not necessarily interfere with free will: for all astrology is nothing more than the experience and observation of coincidences, in which the astrologan is distinguished by a greater degree of knowledge and research, and a more methodical arrangement of facts and correspondence, than is possessed by our aunts and grandmothers, who are all sybils in their way, and predict from certain appearances in the sky, fair or bad weather . . .”

The prospectus of the unpublished parts is to be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum Library, bound in a volume entitled Fine Art Pamphlets, 1801-1874. It was to be called A List of a Portion of the Classic Fables and Sacred Histories of which an entirely new and Detailed explanation is prepared for publication, from Discoveries founded on the Application of Astrological Knowledge, and on the ancient Theban art of Geomancy, by John Varley.

Here are some of the mysteries that Varley proposed to elucidate or to explain by zodiacal influences. Why the sacrifice of Abel was more acceptable to the Supreme Being than that of Cain.

The Zodiacal origin of Baptism, and its reference to a principle of morality.
Why fire was said to have been first invented or discovered in Delos. The establishment of Christianity and the abolition of the worship of heathen gods, shown to have accompanied the processional motion of particular fixed stars; and of the manner in which they be capable of influencing or indicating the movements of mankind.

An explanation of the four modes acknowledged by the Apostle Paul, by which God, at various times and in divers manners spake, "or revealed" by the prophets or seers.

The prospectus, in itself, proves Varley's intense preoccupation with mysteries which have exercised the genius of poets, philosophers and religionists since the beginning of history. Astrology was an important facet of the artist's personality; and whatever Gilchrist's opinion of this side of Varley's genius, Stanley Redgrove has written that the Treatise of Zodiacal Physiognomy is a "work of great originality, being a 'veritable curiosity of literature'."